

Marcin Pędich
mpedich@gmail.com

An intercultural analysis of library buildings in Galwey County, Ireland

(Analiza międzykulturowa budynków bibliotecznych w hrabstwie Galwey w Irlandii)

Słowa kluczowe: budynki biblioteczne, architektura biblioteczna, wymiary kultury, biblioteki irlandzkie

Abstrakt: Publikacja jest efektem wizyty studyjnej w Galwey w Irlandii, podczas której poddano obserwacji organizację przestrzenną lokalnych bibliotek. W badaniu wykorzystano metodologię stosowaną wcześniej w obserwacjach niemieckich i polskich bibliotek akademickich. Pozwala to na pewne porównania, aczkolwiek z zastrzeżeniem, że charakter próby z Galwey różni się nieco od tej użytej i zaprezentowanej wcześniej. Nawet jeśli pominięto niektóre porównania, autor wyraża nadzieję, że dogłębna analiza pięciu różnych bibliotek w jednym hrabstwie w Irlandii może stanowić źródło zainteresowania czytelników.

Keywords: library buildings, library architecture, dimensions of culture, Irish libraries

Abstract: This article is the result of a brief study visit to Galwey, Ireland, in the course of which I had the opportunity to observe the spatial organisation of local libraries. In the study I have used methodology previously applied to observations of German and Polish academic libraries. This allows for some comparisons, albeit with the disclaimer that the character of the Galwey sample is slightly different from the one used and presented previously. Even if any comparisons are to be disregarded, I present an in-depth analysis of five various libraries in a single county in Ireland, which might be of interest to our readers.

Galwey University Library

Considering how large and important the University is, this library is the best place to start. It is located in the James Hardiman Building, at the very heart of the university campus. The building is a mix of brutalism and modernism typical of the 1970s (it is very similar to the Nicolaus Copernicus University Library in Toruń) and must have seemed like the peak of modernity in its day. It is a three-storey structure, housing 700 thousand volumes, including over 500 thousand printed books.

Two caveats need to be made. Most importantly, the James Hardiman Building is old and it shows (see image 1). By the librarians' own admission, it is at the end of its lifecycle and there are, indeed, plans to build a new one within the next few years. However, it is quite flexible, so one could argue that its current arrangement is still largely a matter of choice.

Another issue that needs explaining is the adjacent Nursing and Midwifery Library. While it is technically in a separate, three-storey building, with its own name and, presumably, a separate collection, it is also tiny and freely accessible from the main library building, has no website of its own, and does not seem to have any staff. It is therefore treated as a part of the James Hardiman University Library for the purposes of this study.

Image 1. The James Hardiman Library Building at the Galway University Campus



Source: NUI Galway. In *Wikimedia Commons* [Dokument elektroniczny]. Tryb dostępu: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=118032931>.

Individualism

There are open stacks areas in the James Hardiman Library (albeit inaccessible during my visit, due to pandemic restrictions), but they are small in comparison to the number of reading spaces. It is clear that the main access paradigm is through lending from closed stacks, which are located in the basement.

The library is divided into parts primarily based on subject matter, though this division is not very prominent. There are separate sections with journals, video, and microfilms, but most of the accessible collection consists of books divided by subject. Crucially, the various floors of the library contain books on different subjects. Nevertheless, the division is not made obvious – the whole open stacks collection is in a single (mostly) open space, albeit stretched over a number of floors. Neither is there particularly conspicuous signage denoting individual floors or parts of the library as dedicated to a particular subject area. The one exception is the Nursing and Midwifery Library mentioned above.

There are quite a few group study rooms in the library, located in two different places in the building, as well as another three in the adjacent Nursing and Midwifery Library. There is also a Postgraduate Reading Room, but it most likely serves more as an office space for PhD students than an actual reading room. There are no designated areas for more senior faculty members.

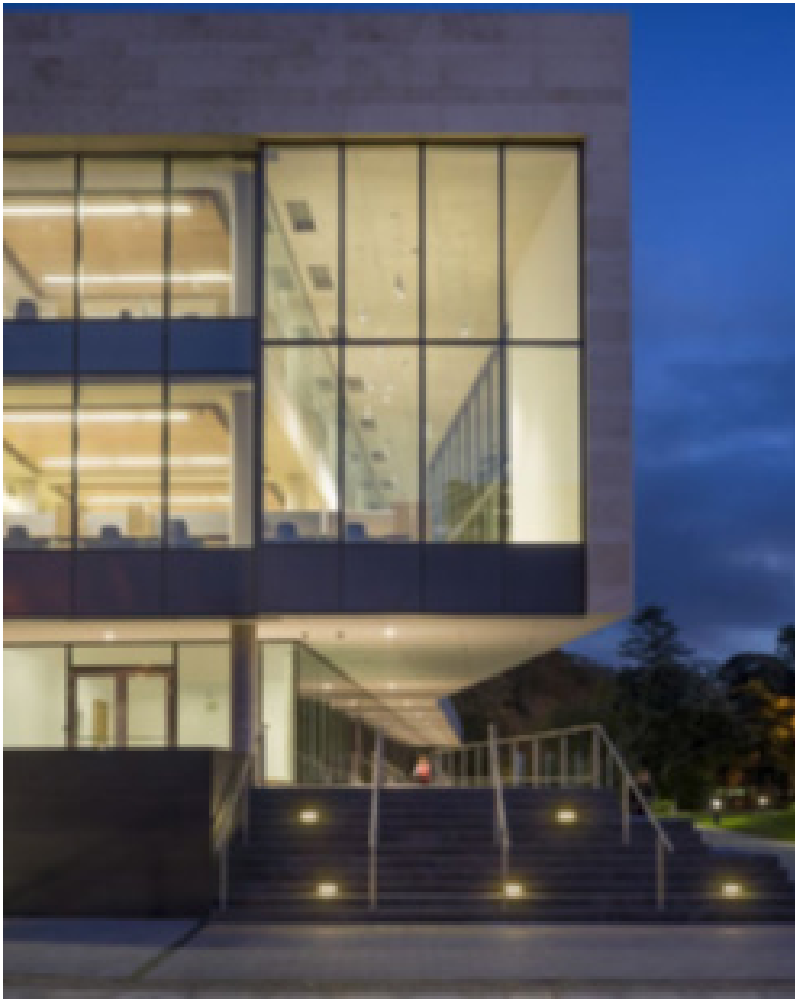
Neither is there any room for readers to socialize. Although the size of the library and abundance of group study rooms makes it possible to mingle, the highly stressed requirement for silence strongly discourages socializing. There are, however, some sofas and armchairs in the hallway of the James Hardiman Building, through which one enters the library.

Computerisation and automation is also very visible. There are a lot of computers in the library, but only a few information desks (mostly circulation desks at the entrance). Although most of these computers are located in a few designated „PC Suites”, rather than dispersed throughout the building. There are also self-service stations for lending out books from the open stacks section, as well as drop-in boxes and automated lockers for picking up books on order from the closed stacks part of the collection.

While no other University facilities, with the exception of the Postgraduate reading room, occupy any space in the library building, it is in fact closed to the public. I had to get permission to even look inside. I was told by the staff that this is a common practice in academic libraries in Ireland, although the ATU Library in Galway is open to anyone.

The overall impression that the library building makes is unimpressive (pun intended). There is very little variety in the interior's furnishings. There are a few different types of desks, but other than that it is all fairly uniform in style. There is also no art or decoration of any kind. The building itself might have had quite the wow factor when it was built in the 1970s and is indeed a great example of the architecture of the period. The university campus guide even recommends this area as an attraction, because of the characteristic architecture of the surrounding buildings, including the Hardiman Building. It still can make quite an impression under certain circumstances, as demonstrated by some of the night-time photos that can be found on-line (cf. image 2). Nevertheless, there is a reason this style of architecture was abandoned and time has not been generous to the library building. At most times and most angles it looks like a drab, dull concrete block. The unimaginative interior furnishings and visibly deteriorating infrastructure add to the negative impression.

