

Interview with Petra Hauke: Sustainable Development Goals in medical libraries

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Abstract

The role of libraries in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has become an increasingly important topic in the last years. The authors of this paper talked to Petra Hauke, convenor of the "Environment, Sustainability and Libraries Special Interest Group" (ENSULIB) at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) about her work and the ways medical libraries might contribute to implementing the SDGs.

Key words: Sustainable Development Goals; environment.



Fig. 1. Petra Hauke

Introduction

Petra Hauke is LIS lecturer at the Institute for Library and Information Science at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and also co-founder of the German Green

Library Network (Netzwerk Grüne Bibliothek) (1) (<https://www.ibi.hu-berlin.de/de/ueber-uns/personen/hauke>; email: petra.hauke@hu-berlin.de). She was interviewed by Franziska Corradini, Library Assistant, Bern University of Teacher Education, Bern; Irma Klerings, Cochrane Information Specialist, Donau University, Krems; and Gerhard Bissels, Lecturer in Library Innovation, University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons, Chur on the Sustainable Development Goals in medical libraries (2). The interview took place on Nov. 9, 2020, via video link.

What is ENSULIB?

Q: You are convenor of ENSULIB, the IFLA's Environment, Sustainability and Libraries Special Interest Group which will be established as a "section" in January 2021. Could you briefly acquaint JEAHIL readers with the role and goals of ENSULIB?

A: ENSULIB started in 2009 as a "Special Interest Group (SIG)". Within IFLA, Special Interest Groups bring together libraries and librarians with common and continuing interests which they wish to discuss or explore with other IFLA members, but which are not included in the goals of an existing Section. Finally ENSULIB was able to convince the Governing Board that our focus is clearly a topic of great interest and a

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benefit for many IFLA members and to the field at large. ENSULIB's role within the IFLA community is to encourage and support libraries' environmental and social responsibility and the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals.

Q: How does ENSULIB function, and what are the plans of the section for the next years?

A: ENSULIB's aim is to make libraries active supporters and actors of the United Nations Agenda 2030 in terms of all aspects of ecological, social, and economic sustainability. The section is concerned with all types of libraries that are engaged in environmental and social responsibility and supporting the 2030 Agenda. "Green Librarianship" is a global approach of all aspects of librarianship, from the conception of the library's building, of the day-to-day management, of all its resources, up to the information work about environmental issues and the support to local initiatives.

Specific aims set out in the section's action plan include:

- to identify the best sustainable practices in libraries and share them;
- to develop and promote tools and standards to support libraries in their conversion to sustainability;
- to increase the effectiveness of all types of libraries that focus on sustainability in all its aspects;
- to provide a forum for addressing sustainability issues related to libraries' services;
- to advocate for "green libraries" as a fundamental component in the development throughout the world;
- to share experience, knowledge and problem-solving strategies, and promote networking amongst green libraries and green research services.

ENSULIB's new standing committee (SC) will be established during the IFLA World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) in August 2021 – which will become a virtual conference. The SC will define working groups for e.g. the IFLA Green Library Award (which has been running already since 2016), green library standards, prepare sessions and satellite meetings for the annual WLIC, cooperate with national green libraries initiatives like the German "Netzwerk Grüne Bibliothek", the Finnish green

library network, and the Swiss campaign "biblio2030", create a green libraries projects bank, plan webinars etc. – depending on the capacities and abilities of the upcoming section's standing committee members.

Q: ENSULIB is planning to set up a toolkit on the Web to help libraries become more sustainable. There are quite a few websites with this aim already, especially in the German-speaking countries, with the bulk of the information rather similar, but some unique bits on each platform. Does creating even another platform make sense?

A: Our aim is to bring all the information from the various websites together on the ENSULIB website.

Q: Shouldn't there be some standard for sustainability in medical, or research libraries in general?

A: Libraries should aim to have a sustainable building, and to run services sustainably. Beyond that, IFLA says sustainability is libraries' business. It's every library's business, so all libraries are asked to become advocates for sustainability!

Q: How will the knowledge gathered through ENSULIB's work be transferred to librarians?

A: The section works to meet its objectives through the following activities:

- sharing experiences, best practices and new developments through its sessions at the WLIC and satellite meetings. Information is shared with the wider membership through the section's web pages, email list and social media;
- publishing guidance on establishing and providing library services for green libraries, based on the experience of section members and elaborated with other relevant bodies, such as national green libraries initiatives.

