

The Library: Public Destination for Private Intentions

reflection

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Andrea Beznitchi

5861683

Interiors. Buildings. Cities

The architectural theme and spatial typology explored in the Interiors Buildings Cities graduation studio is the Palace. As a complex public institution that accommodates life and architecture at different scales, the Stockholm Public Library was the focal point for the studio this year. Around the turn of the century, libraries were confronted with increased digitalisation, privatisation of public space and questions about their role in society. The institution has gradually transformed - from a place dedicated to lending books to a complex public space that promotes inclusivity and diversity by allowing people to engage in the ever-growing world of knowledge.

The starting point of the studio is the architectural competition launched in 2006, which sought the expansion of the Library and the possibility of a renewed urban strategy. The challenge then became addressing the identity of the monumental building and the integration of a wide range of programmes, as well as discussing and embracing issues of equality and multiculturalism.

Meticulously planned and designed by Erik Gunnar Asplund, the Stockholm Public Library proudly stands at the foot of Observatory Hill, alongside three annex buildings. Through careful consideration and comprehensive analysis of the urban situation, we as a studio managed to determine the limits of the potential extension of the Library. The present state of all four buildings was assessed in terms of spaces, programme and particular focus on heritage and preservation.

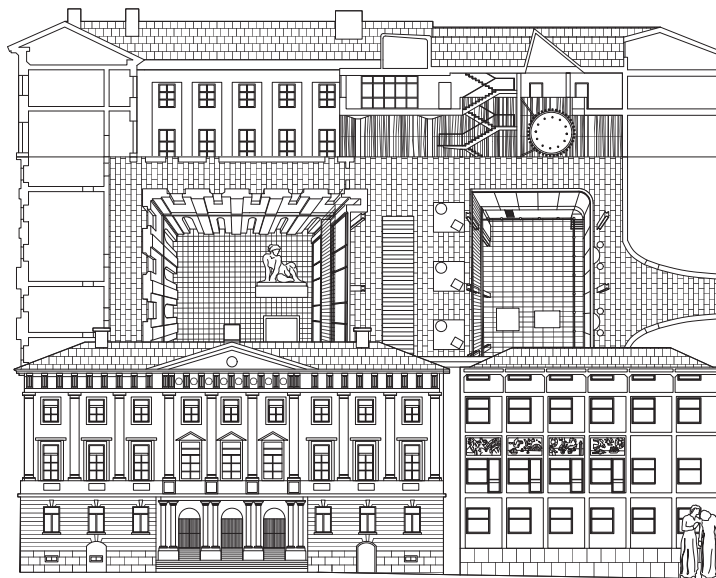


fig. 01 Gothenburg Law Courts Annex research drawing. Made by Andrea Beznitchi, Dominika Kubicka, Kelly Gumbs, Renzo Westerbeek, 2023.

By LOOKING CAREFULLY, the studio has collectively examined the work and thinking of Gunnar Asplund. By studying the methods and compositional concerns of several projects, we were able to understand the wider frame in which the architect practised and developed individual positions towards the Library itself.

Furthermore, a 1:25 model of crucial spaces of the Library was built, by studying archival material. Intending to record how the library was conceived and perceived in its early existence, we were able to reflect, individually, on the overall strategy and the sensibility of the internal spaces. The main space in the Library, the Rotunda, is composed of walls housing a continuous horizontal system of open shelves. Constructed in a stepped manner, the space allows for a series of balconies to emerge, as well as the poche rooms behind the bookshelves. The modelling exercise enriched my perception of the seemingly endless room and the inhabited wall and its thickness, and it later became a critical aspect of my approach to the project.

The FIRST THOUGHTS about what a Library should be formed the brief for an initial design exercise prompted us to determine the scale, purpose and character of a room in a library. My proposal explores the concept of a library room as a memory collector, pondering the role of libraries in accommodating an immense body of knowledge and its communication with the



fig. 02 Collective 1:25 model. Rotunda space. Photo by Kamil Urban, 2023.

fig. 03 A room in a library. Photo by author, 2023.

outside world. The room is architecturally embedded in a stretched-out corner, an idea which is carried through to the larger design project. I have explored diverse notions of individuality and privateness in a public setting. I believe that a library can fulfil its role as a successful public space if it manages to turn *the complex* and *the intimate* into *the social*.

Towards P2, the strategy that I adopted looked at the site located between the Library and its three annexes, Spelbomskan Square. Becoming fascinated with the inadequacy of the West Wing facade that faces the square and the impracticality of the annexes, I started with the idea of introducing a new front.

Over the course of the semester, my project has attempted to activate the existing by careful means, enhancing existing qualities and connecting the detached, the library and its closest annex. In order to facilitate a connection between the buildings, a delicate intervention is added, a screen that is able to negotiate the differences between the two buildings, as well as act as a filter between the street and Observatory Hill. Certain site conditions such as the frieze on the Library facade, and the different internal levels were the challenges that I had to respond to and adapt to. By embracing the misalignments (the angle of the library in relationship to the street and the annexes), a series of balconies is created, and the structure directly engages with the library interior, becoming the inhabited stretched-out wall of the West wing.

