

Tablet Cafés, Code Hours, Preservation, and Sustainability in Libraries *The Aruba National Library and the UN Agenda 2030. A Small Island Case Study from the Caribbean*

Peter Scholing

Biblioteca Nacional Aruba, Oranjestad, Aruba

E-mail address: p.scholing@bibliotecanacional.aw

Astrid Britten

Biblioteca Nacional Aruba, Oranjestad, Aruba

E-mail address: a.britten@bibliotecanacional.aw



Copyright © 2017 by Peter Scholing and Astrid Britten, Biblioteca Nacional Aruba. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

In this paper, staff from Biblioteca Nacional Aruba share examples of how library policy and sustainability are inseparably linked and interconnected, and how small-scale libraries can take on important roles in larger-scale processes, like the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Libraries are inherently designed as sustainable institutions, combining core societal values as literacy, lifelong learning, access to all, building societies and celebrating diversity and culture.

This paper is a direct result of Biblioteca Nacional Aruba's participation in IFLA's International Advocacy Programme for Libraries, Development and the UN 2030 Agenda.

Keywords: national libraries, sustainability, media and information literacy, UN Agenda 2030, advocacy

Introduction

As a small-scale island society, an independent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands since 1986, Aruba is a relatively young nation, and a relatively new democracy.

With an education system inherited from the colonial days, where the spoken language (Papiamentu), the primary official and spoken language, differs from the formal instruction language (Dutch). Papiamentu/u is a language shared by the Southern Caribbean Islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao, spoken on all three islands, although with lexical and slight pronunciation differences between the islands. Culturally, Aruba has been on the crossroads of Arowac native inhabitation, Spanish and Dutch colonial influence, Afro-Caribbean slave trade, Latin-American and Anglo-Caribbean migrant workers, and American tourism and

popular culture. Aruba is a diverse melting pot of cultures, a unique microcosmos of modern multiculturalism and multilingualism. But although culturally diverse, Aruba is economically a monoculture: after decades of economic prosperity through the oil industry (due to the close proximity to the Venezuelan mainland and its oil fields), our economy is almost fully dependent on the tourist industry. All in all, a small island developing state (SIDS), with ties to the world, but also quite dependent on a small set of external factors like tourism, and regional security.

In order to become a more diversified, economy and a modern information society, Aruba is looking towards a future as a more green and sustainable nation, connected to the world, acting as a stepping stone between the “old world” and the “new”, a “gateway between Europe and the Americas”, as the current government has formulated it. And this comes with an accompanying skill set for current and future citizens and workers.

How does our institution, Biblioteca Nacional Aruba (BNA, the Aruba National Library) figure into this? In a small society, small institutions like libraries can take on larger roles than just being a building containing books. They are or can become hubs in society, taking on a connecting role, an advocacy role for certain issues, like sustainability, access to information, and transparency, all of utmost importance to a nation.

Adding value: libraries sustaining communities, and vice versa

Parts of the following story might seem very recognizable, or even familiar. That’s because many libraries and librarians think alike, inform themselves, and stay up-to-date with the latest developments. Ideas that work are transplanted into local libraries all over the world, and implemented as additions to strong library outreach programmes. That’s the strength of ideas and information: good ideas travel fast.

Literacy rates on Aruba are relatively high compared to the region (over 97% of the total population), but traditional readership and library membership is down, as can be witnessed in many libraries across the world. Information across the world is accessible from nearly every home and through every mobile device on the island. People don’t need to go to the library anymore to access certain pieces of information. But does that mean that we, as the Aruban National Library, are an obsolete institution?

On the contrary: it’s about the added value: The library is still very busy and well-visited, especially after school hours. Our workshops, book presentations and cultural events continue to attract diverse crowds. And if we are able to provide even higher levels of access to information, by either offering internet access, digital literacy programs, or by digitizing and publishing the wealth of information stored in our National and special collections, it will get even better.

A library is more than a building, more than a set of walls: it’s a hub, a community center, an information gateway, more than the sum of its services. And there’s where the library’s role in the UN Agenda 2030 lies: information, connections, enabling, and partnerships.

Bridging a different kind of digital divide

In many parts of the world there exists a "digital divide" between the people who have access to technology and the internet, and those who have not. Although Aruba is a relatively prosperous island for Caribbean standards, that is also the case, to some extent, as is the case

in even the most affluent societies. That's why Biblioteca Nacional Aruba offers its patrons free access to Wi-Fi, and to internet-connected computers, as part of its vision to act as a gateway to any and all patrons and visitors in search of information, in whichever way, shape or form(at).

