Qatar National Library
as Part of a Countrywide Knowledge Infrastructure

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ABSTRACT

Qatar National Library (QNL) opened in autumn 2017; the official inauguration happened in April 2018. QNL combines a national library, a public library, and an academic library in one institution. The library aims at becoming the knowledge hub of Qatar, seeing itself as a "third place" and an important driving force of Qatar's knowledge-based economy. For about ten years, Qatar has been heavily investing in the infrastructure of knowledge institutions. Besides the public Qatar University, the state attracted famous international universities to open branch campuses in a newly constructed knowledge cluster called "Education City." QNL is located in Education City as well. Its development is part of the country-wide efforts to construct a competitive knowledge economy, which is supposed to guarantee the country's wealth. We report on the library's manifold offers and discuss critically the book culture and reading habits in Qatar, the level of information literacy of Qatari nationals and expats as well as the location of QNL on the outskirts of Doha.

Keywords: Qatar National Library (QNL), Qatar, Education City, Knowledge Infrastructure, Reading, Information Literacy, Knowledge Society, Third Place

1. Introduction

Once rapidly grown due to large oil and gas reserves, the governments of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are nowadays aware of ending resources and declining demand of oil- and gas-burning countries due to electric mobility and enhanced ecological awareness. Additionally, new oil production methods as hydraulic fractioning, increasingly used, for instance, in the United States, intensify competition on the oil markets.

One GCC member, the state of Qatar makes great plans for the era after the oil (Fromherz, 2017; Kamrava, 2015; Roberts, 2017; Salama and Wiedmann, 2013; Ulrichsen, 2014, 2016). Nowadays, Qatar is one of the wealthiest countries of the world. Furthermore, the prospect of Doha hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022 has led to further changes within the country. In respect of this spectacle, Qatar invests heavily in

world-class infrastructure (e.g., a new metro system and with Lusail a newly constructed "smart" city) and in the improvement of its education and healthcare systems. By hosting renowned sports events and international conferences, as well as marketing itself as a brand, Qatar has successfully managed to attract global interest and awareness. It is safe to say that Qatar's capital city Doha became "an important emerging regional and global capital in the Middle East" (Salama and Wiedmann, 2013, p. xxi) that attracts attention not only to the oil and gas sector, but also to culture and sports, tourism, politics and policy initiation.

Qatar's government has the task to bring the country and its people on the right track – a track that transforms Qatar into a knowledge-based society (QF, 2013). To achieve this goal and to spread the nation's task, the previous Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and his political supporters introduced the Qatar National Vision 2030 in 2008 (GSDP, 2008, p. 2). For the supplementary Qatar National Development Strategy, the main goal is to build on knowledge. "As Qatar's economy diversifies more from its reliance on gas and oil, success will increasingly depend on the ability to compete in a global knowledge economy. Educating and training Qataris to their full potential will be critical to continuing progress" (GSDP, 2011, p. 122).

An important reason to select Qatar and its national library as a case study lies in the starting position for the transformation process towards a knowledge society. About two or three decades ago, there was nothing in Qatar we could associate with a knowledge economy: no functioning education system K-12, nearly no universities, no knowledge-intensive companies, no knowledge-based development. In contrast, in "old" countries as the US, UK, France, Germany, Japan or China, knowledge institutions look back on centuries of history. In Qatar, we are able to study the transitioning towards a knowledge society and the role of libraries in the development from scratch, thus from the very beginning.

Since the late 1990s Qatar's capital Doha has developed rapidly into a city characterized by skyscrapers (Figure 1), shopping malls, museums, stadiums, and artificial islands. The Pearl, an artificial island with new apartments, houses, villas, a yacht harbor, parks, restaurants, and high-class retail strips, is already inhabited to a large part. A gorgeous waterfront and the famous Museum of Islamic Art, as well as the fact that the city will be the venue of the soccer world championship in 2022, have put Doha into the limelight. The Arabian oryx is Qatar's national animal. "The Oryx takes off," Conventz et al. (2015, p. 65) state. "The oryx antelope is the iconic logo of Qatar Airways, which can be regarded as one epitome of Doha's being a rising hub in the Gulf region."

Following Gremm et al. (2015) we can carefully say that Kuwait is the past, Dubai is the present and Doha is the future in the entire Gulf region when it comes to the transition towards knowledge societies (Gremm et al., 2018). However, in Qatar (and the entire Gulf region) there are remarkable obstacles to arrive at a functioning knowledge society, resulting from problems of the transition of (especially native) graduates into the labor markets and the mentality of the native population to work hard (Kosior et al., 2015). Maybe there is another problematic habit of Qataris. People in Qatar do not like to read because "reading and writing are activities restricted exclusively to school" (Ulmer, 2009, p. 112).

On April 16th, 2018, the one millionth book was placed in the new building of Qatar National Library (QNL) in Doha's Education City as part of its inauguration ceremony (Saleem, 2018; Varghese, 2018). Earlier, in November 2017, QNL opened its doors to the public for the first time (Saleem, 2017; Varghese, 2017). Our basic research question is: What is the role of QNL in the countrywide process of its transformation towards a knowledge society? As a combination of public library (for the citizens of Doha and the entire state), academic library (for the universities in Education City) and national library, QNL unifies important library types in one single institution. Further research questions are: What services are provided? Will it be adequately used – also under the perspective of the often stated restricted motivation of the Arabian population to read books? Is there any information literacy or media literacy instruction offered by QNL? Is the location in the outskirts of Doha optimal for broad usage?

2. Methods

We applied three methods in order to acquire information on QNL and its position on Qatar's way towards a knowledge society. Besides literature review (method 1), we conducted rapid ethnographic field research (Millen, 2000) on-site (i.e., we visited Education City and Qatar University in February 2016) (method 2) and conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 experts in both institutions (method 3).

