

ELSA

(European Libraries and Sustainable Assessment)
WORKING GROUP

Towards the implementation of SDG Indicators in European Libraries



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ELSA Working Group Members (2019-2020)

Ms Selenay Aytac

LIS Professor, Long Island University, United States

Ms Maija Berndtson

Retired Library Director, Helsinki City Library, Helsinki, Finland

Mr Christophe Evans

Sociologist, Service des Études et de la Recherche, Bibliothèque Publique d'information, Paris, France

Ms Chiara Faggiolani

LIS Professor, University Roma La Sapienza, Rome, Italy

Ms Marjolein Oomes

Researcher, Royal Library, The Hague, Netherlands

Mr Mats Öström

Former Culture Director, Gävle and Sandviken, Sweden

Ms Ulla Wimmer

Research Assistant, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

Ex officio

Mr Giuseppe Vitiello

EBLIDA Director
g.vitiello [AT] eblida.org

Mr Ton van Vlimmeren

President EBLIDA

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Preface

The reflection around, and the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in libraries is progressing at a quick pace. At first, sustainability essentially concerned the development of the green library, and therefore of green library buildings designed to minimize the negative impact of the library and library activities on the natural environment through the selection of appropriate materials, biodegradable products and the adoption of waste disposal measures in all library sectors and undertakings (Antonelli 2008).

The ferment brought about by the approval of the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in 2015 gave way to a multitude of events, exhibitions and library activities aiming to show how libraries were at the forefront of the sustainable development movement. The EBLIDA First European report on “Sustainable Development Goals and European Libraries” claims that stories about sustainability need to be embedded in a narrative of policies and indicators where SDGs:

- a) are part of the library core mission,
- b) concern life-style orientations in addition to fiscal and legislative macro-policies, and
- c) should not be the object of actions of a merely demonstrative nature (EBLIDA 2020a).

The same EBLIDA document (EBLIDA 2020a) reports about some of the policies currently being implemented in some European countries and also design a post-Covid 19 vision and scenario where SDG objectives are implemented thanks to the European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 (EBLIDA 2020b). Within these broader frameworks, library policies need to link with indicators of a different nature and should be evaluated in the SDG perspective. This is the scope of the work undertaken by the EBLIDA ELSA (European Libraries and Sustainable Assessment) Working Group, which started in October 2019 with the following mandate:

- To establish proper methodologies for the assessment of library performance in the social and economic field, in addition to current collection-oriented quantitative library measurement;
- To advocate for libraries at European level by measuring the impact of libraries on society as a whole and link this impact to socio-economic indicators of a more general nature, such as Eurostat-based SDG Indicators,
- To disseminate WG-ELSA results through awareness, evaluation and training activities.

At the beginning, the ELSA Group evaluated current studies assessing the socio-economic impact of libraries. While emphasising their usefulness both for library evaluation and advocacy, ELSA Group Members stressed the importance of an SDG-centered methodology with practical examples (listed in this report) in Serbia, Romania, The Netherlands, France and, for the fake news concern, in Italy, France, Germany and the UK.

Assessing the implementation of SDGs in libraries is a thorny issue. On the one hand, libraries need figures in order to show that their commitment to sustainable development is not a nice story to be told, but a sound policy to be pursued. On the other hand, they also need to be realistic. Putting it bluntly: what is more effective for the 2030 Agenda, a fiscal incentive providing pocket money for the acquisition of electric cars or an exhibition on electric cars held in a library? This is not the point, however. Libraries and other cultural institutions operate on the construction of mental beliefs and social habits; therefore they contribute to shaping, reinforcing and consolidating trends and opinions. A choral, systematic library action may therefore be decisive, provided that the SDG-oriented library policy is well constructed and corroborated by sound indicators.

The ELSA Group focused therefore on working methods and tried to extract some of the best practices in several library domains. The evaluation of SDGs in libraries is too fresh a topic to allow for definitive

conclusions; it needs further reflection and extraction. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that this first attempt will encourage a change of perspective about SDGs, with library projects being transformed into policies and isolated or random figures being converted into SDG-oriented indicators.

I am most grateful to the members of the Group who were able to deal with this issue from scratch, questioning existing methodologies and refusing to orient the discussion towards easy answers. The methodological remarks made by Christophe Evans, Marjolein Oomes and Ulla Wimmer have been essential in defining the scope of the ELSA Group; Selenay Atac, Maija Berndtson and Mats Öström, Chiara Faggiolani provided practical examples from their projects: respectively LESPI (“Library Environment Sustainability Progress Index”), LRE (Library Ranking Europe) and the collaboration between the Italian Library Association and the Italian Institute of Statistics. Examples and best practices listed in this report reinforce the conclusion that SDG indicators should be tailored and, where applicable, adapted to the library field in order to set a common frame of reference for SDG-oriented library policies and projects.

ELSA’s ultimate objective is to contribute to the strengthening of an administrative culture of sustainability and to the reinforcement of the links between libraries and the communities they refer to. Through the ELSA methodology, it should be easier to communicate the progress of library action on sustainable development to political and policy-making administrators, especially at local level. Some of the papers shaping the current report will be presented at the Milan Stelline Conference, on 16 September 2020. Reference to this document will also be included in the TUT (Think the UnThinkable report and workshops (October 2020), where SDG policies will be introduced to EBLIDA Members and ways of funding SDG projects will be discussed.

