

May 2003

Public Libraries in Singapore 2002/2003

Background

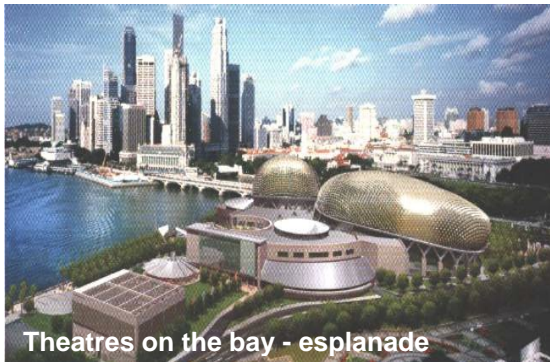
The National Library Board of Singapore oversees the planning, development and operations of the National Reference Library, the public libraries and the government department libraries. It also sells value-added services such as planning, development and management of libraries and packaging of information services to any client, in and outside Singapore.

In 1992, the Minister for Information and the Arts set up a broad-based committee to review all publicly-funded libraries, with the aim of improving access to libraries and resources.

In 1995, the Library 2000 report was completed and the recommendations accepted by government. The National Library was converted to a statutory board and renamed the National Library Board (NLB).

The public library system is a key component of the NLB. It comprises two regional libraries, 20 community libraries and 37 community children's libraries.

New libraries in 2002



Theatres on the bay - esplanade



Reading Lounge – looking out to the seafront

[library@esplanade](#)

On 13 Sep 2002, the [library@esplanade](#) opened its doors to the public and entertained 3,800 people on its opening day.

This is the NLB's first niche library that focuses the performing arts. Resources on four subjects were made available: dance, music, theatre, film.

The library came about in a rather unusual manner when the government planned for a new mega-performing arts center at the seafront. To leverage on the NLB's traffic, the arts center approached the NLB to asked if the Board was keen to explore having a library dedicated to the performing arts at its new center.

The NLB deliberated on the proposal and decided that it would be a great idea to take this opportunity to test the idea of a niche library, focusing on specific subjects.

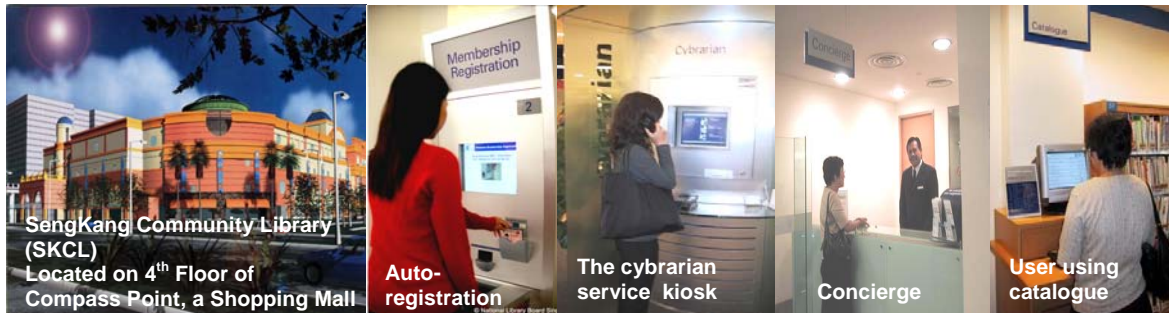
After 2 years of planning, the library opened. It occupies over 2,200 sq m of the third level of the arts center and has a number of new services prototyped:

- i) a piano practice room which allows for individuals or groups to try out piano pieces using a piano located in the room. Users are allowed to bring in their own musical instruments,
- ii) two video-screening rooms equipped with state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment, for groups of four or eight,
- iii) premium membership for music scores, which allows members to borrow up to 8 library items, including items from a large music scores collection, for an annual fee of S\$20.60, and
- iv) music sampling posts which facilitates users listening to CDs in the library while they are there.



library@esplanade attracts both the general public and members of the performing arts community. Since its opening in September 2002, loans totaled 338,028 and visitorship totaled 869,468 to date (June 2003)

SengKang Community Library – A Totally DIY Library



For the past 7 years, the NLB had been automating its services systematically. By 2001, almost all library transactions were automated, except for the registration of new members and the enquiry service.

In 2001, when the Board started planning for SengKang Community Library, the project team felt that time was ideal for the Board to try out a new concept, ie. prototype a library without any staff onsite, and allow users to conduct all library transactions without the physical presence of staff.

At that point in time, it was decided that development work should start to automate the registration work of new members. Enquiry service would be enabled and facilitated via a cybrarian enquiry kiosk.

On 1 December 2002, the SengKang Community Library opened its door to the public. 12,300 people walked in on its opening day. 13,900 library items were borrowed, 148 new members registered themselves and 255 enquiries were received via the cybrarian enquiry kiosk.

The automated registration service is delivered via a touch-screen which allows a new member to key in his/her personal particulars. At the end of the data-entry process, the user is asked if he/she wants to have a membership card. If so, a card will be generated at the kiosk automatically for the user.

The cybrarian enquiry kiosk operates using a PC co-browsing facility and a telephone is linked to a Librarian's phone. When a user picks up the phone, he is automatically linked

to the Librarian's at a remote site, and he is able to ask his question. The Librarian will use the co-browsing facility on the PC screen to show the user the search strategy used to get to the resources to answer for his enquiry. The session ends when the user gets the answer to his question.

The SengKang Community Library is very well-used, and has achieved loans of 868,589 and visitorship of 636,208 since it opened on 1 December 2002 to end May 2003. Registration of new members and number of enquiries received via the cybrarian service have been encouragingly high, comparable to usage level in other similar libraries.

This means that even without a customer service counter, users are able to obtain services via other channels provided. NLB is monitoring the usage of this library closely before it decides on whether to implement the concept at other NLB libraries.

In transforming the NLB from a traditional public library to a lifestyle library with a wide range of enhanced services, the NLB managed to increase the number of loans and visitors to the libraries, from 10 million loans in 1994 to 31.7 million in 2002, and from 6 million visitors to over 31.5 million during the same period.

Future plans

We are now upgrading a community library to a regional library in Jurong East, and planning for a Totally Do-It-Yourself library on a larger scale at the Queenstown Community Library. This has a floor area about twice the floor area of the SengKang Community Library.

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