

## The Right Statues of the Librairie in the Université

by MICHEL IDRAC

I would like to take this opportunity to underline the personal role that our former vice-chancellor Romain Gaignard played in the success of this library project. He first of all resuscitated the project and then he found the financing to complete it. He not only played a part in the construction of the building but he also encouraged the setting up of our university's new documentary policy, indeed this library building must be seen in the wider documentary context. At the University of Toulouse le Mirail we are the inheritors of the former Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences of the university founded in 1229 and for centuries we were located in the centre of the city. To understand the project it is necessary to outline the recent history of our establishment, which became the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail in 1971. In 1970 we left the centre city to a 'campus' situated in the Mirail area, 5 km outside the city. The campus was the work of G. Candilis.

### THE CRISIS

This is a story of a series of crises. The programme for building the campus, dating from 1967, was for a university with 8,000 students. When it opened there were 12,000 students... At the end of the 1980's there were more than 20,000. The university was expanding so fast that it was becoming very hard to find sufficient space for lectures and classes. In 1989, emergency funding was made available to build a teaching block, with further funding in 1990 & 1991. In 1990, after these initial additions, an outline plan was drawn up featuring a „large library". This was a means of recognising the extent of the needs, and this simple unofficial document had its role to play in the unfolding of events.

In 1990 the main university library only had 600 reading places the whole building measured 4,200 m<sup>2</sup>. If one adds the m<sup>2</sup> of departmental libraries

(4,457 m<sup>2</sup>, 933 places) one only reaches the figure of 0.26 m<sup>2</sup> per student, very far from minimum 1.5 m<sup>2</sup> per student. The pitiable state of French university libraries was outlined in the Miquel Rapport (1988) and it was hoped that part of the University 2000 Plan would help rectify the situation.

Another problem in Toulouse was the fact that the size of the collections. There were two reasons for this: before the creation of the University of Toulouse le Mirail in 1971, the library was originally part of the Faculté de Droit et Sciences Sociales library – when this was split into two, the Mirail library lost out. Moreover, annual funding was so low in the early 80s that even indispensable collections could not be bought.

As for the departments, they used part of their meagre budgets to buy basic books for their students and there was little contact between the main university library. Professional librarians did not always staff the departmental libraries. The two documentary systems did not work together but were worlds apart.

In 1990, given the spectacular growth in the number of students, the French State decided to make significant investments in new buildings in order to cater for these new students. Local authorities were approached for financing, and after years of stagnation and countless difficulties, it was at last decided to build a new library. As enlarging the old library was out of the question, the building of a new library had long figured in the list of needs put forward by our university. But other programmes were given priority and for the library the university only got enough money to build a 6,000 m<sup>2</sup> library.

#### 1991-1996: 5 YEARS OF HESITATIONS

During the 5 years following the decision to build, the project was virtually shelved, for two main reasons. Firstly, the project was not a priority for the university. Other needs were thought to be more urgent – a research building, which was completed in 1994, and a building for the School of History, completed in 1997.

But there were also hesitations concerning the project itself. The money available (9.5 M) could not finance a large building. And very quickly there appeared a conflict between the two partners regarding design – should it be a regional library or a university library? At first the developer was supposed to be the Midi-Pyrénées region as the main financier. The Region wished to make the library a kind of bridgehead for the network it wished to set up with other smaller and more general libraries it ran in other towns. The university

however required extra space as quickly as possible in order to satisfy student demand for seating. The two projects were incompatible, hence the delays.

Moreover, there was no suitable land available in the immediate area around the campus. Proposals to build a library not far from the campus and not just for students went forward in 1992, but when another library in the area (Bagatelle) went up in flames, the project was abandoned.

It was only when the university's governing board was changed in 1996 that things actually began to move.

#### THE UNIVERSITY'S NEW DOCUMENTATION POLICY

Disadvantages of the documentary situation in the early 1990s. There was a great lack of clarity and efficiency in the functioning of many of the campus libraries. The opening of various documentation centres, often connected to research activities exacerbated the situation – these centres were subject to no regulations or control, this was all in response to a need. The majority of potential users had little access to the different collections, which were located in various places around the campus. From administrative point of view, the French State, which oversees, controls and finances, there was no overall view.

#### SETTING UP A UNIFIED SERVICE

One solution envisaged to overcome this situation was to apply the 1985 Savary decree by setting up a unified documentation service – a kind of federative structure. It was important to provide real organisational coherence in order to support lecturing and research. This was the basis on which the university was to negotiate a contract with the State in order to receive the necessary financing.

As soon as the new vice-chancellor Gaignard was elected, he decided to apply the Savary decree and he organised the setting up of a Unified Documentation Service (Service Commun de la Documentation) whose role was to federate all the documentary services on the campus. The mission of the intra-university service (between the different universities of the city Service Inter-Etablissements de Coopération Documentaire) was redefined. The creation of the Unified Documentation Service (SCD) meant that the faculty libraries could gradually be incorporated within the Unified Documentation Service

and the university documentation policy be harmonised, wherever the collections might actually be.

