HIDDEN SPACES,
REIMAGINING THE LIBRARY

PROGRESS BOOKLET

BY ANTONIO SEGURA
An expansion to the Stockholm city library.

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KTH Architecture
Advisors: Meike Schalk, Hélène Frichot

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WHAT AND WHY
INTENTIONS AT THE START OF THE PROJECT

There will be 150,000 more inhabitants in Stockholm by the year 2030. If this is the case, the city will not have a public library that lives up to the ambitions of a “sparkling cultural city of knowledge”, as the former Mayor of Stockholm put it. She also wrote, and I completely agree, that the current Åslund Library should form an integral part of a beautifully composed whole together with a new addition to the library.

In 2006, the city of Stockholm had an international competition involving the expansion of the city’s library. The competition ran its course but to this day, no changes have been made. The basis for my project is this competition.

There is another problem the city has that needs to be solved. Each year more than 1500 hotel rooms are missing from the city. Furthermore, facilities for medium-term stay are rare. Also, SvD reports that only 28 student apartments have been built between 2007 and 2010, meanwhile the waiting time for student apartments has quadrupled. What I propose adding to the program of the library is a hotel aimed at researchers and exchange students to stay at. The library will become a lively public building open for all, 24/7 and will stimulate meetings, discussions and study.

With so much time given to work on this one project, I look forward to spending a fair amount of that time studying the details of the site and library today, as well as designing my own. I am annoyed by the lack of attention to detail I see around me so often. I believe cohesive works with no details sticking out like a sore thumb bring a sense of calm into our strenuous everyday lives. Interestingly enough Åslund was also meticulous about details, evident in the library standing today, so it will be very interesting relating to that building.

This project will also give me the opportunity to take the time to seriously formulate a standpoint when it comes to modifying and adding to other’s architectural works.

BODY AND MIND, BOOKS AND BEDS

But there’s a problem with the current library. It’s too small today, it was too small when it was built in 1928 and it will be too small in 2030 when 150,000 more people live here. Hence the need for the expansion. Furthermore, with the arrival of citybanan, the nearby station Odenplan will be many commuter’s main link to the city and will thereby make this library their closest one.

There is another problem the city has and that is the temporarily bedless. Various sources report that by far the most common length of time to be homeless is one day. But aside from the homeless who are known to use libraries as shelters, many other people find themselves in need of a bed once in a while. As this diagram shows, there are just a handful of hostels in the inner city that offers beds for under 500 for a night. That’s why I propose that the library offer beds for loan. One of my inspirations for this is Jorge Borges idea of the infinite library which is composed of a series of rooms, each with a sleeping closet and a toilet closet. Essentially it offers all you would need to say at the library indefinitely.

MONUMENTALITY

My project plays with the concept on monumentality in various ways. It resists the urge to make the expansion a prominent volume that competes with Åslund’s building and instead takes advantage of the hidden spaces under and in-between. I found that the site had a lot of unused potential and I wanted to explore if and how that potential could be tapped. The basement of Åslund’s library is expanded to connect with the commercial spaces on Sveavägen and all the way to the last annex building at Gyldängatan.
BEDS

This diagram shows the location of my site (the white rectangle) in the wider context of the city. It also shows the libraries in the inner city, shelters, and hostels with rooms for under 500kr/night.
QUESTIONS
INITIAL QUESTIONS
What should a library be today in the 21st century?
How can a library be combined with the typology of a hotel?
How do I relate to an existing building?
To what extent should one honor someone else's architectural work?
How should the books and other media be arranged? What implications do different arrangements and categorizations have?
How can details and ornamentation be classified and used in a tasteful and useful way?

QUESTIONS I LATER TOOK ON
My project is called Hidden Spaces, re-imagining the library. I chose the word “re-imagining” very specifically rather than “designing the library” because rather than just solving the program laid out in the 2006 competition to expand the Stockholm public library, my project asks and explores a bunch of questions:

What if we didn’t tear down the three annex buildings next to Asplund’s library?
What if we didn’t make it a boastful building like most of the competition entries did?
What if we made the library something that could endure into the future by offering things that can’t be digitalized?
What if the library was a place where people were able to stay indefinitely?
What if it was less a quiet book closet and more an urban foyer, a welcoming meeting place that wasn’t aimed at commerce?
SITE
My site is in the inner city of Stockholm, at the crossing of the major streets, Odengatan and Sveavägen, where Åslund’s iconic library lies. The site contains the observatory hill, a pond and an urban surrounding.
PROGRAM
According to the competition brief, the city wants more books on display than in storage. By 2014 they want:

- **Books:** 770,000
- **Books and media public display:** 60%
- **Books and media in storage:** 40%
- **Public areas:** 16,600 m²
- **Study places:** 600
- **Reading Places:** 500
- **Seats:** 200
- **Visitors per day:** 7,000
- **Members of staff:** 120
- **Storage Space:** 2,700 m²
- **Administration space:** 350 m²
- **Possible External tenant:** Not available

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METHOD
Part of what interested me about this project is that I know the place very well since Stockholm is my home town. Furthermore I have available to me the architectural proposals from the 2006 competition. With this background knowledge and inspiration I will be able to come much further in the project and do a much better job than if I would be beginning more from scratch.

