



VRIJE  
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BRUSSEL



# FAMILIAR FAÇADES

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An inquiry into class-cultural interpretations of architecture  
and the inclusiveness of public libraries

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2020-2021

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Sociology

Faculty of Social Sciences and Solvay Business School

*'We shape our buildings;  
thereafter they shape us.'*

Winston Churchill

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## *Foreword*

Before you lies my dissertation, ‘Familiar Façades: An inquiry into class-cultural interpretations of architecture and the inclusiveness of public libraries’, which I could never have completed without the help of a great many people. I would like to start by thanking my girlfriend, parents, brothers and friends for their unwavering support these past four years. I would also like to acknowledge all the people who were kind enough to fill out a questionnaire or make time for an interview and everyone working in the public libraries, social organizations, schools and businesses that helped me with my fieldwork. Also my colleagues deserve mention, because while none of them were directly involved in this project, the camaraderie between the members of the TOR research group proved vital in staying level-headed during difficult moments. Undoubtedly, one person deserves my gratitude more than any other: my promotor, Ignace Glorieux. His experience, expertise and enthusiasm were crucial and helped make the last four years a highly enjoyable and rewarding experience. It goes without saying that there were plenty of challenges and some (very) frustrating moments along the way, but I can only hope that you enjoy reading this dissertation as much as I’ve enjoyed writing it.



## INTRODUCTION





### *Point of departure*

The line of research presented in this dissertation started with a large scale user survey we conducted in 105 Flemish public libraries in 2018. The project was an initiative of the Flemish library and archive association (VVBAD) and its goal was to collect data on the state of the Flemish library sector and provide all libraries who had participated to the research with a personalized report that would give detailed information on how users perceive and use their library. A total of 45.228 active library users filled out a questionnaire, in which they answered more than 75 questions on how they use their library (frequency of visits, typical behaviour, etc) and voiced their opinion regarding their library in a wide variety of subjective items. Almost all questions that were put forward to respondents eventually wound up in a table in the personalized reports, leading to every participating library receiving a 77 page document in which they could ascertain how their users use, perceive and evaluate their library. Being (for the most part) a replication of a study conducted in 2004, we were able to make a lot of direct comparisons between now and the early 2000's.

A great deal had changed since that time, both in society as a whole and the library sector in particular (which of course served as the main motivation behind organizing the study again in the first place). After writing both the personalized reports and more general (vulgarizing) articles for the Flemish library sector, a story with two sides presented itself: on the one hand, we saw that the public library sector had (quite) successfully adapted to new and difficult circumstances, on the other we were confronted with the fact that some developments in recent years were far less encouraging (Mathysen, 2019). Before we go into detail on how this dissertation is structured and which questions we endeavoured to answer and why, we feel it necessary to 'set the scene' somewhat and discuss what (we consider to be) the most

important developments within the public library sector in recent years. They could be summarized as followed (and will be discussed in more detail below):

- Public libraries have the potential to help underprivileged members of society but appear to be less low-threshold or ‘democratic’ than is generally thought
- Public libraries have been under significant pressure in the last two decades, mainly because of increased budgetary stringency and the pervasive digitalization of society
- Public libraries have responded to this pressure by (sometimes quite dramatically) changing their image, what services they provide, how they organize themselves and what they look like
- Public libraries have benefitted from these changes, but there are suggestions that they have become less appealing to working-class visitors in the process

We will also argue in this introduction that (some of) these developments are not reflected on in a sufficiently critical manner in the field of library and information science research. We posit that the possibility that recent changes have led to public libraries becoming (even) more tailored to a middle-class audience, and therefore more exclusionary for (potential) visitors with a lower socio-economic status, remains something of an underexposed subject. This is one of the reasons why we have chosen to study this aspect so extensively and focus more on what libraries ‘do wrong’, as opposed to what they ‘do right’. We would like to start with acknowledging, though, that well-functioning public libraries can yield considerable societal benefits.

## *The societal importance of public libraries*

Public libraries are widely regarded as one of the most important public cultural institutions by academics. They *'support social inclusion by promoting equal opportunities and accommodating diversity to facilitate the active participation of each individual in library programmes and services'* (Abdullah et al., 2015, p. 34). Hapel (2020) states that *'few organizations are better suited than public libraries to be facilitators of informed community engagement processes, for they, both in practice and in culture, uphold the values of intellectual freedom and democracy, inclusion, social and racial justice, equity, appreciation of human dignity, and free access to information without commercial interests or political bias'* (p. 17). Research conducted by the Pew Research center, a nonpartisan American think tank that conducts public opinion polling and demographic research, frequently reports that the public library is often seen as being particularly essential by groups in society who tend to have a lower socio-economic status: *'for lower-income Americans and those who are members of communities of color, libraries have a special role as places to learn new job skills, explore new digital technologies and provide services to them or their community (...), lower-income Americans, blacks and Hispanics are more likely to say that closing their local public library would have a major impact on them or their family'* (Pew Research Center, 2015a). The importance of the public library is not only underscored by those with lower incomes and ethnic minorities, but also visitors with lower levels of education: *'Adults who have not graduated high school are particularly likely to say that their library's closure would have a major impact on them and their family'* (Pew Research Center, 2013). Policy-makers also tend to stress the societal benefits of a well-functioning public library system: *'The importance of the library's role in social inclusion has also been stated in government policy statements, such as in the*

UK, where libraries are deemed to have “an important role to play in helping to combat social exclusion and promote lifelong learning” (Abdullah et al., 2015, p. 35).

In his 2018 book, ‘Palaces for the People’, Eric Klinenberg states that the founding principle behind the public library is that *‘all people deserve free, open access to our shared culture and heritage, which they can use to any end they see fit’* (p. 37) and identifies helping *‘people elevate themselves and improve their situation (...) by providing free access to the widest possible variety of cultural materials to people of all ages, from all ethnicities and groups’* (p. 37) as their most important mission. Klinenberg sees libraries as a very important form of ‘social infrastructure’, which can be understood as open, approachable, low-threshold spaces and places that not only provide valuable services to the community in which they are situated, but also as an informal gathering-place that allows for meaningful interaction between members of different layers of society. The notion of ‘social infrastructure’ is heavily connected to Ray Oldenburg’s concept of ‘third places’. If we consider our homes to be the ‘first’ and our work environment to be the ‘second’ place in our lives, then ‘third places’ are the low-threshold meeting grounds where communities come together and mingle (Oldenburg, 1997). Oldenburg considered ‘third places’ vital for a well-functioning community (and by extension a well-functioning democracy) and showed concern for the fact that they appear to be vanishing, with all the negative consequences this entails for social trust and civic engagement. Oldenburg (1997) goes as far as to say that *‘virtually all means of meeting and getting to know one’s neighbors have been eliminated’* (p. 6). Klinenberg sees strong ‘social infrastructure’ as the answer to the general decline in social capital (and well-being) described by Robert Putnam in his highly influential work ‘Bowling Alone’ (2000), positing that it is *‘the missing piece of the puzzle and building places where all kinds of people can gather is the best way to repair the fractured societies we live in today’* (2018, p. 11). While Oldenburg stresses the fact that third

places *'have been and remain local, independently owned, commercial establishments'* (Oldenburg, 1997, p. 10), Klinenberg emphasizes the importance of publicly funded (cultural) institutions and identifies libraries as *'one of the most undervalued and most critical forms of social infrastructure that we have'* (p. 32).

While we agree that public libraries have great potential for improving the lives of the less fortunate and more vulnerable members of society, the question very much remains whether they are truly low-threshold and approachable (enough). There are plenty of indications, which will be discussed at length in this dissertation, that this is not fully the case. While we would dare to say that the question how culturally democratic public libraries actually are (as opposed to the potential they have for cultural democratization) tends to be avoided somewhat by academics in the field of the library and information sciences, some certainly put it forward. Tonin (2018), for instance, wrote an article entitled *'Do librarians discriminate?'*, and came to the following uneasy conclusion: *'Unfortunately, it turns out, the answer is yes. (...) Libraries risk being part of the problem rather than the solution, and failing, or alienating, some of the users who need them most'*.

### *Under pressure*

Given the considerable challenges that public libraries have had to face in recent years, our emphasis on the less favourable developments (mostly concerning how users who are lower on the socio-economic ladder are represented among their visiting public) could almost be considered to be mean-spirited. The two greatest challenges that public libraries face, are easily recognized: public libraries have to deal with increased budgetary stringency as well as (a

struggle for recognition in the light of) the pervasive digitalization of society. Klinenberg (2018) describes this as follows: *'In recent decades, political leaders driven by the logic of the market have proclaimed that institutions like the library don't work any longer, that we'd be better off investing in new technologies'* (p. 220). The entire cultural sector, both internationally and in Flanders, has faced increased budgetary constraints. Abdullah et al. (2016) for instance, remarked that *'governments in the UK and the USA are closing their public libraries due to the economic downturn'* (p.35). Closer to home, the Flemish regional government decided in 2016 that it was no longer mandatory for every city or municipality to organize a public library, which means that a specific percentage in the cultural subsidiary budget for municipalities is no longer earmarked for the local public library. This questioning of the relevance of public libraries in a digital society started early. In an article from the year 2000, Vavrek asks: *'while the reader may find it an irritating question, one would ask whether or not public library provides any unique services that haven't already been snatched away by the Internet? (...) No doubt, patrons will continue to rely on librarians for recommendations of things to read. But serious competitors for this service now exist. Their call numbers end in dot com'* (p. 32). In the same article, he also asks: *'Has the public library been downsized because of the emergence and popularity of the Internet?'* The answer is short and sobering: *'Yes'* (Vavrek, 2000, p. 34).

The precarious position that public libraries found themselves in at the start of the millennium was highlighted throughout recent years by many authors: *'It is a commonplace (notion) today that the library, regarded as a physical place, is threatening to become an anachronism'* (Garrett, 2004, p. 59). *'Due to new media, new publics and new modes of communication, what we know for sure is that libraries and their function in society and culture are not what they used to be'* (Kann-Christensen and Andersen, 2009, p. 209). Hapel (2020) summarizes the 'digital turn' in society and how this relates to public libraries as followed: *'In the changing*

*landscape of rapidly evolving information technologies, with Google coming into existence in 1998 and Facebook emerging in 2004, (...) speculations in and outside the sector about the future of libraries and Doomsday prophecies abounded, and questions about the long-term relevance of libraries in the bright, shining light of digitization arose from friends and foes of the libraries’* (p. 6).

Most agreed that ‘something’ needed to happen. Muddiman et al. (2001), for instance, called for *‘rapid transformation and change’* (p. 157) in public libraries if they were to remain relevant. While public libraries, both in Flanders and abroad, have seen a decrease in the number of patrons in recent years, it appears as though ‘Doomsday prophecies’ were staved off: public libraries are still here and some are thriving. What is very worrisome though, is that *‘those on the lower end of the socio-economic stratum – those with less education and household income – have reported larger-than-average declines in library use’* (Pew Research Center, 2015b). This evolution is not restricted to the US (the context with which the last quote deals), but is also clearly discernible in Flanders (as will be discussed in more detail in chapter one). How are we to understand these developments in light of the fact that public libraries have changed profoundly, *‘both on an organizational level and in physical layout’* (Hapel, 2020, p. 6)?

### *The building housing the library as (part of) the answer (?)*

First of all, it should be underscored that changes have not necessarily occurred in a sector-wide manner, but where they have, they have often been quite far-reaching. What is also striking to see, is that these changes have manifested themselves both in what libraries ‘do’ and

what they ‘look like’ and that these two aspects are heavily interconnected. Gisolfi (2019) describes this evolution as follows: *‘In some communities, the library has not changed in 20 or 30 years; in others, the library has changed incrementally or even dramatically. (...) The changes in library design are clear: the library is no longer a storehouse for books. It has emerged as a community cultural center, presenting a variety of programs for all age groups. The library’s offerings have increased dramatically with the digital revolution (...). To accommodate these changes, the design of library buildings has also changed. (...) Today’s library looks significantly different from most of its 20th-century predecessors. (...) The future is here. The safe library of 20 years ago is disappearing rapidly’* (p. 7). Gisolfi even posits that *‘if a librarian from the early 20th century were to find herself suddenly transported to a 21st-century library, she would hardly recognize her surroundings’* (p. 18).

Huber (2016) describes libraries as pursuing a *‘bookstore image’*, which is considered to create *‘a much more attractive customer experience through more comfortable chairs, inviting presentation of books and media, colorful children’s areas, and even coffee shops’*. (p. 287) Much is said about the integration of coffee shops (or other facilities where visitors can eat or drink something) in library and information science research literature (Calvert, 2017): coffee shops are generally considered as the ultimate catalyst for public libraries becoming ‘third places’ (Huber, 2016), while also being a symbol for the fact that contemporary libraries, in many ways, are the antithesis of what they were 20 years ago. Gisolfi (2019) describes the ‘old-fashioned’ public library as *‘a quiet place’* that does not allow for *‘talking, food or drink’*, *‘a repository for books’* that always features *‘an imposing circulation desk’* and a *‘modest community room’* (p. 7).

‘Modesty’, it seems, is the thing that is to be avoided at all costs. A sentiment that appears to permeate through library and information science research literature is that a lack of ambition will ultimately be the death-blow of public libraries. Gisolfi (2019) claims, for instance, that one of *‘the typical characteristics of today’s 21st-century library’* is that it is *‘an inspiring public building with an important civic presence’* (p. 16). Ambitious (renovations of) library buildings are a big part of the story of public libraries reinventing themselves for the 21st century. Jochumsen et al. (2012) go as far as to speak of *‘a renaissance for the physical library’*. (p. 587)

There are a handful of public libraries that are considered to be trailblazers. The ‘Openbare bibliotheek Amsterdam’ (constructed in 2007) is often seen as one of the earliest and most successful examples of a ‘new’ public library and more recently there is a lot of attention for the ‘Dokk1’ library in Aarhus (constructed in 2015).

*Amsterdam (2007)*



*Aarhus (2015)*



There is one library, however, that has had more influence than any other on how we think about the modern public library: the ‘Seattle Public Library’, constructed in 2004 by famous Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. It was (and still is) discussed and lauded extensively. The

building houses what is considered to be *'the first 21st-century library'*, a feat it has accomplished by *'discarding every preconception about a public library building'* (Kenney, 2010). It has been described as *'a work of art'* and the building has won numerous awards (Kenney, 2010). For many, it functions as a shining example of how public libraries can reinvent themselves: *'Suddenly, public libraries were on the map', 'from now on, anyone who builds a public library will have to first come to Seattle and study this central library'* (Kenney, 2010). A rather telling anecdote is that the architect, Rem Koolhaas, is seen as being responsible *'for transforming the library'* (Library Journal, 2005). Apparently, in the 21st century, it is not (only) librarians or policy-makers who (must) 'transform' public libraries, but (also) architects. The 'Seattle Public Library' will be discussed in more detail in chapter two, for now it is sufficient to underline how influential this building was and still is.

'Inspiring' buildings are widely considered (especially by those working in the library sector) to be a powerful weapon in the fight against public libraries being thought of as a thing of the past. There is no denying that they have certain positive effects: libraries with newly renovated or constructed buildings often report an uptake in their visiting- and user-numbers. The Seattle Public Library, for instance, was reported to have been visited *'by over 2.3 million individuals, 30 percent from out of town'* (Kenney, 2010) in its first year of operation. Closer to home, the (newly renovated) library of Mechelen has seen *'a doubling of the number of visitors compared to the same period last year in the old library. Also the amount of new patrons or extensions of subscriptions has doubled in comparison to last year.'*<sup>1</sup> (Plaquet, 2019). Houthuys (2019) reports that in *'Mechelen they see a downward trend being reversed. Libraries are going up.'*

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<sup>1</sup> 'Een verdubbeling van het aantal bezoekers in dezelfde periode vorig jaar in de oude bibliotheek. Ook het aantal nieuwe leden of abonnementsverlengingen is verdubbeld tegenover vorig jaar.'

*Especially in Mechelen, where the new library is a prestige project of the city.*<sup>2</sup> In the new and very recently constructed city library of Ghent, De Krook, they also see *'the public returning'* (Houthuys, 2019). The librarian was quoted as saying: *'Ever since we moved to our new building, 2,5 years ago, the amount of materials being loaned out has increased enormously. We're back at the level of 2010.'*<sup>3</sup> (Houthuys, 2019)

*A new (but perhaps somewhat misplaced) hope*

It would appear that the library sector has 'struck gold' with the realization that 'inspiring', 'land-mark' buildings can turn the tide and help attract more visitors. There is something of a celebratory atmosphere in a lot of library and information science literature: *'Ten years ago, I heard repeatedly that we would no longer need public libraries, that computers and e-readers would supersede the library. I am no longer hearing about the demise of libraries and, in fact, I am hearing that public libraries are busier and more popular with patrons than ever.'* (Kenney, 2010) Understandably, increasing visiting numbers is a major concern for public libraries and, in itself, it is a valid objective. There is a great self-awareness among library professionals that much has changed and that changes were necessary: *'We knew (...) that the business model of the library (...) would have to change'* (Hapel, 2020, p. 6).

The notion that public libraries have a 'business model', however, is very telling and indicative of the fact that public libraries are increasingly evaluated along the lines of more quantitative

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<sup>2</sup> 'In de bibliotheek van Mechelen zien ze de neerwaartse trend keren. 'Bibliotheeken zitten in een *up*. Zeker in Mechelen, waar de nieuwe bib een prestigeproject is van de stad.'

<sup>3</sup> 'En ook in de gigantische Gentse stadsbib, De Krook, ziet directeur Krist Biebauw het publiek terugkeren. 'Sinds we naar ons nieuwe gebouw zijn verhuisd, 2,5 jaar geleden, is het aantal uitleningen enorm toegenomen. Blijvend. We zitten nu weer op het niveau van 2010.'

and even neoliberal criteria: *'a view on library activity has developed that emphasizes the necessity for libraries to view their activities and services as businesses having a commodity to sell, in particular articulated by matters of efficiency and a growing focus on performance measurement'* (Kann-Christensen and Andersen, 2009, p. 209). Kann-Christensen and Andersen express concern about this turn towards neoliberal thinking in the public library sector, warning that in the long run it may *'lead to their own death'* (2009, p. 209).

From our (distinctly sociological) viewpoint, the question whether the adoption of 'a neoliberal way of thinking' in library organization and design has contributed to the disproportionate decline of visitors with a lower socio-economic status presents itself clearly and urgently. It does not, however, appear to be a major concern in library and information science research literature. The fact that public libraries are (arguably) becoming less culturally democratic, illustrated by greater-than-average declines of lower educated visitors (who were already an underrepresented group in public libraries) is frequently overlooked. Instead, much of recent literature that discusses innovation and change (especially when it comes to how libraries are built and designed) displays an overfocus on positive effects and tends to be somewhat self-congratulatory in tone and lacking in serious critical reflection.

Hapel (2020) for instance, champions *'an innovation strategy based on a methodology called Seven Circles of Innovation'* (p. 9). Jochumsen et al. (2012), on the other hand, propose the 'four spaces model'. Accompanied by a well-designed infographic, the model emphasizes that public libraries have four goals and needs to organize themselves accordingly: *'(1) experience; (2) involvement; (3) empowerment; and (4) innovation'* (p. 589). They state that the model should be understood as *'an overall strategy in which the library seeks to increase the number of users and visitors'* (Jochumsen et al., 2012, p. 591). Furthermore, they discern *'young*

*people's needs of a more experience-oriented learning through playful, interactive and social learning patterns'* (p. 591), but provide no references, user survey data or even opinion polling that this is, in fact, what 'young people' need or want. Baleiko (2019), in turn, reduces the entirety of the visiting public into two categories who have *'two distinct mindsets: (...) The Hunter (and the) The Gatherer'* (p. 17) and also places a lot of emphasis on the fact whether libraries have 'award-winning' architectural buildings or not, something which has apparently become an important criterion for library effectiveness. In similar fashion, Pape and Sirona (2018) discuss the renovation of the Dostoevsky Library in Moscow and claim that in *'the architectural reconstruction, the team placed emphasis on creating a modern and open design that is inviting for the library user'* (p. 788). No information is given on what constitutes 'invitingness' and the question whether the library's users actually agree with the authors that the library is more inviting now is never asked. Descriptions of libraries that have undergone innovation, would often not be out of place in a travel brochure: *'Its forms, along with light, colors, and movement, delight the eye and inspire feelings of pleasure. (...) The architects accomplished this design feat by adopting a notched parallelogram as the structure's basic shape. The gently flowing lineal centerpiece in this form (...) meanders purposefully through the building. (...) The intuitive message is "Come on in and explore."'* (Holt, 2008, p. 175) Again, any type of critical evaluation about whether all of this actually contributes to a library being more inclusive or inviting is absent. A lot of literature on how public library buildings have changed is also very lofty: *'Despite pursuing different walks of life, existing in different socioeconomic strata, and belonging to various ethnic and racial groups and constructs, sharing space helps us to understand that there are more qualities that unite us than divide us, and to realize that we are all human beings, harboring the same basic feelings of love, hate, fear, hope, desire, despair – that we all share the human condition.'* (Hapel, 2020, p. 14) Again,

the question whether the new ‘inspiring’ building has actually stimulated the attendance of visitors with a lower socio-economic status, is never put forward.

Why is there not more critical reflection? The answer to that question is likely that these grand renovation and construction projects are (very) expensive. The Seattle Public Library, for instance, cost a whopping \$165.5 million (Kenney, 2010). The possibility that these enormously costly endeavours could actually undermine one of the public library’s most important directives (being low-threshold and approachable to visitors from all layers of society) is made worse by the fact that large, ‘inspiring’ and very costly buildings have seemingly been prioritized in a period of increased budgetary stringency. This makes entertaining the possibility that they might ‘not work’ unappealing.

### *Asking the right questions*

Perhaps we have been rather harsh so far in our assessment of how the field of library and information science research tackles the subject of how innovation and change has affected inclusion. There are, of course, authors that do take a more critical stance towards this topic: we have already referred to Kahn-Christensen and Andersen (2009), who underscore that we should never lose sight of the fact that *‘the library is a political institution with democratic obligations’* (p. 217). More recently, Williment (2019) has raised concerns on how changes in public library organization impact inclusiveness, stating that the *‘belief that the public library is an inclusive institution is so ardently incorporated into the identity of public librarianship that questioning the social inclusiveness of libraries rarely occurs’* (p. 2). Williment underscores a very important point, namely that *‘libraries and library staff are typically*

*representative of middle-class values and worldviews (...), which unintentionally or purposely become integrated into library service planning and delivery. (...) But, does a service model which works fairly well with traditional users also address the needs of socially excluded library users and non-users? If not, how can libraries respond? (...) How can we make public libraries the socially inclusive institutions we want them to be?'* (p. 3). This last question, we would posit, does not get asked enough. Of course, to a certain extent, it is understandable why these questions are asked so sparsely and why a neoliberal logic has taken over: *'libraries view the present uncertainty that comes with an ever-changing society and a constant stream of new technologies as a threat. To a large extent libraries respond to this perceived threat by trying to legitimize themselves in economic terms in order to prove their worth by being able to exhibit satisfied customers at any cost. Therefore, marketing the library becomes a question of attracting as many users as possible and giving them what they (seemingly) want. It should be emphasized that this is not necessarily the libraries' fault that it has become to be so - the new public philosophy that encourages this strategy can be found on all levels and in all sectors in Western societies. Nevertheless, such a view of library activity has some serious flaws.'* (Kann-Christensen and Andersen, 2009, p. 220)

### *Focus of research*

The line of research presented in this dissertation will focus on how recent changes and developments in the appearance, design and physical layout of public libraries have impacted inclusiveness and how members of different social classes experience and evaluate this aspect of public libraries. Our motivations for choosing this specific topic are discussed extensively in chapters one and two.

Most research focusing on the inclusiveness and ‘democratic obligations’ of public libraries (such as the work of the above-mentioned authors) deals with how they are managed and organized with regard to their services. While these are undoubtedly important aspects of a public library’s functioning (that also deserve the attention of researchers), we will argue in chapter one (where we ourselves first approach the topic of inclusiveness from this more ‘traditional’ perspective) that they fall short of providing satisfying answers to the question why public libraries are visited (increasingly) less frequent by visitors with lower levels of education. The insights gained in chapter one confronted us with the notion that we were ‘missing a variable’ in our analytical framework and that we needed to expand our scope to include aspects of public libraries that are usually not considered to be relevant with regard to this problem.

The fact that the physical appearance of public libraries had profoundly changed over the course of the last two decades, as discussed in this introduction, prompted us to perform analyses on the 2018 user survey data (presented in chapter two) that tried to ascertain how important this aspect actually is. These analyses show that the architectural characteristics of the buildings that house public libraries are, in fact, particularly relevant for how public libraries are perceived by users, both in a general sense and with regard to how different types of users will respond to them. We decided that this aspect of public libraries should be studied more thoroughly and a new research project was undertaken that focused on how different types of (potential) visitors experience public library buildings with varying (and sometimes contrasting) architectural styles. The (somewhat unusual) research design and methodology of this study are discussed extensively in chapter three, while its results are presented in the fourth and final chapter.

## *Overview of chapters*

The first three chapters of this dissertation were written (in first instance) as articles for various journals. To allow for a better reading experience and to avoid needless repetition, the texts (as they appear in this dissertation) were rewritten and redacted to certain extent. Of course, our findings and conclusions have remained the same. Our goal is to rework chapter four, which is by far the lengthiest and arguably the most important chapter of this dissertation, into (at least) two articles in the near future.

Chapter one, which is based on the article ‘Inviting and/or inclusive’, accepted for publication by the IFLA journal (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), first presents data that clearly shows that there has been an increasing ‘evaporation’ of an already (historically) underrepresented group in Flemish public libraries: the lower educated. This is followed by a discussion that tries to get a firmer grasp on what it means for public libraries to be ‘inviting’. As already mentioned above, chapter one also presents analyses that show that the ‘classic’ library characteristics that are usually taken into account to shape a policy of inclusion (lower membership fees, adjusting the collection, etc), have a very limited effect in attracting more lower educated visitors. The chapter ends by positing that, because education level is so closely connected to the cultural dimension of social class membership, more attention for the ‘look and feel’ of public libraries, how its ‘image’ is communicated through the architecture of the building that houses the public library, is needed.

Chapter two, based on the article ‘Architecture, aesthetics, class & library attendance’, accepted for publication by The European Journal for Cultural and Political Sociology, is a multifaceted investigation into the topic of ‘look and feel’. It discusses how social class, aesthetics and the

experience of (public) space are connected, with special attention for the work of Pierre Bourdieu (and later empirical research using his concepts). Chapter two also addresses the topic of iconic architecture (as defined by Paul Jones) and shows that the architectural style of a library plays a considerable role in its perceived ‘invitingness’. The chapter also expands on exploratory analyses that provided us with interesting cases for later research and ends by suggesting that a somewhat unusual research design is needed to tackle this (perhaps equally unusual) subject: what we would eventually call ‘VR-assisted interviews’.

Chapter three, based on the research note ‘Integrating virtual reality in qualitative research methods’, currently under review at the journal *Methodological Innovations*, discusses the practical organization and methodology behind these ‘VR-assisted interviews’. It underlines the inherent challenges of studying aesthetic preferences in social science research and gives an overview of how VR has been used in social sciences before. Chapter three also describes our experiences in the field, before ending with a discussion of why using VR was essential and how it contributed to our research.

Chapter four, entitled ‘A sociology of architecture’, endeavours to present a coherent and theoretically grounded account of what were the most important findings of our extensive and detailed analysis of both the VR-assisted interviews and several in-depth interviews we conducted with architects. To a certain extent, this chapter can be considered a collection of four papers with the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu functioning as the main thread that runs through them. In the first section, we discuss the central position that education level takes in Bourdieusian analysis. Next, we apply his concept of ‘legitimacy’ and the ‘language of the dominant class’ to how respondents from different social classes expressed themselves when discussing architecture. Thereafter, we take a critical look at how ‘cultural objects’ are

operationalized by Bourdieu and compare this to our own approach, followed by a discussion in the last section of (what we consider to be) four unique and interesting properties of architecture (as an art-form).

In the conclusion, relying on the insights gained through our research, we reflect on the context that was sketched in this introduction and look forward to what should or could be subjects of future studies.



## CHAPTER I

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Inviting and/or inclusive



## **Introduction**

As mentioned in the general introduction, (Flemish) public libraries face new and difficult circumstances. Increasing budgetary constraints pose a considerable challenge, but it is especially the internet and the various new ways in which we consume media that has put pressure on public libraries. It is no exaggeration to state that, in the fourteen years between 2004 and 2018, the world has undergone a drastic and pervasive digitalization. Printed books, CD's, DVD's and other analogue materials have become far less relevant in a time where society consumes a very considerable percentage of its culture online.

Much has changed since the early 2000's: YouTube, Spotify and other streaming services that have become so ubiquitous simply did not exist yet back then, video rental shops have all but disappeared and media that was previously synonymous with print (novels, magazines, newspapers) are increasingly being consumed digitally. Nonetheless, reports based on the 2018 user survey showed that public libraries, sometimes considered outdated in this new digital landscape, were found to have improved their image, with many evolving into community hubs that function as meeting spaces, while also retaining their traditional role of content provider (Mathysen, 2019). Public libraries in Flanders appear to have shown great resolve and adaptability, something for which they should be commended. However, not every development during the last years is very encouraging, in particular how well certain groups in society (especially visitors with lower levels of education) are represented among the visitors of public libraries. This is important, since the inclusiveness of public libraries is a crucial aspect in evaluating their effectiveness and success (Kann-Christensen and Andersen, 2009).

This chapter is aimed at better understanding important changes and developments that have happened within the (Flemish) public library sector and how these have affected the inclusiveness of public libraries. First, we will take a detailed look at how the composition of the visiting public of Flemish libraries has changed over the last two decades. Next, we will attempt to get a firmer grasp on how perceptions regarding the public library have changed by comparing data from the 2018 user survey data to that of the 2004 user survey data. We will also discuss which reasons different types of visitors give for not going to public libraries any more. Lastly, we will determine which library characteristics positively (or negatively) impact the attendance of certain underrepresented groups.

### **1. Decreasing attendance numbers and the Matthew effect**

Fewer people in Flanders visit public libraries today compared to 2004 and the composition of the visiting public has changed. This is best illustrated by looking at data stemming from different editions of the Flemish participation survey, a large scale research in which a standardized questionnaire on recreational time use is presented to a random sample of the Flemish population<sup>4</sup> (Lievens, 2015). Table one, for instance, compares the percentage of male and female respondents of the Participation Surveys of 2004, 2009 and 2014 that say to have visited a public library in the last six months. It is apparent that men continue to be underrepresented as library visitors. When looking at the bottom row, it also becomes clear that considerably fewer respondents visited public libraries in 2014 in comparison to 2004.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information, see <https://steunpuntcultuur.be/en/research-lines/participationsurvey>

Table 1: Percentages of men and women that visit public libraries in Flanders, data derived from different editions of Participation Survey (2003/2004, 2009 & 2014)

	2003/2004 (N = 2548)	2009 (N = 3144)	2014 (N = 3927)	Difference 2004 - 2014
Women	41,3%	37,5%	34,3%	-16,9%
Men	32,1%	28,5%	25,5%	-20,6%
Total	36,6%	33,0%	30,0%	-18,0%

Table 2: Percentages within age categories that visit public libraries in Flanders, data derived from different editions of Participation Survey (2003/2004, 2009 & 2014)

	2003/2004 (N = 2548)	2009 (N = 3144)	2014 (N = 3927)	Difference 2004 - 2014
18-34 years old	41,7%	40,0%	34,3%	-17,7%
35-54 years old	40,8%	35,7%	36,1%	-11,5%
55 - 64 years old	26,9%	20,3%	22,9%	-14,9%
65 years or older	16,9%	16,9%	15,0%	-11,2%
Total	36,6%	33,0%	30,0%	-18,0%

While the diminution of library visitors is still somewhat comparable between men and women, the same cannot be said of how different age categories or education levels are represented in public libraries now when comparing to 2004. Table two clearly shows that, while they are still the second largest age group, the decrease of library visitors in the age category 18-34 years is considerably larger than that of library visitors who are 65 years or older. The possibility that this evolution has continued between 2014 and 2018 could be part of the explanation why there is such an overrepresentation of elderly respondents in the 2018 user survey (see table b in the appendix of this chapter). Perhaps the most interesting evolution with regard to the changing

public of public libraries, becomes visible in table three. The higher educated still visit public libraries far more often and increasingly fewer lower educated are visiting public libraries.

Table 3: Percentages within education levels that visit public libraries in Flanders, data derived from different editions of Participation Survey (2003/2004, 2009 & 2014)

	2003/2004 (N = 2548)	2009 (N = 3144)	2014 (N = 3927)	Difference 2004 - 2014
No or lower education	11,8%	11,6%	7,6%	-35,6%
Lower secondary education	26,3%	19,3%	17,8%	-32,3%
Higher secondary education	33,8%	27,8%	26,1%	-22,8%
Higher education	48,9%	44,1%	45,8%	-6,3%
Total	36,6%	33,0%	30,0%	-18,0%

The fact that public libraries seem to be becoming increasingly less appealing for the lower educated is reason for concern, especially when considering that this aspect of the public library's functioning has always been suboptimal: *'At their origin in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 19th century, public libraries were explicitly aimed at educating all citizens, including the lower classes (De Cock, 2000; Muddiman, 1999). Public library founders and advocates considered reading to be a useful pastime. In spite of this humanistic philosophy, Muddiman (1999) notes that English public libraries experienced problems in reaching the lower classes right from the start. (...) Public libraries developed into institutions directed at the skilled and the middle class.'* (Glorieux et al, 2007, p. 201)

This humanistic philosophy has continuously inspired what policy makers say regarding the function of public libraries: a discourse analysis on legislative texts issued by Flemish ministers of culture (De Pauw, 2005) regarding public libraries shows one constant, a focus on what

Frank Huysmans (2006) calls the ‘social-pedagogic motive’, the notion that public libraries exist to offer every individual the chance to develop themselves through culture and so doing increase opportunities for societal advancement. This emancipating role of the public library is often underlined when defending public spending and compared to other subsidized institutions (such as the opera or theatre), public libraries do quite well in reaching people with lower education and/or income levels. That being said, the overwhelming majority of library-visitors are still members of the middleclass, both in Flanders and other Western countries (Huysmans and Hillebrink, 2008; Manzuch and Maceviciute, 2014; Sei-Ching and Kyung-Sun, 2008).

In other words, it appears the Matthew effect (Merton, 1968) is in play: as with many other institutions in the welfare state that are primarily targeted towards the more vulnerable members of society, it is the middleclass that benefits most from the existence of these institutions. This continuing discrepancy between intent (public libraries for all, including and perhaps especially the most vulnerable members of society) and result (the fact that the majority of public library users are members of the middle class) calls for inquiry into the causes and possible solutions to this problem.

## **2. A drop in attendance, but somehow more inviting**

One finding from the 2018 user survey in particular (the practical organisation of which will be discussed in more detail in paragraph four of this chapter), drew our attention when reflecting on the inclusiveness of public libraries: a considerably higher percentage of users agreed (or completely agreed) with the statement that their library is an inviting place in 2018 (66,4%)

than in 2004 (55,8%)<sup>5</sup>. This is, of course, somewhat contradictory of the fact that public libraries are attracting fewer visitors. In general, comparing how the attendance of certain groups in public libraries has changed between 2004 and 2014 is important for a nuanced interpretation of many of the results stemming from the 2018 user survey. For instance: 98,2% of all users were found to still loan out books in 2018 and DVD's seemed to be more popular now than in 2004. There is of course a very real possibility that the people who have since turned to online services for books and DVD's simply do not visit the public library anymore and so doing were not questioned about this aspect of the public library. When we consider these types of developments, how should we interpret the (counterintuitive) finding that perceived 'invitingness' has risen since 2004?

Table four compares how different subgroups of the visiting public (of Flemish public libraries) answered the question concerning 'invitingness' in 2004 and 2018. The last column shows that 'perceived invitingness' has risen in all categories, even among subgroups of the visiting public where we see stronger-than-average declines in library attendance, such as 18 to 29 year olds and the lower educated<sup>6</sup>. It is also interesting to note that 'invitingness' has risen more for men, but that women still find public libraries to be more inviting overall. It's also striking to see that the different subgroups of the visiting public are much more in unison about whether or not their library is an inviting place or not in 2018 compared to 2004, with most percentages (younger and male respondents being the exception) hovering around the global average of 66,4%. Taken at face value, table four seems to suggest more like-mindedness among the visitors of public libraries in 2018 in comparison to 2004.

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<sup>5</sup> Respondents could specify to what degree they agreed with the statement 'the library is an inviting place' on a five point Likert-scale.

<sup>6</sup> Respondents were asked what their highest attained diploma was and which type of educational institution they attended. Answers were reduced to four categories for analysis.

Table 4: Invitingness for different subgroups of the visiting public, 2004 versus 2018

	2004 (N = 31.126)	2018 (N = 44.730)	Difference 2004-2018
Men	51,3%	63,5%	12,2%
Women	58,3%	67,9%	9,6%
18 to 29 years	49,7%	60,7%	11,0%
30 to 44 years	55,8%	67,1%	11,3%
45 to 59 years	57,1%	65,5%	8,4%
60 years or older	63,9%	67,9%	4,0%
No or lower education	63,5%	66,7%	3,2%
Lower secondary education	59,6%	68,2%	8,5%
Higher secondary education	55,4%	65,1%	9,8%
Higher education	56,6%	67,1%	10,5%
Income under 1300€	59,7%	66,7%	7,0%
Income between 1300 and 2599,99€	57,8%	66,0%	8,2%
Income between 2600 and 3899,99€	55,0%	66,9%	11,9%
Income between 3900 and 5199,99€	54,8%	67,7%	12,9%
Income over 5200€	54,4%	67,1%	12,7%
Total	55,8%	66,4%	10,6%

What should also be noted, however, is that a disproportionately small increase in the ‘perceived invitingness’ among respondents with the lowest education level (‘No or lower education’) has coincided with a disproportionately large decline in visitors in this category. It appears that public libraries have (most likely inadvertently) become more inviting for visitors with a higher socio-economic status: when looking at income<sup>7</sup>, for instance, we also see that ‘invitingness’ has risen most for visitors with higher incomes.

<sup>7</sup> Respondents were asked to report their household income. The categories shown in table four present the answer options put forward to respondents in 2018, which were identical to the answer options in 2004, but adjusted for indexation and inflation.

All of this suggests a ‘selection effect’ of sorts: in all likelihood, the changes that public libraries have gone through have made public libraries less appealing for a considerable number of users with a lower socio-economic status, causing them to visit libraries less. Those that have remained are likely more in tune with middle class tastes and values, which explains why the ‘perceived invitingness’ in this group of users has remained constant (and has even risen slightly).

The numbers we have presented so far suggests that ‘invitingness’ is a somewhat misleading indicator and that the data collected in the user survey is not completely suited to understand this aspect of how public libraries have evolved (since people who have stopped visiting public libraries in recent years were not included in our sample). There are strong indications however, that appealing more to higher educated visitors seems to have an adverse effect on how the library is perceived (and subsequently visited) by lower educated visitors. Our findings suggest that further inquiry into what actually constitutes ‘invitingness’ for different types of visitors (from different social backgrounds), with particular attention for differences in education level, is necessary. Chapters two and (especially) four will explore this topic thoroughly.

A possibility that we need to consider first is that ‘invitingness’, in itself, is perhaps less relevant than we make it out to be. We previously emphasized the fact that public libraries are ‘under pressure’, mostly because of all of the alternatives to certain library functions provided by digital, online media. Perhaps lower educated visitors are simply more pragmatic and have turned to the internet for services once provided to them by the public library. Data from the 2014 Flemish Participation Survey, presented in table five, contradicts this notion.

Table 5: reasons why respondents with different education levels say they no longer visit public libraries, Participation Survey 2014 (N = 1717)

	No or lower education	Lower secondary education	Higher secondary education	Higher education
I can find all the information I need on the internet now	11,7%	25,1%	35,7%	42,1%
I've stopped loaning out materials since streaming/downloading	2,4%	9,6%	11,5%	13,6%
Because of digital (e)books	1,0%	2,8%	5,3%	9,2%
What is on offer doesn't appeal to me	8,3%	7,1%	3,8%	5,3%

When respondents were asked why they ‘no longer visit the library’, it becomes clear that it is especially higher educated (former) visitors that no longer go to the public library because of ‘digital alternatives’. They are consistently overrepresented in saying that they no longer go to the library because they can find all the information they need on the internet, because they stream and download more and because they read digital (e)books. Conversely, one reason the group of lowest educated respondents give (for why they visit public libraries less) more than any other group, is the more general (and somewhat ambiguous) ‘what is on offer doesn’t appeal to me’. It should be underlined that this statement does not refer specifically to the collection of the library and is therefore difficult to interpret. If the advent of the digital media landscape affects lower educated visitors less (than those with higher education levels), why do they visit the public library (increasingly) less frequent?

### 3. Research questions

To understand more about what discourages the attendance of lower educated visitors, we decided to replicate two analyses (also performed on the 2004 user survey data) which aimed to discern what library characteristics stimulate the attendance underrepresented groups. The results of these analyses were published in the article ‘Mind the Gap’ (Glorieux et al., 2007). In that study, both men and the lower educated were rightly identified as being underrepresented in public libraries: *‘the socially disadvantaged are gravely underrepresented. (...) People with low levels of education are much less likely to visit public libraries than people who are highly educated (...). Men are also underrepresented in Flemish public libraries.’* (Glorieux et al., 2007, 191) This led to the following research questions:

- 1) Which libraries attract many lower educated visitors<sup>8</sup>, when controlling for the social and demographic characteristics of the municipality?
  
- 2) Which libraries manage to attract a lot of men, when controlling for the sociodemographic profile of the municipality?

Since it is clear that the underrepresentation of both groups still exists and because the situation has even appeared to have worsened with regard to public library users with lower levels of education, it is interesting to answer the same questions again using the 2018 data and compare the results with those of 2004.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Lower educated’ is defined here as not having finished higher education.

## **4. Methodology**

### ***4.1. Study population***

In 2004, 165 public libraries in Flanders participated to the research, with little over 32.000 library users filling out the questionnaire. In 2018, 105 libraries signed up (roughly one third of all public libraries in Flanders, including also Dutch-speaking libraries in Brussels). Despite having less participating libraries in 2018, considerably more respondents participated to the user survey. Exactly 45.228 usable questionnaires were filled out by library visitors in 2018. There are two reasons why more questionnaires were gathered despite having fewer participating libraries: first, unlike in 2004, respondents could now fill out the questionnaire online at home and at their convenience. Secondly, the decision was made to not take a sample of registered users, as had been done in 2004. It should be stressed that this decision was not taken lightly: a steering group consisting of librarians that represented all participating libraries insisted on allowing every visitor to participate in the research if they so desired. The reason for this was merited by the fact that public libraries in 2018 also attract a sizable number of visitors who are not necessarily registered members. This was far less common in 2004.

Potential respondents were required to meet two criteria in order to be allowed to participate in the research: they had to be eighteen years or older and have visited their library at least once in the last year. The decision to exclude patrons who only used their library virtually or online was also made in concurrence with the steering group: the reasons for this being that the most notable ‘virtual use’ of public libraries in Flanders is restricted to consulting online catalogues and the fact that the questionnaire mostly dealt with on-site library use. The distribution of age,

gender and education level among the survey's respondents (showing that respondents tend to be older, female and higher educated) are presented in the appendix.

#### ***4.2. Data collection methods***

As mentioned briefly in the previous subparagraph, respondents were recruited differently in 2004 than in 2018. In 2004, every participating library provided the researchers with a spreadsheet containing account numbers of every library member who was eighteen years or older. A random sample of members was selected using statistical software, the size of which varied according to the number of active users of a library. This list of selected members was then communicated back to the library, who entered this information into their own software, prompting a notification every time a library member that had been selected to be a respondent loaned out or returned a book. At this point, the user would be invited to participate in the research. If they agreed, they would be given a paper questionnaire, which they were required to fill out in the library or take home and return within a certain timeframe.

In 2018, for reasons already mentioned above, all active users that were eighteen years or older were invited to participate in the research. This was done primarily by sending all eligible users an email containing a link leading to a website that allowed them to fill out the questionnaire online. The email also mentioned that paper questionnaires would be made available at the library itself, but the vast majority of questionnaires (97,6%) were filled out online. The user survey was also promoted in other ways: active on-site recruitment by library staff, posters, flyers, mentioned in newsletters, etc.

### ***4.3. Instruments***

The questionnaires put forward to library users in 2004 and 2018 covered a wide array of themes and topics, allowing respondents to evaluate and share their (dis)satisfaction with most aspects of their library's functioning, while also providing detailed information on how they used their library. Considering that the questionnaires were long (the 2018 questionnaire featured more than 75 questions, with several questions containing multiple items in scale-form) and covered a lot of different themes and subjects, both yielded impressive datasets. While the majority of questions featured in the 2004 questionnaire were kept, some were removed from the questionnaire in 2018 (e.g. anything pertaining to CD-ROMs, since these are no longer a part of Flemish library collections), while other questions were added or altered to be able to approach certain subjects in greater detail (eg, the cultural activities that the library organizes or how the library is active on social media). Out of the 105 libraries that participated to the research in 2018, 71 had also participated to the research in 2004, which allows for a lot of direct comparison between 2004 and 2018.

That considerably fewer libraries decided to participate in the research in 2018, can likely be understood in light of the fact that libraries had to contribute financially to the project in order to participate. This was also the case in 2004, but was far less self-evident in 2018 since budgetary constraints had increased both in the cultural sector as a whole and more specifically also for public libraries. It should also be mentioned that the regional government of Antwerp financed the participation of all libraries within the province in 2004, but not 2018.

#### ***4.4. Data analysis***

The distribution of age, gender and education level among the survey's respondents are presented in the appendix of this chapter (tables a, b and c). These show that respondents tend to be older, female and higher educated. Although this is undoubtedly a reflection of real-life attendance levels, we would also like to underline that we do not claim that the data we gathered is perfectly representative of the population<sup>9</sup>.

The analyses conducted in 2004 were replicated as closely as possible. Multiple regression analysis, carried out on the level of individual libraries, makes it possible to determine the strength of association between independent variables (here the different library characteristics) and the dependent variable (here the percentages of male and lower-educated respondents). Just as in 2007, municipality characteristics and library size were also included in the model to see if they are significantly associated with the dependent variable. If that was found to be the case, they were kept in the model and library characteristics would be added later.

Almost all of the variables that were used in 2007, could be found or reconstructed for the analyses on the 2018 data. When a variable could not be found or reconstructed in exactly the same way as in 2007, another comparable one was used to replace it. For an overview of all the

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<sup>9</sup> A number of checks were done to determine whether the overrepresentation of certain groups caused skewed results in the analyses (using the user survey data) presented in this chapter and chapter two. Weighting coefficients (included in tables b and c in the appendix) were calculated based on the distributions of respondents that reported to be library visitors in the 2014 Flemish Participation Survey. When weighing the data so that the distribution of respondents more closely reflects the actual attendance of different age-groups and education levels, it was clear that this led to only marginal changes in results. For example: repeating the regression analysis presented in chapter two with weighted data led to almost identical results. The largest difference between (both standardized and unstandardized) coefficients in the weighted and unweighted model was 0,008. Therefore, the findings presented both in this chapter and chapter two are those resulting from analyses using unweighted data.

variables that were used in the regression analyses, see table d in the appendix of this chapter. We also specify whether or not the exact same variable used in 2004 could be found for 2018 and, if that was not the case, which variable was used to replace it. We also list the variables that were added to the analyses in 2018 and were not included in 2004. These new variables reflect certain developments within the Flemish public library sector, such as how many extra library-locations there are apart from the main location (which was included because many libraries have been forced to close extra locations due to budgetary restraints), the age of the building (there has been a trend to house public libraries in increasingly new and contemporary styled buildings, not just in Flanders but also worldwide) and whether or not the library has a bar or restaurant (this has become increasingly common in public libraries).

Just as in 2004, the data used in 2018 stems from different sources: information on library characteristics was extracted from both the BIOS database (which centralizes data that libraries provide about their collection, registered users, staff and finances) and an additional questionnaire that the librarians of participating libraries were required to fill out. The information on municipalities was taken from data made available by Statbel, this time using data collected in 2011.

## 5. Results

Table 6: Regression analysis of the percentage of male library visitors, 2018

	Regression coefficient	Standard error	Beta	t-value	p-value
Intercept	27,697	3,098		8,940	0,000
Unemployment percentage in active population in municipality	121,466	23,428	0,540	5,185	0,000
Total number of people living in municipality	-6,390E-05	0,000	-0,323	-2,248	0,027
Percentage of children's books in collections	-32,332	7,222	-0,386	-4,477	0,000
Percentage of DVD's in collection	45,049	16,061	0,200	2,805	0,006
Number of extra library-locations apart from main location	1,071	0,301	0,403	3,557	0,001
Total number of opening hours	0,116	0,055	0,199	2,098	0,038
Membership fee amount	0,432	0,197	0,157	2,189	0,031

$R^2$  (explained variance) = 0,55 (N = 102)

Table six shows the result of the regression analysis<sup>10</sup> performed on the 2018 data that treats the percentage of male respondents of every library as a dependent variable. As mentioned before, an analysis in which only the municipality characteristics were included as independent variables, was carried out first. Two significant municipality characteristics were found: the unemployment percentage in the active population (15 to 64 years old) and the total number of people living in the municipality, with the first one having a positive effect and the second one having a negative effect. Looking at the library characteristics that are found to be significant, certain similarities between 2004 and 2018 become apparent: the percentage of DVD's in the

<sup>10</sup> Independent variables are sorted by whether they express municipality characteristics, the composition of the library collection or general library characteristics

collection has a positive effect now, while the percentage of audio-visual materials was found to be relevant in 2004. Also the opening hours of the library remain relevant. Furthermore, it appears that a higher percentage of children's books in the collection has a negative effect on the percentage of men that visit the library.

Table 7: Regression analysis of the percentage of library users without higher education degree, 2018 (partialled out for the percentage of adults in the municipality without higher education degree)

	Regression coefficient	Standard error	Beta	t-value	p-value
Intercept	0,735	0,036		20,418	0,000
Average income municipality	-2,175E-05	0,000	-0,682	-14,660	0,000
Percentage of foreign inhabitants municipality <sup>11</sup>	-0,431	0,043	-0,460	-9,992	0,000
Percentage of non-fiction works in collection	0,158	0,065	0,105	2,424	0,017
Total number of adult library members	-2,490E-06	0,000	-0,191	-3,176	0,002
Number of computers available to the public	0,001	0,001	0,145	2,248	0,027

$R^2$  (explained variance) = 0,23 (N = 102)

Table seven shows the result of the regression analysis performed on the 2018 data that treats the percentage of lower educated respondents of every library as a dependent variable. In preparation of the analysis, just as in 2004, a strong relationship was found between the percentage of lower educated residents of the municipality in which a library is located and the percentage of lower educated library visitors: a 0,76 correlation was found for 2004 and a 0,78 correlation for 2018. This was taken into account in exactly the same way now as it was in

<sup>11</sup> Inhabitants are considered 'foreign' if they do not have the Belgian nationality

2004: *'In order to control for the influence of the local population composition, the percentage of lowly educated library visitors is partialled out for the percentage of lowly educated residents in the municipality. The new measure indicates whether a library attracts more or fewer lowly educated visitors, compared to other libraries in municipalities with a similar percentage of lowly educated residents. (...) This is done by saving the unstandardized residuals of a regression analysis with the percentage of lowly educated residents as an independent and the percentage of lowly educated library visitors as a dependent variable.'* (Glorieux et al., 2007, p. 196)

When including municipality characteristics in this model, the average income and the percentage of foreign inhabitants in a municipality both have significant and negative effects, meaning that as the average income and the percentage of foreign inhabitants rise, the library has fewer lower educated visitors. Comparing the effect sizes of the municipality characteristics with those of the library characteristics in table seven, it becomes clear that the municipality characteristics play a much greater role in explaining why some libraries attract more lower educated visitors. This becomes even more clear when including the percentage of lower educated residents in the regression: at that point, these three indicators (the percentage of lower educated residents, the average income in the municipality and the percentage of foreign inhabitants)<sup>12</sup> explain 82,7% of the variation in the percentage of lower educated visitors. However, even when including the two municipality characteristics that were found to be significant, the explained variance of the model that does not include the percentage of lower educated inhabitants drops to 0,23.

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<sup>12</sup> Variance Inflation Factor-values for the percentage of lowly educated residents (2.830), the average income in the municipality (3.162) and the percentage of foreign inhabitants (2.095) suggested only moderate correlation between these predictor variables and therefore no severe multicollinearity

## **6. Discussion**

The results of the 2007 analyses that sought to determine which, if any, library characteristics have a positive effect on the presence of certain types of visitors that are usually underrepresented, were very clear: *'When it comes to attracting more male visitors, some measures were clearly associated with the percentage of male visitors. (...) However, when it comes to reaching socially disadvantaged groups, in this case the lower educated, the impact of library characteristics appears very limited. (...) If a public library appears to be attracting more lower-educated visitors, this is for a large part due to the fact that the community itself has a generally low level of education.'* (Glorieux et al., 2007, 201) In short: in 2007, libraries were told that they could make themselves more appealing to male visitors by improving their audio-visual collection and by expanding opening hours, but similar specific advice could not be formulated with regard to the lower educated.

### ***6.1. Male visitors in the library***

The results presented in table six suggest, among other things, that men tend to visit public libraries more often when they are unemployed. This seems to be confirmed when comparing the distribution of employment status between men and women among the library visitors that participated to the research in 2018: 3,4% of the men between 18 and 64 reported to be unemployed, compared to 2,2% among women between 18 and 64. Unemployment in the active population also includes people in that age category who have gone into early retirement and here it becomes clear why the effect is so strong: 15,3% of the men in the research between 18 and 64 report to be pensioned, while this is only 8,5% among women.

The finding that a higher percentage of children's books in the collection has a negative effect on the percentage of men that visit the library in 2018, seems to be confirmed by the fact that men (14,7%) reported to visit the library far less often with or for their children than women (28,5%) when looking at the results of the 2018 user survey. In general, having children seems to have a negative effect on library attendance for men. When comparing the family situation of male and female respondents, it appears that there are considerably fewer men in every category in which children are part of the family composition.

The library characteristics that are found to be relevant seem to suggest that men will visit libraries more easily if they have more flexible opening hours, more extra library locations (that are most likely located closer to their home, making visiting easier) and have a specific type of collection (bigger DVD collection, less aimed at children). Just as in 2004, library characteristics can play an important role in attracting men. This becomes clear when comparing the explained variance of the model without library characteristics (0,26) with the model that does include library characteristics (0,55).

## ***6.2. Lower-educated library users***

With regard to lower educated library users, some library characteristics were found to have statistically significant, but also very limited effects: the number of adult members, the number of computers made available to the public and the percentage of non-fiction works. The effects suggest that larger libraries attract fewer lower educated visitors, while libraries that provide more access to computers and have more non-fiction works in their collection do slightly better in attracting lower educated visitors. However, the small effect sizes lead us to the same conclusion as in 2004, namely that *'when it comes to reaching socially disadvantaged groups,*

*in this case the lower educated, the impact of library characteristics appears very limited.'*  
(Glorieux et al., 2007, 201)

## **Conclusion**

This chapter underlines the uneasy fact that, despite fourteen years and a sector-wide effort to make public libraries more inviting and less elitist, the situation has arguably gotten worse since 2004. As mentioned several times before, public libraries have changed considerably in recent years: they have diversified their activities (integrated coffee bars, organizing more activities, etc) and often look very different now in comparison to the early 2000's (fewer branch libraries operating on a smaller scale, more contemporary styled buildings and interiors, etc). Looking at our findings, we posit that these changes have made public libraries (in Flanders) more attractive for certain visitors, but likely also more 'selective' in the sense that certain types of visitors feel less at home in this new environment. This is best illustrated by the fact that (quite drastic) changes in the composition of the visiting public have gone hand in hand with an improvement of how 'invitingness' is evaluated in a general sense. Focusing on underrepresented groups, as has been done here, casts some light on how we might address this issue. Perhaps the most important finding we have presented is that the greatest challenge lies in finding ways of attracting more visitors with lower levels of education. They are increasingly underrepresented and it is difficult to identify concrete interventions that might stimulate their attendance in a meaningful way.

An important consideration to make at this point is that the independent variables that were used in the multiple regression analyses, while varied and numerous, are reductive to a certain

degree: they are mostly of a very practical and economical nature (such as membership fees or opening hours). These proved very useful when looking at the underrepresentation of men in Flemish public libraries, but seem to fall short of providing any type of meaningful explanation for the underrepresentation of the lower-educated, both in 2004 and 2018. This can likely be attributed to the fact that differences in participation caused by gender differ substantially from differences in participation caused by education level, which is connected much more closely to a cultural dimension of class membership.

This realization confronts us with the notion that the (somewhat more intangible) factor of the ‘look and feel’ of public libraries, and how this affects the impression that (potential) visitors from different social backgrounds have about this cultural institution, deserves more attention. As mentioned in the general introduction, public libraries have not only changed what ‘they do’ but also ‘what they look like’. Because analyses like the ones we have presented in this chapter cannot explain what has caused the disproportionately strong drop in attendance of lower educated visitors, we consider the question of how the image and cultural character of a public library is communicated through the architectural style of its building as a particularly relevant one. This aspect of public libraries will therefore be explored at length in this dissertation, starting with chapter two.

