

## From the Storage of Tobacco to a Research Library: The Conversion of the Toulouse Tobacco Factory

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### THE UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

Toulouse is a large City in the South of France, located near the *Pyrénées* Mountains and Spain. It's a very old City; it's been there since the 3rd century BC and has always been playing an important part in the intellectual and cultural development of the area and beyond. The Toulouse University is the second largest and the second oldest one in France: it was founded in 1229, a few years only after that of Paris. It was attended by a number of famous masters and students in the middle-Ages and in modern times. I can't help showing our polish hosts a particular registration sheet which is kept at the library, where you can read the name *Zdzislaw Joseph Sklodowski*, the uncle of Marie *Slodowska*, also known by the French as *Marie Curie*.

Today, Toulouse has got three plain Universities, two polytechnics, as well as a large number of superior schools, mostly dedicated to aeronautics and chemistry. With nearly 100,000 students and a very strong research activity, all university institutions have united to create the Toulouse University Network and the libraries of these universities have built their own documentary network and common catalogue (Toulouse University libraries Network).

The University of social sciences Toulouse 1 covers subjects such as law, economics, management, political science and computer science for 16,000 students and 460 teachers. While all other campuses are established on the edge of the urban area, UT1 is the only university located right in the city centre, on the very site of the former, medieval university, in the heart of what is known as the „quartier latin” of Toulouse. This location has many advantages but also, let us admit it, a number of disadvantages when it comes to planning the university's real estate development. At the end of the nineteen-sixties, when the number of French students increased considerably,

new buildings, and most notably a large library of 9,000 square metres, had already been erected next to the „former university”, on the ground of a former arsenal that the army had left unused. Twenty years later, the premises dedicated to teaching and research, as well as the library where quite saturated again.

At that point, an extension on the same Arsenal site was impossible, there wasn't enough available ground left. Then the authorities of the city suggested the University might fit into a set of buildings located about one mile away from there: the former Tobacco Factory (*La Manufacture des Tabacs*).

#### EXTENDING INTO THE MANUFACTURE: THE EXTENSION PROJECT

This large architectural scheme dates back to the second half of the Nineteenth century and includes several bodies of building arranged in a square surrounding a central yard, with its front opening onto the Canal de Brienne and its back onto the river Garonne. Although the factory has ceased to accommodate industrial activities since 1979 only, the buildings had already been damaged in many ways when it was agreed that they should be allocated to the University: decay, fire, vandalism. The decision to convert the Tobacco Factory into buildings of the University of social sciences was made within the framework of a national development programme known as Universités 2000. The particular programme concerning the Manufacture site was finalised at the end of 1992 and specifies six sets of activities:

- Reception,
- the library and documentation areas,
- co-ordination (educational, administrative, technical and computer-based),
- teaching (lectures and courses),
- research,
- logistical aspects.

It appeared quite soon that the existing buildings, which were 17,000 square metres big altogether, were not large enough to meet the needs of such a programme. A good extra 8,000 square metres was required, when in fact, the site was already distinguished by an extraordinarily high rate of ground

covered with buildings: 80 %, for an area of over one hectare. The solution was, for the architect, to evaluate the available space in terms of volume and not only surface: the existing floors were quite high, so that one could contemplate creating additional levels. Under the efficient pressure of associations and local inhabitants, all the façades and roofing had been officially registered as Historic Monuments and were therefore totally protected, so that the whole work consisted in re-building without altering the exterior. A new construction was carried out from the inside, set back from the historical structure: two edifices fit into each other, the new one into the old one.

#### THE LIBRARY

The library was created during the third, last phase of the work. It was originally planned that its surface would be 4,500 square metres, divided into several rooms and levels, on both sides of an interior street. The difficulties specific to the conversion project in general, appeared particularly acute in the case of the library, for several reasons:

1. The area of the former factory that was chosen to become the library was a warehouse where the tobacco used to be stored before being processed in the workshops: a solid building with very few openings set in it, and many thick, red-brick walls inside, dividing the interior space into watertight compartments.

So the space was initially deprived of natural light, not very suitable for reading, *a priori* not very flexible either. The first difficulties lay in the initial architectural restraints.