But in a sense, with mobile technology becoming cheaper and more advanced, and thus more accessible, eliminating part of the digital divide for some, by providing access, in fact creates a different kind of "digital divide" at the same time: that of digital literacy, between the ones that can independently access, interpret, and transform, and use information and those that (yet) cannot: having an advanced, "smart" device in many cases does not yet equal effective use, and elimination of barriers to information access. And in a sense, that's also part of our core business as a library. For the younger generations, having grown up with ever-changing technological possibilities means that they can adapt to any new technology and adopt it quite effortlessly. But for certain groups of patrons—for instance senior citizens—that is not necessarily the case. The library, with its skilled and tech-savvy information professionals, can and should step in to help cross this divide.

In the case of senior citizens we noticed that many of them got stuck with "smart devices" with touch screens and unlimited capabilities, but without knowledge of even how to adjust basic settings, or to complete basic tasks. This happened mostly through aggressive marketing by and with limited support from telecommunications companies and technology vendors. In other cases, our patrons were gifted tablets or cellphones by their children or grandchildren living abroad, in hopes of them "staying connected" through Skype or Facetime. But without the proper basic knowledge on how to use the touchscreen, how to unlock their phones, or how to add apps, most patrons that visited didn't get any further than being able to answering phone calls, or perhaps how to open a card game app that a grandchild added to their home screen. Furthermore, the helpdesks of cellular providers don't usually make time for clients to help them underway after selling them their new devices, and not all of our patrons were able to get help from patient family members. We recognized that there wasn't really a place in our community that would offer the help they needed, in a no-rush, welcoming fashion. In the past, we had offered all kinds of activities, workshops and courses, including basic computer courses, courses on "how to access the internet", digital photography et cetera. But different times call for different measures, and so do different devices.

Reading up about initiatives by libraries around the world, we picked up on an initiative by local libraries in the Netherlands called "iPad Cafés" or "Tablet Cafés". In this initiative, which is usually preceded by an introductory course in iPad or Android use, libraries offer their space and facilities for mobile device owners who have taken the initial course to meet up regularly, help each other, to train their skills and to exchange tips and tricks they learned. Not having a large cache of mobile devices in our possession, we chose to adapt it to a localized setting, and to open it up to people with all kinds of skill levels, to make it platform-independent, based on a "bring your own device" policy, in order to help patrons better understand and use their own technology, instead of learning some basic skills on library-owned devices, trying to apply this knowledge later on, at home.



Figure 1: Library staff and “peer volunteers” engaging with library patrons participating in a “Tablet Café 60+” at Biblioteca Nacional Aruba. Picture: BNA.

On October 1st, 2014, the "United Nations International Day of Older Persons" we launched our first "Tablet Café 60+" to address that divide, in what would become a well-visited bi-monthly event. Every two months, on a Tuesday or Wednesday morning (usual off-peak hours in our libraries), patrons would be able to get individualized help in getting to explore their devices, in gaining confidence in using them, and in trying new things.

Most tablet cafés followed a certain pattern, with similar questions. We would usually start in the settings section, by connecting to our free library Wi-Fi, in order to explain internet connections, the use (and costs) of cellular data, data roaming, and how to protect themselves and their devices when connected. Install Skype, setup a conversation with someone across the room, and add their family members in order to be able to connect instantly the next time, when perhaps there wouldn't be any help around. Even trying to take "selfies" for the first time was a regular part of the Tablet Café mornings. As sessions passed by, we saw an increase in “peers” willing to assist fellow senior citizens with their technology-related questions. Apart from the in-person help sessions we invited experts to talk about internet safety, customer service agents from banks to talk about online banking, the social security system to talk about their online portal for pensions, and so on, to discuss topics that people usually read or hear about, but were afraid to just try out.

The previous paragraphs were written in past tense. That's because we decided to adapt, to accommodate changing needs and demands from our patrons. In the last editions of the Tablet Café, we noticed that attendance was declining, and the types of questions raised were changing to more individual, less general ones, ones that needed more one-on-one attention and slight change in staffing for the events. As a consequence, we're in the process of "revamping" our digital literacy services for seniors to accommodate the changing demand,

moving away from large-scale sessions, to more frequent (bi-weekly or monthly) "walk in" technology and information office hours, with librarians and "peer volunteers" being available to help out patrons on a more individual basis, and to go even more in depth into information- and technology-related requests as needed.

