

## French University Libraries 1988-1998: A Statistical Analysis

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In 1989 the French government was presented with a report drafted by a group of specialists headed by André Miquel, the former director of the Bibliothèque Nationale. The Rapport Miquel, as the document was named, drew a rather bleak picture of French university libraries by pointing out various shortcomings. As it outlined a number of remedial measures as well, the report was welcomed by the Ministry of Education and its library department made it the basis of a new programme aimed at strengthening the country's neglected university libraries. That move was formulated in agreement with a collateral measure named decentralization law which obliges several government agencies, until then mostly located in the nation's capital, to remove to provincial cities. The decentralization law, applied since 1986, turned out an additional boon to provincial educational institutions. The predominance of Parisian university libraries, so very pronounced since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, has since been scaled down and the imbalance somewhat reduced. Whereas the long established and traditional university libraries have claimed the operation a clear success, not all institutions have benefited equally from that positive development.

Based on an analysis of statistical data from the past decade which have been published annually by the French Ministry of Education (*Annuaire des bibliothèques universitaires*), the article gives an overview of developments with regard to buildings, personnel, services, acquisitions and collections of French university libraries during the last decade.

### 1. ORGANISATION

Since the early 1990s, most university libraries have been operating under the rules of a law passed in 1984 which aims at reorganising the various libraries within a university. The law stipulates the creation of a cooperative library

service for each university, either as a close-knit structure (services communs de la documentation = SCD) or as a system of associated units (services interétablissements de coopération documentaire = SICD). Both administrative measures want to achieve a joint approach with regard to acquisitions, cataloguing, user education and information technology at each institution. The various components of a library network within a university are allowed to choose whether to become integrated or only associated with the overall structure.

## 2. BUILDINGS

During the last 10 years, a number of new universities opened their doors in the Parisian conurbation as well as in the provinces. The new foundations were established in accordance with the plans of the French government aimed at offering students a better access to university education nationwide. Whereas lecture halls and laboratories went up, the libraries of those institutions did not expand and develop accordingly.

Year	Number of libraries	Number of sections	Floor space (m <sup>2</sup> )	Seating capacity
1978	59	177	603,700	58,000
1983	61	184	615,400	---
1988	64	195	628,700	65,000
1993	82	290	672,600	72,800
1998	95	391	845,800	92,500

Table 1: Buildings

In 1978 there existed 59 university libraries with a total of 177 sectional libraries, the usable floor space measuring ca. 603,700 square metres. On the average, each sectional library had ca. 3,410 square metres of floor space at their disposal, while the average number of seats available to users was 327. During the last two decades 214 new sectional libraries were erected, but their accumulated floor space measured just 245,000 square metres. Per unit this amounts to only 1,145 square metres, and the number of seats decreased likewise to 160 on average. While more sectional libraries were built, the average unit was reduced to half the size with about half the seating capacity. According to the plan „Université 2000“ the government had made public its intentions to construct library buildings with a further 180,000 square metres, but that ambitious aim was not fully attained.

As to the relation of open to closed access, nationally 32 percent of all stock was available from open shelves.

### 3. PERSONNEL

Due to continued budgetary restrictions decreed by the French Ministry of Finance, the government was not successful in creating a sufficient number of new positions for library personnel during the last ten years. During the 1980s, the number of posts even decreased slightly. By and large the number of employees did not increase in step with the expansion of library provisions, and only a relatively small percentage of staff can boast a formal library training. In 1998 the 95 university libraries in operation had a total personnel pool of 4,062 posts of which only 1,848 (45.5 %) had gone through a formal library education (conservateur, bibliothécaire, bibliothécaire-adjoint).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of libraries</b>	<b>Library personnel</b>
1978	59	3,033
1983	61	3,321
1988	64	3,149
1993	82	3,411
1998	95	4,062

Table 2: Personnel

In 1978 the 59 university libraries had an average staff size of 51, two decades later that figure had dropped to 42. Only two provincial and three Parisian libraries had a staff size exceeding 100 positions in 1998.

