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MANAGING THE PROCESS TOWARDS A NEW
LIBRARY BUILDING. EXPERIENCES FROM
UTRECHT UNIVERSITY



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Managing the process towards a new library building. Experiences from Utrecht University.

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Abstract

In September 2004 Utrecht University will open a new building for the university library. The process towards this new library began in 1995. This process is completely conducted under the responsibility of the university librarian.

The presentation describes:

- the new building: its functions and design, as well as its future flexibility ;
- the project: the project phases and the project organization in the different phases.

Special attention is given to the crucial role of the university librarian and the pitfalls of the specific way the project was structured.

Finally, some observations are made concerning the momentum towards organizational and cultural change, created by a new building.

1. Introduction

In 1995 Utrecht University Library started a process towards a new library building. In September 2004 the building will be open for public.

In this paper a number of experiences will be highlighted. These concern the following topics:

- Demands for new library buildings: what should be taken into account when building a library in the time when the library's function is rapidly changing?
- The project and the process: which phases can be distinguished and what are important guidelines for these phases?
- The role of the librarian: how can he or she overcome a lack of experience in building projects?
- Momentum for change: how can the opportunity of a new building help to strengthen the organization and its culture?

In this introduction a short impression is given of the library involved and of the situation that has led to the building process. Also the main data about the new building are presented.

Utrecht University Library was founded in 1584. Nowadays, it is a co-operative network of a Central Library and 14 branch libraries. Its collection contains 4.600.000 documents, among which 650 medieval manuscripts and 127.000 books printed before 1801. It presently has 15.000 serial subscriptions, of which more than 50% are electronic.

The number of patrons is 35.000 and circulation amounts to 250.000 per year.

Utrecht University Library employs a staff of 200 fulltime equivalents (280 persons).

Acquisition expenditures are €4.500.000 per year. The annual turnover is €16.500.000.

The following considerations led to the conclusion that a new library building was necessary.

First, there were a number of specific problems connected with the housing of the library that could be solved by a new building. The present housing situation is characterized by dispersion: 6 buildings in different parts of the town: some in the old city (among which the main building), some in the campus “De Uithof” outside the city, some in an industrial area at the other end of the city. But there is also the problem of lack of space, which will only grow in the years to come. Furthermore, the main building of the Central Library offers insufficient security protection, while the collection is also threatened by the inferior climate within the building.

Secondly, a new building would make it possible to anticipate future developments, especially concerning the improvement of public facilities. Furthermore, the University Board wanted to create a real campus in De Uithof: a modern library building within this campus would certainly be a strong factor.

Looking at the time scale of the project, the main milestones are the following:

- November 1995 start
- March 1997 approval of the program
- March 1999 final design
- July 2001 start construction
- May 2004 construction finished
- September 2004 library in use

The new building has the following dimensions:

- New Library Building 24.000 m²
- Shops 500 m²
- Parking (cars) 8.000 m²
- Parking (bikes) 400 m²
- Total 32.900 m²

The dimensions for the different functions:

- Public areas 12.000 m²
- Book-stacks 11.500 m²
- Offices 4.500 m²

The public areas contain:

- Lounge / cafeteria.
- Lecture room (130 persons), also to be used as an exhibition room.
- Lending desk.
- General reading room.
- Reading room Social Sciences and Geographical Studies.
- Reading room Theology and Philosophy.
- Reading room Special Collections.
- 550 reader seats.
- Wireless network connection.

In total, the collection in the building takes 90.000 m:

- open access in reading rooms 12.000 m
- stacks pre 1901 30.000 m
- stacks after 1901 48.000 m

Finally, the financial data about the project:

- Total budget at the start January 1997 €45.600.000
- Total budget corrected for inflation January 2001 €50.000.000
- Total budget actually needed August 2001 €70.500.000
(including furniture €3.200.000 euro
moving costs €1.500.000 euro)

2. Demands on new library buildings:

The future of university libraries is heavily influenced by technological developments. More and more information becomes digitally available, and also the design of the services, logistics, and back office procedures of the library are under the influence of technology. This brings forward a number of uncertainties, not as much about the direction of the developments, but certainly about the pace in which the necessary changes will take place. This is, for instance, dependent on the policy of traditional publishers: when and how will they make their material electronically available and under what conditions? Another relevant question concerns the primary processes of the universities: the application of information technology in research and teaching will also be of influence on the future of the library.

Despite these uncertainties, a number of things can be concluded about the demands for a new library building.

