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CAN LIBRARY SPACE BE AVANT-GARDE?

CZY PRZESTRZEŃ BIBLIOTECZNA MOŻE BYĆ AWANGARDOWA?

Abstract

The library is described as a temple of knowledge and evokes rational and organised places. The crisis of reading that came with the rise of new technologies has redefined the meaning and functioning of the facilities. Contemporary realisations defy the traditionally perceived library space. For designers, they are becoming an opportunity to turn the boldest visions into reality. The result is spectacular spaces, often even avant-garde – breaking with the trends, introducing non-standard and innovative solutions. This paper presents examples of avant-garde library reading rooms, discussing their traditionally understood function and aesthetics.

Keywords: avant-garde, library, library space, reading room

Streszczenie

Biblioteka określana jest świątynią wiedzy i jako taka przywołuje skojarzenia z miejscem racjonalnym i zorganizowanym. Kryzys książki, który nastąpił wraz z pojawieniem się nowych technologii, wymagał redefinicji znaczenia i sposobu funkcjonowania obiektów. Współczesne realizacje przeczą tradycyjnie widzianej przestrzeni bibliotecznej. Dla projektantów stały się okazją do urzeczywistnienia najśmielszych wizji. W efekcie powstają przestrzenie spektakularne, często wręcz awangardowe – zrywające z aktualnymi trendami, wprowadzające niestandardowe i innowacyjne rozwiązania. Praca przedstawia przykłady awangardowych czytelni bibliotecznych, wchodząc w dyskurs z ich tradycyjnie rozumianą funkcją i estetyką.

Słowa kluczowe: awangarda, biblioteka, przestrzeń biblioteczna, czytelnia

1. THE EVOLUTION OF LIBRARY SPACE

Considering the definition, a library is a building which serves a purpose of collecting various sources and making them publicly available. Despite the fact that hundreds of years have passed, library's primary function remained the same. However, at the same time, libraries as institutions gained new modern image and new roles that they tend to fulfill nowadays. The very first library buildings were mainly used for educational and academic activities. That is why most of them were built near universities or sacred establishments. As one may assume, reading rooms had a more of an elite character and were mostly dedicated to the well-educated or fairly wealthy individuals. The demand for books depended not on the quality and quantity, but on the expenses. Printers and booksellers moved near universities or other important establishments, where they could grow their

business much easier. Significant changes happened together with the invention of print, which made literary sources much more common and easily accessible. Books were not so much of a luxury anymore, becoming a common good. Libraries and reading rooms became independent from specific buildings. New separate establishments appeared. In the center of each of them was a reading room.

For a long time, the idea of *three-way division* was the main component in the architecture of the buildings' space. Therefore, buildings dedicated to libraries were divided into reading rooms, archives, and librarian working space. This rule was presented by Italian architect Leopoldo Della Santa in 1816, in his book *Della costruzione et dell regolamento di una pubblica universale biblioteca*. Books were collected and put into economically planned storages, while the most popular positions were displayed on the shelves near the reading rooms. The librarians would work in the back room, taking care of the archives or offering help in finding a desired book. An extension to the concept of a library were new indications, establishing the canon of library's architecture present at that time. The rules referred to the division between the storage, reading room, and working space, emphasizing the lack of any possibility of a book, a librarian and a user crossing their ways. Nowadays, changes in those rules are not necessarily unacceptable. Sometimes it is even desired due to the fact that the institution has more of a transparent and open character these days.

A key factor that contributed to the establishment of library space in a form known today was the popularization of the idea of *free access to the bookshelves*. A starting point for this conception was the idea that a user should use the book collection independently and have an easy and direct access to the sources. The bookshelves were no longer a decorative piece of furniture. The librarians, however, would not have to assist every user and bring them the desired books. Reading rooms became open and welcoming spaces, that could be used freely by anyone.

