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Green Libraries: IFLA's actions and resources for sustainability and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

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ABSTRACT: The concept of a “green library” has been discussed since the 1990s and is associated with the activities that libraries carry out to minimise the negative human impact on the natural environment. This research aims to analyse the role of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in promoting green libraries. The methodology adopted includes research and analysis of the IFLA website. The results show that this institution has been promoting and disseminating the issue through various initiatives. These include the creation of the IFLA Environment, Sustainability, and Libraries Section (ENSULIB) in 2021, the Green Library definition webpage, and the IFLA Green Library and Green Library Project awards. Open-access reference publications are also available in the IFLA repository. Educational actions and projects that unite librarians from all over the world in favour of sustainability and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also supported by IFLA. It is concluded that IFLA highlights the role of libraries in sustainable development and encourages them to actively decrease emissions, promote sustainable economy and

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provide library services with a focus on social sustainability. ENSULIB is increasingly promoting libraries' commitment to the implementation of the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

KEYWORDS: Green Libraries, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, IFLA ENSULIB Section, Sustainable Development Goals.

INTRODUCTION

The 17 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 represent a global call to action for eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring peace and prosperity by 2030. To achieve these goals, all institutions, including libraries, must prioritize sustainability.

Over the past few decades, libraries have showcased their dedication to environmental sustainability, raised awareness about social sustainability, and taken a leadership role in environmental education. They serve as examples of sustainable buildings and practices, educate the public on sustainability literacy, and support research and activities related to sustainability.

Founded in 1927, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is "the global voice of libraries, representing the interests of the profession and working to improve services worldwide" (IFLA, 2024a). As IFLA is the most important global association for libraries, its website is a source of information for librarians, community stakeholders, local government agencies, policy makers and educational institutions.

Given its global reach and its mission to connect libraries, librarians and information professionals around the world, the IFLA website is a valuable resource for various topics related to libraries and information in general, and to the subject of this research, green libraries.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The concept of a "green library" has been discussed since the 1990s and is associated with the activities that libraries carry out to minimise

the negative human impact on the natural environment. Nevertheless, the term cannot be limited to buildings. According to the IFLA Environment, Sustainability, and Libraries Section (ENSULIB), a “green library” is synonymous with a green and sustainable library, i.e., a library that takes environmental, economic, and social sustainability into account. These libraries can be of any size, but they must have a clear sustainability agenda that includes: “green buildings and equipment, green office principles, sustainable economy, sustainable library services, social sustainability, environmental management and commitment to general environmental goals and programmes” (IFLA ENSULIB, 2022).

Within this context, green libraries “also focus on services, activities, events, literature and projects related to any kind of sustainability that follows the United Nations Agenda 2030, demonstrating the social role and responsibility of libraries as leaders in sustainability education” (Hauke, 2019, p.1).

A simple search for “green libraries” or related terms returns a significant number of research articles, news, stories, and blog posts. Websites like “Green Libraries” (North America) and “Green Libraries Manifesto” (United Kingdom) offer resources and best practices for library greening. Using academic databases, we can analyse published papers on green libraries, tracking trends in authorship, citations, and publication dates. Overall, the growing scientific production about green libraries reflects a vital and expanding field.

Since IFLA is a global organisation that connects libraries, librarians, and information professionals worldwide, this research aims to analyse the role of the IFLA in promoting green libraries. Based on this objective, the research questions are: What is the IFLA’s involvement in promoting green libraries? What are the key initiatives that IFLA has implemented to promote green libraries?

Researching IFLA’s actions in this area or topic can provide valuable insights considering their influence as an international organisation, their advocacy and collaboration efforts, their resource allocation, and their impact on the entire library community.

RESEARCH METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

This research is exploratory in nature, using a qualitative approach. The methodology used includes research and analysis of the IFLA website between November 2023 and January 2024. The collected information was analysed to synthesise and summarise the key initiatives that IFLA has developed and implemented to promote green libraries. The IFLA institutional repositories were also searched using the following filters: In the “Topic” field the key word used was the term “Green Libraries”, and in the “Type” of publication and “Unit” all resources were selected.

RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCH ON THE IFLA WEBSITE

From the research and analysis carried out, we can perceive that IFLA has been promoting and disseminating the issue through various initiatives, which we highlight below.

