

MSc3/4 Palace
Interiors Buildings Cities graduation studio
Reflection Paper

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Introduction

The studio design brief is about reimagining the Stockholm City Library, a monumental building designed by Erik Gunnar Asplund. Built in 1928, it was the first public library in Sweden to adopt the principle of open bookshelves for the public. Nearly a century has passed, and the concept of a public library has evolved significantly. The studio project is not only about designing a library but also about redefining what a library is or should be, and how this new concept can be implemented in a redesigned Stockholm City Library. The challenge lies in balancing the historical significance of Asplund's design with contemporary needs and technological advancements, creating a space that serves today's public while honouring its past.

Relationship between research and design

The research for this design project was extensive and multifaceted. During the first semester we had to design a room for a library. By designing and creating a physical model of this room, it became clear that considering a single room necessitates thinking about the entire library. What should a library be like? Based on my own experiences of visiting libraries, I believe a library should resemble a public square. In this square, people can go their own way to explore the space and find a book or a place to sit down. There should be a variety of spaces to cater to different needs, making the library interesting and encouraging visitors to move around, thereby increasing the chance of social interaction. A library is unique because it brings people together, fosters new encounters, and, most importantly, facilitate a place where people can learn from each other. This, I believe, is the essence of a library.

To better understand the Stockholm City Library, our studio conducted collaborative research on Asplund's other designs, the library itself, and eight modern public libraries. This research formed the foundation of my design. Constructing a 1:25 model of the library's major spaces provided insight into the ideas of Asplund. This, combined with research on his other works, made me realise that he used recurring themes in his designs, particularly in how he conceived spatial experiences. How do people move from one space to another? What will they see? I continually asked myself these questions while designing the new Stockholm Library, aiming to create a unique experience that would attract visitors to this new building.

Besides this collaborative research, there were a few other themes that required investigation. The design brief is based on competitions from 2006 and 2014, each with a different interpretation of redesigning the library. Part of the studio design brief was to rethink these previous programmes. To get a better understanding of the programme of a library I also analysed the programmes of other interesting libraries. This analysis revealed that the library needs more space to accommodate a larger programme of than its current capacity. Given the library's iconic and monumental status and the historical value of the surrounding buildings, I pondered where this extra space could come from. This made me to further research the location and the terrain of the hill, which shaped the design of the new building.

Design process and insights

I have learned a lot from this design process. One thing that helped me often was creating sketch models of different parts of the building. The complex shape of the building made it challenging to develop a good system for things like shafts and the structure. Making models made it easier to visualize ideas and explaining them. And often I used the models to make decisions. Throughout the design process I continually moved between research and design, as well as between different scales, from making detailed interior models to site plans. And by doing this it made me understand the importance of this iterative process, as it resulted in a better design. In addition to this, feedback from peers and tutors played a crucial role in refining the design. Their insights gave me fresh ideas and made me consider aspects I might have overlooked. Normally a project of this scale would be designed with a whole team of designers and advisors. So having these feedback sessions with others were really valuable.

The proposal

The main focus of my design proposal is the experience of the spaces, both outdoor and indoor. The building forms a connection between the street, the park and the hill, integrating with the landscape and extending it indoors. The interior is an open landscape with voids and height differences defining various spaces. Some feel more open and public, while others are more intimate and private. The openness and the more playful layout contrast with the formal reading rooms of the existing Stockholm City Library. I aimed for the new building to offer something different. Where the existing building has almost no window to look out from, the new building's facade is almost entirely a glass curtain wall. Being able to look outside and see nature is healthier, especially if you spend a long time in a space. So this new building provides users with the choice of their preferred environment to study, making the library more inclusive for diverse needs.

Conclusion

This design proposal addresses different architectural scales: the interior, the building and the urban surroundings, all interrelated. This approach of zooming in and out offered a new perspective on designing. Sometimes when you can't seem to solve something, it helps to view it from a different perspective. The research about different aspects of the design helped me to make design choices and justify why things turned out a certain way, which is something I often struggle with. This design process has been enlightening, providing valuable lessons for future projects.