The President’s Editorial:
The 28th EBLIDA Conference and a new format for our Newsletter

Dear colleagues,

First of all, let me wish you all a new year full of joy and prosperity! I hope that you have returned from an enjoyable break and that you are ready to go forward with us, into this new and exciting year and decade ahead. I look forward to working together with you, and hopefully to meeting you in Belgrade in June of this year!

The January 2020 issue of the EBLIDA Newsletter is special for two reasons. First, this issue is fully dedicated to the 28th EBLIDA Conference taking place in Belgrade on 22-23 June 2020. The topic of the Conference is Sustainable Development Goals: what to do, how and with whom European libraries can work for a better World.

The articles included in this Newsletter are framing sustainable activities in libraries into the broader context of the European Union SDG programme. The first session of the Conference is dedicated to the general objectives of the Conference and EBLIDA’s strategy and achievements, so far. We expect that the Conference will mark a trigger point for an SDG-oriented library strategy in Europe and the beginning of a roadmap that will raise the status of European libraries and allow them to make the most out of the European programmes on sustainable development. As an inter-governmental organisation, the United Nations use National Voluntary Reports to measure the progress of Member States towards the attainment of the 2030 Agenda. As a
European organisation, EBLIDA is investigating whether, and to what extent, European libraries can adopt a joint approach to SDGs and nurture a common culture of sustainability. The presence of Barbara Lison, IFLA President-Elect, as keynote speaker will ensure that library experiences from other parts of the world will be brought to the European stage.

The second Session of the Conference is dedicated to SDG project evaluation – a problematic issue, indeed. The real lifeblood of the UN SDG programme is in its 169 targets and 232 indicators, which map what is indivisible in development and chart the requirements for the planet to be sustainable. Irrespective of the fact that UN indicators are sometimes difficult to implement or do not rely on fully trustworthy statistics, measurement is the real strength of Sustainable Development programmes. Beyond empty rhetoric and political interest, figures and percentages ascertain the willingness and the sincerity of governmental efforts towards sustainability.

Evaluative working methods will be applied to several SDG European projects in libraries with qualitative assessments which measure how library SDG projects are successfully implemented. Tools and services developed within the EBLIDA SDG European House will be used. The EBLIDA SDG House includes the EBLIDA Matrix - a situation room where the latest news on SDG European programmes and indicators are channeled - and an access-to-information room - a partnership with NewsGuard aimed at combating fake news and misinformation. More rooms are now being opened.

This Newsletter issue is special also for another reason. EBLIDA has partnered with NewsGuard in order to combat fake news in libraries. The best way of showing how NewsGuard is functioning is to apply NewsGuard’s nine formal criteria of credibility and transparency to our corporate communication, and in particular to the format of the EBLIDA Newsletter. We decided therefore to designate a responsible for the publication, to show the names of the creators of the articles and to report regularly about errors and false information. We expect another NewsGuard evaluation later in 2020 and we trust that red ratings resulting from the first NewsGuard evaluation will turn green.

“Every beginning is only a sequel”, said the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska. We enter the new Year with feelings of optimism and the idea that we can build upon EBLIDA’s past achievements to create momentum for public libraries in order to start an exciting and eventful 2020.

Yours sincerely,

Ton van Vlimmeren
EBLIDA President
Session One: Introduction

There is nothing fanciful in the title of the 28th EBLIDA Conference: if libraries change people’s lives, they may also change the world. Just as the United Nations Sustainable Development programme, the EBLIDA strategy is dictated by sheer necessity: the need to create more inclusive societies and to save the planet from the harmful activities of its inhabitants. Inclusive societies are those where people aggregate and live in peaceful coexistence. Movements of populations are encouraged by climate change, where emergency is turning more often than expected into climate disasters. Working for a better world is a universal commitment; no longer a moral imperative, it has become a matter of urgency.

The implementation of Sustainable Development Goals is providing a new challenging framework for libraries. For some librarians, SDGs do not add anything to library work and objectives; after all, libraries are per se sustainable agencies. There is something true in this statement, but the application of SDGs in libraries does not translate into a change in the nature of the work of libraries; it is first and foremost a change in the perspective in how libraries assess their own activities.

