Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Gathering Evidence for Sustainable Development Goals: An Alignment Perspective

Paula Ochôa and Leonor Gaspar Pinto

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Using Evidence in Practice

Gathering Evidence for Sustainable Development Goals: An Alignment Perspective

Paula Ochôa
Integrated Researcher and Assistant Professor
Centro de Humanidades (CHAM-NOVA FCSH)
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa
Lisbon, Portugal
Email: paulatelo@fcsh.unl.pt

Leonor Gaspar Pinto
Integrated Research and Invited Assistant Professor
Centro de Humanidades (CHAM-NOVA FCSH)
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa
Lisbon, Portugal
Email: lgpinto@sapo.pt

Setting

In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) Member States adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and set the global, national, and local framework for putting that responsibility into action (United Nations, 2015). The new global agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that must be met by all countries by 2030 so that "no one will be left behind" (United Nations, 2015, p. 6). The 169 associated targets are monitored and reviewed using a set of global indicators (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2015).

Sectorial organizations have worked to bring their potential contributions toward sustainable development to the attention of Member States and the UN. In the post-2015 process, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) committed to promoting libraries within the the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* as a key initiative under the strategic directions set for 2016-2021 (IFLA, 2015). Access to

information has been recognized as a target under SDG16 (target 16.10), culture and information and communication technology have also been included in the SDGs (target 11.4 and targets 5b, 9c, 17.8, respectively), and universal literacy is recognized in the vision for the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (IFLA, 2018).

Problem

In Portugal, initiatives to promote library and information services within the 2030 Agenda are still modest. Research intersecting Information Science with Performance Evaluation and Sustainable Development is not yet sufficiently developed (Ochôa & Pinto, 2019).

Since 2012, researchers at the Centre for the Humanities (CHAM) in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Universidade NOVA de Lisboa have been pursuing a line of research that intersects performance evaluation of Library and Information Services (LIS) with sustainability, transition management, and competence development. In 2013-2014, this intersection was put into practice through in co-creationworkshops directed at students of LIS courses that focus on building a sustainability assessment framework. These interdisciplinary experiences led to workshop participants outlining a draft of a conceptual framework for assessing the sustainability and impacts of LIS. The conceptual framework was further consolidated (Ochôa & Pinto, 2014) and expanded by introducing the evaluation perspectives provided by: 1) ISO 16439 standard (2014), namely impact evaluation areas/focus and methods for collecting evidence of impact; 2) media and information literacy indicators (Ochôa & Pinto, 2015).

In November 2016, a team of researchers at CHAM were willing to think globally but act locally looked for an answer to the question *How can public libraries gather evidence and*

evaluate their contribution to the SDGs? The researchers started an action research project named Bibliotecas Públicas e Sustentabilidade: Recolha de Evidências da Contribuição para os ODS (Public Libraries and Sustainability: Gathering Evidence of Contribution to SDGs, aka Project PLS). Project PLS aims to develop a framework (model) for evaluating public libraries' contribution to the SDGs, and to tailor the model to Portuguese public libraries (Pinto & Ochôa, 2018a).

Evidence

Evaluation research and evidence based theory provided the general framework for Project PLS. The research question was addressed through an qualitative methodology supported by the combination of two principal methods: 1) literature review and 2) construction and application of conceptual models as well as tools for analysis. The literature review process was complemented by a questionnaire that analyzed Portuguese public libraries' involvement in SDGs international, national, and local initiatives.

An integrated and holistic approach was used to co-create the Model for the Alignment and Evidence Gathering of Libraries' Contribution to Sustainable Development (see figure 1). For the model, the concept of *evidence* can be any type of information or data used to help answer a question. The information or data collected becomes evidence when it is used to demonstrate a library's contribution(s) to sustainable development, when it is used to determine goal or target achievement, when it is used to show the alignment initiatives adopted, or when it is used to understand various impacts on stakeholders (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015).

