

IMAGINATION AND PARTICIPATION

IMAGINATION AND PARTICIPATION: next step in public library architecture.

In this book librarians Rob Bruijnzeels and Joyce Sternheim present a new vision on the future architecture of public libraries. For quite some time the authors have been involved in the transition of library work and its effects on the architecture and layout of library buildings. The central question in their book is whether the changing role of public libraries in society could lead to a new typology, a new building type with its own readable architecture. Rob and Joyce will discuss this with famous Dutch architects, who have built public libraries in the Netherlands and abroad, and with experts in the field of public space and urban and rural development. Based on these conversations and their own insights and experiences, the authors propose new principles for the architecture of public libraries, illustrated by projects of the Ministry of Imagination, the think-tank and design collective they are part of.

WHY THIS BOOK?

The library in transition

Public libraries belong to the most visited cultural institutions in the world. They are often the last genuine public spaces, a place that is open to everyone, regardless of age, educational level, income or origin. They are a vital link in every community by helping people understand society's complexity and finding their place in it. However, due to social and technological changes, the library now operates at the intersection of tradition and innovation. The 'classic' public library is disappearing, superseded by new media, the internet, new user concepts and different (marketing) strategies. In addition to books, which will of course continue to exist, digital media take up a more prominent place in library collections. This is not just about printed books being replaced by new technology. There's something else going on: the library's classic distribution model is no longer sufficient. Libraries all over the world realise that modernising or improving their existing range of products and services is not the solution. They want to focus on new forms of library work: on co-creation, knowledge sharing, participation and establishing connections between people in the local community. The collection of the library should play a key role in this process of knowledge creation and knowledge sharing. In reality, however, the collection is increasingly considered to be of minor importance. How can we turn the tide and restore the role of the collection as a source of inspiration, work material and living archive?

Public space

In response to their changing role, public libraries increasingly focus on organising activities and stimulating encounters. As a result, new terms are emerging with which the library emphasises its value for the local community. Third place, social condenser, agora, living room of the city ... they all refer to the importance of the library as public space, an open and accessible place where people from all sections of society can meet. Subsequently, what often happens is that the idea of the library as a meeting place is primarily approached as an interior design issue. The focus is on creating an inviting and attractive place to stay with comfortable seating- and study areas, good Wi-Fi and excellent coffee. There's nothing wrong with that, of course. It's just that it doesn't automatically lead to an exchange of knowledge, ideas and inspiration. To achieve that the library needs to stimulate curiosity, reflection and conversation. And what's so unique about a library is that it uses its collection and programming for this purpose. How can these unique features of the public library be reflected in architecture and interior design, so it doesn't become an interchangeable public space?

Library architecture is booming

Around the world impressive new library buildings are emerging, often designed by famous architects. Every city wants its own icon; a distinctive building with a large public appeal that also acts as a driver of urban or rural development. The question is whether all these spectacular buildings reflect a new vision on the role of the public library in society. We sometimes see striking new buildings that, on closer inspection, have quite a traditional lay out. The archetype of a library translated into ultra-modern design. And then we also see flashy buildings that offer space for a wide range of activities, but have lost their identity as a library. Is it possible to design a building that is immediately

recognisable as a library and at the same time gives shape to the new role of the library in society? A building with a distinctive narrative, a clear and compelling story that describes how the library wants to serve the local community and the way this is reflected in the building?

Imagination and participation

Imagination and participation is a book that aims to bridge the gap between library innovation and innovative architecture. Over time, the authors have developed their own distinctive vision on the subject, which is put into practice by the Ministry of Imagination, the think-tank and design collective they are part of. The Ministry has realised a number of notable new library concepts in the Netherlands and is now also operating at an international level.

In this book, the authors report on their investigation into the unique qualities of library work and their significance for the architecture of public libraries. The aim is to eventually arrive at a 'program of dreams': new principles for the architecture and form language of the public library that allow us to develop an own distinctive typology.

A first

There's no book yet that specifically deals with the architecture of public libraries. Existing books on library architecture make no distinction between public, special, scientific or university libraries. "A library is a library," the motto seems to be. By approaching it that way, the function, role and specific importance of public libraries are being ignored: public buildings and accessible collections at the heart of society, where the location of the building is also of great importance for urban and rural development.

