

Foyers facades and fenestrations: new library spaces in Europe and Scandinavia

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Abstract

Expect a visually exciting and stimulating presentation of library architecture from over 20 new Central and large community libraries in England, Netherlands, Helsinki, Sweden and Denmark. It will be the culmination of facts and inspiration gathered on a five week adventure funded in part through the LIANZA Edith Jessie Carnell travelling Scholarship. It is no secret that libraries need to keep up and lead the way in the fast paced technologically driven world of the 21st Century. As libraries are still being funded, built, used and valued there are obviously things that are going well. It is my intention to discover what is working in other countries and why, how others are remaining relevant and what they are doing to enhance the user experience through design and decoration.

This presentation will also contain key themes and feedback from the NEXT Library 2013 conference in Aarhus Denmark as they relate to future libraries.

Introduction

I was awarded the Edith Jessie Carnell Travelling Scholarship in 2102. The purpose of my travels was to find inspiration and knowledge to help with the development of the new central library in Christchurch as well as discover what other libraries are doing to address the issues of the role of libraries in the 21 century. Exploring these issues I expected to return with a raft of ideas to help inform developments at Christchurch City Libraries and plenty to share with colleagues throughout New Zealand. I visited 27 public libraries in five countries over a period of five and a half weeks in May and June 2013. In this report I could not possibly reference every library I visited but have included a comprehensive list of libraries and resources can be found at find at www.sallyandjessieineurope.wordpress.com and photos from each library are available on Flickr at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cclstaff/sets/72157635902558114/>

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank LIANZA for the award and financial support that enabled me to embark on this adventure and also Christchurch City Libraries for the financial and professional support I received.

Special thanks go to all the people who met and hosted me over my journey. People were endlessly generous with their time and ideas and as a lone traveller these interactions were very valuable both professionally and personally. Learning about various cultural and business practices enhanced my understanding and gave much room for thought. I hope I represent the libraries and countries in an equally generous way in this paper.

It is important to note that the views expressed in this paper are my own and are not necessarily those held by Christchurch City Libraries or LIANZA. This work is a personal reflection

Summary

In this paper I discuss some common themes I observed in the six large central libraries I visited and also share some of the innovative and future focused things people are doing with and for their communities addressing the challenges of the 21st century library. Although beautiful spaces engender many good things, it is at its heart, the people and the experiences that make the real difference. There is probably nothing new in this premise but hopefully some of the ways people are achieving this will spark ideas for others to pick up on and develop. Intermingled with these thoughts and observations is my learning from attending the Next Library 2013 conference which provided short but intense inspirational exposure to practitioners in various fields from libraries to marketing; reference to these speakers are included through the paper.

Central Libraries

The role central libraries play in large cities is arguably similar in all the cities I visited and probably the same the world over. Redevelopment and revitalisation of city centres, development of a community space in a city, civic pride, a place that a city can show off its collections, provide a democratic space for its people, an iconic building to name a few. In this age of digital media, the supposed demise of the book and the tightening of funding budgets, it could be considered miraculous that these amazing buildings are continuing to be built, but they are. So what are the similarities? Without delving into the histories of each project and comparing strategies I took a face value approach to this.

Collaboration, civic pride, democracy, point of difference, access to precious materials and valued items were common themes. I think there is nothing new in this as a concept but what I saw in some places showed that collaborations need to be an honest venture with equality at the centre of the partnership. It is not enough to tinker around the edges of collaboration and success requires an honest and inclusive approach from the outset. Successful collaborative partnerships are valuable on a political level and provide sustainable functional and financial viability at the very least. Building a business case with partners, sharing the load financially, connecting with a larger audience which engender support and ownership are some of the many benefits of collaboration. The question of sustainability, shared visions, hours of opening, funding, fairness are 'problems' to be considered but from the library perspective of those I visited, these problems are no different to the many ongoing issues for the lone library. It would appear there is no magic bullet but rather a solution that works for the time and location; local solutions to global (at least Western) problems.

The recently opened and renamed Library of Birmingham is connected with the REP theatre and has its own theatre in the building; other partners include the British Film Institute whereby a dedicated area for viewing unique films and television programmes has been specially designed. The 'golden box' floor in the centre of the building houses the city archives 26,000 metres of legacy items with a 15 year expansion plan. Part of the legacy element of this library is the inclusion of a Victorian library high up in the building and houses one of the 12 National Collections of Photography a collection of 2-3 million images and plates. These collaborations with national bodies and collections not only attract people but funding, kudos and also cement the role of central libraries in providing democratic access to material and services that belongs to the community.



