

New public libraries *vis à vis* urban lifestyles and global cities

by

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Introduction and methodological highlights

As a premise, I would like to stress that the issues discussed in this paper are the result of a research carried out for my PhD thesis and are more widely presented in the book published by Carocci in 2009.¹

This research starts from the firm belief that libraries can be approached as one kind of social institutions, which are intended as durable organisations founded for the society to guarantee the achievement of specific public aims.² In the case of libraries, their traditional mission - since the outset - is the preservation of written memories and the availability of publications to the public, even if the concept of public has profoundly changed over time.³

If we agree to conceive libraries as social institutions, then library science, which is the disciplinary field concerning the building up and organisation of a library in order to make bibliographic materials available for users, should be naturally considered as a branch of social sciences.⁴

This is not so obvious in Italy as it is in the Anglo-American area,⁵ since here, according to a long tradition and to the current organisation of disciplinary fields in universities, library science is considered as a branch of the humanities. Actually, there is a widespread belief that it mainly regards books and historical matters and the research focus is on books as physical objects and bibliographic disciplines more than on information management, research techniques and the specialised disciplinary fields covered by the library collections.

Considering library science as a branch of social sciences and libraries as social institutions are the first two given premises of the analysis I am going to carry out in the following pages.

¹ Anna Galluzzi, *Biblioteche per la città. Nuove prospettive di un servizio pubblico*. Roma: Carocci, 2009.

² Paolo Traniello, *La biblioteca pubblica. Storia di un istituto nell'Europa contemporanea*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997, p. 296-297.

³ Giovanni Solimine, *La biblioteca e il suo tempo. Scritti di Storia della Biblioteca*. Manziana (RM), Vecchiarelli, 2004.

⁴ Anna Galluzzi, *A proposito di biblioteconomia e scienze sociali*, «Bollettino AIB», 45 (2005), n. 2, p. 227-234

⁵ Jesse H. Shera, *The foundations of education for librarianship*. New York: Becjer and Hayes, 1972.

Once the existence of a specific relationship between libraries and society and the fact that they could affect each other have been assumed, the other methodological choices are consequently made.

First of all, we have to take into account how the two terms of this relationship have changed over time, in particular how libraries have modified their status and activities to cope with the new composition and needs of the public. For example, the process of library diversification into categories was one of the answers to the changes which were profoundly modifying the society during the second half of the 19th Century.⁶ In particular, as it is well known,⁷ public libraries were one of the products of the industrial revolution and were intended to serve all the population, since new social classes had moved to industrial cities and had begun to learn to read. Slowly, the public of these libraries became bigger and bigger and public libraries, funded by citizens' taxes, committed themselves to offer bibliographic and community information to everyone in the simplest and most accessible way.

Secondly, given the tight relationship between society and public libraries (but also libraries in general), the phenomenon of mass and global urbanisation must be taken into account, considering the fact that urban life has become a prototype of contemporary life and a mirror of the society. In fact, by now, the majority of the world population lives in an urban setting and, if not, lives according to an urban way of life.⁸ Consequently, the urban setting is the most appropriate to study the contemporary and future public library and it's highly probable that we have to study the urban way of life to understand what public libraries should be and how they should develop.

Considering all this, in my opinion, an in-depth analysis of public libraries would necessarily require an interdisciplinary approach⁹ which draws on urban sociology, anthropology, sociology of knowledge, mass communication, cultural economy and so on, in order to highlight not only their cultural side, but also their social and recreational aspects.

Furthermore, according to the methodological principles of the social sciences, the analysis of the main features of modern lifestyles should go hand in hand with the examination of case

⁶ Michael H. Harris, *History of libraries in the Western world*, 4th ed. The Scarecrow Press, Lanham (Maryland) – London 1999.

⁷ Paolo Traniello, *La biblioteca pubblica. Storia di un istituto nell'Europa contemporanea*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997.

⁸ *La dimensione metropolitana. Sviluppo e governo della nuova città*, a cura di Guido Martinotti. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1999. In particular, on English public library consult: Alistair Black, *A new history of the English public library. Social and intellectual contexts, 1850-1914*, Leicester University Press, London-New York 1996, p. 18.

⁹ Consult the following references for the history of knowledge and the growing importance of an interdisciplinary approach: Saul Meghnagi, *Il sapere professionale. Competenza, diritti, democrazia*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2005; Peter Burke, *Storia sociale della conoscenza. Da Gutenberg a Diderot*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2002 (Eng. Ed.: *A social history of knowledge: from Gutenberg to Diderot*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2000); Dominique Vinck, *Pratiques de l'interdisciplinarité. Mutation des sciences, de l'industrie et de l'enseignement*, PUG, Grenoble 2000.

studies, represented by recently built public libraries all around the world, in order to single out possible theoretical models to foreshadow the public library of the future.¹⁰

The case studies have been accurately selected in order to be comparable and representative of a homogeneous cultural and geographical context. All the chosen libraries are located in large cities (more than 500,000 citizens) of the Western world (particularly North America and Europe), are hosted in purpose-made buildings of more than 10,000 m² and were open to the public between 1995 and 2007.

In particular, the libraries which have been taken into account are: the Seattle Public Library;¹¹ the Cerritos Public Library¹², the Vancouver Public Library;¹³ the Bibliothèque de l'Université Paris 8¹⁴ (which is not a public library, but is open to the general public and was built to link the outskirts with the city centre); the Stadt- und Landesbibliothek in Dortmund;¹⁵ the Bibliothèque Municipale in Marseille;¹⁶ the Whitechapel Idea Store in London¹⁷ and the Biblioteca Jaume Fuster in Barcelona.¹⁸

Though not responding to all the given criteria, the Bibliothèque Publique d'Information¹⁹ in Paris (built in 1977, but totally renovated and reorganised after 20 years and re-opened in 2000) and some new Italian public libraries,²⁰ such as the Sala Borsa Library²¹ in Bologna or the San Giorgio Library in Pistoia,²² are taken into consideration.

