

Marcin Pędich

e-mail: mpedich@gmail.com

Power Distance in library architecture. An analysis of selected new library buildings in former East Germany

(Dystans Władzy w architekturze bibliotek. Analiza wybranych nowych budynków bibliotek na terenie Wschodnich Niemiec)

Słowa kluczowe: kultura organizacyjna, Dystans Władzy, budynki biblioteczne, biblioteki niemieckie

Abstrakt: Artykuł porusza problem przestrzeni bibliotecznej będącej jednym z elementów kształtujących kulturę organizacyjną biblioteki. Model wymiarów kulturowych Hofstede'go stanowi podstawę analizy oraz porównania budynków bibliotecznych zaprezentowanych w artykule. Tekst skupia się na wymiarze Dystansu Władzy. Artykuł jest kontynuacją wcześniejszych publikacji dotyczących wymiarów Indywidualizmu i Unikania Niepewności.

Keywords: organizational culture, Power Distance, library buildings, German libraries

Abstract: The article addresses the problem of library space as a component of a formative element of organisational culture. In particular it uses Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a tool to analyse and compare library buildings with each other and with an idealised theoretical model of a library. It focuses on Power Distance and is a continuation of earlier articles covering Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance.

Introduction

This is the third in a series of articles aiming to address library space as a formative element and manifestation of the organisational culture of a library. As in the previous instances [15; 17] it makes use of parts of Hofstede's six dimensional culture model as a tool facilitating the analysis and comparison of library buildings with both each other and an idealised theoretical model. While the previous articles addressed Individualism (IDV) and Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) this one focuses specifically on Power Distance (PDI). This paper will not include a discussion of the basics of culture theory, a description of Hofstede's model, or a justification for using it in this context, as these topics have been discussed extensively in the first article in this series [15]. They have also been addressed at length in my earlier publications [13; 14; 16]. The aforementioned article [15] also characterises the research method and the research area of the study that forms the foundation of this analysis.

Power Distance – definitions

Power Distance (PDI) is the first cultural dimension discussed by Hofstede, although in my research it has turned out to be less prominent in spatial organisation than Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance. Hofstede defines this dimension of culture as the range of expectation and acceptance for unequal distribution of power, expressed by less influential (subordinate) members of an institution or organization [5]. Power Distance affects the relationship between superiors and subordinates, between parents and children, between the teacher and students, or between the librarian and the reader. In other words, this dimension describes dependency relationships. In high PDI cultures there is a strong, one-sided dependence of subordinates on their superiors, accompanied by significant emotional distance. As a result, subordinates rarely address their superiors directly and do not oppose them. On the other hand, in low PDI cultures there is a relationship of interdependence accompanied by a small emotional distance. Therefore, subordinates have no problem addressing their superiors or expressing objections. In Hofstede's research Malaysia and Slovakia have the highest Power Distance (PDI = 104) and Austria has the lowest (PDI = 11) [5, p. 57–59].

In high PDI cultures organizations tend to be centralized, with an extensive, hierarchical leadership structure. Superiors expect subordinates to comply, while subordinates expect the supervisor to tell them what to do and how to do it. The relationship between subordinates and superiors has a strong emotional charge and the supervisor is often seen in a fatherly role. Differences in position within an organization result in significant differences in pay and in status, which also extends beyond the workplace and is emphasized by status symbols. A similar assumption is made about other areas of social life: it is believed that skills, wealth, and power should be related and therefore people holding them are entitled to privileges. Countries with high PDI often have autocratic or oligarchic governments and, since high PDI cultures tend to put rulers above the law, any trappings of democracy are mostly symbolic. These models of power are strengthened from childhood by school and family. Children are, above all, expected to obey and respect their elders. The teacher is a 'guru', who communicates personal wisdom to the students, and their authority, like parental authority, is unquestionable.

In low PDI cultures, superiors are treated more like ordinary employees, but with specific duties and powers. Open criticism of superiors is acceptable and they themselves often consult their subordinates. Accordingly, the other employees are expected to display initiative. As a result, organizations tend to decentralize and the relation between subordinates and superiors is more pragmatic than emotional. Differences in status between subordinates and superiors are small and do not extend beyond the workplace. Hence, the wage differences are smaller than in high PDI cultures and less importance is attached to status symbols. Government is treated similarly to leadership in organizations. Governments are democratically elected and their competences and privileges are strictly defined. It is commonly believed that everyone should have equal rights and using the privileges of power for personal needs is stigmatized. Such attitudes are strengthened by upbringing – teachers

and parents treat young people as partners and students are expected to show initiative. Communicating objective factual information is emphasised in teaching.

