The EBLIDA Newsletter is normally published monthly and deals with European library & information issues, programmes, news and events of interest to the library and the cultural community.

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1. Editorial by Ton van Vlimmeren, EBLIDA President

Save the dates:
Online Workshops - 13, 14 and 16 October 2020
and
Online EBLIDA Annual Council - 28 October 2020

It is with great pleasure that we announce the 2020 EBLIDA Annual Council meeting – to be held online this year, due to Covid-19 restrictions and measures. For some, it will be twice the pleasure, since the Annual Council meeting will be preceded by three Workshops on 13, 14 and 16 October 2020.

This year, the EBLIDA Annual Council should have taken place in Belgrade and we will certainly miss the opportunity to connect in person, often the most enjoyable part of EBLIDA meetings and the recipe for their success. Online meetings, however, help overcome physical distance and the opportunity will be given to all EBLIDA Members to join the Council on a common online platform.

On 28th October, all Members will have the opportunity to consider the documents presented by the EBLIDA Executive Committee. Two weeks before, the meetings provide the possibility of discussing the EBLIDA strategy in more detail and also to come up with concrete ideas for the post-Covid phase. Further information about the Annual Council 2020 and the workshops will be sent in the near future.

Throughout Europe, libraries are cautiously opening to the public in compliance with strict procedures and regulations emanated by national authorities. But - were they ever locked down?
During the Covid-19 crisis, library digital collections were made available to the public and demand in access to e-books and e-journals rocketed in each library, in particular in public libraries. Many libraries also provided access to Covid-19 related health information produced by governmental authorities – one of the many ways in which the library engaged in fighting fake news about the pandemic.

A wide variety of library activities towards communities were implemented via phone, text, email and through platforms. Some consisted of supporting elderly people in lockdown; in some cases, libraries delivered food when necessary and supported education for those kids who could not access online teaching from home or those in vulnerable domestic circumstances. Other libraries used social media to offer story time, through Facebook groups and YouTube profiles, or also for library exchange and (re-)use of digital products. Libraries in a few countries even provided face masks for healthcare workers through 3D printers. Library resilience during the crisis was so strong that it could hardly be said that European libraries were in lockdown during the Covid crisis.

Just as with libraries, the EBLIDA office also did not close during the lockdown.

In May and June 2020, three reports were published by the EBLIDA European Sustainability House: “A European library agenda for the post-Covid 19 age”, “European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027: Funding opportunities for Libraries” and “Sustainable Development Goals and libraries. First European Report”.

All reports were based on direct input provided by our Members to various surveys elaborated by the EBLIDA Secretariat. The three combined reports are going to update the EBLIDA Matrix, now available on the EBLIDA website.

This Newsletter includes a series of Questions and Answers which summarise the three reports in a dynamic and readable way. Some Members of the EBLIDA Executive Committee are delivering interviews about EBLIDA work for the Belgian, Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, French, Italian and Luxembourgish library communities. It is worth remembering that all Newsletter articles and EBLIDA publications can be translated and diffused among professionals librarians.

In this Newsletter we also welcome Czech answers to the EBLIDA Checklist. EBLIDA Members’ response to the Checklist, the Paper on European Structural and Investment Funds and the First European report on Sustainable Development Goals – all this material is going to feed “Think the unthinkable. A post Covid-19 European Library Agenda meeting Sustainable Development Goals and funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds (2021-2027)”, a report aggregating the work undertaken by EBLIDA in Spring 2020. What will the future hold for libraries after Covid-19 crisis? Will libraries revert to the past after the crisis and smoothly re-integrate assets and roles they were used to holding and playing?

The “Think the unthinkable” report will help libraries all over Europe participate in the progress of the Agenda 2030 in a Europe that is smarter, greener, more connected, more social and closer-to-its-citizens - the five objectives of the 2021-2027 European Structural and Investment Funds.

We will resume this Newsletter at the end of the summer with more information on the EBLIDA Annual Council and regional workshops.

Good luck with your library reopening and enjoy your summer!

2. Report from the Czech Republic
The *Svaz knihovníků a informačních pracovníků České republiky* / Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic responds to the EBLIDA Covid-19 Checklist.

1. Has you (national) library association released regular website information, newsletters and/or updates on library posture in your country during the Covid-19 crisis?