The younger generation: advocacy for sustainability, digital literacy and 21st century skills in schools

For decades, the Aruba National Library has been involved in educational programs and in supporting schools. BNA has a school library service department geared towards primary education. The department supports schools in setting up school libraries as well as providing rotating topical collections to support the curriculum. Apart from that the library has a strong after school activity program get towards reading and literacy. This year, for instance, we celebrate the 25th edition of our annual children’s book festival, a yearly week-long celebration of reading and children’s literature, always with a multinational cast of authors.

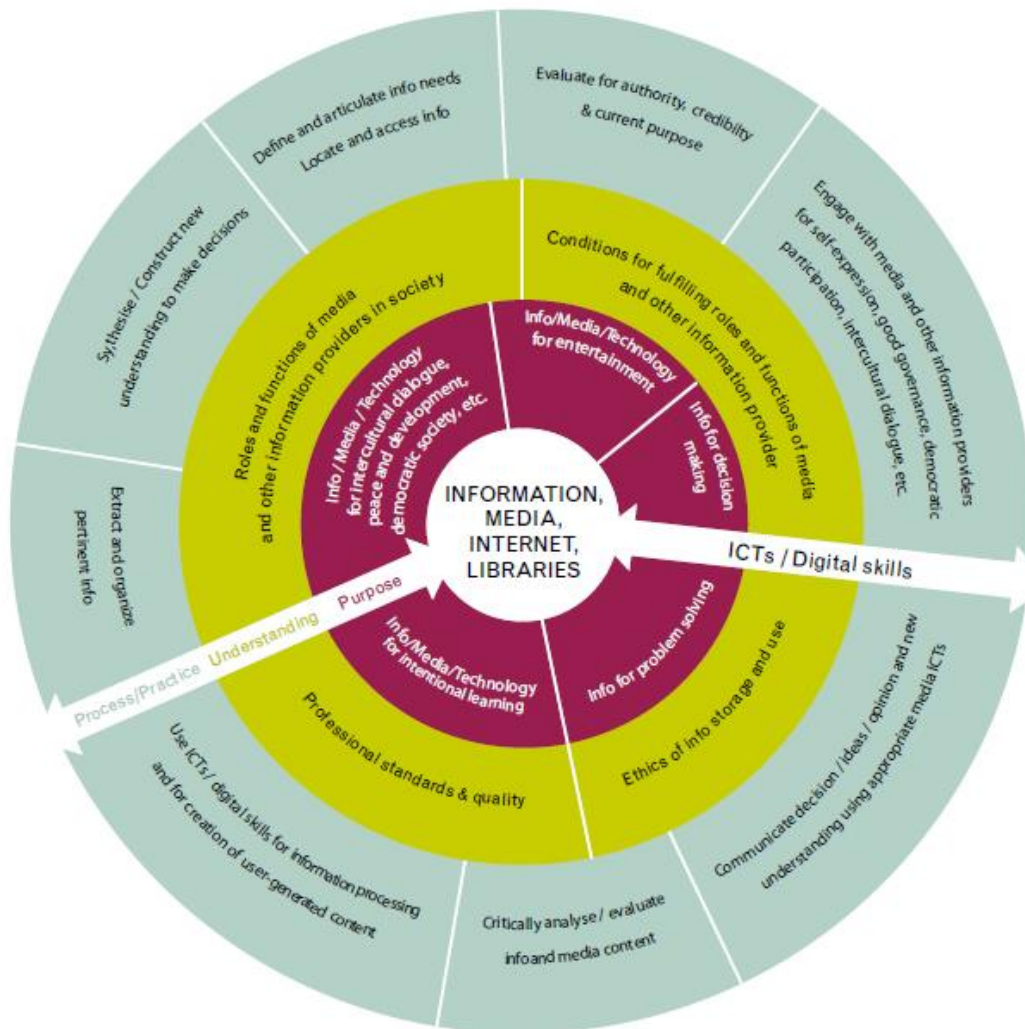


Figure 2: UNESCO’s proposed conceptual model for Media and Information Literacy, with libraries at the center. Picture: Grizzle et al, *UNESCO Media and Information Literacy. Policy and Strategy guidelines* (2013).

As a library, you can either choose passive involvement in (digital) information access, by providing the infrastructure, computers and basic internet services, or set the bar a lot higher: by actively promoting and advocating freedom of access, information literacy, and sustainable societies, by organizing events, and by establishing partnerships to further this goal.

