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Identifying Parameters for Analysing and Improving Public Libraries of Kerala A Case of Quilon Public Library and Research Centre, Kollam

Krishna S J, Ar.Vidya Kamath

8th Semester Student, TKM School of Architecture, Kollam, Kerala, India

Associaite Professor, TKM School of Architecture, Kollam, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT: The dissertation "Identifying Parameters for Analysing and Improving Public Libraries of Kerala: A Case of Quilon Public Library and Research Centre, Kollam" is aimed at transforming public libraries into catalysts for social activation and vibrant community hubs. Included among the objectives are the understanding of the need for social activation, the identification of key evaluation parameters, and the assessment of the current state of public libraries in Kerala, with a focus on the Kollam Public Library. Literature review, site visits, interviews, and surveys are employed in the methodology to gather insights on community engagement.

The research stages include the understanding of library types, the necessity for transformation, contemporary design strategies, Kerala's reading culture, and the socio-political role of libraries. A Library Evaluation Test (LET) Chart is developed to assess library performance based on identified parameters. The context and conditions of the Quilon Public Library and Research Centre (QPLRC) are highlighted in the live study.

It is indicated by key findings that poor accessibility, mismatched user group typologies, lack of funding, and introverted design contribute to library inactivity. The study concludes that while QPLRC has potential as a vibrant community centre, infrastructure improvements, particularly in movement paths, are essential to enhance community participation. Despite challenges, QPLRC remains a popular, affordable workspace in Kollam, suggesting that its role in social engagement could be significantly boosted by targeted improvements.

KEYWORDS: Public Libraries, Social Activation, Community Engagement, Evaluation Parameters, Library Evaluation Test (LET) Chart

I. INTRODUCTION (MAIN HEADINGS FONT SIZE 13 BOLD)

Public libraries are recognized as critical community centres that provide access to knowledge and foster social engagement. This research is aimed at identifying parameters for evaluating and improving public libraries in Kerala, with a particular focus placed on transforming these spaces into active community hubs. The Quilon Public Library and Research Centre (QPLRC) in Kollam has been selected as the primary case study due to its central role in the community and its potential for development.

Aim and Objectives (Sub-sections font size 12 bold)

The parameters for assessing public libraries in Kerala are aimed to be discovered by this dissertation, with the goal of transforming them into catalysts of social activation and vibrant hubs of community engagement.

The objectives include:

- Key parameters for successful library functioning are to be identified.
- The current state of public libraries in Kerala is to be evaluated.
- Strategies for enhancing the role of libraries as community hubs are to be proposed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of public libraries in social and community development is underscored by existing literature. Flexible design, technological integration, and community engagement are emphasized by modern libraries. In Kerala, a crucial socio-political role is also played by public libraries, with contributions made to education and cultural preservation. Contemporary library design strategies and their applicability to Kerala's public libraries are examined in this review.

Based on extensive literature research, seven key parameters for evaluation have been identified: Inclusivity, Community Engagement, User-Centricity, Flexibility, Sustainability, Landscaping, and Cultural Sensitivity. The focus of the study is specifically placed on the architectural and contextual analysis of libraries, with service, finance, and technological aspects being excluded. These latter areas are widely discussed in existing literature and were not explored in depth due to the necessity to address less-researched architectural and contextual dimensions. Based on the parameters for evaluation identified, the Library Evaluation Test (LET) Chart was prepared.

Table1:Ranking Identified Parameters

	Ranjith, K.S.	Anderson, B. L.	Sanwald, W. W.	Calvert, P. J.	IFLA	Sasaki.	VMDO Architects.
Inclusivity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Technological Integration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community Engagement	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
User-Centricity	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Services	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Flexibility		✓			✓	✓	✓
Sustainability		✓				✓	✓
Landscaping		✓	✓				
Finance	✓				✓		
Cultural Sensitivity		✓					

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III. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was employed to evaluate the Quilon Public Library and Research Centre (QPLRC). Quantitative and qualitative techniques were integrated in this approach to assess how well the library aligns with seven key design parameters: Inclusivity, Community Engagement, User- Centricity, Flexibility, Sustainability, Landscaping, and Cultural Sensitivity.

Surveys

Structured surveys were conducted with library users and staff to gather quantitative data on several architectural and contextual aspects. How well the library supports accessibility, community interaction, and the adaptability of spaces

was assessed through these surveys. Feedback on sustainability practices and landscaping features was also collected.

