

Can a 1960s Library Be Transformed For the 21st Century?

by NADINE DELCARMINE

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the renovation of Grenoble University's library. It is the main inter-university documentary cooperation service ([SICD2](#)) network in Grenoble, which serves two Universities: [Stendhal](#) and [Pierre Mendès France](#). Administratively it is attached to the latter. After the 1989 Micquel Report, which was a severe appraisal of France's university libraries, the state showed its intention to upgrade them by preparing the U2000 programme. The objectives were to create more working places, unrestricted access to documentation, improve user comfort, and change the image of the libraries. In June 1994, replying to representations by the President of Grenoble's Université Pierre Mendès-France (UPMF) on safety problems at the Law and Humanities Library, the Construction and Maintenance Department at the Ministry of Education requested an "all-encompassing approach to upgrading work, covering safety and refurbishment to as-new standard", and stipulated that "this policy review should be conducted as part of the preparation of the new establishment contract". This context gave rise to the rehabilitation and restructuring of the library. In 1995, the universities and the SICD set themselves an ambition: to turn the 1960s library into a documentary resource for the 21st century, making it the lynchpin of the SICD library network and providing suitable premises. The project symbolically called "Doc2000" was created. After a long gestation period, during which funding was gradually secured, the project entered the execution phase. The relevance of the project was tested by numerous twists and turns: a fruitless invitation to tender and shifting project ownership; three university presidents; two SICD directors and one interim-director, who also directed the university library; and the involvement of two project leaders.

I intend to show how hard it is for the library, at the end of the process chain, to reconcile and align the scheduling of the works, the scheduling of the service changes and structural organisation, and the works themselves. I'll outline the basic economics of the project, which combines an obsolete building with thoughts on the necessary evolution of its services. Then, I'll attempt to show how we tried to develop the existing building to cater for evolving services. Lastly, I'll explain why execution of the works was like sailing down a long tempestuous river.

AN UNSUITABLE BUILDING , COMBINED WITH THINKING ON SERVICE EVOLUTION

The five-storey building was built in 1966 with a net floor area of 12,716 square metres, and since then has played a special role at the heart of the campus. But despite its construction quality, it no longer met safety standards. This was true of the electrics, the ceiling materials and the emergency exits. This state was exacerbated by the services' operating conditions and the spatial organisation, which had greatly evolved in 30 years and presented genuine risks. In addition, there were no access or safety facilities for disabled people. The library was saturated, and no longer met the expectations of students and researchers who worked there in highly uncomfortable conditions.

The users, who had nearly tripled in number between 1966 and 1999 (from 11,000 students to 27,000), occupied every nook and cranny, including the darkest and most inconvenient spots such as under the monumental staircase in the grand hall. The building was an acoustic failure, and the workrooms were extremely noisy. Documentation was piled in storerooms where it was difficult to walk around. Many documents had been made directly accessible without any widening of the traffic paths, simply by removing storeroom partitions. Rollout of the unrestricted-access collections was completely stymied. And the consultation places were sub-standard. Services were provided in precarious conditions. User training, a mission developed in the late 1990s, was performed in unsuitable surroundings, with no sound insulation or division from user traffic. The location and configuration of the lending bank derived from changes caused by increased transaction volume and uncomfortable staff working conditions. Obviously this did not promote dialogue with users! As staff numbers rose over the years (from 44 librarians in 1971 to about 100 in 1999), some offices were transplanted into public spaces. The staff-user equilibrium was unstable, and generated tensions. Staff working in internal offices was hardly better off. They were squeezed into overloaded premises, which over time had ceased to be functional. The departments were scattered, which affected the documentation circuit and increased the time needed to make documents available to users. What's more, staff did not have their own training room. Such conditions made it hard for the library to perform its cultural function. It is fair to say that the library building was impeding the development of staff practices and user service.

Diagram 1. Public and staff statistics

	1966	1999
Public	11 000	27 000
Entries per year		518 000
Entries per day		2 031
	1971	2001
Librarians	44	70

In 1995, SICD management and the presidents of the two universities served by the library looked at the quality of service provision and the role of the SICD and library within the university. The review, which has since been ongoing, led to ambitious proposals for a far-reaching redefinition of the documentation service against a backdrop of restructuring and renovation of the library building. Renovation plans were subsequently recommended: upgrade the building's safety, but also reorganise user traffic paths and the internal services; improve the reception and information areas by adapting reading places to users' needs; ensure coherent provision of the documentary collections and network-access terminals; and develop information-search training to promote reader autonomy.

