

Werk

Titel: The new building of the National Library of Estonia

Autor: Eenmaa, Ivi

Ort: Graz

Jahr: 1997

PURL: https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?514854804_0007|log35

Kontakt/Contact

Digizeitschriften e.V.
SUB Göttingen
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 1
37073 Göttingen

✉ info@digizeitschriften.de

The new building of the National Library of Estonia

IVI EENMAA

National Library of Estonia, Tallinn

Historical background

In small countries it is usually possible for each generation to erect one - or, with luck, two - large buildings which are meant to serve culture: universities, theaters, art centers, libraries, etc. It often takes even more than a century to complete a church. In most cases problems are solved by rebuilding old constructions; this has produced very interesting results, also here in Paris.

In the history of the Estonian state and its people, the period of independence has been rather short; during this time, however, Estonians built up the opera theatre. In 1939 a piece of land was bought for the new building of the National Library; but the destroyal of our independence in 1940 also destroyed all plans about the new library building. The dreams remained, but for decades they were just hopeless fantasies. It would be unjust to claim that no libraries were built during the 50 years since 1940: during this period the Tartu University, the Estonian Academy of Sciences and the Tallinn Technical University got a new library building. The latter two, however, remained unfinished, only the first planned stages being executed.

Sometimes I think that God has given me a difficult but lucky destiny. All former directors of the National Library have done their best to put a start to the new building, but this dream of many years came true only during the "reign" of the undersigned. The conviction of our librarianship about the national library's role in a small country concurs with the vision

of our library staff - it should fulfill not only the function of a mere library, but act as a cultural center. We are convinced that namely since the beginning of the new construction Estonians have considered the National Library to be a cultural symbol, a cornerstone in the basement of our culture and national integration. Hence has the planning of the infrastructure, from the very beginning, included space for culture - possibilities to exhibit art, to organize concerts, to promote culture in general. The development of modern technology has been supporting our role as an information center. The general arrangement of space has served the purpose of making people feel comfortable. And, mind you, it concerns not only the visitors. Readers can never make the most of all the facilities if librarians do not enjoy working in the library.

The construction process witnessed a very dramatic and crucial period in the history of Estonia: our people regained independence, followed by the change of the regime and borders of our country as well as a new monetary system. The greater part of the building process coincided with those revolutionary changes, which left their mark on everything. On the one hand, we were free to make any changes in the plans; on the other hand, monetary reform created a totally new situation where we were at liberty to make decisions but actually had no resources for building. It obviously seems totally unbelievable but the cost of the building with the basic furniture is about 1 million US dollars. Yet has cheap construction resulted in a vast amount of problems: we are now facing the necessity to rebuild, repair, replace, etc. Earlier our major concerns were connected with ideological matters; nowadays it is money that gets the wheels rolling.

The exterior and location of the building

The architecture and the interior design of the building naturally proceeded not only from the functions of the library but also from the surroundings, the architecture of the neighbourhood (col.ill. 68, p. 40). Tallinn is an ancient town, its older part comprising the medieval old town with the Toompea castle towering above it. The oldest part has been

