

# AN IMPRESSIVE JOURNEY

Jens-Christian Schmidt's tenure as Ramboll Foundation board member ended on April 4 after twenty years in the Foundation. First employed in Ramboll's Aalborg office in 1970, Jens-Christian looks back fondly over nearly fifty years of involvement with the company.

## Taught by the best

While studying engineering at the Danish Technical University, Jens-Christian was lucky enough to have Ramboll co-founder Johan Hannemann as his teacher. "Hannemann was formidable at what is known as statics in complicated structures, but it could be sometimes difficult to follow his train of thought during lectures," says Jens-Christian.

Not long after he began working for Ramboll, Jens-Christian discovered that Hannemann had actually made a rare miscalculation while developing a special foundation construction for high-voltage masts, which at that time were the company's speciality. "We smiled and corrected the mistake and never discussed it," says Jens-Christian. "And all the masts are still standing today!"

## The perfect match

His early days at Ramboll were characterised by the same emphasis on the fair treatment of clients and the wellbeing of employees that is still synonymous with the

company we know today. Central to this was the way in which Johan Hannemann and Børge Rambøll complemented each other.

"Hannemann often visited offices around the country," says Jens-Christian. "Not least when we were working on major projects and he was often very involved. You really felt as though you were close to the company's top management and there was a lot of mutual respect."

Børge Rambøll on the other hand was more "interested in employees and the working culture, and ensuring that everything was proper and reasonable. He was actively interested in and showed great empathy for everyone he saw and met. I remember when he and his wife visited us in North Jutland. He had the ability to put you in a good mood and it was incredibly motivating having a conversation with him," says Jens-Christian.

## Board member

Jens-Christian joined the board of the Ramboll Foundation in 1998

when there were nearly 2,000 employees; since then the company has grown significantly. In response to this, the Foundation has also evolved - in particular becoming more active and visible in its role. "At the end of the nineties the Foundation was relatively anonymous," he says. "It's true that the Foundation owned all the shares in Ramboll and was also the owner - but in reality, it didn't really fully exert its role as the owner as all significant decisions were made by the operational part of Ramboll."

Gradually though, the Foundation developed into its present role as an active owner with both a clear governance model and a management structure. "The Foundation takes decisions based on being an owner while the Group Board of Directors and the Executive Board have responsibility for the daily running of the company," explains Jens-Christian. "The cooperation between the Foundation and Group Board of Directors is agreed in 'Long-term Priorities and Aims' document."

### Distinct advantages

According to Jens-Christian, there are proven benefits for companies that are owned by foundations. "A major study by Copenhagen Business School has shown that foundation-owned companies do better on average than other types of companies. This is mainly because most of their revenue remains in the company, providing the opportunity to develop it while taking a long-term view. This provides an environment in which to take the right decisions."

But it is not enough to be simply owned by a foundation. "What really means something is how the foundation works together with the top management," says Jens-Christian. "It is important for a company to have a good owner and it is important to have a good working culture."

As the company continues to grow, the Foundation will develop accordingly. "We can always improve," says Jens-Christian. "Therefore, we have established the Futures Committee that examines the ways in which the Foundation



can develop and be the best possible owner for Ramboll and therefore represent the employees' ownership."

"It's been incredibly exciting being part of the Ramboll and having so many fantastic colleagues as well as being part of the Foundation - and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of it," he says.

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Major projects include residential apartments in Algiers, natural gas projects, the Great Belt bridge and the University Hospital in Aarhus.

Lives in Aalborg