

## Milestones and Stumblestones: The long and weary way to a new Library Helsinki 2014

On the 24. October 2011, the library day in Germany, the new public library was opened in the middle of the new city district which belongs to the big city development project Stuttgart 21. I am sure, you have heard about the ambitious city construction project that will be realized when the tracks have been layed and the new station is finished. There will be a long range of urbanistic changes and expansions in Stuttgart.

When the project was presented to the public for the first time in April 1994 20 years ago there was a great acceptance by the citizens of Stuttgart.

The urban development plan of the office Trojan & Trojan promised an attractive new cityquarter with an interesting mix of working and living as well as learning and culture. A science-center, a new concert hall and in the center the library 21 were planned to be built here. The unexploited area of the former freight station should already have been transformed into a bustling, urban area in the year 2000.

The vision of a new building in the center of the new city quarter was definitely promising. The team of the public library of Stuttgart created a completely new concept and space eloquation plan for the library of the 21 century in just six weeks time. The city council approved the concept and this was the foundation for the call for tender for the architect competition.

After many discussions about the shape of the building – the New Museum of Art in Stuttgart is also a glass cube – and the fassade design, the winner of the first price was the Corean architect Eun Young Yi. A crystal cube surrounded by water was designated to become the cultural and intelectual center of the Europaviertel. The new building seemed to be within reach.

The area for Stuttgart 21 belongs to Deutsche Bahn. The Deutsche Bahn intended to go public and they had every interest in assesing the real estate as expensively as possible. The development plan consisted of intensive use of the land with compact architecture and a large number of high rise buildings. Long and tough negotiations with the city of Stuttgart followed and went on for many years.

Immediately after the decision of the town council to built the new library in the center of Stuttgart 21 the municipal library of Stuttgart started an intensive public relations campaign. The modern concept attracted great interest and high acceptance by the citizens and the peers and everyone was eagerly looking forward to the new library.

An exhibition with the best design of the architects was a first highlight. The city counciler for building and construction opened the exhibition and the architect introduced his idea together with his philosophy to the public. A series of information events followed especially for the press.

The performance of the concept artist Edgar Harward labled the area as a special place for setting cultural marks. In addition a flyer was printed and the homepage was created with all the architectural details and the space allocation plan, the concept and the philosophy of the Library 21.

Please remember: In 1998 these ways of communication were realy spectacular and state of the art. Nowadays we would write a blog, like the colleagues in Berlin for their new library ZLB.

Reports in different media and in the internet iniciated great interest all over the world and

many people want to visit the new library.

We have communicated this worldwide interest in the new Stuttgart Library to the top administration and the public in connection with tangible figures that prove the urgent need for the new library.

We proved that we had the highest number of visitors in the city, even higher than the at that time very successful soccer club VfB. More inhabitants of Stuttgart went to the library than to the sports stadium.

In addition, we planned events, which were of such great interest to the public, that the small Wilhelmspalais burst at its seams. The Cooperation with the University of Stuttgart and Radio SWR invited famous scientists, philosophers and writers into the house, but also erotic literature in the "Long Night of the Museums" attracted many, many visitors.

At all our guided tours, in all salutations and speech drafts the need for the new central library was always an issue. Even when new branch libraries were opened- and we have newly built or re-established ten during this period – the hope for opening a new large library was always stated.

Just as Cato the Elder, who implored the destruction of Carthage at each meeting of the Roman Senate, we continuously asked for the new library 21. Always, at every suitable opportunity.

Numerous surveys among the citizens of Stuttgart and of course among the library users who always had a strong desire for a new library were also helpful. Today we would certainly be much more offensive by using the instruments of citizen participation for winning stakeholders for this project.

A similarly successful action took place here in Helsinki: The requests of citizens for the new library has resulted in an impressively diverse, solid and strong concept for the new house.

Circles of friends can be very helpful. Their freedom to act and their influence is often greater than that of the employees in the municipal structures.

All measures and projects that we carried out to modernize the Stuttgart City Library were also based on the preparation for the new library. The introduction of RFID in the old library, the testing of the automatic media check-in and check-out and the first sorting machine in the old library were also always test stations for the modern, new library. In this way we always present in the press and public.

## **Windows of Opportunity**

All this has helped us to keep the theme in mind in public until 2003. But after the official construction decision the plans were not carried out. The realization of Stuttgart 21 moved out of the public interest and doubts about the actual construction of the new library were also expressed quietly at first and but then also quite frankly.

But we did not stop believing in the new European quarter as a center with the new library in the middle. But after we were confidentially asked to consider alternatives we were slightly discouraged.

Two buildings were considered: A business building and the upper floor of a new shopping mall. Both in a perfect, highly attractive central city location!

After having a closer look the first house proved to be too small for a modern library. The

second, however, was more promising: The top floor of the new Shopping Center Were planned to have an arched roof with conservatories. In summer the conservatories could be opened and transformed into roof gardens with a beautiful view over the city. The space was also large enough.

During the first discussions with the builders and investors the glass roof was changed to a closed aluminum roof, - like at our airport. No chance for roof gardens and the access was highly complicated and not really barrier free.

After a sleepless night we declined.

This decision was not really easy for us, because we didn't know at that time, if this was the last chance for a new library.

Our employees also were not very confident anymore. Especially when the increased budget for a greater media stock in the new library was frozen. But there was no resignation or standstill. We worked intensively on the further development of our new library concept. Opportunities for lifelong learning in the most diverse forms and with numerous partners have been developed during this time. The now established intercultural library work began in this period. We also adapted our philosophy to new developments and our service offers expanded continuously.

Finally: In 200X the city of Stuttgart bought the real estate from the Deutsche Bahn for the new library at the assigned place and also arranged that the access roads were built. The initial planning began.

