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The effective use of space in university and public libraries: current issues.

Abstract

The paper considers key issues relating to space use and its development in university and public libraries. It focuses on the United Kingdom (UK) but draws on developments and discourse from elsewhere in the world through review of the literature. The paper provides an insight into the recent growth in activity and thinking in use of space in libraries and what is driving this. It highlights factors influencing current and future developments. These include: terminology, theory relating to space and use, physical and virtual space, impact of everyday use of digital technologies outside the library, and staff, users and senior management attitudes. It identifies methods employed to assess use of space in libraries and provides an overview of an ethnographic study of a recently established open space at Loughborough University Pilkington Library.

Introduction

The use of space in university and public libraries in the UK is currently a 'hot' topic. This is evidenced in various ways. Significantly, the Designing Libraries Gateway, originally hosted at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, has recently developed in scope, to address a wider variety of libraries:

From 2004 onwards, with funding from MLA [Museums, Libraries and Archives Council] and support from CILIP [Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals], it [Designing Libraries team, Aberystwyth University] has maintained and expanded the Designing

Libraries site as a data and image bank and an information resource aimed at providing a service to anyone with interests in library design and planning. During that time Designing Libraries has expanded the scope of its database to accommodate libraries from other sectors and other countries; entered into partnership with SCONUL to make available SCONUL's [Society of College, National and University Libraries] data relating to UK and Ireland university library buildings, and added numerous new facilities. (Designing Libraries. History, 2009).

With regard to universities, a UK Learning Spaces Special Interest Group (SIG) was set up early in 2009, with its initial meeting in April:

Co-hosted by Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield the inaugural meeting will focus on sharing research, practice and ideas around learning space design and evaluation, as well as scoping out ideas for the future development of the group. (UK Learning Space SIG. About , 2009)

SCONUL has identified e-learning, e-research and space planning, among other key topics, and provides more information about these and its activities with regard to libraries on its website (SCONUL, 2007). University libraries have also benefited from Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) publications such as guides on physical space design and the impact of new technology and developments in learning (see, for example, JISC, 2006; 2008). JISC also recently held a meeting to debate Libraries of the future (JISC, 2009), which, *inter alia*, addressed space and place. The JISC Libraries of the future website is now offering itself as a facilitator of debate and involvement, online and in person through promoting a variety of events. A comprehensive overview of the qualities of good library space and design and issues and drivers related to them, is provided by McDonald who reviews, in the current context, Faulkner-Brown's 'ten commandments' of planning libraries from the 1970s. With regard to changes in learning spaces in academic libraries, an overview is provided by Secker (2008) in a literature

review, part of a project investigating libraries and social software in education.

With regard to public libraries, MLA has a programme for Public library buildings within its Framework for the Future programme (MLA Programmes, 2009). MLA, along with other key agencies has recently launched an initiative, Living places, (2008) that aims

... to ensure that all communities, particularly those experiencing housing-led growth and regeneration, can benefit from cultural and sporting opportunities. By working together, the partners will ensure that culture is embedded in the development of our villages, towns and cities alongside other key areas of provision such as healthcare and transport ... We refer to 'culture & sport' as the collective term for a range of activities, resources, facilities and expertise that include arts, sport, heritage, museums, libraries and archives, the built environment – and the creative industries, including film and media. The culture of a place is the product of people's sense of pride, identity and connectedness and cultural activity provides a route for harnessing and developing this local distinctiveness. (living places. About living spaces, 2008)

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) also offers information and case studies, including recent public library buildings (CABE, 2009). *Better Public Libraries* (2003) and *Worpole* (2004) provide a comprehensive overview of current and future design and use of space in public libraries, issues and drivers.

This increasing interest of policy makers in the design of public library buildings has emerged from a general heightened concern with community development and engagement (see, for example, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). As part of this agenda, the role that public libraries can play in fostering community by acting as a "friendly, neutral space" (Goulding, 2006 p. 255) has been celebrated by practitioners

and policy makers. Framework for the Future (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003) established 'community and civic values' as one of its three key themes and Dolan (2007) also emphasised the role of the public library as a "community place", suggesting that the public library is "a place for the whole community to come together as individuals, in families and as a community to read, learn and discover" (p. 6). Goulding (2006) found that although senior public library practitioners and policy makers "were keen to press the case for libraries to act as public, community spaces where people can meet and interact with the aim of facilitating more positive and extensive connections within the neighbourhood" they were also concerned that "much of the public library building stock in the UK is not appropriate for a modern public library service" (p. 259). As noted above, MLA has a programme to improve public library buildings in England and £80 million worth of funding has been made available through the Community Libraries Programme, focusing primarily on the upgrading of public library buildings. Locally, new build and refurbishment programmes have also been successful (see below) with an emphasis on making public library buildings exciting and accessible community spaces.

