

***The National Library of Romania –
A New Headquarters – A New Beginning***

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Abstract

The National Library of Romania will open a new headquarters at the end of 2011. The need for a suitable place for the library appears in 1957, two years after the reestablishment of the national library. In 1968, the designing requirements for building a national library are drawn up, and in 1971 the first designing theme is made, which will undergo adjustments after the 1977 earthquake. The works begin in 1986 and are abandoned after December 1989. In 2007, the designing is resumed, followed in 2008 by the execution of the works, which are completed in December 2011. Thus, after more than 50 years, the new building of the National Library of Romania is inaugurated, a building that meets the requirements and the specific functionalities of a national library.

Keywords: *the National Library of Romania, national library, building, Romania*

The National Library is one of the most important symbols of a country and at the same time an institution of strategic importance because of its mission to establish, preserve and capitalize the written intellectual creation of that nation.

The buildings housing national libraries are, for each country, representative buildings from the architectural point of view, as they symbolically sum up the people's cultural heritage. Many European countries have allocated, as national headquarters for their libraries, former palaces (Austria, Spain, Hungary), buildings of patrimonial and symbolic value (the Czech Republic, Italy, Finland) or buildings with the clear purpose of a national library, properly sized and representing peaks of architectural achievements (France, Great Britain, Russia, Belarus, Croatia).

Romania is one of the countries that have built a representative building to house the national documentary heritage found in the National Library. Compared with other European countries, Romania has a relatively young national library, whose collections illustrate, through their ways of formation, development and structure, the historical destiny of the Romanian people.

The urgent need for Romania to carry out the functions of a national library led to the re-establishment of this institution, after a break of 54 years. By the Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 1193 from 25 June 1955, the institution resumes its activity under its old name, slightly modified, the State Central Library, until 1990, when it received the current title, of the National Library of Romania (GD 476 of 05.02.1990), after the model of other libraries in Europe.

The State Central Library started out in 1956, when it opened to the public with 41,959 bibliographic units, some of which consisted of the current book production, collected through the legal deposit function by the Book State Fund, established by the Council of Ministers decision of RPR in 1952, and from the funds of several large public libraries or rather of what was left of them, from the libraries of establishments, foundations and museums, as well as from private collections, collected and managed by the Book State Fund, too.

The funds are rising fast, the main ways of adding up being the entries through the Legal Deposit, current purchases, donations, international exchanges and even whole libraries of some abolished institutions. The most massive entry of publications, more than one million, was recorded in 1970, at the full incorporation of the Book State Fund. Another imported batch, from the late 60s, came from ARLUS Library. Thus, the number of documents held by the SCL amounts to approx. 7 million b.u. in the early 70s.

The rapid growth of the collections and the many functions and specific tasks of a national library have imposed, as a necessity, the

construction of a building dedicated to the national library. In fact, even in 1957 when the State Central Library moves to the former Stock Exchange Palace in Ion Ghica Street no. 4, the space is estimated as insufficient and it is stated as a goal "the need to build proper premises for the library, on an appropriate space to allow the growth of the deposits and services in relation to the development of the library in time and the application of mechanical means of quick service for the readers and the automation of the work process."(1)

In 1968 "The program for the preparation of the designing theme for building the State Central Library of R. S. Romania" (2) is elaborated, in fact an elaborate set of requirements exposed in more than 100 pages, concerning "the library location; the architectural design; the functional design ; the capacity of the deposits, reading halls, services, workshops, etc.; the furniture, equipment and installations issues." There is very good knowledge of the requirements that a building designed to house a national library must meet, and are also considered to be embedded the most modern architectural aspects in terms of aesthetics and functionality of the building.

Regarding the location, it was recommended that the land for the library should be located in the center so as to be easily accessible from anywhere in the city. Limestone land, rich in underground springs, or lands situated in the vicinity of water reservoirs must be avoided. Regarding the neighbourhood land, the highly trafficked and especially the dusty ways of communications, laboratories or companies emitting fumes, smoke or industrial dust or noise must be avoided as much as possible. A green curtain to separate the building from the communication channels and protect it from dust and noise was also recommended. A park around the library was considered a natural barrier of protection. The land that would be given to the library building had to have a much greater extent than the one required by the building itself, thus taking into account future expansions and increases in the building capacity .

