Romanian libraries: a new form, a new identity? Case of study: The Municipal Library of Turda

(Published online 14 March 2017)

Radu Alexandru Tonca[*1]

[1]*Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning 72-76 Observatorului Str., 400500, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

Abstract

Libraries have suffered significant transformations in the recent decades, re-establishing its goals and objectives and rethinking its whole attitude towards the public. This new approach is focused on attracting and incitement the users, on display a generous offer in terms of cultural activities, scientific or educational ones and on continuous updating of information. The libraries in small and medium sized cities in Romania are facing several problems, among which, the most important ones are the lack of proper spaces, the increased disinterest of local communities for the library's services and the specific problems concerning the adaptation process to new technologies. A typical case is that of the municipal library in Turda, which has a dedicated and ambitious staff, but which meets the usual problems, like the poor involvement of local authorities and the lack of based strategies to revive the interest for culture and cultural institutions. It is important to discuss the current situation of these libraries for a better understanding of the difficulties to be overcome and to plan their future development. The strong impact that new technologies have on institutions and especially on users is significant and should be considered in developing strategies to modernize libraries. Municipal Library of Turda case study is a step in advance to understand the situation of these libraries, a multifaceted analysis being done, seeking the understanding of the library's place in the city, the library's place in the community, the interior design and the new forms and contextual adaptations, etc.

Rezumat

Bibliotecile s-au transformat în mod semnificativ în ultimele decenii, schimbându-şi ţelurile şi obiectivele şi regândindu-şi întreaga atitudine faţă de publicul utilizator. Această nouă abordare este axată pe atragerea şi incitarea utilizatorilor, pe oferirea unei palete largi de activităţi culturale, ştiinţifice sau educaţionale şi pe continua actualizare a informaţiei. Bibliotecile din oraşele mici şi mijlocii din România se confruntă cu o serie de probleme, printre care, cele mai importante sunt lipsa spaţiilor potrivite şi dezinteresul tot mai mare al comunităţilor locale faţă de serviciile instituţiei, precum şi problemele tipice de adaptare la noile tehnologii. Un caz concludent este cel al bibliotecii municipale din Turda, care are un personal dedicat, dar care întâlneşte problemele obişnuite, ca neimplicarea autorităţilor locale şi lipsa strategiilor de revitalizare a interesului pentru cultură şi instituţii culturale. Este important să discutăm situaţia actuală a acestor biblioteci pentru o mai bună înţelegere a dificultăţilor în dezvoltarea viitoare a acestora.

---
[*] Corresponding author: Radu Alexandru Tonca Tel./ Fax.: 0040 747 599 775
E-mail address: radu.tonca@yahoo.com

Impactul puternic pe care noile tehnologii îl au asupra instituţiilor şi în special asupra utilizatorilor este semnificativ şi ar trebui avut în vedere în elaborarea strategiilor de modernizare a bibliotecilor. Cazul de studiu al Bibliotecii Municipale din Turda este un pas în faţă în înţelegerea situaţiei acestor biblioteci, analiza fiind făcută din perspective diferite, precum locul bibliotecii în oraş sau locul acesteia în comunitate, designul interior sau noile forme de adaptare contextuală, etc.

1. „Teodor Murăşanu", Turda's Municipal Library – SHORT HISTORY

The Municipal Library in Turda, firstly called "*Districts Library*", dates from the '50s. The beginnings of Turda's library and of public reading, in general, is older, hovering sometime in the late nineteenth century, when the biggest cultural changes and education developments take place, due to the assertion of nationalism.[1]

The first libraries in Turda are set up under the auspices of various cultural societies or associations, as ASTRA or The Reading Society of Romanian Women in Turda. The most important libraries that work in Turda, at the end of the nineteenth century, are: Romanian Women's Reading Society Library in Turda, The Romanian Ladies Reunion Library, The Romanian Craftsmen Reunion Library. These operate up to the Second World War. After Orban Balazs, there were various Hungarian cultural organizations in Turda, like the "Citizens Reading Society", dedicated to the middle class society of Turda. Women's Reading Society, founded by the wife of a local count, aimed at promoting Hungarian literature and also engage in various charitable activities. This company owned newspapers, magazines and a small library of approximately 3,000 volumes.[2]

With the "*awakening*" of the Romanian people from the second half of the nineteenth century and the awareness of denationalization danger in Transylvania, a growing interest in libraries gets shape and libraries are seen as an important mean of movement and spread of nationalist ideas. Thus, the library begins to be seen as a tool for changing mentalities, for education and as an impetus towards a richer and freer intellectual life. After 1840 the number of publications increases and, consequently, the libraries develop, also being stimulated by a reform package, implemented by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, which contained a so-called libraries law, contemporary with the development of Library Science in Europe.[3]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, some of the parish libraries, closed for the public until then, started opening and began to function as public libraries. In Turda, for example, there was the Library of Greek-Catholic Deanery. The limited financial resources and the modesty of spaces lead to a small audience.

In the interwar period, ASTRA's cultural activity is still very intense. This association organizes conferences, lectures for craftsmen, cultural and literary meetings for intellectual public. ASTRA also continues to lead many libraries; in Turda there were about 20 libraries that were functioning under its aegis.

Like nowadays, the early twentieth century society was facing with the reading problem and issues related to libraries, reading and readers were frequently debated. Various cultural foundations and associations made efforts to educate the public and to generate interest in book, like Prince Charles Royal Cultural Foundation, which, for example, initiates the holiday "Book Week", held annually in May.

