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An intercultural analysis of library buildings in Brighton, United Kingdom

(Analiza międzykulturowa budynków bibliotecznych w Brighton w Wielkiej Brytanii)

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

Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł jest wynikiem wizyty studyjnej w Brighton w Wielkiej Brytanii, podczas której przeanalizowano układ przestrzenny lokalnych bibliotek. Zastosowana metodologia, wcześniej wykorzystywana do analizy bibliotek w Niemczech, Polsce i Irlandii, umożliwiła wstępne porównanie bibliotek, przy założeniu, że próba badawcza z Brighton różni się nieco od tych wcześniej analizowanych. Pomimo tych ograniczeń, w artykule przedstawiono kompleksową analizę pięciu różnych bibliotek w tym samym mieście w Wielkiej Brytanii, co może dostarczyć cennych wniosków.

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

Abstract: This paper is the result of a study visit to Brighton, UK, during which I examined the spatial arrangement of local libraries. Using a methodology previously applied to libraries in Germany, Poland, and Ireland, this study enables tentative comparisons, while acknowledging that the characteristics of the Brighton sample differ somewhat from those previously analyzed. Despite these limitations, this paper provides a comprehensive examination of five diverse libraries within a single UK city, offering potentially valuable insights for our audience.

Introduction

Previous articles in this series have presented analyses of selected academic library buildings in Germany, utilizing Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions [cf. 3] as a conceptual framework. Based on Hofstede's research and prior investigations, three cultural dimensions were selected to elucidate how the spatial layout of a library building might impact its organizational culture, patrons' perceptions, and potentially their behaviour. My earlier articles in *Library Management* journal focused on Individualism (IDV) [8], Power Distance (PDI) [9], and Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) [10]. A subsequent paper analysed disparities in the aggregate findings of research conducted in German and Polish academic libraries [6]. Finally, the latest article presented a case study of six libraries in Galway County, Ireland, exploring all three dimensions [7].

The present paper is similar in nature to the previous article, as it discusses five libraries in Brighton, UK in a detailed analysis of all three dimensions. I will also attempt to compare the results to UK's values of cultural dimensions, as presented by Hofstede, and to the results I had obtained in previous research. The study sample included three academic libraries – the Aldrich and Falmer libraries located at University of Brighton campuses and the Library of the University of Sussex – and two public libraries: the central cog of Brighton's library system – the Jubilee Library – and one branch library, located in Whitehawk. Four of these libraries are modern buildings erected in the 21st century, the one exception being the University of Sussex Library, which was opened in 1963. This is also the largest institution in the sample, comparable to the large academic libraries I have discussed in previous papers. Conversely, the Whitehawk branch library is very small, while the rest of the sample can be described as mid-range (with collections of between 50 and 200 thousand volumes). All the observations were conducted in April 2024. Because the University of Brighton normally only allows students and faculty to access the libraries, the Falmer and Aldrich libraries were visited with cooperation and guidance of staff members. I would hereby like to thank Jenny Maidment (from Falmer Library) and Nick Alexander (from Aldrich Library) for the tour of the premises and all the information they provided.

Aldrich Library

The Aldrich Library, located at the Moulsecoomb Campus, is the largest of the University of Brighton's four libraries, housing approximately 150,000 units. Its premises were built as part of the 1996 renovation of the Cockcroft building (sponsored by the eponymous Aldrich family). However, most of the library space is not located within adapted rooms of the Cockcroft Building but in a freestanding extension, although the main entrance is typically accessed through the Cockcroft Building. Interestingly, the library's direct entrance to the main building is open only after hours, allowing students to access limited services – such as study areas and a computer room – without staff on site. The building's architectural style can be described as a modern take on brutalism, combining large windows with grey cinder blocks, light wood, and raw concrete, which has earned it some recognition from the architectural community (see image 1).

Image 1. The Aldrich Library building seen from the outside

Source: author's collection.

Individualism

Let us first examine the spatial organisation of the Aldrich Library building from the point of view of the cultural dimension of Individualism (IDV) [cf. 2; 8]. As noted in my previous papers [8], open stacks are a key factor shaping the perceived Individualism of a library space. The Aldrich Library only has a small storage area, with the majority of its collection available from open stacks (see image 2).

Image 2. The open stacks area of the Aldrich Library

Source: author's collection.

One interesting aspect of the library's organisation is its division into distinct areas. While the modest journal collection is kept separate, all books and other media are arranged in a single continuous collection following the Dewey decimal system. However, the primary division is between the "quiet study" areas on the ground and first floor (where no noise restrictions apply) and the silent study areas on the second and third floor (where silence is enforced). This system is unusual, compared to the libraries studied in my earlier papers, although not quite unique, as it is replicated in other academic libraries in Brighton and even (if less explicitly) in the public Jubilee Library.

There are 13 group study rooms in the library (which can also be booked by individuals) and two large areas with numerous group-work tables: in the entry hall these are separated by S-shaped barriers (sort of a modernised take on the cubicle or the *beaurolanschaft* idea); on the lowest floor there is a large room with a number of tables and whiteboards on the wall. Providing space for group work is clearly a key function of the library. However, these areas facilitate not only collaborative study but also casual interactions and socializing. Additionally, there is also a café just outside the library entrance in the Cockcroft Building.

There is a number of self-check-out terminals in the library. There is also a reservation room, where students can pick up and check out (using a self-service terminal) books

ordered from other Brighton University libraries or the Aldrich collection. It is also noteworthy that some parts of the library (a study and computer room) are available to students after hours even when no staff are on site.

There are numerous computer stations in the downstairs computer room and throughout the library, though they are not particularly conspicuous. The Help Desk, on the other hand, despite being the only one, is the first thing visitors see upon entering the library.

Even though the floors in the main part of the building mostly follow the same layout and use uniform furniture, overall there is a lot of variety in the library, primarily in terms of styles of work that various areas facilitate: there are the S-shaped "cubicles" in the entry hall, the large group study and computer rooms on the ground floor, and a more traditional layout on the second and third floor. Subtle decorative elements also contribute to the library's character, such as the colourful "cubicles" and sound-proofing panels on the walls and hanging from the ceiling in the entry hall. The dominant stylistic choice is the vaguely sixties-inspired mix of grey cinderblock, light wood, and panelled glass walls, which are used sparingly enough to remain visually interesting and not feel oppressive (which is often a risk with this style). There are also small functional oddities, such as the lounge room on the ground floor, the "consultation" pod next to the Help Desk, or the characteristic sound-proofed red British telephone booth, which allows patrons to take phone calls or teleconference without disturbing other users (image 3).

Image 3. The telephone booth

Source: author's collection.

Unlike in some academic libraries (including the Falmer Library, which will be discussed next) the university has not intruded on the library space and the only area in the Aldrich Library not directly used for library purposes consists of three rooms used by the Skills Hub – an institution providing study skills training for students. It should be noted, however, that the library is not freely available to non-students.

Despite receiving architectural distinctions, the building lacks what might be called a "wow factor". Because it is accessed through the Cockcroft Building, its architecture cannot be fully appreciated upon approach. Not that it is particularly impressive – from the outside it looks like a modern office building with a glass façade. Inside, the main stylistic choice – the use of cinder blocks and raw concrete in a vaguely brutalist style (image 4), combined with 60s-inspired light wooden elements and panelled glass walls – is interesting, but it is not something that would elicit a sense of awe or delight. In fact, the most impressive part of the library is the entry hall (still in the Cockcroft Building), which is colourful and vibrant, thanks to the crowds of students.

