

Branding: Bridging: Building. A Story of How One Small Rural Library Eliminated One of the Toughest Russian Problems

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Abstract:

The process of transforming an average town library into a library of excellence (Model Library) ran through the following stages: doing research and analysis of the situation on hand, developing a new concept of the library operations, crafting the design concept, drawing up a program for cultural activities, overhauling the range of services and devising a PR-promotion campaign.

Stage No 1. Research

In order to draft the plan of actions for the Bogolyubovo library's modernization we first had to examine the neighborhood, the patrons' needs and the facilities.

The basic research methods were as follows:

- collecting data on the demographical and geographical specifics of the region;
- conducting sociological survey of the local dwellers using the questionnaire;
- direct frontal interviews with the library's employees;
- doing research into the library's reports and records;
- visual examination of the building and the paperwork;
- getting to know the local institutions of education in the district;
- interviewing spokespeople for the local district authorities.

The locality and geography

The Bogolyubovo library's address is Lenina St. 46, the town of Bogolyubovo, Suzdal District, Vladimir Oblast. The population of the town amounts to 4,494 people. The municipality with the Bogolyubovo administrative center totals some 10,500 people.

Bogolyubovo is a suburb of Vladimir, the regional center with a 350,000-strong population. It is only 7 km away from it. There is a good bus service between Bogolyubovo and Vladimir: buses run every 30 min. The M7 motorway (Vladimir – Nizhni Novgorod) and the railroad line

Moscow – Ufa are passing through the town. The local people tend to get round the town on foot or by bike.

Thanks to Bogolyubovo's rich history (the town celebrated its 850th anniversary in 2015) the town is part of the famous *Golden Ring of Russia* and *Minor Golden Ring of Vladimir Oblast* tourist itineraries. The town of Bogolyubovo is noted for two highly-valued pieces of white-stone architecture recognized by UNESCO as world heritage sites: the Church of the Intercession of the Mother of God on the Nerl River (the Pokrova-na-Nerli Church) (1165) and the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Mother of God (Bogoroditse-Rozhdestvensky Sobor) and the castle of Andrew the Pious (1158 – 1165). The historical legacy of the place presents an extremely tangible factor affecting the activities of the library as well as those of the other institutions of culture in the region.

The library occupies the rear part of a single-story house built in 1954. The library shares the building with a food store in the front part. The entrance to the library is from Severnaya Street. The building's depreciation rate is 32%.

The local administration and the local culture center are within the walking distance from the library, and so are the post office, the nursery and preschool center, the high school and the music school and a small park.

Despite being a tourist attraction the town has no adequate infrastructure for tourism, apart from a souvenir stand in the parking zone in front of the Pokrova-na-Nerli Church. To obtain information on the local history and culture is a real problem for the unguided tourists. That's exactly the niche for the library.

Local dwellers' milieu and cultural status analysis

An average Bogolyubovo dweller lives in his/her own house and is in permanent employment. Quite a few able-bodied townspeople work in Vladimir. Others are employed at the local enterprises such as *Hame Foods Factory*, the agricultural enterprises *Novoselsky* and *Niva*, the *Vladimirsky* ceramics factory, as well as the local small businesses like car service centers and stores.

An average monthly income is 14,000 Rbls per person, which is characteristic of the region.

Most households have no Internet connectivity although the need for it is keenly felt. It is particularly true for the school children and teenagers: the school day finishes at 4 p.m. and those who do not attend music lessons or any groups or clubs at the culture center are left to themselves. Apart from the high school and the culture center Bogolyubovo has no youth venues. The town is in need of cultural communication spaces where teenagers could socialize. The old building of the culture center is in a state of disrepair. The allocated funds are insufficient not only to thoroughly renovate it but even to keep it up. There is no conference room in the Bogolyubovo high school. So school gatherings have to be held either in the gym or in the hallways.