## Chapter I - Appendix

Table a: Distribution of gender in dataset

	2018	PaS2014
Male	36,2%	42,2%
Female	63,6%	57,8%
No answer	0,2%	/
Total	45274	870

Table b: Distribution of age in dataset

	2018	PaS 2014	Weighting coefficient*
18 to 29 years old	8,2%	21,3%	2,6031
30 to 44 years old	21,1%	32,3%	1,5303
45 to 59 years old	30,9%	26,0%	0,8435
60 years or older	39,8%	20,3%	0,5105
Total (100%)	45228	870	

Table c: Distribution of education levels in dataset

	2018	PaS 2014	Weighting coefficient*
None or lower education	1,7%	3,3%	2,6803
Lower secondary education	5,1%	10,2%	2,8433
Higher secondary education	24,5%	36,7%	1,6688
Higher education	67,1%	49,8%	0,6802
Other	1,7%	/	
Total	42929	776	

Table d: Independent variables used in 2004 and 2018 regression-analyses

2004	2018
Membership fee	“
Opening hours	“
Lending period for books	“
Fines for books and CD's returned late	“
Lending fee CD's, CD-ROMs, DVDs, Videotapes	“
Number of cultural activities in library organized in past year	“
Percentage of children's and juvenile books in library collection	“
Percentage of fiction books	“
Percentage of non-fiction books	“
Percentage of CD's	“
Percentage of CD-ROMs	(CD-ROM's are no longer part of library collections)
Percentage of videotapes and DVDs	Percentage of DVDs (videotapes are no longer part of library collections)
Percentage of audio-visual items	“
Number of computers available to visitors	“
/	Number of extra library-locations apart from main location
/	Age of the building
/	Whether or not the library has a facility for eating and drinking
Number of inhabitants aged 15 or older	“
Percentage of male inhabitants	“
Percentage of inhabitants without a higher education degree	“
Percentage of inhabitants who do not have the Belgian nationality	“
Percentage of inhabitants who live in a house without basic comfort	Percentage unemployed inhabitants in active population (15 to 64 years old)
Mean income of the municipality	“

## CHAPTER II

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Architecture, aesthetics, class & library attendance



## **Introduction**

As mentioned in chapter one, the ‘social-pedagogic motive’, the idea that every individual must be offered the chance to develop themselves through culture so that they might increase their opportunities for societal advancement, has been a driving force behind public library policy since the end of the 19th century (Huysmans, 2006). The notion of ‘societal advancement’ of course suggests that public libraries are predominantly aimed at the more vulnerable members of society: members of the working-class or those with lower incomes and lower levels of educational attainment. While public libraries have always been tasked by policy-makers to reach especially this segment of society (De Pauw, 2005; Huysmans, 2006), it could be argued that they are not meeting this objective: the majority of library visitors are (and always have been) middleclass, both in Flanders (Glorieux et al., 2007) and in most other Western countries (Huysmans and Hillebrink, 2008; Manzuch and Maceviciute, 2014; Sei-Ching and Kyung-Sun, 2008). Results from the Flemish Participation Survey (2014) suggests a worrying trend concerning library attendance with regard to lower educated visitors especially. Library attendance has dropped with 6,6% on average between 2004 and 2014, but disproportionately so among visitors with lower levels of education (Lievens, 2015). We would therefore argue that a suboptimal situation (a historic underrepresentation of visitors with lower levels of education) has gotten worse in recent years.

Research aimed at understanding why lower educated visitors are underrepresented in public libraries tends to focus on factors of a very practical and economical nature (such as membership fees or opening hours). These proved very useful when looking at, for example, the underrepresentation of men in Flemish public libraries (Glorieux et al., 2007), but seem to fall short of providing any type of meaningful explanation for the underrepresentation of lower

educated users. Therefore, in this chapter, we will approach the topic from a more ‘class-cultural’ perspective in which lower educated visitors are conceptualized as a (more vulnerable) social group that experiences (a form of) symbolic violence when trying to participate in a cultural institution, in this case public libraries, that is dominated by the middle class. Of course, we are not the first to point out that certain public institutions that should be ‘open’ to all, appear to (unintentionally) exclude more vulnerable groups in society: Dawson (2014), for instance, found that science museums tend to discourage the attendance of low-income and minority ethnic groups by maintaining *‘problematic assumptions about the capital that participants could bring to their visits, notably speaking and reading English, understanding scientific terms and concepts, available financial resources, “free” time, and familiarity with ISE<sup>13</sup> institutions’* (p. 1004). Instead of focusing on barriers such as income or language, we will emphasize the importance of the architectural style of the building housing a public institution as both an overlooked and relevant threshold in our research.

The reason for studying this specific barrier for library attendance is that, as discussed in the general introduction, public libraries often look very different now compared to the early 2000’s: for one thing, they are often housed in ‘inspiring’ (or what we will call ‘iconic’) buildings. Because the advent of this new ‘look’ for public libraries has coincided with dropping attendance numbers among lower educated visitors and because traditional library characteristics (opening hours, membership fees, etc) or the digitalization of society offer no real explanations for this, we will pay special attention to the rise of ‘iconic’ architecture and question whether this specific (rather abstract and artistic) architectural style is a good one for public libraries. Of course, claiming that the architectural style in which a public library is built will have effect on the attendance of lower educated visitors and problematizing iconic

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<sup>13</sup> Informal Science Education

architecture, raises two questions we must consider:

- 1) Does the architectural style of a library building really play a considerable role in the perceived invitingness of a public library?
- 2) Is education level connected to the appreciation of iconic architecture?

In paragraph one, we first discuss the use of iconic architecture in public buildings, followed by an overview of sociological theory regarding the nature of aesthetics and its relationship to social background. In paragraph three, we will first answer research question one by discussing several analyses using our user survey data. These will show that the architectural style of the building housing a library is very important for its perceived invitingness. Next, we will present an exploratory analysis (also based on our own research) which allows us to identify libraries where the ‘invitingness’ or ‘attractiveness’ of the building is evaluated in a significantly different way according to the education level. Apart from offering a first (limited) confirmation of our hypothesis that education level plays a significant role in how visitors experience iconic architecture and interpret the building and invitingness of their library, these analyses also provided us with interesting cases for future research (presented in chapters three and four). We would like to note that determining exactly which aesthetic elements or styles repel or attract different social classes will not be discussed here, but in chapter four.

## 1. Theory

### *1.1 Iconic architecture*

‘Iconic’ architecture has been on the rise ever since Frank Gehry helped revitalize the city of Bilbao with his design for the Guggenheim museum in 1997: *‘Bilbao posed a big problem for the Basque Government. The city’s century-old steel industry was fast becoming obsolete. No less than 30% of Bilbao’s population was unemployed and terrorism and drugs were ripping the city’s social fabric apart. The city needed to be re-invented. (...) Bilbao became a benchmark for others (...) eager to put themselves on the map, attract tourists and boost the local economy. All that was needed, it seemed, was a special building design by a star architect.’* (Moix, 2012, p. 38) Whether the so-called ‘Bilbao effect’ can actually have that much impact on a city’s development has been called in to question increasingly frequent in recent years, Dickson (2017) rightly underlines that before the completion of the Guggenheim, *‘regeneration had been under way for nearly a decade. In 1988, a new metro system was commissioned from Norman Foster, followed by César Pelli’s major “master plan for Bilbao” in 1989, which suggested razing industrial areas and redeveloping them into business, residential and leisure hot spots’.*

Despite justified doubts regarding its ‘regenerative’ potential, the use of iconic architecture in attempts to try and kick-start a positive development in a neighbourhood or even an entire city gained in popularity and did not limit itself to museums. In the last two decades, a considerable number of cities have constructed ‘iconic’ public libraries. The first to really follow in Bilbao’s example, was the Seattle Public Library. Designed by famous Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, it opened in 2004 and was recently dubbed the ‘most Instagrammable’ library in the world

(Davis, 2018). Since then, it seems that the ‘Instagrammability’ of public libraries has become increasingly important.

*Seattle (2004)*



An (incomplete) overview of cities (outside of Belgium) that recently opted for a library in an iconic style (Kowalczyk, 2017) illustrates how widespread the phenomenon has become:

- Australia: Cooroy, Sydney
- Austria: Vienna
- Brazil: Sao Paulo
- Canada: Ontario, Toronto
- Chile: Constitution
- China: Tongling, LiYuan
- Colombia: Medellin
- Denmark: Copenhagen
- Finland: Turku
- France: Auneau, Thionville, Versailles
- French Guiana: Cayenne
- Germany: Freiburg, Stuttgart
- Ireland: Dublin
- Italy: Maranello
- Japan: Tokyo
- Mexico: Mexico City
- Norway: Vennesla
- Poland: Warsaw
- Scotland: Aberdeen
- Slovakia: Ruzomberok
- Singapore: Bishan
- South Korea: Tong-In
- Spain: Barcelona
- The Netherlands: Utrecht
- United Kingdom: Birmingham
- United States: New Haven, Cedar Rapids

The decision makers spearheading these ambitious projects are often lauded when things come to fruition: a landmark building is seen as a sign that the public library has successfully shifted gears from being a 'stuffy', old-fashioned institute to a vibrant and 'hip' place 'for everyone'. We would like to challenge this unbridled optimism somewhat by asking: who are these libraries really for? The Guggenheim in Bilbao was built to 'attract tourists', arguably a valid objective for a museum. But what happens when public libraries are built mainly to attract tourists, to be iconic, to be 'Instagrammable'? Public libraries are (supposed to be) highly approachable, publicly funded cultural institutions carrying out an emancipatory task. Does it really make sense then, to model them after museums for modern art, one of the least approachable public institutions? Data from the Flemish Participation Survey (2014), clearly shows that the underrepresentation of lower educated visitors is greater in museums for modern art than in public libraries. For example: 26,8% of respondents who (only) completed secondary education regularly visit public libraries, while only 5,0% of this group visit museums for modern art. Is there then no danger of discouraging people with lower education levels, who already visit public libraries far less and whose attendance culture workers are trying to increase?

Paul Jones discusses the subject of iconic architecture in 'The Sociology of Architecture', stating that *"political agencies" recent embrace of what has come to be known as "iconic" architecture can be understood as a continuation of longstanding attempts to mobilize major building projects, first, to materialize wider discourses of major social change, and second, to generate surplus value from urban space'* (2011, p. 115). The use of iconic architecture is recognized as a powerful tool in 'rebranding' certain sites, neighbourhoods and even entire cities. However, Anne-Marie Broudehoux rightly argues that the act of 'rebranding' also implies a reduction of *'several different visions of local culture into a single vision that reflects*

*the aspirations of a powerful elite and the values, lifestyles, and expectations of potential investors and tourists. These practices are therefore highly elitist and exclusionary, and often signify to more disadvantaged segments of the population that they have no place in this revitalised and gentrified urban spectacle'* (2004, as cited in Jones, 2011). Again, the Guggenheim in Bilbao is a prime example of this: local residents of the lower and working classes recognize the positive economic impact the museum has had on their city, but generally feel little to no connection to the institution *'in terms of quality of life, social cohesion, regional identity or governance'* (Jones, 2011, p. 116). Culture-led regeneration projects often display an uncoupling between local sentiments and political aspiration, with ambitious policy-makers struggling to 'sell' their vision to locals. In an attempt to remedy these reservations, which can turn into roadblocks for the actual completion of the project, the practice of community consultation is deployed, the actual role and impact of which, are often very ambiguous. Jones goes so far as to categorize them as 'legitimation exercises' for schemes that will be selected *'regardless of the outcome of the public vote'* (2011, p. 127), *because 'it is not always clear what 'consultation' or 'community empowerment' actually mean in practice'* (2011, p. 126). In short: iconic architecture often appears after a problematic decision-making process where the voices of (working-class) locals are ignored. Dutton and Mann posit that *'to make architecture is to map the world in some way, to intervene, to signify; it is a political act. Architecture, then, as discourse, practice, and form operates at the intersection of power, relations of production and culture, and representation, and it is instrumental to the construction of our identities'* (2000, as cited in Jones, 2011). The fact that iconic building projects are frequently contended, signifies that they tend to lack grassroots support. That iconic architecture has nonetheless become ubiquitous, suggests a problematic and lob-sided decision-making process.

One might ask of course: how do we define ‘iconic’ architecture? Categorizing and defining aesthetic qualities is invariably a precarious undertaking, especially when operationalizing it as a concept for social scientific research. Once again, we turn to Paul Jones for clarification. He defines iconic buildings as ‘distinctive’ and ‘eye-catching’ (2011, p. 121): *‘icons, while maybe or maybe not physically dominating the surrounding landscape, are explicitly positioned relative to a visual consumer – either the visitor in front of the building or more likely the viewer of a mediated image in press, television or film – and, a ‘successful’ building will necessarily develop a strong association to place through an instantly recognizable form designed to be both distinctive and widely disseminated in this mediated form’* (2011, p. 120). Iconic buildings are media-friendly, *‘Instagrammable’* and can *‘survive being shrunk to the size of a TV screen, or smaller, to a letterhead or stamp’* (2011, p. 121). This definition is somewhat problematic for our research, since it also applies to older, historical buildings such as the Eiffel-tower or the leaning tower of Pisa. Therefore, we must specify that when we refer to ‘iconic’ buildings in this dissertation, we refer to a style that architects would also call ‘contemporary’, meaning it has been around for roughly 25 years. The use of the term ‘iconic’ in contemporary architecture often refers to large buildings, characterized by a use of ‘bare’ materials such as glass and concrete, a limited colour-palette and a tendency for abstract, stylized shapes.

## ***1.2 Aesthetics & class in sociological theory***

Pierre Bourdieu is certainly the most influential author in sociology with regards to the link between social class and the interpretation and experience of culture and the aesthetic. Central to Bourdieu’s theories, is the idea that *‘culture (is) an arbitrarily constructed notion, (...) social groups (construct) their own particular contingent notions of ‘culture’* (Webster, 2011, p. 7). This in turn implies that cultural perception is not *‘the result of some inexplicable ‘sense’ or*

*'feeling' (but) in fact the result of the subconscious decoding and reasoning of the 'learned' habitus'* (Webster, 2011, p. 99). Bourdieu's habitus is not the only, but certainly the most common way of conceptualizing this connection. Bourdieu (1984) directed his attention to the connection between (interior) architecture and class (albeit in an almost anecdotal way) in *Distinction*. In a study, he asked respondents to describe their 'ideal home' from a list of adjectives. *'The results were correlated against the respondents' job type and, perhaps not surprisingly, they demonstrated that the working-class respondents expressed preferences for functional interiors, the middle classes wanted 'cosy', 'comfortable' and 'neat' interiors, while the most-educated classes, teachers and professionals, preferred more aesthetic, 'studied' and 'harmonious' homes.'* (Webster, 2011, p. 44)

Several researchers later applied the concept of habitus to studies regarding the experience of space and architecture. Most studies focus on the way employees experience the design and decoration of their office spaces. Kimberly Elsbach conducted a study regarding the role that office décor plays in identifying and marking intra-organizational roles and identities. She underlined the great importance of details, regarding the furniture in the office of one of the managers, one respondent even said: *'The quality of the furniture, in particular, seemed to indicate a level of separateness'* (2004, p. 116). Wasserman and Frenkel (2015) also studied the relationship between spatial design, gender and social class by conducting a case study in the Israeli ministry of foreign affairs. Interviews with employees of different social backgrounds, managers and architects behind the building (that opened its doors in 2002) formed the basis of their analyses. Their main conclusion was that respondents experienced their (new) office space very differently, depending on their gender and the social class they belonged to: *'Highly educated middle-class women feel comfortable in the new space and know how to 'fit in' and comply with the organization's image of the ideal worker, despite*

*experiencing the space as masculine. Women from lower-class backgrounds, however, experience the space as more oppressive and marginalizing, and lack the cultural capital to adapt themselves to the newly imposed organizational identity'* (2015, p. 1501). The authors stress the fact that both the architects and the decision makers wanted to convey the sense of a 'new Israel', open to Western influences and exhibiting a professional and international image: *'While the architects' and managers' discursive work rarely refers directly to gender or class, it nonetheless lays the foundation for the rejection of markers of femininity, or indeed of anything that diverges from a Western, middle-class, rational aesthetics'* (2015, p. 1486).

Although Marx never really developed a theory regarding the aesthetic (and much less architecture), we could view this last quote as typically Marxist. The aesthetic is regarded as yet another arena for class struggle, or as Richard Shusterman put it: *'some Marxists would claim that all traditional (including temporary) aesthetics represents an attempt to portray and justify certain socially conditioned and privileged determinations of taste as naturally or ontologically grounded values'* (1989, p. 98). More specifically regarding the experience of spaces, Wasserman and Frenkel also summarize the ideas of neo-Marxist Henri Lefebvre as followed: *'space is never neutrally conceptualized; rather, it reflects the priorities of the dominant group, and it is affected by the social position of those in power to dictate specific elite tastes.'* (2015, p. 1488) Furthermore, it should be noted that several authors suggest that the characteristics of a space and the meaning we ascribe to those spaces can facilitate different types of behaviour. The phenomenological occurrence of entering a 'special' place and the behaviour that ensues because of it, receives a great deal of attention in the sociology of religion and in anthropology, more specifically regarding the relation between the sacred and the profane: *'Sacred things are treated with particular respect and preserved from what is thought to defile them. They are treated in this way because they are believed to represent a normative*

*order: (...) distinguishing social roles according to gender or age or marking out territories as proper places for particular groups*' (Dawes, 2017, p. 26). The regulating power of the sacred is emphasized by many authors and is often linked to spatial factors: *'sacred spaces (...) may be taboo in the sense that a site is so sacred that only certain people can enter'* (Dallen and Olsen, 2006, p. 111).

We would like to argue that social class functions in a manner similar to the spiritual or sacred, with regard to assigning meaning to spaces and buildings. We believe that the uneasy feeling of not belonging somewhere, can often be traced back to the sensation that we are venturing beyond our familiar social milieu. Some feel uneasy entering an 'uptown' art gallery, others when entering the folksy pub behind a football stadium. The façades of these different buildings contain symbolic signals that communicate a message: for some it will be an invitation, for others a sign to keep on walking. The role of the affective needs to be stressed, no one consciously thinks: *'this building and the events that take place in it, are incompatible with the habitus of my social class'*. On the contrary, people prefer to ignore class differences, whatever side of the spectrum they are on: *'recognition of status differences in cross-class interactions is likely to generate anxiety for the interactants'* (Gray and Kish-Gephart, 2013, p.675). Just like with the spiritual, fear plays an important part in reinforcing social taboo.

Gray and Kish-Gephart see 'class work' as the most important coping-mechanism when cross-class interactions take place. They provide the following definition for 'class work': *'interpretive processes and interaction rituals that organizational members individually and collectively take to manage cross-class encounters'* (2013, p. 671). Wasserman and Frenkel (2015) give a good example of this. In their research, they found that 90% of all secretaries used 'guerrilla architecture' to make the office space, which they deem cold and overly

business-like, more liveable: photos and colourful little art pieces on their desks play a mediating role. Le Corbusier's brutalist projects, most notably his 'Unité d'Habitation' in Marseille (constructed in 1952), invoked similar responses from the working-class residents who would end up occupying these buildings. The sleek, modern design, completely erected in concrete, did not sit necessarily well with the inhabitants, spurring them to mediate the architects' vision by adding more traditional elements, such as ornamented hardwood doors. The concept of 'class work' can of course be very valuable in researching the relationship between social class and architecture, not in the least because it emphasizes the interpretative and creative role that individuals can assume in dealing with class differences. Still, it has to be noted that all research regarding this theme focuses on 'cross class interactions' that are almost unavoidable. Methodologically speaking, an office is the ideal setting to research 'class-salient encounters': managers and employees of different social backgrounds are forced to share a space. We would argue however, that the potentially most 'class-salient' encounters never happen in the first place. If it is true that aesthetics deter people from entering a building or space altogether, it becomes very difficult to conduct a research on the reasons why they do not enter. To put it more plainly: recruiting respondents because they *do not* do something, generates a lot of practical problems. Moreover, it is not an easy thing to operationalize an individual's judgement of the aesthetic. Perhaps these are some of the reasons why there is so little attention for the effects of the aesthetic with regards to attendance of public buildings and cultural institutions.

### ***1.3. Our focus on education level***

To round out our theory section, we would like to briefly discuss our choice to focus so heavily on education level, as opposed to other indicators of social class, in our own work. This choice

should be understood in two ways: first, we approach the topic from a distinctly Bourdieusian perspective and his work on the attendance of cultural institutions, especially, tends to place great emphasis on the importance of education. Regarding how members of different social classes experience museums, he found that *'in addition to visiting and its patterns, all visitors' behavior (...) are directly and almost exclusively related to education'* (Bourdieu, 1991, p.37). Of course, education level and social class are not interchangeable concepts, the connection between the two is too complex for that, but considering the nature of our data and the emphasis on cultural capital in our research, we do consider it the best indicator of social class at our disposal. We acknowledge that the choice of a different indicator might have led to different results, but education level is the most sound choice with regard to our theoretical assumptions. Secondly, as discussed in the introduction, when looking at the changing composition of the visiting public of public libraries, the most worrying trend seems to pertain to education level (more so than income, gender or age), underscoring the need for more information regarding this topic.

## **2. Methods and data analysis**

The analyses presented in paragraph three were performed on the data collected in our 2018 user survey in Flemish public libraries. To avoid needless repetition, the study population and data collection methods will not be discussed again here (since these were already discussed at length in chapter one).

## ***2.1. Correlations, PCA and regression analysis***

Tables two and three in paragraph three present analyses that try to determine which library characteristics are most important in order for users to consider them to be ‘inviting’. The first analysis (table one) correlates the level of perceived invitingness (respondents could specify to what degree they agreed with the statement ‘the library is an inviting place’ on a five point Likert-scale) with all items on satisfaction (respondents could say how satisfied they were with a specific aspect of their library, again on a five point Likert-scale). These items cover a lot of ground, from the satisfaction with staff to the quality of infrastructure. This analysis was carried out on respondent (and not library) level.

We also conducted a regression analysis with these items, presented in table two. Since many were conceptually very similar (eg ‘Friendliness of staff’ and ‘Helpfulness of staff’), we decided to perform a factor analysis (PCA) first to see if any latent underlying variables could be identified. This approach strongly resembles the analyses carried out in chapter one, although there the percentage of male and lower educated visitors in every library served as dependent variables instead of perceived invitingness (Glorieux et al., 2007). PCA suggested six different components and we identified three items that did not load sufficiently on any of these six:

- Satisfaction with opening hours
- Satisfaction with the membership fee
- Satisfaction with fines arrangement

These were removed from the model and the PCA was run again, resulting again in six components. Our next step was to ascertain whether the suggested components made sense conceptually. We concluded that one did not, PCA suggested that the following four items belonged together:

- Satisfaction with copy and printing services in library
- Satisfaction with cultural activities
- Satisfaction with library newsletter
- Satisfaction with social media presence of library

After removing the items regarding the copy and printing services and the cultural activities because they were conceptually too distinct, PCA suggested a model with five components that was not only statistically sound, but also made sense conceptually. Based on the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0,908), Bartlett's test of sphericity (0,000) and a total explained variance of 73,8%, we concluded that this model was valid and usable. The following latent variables were constructed (the total variance explained and a more detailed overview of which items contributed to which latent variable is given in tables a and b of the appendix of this chapter):

- Satisfaction with building and interior
- Satisfaction with online presence of library
- Satisfaction with reachability of library
- Satisfaction with system for checking out materials
- Satisfaction with staff

## *2.2. Exploratory analyses*

Apart from ascertaining what impact the building and interior have on how inviting users consider their library to be, we also want to identify libraries that are evaluated in a significantly different way by users with different education levels. For this reason, the data gathered in the user survey was also used to conduct a series of exploratory analyses to identify libraries that were perceived differently by users with varying education levels with regard to the attractiveness of their building and/or their perceived invitingness. This of course means these analyses were conducted on the level of individual libraries. We looked again at the statement ‘the library is an inviting place’ and the item on satisfaction regarding the ‘appeal of the building’, this time linking them to respondents’ education levels. In order to increase the robustness of this indicator, we only selected respondents whose educational-level is identical to that of their highest educated parent (N = 14 361). This way, we made sure that respondents can be more accurately categorized as members of a certain social class, without needing to employ other indicators (income, profession, etc.) that are less connected to cultural capital.

The primary way in which we sought to identify libraries that are perceived differently according to education level, was through ANOVA testing, treating education level as the independent variable and the perceived invitingness and attractiveness of the library as dependent variables. Additionally, we also used Spearman’s Rho to find libraries where the attractiveness or invitingness of a library correlates significantly with the education level of its users.

Through ANOVA testing, we were able to identify nine different libraries where the attractiveness of the building and invitingness of the library seemed to differ significantly

between respondents with different education levels<sup>14</sup>. Through Spearman's Rho, a total of four libraries were identified (three of which were also identified through ANOVA testing) where education levels seem to correlate significantly with the subjective look and feel of the library. All relevant output of these analyses can be found in the appendix of this chapter (tables c through f)<sup>15</sup>. While the methods used here might seem somewhat unusual or rudimentary, they nonetheless served the goal of this exploratory analysis very well by being readily interpretable, which allowed us to analyse more than a hundred libraries uniformly and simultaneously.

### **3. Results**

#### ***3.1 The importance of architecture with regard to perceived invitingness***

Starting from the observation that the degree to which a library is perceived to be 'inviting' by its users varied significantly between libraries, we set out to ascertain what determines whether a library is inviting or not. The results in table one clearly point to the importance of the building and interior design with regard to the perceived invitingness of libraries. In fact, although all correlations are statistically significant, only items regarding the building and interior design show relevant correlations. It is especially striking to see how seemingly irrelevant the friendliness or availability of the staff is. One would think that these play a major role in creating a welcoming and hospitable environment, perhaps even more so than the building, but the data suggests otherwise.

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<sup>14</sup> We only included libraries that also yielded significant differences between lower and higher educational levels when looking at the Multiple Comparisons table.

<sup>15</sup> We provide cross tables because they give a more tangible overview of differences between categories than the actual output created by ANOVA

Table 1: Correlations (Spearman's Rho) between agreement with statement 'The library is an inviting place' and all items in questionnaire regarding satisfaction, sorted from strongest correlation to weakest correlation (N = 44.963 in 105 libraries)

Satisfaction with building of library	,472**
Satisfaction with interior design of library	,442**
Satisfaction with reading room	,411**
Satisfaction with signage in library	,375**
Satisfaction with how library collection is organized	,347**
Satisfaction with accessibility of library	,304**
Satisfaction with cultural activities	,298**
Satisfaction with reachability of library	,293**
Satisfaction with library website	,265**
Satisfaction with library newsletter	,263**
Satisfaction with social media presence of library	,260**
Satisfaction with competence of staff	,258**
Satisfaction with availability of staff	,252**
Satisfaction with online catalogue of library	,250**
Satisfaction with how fast staff can provide help	,248**
Satisfaction with copy and printing services in library	,244**
Satisfaction with opening hours	,244**
Satisfaction with parking availability	,241**
Satisfaction with payment options in library	,238**
Satisfaction with helpfulness of staff	,237**
Satisfaction with friendliness of staff	,235**
Satisfaction with automatized loan-out infrastructure	,234**
Satisfaction with bicycle accommodations	,228**
Satisfaction with membership fee	,210**
Satisfaction with fines arrangement	,205**
Satisfaction with online service 'My library'	,202**

The results of the regression analysis, using the newly constructed variables found through PCA and the five items that were not included in the final model of the factor analysis<sup>16</sup> as independent variables and the perceived 'invitingness' of the library as the dependent variable, can be seen in table two. The regression analysis confirms what was suggested in table one. All constructed variables are significant, together with most singular items (only the item regarding the copy and print services was insignificant and was therefore omitted from table two). When looking at the effect-sizes, both standardized and unstandardized, it becomes very clear that the satisfaction with the building and interior design of a library clearly has the most impact on whether a library will be experienced as being inviting. In preparation of these analyses, we of course suspected that the building or interior design of libraries might be relevant, but even we were very surprised to find how strongly they determine the level of perceived 'invitingness'. It should perhaps be noted here that the satisfaction with the building and interior design should not be understood as pertaining exclusively to the aesthetic, as an item on how the library collection is organized also loads on this latent variable. This makes sense, as function and design intertwine heavily in architecture, or as Frank Lloyd Wright famously stated: 'form and function are one' (Cruz, 2012). The 'reading room' (the satisfaction with which also loads on the latent variable) of a library is not something that respondents only 'look at', they likely also evaluate how 'comfortable' the seating arrangements are for example.

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<sup>16</sup> These items were: satisfaction with opening hours, satisfaction with membership fees, satisfaction with fines arrangement, satisfaction with copy and printing services in library and satisfaction with cultural activities

Table 2: Regression analysis of agreement respondents with statement ‘The library is an inviting place’ (on five-point Likert-scale)

	Regression coefficient	Standard error	Beta	t-value	p-value
Intercept	3,299	0,080		41,250	0,000
Satisfaction with building and interior design (factor)	0,328	0,009	0,378	36,076	0,000
Satisfaction with online presence of library (factor)	0,139	0,010	0,160	13,726	0,000
Satisfaction with reachability of library (factor)	0,120	0,009	0,138	13,871	0,000
Satisfaction with system for checking out materials (factor)	0,113	0,009	0,131	12,500	0,000
Satisfaction with staff (item)	0,100	0,009	0,115	11,060	0,000
Satisfaction with cultural activities (item)	0,074	0,015	0,066	4,822	0,000
Satisfaction with membership fee (item)	0,056	0,013	0,048	4,151	0,000
Satisfaction with opening hours (item)	0,034	0,011	0,037	3,226	0,001
Satisfaction with system of fines (item)	-0,037	0,012	-0,037	-3,067	0,002

$R^2$  (explained variance) = 0.26 (N = 45 887).

### ***3.2 Exploratory analyses***

In our literature review presented above, we hope to have adequately shown that social class membership can considerably determine and shape aesthetic preferences, including (but not limited to) what type of buildings and interiors one feels comfortable in. This leads to the question which specific aesthetic elements can discourage or encourage members of certain social classes to enter/visit a space or building, one we will not conclusively answer in this chapter. Exploratory analysis of the user survey data, however, did allow us to identify ten libraries where the invitingness and attractiveness of the library is experienced differently by users with different levels of education.

Though the size of all found correlations can be interpreted as relatively low, we still think that these merit further research. The primary goal here, after all, was to find cases (public libraries) that can be studied more closely in future research, but also look for a first confirmation of our assumption that certain styles can discourage the attendance of certain types of visitors and that iconic architecture likely appeals more to the higher educated. A closer look at the results of the analyses shows us that only three out of these ten libraries were consistently evaluated better on their invitingness and/or attractiveness by respondents with lower educational levels, which seems to confirm that public libraries in general tend to be more tailored to the preferences and tastes of higher educated users. All libraries have been anonymized, the reason for this being that the degree to which a specific public library is inviting for users with lower levels of education, is something of a controversial matter.

As mentioned before, the question which aesthetic styles repel or attract different social classes will be answered mainly in chapter four. However, while admittedly having no analytic value whatsoever, a subjective assessment of photos depicting the different libraries that were identified can, at the very least, indicate whether libraries that were evaluated better by those with higher levels of education tend to be (more) ‘iconic’. In that sense, it is interesting to note that out of the seven libraries that were judged significantly better by respondents with higher education levels, we considered four as iconic, or at least having iconic characteristics: the buildings themselves, viewed from outside, are not only larger than most libraries, but are characterized by more abstract designs with smooth lines and (often very large) glass walls. The interiors can be described as large, open spaces with high ceilings. The usage of colour is also similar between these buildings, with a clear preference for muted colours. Moreover, two of the four libraries we considered to be iconic were found to be constructed in the last decade and were designed by prestigious architectural firms. The three libraries that were evaluated

significantly better by respondents with lower education levels, in turn, seem to adhere more to the classic image of a small-town public library: the buildings are considerably smaller and inconspicuous, the interiors decidedly more homey and less imposing, especially ‘library C’, which features an interior that appears to have remained largely unchanged for decades. It’s difficult not to be reminded here of Bourdieu’s findings regarding class-based differences in descriptions of the ‘ideal home’, as discussed in our theory section.

Three libraries were more closely examined since they have a small sample size: libraries A (52 respondents), C (49 respondents) and especially D (32 respondents). These three had the largest effect sizes of all libraries found through ANOVA, which is cause for concern since Eta-squared is influenced by sample size. As a control measure, Omega-squared (which factors in sample size and is therefore more unbiased) was also calculated for these three libraries: effect sizes decreased, but remained high (0,191 for library A; 0,121 for library C and 0,179 for library D). The smaller sample sizes can, at least in part, be explained by the fact that these are simply smaller libraries. As a measure of control, we decided to check whether what was suggested through ANOVA (namely that libraries A and C are more appealing, and library D less appealing, to lower educated visitors) by comparing how well certain educational levels were represented in the sample of each library (and other libraries in that specific cluster). This showed that lower educated visitors are far better represented in libraries A and C than in library D. For instance: respondents who only completed lower secondary education represented 12,0% of the sample in library C and 5,3% in library A. Library D on the other hand, had zero respondents in this category. When looking at respondents who finished higher education (college or university), they represented 75,3% of the sample in library D, 60,0% in library A and merely 54,9% in library C. These additional checks seem to confirm the suggested connection between educational level and perceived invitingness/attractiveness.

While identifying libraries that are experienced differently according to education level is interesting, we are also confronted with the fact that there are 95 libraries in our dataset that don't exhibit significant differences. One could argue that this means that there is no connection, but it is important to stress the exploratory nature of the analyses and the fact that the variables were used in a way for which they were not originally designed. We also suspect that more libraries would have been able to be identified if respondents with lower educational levels would have been better represented in the dataset. Conversely, while it is true that ANOVA and Spearman's Rho require a sufficient number of respondents in each category to determine whether a found effect is statistically significant, they are immune to how well certain categories are represented in a sample once those thresholds have been reached. In short: we might have been able to identify more relevant libraries if lower educated visitors were better represented in our sample, but the ones we found are undoubtedly examples of libraries that are evaluated significantly different by lower and higher educated visitors. In any case, the fact that we are dealing with data gathered in a user survey, serves as a considerable limitation with regard to our analyses aimed at determining which libraries are uninviting for lower educated visitors.

A last important point to make is that, while 'iconic' architecture is on the rise for public libraries, its 'price tag' prohibits most small towns from constructing their library in this style and the vast majority of public libraries in our research are not located in urban areas: only 11 libraries in our research are located in what can technically be classified as a 'city', of which only two can be considered to be 'major cities'. Of these 11 libraries, however, three were found to be both more inviting for higher educated respondents, as well as being housed in a building that has iconic characteristics. This puts our findings in a new light by illustrating that, when focusing on libraries that are more likely to have an iconic building, we see that quite a

considerable number have opted for this style and not without consequence for their appeal to lower educated visitors.

### ***3.3 Limitations***

There are, of course, certain aspects of our approach to this subject one might criticize. An important one being that perhaps we are putting too much emphasis on education level or social class as determinants for whether or not an aesthetic style can encourage or discourage public library attendance. We can only answer that any conflation of identity that serves to predict behaviour will reduce complexity and the effects of social-class membership will undoubtedly be mediated by individual idiosyncrasies. It is a certainty that not every person with a lower level of education has a deep-rooted aversion for iconic architecture, the question is rather whether it is more prevalent among the lower educated and whether this has can have an impact on library attendance. We think our approach is greatly preferred to a conceptualization of visitors of public libraries that does not take education (or class-membership) into account. It should also be noted that a satisfactory answer to the question of lower library attendance-levels of the working-class has never been given and we believe this is, at least in part, because of an overfocus on the practical, rational and economic dimensions of public library attendance. Le Roux et al. (2008) also argue that income or professional status do not suffice in explaining why certain cultural institutions are more ‘high-brow’ than others. As already argued in chapter one, there is likely a more cultural dimension that is being overlooked and perhaps the building that houses a public library is the first and most important cultural message in communicating a sense of openness and belonging. The possibility that exclusion can start with a mere glance at a building, as we have tried to argue here, is worth studying and understanding.

Another limitation of our research pertains to the fact that we did not take the specific surroundings in which public libraries are located (and how this might present an additional exclusionary element for visitors with a working-class background) into consideration. Iconic architecture is surely linked to gentrification and while we made the point that ‘iconic’ libraries are predominantly found in (larger) cities, our data does not allow for a more detailed investigation into this subject. While we are certain that the aesthetic characteristics of iconic architecture play a role in and of itself (so outside of the dynamics of urban planning or the processes of gentrification) and can be studied as such, we acknowledge that this aspect perhaps should be given greater consideration than we have been able to do here.

## **Conclusion**

We started this chapter by (once again) emphasizing that public libraries are not living up to the emancipatory task that society has bestowed on them. Next, through an overview of relevant literature, we argued that it is cause for concern that an iconic brand of architecture is gaining popularity for public buildings, including public libraries, considering that this style of architecture is often associated with very highbrow cultural institutions and therefore might further discourage the attendance of lower educated visitors. Analysis of the data gathered in our large scale user survey showed that the architectural style and interior design of a library play a prominent role in its perceived invitingness, more so than any other factor, including the friendliness of the staff or more practical aspects of its infrastructure. After that, through a series of exploratory analyses, we found interesting cases for future research and showed that iconic architecture is likely experienced and evaluated differently according to the education level of visitors and that this might have a negative effect on the library attendance of lower educated visitors.

While the findings presented in this chapter suggest a connection between social class membership and the appreciation or preference for certain architectural styles and aesthetics, we can't say so conclusively yet based on this data. The main reason for this is because our sample is composed of mainly higher educated respondents, which reflects the class-based nature of the Flemish library system, as discussed in the introduction. Therefore, two things were very important for us going forward in this line of research. First of all, we wanted to be able to 'open up' our research to a wider audience, not just library-visitors. As noted before, the potentially most class-salient encounters might never happen in the first place. In all likelihood, the lower educated or working-class visitors of public libraries also represent a segment of those groups who are already more inclined to have positive attitudes towards cultural institutions and middle class attitudes, values and tastes. Therefore, respondents needed to be more widely recruited in future research. Secondly, together with a much more detailed evaluation of the libraries we identified as being experienced differently according to education level, we wanted respondents to be able to assess multiple environments and compare them. For these reasons, we opted for a rather experimental research design (which will be discussed at length in chapter three) using Virtual Reality, since being virtually 'immersed' in photorealistic environments was the closest we could come to having respondents experience and evaluate multiple spaces in a relatively short amount of time. How respondents score and describe the different environments, will of course be linked to socio-demographic variables. This will allow us to analyse class-based dispositions towards aesthetics and architecture in a very detailed manner, which is important, since it could be argued that *'there has not been any sustained attention to the aesthetic elements of Bourdieu's thinking'* (Hanquinet, Roose and Savage, 2014, p. 113).

The fact that architecture and aesthetics are often experienced and evaluated very differently depending on education level and social class membership, has been underlined and illustrated to a great extent in this chapter. This could have lead us to the assumption that failure is inevitable when it comes to constructing public buildings that should appeal to all layers of society, even if architects and decision makers should decide to give this aspect of public buildings the importance we believe it deserves. We were more optimistic for two reasons. First of all: not every library that was included in our dataset and had recently opted for a more contemporary architectural style was evaluated significantly different by lower and higher educated respondents. This suggest that modern (maybe even slightly iconic) library-buildings aren't necessarily evaluated poorly by members of the working-class or visitors with lower incomes or education levels. Charles Jencks (2006), perhaps the strongest advocate for iconic buildings in the field of architectural theory, not only claimed that they can play a significant symbolic role in our relativistic and postmodern society, he also argued for '*a code of good practice*' (p.3) when designing and building iconic architecture, admitting that many iconic buildings miss their mark by not resonating with the general public. He argued that there should be '*more thought on the iconography behind the buildings*' and '*more coherence in the use of metaphors*' (p. 16). As social scientists, we are interested in what would constitute this 'code of good practice' when taking social stratification, which we put forward as being important with regard to architecture in this chapter, into consideration. What sets 'good' iconic buildings apart? Why do some (perhaps inadvertently) manage to appeal to a wider range of visitors? Perhaps a better understanding of the preferences and interpretation-schemes of members of different social classes, can eventually contribute to a more inclusive architecture for public buildings.

## Chapter II - Appendix

Table a: Principal Component Analysis, Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Satisfaction with online presence of library	7,247	42,6	42,6	7,247	42,6	42,6
Satisfaction with building and interior	1,735	10,2	52,8	1,735	10,2	52,8
Satisfaction with staff	1,406	8,3	61,1	1,406	8,3	61,1
Satisfaction with reachability of library	1,108	6,5	67,6	1,108	6,5	67,6
Satisfaction with system for checking out materials	1,044	6,1	73,8	1,044	6,1	73,8

Table b: Principal Component Analysis, Rotated Factor Matrix

Items	Factor					Component
	1	2	3	4	5	
Satisfaction with library newsletter	<b>0,771</b>	0,228	0,174	0,064	0,047	
Satisfaction with social media presence of library	<b>0,769</b>	0,238	0,130	0,074	0,004	Satisfaction with online presence of library
Satisfaction with online catalogue of library	<b>0,755</b>	0,116	0,133	0,153	0,236	
Satisfaction with library website	<b>0,746</b>	0,208	0,173	0,145	0,158	
Satisfaction with online service 'My library'	<b>0,693</b>	0,050	0,133	0,140	0,294	
Satisfaction with interior design of library	0,185	<b>0,849</b>	0,187	0,215	0,141	
Satisfaction with building of library	0,149	<b>0,835</b>	0,113	0,221	0,141	Satisfaction with building and interior
Satisfaction with reading room	0,221	<b>0,800</b>	0,159	0,192	0,114	
Satisfaction with how library collection is organized	0,290	<b>0,654</b>	0,258	0,175	0,117	
Satisfaction with friendliness of staff	0,173	0,180	<b>0,863</b>	0,146	0,123	Satisfaction with staff
Satisfaction with competence of staff	0,218	0,214	<b>0,840</b>	0,156	0,114	
Satisfaction with how fast staff can provide help	0,216	0,180	<b>0,833</b>	0,206	0,122	
Satisfaction with parking availability	0,120	0,187	0,116	<b>0,840</b>	0,050	Satisfaction with reachability of library
Satisfaction with bicycle accommodations	0,164	0,200	0,147	<b>0,764</b>	0,058	
Satisfaction with reachability of library	0,134	0,281	0,240	<b>0,709</b>	0,192	Satisfaction with system for checking out materials
Satisfaction with automatized loan-out infrastructure	0,217	0,166	0,149	0,127	<b>0,811</b>	
Satisfaction with payment options in library	0,218	0,179	0,129	0,087	<b>0,806</b>	

Notes. Rotation method; Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table c: educational level crossed with level of agreement with statement ‘the library is an inviting place’

		Totally don't agree	Don't agree	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree
Library E* (N = 192) $\eta^2 = 0,064$	None or elementary school	11,1%	11,1%	22,2%	33,3%	22,2%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	12,5%	0,0%	50,0%	37,5%
	Higher secondary education	1,9%	3,7%	11,1%	57,4%	25,9%
	Higher education (college)	0,0%	1,2%	7,0%	60,5%	31,4%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	0,0%	8,6%	48,6%	42,9%
Library F** (N = 978) $\eta^2 = 0,017$	None or elementary school	9,5%	14,3%	23,8%	42,9%	9,5%
	Lower secondary education	3,4%	3,4%	31,0%	58,6%	3,4%
	Higher secondary education	1,0%	3,6%	19,3%	55,3%	20,8%
	Higher education (college)	4,1%	6,1%	20,7%	45,8%	23,3%
	Higher education (university)	0,8%	7,5%	16,8%	47,4%	27,6%
Library G** (N = 257) $\eta^2 = 0,055$	None or elementary school	15,8%	15,8%	36,8%	26,3%	5,3%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	6,7%	26,7%	46,7%	20,0%
	Higher secondary education	0,0%	5,3%	38,9%	52,6%	3,2%
	Higher education (college)	3,7%	14,6%	30,5%	41,5%	9,8%
	Higher education (university)	2,2%	8,7%	26,1%	43,5%	19,6%
Library A** (N = 52) $\eta^2 = 0,258$	None or elementary school	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	33,3%	66,7%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	25,0%	75,0%	0,0%
	Higher secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	22,2%	61,1%	16,7%
	Higher education (college)	0,0%	4,5%	50,0%	40,9%	4,5%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	0,0%	80,0%	20,0%	0,0%
Library H* (N = 262) $\eta^2 = 0,042$	None or elementary school	8,3%	8,3%	41,7%	33,3%	8,3%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	23,1%	46,2%	30,8%
	Higher secondary education	2,5%	4,9%	22,2%	43,2%	27,2%
	Higher education (college)	2,0%	1,0%	11,0%	61,0%	25,0%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	3,6%	17,9%	51,8%	26,8%
Library I** (N = 97) $\eta^2 = 0,148$	None or elementary school	14,3%	28,6%	28,6%	28,6%	0,0%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	30,0%	70,0%	0,0%
	Higher secondary education	0,0%	6,9%	13,8%	62,1%	17,2%
	Higher education (college)	0,0%	2,2%	24,4%	57,8%	15,6%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	0,0%	33,3%	50,0%	16,7%

Table d: educational level crossed with evaluation of attractiveness of building

		Not at all satisfied	Not satisfied	Neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Library E** (N = 195) $\eta^2 = 0,068$	None or elementary school	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	50,0%	50,0%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	33,3%	66,7%
	Higher secondary education	0,0%	1,8%	7,3%	40,0%	50,9%
	Higher education (college)	0,0%	0,0%	1,1%	21,6%	77,3%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	0,0%	2,9%	25,7%	71,4%
Library G* (N = 255) $\eta^2 = 0,038$	None or elementary school	0,0%	0,0%	20,0%	35,0%	45,0%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	18,8%	56,3%	25,0%
	Higher secondary education	1,1%	4,3%	17,4%	57,6%	19,6%
	Higher education (college)	4,8%	6,0%	20,5%	48,2%	20,5%
	Higher education (university)	4,5%	11,4%	25,0%	40,9%	18,2%
Library D* (N = 32) $\eta^2 = 0,237$	None or elementary school	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	Higher secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	55,6%	44,4%
	Higher education (college)	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	21,4%	78,6%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%
Library H* (N = 252) $\eta^2 = 0,046$	None or elementary school	0,0%	18,2%	18,2%	18,2%	45,5%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	14,3%	42,9%	42,9%
	Higher secondary education	0,0%	1,3%	7,8%	44,2%	46,8%
	Higher education (college)	0,0%	0,0%	5,2%	34,4%	60,4%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	3,7%	5,6%	42,6%	48,1%
Library C* (N = 49) $\eta^2 = 0,190$	None or elementary school	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	25,0%	75,0%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	33,3%	66,7%
	Higher secondary education	0,0%	5,6%	16,7%	50,0%	27,8%
	Higher education (college)	0,0%	6,3%	18,8%	62,5%	12,5%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	0,0%	20,0%	80,0%	0,0%
Library J** (N = 207) $\eta^2 = 0,086$	None or elementary school	0,0%	0,0%	10,0%	10,0%	80,0%
	Lower secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	45,5%	54,5%
	Higher secondary education	0,0%	6,3%	12,7%	52,4%	28,6%
	Higher education (college)	0,0%	4,2%	11,5%	53,1%	31,3%
	Higher education (university)	0,0%	3,7%	25,9%	63,0%	7,4%

Table e: education and perceived invitingness of library  
(Spearman's Rho, controlled for age)

	Correlation
Library A	-0,439**
Library B	0,397*

Table f: education and perceived attractiveness of library  
(Spearman's Rho, controlled for age)

	Correlation
Library C	-0,386**
Library B	0,430**
Library D	0,481**

## CHAPTER III

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Integrating Virtual Reality in qualitative research methods



## **Introduction**

Despite already existing for decades (the first head-mounted display dates back as far as 1968), Virtual Reality is still very much an upcoming technology. Because several large tech-companies have applied themselves to VR in recent years (most notably Google, HTC, Microsoft, Samsung and Facebook), the technology has reached a point where it can offer photorealistic experiences, while also being consumer-friendly and affordable. The development of VR for large consumer audiences has also spurred software-developers to start designing applications to be used on those devices. Because of this, using VR in social science research has never been more self-evident than now: until very recently, a researcher who wanted to use VR in a study would have been obliged to develop their own software and possibly even hardware, which would of course be very complicated and costly. Still, while the last years have seen considerable advances in VR consumer-software, there has been quite limited adoption in wider society and a very limited amount of software has been developed for the specific purpose of conducting research. The challenge for researchers now is choosing from a wide range of products and services (most of which are not tailored to research purposes) and familiarizing oneself with a field of technology that, despite its long history, is still very much in development.

In this chapter, we aim to illustrate that integrating Virtual Reality to good effect in social science research does not necessarily require specialized hardware or software, an abundance of expertise on VR-technology or even a large budget. We will do this by discussing our use of a method we have come to call ‘VR-assisted interviews’: conducting a (semi-structured) interview while respondents are confronted with a virtual environment via a VR-headset. Since the term ‘virtual reality’ has been used to describe many different technologies, practices and

techniques within social scientific literature, we would first like disentangle the concept somewhat in the next paragraph before expanding on our own research project.

## **1. Virtual Reality: a catch-all term**

The first uses of VR in social sciences go as far back as the late eighties. From that time until now, VR has mostly been used in the fields of (social) psychology and communication studies. A few notable researchers that have devoted themselves, not just to using VR in their own research, but also to encouraging others to make use of these technologies are Frank Biocca, Jack Loomis and Jim Blascovich. More recently, VR has also become more popular in the field of criminology (Van Gelder et al., 2017). It has been used to research a plethora of different topics and subjects, ranging from anxiety and phobias, non-verbal behaviour, spatial cognition, media effects, juvenile delinquency, interpersonal aggression and has *'also been explored as a tool for cognitive behavioral therapy'* (Fox et al., 2009, p. 100). It's clear that the possibility of evoking real-world sensations and designing virtual environments that respondents can experience has spoken to the imaginations of many researchers in the past three decades, although it should also be noted that its use is practically absent from certain disciplines within social science such as political science and sociology. This is of course linked to the subject matter of these disciplines, VR lends itself more readily to the interests of communication science or (social) psychology. That being said, it can also be a very useful tool for sociologists when studying certain subjects, as we will illustrate.

Fox, Arena and Bailenson outlined the three primary ways in which VR has been incorporated in the social sciences in 2009. Although more than 10 years have passed since then, the

classification still holds true when looking at more recent research in social science that utilizes VR: *'first, Virtual Environments have been studied by social scientists as objects in and of themselves. What is the human experience like within a VE that is similar to or different from the experiences in the physical world? (...) Secondly, VEs have been created with the intention of application outside of the laboratory in order to achieve real world goals. For example, surgical VEs have been developed to familiarize doctors with new medical procedures. Finally, VEs have been used as a method to study social scientific phenomena, enabling the replication and extension of real world experiments in a more controlled environment and also helping researchers create stimuli that may be too costly or impractical to achieve in the real world'* (2009, p. 98).

It is important to add that there are different ways to 'design' the virtual environments that respondents will experience. One way is to generate an environment from scratch using a computer program. Another way is to 'capture' images of real-world surroundings using special 360° camera's. A hybrid technique is also possible, where 360° images are captured and then overlaid with computer-generated elements. The term 'VR' in social scientific research predominantly refers to viewing or interacting with an environment that is completely computer generated through a head-mounted display (Pan and Hamilton, 2018). There are, however, also studies where respondents experience computer generated environments in a two-dimensional format, of which 'netnographies', *'a specialized form of ethnographic research that has been adapted to the unique contingencies of various types of computer-mediated social interaction'* (Kozinets, 2012, p.39), are a good example. This type of research tends to treat virtual environments predominantly as *'objects in and of themselves'* (2009, p. 98), as described by Fox, Arena and Bailenson above.

Additionally, there are also different ways in which the virtual environment can function with regards to the collection of data. Collecting data can happen both within the virtual environment itself, as well as outside of it. In the first case, when data is collected within the virtual environment, respondents will have an interactive, often very ‘gamelike’ experience while participating to the research: using controls, they will be able navigate a virtual environment, perform tasks, make choices, be prompted questions, etc, with data on their behaviour being recorded throughout. A very impressive application of this concept is the software ‘AVA360VR’ (McIlvenny, 2018). While we are certain that software of this kind is of great worth to behavioural and social science research, we would like to underscore that gathering data within the virtual environment itself is not a prerequisite for a successful utilization of VR-technology in a research design. Integrating virtual environments in more ‘traditional’ research methods can prove very valuable: in our research, we simulated a real-world setting using photorealistic 360° images (instead of computer generated environments) that can be viewed through a head-mounted display and collected data on how respondents react to it by conducting an interview during and after their experience. This choice was made both out of practical as well as methodological considerations, which we will discuss later on.

## **2. The study: a quick summary**

In chapter one, we discussed how users of lower educational achievement are visiting public libraries increasingly less frequent in recent years in Flanders. Research that tries to understand or explain why certain libraries are visited less frequently by people with a lower socio-economic status, tends to focus on very tangible, practical and economical characteristics of public libraries such as the composition of the collection, membership fees or the number of

computers that are available to visitors (Glorieux et al., 2007). While these types of analyses are valuable, they fail to capture the cultural, often more implicit, dimension of public library participation. A threshold we found to be very relevant, but that has received little to no attention, is the architectural style of the building that a public library is housed in. In chapter two we identified a number of libraries where the 'invitingness' and/or 'attractiveness' of the library is evaluated very differently by visitors of lower educational achievement compared to visitors of higher educational achievement. We wanted to corroborate our findings and understand what it was that made these specific buildings and/or interiors designs less inviting for certain segments of the visiting public.

Research on cultural preferences and participation is a well-established field within cultural sociology. How frequently one visits certain cultural institutions or how many books one reads every year are questions that lend themselves perfectly to a written questionnaire or a structured interview. The subject of aesthetic preferences, however, is often regarded more as a domain of psychology and even philosophy, but also in those fields, the difficulties in measuring aesthetic preferences are often underlined. Augustin and Wagemans rightly see a '*relative lack of standardised measurement instruments*' while also identifying problems '*of a more theoretical nature: What is aesthetics, aesthetic experience, aesthetic impressions, and what is it that we are studying—beauty, pleasingness, etc? Definitions of aesthetics-related terms differ widely between authors, and terminology is far from systematic*' (2012, p. 456).

### **3. Practical challenges and the added value of VR**

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1968, 1991) provide a very interesting framework for social scientists to study class-based dispositions to aesthetics, but choosing architecture as the subject of a study regarding aesthetic preferences (and how these preferences interact with education level and class-membership), is far from self-evident. One could choose to follow Bourdieu's example (as he did with museums in 'Distinction') and invite respondents to visit a set of libraries and afterwards ask a series of questions in a semi-structured interview, but considering first that we want to compare reactions to (at least five) different libraries (that were found to be experienced and evaluated differently through our exploratory analyses in chapter two) and second that these libraries are not located closely to one another (a car-ride between the two libraries that were identified through our exploratory analyses and that are furthest apart would take approximately two hours), this is not a feasible option. There are also other practical challenges to take into consideration. Say we would organize such visits and take groups of five to ten people on a day-long field trip across Flemish libraries: it is not only highly unlikely that many respondents would be willing to devote so much of their time, but the circumstances (weather conditions, amount of people in every library, type of visitors in every library, etc) could change drastically from one visit to the next. In short: any kind of experimental control would be almost impossible to achieve.

This means we have to turn to media to represent the buildings we want to confront respondents with. Using photography or video solves the practical problem of having to take groups of people on day-long field-trips, makes it possible to evaluate several buildings in a relatively short amount of time and allows for more experimental control since every respondent would see the same images or video. But using photography or video confronts us with another

problem. Architecture is distinctly experienced in a three-dimensional way: the immersive nature of buildings and spaces greatly shapes our experience of them. In that regard, film and photography, as two-dimensional mediums, fall wholly short of evoking the experience one has when standing before, or entering, a building. VR offers the perfect solution: it can facilitate very immersive, three-dimensional experiences, while also possessing all the advantages of more traditional media.

For those who are unfamiliar with how 360 degree images can create a realistic virtual experience of an environment or a space, we would like to refer to the figures that are featured in the appendix of this chapter, where we also provide a more detailed account of some practical and technical aspects of our research design. We hope to provide some tangibility on what it means to use consumer level VR-technology in the practice of social science research. We believe sharing this kind of information is essential, since it will most likely be technical and practical thresholds that will prevent many researchers from adopting VR-technology in their research. McIlvenny (2018) rightly underscores that integrating VR into research methodology *'will be a steep learning curve for new generations of scholars'*. It is also rather telling that Jewitt et al. (2016) found *'a wider range of methodological innovation'* (p.6) among researchers in artistic research fields than in social sciences. By the nature of their expertise, researchers in the field of arts will feel much more comfortable in experimenting with new mediums and technologies. Therefore, to whom it may concern, we go into more detail on working with consumer-oriented VR-technology in the appendix of this chapter.

We would also like to add here that, while it is certainly true that a sense of scale and space is especially relevant when researching the effect a specific style of architecture has on its visitors, we are of the opinion that most research that aims to simulate a real-life situation or experience

with visual media could benefit greatly from using 360 degree video that can be viewed with VR-goggles. At the very least, since its application has become much more self-evident in recent years, it should be considered as an option. After all, using two-dimensional video to simulate real-world experiences has serious drawbacks, as McIlvenny (2020) also underlines: *'media scholars have critiqued the dominant use of (2D) video recordings because of, for instance (...) the limitations of video to 'capture' reality, (and) the screen essentialism and planocentrism of flat video'* (p.3). Using VR-technology solves several of these 'scenographic' problems, not in the least those that pose themselves with regard to the 'praxeology of camerawork', *'the ways in which camera technique shapes what can be 'seen' in the resulting recordings'* (McIlvenny, 2020, p. 5). Still, while 360 degree video largely solves the problem of 'framing', we need to acknowledge that other challenges still exist: any 'capturing' of a natural or social setting will always involve making creative and practical choices that require deliberation: the colour temperature of daylight, for instance, changes throughout the day and different light circumstances are known to evoke different feelings (Park et al., 2013).