Image 4. The characteristic interior design of the Aldrich Library building
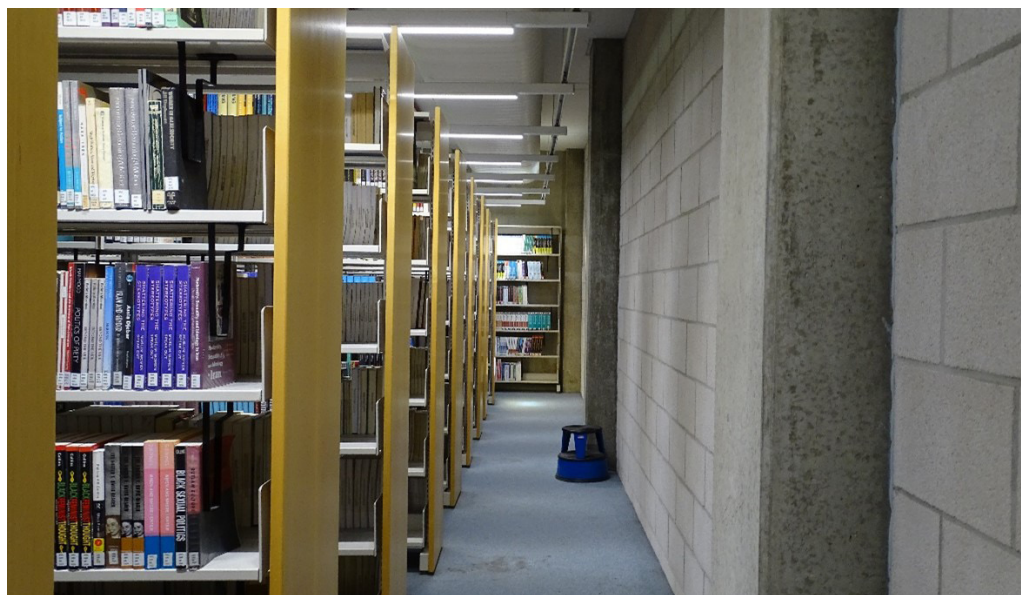
Source: author's collection.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Let us now consider the spatial organisation of Aldrich Library from the point of view of Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) [cf. 10]. As noted in previous research [10] the key aspect in this respect is flexibility. The Aldrich Library is housed in a multi-storey building with a fairly small footprint, which in itself limits its flexibility. Each floor of the main part of the

library is also divided in two by a cinderblock wall. This creates a number of fairly flexible, but rather small spaces. Thus, overall, it is not very flexible.

The building's centre of gravity can be said to be at the junction of the Cockcroft Building main hall and the Aldrich Library Building proper and thus it is the patrons who are unequivocally at the centre. Moreover, the overall design strongly emphasizes user-centricity.

Most of the staff rooms are concentrated in a few places off to the side of the readers' areas, although there are some offices in other places as well. However, the space is well designed to clearly direct patrons towards their areas and away from staff rooms, so this is not a problem. Thus, it can be said that the division between staff and readers' areas is preserved, albeit not perfectly.

The separation of the parts of the library with various functions is also very clear. The natural division between various floors and the Cockcroft Building is used to clearly distinguish the group, quiet, and silent study areas. The former are also visually distinct, while the latter are very clearly marked.

The library offers an open WiFi network (including eduroam), and internet access on computer stations, though login is required. Patrons' activities are not closely monitored, either online or offline. CCTV cameras are discreet and there are no staff stations past the Help Desk, though they do police the upper floors to ensure silence is observed. Neither do patrons feel like their freedom of movement is limited: the interior mostly consists of open spaces, including the staircases. Even the fire doors are kept open and close automatically only if there is a fire alarm. Signage is primarily used to direct patrons to specific parts of the library. The only ones that may constitute a prohibition are the conspicuous red "Silent Study" signs on the second and third floors (see image 5).

Image 5. Silent study floor sign

Source: author's collection.

Power Distance

Let us now consider aspects of the spatial organisation of Aldrich Library that may increase or decrease Power Distance (PDI) [cf. 9]. Firstly, there are no obvious status symbols here – everything is very utilitarian and the library is very user centric. Neither is there a separate study, nor a reading room for higher status patrons, such as academic staff.

Furthermore, the library building appears open and accessible. The main entry hall, with its colourful "cubicles", creates an impression of openness and patrons' movement is unobstructed (even the staircases are open), although, in fact, the library interior is divided into many smaller spaces with the central dividing wall and glass walls along the staircases. While this layout helps maintain silence on the upper floors, it does not enhance the sense of openness, especially since there are also many staff-only doors.

Regarding minor aspects of spatial organization, it is worth noting that almost no space is allocated to the University's other (non-library-related) tasks, with the exception of the Skills Hub, which is present in all academic libraries in Brighton. There are no plants in the building and its style is best described as pragmatic, but friendly. Assuming that the Cockcroft Building is the "outside" to the library, only a single door separates patrons from the first librarian or bookshelf, although it does require a key card to open. Right beyond the entrance there is the reservations room, followed by the Help Desk.

Falmer Library

The free standing, three-storey library building at the Falmer Campus of the University of Brighton is 23 years old, slightly newer than Aldrich Library, and was built in a similar faux brutalist style (image 6). It is a digital first library, which currently, after significant pruning of the collection, holds about 50 thousand units, leaving it with a lot of space, which is planned to be filled with the collection of the soon to be liquidated Queenwood Library.

Image 6. The Falmer Library Building seen from the outside

Source: author's collection.

Individualism

Let us begin with the aspects of spatial organisation of Falmer Library that may contribute to building a sense of Individualism (IDV) [cf. 8]. As previously mentioned, a key factor is the use of open stacks. The whole current (rather modest, after significant pruning) collection is in open stacks, and this mode of access will be preserved even after it is expanded with items moved from the Eastbourne campus.

Similarly to Aldrich Library, at Falmer the building is divided into areas designed for two work styles: quiet study (for small groups or pairs) and silent study (for individual work). The quiet study floor also contains a small collection of journals and a slightly larger collection of children's and young readers' books (image 7) to be used by students of Educational Sciences, but this is an outcome of existing division, not its driving motive.

There are five group study rooms in the library. There used to be a few more, but they have been adapted for other purposes – a point that will be relevant later. These rooms can also be booked by individuals who require additional privacy due to sensory sensitivity, teleconferencing needs, or other reasons. However, there is no separate academic staff area.

Image 7. The young readers' collection

Source: author's collection.

There is no dedicated meeting space in the library, such as a cafeteria, but there is ample room for interaction on the quiet study floor, featuring round café tables with comfortable armchairs or sofas, as well as two types of cubicles that provide groups with additional privacy. The Wellbeing Space could also be considered, though it is located on the silent study floor and is primarily intended for quiet meditation.

There is a book drop and two self-checkout terminals, as well as numerous computer stations, which are spread throughout the library, although there is also a separate computer study room on the lower floor. Although the (only) Help Desk at the entrance is very conspic-

uous, these computer stations are absolutely ubiquitous – there are dozens of them on each floor, including a computer study room that remains open past the library's working hours. This makes them much more prominent, further emphasising the reader's independence.

The interior of the Falmer Library building is incredibly varied, albeit seemingly more against the wishes of the original designers, than in line with them. Much of this diversity can be attributed to the creativity of the current management and the changes implemented in recent years. Alongside traditional desks and numerous computer stations there are individual circular desks, round café tables with soft chairs, two types of sofas, two kinds of cubicles allowing for privacy, and a corner with some "experimental" furniture on loan from the producer (though I was told it was not catching on) (see image 8). The shelving is also in varying arrangements, creating deliberate "breaks" in the stacks to make them less intimidating. The Wellbeing Space on the upper floor sports a variety of furniture, houseplants, jigsaw puzzles, etc. The originally grey walls made of concrete blocks have been painted white in some places or decorated with blue acoustic panels. The beautiful views outside add to the variety.

