Second European report

Sustainable Development Goals and Libraries

Synthesis Report

prepared by the EBLIDA Secretariat
in collaboration with the
National Library of Latvia

November 2021

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1. Introduction, by Ton van Vlimmeren

In 2020, EBLIDA released the First European Report on Sustainable Development Goals and Libraries. One year ago, the enthusiastic response from library associations showed a quite disparate picture, from front runners fully committed to the attainment of SDGs to a minimal level of awareness. In general, the Agenda 2030 was still considered an accessory objective, not pivotal in library activities. One year later, in 2021, an interesting shift can be noticed and the situation reported by the 2nd European Report offers a totally different scenario.

Not only is the level of awareness much higher than in the past, but a good number of library associations have convincingly embarked upon the Agenda 2030 pathway. In spite of, or perhaps because of the catastrophic impact of the pandemic and the poor SDG global record in 2021, coherent and fully-fledged policies are now being enforced. There is a clear understanding, at least at top level, that libraries can make the most out of SDG strategies.

This provides evidence of the validity of the EBLIDA approach. In 2019, six months before the European Commission re-oriented its work programme towards the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, EBLIDA made the proposal that SDGs implemented in libraries should not only be stories told to administrators and policy-makers for advocacy purposes, but ought to consist of a fully-fledged concept framing library work into a much broader and far-reaching scope.

This strategy proved to be accurate during the Covid crisis, when libraries developed along two directions: the digital library and the socially inclusive library. The Covid crisis has clearly shown that open access to information does not necessarily mean open access to *accurate* information. When accurate information has a cost, libraries remain safe harbours for free access, guaranteeing quality output and access to certified information.

The chapter of the socially inclusive library fully complies with the social and economic pillars of the Agenda 2030. The EBLIDA Second European report on Sustainable Development and Libraries provides many hints on how SDGs are perceived in libraries, but also on how libraries can be perceived in society. The EBLIDA accompanying programme "Think The Unthinkable – a European library agenda meeting sustainable development goals to be funded through European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2021-2027" lays the foundation for possible funding for SDG-oriented projects.

This report is opening new directions for future EBLIDA strategy in the SDG field. It fulfils library commitment towards the attainment of SDGs in society, reinforces SDG-oriented policies in libraries at European scale and boosts the preparation of projects at national and international level. In this respect, it is a milestone for library work whose impact will be measured hopefully in the very near future.

Ton van Vlimmeren, President EBLIDA

2. Methodology

In June 2021, the EBLIDA Secretariat sent out a survey addressed at library associations and at the community of EBLIDA experts who are promoting the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. This community stationing in the EBLIDA Sustainable Development House includes the EBLIDA Executive Committee, the EBLIDA Expert Group ELSIA (European Libraries and Sustainable development Implementation and Assessment) and TTU ("Think The Unthinkable") coordinators.

Answers were received from the library associations and other representative institutions of 17 countries. These countries and associations/institutions are: Bulgaria (Bulgarian Library and Information Association), Czech Republic (Czech Library Association and Masaryk University), Denmark (Aarhus Public Libraries and Danish Library Association), Estonia (Estonian Librarians' Association), Finland (Finnish Library Association), France (French Library Association), Germany (German Library Association), Greece (Association of Greek Librarians and Information Scientists), Italy (Italian Library Association, CSBNO and Rete delle Reti), Latvia (National Library of Latvia and the Library Association of Latvia), Lithuania (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania and the Library Association of Lithuania), the Netherlands (The Alignment House), Portugal (Portuguese Library Association and the General Directorate for Book, Archives and Libraries), Romania (The Association of Librarians and Public libraries in Romania), Spain (FESABID), Sweden (Swedish Library Association).

Most responses covered all aspects of the survey, thus providing full information about policies enforced at national level and main projects. Some of the responses are the expression of the official policy of the national library association or the entity which plays a central role in the implementation of SDGs; some of the others are expert opinions which picture the situation in each country in a realistic way.
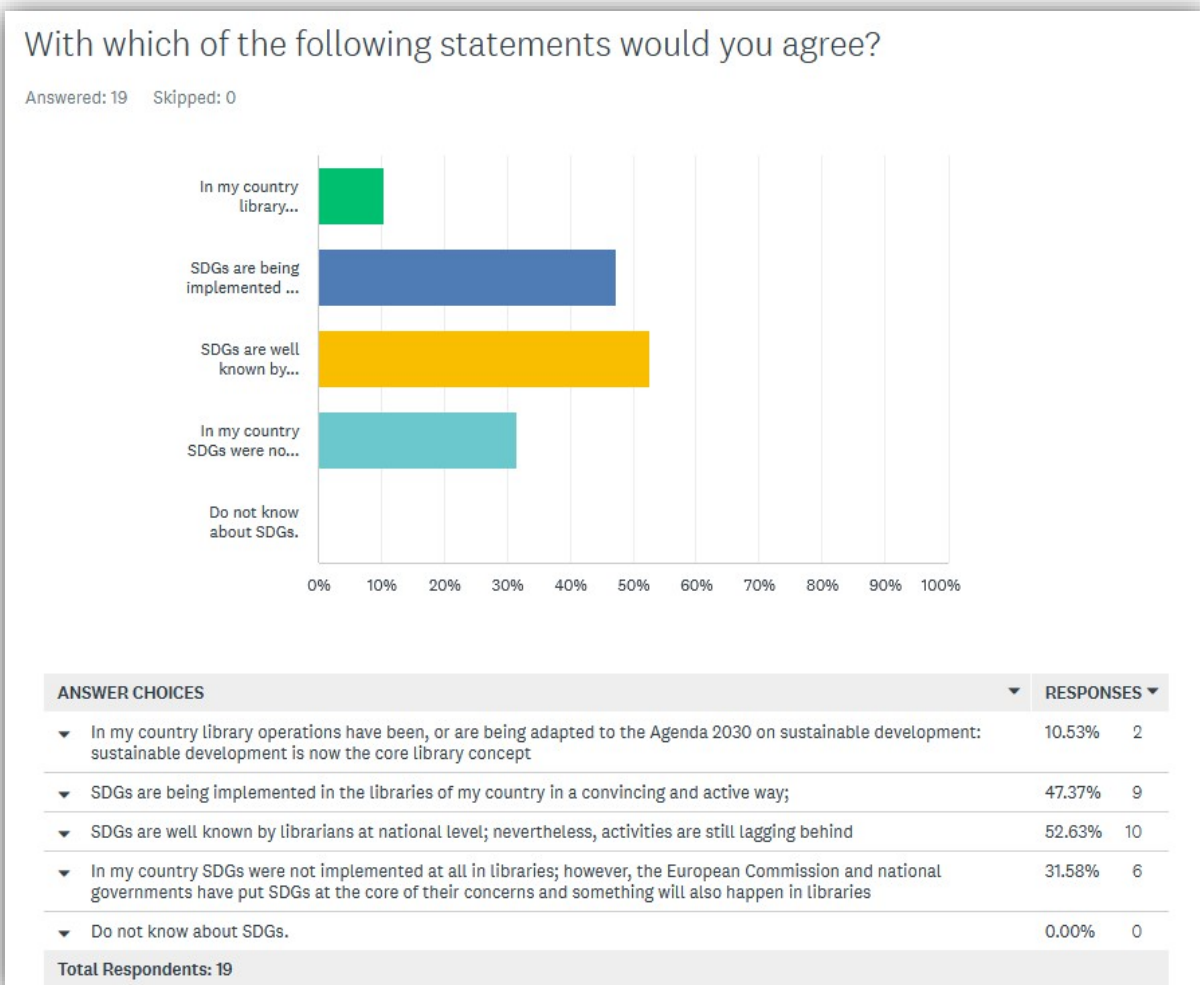
With 19 questions, the survey was partly structured with pre-coded questions and partly unstructured with free answers. A long list of some 50 projects, chosen by respondents among the most qualified, exemplifies the SDG-oriented policies followed by libraries for each concerned country. The resulting report is divided into two parts: the first synthesises the content of the answers; the second includes a series of country profiles which clearly illustrates the nature and the level of effort deployed by library associations and their partners in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in libraries.