#### **4. Making a choice: collecting data within or outside of the virtual environment**

While it was clear from the beginning that we would have to film 'real-world' environments (libraries that were found to be experienced differently according to education level), not computer-generated ones and that these videos would be viewed using VR-goggles, a choice still had to be made with regard to how we would collect data. Our first option was to develop our own software ('AVA360VR' was still in development at this point in time) that would have likened the experience to that of a videogame: among other things, respondents would be able to choose in what order they would visit the different buildings and spaces and how much time

they would spend in them. The software would also have a built-in question-and-answer module: upon spending some time in a certain space, questions would pop up that could be answered using a handheld controller. Respondents would be able to, for example, choose from a list of adjectives they feel best describes the space they are viewing, as well as allow them to give a score for (certain aspects of) that building or interior. Answers would be immediately translated to a spreadsheet, ready to be imported in statistical software. The viability of this concept was explored with a developer that had experience designing apps for Virtual Reality. Neither the fact that we would essentially be developing our own VR-game that used photorealistic environments, nor the integration of a Q&A-module or the translation of respondents' answers to a spreadsheet would apparently pose any real problems: several development platforms, most notably Unity, allow for all of those functionalities.

However, it was quickly decided that we would not pursue this option, both out of practical and methodological concerns, the biggest of which was the user-friendliness of the whole experience. As mentioned in the introduction, VR is far from a new technology, but it is still very much a niche product despite its increasing popularity. Familiarizing oneself with how VR-environments and VR-applications work takes time, even for very tech-savvy users. Another very important consideration was the fact that a more qualitative methodology was much more in line with the subject of aesthetic preferences. In that sense, offering a list of predetermined adjectives to describe a building or space, for example, creates a danger of steering the experience and evaluation of those spaces. We therefore decided to opt instead for an approach that would require no competence in dealing with VR-applications on part of the respondents: they would simply have to put on VR-goggles and edited clips (showing the different libraries) would automatically start and stop (being triggered remotely by the interviewer). The application 'VR-Sync' provides exactly this functionality: the interviewer can

‘push’ a selected video to the VR-goggles the respondent is wearing and then ask questions regarding the virtual environment they are in. During and after viewing, respondents would answer questions that let them share their thoughts on what they are seeing, while everything they said was being recorded. This method allows respondents to focus on what they are seeing and experiencing, instead of having them worry about how to operate an application they are using for the first time. It’s also worth mentioning that the user-friendliness of this method also extends itself to the researchers: as far as the actual analysis of the interviews is concerned, for example, there is hardly any difference here with how one would transcribe or analyse any other series of semi-structured interviews.

It should be noted that, since there is no truly ‘interactive component’ to this experience, we consider what our respondents experienced to be a variation, rather than a real ‘example’, of what McIlvenny describes as ‘inhabiting video’: *‘exploring complex spatial video and audio recordings of a single scene’* (2020, p. 7). Respondents could comment on what they were experiencing and were asked questions, but they could not intervene in or change their environments. Our research is also not an example of respondents inhabiting a *‘digital body’*: *‘corporeal fleshy bodies interacting with digital technology but also (...) corporeal bodies (that) are momentarily digitally re-presented’* (Jewitt et al., 2016, p.1). There is definitely a kind of ‘corporality’ to the experience though, since a ‘first person’ viewpoint at eye level is maintained throughout the VR experience. As a technique, VR-assisted interviews put their own spin on ‘interactiveness’ and ‘corporality’, one that we would argue fits how we experience architecture in the real world: when we view a building for the first time, we generally do not start changing the environment to any considerable degree (nor could we), but we might tell the person standing next to us if we like it or not.

## **5. Experiences with VR-assisted interviews in the field and quality of representation**

In the end, we were able to conduct a total of 73 VR-assisted interviews in which each respondent ‘visited’ five real-world libraries, albeit virtually. Libraries were always ‘visited’ in the same order. On average, these interviews lasted 22 minutes, with the shortest being completed in 13 minutes and the longest in 34 minutes. The VR-assisted interview was accompanied by a short, written questionnaire in which respondents were asked to answer a series of socio-demographic questions. When looking at the distribution of basic background variables (tables a through c in the appendix of this chapter), we see that we were able to reach quite a balanced composition of respondents with regard to education-level and age, but we did interview considerably more women (44) than men (27) (two respondents did not answer the question regarding their gender).

We initially started recruiting respondents by visiting social organizations in different cities in Flanders (Antwerp, Ghent and Leuven), all of which sought to help and empower locals by providing a communal meeting space, organizing group activities and/or providing a ‘social restaurant’. We visited these organizations for eight days in total. Practically all people visiting these meeting spaces or social restaurants were asked (in person) whether they would be interested in participating to our research. Eventually, we were able to conduct 23 interviews this way. A little over half of all respondents who had no higher education were found through these organizations. Next, we contacted both the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and a Flemish marketing bureau (both situated in Antwerp). Students and employees were (randomly) asked if they were willing to participate (in person). This was done to ensure we had a sufficient amount of younger and higher educated respondents. A total of 11 respondents were interviewed here over the course of just two days. For the remaining interviews, we turned to

five public libraries which had participated to the large scale user survey, asking them whether we could interview respondents who had filled out a questionnaire for their library and had made themselves eligible for follow-up research. To be clear: the libraries we contacted with this question, were not the libraries that were shown through VR, users were not asked to evaluate the building of the library they visit most frequently. We sent out invitations via email, asking potential respondents whether they could come to their own local library for an interview on certain predetermined days. The good thing here was that we had a lot of information regarding their profile, which allowed us to make sure that we had a sufficient number of individuals with lower education levels across different age groups here as well. Although we went to many different locations, all interviews were conducted in either an empty conference room, office or class room (that was made available to us). Interviews were always conducted one-on-one, with only the interviewer and the respondent in the room. This was done to ensure that respondents felt as comfortable as possible in voicing their opinion.

Typically, respondents would enter the room (either because they had an appointment or they had just been randomly recruited) and would be asked to take a seat. The interviewer would give a quick introduction, after which respondents would put on the VR-goggles. Respondents saw two separate videos per library, one showing the building/exterior and one showing the interior. Videos of exteriors contained two different viewpoints and videos of interiors contained three different viewpoints. The following questions were asked to respondents while they viewed the exterior of every library:

- Do you recognize this building?  
If so: have you ever entered this building?
- Do you feel this is a typical building for a library? Is it recognizable as a library?
- How would you describe this building?
- Do you find this to be a nice, attractive building?
- Do you find this to be an inviting building?
- Does this building perhaps remind you of another (type of) building you know?

If a respondent answered in a positive way to the first two questions, they would also be asked if the VR-environments were a good representation of the library in question. Next, we would move on to the video of the interior and ask the following questions:

- Do you feel this is a typical interior for a library? Is it recognizable as a library on the inside?
- How would you describe this building?
- Do you find this to be a nice, attractive interior?
- Do you find this to be an inviting interior?
- Does this space perhaps remind you of another (type of) building or space you know?

After discussing both the building and the interior, we would ask respondents to give a general score to the library, a number between one and ten. These questions were asked to every respondent for every library. At the end of the interview, we asked respondents to take off the VR-goggles and showed them pictures of every library while asking the following questions:

- After having seen them all now, which library do you think is the nicest, the most attractive (as a whole)?
- Which library do you think is the least nice, the least attractive (as a whole)?
- Which library is the most inviting one (as a whole)?
- Which library is the least inviting one (as a whole)?

After these round-up questions, respondents were asked to fill out the written questionnaire. Additionally, we kept a log in which we noted several things about how each respondent reacted to the experience, more specifically:

- The respondent's general attitude towards the research
- His or her familiarity with Virtual Reality
- How smooth the interview went (both in terms of how easy it was for the respondent to participate in the research, as well as any technical or other difficulties that came up)
- Any information pertaining to the respondent that we felt might be relevant but would not show up in the questionnaire

This allowed us to make an overview of how these 73 respondents dealt with our unusual research design. First and perhaps most importantly, it should be noted that for 43 of our 73 respondents, this was their first time experiencing VR in any way, shape or form. Another 24 respondents had limited experience with VR, ranging from experiencing it once in a museum to riding a rollercoaster that featured VR. Only six respondents had extensive experience using VR, meaning they themselves (or someone in their family) actually owned a pair of VR-goggles and used it frequently. Only one background-variable seems to be a good indicator for predicting whether someone will have had previous experience with VR or not. Perhaps

unsurprisingly, this is the age of a respondent. The number of respondents who have no experience whatsoever with VR steadily rises with age (see table d in appendix of this chapter). Other than that, it seems the familiarity with VR is quite evenly distributed when looking at gender, education level and even income categories.

We considered it quite remarkable that only one respondent seemed particularly impressed when experiencing VR-technology for the first time. Furthermore, only a very limited number of people made a comment of any kind regarding the technology when seeing a virtual environment for the first time. Some respondents were unsure at first whether they could actually look around the environments in a way that resembled real life and were only mildly surprised when they realized they could. Almost all respondents immediately and unreflectively started looking around and evaluating the surroundings, buildings and interiors without giving any notice at all to the fact that they were experiencing something through VR-technology. We believe this is one of the best indicators that VR in the way we used it (photo-realistic, 360 degree videos that are triggered by the interviewer) has the potential to invoke a real-world experience. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that the majority of interviews were conducted without any sort of difficulties or problems whatsoever. For the sake of completeness, and because the circumstances in which we encountered some of these problems might be relevant for other researchers who are considering using VR in one their studies, we discuss them in more detail in the appendix of this chapter.

Of course, the fact that problems (technical or otherwise) were mostly absent is no measure for the actual ‘quality of representation’. The most important thing, after all, is whether this technique gives a faithful representation of the buildings and spaces in question. There were 15 instances in which a library both was recognized and had been visited by a respondent before.

Nine out of those fifteen respondents said unequivocally that the VR-environment was a faithful representation of the building in question. Four respondents said it was a somewhat faithful representation of the building in question and one respondent felt that it did not represent the library in question in an accurate way. When asked what exactly made the representation suboptimal or problematic, most of the remarks had to do with the fact that the images failed to convey all the different functions and aspects of the library (it is probably not a coincidence that all these more reserved responses pertained to the largest library we showed), stating that the shown videos gave an incomplete impression of the library (eg, respondents mentioned that we did not show the coffee-bar inside the library). While this is of course a valid remark, it should be noted that it does not pertain to the aesthetic or spatial qualities of the building. In other words: the space did not seem a lot bigger, smaller or more or less attractive than in real life. Considering how easy participation was for even the most VR-inexperienced respondents and that the data gathered was perfectly suited for analysis, we conclude that opting for VR-assisted interviews (instead of a more advanced, ‘gamelike’ method) was the right choice.

## **Conclusion**

In many ways, we have made an argument here for a very ‘modest’ application of VR-technology in social science research, one that stays well within the bounds of what VR-technology currently has to offer. More than trying to ‘reinvent the wheel’, we feel we have ‘resituated’ a method, *‘that is using a method in a new context but within the method’s original discipline’* (Jewitt et al., 2016, p.6). This does not lessen the relevance of our application of VR-technology, since ‘resituating’ *‘can elaborate a method by pushing its limits, bring new perspectives and agendas to bear on a method, and (support) experimentation’* (Jewitt et al.,

2016, p.6). ‘Elaborating’ the semi-structured interview by confronting respondents with lifelike, immersive environments has, at the very least, proved of great worth in tackling our own research questions. Therefore, we would argue that there is no real ‘wrong’ way to implement VR in social science research, as long as its practical and methodological limitations are recognized and taken into consideration. We consider our research an apt example of how an experimental approach to a subject can be (relatively) modest from a technical or technological standpoint, but still provide real added value. That being said, we are also convinced that ‘gamelike’ Virtual Reality research designs will open up a world of possibilities and we expect its toolbox to expand in significant ways as VR-technology advances: perhaps soon it will be possible to measure biometric data such as a respondent’s pulse or pupil dilation upon experiencing a specific event in an integrated way, for example.

Finally, we want to underscore that complex research designs can have their drawbacks, especially if the technology they use has not seen widespread adoption in society: if your wish is to conduct a considerable number of VR-assisted interviews at this point in time, expect to spend more time on one respondent, or more respondents to not be able to finish, as the user-experience becomes increasingly complex. This will likely change in the future as VR becomes more common, but at the moment is still very important to take into consideration. Another important limitation connected to the fact that VR is still a relatively niche product, is that this also severely limits the possibility for large-scale data-collection. Similar to online written questionnaires twenty years ago, you can’t expect to launch a VR-research online now and expect a diverse and representative sample of society to participate. This is why we felt it important to share our experience in integrating VR-technology in a qualitative research method that proved easy to use for both researchers, as well as respondents of different ages and education levels.

## **Practical and technical details of the research design**

### *How 360° images can simulate depth and perspective when viewed through VR-goggles*

Figures 1a to 1c show the building and surrounding environment of one of the libraries participating to our research, figures 2a to 2c show the interior of the same library. Figures 1a and 2a show what a 360° camera captures. Seen in its entirety (in a two-dimensional format), this is of course a very distorted image, with objects growing increasingly larger as they are situated closer to the camera. It is only by viewing a small portion of this image, as one would when seeing them through VR-goggles, that the volumetric effect takes hold. We illustrate this with figures 1b, 1c, 2b and 2c. When only seeing one small portion of the screen at a time, it ceases to appear as distorted and the increase in size of objects that are closer to the camera add to the illusion of depth and perspective. A considerable part of what makes these virtual environments feel very lifelike, is that a viewer can turn or tilt his head in any direction, showing another portion of the 360° image with another corresponding part of the environment or space. We would like to stress the fact that the effect is a lot more convincing when wearing VR-goggles: the two-dimensional representation of the effect in this appendix only serves to illustrate the principle and does not adequately convey how lifelike 360° videos seen through VR-goggles can be.

### *Choosing the right hardware*

Choosing the right hardware is an important step in any research involving VR and will depend greatly on what is to be achieved. We ended up choosing the Oculus Go (manufactured by Facebook) as VR-goggles to be used, not just because it was very moderately priced (219€), but because at the time (June 2018) it also offered the highest display-resolution, even when comparing to far more expensive devices. A high display-resolution was very important for us, considering our goal is to evoke an immersive and life-like experience for our respondents. An important limitation to this device is that it was designed primarily as a media-viewer and therefore only offers a stationary experience, meaning users cannot move through a virtual

space as with other, more expensive or more recently produced devices. One could navigate virtual spaces with this device using an on-screen cursor that can be controlled via a handheld controller (that came with the device), likening the experience to exploring a neighbourhood in Google Street View. The other important piece of hardware we required, was a 360° camera. Again, we had many different options. At the consumer and so-called ‘prosumer’ level, 360° camera’s come in a price range between 50€ and 2000€. Professional 360° cameras can cost anywhere north of 4000€. We eventually opted for a GoPro Fusion, costing 450€, because it was a reputable and affordable option to capture images in 5K-resolution. The most important limitation of the device is that it only supports monoscopic (instead of stereoscopic) video, meaning there is no 3D-offset and therefore a less powerful illusion of depth. This was an economical choice, considering stereoscopic 360° camera’s fall into a considerably higher price range, but it was also defensible considering how monoscopic video still looks very convincing and life-like as long as there are not too many interactions with objects in the foreground of the environment you are filming. In other words: there is little difference between monoscopic and stereoscopic as long as what is depicted is at some distance of the camera, which we could take into account while filming. Once some more minor pieces of equipment such as memory cards and a tripod were purchased, a total amount of 780€ was spent on hardware.

### *Documenting the libraries*

Considering the libraries varied strongly in size, the time it took to film them also varied quite significantly (the smallest one took about an hour, while the largest one took almost three hours). We decided to capture as many different viewpoints as possible, but for the sake of uniformity, we self-imposed strict guidelines for the documentation process. For example: we always captured the exterior of the library in such a way that the building could be seen in one glance. This meant that the camera would be further away from the building if it was bigger and closer to it if the building was smaller. Next, we filmed several shots approximately three meters from the entrance. Once inside, two shots were made in an identical way in every library: one just after entering and another close to the information desk. After that, we would explore the library, trying to find viewpoints that would capture the unique aesthetic of the building. It was decided to film the interior of every library during closing hours to avoid too much variation in number and types of visitors, putting the emphasis instead on the architectural qualities of the building.

### *Choosing software for post-production*

Two different types of software were used in processing the video's. Since the 360° camera used two different camera's that simultaneously capture a 180° field of view, these two videos needed to be stitched together, which happened with a piece of software provided by the manufacturer of the camera (GoPro). This was a (painfully) slow process: stitching all videos together took days of processing on a powerful desktop computer. Next, a selection of clips had to be made and these needed to be edited together so that every library was represented in two videos: one showing the exterior and one showing the interior. Again, we could choose from several video editing software programs to accomplish this, but eventually opted for Final Cut Pro X, since it is (known to be) user-friendly and, even more importantly, supports 360° video. Editing the clips together was, for the most part, very straightforward. For a limited selection of clips however, a visual effect had to be applied that allowed us to superimpose a small portion of a certain shot with another take using the exact same picture frame. The reason for this was that, since the camera captures the environment in 360° and several shots had to be done in large open and public places, the researcher handling the camera couldn't always hide behind an object. To avoid having the researcher in those shots, this visual effect had to be applied in post-production.

### *(Minor) problems encountered in the field*

The lenses inside a VR-headset lenses can fog up on occasion, but this is quickly remedied by cleaning the lenses, taking a little break and lowering the temperature of the room (by opening a window for example). This mostly happened when respondents just came from outside or had done some form of physical activity, such as riding their bike, just before starting the interview. Furthermore, three respondents reported that an image looked distorted. This remark was always made about the same image, one that prominently featured a bookcase that was located quite close to the camera. This is a consequence of using monoscopic, instead of stereoscopic camera's (as explained above). While regrettable, considering it happened only with one video and to only three out of 73 respondents, it is perhaps negligible and does not merit spending considerably more on a stereoscopic camera just to remedy this problem. Moreover, one respondent, who mentioned to be on the autistic spectrum and very sensitive to all sorts of sensory stimuli, could not tolerate the screen turning to black (which happened after viewing a video) and reported an annoying 'flickering' in these moments. This person was able to

complete the interview, however, by simply taking off the goggles when the screen turned to black in between viewing libraries. All other respondents kept the VR-goggles on for the full duration of the interview. Finally, one respondent reported feeling slightly dizzy after the interview, but not in any way severe enough that it required stopping the interview. We suspect this problem will occur much more frequently if the virtual environment that respondents are confronted with becomes more interactive and if they actually have to ‘move’ through the virtual space.

## Tables

Table a: Distribution of age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18 to 29 years old	11	15,1	15,9	15,9
30 to 44 years old	21	28,8	30,4	46,4
45 to 59 years old	21	28,8	30,4	76,8
60 years or older	16	21,9	23,2	100,0
No answer	4	5,5	100,0	
Total	73	100		

Table b: Distribution of gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	27	37,0
Female	44	60,3
No answer	2	2,7
Total	73	98,6

Table c: Distribution of education levels

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
None or lower education	6	8,2	8,2
Lower secondary education	7	9,6	17,8
Higher secondary education	18	24,7	42,5
Higher education	41	56,2	98,6
Other	1	1,4	100,0
Total	73	100,0	

Table d: cross table showing familiarity with VR in every age category

	No prior experience	Limited prior experience	Extensive prior experience
18 to 29 years	2	8	1
30 to 44 years	9	8	4
45 to 59 years	13	8	0
60 years or older	15	0	1
Total	39	24	6

**Figures**

Figure 1a



Figure 1b



Figure 1c



Figure 2a



Figure 2b

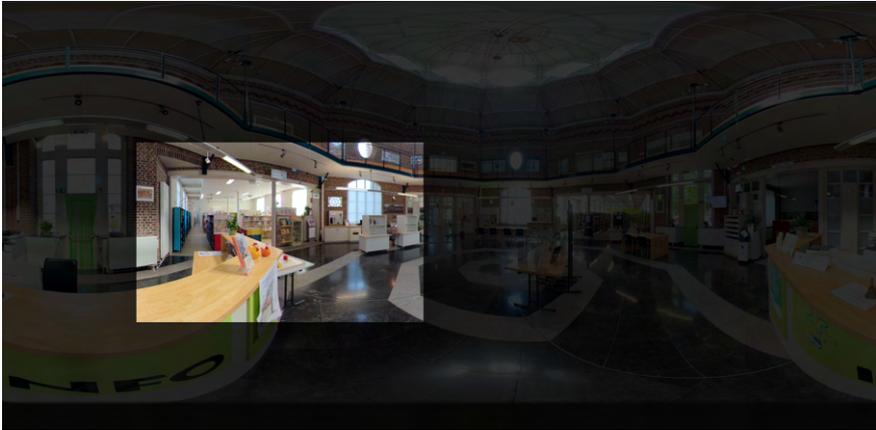


Figure 2c





## CHAPTER IV

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A sociology of architecture



## **Introduction**

Is the public library one of the (last) few truly democratic cultural institutions? Or is it, to put it colourfully, another class-cultural battleground where those with lower levels of cultural capital are hopelessly outgunned? These (big) questions lie at the heart of this dissertation. Of course, as mentioned several times before in previous chapters, public libraries do quite well in reaching people with lower levels of education or income compared to other cultural institutions such as the theatre, museums or opera houses. However, it is also a fact that those with lower levels of education visit public libraries (increasingly) less frequent compared to those with higher levels of education. As shown in chapter one, individuals with a higher education degree were six times more likely to have visited a public library in 2014 compared to individuals who (at most) had finished elementary school (while they were ‘only’ four times more likely in 2004). It should also be noted that this trend cannot be explained by other changes in the composition of the visiting public of public libraries. Quite the contrary, in fact, since it is especially younger visitors (who are statistically more likely to be higher educated) who visit public libraries increasingly less frequent in comparison to the early 2000’s. As we argued in chapters one, two and three, public libraries do not (fully) live up to their reputation of being as low-threshold and approachable as they present themselves to be.

The ‘evaporation’ of (especially) the lower educated among the visitors of public libraries is remarkable, worrying and (frustratingly) difficult to understand or explain when taking ‘classic’ indicators of public libraries’ functioning into consideration. Membership fees, opening hours, amount of staff present, the number of cultural activities organized, the characteristics of the collection; analyses based on our user survey data suggest that these have no (or very limited) impact on the attendance levels of the lower educated (as discussed in chapter one). To put it

plainly: sociologists have (had) no good advice to give to public library professionals on how to stimulate the attendance of lower educated visitors. We believe, however, that cultural sociology (and Bourdieu's ideas and concepts in particular) can offer us a new and fresh perspective on the matter: if we wish to understand differences in interpretation, appreciation and behaviour that are connected to education level, we should pay attention to what we described as the 'cultural dimension of class membership' in chapter one. It is less common to think of public libraries as (interaction) settings where cultural capital, habitus or conspicuous consumption are very relevant, but why wouldn't they be? Their core activity is lending out books and other materials that belong to both popular 'lowbrow' and 'legitimate' 'highbrow' culture and they were founded (often around the start of the 20th century) on the notion that members of the working class should be given the opportunity to develop themselves through culture and so doing, increase their opportunities for societal advancement.

But what actually constitutes a library's look and feel? What makes it appealing and inviting? And do people from different social classes really have different tastes and preferences? What makes a library appear either 'highbrow' or 'lowbrow'? In chapter two, we identified the architectural style of the buildings in which public libraries are housed as the most promising entry-point for understanding more about education- and class-based differences in how public libraries are perceived and experienced. We had two reasons for doing so. Firstly, the last two decades have seen a worldwide trend to house public libraries in so-called 'iconic' buildings. Paul Jones (2011) defines 'iconic' buildings as being very 'distinctive', 'eye-catching', 'media-friendly', 'contemporary', often quite 'large' buildings that 'physically dominate the surrounding landscape', predominantly use 'bare' materials (such as glass and concrete) and utilize a 'limited colour palette'. The two libraries shown below are good examples of public libraries constructed in this style.

*Vienna (2013)*



*Tongling (2015)*



These are, of course, a far cry from the more ‘traditional’ library buildings that most people grew up with, featuring either very ‘classicist’, but even more often just very inconspicuous ‘everyday’ architecture. It is important to mention that, outside of public libraries, this iconic architectural style is predominantly applied to more ‘highbrow’ cultural institutions (eg, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao) and/or very professional, international environments such as office buildings (eg, The Shard in London). In short: spaces that are (simply because of the nature of the institutions they house) more frequently visited by members of the (higher) middle class and less by members of the working class. Secondly, analyses based on the 2018 Flemish public library user survey data (also presented in chapter two) showed that subjective satisfaction with the spatial and architectural qualities of the library building has the greatest impact on library users experiencing their library as being ‘inviting’ or not. Other factors, that we intuitively might expect to be of greater importance, such as the friendliness of the staff, were found to be much less relevant than the building and interior design of the library. These considerations led us to perform another (exploratory) analysis on the user survey data that would allow us to identify libraries which were evaluated significantly different (with regards to their ‘invitingness’ and ‘attractiveness’) by respondents with different education levels. Among the seven libraries that we identified as being more ‘inviting’ and more ‘attractive’ for

respondents with higher levels of education, four libraries had buildings with unmistakable ‘iconic’ characteristics. The three libraries that were evaluated better by respondents with lower levels of education, on the other hand, were housed in more inconspicuous and ‘ordinary’ buildings.

### *Methodology*

Now that we had found interesting cases (libraries with buildings that are appreciated differently by visitors with different levels of education), our ambition was to deepen our understanding on what exactly ‘makes’ these spaces less inviting for certain types of (potential) visitors. In order to allow for respondents to ‘visit’, discuss and evaluate the different libraries (we had identified through exploratory analysis) in a (relatively) short amount of time, an experimental research design using Virtual Reality-technology was developed. This approach solved a multitude of practical and methodological problems, all of which are discussed at length in chapter three. We conducted 73 ‘VR-assisted interviews’ with randomly recruited respondents from different ages, income levels and education levels. All respondents ‘visited’ the same five public libraries, albeit virtually, and were given the chance to share their thoughts and evaluate these libraries on how much they liked or disliked the (architectural) style of the building and interior and how inviting they considered these libraries to be. In short: respondents were asked to evaluate all five libraries on their architectural qualities and look and feel, but were also given space to share spontaneous thoughts and critiques outside of the aesthetic.

Since we gathered over 27 hours worth of interviews, we felt it was essential to first try and approach the data in a quantitative way. The interviews were meticulously coded and the resulting data was subsequently linked to the answers that every respondent had given to questions regarding their socio-demographic background in a separate written questionnaire. This yielded a dataset that allowed for simple quantitative analyses, such as drawing correlations and generating frequency tables, while also allowing us to present certain things graphically using Multiple Component Analysis (eg, how education level is connected to the use of certain adjectives). It goes without saying that the size of the sample limited our options, but this approach proved valuable nonetheless. These analyses provided us with a ‘compass’, a ‘floor plan’ that helped us navigate this myriad of evaluations and opinions and provided us with an overview of general patterns of class-based and socio-demographic differences in how these buildings are experienced and evaluated. It also allowed us to identify respondents whose judgment seemed to differ strongly from that of respondents with a comparable profile. Analysing the interviews while being guided by quantitative data brought attention to things that otherwise might have eluded us and helped us to avoid being guided too much by our own preconceptions about what we thought we might find. A lengthy, additional report detailing the results of these analyses can be found in the appendix of this dissertation. We occasionally refer to specific tables, paragraphs or sections in footnotes throughout this chapter, but consulting the report (in full) is not essential: it functions mainly as a reference document in the context of this dissertation.

Before expanding on how we plan to use the results of these analyses in this chapter, we need to add that (next to excerpts stemming from the VR-assisted interviews conducted with randomly recruited respondents) we will also be presenting excerpts from in-depth interviews with architects. Since architecture takes such a central role in our research, we felt it necessary

to include a professional perspective on the subject. Six architects (four men and two women) with an average age of 46 (the youngest being 28 years old and the oldest 70 years old) were interviewed over the course of a year. For more detailed information regarding the profiles of the architects we interviewed, please see the appendix of this chapter. We should mention that we had hoped to interview more architects, but Covid-19 tempered our ambition. In any case, despite being limited in number, the six interviews provided us with many interesting comments and perspectives. For that reason, excerpts from these interviews will also be discussed here.

### *Telling the larger story*

This chapter aims to go beyond a mere description of results (as presented in the additional report) by letting the insights gained from coding and analysing the VR-assisted interviews guide a more qualitative analysis of both the VR-assisted interviews and the in-depth interviews with architects and approaching the whole from a distinctly theoretical perspective. There has been continuous attention for class-based dispositions to art and culture within cultural sociology for decades, with much discussion centred around the theories and ideas put forth by Pierre Bourdieu. Our research follows this tradition by showing both that many of his findings and hypotheses (still) ring true (today), while also placing question marks behind some aspects of his work. To a certain extent, this chapter is a collection of four papers (each presented in a separate section) with Bourdieu being the thread that runs through them. In the first section, we discuss the central position that education level takes in Bourdieusian analysis in light of our findings. Next, in section two, we apply his concept of ‘legitimacy’ and the ‘language of the dominant class’ to how respondents from different social classes expressed themselves during the VR-assisted interviews and discuss what the implications could be for

‘community consultation’. Thereafter, in section three, we take a critical look at how ‘cultural objects’ are operationalized by Bourdieu and compare this to our own approach. This is then followed by a discussion in section four of (what we consider to be) unique properties of architecture (as an art-form) and what their significance is in terms of a sociological perspective on architecture.

### *Overview of ‘visited’ libraries*

Before we move on to the first section, it is necessary to provide more context on the public libraries that our respondents ‘visited’ and evaluated in the VR-assisted interviews. These will remain anonymous throughout this chapter, a choice that was made to help convince the libraries to participate in the research, which was not always self-evident, considering we are studying (in a very detailed way) how ‘culturally democratic’ the look and feel of these libraries is. We hope to have sufficiently argued in previous chapters that this is a very sensitive, perhaps even controversial topic, when discussing public libraries. Moreover, outright ‘identifying’ individual libraries as being ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘problematic’ or ‘optimal’, was never the main objective of this research project.

However, it is of course crucial that readers can form a clear picture of what types of buildings we are talking about. This is why we have developed a website ([www.torvub.be/360library](http://www.torvub.be/360library)) that features 360 degree images of the libraries. This website allows readers to (interactively) view the environments in much the same way as they were experienced by respondents and architects, with the interface and controls making it possible to look around the different spaces and interiors. Each library has been given a pseudonym based on a type of building it was

frequently compared to. Below, we provide a short description of every library, a summary of the patterns of evaluation that became apparent through quantitative analysis and a selection of adjectives used by respondents to describe the buildings. The adjectives used here are ‘neutral’ (adjectives such as ‘ugly’ or ‘cosy’ were of course often used, but will not be mentioned here) and pertain solely to aesthetic and formal elements. We would like to encourage readers to take a look at the 360 degree environments on our website while reading the descriptions.

**‘The Mansion’** is located in a small town. The library is part of a bigger ‘complex’ featuring other services organized by the municipality, such as an (amateur) art academy and social services. The façade of the building was constructed in the second half of the 19th century and is classified as a ‘mansion’ (hence its pseudonym). However, the façade is just one side of the story, since the actual library itself is located in a recently (during the last decade) constructed ‘expansion’ of the complex. This

explains why the interior of the library is often described by respondents as being very ‘modern’ or even ‘industrial’, while the building is described as being ‘classical’ and ‘historic’. On average, this library was evaluated the poorest



of all libraries included in this research with regard to its look and feel. This library does not have an extremely ‘divisive’ look and feel, but it’s interior is experienced and evaluated less favourably by respondents with higher levels of occupational prestige. ‘The Mansion’ is evaluated more consistently across social classes compared to most other libraries in our research, but descriptions do vary between respondents with different levels of education. Adjectives used by respondents to describe the building and interior are ‘classical’, ‘modern’, ‘historic’, ‘white’, ‘grey’, ‘stately’, ‘light’ and ‘industrial’.

**‘The Cinema’** is located in a city. It is the second newest of all the libraries that were ‘visited’ by respondents, being constructed in the late 2000’s. It is located on a large, open square and the library was part of the renovation project of said square. ‘The Cinema’ is quite large and features walls (on one side) that are completely glass-surface. Unlike ‘The Mansion’, the interior of ‘The Cinema’ is very much a continuation of the style of the exterior. ‘The Cinema’ is the best evaluated library in our research, which was somewhat of a surprise considering that it emerged from our exploratory analyses very clearly as a library where both the attractiveness



and ‘invitingness’ were very dependent on education level, with higher educated users giving distinctly better evaluations in the user survey. This forced us to look beyond the style of the building and consider which contextual factors

could be in play. When taking a closer look at what respondents (of the user survey) who gave a poor evaluation of ‘The Cinema’s’ attractiveness and ‘invitingness’ said in an open question at the end of the questionnaire, the theme of ‘street youth’ loitering in and around the library became apparent (often explicitly mentioning that these ‘street youth’ had a migration background). Probably this will have had some effect on our exploratory analyses, although it should be emphasized that every (quantitative) analysis of the VR-assisted interviews did point towards ‘The Cinema’ being evaluated significantly better by respondents with a higher socio-economic status. Adjectives used by respondents to describe the building and interior are ‘modern’, ‘big’, ‘high’, ‘spacious’, ‘black’, ‘clear’ and ‘architectural’.

**‘The School’** is easily the smallest library in this research. It is located in a rural municipality. Although ‘The Church’ (discussed below) is located in an even smaller municipality, it does have a considerably larger library. Similar to ‘The Mansion’, ‘The School’ it is located in a larger ‘complex’ that features different functions, one of which is a small venue for local theatre productions. The building is certainly not new, but also not historic, being built in an inconspicuous style that was popular throughout the 70’s and 80’s in



Belgium. ‘The School’, certainly the most ‘typical’ and ‘recognizable’ library in our research, is a very interesting case. Analysis shows that it manages to create an approachable, low-threshold setting for the elderly and lower educated visitors. It should, however, also be said that the groups who visit public libraries most frequently (affluent, higher educated, middle class) do not respond well to the look and feel of this library. It is perhaps a telling anecdote that, when reaching out to the librarian in charge of ‘The School’, there was genuine disbelief that we could be interested in learning more about its aesthetic, architecture or interior design. Adjectives used by respondents to describe the building and interior are ‘small’, ‘low’, ‘old’, ‘old-fashioned’, ‘neat’, ‘orderly’ and (above all) ‘cosy’.



**‘The Ship’** is the most recently constructed (less than five years ago) and also largest library in this research. It is located in a city. It was built in an abstract, artistic style that respondents most often described as ‘modern’, while architects described it as

‘contemporary’. It gets its (rather strange) pseudonym from the fact that most respondents said the building resembled a docked ship, an effect that was intended by the architectural firm that designed the building. Because it is such a recent building, just as with ‘The Cinema’, the interior is very much a reflection of the exterior in terms of architectural style. In preparation of this study, we ourselves identified this library as being the most iconic (as described by Paul Jones) in Flanders. Analyses of respondents’ reactions to ‘The Ship’ are very clear: it is a library that is evaluated significantly better by respondents who have a higher socio-economic status and seems to appeal far less to respondents with lower levels of education (especially if they are also older). We see that lower educated respondents find the building far less ‘recognizable’ as a public library than higher educated respondents and that those who have (had) a job with lower occupational prestige find the interior less recognizable or ‘typical’ for a public library. Adjectives used by respondents to describe the building and interior are ‘modern’, ‘contemporary’, ‘big’, ‘architectural’, ‘dark’, ‘black’, ‘grey’, ‘austere’, ‘minimalistic’ and ‘clean’.

**‘The Church’** is located in the smallest municipality in our research and has the oldest building. It was constructed in the middle of the 19th century. Originally, this building was an elementary school before it was repurposed as a local public library in 1994, with an extensive restoration taking place around the same time. The library hosts several local cultural organizations (eg, the local history circle). Although a

lot of historic elements were preserved in the interior, it also features quite a lot of contemporary elements, which explains why adjectives such as ‘modern’ and ‘new’ are used to describe the building alongside ‘old’ and



‘historic’. ‘The Church’ is the most difficult to make sense of with regard to class-based dispositions. It’s not just that there is a limited number of socio-demographic variables displaying significant effects (mostly age, to a much lesser extent gender, education level of a respondent’s parents and the participation to highbrow activities), the effects found here also contradict what we expected to find based on our exploratory analysis of the user survey data. Perhaps the fact that we also interviewed respondents who never visit public libraries is part of the explanation. We also consider it likely that there are specific contextual factors at play beyond the look and feel of the building, although these cannot be discerned as easily as for ‘The Cinema’. Adjectives used by respondents to describe the building and interior are ‘old’, ‘classic’, ‘historic’, ‘renovated’, ‘restored’, ‘renewed’, ‘modern’, ‘new’, ‘typical’, ‘orderly’, ‘neat’ and ‘light’.

*Do evaluations really differ according to education level?*

We would like to close out the introduction by emphasizing that education-based differences in appreciation and evaluation presented themselves clearly throughout our results, especially when considering the most ‘extreme’ example of iconic architecture that we confronted our respondents with: ‘The Ship’.

Table 1: Average score’s given to libraries

Rank	All respondents (N = 72 <sup>17</sup> )	Higher education (N = 41)	High school (N = 18)	Elementary school (N = 13)
1	The Cinema (8,3)	The Cinema (8,4)	The Cinema (8,0)	The Church (8,5)
2	The Church (7,8)	<b>The Ship (7,8)</b>	The Church (7,6)	The Cinema (8,4)
3	<b>The Ship (7,5)</b>	The Church (7,7)	<b>The Ship (7,4)</b>	The School (7,5)
4	The School (7,0)	The School (6,9)	The School (7,1)	The Mansion (6,5)
5	The Mansion (6,3)	The Mansion (6,2)	The Mansion (6,4)	<b>The Ship (6,3)</b>

Table one shows how libraries are ranked based on the average scores that were given by respondents to every library within three subcategories of education level. The second column shows the average scores that were given to libraries by respondents who completed higher education (college or university). This ranking strongly resembles the ranking in the first column (all respondents), with the exception of ‘The Ship’ being bumped up one place, which indicates that ‘The Ship’ is evaluated better by the higher educated and that the majority of our respondents were higher educated. Column four, displaying the average scores that were given

<sup>17</sup> One interview was deemed completely ‘unusable’ and was excluded from all analyses. For more information on respondent selection, see page 6 of the report in the appendix

by respondents who (only) finished high school, shows that ‘The Ship’ falls back to third place and the average score of ‘The Church’ and ‘The Mansion’ rising slightly. Column five, which shows the average scores given by respondents who did not finish high school, displays some remarkable changes in average scores given: ‘The Cinema’ is no longer ranked first, although the average score is identical to that given by higher educated respondents (8,4). It is now ‘The Church’ that takes first place and ‘The School’ gets a considerably higher score, allowing it to get bumped up to third place. ‘The Ship’, on the other hand, takes a sharp fall downwards, ending up as the worst scored library, again suggesting that education level plays an important role in how this very contemporary, modern, iconic library is experienced and evaluated. Although our sample is small, we do see that, when stripped of all other contextual factors (staff, organization, collection, membership fees, etc) these libraries are experienced and evaluated differently by respondents with different education levels. The question remains, however, whether our strong (and therefore typically Bourdieusian) emphasis on education level in previous chapters was completely justified. A question we will endeavour to answer in section one.

## 1. The central position of education level in Bourdieusian analysis

Parsons (1976), Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1991, 1993) and DiMaggio and Useem (1978) all underscored the importance of education level with regard to class-based dispositions to art, aesthetics and cultural participation. In texts that, to a great extent, established the subject of how taste interplays with cultural capital (and how this sustains and reproduces inequality), education level was consistently found to be *'the most salient determinant of arts involvement'* (DiMaggio & Useem, 1978, p. 156). Bourdieu (1991), for instance, wrote about art museums: *'In addition to visiting and its patterns, all visitors' behavior, and all their attitudes to works on display, are directly and almost exclusively related to education.'* (p. 37) DiMaggio and Useem (1978) also stressed that the importance of education level is ubiquitous in *'advanced capitalist societies'* (p. 156).

Our research, which has sought to understand how class-based dispositions to art and aesthetics function in light of the experience and appreciation of architecture, also placed education level front and centre. The notion that education level is crucial in understanding this subject, has guided and informed both our theoretical framework and our methodology. The exploratory analyses presented in chapter two, which were aimed at finding interesting public libraries that our respondents could (virtually) visit and evaluate, treated education level (and not income, occupational prestige, age or gender) as the independent variable. Looking at the results of our analyses of the VR-assisted interviews, we would argue that this choice was a correct one. Considering the different variables that can express social class membership, education appears to be the most important: both the education level of the respondent and of a respondent's parent play a distinct role in the experience and evaluation of architecture and spaces. It's also interesting to see that the more 'extreme' manifestations of architectural styles (either very

mundane or very ‘iconic’) elicit the biggest differences in evaluation between respondents with different education levels<sup>18</sup>. The following reactions to ‘The Ship’ (the most ‘iconic’ library in our research) are good illustrations of this:

*‘I think it’s a magnificent building, (...) all those different protruding layers that aren’t identical, I think it’s really, I mean, architecture-wise it’s something you just can’t ignore, the location is wonderful too, it’s wonderfully located by the water.’<sup>19</sup>*

- Woman, 22 years old, higher education

*‘Jesus Christ, I think it’s extremely hideous. (...) It reminds me of thunderclouds, it has nothing in terms of attractiveness or cosiness.’<sup>20</sup>*

- Woman, 83 years old, elementary school

Moreover, we also found that the occupational prestige of a respondent’s (last) job seems to be more determinative than income with regard to how the buildings of public libraries are experienced. All of this points to a confirmation of our hypothesis, formulated in chapter one, that the ‘cultural dimension’ of class membership is more important than the ‘economical dimension’ of class membership when it comes to how we experience the ‘look and feel’ of a place. The amount of cultural capital that an individual was able (or allowed) to accrue during their formative years constitutes, to a considerable degree, their experience of architecture and spaces: it influences whether we find certain aspects of architecture more important than others (eg, higher educated respondents value the use of high-quality materials more<sup>21</sup>) and also helps shape specific aesthetic preferences. A lack of ‘familiarity’ with certain aesthetic codes and

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<sup>18</sup> See tables 20 (‘The School’) and 23 (‘The Ship’) in paragraph three of the report in the appendix (p. 29 & 34)

<sup>19</sup> *‘Ik vind het echt een prachtig gebouw, (...) al die verschillende lagen die er uit steken en niet identiek zijn, ik vind dat echt, allé, qua architectuur is ’t gewoon iets waar ge niet kunt naast kijken, het heeft een mooie ligging ook, prachtige ligging aan het water’*

<sup>20</sup> *‘Christus Jezus, ik vind het vreselijk lelijk. (...) Het doet me denken aan onweerswolken, het heeft niets aantrekkelijk of gezellig.’*

<sup>21</sup> See table 30 in paragraph four of the report in the appendix (p. 49)

architectural styles contributes to perceiving a space as (more) uninviting (eg, respondents who did not finish high school struggling to compare ‘The Ship’ to other types of institutions or buildings<sup>22</sup>).

### *Looking beyond education level*

Other (more recent) research into the subject of taste and aesthetic dispositions also confirms the importance of education level and defends the persistent attention paid to it, while also calling into question the way in which education level dominates as an indicator for cultural consumption and appreciation in cultural sociological research. The (simple) quantitative analyses performed on the dataset resulting from the coding of the VR-interviews, also suggest that education level should not be treated as singular: age, for instance, appears to play a major factor in how libraries were evaluated with regard to their recognisability, their attractiveness and their ‘invitingness’. Age is at least (and arguably even more) important than the education level of the respondent, the education level of the respondent’s highest schooled parent and the occupational prestige of the respondent’s (last) job. Income, how often a respondent participates to ‘highbrow’ cultural activities and gender appear to be less relevant<sup>23</sup>.

Van Eijck and Bargeman (2004), came to a similar conclusion regarding the importance of both age and education level: *‘age and education are becoming more important. (...) Traditional (gender) roles and money (scarcity) do indeed determine taste patterns less’* (p. 455-456). Of course, differences in experience and appreciation between age-groups are likely best

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<sup>22</sup> See tables 24 & 25 and figures 12 & 13 and discussion in paragraph three of the report in the appendix (p. 35 - 36)

<sup>23</sup> See correlation matrices in paragraph three of the report in the appendix (p. 15-40)

understood as generational differences. Rosa (2011) posits that *'when social change (...) reaches the threshold of an intergenerational pace'*, as it has done in post-modern society, *'the relationship between generations is obviously fundamentally altered'* (p. 210), with this fundamentally altered relationship also extending itself to differences in taste and preferences for certain cultural practices and activities. We consider it unlikely that opinions on what constitutes 'good' or 'welcoming' architecture would be so divided across age-groups in, for instance, pre-modern societies. Different generations in post-modern societies, however, often have *'a notably different relationship to history and the cultural canon'* (Friedman et al., 2015, p. 4). The idea that a (relative) consistency of life-experiences would contribute to a higher convergence in cultural preferences and tastes between generations, underscores the notion that no indicator can be treated as a thing unto itself: generational differences are best understood from the perspective of social change and some of the most drastic societal changes in recent years pertain to the professional life of individuals and the degree to which (especially higher) education has become more self-evident. Age (or what it means in terms of membership of a certain generation) also does not function solely as a proxy for class-differences, it has its own dynamic, as Friedman et al. (2015) underline when they discuss the generational 'discord' among those with higher levels of cultural capital with regard to how they view 'high culture': *'High culture is classically oriented towards iconic works from the past, even when, as with the avant-garde, these are a platform to launch new and novel forms against. The historical canon is thus a benchmark against which excellence is measured, even amongst those who innovate. By contrast, it is argued that emerging cultural capital celebrates the new and contemporary for their own sake, and has much less interest in past canonical objects'* (p. 4). This insight helps to make sense of our finding that iconic architecture is not only evaluated better by respondents with more cultural capital (who have higher levels of education), but also better by younger respondents within that group.

Although our sample is too small to effectively study interaction-effects between different socio-demographic variables in a statistical sense, we do see indications of converging tastes and evaluations between respondents with similar characteristics (eg, age, gender) that are often ‘embedded’ in varying levels of educational attainment. It is therefore useful to deploy a less rigid approach to the subject than the one established by Bourdieu, as Prior (2005) argues: *‘(T)here is a distinct lack of attention to the complex and cross-cutting mechanisms of inequality based on class, gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity in Bourdieu’s work. Contemporary studies of consumption, even those that have adopted the approach taken in Distinction, have pointed to the need to replace Bourdieu’s rather rigid conceptions of class with a more fluid, diverse and declassified conception of stratification.’* (p. 131)

### *Intersectionality*

A good example of a ‘cross-cutting mechanism’ in our research was found with regard to the interplay between gender and education level. The limited amount of significant correlations found for gender is perhaps somewhat surprising, but it is telling that two of the three gender-effects were found for ‘The Ship’<sup>24</sup>. Generally, men tend to perceive this library as being more inviting than women. As stated before, our sample is too small to conduct more detailed statistical analysis into this subject, but simple cross-tables that allow for comparisons between different subgroups based on gender and education level do seem to suggest a type of ‘comorbidity’ for ‘The Ship’: respondents who are both female and lower educated evaluate this library more poorly than respondents who are not part of either subgroup. In that sense, gender acts as a ‘mediator’ of sorts, appearing to soften the effect of education level for men

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<sup>24</sup> See table 23 in paragraph three of the report in the appendix (p. 34)

and exacerbating it for women. This finding falls in line with the work of Wasserman and Frenkel (2015), which we discussed in chapter two. Their research showed that women from working-class backgrounds experience and evaluate overly austere, outspokenly professional environments worse than men from working-class backgrounds. The authors even mentioned that women *'experience the space as more oppressive and marginalizing'* (p. 1501). The business-like look and feel of 'The Ship' (one in three respondents stated that the 'The Ship' resembles an office building) that is typical of iconic architecture, explains why we see significant correlations between the gender and education level of respondents and the 'invitingness' of the building and interior. The first excerpt below shows how one female respondent described 'The Ship' shortly before comparing it to the offices of a 'law firm':

*'It's quite, uhm, how do you call it? Threatening, I think (...). Much too dark and black and you can't see anything through the windows... it's more like a fortress.'*<sup>25</sup>

- Woman, 40 years old, Higher education

*'It doesn't really look like a library (...). I think it looks more like an office building. (...) Yeah, it really doesn't appeal to me. No. No. No.'*

***'(...) And why do you say that?'***

*'Yeah, because it's so sombre, I think a library (...) it has to be a bit more cheerful I think, I think it's all quite, yeah, dark'*<sup>26</sup>

- Woman, 66 years old, elementary school

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<sup>25</sup> *'Het is nogal, euh, hoe noem je dat? Bedreigend vind ik zo (...) veel te donker en zwart en je ziet niets door de ramen... meer zo'n fort'*

<sup>26</sup> *'Het lijkt niet echt een bibliotheek (...) Ik denk dat het meer lijkt op een kantoorgebouw. (...) Ja, dat spreekt mij echt niet aan. Nee. Nee, nee.*

*(...) En waar ligt dat dan juist in?*

*Ja, omdat het zo somber is, ik vind een bibliotheek (...) dat moet wat vrolijker zijn vind ik, ik vind het allemaal vrij, ja, donker'*

It should perhaps be noted that none of our respondents explicitly referenced their gender as being relevant for their appraisal of ‘The Ship’. Two of the architects we interviewed, however, did emphasize the distinct ‘masculinity’ of ‘The Ship’ when we confronted them with the fact that we had found gender-effects with regard to the ‘invitingness’ of this library. One (female) architect described its style as ‘aggressive’ (which she carefully asserted would be more appealing to men) and another (male) architect expressed himself as followed:

*‘It’s like walking in to a cigar box (chuckles), that smoky brown colour, it exudes a ‘men only’ atmosphere’<sup>27</sup>*

- Architect, man, 60 years old

Recognition of the fact that gender plays a considerable part in how (potential) visitors experience iconic architecture does not trivialize the importance of cultural capital but, as we hope to have illustrated, simply adds an extra dimension to it. Our research confirms that education level is indeed the most salient class-based indicator of how (potential) visitors will experience iconic architecture, but also underlines the fact that paying attention to the ways in which education level interacts with other socio-demographic characteristics can add depth to our understanding. The fact that gender effects were (almost exclusively) found for ‘The Ship’ (the most extreme manifestation of iconic architecture in our research) is not an argument for discarding gender as a factor that should not be taken into consideration, but quite the opposite: the fact that these effects arise so outspokenly and almost exclusively for ‘The Ship’ is noteworthy and tells us something important about iconic architecture.

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<sup>27</sup> *‘Dat vind ik, alsof ge een sigarenkist binnenkomt (lachje), dat gerookt bruin, da’s echt een mannenbastion’*

*Education level as a subject of policy-oriented discourse*

Adopting a ‘multidimensional’ and ‘fluid’ outlook is challenging, but it does make it less likely to make caricatures out of class-based differences in cultural consumption. Ideal-types that succeed in offering solid ground for analysis should not be confused with a perfect reflection of society or the individuals that inhabit it, a point that Lahire (2008) also stresses when he makes a distinction between ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ cultural profiles, something we will go into more detail on later. Recognition of the fact that education level is the most salient, but also an imperfect indicator of class-based taste and subsequent behaviour (which should also be understood in terms of how it interacts with other relevant socio-demographic variables) should not be misconstrued as an argument against the persistent attention for education level in analysing differences in cultural appreciation and consumption. We posit that it is vital that social scientists keep stressing its importance, not in the least because attention to this important dimension is often wholly lacking from non-scientific and/or policy-oriented discourse regarding the democratization of art and cultural participation. We would argue that there is a certain disregard for education level: age, gender and even income are discussed much more frequently and self-evidently when trying to understand or remedy the unequal attendance of certain groups to public cultural institutions (such as public libraries). Contemporary cultural sociology however is, of course, permeated with Bourdieu’s idea’s regarding ‘habitus’, but we would argue that the complexity of the concept bars it from finding mainstream adoption in political discourse. Consider the following excerpt from ‘Outline of a theory of practice’ (1977):

*'The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (...) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations. (...) (T)he practices produced by the habitus (are) the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations.'* (p. 72)

Perhaps we shouldn't be too surprised that a concept such as cultural capital, which is at the same time the product of socialization and is simultaneously so determinative for disposition and behaviour can be misconstrued as being intellectualistic (or even moralistic). In chapter two, we claimed that 'people prefer to ignore class differences, whatever side of the spectrum they are on': concurrent with being hard to fully grasp for those outside of the social sciences, education level and cultural capital as explanations for preferences and behaviour is something of a taboo. Social scientists are likely the only group of people that feel truly comfortable in recognizing education level (and the effect it has on cultural capital attainment) as a critical factor in cultural tastes and behaviour.

#### *Meta-perspectives on 'invitingness'*

It is interesting to note here that little over half of all respondents explicitly and spontaneously discussed whether or not one or more of the libraries they 'visited' during the VR-assisted interview were also welcoming or accommodating enough for 'other types' of visitors. For example: respondents who had no children themselves would comment on how suited a library would be for children or respondents in good health would voice concerns about how accessible and manoeuvrable a library would be for disabled visitors.

*'If I would have children and this would be close to my house, I would take the kids to go read a book here'<sup>28</sup>*

- Woman, 24 years old, higher education

*'A lot of stairs it seems, yes, I immediately, yes, a lot of stairs, it's all stairs, yes, this might not be good for disabled people'<sup>29</sup>*

- Man, 56 years old, high school

This 'meta-perspective' was often an important aspect of a respondent's evaluation of a library and was commented on both positively and negatively, meaning that respondents felt a certain library was accommodating and welcoming (or not) for a specific type of user. Only two respondents, however, alluded to class-membership as a factor of potential importance in how a library could be perceived. Interestingly though, and this should come as no surprise, these comments were made while viewing 'The Cinema' (first excerpt below) and 'The Ship' (second excerpt below), the two most contemporary and iconic public libraries in our research:

*'It's not a typical building, but... yeah, I don't know if it would be inviting for everybody, but... yeah'*

***'And for who do you think it would be less inviting?'***

*'Well, for more "common" people, if I can say it like that, if you know what I mean'<sup>30</sup>*

- Woman, 51 years old, higher education

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<sup>28</sup> *'Als ik kinderen zou hebben en dit is zo, dicht bij mij thuis, zou ik wel met de kindjes een boekje gaan lezen hier'*

<sup>29</sup> *'Veel trappen precies. En ja, allé, wat ik mij direct, allé ja, veel trappen, allemaal trappen, ja, voor mindervaliden is dat misschien al niet zo vanzelfsprekend'*

<sup>30</sup> *'Het is geen typisch gebouw, maar... ja, ik weet niet of het voor iedereen uitnodigend zou zijn, maar... ja*

*Voor wie denkt u dat het misschien minder uitnodigend zou zijn?*

*Ja, meer volkse mensen, als ik dat zo mag uitdrukken, als ge begrijpt wat ik wil zeggen'*

*'I just thought of something: it's so very beautiful that, maybe, I think, there's a risk that a certain class of people experience a threshold to walk in here, you know what I mean? (...) I think that it is so beautiful that it gives it a bit of a more elitist feeling and that maybe a certain class of people will be more easily excluded'<sup>31</sup>*

- Woman, 43 years old, higher education

### *Architects and inclusivity*

Based on our in-depth interviews with architects, it appears that it is mostly a younger generation of architects that displays more awareness of the fact that social class or education level could contribute to a specific style of architecture being found more or less attractive and inviting:

*'I think that we, uhm, with the higher educated (...) we can use more experimental and contemporary design, because they understand it better and... appreciate it more (...), while with the lesser educated (...) we will make choices so that the whole is less hermetically sealed and more understandable'<sup>32</sup>*

- Architect, 32 years old, man

Another (younger) architect also acknowledged social class as being relevant, but simultaneously asserted that age is more important for architects to take into consideration. It should also be noted that, while discussing class-based differences, this architect also made a quite extreme characterization ('clochards') of social class differences. Moreover, it was

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<sup>31</sup> *'Ik maak mij net een bedenking: het ziet er zodanig mooi uit, dat je misschien, denk ik, weer het risico loopt dat je bepaalde klassen van mensen, tegenhoudt op de drempel, snap je wat ik bedoel? (...) Ik denk dat het zodanig mooi is en toch een beetje elitairder gevoel geeft dat misschien een bepaalde klasse mensen meer gaat uitsluiten.'*

<sup>32</sup> *'Ik denk dat we, euhm, bij hoogopgeleiden minder rekening moeten houden met die personen in die zin vooral op het esthetische vlak, dat we meer mogen experimenteren, hedendaagse vormgeving gebruiken, omdat die dat beter begrijpen en beter, ja, beter appreciëren (...), terwijl voor minder-hoogopgeleiden (...), euhm, bepaalde keuzes te maken zodanig dat het minder hermetisch is en verstaanbaarder'*

acknowledged that possible differences in social class are not really prioritized during the design process:

*'There is also, like... social class membership, but in real, nobody cares, when you do a project, you don't think about... You just think about how to prevent a 'clochard' to be under your roof outside'<sup>33</sup>*

- Architect, 28 years old, woman

When asked what the most 'important differences between people' are that have to be taken into consideration while designing a public building, architects generally pointed towards age. If we consider that age was, in fact, found to be so relevant for the architectural experience in our research, we cannot really argue that architects and policy-makers are 'wrong' to pay attention to age-differences. That being said, 'taking elderly visitors into consideration' in architecture and interior design mostly equates to making certain practical choices (mostly of an ergonomic nature,) which underlines the fact that architects do not approach age-based differences from a generational, class-cultural perspective. Nonetheless, acknowledging these needs of elderly visitors is also important, as one of the architects underscored:

*'There has been increased attention to people's needs, (...) older people, they used to be completely forgotten, they were written off, no longer important and now a lot of thought goes into what they think (...) is important'<sup>34</sup>*

- Architect, man, 70 years old

It should also be noted that we are not claiming that architects and policy-makers are not open to increasing the approachability and 'readability' of public libraries for the lower educated. At

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<sup>33</sup> Interview conducted in English

<sup>34</sup> *'Er is een grote aandacht ontstaan naar behoeftes van mensen, (...) oudere mensen, vroeger werden die totaal vergeten, uh, zij waren afgeschreven en niet meer belangrijk en daar wordt nu wel heel dikwijls over nagedacht ook, wat zij belangrijk (...) vinden.'*

the end of our in-depth interviews with architects, we briefly explained the subject we were working on and all considered it to be a valid perspective but also struggled to see how these kinds of differences could be taken into account in practice. Social class and cultural capital are simply not self-evident concepts to ‘work with’ when planning both the building and the program of a public library (or any other public space for that matter).

