

CASE EXEMPLARS OF HOW ACADEMIC LIBRARIES PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Edited by Sarah K. Tribelhorn and Bharat Mehra

ADVANCES IN
LIBRARIANSHIP

VOLUME 59

**CASE EXEMPLARS OF HOW
ACADEMIC LIBRARIES PROMOTE
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**

ADVANCES IN LIBRARIANSHIP

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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SERIES EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to take this opportunity and introduce myself as the Series Editor of *Advances in Librarianship* since January 2021 in this role. Over the past few years, I have tried to extend the series' impact via integrating a critical perspective that spotlights social justice and inclusive praxis from the shadows to an emerging canon at the core of who we are and what we value in library and information science (LIS) research, scholarship, education, and practice. This strategic vision has required destabilizing of entrenched hegemonies within our privileged ranks, and in our external communities at large. The aim has been to inspire and mobilize LIS stakeholders in a more assertive capacity as active agents that directly alleviate intersecting political, economic, and social imbalances developed over the course of human history. Such efforts have now emerged as part of a larger intergenerational, community-wide international movement. They are publicly transmitted through a dynamic cultural memory and praxis of activism, advocacy, and resistance to a neoliberal global network information society that perpetuates an imperialist and colonial world order with its redrawn boundaries of power abuse, disparities, and exploitation.

Recent political attacks in the United States targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and egalitarian institutions in a civil society (e.g., libraries, colleges and universities, agencies funding DEI research, K-12 schools, etc.) stem from insecurities that threats of social justice advocacy pose to existing power differentials and status quo conditions. They are operationalized via the manipulative brainwashing of the public through flows of dis/misinformation in predominant news channels and the ransacking of democratic processes sanctioned from the highest office of the land. The use of oppressive and systemic infrastructures as terrorizing tools is meant to erase any semblance of fairness, justice, empowerment, and democracy with devastating local, regional, national, and global implications. Hence, an urgency of continued "speaking up and speaking out" in support of social justice acts of defiance by LIS professionals and others cannot be overstated. We must remain committed to examine innovative counternarratives, especially in the face of contemporary political and economic forces of aggression that are facilitated through the ubiquitous neoliberal infrastructures of capitalism (and governing authorities) the world over.

The appetite for power is insatiable. It is voracious and wants more and more unless its growth is curtailed. The dysfunction of the times, evidenced in the political oppression and loss of humanity, has worsened since the second resurrection of Donald J. Trump as the 47th president of the United States in January 2025. As we cross the quarter-century mark, plunged in these insurmountable challenges, LIS professionals need to persist in the doing-and-documenting of social justice advocacy to make some kind of impactful difference. We must explore creative

approaches and stay open to paradigmatic shifts required to serve as a foundation of inspiration upon which, together in our multiple identities and diversities, we can actively contribute to the building of a meaningful civil society around the globe. How else is it possible to offer a brighter future of universal hope and global progress for our children to inherit, instead of this politically degraded and dismal cultural inheritance of doom and decay based on widened gaps between the haves and have nots?

Yet, the harsh political realities of today provide potential opportunities for the emergence of an action-oriented space of resistance and information grounds of resilience and rebirth. New stimulating models reimagining (or extending) cultural memory institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, archives, schools, etc.) and the field of information can stimulate real change for moving us forward. We also need to better tell our stories of information activism and community mobilization in the face of overwhelming challenges to human existence, from dogmatic forces of neoliberal corporatization, political ransacking, media irresponsibility, climate change, environmental degradation, and pandemic dis/misinformation, to name a few. What do contemporary threats of human extinction and cultural decline mean for LIS professionals, be it scholars, researchers, educators, practitioners, students, and others embedded in a variety of information settings? First, it requires actions in the “doing” of resistance via information to decenter dysfunctional powerbrokers and their oppressions and entitled privileges. However, disseminating a forward-thinking agenda and narrative beyond our internally focused bastardized institutional bastions is equally important, as we adapt and adopt an active stance of resistance to political and economic marginalization and promote fairness, justice, equity, change agency, empowerment, community building, and community development.

