

Library of Sorbonne, from passive to dynamic Storage : Refurbishments and New Organization of the Collections (2003-2016)

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Abstract:

Because of safety reasons, it has been known since August 2003 that the 1897-building of the library of Sorbonne would close after the whole moving of its collections (research documents in humanities and 120.000 heritage items).

In June 2009, most-used collections were stored in Sainte-Barbe provisional library (opened from May 2010 to May 2013) and were due to Sorbonne after the works. Less-used items were stored in premises near the Sorbonne and in the Centre technique du livre de l'enseignement supérieur (CTLES, 32km from Paris).

The library reopened in Sorbonne on November, 15th 2013 after a complete refurbishment and another moving of its collections. As the refurbished buildings offer 24.000lm of shelves only, another 17.000lm have to be stored off site.

In 2016, at least 4.000lm will be transferred to the new facilities of the CTLES and a dynamic storage system will be settled. Therefore, by 2020, half of the collections will be stored in Sorbonne and the other 50% in CTLES.

Library of Sorbonne, from passive to dynamic Storage : Refurbishments and New Organization of the Collections (2003-2016)

The library of Sorbonne reopened in Sorbonne on November 15th, 2013, ending up with a ten years long process of planning and rebuilding. Though strongly settled in Paris Quartier Latin, this huge and relevant collection shivered on its base due to a long refurbishment process.

In the library of Sorbonne, the collections in Humanities are so extended that "heritage" means "ancient collections" as well as « rather recent (19th and 20th century) but exhaustive collections ». Those « special collections » contain nearly two millions research level items (37.000lm) and also more than 120.000 books and documents prior to the French Revolution: 2100 manuscripts, 350 incunabula, famous teachers' archives, documents about the University of Paris, etc.

Those documents are now widely available in completely refurbished thematic (history, philosophy, literature) reading rooms. A digital system allows every registered user to book his documents in advance whether the documents are stored in Sorbonne or not. Training rooms and rooms for collective or individual work are also available. 12 point size.

Love Labour's Lost (2003-2010)

Splendors and Miseries

The historical buildings of the library of Sorbonne were opened on December 3rd, 1897. The architect, Henri-Paul Nénot, built a general library for the University of Paris. By 1900, its main reading room (613sqm) can host 275 people and the stacks, organized in two towers of three levels each, 200.000 books. From the very beginning of the 20th century, this historic building has been listed.

In its shape, the library unfortunately revealed soon insufficient. In 1930, new furniture were installed in the main reading room to accommodate more than 400 people and each tower of stacks received five more levels, which increased the whole capacity of the library up to 1.000.000 documents.

Very few changes occurred between 1930 and 1970. But, in 1972, the University of Paris split into 13 different universities. The science universities moved to a new campus in Jussieu and the library of Sorbonne lost its collections of science. At the same time, it has been decided to built new stacks underneath the Sorbonne. The whole capacity of the stacks grew up to 38.000 lm of shelves.

On April 9th, 2010, when the library of Sorbonne closed to the public before the launching of the refurbishment works, the reading rooms still had their 1897 shape. In more than one century, very few significant works had been made in this now-exhausted building. The pressure of the public, the intensive use of the library, the lack of working places in the university libraries in Paris, the post 1968-symbolic impact of the Sorbonne are one of the reasons that made a proper refurbishment of the building almost impossible.

And, as a predictable conclusion to this more-than-one-century-old situation, due to safety reasons, the library of Sorbonne was urged to close to the public on August 2003. Nevertheless, the Rector-Chancellor and the Mayor of Paris managed to postpone the closure arguing that a complete refurbishment program should be defined (2003-2010).

A Heritage and its History

It was well-known since 1990's that a complete refurbishment of the library of Sorbonne would be once necessary. And, as soon as July 2003, the University of Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne, which provides general support to the library of Sorbonne, decided to hire locals in the Quartier Latin district (crypt of Notre-Dame-du-Liban) to host 8.000lm of document in case the refurbishment works would start earlier than what could be fancied.

Strong hopes of having built in Sorbonne a new storage facility (25.000 lm) which would allow the library to host the 38.000lm of collections collapsed after the project of building such a facility was given up. As soon as 2005, the foreseen structure to be built underneath the main courtyard of the Sorbonne has been in fact considered as impossible to achieve. Therefore, from 2005, it has been thought that there would be no long-term solution to the lack of storage unless a new building would be built out of the center of Paris.

