



THE CONCEPT OF THE “THIRD PLACE” IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the concept of the “third place” as one of the key areas in the transformation of library and information activities in the context of the digital society. The essence of the concept of the “third place” is revealed, and its adaptation in the practice of modern libraries is analyzed. Special attention is paid to the role of libraries as open public spaces that facilitate communication, informal learning, and cultural interaction among users. Examples of the implementation of this concept in library practice are given, and its influence on increasing the social significance of libraries and expanding the range of services provided is also revealed.

Keywords: library, sociocultural space, communication, library users, library services, digital transformation, information environment, cultural interaction.

In recent years, the concept of the “third place,” proposed by the American sociologist R. Oldenburg [5], has become increasingly relevant in various spheres of public life. This idea implies the creation of spaces distinct from home and work, where people can gather, communicate, exchange ideas, and develop as individuals. The concept of “third places” describes urban spaces that occupy an intermediate position between the personal sphere (home, the “first place”) and the professional sphere (work, the “second place”). Unlike the strictly regulated spaces of home and work, “third places” provide individuals with an opportunity for self-identification and informal social interaction. Such spaces include a variety of public locations, such as bars, cafés, parks, fitness centers, and libraries, whose form and history vary depending on the region. They are centers of informal public life, contributing to the formation of various social groups and communities of interest. The main function of “third places” is communication and intellectual exchange rather than the maintenance of social status. Alexandra Nenko notes that libraries, striving for openness and creativity, are actively adapting to this role while preserving their core function [3]. Specialists propose the concept of library communication centers, focusing on both the semantic and material components, while emphasizing the importance of preserving the book potential and organizing the space competently, rather than turning libraries into catering establishments. A significant barrier to the realization of libraries as “third places” is the population’s low awareness of their existence and their unattractive appearance: people simply do not know about libraries (90% of residents do not know about the libraries in their district and do not notice them because they are gray and inconspicuous). This is also a question of exterior design, and it conceals great potential for the development of libraries as public spaces.

In the context of library and information activities, the third place acquires special significance, since libraries have traditionally performed not only the function of storing information, but also that of creating a comfortable environment for communication and leisure.

A third place is a space where people can interact freely and develop their social ties. It should be:

1. Accessible and local: the space should be located in a convenient place, be open to all categories of the population, and have flexible working hours.
2. Open to all social categories: it is important that a third place be inclusive, allowing people from different social strata to interact and exchange experience, which helps reduce social barriers.



3. Offering opportunities for leisure and entertainment: a third place should provide various activities that not only educate but also entertain, including master classes, lectures, exhibitions, and cultural events.

4. Comfortable and relaxed for communication: the atmosphere of a third place should encourage free communication, new acquaintances, and cooperation.

Within library and information activities, the concept of the third place finds particularly relevant application. Libraries, as centers of knowledge, are increasingly becoming places where people can not only obtain information, but also meet, communicate, and discuss current issues. This is confirmed by a number of documents regulating the activities of public libraries, which emphasize the importance of creating such spaces [4].

Modern libraries are actively working to integrate the characteristics of the third place into their activities. For example, many of them are beginning to offer not only traditional services — lending books and providing access to information resources — but also to organize various events aimed at engaging users. These may include literary evenings, exhibitions of local artists, skills-development courses, and much more.

To study how library users perceive the concept of the third place, a survey with elements of the semantic differential method was conducted. Respondents assessed such characteristics as accessibility, openness to different social groups, and the variety of leisure activities [8].

The survey results showed that most respondents note the high accessibility of libraries and their openness to all categories of the population. Users also gave a positive assessment of the variety of events offered, which confirms that library and information centers do indeed correspond to the characteristics of a third place.

Despite the successful implementation of the third place concept in the library context, libraries should continue working to improve their environment. This may include:

- Expanding the range of events: it is important to offer new formats of interaction that will be interesting to different groups of users.
- Creating a comfortable atmosphere: arranging the space with users' convenience in mind, including areas for rest and communication.
- Using technologies: introducing digital solutions that will help make the library more accessible and attractive to a youth audience.
- Active cooperation with local communities: establishing partnerships with organizations and initiatives that can enrich the library program.

The concept of the third place in library and information activities opens new horizons for the development and transformation of libraries in modern society. The creation of comfortable, accessible, and inclusive spaces contributes not only to the exchange of knowledge, but also to the strengthening of social ties, making libraries important centers of public life.

In recent decades, the concept of the “third place” — a space distinct from home and work — has become increasingly relevant for public libraries. These institutions are ceasing to be merely repositories of books and are turning into multifunctional public centers that offer a variety of services meeting the needs of modern society.

One striking example of library transformation is the San Francisco Library, where a full-time social worker helps homeless visitors obtain housing and medical assistance. This approach emphasizes the importance of libraries as places where everyone can find support and the resources necessary to improve their quality of life. Libraries are becoming places where people can not only gain access to information, but also find the help they need in difficult life situations.



