Sustainability and Academic Libraries
A Story from Denmark

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Abstract

The University of Southern Denmark has set out its Vision and Strategy and the Library has become an eminent partner in supporting the University in achieving its sustainability ambitions.

This editorial highlights how research libraries support sustainable development and why they are crucial for the achievement of sustainability across the university. It calls attention to national and local projects that the University Library of Southern Denmark works on to promote sustainability in its innovation and day-to-day operations and services.

Keywords: Sustainability; Sustainable Libraries; Academic Libraries; Sustainable Development Goals; Library Engagement

1. Introduction

Sustainability has gained prominence in Denmark, becoming central to daily life and the 2030 Agenda goals (https://db2030.dk/; DB 2030 Forside, n.d.). Denmark's high societal trust has facilitated collaboration between the government, organisations and various sectors to drive sustainability efforts.

The University of Southern Denmark (SDU) has strategically integrated sustainability into its management and development, aligning it with the University's goals. The Library of SDU (SDUB) plays a crucial role in supporting sustainable development in education, research and knowledge transfer and has also embedded sustainability in its operations and services, thus contributing to a more sustainable future.

In June 2019, SDU integrated the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its research, education programmes and operations. A major kick-off event in September 2019 brought together students, staff and researchers to address SDG-related challenges. SDU has established a climate-focused interdisciplinary cluster and aims to reduce CO2 emissions as per its Climate Plan 2030 (SDU, n.d.) by means of research, climate-friendly behaviour and development of sustainable solutions. In addition, an education programme equips participants to lead green transition projects, with university staff, including library members, serving as sustainability ambassadors.

2. The Library as a Transformative Partner

In order to continue to offer services that meet the needs of students and researchers, academic libraries as the heart of learning communities must effectively capture ideas about the future and communicate the scale of the envisioned transformation to stakeholders by setting clear visions and strategies (Corrall, 2003).

Serving six campuses and employing 110 staff members, SDUB is Denmark's second-largest research library. The Library focuses on sustainability and innovation and offers more than 3 million digital and print resources that support research and education, offers 24/7 library services to all students and staff and provides study spaces for more than 2,000 users. SDUB's four key goals are strategically aligned with the University's goals and include fostering research collaborations, enhancing student and faculty services, digitisation and sustainability partnerships. As a member of national and international library associations, SDUB has identified areas in which the Library can make significant contributions and planned services and events to engage its community in ways that position the Library as a key player in learning and knowledge across the University and in higher education.

After the University decided to work with the SDGs, the Library established its own Sustainability Committee as part of its new sustainability strategy. The Committee's mission is to educate, raise awareness and promote a culture that integrates sustainability into the daily practices of the Library community.

The Sustainability Committee is responsible for:

- Developing and recommending comprehensive strategic practices that promote sustainability.
- Educating the Library community, through various communication channels, about sustainability topics.
- Collaborating with various groups on all campuses to share information and best practices related to sustainability.

The UN's 17 SDGs illustrate how countries can collectively address the largest global environmental and human challenges to achieve more sustainable development by 2030. Denmark is among the leaders in implementing the SDGs, but if all goals are to be met on time, organisations must take the lead.

To advance the SDGs, the DB2030 network, initiated by the Danish Library Association, connects libraries and organisations focused on sustainability. DB2030 advocates for libraries to be key partners in integrating SDGs into citizens' lives. In collaboration with CHORA 2030, DB2030 developed the library SDGs certification which provides a framework for libraries to enhance their role in sustainability and citizen engagement. Several libraries, including SDUB, are already actively engaged in this work by developing action plans for their work with the global SDGs, having initiated a range of activities and collaborations and having been certified.

3. Transferable, Sustainability Themed Projects at SDUB

At SDUB, colleagues and members of the Sustainability Committee have developed numerous initiatives and projects that are transferable to other libraries.

- Sustainable Research Communication
- Green Information Literacy

- Green Corner
- Book swap
- Five Star Hotel for Plants.

SDUB plays a pivotal role in fostering a sustainable and inclusive research community by supporting the development of knowledge, facilitating access to essential resources and promoting practices that ensure the long-term availability and dissemination of research. By providing the right background, structures, infrastructure and skills, the Library advocates for the development of open access policies and roadmaps within the institution and shares expertise in organising, managing and curating research data with researchers and the public. It offers courses and guidance on the responsible conduct of research. In addition, colleagues in the research documentation department ensure that researchers register their publications in the University repository.