2. Other kinds of problems arose from the way the conversion project was run. The *Université 2000* project, which I've alluded to, said that local authorities should contribute to the financing and that, consecutively, the control of the work would be shared. As for the *Manufacture* site, the *Région Midi-Pyrénées*, that is, the County Council, got the whole responsibility of it and things didn't work very well.

We, the head librarians of French university libraries, were, to my opinion, very well prepared for great constructing operations as planned by *Universités 2000* and for the next project *Universités 3M* that starts now: definition of the programme, dialogue with the architect and the local authorities responsible for the work, following through the work ...

In 1991, the president of the University had asked me to write up a forward-looking document of two sheets at most, to indicate the main items of conception for the future library. When I gave him the document he had ordered, I underlined the fact that it was a mere sketch, and insisted on taking part in the realisation of the programme itself.

The document included the following options:

- the largest possible application of the free-access principle in the reading rooms, with very little storage room;
- a large variety of types of studying seats (tables among sets of shelves, seats for multimedia consulting, rooms for group work, meeting-rooms for researchers, some „carrels”);
- a large access to new technology tools, which implies that the library should be fully equipped with cable;
- the development of services specifically designed for researchers: bibliographic research, training in using documentary tools, interlibrary loan service;
- and lastly, a reminder of a few principles about how to arrange things in a library, whatever the kind: flexibility (with a sufficient loading of the ground in the whole library), „readability” of the buildings, safety of people but also of the collections, standards for lighting, temperature and hygrometry.

Luckily enough, most of these propositions were taken into account in the general programme finalised at the end of 1992, for I wasn't invited to take part in the making of the programme itself, and I could have only little influence on the detailed, preparatory project.

3. A third difficulty arose from the University itself. Although no one ever denied that the *Arsenal* premises were saturated and that an extension was needed, although nearly everyone accepted pretty soon the idea that the *Manufacture* should accommodate both sectors of professional-oriented training and research, firm decisions on which particular team and which particular degree-course should move into the new site were long and hard to take; so that we couldn't know what particular public (what kind of students, teachers, researchers) the library would be designed for until the development programme was launched! Besides, since this was a creation, it wasn't easy to define precisely in advance the size of the staff, as the creation of additional posts is subjected to annual negotiations with the

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Education State Department, and not middle-term planification, which would be more appropriate.

Fortunately, in the middle of that ocean of difficulties, some glimmers of hope have appeared, like those of a beacon that allowed us to sail between the reefs and helped us to follow the right route.

1. First, the qualities of the architect, Mister Gabriel de Marien. This architect had taken part in competitions for building libraries before, and had actually already built some. Therefore, their specific definition and organisational restraints were not new to him.

Moreover, contacts with him have soon become easy and positive: although the Region had forbidden him to meet the future users of the building, he did, and we could have a few major changes achieved:

- The pulling down of the brick walls on the second floor, so as to obtain a single 900 square metres large reading-room instead of three smaller ones;
  - the transformation of a room that was originally planned as a storage room (while it was one of the few spots with some natural light coming in) into a workshop where book would be catalogued and covered.
2. The decision that the University was to establish the most part of its research activities as well as its professional-oriented training cycles on the *Manufacture* site induced the library to develop a very interesting project. At that point, the concept of „Central library for research” rose up, which allowed to make the library’s specific function, missions and services clear:
    - The library had authority to gather most (and sooner or later, the whole) of the research documentation that was, until then, scattered in faculties and documentation centres. Decisions to move, transport and donate part or wholes of collections were quickly taken (and are still being taken at that date).
    - Access being restricted to students in their fourth year of studies and beyond, the library could define and set up specific services for advanced students and researchers, which is not that easy in libraries that have to take in crowds of first degree students.
    - As the library didn’t have a pre-existing collection at its disposal, emphasis was deliberately laid on electronic resources. Today, while

the collection has grown considerably larger, the library is still known for making wide way for information new technologies.

#### THE ARCHITECTURAL CHALLENGE

There were two important needs at stake: vertical and horizontal circulation ways between the various areas, and treatment of the light.

