

Design criteria for the library of tomorrow

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Toward a new library

The contemporary library and the building in which it is housed remain rooted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: an institute, a relatively stable organizational unit with its own rules, personnel, financing, etc. The 'stable' aspects of the institute have made it what it is today: a valuable institution in our society. Yet at the same time, this 'DNA' has had an inhibiting effect on being open to change. Being open to change is necessary in order to remain valuable in the future and be prepared to provide answers to tomorrow's society. It is just these questions which will drastically change in the coming years.

Which library?

The old 'classic' library is disappearing, superseded by new media, the internet, new user concepts and other (marketing) strategies. Naturally the book will continue on, but new media will demand their place in library collections. The library collection will be transformed by this, becoming multimedial. Information is no longer linked to a single medium and this will give a hybrid character to the library of the future.

From stand alone to networks

The introduction of web browsers and on-line retrieval has blurred the traditional division between property and collections even further. Collections and knowledge have been incorporated into a network of collections spread across many libraries and allied institutions such as Archives, Museums, Schools.

From consumer to producer

It is not only the walls between collections that are falling. The classic division between producers and consumers of information is disappearing as well. The internet has provided for an extensive democratization of media. Knowledge is no

longer reserved to experts and the production of information is no longer solely the preserve of publishers and broadcasting networks. In addition to being consumers of information, users have also increasingly become producers and developers. The new sources created by this new activity will increasingly be part of the library's collection.

From famine to feast

One hears today about an abundance of information of all kinds and sizes. The internet is an endless source of information to search and from which to select: what kind of (cultural) information would I like to consume? In this situation consumers are an abundance of capricious users. Some have specific interests connected to (cultural) background, age, education and situation; others are flighty and their preferences constantly change. It is difficult to make a selection from the great quantity of meaningful information: what information inspires or supports my life as an individual and as a member of society?

A consequence of this is that the attention span needed to process information has grown shorter. We get distracted by a great many things. Some people withdraw and limit themselves to passive amusement. The new question for the library is whether it can offer a value added in this situation of abundance. The opening up of (cultural) information will in any case:

- be more about providing meaning
- must match public diversity
- must challenge, surprise and really help people
- must distinguish itself with high quality
- be designed for young and old alike

'The library is a **tool for personal change**. It connects me with ideas, with stories, with messages, with other people. It shows me the culture I'm part of and the culture I am not part of. A library allows me to participate, to peek into other worlds I don't know, to get a sense, to imagine, to experience, to live. It gives me the place and time to see things I otherwise wouldn't see. It surprises me and bores me at the same time. Reading my borrowed books unfolds into a silent dialogue with the author, the character, the subject or myself. The library is not a building, it is a deeply personal series of encounters that tickle my imagination, develop my dreaming and make me an explorer. Although it is a place, it creates a time and the stories I read build my experience of silence.'

Bert Mulder, *De vleugels van de bibliotheek* [Library on wings]¹

From 'instrumental' deployment to information architecture

Library collections have traditionally been placed on bookshelves according to (centuries old) principles of organization by librarians: alphabetic (fiction) or systematic (non-fiction). The most important interface for collections was the (card) catalogue and, secondarily, the bookshelves themselves. There are new ways to open up accessibility, however. Public libraries use the AquaBrowser – a search engine that presents a great amount of information from various sources in an attractive and associative way – with great success. Using a search term, AquaBrowser provides a list of the information found; so far nothing new. But the browser also provides a 'word cloud' which includes all kinds of terms which in one way or another have something to do with the term searched. This is how the visitor is stimulated to search further using other headwords. In fact, the browser builds a kind of mind map for the visitor thereby making searching easier. Adaptation of RFID

technology has made it possible to 'physically' modify other search strategies in public libraries. Users can be led interactively to the material they want and then find extra information (in context) with these materials. And last but not least, developments in the video gaming industry can be a great boon to libraries. Can the library collection be opened up and presented as in a game? And what consequences might that have for the design and layout of buildings?

Conclusions:

The library is changing and this has consequences for the development criteria of tomorrow's libraries.

The library links to all kinds of partners – archives, museums and creative institutions – in the cultural, pedagogic and social fields.

The library will become a multifaceted facility where people will not only consume, but also create knowledge.

'Upstream' is as important as downstream.

The library is in transition from a building with space for 'passive consumption' and the storage of books into an institute where users 'tag', comment upon and contextualize information themselves.