Image 2. James Hardiman Building by night



Source: James Hardiman Library, University of Galway. In *Google Maps* [Dokument elektroniczny]. Tryb dostępu: https://www.google.com/maps/uv?pb=!1s0x485b96f3c27c4a39%3A0xf20fbab62b-b8e469!3m1!7e115!4shttps%3A%2F%2F5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipPKsSjev_qSkYoXnJpHxjIBGzunVukdM-QMksMD%3Dw1916-h957-n-k-no!5sJames%20Hardiman%20Library%20-%20Google%20Search!15sCgIgAQ&imagekey=!1e10!2sAF1QipPKsSjev_qSkYoXnJpHxjIBGzunVukdM-QMksMD&chl=en&csa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj17u7K0u77AhXrlosKHZcZCzsQ7ZgBegQIXRAC.

On the whole, this gives the library a very average level of Individualism, as elements that suggest collectivism are equally numerous to those that point to a higher IDV. This seems inconsistent with Ireland's cultural background, which is characterised by moderately high individualism – Hofstede [3; 4] gives Ireland an IDV score of 70 – and a stark departure from the modern standards of library architecture and design. Not only are there

fewer elements promoting high individualism, but more importantly, there are many more aspects that point towards low IDV than is suggested by modern standards of library architecture and design. The James Hardiman building also differs in this respect from other libraries in Galway, which are closer to the theoretical model (cf. figure 8). This is most likely related to the use of closed stacks and the library's age, although, as mentioned before, its open plan would allow for it to be reorganised to reflect more modern design sensibilities.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The James Hardiman Library building clearly follows the essential tenets of flexibility, as understood in the period when it was built. The whole structure is based on pillars, with no load-bearing walls, other than the ones surrounding the centrally located hubs with lavatory facilities, staircases, lifts, and technical utilities¹. However, the size of these hubs and their central location is something of a problem, as they take up a large chunk of the interior and obscure lines of sight. More importantly, the library does not seem to have taken advantage of this flexibility, as the layout still feels very much like the 1970's concept of modernity.

While the library does have an essential internal division, it is not in any way obvious to observers. This also applies to the division between patrons' and librarians' areas. Although there is a clearly separate staff area, there are also many small offices on the lower floors, which intermix with the readers' area. Although, admittedly, in some cases this is probably meant to facilitate contact with the staff. The centre of gravity of every floor is somewhere between the two communication and utilities hubs, among the open stacks, so one can say that both the reader and the books are at the focal point.

While access to the library is strictly controlled (with gates opened by library card and lack of access to the public), inside there seems to be hardly any oversight. There are but a few librarians, mostly at the entrance, and it is easy to remain hidden from view. There are also very few closed doors, other than those leading to staircases. These are fire doors and remain shut at all times. There are also some locked doors, leading to the James Hardiman Research Building, but they are on the perimeter and do not obstruct the movement of patrons. The same applies to the few offices and group study rooms. Neither are there many prohibition signs in the library. There is overall not much signage. The most conspicuous signs are the ones admonishing readers to remain quiet, which seems to be something of a key issue for the library, perhaps pointing to some tension between student behaviour, prompted by the rather open spatial arrangements, and the natural conservatism of a library that has been occupying the same (largely unchanging) space for 50 years.

This conservatism can also be seen in the library's surprisingly high apparent uncertainty avoidance. While the number of elements that would drive UAI down is similar to that of the other libraries in Galway and in the theoretical model, the number of factors that might indicate higher uncertainty avoidance is far greater than in either of those².

¹ It would not have looked out of place in Cudnik's 1980 compendium on library architecture and design

² For questions where it was impossible to give a single unambivalent answer, I opted to select more than one answer, which seemed reasonable, considering the nature of the questionnaire. If one were to assume that

It also seems to be at odds with Ireland's cultural dimensions scores, as calculated by Hofstede [3; 4], who gives Ireland a UAI score of 35. As I have shown before [5;10], libraries with closed stacks systems tend to have higher uncertainty avoidance. This might be one of the factors here, alongside the age of the building and apparent lack of major updates to its spatial organisation.

Power Distance

Controlled access seems to be the only status symbol in the library. It also feels, as was already mentioned, very open. Technically the whole library is an open space, with no internal divisions, although there are a few offices and group study rooms around the perimeter, as well as locked doors to the adjacent James Hardiman Research Building. However, due to their location, they do not impact this sense freedom of movement significantly. Even the PC suites are not in separate rooms. The only exception to this is the Nursing and Midwifery Library, which is in a separate building, connected through a short corridor. However, this open design is significantly hampered by the centrally located communication hubs, one of which contains lavatory facilities, staircases, and lifts, and the other serving technical purposes. Their size means that they obstruct lines of sight making the library seem smaller and harder to navigate than it actually is.

The only function that this space serves, which goes beyond the core tasks of the library, is to house the Postgraduate Reading Room, which seems to be more of an office space for PhD students, than an actual reading room.

As far as style is concerned, the Galway University Library is, as mentioned before, very unimpressive. There are no decorative elements inside and no plants. While a lot of the furniture is new, it is very uninteresting and the interior looks visibly aged and worn out. Other than that standardisation and practicality dominate.

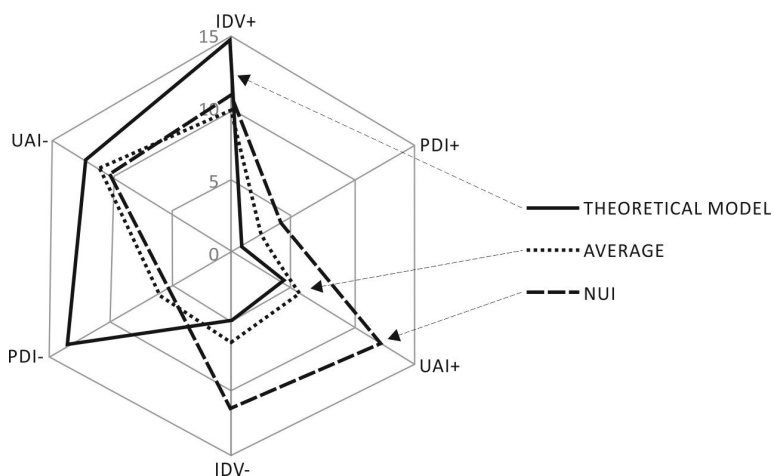
The library is, however, easily accessible. Assuming the starting point is the hallway of the James Hardiman Building (of which the library occupies but one wing), one only needs to cross the gates (which are opened with a library card) to enter the entry hallway where two circulations desks can be found. However, since these are designed to accommodate large queues and clearly not to provide information to patrons, it might be said that to have any meaningful interaction with the library, one must go further into the main open space area – through yet another door. If we take the outside courtyard as the starting point, that adds another double doorway (albeit automated).

In terms of power distance, the James Hardiman library building is much closer to other libraries in Galway: it has slightly more high PDI aspects and slightly fewer elements that would lower power distance, but the difference is not as apparent as is the case with the other two dimensions. While the latter number is a clear departure from what would be suggested by subject literature, the same can be said of every library in Galway and

contradicting answer “cancel out” instead, this would bring the number of elements indicating high UAI down a little, but also bring down the number of elements indicating low UAI. In the end, the James Hardiman library building would still be an outlier in the sample.

indeed most of the libraries I have studied in either Germany [9] or Poland [5]. Overall, the building's spatial arrangements suggest low power distance, which is also in line with the country's cultural values – Hofstede [3; 4] gives Ireland a PDI score of 28. Figure 1 shows the relative positions of apparent cultural dimensions of the National University of Ireland library building in Galway, compared to averaged results for other libraries in Galway County and results based on subject literature

Figure 1. The relative positions of apparent cultural dimensions of the National University of Ireland library building in Galway, compared to averaged results for other libraries in Galway County and results based on subject literature



Source: self-elaboration.