##### *1. Circulation*

The library consists, in fact, of two parts, in two different buildings (C and H). The interior street functions as a natural circulation area that communicates with both of them, through several doors. An additional, direct communication way was established via a footbridge that stretches over the interior street.

On the side of the vaster building, the H-building, the division of rooms by brick walls, and the application of safety rules have led to the construction of too many stairways (6 different) considering the functional needs of the library.

Besides, two lifts were set up; one for the public, the other for the staff. (The footbridge and the lift also enable handicapped people to have access to the first floor of the legal studies reading room, in the C-building.)

On the other side (H building), the two rooms at both ends of the ground-floor of the building are dedicated to internal services; all other rooms can be accessed to by the public. The first area, where you can find the general reception, the loan-desk and the „press reading-corner”, is a partly exception to the otherwise systematically applied principle to split the rooms in two with an additional floor, halfway up these high walls. In that area, you can still see the original height of the building. We wished the brick walls separating the different reading rooms could have been more widely opened so as to increased the communication between areas and make the library's spatial organisation clearer. Unfortunately, this was not possible: the openings are only 1.5 metres wide, with firebreak doors.

## *2. Treatment of the Light*

Only the legal science reading rooms (C-building) have great windows giving onto the central yard. The H-building used to get no daylight but through a few openings onto the interior street, which is itself covered with a glass-roof.

The roof of that building had burnt, so its reconstruction made it possible to set up two devices:

- the addition of a row of windows surrounding almost completely the great reading-room of the second floor, thus generously lighting it up;
- the setting-up of real zenithal window-panes in the roof itself, right above the brick walls, so as to let the light come in and, by the way of a narrow hollowing out of floors at the base of walls, let it fall down to the ground-floor. The resulting light grazes the walls and underlines the brick bedstead against which the regular figure of dark-wood pillars stands out.

## *3. Other Devices, Further Problems*

The other areas described in the programme as necessary items (14 individual carrels, a meeting room and a training room) were realised and they are intensively used since the day the library opened. The internal work areas (offices, rooms for books' cataloguing and fitting out, internal meeting room) were difficult to fit into the whole of the space granted to the library: the building lent itself more obviously to fitting out large reading rooms than to partitioned, restricted spaces. Besides, we had got no information on the size of the staff from the preparatory project, so that the number of offices realised was too small: seven altogether, four of which had no window! Moreover, the latter were set pretty far from the other internal services, and therefore, can not accommodate librarians who take part in the treatment of documents. Consequently, we had to create two large collective offices after the library was „delivered”.

Among other difficulties encountered during the whole achievement, the financial issue appeared crucial. As I told you, the library was built during the last phase of the works; the overall budget could not be reduced, so the library had to suffer the consequences of the overspending of the first two phases, which of course affected the work somewhat:

- the general standard of finish was to a certain extent sacrificed. The architect did his best to explain that bare concrete or exposed perpendes were an aesthetic choice, but this doesn't account for cheap lighting

equipment and flooring. During the last months of work, we obtained a few changes on those points (carpeting, replacement of some neon tubes by hanging lamps), but they were financed with the functional budget of the library.

- Some indispensable devices were not set up. Some of them, such as cable equipment or alarm system, had been mentioned in the preparatory programme, though. Others were inherent to the technical conception of the building. For instance, the interior street has got no temperature control device. It's cold in winter and quite hot in summer, which made it impossible to use it for purposes that require the constant presence of a member of staff. More generally, an air-conditioning device was absolutely necessary for the library to be opened in summer, but there wasn't any installed; we are thinking about how to make it possible today, financing with „U3M” funds.

#### THE OVERALL MOOD - THE FURNITURE

One of the characteristics of the library's buildings is the strong presence of original architectural items: The yellow and red brick façades, the great interior red-brick walls, the pillars (wooden pillars in the H-building, cast-iron pillars in the C-building), stone or metal peculiarities.

The reconstructed roof was conceived so as to rest on an exposed, metal framework and the woodwork was replaced by metal frames everywhere. The additional floors and partition walls were partly left untreated. This coexistence of older and modern items was actively cultivated by the architect and contributes to the undeniable charm of the place.

The pre-existing colours were very strong (red bricks, dark grey frameworks and metal items), so the supplementary colours were deliberately quiet: tobacco-coloured coating for walls with exposed perpend, neutral carpeting, all other surfaces painted white.

