Evaluation of University Library Buildings in France, the Second Survey (2000–2007)

Marie-Françoise Bisbrouck

Université Paris-Sorbonne, Service commun de la Documentation,
28 rue Serpente, 75006 Paris, France,
Marie-Francoise.Bisbrouck@paris-sorbonne.fr

A powerpoint presentation with photographs of the libraries covered in this article is available from http://www.zhbluzern.ch/liber-lag/PP_LAG_08/Tuesday/Bisbrouck_LIBER_Budapest_PowerPoint_def_alle2.pdf.

Abstract

After having described the historic perspective in which French university buildings and academic libraries were constructed or reconstructed since the middle of the 1950s, the author describes the survey she conducted in 2007 among colleagues who had opened 22 new or restructured library buildings. She presents the first results of the survey and compares them with the results of the earlier survey (1999–2000) she conducted, which concerned 30 library buildings. She tries to determine which changes have taken place in the past eight to ten years and focuses on the continuous training effort geared to improve head librarians' knowledge in the field of library buildings. And this training effort works!

Key Words: Academic libraries; France; Building and restructuring; 2000–2007

1. Introduction

In opening, I should like briefly to describe the historic perspective in which French university-building — and therefore openings of academic libraries — have taken place since the middle of the 1950s.

The very fast growth in student numbers since that time (from 155,000 in 1955 to 600,000 at the end of the 1970s) induced the French state to increase the number of universities and launch new buildings. From 1955 to 1975, therefore, about 4.5 million square metres of academic buildings were opened to the public, of which 516,000 square metres was dedicated to libraries (involving 110 buildings). However, the student unrest of 1967, followed by the events of May 1968 (revolt in universities, and to a certain extent, unrest in the wider France as a whole...) caused the state to mistrust students to the extent that the latter were moved out of city centres and concentrated on campuses. All of this was followed by a total halt in university construction, from 1975 onwards. Furthermore, over a similar period, France had gone from 23 universities in 1945, to 47 in 1975.

Given that student numbers have continued to grow strongly (from one million at the end of the 1980s, to around 1.5 million nowadays (with, however, a certain stagnation over the past five or six years), the accommodation outlook in universities, from being relatively satisfactory at the end of the 1960s, quickly became catastrophic, both in terms of lack of amphitheatres, classrooms, refectories, student accommodation, and in terms of library space. By 1990, a rethink had become necessary, and construction of academic buildings and libraries took off again thereafter. Several national development plans succeeded one another in emergency fashion from 1990 onwards: 'University 2000' (from 1991 to 1995), 'The 11th Plan' (from 1994 to 1999), and finally, 'University of the Third Millennium' (from 2000 to 2006 for the first tranche, and currently a second tranche from 2007 to 2013). And the number of French universities continued to grow over the same period, the figure today standing at 85.

Since 1991 these various academic building development plans were undertaken in the framework of a national policy, involving shared financing of costs between the state and the various authorities (regions, 'départements' and municipalities). As a national average, shared financing comes to around 50 percent for the state and 50 percent for the authority in question, although

certain operations have been fully financed by the state, and others fully financed by an authority (often, a region).

A first analysis of these new academic-library building efforts was undertaken over the period 1999–2000, and examined some 30 operations out of the 110 performed between 1992 and 1999. It provided some very positive results, but others were less spectacular. I reported on this survey to the 2002 LIBER Architecture Group seminar at Leipzig.

Since this report contained very useful information for future construction programmes in France, the LIBER Architecture Group asked me to organise a new survey of French academic library buildings constructed between 2000 and 2007, in the framework of our Budapest seminar. I therefore conducted a new survey among colleagues who had opened new buildings or restructured buildings over this period, primarily in order to determine which changes had taken place, but also to measure the hoped-for progression with regard to the results of the earlier survey.