Relevant information is shared by our Association's executive committee and also by the Librarianship Institute (organizational unit of the National Library of the Czech Republic) – these two professional bodies closely collaborated on various library-related issues. Updates were shared via Czech library-oriented mailing lists and also through the Librarianship Institute's website. This website is a place which Czech librarians use to exchange professional information. A special webpage dedicated to the Covid-19 response has been set up on this website: [https://ipk.nkp.cz/koronavirus-1/koronavirus](https://ipk.nkp.cz/koronavirus-1/koronavirus).

2. Does your library association provide legal advice (or links to legal information) on the role, rights and duties of the library as an employer?

A special section on the Covid-19 webpage is focused on legal information for library managers: [https://ipk.nkp.cz/koronavirus-1/koronavirus#porad](https://ipk.nkp.cz/koronavirus-1/koronavirus#porad). Although this webpage is regularly updated by the National Library of the Czech Republic, it is done in close cooperation with our Association.

3. Do you provide any information or links about Covid-19 that are relevant for libraries (e.g. lifespan of the virus on paper and plastic)?


4. Has your library, or library association, participated in the general strategy of controlling the diffusion of Covid-19?

Yes, but only in terms of preparing guidelines for libraries which gradually resume their operation and start providing their core services again (full operation is expected to resume in late May or early June, depending on how the Covid-19 pandemic develops). In April 2020, the Central
Library Council (an advisory body to the Minister of Culture) prepared a draft course of action for reopening libraries. This prompted the Ministry of Culture to let libraries partly reopen much earlier than originally expected and, at the same time, issue appropriate guidance (https://ipk.nkp.cz/docs/covid-19/recommendations-of-the-ministry-of-culture-or-opening-libraries). Following these brief recommendations, a more detailed guidance was issued by the Central Library Council (https://ipk.nkp.cz/docs/covid-19/recommendation-of-the-central-library-council-for-libraries-opening) very shortly afterwards. However, the major decisions about the overall strategy are taken by the Czech Government with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Interior playing the key roles.

5. Is the Covid-19 crisis impacting on the financial position of your (national) library association (for instance, cancelled conferences)?

It is yet unclear what the Covid-19 financial impact will look like. What is certain, though, is that some professional events organized by our Association will not take place this year. Some may be postponed to late 2020 or to 2021. A number of these events are co-funded through one of our Ministry of Culture's grant schemes – some of these will have to be reconsidered to make sure they can actually take place. It also seems rather likely that the grant schemes' budget for 2021 will be reduced, making it more difficult to organize some of the postponed events.

6. Does your association collect information on how the crisis impacts the financial position of the libraries?

The Librarianship Institute asked Czech libraries to share their views on this subject back in April via an online questionnaire. It is expected that a follow-up survey will take place at a later time as now it is – for a number of organizations – too early to predict if Covid-19-related budget cuts will indeed be in place and how deep such cuts may become. In general, libraries more and more frequently say that their parent or governing and funding body reduces their budget and further budget cuts are to be expected in 2021. Also, libraries now have to cope with higher costs because they have to buy personal protective equipment for their staff and also offer disinfectants, disposable gloves etc. to library visitors.

7. Is your association negotiating with (local/national) government bodies for support to libraries in order to deal with financial effects and loss of results?

The results from the online questionnaire survey have already been shared with the Ministry of Culture. Also, the follow-up survey results are intended for sharing with it to make sure this governmental body responsible for setting up basic rules for libraries is aware of the emerging situation and can take appropriate action, if deemed necessary.

8. Is your association, the (national) library or other library coordination centre releasing regular information about the digital offer and library services to the general public?

Both our Association, National Library of the Czech Republic, Moravian Library in Brno and a number of other libraries as well are hard at work trying inform the general public about libraries’ digital offerings. There is a special website which serves as a hub for digital services provided by Czech libraries: https://protiviru.knihovny.cz/ (Knihovny.cz is a service which aims at providing a main gateway to Czech libraries).

9. Are digital services freely accessible to everyone? If not, is someone (association, national library) negotiating with relevant commercial partners and government to remove barriers as a crisis measure?

A number of digital services are freely available not only to library patrons but also to general public. In this regard, the Czech libraries were not unprepared when the lockdown was introduced. What changed, however, was the intensity of digital services promotion.
libraries operated by the National Library of the Czech Republic and Moravian Library in Brno are made available to university students and teachers. The digital libraries offer about 250,000 digitized books and periodicals and students and teachers can use them without the need to physically visit the aforementioned libraries. The access is granted for the whole period during which the libraries are closed to public. As of May 7, 2020, the digital libraries should be accessible until May 17th, 2020.

