

## Buildings for a new age of libraries: in 2029 we will still have walls

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We have repeatedly heard, in and out of this Conference, about the intrinsic difficulty of knowing what the libraries of the future will look like, even more so in the distant 2029. As Professor Francisco Jarauta pointed out in the opening lecture, to set this challenge up is an act of boldness; maybe even too courageous. We think this is stressed in the case of buildings, which we will proceed to discuss. We consequently agree with architect Charles Mueller (2012), who states the extreme difficulty of making these predictions amidst all the changes that we experience. Nevertheless, let's go.

We can even ask ourselves if in 2029 will there still be buildings for libraries or libraries as a physical, tangible space. We will not dig very deep into this discussion, which has been thoroughly discussed in other places. We simply think that they will exist, but that, evidently, they will have a different shape. That is what we are going to talk about in this text: we will try to take an approach as to what the library building will look like.

This future presence of spaces is supported by the experts general opinion, as said by the report Predictions for a constantly evolving profession by Gómez, Hernández and Merlo (2011) made for FESABID. Researchers linked to this field of relevance from Darkhild (2011) point out that, surprisingly, the challenge represented by the wall-less library, which arises from the development of IT, hasn't reduced, but apparently increased the interest for the library as a physical space. Furthermore, "the new possibilities offered by digital design [precisely this technology] have allowed bold and spectacular architectural experiments".

If we insist on this idea, and on the difficulty of making long-term predictions, we can remember the guessing exercise made in 1995 in Australia, which tried to create a future image of libraries in 2010. Talvé (2011) tells us about four possible scenarios, of which just one predicted reinvention and revitalization of public libraries, which is something that has already happened. The long-discussed bipolarity between physical and virtual libraries is non-existent. Both models have converged and have developed accordingly. As Merlo Verga (2013) said on twitter, "a #library without paper can be a library. A library without books will never be a library. Format is not important." The mixture of digital, social and aesthetic aspects has produced new places, which can be used in a common or individual way for exchange and/or learning.

Therefore, let us imagine how this library will look like. This is our objective in these pages: to make an approximation (more of a bet) to the characteristics that libraries may or may not have in 2029. Even though we will be taking a futurologist's approach, we will try to rely not only on intuition and personal experience (though we will). We will first try to unearth the trends that buildings are following nowadays, which will be our starting point and our beacon to imagine which direction will they follow from now on.

In order to find out about these trends over a method will rely on both bibliography and on observation. From here, we will be able to make some predictions we are looking for, again with help of the experts on this field.

## Trends in library buildings

As we have already stated, we will use and merge the opinions of experts such as Dahlkild (2011), Latimer (2011) or Schaper/Scherer (2012). We will also use the results of the Conference "Futures of Public Library" by Bonet (2010).

**We are still building.** The first thing we must clarify is that the drop in construction hasn't been as drastic as expected. Only the financial crisis has momentarily slowed down this trend. In 2010, 80 new libraries were built, and another 90 were renewed or rebuilt in the U.S., according to ALA; facing 100 and 111, respectively in 2002 (Watkins, 2011). In the future, we probably won't build many new libraries, but we will have to reorganise and transform the existing ones.

**Technological developments.** Technology is present everywhere and its developments are almost imposible to predict. It has radically transformed our collections and the way we access them, and it will undoubtedly determine the evolution of spaces, as it has done in the last decades. Let's remember the big computer areas, net wiring, spaces for processing... they all were necessary novelties back in the time, and now they have frankly fallen into disuse. This technology is still influencing us, through, for example, the extension of radio-frequency (RFID) or the robotization of deposits. Likewise, because of technology we are forced to provide our spaces with many plugs and to control illumination regarding the screens. Another consequence is the tendency towards self-service, allowed by RFID. But this is not all. Right in front of us lay futures such as geopositioning of collections and free spaces, which we will check in our mobile devices.

**A library designed around the patron.** Technological developments produce an increasing availability of e-resources, which has transformed the balance between digital and print resources. The freeing of space that the reduction or blockage of paper collections implies allows us to redesign libraries: instead of designing them around the "book", for its homing and access, we will design it around people, to facilitate their exchange with the library and with another users. Janine Smith (Oberbeeke, 2012) points out that users want to socialise in the library: talk to friends, eat, drink, work in groups, use their phones and use the library 24 hours a day. Furthermore, every service must be presented à la carte, foreseeing their adaptability among all the future needs of those final users. As a result other trends will arise.

**External deposits.** There are huge collections with decreasing use, but which we want to keep because of their value and their potential future usefulness. In the face of this, external deposits for books and paper magazines which occupy some precious space in our libraries are generalised. This deposits are more efficient if they are established in a cooperative way, so as not to save the same title repeatedly and uselessly. Likewise, this allows us to create large deposits subject to robotization, which is extremely costly.

