



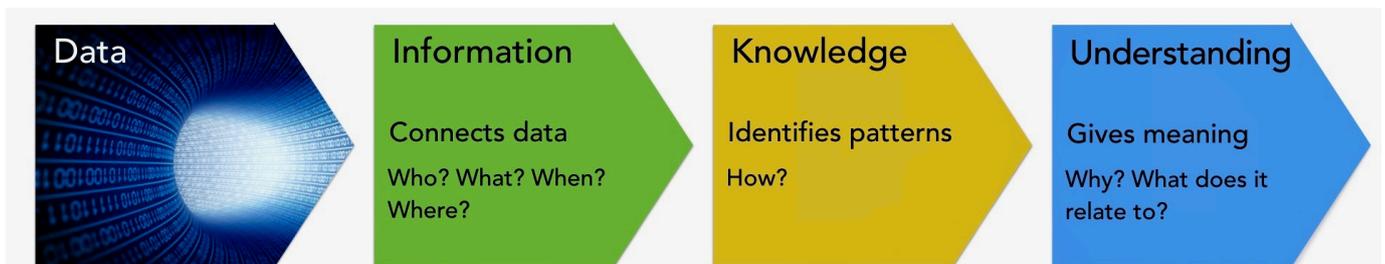
The Ministry of Imagination

The Dutch Ministry of Imagination (Ministerie van Verbeelding) is a unique cooperation of architect Jan David Hanrath, librarians Rob Bruijnzeels and Joyce Sternheim, cultural programmer Marien Brand and designers Florian de Visser en Lotte van Wulfften Palthe. We combine our creativity and expertise to design new work processes and exiting one-off library buildings that go beyond trends like the library as a Third Place.

Why we do this

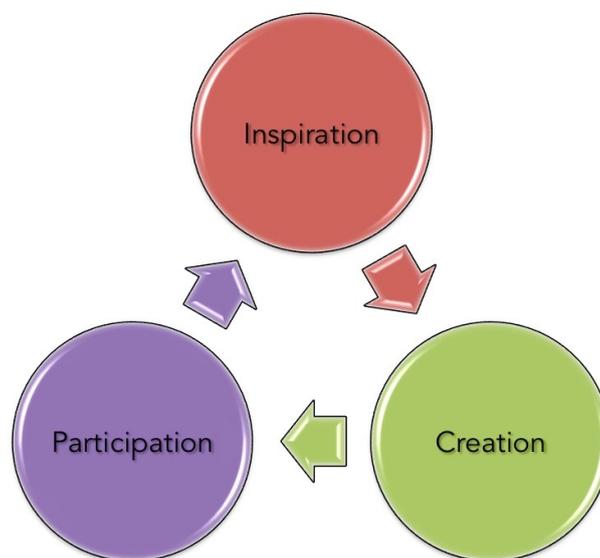
Society needs well-informed and responsible citizens who are willing to engage in conversations about issues relating to their local communities. It has become increasingly important to involve people in problems and topics that affect their lives and their local communities and develop smart and creative solutions through collective intelligence. Current processes of the public library however, are still primarily aimed at developing individual skills. Although of great importance, these skills do not actively stimulate people to share knowledge and insights or to engage in conversations.

We strongly believe that public libraries need to take on a coordinating and inspiring role in the promotion of deeper understanding and the enhancement of collective intelligence. It means the library has to tap into the collective insight of people and allow their knowledge and activities to become part of the library collection.



How we do this

To achieve this we have developed a new way of working that revolves around the more active processes of inspiration, creation and participation. Core of this process is agenda setting: addressing a specific theme or question that is of importance to the local community. It means that during an extended period of time, the library will investigate the theme from a variety of angles. By actively using the collection, mobilising all available knowledge and organising activities, discussions and lectures, possible answers, ideas and opinions are researched in cooperation with citizens and organisations in the local community.



It all starts with inspiration. By asking probing questions and by designing new and exciting ways to present the collection, the library triggers people's curiosity and interest in the subject. People are then stimulated to express their opinions and add new and valuable significance to the collection, helping them to engage in further exploration and reflection. When they subsequently share their knowledge, stories and opinions with other users, new insights and new meaning will emerge. Acquired knowledge and deeper understanding that inspires and enriches the library and the community, thereby starting a new cycle of inspiration, creation and participation.

To put this into practice we have also developed a set of new work forms. Together they form a directive for all activities that take place in the library. Activities that help unlock knowledge and expertise that is already available in the community. For they should always be adapted to the needs and wants of the local community.



One-off design

The new way of working clearly has implications for the layout of library space. In the past the space was primarily defined by the amount and arrangement of bookcases. Now the new processes of inspiration, creation and participation determine the arrangement of space. The library is no longer just the place where the collection is located. Instead, it is the sum total of the spaces in which the library's various services and facilities are offered.

This doesn't mean we choose 'one size fits all' solutions. Each library and each community has their own story to tell. That's why we always come up with a one-off design that reflects the distinctive character of the community and the needs and wants of the locals. That way, the library becomes a place for social interaction and shared experiences, a place that is loved by the whole community.

A few examples

In the city of Gouda we realised the Chocolate Factory, the first library that is completely based on the new processes of inspiration, creation and participation. Besides the library the building also houses the Mid-Holland Archive, The Gouda Fine Printing Society and Restaurant Kruim. They all share a common goal: creating an active and dynamic social setting for the people in Gouda; a place to learn, meet others and exchange ideas. This way the former chocolate factory is turned into a place of production again: now of knowledge and ideas.

To achieve this, all functions are integrated in an open plan design with an industrial look, softened by wood tones and comfy seating areas. There's a unique floor design by Florian de Visser in which the layout of the old factory is depicted. The Chocolate Factory won the 2015 award for best library in the Netherlands.



De Korenbeurs (Corn Exchange) in Schiedam is a beautiful classicist building, designed by the Italian-Dutch architect Jan Guidici in 1792. In 2015 we turned it into a new home for the public library. It's a library with a special feature: a wonderful indoor garden where people can read, relax, enjoy conversations and 'grow their brains'. For this we transformed the courtyard into a luscious garden with large trees and plants, placed in specially constructed raised beds. There's also a large reading table under a custom designed chandelier, made up of gin glasses. It refers to the history of the building as a marketplace for cereals for the local gin industry.

In 2015 the garden won the award for best interior landscaping project in the Netherlands.

We are currently working on the interior design of the new public library of Deventer that will be opened in 2018. Also, in the past year we wrote a new collection policy for public libraries in the Netherlands, completely redefining the role of library collections in line with our new work process.