All these libraries, except the Cerritos Public Library, were personally visited by myself during the years 2006-2008.

Some features of urban lifestyles

Let's start examining some of the main features of the urban lifestyle and trying to figure out their possible connections with the use of libraries and cultural institutions.

¹⁰ Among the most meaningful references concerning the method of sociological research see in particular: Kenneth D. Bailey, *Metodi della ricerca sociale*, 3 vv, Il Mulino, Bologna 2006 (Eng. Ed.: *Methods of Social Research*. New York, Free Press, 1978) and Piergiorgio Corbetta, *Metodologia e tecniche della ricerca sociale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1999.

¹¹ <<http://www.spl.org/>>.

¹² <<http://www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/library/library.html>>.

¹³ <<http://www.vpl.ca/>>.

¹⁴ <<http://www.bu.univ-paris8.fr/web/>>.

¹⁵ <<http://www.bibliothek.dortmund.de/>>.

¹⁶ <<http://www.bmvr.marseille.fr/Fede/Main.asp?lang=FR>>.

¹⁷ <<http://www.ideastore.co.uk/>>.

¹⁸ <http://w3.bcn.es/V51/Home/V51HomeLinkPl/0,3989,99468069_99472061_1,00.html>.

¹⁹ <<http://www.bpi.fr/>>.

²⁰ Anna Galluzzi, *New public libraries in Italy: trends and issues*, «International Information and Library Review», 41 (2009), p. 52-59.

²¹ <<http://www.bibliotecasalaborsa.it/home.php>>.

²² <<http://www.comune.pistoia.it/sangiorgio/index.html>>.

According to Wikipedia,²³ urban sociology is the sociological study of social life and human interaction in metropolitan areas. It is a normative discipline of sociology seeking to study the structures, processes, changes and problems of an urban area and by doing so providing inputs for planning and policy making. From the librarian's point of view, it enlightens processes which should be central in planning libraries and services.

Heading for this aim, the first issue to highlight is that modern life is double-sided. This means that we all live in two different levels of relationships, the virtual one and the physical one, as Manuel Castells clearly points out.²⁴

The growing interactivity of the Internet gives us the possibility to create our own relational environment over the net and to keep ourselves linked to this environment everywhere we go.²⁵ The tools of the Web 2.0 - social networking, chat lines, instant messaging, VOIP and so on - affect the way we live and manage the human relations not only over the net, but also in everyday life.

Someone thinks that people will meet less and less in the future, insofar as the use of the Internet and social networking grows. On the contrary, some sociologists have highlighted that mobility and proximity are two key points of modern life. The more we spend time over the Internet and use the Web for an increasing number of activities which before required a physical transfer, the more we move and go around to entertain ourselves and to meet other people.

The need to physically meet other people clearly emerges from the success of mass events like the "Notte Bianca" (Nuit Blanche)²⁶ or the street cultural festivals²⁷ dedicated to specific disciplinary fields.

These characteristics of modern citizens are labelled under the tags "compulsion to mobility" and "compulsion to proximity", and, though apparently conflicting, they actually are the two sides of the story.²⁸

The second issue to be carefully considered is the changing composition of urban population and the different groups of people exploiting cities and their public and private services. Alongside the resident population, some non-resident groups of people (commuters, city users, businessmen,

²³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_sociology>.

²⁴ Manuel Castells, *La città delle reti*. Venezia, Marsilio, 2004; Manuel Castells, *The informational city: information technology, economic restructuring, and the urban-regional process*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 1991.

²⁵ Manuel Castells, *La nascita della società in rete*. Milano, EGEA-Università Bocconi, 2002, p.458 (Eng. Ed.: *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. I. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK. Blackwell. 1996).

²⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuit_Blanche>.

²⁷ In Italy each year many of these festivals take place and appeal lots of people, for example the Literature Festival in Mantua (<http://www.festivaletteratura.it/>), the Philosophy Festival in Modena (<http://www.festivalfilosofia.it/festival/Viewer?cmd=default>), the Math Festival in Rome (<http://www.festivaldellamatematica.it/>) and so on.

²⁸ Serena Vicari Haddock, *La città contemporanea*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2004, p. 181-188.

students etc.) are becoming more and more important for urban economy and are greatly affecting the way in which the city services are organised.²⁹

The fact is that some of these groups, like the city users, are less predictable in their way of using the services and in their movements around the city. They have been compared to swarms, because they aggregate and scatter depending on occasions and situations. Therefore, organising services for these people is challenging, but nowadays it is impossible to plan the urban services without taking into account the non-resident groups.

The relationship of local governance and city users is contradictory and problematic. In fact, city users have a deep impact over services and, for many cities, they are an important source of wealth and a powerful engine for the local economy. On the other hand, they do not contribute to local assets since they pay taxes somewhere else. Consequently, they could become a reason of conflict between the different groups inside the city, particularly when public services are tailored to city users' needs more than to taxpayers' needs.³⁰

The third aspect deserving an analysis is the trend towards a huge compression of space and time in everyone's life, particularly in the urban context; this characteristic greatly weighs on people's choices and on their own lives' arrangements.³¹

Though, according to many researches and statistics regarding working hours, free time has never been so much as nowadays, people seem to have far less time than in the past and continuously run from a place to another pursuing things to do.³²

In this endless motion they cover greater and greater distances, thanks to the growing speed of means of transportation and the massive use of high-speed trains and airplanes. Under the same framework, another paradoxical phenomenon takes place: big cities, though far from each other, could be nearer than two neighbourhoods located at the two opposite sides of a metropolitan area. This happens because some places are considered crucial junctions in the transportation map on a local and global level and are connected with better and faster means of transport.³³

The lack of time and the wide offer of cultural and entertaining activities threatens the survival of less popular institutions and triggers a tough competition to attract the interest of users.

²⁹ Giampaolo Nuvolati, *Popolazioni in movimento, città in trasformazione. Abitanti, pendolari, city users, uomini d'affari e flâneurs*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002.

³⁰ Guido Martinotti, *Metropoli. La nuova morfologia sociale della città*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993, p. 163.