Power Distance in the library

Discussion of the importance of Power Distance in the organizational culture of a library must take into account that libraries are usually institutions with educational functions. Therefore, the relations between librarians and readers are analogous to those between teachers and students, especially in school and university libraries. This means that Power Distance is reflected not only in the relations between library staff and management, but also (and perhaps more importantly) in the relations between librarians and patrons. So is the performance of library tasks better facilitated by a smaller or greater Power Distance? In high Power Distance cultures the need to emphasize the status of librarians can lead to unnecessary barriers in access to collections and services. Therefore, it seems that it would be more beneficial for the realization of a library's tasks to have lower Power Distance, especially for public libraries. In the school library, on the other hand, greater Power Distance may support the role of the librarian as a teacher and guide. In this case, a lot depends on the prevalent teaching style in a given culture. It is difficult to say what the organizational culture of an academic library should look like in this context. It is worth noting that the organizational solutions used in contemporary libraries that increase the reader's independence, such as open stacks and on-line services, help to reduce Power Distance. An organizational culture characterised by high Power Distance may lead to clashes between the need to emphasize the librarian's status and the organisation of modern library work.

A number of scholars have expressed (more or less directly) their opinions regarding Power Distance, or some of its aspects, in the organisational culture of libraries. Henryk Hollender stated (albeit without much conviction) that the privileges of readers in a research library cannot be standardized, implying that, for example, professors should access collections on different terms than students, which points to a higher Power Distance (or possibly collectivism) as the norm in an academic library [6]. It is indeed sometimes the case that university staff hold certain privileges. For instance, in the University of Białystok University Library teaching staff used to have priority access to private study rooms and pay no fines for overdue books. Although it must be admitted that such minor advantages are justified more by their specific tasks related to research work than by the undoubtedly hierarchical nature of university organisation, which is reflected more clearly in informal gestures and attitudes.

On the other hand, a „high level of information culture” proposed by Katarzyna Materska as valuable in a library [11, p. 15] may be associated with a smaller Power Distance. This is suggested by such features of this „developed information culture” as „stimulating direct communication”, top down communication, and „being able to participate in the decision-making process,” [11, p. 15]. Zdzisław Gębołyś invoked the example of a German library which describes a new organizational culture characterised by decentralization of decision making and abolishing hierarchy. This indicates an intent to lower Power

Distance [4, p. 143]. Hanna Andruszko's discussion of talent management also seems to favour a lower Power Distance [1, p. 181]. Joanna Kamińska points out that in managing a library as a learning organization, one should, among others, encourage employees to suggest new solutions [7, p. 206]. The author considers a democratic management style to be the best suited for a library [7, p. 207], which also indicates a lower Power Distance.

Maja Wojciechowska lists delegating authority, which is more likely in a low Power Distance cultures, as a feature of an organisation focused on efficiency, innovation, and personal development of librarians [18, p. 221–226]. Jadwiga Kotulska also points out that leaders should delegate authority and responsibility to librarians [8, p. 194]. At the same time, however, her very clear emphasis on the role of the individual leader in shaping the organizational culture and managing the library indicates rather a paternalistic culture with a large Power Distance [8, p. 194]. The importance of the manager's personal authority is also emphasized by Kamińska [7, p. 207].

As for the organisation of library space, the third principle of Harry Faulkner-Braun's so-called „Decalogue” [3] – Accessibility – indicates a lower Power Distance as a preferred value in the organizational culture of libraries. What is more any solution that makes the patrons dependent on the help or decision of the other librarian will serve to raise the status of the latter in their mutual relationship, but also limit accessibility. Obstacles making it harder for patrons to access services and collections have the same effect. Thus, in order to ensure compliance with the principle of accessibility and to take full advantage of the architectural solutions supporting it, the organizational culture of the library should be characterized by a small Power Distance. This should also work in the other direction: a library built for accessibility can be expected to support the development of a low Power Distance culture.

Status symbols play an important role in high Power Distance cultures. All elements emphasizing the status of the library, librarians, and people in managerial positions, increase Power Distance. An excessively sumptuous décor in the library building might be one such element. The entrance to the library building is also a significant symbol. Power Distance may be increased by elements such as the need to cover a longer distance from the entrance to the nearest librarian or the need to climb stairs (especially if they are large and impressive).

An emphasised cloak room or security point at the entrance has a similar effect. Whereas in an individual department it might be a door that only opens from the inside. The appearance of the librarian's workstation also affects Power Distance – large desks on raised platforms emphasize the librarian's status. A closed stacks system also creates greater Power Distance than open stacks, as it forces readers to rely on intermediaries to search and access the collections.

The Power Distance between library management and staff is increased in a similar fashion. Large, well-equipped offices, guarded against uninvited guests by a secretary, separate offices for lower-level managers – these elements emphasize the hierarchy and increase the distance between superiors and subordinates. The location of these offices is also important: if the manager's office is closer to the main entrance than the information

desk, then we are probably dealing with a hierarchical organizational culture with a large Power Distance.

