

Shell Library Protocol

1. Shell Library

Shell Library is a model for a collaborative local & non-circulating library. A project that aims to create a local network that rethinks the links between books and where private individuals pool together their personal collections for public access. The references of the individual collections are gathered in an online index that can be accessed to in turn create new physical collections accessible for consulting. This hybrid proposal is a decentralized model of a library but could very well be implemented for another type of sharing institution.

Isn't it a shame that carefully selected personal libraries have a *shelf life*; sitting on their collectors' shelves and having but a limited reach inside their walls? Lots of hidden gems and scarce books lead this shelf life and end up being forgotten or just used for decoration. This library model would put collectors and book owners forth as active members of the community by allowing them to share their books with a wider audience, as well as develop themselves by creating new links and collections from the items of the various pooled collections. These new links are a way of reorganising the library and breathe new life into it. These newly created collections present a new body of knowledge, and hopefully a valuable tool for public use. The 5 laws of a library proposed by Ranganathan in 1931, still ring true in what we want to achieve:

Books are for use.
Every reader his or her book.
Every book its reader.
Save the time of the reader.
A library is a growing organism.

This proof of concept will henceforth be referred to as *Shell Library*; the first prototype of this non-circulating collaborative library.

Shell Library will only have on-site consultancy of a few collections, so as to not lose track of the items placed in the library's care. The works do not leave their place of exhibition as there is no lending out. This serves to preserve the library's content, which remains the private property of its collectors. The references of the entire collection can be browsed online, in an index containing all the items: the *Meta-Shell Library*

https://www.zotero.org/groups/2660619/shell_office/library

Shell Library exists on multiple levels:

- A index containing the references/metadata of all the items shared by the members: *Meta-Shell Library*
- Smaller thematic collections sourced out of the *Meta-Shell Library* that are physically accessible in the *Shell Library* space
- The community and librarians involved with *Shell Library*

“What is the use of possessing numberless books and libraries, whose titles their owner can hardly read through in a lifetime?”
– Seneca the Younger

2. Physicality in the digital age

Even though lots of libraries still exist all around us, *Shell Library* believes that there can never be too many; access to information shouldn't be a privilege. Many public libraries suffer the problem of having a limited budget, not all books can or will be acquired and some books will be discarded over time. A library is thus also a political space, the books that are kept are prioritized above others.

Shell Library would be a library managed by the community with items of the community, items that are sometimes scarce or too niche to be acquired by a regular library or easily available in bookstores. The issue of space is also fixed when you have a decentralised storage of books that stays at the collectors' place, books don't simply get discarded because they haven't been consulted in a while. Although specialty libraries have access to (some) niche and international books, they still maintain a specific acquiring process, many books will not pass the screening process to be acquired. Specialty libraries are often membership-based; the access to those isn't readily available for everyone.

So thinking of a library as a participatory project enables us to create collections that are not yet available to public access and access to books that are too niche (or old) to be acquired by mainstream institutions.

The internet has always been used for the sharing of information and so a multitude of online libraries have popped up since the beginning of the online era. Online libraries would seem to be the solution for readily accessible material by everyone, and although it's a solution; online libraries lack in other aspects. The first aspect is that they remove the concept of scarcity which means they dabble in the waters of copyright infringement, these libraries are also only available to the informed since they get taken down from time to time.

Another issue is that the physicality of an object is lost in the digital space. The qualities of the book are lost in digital translation. We haven't arrived at a point yet where we can clearly represent the feel, fragility or smell of paper, the book as an object can't be replicated.

Another issue of the digital library is that the librarians, caretakers and visitors that make the library a flourishing library are forgotten. A book is only as interesting as the person who shares it, the person who can tell you more about it and can help you towards other material. Furthermore, the digital space doesn't contain the latest on a special topic or the limited edition pamphlet; the richness of *Shell Library* is thanks to its contributors.

While I'm elated that these many digital library projects exist, whether they be legal, extra-legal or on the edge of legality, this model aims to create a physical and legal alternative.

A big fallacy today is that all problems require modern solutions, technology isn't and shouldn't always be the answer. Not everything should be fully automated and digitised.

A digital library shouldn't be the only vision for the future as to make works accessible to everyone. This isn't a "*tech-fearful*" approach, this is a concept where the local and the digital networks can coexist. An approach to rethink the digital network locally; a *slow-er* web. It is in the possibility to consult books of others and in the sharing of connections that the potential of *Shell Library* lies.

To achieve all of this, *Shell Library* mixes a system of centralised and decentralised ideas to create a new protocol. Centralised as in *Meta-Shell Library*, the online reference index and decentralised as in the private individuals, the nodes that make up *Shell Library's* eco-system.

3. Meta-Shell Library

Shell Library exists thanks to community involvement, I will often refer to collectors instead of community but to me anyone who owns a few books is a collector. This is a library meant for everyone that is interested, an open access to all.