In March 2007 I sent a quite exhaustive questionnaire (practically the same as the one used in 1999) to 28 libraries, and I received 22 useful responses. My first observation was very satisfying: on receiving the questionnaire, most of my colleagues told me how glad they were at the opportunity of re-opening their memories to provide studied and constructed answers concerning their new buildings, and usage experience by students and staff alike.

All respondents stated outright that the *experience* (whether new build, or major structural alterations) had been one of the highlights of their career, offering the general impression that they had 'assisted in something very special' in their professional career — quite apart from satisfaction of the respective users (obviously the fundamental criterion). They had participated, often passionately, in a field far removed from their normal professional domain.

Their satisfaction, notwithstanding the difficulties encountered along the way, basically centred on:

- having been capable, over an extended period (several years), of managing a sometimes difficult operation;
- involving interlocutors quite different from the habitual actors;

- and having 'dared' to imagine totally new volumes in their available space, and the attendant organisational changes, on an unknown level, to accommodate new types of usage or profound changes in thinking.

Satisfaction was also evident in respect to working with parties interested in full and complete performance of the project, in particular architects and furniture suppliers.

2. The questionnaire

My aim was for the study to examine several angles, to ensure both wide-angle and narrow fields of view (quantitative and qualitative) regarding the delivered buildings. In particular:

- roll-out of the construction (or structural alterations) process (programme definition, architectural competition, followed by the various preparation stages for plans and written documents, work-site criteria etc.);
- points of conformity or divergence between the objectives set at project launch, and the results from the completed construction;
- in the event of divergence, identifying of reasons (poor programme? poor architect? phased project, resulting in loss of initial objectives? excessive lead-time between programme definition and building construction?);
- level of quality in construction of the building;
- quality of dialogue between the various parties;
- additional tasks necessitated by the actual building or structural alterations operation (reorganisation of services, of library collections; data processing, removals etc.);
- costs and building time.

Other questions concerned:

- the staff necessary to run the building depending on opening hours to the public;
- the public in question;

- siting of the building;
- future extension possibilities;
- siting of the building on the campus or in the city;
- organisation of public areas between collections and reading rooms, sizing of same; variety of areas offered; legibility of same; comfort levels; potential for change over time, depending on new needs arising; aesthetics of the building and furnishing; human factors aspects etc.;
- organisation of internal work areas for staff;
- organisation of library storage;
- new technical equipment introduced in the new building: automated lending machines; automatic document conveyors ('Télélift' or 'Télédoc' or similar); access possibilities to the library by certain users when the building is normally closed to the public — all of which are important factors to be considered from the programme definition phase.

And, in conclusion, I requested two other inputs:

- any suggestions, whether with regard to the building design, or organisation of the public areas, staff areas and library collection areas, and of likely interest to other colleagues embarking on their own programmes;
- their opinion as to the three major qualities and the three major shortcomings of their new building; and, in the latter case, the possibilities of redress.

The responses to the questionnaire provided by these colleagues allowed the creation, at national level, of an up-to-date 'inventory' of major trends in building development as a function of changes in services provided to users. They informed us as to the directions to follow, those extra little efforts required to produce change.

3. Output data

Naturally, at the present time I am only able to provide a basic outline of the survey results. I have organised the results into several main categories, trying as far as possible to compare them to those obtained from the 1999–2000 study, in order to be able to measure progress.

The categories are:

1. factors relating to buildings as physical entities: siting; type of building; number of programme phases, etc.; at this stage, the aim is basically quantitative;
2. library opening date and duration of works;
3. design of library areas.

3.1. Physical Features

3.1.1. Siting of libraries, types of buildings, programme tranches

Siting of libraries between town and out-of-town campuses changed appreciably between the 1992 operations and the programmes of 1999 and later: in the first period, many operations took place within newer universities, most of which had been built not on campuses, but in city centres. In the second period, many programmes refer to library reconstruction on existing campuses.

