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ecological sustainability of libraries



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State of Ecological Sustainability in Libraries

Leila Sonkkanen, Planner

Helsinki City Library, Sustainable Development in Libraries Project

Towards sustainable development

Services, buildings, logistics, equipment and much more – that is normal everyday life of libraries. You must have reviewed these components in connection with annual budgeting, but have you ever realised that they are also all related to the ecological sustainability of libraries?

Ecological sustainability is one of the aspects of sustainable development. It refers to ensuring nature's diversity and the viability of ecosystems as well as adapting people's actions to it so that nature is not overburdened and the continued loss of natural resources is halted.

The Sustainable Development in Libraries Project wanted to look into how libraries have taken into account other components of ecological sustainability in addition to their core operations, loaning material. Have libraries already extended their scope to include ecological sustainability in financial observations to give a true picture of the environmental impact of libraries? Have environmental effects been measured?

The pressure to transform familiar procedures into more environmentally sustainable ones by reducing the environmental impact is increasing hand in hand with environmental awareness. This does not only apply to libraries; the municipality and city on the whole should create conditions for sustainable development and acting in an environmentally friendly manner.

Libraries are in an excellent position to be both an ecological operator and promoter of environmental awareness. Guidelines for ecological sustainability should be created in mutual collaboration with experts, in accordance with the best policies and examples, aiming at activities that do not clash with our environment.

Sustainable development must be persistent and aim at continuous improvements by observing environmentally responsible actions in all operations. The library sector should also create models and systems that facilitate sustainable development.

The state of ecological sustainability of libraries

The purpose of the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project is to develop and improve the ecological sustainability of public libraries by studying the current situation of sustainable development activities, creating integral operating models and policies, presenting development plans as well as developing ways of environmental communication for both the library sector and different customer segments.

The project endeavours to use existing expert and partnership resources as a mutual source of information and resource and involve the different interest groups in the plan-



ning and goals of sustainable development. International connections will help to promote a wider and more balanced sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development in Libraries Project compiled a survey for public libraries in February 2012 on the current state of ecological sustainability. An invitation to the survey was emailed to 768 addresses. There were 141 responses, which is a noteworthy amount of material as such, albeit only a fifth of the total target group. The response percentage was 18%, which can be considered as an average result of response activity. Some of the largest cities were well represented with 14–17 responses per municipality; however, responses were only received from some 20 municipalities.

The survey was divided into five sections:

1. environmental management – environmental management refers to the management and administration of environmental matters in an organisation in a way that considers the environmental impact of the operations of an organisation in decision-making

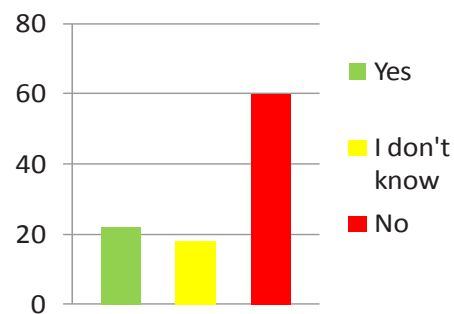
2. environmental economy – usage and usage impact of natural resources in financial decision-making.

3. education of environmental burden – the practical goals of the library in its own operations to reduce environmental impact

1.

Single answers, where Yes or I don't know are > 50%

- There are sustainable programs or -guidelines for the city or community
- There are guidelines for energy efficiency for the library
- There is mentoring for new employees about sustainability



No-answers 60 %

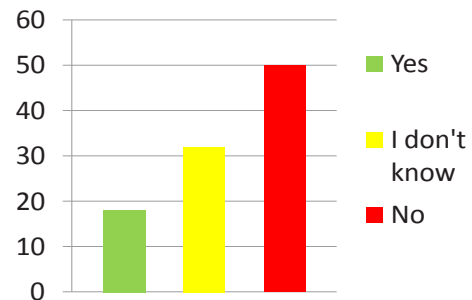
- The level of environmental management needs large improvements

Gaia Consulting Oy

2.

Single answers, where Yes or I don't know > 50%

- Cost are followed per service f.ex loan or opening hours
- In price quotations sustainability is one criteria
- Sustainability is one criteria for investing and projects
- Eco-efficiency is considered in renovations



No-answers 50 %

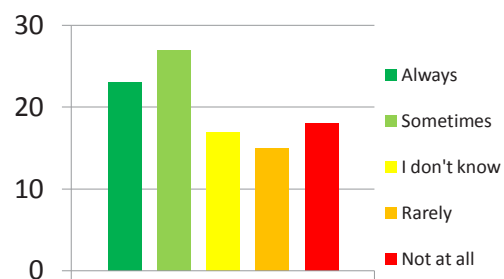
- In economical decisions environmental finances are not considered

Gaia Consulting Oy

3.

Single answers, where Always or Usually > 50%

- Sorting different wastes
- Turn off lights after 10 minutes and use of daylight
- Computers and other machines switched off at the end of working day and for the weekends
- Machines go to sleep mode when not in use
- E-mails are preferred
- Room temperature is max 21–22° C



Large needs for improvements (answers Not at all or Little/Sometimes > 50 %)

- Prefer laptop instead of desktop
- Double sided printing is assumption
- Library busses are used as promoting ecological awareness

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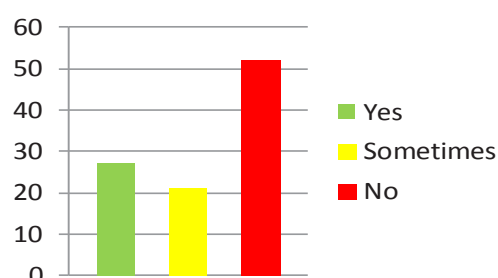
4. increase of environmental awareness – environmental awareness – awareness of environmental aspects and individual choices – is one of the requirements for environmentally friendly solutions

5. environmental communication – environmental communication refers to communication of offices and agencies relating to environmental aspects and communication spreading and distributing environmental awareness.