The next step in the evolution of libraries' architecture is yet again connected to the concept of openness and flexible solutions in the context of space structures design. Modular layout, that originated in the USA, became more popular. It is especially noticeable in the regular pillar construction, that gives the entire building a great potential for any changes in space arrangements. A crucial element was a proper analysis of institution's space requirements, its form, its character, and the catchment area of it. The guidelines also referred to the building's accessibility, its surrounding, and its position in it¹.

2. LIBRARY ARCHITECTURE IN THE FACE OF CHANGES AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The last decades of the 20th century mark the time period of the great technological development, that affected almost every area of human life. Technological evolution had a fairly specific influence on the functioning of libraries not only in the context of their functioning, but also in terms of the role of a book. Up until now borrowing a book was the only aim of library's user. However, new media such as television and cinema became a form of a competition for the traditional paperback book. Those changes transformed into a literal crisis of readership, which resulted in a lot of libraries being closed. Such tendency was even

¹ Z. Żmigrodzki (ed.), *Bibliotekarstwo*, Wydawnictwo SBP, Warszawa 1998, pp. 23–25.

more drastic in case of countries where reading culture was quite weak at the start. Another crucial step in the evolution of libraries was the popularization of computers and the rising popularity of the internet.

Reading books was becoming more and more rare. Computers offered people a new form of leisure, that focused more on the entertainment, which was especially attractive for younger users. Technological devices in the 80s and 90s were being developed and updated very quickly, offering a new range of possibilities with every modification. Apart from the entertainment aspect, the element of innovation was also crucial for the improvements made in the general functioning of various institutions, including libraries. On one hand, it allowed for better management of the catalogues and then, it improved the methods of searching through the sources. On the other hand, the introduced innovations had proven to be complementary to the existence and functioning of traditional books. As a result, a regular reading stands were replaced with desks equipped with monitors, keyboards, and computers. It seemed that such spots will be an important element of the future of libraries and reading rooms. However, things took a different turn. Thanks to the dynamic changes connected to the internet and the concept of wireless communication, mobile phones were becoming more and more popular. They served for easy communication at first, but with time numerous other functions connected to entertainment and information-spreading were developed. Computers also underwent significant changes. New ones were more compact, smaller, and accessible in portable form.

Technological revolution affected books in their traditional paperback form. Any text could be written and displayed in a digital form on a computer screen. Completely new separate devices were introduced. Their main function was in fact to display any written text, book in particular. E-books were initially treated as something of a gadget. However, their later development had proven that it is just a matter of time until e-books become a convenient and portable device for reading books. At that time, numerous sociologists and researchers predicted a complete recession of paperback books, as well as of the functioning of libraries. New digital access to the information, news, digital newspapers, and books was supposed to mean an absolute lack of demand for physical products.

Rising popularity of the internet contributed to the fact that many services were now available online. At that time libraries functioned, following the idea of adding those new technological solutions to their systems. As a result, desks with computers in reading rooms were replaced with various pieces of furniture that allowed for other ways of using the available space. Properly chosen equipment helped the institution become a more open and multi-functional place that could play a more social, cultural, and artistic role. As a result, today's libraries are not limited only to their fundamental function connected to the collecting and managing the sources.

Additional rooms such as meeting and conference rooms, auditoriums, catering spaces and galleries add much more appeal to the general institution. In those cases, calling such place a 'library' is more of a symbolic matter. Nowadays, this word stands for a building that has many more functions than the one from the traditional concept. At the end of the 20th century 'media libraries' began to appear. They stood as equivalents for institutions meant for sharing the digital sources. At the same time, the name of those establishments might be confusing because media libraries did not resign using traditional books completely.