My research phase will include five areas which I will devote 1 week each to. This time plan is not be kept too strictly as I suspect some may take longer or shorter time to complete.

1. Documenting the details of Asplund’s Library including colors, dimensions and ornamentations.

2. Documenting the area around, including view and arrival from different locations as well as the library’s relation to surrounding buildings.

3. Book classification systems. Because I want to examine and question the way knowledge is arranged and hierarchically categorized, and this will serve as guidance for specially laying out media in the library.

4. Managing traffic in hotels. For this I am planning to visit and speak to the managers of my favorite hotels in Stockholm, as well as one or two smaller hotels.

5. Go through previous proposals. This will obviously give me inspiration for how I could design the library, but also, by reading critiques in DN and Arkitekten, know what mistakes I may want to avoid.

**BOOKS CONSULTED**


Very captivating beginning but then found myself skimming over more and more. He wrote that many architects in history like order and were a bit pretentious about their profession. Le Corbusier liked white and Till essentially accused him of being a racist for it. He also wrote that architecture is waste in transit. The book feels very unfamiliar and unsettling because I don’t know what the author wants. He says a lot but he’s not telling a story to entertain, he’s not explaining a scientific theory and he’s not giving me advice. He questions things but doesn’t suggest an alternative. That’s a bit of an exaggeration since he does come with a few suggestions, but that is the overall feeling I have of the book. Near the end I was glad to see him refer to my favorite feminist writer, Carol Gilligan, and it gave me reason to think Till and I agree more than it seems, but have different ways of expressing it.


The author brings up interesting dilemmas, but he’s not that helpful at answering them. His comments are more conversational than normative. Right from the start we have a difference in opinions because he writes about obligations to the profession, client, environment, etc. which are premises I don’t accept and the author doesn’t argue for. One thing I found was interesting was: there’s your opinion about the project, there’s the client, but there may also be strong opinion from the community that should come into consideration. What does relieve you of some responsibility however is that you do not have the final say in what gets built. Your proposal that reflects the community’s wishes isn’t worth anything if it doesn’t get built. Urging a client to reconsider is sometimes enough, and then you can proceed to just do what the client asks for.

Contained nice examples of similar forms I was considering in my project. I appreciate architecture that takes one concept and explores how far and well it can be taken.


A very fun read, but unfortunately not very helpful for my project. It did however help me realize that some people intentionally do not want to find what they want quickly and instead allow themselves to come across things they hadn’t expected in their search.


Literally one long checklist. It’s great that it exists but I did not have time to think of every little detail this book addresses.


While I’m not a fan of a library resembling a feeling of maze-like mystery, I do appreciate the idea of having all that you need to stay there available so you can keep exploring. His library is composed of an array of hexagonal rooms, each containing a sleeping closet and a toilet closet. By the end of my project I managed to create an interesting blend: The book area resembles a forest where one can explore and even get lost, yet there is an underlying rationality.


Not a bad book at all. It served me by giving me some presidents of libraries in Scandinavia that are pushing the boundaries of what


Library Builders, Great Britain: Academic editions (1997)

Contained nice examples of similar forms I was considering in my project.
I spent a significant amount of time figuring out what the best way would be to divide the books into sections. The current book classification system used in Swedish libraries is its own SAB system. The strange things I discovered in the brief for the competition was that the division or sections for the expansion of the library didn’t correlate at all with the book classifications. This resulted in many strange and confusion scenarios, for example:

Religion would be found in The arts
Anthropology would be found in People and countries
Sports would be found in nature and Technology
History would be found in people and countries

By converting to the Dewey decimal classification system and arranging the library into sections that mirror Dewey’s we’d have the following scenarios instead:

Religion would be found in Religion
Anthropology would be found in Social Sciences
Sports would be found in Art and recreation
History would be found in History and geography
TIME LINE
There are 3 main phases to the project. Analysis will be about the five areas of inquiry I described on the previous page. Solving the problems will be about first getting to know what I am aiming at and secondly, figuring out what kind of a building meets that criteria. The first two phases will be completed before the mid critique, where I expect to have a rough, but realistic, idea of where I am heading. The third phase, refining the project, is about taking my idea and refining it, making it more real by typical methods of measuring and drawing as well as applying personal design methods and values I have developed throughout the years. A large part of my design method is deciding what the building is not as a way of “chipping the statue out of the block of stone”. In concrete terms, this is deciding, for example, “I will not modify Asplund’s building”, or “The hotel will not get a separate entrance.” The latter decision will directly limit the possible ways I can arrange the building’s functions.
**THE APOTHEOSIS OF WASHINGTON**

The Apotheosis of Washington is the immense fresco painted by Italian artist Constantino Brumidi in 1865 and visible through the oculus of the dome in the rotunda of the United States Capitol Building.