Pending the approval of the Executive Committee, the work undertaken by the ELSA Group in 2021 may concern the preparation of Guidelines leading to the elaboration of Sustainability Reports in libraries. Important companies normally considered major agents of pollutant emissions or unsustainable developments - like aviation, oil or car companies – claim to be champions of sustainable development. They draft far-fetched sustainability reports. It is paradoxical, indeed, that libraries – which are per se sustainable agencies - are not yet able to communicate their sustainability assets.

Giuseppe Vitiello
Coordinator of the ELSA Working Group

1. Introduction

The importance of libraries in society has been questioned by the advent of digital networks and the emergence of information service conglomerates providing easy and free access to information. With the early millennium economic crisis, library budgets were cut together with the library’s ability to enhance services and to adapt to technological change. What could be called the “substitutability syndrome” has taken roots within the library profession: how successful and cost-effective is a library service if it can be replaced by a service made available for free or for a very low cost by information service providers?

European Union countries started to collect library statistics in a more systematic and intensive manner around 1990-2000, thanks to funding provided by the European Commission (Ramsdale et alia 2001). Apart from quality, the scope of library statistics leaves much to be desired. The focus is mainly on quantitative output (numbers of materials, loans, visits, etc.), but not enough light is shed on the intrinsic value of the library to the user and the impact on his or her daily life (Huysmans-Oomes 2013). There is an increased need to look for alternative methodologies in terms of measuring outcomes – what has been defined as the “direct, pre-defined effect of the output related to goals and objectives of the library’s planning (e.g. number of users, user satisfaction levels)” (ISO 16439:2014).

The common idea that research should not only address the question ‘what have we done?’ but should also answer the question ‘what good have we done for our patrons and society as a whole?’ can be summarised in the table below (Oomes, 2020):

Figure 1: Comparing public library outputs, outcomes and impact

Output	Outcome	Impact
Directly visible, tangible or countable results of an activity and the extent to which it has been used, such as the number of computer courses and the number of participants. Output is countable and is expressed in (a) numerical value (s).	(Positive) change that has been brought about with library products and services in people's lives or within the community. Outcomes are often closely linked to the goals of a specific activity and show the extent to which a program is successful or effective.	The change that an organization brings about in the long term. Where "outcome" indicates a specific change as a direct consequence of an activity, impact is about the extent to which an activity has influenced the lives and environment of participants on a wider scale.

At the turn of the third Millennium it seemed that the so called impact studies could best measure the relevance of libraries in society. Even if they are not directly related to the evaluation of Sustainable Development Goals in libraries, impact studies are an important reference in methodological and advocacy terms. A short description is therefore essential in order to introduce the broader issue of sustainability indicators to be implemented in European libraries.

2. Library impact studies in Europe: methodologies and results

A number of studies (hereafter: impact studies) have examined the socio-economic impact of libraries using different methodologies. These can be roughly divided into two broad categories: impact studies as such, which assess the economic influence of a library at municipal, regional or even national level, and cost-benefit analyses assessing the value of library usage expressed in monetary terms (Benhamou 2016; Koop 2017).

Impact studies evaluate direct and indirect library outcomes. Direct effects are the changes in the national or local economy that are caused by the direct expenses of the library or their visitors. A multiplier is normally associated with users' expenditure – what they spend within library walls. The equation is the following: Users' expenditure *plus* long-term growth *plus* short-term expenditure within a region *minus* library costs is equal to the net economic impact of a cultural institution. Indirect library outcomes can be understood as the changes that involve all other production activities as a result of the relations between direct suppliers and their subcontractors in the local economy (Nicolas 2017).

Methodologies used to assess users' expenditure, also from the non-users' perspective, normally consist of identifying the monetary value of library services to users in order to identify the wider influence a library has on the economic life of a community, region, or the national economy (ISO 16439). A variety of methodologies can be applied, going from the measurement of consumers' attitudes and preferences to conjoint analysis, and from choice modelling to contingent valuation (a review in Koop 2017, pp. 78-90). An important indicator resulting from impact studies is the Return on Investment (RoI), normally defined as "the relationship between the total economic benefit of the library and the total resources invested in the library" (ISO 2014).

Contingent valuation – the value a person places on a good - is broadly employed in order to evaluate people's willingness to pay in order to obtain a specified good, or their willingness to accept giving up a good. This methodology has been applied in a variety of cases both at national and at local level.

In Denmark (Fremtidens Biblioteker 2015), the value placed by Danes on libraries, corresponds to a total level of willingness to pay up to DKK 4bn a year (€ 553 M), significantly more than the DKK 2.5bn (€ 334 M) they currently pay for libraries via taxes. Even more striking is the fact that this high value is expressed both by library users and non-users (32% of the Danish population).

The contingent valuation method has also been used to assess the public library system in Latvia (Latvia 2012). The annual average total profit created by public libraries in Latvia over 2008- 2010 was almost 23.8 million lats (€ 16.6 M), while the annual cost of the library system was just over 17 million lats (€ 11.9 M). The resulting net profit was nearly 6.5 million lats (€ 4.5 M) annually. An additional 9.8 million lats (€ 6.86 M) was the estimated indirect monetary profit of Latvian public libraries.