American sociologist, Ray Oldenburg, the author of the book *The Great Good Place*, played a crucial role in discovering the potential of libraries. He introduced the idea of the

third place – an object, that has a specific function in our society. The expert claimed that human life revolves around three spheres of activity, in which every individual needs to function properly, meaning: home, work, and social life. Oldenburg noticed that Americans spend most of their time at home, which results in a form of stagnation and regress in the context of cultural development. The so-called *third place* is supposed to be something between a space where we feel comfortable, spending time productively, but at the same time we can procrastinate or use this place for socializing. In the USA, such places were often clubs, pubs, bowling alleys, or libraries. In the case of libraries, the division into specific areas is especially important for the building to gain a more of a social character and fulfill the requirements of *the third place*. The division would take into consideration different social groups and themes, providing a comfortable setting and pleasant design of the interiors. As a result, a library should somewhat resemble a home setting, where one can easily grab any book from the shelf at any moment and sit down to read with a cup of coffee. A larger shared tables are becoming more popular rather than single working spots².

British architect, Harry Faulkner-Brown, has presented a set of rules titled *Ten Commandments*, that effectively summarized the search for a new image of modern libraries in the middle of the 1990s. Changes appeared once the owners decided to give up the idea of three-way division and non-crossing ways. Reading rooms were supposed to be as open and welcoming as possible. Most of the rules were connected to the access to the books. The guideline at that time indicated that it is crucial to modify and adapt the space in order to fully use the building's potential. Separate points referred to the balanced and economic approach to the realization of given investments³.

In 2006, a librarian and IFLA activist Andrew McDonald updated the rules of libraries' functioning, referring to the guideline by Faulkner-Browne. He introduced expected innovations leading to modern versions of libraries in his article *The Ten Commandments revisited: the Qualities of Good Library Space*. The most important factor for a librarian was the functionality of the place that "work correctly, looks good, and ages gracefully". At the same time, it should be prioritized over aesthetic values, because the matter of convenience is the most important. A project of such place should consider a proper choice of technological devices, equipment, furniture, and design in order to help create dynamic and complex relations between people, books, and space. A crucial factor was also the flexibility of the arrangements and possibility for various changes during the next years, taking into consideration the technological development. The expert discusses the issue of broadly understood availability separately. He takes into consideration designing without any particular limits or exclusions. Some users might like peaceful, quiet environment, however, nowadays it is often preferred for a reading room to be aesthetically inviting, visually stimulating or even quite noisy. The extent to which a given space is inspirational depends on the idea of the designer and their way of applying certain means of expression, creating visuals and including aesthetic furniture. All of those aspects together create the ambience of a given place. The diversity of using such spaces should be prioritized, especially in terms of lighting, acoustics, and conditioning. Apart from the functional and

² Third place, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Third_place&oldid=901930220 (access: 7.07.2022).

³ M. Deve, *Planning Public Library Buildings: Concepts and Issues for the Librarian*, Routledge, London 2016, pp. 217–219.

aesthetic values, introduction of solutions leading to the energetic independence of a given establishment is crucial in terms of sustainable development and the influence of buildings on the environment⁴.

After the publication of the set of rules, McDonald decided to update them and add another element – *Oomph*, meaning ‘an awe’. It is a characteristic or a set of characteristics that make the user feel excited and impressed. This phenomenon refers both to object and activities as well as to architecture. All of them share one feature – through their form and influence those elements can evoke enthusiasm in users. In the context of architecture the elements that have such effect can be, for instance, photogenic objects. They often become the goal of the users’ arrival at the establishment, not necessarily thanks to their function, but rather the aesthetic values.

3. TRADITION VS AVANT-GARDE

Technological changes that have taken place in the functioning of today’s societies, the ways of building and the functioning of institutions have led to changes noticeable both in the field of organizing space and the visual aspect of libraries.

In the 21st century, the reading room was still in the center of the building, but it was not seen as a peaceful, quiet space. The idea of segregation of individual library departments and placing them in separate rooms has been replaced by the act of integrating them into one large area. When it comes to larger facilities on individual floors, in the place of rows of desks and evenly spaced shelves, various free-standing pieces of furniture appeared. Sometimes they are not directly associated with studying, but more with relaxation and leisure. In addition to the singular workplaces, shared tables have been introduced that allow for both studying together and arranging meetings. A different approach is also visible in the aspect of aesthetics, i.e. the interior finish and its general character. As a result, reading rooms are created in minimalist, industrial or Scandinavian styles. Rooms are designed almost completely white, as well as with a huge dose of color. Until now, the reading room has also retained a traditional, safe approach in terms of materials and colors.