Toward a new library building

The developments listed above have repercussions for the library of the future. Libraries continue to be designed based on old paradigms and criteria: consumption, shortage, stand-alone, instrumental opening up. In fact, contemporary libraries are still built as covered stacks arranged and ordered according to an outdated catalogue. Projects such as restyling or adapting sundry retail concepts are big improvements indeed, but are still variants on old principles of efficiency aimed to 'sell' (i.e., loan) the collections. There are (too) many bookcases in a monotonous grid, all books being of equal (un)importance, with here and there room for a small display.

'Museums, libraries, airports, hospitals and schools are becoming increasingly indistinguishable from shopping. Their adoption of retail for survival has unleashed an enormous wave of commercial entrapment that has transformed museum goers, researchers, travelers, patients and students into customers. The result is a deadening loss of variety. What were once valued activities no longer retain their uniqueness and richness. What if the comparison were reversed so that customers were no longer seen as consumers, but as researchers, students, patients and museum goers? What if the shopping experience were not one of impoverishment, but of enrichment? What if the typologies were reversed, so that the store functioned as a gallery, street, stage, library?'

Rem Koolhaas, *Projects For Prada* (Prada, 2001).

Yet where will the visitor now really be surprised, challenged or given the opportunity to 'customize' the collection to their desires, expertise and needs? Where will the stories be told? The new library will offer shelter to new functions. A building and institution which will make the collection and its users special. The library of the future will offer space for inspiration, knowledge, fantasy and amazement. The library wants to create richness and surprise with its collection, wants to tell stories. In so doing the library wants to become an inspiring source of culture instead of the umpteenth information center or café with newspapers. This requires dramaturgy instead of the customary structuring. The term collection is chiefly associated with tangible sources in a bound space. The accessibility and availability of these sources

is important, but more important still is a meaningful connection between them. It is precisely via the organization of these connections that the public library can distinguish itself. This would include intrinsic expertise (knowledge of the collection), but also the ability to use the collection to creatively organize wealth, meaning and surprise, 'the collection's story'. The new library will be a theater where old and new 'stories' will be told (the 'collection's dramaturgy'). The versatile and multimedial collection is an important aid to this. As a cultural entrepreneur, this library will make alliances and join other organizations in related sectors engaged in this process – archives, museums, creative industries – which will strengthen and supplement the library's function. The goal here is to create intelligent and useful combinations which will deliver added cultural value. And the library should be for young and old alike. There are just a few places in the public domain where children, young people and adults come together for the same purpose and with a shared passion.

'About thirty students from the Eindhoven Design Academy participated in a cooperative project with the Association of Public Libraries on the future of the public library. What if?... They developed six concepts based on the question – that is, based on their own experiences and wishes – what the library would look like in the future. What was remarkable was that every proposal found use and access to the collection more important than the collection itself. The Community Encounter proposal inquired after how the library could bring people together. It suggests that public space is increasingly more sharply divided into a great number of functions making exchange with various communities less possible. In addition, physical and virtual reality seldom meet. The library of the future should be able to bring about a link between these two worlds. Another concept describes a visit to the library as a trip. The visitor (traveler) can label and save in digital 'en-space' everything they encounter during their search. 'En-space' is a space between the public and private spheres where digital information is exchanged and via a big screen is made directly available to other users. In addition to these personal finds, there is a static archive in which older personal finds are kept.' *Bibliotheekblad* ['Toekomst bibliotheek: data dating, brain gym en mind spa'; tekst Femke van den Berg; 2006; nr. 14.]

Conclusions:

The new library is a place which offers accommodation to new functions. The library of the future should offer room for inspiration, knowledge, fantasy and amazement.

In the new library the process of organizing and partitioning information and imagination must be central. The library was a building with a collection, but is becoming a place where meaningful processes are organized.

In the digital age the library's public space will receive an extra dimension as the 'intangible' digital world of information and the physical information carriers meet one another. This will result in new assemblages of users actively invited and readied to contribute their own to these collections and provide new meanings for themselves and for each other.

Based on this intrinsic renewal intensive cooperative links will be made with relevant partners in the worlds of culture, (informal) education and history and imagination.

Together they will create the ingredients for renewed cooperation and for new services to end users.

The (library) building will become a place for work, meetings, inspiration, research, tranquility, debate, reflection, space and connection.

1. What if... : what would you like the library to be? = hoe zou je willen dat de bibliotheek van de toekomst er uit gaat zien? / Palliser, Nadia...[et al]. - Den Haag ; Eindhoven : Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken : Design Academy Eindhoven, 2006. -128 p. : ill. ; 25 cm. - ISBN 978-90-5483-732-9.