



Libraries as Public Spaces

New Champions for Civic Spaces

Traditionally regarded as centres of information resources, public libraries have also always played an important role as trusted and inclusive community spaces. While information is increasingly accessible online, **Joanna Tan** shows us how modern public libraries are renewing their role as valued social spaces that not only anchor their communities but can also revitalise and transform them.



Open-Air Library, Magdeburg, Germany

An urban planning experiment to boost social networks in the Salbke district resulted in the creation of this community-led, sustainably built public library that fuses interior and exterior space. As the district's "green living room", the library is an important focal point for community activities that support social and cultural life.





The Pinch, Yunnan, China

Built after a series of devastating earthquakes, The Pinch is the Shuanghe Village's central community space as well as a memorial to the earthquake victims and the survivors' resilience. Villagers read and socialise at the library and adjacent plaza, while the curved roof of the building acts as a pedestrian ramp and play structure.



Biblioteca España, Medellín, Colombia

The Biblioteca España (Spain Library Park) is one of several public libraries built in the city's high-risk areas to combat violence and create more equitable socio-economic opportunities. Residents gather in this oasis for readings, screenings, concerts and discussions. The small windows encourage disconnection from the surrounding neighbourhood's poverty.





National Library Building, Singapore

Library visitorship is one of the world's highest in densely populated Singapore. Despite plentiful online resources, this internationally-acclaimed "green" building draws over a million people annually. Visitors vie for space in the reading rooms, study lounge and sky gardens, attend exhibitions, watch performances, and participate in community events at the public plaza.



Dokk1 Library and Citizens' Services, Aarhus, Denmark

Built on derelict industrial space, Dokk1 was converted into a "covered urban square" for community interaction, learning and knowledge sharing. The centre also offers flexible internal spaces for experimentation and innovation. Large staircases and open terraces provide access to the building from all sides, and are popular as meeting and resting spots.