Cost-benefit analysis is the other methodology used to ascertain the value of a public service. It consists of breaking down the features of the public service to ascertain its value by comparing the market price of analogous services if they were performed by the private sector. This methodology has been used in another study, committed by FESABID, the Spanish library association (FESABID 2014), in combination with a qualitative survey of users and a survey of non-users through contingent valuation. The FESABID study pursues various objectives:

- to ascertain how the public perceives libraries by canvassing both users and non-users;
- to identify the ways in which libraries contribute to social well-being and to the Spanish economy's productivity;
- to define methodologies defining libraries' contribution to social well-being into economic terms;
- to balance libraries' contribution against their economic cost, in other words, to identify their Return on Investment (RoI).

Depending on the estimation method used - respectively, market price and contingent valuation - Spain's network of public, university and research libraries contributes between €3.09 billion and €4.23 billion to society every year. This is equivalent to an ROI of between €2.80 and €3.83 per euro invested, based on annual expenditure and investment of €1.10 billion. Services provided to the community are valued even higher by non-users, who would be willing to pay €32.10/year in tax to maintain libraries.

With approximately 50% of the UK population holding a library card, some 150 Library Authorities in England are responsible for approximately 2,952 Council-run library service points (including mobiles). This network supports more than 194m in person visits each year plus nearly 94m more online. A recent study suggests that every £1 invested in libraries returns between £5 and £7 – a return of between £5bn and £6bn a year for the UK economy (CILIP 2019, p. 3). UK libraries are important for urban planning, education and informal learning, health and social care, digital skills, enterprise and business support, and to prevent poverty and social exclusion. In the same study, a table shows that for £1 (or \$1 in Canada) spent for public libraries in Australia, New Zealand and USA, the ROI is estimated to be, respectively, £4.30, £4.10 and £3.89 - £5.48 (\$5.63 in Canada) (CILIP 2019, p. 11).

On the basis of a number of studies carried out in North America and Europe, Aabø (2009, p. 12) concludes that “for each dollar of taxpayers’ money invested in public libraries, the libraries – on average – return a value to the citizens of 4 to 5 times more. [...] This is a strong message with policy implications”.

Broad research at national level is amplified by impact studies carried out at local public library systems or at institutional level. When the scope of the research is narrower, it is possible to give what anthropologists would call “thick” descriptions of library impact, which allow for a better exploration of the links between the cultural institution and the communities they refer to. The British Library (The British Library 2013) used the contingent valuation method to measure its contribution to the national economy. The most important library institution in Great Britain has an annual value of £363m, of which £304m is indirect value and £59m direct value. The cost-benefit ratio is 4.4:1; for each £1 of public funding the British Library receives annually, £4.40 is generated for the UK economy.

An ROI equal to 2,10 up to 14,10 has been estimated for three German University libraries (Ruppenthal 2013). Every citizen of Melle, a small city (46,493 inhabitants) situated in Nordrhein-Westphalen (Germany), is willing to pay up to ca 17 euro per year for library services; according to the author, “a library does not create value, but can initiate processes and make an offer which entails effects for individuals or institutions” (Koop 2017, p. 328).

Among many others, an interesting impact study has been realised in the Val d’Oise Department (North-East of Paris, ca 1,2 million inhabitants and 128 libraries), with a view to:

- orienting policy-making choices at local level,
- renewing methodologies in impact studies taking into account economic, social, cultural and educational implications, and
- (re-) orienting library missions towards activities having a strong impact on population (Conseil départemental du Val d’Oise 2016).

Library activities have been evaluated in relation to the spill-over effects on the local economy, and in particular on local suppliers. 50% of library expenditure was spent in the Val d’Oise department; this expenditure together with visitors’ spending greatly benefited local trade (bookshops, small shops, etc.). Val d’Oise library investment is significant to social inclusion, thanks to close partnerships established with local associations, to exchanges with other cultural institutions and to school and academic achievements. The Val d’Oise study lacks the juice of the impact exercise – figures assessing the strength of the library’s impact on local environment - but the gist is there and it shows the robust influence on policies set up by locally elected members.

3. Different categorisations of library outcomes

The range of techniques used to measure library outcomes show the rich contribution of impact studies towards library science. In spite of this, there is no standard methodology on how to structure impact areas and their related indicators (AFNOR/CN46-8 2016). Koop identifies three possible categories of impact: on individuals, in terms of abilities, competencies, representations and behaviours; on society, in terms of social inclusion, education and lifelong learning, cultural heritage, public health and reinforcement of democracy; and on the economy, in terms of Return on Investment (RoI) and the commercial life of a city or a region (Koop 2017, pp. 25-26).

Huysmans-Oomes (2013) identify five categories of possible impact: educational, cultural, social, economic and affective. In these domains, they maintain, “the library is assumed and/or proven to be influential, through its function as a warm, welcoming and neutral meeting place, as a supplier (disseminator) of information, as a multimedia learning environment, organizer of or host for cultural activities and debates, etc.” (Huysmans-Oomes 2013, p. 174).