Academic research into the design and use of public library space has similarly focused on the capacity of public library buildings to promote and sustain community engagement, identity and citizenship and, increasingly, on their impact on social capital. In 2003, for example, Bryson, Usherwood and Proctor explored the impact of new library buildings on their communities, suggesting that public libraries had the potential to build social capital through the fostering of social links which bind the community together. Goulding (2004) similarly argued that libraries can contribute to the building of social capital by providing space for interaction and integration enabling social networking and by providing citizenship information resources. In response to criticisms that there was a lack of evidence to critically assess these claims (see, for example, Daly 2005), Varheim, Steinmo and Ide (2008) explored the extent to which public library buildings in Norway create "generalized trust" defined as when "individuals trust most people, not only their own kind ... trust towards diverse others, people of different age, class, gender, race and

ethnicity” (p. 878). They concluded that the public library was an important meeting space for specific vulnerable groups but not for people in general, although formal library-based activities did contribute to generating generalized trust¹. Another feature of public library buildings of interest to researchers is the extent to which public libraries “provide both the resources and space for fostering increased civic participation and engagement across all sections of a community” (Daly, 2005). According to Usherwood, Wilson and Bryson, (2005, p. 93) public libraries “provide a site for public, even civic interaction... In so doing they help create the conditions in which a healthy functioning democracy can flourish. Ideas can be created and shared in public spaces”. Thus, public library buildings may also encourage civic engagement and participation through the development of community partnerships, the facilitation of local dialogue and the dissemination of printed and electronic citizenship information (Kranich, 2004).

The heightened policy and scholarly focus on public library design and use is reflected to a certain degree in a more general interest from the public and the media in the UK although, increasingly, newspaper reports and features often raise concerns about developments. In response to a speech by the Culture Secretary Andy Burnham (DCMS. Media Releases, 2008), for example, in which he suggested that public libraries should be full of “joy and chatter” and raised the issue of whether they should be “silent places for reading? Or social places for people to meet and discuss, perhaps with coffee shops or internet cafes”, several national newspapers ran Editorials, features and letters pages disputing the Government’s priorities for public libraries (see, for example, Brown, 2008 and Cooke, 2008).

Despite some misgivings about changes to the environment and atmosphere of library buildings, universities and local authorities are pressing ahead with development and there are many examples of recent and planned new libraries and refurbishments in both sectors. See, for example, Birmingham

¹ Varheim’s project is part of the Norwegian PLACE (Public Libraries – Arenas for Citizenship) project investigating the extent to which the public library can act as a community meeting place, fostering social capital in a digital and multicultural context:
<http://www.hio.no/Enheter/Avdeling-for-journalistikk-bibliotek-og-informasjonsfag/PLACE>

City Council. Libraries. Library of Birmingham (2009); Booth, R (2009); Kent TV. Community Channel (2009); Liverpool John Moores University. Aldham Robarts Learning Resource Centre (2009); MLA. News (2009); Nottinghamshire County Council. Libraries (2009); University of Leicester. [Building the] David Wilson Library (2009); Worcester Library and History Centre (Worcester Public Library, the University Library, the County Record Office, the History Centre and the Worcester Historic Environment & Archaeology Service).

Use of space in libraries - debate

As can be seen from the above, there is a growing debate in the UK about space and place with regard to libraries. The literature suggests that this is perhaps happening later than elsewhere, for example, Australia and the US. In university libraries, the debate goes on in the wider context of learning across the institution and the different requirements of a changing student profile:

We should provide a variety of study environments to suit the growing diversity of our users and their different styles of learning and discovery. Students should be encouraged to learn at their own pace and in their own time, with provision not only for private study and independent learning, but also, increasingly, for group work and interactive learning. Indeed, the provision of social and collaborative spaces in which users can interact with each other is an important trend. The 'hybrid library' must, of course, provide access to both traditional and electronic resources, and an increasing amount of space is devoted to IT services (both wired and wireless provision) and technical support, information skills training and seminar rooms (McDonald, 2006).

