

uni information



Mai 1970

12



Spécial Cité Universitaire

l'un et le multiple

Photos Ariel Akerib





Photo Ariel Akerib

The Cité Universitaire file

nine articles framed by residents' opinions (exerpts from an enquiry among ancient residents, between 1963 and 1967)

Thinking of students Building for students Twenty years ago

Whatever the theory, the “options” or the ideological positions we’d like to establish, or accept, life imposes its day-to-day reality: the student is a young adult who must be able to live and have access to education as freely as possible, but who is often deprived of this fundamental freedom. The condition of “being a student” thus places the student in a socially uncertain situation, in all times and under every regime, whether we want it or not, whether we accept it or not: by spending most of the time practising, learning, one cannot be at the same time an economically viable worker thus ensuring financial independence. Given the multitude of adverse factors which imperatively transforms a student’s existence in a constant fight, one should not add those of day to day life. Housing can be such a factor. It has been for many, and in a dramatic way, roughly twenty years ago, when the Ancient Students’ Alumni Association decided to build the Cité Universitaire on the Avenue de Miremont, on the recommendation of its Patronage Committee (which it had formed, was managing, and which was responsible at the time of the entire social service in our University).

Among the students who, at the time, were having the greatest housing difficulties, those who suffered from a sense of demoralizing isolation were the most numerous, and were pitied the most. According to the studies of the Patronage Committee, it had to be admitted that students’ housing had to take different shapes, in accordance with the different kinds of persons and related with their particular personal characteristics. What was missing above all, at the time, was housing where the individual who did not want to be “recruited”, who wanted to pursue his original research, could however live in a small, custom made community. And society had to unburden these communities from financial worries which could crush them, but at the same time lay out contacts with the exterior, the city, the world, so that they did not risk withdrawing onto themselves (for the student who is always lacking time, outside the world, to acquire all the desirable education, must be able to study, also by experimenting, this world where the future diploma will soon allow him to act).

The basic module was the eight student “team”, living in individual rooms in an apartment, equipped with an eight post kitchen and normal sanitary confort for our times. It was intended that they would come together, each according to his financial possibilities, around an “ancient”, those whose characters and demands pushed them to assembly, with no distinction as to race, religion, language, nationality or faculty. This team was the frame in which an individual equilibrium could be reached in a calculated community. For the equilibrium of the person as a whole, in its different functions and in relation to one’s immediate entourage, is health that inclines to better studying. In a community which is roughly the size of a family, order is naturally kept by self discipline: self-indulgence is not allowed to compromise one’s image or alter the lifestyle of the team.

But this team had to be put in contact with others, from the same house or from outside, even from other layers of society, outside the University. This is why four teams formed a “group”, led by a group leader. Aside from his small personal quarters, the leader had to have a group reunion room. One thus hoped that no “youngster” would pass on the advice offered by a more experienced comrade; and the older student also had to translate into friendlier terms the regulations and discipline norms whithout which there is no real studying; he also had to partly de-centralise the administrative chores of a well organized house. Our “assistants”, those who we now call auxiliary teachers, seemed perfect for such roles: they knew the problems that the students faced in the classrooms, during seminaries and fieldwork; it seemed possible to extend their useful middle-men and “advisor” functions, to promote their integration in the University team of students , assistants and professors – and why not? – improve the financial situation of some of them.

Thus there appeared student groups, male and female, and floors with studios for couples (some with children’s rooms). We had known all along that the approximatley 400 beds would not be enough given the demand. We had wanted to offer them to those wishing to live in the atmosphere such as it was defined (for it has to be repeated that there are other housing alternatives for students having a different state of mind, and that everyone must be able to find the conditions that match his aspirations in order to acquire more easily his individual equilibrium). In those places where the experience has been methodically carried out according to the initial programme, at leas for some months or years, we know that this inspiration led to success and that the ones taking advantage still talk about it gratefully through time and space.