ATU University Library

Let us begin with explaining some of the confusion that may arise from the recent history of the library's parent institutions. In April 2022, mere weeks before my visit, the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology had been officially dissolved and its functions transferred to the Atlantic Technological University, created through a merger of GMIT and two other institutes of technology. Therefore, in various sources (including on-line) the campus and the library within are interchangeably referred to as either GMIT or ATU Galway. Regardless of its name, the library is located in a modern building at the university campus, overlooking Galway Bay. More specifically, it is housed in its most iconic building, distinguished by its sail-like copper panels, which are meant to invoke both Galway's maritime traditions and technological innovation (see image 3).

Image 3. ATU Galway (former GMIT) library building



Source: ATU [Dokument elektroniczny]. Tryb dostępu: https://www.atu.ie/sites/default/files/styles/homepage_hero/public/2022-03/GMIT-Galway-Campus.jpg.

Individualism

An open stacks area, holding 45 of the libraries 90 thousand volumes, occupies a large part of the building. Although this is not obvious at the first glance, this collections is primarily divided by subject matter – some classification numbers are held upstairs and the rest on the ground floor. It is further divided between the Journal Archive and the book collection, with both of these collections split between the two floors by subject, following the same classification. This division is slightly more conspicuous: broadly, it is journals to the left, books to the right. It is most clear on the upper floor, where journals are shelved along the left wall. The Western Theological Trust collection, which is also housed upstairs, is also clearly marked as separate. It should, however, be stressed that the whole collection is stored in a single open space.

There are 15 group study rooms in the library, with clear rules of booking, located upstairs along the left wall. It is clear that they perform an essential function in the library. There are, however, no special reading rooms, including for the faculty. The Postgraduate Research Office, located in the library, is in fact not a reading room, but an office space used by the university's numerous postgraduate students, who could not be accommodated elsewhere.

As for social spaces, there is an area on the ground floor with low sofas and a large table on the upper floor, which seem to facilitate this function (see image 4). It must also be noted that the library is part of a larger campus (entry is from a general purpose hallway), which provides space for such functions. There is in fact a cafeteria right opposite the library entrance.

Image 4. ATU Library lounge area



Source: author's collection.

Surprisingly, there is only one self-service checkout booth, which the librarians are not particularly happy with, although it does see a lot of use. This is unexpected, as all other libraries I have seen in Ireland, even the smaller public ones, do facilitate self-service and often have numerous devices. Similarly, information desks are more prominent than computer terminals. While computer stations can be found all around the library, they are placed rather discreetly, which makes the two circulation desks at the entrance more conspicuous. These terminals can only be used to access the catalogues. The general purpose PCs seem to all be housed in one IT room.

The whole interior is in the same modern style, but there is a number of different desk arrangements and styles, as well as some sofas. The views outside and down the light wells from the upper floor are also leveraged to provide interesting little corners to sit in. Overall the impression is positive: cohesive, but with enough variety.

The whole underground floor of the building is not a part of the library, but serves other purposes. One may say that, since the library is integrated into the wider campus, this area should simply not be considered as part of the library. On the other hand, it is still physically a part of a building erected specifically to house the library and there is a rather conspicuous closed entrance to the underground floor in the library. Other than that, the only area taken over for university purposes is the aforementioned Postgraduate Research Office. It is also specifically noted that faculty members are not allowed to book group study

rooms (presumably for classes). Furthermore, the library is also open to the public, which is, as I was told at the Galway University Library, not a standard for academic libraries in Ireland.

The interior of the ATU Galway library building is definitely interesting and attractive. It is also capable of inducing small gasps of delight, though perhaps not a particularly resounding „Wow”. The whole structure on the other hand, with its copper plating, is indeed quite impressive, at least when viewed from Galway Road and the bay. Overall the building suggests moderate individualism, in line with Ireland’s cultural dimensions values, similar to the other libraries in Galway (other than the James Hardiman building at NUI) and slightly less pronounced than subject literature would suggest.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The building is mostly flexible, although the light-wells might be a problem if major changes are needed. Open stacks are found at the centre of gravity of each floor and the building as a whole. For the most part, the division between the librarians’ and readers’ areas is preserved. There are a few offices accessible from the main open stacks area, but their purpose is to allow access to section librarians. They may perhaps be seen as something of a cross between an office and an information desk.

Although the library is divided into sections following a specific system (by subject between floors and between journals and books on each floor) and the Western Theology Collection is clearly marked out, everything is still located within a single open space, with clear lines of sight, even between the two floors.

Internet access is provided via WiFi. There is eduroam and a guest network that requires registration via phone number or e-mail, although it does not work terribly well – I only got the password on the next day after visiting the library. The internet can also be accessed from computers in the PC Suite. The ubiquitous computer terminals only provide access to the catalogues.

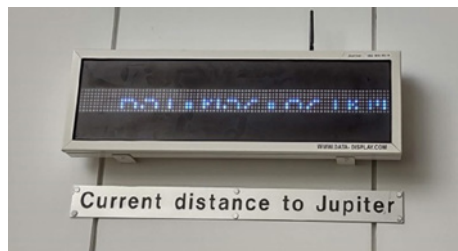
There is very little ostensible oversight over the readers. There are only a few staff members at the entrance, there are no conspicuous CCTV cameras, and some of the desks are deliberately arranged between the shelves in a way that allows for a greater degree of privacy. There are also hardly any barriers to movement within the library – the staircase is open and the only spaces with doors are located along the left wall. These are all fairly small areas with a specific purpose. There is also very little signage in the library. Overall this gives the ATU library a fairly low uncertainty avoidance score – much lower than the NUI library in Galway, but similar to Galway’s public libraries and in line with both Ireland’s cultural values [cf. 3; 4] and the assumptions of the theoretical model [cf. 10].

Power Distance

The library is definitely not intimidating – there are no librarians’ status symbols in it and it seems very open and accessible. Most of it is a single open space available to the readers. However, the library does not offer any functions that would go beyond its primary tasks, even though there is a significant part of the building itself taken over for university use (entire underground and the Postgraduate Study Office).

While the interior of the building is pleasant and does provide a few interesting details, its style has a clear focus on modernity and practicality, with few decorative elements, other than the (admittedly, very cool) displays informing about the distance to other planets in the Solar System (image 5). There is also no greenery in the library, other than what can be seen from the windows.

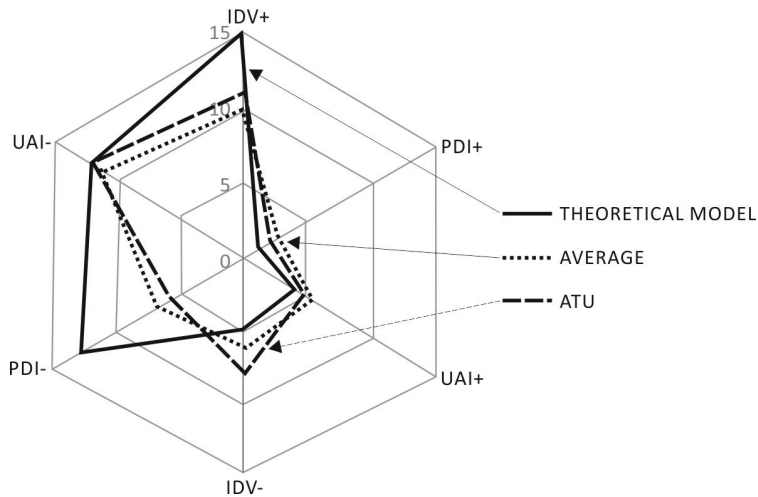
Image 5. ATU library, decorative element



Source: author’s collection.

The library is only separated by a single fire door from the hall it shares with another campus building. If entering from the outside, one must also add a double automatic door leading into the hallway. Additionally, the door to the library is very close to the entrance to the whole building complex. The circulation/information desk is located immediately beyond the entrance door, on the left. Slightly further to the right there is the lounge area with the popular journals collection. Overall, the apparent power distance of the library building seems very low – not as much as in the theoretical model [cf. 9], which few libraries can compare with, but similar to the other libraries in Galway and in my other studies and in line with Ireland’s low PDI level (see figure 9 and 2) [cf. 3; 4].