4.

Single answers, where Yes or Sometimes > 50%

- Library organizes environmental theme weeks and events
- Library offers electronic services e.g. SMS and e-mail
- Energy counters or other such kind of material could be loaned from library



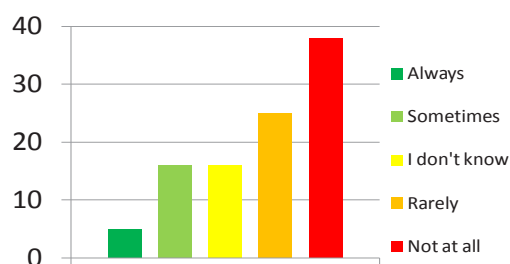
Large need for improvements (No- answers > 50 %)

- Loans of environmental material are measured
- Sorting is also possible in customers areas
- Recycling of used books, magazines or batteries is possible for customers
- Library uses the methods of education for sustainable development in its work with children and youth

5.

Single answers, where Always or Sometimes > 50 %

- No actions broke the 50% line
- Large needs of improvement in environmental communication



Large needs of improvement (single answers Not at all or Little > 50 %)

- Annual reports includes environmental issues
- In the meetings environmental issues are on the agenda
- Library internet pages have environmental headlines
- Library communication reports about library's environmental issues
- Library cooperates with other organizations or non-governmental organizations on environmental issues.

Reduction of environmental burden was the largest section with 23 questions, environmental management contained 14 questions, environmental economy 7, increase of environmental awareness 10 and environmental communication 8. In addition, the different parts contained 7 open questions in total.

Reduction of environmental burden or everyday environmental actions played an important role in the day-to-day activities of libraries, but the responses of the survey also revealed that the other surveyed sections have not yet been considered comprehensively when improving the level of ecological sustainability.

The project team on the tracks of sustainable development

Nine libraries throughout Finland took part in the project, making up an active project team: The JRR Library, Kemijärvi City Library, Kotka City Library, Kuusamo City Library, Oulu City Library – Regional Library, Porvoo City Library – Regional Library of Uusimaa, Rääkkylä Library, Vallila Library, Helsinki City Library and Varkaus City Library.

This publication allows us to explore the environmental work of the project team libraries through articles. The articles illustrate well the current situation and policies of libraries in environmental matters – on one hand their enthusiasm in everyday environmental work and frustration with the lack of programmes and commitment on the other.

The goal of the project team for their work this coming autumn is to compile a brief environment guide for libraries that assembles together possibilities for actions towards ecological sustainability from the viewpoint of both customers and those making decisions for the libraries.

Bringing environmental work out to the open

Building ecological sustainability is the sum of several factors, and combining them together presents challenges. The survey clearly demonstrates that guidelines are needed to develop an environmentally friendly policy for libraries. Since the promotion of sustainable development and acquiring information are currently very much dependent on those employees who take an interest in environmental issues, general instructions, guidelines and a framework would enable their effective use in different libraries.

The possibilities are just around the corner, so I challenge the libraries not just to pick the ripe fruit but to delve deeper in their actions and services to improve ecological sustainability at every level. The aspect of sustainable development can emphasise the role of the entire library system in the future and – once again – provide us with the chance to be pioneers.

I wish to express my warmest thanks to the project team who spared no efforts in compiling the national survey or preparing project material for the international IFLA conference. I also want to thank Jouni Juntumaa from Helsinki City Library for preparing the survey for the Digium survey programme and Mari Saario and Laura Oja from Gaia Consulting Oy for their expert input to the survey work project and analysis

Expert's View on the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project

Mari Saario, Senior Consultant, Gaia Consulting Oy

Laura Oja, Consultant, Gaia Consulting Oy

Summary on the expert work

The Sustainable Development in Libraries Project sent a survey to public libraries in Finland in February 2012 in order to determine the state of their ecological sustainability. Gaia Consulting Oy analysed the responses and organised a workshop for the project team. The survey received 141 responses in total from 20 different municipalities. The workshop had representatives from eight libraries in seven different municipalities. The workshop confirmed the results of the survey and formulated the objectives and preliminary actions for a sustainable library. Experts from Gaia also compiled a brief expert view of their own on the state, results and possibilities of the project.

The current state of ecological sustainability in libraries

The survey of the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project was aimed at library personnel. The view of the library personnel was very relevant for examining the current situation, particularly in terms of procedures already implemented. Based on the responses, ecological sustainability in libraries has so far been synonymous with certain specific environmental actions. These environmental actions relate especially to specific activities of the personnel, for example sorting refuse. Many respondents are faced with similar challenges, such as inadequate possibilities to influence the management and energy efficiency of their own premises. Environmental work is lacking a strategic level or it is too distant, so an individual employee perceives the possibilities of the library to influence ecological sustainability as very limited. The significance of strategies and guidelines at the level of regional libraries and municipalities are emphasised in small libraries in particular.

The large proportion of "Cannot say"-replies in nearly all sections of the survey demonstrates that the respondent fails to identify actions relating to sustainable development in his or her own library. Up to 60 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that the components of environmental management had not been taken into account well enough in their own libraries. This is a significant finding, because the respondents came primarily from large cities that are very likely to have various environmental programmes and strategies. Either they have not become established in the library or the respondents do not recognise them. Similarly, the responses indicate that environmental issues are surprisingly rarely an influential factor in acquisitions, irrespective of the guidelines and know-how in green acquisitions that are in place in big cities.

As the resources are limited and there is no interaction network or guidelines for the management of environmental matters, different municipalities struggle with the same challenges and actions are often reliant on the individuals' activity and enthusiasm. It is recommended that instructions are compiled in a centralised way. It would also be beneficial to direct the limited resources to essential activities, basing them on an assessment of the significance of the environmental impact of individual actions and own possibilities to influence.