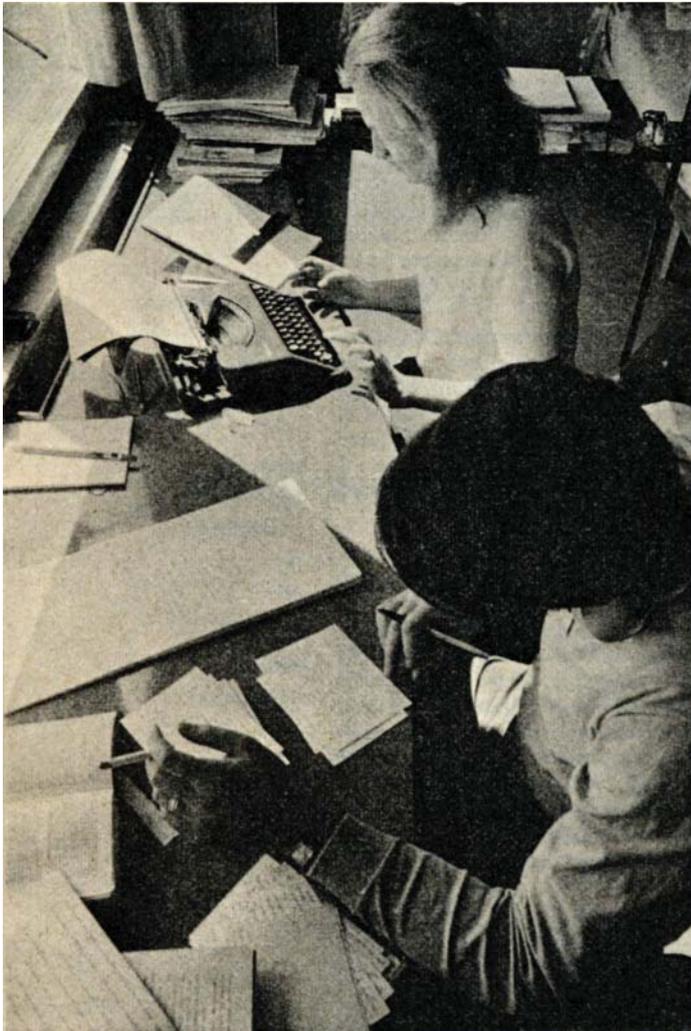
Such a complex needed a restaurant, the possibilty to do some urgent shopping, a few reunion and games’ rooms, sportsgrounds, dormitories for emergencies or for temporary guests, and a cultural center. All of these had been provided. The Simon I. Patiño Foundation generously participated as well, without asking for anything in return - except maybe the possibility to further offer material, cultural and artistic goods, which it is continuing to do in collaboration with the leaders of the Cité Universitaire. It was not intended for all the recreation activities to be organized, for they are an excellent opportunity to create contacts with the outside world. It was wished however that the common premises would be a meeting place for many students – including those who live elsewhere – with many professors and outside friends, in order to encourage the creation of what could be called the “university community of the city”.

It is without doubt that the inauguration of these buildings (completed by the devoted and highly imaginative activity of the person in charge of the “Housing Office” of the University, and by the creation of several other “centers”, “homes” and “houses”) has largely contributed in making the students’ housing crisis less acute these past few years.

The institution has, without doubt, somewhat evolved in comparrison to the original project. It is not out of the question that it shall return to it one day. The most important aspect is that it should live and develop with the same pep, according to the opportunities given to it by the dedicated experts that are its leaders.

Life requires a constant adaptation to existing circumstances. As the University itself, any institution linked to it must be a place of continuing research: it must work on a more comprehensive definition of its essential ideas (the eternal aspects of its tradition) and at the same time it must try to apply them to the constantly changing present conditions. By the way it was built, Geneva's Cité Universitaire can, at all times, allow such efforts to be made. The knowledge of this permanent character is a justification and a relief for those who have built it, and should be a hope without end for those living in it.

Jean-Aimé BAUMANN



**Entering
the Cité**

**Being
amongst
the four
hundred**

Picture Ariel Akerib

The student who wishes to live at the Cité Universitaire must fill in an application on a pre-established form available for everybody in University. These forms are processed by the management who can recommend the convocation of the admissions commission should it find necessary to do so.

The admissions commission

Governed by special rules and regulations, the admissions commission decides on the applications it receives based on certain criteria set forth by the Cité's "Conseil de Fondation" (the Governing Board). It is composed of six members:

-3 members, amongst which the director of the Cité Universitaire, which are designated by the Foundation;

-3 members are students designated by those living at the Cité, and they represent couples, male students and female students;

The president of the commission, who holds a casting vote, is designated by the Foundation and is, in practice, a member of the "Bureau de la Fondation" (the Foundation's board). Apart the persons mentioned, the secretariat

of the University has a member who advises the commission (verification of registrations) and also the “Bureau du logement” which ensures a coherent action by the commission in the larger context of student housing in general.

Admission criteria

It is important to stress the fact that whatever the criteria may be, the commission always takes into account the students’ best interest in applying them. This is a fundamental rule: the admission criteria are stated in order to prevent arbitrary decisions, and their enforcement is flexible so that any excess is prevented. The two main criteria are the following:

The student: being a student is obviously necessary in order to be admitted at the Cité Universitaire, an exception being made in the case of couples, for the spouse who is not a student. Priority is given however to those who are both students. Is considered a student the person who has registered (or is registering) with the University: the University advisory member decides upon this matter.

The income: single students must not earn more than CHF 700.- a month, whereas couples should not earn more than CHF 1’100.- a month if they have no children, or CHF 1’500.- a month if they do have children.

One could give an exhaustive list of the admission criteria, but it would be useless: in practice, the two criteria already stated are by far the most important, and the commission is always flexible in their enforcement.

No one should forget that the aim of the commission is to serve, and that this can prove difficult at times: a choice is imposed by the lack of space between equally worthy applications. The choice is painful, for everyone is aware of the fact the future of an applicant, otherwise accepted, can be profoundly changed or even compromised. This is one of the reasons that recently led me – after a few years of being the president of the admissions commission – to ask to be relieved from my position; I am not sure of my ability to maintain a balanced and fresh judgement before such worrisome choices. This problem is of such capital importance that the person responsible for its solution doesn’t have the right to keep his position if he doubts his force to make such exhausting choices. Do not forget that the regular task of this commission is allocating ten apartments by choosing between fifty eligible applicants!