*The absence of social class in architectural theory*

We would argue that architects are not really taught to consider class-membership as an important factor that can influence the architectural experience. There is no strong tradition in thinking about social class in architectural theory, unlike the already established and increasing attention for differences in use and expectations based on age, best illustrated by the (recently published) book ‘Age-Inclusive Public Space’ (2020). In general, professionals and policymakers in the library sector are also far more susceptible to recognizing age (as well as income or migration history) as important factors that should help shape policy, but hardly ever bring social class to the foreground. For example: the fact that users have varying levels of education attainment is wholly ignored in the book ‘Planning the modern public library’ (McCabe & Kennedy, 2003), even in a chapter that focuses on ‘community consultation’. The book does, however, contain a lengthy chapter titled ‘Creating a senior-friendly library’.

Of course, architects do not completely ignore sociological insight, but we do suggest that they overlook social stratification in a lot of important ways and that ‘attention for the social’ within architecture is mostly limited to reflections on urban planning. Architectural theory seems fixated with the idea of a ‘universal’ user: spaces simply need to be user-friendly and ‘beautiful’

in order for them to ‘work’. Shusterman (1989) points towards Hume and Kant as those responsible for installing a mode of thinking about the aesthetic in which there is no room for considering social class. Both thinkers made it their goal to develop a philosophy of the aesthetic that transcended the mutable, with universalism and naturalism being the end goal. However, the theories of both Hume and Kant were strongly contradictory. Hume defends the notion that every individual whose perception is not corrupted by ‘illness or psychological afflictions’ is able to be a good critic of the aesthetic, but Shusterman rightly points out: *‘When we look at whom Hume regards as the good critic or ‘true judge’, it is obviously not a healthy innocent or homme sauvage, but someone who is thoroughly educated, socially trained, and culturally conditioned.’* (p. 105) It’s also worth noting that Kant had similarly essentialist ideas regarding the concept of space itself. Durkheim (1912) criticized this in his introduction to ‘The Elementary Forms of Religious Life’: *‘space is not the vague and indeterminate medium that Kant imagined. If purely and absolutely homogeneous, it would be of no use and would offer nothing for thought to hold on to. Spatial representation essentially consists in a primary coordination of given sense experience. (...) Space would not be itself if, like time, it was not divided and differentiated’* (p. 10). Durkheim proposes a positivistic approach to the study of space by claiming that the interpretation of space (and also time) depends on socialization: *‘all men of the same civilization conceive of space in the same manner’* (p. 11).

One could say that ‘universalistic’ ideas regarding the aesthetic experience have persevered since antiquity, ever since Pythagoras proposed that reality is mathematically structured and that therefore also beauty must be a mathematical attribute. This spawned a mode of thinking that would culminate in the notion of the ‘golden ratio’, in a way the ultimate expression of the idea that beauty is something transcendental and universal (Cornelis and Verwulgen, 2018). Modern sociology of course rejects this idea and states that the interpretation and experience of

art and culture, but also any space or setting, is shaped and influenced by our social background. Given that architects seem increasingly open to the idea that age-based differences should be taken into account, perhaps they can be persuaded to take social class-membership into the equation as well. We think cultural sociology can offer architectural theory a new framework for thinking about how architectural experience varies between different types of visitors. We would argue that cultural capital and education level should form the central axis of that framework, with other socio-demographic variables such as age, gender and occupational prestige adding nuance and depth. In the next section, we posit that discarding (outdated) universalistic notions about taste and aesthetic preferences and acknowledging (and valuing) differences in experience, evaluation and how different groups tend to express themselves, can help improve the practice of community consultation, an (often criticized) instrument used by policy-makers and architects when realizing public buildings.

## 2. Legitimate language and its implications for ‘community consultation’

Bourdieu attributes the inability of members of lower social classes to ‘correctly’ read and interpret cultural objects to a lack of cultural capital. The amount of cultural capital we possess will determine *‘the extent to which we are able to perceive the world aesthetically’* (Stewart, 2016, p. 48). What Bourdieu calls ‘pure taste’, which *‘asserts the absolute primacy of form over function’* (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 30), is necessary for a ‘correct reading’ of cultural objects. ‘Pure taste’ is also described by Bourdieu as the ‘dominant aesthetic’, one *‘that is expressive of a habitus cultivated through many years of education, and thus an accumulation of cultural capital; a lengthy period of time freed from economic necessity; and an implicit or explicit awareness of the state of play in the cultural field’* (Stewart, 2016, p. 48). Identifying ‘pure taste’ as the ‘dominant aesthetic’ points towards an important power dynamic: it suggests that certain classes, groups and individuals (who possess more cultural capital in comparison to others) dominate society’s discourse on art, aesthetics and cultural participation to a greater degree. It implies that some possess more ‘legitimacy’ than others for expressing approval or critique: *‘authority will depend, to a great extent, on the volume and distribution of the capital they possess or their position in the hierarchy of a social group or field’* (Stewart, 2016, p. 45).

By placing so much emphasis on form (by constructing buildings in a very artistic and abstract style), iconic architecture appeals more to those who have ‘pure taste’ and conversely harms the ‘readability’ and invitingness of public libraries for (potential) visitors who have relatively low levels of cultural capital. This, of course, is at odds with the societal function that public libraries have been tasked with: offering members of lower social classes the chance to develop themselves through culture, best expressed in Huysmans’ (2006) concept of the ‘social-pedagogic motive’. Our research shows that individuals with lower levels of education

attainment deem iconic public libraries as less approachable and recognizable compared to those with higher levels of education. We already mentioned the fact that lower educated respondents struggled to make comparisons to other types of buildings and institutions while viewing ‘The Ship’<sup>35</sup>. It is also noteworthy that ‘The School’, the library evaluated in a disproportionately favourable way by lower educated respondents, was found to be the most ‘typical’ library overall, especially when looking at the interior: three out of four respondents found ‘The School’ to have a ‘very typical’ interior, significantly more than the other libraries our respondents ‘visited’ (even the ‘The Mansion’ and ‘The Church’ were found to be ‘very typical’ by only one third of all respondents). ‘The School’ elicited a lot of the following types of reactions:

*‘Yes, that’s for me, as I’d say, a classic library’<sup>36</sup>*

- Man, 43 years old, high school

***‘And do you consider this to be a typical library building?’***

*‘I think there are a lot of this kind in Flanders, yes’<sup>37</sup>*

- Man, 37 years old, higher education

While ‘The School’ is very recognizable (as a library) across all social classes, it is apparent that this has more of an impact on favourable evaluations for those with lower levels of education than those with higher levels of education<sup>38</sup>, which suggests that the architectural style of a building being easily ‘decipherable’ (meaning that no significant amount of cultural capital is needed to ‘recognize’ it as a library) is more likely to attribute to a good experience

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<sup>35</sup> See figures 12 and 13 in paragraph three of the report in the appendix (p. 36)

<sup>36</sup> *‘Ja, da’s eigenlijk voor mij gewoon, gelijk ik zeg een klassieke bibliotheek’*

<sup>37</sup> *‘En is dit nu een typisch bibliotheekgebouw?’*

*Ik denk dat er zo veel zijn in Vlaanderen, ja’*

<sup>38</sup> See page 28 in paragraph three of the report in the appendix

among the lower educated and is less important for the higher educated (who are more prone to experience very recognizable public libraries as ‘mundane’ or ‘boring’). One respondent said the following about ‘The School’:

*‘It gives me the same feeling as the library in my own village, a bit outdated (...) and uhm, a bit boring’<sup>39</sup>*

- Man, 21 years old, higher education

### *‘Deciphering’ the iconic*

Public libraries adopting a very abstract and ‘artistic’ style that most people would associate with professional, business-like, international settings (eg, ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’ being compared to contemporary office buildings, banks, airports, etc) and highbrow cultural institutions (eg, museums, university buildings)<sup>40</sup> disrupts the process that Berger and Luckmann call ‘typification’, understanding the function of a specific building or place based on its aesthetic: *‘Along the same lines as the typification of people and social situations, typical programs of actions are attached to typical buildings: We go to the ‘mall’ in order to shop (not to pray), and we cheer our team on in the ‘stadium’* (Steets, 2015, p. 103). We posit that, to a certain extent, this disruption is intentional: public libraries have been keen to change their image and a change in architectural style serves the purpose of symbolizing that change. Results from the user survey we conducted, illustrate that public libraries have significantly changed their ‘program’ in the last two decades: the materials on offer have changed (eg, more audio-visual materials, an increasing number of public libraries lend out videogames), there has been

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<sup>39</sup> *‘Het (geeft) wel zo het gevoel als in de bibliotheek van bij mijn dorp, een beetje outdated (...) en euh, een beetje saai’*

<sup>40</sup> See tables 18-19 on page 25 and tables 24 and 25 on page 35 in paragraph three of the report in the appendix

a significant increase in the amount of activities that public libraries organize (eg, workshops, concerts) and many public libraries now feature a restaurant or coffee bar. These changes all point towards public libraries wishing to lose the image of ‘only’ being a repository for books and becoming more of a ‘community hub’. In itself, this diversification in program is likely a good thing, as long as the ‘classic’ core-task of lending out books is not endangered by it (it should be noted that loaning out materials, especially books, is still the primary reason people visit libraries). However, coupling this change in program to a drastic change in architectural style is not only unnecessary, but also increases the chance of alienating people who have certain (more traditional) expectations of what a public library is and does and what it looks like. Unsurprisingly, ‘The Ship’ is evaluated poorly on its ‘readability’<sup>41</sup>. Even younger and higher educated respondents who appreciate the style of the building struggle to immediately recognize it as a public library:

*‘Well, from the outside, it’s a very attractive building, but on the inside, I have the feeling that I don’t really know what it is, especially when just entering, I think it’s not very clear that this is a library’<sup>42</sup>*

- Man, 21 years old, higher education

*‘For me, it’s too austere, the books aren’t prominent, no, it’s too austere, for me it’s not a library. If I would have walked in there, I would have said: no, we have to turn around because we’re not in the right place’<sup>43</sup>*

- Woman, 45 years old, high school

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<sup>41</sup> See table 36 on page 58 in paragraph four of the report in the appendix

<sup>42</sup> *‘Langs buiten vond ik het enorm aantrekkelijk, maar langs binnen heb ik zo inderdaad het gevoel dat ik niet echt weet wat dat het is, zeker als je binnenkomt, is het niet echt duidelijk dat het een bibliotheek is vind ik’*

<sup>43</sup> *‘Het is mij te strak, de boeken komen niet tot hun recht, nee, het is mij veel te strak, het is voor mij geen bibliotheek. Als ik daar binnen gestapt zou zijn, zou ik zeggen van: nee, we moeten omdraaien want we zitten helemaal fout’*

*Where are the books?*

A considerable number of respondents made the very specific comment that there were no books in sight upon entering ‘The Ship’ (and to a lesser extent ‘The Cinema’). The following excerpts all pertain to ‘The Ship’:

*‘I haven’t seen any books yet (laughs)’<sup>44</sup>*

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

*‘It’s not clear yet that it’s a library, it still isn’t, I don’t see any books’<sup>45</sup>*

- Man, 61 years old, higher education

*‘The ceiling’s a pity, but other than that, I think it’s quite cool, very industrial, modern, but I’m not seeing any books (chuckle), I still don’t realize that it’s a library’<sup>46</sup>*

- Woman, 25 years old, higher education

*‘Oh, so it is a library? Yeah, now I see it, it’s getting closer, in the back there are books right? Alright, OK’<sup>47</sup>*

- Woman, 76 years old, high school

This recurring theme of the ‘lack of books’ creating a feeling of ‘not being in a library’ is interesting, but hardly surprising. For many visitors, libraries are still synonymous with the reading of books and not putting them prominently on display is counter-effective in creating a welcoming, ‘readable’ and recognizable environment. In contrast, when considering positive evaluations regarding readability, it should be noted that high ‘readability’ correlates in a significant way with education level (of the parents) and age in ‘The School’: lower educated

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<sup>44</sup> *‘Ja, ik zag nog geen boeken (lacht)’*

<sup>45</sup> *‘Het valt niet op dat het een bibliotheek is, nog altijd niet, ik zie geen boeken’*

<sup>46</sup> *‘Jammer van het plafond met die latjes, maar voor de rest, vind ik het wel cool, zo heel industrieel, modern, maar ik zie precies geen boeken (lachje), ik heb nog altijd niet door dat het een bibliotheek is’*

<sup>47</sup> *‘Ah, toch een bibliotheek? Ja, nu zie ik, het komt zo wat dichterbij, daar achter zijn boeken hé? Voila, OK’*

respondents, respondents whose parents are lower educated and older respondents all comment positively on the readability of ‘The School’ more frequently. Even when partialling out the age of respondents, a significant correlation still remains with regard to the education level of respondents, meaning that lower educated respondents highly value the readability of ‘The School’, as the next excerpts illustrate:

*‘Well look here, yes (...) this might be a bit more old-fashioned than the previous one (‘The Cinema’), but this is, yeah, this is good, very good even, those tables with the computers, everything, yes, this I like very much, it would be easy for me to find my way there’<sup>48</sup>*

- Man, 68 years old, elementary school

*‘This is more functional, because you can see... like that corner for children for instance with those things, that tower in the middle, that’s something, here you have a sort of, a kind of self-evidence’<sup>49</sup>*

- Man, 57 years old, high school

Our findings suggest that complicating the process of ‘typification’ by constructing public libraries that do not resemble what most people consider to be ‘typical’ for public libraries (eg, removing the important visual queue of being surrounded by books upon entering the building) likely has greater consequences for individuals with lower levels of cultural capital. In a sense, a variation on what Stewart calls ‘evaluative reworking’ (2016, p. 48) takes place: instead of something in ‘bad taste’ being ‘*recuperated and made prestigious*’, something trusted and everyday (a public library) forces a re-evaluation among its (potential) visitors by adopting an architectural style that is associated with more business-like and highbrow (cultural) institutions. This forced re-evaluation will ‘challenge’ and ‘excite’ the higher educated, but

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<sup>48</sup> *‘Dat vind ik nu, ja, (...) het is misschien een beetje ouderwets dan de vorige (‘The Cinema’), maar ik vind dit, jawel, dat is goed, dat is heel goed zelfs, die tafels met computers, alles, ja, dat vind ik goed, ja, ik zou daar wel gemakkelijk mijn weg vinden’*

<sup>49</sup> *‘Dit is al meer functioneler omdat je dus ziet... gelijk bijvoorbeeld die kinderhoek met die dingen, die toren in't midden, dus da's iets, hier heb je eigenlijk een soort, direct een vanzelfsprekendheid.’*

mostly discourages the lower educated since it requires '*an aesthetic disposition and high levels of cultural capital*' (Stewart, 2016, p. 48).

### *Why opt for the iconic?*

We have already paid attention to what motivates decision makers to build public libraries in an iconic style in chapter two. Sklair (2006) uses the term 'urban boosterism', which he describes as '*the most common rationale for deliberately creating iconic architecture. Those driving urban boosterism deliberately attempt to create urban architectural icons in order to draw tourists, convention and mega-event attendees with money to spend and the images they project are directed to this end.*' (p. 38) In the face of societal developments that threaten the relevancy of public libraries, of which the pervasive digitalization of society is the most prominent, iconic architecture can be seen as an attempt to upgrade the image of public libraries and attract visitors. Additionally, and this is not limited to public libraries, ideas regarding how visitors or 'users' of public institutions are best conceptualized or approached have also changed. Martin et al. (2015), in an article that focusses on the importance of choosing the 'right' architectural style for health care institutions, posit that this has evolved '*towards neoliberal forms of subjectivity, whereby patients are construed as consumers and responsabilised citizens*' (p. 12). Martin et al. rightly identify this as problematic, similar to how we voice concerns regarding the fact that the most important target audience of public libraries is already visiting public libraries less frequently in recent years and are likely more discouraged to visit public libraries that are constructed in an iconic architectural style. In general, public libraries will benefit from deploying a 'measured' and 'balanced' architectural style. Making an architectural 'statement', however, can cause adverse effects on how these

libraries are perceived by their (potential) visitors. Conversely, a refusal to ‘get with the times’ can discourage (potential) visitors who have a higher socio-economic status.

Still, everything points towards a (most likely inadvertent) prioritization of (potential) visitors who already possess higher levels of cultural capital during the design of both the building and interior of iconic public libraries. If we consider this to be problematic, we have to think about how this can be addressed during the development and design process that precedes the realization of public libraries: what tools do we have to prevent public libraries (or other public cultural institutions for that matter) from being constructed in such a way that they would cause the lower educated to feel unwelcome or out of place? The process of developing and designing public libraries needs to have ‘guard rails’ built in and we would argue that ‘community consultation’ can fulfil this function: let locals (from all layers of society) have their say on what their ‘community hub’ should look like and how it should function. However, as we have discussed before, Jones (2011) rightly underlines the ‘ritualistic’ nature of community consultation: is not simply a matter of organizing more (but also better) community consultation. It is important to note here that several of the architects we interviewed questioned the relevance and efficacy of community consultation:

*'I'm all for it, and it has to happen, even if it was just to familiarize people and to point them to positive and negative aspects (of the project). Sometimes, good things come out of it, I'm convinced of that (...), but yeah, often it's... you organize a participation-meeting about a new building, let's say, a community centre, and then one person starts complaining about how the sidewalk looks wrong and another starts talking about how the snack bar will be closed for some time and all of that is irrelevant... and then there are so many opinions and problems that the most important issues don't shine through and that it becomes a dumbed-down version of something that was actually great in the beginning'<sup>50</sup>*

- Architect, man, 31 years old

*'It happens very often that you don't understand who the people will be that will end up using the building, especially when it comes to public buildings (...) and if then you say: OK, we'll try to work with participation-programs and all that, then these are often very disappointing, like: "this is not how we are going to solve this problem, designing this building together" or co-creation or whatever you want to call it'<sup>51</sup>*

- Architect, man, 60 years old

In general, architects are very much open to the idea of community consultation, but generally do not regard it as a meaningful instrument that can inform their design process. Furthermore, it should also be noted that architects invariably work in assignment of others and that these actors (those who commission the building) often specifically request a building that is most likely to effectuate urban boosterism:

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<sup>50</sup> *'Ik ben er ook wel voorstander van, het moet ook gebeuren, al was het alleen nog maar om de mensen er vertrouwd mee te laten worden en ze te wijzen op de positieve of de negatieve punten. Er komen soms ook goede dingen uit, daar ben ik van overtuigd (...), ma ja, vaak is het... organiseert ge een participatievergadering over een nieuw gebouw, een buurthuis, ik zeg maar iets, en dan is er één iemand die begint te klagen over de trottoir die slecht ligt, de andere begint te praten over de frituur die niet open gaat en dat doet allemaal niet ter zake, dat is eigenlijk allemaal niet relevant... en dan zijn er zoveel meningen en zoveel problemen dat het belangrijkste punt er niet doorkomt en dat het een heel afgezwakte versie wordt van iets dat in eerste instantie iets fantastisch was.'*

<sup>51</sup> *'Heel dikwijls kent ge de gebruikers niet, zeker bij publieke gebouwen al zeker niet (...) en als ge dan zegt van: OK, we gaan proberen met participatie-trajecten en zo te werken, dan kom ik ook heel dikwijls teleurgesteld terug van wat daar eigenlijk maar uitkomt, van: 'Zo gaan we het ook niet oplossen, van allemaal samen te ontwerpen', of co-creatie of wat is het allemaal'*

*'Of course, you have, in politics, for example, people who seriously consider participatory programs and community consultation, but you also have those who wish to see their names in the history books and they will get there more easily with that kind of building ('The Ship'), than with a building that radiates a kind of sensitivity and friendliness, yeah, that's really the problem'<sup>52</sup>*

Architect, woman, 57 years old

### *A socio-linguistic look at community consultation*

To better understand the problem at hand, we propose that a more socio-linguistic approach to the inherent pitfalls of 'community consultation' is necessary, one that recognizes that there are significant differences in how members of different social classes express themselves about art and aesthetic preferences. Parsons (1976) characterized these differences as followed: *'if one's major vocabulary for praise and dispraise lies in the range dominated by the concepts of "beautiful" and "ugly," how can one be anything but confused by, say, Beckett's plays, or Picasso's Guernica?'* (p. 307). In our research, we also see confirmation of the relative 'linguistic poverty' (that both Parsons and Bourdieu suggested) of respondents with lower levels of education when discussing art and culture, in this case architectural qualities and styles. Of course, it should be noted that higher educated respondents would likely display signs of relative 'linguistic poverty' when discussing other topics (ones that are more of an integral part of the habitus or members of the working class).

In our interviews, we see that descriptions vary quite significantly between subgroups of respondents with different education levels. For one thing, the higher educated have more of a

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<sup>52</sup> *'Je hebt mensen die absoluut, allé, vanuit politiek bijvoorbeeld, mensen die erg kijken naar een soort van participatieve trajecten, maar ge hebt natuurlijk ook nog steeds die hun naam in de geschiedenisboeken willen zien staan en dat zullen ze eerder hebben met zo'n gebouw ('The Ship') dan met een gebouw dat een soort gevoeligheid uitstraalt en een soort vriendelijkheid, ja, dat is nu eenmaal het probleem.'*

‘shared vocabulary’ when discussing architecture, in that they tend to use the same words on a more frequent base, and that this ‘shared vocabulary’ is characterized by more frequent use of ‘cultural’ and ‘abstract’ concepts. When describing the building of ‘The Mansion’, for example, higher educated respondents exclusively use the word ‘classical’, while lower educated respondents tended to use more generic and non-specific adjectives such as ‘nice’ far more often than higher educated respondents. Also, when positively describing the interior of ‘The Mansion’, higher educated respondents used adjectives such as ‘open’, ‘modern’, ‘spacious’ and ‘light’ almost exclusively. When viewing ‘The Cinema’, words such as ‘transparent’ and ‘austere’ were used only by higher educated respondents and in ‘The Ship’, adjectives that suggest a certain atmosphere being facilitated by the interior (‘calm’, ‘soothing’) are only used by respondents who finished high school and/or higher education<sup>53</sup>. Furthermore, comments regarding the coherence and harmonization of different aesthetic aspects were only voiced by higher educated respondents who participate in a lot of highbrow cultural activities and only while ‘visiting’ ‘The Ship’.

*‘A choice was made for a contemporary architecture with contemporary materials, a contemporary approach and I think that’s strong. Yes, the design is very, uh, consistent, the metal, uhm, terrace and then those armchairs also partly in metal and leather, yes, very consistent.’<sup>54</sup>*

- Woman, 43 years old, higher education

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<sup>53</sup> See figures 2, 3 (p. 21), 4, 5 (p. 22) 8, 9 (p. 27) 14 (p. 37), 15, 16 (p. 38) and 17 (p. 39) in paragraph three of the report in the appendix

<sup>54</sup> *‘Men heeft gekozen voor hedendaagse architectuur met hedendaagse materialen, een hedendaagse benadering en, dat vind ik dan ook weer sterk. Ja, het design is heel euh, consistent, metalen euhm, terras en dan die zetels ook een stuk uit metaal en leder, ja, heel consistent gedaan’*

*'You can feel, a lot of thought went into it, the fact that those chairs are there, that those lights were placed in that way, uhm, you feel more of the innovation straight away, with those screens you see, I didn't see that in the other libraries.'*<sup>55</sup>

- Man, 31 years old, higher education

It is also worth noting that both respondents who were quoted directly above lauded the harmonization of aesthetic elements in 'The Ship', but also stated that the interior was not very inviting. Higher educated respondents tended to be more easily inclined to give a good evaluation of 'The Ship' even though the look and feel was not to their liking on a more intuitive level, mostly because they appreciated the 'studied' and 'thought out' aesthetic of the building and interior. 'Cosiness' and 'friendliness' are often of secondary importance for those with higher levels of cultural capital. These are perfect illustrations of higher educated individuals possessing 'pure taste', facilitating a 'legitimate reading' of designs and spaces, which decision-makers and architects are likely to find much more engaging during community consultation. The degree to which groups (and individuals in those groups) have internalized the 'dominant aesthetic' and have mastered the 'shared language' that expresses it, is bound to have an effect on how 'legitimate' their remarks and criticisms are perceived to be (during, for instance, moments of community consultation).

### *Reservedness and self-censorship*

This was not the only relevant insight we gained with regard to the precarious nature of community consultation: we also see strong indications of greater levels of self-censorship

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<sup>55</sup> *'Ge voelt dat, daar is over nagedacht, dat die stoelen daar staan, dat die lichten daar zo zijn gezet, euhm, ge voelt al meteen meer die innovatie, met die schermen dat je daar ziet, dat had ik ook nog niet gezien in die vorige bibs.'*

among certain types of respondents when it comes to voicing criticism. From our analyses, an ideal-type of the visitor that was most likely to evaluate ‘The Ship’ poorly emerged: in general, elderly women with lower levels of education tended to feel disproportionately unwelcome and ‘out of place’ in ‘The Ship’<sup>56</sup>. To gain more insight into the matter, an outlier analysis was conducted in which the transcripts of respondents that belonged to this specific group but also gave high scores to ‘The Ship’ were looked at more closely<sup>57</sup>. This made it abundantly clear that reservedness in judgment and socially desirable answering played a significant role in explaining why these outliers gave such high scores to ‘The Ship’. Two outliers, especially, displayed great unease in scoring and judging most libraries they ‘visited’ (so not only ‘The Ship’). Asking these outliers to score any library they ‘visited’, often took repeated efforts from the interviewer to assure them that they were fully within their right to give any score they wanted. The following excerpt followed a long pause after one outlier was asked to score ‘The Cinema’:

***‘You gave the last one a seven out of ten.’***

*‘Then I should give this one a bit more, but I don’t really want to.’*

***‘Remember: this is a personal score. If you feel: I would rather visit that other library compared to this one (...)’***

*‘Yes, well, then I’ll only give a six out of ten, maybe I’m not right to do so, because it’s a really nice building, but... Yes, it can be, but... (...) You know, it’s not for me personally, but yeah, who am I right? There are so many young people who would look at it differently.’<sup>58</sup>*

- Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

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<sup>56</sup> See table 23 on page 34 in paragraph three of the report in the appendix

<sup>57</sup> See pages 80 through 82 in paragraph five of the report in the appendix

<sup>58</sup> *‘U heeft de vorige een 7 gegeven*

*Dan zou ik ‘m ietsje meer moeten geven, maar het is niet met mijn volle goesting*

*Maar ‘t is u persoonlijk hé, als gij vind: ik zou liever die andere bibliotheek bezoeken dan deze (...)*

*Ja, dan geef ik maar een 6, ‘t is misschien onterecht, want het is een heel schoon gebouw, maar...*

*Ja, dat kan zijn, maar... (...) Niet voor mij persoonlijk, maar ja, wie ben ik hé, er zijn zoveel jongere mensen die er anders tegenaan kijken’*

The outliers often made remarks that the interior was not very inviting, that the building was too imposing and that the whole project will have likely cost too much money. When asked to give a score, however, the outliers were quick to give high numbers. One respondent (the second excerpt featured below) became noticeably annoyed when the interviewer shortly highlighted that her score did not seem to fit with her description and discussion of ‘The Ship’.

*‘But I can’t, I mean, I can’t give something big like this a two, can I? That won’t do, so I have to go up, right?’<sup>59</sup>*

- Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

*‘Oh, there you go again, you really have to... Yeah, that’s a, that’s perfect isn’t it? If you have that in your city, then you think: ‘wow’, right? Let’s say I give it an eight, but that the building... they could have done with less’*

***‘But you would still like to give an eight?’***

*‘(Laughs nervously) Come on, yes, I don’t know, I don’t know!’<sup>60</sup>*

- Woman, 72 years old, high school

Analysing the transcripts of their interviews shows that these women generally feel uncomfortable passing judgment, especially on more ‘purely aesthetic’ cultural objects. Their description of ‘The Ship’, especially, was consistently incongruent with how they scored it. In general, they frequently referred to their own age for stating a certain opinion and repeatedly asked the interviewer (sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly) for confirmation that they were saying something ‘acceptable’. It should be noted that not only elderly women, but also elderly men (which were not featured in the outlier analysis), often explicitly referred to their own (advanced) age as the reason for giving a negative evaluation of ‘The Ship’:

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<sup>59</sup> *‘Ik kan dat niet zo, zoiets groot, toch niet met een twee wegzetten. Dat gaat niet goed, dus dan moest ik naar omhoog hé?’*

<sup>60</sup> *‘Goh, daar zijt ge weer, dan moet ge echt... Ja, da’s een, perfect hé, als ge dat in uw stad hebt, dat ge denkt van: ‘wow’, hé? Laat ons zeggen da’k er een 8 aan geef, maar dat het qua gebouw... het kan met minder.*

*Maar toch een acht?’*

*(lacht op nerveuze wijze) Seg, ja, ik weet het niet, ik weet het niet!’*

*'It's cold, it's, no, it doesn't invite me to go inside, that, no, I don't think it's special, no. (...)'*

***'So, personally, it doesn't appeal to you?'***

*'No, but that will be because of me, it doesn't have anything to do with... probably it's because of my age'<sup>61</sup>*

- Man, 68 years old, elementary school

Most of the elderly respondents that engaged in self-censorship or placed their personal opinions 'between brackets' when critiquing 'The Ship' were also lower educated, which suggest that in the act of voicing a more critical opinion, age might act as a 'proxy', a scapegoat, for a self-perceived lack of cultural capital. This is, of course, 'conspicuous' behaviour. The 'reservedness in judgment' that respondents with lower education levels display when discussing 'The Ship' is most likely a form of impression management, or as Bourdieu puts it: *'They (the least cultivated) feel 'out of place' and they keep a check on themselves, for fear of drawing attention to themselves.'* (1993, p. 51) Feeling comfortable in voicing criticism requires feeling 'legitimized' to do so and these elderly, lower educated visitors likely (unconsciously) feel themselves lacking in cultural capital to be 'allowed' to do so. This self-imposed reservedness complicates community consultation greatly, making it even more likely that stakeholders who better master the 'language of the dominant class' will have a greater impact on the decision-making process.

Perhaps it is important to briefly discuss a point raised by Daenekindt and Roose (2011) regarding the difference between 'dispositions' and 'actions' here: *'Since most acts of consumption are conspicuous, they function as markers of one's identity. Dispositions, however, are more hidden and thus less vulnerable to judgement of others'* (p. 51). While it is

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<sup>61</sup> *'Het is koud, het is, nee, daar hebt ge toch niet de neiging om binnen te stappen, dat, nee, dat vind ik niet bijzonder, nee. (...)*  
*Persoonlijk spreekt het u niet aan?*  
*Nee, maar dat zal aan mij liggen, dat zal niet aan... aan mijne leeftijd waarschijnlijk'*

true that dispositions (in this case, one's opinion about an architectural style) are less subjected to conspicuous consumption and therefore impression management, passing judgment (of which giving a numerical score to a building is the most explicit example in our research) is, to a significant degree, an action. 'The Ship' elicits objections and (sometimes non-verbal) negative reactions, which are less vulnerable to the judgment of others, but the ensuing explicit evaluation (giving a score) is characterized by 'conspicuous' behaviour.

*Different types of visitors, different types of critique*

The realization that members of different social groups express themselves differently when critiquing architecture and that certain groups are more prone to self-censorship calls for reflection on how community consultation is organized. We would posit that, if public libraries wish to attract more working-class visitors and (continue to) carry out their emancipatory task, the 'valorisation' of discourses that do not adhere (or adhere less) to the 'dominant aesthetic' becomes crucial and 'pure taste' should no longer be given primacy. Other criteria, that are likely to carry more weight for members of social classes that possess less cultural capital, should be treated as equally important. Much of the criticism voiced by lower educated respondents (on more iconic buildings) in our research deals with the 'needless excess' of iconic buildings, the cost of construction and the possibly detrimental impact on smaller libraries in the vicinity of 'iconic' public libraries, etc. The excerpt below illustrates a stance that large projects like 'The Ship' often come to fruition at the expense of local libraries in smaller communities:

*'Well, the government's money, they threw it around, didn't they? (...) I mean, I think, you know, the state has to economize, we all have to economize. (later, while discussing 'The Church') As long as they have a good choice of books and you can go to the counter to ask something, the fact that it's smaller in scale, I don't know, I'd prefer an extra library instead of one that's so... but that's where we're headed, because also here in (a village of the municipality where the respondent lives), they closed the local library'*<sup>62</sup>

- Woman, 72 years old, high school

It is clear that the class-based differences found here (with regard to what seem to be important aspects of a building's look and feel) are still largely the same as the ones found by Bourdieu in the sixties and seventies: the lower educated seem to greatly value functionality, cosiness and cleanliness, which explains their disproportionately good evaluations of 'The School'. The impact that look and feel can have, is not to be underestimated: when comparing 'The School' with the other 104 libraries that participated to the large scale user survey (BIB2018), they rank third in percentage of respondents who did not finish high school. Of course, as discussed in chapter one, the demographic composition of a city or municipality plays an important part in the library-attendance of lower educated visitors and 'The School' is located in a municipality with a relatively high percentage of lower educated inhabitants, but (together with 'The Church' in equal measure) it still 'outperforms' the other libraries in our research when comparing the percentage of inhabitants with no higher education and the percentage of respondents in our sample with no higher education<sup>63</sup>. This suggests that an approachable look and feel really does translate into better attendance numbers for the lower educated because it is a recognizable, comfortable, 'cosy' place that is not intimidating to anyone. This makes 'The School' the

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<sup>62</sup> *'Ja, het overheidsgeld moeten ze precies, ze hebben er mee gegooid (...) Allé jong, ja, ik denk, allé, de staat moet bezuinigen en wij moeten allemaal bezuinigen (...) (Bij bespreking 'The Church') Als ze maar een goede keuze van boeken hebben en dat ge aan de balie terechtkunt om iets te vragen en dat dat allemaal een beetje kleinschaliger is misschien, ik weet niet, liever een bibliotheek meer, dan zo een heel, maar daar gaan ze wel een beetje naartoe hé, want, bij ons in (in een deelgemeente) is de bibliotheek gesloten'*

<sup>63</sup> See page 33 in paragraph three of the report in the appendix

antithesis of ‘The Ship’ and a very interesting place to take notes from with regard to its aesthetic qualities. Of course, ‘The School’ is also not necessarily a ‘perfect’ model for how libraries can become more culturally democratic: if we really want to attract ‘all layers of society’, we shouldn’t discourage those with a higher socio-economic status. Reconciling more ‘ethical’ critique with ‘pure taste’ is crucial, but certainly not self-evident, as Stewart (2016) points out: *‘the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of evaluative judgements are not only difficult to disentangle, they are often at loggerheads’* (p. 42).

A final important nuance: we are not of the opinion that the ‘opening up’ of the decision-making process to ‘ethical’ critique should be applied to other artistic domains or even privately funded architecture. We are not trying to argue that a musician or painter should be dictated on what their art could or should look like. However, we do find it highly defensible that this emphasis on democratization is applicable to cultural institutions that are financed with governmental funds and have the ambition to attract visitors from all social layers of society. The architectural style of a public building should be susceptible to both the aesthetic and ‘ethical’ critique of members from all layers of society. Public libraries fulfil an important function and the aesthetic qualities of the buildings that house them should not nullify the directive that society has tasked them with.

### 3. A critical look at the operationalization of ‘cultural objects’

*‘Bourdieu’s sociology is through and through a cognitive sociology, and in fact none of his major works (...) can be interpreted outside of this cognitive context.’ (Lizardo, 2004, p. 394)*

Lizardo rightly underlines that Bourdieu’s work on the class-based appreciation of art and culture is outspokenly ‘cognitive’ in nature: the focus is very much on the subject (which interprets art and culture through his or her habitus) and much less on the inherent aesthetic and formal characteristics of the cultural objects that are placed in front of the subject. Bourdieu, of course, does recognize the fact that cultural objects have diverging ‘levels of emission’, ‘*defined as the degree of intrinsic complexity and subtlety*’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 224), but rarely goes into much detail on the matter: genres (eg, classical paintings versus modern paintings) or even entire art-disciplines are mostly approached in a ‘monolithic’ way: ‘*The less educated visitors (...) prefer the most famous paintings and those sanctioned by school teaching, whereas modern painters who have the least chance of being mentioned in schools are quoted only by those with the highest educational qualifications*’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 231). Bourdieu seems uninterested in ‘operationalizing’ cultural objects based on their aesthetic qualities in a comprehensive way and almost invariably opts for a cultural-historical approach: ‘*The readability of a contemporary work varies primarily according to the relationship which the creators maintain, in a given period, in a given society, with the code of the previous period*’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 225). That is not to say that Bourdieu completely ignores what constitutes the aesthetic experience outside of the cognitive, as Lizardo underlines when he states that Bourdieu challenges the Kantian philosophy regarding art-appreciation: ‘*Bourdieu mentions Piaget’s work precisely in the context of talking about the pre-reflexive, bodily status of art appreciation, opposing the*

*Kantian view of artistic appreciation as a purely cognitive and incorporeal act of judgment: Art is also a “bodily thing”, and music, the most “pure” and “spiritual” of all the arts, is perhaps simply the most corporeal’* (Lizardo, 2004, p.389). Our research (design) tries to address the importance of the ‘corporeal’ dimension of art appreciation by simulating a ‘lifelike’ experience through Virtual Reality: by placing respondents in a photo-realistic, three-dimensional environment we strived to elicit the ‘corporeality’ that is so crucial in how we experience architecture.

While the Bourdieusian emphasis on the importance of the cultural-historic dimension in art- and culture appreciation is undoubtedly justified, we would argue that this cognitive approach can be reductionist at times, as it ignores the enormous diversity in cultural objects. Of course, we acknowledge that these *‘approaches have been essential in helping people grasp the importance of these cultural preferences in understanding social inequalities and the way these preferences act as markers of social position. However, they have relied on a reductive vision of aesthetic principles in which ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures have become robbed of all intrinsic value and simply defined by the symbolic value given to people who like them’* (Hanquinet, 2018, p. 1). The influence that Bourdieu exercises explains why many studies on this subject circumvent taking specific aesthetic characteristics into account. A good example is a study by Daenekindt and Roose (2011) in which respondents were asked to self-report on what makes a film ‘good’ or ‘enjoyable’. The actual characteristics of specific ‘cultural artefacts’ (in this case films) were hardly taken into consideration. Of course, other authors preceded us in criticizing this tendency to reductionism in Bourdieu’s work: *‘we certainly cannot reduce the nature of readership to the amount of time spent in front of the object. Working-class visitors might spend on average 25 minutes less in the museum than upper-class visitors (...), but we cannot assume these groups read the objects uniformly (within classes) or differently (between classes). This*

*statistical reductionism homogenizes readings amongst tightly-defined classes and does not allow for polysemy* (Prior, 2005, p.134). Parsons (1976) also warned for any approach that only takes the cognitive in consideration. Stewart (2016), in turn, notes: *'It is notable that in various strains of sociological research (there is) a renewed attention to the cultural object itself. For example, Janet Wolff's post-critical account of beauty refers to extra-sociological criteria including, for example, the composition, colour and form of a painting (...) Bielby and Bielby (2004) draw attention to the ways in which value-judgements are made by fans in relation to soap operas depending on aesthetic properties such as the plausibility (or otherwise) of a plot line or character development'* (p.44).

#### *The importance of the inherent aesthetic characteristics of cultural objects*

We have paid great attention to the actual aesthetic characteristics of different buildings and architectural styles in our analysis and results show that nuances in aesthetic characteristics not only play a considerable role in how buildings are experienced and evaluated across different classes, but also that the degree to which certain characteristics are considered to be important, is also subject to class-based (and other demographic) differences. Colour, light and material-use, for instance, are discussed more often by respondents with higher education levels (or whose parents have higher education levels) and less often by older respondents<sup>64</sup>. Of course, these effects are linked: education level correlates negatively with age in our sample. When we partial out age, however, we see that the material-use in a library is discussed more often (0,318\*\*) as education level rises. This suggests that higher-educated visitors care more about (what they consider to be the 'right') use of materials in a building than lower educated visitors.

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<sup>64</sup> See page 46, subparagraph 4.1 of the report in the appendix

Additionally, we see that older respondents seem to place less emphasis on the use of colour and light (eg, the use of natural light versus artificial light). In ‘The Church’, more than a third of all respondents discuss the use of colour. After the size and spaciousness of ‘The Cinema’, this is the most frequently discussed aesthetic quality of any library. Opinions are very much divided (a slight majority of respondents is outspokenly negative) about the use of colour in ‘The Church’. Almost all respondents refer to the use of the colour green, with many respondents describing it as ‘garish’ or ‘fluorescent’, while others describe it as ‘bright’ and ‘colourful’.

*‘So the colours too, uhm, yes, it’s a bit more uhm, a bit more with the times, the colour consultant did a good job’<sup>65</sup>*

- Man, 56 years old, high school

*‘Well, yeah, that green over there. It doesn’t help to relax. They didn’t listen to their colour consultant’<sup>66</sup>*

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

A significant positive correlation was found between education level and the frequency with which colour was discussed while viewing ‘The Church’. Out of the 27 respondents that discussed the use of colour, 20 had finished higher education and eleven of them evaluated the use of colour in a negative way. Out of the six respondents who had finished high school that discussed the colour in ‘The Church’, just one was negative. The evaluation of the use of colour also tended to become increasingly negative as age dropped, with younger respondents invariably giving a bad evaluation.

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<sup>65</sup> ‘Dus de kleuren ook euh, ja, ‘t is een beetje meer euh, beetje meer met de tijd mee, de kleurenconsulent heeft zijn werk gedaan’

<sup>66</sup> ‘Goh, ja, dat groen hé zo. Daar wordt je niet rustig van. Die zullen niet naar de kleurenconsulent geluisterd hebben.’

*'(mimics gag-reflex) that green, no, I couldn't enter that space. No no, that light green is really... I'm very sensitive to colour, I just couldn't enter that space because of it'*<sup>67</sup>

- Woman, 24 years old, higher education

When looking at the frequency with which respondents explicitly discussed the furniture in the different libraries they 'visited', it is interesting to note that this aspect was most often discussed in 'The Mansion' and 'The School' (which were both identified as being more appealing for working-class visitors). Especially 'The School' stands out, with one third of all respondents commenting on the furniture in this library. It is not the case that a specific subgroup of visitors commented more often than others, but there is a clear pattern discernible when it comes to the evaluation of the furniture: out of the ten respondents that gave a positive evaluation, only two were highly educated, while six out of nine negative evaluations belonged to highly educated respondents.

*'And then those red armchairs here, I recognize the typical little IKEA-table, uhm, it's all a bit outdated'*<sup>68</sup>

- Man, 21 years old, higher education

*'Yeah, those red armchairs, for me... it's dreadful. And that little table with those little canteen-tables'*<sup>69</sup>

- Woman, 37 years old, higher education

Conversely, we see that other aesthetic characteristics are interpreted and evaluated in a more uniform way. Size and spaciousness was discussed most often by respondents when viewing 'The Cinema' and most respondents evaluated this spaciousness in a positive way. This pertains

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<sup>67</sup> *'(Geluid van afkeer) dat groen, nee, daar zou ik echt niet kunnen gaan. Nee nee, dat licht groen is echt... maar ik ben heel kleur-sensitief, gewoon daardoor zou ik niet in die ruimte kunnen gaan.'*

<sup>68</sup> *'En dan hier die rode zeteltjes, het typische IKEA-tafeltje dat ik herken, euhm, dat is allemaal inderdaad wat meer outdated'*

<sup>69</sup> *'Ja, zo die rode stoelen, dat is... voor mij affreus. En dat tafeltje met die, met die, ja, kantine-tafeltjes'*

predominantly to the interior, which is a very large open space featuring multiple ‘terraces’ on which the collection is housed and where seating areas are provided. This openness appears to appeal to a high number of respondents and no noteworthy differences between different subgroups of respondents was found. Respondents also invariably appreciate libraries with an abundance of (preferably natural) light and respond less favourably when interiors appear to be too dark or when featuring too much artificial or ‘cold’ industrial lighting. Although less frequent, the negative evaluations of the light in ‘The Mansion’ tend to refer to the use of artificial light.

*‘Are those lamps on the ceiling or is there light? They’re lamps, industrial lamps (...) I think there is too little daylight to really call it (an) attractive (space).’<sup>70</sup>*

- Woman, 43 years old, higher education

This preference for an abundance of natural light also explains why the use of light in ‘The School’ and ‘The Ship’ is evaluated negatively quite often. Both libraries rely heavily on the use of artificial lighting and have walls in darker colours. Several of the positive evaluations of the light in ‘The Ship’ are made before viewing the interior and are based on the fact that the library has a lot of glass-surface walls, these however (perhaps somewhat surprisingly) do not provide a lot of direct natural light, since the steel framework surrounding the building prohibits light from falling on the windows. The findings with regard to the lighting in public libraries are anything but surprising: abundant natural light is preferred by a large majority of respondents, regardless of their social background, age or gender. If any of the aesthetic elements we discussed here could be treated in a universalistic way by architects or designers, light would most likely be it.

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<sup>70</sup> *‘Zijn dat nu lampen aan het plafond of komt er nu licht? Het zijn lampen, industriële lampen (...) Ik denk dat er te weinig daglicht is om het echt aantrekkelijk te kunnen noemen.’*

Earlier we made the argument that ‘ethical’ critique should be acknowledged more during community consultation. Naturally, ethical critique has a distinctly cognitive nature, but we posit that this can be ‘activated’ purely by aesthetic characteristics and that this does not require knowledge pertaining to a specific context. The majority of our respondents did not know in which cities ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’ were located, making it impossible for them to know whether the realization of these public libraries actually had a detrimental impact on smaller libraries in the region. However, the aesthetic characteristics of the building sufficed in ‘activating’ their moral stance, illustrating that *aesthetic values are intrinsically bound up with moral values*’ (Hanquinet, 2018, p. 4). ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’ were easily recognized as expensive projects. Significant correlations were found when looking at the frequency with which certain subgroups of socio-demographic variables mention the cost of these buildings. Respondents that lived in less urban/more rural areas tended to emphasize the construction costs and the fact that a lot of tax-payer’s money was spent. Respondents also tend to characterize ‘The Ship’ as a ‘bad investment’ of tax-payer’s money more often if they claim to be less interested in architecture (as an art-form). This illustrates that (potential) visitors, unbeknownst to the actual context in which these libraries came about, reflect on the financial realities that play a role in the realization of public buildings purely based on their appearance: the apparent opulence of ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’ can lead to frustration and resentment, with apparent budgetary discrepancy being seen by some as unfair and problematic.

### *Iconicity as a continuum*

As mentioned before (in chapter three), Augustin and Wagemans (2012) underscore the fact that operationalizing cultural objects for analysis is extremely challenging. This is likely why

*'most sociological research on cultural preferences has avoided examining the aesthetic structures and criteria underlying them, leaving these to art philosophers and historians'* (Hanquinet, 2018, p. 2). We posit that an important starting point, if sociologists were to attempt a true operationalization of cultural objects, is to avoid all too much *a priori* categorizing. Our study tried to avoid this by letting respondents themselves determine which buildings were subject to class-based differences in interpretation and evaluation, starting with the exploratory analyses (based on our user survey data) that provided us with the cases for our study (i.e. which public libraries were to be 'visited' during the VR-assisted interviews). The interviews (with respondents) were also kept 'open' to a considerable degree, with a relatively low amount of standardized questions, leaving time and space for respondents to spontaneously describe their experience and thoughts. This allowed us to discern that 'iconic' and contemporary architecture is not problematic in and of itself, but rather that a too extreme manifestation of this style can be problematic for lower educated and elderly respondents. 'Iconicity', therefore, should not be characterized as something dichotomous: buildings can be 'iconic' to a greater or lesser degree and it is the culmination of many aesthetic choices that constitutes whether or not this contemporary, ambitious style of architecture will 'work' (for visitors from all layers of society) or not. The excellent evaluations for 'The Cinema' illustrate that there is most definitely a place for large and new public libraries with a fresh and 'tantalizing' style. However, it appears that moderation is key: once the pendulum swings too far and the desire to make an architectural statement, as we would argue has happened in 'The Ship', outweighs other (arguably more important) goals, alienating a sizable portion of your target-audience becomes possible, if not likely. Several of the architects we interviewed also considered 'The Ship' as a too extreme manifestation of iconic architecture, making it inappropriate for a public library:

*'I ask myself a lot of questions about the overuse of steel for that building. Also, uhm, a sort of lining and a kind of aesthetic... I think a great deal of attention went into the aesthetic. (...) I think that anything that (has to do with) massiveness and grandeur... are wrong choices (for public libraries)'*<sup>71</sup>

- Architect, man, 70 years old

*'This kind of architecture (...) has long been praised, a kind of elitism that (...) places itself above the world and... it's almost not to be used even, you know, but a library is something, yeah, something for, let's say: "the people", isn't it? (...) A courthouse, that can be something different (...) not too inviting, that has a completely different, yeah, narrative, I think, than a library. I feel that there are number of things we have to take into consideration when we design (a library).'*<sup>72</sup>

- Architect, woman, 57 years old

It is important to underline that, if we would have shown only one of these two libraries to our respondents because we had (*a priori*) considered them to be archetypical example of iconic architecture, we would have come to the conclusion that 'iconicity' is either highly preferable or problematic. Both conclusions would have been wrong. In that sense, our efforts to pay so much attention to actual aesthetic characteristics has paid off, as it leads us to a conceptualization of 'iconicity' as a continuum: class-based dispositions most definitely exist, but the properties of aesthetic and cultural objects within a certain style or genre must also be accounted for. It is exactly this insight that has lead us to the conclusion that if public libraries have the desire to attract more (working-class) visitors, contemporary or iconic architecture should not necessarily be completely discarded (by library professionals, policy makers and architects). In fact, given the great evaluations of 'The Cinema', we would be inclined to say

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<sup>71</sup> *'Er zit daar een boel staal aan dat gebouw waar ik mij vragen bij stel. Uhm, ook een soort van belijning en een soort van esthetiek... ik denk dat er hier heel veel aan het esthetische gedacht is. (...) Ik denk alles wat met reusachtigheid en grootsheid... foute keuzes zijn (voor openbare bibliotheken).'*

<sup>72</sup> *'Dit soort architectuur is lang (...) toegejuicht, een soort van elitarisme dat (...) zich boven de wereld gaat zetten en... het is eigenlijk niet bedoeld om te gebruiken bijna, weette, maar een bibliotheek is toch echt wel, ja, iets voor, laat ons zeggen: 'voor de mensen', hé? (...) Een gerechtsgebouw, dat kan dan weer iets anders zijn (...) liefst niet inviterend, dat heeft een totaal andere, ja, narratief vind ik, dan een bibliotheek. Allé, daar zijn toch een aantal zaken die we daarin moeten meenemen, als ge (een bibliotheek) ontwerpt.'*

that an ‘optimal’ style for public libraries (equally enjoyed by all potential visitors) gravitates towards more contemporary architecture, with the very important caveat that too extreme manifestations of ‘iconicity’ must be avoided. Aesthetic objects should be thought of as adhering in a continuous (and not dichotomous) manner to a certain style: different manifestations of iconic architecture are never either 100% ‘highbrow’ or ‘lowbrow’.

### *‘Consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ cultural objects*

The argument we make with regard to a more nuanced approach towards cultural objects, resembles Lahire’s (2008) work on ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ cultural profiles: *‘Individuals in contemporary societies are very likely to behave like other members of the social group to which they belong, and at the same time it is very likely that they will not only act in the way expected of that group. That is to say, it is very likely that some aspects of their behaviour will be atypical in terms of the social group to which they belong’* (p.171). Lahire criticizes Bourdieu for approaching cultural participation in a too ideal-typical way by focusing on ‘extreme’ and exceptional outliers in behaviour. Lahire illustrates this by acknowledging that ‘managers’ do, in fact, attend more opera, but that this does not necessarily mean that this is their favourite genre of music. We would argue, in a similar manner, that cultural objects can be both dissonant and consonant. ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’ are both examples of iconic architecture, but ‘The Cinema’ also integrates aesthetic qualities that are associated with more approachable cultural institutions (hence the pseudonym we have given this library) and is therefore a ‘dissonant’ cultural object. ‘The Ship’, however, is a more ‘pure’ manifestation of iconic architecture and is therefore ‘consonant’. It should also be noted that, while Lahire focuses mainly on intra-individual variation in cultural dispositions and behaviour, he too argues that the cultural

offering itself is approached too monolithically at times. We agree that certain art disciplines and genres are regarded as too internally consistent: a four-hour opera by Wagner can hardly be compared to the New Year's concert of the Wiener Philharmoniker, even though both 'cultural objects' are examples of attending a concert of classical music. In a questionnaire on cultural participation with close-ended questions, both would be 'captured' by the same item. To be clear, this is not a critique towards large-scale research on cultural participation, which is crucial in understanding how behaviours and dispositions evolve. Much of our own work and analysis is heavily supported by insights gained through this kind of large scale research using a more quantitative approach (eg, data stemming from the Flemish Participation Survey in chapter one). We only wish to defend the notion that paying attention to the aesthetic characteristics of cultural objects can be of added value in qualitative research on class-based differences in cultural appreciation and behaviour. To quote Friedman et al. (2015): *'we are not advocating abandoning quantitative analysis (...) (but) such work should ideally be carried out in conjunction with qualitative enquiry. The advantage of this kind of data (...) is that it allows for an examination of not just what culture people consume, but how they consume; their style of appreciation'* (p. 6).

It is perhaps superfluous to mention that architects are also of the opinion that a specific building can be a successful or an unsuccessful manifestation of a specific architectural movement or style. The first excerpt below shows one architect explicitly stating this notion. The second excerpt features one of the architects discussing the architectural firm that designed 'The Ship'. The architect in question spontaneously compared 'The Ship' to the Seattle Public Library, but was quick to say that he considered the work of Rem Koolhaas (the architect of Seattle Public Library) superior.

*'We are also of the conviction that you can make something good in any style or taste. So you can, to translate it to painting, you can paint an abstract painting or a figurative painting, but within every art movement you can make a distinction between good and bad.'*<sup>73</sup>

- Architect, 32 years old, man

*'In my opinion, that architectural firm (...) I won't say that they, uhm, that they're bad (laughs), but I think that Rem Koolhaas is more ground-breaking when it comes to public buildings.'*<sup>74</sup>

- Architect, 33 years old, man

A sociological, class-cultural approach to aesthetics and art is both fascinating and enlightening and is to be greatly preferred over explanations grounded in a universalistic philosophy, as it provides answers to the question why tastes differ between individuals and social groups. However, *'once formed, aesthetic values have a force of their own, as they are in various ways integrated in people's practical consciousness and this guides them in their everyday encounters with cultural goods'* (Hanquinet, 2018, p. 5). Continuous and nuanced attention for the actual art form itself within sociological analysis, is therefore essential. For this reason, we will discuss several unique properties of architecture in the next section.

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<sup>73</sup> *'We zijn ook van de overtuiging dat je binnen elke stijl of smaak iets goed kunt maken. Dus ge kunt, om het naar de kunst te vertalen, ge kunt een abstract schilderij hebben of een figuratief schilderij, maar binnen elke stroming kunt ge ook goed en slecht onderscheiden.'*

<sup>74</sup> *'Ik vind, dat architectenbureau (...) ik zal niet zeggen dat die, euh, dat die slecht zijn (lacht), maar ik denk dat Rem Koolhaas toch nog net iets baanbrekender is in publieke gebouwen.'*

#### **4. Four unique properties of architecture**

Attention for the ‘extra-sociological’ characteristics of cultural objects in sociological analysis is best embedded in an understanding of the unique properties of the art discipline to which those cultural objects belong. Therefore, we would like to discuss four important properties of architecture that we have recognized and we think should be acknowledged in light of class-based differences in experience and evaluation. The first important property is that the ‘art work’ itself coincides, to a very considerable degree, with the setting in which the ‘art work’ figures. The second important property is that architecture is never produced in an ‘autonomous field of cultural production’. These two properties both have implications for the ‘autonomy’ of architecture as an art-form, with the first suggesting a higher degree of autonomy and the second suggesting a lower degree of autonomy (compared to other fields of artistic production). The third property pertains to the fact that our experience of architecture is never ‘purely aesthetic’, since functional and practical considerations (such as comfort) are also an integral part of how we ‘use’ spaces. The fourth property pertains to the outspokenly ‘public’ nature of architecture and the implications that this has for the ‘conspicuous consumption’ of architecture. After discussing these four properties, we finish this section with voicing a final (more art-historical) critique of iconic architecture and discussing shortly what benefits iconic architecture might offer.

