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Wayfinding Signage Design Standards and Practices for Australian Public Library Spaces (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Objective/Significance] This study investigates and analyzes the standard guidelines and their contents for spatial wayfinding signage in Australian libraries, aiming to provide reference and inspiration for the development of signage design guidelines for library spaces in China. [Method/Process] Employing web-based survey methodology, relevant guidelines and standards for spatial wayfinding signage in public libraries across Australian states were collected. The signage design practices in these spaces were analyzed through case studies of the State Library of Victoria and the Marrickville Library in New South Wales, both recipients of the 2020 Australian National Architecture Award. [Results/Conclusions] The standard guidelines for spatial wayfinding signage in Australian public libraries are characterized by rich content, diverse forms, and considerable flexibility in adapting to evolving social environments. The study yields the following implications for domestic public library spatial signage design: establish a comprehensive guideline framework incorporating library signage design; create signage that harmonizes with the surrounding environment; emphasize diversification of library spatial signage; enhance design for specialized library spaces; and engage professional signage designers.

Full Text

Preamble

Research on the Design Standards and Practice of Space Guidance Signage for Public Libraries in Australia

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Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] This study aims to investigate and analyze the standard guidelines and their content for spatial guidance signage in Australian libraries, providing reference for the formulation of library space signage design guidelines in China. [Method/Process] Using web-based research methods, we obtained relevant guidelines and standards for public library spatial guidance signage across Australian states. Taking the Victoria State Library and Marrickville Library in New South Wales—both recipients of the 2020 Australian National Architecture Award—as case studies, we analyzed their spatial signage design practices. [Result/Conclusion] Australian public library spatial guidance signage standards are rich in content and diverse in form, demonstrating flexibility as the social environment evolves. The findings offer insights for domestic public library spatial guidance signage design: develop a guideline framework that includes library signage design; design library spatial guidance signage that coordinates with the environment; emphasize diversification of library spatial guidance signage; strengthen design for special library spaces; and engage professional signage designers.

Keywords: public library; signage; physical space; Australia
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According to China's *Technical Code for Signage Systems in Public Buildings* [1] (GB/T 51223-2017), signage is defined as an information carrier in public architectural spaces that provides orientation and identification functions to users through visual, auditory, tactile, or other perceptual means. Clear and perceivable library spatial guidance signage constitutes a primary detail and important content of library spaces, serving a non-negligible role: on one hand, it enhances the efficiency of user services and resource development for library staff, saving time for both readers and personnel; on the other hand, it facilitates readers' perception and understanding of library spatial values and cultural spirit while utilizing library spaces, thereby fundamentally promoting reading through spatial design.

In recent years, as Chinese government investment in public cultural undertakings has increased, library construction has entered a new phase. During this process, library buildings have grown larger, service types have become more diverse, and user demographics have multiplied. Library spatial guidance signage systems, as crucial means to improve library recognizability and service environments, have garnered increasing attention from libraries. Although relevant departments have formulated service guidelines and standards for library space construction, few specifically address library spatial guidance signage design. Most existing standards or guidelines related to library construction contain minimal content on signage, typically only one or two sentences, which cannot provide adequate guidance for library signage design and implementation.

Internationally, some countries and regions have promulgated signage-related guidelines or standards, such as ISO 7001:1990 *Public Information Symbols* issued by the International Organization for Standardization in 1990, the *Safety*

Signs guide within the EU's 1996 *Health and Safety Regulations*, Scotland's Natural Heritage Agency's 2007 *Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access*, and the 2012 update to the U.S. *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) emphasizing wayfinding signage for visually impaired individuals [20]. China has also developed signage-related standards and policies, including the *Public Information Graphical Symbols for Use on Signs* (GB/T 10001) series issued in 2000 and the *Technical Code for Signage Systems in Public Buildings* (GB/T 51223-2017) promulgated in 2017. However, both internationally and domestically, most standards or guidelines related to library construction contain limited sections on signage.

Foreign research on library physical space signage has addressed library signage language [2-3], evaluation [4-5], classification and design [6-9], and digital library signage [10]. In China, theoretical research on library physical space guidance signage has primarily focused on spatial language theory and black box theory [11], situational cognition theory [12], and their integration with library space signage. Practical research initially concentrated on functional studies of directional signs [13] and collection guidance signs [14]. Subsequent scholars examined signage systems: Zhou Lili studied the existing signage system of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics Library, identified its problems, and proposed solutions [15]; Professor Ke Ping categorized library signage into four functional types—directional, locational, informational, and promotional—and offered recommendations for library signage system design [16]; Wang Liya et al. studied signage functions, noting their roles in education [17], cultural transmission [18], and dual management [8]; Liu Wei proposed a complete guidance signage system for blind users through visual, auditory, and tactile orientation systems [19].