Expulsion criteria

The admissions commission serves as expulsion commission when its advisors are not present. Furthermore, upon consulting with the president of the admissions commission, the director can admit a student and can naturally also exclude another, namely for not being registered in University or if rent has not been paid for more than three months. However, only the commission is competent to exclude a student who lied on completing the form, namely concerning his income or for other serious reasons. The excluded student, be it by the commission or by the director, can demand a re-examination of his case. In principle, a student having completed three years of studies must leave the Cité but there is a possibility to obtain two extra semesters at most. The commission is very strict with those who hide their real income, but in practice it is impossible to obtain such information: the declared income cannot be verified and fellow students will never give away someone whose lifestyle shows higher resources than those declared, which is perfectly understandable.

As a conclusion, apart from the fact that this is an obviously incomplete account, I can say that the presence of students in the admissions commission for more than a year is a very good choice. This task is a difficult one for the above mentioned reasons and because of the insufficient housing available. Choosing is often difficult.

Gil VAUCHER

Life at the Cité

Dynamism

Participation

By building a Cité Universitaire, Geneva took the lead over the rest of Switzerland, but this was made possible only by integrating on a large scale the experience of the neighbouring countries. Its promoters wanted not only to offer students mere housing, but also to create the necessary living conditions, adapted to student life and to avoid at the same time the trap of an academic ghetto.

Let us now take a look at the facilities offered to students, most of which being accessible to all of them as well as to the general public:

- 330 individual furnished rooms, at CHF 160 / month, all taxes included, in two buildings and 8-place apartments provided with kitchenette, 2 showers, refrigerators (and an ironing room in the young girls' building).
- 32 studios for couples, fully equipped, with kitchenette and separate bathroom, at CHF 260 / month, all taxes included.¹
- 6 children rooms
- 10 studios for the persons in charge with the floors' administration
- a 50-bed dormitory for short-term tourists
- a self-service restaurant
- a bar in the basement, managed by the residents
- a reading-room and a game-room, also called "party room" (salle de fêtes)
- other rooms, such as the 2 TV-rooms and the music-room for auditions
- 1 photo lab
- 2 study rooms
- the crèche "Les Tiolus" for children up to 3 years old, either the residents' or the neighbourhood families' sons and the daughters
- the Patiño Hall, with 430 places, a multifunctional area, with a contemporary art exhibition room
- the University's sport facilities
- the parking area

Among others, several private tradesmen are being hosted, as follows:

- 1 Cooperative shop
- 1 laundry surface
- 1 tobacconist's ("tabacs-journaux")

The Patiño Hall also serves as a classroom for the medicine students preparing their second "propé" in medicine or for the S.E.S. (Economical and Social Sciences) students preparing their first session of exams. The Hall is administered by a steering Committee composed of representatives of the University as well as of the Cité Universitaire and Patiño Foundations.

In spite of being owned by the Cité Universitaire de Genève, the Patiño Hall is financially independent thanks to a State guarantee in the event of budget deficit.

Communal life

Living at the Cité Universitaire means active participation. Yet, not all residents understand this and they actually consider the Cité as an affordable hotel. The Foundation acknowledged their right not to take part in communal activities and thus, no one is forced to get involved in any way. Well, too bad for the anchorites – they miss the richness of a 400 people heterogeneous, yet human scale 55-nation gathering, made of students coming from all over the world, from Japan to Chile, and from South Africa to Iceland! What an opportunity to interact! Actually, most of the residents take advantage of it at the restaurant, at the bar (the famous Barbar), in the game room, or in the party room, in the shared spaces, etc. Clubs and other activities enable contacts: a music commission managing the disco and organising the concerts together with Jeunesses Musicales, a cinema club organising projections of excellent films which are no longer on the market, a study group focusing on economic issues, a chess club and, very recently, a photo club. Concerts, conferences, evening film projections on different countries previously chosen by the residents, parties, etc are all representative of the life at the Cité and enable contact between people. These activities as well as the various clubs depend on the residents' involvement, their initiatives and their hobbies. It is in this context that the magazine Cité-Information was founded in 1963, the very year the Cité itself was inaugurated, having an ascending evolution until 1966, when its last columnist left. The magazine continued for another one year and a half, at an average quality and popularity level. Nowadays, the magazine is on the back burner, waiting for journalism enthusiasts. Similarly, between 1966 and 1967, thanks to the commitment of a floor responsible, who happened to be the 7th ping-pong player in Switzerland, the Patiño Hall, still unfinished, was partly organised as a champions' breeding-ground. 18 teams of the UNI-TTC, a club title supported by Mr. Brechbühl, were competing in the Geneva championships. But as soon as the organiser left, everything crumbled and now, that the Patiño Hall is ready, no one knows anymore where to play ping-pong at the Cité. Yet, there remain Mr. Wioska's sons, the general supervisor of the Cité, who are Swiss junior champions and who were trained by Gérald Vez.

Any student willing to start an activity is encouraged according to the available resources.

An important role is played by the BAR – the Residents' Association Office. The direct connection with the city by bus will soon be in place, a major inconvenient of the Cité Universitaire being thus solved.

