

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY IN DUTCH LIBRARY ARCHITECTURE (1970-1990)

A CASE STUDY OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY HEERLEN (1986) BY JO COENEN

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ABSTRACT

Between 1970 and 1990, public libraries in the Netherlands underwent a significant transformation. They went from quiet, book centered spaces into multifunctional and socially integrated public buildings. This shift was created by broader changes in society, thanks to government decentralization, economic constraints and urban renewal.

This thesis explores how these evolving ideas are reflected in the design of the Public Library of Heerlen (1986) by architect Jo Coenen. Through a case study, it is examined how spatial organization, urban integration and design vision contributed to the library's multifunctional character. By using primary sources such as architectural drawings, journals and interviews, the library is placed in a

broader context. Additionally, two comparative cases, Apeldoorn (1984) by Hans Ruijsenaars and Zeewolde (1989) by Koen van Velsen, are analysed to create a broader context.

At the end of the thesis, it is concluded that the library of Heerlen is an unique example of integration of multiple functions in its urban landscape. While Apeldoorn follows a more book oriented layout and Zeewolde emphasizes internal spatial openness, neither has the same amount of multifunctionality as Heerlen. The library's spatial layout, the integration with the Raadhuisplein and the response to Heerlen's post-mine urban renewal efforts make it a unique design to the challenges of that time period.

KEYWORDS

Multifunctionality
Library architecture
Urban renewal

INTRODUCTION

National context of library development

Between 1920 and 1990 Dutch public libraries in the Netherlands underwent significant growth and transformation. The existence of public libraries, was a reaction to the social class division in the early 20th century. Public libraries sought to democratize access to knowledge and provide opportunities for study and personal development. (Beleidshistorie van de Openbare Bibliotheek, 2024). Later on in the 20th century, municipalities gained more responsibility for public institutions, including libraries, due to decentralisation. Meanwhile, national subsidies were declining. This in combination with a shift in media usage (Huysmans, F., 2007), libraries had to reinvent themselves as multifunctional buildings.

Introduction of the case study

The Public Library of Heerlen (1986), designed by Jo Coenen, epitomizes this transformation. In 1974, the last mine in Heerlen closed, writes Simons (2025). The mines were important for the growth of Limburg. When these mines closed, a lot of unemployment arose and it was time for a rearrangement of the urban landscape. The government of Heerlen used architecture to revitalise the city and reinvent its identity. When the need for a new library arose, it could become more than a building for book storage. The library combined multifunctionality and community needs, making it an important element in the city's redevelopment efforts, after the closing of the mines in the area (Coenen, J. & Ummels, W. M., 1986).

Research gap

Jo Coenen's work has been discussed in multiple architectural literature, which are mostly focused on his general design ideas and urban planning contributions. The Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen is recognized for its role in the renewal of the urban structure and for its architectural form. But what is missing is a focused, scientific and critical analysis of how the library exemplifies the transformation of Dutch libraries between 1970 and 1990 in to multifunctional buildings. This research will fill that gap by analysing the urban, spatial and material aspects of the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986), situating it in a broader context by comparing it with the libraries in Apeldoorn (1984) by Hans Ruijsenaars and Zeewolde (1989) by Koen van Velsen.

This thesis explores how the transformation of libraries is reflected in the design of the library of Heerlen (1986). The main research question is: ***How does the design of the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986) by Jo Coenen reflect evolving ideas of library architecture in the Netherlands between 1970 and 1990, with particular attention to its multifunctional role?***

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does the design of the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986) by Jo Coenen reflect evolving ideas of library architecture in the Netherlands between 1970 and 1990, with particular attention to its multifunctional role?

Sub-questions:

1. What were Jo Coenen's design intentions for the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986), and how were they influenced by the broader urban renewal strategy of Heerlen in the 1980s?
2. How does the spatial organization and materiality of the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986) reflect the multifunctional demands of public libraries during this period?
3. How do the libraries in Apeldoorn (1984) and Zeewolde (1989) compare to Heerlen (1986) in their approaches to multifunctionality and societal needs?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research will use the three following methods:

1. Archival Research

Examination of primary sources such as architectural drawings, interviews and design reports.

2. Literature Review

Analysis of secondary sources, including books and journal articles about Jo Coenen, Heerlen city development plan, library design and Dutch architectural trends.

3. Comparative Analysis

A comparison of the Heerlen library with the libraries in Apeldoorn (1984) and Zeewolde (1989).

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CHAPTER 1: TRENDS

ARCHITECTURAL TRENDS

General architecture trends

In the 1970s architecture and urban planning in the Netherlands was largely centralized and controlled by the government. They focused on large scale structural masterplans. According to historian Liage Böhl in *Steden in de steigers. Stadsvernieuwing in Nederland 1970-1990*, pre-war neighbourhoods became vacant in the 1970s, which was a consequence of ministerial and municipal policies. This modernist approach of the government dictated that functions had to be strictly separated in the urban plan, like living, working et cetera.

Before the 1980s cities primarily focused on expanding outside of the historical city centre, which resulted in a standardized urban system. But later on the system faced a lot of critique because of the lack of architectural quality. As a reaction to that criticism, urban planning shifted in the 1980s, towards a more decentralized approach.

Decentralisation meant that architecture and urban planning became more influenced by private investors, leading to a free market orientation. As a result, architecture and urban planning became tools for city marketing, which then was used by municipalities to compete with other cities. To counteract the loss of urban identity, cities began to prioritise visually appealing architectural plans, thus strengthening their position in intercity competition. Architecture and urban planning thus played a crucial role in shaping and presenting a city's image.

The changing position of the government had an effect on the architecture and urban planning. No standardized expansion for the growing population by the government. But more space for visually distinctive buildings, which responded to the needs of the cities and gave them a unique identity.

Examples of buildings in 1970-1990

Besides the influence of the government's changing role in architecture and urban planning, there was also a shift in architectural styles during this time period. The 1970s were dominated by strict modernism and brutalism, while the 1980s saw the rise of postmodernism, high-tech architecture and organic forms.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is not necessary to explore these architectural movements in detail. However, understanding these broader trends provides context of the time. The following illustrations (1-6) showcase buildings that reflect these shifts in style, highlighting examples of modernism, brutalism, postmodernism and high-tech architecture.



Illustration 1: De Kunsthall, Rotterdam (1992) architect Rem Koolhaas (OMA) - deconstructive and high tech modernism.

Source: <https://www.oma.com/projects/kunsthall>

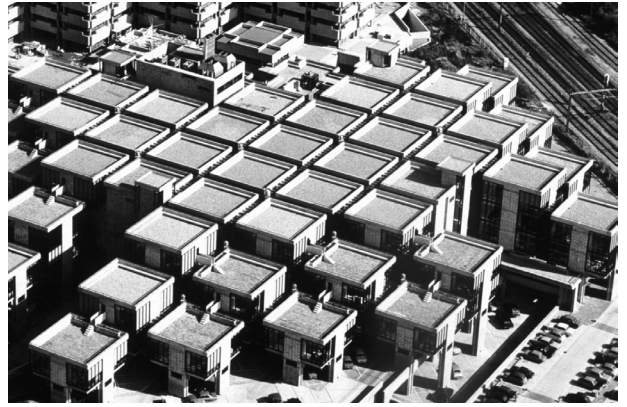


Illustration 2: Centraal Beheer, Apeldoorn (1974) architect Herman Hertzberger - Structuralism.

Source: <https://www.ahh.nl/index.php/nl/nieuws2/15-voormalig-centraal-beheer-wordt-hertzberger-parc>



Illustration 3: ING House, Amsterdam (1987) architects Ton Alberts & Max van Huut - organic architecture.

Photo: Bart van Hoek. Source: <https://www.architectuur.org/xfoto.php?pr=45&id=8&nr=1>



Illustration 4: Gasunie Headquarters, Groningen (1994) architects Ton Alberts & Max van Huut - organic architecture and structuralism.

Source: <https://www.albertsenvanhuut.nl/portfolio-items/headquarters-gasunie/>



Illustration 5: Kubus Woningen, Rotterdam (1984) architect Piet Blom - structuralism.

Photo: Dirk Verwoerd Source: https://www.archdaily.com/482339/ad-classics-kubuswoningen-piet-blom/5313434fc07a80b93f000043-ad-classics-kubuswoningen-piet-blom-photo?next_project=no



Illustration 6: Groninger Museum, Groningen (1994) architects Alessandro Mendini, Philippe Starck and Coop Himmel(b)au - postmodernism - deconstructivism.

Source: <https://www.petrucimarco.it/en/project-view/the-netherlands-groningen-museum/>

LIBRARIES

The growth of libraries

The Openbare Bibliotheek has been in existence for about 100 years in the Netherlands (first in Dordrecht in 1899). Data on the Openbare Bibliotheek has been well kept since 1950, see appendix table 1, which clearly shows the growth and decline of the organisation from 1950 to 2024. Between 1970 and 1990 the number of members increased from 1,497,000 to 4,346,000 (CBS, 2024). This growth is due to the de-pillarisation in the 1960s, as described in *Beleidshistorie van de openbare Bibliotheek* by the Nationale Bibliotheek. The last vernacular libraries in the Netherlands were transformed into public libraries. In addition, the network of youth libraries received a boost in the period between 1960 and 1974.

