
The Library Park Project: Proposal for Redesigning the Spaces in the Martí Provincial Library to Facilitate the Implementation of Services Impacting Community Development

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ABSTRACT

Today the design and development of new services, products, and spaces at libraries must be supported by an architectural design that reinforces the role of the institution as a regular meeting place, a space to get together, fully integrated into its urban setting, with services and spaces that are articulated and go beyond the physical limits of the institution. The aim of this paper is to describe the proposed renovation of the central patio and the spaces that surround it at Martí Provincial Library in Cuba. This renovation will allow the library to offer new services under the concept of a Library Park, that is to say, an area for citizen empowerment and community development. This report also emphasizes the need to confront the changes that the library must do in those spaces to become an ideal location for the community to find recreation, training, and needed information.

INTRODUCTION

Given the economic changes that have taken place in Cuban society, it is essential for libraries to increase their efforts to empower citizens and to provide them with the skills and tools that will allow them to function within society and avoid exclusion. Achieving this goal will require a commitment to changes in the physical structure of these institutions and to the reconfiguration of their facilities so as to offer spaces that allow for a spectrum of different services.

Bilandzic and Foth (2013) explain that users generally come to the library to satisfy three fundamental needs: (1) to use computers and the

internet and to use the software required for specific tasks, (2) to take advantage of a location for collaborative work between individuals and groups, and (3) to obtain training in an informal environment by means of attendance at workshops, presentations, exhibitions, and similar events.

In response to this, libraries must specifically identify user demands and implement services and products to fulfill them so as to ensure that the institution remains central to the community. Libraries must work with and for the community. To achieve these goals, spaces are created for study and group work, formal learning, experimentation, and discussion and recreation.

This evolution in the role of libraries and the creation of new services, products, and spaces that accompany this evolution must be supported by architectural design. Specifically, architectural design must reinforce the role of the institution as a habitual meeting place, a convenient place that is an integral part of the urban area, with services and spaces that are properly organized, mutually reinforcing, and that go beyond the physical confines of the facilities. Worldwide, renovation and construction projects are in progress that respond to this new library model.

Examples of what are called Library Parks are currently being created in Columbia. Their purpose is to encourage citizens to meet; create groups; make progress in meeting the new challenges of the digital age; and access spaces where they can take part in educational, cultural, and recreational activities. This experience has been adapted to the Cuban context; for example, the open spaces around the José Martí National Library in Havana and the Elvira Cape Provincial Library of Santiago de Cuba have begun to be converted into Library Parks. The particular purpose of the reconfiguration of these spaces is to enable the libraries to offer cultural events and activities that promote reading and recreation.

The plan outlined in this document describes the proposed process for rehabilitating the central patio of the Martí Provincial Library and the spaces that surround it, some of which are currently not in use. The institution will thus be able to provide new opportunities for conversation, work, play, experimentation, and learning. The result will be increased visibility for the library as an important cultural and social center in the community that is responsive to the varied needs of its users.

Two factors hold back public library use in Cuba. First is that it is impossible to buy new literature or get access to international databases and new technologies on account of the economic embargo of Cuba. Second are the recent changes to how users search and retrieve information. Internet access inside many institutions and at Wi-Fi spots has increased, making the library less attractive to many. This project is a way to increase library use by developing new spaces and services according to current trends.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology consists of applied research with a descriptive component. Given its scope, the research made use of empirical methods of classical document analysis and case studies. The first step was the delineation of the various characteristics of the architectural design of the library building and its interior and exterior spaces. The next step was the identification of the library's significant characteristics and elements (e.g., seating capacity of rooms, the current use of the different spaces at library). Based on this, it was possible to establish conceptual ideas for a physical redesign of the Martí Provincial Library.

The research used focus-group sessions as an instrument for the collection of information. Their objective was to query the community as to their experiences and perceptions. The participants in the focus groups included regular users of the institution, colleagues from other libraries, and personnel employed at the institution.

