Is there a future for libraries?

Earlier this month, Europe's largest library opened in Birmingham, UK. Will it become a model for 21st century public libraries?

The library aims to inspire. Part of its mission statement is to "transform lives through learning, knowledge and culture." Hence the ten floors, the banks of computers, the shelves of CD audio and DVDs alongside those filled with books. Even the architecture has attracted attention, with its eco-friendly design.

But….is the venture out of touch with today's readers?

Across the Atlantic, the first digital-only library in the US is set to open later this year, in Bexar County, Texas. Known as BiblioTech, one aim of this digital-only library will be to provide access to e-books for those spread across "large, sparsely-populated areas". Bexar County has never had a public library, or even a bookshop. .

For a 'tech' project, BiblioTech is actually 'low-cost'. It will have 100 e-readers. Although these can be borrowed, the main idea is that users can actually access the 10,000 digital books in the library from their own homes. Will the new library benefit people living remotely?

The acronym 'BYOD' (a 'buzz term' in both education and the business world) stands for 'Bring your own device'. Users are invited to come to the library with an iPad, Android tablet, KindleFire, Nook e-reader…well, the list of devices gets longer by the day! BiblioTech is modelled on Apple's iTunes store.

This new library will work in partnership with local schools and run digital literacy courses.

But for many people, the 'bookless library' is a contradiction in terms. While some elite schools give every child an iPad, the school library still contains real books! Who knows what our childrens' children will be reading, and how. As ever, the future is still a matter of speculation.

Questions to ask your students:

When was the last time you visited a public library?
Do you have an e-book reader?
What do you see as the future of libraries in your own city?

Websites to explore:
http://www.libraryofbirmingham.com/
http://bexarbibliotech.org/
http://www.breeam.org/
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-22160990