
From Information Literacy to Green Literacy: Training Librarians as Trainers for Sustainability Literacy

Petra Hauke

Berlin School for Library and Information Science, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

E-mail address: petra.hauke@hu-berlin.de



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Abstract:

Introduction

It is obvious that libraries as education partners play an active role in society. Since the advent of the Green Library Movement, their commitment to sustainability has become more and more visible. With IFLA's adaption of the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and IFLA's "Global Vision of a strong and united library field powering literate informed and participative societies"¹ libraries are called to take action and to initiate the change that is urgently needed facing global challenges like climate change, poverty, hunger, gender equality etc.

Objectives

Libraries should use their positive image to set a precedent through their various service strategies. In the context of teaching information literacy, libraries have already taken over multiple responsibilities. However, as important agencies for providing information, they must address more than information literacy and should take over the responsibility to teach green literacy in response to dramatic climate change and growing ecological awareness.

Approach

The paper aims to encourage teaching as well as practicing librarians to move from teaching information literacy to trainers for sustainability literacy. The paper addresses considerations, resources, and some best practice examples for how to achieve sustainable literacy that meets the urgent challenges of our time.

Conclusion

Both academic as well as public libraries are important partners to act as agents for change: "Libraries are the motors for change" – as the current IFLA President Glòria Pérez-Salmerón claimed. The United Nations 2030 Agenda's overall goal is "Transforming our world". Moving

¹ International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, n.d.

forward from teaching information literacy to educating sustainability literacy that touches any and every circumstances of life seems to be the libraries' meaningful contribution to help achieve the Agenda 2030 goals.

Keywords: Sustainability; Sustainable Development Goals; Green Library; Information literacy; Sustainability literacy

Introduction

Discussing the role of libraries in our society means discussing information and its dissemination as well as teaching information literacy. Information literacy (IL) is defined as “skill in finding the information one needs, [. . .] the skills required to critically evaluate information content and employ it effectively [. . .]”.² But are the dissemination of information and teaching information literacy enough? The motto of the current IFLA President Glòria Pérez-Salmerón is “Libraries: Motors for Change”! She says: “The challenges facing the library field from ever-increasing globalization can only be met and overcome by an inclusive, global response from a united library field.”³ “Sustainability literacy” can in fact serve as an inclusive, global response.

The ecological crisis is one of the biggest problems the modern world faces. As a large-scale problem for society, it is therefore a key issue for libraries to address. As the Environment, Sustainability and Libraries (ENSULIB) Special Interest Group of IFLA states: “The consideration of the role of humanity in climate change and the notion of sustainable development are core concerns of society, and consequently of libraries.”⁴

As cultural institutions that serve all members of society, including children, young adults, adults, and the elderly alike, libraries have a legal and moral obligation to contribute to sustainability education through teaching more than information literacy; they should take over the leadership in teaching sustainability literacy. Teaching sustainability literacy should be seen from different points of view:

- Teaching more theoretical issues through sustainability literacy courses, mainly at academic libraries
- Teaching through a more practical approach, mainly at public libraries, offering Repair Cafés, Foodsharing initiatives, Urban Gardening programmes etc.

Both approaches are important because they meet different users' expectations, interests, and abilities. One of the SDG indicators is: “Leaving no one behind” — which means that also people who are not familiar with reading and studying should become part of the sustainability movement through a more practical approach, offered by libraries through appropriate programs.

Environmental / Ecological / Green / Sustainability Literacy

Since the advent of the Green Library Movement, libraries' commitment to sustainability has become more and more visible. The mostly repeated definition⁵ of a Green Library focuses

² Information literacy, n.d.

³ International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2017, October 19.

⁴ ENSULIB, n.d.-a.

⁵ Green library, n.d.

on the physical building. However, it should be stated that not all libraries can be rebuilt or restored to become a Green Library. The aforementioned definition should however be updated, as many authors have pointed out that “Green Libraries are more than just buildings”⁶. Green Libraries “also focus on related services, activities, events, literature and projects, demonstrating the social role and responsibility of libraries as leaders in environmental sustainability”⁷. Doing so Green Libraries act – more or less indirectly – as educators in sustainability literacy.