A key feature of the debate is the library as 'third place', which some see as a key function of the library of the future. 'Third place', a concept used by

Oldenburg (1989) is a different place to 'first place', the home, and 'second place', the workplace. This is seen as relevant to both public and academic libraries as highlighted in a recent newspaper article which notes that: "British architecture has produced Peckham public library and the Ideas Store in Whitechapel, libraries that put themselves at the heart of the community with internet cafes, crèches, social spaces and classrooms for adult learning" (Hoare, 2008). Bromberg (2006, p.1), writing in the US, explains

Libraries are transformative places and offer people a "third place" (not home, not work) where they can come to explore, imagine, think, learn, play, and reflect. Our function as a "third place" has never been more important to our continued health and relevance. If libraries are to survive and thrive we must redouble our efforts and refocus our energies to ensure that we are not only "third places" but "destinations of choice".

Others may see this approach as part of a 'dumbing down' (see, for example, Doughty, 2009).

Terminology

It is not always evident that all of those active or interested in this area are using terminology in the same way. This is underlined by Gayton (2008) in a paper which has attracted considerable interest:

A communal academic library is not the same as a social academic library. The social model envisions a library in which students and faculty collaborate and communicate with each other in the creation of new knowledge. Adding social functions and services like cafés, art galleries, group study facilities, and info commons creates spaces and models of behaviour that are open to conversation and cooperative work. The problem is that the social model undermines something that is highly valued in academic libraries: the communal nature of quiet,

serious study. Communal activity in academic libraries is a solitary activity: it is studious, contemplative, and quiet. Social activity is a group activity: it is sometimes studious, not always contemplative, and certainly not quiet (Gayton, p.60).

He continues:

Implicit in this view is a confusion between “social” and “communal”. There is a profound difference between a space in which library users are engaged in social activity and a space in which they are engaged in communal activity. Social activity in a library involves conversation and discussion among people, about either the work at hand or more trivial matters. Community activity in a library involves seeing and being seen quietly engaged in study (Gayton, p.60).

Think about the informal terms we use in describing space – for example, personal, social, communal, hybrid, public, virtual, e-, digital, physical, and add to those others, such as knowledge, smart. Likewise with place, first, second, third, another, sense of; and related terms such as location, environment, surroundings, and so on.

Spatial theory

Some have looked at the theory of space and the activity and thinking of practitioners and academics. Examples include Pomeranz and Marchionini, 2006, Lawson, 2008, Templeton, 2008. More of this might be appropriate, but if this is to include multidisciplinary input from outside the sector, it is a considerable task as indicated by the scope of a website providing links to information about research on place and space (Janz, 2006).

Physical and virtual space

One aspect affecting libraries that has attracted attention in recent years is physical and virtual space and the relationship of the one to the other. With so many services and resources available remotely via a range of ever developing digital technologies, is there still, for example, a need for a physical library, or if there is, what should it be?

But I suspect that we have exhausted the all-encompassing vision of the library as place. A place can continue to be part of the definition of a library, but it is reduce to only a part. We have outgrown that metaphor for understanding who we are and what we do. In an increasingly digital and consortial world, the library as a place must give way to something such as the library as a mission (Kohl, 2006, p.118).

A recent blog posting provides an interesting view on this:

Of all the effects that computer and digital technologies have had on our society, the most striking in my opinion is the effect that it is having on our sense of place: that is, where we are. During the last several months I have been run into or nearly run into by people on the UVM campus who are not looking where they are walking while they check something on their cell phones or other hand held technologies... Each semester the elsewhere-ness via ipods/mp3s, cellphones, and similarly portable devices grows. As people attempt to be in two places at once...

... Libraries do not seem to be thinking about technology in terms of information access alone, but also in terms of user expectations and services. I think that means user space. Libraries are still ... upholding the same traditional value of a place to think. It's just that "place" has changed...and so has "think." (Place and libraries and technology, 2008).