The Bogolyubovo culture center is next door to the library. Its building needs extensive repairs. It has inefficient coal heating. The culture center runs a broad cultural program: weaving and needlework clubs, vocalism, vocal and instrumental ensemble, sports and dance groups. Despite the big floor space, there is a shortage of rooms for classes because the partitions are ill-placed. The culture center administration showed great interest in the library's modernization. Thanks to the resourcefulness of Olga Andon, the head of the Bogolyubovo library, the library became an additional space for the high school and the culture center activities.

Pooling efforts and organizing joint events opens up new vistas. The revamped library's cooperation with the local institutions of culture and education, including the music school, may produce a fantastic synergy effect on the community's life.

Technical description of the library: the exterior and the interior

The entrance zone lacks an adequate signage and decoration.

The main room is divided into four zones: the librarian's working zone (which simultaneously serves as the only computer workplace for patrons), kids' zone, the book depository zone and the reading zone with desks. Neither zone seems to be comfortable enough from the users' prospective. There aren't enough seats to hold mass events.

The use of the closets is inadequate; if refurnished they could be used much more efficiently. The bathroom and the sanitary equipment are substandard. There is no hot water.

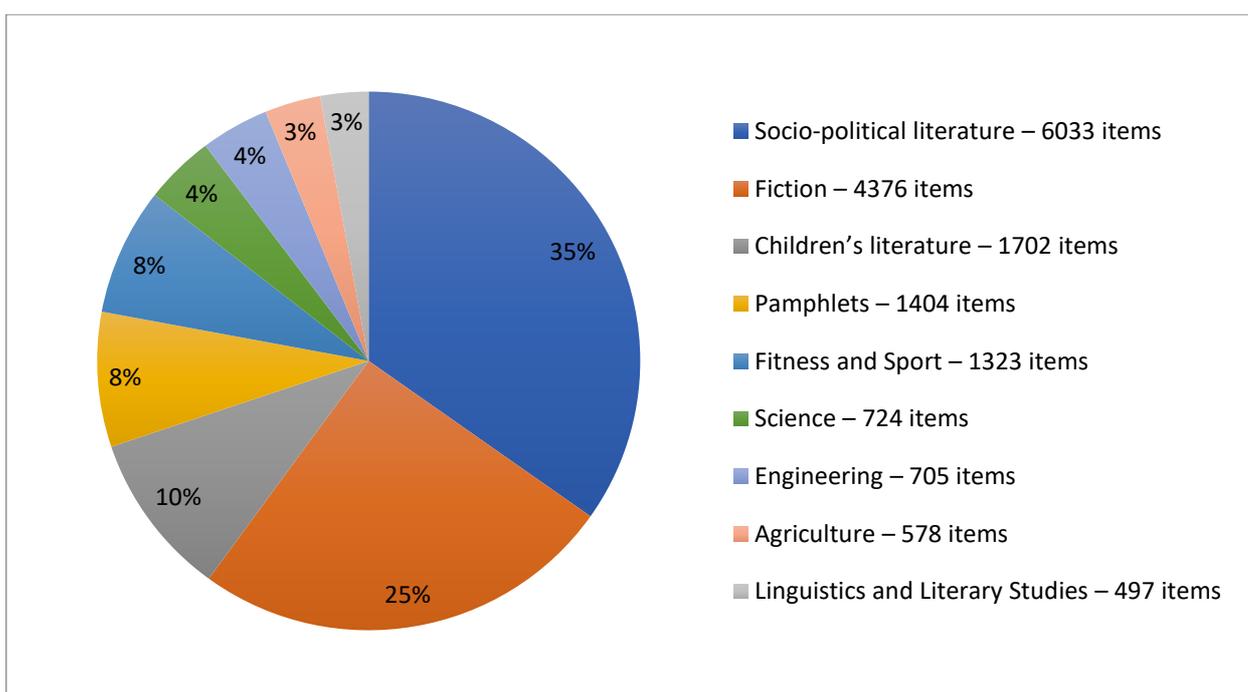
All rooms need to be redecorated.

