

Academic Libraries of the World: Exemplars, Educators, Enablers for Sustainable Development

Petra Hauke

Visiting Teacher at Berlin School for Library and Information Science,
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany;

Convenor of ENSULIB, IFLA's Environment, Sustainability and
Libraries Special Interest Group

petra.hauke@hu-berlin.de

ABSTRACT

Sustainable thinking and going green are undoubtedly on the agenda worldwide. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) adopted the United Nations Agenda 2030 to demonstrate the key role of libraries as engines for sustainable development. The purpose of this study is to motivate and encourage academic libraries to take a leading role in their communities to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030 and to stimulate further research on the topic. This study identifies, for the first time, outstanding examples of sustainable libraries from all over the world. It focuses on academic libraries that took part in the IFLA Green Library Award competition or those that published their project as an SDG story on the Library Map of the World. The examples given depict how libraries and access to information address the demands across all SDGs. Tools such as a checklist, a short literature review and relevant websites complement the study. Academic libraries and librarians can learn by example and adopt strategies and solutions proven to be successful in other countries. By doing so, they can join a global movement to act as exemplars, educators, and enablers for sustainable development (IFLA, 2018).

Keywords: green libraries, SGD, sustainable development, Agenda 2030

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable thinking and going green are on the agenda worldwide. More and more public and academic libraries are taking over a leading role regarding the awareness of ecological sustainability (Hauke & Charney, 2020). They are reducing their own “ecological footprint” through strategic goals focusing on environment friendly building design and management. In addition, they also provide “green services” and education, thereby serving as examples of ethical

leadership (Hauke, Charney, and Sahavirta, 2018). The number of examples of creative and innovative initiatives is growing. Many of these involve library customers directly through sustainability projects, such as secondhand shops or fairtrade cafeterias in the library, running maker spaces to foster DIY initiatives, to name but a few.

The fact that libraries and librarians have long been positioning themselves as responsible actors for environmental protection issues became clear with the concept of the “green library”. It has become more than just about ecological buildings, but also about the social role of libraries and their task to actively tackle the most important social challenges of our time—the issue of sustainability. (Sahavirta, 2017)

Going through former publications, one can find, from about year 2000, a surge in articles on the “green library movement” (Antonelli, 2008). However, the very first articles on so called green libraries were published in the early 1990s. As Lynn Boyden and James Weiner postulated in 2000, libraries “as gateways for knowledge [...] are particularly well suited as demonstration vehicles” as well as for “teaching environmental responsibility to communities” (Boyden & Weiner, 2000).

Most publications about green libraries focused on eco-building, for instance, the article on “a new century in public library architecture” (Tseng 2007). However not all libraries – both public and academic libraries – have the opportunity to build a new building or to renovate and modernize an old one. The challenge is: “Libraries have to operate environmentally now and in the future in existing buildings without new resources. But how do we achieve this?”

Aside from a new or renovated sustainable building, there are other opportunities for “going green” within the library and in serving the community. It is about reducing the “ecological footprint” in the libraries’ workday. Green libraries are focused on sustainable management, services, programs, events, literature, and projects, demonstrating the social role and responsibility of libraries as leaders in environmental sustainability (Hauke, Charney, & Sahavirta, 2018).

THE UN AGENDA 2030 FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was signed by all member states at a UN Summit in September 2015. The agenda applies to all countries of the world (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Developing countries, emerging economies and industrialized countries were called to make their contribution. It will depend on all of us whether the agenda remains a vision or is actually implemented, because this is not about Sunday speeches, but about active action by each of us.

The agenda has no less objective than to change this world to a one in which everyone acts in an environmentally sound, socially just, and economically efficient manner. Since the Agenda focuses on a worth living life on this planet in general,

all goals – ecological as well as social and economic ones – are ultimately to be understood as “green” goals toward a life worth living.

IFLA, THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

IFLA is committed to library and information policy issues on a global level. Within the framework of this advocacy, IFLA has succeeded in contributing its positions to the United Nations negotiations on the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Within the sustainable development goals defined here, “Ensure access to information” was included under goal 16.10. The importance of access to information for achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals was emphasized, and libraries were made known as partners in achieving the goals (Bradley 2016; IFLA, 2015). However, libraries should not sit back and think that they already done everything. The Agenda calls for special efforts from all – thereby also from libraries and librarians – to achieve the goals.

IFLA has adopted the Agenda 2030 to its International Advocacy Programme (IAP) in 2016, clearly demonstrating the important role of libraries in achieving these goals (IFLA, 2020a). Based on the IAP programme, IFLA initiated regional workshops worldwide to raise awareness on the Agenda 2030 and SDGs and to ensure that libraries are included in national sustainability strategies. As a recent IFLA publication stated: “Sustainability is Libraries’ Business” (IFLA, 2019a). IFLA sees libraries as role models, educational partners, and enablers in this context. IFLA is continuing its activities around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, both in direct engagement and in supporting members at the national level (IFLA, 2020b).