Influence of everyday use of digital technologies

A key factor in all of this is people's use and expectations in the world outside libraries – where for many the use of digital technologies is commonplace. This is particularly the case with young people who have grown up with such technologies, referred to by an increasing number of terms each with their own shade of meaning, such as millennials, digital natives, the Google generation, Generation Y, Generation Z, and Generation@ (see, for example, Fister, 2004; Gardner and Eng, 2005; Oblinger, 2003).

As Lam et al note (2006, p.3):

The young undergraduates display a strong preference towards collaborative teamwork, and expect nomadic communications. The technology allows them to interact with multiple persons in multiple simultaneous activities and conversations in playing Web games, chat rooms and IM. They are also more skilled in multitasking than previous generations ... It is important for them to access multimedia tools anywhere anytime. As such, they expect the technologies to be mobile and the devices portable.

Another fast-growing trend in teaching and learning is the yearning for liberty and freedom of choice. With many more alternatives in services and products available to them than any previous generation ... They desire to have diverse educational environments that accommodate different learning styles. They prefer a place where they can eat, drink, discuss, listen to music, check e-mails and read books, all at the same time. In this regard, are librarians posing too many use restrictions on our young undergraduates? It is not their habit to get information from a specific physical location during specific opening hours and following specific rules and regulations.

Prensky (2001, p.1), writing five years earlier, also commented on this:

Today's students – K through college – represent the first generations to grow up with this new technology. They have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Today's average college grads have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV). Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives.

It is now clear that as a result of this ubiquitous environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today's *students think and process information fundamentally differently* from their predecessors.

It must not, however, be assumed that all young people make effective use of digital technologies - they may not have sufficient information literacy skills to exploit them. Indeed, a recent UK report highlights this, for example:

the information literacy of young people, has not improved with the widening access to technology: in fact, their apparent facility with computers disguises some worrying problems

internet research shows that the speed of young people's web searching means that little time is spent in evaluating information, either for relevance, accuracy or authority

young people have a poor understanding of their information needs and thus find it difficult to develop effective search strategies
(Information behaviour, p.12)

Likewise, public libraries are striving to achieve goals of government initiatives relating to social inclusion which involves attracting groups from communities who may not have such skills.

This does not relate just to young people and undergraduates. For example, academic libraries must also consider how they design effective research spaces, blending physical and virtual environments and resources for a range of students and academics.

Staff attitudes

It is therefore vital that staff are involved in all aspects of developments in space and its use. Not only should their views be sought along with those of users in consultation processes relating to new libraries and/or changes in the use of space. Consideration must also be given to their attitudes as to how this might impact on their current role. Management need to take this into account along with the physical changes they are planning. Involving staff in helping plan and develop library spaces in changing from traditional to innovative uses can lead to tensions. Invariably there will be conflict when some wish to retain traditional uses whereas others relish the changes.

Assessing the effectiveness of innovations in the use of space

Libraries routinely evaluate the use of space. As new uses of space are employed, it would seem appropriate to assess them, to see if they are working as planned, to provide evidence for further developments, and so on. As new uses grow, why shouldn't new methods of assessment be used too? These may not be novel from a methodological point of view, but they may be in their application in this sector and for this purpose. The literature reveals developments – see, for example, Fried Foster and Gibbons (eds), 2007 (ethnographic tools); Ludwig and Starr, 2005 (delphi study), Potthoff et al, 2000 (role repertory grid), Webb, Schaller and Hunley, 2008 (multi-method including video study), and Xia, 2005 (GIS).

At a recent UK seminar, Sheffield Hallam University provided good examples (Aspden and Harrop, 2009) on how to seek students' views on the new spaces they had created. Students were asked to take pictures of space they

liked and disliked and a wiki was set up for them to respond to. 'Twitter' was also used to seek feedback

Ethnographic study - Loughborough University Pilkington Library

Loughborough University Pilkington Library, opened in 1980, like most university libraries, has re-configured and developed its physical space over the years. The building covers 7777m² over 3 floors and provides in this space approximately 900 study spaces and over 120 open access pcs. The Library stores over 400,000 books and gives access to 4000 print journals. In 2005, an open-plan space was created on the entrance level of the Library. The Library undertook an exploration in 2006 to establish levels and patterns of use in the different kinds of physical space it provided (Walton, 2006). This study did show some insight into the how the open-plan, social learning space was being used but it did not provide the answers to various questions such as:

- What do students do when they are in the space?
- What is the inter-relationship between social and learning activities?
- Do students work in groups or individually in this space?
- What learning resources do they use there?
- Are different activities taking place in the different parts of the area?