Event the concept of Cité Universitaire is frequently attacked: "students are isolated and they are already quite isolated from the rest of the society. They are being created an artificial world exempt from responsibilities, offering them all the facilities. This is not the way to prepare them for life." And it makes sense in a way. But one should also take into account the advantages of this: the concept of student is understood nowadays as a temporary backing off in order to prepare one's professional future. Given this, a Cité Universitaire offers the advantage of solving rationally the housing crisis and providing an appropriate place for students, as they have special needs and a well defined goal – to graduate from university. Besides, it was noticed that, paradoxically, in a well structured framework the world's great tensions have a weaker impact. For instance, during the "six day war" the Arab and the Israeli blocs formed immediately, but, after having eyed up each other for a short while, they restarted their regular life and contacts. This does not prevent residents from forming groups and discuss the world's major events until 4 in the morning.

A rebellious student, caught occupying illegally one of the rooms told us a few days ago, that : « the Cité Universitaire in Geneva is a paradise as compared to the similar establishments in my country." He was speaking of the United States.

Anyway, we have a good image and many people confirm this by writing or by telling it to us. We think our mission is accomplished as one of them stated that: "I have spent here the most beautiful days of my life".

The Patiño Hall

Integrating a cultural space in the Cité Universitaire

Inaugurated on November 28th 1968, the Simon I. Patiño Hall was initially designed without a fixed internal structure. Stage, walls, seats could change place easily, which is the reason why the octagonal shape was adopted. Later on, the idea of mobility was abandoned, but only after the external enclosure was built. This is the reason why the hall is now inscribed in an octagon.

The hall contains 430 places. The ground floor and the circle are sloping down, allowing good visibility from any place. At the back of each seat there is a folding small table for attending lectures, conferences, etc. For this purpose, cabins for interpreters may be added according to the provisions of the design. The hall may also host choreographic, dramatic, cinema and lyric performances, as well as concerts, variety shows, etc.

The Stage

The stage is 10 m long and maximum 12 m large, with adjustable height. This solution was adopted in order to avoid the *boîte à l'italienne*. The stage is equipped with an orchestra pit, and with trap doors, to enable bringing settings underneath. On the other hand, the stage is surrounded by a black curtain system. In fact, the whole stage system is black, as well as the lightening battens, the acoustic reflectors, etc are entirely black so that pulling them up and down in front of the spectators makes no shadow on the background curtain. One should also mention a beaded screen that can be folded and stored in the wings.

Dressing and rehearsal rooms, as well as settings' store room are located in the basement. The greenroom is located on the stage floor. Four exhibition rooms were also built up, under the Hall.

Sound and light

The adaptability demands of this hall made necessary certain acoustic features, which had to be carefully determined by Mr. Pierre Walder, acoustic-engineer at the Radio Suisse-Romande, in charge with the electro-acoustic equipment. It was necessary to calculate a reverberation time feeble enough to adjust to the speakers' and the actors' elocution and to ensure perfect understanding. On the other

hand, the reverberation time needed to be high enough to enable the blending of traditional musical instruments. An average reverberation time was eventually preferred.

For music, this reverberation time may be slightly increased by using four wooden acoustic reflectors hang above the stage, height and inclination being adjustable. Sound membranes cover the walls of the hall in order to get a reverberation time as independent as possible from frequency. The walls' shape and their covering ensure an excellent diffusion both in the hall and on the stage.

The sound control at the back of the hall is made of two tape players, one deck and allows the plugging in of other devices, such as a professional tape recorder, four out-puts and an extra out-put. Level controls are made visually (4 modulometers). A plug-in board allows sending any signal towards one or several of the 12 loudspeakers on the ceiling, on the walls and on the stage.



Picture Ariel Akerib

There is also a lecturer desk, equipped with 2 microphones, one interphone and a remote control of the slide-film projector, allowing the speaker to remain independent from the control desk. This flexible arrangement is appropriate both for traditional sound broadcasting and for surround broadcasting. Two interphone systems, a broadcasting system allowing the control desk, the boxes, the foyer, to follow the performance, as well as plug-ins installation for radio and TV and a Yamaha piano are also available.

As for the light equipment, it is made of a light system allowing intensity adjustment for each projector as well as for a number of projectors on the stage and in the hall. This installation also contains a 16mm cinema projector, as well as a 35 mm one, a slide projector and an epidiascope. The lecture equipment comprises blackboards and two overhead projectors.

Being well equipped from a technical point of view and well designed for hosting its public, this hall may be used for various activities having thus the opportunity to become more known by the show professionals and by the public.

JACQUES-HENRI PLOMB

**An already praiseworthy
past promising a great future**

The Simon I. Patiño Hall was inaugurated in November 1968. This perfect architectural octagon integrates the Cité Universitaire and is made of one show room, an exhibition hall and several other halls, remarkably well equipped and ready to promote Arts and Culture.

At the time, various activities were organised during an entire week. The Nouveau Théâtre de Poche, the Strasbourg Percussion Group, the Contemporary Music Studio as well as an exhibition dedicated to Charles Rollier were in the programme to guarantee the success of this inauguration by letting the public fully enjoy the beauty and the adaptability of the hall. A new show room was born, ready to serve its public. Geneva was grateful for this achievement to the Foundation created in the memory of Simon I. Patiño. Thanks to a consistent donation, the latter contributed to this happy event. By providing the Cité Universitaire with a show room, students were given the opportunity to experience artistic life in all its forms, while the general public was invited to take part in the cultural life of the Cité.

Now that the tool was ready to be used, it was the time to put it at use and make it live. After one year of running, the success of the contemporary art representations confirmed that the Geneva public appreciated this new place and its activities.