There are too many boards with text information on them. The library has neither logo, nor house style in the signage, bulletin boards or book subject headings. All this has yet to be designed and implemented.

The library stock

The current stock comprises 15,938 items: half of these books are kept in the depository, being samples of the obsolete socio-political literature of the 1970-1980s (6,033 volumes in total). The stock, for the most part, consists of books worn with use and needs to be replenished. Apart from two glossies on religion, the library holds no subscriptions to periodicals, although popular glossies are in high demand and would be most welcome by the local people who cannot afford them.

The composition structure of the library stock:



The patrons' needs analysis

While conducting the research of the Bogolyubovo library, in addition to ethnography we held an opinion poll. 113 people filled out a questionnaire.

The survey revealed the following:

1. 32% of the polled are ready to come up with an idea for an event or even organize their own event in the library. In other words, one third of the respondents would be willing to actively engage and to launch a project or an event;
2. there's a great demand for glossies, in particular popular glossies on music and cinema, design and style, fashion and beauty;
3. there's a considerable demand for learning opportunities; half of the polled favor foreign language courses; a computer course comes second in popularity and is followed by design study and Internet surfing courses; public services and various DIY courses are also of interest to the locals;
4. the local library is valued, first and foremost, for its recreation opportunities, comfort, librarian's cheerful service, availability of individual workplaces as well as modern information storage media and standard auxiliary services like copying, printing, scanning, etc.
5. among the most favored formats are master class, movie screening, quest;
6. most popular types of events include meetings with interesting people, musical evenings, interactive contests, quizzes and interest groups;
7. the library's opening hours need to be changed – the majority of the respondents, primarily the children and the working adults, would like to see them shifted from 10:00 – 17:00 to 12:00 – 19:00 Monday through Friday and extended to the weekend days. Currently, the opening hours on Saturdays and Sundays are not provided for, but at Olga Andon's initiative the library opens its doors to patrons on Sundays.

We have polled local dwellers and prospective library patrons and identified the following needs:

- tourist information on local history and culture: the Bogolyubovo library could provide it to the visitors and turn into an information and leisure tourist hub;
- an after-school activities space, comfortable and suitable for doing home assignments, fitted out with computers and good internet connectivity;
- a comfortable “third place” open to suggestions and initiatives, a venue to visit outside one's working hours, yet functionally different from home environment;
- a place for socializing, exchanging information and for active cultural communication;
- opportunities for learning in a modern format.

Due to the shortage of public venues the town-dwellers perceive their library as a place to get information, learn new skills and develop one's abilities in a comfortable, conducive environment. The concept of library services, i.e. their number and structure, should undergo complete revision to accommodate the interests and demands voiced by the users.

The library cultural program analysis

Albeit rich, the library's cultural program didn't fully meet the interests and needs of the townsfolk. The traditional formats didn't go down well with them apparently due to their low relevancy. In addition to the refurbishment, the Bogolyubovo library called for a new concept of the library's operations involving the implementation of modern work procedures and opportunities.

The local young people who have already organized events in the library are likely to be joined by others if the library gets remodeled so that there is a multifunctional space for master classes.

Research outcomes

The identified problems and challenges are as follows:

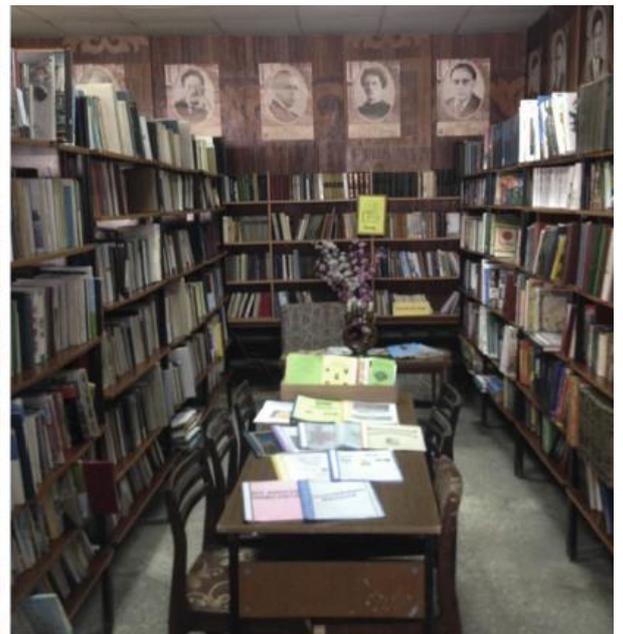
- Lack of road infrastructure: access roads are worn down and broken
- The library is hardly visible from the town's main street
- Broadband Internet connectivity is practically unavailable in the area: neither the library nor locals have Internet connection
- The dilapidated state of the nearby buildings and fencing create a negative image
- The economically depressed, subsidized area
- Lack of youth venues of cultural and educational character except for the local culture center and the music school. Lack of leisure opportunities
- Lack of supplementary education opportunities (outside school curriculum)
- Conflicting local interests: the local authorities' approach to boost the tourist industry is biased in favor of the Svyato-Bogolyubsky Monastery and the Pokrova-na-Nerli Church
- The local authorities seem uninterested in lending support to the library as an important social institution
- The library's opening hours are inconvenient for the locals
- The library cultural program is, on the whole, irrelevant to the needs of the audience.



The exterior. The library's front



The interior. The main reading room



The interior. The seats for patrons

Having identified the problems we proceeded to map out a course of action for the library's overhaul turning it into a library of a new type, concurrent with the patrons needs.

GR: INITIATING A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE MINISTRY OF RUSSIA AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We came up to the Russian Ministry of culture with this plan of renovation of rural libraries. The Minister Vladimir Medinsky appreciated high potential of the renovation project and after several months the Ministry issued new official document “Model Standard for public libraries” based on our suggestions and main conclusions from the Research. In this document there are several recommendations to the libraries – how to become efficient cultural space and engage local community.

After launching Model Standard, the Minister helped to implement official document with recommendations to life on the base of pilot library – Bogolyubovo’s – and offered special terms of partnership with the Region authorities in the fields of financing and cooperation.

Local government and the Ministry agreed upon partnership model where M.I. Rudomino All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature with the support of the Ministry is in charge of design, furniture and equipment facilities, cultural activities program of the library, educational program for librarians and helps with PR – and the local government provides overhaul of the building and fund replenishment now and further on. The constant replenishment of the fund is essential part of the Model library life.

M.I. Rudomino All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature was also in charge of coordinating and consulting, managed and controlled each stage of the process.

Stage No 2. Setting the objectives and rebooting the work concept

The main objective:

The project is aimed at encouraging active library members to come up with their own ideas and bring them to life on the library premises.

Creating the library of a new type involves:

1. renovating and remodeling the premises, fixing utilities, providing broadband Internet connectivity;
2. implementing the design concept and the space zoning concept; replenishing the stock and renovating the equipment according to the concept’s recommendations;
3. drawing up a program for cultural activities as well as for the library’s opening ceremony, establishing PR channels for media coverage;
4. holding a PR-campaign and the library’s opening ceremony involving mass media, local officials and public.