The Law of 1932, made by Nicolae Iorga, the first law of popular libraries, or the public libraries, comprising the village and the city ones, open to all residents. It is mentioned an administrative system, which had led the librarian and the library's to having their own budget, as part of the local budget. In Turda, perhaps as a result of this law, by the end of 1937 a public library is founded, with the book fund consisting of donations from foundations like Royal House of Schools or different acquisitions, establishing their headquarters in a large hall of the House of Culture, a building on the Avram Iancu Street, today, above the Fox Cinema and the National Theatre. At war's end, the „union libraries" appear, which will be set up in the factories in Turda. The Union members could use these libraries for free, and the non-members would pay a fee of „200 lei" per month. [1]

In the first phase, the Communists will purify the existing libraries and then will start real campaigns for the development of public reading, creating the legal basis for the establishment of new libraries, Decree No.17 / 1949. That's how, officially, the public library is founded. Turda's Central District Library subordinated to the Department of Culture and Art of the People's District Council of Turda, took over the approximately 4,200 volumes, reaching a total of 25,000 volumes fund. In 1952 the library was moved to the ground floor, in the current space, and since 1966 it has opened a new section for children, which functioned until 1973 in a hall of the actual space of department for adults. In 1973 this children's section moved into the space in which it works today, in the old District Court building. Turda's Central District Library, subordinated to the Department of Culture and Art of the People's Council District, Turda, in 1950, establishes its headquarters in the current library's building.

Quitting the "*Soviet culture*" and promoting of Romanian culture, after the 60s, generates an increased interest for culture's growth and the library begins to develop. With the new administrative-territorial division, in 1968, when the city becomes a "municipium" the transformation between District Library into Municipal library takes place.

After the '89 events, the library will focus on its specific activities to popularize reading and book through exhibitions, literary gatherings or reading circles.

A special attention will be given to the activities for children, the library venturing into numerous collaborations with local Kid's Club, middle schools and even city's kindergartens. Since 1993, the municipal library was renamed after "Teodor Murăşanu", a local writer and editor. And after 2000 the modernization and computerization of the library began. Currently, the library has three sections: Section for adults, children section and Oprisani Branch, incorporating an encyclopedic collection of more than 100 000 books and serving, currently, around 10,000 readers.

According to librarians, after 2000, the library was focused on the acquisition of books, the establishment of new funds, specialty literature, like informatics, law and legislation, philosophy, psychology, etc. Also librarians began to be more attentive to public needs and acquisitions were aimed at covering these needs.

Since 2001 there is a collection of audio-visual materials, and in 2006 the Internet is installed in the library, having opened a hall for public Internet access.

Librarians mention the many advantages of access to electronic media, including the democratization of culture and knowledge, improvement of daily life, broadcasting and easily access documents remotely reading and diversification opportunities through simultaneous access to several texts. New technologies have positively affected the content and quality of reading, but have also allowed organizing educational activities and user training in computer use and new means of access to information.[4]

2. The place of the library – in the CITY

2.1 Library's buildings

Today, the library has three offices: The main centre (housed in the Municipal Theatre)(Fig. 1), The Children's Department, which has its headquarters in another central building, namely the former courthouse and The Oprisani Branch, which functions in a school's building. The library is thus divided into several locations in town, none being designed specifically as a library. The Municipal Theater Building, where the main office works, is built in the early twentieth century. On the north side the Library has its headquarters.

Figure 1. The place of the Library in the city – the Municipal Theater.
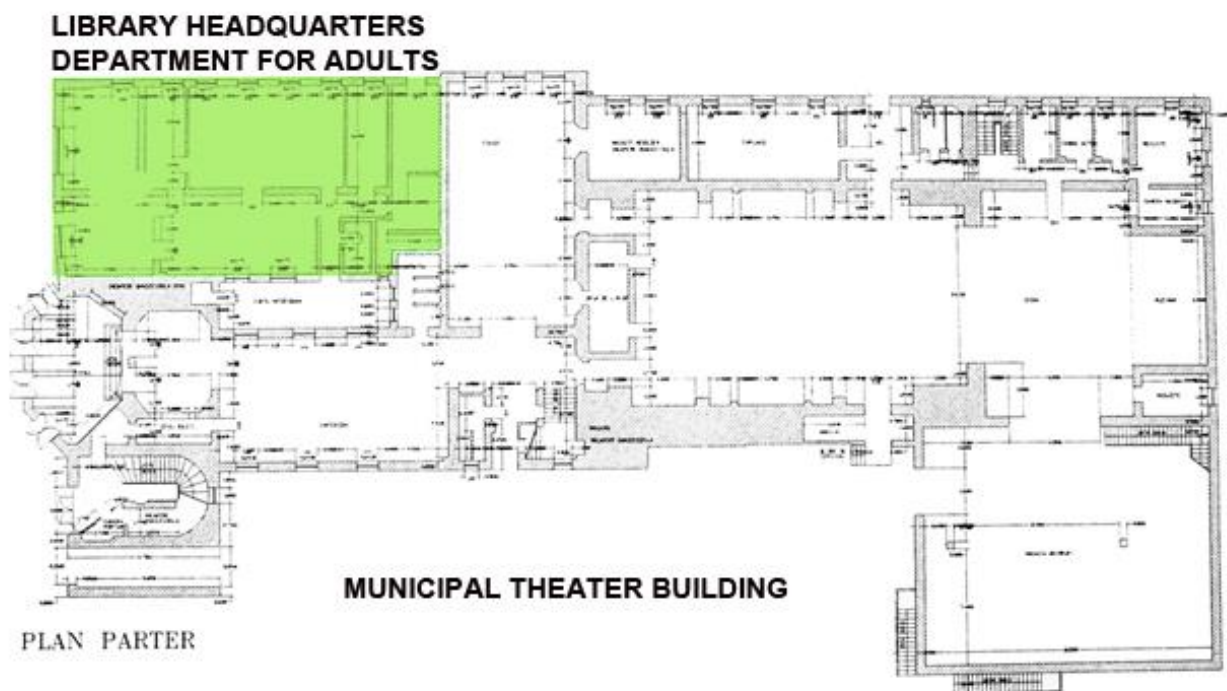