In September 2021, the National Library of Latvia organised an online conference – localising the Sustainable Development Goals through Baltic museums and libraries – in collaboration with the Latvian Museum Association and the Library Association of Latvia. After this successful conference, the National Library of Latvia wished to extend the promotion of SDGs from the Baltic area to the rest of Europe. A natural ally was found in EBLIDA, whose three-year commitment to the Agenda 2030 has helped boost SDG activities all over Europe.

The "Second European Report on Sustainable Development Goals and Libraries" has been jointly drafted by EBLIDA and the National Library of Latvia. This synthesis will be presented during the EBLIDA-Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe Webinar on 23rd November. A longer version, also including Country profiles, will be presented on 24th February 2022 in the course of a meeting organised by the French Presidency of the European Union. Further by-products are expected to be released in the near future.

## 3. SDGs: national perception and coordinating entities

3.1 SDGs in European libraries are not only about projects, they are also about how library personnel and users perceive and apply them in their everyday work. Respondents were given the possibility of choosing different statements reflecting their perceptions. Half stated that the level of awareness of SDGs in libraries has increased, but activities are still lagging behind. Remarkably enough, 47% of the responses conclude that SDGs are implemented in a convincing and active way. Another third expresses the opinion that, in spite of a good understanding of policies and objectives, SDGs are not implemented in libraries. No one, however, shows total ignorance of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

With which of the following statements would you agree?

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
In my country library operations have been, or are being adapted to the Agenda 2030 on sustainable development: sustainable development is now the core library concept	10.53%	2
SDGs are being implemented in the libraries of my country in a convincing and active way;	47.37%	9
SDGs are well known by librarians at national level; nevertheless, activities are still lagging behind	52.63%	10
In my country SDGs were not implemented at all in libraries; however, the European Commission and national governments have put SDGs at the core of their concerns and something will also happen in libraries	31.58%	6
Do not know about SDGs.	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 19		

3.2 A good 84 % of national library associations and/or library agencies state that there is a clear promotion of SDG-oriented schemes, with a selection of SDGs that are relevant at national level and the definition of well-established policies. This result confirms that awareness, at least at top level, has increased from 2020 to 2021, together with the understanding that SDGs are a central drive for library development.

Have library associations and/or library agencies in your country identified policies with a view to pursuing sustainable development policies in libraries?

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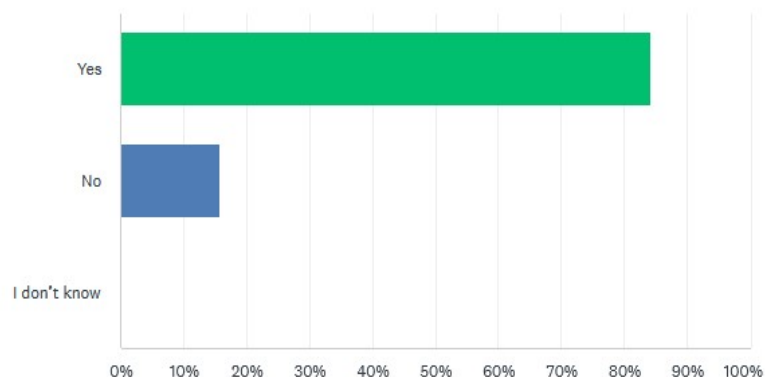
| ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	84.21%	16
No	15.79%	3
I don't know	0.00%	0
TOTAL		19

3.3 15 out of 17 SDGs are recognised as being relevant for ordinary library work. Not all of them, however, enjoy the same priority and are implemented with equal effort. Unsurprisingly, almost all respondents (95%) selected SDG 4 "Quality education" as the pivotal SDG for libraries. Interestingly enough, SDG 11 "Sustainable Cities and Communities" and SDG 16 "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" are also strongly associated with library work (respectively 68% and 63% of the answers) - library heritage is core in SDG 11, whereas SDG 16, Target 10, deals with access to information. SDG 17 is also strongly associated with library work, although this SDG is understood more in the sense of traditional library cooperation than recognition of the need for international partnership (57 % of responses). In the wake of the Covid disaster, it is not surprising that SDGs 3 "Good Health and well-being" (47%) and SDG 10 "Reducing Inequality" (48%) are also at the core of library policies –evidence, if any, of the socially inclusive nature of library work.

Library professionals are women to a large extent; therefore, it may be surprising that SDG 5 "Gender Equality" is considered a core business for libraries by only 42% of respondents. Awareness activities about SDG 12 "Responsible Consumption and Production" and SDG 13 "Climate Action" also enjoy popularity in SDG-oriented library activities (42%).