preserved despite of our complicated history full of numerous wars and changing rulers. The other parts of the town resemble a typical European city - dull post-war buildings with no specific architectural value. The National Library lies on the borderline of those two parts, thus having very different neighbours. The location is a very good one, actually the best possible in Tallinn. On one hand, we are very conveniently right in the center; on the other hand, the building is easily accessible, having parking facilities and lacking certain restrictions effective in the old town (like restricted access for cars and very difficult, nearly impossible conditions for disabled people to move around). A strong impact on the architectural solution has definitely come from one of our most prominent and closest neighbours - the St. Charles' Church that is certainly a dominating element in the whole neighbourhood. The church as well as our old town were the determining factors in choosing the chief building material. Influenced also by our poverty that excluded the purchasing of expensive building materials from abroad to erect a highly modern steel-and-glass building, the final decision favoured dolomite - sometimes even called the Estonian marble as being largely found in our country and enjoying a wide use in our contemporary architecture. Now it appears that this choice was the best for us; we were also lucky to have a very talented architect who skillfully combined the appearance and atmosphere of the old town and the church with a modern library building, using dolomite as one of the connecting elements. It is common truth that tastes differ - the architect Mr. Raine Karp has been accused of redundant monumentality; however, the library staff considers his solution to be a very good one - the old town is not dominated by the library but nevertheless it is a prominent building that one cannot miss. Similar principles have been followed in the interior - to preserve the architectural qualities characteristic of old Tallinn and to combine them with contemporary furniture and modern technology, brightening the symbiosis with numerous green plants. I have often been asked, when will the library be completed; the answer is - never, every day brings new ideas to enrich the interior, to make it cosier for visitors and the staff (col.ill. 69, p. 40).

Tasks of the library: arrangement of space

There is one issue I would like to draw your attention to: our double functions. The tasks of a parliamentary library added by our previous developments have determined the general nature and character of the reading rooms. We have only one large reading room; large offices so common in many countries are lacking altogether. Knowing the psychology of our people and the nordic people in general, we knew that large offices divided with shelves and bookcases were unsuitable for us. Our people have always favoured privacy, thus are all offices meant for one, two or maximum three employees. The same principle applies to reading rooms (col.ill. 70, p. 40). We have used furniture to divide the reading rooms in order to make them seem smaller, to create the impression of privacy.

In this part of the world it is rather dark during most of the year. That made the issue of lighting a crucial one for us. The general solution is a combination of general lighting and local lighting.

It was clear already during the construction process that we cannot afford expensive modern technical equipment, that determined the location of stackrooms. There are two floors below ground - these are for books only. On the floors above ground level the stackrooms are located in the central part of the building, surrounded on two sides by staffrooms and on the other two sides by reading rooms. The idea is twofold: to make the most of the natural light during the dark months of the year, and to bring books as close to the readers as possible in order to provide quick services.

Coming back to our multiple functions proceeding from the aspiration of being a cultural, information and communication center, I would like to bring out some other factors. The premises include a modern conference center, consisting of a conference hall with nearly 300 seats, a smaller auditorium, a cafe-restaurant and several work rooms. Our experience has shown that such a center (i.e. a polyfunctional conference hall with removable seats and all technical facilities, including equipment for simultaneous interpretation) was actually lacking in Tallinn. Numerous

significant political and cultural events have taken place in our library building, not to mention the additional resources acquired from rents that have helped us in covering maintenance expenses.

During difficult periods in history there are always people and domains of life that tend to get totally neglected - unfortunately they usually include culture, education and people connected with them. The tendency of putting economy first and leaving culture on its own is presently prevalent also in Estonia. On the other hand - without culture and education, without promoting intellectual spheres there can be no harmonious development in any state. We should not forget that largely with the help of its culture has the Estonian people survived. Hence has the National Library of Estonia tried to support artists and musicians, making our numerous exhibition areas available for art displays and our conference hall for concerts and theatrical performances free of charge. The same applies to the Estonian Children's Library, whose main events have been held in our building.