3. Qatar's Way Towards a Knowledge Society

Made rich by large reserves of oil and especially natural gas, the country is more than capable to react to the thread of ending resources. Due to its resources, Qatar is not only the country with one of the world's highest per capita income, but also the country with the lowest unemployment rate – leading the Qataris to show a "rentier mentality." In a rentier state, "only few are engaged in the generation of this rent (wealth), the majority being only involved in the distribution and utilization of it" (Beblawi, 1987, p. 51). The principal recipient of the external rent is the state's government, which in turn

distributes the rent to its citizens in the GCC states. In a rentier state, there is a break in the work – reward causation. "Reward – income or wealth – is not related to work and risk bearing, rather to chance or situation," Beblawi (1987, p. 52) emphasizes. It is problematic to motivate the privileged citizens to work hard (as money comes anyway). This will become a challenge for Qatar: mastering the transition towards knowledge society and motivating the native people to let go of their rentier mentality.

Qatar has developed a plan to diversify its economy, manifested in the Qatar National Vision 2030. The goal is to transform Qatar into a pioneering state with a knowledge-based and extremely competitive economy while maintaining its strong cultural and traditional values. Results are already visible in the progress that the country has made in economic, social and political fields (GSDP, 2008). Remarkable institutions reflecting the efforts towards knowledge society are the newly built knowledge-intensive areas Education City and Qatar University.

Figure 1: Business District in Doha's West Bay. *Source:* Authors.

4. Education City and Qatar University

To advance the education system in Qatar, an Emiri Decree established the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF) in 1995. Under the leadership of Sheikha Moza (the former emir's wife) the private, non-profit organization QF has set itself to improve the quality of life in Qatar and the surrounding region by providing world-class educational opportunities. This vision is realized in a new higher education campus located in the northwest of Doha called Education City (Figure 2). Based on the model of the branch campus concept, the 2,500 acres big area

accommodates world-class universities that "offer their most prestigious programmes to Qatar as fully-fledged partners of Qatar Foundation" (Salama & Wiedmann, 2013, p. 55). These foreign universities offering their programs to Qatar's students are from the UK, the United States and France and include Virginia Commonwealth University (Art and Design; since 1998), Weill Cornell Medical College (Healthcare; since 2001), Texas A&M University (Petroleum Engineering; since 2003), Georgetown University (Politics; since 2005), Northwestern University (Communication, Journalism; since 2008), HEC Paris (Business and Management; since 2010), and the University College London (Librarianship and Museum Practice; since 2012). Additionally, there is the national Hamad Bin Khalifa University (since 2012) with a widespread offer of study programs (Computer Science, Energy, Healthcare, Islamic Studies, Islamic Finance, Law and Translation; Gremm et al., 2018, pp. 171 f.).

The world's most expensive national education project is the first step of Doha's plan to become an important knowledge center with a knowledge-based economy. Nowadays, the universities in Education City enroll about 2,700 students. QNL is located inside Education City.

Figure 2: Doha's Education City. *Source:* Authors.

The second pillar of Qatar's higher education is Qatar University (QU). It has reached substantial international attention and is frequently mentioned in international media.

At QU, more than 20,000 students are enrolled. QU is a university running nine colleges, namely Arts and Sciences, Business and Economics, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy as well as Sharia and Islamic Studies. According to Times Higher Education, Qatar University is the most international university in the world (Bothwell, 2016). However, Education City and Qatar University are only sparsely connected. The institutions are placed at different locations in Doha; Qatar University acts more traditionally (e.g., by offering gender-separated undergraduate courses and separate libraries for males and females), while the international universities in Education City follow Western standards. As it is very problematic for Qatari girls to study abroad, it seems that in Education City, the universities came to the girls (and not the girls to the universities in foreign countries). Prospectively, Qatar has to face the challenge "of aligning Arabian Gulf expectations, traditions, and norms with those of knowledge economies" (Wiseman, Alromi, & Alshumrani, 2014, p. 2).

There are further higher education institutions in Qatar, all run by foreign educational establishments (Gremm et al., 2018, p. 184). The biggest institution is the College of the North Atlantic, a technical university operated by Canadian instructors, with about 3,000 students. Worth mentioning are Stenden University Qatar, Calgary University Qatar and the Qatar College of Aeronautics.

5. Qatar's Library System

Qatar National Library was established in the year 1962 by merging Doha's Public Library (founded in 1956) and the library of the Education Department (established in 1954). With the foundation of Qatar University (in 1973) and its academic library, a second main library in Qatar came into life (Aman and Khalifa, 1983; Rashid, 1988). For 1988, Raschid (p. 216) concludes, "despite increasing efforts the library system in Qatar has not reached the standard found in American libraries;" the library services are "inadequate" (Raschid, 1988, p. 217). This is the poor situation of Qatar's library system about 20 years ago.

"Over the last twenty years, the State of Qatar has witnessed colossal developments in its various sectors such as economy, society, technology, and education" (Medawar and Tabet, 2016, p. 52). Today, there are many academic and few public libraries in Qatar. The university libraries in Education City (Gyesly, 2010; Medawar and Tabet, 2016) include (in brackets the amount of physical resources as an estimation of the library's size)

- Academic Bridge Program Library (12,700 print resources),
- Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar Library (16,000),

- Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar Library (90,000),
- HEC Paris in Qatar Library (1,000),
- Northwestern University in Qatar Library (34,000) (Clausen, 2015),
- Texas A&M University at Qatar Library (10,000) (Gilreath, 2006; Yang and Gyeszly, 2009),
- Translation and Interpreting Institute Library at Hamad bin Khalifa University (2,000),
- University College London Qatar Library (in cooperation with Georgetown Univ. Library; additionally, UCLQ offers an MA study in Library and Information Studies),
- Virginia Commonwealth University Qatar Library (40,000),
- Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (e-library).