³¹ Valeria Giordano, *La metropoli e oltre. Percorsi nel tempo e nello spazio della modernità*. Roma, Meltemi, 2005.

³² Antonio M. Chiesi, *Gli orari della città e l'offerta dei servizi*, in *La biblioteca, il cittadino, la città. Atti del XLII Congresso nazionale dell'Associazione italiana biblioteche, Trieste, 27-28-29 novembre 1996*, a cura di Romano Vecchiet, Associazione italiana biblioteche, Roma 1998, p. 74-79.

³³ Elio Piroddi – Laura Brunori - Carla Di Berardino, *Scenari per l'Europa delle città*. Milano, Franco Angeli, 2002, p. 182-184.

The fourth feature characterising current urban life is the deep mutation of the urban landscape, as a consequence of numerous architectural interventions meant to redevelop the city centres or outlying abandoned areas,³⁴ in conjunction with a changing urban economy.

On the one hand, the current urban economy shows, on many levels, the characteristics of the McDonald's model.³⁵ This model, which has been applied to many areas and services over the time and has been adapted to different settings, is based upon several and sometimes contradictory principles:

- efficiency in offering services, which means paying attention to the ratio between costs and benefits and to the organisation of internal procedures;
- predictability of service or product offered to users, in order to respond to the anxiety of modern citizens;
- control of every step of the production process in order to standardise the results.

Alongside the McDonald's style, the "long tail" paradigm affects the relationship between citizens and markets. The "long tail", as clearly described by Chris Anderson in his book,³⁶ is the strict relation among niche products, web offering and traditional selling. The assumption is that, over the Internet, the physical constraints have been overcome and an increasing number of different and specific needs can be satisfied. Therefore, if in the past niche demands could be hardly satisfied by referring to specialised shops located in the biggest cities (the long tail of the physical world) and only mainstream products were economically convenient, nowadays the Internet and the phenomenon of the digital convergence give niches the opportunity to proliferate and make them economically more convenient than mainstream products.

Furthermore, the particular structure of the Internet and its growing usage strengthen the trend towards the "one stop shop" approach, that is the users' expectation to get satisfaction for a number of diverse needs through a single physical or virtual desk.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that urban economy is turning everything into a show and making any transaction an unforgettable experience.³⁷ The "experience economy" is one of the most successful study patterns of the last few years and its ground idea has been widely applied. It is founded on the principle that the value of whatever service or transaction depends more upon the

³⁴ Giandomenico Amendola, *La città postmoderna. Magie e paure della metropoli contemporanea*. Seconda edizione. Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2004.

³⁵ George Ritzer, *Il mondo alla McDonald's*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997 (Eng. Ed.: *The McDonaldization of society*, 4th ed., Thousand Oaks, CA, Pine Forge Press, 2004).

³⁶ Chris Anderson, *La coda lunga. Da un mercato di massa a una massa di mercati*. Trad. di Susanna Bourlot. Torino, Codice Edizioni, 2007 (Eng. Ed.: Chris Anderson, *The long tail: how endless choice is creating unlimited demand*. London : Random House Business Books, 2007).

³⁷ Amendola, *La città postmoderna* cit.

experience users live than upon its content or usefulness.³⁸ The exciting side of whatever experience is capable of steering the choices of users more than any other variable.

One of the most typical products of the contemporary economy with all its peculiarities is the shopping mall,³⁹ a commercial structure born in the United States following ancient models of indoor markets coming from Europe and the Middle-East and then spread all over the world.

Shopping malls are the prototype of a private place which pretends to be public, but keeps outside all the ugly things characterising the real public places. They respond to the above-mentioned “compulsion to proximity” and are a perfect artificial synthesis of city life, where people can find altogether places to eat, plazas, promenades, seating areas, fountains, little gardens, all kinds of shops, one or more big supermarkets, and in some cases, cinemas, hotels, fun fairs and so on.

Shopping malls are becoming a place where you can summarise the things you can do in a city all in one neighbourhood and all in one day. There is no doubt that shopping malls, besides their practical and commercial role, have gained a symbolic status as paradigms of modern lifestyle and, nowadays, whatever service is to be planned cannot disregard the shopping mall model and its prerequisites.⁴⁰

It's not a matter of ideological support to one sociological and economic model or another, but rather a need to understand the direction towards which our society is heading to at a fast pace. It is theoretically wrong to reject change, because if we reject it we cannot manage its consequences and, if the case, improve upon it.⁴¹

Study patterns and case studies

The junction of sociological studies with the analysis of the case studies is the precondition to define a number of theoretical library models, which enshrine the characteristics of existing libraries and the desirable features responding to the challenging demands of the social setting.

The models I have outlined have been labelled with self-explanatory names to point out their main characteristics.⁴² The proposed five patterns are the following:

- the experience library,⁴³ which takes inspiration from the experience society by Pine and Gilmour;⁴⁴

³⁸ B. Joseph Pine II – James H. Gilmore, *L'economia delle esperienze. Oltre il servizio*, introduzione di Silvio Rubbia. [Milano], Etas, 2000 (Eng. Ed.: B. Joseph Pine II - James H. Gilmore, *The experience economy: work is theatre & every business a stage*. Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 1999).

³⁹ Amendola, *La città postmoderna* cit.

⁴⁰ Vicari Haddock, *La città contemporanea* cit., p. 164-167.

⁴¹ Alessandro Baricco, *I barbari. Saggio sulla mutazione*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2008.

⁴² Galluzzi, *Biblioteche per la città* cit., cap. 2.

- the library as an urban and social space,⁴⁵ which stresses the social role of a public library;
- the bookstore library,⁴⁶ aimed at strengthening the marketing side of the library;
- the reference library,⁴⁷ built around learning and information;
- the niche library,⁴⁸ responding to the long tail philosophy and to a specialised society.