While the number of libraries grew considerably, work was under way from 1966 on a new library law to replace the old one of 1921. The new law came into force in 1975 (Schneiders, 1990). The law provided for a more even distribution of public library facilities across the country, full reimbursement of staff costs and twenty percent of other costs. This only did not last long, by the 1980s more and more responsibilities were being transferred from national to local government. In *De openbare bibliotheek in Nederland en de veranderende leesescultuur, sinds 1975*, Professor Frank Huysmans at the University of Amsterdam, describes how it was already clear when the Dutch Library Act was introduced that it would not last. As early as the 1970s, the idea emerged that libraries should be part of the social network, that was to be decentralised to lower levels of government. Libraries were also hit by the economic crisis of the 1980s, which led to a significant reduction in subsidies. This was accompanied by a move from free access for children to half the adult price. Since 1980 (see table 1 and 2 in annex), membership growth seems to have stagnated (CBS, 2024).

In addition to changing laws and regulations, the way libraries operated in the 1960s was not as public as it could be. In *De openbare bibliotheek in Nederland en de veranderende leesescultuur, sinds 1975*, Huysmans describes how, until the 1960s, it was not possible in many public reading rooms for someone to walk past the shelves and borrow a book. The help of a librarian was needed. The de-pillarisation of the 1960s also meant that this relationship fell away and

the individual became more important. There was more space to explore on your own.

No more reading

But why did the memberships stagnate in 1980, (see table 1 and 2 in annex) Huysmans describes three reasons why younger generations spend less time reading, two of which apply to the period 1970-1990. First, there is a change in the media landscape. Media history shows that when a new type of media emerges, the old types do not disappear. Since the twentieth century, books have had to face constant competition from film, radio, audio and so on. There are more and more types of media nowadays, but media use has remained at around 18 to 19 hours per week since 1975 at least till 2006 (K. Breedvelt, 2006). Secondly, there is a wider range of leisure activities. The range of activities on offer has grown enormously and above all, more attention is being paid to this in marketing.

Trends in libraries

But how did libraries change in the 1970s till 1990s, what trends are there to find? There are five key trends to be discussed. The first one is the change from book storage to open and interactive spaces. Before the de-pillarisation, described above in *the growth of libraries*, libraries were quiet and enclosed spaces, designed mainly for book storage and individual studying. This changed towards a more open floorplan, where users were encouraged to interact with each other. The second trend has to do with the influence of new technologies, not only the introduction of new digital resources, but also material innovation made it possible for libraries to have a different architectural expression. In *the people's palaces: public libraries in the information society*, Huysmans explores how libraries adjust themselves to the changing community needs. In the text the third trend becomes clear, libraries began to offer spaces for cultural events, lectures and so on, to make them part of a bigger community. And as described before the depolarisation made it possible to individually explore the library, which resulted in study places and reading cafés (de Jonge, 2018). The last trend is the integration of libraries into the urban development. Libraries became part of the city as a cultural landmark. (architectuurgids Nederland 1980-nu).

In conclusion the typology of the library is changing. The library is becoming a social and multifunctional hub to the urban plan.

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY

As mentioned above, the Netherlands went through an economic crisis in the 1980s, which led to government cutbacks. As a result, subsidies for public buildings, including libraries, were significantly reduced. This created financial difficulties for libraries and alternatives had to be sought. In addition, local governments were given more responsibility for funding libraries, but the municipalities themselves had fewer resources. (Huysmans, F. 2007)

This is where multi-functionality comes in. By mixing functions, libraries could generate additional income and thus defend their right to exist. Since the 1980s, there has been a trend for libraries to share space with other cultural institutions, such as theatres, study spaces, commercial spaces, etc. An example of a library that integrated multiple functions between the timeperiode 1980-1990, is the Central Library of Rotterdam, where a library is combined with a café, theatre and art gallery. (architectuurgids.nl - Centrale Bibliotheek Rotterdam, van Den Broek & Bakema, Rotterdam, after 2004)

The change in government policy from centrally organised to market driven also played a role. Architecture was used as a tool to make cities more attractive. Multifunctional libraries were funded earlier because they were more economically viable and also had a broader social function.

CHAPTER 2: CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 establishes how Dutch libraries evolved between 1970 and 1990 due to three factors, government decentralization, city marketing and urban renewal and the rise of multifunctionality in response to economic constraints. These shifts reshaped the role of public libraries, transforming them from book focused buildings into multifunctional hubs, which are integrated into the urban plan. The Heerlen Library (1986), designed by Jo Coenen, embodies these developments, making it a good case study for understanding how libraries adapted to the changing ideas and needs of the Dutch population. The primary goal of this case study is to analyse how the library of Heerlen embodies multifunctionality in spatial design, programmatic use and urban context.

To determine whether the Heerlen Library represents an unique response to local conditions or is part of a broader trend in Dutch library architecture, this case study is placed within a bigger framework. By analysing Heerlen alongside the libraries of Apeldoorn (1984) by Hans Ruijsenaars and Zeewolde (1989) by Koen van Velsen, it can be discussed whether the design was an unique case or part of a nationwide shift.

JO COENEN

The architect

Jo Coenen, born in 1949 in Heerlen, is a Dutch architect. According to the architectural historian Hans Ibelings in *Jo Coenen: De Ontdekking van Architectuur* (1989), Coenen is one of the few architects capable of designing both a standalone building and a master plan for a district. He studied architecture at Eindhoven University of Technology. At the time Coenen began his studies (1968), architecture was a controversial term. In particular, Delft students, criticized the role of the architect in a capitalistic society.

Coenen's designs are created at various scales, ranging from small residential projects to large urban developments. Well-known examples of his work are the Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam (1988) and the urban development plan for Céramique in Maastricht (1987). In his designs, he

often establishes a connection between architecture and urban planning. In this way, his buildings are not isolated objects but part of the urban plan (Ibelings & Hermans, 1989; Oxenaar et al., 1994).

Design Ideas

Using both old and new architectural traditions, Coenen brings order and structure to his designs. While adhering to strictly defined lines, he applies bold and inventive modifications. Over the course of his career, a strategic approach emerged, where he emphasizes the motifs of homogeneity, order and rhythm (Ibelings & Hermans, 1989).

From Coenen's earliest designs, several recurring themes become evident: architectural and urban space, monumentality, the route and particularly the role of the individual building within the urban context. In each of his designs, whether architectural or urban, he continually discovers new ways to shape these themes (Ibelings & Hermans, 1989).

Jo Coenen stated in *Jo Coenen: de ontdekking van Architectuur* (1989): "What is important to me is that a building remains clearly legible in its form or an urban plan in a constellation of forms".

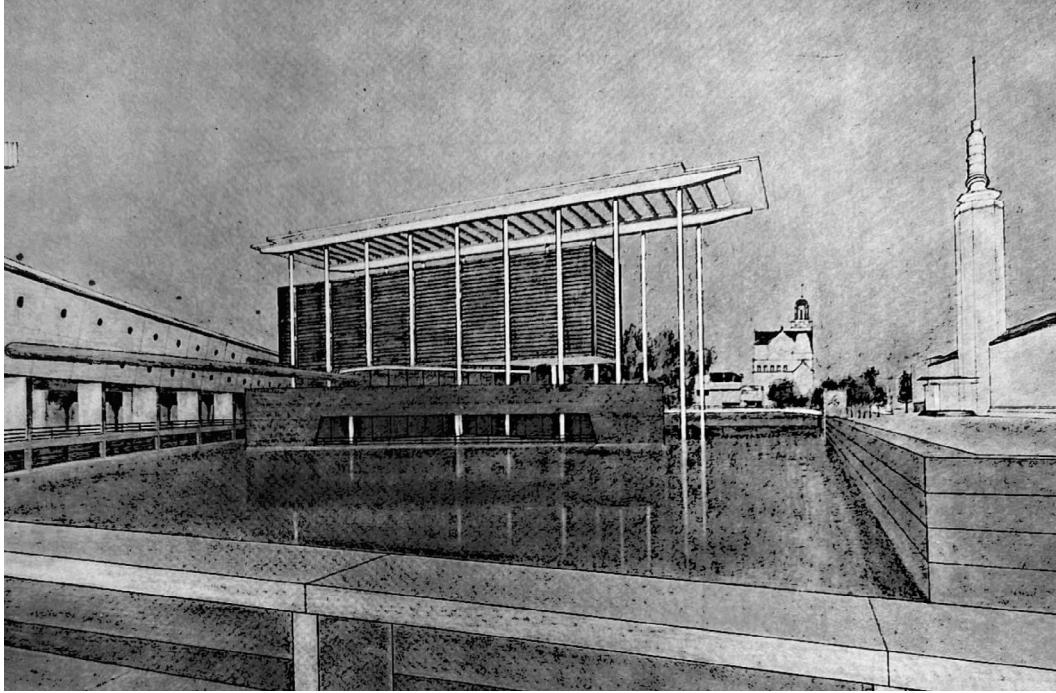


Illustration 7: Netherlands Architecture Institute, Rotterdam (1988) architect Jo Coenen.
 Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1988). Source: Ibelings (1989) *Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur*