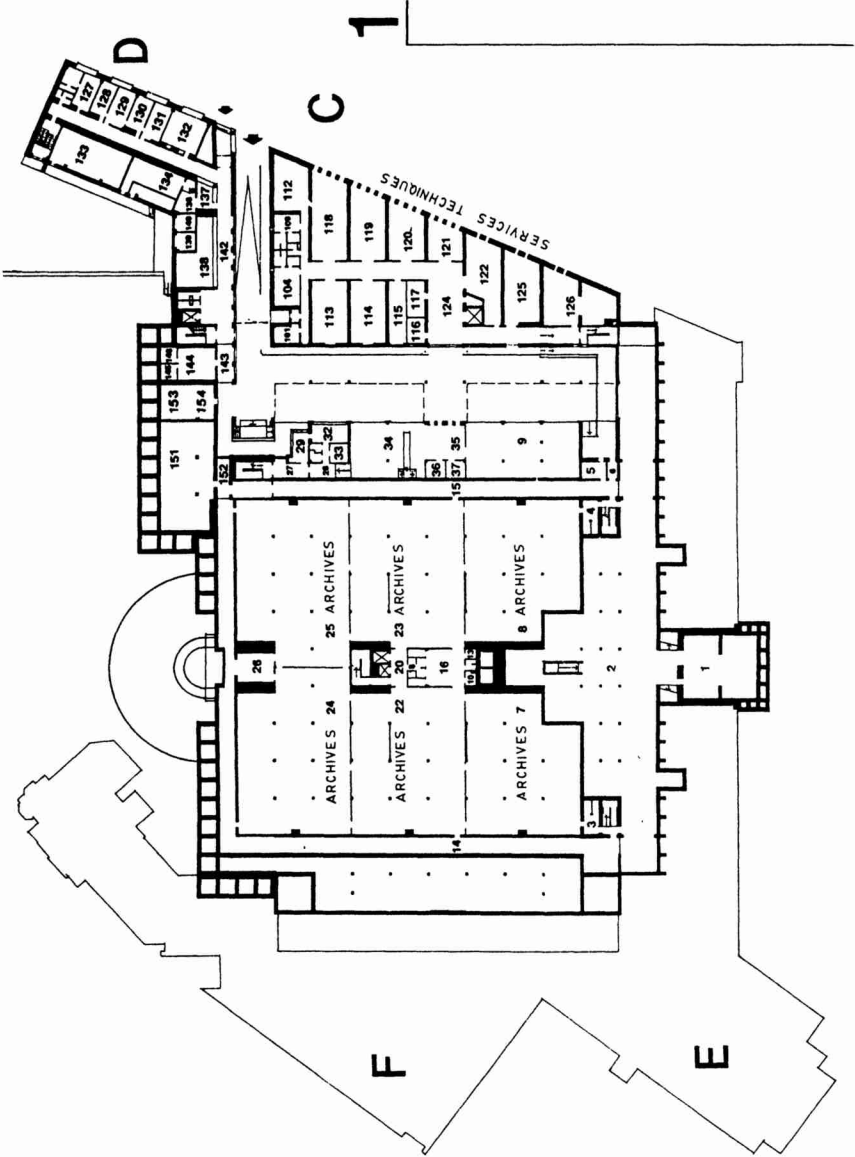
Although our activities and developments are usually directed outward, we have not neglected our own staff. Lacking the sufficient funding for salaries, we have tried to find other compensatory means for our employees, as people are the major force in the development process. I do not possess the exact data about the library staff composition in other countries, but I am fairly certain that women predominate. About Estonian libraries I can state with certainty that the staff consists mostly of women. The development of new technology has naturally brought more men to libraries, but they are only drops in the sea. During the transitional period that the whole Eastern and Central Europe is undergoing, women have a very difficult role. Professions occupying mostly women offer the lowest salaries. At the same time there are only few spheres (like banking, for example) that enable men to support their families. In Estonia the employment of women is very high. They have to be successful at work and take care of their homes. Yet every woman dreams about being attractive. Being a general director, but also a woman, I have tried to bring certain services to our library building. Our building houses the saloons of a hairdresser and a beautician, a solarium, a massage room, a

gym - these services offer a considerable discount for the library staff. I am convinced that these facilities help to reduce tensions that are easy to emerge in a large team consisting mostly of women. It is also time-saving, as people do not have to go out of the building.

