

# HERITAGE ALERT

September 2009

ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage

## SUMMARY

In 2007, the winning design of an architectural competition for an extension to the Gunnar Asplund designed Stockholm City Library was announced. The heritage significance of the library building and its annexes are theoretically protected by a range of Swedish laws, but it is considered that the winning design would have serious adverse impacts on the heritage of the Asplund Library complex.

The proposed size of the new buildings would overwhelm the library and the original monumental main entrance would lose its function, thereby diminishing the power of Asplund's original design. The proposed demolition of the three annexes would destroy the overall experience of the site as originally planned and designed by Asplund.

The heritage values of this site, and the international importance of the work of Gunnar Asplund requires careful and comprehensive reconsideration of the proposal to avoid such impacts.

The presidents of ICOMOS, the International Union of Architects, Docomomo and the ICOMOS ISC 20C have jointly requested that the Mayor of the City of Stockholm urgently reconsider the project to avoid any adverse heritage impacts, and to resolve a more acceptable design solution in heritage terms.

### 1 Identity of Building/Artifact/Object/Place

1.1 **Current name and original name:** Stockholm's stadsbibliotek/Stockholm City Library.  
Official property identification: Spelbomskan 16

### 1.2 Location

**Town, Country, Street :** Stockholm, Sweden, Sveavägen 73

1.3 **Classification/ Typology:** The main library of the City of Stockholm is an internationally well known modern classicist building designed by Gunnar Asplund (b.1885 - d.1940) and built in 1924-28 as a forerunner of the Modern Movement in Sweden. The setting also consists of a park with a rectangular reflecting pond, and three annexes planned by Asplund but designed by other architects, see below. The Library is one of Asplund's most important works of architecture, to be compared to the Woodland Cemetery, which is on the World Heritage List.

1.4 **Protection Status:** The library is locally listed in the highest local rank, equal to a Cultural Heritage Building (according to the Heritage Conservation Act). It is thus protected according to the Planning and Building Act, managed by the local political boards. The site is designated an Area of National Interest according to the Environmental Code. Negotiations are on-going about listing the

library as a Cultural Heritage Building. Of the annexes the two (middle and west) are locally listed in the highest rank and the annex closest to the library in the second highest rank. The park is included in the Area of National Interest.

The Library has been included in the International Registers of Docomomo International since 1996.

## **2 History and Significance**

**2.1 Description: The library building** has strictly geometrical design with a square base and a cylindrical central volume, containing the central book-hall, rising up high in the middle. The four wings of the square base contain different rooms for specialized literature, children's literature, news-papers, study-halls and offices. The low bazaar-building towards Sveavägen contains shops and restaurants. The interior and some parts of the exterior are richly decorated by different kinds of works of art. **The park** is situated south of the library and is framed by Sveavägen, The School of Economics and the hill on top of which the old Observatory is situated. Characteristic for the park are the little water-fall, terraces towards the hillside, the reflecting pond and sculptures.

**The three annexes** were also included in the original plan by Gunnar Asplund but designed by other architects. All three annexes are of classicist and/or modernist design.

**2.2 Date of project/ Date of Construction/ Finishing of work:** A design scheme was proposed in 1922. **Design and construction of the library 1924 -28.** Addition 1932 of the west wing and the bazaars, following the original plan and design. Inauguration March 31<sup>st</sup> 1928.

**Annex 1** (closest to the library): construction 1952-53. **Annex 2** (middle): construction 1932. **Annex 3** (the third seen from the library): construction 1929-30.

### **2.3 Architect/ designers:**

**Plan, park and the library:** Architect Gunnar Asplund (b.1885 – d.1940). Expert on library questions: Fredrik Hjelmqvist.

**Annex 1:** Architect Paul Hedqvist (b. 1895 – d. 1977).

**Annex 2:** Architect Erik Lallerstedt (b. 1864 – d. 1955).

**Annex 3:** Architect Erik Lallerstedt (b. 1864 – d. 1955).

### **2.4 Architect Designers still living? No.**

**Residence, country of birth, contact.** Stockholm, Sweden.

### **2.5 Original use of building/place:** Library: City Public Library

Annex 1: Library of the Faculty of Arts. Annex 2: University education on Social Science.