Writing about the beginning of libraries, one should firstly consider the first Greek book collections belonging to temples, schools, gymnasiums (facilities combining culture and sport). Before libraries were places accessible to everyone, they served elites and educated audiences, being dedicated to the higher education community exclusively. The most famous library of that time was the library of Alexandria, situated next to the temple of the Muses, which was a meeting place for scholars, philologists and was used for the organization of cultural events. At the same time, its establishing introduced the concept of a monumental structure into architecture as the library contained over 70,000 coils. The end of its functioning was caused by a fire in the 1st century BC⁵.

⁴ A. McDonald, *The Ten Commandments revisited: the Qualities of Good Library Space*, LIBER Quarterly, 2006, Vol. 16, No. 2, DOI: 10.18352/lq.7840 (access: 7.07.2022).

⁵ J. Sadowska, K. Zimnoch, *Biblioteki i ich użytkownicy – od elitarności do powszechności* [in:] H. Brzezińska-Stec, J. Żochowska (eds.), *Biblioteki bez użytkowników...? Diagnoza problemu*, V Ogólnopolska Konferencja Naukowa, Supraśl, 14–16 września 2015, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok 2015, p. 20.



Ill. 1. New Alexandria library building, source: <https://snohetta.com/project/5-bibliotheca-alexandrina> (access: 7.07.2022).

The creation of the new library of Alexandria was a topic that was discussed many times, but it finally came to conclusion only at the end of the 20th century. The architectural competition was organized by UNESCO in 1998. It led to the selection of Snohetta studio (today one of the most famous offices) as the first-place winner. Due to the prolonged collection of funds and some delays in the process of construction, the building was finally opened in 2002, located along the port of Alexandria.

References to the past were clearly noticeable in a monumental, cut-cylinder-like form, the facades of which were decorated with embossed inscriptions and symbols inspired by ancient culture. The sculptural panels were made of cut local stone in collaboration with artists Jorunn Sannes and Kristian Blystad. The round shape – according to the creators' idea – stands as a reference to the cyclical nature of knowledge, flowing with time. The shiny, slanted roof resembles an ancient lighthouse and makes the building a new symbol of the city, emphasizing the role of science and culture. The slightly slanted roof is decorated with skylights, offering light to the main reading room, which has a surprising shape of amphitheatre platforms. It is also a reference to the ancient Greek scenes, thus giving a more complex cultural character to the reading room. As a result, the users are situated in one large space, but on separate steps with comfortable natural lighting⁶.

Snohetta's vision had a significant impact on many subsequent library projects, showing that a niche approach to spatial organization and the general atmosphere of a place could attract great audiences. The visualization of the reading room as a large and open space was continued in most large library projects carried out in the 21st century, but the use of amphitheatres also gained popularity. They appeared both as full-size concepts, where the platforms filled the entire surface of the room, and in a smaller scale, which was important for the visual perception of some spaces.

The designs of Neutelings Riedijk Architects in Arnhem and Amersfoort are an impressive example of concepts of a reading room using the idea of an amphitheatre in the arrangement.