Q: What methods is ENSULIB going to use to motivate librarians/libraries to change toward a more ecological "everyday life" (attitude, mindset, processes etc.)?

A: IFLA, as the world association, has declared all libraries to be advocates of the Agenda 2030 as early as 2015 through the International Advocacy Programme (IAP). The Programme aims to help libraries worldwide achieve these goals through their work. IFLA explicitly says: "Take action!" Every person in the library system and beyond can help promote the role of libraries as supporters of sustainable development. IFLA expressly says: "Sustainability is libraries' business!" As institutions with a societal

mission, it is natural for libraries to seek to address the major societal challenges of today – and there are fewer greater than sustainability. Libraries should act as exemplars, educators, and enablers (3).

Medical libraries and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals

Q: On the IFLA's map of libraries reporting activities related to the UN's SDGs, there are almost exclusively public libraries represented. We have not found a single example of a medical library participating. Why do you think this is?

A: IFLA is looking for any kind of libraries which follow the UN Agenda 2030 to demonstrate how libraries contribute to improved outcomes across all SDGs. It seems that medical libraries have not yet appeared in this context. Or they have not taken the appropriate public position. Few publications are available on sustainability projects in medical libraries (4-6). There are numerous examples of academic libraries that position themselves publicly in the sense of SDGs like the University Library of Valencia, Spain (7), or winners of the IFLA Green Library Award like the Thailand, Rangsit University Library (8), to name but a few.

Q: Which of the SDGs should, in your view, medical libraries give particular attention?

A: First of all SDG 3: Health and well-being. Health has a central position in the agenda through SDG 3, but also is closely linked to over a dozen targets in other goals related to urban health, equal access to treatments, and non-communicable diseases, among others. In fact, the SDGs represent a unique opportunity to promote public health through an integrated approach to public policies across different sectors. For example, better education for girls (SDG 4.1) would improve maternal health (SDG 3.1). Tackling child malnourishment (SDG 2.2) would have a great impact on child health (SDG 3.2). And ensuring access to safe water (SDG 6.1) or tackling ambient air pollution (SDG 11.6) will evidently have a direct impact on several SDG 3 targets. On the other hand, using coal to improve energy access (SDG 7) would have a negative impact on health. The few examples given should make clear, that in the end all SDGs refer in any way to SDG 3 "Good Health".

Q: Medical and other specialist libraries tend to focus on a specialist audience, such as hospital staff, or

researchers and students of a medical faculty. If we are talking about promoting health literacy, or Public Health in general, wouldn't medical libraries have to broaden their audience, to include non-specialists?

A: Both are possible. Medical libraries can either focus on their specialist communities, or go beyond that, and – if you have the capacity, and the expertise – reach out to external audiences, at least if the institution permits. But medical libraries that support research or clinical practice, already contribute to achieving SDG 3, Health and Well-Being. When Donna Scheeder, the former IFLA president, was involved in the United Nations' development of the Sustainable Development Goals, she made sure basic information provision was included – because without access to information, none of the other goals could be achieved. This was the beginning of the current development, but we now realise we have the chance to achieve more!

Q: I see a problem with the lack of capacity in libraries. Libraries are currently not in a position to seriously embrace and push for the SDGs; they just do not have the extra staff time. Is just lending books enough?

A: IFLA wants to demonstrate the importance of libraries in achieving the SDGs. We librarians ought to make the decision makers aware that libraries are crucial for achieving the SDGs. By just delivering what they do anyway, libraries contribute already towards achieving the SDGs. This is the first step – but if at all possible, we should go further.

Q: Libraries could go further, and argue for additional funding to support the SDGs.

A: Exactly! Library associations initially felt that it was enough to claim sustainability for themselves. Mission accomplished. But they ought to go beyond that, and should not miss this opportunity. IFLA says: "Sustainability is libraries' business". This sentence can be read either as a statement, or as a task for libraries to achieve.

Q: As someone who has been involved in sustainability in libraries for a quite a while, have you seen enough change happening? 2030 is approaching fast... Are you confident that we will meet the 2030 goals?

