Abstract

Rapid technological developments today are taking place alongside sweeping economic and social changes. Within this rubric of interwoven changes, one trend is of particular interest, the emerging importance of Information Technology (IT) in all spheres of life. IT will shape not only the way daily activities are conducted, but also the spaces with which these activities take reference.

IT does not have the monopoly of influence over the design of architectural spaces, but it is one of many other powerful forces, such as political ideology, economic and technical viability and so forth. The power of IT does not dictate the design of an architectural space, but rather, it allows expression of other design intentions.

IT has the power to close distances and overcome physical barriers. This means that geometrical relationships between spaces are freed to be expressed in means other than by physical and formal relationships. Freedom from previously cardinal rules such as circulation and visual connection gives the impression of an apparent equalisation, the breaking down of hierarchical structures, takes place.

However, old centre-periphery power structures are not destroyed, but they are modified and survive. Using the freedom of distributing functions over distances, historically based power relationships are able to concentrate power in a few sites. This decoupling is the sharp division of labour and decentralisation of different functions, and extreme flexibility of location.

The idea of apparent equalisation and decoupling are important in understanding the relationship of the proposed new Singapore National Library Building and the National Library System outlined in the Library 2000 Report. This report recommends decentralisation of public library facilities into a network of electronically linked regional libraries, but contradicts this by suggesting the building of a new National Library as a national icon.

These will be important points to note in the design of the new National Library Building.