

## **Around the World in Not-Quite-80 Libraries:**

### **What Library Trends Around the World Show Us About Future Library Spaces**

Stephanie Chase, Director, Hillsboro Public Library, Hillsboro, Oregon, United States

Justine Hyde, Director, Library Services and Experience, State Library Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

#### **Abstract**

It can be invaluable for library staff at all levels to visit other libraries and gain first-hand knowledge of a service concept in action, or to experience a new or redesigned library space in person. Over the past 18 months, Justine Hyde (State Library Victoria, Melbourne, Australia) and Stephanie Chase (Hillsboro Public Library, Hillsboro, Oregon, USA) traveled together and separately to visit libraries in Australia, Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Canada, and the United States to investigate what libraries at the cutting edge are offering and implementing.

Through these visits, as well as opportunities to meet with library staff and key leadership, it quickly became clear that libraries around the globe are grappling with similar issues, and are looking toward the implementation of similar trends to respond to these issues. Time and time again, the work of these innovative libraries was focused on the same six areas. Those areas are:

- Emphasis on reading
- Spaces for doing and learning
- Responsive, multi-use spaces
- Co-located services
- Shift to self-service
- Urban regeneration.

Through the sharing of best practices, lessons learned, implementation suggestions, and a significant number of images of the concepts in place in spaces, libraries around the world can take advantage of the innovations of our colleagues.

## **Reading is Fundamental**

In the United States, it has been demonstrated time and time again that the American public most strongly associates public libraries with books and reading. Libraries play a key role in promoting and supporting early literacy initiatives, and in providing access to collections broad in scope to meet the informal learning and entertainment needs of the public.

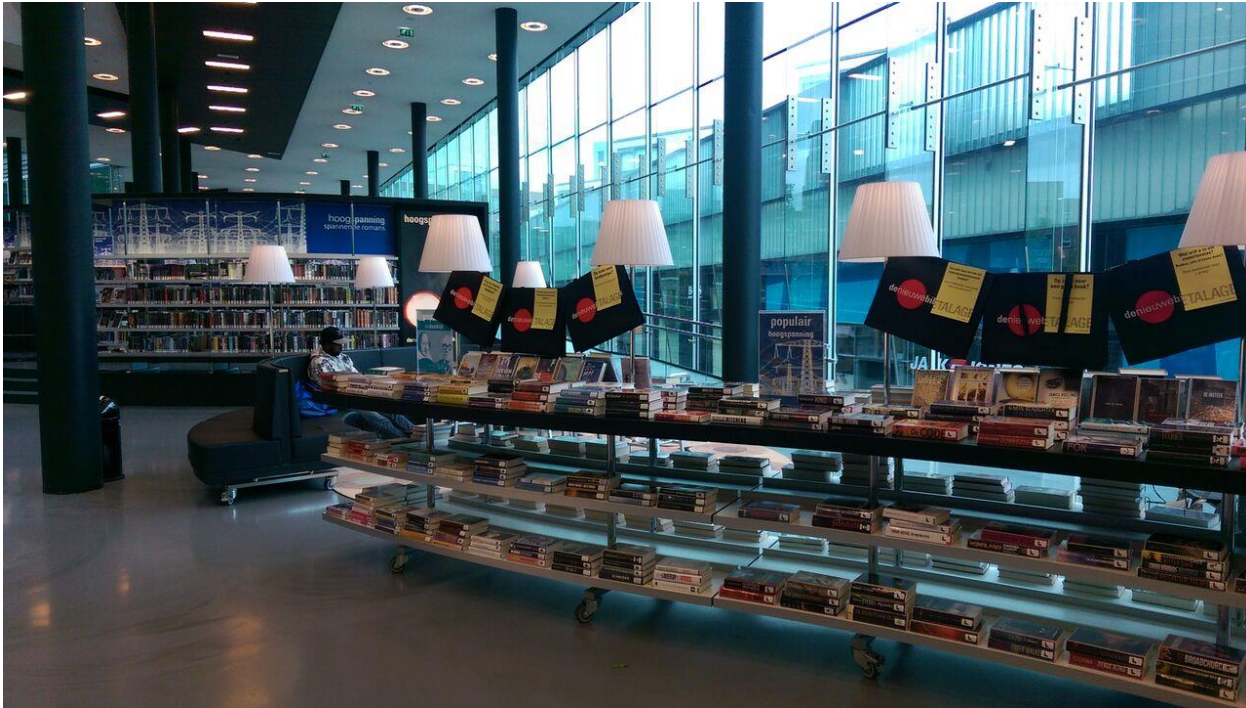
At the same time, many libraries have been shrinking their collections, reducing the overall collection size as they focus on new and popular materials. In many ways, this has helped libraries, as readers of all ages are more easily able to find the materials they are looking for. The work of libraries to connect readers and their books is not done only through collection maintenance; in the most successful libraries we visited, there was an increased emphasis on merchandising and connecting with staff or other patrons around reading.