Overall, current domestic research lacks studies on foreign spatial guidance signage design standards and guidelines. Through investigation, we found that Australia possesses national and local library construction guidelines and standards with substantial content on library signage. To gain deeper understanding of signage design guidelines and standards, this article employs web-based research to obtain relevant Australian library guidance signage texts, uses multicase comparative study and content analysis to examine signage design content, and conducts content analysis and case studies of Australian public library spatial guidance signage design standards to learn from and reference relevant content, aiming to provide references for guideline frameworks for library spatial guidance signage design.

2 Australian Public Library Spatial Guidance Signage Design Guidelines

2.1 National Guidelines—*People Places: A Guide for Planning Public Library Buildings*

People Places: A Guide for Planning Public Library Buildings (hereinafter referred to as *People Places*) is a guideline designed to assist in planning and designing library architecture. First published in 2000 to address construction issues in New South Wales libraries, it provides direction for library builders and methods for planning and constructing public libraries [21]. As spatial design concepts and utilization practices continue to evolve, *People Places* was revised in 2005 and 2012, resulting in three current versions. In July 2019, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) approved it as an Australian national standard. In August 2020, the New South Wales State Library, referencing input from Eltan Consulting, FJMT Architects, and Neeson Murcutt Architects, released an online version based on the third edition. The *People Places* analyzed below refers to this August 2020 online version [22].

People Places maintains that signage must be included in building plans from the initial design stage and adequately funded, as signage is crucial for libraries, especially large ones. Many people are unfamiliar with large library layouts and may become lost, preventing them from effectively using library facilities and resources. Accordingly, *People Places* proposes that library signage should include street signs, identity signage, entrance signage, wayfinding signage, statutory signage, changeable entry and external signage, collection signage, aisle signage, shelf signage, promotional signage, and permanent signage (see Table 1). Relevant chapters detail design and usage requirements for each type. For example, the "Library Construction Considerations—Collection Layout" chapter offers recommendations on shelf signage positioning, content, and application methods [23], while suggesting image-based signage for children's areas to facilitate understanding [24]. Shelf, collection, and wayfinding signage should align with library themes and concepts, with wayfinding signage also coordinating with surrounding architecture and the library's own style.

People Places emphasizes three key principles. First, professional collaboration and signage expertise must be prioritized. Architects and librarians should closely consult to prepare relevant library guidelines and signage. In the absence of specific library signage guidelines, assistance from graphic designers and other professionals should be sought, learning from signage in bookstores, museums, art galleries, and other buildings or guidelines to create graphic manuals for subsequent construction. Library signage should ideally be tested before formal installation to ensure better adaptability. Second, special population needs must be fully considered to enhance signage inclusivity. Library signage should be clear and visible, preferably using Braille and raised tactile forms, with auditory signage considered in certain locations to assist visually impaired individuals. Regarding signage language, signage should reflect reader demographics

by using appropriate languages to break language barriers and facilitate communication between staff and readers. Against the backdrop of multicultural community construction, the Australian Library Multilingual Signage Website [25] provides slogans in 55 languages, browsable by phrase initials or searchable. If required phrases are unavailable, requests can be submitted to the New South Wales State Library Public Services Department. Third, signage diversity must be considered, including diverse forms and locations. Since different libraries have distinct characteristics and concepts with varied themes, guidance signage should integrate with themes to showcase them while reflecting library features. Additionally, library-designed signage can support multicultural community construction by providing information for diverse cultural communities, such as using different colors for different languages in "welcome signage" [22].

2.2 Local Policies, Standards, and Guidelines

Beyond the national standards described in 2.1, relevant policies and standard guidelines for public libraries in Australian states and territories also contain sections on spatial guidance signage design (see Table 2). Tasmania lacks specific guidelines for public library signage design but mentions guidance signage in its *School Library Guidelines* under collection organization and layout, space and environment, and services [26]. The Western Australia State Library and South Australia State Library websites contain no content related to library signage design and usage.