Seventeen buildings out of 22 are single-purpose facilities not shared with other services. However, in six cases, joint use exists with other university departments (data processing, university press, culture, student services); nonetheless, library space is dominant (over 90% of total area). Five libraries are located in teaching centres, where they occupy one or more floors; however, the library area is not preponderant within the building. Fifteen operations involve construction, and 7 involve major restructuring, of which 4 projects involve additional floor space.

Fifteen operations were performed in a single tranche and 6 involved two tranches. One involved three tranches. Of the 7 multi-tranche operations, 5 involved directly successive tranche working.

Where an extension capability exists (10 operations out of 22), it is often very limited. In this respect, the situation between the two surveys differs very little.

3.1.2. Weekly library opening hours

The weekly public opening hours for the 22 libraries in the study average 54 hours and 10 minutes, compared to 54 hours and 40 minutes in 1999. The small decrease is associated essentially with lack of additional staff recruitment concomitant with the opening of new premises.

3.1.3. Areas

In terms of areas, the 22 operations in the study represent close on 147,000 m^2 of library space, of which over 100,000 m^2 results from new build (15 buildings) and just over 46,000 m^2 from restructuring (7 buildings). Five operations offer less than 3,000 m^2 and 6 more than 9,000 m^2. The average surface area per operation (new build or restructuring) is in the order of 6,700 m^2 (versus 3,750 m^2 in the 1999–2000 study); this represents a large increase.

Breakdown of library areas per major service-type:

- public services occupy 81,000 m^2, or 55.5% of total floor space. The average percentage of public services areas within total library floor space differs very little according to programme: new build is 55.4% and restructuring is 54.9%;
- internal departments occupy 12,400 m^2, or 8.5% of the total area;
- storage occupies 15,700 m^2, or 10.7% of the total area;
- circulation, toilets and plant-rooms cover 36,900 m^2, or an average of 25.2%.

The calculating of 'circulation' areas still causes major difficulties since (and this is noteworthy), a part of this area is 'forgotten' or is integrated into public areas or internal-services areas. I therefore had to recalculate all areas on the basis of drawings, for 17 operations out of 22! At the start of the output data analysis, 12 operations out of 22 were credited with less than 15% circulation space, and 5 with less than 10%, which is obviously impossible. After recal-

culating from the drawings, it is seen that the 2007 ratio (25.4%) is appreciably higher than that observed in 1999 (18.7%). Nonetheless, as I had demonstrated in 2000, the 'plant-room part' included in 'circulation' is ever greater in new buildings, because the latter are increasingly 'technical' (ventilation, heating, centralised building management, access control, security of possessions and people etc.).

The area-per-user ratio equates 0.93 m^2 for new build, and 0.60 m^2 for restructuring operations, representing an overall average of 0.71 m^2 when applied to the 206,800 students served by these libraries. Only 7 operations out of 22 exceed one square metre per user, that is 31.8% of the operations (versus 39.5% in 1999), which is not very satisfactory. Eleven operations out of 22 (50%) show less than 0.80 m^2, and 5 less than 0.50 m^2.

I ought to state that the ratio of 0.73 m^2 per user (average observed over all French academic libraries in 1988), was considered by the Miquel Report (published in 1989) as the 'absolute poverty threshold.' It is therefore unfortunate to notice a decrease in relation to the 2000 figure. Curiously, however, the colleagues surveyed do not offer any criticism regarding cramped areas within their libraries, and no longer quote it as a problem, except in one or two cases, specifically relating to storage.

3.2. New Library Opening Dates and Duration of Works

Of the 22 libraries studied, most operations were programmed between 1999 and 2001 and the libraries opened their doors to the public from 2003 onward, and particularly in 2005 and 2006.

Concerning the duration of works between programme development and opening to the public, it must be mentioned that with regard to the 1999 survey where the findings showed an average operation duration of 4.5 to 5 years, the average performance time for operations undertaken between 2000 and 2007 is appreciably longer, since 59% of operations last over six years. However, it should be noted that the question of financing was crucial for several projects. Five operations out of 22 were performed in two tranches.