IFLA created the ENSULIB Section in January 2021, which had previously been the Environment, Sustainability, and Libraries Special Interest Group (IFLA ENSULIB, 2021). ENSULIB aims “to encourage librarians to inspire their communities into more environmentally sustainable way of action” worldwide, “by providing materials on green librarianship, giving voice to green librarians and library projects worldwide, leading by example, and offering a discussion forum” (IFLA, 2023a).

Knowledge hubs are essentially centralised locations where information, resources, and expertise on a specific topic are collected, organised, and disseminated. IFLA has a virtual knowledge hub that plays a vital role in knowledge sharing, collaboration, and learning about green libraries. A page on the IFLA website that defines a “Green Library” and explains how it may be an active and important part of sustainable development is available for viewing. Green and sustainable libraries should have a sustainability agenda which includes (figure 1):

Figure 1: Green and sustainable libraries

Topic	Description
Green buildings and equipment	Actively reducing the carbon footprint of library buildings and equipment.
Green office principles	Implementing environmentally sustainable operational routines and processes.
Sustainable economy	Promoting restrained consumption, advancing circular and sharing economy practices, and making them accessible to the community.
Sustainable library services	Ensuring easy access to relevant and up-to-date information for users, offering environmental education, and maintaining efficient operations with a positive carbon handprint.
Social sustainability	Focusing on good education, literacy, community engagement, cross-cultural diversity, social inclusion, and overall participation while actively working to reduce inequality.
Environmental management	Setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timebound) environmental goals, minimising the library's negative impact on the environment, and communicating results and policies to a broader audience.
Commitment to general environmental goals	Guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement, and related environmental certificates and programmes.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on IFLA Section Environment, Sustainability and Libraries, 2022.

The ENSULIB Section “Green Library Website” also includes guides or checklists for libraries to evaluate their sustainability practices, a “What is a Green Library?” poster template, information about Green Library Tools and the International Green Library Bibliography in cooperation with the German Green Library Network” (IFLA ENSULIB, 2023).

The Green Library Checklists are a set of guidelines that provide a list of actions that libraries can take to become more environmentally sustainable. The “Sustainable buildings, equipment, and management. A checklist” (figure 2), originally published in German/English in “The Green Library = Die grüne Bibliothek. The challenge of environmental sustainability” (Hauke, Latimer & Werner, 2013), cover topics such as green buildings and equipment, green office principles, sustainable library services (Werner & Latimer, 2014).

Figure 2: The Green Library Checklists Project

The Green Library Checklists Project

The Green Library Checklist, "Sustainable buildings, equipment, and management. A checklist" was originally published in German/English in: *The Green Library = Die grüne Bibliothek. The challenge of environmental sustainability* / ed. on behalf of IFLA by Petra Hauke, Karen Latimer and Klaus Ulrich Werner. München/Boston: De Gruyter Saur, 2013. VIII, 433 pp., ill. (IFLA Publications, 161) ISBN 978-3-11-030972-0. Available online, as open access/under an open access license.

The Checklist is available in the following languages: German/English (original)

Translations:

Arabic — Catalan — Chinese — Croatian — Czech — Farsi(Persian) — Finnish — French — Greek — Hebrew
— Hindi — Hungarian — Indonesian — Italian — Norwegian — Polish — Portuguese — Punjabi —
Romanian — Russian — Serbian — Slovenian — Spanish — Swahili — Swedish — Thai — Turkish — Uzbek

Source: <https://www.ifla.org/the-green-library-checklists-project>

The Green Library Tools, or Toolbox is a project by the ENSULIB that aims to provide resources and stories for library professionals to get involved with sustainability in libraries. The project (figure 3) includes five sections: clarifying concepts, international framework, resources, green libraries in the world, and annual international days. The resources include books, articles, videos, repositories, games, and blogs; the green libraries in the world include networks and inspiring experiences of sustainable libraries in different countries in their own language. The annual international days are selected International Days of the United Nations related to the environment and connected with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (IFLA ENSULIB, 2022).

Figure 3: Tools for Green Libraries



Source: https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/GreenLibsTools_v01_202210-1.pdf

According to Hauke (2019), the IFLA Green Library Award (figure 4) was established in 2015 by ENSULIB, IFLA's Environment, Sustainability and Libraries Special Interest Group, and is sponsored by the German publishing house de Gruyter Saur. "Following the IFLA Statement on Libraries and Sustainable Development, the award will help to advance the profession through illuminating the role of libraries and librarians in the advancement of sustainability standards and the promotion of specialized knowledge within professional practice" (Hauke, 2019, p.2).