For the *public facilities* a number of aspects are essential:

- An *integration of different desks* (circulation, information) is efficient and improves the flexibility.
- Collections should be placed in *open stacks* as much as possible.
- There is a still increasing need for *study places*, not only to study the material that is available in the library, but also to work with material brought into the library by the students themselves. More private areas are also needed, such as small cabins for one or two persons.
- All places should have a *network connection* and many places should be equipped with a *PC*. In addition, a wireless network connection is useful.
- Study places should not be restricted to silence areas. There is an increasing need among students for facilities for *group activities*.
- *Copying & printing* facilities should be available in or near every reading room.
- *Video conferencing* facilities are useful, enabling students to communicate with colleagues abroad. The demand for these facilities will certainly increase in the years to come.

The following demands are vital for the *stacks*:

- The future need for closed stacks is dependent on the degree in which material will be preserved electronically in the future. This will be especially the case with journals. On the longer term, the acquisition of monographs will also decrease due to the digital distribution of information. Therefore, one should take into account only a limited growth for the stacks.
- Climatological demands for special collections are, of course, of high, and never decreasing, importance. Manuscripts and old prints, as well as material from the 19th century are vulnerable and it is necessary to create favorable conditions for their preservation.

Next, it is highly important to profile the library as a *meeting place*, a place for social contacts for students and university staff.

Originally, a library was a place for consulting sources and literature available in the library. This role of the library created a quiet, studious atmosphere, and this atmosphere attracted people that wanted to study their own material in silence. This role of the library is likely to decrease, as more and more information becomes digitally available, and thus can be consulted at one's working place at the university or even at home. But also more and more group activities take place in the library, introducing more noise. In addition, in many universities small-scale study facilities are created at a decentralized level, close to where the actual teaching process takes place.

In order to remain an attractive place, especially to students, it is effective to profile the library as an attractive meeting place.

Last, but certainly not least, *flexibility* is needed.

Functional changes must be possible: while journals will be distributed and archived electronically, and the number of monographs purchased will decrease, more space becomes available for study places. This implies an increase in the number of visitors and also an increase in the need for facilities (PC's, printing and copying facilities). The security and climatological infrastructure should keep pace with this development (the number of elevators e.g.) also.

Technological developments, however, may also lead to a concentration of branch libraries. When relevant information sources are available at each working place or at home, university staff will visit the library less frequently. Library space, then, is being used less efficiently, especially in science and technology libraries. Thus the faculty responsible for the library facilities will be inclined to move the remaining material and the study places to a central library, or to combine the library facilities for a number of faculties. This development may imply an increasing number of books on the shorter term.

Furthermore, on the longer term it is also to be expected that the number of library staff will decrease, especially because of increased efficiency in the back office processes. This means that less office space will be needed.

This developments call for flexibility and for a spatial integration of the different functions (offices, stacks, reading rooms, meeting rooms, etc.) instead of a structure of separated compartments for each function.

3. The project and the process

This chapter deals with the different phases of the building project at Utrecht. For each phase it describes shortly the main stages and presents the lessons learned at Utrecht.

The main phases of the project are:

1. Program definition.
2. Design.
3. Construction.
4. Furnishing and equipping.
5. Moving.
6. In use.

stage, the construction specifications, therefore showed a deficit that could not be resolved.

Carrying out intensive financial checks on the ongoing design during the design process can prevent this dilemma. These checks should not (or not only) be carried out by the architect himself, but by the financial advisor of the university.

Phase 3. Construction.

For this phase the following stages can be distinguished:

- European tender procedure, ended in November 2000
- Start of the construction July 2001
- Construction completed May 2004

The reason that there is a relatively large time gap between the end of the tender procedure and the start of the construction is the fact that the tender made clear that a larger budget was needed. This caused political discussions in the university, also related to the general situation in the Netherlands that the market for construction companies was not working well at that time. In a number of cases, it had been proven that the rules for European tender procedures were violated because construction companies negotiated together before the formal submission. Nevertheless, the university board finally decided to increase the budget.

The most important lessons learned during this phase, are the following:

- There are always mistakes in the construction specifications. Correction of these mistakes is inevitable but rather expensive and also time consuming.
- The architect keeps designing new details even during the construction process, not only to correct mistakes, but also in reaction to the construction with the intention to improve details of the construction. Changes during the construction process are expensive and should be prevented as much as possible. Therefore, a strong, professional process management is needed and a very restrictive financial policy.

Phase 4. Furnishing and equipping

This phase is concerned with furniture, desks, PC's, equipment for facilities, audio-visual equipment, etc.

Lessons learned:

- A program made at the beginning of the project will be outdated at the moment it is actually needed. Therefore, the program should be reviewed and revised as late as possible. Take for instance the audiovisual equipment. Demands for this equipment have changed extensively the past years, so the program made at the beginning of the project was completely outdated.
- The architect's role should be mainly advisory. Most architects want to design several elements of the furniture. From the point of view of cost effectiveness, an advisory role is preferred. However, for some elements that are important for the library's profile and are not large in number, there is no objection to a designer's role for the architect.