In Geneva, demolishing or closing the artistic establishments, already too scarce, had become a common thing and yet, the Patiño Hall, on Miremont Avenue, stands as one of the last places where various art representations still remain possible.

J.-P. B.

Statistics of the nationalities represented at the Cité Universitaire of Geneva during the Summer Semester of 1970

EUROPE	Men	Women	Couples
Switzerland	86	43	7
Germany	12	5	1
England	2	3	
Belgium	3	1	1
Bulgaria	1		
Cyprus		1	
Spain	1		
Finland	1	1	
France	9	21	3
Greece	4	6	1
Nederland	7	8	1
Hungary	1		
Ireland	1		
Italy	3	2	1
Norway	2		
Poland	2		
Portugal	1	1	
Romania			1
Sweden	2	2	
Czechoslovakia	3	1	
Turkey	1	2	
USSR	2	1	
Yugoslavia	1	1	1
	145	99	17
AFRICA			
Burundi	4		
Congo	1		
Egypt	4	3	2
Madagascar		1	
Morocco	3		
Nigeria	1		
Rwanda	2		
Tunisia			1
SOUTH AMERICA			
Barbados			1
Bolivia	1		1
Brazil	3	1	1
Argentina		3	
Haiti	2		
Chili	1		
Mexico	1	1	1
Nicaragua	1		1
Paraguay			1
Ecuador			1
Trinidad	1		
Uruguay	2		
USA	10	3	3
CANADA	1	1	1
ASIA			
Afghanistan	1		
China	1	1	
Indonesia		1	
Iran		3	
Israel	2	5	2
Japan	1		
Philippines			1
Syria	1		
Vietnam	7	7	
AUSTRALIA		1	
New Zealand	1	1	
	52	32	17

55 nationalities – 396 residents
+ 12 children
157 Swiss – 39.65%

Right next to the outdoor sports facilities



Old picture

1. The existing facilities.

The sports facilities of the University are situated on a parcel of land belonging to the État de Genève and they are managed by an administrative board in cooperation with the University, the État de Genève and the Cité management. This parcel is situated right next to the Cité Universitaire.

These facilities comprise a small size training field (40m x 70m), surrounded by a round running-track, made of Grastex elastic bitumen, as wide as a corridor (1m 50cm). At the west end of the ground there is an 80 m long, 4-lane running track, made of porous bitumen.

This stadium may be used for football and handball in small teams and may also host other games, as well as throws and races.

At the southern end of the stadium there are various facilities for jumping and throwing training.

In spite of the small surface of this stadium, simultaneous activities are possible, thanks to the wise positioning of the various facilities.

Next to this small stadium, there is a game area, comprising two basketball training fields, as well as two volleyball fields.

Next to these playing fields there is a small area planted with grass, for physical education and games.

All these training surfaces are surrounded by lawn and flowers – a nook of greenery in front of the Cité, much more relaxing and pleasant than the parking that was initially planned in the area.

Separated from the stadium by the two small villas hosting the Cité kindergarten, there are 5 tennis fields, belonging to the university Tennis Club.

The university Tennis Club comprises 4 clay tennis courses, built according to the “Rievo” new technology, which allows playing right after heavy rain, with no delay.

The fifth course is a Porosol-type made of porous concrete, enabling playing tennis throughout the year.

Among other sports facilities of the university Tennis Club, there is also a physical education training hall, a small bodybuilding room, as well as bathroom facilities and very modern locker rooms.

A small cafeteria is also in place and it is being serviced by the kind guardians of the stadium – Mr. and Mrs. Penseyres.

All these facilities are highly exploited, especially in the evening, and therefore their extension is to be considered soon.

2. Future extension and sports facilities

In a quite near future it will be necessary to increase the surface for these sports facilities whereas the university stadium will probably be integrated as an annex of the new constructions to be built one day in the area between the Arve’s loop and the Bout du Monde.

For the time being, the most urgent construction to be erected is a sports hall, projected on the properties of the Cité Universitaire. It should comprise a wide hall for physical education, athletics, games as well as other various sports activities.

These facilities should be big enough to allow 2 basketball matches, 3 volleyball matches, 2 handball or futsal (indoor football) matches at the same time.

This project was deeply studied and credits were requested from the État de Genève.

In conclusion, it is desirable that the University of Geneva built its own covered sport fields, thus allowing the university sports to extend further, which is not the case at the moment.

JEAN BRECHBUHL

The Cité Universitaire Foundation Council

President: Raymond Racine

Vice-Presidents: Gil Vaucher – Jacques Vicari

Secretary : Jean-Pierre Guillermet

Members of the Office:

University Superintendent: Martin Peter

Construction delegate: Armand Bossard

Financial delegate: René Rahm

Social Affairs delegate: Gil Vaucher

Members of the Council:

André Baudois

Alexandre Bernstein

René Grosclaude

Paul Guichonnet

Raymond Leclerc

Council Secretariat: Colette Coëx

Management Committee of the Simon I. Patiño Hall

President: Jacques Vicari

Patiño Foundation representatives : Jean-Aimé Baumann, John Dubouchet

Cité Universitaire Foundation representatives : Jacques Vicari, Colette Coëx

Delegates at the Committee, having advisory rights : André Hürst, on behalf of the University, Rémy Wyler, on behalf of the Cité

