

BRINGING A LIBRARY TO PATRONS: LIBRARIES AT  
ALTERNATIVE SPACES

**Adam Sofronijević\***, **Jelena Andonovski\*\***  
University library “Svetozar Marković”, Belgrade

**Abstract:** In the hope of providing an inspirational example paper presents examples of libraries operating at alternative spaces. Libraries at two airports, at the boat and in the underground railway system are depicted in an effort to provide examples of best practice because possibilities in this area numerous and still mostly unused. By following patrons to these alternative spaces libraries have increased the usability and widened the range of their target user groups. In order to accommodate specific target user groups i.e. travelers these libraries had to develop expertise in collection development in regards to usage of paper and electronic resources and also the media by which electronic resources are delivered to users. Heavy usage of electronic reading devices like iPADS at these libraries should be illustrative and inspirational for libraries based at classical spaces on how tackling users needs and expectations change the tools for librarians' everyday working tasks.

**Keywords:** Libraries, alternative spaces, airport library, metro library, boat library, librarianship, service upgrade, iPad.

\*sofronijevic@unilib.bg.ac.rs

\*\*andonovski@unilib.bg.ac.rs

## 1. Introduction

Dynamic environment and changing habits of patrons have very complex impact on librarianship and everyday operations of libraries. One of the important aspects of these operations is the need to offer patrons the services at places where they spend most of their time irrelevant of nature of these spaces. In the virtual world this has been widely accepted and implemented by development of Library 2.0 concept that allows for services at virtual location different than the official Web page of the library. At the same time in physical world library services are still mostly confined to library buildings. As of April 2011 some examples of pushing things forward in this area have been evident. Few libraries have followed patrons to alternative spaces i.e. airports, metro, boat. The fact which is of utmost importance for library community is that these activities have been implemented in different countries, not just the first world ones. Expenses of such activities are significant but not enormous making them suitable for the era of limited budgets and return on investment analysis. In the hope of providing an inspirational example paper presents examples of libraries operating at alternative spaces. These libraries have gone where the patrons are in the physical world increasing the usability and widening the range of target user groups. In order to accommodate specific target user groups i.e. travelers these libraries had to develop expertise in collection development in regards to usage of paper and electronic resources and also the media by which electronic resources are delivered to users. Heavy usage of electronic reading devices like iPADS at these libraries should be illustrative and inspirational for libraries based at classical spaces on how tackling users needs and expectations change the tools for librarians' everyday working tasks. Also persistence of print editions at these libraries shows the lasting importance of these editions for generations of patrons that are used to them and find them irreplaceable.

## 2. Airport library - Schiphol

Schiphol Amsterdam Airport is the official name of the main airport of city of Amsterdam in Netherlands. It advertised the opening of the first airport library in July 2010 (Airport Library ready for take-off). In fact the first library at an airport was opened in Nashville, USA in 1962 (Nashville public library – library history). This was a branch of Nashville public library and was established by collaboration of this library and the Nashville airport. This first library at an airport was operational until 1969 when it was closed. It offered books for reading in the library space at new terminal area of airport. This example was not followed by other libraries and therefore it remains an illustrative but ahead of its time endeavor in librarianship. Schiphol airport is one of the busiest air travel hubs in Europe being departing or arrival point for many travelers coming to Europe or leaving it via connecting flights. Airport is located in Amsterdam municipality of Haarlemmermeer and was opened for civilian transport in 1920. In 2010 45.3 millions of passengers passed through it making it the 5<sup>th</sup> largest in Europe and 15<sup>th</sup> in the world by total passenger traffic. Schiphol airport building has a central plaza from which three terminal wings are fanning. Important spot at the airport is Holland Boulevard (Schiphol Amsterdam Airport – Holland Boulevard). It contains numerous shops, restaurants, baby care lounge, casino, Rijksmuseum airport exhibition room and shop. All this was complemented by opening of the airport library on July 15<sup>th</sup> 2010.