Image 8. Various group seating arrangements

Source: author's collection.

An aspect of spatial organisation negatively impacts Individualism is the use of library space for the needs of the university. In the Falmer Library most of the computer rooms on the lower floor have been taken over to be used as classrooms, as is the case with the training room at the entrance. However the latter has been partially reclaimed by the library, which allowing students to use it after closing hours. It should also be noted that the library is inaccessible to external users.

Despite the librarians' efforts, the building itself does not inspire a sense of awe or delight. Indeed, it is only through these efforts that it is as friendly as it is, as the original concept – with its uncovered cinder block design – is rather dull and oppressive. Neither is the building particularly impressive from the outside.

Uncertainty Avoidance

As mentioned before, when considering Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), the key aspect is flexibility [cf. 10]. In the Falmer Library most of the two main floors consist of open spaces with no hard divisions, except for the centrally located air/light wells, staircase, lavatories, and technical facilities. Indeed, the library in its current form is a testament to flexibility. The collection has been significantly reduced in recent years, allowing the stacks to be spaced out and more open, sociopetal[1] spaces to be created. As the library is expected to take over the collections of another university library, it is already clear that it will easily be able to accommodate them and adapt.

The shape of the building makes it almost impossible to determine a true centre of gravity, but it is clear that the reader is always at the centre of library space at Falmer. Furthermore, for the most part, it preserves a clear division into user and staff spaces. Although there are a few offices on the silent study level, most librarians work in a separate office space at the back of the quiet study floor. This can be accessed directly from the Help Desk allowing information and staff to move efficiently between the two, without crossing paths with the patrons. The division into areas with different functions is also clear, as the two areas are located on separate floors.

Although access to the numerous computer stations (with internet access – see image 9) is limited by the necessity to log in, this is hardly an obstacle, as anyone with access to the library at all will have a login. Nevertheless, there is also an open WiFi network in the library for use with private computers.

Image 9. Being able to turn away from the screen and look at distant objects is good for eye health

Source: author's collection.

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[1]   A physical environment that promotes social interaction, such as circular seating arrangements [8].

Direct supervision of patrons has been deliberately reduced: there is only one librarian's station at the entrance, and it was redesigned to allow librarians to face the entrance rather than the interior of the library. There are also numerous spaces that are hidden from view providing patrons with greater privacy. There are not even any conspicuous CCTV cameras. Readers' privacy is clearly more important than oversight in this library.

Neither is the patrons' freedom of movement overtly limited. There are a few closed office spaces, they are all positioned at the edges of the reading area. Inside there are no doors or other clear divisions. Even the staircase remains open. Similarly, while there are a lot of information signs throughout the library, there are hardly any signs directly enforcing rules or imposing bans.

Power Distance

The third dimension under analysis is Power Distance (PDI) [cf. 9]. Its most obvious manifestation takes the form of status symbols, which the Falmer Library is largely devoid of. The original design is simplistic and utilitarian, and the modern arrangements are very user-centred, while the slightly intimidating security desk at the entrance is never manned. The library's layout also contributes to the sense of openness and accessibility, as most of the patrons' areas are open spaces with very few barriers.

Physical access to the library's resources is also straightforward: the entrance sequence consists of a double automatic door and a corridor leading to the Help Desk (image 10). Upon entering, patrons first encounter a small rest area and an unmanned security, followed by a corridor with lavatory facilities, which opens directly into the central hallway with the Help Desk. However, it is worth noting that the entrance is at the side of the library building, under a hanging floor and behind a more recent campus building, which means that it is somewhat out of sight and easy to miss. Patrons must also use a keycard to access to the building.

Image 10. Entry hallway. The cinder block design does not work as well here as in the Aldrich Library

Source: author's collection.

Overall, the style of the building is difficult to define. It appears to have been originally designed to evoke a sense of history, by copying the design concept of the Aldrich Library, albeit of ca. 1960s rather than the premodern era or at least the 19th century that library buildings usually try to bring to mind. However, successful efforts have also been made to "warm up" the cold and oppressive original design. Many houseplants have been placed in the Wellbeing Area (readers are also encouraged to "adopt" saplings) and beautiful pastoral views of greenery can also be seen from the windows.

As mentioned before, many rooms in the library have been taken over for teaching purposes and it also houses one of the faculties' computer technicians and an office for the Skills Hub.

University of Sussex Library

Unlike the University of Brighton, which has its collections dispersed among four branch libraries, the University of Sussex follows the campus model, where all students are in one location and are served by a single large library. As a result, this library is significantly larger. It is also much older than the other libraries discussed, being opened in 1963 (by Queen Elisabeth herself). Nevertheless, it is a purpose-built facility and remains modern despite its age, making it an appropriate point of comparison for the sake of this study (image 11).

Image 11. Entrance to the University of Sussex Library

Source: author's collection.

Individualism

Starting with aspects of design that may contribute to Individualism (IDV) [cf. 8], we first examine the use of open stacks. The entire collection of the University of Sussex

Library seems to be in open stacks, apart from the special collections, which are stored at "the Keep", which is a completely separate location What was once a closed storage area with rolling stacks in the basement now seems to have been converted into open (though still rolling) stacks holding the journal collection.

Similar to the Aldrich and Falmer Library, while the journal collection has been clearly separated from the book collection, it does not constitute a large enough part of the library space for this to be deemed the prime mode of division. The book collection itself is sorted by subject, following the decimal system. However, the main division, just as in University of Brighton libraries, is based on the style of work: the ground floor is for group study, first floor for quiet study (where limited communications is allowed), and the second floor for silent study (where readers are expected to work alone) (image 12). In fact, this division goes beyond signs and rules, as it directly informs the spatial arrangements of each floor:

The ground floor features large communal desks, as well as information and circulation areas, and most secondary library functions including the cafeteria, the Wellbeing Area, and seminar rooms.

The first floor follows a more traditional layout, with rows of desks interspersed with open stacks, a single enclosed study area, and the family study room.

The second floor consolidates all stacks in one area (presumably to limit the noise caused by readers searching the stacks) and the various study areas are separated by glass walls to ensure silence.

**Image 12.** View of the three floors of the library building
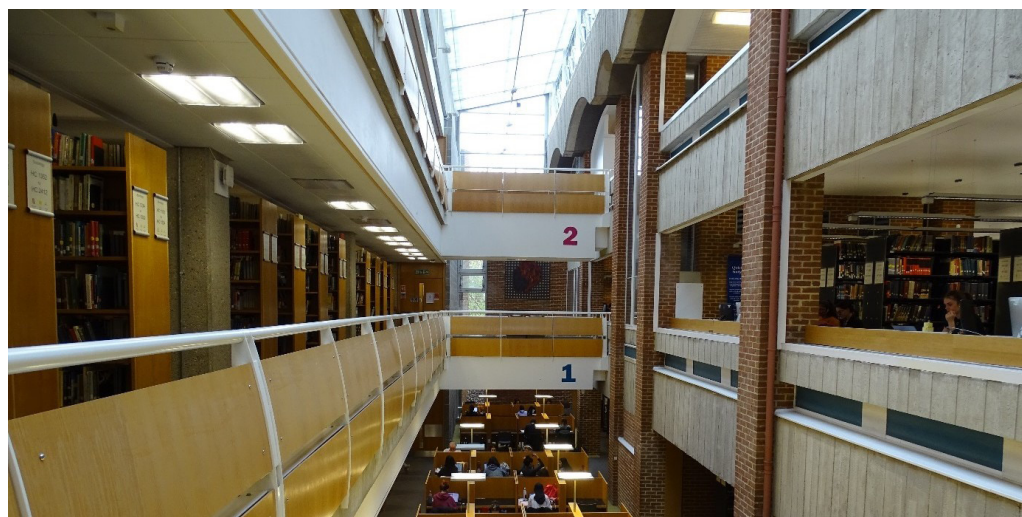
Source: author's collection.