In state and territory public library local policies, guidelines, and standards, three themes are prominent. First is signage inclusivity, such as signage for special populations. Queensland's standards propose using Braille and voice signage. Second is coordination, requiring harmony not only with internal and external library environments but also with broader social contexts, adapting to changing times. Regarding daily library operation signage, Victoria and Queensland guidelines specify requirements and considerations for food policies, library entry rules, and user obligations. Third is safety signage, particularly in the COVID-19 environment, with Queensland, Northern Territory, and Australian Capital Territory standards noting that signage can remind people about public health safety. Directional signage also helps readers better utilize library resources. These signage designs reflect coordination, diversity, and inclusivity in library signage design and usage.

3 Australian Public Library Spatial Guidance Signage Design Practice

An Australian Institute of Architects survey revealed that 96% of Australians believe well-designed public buildings and spaces make living areas more beautiful and increase building value. Since 1981, the Australian Institute of Architects has annually presented National Architecture Awards to recognize outstanding achievements in architecture and promote architects and architecture nationally

and internationally. The award system comprises three levels: Regional, Chapter, and National [36]. In the 2020 awards, two Australian libraries received this honor: the Victoria State Library in Melbourne and the Marrickville Library in New South Wales, demonstrating their significant achievements in spatial design and representativeness. Therefore, this article selects these two libraries for case analysis.

3.1 Emphasis on Coordination with Spatial Environment

The Victoria State Library is Australia's oldest and most heavily trafficked library, receiving the 2020 Australian National Architecture Award for public buildings and heritage architecture. Additionally, it won the "Overall Winner and People's Choice" Best New Space Award in the 2018 Concrete Playground Best of Melbourne Awards [37]. The 163-year-old building combines "tradition" and "modernity," with signage design fully demonstrating coordination with the library's spatial environment. External identity signage is clearly visible, with "STATE LIBRARY VICTORIA" inscribed in raised black lettering on the wall—simple yet dignified, with black characters reflecting the library's profound historical heritage. White signage on entrance pillars indicates street locations while showing relationships with other buildings, providing readers with surrounding environment and activity cues (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Wayfinding signage employs white-background-black-text design, with background images in the same color family as walls and surrounding environments, integrating seamlessly. The folded design distinguishes signage from walls while allowing readers to immediately identify indicated content, including current location, directions, and destinations. Common locations like restrooms use internationally recognized or familiar icons, with floor plans displayed and annotated (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]). The Queen's Hall at State Library Victoria, a landmark building reopened after 16 years, features signage in overall brown tones coordinating with the classical surroundings, reflecting classical beauty while being embedded on glass doors with white wayfinding signage on both sides, enabling immediate recognition (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]).

3.2 Emphasis on Diversity in Signage Design

First, guidance signage is presented through multiple forms. Beyond conventional graphics, letters, and colors, digital signage is also employed. Marrickville Library uses electronic displays for wayfinding, helping readers understand basic library information (see Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]). Second, signage demonstrates diversity in spatial positioning. Most signage is engraved or printed on library furniture. Shelf signage, based on human height, is generally placed on upper shelves, simply displaying call numbers and categories to facilitate book location and usage (see Figure 5 [Figure 5: see original paper]). Additionally, some signage is applied to floors—Marrickville Library designs wayfinding signage on both walls and floors, creating three-dimensional icons

that help readers better understand their destination and route (see Figure 6 [Figure 6: see original paper]). Through diverse presentation forms and appropriate placement throughout the space, readers can better comprehend library layouts and utilize resources without becoming lost.

Beyond these two libraries, Oran Park Library mentioned in *People Places* also demonstrates theme-based, diverse signage design. Built near a racetrack, the entire library prominently features a racing theme, with the guidance system incorporating racing elements such as vintage track graphics, racing stripes, rounded sign corners, and orange edges.

3.3 Emphasis on Inclusive Signage Design

Public libraries should serve all citizens equally, openly, and inclusively. As W. Ruth, director of Principle Architectus responsible for Victoria State Library construction, stated, user surveys were conducted during preliminary research, with special population needs fully considered during construction [38]. Therefore, Victoria State Library is equipped with an induction hearing system to assist special populations, identified through "image + text" with engraved, prominently displayed fonts rather than direct printing on white signage (see Figure 7 [Figure 7: see original paper]). Additionally, baseboards installed under each column enable visually impaired individuals to navigate easily. Marrickville Library also fully considers special population needs in its signage design, demonstrating inclusivity. Its accessible pathway signage uses raised tactile forms with Braille indicating meaning (see Figure 8 [Figure 8: see original paper]), with positioning carefully considered and placed at appropriate heights on walls according to human dimensions.