In linking the cultural, informational and educational objectives of European libraries to the EU 2030 Agenda, the concept of the “social” library can thrive in a political environment that, at least in Europe, seems to be prone to a full commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It also means to proceed to an evaluation of SDG projects in libraries, that is not based on internal or introverted criteria, but is rooted in the machinery of a global and comprehensive set of European and UN SDG indicators.

The 28th EBLIDA Conference therefore has four objectives:

- To present the EBLIDA Strategy on SDGs to a wide audience by creating awareness on policies and programmes developed at European level;
- To evaluate SDG stories on the basis of the working methods elaborated by the ELSA Working group;
- To allow library professionals and administrators to get into a full-immersion experience of the administrative culture of sustainability;
- To stimulate library advocacy from below, close to national and local policies on SDGs.
Session Two: Strategies
The EBLIDA Strategy on Sustainable Development Goals

The UN SDG programme was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015. Unlike its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), UN SDGs do not hinge on a traditional philosophy of international development, where States having a high national income support the development of more disadvantaged countries.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has drastically broadened the notion of international development by encompassing, in an integrated fashion, its social, economic and environmental dimensions. It has superseded the donor-recipient pattern in favour of a universal and holistic partnership where all countries have an equal level and dignity and they all share the responsibility to contribute, within the limits of their capacities, to the attainment of the SDGs. With its 169 targets and 232 approved indicators, the UN SDG programme is bringing about a tidal movement in societies all over the world – and this movement has deserved enthusiastic support by libraries.

SDG strategy in libraries were initiated by IFLA through its work on the Green Library. This strategy resulted in the approval of the Green Library Checklist on Sustainable buildings, equipment, and management (2013) and the Storytelling manual released in 2018. Beyond the international approach, it is now time to get into regional / national ways of sustaining development. EBLIDA's tasks are to a) create awareness about the European road towards Sustainable Development, b) support European libraries in the attainment of SDGs, c) compare library indicators with EU sustainability indicators and, finally, d) help libraries utilise and align their objectives with EU programmes designed to implement SDGs in Europe.

EBLIDA entered into the SDG business in 2019 with the construction of the SDG European House, including the EBLIDA Matrix, a list of EU programmes focused on Sustainable Development, and the EBLIDA partnership with NewsGuard, in order to attain SDG 16, Target 10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements. Another initiative closely linked with SDG development is the creation of the ELSA (European Libraries and Sustainability Assessment) Working Group. With a one-year mandate, ELSA uses impact studies and working methods to evaluate SDG projects in libraries.

SDGs may also work as a political and intellectual framework of the 2019-2022 four-strand EBLIDA Strategic Plan. The first Strand - The Political Framework - consists of advocacy for libraries in collaboration with PL 2030, IFLA, LIBER and SPARC Europe: a Library Manifesto for Europe has been diffused among MEPs. We are also cooperating with PL2030 in creating awareness on Generation Code – an exhibition at the European Parliament of the most advanced and technology-oriented projects in libraries. We also back PL2030 in their “Library Lovers” programme – a club of Members of the European Parliament supporting library development. We would like now to create awareness on libraries and SDGs within European institutions, in order to show the level of engagement and the big investment libraries are making in the attainment of SDGs.

EBLIDA is also developing national / legislation and policies which are in line with SDG objectives. These policies should be supported by appropriate library indicators which would measure, country by country and objective by objective, European libraries’ ability to work with external partners and to fully exploit European SDG-oriented programmes. EBLIDA’s strategy will be explained in Milan (March 2020) and Riga (April 2020). In the first
Why a European Strategy for Sustainable Development Goals

All countries have an equal level and dignity and they all share the responsibility to contribute to the attainment of the SDGs. National SDG contributions are expressed in Voluntary National Reviews, where every country takes stock of, and assesses progress and shortcomings in the implementation of SDGs at national level. In 2017, the European Union as an organisation created a multi-stakeholder platform, including European high-level experts and policy-makers in sustainability. The aim of the multi-stakeholder platform is to advise the European Commission on the implementation of the SDGs.

There are several reasons why the EU approach can be considered different from the one set up at UN level. The goals are interpreted according to the EU context; for example, EU Programmes and projects within Goal No. 2: “Zero Hunger” focus more on food wastage and food security than on food shortage. Unlike many disadvantaged regions of the world, which face hunger, the EU’s central nutritional challenge is obesity; therefore, the European Commission has given priority to the fight against obesity and has encouraged organic farming.