The experience library directly come from one of the above-mentioned features of the current urban economy and is deeply rooted in the idea expressed by Pine and Gilmour. Simplifying, it can be defined as a library where much more attention is given to the experience of a service than to its content. This means that, on equal terms of quality level or even at a lower level, the way in which the service is delivered to the user makes the difference.

As the personal experience is something the Web cannot replace, investing on experience is highly rewarding in the competition against Web services and it is a possible answer to that "compulsion to proximity" sociologists have brought to light. When an activity can be satisfactorily replaced by an online session, people tend to choose the latter, unless the experience of physically engaging in that activity is self-rewarding and can add something pleasant to everyday life.

Then, what does planning a library as a place for experience mean? It means that libraries should be places to be discovered step by step both from an architectural, human relations and services' points of view. After all, this would be perfectly consistent with the fact that our society has a marked performing and spectacular nature and likes any place or situation capable of catching the eye and drawing attention.

Several libraries among those recently built all around the world are founded upon these principles. Among the selected case studies, the Seattle Public Library is the closest to the idea of an experience library.⁴⁹

⁴³ Ivi, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Pine II –Gilmore, *L'economia delle esperienze* cit.

⁴⁵ Galluzzi, *Biblioteche per la città* cit., p. 40.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 67.

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 45.

⁴⁹ The library website: <<http://www.spl.org/>>; see also: David Dillon, *Turning the page Rem Koolhaas retools a traditional civic institution at the Seattle library*, «The Dallas Morning News», 23th June 2004, p. 14E; Anna Galluzzi, *Seattle e Vancouver: due modi di fare "esperienza" della biblioteca pubblica*, «Biblioteche oggi», 2, 26 (2008), pp. 47-56; Andrew Gumbel, *Architecture: the perfect city library; Rem Koolhaas's design for the Seattle library was initially derided*, «The Independent», 25th May 2004; John Douglas Marshall, *Place of learning, place of dreams. A history of the Seattle public library*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 2004; Nicolai Ouroussoff, *Architecture review: Shimmering break from conformity; In Seattle's library, Rem Koolhaas has created a protective shell and filled it with new ideas*, «Los Angeles Times», 21th May 2004, p. 1; *Seattle Public Library OMA / LMN*, Michael Kubo and Ramon Prat editors, Actar, Barcelona 2005; *The Seattle Public Library. Virtual Tour of Central Library hosted by Deborah L. Jacobs*, *City Librarian*, 1 CD-ROM, The Seattle Public Library, Seattle 2007; Deyan Sudjic, *Review: Architecture: The people's palace: Seattle is a perfect playground for world -class architects. Now Rem Koolhaas has struck career gold there with his cool glass library, which combines functional public space with a seductive aesthetic. Just don't loiter in the toilet*, «The Observer», 17th October 2004, p. 9.

The Seattle Public Library is housed in a building by Rem Koolhaas. Rem Koolhaas,⁵⁰ one of the most representative architects of the postmodernism, and it has rapidly become one of his most known trademarks.

The experience identity of this library is recognisable on a number of different levels. From the architectural point of view, many commentators stress the peculiar relationship between its external shape and the internal perception. From the outside, the library seems a fortress with its cage structure and its staggered levels and, according to someone's opinion, it is not perceived as welcoming. Inside, notwithstanding the size of the setting which could puzzle users and the originality of some architectural solutions, feeling at one's ease is a common perception. There is no doubt that this is not a boring building and each visit can be experienced as a new discovery.

From a library point of view, Rem Koolhaas has given many traditional library spaces a new twist and meaning: for example, the Mixing Chamber, where physical and virtual collections meet and reference transactions between librarians and users take place, or the Book Spiral, where the whole collection is arranged in a single sequence according to the DDC.

A library which is completely designed under the principles of the experience economy is the Cerritos Public Library,⁵¹ in the Los Angeles County. This library has been labelled as the "best library showplace at this time"⁵² and perfectly responds to today's trend to turn everything into a show from both the architectural and the organisational point of view.

In particular, the most striking thing of this library is the fact that each of its sections is planned around a theme, according to a ground theme which sounds like: "Honouring the past - Imagining the future".⁵³ Therefore, the children area is organised and equipped as a recreation ground, while the upper level is dedicated to the 21st Century and is furnished in high tech style and here the main characters are personal computers and holographic images. The area dedicated to the historical collection looks like a private library of the 19th Century.

As far as libraries as urban and social spaces are concerned, it is worth stressing that this model points out the need to insert libraries in urban renovation processes. In this case, libraries have to focus on their role as meeting places, capable of stimulating social changes and habits,

⁵⁰ The architect's website: <<http://www.oma.nl/>>; see also: Roberto Gargiani, *Rem Koolhaas / OMA*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2006; Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York. Un manifesto retroattivo per Manhattan*, ed. ital. a cura di Marco Braghi, Electa, Milano 2001 (Eng. Ed.: *Delirious New York: a retroactive manifesto for Manhattan*. London, Thames & Hudson, 1978); Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi, *Rem Koolhaas. trasparenze metropolitane*, Testo & immagine, Torino 1997; *Rem Koolhaas/OMA*, TeNeues, New York [etc.] 2002.

⁵¹ The library website: <<http://www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/library/library.html>>; see also: Kenneth E. Dowlin, *The Library as Place. Challenges in the digital age*, in *Libraries as places: buildings for the 21st century. Proceedings of the thirteenth seminar of IFLA's Library buildings and equipment section together with IFLA's Public libraries section, Paris, France, 28 July - 1 August 2003*, edited by Marie-François Bisbrouck [et al.], Saur, München 2004, p. 30-34.

⁵² Introducing "The Experience Library", <http://www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/library/fact_sheet.html>.

⁵³ Cerritos Library Photos, <<http://www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/library/photos/library.html>>; Cerritos Library QuickTime 360° Views, <http://www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/library/quicktime/library_360_views.html>.

giving new life to a neighborhood, attracting different categories of users every day, without peaking on specific time slots.

A number of libraries have been built in order to create new focus points inside the city or to set down other possible uses to off-centre neighbourhoods. For example, Dortmund's Stadt -und Landesbibliothek⁵⁴ and Marseille's Bibliothèque Municipale⁵⁵ were specifically planned as part of urban renovation strategies.