10. Is there – especially in e-books- a more extensive and targeted offer for specific groups like elderly citizens isolated at home, young people and children?

The Municipal Library of Prague has added new sections to its E-Library which provide users with pre-selected lists of books recommended to the youngest children or to school teachers: https://www.mlp.cz/cz/katalog-on-line/eknihy/. (E-Library is a service which provides digitally published classic titles and also current literature free of charge to anyone interested. N.B.: The offer is, in fact, the publishing production of the Municipal Library of Prague.) Similar pre-selected lists are available via https://protiviru.knihovny.cz/.

12-14. During the Covid-19 crisis was there a (national) platform, list-server or otherwise where libraries can post their best practices of services, exchange and (re-)use digital products, and safety measures for their patrons?

Czech libraries use all kinds of ways to keep being notified about newly created or adjusted library services. Social media and mailing lists can probably be considered the most important places where such sharing takes place, together with the Librarianship Institute's specialized Covid-19 webpage.

16. Is there an exchange of how library staff is working from home, doing (online) learning and training or delivering services?

Nationwide general library-oriented mailing lists as well as social media platforms and person-to-person online communication through email, instant messaging etc. can probably be considered the key tools used to share experience. There are also a number of specialized mailing lists where a lively discussion takes place. So definitely, such an exchange does take place in the Czech Republic.

17. Is there a (national) platform, list-server or otherwise for online learning and training possibilities for library staff?

Again, Czech librarians basically engage in nationwide library-oriented mailing lists where all types of topics are discussed. Our Association also offers a specialized library education mailing list. In the early days of the lockdown, librarians used this list to share their experience with online videoconferencing tools and their suitability for educational purposes.

18. Is there a (national) platform, list-server or otherwise for other tasks performed by library staff (e.g. helping (online) in the community information centre or giving telephone calls to isolated elderly patrons/citizens)?

I am not sure whether this is the right type of answer to this question but Czech libraries traditionally offer a virtual reference service which is called Ask Your Library (Ptejte se knihovny): https://www.ptejteseknihovny.cz/english. This service has not been temporarily suspended due to Covid-19 (unlike basically all on-site services) and keeps being a valuable resource for library users from all over the country (also, as the archives are available, answers are not used solely by those who have asked the questions but are available to just about anyone interested).
3. A European Library Agenda for the post-Covid 19 Age
Work in Progress

In April 2020, EBLIDA launched a survey aimed to detect measures, practices and possible services that were initiated during the crisis and could be pursued in one way or another in post-Covid 19 times. Following this survey, the report “Preparing a European Library Agenda for the Post-Covid Age – A Work in Progress” has been published.

The report covers 17 European countries and is based on the responses kindly and promptly forwarded by EBLIDA Members.

1. Covid 19 is impacting on European libraries in an unprecedented way. Do you share this point of view?

In April and May 2020, a few reports have been published, examining the effects of the Covid-19 crisis on libraries at European and international level. All of them were based on the same information provided by library associations. Nevertheless, they differ from one another on the basis of how the perspective data are examined and put into a broader framework.

Concerning EBLIDA, we have tried to describe not only post-Covid 19 library prospects in the short term, but also in the medium term. The result is an overview including a distinction between library activities based on contingent factors – which hopefully will not replicate – and library activities and trends that will become permanent in the post-Covid 19 age. If I have to answer your question more properly: Yes, there will be long-term implications for libraries, and they will be first and foremost of a financial nature.

2. Can you describe the EBLIDA approach more in detail?

We have identified five new normals for a European Library Agenda in the post-Covid-19 age:

- Exponential social distancing: a well-connected two-meter library;
- Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways;
- Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget composition;
- Library governance at central and local levels;
- Do not forget the climate change opportunity and threat.

Librarians are now fully concentrated on social distancing and how it can be best implemented, in relation to sanitation of collections, personnel security and access policy. Professional exchange of information is always very useful and EBLIDA has already published four special issues of the EBLIDA Newsletter, in which best practices are reported. It should be born in mind that library routines will be driven by health regulations, risk perception, and the arrangement of library spaces and regulations in these fields are of national, and even local nature.