The same kind of tones was chosen for the furniture: fair beech-wood, white-metal shelving, dark grey table-tops and desktops, black-leather seats. The wooden panels covering the edge of shelvings echoes the pattern of the new brick walls. There are two kinds of tables (with the sole purpose of restricting conversations between students, in order to keep the library noiseless):

- large, wide tables in rows with a median panel to separate readers studying on both sides;
- small tables for one or two persons.



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Thanks to this device, electrical and computer-type sockets as well as individual lighting could be set up for each work seat; these are the ones most readers prefer.

For the small tables in the Economics and management reading room on the second floor, sockets were set up in the ground. The carrels have a plain, wide table and also electrical and computer-type sockets.

Each reading room corresponds to a particular subject and includes all types of documents: two rooms for Legal science, communicating with an open stairway (the only one in the building not be inside a wall); one room for European documentation; and the great room for economics, management and computer science. Access to the electronic resources, which are organised into a network covering the whole University, is available in every room, although there is also a special area dedicated to such consultations next to the reception, so that staff members can easily help readers when necessary.

Signs and signals were very carefully designed; several materials were used to increase efficiency: most of the direction signs (wall panels and „lecterns”) consist of white fonts on a dark-grey background, wall panels and general direction „lecterns”. The main desk is indicated by a woven banner, and the great reading-room of the second floor is divided into three symbolical areas with three distinctive names written on triangular signs which look like boat-sails.

#### ELEMENTS FOR AN APPRAISAL

After three years, a first evaluation of the conversion enterprise and of the library's functioning can be made:

- The difficulties are mainly due to the project's inaccuracy and the insufficient part of the budget dedicated to the restoration work. Most of the deficiencies I described further up could be made up for (cable equipment, additional offices ...), or soon will be (air-conditioning). Another difficulty is linked to the application of safety rules. They have forced us to set up about ten emergency exits, very difficult to watch efficiently; for lack of an alarm system, we fitted them with plastic chains, which doesn't look very nice and is probably not very efficient either. Because of the same rules, most of the stairways had to be confined between walls, which makes the circulation inside the library not very clear.

- Nevertheless, the positive aspects prevail in this appraisal:
  - *La Manufacture* constitutes, at a very short distance, a considerable extension of the University's main site, in the heart of a tightly developed historic district. Circulation between the two sites is easy and frequent for students and teachers. This closeness has also helped the new library to define itself as the central research library for the University.
  - The renovation allowed to safeguard a magnificent old building, an surviving evidence of the city's industrial past.
  - The whole renovation programme was coherent enough not to isolate the library and, on the contrary, made documentation a major function, integrated into the new site
  - The building's potential and the architect's work have combined to make *La Manufacture* a brilliant place as far as aesthetics and atmosphere are concerned.
- The practical experience and the evolution of the library's functioning have also led to minimize the negative impression that the absence of a detailed programme might have given first, especially concerning the planning of collections. Indeed, the library's success prompted documentation and research centers to donate research collections of major interests. These donations were more important than the mere growth of the overall collection, as it could have been planned, through acquisitions alone. The principles initially set (flexibility, free-access) efficiently helped us to manage these unplanned developments which we consider a further evidence of the library's high quality and how much it is appreciated by the University.

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Figure 1: The tobacco factory