Access to information, in our eyes, goes way beyond proving the basic access itself. As information professionals, and knowledgeable members of society, librarians and by extension libraries can aspire to take an active role in shaping a knowledge-based information society, with learners of all ages in possession of media and information literacy skills, computational thinking skills, and critical thinking skills. With Aruba being a small island, literally one library (or one librarian) can make a difference.

In order to try and accomplish this larger role, BNA has partnered up with several local institutions and private partners, with the national UNESCO chapter (and internationally, with support and funding through their Participation Programme), but also with international partners and organizations like *Mediawijzer*, the Dutch platform for media literacy (as an institutional network member), *NAMLE*, the (American) National Association for Media Literacy Education (through personal memberships), seeking cooperation, partnerships, and inspiration on a national, regional and international level. It is our hope that we can play a role in establishing a permanent local platform to advocate the importance of Media and Information Literacy—and of 21st Century Skills as a whole—as integral parts in the nation’s formal school curriculum, like the aforementioned *NAMLE* in the United States, *Mediawijzer* in the Netherlands, and *UNESCO* on a global level (through its *GAPMIL* programme).



Figure 3: The Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning Mrs. Michelle Hooyboer-Winklaar engaging with a student during the 2016 edition of the global Hour of Code event, at Biblioteca Nacional Aruba. Picture: Ministry of Education, Aruba.

One prime example of this quest to further advocate is the establishment of Aruban participation in the annual global Hour of Code event. The Hour of Code is an event which takes place every year in December. It is a one-hour introduction to computer science, where children and lifelong learners ages 4 and up can learn how to code in a game-based environment, learning logic, cooperating with each other, and other problem-solving skills all while seemingly “playing an online game”. In December of 2015, BNA had the honor of hosting the first set of Hour of Code events on Aruba, in cooperation with local telecommunications and ICT companies, and with one primary school participating. That year a total of 150 school children aged 8-12 participated on Aruba, all in our library’s computer lab. Last December, Aruba’s participation and the partnership had grown, with the library hosting over 300 students, double the number of the previous year, and over 1600 students participating nationwide. For a small island, this is not a small feat. For this year, we’re aiming towards at least the same participation levels, and towards at least an equal level of partnership, all while using this event as an example of advocating its permanent inclusion in the national curriculum, as mentioned above.

Sustainability in Libraries and Sustainable Partnerships for Preservation

The same principle goes for sustainability: you can just stick with providing the books, and access to information about sustainability, or you can practice it. This year we celebrated the fifth annual “Green Education Symposium”, hosted by the library together with, aimed at providing high school students with concrete, localized examples on sustainable development, the impact on climate change on a small island society, and how they can have an impact themselves. Furthermore, the library served as the pilot project in the Aruban government’s efforts to limit energy consumption for government buildings, and is involved in talks about using the library’s roof for solar panels and a sustainable urban roof garden, plans that will hopefully come to fruition soon.

Another aspect of sustainability for (national and special) libraries is durable preservation and digital sustainability in terms of valuable and culturally important special collections. As BNA has a dual role as both the national and public library, and as such has an important task to safeguard Aruba’s national documentary heritage. BNA’s Arubiana/Caribiana department is in charge of the National Documentary Collection and a host of special collections varying from unique local publications to photographic and audiovisual collections. As one of the main national actors in terms of heritage preservation, BNA has partnered up with the Aruba National Archive (ANA) in order to determine a set of national digitization guidelines and standard procedures, analogous to the *US Federal Digitization Guidelines (FADGI)* and the Dutch *Metamorfoze* standards. IFLA and UNESCO’s *Persist Guidelines* for Digital Sustainability and their joint *Manifesto for Digital Libraries* are important influences for our national process as well.

As far as the UN’s 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals are concerned: a recent quick scan as part of an IFLA regional advocacy workshop showed that BNA is or has already been involved in projects that are linked in one way or another to 12 of the 17 SDGs. The programs and projects mentioned in previous paragraphs are only some examples, with most library programs spanning and connecting multiple development goals.



Figure 4: *Metanan Mundial pa Desarojo Sostenibel*, the Papiamentu Language version of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, localized and produced in cooperation with the BNA Media Production Department. Picture: SDG Aruba Committee.

Apart from connecting SDGs to activities within our library, we have been involved in a special way in the national Aruban SDG process as well. From the years when the SDGs were still defined as the (more limited) Millennium Development Goals, the library and our librarians have been involved in national working groups working on national development plans, like *Nos Aruba 2025* (2009-10). When the Aruban government (in 2015-16) was preparing to start the process in writing a new national development plan directly linked to the UN 2030 Agenda, BNA was not only invited to take part in the process, but also invited to take on a PR and advocacy role for this national process, through its Media Production department (figures 4 and 5 in this paper are examples of this cooperation between BNA and the national SDG committee). Participation in the regional IFLA IAP Workshop further fortified this position. This national process is still ongoing, but results, both direct and indirect are already visible. For example, as a byproduct of this process, our next library policy and vision document will be fully based on sustainability and will be linked directly to the UN 2030 Agenda.