Advances in Librarianship holds a special place in the hands, hearts, and minds of readers as a key platform to support creative ideas and practices that change and better articulate the vital contributions of libraries and the impact of information on diverse multicultural communities in a global network and pluralistic information society. Looking ahead, my aim for the series is to engage our diverse professional communities in critical discourse that enables real transformations to occur. It is important to propel progress in shifting entrenched positionalities in LIS, while making visible content related to the margins. Decentering canons and practices toward equity of representation, inclusivity, and progressive change will naturally occur. Intersecting social, cultural, political, and economic upheavals in recent times demand an urgent response from the LIS professions in this regard. This could not be more important than the current moment of the NOW.

I am truly honored and privileged to build on the legacy of Paul T. Jaeger, who served as Series Editor of *Advances in Librarianship* since 2013. His contributions built on the deployment of LIS in addressing DEI concerns more substantially beyond past lip service, also shaping the focus of the book series. In the light of contemporary toxicities of the day, I plan to continue operationalizing new directions for single or multi-authored book-length explorations and edited collections by shifting focus on understudied spaces, invisible populations from the margins, and knowledge domains underrepresented in highly impactful venues

of LIS and beyond. Examples might involve a reflective journey that established, or newly emerging LIS professionals seek to document as they critically reflect, assess, evaluate, and propose actions to change entrenched practices in different LIS-related settings. It might also involve decolonizing systemic LIS inequities that are established through biased Anglo/Euro-centricities and values with inclusion of new content from geographical diversities around the world.

Case Exemplars of How Academic Libraries Promote Sustainable Communities represents these intersections and more in its knitting of narratives developed around novel academic library examples that are delivering traditional functionalities of service with extended modes of practice as well as innovating creative out-of-the-box partnerships that venture deeper into embedded communities than in the past. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) provide a framework to plan and operationalize these initiatives in the current reality. They also signify future opportunities of growth and vitality for the academic library in various possibilities offered through extended outreach, engagement, impact, and understanding. Adopting the UN SDGs in relation to what the academic librarian does chronicles their efforts in these chapters to open the closed doors of their library that stayed housed in its insular home, long entrenched solely within the elitist academy and distanced from surrounding external communities at local, regional, national, and international levels. The chapters in this book illustrate the value and outcomes of adopting a globally validated framework as well as touch upon challenges that academic librarians might encounter from their own administrators and others in higher education. The research also serves as an inspiration for professionals to continue their efforts to bridge intersecting social, political, and economic gaps in their geographical regions and cultural spaces around the world. Authors in their case exemplars courageously symbolize an essential need to keep up the resistance and practice of counter-storytelling alive (even from "behind the stacks" of the academic library), especially relevant as we encounter greater attacks spearheaded through various political platforms and conservative vote-bank constituencies in this dysfunctional age of the problematic times.

In my brief narrative, I am also reaching out to our multiple audiences for their support to spread the call for proposals to new volumes in the *Advancement in Librarianship* series. Let us find our "collective voice" in the LIS professions as we identify proactive responses to resist the political and economic hegemony. Let us embrace new roles to make us (and others) all uncomfortable as we continue to "push the buttons" of progressive change, thereby, becoming stronger in our quest to further social justice and develop our humanity, human dignity, respect, and potential to the fullest.

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Sarah K. Tribelhorn is the Sciences and Sustainability Librarian at San Diego State University. She has been instrumental in leading sustainability initiatives in the University Library, including the formation of a library Sustainability Committee and the library's participation in the Sustainable Libraries Initiative Certification Program for academic libraries to benchmark sustainability within the library. Other initiatives have included mapping the work being carried out in the University Library to each of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and increasing campus and community engagement in sustainability projects.