The Centre for Special Collections and Digital Humanities integrates the Library's efforts in preserving, digitising and disseminating special collections. Its mission is to serve as a hub for Digital Humanities work at the University. We focus on digitising various materials and making them accessible to the public while also developing resources that allow researchers and students to use digital methods such as text mining, visualisation models and 3D modelling of objects.

Today, as awareness and interest in environmental issues and sustainability grow, the amount of information on sustainability and the green transition also appears to be increasing. In response, SDUB has created a dedicated LibGuide on sustainability to curate knowledge, share information and showcase various materials related to sustainability. The guide integrates the SDGs into all activities and includes books, articles, news, statistics, data and case studies relevant to one or more of the SDGs, thereby enabling students to actively contribute to building a sustainable future.

The "Green Corner" project, launched at one of our campus libraries, is an open space for students, staff and citizens to develop sustainable ideas and projects, which promotes campus sustainability. It raises awareness about the University's sustainability goals and supports the transformation of ideas into real projects by offering advice, materials, sustainable games and networking opportunities. The project also fosters collaboration between students,

employees and management. Green Corner hosts lectures, co-design workshops and activities related to the SDGs, which encourages participation and integrating users' perspectives in decision-making.

In the Green Corner, there is a space where students and staff can donate or drop off textbooks and fiction books they no longer use. The true cost of owning a new book is environmental as well as financial. By providing this option, we encourage our users to read sustainably.

During the semester break, we offer a plant-sitting service for our library users. Students and staff who are going on vacation and cannot care for their plants can bring them to the Library where our colleagues will take care of them during working hours. This initiative has been very successful, with librarians receiving positive feedback and appreciation from students and colleagues.

4. SDU Citizen Science Knowledge Centre

Citizen science is often associated with data collection and mapping of natural areas, but its scope extends beyond that.

Birk et al. (2024) believes that integrating citizen science activities into daily work offers valuable opportunities to build community trust, enhance library services, strengthen collaboration with academia, and promote public engagement.

In this regard, the SDU Citizen Science Knowledge Centre (University of Southern Denmark, n.d.), hosted by the Library and led by the Library's deputy director in collaboration with the Faculty of Health, the Danish Institute for Advanced Study (DIAS), the Research & Innovation Organization (RIO) and Odense University Hospital, has several overarching goals. These include bringing citizens closer to science and scientists closer to society, facilitating knowledge sharing about citizen science both internally and externally, and opening the research process to all citizens across various education levels and social groups through communication, education and learning.

The Knowledge Centre supports and reinforces the University's strategy of "creating value for and with society" and aims to attract and engage both current and future generations of talent, learners and citizen scientists.

Usher et al. (2019) notes that "eco-stress" caused by climate change is only beginning to be documented. This indicates that more work is needed, not only to understand this phenomenon but also to provide young people with opportunities to express their concerns. Climate Future Fiction (University of Southern Denmark, n.d.) is a national Citizen Science project coordinated by colleagues from SDU Citizen Science in collaboration with researchers across the University. The project enables high school students to creatively express their partially unconscious concerns, hopes, and fears regarding climate change and raises awareness of its impact on their personal lives.

5. What's Next?

Academic libraries have always been central components of universities. As universities increasingly adopt sustainability practices, libraries need to design an integrated framework for sustainable operations and inspiring sustainable practices everywhere. The adoption of sustainability initiatives in academic libraries presents challenges that are not only rooted in management goodwill but also in the operations and services that constitute sustainable practices.

Sharing knowledge, reusing ideas and engaging stakeholders are crucial for actively supporting citizens' engagement with sustainability and empowering them to create a better future.

This editorial is a call to action for all academic libraries to actively share knowledge, ideas and best practices and foster partnerships with other libraries and organisations – both nationally and internationally – to develop new ideas and ensure environmental sustainability for combating climate change.

"Sustainability is a mindset we must continue to work with – a cultural change that must be articulated again and again, because changes and shared understanding do not happen by themselves. Therefore, we commit ourselves. The sustainability certification precisely marks our commitment to strengthening sustainable initiatives and emphasises that libraries play a central role in promoting sustainability and the fulfilment of the UN's Global Goals, both as a library and as part of the University" (Dorch, as cited in Rasmussen, 2024, p. 9).

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CS	Citizen Science
DB2030	Danmark Biblioteksforening (Danish Library Association)
DIAS	Danish Institute for Advanced Study
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RIO	Research & Innovation Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDU	Syddansk Universitet (The University of Southern Denmark)
SDUB	Syddansk Universitetsbibliotek (The University Library of Southern Denmark)
UN	United Nations

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