The challenge is to see to what extent library services can be implemented in a hybrid way – partly through the use of technologies, partly physical – and how to bring people together while, at the same time, keeping them at a distance from each other. During the crisis, libraries created platforms and special webpages as well as diversifying their services; they expanded telephone services, organised foodbanks in towns, provided services to children staying at home and...
Experiences running in France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and in many other countries show that reaching out to people and yet, keeping them at an appropriate and safe physical distance, is possible. This depth of experience will not be lost in the long-term.

3. Can technologies help?

Technologies can, and do help, a lot. During the crisis, libraries organised face mask production and the transfer of computers from libraries to students. Access to digital resources boomed in all European public libraries. The public library of Tallinn probably had the most spectacular rise, with access increasing from 373 in 2019 (March-April 2019) to almost 10,000 (same period, 2020). In all countries, however, access doubled and tripled in numbers. The demand for digital resources has increased both in quantity and quality, with an offer including self-training, video on demand, music, press, e-books.

Two factors may hamper the consolidation of increased demand for digital library platforms. The first is the quality of the relationship between publishers and libraries and how prices for digital publications will level off, in spite of increasing demand in libraries. Only the National Library of Latvia (and partially, the National Library of Sweden) managed to come to an agreement with copyright agencies and authors’ associations and to enhance access to the digital collections of e-periodicals and e-books during the Covid-19 crisis. There is little hope that these agreement will continue after the crisis.

The second factor is the digital divide and the distinction between the have and the have-nots in terms of access to broadband, equipment, digital literacy skills, quality technical support, to online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration. The role of EBLIDA is to continue working on e-copies, as has been done in the past, and to stimulate library projects within the European Structural and Investment Fund 2021-2027. In this way we hope to contribute to the setting up of a post-Covid 19 European agenda.

4. In your opinion, how strong will the financial impact of Covid 19 be on libraries in Europe?

Europe has been among the worst-hit areas in the world; its economy is expected to contract sharply, by almost 10% in some European countries. If library budgets shrink in the same proportion as national projections describe, operations will be seriously hampered in all fields.

Library expenditure is flexible only to a certain extent. The budget allocated to building maintenance, personnel and, to a certain extent, the purchase of digital resources, is largely inelastic. Moreover, 75% to 100% of the library’s income is mono-sourced and generated at local level by city or regional authorities.

The risk is that downsizing library operations may end up with substantial budget cuts to the “social” library – to those activities oriented at specialised groups of people and often implemented in collaboration with the “third sector”. It is worth remembering that the “social”, “third place” library, the library as meeting place – in other words, the library operating with and within the communities it refers to – has had the most stimulating developments in the public library sector in the last two decades.

These cuts should not become inevitable and EBLIDA has suggestions on how to stop it: first of all, by reviewing the composition of library budgets. EBLIDA advocates that the European 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the optimal conceptual framework for preserving library budgets and maintaining all options open in a “social” library. And that SDG projects in libraries can be funded by European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027. More than an alternative to current library funding, ESIF should become a catalyst for a European, post-Covid, library agenda.
proved to be essential during the Covid 19 crisis. Bulgaria, Germany and the Netherlands also used ESI Funds to revitalise all kinds of library services.

5. The EBLIDA Report suggests possible changes in library governance. In which direction?

I would not speak of radical changes, but of a few adjustments. During the Covid-19 crisis, we have seen a movement towards the centralisation of library activities, especially with regard to access to digital services, in terms of copyright clearance, standardisation of technical requirements and coordination of management tasks, including statistics. At the same time, local and professional governance is a key determinant for the setting up of innovative services or the adaptation of existing ones.

These spontaneous grassroots or institutional movements should be reinforced to find a steady and sustained place in the post-Covid-19 agenda. These new forms of governance may prove to be useful if European libraries identify themselves as structural components of a cohesion policy and wish to access EU Structural and Investment Funds.

6. Is library recovery after the Covid 19 pandemic at odds with sustainable development?

Rather the opposite. Consolidated access to digital resources, hybrid forms of support for those who are left behind, renewed library governance and reviewed library budgets in line with European Structural and Investment Funds – all this is in line with sustainable development. When library policy makers make decisions in the post Covid-19 age, there will always be the case for climate-friendly solutions. Librarians should apply the European Commission Taxonomy, which sets criteria for screening economic activities that can make a substantial contribution to climate change mitigation or adaptation.

