

Libraries in conforming and nonconforming places

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ABSTRACT

Libraries remained preeminently public spaces. The internet's proliferation and the interference of the virtual space into the real public one led to the Mediatheques' birth, as an alternative to traditional libraries. A counteraction consists of library arrangements in nonconforming places, attractive by the uniqueness of their ambient, but these still address to a niche sector. A dual library, equipped both with printed book stands and multimedia support, attractive and interactive, arranged in a nonconforming place, having a well-established theme can become an attractor in the public space through its enlarged addressability.

Keywords: library, mediatheque, interactivity, attractor, public space

I. INTRODUCTION - THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBRARIES

“Libraries appeared to satisfy a fundamental need of the society: to maintain and share to the future generations the knowledge acquired along the time, recorded on a sustainable media” [1]. The first written records date back in 3000 before Christ. These contained commercial archives, hence the first libraries were aimed at accounting written records, but there were also collections of anthems, poetry, mathematic texts and others aside these. Such libraries were located in the Mesopotamia temples. The Egyptian libraries appeared around 2400 before Christ, also found in temples, having the function of religious and cultural centre. In Egypt, important crowned individuals were holding collections of important books.

The term of [2] library appears for the first time in the civilisation history at the beginning of 2000 BC. The first inscriptions were made on [3] papyrus and the writing tool was a brush made of cane with a sharp top. Aside papyrus, inscriptions were also made on clay plates or on [4] parchment. Inscriptions on clay plates dating back in 2600 BC were discovered in the Sumer temple.

The first library in the true meaning of the word appears in the 17th century in Ninive BC and it aims at educating future generations. It made available a series of books about culture and various information about Mesopotamia.

In the Roman Empire, everything changes, the library is no longer a tool of educating the population, but it becomes a private one, a sort of pride of the social standing. The importance of education is once again put on the first place in Byzantium and Islam. In 353, an imperial and a university library are built in Constantinople.

“In Europe, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the political and social chaos and the economic decline also impact the libraries. The western institution, which succeeds to further ensure the necessary conditions for their existence, is the Christian monastery, which sets out its foundation between 500 and 550. The monastery libraries were having three roles: to make available a place for spiritual reflection, to archive religious texts and to copy religious texts or sometimes even secular texts” [5]

II. THE HISTORY OF LIBRARIES

A. The classical period

The Alexandria library is considered one of the greatest libraries of the ancient world. It was developed and it operated during the dynasty of Ptolomeu in the 3rd century BC. Another large library was built in the honour of Tiberiu Julius Celsus Palamaenus with the purpose of storing over 1200 scrolls. Following an earthquake, the library was destroyed and currently we can only see the remains of the construction.

B. The late Antiquity

In Antiquity and then in the Middle Ages, as opposed to the classical period, several types of libraries were emerging:

- imperial libraries
- patriarchal libraries
- monarchical libraries
- private libraries

Once with the emergence of the monarchical libraries, part of the classic Greek works was destroyed and only the ones with a religious look were maintained. The monks were the ones writing the books meant for monk education. A high number of books were written, filling all the libraries from churches and monasteries.

The imperial libraries hosted many books, they also included volumes written by famous classic authors such as Plato, Aristotle and several others. These libraries developed and introduced a sort of school for education of the locals, organised around the library. In the 5th century, the Constantinople Library was becoming the largest library from Europe, with storage of over 120,000 volumes, but it did not last long because it burnt following a fire.

The patriarchal library was serving more as a warehouse for ecumenical councils. The private library is usually managed by church representatives or by aristocracy.

C. The Islamic countries

In the 8th century, the Muslims have begun importing the paper manufacturing method from China and open a factory in Bagdad. Once with the emergence of paper, the Muslims started to write more and more and to open libraries even in the smallest Islamic towns. [6] “Islam is also a monotheistic religion, it is also the belief in a single God, and aside the Koran, which is

the fundamental book, it also acknowledges the Psalms, Torah and the Gospel. The golden age of Islam, also referred to as the Islamic Renaissance, took place between the 7th and the 8th and in the 13th century AD until the 16th century and it overlaps precisely upon the European Middle Ages. Starting with the importance given to knowledge in the Islamic religion, an idea inspired by the prophet Mohamed himself, the representatives of this culture, aside the fact that they generated a lot of scientific, technological and artistic innovations, have “filed away” a great part of the ancient knowledge in all the fields, playing an essential role in their perpetuation in time, feeding in their thirst for knowledge from the streams of the Persian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, Greek, Roman or Byzantine civilizations. The reconsidering of the cultural ancient values took place in the Western European culture hardly in the 15th - 16th centuries, in the Islamic world the phenomenon was already at its peak; a great part of these values was kept precisely due to Islam and the enlightened personalities of the European Renaissance reached them partially in this way. By writing the knowledge and by the cultural mix, the achievements of Islam influenced the evolution of the civilization on all the continents.”