Consequently a new scale project had to be planned (2006). Its main characteristic had been that the former building of the library of Sorbonne would have to be reused and refurbished. As much documents as possible would have to be stored in the library of Sorbonne, which could hardly host 20.000lm of shelves after the refurbishment. Another building would have to be planned and built to store the remaining books. It had been considered that a building lot belonging to the French state in Marne-la-Vallée (32 km from Paris city center) would be appropriate to arrange such a storage facility. In 2007, by a memorandum of understanding between French state and Ile-de-France region, a new storage facility, able to host up to 23.000lm, started to be planned.

By mid-2008, the general scheme of the collections spreading of the library of Sorbonne was settled. More or less 20.000lm would stay in Sorbonne and up to 17.000lm would be stored elsewhere. This scheme is and will be in the future the key point of the organization of the collections.

The Voyage Out (2009-2013)

The Exile

The calls for tenders for the refurbishment works were passed by Paris City Council (2009), owner of the lot and the building of Sorbonne. It was then clearly established that the works would start by mid-2010. The complete moving of the collections had to be planned. The calls for tenders for the moving were passed in early 2009 and, from June 2009 till June 2010, nearly 38.000lm of documents were moved away.

In 2008, considering that the library of Sorbonne would lose 38% of its shelving capacities when it would be back in Sorbonne, it was decided to split the collections into two main blocks:

- between 2010 and 2013, the more-used material would be stored in Sainte-Barbe temporary library and, after 2013, in Sorbonne (12.000lm in stacks and 1500lm in open access) ;
- less-used collections would be stored in the crypt of Notre-Dame-du-Liban (8000lm) and, thanks to a memorandum of understanding with the Centre technique du livre de

l'enseignement supérieur (CTLES), another 17.000 ml of shelving would be provided by CTLES in Marne-la-Vallée, staying these documents fully available out of a shuttle system the day after they had been ordered by a user.

This repartition was grounded on a long-term survey (2004-2009) about the use of the collections in the library of Sorbonne, and specially the periodical ones. Less-used and more-used marks of books and periodicals had been identified for a long scale of time. More or less, the principles of this repartition are still active today and influenced the spreading of the collections which has been fixed in 2013 when the moving back of the collections was prepared.

A New Land

From May 25th, 2010 to May 18th, 2013, the library of Sorbonne opened in Sainte-Barbe building to its users. Those three years can be considered as "experimental years".

Managing the complete moving of the collections supposed to cope with strong constraints. The recently-open Sainte-Barbe library (February 2009) had to share its own spaces with the library of Sorbonne and in particular the main hall of its building. Two reading rooms had been provisionally given to the library of Sorbonne. The documents stored in new Sainte-Barbe stacks, fully equipped by compact shelves in 2010 on the occasion of the moving of the library of Sorbonne's collections, revealed difficult to use all day long.

However the library of Sorbonne has taken also many advantages of this peculiar situation. The opportunity was given to the library of Sorbonne to play its full role as one of the major French research academic libraries in Humanities. The registration and loan system were founded anew on easier basis for the users. The opening hours have increased a little (from 57 weekly opening hours in 2008 to 59 in 2010). The open access collections have grown up to 40.000 documents whereas there were no more than 10.000 documents in Sorbonne prior to 2010. Free access to digital resources has started to be provided to the registered users. Digital booking facilities for all the documents have opened from mid-2010.

Among all the improvements, the habit of working collectively has been taken to achieve the global project "Sorbonne 2013". This change in mind has been essential and still has a strong influence on the social climate in the library. It meant that the key points for the modernization were listed and summed up in 6 main issues (divided themselves in 38 main goals), such as : rebuilding a new library, building a virtual library, improving services offered to the users, enhancing the collections, improving the management and the communication. Focus groups, working groups, workshops, etc. have been organized to ensure a global commitment of the personal in the modernization of the library.

The Fruit of the Tree (2013-2016)

The Fruit of the Tree

In the meanwhile (2010-2013) the refurbishment program progressed widely. Generally speaking it can be said that the refurbishment solved almost all the problems that had been pointed out in 2003: ventilation, fire protections, evacuation systems, electricity, plumbing, access to disabled people, etc. were completely changed and brought to common standards.

Nevertheless when it has opened to the public on November 15th, 2013, though rebuilt, the library of Sorbonne has not increased significantly its size. For instance, 2100sqm only are open to the public and the stacks offer only 24.000lm of shelving. However, we must note that the storage capacity increased of almost 20% compared to the 2008 previsions thanks to the installation of compact shelves, which supposed to reinforce the floorings : however, the loss of storage remains as high as 31% (14.000lm). Eventually, it was decided that the heritage collections (4.300lm) and most current and highly-used collections (17.000lm) would be stored in Sorbonne and 17.000lm out of Sorbonne.