Figure 1 Birmingham Library months before opening

Similarly The Hive in Worcester, serving a city of 100,000 people houses the public and university libraries, Council contact centre with self-service payment machines, 'Archive and Archaeology' services as well as Public records. All of these are in one building with equal prominence on various levels which also provides a purpose to move through the building and with a generous central atrium all are visible and openly accessible. This was carefully designed to provide the much desired quiet study spaces and with the children's area placed on the ground floor along with the café and quick visit collections and services, welcomed the noise and buzz of a civic space. Even the often elusive business community make the most of the space with prominent state of the art meeting rooms suspended over the children's area. This model of collaboration appeared to have many benefits for all parties and particularly the community.

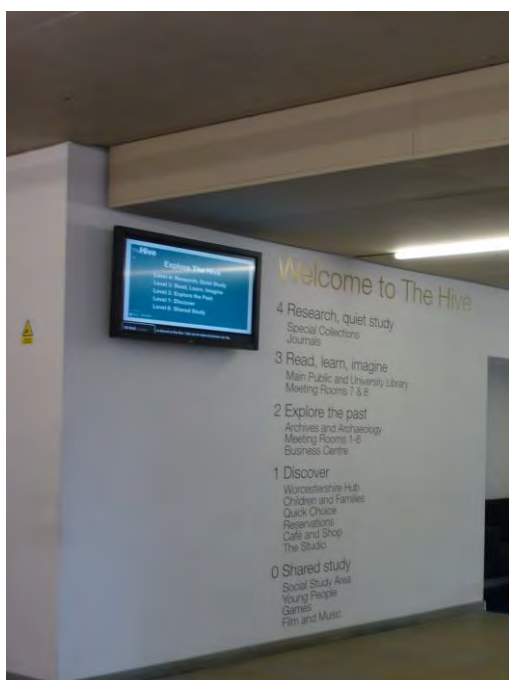


Figure 2 The Hive list of services

Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (OBA) provides a stunning canal side building with great views and spaces as well as services. Each floor has a purpose and 'square' for events and exhibition which vary depending on the role of the floor. The key partners in this building include a local radio station as well as the national radio which records one hour of programming each day. IHLIA (International gay/lesbian information and archive) has partnered with the library to create an area and collection in the library, an on-going partnership. As an art capital in Europe it was no surprise to see many exhibition spaces for art as well as special collections of renowned local authors. These collections and spaces are managed by the various partners. Other special collaborations include a museum space, an auditorium, an exhibition room, the Library Museum and a large well renowned self-service restaurant on the seventh floor.



Figure 3 Van Gogh exhibition at OBA

'Times change – and so do we' is the opening statement in the Strategy for Malmö City Library 2009 – 2012: "The Darling Library – your life, your dreams, your library" created to bring the citizens of Malmö into the world of libraries of the future. It is a refreshingly honest document that spells out the realities of the digital world, the competing needs for people's time, the need to break down boundaries and the need to collaborate with a wide range of partners and to just get on with it. It is about changing the paradigm of libraries in the minds at least of its citizens.

This honesty is refreshing and echoes the words of Jens Thorhauge when he summed up the essence of the Next conference themes

- Be open minded and honest about the fluidity of the changes
- Embrace change and don't be looking back all the time
- Bring the best with us but actively
- Life is complex

Considering this document was published in 2009, Malmo is leading the way in making the big changes libraries need to make to move forward and stay viable and relevant.

The library space has been through three significant changes since its opening in 1905 with the most recent and stunning addition being the Henning Larsen 'Cathedral of light' extension; it is an architectural delight.