The physical collections of the branch campuses' libraries are rather small; however, there are always close ties to the home campus' libraries. A remote access to all holdings of the home university (including the catalogs, online databases, e-books, e-journals and document delivery) is given for the entire faculty and their students (Gyeszly, 2010).

Outside Education City, there are further academic libraries:
- College of the North Atlantic Qatar Library (14,000),
- Community College Qatar Library (5,000),
- Stenden University Qatar Library (6,000),
- University of Calgary Qatar Learning Commons (3,000), and, finally,
- Qatar University Library (330,000) – the biggest library in Qatar after QNL (Kindilchie and Samarraie, 2008).

Governmental libraries comprise diverse topic-specific libraries, as, for instance, the Agricultural Affairs Ministry Library or the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority Library. Special libraries can be found, for example, at the Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, Hamad Health Services, Sidra Medical & Research Center, and the Museum of Islamic Art.

In Doha as well as in smaller towns as Al-Khor, Al-Shamal and Al-Wakra, public libraries have been established. However, "the public library sector continues to emerge; most libraries are not automated" (Medawar and Tabet, 2016, p. 64).

Similarly suboptimal is the state of school libraries. There is a long tradition of school libraries in Qatar, as all schools have libraries. When public schools were launched in

1951, the school library "was considered from the very beginning to be a major component of the Qatari school" (Khalifa, 1992, p. 484). However, there are no professional librarians working in the schools (Rashid, 1988, p. 215). The principal service of the school libraries is lending books (Khalifa, 1992, p. 494). In 2016, the circulating library collection in public schools amounted to 5,600 books on average, in contrast to international schools with nearly 9,000 books (Medawar and Tabet, 2016, p. 66). Furthermore, many school libraries still lack advanced integrated library systems.

As a major strength of Qatar's library system Medawar and Tabet (2016, p. 68) emphasize the role of QNL.

6. Qatar National Library (QNL)

"Higher education and research, as much as a knowledge-based economy in general, need access to international information and knowledge and the development of a national knowledge base," Lux (2014a, p. 175), former QNL project director, states. According to Mainka and Khveshchanka (2012), libraries are important knowledge hubs of knowledge-based societies because they are the traditional institutions of knowledge management. Beside print publications, libraries need to provide sufficient digital material and an attractive physical infrastructure for their users (Mainka et al., 2013).

QNL states that their library is a "third place," a "community space" (QNL, 2018a). The concept of a "third place" was introduced by Oldenburg and Brissett in 1982. "Third places are characterized in terms of sociability and nondiscursive symbolism" (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982, p. 265; Oldenburg, 1999), they are places outside the home and the workplace as, for instance, coffee houses and neighborhood taverns (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982, pp. 268 and 281). Referring to Harris (2007, p. 145), "public libraries are in a unique position to become the next great good places, places where people can freely gather and interact." Not only books and other media are important for a library, but additionally the provision of spaces (Mainka et al., 2013). In knowledge societies and in their prototypical cities called "informational cities" or "smart cities" (Castells, 1989; Stock, 2011), we have to distinguish between "libraries as a third physical space" and "libraries as a third digital space." "People who frequent third places create community" (Montgomery and Miller, 2011, p. 233). In this sense, the library provides the spaces for building and cultivating communities as well. QNL sets high standards by referring to third places:

- an attractive building (as a condition for the supply of any spaces),

- optimal collections and services on-site (as classical library functions),
- offer of digital spaces (access to digital resources), and
- offer of physical spaces (for community building).

"The profession of librarianship in the State of Qatar is currently in a phase of rapid growth, development and transition" (Johnston and Williams, 2015, p. 86). For a long time, librarians in Qatar did not play a significant role in the country. However, with the establishment of QNL and the will of Qatar to develop a knowledge-based society this is changing for the better. Librarians provide access to the most important resource in this form of society, namely knowledge, and provide spaces (physical as well as digital) for the people's community cultivating.

Figure 3: Qatar National Library. *Source:* Twitter / Sebastian Wilke (courtesy of the photographer).

6.1 Building and Staff

Since the "library as a space" (Lux, 2016, p. 105) is an important aspect of libraries, we should give attention to QNL's building in Education City (Figure 3). The new building of QNL was created by Rem Koolhas and his associated company, the "Office for Metropolitan Architecture" (OMA) in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. In the self-image of QNL the building is "a community space for Qatar's residents and a place for learning, contemplation and exchange of ideas" (QNL, 2018a). The building looks like two papers "that are pulled apart and folded diagonally at the corners to create a shell-like container, which encloses the open-plan interior" (QNL 2018d). The first floor is constructed as one huge space reminding of an urban plaza. There are cascading levels,

which can be accessed by stairs, ramps, lifts, and the so-called "People Mover System" (a hybrid of an elevator and an escalator). Below the first floor, the heritage library is situated, resembling an archeological site. The bookshelves are arranged on the different levels. Standing in front of them gives the impression of being in an amphitheater with thematically arranged book shelves on the different galleries.

This futuristic looking arrangement of books reminds of scholar Camillo Delminio's idea in the Early Modern Age (1990; the manuscript is from 1530). He proposed the library to be a "memory theater" in form of an amphitheater with the knowledge items on the steps in order to "stage the knowledge" and allowing the users to easily attain and retain the knowledge (Stock and Stock, 2013, pp. 507 f.). There is no doubt that the library building is a landmark in Qatar and one of the most attractive libraries on a global scale.