Five major areas - studying, work and business, everyday activities, leisure activities, and social relations – are also taken into consideration in a comparative study on perceived outcomes of public libraries in Finland, Norway and the Netherlands (Vakari et alia 2014). In a comparative survey realized in five countries - Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, South Korea and the U.S – four domains and 19 measures are used (Vakkari et alia 2016). The four domains are: Work; Education; Everyday activities; Leisure activities.

A recent French study, committed by the French Ministry of Culture (Direction générale des médias et des industries culturelles 2019), inventorises both individuals and societal domains. It lists 12 possible areas of library development, which require ad hoc indicators. According to the study, libraries can help:

1. Develop individual cognitive functions;
2. Diffuse literacy;
3. Develop individual construction of the Self;
4. Diffuse civilized habits;
5. Empower people;
6. Develop cultural and digital practices;
7. Create Networking and partnership;
8. Encourage cultural democratisation and fair opportunities;
9. Support educational performance;
10. Support employability in a region;
11. Enhance public security;
12. Enhance territorial attractiveness.

In this study, individual feelings, like the construction of the self and widespread practices of civilities, are considered worth investigating although one may wonder which indicators would precisely measure them. It is true, however, that two of the main things that make libraries so attractive are the sense of fulfilment users experience when visiting library spaces, and the inner perception that they are entering a more civilized world.

Another source of difference among scholars lies in the way impact is measured. ISO 16439 (2014) lists three methods:

- 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.

Scholars resort to one of the other methods, or a combination of the three. In the French study (Direction générale des médias et des industries culturelles 2019) relevant data are categorised according to their source channel:

- data of general interest (national statistics);
- data internal to the library; and
- data generated by ad hoc enquiries.

4. Strengths of impact value studies: the case for SDG indicators

In addition to different methodologies, some other factors may undermine the usefulness of impact studies in the field of libraries (Evans 2017). First, individual opinions may conflict with general societal trends. High user satisfaction, for instance, is an indicator strongly reflecting the positive impact of libraries. It is not seldom, however, that facts or developments considered very useful by users may concern declining or obsolescent services. In this case, impact studies do not facilitate long-term planning.

Secondly, impact studies are often carried out through self-administered questionnaires filled by respondents without researchers' intervention. Ministries, library sponsors and granters prefer self-administered questionnaires as they are usually less expensive than qualitative analysis based on interviews. Individual perceptions, however, may alter data and undermine the scientific validity of the results of the impact studies.

Moreover, *comparaison n'est pas raison*: data trends may infer judgements which are not 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. This *post-hoc* fallacy, as it is normally called, is particularly visible when indicators present in library impact studies should allow for easy comparisons with indicators of different nature. The GDP of a nation is a universal indicator used to assess the economic wealth of a nation and a superficial comparison may lead to the conclusion that countries having a higher GDP are also those where libraries thrive. There is nothing scientific in it: evidence is not proven in all cases and may not go through the falsification test.

And finally, whatever methodology is used, impact studies are expensive and libraries may be 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 are crucial for library development.

It is fair to say that pure statistical evidence which is not framed into a convincing narrative can have a boomerang effect. Library data compared to data resulting from services performed by information providers in the private sector can produce disappointing reporting. To give an example, contingent valuation applied to library services may show that people's willingness to pay for libraries may be exceedingly lower than people's willingness to pay for, for example, Google Maps services. If this is the case, what we have called librarians' "substitutability syndrome" may turn into a nightmare.

In order to overcome this syndrome, or this nightmare, it is good to prove not only how useful, but also how unique library services are, especially in market failure cases. Impact evidence should be embedded in a distinctive framework and used in connection with other indicators. The United Nations Sustainable Development Programme may provide for this framework as an opportunity for library development and as a trigger for further progress in impact studies.

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda, adopted by all Member States of the United Nations, provides a roadmap for UN countries towards sustainable prosperity, social inclusion and equality while at the same time preserving our planet and leaving no one behind. There are at least two advantages in linking library action to the Sustainability Agenda developed by the United Nations and, in Europe, by the EU 2030 Agenda.

The first is political. Libraries' cultural and educational objectives are not developed in an abstract manner, but are closely linked to the sustainability orientations pursued by the communities they intend to serve. Sustainable development is first and foremost an issue of culture. It is rooted in the system of beliefs, values, attitudes and meanings through which human beings communicate, perpetuate, and develop. Within the broader political architecture of SDGs, the concept of the "social" library can find adequate legitimacy and support strategic planning. After all, culture and education help societies to become sustainable and to reproduce themselves in a way that does not compromise the opportunities of future generations.

The second advantage is economic. Libraries are much more than the content they store in their precincts and on their servers. As "third place" (Servet 2010), their duty is also to develop activities targeted at the public as a whole. A more powerful evaluation system should look at library practices in terms of modalities of use, rather than on the intensity of use of library collections. They should include, for instance, the number of voluntary and community groups normally linked to the library service, the proportion of hours when libraries are used for organised activities outside of traditional library services, and formal connections with schools and colleges as well as with local businesses (Matarazzo 1998).

