

# Stockholm City Library

## P4 Reflection

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17-05-2024



Photograph by David Grandorge. 2015.

This reflection on the graduation project aims to look back on the graduation year, summarising its scope and methodology and reflecting on it. Design and research weren't different phases, but rather integrated throughout the project. Research by design also made up a large part of the research part of the project.

### A Modern Library

What is a Library in the 21st century? That's one of the main questions that we started the project with at the beginning of the year. We tried to answer this question in different ways by researching various modern libraries and by having a debate on the role of libraries in society. Collectively, we analysed different libraries around the world: the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Viipuri Library, the National and University Library, the Beinecke Library New Haven, the Berlin Statsbibliothek, the British Library, the Exeter Library and the Seattle Public Library. We analysed the buildings in small groups and presented the results to each other. This gave exciting insights into how these libraries worked, both in programme and spatially, by redrawing the plans and sections of these libraries. By doing the research in groups and presenting to each other, much research on various buildings could be done in little time. Andrea Beznitchi, Dominika Kubicka, Kelly Gumbs, and I analysed the British Library in London. By Colin St John Wilson. Spatially interesting about this Library is how the larger reading rooms are flooded with (indirect) daylight. In volume, it reacts to its direct neighbours, a residential block on one side and St Pancras Station on the other. In terms of programme, it's not very contemporary in its diversity. It's mostly tailored to storing books and making them accessible to the public. Other libraries we analysed that have influenced my design specifically are the section and outdoor square of the Beinecke Library and the Exeter Library in developing the design for my P1 Room for a Library, with its Library-tailored furniture. We also did site visits to het Predikheren Klooster by Korteknie Stuhlmacher Architecten (KSA) and the LocHal in Tilburg, where the LocHal in Tilburg contains very little books and is more a "living room for the city" in contrast to the more classical interpretation of the Library typology by KSA. It was beneficial to visit different libraries during the project, to get a feeling for them spatially and in terms of programme. I personally also tried to visit libraries in the places I went to outside of university, from small neighbourhood libraries to more extensive city libraries. I went to the Centrale OBA in Amsterdam by Jo Coenen, het Forum in Groningen, OPEN in Delft, the Royal Library in Stockholm, and the Library in the Hasanpaşa Gasworks in Istanbul. What I enjoy about working on a public building is that you can go and visit them everywhere, in different scales and with various approaches. And in general, you're not only the designer of a public building, but most probably also have some experience as a user.

### Asplund Precedents

While one crucial research aspect of the Graduation Project was the typology of the Library, another es-

sential aspect was the architecture of Asplund. The site for this year's Graduation Project is an existing, almost century-old Library building by the famous Swedish architect Erik Gunnar Asplund (1885 - 1940), built in 1928. I enjoyed this architectural context for the project, as it gives a lot of historical and architectural context to work with. We analysed various projects by Asplund, again, collectively: Villa Snellman, the Woodland Chapel, Lister County Courthouse, the Skandia Cinema, the Stockholm Exhibition, the Bredenberg Department Store, the Gothenburg Law Court Annex and the Woodland Crematorium. This gave an insight into how Asplund's architecture worked and which architectural tools he used to design various types of buildings. We analysed the Gothenburg Law Court Annex with the same people as mentioned before. This was explicitly interesting since it is also an extension of an existing semi-public building. Just like our assignment for the extension of the existing Asplund building. What I found very useful about this assignment was that we got to understand Asplund's architecture, which helped read the architecture of the Stockholm City Library more in-depth. This was very important as the existing Asplund building on the site is of particular monumental architectural value, which is very significant for its location. Our role was to take a position relating to this.

### **Scenes of a Public Library**

Another part of the project's research phase was making the 1:25 model of seven important rooms within the Library. This was again a collective effort, where we got to decide ourselves the scale and scope of the model. It brought us together as a group, which made the year much more pleasant since we became a tight-knit group. It was also an intense project that taught me more about managing a group of people and making a collective effort democratically. What is interesting about working in a group of students is that by design, there is no hierarchy. This can also be challenging, as no one has the right to make final decisions on his/her own. When working with people you don't know, it was interesting to see the different skills of people and the way they behave in a group. This sharpened some of my soft skills. Working on a model in such a large group also has some more complex parts. Such as that, not everyone has the same feeling of responsibility, so of course, some people do more and some do less. It is important not to get demotivated by the people who are less motivated to work but to find motivation in the ones who do feel the same eagerness. Making the 1:25 model made me understand how the fabric of the existing Library worked, and also the spatiality and furnishing of it. Even though, at various times, it felt somehow useless to put so much effort and time into the model. For example, making the roughly estimated 20,000 books was a tedious task. But in the end, it was beneficial to always have the model close by and be able to keep on looking at it throughout the course of the year. It was also fun to see how strangers kept walking into our studio space to be impressed by the 1:25 model.