D. The Renaissance

In the 15th century, a sort of “academy of scientists” is formed in the Malestian library, founded by Malatesta Novello. Scientists and church people had various collections of books they wanted to share to the public avid for knowledge. (Fig.1,2.) The Laurentian library from Florence holds over 11,000 manuscripts and 4,500 printed books. It was built inside the Medicean Basilica di San Lorenzo di Firenze monastery under the patronage of Clement the 7th. The Laurentian library (based on the name of Lorenzo de Medici) was famous for its architecture planned and built by Michelangelo. The corridor was built over the former monachal chambers, having an entry from the upper level of the monastery. There is a stair that leads to the lecture room and it occupies half of the corridor floor. Because the lecture room was arranged in an already existing room, Michelangelo had

to lower the weight of the walls, the system of frames columns it used, lowering the volume and weight of the arcades in between.

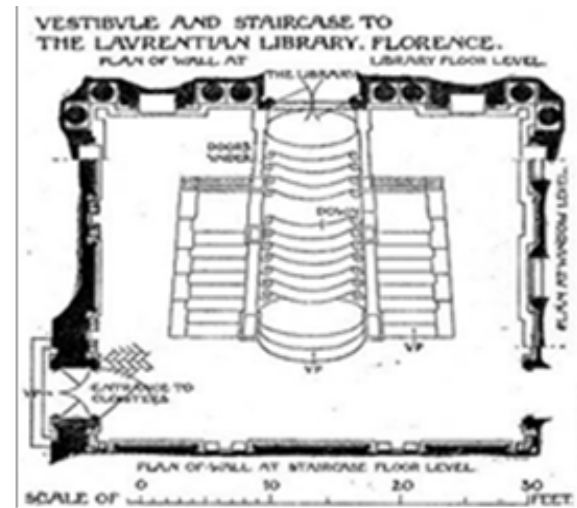


Fig. 1 The layout of the Laurentian library stair
Source:<http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/12.133/3916>



Fig. 2 The Laurentian Library lecture room

E. The Enlightenment Age

The 17th and 18th centuries were the golden age of libraries. The Chetham Library from Manchester is the world’s oldest public library opened in 1653 with books in English. Another library of fairly large sizes and known for the impressive number of volumes, over 5,000, is the British Museum library founded in 1751. In the 18th century, the books become public and they are changed from parochial to borrow libraries.

F. National libraries

The first national library was founded in 1753,

meant for the public with the aim of having access to more knowledge. This library within the British Museum had a room dedicated to reading, which was opened in 1957. Subsequently, a library regulation to aid the future libraries was written.

G. The libraries of the 20th century

The libraries started to give a very high interest on the outer look, as there were built a lot of libraries in various architectural styles with modernist influences. Accent was put on the internal surface of the premises, on the way that the shelves were divided, the reading areas etc. The lighting was among the most important elements in such a space meant for reading. (Fig.3.) An example of library where a focus is put on the most appropriate use of space is the Municipal Library from Wolfsburg, built by the architect Alvar Alto in 1958-1962.



Fig.3 Arh Alvar Alto, Wolfsburg Municipal Library, Germany 1958-1962 Source:<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/565131453211550725/>

III. TYPES OF LIBRARIES

Depending on the activity field, libraries are divided in:

- classical libraries, focused on collections of text and graphics
- mediatheques: multimedia libraries, electronic libraries

A. Classical libraries, focused on collections of text and graphics

These libraries are usually the traditional state ones, university libraries, school libraries etc. Generally, university or school libraries are connected to an educational unit with the aim of

helping the student in finding the school curriculum and to “push” them towards a research, closer-knowledge stage on several interesting things. Harvard is among the greatest university libraries in the world. In 1990, the Congress Library became the world’s largest library, containing universal collections in over 450 languages. The National Library of Romania was opened in 2012 and it is included in the top best libraries in the world, surpassing the public library from New York.

B. Mediatheques - multimedia libraries/ electronic libraries

The emergence and proliferation of Internet led to the appearance of mediatheques, as an alternative to the traditional, physical-media library. The mediatheques contained originally a rich background of albums, musical parts, books and art magazines, audio and video tapes and subsequently CDs and DVDs. In some of these places, art exhibitions or seminars could be organised.