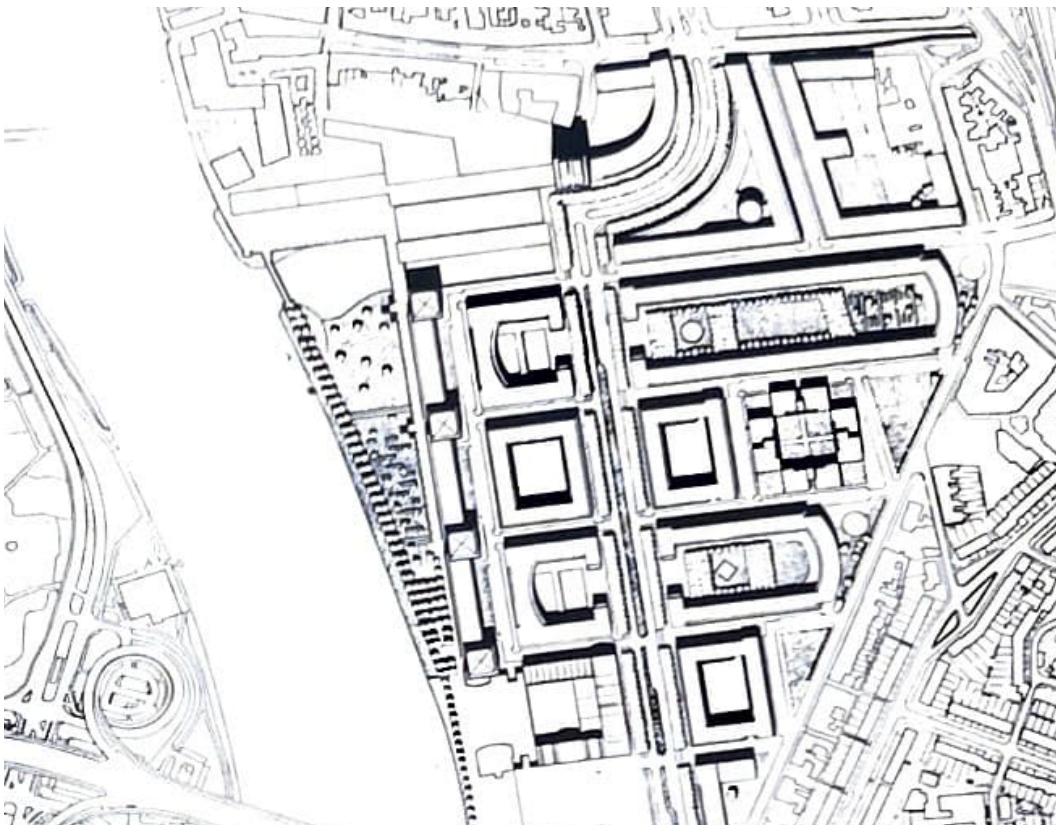


Illustration 8: Céramique, Maastricht (1987) architect Jo Coenen.
 Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1987). Source: Ibelings (1989) *Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur*

CASE STUDY

The vision for the library of Heerlen

To fully understand the design of the multifunctional library of Heerlen, it is essential to examine its underlying vision.

Initially, the municipality of Heerlen developed a program for the library with four components: a public library, a museum, a chamber of commerce and a parking garage. However, this quickly presented significant architectural and urban design challenges. A solution required organizational skills and strategic urban planning. Instead of creating a dominant mega structure, the design evolved into a composition of interconnected spaces, ensuring that the urban structure remained intact while reinforcing and complementing the cityscape. (Oxenaar et al., 1994)

This approach aligns with the shifting role of architecture and urban planning described in Chapter 1. Heerlen recognized that a strong urban and architectural design was necessary not only for functional purposes but also to enhance the city's identity. This transformation of libraries from isolated book depositories into cultural and multifunctional hubs is reflected in Coenen's strategy: integrating the library in the broader urban renewal efforts of Heerlen.

Thus, Jo Coenen and his firm were assigned to design a multifunctional building within Heerlen's fragmented city center. The task was to create a cohesive and inviting public space, together with the Raadhuis and Raadhuisplein. In the architectural journal BOUW (1986), Coenen elaborated on his approach: *"Our main concern was to locate this complex in such a way that it would improve the fragmented character of Heerlen's inner city, which is in need of clearer urban spaces. Therefore, the idea of a complex with a characteristic appearance around an enclosed urban court became increasingly lively."* (BOUW, 1986). The vision of Jo Coenen and his team aligns with the transformation described in Chapter 1, where Dutch libraries evolved from isolated book storage into cultural, multifunctional hubs that combine architecture and urban planning into a cohesive design.

Jo Coenen later reflected on this approach in an interview in *Jo Coenen: De ontdekking van architectuur* (1989): *"Restoring the natural coherence of things could be an objective of architecture."* With

this quote, Coenen expresses the idea that the library was conceived as an active participant in the city's transformation, rather than as a standalone building. A standalone building would have ignored or disconnected itself from its context, in an architecturally and functional way. But in contrast, Coenen's design embraces the context and creates a connection with it.

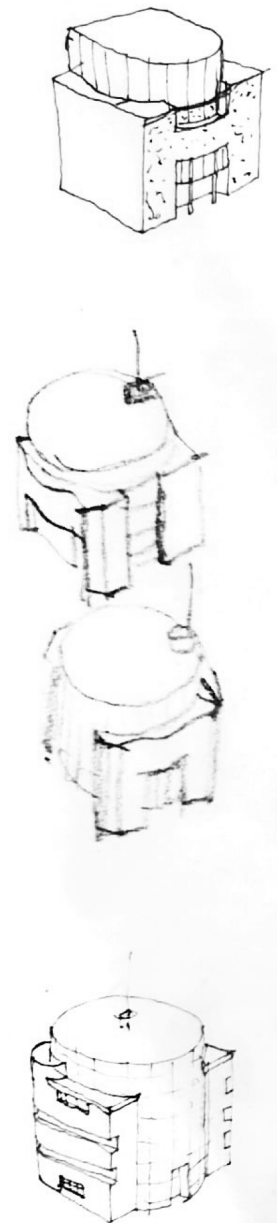


Illustration 9: Sketches of the Heerlen Library by Jo Coenen. Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) *Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur*

Analysis of multifunctionality

The Heerlen Library is analysed for its multifunctional character in two key aspects: spatial organization and functionality and integration with the urban context.

establishes a connection with the city. This reinforces the idea that a library is more than just an isolated book storage facility, but rather a space for social interaction and cultural engagement.

Spatial organisation and functionality

The spatial layout of the Heerlen Library was designed to accommodate various functions. The building consists of different zones, distinguishing between different spaces such as study areas, public interaction spaces and cultural functions. This zoning strategy allows each function to operate independently while maintaining cohesion in the overall design.

The building is clearly divided:

1. Underground: is the most quiet space in the building, designated for book storage and reading areas.
 2. Ground floor: functions as a transparent and public space, where visitors are being welcomed and a strong connection with the city is maintained.
 3. Upper floors: is designed for cultural and administrative functions, including an exhibition space and offices.
 4. Rooftop: offers a panoramic view and includes a café, which serves as a venue for various events.
- (BOUW, 1986)

In the journal *BOUW* (1986), Jo Coenen explains how the multifunctional character of the building is even reflected on the roof: *"Its roof - the internal court - will be used as a sculpture court and, due to its enclosed nature, is very suitable for theatrical or musical performances"*

An important element in achieving the multifunctional character, is the contrast in the design between transparency and enclosure. The ground floor is open and accessible, utilizing large glass surfaces, which creates a connection with the city and emphasizes the public function of the building. This public character extends into the internal courtyard, which serves as a visual link between two different programs. The atrium, from the basement to the first floor, allows for natural light while simultaneously establishing a connection between the different zones.

In contrast, the upper floors are more enclosed, accommodating spaces that require silence or privacy, such as the administrative offices. However, on the rooftop, the panoramic view once again

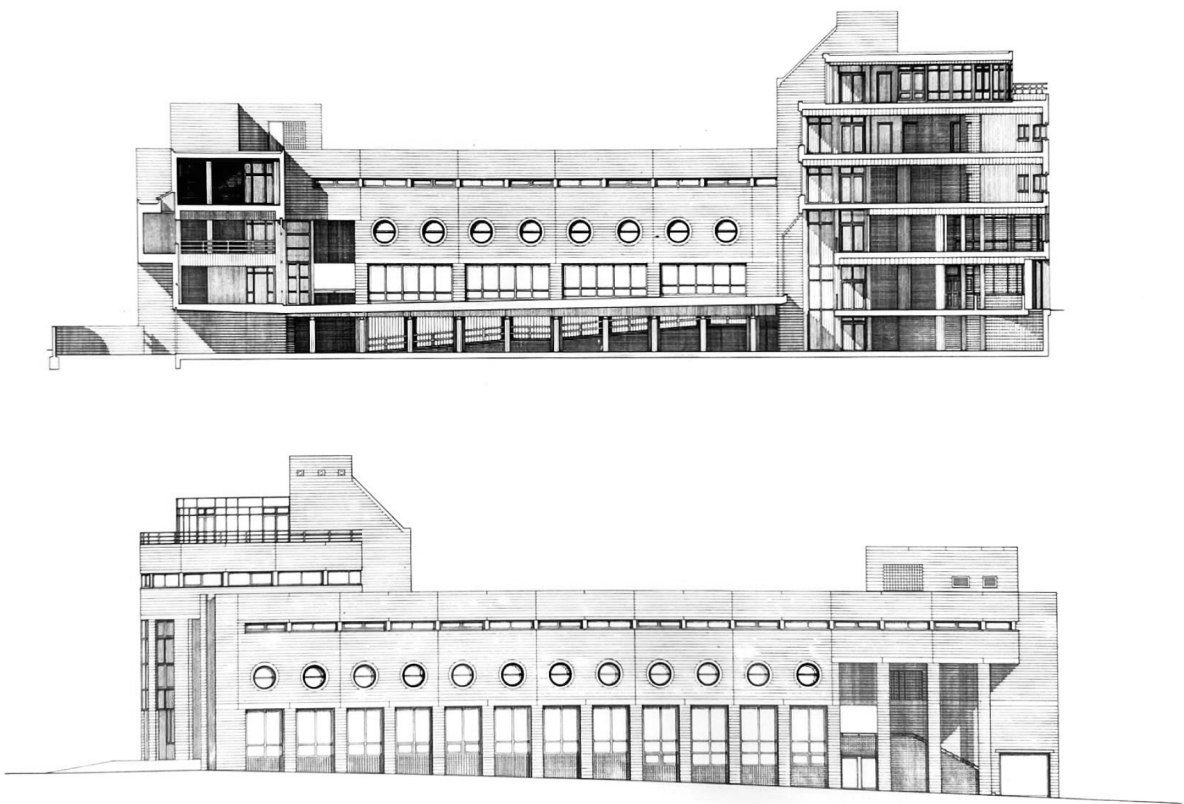


Illustration 10: Longitudinal section and side view of the library of Heerlen.

Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) *Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur*

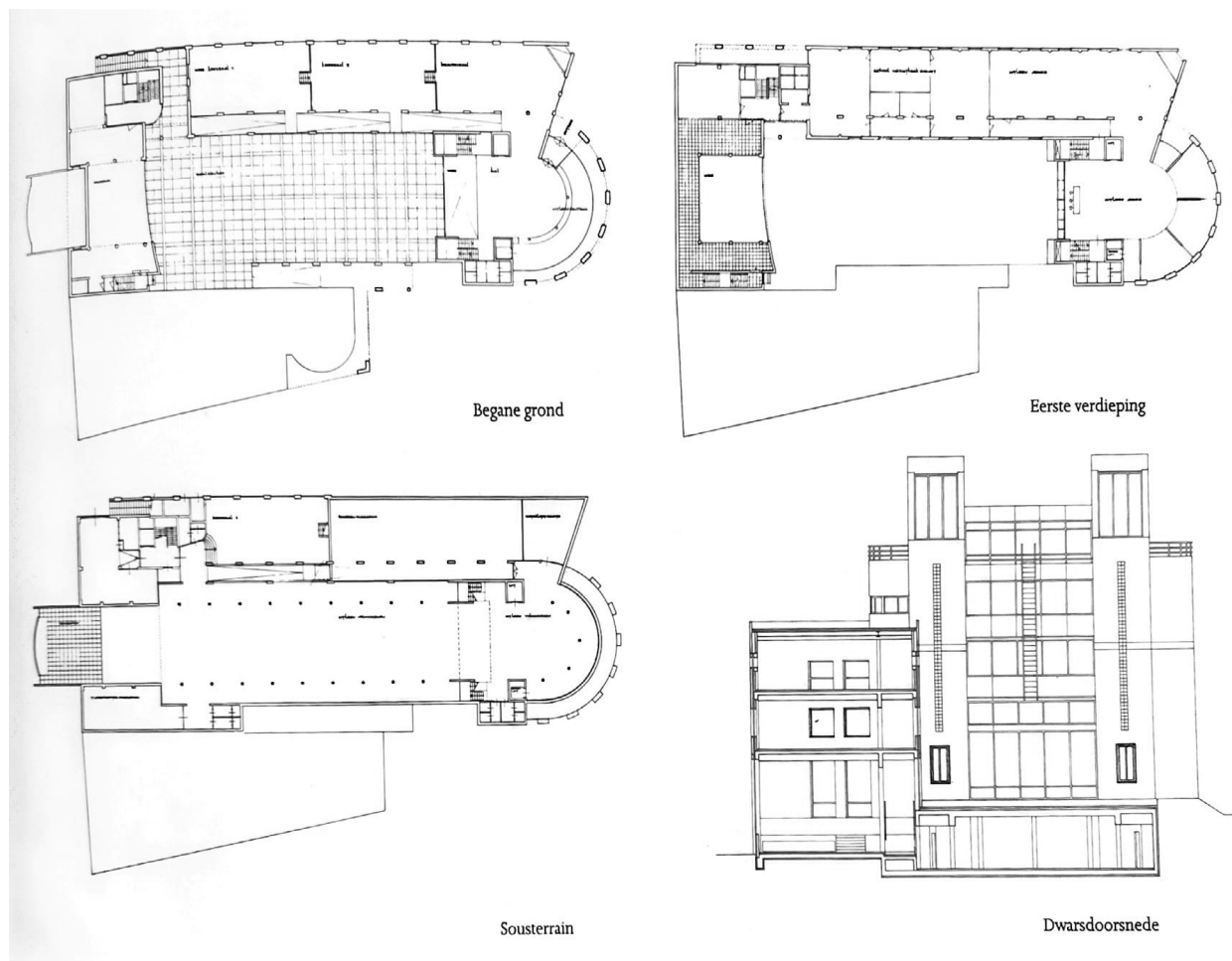


Illustration 11: Floorplans and section of the library of Heerlen (1986) architect Jo Coenen.

Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) *Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur*

Integration with the urban context

The library of Heerlen was not designed as a standalone object, explained in *chapter 2 The vision for the library of Heerlen* p.13, but as an integrated element in the cities context. Through spatial organization, routes and strategic placement of entrees, the library functions as a link between public function, pedestrian movement and identity of the city. The importance of this integration reflects broader city strategies, discussed in *chapter 1*. Where architecture and urban design became tools to strengthen the identity of the city.

Jo Coenen describes in the *BOUW* (1986) magazine how the design of the library is a composition of interconnected volumes, ensuring clarity in programmatic functions, while avoiding isolation from the city. He describes the design in three main masses:

1. The 'kop' which means 'head' of the complex: consists out of the main entrance, the reception and a few administrative functions.
2. The two parallel wings: one houses the reading and lending areas and the other contains the Kamer Van Koophandel.
3. The 'hof' which means courtyard: is surrounded by the museum and library and functions as a semi-public place where the different masses are connected.

Jo Coenen: *"Also, in this way a natural division into the various functions of the complex is possible and the whole gets its articulation"* (BOUW, 1986)

An important part of the integration with the urban context is the carefully designed pedestrian system, where Coenen makes the building an extension of the public space. In the magazine *BOUW* (1986) he said the next thing about the connection: *"To prevent the new building complex from becoming a solitary object, a meaningful connection to the urban fabric was sought. This was found by creating an internal court."*

The integration is important for the multifunctional character of the building for several reasons. At first, the multiple entrances ensure different user groups to be able to access the building independently. Which shows how the library works as a network of spaces and function that provide for both library users and passerby. Secondly, the diagonal route through the courtyard allows people to cross through the library complex without entering the building.

This supports the constant flow of movement of the city. And finally, the visual connection between indoor and outdoor spaces makes the different functions of the building visible. The openness of the spaces, encourages engagement of different events that can take place. What can be taken away from this is that the spatial integration strengthens the multifunctional purpose by making sure that it does not only serve people who are actively seeking library services, but also incidental users.

The spatial and programmatic integration with the city, blurs the boundary of the building between a library and a community centre. By doing this the library extends its multifunctionality beyond the building itself. For example the Raadhuisplein, which is the public square, functions as an extension of the library, thanks to the transparency of the façade on the ground floor. Besides that, the building shares its circulation with the Kamer van Koophandel. Where municipal functions are integrated with the library.

In short the building is not only a library, but it is a carefully designed urban connection. Where spatial openness, routes and multifunctional spaces are combined in to a multifunctional civic hub.

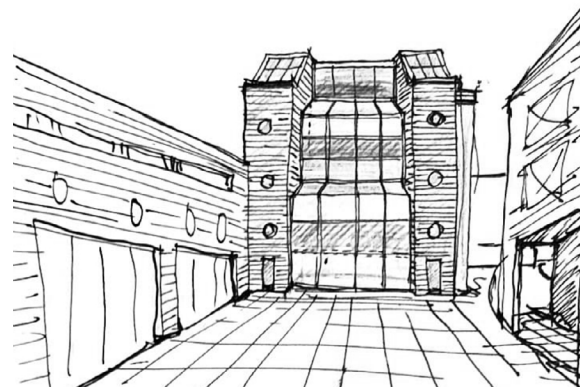
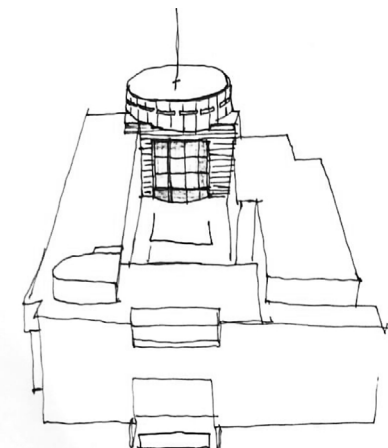
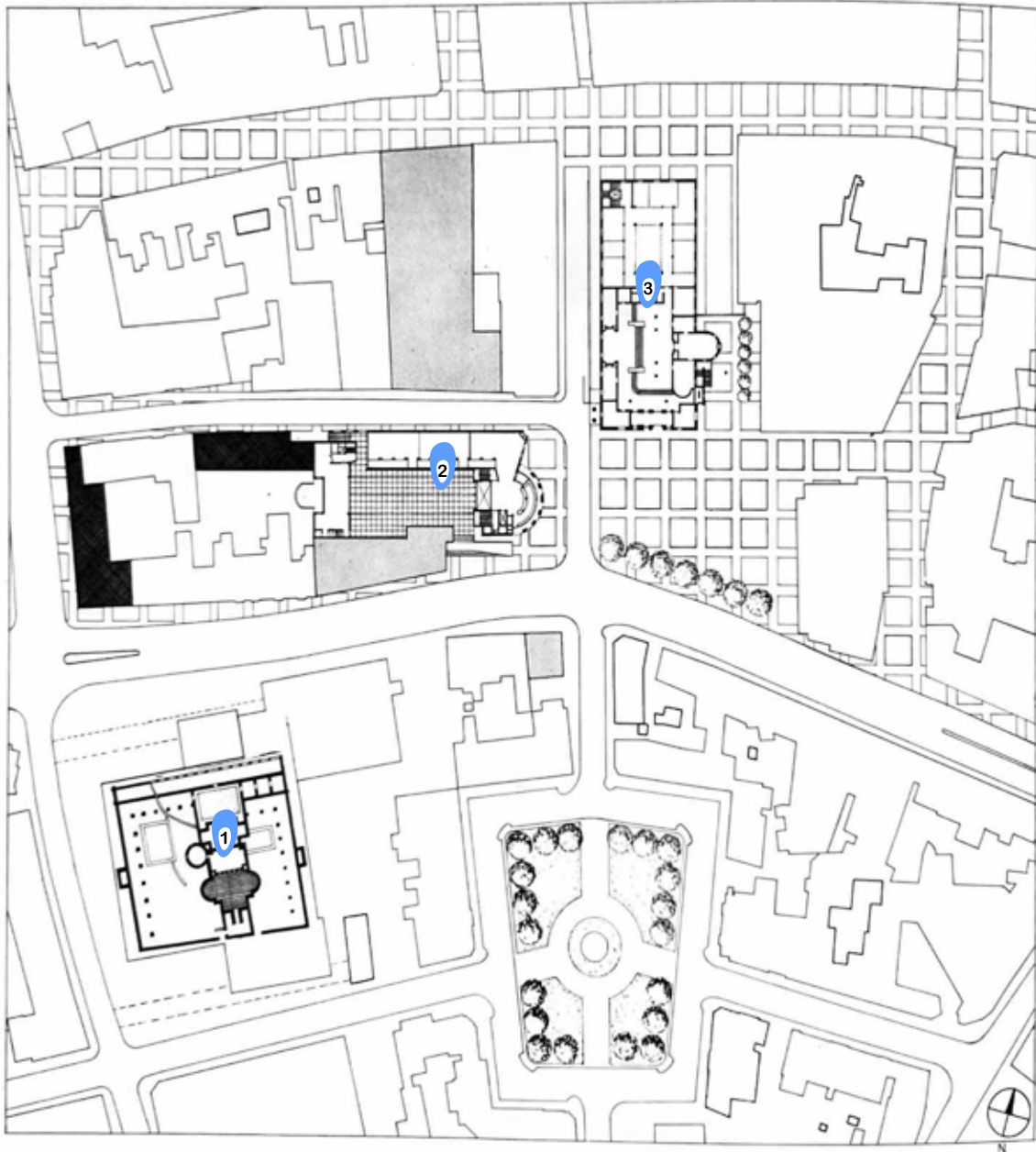


