At the scale of the building’s immediate site as well as its interior, the form of the Münster City Library by Architekturbüro Bolles-Wilson + Partner establishes unique organizational systems and patterns of flow. At a larger scale, the library’s form is an attempt to unify the historic city center and establish a cohesive urban environment.

THE IMMEDIATE SITE

The site of the Münster City Library has several interesting patterns and systems that are established through its form. The form of the entire library is analogous to metabolic systems found in nature where individual elements assemble to create a more complex form. Library elements include the newspaper room, the café, the book stacks, the deliveries wing and the reading spaces. These areas can be seen as unique self-contained cells but if one or several of these elements were taken away the overall form of the library would feel unresolved and incomplete. When the assemblage of these elements is complete the library feels whole.

The relationship between these different elements is a kind of natural and organic system with soft boundaries between them that allows for fluidity, which takes form in the flow of people, flow of dialogue and the flow of information. With this pattern of transfer and flow, the interior form of the Münster City Library is comparable to the organizations and systems of nature (ie: the fundamental transfer and flow of energy and matter in nature). It is as if the library is an attempt to turn technology and architectural form into a more natural process.

The form of the Library Alley also creates a distinct pattern of flow and organizational system. The exterior roof-like shells of the library that runs adjacent to the alley are largely not perforated by windows and they have no entrances. Instead, they serve to keep the flow of pedestrian traffic moving through the alley and also directing people towards the entrance. In this rift between the two buildings, the library forms connections with its surrounding environment through a network of movement that flows through the alley, around the building and into the library itself.
THE GREATER CITY CENTER

The immediate library site works to create its own systems but the building also works with the existing systems in the city center of Münster in order to create a more cohesive urban environment. The form of the Münster City Library has a tremendous impact on its surroundings while at the same time the building is greatly influenced by the historic city center where it is situated. While modern architecture often fragments cities and society, the form of the library is a deliberate attempt to unify the urban environment.

CONNECTION WITH NATURAL SYSTEMS

Again, an analogy with nature becomes useful. In natural systems, as previously discussed, there are elements that are critical to the existence of the overall system. If one of these elements were examined on its own it would have little meaning. But when analyzed in the context of the entire system its significance becomes clear. The Münster City Library is one such element that when analyzed in the context of the city center it becomes clear how important it is. The library has made the surrounding urban fabric more tightly knit as it helps to establish a more natural and cohesive organization for the urban area. The library helps define the ‘urban organism’ as a complete and connected environment, as if it is mimicking a more natural environment.

In nature, connections between elements work to create strong and meaningful organizational systems and such connections are present in the Münster city center. The urban environment around the library does not feel like buildings have been arbitrarily or artificially placed, but instead they have been constructed so that there are links between them. The Münster City Library enhances these connections, whether they are physical, spatial or connections in terms of flow and movement. Such connections are established in the way the form of the library addresses the streets and pedestrian pathways, in the way the north side of the library integrates itself within existing urban buildings, in the way that east-west offset of two buildings responds to and influences flow, and in the way the library alley directs the flow and movement of people. If the library was removed, there would be a sense of an unnatural empty void in the city center.
connecting buildings designed by Architekturbüro Bolles-Wilson + Partner

integration with existing buildings

pedestrian and automobile accessibility
**HISTORICAL CONNECTION**

The form of the library was greatly influenced by the urban geography and historical stratification of Münster's city center. The form of the library helps one consider the building and its urban surroundings as a whole, not just physically but also with respect to the passage of time. The past and present are reflected throughout the architecture of the historic city center as newer buildings are integrated with older ones. The Münster City Library is a perfect example of this as it is situated within a very old and established portion of Münster. The library’s form gives it a strong connection with the older buildings in the area, including a triangular urban block of buildings to its north and the much older Lamberti Church to the west. The Lamberti Church, as well as other historic sites such as the Cathedral of Saint Paul, the Prinzipalmarkt and the Promenade Park encircling the city center, are all connected to the library through the Library Alley’s powerful spatial axis created by the building’s exterior form. In order to try and unify the library with its surrounding architecture, the city itself, including its plan, becomes a crucial factor in deciding the form of the building. The library does not embrace mythical forms of the past nor nostalgia, it is a reaction to both the past and the present. Ultimately, the library may have a specific function but it relates to a continuing tradition of life in the Münster city center.

**LIBRARY AS AN ACCESSIBLE FORM**

Given that the library integrates itself within the existing urban fabric and enhances its connections, the building is not an imposing nor a dominating form. This is a public library that has been designed to invite and encourage people to experience it by utilizing a form that does not impose and that directs the flow of people around the building, through the Library Alley and towards the main entrance. It’s a form that initiates participation. Furthermore, the form does not generate any codified authority and individuals are largely free to experience the library as they choose. This creates not only a free-flow of human traffic but also a free-flow communication, dialogue, ideas and experience in and around the library.