Rozet – Culture house in Arnhem is a building located at the meeting point of the station area and Kerkplein square, Rijnboog district. The location of the building on the main road, between the station and the church square, was inspired by the act of prioritizing functionality, which can be noticed in the spatial structure of the building. The cubature

⁶ <https://snohetta.com/project/5-bibliotheca-alexandrina> (access: 7.07.2022).

tightly fills the available area, therefore, it is characterized by a simple, elongated shape. Along one of the longer elevations of the building, an internal, widely open staircase has been introduced. This element stands as a metaphor for the road. It connects various institutions located in the building, at the same time creating an attractive and original space. The landings of the stairs not only allow one to move to separate areas, but also have a variety of arrangements that favor learning, integration, meetings, and exhibitions. The architects wanted this space to be distinguished also in the overall body of the building, hence the glazing, revealing the flight of the stairs, appears in the place of its course, breaking the compact division of the building facade. The space is complemented by impressive wall finishing, which is also visible in the design of the facades. These are concrete prefabricated elements with rosette pattern sculptures, standing as a reference to the history of the city⁷.



Ill. 2. A staircase crossing all floors in the Rozet – Arnhem Culture house, source: <https://neutelings-riedijk.com/cultural-center-rozet> (access: 7.07.2022).

Culture House Eemhuis in Amersfoort attracts attention with its impressive, hill-like form. The building combines several municipal institutions, which is reflected in the dynamic form of the facility. The building's base consists of two parts, a horizontal full structure covered with glazed, hand-formed ceramic bricks and a glazed structure with distinctive vertical facade columns. Three departments of art, dedicated to theatre and dance, visual arts and music, are located in cantilevered blocks. In combination with shiny metal panels, the facade adds to the industrial character of the building. At the same time, the facade panels refer to an artistic function, as they are decorated with an embossing in the form of hemispheres.

According to the creators' idea, the ground floor was to resemble a public square, emphasizing openness as it is accessible from all directions, offering an entrance area, a café, and an exhibition center. The most unique of all is the library. The main reading room is located in a large modern amphitheatre space, located high up. The terrace layout also refers to the form and shape of the hill. On the outskirts of the amphitheatre there are flights of stairs leading to the very top, where the surrounding space is available for users. At the individual landing levels, there are successive sequences of reading stands and bookshelves⁸.

⁷ <https://neutelings-riedijk.com/cultural-center-rozet/s> (access: 7.07.2022).

⁸ <https://www.archdaily.com/495483/culture-house-eemhuis-neutelings-riedijk-architects> (access: 7.07.2022).



Ill. 3. Hill-like architectural form of Culture House Eemhuis in Amersfoort, source: <https://neutelings-riedijk.com/cultural-center-eemhuis> (access: 7.07.2022).

The creation of the new library in Dunkerque is an unusual concept, as it assumed moving the library's functioning to the already existing building occupied by the Beaux-Arts Museum. The building is truly monumental and was constructed in an international style with visible references to the architecture of Oscar Niemeyer.

Designers from D'HOUNDT + BAJART Architects & Associates returned to the original, unconverted structure, renewing the building's façade, discreetly adding new elements of the white color scheme. White is also visible in the interiors, but only to be a background for the pastel color palette adopted for the concept. Additionally, glazing and skylights were introduced to make the rooms brighter. The architects also decided to change the understanding of the front facade by relocating the main entrance to the facade facing the theatre square. The new entrance features a simple roof and wide glazing on two levels of the building. The former entrance to the building has been carefully renovated made into a vestibule with a characteristic oval roof. Now the place boasts a music pavilion there. The soft form of the entrance roof has become an inspiration for interior aesthetics.

Architects almost completely gave up introducing right angles. The interior design resigns from the classic image of the reading room with the rigid arrangement of shelves and study stations. Both levels are characterized by an open space. Offices or conference halls that required separate spaces are moved to the corners and decorated with glass panels, remaining visually consistent. The connection of the ground floor with the first floor is reinforced by a centrally located amphitheatre and a large opening in the ceiling between the floors. Looking from the point of the entrance, the attention is drawn to the floor, which the designers turned into a system of multi-colored spots resembling geodetic contours. The layers together create the steps of the amphitheatre of a similar form. The amphitheatre offers a modern space for spending time, and in its cubature it boasts a large auditorium and a smaller conference hall. A tabletop with places to study has been placed along the cut-out in the ceiling. The curves are also visible in the glass partition walls separating the meeting rooms. The introduced furniture is simple and minimalistic kept in white and colorful schemes⁹.