Illustration 12: Sketches of 'het hof' of the Heerlen Library
Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) Jo Coenen: *de Ontdekking van de Architectuur*



- (1) Thermenmuseum (1977)
- (2) Library of Heerlen (1986)
- (3) Raadhuis (1942)

Illustration 13: Urban context of the library of Heerlen (1986), with the Thermenmuseum (1977) and Raadhuis (1942).
 Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) *Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur*

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The following section presents a comparative analysis between the Heerlen library (1986) by Jo Coenen, Apeldoorn (1984) by Hans Ruijsenaars and Zeewolde (1989) by Koen van Velsen. The comparison between these libraries is essential for positioning the Heerlen library within a broader architectural and urban context. The libraries in Apeldoorn and Zeewolde were selected because they are built in the same time period but within different urban situations.

Placing the Heerlen library in a broader context, is valuable for examining wider development of public libraries in the Netherlands between 1970 and 1990, particularly regarding multifunctionality.

The analysis is structured as follows. First, there is a brief description of the architect and urban context. After that, the design assignment is explained, which was given to the architect. This is followed by a brief discussion of the library's design. Next, the architectural and urban elements related to multifunctionality are analysed. Finally, a comparison is made with the Heerlen library to highlight key differences and similarities.

Heerlen vs. Apeldoorn

The library of Apeldoorn designed by the architect Hans Ruijsenaars was built in 1984. Hans Ruijsenaars is according to author Frits Bless (1993), well known for his quality of space, proportions and natural light, but above all, the human centred design. (Bless et al., 1993)

"In the nearly three years that I have had to deal with Hans Ruijsenaars and his city hall - in connection with the art in his building - , for me, in addition to the quality of space, dimensions, light, especially the quality of humanity has become characteristic of the architect Hans Ruijsenaars." Frits Bless in Hans Ruijsenaars: architect (1993)

To further explain the architect Ruijsenaars, a list of keywords can be introduced, which he talked about in his lecture at the TU Eindhoven (1990): coherence, alienation, powerlessness, style, history, knowledge, precision, structure, and light. (Bless et al., 1993)

The design

In 1980, the commission was given to design a new library. At that time, Apeldoorn was not undergoing the same level of transformation as Heerlen, but

there was a growing cultural awareness. The library was intended to be a knowledge centre, with the possibility of future expansion in a second phase. All objectives, functions and requirements were defined in the program of demands.

The building had to be flexible without requiring major structural modifications. Like other cities, Apeldoorn also faced national budget cuts due to the economic crisis in the 20th century. Despite these financial constraints, the library was meant to be a valuable addition to Apeldoorn, aligning with the urban strategies discussed in Chapter 1, where architecture and urban planning were used as tools to enhance the city's image.

The design is best understood through a vertical zoning system. The ground floor houses the central lending and information desk, the first floor contains quiet study areas and reading rooms, and the second floor accommodates non-public spaces, such as offices for staff. (BOUW, 1985)(Bless et al., 1993)

"After all, the public library (1985) was also designed by him. Already that building was appreciated and even admired by many: for its sober monumentality, its light, its space and its detailing." Frits Bless in Hans Ruijsenaars: architect (1993)

Multifunctionality

Regarding the multifunctionality of the building, there was little evidence of it. In terms of spatial organization, there was no integration of cultural or commercial functions. Instead, the library followed a more traditional layout, where book collections and reading areas were strictly separated from other functions in the building, such as the staff offices.

Additionally, the building is relatively closed, with few visual and physical connections to the city. However, the interior was designed to be flexible, allowing for future adjustments without major structural modifications. Ultimately, the building serves a single function, a library, but was designed in a way that would allow it to be easily adapted for a different use in the future.

Comparison Heerlen vs. Apeldoorn

Firstly, the Apeldoorn Library follows a more classical layout, where the focus is on borrowing and reading books, as well as studying. In contrast, Heerlen breaks away from the standard typology by integrating new functions, engaging with the city,

and encouraging public interaction.

Secondly, in terms of spatial organization, Apeldoorn's design is characterized by a closed structure with fixed functions, whereas Heerlen's layout is flexible, open and interactive with the city. The comparison between the Heerlen and Apeldoorn libraries demonstrates that Heerlen's multifunctional design is relatively unique. Apeldoorn adheres to a more classical library layout, where the focus is on reading and borrowing books and multifunctionality is absent, whereas Heerlen actively embraces it.

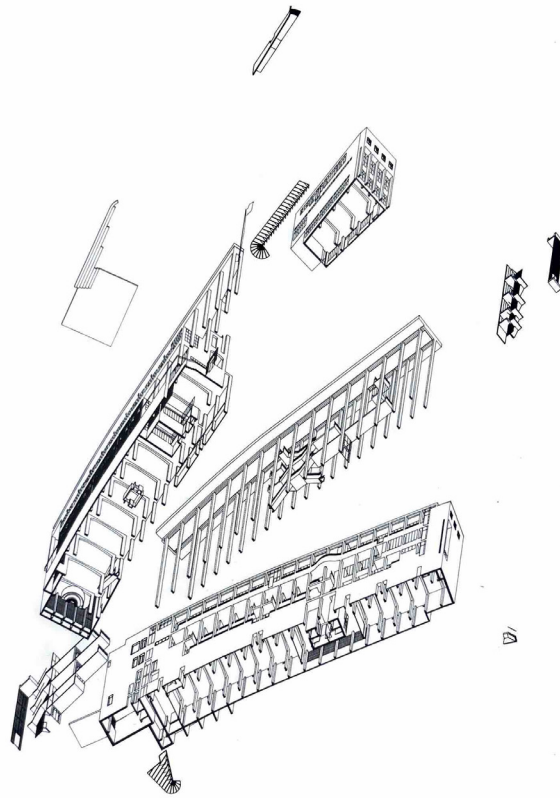


Illustration 14: Exploded view, perspective from the bottom, of the library of Apeldoorn (1984).
 Drawing: Hans Ruijsenaars (circa 1980). Source: Bless, F., Ruijsenaars, H. & de Vries, R. (1993) Hans Ruijsenaars: Architect.

