MONOGRAPHIC SECTION

User-oriented and creative libraries: the opportunities of spaces

Edited by
Michelle F. Schaffer
Medical Library, University Library of Bern,
University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland
michelle.schaffer@ub.unibe.ch

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Michelle F. Schaffer
Medical Library, University Library of Bern,
University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland
michelle.schaffer@ub.unibe.ch

Libraries today are central features on university campus. They can fulfill several needs of university students, employees and of the public at the same place. The library space offers a unique opportunity to achieve individual learning mixed with collaborative techniques. The provided tools and services support learning and ensure that users find accurate information in the "flood of information". Further the library is the place to meet the scientific writing tutor or information specialist for consultation in designing search strategies. Therefore even with the increasing digitalization trend the library stays as an important "knowledge transfer center" which is also shown in the increasing numbers of visitors. The challenging task of the library is to deal with the different demands. Transformation of the education paradigm in the 21st century converts university libraries into dynamic centres. While we should continue with developing more high-tech collaborative open-space design with audiovisual technologies, we should not forget that quiet study spaces are still a desirable feature (1). Therefore the library spaces have to be adapted to new services and to a variety of user needs (information services, group-work rooms, silent study zone, exhibition facilities, multi-purpose rooms, digital audiovisual editing rooms, etc.). However, the uncertainty over future technological changes and the rapid change in the needs of library users must not be neglected and requires a greater flexibility of spaces, with mobile fittings and furnishings that can be re-arranged along with their integrated technical installation.

The transformation of the library's role in the network society and digital age has led to the redefinition of its mission and the adaption of new and innovative architectural design strategies, which prioritizes spaces for user activities over spaces for housing physical collections (2). Hence, the digital age has transformed the library's role. It no longer has to safeguard and preserve only the physical collection of books or knowledge. The library becomes a learning and social centre and at the same time a producer of new contents and information products. Finally, the library has to consider the various special needs of its users such as students, researchers, entrepreneurs, cultural consumers, special interest groups, minorities etc. which makes the library an important meeting place within the lifelong learning paradigm.

It was a great pleasure to read about the innovative thinking and ideas on how different medical libraries transformed their rooms into unique meeting places. A predominant finding when reading all the articles was the importance of consultation of stakeholders (such as workshops with student representatives and academics, surveys etc.) for a successful library design. I think the quantity of articles received clearly shows that the transformation of the library's role in the digital age has also to consider the library design.

In this themed issue, Kirsi Mäenpää of the Helsinki University Library in Finland demonstrates how freed spaces due to the decrease in printed books can be reused in a practical way. They started a collaboration with Terkko Health Hub, which is a startup community, a co-working area and an event space focused on health sciences and life sciences. The statement of Kirsi Mäenpää "the library transforms for its users and according to the demands of the time" hits the target of this issue very well. I am very grateful to her for showing us how premises can be used in a rather unconventional way and detached from traditional library spaces. Planning works, the shared organization of the services and experiences from the last two years are discussed in this article.

Annsofie Olsson and Lotti Dorthé of the Malmö University Library in Sweden had a very creative idea on how to use library spaces. The Researchers' Gallery shows exhibitions on current and ongoing research, which offers on one hand an opportunity to start collaborations between researchers and librarians, on the other hand, a platform to explain research activities in a comprehensible way to the public. With interactive and sometimes provocative elements, visitors are encouraged to react and contribute. This opens an active dialogue between science and the society and can give new ideas about current research. This is another excellent way to emphasize the role of the library as a place for knowledge transfer and research communication.

In another contribution, Isabelle de Kaenel, Cécile Jaques and Alexia Trombert of the Medical Library in Lausanne in Switzerland present how they tackled the challenge when the library was moved out from the hospital main building to new premises with a potential threat to close collaboration with the clinical and research units. As the authors state "More than a global service, customized solutions are expected from the medical librarians". In the article they describe their tridimensional approach to fulfill the students need to have a functional, comfortable and convivial space for learning, further to establish the library's role as online resources provider and finally how they could still offer offsite individual support services for the clinical and research community.

To find out how a student defines an attractive study environment and how the Linnaheus University Library is perceived by students leads us to reading the article by Marie Frederiksson from the Linnaeus University Library and Kalmar County Council Medical e-library in Sweden. The author demonstrates that it is valuable to work with students and to analyse survey results for guidance for future changes in the long term. By categorizing the results of the survey, a pre- and post-evaluation could be conducted and made the results comparable. For example, the results showed that the coloured markings made during refurbishment were helpful for the student to perceive the four different zones. This contribution shows us how helpful it could be to do space design based on an in-depth survey.

Other interesting results from user experience methods and how valuable they are to develop learning environments are presented in the article by Carina Ahlberg of the Karolinska Institutet University Library in Stockholm. The author presents to us how furnishing and colors can be used in different ways, for instance to reduce the noise or to connect the physical and the digital library. Through creative thinking from the library staff and using cost saving methods, user needs can be met. Therefore they could design an attractive learning place and make the library space distinguishable from other learning environments. This is another way to build the library of the future.

Kate Kelly and Kathryn Smith of RCSI Library in Dublin, Ireland present in their case study how the design of the health sciences library was based on user and stakeholder consultation and how the RSCI strategy was considered to create a state of the art learning space and to evaluate the impact it has on library service delivery. With their boundary-less library, the variety in spaces and seating and the new library service model, they can present very well that the library is much more than just a place. Their library was awarded with the prestigious SCONUL Library Design Award in 2019. Further, they had many visits from librarians and architects and there was even sufficient sectoral interest to hold a seminar.

The last article is by myself and describes the opportunity of the increase in medical student numbers and the introduction of a full-time pharmacy course to change the profile of a library. The cost-saving library refurbishment led to an attractive space that supports learning, research and encourages discussion between medical students and researchers.

In conclusion, I am most grateful to the authors of all the contributions in this themed issue for their support and I appreciated their innovative thinking to emphasize the importance of designing the library space, and also to the JEAHIL Chief Editor and Editorial Board for the invitation to be its guest editor. I am also thankful to the English editor, Claire Powell who revised spelling and style mistakes before this issue was published.

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