There are currently 232 individual indicators monitoring the 17 goals and 169 targets of the SDGs, but the indicator set used in Europe by Eurostat lists no more than 100 SDG indicators in 2018. This is not surprising. The UN indicators are selected for global level reporting and are not always relevant for European Union countries. The EU SDG indicator set includes also indicators from high-level scoreboards of EU policies: impact indicators for Strategic Plan 2016-2020 referring to the 10 Commission priorities; the headline indicators of the Europe 2020 strategy; indicators included in the Social Scoreboard for the European Pillar of Social Rights. EUROSTAT quality assessment for EU SDG Indicators (EUROSTAT 2019) includes criteria such as: Frequency of dissemination, Timeliness, Reference area (for all EU MS and EU aggregate available); Comparability on a geographical basis; Time coverage (in years), and Comparability - over time. And some useful Guidelines have been published by OECD (OECD 2010).

In order to fulfill their social, economic and environmental role, and make it visible to stakeholders, libraries should incorporate SDGs into their own strategy and use them as guidelines for library impact research. Various arguments underlie this conviction:

- The SDGs help distinguish the policy fields or social issues that are considered to be relevant by policy makers and society in general and thus help prioritise library activities,
- They provide a common framework for assessing library impact in language that appeals to government officials on both local, national, European and global levels,
- strengthen the dialogue between libraries and governments / stakeholders and create an adequate advocacy narrative for elected Members, administrators and granters,
- and contribute to maintaining a positive "license to operate" - by drawing up a strategy that is in line with government priorities (Oomes 2020).

5. Library indicators and SDG Indicators (1): Serbia and Romania

The application of SDGs in European libraries requires a two-step process. The first is internal to the library and applied to its premises: how a library re-organises itself to be SDG-compliant. The second is external and applied to library's interaction with the community it refers to. While tools applying quantitative benchmarking are built-in features of library information systems, qualitative benchmarking is less frequent but effective, as the two following examples may demonstrate.

LRE (Library Ranking Europe) is a system aimed at ranking libraries in relation to their visibility and accessibility as well as their ability to become community centres or independent meeting places (Berndtson and Öström 2019). It works on the basis of six main criteria and their related weights: information about the library (6%), site visibility and access (25%), service and supply (44%), premises (13%), choice of collection (6%), and freedom of expression and of choice (6%). The chosen technique is mystery shopping - consumer's specific identity and purpose are generally not known by the establishment being evaluated. This methodology is often used in the assessment of touristic establishments, schools, universities and cities in order to strengthen the citizen and customer perspective. Little things can make big differences; very often, small and relatively inexpensive changes are determinant to changing library visibility and accessibility.

The second tool intends to answer the question: How hard are libraries working in order to attain SDGs? The LESPI ("Library Environment Sustainability Progress Index") tool is an attempt to link library performances with SDG indicators (Aytac 2019). The tool focuses on 46 selected SDG targets out of 169 and has been tested at the Long Island University. Results indicated that 6 out of 12 economic, 11 out of 22 social, and only 1 out of 7 environmental UN SDGs were currently being met by the Long Island library, in a percentage which amounts to, respectively, 50% of economic, 50% of social, and 14.28% of environmental goals. LESPI feasibility should be tested with other libraries, and in particular with public libraries, to further consolidate.

Comparing library performance indicators 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 nestled into sustainable growth. It would be an illusory and self-gratulatory exercise to say that massive campaigns on clean energy promoted by libraries have been determinant in promoting successful energy policies at international, national and local level. Earlier in this paper, we already made reference to the *post-hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy.

The contribution of impact studies to sustainability applied in libraries has to be found elsewhere, namely in libraries' ability to incorporate evaluative methods and practices promoted by impact studies with a view to creating an adequate advocacy narrative for elected Members, administrators and granters. SDG 2: no Hunger in Europe focusses 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 challenge is resilient agriculture and organic farming. Two *ante litteram* SDG 2 Stories, (*ante litteram* because the two projects developed well before the approval of the UN SDG programme in 2015), may clarify.

The two projects are deliberately taken from Eastern European countries. The first was implemented in 2012 in Serbia in the Jagodina municipality (Crnkovic 2013), where half the population lives in villages and 70% of the economy is agricultural. An enquiry into the local needs of farmers showed a large gap existing between the Serbian government online notification system about subsidies and incentives for farmers and the level of ICT literacy in the region, in terms of access to computers and information technology skills. The Agrolib project revitalised five rural libraries and endowed them with modern technologies and advanced library services aiming to link farmers with the State, farmers among themselves and farmers with potential

sellers and buyers of agricultural products, machinery and services. Library websites were re-designed to offer weather forecast, agricultural magazines and the Agrolib market (information exchange about agricultural products). Farmers' visits to rural libraries boomed in the first semester of 2012 and changed the local cultural outlook, together with the mission of libraries in the region. The Agrolib project was replicated in rural areas of Latvia, Lithuania and North Macedonia.

The second project took place between 2011 and 2014 (Public Libraries in Romania 2011-2014). Romanian public libraries saved \$1.25 million and 230,000 working days for 116,000 farmers. Furthermore, the farmers received \$205 million of subsidies. This impressive score was achieved thanks to an activity implemented by IREX Romania (Biblionet project) funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. IREX concluded a collaboration agreement with the Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture (APIA), aimed at using the computers donated to the public libraries to fill in online the agricultural subsidy applications managed by APIA.