Figure 2. The relative positions of apparent cultural dimensions of the Atlantic Technical University library building in Galway, compared to averaged results for other libraries in Galway County and results based on subject literature



Source: self-elaboration.

Galway City Library

Galway's main public library occupies half the ground floor of the Hynes Building – a recently refurbished three-storey office block from the 1970s, located in the very centre of Galway, in St. Augustine Street (see image 6). It has to be noted that the building was neither built specifically to house a library, nor dedicated entirely to it. Nevertheless, the space the institution occupies is clearly distinct and can be seen as a separate whole. The library seems rather small for a city of over 80 thousand inhabitants, however, this has to be seen in the context of the library system in Galway and Ireland as a whole, which is not like the one prevalent in Poland, i.e. a main central city library with smaller branches. Galway's libraries seem to be fairly independent, meaning that the city centre library is not superior to the others, but merely the largest and most centrally located public library. At the same time, all of Ireland has a single unified library system, with a common catalogue, which allows readers to borrow books from any library in the country and return them to any other library. This means that, from a certain point of view, the available library collection is much larger than what is housed in the library at any given time.

Image 6. Galway City Library, outside view



Source: Galway City Library. In Facebook [Dokument elektroniczny]. Tryb dooępu: [https:// www.facebook.com/galwaycitylib/photos/pb.100064774203804.-2207520000./4574735312541392/?type=3](https://www.facebook.com/galwaycitylib/photos/pb.100064774203804.-2207520000./4574735312541392/?type=3).

Individualism

The whole library is an open stacks area or, more precisely, two such areas, housing the whole collection. Although some books can be brought in from the external administrative building, they do not form a significant part of the collection. The library is divided into two distinct parts – for adults and for children – which are housed in two different rooms and have separate circulation/information desks. The children's library seems to have even had its own separate entrance at some point. Within each section, all the materials are in one room, but there are separate shelves for audiobooks, journals, graphic novels, etc. The books themselves are divided by subject matter: fiction, history etc.

There is a large separate room in the main section of the library, which can be and indeed is used for group work. There is also a round table in the open stacks section and a similar table for small children in the childrens' section. Considering the size of the library, this is a lot of group study space.

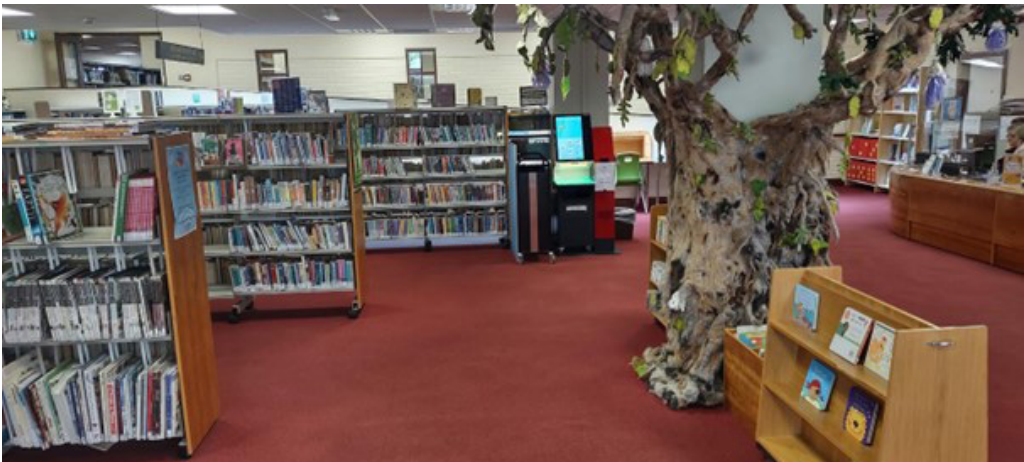
However, there is no dedicated space for patrons to socialise, which is probably due to the small size of the library. There are the aforementioned round tables and some of the ubiquitous armchairs are placed in pairs, but it would be hard to have a conversation there

without disturbing other patrons. Children, on the other hand, have ample space to mingle. Generally no other functions are performed in the part of the building dedicated to the library that are not related to its core tasks.

There is a self-service checkout terminal at the entrance to the library and another one in the children's section, but other than that computers do not dominate. There is a large and conspicuous information/circulation desk right at the entrance, while computer stations are well hidden in a corner, behind some bookshelves. There are also a few tablets affixed to the walls in various places, but they are rather inconspicuous. They were offline during my visit and nobody seemed particularly upset about it, which indicates that they do not see much use.

The interior organisation and décor is quite varied for a space of this size. Firstly, there are the two distinct areas, with the children's section especially richly decorated, complete with a fake tree in the middle of the room (image 7). There is also a variety of desks and seating – from comfortable armchairs to tiny children's tables. All in all, it is an interesting space and the children's section is nicely decorated, but overall it is not exceptionally impressive. From the outside it mostly looks like a storefront from the 1990s. Nothing here that could be described as a „wow factor”. Nevertheless, overall Galway City Library building suggests moderate individualism, perhaps slightly lower than other public libraries in Galway, but higher than the James Hardiman building at the NUI campus (cf. figure 8). While it does not reach the apparent IDV levels suggested by subject literature, few libraries do.

Image 7. Galway City Library, children's area



Source: author's collection.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Although the library is separated into two distinct sections, both of them are essentially flexible open spaces. Moreover, the bookshelves are on wheels, making it extra easy to transform the space if need be.

One is tempted to say that the door between the two sections of the library is at the centre of its gravity, which would put the reader (slightly ambiguously) at the focal point. This is actually repeated in the layout of both areas, although in the children's reading section the fake tree is in the middle of the room. The librarians' back rooms are accessible through doors safely tucked away behind circulation desks, so they do not interfere with the patrons' movement.

How is the interior space of the library organised? This question is not easy to address. On the one hand, the division between the adult and children's section could not be more clear, but on the other, both parts are open stacks areas and there are no separate computer rooms or group-work areas.

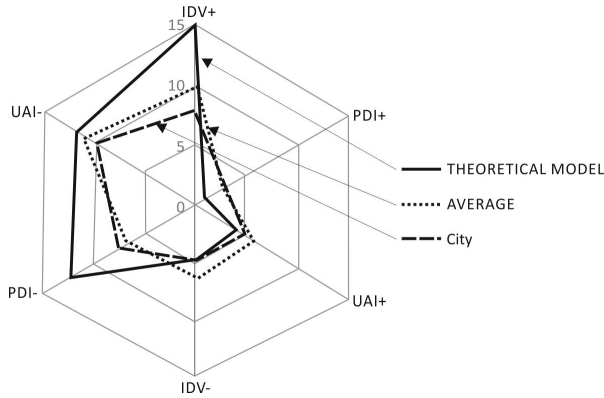
Little control is exerted over the readers' activity. Internet access is provided via an open WiFi network. Oversight is mainly performed through CCTV. The open space with few doors creates hardly any obstacles to the readers' movement, even if there are some no entry signs. The „beautifully crafted” [11] and designed information signs in both of Ireland's languages are definitely the most prominent signage in the library. This gives the building an apparent uncertainty avoidance score similar to that of the ATU library and slightly higher than the smaller Westview and Oranmore libraries (cf. figure 10). It is also close enough to the assumptions of the theoretical model [cf. 10].

Power Distance

There are no status symbols in the library, no prominent counters, no constant oversight. The library also feels open and accessible. The two distinct sections are both open space areas and the whole library has an unassuming friendly quality. There is even a potted plant or two, although the most prominent piece of greenery in the library is the fake tree in the children's section. There are only two doors to pass to enter the library, one of which is open in summer and the other opens automatically. There is a circulation desk right next to the entrance, but the stacks are right behind it.

If there is any criticism to be made of Galway City Library, it is that it lacks a distinct style. It seems pragmatic, but not in the soulless corporate style and it is quite cosy and friendly. The dual-language signage using stylised lettering is a clear invocation of Irish heritage, but other than that there is nothing overtly „historical” about the style, nor indeed anything distinctly modern. This gives the library a slightly lower apparent power distance level than the other libraries in Galway, though not as low as the theoretical model would suggest (see figure 3) [cf. 9].