Bharat Mehra is Professor and EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice at the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies, positions he has held since January 2019. His community-engaged action research implements social justice and inclusion advocacy while operationalizing critical paradigms and bridging theory–practice–impact divides. He has applied community informatics in library and information studies, or the use of information and communication technologies toward empowerment of underserved populations, challenging the epistemological, ontological, methodological, and axiological roots of traditional discourse. He has collaborated with racial/ethnic groups, international diaspora, sexual minorities, rural communities, low-income families, small businesses, and others to represent their experiences and perspectives in the design of community-based information systems and services. Before joining the University of Alabama, he served as a faculty member in the School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee, from January 2005 to December 2018. He earned his PhD in Library and Information Science in December 2004 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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Morgan Barker holds a BA in Recreation Administration, an MBA, and an MLIS. Her professional adventure began in outdoor education, facilitating thoughtful experiences outside. As her career evolved, she transitioned into design and international manufacturing, gaining valuable insights into global sustainability practices. In 2011, she ventured into higher education as Faculty in the California Community College system, teaching Business Ethics and other courses where people + planet are diligently considered. She now works as the Sustainability Librarian at Cal Poly Humboldt, where she supports the campus in nurturing the university's sustainability research and curriculum. Her favorite project is being able to sit on the Sustainable Humboldt Innovative Futures Trust committee – a place where student fees are distributed to fund sustainability projects inspired by student ideas. She spends her time cold plunging in the crisp waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Buenaventura (Ven) Basco is a seasoned Librarian at the University of Central Florida (UCF), serving since 1998. With a Master's in Library and Information Science from the University of South Florida and an MBA from the UCF, he has held various leadership roles, including Interim Department Head of Research and Information Services and Interim Department Head of Circulation Services. He has earned awards such as the Jean Key Gates Distinguished Alumni Award and the UCF Excellence in Librarianship Award. His professional involvement spans numerous committees and organizations, reflecting his commitment to advancing library science and supporting diverse communities. He has demonstrated exceptional leadership as President and Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Librarians' Association (ALA), and as Chair of several ALA committees. He is dedicated to international librarianship, actively participating in global conferences and initiatives to foster international cooperation and exchange.

Danilo Madayag Baylen is a tenured Instructional Technology, Media, and Design Professor at the University of West Georgia (USA). His scholarships focus on technology integration practices, multiliteracies, and learning experience design. As a scholar-practitioner, he was Lead Editor of *Essentials of Teaching and Integrating Visual and Media Literacy*. He received the Association for Educational Communications and Technology's James W. Brown publication award. He also co-authored and co-edited several publications on technology-supported initiatives, LIS in the Asia-Pacific region, and visual and media literacy. He taught English to Indochinese refugees in Southeast Asia and served as a Project Officer in the Philippine government. In 2023, he received honors as a Fulbright US Scholar to the Philippines and Outstanding Alumnus for Education by the West Visayas State University. The University of Alabama recognized him as a 2024 Centennial Scholar and the 2025 Outstanding Alumnus for Library and Information Studies.

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Beth Filar Williams is an Associate Professor and User Experience Research Librarian at Oregon State University Libraries, with more than 20 years of experience in many types of libraries and locations. She applies this experience and an evergreen curiosity to understanding our users' needs, connecting people, and empowering libraries as societal strongholds. She was especially proud to co-found American Library Association's Sustainability Round Table: Libraries Fostering Resilient Communities.

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INTRODUCTION

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Case Exemplars of How Academic Libraries Promote Sustainable Communities is based on a key assumption that academic libraries around the world have a strong potential role and a deep ethical obligation to promote sustainability in the external communities within which they are situated (Jankowska, 2014). As we face new global challenges and opportunities in the quarter mark of the 21st century owing to emerging and intertwined social, cultural, political, and economic pressures, academic librarians must change and discard outdated notions in their elitist, exclusionary, and passive roles steeped in neutrality toward external community dynamics (Carlson & Kneale, 2011; Mehra & Rioux, 2016; Mehra & Srinivasan, 2007). This is important for their own survival and sustenance as well as to generate positive impacts outside their traditional bastions of white privilege and inward-looking institutions of higher learning (Mehra & Gray, 2020). It is deeply connected to a need for embedded librarianship on a more overarching level and developing a leadership voice to propel change beyond their support of an outdated definition of education in its primary focus of solely teaching, learning, and research contained predominantly within a closed campus or online classroom (Berdish & Seeman, 2010; Mehra, 2021a). Disconnected from external communities, students' learning and faculty research activities in such scenarios of the past stayed essentially abstracted and purely theoretical (Lehn, 2018). Today's expectations seek more from academic libraries in responding to the problematized need of the hour in a complex (often conflicting), globally interconnected, and networked society (Bolin, 2017). The human impact on social, cultural, and environmental degradation has accelerated to an extent where the question around the survival of the Earth and the human species is acknowledged as a powerful reality (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). These demands require academic libraries (and librarians) to emerge from their dark closets hidden behind inaccessible stacks as leaders who support diverse educational experiences toward making a

