

Session 8, Friday

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**A new library – ten years after**

**Abstract**

The history of the Zentralbibliothek Zürich, established in 1910 as a foundation by means of a contract between the city and canton, stretches back as far as 1629 (the Stadtbibliothek) and 1835 (the Kantonsbibliothek and the Universitätsbibliothek). From 1634 to 1917, the library was located in the Wasserkirche, then from 1917 on its own premises, in a new library building. This building was functionally excellent in its day; the use of books and periodicals was made as easy and handy for the public as conventional methods at that time would allow. But the success of this library ('Kantons-, Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek') led, in the late 1930s, to insufficient space for books, staff and the public. Emergency measures had to be taken because the much-needed library extension did not come about. Building programmes, an architectural competition, planning, budgeting, parliamentary debate in the councils of both canton and city – all this took time. During this period, the number of library users grew to more than fifty thousand; new acquisitions required an additional kilometre of shelf space per year, and the annual book circulation rose into the hundreds of thousands. Finally, the construction of the new extension was able to begin in 1990.

The two decades prior to building were taken up by detailed planning, cost estimates and financing, a publicity campaign before a public vote, appeasing opposition from nearby residents as well as from the committees responsible for maintaining historical monuments. A special challenge was to find enough space for our lending operations during the construction period. We therefore moved into two former arsenals and several off-site storehouses. Everything remained accessible to the public, albeit with a slower service and demanding greater efforts from the staff. These were the times of the so-called 'Dezentralbibliothek' or 'De-Central Library'.

Despite all the construction changes, we left the main library door in the old building: it remains still the only entrance for the public. In this old part, there are four special collections (rare books, manuscripts, maps, prints and drawings). The new extension re-establishes the division between public and staff areas as had been practised in the building of 1917: the administrative departments are housed in the new administrative wing, with direct access to the public wing on all floors but one. Areas with delivery and dispatching operations are located near the garage and service lift; a book-transport system connects the old building, the public wing and the administration wing on all levels.

The new public wing includes the catalogue hall, reading rooms with reference works and handbooks, and two galleries offering new, unbound periodicals. Stairs and lifts descend to the open stacks underground. There we try to offer as many books as possible on open access. We sinned against standards, norms, rules and dogmas. We narrowed the space between shelves, reduced the shelf depth; we disregarded the rule of systematic arrangement of books, and, above all, we introduced rolling bookcases to the public. The public's clear assent, no disorder in the stacks and a continuing low rate of loss have proven us right.

In 1994 we opened our large, new extension, and in 1995 all renovation in the old building was completed. Ten years of living in and with the building complex confirms to us that the construction was successful, and that we would hardly plan things differently today. Until now, we have been able to accommodate new developments in the building, such as access to electronic publications and the internet. Flexibility occurs above all in the in mind, and to a lesser extent in buildings: We take the building as it is and adjust ourselves to new uses – and not without success.

## **CV**

1943 Born in Vienna

1961 School leaving exam at the Schottengymnasium Vienna

1961 – 1968 Studies of Philosophy and Archeology in Vienna, Rome, Munich and Innsbruck

1972 Bavarian State Library; academic librarian

1972 – 1983 Bavarian Library Service

1983 Central Library Zurich, Director