4. The role of the university librarian

The project organization within the university is as follows:

- A steering group, consisting of:
 - the university librarian (chair),
 - the director of the university's building department,
 - during the construction phase: the process manager.
- A project manager from the university's building department.
- A coordinator within the library for the coordination of all activities within the library, as well as communication and public relations.
- Working groups, concerned with the program definition and the check of the preliminary design, the design, and the construction specifications against the program. The role of these working groups in all phases was advisory towards the steering group.

In this project the final responsibility was in the hands of the university librarian. This, however, is rather extraordinary. In most cases, someone from the university's building department has the final responsibility.

This final responsibility with the librarian has a clear advantage: strong user involvement. The functionality gets absolute priority in discussions that are caused by tension between architecture and functionality.

There is also an obvious disadvantage: the lack of experience in building projects. It will very seldom be the case that a university librarian has experience in building projects.

The lessons learned in respect to the librarian's role are directly related to his lack of expertise.

The lack of expertise has to be corrected in a number of ways.

First, intensive interaction and cooperation is needed with the building department of the university.

Secondly, as has been mentioned before, there has to be a strong financial control during the design phase. Interaction with the architect is necessary to get a good picture of the financial consequences of his design at an early stage. Asking advice only at the end of each stage of the design process is risky. If there is not enough expertise in the building department to carry out these financial checks, this expertise should be hired outside the university.

Thirdly, it is necessary to have a strong process management during the construction phase by a manager who is experienced in this respect. He or she should get far-reaching authorizations. This process manager is concerned with additional work that appears to be necessary during the construction process, necessary deviations from the construction specifications, interaction between the construction company and the architect, hiring additional advice when necessary, delay in the construction, and last but not least, the financial control. Main decisions are to be made by the steering group, especially when functionality is at stake.

Fourthly, in case of doubt: ask for a second opinion. When some element in the construction is innovative (which means that it has never been done before), or when, for instance, there is discussion about the acoustic quality, an advisor should be hired to give a second opinion to the steering group.

5. Momentum for change.

When an institution is in the process of creating a new building, this has a number of consequences for the way the work processes are structured. Especially, when there is a concentration of several locations, the efficiency can be improved. The organizational structure has to be adapted in order to realize this. This certainly is the case at Utrecht, but in addition, Utrecht University Library is also being confronted by a severe budget cut.

Even without the budget cut, an extensive reorganization would have been implemented. There are a number of reasons for this.

- Integration of collections of branch libraries.
The library facilities for the faculties that are located close to the new building are concentrated in the new building. This means an organizational combination of hitherto separate departments (public services as well as back office).
- Concentration of administrative staff of branch libraries.
The new building provides the opportunity to concentrate all document handling activities. Therefore new workflow processes had to be designed.
- Efficiency.
Concentration of all the stacks, that were hitherto located in five buildings, is a good example of efficiency that can be realized by moving to a new building.

But a new building also brings forward a new atmosphere, and therefore offers opportunities for a cultural change in the library. At Utrecht the following elements are emphasized in relation to the new building.

- Strengthening of user orientation.
The Central Library had, in its old housing, barely a collection in open stacks. In the new building a number of branch libraries also have their collections and reading room, which means a stronger interaction between staff working for central activities and staff working for the faculties and a more direct contact with users for all library staff. In the reorganization, the strengthening of user orientation is the main issue.
- The library as a cultural center.
The new building has a lecture room for 130 persons that also can be used for exhibitions. Both functions are new for the Utrecht University Library. In the lecture room scientific symposia can take place. Therefore, this presents the opportunity to profile the library as the cultural center of the campus.
- The library as a meeting place.
The location, right in the middle of the campus, combined with the lecture room, make it possible to profile the library also as a meeting place.

6. Concluding remarks.

In the beginning of the whole process, the participants in the project visited a lot of library buildings. Often people asked: "Which one can be regarded as the library of the future?" However, the conclusion at Utrecht was that THE library of the future does not exist. Each library has its own environment, its own strategy and priorities, its own challenges. Visits to other libraries give a lot of insight in the way the different functions of the library can be translated in a design for a building. They can never be

copied, but still there is a lot to learn: about how you can improve your program, about the relation between program and design, and about mistakes that are to be avoided. In all this, “flexibility” is the key word. There is a lot of uncertainty in the library’s future, so adaptability is a priority.

Concerning the process, it can be concluded that continuous communication with the architect is necessary because of the constant tension between functionality and architecture. Therefore, in selecting the architect, the possibilities for a fruitful communication must be an important argument.

And last but not least, it has to be repeated: financial control is vital. This certainly brings forward some tension in the relation with the architect, but in this respect also communication certainly helps.