Conversely, reducing the Power Distance in the library is achieved primarily by avoiding these organisational solutions. The pragmatic aspect should dominate the design and spatial organization of a library building. One should strive to break down barriers (even symbolic ones) between readers, librarians, and collections, as well as between employees and management. Therefore, open stacks serve to reduce Power Distance. The presence of rooms where the director may hold meetings with employees is an indicator of a more participatory management style and lower Power Distance.

Power Distance in research

The nature of the research project has been discussed in detail in the first article [15]. In brief, the research was based on a questionnaire, completed by an observing researcher, regarding a number of features related to either high or low IDV, UAI (discussed in previous two articles [15; 17]), and PDI, which is the subject of this paper. What follows is a detailed discussion of the questions linked primarily to Power Distance.

The first question related to this dimension of culture asked whether the library appears to be open and easily accessible. Openness is a quality that may be difficult to unambiguously define. The impression that a library building makes on the reader plays a very important role in creating the atmosphere of openness. Although this is often subjective, it is possible to identify certain characteristic features of spatial organisation that affect an atmosphere of openness. The questionnaire assumes two standard affirmative answers and two negative ones. The first possibility is that openness is built by physically opening the library space, making it easily accessible to patrons. The second option is that much of the library is visible to readers, while physical divisions are maintained, thanks to the use of glass partition walls. On the negative side, a lack of openness may be projected by either an imposing, unfriendly style or actual obstacles preventing readers from freely accessing the library.

In many modern library buildings, the interior of the library is a single open space devoid of physical divisions. This gives patrons tangible freedom of movement in the library. Therefore, it may be associated with a smaller Power Distance on the one hand and weak Uncertainty Avoidance on the other. Actual freedom of movement limits the librarian's ability to control patrons and increases the unpredictability of their behaviour. Thus, it can be considered a symptom of low Uncertainty Avoidance. At the same time, by making the reader aware of this freedom of movement, one gives them a sense of independence and limits the role of the librarian, thus reducing Power Distance. Of course, the librarian is still very much needed in the library, but the patrons do not feel like they cannot do anything without the staff's help and supervision. A similar, although more subtle, effect is gained from opening the visual field: the absence of walls allows the users to see the entire interior, giving them a feeling of being in control of the situation instead of being controlled. It also limits the possibility of visual separation of employees (i.e. makes it harder for them to

„hide”), which also serves to reduce the distance between them and the readers. The use of glass partition walls has a similar symbolic overtone, while allowing greater control over the movement of people in the library. It can also increase the transparency of the institution’s operations. The key element here is the lack of visual separation.

These two answers were separated, because open planning is also the most flexible way of arranging space, requiring the least amount of effort and resources to transform it to fit changing needs. Therefore, it provides the ability to react quickly to changes and innovations and to experiment with new spatial arrangements. This suggests low Uncertainty Avoidance, alongside low Power Distance. Dividing space with glass partition walls does not provide this quality. It has to be noted, for due diligence, that this solution is often used as a compromise between the desire to keep the library open and the need to keep it quiet, especially in libraries too small for distance alone to separate more and less noisy areas sufficiently.

Two distinctive features, which make the library seem less open and accessible, have also been listed. The first problem may be the style and décor of the library. It is difficult to fully define this problem, as it is somewhat subjective, but there are certain elements that make the library seem „inaccessible and unfriendly”. Tomasz Kruszewski points to the importance of the design of the main entrance in this context [9, p. 298–306]: heavy, overly large or numerous doors may intimidate patrons. This also applies to doors inside the library. Illegible or insufficient signage may also be a problem. Long, narrow corridors may also be a source of anxiety for users, especially if they are insufficiently lit. Similarly, lack of sufficient lighting in general can be intimidating (in addition to the obvious practical problems it creates). An important stylistic element that creates the impression of inaccessibility is an excess of librarians’ status symbols, such as large, elevated counters, closed offices, or librarians’ desks „guarding access” to reading rooms. This „unfriendly” style can be associated with high Power Distance.

The second factor that makes a library building seem inaccessible is emphasising its divisions, as well as the presence of too many closed doors, an opaque interior plan, and a lack of clear information signs. Patrons who keep finding closed doors in their way feel like their presence in the library is undesirable. The resulting impression that using the library is a privilege rather than a right, as well as the necessity to ask librarians for help that often accompanies it, is associated with greater Power Distance, while excessive control over the movement of people may indicate strong Uncertainty Avoidance.

The next question asked to what extent the building complies with the requirements of the library’s work. First of all, does it perform functions that go beyond the basic tasks of a library? Many modern libraries devote some of their space to other goals – organizing exhibitions, conferences, workshops, or simply creating a place where readers can spend their free time. Making the library a „third place”, where patrons not only work but also spend time on other activities, gives them a greater sense of freedom and being „at home”, thus reducing Power Distance. On the other hand, devoting a significant part of library space to areas serving mostly to build up prestige at the expense of the readers might be

considered a status symbol. Similarly, if much of an academic library building is taken over by spaces serving the broader needs of the university, such as lecture halls or offices, it points to a more hierarchical organisational structure suggestive of high Power Distance.