Interestingly, the University of Sussex Library is one of the few libraries in my studies and the only one in Brighton to have a dedicated study area for staff and PhD students: the Sussex Research Hive on the second floor (see image 13). There is also a family study room

for patrons with children, which requires prior booking, making it a limited access reading room for a specific group of readers. Other than that, there are ten generally available group study rooms in the library, with two additional ones located in the Sussex Research Hive. Furthermore, the whole ground floor is dedicated to group work with numerous communal desks in an open space. These can be seen as a space for socialising, but there is also a cafeteria, a large rest area adjacent to it, and a Wellbeing Area. One could say that the entire ground floor is designed for being together, whether for group work or socializing.

Image 13. The Sussex Research Hive
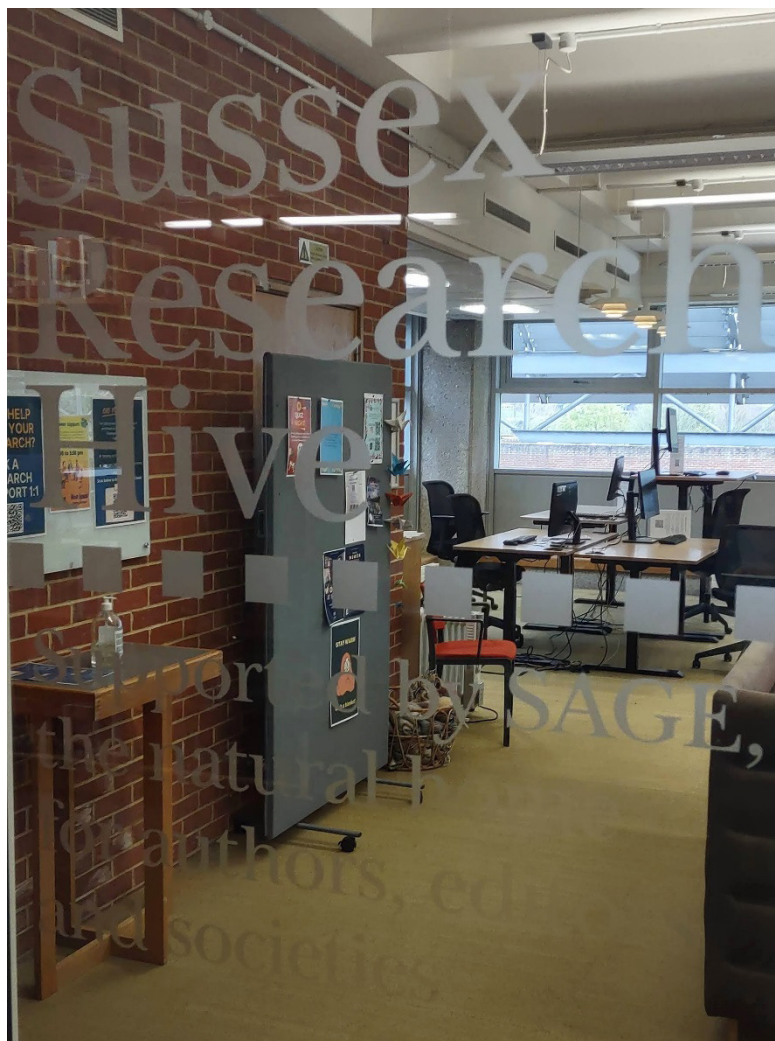
Source: author's collection.

Despite its orientation toward group work, the library also promotes user independence. As mentioned, the collection is in open stacks and books can be borrowed through self-checkout terminals and a returned via a specialised machine. Although there seem to be very few computer stations in the library, there is of course open WiFi and students can also borrow laptops from the library.

The interior of the library is quite varied. There is a consistent background style with red brick, raw concrete, and traditional wooden desks and stacks, but it is overlayed with artworks of various styles and a large variety of furniture, from 1960s style armchairs to modern glass cabins for individual work (image 14), through all manner of desks and seating arrangements. There are also some potted plants in the wellbeing area. Furthermore, each floor is arranged differently, as was described above.

Image 14. Individual silent work pods and laptop rental machine

Source: author's collection.

Unlike the libraries at the University of Brighton, the University of Sussex Library follows an open gate policy, allowing everyone to access its collections. Neither have any of its premises been taken over by the university for teaching (or other) purposes, except for the Skills Hub, which is also present in other university libraries in Brighton.

It would be a stretch to call the building disappointing, but it is not particularly spectacular either. The "red brick brutalism" of its the architecture might be impressive, but it does not really stand out among the other identical buildings at the campus (which is not, in itself, a bad thing). However, preserving much of the library's 1960s style was undoubtedly a good decision, as it has transitioned from merely outdated to historically significant. The variety of art and arrangements also make the space more interesting, but at the same time it is a bit of a maze and the library lacks the 'oomph factor that would make one stop in their tracks.

The presence of a separate staff reading room (as well as, to a lesser extent, the family room – image 15) might indicate a greater emphasis on group identity than usual. Com-

bined with the library's strong focus on group work this could indicate a more collectivist orientation. However, the other aspects of spatial arrangement point to higher individualism.

Image 15. The Family Study Room

Source: author's collection.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Moving on to Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), the key aspect here is flexibility [cf. 10], which seems to be quite good, especially for such an old building. Even though there seem to be many divisions in the interior (as well as light/air-wells, internal courtyards, and staircases) many of these are not structural and there are large open spaces in the building, that can easily be rearranged, as evidenced by the different organisation of individual floors (which seems to be a more modern development).

It is difficult to point to a definite "centre of gravity" of the building, because of the complexity of its arrangements. However, looking at the floor plans, one can see that there is a part of the open stacks area at the geometric center of the building, placing the book and the reader at the library's "centre of gravity".

The division between the patrons' and librarians' areas is well defined. On the first and second floor the staff areas are located in a separated part of the building, which also contains enclosed spaces for readers – the family and group study rooms on the first floor. On the ground floor they are more dispersed, but also on the perimeter and not in the way of patrons' movement.

The main division of the building into various patrons' areas is also very clear, not only because these spaces are located on separate floors, but also because they are arranged differently. It is also clearly communicated through numerous banners and signage (image 16).

Image 16. Quiet and group study banners explaining the rules of each section of the library

Source: author's collection.

Patrons can access the internet through an open WiFi network in the whole building. Neither do they feel like their off-line activity is monitored in the library. Librarians are mostly stationed on the ground floor and there are no conspicuous CCTV cameras. However, readers' freedom of movement is quite restricted: the second floor is divided by numerous partition walls and even on the lower floors there are a few of these and the whole interior is somewhat labyrinthine, making it hard to navigate. Additionally, the most conspicuous signs in the library are the large banners establishing the rules of the group/quiet/silent study areas (image 16). These aspects do not contribute to a sense of freedom, despite the lack of oversight. One might argue that privacy is prioritized over freedom in this library.

