

# MEBAK – Supportive of the entire industry

**COLLECTING COLLECTIVELY** | Since October 2nd 2020, Dr. Martin Zarnkow of the Research Center Weihenstephan for Brewing and Food Quality has been the new chairman of the Mitteleuropäische Brautechnische Analysenkommission (Central European Commission for Technical Brewing Analysis), or MEBAK for short. He has succeeded Prof. Frank-Jürgen Methner of the TU Berlin, who headed MEBAK from 2016 to 2020. The organization, too, currently finds itself in a period of transition – a very good reason for BRAUWELT International to visit its new chairman.

**Dr. Zarnkow, after 17 years as a member of MEBAK, you are now its chairman. How did your path in life lead you to MEBAK?**

**Dr. Martin Zarnkow:** Along with Dr. Stefan Kreis, Dr. Christoph Tenge and Prof. Fritz Jacob, I was recommended as a candidate to replace members retiring from MEBAK in 2003. Once a candidate has been endorsed as a potential member of MEBAK, they are invited to give a presentation at the next MEBAK semi-annual plenary session. This allows the candidate to demonstrate that they are well-versed in scientific analysis methods. The members of MEBAK then decide whether they will accept the candidate as a member. There is no guarantee that a candidate will be accepted. However, I personally am only aware of one candidate who was not offered membership.

I have served as secretary of the organization since 2004. I have always found this to be a great advantage, because it has allowed me to keep up with all that's going on.

**The members have key responsibilities. Who are the members of MEBAK?**

**Dr. Zarnkow:** As a reflection of our historical roots and as the heir to the legacy of the organization Deutsche Brautechnische Analysenkommission (German Commission for Brewing Analysis) or DBAK, the majority of our members come from Germany,

Austria and Switzerland. Meanwhile, they have been joined by members from other countries, such as the Czech Republic and Italy, although German has remained our primary language within the organization. Most of our members are from universities, breweries and other companies which are involved in brewery analysis. A few years ago, we decided to no longer place emphasis on the participation of a company or an institution, but instead on the expertise of

individuals. Therefore, it may happen that more than one person from a certain institution are members. That was precisely the case with me back then...

We have a total of 21 members from five countries who are assigned to 10 different working groups. We also have three honorary chairmen and 17 honorary members. We are currently planning on adding three more members.

**What have you experienced over your time spent as a member of MEBAK? What has changed?**

**Dr. Zarnkow:** Over the past 17 years, MEBAK has expanded its scope and embarked upon new endeavors. For example, consider the separate volumes devoted to water and sensory analysis published during this time. The latest will be the upcoming volume on microbiology. MEBAK has widened its focus to encompass the entire beverage industry. Therefore, beer has now been joined by non-alcoholic beverages, such as water, soft drinks and juice. Furthermore, a separate



**BRAUWELT International visited the new chairman of MEBAK, Dr. Martin Zarnkow, in his office at the Alte Akademie in Freising-Weihenstephan**

volume has been published on the topic of microbreweries which was conceived to meet the needs of breweries ranging from small to really tiny. Unlike the other MEBAK volumes, it also addresses legal aspects and regulations affecting breweries – and even covers architectural considerations. Thus, we are approaching brewing operations from a completely different perspective.

### What are the current challenges facing MEBAK?

**Dr. Zarnkow:** One of the major challenges we are facing right now is the conversion of the MEBAK volumes in print to online publications. In contrast to our guidelines describing brewhouse evaluation or filtration, which will remain as books for the time being, the MEBAK volumes will only be available online in the future. To this end, we are now conducting a comprehensive revision of all analyses, in German and in English. Among other reasons, this is necessary for the layout. And this is a mammoth task. It will not only occupy our time now but over the long term as well, since constantly maintaining an online presence requires a different level of supervision than a printed book. We are starting with our three most important volumes, Raw Materials, Wort, Beer and Beer-based Beverages and Water, each of which will then appear as individual chapters online.

We are currently scrutinizing exactly how the material will look online. There will probably be an annual subscription which will allow access to the content of all of the earlier volumes as separate chapters. We are still in the process of determining whether individual analyses will also be offered. Of course, it will be possible to explore the material to a certain extent before encountering a paywall. This is where another important aspect of our online presence emerges: we are also acutely aware of the role the MEBAK volumes play as textbooks for training and educating brewers. For this reason, educational institutions will receive discounted access, and we will also be offering trial subscriptions. However, we are still working on the details of how exactly this will be implemented.

