

Focus on Educating for Sustainability:
Toolkit for Academic Libraries

By Maria Anna Jankowska (ed.). (Sacramento, CA:
Library Juice Press, 2014). ISBN 978-1-936117-61-1

Reviewed by Patricia Brown

2014 is the final year in the “Decade of Education for Sustainable Development,” declared by the United Nations for 2005-2014. Sustainability is a subject of global as well as local concern, from Australia to Puerto Rico. In San Juan, the 2011 IFLA conference focus was “social sustainability.” It’s also a trendy subject, so much so that a keyword search in my small library yielded 568,093 results plus a Research Starter article.¹ UCLA social sciences librarian Maria Anna Jankowska offers a timely, broad, scholarly, and practical essay collection which encourages “the active participation of libraries in the university sustainability movement”(2). Jankowska herself is an activist scholar; she founded and continues to edit the *Electronic Green Journal*, has served with the ALA’s Social Responsibility Round Table, and has written on libraries and sustainability for the ACRL and the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*.

In *Focus on Educating for Sustainability*, Jankowska divides “sustainability” into four sections: information literacy, collection development, scholarly publishing, and a miscellany of leadership, accountability, conservation, and values. The case studies range from courses and curricula (in English composition, interior design, geography, literature, and sustainability studies, plus professional development workshops) to programs (an energy audit of a library, a finals-week marathon) to “green teams” and seed exchanges. The strength of this collection lies in its emphasis on teaching as the academic library’s central mission. In the opening essay, for example, Kathleen J. Ryan

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■ KEYWORDS: Sustainability; Environmental education.

and Megan Stark describe information literacy education at the University of Montana as “an opportunity to re-establish local, contextual meaning to the ways librarians teach students to find and engage sources” (13). Ted Bergfeld and Allison B. Brungard explain how sustainability principles are “deeply rooted in the curriculum and guide University practice” at Duquesne (227). Two case studies from Auburn University show the collaboration of librarians, instructors and administrators in bringing sustainability into the curriculum and collection development. Their sustainable expectations were signaled by “changes in the vocabulary used by instructors from ‘scholarly’ and ‘popular’ to ‘credible, reliable, dependable, and/or reputable’” (52). On other topics, Mara M. J. Egherman discusses energy management, and Barbara DeFelice describes Dartmouth College Library’s “role in the scholarly communication ecosystem” (157). These and the other essays expound the variety of ways libraries can advocate and implement sustainable practice.

This breadth of scope reflects a problem in sustainability literature: it is generally more concerned with solutions than with theory or defining the subject. *Focus on Educating for Sustainability* regards its subject as an opportunity for thinking, not for writing definitions (3), yet defining the field is necessary to “fully integrate sustainability literacy into information literacy” (57) as well to build the values and concepts needed for any scholarly discipline. Several contributors (Zanin-Yost, Carter and Schmidt, and Jankowska herself) mention the absence of clear boundaries as a scholarly flaw; others (Zanin-Yost, Brunvand et al., and Leousis and Schmidt) also regard it as an inter- or trans-disciplinary advantage (24-5, 119, 126-8). Though the field is important and interesting, the term “sustainability” needs disambiguation and limitation.

Sustainability is generally concerned with both the health of the planet as a provider of life systems for humanity and the establishment of knowledgeable and empowered societies. It is a future-oriented outlook [and] has a normative aspect (Carr 2013).

This collection also needs a well-reasoned, logical argument about ethics, because environmental issues are intertwined with ethics; library service, environmental sustainability, and respect for life and heritage are not concepts accepted by all, but values. In “Community Archiving and Sustainability: Denison University’s Homestead” (159-72), the inclusion of “pets throughout the years” in the “human and non-human inhabitants” (165) is a poignant example of the values embodied in this article especially, but throughout the collection. These mark an ethical view distinctly different from that of, say, factory-farm owners or Styrofoam manufacturers. An article about the “triple bottom line” of economic, social, and environmental returns (Casey et al., 175-88) invokes “interconnectedness across space and time, involving a study of

what matters for the future” (177). The concluding sentence of the final essay asserts an ethical imprimatur that “librarians and library workers should educate themselves, demonstrate role-model sustainable behaviors, and reach out to their communities to promote sustainable practices” (253). But why should this be so? A chapter about values and the ALA Code of Ethics could have addressed this assumption.

Another neglected aspect here is the sustainability of written language conventions. The text contains a high number of copyediting errors, from punctuation mistakes and simple typos (including misprinting a title in the table of contents and misspelling an author’s last name in the running heads) to a variety of small flaws the editor or publisher should have fixed before going to press. If we as scholarly progressive librarians ignore form, whether in establishing definitions or observing conventions, our ideas will become flabby.

Despite these problems, *Focus on Educating for Sustainability* does carry out its focus quite well and deserves a place alongside *Greening Libraries* (reviewed in *Progressive Librarian* 40[2012]: 130-32) and the less academic *How Green Is My Library*, by Sam McBane Mulford and Ned A. Himmel (Libraries Unlimited, 2010).

In addition, Tony Wilson (2011) adds three “sentimental” aspects of sustainable librarianship to the issues of physical environment, education, and community cooperation considered by Jankowska and her contributors: the future of libraries, the value of literacy, and knowledge itself. Read Wilson’s article along with this book to learn more about our future.

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carr, C. (2013). “Sustainability.” *Salem Press Encyclopedia*. Database: EBSCO Research Starters (accession number 89475396).

Wilson, T. (2011). “Sentiment and sustainability in the modern library.” *ALKI* 27(1), 14-16. <http://www.wla.org/publications.alki>

NOTES

- 1 In EBSCO Discovery Service at LeDoux Library, LSU Eunice, on May 22, 2014. The topic range was wide, from industrial and agricultural subjects to commercial and conservation issues, both theoretical and applied. Interestingly, a subset of articles from the 1940s and 1950s was about military weapons.