

This is the main question we should address to ourselves in order to develop a successful project for the Varna Library. What should a library offer and to whom? Where does its limits start and end, keeping the high quality of services as a benchmark? What means 'services' library-wise?

The biggest library of the ancient times was the Library of Alexandria, in Egypt. Alexandria was a Hellenistic city founded by Alexander the Great. Ptolemy II Soter, Great Alexander's successor, desired to found a museum, based on Aristotle's Lyceum, to be called Ptolemaic Museum Academy. His aim was to transform Alexandria from a summer resort for rich Greeks to a city of glory and knowledge. When the library of Alexandria was founded, including a branch library and a museum, included a widened programmatic condition in its space, such as baths, zoo, walk gardens, a large dining hall, a reading room, lecture halls, and meeting rooms. As it accommodated a number of scholars gathered to give lectures and conduct research, the library was apart from repository, a cultural centre and an intellectual meeting place. The notion of a library as a cultural hub and a think tank exists since the ancient times; as is the concept (place marketing) of using a cultural institution to transform a city's identity and develop its economy.

Libraries existed throughout time and served different purposes. However, one definite contributor to the notion of library as we know it today was the Dewey institution in the USA. Melvil Dewey was the man who published in 1876 a proprietary library classification system (DDC), along with a whole design system of organizing a library's interior space, like selves, reading spots etc. He was also one of the pioneers to organize public university libraries. His notion of the library as a book-warehouse and a study place, accessible and open to everybody interested is established and maintained till our times. However, the library's ontology varies according to one's geographical spot and culture.

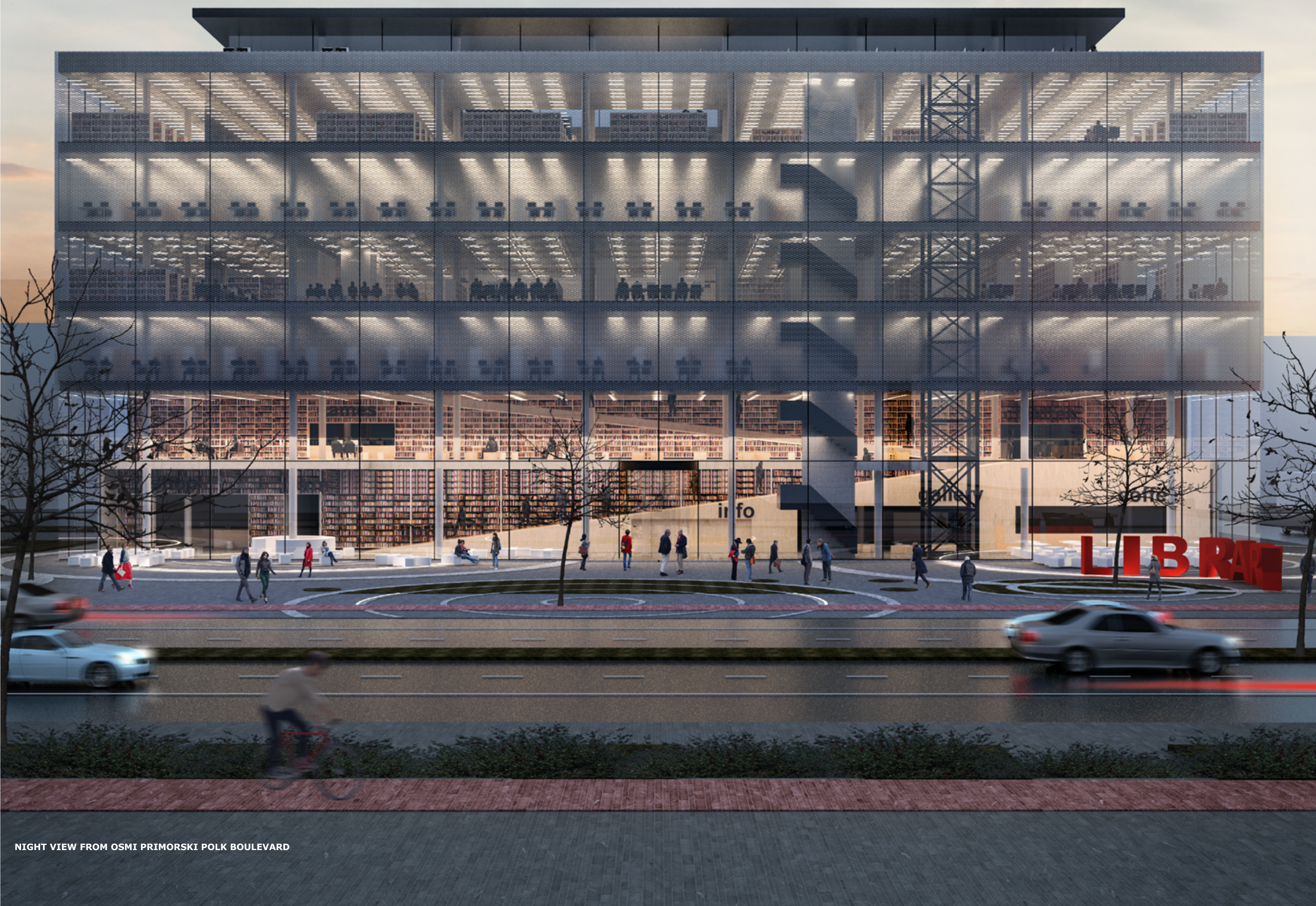
Chitalishte

For instance, in Bulgaria an Alexandria-wise tradition has been developed since the middle of the 19th c. The unique tradition of chitalishte, chitali (reading) – "site (place of action), that means 'reading-happening', 'reading-topos'. Its main aim was the development of public education, which considered as a key importance factor for the freedom of the nation. Initially created as reading rooms for self-education, chitalishte soon evolved into multifunctional spaces with facilities for public scientific lectures, events and theatre performances, secret locations for political discussions and conspiracy, rooms for silent learning, halls for practicing amateur arts, etc. It was of immense importance for those who did not acquire formal education.

Libraries have always been the institutions that democratize knowledge, making copyright protected material, often inaccessible outside libraries, available to anyone interested to study it, but also being committed to intellectual freedom, freedom of speech and the free flow of information. "Even if you never step foot in our doors, we are still working for you" (American Library Association).

However, the last decades the role of library has changed significantly. Society is changing rapidly. The financial crisis, the emigration, the population growth, the boost of technology – compression or annihilation of distance, different media, search engines, chat sites, peer-to-peer networks, digital identities, digital social groups – digital lives. What do Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have to do with libraries? Why bother to concern ourselves with data? How does Google search redefine the role of a library? All these radical changes are not opportunities to, but offer opportunities to libraries.

As it happened from codices, to the birth of typography, the publishing industry and the rise of information technology, libraries are being re-inventing themselves. Today, they cease being archives and become a 'learning commons', a flexible, online/physical educational, collaborative platform, thus a meeting point for social interaction and group work. This tendency is reinforced by the emerging architecture that corresponds to these institutions. The old model of readings halls, restricted collection areas and bookshelves all around the walls has given its place to open plan, full of daylight space, easy movement and access, cozy furniture, soft floors, coffee tables, laptop workspaces, gaming consoles, mobile applications, innovative gadgets, mobile studios, silent rooms, electronic equipment, children zones. All this create a dynamic, cool, homey, user-friendly, diverse and versatile space addressed to a wider range of users that motivates children, teenagers and adults to re-visit the library. In the heart of this change is the opening up to metadata, technologies, the creation of software, new products and services, and the development of knowledge and community.



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