Annex 3: Institute for Bio-Chemistry of the Technical High-school.

**2.6 New use if any:** The library is still the main Library of Stockholm. Annex 1 contains today the International library and News-paper library. Annex 2: Swedish Institute of Children's literature. Annex 3: management and offices of the City Library.

**2.7 Changes, additions:** Because of lack of money only three of the four wings of the library were built in 1924. The fourth wing and the bazaars were built in 1932, all in line with Asplund's original plans. Three of the four inner courtyards have been built in. 1973-74 elevators and toilets were added to one of the inner courtyards and stairs to the book-galleries in the book hall. 1979-81 new

mechanical systems were added. 2003 new desks were added in the book hall. Many original windows have been replaced with triple glazed ones. In 1981 700 items of original furniture, mostly designed by Asplund, were still in use, which was then partly repaired and reused. Some of the furniture is worn-out and discarded today.

**2.8 Current Condition:** Good. It has always been considered too small for its purpose.

**2.9 Original Design Intent:** The original design and intent can still be experienced.

### **3 Description (history and technology)**

**3.1 Construction system used: Library:** Foundation of concrete blocks. Brick walls with lime plaster. Joists and beams of iron and concrete. Roofs of tarred board and on the rotunda sheet copper. **Annex 1**, closest to the library: Facades of light yellow plaster and granite details, metal roof. Interior has been partly changed but the main staircase is original. **Annex 2**, middle: light yellow lime plaster with sculptured limestone reliefs surrounding the entrance, metal roof. Interior has been partly changed but the main staircase is original. **Annex 3**, (the third seen from the library) yellow facades with ashlar-rusticated lime plaster with sculptured black granite pillars on both sides of the entrance, metal roof. The interior has been partly changed but the main staircase is original.

**3.2 Context/setting:** The Library building, the three annexes and the park are set in an urban setting of the city of Stockholm. Next to the Library is also the Observatory Hill.

**3.3 Social and cultural context:** In the closest neighborhood are situated several buildings of high architectural rank intended for education purposes and an 18<sup>th</sup> century astronomic observatory. This "Area of National Interest" contains buildings representing the beginning of higher education and research, both the early Technical High-school and the University, of Stockholm. In this context the City Library stands for "knowledge for everybody".

**3.4 Materials/fabric/form/function: Library:** The brick facades were originally plastered with lime plaster. Steps of granite, different details (such as roof cornices and porticoes of Swedish marble from Grottorp. Inside are in public areas walls of veneer wainscot of precious wood materials and other walls were lime wash painted in bright colors like red, green and yellow. Decorative painting of walls and ceilings were originally executed but are only seen today in a few places. Most furniture and book-shelves were designed by Asplund and produced by the Nordiska Kompaniet in Stockholm.

**3.5 Aesthetic value: Library:** The well composed unit of classicism and modernism creates a highly estimated and unique design of the Library building. The impressive main entrance with the high exterior steps is of particular importance for Asplund's design concept, as it leads up to the solemn book-hall. **The three annexes:** the strict classical and modernist design creates a dignified setting to the library building. **The park:** The reflecting pond and the sculptures create together with the plants an inviting oasis. **The ensemble:** Together the library, the park and the annexes are a well preserved example of the unique design of the architect Gunnar Asplund.

## **4 Source of Alert**

**4.1 References, contacts:** All information on the history and construction of the buildings are from the documentation report from The City Museum of Stockholm 2003: "Spelbomskan 16, STOCKHOLMS STADSBIKLIOTEK and from the documentation report "Sydvastra Vasastaden" 1987 by The City Museum and from the "Program for detaljplan" (program for detail-plan) by The City Planning and Building office 2007.

