4.6 Location of a Building

Political and financial factors, as well as purely technical requirements often influence the choice of a site for an archive building. Whatever the reasons, the choice of a site is crucial because a mistake cannot be corrected later and can jeopardise the whole future of an archive service (Duchein, 1988). In the past archives were often put up on sites which authorities are prepared to offer. Most of the time, cost and competition for land primarily determines where record offices are built (Thomas, 1988).

According to an older, partly outdated RAMP study several factors have to be considered when a new site is chosen. Amongst other things the site should not be located near areas subject to high levels of air pollution, a major and increasing problem in most of the metropolitan areas in developing countries. Likewise, sites near obvious polluting industries should be avoided, which includes railway stations. Local climatic conditions of possible sites should be studied carefully and preference should be given to ones that are on high ground, have a cool and dry climate and are protected against sun and storms. Locations that are subject to humid, salty or sandy winds, like coastal areas, are unsuitable. At the very least the openings should not face directly into the direction of the prevailing winds. Some environmental protection can also be gained by careful positioning of the structure to take advantage of any natural shade or protection against wind (Daniel et al., 2000; Ezennia, 1989; Ling, 1998; Thomas, 1987).

Paul Gut specifies the site-specific conditions as the presence a pool of cold air, local wind, water, urbanisation, altitude and ground surface. These factors make a real difference and need to be considered in designing the details of the building and in the selection of the construction site (Gut et al., 1993). Rosenberg noticed a rise of 12% in relative humidity inside a museum on the coast of Gabon, while the outside temperature was 7 – 10°C higher. This was partly due to the location of the building (Rosenberg, 1986). In Fiji the external temperature fluctuated widely on a daily basis, the maximum being between 18°C and 48°C. The average fluctuations, monitored during a 54 days period, were between 22°C and 32°C (Daniel et al., 2000). The site should also be carefully inspected to ascertain if there are termite mounds or nests in the vicinity (Ling, 1998).

Some sites are more logical than others. If it is intended to build a repository mainly for historical records, it would be advisable to site it in the university quarter or near a library or museum. If, on the other hand, the repository were for semi-current records, it would be better to keep them near the administrative centre. To store archives a long way from town, is not a very good idea. An archive should not be deprived of contact with its potential users: archives are not dead things! (Duchein, 1988).

As time goes by the factors that should apply when selecting the site for an archival repository change. For one, prices for land and housing in the centres of urban areas can rise sky-high. For another, the surroundings of each site need to be considered. Today we distinguish between internal and external factors that influence our choice of the site. Yet, each site and each building are unique (Ling, 1998).

Once a site has been chosen, thought should be given to providing the best orientation of the building. To avoid direct sunlight it is better to orientate the building to the north, in the northern hemisphere, or to the south in the southern hemisphere (Duchein, 1988). Normally north light is recommended as the most suitable natural light for galleries and for conservation studios. The north light is uniform and colours are distinctly visible. East-west orientation, which is favoured by traditional builders in India, is not suitable, unless the walls facing east and west are protected by sun-breakers or wide projections (Agrawal, 1974).