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Cultural sustainability as a strategy for the survival of museums and libraries

Kirsten Loach, Jennifer Rowley and Jillian Griffiths

Department of Languages, Information and Communications, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

Cultural sustainability has become a growing priority within sustainable development agendas, and is now often depicted as a fourth pillar, equal to social, economic, and environmental concerns. Museums and libraries play a unique role within cultural sustainability by preserving their communities' heritage. However, sustainability policy and research within these sectors still tends to focus on the social, economic, and environmental pillars. This article provides a critique of sustainability policy and research for museums and libraries. It argues that more explicit coverage of cultural sustainability is required to not only improve the contributions of museums and libraries to cultural sustainability, but also to provide an increased understanding and appreciation of the value of these institutions necessary for their continued survival.

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Introduction

Libraries, particularly through their special collections, and museums maintain important cultural artefacts that represent a significant part of the heritage of the communities that they serve. Indeed, not only their collections, but also the museums and libraries themselves, including their history and buildings, are a cultural asset that can enrich local communities and, alongside other heritage attractions contribute to tourism associated with a city or region.

One of the primary aims of museums and libraries is to hold these cultural assets in trust for their communities, yet a series of challenges in recent years have put the long-term survival of these institutions at risk, with implications for the sustainability of the cultural assets within their care. Cuts to public funding and reducing revenues for charitable organisations (ACE 2011), together with difficulties in maintaining relevance within increasingly competitive leisure and information markets (Kazi 2012), mean that both museums and libraries face an ongoing battle to justify their existence and secure their futures.

Finding themselves lacking in support for their cultural mission, organisations have been encouraged to adopt more sustainable business models based upon the triple bottom line approach, which evaluates their work according to their contribution to the wider social, economic, and environmental sustainable development goals of society (Jankowska and Marcum 2010, Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* 2014). Yet whilst such measures can often help to ensure the general sustainability of their organisations, it can also lead to the neglect of their original mission, with the pressure to meet targets and demonstrate value in these three areas leading to the 'acquisition, preservation, and research of the collections' becoming 'considered subordinate' to these other 'aims' (Anderson 2009, 6).

CONTACT Jennifer Rowley  J.Rowley@mmu.ac.uk

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However, there is increasing recognition that culture is of equal importance as social, economic, and environmental concerns in a sustainable society. Indeed, the inclusion of a concern for culture within sustainable development agendas was a central focus of the United Nations' post 2015 sustainability goals (IFACCA 2013). With the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of cultural vitality having been identified as key to enabling cultural sustainability (Soini and Birkeland 2014), this would seem to be a prime opportunity for museums and libraries to demonstrate the true value of their work. Yet to date there has been limited acknowledgment of the notion of cultural sustainability as an equal concern within sustainability policies for museums and libraries, and as a result, their work to sustain culture continues to be considered as subsidiary to demonstrating their contributions to social, economic, and environmental concerns.

Accordingly, this article aims to highlight the disparity that currently exists between museum and library practices that have cultural sustainability at their core, and policy that values the work of these institutions in sustaining culture according to its ancillary benefits rather than its intrinsic value. It suggests that if one of the functions of policy is to align practice with wider agendas in society, then policies for museums and libraries should be revised in order to reflect the growing consensus that cultural sustainability should be considered as a definitive outcome in its own right. This would then provide further justification for the future support of museums and libraries, by helping to articulate the value of their unique role in sustaining culture beyond its instrumental role in social, economic and environmental issues. Specifically, this article:

- (1) Profiles the museum and library sectors in the UK.
- (2) Reviews the use of the triple bottom line in sustainability policy and research within the museum and library sectors.
- (3) Explores the growing consensus surrounding culture as the 'fourth pillar' of sustainability.
- (4) Considers the implications of the lack of recognition of culture as an equal pillar within sustainability policy and research in the museum and library sectors.
- (5) Proposes directions for future research and development.

Profile of the museum and library sector in the UK

The Museums Association estimates that there are around 2500 museums in the UK. These range from national museums run by central government, whose collections are 'considered to be of national importance'; to local authority run museums that hold collections which tend to 'reflect local history and heritage'. In addition to these, many university museums maintain collections relating 'to specific areas of academic interest', and a diverse range of independent museums 'owned by registered charities and other independent bodies or trusts', also hold materials that vary considerably in their area of interest, focusing on anything from tanks to pencils (Museums Association 2015).

The UK also has an estimated 4145 public libraries (Public Libraries News 2015). Working to 'provide free services that empower people with access to resources', these libraries are generally run by local authorities (GOV.UK 2013), and, as with museums, exist alongside a variety of other kinds of library. Akin to national museums, national libraries contain 'a high concentration of the nation's treasures', often working to collect together 'the literary production of the nation' (IFLA 1997). Academic libraries exist to support the work of students and researchers by providing access to relevant resources (CILIP 2014), whilst special libraries, that are often privately owned and sometimes form part of a larger business or organisation, hold collections that tend to be of a more specialist interest specific to the requirements of the institution that they support (Merriam-Webster 2015).

