This publication invites radical thinking about the impact of environmental features within the library facility and those elements that achieve the most productive outcomes for children and young adults. It is mostly Western in approach but has chapters relating the planning experience for the first public library in Muscat, Oman and the processes at work in a public library in Turkey. The basic premise is that library spaces for children and young adults do matter: they establish the general environment, form the parameters for the kind of communication which will prevail and set the parameters for flexibility for programmes, initiatives and services for youth.

Many managers would endorse the need for spatial renewal. The current adjustment reflects responses to the digital age, among other social and cultural changes, with an overriding concern for relevance to current needs. The process of design, décor, furniture, fittings and service provision reflects changes in the socio-cultural environment. Unfortunately, fiscal considerations usually mean that transitions are a matter of drastic change rather than a continuous adjustment. An understanding of the current market involves the best practice strategies of world-class museums, successful retail outlets and ‘high end’ marketing organisations.

In current thinking there has to be consideration of cross-disciplinary fields which may have been discrete in the past. This will involve media and digital insight, awareness of the sophistication of media usage by the under-18-year-olds, as well as understanding of learning and curriculum demands of the current education syllabi. As well, there must be a rethink of the expected behaviour of the youth segment of the community. In the past public libraries have reinforced the disciplinary codes of the education sector, but many now think that public libraries should be seen as public spaces disassociated from the controlled spaces common to educational facilities. These changes in philosophy obviously affect library design in terms of spatial provision, architectural and interior design and servicing. The participatory nature of modern media embraces multi-modal response involving collaboration, media facilities, small but well-equipped studios and very contemporary facilities.

The book is a fascinating international journey offering insight into practical ways in which librarians and architects rethink strategies for children’s and young adult library services. Allied to this is the public library’s responsibility to encompass the literacy needs of adults who care for children. This involves friendly, socially inclusive spaces/programmes, accessibility in terms of hours for working parents, an inviting family-friendly physical environment, an atmosphere which supports rather than challenges, services addressing family literacy and language assistance. This is based on the premise that the country’s children and young
adults are the country’s social capital, and the very continuance of the public library facility depends on its relevance. Though this title does not address school libraries specifically, it is still relevant to this sector.

This is recommended reading for every librarian handling a children’s and young adult service, with a reminder that there is no end-point for library design – rather libraries need to regard it as a continuum if they wish to remain relevant.

Heather Fisher
New England Girls’ School