Figure 3. The relative positions of apparent cultural dimensions of the Galway City Library building in Galway, compared to averaged results for other libraries in Galway County and results based on subject literature



Source: self-elaboration.

Ballybane Library

The Ballybane Library occupies the whole ground floor of a three-floor building and houses around 35 thousand volumes (image 8). The building also houses the La Nua Psychiatric Day Hospital. It is slightly off the beaten track, in a residential neighbourhood, but close to the ATU Campus and the very picturesque Merlin Park (complete with the ruins of a very small castle).

Image 8. Ballybane Library entrance



Source: author's collection.

Individualism

The whole collection is available in open stacks. Its main and most conspicuous division is between the children's section on the right and the adult's section on the left. Other than that, form, purpose, and audience are all taken into account, as well as subject matter. Thus, there are three shelves with audiobooks – fiction, non-fiction, and children's audiobooks. There are separate sections for children of various ages, a shelf with large print books, and a section titled „coffee table books”, which contains richly illustrated books in large formats (like albums of art and photographs) – the type of book one would put on a coffee table. It is important to note that the whole collection is placed in a single open space with no clear boundaries, allowing young readers to wander into „older” sections of the library.

There are no group study rooms in the library and other than the tables in the children's section, there isn't really much space that could be used for group work. Neither is there really any space dedicated to socializing, although there is coffee served in the library.

There are two self-service check-out devices in the library and in general computers seem to be more exposed. There is a rather conspicuous information/circulation desk, but the first thing one walks into in the library is a row of computers. This is a long desk, where all the computers are located. There are only a few of them, but for a library this size the number is quite large.

There is a diversity of seating arrangement in the library, if only because there is a large children's section, but compared to other public libraries in Galway, less effort has been made to „spice up” the space. Therefore, one cannot really speak of a „wow factor” in the context of this library. There is nothing remarkable about its design and not just because of its size. Neither is it particularly unappealing or uniform in style. It has the usual mix of elements one would expect to find in a small public library with a broad user base. Despite this lack of style, Ballybane Library suggests, on the whole, slightly higher individualism than the other public libraries in Galway, though the difference is very slight. Beyond that, little can be said about it that has not been said about the ATU and City libraries.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The library occupies only a single floor in a larger building, which also houses the psychiatric day hospital. Nevertheless, this space is a single open area with no dividing walls, giving it a high degree of flexibility. Its centre of gravity is somewhere between the open stacks of the children's and adult's section, putting the readers in the focal point. The librarians' section is in a room hidden behind the circulation desk. The whole library is a single open space and, while it is obvious where the children's and adult's sections are, there are no walls or barriers between them.

Little effort has been made to control the patrons' activities. Theoretically, the librarian can see most of the interior, as it is a single open space. This however seems to be a coincidence rather than a deliberate attempt at control. For instance, the young children's section table is hidden behind a bookshelf, half the monitor screens face the other way from

the circulation desk, and parts of the adult section also remain out of line of sight, because the room is roughly crescent shaped. Neither are there any obstacles to movement, as the library is a single open space. There is also very little signage of any kind and internet access is provided through an open WiFi network with no login required.

Overall, the building seems to suggest slightly greater uncertainty avoidance than the other library buildings in Galway or the theoretical library based on subject literature (see figure 10) [cf. 10], though this discrepancy is not huge and seems to be more incidental than deliberate.

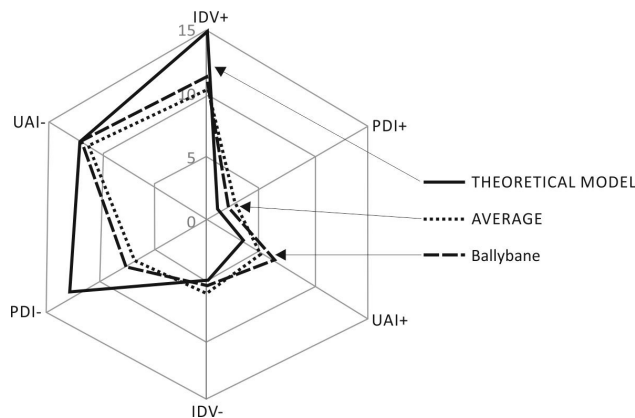
Power Distance

There are no status symbols in the library – the circulation desk is large, or rather long, but low and utilitarian. Overall the library is very modest. Its open space also feels very open and accessible. Apart from the coffee machine at the entrance, no space has been dedicated to functions other than the core tasks of a library.

As mentioned, it is the usual mix of numerous armchairs, desks, and children’s furniture one would expect in a small public library. The coffee station at the entrance gives it a particularly friendly feel, which is also an apt description of the overall style of the library, although there is no greenery of any sort.

The library is entered through a small windbreaker with a single door on each end, which can be opened with the press of a button for people in wheelchairs. The first thing one meets upon entering is a desk right opposite the door, which is the home of the coffee maker, and the next thing is a row of computers. Therefore, the library building seems to project very low power distance, similar to the assumptions based on subject literature [cf. 9] and slightly lower than the other libraries in Galway (cf. figure 11 and 4).

Figure 4. The relative positions of apparent cultural dimensions of the Ballybane Public Library building in Galway, compared to averaged results for other libraries in Galway County and results based on subject literature



Source: self-elaboration.

Westside Public Library

The Galway Westside Library is located, unsurprisingly, on the western outskirts of the city, in the eponymous neighbourhood of Westside. It is located in a very appropriate spot, next to the local community centre, a TUSLA family services office, a resource centre offering office space for various organisations, and the parish church. The building itself somewhat resembles an indoor swimming pool and is interesting, but rather ugly (see image 9). However, its construction does allow a lot of natural light inside.

Image 9. Westside Public Library building



Source: author's collection.

Individualism

The library holds a collection of around 60 thousand volumes, all of which are held within one open stacks area, with only one partial partition wall dividing it. The organisation of the collection is (similarly to Galway City Library) uniquely user centric: individual shelves or areas house parts of the collection selected by target audience, by form, and by subject matter. So there is a young children's area and a section for older children, as well as an audiobooks and visual novel shelf, but also a parenting section, an Irish authors section, etc. It all seems rather chaotic at first, but the end result is, in my opinion, very practical, putting user needs ahead of having a rigid system. Because of the structure of the building, the division between the adult and children's sections is less obvious than in Galway's other public libraries. The only part that is quite clearly and deliberately marked out is the youngest readers' section placed in a half-open children's playhouse (image 10).

Image 10. Westside Public Library, young readers' section



Source: author's collection.

There are no group study rooms in the library, but there is a large table in a cul-de-sac behind a partition wall, which would be a good place for group work. There is also a separated maker space with a large communal table, although it is not meant to be used as a group study room, but rather for crafts, club meetings, and similar activities. Unsurprisingly, given the size of the library, there are also no dedicated spaces for patrons to socialise, although people do at the group study table. Moreover, craft (e.g. knitting) clubs meet in the Maker Space, where they can not only pursue their interests, but also socialize over tea or coffee prepared in a tiny kitchenette.

Like, as it would seem, all public libraries in Ireland, the one in Galway Westside is equipped with two self-service check-out stations, right in front of the entrance. Other than that, however, the circulation and information desk placed in the middle of the library is much more exposed than the rather inconspicuous computer stations, most of which are collected in one area.

The interior is fairly varied, with different types of desks and seating, as well as the group study table, the children's „playhouse”, and the Maker Space. Books are generously used as decoration around the library. If anything can be held against it, it is a sense of chaos, rather than a lack of variety.

While the building is fairly modern (dating from the early 2000s) and not without its charm, it has not aged well. The interior is, as mentioned, somewhat chaotic rather than impressive, though it cannot be described as boring or unappealing either. The playhouse area gives it some extra appeal, as does the generous use of books as decoration, but it is not enough to give it a definite „wow factor”.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Most of the building forms a single open space, divided only with bookshelves and partition walls, which gives it a lot of flexibility. The only more permanent elements are a small entry hallway and the tiny kitchenette behind its wall.