The library staff includes many expatriate employees. Even the management is (still) in the hands of foreigners. The project director was Claudia Lux, a German (Lo, Cho and Chiu, 2017, pp. 111-128; Lux, 2014b); the current executive director, Sohair Wastawy, is an American citizen with roots in Egypt. About 200 professionals were hired to work for QNL (Interview partners 2 & 12).

6.2 Collections and Services On-Site

QNL's homepage (Figure 4) gives an overview of the library's services. In its main collection, QNL hosts almost 1 million books. The main physical collections of non-fiction books on the shelves are systematically arranged following the Library of Congress Classification System (LCC), while the children's and teen's books are ordered by the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). All other media (fiction books and the heritage collection, for example) are arranged by local classification systems (QNL, 2018c). In the heritage library, users are able to find manuscripts, early printed Arabic books, globes, maps and objects on Qatar and the region (QNL, 2018a). Of course, QNL provides further typical and classical library services such as "Ask a Librarian" and document delivery.
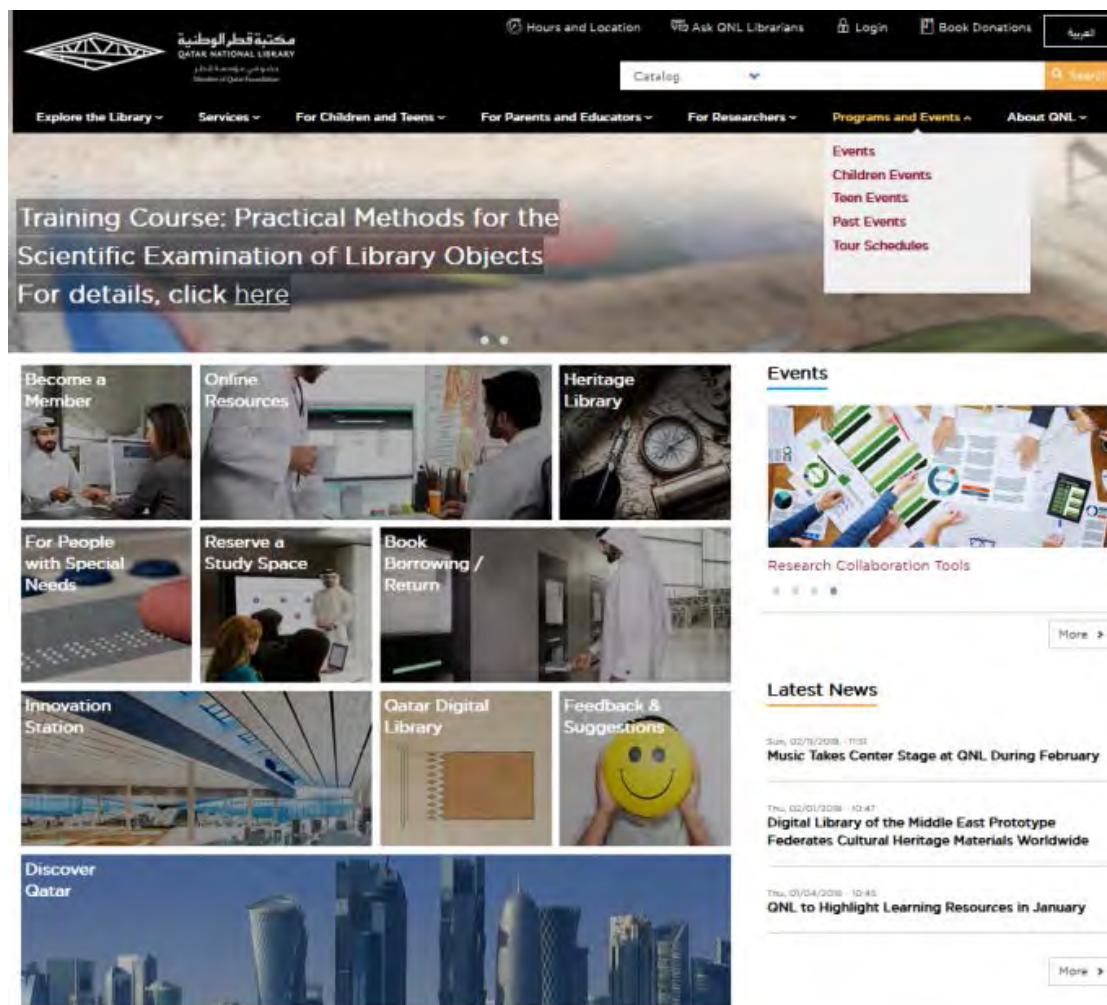
Figure 4: Qatar National Library / Homepage. *Source:* https://www.qnl.qa/en.

Apart from about 100,000 printed books especially for children, QNL has developmental toys, computer stations with software for children, iPads with learning applications and audio-visual materials for children (QNL, 2018e). For teenagers, there are about 30,000 printed books and gaming kiosks with consoles and video games (QNL, 2018b).

To make use of QNL's services, one has to become a member. Membership is bound to living in Qatar, be it as Qatari citizen or as expat resident. All library services are free of charge for members (QNL, 2018a); as well as the library card, therefore the membership is free (QNL, 2018c).

6.3 Digital Spaces

The digital spaces of QNL include four sub-spaces, namely

- the library catalog,
- online resources,

- Qatar Digital Library, and

- digitized materials.

Figure 5: QNL Catalog / Results List. *Source:* https://www.qnl.qa/en/node/3173.

Besides the online catalog of all physical holdings (Figure 5) QNL offers access to professional information services. It is a typical service comparable to good academic libraries; it includes, among many others, ProQuest, Wiley, JSTOR, Springer eBooks, Taylor & Francis, De Gruyter, Emerald, SAGE, Science Direct eBooks, and Web of Science (QNL, 2018f). Access is provided to 178 databases and 318,000 e-books as of August 2016 (Owino and Dudek, 2016, p. 233). Due to national licenses, some online resources may be accessed – for free – by every QNL member from everywhere in Qatar.