The possibilities of libraries to influence the development of social ecological sustainability outside their own walls were only touched upon briefly in the survey. This was emphasised mostly in communication, exemplariness and environmental education.

Even though the project is entitled "Sustainable Development in Libraries", the survey and the project itself have restricted sustainability expressly to environmental protection, for example resource and energy efficiency. However, sustainability also includes social and economical aspects. For their part, the current situation has not yet been reviewed.

The possibilities of eco-support activities

Finnish municipalities operate different systems to establish environmental strategies in the day-to-day operations of organisations. The eco-support system is a new one, based on guidance between colleagues in practical environmental issues. The six largest cities in Finland have recently committed to eco-support, and it is also used in Kotka and Hämeenlinna among other places. Its premise has been a joint international project coordinated by the City of Helsinki Environment Centre.



Experts of Gaia discussing eco-support in the municipal climate conference.

The evaluation of eco-support activities carried out by Gaia illustrates a similar situation in the early stages of environmental activities as what could be observed in the current state of libraries. Eco-support activities that make use of the motivation and interests of municipal employees normally start with well known environmental topics, such as sorting refuse and energy efficiency. The efficiency of eco-support activities, however, depends on the enthusiasm of individual employees, and results of the activities are rarely measured or demonstrated. Activities can subsequently still develop further and extend, for example, to encompass the customer's viewpoint, acquisitions and financial control. This can only happen if the management and supervisors acknowledge the importance of the activities and those interested can have a network for exchanging good practices.¹

1 Evaluation of eco-support activities, Gaia Consulting, the 2011 report available on the web at: http://www.eco-support.net/tiedostot/fi/Gaia_Ekotukitoiminnan%20vaikutusten_arviointi_raportti_valmis.pdf

Experiences of eco-support activities were used as the basis for analysing the possibilities of sustainable libraries from the personnel's perspective. This does not mean that libraries should develop their operations especially through eco-support activities. A similar concept of a mutual network for the personnel can, however, be a springboard that distributes good practices of sustainability between libraries.

Recommendations: Towards a sustainable library

Based on the findings of the workshop of the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project, the following recommendations for developing ecological sustainability in libraries can be presented:

- 1.** Information must be distributed and established
 - Bringing out the best practices and introducing them to wider use requires an environmental guide and work methods that motivate people to participate
- 2.** An individual employee must be supported in implementing sustainability
 - Commitment and mandate of the management of the organisation for activities
 - Commitment at the city level: environmental programme and targets
 - Peer support network, for example through eco-support activities
 - Environmental training, tips for best practices and instructions on how to measure success
 - Encouragement
- 3.** Indicators and monitoring methods should be developed
- 4.** Cooperation between different operators should be developed
 - Between agencies, for example with the engineering department of the municipality
 - The library can also encourage sustainability internally
- 5.** Customer communication should receive more attention
 - Libraries have considerable opportunities to improve their customers' environmental awareness through communication and environmental education as well as acting as an example
- 6.** The intrinsic role of the library in sustainable development should be emphasised more
 - Library activities are in themselves ecological, which deserves to be highlighted more
 - The role of the library in promoting social sustainability needs to be reinforced

The recommendations have been presented in the order of implementation. We must first act on the needs demonstrated by the current situation on distributing and establishing information and organising operations as well as providing resources. The optimal impact will, however, reach beyond the library to the municipality, residents and surrounding society.

Future prospects

The large number of responses to the survey and the initial interest in the project prove that the field has a need for and interest in sustainable library operations, even if the subject has not yet been very precisely defined.

Gaia is interested in considering other aspects of sustainability as well in the future. These can be related to, for example, social sustainability and the role of libraries in promoting accessibility, cherishing cultural heritage and preventing social exclusion by providing information, cultural experiences and an opportunity even for those with low income to be part of the information society.

The next phase of the work should involve the library management, customers and other significant interest groups. Proceeding this way could turn the guide book of good environmental tips into an extensive route map towards a sustainable library. This guide would thus do its share in empowering and crystallising the future of the Finnish library institution.



A Visit to the Library Reduces Your Carbon Footprint

– the library, pioneer in environmental sustainability

Harri Sahavirta, Ph.D.

Chief Librarian, Vallila and Suomenlinna Libraries, Helsinki City Library

Introduction

Environmental work in Vallila Library began when we were applying for the EcoCompass label. We were awarded the label a couple of years later in spring 2011 as the first public sector operator. By then, we had already drafted our own environmental programme for Vallila Library and were trying to unravel the true meaning of environmental sustainability for a library. We also discovered that environmental awareness in libraries really deserved more attention; we had not come across the subject in our library or elsewhere very much at all. Environmental sustainability in libraries is obvious as such, but no one can say exactly why or how.

The discussion around ecology has been largely limited to the energy-efficiency of new constructions and basic renovations. There are projects proposed in the world costing millions, where solar panels and hyper-technical air-conditioning systems are combined with automatic lighting and automated book storages. This is naturally an important part of environmental thinking, but we cannot rebuild all libraries and make them energy-efficient, hence we must find other means as well. Libraries have to operate environmentally now and in the future in existing buildings and without new resources. But how do we achieve this?

The Sustainable Development in Libraries Project and the survey to libraries conducted during it (spring 2012) revealed that the same questions as we asked in Vallila have been posed elsewhere in Finland. Although there are differences as well. One of the differences is that the City of Helsinki takes a very positive approach to environmental issues. Helsinki endeavours to be an environmentally friendly city, and city agencies are expected to outline their own environmental programmes among other things. Helsinki does not therefore expect that we should try to justify the sustainability of sustainable development to the municipal decision-makers – and the municipal level also has professionals and good practices in place for environmental work, such as eco-support systems and a designated model for an environmental policy. The situation is different in many other municipalities, and the importance of environmental issues is being communicated to municipal decision-makers – and customers. The library could be the party here that awakens others to realise how important the issues are. Libraries can make a stand, and they do not need to remain neutral in this respect.