The only two clearly separated areas of the library are the Maker Space and the half open „playhouse” with the youngest readers’ collection. The group study table is also somewhat separate, with walls on three sides. For such a small open-space library, that is quite a lot of semi-closed-off spaces. Nevertheless, the whole library is a single open space and there are no real restrictions to patrons’ movement. Although the Maker Space is closed to regular readers, it is hidden off to the side and does not get in the way of moving freely around the library.

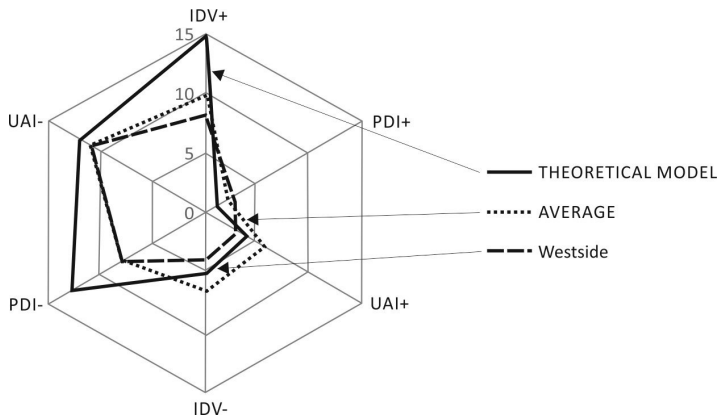
Right in the middle of the building there is a circulation and information desk, which commands a view of most of the interior. However, there are a few places to hide in the library and control does not seem to be important to its layout. Neither is it a priority when internet use is concerned, as it is accessible through an unsecured WiFi network with no login required. There also seems to be little conspicuous signage in the library. This contributes to the building’s overall very low apparent uncertainty avoidance. Its numerical score is lower than that of most other studied libraries (cf. figure 10) and indeed lower than what is suggested by subject literature [cf. 10].

Power Distance

There are no elements in the building that could be considered status symbols and it seems very open and accessible. Although it does not fulfill many functions that would obviously go beyond a library’s core tasks, it does include a Maker Space, complete with a 3d printer and a kitchenette, which is quite a lot for an institution of this size. The style and furnishings of the library definitely stress comfort and „friendliness”, although it does seem a bit chaotic. There are no plants or flowers in the building.

Entrance to the library leads through a single door from the outside, leading to a small hallway, from which another door leads into the library. The first of these is open, the other automated, albeit a bit unreliable. The first thing one sees upon entering the library are the two self-service check-out terminals are directly opposite the door, but the circulation desk is right next to the entrance. Overall, the library building seems to project a low power distance, similar to that of other libraries in the area, although not as low as the academic libraries I have studied previously or the idealised model based on subject literature (see figure 5) [cf. 9].

Figure 5. The relative positions of apparent cultural dimensions of the Westside Public Library building in Galway, compared to averaged results for other libraries in Galway County and results based on subject literature



Source: self-elaboration.

Oranmore Public Library

Oranmore is a town of five thousand inhabitants, located nine kilometres east of Galway. While it is not part of Galway itself, it is reachable by city bus. Oranmore is home to a medieval castle (now in private hands) and a nineteenth-century neo-gothic church, which houses the local public library (see image 11). The temple was deconsecrated in 1972, after it had been replaced by a new parish church, and, as the locals tell it, would have been demolished in the nineties, had the local community not come together to save it and have it converted to a library. With this unusual location, it is one of the most unique small public libraries out there.

Image 11. Oranmore Public Library interior with stained glass windows



Source: author's collection.

Individualism

The whole, albeit tiny, collection is available from open stacks. There is a clearly distinguishable children's section, but the whole collection is placed in a single open space. Probably due to the small size of the building, there is no space for group work, not even a larger table. Neither is there really any room for patrons to socialize, although there are a few armchairs placed in a manner that would facilitate conversation (image 12). There is also a café just across the street.

As in all public libraries in Ireland, there are self-service check-out stations in the building and a few computers gathered in one corner, but the information desk clearly dominates the interior much more than the machines. Other than that, the library is equipped with the usual mix of armchairs, desks, and children's furniture. However, the stained glass windows and the choir decks above the entrance have been preserved, adding to the variety and giving it a truly unique, magical feel.

Undoubtedly, the „wow factor” is strong with this one and it comes primarily from the beautiful building itself. Churches often strive to awe and this is additionally an historical building, built in a style imitating history even older than itself, with grey stone walls, a carved wooden choir deck, and beautiful stained glass windows. An additional sense of excitement is provoked by the surprise of finding a library in this location. Although I would argue that it is also oddly fitting for a library to occupy a „holy space”. Especially one that is clearly so important to the community.

Overall, the library building seems to project moderately high individualism, somewhat lower than subject literature prescribes, but very similar to other libraries in the area (see figure 8).

Image 12. Oranmore Public Library interior



Source: author's collection.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The library, although it occupies an adapted building, is flexible, mostly by virtue of occupying a single open space with few divisions, which allows for easy changes. This is helped by the fact that the roof is a self-supporting structure, with no upright posts inside the church [2]. In a bit of a twist, flexibility is facilitated by the fact that this space was not designed for a library and has therefore no preconceived notions of what the spatial arrangement needs to be.

The circulation desk is off to the side and the bookshelves are mostly lined up along the walls, placing the patron in the library's centre of gravity (cf. image 11). Despite its small size, the library manages to preserve a clear separation of functions by using the raised choir deck as storage space and back office. Other than that, there are few internal divisions in the single open space occupied by the library.

The librarians have easy oversight of the space, as they can see most of the interior from the circulation desk, but with the tiny size of the library it is hard to say whether this is a design choice or just a side effect of the convenient placement of the circulation desk. Certainly other aspects of the library's organisation do not point to a particular preoccupation with control. There is internet access on the library's own computers and through an open WiFi network. The whole library is a single open space with few obstacles to obstruct the movement of patrons. Only the storage space on the choir deck is naturally separated from the main floor, because it is on a raised platform. Neither are there many prohibition signs. There are some rules and regulations on display, but most of the signage is informative in nature. All this gives Oranmore Public Library the lowest apparent uncertainty avoidance of all the studied buildings and indeed lower than is suggested by subject literature (cf. figure 10).

Power Distance

There are no status symbols in the library, other than the fact that it is in a literal temple (although this is, admittedly, a big one). The designers thankfully resisted the urge to place the circulation desk where the altar would have originally been located. The whole interior is a single open space and even the „back rooms” are visible, as they are placed on the open choir deck, giving the building an air of openness and accessibility, despite the somewhat intimidating demeanour of a nineteenth-century church in a graveyard. The sense of openness is also helped by ease of access: the library is on the ground floor (the small church has no steps leading up into it) and the interior is separated from the outside with only the original double door of the church (open in summer), followed by a modern automated door of the type found in other libraries in Galway county (cf. image 13). Although there is also an open iron gate separating the street from the graveyard in which the church is located (which, admittedly, might be slightly intimidating to some users).

Image 13. Entrance to the Oranmore Library, with bookdrop and flower pot

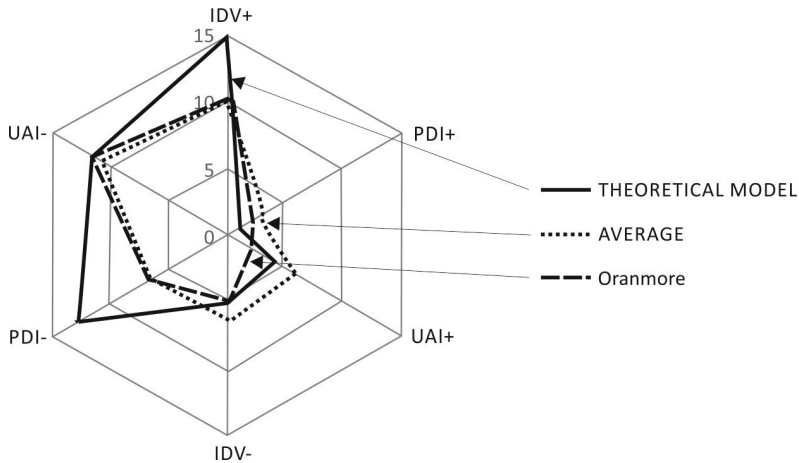


Source: author's collection.