All other SDGs – SDG 1 "No poverty", SDG 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth", SDG 6 "Clean Water and Sanitation", SDG 7 "Affordable and Clean Energy", "SDG 9 "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure", SDG 15 "Life on Land" – are less popular in libraries (from 10 % to 30 % of the answers). SDG 2 "Zero Hunger" and SDG 14 "Life below water" are not immediately perceived as close to library work, although occasional projects may take place within the framework of research libraries.

If you answered YES to question No. 3, which goals are central to the SDG-oriented library policy of your country? (please tick all relevant goals)

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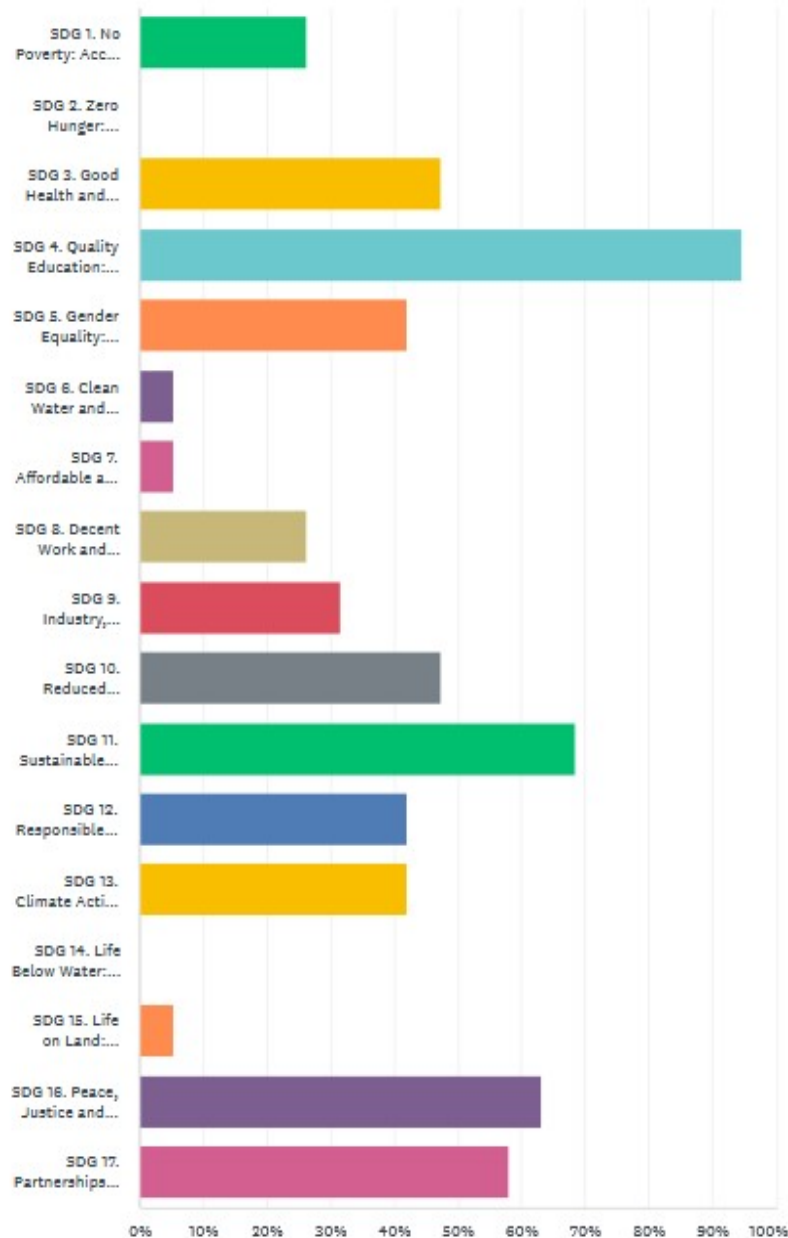
3.4 More than 70% of respondents certify that a group of library experts working at national level is in charge of promoting and coordinating the library's endeavour to implement the European 2030 Agenda. This group may be officially established through formal agreements between the involved entities, or can be informal. It may be argued that even in countries where the SDG penetration in libraries is scarce or insufficient, there is a strong institutional basis. This is an encouraging sign for future progress.