In 1999, the merits of these plans were confirmed by a seminar in which the user groups (students, researchers and teachers) and library staff detailed their wishes. Furthermore, a working group called "GTF", focusing on functions, was formed to modify staff working practices in the context of the changes to the building and evolution in the documentation and library world. As a result, a proposal was made to fully restructure the public areas into six thematic sections, and drop the hierarchy of separate student and researcher areas. The scheduling committee issued its conclusions on the restructuring and rehabilitation of the entire building. It was a tricky task, requiring the alignment of objectives and finance. Onerous decisions were taken to define the scope of the works: upgrade to current safety standards, spatial reorganisation to improve user service, no additional square meterage, retention of existing woodwork, no air conditioning, etc. A plan to split the operation into two phases was discussed. The project steering committee then gave the green light for the architectural plans to be drawn up.

EVOLVING THE EXISTING BUILDING TO CATER FOR CHANGING SERVICES

The contract to draw up the architectural plans was awarded to the Du Besset-Lyon firm on the basis of its expertise, references and resources. In February 2000, having been asked to restructure and rehabilitate the entire building, Mr du Besset redefined the principles of the restructuring in these terms:

The objectives of the restructuring must be the same as for a new building:

- recreate the best conditions of access and document consultation for readers;
- provide the latest information technology;
- give the reader community a view of itself and of the full range of available documents;
- provide places to talk and meet;
- offer the best operating methods for the internal services and for store-room access.

He stated that, to meet these objectives, it was necessary

1. to utilise the architectural potential of the original building by:

- fully preserving the large volumes of the reading rooms,
- restoring the view of the entire space in the hall

2. to enable the building to function very clearly by:

- interlinking all levels by a large central stairwell;
- creating large open areas on each floor, which reading rooms conspicuously look onto;
- providing on each floor (including the ground floor) a view of the reading rooms from the traffic paths;
- grouping the store-rooms;
- grouping the internal services;
- giving them their own traffic paths;
- creating direct links between the internal departments and the reading rooms.

The prime contractor's objective, besides the safety upgrade, was better user traffic flows, transparency, and spatial redevelopment. In fact, the prime contractor would keep the building shell and profoundly reshape the interior. There would be extensive demolition work, but the mezzanine levels would be kept: access to them would be improved to fully open them up to users and treat them on an equal basis with the other levels. The prime contractor highlighted the utility of a slight extension of the surface area, to rationalise the building's organisation by grouping the internal services.

The final decision to conduct the works in two phases was taken in spring 2000: the prime contractor was asked to conceive an all-encompassing project up to and including the pre-project summary. The decision meant allocating all funding to full rehabilitation of the east wing and of the central section (except for the woodwork and air-conditioning, which would only be replaced where the older collections were located).

The final budget was slightly under 11 million euros: more than 60% state subsidies, 35% from local authorities, and 5% from the university SICD's own funds. Fresh funding would be secured for the west wing.

Diagram 2. *The final budget: about 11 million euro*

Funding (excluding west wing):	
State Government	60,5 %
Regional Institution	27 %
Local Institution	7,07 %
SICD	5,18 %

Result (excluding west wing):		
improvement	euro 9 916 106	91,9 %
moving	euro 305 455	2,8 %
furniture	euro 574 387	5,3 %
Total	euro 10 795 948	100 %

The project underwent several changes, due to cost issues and the state of the construction market when the invitation to tender (ITT) was launched in December 2000. Some changes were due to policy shifts by the project owner, whose thinking continued during the process. After the first ITT failed in 2000, the steering committee asked the architect to amend his plans and generate savings to stay on budget. Without fundamentally altering the restructuring principles set out the year before, the architect proposed works that it deemed less expensive. He didn't drop the idea of a dense storage area. But instead of reinforcing the screed of the existing storeroom - a costly technical challenge - he proposed creating a 500-square-metre storeroom. The objective was also to limit the cost of transferring the collections, and to avoid non-access to documents over a long period. Lastly, he kept the possibility of extending the south facade of the building above this new store-room; all other extension sites had been ruled out by a new tramline route.