Libraries are environmentally friendly

The basic concept of library operations is environmentally friendly, since their basic activities include the loan of material, information retrieval and provision of an open, mutual space. There are no activities that burden the environment. Bringing environmental awareness to libraries does not thus necessarily imply huge and drastic changes, and we do not have to anticipate new innovations that would make our working meth-

ods less detrimental to the environment. But it is hard to find real targets for improvement – and you can easily be met with certain kind of rejection. "We no longer need to improve, since we have already been recycling for 150 years" or "How could our meagre improvements have any impact, when others are far worse in destroying the environment". Is it even worth a try?

These are questions that anyone with an interest in environmental issues will have to answer at some stage. I always bring them up myself in environmental conversations. Leo Stranius from the Finnish Nature League replied by pointing out that Gandhi was but one small man and Rosa Parks one woman. He went on by saying that for the carbon footprint it makes no difference whether a product is imported from the other side of the world – it is more important how we Finns travel to the shop to buy it. Hence it has a greater effect on the carbon footprint of a banana whether we ride a bicycle or a car when we go shopping than that the fruit itself has sailed across the Atlantic. Change begins somewhere, and every little helps.

Recycling, energy efficiency and acquisitions

Recycling, environmentally friendly acquisitions and energy efficiency are the essential factors in environmental sustainability. The Sustainable Development in Libraries Project seems to indicate in its survey that libraries are very aware of environmental issues in this respect. Quite a lot of this kind of environmental work is carried out in libraries.

However, recycling, energy efficiency and acquisitions can be problematic for libraries. Only a few years ago we used to think that computers would make us more environmentally aware. But the amount of paper has not decreased in my view – and I have to admit to myself far too often that, instead of a brief email, I have ended up printing three pages of trivial chatting. At the same time, many have begun to estimate how much waste and scrap is generated from computers. The lifespan of technology is not very long, and equipment gets replaced frequently. Computers and other technology also use electricity. We did a calculation in Vallila Library, whereby the biggest energy savings could be achieved by switching off all computers for the night. This was not allowed, however, since software updates are carried out at night. There was a recent change to this rule, partly due to environmental considerations.

And this brings us to our first important observation in Vallila: We are dependent on other operators in several respect and follow the general guidelines of the city, for example. We cannot make independent decisions like businesses. Some simple solutions are excluded from us, some take time and require constant reminding (that is occasionally referred to as nagging).

This observation was repeated several time during our own eco-project. Vallila Library is located in the same property with a day care nursery and owned by the city, which affects refuse collection, among other things. Our waste amounts are minimal, though, with the exception of paper. Paper is obviously recycled. Acquisitions are also made through suppliers selected by the city and based on existing agreements. Hence, it is the agreements and pricing of the city that control our operations, and we cannot set many criteria of our own when making acquisition decisions. In spite of all this, we should always remember to keep in mind that one of the acquisition criteria should be environmental sustainability.

The responses of the survey to libraries clearly demonstrated the same problem: libraries operate in a given operating environment, property or municipality, where things are done in a certain way, and that way is not always the most environmentally friendly one. So what else could we do but shrug our shoulders and wait for someone else to bring about a change? Well, customs never change if nobody demands a change. Libraries could begin by asking for environmentally friendly energy or giving preference to products that reduce the impact on nature. The first wish may not open everyone's eyes; you may need to shout out for longer, but sometimes someone will listen.

On the other hand, we should be careful about what is measured when we talk about saving energy. Based on a simple formula, we should reduce the consumption of energy used for electricity and heating. This is also the basic premise in all environmental programmes. The target is continuous reduction, and that is all that matters. We can, of course, ask whether continuous reduction is even possible year by year and whether it is possible to reduce heating costs in a country that can be ravaged by freezing weather for several months. We will reach a "natural limit" at some point, and reduction will no longer be possible. Before that, however, it is worth going around the property and finding out where the draught is coming from (or if it is too warm).

The paradoxical claim also applies to libraries: more is less. The simplest way to save energy would be to reduce the opening times; keep the library closed, switch off the lights and take away the computers: the consumption in the property would go down. The library is aiming at the other direction. We are trying to keep the library open as long as possible and provide a shared space for reading, working, getting together or just spending time – so that we would have the lights on where elsewhere they would be off. So that we would have 10 computers and not everyone would need a computer of their own.

You could then claim that a property where people enjoy spending time in is environmentally friendlier than a cold and dismal dump. The idea of a mutual living room is thus an ecological concept – and there are even visionaries who claim that in the future people will live in smaller flats and small entrepreneurs will not necessarily need their own premises, because the library will provide a shared space. The library is a living room and office, a communal working space.

An increase in our own electricity consumption can thus reduce the total electricity consumption in the region. Equally, succeeding in increasing the use of shared space will also increase the amount of waste (in customer areas). Therefore, calculations on the energy consumption and waste of libraries must include the degree of use. This will mean that a building that houses several activities under one roof and has several users is environmentally friendlier than one that is used less or designated for only one purpose. These examples underline how important it would be to consider such criteria and standards of environmental sustainability that would be applicable to libraries. At the moment, there are none.

Trendsetter and informant

On the basis of all this, we concluded in Vallila that the best alternative to make our take on environmental sustainability visible could be increasing environmental awareness and acting as a trendsetter. Trendsetting means that we express our commitment to en-

environmental issues to our customers, show an example and encourage others to follow it as well. Acquiring the eco-label was an essential part of this in Vallila. It talks about our values and that we have also done something: we consider environmental issues important enough to have made an effort for the label.