If everything goes according to plan, the new MEBAK online presence is expected to be launched in mid-2021. Of course, it also depends on the content and formatting revisions of the analyses that I mentioned earlier. All of our members work on a voluntary basis, and therefore we can only



Members of MEBAK at their last meeting in November of 2019 in Darmstadt at one of their last meetings

send out a request, asking for their cooperation in order to get this accomplished. To do so, it is important to motivate and coordinate our numerous working groups. First, Dr. Gerold Reil, both a fellow member of the board and my colleague, will devote his efforts to the chapter Wort, Beer and Beer-based Beverages. The deputy chairman on the MEBAK board, Matthias Hansen of the company Ireks in Kulmbach, will be responsible for implementation and support of the online presence. Our greater goal in establishing ourselves online is to achieve better visibility. After all, we want to help the industry!

### In addition to MEBAK, there are other analysis collections such as those from EBC Analytica and the ASBC. How do you view MEBAK in comparison?

**Dr. Zarnkow:** Well, differences do exist, regarding both the content and structure. The primary goal of MEBAK is to collect and maintain a repository of analysis methods. We do not necessarily seek to develop new methods ourselves, but that does, without question, sometimes happen along the way. However, our true goal is to collect analysis methods and provide a detailed description of these methods, which ultimately leads to the comprehensive nature of our volumes. I've already mentioned the use of our volumes for educational purposes. In contrast to the ASBC and EBC, which generally only adopt analysis methods in their collections after complex collaborative trials have been performed, our collections include methods

which are carried out, for example, in just one laboratory. In this situation, a collaborative trial is simply not possible. Naturally, we label these types of methods accordingly, but we certainly want to include them as long as the methods have merit and contribute to our pool of knowledge. We are interested in sharing the possibilities that exist. We collect all of the methods we can, but one aspect is quite clear: the person who utilizes a method in a brewery or beverage production facility must decide how it will be applied. Let's take the isothermal 65 °C mash method as an example: we record all the data about this method, but in the end the brewer must decide whether to keep using the Congress mash regime or adopt the new method.

Of course, we collaborate with our colleagues at the ASBC and EBC. MEBAK also regularly participates in collaborative trials. Historically, we have always been an independent organization, and we want to remain so. Our organizations are structured differently, for example, in how we approach our work: because our working groups are small, this enables our experts to have open and direct lines of communication with one another. In addition, since we are using our native language of German instead of a shared international language of English, this helps us update our collections of analysis methods much more quickly and effectively. I see that as a great advantage that we would like to preserve. Placing young experts with more experienced members in working groups is another positive aspect of our system.

### Is there anything you would like to change?

**Dr. Zarnkow:** I would imagine that we will extend our range to include new topics. At the moment, we are considering the addition of other beverages. Cider is a good example. The topic of microanalysis continues to gain in importance for us for the simple reason that analysis methods are becoming more precise. The entire beverage industry can profit from our knowledge if MEBAK is able to identify the appropriate analysis methods early on. There have already been several unpleasant incidents involving non-industry laboratories attempting to detect supposed contaminants in beer. Often these self-proclaimed consumer protection groups or environmental watchdogs overlook the fact that many methods are well-suited for the analysis of water but are not at

all applicable for wort or beer. The matrix of beer, with its thousands of known and unknown substances, requires methods that are adapted to its particular characteristics.

We are also facing major challenges resulting from climate change (keyword: raw materials) as well as ongoing revisions to legal requirements. Nevertheless, although we work on a voluntary basis, I am convinced that we will be able to successfully accomplish these tasks in rapid succession and in a professional manner, because of our small working groups, common native language and efficient communication. Of course, we would like to exchange information with other institutions, such as the EBC, to an even greater extent, not only for purposes of collaboration but also to avoid working on tasks in parallel. My vision is to build a much larger foundation for coopera-

tion which will ultimately benefit everyone.

### And in conclusion, a completely different question: November of 2021 will mark the 50th anniversary of MEBAK. Have you already made plans to mark the occasion?

**Dr. Zarnkow:** Planning an anniversary celebration is somewhat difficult given the current circumstances. We cannot make any plans at the moment. Fortunately, we still have some time until November rolls around.

**Dr. Zarnkow, thank you very much for the interview and all the best for the tasks that await you!**

*This interview was conducted by BRAUWELT Editor-in-Chief Dr. Lydia Junkersfeld*