Figure 4: IFLA Green Library Award logo



Source: <https://www.ifla.org/g/environment-sustainability-and-libraries/ifla-green-library-award>

The objectives of the IFLA Green Library Award are: "to reward the best Green Library submission that communicates the library's commitment to environmental sustainability; to create awareness of libraries' social responsibility and leadership in environmental education; to support the worldwide Green Library movement concerned with environmentally sustainable buildings, environmentally sustainable information resources and programming, conservation of resources and energy; to promote the development of Green Libraries initiatives locally and worldwide; to encourage Green Libraries to actively present their activities to an international audience" (IFLA, 2023b).

The prize is awarded in two categories: Best Green Library and Best Green Library Project. Last year, in 2023, the first place of Green Library Award was given to EPM Library in Cucuta, Colombia, with the project "Education for Sustainable Development" (figure 5). According to IFLA

(2023b), this project deserved the award because it demonstrates “that sustainability is at the heart of their strategy and embedded in all their activities: storytime programmes, lectures, robotics/new technology, and business development”. Despite Colombia being a country with a low to medium income level, this library seeks to value the idea of continuous improvement with its projects in sustainable education.

Figure 5: Green Library Award - EPM Library



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=679799794190690&set=pb.100064820255732.-2207520000&type=3>

In the Best Green Library Project category, the 2023 winner was the West Vancouver Memorial Library in Canada with the project “Climate Writer in Residence at the West Vancouver Memorial Library: A Novel Solution” (figure 6). According to IFLA (2023b) this project deserves to win this award for “its innovative contribution that combines literature and climate in a unique way, creating education programs for sustainable development that involve the entire community through a variety of events. In addition, effective energy-saving measures have led to a greener design of the library itself.” This programme impacts not only its local users but also hopes to be a model for other libraries globally (IFLA, 2023b). Since 2022, a Climate Writer in Residence inspires community engagement on climate issues through writing.

Figure 6: Best Green Library Project - West Vancouver Memorial Library



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=691873292983340&set=pb.100064820255732.-2207520000&type=3>

The IFLA ENSULIB Newsletter, published twice a year since December 2021, “reviews ENSULIB’s activities and achievements and provides a platform for presenting interesting stories, events or projects from libraries all over the world, which follow a clear green and sustainable commitment” (IFLA, 2022).

Since 2022, IFLA has been organising free webinars, available online, on the topics related to the green and sustainable libraries and library projects, the SDGs, and other relevant emerging trends.

ENSULIB has, since 2009, held meetings and programmes at the “IFLA World Library and Information Congress” (figure 7) about environmental, economic, and social sustainability in all areas of libraries and librarianship.

Figure 7: IFLA World Library and Information Congress



Source: <https://www.ifla.org/congress>

IFLA supports the SDGs stories for the Library Map of the World (figure 8). This Map provides “national level library data across all types of libraries in all regions of the world”. In addition to data, on this Map we can “learn how libraries contribute to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by exploring stories by selected country or SDG”. Many libraries have programmes or activities that relate to the SDGs. “Each SDG story consists of the short description of activity, project or programme and its impact on community as well as links to additional information, pictures and videos” (IFLA, 2024b). ENSULIB also helps green libraries share their stories on the IFLA SDG website, boosting IFLA’s visibility and communication.

Figure 8: IFLA Library Map of the World



Source: <https://librarymap.ifla.org/stories>

IFLA is, also, currently developing guidelines for green and sustainable libraries that will offer specific recommendations and best practices applicable to libraries and information centres. By implementing these guidelines, libraries can showcase their dedication to environmental responsibility, raise awareness about green and sustainable issues, drive positive change within their communities, prioritize diversity, equity and inclusivity, and contribute to a more sustainable future (IFLA ENSULIB, 2023).