3.4 Emphasizing Professionalism in Design

Professionals possess extensive specialized knowledge, and Australian libraries attach great importance to professional team participation in signage design processes. Victoria State Library was designed by Australian firm FIRM Architecture and Danish firm Schmidt Hammer Lassen (SHL) under the guidance of the Victorian Heritage Council and Andronas Conservation Architecture, with a dedicated signage design team—ID Lab—included in the consultant/construction team [39]. Marrickville Library was designed by BVN Architecture, also equipped with a specialized signage design team—CITIZEN GROUP [40]. Additionally, Surry Hills Library & Community Centre engaged COLLIDER for signage design [41]. Professional expertise is also applied in signage consultation, investigation, and evaluation. When developing new wayfinding signage, the New South Wales State Library installed test signage in the Macquarie Street building, evaluated the test signs, and provided feedback to design and visitor experience teams to innovate and improve wayfinding signage [42].

4 Implications for Chinese Public Library Spatial Guidance Signage Design

4.1 Develop a Guideline Framework Including Library Signage Design

As analyzed above, although Australian states lack separate guidelines, policies, or standards specifically for library spatial guidance signage design and implementation, relevant chapters on signage design and usage exist in library construction and management guidelines [22-23], thereby standardizing and promoting signage standardization. Currently, China's library construction field has developed standards for architectural layout [43] and building area [44], but these contain minimal content on library spatial signage design, typically only one or two sentences insufficient for guiding signage design and usage. For example, the *Public Library Construction Standard* (Jianbiao 108-2008) issued by the Ministry of Culture and approved by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the National Development and Reform Commission in 2008 mentions only in Article 16 that "main entrances should separate people, books, and vehicles with clear signage." The *Library Building Design Code* (JGJ38-2015) also lacks systematic exposition on library spatial signage.

However, public libraries are "public cultural facilities" belonging to the public sector, where China has already established signage-related standards. Based on ISO 7001:1990, China issued the *Public Information Graphical Symbols for Use on Signs* GB/T 10001 series in 2000, standardizing graphical symbols in public information. In 2017, China promulgated the *Technical Code for Signage Systems in Public Buildings* (GB/T 51223-2017). Therefore, with stakeholder collaboration, library spatial guidance signage design can reference domestic and international signage design requirements from both public sector and library professional fields, combined with China's specific conditions, to develop a guideline encompassing library spatial guidance signage systems. Such guidelines should standardize signage types, design and usage requirements for different signage categories, quantities, positioning, and evaluation methods, highlighting coordination, diversity, inclusivity, and professionalism in signage design to guide Chinese library signage design and usage, enabling various library signage to fulfill their intended functions.

4.2 Design Library Spatial Guidance Signage Coordinated with Environment

Architect Arthur Erickson believed that architectural design is not architects' imagination but the inevitable result of purpose and environment, with environment shaping architecture [45]. Library guidance signage is an indispensable component of library architecture, helping readers better understand and utilize libraries. As analyzed, Victoria State Library's signage design coordinates with internal and external environments through careful consideration of fonts, colors, shapes, materials, and textures. The white-background-black-text wayfinding signage on interior walls uses background images in the same color family as

wall surfaces, with folded shapes distinguishing signage from walls while black text highlights and beautifies the signage and embellishes the spatial environment.

In China's library spatial construction, some libraries like Jiaxing Library Gaozhao Branch and Suzhou Second Library have used famous reading quotes as promotional signage in Chinese-English bilingual formats with authors and sources indicated, creating a cultural atmosphere. Most signage uses wood, paper, or plastic materials, with notable exceptions like Nansha Library's shelf signage using graphene-based electronic paper requiring no charging, rewritable, with high light transmittance, creating a better user experience and technological ambiance. However, some library signage is randomly pasted on consultation desks or walls, appearing disorganized and incongruous with library spatial environments. This requires libraries to fully coordinate signage design with internal and external environments, respecting location and intended themes and functions. Coastal locations can incorporate marine elements, park settings can adopt natural designs, environmental themes can reuse waste materials, and children's areas can use highly saturated colors for liveliness. Through research on fonts, colors, shapes, positioning, and materials, guidance signage can coordinate with overall library atmosphere and environment, attracting reading interest and creating a sense of zero distance between people and knowledge.