These questions were very important and the Library was struggling to find the answers. Physical space is a very expensive resource to maintain and provide in any university and the library has to justify to the rest of the institution how its physical space is used in delivering its services. The Library had taken the bold step in 2004 in removing most of the large print reference collection, printed indexes and abstracts and large book shelves from its main entrance floor (level 3). Group study tables, individual study tables, white boards, wi fi network, and settees had replaced them. The Library Café was altered so that it opened out onto this area. Eating, drinking, noise and mobile phone restrictions were removed. The intention was that this physical space

would be effective in supporting various types of learning as well being a social space. This was done in the acknowledgement that students learn in different ways and libraries have to adapt to reflect these changes. The other two levels (1 and 2) of the library remain designated as 'traditional', quiet study areas where food and drink are excluded. They provide 139 and 298 seats respectively.

Such a radical change in space use was not necessarily guaranteed to receive unanimous approval from the Library user. One senior academic commented that "the Library was trying to turn itself into McDonald's restaurant" and another argued that the Library was trying to re-place the Students' Union. In this context the Library realised it needed to provide the evidence that did not emerge in its 2006 study (Walton, 2006). There was an absence of rich, detailed data on the area so various methodologies were reviewed that would generate such information. After long consideration the Library decided to undertake an ethnographic study of the space. Very few recent studies of libraries have been undertaken in the UK using this methodology, but it is more prevalent in Canada (see, for example, Given and Leckie, 2003; McKechnie, 2000; McKechnie *et al.* 2004; McKechnie *et al.* 2006).

In such an ethnographic study, the data is collected by a researcher(s) undertaking observation fieldwork in the environment being studied. The group working on this study felt the following definition of ethnography (Fetterman, 1998, p.1) was the most helpful:

The art and science of describing a group or culture... much like the one taken on by an investigative reporter... [yet] about the routine, daily lives of people. The more predictable patterns of human thought and behaviour are the focus of inquiry.

The study was completed between March and August 2007 with the data being collected over 40 hours of unobtrusive observation in the Library space. The project team comprised a Masters student and an academic from the

Department of Information Science at the University, and a senior member of the Library staff. Approval was sought from the University's Ethics Committee as the investigation did involve unobtrusive/ covert observation of participants. A pilot study (2 hours) was undertaken, and lesson learned from this; for example, the researcher tried different ways of recording observations but determined, as a touch typist, that typing into a laptop was most the most effective method for her. The pilot also underlined the need to carry out observations from different locations within Open³. It was determined that a grounded theory approach to analysis would be taken. Eight broad themes were identified:

- collaborative study
- individual study
- intrusions and interruptions
- Open³ as a social space
- Open³ as a public/private space
- use of technology
- diversity
- Library staff/Library materials.

Rich data were gathered; it should be noted that activities in Open³, may be different in the months not covered in this observation. General conclusions from this study included:

- the space is mainly popular with students (especially undergraduates) who use it for both group and individual study.
- users see it simultaneously as a social space and a work environment.
- the proximity of Open³ to the café, and the relaxed atmosphere of the area encourages users to settle down and stay for prolonged periods.
- use is at its peak during term-time and the revision/examination period

- the presence of technology (PCs, wi-fi internet access etc.) is valued and widely used.
- a tacit code of etiquette governs behaviour in the area. Most users behave in accordance with this, keeping noise below a certain level, and often leaving the library to make mobile telephone calls.
- most people behave considerately towards others and use Open³ with respect.

The project also demonstrated that the ethnographic methodology can be successfully and usefully applied within an academic library to produce practical, beneficial insight into how space is used. Future ethnographic studies would be advised to recruit more researchers in order to prevent one individual becoming overly fatigued (intense concentration from the observer is required) during the data collection phase and to ensure that one individual's perspective does not dominate the findings. (The library/bookstore study of McKechnie *et al.* (2004) is an example of a larger scale study which successfully used multiple researchers.) It would be interesting to conduct similar studies in other academic libraries in order to compare user behaviour. Explicit recommendations to Loughborough University Pilkington were made. (For further details of the survey, see Bryant, Matthews and Walton, 2009.)