Is there an informal or official group, or more groups, in charge of promoting / coordinating libraries in the attainment of sustainable development goals in your country?
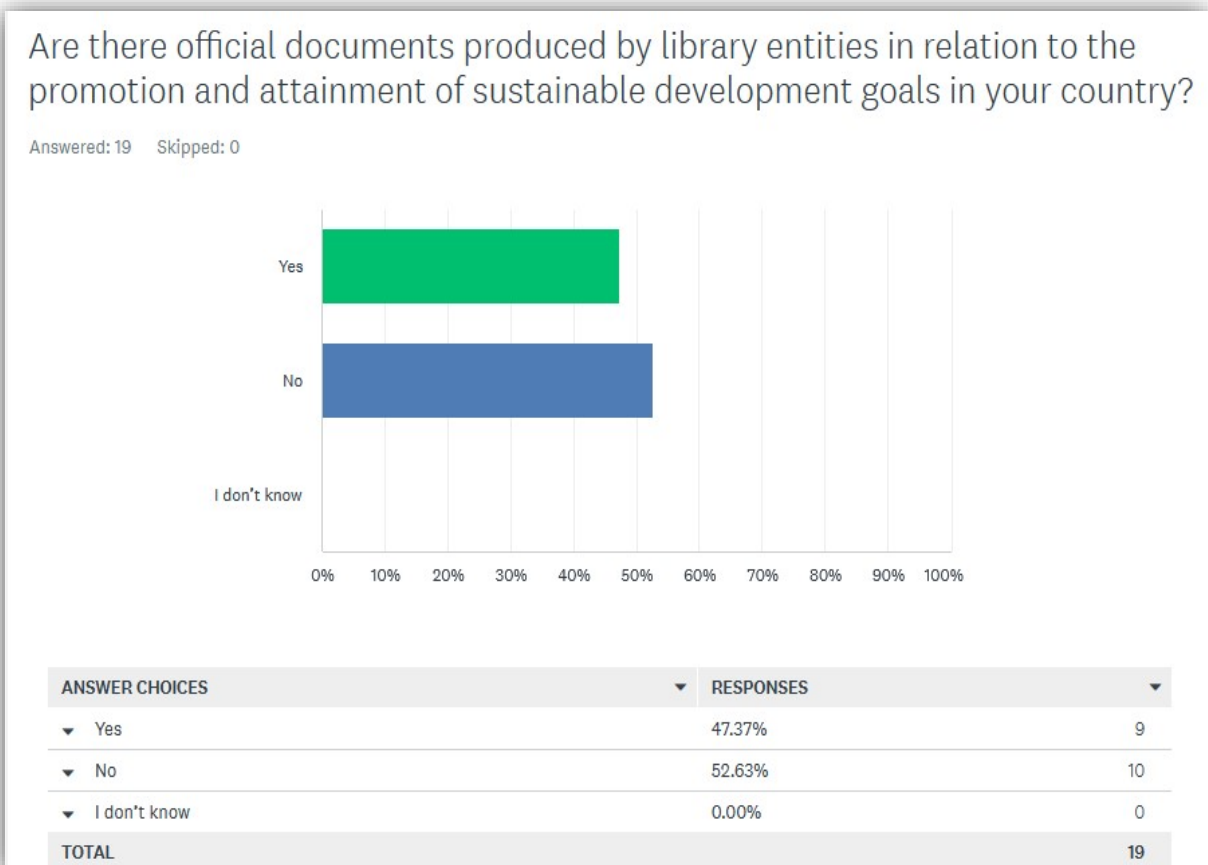
Answered: 19   Skipped: 0
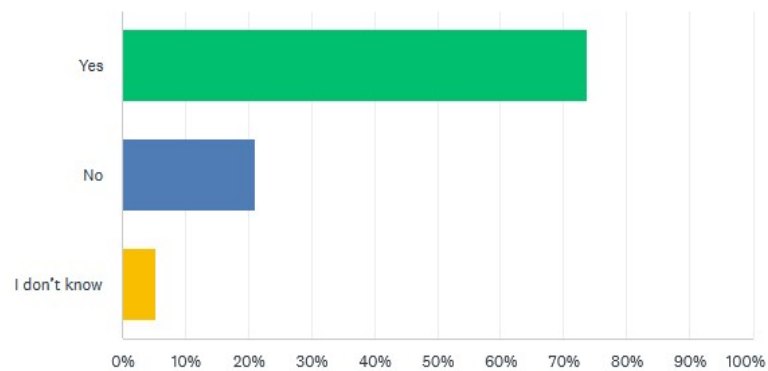
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	73.68%	14
No	21.05%	4
I don't know	5.26%	1
TOTAL		19

# 4. Visibility at national level and library advocacy

4.1 Do libraries implement SDG projects as a result of well-coordinated policy, or do they act in the wake of a spontaneous determination to support the SDG cause? The EBLIDA community is divided in half. Most of them (53 %) report that there is no written policy or guidelines designed to foster the implementation of SDGs in libraries; an almost similar percentage (47 %) states that an SDG-oriented library policy is formulated in official documents in a more or less formal way.

Are there official documents produced by library entities in relation to the promotion and attainment of sustainable development goals in your country?

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	47.37%	9
No	52.63%	10
I don't know	0.00%	0
TOTAL		19

4.2 In some cases, official SDG-related documents established by national authorities mention libraries as agencies committed to the attainment of the Agenda 2030. Answers reporting about this institutionalisation of library work, however, is not straightforward. 42% of the respondents are adamant in stating that libraries or library work is not mentioned in official SDG-focussed documents produced out of libraries. But, another 37 % reports that libraries have found their own place in national SDG-focused documents. The high percentage of "Do not know" answers (21 %) shows that a significant number of respondents is unaware of the SDG administrative architecture set in place in their own country.

Is there any mention of libraries or library activities in the official SDG documents (National Voluntary Report, SDG National Roadmap, etc.)?
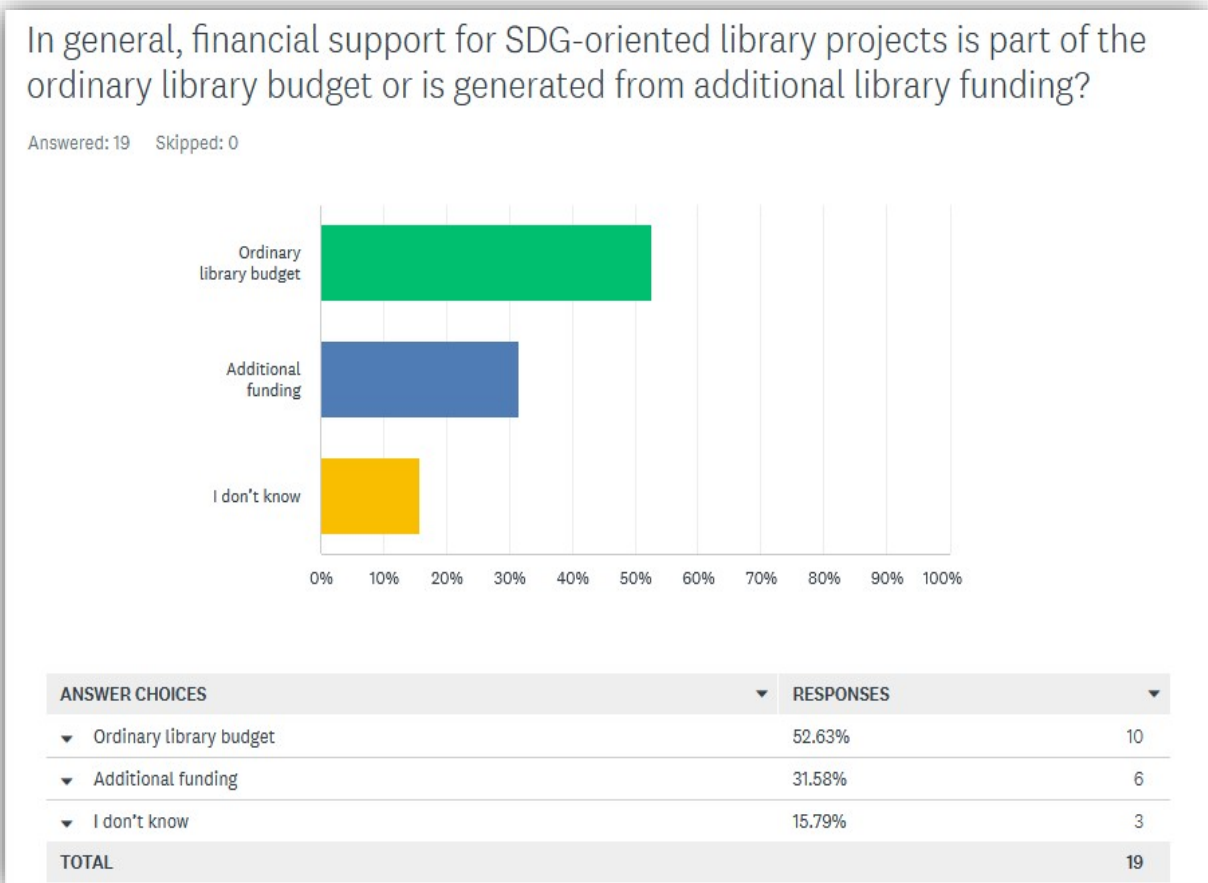
Answered: 19   Skipped: 0
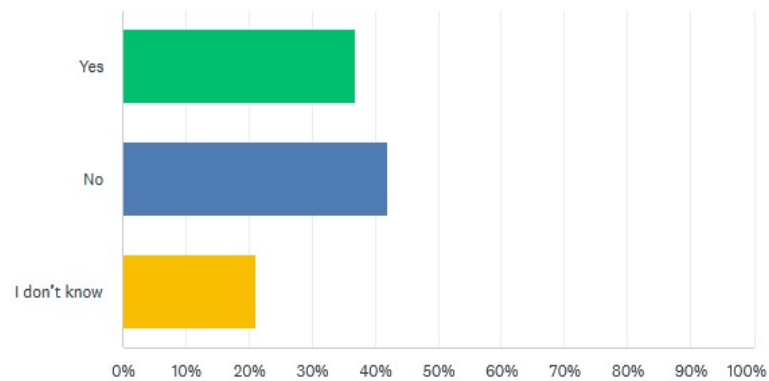
ANSWER CHOICES ▾	RESPONSES ▾	
▾ Yes	36.84%	7
▾ No	42.11%	8
▾ I don't know	21.05%	4
TOTAL		19