**Contact persons:** City architect Per Kallstenius ([per.kallstenius@sbk.stockholm.se](mailto:per.kallstenius@sbk.stockholm.se)) can inform on the formal proceedings of the project, Berit Svedberg Director of the Cultural Board ([berit.svedberg@kultur.stockholm.se](mailto:berit.svedberg@kultur.stockholm.se)) can inform on the latest negotiations, as can also Madeleine Sjostedt the political director of the Cultural Board ([Madeleine.sjostedt@stadshuset.stockholm.se](mailto:Madeleine.sjostedt@stadshuset.stockholm.se)). Ann-Charlotte Backlund, the director of The City Museum including heritage department can inform on the listing procedure ([ann.charlotte.backlund@stadsmuseum.stockholm.se](mailto:ann.charlotte.backlund@stadsmuseum.stockholm.se))

**4.2 Groups supporting Alert and/or nomination, contacts:** The International Council on Monuments and Sites (President Gustavo Araoz, Washington), ICOMOS Sweden (President Kerstin Westerlund Bjurstrom), ICOMOS International Scientific Committee for Twentieth Century Heritage (President, Sheridan Burke, Australia), Docomomo International (President, Maristella Casciato, Rome), Docomomo Sweden (Lotta Lander) International Union of Architects (President Louise Cox, Paris), the association St Erik (Kerstin Westerlund Bjurstrom) and many local private persons and organizations. Local heritage officers. At least one of the two leading Stockholm morning news-papers.

**4.3 Groups against Alert:** The City of Stockholm: obviously the central authorities are for the building of the extension since the City has arranged the competition suggesting the place of the three annexes as an extension-area and since the winning proposal has been chosen, which will lead to the demolition of the three annexes and to serious damage of the integrity of the Asplund Library. Dagens Nyheter, one of the two leading Stockholm newspapers, has published several articles supporting the winning proposal (but also an editorial against it). The private group YIMBY (yes in my back-yard) and, of course, some private architects.

**4.4 Local, Regional, International significance citations:**

"The climax as regards all Scandinavia". Henry-Russel Hitchcock (1975, first published in 1958), *The Pelican History of Art, Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, p.540.

"This is one of the great buildings of the twentieth century" on Stockholm City Library. Jonathan Glancey (1998 and 2008), *Modern Architecture, the structures that shaped the modern world*, p. 45. (Glancey is Architecture and Design Editor of *The Guardian*).

**4.5 Letters of support, newspaper articles, etc.:** A great number of articles have been published in Swedish newspaper, the overwhelming majority opposing the current extension project, among those are:

Adams, Nicholas. Hur kunde det bli så här? *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 40.

Andersson, Ola. Respekten försvinner för kulturskyddet. *Svenska Dagbladet* 2007-12-06.

Andersson, Ola. Löftesbrott mot medborgarna, *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 41.

Andersson, Ola. En chans att likvidera projektet. *Svenska Dagbladet* 2008-10-04.

Andersson, Thorbjörn. Asplunds primadonna tål inte konkurrens. *Svenska Dagbladet* 2007-10-17.

Andersson, Thorbjörn. Råämne i behov av hjälp, *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 42.  
*Dagens Nyheter* 2008-04-13 (Editorial) Rädda Stadsbiblioteket.  
 Eriksson, Eva. Gör inte ett annex av Asplunds juvel. *Svenska Dagbladet* 2007-09-26.  
 Eriksson, Eva. Bibliotek vid Slussen skulle lösa två problem. *Svenska Dagbladet* 2007-10-25.  
 Eriksson, Eva. Slussen bästa platsen. *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 42.  
 Eriksson, Eva. Biblioteket och kullen. *Arkitektur* 2008:3, p.58-65.  
 Feilitzen, Fredrik von. Bevara Asplunds helhet! Vem vill ta "köksvägen" in i rotundan?. *Dagens Nyheter* 2008-03-12.  
 Gabrielsson, Catharina. Förslaget trotsar tävlingens logik. *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 43.  
 Lewan, Tomas. Riksintresset urholkas när helheten beskärs. *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 44.  
 Marcus, Lars. Representativitet framför performativitet. *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 44.  
 Mårtelius Johan. Längs bokens rygg. *Arkitektur* 2006:4, p. 14-27.  
 Mårtelius, Johan. Stadsbibliotekstävlingen – finalisterna. Komplettera och frilägg. *Arkitektur* 2007:2, p. 40-47.  
 Mårtelius, Johan. Förhindra katastrof – omarbete programmet. *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 45.  
 Mårtelius, Johan, Stryk över – börja om. *Arkitektur* 2008:5, p. 40-43.  
 Pontvik, Alexis, Svår uppgift att både bevara och förnya. *Svenska Dagbladet* 2007-10-02.  
 Pontvik, Alexis. En dubbel förlust. *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 46.  
 Wang, Wilfried. Förslagen avslöjar att frågan är fel ställd. *Svenska Dagbladet* 2007-10-04.  
 Wang, Wilfried. Triumf för den naiva modernismen. *Arkitektur* 2008:1, p. 46.