There is also a question regarding the presence of greenery in the building, which seems to be the norm in Polish libraries. However, there is no essential part of library work that would require the presence of flowers or potted plants. This seems to be a manifestation of an aspect of organizational culture common to most libraries in Poland. Flowers and greenery create a friendly atmosphere, which may be an indication of a lower Power Distance. They are also associated with the feminine aspect of the dimension of Masculinity [5, p. 135–186] and thus may be a result of the librarian profession being dominated by women in Poland. Nevertheless, the homely atmosphere they create could serve to reduce Power Distance.

The style and aesthetics of the building of a library (its equipment and interior design), which are the subject of the next point in the questionnaire, say a lot about its organizational culture. First of all, they have a significant impact on developing the organizational culture by playing a key role in shaping the atmosphere of the library and its image in the minds of readers and librarians. They can also be the result of (conscious or not) beliefs of the people responsible for the design – librarians should be among these people, perhaps transferring the existing organizational culture of the institution to its new building. It is impossible to predict all the potential features of style and aesthetics of a library building and their cultural aspects. Therefore, this question has a more open character than the previous ones. Although there were a dozen or so typical answers describing stylistic and aesthetic features that a library building may have several of, it was impossible to predict all of them.

Aesthetics seem to be most strongly associated with Power Distance – an impressive, threatening, or monumental building increases PDI. Similarly, displays of wealth or a so-called „temple style” are status symbols and as such suggest greater Power Distance. In turn, a style that could be described as warm and friendly reduces this distance. Similarly, the pragmatic style reduces PDI, mostly because it lacks status symbols. Many aspects of style and décor may also be associated with other cultural dimensions, some of which have been discussed in previous articles [13; 15; 17].

The importance of doors and other visible and invisible barriers to accessing the library is addressed by the question „how many doors must the reader go through before reaching the first bookshelf or librarian’s desk?” This question applies not only to literal doors, but also to other obstacles: stairs, gates, etc. A large number of these, separating the reader from the librarian and library services, may be intimidating and create the impression that using the library is some sort of special privilege, which suggests high Power Distance.

It is also important what facility is placed closest to the library entrance. If it is an information desk, it indicates openness to the reader and low Power Distance, and if it is a computer station or open stacks area, it suggests even lower PDI, as well as strong Individualism. On the other hand, if administration is located at the entrance, especially

the director's office, it suggests greater Power Distance, because it indicates that the work done by the librarians (especially the head librarian) „behind the scenes” takes priority over library services. Greater Power Distance can also be inferred from placing status symbols near the entrance, or elements which serve to build up the prestige of the library, such as exhibition halls. As with style, it is difficult to predict all the possible answers and their implications here.

Power Distance in an idealized model

Subject literature and examples of good practice seem to point to the value of status symbols in relation to the library building as a whole, but not the librarian's status in relation to the reader. On the contrary, it is rather recommended that there be few status symbols, as they may conflict with functionality (e.g. registration required), accessibility (e.g. closed reading rooms, secretariats), or adaptation to the needs of the disabled (high counters and desks). The most important features of a modern library are openness [2] and accessibility [3; 12]. It seems obvious that these features should be reflected in the spatial organization of the library building. Glass partition walls serve only partially to create the impression of openness and accessibility.

To what extent should the building conform to the requirements of library work? Should it perform functions that go beyond its basic tasks (i.e. the circulation of collections and information services)? It would seem that the answer is yes [19, p. 169]. This is required by the concept of the library as „the third place” [10]. Also, in various articles presenting examples of good practice, authors usually boast about the presence of conference centres and such in their libraries.

The presence of greenery may not be an essential aspect of the spatial organization of libraries, but it is presented as desirable [19, p. 172] rather than harmful. It is also conducive to making the building more varied, which is a desirable feature [12].

It is impossible to clearly define what features should appear in the style and aesthetics of a library building, but there are several that are particularly advantageous. First of all, it should be original. It also seems desirable to demonstrate other features of good spatial organization, such as comfort, safety, efficiency [3; 12], or a modern and „friendly” style [19, p. 172–173]. Features such as excessive monumentalism, on the other hand, are undesirable.

The principle of accessibility requires that the first thing that a reader encounters after entering the library should be an information desk (or possibly a computer) and/or collections. They should also be separated from these facilities by as few obstacles (doors, stairs, etc.) as possible.

Summing up, analysis of the literature on the spatial organization of libraries clearly shows that it is desirable to reduce the Power Distance in the librarian-reader relationship as much as possible. Recommendations in this regard seem even firmer than for the previously discussed dimensions [15; 17]. The library is to be an open and friendly place where the reader feels at home.

Libraries in Germany

A general overview of the German libraries included in the study has already been presented in previous articles [15; 17], so I shall move straight into a discussion of the research results.