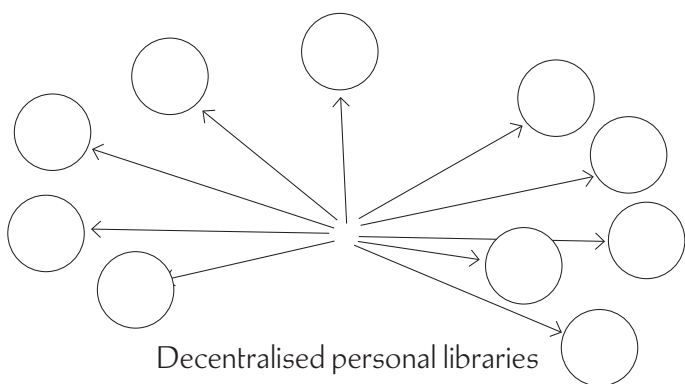
The first level of *Shell Library* is its centralised index, *Meta-Shell Library*, containing the references or metadata of all the individual collections. In this space no screening process exists, every material is welcome to be referenced. The goal of *Meta-Shell Library* is to index all that exists in the collectors' home to enable later collection-creation.

Not choosing to censor at this stage allows the inclusion of "*loaded*" or "*bad*" books into the index. *Shell Library* wants to promote critical thinking and censoring has never been an answer to that. These materials exist and should prove interesting when put face to face with other items of the collection. The *Meta-Shell Library* creates sub-collections that indexes the books by their collectors.

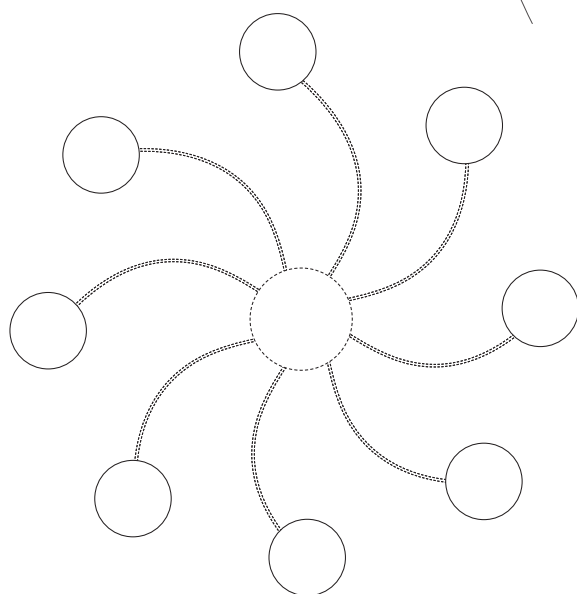
Collection creation happens at a later stage of the library with items originating from the *Meta-Shell Library*. This index is currently on view on Zotero (an online reference manager) and contains the references of all of the items that the members wish to share. It is essentially an index of all the possible works that could be accessed.

https://www.zotero.org/groups/2660619/shell_office/library

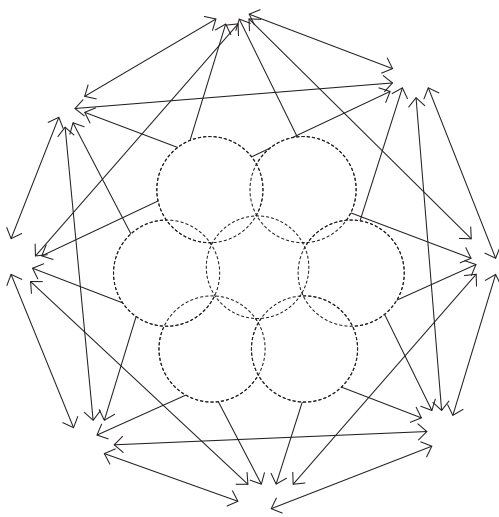
Schematics of the protocol



gathering of metadata
for the index

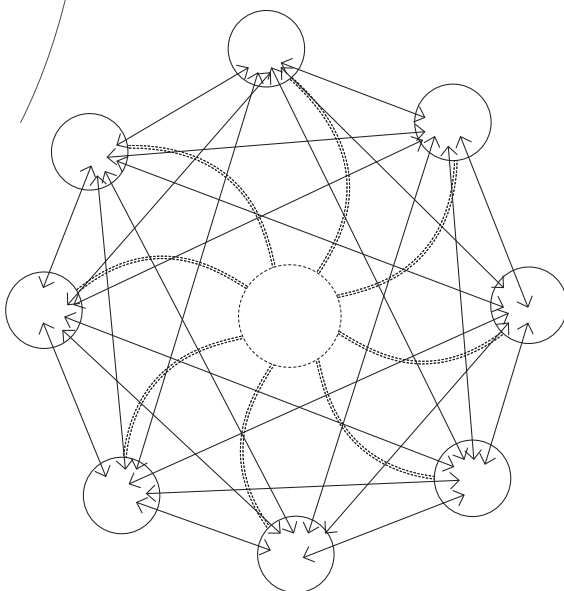


Meta-Shell Library
online reference index



Temporary Thematic Collections
on view in the physical library

centralising the collections
in a non-circulating space



Thematic collection creation
through decentralised voting process

selection of books &
voting

4. Collection Creation

Shell Library will only have a small portion of the library that can be accessed at a time, a curated collection of books that are selected by the community. These collections are sourced from the *Meta-Shell Library* that gives a clear overview of all the available books. *Shell Library* wants to be a learning garden, a place where connections are made. A place where you can consult books physically and share about it. A hyperlinked culture.