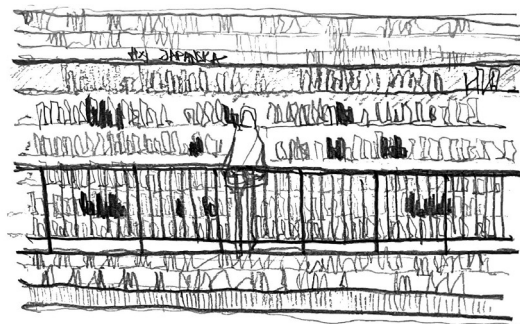
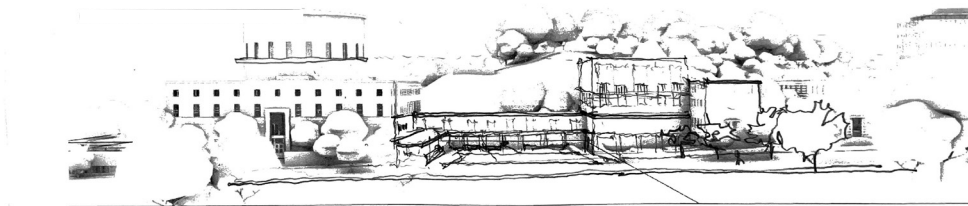


fig. 04 Initial strategy considering the rear part of the Library and its annexes, introducing a new public front. Made by author, 2024.

fig. 05 Endless shelves in the rotunda guided by intense horizontality. Made by author, 2023.

Internally, the intervention aims to relieve the unbalanced corner that is housing several functions that are colliding with each other, allowing for continuity and more accessible spaces. Embracing the beautiful and the challenging aspects of all the different activities that can take place in the library, my proposal is looking at carefully introducing a generous range of social spaces as well as individual ones, contributing to the overall complexity of the institution - a complexity that can rarely be found in the more dispersed and fragmented spaces in the city. The growing tendency in contemporary libraries is to get bigger and to offer more diverse programmes, almost becoming “cultural centres”. However, given the status of the Stockholm Public Library and its surroundings, my project is attempting to introduce new functions by increasing the quality of the existing spaces and providing increased accessibility through the independent structure. Overall, the addition would be valuable in establishing a compelling and logical portrayal of the Public Library as a uniquely inclusive space.

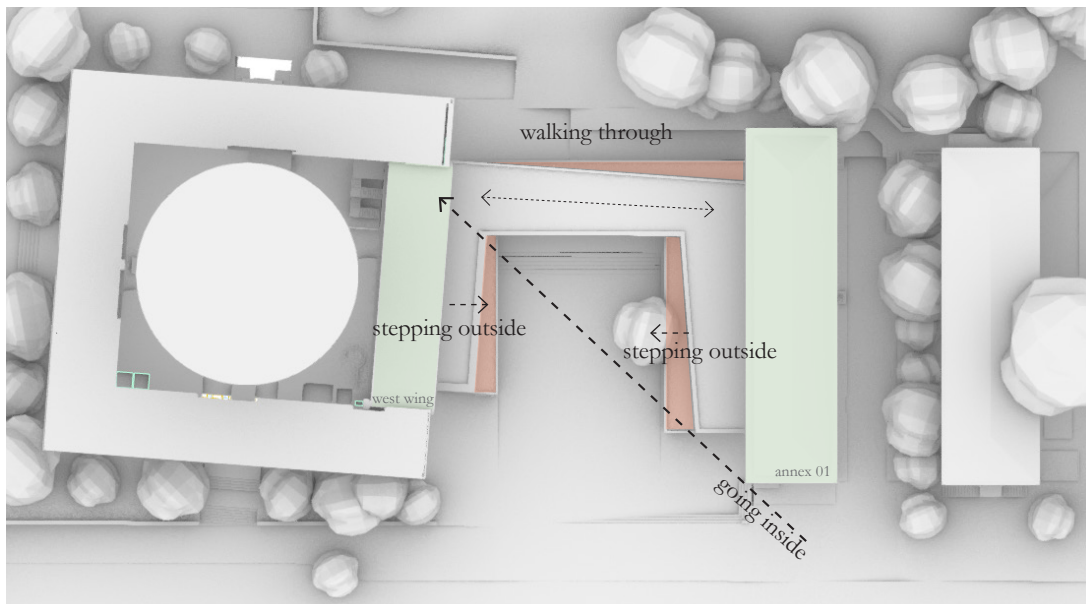


fig. 06 Accessibility and circulation diagram for the proposal. Made by author, 2024.

In conclusion, the graduation project has largely been guided by the multitude and variety of design and research exercises set up by the briefs. The individual and collective tasks were meaningful in establishing a position regarding heritage and monumentality, as well as the general approach towards understanding the different scales across a public institution. The way in which the studio worked collectively in compiling critical data about the existing buildings and liaising with different consultants to gather information has proven to be valuable in establishing coherence and understanding across all projects that have emerged, and ultimately establishing the Stockholm Public Library as an essential service to the city.



fig. 07 Moment along the balcony in the inhabited Library facade. Made by author, 2024.

fig. 08 Section outlining existing programme cohabitating with the proposed. Made by author, 2024.