Each focus-group session began with a short presentation explaining the current situation and offering proposals regarding the future of the library building. A set of four questions was presented in order to stimulate the expression of spontaneous opinions, followed by an opportunity for the participants to ask their own questions. The questions were as follows:

- What is your current relationship to the information services that the library offers now?
- What are your opinions regarding the implementation of the new services described?
- Do you think that the library has underutilized spaces or spaces that could be adapted for new services or uses?
- Of the new services and uses described, which ones would you like the library to offer?

The sessions, which each lasted two hours, consisted of two parts. In the first portion, a panoramic view of different elements that characterize the existing library building was presented using current best practices. In the second portion, the topics were discussed based on the questions described above. The session concluded with an outline of the services and functions that might be offered, and identified the locations where each might take place.

THE CHANGING USES OF SPACE IN LIBRARIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the changes that have arisen from the ease of access to information provided by new technologies, many libraries have begun to warehouse their physical collections in order to conserve them, leaving the areas these collections used to occupy open for other purposes. This approach

has faced opposition from many sectors, but it is a necessary step given the need for flexible spaces. Flexible spaces are able to be used differently depending on the function or new service being provided to users. Some examples include laboratories for producing audiovisual content, locations for access to technology, and spaces for educational workshops.

This new understanding of the library has led to innovation in the design of the library's physical structure. One good example of this is the new public library in Umeå, Sweden, which was intended to connect the business area of the city and its urban center. The entire building is a cultural center. In addition to areas for study, document consultation, and collection storage, it houses a theater, a cinema, an art gallery, conference areas, creative workshop areas, a museum, and a cafeteria. The idea was conceived as a creative space, a space for access to knowledge, creativity, development, integration, and community growth. It opened in 2014 (Svobodová 2016).

Along these lines, another model to consider when reorganizing library services or spaces or when constructing a new building is the project developed by the Agency for Culture and Palaces of Denmark (Agency for Culture and Palaces 2016a), which is based on the fundamental premise of the importance of channeling user experiences and making experiences accessible by means of spatial design. This project provides descriptions for approximately twenty new or renovated library buildings, all adapted to fulfill current needs. These examples are viewed as making use of best practices, and some constants in the process of designing the library building to suit its new functions and services can be identified:

- The need of the project to have the goal of a perfect interweaving of physical space and virtual space
- The incorporation of various means of visual communication that support users as they move throughout the institution, such as interactive screens, wireless networks, and signage
- Flexible furniture and equipment so that spaces can be adapted for different uses
- The creation of workspaces where users may consider ideas, gather information, learn, and share
- Use of the features of the urban landscape, such as squares, parks, interior patios, and gardens, all functionally coordinated with the activities being offered
- Good use of insulation, natural light, and solar panels, so that the building is sustainable and eco-friendly
- The incorporation of various flexible spaces for cultural events—the presentation of books, musical events, plays, expositions, etc.—and possibly for rest, cafeterias, stores, and recreational areas
- An architectural design reflecting two tendencies in dialogue: the li-

brary as a grand public building designed as an urban focal point while at the same time fully incorporated into the urban or natural landscape

- Attractive interior design that is both simple and informal

Another document that must be consulted when new construction or renovation of a library is under consideration is one produced by the Buildings and Equipment Group of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (Latimer and Niegaard 2007). It insists that a library building, at its core, must be the following:

- **Functional:** a space that works well, is attractive, and is built to last
- **Adaptable:** a flexible space that can be easily changed depending on its use
- **Accessible:** a social space that is welcoming, easy to use, and that stimulates the user's intelligence
- **Varied:** a space that includes various environments and learning structures
- **Interactive:** a space that is well organized and encourages contact between users and the services offered.
- **Favorable:** a high-quality human space—well-lit rooms, easy access, pleasant decor, and furnishings that inspire people to return to the library for its services
- **Appropriate to the activities taking place within it:** a space that offers the necessary conditions for reading and computer use, for example
- **Safe:** a space that is safe not only for users but also for the collections, equipment, data, and building itself
- **Effective:** a space that is economical in terms of cost, the personnel provided, and functionality
- **Appropriate for information technology:** a space with flexible benefits for users and staff—such as wireless connections, internet access, and loans of mobile devices—which allow for communication, information search, and the use of digital or digitized documents
- **Impactful:** a space that stimulates the mind and spirit