Philologische Bibliothek der Freien Universität [Philological Library of the Free University]

This three-storey circular building designed by sir Norman Foster is a part of the Rost-und Silberlaube campus of the Free University in Berlin and one of the more famous library designs. However, there are no status symbols in the library to accompany its relative fame. Although the first thing a reader encounters after entering the building are the information/circulation desks (even the locker rooms are further away, to the side), there is no need to check in and the counters are utilitarian and fairly low, so that the reader looks down at the librarians. The library also gives the impression of being very open and easily accessible. The entire building is a single open space with no divisions. The main staircase is open, with unrestricted view of almost the entire interior. There are hardly any doors in the library (and one of the few that there are opens automatically) and one would be hard pressed to find one that says '*keine eintritt*' ('no entry') – these appear in only two places in the library, one of which is in the basement at the bottom of the fire escape. There are closed and unmarked doors to some technical facilities, but they are inconspicuous – for the average reader they do not differ from a wall.

Neither are there any barriers to enter the library itself. A single revolving door leads to it, there is no visible security, no need to report to librarians or register in any way. Readers are required to leave coats or bags behind, but there is not even a typical cloakroom – items are left in automated (and very user friendly) lockers. The only issue with accessibility for outside visitors is that, although the library is located in a separate building, the entrance to it is inside the Freien Universität campus and there is no information outside that there indeed is a library in there. This is normal practice for a departmental library, but rare for a standalone building. It should be noted, however, that students are the intended users of the library, so this cannot be taken as a significant problem. Nonetheless, as someone who has spent quite some time looking for the library I cannot but wonder at why this would be the case. The building itself is dedicated solely to library work – there are no cafes, conference rooms, etc. This is probably because the library building is integrated into the university campus that performs these functions. Indeed, even the rest areas and social functions have been relegated to the corridors outside.

The style and aesthetics of the equipment and décor of the library building can be described as modern and original (mainly due to its overall shape that is meant to resemble the human brain). However, it is characterized by excessive standardization. Even the works of art all follow the same theme (see image 1). Nor is there any greenery in the library. Its style and furnishings are predominantly pragmatic. All in all, the *Philologische Bibliothek* building suggests an extremely low Power Distance, following the idealised model presented above.

Image 1. The characteristic ‘handwriting’ motif reproduced in all works of art throughout the library



Source: author’s collection.

Veterinärmedizinische Bibliothek der Freien Universität [Veterinary Medical Library of the Free University]

This small but delightful library is located in the adapted building of a riding hall at the campus of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Berlin’s Free University. The building is simple in shape and there are no visible status symbols in the library. The presence of staff is hardly felt at all, as there is only one information desk at the entrance, which is justified by the small size and open character of the library. The main part of the library is an open stacks area without unnecessary divisions. The sense of openness is enhanced by the high ceiling and large light well in the middle of the building.

It would seem that the building is too small to accommodate any additional functions and indeed there are no cafes and such, but there are seminar rooms, a nursing mother’s room, a children’s playroom, and a relaxation room (with an explicit prohibition against working in it), as well as numerous museum exhibits (see image 2). There is also a lot of greenery inside. This variety and the rich collection of zoological exhibits and animal-themed works of art make the interior design traditional and original at the same time. The library seems intimate and friendly.

Image 2. Interior of the Veterinärmedizinische Bibliothek der FU



Source: author's collection.

A few steps lead to the entrance door, which in turn opens directly into a locker room, from which a single door takes readers straight into the open stacks area and the information desk, which is right next to the entrance. The space of the Veterinary Library of the Freien Universität follows modern standards in displaying a very low Power Distance.

Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum [Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm Center]

This impressive building, housing the main Humboldt University library is best known for its cavernous main reading hall (see image 3). The library building is modern and original. It is also very impressive, although it can also be rather overwhelming. The building as a whole is decidedly monumental, but there are few librarians in it and there are no visible status symbols.

Image 3. Grimm Zentrum reading hall decks



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grimm-Zentrum_Leseterrassen.jpg#/media/File:Grimm-Zentrum_Leseterrassen.jpg

Glass is used in the walls of the central part of the building, but the panes are placed between thick pillars so that one cannot see much through them. Furthermore, the main reading room doors are narrow and almost indistinguishable from the glass panes in the walls, so it is possible for a visitor to simply not know how to enter it. The central open space allows users to see other parts of the library, but the thick pillars make the view very fragmented, while the cavernous size of this area and the resulting distances create a sense of separation rather than openness, especially since the reading „rooms” on staggered terraces are separated by the canyon-like „gap” in the middle. In addition, the rest of the building is a maze of narrow corridors, doors, and closed-off passages.

The building performs various functions that go beyond the basic tasks of the library. There is a bar here, although it is small for such a big library and overcrowded, so it is useful

for readers only. There is also an auditorium, numerous lecture halls, a video conference room, and publicly accessible computer stations in the entrance hall.