### *A convergence between art work and setting*

The first important property of architecture we would like to highlight is that it features a (near) complete convergence between what Bourdieu describes as an ‘art work’ and the ‘setting’ in which it is presented:

*‘We can orient to Bourdieu’s sociology of art by differentiating three interdependent dimensions, forms or locales: 1) the artist and **the art works themselves** – concrete products produced by cultural workers in particular historical conditions; 2) what might broadly be called ‘**social space**’, ranging from **the local settings in which art works figure** – museums, academies, cities – to the overarching sets of relations within which struggles over art occur, Bourdieu’s fields; 3) the audience, possessing sums of cultural and economic capital that activate their attitudes, artistic preferences, bodily habits and cognitive competences – in short, their habituses.’* (Prior, 2005, p. 125, emphasis added)

In contrast with most cultural objects, architecture is simultaneously the ‘art work’ and the ‘setting’ in which the ‘art work’ figures. In that sense, architecture is more ‘autonomous’ than other art disciplines. A painter might have complete control over what his or her work ‘looks like’, but often has very limited say on the setting in which it will (eventually) be shown. To use a (somewhat extreme) illustration: in 1624, Rubens paints the altarpiece ‘Adoration of the Magi’ meant for St. Michael’s Abbey in Antwerp, 400 years later it hangs in a museum with an eclectic architectural style that mixes classicist and Flemish renaissance elements. Architecture, in no small part because of its scale, constitutes a more self-contained experience. Of course, in most cases, architecture responds and adapts to its surroundings. In our in-depth interviews with architects, several emphasized the importance of buildings adapting to (and

functioning in) the wider context in which they are placed. When asked what constitutes a ‘good design’, one architect answered:

*‘That place, it has to be... to not (commit an act of) violence (against) the city, it has to be in a way, uh, in harmony with the context in which it is, (...) for example, Centre Pompidou, it’s not in harmony with the rest of the space, so for my vision, for me, you’re doing something wrong to the city.’<sup>75</sup>*

- Architect, 28 years old, woman

Furthermore, the function of buildings, what architects tend to describe as its ‘program’, can change over time and will often be adapted accordingly. Again, most architects we interviewed emphasized this fact and stressed the importance of designing buildings that show flexibility towards a change in its ‘program’. Several architects underlined that this was less of a concern in the past, but has become much more of a focal point in contemporary architecture:

*‘What I do find very important is that, of course we design a building for a certain ‘program’, but we have to be able transcend that, the program is the incentive, so that has to make sense, but the ambition is that you make a building that could, just as easily, carry another program and that, so doing, has a kind of inherent quality. Those are our best buildings, that are sustainable because we want to keep them, because they have the potential so that we can do other things with them in time.’<sup>76</sup>*

- Architect, man, 60 years old

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<sup>75</sup> Interview conducted in English

<sup>76</sup> *‘Wat ik altijd wel heel belangrijk vind is dat, we maken een gebouw voor een programma, we moeten dat kunnen overstijgen, het programma is de aanleiding, dus dat moet kloppen, maar de ambitie is altijd dat je een gebouw maakt dat straks even goed een ander programma kan dragen en dat dus eigenlijk een soort inherente kwaliteit begint te hebben. Dat zijn ook onze beste gebouwen, die ook duurzaam zijn omdat we ze willen houden, omdat er ergens een potentie zit in dat gebouw waar dat je ook andere dingen mee kan doen.’*

*The customer is always right*

The two excerpts above already point towards a second important property of architecture, namely that architecture is never produced in an ‘autonomous field of cultural production’. The design (and subsequent realization) of architecture is always subject to both practical restrictions (technical limitations, zoning laws, etc) as well as involvement and instructions from clients. When designing private homes, the client is a private citizen, in the case of public buildings this will be a group of (professional) stakeholders such as politicians or administrators. All architects that were interviewed emphasized the fact that, in many ways, they had limited autonomy in designing and realizing buildings:

*‘There are a lot of stakeholders (...), there’s the user, the people who happen to pass by, the government, the... the environment, you have really a lot of parameters and then you also have other parameters that have an influence, the client, the budget, spatial planning, the fire department has its demands, you have to take disabled people into account...’<sup>77</sup>*

- Architect, 32 years old, man

*‘So, me as an architect, I cannot decide really how I want, I mean, I can propose, but most of the time, when a promotor calls your agency, he already knows what kind of space he wants (...). It’s a bit different on private buildings, because you have a client which is also the user of the space (...), but as all the libraries are done for the public and there is an investor, you have to convince the investor.’<sup>78</sup>*

- Architect, 28 years old, woman

As mentioned before, buildings always have a function or ‘program’, which means that architecture can hardly ever be ‘art for the sake of art’. Every architect that was interviewed also emphasized the fact that architecture is not a ‘pure’ art-form:

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<sup>77</sup> *‘Er zijn heel veel stakeholders (...), het is de gebruiker, de mensen die toevallig rondlopen, de overheid, de... gans het milieu, ge hebt eigenlijk heel veel parameters en dan daarnaast hebt ge ook nog eens andere parameters die beïnvloeden, zijnde de bouwheer, het budget, ruimtelijke ordening, de brandweer zijn eisen, mindervaliden waar dat je mee moet rekening houden...’*

<sup>78</sup> Interview conducted in English

*'It's an applied art (...), my husband is a visual artist and I always tell him: for me, architecture is not art, he doesn't get that (...), I mean, yes a public building can appeal to you and can facilitate strong associations, whatever you like, but a building still has a function and art does not need to have a function'*<sup>79</sup>

- Architect, woman, 57 years old

*'I would say that there is an artistic principal, but it's not as important as people think (...), architecture is making the building work from a functional point of view, making it work from a structural point of view, making it work from a technical point of view and trying to understand how all these materials work together (...) you try to place the materials in a way that from inside and outside looks coherent and aesthetically agreeable, but for me the artistic part is really small'*<sup>80</sup>

- Architect, woman, 28 years old

*'There are buildings that are on the borderline between art and architecture, but most buildings, architectural buildings, for me are not really art, I think art is much broader than architecture'*<sup>81</sup>

- Architect, man, 33 years old

*'For me architecture is an applied art-form, if you can even call it an art-form'*<sup>82</sup>

- Architect, man, 60 years old

*'Architecture tries to understand what the situation is, what the facts are, it also strives to take an empathetic stance towards all of this. Art doesn't have to be empathetic, can even "distance itself" from this, there's a lot of art that does this, but uhm, architecture has to have a degree of, yes, empathy, compassion for a community'*<sup>83</sup>

- Architect, man, 70 years old

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<sup>79</sup> *'Een toegepaste kunst (...), mijn man is beeldend kunstenaar en ik zeg altijd: voor mij is architectuur geen kunst, hij snapt dat niet (...) allé, een publiek gebouw kan ook appelleren, kan associaties oproepen, noem maar op, maar een gebouw heeft ook nog wel een functie en kunst op zich hoeft geen functie te hebben'*

<sup>80</sup> Interview conducted in English

<sup>81</sup> *'Er zijn gebouwen die op de grens liggen tussen kunst en architectuur, maar de meeste gebouwen, architecturale gebouwen, zijn voor mij niet echt kunst, ik vind kunst nog veel breder dan architectuur'*

<sup>82</sup> *'Architectuur, voor mij is dat een heel toegepaste kunst, als het al een kunst is'*

<sup>83</sup> *'Architectuur (...) probeert te begrijpen wat de situatie is, wat de feiten zijn, wil hier ook een soort empatische houding ten opzichte van aannemen. Kunst hoeft niet empatisch te zijn, kan zich zelfs "afzetten van" en er is heel veel kunst die dat doet, maar euhm, architectuur moet toch een graad van, ja, empathie, medeleven met de gemeenschap'*

*'I think the main difference is that art does not have a function. (...) (Architecture is) also a kind of craft, like, a watchmaker making a watch, that is also a kind of art, a craft that can be very beautiful, that in its detail and design can be art to a large extent, but the most important thing is that it works'*<sup>84</sup>

- Architect, man, 32 years old

This emphasis on functionality is very much at the heart of architecture, although this should not be understood as architects claiming that function outweighs design, in fact only one architect explicitly stated that function is 'a bit more important'. Most architects emphasize that a good design pays equal attention to function and form and that one implies the other:

*'What modernity has taught us is: what functions well, is beautiful'*<sup>85</sup>

- Architect, man, 70 years old

*'For me, the two are automatically linked, I don't like talking about design as if it is some sort of additional thing, I think they have to be inherently linked to one another'*<sup>86</sup>

- Architect, man, 60 years old

Iconic architecture, or at least the more extreme manifestations of it where buildings become 'sculptures' and form is heavily prioritized over function, could be interpreted as a striving for more artistic autonomy for architects. Some architects see this movement (that prioritizes artistry over readability and functionality) as a problematic one and disavow buildings such as 'The Ship' for this reason:

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<sup>84</sup> *'Ik denk dat het grote verschil met kunst is dat kunst geen functie heeft. (...) het (is) ook een soort ambacht, een soort, zoals een horlogemaker een horloge, dat is ook een soort kunst, een soort ambacht die heel mooi kan zijn, die ook in zijn details en in zijn vormgeving voor een groot deel kunst is, maar het gaat er wel vooral over dat het werkt'*

<sup>85</sup> *'Wat de moderniteit bijgebracht heeft is: wat goed functioneert, is mooi.'*

<sup>86</sup> *'Voor mij zijn de twee automatisch gelinkt, ik spreek niet graag over design, ik vind dat precies een soort toegevoegd ding, terwijl ik denk dat ze inherent moeten verbonden zijn'*

*'I actually take issue with buildings, I call it 'photography-architecture', that look very beautiful in pictures and whatnot, but that are actually not, yeah, if you look at the scale of the user, are completely incomprehensible'<sup>87</sup>*

- Architect, woman, 57 years old

It should also be noted, however, that while all architects we interviewed take issue (to a greater or lesser extent) with 'photography-architecture', not all consider 'The Ship' as an example of this type of misguided architectural ambition. One architect said:

*'What I also like about this building, is that it has a bit of a dark, dramatic atmosphere, I think a library should have that (...). Of course, if you were to design a community centre or something, then you can't do that (...) but I think that a library can have a certain heaviness'<sup>88</sup>*

- Architect, 32 years old, man

### *Form over/flows function*

The architect quoted directly above also made an interesting distinction between what he called 'building buildings' and what he considered to be 'real' architecture, implying that some designs have no artistic qualities and are made with only functionality in mind. Interestingly enough, the respondents taking part in our VR-assisted interviews seemed to make a similar distinction. Respondents used the word 'architecture' almost exclusively while discussing 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' (and not the other three libraries). There were also class-based differences found

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<sup>87</sup> *'Ik heb problemen eigenlijk met gebouwen en ik noem dat een beetje 'foto-architectuur', die er zeer mooi uitziet op foto en noem maar op, maar dus die eigenlijk niet, ja, als men dan gaat kijken op schaal van de gebruiker, eigenlijk totaal onbegrijpbaar zijn'*

<sup>88</sup> *'Ik vind leuk aan dit gebouw ook, dat het een beetje een donkere, dramatische sfeer heeft, ik vind dat een bibliotheek dat moet hebben (...). Ja, als ge een buurthuis of een gemeenschapscentrum of zo ontwerpt, dan mag dat juist totaal niet... (...) maar ik vind, een bibliotheek, dat mag een bepaalde zwaarheid hebben'*

regarding the use of the word ‘architecture’: in both ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’, respondents with a higher education level, whose parents have a high level of education and respondents who participate more often to ‘highbrow’ cultural activities in their free time all use the word ‘architecture’ to describe these two buildings more often. Almost all respondents describing these library buildings as ‘architecture’ (or as being ‘architectural’), do so in an outspokenly positive manner. The first two excerpts pertain to ‘The Cinema’, the last two to ‘The Ship’:

*I like it, it's minimalistic, uhm, it's modern, with all that glass, it immediately appeals to me, that's a building that you don't just pass by when you're walking there, you immediately notice it I think, it's remarkable architecture*<sup>89</sup>

- Woman, 22 years old, higher education

*It actually, uhm, elevates that whole city to a higher level. Or at least the architecture in that city, yeah.*<sup>90</sup>

- Man, 37 years old, higher education

*Very beautiful architecture, especially in the context of (that city) it really stands out, it's very big, it's a real statement-building, uhm, yeah.*<sup>91</sup>

- Woman, 39 years old, higher education

*Architecturally, yeah, that's neat. They really put in a lot of effort and money in making something out of it.*<sup>92</sup>

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

The fact that the use of the word ‘architecture’ coincides with a positive evaluation of the library’s style indicates two interesting notions: firstly, that the term ‘architecture’ functions as

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<sup>89</sup> *Ik vind het wel mooi, ik vind het veel strakker, euh, 't is modern, met al dat glas, dat spreekt direct aan, da's een gebouw dat u niet zomaar voorbijgaat als ge daar passeert, ge hebt het direct gezien denk ik, 't is opvallende architectuur'*

<sup>90</sup> *Het trekt eigenlijk euh, die stad naar een hoger niveau hé. Alleszins de architectuur in die stad, ja.'*

<sup>91</sup> *Super mooie architectuur, speciaal in't beeld van (die stad) valt het op, het is zeer groot, het is echt zo'n statement-gebouw, euhm, ja.'*

<sup>92</sup> *Architecturaal is dat, ja, tof hé. Daar hebben ze ook echt moeite en geld in gestoken om er iets van te maken hé.'*

a seal of approval for respondents with a higher socio-economic status. Secondly, that it makes sense for architects to strive towards their buildings being described as ‘architecture’ as it elicits a positive connotation among the people who are more likely to be in positions to grant them funding and award them projects. However, while buildings that are more ‘architectural’ might elicit positive responses from those with more cultural capital, we also see that there is no true ‘purely’ aesthetic experience of architecture (as opposed to most other art-forms). This is the third important property of architecture in light of a class-based analysis, one that is best illustrated by the fact that ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’ are also consistently evaluated on their usability, functionality and invitingness, even by respondents that tend to value aesthetic qualities more than others (higher educated and younger visitors):

*‘(Sighs) Yes, in itself I think it’s an attractive building, but (...) you can’t see anywhere that it’s a library, or is it written on that sign over there maybe? I don’t know... Yeah, no, I wouldn’t go or be like: I’m spontaneously going to go and see what’s over there’<sup>93</sup>*  
- Woman, 52 years old, higher education

*‘It’s beautiful, but I would prefer to spend time in the previous one (‘The School’). (...) I think it’s really beautiful, but it doesn’t have, for me a library can, can have some cosiness, to spend some time there’<sup>94</sup>*  
- Man, 20 years old, higher education

*‘Well, with regards to its architecture, this building is nice and beautiful, but yeah, pffff, no, it’s rather, uhm, how do you call it? Threatening, if you ask me (...) the architecture is, wow, very impressive, but no, I would... I would stay away from it’<sup>95</sup>*  
- Woman, 40 years old, higher education

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<sup>93</sup> *‘(Zucht) Ja, op zich vind ik het gebouw (...) wel mooi, maar... (...) ge ziet nergens dat het de bibliotheek is of staat dat op dat bord daar misschien? Ik weet het niet... Ja, nee, ik zou niet gaan, zoiets hebben van: ik ga eens uit mezelf kijken wat daar is’*

<sup>94</sup> *‘Het is mooi, maar ik zou liever in de vorige (‘The School’) wat tijd spenderen. (...) Ik vind het heel mooi, maar het heeft niet zo, een bibliotheek voor mij, mag wel wat gezelligheid hebben, om daar wat tijd door te brengen’*

<sup>95</sup> *‘Euh, goh, dit gebouw is qua architectuur tof en mooi, maar ja, pfff, nee, het is nogal, euh, hoe noem je dat? Bedreigend vind ik zo (...) qua architectuur natuurlijk wow, weer indrukwekkend, maar nee, ik zou... ik zou er van wegblijven’*

We see that ‘tensions’ can arise between an appreciation for an aesthetic style and the perceived invitingness of a building most outspokenly in ‘The Ship’, where one in five respondents remarked that they like the style of the building, but do not deem it to be an inviting space. The following excerpts illustrate this sentiment very well. The first respondent praised the building of ‘The Ship’ extensively for its beauty before this exchange with the interviewer.

***‘And is it also inviting for you to stay and, let’s say, read a magazine or something?’***

*‘Hmmm, well, actually no, I don’t know, for me, not really, because, it’s a really big space, like, you go in to take something and then you immediately leave’*

***‘Because it’s so big? Or because of the way it looks?’***

*‘Also because of the way it looks’<sup>96</sup>*

- Woman, 32 years old, elementary school

*‘I can enjoy it, I can think it’s nice, but to me it gives a feeling of: OK, since it’s so ‘spacy’ and modern, it also gives me a feeling of, yes, no, not to hang around, no. The minimalistic style is a bit too cold for it, I think.’<sup>97</sup>*

- Man, 43 years old, higher education

It’s interesting to see that an appreciation for the aesthetic qualities of the building does not automatically translate into a positive evaluation of the overall ‘invitingness’. Respondents can hold the architecture in high regard and still feel less welcome. In short: architecture is an art-form where, on average, ‘pure taste’ is arguably less important in comparison to other artistic

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<sup>96</sup> *‘En nodigt het ook uit om te blijven zitten, boekje te lezen, zoiets?’*

*Goh, euh, eigenlijk euh, ja, ik weet niet, voor mij niet echt, want, dat is zo echt een grote ruimte, zo precies dat je moet iets euh, regelen en direct buiten*

*Nee, nee. Ook omdat het zo groot is? Of, meer hoe dat het eruitziet?’*

*Hoe dat het eruitziet ook hé’*

<sup>97</sup> *‘Ik kan er van genieten, ik kan dat mooi vinden, maar dan geeft mij dat het gevoel van: OK, met dat het spacy en modern is, geeft het mij ook een klein beetje gevoel een klein beetje van, mja, nee, om niet te blijven rondhangen, nee. Daar is de minimalistische stijl iets te kil voor denk ik.’*

disciplines, although individuals who possess higher amounts of cultural capital do value this purely aesthetic dimension more than those with lower amounts of cultural capital.

*To see and be seen*

The fourth and final property that we think sets architecture apart from other artistic disciplines is that it is always consumed in a distinctly ‘public’ way, especially when considering public buildings. Aside from homes, architecture can hardly ever be experienced in private. This implies that ‘*one of the major transformations in the cultural order of things*’ that Lahire (2008, p. 176) discusses, the fact that ‘*new cultural products are often consumed in private*’, has not taken place in architecture. This is not without consequence, since ‘*the private sphere allows individuals to let go, to relax their control over their emotions. Equally, it favours the least formal and most hedonistic dispositions, given that the actor is freed from the gaze of the other, and finds himself in a situation of minimal formality or officiality. (...) The consumption of commercial or “lowbrow” cultural products has therefore been opened up to publics a priori more resistant towards them as a result of their high level of education.*’ This implies that ‘conspicuous consumption’ has remained (and will remain) more relevant for architecture than other artistic disciplines. Services such as Netflix and Spotify might create ‘safe spaces’ where consumers can give in to ‘guilty pleasures’, stimulating the ‘lowbrow’ cultural consumption of media such as film and music, but architecture (and especially more iconic architecture) creates a very public interaction setting where ‘seeing and being seen’ is a significant part of the experience. One respondent alluded to this in a colourfully way while ‘visiting’ ‘The Cinema’:

*'There might be a big lounge space there, but everyone will huddle together there, I prefer (...) that everyone has their own little corner (...) You burp one time and everyone heard you. (...) You're continuously watched down there in the middle. I don't think I'd (find) a lot of peace and quiet to read a book'<sup>98</sup>*

- Man, 43 years old, high school

In all likelihood, iconic architecture heightens the importance of 'conspicuousness', but we cannot say so conclusively based on our results. Further research, leaning on a more ethnographical approach, could help clarify this.

*Iconic = outdated?*

Our last critical note on iconic architecture is more art-historical in nature, namely that extreme manifestations of iconic architecture are an expression of an outdated (and perhaps increasingly irrelevant) outlook on art and culture. Bauman (2011) rightly calls to attention that art has lost its potential to 'shock', to provoke people: *'Art, when it is spoken about, rarely inspires the sanctimonious or reverential tone so common in the past. There is no coming to blows. No raising of barricades. No flashing of knives'* (p. 15). In all likelihood, 'shocking' library patrons was never the main objective of architects that designed the more extreme examples of iconic public libraries (in our research), but eliciting some kind of heightened reaction (beyond mere appreciation or recognition) must have been their intent. The word 'scary', for instance, was used a few times (and exclusively) to describe 'The Ship'. When asked if the library was inviting, one respondent answered:

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<sup>98</sup> *'Er staat daar wel een grote salon, maar iedereen gaat daar ook gaan samen zitten, ik zit liever (...) dat iedereen ook zijn eigen hoekje heeft (...) Ge laat ene boer, iedereen heeft het gehoord. (...) Ge wordt ook continu bekeken daar in't midden. Ik peins niet dat ik daar dan veel rust, voor een boek te lezen'*

*(sighs) For me yes, subjectively speaking, on the other hand, I'm also a Lord of the Rings-fan and I think if that would be in our time, then Mordor... Sauron, he, I mean, he would have lived here. I mean, I think it's... it looks scary, if I'm being honest*<sup>99</sup>

- Man, 31 years old, higher education

One of the architects, who was previously unfamiliar with 'The Ship', had this reaction upon her first viewing of the building:

*(Sighs) Wow, uh... (hums 'The Imperial March' from Star Wars, then laughs). Yes, I would say that it's a public building (chuckles), I wouldn't know what's inside. It's a bit scary, it's a bit oppressive.*<sup>100</sup>

- Architect, 28 years old, woman

These are exceptions, however. Most negative reactions to 'The Ship' or 'The Cinema' do not indicate controversy or outrage pertaining to the aesthetic qualities as such, but more to the fact (as discussed before) that these buildings had likely 'cost too much'. While it is true that only 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' elicited responses from respondents that the building was 'overwhelming', this happened sparsely and was not always commented on in a negative way: two respondents stated that the building of 'The Cinema' was overwhelming (with one expressing themselves about it in a neutral and the other in a positive way), while nine respondents stated that the building of 'The Ship' was 'overwhelming', of which five thought this to be a negative aspect. Of those five, three had higher levels of education, suggesting that lower educated respondents are not more easily 'overwhelmed' by iconic architecture, they simply appreciate it less because it is less recognizable and less inviting. Note also, that both excerpts above came from higher educated individuals.

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<sup>99</sup> *(zucht) Voor mij wel, subjectief, langs de andere kant, ik ben ook een Lord of the Rings-fan en ik denk moest dat in onze tijd zijn, zou Mordor hier... Sauron hier, allé, hier in gewoond hebben. Allé, ik vind het... het heeft een eng uiterlijk, als ik eerlijk ben'*

<sup>100</sup> Interview conducted in English

This all suggests that iconic architecture does not have truly ‘subversive’ qualities: it is not particularly ‘daring’ and it does not ‘shock’ people. We are therefore inclined to see iconic architecture more as an expression of the ‘entertainment culture’ that Lahire (2008) discusses: *‘Over the course of the past 40 years, classically legitimate forms of culture have fallen victim both to the rise of scientific culture (...) and to the growth of entertainment culture (promoted by big business, more profitable than any other form of leisure or culture)’* (p. 175). An outspokenly neoliberal logic in cultural policy fuels iconic architecture, not artistic ambition, illustrated by its connection to ‘urban boosterism’, the emphasis placed on touristic value and the growing tendency to approach patrons as ‘consumers’.

### *The upside of iconic architecture*

Throughout this chapter, we have criticized iconic architecture (or at least too extreme manifestations of it) in a variety of ways and on different fronts. That is why we would like to close by underlining the fact that constructing larger libraries in a more ‘bold’ architectural style can also have its merits. This is nicely illustrated by the fact that ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’ are both described far more often as having ‘tantalizing’/‘provocative’<sup>101</sup> buildings, both by higher educated and lower educated respondents. Especially ‘The Ship’, the most ‘iconic’ library building in our research, elicits this comment quite often, with roughly one in five respondents describing it as such. The following excerpts all followed after the interviewer asked if it was an inviting building (and whether the respondent would be likely to enter the building):

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<sup>101</sup> The words ‘tantalizing’ and ‘provocative’ are used here, but they do not completely capture the meaning of the Dutch word ‘prikkelend’, which in its most literal translation would be ‘excitatory’.

*'Yes, because it's impressive, if I would have some time, I would have gone inside'*<sup>102</sup>

- Man, 55 years old, higher education

*'Uhm, out of curiosity, to know what it is'*<sup>103</sup>

- Man, 74 years old, higher education

*'It challenges you, I mean uhm, it has something, uhm, it's one of those things, it stands out'*<sup>104</sup>

- Man, 56 years old, high school

*'Yes, yes, if only out of curiosity. I would give a (score of) 9 (to that building)'*<sup>105</sup>

- Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

These kinds of reactions are likely the ones that the architects and decision-makers behind the building were aiming for and there is no denying that a distinct, iconic style can have its benefits. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, buildings with newly renovated or constructed buildings often report an uptake in their visiting- and user-numbers. The important question, however, is if this uptake happens 'across the board' or whether a specific group of (potential) visitors outweighs others. When looking at the frequency with which different education levels are represented among the libraries in our research (as discussed earlier in this chapter as well as in chapter two) it is likely that very iconic buildings have a negative impact on the attendance of visitors with a lower socio-economic profile. Is this then a defensible choice? It should also be noted that 'The Ship' was simultaneously described as 'tantalizing/provocative' by several respondents, who then went on to emphasize a lack of 'invitingness' or recognisability. The following excerpt also followed the question whether 'The Ship' had an inviting building:

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<sup>102</sup> *'Ja, omdat't imponant is hé, als ik meer tijd moest gehad hebben op dat moment of euh, zou ik wel eens binnengestapt hebben'*

<sup>103</sup> *'Euhhh, uit nieuwsgierigheid, om te weten wat het is'*

<sup>104</sup> *'Uitdagend, ik wil zeggen euh, het heeft iets, euh, het is iets, het springt er uit'*

<sup>105</sup> *'Ja, ja, al is 't alleen maar uit nieuwsgierigheid. Ik zou daar een 9 voor geven'*

*'Uhm (sighs), a bit less inviting, it's tantalizing/provocative, it makes me curious. So, I would go and take a look from up close to see what it is, but at first glance, it doesn't give me the feeling of: "that's a library", I don't have the feeling straight away that this is a public space where I am welcome'*<sup>106</sup>

- Man, 43 years old, higher education

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<sup>106</sup> 'Euhmm, (zucht), iets minder uitnodigend, maar het prikkelt wel, het maakt wel nieuwsgierig. Dus ik zou wel eens dichterbij gaan om te zien wat het is, maar op het eerste zicht, geeft dat mij niet het gevoel: 'da's een bibliotheek', ik heb niet dadelijk het gevoel dat dat een openbare ruimte is waar dat ik dus welkom ben'

## **Conclusion**

In many ways, this chapter is a conversation between the results and findings of our research and Bourdieu's highly influential work on class-based dispositions to culture, art and aesthetics. Of course, our work itself has been heavily influenced by Bourdieu, which also makes this conversation a look in the mirror and an evaluation of the assumptions and hypotheses that motivated us to tackle the subject. What are our conclusions? First of all, we see plenty of confirmation of the notion that cultural capital and education level are vital concepts in understanding how individuals experience, evaluate and make sense of architecture and spaces. This suggests that the architectural style of a building that houses a public library is not something of secondary importance, but crucial in understanding why certain public libraries do better than others in attracting visitors with lower education levels or members of the working class. That being said, education level should not be understood as a singular and all-encompassing indicator: gender and (especially) age need to be taken into consideration too and would preferably be integrated in a 'multidimensional' approach. Secondly, we see clear, present-day confirmation of Bourdieu's ideas on legitimacy and the 'language of the dominant class'. These concepts have proved valuable in our approach of a very 'political' dimension of our subject, the practice of community consultation. Thirdly, we discussed how Bourdieu treats 'cultural objects' in his work and have compared this to our own approach. This is undoubtedly the point where we are most critical of Bourdieu, falling in line with several of his critics and committing ourselves to a (more contemporary) research paradigm that takes the 'extra-sociological' characteristics of cultural objects seriously. That being said, we do acknowledge the enormous value of Bourdieu's (distinctly cognitive and cultural-historic) approach to art and aesthetics: we consider the fourth and last section of this chapter to be quite a 'typically' Bourdieusian discussion of what (we think) are important characteristics of architecture and

how these help make sense of this art-form and its 'field' in a sociological way. It could be argued that there is 'no escaping' Bourdieu if one has the desire to engage with contemporary cultural sociology in any serious way: most cultural sociologists recognize that they are indebted to his ideas and concepts and those that don't often work in distinct opposition to his work, treating it as a whetstone on which to sharpen their knives. In the end, the research presented in this dissertation can be seen as (another) confirmation that the Bourdieusian approach is still enormously valuable for contemporary (cultural) sociology, but also as a reminder that we should not simply adopt every theory, concept or method unquestioningly.

## *Chapter IV - Appendix*

Between November 2019 and November 2020, we conducted six in-depth interviews with architects. Our ambition was to interview at least ten, but Covid-19 forced us to reschedule several interviews and adjust our expectations. The last three interviews had to be conducted online, as opposed to the three first ones, which were conducted face-to-face. The first three architects were able to view the 360° videos of the libraries in the exact same way as the respondents participating in the VR-assisted interviews. The last three architects were able to view the 360° images on a website (similar to [www.torvub.be/360library](http://www.torvub.be/360library)). Below are short descriptions of each of the architects we spoke to, presented in the order in which they were interviewed.

The first architect we interviewed (33 years old, man) received his master's degree in architecture in 2014 after which he did several internships at architectural firms of varying sizes. His first job in architecture was at an architectural firm located in Antwerp. He has since worked on projects that involved (among other things) renovations of school buildings and is currently self-employed, focusing mainly on the construction and renovation of private residences. He stated to have never been involved in the design or construction of a public library.

The second architect we interviewed (32 years old, man) received his master's degree in architecture in 2013 and did his internship in the architectural firm of one of his professors and stayed on at that firm for a year as an employee. He has recently started his own architectural firm (in partnership with one of his classmates from college) in which he works on a wide range of projects, from office buildings and stores to apartments and private residences. He stated to have never been involved in the design or construction of a public library himself, but mentioned that he had some knowledge on the subject since his partner had worked on a public library in the past.

The third architect we interviewed (28 years old, woman) received her master's degree in architecture in 2015 and went on to do her internship at an architectural firm in Paris. Following this internship, she started working for another architectural firm in Paris. Both firms tend to work on (very) large projects, such as office buildings and railway stations. During her internship, she took part in a design contest for a school that also had to include a library. While

her firm did not win the contest, she was part of the team designing the library for this school, which she stated was an interesting experience.

The fourth architect we interviewed (70 years old, man) received his master's degree in architecture in 1974 and did his internship working for a self-employed architect. He started his own (highly reputed) architectural firm shortly after finishing his internship and has taught at several colleges and universities, both in Belgium and abroad. The architectural firm mainly works on large projects and public buildings. He has worked on two public libraries in his career: one project involved the restoration of a large library in a city in Belgium, the other project was a completely new design for a public library in another city in Belgium. In other words: this architect has extensive experience in designing public libraries.

The fifth architect we interviewed (57 years old, woman) received her master's degree in architecture in 1986 and followed this up with a specialization in architectural restoration. She completed her internship at a firm that specializes in heritage sites. She later worked for a (very reputable) Flemish architect. Since the early nineties, she has taught at both a Flemish college and a Flemish university. A little over five years ago she completed a PhD, writing a dissertation on (small-scale, rural) architectural heritage. She stated to have never been involved in the design or construction of a public library.

The sixth and final architect we interviewed (60 years old, man) graduated as an engineer-architect in 1983, followed by an internship at an architectural firm that mainly focuses on industrial sites. Afterwards, he started his own architectural firm (together with two partners), that transitioned from working mainly on private residences to larger projects (often after winning design contests). Since the early nineties he has also been working on smaller projects under his own name. In the early 2000's his architectural firm entered a design contest for a public library in a large municipality in Belgium. Although they eventually did not win the contest, this does of course mean that he is familiar with the process of designing a public library.

## CONCLUSION

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### *Some sound advice*

Many times throughout this dissertation, we have emphasized that public libraries have changed considerably in the last two decades, both in what they ‘do’ and what they ‘look like’. Based on what we have learned about how architecture is experienced along class-cultural divides, we believe the simplest, soundest and most tangible advice we can give to library professionals, policy-makers, architects and interior designers (when constructing or renovating a library) is: focus on recognisability by integrating visual cues that give the visiting public some confirmation that they are ‘in the right place’. In chapter four, we discussed the fact that many respondents commented that they did not ‘see any books’ upon entering ‘The Ship’. The choice to not prominently display books (undoubtedly still the most widely understood symbol of public libraries), is likely the best illustration of a changed approach to library design and construction, indicative of a desire to abandon the trusted, familiar image of public libraries. Grant (2015), for instance, writes: *‘One place librarians need to be concerned about today is the library brand (...). Recent research reports show the library brand as “books” (...): “In 2005, most Americans (69%) said ‘books’ is the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the library. In 2010, even more, 75% believe that the library brand is books.” Reading that sentence should make you uneasy’* (p. 100). Based on all the insights we’ve gained through our research, our reaction to Grant’s concerns can only be: Why? Why should librarians feel uneasy at the thought that most people connect public libraries to books? Results from the 2018 user survey show us, after all, that 98,2% of all users still regularly loan out books.

Furthermore, recognisability and innovation need not be mutually exclusive. The recently constructed ‘Utopia’ library in Aalst, for instance, is a great example of a public library that has a building in a contemporary architectural style, but still embraces books (as a symbol): *‘(In*

*front of the library) a square arose that looks onto an enormous window. Behind that window you can see an equally enormous bookcase of three stories high. This is not just a strong communicative image, but also an example of “architecture parlante” that signals that this place is a library*<sup>107</sup> (Van Synghel, 2019). While our findings clearly show that the experience and interpretation of architecture varies according to social background, we also see that ‘architecture parlante’, architecture that explains its own function and identity, is worth pursuing. There are common denominators and widely understood symbols that architects can capitalize on in pursuit of an inclusive style. In the case of public libraries, ‘books’ is surely one of those symbols. Committing to recognisability, we argue, will only help infrastructure to become ‘social infrastructure’ and places to become ‘third places’.

### *Third places and false generosity*

Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, we were often reminded of Bourdieu’s comment regarding the fact that museums are often free (in that they have no admission price), but that this does not necessarily make them less elitist or more approachable. He considers this to be *‘false generosity, since free entry is also optional entry, reserved for those (...) equipped with the ability to appropriate the works of art’* (Bourdieu et al., 1991, p. 113). Making museums free, one could argue, can actually hurt the chances of visitors with lower levels of cultural capital to feel that they are ‘legitimized’ to be there. Let’s compare this to a public space on the other end of the class-cultural spectrum: the fast food restaurant McDonald’s. Despite not being ‘independently owned’ by members of the community, McDonald’s is often

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<sup>107</sup> ‘(Voor de bibliotheek) ontstond een pleintje dat uitgaat op een reusachtig raam. Daarachter is een al even reusachtige boekenkast te zien van drie verdiepingen hoog. Dit is niet alleen een sterk communicatief beeld, maar ook een voorbeeld van *architecture parlante* die aangeeft dat het om een bibliotheek gaat.’

considered an important ‘third place’ for many. Butler and Diaz (2016) note: *‘for lower-income Americans, the twin arches are becoming almost the equivalent of the English “pub,” which after all is short for “public house”’: groups of retirees meeting for coffee and talk, they might hold regular Bible study meetings there, and people treat the restaurant as an inexpensive hangout’*. Buying a beverage (for as little as 1€) gives you the right to sit somewhere comfortably for hours and enjoy free Wi-Fi. There, a small financial transaction goes a long way in legitimizing your presence. Klinenberg (2018) emphasizes the ‘legitimizing effect’ of purchasing something when discussing why pubs are such important social ‘equalizers’ in British culture: *‘Once a man has bought or has been bought his glass of beer, he has entered an environment in which he (is) participator rather than spectator’* (p. 20). In free museums, however, visitors have to legitimize their attendance primarily by their interest in (and knowledge of) what is on display. Perhaps the many innovations that have happened in public libraries in recent years are also examples of ‘false generosity’: by stepping away from their trusted appearance, by expanding functions, by presenting books as increasingly less relevant and by changing their aesthetic (all interventions aimed at making libraries more low-threshold), visitors with lower levels of cultural capital actually feel less legitimized to be there. Our research shows that respondents with lower levels of education have a harder time ‘recognizing’ more contemporary, iconic public libraries (as public libraries) and that lower educated and (especially) elderly respondents often feel uncomfortable in voicing critique towards them.

The suggested ‘legitimizing’ effect of buying something, however, does shine a positive light on a trend in public libraries we have discussed on several occasions in this dissertation, namely that an increasing number of libraries have started to integrate coffee bars (or even restaurants) since recent years. Of course, our research suggests that careful consideration is needed on the

appearance of these (new) facilities. Simply put, library professionals and architects shouldn't get carried away and unreflectively design these facilities to their (middle class) heart's content. Using inclusive architecture and interior design to communicate to (potential) visitors that the library is (still) a third place that does not require a higher education degree to enjoy or is not a place reserved solely for a tech-savvy, younger generation, can play a significant role in lowering the threshold for public libraries.

*Stepping away from the (neoliberal) focus on efficiency and marketing*

Of course, public libraries also need to be allowed the opportunity to become more low-threshold. The first (and perhaps even most important) step in the right direction, is letting go of neoliberal criteria in measuring library effectiveness, as defined by Kann-Christensen and Andersen (2009) in the general introduction. We would make the argument that thinking of public libraries in terms of increasing visiting numbers (without taking socio-demographic diversity into account), 'brand images' and 'business models' is often detrimental to the emancipatory task that society has bestowed on them. Abandoning a neoliberal philosophy, of course, doesn't mean giving librarians 'carte blanche' to organize and design their libraries in any way they see fit. Priorities have to be set and the main one (for the foreseeable future), as we have argued throughout this dissertation, is stimulating the attendance of visitors with a lower socio-economic status. Building massive, iconic libraries is likely not the optimal way to do that.

Perhaps there is something to be learned from the early beginnings of the public library sector, best illustrated by the example of the so-called ‘Carnegie Library’. In a nutshell, industrialist Andrew Carnegie stimulated the (American) public library sector in the late 19th and early 20th century, financing the construction of over 3.000 public libraries. This massive philanthropic project was managed by James Bertram, who wrote a pamphlet called ‘Notes on Library Buildings’, *‘which codified his architectural criteria for libraries’* (Gangewere, 2014, p. 111). Cities and towns that wanted a public library would apply for financial support and a lot of Bertram’s focus went to assessing the viability of projects and whether the right priorities were being considered: *‘Whenever a letter requesting a library came in, Bertram sent the applicant a detailed questionnaire (...), if initial requirements were met, Bertram asked the amount the town was willing to pledge for the library’s annual maintenance, whether a site was being provided, and the amount of money already available. (...) He continuously challenged town officials about money wasted on pretentious architecture and useless space’* (Gangewere, 2014, p. 111).

While there certainly are examples of very large and impressive ‘Carnegie Libraries’, Klinenberg (2018) rightly underlines that most *‘are set in ordinary residential neighborhoods throughout the world, and they continue to be powerful sources of uplift’* (p. 218). Klinenberg (and we along with him) often questions how beneficial, everything considered, megaprojects really are. He gives the example of the new Donnell Library in New York City (constructed in 2013), which is reported to have cost anywhere between \$20 million and \$40 million: *‘while some appreciated its twenty-first century design, both users and critics complained that it felt soulless, more like an Apple Store than a community hub’* (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 221). Why bank on hit-or-miss architectural statements? Why not invest that money in (more modest) renovations or in the maintenance and upkeep of branch libraries? Our findings suggest, after

all, that well-executed renovations are often appreciated and that the ‘opulent aesthetic’ of iconic buildings can cause resentment. All things considered, we cannot help but propose a more conservative and circumspect approach to library construction and renovation.

*It's not just architecture and it's not just libraries*

While our focus on architectural styles has proved fruitful, we would like to emphasize one last time that the architectural characteristics of the building that houses a public library is not the only factor of importance when thinking about inclusion and public buildings and spaces. It goes without saying that the ‘program’ of public libraries, the services it provides and activities it organizes, are also very important. Our research does not deny this, we ‘merely’ provide an additional perspective on the matter by questioning the (often made) assumption that ‘attractiveness’ and ‘invitingness’ mean the same thing for every type of visitor. Additionally, we would like to highlight that the public library is not the only type of social infrastructure that could benefit from more critical reflection on how its physical layout is designed. When Klinenberg (2018) sums up what ‘counts’ as social infrastructure, ‘libraries’ are first on his list, but he adds that *‘schools, playgrounds, parks, athletic fields, and swimming pools, are vital parts of the social infrastructure. So too are sidewalks, courtyards, community gardens, and other green spaces that invite people into the public realm’* (p. 16). All of these spaces and places could benefit from being built in an inclusive architectural style. Universities, for example, are also not necessarily the most inclusive places with regards to their look and feel. Serena Bufton’s *‘The Lifeworld of the University Student: Habitus and Social Class’* (2003) shows that the same class-based patterns of experience and evaluation we identified for public libraries, also present themselves in higher education institutions. Public libraries and

universities share a reputation of being *'engines of social mobility'* (Owens and de St Croix, 2020, p. 5), but are we doing enough to make them live up to that reputation? And how do we deal with the infrastructure we have inherited from previous generations?

### *The importance of national and regional contexts*

The fact that we 'inherit' a lot of our built environment, underscores an aspect of our work that has remained somewhat underexposed: the notion of path dependency and the fact that regions and nations have to deal with different historical legacies and contexts. Throughout this dissertation, the 'typical' Flemish library of the past was rightly identified as being predominantly small-scale and inconspicuous. Pape and Smirnova (2018), however, describe that public facilities in Moscow (especially under Soviet rule) were famous for their *'pretentious and, at times, pompous designs'* (p. 787). A rather telling anecdote is that one of the few respondents who considered 'The Ship' to be very recognizable as a public library was born in the former Soviet Union. The scale of the building alone, was reminiscent for her of the type of public buildings that she knew from her childhood.

Lastly, it is also not just the experience and evaluation of the built environment that will vary according to regional and national contexts. Public libraries, just like other public and cultural institutions, 'do' different things in different countries, as Hapel (2020) rightly underscores: *'In the library sectors of both the United States and the United Kingdom, community engagement generally seems to revolve more around issues of social and racial equity, diversity, and inclusion than is the case in Scandinavian libraries – undoubtedly due to the deeper, more difficult, and very visible societal challenges in those countries, especially in the United States.'*

*Many libraries here are seemingly among the first responders to large emergencies such as heat-waves, wildfires, and flooding, providing shelter and sometimes temporary accommodation, as well as offering safe places for people experiencing homelessness and poverty'* (p. 17). This too, will likely have an impact on what the built environment means and how relevant (non)inclusive architecture is for the people that need these institutions most.

### *Limitations and future research*

Studying the interplay between social class, aesthetic preferences and cultural participation is a challenging and somewhat precarious undertaking. We have approached the subject from different fronts, using different types of data (collection) and analyses that (we think) complement each other in important ways. Naturally, there are also limitations to our research that we need to acknowledge: the data gathered in the large scale user surveys does not capture the opinion of (former) users who have stopped visiting public libraries, we have relied heavily on an experimental research design (using technology and software that is not specifically designed for research purposes) and the respondents that participated to the VR-assisted interviews do not constitute a representative sample of society. Regardless, we think we were able to gain valuable insights despite these limitations.

That being said, there is still plenty more to be unearthed about the subject we have tackled in this dissertation. The idea that national and regional contexts are relevant for how social infrastructure and architecture is experienced, for instance, naturally leads us to the notion that it would be interesting to repeat our study, or perform a similar one, in another region or context and see how results differ compared to what we found. The topic that (we find) presents itself

most prominently as deserving of more inquiry however, is the socio-linguistic dimension of community consultation. Considerable attention was given to this subject in chapter four, but much more could be done to come to a deeper understanding of the inherent pitfalls of this very precarious policy instrument. Since we wholeheartedly agree with Klinenberg (2018) when he posits that *'what we need, now more than ever, is an inclusive conversation about the kinds of infrastructure - physical as well as social - that would best serve, sustain and protect us'* (p. 232), we believe ethnographic research on the actual processes of community consultation could be enormously valuable. If we want more inclusive architecture and a stronger social infrastructure, it is imperative that citizens, policy-makers, architects and sociologists work better and more closely together.



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## APPENDIX



# **REPORT**

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Coding and analysis of the VR-assisted interviews

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## *Foreword*

This report deals with the results of the analyses that were performed on the VR-assisted interviews. The first three chapters of this dissertation serve as the foundation for the work that is presented here. In that capacity, they constitute a long and detailed literature study. To avoid needless repetition, the theoretical framework of the research presented in these chapters will not be discussed again here. This report will give a detailed overview of the coding and analysis of the VR-assisted interviews, and a first discussion of what this analysis tells us, but no conclusion. The insights gained through the analysis presented in this report are discussed in a more coherent and theoretically grounded way in chapter four.

### *1. Methodology*

#### *1.1. First coding*

Since we gathered over 27 hours worth of interviews and we focused on recruiting respondents from different social backgrounds, we felt it was essential to try and ‘translate’ the evaluations that respondents had given to a dataset that would allow for simple quantitative analyses. We considered this first analysis as one that would provide us with a ‘compass’ or a ‘floor plan’, something to help us navigate this myriad of evaluations and opinions. The first coding draws an outline of what seem to be the class-based and socio-demographic patterns in how these buildings are evaluated, while also allowing us to identify respondents whose judgment seems to differ strongly from that of respondents with a comparable profile. The second coding and subsequent analyses would then help to ‘colour in’ these outlines by discussing patterns of experience and evaluation that could not be captured by the first coding and illustrating them with citations.

This first coding was performed during the transcription of the interviews. A coding scheme was developed that could be filled out during the typing out of 27 hours of interviews. The goal was to quantify all responses that were given to all recurring questions we had explicitly asked every respondent about every building. Of course we also allowed for (and even stimulated) respondents to expand on things they brought up spontaneously, but we felt it best to address this during the second coding. The first set of recurring questions pertained to the video every respondent saw of the exterior of every library. Each respondent was asked:

- Do you recognize this building?
  - If so: have you ever entered this building?
- Do you feel this is a typical building for a library? Is it recognizable as a library?
- How would you describe this building?
- Do you find this a nice, attractive building?
- Do you find this an inviting building?
- Does this building perhaps remind you of another (type of) building you know?

If a respondent answered in a positive way to the first two questions, they would also be asked if the VR-video's were a good representation of the library as they had had experienced it in real life. Next we would move on to a video of the interior of every building:

- Do you feel this is a typical interior for a library? Is it recognizable as a library on the inside?
- How would you describe this building?
- Do you find this to be a nice, attractive interior?
- Do you find this to be an inviting interior?
- Does this space perhaps remind you of another (type of) building or space you know?

After discussing both the building and the interior, we would ask respondents to give a general score to the library, a number between one and ten. These questions were asked to every respondent for every library. At the end of the interview, we asked respondents to take off the VR-goggles and showed them pictures of every library, while asking the following questions:

- After having seen them all now, which library do you think is the nicest, the most attractive (as a whole)?
- Which library do you think is the least nice, the least attractive (as a whole)?
- Which library is the most inviting one (as a whole)?
- Which library is the least inviting one (as a whole)?

The coding scheme we devised allowed for most of these questions to be quantified. Whether respondents had recognized and/or visited the buildings could be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Which library they felt to be most attractive or inviting could be answered with a multiple choice question. The description that respondents gave of spaces was taken into account by noting every adjective that respondents used to describe a building or interior, which could then be translated into dummy-variables later on (this exercise was limited to adjectives that were used by at least two respondents). The comparisons that were drawn with other buildings or interiors were treated in the same way: if a respondent said the building of a library reminded him of another (type of) building, this was noted and the most common answers were later coded into dummy-variables. The responses that were given to the questions whether a respondent thought a building or interior was typical, attractive or inviting were translated into Likert-scales, meaning that the degree to which a respondent found, for instance, the interior of a specific library inviting, could vary from 'completely not inviting' to 'very inviting'. This was, at times, a difficult exercise, because things such as hesitance and intonation had to be taken into account. A respondent might answer 'yes' to the question whether he or she feels that the building of a certain library is nice or attractive, but this 'yes' can sound wholehearted or doubtful. One could argue that Likert-scales are too reductive, but some quantitative reduction is necessary to allow for the discernment of patterns, commonalities and tendencies.

This coding and the subsequent linking of this data to the answers that every respondent had given to questions regarding their socio-demographic background in a separate written questionnaire, yielded a dataset that allowed for simple quantitative analyses, such as drawing

correlations and generating frequency tables, while also allowing us to present certain things graphically using Multiple Component Analysis (eg, how education level is connected to the use of certain adjectives). We would like to stress the fact that we will use MCA as a means to discern patterns of description among our respondents, not to make inferences about the representativeness of these patterns among the population. MCA requires quite a high number of respondents in each subcategory of an independent variable to yield statistically significant results. We can already say that none of the MCA's presented in this chapter are statistically significant, they simply present certain patterns of description among our respondents in a graphical way.

### *1.2. Second coding*

Because the content of the interviews were, of course, not limited to the answers that were given to the recurring questions mentioned above, we also wanted to devise a coding scheme that would allow us to quantify (or at least generalize) certain recurring themes, attitudes or opinions. The groundwork for the second coding was also done during the transcription of the interviews: if a certain remark struck us as being interesting or seemed to come up quite often, we would make note of it in a separate spreadsheet. To give the reader an idea of what this means in practice, consider the following examples of notes that were made:

- Respondent emphasizes that this library cost a lot of money to build
- Respondent emphasizes the use of colour in the interior of the library
- Respondent reports to be overwhelmed by the exterior of the building
- Respondent emphasizes the furniture that was used in the interior of this library
- Respondent shows reservation in evaluating a specific library (but not necessarily others)
- Respondent argues with interviewer about the meaning of the word 'typical' with regard to the interior of this specific library, but not with regard to the interiors of other libraries

While transcribing the interviews, 108 separate notes such as the ones above were made. The majority of these were then later condensed and/or organized into different categories and subcategories and then translated into a coding scheme that could be filled out while listening to the interviews a second time. This way, we can determine which percentage of respondents show, for instance, reservation about evaluating a specific library. The results of this coding can also be linked to the dataset of the written questionnaire and the first coding, which allows us to see if certain remarks or behaviors are more prevalent among certain subgroups of respondents. For instance, as we will discuss more at length later, it was found that the apparent construction-cost of a library is an important factor in how a building is perceived and that respondents who are less interested in architecture as an art-form consider buildings that are too 'iconic' as a bad investment of tax-payer's money.

The second coding and the accompanying analyses are illustrated both by frequency tables and citations that (best) illustrate certain opinions and sentiments. Analyzing the interviews while

being heavily guided by these two codings brought attention to things that otherwise might have eluded us and helped us avoid being guided too much by our own preconceptions about what we thought we might find.

### *1.3. Outlier analysis*

Since both the first and second coding (and all analyses that were conducted based on their data) are heavily focused on finding class-based or socio-demographic commonalities in experience, evaluation and description, an outlier analysis will also be performed near the end of this chapter. This is done to gain more insight into respondents that seem to diverge significantly from what would be expected from them in terms of their evaluation of a certain library (when looking at their profile). As will become apparent later, two libraries in our research are each other's opposites when looking at which types of respondents are more favorably inclined towards them, with one being evaluated significantly better by respondents with a higher socio-economic status and one by respondents with a lower socio-economic status. In the outlier analysis, we will focus on respondents that appear to break with this pattern. We do this in order to add nuance to our conceptualization of class-based dispositions and to account for differences between respondents that we were perhaps unable to question, measure or conceptualize. Since this outlier analysis was informed by insights gained from both codings and ensuing analyses, more details regarding the used methodology will be given at the start of paragraph five, at which point they will be more intelligible than now.

### *1.4. Quality of interviews and respondent selection*

As mentioned before, we were able to conduct 73 VR-assisted interviews in total. Not all interviews were used for all analyses, since some were deemed problematic. One interview was deemed completely unusable and was therefore not included in any of the quantitative or qualitative analyses. The reason for this is that the respondent in question first refused to answer the majority of questions in the written questionnaire that accompanied the VR-assisted interview and went off-topic during the interview frequently and exhibited a high degree of confusion, making it impossible to complete the interview in a satisfactory way. Therefore, the majority of analyses are based on a total of 72 interviews. However, a stricter selection of respondents was made for the correlation matrices featured in paragraph three. The reason for excluding three additional respondents for these analyses is that they consistently gave (near) perfect scores on every aspect for every library. Their reasons for doing so range from an incomplete understanding of the meaning of the words 'attractive' and 'inviting' (eg, one of the excluded respondents had a very limited understanding of the Dutch language, causing this person to give highly contradictory answers as to which libraries were inviting or not during and at the end of the interview) to an unmistakable tendency to answer in a socially desirable way. Respondents that were found to be incapable of differentiating between the libraries they 'visited' in a truthful and meaningful way were therefore excluded from the analyses that produced the correlation

matrices in paragraph three. Of course, there were other respondents who frequently gave high scores and good evaluations, this in itself is not a problem. Positively inclined respondents were included as long as they evaluated at least one aspect of one library in a (slightly) negative way.

## *2. Description of libraries featured in VR-assisted interview*

As mentioned above and in previous chapters, the libraries that were ‘visited’ and evaluated in the VR-assisted interviews, will remain anonymous throughout this dissertation. This choice was made to help convince these libraries to participate to the research, which was not always self-evident, considering we are studying (in a very detailed way) how culturally democratic the look and feel of these libraries is. We hope to have sufficiently argued in previous chapters that this is a very sensitive, perhaps even controversial topic, when discussing public libraries. Moreover, outright ‘identifying’ individual libraries as being ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘problematic’ or ‘optimal’, was never the main objective of this research project. Our goal is to ascertain what the effects are of certain aesthetic styles and choices in constituting a public cultural institution that is approachable to some and less so to others. One might even say that outright identifying the libraries that participated to this research, would only draw attention away from what is actually at the core of what we are trying to achieve. That being said, we also do not find it unthinkable that anyone who has a certain familiarity with Flemish public libraries, will be able to identify one or even several of the libraries that were virtually ‘visited’ by our respondents.

Of course, we do realize the importance of giving an apt description of the aesthetic character of the libraries that are discussed here. We will do this in the following ways: first, as mentioned before, we always asked respondents if the library reminded them of another building. We made a list of all the specific buildings that every library was compared to and then selected the one which most closely resembles the library aesthetically (sometimes libraries were compared to another building for other reasons). A picture of this building (which is not necessarily another library) is presented below. This provides a helpful touchstone as to what kind of building we are dealing with in an aesthetic sense. Next, we provide a selection of adjectives used by respondents to describe the buildings. The adjectives used here are ‘neutral’ (adjectives such as ‘ugly’ or ‘cozy’ were of course often used, but will not be mentioned here) and pertain solely to aesthetic and formal elements. We also provide a short description of every library. It should be noted that these descriptions were kept concise to easily allow the reader to return to this section in order to refresh their memory when reading analyses about a specific library later on in this chapter (if they so desire). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the website [www.torvub.be/360library](http://www.torvub.be/360library) allows the readers of this report to (interactively) view the 360° images that were shown to respondents. In chapter four, in this report and on the website, all libraries have been given pseudonyms based on the type of building every library was frequently compared to. These pseudonyms are the following:

- ‘The Mansion’
- ‘The Cinema’
- ‘The School’
- ‘The Ship’
- ‘The Church’

### 'The Mansion'

Classical, modern

Historic

White, gray

Stately

Light

Industrial



'The Mansion' is located in a small town, which is itself located close to a city. The library is part of a bigger 'complex' featuring other services organized by the municipality, such as an (amateur) art academy and social services. The facade of the building was constructed in the second half of the 19th century and is classified as a 'mansion'. However, the facade is just one side of the story, since the actual library itself is actually located in a recently (during the last decade) constructed 'expansion' of the complex. This explains why the interior of the library is often described by respondents as being very 'modern' or even 'industrial', while the building is described as being 'classical' and 'historic'.

### 'The Cinema'

Modern

Big, high, spacious

Austere

Black

Clear

Architectural



'The Cinema' is located in a city. It is the second newest of all the libraries that were 'visited' by respondents, being constructed in the late 2000's. It is located on a large, open square and the library was part of the renovation project of said square. It should be said that, while the photo above gives a good indication of the style of the library, 'The Cinema' is still considerably larger and features walls that are completely glass-surface. Unlike 'The Mansion', the interior of 'The Cinema' is very much a continuation of the style of the exterior.

### 'The School'

Small  
Low  
Old, old-fashioned  
Neat, Orderly  
Cosy



'The School' is easily the smallest library in this research, located in a rural municipality. Although 'The Church' is located in an even smaller municipality, it does have a considerably larger library. Similar to 'The Mansion', 'The School' it is located in a larger 'complex' that features different functions, one of which is a small venue for local theatre productions. The building is certainly not new, but also not historic, being built in an inconspicuous style that was popular throughout the 70's and 80's in Belgium.

### 'The Ship'

Modern, contemporary  
Big  
Architectural  
Dark, black, gray  
Austere  
Minimalistic, Clean



'The Ship' is the most recently constructed (less than five years ago) and also largest library in this research. It is located in a city in Flanders. It was built in an abstract style that respondents most often described as 'modern', while architects would describe it as 'contemporary'. The picture above gives a good representation of the style of the building, but 'The Ship' is less high and considerably wider and deeper. Because it is such a recent building, just as with 'The Cinema', the interior is very much a reflection of the exterior in terms of architectural style. In preparation of this study, we ourselves identified this library as being the most iconic (as described by Paul Jones) in Flanders.

## 'The Church'

Old, classic, historic

Renovated, restored, renewed

Modern, new

Typical

Orderly, Neat

Light



'The Church' is located in the smallest municipality in our research and has the oldest building. It was constructed in the middle of the 19th century. Originally, this building was an elementary school before it was repurposed as a local public library in 1994, with an extensive restoration taking place around the same time. As said before, it is quite large to be located in such a small municipality. The library also hosts several local cultural organizations (e.g., the local history circle). Although a lot of historic elements were preserved for the interior, it does also feature quite a lot of more contemporary elements, which explains why adjectives as 'modern' and 'new' are used to describe the building alongside 'old' and 'historic'.

### 3. Results of first coding

#### 3.1. General results and scores, global evaluations

Before taking socio-demographic (and other) background variables into consideration, it is useful to see how the libraries were generally evaluated by our respondents. If we don't account for differences between respondents, what was the most popular library?

Table 1: Average score per library (N = 72)

'The Cinema'	8,3
'The Church'	7,8
'The Ship'	7,5
'The School'	7,0
'The Mansion'	6,3

Table one shows that 'The Cinema' was given the highest overall score on average, while 'The Mansion' was given the lowest overall score. We would like to note that the degree to which certain segments of society are represented among our respondents weigh on this ranking, something that will become clear later. However, this does adhere to a general impression we had while conducting the interviews. There tended to be a strong positive reaction to 'The Cinema' and a strong negative reaction to 'The Mansion', with there being more variation in how respondents reacted to the other three libraries.