## 5. How are SDG-oriented library projects funded?

5.1 Support for SDG-oriented library projects is part of the ordinary library budget in 53 % of the cases, while one third of respondents reports that SDGs are implemented by the means of additional library funding.

In general, financial support for SDG-oriented library projects is part of the ordinary library budget or is generated from additional library funding?

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Ordinary library budget	52.63%	10
Additional funding	31.58%	6
I don't know	15.79%	3
TOTAL		19

5.2 Additional, non-cultural funding for SDG-oriented library projects is provided by ministries (79 % of respondents), international organisations (European Commission, Structural Funds, etc., 58 %), national or international foundations (53 %), City/Provincial/Regional Councils (53 %); Non-Governmental Organisations (47 %). In several cases (21 %), SDG-oriented library projects are funded by commercial enterprises.

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If additional funding is provided, support is provided by (multiple answers are possible):

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0
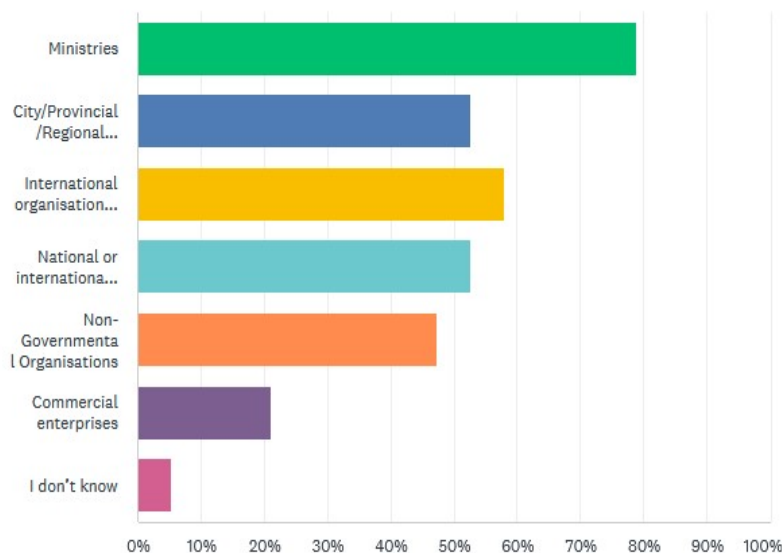
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Ministries	78.95%	15
City/Provincial/Regional Councils	52.63%	10
International organisations (European Commission, Structural Funds, etc)	57.89%	11
National or international Foundations	52.63%	10
Non-Governmental Organisations	47.37%	9
Commercial enterprises	21.05%	4
I don't know	5.26%	1
Total Respondents: 19		

5.3 In general, it can be said that the state or local cultural agencies are providing the bulk of funding (37 % of the responses); nevertheless, other departments have started funding SDG-oriented library projects, like the economic (16 %), social affairs (11 %) and educational departments (5 %). In 34 % of the answers funding for libraries is coming from other sources (16 %) or is unknown (16 %) to the respondent.

If additional funding for SDG-oriented projects is provided by international, governmental or local agencies, which department would allocate them:

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0
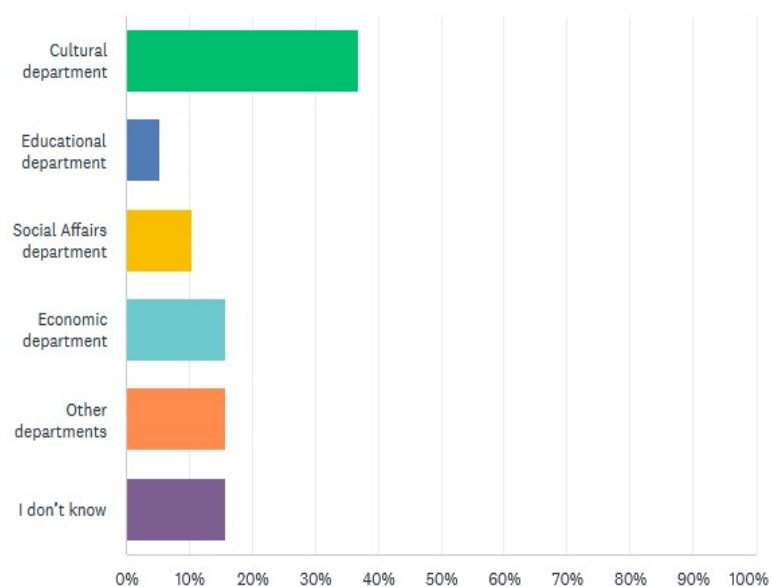
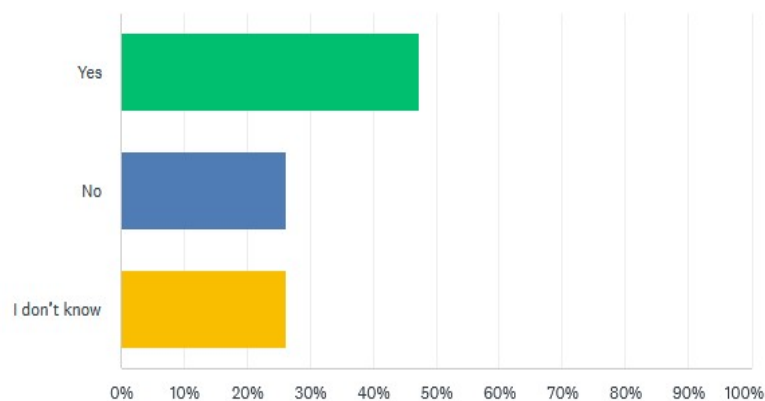| ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Cultural department	36.84%	7
Educational department	5.26%	1
Social Affairs department	10.53%	2
Economic department	15.79%	3
Other departments	15.79%	3
I don't know	15.79%	3
TOTAL		19

6. International partnership

6.1 Almost half of the respondents (47 %) are unable to answer whether, and to what extent, SDG-oriented library projects benefit from international / European partnership. A good 37 % indicate that library projects are not part of ordinary activities and do not benefit from international / European partnership. Only 16 % of respondents acknowledge an EU grant for library projects. An investigation on the impact of EU programmes in libraries is therefore strongly needed.

In your country, to what extent are library projects not part of ordinary activities benefiting from international/European partnership?

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all	36.84%	7
During the last two-three years European/international funding for library projects was consistent, up to 10% of the library budget	15.79%	3
During the last two-three years European/international funding for library projects was consistent, up to 20% of the library budget, and beyond	0.00%	0
I don't know	47.37%	9
TOTAL		19

6.2 Along the same line of thought, almost half respondents (47 %) indicate that some libraries have benefited from EU Structural and Investment Funds in the past. The remaining 53 % of answers state that such information is not known or that libraries have not benefited from EU Structural and Investment Funds.

Have libraries in your country benefited from EU Structural and Investment Funds in the past?

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0

	Yes	No	I don't know

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	47.37%	9
No	26.32%	5
I don't know	26.32%	5
TOTAL		**19**

6.3 *More than a third of the respondents (37 %) believe that the SDG reorientation of EU Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 will promote library activities. Whether this will represent a genuine opportunity remains uncertain.*

The EU Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 (European regional development Fund, European Social Fund, Cohesion Policy, etc.) have been thoroughly re-oriented in light of the new Sustainable Development priorities set up by the European Commission. Are there initiatives, or library endeavours which may lead you to think that libraries will make the most out of them?
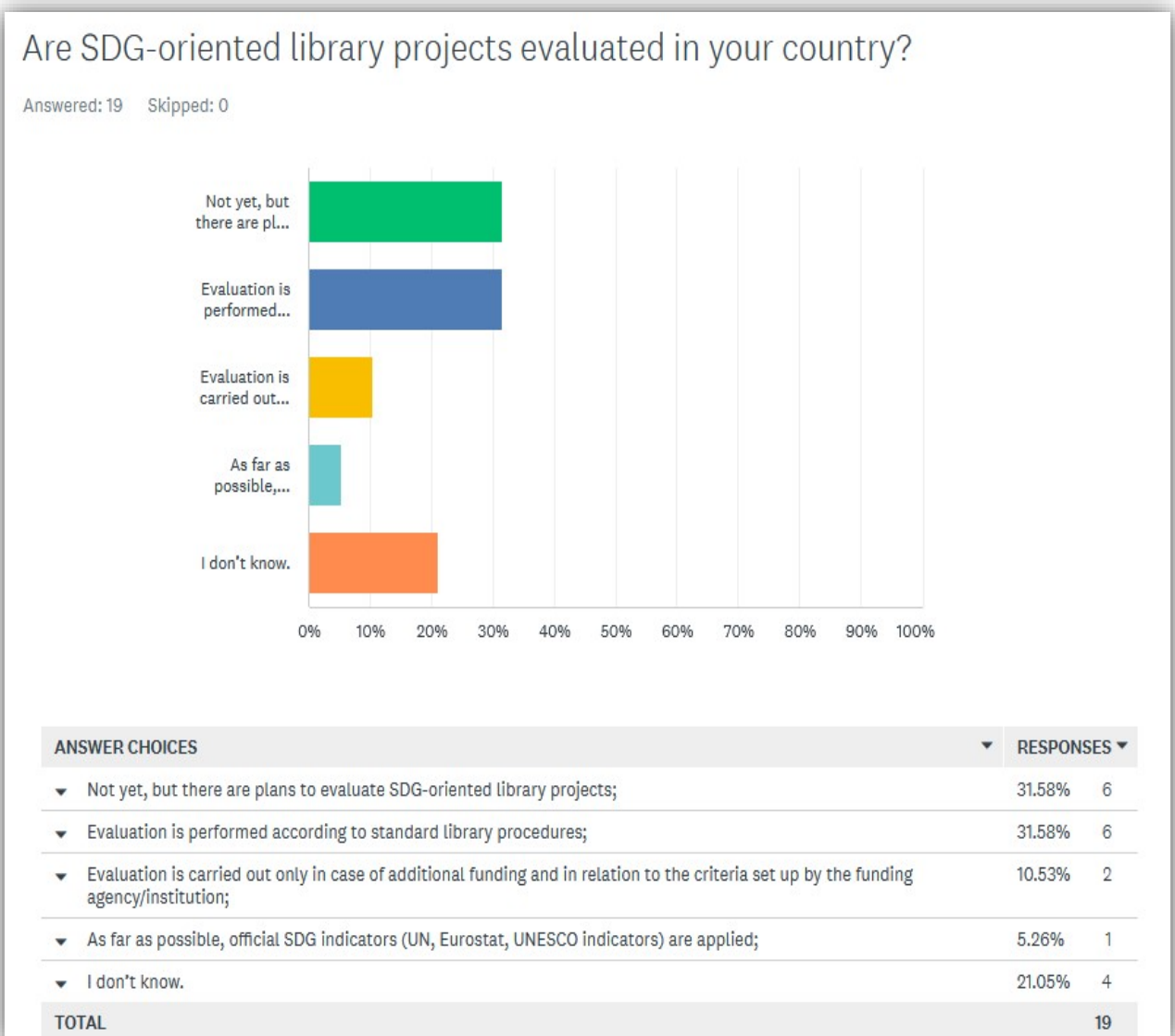
Answered: 19   Skipped: 0
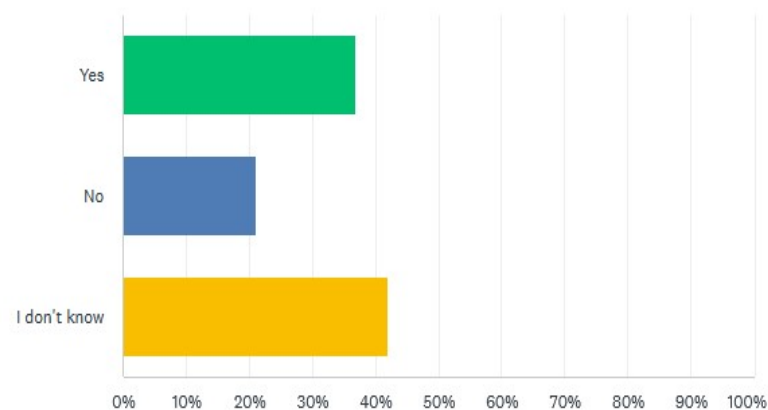
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	36.84%	7
No	21.05%	4
I don't know	42.11%	8
TOTAL		19