The Qatar Digital Library provides access to a collection of historical archival items

related to Qatar, the Gulf region and the Middle East as well as manuscripts of Arab Islamic sciences. In cooperation with the British Library, more than 1.3 million items were cataloged and digitized (Figure 6).
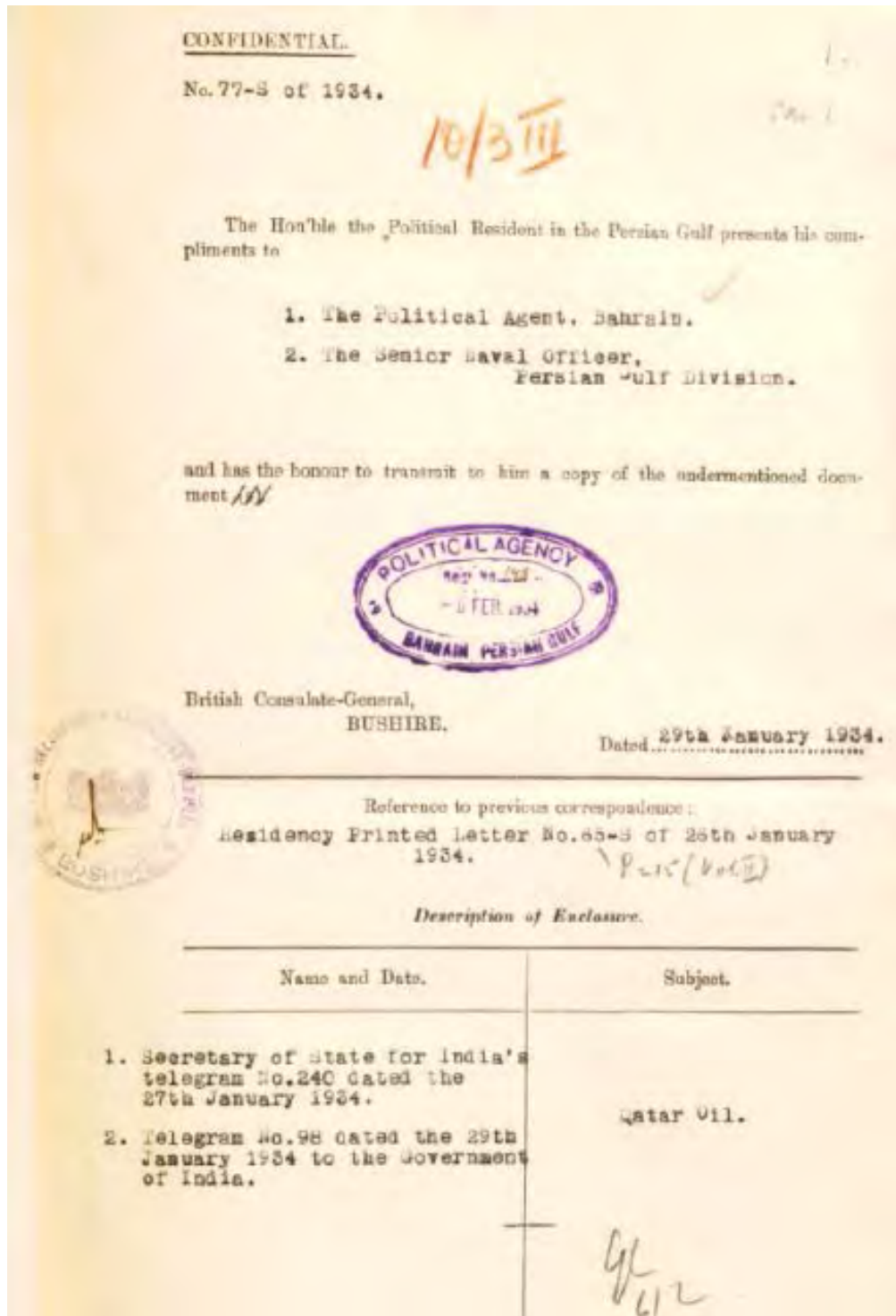
Figure 6: Example from the Qatar Digital Library: Qatar Oil Concession from Jan. 29, 1934. *Source:* Qatar Digital Library (www.qdl.qa).

QNL's digitization center has the task to make heritage materials accessible for the public (QNL, 2018g). Books which can no longer be physically available "due to format obsolescence or fragile condition" (QNL, 2918g), images and Arabic manuscripts are being scanned. This includes a project for word-by-word indexing of (handwritten) manuscripts (Al-Maadeed et al., 2014).

6.4 Physical Spaces

QNL offers lots of spaces for reading. There are more than 600 seats all over the building and additionally nearly 30 carrels as quiet spaces for individual study (QNL, 2018b). Furthermore, many group study rooms, instruction rooms (one room specialized for information fluency instruction) and event spaces (e.g., for exhibitions). The "Innovation Station" includes computer workstations, 3D printing and scanning, videography and photography equipment as well as stations for old media conversion (e.g., to transform VHS tapes into digital formats). Of course, QNL offers publicly accessible PCs, printers and scanners. In QNL, users can use large media walls and two-sided media pillars (called "totems") for infotainment, for instance, for interactive games, drawing and e-souvenirs. The library includes an auditorium with about 450 seats. Here, performances of the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra take place (Figure 7). Needless to say, QNL also houses a restaurant and a cafe.

Figure 7: The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra at QNL. *Source:* Twitter / Sebastian Wilke (courtesy of the photographer).