The electronic libraries provide books, newspapers, magazines, video content (movies, documentaries), audio records (music, audio books) - all in electronic form, mediated in digital interfaces addressing the two involved senses: seeing and hearing. These are of two types: the library of a computer program or collections of electronic data interconnected by means of computer networks (Internet).

The contemporary libraries can be exclusively electronic or can be developed in “electronic sectors” of some traditional libraries that also contain printed book sections. Some of them are institutions, other are constituted in integral parts of some university institutions, museums etc.

(Fig.4,5,6.) The “Ars Electronica” Center from Linz, Austria, is not a mediatheque in itself, but a visual arts centre with a multidisciplinary, interactive and educational character. Although the new artistic environments assume the clearance of the museum criterion - idea taken since the historical avant-garde - the suppression of the material media by digital technique leading to a full opening, the removal of the museums is nevertheless an illusion provided that the Internet already develops its own museum, its own

galleries (websites, platforms or networks). The contact of the receiver with the work of art remains a remote one, intermediated by the PC display.



Fig. 4. Ars Electronica Center, Linz Photo: A. Racolța

The “Ars Electronica” Center plays somehow paradoxically precisely the role of museum of electronic art, or better said of exhibition space or manifestation media provided that it facilitates the direct contact with an ephemeral product, be it real or virtual, resulted following an act of creation sustained by computer use. Moreover, “Ars Electronica” is at the same time the place where a number of specific projects are released, provided that it has an interdisciplinarity with a multitude of scientific areas. The public is at its turn encouraged to interact with the “Exhibits” from the museum in a ludic process meant for all ages. The collaboration between artists and scientists in approaching some complex themes (climate change, population increase, environmental pollution etc.) is completed by the direct intervention of the visitors.



Fig. 5. Ars Electronica Center, Linz Photo: A. Racolța



Fig. 6. Ars Electronica Center, Linz Photo: A. Racolța

IV. REUSING DECOMMISSIONED PLACES AS LIBRARIES

A “resistance” counter-reaction in successfully increasing the virtual media is the development of libraries in nonconforming spaces, attractive due to ambience, but these address to a niche sector, many of us preferring today a digital library, online or individual study at home, on the Internet.

The spatial features and the old functionality of such buildings often refrain powerfully on the new utility, particularly when the new library becomes a thematic one, either by the provided study material or by the internal or external “scenography” that often defines its title. Specific examples are various and plenty:

A. Bookstore Dominican church Maastricht

Architects: Merckx and Girod

Surface: 1200 sqm

Year: 2007

(Fig.7,8.) This example is completely different from the form in which we usually see a library or a book store. The desacralisation of a church is a dubitable process in terms of morality, which can bring the odium of the religious community, but in this case the new designation is not a frivolous one (such as a record library, as for example, in other cases). It is about a development that somewhat reminds about the past image because at the beginning, some of the libraries were also found inside monasteries, churches, temples. The architects Merckx and Girod received a project assuming the development of a library in a nonconforming space - a Dominican church/ This is a religious edifice built

in the 13th century, in a Gothic style. The same architects designed two other libraries for the same client, but this time something special was intended.



Fig. 7. Bookstore în Dominican Church Sursa: <http://www.dezeen.com/2007/12/04/a-shop-in-a-church-by-merkx-girod-architecten/>



Fig .8. Bookstore în Dominican Church Source: <http://www.dezeen.com/2007/12/04/a-shop-in-a-church-by-merkx-girod-architecten/>

Although originally the customer's intent was to divide the chosen area on two levels, this intention was not appreciated by the architects because they wanted to maintain and value the beauty of the church. To satisfy both sides, the area was divided in two, one part compartmented on two levels and the other left free. The al-

tar was transferred in a coffee shop with a cross-shaped central table. The compartmenting of the library itself was made by means of a black steel structure that did not affect the building strength structure. In 2008, this development received the title of the most beautiful library in the world, given by The Guardian. To highlight the beauty of the church, restoration works were executed and a minimalistic furniture was proposed to clear the premises. The indoor lighting is one of the most important aspects of the development because it was intended to have a lighting to remind of the light given by candles that once used to burn in the church.

B. Lyuan library

Architects: Li Xiaodong

Location: Beijing, China

Year: March 2011 - October 2011

Surface: 175 sqm

It was intended to create a space where the locals would feel comfortable and as close to the nature. [7] The construction is executed in a proportion of 90% from local materials found around the site. The outer walls are made of glass panels covered with wooden "canes" found at the locals, with the aim of preventing the light from penetrating directly inside, positioned on a steel frame. (Fig.9.)