The architectural concept of the building had to take into account the three goals of modern architecture: functionality, flexibility (internal and external), intimacy.

The functionality meant that the library was seen as a living organism in which the proper functioning of the whole depended on the good functioning of each component. One takes into consideration the circuit of publications between deposits and reading halls, the circuit of users, of librarians, the functionality of the reading halls, workshops, offices, other spaces.

The flexibility considered the further development of the building due to the growth of the collections, the diversification of the activities, the permanent ensuring of the microclimate conditions.

The intimacy was defined as opposition to rigidity and it was considered that a library must provide a warm atmosphere, familiar without formalism and conventionalism.

It also had to be considered a technical formulation which implied: a good preservation of the publications; the mechanization of transport (horizontal, vertical); the transmission of the orders from the reading halls to deposits; the introduction of the automation in processing the publications and the information retrieval; the appropriate use for all departments of the library activity.

No detail was neglected, concerning the conditions which the library spaces must fulfill according to the utility they will have. There are set out the conditions which the reading halls must meet depending on the domain they will serve, the types of publications included, the type of specific users, the intermediate or free access to shelf for publications. There are also taken into discussion the proper reading halls, specialized on domains and organized for regular users and researchers as well as complex reading halls organized for certain areas of human knowledge, that also include processing and preservation services.

8 reading halls are to be designed, with capacities not exceeding (aside from the exceptional cases) 100 seats or 10–50 places for researchers, and be provided with annex deposits nearby. There was also taken into account the free access to the shelf and therefore this aspect had to be accounted for in the design of the reading halls.

Each reading hall was designed as a small complex with relative autonomy which included: the reading hall itself for all categories of readers; the researchers study hall; the deposit or the annex deposits; the afferent specialized catalogue room.

The complex halls are actually the reading halls attached to the cabinets of the special collections. It was considered that the access to documents such as manuscripts, correspondence, historical documents, prints, photographs, drawings, maps, atlases, records, filmstrips and other types from the special collections must be made within or near the offices so that to always respect the preservation conditions and not to disturb the specific processing and exploitation activities. The consulting character being of research, the category of beneficiaries is limited, and therefore the number of reading places is reduced (it is recommended to be similar to the

study rooms). In the category of complex halls, besides the special collections there are also the music section, the bibliologic section and the special fund section. Such complex sections had to include: study rooms; deposits; cataloguing rooms; an exhibition hall; an office for receiving and processing the publications; a projection hall; rooms equipped with audio-visual media for learning foreign languages and for individual auditions.

The library catalogue had to be installed in a separate room located in the center of the building so it could serve all the reading halls and study rooms.

For each service, the specific activities are listed so that the space needs for specific facilities and appropriate furniture can be highlighted.

Conference rooms, exhibition areas, cloakroom, library workshops are also provided for.

The requirements for lighting, plants, furniture are specified. The furniture is considered as an integral part of the architectural design of the library, and accordingly, its design must take into account the aesthetics conceived in relation to the rooms, the color should be related to the walls and floor. The furniture for children had to be designed separately, as well as the furniture for the special collections which needed to be designed after specific requirements.

The accessory areas include a cafeteria for the public and a smoking room. A parking area for the institution is also taken into account.

All the subsequent designings and redesignings started from these designing requirements.

The first general designing theme dates from 1971 (3). The discussions were resumed after the 1977 earthquake, the designing theme being updated with additional studies of resistance and adjustments for the subsequent compartmentalisations. The construction was begun in 1986. The events from December 1989 led to the suspension of the investment. Till 2005, funds were allocated from the budget of the institution in order to allow the arrangement of storage facilities, for bringing together the collections spread in different locations.

In 2007, the project for the new building of the National Library of Romania is taken on by the Government, as a project of national importance and benefiting by the financing from the World Bank.

The National Library, as beneficiary, and SC Carpați Project, the designer, presented arguments in support of a representative project for the new headquarters of the National Library of Romania. The basic argument was the patrimonial and symbolic importance that a national library represents for a country. Developed in collaboration with specialists from

the National Library of Romania, the (re)designing theme has the ambition to contribute to the success of this institution in its efforts to promote Romania's image in the world.

For the National Library as a cultural institution, in order to ensure its multiple functions, the achievement of characteristic spaces has been pursued, structured on the following functions:

- areas for the national library function;
- areas with predominantly cultural functions;
- administrative service areas;
- technical areas, circulations and utility annexes.