New SICD management took over in January 2001 and decided that a new utilisation of space and the overhaul of the library's internal organisation - to strengthen the documentation network - inevitably went hand in hand. As preparations for the library works advanced, so did the library and organisational projects, with the aim of implementing the service overhaul once the

rehabilitation works were over. The method chosen to maximise the success of the change involved all staff. The functions working group GTF, which had been completely reshuffled, held about 30 meetings during the restructuring process to define the operating scope of the library. In parallel, more flexible groups held 20 meetings to plan the layout of the various departments on the drawings. Thinking was stimulated by fact-finding trips to public and university libraries. A specific training programme from 2002 to 2004 supported these extensive changes.

This process generated requests for design changes, to optimise office allocation and make the book circuit more fluid: the cataloguing office follows the order-receipt office, and the facilities office moves closer to the reading rooms. Another example: the aspects of culture and exchange which - in the architect's plans - were highlighted on the ground floor, were strengthened by creating a lecture room out of the user training room and staff meeting room. The location of the IT facilities and the entrance to the administrative building were also significantly modified.

EXECUTION OF WORKS

For everyone - library staff, users, university authorities, and contractors - the works phase was like sailing down a long, tempestuous river. To continue library service - a requirement stipulated by the university - the prime contractor planned 18 months of execution, starting in February 2001 and split into several phases. The failed invitation to tender simply delayed the initial schedule. After a second invitation to tender in autumn 2001, work began in February 2002. The completion deadline, originally scheduled as January 2004, was put back to the end of May 2004, with the library fully re-opening for the next academic year. The first complete phase will have covered 27 months of works, plus a highly unsettling 12-month interval.

During execution, the universities demanded that rehabilitation-related costs be minimised, and that the library continued to serve its users. So the contractors and library staff worked in parallel on-site. Splitting the works into four successive or parallel - but interdependent - stages meant that the librarians' work areas overlapped considerably with the rebuilding areas. The library had to shrink and give way to the contractors. As the works advanced, the library limits changed. At times, the library was in the middle of the works; at other times, the works were in the middle of the library - both situations were uncomfortable! With each step, fallback strategies had to be devised and adapted to the available space. Then came the big transfers: 28 linear kilometres of collections and shelving, and 100 librarians. Faced with these difficulties, the project leader had to acquire a solid understanding of the works schedule, and consider several factors when anticipating what action was required.

The steering committee stated that budgetary restraint was absolutely imperative. The idea of using prefabricated units to temporarily house the library staff and services was rejected in 2000; the solution of storing the collections in off-campus premises was dropped in 2001. So on-campus premises had to be found for the staff and services that had to leave the library building because there was no room or to enable continued user access. The universities are already cramped, and struggled to provide the library with rooms. However, the steering committee agreed to move all the unrestricted-access collections to the west wing during the works in the east wing.

Harmonising the university calendar with the redevelopment plans was no mean feat. It was deemed essential to carry out works on the central staircase in the summer, to protect the building from bad weather when the roof was opened up and to limit inconvenience for users. But execution disrupted this harmony, and the library was forced to adapt. Adaptation - to keep operations smooth and protect the project balance - required the prior definition of services that were necessary and possible; a reasoned programme; and a detailed task list. At first, the project leader had to absorb the architectural plans, the schedule and the execution-phase breakdown, and check with the architect and site manager how this affected space that was available or needing to be vacated, and how it modified or blocked off traffic paths. He could then devise the best operating and fallback strategy. It was then necessary to detail the volumes being moved or removed; and the conditions of transfer cost assessment. At this stage, the university authorities had to be persuaded to amend the budget allocations, which were key to safeguarding the project; it was necessary to decide whether library staff can provide a public service *and / or* become transfer staff. Then came the phase of inviting tenders for, or ordering, transfers and furniture.

