

Services and Collections Gathered Near the User: Helsinki University Library and its Present Building Projects

by DORRIT GUSTAFSSON

1. GENERAL FACTS

As the National Library of Finland, founded 1640, the Helsinki University Library requires adequate space and this is something we have lacked for the last 60 years. Our main effort over the last decades has been to concentrate our services and collections in one area to form a Library complex. The only way to do it is to renovate old above ground and to build new underground and then try to join them.

The Main Library Building is located in the middle of city centre and in the heart of city campus. The Library is now located on several sites whose activities include technical services, such as the National bibliography, acquisition and cataloguing, all network services as well as the development unit for library computerization. The Library has a repository library located 100 kilometres from Helsinki, and Conservation and microfilming are located in another town, about 250 kilometres away. The Library's collections cover some 100 kilometres of linear shelving and are separated into several scattered stacks.

At the beginning of 1998 the Library was running services on three different sites because the Slavonic Library and the American Resource Center were located elsewhere.

2. THE BUILDING PROJECTS AND THEIR STAGES

The 1990's have seen large-scale planning, construction and renovation projects. The first and the second of the following stages are now completed.

1. The first stage: the Fabiania building was built in 1847 - 1897. Formerly housing the departments of anatomy and pharmacy, the Fabiania was restored for the Library's use in 1998. This was the start of the Library complex.
2. The second stage: the Main Library and the Fabiania were joined and the Library complex was formed. The Main Library consists of the library building dating from 1840, and the extension building Rotunda from 1906. The renovation of the Rotunda and the passage between the buildings was completed in autumn 1999.
3. The third stage: the construction of the four-storey underground stacks has been started and will be completed in autumn 2000. The stacks are in many ways similar to the warehouse of the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm, which we have visited several times for consultation over the years.
4. The fourth stage has just started. Small underground stacks from the 50s, located in the middle of the Library complex, will be pulled down. Some of the levels will be renovated to form open access space. The project is scheduled for completion at the beginning of 2001.
5. The fifth stage will start in 2010 – 2015 with the second part of the new underground collection stacks.
6. The sixth stage has been designed but not financed. In 2005 the entrance halls and bookstore in the Main Library may be repaired. At present they are impractical in view of the increasing number of library users.

All the old buildings except the stacks from the 50s are protected by a statute on state-owned buildings. This has set and will set limits on planning. The projects can also be seen as two: one involving the space above ground and the other underground.

3. GENERAL AIMS FOR THE LIBRARY COMPLEX

The construction and repair of the Library are of course guided by the ideas of service and activity. The Library's general aim and policy has been to concentrate services and collections near the user. Our intention has been to create an open library both in terms of space and services. Advanced library automation and strategies for expanded network services like the National Electronic Library and digitization of collections have supported this aim. On the other hand, the old buildings set many restrictions on the location of

activities and services: you can't place collections where you want to, routes, paths and connections can't be arranged in the best way, there's not enough flexibility, and so on. But in any case, we can set the following starting-points and general aims for the use of the complex:

- The new Library complex is for the Library's users;
- the technical infrastructure made it possible to locate the Library's technical services outside the city centre;
- the library complex is easy to use;
- the complex of many buildings may be complicated for the users. So each building must have its own functions or profiles;
- and the efficiency of the operational procedures shall be improved;
- even though we have more space and new services the number of staff has not increased but services are available everywhere – this is guaranteed by library automation and net services;
- the last starting-point is that the security of the collections is better.

4. THE LIBRARY COMPLEX ABOVE GROUND

The above ground user areas are the main part of the Library complex. You can say that the Library complex really forms an open library. Almost 90 % of the complex is open for customer use.

The short underground passage between the three buildings begins in the middle of the cafeteria. The library user can actually walk through the whole Library complex. The passage also leads to the two open access underground levels. The complex has only one customer entrance for safety as well as for architectural reasons. It is important to emphasize that the starting-point of architectural planning was the Main Library, because when you get your first glimpse of the Library as you enter the Main Library entrance, you get an idea of the use of space in the complex as a whole.