7. What’s next for EBLIDA?

The report “Preparing a European Library Agenda for the Post-Covid 19 Age – Work in Progress” is the first in a series of reports which also include the Paper “European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027” and the “Sustainable Development Goals and Libraries - First European Report”. Thee three reports are going to be aggregated in a milestone report: “Think the unthinkable. A post Covid-19 European Library Agenda meeting Sustainable Development Goals and funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds (2021-2027)”).

With an easy metaphor, I would like to describe the connection between the three reports as the workings of a car, where the post-Covid 19 library agenda is the engine, sustainable development goals are the chassis and ESI Funds may be the fuel. The metaphor continues with the three reports offering a series of prototypes for a future post-Covid 19 library agenda, which have to be adapted to the needs of the library or the (local, regional, national) library system. And of course, the driver is the library policy-maker willing to use this vehicle to reach the destinations looming on the 2030/ESIF/library horizon.

We hope that librarians all over Europe will be empathic towards the EBLIDA strategy and we are ready to invest in it. EBLIDA is offering consultancy services to its members in order to gain a better understanding of ESI Funds and how they can align with the library’s missions, in particular if linked with the European 2030 Agenda on sustainable development.

We wish to support European libraries and library associations throughout their difficult journey in the post-Covid 19 age.
The magnitude of the Covid-19 crisis and its possible impact on library activities may prompt a reaction from libraries which cannot be funded through ordinary library funding. The European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 could prop up strained library budgets in the post-Covid 19 age. Hence, EBLIDA prepared the Paper European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027: Funding opportunities for Libraries – here is the press release.

1. The ESIF Report suggests that there may be interesting perspectives for libraries and nevertheless, access to these funds seems to be quite complex. Can you summarise in few, and simple, words what libraries can do exactly?

I fully agree that ESI Funds is not a simple issue. Moreover, communication about them is done through long and complex EU regulations, reports, web information. The ESIF matter, however, is far from being “a riddle wrapped up in an enigma”. Very simply, the overall aim of ESIF is to create a more cohesive Europe with convergent economies, more jobs and a higher standard of living in all European countries; once you keep this principle in mind, everything starts to be more straightforward.

2. Promising start, but we are still confused about ESIF. Let’s reformulate the question in different words: where do you take the certitude that libraries fit ESIF 2021-2027?

When an instrument, and especially a financial instrument, is introduced in a new context for the first time, only practice can tell whether it fits the purpose of the beneficiary. Libraries often claim that their activities are considered “vital” for society; through ESIF they are given the opportunity to show how structurally essential they are for the social and the economic development of a country. They may prove that books and media, library products and services, are not merely an alternative to bookshops and movie theatres, but are concretely supporting unemployed people in finding a job and deprived persons in their personal development. In other words, they are showing that they are striving to create a cohesive society and help democracy to consolidate and thrive.

3. Can you explain, in few words, what the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) mean and why these Funds should be attractive for libraries?

ERDF strengthens economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions. ESF is Europe’s main instrument for supporting jobs, helping people to improve their employment prospects and ensuring fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens. They are attractive because they have been used in libraries in several countries – successfully. The scope of the two funds may be even better understood against their historical background.

Some twenty years ago, there was no doubt about the purpose of European Structural Funds: hard infrastructure. For years, ESIF conjured up ideas of railway corridors, broadband wirelines, city development and subsidies to farmers, to name but a few. Some twenty years ago, however, it became apparent that enhancing infrastructure is a means, and not an end to furthering economic development. An underused infrastructure results in a white elephant. That was the moment when ESIF started to focus not only on buildings and motorways, but also on
4. What about European gibberish: *ex-ante conditionality, thematic concentration, smart specialisation strategies*?

EC action is implemented through regulations, policy papers and investments. It is a concrete action, but Europe is felt as distant from citizens’ ordinary life and terminology does not help to fill the gap. Personally, I believe that the EU action would gain in being less verbally imaginative and in using more down-to-earth metaphors. *Ex-ante conditionality* means very simply that investments can be best supported by a national, or regional policy in place. If you want to build a library, for instance, it is good to have an existent and functioning library policy which explains why a library has to be built exactly in that specific area, and why. If you wish to work on a set of library services in the post-Covid age, it may be helpful to have a library agenda which sets priorities at European level, as EBLiDA tried to do with its May 2020 document “Preparing a Library Agenda for the post-Covid Age”.