The official website of the library states that the Airport Library represents the Dutch public library service. The initiative for the creation of the library started in of 2006. It was headed by the group of library organizations: ProBiblio, the Netherlands Organization for Public Libraries and the public libraries of Amsterdam, Haarlemmermeer and Delft. The outlines of the concept of Airport Library soon were created and from

this building of the project headed on. ProBiblio has been in charge of managing the project from its beginning. Airport Library is governed by a board of three representatives which represent ProBiblio public library of Amsterdam and public library of Haarlemmermeer. Operations of the Airport Library are based on contributions by a variety of partners. They either contribute to the collection or provide financial support. Main sponsor of the library is the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Other important partners in financial area are Schiphol Group, owner of the airport and library organizations of Holland.

Passengers on intercontinental flights are primary target user group of the airport library, because usually they spend a lot of time at the airport waiting for their connecting flights. It has been decided that the Dutch culture should be main theme presented at the library and for the Dutch public libraries the airport library is an important venue to present themselves. What airport library offers to its patrons is a sitting area with added value. In this way transfer passengers, who are in the Netherlands only to change flights, get a chance for their unique impression of the culture of this country they would otherwise missed completely. As stated by the official web presentation of the airport library it offers the following:

- Translated Dutch fiction in nearly thirty languages
- The books that are annually chosen as the Best Designed Dutch Books
- Photo books, photo shows and videos that reflect Dutch culture
- Music of Dutch musicians

The service for those patrons that wish to take materials something with them also exists. The TankU-downloadscreens offers short movies about Dutch culture for download Via a Bluetooth connection. These movies can be transferred to a mobile phone, as a souvenir or as entertain-

ment during the flight. Collection of the airport library offers comprehensive materials on Dutch architecture, visual arts, design, fashion and history. All in all airport library has 25 seats divided between table seats and comfort seats. 9 iPADS are available for patrons, along the 1,250 printed books. The airport library covers the space of 90 square meters.

Mission of the airport library goes as follows: “Airport Library is a welcoming and inspiring library that, with its compact and high-quality collection of books and digital media, offers intercontinental travelers at Schiphol a showcase of Dutch art and culture.” One can distinguish importance of the mission for different stakeholders of the library, primary being of course its users and financiers. The airport library vision is to “achieve its mission by realizing a permanently accessible library in a daring design, with expert and interested staff and offering a high-quality, imaginative and captivating collection. Airport Library is a joint responsibility of the Dutch libraries.” (Airport library – mission and vision). Even this high ranking library which aspires to quality service has flows in important documentation of mission and vision statement where in vision statement an unnecessary sentence on responsible bodies for operations of the library can be found. Apart from this vision statement declares a staffed library while at the moment airport library operates without staff present at the location of the library. Nevertheless the hope for fulfillment of the mission and pursuit of the vision of the airport library should be widespread in librarianship community since the success of this institution grounds important basis for similar projects around the world that might be important for development of the profession.

### **3. Airport e-book library – Taoyuan**

In March 2011 Taiwan’s international airport Taoyuan announced the opening of the airport e-book library (Taiwanese airport’s e-library adds

a new option for bored travelers). The creation of the library was proposed by Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou in an effort to additionally showcase the island's high-tech capabilities. Innovative idea typical for this library is that the library is managed by the duty-free shop, who on its part worked with Taiwan's government-funded Institute for Information Industry to establish the operations of the library. The initial project costs were estimated at 102,000 \$. This library, which was announced as the first airport in-transit e-library, offers 400 e-book titles to its patrons. The poll of patrons is enormous since approximately 17 millions passengers were transferred through the airport in 2010. Having this in mind one can think of 30 available iPADS and different e-book reader devices with e-ink screens as a minimal starting point in library life cycle. Each device is loaded with the same collection of 400 Chinese and English-language e-books and patrons are not allowed to transfer these books to their devices but are to read them in the library public space. The e-books are stored in the ePub and Zinio formats. The library also offers 2,000 printed books acknowledging once more the persisting importance of this media (Taiwan Airport, Opens E-library for Transit Passengers).