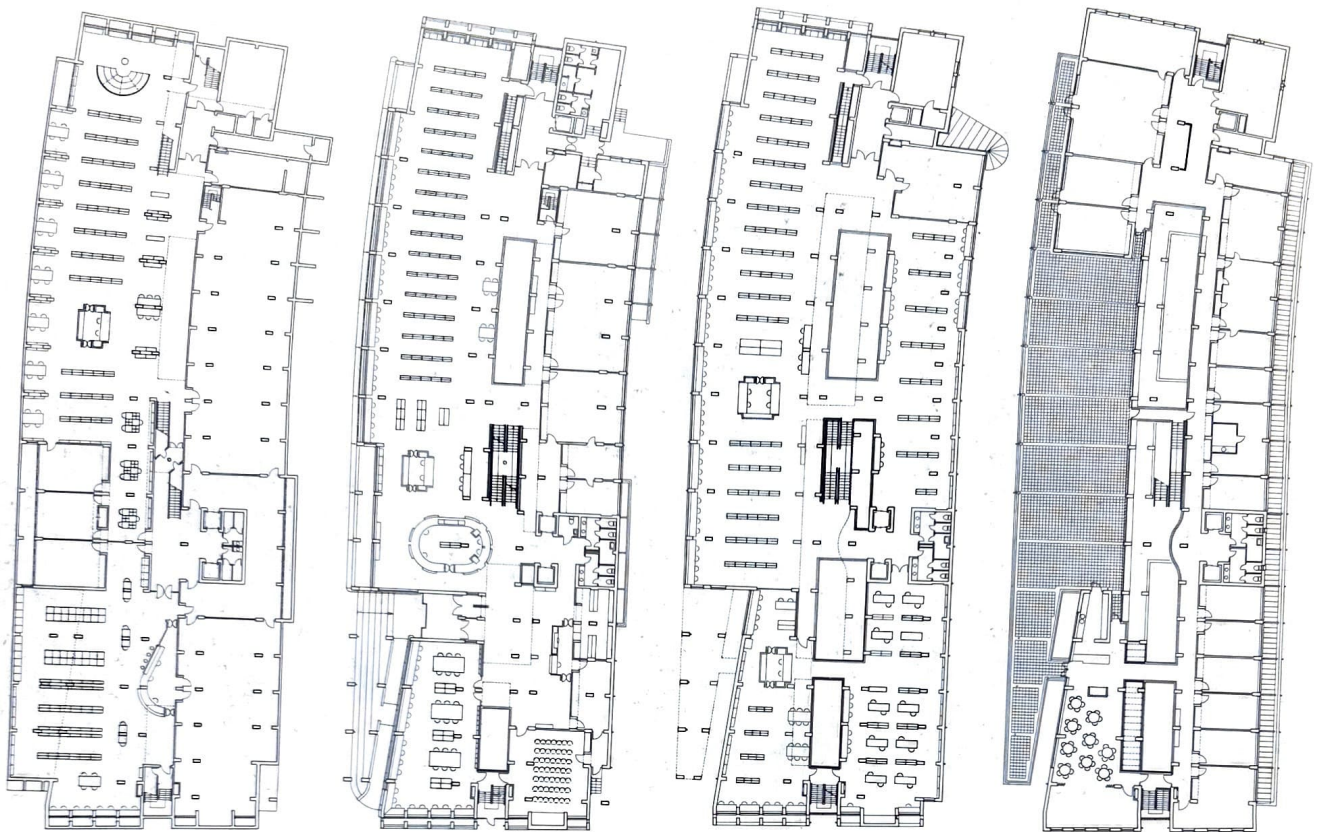


Illustration 15: Floorplans of the library of Apeldoorn (1984).
 Drawing: Hans Ruijsenaars (circa 1980). Source: Bless, F., Ruijsenaars, H. & de Vries, R. (1993) Hans Ruijsenaars: Architect.

Heerlen vs. Zeewolde

The library of Zeewolde designed by the architect Koen van Velsen was built in 1989. Van Velsen is well known for his open designs and interaction with the surroundings. In *Koen van Velsen* (1995) Janny Rodermond, director of the Stimulation Fund for Architecture, stated: *"In some cases, it seems as if Van Velsen exhausts all the architectural possibilities that a spatial concept awakens. This is particularly true of the library in Zeewolde. As a result, this building has the character of an ode to architecture: it makes a new reality appear, which can hardly be described with the usual vocabulary."* The perception of space is central in Van Velsen's work. Aspects as material use, construction and design are entirely in the service of functional use and spatial experience. As a result, his designs are complex and spectacular, where he often uses raw materials. (Rodermond, 1995)

The design

In the 1980s, Zeewolde was a newly developed polder town that needed public buildings to create social spaces. The library was conceived as a cultural centre for a young community (Rodermond, 1995).

The library is located at a square with arcades, but to distinguish it as a public building, its arcade was designed five meters deep, instead of the two meters used for surrounding buildings. Besides that, the bookshelves are visible from the exterior, making the library's function readable from the outside. (Van Velzen, z.d.)

Multifunctionality

The Zeewolde Library incorporates some elements of multifunctionality, primarily in terms of spatial transparency and flexibility. First, the design allows for future expansion, which indicates long term adaptability. Secondly, open spaces are created to have the opportunity to combine different functions. However the library lacks in connection with the urban context. The design is rather inward focused than integrated in the city and its functions. Van Velsen mainly focused on how interior spaces are connected to each other.

Comparison Heerlen vs. Zeewolde

First, there are some similarities between the Heerlen Library (1986) and the Zeewolde Library (1988). Both use transparency and openness as a means to enhance accessibility. However, in Heerlen, transparency plays a broader role by making connections between different functions and the

city. In contrast, Zeewolde's transparency is primarily internal, focusing on the spatial continuity within the building, rather than integration with urban structure.

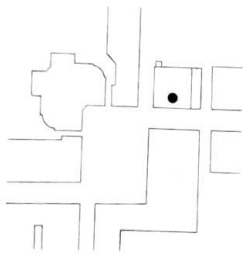
Secondly, the Zeewolde Library is a standalone structure, unlike Heerlen. Zeewolde does not aim to integrate functions beyond the building itself, nor does it extend into the public square in front of the library. In contrast, the Heerlen Library actively engages with the urban fabric, incorporating multiple civic functions and creating connections between different public spaces.

In conclusion, Zeewolde is primarily an open and transparent building internally, creating strong visual and spatial connections within the library. However, Heerlen takes this a step further, not only embracing openness within the building but also ensuring a direct relationship with the urban surroundings, solidifying its role as a multifunctional civic hub.

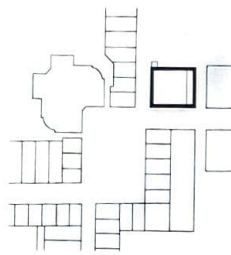
Conclusion

In conclusion, by doing a comparative analysis between the library of Heerlen (1986), Apeldoorn (1984) and Zeewolde (1989), the library of Heerlen is placed in a broader context. Which is valuable for examining the wider development of public libraries in the Netherlands between 1970 and 1990, particularly regarding multifunctionality. After the analysis it can be concluded that first, the library of Apeldoorn has a more classical design, without multifunctionality. Secondly, the library of Zeewolde is more flexible in its design than Apeldoorn, but doesn't make a connection with the urban context. Whereas the library of Heerlen has flexibility, openness and a connection with the urban context, making it an unique example of a public library.

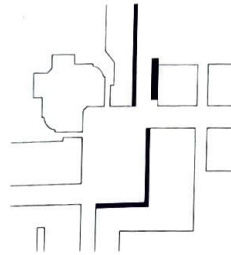
Overhoekse positie ten opzichte van plein



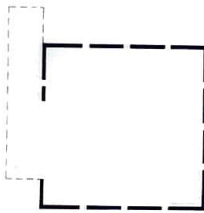
Object in winkel-woonomgeving



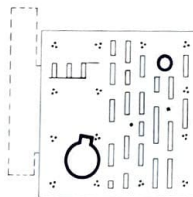
Arcade als voortzetting stedelijke ruimte



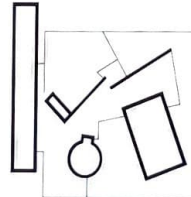
Hoe open kan besloten ruimte zijn?



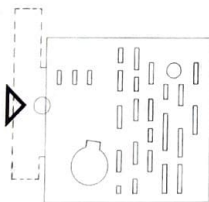
Binnenwereld: inrichting van losse elementen



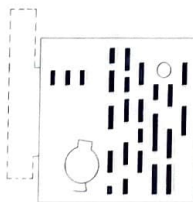
Binnenwereld: binnenruimtes en losse volumes



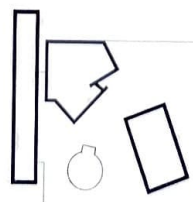
Toegang



Boekerij



Kantoor, lees- en studieruimte



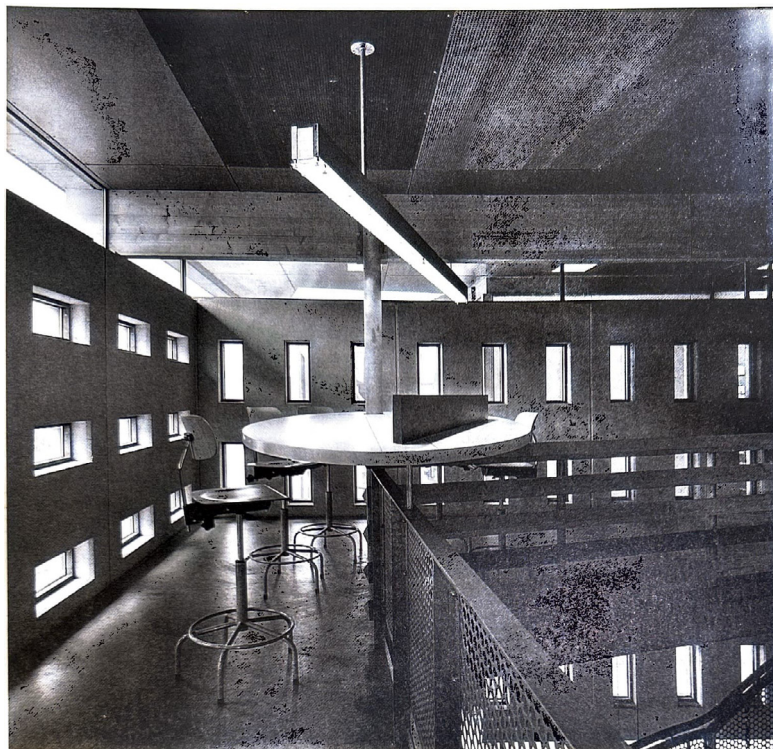


Illustration 17: Pictograms of spatial layout of the library of Zeewolde (1989).
Drawing: Michel Boesveld (circa 1995). Source: Rodermond, J. (1995). *Koen van Velsen*.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the research question: **How does the design of the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986) by Jo Coenen reflect evolving ideas of library architecture in the Netherlands between 1970 and 1990, with particular attention to its multifunctional role?** To answer this question, four sub-questions were addressed through a combination of historical research, literature review and comparative analysis.