In the alignment process, the use and/or adaptation of library assessment data is valued using any or a combination of the following:
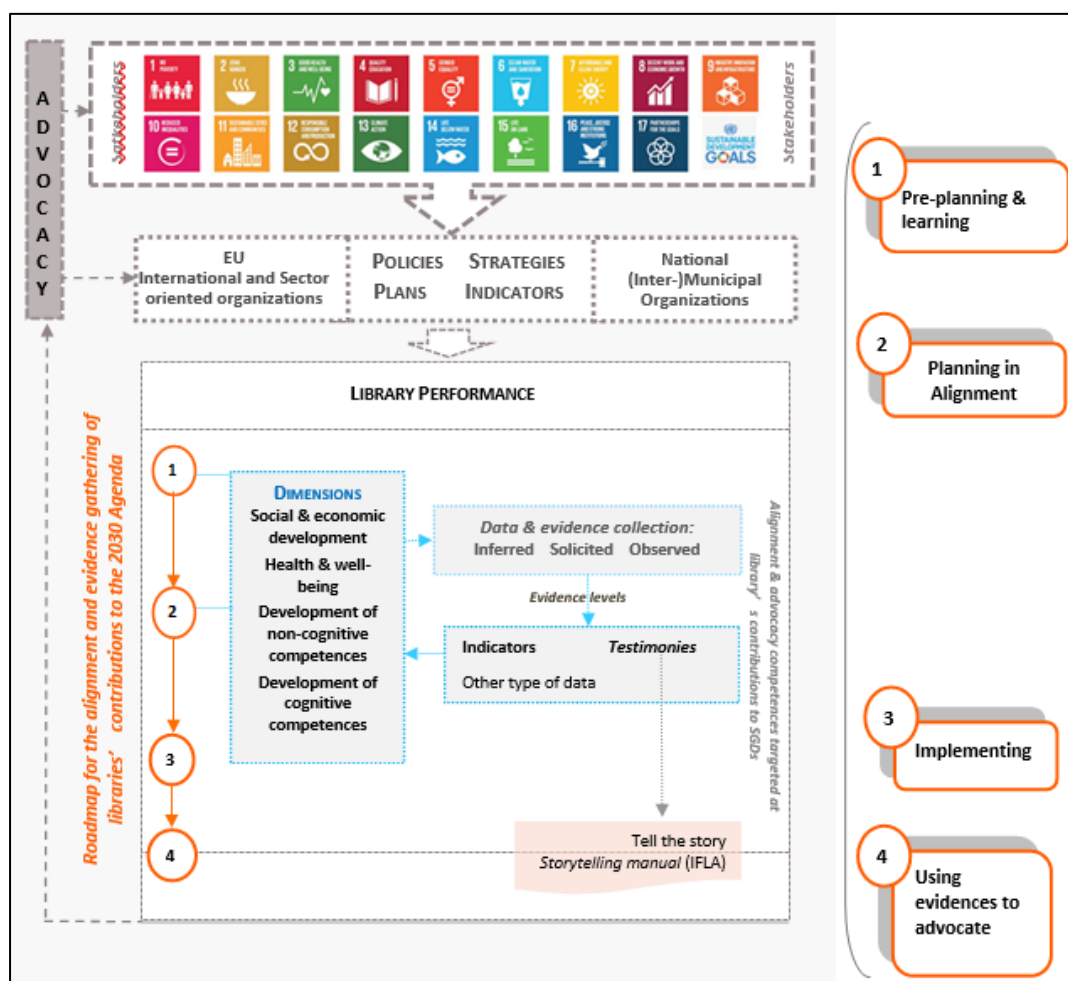
Figure 1
Model for the alignment and evidence gathering of libraries' contribution to sustainable
development (Pinto & Ochôa, 2018).

- UN Global Indicators
- Portuguese national indicators
  (whenever possible) that correspond
  to the UN Global Indicators
- ISO 11620 – library performance
  indicators
- ISO 16439 – methods and procedures
  for assessing the impact of libraries

Any of these may be complemented by the
Global Libraries Impact Planning and
Assessment Guide (Bill & Melinda Gates
Foundation, 2015) or the Generic Learning
Outcomes and Generic Social Outcomes (Arts
Council England).