Figure 2. The place of the Library in the city – the department for adults.

The ground floor office (Fig. 2) is designed as the following: the entrance is made through a hallway, where the catalogs and records are, then, on the left there is a reading room and straight

ahead there is the free access to shelves room; on the north side three small offices can be found and straight ahead, there is the computers room. The book store is located in the basement.

The limited space is a major drawback and a real hindrance in carrying out the normal activities. The librarians accuse this problem along of course with the one of the extremely limited funds. The Children Section's Headquarters (Fig. 3) is also located in a limited space and relatively undeveloped, on Coşbuc Street, in a part of the ground floor of the former buildings of the Law Court.

Figure 3. The place of the Library in the city – the department for children.

2.2 Location and connection in the city

The following scheme shows the situation of the library in the city, pointing out the connections and the current exposure or visibility, as the possible extensions or transmutations in other available spaces of the municipality. (Fig. 4)

First we'll see a brief analysis of the historical center of the city, so we can understand the context in which the library is integrated, locating the main landmarks and monuments and important cultural buildings in the central area.

The list on the right, in the above immage, includes the existing historical monuments in the central area and some graphic signs that explain different visual land-marks.

The central area of Turda is a protected monument, as an urban ensemble. There are a number of features that make the historical center unique and valuable, but what is important is that the buildings of civic and social importance are gathered here, as the town-hall, the cadaster and land registration office, the court and the police (moved several years ago) and most of the commercial and service functions.
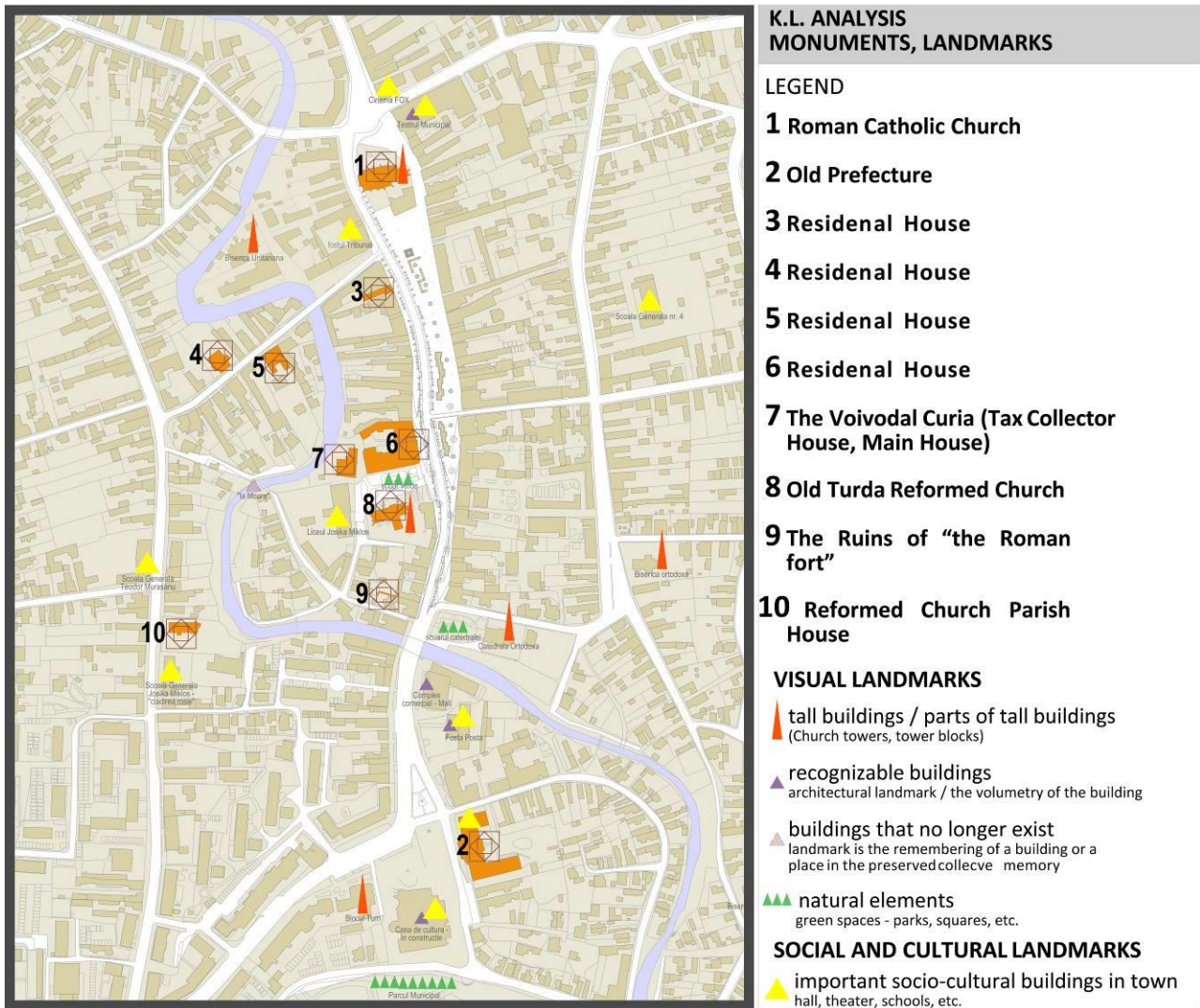
Figure 4. K.L. Analysis. Monuments. Landmarks.