Tables two to nine mostly confirm the 'ranking' of the five libraries as presented in table one. Tables two to four indicate what percentages of respondents answered positively when asked if a building or interior of certain library was inviting or attractive. Tables six to nine give an overview of the answers given during the closing questions of the interview, in which they had to select the 'best' or 'worst' library with regard to 'invitingness' or attractiveness. It is clear that 'The Cinema' was considered to be attractive as well as inviting by a large majority of our respondents, while also being chosen most often as 'best' or most preferred library overall. 'The Mansion', on the other hand, is evaluated very poorly across the board. In fact, only in table two, concerning the percentage of respondents that find the building attractive, does 'The School' perform worse than 'The Mansion'. We also see that 'The Church' is generally evaluated very positively, being ranked consistently as second highest in tables two to seven.

Table 2: Percentage of respondents that finds building attractive (N =72)

'The Cinema'	80,9
'The Church'	77,9
'The Ship'	60,9
'The Mansion'	39,7
'The School'	14,7

Table 3: Percentage of respondents that find interior attractive (N = 72)

'The Cinema'	89,7
'The Church'	77,9
'The Ship'	55,1
'The School'	51,5
'The Mansion'	32,4

Table 4: Percentage of respondents that finds building inviting (N = 72)

'The Cinema'	89,7
'The Church'	76,5
'The Ship'	52,9
'The School'	30,9
'The Mansion'	25,0

Table 5: Percentage respondents that find interior inviting (N = 72)

'The Cinema'	79,4
'The Church'	74,6
'The School'	63,2
'The Ship'	37,7
'The Mansion'	33,8

Table 6: Most beautiful library, both building and interior (percentage) (N = 72)

'The Cinema'	35,3
'The Church'	27,9
'The Ship'	17,6
Mansion & Church	2,9
Cinema & Church	2,9
'The School'	2,9
School & Church	2,9
Ship & Church	2,9
Cinema & Ship	1,5
Cinema, Ship & Church	1,5
No answer	1,5

Table 7: Most inviting library, both building and interior (percentage) (N = 72)

'The Cinema'	36,8
'The Church'	23,5
'The Ship'	17,6
'The School'	5,9
'The Mansion'	4,4
Cinema & Ship	4,4
Ship & Church	4,4
Cinema & School	1,5
School & Church	1,5

Table 8: Least beautiful library, both building and interior (percentage) (N = 72)

'The Mansion'	46,3
'The Church'	25,4
'The Ship'	20,9
'The Church'	3,0
Mansion & School	1,5
The Cinema'	1,5
No answer	1,5

Table 9: Least inviting library, both building and interior (percentage) (N = 72)

'The Mansion'	41,8
'The Church'	26,9
'The Ship'	25,4
Mansion & School	3,0
No answer	3,0

When looking at 'The School' and 'The Ship', it becomes clear that the most variation in how libraries were generally evaluated by our respondents, can be found with regard to these two libraries. This is not surprising, considering these two libraries have two completely different aesthetics. They represent two extremes in architectural style: 'The Ship' is very contemporary and iconic, while 'The School' adheres strongly to the classic image of a small-town public library. Table two clearly shows that the building of 'The Ship' is found to be far more attractive than that of 'The School', a difference in evaluation that is completely absent when asking respondents about the attractiveness of the interior (shown in table three). Table four shows that the building of 'The Ship' is generally found to be far more inviting than that of 'The School', while the opposite can be said about the interior.

### 3.2. Scores given to libraries, taking socio-demographic variables into account

Before discussing in depth how different aspects of experience, evaluation and description vary with certain characteristics of respondents for every library separately, it is interesting to start with a simple comparative analysis. Table ten is a correlation matrix in which the overall score that was given by a respondent to every library was correlated against nine different background variables (for more information on how these variables were operationalized, see table a in the appendix). This allows us to see if a library is scored significantly better or worse by certain subgroups of our respondents and which background variables seem to be most relevant in explaining differences in evaluation. To improve the readability of this matrix, we have highlighted each correlation that was found to be statistically significant.

Table 10: Global score given to library, correlated against background variables (Spearman's Rho) (N = 69)

	The Mansion	The Cinema	The School	The Ship	The Church
Occupational prestige	-,317*	0,012	-0,028	,306*	0,097
Urbanization town/ city	0,038	-0,054	0,056	0,064	-0,132
Gender	-0,118	0,231	0,168	-0,084	,365**
Subjective interest in architecture	-0,100	0,088	0,009	,253*	-0,200
Income	-0,150	0,028	-,293*	0,065	0,101
Participation to 'highbrow' activities	0,022	0,131	-0,186	0,152	-,260*
Age	,306*	-0,124	,498**	-,297*	,397**
Education level parent	-0,225	0,185	-0,215	,379**	-0,180
Education level	-0,124	0,096	-0,225	,286*	-0,148

Perhaps the first thing that is striking to see, is that 'The Cinema' is not scored significantly better or worse by any subgroup of visitors. Together with the fact that it is persistently scored the highest and was most often selected as being the 'most attractive' and 'most inviting' library during the closing questions of the interview, this suggests that the style of the building and interior seem to resonate very well with our respondents, regardless of differences in profile. 'The Mansion' and 'The School' are similar, in that they are both scored significantly better by older respondents and worse by respondents with a higher socio-economic status, seeing as how 'The Mansion' is evaluated worse by respondents who tend to have (had) a profession with higher occupational prestige and 'The School' is evaluated worse by respondents who have a higher income. 'The Mansion' and 'The School' were both identified as being evaluated better by lower educated respondents in the exploratory analyses presented in chapter two. When looking at 'The Church', we see that gender is 'flagged' as a relevant background variable, there is a significant and positive correlation, which means here that the library is scored considerably higher by women than by men. 'The Church' is also evaluated better by older respondents and those who participate to more 'highbrow' cultural activities. This last effect falls in line with the fact that 'The Church' was found to be evaluated better by respondents with higher education levels in our exploratory analyses. Looking at 'The Ship', it becomes clear that this library is the most 'divisive': it is evaluated significantly better by younger respondents, respondents who have (had) a

profession with higher occupational prestige, who reported to have a higher interest in architecture and who are higher educated. Moreover, it's striking to see that the education level of the parents is also found to be relevant here, with respondents with higher educated parents evaluating the library significantly better. It is interesting to note that the two most contemporary libraries, 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship', who were both found to be evaluated better by higher educated respondents in our exploratory analyses, are in such stark contrast to each other here, with 'The Cinema' not complying at all to the patterns we expected to see and 'The Ship' adhering to it almost completely. This will be addressed in more detail later on in this chapter.

In general, it is interesting to see how age seems to play such a considerable role. Later, when approaching the evaluations given by respondents in more detail, it will become clear that education level plays a more significant role in experience and evaluation than suggested here. We would like to round out this look at how libraries were scored by providing three more tables. These display the average scores that were given to every library within three subcategories of education level.

Table 11: Average score given to library (higher education) (N = 41)

Score 'The Cinema'	8,4
Score 'The Ship'	7,8
Score 'The Church'	7,7
Score 'The School'	6,9
Score 'The Mansion'	6,2

Table 12: Average score given to library (secondary education) (N = 18)

Score 'The Cinema'	8,0
Score 'The Church'	7,6
Score 'The Ship'	7,4
Score 'The School'	7,1
Score 'The Mansion'	6,4

Table 13: Average score given to library (elementary school) (N = 13)

Score 'The Church'	8,5
Score 'The Cinema'	8,4
Score 'The School'	7,5
Score 'The Mansion'	6,5
Score 'The Ship'	6,3

Table eleven shows the average scores that were given to libraries by respondents who completed higher education (college or university). This table strongly resembles table one, with the exception of 'The Ship' being bumped up one place in the ranking, which indicates two things: one, that as suggested in the correlation matrix in table ten, 'The Ship' is evaluated significantly better by the higher educated and secondly that the fact that the majority of respondents who were interviewed were higher educated also weighs on the ranking in table one. Table twelve, displaying the average scores that were given by respondents who (only) finished high school, shows that 'The Ship' falls back to third place and the average score of 'The School' and 'The Mansion' rise slightly. Table thirteen, which shows the average scores given by respondents who did not finish high school, displays some remarkable changes in average scores given. 'The Cinema' is no longer ranked first, although the average score is identical to that given by higher educated respondents (8,4). It is now 'The Church' that takes first place and 'The School' gets a considerably higher score, allowing it to get bumped up to third place in the ranking. 'The Ship', on the other hand, takes a sharp fall downwards, ending up as the worst scored library, again suggesting that education level plays an important role in how this very contemporary, modern, iconic library is experienced and evaluated.

In the next five subparagraphs, we will discuss the results of a series of library-specific analyses. We start with a correlation matrix that is very similar to the one presented in table ten, using the exact same socio-demographic variables, but this time we correlate them with the six scales that express how typical, attractive and inviting respondents find both the building and interior of a specific library. Next, we take a look at what types of other buildings and interiors that specific library is compared too. Then, we show what are the most commonly used adjectives to describe the building or interior (making a distinction between which adjectives were used positively and which were used negatively) and if and how the use of a certain adjective is connected to education level.

### 3.2.1. 'The Mansion'

Table 14: Different aspects of 'The Mansion', correlated against background variables (Spearman's Rho) (N = 69)

	Building typical?	Building attractive?	Building inviting?	Interior typical?	Interior attractive?	Interior inviting?
Occupational prestige	-0,264	0,116	-0,130	-0,194	-,274*	-,320*
Urbanization town/city	0,042	-0,219	-0,059	0,243	0,072	0,085
Gender	-0,197	-0,087	-0,107	-0,146	-0,066	0,078
Subjective interest in architecture	0,122	0,152	-0,051	-0,185	-0,126	-0,070
Income	-,378*	0,084	-0,132	-0,334	-0,155	-0,205
Participation to 'highbrow' activities	0,000	0,177	-0,017	-0,074	-0,153	-0,058
Age	0,048	-0,089	0,165	0,017	,303*	,299*
Education level parent	-0,190	0,125	-0,047	-0,194	-0,183	-0,144
Education level	-0,164	0,066	-0,049	0,153	-0,101	-0,099

Table fourteen displays which aspects of the look and feel of 'The Mansion' are experienced and evaluated significantly different by which socio-demographic subgroups. First off, we see that five significant correlations were found, this is the same amount as 'The Cinema' and 'The Church'. In 'The School' and 'The Ship', eighteen and sixteen correlations were found, respectively. This seems to suggest that 'The Mansion', 'The Cinema' and 'The Church' are far less 'divisive' than libraries 'The School' and 'The Ship', by which we mean that experience and evaluation vary less according to profile and socio-economic status. It should be emphasized that this table does not express if a library is actually evaluated well or not. Remember that 'The Mansion' was evaluated as worst overall, while 'The Cinema' was evaluated as best overall and that both have an equal number of significant correlations.

What can we learn about 'The Mansion' by looking at table fourteen? For starters, we see that social class plays a role in how this library is evaluated: the interior is found to be both less attractive and less inviting by respondents with higher occupational prestige. The building is also found to be less typical by respondents who have a higher income. Education level is seemingly irrelevant, which allows us to nuance our exploratory analyses where we identified 'The Mansion'

as being evaluated differently by respondents with different levels of education: there is a class-component to how this building is experienced, but it is suggested here to be connected more closely to the economic dimension of class than its cultural dimension. Age is also found to influence how the interior is perceived, with elderly respondents generally liking the interior more. This is somewhat surprising, since as mentioned before, the interior is quite new and in all other libraries it is clear that elderly respondents prefer less contemporary buildings and interiors and younger respondents prefer more contemporary buildings and interiors.

Tables fifteen and sixteen show which type of buildings and interiors 'The Mansion' is most often compared to. It should be noted that a comparison had to be made by at least two respondents for it to be included in this list. Table fifteen shows that the building of 'The Mansion' most resembles a local government building, such as a town hall, for almost one quarter of all respondents, followed by a private residence or a mansion (this is unsurprising, since the building is in fact classified as a mansion). When looking at what other types of interiors the interior of 'The Mansion' is compared to, we see that, at least on the inside, 'The Mansion' is apparently a typical library. It was compared most often to 'other libraries' or 'specific' buildings which were exclusively other specific libraries.

Table 15: Building 'The Mansion' resembles... (N = 72)

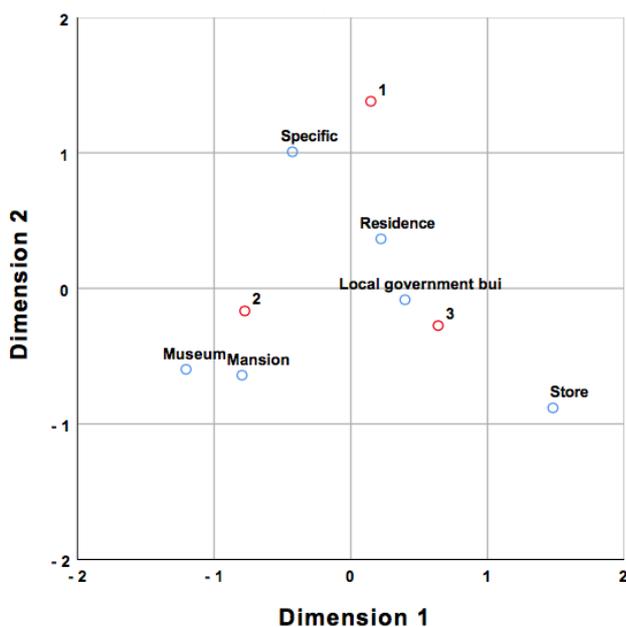
	% of respondents
Local government building (town hall, etc)	25,0%
Residence	15,3%
Mansion	9,7%
Specific building	6,9%
Store (thrift shop, designer store, etc)	5,6%
Museum	4,2%

Table 16: Interior 'The Mansion' resembles... (N = 72)

	% of respondents
Other library	8,3%
Specific building	6,9%
Thrift shop	5,6%
Low cost supermarket	2,8%
Office space	2,8%
Factory hall	2,8%

Figure one below shows the result of a multiple correspondence analysis in which the frequency with which respondents with different education levels compare the building of 'The Mansion' to other types of buildings is taken into account. MCA allows for two things: it shows if a specific subgroup makes a certain comparison more often than others and if subgroups 'behave' more or less similar. Simply put: the closer an education level is to a specific comparison, the more 'exclusively' it is used by respondents in that subgroup and if two education levels are close to each other, it means they are similar in how they compare 'The Mansion' to other buildings. It should be noted that we use three different categories of education level here instead of four as in other analyses (such as the correlation matrices): this is done to address the comparatively low amount of lower educated respondents in our sample. The red circles indicate different education levels of respondents, with number one representing respondents who (only) finished elementary school, number two representing respondents who finished high school (but not higher education) and number three signifying respondents who finished higher education.

Figure 1: MCA, comparisons building 'The Mansion' vs education level (N = 72)



The first thing that becomes clear is that respondents with different education levels appear to compare the building of 'The Mansion' quite differently to one another. Higher educated respondents seem to compare the buildings most often to local government buildings, while those who finished secondary education tend to describe it as resembling a museum or mansion. Lower educated respondents are most often reminded of another specific building. While it is also possible to perform this type of analysis for the interior of every library, we only present these for 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship'. The reason for this is that the overwhelming majority of respondents say that the interiors of the other libraries are very typical for public libraries, which is not the case for libraries 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship'.

Figures two to five show the results of the multiple correspondence analyses that were conducted with regard to the adjectives that were most commonly used to describe the building and interior of 'The Mansion'. We distinguish adjectives that were used in a positive way from those that were used in a negative way. Just as before, the numbers signify subgroups with different education levels. It should be noted that only adjectives that were used by more than three respondents were included in the MCA's. The actual frequency with which a specific adjective was used is not shown, but it will be mentioned where relevant in our discussion of the figures.

Figure 2: MCA, 'The Mansion', negative adjectives used to describe building (N = 72)

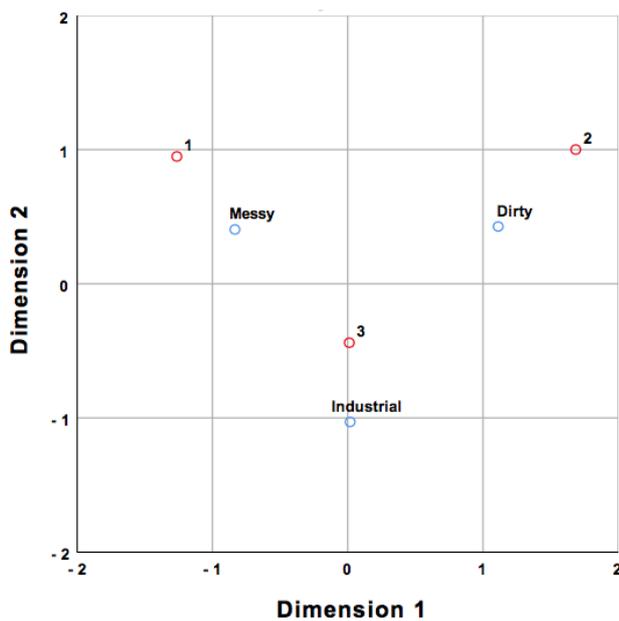
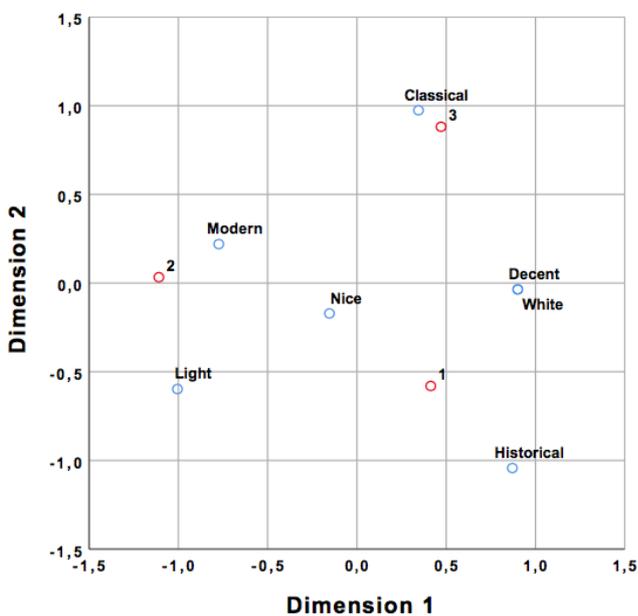


Figure two illustrates something that we also see for most other libraries, namely that respondents tended to use less adjectives to negatively describe a building or interior. All three negative adjectives were each only used three times. We see that only higher educated respondents describe the building as being 'industrial', while lower educated respondents place more emphasis on a lack of order and cleanliness. This pertained mostly to the area around the entrance.

Figure 3: MCA, 'The Mansion', positive adjectives used to describe building (N = 72)



The adjectives 'classical', 'modern' and 'nice' were most commonly used to describe the building of 'The Mansion' in a positive way. It seems that higher educated respondents exclusively use the word 'classical'. Figure three also illustrates something that we see in other figures, namely that lower educated respondents tend to use generic and non-specific adjectives such as 'nice' more often than higher educated respondents.

Figure 4: MCA, 'The Mansion', negative adjectives used to describe interior (N = 72)

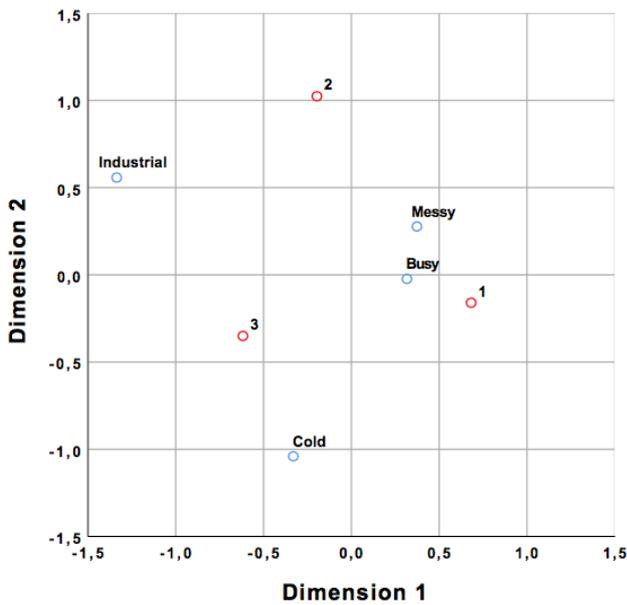


Figure four partly confirms what we saw in figure two, namely that lower educated respondents tend to use adjectives to describe disorder far more often than higher educated respondents. 'Messy' was also the most used adjective to describe the interior. However, we also see that the word 'industrial' is no longer used exclusively by the higher educated. 'Cold' was also used quite frequently and almost exclusively by higher educated respondents.

Figure 5: MCA, 'The Mansion', positive adjectives used to describe interior (N = 72)

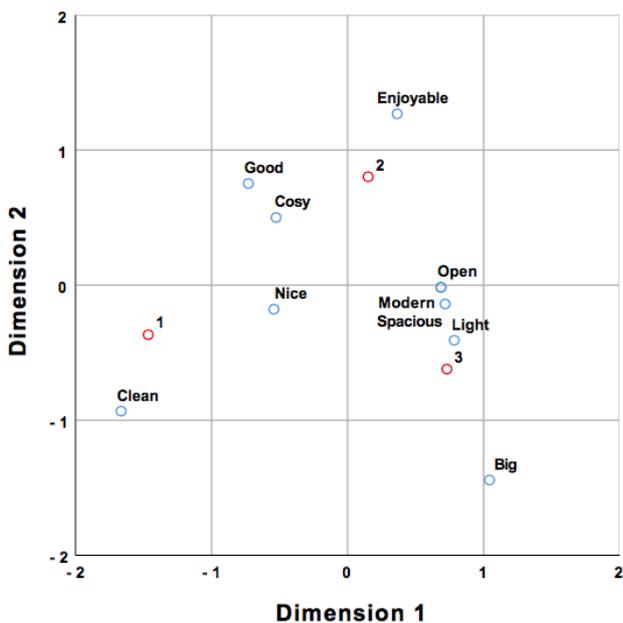


Figure five shows that higher educated respondents tend to have more of a 'shared' vocabulary when positively describing the interior of 'The Mansion', illustrated by the fact that they use adjectives such as 'open', 'modern', 'spacious' and 'light' almost exclusively. Again, the emphasis on order and cleanliness for lower educated respondents becomes clear when we see that the word 'clean' is used almost exclusively by respondents in subgroup one.

Figures two to five seem to fall in line with Bourdieu's findings with regard to how people from different social classes would describe their ideal home. Lower educated respondents stress the importance of order, cleanliness and coziness (or complain of the lack thereof), while higher educated respondents tend to use more abstract adjectives that emphasize the importance of studiousness (cold, classic) and harmony (open, spacious, light). In any case, descriptions seem to vary quite significantly between subgroups of different education levels.

What does all of this tell us about 'The Mansion'? It is perhaps crucial to underscore that this library was generally evaluated as the poorest of all libraries included in this research with regard to its look and feel. However, it also seems that this library does not have an extremely 'divisive' look and feel, it is experienced and evaluated more consistently across social classes than other libraries in our research, although descriptions do seem to vary. This is reflected by looking at which other types of buildings and interiors 'The Mansion' is compared to: a local government building is arguably far less imposing to the socially vulnerable than a museum or office building (comparisons that are often used for 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' as we will see later). The emphasis on it being a 'local' government building is perhaps also significant: 'The Cinema' also resembles a government building for a lot of our respondents, but here there was more mention of it being used by national or regional parliaments. The fact that the interior is most often compared to other specific libraries, also means that it is highly recognizable as a library. Perhaps it is this 'recognizability' or 'typicalness' that explains the negative stance that younger respondents and those with a higher socio-economic status take: 'The Mansion' is likely too 'ordinary' and 'boring'.

### 3.2.2. *'The Cinema'*

Table seventeen displays which aspects of the look and feel of 'The Cinema' are experienced and evaluated significantly different by which socio-demographic subgroups. As mentioned before, there are relatively few sufficiently large and statistically significant effects to be found in this correlation matrix, five in total, the same amount as found for 'The Mansion' and 'The Church'. These do, however, paint a totally different picture than the one for 'The Mansion'. First of all, we see that the building is found to be more attractive for respondents who have higher occupational prestige. The building is also considered to be more typical and inviting by respondents who participate more frequently to 'highbrow' cultural activities, meaning that respondents who go more often to opera, theatre, museums or ballet find 'The Cinema' to be more 'recognizable' as a library, while also feeling more comfortable to enter. This is quite significant, suggesting that the style of the building of 'The Cinema' does reminisce of more elitist cultural institutions. Furthermore, we see that the building is also found to be less inviting by elderly respondents. This illustrates a general tendency, namely that older respondents appreciate buildings in 'older' styles more and younger respondents appreciate newer buildings more. Finally, we also see that education level correlates significantly (and quite strongly) with the perceived 'typicalness' of the interior, meaning that respondents with a higher education level tend to find the interior of 'The Cinema' more typical and recognizable as a library. It should be noted that, while 'The Cinema' was easily the best evaluated library in our research, several class-based dispositions do come forward as being relevant, all indicating that people with a higher socio-economic status are more positively inclined towards different aspects of this library. At the same time, it's striking that there are no significant correlations with regard to the library interior's attractiveness or invitingness, suggesting that a large part of the excellent evaluations it received, come down to a very well-designed interior.

Table 17: Different aspects of 'The Cinema', correlated against background variables (Spearman's Rho) (N = 69)

	Building typical?	Building attractive?	Building inviting?	Interior typical?	Interior attractive?	Interior inviting?
Occupational prestige	0,037	,274*	0,200	-0,064	0,102	0,039
Urbanization town/city	-0,114	-0,199	-0,228	0,150	-0,071	-0,081
Gender	0,031	0,001	0,016	-0,046	0,125	-0,014
Subjective interest in architecture	0,027	-0,074	0,043	-0,028	0,061	0,225
Income	0,000	0,049	0,078	0,120	0,024	0,054
Participation to 'highbrow' activities	,387*	0,160	,334**	0,315	0,046	0,072
Age	-0,275	-0,019	-,262*	-0,219	0,013	-0,140
Education level parent	0,157	-0,025	0,228	0,200	-0,066	0,134
Education level	0,130	-0,002	0,200	,405*	-0,068	0,060

It will not come as a surprise that these three concepts; 'typicalness', 'invitingness' and 'attractiveness', are closely connected. If we generate correlation matrices where these three concepts, together with the overall score, are compared to each other, there are always large and significant correlations to be found between all concepts. It was striking to see that, for every single library, when looking at how the overall score correlates with these different aspects, the strongest effect was always found for the 'invitingness' of the interior. This suggests that the perceived 'invitingness' of the interior of a library will influence the overall score given to a library the most. This probably explains why 'The Cinema' does so well when taking the general score into consideration. Of course, asking respondents to give a number between one and ten does not capture the complexity of how people feel about a space or place, but it is an indication of it. If anything, this underlines the importance of a well-designed interior, suggesting that it outweighs the importance of the architectural style of the building itself.

Table 18: Building 'The Cinema' resembles... (N = 72)

	% of respondents
Government building (city hall, administration, etc)	11,1%
Office building	9,7%
Specific	9,7%
Other recently constructed libraries	6,9%
Cultural centre	5,6%
Cinema	5,6%
Museum	4,2%
University library	4,2%

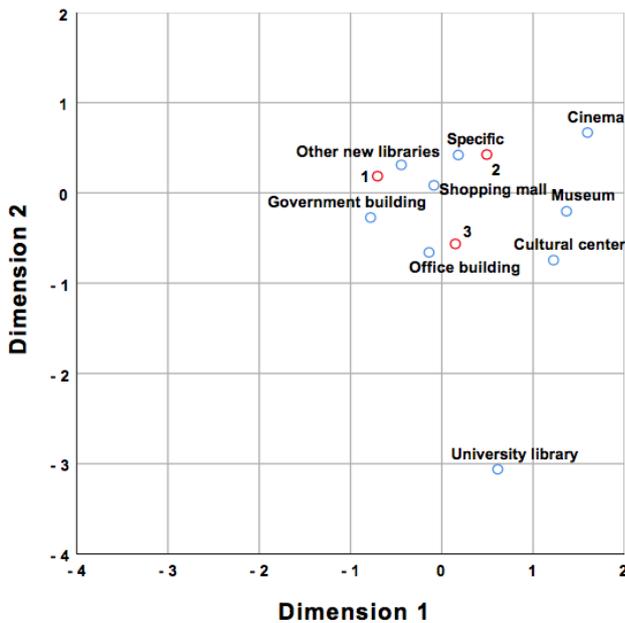
Table eighteen lists the different types of buildings that resemble 'The Cinema' according to our respondents. As mentioned in the paragraph concerning 'The Mansion', also 'The Cinema' is compared most often to a government building, but of a decidedly different and larger scale. Quite a lot of respondents also compared it to an office building. It is also clear that for a substantial amount of respondents, 'The Cinema' also resembles other cultural institutions. Some more elitist (cultural centre, museum) than others (cinema). Several respondents also likened 'The Cinema' to other (predominantly large scale) libraries that were constructed in recent years and in a similar style, both in Belgium and other countries.

Table 19: Interior 'The Cinema' resembles... (N = 72)

	% of respondents
Museum	8,3%
Specific	6,9%
University building	5,6%
Office space	4,2%
Cinema	4,2%
Hospital	4,2%
Shopping mall	2,8%
Theatre	2,8%
Government building	2,8%

Table nineteen shows that there is some consistency in comparisons made for both the building and interior, although the emphasis seems to shift somewhat from business-like to cultural, illustrated by the fact that ‘museum’ now takes the top spot and ‘university building’ is also mentioned quite frequently, while it is compared far less frequently to a ‘government building’. Figures six and seven present the results of two multiple correspondence analyses on how comparisons are made by respondents with different education levels.

Figure 6: MCA, comparisons building ‘The Cinema’ vs education level (N = 72)



The first thing that figure six illustrates, is that the differences in comparisons made are not that considerable. In fact, ‘University library’ is the only comparison that is exclusively made by one group, namely the higher educated. This suggests that this building evokes similar connotations across different social classes, although it should be noted that only respondents who finished (at least) secondary education compare it to other cultural institutions (cultural centre, museum, cinema).

Figure 7: MCA, comparisons interior ‘The Cinema’ vs education level (N = 72)

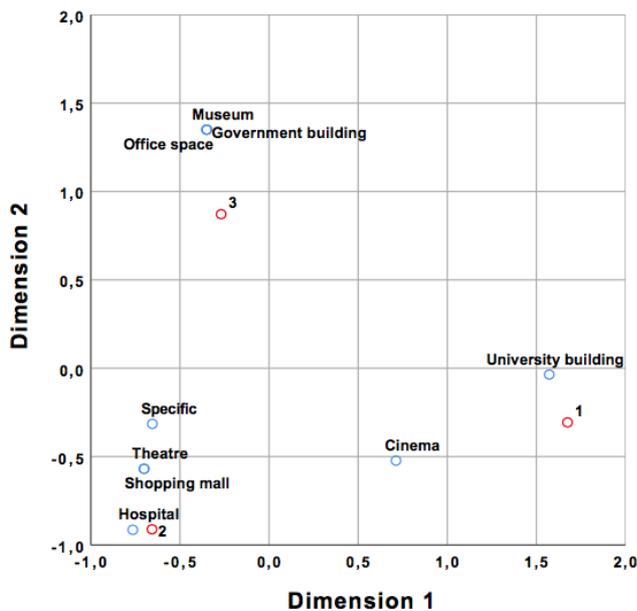


Figure seven illustrates that there is more variation in what comparisons are made for the interior of ‘The Cinema’ when looking at education level. Especially subgroup one (respondents who only finished elementary school) is somewhat ‘isolated’ here. Moreover, we see that the higher educated respondents are the only ones to compare the interior of ‘The Cinema’ to an ‘office space’, ‘government building’ or ‘museum’.

Because 'The Cinema' was evaluated so well by a large majority of our respondents, no multiple correspondence analyses could be conducted with regard to adjectives used to negatively describe either the building or the interior. The only negative adjectives that recurred (very sparsely) regarding both the building and interior of 'The Cinema', were that it was somewhat 'large' and 'overwhelming', which is a fair comment to make, considering the library is made up mostly of one very large open space, with a ceiling that reaches up to around twenty-five meters.

Figure 8: MCA, 'The Cinema', positive adjectives used to describe building (N = 72)

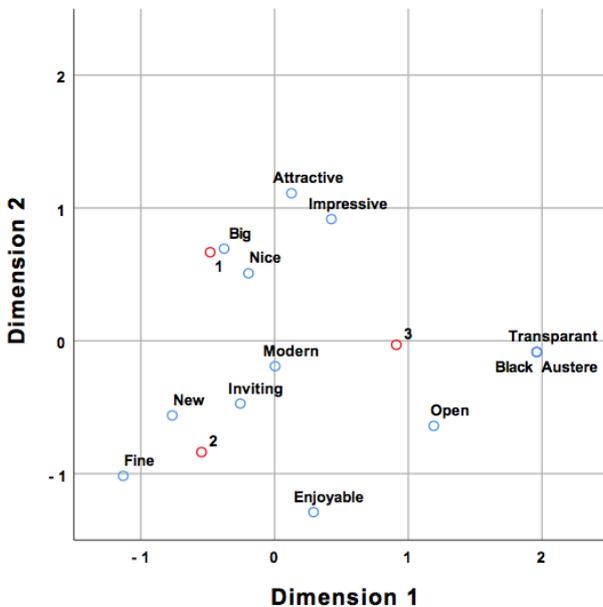
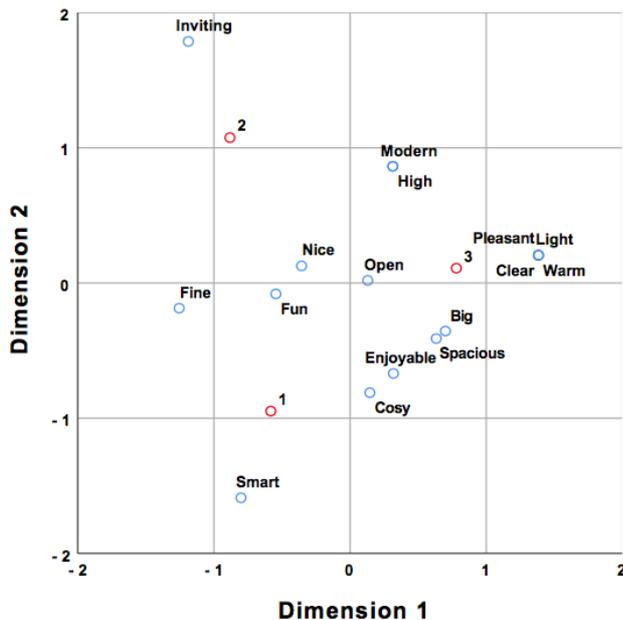


Figure eight makes it clear that some adjectives are clearly used equally frequent across different education levels. 'Modern', for instance, is almost perfectly located between the three different subgroups, meaning that all subgroups describe it as such. Again, just as with 'The Mansion', we see that more 'generic' positive adjectives such as 'fine' and 'nice' are used exclusively by respondents in subgroups one and two, while more abstract descriptions such as 'transparent' and 'austere' are used only by higher educated respondents. The fact that 'black' and 'austere' are used in a positive way, is also noteworthy.

Figure 9: MCA, 'The Cinema', positive adjectives used to describe interior (N = 72)



This difference with regard to the use of more abstract or more generic terms can also be found for the interior, as we can see in figure nine. Words such as 'fine', 'nice' and even 'fun' seem to 'hover' between groups one and two, while words as 'clear' and 'light' are used only by respondents in subgroup three. The word 'open', indicating a sense of harmony or balance does not exclusively belong to the higher educated, but is still situated closer to them than to other groups.

'The Cinema' is easily the best evaluated library in our research, which is perhaps somewhat of a surprise considering that it emerged from our exploratory analyses very clearly as a library where both the attractiveness and 'invitingness' were very dependent on education level, with higher educated users giving far better evaluations in the user survey. The fact that not that many significant effects were found here, forces us to look beyond the style of the building and consider that perhaps contextual factors are in play. When taking a closer look at what respondents (of the user survey) who gave a poor evaluation of The Cinema's attractiveness and 'invitingness' said in an open question at the end of the questionnaire, the theme of 'street youth' loitering in and around the library became apparent (often explicitly mentioning that these 'street youth' had a migration background). Probably this will have had some effect on our exploratory analyses, although it should be emphasized that every effect that emerged in the correlation matrix in table seventeen did point towards 'The Cinema' being evaluated better by respondents with a higher socio-economic status. As mentioned in chapter one, however, a more positive evaluation by one subgroup does not necessarily mean that others evaluate it poorly. Furthermore, it is also clear that 'The Cinema' resembles spaces and institutions that are less familiar to working-class individuals (offices, museums, university buildings, etc). It is also important to consider that four out of five differences in evaluation between groups were found with regard to the building of 'The Cinema'. It seems that the interior is evaluated very well across class lines, something that certainly can not be said about 'The Ship', as we will discuss later on. The interior of 'The Cinema' more than likely provides a good model on how to design an interior for a large scale library that boasts a contemporary style.

### 3.2.3. *'The School'*

When looking at table 20, it immediately becomes clear that far more significant correlations could be found for 'The School' than 'The Mansion' and 'The Cinema'. In fact, with eighteen, 'The School' seems to be the most 'divisive' library. Only 'The Ship' comes close, with sixteen significant correlations. When we look at which aspects of the look and feel of 'The School' are experienced and evaluated significantly different, we see that there are no significant effects to be found with regard to the 'typicalness' of the library. When we also consider that 'The School' is found to be the most typical library overall, especially when looking at the interior (73,0% of respondents found 'The School' to have a 'very typical' interior, significantly more than 'The Mansion' and 'The Church', who were found to be 'very typical' by only 33,3% of all respondents), it becomes clear that 'The School' is very recognizable as a library across all social classes. When looking at which socio-demographic characteristics correlate significantly with the perceived 'invitingness' and attractiveness of both the interior and exterior of 'The School', certain distinct class-based dispositions become apparent. Respondents who have a lower income, whose parents have a lower education level and who have a lower education level themselves are clearly more positively inclined towards almost every aspect of 'The School' (and vice versa). When discussing the attractiveness of the building, also occupational prestige and the frequency with which a respondent participates to 'highbrow' cultural activities appear to be relevant, with the

building becoming less attractive if respondents have more prestigious jobs or go more to museums, opera, theatre and/or ballet.

Table 20: Different aspects of 'The School', correlated against background variables (Spearman's Rho) (N = 69)

	Building typical?	Building attractive?	Building inviting?	Interior typical?	Interior attractive?	Interior inviting?
Occupational prestige	0,158	-,293*	-0,172	-0,098	-0,204	-0,165
Urbanization town/city	-0,210	0,222	0,041	-0,218	-0,016	-0,113
Gender	-0,273	0,071	0,127	-0,261	0,118	0,098
Subjective interest in architecture	0,139	-0,094	-0,044	-0,056	-0,127	-0,105
Income	0,331	-,422**	-,338*	-0,184	-,443**	-,372**
Participation to 'highbrow' activities	0,104	-,272*	-0,186	-0,209	-0,187	-0,131
Age	-0,069	,608**	,564**	0,096	,544**	,467**
Education level parent	0,145	-,312*	-,293*	-0,044	-,287*	-,247*
Education level	0,184	-,382**	-,354**	0,105	-,266*	-,262*

Finally, it is also clear that age plays a very considerable role in how 'The School' is experienced and evaluated, with older respondents having a much more positive reaction to both the building and interior of 'The School' than younger respondents. If we were to imagine the 'ideal-typical' person who appreciates 'The School' the most, it would be an older person with a lower income and a lower level of education. This is important: there is apparently something about this very typical, old-fashioned, small-scale library that sits well with the societal groups whose attendance, as we saw in chapter one, should be improved.

When we take a look at what type of buildings our respondents compare the building of 'The School' to in table 21, we learn more about the highly 'approachable' character of this library. About one third of all respondents compare the building to a preschool or elementary school, which is very relevant considering that every single one of our respondents has personally attended this institution in their childhood. The library also resembles a bar or cafeteria, which undoubtedly has something to do with the fact that a large terrace sits right in front of it. Perhaps we should specify here that the most common used Dutch word in this context was 'café', which

perhaps has a different and more folksy connotation than the English word ‘bar’. The Flemish ‘café’ is frequented by virtually all layers of society and can be a more family-friendly place than the English word ‘bar’ suggests.

Table 21: Building ‘The School’ resembles... (N = 72)

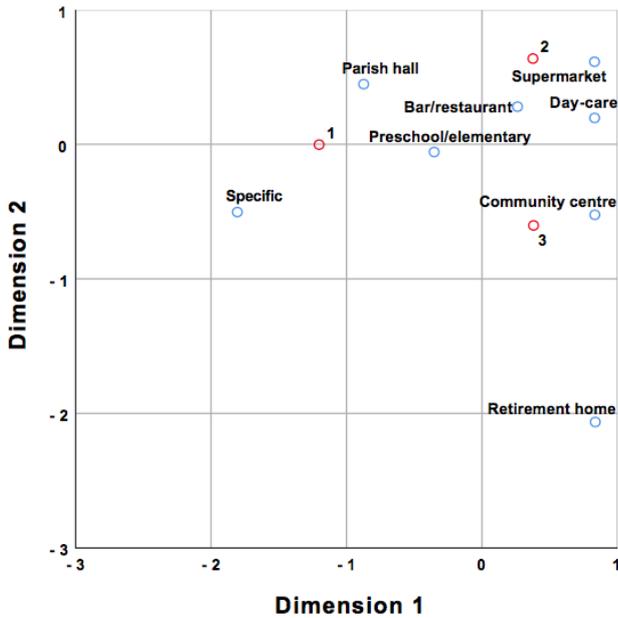
	% of respondents
Preschool/elementary school	30,6%
Bar, cafeteria, etc.	16,7%
Supermarket (Aldi, Lidl, etc)	9,7%
Community centre	6,9%
Retirement home	5,6%
Parish hall	4,2%
Day-care	4,2%
Specific building	2,8%

The building of ‘The School’ apparently also reminds respondents of a supermarket. Striking here is that the emphasis was placed on it resembling a ‘low cost’ supermarket, such as Aldi or Lidl. This could be an indication of why income plays such an important role in how the library is perceived (if we consider theories regarding conspicuous consumption). It should be noted that every other comparison that was frequently made also point towards very low-threshold institutions such as community centers, retirement homes, parish halls and day-cares. The interior of ‘The School’ was compared to other spaces far less frequently, as we can see in table 22. Some felt that the style of a school or class was continued inside, but there seemed to be a consensus about the fact that ‘The School’ has an archetypical interior for a small-town public library.

Table 22: Interior ‘The School’ resembles... (N = 72)

	% of respondents
School, class	5,6%
Chalet	2,8%
Gymnasium	2,8%
Specific	2,8%

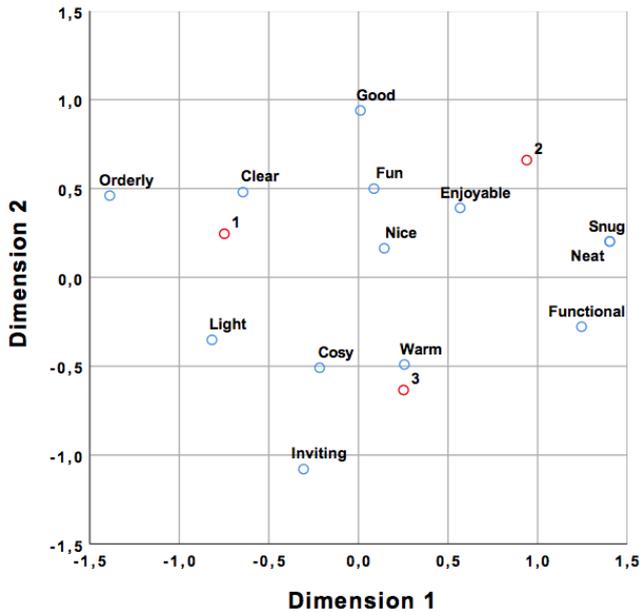
Figure 10: MCA, comparisons building 'The School' vs education level (N = 72)



Because so little comparisons were made with regard to 'The School's interior, we only performed a multiple correspondence analysis for the building of 'The School'. Figure ten shows that respondents with different education levels compare 'The School' to a preschool or elementary school equally frequent. Also the comparison with a bar or restaurant was made by respondents with different education levels, although it does seem to be used more frequently by respondents who finished high school. What stands out here is that only higher educated respondents compare the building of 'The School' to a retirement home. Considering that the respondents who made this specific comparison also tended to evaluate the building more poorly, we garner that this comparison is made somewhat mockingly.

That being said, when we look at how respondents describe 'The School', it is remarkable how little adjectives were used. In fact, the multiple correspondence analysis could only be made for adjectives that were used in a positive way to describe the interior. If we take into consideration that 'The School' was evaluated quite poorly by a large number of (mostly higher educated) respondents, we are inclined to say that these respondents showed 'restraint' in criticizing 'The School'. Respondents with higher education levels felt comfortable in giving 'The School' a low score or admitting that they found it to be uninviting or unattractive, but perhaps felt uneasy in going into great detail about it. These respondents likely feel sympathy for this small-town library that obviously has limited resources. The analyses performed on the dataset that was obtained through our second coding, did in fact show that respondents who have (had) a profession with more occupational prestige tend to emphasize more often that 'The School' appears to be working with a limited budget. The subject of what respondents think about the budgets the libraries have available to them and how that plays into their evaluation of the library, will be discussed in more depth later on in this chapter (subparagraph 4.2.3).

Figure 11: MCA, 'The School', positive adjectives used to describe interior (N = 72)



The fact that an MCA could only be made for the positive adjectives used to describe the interior confirms an impression that arose while conducting the interviews, namely that the interior was generally evaluated quite favorably across respondents with different profiles. Considering what was said before with regard to the strong correlation between the quality of the interior and the general score that respondents gave to libraries, this could also be an explanation as to why 'The School' is evaluated more favorably compared to 'The Mansion', despite being more 'divisive', as illustrated in table twenty.

The kind of adjectives used to describe the interior of 'The School' are also quite telling, with many implying a very homely feeling ('cosy', 'warm', and 'snug'). What is very striking here is that the term 'cosy', together with easily being the most popular adjective to describe the interior of 'The School', is used so frequently by higher educated respondents. This somewhat contradicts what Bourdieu found in *Distinction* when asking people from different social classes to describe their ideal home, namely that 'cosiness' is valued more by members of the working class. We suspect that there is a cultural, contextual factor at play here. The Dutch word 'gezellig' is perhaps more layered and elicits more positive connotations than the English word 'cosy', likening it more to the Scandinavian concept of 'hygge', which is generally described as 'a mood of coziness and comfortable conviviality with feelings of wellness and contentment' (Wikipedia). To illustrate, when literally translated, it is perfectly acceptable to say in Dutch: 'it is cosy that you are here' or 'it was a cosy dinner'. All other library interiors were also described as being 'cosy', but far less frequently than was the case for 'The School' (e.g. twice as frequently as the interior of 'The Church' and five times more frequently than the interior of 'The Ship'). The fact that this (powerfully charged) adjective is used so often, is another indication of the very approachable look and feel of 'The School'.

'The School', easily the most 'typical' and 'recognizable' library in our research, is a very interesting case. Perhaps we have put too much emphasis so far on what it does right, namely that it manages to create an approachable, low-threshold setting for working-class individuals. It should also be underlined that the groups who visit public libraries most frequently (affluent, higher educated, middle class) do not respond well to the look and feel of this library. It is perhaps a telling anecdote that, when reaching out to the librarian in charge of 'The School', there was genuine disbelief that we could be interested in learning more about its aesthetic, architecture or interior design. 'The School' is not necessarily a perfect model for how libraries can become more culturally democratic when considering how they should be designed. If we really want to attract 'all layers of society', we shouldn't discourage those with a higher socio-economic status. That being said, when comparing 'The School' with the other 104 libraries that participated to the large scale user survey, they do rank third in percentage of respondents who did not finish high school. Of course, as discussed in chapter one, the demographic composition of a city or municipality plays an important part in the library-attendance of lower educated visitors and 'The School' is located in a municipality with a relatively high percentage of lower educated inhabitants, but (together with 'The Church' in equal measure) it still 'outperforms' libraries 'The Mansion', 'The Ship' and especially 'The Cinema' when comparing the percentage of inhabitants with no higher education and the percentage of respondents in our sample with no higher education (see table c in appendix for an overview). This suggests that this approachable look and feel really does translate into better attendance numbers for the lower educated. This leads us to conclude that 'The School' can offer a lot of insight in what are important touchstones or boundaries for decision makers and architects to take into account when constructing a new library or renovating an older one. 'The School' is a recognizable, comfortable, 'cosy' place that is not intimidating to anyone, making it the antithesis of 'The Ship' and a very interesting place to study with regard to its aesthetic qualities, as we will do in more detail later on.

#### 3.2.4. *'The Ship'*

Looking at table 23, it immediately becomes clear why 'The Ship' was described above as the antithesis of 'The School'. For both libraries, six socio-demographic variables correlate significantly with one (or more) aspects of the building's or interior's aesthetic, five of which (occupational prestige, participation to highbrow activities, age, education level parent and education level of the respondent) are the same for 'The School' and 'The Ship'. Instead of income (as is the case for 'The School'), now gender appears to play a role in how 'The Ship' is experienced and evaluated. Considering that gender was constructed as a dummy-variable, with 'female' being coded as one and 'male' being coded as zero, and we see a negative correlation with regard to the 'invitingness' of both the building and the interior, we see that women tend to find both the building and interior of 'The Ship' less inviting. If we compare the directions of correlations found for libraries 'The School' and 'The Ship', they appear to mirror each other. In contrast to 'The School', 'The Ship' is evaluated better by younger respondents who participate more to high brow cultural activities, whose (last) job has more occupational prestige and who both themselves and their parents generally have a higher level of education. The respondents

who evaluate 'The Ship' well clearly tend to have a higher socio-economic status. When looking at which aspects seem most relevant in dividing opinions between classes, the 'invitingness' of 'The Ship' appears to elicit very different responses. Half of all correlations have to do with the 'invitingness' of either the building or the interior. This seems to suggest that 'The Ship' is generally found to be more attractive than it is inviting.

Table 23: Different aspects of 'The Ship', correlated against background variables (Spearman's Rho) (N = 69)

	Building typical?	Building attractive?	Building inviting?	Interior typical?	Interior attractive?	Interior inviting?
Occupational prestige	-0,001	,309*	,316*	,393*	0,231	0,252
Urbanization town/city	0,218	-0,037	-0,160	0,228	-0,132	0,072
Gender	0,077	-0,028	-,261*	-0,118	-0,002	-,309**
Subjective interest in architecture	0,045	0,133	0,223	-0,047	0,103	0,029
Income	0,194	0,115	0,240	0,134	0,128	0,145
Participation to 'highbrow' activities	0,179	0,105	0,130	0,312	,276*	0,200
Age	-,334*	-,250*	-,291*	-0,220	-,324**	-0,227
Education level parent	0,111	0,190	,246*	0,317	,293*	,261*
Education level	,328*	0,190	,375**	0,244	0,191	,306*

When looking at table 24, we see that, according to our respondents, the building of 'The Ship' strongly resembles an office building. We would like to mention the findings of Wasserman and Frenkel (2015) that were discussed in chapter two again. Their research showed that women from lower-class backgrounds experience and evaluate overly austere, outspokenly professional environments poorly. The authors even mentioned that women *'experience the space as more oppressive and marginalizing'* (p. 1501). The businesslike look and feel of 'The Ship' probably explains why we see significant correlations between the occupational prestige, gender and education level of respondents and the 'invitingness' of the building. It's interesting to take variables such as gender and age into consideration alongside class-membership with regard to how these buildings are experienced and evaluated. Our sample is too small to conduct more detailed statistical analysis into this subject, but simple cross-tables that allow for comparisons between genders and education levels do seem to suggest a kind of 'comorbidity' for 'The Ship':

respondents who are both female and lower educated evaluate this library more poorly than respondents who are not part of either subgroup.

Table 24: Building 'The Ship' resembles... (N = 72)

	% of respondents
Office building	33,3%
Museum	22,2%
Ship	20,8%
Specific (MAS in Antwerp, etc)	15,3%
Government building (bv. Administration, City hall, etc)	8,3%
Theatre, concert hall	6,9%
University, college	6,9%
Apartments	6,9%

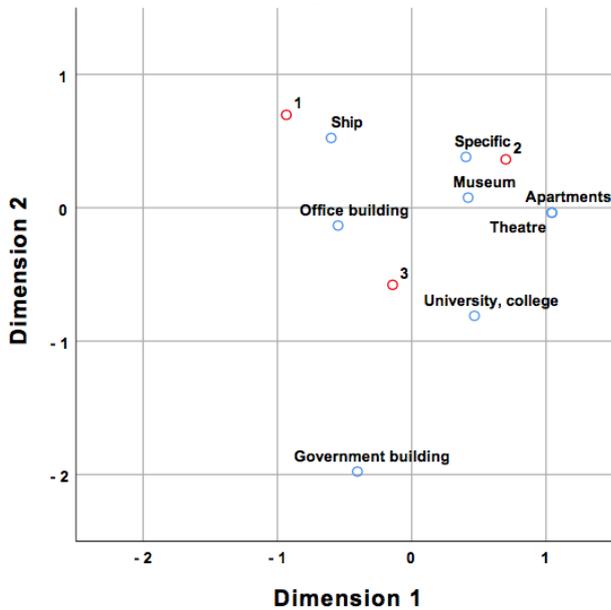
It is also interesting to see that 'The Ship' is often compared to a museum. Again we would like to refer to chapter two, where we mentioned that the Guggenheim in Bilbao was something of 'game changer' for how public cultural institutions are designed and built nowadays. It seems that our respondents also make this connotation. Furthermore, 'The Ship' also reminds respondents of other rather elitist institutions such as the theatre and universities. Perhaps some explanation is needed with regard to the fact that the building of 'The Ship' was often compared to a 'ship'. This can be explained by the fact that the library is surrounded by water and was meant to resemble a docked ship. One of the architects we spoke to for an in-depth interview spoke with some disdain with regard to this attempt at 'high-concept' architecture, claiming that the average visitor would never pick up on this. He was quite surprised when we mentioned that many respondents spontaneously said the building reminded them of a ship.

Table 25: Interior 'The Ship' resembles... (N = 72)

	% of respondents
Office space	11,1%
Museum	11,1%
Bank	6,9%
Hotel reception	4,2%
Airport	2,8%
Specific	2,8%

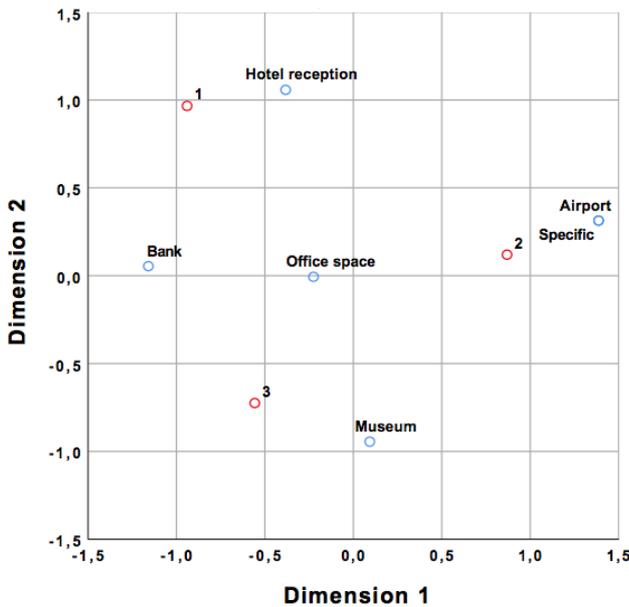
In table 25, we see that the businesslike style of the building is continued in the interior. Apart from being compared to an ‘office space’, some respondents even compared it to the inside of a bank. ‘Hotel reception’ and ‘airport’, again quite businesslike, international environments were also mentioned. When we look at figures 12 and 13 to see what comparisons are most often made by respondents with certain levels of education, a few things are quite striking.

Figure 12: MCA, comparisons building ‘The Ship’ vs education level (N = 72)



First, we see that the comparison with a ‘ship’ is most often made by respondents who did not finish high school. This is perhaps surprising, considering that this resemblance was considered as quite ‘high-concept’ by one of the architects we interviewed. Furthermore it should be noted that the comparison with a museum is made mostly by respondents in subgroups two and three, but hardly by those in subgroup one (respondents who ‘only’ finished elementary school).

Figure 13: MCA, comparisons interior ‘The Ship’ vs education level (N = 72)



With regard to the interior, we see that the comparison with an office space is made equally frequent between all subgroups. This was somewhat different with regard to the building, where it ‘belonged’ more (but not exclusively) to the lowest and highest educated (so to a lesser extent to respondents who finished high school). The fact that only subgroups two and three make the connotation between ‘The Ship’ and a museum is confirmed here.

Figures twelve and thirteen add an important nuance to an assumption we have held so far, namely that it is problematic to construct public libraries in such a way that they resemble more highbrow cultural institutions such as museums for modern art because it will elicit connotations with spaces that the lower educated and/or working-class individuals are less familiar with, making them more imposing and less approachable for these types of visitors. This idea still seems to ring true to a certain extent, we see that respondents who finished high school 'recognize' the style of 'The Ship' as that of a more elitist cultural institution, which is important because also high school graduates are underrepresented in public libraries. However, only one respondent who did not finish high school compared 'The Ship' to a museum, suggesting that the problem is not necessarily that this group of respondents is making 'bad' connotations, but more that less connotations are being made at all. In fact, apart from comparing it to a ship and an office building, the lowest educated subgroup of respondents hardly compare 'The Ship' to another type of building of any kind. This suggests that there is very low 'recognizability', making it almost into an 'alien' environment, which of course can also be detrimental to the invitingness of a building.

Figures fourteen to seventeen illustrate which adjectives were used most often to describe both the building and interior of 'The Ship', while also showing which subgroups of respondents (based on education) level use which adjectives more frequently.