The temporary collections are thematic collections consisting between 8 and 12 books each sourced from the *Meta-Shell Library*. The thematic collections are physically accessible for a certain time before they return to their collectors' libraries.

These collections are called thematic collections in contrast with the individual collectors' collections that can be found in the meta-library. The topic of these thematic collections are proposed by the members and stem from their particular interests or subjects they want to see tackled.

Since it is not realistic to physically centralise all the books, only a small selection gets shown. *Shell Library* wants to be a nomadic project that moves around the city. *Shell Library* also wants to return the books in perfect state to the collectors since it's only loaned out to the library, that's why they stay only in the library for a limited time.

The act of linking one book with the other to create curated collections is one of creating links, social links but also as a thought process. *Shell Library* can be seen as a local network, where the books and the people get interlinked to share knowledge. The richness of these thematic collections comes from the fact that the individual collectors already picked out these specific books for their libraries and have a personal history with them. It isn't just about the books but also the people that chose those books.

Thematic collections get approved after passing a community vote. This is the next stage of *Shell Library* with a decentralised governance system.

5. Non-Circulating or "Chained"

The concept of a non-circular library or reference library is a very old one, as books have always been precious or scarce objects they often didn't leave their place of residence. In the Middle Ages, they would go as far as chaining particular books to the stalls, so they wouldn't get stolen or removed. Nowadays we still find non-circulating libraries in universities or research centers but they are most commonly referred to as reference libraries, where people consult on the spot. As these books are often commonly consulted, a reference library allows the works to be always on hand.

Shell Library uses the same principle, which enables it to become a meeting point where people can share their love for books and dive into research. It's also a practical solution as the books that are submitted to *Shell Library* are a loan from their respective collectors. We love and appreciate books and so as to insure their condition, they will remain in the *Shell Library* space.

6. Classification

The materials listed in the *Meta-Shell Library* are classified by their collectors' provenance and then further classified by the community using an uncontrolled vocabulary. A smaller controlled vocabulary is also used to index the meta-shell library into bigger segments for quick navigation.

7. Consensus & Voting protocol

As mentioned before, the thematic collections that are physically accessible pass a voting process. This selection process for the *Shell Library* thematic collections happens in 4 stages:

- Proposal period for a new "*thematic*" collections
- Voting on the thematic collection
- Proposal for collection items:
a min. of 4 items required and up to 30
- Voting on collection items (a max. of 10 selected works).

Each proposal is put up to vote and accepted after reaching a super-majority of 80%. This vote will only qualify once quorum is reached before the end of the allocated voting period. The quorum will be set at 60% participation.

The power to vote is obtained by contributing a minimum of 10 books to the library. This voting power is the same for everyone: 1 person, 1 vote. Voting is facultative and non-mandatory, although more voters guarantee a better democratic system. If a person doesn't wish to participate in this process, they can choose to delegate their voting power to another member. This delegation system allows for quicker decision-making; "*do-ers decide*". Delegated votes will count towards quorum, so the act of delegating is based on a system of trust, liquid democracy. The act of voting or delegating is encouraged to keep an active and well represented democratic system.

We must still take into account the risk of centralising the voting power in a few members; delegating too many votes towards a single person moves the process of a decentralized process back towards a centralized one. This responsibility lies with the members, a community project can only be a community project if people get involved, so for now "*do-ers*" decide.

Members can request their delegated voting power immediately from the proxy (if the proxy already voted in this cycle, they'll have their voting power back by the next voting cycle).

Under extreme circumstances, such as the appeal of a vote by a super-majority of the delegators will render their delegated votes as null.

8. Governance of the library

The *Shell Library* governance happens through the “*active*” members; members that have been involved for at least 3 consecutive voting cycles of library collection creation. This governing power will be removed after 3 consecutive non-voting cycles on projects. *Do-ers* decide, people who don’t get involved don’t get to have a say in how the system is run. Same as with the collection voting, the voting power is $n=1$; everyone is equal.

There is also a possibility of implementing the thematic voting and governance system into a *DAO* (*decentralised autonomous organisation*). An automatic and truly decentralised protocol will ensure that the project will live on as long as members continue to vote. The backbone structure will stay in place long enough as to allow decision making for a few cycles. Lastly, this structure can further be changed by the members through voting.

“Organizing information is never innocent.”
– Geraldine Juárez