This is also our response to the tricky question: "what good will it do if I switch off the lights when millions of others do not do the same?" We all know that these small acts will not save the world (until they are all summed up collectively) – but if we do not do these small deeds ourselves, we cannot set an encouraging example for others. And if we carry on doing these small deeds, they may spread from the workplace to the home, from the clerk to the customer and from the municipal residents to the decision-makers.

We therefore laid out a four-stage action plan in Vallila:

1. We will communicate to our customers our commitment to environmental issues. We have added information on our environmental programme on our web pages, among other things. Why? Because it is very unlikely that we could influence our customers' attitudes, if we do not tell them about ours.

The first step only took us half-way through though, since we (somehow) imagined that it would suffice to recycle our waste and even talk about it. It did not occur to us, instead, to bring our recycling bins to the customers in the public areas. We did not use the most common trick: "help us to recycle". We will need to do something about it.

2. We will provide easy access to environmental information. As the amount of information and number of volumes in the library increases, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to find the relevant information. The classification systems of libraries are not necessarily helpful either: information about waste recycling, climate change and energy-efficient construction is divided to different areas of the collection. We assembled environmental literature together and arranged it on its own shelf. Our collection is modest, but the customers have discovered it. Setting up an eco-collection has for its part influenced the choice of material almost as if by itself: new material is acquired for the eco-shelf, simply because it is there.

However, we did not agree with the claim that we should increase the amount of environmental literature. That is, the easiest way to expand the collection would be not to remove outdated information. But it is better for us to have a small but up-to-date collection of environmental literature. This will, of course, have an impact on how to measure things, as quantitative assessment would be straightforward.

Another noteworthy point is that "easy access to environmental information" is not enough, if it merely refers to a comprehensive special collection that meets the needs of expert environmental knowledge. It is obviously good if a library collection has depth and information even to those familiar with the subject. But we do not need to make the access particularly easy for the enthusiasts; they will dig as deep as they need to find the information they want. The real challenge is to raise interest in customers who have never thought about the environment before. If we could attract new people to realise the importance of environmental awareness, we would have done a true environmental deed. What can we do to achieve this? Perhaps we should not just provide environmental information rather than offer it in a form that is easy to understand and remember.

We began testing this idea in Vallila almost by accident this spring. Climateinfo brought us four little wooden sticks to display that were all different sizes and represented the carbon footprint of different foodstuffs. The customers' task was to guess which stick represented which foodstuff. Simple, illustrative and fun. Quite a few stopped to the table to wonder. And we realised that if we could first get people to stop and become aware this way, sturdier environmental information could begin to interest them later.

3. We will organise environment-themed events. We have introduced environmental topics in our discussion events: in the spring 2010 it was the climate change, in the spring 2011 the role of water as an environmental factor and in the spring 2012 we organised an entire series of discussions series entitled "How to live sustainably". Leading experts in the field have been happy to come to the library and share their knowledge.

4. We will be an example to other libraries. We have presented our environmental project to other libraries in Helsinki and took part in the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project. We are trying to share our experiences and raise discussion about the topic. The aim is that more and more libraries would want to become environmentally friendly and realise that it is not an impossible task to achieve.

This may be a huge undertaking for a small library – but small can be big, and small deeds can have a great impact.

New ideas

Trendsetting must not stop here, however. We will also need new ideas and ways to act. Helsinki City Library has been experimenting with several new ideas. Libraries do not just loan traditional library materials, but many libraries also have electricity meters and sports equipment for loan. Some of the items are owned by other city agencies, some have been acquired by the library. The problem is that someone has to pay for the goods and the library has to keep them on a continuous basis, which restricts its operations.

We tested a slightly different way to loan things in Vallila Library. The library cooperates with the Kuinoma borrowing service as its collection point. Kuinoma is a company that people use to lend their goods to others. The owner of the item and the borrower agree on the terms of the loan, after which the item is brought to the library for collection by the borrower. The advantage of this operation to the library is that it does not need to acquire the goods it provides. Although, we need a bunch of motivated people who want to loan their own goods to strangers.

The goal of this activity is to moderate consumption. When you move house and need a drill to fix a couple of shelves, you can look up the borrowing service if someone has a suitable drill for loan. Not everything needs to be bought.

Environmental sustainability can be an advantage in marketing

It is no longer enough for a library to be environmentally aware. It must also speak up about it or, even better, shout out loud. Environmental sustainability needs to be a part of the image of the library – and we are now talking about marketing libraries.

Libraries should pay attention to their image. If we want to get resources from the city, for example, we must make sure that political decision-makers and the media become aware of our existence and that we support important issues. The same applies to the customers and local residents. Sustainability and new, environmentally friendly services are one way to market libraries. At the same time, we will be writing a story about the library that is also a responsible operator alongside all the other things and that is concerned about the future and the state of the environment.

This does matter. We quickly realised in Vallila that our customers appreciated our environmental awareness. As one customer said: "I am proud that my own library is such a responsible operator in these matters". But for some reason, the library is almost the only institution that has failed to notice the significance of environmental sustainability in this respect. Not all libraries have a sign on their door saying "a visit to the library reduces your carbon footprint". Why not? Vallila has one!

This article is partly based in my "Showing the Green Way - Advocating Green Values and Image in a Finnish Public Library", IFLA Journal, Vol 38, Issue 2, 2012



Kotka Is Going Green

Saara Leskinen, informatician

Kotka City Library

The eco-activities of Kotka City Library were sparked off by the national Eco-support project that Kotka joined in 2009. The purpose of the project is to train employees to spread environmental awareness in their workplaces and so reduce the environmental impact. The library only had one participant in the training sessions, but there was wider interest, which led to the establishment of the dedicated Ekoilijat eco-group in the library. The group has currently nine members, and its meetings discuss, for example, the mysteries of waste management, spreading environmental information and changes in legislation in the field.