#### **4. Metro library - Santiago**

The first metro library system was opened in Santiago, Chile in June 1996 (Bibliometro). It was created as a partnership between the Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums of Chile and Santiago's subway company in an effort to foster access of the comprehensive and diverse number of people to books and libraries. In 90' most communities in Chile lacked the opportunities for access to reading. Therefore the authorities tried to kick start projects that would provide such opportunities in spaces with daily influx of people. Bibliometro Program emerged as one of the most successful solutions to this problem. By offering library services at metro

stations in Santiago it made books available to vast audience of commuters and travelers. Consistent with the initial objectives of promotion of books and reading habits, it was decided that the collections would be mostly made out of novels, poetry, essays, short stories, comics, art and other recreational and entertainment materials. In building the collection special emphasis was on Chilean and Latin American authors.

The idea of promotion of reading and the book was only consistent with attractive architectural line of lending points that needed to be easily recognizable, and bear some resemblance to the subway cars. Such design was soon accomplished and each Bibliometro lending point was settled in a stylish, subway car like structure with an approximate area of 15 square meters. These lending points were originally equipped with 532 titles with three copies each, that is, with 1,596 volumes. The Bibliometro system was conceived from the beginning as a network service function, where users who sign up at any point in the network could use the entire system, taking the opportunity to loan or return books at any Bibliometro point. This was made feasible by the incorporation of library automation system software.

The mission of the Bibliometro is to "contribute to the promotion of reading habits in people who regularly use the services of Metro, as well as in the communities near Bibliometro points through building attractive collections and offering high quality services." In pursuing this mission Bibliometro today offers three basic services: loan of book, Internet service and cultural activities. At each Bibliometro point presently there are over a thousand titles from the most varied genres. Local and Latin American authors are favored, but books authored in other regions are also available. Each user has the right to take up to three books on loan for 14 consecutive days, renewable for an equal period. Patrons can loan or return books at any point in the system and

at each Bibliometro point there is a return box, which can be used at times when the service is closed. Complementary to the book loan service free Internet service is provided by Bibliometro points. Patrons can access digital materials and use bibliographic databases. Cultural activities organized at Bibliometro points are diverse and designed to attract different audiences. Literary gatherings, movie projections, storytelling for children and adults, poetry recitals and literary competitions are organized throughout the year in an attempt to keep the public constantly attracted to Bibliometro system.

Today Bibliometro system has grown from three to 16 points. From the beginning of the project 90,000 people have used the service and currently over 50,000 patrons are active. All in all 1.8 million loans have been made so far. Most of the loans have been made between 13:00 and 21:00, the time which is usually busiest in Santiago metro and that coincides with lunch time and the end of the workday.

### **5. Boat library – Norway**

The book boat service, that is similar to library bus service serving the needs of distant small communities, exists in Norway since 1959 (Library boat Epos). The difference between book boat service of the past and the contemporary service of this kind that earned it the name of the boat library is in cultural programs hosted at the boat. This project brings cultural events to furthest islands and shores of Norway along with the book lending service. In this way broader audience of patrons is attracted to the library. Currently the boat named “Epos” is providing for these services at the western coast of Norway. The crew aboard this library boat consists of two seamen, a cook, two or three librarians and one

or two persons responsible for cultural activities. The boat library serves more than 250 small communities of western Norwegian coast. Aboard it has 6000 books while 2000 are on lending at any given time. These books are part of library collections of three Norwegian counties in which the boat library operates. Cultural activities and programs are performed during most of the visits to the small communities. Usually writers are guest of the boat library and they tell from their books or literary gatherings and storytelling for children and adults are organized. Some of the cultural activities are aimed at children but are suitable for the whole family. The library boat is enormously popular in the small communities of western Norwegian coastline since it is the only possibility for the members of these communities to engage in cultural activities.

### **6. Conclusions**

Libraries at alternative spaces are grounded in the idea of focusing on patrons’ needs, foremost by following users to certain physical spaces and offering them library services there but also by differentiating certain from the whole range of various library services available at traditional library that are most suited for the specific target user group of travelers. By doing so these libraries should become the focus of librarianship community attention because of valuable experience in the area of accommodating patrons’ needs, which has always been the holy grail of librarianship. By learning from these libraries some aspects of operations of traditional libraries can be upgraded and by following the basic idea of going where the patrons are librarianship can upgrade its chances for survival and prosper in globalised, dynamic contemporary environment that proved so often to be difficult for grasping for this non-profit industry.

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