



An Agenda for the Environmental Sustainability and Libraries Special Interest Group

Veerle Minner Van Neygen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor - Carlos III University and
Library Consultant - Grupo de Asesoría Documental, S.L.
Madrid, Spain

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Abstract:

The presentation summarizes the mission, objectives and plans of the Environmental Sustainability and Libraries Special Interest Group (SIG) and discusses how it can benefit its members, how members' participation can help the SIG, and items on the short/medium term agenda such as definition of the group's identity, growth of membership, increase of international participation, improvement of communication tools, multilingual access, activities, cooperation with other entities.

Introduction & acknowledgements

The Environmental Sustainability and Libraries Special Interest Group had auspicious beginnings thanks to the boost and continuous support provided by IFLA President Claudia Lux's interest in the subject, to the trust, support and work offered by the sponsoring IFLA Preservation and Conservation Section and its chairman Per Culhed, to the work and support of IFLA staff in general, and last but not least, to the enthusiasm and efforts of many of the SIGs members.

This session is like the maiden voyage of a ship; the SIG finally got launched and is now navigating under full sail with a good breeze. However, we must be aware that in order to be able to reach its objectives and be well equipped to fulfil its missions at the different ports it wants later to visit, the ship needs to perfect some details and requires further development. This presentation will briefly introduce what we think should be done in the short to medium

term (after summarizing – for the benefit of those who have not read/heard the introductory presentations or the SIG’s site - the concerns it is expected to address.)

Following the injunctions about sustainable development and the environment given to IFLA in general by Claudia Lux in her Québec speech, this group aims at contributing its grain of sand to the efforts for reaching the 7th UN Millennium Goal of ensuring environmental sustainability. Many definitions can be found for “sustainability” and “sustainable development”. Most of them tell us that the concept has to do with: a) durability - the ability to maintain basic aspects, functions and productivity of eco- and human systems and to regenerate, b) respect for the environment, and c) compatibility with the needs of future generations.

In keeping with this, the SIG’s objectives, as initially stated on the IFLA website, seeks to address mainly the following:

- Effects of climate change on libraries (How will your collections survive heat waves or floods or unusual bugs? How manageable will your operations be?)
- The application of environment-friendly practices in libraries, (Like saving paper: how many trees are your printers killing? Or changing light bulbs - each fluorescent bulb saves burning 250 kg’s of coal – equivalent to a stove burning for one month).
- The proposal of environmental recommendations to the profession. (Starting with practical advice and eventually getting as far as proposing standards or guidelines.)
- Increasing and promoting documentary resources and library services connected to sustainability. (Big classics like Collection development, Resource sharing, User education... but focused on sustainability.)
- Increasing awareness of librarians themselves about environmental concerns. (Just ask some colleagues what they think about the climate crisis, for example...you might be amazed at the responses!!)

Since the beginnings of the group, several additional concerns and objectives have been identified and proposed, and the notion has emerged that it has something to offer to its members, besides asking, recommending or prescribing...

What the SIG offers

Decades ago, JFK said in his inaugural speech "...ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country." We’ll thus start by telling you what we hope to be able to do for you. As already explained at the Madurodam Conference, organized by the Dutch association of public libraries – *Vereniging Openbare Bibliotheken* (VOB) earlier this year under the leadership of Marian Koren, hopefully the SIG has something to offer to information professionals who care about sustainable development - among other:

- belonging to a group that is open to information professionals worldwide (There’s no need to be registered with a professional association)
- participating in a forum under the umbrella of a prestigious international organization for sharing information about resources, experiences and ideas and for discussion (which provides the benefits of collective intelligence)

- obtaining the enrichment and excitement of a multicultural perspective on sustainability and development (by becoming aware of different realities, perceptions, interpretations, etc. from all parts of the world).

All of this is expected to enhance creativity and inspiration for problem solving related to sustainability, or to facilitate “rediscovery” of sometimes forgotten but still valid traditional knowledge. Eventually, useful tools, guidelines and models will emerge from the group’s work.

Although the ultimate purpose of this group is to facilitate the transmission of knowledge as it relates to environmentally sustainable development, in trying to achieve this, it also provides for members the mutual support of peers well as the authoritativeness of an official institution in the sometimes difficult endeavour of advocacy. In addition, the cohesiveness of groups in general provides strength, and as we all have experienced, this is a commodity that is often in short supply for libraries when competing for attention or funding from supervisory or ruling entities.

In order to be able to accomplish its purpose, the SIG first needs to take certain steps.

Short term plans of the SIG.

Co-convenor Vincent Bonnet, in his introductory presentation, already hinted at some additional ideas, objectives and ambitions that have emerged after drafting the founding “mission and objective statement”, such as:

- a) promoting the idea that green is good for you – professionals and the public at large, as well as working with all age groups
- b) becoming a group of reference, suggesting standards and providing means for coordination
- c) helping with green projects in developing countries.