*Thematic concentration* refers to the fact that, the more a country is focused on few objectives, which correspond very much to its national assets, the stronger the impact on its economy. Let me give you an example: as you know, Mediterranean countries are blessed by a superb cultural heritage which has shaped urban planning and their rural environment. Cultural heritage is an important source of income for Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Unsurprisingly, ESIF money has been used to restore less known monuments in little visited cities in the assumption, an accurate one, that tourism can be channelled towards equally beautiful, but less known parts of the Mediterranean region. In this case, “*thematic concentration*” means that Mediterranean countries choose cultural heritage as a structural investment in order to build “smart specialisation strategies” on this basis. The title given by Italy to one of ESIF national Operational Programmes in 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 was (and perhaps will also be in ESIF 2021-2027): “Tourism and Cultural Heritage”. The Italian “smart specialisation strategy” was worth 1,2 billion euro from 2007-2013.

5. How do you differentiate between ERDF and ESF specific objectives?

ERDF and ESF+ specific objectives are often of a similar nature and are close to each other, also in formulation. It is hard to make a difference. More than content, it is important to understand the strategy developed by the country where the ESIF programme is developed. The report mentions a few cases, for instance that of the Netherlands. In this country, ERDF 2014-2020 policy is being focused on two general objectives: innovation and a low-carbon economy. With such narrow thematic concentration, there is little room for library projects within ERDF. Conversely, the Netherlands has invested a considerable amount of money in ESF+ and in particular, on social inclusion and higher employment. Extra ESF funding is also provided for the four largest cities – Rotterdam, Amsterdam, The Hague and Utrecht – to help improve job opportunities for young people and non-European immigrants through coaching and training programmes. If this quality of thematic concentration is confirmed in Dutch ESF+ 2021-2027, money will be available to launch new library projects.

6. You may remember Kissinger’s famous remark: “Who do I call if I want to speak to Europe?”. If libraries wish to understand ESIF better, who should they call first?

Surprisingly enough, the first telephone call may be made to a colleague working in the same administration. ESI Funds are allocated on the basis of a partnership agreement stipulated between the EC and Member States. A partnership agreement consists of setting up national and/or regional Operational Programmes (OPs) on the priorities identified by each Member States. I would strongly advise librarians willing to access ESIF to contact the managing authority in their country. The whole list, country after country, is available here [https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/managing-authorities/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/managing-authorities/).

Partnership agreements between the European Commission and Member States are being
other library initiatives may be compliant with ESIF’s main objectives.

7. And the second telephone call?

Perhaps you might call EBLIDA to look for advice. EBLIDA is offering consultancy services to its members in order to gain a better understanding of ESI Funds and how they can align with the library’s missions, in particular if linked with the European 2030 Agenda on sustainable development. This is an ad hoc, temporary service, which will run in June and July 2020. On the basis of the success of this initiative we may decide on further steps to be undertaken in collaboration with EBLIDA Members.

5. SDGs and European Libraries

The “Sustainable Development Goals and libraries – First European Report” is the first attempt to map SDG projects in European libraries not only as stories to be told to administrators and policy-makers for advocacy purposes, but also as a fully-fledged concept apt to frame library work into the broader and far-reaching scope of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A new agenda is desperately needed for two reasons:

a) historically, because the traditional library sphere (free of charge services based on books and other media) has been challenged in the last two decades by private information service providers, and

b) because we are entering a post-Covid 19 age where many of the traditional assumptions in the world of libraries will be re-questioned or reshuffled.


1. Sustainable Development Goals and European libraries – what is the link?

I would like to start by saying what SDGs are not for libraries. SDGs are not accessory objectives for libraries, ideals that libraries pursue to be trendy and in line with smart options about the future of humankind.

Sustainable development is not something that is left to governmental policies for social and economic affairs, while the core concerns for libraries are about culture and education.

SDGs do not deal exclusively with climate change and low-carbon emissions – they are not Greta Thunberg’s business, a commendable goal which is beside library missions.

SDGs are not objectives which unfold through exhibitions, one-off events and poster sessions. They can be incorporated into library main objectives and be part of their normal administration.
2. This is what sustainable development is not for libraries; so, what do SDGs mean for libraries?