This was seen most notably in the new Almere Library, located about 30 minutes outside of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Almere received a significant amount of press at their opening for their building, the location at the end of a busy shopping street with a straight path to and from the train station, and for their focus on books, particularly at entry. The library is organised by genre or area of focus, complemented by clear, bright, graphic signage. With no signage in English, it was still possible -- and in fact easy -- to use the library and explore the collections.



Collection signage, Almere Library. Photo by Stephanie Chase.

Visitors to the Almere Library are immediately greeted with well-merchandised collections, providing a sense of abundance and joy. As with other Northern European libraries, there is an emphasis on high quality structural materials, especially in shelving.



*Lobby collection, Almere Library. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

The emphasis on welcoming patrons into the library, greeting them with attractive and enticing collections on display, is also prevalent at the libraries in the Anythink system, located just outside of Denver, Colorado in the United States. Anythink is well-known for their re-branding (hence the unusual name), for “ditching Dewey” and shelving all of their collections by subject or areas of interest, and for their attractive spaces.

Director Pam Sandlian Smith often speaks of the library building giving a metaphoric “hug” upon entrance; when each of the libraries in the system was renovated, there was a focus on ensuring a positive library experience through well-designed and thoughtful library spaces. This can be seen in the new books section of their flagship location, Wright Farms, which features an open and spacious area for browsing with comfortable seating.



*New books area, Anythink Wright Farms, Thornton, Colorado. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

Anythink's system of shelving by subject also ensures that patrons can more easily browse the collection in their area of interest, and use the library collection independently, without the library catalog or the support of staff.

Amsterdam's Central Library, Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (The Netherlands), similarly focuses on clean, spare, and accessible shelving, highlighting the collection. Display shelving is located throughout the building, particularly at high-traffic areas, such as the base of the staircase to the popular restaurant/cafe on the 10th floor.



*Book display, Amsterdam Central Library. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

The work of connecting readers and books does not only happen passively, or in our physical spaces; much of this work is done on a person-to-person basis, and online. The Lawrence Public Library, in Lawrence, Kansas (United States), has created the Book Squad, a particularly robust example of highlighting the skills of readers' advisory staff and translating those skills, as well as the personalities and reading preferences of the team, to the physical and digital spaces. Patrons can follow staff online through the library catalog; see what the staff are reading; easily access reading suggestions, comments, and the like; take part in one-on-one sessions with staff to develop reading lists and explore reading preferences; find the reading suggestions of staff throughout the library; and more.



*Mini display featuring Book Squad member Polli, Lawrence Public Library, Kansas. Photo by Brad Allen.*

At the Dok Library in Delft, Netherlands, readers are encouraged to browse the library's ebook collection through a clever display of tablets pre-loaded with latest releases and popular picks. This approach moves the idea of browsable collections of digital content into the physical world.



*E-book tablet display, Dok Delft Library, Netherlands. Photo by Justine Hyde.*

This idea of browsable collections of digital content is taken to another level of sophistication at Civic Digest, in Newcastle, New South Wales (Australia). This innovative branch of the public library is located in downtown Newcastle. It is a cafe and has no physical library collection. Instead, large touch tables are available throughout the space to browse the library's digital collections including e-books, magazines and other digital content.