A: It will be a challenge. We should try to do everything we can – but it is a vision. We will still have hunger, inequality and so on in 2030. We don't have much time left. We should try our best! It depends on us all if the change is a vision, or an illusion.

Q: Do you have plans to work with specialist librarians'

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organisations, such as EAHIL or the MLA in the medical field?

A: Yes, of course. This is essential to achieve the goals and also follows SDG 17: Partnership for the goals. They are all invited not only to sign an institutional membership but also to apply for a standing committee membership.

Q: Special libraries might have a profound knowledge concerning specific goals. How could an exchange, a transfer of this knowledge to other libraries, or back up to decision-makers e.g. in government, look like?

A: IFLA says: "Libraries are key institutions for achieving the goals" (1, 7). Libraries enable access to information – and access to information is crucial for achieving the goals. Reliable information on health issues (SDG 3), climate change (SDG 13), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), to name but a few, provided and actively distributed by special libraries to governments, decision makers and the libraries' professional community, is essential to achieve the goals. But libraries can do more than provide access to information. Libraries can – and already do! – act as exemplars, educators, and enablers. Programmes like "Love our Library", provided by the University Library of Cork, Ireland, could easily be adopted by special libraries (9). Their engagement should not only extend within the internal community, but also reach out to the outside community. "The Sustainable Library's Cookbook" by Raymond Pun and Gary L. Shaffe, published by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) offers a wide range of examples, e.g.: "Cultivating community through a fruit and veggie exchange", "Adding more green for a healthier library: modeling sustainability practice", "Rooftop garden ratatouille: developing plaza/deck library greenspace", "Teaching undergraduates how to critically evaluate information resources and scholarship related to sustainable agriculture" (10).

SDGs in the wider and the narrower sense. Green libraries

Q: We perceive two different approaches to the UN's SDGs that libraries could pursue: they could either focus on the sustainability of the library's operation; or they could get involved in implementing SDGs themselves. Where do you see the role of libraries?

A: Both. Green library buildings follow e.g. LEED or

ISO criteria as far as possible. But so-called green libraries are also committed to sustainable routines like recycling and decreasing consumption, modification of the conditions of storage and preservation, applications of environment-friendly practices like recovery of rainwater, use of renewable energy sources, printing control, paper recycling, etc. Special libraries with their special knowledge also have a major role in universities and research centres. Going beyond provision of books and journals, they also offer valuable training and support on how to get the best out of the information. The University library in Gothenburg, Sweden, has developed tools on information literacy for sustainability, adaptable for other libraries (11). In their function as "exemplars, educators, and enablers" also special libraries can go "out of the box" to draw public and decision makers' attention to the need of achieving the SDGs.

Q: Does/Should the role of libraries differ depending on the socioeconomic setting (e.g. global North vs South)?

A: The SDGs address global challenges like poverty, inequality, climate change, peace and justice etc. Nevertheless, the problems faced by countries of the North or South are different. Although all SDGs are interdependent and cannot be addressed separately, countries that are characterised by poverty and hunger will have different priorities from countries that are more likely to be characterised by economic abundance. Accordingly, libraries will also have different priorities in the implementation of the SDGs. In this context, for example the National Library of Uganda provides ICT training to female farmers to access weather forecasts, crop prices, and to set up online markets in their local languages (12) while others discuss the "Trust in International Digital Content: Open Access and Access to Information at the World Bank" and how this trust can be used in pursuit of achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals and opportunity for all (13). Achieving the SDGs is a global challenge, but the resulting requirements and possibilities differ.

Q: Are there blueprints that we could – or should – provide to libraries in poorer countries in the South, to further their transition to sustainability?

A: Of course, our duty is to cooperate. We have more opportunities with our richer resources. But we need to take into account what possibilities libraries in

poorer countries have. For many years I taught book publishing. And when I asked my students if they'd prefer to produce an electronic book, or a printed one, they usually went for the print publication! I make my IFLA publications available on-line, if at all possible, Open Access. But some libraries in the global South do have so limited or even no access to electronic resources that I always try to also have a print version produced that can be sent to those libraries. Our current IFLA book project (on new libraries in old buildings) will be a pilot - Open Access electronically, with a parallel print edition.

Q: Thank you very much, Petra, for this interview!

More information on ENSULIB activities can be found at the IFLA website: <https://www.ifla.org/environment-sustainability-and-libraries>

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