Not all 232 sustainability indicators are applied in Europe. Eurostat has set up its own series of 100 indicators which mirror those present in the UN SDG scheme in most cases. In other cases, however, they depart from them and evaluate sub-targets which are EU-specific. For instance, the main Eurostat indicator assessing the implementation of Goal no. 2 is the percentage of obesity in population – an indicator which is not included in the thirteen UN indicators used to measure the attainment of Goal no. 2 at international level.

The European Commission has made extensive efforts to introduce sustainability elements into EU activities through the integration of SDG targets into almost all EU programmes. Financial support is provided 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. They are an interesting window of opportunity for libraries, if libraries are able to get out of their traditional lines of activities and to interact with external actors involved in the development of SDGs.

European libraries may be tempted to place more emphasis on several goals and discard others that don’t align with presumed European priorities. This lack of an overall perspective is misleading and tends to forget that big investments on sustainability are doomed to fail if they do not come together with changes in lifestyle and individual habits. To refer to the Goal 2 example, library policies may be felt “inappropriate” since there are few cases of malnourishment, food insecurity, malnutrition and stunting in Europe or, if they exist, they are concentrated in a relatively small pockets of areas. If the fight against obesity becomes a priority, European libraries could, in association with third-party organisations (NGOs, associations and charitable organisations), initiate awareness activities and training events aiming to contrast bad nutritional habits among library users. The same change in perspective, the same alliance with SDG implementers could apply to all SDGs implemented in libraries.
Impact studies measure how a sector has improved as a result of a new governmental / local policy or initiative. In Europe, the economic, societal and cultural impact of libraries has been investigated in several countries: in Latvia, Spain, Denmark and the UK. In general, studies on library economic impact have come to the conclusion that for each dollar of taxpayers’ money invested in public libraries, the libraries – on average – return a value to the citizens of up to 4 to 5 times more.

An ISO standard designates the “Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries” (ISO 16439:2014). Nevertheless, working methods may differ in relation to the categorization of library areas. Libraries may impact on individuals - in terms of abilities and representations -, on society - in terms of social inclusion, cultural heritage, public health and reinforcement of democracy -, or on the national/local economy - in terms of Return on Investment (RoI).

The same ISO standard lists three methods for evaluation:

- inferred evidence, which is brought forward by library statistics that are routinely collected and monitored;
- solicited evidence, based on direct consultation of users, generally by means of a questionnaire, interviews or focus groups; and
- observed evidence, including observation of users by researchers or remotely via video-recording or log analysis.

Impact studies have their own opacities and some factors can clearly undermine the proper application of their methodologies in the field of libraries. Normally, a high level of user satisfaction is considered appreciative of the service which is under evaluation; nevertheless, it may also connote conservative attitudes vis-à-vis services that are declining or are technologically poor.

The analysis of data may also infer judgements which are not always supported by logical evidence. It is not because an event occurs regularly or follows the regular emergence of another event that the relation between the two should be considered its provoking cause or effect. And finally, whatever methodology is used, impact studies are normally expensive and libraries are often too small and poorly resourced to undertake this kind of evaluation.

In spite of these caveats, it would be wrong to overestimate fallacies in library impact studies and underestimate their influence on the decision-making process. Elected Members, administrators and granters need impact studies in order to build a narrative that supports institutional choices and underpins the policy-making process. Library indicators may not be universal, nor adapted to any typology of library, nor be available on a historical basis to show trends and deviations. Neither can they be easily comparable with indicators of a different nature. Nevertheless, they lead to a deliberative process which is based on shared understanding, learning processes, participation and stakeholders’ involvement. When this is the case, it is the solidity of the process, and not the precision of the mechanisms, that is crucial for library development.

The third Session of the 28th Conference will examine the pros and the cons of Impact studies and how they can be usefully applied in the evaluation of SDG projects.

SDG Library Indicators

European libraries rattle off figures and statistics concerning the annual number of library visitors...
in assessing the volume of library business, they have raised the objections of library experts since they reflect quantitative outputs and do not shed enough light on library outcomes - the intrinsic value of the library to the user. The use of current library statistics for advocacy purposes is therefore limited, since performances assessed in a quantitative way fail to convince politicians and policy-makers about the library’s impact on the socio-cultural and economic development of a country or a region.