*Touch table collection browsing, Civic Digest, Newcastle NSW. Photo by Justine Hyde.*

This trend is perhaps the one most immediately able to be implemented in libraries of any size. For example, in Hillsboro, we cleared space in the main entry point of the largest library location for display tables, which feature a number of rotating displays; reconfigured the new books shelves to encourage browsing, echoing the feel of a bookstore; and implemented new branding around our Staff Picks. Furthermore, a robust collection maintenance plan is a must at any library.

The State Library Victoria is a research library so differs from the public library approaches to collection development and display. For instance, we do not currently have an open access fiction collection. However, we are currently doing a major building redevelopment and one aspect of this project is restoring and reopening the Library's original 19th century reading room, Queen's Hall. With this

opportunity, we are planning to include a browsable collection of Australian and Victorian literature and will be able to incorporate some of the design principles outlined above. Similarly, in our new spaces for children and youth, we will be introducing browsing collections for the first time. This will build on our focus on reading and literacy currently served through our early literacy programs, schools programs and our Centre for Youth Literature programming and advocacy. To encourage new ways of connecting readers to writing we have recently announced a partnership with Tablo, an online digital publishing platform with the aim to build an online community of writers and readers in Victoria focused. This digital publishing initiative will also connect self-published writers and their works with our collection development by bringing their works into the collection.

Rather than turning away from books and reading, libraries must find ways to proactively and positively meet the longstanding connection drawn between books and libraries and desire of library patrons to connect around reading.

### **Spaces for Doing & Learning**

While reading and books remain fundamental to the library experience in the locations we visited, most of the libraries had moved away from being spaces where books and shelving were dominant, and had instead changed their focus to creating spaces for activity and interaction -- spaces for doing things. This ranged from spaces for collaborative group work, to children's activity spaces, to maker spaces. It was very common to see libraries with audio recording and mixing studios, green screen video production, screen printing, sewing machines, art and craft studios, 3D printers, laser cutters, Mac labs, and other digital and analogue production tools. In particular, these types of activities were heavily but not exclusively geared towards younger people, though they had wide usage amongst age groups.

A prime example of a library with this approach is Kulturhuset in Stockholm, Sweden, which has a wide range of digital and analogue making and production facilities geared towards youth. These facilities are supported by staff trained in the equipment who are on hand to mentor and support capability-building for library patrons.



*Screen-printing in the makerspace in the Kulturhuset library, Stockholm , Sweden. Photo by Justine Hyde.*

Often the spaces were flexible in that the furniture (including book shelves) could be easily moved and rooms reconfigured in different ways for various needs, and adaptable to library users' preferences. The most successful libraries also tailored the items and services in these spaces to their communities, filling in gaps and ensuring the equipment met the interests and needs of that community.

One such example is the Sound + Vision Studio at the Lawrence Public Library (Kansas, United States). Approximately 40 miles from Kansas City, Missouri, an area known for its rich musical history and vibrant music scene, Lawrence similarly has a strong local music scene, but did not have the

infrastructure to support it. A full-service studio in the library was therefore an obvious option, with the goal of helping local talent share their work locally.



*Sound + Vision Studio, Lawrence Public Library, Lawrence, Kansas. Photo courtesy Lawrence Public Library.*

Several libraries also had unique twists on the seemingly ubiquitous “maker space.” Anythink (Colorado, United States) Brighton branch featured a fairly lo-fi implementation of their Studio concept, creating a space short on design but high on promoting a feeling of rolling up one’s sleeves and getting to work.



*The Studio, Anythink Brighton, Brighton, Colorado. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

Tools in the Studio included 3D printers, 3D printer pens, and sewing machines, with bright fabric displayed.

The Edmonton Public Library, located in the Canadian province of Alberta, has also chosen to emphasise a broader interpretation of “making.” While their Central branch features a more traditional maker space, with design desktops, 3D printing, video games, and recording options, the system has implemented makerspaces in every location by painting one wall in green screen green and providing a large tool chest on wheels containing both digital and analogue options, from Makey Makey kits to pipe cleaners.

