

Learning from the First Step: UniMail, Geneva, Switzerland

by DAISY MCADAM

UniMail, which is the University of Geneva building dedicated to the humanities, is situated in the heart of the city. Students are an integral part of the life of the district with the university situated next to a beautiful landscaped park surrounded by 600 flats. A central lane lets local inhabitants stroll through the main building on to a square, then right into the park.

As soon as the main plan for the area was established as early as 1982, local authorities decided to emphasize the integration of the new complex into the urban environment and to maintain close relations between the university, the district and the town itself.

With a total surface area of 32,000 sq meters, the building has room for 6,500 students and 1,000 professors, researchers, librarians and administrative staff.

Fortunately, the University of Geneva decided to employ its own architect, Agnes Goda, who was the intermediary between the end users (students, librarians, professors, assistants) and the group of architects who had been commissioned to do the building. The resulting edifice is an exciting new landmark in Geneva's architectural landscape.

Collaboration between the university architect, the mandated architects and the librarians started, to all intents and purposes, as early as 1985; there were close relations between several working groups who were in permanent contact with the operational group directed by Professor Beat Burgenmeier, a user himself and who was later to become Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences.

As the special architect representing the university, Agnes Goda was an efficient go-between, working in the interests of the final users. The librarians were constantly aware of four parameters:

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1. Maximum natural lighting
2. The number of linear metres required for a 10 year extension
3. 1 seat for 5 students as a standard user measurement, and
4. The best possible use of space.

The first phase was realized in 1992. The library was intended to house the Faculty of law, the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Environmental Studies as well as the Translators' and Interpreters' School. There was no further intention of enlargement at that point.

In the early 1990's however, there was a new university policy, with major changes in planning; the need for a new library extension became inevitable, but there were of course the inevitable budgetary restrictions. This saw the start of the second phase which proved to be a major challenge. The library was required to manage change in a unique way by reviewing the organization of space and the distribution of its collections more efficiently.

Phase One	Phase Two
1992	1999
5,800 sq meters	3,000 sq meters
4 partners : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences• Faculty of Law• Translators' and Interpreters' School• Centre of Human Ecology	9 partners : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First step partners• Faculty of Psychology and Education• Institute of European Studies• Piaget Archives• Rousseau Archives• Multimedia Centre

A new assessment had to be made and feedback was sought from library users in the form of a questionnaire (see figure 1).

A remettre au PRET-ACCUEIL B.S.E.S.

QUESTIONNAIRE DE SATISFACTION

Architecture et aménagement

Bilan de la 1ère étape

	très bon	bon	moyen	insuffisant	très insuffisant
Globalement, quel est votre degré de satisfaction à l'égard de la BSES à UNI MAIL ?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Le confort est-il globalement adapté à vos besoins ?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L'éclairage, est-il suffisant et adapté à vos besoins ?					
au niveau des tables de travail	<input type="checkbox"/>				
dans les zones de détente	<input type="checkbox"/>				
dans les rayonnages	<input type="checkbox"/>				
dans les carrels	<input type="checkbox"/>				
aux tables de consultation OPAC	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Que pensez-vous des carrels ? (places de travail individuel à trois parois) ?					
<input type="checkbox"/> c'est très utile pour s'isoler					
<input type="checkbox"/> c'est superflu, je m'en passe tout à fait					
<input type="checkbox"/> c'est pratique pour brancher mon PC portable					
Que pensez-vous des cabines de travail en groupe ?					
<input type="checkbox"/> c'est très utile					
<input type="checkbox"/> c'est superflu, je trouve un autre lieu pour discuter de mon travail					
<input type="checkbox"/> c'est indispensable, il en faudrait plus					
<input type="checkbox"/> c'est pratique pour chahuter					
Que pensez-vous des places de travail ?					
<input type="checkbox"/> les sièges sont confortables					
<input type="checkbox"/> les sièges sont trop durs					
<input type="checkbox"/> la surface de travail est confortable					
<input type="checkbox"/> l'espace de travail est insuffisant					
Que pensez-vous des zones de détente ?					
<input type="checkbox"/> je m'y arrête de temps à autre					
<input type="checkbox"/> j'ai d'autres endroits pour méditer					
<input type="checkbox"/> les fauteuils à accoudoirs sont adéquats					
<input type="checkbox"/> les fauteuils à accoudoirs sont inconfortables					
Si vous pouviez bénéficier de casiers personnels à la bibliothèque, les utiliseriez-vous ?					
<input type="checkbox"/> oui					
<input type="checkbox"/> non					
Et les portemanteaux ?					
<input type="checkbox"/> oui					
<input type="checkbox"/> non					
Le bruit est-il une nuisance supportable ?					
<input type="checkbox"/> oui					
<input type="checkbox"/> non					
Vos commentaires et vos remarques :					