The following diagram represents a graphical analysis of functions in the central area. (Fig. 5) From it emerges that the mixed functions buildings prevail, this being a feature specific to historic centers of European cities. Of course, the functional mixing is one of the principles that libraries should consider, since this desired symbiosis, sought and planned can bring benefits, both in terms of intensifying the users flow and in terms of economic benefits. We also note the presence of several schools in downtown.
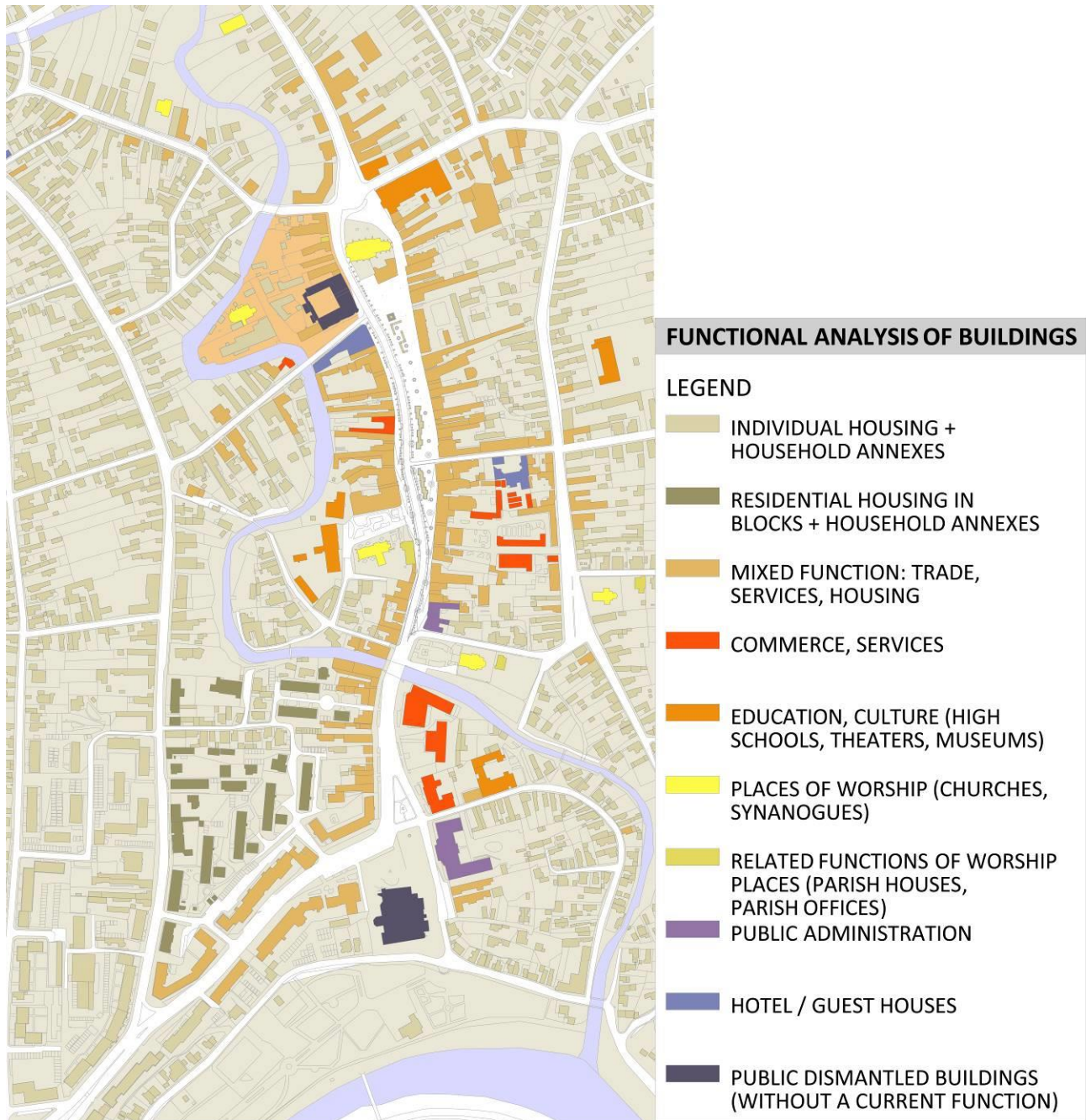
Figure 5. Functional analysis of buildings.