⁹ <https://www.archdaily.com/926820/la-bib-of-dunkerque-library-dhoundt-plus-bajart-architects-and-associates> (access: 7.07.2022).



III. 4. The biophilic form of the amphitheatre in the LA BIB – Dunkerque Library, source: <https://www.archdaily.com/926820/la-bib-of-dunkerque-library-dhoundt-plus-bajart-architects-and--associate> (access: 7.07.2022).

The rising popularity of public library institutions in the 16th century in Europe was related to the public access to books becoming easier, therefore, the first facilities were located in Italy, France and Germany. Italian buildings are considered to be some of the first and most important public libraries in modern Europe. The first establishment was Mediceo-Laurenziana library, dated 1444, funded in Florence by Cuzma Medici. In 1521, the book collection was moved to a new building designed by Michelangelo. The second building is the Malatestiana Library in Cesena from 1452, boasting a reading room illuminated by large windows, equipped with reading desktops placed along the walls. This simplistic form of the reading room turns out to be relevant today in the context of contemporary architecture. An example is the implementation of such method in Vennesla designed by Helen & Hard – a Norwegian studio known for its great appreciation of implementing wooden elements.

The idea behind the concept of Vennesla library is a building in which the internal space has a form of a passage. The soft forms of the interior are already noticeable from the square in front of the building and together they create a futuristic look. The medieval reading stands were replaced with original bookcases, which allowed for maintaining an elongated and well-organized area of the building. The main structure is made of wooden frames, thanks to which in the obtained space there are no pillars. Vaults were created between the ribs. The columns and beams also harmonize with the technical aspects of the structure, air-conditioning installations and lighting. The architects wanted the entire ground floor to remain open, while at the same time the floor has two levels, which are connected by amphitheatre stairs. This made it possible to hide additional rooms and meetings under the stairs, while maintaining the openness of the space¹⁰.

Since the concept of separate library rooms was formulated, special attention was paid to their visual aspect. Both the aesthetics of the interior and the furnishings were equally crucial. Even then, one could feel the breath-taking nature of the so-called temple of Knowledge, emphasizing the artistic ambience of the interior. The way of halls' finishing was an element belonging to the theoretical rules. It also combined the work of architects, sculptors and painters, corresponding to the styles of a given era. The Renaissance period brought significant changes in the characterization of the reading room.

¹⁰ <https://helenhard.no/work/vennesla-library/> (access: 7.07.2022).



Ill. 5. Contemporary, yet reminiscent of futuristic space vehicles, reading room at the Vennesla Library, source: <https://helenhard.no/work/vennesla-library/> (access: 7.07.2022).

The example of the Italian Mazrine library from 1643 shows the impressive space of the reading room defining the aesthetics of the library in the hall system. It was an oblong, narrow reading room with high bookshelves, situated along the walls. In the center, there were desktops for the readers. Other libraries, such as Library Angelica in Italy or Strahov in the Czech Republic, explored the idea, presenting sculpted shelves and impressive painted vaults. High shelves in the following years were considered impractical, but their modern interpretation returned in the 21st century and can be found in many awe-inspiring facilities. In the Baroque period, monumental paintings became a dominating element in library buildings. Rococo was characterized by lavish decorations, and in Classicism moderation and harmony were a priority¹¹.

The Stuttgart City Library adds a lot to the fascinating discourse of Renaissance and Baroque understanding of reading rooms. Designed by Yi Architects, the library draws attention with its uncompromising, cube-shaped construction with an edge up to 45 meters long, boasting 9 floors. The elevations have no traditional windows. The building has a double façade and the one visible from the outside is based on a set of columns decorated with frosted glass bricks. The glass filling lights up in the evening, thanks to which the seemingly boring monolith turns into glowing block.