### **A Room for A Library**

After the very collective research of the course, we went into designing a Room for a Library. What I enjoyed about this exercise was that it was scale-less and also context-less. Anything was possible, and it was an architectural assignment about bookshelf dimensions, materials, window sizes, and human dimensions. In the process, I debated making a classroom for sharing knowledge and language learning or a reading room. Looking back, I should have made a classroom since the sharing of knowledge played an important role in the concept of my design.

Creating the room and thinking about architecture on such a small model-making scale was an exciting and helpful assignment. I would've wanted to make more rooms like these throughout the course, but making them is time-consuming. Even though the concept of the room itself, a reading room with various types of study/reading spaces, was not something that came back again into the design of the Library extension, some concepts did come back, like the vertical tall windows that let in much daylight deep into the room, and the idea of the inhabited plinth, which different people use in their unique way. This plinth was a theme that kept coming back in various stages of the design and is very typical for both the Room, the Asplund Library, and the designed extension.

### **Extending the Library**

Coming from these various collective research assignments and this personal design assignment for the Room, we started working on a strategy to extend the Library and transform the century-old Asplund building into a modern city Library. As a starting point, we used two briefs released as a competition in 2006 and 2014, both of which failed for various political reasons. What I found very interesting was positioning yourself between those briefs, considering everything we researched about the building, the Library as a typology and Asplund's architecture. What I liked was that there was a wide range of solutions

possible within the assignment. Some students decided to work inside the fabric of the Asplund building, others decided to build whole new buildings next to the existing Asplund building, and everything in between.

Even though we all worked on the same assignment in the same context, every building is unique. I aimed to rework the existing Library fabric but also extend it, adding rooms for functions that the current Library doesn't have. One crucial missing function of the Library is the lack of space to share. A Library shouldn't only be a place to consume knowledge individually in the form of a book but also to share knowledge with different people from different backgrounds and opinions. By P2, I had worked out a strategic design for both programme and architectural interventions. The tutors emphasised the importance of already starting to design the building while still thinking about strategy. In the end, it's about designing a building that is the embodiment of a certain strategy. In general, we kept looking at the plan as a whole, but sometimes zooming into parts of specific interest. I would've maybe liked to spend more time on various less design-related research topics, like inclusivity in architecture and other more sociological topics. Still, during the tutorials, there was much more focus on architecture.

At P2, I was pretty happy with the direction I chose and the strategy I designed. A theme that kept my interest throughout the graduation year was the societal function of a Public Library and the Public Library as social infrastructure, a term introduced by sociologist Eric Klinenberg. I read books on this and found it a very captivating concept. Besides this, language has always been of interest to me, and the existing International Library and the role this plays in an increasingly international society was something that kept my interest throughout the course and played an essential role in the development of the building. The length of the graduation course made it a very extensive and in-depth process.

There was time to think more about the building and its use than there usually is in the academic context. This made it possible to go back and forth between scales and research and design extensively. The assignment also increased my interest in designing public buildings, especially their scale and value in shaping society. This is also why I specifically enjoyed the debate with Amy Thomas going into the role of the Modern Public Library, where we didn't talk about architecture at all but about the role of the Library for society. While I heavily enjoyed the project throughout the year, and it has always kept my interest, in the end, there were sometimes moments when it felt like it took too long. I sometimes found it challenging not to be able to have someone else to bounce ideas off to, as you could do in group work. Even though we tried to change this by organising "Tuesday Club", a moment on Tuesday afternoon when we would sit together with students who were interested in talking about each other's individual designs together, because we all know the context so well, we could help each other. Still, I see the value in working together and creating a building together. Working individually does force you to work on all aspects of architecture, as you cannot let someone else do the things you're maybe less interested in or good at.



P3 Fragment.

In conclusion, I found the extension of the Asplund Library an exciting project to graduate on. The Library as a typology has changed over many years, and with increased digitalisation, its shape will change over time. It is also a building type with a profound history, both architecturally and socially. It is valuable as an architect to be able to reflect and think about this, challenging an established typology. Working within a precious architectural context like Asplund's city Library is also complicated but thought-provoking at the same time. It was interesting to see how the project developed with the help of the different tutors, who all come from various backgrounds and thus all have different inputs for your project.

Between P4 and P5, I plan to consolidate all the different ideas, research, and relations between research and design in the drawings. I also plan to build a large-scale section model of the relationship between the city, building, and interior of the design. This model aims to show again the different types and scales of interventions I did concerning Asplund's Library. I will also work on the end-of-the-year exhibition, showing the research we've done as a collective throughout the year and the different outcomes of that research.