Articles signed by several persons:

*Svenska Dagbladet* 2008-03-10: Spotta inte på arkitekten Asplund [Don't spit on the architect Asplund] and *Svenska Dagbladet* 2008-03-31: Stockholm sätts på kartan med en plump [Stockholm placed on the map with a blot]. Signed by:

*Nicholas Adams*, Professor in the History of Architecture, Vassar College NY; *Ola Andersson*, architect; *Fredric Bedoire*, Professor in the History of Architecture, School of Architecture of the Royal University College of Fine Art; *Anders Bergström*, architect, D Eng; *Claes Caldenby*, Professor in the History of Architecture, Chalmers University of Technology; *Eva Eriksson*, Ph D, writer on architecture; *Horace Engdahl*, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy; *Catharina Gabrielsson*, architect, D Eng; *Elisabeth Hatz*, Professor in Architecture, Royal Institute of Technology; *Thomas Hall* Professor emeritus in Art History, University of Stockholm; *Olof Hultin*, editor-in-chief, tidskriften *Arkitektur*; *Tomas Lewan*, architect, writer on architecture; *Jan Lisinski*, architect, Professor in Conservation, School of Architecture of the Royal University College of Fine Art; *Lars Nittve*, Director of the Moderna Museet; *Karin Nyrén*, Professor in Interior Architecture, University College of Arts, Crafts and Design; *Alexis Pontvik* Professor in Urban Design, Royal Institute of Technology; *Eva Rudberg*, Associate Professor, researcher in architecture; *Marianne Råberg*, PhD, former City Antiquarian; *Beate Sydhoff* former Permanent Secretary of the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts; *Solfrid Söderlind*, Professor in Art History, Director of the Nationalmuseum; *Johan Mårtelius*, Professor in the History of Architecture, Royal Institute of Technology; *Wilfried Wang*, Professor in Architecture, University of Texas; *Ebba Witt-Brattström*, Professor in History of Literature, Södertörn University; *Hans Wohlin*, architect, former Director of the Stockholm City Planning Administration; *Per Wästberg*, author, member of the Swedish Academy; *Jan Åman*, Director of the art hall and "Laboratory of the contemporary" Färgfabriken.

*Dagens Nyheter* 2008-03-18: Tänk om, Stockholm [Reconsider Stockholm]. Article signed by:

*Andrea Deplazes*, architect, Professor, ETH Zürich; *Kenneth Frampton*, Professor, Columbia University, NY; *Tony Fretton*, Architect RIBA London and Delft; *Josep LLuis Mateo*, architect, Professor, Spain and Switzerland; *Shelley McNamara & Yvonne Farrell*, Grafton Architects, Dublin; *Peter Märkli*, architect, Professor, Switzerland; *Irenée Scalbert*, architect, London, former editor AA Files; *Alvaro Siza*, Architect, Professor, Portugal; *Elizabeth Bonde Hatz*, architect, Professor, Stockholm and Ireland.

#### **4.6 Publications that describe the work/place, bibliography, etc.:**

##### Literature on Gunnar Asplund, monographic and thematic works

Ahlberg, Hakon (1982). *Gunnar Asplund, arquitecto: 1885-1940*. Murcia: Comisión de cultura del Colegio oficial de aparejadores y arquitectos técnicos.

Alison, Filippo & Acking, Carl-Axel (red.) (1985). *Erik Gunnar Asplund: mobili e oggetti*. Milano: Electa.