### 7. Evaluation of SDG-oriented library projects

7.1 The administration of SDG-oriented library projects is not yet so advanced as to corroborate a re-shuffle of the traditional library framework. One third of the answers do not mention any evaluation scheme, although there are plans to start this process. SDG-oriented projects are normally evaluated according to standard library procedures (32% of the responses) or in relation to the criteria set up by the funding agency/institution (11%); only in a small number of cases, official SDG indicators (UN, Eurostat, UNESCO indicators) are applied (5%). 21% of responses do not know about any form of evaluation whatsoever.

Are SDG-oriented library projects evaluated in your country?

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
▾	Not yet, but there are plans to evaluate SDG-oriented library projects;	31.58%	6
▾	Evaluation is performed according to standard library procedures;	31.58%	6
▾	Evaluation is carried out only in case of additional funding and in relation to the criteria set up by the funding agency/institution;	10.53%	2
▾	As far as possible, official SDG indicators (UN, Eurostat, UNESCO indicators) are applied;	5.26%	1
▾	I don't know.	21.05%	4
TOTAL			**19**

7.2 Lack of evaluation or evaluation carried out in a traditional way suggests the need for innovative assessing schemes. Unsurprisingly, 68 % of respondents would like to see library indicators in this field. In general, it can easily be said that project evaluation in compliance with SDG official indicators (UN, UNESCO, Eurostat) is very difficult since they are hardly connected to library activities and/or are managed by the National Institute of Statistics.

If you evaluate SDG-oriented library projects, how would you qualify your experience (multiple answers are possible):

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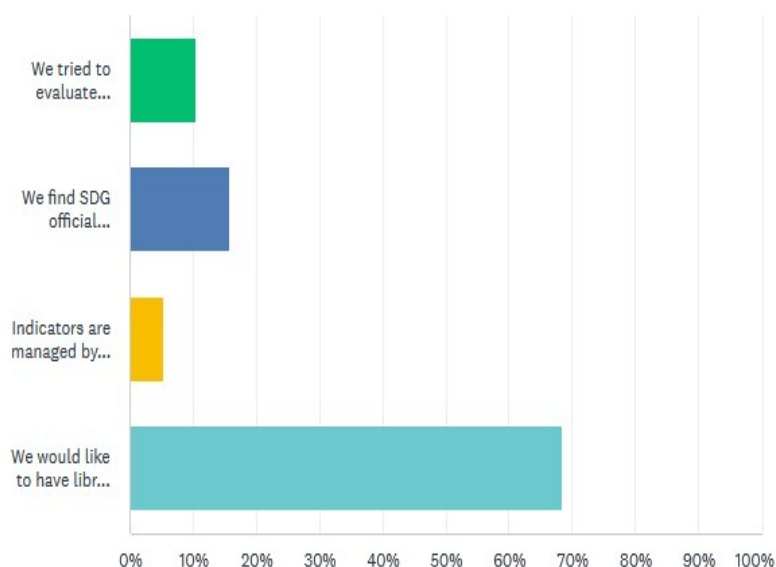
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
We tried to evaluate projects, but were unsuccessful	10.53%	2
We find SDG official indicators (UN, UNESCO, Eurostat) difficult to apply because they are not connected with library activities	15.79%	3
Indicators are managed by National Institute of Statistics and we do not have contact with these people	5.26%	1
We would like to have library indicators – would it be possible to develop them?	68.42%	13
TOTAL		19

7.3 In all countries covered by the survey, library activities meeting SDGs are quite similar. What varies is the priority given to these activities. Respondents agree that partnerships with civil society on projects regarding digital inclusion and digital citizenship is the objective of many projects (84% of the responses). A good number also mentions debates on SDGs with citizens (79%) and green library premises, energy-saving infrastructure, waste management, SDG policy with staff (63%). 58% of the responses consider that SDG-oriented projects should be centred on library collections, although only 37% of them consider library exhibitions the most suitable activity.