Interviews

Qualitative insights into the library's design and its impact were provided by semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including library administrators, architects, community leaders, and regular patrons. The focus of these interviews was placed on the library's inclusivity, its role in fostering community engagement, and the flexibility of its spaces. The effectiveness of sustainability measures and the integration of culturally sensitive elements were also covered in the discussions.

Live Observations

A direct assessment of the architectural and contextual features of the QPLRC was offered by on-site observations. The layout was evaluated by observers to determine how it facilitates movement, accessibility, and user interactions.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data Collection

Insights into various perspectives on the library, its functionality, and effectiveness were provided by each data collection methodology adopted.

1. Surveys

Specific areas where the library's design could be improved to better meet the parameters and address existing challenges, such as poor accessibility and mismatched user group typologies, were identified with the help of this data.

2. Interviews

It was revealed by the qualitative data that, while the library has potential, its effectiveness is affected by issues such as introverted design and funding constraints.

3. Live Observations

Current challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure and design elements that limit community participation, were highlighted by the observations. Despite these issues, the library was noted for being an affordable workspace in Kollam. The need for targeted improvements to enhance the library's ability to serve as a vibrant community hub was underscored by the observations.

Key Findings

Parameter	Findings
Inclusivity	Adequate accessibility features for individuals with disabilities are lacking in the library's design.
Community Engagement	The potential of the library to foster community interaction is limited by the introverted design.
User-Centricity	A mismatch between user group typologies and available services is leading to reduced user satisfaction.
Flexibility	The adaptability of the existing layout to different functions and events is limited, reducing its utility.
Sustainability	Significant sustainable practices or materials are not incorporated by the library.
Landscaping	The minimal current landscaping does not enhance the library's ambiance or usability.
Cultural Sensitivity	The local culture and heritage are not sufficiently reflected by the design.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The architectural and contextual factors influencing QPLRC's performance and engagement were evaluated, with the hypothesis that improvements would enhance its role as a community hub and increase user satisfaction.

The need for inclusivity was highlighted, with recommendations for ramps, accessible restrooms, and clear signage. It was suggested that open, inviting spaces could boost community engagement. User- centricity was indicated to require tailoring services to diverse needs, while flexibility was noted to call for modular furniture and multi-purpose rooms. The absence of sustainable practices was identified, with a recommendation for energy-efficient systems and sustainable materials. Enhancing green spaces was found to improve the library's ambiance and usability, and integrating culturally sensitive elements was suggested to increase relevance and appeal. Addressing these challenges is considered crucial for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of public libraries like QPLRC, providing insights for global library design.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is concluded by the study that, while the QPLRC has the potential to be a vibrant community center, significant improvements in infrastructure and design are considered crucial to enhance community participation. Despite contextual challenges, the library is regarded as a popular, affordable workspace in Kollam, suggesting that targeted architectural and contextual enhancements could significantly boost its role in social engagement and community development.

Evaluation and Interpretation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the QPLRC:

- Enhance Accessibility:
 - Ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms should be installed to accommodate users with disabilities.
 - Clear signage and pathways should be ensured to facilitate easy navigation of the library.
- Promote Community Engagement:
 - The exterior should be redesigned to create more open, inviting spaces that encourage community interaction.
 - Programs and events that cater to diverse community interests should be developed.
- Align Services with User Needs:
 - Regular surveys should be conducted to understand the evolving needs of different user groups.
 - Services and spaces should be tailored to better meet these needs, ensuring a user- centric approach.
- Increase Flexibility:
 - Modular furniture and multi-purpose rooms that can be easily reconfigured for various events and activities should be incorporated.
 - Spaces that can adapt to different functions should be designed, enhancing the library's versatility.
- Implement Sustainable Practices:
 - Energy-efficient systems, such as LED lighting and solar panels, should be integrated to reduce the library's environmental footprint.
 - Sustainable materials should be used in renovations and new constructions.
- Improve Landscaping:
 - Well-designed green spaces that enhance the library's ambiance and provide areas for outdoor activities should be developed.
 - Native plants should be incorporated to reflect local biodiversity and reduce maintenance requirements.
- Incorporate Cultural Sensitivity:
 - Local culture and heritage should be reflected in the library's design through art, architecture, and cultural programs.
 - Engagement with local artists and cultural organizations should be fostered to create a library environment that resonates with the community.

By implementing these recommendations, the functionality and effectiveness of the QPLRC can be significantly enhanced, transforming it into a more inclusive, engaging, and sustainable community hub. User satisfaction will be increased, and the library's role in fostering social engagement and cultural preservation in Kollam will be strengthened.

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