

Octathlon competitor Dr Sigrid Reinitzer at Eighty



The strange circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic are keeping us apart, even if we would really like to meet and hug, which many of us in Maribor would like to do on Dr Sigrid Reinitzer's birthday. Maribor and Graz are so close in distance and share so many important historical events that we have been connected for decades and have received a fair share of her professional advice and kindness and openness.

Our common interests and issues in librarianship have also just kind of presented themselves unprompted. There are mostly new and ground-breaking dilemmas about the future of libraries as the custodians and organisers of knowledge, which is a topic followed by Dr Reinitzer in great detail, and we all wish that she will continue to share her findings on this topic for a long time.

I am sure that a big and detailed book is being written somewhere about the jubilant, but this writing here is appealing to the more casual side of things, as Sigrid is more than just a strict librarian holding a finger to her mouth shushing library users. And what is more, turning 80 is not a milestone that would prohibit staying playful.

Acrobatic sports competitor

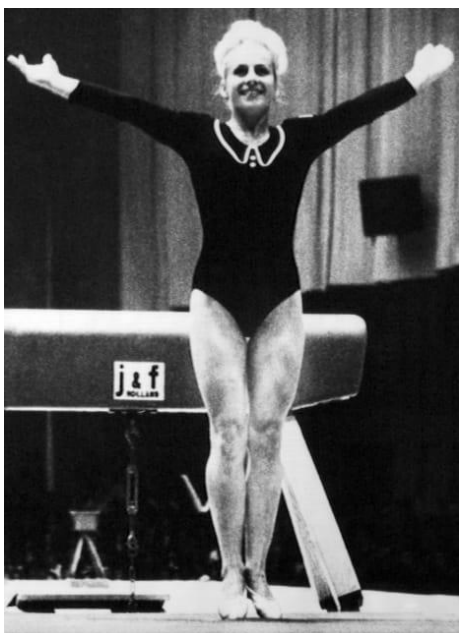


Figure 1: Věra Čáslavská

This picture shows Věra Čáslavská next to the vault, her best gymnastics discipline. But it was also on the vault where Sigrid Reinitzer was at the top of Austrian gymnastics for many years. Because both the author of this post and Sigrid Reinitzer had once been dedicated gymnasts, we appreciated the courage of this (then) Czecho-Slovak gymnast, who, in 1968, risked her 22 medals she had won at the Olympic games, world championships and European championships and protested the Soviet Union in Mexico City. She signed the manifesto entitled *The Two Thousand Words* and, as a result, thanks to a »comrade intervention«, spent the next twenty years cleaning the gymnasium and minding children. Following the Velvet Revolution, when she was reintroduced into public life, she was struck by a family tragedy, from which she never recovered and died a broken woman a few years ago.

Can you imagine Sigrid Reinitzer getting ready for the octathlon in four disciplines - events floor, vault, uneven bars and beam – with both a compulsory and optional routine?

Manager of a boys' only student dormitory

There is another thing that the author of this post and Sigrid Reinitzer have in common: both got their first jobs as managers of a student dormitory. Compared to her *Friedrich Schiller Studentenheim* in Graz, where in 1968 you could only occasionally hear somebody chanting 'Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh' (according to an occupant in those times, my friend Professor Reimann), my dormitory near Rožnik in Ljubljana was rather wilder.

And again: can you imagine a young doctor in charge of a large boys' dormitory in which ladies' visits were strictly prohibited?

From a family of scientists

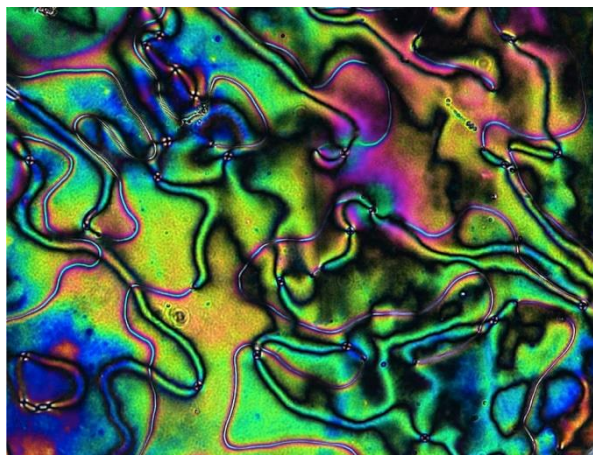


Figure 2: Liquid crystals under a microscope

The Reinitzer family originates from Prague, a city once similar to Maribor due to its »Central European« multiculturalism. The surname had later become popular in Japan, where any educated tech-savvy person had already heard of the inventor of liquid crystals. Who does not remember those Japanese watches with shiny displays that were the predecessors of LCD-screens? A professor at *Karl-Ferdinands-Universität* and later, rector of the Technical University of Graz, Friedrich Reinitzer was one from the group of genius Graz chemists (also among them »our own« Nobel Prize winner

Friderik Pregl), he was also Sigrid's grandfather. But this was only the beginning of the »academic nest« of the Reinitzer family at Seebachergasse 10, which also comprises Sigrid's famous uncles Benjamin and Alois, her parents Edith and Gernot, her brothers Gero and Heimo – enough of them to establish their own faculty. I believe it must have been difficult for Sigrid to pick a study subject, so she decided to graduate from several: law, Germanic studies, geography, ethnology, chemical engineering and, to top it all off, library studies. I asked her once if such a wide range of knowledge is useful for librarianship, to which she very humbly replied that it cannot hurt.