Fig 9. Arh Li Xiaodong, Liyuan Library, 2011 Source: <http://www.archdaily.com/256525/liyuan-library-li-xiaodong-atelier/>

Aside this aspect, the "construction case" falls good in the landscape. The interior is divided on several levels and each space is used to store

books, such as the surface from between the levels. Each level has several functions, the stairs are used as a seating area and for book storage, the windows are divided in several beams, forming selves for books. A large part of the books from this library is donated by people or organisations. The materials, the colour range, as also the construction techniques, all of them are designed to fall within this small construction in nature. The simplicity of the parallelepiped structure somehow replicates the rural constructions from China, made from materials provided by nature, waiving the appearance of architectural design. The Liyuan Library represents a major discrepancy as against what currently happens in China.

C. Book mountain library

Architects: MVRDV

Location: Spijkensisse, The Netherlands

It is a library similar on the outside with the classic Dutch farms. (Fig.10,11.) The construction has the shape of a pyramid with brick walls and the roof is made of glass on wood structure. The name of the library comes from the spiral made of book selves, routes and terraces that come around the central space on a length of 480 m on a height developed on the 5 shelf levels going upwards to the central coffee shop positioned towards the pyramid top.



Fig 10. Arh MVRDV, Book mountain Spijkensisse, The Netherlands Source.:<http://www.dezeen.com/2012/10/04/book-mountain-library-pyramid-by-mvrdv/>

Because the natural light penetrates directly into the room, there is the risk for the books to degrade in time. The library also contains an auditorium, an education centre, rooms, offices, stores and a chess club. The shelves are made from recycled fireproof flower pots.



Fig 11. Arh MVRDV, Book mountain Spijkensisse, The Netherlands Source.:<http://www.dezeen.com/2012/10/04/book-mountain-library-pyramid-by-mvrdv/>

D. Library bus

Architect: Peter Thuvander, Martin Hedensrom

Location: Kiruna, Sweden

(Fig.12,13.) A new innovating location for a library was designed and built by some architects in a bus. This library fulfils several functions such as library and a small cinema. The bus shape is designed to include a maximum of services. The front part of the bus is organised as a traditional library with several shelves and a chair.



Fig 12. Library Bus, Kiruna, Sweden, Source: <http://www.shearyadi.com/myworld/library-bus-of-the-year-by-the-swedish-librarian-society/>

The back part is more for a young public and it includes other media, such as music, movie and computer games. Aside this, there is a couch to listen to music. The back part of the bus can be used for

classes and movie projections. The bus function is not only a book transportation means, but also a culture recipient and a meeting place. During the night, the bus becomes a lamp to attract the people around. The shelf frames are made of aluminium and are covered with white paint. The chairs are made of MDF. The floor is made of circular grey rubber.



Fig 13. Library Bus, Kiruna, Sweden, Source: <http://www.shearyadi.com/myworld/library-bus-of-the-year-by-the-swedish-librarian-society>

V. CONCLUSIONS - ARGUMENT FOR THE POTENTIAL OF CONTEMPORARY LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT IN NONCONFORMING SPACES TO RECOVER THE PUBLIC SPACE

A dual library, equipped both with printed book sections and with multimedia information based on most recent technology, attractive and interactive, developed in a nonconforming place and with a well-established theme operating as a “hook”, as an attractor, could be a successful solution, addressing simultaneously several typologies of culture consumers and several categories of age. Such a library would be successful if the material provided here free of charge can only be found on internet if purchased. A potential multifunctional character, permanent or temporary (the literary coffee shop, small theatre, small concerts or events, book releases, lectures, projections etc.) can be an additional point for the operation of such a library. Such places can also help the parents with premises developed for children (kids area) to provide a diversity of specific activities yet “masked”, focusing towards the educational side based on the ludic,

attractive and interactive character of the learning “interface”.

The optics based on community acknowledgment of a value of a decommissioned edifice (historical, aesthetical, economic or just sentimental value) can transform a building that from various reasons became non cost-effective for a certain functionality, in an attractor, by recovering and re-operating it as a public endowment (multimedia library), yet maintaining the thematic of the old function to facilitate acceptance from the local community that it involved. By its new function, a plus of value can be given into the local community public space. The overall local community can even be reinforced by the accession of several categories of age to the same cultural objective based on the existing thematic of the edifice, also outsourced in the circumstantial space. The mix between the various sub-cultures can be achieved by arranging such a cultural pole with extended targeting, because the inflow of culture consumers from outside the respective adjacency can be important; by a reverse process, the thematic value of the place can increase on urban level by inserting it into the awareness of the new “customers” coming from other areas of the town or even from other cultural environments.

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