For obvious reasons, the style of the building is informed primarily by its historical character and original function. It is definitely unique, as it is not a usual choice of a library building. By preserving the historical church structure, the library invokes a sense of history and tradition. Nevertheless, it seems very friendly, thanks to comfortable armchairs and bright colours. This impression is helped by the presence of potted plants both inside the church and in front of the entrance (cf. image 13).

The space is too small to house anything but the library, but a lot of events take place there nonetheless, so it operates a lot like a culture centre. The advantage of the library's diminutive size is that essentially everything inside it is close to the entrance. Unlike an actual church, the Oranmore Public Library building projects very low power distance, on par with other libraries in Galway, though slightly higher than in the theoretical model (cf. figure 11 and 6).

Figure 6. The relative positions of apparent cultural dimensions of the Oranmore Public Library building, compared to averaged results for other libraries in Galway County and results based on subject literature

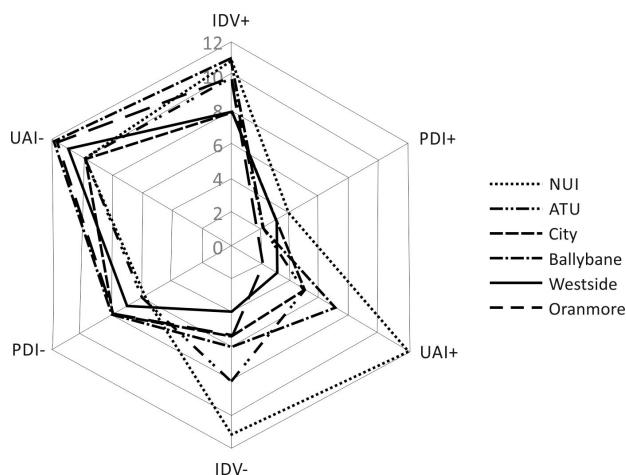


Source: self-elaboration.

Overview

As can be seen in figure 7, the library buildings in Galway are quite consistent in terms of their apparent cultural dimensions. This would make Irish libraries more similar to German ones, which in my studies turned out to be very consistent [cf. 5; 8; 9; 10], than to Polish libraries which are, to use a colloquialism, „all over the place”. This must be qualified with the caveat that the character of the sample is very different in this case: all the libraries are in one city and, more importantly, most of them are fairly small public libraries. Nevertheless, the Atlantic Technological University library also aligns quite closely with others. More importantly, the Irish public library system is much more integrated (and thus, presumably, standardised) than is the case in Poland, which could be a factor here. Broader research, involving more libraries in Ireland and, perhaps, a greater variety of library types in Poland, would be needed here.

Figure 7. Relative position of the cultural dimensions for various libraries in Galway



Source: self-elaboration.

The only outlier is the James Hardiman building of the National University of Ireland in Galway (cf. figure 1), which clearly diverges from the others in terms of elements that would lower its apparent individualism and increase uncertainty avoidance. The fact that the ATU library seems more aligned with the smaller public libraries means that this discrepancy cannot be ascribed to the difference between public and academic libraries. Instead, it is most likely caused by the fact that, as I have noted in my previous studies [5; 8; 9; 10], libraries with closed stacks lending systems tend to rank lower on individualism and higher on uncertainty avoidance³ and power distance. A similar pattern emerged in my study of German universities [8; 9; 10], where the only library with a closed stacks system – Zweigbibliothek Forstwesen in Tharandt – was also the only one that clearly diverged from the very uniform German sample.

However, the age of the James Hardiman building, which dates to the 1970s, could also be a factor. This gives rise to an interesting question: The NUI library building seems ite flexible⁴. Why then, was its spatial organisation not updated to fit more modern organisational and aesthetic standards? Or perhaps if it was updated, why did this not bring sufficient results? These questions are impossible to answer without a deeper dive into particular case studies and comparisons with other, similar library buildings, but they are nonetheless worthy of consideration.

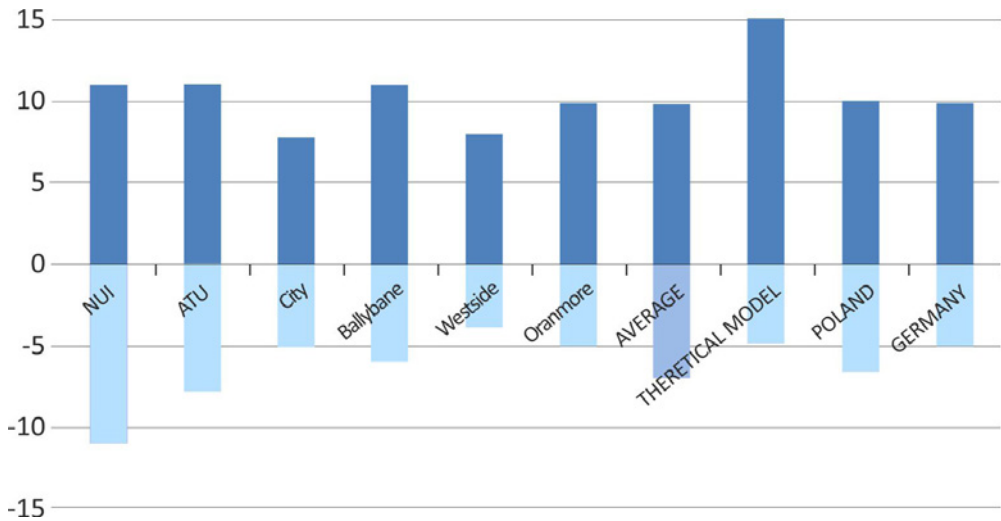
A similar case is that of the former University of Białystok (Poland) library building, currently housing Białystok's main public library. While this is a modern structure, it has been taken over by a completely different library, with a vastly different profile. And yet, as I have found, very few changes have been made in its spatial organisation, despite the fact that the objectives of a public library should be different than those of a university library,

³ This makes obvious sense, because closed stacks indeed do provide more security and control.

⁴ Certainly from an engineering standpoint, as understood by architects and librarians in its day [cf. 1].

not to mention that some of the building's arrangements were dubious to begin with [6]. These are examples of library buildings where inertia seems to have overcome the possibilities created by flexibility. Is this inevitable? This would be an interesting issue for further study.

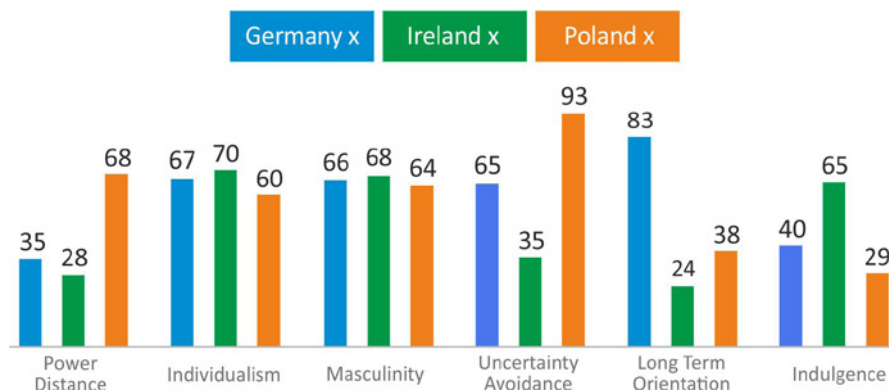
Figure 8. Apparent levels of individualism of the studied library buildings in Galway County, compared to the suggestions drawn from subject literature and averaged results for Polish and German library buildings obtained in previous studies [cf. 5; 8; 9; 10]



Source: self-elaboration.

