



ALFRED-WEGENER-INSTITUT
HELMHOLTZ-ZENTRUM FÜR POLAR-
UND MEERESFORSCHUNG

New Building in Bremerhaven

Groundbreaking Ceremony for the AWI Technical Centre

Representatives of the political and research communities celebrate the future Rasmus Willumsen House

[18. April 2019] On Thursday, 18 April 2019 an official groundbreaking ceremony was held for a new Technical Centre for the development of innovative maritime technologies in Klußmannstraße, Bremerhaven. Representatives of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal State of Bremen, and the City of Bremerhaven celebrated this milestone together with the Directorate and staff of the Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research.



Groundbreaking ceremony AWI Technical Centre (Photo: Kathrin Doepner)

Statements on the occasion of the groundbreaking ceremony:

Dr Michael Meister, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF):

“The seas, oceans and polar regions play a key role in the global climate system. We need to pursue research in these areas in order to understand and counteract climate change. In this regard, the AWI delivers outstanding research. And in order to continue to do so, it must develop, operate and maintain large instruments and marine infrastructure. To allow it to centrally carry out expedition preparations and logistical work in the future, the AWI is now receiving a new and highly functional building - the Technical Centre. Through their joint financial support, the BMBF and the Federal State of Bremen are working together to provide the prerequisites for excellent polar research, made in Germany.”

Mayor Dr Carsten Sieling, President of the Senate of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen:

“With today’s groundbreaking ceremony, a new chapter is opened in the AWI’s impressive success story in Bremerhaven. In the context of the academic system in the State of Bremen, the AWI is a blazing beacon to the world. Over the past 30 years, the State of Bremen has grown into a land of research and technological innovation, and the Alfred Wegener Institute fulfils an essential role in that research landscape. Excellent polar and marine research is conducted here: in modern laboratory complexes, at the North and South Poles, and on the high seas, experts from a diverse range of disciplines are working hand in hand. The AWI Technical Centre will help to advance these research efforts. The AWI is and will remain a world-class research institute.”

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The



Institute

The Alfred Wegener Institute pursues research in the polar regions and the oceans of mid and high latitudes. As one of the 19 centres of the Helmholtz Association it coordinates polar research in Germany and provides ships like the research icebreaker Polarstern and stations for the international scientific community.

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Eva Quante-Brandt, Senator for Science, Health and Consumer Protection
Bremen:

“The Alfred Wegener Institute enjoys an admirable reputation, both nationally and internationally. Further, it plays a critical part in the State of Bremen’s research landscape. Thanks to its dedicated staff, excellent infrastructure and ambitious strategy, it represents a first-class candidate for overcoming the pressing ecological issues that will shape our future. Expeditions are a vital component of the AWI’s mission. With this new addition, the AWI will be equipped to more effectively prepare those expeditions.”

Melf Grantz, Lord Mayor of Bremerhaven:

“As a marine research institute, the AWI profits from being based in Bremerhaven, with its direct connection to the sea. With today’s groundbreaking ceremony, the expansion of the AWI’s ‘Am Handelshafen’ campus in and around the Klußmannstraße continues. The first AWI researchers moved into the ‘Deutsche See’ building in 2017, and in the future, the former ‘Nordsee’ administration building will also be made available to the institute. With the addition of the Technical Centre, the AWI will be optimally equipped to address the research topics of today and tomorrow. The AWI’s activities serve to enrich the value of the harbour area, as a result of which a maritime ‘research mile’ is gradually forming.”

Prof Antje Boetius, Director of the Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research:

“In order to explore and monitor extreme habitats in the polar regions, in the oceans and on the coasts, we have to use technologies that continue to work below dense frost, under high pressures, in constant darkness, in contact with highly reactive gases and liquids, and when subjected to tremendously powerful waves, that can gather and transmit data within and below the ice and water, where human beings simply can’t. You can’t buy instruments like that off the shelf; we have to develop them ourselves. Which is why we’re building the Technical Centre: it will offer inventors, developers, mechanics and tinkerers a central hub of workshops, testing tanks and laboratories, which they can use to test new methods like 3D printing, robotics, and autonomous sample-gathering, to name but a few.”

Dr Karsten Wurr, Administrative Director of the Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research:

“The Technical Centre represents a significant improvement to our technical innovative capacity in terms of ocean and ice monitoring. In this regard the AWI’s goal is to bring together its scientific and technical expertise, which is currently scattered across various buildings in the city, and to improve working processes through the joint use of laboratories and workshops. Working together under the same roof will foster close cooperation between engineers and Earth system researchers, students and teachers; in addition, it will bolster the AWI’s innovative strength in research and development for ocean monitoring.”

Background information on the AWI Technical Centre: The Rasmus Willumsen House and the history of its namesake:

The AWI decided to name its new Technical Centre in honour of Rasmus Willumsen, a companion of Alfred Wegener who shared his tragic fate during their last expedition: neither survived. Rasmus Willumsen symbolises all of the supporting forces that contribute to the success of expeditions - past, present and future. Wegener saw in Willumsen a highly capable companion, and held him in high regard. This can be seen in a letter written by Wegener on 6 October 1930, in which he wrote: “[...] I ask that you [...] ensure that there will also be a watch provided for Rasmus, who will be accompanying us.” At the time, expedition watches were strictly reserved for scientists and officers. Rasmus

Willumsen (1907-1930) from Ukkusissat was among those Greenlanders who supported Wegener during his major expedition to Greenland's inland ice in 1930. Its goals were to measure the thickness of the inland ice using new seismic methods, and to gather meteorological data on the coasts and in central Greenland ("Eismitte") for an entire year. Inclement conditions forced Wegener and Willumsen to turn back toward the western station: a journey they would never complete. Wegener most likely suffered a heart attack, while Willumsen simply disappeared; his body was never found.

Rasmus Willumsen's descendants travelled from Greenland to attend the ceremony, so that they could celebrate the AWI Technical Centre being christened in his name, and so that they could preserve his memory in a time capsule that will be encased in the building. As a token of gratitude, the Willumsen family - Hans Peter Willumsen (nephew) and Johan Willumsen (grand-nephew) - were also presented with a replica of the watch that Rasmus was meant to receive.

Video