The Romanian and the Serbian contributions may well illustrate the role public libraries can play in the implementation of SDGs and their connections with local communities and businesses. They also explain how significantly impact studies are beneficial to, and can benefit from, sustainable projects applied to libraries. Cost-benefit analysis may innovate librarians' attitudes as well as amplify library outcomes through built-in users' evaluation practices. They can also inspire local and national administrators in finding new policies and orientations for the library infrastructure.

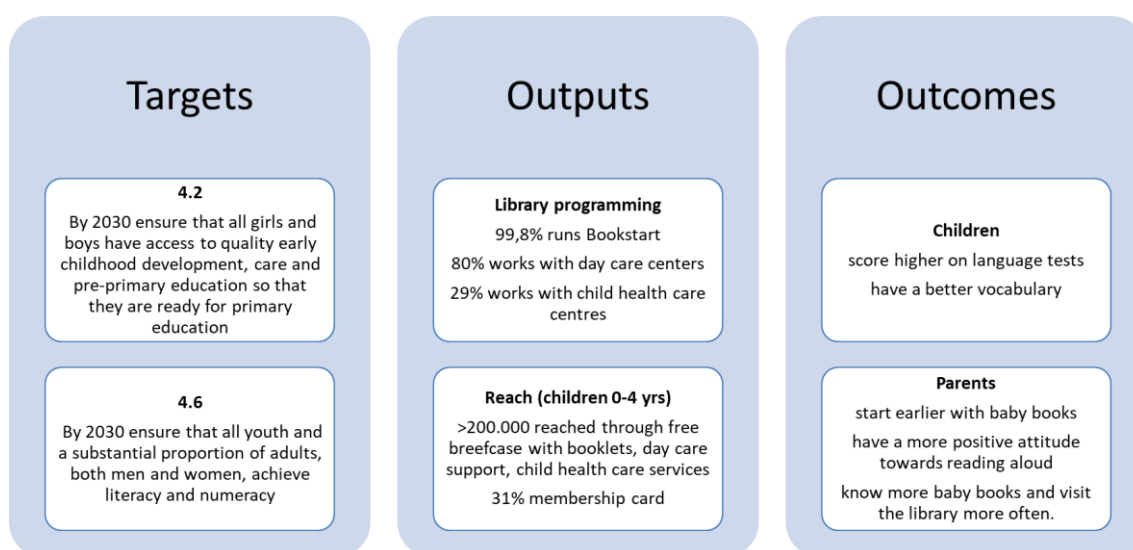
Perhaps the most important lesson to be drawn from the Romanian and the Serbian projects is that they were limited in time: farmers in both Romania and Serbia have gone through the project life-cycle. When projects came to an end, they had made the most out of these innovative schemes and had been able to go from awareness to implementation and from implementation to incorporation into their individual and business working practices. Both librarians and farmers in those regions were putting into practice an administrative culture of sustainability.

6. Library indicators and SDG Indicators (2): The Netherlands

Another example comes from the Netherlands (Oomes 2020). Beyond impact measurement, an important challenge for the future is to use library impact data to assess the extent to which libraries really make a contribution to achieving the universal goals. An example of that is presented in figure 2. It shows the match between library services and SDG 4: *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. We look at the role of public libraries in the field of pre-school education, from a national perspective. Promoting reading among children and preventative strategies against literacy deficiencies at a later age in life have always been an important policy goal for public libraries in the Netherlands. One of the most important educational programs that pursues this goal is Boekstart (Bookstart). In this program young children (0-4 years), parents and professionals are offered a stimulating reading environment, access to books, training and coaching. Both in the library, as well as at home, at day care centers and at child health care centers. The purpose of this program - stimulating literacy and giving young children a better start in primary school - shows a clear match with SDG4, especially if we look at targets 4.2 and 4.6 which focus specifically on early childhood development and literacy. Although the connection between these targets and library services seems obvious from a substantive point of view, evidence will help support this claim.

Information about outputs, as shown in column two below, will give a first indication of the scale on which libraries make an effort. As is shown, there are many libraries that provide services in the field of preschool education. And a large number of children and parents are reached by these services. This might indicate a big contribution to SDG4. The third column adds evidential value to this, by presenting research findings on the impacts of the early literacy programs. These show the positive changes that are brought about by the programs in terms of reading promotion and language skills (Bibliotheek inzicht 2019).

Fig. 2. Connection between SDG targets and library outputs and outcomes.



7. Library indicators and SDG Indicators (3): France

Comparing library performance indicators identified by impact studies with SDG indicators is a difficult task, since it is hard to see how and to what extent they contribute to the attainment of goals. Nevertheless, sometimes data is therefore already there -at hand- or not so difficult to produce or to develop. It can often be very useful to change the way in which they are highlighted to reveal other realities in libraries (Evans, 2017).

First example at the departmental library of Val-d'Oise (a semi-rural department of more than 100 towns or villages near Paris and almost 130 libraries).