This list is by no means exhaustive. There are numerous other types of library and museum, and the ways in which they are classified can also often be far more complex than suggested, owing to systems of governance that can sometimes cross between public, private and academic sectors. Nevertheless, the central mission of all of these organisations revolves around the maintenance of collections for

the benefit of users. Museums aim to honour ‘the legacy of collections, information and knowledge contributed by people in the past’ in order to pass it on ‘to future generations’ (Museums Association 2008, 4); whilst the main purpose of libraries is said to revolve around the ‘selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information’ (ALA 2015). This again involves the management of collections, whether in physical or digital form.

Regardless of any differences in specific missions or aims in maintaining these collections, a diverse range of cultural assets reside within the care of many of these institutions. Taking the museums and libraries of Manchester as an example, the focus of collections can vary from archaeology, anthropology and natural history at the university owned Manchester Museum (Manchester Museum 2015), to the history of the working classes at the Working Class Movement Library, which is an independent registered charity (WCML 2010). The history of theatre in the city resides within the special collections at the central public library (Manchester City Council 2015), whilst it is possible to explore the history of science and engineering within the collections of the Museum of Science and Industry, which is part of the nationwide Science Museum Group (MOSI 2015).

These museum and library collections are often housed within historic buildings that can be considered cultural assets in their own right. Continuing with the example of Manchester, the neo-gothic Manchester Museum was designed by the renowned Victorian architect Alfred Waterhouse (Manchester Museum 2015), and the neoclassical circular Central Library was designed by Vincent Harris and built in the 1930s (Pidd 2014). Such buildings are iconic landmarks within the city, and have strong links to the community in which they are based. For example, the Portico Library was built in 1806 as Manchester was in the grip of its ‘boomtown’ phase, and its members included many closely involved in the industrial revolution (Portico Library 2015).

Museums and libraries clearly make significant contributions to the cultural landscape, and maintain a vast array of cultural heritage for their communities. The role that these organisations play is however far more complex than simply preserving cultural heritage for posterity. Indeed, the museum sector, in particular, has long recognised that organisations have a greater responsibility to society than simply preserving and interpreting cultural artefacts, and should play an active role in improving society by working to address contemporary issues and using their expertise to make a positive difference to their communities (Janes and Conaty 2006).

This perspective is now a fundamental part of museum theory and practice. The Museums Association’s ‘Museums 2020’ initiative for the future development of the sector provides further clarification of how museums are expected to benefit society, ranging from ‘improving people’s lives, building communities, strengthening society and protecting the environment’ (Museums Association 2012, 3). Meanwhile, libraries are expected to have a similar wide-ranging role in inspiring and supporting communities, through having an impact on health and wellbeing, providing social and educational benefits, and making contributions at an economic level (ACE 2014a, Fujiwara *et al.* 2015).

Having a more active role in society in this way is essential for achieving the long-term sustainability of museums and libraries, especially when the public funding of cultural organisations at the cost of other vital services is being questioned (ACE 2011). Engaging with contemporary concerns provides a sense of relevance to the work that organisations undertake in preserving heritage that has clear and immediate benefit for communities, thus counteracting the notion that such work is simply an ‘add-on’, or ‘nice to have’ addition to society (ACE 2011, 3).

The triple bottom line in museums and libraries

As the Museums Association’s ‘Museums 2020’ initiative suggests, it is not however enough for there to be a ‘generalised sense that a museum provides public benefit by merely existing’ (Museums Association 2012, 4). In order to prove their value and continue to be supported, it is essential that museums as well as libraries develop ‘defined and explicit’ explanations of how their activities benefit wider society (4).

As a concern that permeates all levels of society, sustainable development provides a comprehensive approach by which organisations can demonstrate such value. Having originated from a concern

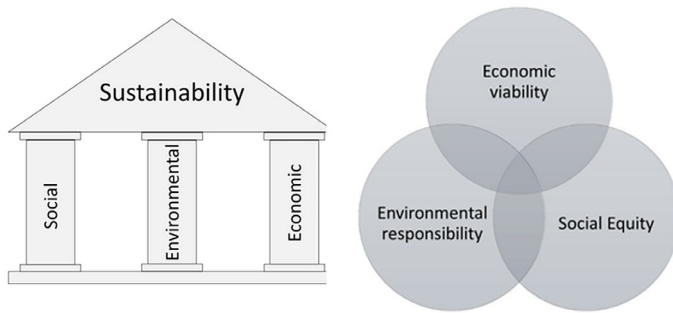


Figure 1. Popular depictions of the three pillars of sustainability, with the Venn diagram emphasising the interdependence of the three components.

over the rapid depletion of ecological resources, the sustainable development ethos recognises that we must move away from 'exclusively economic' ideas about development to a more holistic approach (Hawkes 2001, 9). If society is to develop in a way that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED 1987, 16), then economic growth must be balanced against not only a concern for the protection of the natural environment, but also a concern for the social wellbeing of humanity. These three interdependent aspects of human existence are considered to be of equal importance in enabling society to continue to function, and are commonly referred to as the three pillars of sustainability, as if any one of the pillars is found to be weak, then the whole system becomes unsustainable (Figure 1).