Steward: Jacques-Henri Plomb

Administrative secretary: Charles Albanesi

Statistics by faculties of the students living at the Cité Universitaire. Summer semester 1970

Ecole d'Interprètes (Faculty of Translations Studies)	84
Sciences Économiques et Sociales (Faculty of Economic & Social Sciences)	64
Médecine (Faculty of Medicine)	49
Sciences (Sciences)	46
Lettres (Faculty of Letters - Humanities)	45
Droit (Faculty of Law)	27
Hautes Études Internationales (Graduate Institute of International Studies)	20
Sciences de l'éducation (Faculty of Educational Studies)	20
Médecine Dentaire (Faculty of Dental Medicine)	17
Pharmacie (Faculty of Pharmacy)	10
Architecture (Faculty of Architecture)	1

The Cité Universitaire at the Crossroads between Past and Future

It is certain that – and I will come back to this later on – as Professor Baumann said, the Cité Universitaire must be “a place of permanent research: it must constantly try to achieve the most comprehensive definitions for its essential ideas”.

The Geneva Cité Universitaire is also, and above all, a place where one may live only by responding straightly, with no philosophic escapes, to the administrative musts, which may ignore even essential ideas.

It is an 11 million building that needs to be maintained; it is more than a million worth furniture and other equipment to be renewed; it is a 5 million loan to be reimbursed together with some CHF 250'000 of interest to pay back, and financial resources to build up for further expenditures, etc.

The État de Genève, the Office de surveillance des Fondations (Office monitoring the Foundations' activities), all require annual reports on the “good progress of the business”, irrespective of the “ideas” cherished by the Cité residents. Implicitly, the Conseil de Fondation is responsible in front of the hundreds of private donors, who have voluntarily sponsored the construction of the Cité Universitaire.



Picture Zurkirch

It is also an imperative financial project on a mid and long term, namely to turn the Cité into a self supporting enterprise. It is the explanation for the parsimonious accounting, for the restricted circulation resources, for the amortization according to strict fiscal rules as well as for appealing to social funds...

In brief, in agreement with the local authorities, the Cité Universitaire is convinced that it will do its best meet its initial ambitions and the residents' strong wish that it will be administered according to solid management principles.

It should be very clear: these are the main concerns of the Conseil de Fondation, comprising delegates of the État de Genève, of the City, of the University, of the Association of the Graduate Students and of the General Association of the Students, until its disappearance.

But the Conseil de Fondation is not the only one “entitled” to be concerned. The Management, in charge with the application of concepts, of statutes, of rules and regulations falling in the competence of the Conseil de Fondation, must ensure that the common living of 450 students is made possible, by being apartment administrator and spare-time entertainer at the same time. Maintaining the furniture and the bedding together with the bed linen is one of its responsibilities and in parallel it must ambitiously overcome other difficulties and impose the rules that make possible freedom and discipline.

In their turn, the residents have become aware of their own responsibilities. In 1966, an event somewhat disagreeing with Professor Baumann's ideas took place: the residents organized their General Assembly and voted the statutes of their association, based on centralizing principles going beyond small teams and groups.

Was it announcing the coexistence of two opposite conceptions? Should the federative intentions that had until then ruled even the architectural design of the Cité be abandoned in favor of the residents' point of view? Was it worth trying to conciliate the two conceptions?

After two years of negotiations, the following solution was found:

The Bureau de l'Assemblée des Résidents (BAR – the Residents' Assembly Office) reflects the twelve groups, and represents thus the twelve floors and therefore all the residents. Elections were to be organized for each floor, in line with the federative spirit.

What was going to become of the twelve group chiefs assigned by the Management?

Was it appropriate to maintain twelve mayors elected by the lower structures and twelve prefects assigned by the higher ones?

Current experience teaches us that mayor = prefect, a symbiosis of two trends, one justified by the Rules and Regulations of the Cité Universitaire and the other by the statutes of the Residents' Association.

This synthesis of the two demands (discipline and effectiveness on the one hand and freedom and students' needs on the other), turns the Cité into a new, original establishment. Elected by his peers, the resident becomes the spokesperson of the Management to the residents. It is a brand new doctrine, still lacking name... In fact, commissions with equal representation take the decisions engaging the establishment. This solution is applied for instance when selecting the new residents or when deciding possible expelling.

The contact between the Conseil de Fondation and the residents is established on average twice a year, on the occasion of a buffet supper gathering the three hierarchical parts, when points of view are reconciled.

But, just like any other concepts of life in common, it will not reach its full achievement at the Cité Universitaire in the absence of general consent. It implies that everybody is engaged in the success of the "system" by the rules of the fair play. But which are the best means to ensure fair play? Based upon experience and willing to accommodate empirical evidence with logic, the Conseil de Fondation decides to draft a CHARTER of the Cité Universitaire. The resident adheres to it by signing the resident contract and thus the Charter is integrated in the contract.

The Cité Universitaire is a means of living among others, offered to the student. One may enter the Cité on the condition of adhering to the rules and the spirit of the Charter.

It is yet far from us to brag about having discovered the squaring of a social circle. This merit is attributed to May 1968. Since then, spirits have evolved and with a bit of detachment one may discriminate between objecting to fundamental choices of the society and choices regarding strictly the deficiencies of the university system.