Asplund 1885-1940. *Arkitekturmuseets årsbok 1985* (1986), med texter av Claes Caldenby, Johan Mårtelius, Lisbet Balslev Jørgensen, Lars Olof Larsson, Göran Schildt, Åke Fant, Björn Linn, Carl-Axel Acking, Marc Treib.

Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, Eskil Sundahl, Uno Åhrén, *Acceptera* (1931) Facs.-utg. (1980) Stockholm: Tiden.

Blundell Jones, Peter (2006). *Gunnar Asplund*. London: Phaidon.

Caldenby, Claes & Hultin, Olof (red) (1985). *Asplund*. Arkitektur Förlag.

Constant, Caroline (1994). *The woodland cemetery: toward a spiritual landscape: Erik Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz 1915-61*. Stockholm: Byggförlaget.

Creagh, Lucy, Kåberg, Helena & Lane, Barabara Miller (red.) (2008). *Modern Swedish design: three founding texts / by Uno Åhrén, Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Ellen Key, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson and Eskil Sundahl ; edited and with introductions by Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg, and Barbara Miller Lane*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Cruickshank, Dan (red.) (1988). *Erik Gunnar Asplund*. London: The Architects' Journal.

De Maré, Eric (1955). *Gunnar Asplund: a great modern architect*. (Art and Technics).

Engfors, Christina (red) (1990), *E.G. Asplund. Arkitekt, vän och kollega*. Arkitektur Förlag. Eng. transl. *E.G. Asplund, Architect, Friend and Colleague*.

*Erik Gunnar Asplund: Woodland crematorium, Stockholm, Sweden. 1935-40; Woodland chapel, Stockholm, Sweden. 1918-20; Stockholm public library, Stockholm, Sweden. 1920-28. (1982).* Tokyo, Japan: A.D.A. Edita Tokyo.

*Erik Gunnar Asplund: 1885-1940. [Madrid]: Secretaria General Técnica, Ministerio de Obras Públicas y Urbanismo (1987).*

*Erik Gunnar Asplund: architecte et designer suédois. [Paris]: Editions Regirex-France (1989).*

*Erik Gunnar Asplund. 1.ed. Barcelona: Editorial Stylos. (1990).*

Ford, Edward R. (1996). *The details of modern architecture. Vol. 2, 1928-1988*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Edwin (1999). *Monument builders: modern architecture and death*. Chichester: Academy Ed., Wiley.

Gili, Mónica (red.) (1999). *La última casa: the last house*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.

Hermann, Heinrich Gregor (1996). *Spiritual dimensions in 20th-century architecture: a study of three paradigmatic works by Louis I. Kahn, Le Corbusier and Gunnar Asplund & Sigurd Lewerentz*. Diss. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard univ., 1995.

Holmdahl, Gustav, Lind, Sven Ivar & Ödeen, Kjell (red) Hakon Ahlberg (text) (1943). *Gunnar Asplund arkitekt: 1885-1940: ritningar, skisser och fotografier* Stockholm: Tidskriften Byggmästaren, Facs. (1981) Stockholm, Byggförlaget. Eng edition *Gunnar Asplund, architect: 1885-1940: plans, sketches and* (1950). Stockholm: Tidskriften Byggmästaren.

International Symposium on the Architecture of Erik Gunnar Asplund (1986). *Lectures and briefings from the International Symposium on the Architecture of Erik Gunnar Asplund, 14th-17th October, 1985 in Stockholm and Gothenburg*. Stockholm: Arkitekturmuseet.

Johansson, Bengt O H (1996), *Tallum*, Byggförlaget. Eng edition. *Tallum: Gunnar Asplund's and Sigurd Lewerentz's Woodland Cemetery*.

Kaiser, Klaus (red.) (1988). *Architekten - Erik Gunnar Asplund und Sigurd Lewerentz*. 1. Aufl. Stuttgart: IRB-Vlg.

Korte, Martin (1986). *Archetypen: Ihre Herkunft und Bedeutung bei Erik Gunnar Asplund: die Formfindung Asplunds als Verschmelzungsprozess klassizistischer, symbolistischer und traditionalistischer Aspekte in der Architektur*. Braunschweig: Technische Universität.

