



News 2001/01

Section on Library Buildings and Equipment

Editorial

By Hellen Niegaard

Looking for professional inspiration!

Once again, the section on Library Buildings and Equipment, invite professionals from all over the world to take advantage of the yearly IFLA Conference and meet ahead of the conference.

As an official pre-conference seminar the 12th Seminar of the Section of Library Buildings and Equipment takes place immediately prior to the IFLA conference from August 15th to the 17th, at Boston Northeastern University. The seminar focuses on challenges provoked by the digital revolution, seriously affecting library facilities: both existing and proposed. If you are looking for new solutions, evaluating old ones, or keeping up-to-date with the newest developments, be sure to attend the seminar. Programme information on page 3.

Also do not miss the section's Open Session at the IFLA Conference. It provides another active forum for the range of issues facing library professionals and architects, when preparing new or renovating old library buildings. Join the section Tuesday 21st (see page 4). The Committee, its members are listed on page 4, meet twice in Boston. Observers are welcome. Saturday the 18th: 11.30-14.20 (meeting 31) and Friday the 24th: 08.00-10.00 (meeting 216). Agenda will be mailed electronically to the committee soon, if not, kindly contact Joan.DeBeer@nlsa.ac.za.

New publications on Library buildings

"Library Buildings in a changing environment", IFLA Publications 94 (ISBN 3-598-21819-2). The proceedings of the 11th Seminar of the Section, which took place in Shanghai 1999, have recently been published and offer a range of stories describing library buildings all over the world, from China to Warsaw to Catalonia. Anyone planning a library building must read this book, price etc see www.ifla.org/III/misc/lbca.htm .

In Norway the Norwegian Directorate of Public Libraries has published a beautiful and interesting short introduction to ten new library buildings from the last decade "Norwegian Public Library Buildings 1990-2000". The publication pays special attention to architectural aspects and is written by Mari Lending. Text in Norwegian and English. It can be purchased from Statens Bibliotekstilsyn, P.Box 8145 Dep., Oslo N-0033, Norway. E-mail: sb@bibtils.no .

Share the latest news with your colleagues abroad

Do not hesitate to let other members of the section and readers of the newsletter know about local building programmes, progress or problems of general interest. Contributions should reach me before October 1st.

And finally please send any changes in address to section secretary Joan De Beer. Mail addresses on page 4.

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More reuse than new departure

Trends in Danish library architecture By
Jens Lauridsen, Deputy director,
The regional library of Northern Jutland

PIAZZA SANTISSIMA ANNUNZIATA in Florence is one of the world's most beautiful squares from the early Renaissance. Created as a charming entity, surrounded by loggias, it captivates you with its harmony and severe geometry. The architecture is so elevated and refined that it is said of the Annunziata Square "that here no questions are posed, only answers given". The same cannot be said for Danish library building in the past decade. There is little evidence of wholeness and unity, on the contrary most building has been in the shape of extensions or conversions of existing houses, and generally speaking there are more questions left unanswered than definitive answers given.

IT-development

There are several reasons for this situation. The most important being that the library concept is in a state of flux and that is to a great extent due to the IT-development. Since the first libraries in ancient times and up to this day the library concept has been synonymous with an edited collection of materials. This attitude has been reflected over the years in buildings, which are designed with maintenance and promotion of the collection in mind.

Redefinition of the library concept

Today we are on the lookout for a new library concept. The swift digitising of a lot of information limits the need for maintaining physical collections. The virtual library is bound to render superfluous many users' traditional physical visits to the library. What will be the consequences of this for the future function of the library? We do not know precisely yet, and until a new library concept has been defined, we shall probably not see any markedly different new libraries. A precise definition of function and contents is the prerequisite for new library architecture.

For the time being we shall have to "content" ourselves with conversions and extensions; realize that the libraries of today are not to be constructed as a "unity" on the basis of manifest professional and political visions of a new library. It is much more likely that urgent space problems in the libraries are going to be solved by more or less haphazard local political compromises: An ailing shopping centre with expired leases, a closed-down factory or nursing home etc.

That is the way things are right now. On the one hand it is imperative to tackle the situation as it is and get the optimal result out of this conversion or that extension. On the other hand it is extremely important to learn from the experience of previous library conversions and stick to a new definition of the library concept, which is going first of all to ensure the continued exis-

tence of the libraries and secondly will lead to new library buildings with an innovative and visionary architecture.

Conversions and extensions

The set task first. Obviously it is often going to be problematic having to design a library in an already existing building. The distribution of the rooms may be wrong for the library, it may not be easily accessible, e.g. on the first floor, some times spread on several floors. It might be a building which does not really lend itself to the purpose. You might choose to ignore that and just concentrate on designing the library in the best possible way under the given circumstances. Let the library speak for itself; trust to its age-old value and power of attraction - as a library.

This strategy - which is incidentally not to be recommended - may succeed if the project is carried out at the most professional level possible. For example, a library with limited opening hours, placed in a shopping centre with long opening hours, is bound to be regarded more as an irritation than a service. Whereas you will create the best libraries, where the positive elements of the surroundings have been integrated into the local library concept. An "open architecture" which places the library in a dynamic context as a pivotal information and meeting ground. That has often been the case. A library placed in a shopping centre will arrange cultural activities together with a bookshop or other traders. A library placed in a cultural centre will be in charge of the promotion of all the centre's activities.

