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The postmodern library

Changing paradigms - continuing challenges

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We live in a time of changing paradigms. The time of the "modern" library-building is over. It was supposed to bring total flexibility. Unfortunately, the flexibility it provided (for instance the possibility to change the space between book shelves and offices) was rarely needed. To rearrange the reader's desks and to enlarge them to cater for the now needed combined book/PC-desk on the other hand is most troublesome in modern buildings (compare Quinsee p 73).

New generations of architects now draw up buildings of most diverse designs and shapes. They no longer like to build rectangular modular buildings. All post-modern architecture styles are therefore represented in this volume. There are deconstructivists at work (Valode and Pistre, Nanterre (p 14 and 57), but we also look at the redesign of a high-tech library like the Bibliothèque publique d'information in the Centre Pompidou (p 174-188). You will find pieces on internationally well known architects like Norman Foster (Cranfield, p 28, 75), Robert Gordons (Aberdeen, p 76) or Colin Rice (Cambridge, p 29, 76).

However, not always do the most eminent architects also build the best library buildings, which combine attractive architectural design with optimized functionality. You may, for example, find one of the internationally most interesting library buildings for the future - oriented hybrid book-computer world in Göttingen. This building is the work of an until now only regionally known architect (E. Gerber, p 42-54). The best solution for lighting of a computer-reader-seat can be found at the Free University of Brussells (p 236-253). Ecological concerns are taken into consideration most successfully in the plans for the new university library in Warsaw (p 276-286).

It is the true opportunity of events like the Paris seminar to bring together architects, librarians and people from government to discuss the pros and cons of new buildings and new architectural developments. The visits to outstanding examples of modern and postmodern library buildings such as the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (p 152-154), the Bibliothèque de l'Institut Pasteur and the Infothèque du Pôle universitaire Léonard de Vinci (p 14, 57) gave new insights into architectural as well as organizational problems. Special building aspects such as the provisions for handicaped people, could also be discussed at this opportunity.

The preparation, the program, the library visits and the entire realisation of this conference showed the outstanding professionalism of our French colleagues in the libraries as well as in the ministry. An extraordinary number of colleagues from all over Europe wanted to attend this conference. This unfortunately made it impossible to accept all applicants as participants. Therefore it is particularly worthwile, that this publication communicates the essence of the seminar through combining the papers with photos, plans and other illustrations. The organizer, Marie-Françoise Bisbrouck, was such a successfull fundraiser, that half the production cost for this special volume could be donated to LIBER. We all should be especially grateful to the organizer for this.

It may be the case that the paradigms of library architecture are changing. The trend to build libraries however is now stronger than ever before.

It thus remains all the more necessary to exchange ideas and to improve our knowledge of successful library architecture. The Paris seminar was an important event in this process. Modern technologies will allow us to continue the exchange of information about new library buildings in Europe more easily and regularly. The LIBER Architecture Group will make a start by publishing the results of a questionnaire about new building projects on the Internet in the coming months. Beyond this, however, there remains a need for more discussion and personal exchange. The Architecture Group is thus also already preparing the next seminar in 1998 - as the participants of Paris desired. This seminar will provide another opportunity to discuss new developments and experiences. It will

enable us to build more effective library buildings to cope with the changing needs of research-workers and students. It will thus help to make libraries successful service-providers for the academic community.

But, of course, libraries can and must be more. As Melot shows in his extraordinary paper (p 55-65), they are not only intellectual centres. They are also identity-creating symbols of their nations, universities or towns. To combine functionality and modern technology with aesthetic and symbolic dimensions remains a continuing challenge, both for architects and for librarians.