

TU Delft Library Learning Centre **Inform, reform & transform¹**

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Background

TU Delft Library forms part of the supporting services of the TU Delft in the Netherlands and shares with these services as primary goal to support and link the university's core processes, being research and education. Our mission is to provide "a clear view on knowledge and information" for all our customer groups, also supporting the main public, companies and institutes interested in scientific-technical information, because of our national assignment in this area. TU Delft holds 14000 students (13% percentage international) and 8 faculties on science, engineering and design. The university library has one central building, and six branch libraries in the TU Delft campus. We are faced by the following developments:

- the space at the library is not optimally used; we have only liveliness in the library during exam periods, on average 14 weeks per year
- decrease in the use of traditional library products and services
- TU Delft learning centre project to result in new building

Where do we come from?

At the beginning of the Mekelweg the Van den Broek and Bakema's general assembly hall inevitably hogs the attention (Fig. 1). It is difficult for a new building to compete with the eloquently canting concrete sculpture, which evokes associations with a giant frog or concrete Thunderbird. The new library avoids this conflict by not being a building at all but a raked landscape. The formerly paved ground level round the general assembly hall is transmuted into a green landscape that rises up gently at the rear to continue as the library's triangular grass roof. The faces are of glass, thereby strengthening the illusion of a hovering carpet of grass. Here, over ten years ago, another transformation took place: the first step in transforming the TU district into a more campus-style social space².

The building is ecologically sound: climate façade, cold and heat storage. All this combined with a sunken book depot: books kept as if they were vintage wines.

¹ Paper based on presentation at "21st Century Libraries: Changing Forms, Changing Challenges, Changing Objectives", 8th Frankfurt scientific symposium, November 3-4, 2008, Frankfurt, Germany.

² Quotes about the building come from Mecanoo architects, "Delft University of Technology Library", 010 Publishers, Rotterdam 2000.

The grassroof also figures prominently on the technical front. The intensity of its mass has great heat-accumulating and insulating properties, so that the space beneath is less susceptible to changes in temperature. The mass also makes for excellent soundproofing and the vegetation retains rainwater longer (Fig. 2). It took a long time to decide what form the large volume to contrast with the landscape should take. Structural logic finally defined the shape: a cone, like a tepee in the landscape. The cone as a symbol of technique, but also of repose and contemplation (Fig. 3).

You had to feel the landscape inside too. The enormous expanse of the floor has literally the colour of the Sahara. The blue wall with the suspended bookcase has the presence almost of a stage-set (Fig. 4).

In Figure 5 you find a good example of the spatial experience of the large central hall beneath the curved roof. Dynamic architectural spaces with the character of urban exterior spaces such as squares and boulevards. The hall is presided over by two elements: the cone poking through the roof and the vast steel "bookcase" or open book depot. Reading rooms are slung from the tip of the cone, making the hall an enormous column-free space.

The large circulation desk in the hall is the central hub of the library, for enquiries, research, and the issue and return of books. The desk is thoroughly organic in form: a fragment of bark from a Caucasian elm (Fig. 6).

Three hundred computers were intended for the main study area. We laid places for study on long tables, adding partitions for privacy, for keeping light off the computer screens and for visually organizing the computers landscape. We then incorporated a Mondrian pattern of red place mats in the tables, a reference to the leather patches of the tables of old libraries (Fig. 7). Here and now in 2008 we still have 70 pc's in this study room.

The architect wanted to bring romance to the university of technology. She dreamt of rolling lawns, solitary trees, blossoms, diagonal paths. A campus where old and new buildings would stand together. The general assembly hall and the library had to be its heart, these had to have a parklike setting (Fig. 3). Our architect, Francine Houben, Mecanoo, understands the need for a change, after ten years of full use.

Informing all the time

Apart from the circa million books, we have of course a growing number of e-books and more diversity in what we offer than some ten years ago (Fig. 8). In our TU Delft repository we host PhD Theses, Bachelor & Master theses and e.g. reports suited for open access. After the fire at the Faculty of Architecture (May 2008) everybody understands the need to digitize slides.

We run a 3TU.project (federation of the three technical universities in the Netherlands) to set up a datacentre, and run our first pilot for it. Let people keep their datasets they created during experiments, reuse them, and make them

available for others to use, via their own institutes, not via the commercial publishers.