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sustainable difference in their local, regional, national, and international communities (Kampen-Breit, 2023). This urgent mandate necessarily requires going beyond our traditional functions and responsibilities of power and privilege in historical and contemporary university and college libraries or research centers that have, for the most part, stayed entrenched behind the doors of their elitist institutions of higher learning (Efrid-Green et al., 2024).

This edited collection responds to a need for a forward-looking and progressive vision for academic libraries to engage with their stakeholders in the academy (i.e., students, faculty, scholars, staff, and administrators) and beyond to get more closely attuned in supporting their external communities' sustainability efforts that directly make a real difference in people's lives (Cmor, 2016). The carefully whetted chapters in this edition illustrate rich descriptions and analytical glimpses of exemplar case libraries in the academy that aim to achieve this agenda. These gems were included based on their documentation of leadership roles in noteworthy examples where academic librarians served as facilitators, agents of change, and information service providers (plus more) to further the educational missions of their universities and colleges beyond outdated notions of research, scholarship, teaching, learning, and engagement. The focus is on case studies of reflective praxis (i.e., critical, introspective, action-oriented, and engaged) and vital narratives of academic libraries that exemplify collaborations working with varied partners (external and internal) in aligning their roles and responsibilities with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) outlined in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015).

The aim of the 17 UN SDGs is to:

1. SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere [No poverty].
2. SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture [Zero hunger].
3. SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages [Good health and well-being].
4. SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all [Quality education].
5. SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls [Gender equality].
6. SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all [Clean water and sanitation].
7. SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all [Affordable and clean energy].
8. SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all [Decent work and economic growth].
9. SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation [Industry, innovation, and infrastructure].
10. SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries [Reduced inequalities].

11. SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable [Sustainable cities and communities].
12. SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns [Responsible consumption and production].
13. SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts [Climate action].
14. SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development [Life below water].
15. SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss [Life on land].
16. SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels [Peace, justice, and strong institutions].
17. SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development [Partnerships for the goals].

Some illustrative examples of possibilities in how academic libraries are, and can work among majority members in the future, to integrate the UN SDGs for each of the different areas include:

1. No poverty: Providing affordable learning solutions for students, providing community support to satellite campuses, and supporting writing and tutor centers in the library to empower the community.
2. Zero hunger: Providing community support for food banks; supporting campus-wide food drives.
3. Good health and well-being: Collaborating with campus partners to promote health and wellness events; hosting inclusive topical pop-up displays to encourage student and community dialogue.
4. Quality education: Developing inclusive study areas; creating dedicated learner-based information literacy instruction; providing in-depth one-on-one consultations to best support the community.
5. Gender equality: Advocating for the library as a safe space regardless of gender and/or orientation; developing research support by women in STEM; providing a lactation room.
6. Clean water and sanitation: Providing hot and cold water stations throughout the library to reduce single-use plastic and to ensure that water is available freely to the community, if needed.
7. Affordable and clean energy: Intentionally reducing energy consumption by replacing original fixtures with LED options; providing research support on clean energy.
8. Decent work and education: Supporting the discovery and use of career information resources; providing student internships and employment opportunities; providing financial literacy and support.
9. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure: Supporting learning and scholarship innovation through a dedicated Digital Humanities Center; supporting