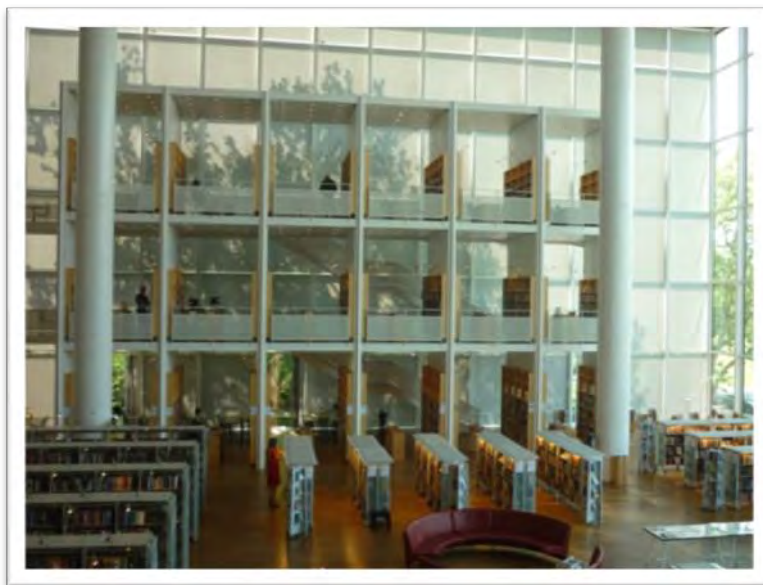


Figure 4 'Cathedral of Light', Malmo

The charming and exciting children's space in the library is the embodiment of the strategy. The space is engaging; it encourages play and activity, discovery and fun as well as providing quiet reading spaces. It welcomes people to stay and there are ample opportunities to connect with ideas and be creative. There are no signs telling people how to behave, rather a space that invites you to participate and enjoy yourself. The vertical structures for children to climb and play and there is a lot of colour and music. They have created a magical place for children integrating the old and new seamlessly with humour and style.



Figure 5 Children's space, Malmo





Figure 6 Music room, Malmo

Transformation of the libraries paradigm

The library of the future will be engaging all of the senses was a theme expressed at Next Library conference. Tio Tretton in the Kulturehuset in Stockholm is showing us the way. In this library for 10-13 year olds only, you can cook, watch a movie, make a movie, draw, paint, read, put on a play or wear dress up clothes. You can also meet with your friends and share and play on a computer/device.



With a 'no adults' policy this space is strictly for kids to have fun in their learning and interaction and is totally self-driven. The space is set up for the children to use as they please. There are few rules, no programmes and no librarians. The staff consists of youth workers, teachers and others with skills and interest in working with young people and information. The library is very welcoming and has an infectious vibrancy and liveliness about it.

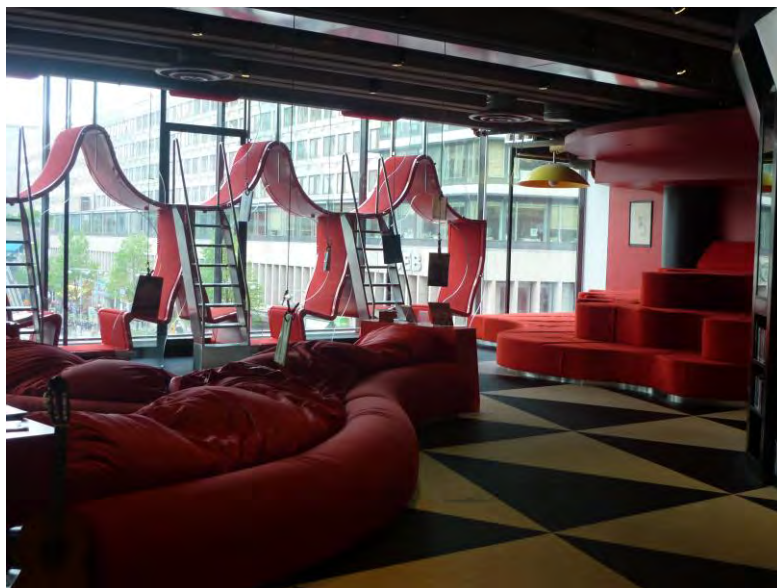


Figure 7 Tio Tretton, Stockholm

The library is closed when school as open and in this time the space is used for school and group visits. It is a very special resource which has a strong people focus which drives the programming and service development. The environment enables swift responses to the needs of the customer.

The challenge to those of us in more traditional models of library service delivery in making changes is being bold enough to make real meaningful change, to let go of habits and processes precious to librarians and listen to our customers and trust in what they are telling us they want and doing it. We need to think about what it is that we are trying to preserve by holding onto our traditional services and ideals and find ways to move into the new library paradigm taking the best of what we do and applying it in new ways for the benefit of our customers, to enhance their lives, to enable them to take control of their learning.



Figure 8 Kitchen space at Tio Tretton

Customers becoming the creators of content not just the consumers was a theme discussed by several contributors at the Next Conference and several libraries I visited are finding new ways to enable the creation of content. In New Zealand we have the kete concept and our own social media spaces where we encourage customers to participate. We have people attending classes and programmes, making digital memories, creating stars at Matariki and whole raft of wonderful activities.