Dortmund's Library, a building by Mario Botta,⁵⁶ is located in the city area between the historical centre and the railway station, which in the past was an industrial estate and, over the last years, has lost its function and vitality inside the city. The building is at the borders of the city, between a ring road and a pedestrian area that had become a place for homeless and marginalised people.

Notwithstanding the objective obstacles to a total redevelopment of this area, there is no doubt that the library has reached its goals, attracting an increasing number of people of different ages and social classes to this area and making it liveable during the opening hours and beyond.

The same happened for Marseille's Bibliothèque Municipale. The library has replaced the old music hall of the city, which was the biggest in France outside of Paris, and has inherited its name, Alcazar. The new library is part of the urban renovation strategy of this central neighbourhood of Marseille, which connects the old harbour with the commercial area of the city and where the high rate of immigrants has created some social problems and raised a negative perception on the part of inhabitants. Since the opening of the library, every day, in front of its entrance, a varied crowd gathers and waits for it to open.

As far as the bookstore library is concerned, its most important features should be accessibility, extensive opening hours, wide bibliographic coverage, attractive arrangement of books, diversification of offer, possibility of choice in a free setting, convergence of library services and entertaining activities. The ground idea is to preserve the traditional mission of a public library in a renovated setting and under an innovative approach, borrowing some of the most successful strategies of commercial activities.

⁵⁴ The library website: <<http://www.bibliothek.dortmund.de/>>; see also: Mario Pisani, *Recenti opere di Mario Botta: Biblioteca a Dortmund, Chiesa all'aeroporto di Malpensa*, «Industria delle costruzioni», pp. 6-19; Ulrich Moeske, *Der Neubau der Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Dortmund*, <http://www.bibliothek.dortmund.de/Artikel_Neubau.pdf>.

⁵⁵ The library website: <<http://www.bmvr.marseille.fr/Fede/Main.asp?lang=FR>>; see also: *L'Alcazar de Marseille, la plus grande bibliothèque hors Paris*, «Agence France Press», 12 novembre 2004; Anna Galluzzi, *Bibliothèque Municipale di Marsiglia: un felice incontro tra politiche nazionali e locali*, «Biblioteche oggi», 5, 26 (2008), p. 14-20; Michel Samson, *A Marseille, succès populaire de la bibliothèque de l'Alcazar*, «Le Monde», 16 novembre 2004.

⁵⁶ The architect's website: <http://www.botta.ch/Page/Recenti_it.php>; see also: Mario Botta, *Quasi un diario. Frammenti intorno all'architettura*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2003.

The Idea Stores,⁵⁷ the new local libraries of the Tower Hamlets' neighbourhood in London, are an inspiring example of this model. The first thing to stress concerning these libraries is the fact that they have been planned in response to a decline in the use of local libraries and after a market survey which has pointed out that library location and size are much more important than number and proximity to users.

The Idea Store strategy is based upon some basic principles like: attractive and accessible buildings, architectural choices inspired by commercial and entertaining places, far-reaching marketing policy, extensive opening hours in line with the surrounding shops, user-centred services tailored upon local needs, mix of learning and information activities and renewal of the dusty image of libraries and librarians. All these characteristics are harmonised with the traditional identity of the British public library as primarily a lending library. Until now, the strategy seems to be successful though it needs to be evaluated over time.

The reference library model⁵⁸ focuses on the capacity to deliver personalised information to users and to be actively inserted in a learning setting. This is a library which proposes itself as a tool for learning and a central point of a number of learning activities. To this end, it invests on the Web and distance services, quality reference service, multimedia and collections tailored upon needs more than upon categories of users.

The Bibliothèque publique d'information (BPI)⁵⁹ in Paris and the Sala Borsa Library⁶⁰ in Bologna are good examples of this model.

⁵⁷ The Idea Stores' website: <<http://www.ideastore.co.uk/>>; see also: *A library and lifelong learning development strategy for Tower Hamlets. A joint accomodation strategy developed by the Customer Services and Education Directorates for the Arts, Leisure, Sports and Youth and Community Services Committees*, April 1999, information updated as at January 2002, <<http://www.ideastore.co.uk/downloads/strategy.pdf>>. Other references: Anna Galluzzi, *Gli Idea Stores di Londra. Biblioteche nel "mercato" urbano e sociale*, «Bibliotime», 2, 11 (2008), <<http://didattica.spbo.unibo.it/bibliotime/num-xi-2/galluzzi.htm>>; Muscogiuri, *Investire in biblioteche pubbliche: servizi, architettura, comunicazione*, «Biblioteche oggi», 7, 25 (2007), pp. 7-16; Giovanni Solimine – Fabio Severino, *Un nuovo modello di biblioteca civica: il caso Idea Store di Londra*, «Economia della cultura», 2, 18 (2008), pp. 225-34; *What the papers say*, <http://www.ideastore.co.uk/en/articles/information_idea_story_what_the_papers_say>.

⁵⁸ This model was initially outlined by Giovanni Solimine in: *La biblioteca: scenari, culture, pratiche di servizio*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2004, in particular p. 56 ss.