Both public and university libraries (the latter, under the “third mission” chapter) are looking for new political and social factors driving library development. These factors are to be found in social change, inclusion, democratic participation, cultural diversity and social integration. This new framework is clearly identified in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and, in Europe, in the EU 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development comes together with 169 sub-objectives and 232 indicators. It is perceived as a complex framework to be administered at macro-level through fiscal and legislative policies. This is false. Everybody, within the limits of his or her capacity, can contribute to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. NGOs, associations and academia are the watchdogs of Governments and can be particularly effective in advocating for policy measures which may be initially costly but are certainly advantageous in the long term.

3. Do you think that an SDG library policy should meet all SDGs, or be focussed on some of them only?

There has been an evolution in the implementation of SDGs in libraries and related thinking. At first, SDGs were interpreted at face value; practically only SDG 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” was considered as being of direct relevance for libraries.

This judgement was not generated from a misconception of SDGs, but from a misconception of libraries. As soon as you do not link library missions to book or media delivery, but start exploring possible uses of these media, the number of implementable SDGs in libraries widen. As soon as library premises are not considered for their most immediate function - book and media loans - but for the role they may play in the society as meeting places to be used by associations working in the civil society, you start considering that all seventeen goals can be incorporated into library activities. It depends on the communities libraries refer to and their more or less permeability to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

4. Librarians feel intimidated by the dense texture of the UN programme: 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 169 targets and 232 indicators. How can libraries measure their activities in relation to the attainment of SDGs?

Measuring library activities in relation to SDGs is a serious issue and cannot be dismissed through the consideration that, after all, SDGs are implemented in libraries for advocacy purposes only and, therefore, indicators are not really needed.

The measurement of the library’s contribution to the attainment of SDGs is a thorny issue, not easily solved, not even in relation to SDG 4. It is relatively straightforward to report about the number of people having participated in vocational training in libraries and the level of their qualifications. Less easy to evaluate is the impact of the received training on individuals and on their lives.

Another example is “access to information” (SDG 16, Target 10). The Technology and Social Change Group of the University of Washington rightly points to the two indicators present in the list of UN SDG Indicators: Indicator 16.10.1 - “Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months” - and Indicator 16.10.2 - “Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy
The solution has to be found elsewhere, in the evaluation of SDG-oriented library projects for which various indicators can be used. Some indicators can be set by the Ministries responsible for library activities. Some others may be designated by the institutions funding library activities; for instance, a project funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 has its own set of indicators.

Some others can be internal to libraries and be non-traditional. For instance, rather than in the intensity of use of library resources, library practices should be seen in terms of modalities of use. The identification of library performance indicators of social impact may include the number of voluntary and community groups normally linked to the library service, the proportion of hours when libraries are used for organized activities apart from traditional library services, the staff time percentage dedicated to contact with the public, and formal connections with schools and colleges as well as with local businesses.

5. What do SDGs mean for EBLIDA?

EBLIDA's engagement in SDG is a must. SDG implementation in European libraries has to be interpreted according to the EU context. For example, Goal 1 “No Poverty” library projects very often do not deal with absolute poverty, but with relative poverty with a view to breaking the poverty chain. Goal 2 “Zero Hunger” library projects focus more on food waste and security than on food shortage: the European Commission has given priority to the fight against obesity and the encouragement given to organic farming.

Second, sustainability indicators in the European Union reflect the priority changes described in EU National Voluntary Reports. In several cases, however, EU indicators depart from them and evaluate sub-targets which are EU country specific. And thirdly, a wide array of EU programmes and projects have been subjected to a re-think and are re-adapting in order to comply with the 2030 Agenda objectives. A large amount of funding opportunities are therefore available to European stakeholders involved in the implementation of SDGs, provided that they take into account EU specific policies and the objectives set up by EU programmes.

As it should be for all libraries, SDG-oriented EBLIDA activities are not accessories to the EBLIDA core mission. In 2019 the EBLIDA Council approved a 2019-2022 Strategic Plan in four strands: 1) Advocacy at political level; 2) Enhance library legislation; 3) Policy-Making in Libraries and 4) Support library education and socio-cultural development. Our SDG engagement is not beyond or beside the activities included in the Strategic Plan; our involvement in the 2030 Agenda consists of re-framing current EBLIDA activities into the SD framework.

SDGs are a policy to pursue, an overall scheme to implement with statistical reporting impacting on sustainability indicators. In other words, we are looking for an administrative culture of sustainability.

About the Newsletter

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