The Fablab concept developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston can be found and is networked in 40 countries (including New Zealand). The aim of the Copenhagen FabLab is to provide facilities, where people can develop and test ideas. Good ideas, once developed are shared with the global FabLab network. FabLab facilities are not used for serial production but offer up an incubation space. The equipment available is electronic related equipment including 3D printing, 3D micro milling machine and scanner, foil cutter, laser cutting, and an embroidery. Laser printing machines, sewing machines, printing presses, special or expensive software packages and a wide range of technologies to try are available at several of the libraries I visited. What do these things have to with the libraries?

The success of libraries in the 21st century will hinge on our ability to apply innovation, seek collaboration, and re-imagine how we can enhance people's lives and all of the services mentioned support customers to be creative using a variety of machines and technology to improve skills and use their imagination. Originally created with architecture students in mind the Copenhagen FabLab has seen a large uptake from the community and it is now the customers who are teaching each other, proudly developing skills in other people.

Meetingpoint @Lasipalatsi is a library with no books. The library staffs, not often trained librarians, help people with their computers, providing a 'Laptop Doctor' service which covers all aspects from technical support to teaching software use. They will digitise your LP at the Vinyl Bar at sister Library10. This embracing of the future and acknowledgement of peoples needs around technology bodes well for the new Helsinki library planned for opening in 2017. Expect to see some great new spaces created as well as a wonderfully supportive and engaged community.

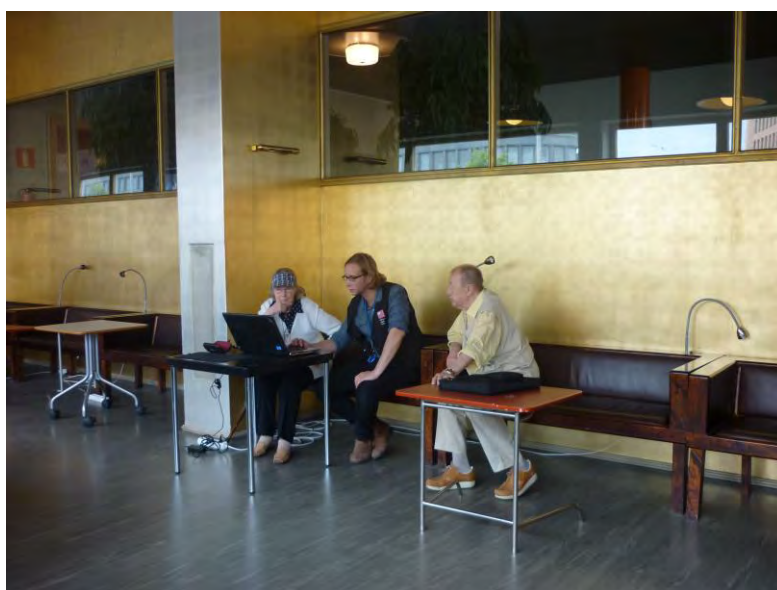


Figure 9 IT help at Meetingpoint@Lasipalatsi

Pat Kosinski the chief executive of Colombo Metropolitan Library in his keynote speech 'Re imaging the roles of public libraries' shared some of the work he and his team have been doing on transforming their library into a 21st century space.

Like most libraries they see an important role of future libraries in hosting events, programmes and learning. Pat acknowledges the need to find new ways of measuring success by taking this route. There is a need to move away from library outputs (what we do), to community based outcomes (what people gain from using our libraries). He encouraged us when doing our planning to ask 'What community goals are we trying to impact with our libraries...what *do* our communities need?'

We need to think deeply about our own community and how libraries can improve the standing of the community as a whole. He shares our dilemmas on how we re-imagine community spaces in the digital age. How do we decide how many books we put in the libraries? Take a look at how many people are in the stacks and what else is happening in our libraries. Mark Jones of IDEO the 'inventor' of 'design thinking' encouraged us to take time to observe our customers behaviour. What are people doing or want to be doing in your library? I observed a librarian in a London library asking people not to sit on the floor to study. There were no places left at the tables and no spare chairs, however the pristine collection remained empty and well lit. This begs the question "Is it ok to use your public library space to store your collection while your customers squeeze into tiny spaces around the edge?" At this same library a large and well-resourced computer lab remained closed and empty because they had no one to run programmes.