Steps already taken

Green ideology has already been promoted in several ways. The Ekoilijat group has organised waste recycling and supplied waste bins with clear instructions, for example. They have also written instructions for saving electricity and paper and for observing ecological aspects in organising events. Libraries have also now got energy consumption meters for loan. An information package about environmental issues is included in familiarisation folders. In addition, the main library has a cabinet for exchanging books, and one meeting room has been furnished with recycled furniture.



Future aspirations

The Ekoilijat group has dreams of solar panels on library roofs, oilfree plastic in books and a green wall covered with plants. The challenge of turning meetings between libraries, which currently require yet more people to travel, into distant meetings is more likely to become reality sooner instead. Currently, work is ongoing with eco-shelves that would assemble together environmental literature now placed in different categories as well as brochures for customers in one place.

Lack of available time and the position between estate management and cleaning services have made it difficult to carry out the plans. These problems must be common in other libraries as well. We hope, however, that they will not dampen the enthusiasm to take even small green steps forwards

Book exchanging cabinet in the main library
photo: Marika Jussila

Sustainable Development in the Everyday Life of the Library

Inkeri Kulpakko, Chief Librarian, Kemijärvi City Library

Kemijärvi City Library was the only library from Lapland in the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project. The project did arouse interest in other libraries in Lapland as well, and information on the progress of the project has been distributed to the other libraries of the province.

Kemijärvi City does not have its own environmental programme. Environmental issues and sustainability are, however, becoming more important, and the city has had some projects around the theme. Kemijärvi Adult Education Centre has had its own sustainable development project that studied the activities of adult education centres on the basis of sustainable development.

Kemijärvi Library has started to move forward the concept of sustainable development in its day-to-day activities with small changes, which, once established in the everyday office life, will bring about significant changes: savings, waste reduction and rationalisation of work processes.

Policies that reduce electricity consumption have been reviewed in library meetings. Lights have normally been left switched on in areas that are not necessarily occupied for more than a short moment at any time. Old habits mean that I leave the lights on even in my own office, but we have tried to stick to the 10-minute rule during the project. If a room is unoccupied for more than 10 minutes, the lights are turned off. The library has bags available for loan for the customers. This helps to reduce the amount of plastic bags. Customers can also recycle their own books by using the book exchange shelf in the entrance area.

Larger ecological actions at Kemijärvi Library include replacing the windows and other renovation works that would improve insulation at the property. This alteration work is being carried out with the technical department of the city, which is responsible for the properties of the city. We hope to have the windows replaced in the summer 2012.

The library is situated in a beautiful cultural centre with high ceilings. Heat consumption is very high particularly in winter, because warm air rises up to the ceiling, leaving work and customer areas with less heat. Our utopian dream is to have a remote-controlled suspended ceiling in the building that could be put in during the coldest weather. Minimum temperature for mobile libraries (-25 degrees). Kemijärvi Library will get a new mobile library in 2014. Sustainability will be taken into account in the acquisition process as far as possible.

The library has been planning to introduce remote working days where possible. This would make it possible, for example, to arrange remote working days at home during cold weather and save heating and fuel costs on cars.

The library will acquire energy consumption meters for loan to customers later on. A compost bin for the library has also been discussed, but its implementation remains undecided.

Kuusamo Developing Sustainable Development

Ritva Niemeläinen, Director of Library Services
Kuusamo City Library

Kuusamo City Library wanted to participate in the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project, because information about promoting environmental matters in working policies is quite fragmented and even outdated. We expected ready and workable solutions from the project for the everyday life of the library. The idea was also that the library could be profiled as an institute of sustainable development even otherwise than just by recycling material on loan in the traditional way.

City's policies

The City of Kuusamo has not so far published any clear operational guidelines. The city has followed through the legislative requirements, and the heating costs of properties as well as electricity and water consumption are monitored. The monitoring has been outsourced to an external company, which is claimed to earn more the less properties use, and that is claimed to be the reason why office areas are quite cold in winter. But there is no proof on how well this kind of outsourcing helps sustainable development. We recently received a statutory energy efficiency certificate that gives 189 as the energy efficiency indicator for the main library building, which was built in 1980, and this means that the library is classified in category D on a scale from A to G, which is about average.

Collection of paper, cardboard and hazardous waste has been in place and worked well for a long time, but plastic and biowaste, for example, are disposed of with unsorted waste. The city only collects biowaste separately from industrial kitchens. We are therefore dependent on the city as far as waste sorting is concerned as well. Electronic document management reduces paper consumption considerably, once you internalise the fact that documents can also be found in the electronic archives when needed.

Baby steps in the library

The enthusiasm for switching off lights and computers among staff varies. There is rarely much work going on in the store room, but people pass through it often and the lights tend to be left on. The constantly lit sea of fluorescent lights was abated somewhat, when we installed switches with movement sensors in the warehouse as well as the stairwell.

We have tried to control paper consumption in the library by using the reverse side of paper sheets as scrap paper, but the contemporary printers can have double-sided printing as a default option, which creates savings more effectively. Staff have also been advised to set black-and-white printing as default in colour printers, which is easy to change when needed.

Plastic is ordered from a domestic supplier, and there is always local extra workforce to help with plastic coating work. Surplus strips are also used for repairs and partial plastic coating. And you do not need to coat everything with plastic anyway.

The recycling shelf for customers has worked well for years. During the project, the library has acquired energy consumption and surface temperature meters as well as a VHS digitising device for loan to customers. Customers can borrow sturdy carrier bags for their material.

The mobile library has invested in economical driving and route planning; long distances do not warrant driving back and forth. Tyre coating and reuse have also been used. Other services have also been trialled with the vehicle over the years, but they have failed to pass the test of time. Large side skirts were installed to the vehicle acquired in 2006 with a view on possible use for transporting. This could include collecting recyclable waste or similar in sparsely populated areas, which would require planning with the environment agency.