For chief architect Eun Young Yi, the concept expresses the essential values of architecture and human dignity in today's world. It possesses a hermetic and mysterious form. Hidden inside of the library symbolizes the discovering of a man's inner self. Only the subsequent layers of the building being revealed allow us to reach the hidden values inside of human mind. This metaphor seems to harmonize well with the general appearance of the structure. There exist four entrances, leading to the surprisingly beautiful interior. Every entrance is centrally located in each one of the elevations. The hall is the center of the entire outlook of the space. It is significantly high, spacious, completely empty and white. However, there are some small openings in the walls. The only large opening is in the middle of the ceiling. It provides glazing to the main library space above the room. A small fountain has been designed for the center of the room – a symbolic and a meditation area.

The character of the interior is a subtle reference to the works of the visionary architect Étienne Boullée. In particular, it refers to his unrealized design from 1784, "Cenotaph for Newton". The architect paid tribute to the scientist in the form of a symbolic tomb with a reference to the sphere – the shape of the Earth. Similarly to Newton discovering the law of universal gravitation and the principles of dynamics, the architect followed similar passion and interest

¹¹ B. Bieńkowska, *Książka na przestrzeni dziejów*, Centrum Edukacji Bibliotekarskiej, Informacyjnej i Dokumentacyjnej im. H. Radlińskiej, Warszawa 2005, p. 119.

in light and optics. Therefore, the designer used these means of expression when planning out the building. A similar approach can be noticed in the general concept of the library, where the love of symmetry, harmony and light is visible. In this place every visitor has a chance to witness something enormous and fascinating¹².

The library space takes up the last 5 floors. They are also created according to the original formal arrangement and have a gallery-like form inspired by an inverted pyramid scheme. The only lighting for the interior comes from the skylights in the ceiling. This solution allows natural light to reach the interior, despite the building boasting several floors. Similarly to the hall, it is a sterile white space, and the only colorful accents are the spines of books and people moving along the gallery, walking down the stairs, or sitting around. The effectiveness of the design has exceeded the initial expectations, attracting not only readers, but also architecture or photography enthusiasts.



Ill. 6. The cube-shaped building form of the Stuttgart City Library (left), source: <https://www.bda-bawue.de/awards/stadtbibliothek-am-mailaender-platz/> and the library space (right), source: <https://thomasguignard.photo/galleries/libraries/> (access: 7.07.2022).

Book Mountain – Public Library Spijkenisse by MVRDV is another intriguing example of an uncompromising and avant-garde approach to designing library space. The building attracts attention both with its pyramid-like external form, as well as with its well-organized space and interior design. The building owes its name not necessarily to the pyramids, but to the mountain of books hidden behind glass facades. The pyramid obviously refers to Egyptian tombs, but thanks to the glazing, the design also refers to a greenhouse as a traditional element of the Dutch farm – the past of the city connected to agriculture.

The internal structure resembles a ziggurat in form. Bookshelves were placed along all the walls and balustrades. What is more, the bookshelves are also an element of the reception desk and the bar counter. The project based on such a layout required the development of platforms, which, connected by stairs, formed a continuous route with a length of approximately 480 m. At the top, there was a cafe with a wonderful panorama view of the city. An interesting fact is that the shelves were made especially for the sake of an investment in the processing of plastic obtained from pots. Moreover, as the reference to the city's architecture building was created with the use of bricks, visible on the floors and walls¹³.

¹² M. Łysiak, *Czy Newton po śmierci zamieszkałby w wielkiej kuli?*, Niezależna.pl <https://niezalezna.pl/381572-czy-newton-po-smierci-zamieszkalby-w-wielkiej-kuli> (access: 7.07.2022).

¹³ N. Baartman, W. Maas, *Book Mountain Spijkenisse: Biography of a Building: make some noise*, NAI010 PUBL, 2014, pp. 5–50



III. 7. Original architectural form of the Public Library Spijkenisse, called Book Mountain, source: <https://www.mvrdiv.nl/projects/126/book-mountain> (access: 7.07.2022).