This example is not unique. Many libraries around the world are beginning to cooperate with social services and nonprofit organizations in order to expand the range of services offered. The Queens Public Library in New York, for example, demonstrates how libraries can become health centers by providing free vaccinations and medical consultations in partnership with healthcare institutions. This not only helps improve the health of the local population, but also strengthens trust in libraries as important public resources [7].

Modern libraries are actively introducing new technologies and formats in order to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. The Oodi Library in Helsinki is a model of the “third place,” offering visitors makerspaces, recording studios, 3D printing, and kitchens for events. This space has become not only a place for reading, but also a platform for creativity, learning, and communication. The high level of library visits per capita confirms the success of this approach.

In addition to traditional services, libraries are beginning to offer programming courses, art workshops, and even lectures on financial literacy. This makes it possible to attract a broader audience and satisfy the diverse interests of the local population.

Another interesting trend is the emergence of “Libraries of Things.” These collections allow users to borrow not only books, but also tools, games, electronics, and even gardening equipment. This approach supports the ideas of sustainable development and the sharing economy, allowing people to save money and resources, while also encouraging a more responsible attitude toward the environment.

In some libraries, one can even find collections of cookbooks and culinary tools, which contributes to the development of culinary culture and communication among visitors. It also creates opportunities for organizing joint events, such as cooking master classes or themed evenings.

Modern public libraries, then, are becoming not simply places for reading, but important centers of public life, where people can receive not only information, but also support, education, health-related services, and cultural enrichment. They are actively adapting to the needs of society, introducing innovations and expanding their functions. Libraries that were once simply repositories of books are today becoming genuine “third places,” where everyone can find their own place and support.

The library is undergoing a transformation, becoming a living organism — a multifunctional sociocultural center. Today’s visitor comes here not only for the rustle of pages, but also for the pulse of life: for the opportunity to communicate, bring ideas to life, reveal talents, realize ambitions, and immerse themselves in a world of intellectual entertainment and up-to-date information. To remain relevant, the library harmoniously combines time-tested resources with innovative interactive technologies and new information services, offering a space where lively meeting zones coexist with quiet corners for reflection.

The renewal of libraries should proceed in such a way that they remain attractive to those who seek fresh books of different genres and value silence for immersion in reading. In implementing the idea of the “third place,” libraries should not become noisy “squares” for general gatherings, as was the case in antiquity (an analogue of the “agora”); this issue has long concerned foreign colleagues. In Uzbekistan, active debates are also underway about how modern libraries can combine their diverse roles. A competent use of the “third place” concept can turn libraries into recognizable “centers of attraction,” but their essence should remain in the sphere of knowledge and culture, not in the sphere of entertainment and consumption. To remain relevant, libraries, like any “third place,” must constantly develop and adapt to the needs of the time, which makes this concept very close to them. However, libraries should not blindly follow all the prescriptions of the “third place” concept while forgetting their core functions. A reasonable balance and meaningful application are necessary



so that libraries can combine their traditional tasks with modern trends without turning into an imitation of other “third places.” The best approach is to use a set of conceptual ideas of the “third place” as a tool, but to do so consciously and critically, so that the library does not lose its core identity and does not become a place intended exclusively for leisure [8].

A safe space where one can take a break from endless scrolling, read carefully into a line, work without the supervision of management, or simply dissolve among shelves full of stories and knowledge — all this can quite easily be found in the reading rooms of Tashkent libraries. For example, within the walls of the Republican Children’s Library it is always noisy, lively, and diverse: toddlers, schoolchildren, students, and adults who have not lost their taste for deep conversation all read here. Someone is just learning to put words together, while someone else is already debating Holden Caulfield’s motives. Another example is the youth library in the Davlatobod district of Namangan, which has become a favorite place not only for the youth of Namangan, but for the whole republic. It is especially convenient and cozy for networking, a great place for holding book presentations, meetings with scholars, or large IT hackathons. The top floor of the library has a discussion area, as well as a “digital library” equipped with 50 computers and a separate “green zone” for young programmers to work.

In Tashkent, every district should have its own public library, and there should be one central public library for the city. The same should apply in Fergana, Navoi, Bukhara, and so on. Most importantly, these libraries should not be something like a mahalla guzar or an administrative office; they should not be tied to any kind of bureaucracy, including membership and patronage. The library should be managed by the people themselves and should serve the people. Perhaps no place in any community is as democratic as the city library. The only entry requirement should be interest [1].

Libraries should not be perceived as a dusty past; they are very much a living present, only more measured. In the general breakneck pace of work and the atmosphere of an endless race, it is sometimes useful to enter a place where time seems to stand still. Because sometimes we all need silence in order to finally hear our own thoughts. Perhaps this is where the superpower of libraries lies.

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