No charter will ever comply with the first and, as to the latter, they will always be understandable, if, as they derive from weaknesses, they enable improvement of the current state of things.

RAYMOND RACINE

The go-ahead for extending the Cité

The Conseil d'État during its meeting on April the 17th 1970 took the decision of putting in charge the Fondation de la Cité Universitaire, the Département de l'Instruction Publique (Public Education Department) and the Département des Travaux Publics (Public Works Department), of the development of a draft regarding the extension of the Cité Universitaire and its costs.

The decision was made after analysis of the reports previously received by the Fondation de la Cité, which affirmed to be ready to take the responsibility of a new construction as well as in response to a study performed by the Social Commission of the University on the housing crisis among students. (see draft and article, p. 25)

Interview with the Architect Louis Payot

Picture Zurkirch



Questioning nowadays someone about his activities is quite easy: carried away by waves of words and ideas, one asks a question now and then, only to conduct the dialogue. When questioning someone about a long-term project, going back to some ten years, the inquirer and his interlocutor are both placed in a historical situation. One is called to remember things. It may become necessary to reopen stored archives. One's recollections must be respected, but memory may fail.

Building a Cité Universitaire is not a trifle for an architect. More than ten years have gone now. Techniques have changed. Do you remember the importance of the work to be transposed on the building site; what may be considered to be the beginning of this project?

At the beginning there was the Architect Martin and myself and we started from a draft designed by my colleague. We were not associates, but we were willing to cooperate in such a way that we could successfully accomplish the mission that had been entrusted with us. It is on this occasion that we set up an office we shared, in order to work together at this project. This office became later the general base for the entire building site. Our attitude: we were open to ideas the other shared with us, while not forgetting ours, more experimental. The novelty – I remember it quite well – was that we had to take into account three entities, that is designing rooms for boys, girls and couples.

It was long-term work anyway, wasn't it?

This kind of building is obviously a question of more than a few months. Every project needed estimates, which was absolutely normal, but they were also discussed besides that. As an architect, I remember how difficult it was to design a room which was supposed to be more than a bedroom for the student. Life had to be made possible with everything it implies. The others may as well recall some great moments of this adventure. For my part, I still remember a few anecdotes. Here's the one about the foundation stone! It had been laid but no one found it after that. Between the moment it had been laid, during a special ceremony and the day we wanted to integrate it in the building, it had vanished. Was it a student prank? Of course this didn't harm the party.

“The party”. That's definitely an architectural concept and not a political one. What exactly is the meaning of this concept when projecting a Cité Universitaire?

It was convenient to take one's “part” of profit out of the opportunities. Why a tower? Why just one and not two? He who says party also says reason. To project reasonably. The main principle: what was wanted and expressed by the pioneers of the idea. For our part, we had to get filled with the idea of a building with residential capacity. Eventually we embraced the idea of a high tower, the first to be ever projected in Switzerland judging by its dimensions and its purpose, I must mention. We searched for inspiration abroad, in Milan especially, but the real situation was specific to Geneva only. What you can see now standing on the Plateau de Champel is the result of a compromise between the University demands and our own conceptions as architects.

What were the University demands at the time?

I cannot tell you exactly. It was mainly about transforming into concrete Professor's Baumann idea, who engaged himself body and soul in this project. His idea was that we should build for groups of residents in a hierarchical project. It was a module, to put it this way.

Having it as a starting base, our main concern was then coping with the differences (for example a nursery for the couples' children). We listened to every opinion, running the risk of satisfying some and disappointing those who came after them. It was impossible to avoid criticism.

Given the dimensions of this project, the unexpected must have been quite expected ?

There was some, it's true. For example prices increased. Progressive financing was in itself a problem. Another example: there were some too ambitious projects for sports facilities, given that there was already something similar at the Bout du Monde, situated at an athlete's hammer throw from here and open for athletes. Nothing was too unexpected to be overcome, but it is well known: people with a vested interest in the project always step in at the last moment to require modifications and it is obviously too late for them to be considered as they may change the whole plan.

Do you remember the reaction of the general public? I imagine such high buildings were not so familiar in the '56s, '57s, '58s...

We had to come up with new ideas not only in the field of architecture, but in that of university too. Nothing like the Labhardt report was available in our case. In spite of everything, data were rather empirical. Only Professor Baumann's idea was precise: give the students the opportunity to live in groups, to mix together in order to learn how to live together, while becoming the only ones responsible for this new way of life. It must not be forgotten – we were looking for a solution to make students feel not so far from their home-country.

Some reactions were quite violent: too much luxury for students, too beautiful for the foreigners. Others even said: "Soon these students will be served break-fast in bed!"

There were 2600 students at the University. You gave shelter to 400 of them. If you were to start all over again...

Oh! I find your question interesting, because it is only natural to cast a critical view on the past. You know, architects were quite concerned about the events in 1968 and the students' claims. We had to take them into account. I mean that, being part of a world eager of immediate change, we had to design a more flexible Cité. This is actually possible given the essential infrastructure. At the time, buildings were still designed to last for a hundred years, therefore in too rigid a manner. Nowadays, the student must be given a basic space, which he is free to modify, by changing walls and by accommodating it according to his needs, to turn it into his home. Yet, it is difficult for me to tell you about a long process which corresponded to our mentality. In brief, there are the variables and the invariables. The current materials allow us to make this distinction.