As stated in our introduction: In a small society, small institutions like libraries can take on larger roles. And partnerships and advocacy are the keys to unlocking this larger role.



Figure 5: Still from the official SDG Aruba advocacy video, localized and produced in cooperation with the BNA Media Production Department. Pictured is SDG #5: Gender equality and women's empowerment. Video: SDG Aruba Committee.

Conclusion

Library use and user groups evolve and change, continually. Nowadays, senior citizens stay active more and more, and after retiring, many choose to keep learning, and to keep participating in society through volunteering. The library also caters to their needs, not only by offering a "place to read", but also a place to learn, and to "connect" (in the broadest sense of the word).

Conversely, young learners use technology as an extension of their life. Access to information, to many of them, is something that's just there, nothing out of the ordinary. Access to all kinds of information is a given, and information is published and used, sometimes without thinking twice about possible consequences. Fake news, dubious sources, and re-use of information without the proper appropriation are real issues. Although libraries have perhaps lost the role of being the sole or primary source of aggregated information in a society, conveying the message of the importance of digital literacy and critical information skills, and establishing partnerships with schools, school boards, (local/national) media outlets, and NGOs like UNESCO and IFLA to anchor these skills in a future-proof curriculum.

The examples mentioned in this paper are just that: examples. Each and every library has its success stories, and more often than not, they can be linked to the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, even if not specially designed as such. Libraries are inherently designed as sustainable institutions, combining core societal values as literacy, lifelong learning, access to all, building societies and celebrating diversity and culture.

A sustainable library policy, with the library not only as a provider, but as a gateway and a guide to information and its efficient use is part of the shared future of libraries and the communities they exist in. Libraries can play a larger role than just "accommodating", and have the potential to be a leader and/or a crucial partner in building a sustainable and inclusive (information) society, building partnerships that fortify each partner's and each individual's strengths.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank:

- IFLA for enabling us to participate in its advocacy programmes, and IFLA-LAC providing us with a global platform to advocate our work;
- UNESCO Aruba and worldwide, for green-lighting our proposal to further advocate Media and Information Literacy on Aruba, as part of their Participation Programme 2016-2017;
- All of our private and public partners in all of our literacy, digital literacy programs.
- The SDG Aruba Committee,
- Our colleagues at Biblioteca Nacional Aruba and at our partner institutions.

References

- Central Bureau for Statistics Aruba, "Literacy and Sustainable Development. Infographic" (2014). <http://cbs.aw/wp/index.php/2014/09/09/infographic-world-literacy-day/>
- IFLA, "International Advocacy Programme" (2016): <https://www.ifla.org/node/11149>
- UNESCO "Participation Programme" (2016) <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/member-states/mscontent/participation-programme/>
- Jan de Waal, "Starten met een Tabletcafé of iPadcafé in de bibliotheek", *Bibliotheekblad* (2013) <http://www.bibliotheekblad.nl/rubrieken/artikel/1000004121>
- Alton Grizzle et al, *UNESCO Media and Information Literacy. Policy and Strategy guidelines* (2013). <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/media-and-information-literacy-policy-and-strategy-guidelines/>
- IFLA/UNESCO, *Manifesto for Digital Libraries. Bridging the Digital Divide: making the world's cultural and scientific heritage accessible to all* <https://www.ifla.org/publications/iflaunesco-manifesto-for-digital-libraries>
- UNESCO/PERSIST Content Task Force, *The UNESCO/PERSIST Guidelines for the selection of digital heritage for long-term preservation* (2016). https://unescopersist.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/persist-content-guidelines_en.pdf
- FADGI, "Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative". <http://www.digitizationguidelines.gov>
- Nos Aruba 2025, *National Integrated Strategic Plan* (2010) <http://www.ea.aw/images/stories/pdf/doc-pub/n/nisp2010.pdf>
- SDG Aruba Committee, "SDG Aruba Social Media Advocacy Platform", <https://www.facebook.com/SDGARuba/>
- UNDP "SDG Alignment Mission Presentation: A Roadmap for SDG Implementation in Aruba" (2017), available through <http://sdgaruba.com>.