Efforts towards environmental, ecological, and/or green literacy have been recognized since the 1990s. Since then, not only the terms but also various programs have become popular, and teaching green literacy has become an important issue. In their conference paper, *From Green Libraries to Green Information Literacy*, S. Kurbanoglu and J. Boustany discuss how information literacy and its instruction can be made green and how they can contribute to the Green Library Movement.⁸

The term “Environmental literacy” has been mentioned as early as 1968.⁹ “Ecological literacy” is not a new term either. It was first publicly used in the end of the 1980s¹⁰ and later came up in the 1990s¹¹. The term “Green literacy” was also mentioned in the early 1990s.¹² It is now defined as “the ability to understand the impact of human decisions and actions on the environment by raising awareness of sustainable development and encouraging critical thinking. Its task is to change the behavior of an individual or the entire institution.”¹³

“Sustainability literacy” takes a broader view as “the knowledge, skills and mindsets that allow individuals to become deeply committed to building a sustainable future and assisting in making informed and effective decisions to this end”¹⁴. Meanwhile sustainability literacy has become popular. Books¹⁵ and articles about were published, Papers were presented at conferences,¹⁶ universities and colleges implemented sustainability literacy into their curricula¹⁷.

The Role of Libraries in Sustainability Literacy Education

Access to information has been recognized in the SDGs as a target under Goal 16.10: “Ensure public access to information [...]” “Public access to information enables people to make informed decisions that can improve their lives. Communities that have access to timely and relevant information for all are better positioned to eradicate poverty and inequality, improve agriculture, provide quality education, and support people’s health, culture, research, and innovation.”¹⁸ Providing access to information as well as teaching information literacy skills in library classes has always been a core issue of libraries.

⁶ Aulisio, 2013; Jones & Wong, 2016.

⁷ ENSULIB, n.d.-c.

⁸ Kurbanoglu & Boustany 2014.

⁹ McBride, Brewer, Berkowitz, & Borrie, 2013.

¹⁰ NAAEE, 2000/2004.

¹¹ Orr, 1992.

¹² Usan, 1992.

¹³ Čadovska & Tkalčić, 2017.

¹⁴ United Nations, 2017.

¹⁵ Stibbe, 2011.

¹⁶ Kurbanoglu, Boustany, Špiranec, Grassian, Mizrachi, & Roy, 2015.

¹⁷ Carter & Schmidt, 2013.

¹⁸ International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2015.

But more than public access to information is required for really meeting the demands of the Sustainable Development Goals. Facing the today's world, libraries cannot remain passive or neutral. The new challenge is to go one step further and to integrate sustainability literacy skills through a socio-environmental concept that defines sustainability literacy as the ability of:

- thinking,
- problem solving,
- decision making,
- and taking action.¹⁹

Sustainability literacy “means having the knowledge and skills to advocate for resilient social, economic and environmental systems”²⁰ – also called the “Triple Bottom Line”.²¹

While there have been many green literacy initiatives over the years, offered by universities, primary schools, etc., green or sustainability literacy courses for or by librarians or libraries are few in number.²² In her book *Focus on Education for Sustainability: Toolkit for Academic Libraries*” Maria Anna Jankowska claims the “libraries’ and librarians’ commitment to advance sustainability education. The book emphasizes a new role for academic libraries, infusing sustainability content into information literacy, collection development, scholarly publishing and communication, services, actions, and the education of future leaders”²³.

In response to the increasing popularity of the Green Library Movement²⁴ worldwide and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, sustainability literacy needs to be implemented into LIS curricula as well as into workplace learning courses and into library courses. In their article *Sustainability Literacy and Information Literacy: Leveraging Librarian Experience* Toni M. Carter and Gregory J. Schmidt describe three approaches by which librarians at Auburn University integrate sustainability literacy into information literacy sessions and the impact of these efforts on the University’s sustainable goals:

- English composition courses, with components as
 - Topic Development
 - Keywords and Synonyms
 - General Databases and Subject Databases
 - Evaluating Courses
- Courses offered through the sustainability studies program
- Upper-level departmental sustainability electives

¹⁹ Carter & Schmidt, 2013.