We still have our work cut out for us in spreading environmental awareness. We do not have a separate eco-shelf, and exhibitions have been scarce. Libraries could run a nationwide circulating exhibition that would utilise already implemented and approved practices. Let's recycle ideas!



A Common Goal Will Bring a Change

Minna Asikainen, Assistant Chief Librarian

Kaijonharju and Ritaharju Libraries, Oulu City Library – Regional Library

The library commits to the city's environmental policy

Oulu City Library has since 2002 been committed to the programme of sustainable development of the City of Oulu, which requires that the different administrative municipalities create an action policy that sets their targets for the environmental programme of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the waste programmes of the Ministry of Environment. The goals of the City of Oulu are, among other things, to make its residents, employees, decision-makers and businesses environmentally aware and committed to sustainable development and implementing sustainable development in the day-to-day activities and behaviour patterns.

Practical measures from fabric bags to electronic announcements

Oulu City Library has implemented several good practices based on sustainable development over the years: plastic coating of books and magazines is now done using more sustainable plastic, return reminders and reservation pick-up notifications can be sent by email or text instead of post and library fees can be paid easily as web payments through the web library. Logistics have also been organised to move daily between the different locations, making it possible for the customer to return material to and collect it from the nearest outlet.

Books that are removed from the collection but cannot be sold due to their poor condition are sent to the Centre for Sustainable Development for disposal. The centre employs young and longterm unemployed people at its own workshops and in companies. The books will end up as insulation material for houses. In addition, Oulu City Library supplies fair trade fabric bags for sale to the customers that are hand-made by Bangladeshi women.

Since 2007 Oulu City Library has had an eco-team that has six members. The members come from the main library, the local library and library administration. The eco-team's task is to present the sustainable development targets of the city library for the budget of the City of Oulu, update the action policies of the sustainable development programme and implement measures for sustainable development in the city library.

City employees are trained in eco-activities

Because the values and objectives of sustainable development are important to Oulu City Library, it was happy to participate in the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project. The library has continued on with ecologically good practices during the project, including e-book readers and digitising devices for customers in its different outlets. The premises of the libraries are also actively offered for use by different operators, and the library events promote fair trade products and sustainable materials. The City of Oulu has launched eco-support activities focussing on climate and energy and training the city's employees as eco-support persons in work communities. The library is also involved in the eco-support activities.

Sustainability is a matter of image

The Sustainable Development in Libraries Project carried out a survey among public libraries in early 2012. One of the conclusions from the survey was that some areas of environmental management still clearly have lots of room for improvement. The management's duty is to show that environmental issues are important and that their management is taken seriously. The management can also show a practical example and positive attitude towards environmental matters, thus promoting environmentally friendly measures.

Ecological sustainability is also very much an image issue. The future objective of Oulu City Library is to develop its environmental communications and make its environmental activities more visible to the customers. Environmental activities can be publicised on the library website and in events and exhibitions, among other things. Sustainability in customer areas can also be improved by different waste sorting points.

Creating new policies emphasises the input of the entire work community: when operations are converted to more environmentally responsible, changes and their importance need to be justified throughout the organisation. Only a common goal and commitment to act will lead to a real change.



Photo: The Reiluja Kirjastokasseja (Fair Library Bags) exhibition in Oulu City Library in 2008

Every Little Helps Towards Sustainable Development

Heidi Häivälä, Chief Librarian
Porvoo City Library

Porvoo City Library – Regional Library of Uusimaa was curious to come along to the Sustainable Development Project. The library is by its nature already promoting the idea of sustainable development by offering material for loan and providing communal services to anyone who wants them; this is not, however, widely discussed from the perspective of sustainable development. The library can act as a trend-setter for sustainable development in its community and as an example to other operators and customers.

The City of Porvoo has drafted an environmental programme for 2010–2020. The programme says the following:

"The city will ensure that all sectors will acquire the necessary competence to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save energy and materials. Staff will receive training in ecologically efficient acquisition processes and energy-efficient work methods. In addition to exercising its influence directly, the city will review the possibilities in different administrative sectors to reduce CO2-emissions indirectly. Nearly all operations can be developed make them more sustainable."

The environmental programme has not so far instigated the library to have its own environmental programme. Even though there are no actual policies in place for the library personnel in terms of improving sustainable development in their own work, small choices in the day-to-day activities do make a difference in the library. Waste is sorted in the staff area, unnecessary printing is avoided, computers and borrowing and return machines are switched off for the night and weekends. Environmental theme days and weeks are observed through organising related exhibitions and events. The library's participation in the project has increased general awareness on environmental issues, and they are discussed and considered more and more among the staff. Changing the daily work procedures in a more sustainable direction takes some getting used to, and uncertainty about new things can occasionally manifest as resistance to change.

The aim of the Skaftkärr project is to build an energy-efficient residential community over 400 hectares for at least 6,000 people. Kevätkumpu Library near the new community launched an energy information point in January 2010. The energy information point provides leaflets on themes around energy and information on energy-efficient products. The library also has energy consumption meters for loan. The library organises energy evenings, where experts in the field give lectures on energy use.

The final outcome of the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project will be a practical guide to support libraries in producing environmental programmes. The guide will give momentum for an environmental programme for Porvoo City Library as well, which will hopefully profile the library as an active operator in the development of ecological sustainability and act as an example to encourage the whole community to do its bit to protect the environment.

The Steps Are Baby Steps But Going in the Right Direction

Tuula Hämäläinen, Librarian
Varkaus City Library

Varkaus City Library wanted to participate in the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project from the start, due to a few interested staff members. Interest in environmental influencing has expanded little by little during the project, and at least the substance behind the term has become better known to the whole staff.