The 21st century brought an increase in the popularity of another trend – biophilia. This approach to designing pays more attention to the relationship between man and the environment. Effective use of biophilia leads to improved physical and mental health of the users, better well-being and other positive emotions related to spiritual experiences. In a science-related environment, it brings significant advantages, benefiting efficiency and effectiveness. Biophilic design is particularly important in urbanized areas, where contact with flora and fauna has been lost or nature is introduced in a thoughtless manner. The architect, through mindful use of means of expression referring to nature, various experiences, and authenticity, has a chance to create not only an awe-inspiring building, but also one evoking positive feelings¹⁴.



III. 8. Biophilia-inspired space in Puzzle – Médiathèque in Thionville, source: <https://coulon-architecte.fr/projet/558/thionville> (access: 7.07.2022).

¹⁴ S.R. Kellert, *Nature By design – The Practice of Biophilic Design*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2018, pp. 18–22.

An example of a biophilic library establishment is the Puzzle – Médiathèque in Thionville, which is also an instance of introducing this type of structure into a highly urbanized area with no access to nature. The idea of the architects from the Dominique Coulon & Associés Studio was to cut off the building from an unappealing neighborhood and create a structure that would be dynamic in its looks and will positively influence users' emotions. Therefore, the so-called 'the first front of the building' is lined with tall trees. Inspiration derived from nature is visible at first glance. The building's facades are characterized by soft ribbons that create the streamlined shape of the library. They are also visible in the part where the façade is divided into solid and glazed parts. In the area located closer to the street, the ribbon lowers, which also adds to the dynamism of the building's shape. An additional advantage is the ramp leading to the roof, where a recreation area has been created separately. Various cultural events take place in the summer in this spot. The ramp resembles a rising hill with its green finishing. Thanks to the side walls, the space is given an intriguing look, allowing the surrounding city to disappear at some point and reveal only the view of the clouds of the sky.

The most impressive seems to be the internal space, which has the character of a vast open area. Its division into individual functional zones stems from the furniture arrangement. As a result, areas for studying and meetings are separated and so is the area dedicated to children. This one is characterized by small hills created in the floor surface, additionally highlighted with a touch of color. Most of the surfaces in the library are plain white, which makes the interior look bright and transparent. The whiteness is also a background for expressive color accents in the form of green or the use of original materials, such as polished sheet metal. The positive perception of library's space is enhanced by the bends of ceilings and separate rooms, enclosed in round, soft forms. Architects refer to these rooms as "bubbles". They are unique not only thanks to their function, but also to an extraordinary finishing of their interiors. Therefore, game rooms, art rooms, and reading rooms differ drastically in terms of materials, textures and colors. In this way, any room can become a place of adventure, a space to explore and rediscover¹⁵.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The definition of architecture is strongly connected to the idea of responding to the changes that humanity goes through. Those changes that took place throughout the 20th and 21st centuries concerned both technological development and lifestyles of societies all around the world. Libraries faced the challenge of adjusting their way of functioning to this new reality. As a result, they have become much more open, accessible, and related not only to the field of education, but also to culture and society.

The changes forced designers to take a new approach to designing institutions, paying attention to the growing need in society to stay in an environment that is much more unrestricted and attractive than the traditional reading rooms with which institutions were associated. The new objects fit perfectly into the definition of the avant-garde, rejecting the old styles, creating new perspectives and avoiding any acts of imitating reality. Therefore, avant-garde in the reading space seems to be a powerful response to the new reality and an immeasurable benefit for both the libraries and their users.

¹⁵ <https://www.dezeen.com/2017/02/03/dominique-coulon-associés-media-third-place-library-thionville-france/> (access: 7.07.2022).

The presented paper showcases some of the examples of a contemporary approach to the design of library space, presenting selected, unconventional projects. At the same time, it situates them on the timeline of history of library architecture, showing that the desire for modern solutions was inscribed in the evolution of library institutions from the very beginning.

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