Conclusion

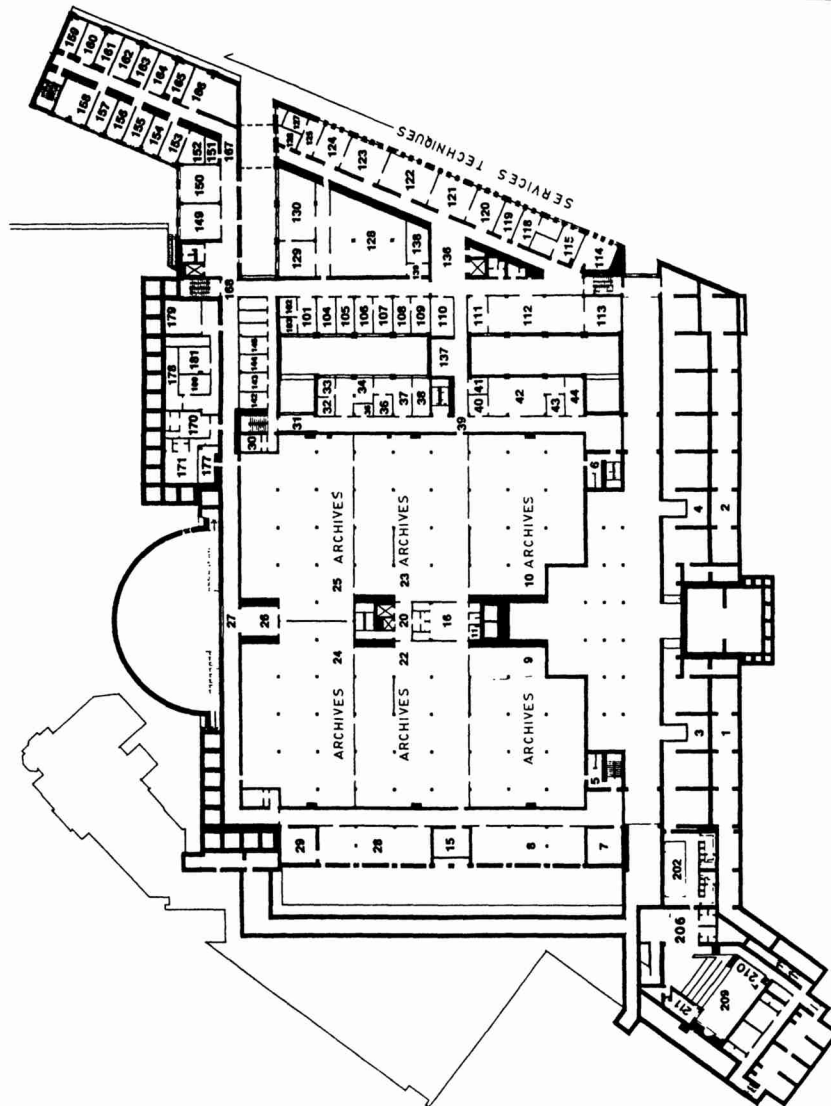
In this short report I tried to bring out the main principles in planning and constructing the building of the National Library of Estonia. Now I can say that we have achieved almost all goals that were established and we have made this building work - considering the half a million-population of Tallinn I am quite proud to say that the number of our readers amounts to 80.000. This construction has and will hold lot of significant cultural, scientific and political events. Almost all plans have been carried out. Only some years ago many people were hesitant about the necessity of building a large library for a small nation. Today this question is no longer raised. And nothing has moved me more than total strangers approaching and thanking me for this library. Still, I cannot rest on my own laurels, since we still have two very important programs to complete: to surround the building with greenery and supplement the interior plant collection as well as to rebuild terraces and roofs that are among the most distinctive features of this building.

Estonians have an old proverb: one's own eye sees the best. Proceedings from that - if you ever find yourselves in Estonia, you are all welcome to visit the National Library.