In spite of the passage, the complex of the three old buildings can give a first impression of being rather complicated for the user. Most of the services for the users are in the Main Library and in the Rotunda. The proximity of the entrance and open access collections and the rather easy access to the cafeteria have made these buildings popular.

The Fabiania building houses more specialized services needed mainly by senior researchers and students preparing their thesis. The farther the distance from the entrance, the lighter the traffic inside the complex. It's also important to regard the security of the collections; the more valuable the collections are, the farther their location is from the entrance.

During the renovation of both the Fabiania and the Rotunda, much attention was given to the buildings themselves. Their structures and spatial divisions were restored and preserved. Almost all the partition walls were removed. In Fabiania, especially we avoided breaking the few wall surfaces as well as the panel roofs. A number of technical improvements needed by a modern electronic library have been introduced. There are about 450 reader seats, most of them have a connection to the university's network.

5. THE UNDERGROUND COLLECTION STACKS, THE CAVE

The Library's long-term policy has been to concentrate its collections near its services. The collections are now situated far from the Library, in many different stacks.

The new underground four-storey building, made of precast concrete panels will be constructed inside a cave 23 metres below sea level. The stack is 150 metres long and 18 metres wide, altogether 10,000 square metres. There is 20 kilometres of linear shelving on every floor and special areas for special material like maps, microforms and recordings.

The new stack allows the Library to concentrate all the collections kept in Helsinki in one stack and also in one complex. The space will be sufficient for only ten to fifteen years. The second phase starts in 2010 - 2015 when the stack will be extended and the Library gets some 200 - 300 shelf kilometres of more space.

The environmental conditions are constant and ideal for storing printed material and manuscripts. The temperature is between 18 and 19° Celsius. The relative humidity is between 45 and 50 %. There are cooler and drier storage conditions for archive negatives for microfilms. The indoor air is chemically filtered, dried, heated, and circulated 1,5 times per hour. The surrounding rock cave will also be heated, dried and ventilated – to ensure the best results indoors but also to stabilize the maintenance costs. There will be a central

vacuum cleaner for all dirty material, which for example all donations will first go through. All the lamps are UV radiation free.

We will not have any water or drain pipes in the stack. Even the fire protection system is a dry sprinkle system. It has not been easy to find a solution for fire protection but we dare not to be without any. About 80 % of fires are caused by the human factor.

The transportation of books and other library material has required special consideration. In addition to elevators a book transporter (Telelift) with 9 stations will be installed. It is the Library's aim to speed up the delivery time of library material. The transporter goes directly to the service points both in the Rotunda and the Fabiania. I would like to thank the National Library of Austria for its special consultation help.

The staff bringing the material will work in shifts. And some of the material in the stack will be copied and scanned to make the service quicker and to protect the material. Some of the material will be delivered through the net to the user's own PC.

All transport to and from the Library will take place by vans and lorries via an underground tunnel to the new stack. From there the material will be distributed inside the Library. Most of the incoming materials are publications, which are ready for shelving and will remain in the underground stack.

6. FINANCING AND COSTS

The costs of all the building projects mentioned here earlier total 170 million FMK (about \$ 30 million). 80 million have been used for the Library complex above ground and the rest, 90 million, for the underground stack.

The area has been financed for the most part by the State Real Property Authority working under the Ministry of Finance. This institution is responsible for all the public and State owned buildings in Finland. A small part of the money has come from the university's own budget.

For the financing of the underground stack project a new type of arrangement had to be developed. The project, even though included in the Government's

Services and Collections Gathered Near the User: Helsinki University Library and Its Present Building Projects

investment programme, would not have received its financing via the State budget until 2006 or 2007. The new stack was needed much earlier.

It also proved to be wise to combine the project with the construction of a large car parking cave in the immediate neighbourhood. An agreement was reached to establish a real estate company with the University as the only shareholder. Later (in 2006) the State will take over the shares in accordance with an investment programme of the Ministry of Education. Until then the Library will pay it off by rent.

Dorrit Gustafsson
Helsinki University Library
Box 15 Unioninkatu 36
00014 University of Helsinki, Finland
Dorrit.Gustafsson@helsinki.fi