3. The place of the library – in the COMMUNITY

Turda's Library is experiencing poverty in budget allocation and is forced to make careful and rigorous book acquisitions, in order to cover the important areas and provide the minimum necessary renewal of publications in scientific and education fields.
Since 2010, the *Biblionet Program*, funded by "Bill & Melinda Gates" foundation, made possible for the library the equipment with computers and the permanent connection and access to the Internet.

The librarians highlight the strong impact that access to the electronic environment had on the institution and its users in particular. The users began to receive a number of benefits, including

free, faster access to information, direct access to multiple documents and multiple readings, instant communication means, etc. Librarians organized computer education courses and a series of trainings for professional development, in order to meet the users needs. There are a number of thematic exhibitions and lists with latest acquisitions are posted on website to inform users about the content of the available collections. Also library bibliographic lists are sent to schools to present the institution's offer to pupils and teachers.

In terms of interior design, the funds were never sufficient for an extensive renovation or refurbishment activities, but some renewals were made. For example, in 2005, through a grant project of Cluj-Napoca County Council the furniture in the Loan room of Adult Section was changed, and also in the reading room of the Department for Children, allowing a greater capacity for shelf Exposure.

Further on, we will try to follow some statistical data and highlight some local trends and behaviors.

3.1 Dynamics of users organized on professions – the number of each year new users, in the period 2004-2012

The graph (Fig. 6) shows that students (high-school and primary school) are the most numerous users enrolled in the period 2004 - 2012. They are followed by *other categories* and for the 3rd place there is a competition between *retirees*, *faculty-students* and *intellectuals*. The other categories, like technicians, officials, workers, housewives and the unemployed are the least interested in library services, with the lowest number of registered new users during this period.
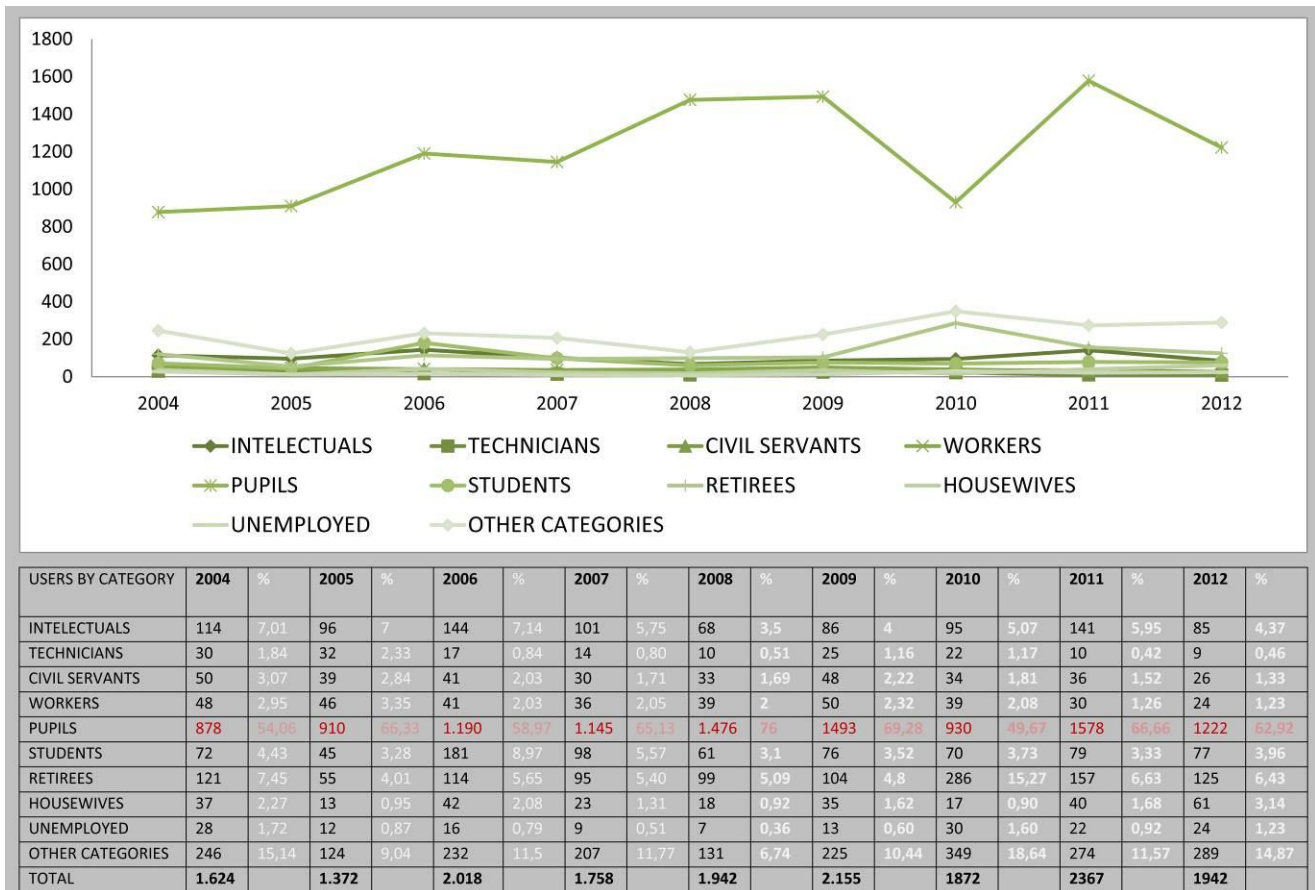