Power Distance

Let us once again begin the analysis of the third dimension – Power Distance (PDI) [cf. 9] – with its most obvious manifestations: despite the naturally intimidating brutalist

architecture, the library does not feel particularly imposing and does not have conspicuous status symbols. Nevertheless, the architectural style, in combination with the somewhat labyrinthine layout and numerous glass walls on the top floor, does not contribute to a sense of openness and accessibility. In practice, library services are fairly accessible, at least to able-bodied readers: up the (somewhat intimidating) stairs, through a double door and an open security gate and the Library Service Desk is on the left. Notably, however, the first facility encountered upon entry is the cafeteria.

Other than the latter, the only space that does not directly contribute to the library's core tasks is the Skills Hub. One could also argue that the Wellbeing Area as well, though it can also be seen as a particular type of reading room (it even has a dedicated collection).

Even though the library building did not set out to reference history, the fact that its original style has been largely preserved over the five decades of its existence gives it a historical character, especially from the point of view of its twenty-year-old target audience. Of the originally intended modern and pragmatic style, only the latter remains (image 17).

Image 17. The old-fashioned interior design and furniture have been preserved in many places
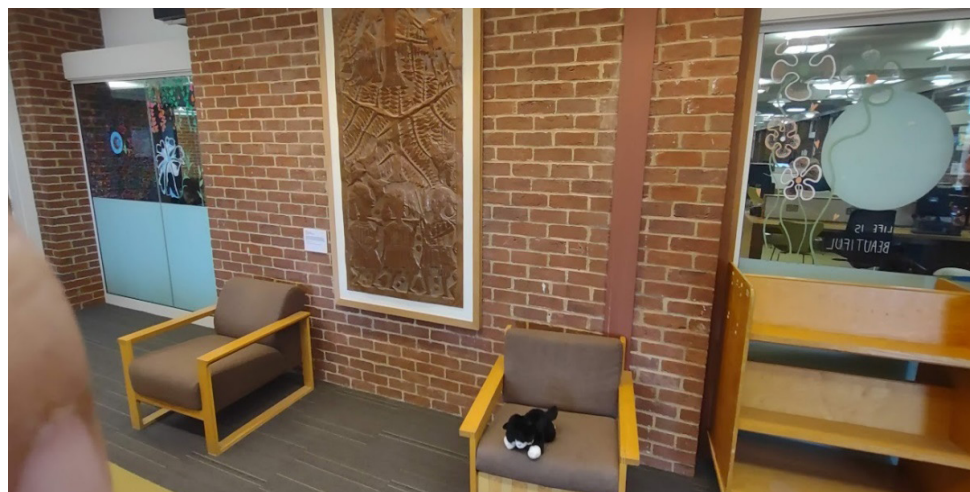
Source: author's collection.

Jubilee Library

The Jubilee Library is the main public library in Brighton & Hove and thus the first of that type in the study. While it is not an academic library, it is housed in a very modern building (image 18), meeting the other requirements of the study. Opened in 2005, this public library was conceived as part of a £50 million project aimed at revitalizing a derelict brownfield site in central Brighton. The building's design has garnered multiple architectural accolades for its innovative use of materials and energy-efficient features. Notably,

the library's carbon footprint is half that of a conventional public building of similar size, thanks to its reliance on natural energy sources [4].

Image 18. Crowds waiting for the opening of the Jubilee Library

Source: author's collection.

Individualism

As in the previously discussed academic libraries in Brighton, most of the collection is in open stacks. Although there is a storeroom for some of the less frequently circulated books with rolling stock, it is very small. It must be noted here that the overall collection appears small for a library this size, but this is in part due to the fact that the whole Brighton library system, including Jubilee and 15 branch libraries, has a single collection and books can be borrowed from and returned to any library in the system. There is also a definite feeling that the library's purpose goes well beyond book circulation.

One of the aspects of library organisation relevant to Individualism is the way the building is divided into sections. This is a complex issue in the case of the Jubilee Library. The library's primary division is between fiction downstairs and non-fiction upstairs (see image 19). Additionally, the ground floor features a separate children's area and a "Young People's Area" for teenagers aged 13-19 (see image 20). These arrangements might typically suggest a lower level of Individualism [cf. 8]. However, in this case it seems to be more of a functional division, similar to the quiet and silent study areas in Brighton's academic libraries, where downstairs is the space for patrons who are socialising or more casually browsing through fiction, while upstairs is a work and study area with a collection supporting such activities.

Image 19. Inside the Jubilee Library

Source: author's collection.

Groupwork facilities are a staple of modern libraries, but also an indicator of the level of individualism. The Jubilee Library does not offer typical group study rooms that can be found in most academic libraries, although the Business & IP Centre on the third floor, where citizens can receive assistance in setting up a small business and hold meetings, has two "meeting pods"[2] – small enclosed rooms designed for private meetings or teleconferences. More importantly, the library is clearly designed as a sociopetal space and provides many seating arrangements facilitating group activities, particularly on the ground floor. There is also a tiny café and a community area, designed to facilitate socialising.

Like all libraries in Brighton, the Jubilee Library is equipped with self-service stations. There are also regular computer stations, though they are mostly placed on the perimeter of the building (in the study area and the young readers' area), making the centrally located help desk more stand out, despite its modest size.

Most of the interior of the library keeps a consistent style (with light-coloured wood, green carpets, and lots of natural light), However, it still manages to feel quite diverse, due to the variety of seating arrangements and a wealth of functionally distinct spaces (children's, young people's, community, and study areas, café, reading room – see for example images 20, 21 and 22). All this together is quite impressive, and the library seems very friendly, though it lacks a truly exceptional "wow factor".

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[2]   It also contains a few desks and sofas with electrical outlets, as well as a very helpful librarian.

Image 20. Young People's Area

Source: author's collection.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The Jubilee Library building seems very flexible (which is one of the key aspects associated with Uncertainty Avoidance [cf. 10]). Its two main parts are open spaces with no divisions and obstacles, other than the few lightwells upstairs. At the same time, the perimeter rooms are interconnected and have wide entrances and simple furnishings. While it may not be possible to fully open them up, altering their functions would mostly be a matter of changing the signs and moving some furniture about. The only significant parts that couldn't be easily adapted for a different purpose are the Business Centre and conference rooms, and (to a lesser extent) the children's area, which is a separate but open space, albeit with distinct furnishings and decorations. All these various specialised areas are clearly marked and designated, if not exactly closed off from the rest of the library (the level of separation varies) (see image 21). The main division of the library's space between the more casual downstairs space and the more studious upper floor is also naturally intuitive.

Image 21. Community Area

Source: author's collection.

As mentioned before, the library is very user-centric, and the reader is clearly at the centre of gravity of this space. Furthermore, the staff areas are located on the mezzanine level, which is mostly inaccessible and not used by patrons, making them all but invisible to visitors. This means that readers do not unintentionally bump into closed doors. In general there are few obstacles to their movement throughout the library, apart from the psychological barrier preventing one from going into an area for a specific group of patrons, such as the teenagers' section on the ground floor, which is clearly distinct and marked. Other than that, however, there is little prohibiting or instructional signage in the library. This contributes to the freedom of movement, as does the lack of obvious monitoring by either staff (who are few) or CCTV (which is inconspicuous) in most parts of the library. Neither is on-line activity closely monitored, as the library offers internet access through open WiFi.