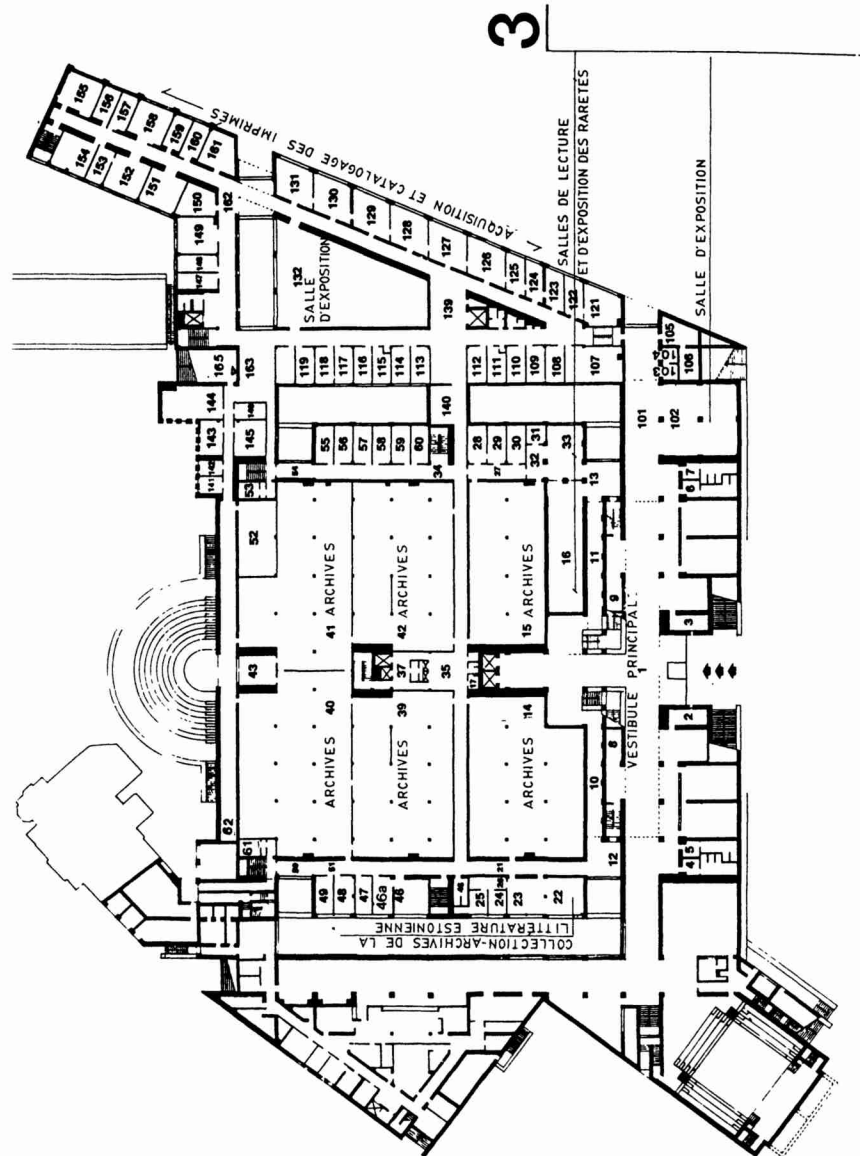


Plan 1

2