IFLA says: “Take action now so that libraries have a say! [...] Libraries must now show that they can drive progress across the entire 2030 Agenda. We encourage all library associations and institutions to take action now (IFLA 2017).” IFLA launched a toolkit which will help library associations and libraries involve their national and regional policy makers in making sure that libraries and access to information are included as part of national and regional development plans that will contribute to meeting the global 2030 Agenda. As the toolkit is published in all official IFLA languages it is available also in Russian.

IFLA LIBRARY MAP OF THE WORLD: SDG STORIES

To demonstrate the important role of libraries in achieving the goals of Agenda 2030, IFLA is collecting and making visible “SDG stories”. (IDLA[#KKA1] , n.d.) Libraries worldwide pursuing one or more of the sustainability goals with their programs or services are encouraged to publish their story here – in English, and if applicable additionally in their respective national language. A “Story Telling Manual”, which can be accessed online, is intended to help tell a good story in an interesting way and prepare it for publication on the platform. (IFLA, 2019b) There are currently (as of 26 August 2020) 41 SDG stories from 25 countries.



Library Map of the World, SDG Stories

One of the linked stories leads to the University College Cork (UCC) Library, which in 2016 launched its sustainability campaign, “Love Our Library”. The ethos of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to “think globally: act locally,” is fundamental to the university’s campaign, embraced by university staff and students alike.

The campaign addresses six SDGs:



RELEVANT SDGS ADDRESSED BY THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK LIBRARY

“The UCC, like all public-sector organisations in Ireland, was obliged under the Public-Sector Energy Efficiency Programme to increase efficiency by 33% by the year 2020. A 2016 review identified the UCC Library, the heart of the campus both geographically and functionally, as one of the greatest energy consumers on campus – accounting for up to 10% of the university’s overall energy use.

The University’s Energy Manager proposed a new energy-saving initiative, which the Library agreed to pilot. With the “Saver Saves” scheme, the Library was given a budget for energy. If they underspent, the savings could be kept and used for environmental projects, but if they overspent, there would be an extra cost to the library.

The Library formed a Green Team to include library staff, the University’s Energy Manager, Sustainability Officer, and others. They focused on monitoring waste management, energy and water use, identifying areas for improvement, and examining the environmental impact of library operations.

As the entire University community would be impacted by this initiative, effective communication was essential to get and keep everyone involved. The team spread the Love Our Library campaign message to the University’s faculty, staff and students, using signage, email and social media. Students were asked to sign a pledge to help the Library make changes, and within 24 hours of its promotion, over 1,000 students had signed up in support.” (IFLA, 2020c)



“Love our Library’ campaign’s signage in the library’s window” by UCC Library is licensed under CC BY 4.0

The project was awarded as a runner-up during the IFLA Green Library Award 2019 competition. The reviewers said:

“For this project, the University College Cork Library receives a special recognition of excellence! The Boole Library at University College Cork has made real and provable “green” changes to their organisation, i.e., sparked real changes in the behaviour of people using and working in the library [...]. Thus, this initiative offered practical solutions to pervasive waste problems and generating a major impact that can be scaled and shared by libraries around the world. The library has developed an excellent road map for other organisations to follow. An additional feature of the project is its strong and consistent communications strategy that keeps all stakeholders updated and involved.”

IFLA GREEN LIBRARY AWARD

With the support of publishing house De Gruyter Saur, Berlin, ENSULIB has been presenting the IFLA Green Library Award annually since 2016. Up to 30 to 50 applications are regularly received worldwide, which are reviewed by an international jury.

Objectives of the IFLA Green Library Award are:

- To reward the best Green Library submission that communicates the library’s commitment to environmental sustainability.
- To create awareness of libraries’ social responsibility and leadership in environmental education. Libraries of all types are encouraged to participate.
- To support the worldwide Green Library movement, concerned with
 - environmentally sustainable buildings;
 - environmentally sustainable information resources and programming;
 - conservation of resources and energy.
- To promote the development of Green Libraries initiatives locally and worldwide
- To encourage Green Libraries to actively present their activities to an international audience (IFLA/ENSULIB, 2020a).

THE USIU-AFRICA (UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-AFRICA) LIBRARY

Academic libraries have been honored several times in the context of the IFLA Green Library Award. In 2018, the Library of the United States International University-Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, was awarded with its contribution “USIU-Africa: Garden in the Library”.



IFLA Green Library Award runner-up: USIU-Africa Library, Nairobi, Kenya: "Garden in the library". © USIU-Africa Library.