IFLA president Claudia Lux, in her presentation at the Madurodam conference spoke about sustainability in, by and for libraries: the role of libraries in activating knowledge about sustainability, the sustainability of collections, the use of materials and energy in libraries, the concept of green library buildings, and above all, advocacy, for and by libraries.

In general terms, in order to convert those directions and intentions into reality, we need to expand, develop and structure this group as soon as possible, just as a ship needs a sound hull and rigging and a well organized crew, fit and sufficient in number, to be able to cross many oceans. Maybe it is not realistic to think that all the items on the agenda that follows can be achieved in the short term, but maybe we should not be all that “realistic”, and rather trust that together we can do it.

a) The SIG’s identity

The focus and objectives of the SIG have to be examined, defined and stated as accurately as possible so that they can serve as a solid base for effective work. Members are expected to reflect about the text of mission and objectives statements and to discuss amendments if necessary.

b) Recruitment and marketing

An important and urgent item on the immediate agenda is to attract more interested persons, participants and volunteers and to make the group as international as possible. For the time being, registered members belong to different countries of the English, French and Spanish speaking world, and from all continents, *except Asia* – this gap needs to be filled urgently. We need members from other language areas and all continents in order to fit and function properly within the IFLA framework and in order to obtain effective results. Creativity needs to be applied to marketing the group.

c) Diversifying speakers

A priority item on the agenda is definitely to attract speakers from different continents besides Europe for the next conferences. (A formal call for papers was impossible this year due to time constraints, so that the convenors had to search for speakers from relevant institutions they knew about.)

d) Multilingual communication

Another item is the challenge of attempting to disseminate information in as many of the IFLA official languages as possible. The IFLA website is expected to eventually provide versions of its pages in several languages, and one of this group's ambitions is to have a multilingual presence on the website. Our initial, informal, virtual social network, Viabilité environnementale et bibliothèques <http://ecothèques.ning.com> is in a very modest way partially trilingual: English, Spanish and French, - but only a few items have been translated - and we wish to make further progress in that direction.

e) Decision-making about the website(s)

After observing the capabilities and functionalities of the new IFLA website and our informal start-up website, members will decide whether it is possible and/or desirable to use only the IFLA site or to use both, interlinked, with different, complementary, functions. In either case, volunteers will be needed to help with transferring information, feeding, maintaining and moderating the site(s) and the mailing list. (It has been very clear from the beginning, that “ecothèques” has been and may remain a great communication tool for use of its members, that aims at maintaining the highest quality standards, but that, however useful, it is informal and unofficial, and is not sponsored or endorsed by IFLA. Members of the social network will be responsible for achieving and maintaining its professional respectability and authoritativeness.

f) Building up the SIG's website(s)

The next item is to improve the aforementioned communication tools by using more of the web 2.0 functions they provide, such as blogs, wikis, communities, etc. and adding secondary pages that can be used by different working groups or areas of specialization..

g) Activities

Still another agenda item will be to identify, propose and gradually start feasible, concrete activities and initiatives that can be undertaken in order to convert intentions into reality.

Some have already been started on the “informal” website, such as creating and maintaining the working groups (look under the headings “Boite à outils” in the Ecotheques site) and can be transferred to the IFLA site. Some examples could be: identifying and posting news items, collecting relevant bookmarks, starting discussions on different topics, etc.

h) Cooperation and exchange, networking

The concerns addressed by the Environmental Sustainability group are quite multidisciplinary in nature, and thus may be of interest to other IFLA groups or sections and/or other organizations. Cooperation and exchange with IFLA and/or other colleagues or associations should also find its place on the agenda.

What YOU can do to make a difference in the world

I remember having heard the phrase ...”you are IFLA”... at an earlier conference. IFLA special interest groups live, make an impact and progress thanks to participation and volunteer work. Most of us are in this profession not only to make a living and because we like books or computing, but also because of the desire to make the world a better place to live in and because the idea of helping makes us feel good. Members can contribute news and content, comment and discuss issues, help with translations, editing, reviewing, formatting..., spread the word and recruit colleagues, etc., etc. Any tiny bit of time and effort that is contributed is immensely valuable. What each of us can do may be small, but it is always very important, and the sum of many small individual efforts can have a huge impact. The reward will be not only in feeling good because of doing something positive at the service of humankind, but also in benefiting from the exchange of information, experiences and ideas from all continents and cultures, and from the support of likeminded colleagues, as well as getting to know many really nice people.

If you are here, it is obviously because you are concerned. What we are working on is a vital issue, as the future of the environment is the future of our children and the knowledge that will be available to them is at stake. I invite you to participate with your comments and insights during the debate at the end of this session, to continue the online dialogue afterwards, and to join forces with the group and volunteer, because as Kipling wrote in the Second Jungle Book: “...For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack”.

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