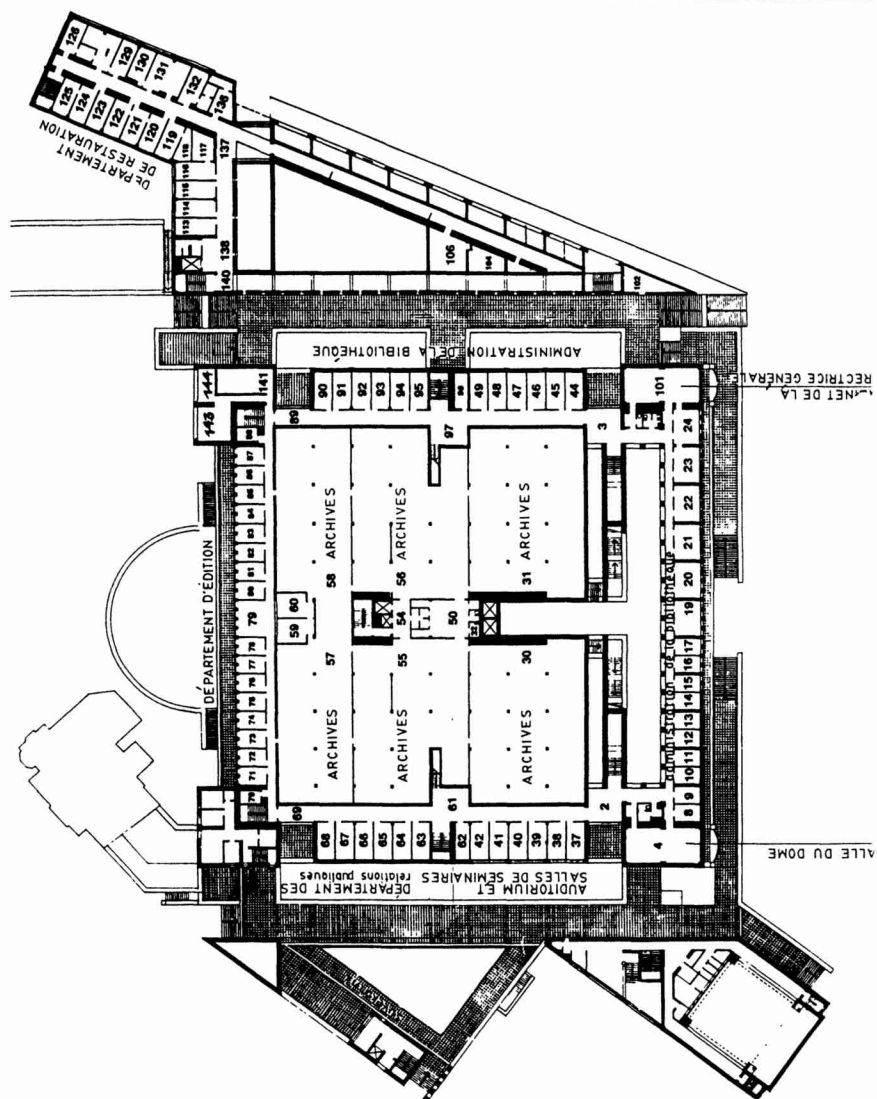


Plan 2

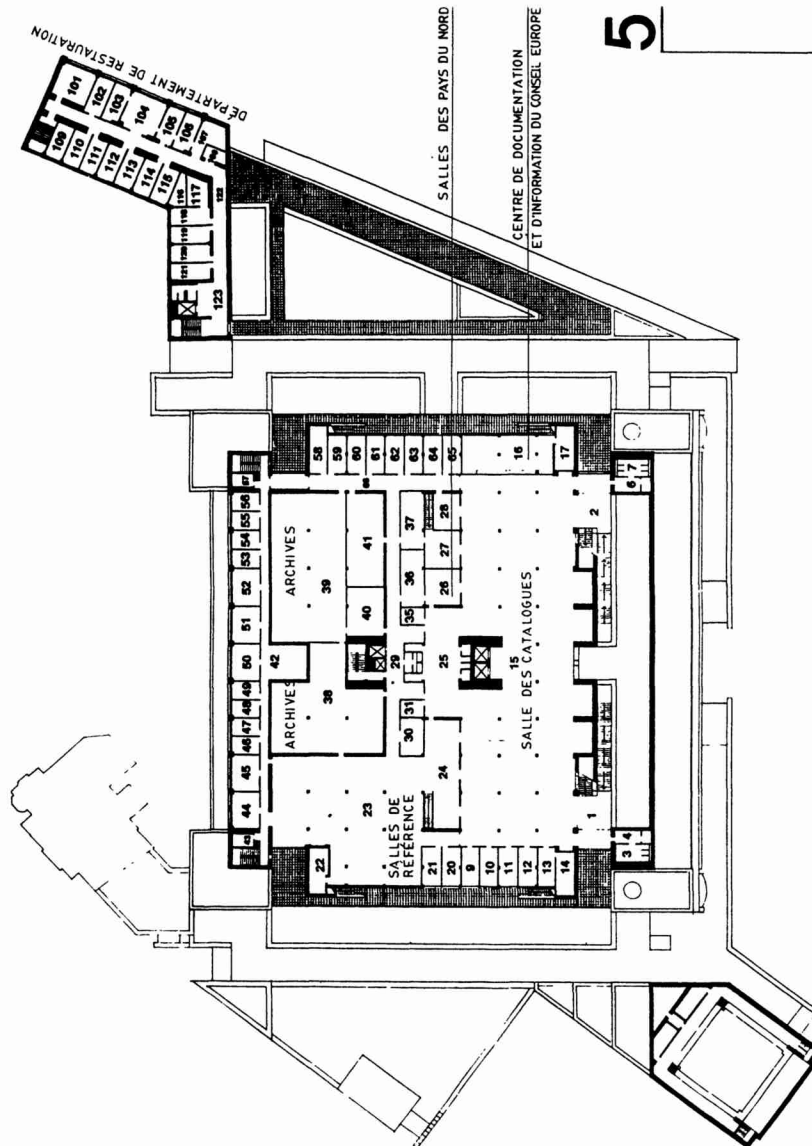