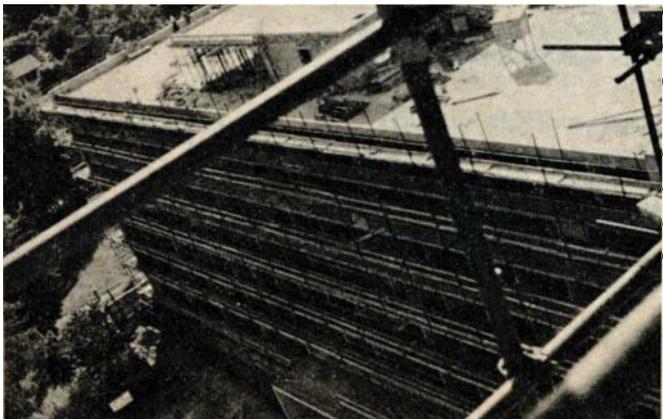
The fears of the homeowners living in the vicinity of the Cité never confirmed. The Cité Tower never had the fate of its brother in Pisa, thanks to the special treatment of the soil. In other words, the building resisted. Is this a reason to be proud? Or, should you prefer, is the Cité still one of your favorite creations?

Like I said, one should remain critic. If we had had a patron saying to us "here's the money, start digging", we might have come up with something different. But don't think difficulties are so unpleasant. Things which were imposed to us had their value after all. The result is a Cité which looks more like

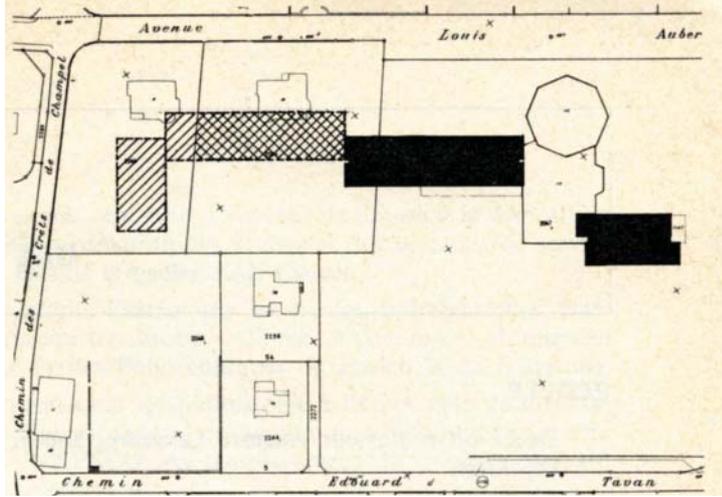
a hotel. The flexibility that we enjoy nowadays in architecture and its great adaptability, prevent us from getting too attached to our previous creations. What I treasure most is rather the excellent memories of those times of cooperation.

Interviewed by J.-L. P.

Picture Zurkirch



Towards an Extension of the Cité Universitaire?



The stumbling block of the extension of the Cité Universitaire is obviously its financing, because housing students in shared apartments built “ex novo” is not profitable in financial terms, from the point of view of the orthodox capitalism.

During the first stage, the Foundation was still hoping to avoid mortgage deadlines, by gathering enough donation funds. In spite of the right of land occupancy given by the State in Miremont, in spite of the rich donations from the State and the City of Geneva and from private donors, it had to make substantial loans and since then, the budgetary balance depends on the rate of interest increase.

Given that the Miremont quadrilateral allows further extensions, it is necessary to look for external financial resources for such projects. The Département des Travaux Publics (Public Works Department), the Département de l’Instruction Publique (Public Education Department), the University and the Foundation, organized a round-table conference and came to the conclusion that there was no other solution but to submit the issue to the legal authorities of the Canton. Should these authorities decide that housing the students is part of the University’s mission and that alongside with the buildings for educational purposes it was equally important to develop buildings with social purposes, then it was only natural that the necessary funds could be approved within the frame of the Critical Works legislation.

It is also obvious that on the one hand those buildings with social purposes should not compete with university buildings and that on the other hand they should comply with the Federal Law concerning the Subventions to Universities by the Confédération.

Besides financing, it is also important to establish the construction schedule, meaning to provide the master-builder with the statement of work. This schedule must integrate the various buildings, not only juxtapose them in a purely chronological order.

Moreover, the concept of rooms gathered within apartments as it is now familiar to the students, will have to be reconsidered according to the Cité experience of the previous years of its existence.

Currently, we only have a draft of a general plan, which is besides subject to fundamental modifications. Nevertheless, it allows the identification of the possible technical and financial features of the extension. Given that the piece of land in the corner formed by the Louis-Aubert Avenue and the Chemin des Crêts does not belong to the État de Genève yet, the first extension may only go up to this limit. Its complement would finish the building which, nevertheless, is sustainable enough for a start. The rest represents a distinct stage continuing the second stage.

Conclusions

- The extension is achievable in several stages;
- Thanks to its necessary extensions, it may offer shelter to 300 students;
- It takes into account the requirements concerning the development of the sports centre, as its first elements have already been installed in the south of the buildings;
- The whole of this operation is estimated at CHF 10.5 million, construction, equipment and furniture included.

(See also p. 22)