As far as the interior space is concerned, See (2015) proposes that any well-designed library must include different environments to connect people, resources, experiences, formal and informal training, and the community as a whole. Among these, which should be both differentiated and interrelated, the following should be included:

- **Meeting Space:** point of first contact with the library as a place for interaction between the individual and the collection. It should be an open space, and the user should be able to make use of it alone or with the assistance of a librarian. It should be located near the checkout desk or the catalogs.
- **Collaboration Space:** a place to share ideas and information and a place

for collaborative work. It should contain resources and furniture in harmony with the activity to be performed.

- **Thinking Space:** a place for silent individual work. It should be far from very noisy and moderately noisy areas.
- **Social Space:** a place for conversation and informal work. A good example is a cafeteria or simply space that is comfortable, with unconventional furniture not usually seen in traditional libraries.
- **Practice Space:** a place where users can rehearse project presentations, practice what has been learned, and discuss knowledge in a social situation.

The Agency for Culture and Palaces of Denmark (2016b) provides a summary of the four uses of these spaces: learning, inspiration, meeting, and creation. These spaces allow users to discover and learn new things, to find what they need—and discover what they did not know they needed—to get together with others, to participate in community events, and to share, create, and innovate. Libraries designed in this way provide services and spaces that yield multiple benefits for users: independent learning, informal training, multimedia literacy for diverse types of scientific communication (for example, workshops, conferences, and discussion groups), relaxation, recreation, increased cultural awareness, and opportunities for community meetings and exchanges. This type of library has rooms and individual workstations as well as workshops and laboratories for creation and experimentation.

Another major consideration in the process of constructing a library or renovating an existing library building so as to provide it with new functionalities is that the institution is a very important part of the city or campus that it serves. For this reason, external areas of the library must also be taken into account. This includes gardens, patios, and terraces, which should be enjoyed by users and converted into additional spaces for reading and recreation as a part of the library environment as a whole. In this regard, Library Parks are proven examples of best practices.

Library Parks are urban complexes. They have a main building that houses the library, surrounded by generous public spaces with green areas, pedestrian areas, and decorative sculptures. The interior spaces can be used for study and for acquiring knowledge, while the external public spaces are suitable for community interaction by means of play and recreation (Alcaldía de Medellín 2008).

In a general sense, it is clear that the library building should fulfill the various needs for information and training of the user community, offering appropriate facilities for these purposes. What is required is a perfect combination of quiet spaces for reading and study; spaces for discussion and group work; spaces for consulting electronic resources; and spaces for relaxing, having a cup of coffee, and talking. In summary, it should be a

diverse building, which is flexible, able to be converted for various uses, and encourages interaction.

An evaluation of current approaches to library construction and renovation shows that the following elements are typical:

- Open spaces that provide flexibility and enable the building to be easily modified
- Semiprivate spaces generally used for document consultation or for very specific group activities, with the appropriate furniture
- Technology-rich spaces where users have access to a very large selection of equipment and where they can learn or share what they have learned by doing
- Spaces for interaction, social activities, and meetings, where the community has access to ideal locations for sharing and for spending time, for exchanging ideas, conversing, and even having a cup of coffee

In recent times, libraries have gone through significant transformations associated primarily with information technologies, the growth and diversification of documentary sources, and the new social role of this age-old institution. For this reason, all library construction projects, like construction projects for other public institutions, must be based on the needs of the people who will use it regularly. Spaces must be inspiring, with welcoming decor that invites users to come in and stay awhile, a comfortable temperature, and, if possible, panoramic views of the city.

What stands out as the characteristic element of twenty-first-century library buildings is the flexibility of its spaces. This concept is not limited to the ability to move furniture from one place to another; broadly, it is the opportunity to achieve ideal solutions to whatever material issues are raised by the various purposes, activities, and services provided by the institution.

DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION OF THE INSTITUTION

The Martí Provincial Library is a cultural institution located in the city of Santa Clara, Cuba. It was founded on February 24, 1925, and it is under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. It serves as the headquarters of the public library network in the Villa Clara region. It is a nonprofit state organization, and as such is administered primarily under two programs. One of these is the National Reading Program, which was reorganized most recently in 2009. The program is under the purview of the José Martí National Library. It provides the Provincial Reading Program in Villa Clara, an initiative with its own set of objectives and activities that are updated every year. The second program is the Triennial Cultural Development Program organized by the Cuban Ministry of Culture.

As a provincial public library, it serves the users of the city of Santa Clara and the province as a whole. Its organizational structure corresponds to

that of a departmentalized library. Because of this, the institution has a vertical structure that responds to the main processes that it performs. There is a top-level administration. In addition, there are two lower administrative levels: the service department, which takes up eight rooms and an office, and the methodological department, which is made up of a work group and an office. In addition, there are two additional departments, automation and personnel/finance. All of these departments report to the director.

The different rooms offer a variety of services, such as internal and external loans of diverse bibliographic materials, consultation and reference services, domestic internet use, and programs to promote reading. It is open to the public ten hours a day, from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m.

The library is located in the historic center of the city of Santa Clara. It occupies the entire building, which was formally used for the Provincial Government and which was classified as a National Monument on June 24, 1999. It is next to Leoncio Vidal Caro Park. This building is one of the most impressive and best conserved in the area, and it expresses an eclectic group of architectural influences corresponding to the beginning of the twentieth century in Cuba, a visual style that is evident in the park as well. The building is solid and spacious and consists of a ground floor with an interior patio and a second floor with a terrace and two porticos, each of which has four Ionic columns and four Roman columns in the front. The façade has a pilaster in the same style along Buenviaje Street. The upper floor has a terrace and a double tower with a lookout. During the original design process, spaces were planned for government business, study, investigation, and living space for the governor.

Santa Clara is the social, economic, and political center of the region. It has a population of 229,483, but only 5,686 people, 2.47 percent of the population, visit the library regularly. This is a low user rate, especially considering that the library is located in the center of the city, with easy access and a very large number of educational, business, and service institutions nearby (Domínguez Darias 2015). Changing the situation will require structural alterations of the building and the reorganization of floor space so as to offer new services and facilities—such as independent learning workshops to assist job seekers and meeting places for the various associations in the city—that promote good reading habits, research ability, and personal and social development.

No one in the community is illiterate, and in general the community is well-educated. However, a considerable number of people do not have technology skills, and approximately 21 percent of the population, while having access to the internet, do not use it effectively. The population has a strong interest in acquiring the skills for jobs that provide good income, given the new laws regarding nongovernment employment. However, because training opportunities are not commonly available, the nongov-

ernment work sector lacks persons with communication, marketing, and small business management skills (Domínguez Darias 2015).

THE MARTÍ PROVINCIAL LIBRARY AND THE ADAPTATION OF SPACES FOR CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The first step taken in this project was the review of the specialized literature on the topic of architectural design in order to determine structural and functional requirements of a contemporary library building. These, described above, were presented to the community, to library users, to librarian colleagues, and to the employees of the institution itself. This was accomplished by means of a focus-group session so as to achieve broad participation in the discussion. A consensus was reached regarding which new services the library should take on, as well as regarding which areas of the building were currently underused, or which might be most effectively adapted for new functionalities. The results of the session are provided in the following images, which are diagrams of how the library spaces are currently used and the areas that have potential to be readopted two new functions (see figs. 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Current Use of Areas of the Martí Provincial Library. Grey signifies public service: reading rooms, computer/internet access labs, and multipurpose spaces. Black signifies staff space for offices, archival collections, and supplies. (Illustration courtesy of the authors.)