USERS BY CATEGORY	2004	%	2005	%	2006	%	2007	%	2008	%	2009	%	2010	%	2011	%	2012	%
INTELECTUALS	114	7,01	96	7	144	7,14	101	5,75	68	3,5	86	4	95	5,07	141	5,95	85	4,37
TECHNICIANS	30	1,84	32	2,33	17	0,84	14	0,80	10	0,51	25	1,16	22	1,17	10	0,42	9	0,46
CIVIL SERVANTS	50	3,07	39	2,84	41	2,03	30	1,71	33	1,69	48	2,22	34	1,81	36	1,52	26	1,33
WORKERS	48	2,95	46	3,35	41	2,03	36	2,05	39	2	50	2,32	39	2,08	30	1,26	24	1,23
PUPILS	878	54,06	910	66,33	1.190	58,97	1.145	65,13	1.476	76	1493	69,28	930	49,67	1578	66,66	1222	62,92
STUDENTS	72	4,43	45	3,28	181	8,97	98	5,57	61	3,1	76	3,52	70	3,73	79	3,33	77	3,96
RETIREES	121	7,45	55	4,01	114	5,65	95	5,40	99	5,09	104	4,8	286	15,27	157	6,63	125	6,43
HOUSEWIVES	37	2,27	13	0,95	42	2,08	23	1,31	18	0,92	35	1,62	17	0,90	40	1,68	61	3,14
UNEMPLOYED	28	1,72	12	0,87	16	0,79	9	0,51	7	0,36	13	0,60	30	1,60	22	0,92	24	1,23
OTHER CATEGORIES	246	15,14	124	9,04	232	11,5	207	11,77	131	6,74	225	10,44	349	18,64	274	11,57	289	14,87
TOTAL	1.624		1.372		2.018		1.758		1.942		2.155		1872		2367		1942	

Figure 6. Dynamics of users organized on professions – the number of each year's new users, in the period 2004-2012.

3.2 Dynamics of users organized on ages categories – the number of each year new users, in the period 2005-2012

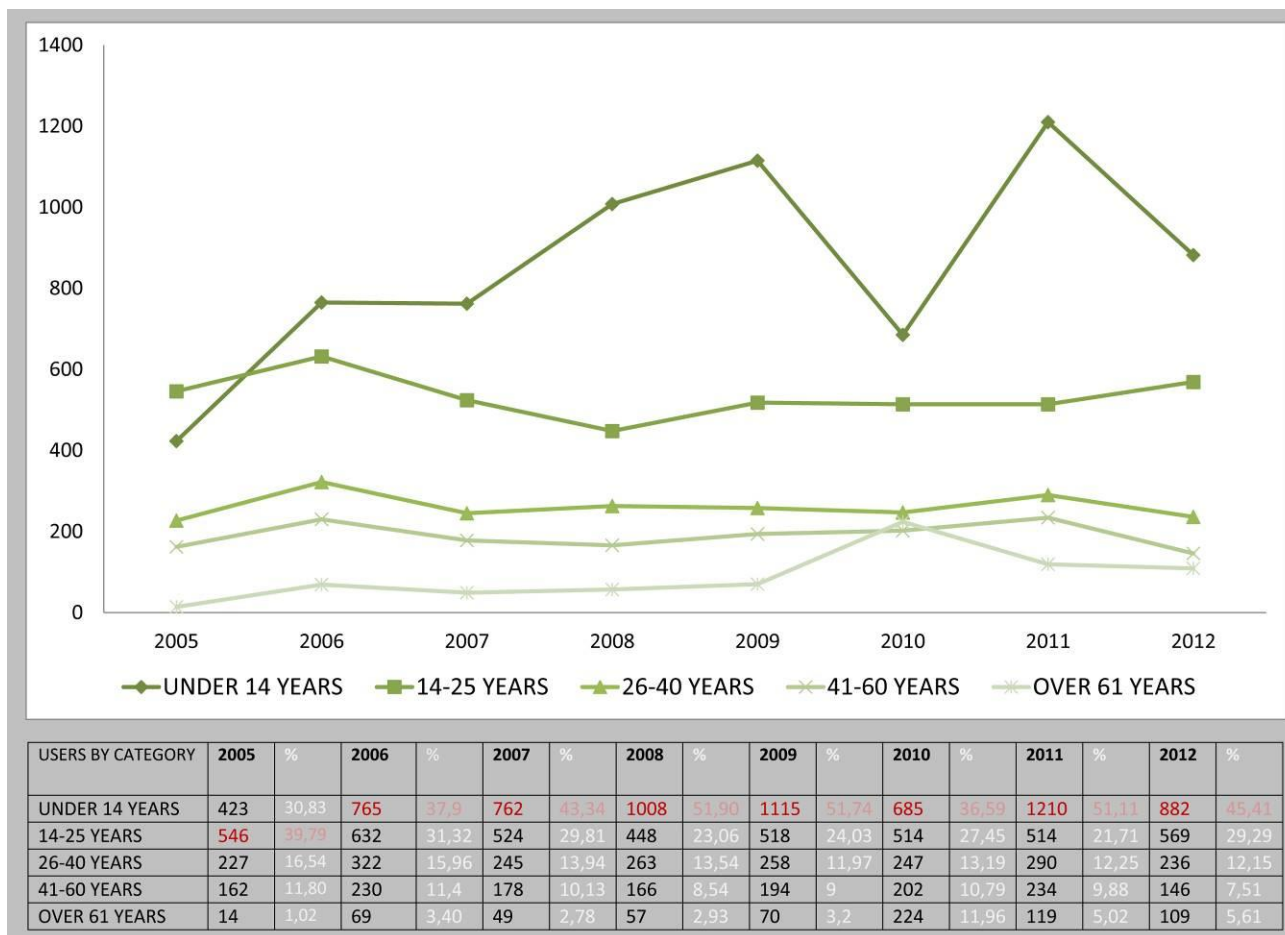| USERS BY CATEGORY	2005	%	2006	%	2007	%	2008	%	2009	%	2010	%	2011	%	2012	%
UNDER 14 YEARS	423	30,83	765	37,9	762	43,34	1008	51,90	1115	51,74	685	36,59	1210	51,11	882	45,41
14-25 YEARS	546	39,79	632	31,32	524	29,81	448	23,06	518	24,03	514	27,45	514	21,71	569	29,29
26-40 YEARS	227	16,54	322	15,96	245	13,94	263	13,54	258	11,97	247	13,19	290	12,25	236	12,15
41-60 YEARS	162	11,80	230	11,4	178	10,13	166	8,54	194	9	202	10,79	234	9,88	146	7,51
OVER 61 YEARS	14	1,02	69	3,40	49	2,78	57	2,93	70	3,2	224	11,96	119	5,02	109	5,61