Power Distance

Despite its status, the library does not convey a strong sense of Power Distance (PDI) [cf. 9]. There are no status symbols in it and the building seems very open and accessible. The interior has been described as "cathedral-like" [1, p. 162-163] and "lofty [and] noble" [5], although such descriptors seem to be something of a stretch. There is, in fact, nothing intimidating about the library. On the contrary, mostly it is bright and friendly, comfortable, and modern, however, the library could benefit from more greenery, particularly since, unlike the previously described libraries, it is not situated in a green suburban area, but in the city centre.

Image 22. Children's Area

Source: author's collection.

Finally, it should be noted that the Jubilee Library does not seem overly focused on traditional tasks: the on-site collection is relatively small for a library of this size and status and numerous other functions are served by the building. There is a gift/book shop at the entrance (like in a museum), a café, a community area, two conference rooms, and a business and IP centre. Moreover, the library feels as much like a community hub as a traditional library – the knitting club was holding a very lively meeting during my visit and there were a lot of people using the computers or working on their laptops.

Having to go in through the aforementioned gift shop to enter the library is definitely an unusual idea. I suppose it helps support the library's budget, but on the downside, it increases the distance between the outside and the first librarian or bookshelf. Patrons must pass through a double outer door, then the gift shop, around the bend, and through another door, to enter the library proper. As a result, the shop is the first thing visitors see upon arrival, making it the most prominent feature near the entrance.

Whitehawk Library

This was the last library I visited during my stay in Brighton. It adds another type of library to the sample – public, like Jubilee, but this time very small, although also housed in a purpose-built modern building (see image 23). The library is located in Whitehawk – an outlying residential neighbourhood of Brighton. The two-storey, semicircular building with a glass façade houses the library on the ground floor and a community centre upstairs.

Image 23. Whitehawk Library – outside view

Source: author's collection.

Individualism

As is typical for small public libraries, the entire collection is available in open stacks. Similar to the Jubilee library, the collection on the spot is smaller than one might expect, but the library is part of the common collections of the whole Brighton library system.

The entire reading area of the library is a single open space, where the collection is divided following a variety of criteria. There is a designated children's area, with separate shelves with books for toddlers, children, and "young people", but other than that the collection is divided primarily by type or by content. For example there is a bookshelf with new books, large print books, another with audiobooks. The rest of the books are arranged by topic. Interestingly, computers also have designated user groups: some are dedicated to teenagers, others are for everyone. All in all, this seems like a user centric approach, where the primary concern is the variety of reader needs.

Another aspect of library organization important from the perspective of Individualism is the availability of group study rooms. This is often difficult to account for in smaller libraries, which may simply lack the space for such an arrangement, however, group work can be accommodated in other ways. In Whitehawk Library there is a so called "meeting pod" – a circular glass-walled soundproofed "room" – which is not exactly a group study room but serves a similar purpose (image 24). This is quite a significant feature for such a small library, though there are no larger desks that would facilitate groupwork. Nor is there much space for patrons to socialize. There are overall few sitting places in the library and none that would really encourage interaction. There are only a few pouffes in the Toy Library area.

Image 24. The Meeting Pod

Source: author's collection.

The library relies heavily on self-service. Not only are there terminals for borrowing and returning books, but the library is only staffed every other day, and on alternate days, it operates on a self-service basis. As a result, while neither the information desk, nor the computer stations are particularly conspicuous, the information desk is unmanned for three days in the week and there is a greater number of the latter, arranged in three separate groupings.

For such a small library, the interior layout is relatively diverse. The whole space follows a uniform style, but the various areas with specific functions have different furniture. Still, there is nothing impressive about either the interior design or the building as a whole.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The part of the building occupied by the library is a single open space with no divisions and only one structural column. Overall, this gives the library building significant flexibility, although the staff area is located behind a wall, which may be a structural element. This may limit flexibility, but not significantly, given the size of the library. On the plus side, this layout ensures a clear separation between the patrons' and staff areas, with

the entrance to the library staff rooms inconspicuously placed behind the information desk.

As mentioned, the library uses open stacks placing both the reader and the book at the center of its design. The primary division between the adult and young reader areas is pretty obvious, but the movement of patrons within the library remains unrestricted – it as a single open space with no rigid barriers, although on unstaffed days it is only available to registered readers. Similarly, internet access is not restricted: library computers require a login and password, but an open WiFi network is also available. Similarly, monitoring is relatively minimal – although CCTV cameras are visible, they are not conspicuous and half the time there is no staff in the library at all. It should be noted that there is a security guard in the hallway. Overall, there is little signage in the library, with most of it limited to section labels and notice boards.

Power Distance

Unsurprisingly, for such a small library, there are no status symbols here whatsoever. The library also feels very open, if not especially accessible – the entrance is located at the back of the building, through a terrace and a corridor with lavatories, a security guard, and a staircase leading to a staff only area. This creates a rather long entrance sequence, which is an unusual choice, given that there is a door leading directly into the parking lot. However, this door remains closed most of the time (perhaps it is used on self-service days?) The first thing one encounters after entering the building is a staircase to a staff only area, the lavatories, and a security guard's post. Once inside the main library space, the first thing is the "Toy Library", from which toys can be lent out (image 25). As a result, both the main collection and the help desk are located quite far from the entrance, although the latter is still visible from the doorway.

Image 25. The Toy Library

**Source:** author's collection.

All of the library's space is dedicated to its purposes, although the building as a whole also accommodates a community centre. There are no plants in the library and its overall style is best described as pragmatic and vaguely modern. The semi-circular design featuring wooden beams supporting the roof and a glass outer wall is nice, but not exceptional.

Results

As was outlined in more detail in my previous articles [8; 9; 10], the study is based on a semi-closed observation form, which allows numerical results to be assigned to individual cultural dimensions. While this is not a perfectly precise measurement (too many individual details need to be considered) it does make it possible to compare libraries more objectively than casual observations based on general impressions would permit.

As shown in figure 1, the libraries analyzed are mostly similar to each other in terms of their apparent levels across all three cultural dimensions and if they do diverge from the others, it is only along one axis, which will be discussed further. The notable exception is Whitehawk Library, likely due to its status as both a public library and the smallest library in the sample.

**Figure 1.** A comparison of libraries in Brighton across all three dimensions
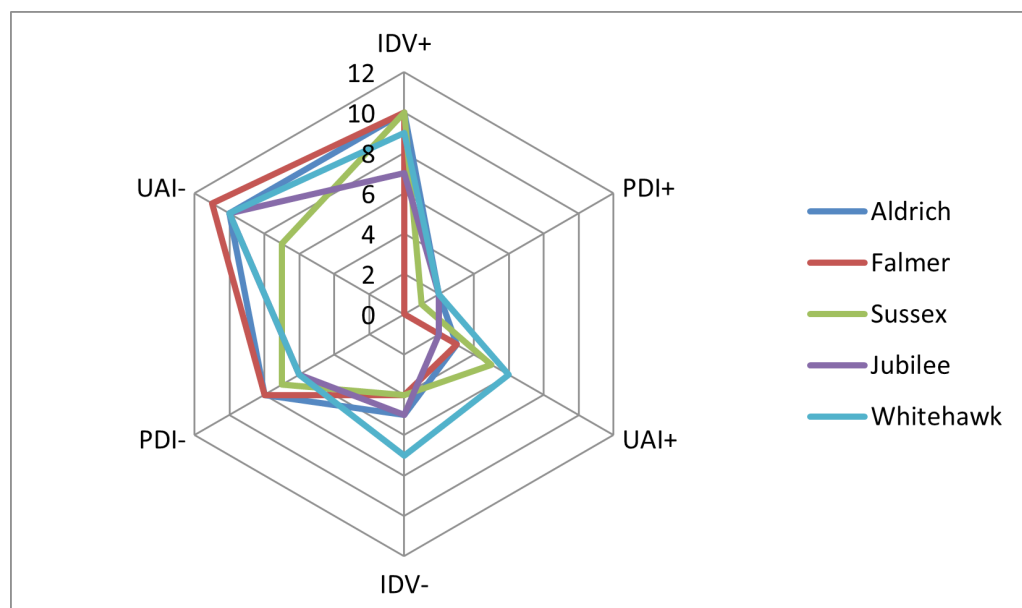
Source: own work.