A study carried out in 2019 by librarians with no specific budget made it possible to enumerate user visits in all libraries of the territory over one week (Conseil 2019). After reckoning and result extrapolation, it was easy to demonstrate that public libraries in the Val-d'Oise territory address an audience 33 times bigger than the famous Stade-de-France in Saint-Denis! This study also demonstrates that the most important variable to explain high attendance rates in libraries is the size of the libraries themselves, not the size or the types of populations: a supply effect somehow. The idea that libraries may be as popular as football was useful in communicating with elected officials and save library internal budgets.

In 2016, another study in the same department gave the opportunity to list every library expenditure of the department to prove that libraries are real economic players. The purchasing of books, office supplies, remuneration of guest artists implemented by librarians with public money are sometimes invested on economic players established within the Val d'Oise department. Libraries do cost money, but they also provide value to be spent on the territory and for the territory (Conseil 2016).

Second example, at the Bibliothèque publique d'information (BPI, Centre Pompidou) in Paris

BPI attendance dropped by 30% from 2000 to 2018 in terms of number of visits. An attendance curve is a difficult result to communicate with our administrative watchdogs (Ministry of Culture, Court of Audit, etc.). To reverse this uncomfortable situation, the BPI now tries to highlight alternative indicators to show other kind of impacts beyond physical visits: for instance duration of visit, occupancy rate, and visiting experience.

Visits are down but the average length of visit increased by one hour from 2000 to 2018; occupancy rate is consequently high because visits last longer; and visiting experience remains generally good despite the decline in attendance. Another change of perspective: when the total annual number of entries is crossed with visit duration, we realize that we obtained in 2018 an overall hourly visit volume relatively close to 2000 - out of all proportion to the attendance decline in raw data. As you can see, raw statistics are sometimes not enough to demonstrate library effects or impacts: figures may be counted in other ways and tell other stories - there is no lie here!

These are simple inferred data, generally available in libraries and not so difficult to produce. Sometimes it can be useful however to carry out more ambitious surveys or general interest researches; quantitative and qualitative studies as you will see.

Third example, French Ministry of Culture (DGMIC-Service du Livre et de la Lecture)

A national and barometric survey about the use of public libraries in France allows the identification of the proportion of registered, non-registered and indirect users of public libraries over the whole adult population (Ministère de la Culture 2017). Results are as follows:

- registered users decreased by half from 2005 to 2016;
- non-registered users greatly increased; and
- the indirect users rate (people who don't visit libraries but take advantage of borrowing by others) shows that our old usual statistics based on registration were no longer sufficient to show the real effects of public libraries.

This new lightning with striking figures helped some French librarians to value their activities and to develop other kind of projects: third places libraries, for instance, in which book borrowing is one activity among many others that do not require registration. The same national study shows that library users were the best equipped over the whole population in terms of personal computer: which shows that internet and personal access to computers do not systematically end up in deserted public libraries.

Fourth and last example, from the BPI - this time, a qualitative research (qualitative in the sense of the method, not only in the sense of the nature of data)

A qualitative research about poor people attending the BPI was led by social researchers in 2014. The research was based on field observations, mostly in-depth interviews. It identified 3 categories of "poor" users of the library where librarians and staff management only saw one generally: homeless users (Paugam and Giorgetti, 2014). The three categories are: frail people, often unnoticed by librarians / dependent people / people with mental illnesses, fairly visible and sometimes disturbing for the other users. The analysis of interviews shows that the library was used by poor people -whatever their situation- for practical reasons but also and above all for cultural or informational reasons (reading press, using computers to relax but also to stay informed, to learn things). One of the key lessons was also that these types of users did not want to be stigmatised as "poor people" in the library, especially frail people: they just wanted to be like any other user and the library was making it possible (access is totally free without any control). Inside the BPI, poor people managed to regain some dignity and the library appeared to be a protective institution for them. The effects of this study have not only been echoed by the press and within the professional community that seized it, but internally as well: it helped BPI staff, for instance, to justify the presence of homeless people in a famous and touristic place like the Centre Pompidou. I specify that this kind of qualitative study could not have been achieved by the means of a questionnaire: dependent users and people with mental illness don't respond to our questionnaire surveys. I add again that we sometimes contract with academics to carry out research with their students [\rightarrow target 1, "No poverty"; \rightarrow target 11, "Sustainable cities and communities"; \rightarrow target 16, "Peace, justice and strong institutions"].

8. Library indicators and SDG Indicators (4): comparing international and European fake news-related library indicators

An interesting case where SDG indicators differ if compared at International and European levels and how they should be adapted to library work is the management of fake news in libraries (Vitiello 2020). Free access to information is a value deeply rooted among library professionals and in their practices. Freedom of expression and free access to information in libraries are normally grounded in a professional narrative which claims that libraries host certified information, i.e. quality information that is checked by facts and does not lead, by error or design, to inaccurate conclusions. According to this narrative, libraries would be an alternative to social media, which often channel suspicious information as a reflection of ideological or biased postures.

The same claim maintains that information acquired by libraries goes through a double level of certification. The first is carried out by publishers, who select quality manuscripts within an uncontrolled and unchecked information jungle. The second is carried out by librarians, who operate further selection of published information in relation to the needs of their users.