**Academic libraries as spaces for learning.** We redesign it to accomodate users, thinking of them as clients; the library is not as a service provider, but a partner of the student/researcher, who is assisted by library's tools and spaces. Spaces are thought of as spaces to facilitate learning. In order to achieve this, the huge and overwhelming abilities of extraction, treatment and diffusion of information allowed by technology meet here with smaller-scale space, which provides a more human dimension for users.

**Allowing Cooperative work.** Related to the previous point, but including different library tipologies, spaces for group work are designed. Work stations which can be occupied by more than one person are installed, minor rooms with different capacities multiply, areas with round tables are set...

**Less numerous, smaller counters in the center of everything.** The new kind of relationship we will establish with users requires more exchanges thus, integrating the librarian into the user's environment as much as possible. To be seen from everywhere and to see everything.

**Green libraries.** Concern for sustainability are strong and have a significant influence on architectural design. As Edwards (2011) points out, the present tendency to make sustainable libraries is rated on a broad sense on the ideas of modern scandinavian architecture from Aalto and another architects, who stressed the use of sunlight, natural materials, social harmony and contact with nature.

**Reuse of buildings.** Related to what we stated before, reuse of buildings has been revitalised beyond the simple will to preserve the architectural heritage. This ecological aspect of reusing of buildings is now particularly recognised and studied, Hauke and Werner (2012).

Consequently, big-box shops are adapted as libraries<sup>1</sup>, like mainly public ones. That's to say, large commercial areas such as those used by Leroy Merlin or MediaMarkt which have been abandoned by this chains. In this way, we get flexible and open space but also one which needs great adaptation to become friendly and according to our needs. We must also consider the fact that it should have an attractive an easily-recognisable look, which is not easy in an industrial unit and without the support of any popular brand. The Public Library of McAllen, Texas (U.S.) went so far as to win the National AIA Honor Award in 2013 (Gil, 2013a). Commercial studies which led to the decision of placing the shop in that area can also be used, even if it can be argued that they must have been wrong if the shop is now closed. There are some issues, especially regarding sustainability, because this areas are related to the automobilistic culture, which clashes with the urban concept of Europe (less and less every day). Likewise, these industrial units usually have designs which are not easy to reconcile with sustainability.

Reusing buildings also disagrees with the idea that is easier to knock the buildings down and rebuild it as we want than to readapt it according to our needs. This is contrary to the idea of sustainability, because we are not taking into account the environmental impact of such an operation (waste production, energy costs for construction, and not profiting from expenses already made).

**Removing small neighbourhood, department or faculty libraries.** Peripheral centers can't offer a vast array of new services, because, simply, they don't have enough space. These libraries are based on loans and on access to paper documents from small collections and have a hard time to provide a varied services offer. Primarily, they can't offer the diversity of zones that the users demand. "Public libraries seem to be unable to fully satisfy either the needs of the masses or those of niches, due to their general design, which is steadily losing its meaning and its recruitment abilities." (Galluzzi, 2010).

This is a consequence of the "long tail" phenomenon: the only initiatives or services that make sense are either those which bring together a huge variety of offers, like the large shopping malls or those highly specialized ones which take care of market niches, like small and specialised shops (or libraries). That name is given by the graphical representation of the market: its central, high part (high selling objects) is very small and the low curve, representing low selling objects or entities, is very long.

**The library as agora or a place for social meeting and networking.** There is a big trend of libraries, regardless of their physical shape, linked with the social aspect of a community. Libraries are the meeting point, the agora of such a community, be it university, urban, school, etc. This arises directly from the concept of "third

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<sup>1</sup> <http://inhabitat.com/big-box-supermarket-transformed-into-gorgeous-eden-prairie-library-in-minnesota/btr-architects-edenprairie-library2/?extend=1>

place" formulated by sociologist Ray Oldenburg<sup>2</sup>. According to him, these third places beyond house and work are necessary for the development of society, places that people go just for the pleasure of being there: to socialise, to talk, to hang out. The original concept, surprisingly, didn't include libraries, but they have turned out to be its paradigm, being one of the few remaining places with free access and which are open to everybody. Agoras or squares to find shelter, leisure or an appropriate place for working. That's why the concepts of open, public and accesible spaces have become so important in the design of libraries. We adopt urban development as a model to create friendly, accesible and varied spaces: a place for everyone, with corners for every need. In its extreme form, the library becomes essential in urban development. It becomes entangled within the territory, with a good location, easy access and buildings which are more inviting than spectacular; it is also entangled in the neighborhood: providing whatever it needs and becoming a community center, activating depressed areas.