Stage No 3. Implementation

The design concept. The library’s space organization and zoning

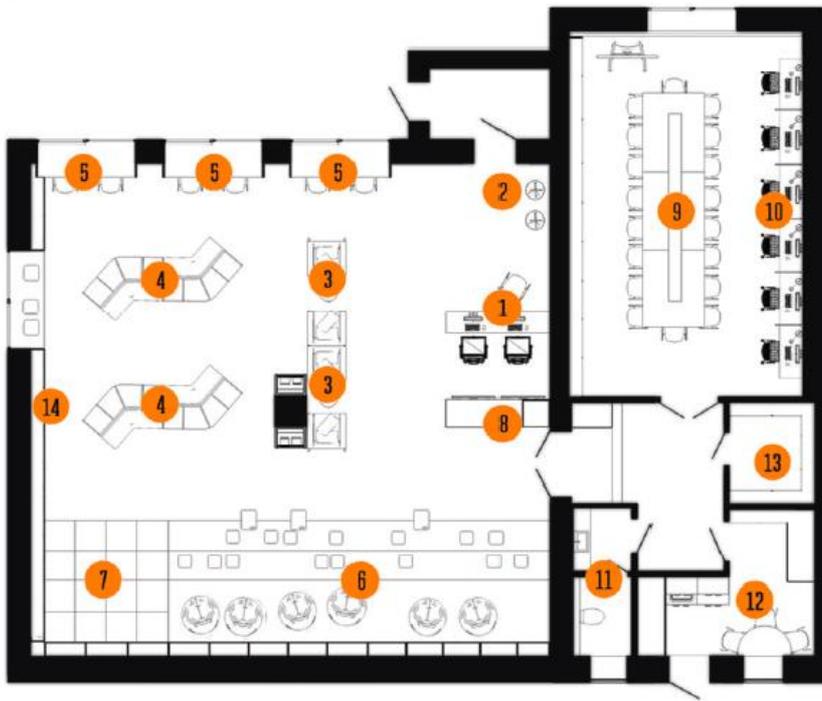
Basing ourselves on the patrons needs analysis as well as the modern library space zoning concept we have worked out the following recommendations:

- to fit out individual workplaces as well as those for groups of different sizes;

- to allocate space for exhibits and art installations;
- to allocate space for self-study and doing home assignments;
- to make an art and creativity zone;
- to set up a kids play zone;
- to mark off the zones with different noise levels;
- to set up a recreation zone;
- to fit out a counter for tourists providing information on local history and culture;
- to install tee/coffee vending machines and a water cooler/thermostat;
- to install the lighting depending on the lighting requirements in each zone;
- to provide the library with furniture easily movable and customizable for various events;
- to make a facelift: repair and redecorate the front, including the windows, install the signboard “Library” and a bicycle parking zone;
- to make the entrance zone as inviting as possible and to fit out a cloakroom adaptable to various seasons and weather conditions;
- to make efficient use of the disused spaces;
- to make the patrons zone big enough to accommodate 12 - 16 readers and 3 - 5 computer users and to seat up to 40 people in case of events; to be able to clear a maximum space for dancing and other master classes; to fit out two workplaces for the librarians; to allocate space for overhead projectors and for the reading club sessions round a large draw-out table;
- to organize a catering zone and a back room;
- to supply the multimedia zone with video game consoles for teenagers and the kids zone with interactive toys;
- to install new equipment to make sure the library has at its disposal at least: 2 LCD TV sets, a multifunction device, 2 computers for the staff and 5 for patrons, 2 video game consoles, an overhead projector, a mobile flipchart, an audio system compatible with the projector, a digital camera, 2 notebooks, 3 static tablets (or similar) for accessing media aggregators.