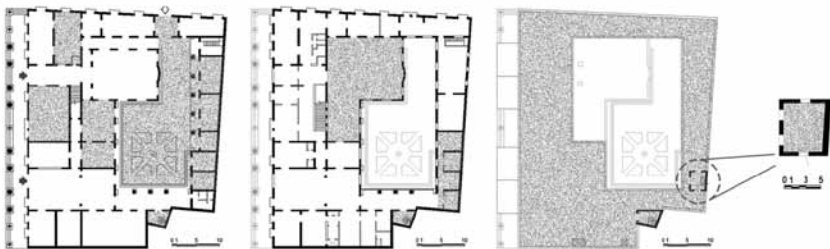


Figure 2. Identification of Underused Areas and Areas with Potential to be Adapted to New Uses in the Martí Provincial Library (in Grey). (Illustration courtesy of the authors.)

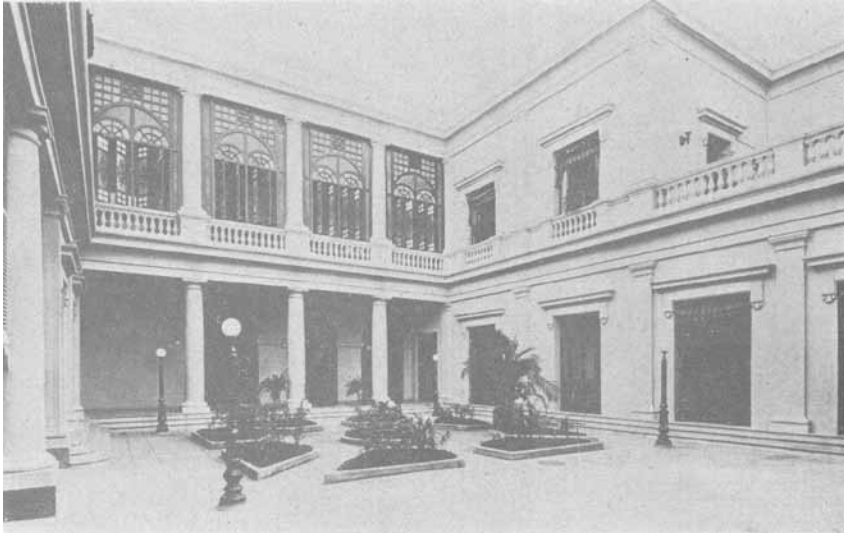


Figure 3. Original Appearance of the Central Patio of the Provincial Government Palace. (Photo courtesy of the José Martí Provincial Library.)

Once users had identified the spaces to be created and the services to be implemented, a project design for the Martí Provincial Library Park began to develop. The central patio would serve as the heart of the institution. It would undergo a process of rehabilitation in order to return it to its original form and to renovate the spaces that are accessed through the patio (see figs. 3 and 4). The purpose was to provide a broad new scope of services to the community. A decision was made at the start of the project to use this area because the greatest number of underutilized spaces and spaces appropriate for renovation surrounded it. Doing this allowed for redefinition of its functions as well as for access to the facility from outside.

The main objective of the project, which will be called the Garófalo Library Park in honor of the first librarian in the region, is to create a space within the Martí Provincial Library for the implementation of services and activities that contribute to citizen empowerment, personal and community development, cultural growth, and the library's functionality as a meeting place.

The project will result in the ability to provide a range of new services. Work will start with the renovation and redecoration of the available areas of the building in order to create the following (see fig. 5):

- *Educational workshop areas/makerspaces* for the acquisition of job skills that represent a significant economic opportunity, given the new laws associated with nongovernment work.



Figure 4. Current Appearance of the Central Patio of the Provincial Government Palace, now the Martí Provincial Library. (Photo courtesy of the José Martí Provincial Library.)

- *An educational and digital creation laboratory* for developing skills in using and handling electronic information.
- *An economic incubator*, appropriate for identifying job opportunities as well as the development of communication, marketing, and small business management skills.
- *An area for relaxation, motivation, and cultural activities*, with comfortable furniture for reading, rest, and participation in cultural and motivational activities.