Figure 7. Dynamics of users organized on age categories – the number of each year's new users, in the period 2004-2012.

The special attention given to Library's Department for Children, which runs many activities for children, paid off and so they are among the most loyal library users. The graph (Fig. 7) shows very clearly that the main users of the library are children, then the teenagers and the young people, the other age groups being quite at a distance, ordered descended by the increasing of the age. There are partnerships between libraries and some schools and, thus, children are encouraged to visit and take part in the activities of the library. We will try to define some functioning principles, through which these small city libraries could work better, compensating the unsuitable spaces, the lack of authorities attention and, most often, the under-funding.

4. New forms and adaptations of libraries

The construction of new offices for libraries is impossible because of the lack of funds and the lack of development strategies of cultural institutions nationwide and maybe libraries should orient towards alternative solutions to expand their spaces and activities.

One idea would be: *The Dispersal of the library in town* – or *The net library*. (Fig. 8) This idea of "spreading" the library in several locations in the city starts from the concept of cultural routes or

promenades, which aim the permanent attraction of tourists from one objective to another, inviting him to walk through the city and experience more spaces.

The diverse functions package would be dispersed into several locations and the need for communication between them would create an interconnected active network. This functional segregation is somehow in contrast to modern ideas of library functioning, which involve gathering all possible functions under one roof. But the contrast is only apparent, because, in fact the library would practically extend its boundaries and would overlap the urban structure.

This idea would work precisely in small and medium sized cities, with a well-defined center, encompassing social and cultural life of the local community. Of course, the distances within this network should remain limited so that physical connections between them to be very easily made and the consumers could travel walking, on foot. There are functions that can migrate into other spaces, in other locations, because, by their nature, they can also work independently or in parallel with the others. It is the case of the conference hall, for lectures, or courses, etc., which allows the expansion of cultural activities and, at the same time, the attraction of a larger audience. It could also be the case of certain sections of the library, as the rare book section or the special collections. There may be, perhaps, the case of the computers room. We saw that, sometimes, users require a clear separation between the reading areas and computer areas, because of noise and environmental reasons.

One advantage of this dispersal of library would be that some enclosed spaces within a city, generally owned by the municipality, could be revived and put to use. In Turda, there would be the example of FOX cinema, which was closed once its income fell below profitability level and which, until today, was not given a sustainable function or destination. The cinema's hall would be perfect for hosting conferences and for other activities, when needed. It could have a "seasonal" functioning and could be also used as library's media room for projections, in normal days.

The following scheme shows a possible connection of several locations where library activities could be conducted. Three of these locations already host a library: the center library, the children's section, and the history museum's library. The former cinema "FOX" as a conference hall, some rooms in the house of culture, which could be used as classrooms and spaces for group activities, meetings, etc. and the building of the former restaurant "Big", later *a mall building,* which has today a multitude of available spaces. There is the possibility of partnerships between the library and the city hall, or with other local institutions, as well as the possibility for the library to run some small economic activities in order to supplement its incomes.

The *symbiotic libra*ry is an idea that comes to complement the precedent, as would be based on the possibility of simultaneous functioning of several activities, stitching the library with some income generators, as a restaurant / bistro or cafe, for example. In addition, the *mobile library*, with temporarily functioning, on determined periods, in certain spaces, could enlarge the library's area of influence in the city, but also in the neighboring villages. We see this mobile library working in two ways. One in which the mobile extension, like a stand for presentation, would be located in strategic locations throw-out the city, attracting new users, maybe tourists, with publications of regional interest advertising materials with latest novelties. And a second model would be one in which the mobile library would essentially function on the principles of Henri Lemaître bibliobuses and would make the library present in the territory, in neighboring towns and villages.