**Iconic architecture.** Somehow related with the previous point, since it also shows a sociopolitical interest in the library as a key element of urban development, the library has become an urban landmark, an element through which companies or directing entities can show their power and their cultural interest. The objective is to obtain a highly attractive and symbolically powerful reference point, the so called "Bilbao effect" or "Guggenheim effect", which means that an iconic building can change the trend of an institution or municipality, creating an attracting pole towards it. Of course, libraries are not alone in this matter, because they share their prominence with another infrastructures, mainly cultural ones, in a competitive movement that has changed architecture at the turn of the millenium and has firmly established a group of "star architects", who are patent idols nowadays.

Buildings such as the gorgeous Public Library of Seattle by Rem Koolhaas and his OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) stuy; the national libraries of France (Dominique Perrault) or the UK (the British Library at St.Pancras made by Sir Colin St.John Wilson); or the "Black Diamond", an extension of the Royal Library of Copenhagen, made by Schmidt, Hammer and Lassen. In Spain we can't help but remember the failed library of the University of Sevilla (Hadid), the CRAI at Deusto (by Moneo) or the Municipal Libary of Tenerife (Herzog & de Meuron).

This trend also coincides with the self-promoting needs of libraries, because we can use buildings as advertising elements. A beautiful, cozy and/or shocking building helps in the succes of the library, as we have seen, for example, in our beloved Regional Library of Murcia.

**Globalisation of the architectural design and conception of libraries.** Even if the huge diversity of stylistic and architectural experiments that have been tried in libraries during the last two decades constitutes a tendency, we can't deny that there is also a great trend the globalisation of design and conception. Libraries are getting more and more similar and are now highly exchangeable between countries. For example, the famous Media Library in Sendai, Tokyo Ito could be exchanged with the aforesaid Seattle library without any kind of problem. Only a handful of, let's say, local tasted libraries such as the Bibliotheca Alexandrina or the one from the University of Peking remain. However, even these can be conceptually moved to other countries. As libraries, they would work elsewhere.

**Care of the interior.** Within a predominant aesthetic minimalism, the interior of libraries are enriched with carefully designed furniture and the inclusion of artwork on the inside, imitating libraries from the past. In this way, we help to create the desired attractive atmosphere. This is useful to us, distinguishing and tayloring our library (Gil, 2013b)

**Flexibility and adaptability.** Of course, all of these premises require the making of flexible or, even better, adaptable buildings. In the face of the future's changing reality and uncertainty, there is a need for spaces which

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<sup>2</sup> Original edition in 1989. We have used: OLDENBURG, Ray. The great good place :cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community. Cambridge, MA : Da Capo Press, 1999. ISBN: 9781569246818

can be easily and cheaply transformed. In order to respond to the multiplicity of needs, we need to be able to use the same area for several purposes with few changes.

## Spaces in 2029

There are more current libraries already looking at that future. Of course, we have some instantly successful examples which will probably lead our way. Without trying to be exhaustive, but only to draw a rough picture, we can pick among the public libraries the Idea Stores, perhaps the most widely-used example. They try to introduce the concept of shopping malls in libraries, also offering a wide array of training and leisure services, which are added to the traditional ones. They can draw some criticism for some matters such as their commercial overtones which make them lose their public service spirit; or even their name, because the word "library" is forgotten.

Anyway, to be truly aware of the effect that such a public library causes in an user, we mention here José Olcina (2012), travel reporter for El País who spoke about the Public Library of Amsterdam or Openbare Bibliotheek in a very significant way. He pointed out that, previously, libraries did not interest him, but that technological changes had renewed them and specifically in this one "the main hall is already looking, in fact, it looks more like the main entrance to a modern art museum than to a library. The white panels illuminating the stairs state what one can find in every floor: audiovisual material, novels, travel books, science... In any case, the best points of the building are its distribution and its ease... Design, modernity, functionality and, most importantly: light."

On another note, the Arnold Bernhard Library of the Quinnipiac University (Hamden, U.S.) has been designed as a small town, with a main square and social spaces, with much natural light. It hosts from solitary students to work groups and the design tries to stress the idea of home and community, of shelter from extreme business.

Other well-known libraries we could mention are the Brighton Jubilee Library or the Bournemouth University Octagon Library. On this matter, we can look up a database with examples and images of libraries renovated or built after 1995 (besides some other interesting material on this topic) in the site Designing Libraries<sup>3</sup>, promoted by CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals).