⁵⁹ The library website: <<http://www.bpi.fr/>>; see also: Martine Blanc-Montmayeur, *La bibliothèque publique d'information. Une bibliothèque revisitée*, «Bulletin des bibliothèques de France», 6, 44 (1999), p. 44-49, <<http://bbf.enssib.fr/sdx/BBF/pdf/bbf-1999-6/05-blanc-montmayeur.pdf>>; Martine Blanc-Montmayeur, *La Bibliothèque publique d'information. Vingt ans après*, «Bulletin des bibliothèques de France», 5, 41 (1996), p. 32-35, <http://bbf.enssib.fr/sdx/BBF/pdf/bbf-1996-5/08_blanc-montmayeur.pdf>; Francesco Dell'Orso, *La nuova BPI. Nel Centre Pompidou di Parigi riapre rinnovata la Bibliothèque publique d'information*, «Biblioteche oggi», 5, 18 (2000), pp. 20-6; Christophe Evans - Agnès Camus - Jean-Michel Cretin, *Les habitués. Le microcosme d'une grande bibliothèque*, préface de Christian Beaudelot, Bibliothèque publique d'information - Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 2000; *Lire ensemble, vivre ensemble. Bibliothèques et laïcité. Actes de la journée d'étude organisée par la Bpi le vendredi 19 septembre 2005, dans la Grande Salle du Centre Pompidou*, Bibliothèque publique d'information/Centre Pompidou, Paris 2005, <<http://editionsdelabibliotheque.bpi.fr/resources/download.cfm?GCOI=84240100254110&thefile=vivreens23janv06.pdf>>; Carlo Revelli, *Ottimismo e polemiche in Francia - I. Dalla Bibliothèque nationale de France alla BPI pareri contrastanti*, «Biblioteche oggi», 9, 19 (2001), p. 46-52; *Les 25 ans de la Bpi. Encyclopédisme, Actualité, Libre accès*.

The BPI is a reference library *ante litteram* as well as one of the first examples of post-modern architecture, as it was built in the Seventies and opened to the public in 1977. The library was completely renovated and reorganised between 2000 and 2004. Since the outset, the BPI was founded on one main principle: accessibility. This principle was declined in a number of different ways: from the central location to gratuity of services, from the informality of access procedures to the open shelves organisation, from the extensive opening hours to the broad coverage of its collections.

Its peculiarity and its strength have been the capacity to periodically renew and reinterpret its founding principles in a changing environment. The commitment to keep collections relevant to today, the encyclopaedic character of bibliographic material, the free and informal access to the library, the focus on reference services have been updated over time according to users' needs and changes in society. All these efforts can be seen as the reasons of the enduring success of the library.

As far as Sala Borsa Library is concerned, there is no doubt that the library's success in terms of public and services and its impact on the social life of the city are strictly linked to its central location and the comprehensive cultural role of this area. The decision to set up this library answered a need for a contemporary public library, as Bologna already had a historical municipal library, the Archiginnasio.⁶¹ The new library was meant to be not only a traditional library, but also a multimedia centre, a place not only for studying and professional activities, but also for meeting and entertaining. Furthermore, it intended to offer distance services taking advantage of new technologies.⁶²

The Sala Borsa Library has been consistent in its choice to be a library for all; the well thought-out management of its spaces and services allows different types of users to stay quietly together, from students with their own textbooks to users who consult its collections for personal or professional reasons, from people who read newspapers and magazines or navigate the Internet to the *flaneurs* who browse without a specific objective. The Sala Borsa Library is meant to satisfy the informational and social needs of different kinds of users, preserving the freedom and ease of

Actes du colloque international organisé par la Bibliothèque publique d'information au Centre Pompidou, les 23 et 24 octobre 2002, Bpi, Centre Pompidou, Paris 2003.

⁶⁰ The library website: <<http://www.bibliotecasalaborsa.it/home.php>>; see also: Anna Maria Brandinelli, *La Biblioteca Sala Borsa di Bologna: storia del progetto e dei luoghi. Un percorso fatto di piccoli grandi passi*, «Biblioteche oggi», 4, 20 (2002), pp. 6-18; Galluzzi, *New public libraries in Italy* cit.; *La Sala Borsa di Bologna. Il palazzo e la biblioteca*, a cura di Paola Foschi e Marco Poli, Editrice Compositori, Bologna 2004.

⁶¹ The library website: <<http://www.archiginnasio.it/>>.

⁶² *La Sala Borsa di Bologna* cit., 71.

access. Staff intermediation is available to the public any time or when help is explicitly requested.⁶³

Its collection management and growth are based upon the same principles, i.e. the pluralism of information and the critical approach to contents, and its bibliographic materials tend to represent the variety of interests and points of view related to age, education, culture and profession of its users.⁶⁴

Finally, let's talk about the niche library, which could be described as a library focusing on its specific functions: preservation, reading and bibliographic information.

The premise of this model is the risk of library marginalisation in the new global and digital framework. According to this opinion, libraries should focus, on the one hand, on the most traditional functions, like preservation of historical contents, and, on the other hand, contribute to the global availability of these sources in a digital format. Therefore, under this perspective, the future library will take up a very small niche of the information society and is supposed to look after very specific activities intended for restricted groups of users.

Some Italian scholars⁶⁵ believe that this is the most appropriate model for Italian public libraries and for all those public libraries which are more focused on collections, in particular historical bibliographic materials, than on services and have never been mass libraries. From their point of view, all the policies and interventions applied to Italian public libraries in order to make them more similar to the Anglo-American model partially or totally failed. In my opinion, the niche library could be an effective possibility for some, but not for all libraries; in particular, I think that this model could be particularly respondent to the identity of libraries intended for a very specific public or function. Obviously, there are many ways of interpreting this niche role and, inside a well-balanced system of libraries, a certain number of these kinds of libraries could be useful and contribute to optimise the overall functioning.

The multipurpose library

The above-described models don't contradict each other. They rather have some common features which makes me think that the future public library will be a mix of these models and will go beyond any settled pattern.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 98.

⁶⁴ *Carta delle collezioni della Biblioteca Sala Borsa: i principi di base*, «Biblioteche oggi», 20 (2002), n. 4, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Alberto Petrucciani, *Biblioteca pubblica senza identità? No, grazie*, «Bollettino AIB», 46 (2006), n. 4, p. 377-382; Paolo Traniello, *Biblioteche e società*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005.

In my opinion, a contradictory and multi-faceted nature should be its founding principle and, for this reason, the expression "multipurpose library" could be appropriate to refer to it.⁶⁶ The characteristics I am going to illustrate should not be accounted for as a recipe for any library, but as a development opportunity focused on big-sized public libraries in metropolitan settings, which does not rule out other kinds of libraries and other possibilities.