3.3. Design of Library Areas

3.3.1. Public services

With regard to the *design of public services*, one approach is to look at the physical organisation of the library building, in terms of the number of floors: 3 libraries below 3,000 m² have only one public level, and 4 libraries out of 5 have an area larger than 8,000 m², occupying 4 public levels. These results are little different from those from the previous period.

As regards reader seating trends it can be noted that a total of approximately 17,300 new reading room seats were commissioned in the 22 libraries in question, or an average of 785 seats per library. This represents a growth of +69% with regard to the 1999 survey of 32 projects with an average of 464 seats per library. However, the said 17,300 seats have to serve 206,800 students, that is, one seat only per 12 students. Thus there has been no progress — in fact there is a slight regression — in comparison with the 1999 survey, since the result at that time was one reading room seat per 11.24 students.

The use of micro-computers in libraries was one of the dark points of the 1999 survey. In 2007, of the 14 libraries answering the question, 5,060 reader seats out of 9,551 are fitted with electrical sockets, or an average of 361 seats per library. Also, 47% of reading room seats have Internet access. Nineteen libraries out of 22 are fitted with Wi-Fi technology, either from the opening of the new building, or installed later where a building opened to the public prior to 2005.

The 22 libraries have a total of 1,613 multimedia workstations for their users, or an average of 73.3 workstations per library, and 7 libraries have more than 100 workstations. In 1999, there were only 712 workstations for the 32 libraries, or an average of 22 stations per library. However, in spite of these significant advances, French academic libraries remain very under-endowed since, given the number of users (206,800 students), one workstation has to serve 128 students once more! However, what has changed radically, is that around 60% of today's students (2007), on a national average, have their own portable computer, which was obviously not the case in 1999.

Nineteen libraries out of the 22 have a training room for their users with an average of 23 seats per room. For the 20 libraries answering the question, the

number of group work rooms open to the public is 141, or an average of 7.15 rooms per library (6 libraries have more than 10 rooms). But demand remains very high, and several libraries declare that there are insufficient rooms, given changes in teaching and teachers' methods.

New libraries offer only very limited amenity and social areas, a situation which remains of great concern and has changed little since 1999:

- None of the libraries has a true café, as observed in certain English or Dutch academic libraries.
- Only four libraries mention the existence of automatic drinks dispensers, and 4 mention the existence of the university refectory in immediate proximity to the library (which is not exactly the same thing!).
- Two libraries only out of 22 mention the existence of cloakrooms and lockers, but only to say that they are seldom used, and 3 mention that the national anti-terrorism security plan ('Vigie-Pirate') currently prohibits the use of cloakrooms or lockers in public buildings.
- Nine libraries out of 22 mention the presence of small 'salons', or perhaps just seating, for leisure-reading or just for waiting for a friend. In 4 cases, they are located in the library entrance lobby. Nonetheless, such facilities remain limited, at best around 20 seats per library. This is still far short of American comfort levels, or within Europe, those found in Dutch, German, Swiss or Scandinavian libraries.
- French academic libraries remain, therefore, essentially places of work, from which any degree of fantasy is excluded, even if certain progress may be observed in relation to the 1999 survey.

There is little 'fantasy' as well when it comes to certain technical developments: only 9 libraries mention the existence of public access automated loan/return systems, and none of the libraries has an automated transfer system for routing collections between document stores and the library counter or other internal departments.

Access of a certain public to libraries outside of the normal library opening hours is practically unheard of, except in the case of computer rooms (but then again, in 2 libraries only). One library mentions the possibility of access to a conference room or, exceptionally, for exhibitions or a cocktail party.

However, it must be recognised that for libraries situated on out-of-town campuses, student life ceases at 7 or 8 p.m. at the latest, and certain of these campuses have security problems after dark.

No library is coupled, for example, with a language laboratory. However, 12 libraries have a 'general culture space' or a 'show space' for their students. Ten libraries mention having an exhibition space and, in 6 cases, this is situated in the lobby. Only 4 mention having a conference room, or a public meeting room. However, 5 libraries out of 21 answering the question mention having an area reserved for the visually handicapped, including appropriate equipment, which is better than previously but still very low nonetheless.

When it comes to open access collections, there has been significant change for the better since 1999. Improving open access was one of the major objectives of the successive academic library development plans, and today there is reason for great satisfaction. Only 5 libraries out of 22 have less than 50% of their collections in open access and 7 have 80% or more.

The number of open access monographs for the 22 recorded libraries is 1,694,007 volumes, or an average of 77,000 volumes per library. Seven libraries have more than 100,000 volumes in open access (the highest being 200,726 volumes). This remains a comparatively mediocre result compared with Anglo-Saxon libraries, but nonetheless represents a large increase (+92%) with regard to the results recorded in 1999.

3.3.2. Storage

With regard to the design of stacks, things are running well. Nnonetheless, two major concerns are noteworthy. The first concerns the safety of the collections: in effect, out of the 20 libraries constructed, 10 of them (50%) have water pipes transiting the stacks! So far, only very limited damage has been reported, by 2 libraries, but one wonders how long this will last. The other concern is the filling rates, which are critical. Of the 19 libraries answering this question, the filling rate of the stacks very soon after the opening of the building is as follows:

- filling rate below 30%: 2 libraries;
- between 30 and 50%: 4 libraries;

- between 50 and 80%: 4 libraries;
- more than 80%: 9 libraries (of which 3 are saturated).

Such excessive filling rates reported so soon after opening the building are in fact the 'price of success' of new library buildings, and not the result of an anomaly in programming. Practically from opening day, the new buildings are made to receive collections from faculty libraries, laboratories and institutes, in a centralisation effort that had not been planned originally. There exists a phenomenon of 'attraction' associated with the quality of these new buildings. It is imperative, therefore, that this 'price of success' causes us to reflect during the programming phase of our new facilities, negotiating with powers-that-be for outright inclusion of the necessary additional library dedicated storage areas, and, moreover, in non-negligible proportions.

In parallel, we need to think about the construction of 'book silos' with deferred access to library collections, because not all printed documents deserve to be in the library if they are rarely or never used. Such book silos could be envisaged as common facilities shared by several libraries, at a regional level for example, or locally for different types of libraries (academic libraries, public libraries, archives perhaps). There exists only one silo of this type in France, for academic libraries in the Greater Paris Region, but several libraries are currently thinking at the local level (city or region) about installing such a facility (less expensive per square metre than a city-centre facility or one on an absolutely saturated campus). However, the use of a silo does entail heavy logistics — shuttles providing a link between the remote silo and the various libraries owning the collections, to ensure a true service to users. I am aware that such silos are under study in several European countries (Switzerland and Germany notably, perhaps Denmark also), in parallel with library-building operations. Such operations must form part of a master plan, a type of pre-development plan, which must then be validated by the local authorities.

Another important point: only one library out of 22 declares that a part of its storage is open to free access by the public. Yet this was one of the major topics in the 1999/2000 survey.

3.3.3. Internal departments for library staff

With regard to libraries' internal departments, the useful area per employee (calculated on full-time equivalents) is satisfactory: 17 libraries out of 22 have more than 15 m^2/staff member. This average area per employee is appreciably larger than previously. It comprises not only office and equipment spaces, but also areas allocated to training, kitchenette and staff cloakrooms, multi-purpose storage, etc. The overall size of these areas is significantly larger than reported in the 1999 survey.

The design of internal departments in the new libraries is overall very satisfactory, services being rarely located on more than two levels. Fitting-out of staff areas is also better than previously: only one library out of 22 does not have a staff kitchenette, and 17 libraries have a meeting room (sometimes for joint use as a training room). Only 5 libraries do not have a training room.

Another interesting figure is the library area to 'managed' per employee (in full-time equivalents). This ratio always seems a little strange, but it nevertheless indicates whether things are changing over time. The 1999 survey revealed an average of 1 full-time equivalent employee 'managing' 188 m^2 of library. The 2007 survey mentions one employee for 253 m^2, which may indicate either a worsening situation, or improved design of areas requiring less personnel, depending on whether one is optimistic or pessimistic!

4. Provisional Conclusion

Noticeably fewer shortcomings are reported by colleagues in the finished buildings than previously, and this is a major point of satisfaction. It must also be said that colleagues are more connoisseur than before in terms of library construction, and they may therefore, during the construction works or alteration process, influence certain decisions that would otherwise have negative repercussions on the future operation of the library.

In effect, due particularly to the number of square metres of libraries commissioned since 1992 (close to 400,000 in approximately 150 projects), every

region henceforth has several new library buildings or heavily renovated buildings, which can be visited and serve as yardsticks, or perhaps even as 'models'.

Moreover, the training effort in this particular field continues year after year at ENSSIB, France's national librarian training school, offering library management courses, and also in professional regional training centres (of which France has around 20). Each course is attended by some 12 to 15 students, and around 40 colleagues are trained each year in subjects of programming, construction, fitting-out, and restructuring of library areas, in courses lasting one week. All of which bears fruit. Therefore, on a local basis, with regard to the 1999 survey, there is a growing number of increasingly knowledgeable people versed in the subject. And, naturally, every two years, a good dozen French colleagues participate in seminars organised by the LIBER Architecture Group! This year, about 20 participants out of 140 are French.

Looking at the improvements mentioned by my colleagues, certain factors stand out:

- Few colleagues today mentioned heavy modifications to their programme during the course of works, even if construction takes longer than during the previous period. Such modifications in fact are most common during operations performed in phases.
- Only 4 or 5 colleagues mentioned relational difficulties with one or the other of the parties (planners, architects, local authorities); such complaints were more numerous in the 1999 survey.
- One colleague even mentions a 'library finishing level far better than the average for this type of building' (Annie Hélot, Caen Sciences).

As for the public, they tend to vote with their feet by increased visits to the library, as demonstrated by the following figures

- +20% to +56% additional readers,
- +24% to +89% additional loans,
- +36% to +58% additional entries,

while over the same period, student numbers have fallen at certain universities.

Subjects of discontent nevertheless remain:

- with regard to teachers, for whom tailor-made reading rooms have been provided, but who never come near! It would be interesting to know whether this is a purely French phenomenon, or one occurring elsewhere in Europe;
- increasing requests for more group workrooms, which are problematic or even impossible to install later for technical reasons (ventilation and acoustics in particular);
- lack of staff to run the new buildings: this complaint does not relate to construction criteria, but simply to operating means;
- the question of libraries 'enclosed' in academic centres and whose opening hours are thus completely tied.

At the start of this article you may remember that in the survey I had asked in the final analysis for the three best qualities and three greatest shortcomings in the new libraries. Among the qualities most often mentioned, we find:

- brightness;
- lightness;
- legibility of spaces;
- optimal siting of the building on the campus or in-town;
- the library as strong architectural landmark on the campus;
- overall comfort;
- efficient organisation of spaces;
- quality of treatment of interior areas and the comfort of new furniture;
- aesthetics of the building;
- quality of the works;
- scale of new technology, etc.

And, as mentioned earlier, many respondents mentioned the enriching experience of the operations for library staff: improved interpersonal relations, existence of a common project, cultivating a team spirit, etc.

As for shortcomings, particular emphasis must be given to problems of a technical nature:

- major problems with ventilation or air-conditioning in public areas (this is in fact the number one problem);
- temperature disparity (too hot or too cold near large glazed areas): this is a recurrent problem;
- concentration of partitions in public areas (required by emergency services, etc.): this decreases flexibility in these areas, and prevents general legibility for the public;
- increasing complexity in running more technical buildings: insufficient qualified personnel for regulating ventilation and heating or setting clocks, managing anti-break-in systems, etc., causing equipment failures and general dissatisfaction among public and staff alike;
- poor weatherproofing of facades (water ingress indicated in three libraries!): this is a 'new' phenomenon never mentioned in the 1999 survey, and indicates insufficient expertise on the part of building firms regarding use of materials;
- acoustics — on a par with ventilation as a perpetual subject of discontent (in particular, insufficient sound insulation in public areas).

In the framework of restructuring operations and building extensions, we must also add:

- lack of money to recondition existing facades and glazing, which damages the architectural unity of the buildings;
- partitioning of spaces, leading to difficulty in finding one's way around;
- very bad site follow-up at one library site, resulting in 26 guarantee claims!

Worse still: few of the stated faults are likely to be corrected in the future, since some are structural shortcomings of the buildings, especially in restructuring operations; others could be corrected, but would entail large cash outlay (such as full refurbishment of a building's ventilation system, for example).

What intrigued me greatly while analysing the output data, it is that very few colleagues say that the space provided by their building is insufficient, whereas usage of their library has increased — in cases by over 50%! Have staff become resigned to having 'tight' libraries? Or does the design of the library's public spaces make up for the lack of surface area? In some respects, I should prefer the second assumption.

To conclude, I should like to quote a few words by one of the colleagues whose library participated in the survey (Valérie Travier, Le Mans University library):

> 'The library is considered as the architectural symbol of the campus… It is visited regularly during all official welcomes to the University. It is also the centrepiece of publicity events organised by the regional board of architecture, city-planning and environment department of the Sarthe county. Many of the University's events now take place at the library, such as symposia and study days, and the university council meetings. The library has became a forum for cultural events: concerts, poetry-readings, presentations by authors, dance productions, various exhibitions in partnership with students' associations etc. The library has also become the architectural symbol of the campus: the surrounding buildings have been renovated in unison with the colours of the library, and this has created a certain homogeneity in the architectural environment. Finally, the associated libraries have asked to be integrated into the new central library, thanks to the latter's opening hours and the general perception that it provides as a place of work and study.'

To counter a common misconception: the unprecedented development of digital documentation increases rather than decreases the need for thinking centres, at a time when ideas themselves are being cast to the four winds. Libraries, in this respect, are recognisable places and points of socialisation, particularly for young students needing the security of a reassuring environment and the human dimension provided by a library. Our role is to offer them these fine open places, with their varied facilities and services, in which they can find their marks.

In my view, we have probably now attained critical mass in terms of academic libraries in France, just as French municipal libraries attained theirs at the start of the 1990s. This means that no-one ever poses the question of whether building a municipal library would be good for the inhabitants of the town or not: it is just done, and done very well, in fact. For academic libraries, which in France are a good fifteen years behind public libraries, I consider that the road ahead is well defined. What remains is for us librarians to convince our authorities once and for all that more money has to be made available so that the buildings being constructed with lasting materials; that the acoustic treatment of libraries must be improved; and that library build-

ings must be made more independent in their contexts (fewer general-use buildings). This step has been made by municipal libraries, such as those in Rennes, Montpellier, Marseille or Toulouse, which are of remarkable quality. We also managed it for the university libraries of Caen, Le Mans, Le Havre and Reims (see the article by Carine El Bekri in this issue of *LIBER Quarterly*). These must serve as examples for the future. On this subject we still need to get the message across, and on a permanent basis.

Last but not least, what I find best of all is that colleagues 'forget', quite rapidly in fact, the difficulties they have lived with in some cases for several years. They speak only of their pleasure and satisfaction with their new library, and how satisfied the users are. All the rest is forgotten, swept away as another chapter begins.

Websites Referred to in the Text

ENSSIB, École nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques, http://www.enssib.fr/

Report on the first French survey conducted by the author in 2002: http://www.digizeitschriften.de/no_cache/home/jkdigitools/loader/?tx_jkDigiTools_pi1%5BIDDOC%5D=528439