*La arquitectura de Gunnar Asplund*. (1981). Madrid: Servicio de publicaciones del Colegio oficial de arquitectos de Madrid.

Larsson, Monica (1988). *Erik Gunnar Asplund som inredningsarkitekt, speglad genom Stockholms stadsbiblioteks barn- och ungdomsavdelning*. Examensarbete.

López-Pelàez, José Manuel (1997). *La arquitectura de Gunnar Asplund: (desde el estudio de las propuestas para ampliar el tribunal de Gotemburgo)*. Diss. Madrid: Universidad Politécnica, 1998.

López-Pelàez, José Manuel (2002). *La arquitectura de Gunnar Asplund*. Barcelona: Fundación Caja de Arquitectos.

López-Pelàez, José Manuel (2002). *Erik Gunnar Asplund: escritos 1906 / 1940: cuaderno del viaje a Italia de 1913*. Madrid: El Croquis.

Nagel, Per & Faber, Tobias (red.) (2003). *Scandinavian modern houses: Vol. 1 The spirit of nordic light*. Copenhagen: Living Architecture.

Plunger, Max & Winter, Karin (1998). *Stockholms stadsbibliotek: arkitekt Gunnar Asplund*. Stockholm: Stockholms stadsbibl. Eng edition. *Stockholm City Library: architect Gunnar Asplund*. Stockholm: Stockholms stadsbibliotek.

Nagy, Elemér (1974). *Erik Gunnar Asplund*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Pelàez, José Manuel López, Elorza, Héctor Fernández & Rudberg, Eva (red.) (2004). *Erik Gunnar Asplund: Exposición universal de Estocolmo 1930*. Madrid: Editorial Rueda.

Rudberg, Eva (1999) *Stockholmsutställningen 1930*. Eng edition. *The Stockholm Exhibition 1930: Modernism's Breakthrough in Swedish Architecture*. Stockholm: Stockholmia Förlag.

*S D: Space design* 1982:10 (Special feature): Erik Gunnar Asplund. (1982). Tokyo: Kajima institute Publ. Co.

Smith, Kendra Schank (2005). *Architects' drawings: a selection of sketches by world famous architects through history*. Amsterdam: Architectural Press.

Wilson, Colin St John (1992). *Architectural reflections: studies in the philosophy and practice of architecture*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Wilson, Colin St. John (1995). *Gunnar Asplund, 1885-1940: the dilemma of classicism*. London: Architectural Association.

Wilson, Colin St. John (2007). *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture*. Black dog publishing.

Wrede, Stuart (1980). *The architecture of Erik Gunnar Asplund*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P.

Wrede, Stuart (1982). *Asupurundo no kenchiku: hokuo kindai kenchiku no reimei*. Tokyo: Kajima shuppan-kai.

Zevi, Bruno (1948). *Erik Gunnar Asplund*. Milano: Il Balcone.

Zevi, Bruno (2000). *Erik Gunnar Asplund*. 1. ed. Torino: Testo & immagine.



Information on the competition: <http://www.arkitekt.se/asplund> and [http://www.arkitekt.se/s21114/f2524/asplund\\_brief.pdf](http://www.arkitekt.se/s21114/f2524/asplund_brief.pdf)

Pictures of the winning entry:

<http://www.nyttstadsbibliotek.stockholm.se/Sve/Sidor/Bilder/Delphinium.pdf>

**4.7 Time Constraints for Advocacy (immediate action/delayed action):** The preparations for the new plan have started. Right now (September 2009) there is a break in the planning in order to make necessary economic calculations.

## **5. Recommended action**

**5.1 Heritage Alert:** international/national: Letters and resolutions from various expert associations. Publishing on ICOMOS ISC20C web-site

**5.2 Letter from:** ICOMOS, Docomomo International, University of Venice, Europa Nostra, private persons and experts all over the world

**5.3 ISC C20 Website:** yes

**5.4 Affiliated:** distribution through UIA/Docomomo/ etc

**5.5 Other actions:** ICOMOS Sweden will request a meeting with the mayor of Stockholm to present the case and ICOMOS letters.