Organisations are now increasingly expected to demonstrate their contributions to sustainability according to these three pillars. This has led to what is known as the triple bottom line approach being adopted across many sectors, which evaluates an organisation according to its wider social, economic, and environmental impact. As organisations that have a fundamental obligation to have socially responsible relationships with their communities, it is not surprising that the applicability of such measures were quickly recognised in both the museum and library sectors. There is now a wealth of policy and research to guide both museums and libraries in becoming more sustainable organisations, and institutions are increasingly expected to align their practices and missions with wider sustainable development agendas.

Museums are expected to 'achieve greater social outcomes and impact' (Museums Association 2013, 3), 'enrich[ing] the lives of individuals, contribut[ing] to strong and resilient communities, and help[ing] create a fair and just society' (2), whilst libraries are expected to 'clarify' and 'design impact measures' of their social objectives' (Shared Intelligence 2013). Numerous reports also strive to demonstrate the contributions of organisations to the economy. For example, the 2015 'Economic impact of Museums in England' report estimates that the nation's museums 'generate an average of £3 income for every £1 of public sector funding invested in the sector' (Kendall 2015). Similarly, the 2014 'Evidence review of the economic contribution of libraries' works to provide insight of the 'contribution public libraries can make at an economic level' (ACE 2014b). Attention has also been paid to environmental concerns, with 'SMART' targets having been developed for museums to help enable them to become greener institutions (Madan 2011, 82), and groups having been set up to consider how libraries can become more environmentally sustainable (IFLA 2014).

These initiatives clearly reflect sustainable development concerns, and an increasing acceptance of the triple bottom line approach to assessing the value of organisations across society. There are many beneficial effects of adopting this approach for museums and libraries. It enables them to demonstrate their continued relevance to society, and provides them with alternative ways to measure the value of their services, which are often difficult to demonstrate solely in terms of economic profit (ACE 2014b). Many actions that contribute to wider sustainability goals can also have a positive effect on the

sustainability of organisations themselves. For example, efforts to reduce energy consumption according to environmental goals can enable financial savings to be made, and outreach projects working towards wider social wellbeing can act as a valuable marketing exercise, promoting wider awareness and helping to develop a positive image of an organisation and its work. At policy level, it also provides policymakers with targets that have long-term relevance and that are applicable to every community, enabling the development of policies that are relevant to institutions across an entire sector.

Despite these many benefits, concerns over the use of the triple bottom line within museums and libraries have been raised. Whilst the adoption of this approach may help to ensure the general future of an institution, it does not allow for adequate recognition of the unique role of museums and libraries in sustaining cultural heritage for their communities. As Campolmi (2013, 239) suggests, 'Preserving but also creating culture makes museums [and by inference, many libraries] core mission different from that of any other media, cultural institutions, commercial businesses and industrial firms'. By evaluating the work of museums and libraries according to the triple bottom line, the unique value of their work in 'preserving and creating culture' is lost, being considered only according to its contribution to wider sustainability goals, rather than according to any intrinsic cultural value that it may hold.

This approach to evaluating culture through its wider impact rather than its intrinsic value is by no means new. Employing instrumental arguments to demonstrate 'culture's contribution to other kinds of good' has been common practice since the 1980s, and has partly arisen owing to the difficulties that exist in understanding and demonstrating the value of culture itself (Holden 2004, 15). Whilst this approach is clearly beneficial in helping cultural institutions to develop socially responsible relationships with their communities, there has been growing concern that this practice of evaluating cultural activity according to its instrumental value can have negative repercussions for the cultural sector. Indeed, as Holden suggests, it has meant that

The cultural aims and practices of organisations have been subverted. Energies have been directed into chasing funding and collecting evidence rather than achieving cultural purposes. In the search for outcomes and ancillary benefits, the essence of culture has been lost. (2004, 20)

Being based upon demonstrating wider impact on social, economic, and environmental concerns, sustainability policies for museums and libraries can be seen to reinforce this approach to evaluating cultural activity through its instrumental value. It is therefore arguable that the increased focus upon meeting the targets of funders and demonstrating value according to these policy agendas can have such negative repercussions as those suggested by Holden. Indeed, as Anderson (2009, 6) suggests, working towards such policy agendas can even lead to the 'acquisition, preservation, and research' of collections becoming 'considered subordinate' to these other 'aims', with the continuity and development of collections suffering as a result.