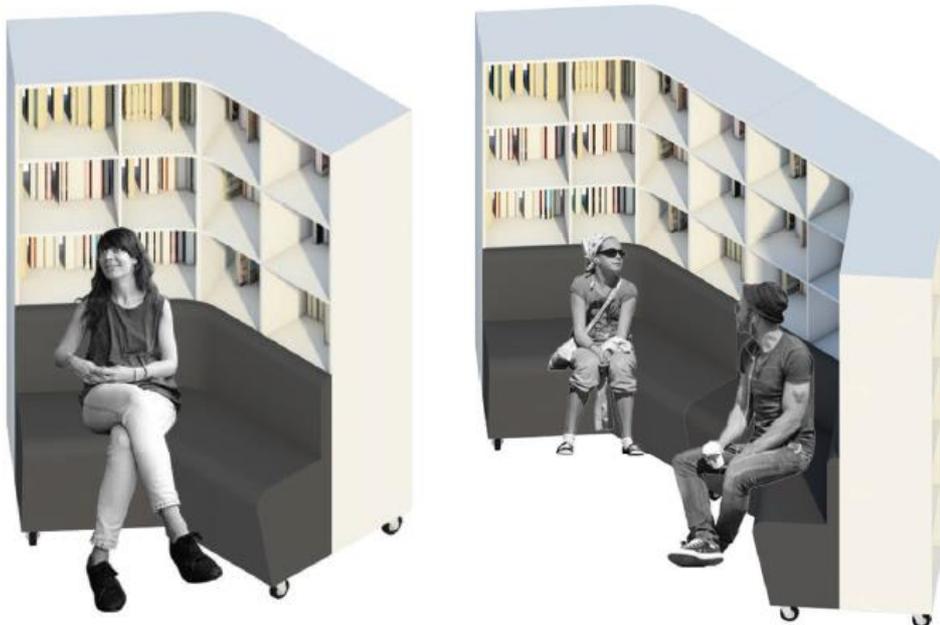
The below layout plan shows the library's zones, which differ in purpose and in the way the space is used.





1. reception area
2. entrance zone
3. recreation zone
4. roll-up stacks
5. individual workplaces
6. amphitheater
7. play zone
8. vending machines
9. conference hall
10. computer workplaces
11. WC
12. back room
13. closet
14. exhibition space

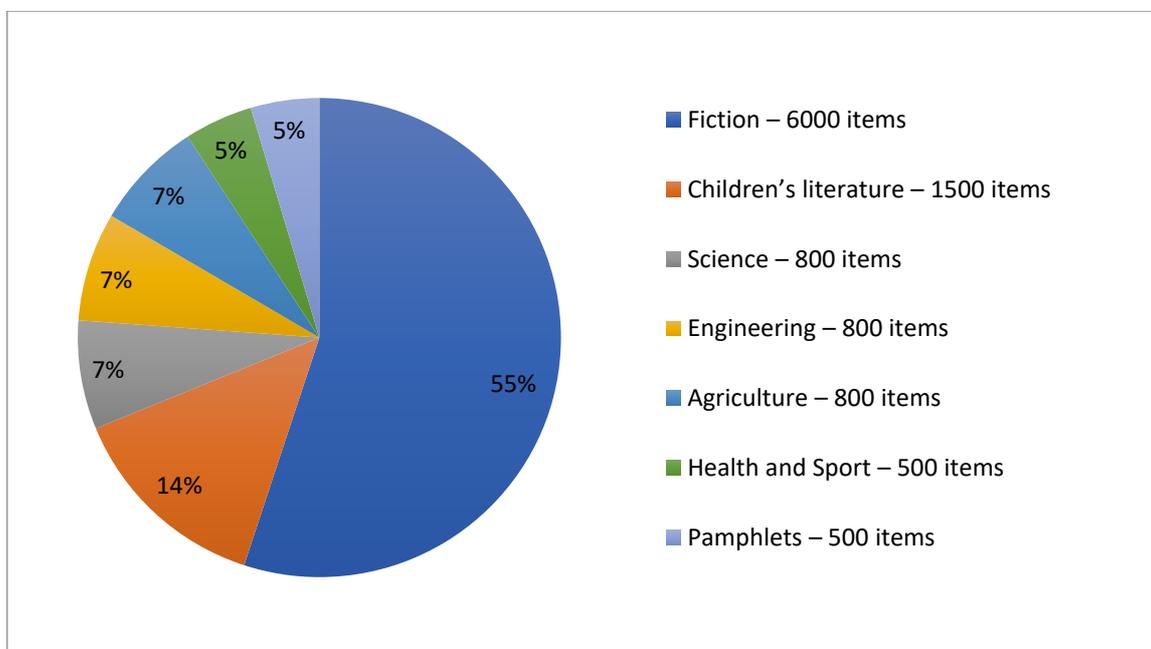
Customizable stacks:





The library's holdings

The library stock profile needs to be put in tune with the modern standards and the patrons' interests. The total number of books should be cut down to 12,700 items. About 6,000 socio-political books pertaining to the Soviet heritage could be written off while fiction and special collections, on the contrary, should be supplemented with new books requested by the patrons. The bulk of the present stock is in a worn-out condition, in particular fiction and children's literature. That's why the whole of the stock is in need of replenishment. The recommended structure of the library stock:



High priority will be given to multifunctional aggregators of web content, including media, public services, etc.

Drawing up a program for cultural activities

It is noteworthy that no matter how rich cultural program may be it should leave room for private initiative so that patrons could come up with their own idea of an event and see it through. This would also call for a clear signage, for instance, *New ideas for library events are welcome*. The four principal directions for developing cultural activities:

Recreation and leisure activities

- book theatre
- festive events
- photo exhibits and presentations
- game park
- handicraft master classes
- home upbringing academy (counseling for parents).

Electronic resources

- virtual traveling
- electronic newspapers
- virtual museum of an author
- National Electronic Library access zone.

Social support

- law awareness portal
- classifieds
- local agency of mutual assistance
- computer literacy course.

Research

- local history and culture
- the town's electronic annals
- environmental trails
- publishing materials on local history and culture
- tourist itineraries.

The PR campaign promoting the library in the local community pre-supposes establishing contacts with the local media and encouraging them to cover the Bogolyubovo library's activities via:

- regional print outlets
- regional TV outlets (creating and running news items and reports)
- regional internet publications.

The project's PR campaign preceded the opening ceremony and included the following steps:

1. to galvanize the support of the local media the Culture Department of the Vladimir Oblast Administration issued a reference letter briefing on the project and inviting to take part in its coverage;
2. two months prior to the opening ceremony an article appeared and drew attention of the general public: it introduced the renewed Bogolyubovo library's mission and offers;
3. two weeks before the opening date we supplied all major media outlets with a press release relating on the Bogolyubovo library as a library of a new type and on its upcoming formal opening. Also we forwarded the local administration a request to help secure, on their part, the coverage of the event. Put in the picture by the earlier publication the journalists responded warmly to our press release.

Outcomes

The opening took place on May 31, 2016.

Among those present at the rejuvenated library's opening ceremony were Mikhail Y. Kolkov, Vladimir Oblast deputy governor, Yevguenia N. Guseva, deputy director of the Department for Science and Education at the Culture Ministry of Russia, Vera S. Zinatullina, director of the Department for Culture at the Vladimir Oblast Administration, Alexei P. Sarayev, head of the Suzdal District Administration, Vadim V. Duda, director general of the M.I. Rudomino All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature as well as representatives from libraries in the Vladimir and Ryazan Oblasts.

<http://www.suzdallib.ru/index/otkrytie-modelnoy-biblioteki-p-bogolyubovo/>

The attention of the local officials and media made the opening a significant event covered on TV and in the press. It also drew attention of locals which resulted in growing attendance rates. In addition, the Bogolyubovo library's head has been returned to the local legislative body. Now as a lawmaker she has more powers to tackle problems facing the local community.

The immediate surroundings have undergone positive changes: the road (Severnaya Street) leading to the library's porch has been repaired while the fences of the neighboring houses have been replaced with new ones.

The local residents started treating the library as a place where they can show or tell about their hobbies, find company for communication, and hold a meeting or some other event.

(Video *Library Upside Down*)

Results in digitals

The library operations indices:

120%

growth in the
library's daily
attendance rate

130%

growth in the mass
events audience

200%

growth in the
children's events
audience