Plan 3

4

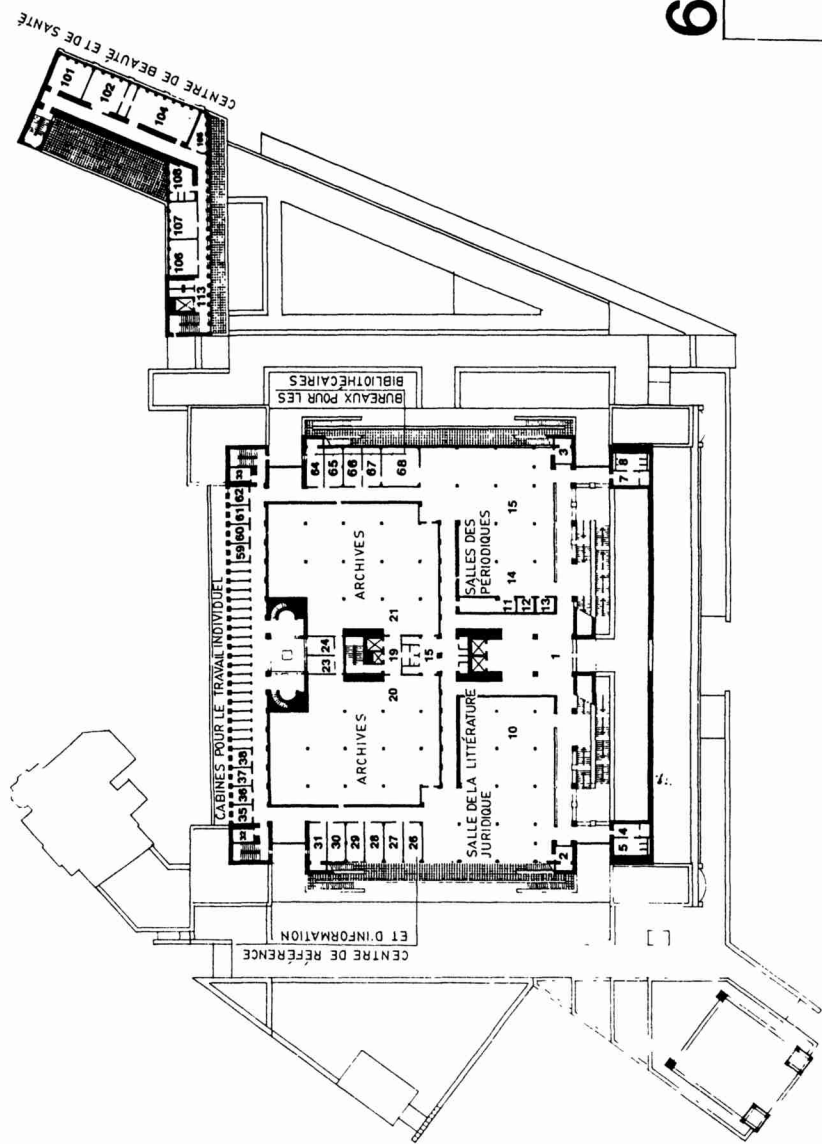


Plan 4