Merci de votre collaboration

Fig. 1: User satisfaction questionnaire for the second step

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Thanks to the survey, users made clear what they really wanted: more technical facilities (computers, photocopiers, printers) more variety in the work place, including casual seating arrangements and special sound-proofed rooms where they could work in groups.

For the staff, it was possible to take advantage of the complete reorganization of the work space. They modified their offices; some were made larger, new ones were added, along with doors, custom-made for special needs, such as interviews with users; more storage rooms and stacks were built and new facilities were adapted for the extension of opening hours. Security was intensified and extra magnetic devices placed near the check-out desk.

The library occupies the first and second floors, with inside patios providing a maximum of light. The reading and working places are set round the patios and along the façades. Stacks are set in the central parts of the library.

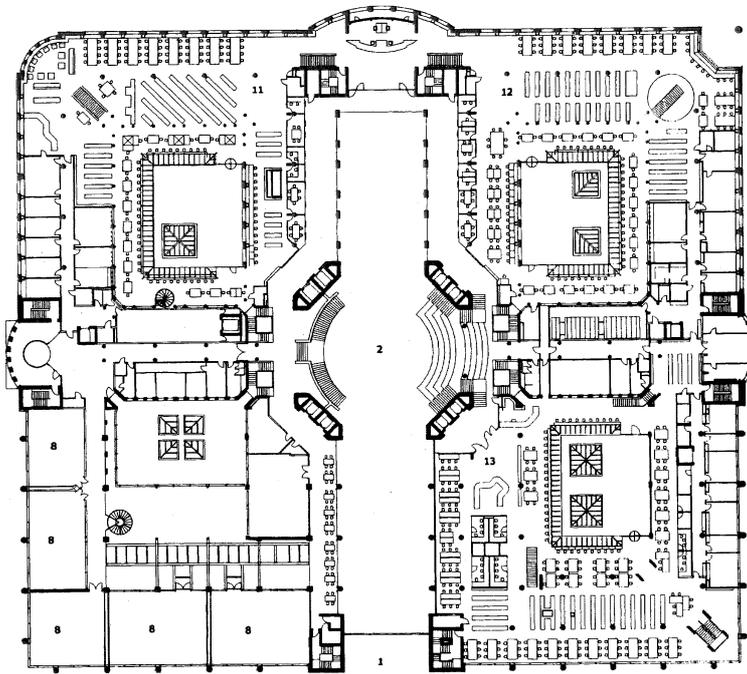


Fig. 2: UniMail Library, First floor

- The use and mission of the library has greatly evolved between phase one and phase two. The new needs of students have been taken into account and, wherever possible, brand new equipment and training rooms have been added.
- The creation of different spaces inside the library in accordance with special lighting and more relaxed areas, offers excellent conditions for intellectual stimulation and concentration adapted to all kinds of user tastes.

The second phase was finally implemented in 1999 and UniMail has now become one of the largest university buildings of its kind in Switzerland.

SOME FACTS

One library with 9 partners
open 84 hrs a week
40 full-time staff,
8,800 sq metres
12 km shelving
450,000 volumes
3,800 journal subscriptions
1,200 working places for users
90 % document accessibility
200 computers for users
20 photocopiers

UniMail Library was not conceived as an independent edifice but was imagined as an integral part of the building itself. It covers nearly 30% of the space available, which indicates the high regard in which it is held by the academic community.

Today, the library – with one million visitors a year – fully meets the needs of the academic community, both students and staff alike.

The library is a working place, a study place and a meeting place.

As mentioned by Professor Burgemeier,

„The Library constitutes the lungs of the University”.