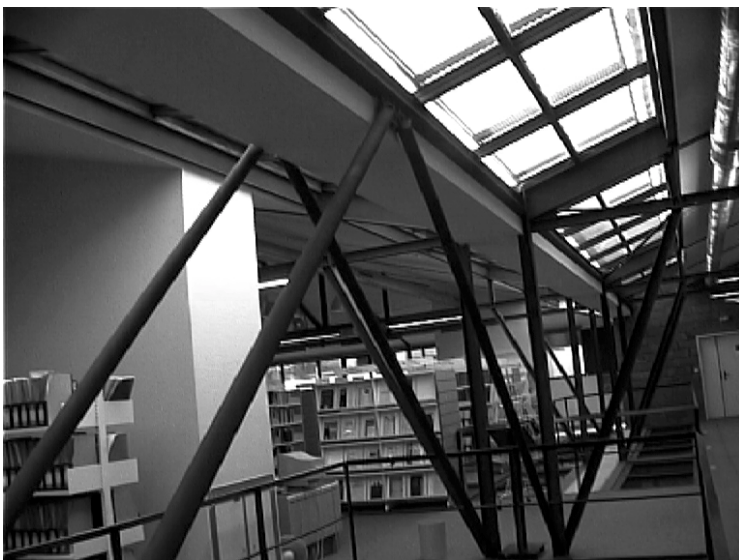


Figure 2: The treatment of light



Figure 3: Reading room



Figure 4: The entrance of the new library

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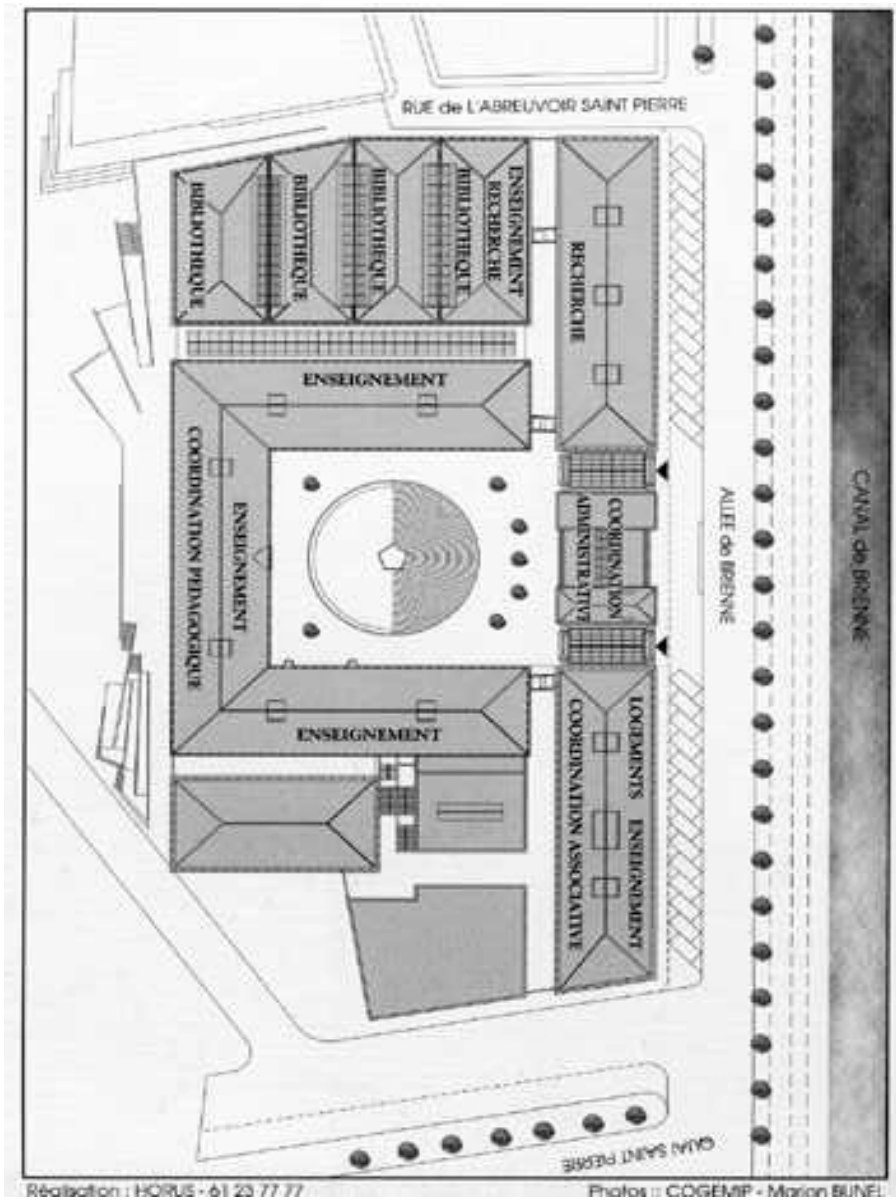


Figure 5: Ground-plan