With DOK, the Delft public library, and other departments (education & student services / ICT) of the university we developed a game Dark Ink under the umbrella UGame-ULearn.

More than ever, with the ease of copy/paste, and the Open Access movement, the mark of quality is important. All researchers, teachers, students, need to realize what it is they use, how to refer to it, and what they “give way”. We developed our own website where we explain how to find and use scientific information³.

Why do we need to reform?

People came to visit our library, to browse in books, to copy their articles, they needed us & needed our; now a lot of the information we give them is available via their own desktop, and our building is only used for studying purposes (Fig. 9). We need to “sell” our offerings and make sure our other services are also “mobilized” into our users’ desktops. We also see parallel developments if we talk to our student&education department: students used to be passively listening to their teachers. Nowadays they take part in their classes and produce part of the lecture material themselves.

Shifting user demands

One of our main customer groups, our students, brings in innovation and challenges all the time. What does the homo zappiens need the library for⁴? At least we know that:

- the unique silence at the library remains important
- but working together on projects is too
- while using the latest technology
- in a library where people like to go, and stay, to create
- the library as Centre of Belonging (Fig. 10)

To exactly understand our reforming process we wrote down, based on discussions with our internal organization, and our customer groups, our ambition document, focused on (and limited to) the future of our library building. We want students to work together, study individually in silence and relax in between. They can find news about the campus and the world around them; have a snack or a soda in a technologically inspiring environment. Our customer groups are defined by our Centre of Belonging concept: the lifecycle of the academically-interested person (with a focus on scientific-technical information). Seven keywords were defined as part of this ambition document, and our reforming project is organized around these keywords, being: living room,

³ <http://www.library.tudelft.nl/tulib>.

⁴ Wim Veen, “Homo zappiens – Growing up in a digital age”, Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd. 2006.

flexibility, cutting edge, knowledge advisor, individual studying, attractive and treasure room.

We also realize, as supporting service of the university, we need to fulfill the university's mission: to develop tomorrow's technology and to deliver autonomous, creative engineers to the society.

Transformation in progress

In 2008 we organized a workshop, including customer groups, and supply organizations, to make the ambition tangible and in Summer 2008 we got agreement to proceed with our project. The first phase is "Quick & visible", so that visitors notice that we are reforming and transforming into a new environment. This phase is started in January 2009 and involves mainly new furniture and alike.

The second phase "Structural and durable" starts mid 2009 and ends towards 2011, where we implement long term changes that ask for technical adjustments and need to involve and discuss personnel issues and changes resulting from our transformation. In 2011 we want our ambition and different working method to be embedded with employees and that TU Delft Library is known and loved by the public.

The following spaces and issues are being discussed by our working groups:

- treasure room (now rather hidden and part of office area)
- exhibitions (new)
- lectures (new)
- gamezone (new)
- meeting place (new)
- less rules, more laissez faire (new)
- new learning & group space (new)
- different circulation desk
- coffee corner (new)

We hope that the transformation will be successful: we involve as much as possible both our user groups and our own employees in the project, working groups.

Figure 1:



Figure 2:

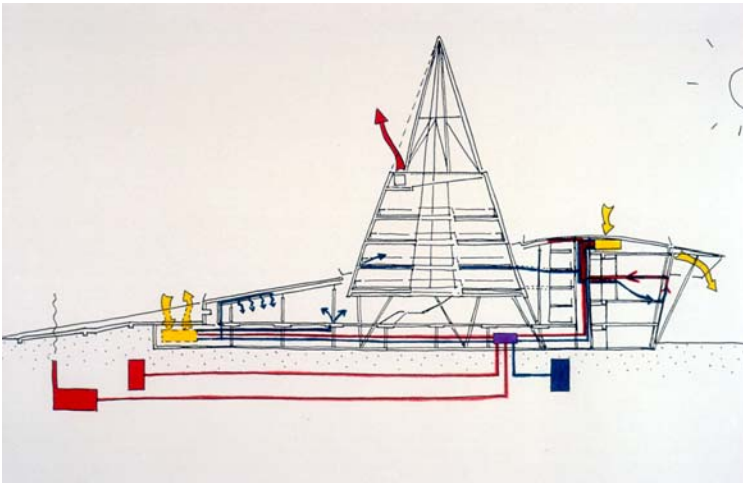


Figure 3:



Figure 4:

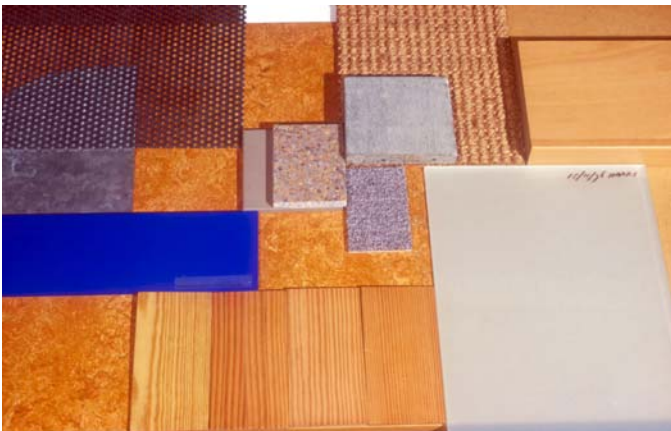


Figure 5:

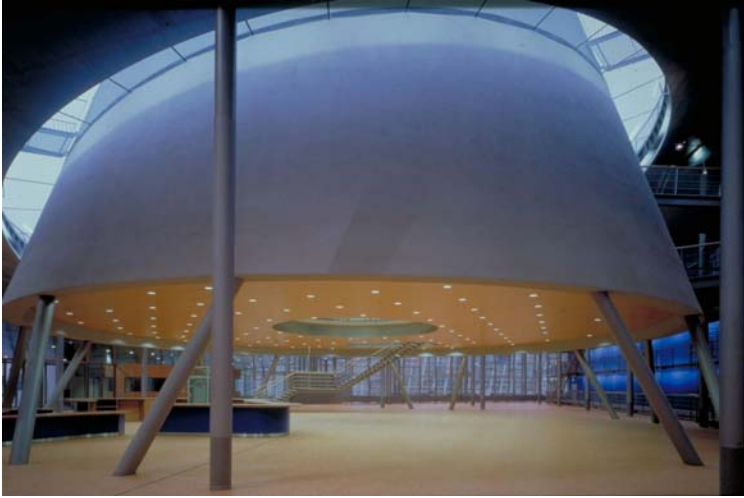


Figure 6:



Figure 7:



Figure 8:

TU Delft Library
Inform

10 000+ objects
TU Delft Repository

datasets

video

games

pictures

maps

13 000 e-books

17

TU Delft Library Learning Centre > Inform, Reform, Transform

Figure 9:

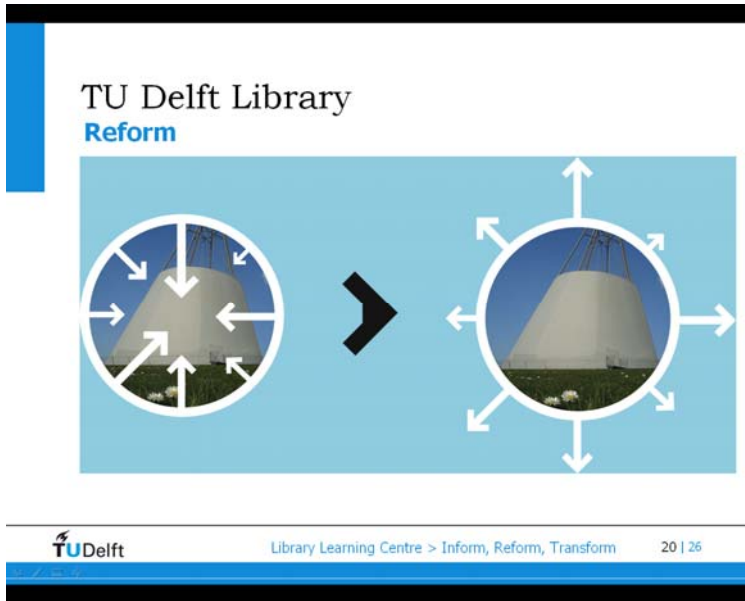


Figure 10:

