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Carlana Mezzalira Pentimalli

THE NEW BRIXEN PUBLIC LIBRARY
BY CARLANA MEZZALIRA
PENTIMALLI

explores the symbiosis between
ancient and contemporary

Architectural firm [Carlana Mezzalira Pentimalli](http://carlanamezzalirapentimalli.com) carlanamezzalirapentimalli.com has completed the new Brixen Public Library (Bolzano, Italy), a stone's throw from the Duomo — a public institution founded in 1984, which, with its legacy of over 36.000 books represents a landmark for the entire Isarco Valley.

Following on from the Music School, the studio doubles its presence in Tyrol's oldest city by giving the community a contemporary space for learning and sharing, a welcoming urban living room that reinforces local cultural identity and instills a strong sense of social cohesion:

"This is not a library intended as a large container of books – quite the opposite. It is a project deeply rooted in its context, designed to welcome and generate human relationships and exchanges, intertwining cultures, practices and people of different ages ".

- explain the architects Michel Carlana, Luca Mezzalira and Curzio Pentimalli.

The project consists of the construction of a unitary complex which includes a new building and the restoration and annexation of the existing buildings of the Ex Finance, a portion of the Ex Court (the first two levels) and of the Ex Prison (part of the ground floor and first floor). The intervention is completed by the redefinition of the existing external spaces, two pedestrian access areas to the north and south of the Ex Finance building, and the garden adjacent to Via Bruno, which was once private and owned by the Bishop.

Planting itself silently and extremely respectfully into its surroundings, the intervention is located south of the Ex Court, in the void generated between two existing buildings, where, before the demolition, there was a lot belonging to the Diocese. A real connecting infrastructure, the new building behaves structurally like a "tree" that leans its cement "branches" towards the buildings of the Ex Finance and the Ex Court, establishing a perpetual relationship between new and old, and inspiring the architects to rename the project, "*Kulturbaum, tree of culture*".

The analogy continues on a planimetric level, dictated by the need for great flexibility and adaptability of the spaces of a contemporary public library. Far from adopting the classic shelving system, the building has a double perimeter shell located between the external concrete walls and the wooden paneling that covers the interiors, and which houses most of the serving spaces: from the vertical distribution to the toilets, to the furniture with bookcases, fixed benches, tables, and more. This "cortex" envelops the space, completely freeing it from any functional obligation.

The versatility of the environments has also guided the intended management and use of the library. By controlling some strategic access points, in fact, **the complex can be completely or partially permeable to the different floors.** In this way, both the buildings and the related external appurtenances serve as independent elements to be used autonomously, to perform multiple functions and events at different times.

The connections that are created between the new building and the existing buildings are tangible and fulfill formal, functional and distributive needs. The new building is the result of a mass that deforms through contractions and dilations in order to recompose itself according to the surrounding stereometries.

Far from self-referencing, **the complex changes as if it were a sensitive organism that continuously adapts to the needs of the site and the project.**

To resolve the minor differences in elevation between the three buildings, the new "branches" compensate for the changes in elevation through slight slopes. The new volume contains two vertical links with different characteristics. **The closed fire escape,** in addition to serving all floors of the courthouse as an emergency exit, also acts as a staircase that connects the ground floor with the attic of the new building. **The open staircase** has been positioned barycentrically with respect to the functional masses that develop along the various levels. It facilitates quick connections between the floors, inviting those who walk through it to enjoy glimpses of the new spatiality. Compositionally and functionally, both staircases are incorporated into the "cortex", while the **pre-existing Ex Finance staircase** is mainly intended for service use.

Total continuity is guaranteed between the exteriors, enhanced by the insertion of tailored furnishing elements, and the interiors of the new library, intended to perform as a true public space. **Entering the new building is like stepping into a portion of the city center.**

Access to the **new building** is from the ground floor through the infotheque. From here, a generous quadruple height space, occupied by the reception area, grants access to the lifts. To the south, there is a newspaper library that can be made independent, ensuring excellent flexibility. On the first floor, the fiction area is designed as an open space which provides access — through a second reception area — to the activities located in the Ex Court and Ex Finance or to the upper floors via a staircase and lift. The second floor is mainly occupied by the non-fiction / treatise area, which directly connects to the Ex Finance building, extending this function.

On the third floor, an additional reception area acts as a junction between the multipurpose room and the literary events area. Toilets, cleaning rooms, storage areas and information desks are evenly distributed on the various levels. The renovation of the other existing buildings has enhanced their ancient character and their high degree of flexibility to accommodate different activities open to the public.

The **Ex Finance building** is configured as an access point to the new intervention with the main front facing Piazza Duomo. On the ground floor, in addition to the two access points to the north (main) and south (secondary), there is an infotheque, a borrow and return area, and cloakroom spaces. The first floor houses the internal offices of the library, while the second and third floors host spaces for non-fiction and treatises and a multipurpose room. Accessibility is granted through a designated independent stairwell and lift.

The ground floor of the **Ex Court building** mainly houses service areas: automated warehouses, the area for checking the 24 h borrow and return area, an external counter, toilets and technical rooms. The first floor encompasses the children's area, the kids' area, music department with archive, playroom and a multipurpose room. The entrance is located on the first floor from the south of the building, the children's area is situated on the east side of the corridor, while the playroom is on the west. Continuing along the corridor, before the frescoes room, the multipurpose room is located to the east and the music archive to the west. To the north, the children's area is housed in a more secluded setting, with two independent rooms and a large area that can also be divided with furniture containing books and games.

In the **Ex Prison building**, a passage gallery and an adjacent ancillary room have been built.

Special attention has been paid to natural lighting, which is essential not only for reading, but also for the maintenance and conservation of books. The south wall of the building, devoid of interesting views, is deliberately blind to prevent the entry of direct light, and equipped on the inside with a "bookcase wall" that occupies the entire height of the building. This continuous boiserie, which becomes the library's manifesto as a treasure chest of knowledge.

The main components of the context have been reinterpreted in a contemporary key, such as **the characteristic "erker"**— typical bow windows that characterize the historic center. Two of these, of a giant order, favor strategic views: the building overlooks the two main areas of Brixen, the White Tower and the bell tower of the

Cathedral on one side, and the Bishop's Palace on the other, tracing a line of continuity with the city's landmarks and most iconic elements. Formally, the two erkers on the outside represent the extension of the volume of the building, within which they recreate a spatiality typical of Nordic culture, forming alcoves ideal for reading or admiring the landscape. The large windows, which trace the boundary between inside and outside, have been designed to favor indirect light at the points where there is the greatest flux and concentration of people.

Finally, two large skylights placed at the top of the complex pitched roof allow the sun's rays to cross the entire height of the building and reach the ground floor, thanks to an articulated system of retraction of the different floors, which plays a fundamental role in the introspection system between them.

Each internal glimpse, **in which everything has been custom designed**, is different, due to the great geometric and volumetric complexity of the building, camouflaged on the outside with clean and essential lines that blend perfectly with the pre-existing structures.

The project of the new Brixen Public Library project by Carlana Mezzalira Pentimalli intensifies the close relationship between architecture and context. Its formal outcome is a public venue, inspired by the architectural characteristics of Brixen, **where the new feeds the old and vice versa, restoring exceptional architecture capable of interweaving historical and contemporary fabric.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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CREDITS

PROJECT NAME
ADDRESS

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ARCHITECT

Carlana Mezzalira Pentimalli
(Michel Carlana, Luca Mezzalira, Curzio Pentimalli)

PROJECT TEAM

Michel Carlana, Luca Mezzalira, Curzio Pentimalli
Marco Carraro, Alessio Oliviero

CLIENT

Comune di Bressanone (BZ)

COMPETITION	2010, 1st prize
DESIGN PHASE	2017 – 2018
CONSTRUCTION PHASE	2019 – 2021
COMPLETION	2022
GFA	3.013 sqm (gross area of the project) 2.378 sqm (gross area of the lot)
COST	7.056.260,80 €
CONTRACTOR	Unionbau
GENERAL PROJECT DIRECTION	Carlana Mezzalira Pentimalli 3M Engineering
PROJECT AND MANAGEMENT OF STRUCTURES, SYSTEMS, FIRE-FIGHTING SYSTEMS AND SECURITY COORDINATION	Bergmeister
ELECTRIC SYSTEM, SAFETY, LIGHTING	Leitner Electro
HYDRO-THERMAL-SANITARY AND MECHANICAL SYSTEM	Ranzato Impianti
LIGHTING CONSULTANT	Von Lutz Studio Associates
ACOUSTIC CONSULTANT	NiRa Consulting (project phase) Studio Architetto Eleonora Strada (construction phase)
EXTERNAL DOORS AND WINDOWS	Askeen
SUPPLIERS	Nerobutto (restoration and special paints) Boden Service (concrete floors) Seeber (wood and carpet flooring) Inoxferdi (blacksmith work) Falegnameria Longato (carpentry)

FURNITURE

Erlacher (custom furniture)
Arte (furniture in series)
Serima (infographics and signage)

MATERIALS

New building structure in reinforced concrete with insulation and aluminum sheet covering roof (Unionbau)
Washed mineral plaster on the facades, special lime paints, restoration works (Nerobutto)
Steel frames covered in anodized aluminum (Askeen)
Polished concrete floors (Boden Service)
Natural larch wood floors, carpets and curtains (Seeber-Tendacor)
Internal coatings in custom-made wood paneling (Falegnameria Longato)
Metal gridded gates and customized handrails (Inoxferdi)
Production and installation of infographics and signage (Serima)

PHOTOGRAPHY

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