The USIU-Africa library is a very large "green" building with a library garden with trees and plants for a green environment. These also provide a good air for users and staff. The reviewers said: "The flat roof gives the harvest of rainwater to water the garden with. The gardens are giving the library an outdoor effect. The plants give the library an ambience and homely feeling. This example shows that libraries in Africa have also embraced the green movement, it is applicable in new buildings and can be used as a good benchmark." (IFLA/ENSULIB, 2018)

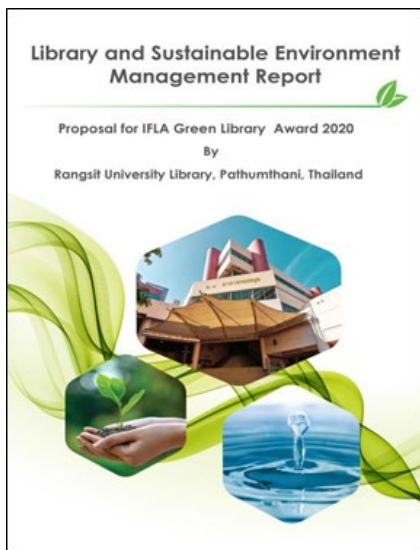
RANGSIT UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, PATHUMTHANI, THAILAND

The winner of the 5th IFLA Green Library Award 2020 was the Rangsit University Library in Thailand, with their "Rangsit University Library and Sustainable Environment Management Report". "Over the last few years, the Library has implemented more than 30 projects and activities to support the sustainable environment management goals. The projects and activities responded to the environmental and sustainable development goals included management review and continuous improvement; self awareness communication; energy and resources; waste and waste water; environment and safety; green procurement; green resources (IFLA/ENSULIB, 2020b)."

The Library has adopted the Thai Library Association Green Library Standard which defines the library as a space for learning and creativity as well as a model for society in regard to energy and environment conservation. The standards and criteria for green library development help libraries manage energy and the environment systematically with efficiency. (Rangsit University Library, 2020)

THE REVIEWERS FOUND:

“Rangsit University Library is a private institution, yet it is accessible to locals and reaches out to local schools and a prison as well as teachers and students. In terms of educating the community, this library holds activities to enhance a leadership role for environmental sustainable management. They have committed themselves to sustainability goals as a managerial framework, and this shows in their professional, systematic and well-documented approach. Sustainability permeates nearly all of their infrastructure, operations and educational goals in an exceptional way. The library monitors its energy, paper and water usage as well as other activities, thus making it possible to evaluate how well the goals are being met (IFLA/ENSULIB, 2020b).”



Rangsit University Library management report, submitted for IFLA Green Library Award competition 2020.

GREEN LIBRARY CHECKLIST

The “Green Library Checklist”, published in 2013 and is available online with open access (in 26 languages, including Russian), is a helpful compilation of 12 main points to be considered when planning a green library project. “For any construction project, just as for any complex undertaking in general, a checklist provides a useful means of confirming that everything has been considered. Although it cannot claim to be exhaustive, the following list of aspects of planning, construction, and also library operation, is designed to help ensure that everything has been considered (Werner, 2013):

Project planning, finance

1. Tendering
2. Site / Location
3. Construction
4. The Building
5. Interior fittings: source, durability, cleaning capabilities, recycling
6. Green information and communication technology (Green IT)
7. User services
8. Library Management
9. Strategic goals
10. Marketing and PR
11. Certificates.

PRINTED AND ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

The German speaking Green Library Network (Netzwerk Grüne Bibliothek) offers, in collaboration with ENSULIB, an international bibliography on green library issues (which is constantly supplemented and updated).

Resources published from 1971 to 2012 are part of “The Green Library” (Hauke, Latimer, & Werner, 2013), available online with open access at <https://www.ibi.hu-berlin.de/de/studium/studprojekte/buchidee/bi12>

The American Library Association (ALA) offers on their website, “Sustainability and Libraries: Green Libraries” with “Resources for the library community to support sustainability through curriculum development, collections, exhibits, events, advocacy, communication, and library buildings and space design” = <https://libguides.ala.org/SustainableLibraries/Green>

Some university libraries offer useful websites on “Green/Sustainable Libraries”, such as:

- Illinois Library: “Green Libraries: Sustainable Libraries – Resources to help libraries go green” = <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/green-libraries/overview/library-specific>
- Carnegie Mellon University Library: “CMU Libraries Sustainable Practices: Green libraries” = <https://guides.library.cmu.edu/c.php?g=829730&p=6426127>

CONCLUSION

This paper stressed that sustainable thinking and going green are on the agenda worldwide. IFLA's adoption of the United Nations Agenda 2030 demonstrate the key role of libraries as engines for sustainable development. Also, academic libraries should take a leading role in their communities to foster the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030 and to stimulate further research on the topic. The study identified some outstanding examples of sustainable libraries with a focus on academic libraries. The examples given show how libraries and access to information address the demands across all SDGs. Academic libraries and librarians may learn by example and take over strategies and solutions which have proved successful elsewhere. Libraries around the world make an important contribution to meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda. It is important that they communicate this commitment clearly, so that they are clearly visible in society as an enabling factor, as exemplars, and as educators for sustainable development, taking over ethical leadership.

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