### 4. USERSHIP

During the last two decades, the tertiary education sector enjoyed a period of enormous growth in France. Today more than 2 million students are enrolled in French universities and other higher education institutions. Thus the number of potential library users has risen as well. As the first two phases of French university studies are mainly based on textbooks, more specialized literature is only required for the final study phase (troisième cycle) or for the needs of academics involved in research. French students in large numbers see the library as a place of study to which they bring their own textbooks instead of using books from the library shelves. Thus quite a number of students complain about crowded study facilities, especially in Paris where the

situation has been deplorable for decades. At several Parisian university libraries the number of registered users has even declined (4 percent) in 1998 due to overcrowding.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Libraries</b>	<b>Registered users</b>
1988	64	659,780
1993	82	1,045,480
1998	95	1,244,500

Table 3: Registered users

In 1988, a library had an average usership of 10,300, a decade later that figure had risen to 13,100. As a consequence, French university libraries have to look after a rising number of users per personnel position.

## 5. COLLECTIONS

Due to the impact of the Rapport Miquel upon decisions in the French Ministry of Education, university libraries have enjoyed a steady rise in funds allocated for acquisitions since the early 1990s. As a consequence, collections have grown on an unprecedented scale. But not all libraries have benefited from that financial largesse in the same manner. Mostly the older and well established institution received the larger portion of those additional allocations.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of libraries</b>	<b>Books &amp; Dissertations</b>
1978	59	16,4
1983	61	18,2
1988	64	19,3
1993	82	22,2
1998	95	25,3

Table 4: Collections (in million volumes)

But the overall positive development cannot hide that many university libraries still are not able to offer their users attractive collections, neither with regard to size nor to quality. Whereas four libraries held a book stock of more than one million volumes (Sorbonne Paris, BIU Médecine Paris, Ste. Geneviève Paris, BNU Strasbourg) in 1998, a further 11 university libraries were furnished with book collections holding more than half a million volumes. Seven of those institutions are located in Paris and the Ile de France.

On the other hand, 20 of the 67 university libraries situated outside the Parisian conglomeration had collections of less than 100,000 volumes, and 10 even fell below the 50,000 volume threshold. In the Parisian conurbation, 2 of the 26 university libraries likewise reported collections holding less than 50,000 volumes. It is no wonder that a large percentage of French academics regard university libraries, especially in the provinces, as poorly equipped and hardly worth visiting, and it is not uncommon that professors more or less regularly travel to Paris in order to consult the literature stocked in the larger research libraries of the French capital.

## 6. ACQUISITIONS

In comparison to the late 1970s, the number of titles acquired per annum has more than doubled and the number of journal subscriptions increased by about 70 percent. But at the same time several new universities were created, and thus the situation has not changed that much for the better with regard to the individual library.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Libraries</b>	<b>Books &amp; Dissertations</b>	<b>Journal subscriptions</b>
1977	59	403,000	89,000
1982	61	384,000	95,000
1987	64	335,000	103,000
1992	82	672,000	125,000
1997	95	1,097,000	158,000

Table 5: Acquisitions

At several university libraries, the annual intake of new monographs is rather modest. In 1998, only 33 (of 67) provincial university libraries added more than 10,000 titles to their stock, among the Parisian institutions 13 (of 26) reported increases which exceeded that figure. In 10 university libraries, however, less than 3,000 new books found their place to the shelves during that year.

With regard to journal subscriptions, the situation is even more obvious. In 1998, only 5 libraries held subscriptions to more than 3,000 journals, but 40 of the 95 university libraries subscribed to less than 1,000 periodicals.

## 7. BUDGETS

In the course of the last two decades, the annual amounts spent on acquisitions increased more than ten times nationally. Especially since the early 1990s, the rate of increase has been rather stable. A certain percentage of that increase, however, was eaten up by a decline in the value of the French Franc with regard to foreign currencies and by the rise in book prices and journal subscriptions, so that the surplus must be viewed in proportion. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the government is determined to bring French university libraries up to par with their West European counterparts.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of libraries</b>	<b>Acquisition budgets</b>
1978	59	36
1983	61	64
1988	64	116
1993	82	254
1998	95	395

Tabel 6: Acquisition Budgets (in M FF)

Until the mid-1980s, university libraries in the Parisian conurbation were usually better off than their provincial sisters, but meanwhile several of the older institutions located in the provinces have benefited more from the ministerial allocations. In 1998, two Parisian (BIU Jussieu, BIU Médecine) and six provincial university libraries (Clermont-Ferrand, Grenoble I, Lyon I, Montpellier, Nantes, Strasbourg I) were allocated the highest acquisition budgets (more than 7 M FF each). In total, the provincial university libraries spent 282 M FF and the Parisian institutions 113 M FF on acquisitions in 1998. At the bottom of the table there were six university libraries, however, which had to manage with less than 1 M FF on acquisitions that year.