- entrepreneurship through a mentoring program; supporting data management practices; applying inclusive and ethical artificial intelligence practices and policies.
10. Reduced inequalities: Promoting initiatives of equitable access to scholarship through an Open Access program; providing Open Educational Resources to promote equitable access to educational materials to students.
 11. Sustainable cities and communities: Building community through public programs; promoting engagement through partnerships with all local public and academic libraries.
 12. Responsible consumption and production: Conducting continuous environmental monitoring of the library and its resources; hosting data management workshops, encouraging best practices; procuring eco-friendly supplies.
 13. Climate action: Supporting campus-wide green initiatives; providing access to environmental resources; establishing a library sustainability committee.
 14. Life below water: Supporting research of coastal marine ecology through collections, consultations, and subject librarian expertise.
 15. Life on land: Supporting research of ecosystem ecology and global change through collections, consultations, and subject librarian expertise.
 16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions: Providing services and support to our cross-border US–Mexico community; supporting shared governance by library faculty to strengthen the community; storing valuable university collections in our archives.
 17. Partnerships for the goals: Developing partnerships between all public and academic libraries in all domains of community life (e.g., health, finances, K–12 education, etc.); developing partnerships with community collaborators for library exhibits to highlight fundamental research and social justice.

DESCRIPTIVE BACKGROUND

It is not as if “sustainability” has emerged as a new phenomenon or understanding in the 21st century, for it has long been debated with various definitions and meanings (Ramsey, 2015). The framework of the UN SDGs is viewed as a strategic and neoliberal approach that has provided the concept of “sustainability” with global visibility and potentially impactful relevance (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). Yet, until recently, library and information science (LIS) professionals (including academic librarians) were resistant to jumping on the bandwagon in embracing the UN SDGs, not even as a fleeting fad or buzzword that is now often seen in public discourse, news media networks, or scholarly circles (Kamińska et al., 2022). The term “sustainability” represents a holistic vision at individual, organizational, national, or international levels to guide forward-looking planning and action-related decision-making (Berg, 2020). Often, sustainability is considered in its three intersecting environmental, social, and economic dimensions for human beings to co-exist on the planet Earth for many years (Purvis et al., 2019). The add-on word “development” with its troublesome attributes in entrenched neoliberalism within problematic global approaches of “developed”

and “developing” nations does integrate strategy and specificity of tangible processes and pathways to achieve a “long-term goal” and vision ([United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\), 2025](#)).

The UN SDGs include 169 targets focusing on sustainable development, including economic, social, and environmental goals to ultimately support human rights, gender equality, and empowerment of women and minority groups ([United Nations, 2015](#)). These goals aim to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and address issues of climate change and environmental justice. Recently some scholarship is emerging to document how globally public libraries are contributing toward achieving the UN SDGs in their own unique ways to bring about social change with their collective community partnerships and impact ([Williams-Cockfield & Mehra, 2023](#)). Similarly, LIS scholars, technocrats, and educators have also begun to realize the significance of developing their work toward sustainability and community impact ([Albright et al., 2022, 2023](#); [Association for Information Science and Technology \(ASIS&T\), 2020](#); [Mehra et al., 2019](#)). However, until recently academic libraries have been conspicuous in their absence in predominant scholarly literature, public discourse, and news media channels, yet, they can be potentially also fundamental agencies to the work of education and action around the UN SDGs. Through their focused aspects of information-related work or in collaboration with diverse entities, academic libraries continue in isolated ways to represent sustainability and present a unique (yet fragmented) voice in campus activities, often being the center of their respective institutions. Academic libraries are also selectively doing the work needed to build community, as outlined by [Kania and Kramer \(2011\)](#) and [Kania et al. \(2021\)](#), including but not limited to, building a culture of relationship development and partnerships with external stakeholders connected to their local, regional, national, and international communities. Academic libraries must continue to facilitate various initiatives with other agencies that further the UN SDGs, built on respect and trust, ensuring equitable and accountable administration that pushes for sustainability efforts and community development, but this has not always been articulated intentionally. Some positive initiatives have included partnerships between public and academic libraries ([Bahr & Bolton, 2002](#)), and between academic libraries and various stakeholders, such as academic departments, local businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and local government agencies, to name a few ([Henderson, 2016](#)). This collection of insightful chapters furthers assessment of such innovative strategies and global perspectives involving some of the cutting-edge work with/by academic libraries to build sustainable communities, through collaborative ventures, and out-of-the-box partnerships.