A step towards technological advance

She came to the University Library of the KFU Graz (Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz) as a package deal along with the first computers, and her curious spirit was soon in charge of implementing them into library operations. The year was 1971. The UBIS system firstly alerted the users that new technologies arrived at the library. Together with Dr Koch, Reinitzer created an electronic version of the domestic Chemical Abstract – Chemie Informationsdienst Graz (CIG). But the main problem of every library was the waiting list for loans, and the first one on hand was the locally exchanged GRIBS system, which was quickly replaced by ALEPH500, which was designed by ExLibris on a network basis. Reinitzer knew that the new technology also required a new understanding and organisation of librarianship, which is also covered by her extensive studies on the structure and planning of research documentation and the function of abstraction and indexing, which she conducted and published in book form in the 1970s. In the meantime, the director of the university library, Court Counsellor Dr Kroller appointed her vice-director, and in 1989, as the first woman, made her his successor to manage the second largest library in the country. Even before that, she gathered a

plethora of the best experts as an editor at the Munich-New York publishing house Saur and published one of the most frequently quoted books in library science entitled *Bibliotheken bauen und führen*. The book *Die Universitätsbibliothek Graz: eine Bibliothek im Wandel; Bibliothekskooperation: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen* is also a testament for her readiness to accept this position.

Head of Graz Library



Figure 3: Graz Library facade

The main library building, which was opened by Emperor Franz Joseph I a hundred years ago, was no longer up to the demands of progress – the stacks for holdings of the second Austrian depository library were upgraded regularly, but the facilities no longer enabled the development of new functionalities. Reinitzer designed a new spatial concept, which seemed contradictory at first: both centralised for managing bibliographic information and de-centralised and spread out over faculties and institutes for the

library users. New modern libraries were created for the faculties of law, social studies and economics, the medical faculty and theological institute, many other libraries were upgraded, a media library was created, the newspaper depot was moved to another location, the entrance hall and the management facilities were renovated. Later on, the library also received a new and very prominent front. This meant a renaissance of modern activities, which were frequently developed in Graz for all of Austria: the Austrian consortia for periodicals (they have 27,000 e-journals alone), interlibrary e-media cooperative, assistance to blind and sight-impaired users, senior citizen programmes, restoration workshop (the treasure, as Sigrid calls it, includes 2200 manuscripts and 1200 incunabula of unspeakable value), digitalisation of material for their own requirements and the requirements of other libraries (also for the Maribor Archdiocese Archive), KFU institutional repository, bibliometrics, etc.

A good university library is of crucial importance for the university's reputation in a modern, the extremely competitive international higher education and research area (which is also subject of the 'Maribor Declaration', adopted at one of the COBISS conferences); it requires from its management a general engagement in multi-faceted librarianship. You must be among those that set the rules and determine the direction of development and not just follow in their footsteps. Reinitzer understood this very well and represented the interests of the Graz academic community in several key positions: firstly in the Austrian Library Association (VÖB), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the Association of European Research Libraries (LIBER), the European Library Automation Group (ELAG); she organised the Alps-Adria Research Library Group, and, upon the initiative of the Rector's Conference of the universities within the Alps-Adria work group, attracted IZUM to publish an electronic guide through the AALIB university libraries – "the first international project coordinated and carried out by IZUM in the years 1990–1992" (Dr Marta

Seljak, *Knjižnica*, 41 (4), 55–67)). She was among the founders and editors of the journals B.I.T. online, ABI-Technik in VÖB Mitteilungen.

An active retiree



Figure 4: Scanning device

The initiative to establish a permanent round table on the activities of retired librarians, which she presented as a fresh retiree at the 30th Austrian Librarianship Days in 2009 seems almost like an anecdote. Why so? Because she couldn't possibly have been worried about what to do with her spare time as she was inundated with several new projects: *Memory of the World* for UNESCO and the related work in the Austrian BAM group (libraries-archives-museums); cooperating in the EU »Council of the Wise« for monitoring the digitalisation of European cultural heritage; her experience was sought after when designing the EuroMACHS (Europe, Digital Media, Arts and Cultural Heritage Studies) study programme at the University of Graz. In general, after her retirement, her university library also tasked her as the 'leader if strategic management for libraries, archives and museums'.

Sigrid Reinitzer and the city of Maribor

Dr Sigrid Reinitzer has at least three places in Maribor, where she feels at home: the Maribor University Library, IZUM and the Opera and Ballet and the Slovene National Theatre in Maribor. I have previously mentioned the AALIB project, which was financed through the OSI (Österreichisches Ost- und Südosteuropa Institut). I was able to witness how much her word meant to the director of OSI, Dr Ilona Slawinski, when I attended the governing board meetings at which the financing was approved for two of our projects: the first one bringing COBISS into »Austrian libraries« in South-East Europe, and the second one providing financial aid for informatisation of libraries in Tuzla after it had been devastated by the war.



Figure 5: Dr Sigrid Reinitzer and Franci Pivec (2006)

As the president of the programme committee of the very popular COBISS conferences, she was always by our side, and her evaluation of IZUM's role in the Balkan crisis must be a particular honour for the management of the Institute at the time: "Librarianship, due to its globalism, provides the ideal basis for cooperation between countries with differently developed information systems. After the devastating strikes of war, global aid mechanisms must be established to strengthen the professions of IT and librarianship. In this respect, IZUM is a role model that I cannot praise highly enough, and which is admired also by several international organisations."



Figure 6: Dr Sigrid Reinitzer (2005)

On my office wall, there is a picture of the legendary Seymour Lubetzky, who generously categorised our library prowess and, hence, continued to go to work until he was 101 when he was going to take some time off to deal with personal things. If we take him as an example, there are still many undiscussed topics with this year's jubilant, so we say: Here's to you, Dr Sigrid Reinitzer, and to many more years!

Written by: mag. Franci Pivec

Translated into English: Petra Bridges

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