Architecture and Libraries: A database of Spanish Public Libraries buildings

Isabel Cuadrado

Head of Libraries Projects Service, Subdirectorate-General for Libraries Coordination, Directorate General for Books, Archives and Libraries, Ministry of Culture. Spain

Introduction

The Directorate General for Books, Archives and Libraries of the Ministry of Culture, through its Subdirectorate-General for Libraries Coordination, has been working in the development of a project that permits promoting, systematizing and spread the architectural heritage of the Spanish Public Libraries. The main aim of this work is to develop a website available to users and professionals by the end of March 2008. It will allow citizens, librarians or the professional of design and architecture, to consult on line the documents and images about the public libraries buildings.

Home page of Arquitectura y bibliotecas

For this, we have developed an application that makes it possible to create visual itineraries on public libraries architecture. This database displays the contents through a combination of text and image and shows the information in an interface developed with Flash Technology through two main access points:

- Libraries: these are the routes of every public library.

- Itineraries: these are the visual routes concerning a particular subject (historic, artistic, geographic...) and that can be developed in cooperation with other libraries.

The database: selection of contents and users

The database has been designed with the aim of systematizing and increasing the access to the architectural heritage of public libraries. It is of interest to all the public wanting to know more, not only about the buildings but also about the cultural context developed around them, either if it is a small town or a neighbourhood in a big city.

This database can be of interest to citizens who only want to know about the architectural details of the public library, and also to librarians interested in the details related to the furniture necessary for a specific section, or to architects who want to consult the materials and building systems of these places, either they are a new construction or restored historical buildings that have been reused as libraries.

All of them will find what they are searching through a framework that displays the information mainly through images. We aim to offer a mainly visual application, but without leaving aside the contents that will inform about:

- Architectural projects.

- Ground plans and elevations.

- The façades.

- The interior details of every library building

- The cultural contexts, monuments and historic-artistic routes that can enrich our view of the library placed in our town or geographic area.

At the moment, we are working to allow the most specialized public to find the specific aspects in which they are interested among the collection of libraries that will display detail information about the spaces, the materials, the lighting, the equipment...

The database: organization and access to information

The library

We will proceed to explain the two main access points. The users choose one of them to start, – Libraries or Itineraries – ,and trough a simple alphabetic menu they select the option of their choice.

The objective of this route is to highlight the relevant architectural information of a library through a gallery of images and some explanatory texts.

Detail of the section related to the Zamora State Public Library

Information is arranged in four different fields that can be accessed though various icons and menus.

- The top of the page: Information about the library, including a link to the URL of that specific library, address, telephone number, post address and choice of language in which the information will be displayed.

- Below: menu of contents. The library itineraries are arranged in two different sections easily identified through the icons.

- Texts: location, history or description of the building, for instance.

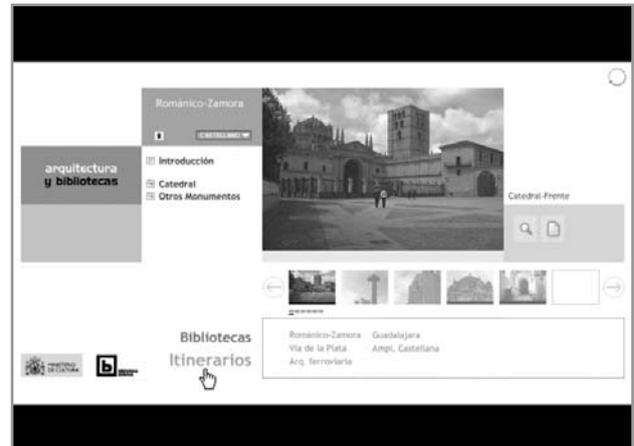- Images: presented in a gallery of images and texts that you can totally configure from the name of the section to the scope. Every image is displayed in three different versions and various sizes that can be enlarged by the zoom: miniature for the image selector, middle size to show the selected image and big when the image is opened with the zoom.

The access through the documents will allow the user to see various aspects of the architectural collection of buildings and their architects. The reading will be lead by a simple side scroll that will permit to move forward and to go more deeply into the information they are interested in through links to other websites (for instance, biographical details of the architects or bibliography about other works).

The images will give the user a chance to enlarge the images from the gallery. With a click on the zoom, the user will have a quality image available, for instance an aerial view of the city, enlarged images outside and inside the library.

The Itinerary

The access to the route of an itinerary is also selected in the same alphabetic menu, like in the previous case. The gallery of images allows us to enlarge photographic details of the buildings or to read a text explaining the information related, for instance, to the construction or to the architectural details of the façades.

Detail of the itinerary associated to the
Zamora State Public Library

Future challenges

Currently, and in an immediate future we are working in a repository that allow us to offer specialized information in terms of the various necessities of the professionals who will visit the website searching for: halls, entries, materials, lighting, furniture, disabled accesses, etc...

We intend to enable the users to do selective search through the various rooms of this group of libraries: children halls, newspaper libraries and that they could see the different topics in which they are

interested: furniture, materials (steel, glass, wood), lighting (outdoor and indoor, daylight or electric light).

Enlarged detail belonging to the images gallery

The criteria for the selective search in libraries will enable us to access only to the information related to the topic we are interested in, which will give the numerous users with different necessities (as for example, physical disabled people) a chance to consult from their home the various gates of the libraries (if they have entrance ramps from outside, lifts, etc.)

The Subdirectorate-General for Libraries Coordination of the Ministry of Culture coordinates the project; working as a technical system administrator, and giving the passwords to the libraries to increase the number of centres and itineraries while every new library joined to the list, develops its own contents freely, information that will be displayed later on in the Flash/XML version so that the users can access to it.

At present we are working for:

- Developing a completely accessible web regarding international standards (specifically, the AAA level of content access in the web 1.0 of W3C-WAI).

- Developing a multilingual web that allows the citizen to choose the texts in any of the Spanish official languages as well as in English; as it is now available in all the applications developed by the MCU collaborating with the Comunidades Autónomas (Regional Administrations).

- Accomplish links to other similar repositories.

We hope to reach these objectives very soon and to make our database available through the website of the Ministry of Culture.

Interesting resources

Romero, S. (2001). La arquitectura de la biblioteca: recomendaciones para un proyecto integral. Barcelona: Col.egui d'Arquitectes de Catalunya.

Coutín Domínguez, A (2002). Arquitectura de información para sitios web. Madrid: Anaya Multimedia.

Library of Virginia. Appendix C: guidelines for determining space needs. Planning for library excellence. [en línea]: http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whatwedo/ldnd/govadmin/pfle/AppendixC.pdf

http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk/gallery/main.php [consulted 08/10/07].