4.3 Emphasize Diversification of Library Spatial Guidance Signage

Surveys show that 78.69% of readers prefer signage combining text and images [15]. O'Neill's experiments demonstrate that graphic signage generates the highest traffic flow, while text signage is most effective in reducing addressing errors [46]. When designing wayfinding signage, Victoria State Library places concise floor plans on signage boards with annotations for each location, enabling readers to combine logical and visual thinking for accurate, convenient library usage. Marrickville Library designs wayfinding signage on both walls and floors, creating three-dimensional icons.

Library spatial guidance signage serves not only to facilitate readers but also to reflect library culture. Each library possesses unique characteristics, special resources, or distinctive culture. Current Chinese library spatial guidance signage design practice has made progress but still faces issues such as homogenized design and lack of innovation in distinctive features. Spatially, library guidance signage need not be limited to walls or shelves—directional signage can use landmark forms or be placed on ceilings within sight lines. In form, signage need not be entirely text-based; children's areas or special population service zones can combine text with pictures or simple illustrations, increasing liveliness and comprehension. Icons can also incorporate local characteristics to enhance cultural identity and distinctiveness, such as Changzhou Library engraving Changzhou School works on the floor of its works collection area and using transparent partitions with portraits of famous Changzhou figures on reading seats, showcasing

local culture while serving as partitions. However, excessive or overly complex signage can overload users with information, producing opposite effects. Therefore, libraries should ensure diversification within a systematic framework when designing spatial guidance signage.

4.4 Strengthen Design for Special Library Space Signage

The *Public Library Manifesto* states that "public libraries should provide equal services to all people" [46]. Library spatial guidance signage aims to enable users to more conveniently enjoy library resources and services. Special populations are also library users whose needs should be fully considered during signage design. As analyzed, Victoria State Library employs an induction hearing system to assist disabled individuals, compensating for visual impairments and marking locations with internationally recognized symbols. Marrickville Library's accessible pathway signage uses "English + Braille" formats. Queensland's *Access for People with Disability* explicitly proposes emergency warning lights for disabled individuals and Braille signage [28].

In China, according to the 2017 *Library Law of the People's Republic of China*, "public libraries shall provide services to the public according to the principles of equality, openness, and sharing… shall consider the characteristics of elderly and disabled groups, actively create conditions, and provide suitable literature information, barrier-free facilities, equipment, and services." Many Chinese libraries have established barrier-free reading rooms containing Braille books, large-print books, and assistive reading tools, with Braille signage on shelves and tactile paths indoors. However, overall inclusivity remains insufficient—while some barrier-free reading rooms have signage facilitating special populations, Braille or voice-guided signage is rarely found at library entrances or in other spatial guidance systems. In 2012, China issued the *Code for Accessibility Design* (GB 50763-2012), which includes provisions on "3.16 Barrier-free Signage Systems and Information Accessibility," "8.7 Cultural Buildings," and appendices specifying international Braille standards and services like audio guides and hearing aids for cultural buildings such as libraries [47]. In font selection, sans-serif fonts can facilitate signage readability. Library guidance signage design should consider special population needs, facilitating their use of library resources, promoting reading, and enhancing library inclusivity.

4.5 Engage Professional Guidance Signage Designers

Confusing terminology and temporary signage can prevent library users from finding needed information [48]. With sufficient funding, libraries should employ professional signage design teams to maximize signage effectiveness. Some Australian libraries engage specialized signage design teams alongside architectural firms. In China, the National Library of China first tendered signage guidance systems as separate projects during its 2011 renovation [49]. While library brand logos are typically professionally designed as institutional symbols (e.g., Nansha Library's logo), internal guidance signage systems rarely involve pro-

fessional teams. Although many new libraries employ specialized architectural firms—such as Ningbo Library and Shanghai Library East, both designed by SHL Architecture, which has professional signage system design teams—these teams are not utilized in Chinese library construction.

People Places proposes "using well-crafted signs," reflected in: using unified signage to avoid random pasting, thereby enhancing professionalism; seeking graphic designers' assistance to create graphic manuals for subsequent use, thereby improving library image. When conditions permit, libraries should employ specialized signage design teams. Library spatial guidance signage should be designed based on thorough investigation, relying on professional expertise while leveraging the strengths of designers, librarians, and readers. Carefully designed signage should be placed in appropriate locations, enabling each library sign to fulfill its function without information overload from excessive signage or inadequate information from insufficient or poorly positioned signs. Professional teams should be engaged to enhance signage professionalism and usability, facilitating readers' understanding and use of libraries.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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