To cope with the obligations imposed on the library, a monitoring unit was set up to support the project leader. At the most critical points, it comprised up to six people, some of whom had to put aside their usual library work. The "Doc2000 unit" prepared certain layout plans, monitored transfers, supported deployment of user services, and set out the conditions for execution of the onerous and unavoidable librarianship tasks prior to re-opening the renovated library in autumn 2004. To make our readers more autonomous, we had to group the collections and display the books and periodicals in thematic sections, and have a single classification. I won't even mention the IT projects - switching the catalogue to digital, revamping the website, creating a database for electronic resources, and so on. Work areas had to be found in very cramped surroundings, and the windows for progressing these tasks had to be scheduled a long way in advance.

With this type of restructuring, the project leader must really be "on the ball", tracking progress daily; but he must also look ahead, to give the library the responsiveness it needs. A highly detailed schedule enables tasks to be moved around if the works are disrupted. It needs several months, sometimes up to ten... if the process is complex. In autumn 2000, scheduling began of the works due to start in February 2001. When the works were postponed at the last minute, much of the exploratory work could be reused in 2002 for the transfer of the collections from one wing to the other.

The formalisation of user services for the beginning of the academic year in autumn 2003, and the transfers, began in November 2002, and one meeting followed another throughout spring 2003. In June 2003, it was clear that the works schedule would have to be extended by two-and-a-half months: the transfer timetable had to be revised to meet the deadline for opening an unusual library service. To minimise user inconvenience, the service was adapted to the size of the building lent to the library. Users could not be hosted during the summers of 2002 and 2003. To bypass the problem, a summer-holiday loan was introduced ; this will also operate in 2004. In September 2002, users returned from holiday to find the library had been turned upside-down, with only the west wing accessible. We grouped all the unrestricted-access collections there without reading spaces. But the biggest shock was at the start of autumn term in 2003: the building was still closed to readers. So we set up a small lending room in Université Stendhal with a daily transfer of documents ordered via the library's online catalogue. All these changes caused major changes to the staff's work. Because of these shifting user arrangements, we published regular, targeted information in various university media, and didn't hesitate to use public media.

A library renovation is unlikely to be an easy process. This is especially true when work is done on an occupied site, as in Grenoble. One of the key differences between renovation and construction is that risk in the former operation is omnipresent. Safety of staff, collections, equipment and the building is affected, firstly because rehabilitation means factoring in a degree of uncertainty - despite the prior structural assessment of the building. And secondly because the contractors each have their own business and operating models. Renovating an occupied site means creating areas of cohabitation or, at best, adjacent work areas for contractors, librarians and users - with repercussions on health and safety because of the noise, the cold, the risks. The workplace doctor can be of great assistance. All project actors must consider the occupied-site factor a long way upline: the prime contractor, the operations manager, and the contractors.

The invitation to tender must clearly state that jobsite procedures must be appropriate, even if they are costly. This must be reiterated at all site meetings. It is the responsibility of the prime contractor to monitor all details of the contractors' procedures. But if the prime contractor is rarely on-site, or is not clear-sighted, or is inattentive, the library could be jeopardised. Safety kept the library management and the university authorities on a constant state of alert. It consumed much of the project leader's energy.

Twenty-six site incidents were recorded in Grenoble between 26 March 2002 and 8 October 2003! None of them was "minor": they all affected the operation of the establishment. Some were nearly very serious.

They fell into several categories:

- fairly conventional incidents, related to the fragile state of the building during the works: intrusions and thefts in the library, a false bomb alert, etc.
- incidents on the library premises but related to contractor operations: falls of rubble or materials; broken fibre-optics or water and gas pipes; water infiltration, flooding, calamitous dust incursion on documents, et cetera. These incidents caused severe risks for staff and severe damage to the collections.
- incidents directly affecting contractor staff due to defective safety procedures.

Maybe there are other categories... Fortunately we didn't experiment with them!

ROLES OF THE LIBRARY DIRECTOR AND PROJECT LEADER

Without generalising, I'd like to end by giving some views on the delicate roles of the library manager and project leader. During the process, they must manage normal library operations and the rebuilding works, and possibly plan for service changes. In the case of Grenoble, they supported all the staff, who dedicated themselves to the project with a view to the expected improvements. Without this core commitment, everything would have been more complicated and the works would have taken much longer. Both perform a very special, sensitive role in the project ownership team and vis-à-vis the prime contractor. By forming the steering committee, the universities took on board the documentation function and recognised its staff's professionalism. But that did not prevent debate on the content and scope of the project, the amount of funding required, and the staff's role in the renovation process. The relationship with the university administration has not always been clear. The bursar is normally responsible for building programmes. Although the project's preparation and execution have

shown that skills are complementary, he felt the librarian-project leader infringed on its prerogatives: it has struggled to accept the end users' involvement in the process, and their direct link to the architect.