The relevance of SDGs for libraries has been demonstrated in an interesting experience reported by Selenay Aytac, who listed SDG policies in libraries and related indicators for 46 SDG Targets out of 169. Nevertheless, comparing library performance indicators identified by impact studies with SDG indicators poses a problem of pragmatism. However hard libraries are working to meet sustainability, how determinant can they be to contribute to goals’ attainment? What realistically can they do to reduce pollution, offer more access to clean fuel and integrate renewable energy into end-use applications in buildings, transport and industry (UN SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy)? Only courageous, ambitious and coherent governmental measures can create the conditions when the tipping point is reached and a society is steadily nested into sustainable growth and it would be an illusory and self-congratulatory exercise to link massive campaigns on clean energy promoted by libraries to successful policies promoted at international, national and local level.

Some kind of “intermediate” indicators may be needed, which take into account methodologies provided by library impact studies, SDG policies at European level and indicators evaluating SDG targets. Half-way between UN/Eurostat indicators and indicators commonly applied in libraries, these data should be collected in a standardised way and be validated by scientific expertise. On the basis of these indicators and the ability of incorporating evaluative methods and practices promoted by impact studies, libraries would generate adequate advocacy narratives for elected Members, administrators and granters.

Session Four: Workshops

Libraries’ cultural and educational objectives are not developed in an abstract manner. They are closely linked to the sustainability orientations pursued by the communities they intend to serve. Therefore, almost any library project may qualify for one or more SDGs provided that project managers / administrators are able to eject themselves from library precincts and approach like-minded people operating in other sectors. Project managers / administrators should be able to understand the language used in SDG implementation, the procedures that are followed and the ways projects are evaluated. In other words, librarians need to master an administrative culture of sustainability.

There are currently 230 individual indicators, each of them managed by a custodian agency, aiming to monitor the 17 SDG goals and 169 targets. To what extent are librarians aware of this complex UN SDG architecture? If all countries have an equal level of dignity and share the responsibility to contribute to the attainment of the SDGs, there may be specific nation-related or continent-related policies and indicators. Are librarians aware of EU SDG policies and indicators? And what happens if SDG policies implemented in libraries are not covered by any specific indicator?

The Working Group sessions of the 28th EBLIDA Conference will focus on European SDG
SDG-oriented project. Split into several groups, participants in the EBLIDA Conference will be assisted by EBLIDA experts on how to report about, and evaluate SDG projects in libraries.

The very first step in any SDG-oriented library project is to identify the relevant SDG and, within the SDG, the Target the library project is aiming to attain. It is important to understand whether the rationale for an SDG project is for the benefit of people, of the planet or of general prosperity (the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability).

A variety of SDG-oriented programmes is offered by the European Union; some of them correspond to an individual SDG; some others cover several SDGs. These programme have triggered on-going SDG policies and are a reference for SDG library projects. They can represent opportunities for funding and therefore this aspect will receive adequate attention in the Working Group sessions.

EU SDG-oriented programmes strive to attain SDG targets on the basis of designated indicators provided by the UN SDG website or also designated by Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union. The EBLIDA Matrix provides a list of the SDG-oriented European Union programmes as well as the List of Eurostat indicators.

At the end of the Workshop, participants will be empowered to participate in the European-wide debate on sustainability, to deal with European SDG indicators, to understand the frame of reference common to SDG operators. They will be able to interact with SDG implementers in successful and ambitious sustainability projects.

- Official Conference website
- Registration information & Fees
- Online Registration (Early bird rate)

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Reporting about errors and false information in the Newsletter

In the EBLIDA Newsletter (November issue) it was stated that Ms. Ulrika Domellöf-Mattson was on the EBLIDA Executive Committee from 2009-2018. In fact she was Member of the EC from 2012 to 2018.

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About the Newsletter

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Editors: Unless otherwise specified, all articles are written by the EBLIDA Secretariat.

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Events and Dates in January 2020

January 14-15
Academic Publishing in Europe (APE 2020) 15th Conference
Place: Berlin, Germany
Organizer: APE

January 22-24
BOBCATSSS 2020
Place: Paris, France
Organizer: BOBCATSSS

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