The now X-year-old space allocation program was still considered visionary and sustainable. For the planning process, the concrete and differentiated requirements of the library were always helpful.

After these years there were more stringent regulations and therefore rising costs for fire protection, for escape plans and building services and construction costs in general.

The construction budget had to be increased from 51 to 79 Million Euros.

There were of course also changes in the plans for the new library.

The most serious problem was the installation of a sorting system that transported all media vertically across 8 floors. The original sorting room was too small and unsuitable for manual or mechanical sorting - fortunately. More than 7000 media a day are transported through the house.

It was impossible and not economical to do this in the traditional way with the freight elevator and manual loading of the transport carts. It was not longer necessary thanks to RFID.

The workplace concept for our visitors has also changed: We always refused to create ugly wired and uncomfortable PC workstations. We have now - thanks to WLAN and RFID - 140 mobile netbooks which our visitors can lend from these intelligent media cabinets on each floor for independent use in the whole house.

They can use the netbooks everywhere, even on the roof terrace. In 2013 many visitors took advantage of this. Of course, the customers can use their own laptop, tablet or smartphone as well.

The workstations in the group rooms are of course always busy. Our visitors love these places and hate to leave when events take place there. The great need for large and small

closed working areas wasn't identified in 1997 - today we would increase these numbers.

We had passionate discussions, if it is possible to realize the "Open End Area" described in the space allocation program ". This section of the library should remain open until 12 PM. The space separation and the organization were too complicated and not feasible with reasonable effort. Now we use one vestibule for the 24-hour book-return and the other on the east side of the building for the small library for sleepless people. This is a media offer, that is available 24 hours day.

Everything else has been realized! From the beginning we aware that the library will not only be a functional building and that compromises will be necessary. We would have liked to have had the Max-Bense forum, our multi-purpose conference room, with natural light and in a similar quality as our gallery hall. Of course we and the city planners miss the water basin that changed into a lawn in the course of planning. Well – also Stuttgart trees do not grow to the sky and the 79 million budget had to be respected.

But again back to the year XX

We started with our proven public relations tactics after the xx decision had been made. We informed the public with events and presentations of the project, with a newsletter and we established a permanent exhibition in the foyer of the old library, which has been updated again and again.

Visitors are invited to formulate their expectations of the new library and the managing director regularly presents the planning status to the public. Of course all the information is on the Internet and in printed form in all branch libraries.

At the groundbreaking ceremony in 2008 we believed for the first time that we had reached the point of no return. The celebration marked on the one hand the way to the new library, but on the other hand, we understood that the surrounding area would not be urban and bustling. We knew that we would be the one and only building in the middle of nowhere. The development of the neighboring estates wasn't in sight and there were the first significant signs that the previous acceptance of the citizens of Stuttgart 21 no longer existed.

For the laying of the foundation stone we asked the citizens of Stuttgart to create a personal A4 page for the 1st book of the new library. The response was overwhelming and very, very positive. The thick book with the many good wishes is integrated in the found stone in the middle of our house.

But at that time we could not see if that would help us.

During the construction of the library there were growing protests in the city against Stuttgart 21. Not especially against the area of the European quarter, but more against the new railway station. That worried us tremendously. The Europaviertel would not have been so attractive if the station had remained as it was and it would have taken the city planning team many years to create an alternative plan.

Visits to Vienna and Amsterdam with libraries that are at difficult locations outside of the city center, encouraged us not to give up.

We started a campaign that was focused entirely on the new house and its contents: "What can the citizens look forward to" became the motto.

In countless events we informed about the progress of the new library. The teams of the different levels presented themselves and their offers. The architects and interior

designers gave an outlook on the design of the new house. The guided tours every Friday afternoon in the new building were also very popular and always fully booked.

We answered even the most critical inquiry as friendly as possible and after a few tours the construction manager and I delivered a good show – like a happy old couple! We presented the new library wherever it was requested.

In this context it also appeared advisable to change the provisional name Library 21 - Library of the 21st Century " to the more neutral Stuttgart City Library - Library at the Milan court. This also fit better to the 17 branch libraries of our system.

For a long time we succeeded in keeping the library out of the now heated discussion about Stuttgart 21, even though it is located in the middle of the effected grounds. The current citizen survey shows that the Stuttgart 21 project is only accepted by a narrow majority. The library on the other hand is one of the the most popular facilities in the city.

## **Luck**

I told you about many measures and efforts that were made to get a new library and how to survive in a difficult environment. Of course we always positioned the library itself as a successful place for all citizens, which needs to be supported.

But there are also factors that we had no influence on or only to a small extent:

Our former Mayor Dr. Wolfgang Schuster was a great advocate of cultural institutions.

Due to a favorable sale of investments a budget has been created which was reserved for the construction of the library and was not touched even in times of tough fiscal consolidation.

Being part of or even the center of a very important urban project let us slip into the role of the "frequency bringer". As an obvious symbol for the municipal support of Stuttgart 21, and thus also as an encouragement for investors our house was positioned in the middle of the development area. This can perhaps be seen critically! But for the library this is a stable protection in times of increasingly challenging municipal financial budgets.

And last but not least: "Think pink" or maybe in our case "Think blue": The functioning urban environment was one of our basic requirements for a new location. It could not be realized for the reasons I just mentioned. The solitary - better exposed location of the library in the first year also had its good side – it had become very well-known right from the beginning. . All citizens of Stuttgart and all visitors see the glowing blue cube when they come into the city by car or by train.

## **Resumé**

The good wishes in the first book in our foundations were fulfilled:

For the citizens of Stuttgart the library has become a home. Our visitor numbers are now approaching 3 million since we have opened.

They are proud that we are among the most important libraries in the world and have been elected the Library of the Year in 2013.