The relationship with the prime contractor involves listening, being attentive to needs expressed, and moments of great tension. The dialogue has never broken down, but it has sometimes been heated: because of design errors that affected library operation and delayed the works; because of incidents due to lack of care and supervision; and because of the architect seeking a role that exceeded assistance and consulting.

The project leader works at the point where library and works requirements meet. He is the interface for many actors: the university authorities, the prime contractor, the staff, and the renovation, transfer and furniture contractors. He must anticipate, listen, and sustain a dialogue. He must transpose the consequences of the architectural design and the building-site restrictions onto library operation. He must imagine, persuade, get solutions validated, schedule, and be alert.

CONCLUSION

The users will put the building to the test in autumn 2004, but the provisional results of the rehabilitation are interesting in several respects. The documentation resource has been partly adapted to all types of reader. The reading rooms have had a full safety upgrade, and are spacious, rational and quiet. The hall has been entirely reshaped.

Diagram 3. Measurements

Surfaces in square meters	2001	2004	Observations
Net floor area	12 890	14 201	New Surface: 1 311
Usable *	9 430	12 518	
Renovated		9 152	
To be renovated (west wing)		3 359	
Stacks	3 141	2 075	Open stacks before renovation: 2 244

* Including technical rooms and circulations

Document searches will be easier, because the layout is clear and there are more computer terminals for catalogue and database searches. The working places let readers use laptop computers, and work alone or together.

Diagram 4. The results of the renovations

	2001	2004	
Working spaces		1 235	1 place for 22 students
Working spaces for laptop computers		350	0 in the west wing
Computers of the library for the public	50	130	

The reception, on four levels, will be totally innovative. There will be dedicated premises for user training. The reception and bibliography information facilities will play a central role in user services; and so will document loans. The library's cultural function will be enhanced. Traffic in the building should be simplified, despite some design errors. And the library should be able to take on its full importance in the wider campus context.

The rehabilitation has also strengthened links within the SICD network, between the university library and the research-unit libraries, which hosted some of the readers the central library could not cope with. As a result, the rehabilitation has helped to introduce or consolidate joint practices. It has also made the university library team more cohesive. The organisational change is now represented spatially, although the staff has yet to fully embrace it.

However, the rehabilitation is creating a harmful burden on staff and readers. The operation of a safety system places very onerous demands on the fire safety department. But universities cannot afford such a department, so the library staff is likely to assume the role. This means lots of technical training far removed from library-related professions, and requires availability that is hard for staff to reconcile with their professional responsibilities.

We foresee another problem: an imbalance between user numbers and staff workloads in the two wings. This is because the storeroom is off-centre in relation to the building. Serving the west wing will be laborious because we could not afford to create a mechanical link. Also, west-wing service will be affected because we cannot stop users being attracted to the working places and services in the renovated wing. The west wing, despite our efforts, is still in the last century.

Because we lacked the funds to satisfy our requirements and ambitions, you might think that splitting the renovation into two phases would have enabled the universities to take a giant leap forward. Phase one has partly happened this, after a fairly chaotic and ultimately uneconomical process.

Phase two of the works must be executed to complete our ambitious project and obtain authorisation to open safety services after the west-wing renovation. Phase two will also be important in the continued adaptation of the building, by increasing the number of diversified working places and document storage capacity; by offering a wider range of training; and by separating the conference venue from the library opening hours. Until the west wing is renovated - and this has not yet been scheduled - users will have an imperfect, two-speed documentary resource.

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

SICD2 – Service Interétablissements de Coopération Documentaire. <http://sicd2.upmf-grenoble.fr/>

Université Pierre Mendès France. <http://www.upmf-grenoble.fr/upmf/>

Université Stendhal. <http://www.u-grenoble3.fr/stendhal/index.html>