The first information desk is located in the entrance hall (which is separated from the street by a single door), although during the author's visit (in January 2016) it was not in use because of the low temperatures in this hall. However, it is the computer stations that are closest to the entrance. The collections are somewhat further away, since one has to go through one more door and a security gate behind the entrance hall and then either go around the ground floor of the building or up to the first floor.

Summing up, the spatial organization of the Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum building suggests fairly small Power Distance, although it should be noted that it generally has very few features that relate at all to this dimension of culture. However, it should also be noted that the few features that increase Power Distance – namely the imposing, not to say intimidating, central hall and the labyrinthine floor plan – are particularly prominent.

Volkswagen Universitätsbibliothek [Volkswagen University Library]

Named after its corporate sponsor, this modern building in central Berlin houses the libraries of the Technical University of Berlin and the Berlin University of the Arts. It is a very simple, albeit huge, structure, with hardly any status symbols inside (or indeed outside) the library. The counters are low and mostly placed off to the side. Librarians' presence is visible, but not overbearing. The library clearly focuses on self-service and one can use it freely without having any contact with its employees. Even borrowing books from the closed stacks collections (if the enormous open stacks area does not offer what one needs) is done without direct assistance from a librarian – the books are not handed out at a circulation desk but taken to a special room where they are placed on shelves, from which the readers who ordered them can take them themselves (and check them out using self-service terminals). The only exception is the small multimedia collection.

The spatial organization of the library gives a very strong impression of openness and accessibility. Apart from the requirement to leave bags and coats in a locker, there are no restrictions on accessing the library. A certain limitation may be presented by the need to have one's own padlock for the lockers (this is surprisingly common in Berlin's libraries). There also seem to be too few of those lockers. As a result many readers simply leave things on a shelf or on the lobby floor; there are in fact so many of them that it is very unlikely for any one particular bag to be stolen. While this is by no means a perfect or deliberate solution, it actually adds to the sense of easy-going latitude. The interior itself is an open space, mostly devoid of walls and doors. The one exception is the periodicals reading room in the basement, which seems to have been adapted from a closed stacks area. A winding hallway with walls of unpainted white bricks leads to it. It all looks somewhat improvised, which would explain the discrepancy with the rest of the library. It is also the only area of the library that is partly closed to the patrons.

There are several lecture halls, a bar, and a bookshop in the building, although they take up little space compared to the vast size of the entire library. The building is the

epitome of functionality. Its design emphasizes efficiency, modernity, and pragmatism. Most of the equipment is standardized, there are few ornaments, nor is there a lot of greenery. On the other hand, the library setup allows a variety of working styles and there are some elements of equipment that are more unique in character, such as the felt-covered two-person cubicles shown in image 4.

Image 4. Two-person cubicle in the Volkswagen Haus



Source: author's collection.

Readers coming in from the street only need to pass through a single revolving door to the main lobby and the doors to the main part of the library, directly behind which there is an information desk and collections in open stacks. The area closest to the entrance is the bookstore, followed by the lockers where readers leave their bags and jackets.

In conclusion, the spatial organization of the Volkswagen Universitätsbibliothek building is devoid of any elements that would increase Power Distance, which is in line with the extremely small Power Distance suggested by the idealised model.

Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden [Saxon State Library - Dresden State and University Library]

The main building of the Land, City and University Library in Dresden (SLUB for short) consists of two five-storey buildings joined by an extended underground space, which houses most of the readers' area. The librarians' desks are utilitarian and not particularly exposed or emphasised and the only status symbol might be the building itself, which is monumental and somewhat overwhelming. However, the library feels very open, if perhaps not very accessible. On the one hand, there are no barriers either to access the library from

the outside or to move around the building itself: there are few closed doors and they are in remote areas; nor is there excessively noticeable supervision by librarians. On the other hand, the library is big and the layout of the interior is not very clear, which makes it easy to become disoriented or even get lost.

There are several lecture halls, a café, and a book museum in the buildings, although they are small in relation to the scale of the entire library. The publicly accessible garden should also be considered a part of the library space. Although, the term garden here is not entirely accurate, because there is little vegetation here, other than grass. Nor is there any greenery inside the building. The library has a rather distinctive décor – on the one hand, it is very modern and on the other, it has many elements invoking the libraries of old – e.g. widespread use of wooden elements or an elevated walkway with bookshelves around the main reading room.

Image 5. SLUB's central reading hall with the visible light roof



Source: author's collection.

A single entrance door (and possibly revolving security gates) is all people entering the library have to cross, before encountering the first librarian. The first thing the reader encounters after entering are lockers for bags and clothes and something of a „waiting room” with sofas set up in the entrance hall. From here the readers move to the circulation desk or reading room, depending on the direction they choose.

To sum up, the spatial organization of the Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden is practically devoid of elements that increase Power Distance, which is in line with the recommendations of the theoretical model.