Also, in Canada, the Vancouver Central Library has developed an 'Inspiration Lab', a high-end digital production facility comprised of audio-recording booths, video recording studios and mac labs with top of the range mixing and production software. The Library also loans out musical instruments for patrons to use in the recording studios if they do not have access to their own equipment.

The Toronto Public Library has its equivalent in the 'Digital Innovation Hub', a sophisticated offer of 3D design and printing, high-end design software, recording studios and supporting equipment. To add to the range of making options they also have an Espresso paperback printing machine to print self-published books, and a vinyl cutter to press vinyl albums recorded in their music studio.

At the Dok Library in Delft, Netherlands, creative, messy spaces have been created for children of all ages. This library has a focus on children and young people as their core user group. The result is a library which is open and responsive to the preferences of children for fun, experiential, activity-based learning.



*Dok, Delft Library Netherland. Photo by Justine Hyde.*

Even in larger, more traditional makerspaces, the trend is toward supporting independent use and exploration of the space and the tools therein, with hours that match or nearly match the open hours of the library. This is the case in the new makerspace in the Johnson County Library in Overland Park, Kansas (United States), where all of the machinery -- including the \$12,000 US laser cutter -- is set up for patrons to use independently, if they so choose.



Makerspace, Johnson County Library, Overland Park, Kansas. Photos by Stephanie Chase.





Libraries who are most successful in providing spaces for doing and learning have implemented spaces that are not restricted by age or schedule, and can truly be flexible. There is no one right formula or design for a maker space; the space and the tools in the space must reflect the interests of the community. Maker spaces must also focus on forms of making that are not purely technology related, such as sewing, canning and preserving, and craft. A focus on play is also crucial, so that learning can be exploratory and fun, differentiating learning at libraries from learning in other more formal contexts such as school.

### **Responsive, Multi-Use Spaces**

Perhaps the most striking trend demonstrated in Europe was the implementation of spaces that are purposefully left unsigned and un-labeled so that the use of the space was determined by patrons. Spaces contained multi-use furniture -- or were continually re-set with different furniture -- in order to have a space that responded to user interests and needs.

In addition, many of these spaces were incorporated into the library so that the library would never have to say they do not have the space to “do” something. One week, this multi-use space might host a maker space; the next, it might be a performance space; the next, it might host a large-scale display.

This is the main intention of the 4th Floor at the Chattanooga Public Library in Tennessee (United States). For years, the 4th floor of the central library was used as storage space; the library transitioned the space to a responsive and multi-use space that can serve a multitude of needs.



*4th Floor, Chattanooga Public Library, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Photo courtesy the Chattanooga Public Library.*

DOKK1, the library in Aarhus, Denmark, is a prime example of this trend in space design. The Library wanted to demonstrate to their public that the library is a continuously changing space; they wanted visitors to be delighted and surprised by what they might find on each visit to the library. Spaces are not labeled as to their use, but demonstrate through furniture: small chairs, low tables, and play furniture in a children's space; tables and chairs for impromptu meeting space; a long row of comfortable reading chairs along a window for quiet reading space.

The Rampen (“Ramp”) is the premier responsive, multi-use space at DOKK1. The Ramp serves as a long, gently graded ramp up to the second floor; as a multi-level auditorium; as a place for work tables or soft seating.



*The Ramp, DOKK1, Aarhus, Denmark. Photo courtesy DOKK1.*

It is important to note that we didn't say *flexible* spaces. The success in these spaces comes not from furniture alone, but from a sense of purpose and a willingness to be responsive to patron choices. Spaces need to transcend the time at which they were built, and allow for a multitude of uses.

The State Library Victoria is prime real-estate in the centre of Melbourne, attracting nearly 2 million visitors a year. It serves as a research library, cultural institution, tourism destination, exhibition space and commercial venue. With all of these competing uses, the ability to change a space, for example, from reading room by day, to event space by night, or from co-working hub to workshop venue, is critical to meet the wide variety of needs and expectations from our diverse patrons.

In Australia and the United States, we have much to learn from this concept of unlabeled spaces, particularly for age groups. We need to be comfortable with letting the public decide on how to use library spaces, and trust the public will be able to intuitively understand the intention of the use of space through furniture choice and in changing purpose.