A GLIMPSE CONTEXTUALIZING LIS LITERATURE AND THE UN SDGs

The history of the UN SDGs and library and information professionals has been outlined clearly in [Williams-Cockfield and Mehra \(2023\)](#), and although their focus was on public libraries, their assessment and analysis are also pertinent to

academic libraries. To date, there has been limited documented focus on sustainability efforts in academic libraries (Tribelhorn, 2023a), but recently, there has been an effort to understand what different academic libraries have been doing toward sustainability (Pun & Shaffer, 2019). Sustainability efforts have typically focused on one or two areas of sustainability and some of the UN SDGs, but have not always been clearly described or articulated in this context. However, select work is being carried out in the typical tasks of librarians, as shown by Tribelhorn (2023b) in an analysis of the efforts conducted at the San Diego State University Library in the United States (San Diego, CA), which is a public research institution. Prior to this study, the work conducted in this academic library had not previously been mapped to the UN SDGs, with little emphasis or reflection on sustainability generally, typical of nearly all of the 12 academic libraries surveyed (Tribelhorn, 2023b). Tribelhorn (2023b) found that several times, even when efforts were carried out to some degree in the academic libraries under study to further the selected UN SDGs, many were not articulating their activities using the relevant language to represent the vocabularies associated with the UN SDGs. Only recently, within the past five years, we are now finding some sustainability initiatives at the San Diego State University Library getting developed and operationalized, a trend that is gaining much momentum (Tribelhorn, 2023b). Yet, few academic libraries were doing this work intentionally, such as the University of Southern Queensland Library (Queensland, Australia), which had a Reflective Practice Librarian dedicated to helping contextualize the impact of library services to the UN SDGs (Gunton & O'Sullivan, 2021). Such efforts have resulted in librarians becoming more intentional in their descriptions and analysis of their efforts, with an emerging knowledge and deeper understanding of the UN SDGs and sustainability (O'Sullivan & Bell, 2022). This foundational work has resulted from the call of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2020), noting that libraries were and are fundamental in achieving the goals of the *UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, focusing on environmental, economic, and social development. In the United States, the work is being promoted to library associations through the American Library Association (ALA, 2020) Task Force on United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The aim of this edited compilation is to show how academic libraries are working toward the UN SDGs in their daily efforts, resulting in a resilient community, through their socially equitable, economically feasible, and environmentally sound practices, and promoting varied community collaborations and partnerships to achieve the agendas.

Part of what academic libraries do is enhance information literacy, provide access to information, and continually work on making information available to all across diverse boundaries; they support digital inclusion, encourage research and scholarly communication, and preserve cultures and heritage, as outlined by the IFLA (2019). We have seen several other library or information organizations also take on the work of helping libraries articulate what they are doing with respect to the UN SDGs, such as the ASIS&T and the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), a global library organization focused on making information

accessible. Work carried out by ASIS&T resulted in the development of an information action brief (IAB) with seven core elements fundamental for connecting the UN SDGs for information professionals (Chu et al., 2023). The OCLC Global Council (2021) identified key activities related to the UN SDGs in academic libraries that are likely to increase, including, but not limited to, a need for more open science and open access, resource sharing, and increased partnerships with other libraries and consortia.

WHY ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND SDGs?

As the center of the campus community, academic libraries can be leaders in collective change for sustainability and to achieve the goals of the UN SDGs. This compilation provides concrete examples of how academic libraries are already impacting social change in their communities (though in fragmented and isolated ways) and that their efforts directly support the global goals for sustainability through strategic planning, community partnerships and collaboration, local and regional networking, and program development and implementation (United Nations, 2015).

