

**“Brand” Value**  
**The case Brand TU Delft Faculteit Bouwkunde**  
**Fire Faculty Architecture**  
**May 13, 2008**

Contribution to Valuing Libraries, a Meeting of Minds on October 28, 2008 in Utrecht  
Final version: November 17, 2008

**Everything of Value is Vulnerable**

**Picture Library Architecture before the fire**

Tuesday May 13, 2008 will be remembered as the day that TU Delft was hit by a big disaster. The Dutch minister of Education R. Plasterk said a few days later: “This is the biggest disaster that struck a Dutch university, ever”.

Early that morning a water leakage caused short circuit in a coffee machine on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor and that started a fire that, in the end, destroyed the complete main building of Faculty Architecture in a tremendous inferno that lasted till the next morning.

Nobody got physically hurt, of course that was most important. But lots of scientific material from researchers, teachers and students got lost and that caused also a lot of personal grief.

**Pictures of the fire**

The faculty possessed one of the world’s most important library collections on architecture with more than 40.000 books and journals with lots of unique material, the oldest parts date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There were also unique, irreplaceable materials in the Map Room (Kaartenkamer) and in the Print Collection (Prentenkabinet). In the buildings there were also collections of video’s and audio-visual materials, a special collection historical chairs, scale models and much more items that can be regarded as part of our cultural and scientific heritage.

The library Architecture is organizational (<http://www.library.tudelft.nl/ws/index.htm>) part of TU Delft Library and was one of the main faculty libraries left. In total there are still 6 separate faculty libraries, although in 2009 two of them will be closed and integrated into the central library. There’s been a process of organizational redesign in recent past, but Architecture is too much depending on having an own working library with much visual materials, so that library got an upgrade with the introduction of self-service facilities and extra maintenance and upgrades. In fact, this restyling had just been finished and the restyling was a clear sign for everybody that this library was ready to play a main role as a pulsing heart in the faculty’s and the universities educational processes.

And then came the fire. The whole day long we saw how the building was absorbed by the flames, stock by stock, from the 6<sup>th</sup> up to the top and over the top, down to the base floors. Firemen were not able to get close enough and could only watch the fire eating the whole building. In less than 24 hours the central part of the building was completely destroyed.

**Pictures after the fire**

Wednesday May 14 the library staff gathered in a meeting to make plans to deal with this disaster. The status quo was confusing. The library was housed in the lower parts of Architecture building on the east side and on the first sight this part seemed to be rather undamaged! Nobody could safely enter the area because of the danger of collapsing of the ruins and falling of concrete materials. But the wings on the building were not burned out. We had no idea how it would be inside, water, heat, moisture, smoke and so on, but there was some hope and also, some relief. Mainly because the wind blew that day from land to sea, from east to west, the wing that housed the library was on the “off the wind” - side. In this library-wing were also the Map Room and the historical Print Collection housed. In the staff meeting we made plans for rescue and recovery as soon as possible, we wanted the library to start up again in de Central Hall of the central TU Delft library, we wanted the services to be alive again and we wanted to renew all the lost parts in a short run. We knew the importance of this library for hundreds of students and scientists. We wanted this library to be back in action within days instead of weeks or months.

### **Pictures precious collections**

Sunday morning, May 18. I got a telephone call from our library director. People from the Demolition Company and authorities had given permission to enter the building and to undertake some rescue operations for the most precious materials in the library exposition cabinets. In a quick hit and run operation we managed to get several historical items out of the exposition cabinets and safeguard them in our specials stocks called the Trésor.

But after that day we got the message and it was a clear message: this was a one time opportunity and there was no expectation on more opportunities, everything that would come out after now would be a present from heaven.

### **Pictures of the first rescue operations, broken cabinets, materials in the Tresor, newspaper article**

From that moment on our main focus was set on rebuilding. But in complete silence there was still the idea of setting up more rescue operations. And on a certain moment, a few weeks after the fire, the decision was made to undertake a last, one-day rescue attempt on a Friday. And if needed and possible, we could spend a second day on Saturday. Because that weekend the demolition workers couldn't carry on due to a big sport event in the nearby sporting area. On Friday May 30 and Saturday May 31 we had a major migration operation ongoing and we moved about 36000 books, 100000 maps and about the same number of historical prints. It turned out to be a big success for everyone involved and a major cultural rescue operation. Almost all the material was unharmed and could be transported to our own temporary stocks on the campus area. No need to get special facilities for freezing and treating, all the material was dry, clean and unharmed.

### **Pictures of the rescue operations and migrations**

On the next Monday we geared up the process of reinstalling the library Architecture and in the end all the saved material was integrated in the central library stock and the open collections in the central hall. On June 17, exactly 5 weeks after the fire, the Library was reopened and handed over in a small reception to the dean of Architecture.

His grateful words – note, the way I remember them - are marking the case and inspiring our work for today: “We never realized how much the library was the central pulsing heart in our faculty’s work until the day the library wasn’t the library anymore, because it had to be regarded as lost and unavailable for a long period. Now we have the library back and the faculty Architecture has back it’s heart. Thank you all.”

### **Final remarks**

So let’s draw some conclusions and remarks on Valuing the Library:

A library is not just a bunch of books and periodicals called “collection”

It’s a concept of access to knowledge and information, to sources, materials, services, facilities and to the people with the right attitude and skills to support

TU Delft Library’s pay offs are: “preferred supplier of knowledge” and “a clear view on information and knowledge”

Value is no more than our own valuation and appreciation

So, the value of a library is the weight that we append to having a library and not the number of loans or the amount of cash return.

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