1. What were Jo Coenen's design intentions for the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986), and how were they influenced by the broader urban renewal strategy of Heerlen in the 1980s?

Jo Coenen's design ideas, were strongly related to the transformation of the city of Heerlen. The municipality wanted a design, which was more than a new public building. A design that also added something to the recovery of the fragmented city and would improve the identity of the city. This vision came from the decentralization of government, where local governments were given more and more responsibilities. This was an opportunity for Heerlen to invest in architecture and thereby improve the city's image. Coenen translated this ambition into a building that is connected to the urban fabric. Thanks to this approach, the library became an urban connector, on a physical, social and symbolic level.

2. How does the spatial organization and materiality of the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986) reflect the multifunctional demands of public libraries during this period?

The spatial layout of the library can be divided into vertical zoning. The underground is the most quiet place and is used for book storage and reading areas. The ground floor functions as a transparent and public space. The upper floors are designed for cultural and administrative purposes. And at the top, is a panoramic view, which also has a café. These different functions work in harmony with each other. Thanks to architectural elements such as transparency, sightlines and the atrium, the flexible character and openness of the building is reinforced. Government decentralization created architectural opportunities on the one hand, as described in the answer to sub-question 1, but on the other hand it also created financial problems. Libraries received less financial support. Multifunctionality became a design tool due to financial necessity.

3. How do the libraries in Apeldoorn (1984) and Zeewolde (1989) compare to Heerlen (1986) in their approaches to multifunctionality and societal needs?

The comparison between the libraries shows that the library in Heerlen (1986) integrated multifunctionality more strongly than those in Apeldoorn (1984) and Zeewolde (1989). The library in Apeldoorn focused more on programmatic separation and showed little flexibility, which suggests that it responded less to decentralisation. Zeewolde focused more on internal openness and spatial quality but did not engage with external connections. In contrast, Heerlen combined multifunctionality with urban integration, addressing societal needs more effectively.

Thanks to the findings of the sub-question, the main question can be answered: **How does the design of the Openbare Bibliotheek Heerlen (1986) by Jo Coenen reflect evolving ideas of library architecture in the Netherlands between 1970 and 1990, with particular attention to its multifunctional role?** In conclusion, the library of Heerlen is a unique example of a multifunctional design in the timeperiod of 1970 till 1990. It is more than a building which stores books, it actively engages with the city. This is created by spatial organization, integration with the urban context and architectural elements such as transparency and sightlines. It creates a shift in the role of libraries as public building. It supports functions beyond its primary purpose.

REFLECTION

Limitation of the case study

The thesis focuses on only one case study, the library of Heerlen (1986), designed by Jo Coenen. The case study is thoroughly examined and provides in-depth and detailed research. However, one case study says little about how representative the project is for the whole of the Netherlands.

Therefore, two comparative cases are added: Apeldoorn and Zeewolde. This helps to create a broader context. It is still a low number of comparative case studies and the context in which the library of Heerlen is placed remains too limited to draw clear conclusions about national trends.

For follow-up research, a broader comparison of at least ten libraries would be much more representative. It is important that they are from the same time period and have different urban contexts.

Sources

The thesis mainly uses sources from the architects themselves. These are very valuable, but they only reflect one perspective and are therefore one-sided.

More archival material could have been used, such as documentation of communication between the municipality and the architect. These would have been useful to better understand the context.

Theory

The thesis only researched the development of libraries in the Netherlands. It would have been interesting to compare this with international developments.

MATERIAL: BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Primary sources:

Bless, F., Ruijsenaars, H. & de Vries, R. (1993) *Hans Ruijsenaars: Architect*. Thoben.

The book begins with an introduction about Hans Ruissenaars. After that different designs are explained, through texts, drawings and pictures, including the library in Apeldoorn.

Brandolini, S., Carter, B. & Coenen, J. (1995). *Jo Coenen: introductions*. Gustavo Gili.

Contains Coenen's work between 1984 and 1994. Does not include the Heerlen library. In the beginning, they describe the characteristics and ideas of Jo Coenen. The book can help with understanding the choices he made for the design of Heerlen library.

De Haan, H., Barbieri, U., Brinkman, E. & Coenen, J., (01/03/2005). *Jo Coenen: van stadsontwerp tot architectonisch detail*. NAI Uitgevers.

The book is a collection of Jo Coenen's oeuvre. Four themes further explain specific designs: places, interventions, measure of things, metamorphoses, knowledge and direction. For each theme, an interview was conducted with Jo Coenen. These interviews provide insight into his ideas on the different themes.

Oxenaar, A., Kirkpatrick, J., & Coenen, J. (1994). *Jo Coenen, architect*. Publishers 010.

The book begins with Jo Coenen's life history, which starts from the beginning of his studies. In chronological order and on the basis of projects, Coenen's vision and outlook on architecture and urban planning become clear. This is followed by a number of Coenen's projects, which are explained with a short text, drawings and photos. The Heerlen library project is also discussed.

Secondary sources:

Groenendijk, P., Vollaard, P. & Kirkpatrick, J. (2009). *Architectuurgids Nederland (1980 – nu)*. Publishers 010.

The book includes several projects in the Netherlands from the 1980s onward. This reveals trends and themes from this period.

Ibelings, H. & Hermans, L. (1989). *Jo Coenen: De ontdekking van de architectuur*. NAI 010 uitgevers. ISBN: 9789072469090

First, a consideration of Jo Coenen's work is given, in which Hans Ibelings discusses a number of themes in Coenen's work, repair of a place, monumentality, architectural space and route. Following this, a selection of works will be shown, subdivided into four different themes: the villa and route, interior space, space and construction and architectural objects in the city. Heerlen library falls under the last category 'architectural objects in the city'. A brief introduction about the building is given, followed by sketches, drawings and photos.

Knulst, W.P. & Kalmijn, M. (1988). *Van woord naar beeld? Onderzoek naar de verschuivingen in de tijdsbesteding aan de media in de periode 1975-1985*. Rijswijk: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP).

The book has insight full information about how libraries responded to the decline in reading books, by incorporating new functions.

Rodermond, J. (1995). *Koen van Velsen*. Publishers 010.

The book begins with an overview of the ideas and vision of Van Velsen, After that multiple projects are illustrated through, concept drawings, drawings and pictures, including the library in Zeewolde.

Schneiders, P. (1990). *Lezen voor iedereen. Geschiedenis van de openbare bibliotheek in Nederland*. Den Haag: Nederlands Bibliotheek en Lektuur Centrum (NBLC).

The book is about the how the Openbare Bibliotheek has evolved in the Netherlands. In the book the writer gives extra attention about the second world war. This can be important to understand the open character of libraries.

Serrazanetti, F., & Schubert, M. (2016). *Jo Coenen : Inspiration and Process in Architecture* (Di 1 ban). Moleskine Books.

The book is about the design methods of Jo Coenen. Which gives a broader understanding of his vision and ideas. This is important to understand the ideas behind the library of Heerlen.

JOURNALS (volume – issue – pages)

Primary sources:

Coenen, J. & Ummels, W. M. (1986). *Bibliotheek en museum te Heerlen*. BOUW. (41, 22, 41-46)
Coverage of Heerlen's library, discussing its role in the urban renewal of Heerlen.

Secondary sources:

BOUW. (1985). *Openbare bibliotheek te Apeldoorn*. BOUW. (40, 13, 31-35)
Analysis of the Apeldoorn library, with specific focus on the functional design and use of material.

BOUW. (1986). *Bilbiotheek en museum te Heerlen*. BOUW. (41, 22, 41046)
Analysis of the Heerlen Library, where they explain the building in different themes, urban context, architecture, spatial organisation, materiality, construction and interior.

BOUW. (1990). *A.J. van Eckprijs voor Van Velsen*. BOUW. (45. 16-17, 5)
Analysis of the Zeewolde library, with focus on the innovative use of light and space.

Huysmans, F., (2007). *De openbare bibliotheek in Nederland en de veranderende leescultuur sinds 1975*.
Jaarboek voor Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis (14)

It is about how the public library changed from 1975. It is about people's reading behaviour, but also about the context the library is in at the time, think about paying or not paying for membership, which then affects the social context. The article is important for understanding the context in which the library is built.

ONLINE SOURCES

Primary sources:

Van Velsen. K., (z.d.) *Library Zeewolde*. Koen van Velsen Architects. <https://www.koenvanvelsen.com/en/projects/38>

The website of Koen van Velsen's architecture firm. On this page several pictures and a short story are presented.

Secondary sources:

architectuurgids.nl (after 2004) *Centrale Bibliotheek Rotterdam, Van den Broek & Bakema, Rotterdam*.
Architectuurgids. https://www.architectuurgids.nl/project/list_projects_of_architect/arc_id/48/prj_id/190

Bnetwerk (01/10/2024) *Beleidshistorie van de openbare bibliotheek*. Bnetwerk. <https://www.bibliotheeknetwerk.nl/artikel/beleidshistorie-van-de-openbare-bibliotheek>

The research article is about the origins of the public library. The research offers insight into the

development of the public library and its growth. It is important to understand the changing ideas about the library to better understand the architecture.

Deen, F. (07/04/2003). *Het 'zwarte verleden' van Limburg*. Historisch Nieuwsblad. <https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/het-zwarte-verleden-van-limburg/>

The text deals with Limburg's mining past and what the closure of these mines brought about. The text is important to understand the social and economic context of Heerlen at the time.

Van Mastrigt, T. (02/11/2013). *De ontwikkeling van City-Oost*. Heerlen Vertelt. <https://www.heerlenvertelt.nl/2013/11/heerlen-city-oost/>

The text is about the development (1970 - 1980) of City Oost, located between St Pancratius Church, the walls of the old fort and Caumerbeek. The library of Heerlen is not located in this region, but the source says something about the ideas about city development in this period.