### **Co-Located Services**

Libraries play a key role in drawing community members together, bringing the community to new areas of the city, and highlighting community resources that may otherwise be hidden. Other organisations can benefit from the incredible visibility the library can bring to their services and work, and the library can benefit from exposure to community members that may not otherwise use library services.

Co-located services seem to be most successful when they are tailored to the needs of the local community, recognise patterns of use in their community, or when the library brings that visibility to smaller organisations in the community. Some examples:

- Aarhus (Denmark) located citizen services (*borgerservice*) on the first floor of the DOKK1, at the very top of the escalators. Citizens can ask questions, pay bills, obtain permits, and other city services.



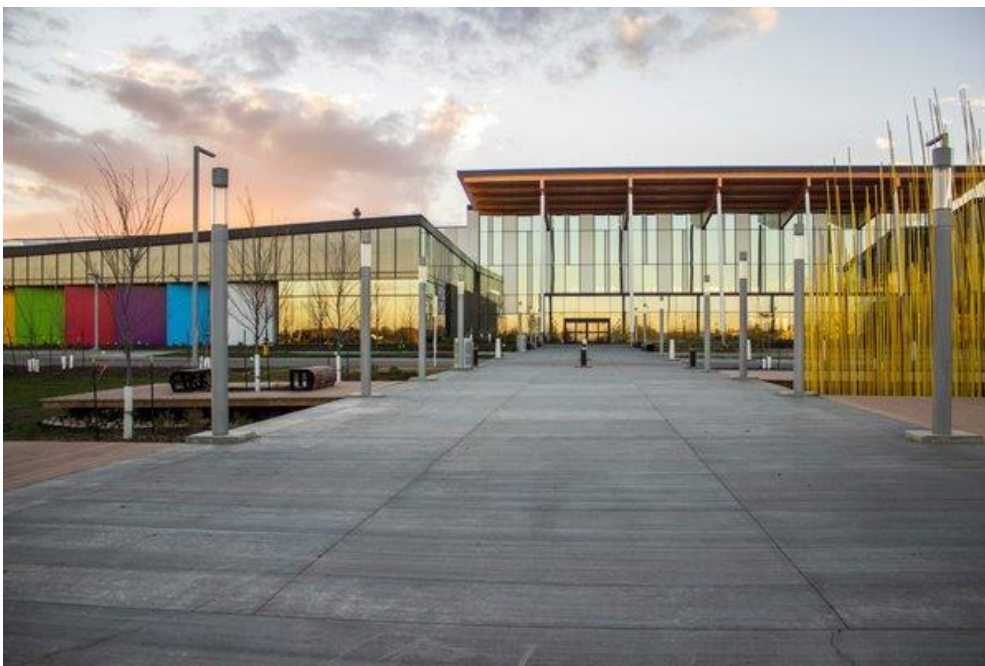
*Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

- Amsterdam's Central Library (The Netherlands) includes a radio station, the International GLBTI Information Center and Archive (IHLIA), and the La Place cafe and a performing arts space on the top floor.
- The WBUR National Public Radio studio in the renovated Johnson Building of the Boston (Massachusetts) Public Library (United States), which occupies a highly visible location of the first floor at a busy street corner.



*Photo courtesy the Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts.*

- Edmonton Public Library's (Canada) Meadows Branch is located in a massive recreation center, featuring several swimming pools, several ice rinks, a workout center, and more. In an area that receives significant snow and can be brutally cold, this kind of one-stop recreation opportunity is invaluable.



*Photo courtesy the City of Edmonton, Edmonton, Alberta.*

- The Melbourne City Library located on Flinders Lane (Australia) is co-located with the Centre for Adult Education; and many public libraries in Victoria are co-located with other services such as community centers, maternal and child health services, artists studios, and recreation facilities.
- Many libraries throughout Scandinavia have a strong emphasis on learning, both through informal and formal programs and activities. Often these programs are delivered as partnerships (both co-located and outreach) with other organisations such as kindergartens, schools, universities, open universities, local colleges, and community groups. These libraries are integral parts of the education and pre-school system and have a clear mandate for literacy, skills development and capacity building in their communities.

