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An Introduction to Libraries and Sustainability: Past, Present, and Future

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This entire issue of the *Electronic Green Journal* (EGJ) is devoted to the theme “Libraries and Sustainability: Past, Present, and Future.” Why is this topic so important? The answer lies in how far libraries and archives have come, and how they now help communities respond to environmental, economic, and social challenges.

The transformation of libraries and archives—from early environmental awareness and the emergence of green libraries and environmental literacy to today’s broader sustainability movement—has been a gradual process. An important milestone in this evolution was the creation of the American Library Association (ALA) Task Force on the Environment within the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) in 1990 (Jankowska, 2002, p. 4). It continued with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), which established what is now the Environment, Sustainability, and Libraries Section (ENSULIB) in 2009 (Sahavirta, 2021), and reached another landmark a decade later, when ALA adopted sustainability as one of the core values of librarianship (American Library Association, 2019).

Moving libraries and archives toward a more sustainable future requires leaders who can translate the principles of sustainability into meaningful organizational practices, services, and strategies. This issue of *EGJ* highlights the work of leaders who are advancing sustainability within their organizations and contributing to the evolving role of libraries and archives in addressing environmental, economic, and social challenges.

The first article, “Navigating Institutional Landscapes: Grassroots Sustainability in Library Contexts,” by Neyda V. Gilman, Dan Hackborn, Beth Filar Williams, Sarah K. Tribelhorn, and Vivienne Byrd, provides a concise history of sustainability in libraries while offering an insightful examination of how traditional management approaches can be challenged and transformed into models of sustainability leadership. The authors

prove how grassroots initiatives can contribute to organizational change and give valuable examples to the broader library community.

The conversation continues with “Readiness of Academic Libraries in North-Central Nigeria to Adopt Green Practices: Strategies for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals” by Oluwaseun Omowumi Akin-Fakorede, Yusuf Ayodeji Ajani, Iliyasu Adamu Jagaba, Farouq Olakunle Malik, Ibrahim Biodun Ayegun, and Chibuzor Livina Dim. The article examines the barriers academic libraries in North-Central Nigeria face in implementing sustainable practices and offers important insights into how these libraries are approaching sustainability within their institutions.

The archival field joins the conversation in shady Radical’s “Sustainability and Ethical Stewardship in Archival Practice: Perspectives from the United States,” which offers a distinctive perspective on the relationship between archives and sustainability. The article examines the different trajectories of archival institutions and for-profit archival companies and introduces a newly developed tool, the *Sustainable Governance and Ethical Stewardship Questionnaire for Engaging with Archival Environments*, designed to encourage critical reflection on archival stewardship and sustainability.

René Tanner and Nardia Cumberbatch expand the discussion beyond the traditional role of libraries as information repositories by examining library services and programs addressing food insecurity in their communities. Their article, “Beyond Books: How Public and Academic Libraries in the United States Fight Food Insecurity,” presents findings from their survey and introduces a set of Food Security Initiative Planning Questions to help libraries develop and strengthen responses to food insecurity.

In “Sustainability Leadership Strategies: A Woman from the Global South Navigating Barriers,” Leili Seifi combines qualitative reflection with theoretical frameworks to explore sustainability leadership through the lens of identity and connections to surrounding communities. The article shows how sustainability leadership can appear even in the face of complex and systemic challenges.

The issue concludes with “Sustainable Pathways: Leadership Through Library Innovation at Western Colorado University,” in which Tiffanie Wick and Kimberly Yadon describe collaborative sustainability initiatives across their campus and the positive effects on its community. Their research report provides a fitting conclusion to the issue by showing how incremental, collaborative changes can contribute to meaningful organizational and community impact.

Taken together, these articles show that sustainability in libraries and related information institutions extends far beyond environmental initiatives. It involves leadership, organizational culture, community engagement, ethical stewardship, innovation, and the ability to respond to complex social and environmental challenges. The contributions in this issue also illustrate that sustainability does not follow a single path. It can appear through grassroots efforts, institutional strategies, collaborative initiatives, new services, or individual leadership. What connects these diverse

approaches is the recognition that libraries, archives, and other information institutions have an important role to play in creating more sustainable and resilient communities.

The authors hope this issue encourages readers to consider how sustainability can become more deeply embedded in their own organizations and practices. The examples presented here remind all of us that meaningful change does not always begin with large-scale transformation; it can begin with individuals and communities willing to question established practices, experiment with new approaches, and work collaboratively toward a more sustainable future.

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