THE AIM OF THE BOOK

With this book the authors aim to inspire librarians, architects, planners and policy makers to bring about a truly innovative architecture of public libraries. Library buildings with a strong, distinctive identity that accommodate new, active forms of knowledge development and sharing; that invite and challenge visitors to create new significances by means of the collection. In order to achieve this, the authors analyse the transition that libraries are in and the new working methods that result from that. They interview renowned architects and planners, prominent figures in the library world, but also recently graduated architects to find out what the ideas of the future generation are. They combine the results of all these conversations with their own insights and practical experiences and subsequently draw up new principles for the architecture and design of public libraries.

The authors want to further propagate and develop the ideas of the book by initiating conversations with architects, libraries and policymakers. This will be done by organising lectures and workshops, but also by making a tour along several important architectural centers in the Netherlands.

LAYOUT

The book consists of the following parts:

1. **"I HAVE TO CHANGE TO STAY THE SAME";** Introductory chapter

In this chapter the authors explain why they wanted to write this book. Being in transition, the public library requires new work processes and new buildings that still express the traditional values of the library. What is the core of public library work and how can this be implemented in our complex and rapidly changing society? This chapter also contains an overview of library typologies that have inspired architects over the centuries.

2. **"GENIUS IS INDIVIDUAL, SCENIUS IS COMMUNAL";** the public library in the urban context

Nowadays library buildings play a more central role in city planning and city design. A public library is a guaranteed crowd-puller in the urban environment of shops, restaurants and terraces. It means the library has to operate in a commercial environment and that is not an easy thing to do. Because in the midst of all this, how do you create a building that really functions as a public domain? A place that fits in with the surrounding community and where there is actually social interaction between different groups?

3. **"THERE IS NO ARCHITECTURAL FORM UNIQUE TO THE LIBRARY";** how to read a library building?

Recognizing and using typologies can provide direction in the design process of a new library building. It forces you to think about how the interaction between user and collection takes shape and which layout is appropriate. It is a necessary and useful precondition for an intensive collaboration between librarian and architect.

4. **"MAKING THE WORLD SAFE FOR QUESTIONS";** Libraries with imagination

In this chapter we authors combine the insights from the interviews with their own vision and experiences. The new principles are illustrated using concrete examples from the own practice of the Ministry of Imagination and from other sources.

5. **DON'T START BY REDESIGNING THE IMAGE; REDESIGN THE ACTION;** Program of imagination

We formulate the most important questions for the future and propose a "program of imagination": new principles for the architecture and form language of public libraries that enable a specific typology. The new principles are illustrated using concrete examples from the own practice of the Ministry of Imagination and from other sources.

6. SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE BOOK: INTERVIEWS WITH DUTCH ARCHITECTS.

The aim was to find answers to the question whether the changing role of the library can be translated into a new typology. They interviewed a number of famous Dutch architects who had recently built public libraries or were still in the middle of that process. It concerns:

- Jo Coenen: Amsterdam Public Library (OBA) en Centre Céramique, Maastricht
- Francine Houben, Mecanoo: a.o. Birmingham Library, Martin Luther King Library in Washington and the New York Public Library Midtown Campus.
- Gert Kwekkeboom and Rick ten Doeschate, Civic: LocHal Tilburg.
- Winy Maas, MVRDV: the Bookmountain in Spijkenisse, the Tianjin-Binhai Library in China and the imaginary Brabant Library 2040.
- Vincent Panhuysen, KAAAN: Utopia Library, Aalst, Belgium.
- Michiel Riedijk, Neutelings Riedijk: Rozet Library Arnhem and Eemhuis Library in Amersfoort.
- Chris van Duijn, OMA: Seattle Public Library, Qatar National Library, Caen (Fr) Public Library

ORGANISATION AND PLANNING

The authors

Authors are librarians Joyce Sternheim and Rob Bruijnzeels of the Ministry of Imagination, a think-tank and design collective that realises exiting one-off library buildings and matching new work processes. Joyce and Rob are librarians with an impressive track record in Dutch public library work. For several years now they are also active internationally. Writing articles and essays in Dutch and foreign professional publications has become an important part of their work. In November 2019, they received the oeuvre award of the Victorine van Schaick Fund from the Royal Dutch Association of Information Professionals for 'their unwavering contributions in word and deed to Dutch public library work'.

The publisher

The book will be published by nai010, the largest internationally orientated Dutch publisher in the fields of architecture, art, photography and design. See: <https://www.nai010.com/en/about-us>

Publication

The richly illustrated book will be published in English as a hardback edition with a height of 28 cm and a width of 23 cm. The anticipated release date is autumn 2021.