It depicts various Roman gods and goddesses helping and inspiring the founders of the United States. It may not be what the artist intended to convey but I see the gods as a symbol for different fields of knowledge. Whatever you want to accomplish, there are people who have gone before you that you can learn from. In this case, “War,” “Science,” “Marine,” “Commerce,” “Mechanics,” and “Agriculture”.

**THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS**

The school of Athens is one of the most famous frescoes by the Italian Renaissance artist Raphael. It appears in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican.

I find this image very inspiring and related to libraries as it depicts over 20 ancient philosophers, scientists, and mathematicians. We all stand on the shoulders of giants and to libraries are an important way for us to gain access to those “shoulders”.
WENNER-GREN CENTER

In the 1960s the businessman Axel Wenner-Gren donated a large amount of money to build a center for visiting scientists, called the Wenner-Gren Center. They would live in the circular building and work in the high-rise. This is a project worth investigating a bit since it has themes similar to my project such as education and medium-term residence.
PROGRESS
MATERIALS AND COLORS
Early on in my project I conducted a study of the colors and materials inside and outside and around Asplund’s library.
HIDDEN SPACES, REIMAGINING THE LIBRARY

PROGRESS
RESEARCHING THE BEDLESS

The majority of people who find themselves technically homeless are bedless just for one night. The 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to US Congress reports: only 10% of homeless population are “chronically homeless”

“We found that eighty per cent of the homeless were in and out really quickly. In Philadelphia, the most common length of time that someone is homeless is one day. And the second most common length is two days. And they never come back” — Dennis Culhane, shelter worker who put together tracking database.

I don’t want to single out specifically homeless people in these sleeping areas. I want to treat the beds like any other facility in a library. People don’t feel sorry for those who go to the library to get books and I don’t think people should feel sorry for those who want a free bed for a night.

Socialstyrelsen said in 2011 there’s 4500 “acutely homeless” in the country, people who plain and simply have nowhere to sleep tonight and aren’t in any homeless support program. 34000 people have some sort of shelter but not their own (10,000 in Stockholm according to Metro). How these beds would work in practice, I imagine they would be borrowed with a library card like a book.

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Gaussian distribution
Average lies between the extremes

Power law distribution
Vital few, trivial many

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HOMELSS-ORGANIZATIONS IN STOCKHOLM

Stockholms Stadsmission
Stortorget 3
Box 2266
103 17 Stockholm

Situation sthlm
Krukmakargatan 36

Hela människan
Fryshuset
Märnsdalsgatan 6, 2 tr

NY Gemenskap
Kammakargatan 36 ög
Box 3053
103 61 Stockholm

Convictus
St Paulsgatan 13
118 46 Stockholm

Frälsningsarmén
Nybrogatan 79 b
Illustration of Borgo’s infinite library.

Wintergarten hostel in Munich.

Early diagram of placement of program on site.

This is the existent basement level of Asplund’s library. There is only gravel between it and the commercial spaces.
BLANKET
The link between the two libraries is cumbersome. I appreciate the large inside spaces and the interesting use of angles, but the result is too complex in my opinion. I will admit that sometimes, a mysterious place with new routes and rooms to find is what you’re after, but that’s not my style. Their drawings were difficult to read, too many numbers and texts and lines in one image. I don’t mind that they turned the commercial spaces to library functions, but the way they did it resulted in 3 poorly connected sections. Nevertheless, it does make me aware of a new possible solution.

BOOK HILL
Like Cut, this one is also eye-catching. Uses a zigzag version of the Seattle library book spiral, it’s great. Continuous book string. Connects to Asplund library just like I want to. It’s great, I’m impressed and feel I have a role model of sorts. They took a risk when they suggested some changes to the Asplund library’s program, but it paid off since they got to the finals of the competition. Has roof access. The downside is that the building as a whole is complex to understand.

NOSCE TE IPSUM
This one also shows that a good proposal can be made keeping most of the annex building and even does so in a better way than Cut. This building seems to hide, which is the opposite of inviting? Like Blanket, this building is also mysterious. It has a lot of dead ends. It’s difficult to understand the layout, I’d like to be able to easily make a map in my mind.

DELPHINIUM
From what I can tell from the very plain presentation, there’s nothing really special about it. But I like how it connects to the hilltop as well as creates a little park as well as takes over the whole block so you can see that something going on in there and it’s inviting. It both creates it’s own little park and little square.

DIKTHÖRNAN
First reaction: weird. I think first reactions matter. Two of the annex buildings are demolished to allow a new square, which I’m pretty neutral towards. On the positive side, it’s very visible from both Odengatan and sveavägen. It works, and has a clever use of skylights, but I still have a strong feeling of dislike towards the proposal.

CUT
This one is very intriguing at first glance. Visibility is important. It makes a connection between Odengatan and sveavägen that gets people away from the noisy street, I’ve had that ambition in mind as well. Organizationally seems fine. Interesting to see it keeps the annex buildings but changes their function.