²⁰ College of Charleston 2016.

²¹ Shaffer 2017; Shaffer, 2018.

²² Jankowska, 2014; Jankowska, Smith, & Buehler, 2014.

²³ Jankowska, 2014, p. 3.

²⁴ LeRue & LeRue, 1991; Antonelli, 2008.

English composition, a mandatory course at Auburn, as well as other courses are used as a vehicle to implement sustainability topics. “By focusing on sustainability literacy within the context of information literacy, librarians at Auburn University have leveraged their expertise to promote the larger institution’s academic sustainability goals”.²⁵

The engagement of libraries and librarians worldwide in taking action for a sustainable worth living world is obvious as international, national, and local initiatives demonstrate impressively.

International Initiatives

ENSULIB

ENSULIB is the Environment, Sustainability and Libraries Special Interest Group of IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. In addition to other activities, ENSULIB is organizing conference sessions at the IFLA World Library and Information Congress.²⁶

ENSULIB’s mission is to address:

- Effects of climate change on libraries (modification of the conditions of storage and preservation, buildings insulation, impacts on library finances and management, . . .).
- Applications of environment-friendly practices in libraries (recovery of rainwater, use of renewable energy sources, printing control, paper recycling, etc.).
- Proposed environmental recommendations for the profession (recycling of outdated documents, use of biodegradable materials, etc.).
- Increasing and promoting sustainability-related library resources and services (development of collections on environmental themes, exhibitions, outreach, etc.)
- Increasing librarians’ own awareness of environmental concerns.²⁷

IFLA Green Library Award

Since the IFLA Green Library Award was announced for the first time in 2016, ENSULIB received many very interesting, convincing, and inspiring submissions from all over the world. The applications showed a broad dedication to environmental issues, which continued with the submissions for the 2017 award. The next award competition for 2018 is already running, and the winner will be announced in June 2018. “Following the IFLA Statement on Libraries and Sustainable Development, the award will help to advance the profession through illuminating the role of libraries and librarians in the advancement of sustainability standards and the promotion of specialized knowledge within professional practice.”²⁸

National Initiatives

Other than on the international level with IFLA and ENSULIB, there are national initiatives that foster the Sustainability Library Movement. Some examples:

²⁵ Carter & Schmidt, 2013, p. 45.

²⁶ ENSULIB, n.d.-b.

²⁷ ENSULIB, n.d.-a.

²⁸ ENSULIB, n.d.-c.

American Library Association / Sustainability Round Table

The “SustainRT” is one of 17 Round Tables that are less formally structured than the ALA Divisions. “SustainRT was created as a venue in which members exchange ideas and opportunities regarding sustainability in order to move toward a more equitable, healthy and economically viable society. The mission of the organization is to provide resources for the library community to support sustainability through curriculum development; collections; exhibits; events; advocacy, communication, library buildings and space design. SustainRT is open to all ALA members and will include both individual members and organizational members.”²⁹ The initiative is collecting helpful information on books, articles, websites, blogs, social groups, and projects on sustainable libraries.

Australian Library and Information Association / ALIA Sustainable Libraries

“The ALIA Sustainable Libraries Group has been established to inform & educate colleagues on issues of sustainability. The group will support and promote research and professional development, and increase the awareness of environmental concerns amongst library staff. The group also seeks to enhance and promote documentary resources connected to sustainability.”³⁰

*Netzwerk Grüne Bibliothek*³¹

The German-speaking network was founded in January 2018 by a group of librarians, LIS teachers, and LIS students. Their goals are to offer a platform for the exchange of ideas, to promote Green Library projects, to support libraries with the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to foster research on libraries and environmental sustainability – to name but a few. The network will include all German speaking countries as there are Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (D-A-CH) but will also cooperate with international Green Library initiatives.

Local Initiatives

Local initiatives come mostly from public libraries, but some academic libraries have also played a role in their development, see e.g. the Chinese University, Hong Kong³², or the University of Douala Library in Cameroon³³. Examples from public libraries in Portugal, Mexico, and Australia include:

- Portugal. Giving back, a green library project. Retrieved from <https://de.scribd.com/document/296481138/Giving-Back-a-Green-Library-Project>

The project describes “measures taken by the Seixal Public Library (SPB) in order to reduce its environmental impact since building construction through the use of toxic free products and recycling practices but also through public promotion of several projects with environmental overtones. These include promoting civic, media, social literacies and the exchange of several goods within the local community mostly targeted at children, families and teenagers. Of these initiatives, we will underline the

²⁹ American Library Association. Sustainability Round Table, n.d.