In general, do you think that SDG-oriented projects should be focused on (multiple answers are possible):

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0
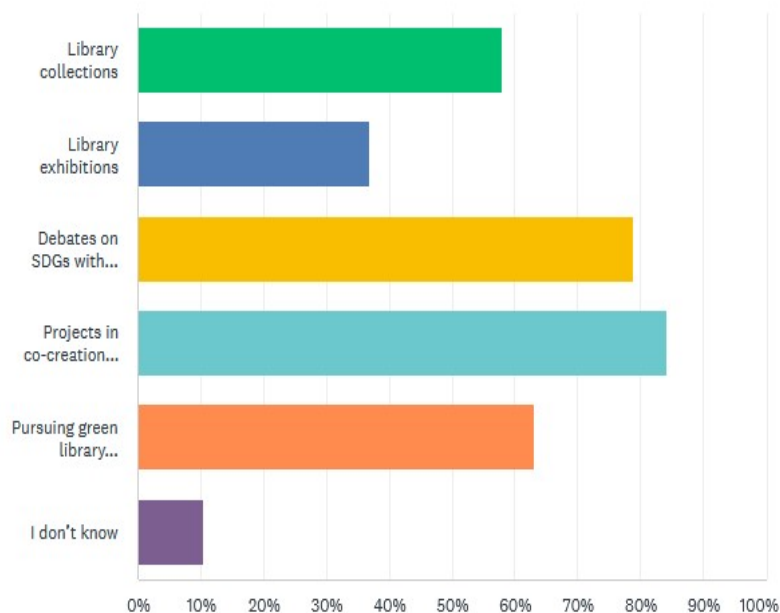
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Library collections	57.89%	11
Library exhibitions	36.84%	7
Debates on SDGs with citizens	78.95%	15
Projects in co-creation with partners/citizens (digital inclusion; digital citizenship)	84.21%	16
Pursuing green library objectives (such as energy-saving infrastructure, waste management, SDG policy with staff)	63.16%	12
I don't know	10.53%	2
Total Respondents: 19		

7.4 More than half of the respondents believe that libraries in Europe may benefit from the EBLIDA Sustainable Development House (including the EBLIDA Matrix and SDG-KIC). The biggest problem is that, in general, libraries do not have enough resources and know-how to file applications for EU funding.

For its members, EBLIDA has created an SDG European House with main assets such as the EBLIDA Matrix and SDG-KIC. Do you think libraries in Europe may benefit from the EBLIDA Sustainable Development House?

Answered: 19   Skipped: 0
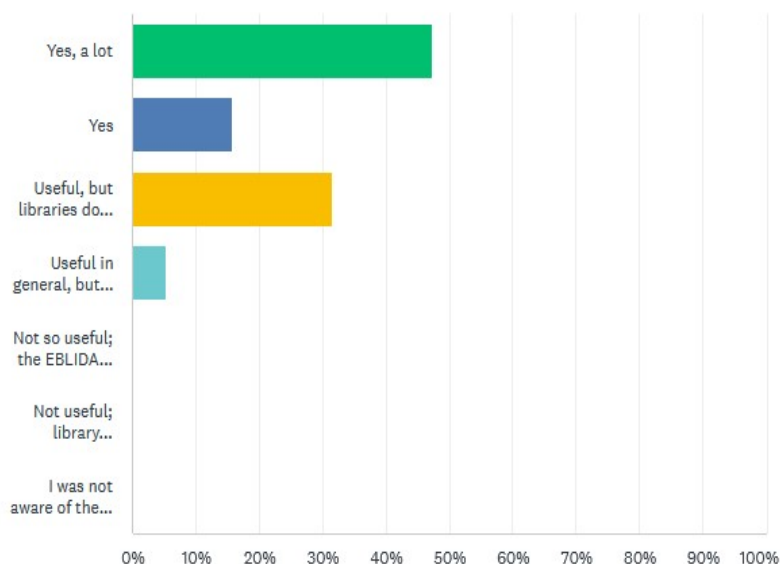
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, a lot	47.37%	9
Yes	15.79%	3
Useful, but libraries don't have enough resources and know-how to file applications for EU funding	31.58%	6
Useful in general, but libraries have their own ordinary activities to carry out	5.26%	1
Not so useful; the EBLIDA Matrix is hard to consult	0.00%	0
Not useful; library projects usually have a local scope, at the best national, very seldom European	0.00%	0
I was not aware of the tool and will take a closer look at it	0.00%	0
TOTAL		19

8. Preliminary conclusions

1. Overall, the progress of SDG implementation in European libraries is quite heterogeneous: in some countries, libraries are fully integrated into the national SDG policy; in others, SDG attainment in libraries is done in a practical way, with no involvement of national authorities.
2. The crucial point for the successful implementation of SDGs is librarians' awareness. Their level of awareness has certainly increased, but activities in libraries are still lagging behind.
3. European libraries are divided in half: some 50% implement SDG projects as a result of well-coordinated policy, while the other half stands for the SDG cause in a spontaneous way. Both movements are therefore possible: a top-down approach, where the impulsion is provided by national or centralised agencies, or a bottom-up approach, with local groups taking the lead in informal endeavours taking place in loose frameworks.
4. Libraries link their projects and activities to the majority of SDGs; obviously enough, areas traditionally linked to libraries - such as education, sustainable community, access to information, freedom of expression and peace - are at the forefront.
5. The nature of the measures implemented by libraries shows how they contribute to this or the other SDG; nevertheless, libraries don't see clearly what their role should be in the attainment of at least two other SDGs (living nature and biodiversity, reduction of global hunger).
6. SDG-oriented projects can be multi-layered and require multi-tasking, but the main focus remains on digital and inclusive issues, as well as on green libraries. If library collections are seen as a significant instrument in fostering SDG issues, exhibitions are not considered to be particularly relevant.
7. 68% of countries would like to have library indicators for the evaluation of SDG-oriented library projects; as a consequence, there is a strong need for indicators in SDG-oriented library projects and activities.
8. Only 32% SDG-oriented library projects are realized on the basis of additional library funding - provided by ministries, international or national organisations or foundations, City/Provincial/Regional Councils, Non-Governmental Organisations and commercial enterprises; that shows that a great deal of work still has to be done in order to arrange closer and stronger partnership with a diverse range of institutions, whether regional/national and/or international; more active project management skills should be provided to libraries.
9. Almost half of the respondents (47%) are unable to answer whether, and to what extent, SDG-oriented library projects benefit from international / European partnership. It means that an investigation into the impact of EU programmes in libraries is strongly needed.
10. Professional organisations and librarians' associations have a great role to play in raising librarians' awareness about SDGs. More active library participation, boosting evaluation tools, raising libraries' awareness of the EU Structural and Investment Funds as well as other EU opportunities, are fundamental tasks for national library associations as well as library organisation active at European level.