In my short time in the library I could see great intentions mismatching the actual needs of the community using the space. I wonder what the future of this library will be. My gentle challenge to open the door and let people use the room and the computers was met with a look of horror and many reasons why that was not a good idea. In contrast to this, in Denmark the concept of 'open libraries' is one way libraries are finding to ensure customers get maximum access to library facilities in times of limited budgets. The 'open library' concept sees some libraries open 24 hours, but generally extended hours, open without staff present. A library card is used to access the space. This was a bold step but in many cases the fears of the librarians' regarding theft and damage have not happened. There are some losses and in some part of the city there are problems but the benefits to the community outweigh the costs.

Parting words from Pat Kosinski

- With a predicted 40% less space required for collections. What are we going to do that is not being done and how do we do it well?
- Mobile devices are taking hold; will people still come to our libraries? We need to embrace the beauty of mobile devices. What are we going to do to keep our customers and their devices in the library?
- Create timely libraries not timeless libraries
- Libraries are democracy's best kept promise
- What can we do that others can't do?
- What happens to the people off the grid? How do we help these people?
- The sweet spot is helping people get online and access the digital world.

How do we do this? Innovation, collaboration, re-imagination

Appendix - List of libraries visited and extra resources

England

Newcastle (Central Library)

<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/leisure-libraries-and-tourism/libraries/city-library>

Library of Birmingham (new Birmingham Central Library) opened 3 September 2013

<http://libraryofbirmingham.com/>

The Hive – Worcester

<http://www.thehiveworcester.org/>

Liverpool Central Library – recently renovated at a cost of £50M

<http://liverpool.gov.uk/libraries/find-a-library/central-library/>

London

Idea Store – Tower Hamlet – leading the way in collaboration and future library thinking for the last 10 years.

Read the story

http://www.ideastore.co.uk/en/containers/universal/about_us_the_idea_story

<http://www.ideastore.co.uk/>

Idea store Whitehall

Idea store Whatney Market - opened 14 May 2013

Canada Water – Southwark Council

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/437/libraries_and_locations/2421/canada_water_library/1

Clapham – Lambeth Council

<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/LeisureCulture/Libraries/LocalLibraries/ClaphamLibrary.htm>

The Netherlands

Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam OBA

When it opened on 7 July 2007 it was the largest Public buildings in Europe. Floor space of 28,500 m² spread out over 10 floors, 1200 seats, of which 600 with Internet-connected computers and a staff of 200.

<http://www.oba.nl/>

DOK – Delft. Home of the innovative DOK Lab

www.dok.info

Denieuwebibliotheek – Almere - Bookshop inspired library opened in March 2010

<http://www.denieuwebibliotheek.nl/>

Helsinki

Library 10 – renowned music library

<http://www.helmet.fi/library10>

Meetingpoint@lasipalatsi

<http://www.helmet.fi/meetingpoint@lasipalatsi>

Sweden

Halmstad Library – Halmstad – architecturally beautiful central library

<http://bibliotek.halmstad.se/>

<http://www.librarybuildings.info/sweden/halmstad-city-library>

Malmo City Library - Malmo

<http://www.malmo.se/stadsbibliotek>

<http://shl.dk/mobile/eng/home/about-architecture/library-culture/halmstad->

Strategy link

http://malmo.se/download/18.1c002f7b12a6486c37280003607/uk_strategi_broschyr_A5.pdf

<http://www.librarybuildings.info/sweden/malmo-city-library>

Stockholm

Kulturehuset – at the centre of Stockholm this facility houses the following libraries. Independent of the city library network

<http://en.kulturhuset.stockholm.se>

- Rum for Barn - for under 7 year olds and their parents and caregivers
- Plattan Library – latest fiction, arts books and international newspapers
- Library Film and Music
- Tiotretton - for 10 to 13 year olds only
- Seritecket – comics and graphic novels library

Stockholm Central – famous Swedish architectural masterpiece designed by Gunnar Asplund

<https://biblioteket.stockholm.se/en>

Sture Bibliotek – 20ms library in the Subway. Example of how to pack a punch in a tiny space

<https://biblioteket.stockholm.se/en/bibliotek/sture-bibliotek>

Denmark

Aalborg

http://www.aalborgbibliotekerne.dk/Aalborg_Public_Libraries-467.aspx

Hjorring

<http://www.librarybuildings.info/denmark/hjorring-library-metropol>

Copenhagen

Copenhagen Central

<https://bibliotek.kk.dk/>

Copenhagen Fablab Valby

<http://kulturogfridid.kk.dk/kultur-valby/copenhagen-fablab>

Rentemestervej Biblioteket

<https://bibliotek.kk.dk/biblioteker/rentemestervej>

<http://www.arkitekturbilleder.dk/bygning-Biblioteket-Rentemestervej-714>