³⁰ Australian Library and Information Association, n.d.

³¹ Netzwerk Grüne Bibliothek, 2018.

³² Jones & Wong, 2016.

³³ Koudjam Yameni, in print.

green practice of exchange and reuse of school manuals, Dar de Volta (Giving Back), a project of social and cultural significance.”³⁴

- Mexico. El Pequeño Sol ecological library. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OProiYPkCDw>

Participatory design and construction of the new library of the school Pequeño Sol in Chiapas, Mexico (<http://www.pequenosol.org>), using recycling materials for construction, integration of landscape, water caption, gardening and natural light. The library was built by the community, led by Germinalia A.C. and its main protect El Ingenio (<http://www.elingenio.org.mx>) engaging parents and kids into its integral process from design, funding and construction. This project was the winner of the IFLA Green Library Award 2016.

- Australia. City of Cockburn - Success Public Library Western Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9Qg0r5E9ys>

Success Library is part of a large health and community hub located in the fast growing suburb of Success in the City of Cockburn. The building brings together a range of community, health, tertiary education, and government services to create a vibrant multi-faceted and integrated service point for the growing and diverse community of the region. Green principles were integral to the design concept.

Online Sources

There are useful online sources on sustainability and libraries, many of them accessible with

Open Access:

- American Library Association. (n.d.). Sustainability and libraries: Green Libraries. Retrieved from <http://libguides.ala.org/SustainableLibraries/Green>
- Barnes, L. (n.d.). Green Libraries: Resources to help libraries go green. Retrieved from <http://guides.library.illinois.edu/green-libraries>
- Designing Libraries. (n.d.). Green Libraries: Sustainable library buildings; A guide to resources and trends in sustainable library building design. Retrieved from <http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk/?PageID=44>
- Going Green @your library: Environmentally friendly practices for libraries and beyond! (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://greeningyourlibrary.wordpress.com/>
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. University Library. (n.d.). Green Libraries: Sustainable libraries: Resources to help libraries go green. Retrieved from <http://guides.library.illinois.edu/green-libraries/overview/library-specific>
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- Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Berlin School of Library and Information Science. (n.d.). [Project] “The Green Library.” Retrieved from <https://www.ibi.hu-berlin.de/de/studium/studprojekte/buchidee/bi12>. With Open Access to:

³⁴ Da Silva & Vaz, 2015.

- Hauke, P., Latimer, K., & Werner, K. U. (Hrsg.). (2013). *The Green Library = Die Grüne Bibliothek: The challenge of environmental sustainability* (IFLA Publication, 161). Berlin, München: De Gruyter Saur. Retrieved from <https://www.ibi.hu-berlin.de/de/studium/studprojekte/buchidee/bi12>
- *International Bibliography 1971–2012*
- *Green Library: Checklists* (available in Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, English, Farsi, Finnish, French, German, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, Uzbek)

Conclusion

Libraries are important spaces for citizen awareness. They should serve as an example for achieving Goal 11 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable." As institutions maintained by the state, public libraries as well as academic libraries should incorporate sustainable construction, criteria, and principles for saving natural resources, minimizing environmental impacts, rational management of public properties, and adequate management of solid waste, not forgetting to fulfill its mission by collaborating to broaden access to information and to encourage reading and sustainable practices. Teaching sustainability literacy in all suitable forms – more academic or more practically focused through "learning by doing" – should be a key item on their agenda.

Libraries are important partners to act as agents for change: "Libraries are the motors for change" – as the current IFLA President Glòria Pérez-Salmerón claimed. The United Nations 2030 Agenda's overall goal is "Transforming our world". Moving forward from teaching information literacy to educating sustainability literacy that touches any and every circumstances of life seems to be the libraries' meaningful contribution to help achieve the Agenda 2030 goals.

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