

NBA and Copenhagen University

Dear employees at the Niels Bohr Archive
Dear colleagues and guests

In the early 1920'es
when Niels Bohr was building up his institute
rules were few.

Scientific liberty was king,
and research was carried out in a playful environment.
Extended collaboration between many different kinds of researchers
was the norm.

Bohr protected his staff of researchers against overwhelming bureaucracy
and titles, nationality or the way you dress
did not play any role.

The institute attracted scientists who – later on - became world famous:
Pauli, Heisenberg, Dirac and Weisskopf – just to name a few.

During breaks
the scientists played table tennis in the library.

Bohr then had to make one rule:
They had to stop using the old books as bats!

Otherwise everything was allowed
in this environment consisting of gifted scientists from all over the world.
Bohr knew that solutions to complicated scientific challenges
were to be found by refusing to respect traditional frontiers and barriers.

This environment became known as “The Copenhagen Spirit”.

And it WAS indeed a lively environment.
I know, because in a way I am a child of the Copenhagen Spirit.
My father used to be a scientist at the institute.
Employed by Bohr himself.
And Weisskopf used to dine in our home!

Niels Bohr started one of the most cross-cultural,
creative and collaborating research environments
ever seen in Denmark.
Everybody wanted to be part of it.

Bohr lived his idea of an open world.
And the list of internationally famous scientists connected to his institute

is as long as the list of its groundbreaking discoveries.

He created an international IQ-magnet
and collector of talent.
Even today we are still striving to copy that recipe
throughout the University as a whole.

But also in other areas than the world of science
Bohr was a great dane.

He was not only interested in quantum mechanics.
He was interested in interacting with the outside world.

He was engaged in politics – in words AND in action
he met with world leaders, wrote a famous open letter to the UN
addressing the importance of mutual trust and cooperation between nations
And he helped saving quite a few jewish scientist during the World War.

This interest in the outside world
And this insisting on collaboration across borders between people
as well as between nations
makes him an important role model for the university.

Bohr's theories – and his institute - are still going strong.
But the knowledge of his life, his philosophy and of a lot of his work,
might not be as well known
had it not been for the persistent work of the Niels Bohr Archive
to document and collect everything we know about Bohr today.

You have become our bridge to the Copenhagen Spirit
by continuing
some of the important virtues of Niels Bohr's institute:
The collaboration and the international outlook.

You are providing an important service
to researchers from several areas and from all over the world;
Physicists and historians alike.

And you have a very close and fruitful cooperation
with the Niels Bohr Institute.

Personally I am looking very much forward to seeing the results
of your collaboration with the University of Copenhagen
on the celebration of the 100 year anniversary
of Bohr's discovery of the atomic model in 2013.

We hope
that it will be possible to link you even closer to the university

in the future.

The potential in collaborating even more is definitely there.
And building up more of a tradition
in the area of history of science
would be relevant.

Having access to your extensive material on Bohr and his work
is essential to the research on the development of quantum mechanics
and to the knowledge of the many political, philosophical and historical aspects of the life of Niels
Bohr.

As prorektor with responsibility for the communication of the university
I appreciate your many efforts in making this piece of history of science available to the public.

You organize high school visits,
You publicize on the internet,
And you communicate the work of Bohr through tv, radio
and a large number of publications.

Your efforts to tell us about Bohrs groundbreaking research
and the Copenhagen spirit
with its international spirit, its playfulness and curiosity,
and its protecting the liberty of research
is an inspiration for the university.

Congratulations on your first 25 years!