Conclusion

The literature reflects a lot of activity in this field. In the UK, it appears to be more about developments – new buildings and refurbishments, with less debate about the use of space, the significance of place, and the role and function of libraries in the context of current and future economic, political, social and technical factors. It has to be said, however, that this debate is growing and forums for it are in place. There is a lot of discussion and experience from elsewhere in the world that, local circumstances apart, could contribute to thinking and activities in the UK. A comprehensive review of worldwide literature, old and new, relating to the sector and also to theory and

activity in related sectors, a potentially major undertaking, would benefit those involved in all aspects of developing libraries of the future.²

UK public and academic libraries face similar challenges and issues in terms of use of space. Recent developments in public libraries have been more openly politically driven and in line with broader political initiatives, for example, relating to social inclusion. In the planning stages, consultation with stakeholders, including 'non-users' has developed. In academic libraries, developments in learning and ICT have been key drivers. A growing attention to gathering evidence on the use of services and space has developed. The sense of the library as place, from impressive but welcoming central public library, conveniently sited local, community library, to modern campus learning resource centre is beginning to take on more significance, perhaps, in spite of the digital library, which some have argued will remove or reduce the need for physical space. People are at the heart of this, users (and non-users) and staff – their needs and views have to be taken into account – and these will be very different.

Another aspect relating to people is that public and academic librarians both need to consider the views of decision makers and their awareness of libraries. Bundy (2004, pp.16-17), reflecting on the situation in Australia and New Zealand, succinctly gives the reasons for this:

Despite the progress with new buildings, and consciousness raising about their value to their communities, the challenge which remains in Australia and New Zealand is how to persuade local government decision makers, and university, further education and school administrators, of the high return on investment in replacing or rebuilding library buildings, when those decision makers

² In this respect, a current awareness service (Searing and Stover Lucht (comps) 2006) from the Graduate School of Library and Information Science and the Library and Information Science Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign should be acknowledged for its coverage.

- may not have had access to a library in their formative childhood years
- may retain views of libraries as the sometimes drab and daunting book lending agencies of their childhood
- may make little direct use of a library themselves
- may still naïvely assume that the internet and the world wide web have displaced, or are displacing, libraries
- have never seen, or been into, a modern, attractive and busy library
- have no sense of the locational, appearance, space, lighting, technological and other deficiencies of libraries for which ultimately they have responsibility to maximise - not constrain – usage.

Libraries have made tremendous advances, have embraced new technologies, developed innovative services, often in times of financial constraint and change, but still face an ‘image’ issue - promotion of what they are about, what they offer, what impact they have for their communities is vital in engaging the support of decision makers and taking them along with the vision of the new library. But librarians must know what their vision is.

Libraries as physical places face serious competition with regard to the provision of information, learning services and leisure opportunities from others. Managers need to be ‘savvy’ to deliver effective services in this context. Efficient design of the library and space within it is crucial – for example, should it be flexible to facilitate varying use and demand, or does this negatively affect function – too many things to all people?

Assessing the use of space is, therefore, essential. Serious thought needs to be given to how this may efficiently be achieved. The ‘head count’ is no longer sufficient, in the way that outcomes and impact have overtaken straightforward output statistics. The literature has shown that this is being addressed - there are examples of different methods that others might adopt. This is one area where public and academic libraries may benefit from each

other's experience. They may also, as some already have, benefit from looking at other areas of the cultural world (see for example, Dove, 2006), and outside (see, for example, Huang, 2001). But this in general terms is nothing new. With regard to place, physical and virtual, and space, librarians need to look to the past and the present to envision their future. Demas (2005, p.1) has commented:

For several generations, academic librarians were primarily preoccupied with the role of their library buildings as portals to information, print and later digital ... In recent years, we have reawakened to the fact that libraries are fundamentally about people – how they learn, how they use information, and how they participate in the life of a learning community. As a result, we are beginning to design libraries that seek to restore parts of the library's historic role as an institution of learning, culture, and intellectual community.

But they must not be old libraries in new guise – they must embrace the new. It is encouraging that debate and discussion about the libraries of the future, including their design and function, is building momentum in the UK.

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