A library built in conjunction with a town hall will coordinate municipal information activity with the town hall and will offer "Quick service" to the citizens of the municipality. A library - in whichever centre it may be placed - will endeavour to synchronize and adapt its opening hours to the centre. The point is that the good library is totally and actively aware of its position.

The atmosphere of the library

It is important that the users, consciously or subconsciously, realize the idea behind the library's placing. It is equally important to understand that library architecture is not just a question of creating an impressive framework - when it comes to the point it is the atmosphere that counts.

You only have to look at the way libraries are traditionally described in literature to see that atmosphere is what it is all about. Atmosphere is closely related to architectural expression and at times the right ambiance is a most enhancing factor. If a library were to be placed in a former electric power station it would be a great shame to wipe out any traces of the building's past function. A certain amount of reuse would be appropriate and show respect for the history of the building. In this way the library gains an extra dimension, and its function as the living link between experience and future options is firmly established. Only by recognizing its function as part of a whole can the library profile be firmly drawn.

The future

This element is so valuable, that it should be incorporated in the new library concept, which has to be defined following the tech-

nological revolution. The library as society's open and democratic space. A library concept which to a greater extent defines the library as a current and changeable cultural process than as a building, which houses collections. A definition true to the traditional ideal of the library as guarantor of free and equal access to information, but which is also fully accepting the changes in the world around us. These changes are due to the information technology and to the competitive elements, which have emerged. Libraries have to compete with expanding TV-media and entertainment industry, and also with other cultural institutions and commercial agents on the information market. This competition demands keen awareness, not cheap plagiarism. The libraries must go their own way, do research into sociological development, take part in it and in that way sharpen their identity. It is an awesome and very exciting task to define a new library concept.

A task which must be solved by the cooperating library service at local, national and international level in close contact with users and politicians.

Many questions remain unanswered in this interim period. One half of our service is rooted in the classical, retrospectively oriented library world, whereas the other is well on its way into a fascinating and dynamic cosmos, where the library's aim will undoubtedly be seen as more visionary.

Two elements of the ongoing process can be singled out: open-

ness and flexibility. A mental openness towards the community as a whole and towards any potential competitor or cooperation partner. An openness which should be reflected in both the interior and exterior architecture – and of course also in those libraries which apart from offering virtual access round the clock also offer you much extended opening hours in which to pay a visit – in surroundings intelligently adapted to the ever moving times.

Take a lesson from the Renaissance!

Let us for a moment return to Florence. One of the most important libraries of the Renaissance period is to be found here. The Laurentian Library was built in the middle of the 1500s as a beautiful framework for the old family library of the Medicis. The library was designed by Michelangelo himself, who thereby created the basis for the manieric architecture, which suppressed classical ideals in preference to power, expressionism and originality.

Let us have a "new manierism" in library architecture and the library might well become the most important public building of the 20th century. For it carries a message and an idea by virtue of being the foundation of knowledge and culture in development oriented democratic societies.

Extract from an article, published in "Bibliotekspressen".

“Future Places: Reinventing Libraries in the Digital Age”

August 15- 17, 2001, Boston U.S.A. Section on Buildings and Equipment

The digital promise has had a dramatic impact on the planning of library facilities: both existing and proposed. Library space must be designed to accommodate user-driven technologies, as well as storage and delivery technologies that are required to provide access to digital information. In the midst of these changes, traditional library services remain and continue to place demands upon library space, which is still required to house ever-expanding paper format collections. It is critical for traditional elements to coexist peacefully with those resources created by advances in technology. This Seminar will examine the impacts of new and traditional services upon the library facility within the contexts of new buildings and the renovation of older facilities.

The Section's XII Buildings Seminar takes place at Boston Northeastern University prior to the Boston IFLA Conference and will provide an exciting opportunity for librarians from around the world to exchange information about recent developments in library building planning in the digital age. Seminar papers and discussions will address general planning issues, including lighting, furniture, computer wiring; and case studies, and will discuss both the successes and failures of the projects. Complementing the papers will be two half-day site visits to four

important library projects in the Boston area. Through this mix of presentations, it is planned that not only descriptive information, but also critical, evaluative planning skills will be engendered.

To address these issues the Seminar has assembled a distinguished group of international experts on library buildings. Jay K. Lucker, noted building consultant and retired Director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Library, is the keynote speaker. Among the speakers are Frances Awcock (Australia), Aaron Cohen (USA), Andrew McDonald (United Kingdom), Theam Siew (Singapore), and Jianzhong Wu (China).

For Further Information please contact: Barton M. Clark b-clark@uiuc.edu or visit the XII Buildings Seminar website at: <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/administration/ifla.htm>. Seminar fee: approx. 250 US\$.

Libraries in the 21st Century: Key Issues

Open session:

August 21, 12.30 – 15.00 (Meeting 135)

Building upon the XII Library Buildings Seminar this year's program will offer three papers that complement the theme of "Future Places: Reinventing Libraries in the Digital Age." An update, with speakers and topics, will be posted in late May or early June at : <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/administration/ifla.htm>. For further information please contact Barton M. Clark b-clark@uiuc.edu.

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