We must not forget the *virtual library*, towards which we are rapidly moving today. In this case it is about the digital libraries, collections of data, stored on servers, in a continuous growth and tending more and more to be interconnected, nationwide and even worldwide.
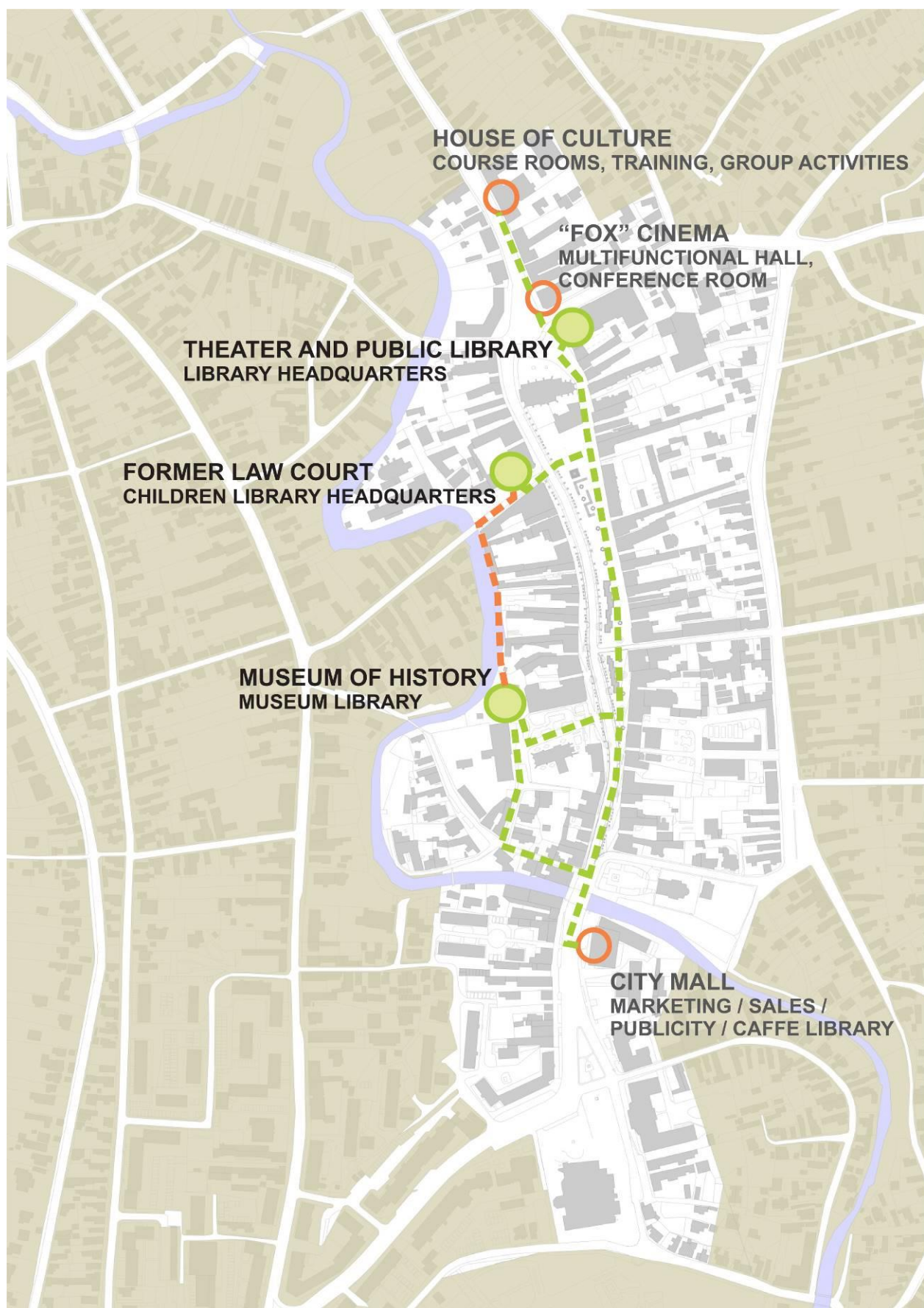
Figure 8. The dispersal of the library in town – or The Net Library.

6. References

[1] BULUȚĂ, Gheorghe, *Scurtă Istorie a Bibliotecilor din România*, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 2000

[2] GERGELY, Eugen, *Turda: istorie şi contemporaneitate*, Ed. Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, Cluj-Napoca, 2005

[3] BULUȚĂ, Gheorghe, *Civilizaţia bibliotecilor*, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 1998

[4] HALGAŞ, Nicolina *Plimbare prin lumea "îmblânzitorilor de cărţi": Biblioteca Municipală "Teodor Murăşanu" Turda – 60 de ani de existenţă*, Ed. Hiperboreea, Turda, 2011

7. List of figures

Figure 1. The place of the Library in the city – the Municipal Theater. Credits: Authors and Street View – Google Maps.
Figure 2. The place of the Library in the city – the department for adults. Credits: Authors and S.C. Birou de Arhitectură NUOVA CITTA S.R.L. *Studiu de reabilitare - centru istoric Turda, Volumul I - Situaţia existentă*, 1996.
Figure 3. The place of the Library in the city – the department for children. Credits: Authors and Street View – Google Maps.
Figure 4. K.L. Analysis. Monuments. Landmarks. Credits: Authors.
Figure 5. Functional analysis of buildings. Credits: Authors.
Figure 6. Dynamics of users organized on professions – the number of each year's new users, in the period 2004-2012.Credits: Authors and „Teodor Murăşanu" Municipal Library of Turda.
Figure 7. Dynamics of users organized on age categories – the number of each year's new users, in the period 2004-2012. Credits: Authors and „Teodor Murăşanu" Municipal Library of Turda.
Figure 8. The dispersal of the library in town – or The Net Library. Credits: Authors.