Figure 14: MCA, 'The Ship', negative adjectives used to describe building (N = 72)

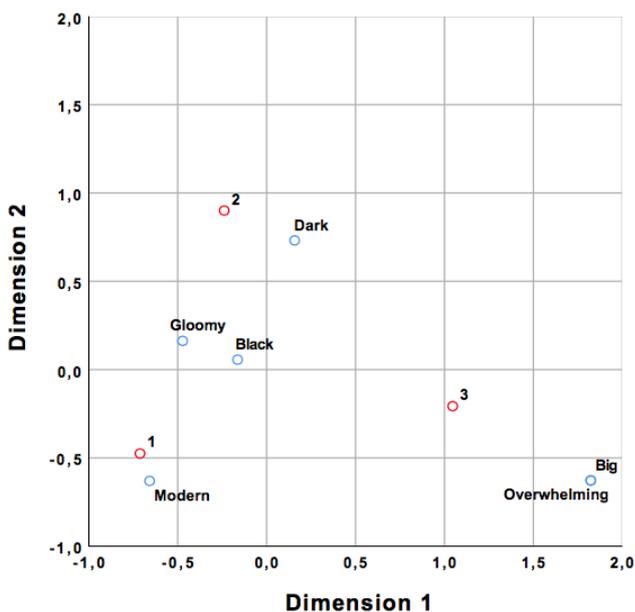
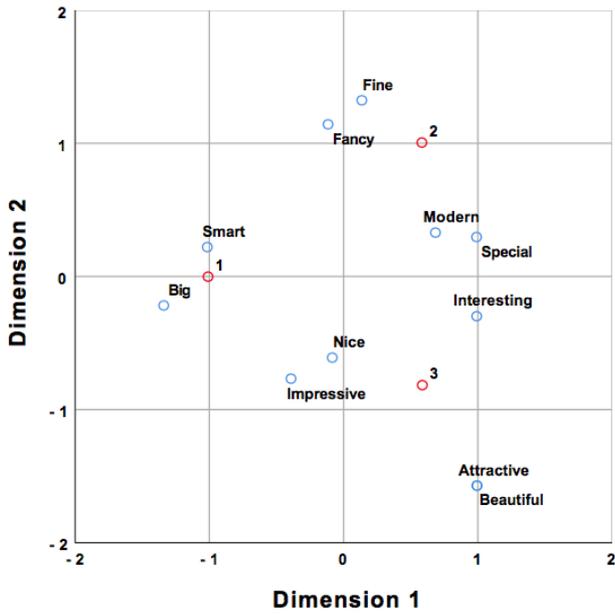


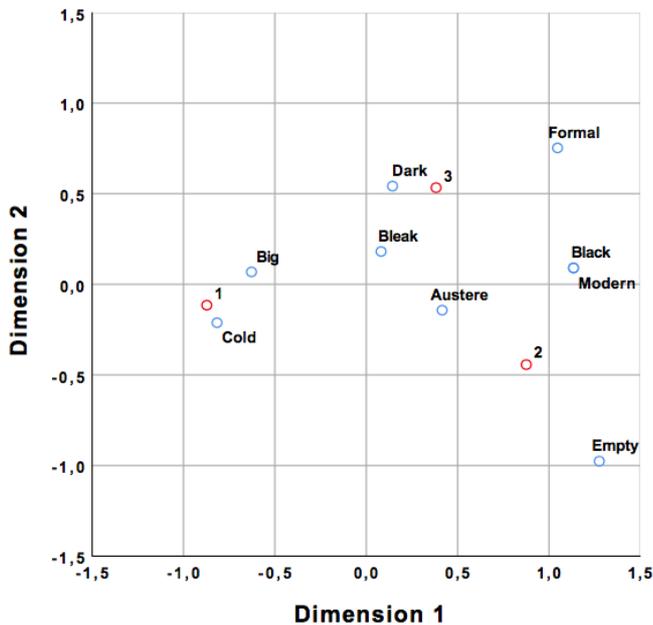
Figure fourteen shows that there are quite significant differences in how the building is described negatively. Adjectives such as 'dark' (the most frequently used adjective), 'black' and 'gloomy' seem to be used almost exclusively by lower educated respondents. Respondents from subgroup one are practically the only ones to use the word 'modern' in a negative way (we see the opposite when the building is described positively). Higher educated respondents tend to criticize the building more for its size, indicating it is too 'overwhelming'.

Figure 15: MCA, 'The Ship', positive adjectives used to describe building (N = 72)



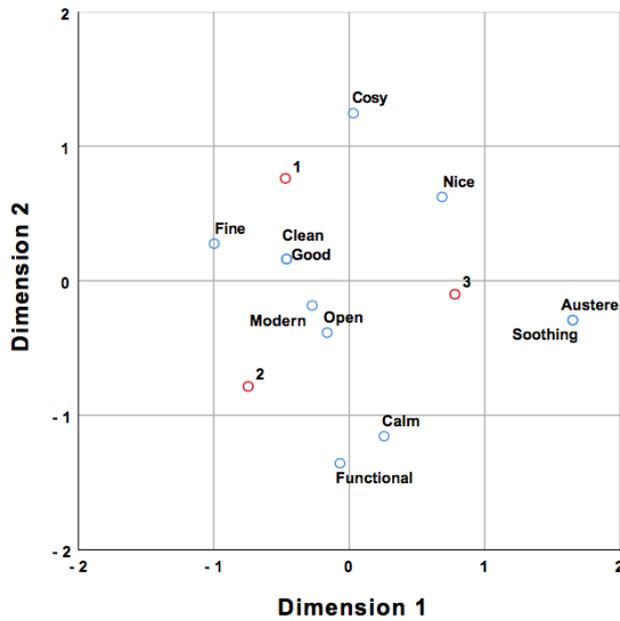
It's interesting to note that, in contrast to figure fourteen, the adjective 'big' is used here more frequently by respondents in subgroup one when describing the building in a positive way. Words such as 'special' and 'interesting' are used equally by those who finished high school and higher educated respondents, while the last group are the only ones to stress the aesthetic qualities of the building, illustrated by the fact that only they use words such as 'attractive' and 'beautiful'.

Figure 16: MCA, 'The Ship', negative adjectives used to describe interior (N = 72)



With regard to the interior, we immediately notice that the words 'cold' and 'big' (together with 'austere' the most frequently used adjectives) are used almost exclusively by respondents in subgroup one. Austere on the other hand, is used far more often by respondents who finished high school or higher education. Now, in contrary to the description of the building, the word 'dark' is used mainly by higher educated respondents.

Figure 17: MCA, 'The Ship', positive adjectives used to describe interior (N = 72)



Several words are used more or less equally frequent by all respondents to describe the interior of 'The Ship' in a positive way (clean, good, modern). It's interesting that 'cosy' is also featured here and belongs mostly to lower educated respondents, but it should be emphasized that it was used far less often than words such as 'open' or 'modern'. Adjectives that suggest a certain atmosphere being facilitated by the interior ('calm', 'soothing') are only used by respondents who finished high school and/or higher education.

There are clearly quite distinct ways in which respondents from different social classes tend to describe both the building and interior of 'The Ship'. This confirms what previous analyses showed, namely that there are significant differences in how this library is experienced and perceived when taking class-membership into account. As the most 'iconic' library to be featured in this research (and perhaps being the most 'iconic' library in Belgium), we should perhaps pay even greater attention to 'The Ship' than to the other libraries featured in this research. As said before, the results of this first coding are meant to function mainly as a 'blueprint', a 'floor plan' to see what are the general tendencies in how these building are experienced and evaluated by respondents from different social classes. What we see with regard to 'The Ship' is very clear: it is a library that is evaluated significantly better by respondents who have a higher socio-economic status and seems to appeal far less to the socially vulnerable. We see that lower educated respondents find the building far less 'recognizable' as a public library than higher educated respondents and that those who have (had) a job with lower occupational prestige find the interior less recognizable or 'typical' for a public library. It's interesting to note that the resemblance to an 'office building' or 'office space' was made both for libraries 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship', who have the most contemporary buildings and interiors, but that the comparison was made far more often (three times more often in fact) for 'The Ship' than for 'The Cinema'. Perhaps this 'businesslike' impression does play a considerable role in explaining why working-class individuals feel less at home and less comfortable in the 'cold' and 'austere' interior of 'The Ship'. The finding that the formal, overly professional and stern look and feel of this library probably outweighs the importance of any (possibly problematic) connotations with elitist cultural institutions in explaining why this space is less inviting and approachable for working class respondents, illustrates why such a detailed analysis was useful.

### 3.2.5. 'The Church'

As mentioned before, 'The Church' displays only five significant correlations in total, four of which are connected to the age of respondents. More specifically, we see that both the building and the interior are found to be more attractive and inviting for older respondents. Taking the architectural style of this library into consideration (the fact that it is a nicely renovated schoolbuilding from the middle of the 19th century) this is perhaps unsurprising, even if the interior is more contemporary. Moreover, it should be emphasized that 'The Church' was generally evaluated very well, arguably second best after 'The Cinema'. Still, when only taking into consideration the first coding of the interviews, 'The Church's' results are probably the hardest to interpret in a meaningful way. Table 26 shows that only one socio-demographic variable that can distinctly be connected to social class-membership plays a role in how 'The Church' is experienced and evaluated: respondents whose parents have a lower education level tend to find the interior somewhat more attractive. This is surprising, since 'The Church' showed up multiple times during our exploratory analyses (of the user survey data) and with clear, strong effects to indicate that this library was being evaluated considerably better by respondents with higher education levels.

Table 26: Different aspects of 'The Church', correlated against background variables (Spearman's Rho) (N = 69)

	Building typical?	Building attractive?	Building inviting?	Interior typical?	Interior attractive?	Interior inviting?
Occupational prestige	0,124	-0,031	-0,034	0,105	-0,010	0,052
Urbanization town/city	-0,188	-0,133	-0,035	0,036	-0,173	-0,041
Gender	-0,085	0,179	0,153	0,000	0,169	0,178
Subjective interest in architecture	0,078	-0,026	-0,052	-0,079	-0,181	-0,181
Income	-0,041	0,059	-0,021	0,253	0,016	0,011
Participation to 'highbrow' activities	-0,175	-0,217	-0,057	0,344	-0,214	-0,153
Age	0,079	,335**	,311*	0,021	,392**	,360**
Education level parent	0,182	-0,132	-0,058	0,346	-,242*	-0,181
Education level	0,016	-0,151	-0,113	-0,057	-0,200	-0,137

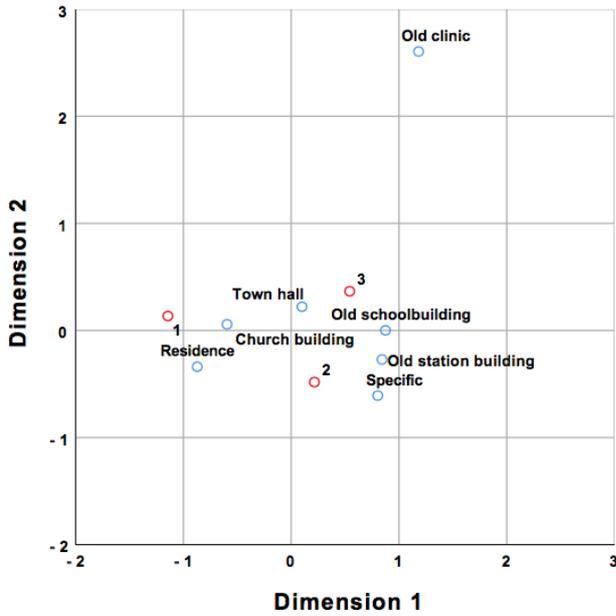
If we return to table ten, taking into consideration the general scores given to the library, we again see a positive correlation for age (meaning older respondents gave a higher score), a positive correlation with regard to gender (meaning that women gave a significantly higher general score to 'The Church') and, again quite surprisingly, a negative effect with regard to the participation to highbrow activities (meaning that respondents who participate more to highbrow activities give a lower general score). This means that the only significant effects that can be connected to social class-membership, shows the opposite of what we were expecting to find. This lead us to question our exploratory analyses: perhaps the strong and consistent effects found in table 26 suggest that our findings with regard to the education level of respondents were in fact indicative of age effects, but this would make little sense, considering that education level tends to correlate negatively with age. A greater appeal to older respondents would likely contribute to negative correlations found with regard to education level. However, if we control for age and repeat the exploratory analysis for 'The Church', significant positive effects remain. This suggest a similar conclusion as the one made for 'The Cinema', namely that there are other contextual factors at play that have nothing to do with the look and feel of the building, although the difference this time is that, while 'The Cinema' showed less effects than was to be expected following our exploratory analyses, the effects found for 'The Church' downright contradict what we expected to see.

Table 27: Building 'The Church' resembles... (N = 72)

	% of respondents
Church building	23,6%
Town hall	13,9%
Old schoolbuilding	11,1%
Old station building	9,7%
Residence	4,2%
Specific	4,2%
Old clinic	1,4%

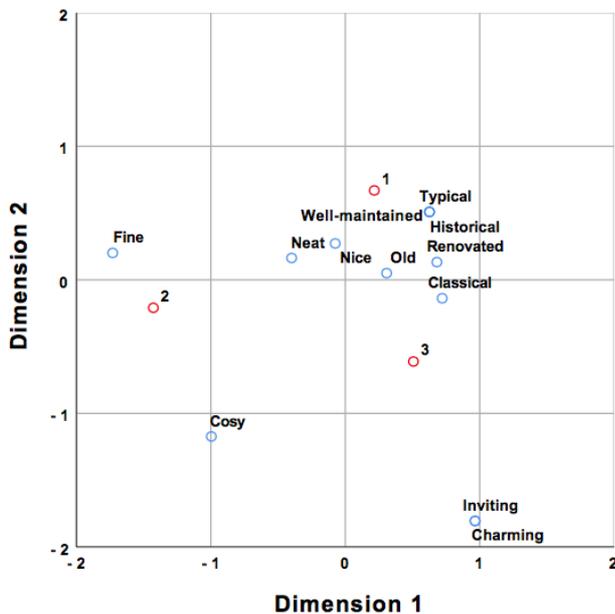
When looking at what types of buildings our respondents compare 'The Church' to in table 27, it is unsurprising that many are reminded of a 'church building', meaning in this case that it does not necessarily literally resemble a church, but rather a building affiliated with the church council. The fact that many descriptions feature the adjective 'old' is also unsurprising, since it is of course a very old building. The interior of 'The Church' was only compared to another type of building four times, so no frequency table or MCA could be constructed for this.

Figure 18: MCA, comparisons building E vs education level (N = 72)



Looking at how comparisons were made between different subgroups of education levels in figure eighteen, it does appear there is quite a high level of convergence. All types of respondents find that 'The Church' resembles a church building. Another similarity with 'The Cinema' is that negative adjectives were used very sparsely to describe both the building and interior of 'The Church', meaning that also here, only MCA's could be constructed for the positive adjectives that were used.

Figure 19: MCA, 'The Church', positive adjectives used to describe building (N = 72)



What stands out here is that most of these positively used adjectives 'hover' between groups one and three, meaning that they share more words when describing the building of 'The Church' than those in group two. Furthermore, many adjectives are located especially close to group one, meaning that they have a very rich vocabulary in describing 'The Church' in a positive way. Many adjectives point to a positive appraisal of the fact that it is a 'historical' ('classical', 'old'), but also a 'renovated' ('neat', 'well-maintained') building.

Figure 20: MCA, 'The Church', positive adjectives used to describe interior (N = 72)

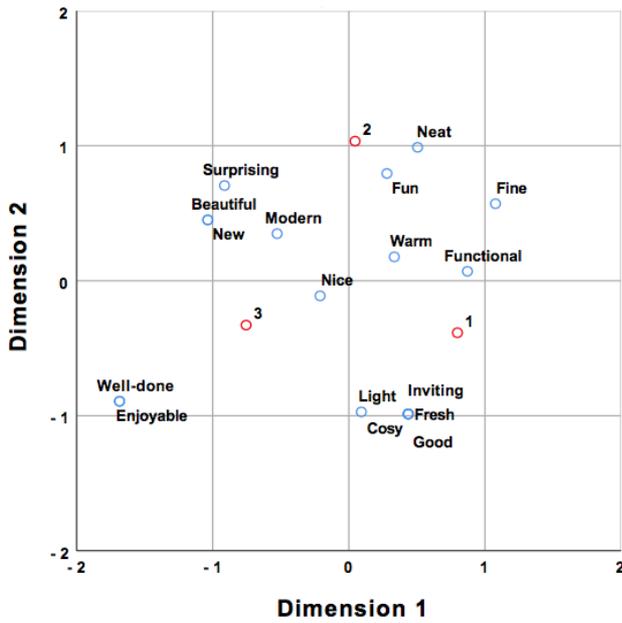


Figure twenty illustrates that lower educated respondents have less of a 'monopoly' on adjectives used to positively describe the interior. Several adjectives are used quite evenly across different education levels ('warm', 'fun', 'nice'), but again, it seems as if groups one and three have a distinct set of words that only they use ('light', 'fresh', 'cosy'), which is perhaps somewhat surprising. The fact that the interior also features more modern elements, seems to be evaluated more positively by subgroups one and two ('new', 'modern', 'surprising')

As we already mentioned at the beginning of this subparagraph, 'The Church' is surely the most difficult to make sense of based on the first coding of the interviews. It's not just that there is a limited amount of socio-demographic variables displaying significant effects (mostly age, to a much lesser extent gender, education level of parents and the participation to highbrow activities), the effects found here also contradict what we expected to find based on our exploratory analysis of the user survey data. Not just the correlation matrix in table 26 points in this direction, also the comparisons with other types of buildings that were made and the adjectives that were used, suggest that this building is interpreted similarly across social classes and is actually evaluated better by those with very low levels of education (illustrated, among other things, by the fact that they 'own' most of the adjectives used to describe the building in a positive way). Perhaps we should also underline the fact that, when calculating the averages of scores given to the different libraries by different education levels in tables eleven to thirteen, 'The Church' is ranked first for respondents who did not finish secondary education. There are probably specific contextual factors at play beyond the look and feel of the building, although these can not be discerned as easily as was the case for 'The Cinema' when looking at answers given to the open question at the end of the user survey questionnaire. Luckily, more can be learned about 'The Church' when analyzing the interviews in a different way, as we will do from the next paragraph on.

### 3.2.6. *Intermediate conclusion*

What has this first coding and the subsequent analyses that have been carried out on the data it has generated taught us? First of all, and this is actually very important, we clearly see actual class-based dispositions towards the buildings and interiors of these different libraries. We know this might seem self-evident at this point, considering that the assumption that there are such differences serves as the foundation of this entire research, but there was always a possibility, however small it seemed after the analyses carried out in chapter two, that architecture was less important than we considered in establishing the look and feel of a library or how inviting it is. However, as shown above, when stripped of all other contextual factors (staff, organization, collection, membership fees, etc) all of the above libraries are still experienced and evaluated differently by respondents from different social classes and different demographic subgroups. Based on our exploratory analyses performed on the user survey data, we expected 'The Mansion' and 'The School' to be evaluated better by people with a lower socio-economic status and the other libraries to be evaluated better by people with a higher socio-economic status. With the exception of 'The Church', these expectations have been met. Together with the fact that the effects were less poignant as we had expected for 'The Cinema', this confronts us with again with a fact that we have hopefully stressed sufficiently throughout this dissertation, namely that aesthetic look and feel is one of several factors contributing to an inviting and inclusive public space, albeit a very important one. The aesthetic design of 'The Cinema' might be slightly more discouraging for working-class individuals, but there are clearly other and more important factors contributing to a higher threshold for this subgroup of visitors in real life. Conversely, it is possible that other factors outside the architectural help mediate the apparently (extremely) uninviting character of 'The Ship' for people with a lower socio-economic status in a positive way. The bottom line is: it is clear that architecture and aesthetics can play a substantial role in making a public library more or less inviting for the people whose attendance should be increased and it should be taken into consideration, especially since chapter one has shown that the 'usual suspects' (collection, staff, membership fees, etc) fall short in explaining why some libraries are visited more (or less) by lower educated individuals.

Differences found between social classes also do not limit themselves to how libraries are scored or evaluated, they also become clear when considering which other types of buildings certain libraries are compared to or how they are described. What is perhaps most clear is that the differences found with regard to what seem to be important aspects of a building's character are still largely the same as the ones found by Bourdieu in the sixties and seventies: the lower educated seem to value coziness and cleanliness and use more generic adjectives when describing a building or space in a positive way, while the higher educated express themselves more in 'intellectual', abstract terms. It is also especially interesting to see that these analyses suggest that the higher educated have more of a 'shared' vocabulary, in that they tend to use the same words on a more frequent base. To borrow yet again from Bourdieu, this points towards his concept of the 'language of the dominant class', which is especially important with regard to the 'political dimension' of designing and building new public libraries. Imagine an architectural firm presenting their designs for an iconic public library at a town hall meeting. After finishing the

presentation, the floor is given to local residents. Whose voice is most likely to be heard? The higher educated individual who shares a similar vocabulary, not just with other higher educated, but also with the architects themselves, or the lower educated individual who expresses himself more idiosyncratically and uses more generic adjectives? Both might be equally critical of the designs (since not all higher educated love iconic architecture, as much as not all lower educated hate it), but the voice of the first will likely ring much louder.

#### 4. Results second coding

##### 4.1. Aesthetic aspects in detail

Below are a series of tables that represent the results of the second coding. Tables 29 through 33 are cross tables that show how often a specific aesthetic aspect of a library was discussed and whether this was discussed in a neutral, negative, mixed or positive way. We start with the aspect that was commented on most often by respondents, a total of 92 times, the size and spaciousness of libraries (this of course means that some respondents discussed the size and spaciousness of multiple libraries, other respondents never mentioned this aspect). Every subsequent aspect discussed here was mentioned less frequently than the previous: material-use was discussed explicitly 86 times, the use of color was discussed 74 times, the furniture featured in the library was discussed 70 times and the light inside the library was discussed 57 times. This order also represents the frequency with which unique respondents mentioned a certain aspect (for just one library or multiple), with the exception that color (39) was discussed by fewer unique respondents than furniture (42). For the sake of completeness, we mention that size and spaciousness was mentioned by 47 unique correspondents, material-use by 43 unique respondents and light by 34 unique respondents.

Before discussing the frequency with which specific aesthetic aspects were discussed and how they were evaluated for each library separately, it can be interesting to discern whether the frequency with which certain aspects are discussed correlate with socio-demographic background variables. In other words: do certain subgroups discuss a certain aesthetic aspect more often than others in a general sense? Table 28 shows us that color, light and material-use are discussed more often by respondents with higher education levels (or whose parents have higher education levels) and less often by older respondents. Of course, these effects are linked: education level correlates negatively with age in our sample. When we partial out age, only one significant correlation remains: the material-use in a library is discussed more often (0,318\*\*) as education level rises. This suggests that higher-educated visitors care more about (what they consider to be the 'right') use of materials in a building than lower educated visitors. Additionally, we see that older respondents seem to place less emphasis on the use of color and light (eg, the use of natural light versus artificial light). Furniture and the size and perception of spaciousness is discussed equally across all subgroups of visitors.

These are not anecdotal insights. First of all, it illustrates yet again that these buildings and spaces are experienced and evaluated in a distinctly different way by different groups of visitors and that both age and education level are particularly relevant. Moreover, insights like these could guide the design of public buildings so that they appeal more to all layers of society. For example: the choice for which furniture to use should be informed by what appeals to 'all' potential visitors, while it is apparently justifiable to tailor the material-use more to the taste of higher educated visitors.

Table 28: frequency of discussed aspects correlated against background variables (N = 72)

	Colour	Furniture	Light	Material-use	Size
Education level parent	0,219	-0,014	,314**	,267*	0,102
Subjective interest in architecture	0,005	0,180	0,231	0,076	0,097
Occupational prestige	0,061	-0,096	0,103	0,251	0,026
Urbanization town/city	-0,027	-0,026	-0,066	-0,103	0,124
Income	0,157	0,061	0,241	0,192	0,007
Age	-,441**	-0,045	-,268*	-,308*	-0,104
Participation to 'highbrow' activities	0,054	0,088	0,044	0,087	0,100
Education level	,327**	-0,037	,292*	,422**	0,162
Gender	0,021	0,148	-0,127	-0,183	0,008

Similar analyses as presented in table 28 were conducted for each library separately to discern whether a certain aspect is discussed more often by a subgroup of a background variable (the results of these analyses are presented in the appendix in tables d through h). All significant and relevant correlations that were found will be discussed below the tables that discuss the frequency with which a specific aesthetic aspect was mentioned or commented on.

Table 29: percentage of respondents that explicitly discusses size and spaciousness (N = 72)

	The Mansion	The Cinema	The School	The Ship	The Church
Neutral	0,0%	4,2%	0,0%	2,8%	0,0%
Negative	5,6%	6,9%	2,8%	8,3%	1,4%
Mixed	0,0%	4,2%	2,8%	2,8%	0,0%
Positive	15,3%	37,5%	5,6%	13,9%	13,9%
Total	20,8%	52,8%	11,1%	27,8%	15,3%

Table 29 shows that size and spaciousness was discussed most often by respondents when viewing 'The Cinema' (52,8%) and that most respondents (37,5%) evaluated this spaciousness in a positive way. This pertains predominantly to the interior of 'The Cinema', which is a very large open space featuring multiple 'terraces' on which the collection is housed and where seating area's are provided. This openness appears to appeal to a high number of respondents, although some do underline the loss of space this entails and complain that the space does become somewhat imposing because of this openness.

*'It's all a bit overwhelming, I prefer it a bit smaller, more intimate (...) No, for me, it's not necessary for it to be this grand.'*<sup>1</sup>

- Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

The only library where a considerable amount of respondents evaluate the size and spaciousness in a negative way, is 'The Ship'. Although 'The Ship' has the largest building by a comfortable margin (it is even significantly larger than 'The Cinema'), the negative comments regarding its size refer mostly to the interior. Some respondents complain about an emptiness and a waste of available space, while others note that the interior feels surprisingly 'small' for such a large building.

*'I expected it to be a bit more spacious...'*<sup>2</sup>

- Man, 39 years old, higher education

*'(sighs) I honestly feel it's too big, lost space when I look around the entrance hall, it's, for a library, too... too big. The building itself is quite nice, but they were not economical with the space that they had'*<sup>3</sup>

- Man, 58 years old, higher education

One interesting correlation was found with regard to 'The School' (the smallest library respondents 'visited' in our research). Respondents who live in larger towns or cities tend to discuss the size and spaciousness of this library more often than other respondents. Most respondents discuss this aspect in a positive way, with the smaller scale of the library often being linked to a feeling of 'coziness'.

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<sup>1</sup> Ik vind het allemaal nogal wat geweldig, ik heb het liever wat kleiner, intiemer (...) Nee, zo heel groots moet ik het allemaal niet hebben

<sup>2</sup> Ik had het nog ietsje 'spacieuzer' verwacht...

<sup>3</sup> (zucht) Ik vind't eigenlijk nogal groot, beetje verloren ruimte als ik hier in de inkomhal kijk, is dat toch, voor een bibliotheek, allé, te, te, te groot, maar het gebouw op zich vind ik wel mooi, ze zijn niet zuinig omgesprongen met de ruimte die ze hadden, hebben

Table 30: percentage of respondents that explicitly discusses material-use (N = 72)

	The Mansion	The Cinema	The School	The Ship	The Church
Neutral	2,8%	1,4%	4,2%	2,8%	0,0%
Negative	11,1%	0,0%	4,2%	12,5%	6,9%
Mixed	5,6%	1,4%	2,8%	1,4%	5,6%
Positive	1,4%	30,6%	18,1%	5,6%	1,4%
Total	20,8%	33,3%	29,2%	22,2%	13,9%

As mentioned before, higher educated respondents tend to focus more on material-use. This was especially the case for 'The Mansion' and 'The Cinema'. In 'The Mansion', 12 out of 15 respondents that discussed the material-use had a higher education degree, with all of them giving either a neutral, negative or mixed reaction. The only positive evaluation of materials used in 'The Mansion' came from a respondent with a high school diploma. Almost all outspokenly negative evaluations of the materials used mention the fact that the library features a lot of 'bare concrete', both on the walls and the floor, with some also complaining about an abundance of 'metal', giving the interior an industrial feel.

*'It gives me an industrial feeling, like, concrete constructions, uhm, rather, rather cold and not cozy for a library'<sup>4</sup>*

- Man, 58 years old, higher education

When looking at 'The Cinema', 17 of the 24 respondents that discussed the material-use had a higher education degree. Regardless of education level, however, practically all remarks regarding the use of materials were positive and referred to the large glass-surface walls of the library. This remark was most often made upon seeing the building and frequently repeated once 'entering' the interior. Specifically for 'The Cinema', significant correlations were also found with regard to the age of respondents and the frequency with which respondents attended 'high brow' cultural events. Only three respondents above the age of 60 mentioned the material-use of the library. As the number of attended 'high brow' cultural events increased, it became more likely for respondents to (positively) discuss the use of materials. This is another indication that the building of 'The Cinema' invokes a look and feel that is typical for a (mostly high brow) cultural institution, previously illustrated by the fact that respondents who participate more to high brow cultural events also find the library to be significantly more 'typical' for a library and more inviting.

It is also noteworthy that the use of materials is generally praised in 'The School', but evaluated quite poorly in 'The Ship'. This is noteworthy considering the enormous contrast in financial investment between the two. Most respondents that react positively to the material-use in 'The School' refer to the fact that wood is very prominently featured in the interior. Numerous aspects of the material-use in 'The Ship' are cause for a bad evaluation: some respondents complain of the

<sup>4</sup> Ik vind dat heel industrieel aanvoelen, zo euh, betonnen constructies euh, eerder, eerder koud en niet gezellig voor een bibliotheek

use of 'bare materials', the same way as in 'The Mansion', with multiple references to steel and concrete. It is also noteworthy that several respondents have difficulty recognizing the materials used on the outside of the building, with some doubting whether the 'abstract' and 'artistic' framework that encases the building is made of wood or steel. Although it is suggested that many people make a positive connection to the use of wood, the fact that this is unclear seems to frustrate respondents. The framework on the outside of 'The Ship' is black, meaning respondents assume the wood would also be painted black in this case. The predominantly negative appraisal of this darkly painted wood points towards the importance of the typical wood-texture in evoking positive feelings. A few respondents also indicated that the quality of materials used is also low, with several specific references to the ugliness of the fixed carpets in the interior of the library. Despite 'The Ship' being so poorly evaluated by respondents with a lower socio-economic status, only one respondent without a high school diploma explicitly evaluates the material-use. This calls into question how relevant material-use is for this subgroup of potential visitors: does the use of materials not affect them and is their poor evaluation caused by other factors? Do they feel less comfortable in critiquing this aspect? In all likelihood, the aesthetic qualities of the used materials do contribute to the overall 'cold' and 'businesslike' feel of the interior, but respondents with a lower socio-economic status experience this aspect in a less outspoken way.

Table 31: percentage of respondents that explicitly discusses colour (N = 72)

	The Mansion	The Cinema	The School	The Ship	The Church
Neutral	2,8%	2,8%	2,8%	1,4%	0,0%
Negative	9,7%	1,4%	9,7%	13,9%	18,1%
Mixed	1,4%	1,4%	1,4%	1,4%	4,2%
Positive	5,6%	4,2%	1,4%	4,2%	15,3%
Total	19,4%	9,7%	15,3%	20,8%	37,5%

When looking at table 31, it is striking to see that 37,5% of all respondents discuss the use of color in 'The Church'. After the size and spaciousness of 'The Cinema', this is the most frequently discussed aesthetic quality of any library. It is also interesting to note that opinions are very much divided, with only slightly more respondents being outspokenly negative. Almost all respondents refer to the use of the color green in the last section of they library they viewed, with many respondents describing it as 'garish' or even 'fluorescent', while others describe it as 'bright' and 'colorful'.

*'So the colors too, uhm, yes, it's a bit more uhm, a bit more with the times, the color consultant did a good job'<sup>5</sup>*

- Man, 56 years old, high school

<sup>5</sup> dus de kleuren ook euh, ja, 't is een beetje meer euh, beetje meer met de tijd mee, de kleurenconsulent heeft zijn werk gedaan

*'Well, yeah, that green over there. It doesn't help to relax. They didn't listen to their color consultant'*<sup>6</sup>

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

A significant positive correlation was found between education level and the frequency with which color was discussed while viewing 'The Church'. Out of the 27 respondents that discussed the use of color, 20 had finished higher education and 11 of them evaluated the use of color in a negative way. Out of the six respondents who had finished high school that discussed the color in 'The Church', just one was negative. Respondents in the oldest age groups (60 years or older) also tended to discuss the use of color in 'The Church' far less often. The evaluation of the use of color also tended to become increasingly negative as age dropped, with younger respondents invariably giving a bad evaluation.

*'(mimics gag-reflex) that green, no, I could not enter that space. No no, that light green is really... I'm very sensitive to color, I just couldn't enter that space because of it'*<sup>7</sup>

- Woman, 24 years old, higher education

Also in 'The Cinema' and 'The School', a negative correlation was found between age and the frequency with which the use of color in the library was discussed, with only respondents under the age of 44 mentioning color. In general, it seems that colors draw more attention from visitors when used in a 'bad' way. For instance: in 'The School', seven out of eleven respondents that mentioned color had something negative to say about it. In general, respondents stress the importance of the use of soothing colors in a public library, while also complaining when they feel there to be a lack of color and subsequently an interior that is 'too dark'. When looking at our most 'iconic' library, 'The Ship', a considerable number of respondents also complain about the exterior being too 'dark', 'black' and the whole being 'colorless'. It should also be noted, however, that some respondents do enjoy this aesthetic, albeit more in a cerebral and reflexive way. When asked if 'The Ship' was inviting, one respondent answered:

*'(sigh) For me yes, subjectively speaking, on the other hand, I'm also a Lord of the Rings-fan and I think if that would be in our time, then Mordor... Sauron, he, I mean, he would have lived here. I mean, I think it's... it looks scary, if I'm being honest'*<sup>8</sup>

- Man, 31 years old, higher education

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<sup>6</sup> goh, ja, dat groen hé zo. Daar wordt je niet rustig van. Die zullen niet naar de kleurenconsulent geluisterd hebben.

<sup>7</sup> (Geluid van afkeer) dat groen, nee, daar zou ik echt niet kunnen gaan. Nee nee, dat licht groen is echt... maar ik ben heel kleur-sensitief, gewoon daardoor zou ik niet in die ruimte kunnen gaan.

<sup>8</sup> (zucht) Voor mij wel, subjectief, langs de andere kant, ik ben ook een Lord of the Rings-fan en ik denk moest dat in onze tijd zijn, zou Mordor hier... Sauron hier, allé, hier in gewoond hebben. Allé, ik vind het... het heeft een eng uiterlijk, als ik eerlijk ben

How color is used, is perhaps the first aspect of aesthetic experience that comes to mind as being very relevant. We have shown here, however, that it arguably less relevant than the experience of size and spaciousness and the use of materials. That being said, color can evoke very strong reactions and connotations from predominantly younger respondents. Avoiding garish and 'bold' colors seems to be important, while also avoiding the impression of a space being 'colorless' and dark.

Table 32: percentage of respondents that explicitly discusses furniture (N = 72)

	The Mansion	The Cinema	The School	The Ship	The Church
Neutral	1,4%	1,4%	2,8%	0,0%	0,0%
Negative	8,3%	1,4%	12,5%	0,0%	2,8%
Mixed	1,4%	0,0%	5,6%	5,6%	1,4%
Positive	9,7%	11,1%	13,9%	6,9%	11,1%
Total	20,8%	13,9%	34,7%	12,5%	15,3%

When looking at the frequency with which respondents explicitly discussed the furniture in the different libraries they 'visited', it is interesting to note that this aspect was most often discussed in 'The Mansion' and 'The School' (which were both identified as being more appealing for working class visitors). Especially 'The School' stands out, with one third of all respondents commenting on the furniture in this library. It is not the case that a specific subgroup of visitors commented more often than others, but there is a clear pattern discernible when it comes to the evaluation of the furniture of 'The School': out of the ten respondents that gave a positive evaluation, only two were highly educated, while six out of nine negative evaluations belonged to highly educated respondents. Most comments, both negative and positive, referred to four red armchairs that were placed in a circle around a small black table. The reactions to this specific set-up provide perhaps the best illustration (coming out of our interviews) of what Bourdieu noted with regard to how practicality and coziness seem to be more important for those in the working class, while those in the middle class also value aesthetic outlook more.

*'I see some red armchairs and a little table (...) that's also very cosy'*<sup>9</sup>  
 - Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

*'And then those red armchairs here, I recognize the typical little IKEA-table, uhm, it's all a bit outdated'*<sup>10</sup>  
 - Man, 21 years old, higher education

<sup>9</sup> Ik zie wel die rode zeteltjes, met dat tafeltje (...) dat is ook heel gezellig

<sup>10</sup> En dan hier die rode zeteltjes, het typische IKEA-tafeltje dat ik herken, euhm, dat is allemaal inderdaad wat meer outdated

*'Yeah, those red armchairs, for me... it's dreadful. And that little table with those little canteen-tables'*<sup>11</sup>

- Woman, 37 years old, higher education

With regards to the frequency with which the furniture in 'The Ship' was explicitly discussed, a significant positive correlation was found with both the occupational prestige and the education level of respondents, meaning that respondents who have (had) more prestigious professions and higher educated respondents tended to discuss the furniture here more often (only one respondent with a high school diploma discussed the furniture of 'The Ship', giving a mixed reaction). A small majority was outspokenly positive about the the furniture, others had mixed reactions and none were negative. Most comments also referred to a seating area (all VR-images shown of interiors featured a seating area of some sort), just as in 'The School'. Several positive remarks referred to how the furniture was part of a larger, harmonious aesthetic.

*'Clearly, a lot of thought when into this, into everything, yes. Very good, it draws you in, relaxes you, everything was thought over, the chairs, uhm... yes, the floor, the walls, the ceiling, lighting'*<sup>12</sup>

- Man, 37 years old, higher education

The fact that a considerable amount of working class respondents commented (mostly in a positive way) on the furniture in 'The Mansion' and 'The School' (which they evaluated more favorably compared to higher educated respondents) but almost none commented on the furniture in 'The Ship', can be an indication that lower educated respondents feel less comfortable in giving negative evaluations. At the end of this section, we will go into more detail on this, but there are very strong indications that working class respondents show more reserve in giving negative evaluations. The fact that these effects are also found in our research, one where respondents were encouraged to be frank and were assured multiple times that there were no wrong answers, again calls into question the practices of 'community consultation' that are often championed in the field of architecture. People with more cultural capital are likely more vocal, especially regarding things they do not like or appreciate.

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<sup>11</sup> Ja, zo die rode stoelen, dat is... voor mij affreus. En dat tafeltje met die, met die, ja, kantine-tafeltjes

<sup>12</sup> Ja, daar is duidelijk over nagedacht hé, over alles, ja. Heel goed, trekt u naar binnen, brengt ook rust, er is over alles nagedacht, over de stoelen, euh... ja, de vloer, de muren, het plafond, verlichting

Table 33: percentage of respondents that explicitly discusses light (N = 72)

	The Mansion	The Cinema	The School	The Ship	The Church
Neutral	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Negative	5,6%	0,0%	6,9%	5,6%	0,0%
Mixed	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	2,8%
Positive	13,9%	18,1%	5,6%	9,7%	11,1%
Total	19,4%	18,1%	12,5%	15,3%	13,9%

Table 33 shows that the frequency with which light is discussed remains quite constant across the five libraries that were 'visited' by respondents. Other specific aesthetic qualities were discussed more unevenly, as became clear in tables 29 to 32. 'The Mansion' seems to be the most interesting case here, not only because it is the library where light is discussed most often (although just slightly more often than in 'The Cinema'), several significant correlations were also found. These all indicate that respondents with a higher socio-economic status tend to discuss the light in this library more frequently: respondents whose parents have a higher educational attainment, who have a higher diploma themselves, who are more interested in architecture and have a higher income all tend to mention or comment on the light in 'The Mansion' more often. Most respondents evaluated the light in this library in a positive way, sometimes despite other aspects that they found less appealing.

*'What I think (about the interior)? A bit full... busy... uhm... grey... a lot of color though, books and whatnot, but a bit grey, luckily there is a lot of light coming in, otherwise it would be too heavy'*<sup>13</sup>

Woman, 67 years old, high school

In general, respondents seem to appreciate libraries with an abundance of (preferably natural) light and respond less favorably when interiors appear to be too dark or when featuring too much artificial or 'cold' industrial lighting. Although less frequent, the negative evaluations of the light in 'The Mansion' tend to refer to the use of artificial light.

*'Are those lamps on the ceiling or is there light? They're lamps, industrial lamps (...) I think there is too little daylight to really call it (an) attractive (space).'*<sup>14</sup>

- Woman, 43 years old, higher education

This preference for an abundance of natural light also explains why the use of light in 'The School' and 'The Ship' is evaluated negatively quite often. Both libraries rely heavily on the use of artificial lighting and have walls in darker colors. Several of the positive evaluations of the light in 'The Ship'

<sup>13</sup> Wat vind ik daar van? Een beetje vol... druk... euhm... grijs... wel veel kleuren bij de aankleding, boeken en dergelijke, maar nogal grijs, gelukkig dat er flink wat licht binnen komt, anders vind ik het nogal zwaar

<sup>14</sup> Zijn dat nu lampen aan het plafond of komt er nu licht? Het zijn lampen, industriële lampen (...) Ik denk dat er te weinig daglicht is om het echt aantrekkelijk te kunnen noemen.

are made before viewing the interior and are based on the fact that the library has a lot of glass-surface walls, these (perhaps somewhat surprisingly) do not provide a lot of direct natural light however, since the steel framework surrounding the building prohibits light from falling on the windows. One respondent (who frequently visited 'The Ship' in real life) made an explicit comparison to the interior of 'The Mansion'.

*'It immediately stands out, a lot of light, big open spaces, a huge difference with ('The Ship') for instance.'*<sup>15</sup>

- Man, pensioner (did not specify year of birth), higher education

The findings with regard to the lighting of public libraries are the least surprising: abundant natural light is preferred by a large majority of respondents, regardless of their social background, age or gender. If any of the aesthetic elements we discussed here could be treated in a universalistic way by architects or designers, light would most likely be it.

We would like to end this subparagraph by noting that two significant correlations were found with regard to explicit comments made about the coherence and harmonization of different aesthetic aspects inside and outside the library buildings. This was also coded, but occurred very rarely, only three times. It is unsurprising that this happened only in 'The Ship' (the most 'iconic' public library in our research) and that only higher educated respondents who participate to a lot of high brow cultural activities mentioned this (and always in a positive way).

*'A choice was made for a contemporary architecture with contemporary materials, a contemporary approach and I think that's strong. Yes, the design is very, uh, consistent, metal, hum, terrace and then those armchairs also partly in metal and leather, yes, very consistent.'*<sup>16</sup>

- Woman, 43 years old, higher education

*'You can feel, a lot of thought went into it, the fact that those chairs are there, that those lights were placed in that way, uhm, you feel more of the innovation straight away, with those screens you see, I didn't see that in the other libraries.'*<sup>17</sup>

- Man, 31 years old, higher education

It is also worth noting that both respondents that were quoted here lauded the harmonization of aesthetic elements in 'The Ship', but also stated that the interior was not very inviting. As illustrated many times, higher educated respondents tended to be more easily inclined to give a good evaluation of 'The Ship' even though the look and feel was not to their liking on an intuitive level, with the 'studied' and 'thought out' aesthetic being much to their liking.

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<sup>15</sup> Het valt mij direct op, heel veel licht, grote ruimtes, een enorme tegenstelling met ('The Ship') bijvoorbeeld.

<sup>16</sup> men heeft gekozen voor hedendaagse architectuur met hedendaagse materialen, een hedendaagse benadering en, dat vind ik dan ook weer sterk. Ja, het design is heel euh, consistent, metalen euhm, terras en dan die zetels ook een stuk uit metaal en leder, ja, heel consistent gedaan

<sup>17</sup> ge voelt dat, daar is over nagedacht, dat die stoelen daar staan, dat die lichten daar zo zijn gezet, euhm, ge voelt al meteen meer die innovatie, met die schermen dat je daar ziet, dat had ik ook nog niet gezien in die vorige bibs.

## 4.2. Opinions and remarks

Now that we have more insight into the relative importance of specific aesthetic elements, both in general and for different subgroups of visitors, we would like to present findings from our second coding that have less to do with specific aesthetic elements. As noted before, during our first coding of the VR-assisted interviews, notes were made of opinions and remarks that were recurring and/or striking and were not featured (in so much detail) in our first coding schedule. For instance, a considerable number of respondents mentioned that a building had a typically urban (or conversely a 'small-town') feel to it. These types of remarks and opinions were added to the second coding scheme as dichotomous variables. Tables 34 through 45 represent all the remarks and opinions that were formulated at least ten times (or by 13,9% of our sample) for one or more libraries. Additionally, all these dichotomous variables (not just the ones that were mentioned by at least 10 respondents) were correlated against background variables to see if a certain opinion or remark is formulated more often by a certain subgroup while viewing a specific library. If a significant effect was found (see tables d through h in the appendix), this will be discussed below the frequency table that deals with the same theme to provide additional insight. Tables were thematically grouped under subparagraphs.

### 4.2.1. Invitingness and audience

Table 34: percentage of respondents that stated that the aesthetic style of the library determines its invitingness (negative or positive) (N = 72)

The Ship	13,9%
The Mansion	8,3%
The Church	5,6%
The School	1,4%
The Cinema	0,0%

A first important finding, that is very much at the heart of this research, is that there are quite substantial differences between the libraries with regard to the frequency with which respondents explicitly stated that the style was determinative for its 'invitingness'. Of course, the fact that the attractiveness of a building or interior is connected to its 'invitingness' has been illustrated across this chapter multiple times. Table 34 reports the amount of the times this was actually said by respondents, therefore marking the libraries where the effect of the style becomes strong enough to go from an implicit impression to an explicit statement. It should be noted that these percentages express the frequency with which this statement was made regardless of whether the respondent said the style had a positive or negative effect on its 'invitingness'. To gain more insight into this, we correlated these dichotomous variables for every library separately against the respective scores and evaluations of their buildings and interiors 'invitingness'. The results of

this analysis are presented in the appendix as table b. This table shows that no significant correlations were found for 'The Mansion', meaning that the statement whether or not the style of this building was determinative for its 'invitingness' was made equally between respondents who gave good and bad evaluations. Significant correlations were, however, found for 'The Ship' and 'The Church' when looking at the scores that were given and the perceived 'invitingness' of the interior. Respondents tended to stress the importance of the style of the library for the 'invitingness' of the library more often if they evaluated it less favorably.

Table 35: percentage of respondents that stated the library was not inviting, but did appreciate the style of the building (N = 72)

The Ship	18,1%
The Cinema	4,2%
The Mansion	1,4%
The Church	1,4%
The School	0,0%

Table 35 offers further insight into the possible 'tensions' that can arise between appreciation for an aesthetic style and perceived invitingness. We see that this is most outspoken for 'The Ship', where 18,1% of all respondents remark that they like the style of the building, but do not deem it to be an inviting space. The following excerpts illustrate this sentiment very well. The first respondent praised the building of 'The Ship' extensively for its beauty before this exchange with the interviewer.

**'And is it also inviting for you to stay and, let's say, read a magazine or something?'**

*'Hmmm, well, actually no, I don't know, for me, not really, because, it's a really big space, like, you go in to take something and then you immediately leave'*

**'Because it's so big? Or because of the way it looks?'**

*'Also because of the way it looks'<sup>18</sup>*

- Woman, 32 years old, elementary school

<sup>18</sup> En nodigt het ook uit om te blijven zitten, boekje te lezen, zoiets?

Goh, euh, eigenlijk euh, ja, ik weet niet, voor mij niet echt, want, dat is zo echt een grote ruimte, zo precies dat je moet iets euh, regelen en direct buiten

Nee, nee. Ook omdat het zo groot is? Of, meer hoe dat het eruitziet?

Hoe dat het eruitziet ook hé

*'I can enjoy it, I can think it's nice, but to me it gives a feeling of: OK, since it's so 'spacy' and modern, it also gives me a feeling of, yes, no, not to hang around, no. The minimalist style is a bit too cold for it, I think.'*<sup>19</sup>

- Man, 43 years old, higher education

It's interesting to see that an appreciation for the aesthetic qualities of the building do not automatically translate into a positive evaluation of the overall 'invitingness'. Respondents can hold the architecture in high regard and still feel less welcome. Based on the evaluations and descriptions of the different libraries in part one, it shouldn't come as a surprise that this is most outspoken in 'The Ship'. However, Table 35 also shows that this happens more often in 'The Cinema', which also has a more contemporary style than 'The Mansion', 'The School' and 'The Church'. This is surprising, because 'The Cinema' was evaluated very well across the board. This incongruence between the appreciation for the style of the building and interior and the perceived 'invitingness' is very important with regard to our research. It calls attention to the fact that the quality of a certain look and feel can not only be evaluated in terms of its aesthetic appeal. If we would have only asked the respondents (quoted above) whether they thought 'The Ship' was 'beautiful', we might have concluded that the library 'worked' for them and that the choice of style was the right one. However, based on their discussions regarding its 'invitingness', it is not unimaginable that they would be less likely to visit this library, despite a clear appreciation for the architectural style it was built in.

Table 36: percentage of respondents that emphasized a lack of readability of the library (N = 72)

The Mansion	18,1%
The Ship	15,3%
The Cinema	6,9%
The School	4,2%
The Church	0,0%

Table 36 illustrates the importance of the so called 'readability' of a public library, which should be understood as the ease with which a respondent feels he or she can orient him- or herself around the library, how clearly and logically the library seems to be organized and its recognizability. A distinction was made during coding whether the respondent evaluated the readability in a negative or in a positive way. Table 36 shows the frequency with which the readability was evaluated poorly in the different libraries. It is clear that this is especially problematic in 'The Mansion' and 'The Ship'. It should also be noted that no significant correlations could be found here, meaning that readability is not evaluated differently between respondents with different socio-economic backgrounds, ages or gender. The lack of readability in 'The Mansion' and 'The

<sup>19</sup> Ik kan er van genieten, ik kan dat mooi vinden, maar dan geeft mij dat het gevoel van: OK, met dat het spacy en modern is, geeft het mij ook een klein beetje gevoel een klein beetje van, mja, nee, om niet te blijven rondhangen, nee. Daar is de minimalistische stijl iets te kil voor denk ik.

Ship' have two distinct reasons. In 'The Mansion', most respondents complain about its 'messiness' and the fact that it appears unstructured:

*'Hmmm, but I don't know where everything is, it's not clear, like: "over there is for children, over there is for adults"'*<sup>20</sup>

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

The problem with the 'readability' of 'The Ship' lies more in the fact that it is less recognizable as a library, even for younger and higher educated respondents who appreciate the style of the building:

*'Well, from the outside, it's a very attractive building, but on the inside, I have the feeling that I don't really know what it is, especially when just entering, I think it's not very clear that this is a library'*<sup>21</sup>

- Man, 21 years old, higher education

*'For me, it's too austere, the books aren't prominent, no, it's too austere, for me it's not a library. If I would have walked in there, I would have said: no, we have to turn around because we're not in the right place'*<sup>22</sup>

- Woman, 45 years old, high school

A considerable number of respondents made the very specific comment that there were no books in sight upon entering 'The Ship' (and to a lesser extent 'The Cinema'). The following excerpts all pertain to 'The Ship':

*'I haven't seen any books yet (laughs)'*<sup>23</sup>

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

*'Stylish, classy... I haven't seen any books yet, it's the entrance hall, grand, modern, grand, yes...'*<sup>24</sup>

- Woman, middle-aged, elementary school

*'It's not clear yet that it's a library, it still isn't, I don't see any books'*<sup>25</sup>

- Man, 61 years old, higher education

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<sup>20</sup> Hmmm, maar ik weet eigenlijk niet waar alles is van, het is niet zo duidelijk van: 'dat is daar voor de kinderen', 'dat is voor volwassenen'

<sup>21</sup> langs buiten vond ik het enorm aantrekkelijk, maar langs binnen heb ik zo inderdaad het gevoel dat ik niet echt weet wat dat het is, zeker als je binnenkomt, is het niet echt duidelijk dat het een bibliotheek is vind ik

<sup>22</sup> Het is mij te strak, de boeken komen niet tot hun recht, nee, het is mij veel te strak, het is voor mij geen bibliotheek. Als ik daar binnen gestapt zou zijn, zou ik zeggen van: nee, we moeten omdraaien want we zitten helemaal fout

<sup>23</sup> Ja, ik zag nog geen boeken (lacht)

<sup>24</sup> Ja, klasse hé, klasse... ik zie tot hiertoe nog geen boeken, het is de inkomshal, groots, modern, groots, ja...

<sup>25</sup> Het valt niet op dat het een bibliotheek is, nog altijd niet, ik zie geen boeken

*'The ceiling's a pity, but other than that, I think it's quite cool, very industrial, modern, but I'm not seeing any books (chuckle), I still don't realize that it's a library'*<sup>26</sup>

- Woman, 25 years old, higher education

*'Oh, so it is a library? Yeah, now I see it, it's getting closer, in the back there are books right?'*

*Alright, OK'*<sup>27</sup>

- Woman, 76 years old, high school

This recurring theme of the 'lack of books' and the subsequent feeling of 'not being in a library' that arises from it, leads us to formulate (perhaps our most) specific advice for designing the interior of a public library: make sure that books, which still function as a symbol of public libraries, are clearly visible upon entering the building. For many visitors, libraries are still synonymous with the reading of books. We can't know for certain based on our data, but we suspect this absence of books in the entrance space of 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' is a deliberate choice, an implicit message that these libraries are 'more' than book-repository's. In our opinion, this approach is unnecessary and counter-effective in creating a welcoming, readable and recognizable environment for a public library.

When considering positive evaluations given concerning readability, which were far less frequent overall, it should be noted that significant effects were found for 'The School' with regard to education level (of the parents) and age. Lower educated respondents, respondents whose parents are lower educated and older respondents all commenting positively on the readability of 'The School' more frequently. When partialling out the age of respondents, a significant correlation still remains with regard to the education level of respondents, meaning that lower educated respondents highly value the readability of 'The School'. To boot, a positive evaluation of the readability was also made most frequent (nine times) for 'The School', in contrast to 'The Cinema' (the second most frequent), where it happened five times. The next excerpts all pertain to 'The School':

*'It's cosy, because it's not too big, it really is. And it also seems very orderly and I like that. It's nice, really.'*<sup>28</sup>

- Woman, 83 years old, elementary school

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<sup>26</sup> Jammer van het plafond met die latjes, maar voor de rest, vind ik het wel cool, zo heel industrieel, modern, maar ik zie precies geen boeken (lachje), ik heb nog altijd niet door dat het een bibliotheek is

<sup>27</sup> Ah, toch een bibliotheek? Ja, nu zie ik, het komt zo wat dichterbij, daar achter zijn boeken hé? Voila, OK

<sup>28</sup> het is gezellig, omdat het niet te groot is, echt waar. En het is precies ook heel ordelijk en daar hou ik van. Ja het is aantrekkelijk, echt waar.

*'Well look here, yes (...) this might be a bit more old-fashioned than the previous one ('The Cinema'), but this is, yeah, this is good, very good even, those tables with the computers, everything, yes, this I like very much, it would be easy for me to find my way there'*<sup>29</sup>

- Man, 68 years old, elementary school

*'This is more functional, because you can see... like that corner for children for instance with those things, that tower in the middle, that's something, here you have a sort of, a kind of self-evidence'*<sup>30</sup>

- Man, 57 years old, high school

These excerpts clearly illustrate that both the smaller size of 'The School' and its more 'classic' layout have positive effects on the library's readability and approachability, especially for older and lower educated respondents. This suggests that 'bigger' is definitely not 'better' when designing low-threshold public buildings.

Table 37: percentage of respondents that mentioned the importance of the library's accessibility/ approachability for certain specific target-audiences to which they themselves do not belong (N = 72)

The School	31,9%
The Cinema	16,7%
The Church	16,7%
The Mansion	11,1%
The Ship	11,1%

Table 37 illustrates that respondents often take a meta-perspective when evaluating a library's accessibility, approachability and even 'invitingness'. A high number of respondents (52,1%) discussed whether or not one or more libraries were also welcoming or accommodating enough for certain target-audiences (of which they were not a part of themselves). This was commented on both positively and negatively, meaning that respondents felt a certain library was either very or not accommodating and welcoming for a specific type of user. In most cases, respondents made this comment in light of a library's accessibility and approachability for either children or disabled visitors, although some references were also made to social class-membership and whether the library is suited for students to do school-work in. It's striking to see that the frequency with which this is discussed while viewing 'The School' is twice as high as in 'The Cinema' and three times as high as in 'The Ship'. A significant correlation was also found for this

<sup>29</sup> Dat vind ik nu, ja, (...) het is misschien een beetje ouderwets dan de vorige ('The Cinema'), maar ik vind dit, jawel, dat is goed, dat is heel goed zelfs, die tafels met computers, alles, ja, dat vind ik goed, ja, ik zou daar wel gemakkelijk mijn weg vinden

<sup>30</sup> Dit is al meer functioneler omdat je dus ziet... gelijk bijvoorbeeld die kinderhoek met die dingen, die toren in't midden, dus da's iets, hier heb je eigenlijk een soort, direct een vanzelfsprekendheid.

variable with regard to 'The School': apparently women tend to discuss this aspect more often than men in 'The School'. Especially in 'The School', the interior was often seen as very appealing and suited for children:

*'Yes, this is very nice for children'*<sup>31</sup>

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

*'That's really great, that little corner for children there, I think, that little tent and everything, very original'*<sup>32</sup>

- Woman, 53 years old, elementary school

*'If I would have children and this would be close to my house, I would take the kids to go read a book here'*<sup>33</sup>

- Woman, 24 years old, higher education

Without wanting to adhere too much to gender-stereotypes, it does seem that the child-friendliness of 'The School's sits particularly well with women. Thinking back to the results of the user survey, this should not come as a surprise. As mentioned in chapter one, women are twice as likely to visit a public library with or for their children than men and having children actually has a negative effect on the general library-attendance of men. In 'The Cinema', the reactions were mainly positive, although the library's size and the fact that the library appears to have a lot of stairs (and at first glance no elevators) was also commented on with regard to its accessibility for the disabled:

*'A lot of stairs it seems, yes, I immediately, yes, a lot of stairs, it's all stairs, yes, this might not be good for disabled people'*<sup>34</sup>

- Man, 56 years old, high school

*'Very impressive, those fish (referring to large drawings on the library windows), that's great, I think it's from a book for toddlers, I think, I think I know more or less which illustrator it is, but yes, for children this should be magical. Yes, for children this should be very inviting.'*<sup>35</sup>

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

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<sup>31</sup> Ja, tof voor de kinderen

<sup>32</sup> Da's heel tof, dat hoekje voor de kinderen, denk ik, dat tentje en zo, da's origineel gevonden

<sup>33</sup> Als ik kinderen zou hebben en dit is zo, dicht bij mij thuis, zou ik wel met de kindjes een boekje gaan lezen hier

<sup>34</sup> Veel trappen precies. En ja, allé, wat ik mij direct, allé ja, veel trappen, allemaal trappen, ja, voor mindervaliden is dat misschien al niet zo vanzelfsprekend

<sup>35</sup> impressionant hé, die vissen, fantastisch, ik veronderstel dat het uit een kleuterboek komt, ik denk, ik denk da'k weet ongeveer welke illustrator, maar ja, voor kinderen moet dat wel magisch zijn. Ja, voor kinderen dat dat zeer uitnodigend is.