Implementation

The cornerstone of the model is a roadmap
that is anchored in the identification of
potential (inter)relations between the
dimensions that frame the impacts of library
activities or projects and the SDGs. The
roadmap supports the alignment cycles in four
steps:

1. **Step 1 – Preplanning and learning.** This
   step creates the conditions for the
   implementation of the process that allows
   libraries to obtain evidence of their
   contribution to drive forward the UN 2030

Agenda. Library and information professionals need to develop basic competences (e.g., to understand the architecture and main concepts of the model).

2. **Step 2 – Planning in the face of alignment.** Based on the information collected in step 1, decisions must be made that will determine what evidence will come out of the alignment process. This step requires several actions such as defining SMART indicators and choosing adequate methods to gather data or evidence. Evidence can be structured according to five levels. Level 1, the most basic, requires only a clear description of the project or activity and its importance to the community and SDGs. In Level 2, libraries gather data that shows some positive change (alignment), but they may not be able to confirm what caused the modification. At Level 3, libraries demonstrate causality between results and the alignment dimensions. In Level 4, evidence is confirmed by independent evaluators, and a determination is made as to whether the project shows potential for replication in other libraries. Finally, Level 5, the highest level, implies the recognition of libraries' contributions to SDG by national and international entities.

3. **Step 3 – Implementing.** The plans from prior steps need to be put into practice. Data is gathered and analyzed, and then the information that will be communicated is prepared.

4. **Step 4 – Using evidence to advocate for libraries.** This step focuses on the effective use of a narrative tool that values the use of anecdotal evidence for impact assessment obtained from users, staff, and other stakeholders. The SDGs story must provide answers to three questions: *Why? Who did what, how, and when? So what?*

There have been several experiences of implementation focused on developing sharing skills through participation at libraries' workshops, at academic and professional conferences, at academic classes,

and through promotional incentives, such as national awards.

Outcomes

The Model for the Alignment and Evidence Gathering of Libraries' Contribution to Sustainable Development was consolidated and expanded within another project. Under IFLA's International Advocacy Programme, the Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists implemented the Project Libraries for Development and the UN 2030 Agenda (April to July 2018). To accelerate library and information professionals' involvement in the systematic process of evaluating and promoting libraries' contribution to SDGs, a step-by-step Guide for Libraries (Pinto & Ochôa, 2018) was built on this Model and made available through the website of the Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists.

One of the model's tools, the Roadmap for the Alignment and Evidence Gathering of Libraries' Contributions to the 2030 Agenda, was tested in two workshops targeted at Portuguese public libraries professionals in July 2018. It also provided the framework for creating a national award in October 2018 related to best practices in sustainable development in libraries of all types.

One of the most lasting and consequential effects of the model may be the impact it is having on LIS student engagement, especially among those who use it most as a tool to reach out and identify new assessment profiles and roles in libraries. The ability to extend evidence based librarianship into assessment competencies demands the exploration of new possibilities for understanding and sharing within curricular content.

Reflection

The relationships between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and public libraries' outcomes can be relevant at different points to evidence based librarianship. One of

the early difficulties in exploring the phenomenon of strategic alignment lies in the ability to capture that dimension in a meaningful way. Social aspects, such as immediate personal outcomes, health, and well-being, have been acknowledged as important traits for acquiring new understanding and developing new knowledge through the model of implementation.

Further, evidence alignment can be significantly associated with other relevant assessment constructs and tools as a management tool and as an agenda for joint research with several stakeholders. In a future research agenda, it is our belief that epistemic communities will develop transdisciplinary and evaluative practices. In this scenario, co-evaluation models will have a pivotal role. Different alignment strategies and evidence will also be valued to deal with the complexity of new open evaluation processes.

The implementation in various contexts of the Model for the Alignment and Evidence Gathering of Libraries' Contribution to Sustainable Development fosters a set of evidence that values strategic alignment as well as impactful evaluation practices and competencies that can be used toward libraries' contribution to the UN 2030 Agenda. The roadmap proved to be particularly useful in developing library and information students' and professionals' alignment and assessment competencies. It also supports libraries' advocacy efforts toward their recognition as active and valuable partners in the development and implementation of national, regional, and local strategies that will help deliver on the SDGs.

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