After all, we are entering a world where people aren't interested in whether something is true or not, or whether they believe it or not, but whether it works.

A library designed as a multipurpose one should cope with many challenges and in particular it should:

- combine small and big size, by focusing on quality of stock and services, balancing freedom and autonomy of users, relying on both cooperation and availability of space;
- offer personalised, though standardised, services to users;
- develop its entertaining role and, at the same time, the functions supporting study and research, and consequently balance self-service and mediation, need for silence and need for socialisation;
- play the role of a public space and be a private place;
- enable to browse among the stacks and search inside the OPAC;
- enhance the functional aspect of the library without neglecting its metaphorical and experience identity;
- re-launch the idea of a library as a place fully integrated in the habits of citizens and city users.

The originality of the multipurpose library can be analysed under several points of view, particularly its typological nature, its approach to users and its role and functions.

As far as its typological nature is concerned, we have already mentioned that the birth of different types of libraries is a process which mainly took shape during the 19th Century, as a consequence of the increasing complexity of society and the involvement of new social classes in education, government, citizenship and entertainment.

In particular, during the second half of the 19th Century, this process sped up in Great Britain and in the United States. This was a period of steady increase in number, aims and functions of libraries, due to different reasons: the economic growth and the increasing wealth, which provided resources to build cultural institutions and libraries; the population growth, which supplied working force to factories and industrial activities and created a large public for cultural activities; the second phase of the industrial revolution, which required more and more sources of information and

⁶⁶ Galluzzi, *Biblioteche per la città* cit., cap. 3.

stimulated higher education levels of workers; the democratic nature of the Anglo-American society, which promoted the self-development of citizens.⁶⁷

As a consequence of this process, academic libraries proliferated thanks to increasing funding and the reform of the education system, school libraries began to develop though they were not completely well-shaped before the 20th Century, special libraries serving public institutions and governmental bodies grew in number and quality, and, above all, public libraries were founded to address the needs of all citizens and were supported by the taxes paid by the local community.

Notwithstanding the diversification of libraries according to their functions and users, a core set of principles and ideas keeps libraries stuck together and nowadays common features seem to be more important than differences among them. The success of the Internet and its evolution towards the so-called Web 2.0 have strongly affected users' behaviour with regards to this.

In particular, users are far less available to use their scarce time for activities which could be carried out over the Internet, especially those activities which do not belong to their spare time.⁶⁸

Secondly, they are more and more used to the "one-stop-shop" approach and prefer service points and places where more than one activity and need can be satisfied. It must be stressed that the unique character of the Web as a vessel in which all digital contents merge into, in spite of level of specialisation or origin, has emphasised the "one stop shop" approach of users towards services not only over the Web, but also in real life.⁶⁹

Thirdly, some aspects of users' lives are merging and this is particularly true for everything pertaining to education and entertainment. Scholars talk about an edutainment society to highlight the fact that work, study, cultural activities, hobbies and spare time are mixed up in everyday life and are not linked to different moments of the day or of the week anymore nor to different periods of life.

Furthermore, we have to emphasise the interdisciplinary character of the current approach towards knowledge and the mix of different levels of knowledge - the academic, the popular and the practical ones - which characterise today's learning paradigm,⁷⁰ as well as the increasing importance of life-long learning.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Harris, *History of libraries in the Western world* cit.

⁶⁸ *La domanda e i consumi culturali*, «Economia della cultura», 2, 12 (2002), pp. 153-229. In particolare: *Introduzione*, pp. 153-6; Michele Trimarchi, *Dentro lo specchio: economia e politica della domanda di cultura*, pp. 157-70; Giuseppe Richeri, *Il fattore tempo nel consumo di beni culturali*, pp. 171-8; Fabio Guerra, *Le tendenze nel consumo del tempo libero in Europa*, pp. 215-29.

⁶⁹ *Perceptions of libraries and information resources. A Report to the OCLC Membership*, OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Dublin (Ohio) 2005, <http://www.oclc.org/reports/pdfs/Percept_all.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Guido Martinotti, *Informazione e sapere*, Anabasi, Milano 1992

⁷¹ Alan Bundy, *Places of connection: new public and academic library buildings in Australia and New Zealand. Paper for Library building conference Bournemouth UK, 5-6 February 2004*, p. 16, consultabile su: <<http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/about/papers/Places-of->

All this considered, some scholars promote a new method of library classification which is not based upon institutional affiliation and traditional categories anymore, but upon size, catchment area, staff and services level and so on.

Another important point of view for the analysis of the multipurpose library is its approach towards users. As a basic principle, this new library is expected to wonder about what is really in line with the users' ways of life and to analyse their cultural preferences and habits.

As stressed before, space and time are the two main variables of the contemporary citizens' life. In particular, sociological studies classify citizens' lifetime in three categories: obliged, bound and free. Obligated time encompasses all those activities which cannot be avoided and cannot be freely managed during the day and the week, like work and school, while bound time refers to all those activities which are necessary for our life and can be planned only to a limited extent, like administrative proceedings and medical examinations. Spare time is the only lapse of time we can autonomously plan and we can fill with pleasant and selected activities.⁷²

As cultural activities are time sensitive, we need to decide to which portion of time they belong. There is no doubt that if we keep on considering libraries linked only to professional and study activities, when the majority of bibliographic resources and connected services will be available online users will not hang out in libraries. Bottling up the process which moves resources and services over the Internet could only keep libraries pretentiously alive for a while.