Individualism[3]

All the analysed academic library buildings in Brighton – Aldrich, Falmer, and University of Sussex – have almost identical results for this dimension (see figure 2). This indicates a strong inclination toward individualism, with some collectivist aspects still present. This aligns with the theoretical model [cf. 8] – the results do not lean as strongly towards higher IDV, but few libraries do. The Jubilee Library appears slightly less individualistic, though elements indicating higher IDV still dominate. This is most likely because the Jubilee Library is not an academic library and strongly focuses on its community aspect. The results for Whitehawk Library show a similar balance between individualism and collectivism but are more widely spread. Interestingly, this pattern does not appear in the Irish sample (which also included public libraries), where it was university libraries that tended more towards the collectivist end of the spectrum [7].

Nevertheless, the results are quite homogenous, especially compared to the Polish sample [6]. As a result, the averaged findings appear largely consistent with modern librarianship standards. They do not indicate as strong individualism as the theoretical model implies, but neither do the averaged results for the other countries. Indeed, very few individual libraries reach that level of apparent IDV either. Compared to the countries examined in my earlier studies [6; 7], the average results are slightly tighter (albeit within an expected margin of error), but otherwise show a similar balance between low and high IDV elements. The averaged results are slightly closer to the Polish results than to those of other countries, but within the expected margin of error, so no conclusion can be drawn from it. This is especially true given the overall consistency of Brighton's libraries compared to the considerable variability observed in Polish libraries.

Figure 2. Apparent Individualism levels of analysed libraries
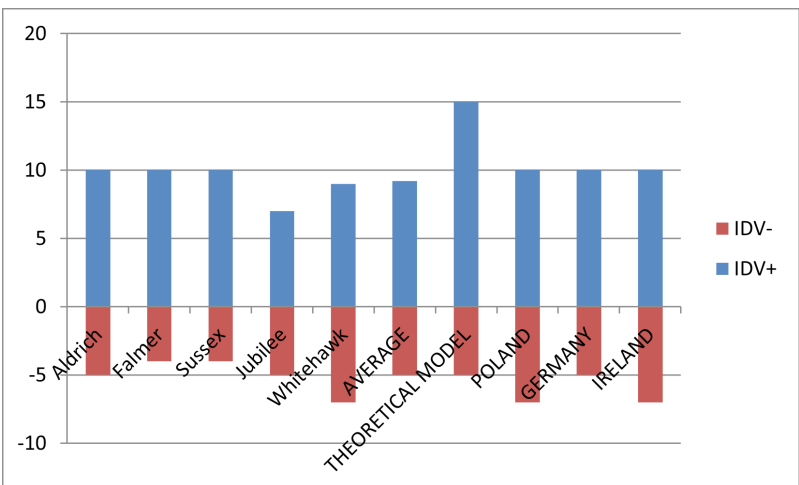
Source: own work.

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[3]   For a more detailed breakdown of this dimension see: _Individualism and collectivism in library architecture. An analysis of selected new library buildings in the Former East Germany_ [8].

Interestingly, these results do not align with the values of Individualism provided for the four countries by Hofstede and his collaborators [3; 2, p. 95-97], which show a significant difference between the highly individualistic German (IDV=79) and British (IDV=76) cultures, and the much more moderate Irish (IDV=58) and Polish (IDV=49) cultures. This suggests a high level of adoption of library organisation and design standards (originating from western cultures).

Uncertainty Avoidance

The libraries in Brighton seem slightly less consistent on the Uncertainty Avoidance axis (figure 3), although they still fall within the bounds of the assumptions of the theoretical model [cf. 10]. In particular, the averaged results align more closely with recommendations from subject literature than those of Polish libraries [cf. 6; 10]. Notably, while the German and Irish averages are respectively narrower and wider than the theoretical model, both strike similar balance.

The Aldrich and Falmer libraries are, somewhat predictably for two parts of the same university, almost identical to each other. That the University of Sussex library displays somewhat higher Uncertainty Avoidance can be explained by its age – standards were somewhat different in the 1960s and, despite the efforts of later librarians, it continues to have an effect. This hypothesis is corroborated by the even higher Uncertainty Avoidance of the James Hardiman Library in Galway, Ireland (from the 1970s and less modernised than the University of Sussex Library) [7] or even the Biblioteka Śląska in Katowice (dating to the late 1990s). It is also much larger than the other analysed libraries, but this does not seem to be a determining factor, as many large libraries in Poland and Germany display extremely low UAI (such as the Warsaw University Library in Poland or the central library of Dresden, Germany).

Interestingly, the Jubilee Library is very similar in terms of UAI to the two University of Brighton libraries, but the Whitehawk library has many more features suggesting higher Uncertainty Avoidance, while also having just as many features suggesting the opposite. This phenomenon is difficult to explain in such a small library and seems to be the cumulative outcome of many small design decisions.

The national averages for UAI are more varied than for IDV, which is most visible in the case of Poland. This is in line with Hofstede's own result, which give Poland an extremely high UAI of 93 (compared to Germany's 65 and 35 for both Ireland and UK) [3; 2, p. 192-194]. Indeed, Polish librarians' commitment to modern librarianship standards is evident in the fact that these results are not even higher on the Uncertainty Avoidance spectrum. While the averaged results for Brighton, UK and Galway, Ireland are not identical, achieve a comparable balance between high and low Uncertainty Avoidance.

**Figure 3.** Apparent Uncertainty Avoidance levels of analysed libraries
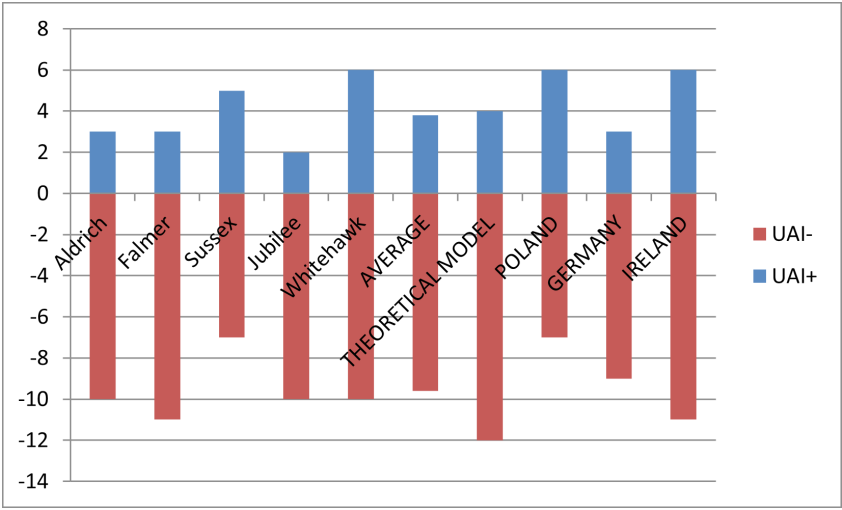
Source: own work.