The patio is the central axis of the project. It is to be used as a space for meetings, for social interactions, for informal reading, and for cultural and recreational activities. The rehabilitation process will include replacement of the original gardens and the four large lamps that existed in this location previously. Provisionally, some structures will be removed, and the entire surrounding area will be painted. Designed as a *rest area, motivational area, and cultural activity area*, the patio will be furnished with benches, chairs, tables, and metal seats. The seating will be distributed throughout the area as well as in the side and rear doorways that access the patio.

The patio will have two primary uses. First, it will be a space for infor-



Figure 5. Proposed Design for Spaces and Services in the Martí Provincial Library: 1) patio; 2) learning workshops, i.e., makerspaces; 3) cafeteria; 4) business incubator; 5) toilet; 6) design/print service; 7) periodical/newspaper reading room; 8) digital learning and creation lab; and 9) multipurpose room. (Illustration courtesy of the authors.)

mal study and reading as well as a space for relaxation during the daytime hours during which the library is open. Second, it will be a place for social gatherings, motivational activities, and cultural activities. These will take place on weekends and in the evenings, in addition to the cultural activities that the institution offers. Organizational gatherings and other group activities will have their place as well.

The Garófalo Library Park, in contrast to other existing projects in the country, will make possible the provision of new services that will have a significant effect on the community. For this reason, it will require the renovation of the areas that are accessed via the patio: areas to be used for training sessions, information services, and general services, such as a cafeteria, restrooms, and document services.

The rear gallery will contain the educational workshop areas, called makerspaces, the Economic Incubator, and the general service area (specifically, the cafeteria and the restrooms). This area will be created from the zones that were formerly used for parking, two offices, and a restroom, with the restroom continuing to be used as such.

The right-wing gallery area will be used for document services (photocopying and binding) and for the institution's newspaper and periodicals section. It will be divided into two independent spaces, one of which will be used for the newspaper and periodicals section, which will be a part of the reading and information area. It will be accessed through that area, thus allowing users to read the newspaper informally in the entryway to the gallery.

The section to the west of the patio consists of two areas that are currently being used as a document warehouse and as a multipurpose room called the Sala Olinta Ariosia. The plan proposes a learning and digital creation laboratory in the area currently used as a warehouse, giving it an independent entryway from the reading and information area while main-

taining the entryways it currently has through the patio and through the multipurpose room. The Olinta Ariosa Multipurpose Room will be turned into a restful area with appropriate furniture, such as armchairs and comfortable seating. In addition, it will have bulletin boards and display cases for temporary exhibitions and for the sale of books and other products, depending on the activities planned for the Caturla room, which is next door.

The project will provide a place for active community participation in workshops, classes, and services for those living in the area. The area will become an environment for innovation, creativity, and the acquisition of new skills by everyone in the community, generally contributing to personal and social development.

An exponential increase in the number of visitors to the institution is expected once these new services and spaces are provided. This will contribute to the impact of the institution, providing visibility and strengthening the institution's ability to take action as a promoter of community progress.

The project will need a budget of 10,000 Cuban pesos and 8,000 US dollars, with part of that provided by the national government. We are also looking to interest foreign institutions. The local government guarantees 100 percent of the Cuban peso budget for construction and 75 percent of US dollar budget for the purchase of necessary equipment.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that a twenty-first-century library must provide a broad spectrum of services as well as spaces. For this reason, the architectural and environmental design of a library should incorporate a good mix of informal, modern places to sit; formal and informal study areas; Wi-Fi equipment; and flexible, multipurpose spaces for use as locations for meetings, events, and other social activities, among other elements.

The incorporation of the areas outside the library, such as gardens and patios, into the scope the library space for the services and activities provided to the community has been recognized as a way to increase the number of library users. These users must perceive the institution as a recreational space, the so-called third space.

The development of the Garófalo Library Park project will become an example at the national level, both in terms of the implementation of new types of services by public libraries and of best practices for the redesign of spaces. The purpose is to gather these services and functions together in a library specifically designed as a place for all members of the community.

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