

## Libraries for a Greener Future: CPDWL Webinar Recap by Helen Chan, IFLA CPDWL Section Chair

February 3, 2025



On January 17, 2025, the IFLA CPDWL Webinar, **“Libraries for a Greener Future: Innovative Responses to Climate Change”**, offered an engaging and thought-provoking discussion on how libraries are addressing climate change through creative programs and services. This webinar underscored the role of libraries as leaders in environmental education and sustainability initiatives. The event featured insightful presentations by esteemed speakers, followed by a dynamic panel discussion with experts and chairs from the six IFLA Regional Division Committees.

This session was a collaborative effort between CPDWL and the following IFLA Regional Division Committees: [Asia-Oceania](#), [Europe](#), [Latin America and the Caribbean](#), [Middle East and North Africa](#), [North America](#), and [Sub-Saharan Africa](#).

### Esteemed Speakers and Panelists

The webinar began with presentations by two esteemed speakers: **Claire McGuire**, Manager of Policy and Advocacy at IFLA, and **Traci Engel Lesneski**, President and CEO of MSR Design. Their contributions set the stage for an engaging panel discussion featuring experts such as **Ton van Vlimmeren** (former Director of Utrecht Public Library), **Erik Boekesteijn** (Senior Advisor at the National Library of the Netherlands), and **Calvert Wright** (architect, educator, and director of Calvert Wright Architecture PC).

The session also welcomed the participation of chairs from the IFLA Regional Division Committees, including **Lin Li Soh** ([Asia-Oceania](#)), **Ertugrul Çimen** ([Europe](#)), **Jeannette Lebrón**

Ramos ([Latin America and Caribbean](#)), Saif AlJabri ([Middle East and North Africa](#)), Diane Koen ([North America](#)), and Ayanda Lebele ([Sub-Saharan Africa](#)).

## Webinar Highlights

The webinar offered valuable insights into libraries' roles in environmental stewardship and climate action. Panelists shared examples of innovative projects, sustainability-focused programs, and strategic partnerships that libraries have developed worldwide. Below are answers to two key questions posed during the open discussion session by Diane Koen, Chair of the North America Regional Division Committee, and the Q&A session by Eman Bushulaibi, Vice-Chair of the Middle East and North Africa Regional Division Committee, with contributions from Traci Engel Lesneski and Ton van Vlimmeren.

### Q1: Renovation vs. New Construction

**Question (by Diane Koen):** “All around the world, could each of you pick a favorite renovation project? The project could be historically significant, a non-library, or just a standard library. What arguments did you use to advocate for renovation versus new construction?”

**Answer (by Traci Engel Lesneski):** “One project that comes to mind is LocHal in Tilberg, Netherlands (design collaboration between CIVIC Architects and Mecanoo). An adaptive reuse of a locomotive shed, it creates a wonderfully flexible platform that is inspiring to experience and expertly supports the library’s innovative programming and services. One reason I love LocHal is that it illustrates a rarely discussed yet critical aspect of sustainability: inspiring love of place. We take care of what we love; emotional connections to a place make it memorable. Connecting people to what makes their region special and evoking an emotional response to it—in particular the ecology or history of a place—helps foster a sensibility that there is value in preserving and caring for it.”

### Q2: Libraries and Climate Action

**Question (by Eman):** “What are some steps an individual library or library system can take to get more involved in climate action?”

**Answer (by Traci Engel Lesneski):**

“The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a terrific framework for libraries to consider how library service offerings and building spaces can foster sustainable and just communities. The SDGs promote “systems thinking” and put education squarely at the heart of progress. An example of SDGs at work is the Fayetteville Public Library (Arkansas). The programs, tools, and spaces designed for their recent expansion are helping tackle SDGs like Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, Decent Work, and Economic Growth. In the early stages of design, the library considered what the region needs for a sustainable future and chose to prioritize workforce development. For example, programming in Fayetteville Public Library’s new teaching kitchen

(<https://www.faylib.org/our-space-12812#kitchen>) promotes nutritional awareness and

sustainable produce growth, and the library partners with the local food industry to develop the workforce for that industry. Their Simulation Lab (<https://www.faylib.org/cfi-simulation-lab>) in the new Center for Innovation (<https://www.faylib.org/innovation>) features several large equipment simulators (e.g., backhoe, loader, forklift, and excavator) individuals can use to learn valuable skills and trades in the process of becoming certified in operating the equipment.”

### **Q3: Sustainability Champions**

**Question (by Diane):** “What should librarians be doing, as part of and post-project, to maintain sustainability champions on board? Could you share your experiences with staff involvement in sustainability?”

**Answer (by Ton van Vlimmeren):**

“If you are in the building process, you hire all kinds of expertise. E.g., screening on crowd control and safety. Invest in having it screened on all aspects of sustainability in the building process, running it and later in circular use.

It will give you new insights.

Showing leadership from the top, encouraging willing staff members to engage in sustainability activities and programs in the library, facilitating them (even little bits are important), rewarding them and paying attention to it in policy documents, reports and communications is extremely helpful to give initiatives a longer life.

Also: help to get ‘ghost riders’ out of the way. For example, senior staff opposing growing edible mushrooms for vegetarian meals on coffee grounds in the library because it is ‘too messy and dirty.’

In every community there are enthusiastic groups of citizens who love to cooperate and help to organize programs in the library. That also helps to continue the work.”

### **Q4: Libraries and Social Impact**

**Question (by Diane):** “What role should librarians play in promoting education, awareness, and social impact? What organizations could libraries partner with to amplify these efforts?”

**Answer (by Ton van Vlimmeren):**

“The library is a trusted institution. We should avoid harming that by becoming too activistic (although there is the risk of having this attributed to us anyhow).

Guided dialogues and discussions are ways to promote sustainability and create awareness as they include arguments and counter arguments. Presentations, documentaries, and exhibitions that invite reflection can fuel these.

There are many local, regional, and national groups that are eager to support the library in programs on fossil energy, fast fashion, greening your neighborhood, food production/consumption, climate change, etcetera.

It is better to start with existing initiatives in your community. Working with kids and schools is sometimes easier to start.

Often Ngo's and foundations support these initiatives in kind and financially.

Be sure when you engage on this route to organize the support of your board and if possible your politicians. Do not surprise them. The discussion should be on sustainability; not on you!"

This webinar underscored the critical role libraries play in promoting sustainability and climate action. Through innovative programming, thoughtful design, and strategic partnerships, libraries worldwide are leading the charge for a greener future.

To learn more, access the **recording** and **presentation files** on the [IFLA CPDWL event webpage](#). For further questions, feel free to contact the [IFLA CPDWL Section Chair](#), Helen Chan, at [Helenmyc331@gmail.com](mailto:Helenmyc331@gmail.com).

**We thank all the collaborators, speakers, and participants for making this event a success!**  
**Stay tuned for more CPDWL webinars.**

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