Power Distance

As can be seen in figure 4, no library in Brighton has as many features lowering Power Distance as would be suggested by subject literature [cf. 9], though this pattern is consistent across the averaged results for all the studied countries. Overall, efforts to reduce Power Distance are evident in all analysed libraries in Brighton, and they generally trend in the right direction. They also demonstrate a high level of consistency in this regard [cf. 9]. The averaged results are also similar to the Polish and German samples – despite variations in spread, the overall balance of factors remains comparable. Ireland is more of an outlier here, with a slightly higher average PDI and not just because of a single extreme case [7]. This is in line with Hofstede's results for the three west-European countries, which all have a PDI of around 30 [3; 2, p. 57-59]. It should be noted, however, that Hofstede assigns Poland a fairly high PDI of 68, which is not reflected in the results of my studies. Once again, this suggests the widespread adoption of universally recognized standards in library organization and design.

Among the individual buildings in Brighton, the Falmer Library displays the lowest Power Distance, mainly thanks to disposing (and quite deliberately) of any features that would increase it. Jubilee Library and Whitehawk Library have identical results, which is expected given that they are both public libraries within the same network, despite their difference in size.

Figure 4. Apparent Power Distance levels of analysed libraries
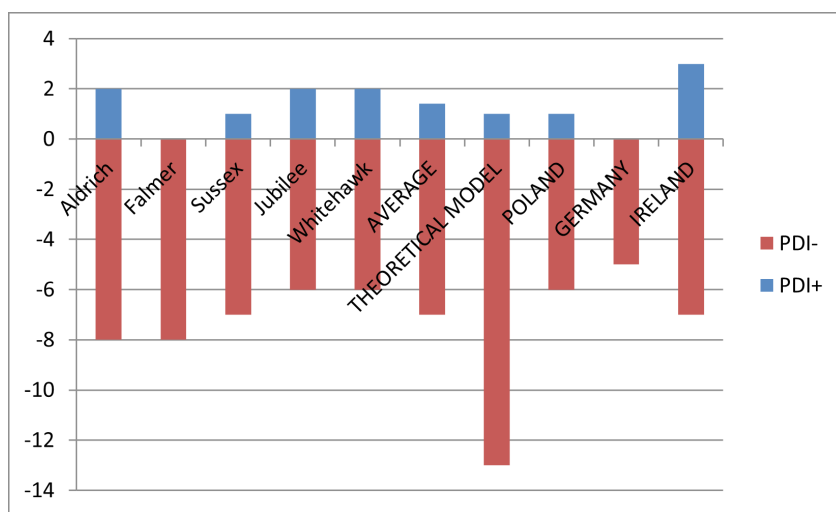
Conclusions

As shown in figure 5, the averaged results across all studied countries are fairly consistent. Poland stands out as a slight outlier, likely due to the considerable variation among libraries in the Polish sample. Polish results also show a greater degree of overlap with the Irish data. Overall, however, all the graphs occupy a similar position on the map of the three dimensions, mostly within the bounds of the graph representing the recommendations of subject literature, though not as extreme. This further reinforces the earlier conclusion regarding the overall consistency and widespread adoption of modern norms and standards in library design. Which is further strengthened by the observation that results of library studies do not overlap strongly with the predictions of Hofstede's 6D model.

With results from four different countries, it is now possible to point out that, while averaged results for each studied country are similar, lower IDV and higher PDI (within a given culture) seem to correlate with a greater variety between library buildings, which is more noticeable in the Irish sample and even more so in the Polish one.

While Polish and (to a lesser extent) Irish libraries are quite varied, German academic libraries demonstrate a high level of consistency [6; 8; 9; 10]. Given that this also seems to be the case with libraries in Brighton (cf. figure 1), there is a possibility of comparing the way libraries are organised in the two countries (or at least the cities of Berlin, Dresden, and Brighton where the research was conducted). Although the averaged results across all dimensions are very similar between the two samples, they are not identical, and neither are the analysed libraries.

Let us first examine the similarities: most libraries in all these cities make use open stacks and broadly open planning. Most of the buildings are also quite flexible and have ample groupwork spaces. The key distinction lies in how group activities (and more broadly tasks of a library) are understood. While all German libraries included in the study had at least one group study room; even if it was not part of the original plan, efforts were made to create one. However, the emphasis is placed firmly on study. German academic libraries seem highly focused on learning. Most of these libraries provide little to no space for socializing; armchairs are often arranged to discourage conversation, and in areas where social interaction could occur, patrons are explicitly instructed to remain silent.

Figure 5. A comparison of libraries in the four studied countries across all three dimensions
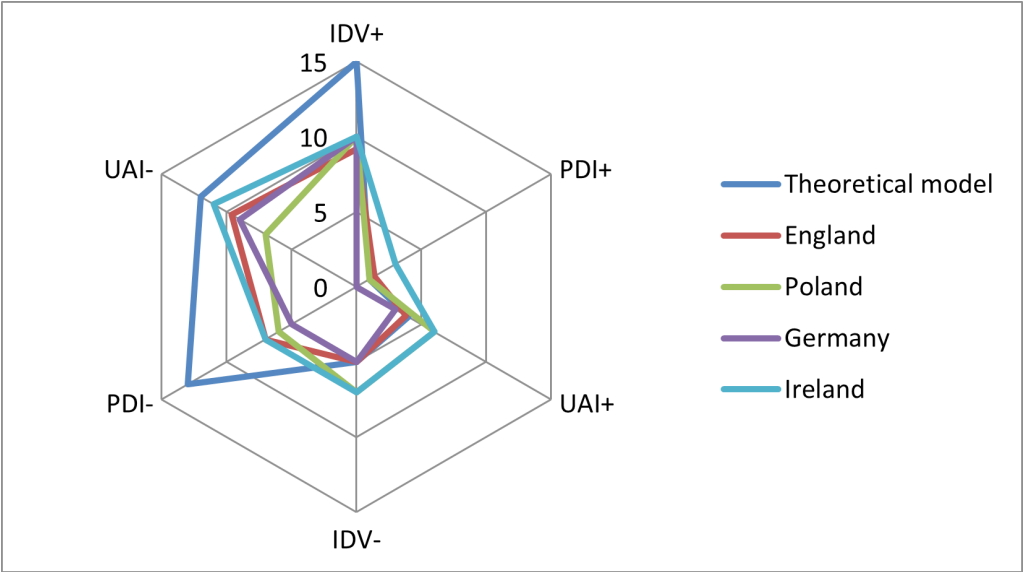
Source: own work.

Whereas English libraries (at least those in Brighton) seem to be taking the idea of a library as a third place [cf. 11] very seriously; to the point where they are open to students after normal working hours. Crucially, most of them dedicate a significant amount of space to group activities. The Aldrich Library offers 13 group study rooms and two large areas with group-work tables: one in the entry hall, and another one on the ground floor. The smaller Falmer Library contains only five group study rooms, but the whole ground floor (so called quiet study area) is dedicated to communal activities. The University of Sussex Library assigns its entire ground floor to group work, except that this purpose is even more clearly stated (it is literally called the group study area). A large part of this level is also explicitly dedicated to socialising, with a large cafeteria, a rest area, and a Wellbeing Space. Patrons can also book one of 12 traditional group study rooms. Although the Jubilee Library lacks traditional group study rooms, it features numerous communal seating

arrangements in both the upstairs study area and the more informal ground-floor section. In all cases – particularly, though not exclusively, in the Jubilee Library – it is evident that group activities extend beyond studying or collaborative projects. To me, this was the most striking aspect of the organizational approach in Brighton's largest libraries.

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