Awaiting an environmental programme

At the start of the project, the staff levels at Varkaus Library were considerably better than at present, and a critical shortage of staff since summer 2011 has slowed down, for example, the preparations of the library's own environmental programme. The programme has remained almost on a conceptual level, but it keeps re-emerging in discussions and will be likely to be implemented in the near future, once the Energy Efficiency Programme of the City of Varkaus that is currently being prepared provides us with a framework. The draft of the Energy Efficiency Programme integrates solutions based on sustainable development comprehensively in the city's operations, and the programme draft promises training for the entire staff in new policies, and the city's residents are also guided to make sustainable decisions. The Kyoto Climate Protocol and stabilising the city's finances are background influences to the programme, which implies that there is true motivation for this development. As stated frequently before, the library's means to influence the climate greatly depend on the opportunities provided by the framework organisation.

Varkaus Library has not updated its own environmental policies for a few years, which has in part led to slipping away from the previously agreed practices. However, the staff's collective environmental awareness has increased during the project, and, when planning operations, you often hear people say: "this has also taken into account sustainable development". Partners have been enticed to follow the library's attempts in energy efficiency, among other things, but these activities have yet to produce tangible results.

We are taking action

Varkaus Library has carried out several sustainable or communal ideas during the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project. We acquired a digitising device to the library, so that everyone does not need to buy one only for relatively shortterm needs. We also provide energy consumption and surface temperature meters for loan for homes or workplaces, rent out a meeting room at weekends at very reasonable rates for a flea market and have exchanged incandescent light bulbs for energy-efficient or LED bulbs. We have set up a recycling trolley for customers where you can freely bring/collect reading or other suitable material.

Varkaus Library carried out the Verkkopuikkari project with Heinävesi and Leppävirta Libraries in 2011–2012, and part of it involved a librarian who would tour the municipality teaching how to use electronic services and information networks in individual training sessions and group events. We think that this will reduce private motoring in the future, when errands such as banking can be run from the home computer. For the same reason, we are participating in running a joint service point at the local library in Kangaslampi by providing staff.



Verkkopuikkari

Participation is sustainable development

The present main library building has been a meeting venue for different pensioners' clubs and special groups since the beginning in 1985, but we have also wanted to offer a communal place for young people for a long time. That is why we have the Mediakeidas (Media Oasis) project in the library, which has been designed on the basis of sustainable development and is still in its construction phase. The Media Oasis has been designed in cooperation with volunteering young people, the young people's services and the library. The oasis will include a cosy lounge area in the library mainly for young people and will contain library material popular among them, a game machine and console games, etc. Once the area is completed, young people will be involved with decorating and living it up and, among other things, building an installation of recycled materials to act as soundproofing. The area will also have an interactive board, so it will most likely be used in the mornings for different training and club meetings, among other things.

It all begins with an attitude

Varkaus Library does not have a dedicated shelf for ecological literature, but there are frequent material exhibitions with ecological themes, and we also aim to introduce sustainable development in some shape to all other exhibitions gradually (travel <> sustainability, child protection <> projects in developing countries, spring exhibition <> sustainable gardening/construction, etc.), and we try to arouse interest and influence attitudes through all this. We have brought forth the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project in all possible contexts and also quietly embedded green ideas to exhibitions brought to us by our partners, as far as feasible. We have not managed to accomplish any revolutionary actions to save the world, but we feel that we are well on our way towards more sustainable library operations and take more responsibility for the environment as public operators than before.

Sustainable Development in Libraries through the Survey

Harri Sahavirta, Ph.D., Chief Librarian

Vallila and Suomenlinna Libraries, Helsinki City Library

The survey for the Sustainable Development in Libraries Project in spring 2012 was the first Finnish survey to study the knowledge and practices relating to sustainable development in public libraries. As such, it provides an overall view of the current situation in libraries: environmental management and consideration of environmental aspects in decision-making or acquisitions are experienced as alien, but practical measures have begun to appear. Hence this study provides a basis for future research in addition to an overall view, but it also acts as a guiding force in work towards sustainable development. The current project team has therefore decided, among other things, to compile an environmental guide for libraries.

What else did the study reveal? The results analysed by Gaia Consulting Oy are very interesting, and everyone is welcome to study them as extensively as desired. For my part, I would like to sketch a few green patterns amidst the ample foliage:

Even a quick glance at the survey material reveals that environmental management is fairly unfamiliar to libraries. Libraries have indeed implemented practical measures aimed at sustainable development, but the theoretical or bureaucratic work has been excluded or left for others. This phenomenon may stem from the idea that concrete actions, such as recycling and waste sorting, have a concrete impact on things (oil leaking to the ground at a landfill site has an obviously visible impact). On the flip side, creating environmental policies for libraries is perceived as abstract and is not thought to have any real effect on the state of the environment (yet another piece of paper). The weakness of environmental management, however, is transparent in communication about environmental issues. And this has an effect on that the existing attitudes among personnel, decision-makers or customers will not change.

Another observation is that environmental awareness appears to emerge through saving, which was originally totally unrelated to the environment. If not any earlier, the oil crisis in the 1970s at least awakened the Finnish people to energy efficiency, and saving paper has a distinctly monetary function: if you halve your use of paper, you also need to buy less of it. Waste sorting and recycling consequently come naturally to those who are used to composting their waste and recycling clothing from one child to another. This means that it is natural for an environmentally sustainable library to turn the thermostat down, save paper and sort waste. It is significantly less common to think that all acquisitions should be environmentally friendly or that commuting to work does matter. Innovations are even rarer.

The third observation would be that the concept of sustainable development seems to have taken on in the sense that many existing activities are understood as sustainable: loaning, recycling and selling books that are removed from the collection are environmentally friendly activities. New services, however, have not been innovated.

The challenge for the future would be to find new services and activities that would create a foundation for sustainable development. Finding new indicators that evaluate the sustainability of libraries is also another challenge for the future. The survey also discovered that sustainability is either practised or not – or practised to some extent, on occasion. But as per yet, there are no precise indicators to measure this.