7. Evaluation of QNL and Qatar's Library System

The role of librarians in the state of Qatar is now to strongly support education and

encourage information consumption and development (Interview partners 2 & 12). At Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, for instance, "librarians become 'knowledge navigators and information mediators'" (Küster, 2010, p. 18). Moreover, the need for well-trained librarians increases strikingly because they require the skills to "serve multiple groups of clients with distinct library and information needs" (Lux, 2014a, p. 177).

Our interviewees are of the opinion that librarians in Qatar are mostly well-trained. The librarians from the university libraries located in Education City sometimes even join the classes at their universities to share their knowledge with the students (Interview partners 1, 3, 8, & 9). Interview partner 2 says that most of the librarians are educated properly to do their job in the country. However, they are trained differently than their colleagues in Western societies. Furthermore, many of the librarians in Qatar only hold an undergraduate degree rather than a master's degree. This is due to the replacement of the library science postgraduate program of Qatar University by an undergraduate LIS program (Daniel, Meho, and Moran, 2015). To change this situation in preparation for the increasing need of well-educated library professionals in the country, the University College London in Qatar offers a master's program in Library and Information Studies (LIS) since October 2013 (Johnston and Williams, 2015). Apart from the undergraduate LIS program from Qatar University, which was abandoned in 2012, the postgraduate LIS program of University College London is the first such program in Qatar (Johnston, Mavodza, and Jirjees, 2015). According to interview partner 12, Qatar likes to hire expertise. "Senior library professionals, from overseas, are the most sought after for their expertise and experience in strategic planning and management capabilities" (Kumaresan and Swrooprani, 2013, p. 2).

The majority of the LIS workforce in Qatar comes from Western and other Arab countries. Only about 10 percent of the librarians are Qatari because qualified and experienced Qatari librarians are scarce (Johnston and Williams, 2015). The country hopes that qualified professionals from other countries are likely to train Qatari librarians. It is also important to note that there is a huge difference in the training of librarians in public and private libraries. Nearly every school in Qatar contains its own library that requires library staff (Interview partner 12). This is in line with Al-Kaabi (2015) who states that it is at least intended that every school in Qatar has its own library. In public school libraries, the staff is not trained at all. However, these schools do not place importance on employing professional librarians and on further education for the staff (Interview partner 12). Most of the school librarians only work part-time while lacking the knowledge and needed skills (Al-Kaabi, 2015). School librarians already

have the feeling that they receive even less training than other librarians in the country and that they are not appreciated as education providers. This might become a problem: While Qatar does not focus on supporting school libraries, most of the librarians in Qatar are of the opinion that there is a strong need for school librarians in the country (Johnston and Williams, 2015). Qatar National Library wants to address this issue by offering special training to school librarians (Lux, 2014a). Unlike public libraries, private libraries do provide training to the librarians (Interview partner 12). However, most of Qatar's librarians state "that they were not satisfied with the level of professional development opportunities that were available to them in Qatar" (Johnston and Williams, 2015, p. 95). Reasons for this opinion are the absence of development support and the requirement to travel to another country to participate in training. This shows that in Qatar librarians themselves feel the need to expand their professional knowledge and skills to do their jobs appropriately.

QNL is, despite any delays, important for Qatar's libraries' changing role. Traditionally, public libraries have not been well resourced and used. Most of the people did not even know that they exist. The aim of Qatar is to change this ignorance with the opening of the National Library. Everyone living in Qatar will be enabled to access all the print and online resources as well as the spaces of the library. QNL has purchased national licenses so that the people will be able to use online databases for the acquisition of knowledge. The library allows people to access knowledge from everywhere, which is an important aspect in a knowledge-based society (Interview partners 2, 4, 10, & 12). The combination of print and online resources and of different collections will enhance the people's experience and usage of the library (Lux, 2014a).

All in all, the evaluation of Qatar's library system is ambivalent. There are weak public libraries (except for the new QNL) and there are also weak school libraries. However, the academic libraries in Education City (with their close ties to the home university's libraries) and especially at Qatar University are comparable to other university libraries all over the world. And, finally, QNL is a world-class library.

When it comes to information dissemination via text and the provision of information in libraries, there is one big problem in Qatar, namely censorship. Books ordered by libraries in Qatar are reviewed before they are imported. If a book argues unlike or against the holy Qur'an, it is not acceptable to list the book in the libraries. Some books that are needed did not pass the review. Additionally, some librarians hold back books that arrive at the libraries because they are unsure about putting them on the shelves for the public to read. Sometimes it takes up to two months until a review is completed

(Interview partners 1, 2, & 4). Even websites are blocked by Qatar, more precisely by Ooredo in accordance with the guidelines that are defined by law-enforcing authorities (OpenNet Initiative, 2009), but most of the people living in the region know how to use a virtual private network (VPN). And people in Qatar obviously use it if they need anything they cannot access otherwise (Interview partners 2 & 3).

8. Book Culture and Reading Habits in Qatar

The libraries in Qatar, especially the public libraries, are barely visited. Al-Kutub Library, the former QNL, and its branches were rarely used (Lux, 2014a). For academic libraries, this fact does not seem to apply because teachers tell their students to go there (Interview partner 12). Our interview partners say that when talking about reading and visiting libraries in Qatar, one needs to distinguish between the habits of Qataris and those of expats. Due to Qatar's nomadic history, a book culture does not exist in the country (Interview partners 1 & 11). "The book is something that is far, far away" (Interview partner 9). A survey conducted by the Childhood Cultural Center of Qatar revealed that children in Qatar are not interested in reading books, stories and magazines (Fahmy, 2015).

> "Even in parts of the Arab region with considerable financial wealth and access to education, book reading is suspected to be low (…). Reasons for this are numerous: Lack of texts translated into Arabic, censorship, political instability, competing classical and colloquial dialects, weak library networks, and piracy all contribute to the diminution of reading in Arab countries" (Martin, Martins, and Naqvi, 2017, p. 3374).