Sustainability is considered the intersection of social equity, economic feasibility, and environmental stewardship (Tanner et al., 2019). It is documented that although many academic libraries are doing some of this work selectively, they are not necessarily being intentional about it, or articulating it in terms of sustainability, nor are they mapping their work to the UN SDGs (Tribelhorn, 2023a). This collection provides an opportunity to understand what different types of academic libraries are doing toward sustainability, both nationally and internationally. From a global perspective, the IFLA (2020) has declared that libraries are central in achieving the UN SDG agenda items; from an American perspective, sustainability is listed as a core value of librarianship by the ALA (2019); and from a local perspective, many academic libraries list sustainability as a core value in their mission and strategic plans (e.g., San Diego State University Library, 2022). This book provides a foundational reference for work being carried out in academic libraries and will potentially inspire libraries not engaged in this work to commit to working toward sustainability and the agenda of the UN SDGs (Tribelhorn, 2023). This collection also represents an inclusive perspective from different types of academic libraries, showing how they can intentionally support the goals of the UN SDGs, thanks to their diverse partnerships and collaborations. The work is structured around case studies that recognize sustainability goals, present academic library research, narratives, and initiatives using a framework that is widely recognized, and clearly illustrate the correlation between academic libraries and community sustainability. It will extend the work done by IFLA (2019), the 2019 ASIS&T conference advisory committee (Mehra et al., 2019), and the OCLC Global Council (2020), among others, by applying that research from theory and best practices to application.

A CRITICAL CONTEXTUAL SCOPE

It was obviously a logical strategy to initially conceptualize this collection with the UN SDGs in the tentative title of the work. However, as we continued digging deeper and making progress in operationalizing the scope and conceptualization while receiving manuscripts from various potentially interested contributors, we realized a few noteworthy realities that caused potential pause. Some of the initial (and final) versions of work submitted by authors intentionally did not focus on only the use of the language, description, and analysis related by the UN SDGs when they were writing about the larger impact of the work in their academic libraries. In our readings of their content and in conversation with some of them and others we identified their concerns about the often overlooked thread of sustainability as the spirit driving the representation in content and contemporary form of the UN SDGs. This was related to the underlying philosophical force of “sustainability” as a concept, construct, mode of practice, and way of existence. Even in the naming through the use of the term “UN SDGs,” there is a certain hegemonic glorification and validation that is achieved, sanctioned per se in a contemporary neoliberal commodification process. Of course, the adoption and implementation of the guidelines through the authority and credibility of the UN has made a tremendous difference in mobilizing many who otherwise would have stayed resistant to embracing sustainability initiatives in practice (e.g., multinational corporations, technocrats, industry, bureaucratic government organizations, etc.). However, the sanctification through the UN SDGs has also meant an erasure of sorts and invisibility imposed on the manifold efforts of sustainability that have been practiced over many decades, if not centuries. For example, this point is not lost when we look at the worldview and life cultures of indigenous populations, the sustainable and survival modes of sustenance in countries of the Global South over many years responding to extremely constraining circumstances, or even the relatively more recent engagement across the academy-community partnerships since the 1970s in the Anglo/European contexts, among others (Caradonna, 2022). We definitely wanted to avoid such erasures and misplaced misappropriations. We challenge the blind embracing of the UN SDGs by many neoliberal pseudo intellectuals and administrators (including white librarians and others), among varied stakeholders around the world, as they perpetuate performative politics to commodify and package the content related to several of the themes linked to the UN SDGs (Mehra, 2021b). Maybe the approach is intentional or unintentional within today’s neoliberal dysfunctions of mis/disinformation, short-term memory and attention span, and social media distractions. Yet, solely practicing lip-service, regarding the UN SDGs, in isolated and fragmented ways by library and information professionals, is a true disservice for it only perpetuates tokenism if it is missing from the very fabric of representations in who we are and how we tell our story and generate impact. Thereby, for true integrity, ethics, and authenticity in thought and action beyond the UN SDGs, sustainability as a core construct must directly inform academic libraries in our envisioning, conceptualization, strategic planning (e.g., mission, vision, values, goals, objectives, resource allocations), operationalization, and