This new organization of the collections in the refurbished library had to be planned to cope with several goals:

- keeping as much documents as possible in Sorbonne,
- keeping the more-used material in Sorbonne,
- organizing the collections in stacks to keep the more-used collections as closed as possible to the delivery desk,
- centralizing the documents delivery,
- storing in Sorbonne the heritage collections,
- developping the open access collections as much as possible in the new library.

Through the looking glass

From November 15th, 2013, the library of Sorbonne has been opened from Monday to Friday from 9am to 8pm and on Saturday 10am to 7pm. On each opening hour the whole range of the services is available.

The collections of the library of Sorbonne that are stored in Sorbonne nowadays represent a bit more than 20.000lm in stacks, among which 57% are stored in electric compact shelves.

The open access collections are thematically organized. In every room, the user can find general documentation, assistance and special services. Three main zones respectively dedicated to literature (main reading room), philosophy (two reading rooms) and history (two reading rooms) provide the public with the general documentation on their particular subjects of interest and may foster a first approach to a research. In every thematic reading room, books, periodicals and digital material are available. In detail, there are:

- 10500 volumes and 166 periodicals in Ancient and Medieval History room (Fustel de Coulanges reading room),
- 10500 volumes and 140 periodicals in Modern and Contemporary History room (Labrousse reading room),
- 7500 volumes and 250 periodicals in Philosophy rooms (Aristotle and Jankélévitch rooms),
- more than 7000 volumes and 110 periodicals in Literature and Social Sciences room (Romilly room),
- nearly 2000 volumes in special and rare books room.

Another 105.000 documents (80.000 books and 25.000 volumes of periodicals) freshly earned by the library of Sorbonne are available in open stacks upon an accreditation system reserved to the professors, assistants and researchers that accepted to complete a security visit.

17.000lm of documents (4.000lm in the crypt and 13.000lm in CTLEs) currently stored out of the Sorbonne are accessible out a digital booking system the day after asking for them.

Great Expectations (2016-2020)

The new principles of organization are now clearly established and have been used for nearly 10 months. However the current collections are still increasing at the rythm of 600lm per year. That means that the 3.500lm of shelves kept free at the moment will be full up in less than 6 years. This conception of the balance between storage and open access and between present and distant storage is supposed to be very flexible. For this reason, it has been decided that a dynamic management of the collections would be imagined and settled as soon as possible in order to keep never more than 21.000lm of shelving occupied in Sorbonne (85% of the whole capacity of the stacks).

Anyway the current system of book delivery settled from November 2013 is due to change once again after 2016. The storage facility that had been foreseen in 2007 for the library of Sorbonne in Marne-la-Vallée to face the problem of the lack of storage definitely changed in its purpose and size after 2010. In fact, thanks to a survey ordered to Pr. Bernard Larrourturou by the French Ministry for Higher Education, it has been decided that the CTLES capacities would increase dramatically and would pass to 180.000lm. This tremendous change of size means that this new storage facility will be shared by all the universities in Paris and will also host collections from university libraries in the whole French territory. This means also that the CTLES core mission will change and allow university libraries to use it as a permanent deposit facility: in this respect, a decree (February 2014) modified the status of the CTLES.

After the extension of CTLES is open, in 2016, at least another 4.000lm of collections will be transferred from library of Sorbonne to CTLES and the University Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne will end up with the expensive rental of crypt of Notre-Dame-du-Liban. From 2016 a dynamic storage system is planned to be settled: the location of each document will depend

on its use and its cycle of life. Thanks to this system, the library of Sorbonne will be able - at least in theory and in a long-term perspective - to get rid of a complex 19th century marks system that still anchors the library of Sorbonne in the past.

It sounds clear now that by 2020, 50% of the collections of the library of Sorbonne are expected to be stored in Sorbonne and another 50% in CTLES.

At the end of a nearly 15 years' cycle and thanks to the refurbishment program, the library of Sorbonne will gradually skip from a passive to a dynamic storage. On one hand, in 2016, the stacks in Sorbonne will be full and there will be no other solution. On the other hand, this change in the way of managing such an amount of documents will stress on a crucial point, even when we are talking about research collections. Building and maintaining a research collection do not mean only to accumulate documents but to assess the collection and to review constantly how relevant documents are to the researchers' community