One of the first applications of the new documentary policy was that when a buildings on the campus were restructured, small documentary centres were brought together and enlarged, to avoid having books being locked up in cupboards and only available a few hours a week. It was not always an easy transition. The distinctive nature of each centre was not to disappear overnight. However there was a general consensus about the idea of a new library building which became possible thanks to a change of developer.

#### THE NEW BUILDING

When the State rather than the Region took over the function of developer, the project was able to move forward.

The University appointed a project manager whose particular task was to find a common language between professional needs in documentation, users' expectations and needs and obligations imposed by the building authority codes.

#### A PROGRAMME DEVELOPED WITH THE USERS

Even before the works programmer was appointed there were a series of preparatory meetings between the personnel of the central library and the departmental libraries. Once the works programmer appointed, work became interactive, the work of preparing invitation for bids was formalised.

The tender published at the end of 1996 was for a complete project even if it was known that the level of funding would limit construction to part of the project and that the university would set about looking for further funding to complete the project. Today funding has been found thanks to the so-called Universities for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium Programme. The first part was due to be completed in October 2001 and building for the second part is to start at the beginning of the summer of 2002, bringing the total area up from 6,000 to 15,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

#### OBSTACLES: THE TIME FACTOR

The explosion of the AZF chemical factory in Toulouse on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2001 (30 people killed, over 2000 injured) was only one of the factors accounting for the delay in opening the building – there were a series of other obstacles.

The first of these was the amount of time necessary to get the building project off the ground. Once the project had been reactivated, a further three years were necessary to really get things moving. There was the problem of planning permission, which is particularly complex in France, particularly as it was a building for the public, thus with very strict security regulations. More and more obligations were imposed on the developer as the procedure ran its course, slowing things down and implying higher costs to circumvent obstacles. The result being that after a delay of several years, the original sums of money were insufficient and new financing was needed to be able to sign contracts with builders. With such a long wait costs inevitably increased and plans became less clear-cut.

Uncertainties about the future were the second delaying factor. Even if it had been decided to give priority to electronically accessing documents, the means of implementing the decision were open to debate. Techniques change very quickly. Plans had to take this into account and not rely on past solutions. Thus in 1996 the building was designed so as to give users access to both paper and digital documents. Not only did physical documents have to be stocked but all forms of documents accessed. This implied connecting half of the available places to data transmission networks, but without actually deciding which techniques would be used and without information about costs of such accessing or the legal implications, both of which change very quickly.

Finally, things were not made easy by changes in the team of people leading the project. And in particular, given the length of the administrative stages, only small modifications could be made without upsetting the financial logic of the whole. It was thus vital to have a small team working on the ongoing project whose members took part in the initial phases.

#### INTEGRATING THE PROJECT INTO THE CAMPUS RECONSTRUCTION PLAN

Since the new library project was launched, it has been decided to rebuild the oldest part of the campus, which cannot easily be repaired or extended. This

new project does not concern the new library, but the new campus will be organised around the library building.

It is only in the long term that one will be able to appreciate the new library. This will not just include the building, which is both well built and seems functional. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our architect, Pierre Riboulet, in particular for the attention he paid to the library users during the consultation phase. Thanks to this, our initial proposals were improved upon, and the building will be an efficient one.

We will hardly have one square meter per student potentially present, once the Riboulet building has been completely finished. Can we make do with this? The question of the optimum shape of the new library was not followed through. To comply with norms, an extra 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> should have been built. What was impossible five years ago is still not possible today. The building we wished to have and which will soon be completed is a finished building in architectural terms. One cannot envisage adding an extra part, and there is insufficient space to do so. Should one, moreover, purely use quantitative norms when, thanks to the importance of automation things are changing.

High-speed fibre optic networks are being installed in the Toulouse region; we had not envisaged this when the library programme was launched in 1996. The result is that one cannot think through the library programme in isolation, we now have to take the whole campus as a unit and the university's other sites in the region.

We are only at the opening phase – of reconstructing the campus. In this period when techniques are evolving and when there are limits to building capacity, the solution probably lies in furthering the integration policy for departmental libraries, whose areas can be slightly increased and which can be networked. The present layout will not be totally reproduced but rationalised, implying merging some elements.

Thus in our view the outline plan currently being designed for the whole campus should not be based purely on planning considerations. It is merely a tool for a 'political' project. It must help us to harmonise the various ongoing projects and to optimise future functioning. It will inevitably lead to a new blueprint and must include the buildings that are to stay. It must thus integrate the university's new centre of gravity. The land we found for the new library is at one end of the car park, somewhat far from the present campus centre but in the near future it will appear in its rightful place, at the centre of the new campus. This new library building is at the very centre of the different documentary services thanks to modern technology. This implies constant participation by all the staff involved in the documentation service this work cannot be carried out without upsetting some ingrained habits.

The 'Unified Documentation Service' that we wish to see implemented and which implies unifying our professional practices has yet to be completed. Thus we can see that a long-term project of campus renewal and not just a new library building is in the process of construction.