This library narrative is illusory in at least two ways. First, because together with certified information libraries do store historical pieces of misinformation – anti-revolutionary or revolutionary pamphlets including falsehoods or overtly distorted facts, flat-earth conspiracies or, very simply, obsolete theories that were falsified by successive scientific advances. Metadata about these documents are offered in a neutral way by library catalogues which cannot be considered in any way “weapons” against disinformation. Secondly, however information literate they are, users willing to come to a well-informed and objective judgement about societal, political or scientific events should go through the following steps: 1) access a library; 2) peruse documents including fake news; 3) verify fake news against opposite truths – what Popper calls “principle of falsification.” These conditions, never fully satisfied, are always time-consuming. As Mark Twain is credited to have said (and very likely, this is more fake news): “A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.”

In December 2018, the European Commission approved an “Action Plan Against Disinformation” (European Commission 2018). As a core value of the European Union, freedom of expression is enshrined in the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the constitutions of Member States. Very clearly, fighting fake news is enshrined in SDG 16.10 10: *Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements*. A variety of indicators is set in place by different agencies to measure UN SDG 16.

UN-based Indicators. Two United Nations indicators apply to the SDG Target 16.10. Indicator 16.10.1 measures the “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”. Indicator 16.10.2 measures the “Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information.” (United Nations 2018)

EU-based Indicators. If we turn to the European Union, the state of the art of SDG 16 implementation shows a positive outlook. In relation to other continents, Europe is considered a safe place to live, although there is a clear gap, often nourished by fake news, between the subjective perception of fear and the objective nature of measures set in place (Eurostat 2019). In the list of 100 Eurostat SDG indicators set there is no specific reference to Target 16.10, nor is mention made of specific indicators dealing with this target. Suggestions to introduce an indicator dealing with “Individuals obtaining information from public authorities websites (last 12 months)” were made, but this measurement was “not retained” in consideration of “the limited policy relevance of the proposed indicator in an EU context.” (Eurostat 2019, p. 29).

Indicators produced by NGOs. Indicators related to access to information and freedom of expression are also produced by several NGOs, such as The Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, and IREX.¹ RWB's and IREX's Indicators, however, are limited in scope, from both a contextual and a geographical perspective. The Media Sustainability Index, produced by IREX (IREX 2019) does not cover European Union countries and The World Press Freedom, produced by Reporters Without Borders (2019, p. 2) does not cover social media. The Freedom House, instead, analyses internet freedom all over the world. The 2019 Freedom on the Net Report, the latest of an annual series, emphasises the "Crisis of Social Media" and overtly speaks of "digital authoritarianism" rapidly spreading around the globe (Freedom House 2019, p. 29). None of The Freedom House's indicators, however, explicitly addresses fake news, although one of the conclusions in the Report recommends "information sharing among social media companies and between public and private sectors." (Freedom House 2019, p. 21).

In a paper drafted in collaboration with TASCHA, IFLA rightly points out that access to information is central to library strategies to attain SDG 16.10, and more. It also lists the two indicators strictly linked with the measurement of this particular target: indicator 16.10.1 and indicator 16.10.2. In the IFLA report, they are rightly associated to two Indices: 1. Freedom in the World 2. Freedom on the Net Indices (IFLA and TASCHA 2019, p. 20).

These two indicators are used by UNESCO (SDG-IPDC programme) to report to the UN High Level Political Forum about SDG 16.10 (UNESCO 2019). However important these two indicators are, they *cannot* be used to assess the impact of access to information in European libraries. The first indicator is strictly related to media activities, the second measures how transparent and effective national/local administrations are in delivering the information they produce through websites and portals.

Hence, the need for ad hoc, more library-tailored targets and indicators. There is no doubt that a specific target for SDG 16.10 is the fight against fake news in political advertising and social media manipulation. The ability to manage fake news in libraries is normally dealt with in terms of individual competences in information literacy and implemented in users' education schemes. A positive policy on fake news in libraries also entails website evaluation and tools enabling the automated filtering of fake news. Possible indicators to measure fair access to information and democratic participation in libraries, can be: "The number of people having received information literacy education" and/or "The number of people accessing specific tools detecting fake news in libraries".

In December 2019, EBLIDA and NewsGuard partnered in order to carry out a Europe-wide initiative aimed at combatting fake news (EBLIDA 2019). The EBLIDA-NewsGuard initiative aims to show that disinformation can be opposed, and the objective of inclusive societies can be attained without necessarily resorting to information control and social media surveillance.

NewsGuard provides credibility ratings and detailed "Nutrition Label" reviews for the news and information websites that account for 90% of online engagement with news in each country in which it operates (France, Germany, Italy, the U.K., and the U.S., with more coming soon). The ratings are conducted by trained analysts from diverse backgrounds, who review and describe the websites' adherence to nine journalistic criteria. Each news website receives a Green or Red rating. Green-Red ratings signal if a website generally is diffusing accurate and correct information or knowingly publishes falsehood and propaganda (NewsGuard 2020).

¹ Freedom House is a nongovernmental organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world and financed by individuals, private foundations, the U.S. government, other states, and the European Commission; Reporters without Borders is an NGO specialized in the defence and promotion of freedom of information and financed by the French Prime Minister's Office, the French Foreign Affairs Minister, and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie; IREX is an international non profit organisation specialized in global education and jointly funded by several US federal agencies and private foundations.

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