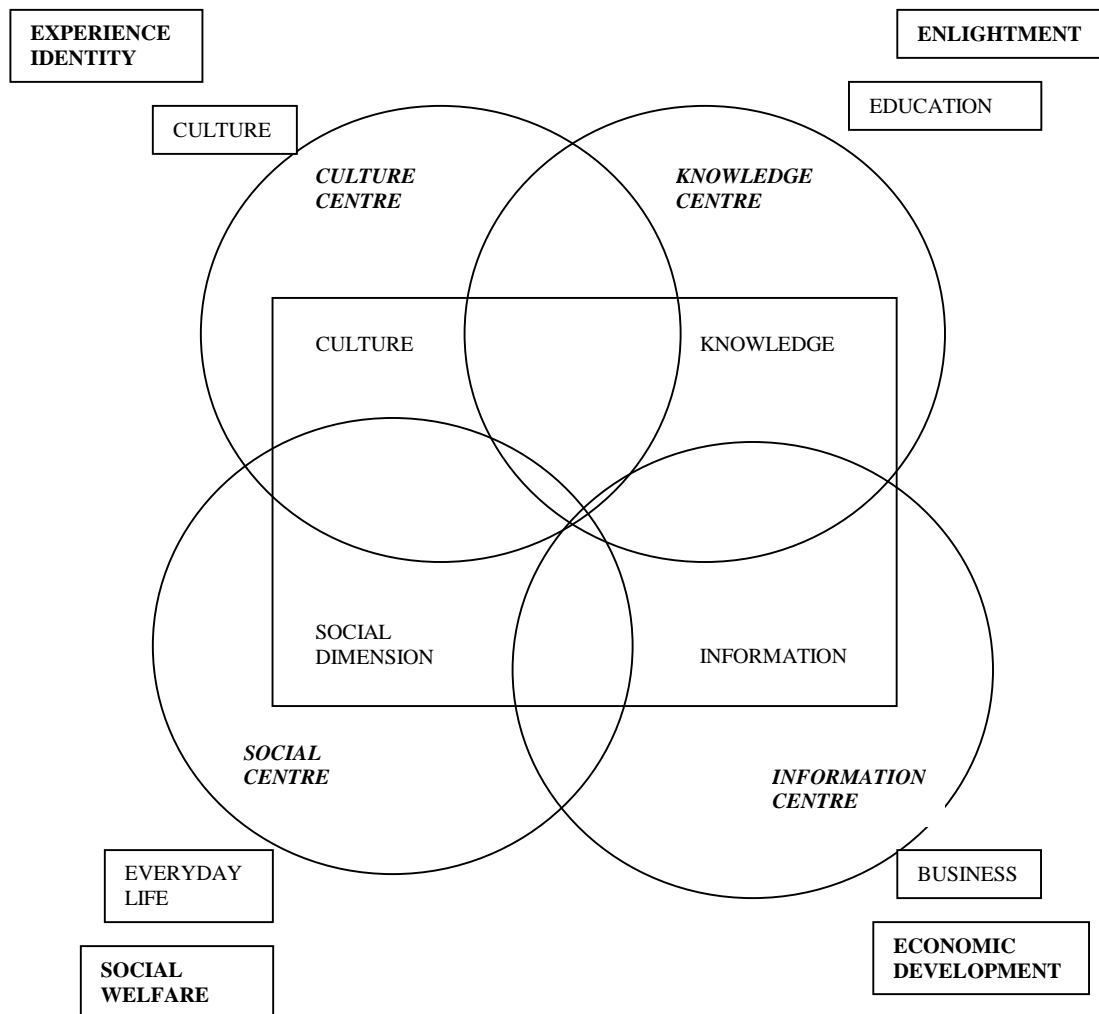
Maybe it would be time for libraries, in particular for public libraries, to start considering themselves as a place for pleasure where users can satisfy a number of needs, like the following ones: be informed, be entertained, be efficiently served, feel safe and unique, and take advantage of other services and places in their enduring search for sense of life.

Roles and functions of multipurpose libraries require a careful consideration too. An interesting description of the possible roles of the contemporary public library could be the following, which has been re-adapted from the proposal of Claus Bjarrum and Andrew Cranfield:⁷³

connection.pdf#search=%22Places%20of%20connection%3A%20new%20public%20and%20academic%20library%20buildings%20in%20Australia%20and%20New%20Zealand%22>.

⁷² *La domanda e i consumi culturali* cit.

⁷³ Claus Bjarrum - Andrew Cranfield, *The future is now. Library re-engineering in the 21st century*, in *Libraries as places* cit., p. 39-63.



The four roles pointed out in this chart partially overlap, as it can be seen, and are all vital for a consistent development of the public library. There is no doubt that libraries are more accustomed to some of these roles, particularly the educational and informational ones, while they have some difficulties in managing the social and cultural ones, which can bring the traditional identity of libraries into question.

Yet, this mix of different aspects is critical for the preservation of a meaningful placement of public libraries.

Conclusions

The multipurpose library intends to overcome the inner contradiction of the public library, which traditionally swings between a solemn and a prosaic status, an institutional and a consumer place, a civic and a mythical space, a mall and a sanctuary.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Galluzzi, *Biblioteche per la città cit.*, p. 159-169.

The public library cannot survive upon the theoretical idea that it is a good thing for community and society in general, it rather has to wonder about its economic and social impact on its territory.

Obviously, the multipurpose library cannot be proposed everywhere and all the time. It can be defined as a big sized library for medium and big cities, where it has the role of magnet for the local library and cultural network, and represents the place where cultural and social needs of citizens can get satisfaction.

After all, we cannot stop the rising of the so-called "barbaric culture" (as defined by the Italian novelist Alessandro Baricco to refer to the post-modern culture)⁷⁵ and we have to accept that this is an era of transformation and libraries cannot avoid to be transformed. It is necessary to be humble and learn from the success stories of others, accepting to give up some prerogatives and to put some certainties into question. Maybe it's time for libraries to leave a certain cultural snobbery behind and confront themselves with a mass culture, in order to critically re-interpret it and provide maps and links to connect the components of this loose-leaf culture. It's not a matter of being fashionable and accommodated to a predominant culture, but the need to be flexible and to understand the inner processes to carry out one's own mission right to the end.

⁷⁵ Baricco, *I barbari* cit.; ; Franco Brevini, *Un cerino nel buio. Come la cultura sopravvive a barbari e antibarbari*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2008; Ed D'Angelo, *Barbarians at the gates of the public library: how postmodern consumer capitalism threatens democracy, civil education and the public good*. Duluth (Mi), Library juice press, c2006.