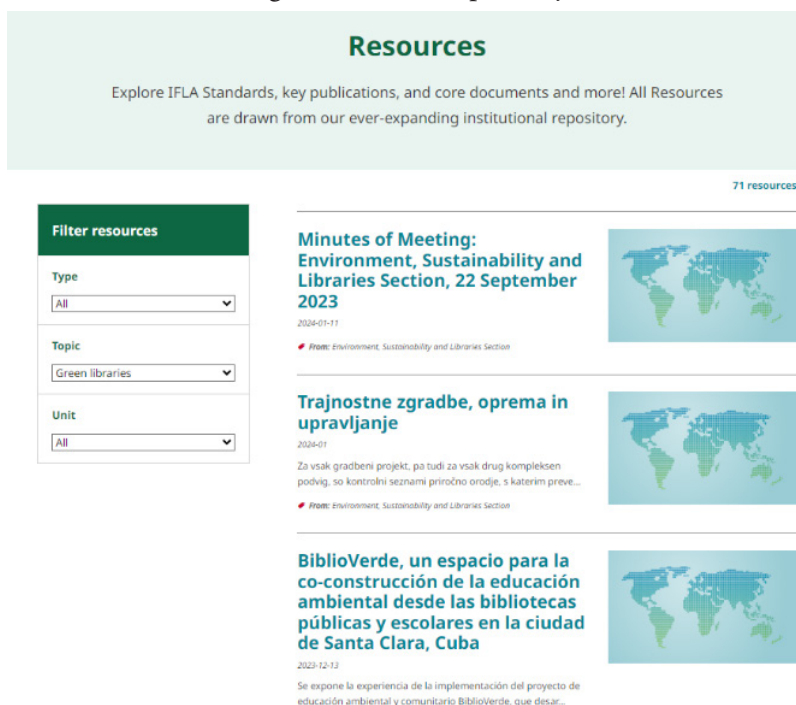
RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCH ON THE IFLA REPOSITORIES

The IFLA Library consolidated IFLA's digital resources into a single online location for ease of accessibility, search, and browsing for those interested in library and information science, available at: <https://library.ifla.org>. Here, between 2013 and 2019, we identified 17 results on the theme of “green libraries”, corresponding to papers presented at the IFLA “World Library and Information Congress”.

The IFLA Repository hosts various collections that can be explored by researchers, librarians, and information professionals for insights and resources, available at: <https://repository.ifla.org>. At this time, between 2009 and 2023, we identified 71 results (figure 9) on the theme “green libraries”. Related subjects are also relevant, such as: Sustainability (52 results), Environment (33 results), UN Sustainable Development Goals (26 results), Environmental sustainability (23 results), Green buildings (16 results), Green collections (8 results).

IFLA has several open-access publications available about the topic “green libraries”, among them (figure 7): Articles (17); Event Materials (19 resources); Posters (16 resources); Brochures (28 resources); Serials (3 resources).

Figure 9: IFLA Repository



Source: <https://www.ifla.org/resources>

Examples of book publications are: “Going Green: Implementing Sustainable Strategies in Libraries Around the World” (Hauke et al., 2018); “New Libraries in Old Buildings: Creative Reuse” (Hauke et al., 2021).

The publication “Going Green: Implementing Sustainable Strategies in Libraries Around the World” (Hauke et al., 2018) provides a comprehensive guide to implementing sustainable strategies in libraries. The book covers topics such as green buildings, management, programmes, and services. The volume collects various contributions ranging from general questions to concrete case studies and is available not in the IFLA repository but in the following link with Open Access: <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/23895>.

The book “New Libraries in Old Buildings” focuses on difficulties and opportunities in revitalisation of old, derelict, or abandoned buildings

into a library and investigates the transformation of buildings that originally had a different purpose. The publication shows worldwide best practice examples from different types of libraries in historic environments, both urban and rural, while maintaining a focus on sustainability concerning the architecture and interior design.

Related to the IFLA Repository and the IFLA Library, they serve distinct but complementary roles. The IFLA Repository includes a broad range of digital resources, such as documents, reports, publications, and other materials produced by IFLA and its working groups. Its main objective is to facilitate access to, and dissemination of information generated by IFLA, promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing within the global library community. In contrast, the IFLA Library is specifically focused on the papers presented at the IFLA World Library and Information Congress and other digital resources and metadata related to these events. Launched in 2013, the IFLA Library acts as the institutional repository of IFLA, centralising access to conference documents and ensuring they are easily searchable and downloadable. This repository is continuously growing, adding both existing and new resources.

In terms of content volume and scope, the IFLA Repository covers a wider range of document types compared to the IFLA Library, which is more specialised in conference-related documents. Both repositories aim to enhance the accessibility of IFLA's outputs, with the IFLA Library concentrating on conference materials while the IFLA Repository offers a more comprehensive collection of IFLA's digital resources.