With all this information, we can have an approximate idea of the characteristics that future libraries will have. We can break it down in the following key aspects:

- ♦ **User-centered libraries.** Libraries will focus on people and their needs, not on storage mediums and their service. The user will be treated as subject and not as an object; as the leading element of the library and the reason for its existence. As a consequence, academic libraries will be designed with spaces to help the learning process.
- ♦ **Alterable spaces.** The spaces should serve different purposes and change their function easily, even within the same day. The idea is not that every space is completely flexible (that doesn't make sense) but that there is a main group of areas which can be adapted easily to serve new purposes.
- ♦ **Space variety.** Our needs include individual spaces for studying, spacious and isolated, in front of no one; social spaces; lounge-style resting spaces, which allow for individual or common leisure time; cabins for researchers; group work rooms; seminars; classrooms; a venue hall; language laboratories... etc.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk/>

Massis (2012) stated that, apart from technological spaces, users still want a silent, quiet, space which is also good for studying or reading individually. A quiet place for reading, studying or researching and another place prepared for meeting and exchanging. Work will be based on contrasts within the space: new/old or noise/silence. There should be new areas: apart from the space designated for being there, videogame rooms, exhibition rooms, a café.... and whatever we can imagine.

- ♦ **Space division.** All this calls for a division of space, specially because of the different noise levels: we will need a silent room for studying and, regularly, another one for research. We might also need an intermediate room, quite similar to the present ones, and a noisy room, for shared work. It would be interesting if they were exchangeable depending on the season (during exams we will need more of silent spaces). For example, by using a traffic light like the one they use in Carlos III at Colmenarejo. The nature of the library will determine the configuration that it uses: a research library and a public one have different needs. Even when comparing two academic libraries, one dedicated to humanities, and social sciences will require more silence and bigger tables.
- ♦ **Easy-to-read buildings.** This diversity can make the user's life harder, so buildings must be easily readable. One must be able to find his way through the building easily.
- ♦ **Neutral spaces<sup>4</sup>.** This simply means creating comfortable areas, which invite users to hang out: a living room. Likewise, we must guarantee the existence of empty spaces, void areas where everything could happen.
- ♦ **Highly technological spaces.** It no longer makes sense to stuff rooms with computers, but technology will keep on advancing and we will need to equip our libraries with different kinds of technology which won't be accesible to everyone. Right now we have plotters, 3D printers, audiovisual creation workshops, computers and specific applications. Of course, plugs everywhere and wifi service. In 2029, all this things will likely be relics.
- ♦ **Spaces for project development.** In this regard, we will likely still have spaces prepared for the development of projects of any kind, named markerspaces. Laboratories with different tools for the creation of knowledge, chiefly 3D printers, scanners, etc., similar to present day MediaLab or YouMedia<sup>5</sup> as explained by Karen Hartman in this same seminar.
- ♦ **Nice spaces.** Aesthetics and comfor will be of the utmost importance. Our spaces must be appealing and the library must have great seduction skills.
- ♦ **Sustainable infrastructures.** The buildings must be sustainable in a double way: in their construction (reusing old buildings and materials, exploitation of local sources, etc.) and in their maintenance (adequate orientation, natural ventilation, usage of renewable energy sources, recycling of grey and rain water, consumption control, durable materials, etc.)
- ♦ **Not only does the collection leave the center, it is also pushed aside.** External, centralized deposits are established and the frequent-use collection is accesible but not integrated into the work

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<sup>4</sup> 14 septiembre 2012. <http://bibliotecas2029.wordpress.com/2012/09/14/nsw/comment-page-1/#comment-94>

<sup>5</sup> <http://youmedia.tumblr.com/>

areas. This rule is not always observed: for instance, a comic collection should be next to a relaxing space.

- ♦ **Integration of librarians and other personnel.** The librarian gets integrated into the spaces, removing barriers such as counters: his mission is direct support. This requires other personnel: experts in media creation, IT consultants, etc. At the same time, the back office reappears to take on some tasks (as a technical process) but more centralized and shared.
- ♦ **Less prohibitions.** We allow users to eat, talk...
- ♦ **Large libraries.** Confronting the long tail trend by Galuzzi (2010), estimations say that libraries will maybe become smaller in absolute terms since they will no longer need huge storage areas, but also that their spaces will be more varied. We agree with the second affirmation, but can't do the same with the first one: even though we will indeed need less space for paper collections, the diversity of services will require a large amount of space.
- ♦ **Imitation of other concepts.** Let us learn from museums (and less so from book shops) by observing what is happening to them: interactive and attractive spaces; and let us also learn from stores. Lets not make poor imitations of book shops, like the novelty tables, but let's learn from user-oriented organizations.

As a brief conclusion, we can say that all these concepts are likely to be applied, but the future will be made by our social and technological environment and mainly by our work. Each and everyone of us makes the future. Furthermore, we must also keep the principle that all these changes should have a purpose. In the end, according to the popular saying, change and improvement are different issues.

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