Figure 8 shows the apparent levels of individualism of the various library buildings in Galway County, as well as the IDV level of the „ideal library” as presented by subject literature and the averages for all the national samples: Irish, Polish, and German. As it can be seen, the Galway sample is quite consistent. Not as much as was the case with German libraries [cf. 8], but definitely more so than in Poland [cf. 5]. While none of them reach the 5 number of elements promoting individualism that are suggested by the theoretical model, they do rank quite high, as would be expected from a country with an IDV of 70 [cf. 3; 4]. Although it should be noted that three of the six library buildings have more elements to their spatial arrangements that promote collectivism than is suggested by the idealised model, it is only a significant difference in the case of the James Hardiman building. The average IDV for libraries in Galway County is actually identical to that of Polish libraries and thus very close to the German average. This should not be surprising, given the similarities between these cultures (cf. figure 9), especially in terms of individualism, although the differences in the size and composition of the samples do not allow for definitive conclusions.

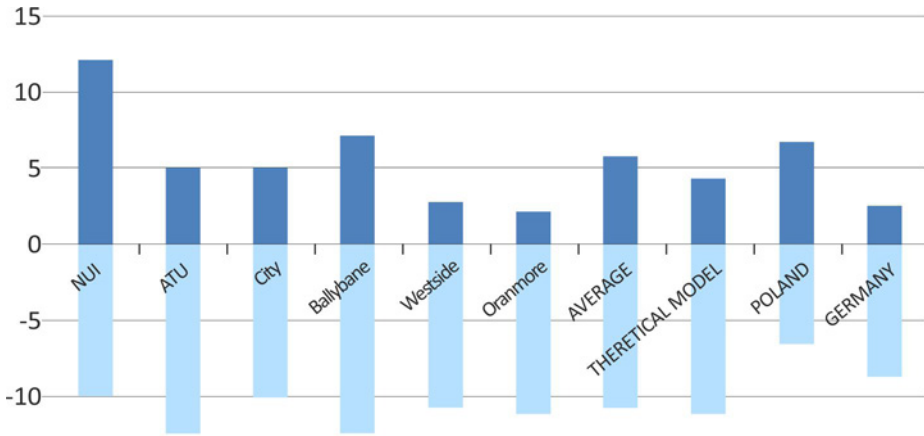
Figure 9. Comparison of cultural dimension levels for Ireland, Poland, and Germany, as provided by Hofstede



Source: based on *Hofstede Insights. Compare Countries* [Dokument elektroniczny]. Tryb dostępu: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/fi/product/compare-countries/>.

Figure 9 shows the level of uncertainty avoidance projected by the studied library buildings, as well as the UAI level in the theoretical model, as suggested by subject literature, and the averages for all the national samples: Irish, Polish, and German. The sample is less consistent here than in the case of individualism (cf. figure 8), with the James Hardiman building being the main outlier again, on the higher end of the UAI spectrum. However, Westside and Oranmore public libraries also differ from the others, with slightly lower apparent uncertainty avoidance. The average for all the studied libraries is very close to the theoretical model based on subject literature. It is in fact closer to it than the Polish and German average, which should be unsurprising, given that Ireland has the lowest UAI score of the three studied countries (cf. figure 9).

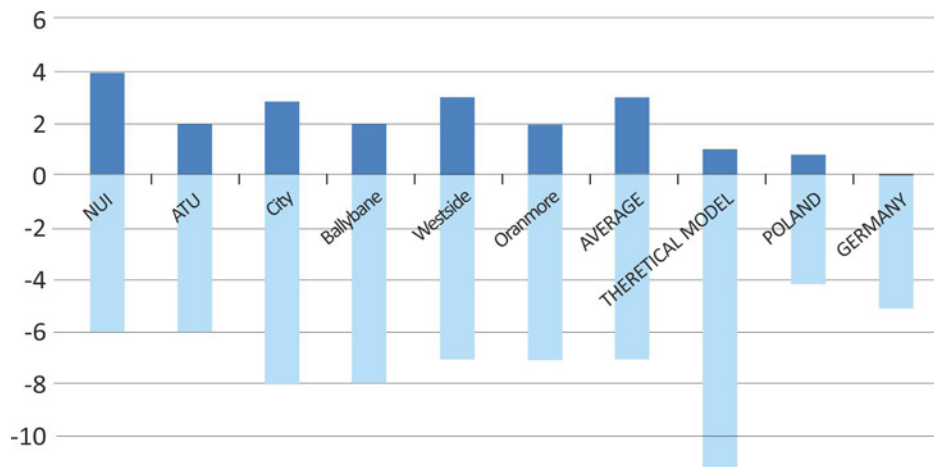
Figure 10. Apparent uncertainty avoidance of the studied library buildings in Galway County, compared to the suggestions drawn from subject literature and averaged results for Polish and German library buildings obtained in previous studies [c.f. 5; 8; 9; 10]



Source: self-elaboration.

Figure 11 shows the apparent power distance displayed by the studied libraries, as well as the PDI of the theoretical idealised library based on subject literature and the average results for all the national samples: Irish, Polish, and German. The average is again fairly consistent. Even the Hardiman Building only slightly diverges from it. More interestingly, said average is higher on the power distance scale than either of the other two national samples. This seems inconsistent with both the theoretical model and Ireland's national culture, which is characterised by PDI lower than that of either Poland or Germany (cf. figure 9). A few possible explanations come to mind. One is that this is a random quirk of the, admittedly, very limited research sample. The other is that this is connected to the fact that said sample is dominated by small public libraries. Finally, it is not inconceivable that there is something particular about Ireland's library culture that leads to this outcome. Given the limited nature of this study, it is impossible to tell at this point, but further research on more Irish libraries and on smaller public libraries in other countries might shed some light on the question. It must also be stressed that the effect is small and the studied libraries for the most part seem very open and friendly.

Figure 11. Apparent power distance of the studied library buildings in Galway County, compared to the suggestions drawn from subject literature and averaged results for Polish and German library buildings obtained in previous studies [cf. 5; 8; 9; 10]

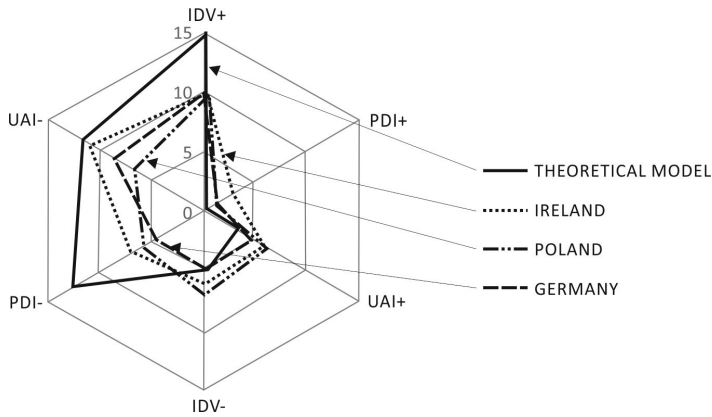


Source: self-elaboration.

Figure 12 presents the relative positions of averaged results for the three national samples and the idealised model library suggested by subject literature across all three dimensions. As can be seen, despite the differences described above, they are in the end quite similar to each other. Furthermore, while they do not exactly overlap with the theoretical model, neither do they wildly diverge from it. This demonstrates the strength of the spatial organisation standards developed in librarianship. Especially since, at this stage of the research, the differences between countries, while interesting, may also be put down to random chance, due to the limited nature of the studied samples and the inconsistencies between them. At the same time, as all three averaged results differ from the idealised model at similar points – primarily on high IDV and low PDI⁵ – it may be surmised that many libraries meet similar problems in striving to follow said standards. As mentioned before, more research would be needed here.

⁵ In terms of UAI they are both closer to the theoretical ideal and less consistent with each other.

Figure 12. The relative position of averaged scores for the three national samples as compared to the theoretical idealised model based on subject literature



Source: self-elaboration.

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