Simons, R., (06/01/2025). *Mijnbouw in Limburg*. Historiek. <https://historiek.net/mijnbouw-in-limburg/49234/>

The text is about Limburg's mining past. About the working situation before and after the mine closure. It helps to understand the period when the library was built.

Stichting Open Monumentendag Heerlen. (24/08/2022). *De vondst – Open Monumentendag Heerlen*. Open Monumentendag Heerlen. <https://openmonumentendagheerlen.nl/omdh/voormalige-bibliotheek/>

The text briefly describes, how Coenen's design for the library in one gesture formed a circular monumental closure of the square and how he made use of the immediately surrounding context in doing so.

Van de Weijer, M. (2017). *Herbestemming na de mijnsluiting. De ruimtelijke plangeschiedenis van Parkstad en het Emmaterrein, 1965 – 1997*. <https://surd.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Artikel4-2017.pdf>

This paper analyses spatial planning documents responding to the closure of the mines. The text is important, to understand the urban planning context of that period.

Archival Sources

Primary sources:

Architectural drawings and reports from Het Nieuwe Instituut and the municipal archives in Heerlen provide resources for this research. Het Nieuwe Instituut has a collection of Jo Coenen's works, including materials related to the Heerlen library, like as drawings, models and additional documentation.

ILLUSTRATIONS (in order 1-17)

(1) De Kunsthal, Rotterdam (1992) architect Rem Koolhaas (OMA) - deconstructive and high tech modernism. Source: <https://www.oma.com/projects/kunsthal>

(2) Centraal Beheer, Apeldoorn (1974) architect Herman Hertzberger - Structuralism. Source: <https://www.ahh.nl/index.php/nl/nieuws2/15-voormaligcentraal-beheer-wordt-hertzberger-parc>

3: ING House, Amsterdam (1987) architects Ton Alberts & Max van Huut - organic architecture. Photo: Bart van Hoek. Source: <https://www.architectuur.org/xfoto.php?pr=45&id=8&nr=1>

4: Gasunie Headquarters, Groningen (1994) architects Ton Alberts & Max van Huut - organic architecture and structuralism. Source: <https://www.albertsenvanhuut.nl/portfolio-items/headquarters-gasunie/>

5: Kubus Woningen, Rotterdam (1984) architect Piet Blom - structuralism. Photo: Dirk Verwoerd Source:

https://www.archdaily.com/482339/ad-classics-kubuswoningen-piet-blom/5313434fc07a80b93f000043-ad-classics-kubuswoningen-piet-blom-photo?next_project=no

6: Groninger Museum, Groningen (1994) architects Alessandro Mendini, Philippe Starck and Coop Himmelbau - postmodernisme - deconstructivism. Source: <https://www.petrucimarco.it/en/project-view/the-netherlands-groningen-museum/>

7: Netherlands Architecture Institute, Rotterdam (1988) architect Jo Coenen. Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1988). Source: Ibelings (1989) Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur

8: Céramique, Maastricht (1987) architect Jo Coenen. Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1987). Source: Ibelings (1989) Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur

9: Sketches of the Heerlen Library by Jo Coenen. Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur

10: Longitudinal section and side view of the library of Heerlen. Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur

11: Floorplans and section of the library of Heerlen (1986) architect Jo Coenen. Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur

12: Sketches of 'het hof' of the Heerlen Library Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur

13: Urban context of the library of Heerlen (1986), with the Thermenmuseum (1977) and Raadhuis (1942). Drawing: Architectenburo ir. Jo Coenen bv, Eindhoven (circa 1983). Source: Ibelings (1989) Jo Coenen: de Ontdekking van de Architectuur

14: Exploded view, perspective from the bottom, of the library of Apeldoorn (1984). Drawing: Hans Ruijsenaars (circa 1980). Source: Bless, F., Ruijsenaars, H. & de Vries, R. (1993) Hans Ruijsenaars: Architect.

15: Floorplans of the library of Apeldoorn (1984). Drawing: Hans Ruijsenaars (circa 1980). Source: Bless, F., Ruijsenaars, H. & de Vries, R. (1993) Hans Ruijsenaars: Architect.

16: Pictograms of spatial layout of the library of Zeewolde (1989). Drawing: Architectenburo K. van Velsen (circa 1995). Source: Rodermond, J. (1995). Koen van Velsen.

17: Pictograms of spatial layout of the library of Zeewolde (1989). Drawing: Michel Boesveld (circa 1995). Source: Rodermond, J. (1995). Koen van Velsen.

APPENDIX

Perioden	Bibliotheekorganisaties aantal	Leden x 1 000	Collecties		Uitleningen	
			Totaal	Boeken	Totaal	Boeken
1900
1950	.	238	2 940	2 940	8 396	8 396
1960	.	582	5 266	5 266	22 316	22 316
1970	.	1 497	12 476	12 475	58 681	58 676
1980	517	4 008	32 319	30 728	161 911	157 986
1990	606	4 346	44 525	41 515	185 724	173 009
2000	542	4 312	42 859	38 096	155 146	141 444
2010	166	3 996	31 323	28 532	100 102	93 398
2015	156	3 784	25 254	23 129	78 069	72 728
2016	154	3 716	24 859	22 924	73 468	68 811
2017	149	3 704	25 201	23 342	71 490	67 380
2018	146	3 655	24 471	22 717	66 608	63 307
2019	145	3 620	24 378	22 798	63 844	61 099
2020	140	3 492	24 818	23 382	44 958	43 428
2021	139	3 330	23 817	22 607	40 772	39 794
2022**	137	3 433	23 786	22 698	53 684	52 647
2023*	133	3 605	23 783	22 217	56 790	53 592

Table 1: Public Libraries; members, collection, loans from 1900 onwards.
Source: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/82469NED>

APPENDIX

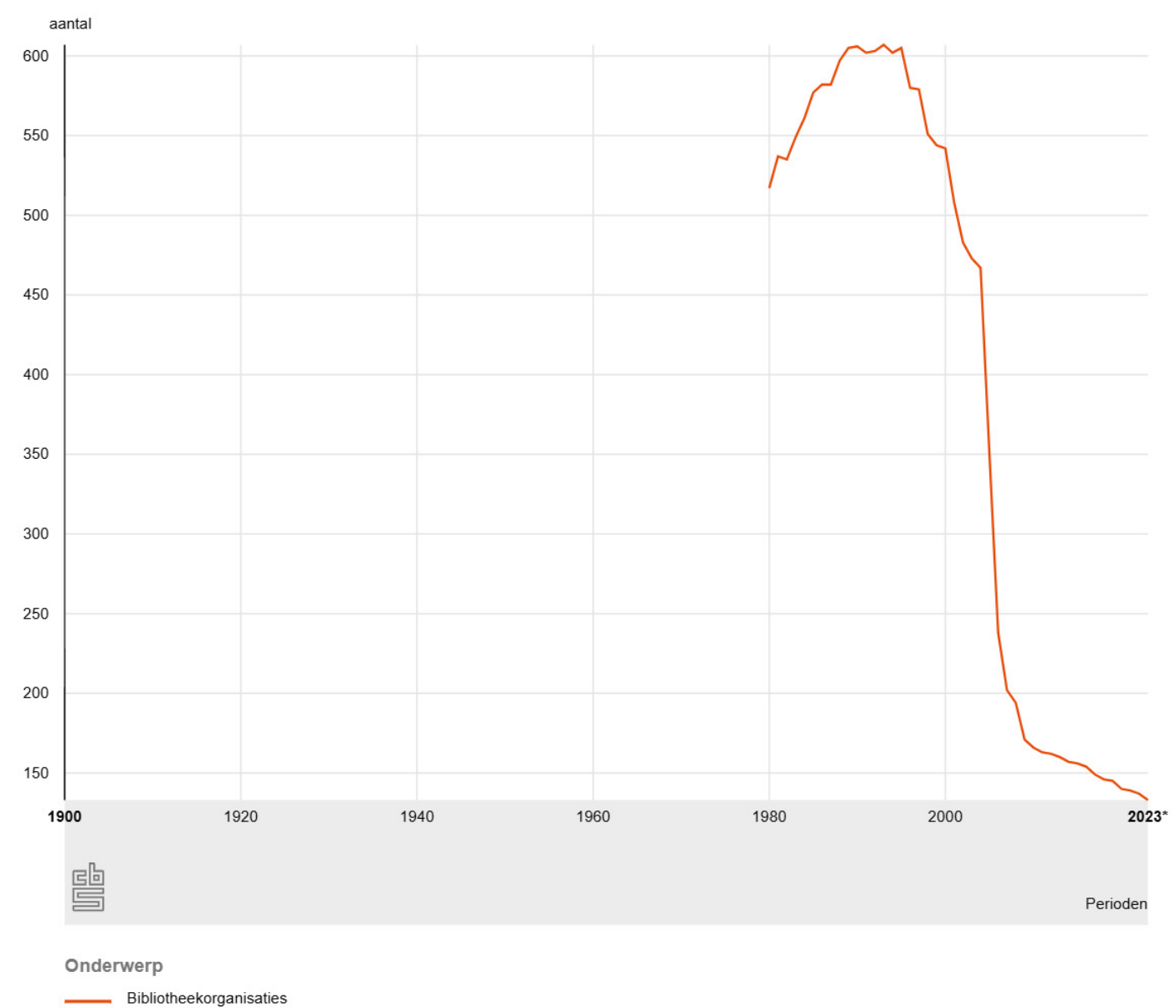


Table 2: Public Libraries; members, collection, loans from 1900 onwards.
Source: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/82469NED>