### **Shift to Self-Service**

It shouldn't be news to anyone working in library service: libraries have been trying to move away from the "battleship desk" and be more mobile for almost a decade. Innovative libraries are installing smaller, flexible, lighter-weight desks that may even look as though they do not need to be staffed.





*Main service point, Anythink Wright Farms, Thornton, Colorado. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

Libraries are also shifting towards self-service for library users. This includes self-service ordering and check out of books and other collection items, as well as self-service for library facilities such as making bookings and using equipment.

This trend towards self-service means that most libraries have significantly reduced the number of staff sitting at desks serving the public. Instead, libraries are lightly staffed on the floor, with other staff available on call as needed, for example through the 'book-a-librarian' services implemented at Herning Public Library in Denmark, where patrons take a numbered ticket, and when it is their turn, are taken to a consultation room to be assisted with their inquiry by a highly-skilled librarian.

In most libraries, large information desks have been replaced by smaller service points, the total number of staff on the floor has been reduced and those remaining staff rove through the library to help patrons at their point of need. To combat the reduction in staff on the floor and less imposing service points, many libraries have made their staff more visible and easier to find via clear wayfinding signage and highly visible uniforms, as is the case in Herning Public Library, Denmark, where the staff wear vests with clear library branding.

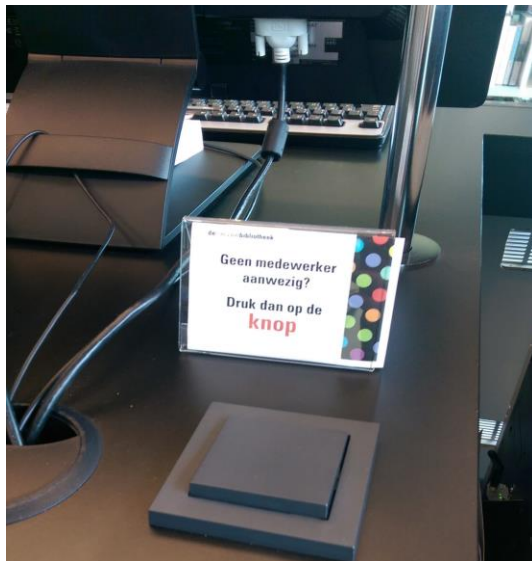
Many libraries are also increasing their interactions with library users by having hosts or greeters at the entry points of libraries to proactively assist the public. This is also a move towards having all staff in the library, no matter what their role, rostered onto these greeting roles with the public.

At Almere, seating, display, and staff and self-help (checkout, printing) stations were sprinkled throughout the space together.



*Integrated seating, searching, and service, Almere Library, Almere, The Netherlands. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

Across almost all of the libraries in Europe, there were very few staff on the floor. Almere's 175,000 square foot library has only 35 employees total. The 200,000 square foot DOKK1 library has one service point and can function with only three people on the floor. Desks at Almere had buttons to press for help ("No employee present? Press the button.")



*Service call button, Almere Library. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*



*DOKK1 service point, Aarhus, Denmark. Photo courtesy schmidt hammer lassen.*

Staff we did see were in uniform; this was the norm across Dutch libraries. Rather than the traditional uniform of clothing pieces, per se, the libraries had a uniform color palette -- in the case of Almere, black and royal blue. Some staff wore black pants and a black button down shirt with the library name embroidered in royal blue, others added some personal style, such as wearing a black skirt and tights with a royal blue shirt with big white polka dots.

At the State Library Victoria, we are in the process of consolidated our service points in a central service hub and introducing more roving library officers to assist patrons at their point of need. Additionally, we are developing self-service kiosks for patrons to find key library information such as 'what's on', maps of our spaces, overviews of our services and the ability to self-register for library membership. Many of the enquiries our staff receive are directional ones, so we are reviewing our wayfinding and signage to reduce the need for staff mediation of navigation through the building. We have recently trialled using 'greeters' in our main entrance to assist patrons orient themselves in the library and to feel welcome. A significant barrier to entry in a big, imposing building like the State Library is encouraging people to cross the threshold and come inside. This 2-week trial was very successful and we plan to introduce this role permanently using a mix of staff and volunteers.