All these functions cooperate, of course, contributing to a comprehensive center of culture, that is interesting and appealing to the public. The architectural treatment of these spaces is modern, achieving a distinct image, according to the scale and importance of the institution functions.

The areas for the national library function, as well as the public library function, have been rigorously designed, controlled and structured, as they will house documents of patrimonial value; they are destined for information, registration, directing, access control, reference rooms, bibliographic research rooms, traditional and electronic catalogues halls, reading halls (including research and individual study rooms), deposits of books, manuscripts, prints, photographs, maps, plans, periodicals, theses, legal deposit etc., the IT systems, the digital library and the electronic editing house, audio-visual and multimedia events, laboratories for book pathology and restoration, book reception and expedition, communication, strategy and cooperation, internal and international cultural relations, book transit, for the typography and the publishing house, and for the Book and Library Museum.

The areas with predominantly cultural functions include: the Aula (400 seats), halls of various capacities, for conferences and cultural events, polyvalent public spaces (for various meetings, events, cultural relations), multimedia halls, bookstores and antique stores, spaces for catering (cafeterias, cafes) and entertainment, exhibition and performance spaces.

The administrative service areas include: offices (for employees, management board, scientific council, human resources, legal, financial and administrative), spaces to serve the staff (canteens, kindergarten, surgeries, union etc.), cloakrooms, toilets.

Technical areas, circulations and utility annexes: areas for utilities, heating, cooling station, transformer stations and general electrical panels,

electrical level panels, water tanks; areas for ensuring the vertical circulations for the public, staff and book (lifts, escalators, moving walkways etc.); facilities to provide the water connections, sewerage, electricity, voice-data stations, fire fighting etc.

Parking access, garage lots will be provided.

The redesigning gave special attention to the exterior look of the building, aiming at creating a modern, XXI-th century look.

The building – one of the largest in the capital – will therefore have been completed by the end of 2011, after 25 years from the starting point of the works (1986), and one can find the spaces specified in the last designing theme.

On 17 March 2009, the minister of Culture, Creeds and National Heritage Theodor Paleologu declared the restarting of the construction works which, according to the contract signed with the company Aedificia Carpați, were to last 30 months.

In this important project, with an investment value of 112,894,627 euros (1.033 euros / sqm.), the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage is the main credit officer and the contracting authority.

The headquarters of the National Library of Romania consist of two buildings: the Aula (22,000 sqm) and the body itself (90,000 sqm), the total area being of 112,000 sqm.

In order to improve the appearance of the building, designers have proposed renouncing the upper entablement of the main entrance and the twin columns that supported it, and combining the elements of classical architecture, present in the original design, with large areas of transparent glass, that will create a strong plastic contrast and will give the ensemble monumentality and strength.

With a built volume of 395,234.13 cubic meters, the building of the National Library of Romania is, according to Norm P118, high, as it has a volume larger than 50,000 cubic meters.

The library itself is composed of 9 bodies (A, BC, D, E, F1, F2, F3, F4), plus the Aula, with 3 bodies (G, H and I).

There are 11 levels, one of them as basement (level height: 3.6 m).

The area of land on which the building is erected (including green spaces, for leisure) is 50,217.25 sqm. The land is owned by the Romanian state and administered by MCPN.

The new headquarters of the National Library of Romania has been designed to meet the functions of a national library, but also cultural and leisure functions. The first levels from the ground floor are generally

reserved for the public, and the upper ones – for deposits, the restoration laboratory and offices. The space for offices is of 8056 square meters.

The whole composition is structured around a large atrium that will polarize everything, functionally and aesthetically. The atrium will be fitted with panoramic elevators and escalators that lead to the reading halls.

Like many other national libraries, NLR will have in its new premises, as we showed above, besides the "traditional" library space, conference and exhibition halls, bookstores, antique stores, multimedia facilities, entertainment spaces, kindergarten, staff canteen, bar and cafes for users. The public spaces, both inside and outside the building, will be interwoven with pools of water, windowboxes, art objects and decorative lighting, and the land surrounding the building will be landscaped with terraces, platforms, walkways and green spaces.

Expected for decades, the new headquarters of the National Library of Romania will be inaugurated at the end of this year. Over 12 million documents, collected over time in its collections, will be found, finally merged, into the new house, and will expect their readers.

References

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