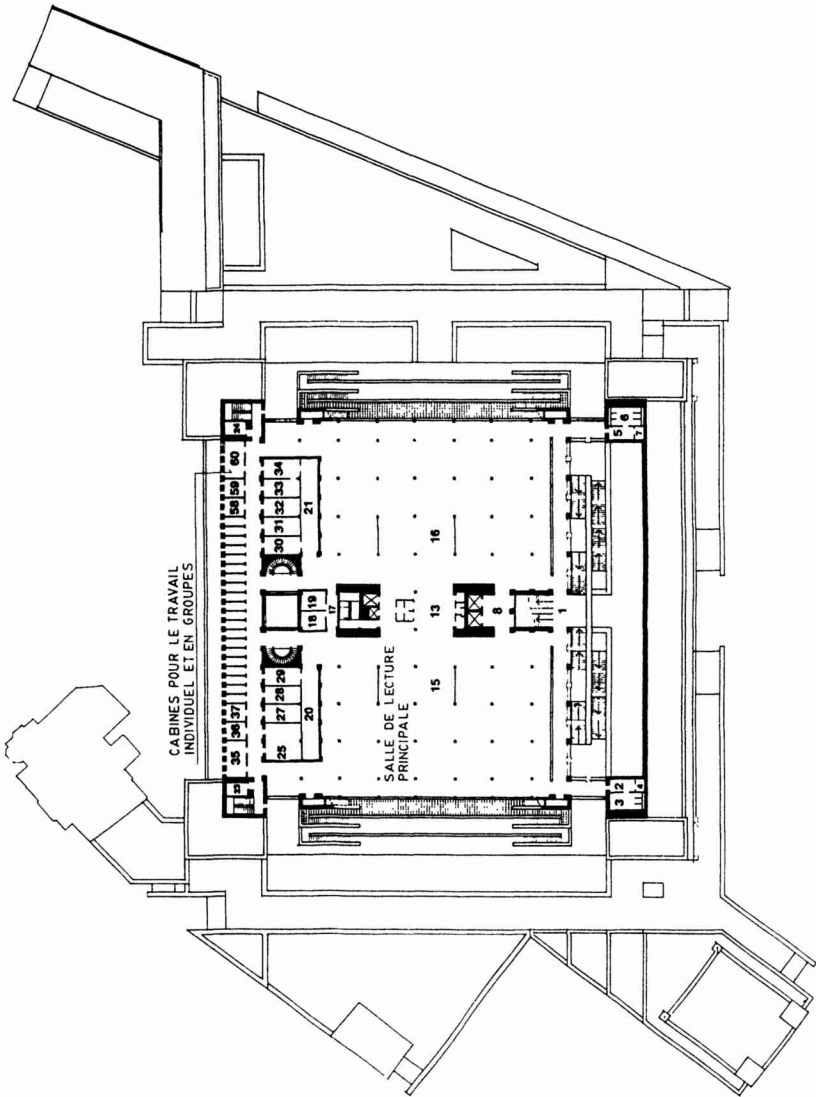


Plan 5

6



Plan 6



Plan 7

Plan 8