Bendriss and Golkowska (2011) found out that one in four university students in Qatar had never been read to as a child. Nearly 30% of the students say that they never or rarely saw their parents read for pleasure.

Expats, who were born in foreign countries, read and use libraries more frequently than Qataris, but expats that are born in the country probably show similar habits to Qataris because they adapt to the local culture. Indeed, there is no statistically significant difference between the book reliance of Qatari nationals (15.34 on a scale between 4 and 20) and Western expatriates in Qatar (15.83) (Martin et al., 2017, p. 3383). From all Arab nationals, Martin et al. (2017) studied, Qataris performed best – similar to nationals from the United Arab Emirates (15.28) or Saudi Arabia (15.28), but much better than people from Egypt (10.81).

Maybe, if the needs of Qataris were acknowledged by employing Arabic-speaking librarians in libraries, the natives would change their habits regarding visiting libraries

(Johnston and Williams, 2015). Just as people in Qatar do not use libraries very often, they seldom visit bookstores. Actually, only 10 percent of the goods in bookshops are books. Customers of those stores are rather expats than Qataris, but the variety of sophisticated literature is described as poor (Interview partners 4 & 11).

We have to mention some exceptions. Not everyone in Qatar hates reading, some Qataris actually really like to read and the book fairs are even crowded (Interview partners 1, 2, & 3). The Doha International Book Fair is an annual event where publishers present their books, regardless of genre, to the Qatari community. This event is a chance for Qatar to convince the people of the importance of acknowledge the worth of libraries and educational institutions. Interviewee 11 says that people in Qatar just skip the step of reading a book. They go from a culture where knowledge is transferred orally to one where knowledge is acquired online. If people are looking for knowledge of any kind, they consult the internet (Interview partner 8) and are most interested in articles from social media platforms (Interview partner 1). However, when it comes to learning materials, students in Qatar, as many of their colleagues worldwide, prefer to print out their course readings rather than reading them with the help of digital devices (Johnston, Salaz, and Alsabbagh, 2016).

"To get more people in Qatar to embrace reading, new efforts are underway to make books more accessible to the public, especially children" (Khatri, 2016, 1st paragraph). With the establishment of QNL and the idea to therein include a Children's Library with children being recognized as a "core user group" (Johnston and Williams, 2015, p. 92) of libraries, Qatar is attempting to create a culture that is keen on reading and where using libraries for knowledge consumption is commonplace (Interview partner 12). Interview partner 1 fears, however, that due to their attitude towards libraries, Qataris will not even visit the new National Library. Interviewee 12 also has doubts that the library will be well visited.

9. Media and Information Literacy

Medawar and Tabet (2016, p. 68) describe a lack of awareness among the people in Qatar "about the libraries and their role." Perhaps, there is a problem with the Arabic language, as the word مَكْتَبَة (maktabah) means both, "library" as well as "bookstore." Library staff in Education City indeed needs to explain that there is a difference between bookshops and libraries (Sandercock, 2016, p. 5). Pullman (2016) asked Qatari native students of Carnegie Mellon University Qatar regarding their pre-college experience with information literacy and libraries. Almost 40% of the students used their high school library "regularly" or "always." And, obviously directed by their instructors,

more than 51% of university students visited a university library regularly or always. In contrast, only 2.3% of all respondents used a public library regularly – and no single student always (Pullman, 2016, p. 60). Medawar and Tabet name a threat to strengthening even the students' perceptions of the library's role:

> "The library is not the first stop to many who research. Students often turn to Google or other Internet search engines rather than library resources as their first choice to find information. Because libraries invest heavily in database subscriptions, libraries need to play an increased role to guide users to search the correct databases and get better search results" (Medawar and Tabet, 2016, p. 71).

Media and information literacy (MIL) is a fairly new aspect in the country, but the Doha Center for Media Freedom (DCMF) realizes its significance with information becoming more and more important in modern societies. DCMF, a non-profit organization that fights for press freedom and quality journalism, has made it its business to provide media and information literacy education. The organization feels that the younger generations need to be encouraged to become media literate critical thinkers. Since 2011, the organization is actively pursuing and expanding its long-term project to provide MIL education in various schools in Qatar and the region (DCMF, 2013).

Sandercock (2016) asked instructors at the College of the North Atlantic in Qatar on their perceptions of the state of information literacy among their students. "Instructors perceive that only

- 39% can identify an information need,
- 29% can scope their information problem,
- 31% can plan and construct a strategy for locating information,
- 35% can gather the information and data needed,
- 17% can evaluate information for credibility,
- 20% can manage information professionally and ethically, and
- 23% can present and synthesise the results of their research" (Sandercock, 2016, p. 19).

On average, only 28% of the students display all seven information literacy skills. Using the same method and the same questions in the U.S., Weetman DaCosta (2010, p. 215) saw a 48% success rate (by the way, this result is still suboptimal).

Information literacy does not seem to be a big topic in Qatar's Education City university libraries, given that our interviewees do not know a lot about it. Interviewees 1 and 12 say that information literacy in Qatar is not high. There are some information literacy courses for students in the libraries of the branch campuses, but they call it differently

(Interview partners 2 & 3). For instance, the library of the Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar offers information, media and materials literacy instruction that is tuned to the core curriculum of the University College (VCU, 2014). According to CMU (2015), librarians from Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar hold information literacy workshops in the course of the year. Moreover, if librarians were asked to help, they would, but nobody asks them (Interview partner 1). Qatari librarians feel the need for information literacy instruction. Librarians that teach information literacy are important for the country and information literacy training for librarians is urgently required (Johnston and Williams, 2015).