Bereichsbibliothek DrePunct [DrePunct Departmental Library]

This is one of SLUB's departmental libraries, located right across the street from the Central Library. There are no visible status symbols in the library. Librarians' presence is hardly visible at all. There are only two information desks, both at the entrance. The building also gives the impression of being open and easily accessible. Almost the entirety of it is an open space without divisions and the few partitions present are mostly made of glass or quite low (not reaching the ceiling). The only clearly separated rooms are workshops that are part of the so-called „Maker Space”. The impression of accessibility is not that strong from the outside, because the library is entered through the adjacent faculty building, which separates it from the street and has a completely different shape and function.

The main library building itself is completely devoted to fulfilling its primary functions. The only area that does not serve to implement its basic tasks is the aforementioned „Maker Space”. However, one can think of this facility as more of a separate institution managed by the library than an inseparable part of it and in any case, though it is accessed from the library it is also located in the adjacent building.

The style and aesthetics of the library emphasize modernity and efficiency, but are also not especially varied. In terms of décor, the library seems like little more than a warehouse (see image 6). There are very few decorative elements, all furniture is uniform, and there are no plants, other than the trees visible through the glass exterior walls. In conclusion, the spatial organization of the DrePunct library shows rather a small Power Distance (similar to what is suggested by the theoretical model), but has few elements relating to this cultural dimension at all.

Image 6. Inside the DrePunct library



Source: author's collection.

Zweigbibliothek Erziehungswissenschaften [Branch Library for Educational Sciences]

This small library occupies a modest building, devoid of any visible status symbols. There is only one librarian's station, and the reader's freedom of movement is unrestrained (see image 7). Only the group study rooms and the parents' with children reading room are harder to reach, because they are accessed from a closed-off staircase. It seems that they were not included in the original plan and only later were rooms adapted for this purpose, which had originally been outside of the readers' area of the library. There are no areas in the building that do not support the library's basic tasks, which is not surprising considering its small size.

The equipment and décor of the library are modern, but quite simple – pragmatic and uniform. There are, however, some potted plants in the building. The information desk closest to the entrance to the library is only separated from the street by double doors. All in all, there is little to say about this unassuming library, but what there is indicates very low Power Distance, in line with the recommendations of the theoretical model.

Image 7. The open stacks area of the Zweigbibliothek Erziehungswissenschaften



Source: author's collection.

Zweigbibliothek Forstwesen [Forestry Branch Library]

Although this library is part of the SLUB library system, it is located not in Dresden, but in the nearby town of Tharandt, which houses the Faculty of Forestry. It is a simple but modern building, with no visible status symbols in the library. Although the central information desk clearly dominates the main hall, which itself is in the building's centre of gravity, it is the only librarian's station in the library, so the presence of staff is not overbearing. The information desk is also quite far away from the entrance (the canteen is closest to it), because readers have to go upstairs (so they need to pass the front door, take the stairs or the elevator, and pass through the door to the open stacks area) to get to it. Besides that,

there are no barriers (neither physical nor organizational) limiting access to the library: there are two entrances (quite a lot for such a small building), most partition walls are glazed and the open stacks area is a single open space (see image 8). The closed stacks area on the second floor is closed off to readers, but since it takes up an entire floor, visitors do not really notice this inaccessible part of the library.

The only part of the library that does not directly serve its basic functions is the canteen, although it should be noted that it occupies a significant part of the building. Allocating the entire ground floor to „non-library” functions is a thought out move in this case, as it is meant to protect the collections against the risk of flooding. The previous building of Zweigbibliothek Forstwesen sustained water damage during a flood in 2002, which informs much of the new building’s design.

Finally, the building lacks a vivid style – it is modern and pragmatic and nothing else. Summing up, the spatial organization indicates a low Power Distance, although slightly larger than in the other German libraries included in the study or in the theoretical model. This library diverged from the German norm also on other dimensions [15; 17]. This can be attributed primarily to solutions motivated by the aforementioned fear of flooding.

Image 8. Interior of the Zweigbibliothek Forstwesen



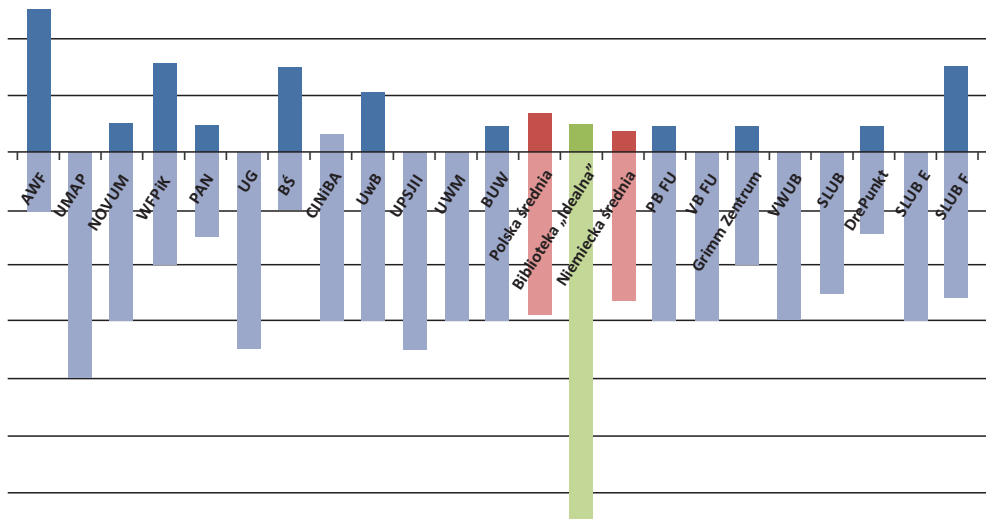
Source: author’s collection.