Libraries need to consider the preferences of their patrons and the best use of valuable staff time. Through highly visible staff on the floor, greeting patrons, and with clear visual cues of status as staff, patrons can easily gain help when needed. Through careful attention to ease of use, patrons can navigate the library without staff assistance, allowing for patron interactions that transcend the transactional.

## **Urban Regeneration**

Around the world, municipalities are recognising the power libraries have to create community, and draw visitors to explore new areas of their cities.

DOKK1 is well known for the intensive and collaborative process the library and municipality undertook to develop the area where the library is located. Officials were looking to revitalise the waterfront, which included uncovering a waterway that had been covered over by a road and extending light rail service along the waterfront. The library was seen as an instrumental component of creating a vibrant city and in reinvigorating the waterfront; unlike the United States, where it would have been much more likely to place City Hall in this location, Aarhus placed a civic building they knew would see a high volume of use and which includes a transport hub - a railway station underneath and the Europe's largest robotic car park. This centre has become a vibrant hub for the community to gather.

The story of the Library at the Dock in Melbourne (Victoria, Australia) is similar. When residential housing and commercial office and retail development began to move into a formerly industrial area of the city, the city council, state government and the commercial developer joined forces to improve the livability of this area for residents by extending the tram line and building a world-class library and an open green next to a public health clinic. The library is strikingly designed, has a 6-star energy rating, and features a cafe, recording, production and making facilities, and an indoor recreation space for adults that includes a ping-pong table, making it a hub for the thriving community in the area.



*Library at the Dock, Melbourne, Australia. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

Surrey, British Columbia (Canada), is a suburban city on the outskirts of Vancouver. Surrey saw rapid growth in the 1980s and 1990s, and as such, did not have a downtown or a true city center. With Surrey projected to continue to grow, becoming larger than Vancouver, City officials wanted to create a central place for residents, and develop an identity for Surrey distinct from its suburban role. A large city square was planned, featuring a light rail stop, a large residential tower with ground floor retail and a satellite location of a popular local university, the city hall, and a new library. The plaza is used for city celebrations and large gatherings.



*Surrey Library, Surrey, British Columbia. Photo by Stephanie Chase.*

It is essential that libraries share stories and figures of their heavy use with their municipalities and funders. In Hillsboro, we have done this in two ways. First, working with our municipal Parks and Recreation department, we measured facility use in both departments, and discovered that annually, the library has double the number of visitors than Parks and Rec, including the minor league baseball stadium. This has served to further strengthen our partnership and collaborations with Parks and Recreation, as the library recognises the much larger number of people Parks and Rec reaches with their marketing endeavors, while Parks and Rec recognises how many more people the library reaches in person.

Second, we also began talking about our facilities in terms of visits, rather than age. Rather than referring to furniture or carpet in need of replacement as ten years old, we point out that the items in question are ten million visits old. As a result of both reframing techniques, we have seen an increase in colleagues around the city using the library for meetings, open houses, and display, and the library is



considered to be an essential anchor for a proposed multi-departmental service location in an underserved area of the city.

Finally, as libraries consider how to best serve their communities, we must have discussions with our municipalities related to the vision of service. Depending on your community, the focus on a Central Library or a single showpiece location brings attention and foot traffic to an underused area and is a benefit to the community as a whole. In other cases, this central focus distracts from the mandate or need to embed services locally in community branches, creating inequitable access across the library service's geographic locations. This may lead to a diminishing drive towards creating walkable and accessible neighborhood hubs.

## **Conclusion**

From this brief snapshot of libraries across Europe, North America, and Australia, it is clear that we have more in common across geographic boundaries than we might first expect. We have outlined some common themes and approaches libraries are taking to address challenges and seize the opportunities for 21st century libraries. Whether it is through space design, service models, place-making or programming, there are great benefits from examining the fresh ideas and innovations of our counterparts around the world. This best-practice approach to library development means we can learn from the success and lessons tried elsewhere in order to benefit our patrons locally. Libraries have always been responsive to the changing needs and expectations of their users, but there is no greater time to address transformation head on to ensure we continue to evolve with our communities.