

The Swiss Institute of Comparative Law – a Brave New World of Legal Research and Librarianship in Lausanne (DORIGNY)

The Swiss Institute of Comparative Law is an autonomous institution set up by the Swiss Federal Government in Lausanne. Opened in 1982, its director is Professor A. E. von Overbeck (University of Fribourg, Switzerland) and vice-director Dr. W. Stoffel. Represented on the Institute's Council are all the law faculties in Switzerland as well as the Federal Government. Professor J. Voyame, the director of the Federal Office of Justice and Professor E. Bucher (University of Bern) are the Council's president and vice-president respectively. Around 25 people work full-time or part-time at the Institute, including several foreign lawyers, usually aged between 25 and 35.

Thoughts that the Institute is a place where crusty academics sit in ivory towers considering abstract problems of their own creation, could easily be dispelled by a week in the company of one of the its lawyers (*collaborateurs scientifiques*). The Institute regularly advises the Swiss Government and private organisations about severely practical problems of foreign law. The Institute's expertise extends from China, and Middle Eastern countries, through Greece, East European countries, Italy, Austria, The Federal Republic of Germany, France, the Low Countries, England and the Commonwealth, to Sweden, Spain, North and South America, not forgetting Switzerland. Generally, the lawyer staff is relatively youthful. So personnel and with it fields of expertise will inevitably change in the future.

The Institute's contribution to legal science often far exceeds the sum of its parts. It promotes the study of international and comparative law in a number of different ways. Its library is used by the students of Lausanne University and other organisations. The system of permitting post-graduate students from all parts of the world to join the Institute on scholarships has given often unique opportunities to the recipients to use the library and other resources. In return such visitors often increase the awareness of those and the Institute of their particular speciality and give new ideas for library acquisitions.

International links are also fostered by the Institute through the international conferences that it organises. It has arranged meetings on the German and Swiss proposed legislation on private international law, the 1980 Vienna Convention on the International Sale of Goods, and on Artificial Procreation, Genetics and the Law. An International Symposium on Chinese Economic Law will take place here on 5th and 6th December 1986.

Up to August 1985, four volumes have appeared of the »Publications of the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law«.

1. Lausanner Kolloquium über den deutschen und den schweizerischen Gesetzesentwurf zur Neuregelung des Internationalen Privatrechts. Lausanne 14.–15. Oktober 1983; 340 p.
2. Premières journées juridiques yougoslavo-suisse. Lausanne et Fribourg, 16–19 novembre 1983, 1984; 256 p.
3. The 1980 Vienna Convention on the International Sale of Goods. Lausanne Colloquium of November 19–20, 1984; trilingual text of the Convention. 1985; 303 p.
4. Artificial Procreation, Genetics and the Law. Lausanne Colloquium of November 29–30, 1985, 1986; 407 p.

Under the directorship of Dr. J. Stepan up to the end of June 1986 and now Dr. H. Knudsen, the Institute has built up a library consisting of over 70 000 volumes and approximately 1400 periodicals. One of its objectives is to have materials on the laws of most if not all the countries of the world.

From the start, the development of new techniques of law librarianship has been high on the list of the Institute's priorities. After a series of meetings with internationally renowned librarians, the Institute prepared a new classification system which could usefully serve as a model for other comparative law libraries (see J. Stepan, »A New Classification of Law for a Foreign, Comparative and International Research Law Library: The System of the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law«, 16 *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 557). The library is connected to SIBIL, a computer cataloging system, by which the books of the Lausanne, Geneva, Fribourg and Neuchâtel libraries, not to mention the Institute's, can be found by title or subject-matter. The Institute also has terminals for the data-base information services of Belgium, France, England, the USA, Netherlands and other countries.

The Swiss Institute of Comparative Law is an attempt by the Swiss Federal Government to develop a truly international center for legal studies. Only those who come to use it, or experience the results of the work done here, will be able to judge how successful it has been, or will become, in the future.

Prof. A. E. von Overbeck
Director

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