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Libraries and Museums as Safe Spaces for Dialogue and Information Literacy

#AskYourMuseum   #AskYourLibrary

On 13 July 2022, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, in partnership with the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre of the Republic of Latvia, Latvian National commission for UNESCO, the Latvian National Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), organized a Side Event at the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, on the ways that museums and libraries can contribute towards dialogue, participation and information literacy, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The video recording of the event: **Libraries and museums as safe spaces for dialogue and information literacy**.

The Side Event accompanied the presentation of the Latvian Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which highlighted the transformative potential of museums and libraries to empower people to participate in sustainable development and the SDGs. Link to VNR **HERE**.

The Latvian VNR drew on experiences gained since 2018, including training and development activities for museum and library staff in webinars and conferences, the publication of practical resources on the SDGs, and the sharing of good practices between institutions, which may help other countries in embedding the SDGs in society.

The Side Event was hosted by Mr Uldis Zariņš, Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture with contributions from Mr Henry McGhie (Curating Tomorrow, UK, and member of the ICOM Sustainable Development Working Group); Ms Kristīne Pabērza-Ramires, head of the IFLA project "World Library Map"; professor at the University of the United Arab Emirates, information literacy expert Ms Maha Bashri; Ms Tetyana Hranchak (Тетяна Гранчак), a member of the board of the Ukrainian Library Association; Mr Edgardo Civallero (Ecuador's Galapagos Islands), representative of the Charles Darwin Foundation; and Ms Lolita Thomsone (Latvia), head of the Žanis Lipke Memorial.

Key points made:

Uldis Zariņš emphasized the greatest power of culture – the ability to address societies through the language of arts – whether it is music, visual arts, or literature – which is very different from the language used by politicians, scientists, or media, for it can touch not only people's minds, but also hearts and souls. Culture can be a powerful instrument for societal and behavioural change, but this means that the power of culture should be applied very responsibly – culture, as all great powers, unfortunately can also be misused or even weaponized, so it is of utmost importance that culture always serves a greater good.

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Kristīne Pabērza-Ramires highlighted the potential of the libraries to foster inclusion, social cohesion, and peace building by offering new opportunities for learning and skill development, by supporting the most vulnerable and engaging in partnerships of diverse stakeholders. Libraries brought, in particular, a strong understanding of the needs of their communities which helped make their services and programmes more effective.

Henry McGhie stated that museums and cultural institutions can be places where the principles of Agenda 2030 are turned into practical action, in terms of 'active, free and meaningful participation' and 'leave no-one behind' to achieve a wide range of international agreements (Conventions and Declarations), and that the principles of Agenda 2030 can help these institutions to develop more transparent, effective, and transformative public services.

Maha Bashri underlined the connection between media, information, and digital literacy, and civic engagement which is essential for maintaining democracy and a pluralistic society. In the current environment of abundant, complex information, libraries can foster democracy on two levels: passively – by providing physical space where knowledge and access to new technologies is readily available to all and actively – by offering services that expand knowledge and in turn encourage citizens' civic engagement in their respective communities.

Spotlight case studies presented by **Tetyana Hranchak**, **Lolita Tomsone** and **Edgardo Civallero** demonstrated the importance of the localization of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs for achieving effective and locally relevant results:

Tetyana Hranchak presented how libraries, created thousands of years ago to support the vitality of communities, nowadays build partnerships to help Ukrainians to survive in war conditions and provide protection: physical, informational, psychological, spiritual.

Lolita Tomsone reminded us that museums are not old cemeteries for history, where objects of great national significance take their final resting place. Museums can bring together diverse communities, shed light on complex histories and offer a safe space for encounter and freedom. Museums are standing firm in the face of adversity.

Edgardo Civallero reaffirmed that collections of museums, archives and libraries are knowledge and memory of the community, that help us to understand, what is our path here and where will it lead in the future. Information is power, knowledge is power, and the mobile library in Galapagos Islands is a powerful tool to help people to understand how to see themselves and how they see their territory. The very first step in fulfilling the big ideas is our own commitment.

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Key conclusions:

Museums, and libraries, can support Agenda 2030 and the SDGs in many ways They:

1. Help protect, safeguard, develop and make available cultural and natural heritage, and support the conservation and care of heritage in the wider world (SDGs 2.5, 11.4, 14.2, 15.1, 15.5, 15.6)

2. Support quality, lifelong education (SDGs 4.7, 4.A, 12.8, 13.3)

3. Promote cultural participation for all, and protecting the right to information and freedom of expression (SDGs 1.4, 5.1, 10.2, 11,7, 16.10)

4. Support sustainable tourism (SDG 8.9)

5. Support research for sustainable development (SDGs 9.1, 9.5, 17.6)

6. Adopt sustainable working methods and practices (eg. SDGs 4.4, 6.4, 7.2, 7.3, 8.8, 12.6, 12.7, 16.6)

7. Take part in local and international partnerships for sustainable development (SDGs 17.16, 17.17)

Museum and library are trusted partners for the implementation of the Agenda 2030:

IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions)	ifla@ifla.org
EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations)	eblida@eblida.org
ICOM (International Council of Museums)	https://icom.museum/en/
NEMO (Network of European Museum Organisations)	office@ne-mo.org
Latvian Museum Association	muzeji@muzeji.lv
Library Association of Latvia	bibliotekarubiedriba@gmail.com
Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia	pasts@km.gov.lv
Latvian National Commission for UNESCO	office@unesco.lv

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Further sources of information:

— Video recordings and conclusions of the conference Localising the Sustainable Development Goals through Baltic museums and libraries: https://baltic-museums-libraries-sdg.lnb.lv/conclusion/

— IFLA Library Map of the World: https://librarymap.ifla.org/

— EBLIDA Sustainable Development Goals and Libraries – First European Report (2020): http://www.eblida.org/Documents/EBLIDA-Report-SDGs-and-their-implementation-in-European-libraries.pdf

— Second European Report on Sustainable Development Goals and Libraries: http://www.eblida.org/Documents/Second-European-Report-on-SDGs-in-Libraries_Full-Report2022.pdf

— UNESCO Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity, and their role in society (2015): http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49357&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

— International Council of Museums adopts the SDGs as its blueprint for sustainable development action: https://icom.museum/en/news/resolutions-adopted-by-icoms-34th-general-assembly/

— The Sustainable Development Goals: helping transform our world through museums (ICOM Voices): https://icom.museum/en/news/the-sustainable-development-goals-helping-transform-our-world-through-museums/

— 'Our Collections Matter', International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM): https://www.iccrom.org/programmes/our-collections-matter

— 'Our Collections Matter Toolkit', ICCROM: https://ocm.iccrom.org/

— Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals https://curatingtomorrow236646048.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/museums-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-2019.pdf

— Mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals in Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums https://curatingtomorrow236646048.files.wordpress.com/2021/11/mainstreaming-the-sustainable-development-goals-in-galleries-libraries-archives-and-museums-curating-tomorrow-2021.pdf

— Museums and Human Rights: human rights as a basis for public service https://curatingtomorrow236646048.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/museums-and-human-rights-2020.pdf

— Museums and Disaster Risk Reduction https://curatingtomorrow236646048.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/museums-and-disaster-risk-reduction-2020.pdf

— Action for Climate Empowerment a guide for galleries, libraries, archives and museums https://curatingtomorrow236646048.files.wordpress.com/2022/03/action-for-climate-empowerment-curating-tomorrow-2022.pdf

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