

From Caracas to Lyon: A road toward sustainable development?

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Abstract

We offer elements and reflections to tackle from Latin American societies and public libraries for moving toward sustainable development. From the *Caracas Declaration for the Public Library* to the *Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development*, there has been a clear and constant plea to the development of Latin America, assuming the value information has for progress and focusing on the access to information, literacy, education and culture as human rights.

Keywords: public libraries, strategies, Caracas Declaration, Lyon Declaration, Latin America

“It is very small the progress or consensus that can be accomplished over information and development in countries where the government, universities and the productive sector used to suspect and still suspect each other” (Páez-Urdaneta, 1990).

Over the last 30 years, the *Caracas Declaration for the Public Library* (UNESCO, CERLALC, IFLA y IABNSB, 1982) has been a guide for the Latin American public library, a roadmap for developing library services, an opportunity for analyzing and assessing the current state of libraries in each country, and an essential document to drive regional comparative librarianship analyses. In our opinion, this is a text that is still valid and important for regional consensus and integration (Granda and Machin-Mastromatteo, 2015).

A new document of impact arrived in August 2014 to move the global and Latin American librarianship. The *Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development*, was approved by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), during the World Library and Information Congress and the 80th General Conference and Assembly (IFLA, 2014) in the French city of Lyon.

The Lyon Declaration (2014) is the expression of a strategy to insert the library sector in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015); the new agenda of development, that aims to follow up the Millennium Development Goals with new objectives (2016-2030). We can then state that the Lyon Declaration is the new worldwide reference document most valuable for the library sector. This document institutes a series of principles that seek the improvement of people’s quality of life, visualizes the right to information as a transformative element and includes ensuring access to information to promote sustainable development and democratic societies. Its content is expressed in six fundamental points on what IFLA and the more than 600 international organizations of signatories (Signatories, 2014), consider around the crucial role that access to information plays for sustainable development.

Among the highlights of the Lyon Declaration, there are: the interesting approach to the concept of sustainable development with a focus on human rights; the importance that information and knowledge has for communities, transparency and social oversight; the capacity of libraries and other information intermediaries for supporting the transmission, organization, structuring and understanding of information (key for development); the prominence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), libraries and other information intermediaries for reducing the divides between national policies and local implementations; and lastly, the acknowledgement that information access and information literacy, are key for sustainable development.

With the Lyon Declaration, libraries, archives and information services are reborn with a new purpose, a wider mission and a global vision for the meaning of information for worldwide sustainable development. The fact that IFLA is actively participating in the development of the Agenda 2030 (IFLA, 2015a) and is advocating for the inclusion of information access, ICTs, the protection of the cultural heritage and universal literacy, is evidence of the value, competences and the future of the library sector in local, national and international arenas.

Regarding Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015), IFLA, its members, the signatories of the Lyon Declaration, a coalition of allies from the civil society and the Member States of the UN, have made possible that culture, ICT, information and literacy are recognized in the following way in the SDGs:

- Regarding culture, goal 11: “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”; contains the target: “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”
- Regarding ICTs, goal 9, related to infrastructure, contains the target: “significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020”. While goal 17, related to global partnerships contains the target: “fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology”.
- Goal 16, “promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies”; contains the target: “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements”.

Additionally, literacy has been acknowledged in Agenda 2030’s vision. In fact, IFLA suggests that libraries may be present in each of the 17 SDGs. In order to demonstrate that libraries can boost the progress of the whole Agenda, IFLA has released a toolkit to support information access in national development plans (IFLA, 2015b). *Libraries and implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda, IFLA Action for Development through Libraries programme* (IFLA, 2015c), has the purpose of encouraging activities to foster the inclusion of libraries and information access as part of national and regional development plans, in order to help fulfill the SDGs. With this document, the global library community has a great opportunity to inform their government leaders about the ways in which libraries work and to be partners for accomplishing development priorities. From 2016, IFLA is inviting us to take actions of defense and promotion for guaranteeing the full acknowledgement of libraries as the engines of local development, as well as ensuring that they have the necessary resources to fulfill this mission (IFLA, 2015c).

The so-called toolkit (IFLA, 2015b) is aimed for information professionals to take actions and organize activities to raise awareness over Agenda 2030 in their institutions. This toolkit seeks to fulfill the following objectives:

1. Understand the UN 2030 Agenda process, and IFLA’s advocacy;
2. Understand how the UN 2030 Agenda will be implemented at the national level;
3. Organize meetings with policymakers to demonstrate the contribution libraries and access to information make to national development, and across the SDGs;
4. Monitor the UN 2030 Agenda and implementation of the SDGs;
5. Tell library users about the SDGs.

These are the first steps for libraries to be able to express themselves when governments decide to implement the SDGs, to actively participate in national consultations over development plans, and to organize meetings with policy makers in order to ensure that they favor library's causes. Returning to our initial idea: a road toward sustainable development? In the current and dynamic global context of information access, we also ask: is Latin America ready for the SDGs? Specifically, do Latin American library professionals have the capacity of answering to the new challenges that are emerging with the implementation of the new Agenda 2030? Could the principles of the Caracas Declaration, as well as those of the Lyon Declaration, help us build strategic lines for the integration and regional consensus that are needed to finally drive us toward development? If social and knowledge divides, as well as the digital divide are harsh Latin American realities, are we at the gates of an institutional divide? A large part of Latin American institutions that are related to information are not close to the pace and dynamics proposed by IFLA in order to be part of the regional advance toward the SDGs and Agenda 2030. If our countries are far from development, we can assume that sustainable development is an even farther goal. It is not impossible to implement Agenda 2030 in Latin American libraries, but we suppose this is going to take time, due to the basic problems that still afflict our societies. We have offered some elements and reflections related to the road toward sustainable development, these should be translated into prompt actions in our countries and institutions if we hope to get in this train that is headed to sustainable development, where we have even been called upon. Some common points we found in the Lyon Declaration allows us to conclude the following: we have been invoking development for more than three decades ago; hence, we were not mistaken for stating the continuing validity of the Caracas Declaration. Now is the moment to recognize the value of information for the progress of Latin America like never before and to assume an approach based on human rights to ensure universal access to information, ICTs, education, culture and literacy as sustainable alternatives to maintain libraries' institutionalism, especially for public libraries. Will we assume the challenge? Agenda 2030 is here and libraries are included. Are we ready to take action?

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