

The Good, the Bad, the Green

How Sustainable is Your Library?

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GOOD NEWS! Libraries are, by their very nature, inherently “green.” They are all about sharing resources, eliminating the need to duplicate them for everybody. **BUT...** we do use a lot of resources, particularly paper and electricity.

As information professionals, “a lot” is a very unsatisfying answer. We like detailed numbers! How can we get accurate data about how much energy/water/paper we consume? **INTRODUCING...**

Resources Libraries Use

Paper: As long as we buy books, we can't avoid it. But we can recycle more, and maybe some of our routine tasks can stay digital instead of getting printed.

Computers: Clearly, power use for computers will only increase. Likewise, for everything stored “in the cloud,” there's a lot of energy being used... somewhere.

Lights: Obviously we need these. But can fixtures or bulbs be modernized to use less?

Water: For landscaping and toilets, consider a catchment system.

The Natural Capital Protocol

a way to measure impacts and dependencies on natural resources

www.naturalcapitalcoalition.org

- Natural capital is one of the commonly recognized forms of capital. Others include financial, intellectual, and social capital.
- The Protocol provides a framework for businesses (and non-profits) to analyze their interactions with this crucial form of capital that forms the basis of all wealth on Earth.

References

- Natural Capital Protocol- download for free at: www.naturalcapitalcoalition.org/protocol/
- IFLA's Green Library Award 2016: <http://www.ifla.org/node/10478>
- Kalo leaf background image credit: User: Avenue/Wikimedia Commons/CC-BY-SA-3.0
- Mahalo to Janet Lam of North Kohala Public Library

Want more? Check these out:

- www.greenlibraries.org - A directory of green libraries in North America
- <http://www.ala.org/sustainrt/> - ALA's Sustainability Round Table

Inspiration: IFLA's 2016 Green Library Award

El Pequeño Sol Ecological Library, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico

Turning trash ... into treasure.

The library was built largely of garbage and pallets. It was all fund-raised and built by the school community.

images: Germinalia A.C.

Programming Ideas

Passive:

- Expand rubbish bins to include multiple types of recycling
- Seed Share Stations to encourage sharing knowledge of growing food
- Make sure that any energy-generating systems in place at the library are visible, and that information about them is accessible (how many kWh does this produce?)

Active:

- Hosting programs for all ages on sustainability, energy conservation, reuse/recycling, and local food systems
- Create makerspaces centered around creative reuse
- Involve the community in brainstorming how the library can become more sustainable over time

North Kohala

Hawaii's Greenest Public Library?

Good "passive" design: Large windows allow for natural lighting in rooms. Cost- very little (high ROI).

Well-meant design: Windmills are really cute. They don't end up providing much of the library's energy needs. Cost- was it worth it?

Good "active" design: Photo-voltaic panels turn sunlight into energy to power library systems. Catchment tank stores water for flushing toilets. Cost- high, but pays off in the long run.

All photos by author