REFLECTION ON THE FINDINGS

On the one hand, in this exploratory research several IFLA initiatives were highlighted, including the creation of the ENSULIB Section, the Green Library webpage or website, the IFLA Green Library Award to libraries and projects, and the open-access publications on the theme “green libraries” and related subjects. Our study encompasses the following key findings accompanied by a succinct overview and our perspective for further research (figure 10).

Figure 10: Analysis of the main results from the authors' perspective

Findings	Description	Author's perspective
Creation of the ENSULIB Section	ENSULIB section aimed at underscores IFLA's dedicated focus on sustainability.	A comprehensive evaluation is warranted to determine its broader impact on libraries worldwide.
Green Library webpage	IFLA's online resource serves as a central hub for information, tools, guidelines, and inspiration related to sustainable library practices.	A comprehensive understanding of how libraries worldwide benefit from these valuable resources requires further research, e.g. through case studies of libraries that actively use them, interviews with librarians and patrons to understand how these resources have influenced their practices, by analysing website usage data to determine which resources are most accessed.
Green Library and Green Library Project Awards	These annual awards recognize outstanding green library initiatives.	While these accolades illuminate commendable practices, efforts to enhance the visibility and dissemination of best practices could be explored further.
Open-access Publications	Publications available for free, covering various aspects of sustainable library practices.	These resources are crucial for knowledge sharing, however assessing the level of engagement and utilization by library professionals could provide valuable insights.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

On the other hand, we have confirmed the perception that we had, i.e., that IFLA plays a crucial role in promoting information sharing and collaboration on green library initiatives. IFLA actively fosters information sharing and collaboration for green library initiatives through a range of strategies which we decided to group into five categories – Knowledge Hub; Capacity Building and Networking; Advocacy and Awareness Raising; Collaboration – with the following characterisation:

Knowledge Hub:

- ENSULIB Section webpage: This dedicated section provides resources, case studies, reports, guidelines, and best practices. The webpage on the IFLA website is a virtual knowledge hub that facilitates communication and knowledge exchange

between libraries worldwide, enabling them to share experiences and learn from each other's green initiatives.

- **Capacity Building and Networking:**
- **Webinars and Conferences:** IFLA regularly organises webinars and conferences dedicated to green libraries, providing opportunities for professionals to learn, share knowledge, and build networks.
- **Regional and National Activities:** IFLA collaborates with regional and national library associations to organise workshops, training sessions, and events focused on green library practices tailored to specific contexts.
- **Mentorship Programmes:** IFLA facilitates mentorship programmes connecting experienced libraries with those starting their green journey, fostering knowledge transfer and capacity building.
- **Advocacy and Awareness Raising:**
- **Policy Statements and Campaigns:** IFLA advocates for policies and initiatives that support sustainable library practices at the national and international level.
- **Awards and Recognition:** IFLA recognises outstanding green library initiatives through awards and programmes, promoting best practices, and inspiring others.
- **Public Engagement:** IFLA works to raise public awareness about the importance of sustainable libraries and their role in promoting environmental literacy and action.
- **Collaboration:**
- **Connecting libraries with relevant stakeholders:** such as green building experts, environmental organizations, and government agencies.
- **Supporting research and development:** by providing funding opportunities and hosting research forums.

- Promoting open access: to ensure that knowledge and resources on green libraries are widely available and accessible.

By employing these strategies, IFLA plays a significant role in fostering a global community of practice for green libraries, accelerating progress towards environmental sustainability in the library sector.

CONCLUSION

Conducting research on the IFLA website and their initiatives related to green libraries was both relevant and important, namely because: IFLA's policies and guidelines impact library practices globally; Researching IFLA's resources for green libraries helped to identify available tools, guidelines, and best practices; IFLA's advocacy efforts can influence policymakers, funding agencies, and library stakeholders to prioritise sustainability; IFLA's actions impact the entire library community; researching their green library initiatives provides a global perspective on sustainable library practices.

The IFLA promotes the development of green library initiatives locally, regionally and worldwide. The ENSLUIB Section encourages and empowers libraries to promote and help the fight for sustainability and environmental protection in their communities.

We conclude that IFLA highlights the role of libraries in sustainable development and encourages them to actively decrease emissions, promote sustainable economy and library services, with a focus on social sustainability. ENSULIB is increasingly promoting libraries' commitment to the implementation of the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

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