Conclusions

Figure 1 presents the relative Power Distance suggested by the spatial organization of the analysed libraries. It should be emphasized that the Power Distance analysis is based on a smaller number of data points than that of the two dimensions discussed in the previous articles [15; 17]. This is due not so much to the inclusion of a (slightly) smaller number of these points in the observation questionnaire, but because there were fewer elements in the

spatial organization of the analysed libraries that would affect Power Distance one way or another. This is particularly evident when comparing the results from individual libraries to the theoretical model (marked in green in fig. 1), which is significantly lower on the negative side of the PDI scale than any of the analysed libraries. The number of elements suggesting high Power Distance is shown above the axis, and the number of elements suggesting low PDI is shown below the axis¹.

Figure 1. The relative Power Distance suggested by the spatial organization of the analysed libraries



Source: author's research.

Similarly to the dimensions of Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance, presented in the previous articles [15; 17], there is greater differentiation among libraries in Poland than in Germany, although the sample seems to be more uniform with regard to this dimension. Only three libraries in Poland and one in Germany stand out from the other analysed libraries (both Polish and German). The averages for both countries are also similar. Therefore, this is the only dimension of culture for which the results of the observations do not fully agree with Hofstede's cultural research results. Hofstede ascribes a much greater Power

¹ Key: AWF – AWF library in Poznań, UMP – Library of the Medical University in Poznań, Novum – Novum Philological Library in Poznań, WFPIK – Polish and Classical Philology Library of the Adam Mickiewicz University, PAN – Polish Academy of Sciences Library in Gdańsk, UG – Gdańsk University Library, BS – Silesian Library in Katowice, CINIIBA – Scientific Information Centre and Academic Library in Katowice, UWB – University of Białystok Library, UPJPII – Library of the Pope John Paul II University in Kraków, UWM – University Library in Olsztyn, BUW – Warsaw University Library, Polska średnia – the average result for all analysed Polish libraries, Biblioteka „Idealna” – idealised theoretical model of library space based on literature and best practices, Niemiecka średnia – the average result for all analysed German libraries, PB FU – Philologische Bibliothek der Freien Universität, VB FU – Veterinärmedizinische Bibliothek der Freien Universität, Grimm-Zentrum – Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum, VWUB Volkswagen Universitätsbibliothek, SLUB – Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, DrePunkt – Bereichsbibliothek DrePunkt, SLUB E – Zweigbibliothek Erziehungswissenschaften, SLUB F – Zweigbibliothek Forstwesen.

Distance to Polish culture. Although it should be noted that the Polish sample included two libraries whose spatial organization clearly indicated a large Power Distance, in direct contravention of industry standards and theoretical recommendations. There were no such libraries in the German sample.

In general, most libraries in the sample (18 out of 20) are characterized by a much greater number of aspects of their spatial organization that point toward a low Power Distance than elements suggesting high PDI. In most of them, there are indeed very few, if any, elements suggesting a high Power Distance. Therefore, it can be said that in relation to this dimension, most of the analysed libraries follow the recommendations of the theoretical model. However, it should be noted that, unlike in the case of dimensions discussed in the previous articles [15; 17], in none of the analysed libraries does the number of elements of spatial organization suggesting low Power Distance even come close to the idealised library model. Therefore, it can be said that the discussed library buildings owe their apparent low PDI more to a lack of elements that would increase it than to a conscious effort to decrease it.

As in the case of the other two dimensions, discussed in previous articles [15; 17], there seems to be no correlation with the library's establishment date or the region or city where it is located. However, the use of open stacks (or lack thereof), which was a key factor shaping the dimensions discussed in previous articles seems to be less important. Admittedly, both library buildings that seem to have a distinctly high Power Distance, have a closed stacks system, as does the Zweigbibliothek Forstwesen in Tharandt, which has a slightly greater Power Distance than other German libraries. However, the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the University Library in Białystok, which use a closed stacks system, seem to have a low Power Distance; lower than the Library of the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology of the Adam Mickiewicz University, which uses open stacks. As for the analysed German libraries in particular, their results can be generally attributed to the fact that, while no great effort was made to intimidate the readers and build a Power Distance between them and the librarians, little was also done to make the library seem more friendly.

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