QNL is starting to recognize the importance of information literacy; by now, on a very low level. In April 2018, QNL promotes a symposium on information literacy to beat fake news.

> "For libraries, …, it is not enough to merely provide access to information; we have been promoting literacy for centuries, and will continue to do so, but now more than ever the idea of 'information literacy' is a necessary next step," Stuart Hamilton, QNL's Deputy Executive Director, states (2018).

However, at the time of our researches, we were not able to identify any systematic program of information literacy instruction at QNL.

10. Location of QNL

Since Qatar National Library is located in Education City, there was once the idea for it to be the main library for students of Education City. The idea resulted from the fact that "Education City currently lacks a central library" (Gyeszly, 2010, p. 87). All the students would use one and the same library instead of visiting the libraries of the branch universities they are enrolled in (Interview partner 12). This idea, however, was not realized and the building that should have become Education City's central library is now the new establishment for QNL. And while students might use and benefit from the QNL, they still have to be given the chance to obtain curriculum-focused resources from the branch campus libraries that are specialized on the topics taught by the universities (Flanagan and Wiebe, 2015). According to interviewee 2, the branch campus libraries will cooperate with the National Library, but at present the agreement with their home campus is the main source of Education City's university libraries.

QNL's location is ideal for students and faculty of Education City. However, there are long distances to Qatar University (about 15 km), to Doha's commercial center West Bay (14 km), and to the reconstructed old city center of Msheireb and Souk Waqif (15 km) (Figure 8). In the future, there will be a metro station of the green line, connecting

QNL directly with Msheireb. However, in the meantime QNL's users have to go by their car or to take a cab.

Figure 8: Location of QNL in Doha. *Source:* Google Maps.

According to Interviewee 12, QNL is as a public library at the wrong place. The location in Education City might be problematic due to its distance to the city center of Doha. Qataris who do not like to use libraries anyway, would not go all the way to Education City. Qatar has also recognized this problem and has already thought about opening further branches of QNL. So far, to attract many visitors, social and recreational aspects, like a cafe and a special events area, as well as cutting-edge technology are included in the library. Moreover, the technical service department and librarians from the public service department promote the new library at public places where many people are reached (Lux, 2014a).

11. Conclusion

We conducted a literature review, rapid ethnographic field research and semi-structured interviews to acquire information on QNL and its position in Qatar. Qatar's government makes great plans for the country and its economy and its people for the "era after the oil." The main goal is to build on knowledge and transform Qatar into a knowledge-based society. For years, Qatar has been heavily investing in the infrastructure of knowledge institutions, among them the newly built knowledge-intensive areas Education City and Qatar University in Doha. Qatar National Library is situated in Education City. It opened its doors, the doors to a national library, a public library, and an academic library all in one, in autumn 2017. An important reason to select Qatar and its national library as a case study is that here, we are able to study the transition towards

a knowledge society and the role of libraries in this development from the start.

Twenty years ago, the library system of Qatar was described as subpar (Raschid, 1988) and librarians did not play an important role. Since then, the educational sector has undergone significant development. Today, there are many academic libraries in Qatar. A major player in further development will indeed be QNL as it aims to become the knowledge hub of Qatar. It not only fulfils an important role in providing access to information and knowledge but also as a "third place" for Qatar's diverse communities. A heavy burden lies on the well-designed corners of QNL, as this library is an important building block of Qatar's knowledge society; however, there are much more projects and incentives in Qatar to successfully establish a knowledge society (Gremm et al., 2018), for instance, the operation of universities and further institutions of higher education, of research institutions (such as Sidra), of science funding institutions, of conventions centres, etc., finally, – most important – the education of people and the enhancement of their motivation to work hard in knowledge-intensive institutions. Looking at the entire library system in Qatar, QNL and most academic libraries are world-class. However, there are only few public and school libraries in Qatar holding up to the same world-class standards. While QNL will address this issue partly by providing training for school librarians, it will need more work to strengthen the public and school libraries throughout the country.

Right now, QNL stands as an excellent example for a modern library. An attractive interior and exterior, as well as space for reading, playing, learning, interaction and entertainment, will surely attract many people. Many of our interviewees told us, however, that libraries in Qatar, especially the public libraries, are barely visited. Furthermore, one should distinguish between the habits of Qataris and those of expats when it comes to reading and visiting libraries. While expats welcome a good library as QNL and indeed use its services, a book culture does not seem to exist among Qataris hindering the nationals to use the QNL to its full extent. Even the majority of QNL's library staff and management consists of expatriate employees. Efforts such as QNL's Children's Library are a way to change the Qatari culture in regards to reading, but some of our interview partners have doubts that the library will be visited by their countrymen. The location of QNL, far away from Qatar University and the city centre, does not improve this argument.

Another important task in transitioning towards a knowledge society is to educate Qataris in Media and Information Literacy (MIL). At the current state, MIL instruction does not seem to be well established in public or academic libraries of Qatar. In April

2018, QNL promotes a symposium on information literacy to beat fake news. Apart from that, no systematic program of information literacy instruction could be detected. We are looking forward to observe future developments in this area.

Finally, for Lux (2014a, p. 176) "it is time to overcome the separation between academic, research and public libraries, and concentrate on a unified service with diverse content for the user. Qatar National Library has a historic chance to start the first fully integrated library from scratch." Such symbiosis grants facilities through the optimal utilization of resources (Stock, 2017, p. 466). Nowadays, in Qatar there are weak public libraries and school libraries, much better academic libraries, and with QNL a world-class integrated library. The knowledge infrastructure is definitively laid; QNL can play a decisive role in Qatar's development towards knowledge society.

However, will the people in Qatar – especially the national Qataris – really change their habits concerning reading, their level of information literacy, and their unproductive rentier mentality?

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