In 1998, every French university library acquired at least 1,000 monographs produced by French publishing houses, but only 15 Parisian and 33 provincial university libraries purchased more than 1,000 foreign books. Near the bottom of the chart are placed 6 Parisian and 20 provincial institutions which each put less than 500 new foreign titles on their shelves in 1998.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Libraries</b>	<b>French/ Foreign books</b>	<b>French/Foreign periodicals</b>
1988	64	40.7 / 14.9	15.7 / 40.8
1993	82	80.1 / 36.8	30.1 / 83.0
1998	95	109.0 / 46.4	50.1 / 144.6

Table 7: Expenditure for books and journals (in M FF)

The situation is less pronounced with regard to periodicals. On average, Parisian university libraries spent 78 percent of their acquisition budgets on foreign periodical titles in 1998, while provincial institutions allocated 73 percent of their funds for the purchase of journals produced outside France.

#### 8. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

In order to redress the scarcity of specialized literature from foreign publishers held by university libraries, the French government introduced a programme supporting the purchase of foreign publications in a number of subjects in the late 1970s. In 1998, 31 subjects were included in the scheme called CADIST (Centre d'Acquisition et de Diffusion de l'Information Scientifique et Technique). In 1998, the government subsidized the scheme to the tune of 22.5 M FF. From that amount, 12.4 M FF went into subscriptions to foreign periodicals, 6.3 M FF was spent on books, and the rest went for the purchase of microforms. The majority of titles acquired with CADIST funds were products from foreign presses.

#### 9. LENDING

Parallel to the increase in student numbers, French university libraries lent a rising number of books and periodicals to their users. Especially notable is the increase in the number of items lent to users for studies at home, a figure which very likely also reflects the lack of study space in academic libraries. In 1998, the number of materials loaned decreased slightly in comparison to the preceding year, due probably to the fact that more collections are being offered on open shelves.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Libraries</b>	<b>Lending (total)</b>	<b>Reading room/ Home study</b>
1988	64	9.2	4.0 / 5.2
1993	82	13.8	4.8 / 9.0
1998	95	16.7	4.4 / 12.3

Tabel 8: Lending (in million transactions)

Inter-library loans are not very much in demand in France. Although the tertiary education sector expanded rapidly during the last two decades – 48 new universities were founded in that period – the statistics of ILL transactions changed not in accord with the expansion of student numbers and teaching personnel. In 1988, about 391,000 ILL requests were filled, a decade later that figure had risen to just 650,000 requests. In 1998, the statistics showed a decline of 4 percent compared to the preceding year. In 1998, 36 percent of all ILL requests were filled by only 6 university libraries (BIU Médecine Paris, Lyon I, Aix-Marseille II, Nancy I, Grenoble I, Sorbonne Paris, Strasbourg I). On the other hand, 16 university libraries contributed each less than 200 ILL requests that year.

#### 10. OPENING HOURS

Although the French Ministry of Education repeatedly urged directors of university libraries to extend the opening hours of their institutions, that plea did not have the desired effect. Nevertheless, on the national average the number of opening hours increased by ten percent in the course of the last decade. Whereas the libraries of national renown (Paris Sorbonne, BDIC Nanterre, Paris Saint-Geneviève, Paris Cujas, BNU Strasbourg) stay open almost the year round, about 20 percent of all university libraries open their doors less than 2000 hours per year. And quite a few institutions cling to the tradition of closing their doors altogether for 5 to 6 weeks during the summer recess.

#### 11. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Ministry of Education has distributed large sums to university libraries in order to install or renew computing equipment. In 1997, the allocations amounted to 23.7 M FF. Meanwhile 70 of the 95 university libraries are operating an integrated library system. The French union catalogue (Catalogue Collectif de France) contains about 3.9 million records for monographs. At

several institutions projects were initiated with the aim of reconverting existing card catalogues into machine-readable files.

## 12. PERSPECTIVE

The new objectives pursued by the French Ministry of Education have resulted in a better funding policy for university libraries altogether. If this policy is continued - which all indicators point to - France will be able to catch up on its backlog with regard to information provisions to students and faculty. In order to strengthen university libraries in the near future, a closer cooperation with well-positioned municipal libraries is being discussed. A further investment in IT based services is also considered as an appropriate measure.