*'Lots of space for students to study, I also know that they organize a lot of things for, uhm, people that don't speak Dutch, which is quite essential for (that city) given its inhabitants'*<sup>36</sup>

- Woman, 52 years old, higher education

Lastly, it should be noted that most comments with regard to this aspect for 'The Ship' were negative. Most respondents felt it was less accommodating or welcoming for either children, the elderly or even people with a lower socio-economic status.

*'It's a place where you take matters into your own hands (referring to the electronic loan-out system), but people who are older and want to loan out a book, they have to familiarize themselves with it, and uhm, yeah...'*<sup>37</sup>

- Man, 56 years old, high school

*'I don't think I would take my children there'*<sup>38</sup>

- Woman, 32 years old, higher education

*'It's not a typical building, but... yeah, I don't know if it would be inviting for everybody, but... yeah'*

**'And for who do you think it would be less inviting?'**

*'Well, for more "common" people, if I can say it like that, if you know what I mean'*<sup>39</sup>

- Woman, 51 years old, higher education

One other respondent commented that she thought 'The Ship' was likely less inviting for members of the working class. While viewing 'The Cinema', she also made a similar remark in regard to that library:

*'I just thought of something: it's so very beautiful that, maybe, I think, there's a risk that a certain class of people experience a threshold to walk in here, you know what I mean? (...) I think that it is so beautiful that it gives it a bit of a more elitist feeling and that maybe a certain class of people will be more easily excluded'*<sup>40</sup>

- Woman, 43 years old, higher education

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<sup>36</sup> veel ruimte ook voor studenten ook om te studeren, daar wordt veel georganiseerd ook voor euh, anderstaligen, wat in (die stad) natuurlijk ook wel een 'pre' is gezien de inwoners

<sup>37</sup> ge kunt daar uw plan trekken hé (verwijzend naar elektronisch uitleensysteem) maar mensen op hogere leeftijd die een boek willen komen lenen, die moeten daar toch een beetje vertrouwd en euh, ja...

<sup>38</sup> ik zou daar niet met mijn kindjes precies direct naartoe gaan

<sup>39</sup> Het is geen typisch gebouw, maar... ja, ik weet niet of het voor iedereen uitnodigend zou zijn, maar... ja  
Voor wie denkt u dat het misschien minder uitnodigend zou zijn?  
Ja, meer volkse mensen, als ik dat zo mag uitdrukken, als ge begrijpt wat ik wil zeggen

<sup>40</sup> Ik maak mij net een bedenking: het ziet er zodanig mooi uit, dat je misschien, denk ik, weer het risico loopt dat je bepaalde klassen van mensen, tegenhoudt op de drempel, snap je wat ik bedoel? (...) Ik denk dat het zodanig mooi is en toch een beetje elitairder gevoel geeft dat misschien een bepaalde klasse mensen meer gaat uitsluiten.

We never considered beforehand that these kind of meta-analyses with regard to the ‘invitingness’ of libraries would turn out to be so important for respondents. People are quick to display empathy when evaluating a building or interior, although of course there are tendencies among these answers that suggest that it does not come down to pure altruism: older respondents tend to pay more attention to whether there are sufficient elevators and whether everything is accessible for people with reduced mobility, while parents (predominantly mothers) evaluate if the library would be suited for their children more often. Still, it is a clear recurring theme, which suggest that the absence of thresholds for ‘other’ groups (be it actual physical ones or more aesthetic or symbolical ones) does add to a library’s overall look and feel. People seem to ‘know’ that a public library is supposed to be a welcoming and accessible place for ‘everybody’ and will (perhaps in a mostly implicit way) evaluate if a library is reaching that goal. Given the premise of our study, we have paid explicit attention to respondents mentioning social-class membership here. We want to stress that these were exceptions. However, we do find it noteworthy that only ‘The Cinema’ and ‘The Ship’ elicit this type of comment. A number of our respondents displayed ‘sociological instincts’ while evaluating libraries, correctly stating which subgroups of (potential) visitors are likely to feel less welcome in certain buildings and spaces.

#### 4.2.2. Interior versus exterior

Table 38: percentage of respondents that stated that the building and interior do not match (N = 72)

The Church	15,3%
The School	4,2%
The Mansion	2,8%
The Ship	2,8%
The Cinema	1,4%

We will be brief about what respondents said with regard to the comparison of the building and the interior of our five libraries, the reason for this being that very little relevant sociological insights were gained. Table 38 shows that a considerable number of respondents felt that the building and interior of library did not match. As mentioned before, the building was constructed in the middle of the 19th century and underwent an extensive renovation (at which time the interior was modernized). It should be noted that no real differences were found here with regard to what different subgroups said about the apparent incongruence of the interior and exterior of ‘The Church’ and that this incongruence had no significant bearing on respondents’ opinion of the library: the average score for ‘The Church’ given by respondents who stated that the exterior and interior did not match was only 0,4 points lower than those who did not state this (7,8 vs 7,4). This leads us to suspect that there are no real adverse effects from having a contrast in a building’s exterior and interior.

Table 39: respondents that stated that the building was better than the interior (N = 72)

The Ship	13,9%
The Church	6,9%
The Cinema	4,2%
The Mansion	1,4%
The School	0,0%

Tables 39 and 40 also confirm what was already suggested throughout this chapter a number of times, namely that 'The Ship' is more appreciated for its building and 'The School' more for its interior. Again, no real noteworthy correlations or effects regarding the scores given to 'The School' and 'The Ship' were found when comparing the respondents who explicitly made these comments. Perhaps the only interesting thing is that respondents who claim that the building of 'The Ship' is superior to its interior give a much lower score to 'The School' (7,2 versus 5,8), again underlining that an appreciation for contemporary, iconic architecture leads respondents to give poorer evaluations to more pragmatic, old-fashioned and cozy libraries.

Tabel 40: percentage of respondents that indicated that the interior is better than the exterior (N = 72)

The School	25,0%
The Mansion	9,7%
The Cinema	5,6%
The Church	5,6%
The Ship	2,8%

#### 4.2.3. Appreciation and description

Table 41: percentage of respondents that used the word 'architecture' to describe the building (N = 72)

The Ship	16,7%
The Cinema	13,9%
The School	2,8%
The Church	2,8%
The Mansion	0,0%

Table 41 illustrates an unsurprising fact, namely that respondents use the word 'architecture' while discussing 'The Ship' and 'The Cinema' far more often than they do with the other three libraries.

There are also differences between subgroups with regard to the use of the word 'architecture': in both 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship', respondents with a higher education level, whose parents have a high level of education and respondents who participate more often to 'high brow' cultural activities in their free time all describe the building as 'architecture' more often. Additionally in 'The Ship', also younger respondents tend to describe the building as architecture more often than older respondents. Almost all respondents describing 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' as 'architecture' (or as being 'architectural'), do so in an outspokenly positive context. The first two excerpts pertain to 'The Cinema', the last two to 'The Ship':

*'I like it, it's minimalistic, uhm, it's modern, with all that glass, it immediately appeals to me, that's a building that you don't just pass by when you're walking there, you immediately notice it I think, it's remarkable architecture'*<sup>41</sup>

- Woman, 22 years old, higher education

*'It actually, uhm, elevates that whole city to a higher level. Or at least the architecture in that city, yeah.'*<sup>42</sup>

- Man, 37 years old, higher education

*'Uhhmm, very beautiful architecture, especially in the context of (that city) it really stands out, it's very big, it's a real statement-building, uhm, yeah.'*<sup>43</sup>

- Woman, 39 years old, higher education

*'Architecturally, yeah, that's neat. They really put in a lot of effort and money in making something out of it.'*<sup>44</sup>

- Woman, 35 years old, higher education

As mentioned before, it is hardly surprising that these two large, contemporary, more abstract buildings are described as 'architecture' more often than the other buildings, but it still interesting to see that these descriptions coincide with a positive evaluation of the library's style. This indicates two interesting notions: firstly, that the term 'architecture' functions as a seal of approval for respondents with a higher socio-economic status. Secondly, that it makes sense for architects to strive towards their buildings being described as 'architecture' as it elicits a positive connotation among the people who are more likely to be in positions to grant them funding and award them projects.

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<sup>41</sup> Ik vind het wel mooi, ik vind het veel strakker, euh, 't is modern, met al dat glas, dat spreekt direct aan, da's een gebouw dat u niet zomaar voorbijgaat als ge daar passeert, ge hebt het direct gezien denk ik, 't is opvallende architectuur

<sup>42</sup> Het trekt eigenlijk euh, die stad naar een hoger niveau hé. Alleszins de architectuur in die stad, ja.

<sup>43</sup> Euhhh, super mooie architectuur, speciaal in't beeld van (die stad) valt het op, het is zeer groot, het is echt zo'n statement-gebouw, euhm, ja.

<sup>44</sup> Architecturaal is dat, ja, tof hé. Daar hebben ze ook echt moeite en geld in gestoken om er iets van te maken hé.

A final noteworthy finding with regard to the use of the term 'architecture', is that it seems to carry a bit more weight for 'The Ship' in comparison to 'The Cinema' when looking at how these buildings are evaluated. The average score given to 'The Cinema' is only slightly (0,1) higher among those that use the term 'architecture' (8,3 versus 8,4), while it is almost a full point higher (0,9) when looking at 'The Ship' (7,4 versus 8,3). Together with the fact that more respondents described 'The Ship' as being 'architecture', this suggests that the fact of being 'architectural' is a more integral part of the building's style and character, which in turn helps to explain why respondents with a lower socio-economic status tend to evaluate 'The Ship' more negatively (illustrated most clearly in tables 11 to 13). All of this suggests that striving for the label 'architectural' is not problematic in itself, but that there is a danger of 'overdoing it' in the sense that it could discourage (potential) visitors with a lower socio-economic status.

Table 42: percentage of respondents that showed appreciation for the fact the library had been renovated (N = 72)

The Church	23,6%
The Mansion	2,8%
The Cinema	0,0%
The School	0,0%
The Ship	0,0%

Table 42 again illustrates an unsurprising fact, namely that a high percentage of respondents explicitly show appreciation for the fact that 'The Church' has been renovated. As mentioned several times, the library underwent extensive remodeling in recent years. When correlating the frequency with which this statement was made with socio-demographic variables, only one significant correlation was found: respondents tend to show more appreciation for renovation if they live in less urban/more rural areas. This is undoubtedly connected to their personal ideas or experiences regarding government investments in public buildings: praise for the fact that 'The Church' was 'nicely renovated' correlates positively with the statements that 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' had a high price-tag and that 'The Ship' was a 'bad investment' of tax-payer's money. The excerpts below illustrate a stance that large projects like 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' often come to fruition at the expense of local libraries in smaller communities:

*'This, I do feel, this ('The Church') is a really typical library, the most are like this, a building that already existed. I like that very much, I don't think all libraries should be built from scratch.'*<sup>45</sup>

Woman, 51 years old, higher education

<sup>45</sup> Van hier vind ik wel, van hier is dat echt zo een typische bibliotheek, de meesten zijn zo hé, een gebouw gemaakt waar het, ja, al bestaande was. Wat ik ook heel goed vind hé, ik vind niet dat alle bibliotheken helemaal opnieuw moeten gebouwd worden

*'I know ('The Cinema' and 'The Ship') cost a lot of money, for example ('The Cinema'), which I think is easily the most beautiful of (its region), well, if then I speak to people from (a neighboring municipality), (...) the first thing I hear is: we cannot compare this, the budget is, I don't know, times 20 or 30, so that's, yeah, for one library in (city in which 'The Cinema' is located) we can have twenty small-town libraries. (...) Living in a small village, I uhm, I actually appreciate ('The Church') the most.'*<sup>46</sup>

- Man, 37 years old, higher education

*(While discussing 'The Ship') Well, the government's money, they threw it around, didn't they? (...) I mean, I think, you know, the state has to economize, we all have to economize. (later, while discussing 'The Church') As long as they have a good choice of books and you can go to the counter to ask something, the fact that it's smaller in scale, I don't know, I'd prefer an extra library instead of one that's so... but that's where we're headed, because also here in (a submunicipality of the municipality where the respondent lives), they closed the local library'*<sup>47</sup>

- Woman, 72 years old, high school

Table 43 further illustrates that respondents see large differences in available budgets and construction costs between the libraries they 'visited'. Again, 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' are seen far more often as expensive projects. Here, more significant correlations were found when looking at the frequency with which certain subgroups of socio-demographic variables mention the cost of these buildings. Respondents that lived in less urban/more rural areas tended to emphasize the construction costs and the fact that a lot of tax-payer's money had been made available for 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' more frequently. Another interesting correlation that was found is that respondents tend to characterize 'The Ship' as a 'bad investment' of tax-payer's money more often if they claim to be less interested in architecture (as an art-form).

Table 43: percentage of respondents that emphasized the cost to build the library (N = 72)

The Ship	13,9%
The Cinema	8,3%
The mansion	1,4%
The Church	1,4%
The School	0,0%

<sup>46</sup> Ik weet dat ze veel geld hebben gekost, bijvoorbeeld als we het hebben over ('The Cinema'), wat ik de mooiste vind van (zijn regio) sowieso, ja goed, en ik spreek van de mensen van (een nabijgelegen gemeente), (...) het eerste wat ik hoor is: dit mogen we niet vergelijken, het budget is maal, ik weet niet, maal 20 of maal 30, dus dat is euh, dus voor één bibliotheek in (stad van 'The Cinema') kunnen we misschien 20 dorpsbibliotheken hebben. (...) Ja, ik woon in een dorp, dus ik euh, ben eigenlijk het meest fan van ('The Church')

<sup>47</sup> (Bij bespreking 'The Ship') Ja, het overheidsgeld moeten ze precies, ze hebben er mee gegooid (...) Allé jong, ja, ik denk, allé, de staat moet bezuinigen en wij moeten allemaal bezuinigen (...) (Bij bespreking 'The Church') Als ze maar een goede keuze van boeken hebben en dat ge aan de balie terechtkunt om iets te vragen en dat dat allemaal een beetje kleinschaliger is misschien, ik weet niet, liever een bibliotheek meer, dan zo een heel, maar daar gaan ze wel een beetje naartoe hé, want, bij ons in (in een deelgemeente) is de bibliotheek gesloten

Tables 42 and 43, alongside the correlations found and the excerpts illustrate that (potential) visitors often reflect on the financial realities that play a role in the realization of public buildings. Undoubtedly, the apparent opulence of 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' can lead to frustration and resentment, especially among library-enthusiasts who see their local libraries being shut down and this did play a factor in how 'The Ship' (and to a lesser extent 'The Cinema') were evaluated. The impression that local libraries are disadvantaged at the expense of larger ones, appears to rise faster when the style of the building is more outspoken and 'architectural'. Analyses conducted for the reports following the user survey regarding this topic suggest that users strongly value having a library close-by, with half of all respondents stating that they would not visit another library to loan out materials (even if that other library is located at less than five kilometers distance). Again, this becomes even more relevant when looking at education level, with 87,0% of respondents who (at most) finished elementary school and 68,1% of respondents who finished high school stating that they would not visit another library to loan out a material that was not available in their local library. Centralization (of collections or services) can be a valuable strategy for a public-library network, but it should be used with caution. Building larger libraries in more urban areas at the expense of local (branch) libraries is very likely to worsen the attendance of working class visitors in that area, not just because of possible feelings of resentment towards the (more expensive) architectural style, but also because different subgroups of visitors behave differently and have different priorities.

Table 43: percentage of respondents that said the building was tantalizing/provocative (N = 72)

The Ship	22,2%
The Cinema	8,3%
The Church	2,8%
The School	1,4%
The Mansion	0,0%

Of course, building larger libraries in a more 'bold' architectural style, also has its merits. One of these is nicely illustrated in table 43, which shows that 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' are described far more often as having 'tantalizing' or 'provocative' buildings. Especially 'The Ship', the most 'iconic' library building in our research, elicits this comment, with 22,2% of respondents describing it as such. The words 'tantalizing' and 'provocative' are used here, but they do not completely capture the meaning of the Dutch word 'prikkelend', which in its most literal translation would be 'excitatory' in English. Just as with the word 'cosy', a direct translation is problematic. A building that is 'prikkelend' calls attention to itself by 'exciting' people and raising curiosity about what it is or what is inside. This is unarguably a great quality for a building, especially a public building. It should also be noted that no significant correlations were found when looking at the frequency with which this statement was made about the buildings of 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship', meaning that respondents with a lower socio-economic status can also find the building to be 'exciting'. Although less frequently commented upon, a significant correlation was found with regard to the

interior of 'The Ship': men are more likely to describe it as 'tantalizing', once more underlining the fact that the interior of 'The Ship' is experienced differently by men and women. When looking at the context in which respondents discuss this 'tantalizing' quality of 'The Ship', it becomes clear that it is strongly connected to 'invitingness'. The following excerpts all followed after the interviewer asked if it was an inviting building (and whether the respondent would be likely to enter the building):

*'Yes, because it's impressive, if I would have some time, I would have went inside'*<sup>48</sup>

- Man, 55 years old, higher education

*'Uhm, out of curiosity, to know what it is'*<sup>49</sup>

- Man, 74 years old, higher education

*'It challenges you, I mean uhm, it has something, uhm, it's one of those things, it stands out'*<sup>50</sup>

- Man, 56 years old, high school

*'Yes, yes, if only out of curiosity. I would give a (score of) 9 (to that building)'*<sup>51</sup>

- Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

These sort of reactions are likely the ones that the architects and decision-makers behind the building were aiming for and there is no denying that a distinct, iconic style can have its benefits. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, all buildings with newly renovated or constructed buildings see an uptake in their visiting- and user-numbers. The question is more if this uptake happens 'across the board' or whether a specific group of (potential) visitors outweighs others. When looking at the frequency with which different education levels are represented among the libraries in our research (as discussed earlier in this chapter as well as in chapter two) it is likely that more iconic buildings have a negative impact on the attendance of visitors with a lower socio-economic profile. Is this then a defensible choice? It should also be noted that 'The Ship' was simultaneously described as 'prikkelend' by several respondents, who then went on to emphasize a lack of 'invitingness' or recognizability. The following excerpt also followed the question whether it was an inviting building:

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<sup>48</sup> Ja, omdat't imponant is hé, als ik meer tijd moest gehad hebben op dat moment of euh, zou ik wel eens binnengestapt hebben

<sup>49</sup> Euhhh, uit nieuwsgierigheid, om te weten wat het is

<sup>50</sup> Uitdagend, ik wil zeggen euh, het heeft iets, euh, het is iets, het springt er uit

<sup>51</sup> Ja, ja, al is't alleen maar uit nieuwsgierigheid. Ik zou daar een 9 voor geven

*'Uhm (sighs), a bit less inviting, it's tantalizing/provocative, it makes me curious. So I would go and take a look from up close to see what it is, but at first glance, it doesn't give me the feeling of: "that's a library", I don't have the feeling straight away that this is a public space where I am welcome'<sup>52</sup>*

- Man, 43 years old, higher education

This last quote also underlines an important limitation of our methodology and this project, namely that we are basing our analyses on first time impressions. Now, it is easy to argue that first impressions are crucial and that many opinions regarding aesthetic qualities or 'invitingness' will not change that considerably over time. However, it can be a factor and we have no means to account for that. It is perfectly possible that the building of 'The Ship' will start to appeal more to respondents that evaluated it poorly if they are exposed to it more frequently. One respondent, an inhabitant of the city that houses 'The Ship', also discussed this topic in a colorful manner while viewing 'The Ship':

*'I can compare it with when Selah Sue<sup>53</sup> came out with her music (vocalizes a sort of stutter reflex), that was also, you would say: what the hell is that? But after a month it's like (snaps his fingers): hey, yeah, I like that. You know, you have to let it sink in a bit'<sup>54</sup>*

- Man, 43 years old, high school

#### 4.2.4. Urban versus local

Table 44: percentage of respondents that emphasizes the urban character of the library (N = 72)

The Cinema	15,3%
The Ship	8,3%
The Church	1,4%
The Mansion	0,0%
The School	0,0%

During our second coding, we also took notes on what respondents said about the libraries' surroundings. Tables 44 and 45 show the frequencies with which respondents emphasized either the urban or small-town character of the libraries. Unsurprisingly, the urban character of 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' (the only two libraries in our research that are actually located in cities) is discussed quite often. It is somewhat strange that 'The Cinema' takes the top spot here, since 'The

<sup>52</sup> Euhmm, (zucht), iets minder uitnodigend, maar het prikkelt wel, het maakt wel nieuwsgierig. Dus ik zou wel eens dichterbij gaan om te zien wat het is, maar op het eerste zicht, geeft dat mij niet het gevoel: 'da's een bibliotheek', ik heb niet dadelijk het gevoel dat dat een openbare ruimte is waar dat ik dus welkom ben

<sup>53</sup> Selah Sue is a Flemish singer in the soul/reggae genre whose vocal style somewhat resembles 'scatting'

<sup>54</sup> ik kan het ook vergelijken met toen dat Selah Sue uitkwam, met haar muziek (vocaliseert een soort van stotter-reflex), dat was ook zo, dat je zou zeggen: allé, wat is dat? Maar na een maand is dat van (knipt met vingers): hé ja, maar ik vind het goed. Weet ge, ge moet het efkes een keer laten bezinken

Ship' is located in a city that has almost four times the inhabitants of the city in which 'The Cinema' is located. When discussing 'The Cinema', most respondents who mention the urban character or underline the fact that this is a library located in a city, do so in neutral terms. The following two excerpts represent the most critical stances taken 'against' the urban character of 'The Cinema'.

### **'Is this a typical library building for you?'**

*'For in a really big city, yes, but, yeah, we can argue over whether (the city of 'The Cinema') is a big city or not (laughs), not really, so... yeah. In Brussels or something, this would have made sense, I just think they got a lot of money for that library and found a good architect.'*<sup>55</sup>

- Man, 37 years old, higher education

*'This isn't really my preference, if for instance they would say: what should we build here in (the respondent's municipality)? I would say: no, I don't think it fits well with the people living here, it is too city-oriented, it really belongs in a bigger city when you see it like this'*<sup>56</sup>

- Woman, 45 years old, high school

Considering that the first excerpt comes from a respondent who frequently visits 'The Cinema' and gave it the highest overall score (together with 'The Ship'), this critique should be seen as more of a side-note, although this specific respondent was critical multiple times of the cost of this library and the impact it had on libraries in the surrounding area (see quote 46 on page 69). Most explicit comments made on the urban character of 'The Ship' also feature an emphasis on how much the library must have cost to construct.

*'But this is obviously a library in a large city. It's a large-city library, there's definitely money there.*

*They have money.'*<sup>57</sup>

- Man, 56 years old, high school

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<sup>55</sup> En is het een typisch bibliotheekgebouw voor u?

Voor echt in een grote stad wel, ja, maar, goed, daar kunnen we over discussiëren of (die stad) een grote stad is (lachje), eigenlijk niet, euh... ja. In Brussel of zo zou dat echt wel kloppen, ik denk dat ze gewoon veel geld hebben gekregen voor die bib en een goede architect gevonden hebben

<sup>56</sup> Het is niet mijn voorkeur, als ze bijvoorbeeld zouden zeggen van: wat zullen we hier in (in gemeente van de respondent) neerzetten? Dan zou ik zeggen: nee, ik vind het niet passen bij de mensen die hier wonen, het is te stads-gericht, het is echt van een grotere stad als je het zo ziet

<sup>57</sup> Maar dat is wel een grootstedelijke bibliotheek zenne. Da's een grootstedelijke bibliotheek, maar daar zijn centen. Daar zijn centen.

Table 45: percentage of respondents that emphasized local, small-town character of library (N = 72)

The School	22,2%
The Church	12,5%
The Mansion	2,8%
The Cinema	0,0%
The Ship	0,0%

When looking at the frequencies with which libraries were described as being typically ‘small-town’, the differences between ‘The School’ and ‘The Church’ are somewhat surprising, since the municipality in which ‘The School’ is located has slightly more inhabitants than the municipality in which ‘The Church’ is located. Both municipalities are located in outspokenly rural areas of Flanders. This is an indication that having a library with a small-town character does not solely come down to the area in which it is located, but is also connected to the style of the building. What is also interesting to see is that quite a lot of significant correlations were found for ‘The School’: respondents whose parents are higher educated, younger respondents and respondents who participate more frequently to ‘high brow’ cultural activities all emphasize the local, small-town character of ‘The School’ more often. Respondents who emphasize the small-town, local character of ‘The School’ also tend to give a lower score to the library and appear to find both the building and interior less attractive.

The fact that this research lets respondents ‘visit’ libraries with varying sizes, located both in small towns and larger cities in Flanders, makes comparing them somewhat problematic. Many respondents also underline (and rightly so) the discrepancy between budgets made available to these buildings. However, there are some important take-aways: this budgetary discrepancy is seen by some as unfair and problematic, while it is clear that respondents with a higher socio-economic status can find small-town, classic, ‘boring’ libraries off-putting. This should also be taken into consideration. Throughout this chapter, we focus heavily on working class respondents and how they feel about these spaces, but it goes without saying that a truly ‘democratic’ public library building should also take the tastes and opinions of more affluent (potential) visitors into consideration.

#### 4.2.5. Reservedness (in judgement)

Before moving on to the outlier-analysis, one last important aspect of respondent-behavior should be discussed. During the transcription and first coding of interviews, we noticed that respondents sometimes exhibited a certain reservedness in making judgments about the look and feel of the libraries they ‘visited’. We were under the impression that this happened most often while respondents visited ‘The School’ and ‘The Ship’, the two libraries that stand furthest apart on the spectrum of ‘modern’/‘iconic’ versus ‘old-fashioned’/‘inconspicuous’. In general, we

thought to perceive that respondents with a lower socio-economic status tend to exhibit some restraint in speaking their mind when viewing 'The Ship', often second-guessing their own opinion, referring to their own profile (mostly age) for a certain opinion or seeking confirmation with the interviewer to see if their remarks were valid. Some respondents with a higher socio-economic status, on the other hand, seemed to be very 'forgiving' while viewing 'The School'. Often mocking the style of the building, before softening and underscoring the fact that the library 'does its job'. In an attempt to chart this sort of reservedness, several behaviors that we felt were recurring were also added to the second coding schedule. For instance: we would check a box if a respondent would start 'negotiating' about the meaning of the word 'inviting' (or 'typical' or 'beautiful') for one library, but not any of the others. This can be construed as an indication that using this word triggers some cognitive dissonance, in the sense that they might feel compelled to say it is 'inviting' because of what they believe the interviewer wants to hear, while they themselves do not find it inviting. The fact that a respondent would only say it while viewing one specific library is important here, because there were also respondents who continuously 'negotiated' about the meaning of these words throughout the interview (and not just for one specific library). The ability to check a box whenever this happens during an interview, generated a dichotomous variable which we could correlate with our socio-demographic variables. While anything but infallible as a technique, being able to see how frequently this happens and whether a certain behavior tends to be performed by a certain subgroup, does help to move away from mere impressions and alleviates bias. For example: we were under the impression that negotiating about the meaning of a word happened quite frequently and that respondents with a lower socio-economic status tended to this more often while viewing 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship', but this appeared to not be the case at all. That being said, certain expressions of 'reservedness' did happen more often among certain subgroups of respondents, especially older respondents. For example: older respondents exhibited reservedness more often in judging the interior of 'The Cinema' and the building of 'The Ship'. Older respondents also tended to make a reference to their (advanced) age more often as the reason for their (negative) evaluation of 'The Ship', while also stating more often that they are probably not part of the target-audience of this library, effectively placing the validity of their own evaluation between brackets. Conversely, younger respondents tended to state more often that they did not consider themselves to be the target-audience of 'The School'. Furthermore, lower educated respondents also displayed more reservedness in judging the interior of 'The Ship' and respondents living in less urban/more rural areas tended to seek the interviewer's confirmation more often about whether their evaluation of 'The Ship' was somewhat valid or acceptable.

The insights gained here underline something very important, namely that, when confronting respondents from different ages and walks of life with a semi-structured interview, great care needs to be taken in making sure that the varying degree to which certain subgroups of the sample are comfortable expressing their (critical) opinion is accounted for. Socially desirable answering needs to be taking into account, even when asking respondents whether or not they think a building looks nice after repeatedly stressing that there are no wrong opinions. The tendencies in reservedness in behavior suggests that respondents self-censor, which gives reason to assume that the differences in evaluation between, for instance, older and younger

respondents or higher and lower educated respondents are actually more substantial than suggested in tables one through fourteen and tables seventeen, 20, 23 and 26 (the correlation matrices placing socio-demographic variables against detailed evaluations of 'typicalness', 'invitingness' and 'attractiveness'). It is also very important to note that this self-censorship, the questioning of the legitimacy of a personal opinion, was more prevalent among working-class respondents. The fact that (especially) older respondents easily turn to questioning the relevance of their opinion says something about how they perceive their place in society and illustrates the danger of their voices not being heard during community consultation. The fact that 'The Ship' elicits this sort of uncertainty most often is not a coincidence. The following excerpt is quite telling in this regard:

*'It's cold, it's, no, it doesn't invite me to go inside, that, no, I don't think it's special, no. (...)'*

**'So, personally, it doesn't appeal to you?'**

*'No, but that will be because of me, it doesn't have anything to do with... probably it's because of my age'<sup>58</sup>*

- Man, 68 years old, elementary school

The fact that age was often found to be so relevant in how buildings were evaluated is also important to take into account when making claims as to the impact of social class and education level. While it is undoubtedly so that age is very much connected to education level, it should be noted that several correlations were still found to be significant after accounting for the age of respondents. Sadly, the practical limitations, amount of time needed to conduct them and relative depth and openness of the interviews limited the number of interviews that could be conducted so that our sample is too small for regression analysis. This by no means, however, should lead to the assumption that the importance of age automatically makes education level or cultural capital irrelevant. Age does not negate the effect of education level, it is equally possible or likely that they reinforce each other with regard to the topic that we deal with.

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<sup>58</sup> Het is koud, het is, nee, daar hebt ge toch niet de neiging om binnen te stappen, dat, nee, dat vind ik niet bijzonder, nee. (...)

Persoonlijk spreekt het u niet aan?

Nee, maar dat zal aan mij liggen, dat zal niet aan... aan mijne leeftijd waarschijnlijk

## 5. *Outlier-analysis*

Both the first and second coding and their subsequent analyses focused heavily on finding commonalities and patterns of experience, evaluation and description. However, individual idiosyncrasies are bound to exist and we have largely ignored this aspect. As mentioned in chapter two it is, for example, *'a certainty that not all working-class people have a deep-rooted aversion for iconic architecture'* (p. 18). To account for our possible over-focus on common denominators, this section will address the so-called 'outliers' with regard to the evaluations given to 'The School' and 'The Ship'. Based on the correlation matrices featured in paragraph three (tables 20 and 23), an 'ideal type' of the kind of visitor that is likely to feel less at home in 'The School' and 'The Ship' emerges. For 'The School', we found that older respondents with lower incomes and lower levels of education are more likely to give a better evaluation. 'The Ship', on the other hand, was evaluated better by male respondents who are younger and have a higher level of education. In this outlier analysis, we will focus on groups of respondents who are more likely to give bad evaluations of these two libraries and select three individuals among these groups who gave atypically high scores. This exercise is limited to these two libraries because they display the most outspoken class-based differences and appear to be each other's polar opposites in this regard. This analysis is conducted to add some nuance to our previous analyses by analyzing the respondents who 'deviate' from the patterns we have uncovered via coding and analysis.

### 5.1. *Selection of outliers*

As mentioned above, 'The School' was evaluated significantly better by older respondents with lower incomes and lower levels of education. Therefore, we are looking for outliers among respondents that are younger, have higher incomes and higher levels of education. We consider all respondents who are under 45 years old as 'younger' and all respondents who earn more than 2000€ per month to have higher-than-average incomes (a little under half of our respondents who answered the question with regard to their income earn less than 2000€ per month) and we consider respondents to be higher educated when they have completed college or university. Our research featured 17 respondents that adhere to all these characteristics. Of these 17 respondents, three were selected that gave significantly higher scores compared to others in this group. These 'outliers' will be compared to the 'inliers' in subparagraph 5.2.

Considering the characteristics of respondents that tend to evaluate 'The Ship' significantly better (young and higher educated men), we are looking for outliers among female respondents that are older and have lower levels of education. By 'older', we mean all respondents that are above the age of 60 and by having 'lower levels of education' we mean that they did not attend higher education. There are 10 respondents in our research that fit this description. Also here, three were selected that have significant higher scores compared to others in this group, which will be compared and discussed in subparagraph 5.3.

## 5.2. Outliers in 'The School'

Table 46: comparison inliers and outliers 'The School' (evaluations and continuous socio-demographic variables)

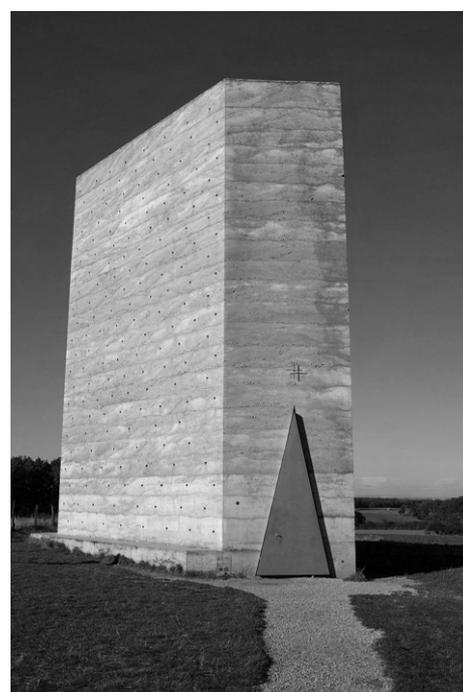
	Inliers (N = 14)	$\sigma$	Outliers (N = 3)	$\sigma$
Score 'The School'	6,39	1,34	8,00	0,00
Building typical?	3,10	1,91	5,00	
Building attractive?	1,23	0,60	1,67	0,58
Building inviting?	1,62	1,12	1,67	0,58
Interior typical?	4,78	0,44	4,50	0,71
Interior attractive?	1,69	1,03	4,67	0,58
Interior inviting?	2,08	1,38	5,00	0,00
Mean population density	1142,00	625,67	588,65	201,48
Mean occupational prestige	65,97	7,41	67,43	2,19
Mean years in education	17,81	1,63	17,67	0,58
Mean number of highbrow activities in last year	8,31	3,15	7,67	0,58

Table 46 gives an overview both of how the 'inliers' evaluated (different aspects of) 'The School' compared to the 'outliers' and the in-group means of several continuous socio-demographic variables. First we see that the average score given to 'The School' by the outliers is significantly higher than that compared to the inliers. In fact, all outliers gave 'The School' an eight out of ten. The three outliers tended to evaluate the exterior of 'The School' only slightly more favorably though <sup>59</sup>, with the biggest differences becoming apparent when looking at how the interior was evaluated: outliers evaluated both the attractiveness and the 'invitingness' of the interior significantly better than the inliers. When comparing the socio-demographic variables featured in table 46, we see that there are no real differences in occupational prestige or years spent in education. Looking at the population density of the municipalities or cities the inliers and outliers live in, there does seem to be a suggestion that the outliers come from less urban areas compare to the inliers. Since 'The School' has often been described as being 'typical small-town', this could partly explain why the outliers are more positively inclined. Outliers also participate slightly less frequent to high-brow activities, but the difference with the inliers is too small to draw any real conclusions based on these numbers.

<sup>59</sup> The numbers here express the means of the ordinal scores given during the first coding of the interviews

Looking at other background-variables (not featured in table 46), we see that the outliers do not differ very strongly from the inliers: the educational attainment of parents is very similar and differences in income are mostly negligible, although the outliers do earn less (641€) on average compared to the inliers when calculating the mean income of outliers and inliers based on the lowest value of the income-category every respondent selected in the questionnaire (outliers earned 3666€ on average compared to inliers who earned 4307€ on average). Furthermore, outliers do not appear to have a significantly higher or lower (self-reported) interest in architecture and do not visit libraries more or less frequently in any meaningful way. In short: the only noteworthy differences between outliers and inliers when looking at background-variables or lifestyle is that the outliers tend to live in less urban areas and earn slightly less compared to inliers (who already earn less on average when looking at the whole sample).

Analyzing the transcripts of the outliers' interviews yielded several interesting insights. For instance, it is striking that all three outliers, when asked at the start of the interview to give an example of a building that they really like or appreciate (this was a warm-up question asked to all respondents), answered with an example of distinctly 'modern' architecture. One respondent said she liked 'modern lofts' with art-deco elements, while the other two gave examples of very abstract, iconic buildings: the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the 'Bruder-Klaus-Feldkapelle', a minimalistic chapel erected in concrete, designed by renowned Swiss architect Peter Zumthor (see image).



While some inliers also answered the warm-up question with examples of contemporary buildings (eg, The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the new Palace of Justice in Antwerp), most actually answered with very classical, historical buildings (eg, Notre Dame in Paris, the Antwerp Cathedral). This counters the notion that the outliers might have less cultural capital compared to the inliers. What is remarkable though, is that the apparent love of the outliers for iconic, contemporary architecture does not necessarily translate into a great appreciation for the contemporary libraries featured in our research. One outlier appreciated both 'The Cinema' and 'The Ship' very much, while the other two gave poor evaluations of 'The Ship'. One outlier also stated that she did not care much for the interior of 'The Cinema'.

One thing all three outliers have in common is that they greatly appreciate the 'cozy' character of 'The School' and the fact that the library is very suited for children. Any outspokenly positive comment or reaction, however, was always reserved for the interior (as was suggested in table

46). Furthermore, all three outliers appreciate the use of materials, especially the fact that a 'warm' and 'inviting' atmosphere was created with a limited budget.

*'With the budget at their disposal, with those, uhm, with those racks and everything, I think it's actually nicely decorated'*<sup>60</sup>

- Woman, 32 years old, higher education

*'Maybe there wasn't a lot of budget for the building in itself, but they made up for it with the interior, by making the right choices, I think, yeah'*<sup>61</sup>

- Man, 37 years old, higher education

What is also noteworthy is that, despite very positive evaluations of 'The School', only one of the outliers actually picked 'The School' as the most attractive or inviting (one outlier stated that it is the most attractive). One outlier even said that 'The School' is the least attractive out of all the libraries they 'visited'. When looking at how they evaluate the other libraries, despite a good evaluation of 'The School', they have a tendency to point towards 'The Cinema' and 'The Church' as being 'the best ones'. The outliers also tend to appreciate 'The Cinema' more than 'The Ship' (two outliers find 'The Ship' the least inviting, with the other outlier stating explicitly that 'The Cinema' is more inviting than 'The Ship').

To conclude: there are no real outspoken differences in socio-economic status between the outliers and inliers, although they do appear to have slightly lower incomes (in comparison, of course, to the inliers, who have an above average income when looking at all respondents that participated to our research). This might explain why they appreciate what was accomplished in 'The School' (with a limited budget) slightly more compared to the inliers. The respondents we have identified as outliers with regard to how they evaluate 'The School' are clearly individuals with high cultural capital that, somewhat atypically, highly value the coziness of the interior of 'The School'. In that sense, they are 'exceptions that prove the rule' and examples of how individual tastes can and will diverge from class-based dispositions.

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<sup>60</sup> ik vind met de middelen die ze hier hebben en met die euhm, rekjes en zo, vind ik het wel mooi ingericht nog

<sup>61</sup> er was misschien weinig budget voor het gebouw op zich en dan hebben ze dat wel goed gemaakt binnen met het interieur, door de juiste keuzes te maken denk ik, ja

### 5.3. Outliers in 'The Ship'

Table 47: comparison inliers and outliers 'The Ship' (evaluations and continuous socio-demographic variables)

	Inliers (N = 7)	$\sigma$	Outliers (N = 3)	$\sigma$
Score 'The Ship'	6,00	0,89	8,67	0,58
Building typical?	1,00	0,00	1,00	0,00
Building attractive?	2,86	1,46	5,00	0,00
Building inviting?	2,14	1,57	3,00	2,83
Interior typical?	1,50	0,71	5,00	
Interior attractive?	1,29	0,49	4,33	1,16
Interior inviting?	1,14	0,38	3,00	1,73
Mean population density	2203,86	915,84	1255,33	1519,59
Mean occupational prestige	38,30	21,36	53,85	2,90
Mean years in education	8,00	6,88	11,00	1,73
Mean number of highbrow activities in last year	6,14	0,90	6,33	1,53

When looking at table 47, which compares the outliers to the inliers for 'The Ship', several things are noteworthy. First of all, the difference between scores given by inliers and outliers is greater here than in table 46 (which discussed the outliers of 'The School'). There are also more outspoken differences when looking at both the evaluation of the building and the interior, although the 'invitingness' (of both the building and interior) is still evaluated quite poorly. When looking closer at the socio-demographic variables featured in table 47, we see that the outliers appear to live in less urban areas when comparing them to the inliers (although the large standard deviation should be noted). More important to underline, perhaps, is the considerably higher mean occupational prestige of the outliers and the fact that they spent a few more years on average in education (although 11 years is normally still insufficient to graduate high school in Flanders).

Looking at other background- and lifestyle-variables (not featured in table 47) shows us that the parents of these outliers tend to be, on average, less educated than those of the inliers. None of the outliers, for example, have parents that attended higher education. Another unexpected fact, is that they tend to have a noticeably lower interest in architecture. Every outlier is also a frequent visitor of public libraries (inliers a bit less on average). Finally, inliers tend to have a slightly

higher income than the outliers (200€ on average), but considering the limited data we have here, not too many conclusions should be drawn from this.

Table 47 and other insights gathered from comparing lifestyle- and background-variables between outliers and inliers do not suggest that the outliers have significantly more or less cultural capital compared to the inliers. Following this, we cannot conclude that a higher (or lower) socio-economic status (perhaps more accurately expressed in other indicators than the one we have focused so heavily on, namely education) contributes to their (atypically) good evaluation of 'The Ship'.

Luckily, the interview-transcripts offer more explanation. They make it abundantly clear that reservedness in judgment and socially desirable answering play a significant role in explaining why these outliers gave such high scores to 'The Ship'. Two outliers, especially, displayed great unease in scoring and judging most libraries they 'visited' (so not only 'The Ship'). When asked to give a score between one and ten to 'The Mansion', one outlier refused to do so and another answered:

*'This, I have to think about, let's see... Yes, yes, I think, uhm, 7 out of 10 or something, I honestly don't know anything about, about other libraries...'*<sup>62</sup>  
- Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

The tendency to second-guess and invalidate one's own opinion was already discussed in the last subparagraph of the section discussing the results from the second coding and it is clear that the outliers for 'The Ship' also 'suffer' from this. When asking these outliers to score any library that they 'visited', it often took repeated efforts from the interviewer to assure them that they were fully within their right to give any score they wanted. The following excerpt follows a long pause after one outlier was asked to score 'The Cinema':

**'You gave the last one a seven out of ten.'**

*'Then I should give this one a bit more, but I don't really want to.'*

**'Remember: this is a personal score. If you feel: I would rather visit that other library compared to this one... (...)'**

*'Yes, well, then I'll only give a six out of ten, maybe I'm not right to do so, because it's a really nice building, but... Yes, it can be, but... (...) You know, it's not for me personally, but yeah, who am I right? There are so many young people who would look at it differently.'*<sup>63</sup>  
- Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

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<sup>62</sup> A: Ik moet daar eventjes over nadenken hé, eens denken... Ja, ja, ik denk zo euh, 7 op 10 of zoiets, ik heb er eigenlijk geen verstand van, van andere bibliotheken...

<sup>63</sup> U heeft de vorige een 7 gegeven

Dan zou ik 'm ietsje meer moeten geven, maar het is niet met mijn volle goesting

Maar 't is u persoonlijk hé, als jij vind: ik zou liever die andere bibliotheek bezoeken dan deze... (...)

Ja, dan geef ik maar een 6, 't is misschien onterecht, want het is een heel schoon gebouw, maar...

Ja, dat kan zijn, maar...

This unease was perhaps most outspoken when evaluating 'The Ship'. In general, 'The Ship' was generally not discussed in a very positive way by the outliers, although it should be noted that one outlier also emphasized the tantalizing/provocative quality of the building. The outliers often made remarks that the interior was not very inviting, that the building was too imposing and that the whole project will have likely cost too much money. When asked to give a score, however, the outliers were quick to give high numbers. One respondent (the second excerpt featured below) became noticeably annoyed when the interviewer shortly questioned the fact that her score did not seem to fit with her description and discussion of 'The Ship'.

*'But I can't, I mean, I can't give something big like this a two, can I? That won't do, so I have to go up, right?'*<sup>64</sup>

- Woman, 82 years old, elementary school

*'Oh, there you go again, you really have to... Yeah, that's a, that's perfect isn't it? If you have that in your city, then you think: 'wow', right? Let's say I give it an eight, but that the building... they could have done with less'*

**'But you would still like to give an eight?'**

*(Laughs nervously) 'Come on, yes, I don't know, I don't know!'*<sup>65</sup>

- Woman, 72 years old, high school

While we should not be too quick to discard the positive things that these outliers said about 'The Ship', simply reading the transcripts of their interviews clearly shows that these women generally feel uncomfortable passing judgment. Their description of 'The Ship', especially, was incongruent with how they scored it. In general, they frequently referred to their own age for stating a certain opinion and repeatedly asked the interviewer (sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly) for confirmation that they were saying something 'acceptable'. It is perhaps also quite telling that none of these outliers chose 'The Ship' as their 'favorite' library (both when discussing attractiveness and 'invitingness') during the closing questions of their interviews. This leads us to the conclusion that, unlike the outliers for 'The School', these individuals do not represent a group of people that challenge our findings with regard to the class-based dispositions discovered through previous analyses, but actually strengthen them by showing that exceptionally good evaluations of 'The Ship' (by female respondents that have a lower socio-economic status) mostly come down to an unease and a reservedness to voice criticism and pass judgment on an impressive, iconic building.

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<sup>64</sup> Ik kan dat niet zo, zoiets groot, toch niet met een twee wegzetten. Dat gaat niet goed, dus dan moest ik naar omhoog hé?

<sup>65</sup> Goh, daar zijt ge weer, dan moet ge echt... Ja, da's een, perfect hé, als ge dat in uw stad hebt, dat ge denkt van: 'wow', hé? Laat ons zeggen da'k er een 8 aan geef, maar dat het qua gebouw... het kan met minder.

Maar toch een acht?

(lacht op nerveuze wijze) Seg, ja, ik weet het niet, ik weet het niet!

## *References*

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## Appendix

Table a: Information on background variables used in correlation matrices

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Age	<p>The age of respondents was calculated based on their year of birth and then coded into four categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 18 to 29 years old,</li><li>- 30 to 44 years old,</li><li>- 45 to 59 years old and</li><li>- 60 to 74 years old)</li></ul>
Education level	<p>Education level of respondents was coded into four categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- No or lower education</li><li>- Lower secondary education</li><li>- Secondary education</li><li>- Higher education</li></ul>
Education level parent	<p>The education level of parents was coded in the same four categories as those for respondents</p>
Gender	<p>Gender was coded as a dummy-variable, with men being assigned value '0' and women value '1', meaning that a positive correlation means a better evaluation by women</p>
Income	<p>Income was defined as the total household income (after taxes). Answer options ranged between 'less than 500€' and 'more than 5500€', with every option increasing with '500€'. Seventeen respondents did not answer this question.</p>
Occupational prestige	<p>Respondents were asked to describe their (previous) main profession. This description was then given an occupational prestige score as defined by Goldthorpe</p>
Participation to 'highbrow' activities	<p>Respondents were asked to specify how frequently they participated to certain cultural activities on a five-point scale. The frequency with which four types of 'highbrow' cultural activities (museum, opera, theatre and ballet) were attended, was computed.</p>
Subjective interest in architecture	<p>Respondents were asked to specify to what degree they consider themselves to be interested in architecture 'as an art-form' on a five-point Likert-scale.</p>
Urbanization town/city	<p>The urban density of the municipality, town or city respondents lived in was determined based on postal code.</p>

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Table b: Determinativeness of style correlated against evaluation of library's building and interior

	Respective score 'The Ship'	Invitingness of respective building	Invitingness of respective interior
Style of 'The Ship' determinative for invitingness	-0,325**	-0,163	-0,346**
Style of 'The mansion' determinative for invitingness	-0,092	-0,176	-0,077
Style of 'The Church' determinative for invitingness	-0,349**	-0,206	-0,335**

Table c: Difference between percentage of inhabitants city/municipality with no higher education and percentage of respondents with no higher education in sample

	Difference
The Church	38,0%
The School	38,0%
The Mansion	40,0%
The Ship	43,0%
The Cinema	50,0%

Table d: Correlation matrix, all opinions and remarks that correlated significantly with socio-demographic variables for 'The Mansion'

	Urbanization	Gender	Occupational prestige	Education level parent	Subjective interest in architecture	Education level	Age	Participation to 'highbrow' activities	Income
Style is very important for 'invitingness'	0,000	-0,186	,273*	-0,011	-0,020	0,161	-0,086	0,041	0,124
Not inviting despite sufficient functionality	-0,010	-,243*	0,195	0,062	0,210	0,223	-0,168	0,034	,296*
Buildings fits well in its environment	0,006	-0,220	0,215	0,057	0,158	0,138	-0,188	0,051	,276*
Outside and inside of building do not match	-0,039	-0,220	0,103	0,213	0,019	0,138	-0,188	,278*	0,031
Respondent shows appreciation for renovation	0,050	-0,046	,313*	-0,037	0,158	0,138	-0,188	-0,190	0,173
Detailed discussion of light in library	-0,219	-0,062	0,184	,303*	,258*	,284*	-0,099	-0,083	,460**
Detailed discussion of used materials	0,057	-0,176	0,141	0,182	0,021	,247*	-0,074	-0,098	0,142

Table e: Correlation matrix, all opinions and remarks that correlated significantly with socio-demographic variables for 'The Cinema'

	Urbanization	Gender	Occupational prestige	Education level parent	Subjective interest in architecture	Education level	Age	Participation to 'highbrow' activities	Income
Discusses local or urban character of library	<b>-.258*</b>	-0,046	-0,031	0,057	0,227	-0,005	-0,017	0,064	-0,009
Emphasizes cost of constructing this library	<b>-.319**</b>	0,021	0,072	0,061	0,098	0,161	0,019	0,060	0,238
Emphasizes financial investment behind library	<b>-.350**</b>	0,086	-0,072	-0,003	0,024	-0,072	0,057	0,087	0,217
Shows reserve in judging interior of library	0,083	0,015	-0,230	-0,047	-0,033	-0,114	<b>,297*</b>	-0,198	-0,124
Describes building as architecture	0,048	<b>-.275*</b>	0,119	<b>,286*</b>	0,134	<b>,261*</b>	-0,144	<b>,243*</b>	0,154
Emphasis 'cultural character' of building	0,066	0,183	0,116	0,149	-0,072	0,096	-0,159	<b>,302*</b>	0,063
Respondent literally says they want to visit the library as user	-0,083	0,021	0,018	<b>,253*</b>	-0,048	0,161	-0,132	0,064	0,116
Detailed discussion of colour	-0,014	-0,041	-0,203	0,215	-0,052	0,189	<b>-.344**</b>	0,186	-0,050
Detailed discussion of furniture	<b>-.248*</b>	0,027	-0,019	-0,100	0,165	0,066	-0,057	0,203	0,246
Detailed discussion of used materials	-0,118	-0,072	0,050	0,234	0,038	<b>,332**</b>	<b>-.250*</b>	<b>,250*</b>	0,014

Table f: Correlation matrix; all opinions and remarks that correlated significantly with socio-demographic variables for 'The School'

	Urbanization	Gender	Occupational prestige	Education level parent	Subjective interest in architecture	Education level	Age	Participation to 'highbrow' activities	Income
Emphasizes local/small-town character of library	-0,035	-0,146	0,180	,410**	0,006	,268*	-,425**	,253*	0,077
Outside and inside match	0,110	0,015	0,184	0,186	-0,033	0,170	-,265*	0,120	0,160
Inside is better than the outside	-0,160	-0,025	0,199	0,146	-0,004	,255*	-,290*	0,194	0,201
Emphasizes lack of financial means for library	-0,149	0,094	,292*	0,123	0,031	0,223	-0,168	0,064	0,130
Does not consider themselves to be part of the target-audience for this library	0,073	0,128	0,147	0,057	0,019	0,138	-,265*	-0,190	-0,076
Judgement based in part on how well library is suited for other audiences	-0,097	,358**	0,082	0,098	0,089	0,040	-0,231	-0,142	0,146
Positive discussion of readability of library	-0,013	0,027	-0,252	-,286*	0,146	-,421**	,337**	-0,076	-0,078
Detailed discussion of colour	-0,069	0,004	-0,106	0,137	0,007	0,086	-,300*	0,054	0,137
Detailed discussion of size/spaciousness	,316**	-0,096	0,036	0,020	0,149	0,019	-0,082	0,193	-0,157

Table 9: Correlation matrix, all opinions and remarks that correlated significantly with socio-demographic variables for 'The Ship'

	Urbanization	Gender	Occupational prestige	Education level parent	Subjective interest in architecture	Education level	Age	Participation to 'highbrow' activities	Income
'Tantalizing' interior	-0,064	-,271*	-0,061	-0,070	0,024	0,004	0,077	-0,053	0,006
Building fits well in environment	0,151	0,128	0,233	0,057	0,019	0,138	-,265*	-0,190	-0,076
Emphasizes urban character of library	-0,182	-0,082	0,142	-0,012	0,044	-0,009	0,019	-,240*	0,236
Inside is better than the outside	0,128	-0,046	-,313*	-0,224	-0,119	-0,234	0,054	-0,002	-0,235
Emphasizes cost of constructing this library	-0,217	0,139	0,083	0,090	-0,211	0,164	0,044	-0,077	-,278*
Emphasizes financial investment behind library	-,259*	0,055	0,038	-0,022	0,097	-0,082	0,039	0,153	-,269*
Bad investment of taxpayer's money	-0,214	0,094	0,046	0,000	-,317**	0,000	0,117	-0,126	0,144
Does not consider themselves to be part of the target-audience for this library	0,105	0,183	-0,043	-,302*	-0,117	-,317**	-,297*	-0,109	-0,071
Refers to own age for a specific opinion/judgment	-0,102	-0,066	-0,033	-,259*	0,105	-,297*	-,287*	0,092	0,034
Reserve in judging building	0,194	-0,066	0,040	-0,008	0,027	-0,111	-,287*	-0,133	-0,039

Reserve in judging interior	0,230	0,183	0,067	-0,075	0,027	-0,257*	0,220	-0,066	-0,048
Reserve in discussing attractiveness of the building	,259*	0,015	-0,138	-0,071	-0,033	-0,185	,297*	-0,154	-0,094
Reserve in discussing attractiveness of the interior	,259*	0,158	-0,060	-0,149	0,081	-0,351**	,297*	-0,154	-0,133
Seeks confirmation for own judgment with interviewer	-,308*	0,183	-0,152	-0,203	-0,045	-0,152	0,228	-0,128	-0,165
Describes building as architecture	0,085	-0,122	0,200	,292*	0,235	,240*	-,273*	,276*	0,164
Detailed discussion of furniture	0,113	-0,060	,285*	0,133	0,077	,238*	-0,238	0,194	0,248
Detailed discussion of coherence of architectural elements	-0,030	-0,128	0,116	,239*	0,138	0,170	-0,137	,243*	0,139

Table h: Correlation matrix, all opinions and remarks that correlated significantly with socio-demographic variables for 'The Church'

	Urbanization	Gender	Occupational prestige	Education level parent	Subjective interest in architecture	Education level	Age	Participation to 'highbrow' activities	Income
'Tantalizing' exterior	0,037	-0,046	-0,046	<b>-,258*</b>	0,088	-0,005	-0,017	0,097	0,098
Functionality important for 'invitingness'	0,091	-0,046	-0,120	-0,098	-0,119	<b>-,266*</b>	0,159	-0,119	-0,108
Outside better than inside	0,092	<b>-,243*</b>	0,002	0,019	0,062	0,038	0,006	0,060	-0,112
Inside better than outside	0,010	0,059	0,114	<b>,263*</b>	0,077	0,096	-0,200	0,222	0,160
Refers to own age for a specific opinion/judgment	<b>-,254*</b>	0,015	0,078	0,081	0,024	0,004	0,230	-0,154	0,073
Literally says not to want to visit this library (for too long)	-0,019	-0,046	0,064	0,213	0,019	0,138	-0,188	0,121	<b>,305*</b>
Shows appreciation for renovation	<b>-,242*</b>	0,017	-0,004	-0,019	-0,111	0,132	0,198	-0,212	0,035
Detailed discussion of colour	-0,002	0,055	-0,006	0,065	-0,038	<b>,276*</b>	<b>-,265*</b>	-0,014	0,238
Detailed discussion of size/spaciousness	-0,081	0,026	0,188	<b>,256*</b>	0,178	0,123	-0,201	0,137	0,000