The fourth pillar: cultural sustainability

Recent changes within the sustainable development field however have the potential to develop a wider appreciation and understanding of the unique role that museums and libraries play in sustaining cultural heritage. Cultural sustainability, originally considered by many as a component of social sustainability, is now often regarded as a distinct component of equal importance to other sustainability concerns. Indeed, many sustainable development models now depict culture as the 'fourth pillar', situated alongside social, economic, and environmental concerns (Hawkes 2001, i; Figure 2).

Defining exactly what we mean by 'culture' has long been a difficult task. Definitions of the term have changed greatly over the centuries, and vary considerably according to the discipline from which it is approached (Barthel-Bouchier 2013). Culture can of course refer to 'intellectual and creative products', such as those which museums and libraries work to conserve and produce (CIDA 2000, 1). However, it can also refer to 'the beliefs and practices' of a society, being part of its 'fabric' and shaping the way in which 'things are done and our understanding of why this should be so' (1).

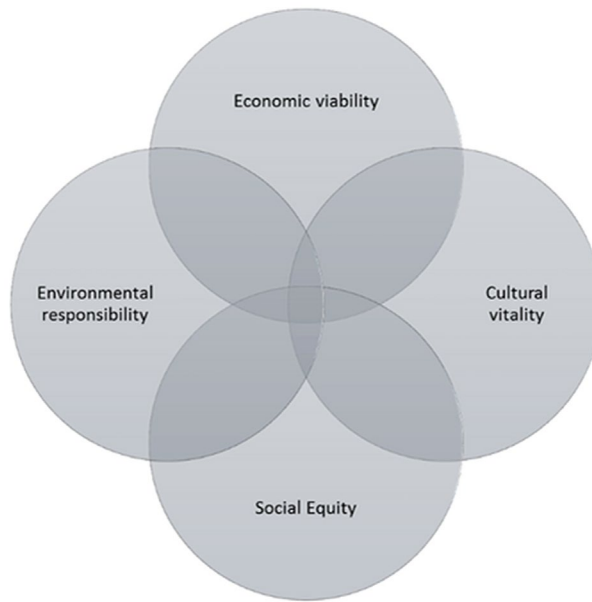


Figure 2. A depiction of the four pillars of sustainability, showing the maintenance of cultural vitality as being of equal importance to environmental, social, and economic concerns.

This second definition would seem to support the thesis that culture is essential for a sustainable society to be possible. Social cohesion depends upon the shared ‘patterns of thought and behaviour, values, and beliefs’ (Barthel-Bouchier 2013, 11) that culture encompasses. It is also through culture that we learn about ‘economic, social, and environmental issues’, and develop our ideas about how society should ‘address’ them (Duxbury and Gillette 2007, 10). From this perspective, whilst culture may have struggled to achieve validation alongside other sustainability goals, it can in fact be considered fundamental to the entire sustainability movement. Culture is not only integral to the existence of a society or social group in the first place, but is also what provides us with the means of ‘comprehending’ and ‘implementing’ the changes in our ideas about living that are required to enable a more sustainable society to be possible (Hawkes 2001, 25).

There is still much work required to fully understand and develop the notion of cultural sustainability. Indeed, owing to the ‘iterative and reciprocal relationship, in which culture constructs society but society also shapes culture’, there are still many difficulties that exist in trying to separate cultural and social sustainability concerns (Dessein *et al.* 2015, 25). Nevertheless, certain concerns have been identified that can be considered key to enabling cultural sustainability. Indeed, Soini and Birkeland’s (2014, 221) analysis of the scientific discourse surrounding cultural sustainability suggests that whilst it may still be ‘at an early stage in its conceptual evolution’, the need for the protection of cultural heritage and the strengthening of cultural vitality have emerged as two key ‘story lines’ within the literature surrounding the term. These concerns, it is proposed, can most clearly be seen to form the ‘fourth, cultural pillar of sustainability parallel to ecological, social, and economic sustainability’ (220).

As such, the protection of cultural heritage assets, which provide a core means by which cultural values and meanings are transferred, is now considered by UNESCO (2013) to be crucial for cultural sustainability to be possible. These assets include both tangible forms of cultural heritage, such as buildings, monuments, books, and works of art; and intangible cultural heritage, such as folklore, traditions, and languages. Of course, the management of such cultural assets is far more complex than

simply ensuring their preservation, as they cannot exist in isolation from the wider cultural needs of society. This more dynamic relationship between cultural heritage and society has many similarities to the relationship between ecological resources and society. Both can be described as forming a 'stock of 'capital' which is 'inherited from our forebears and which we pass on to future generations' (Throsby 1997, 15), but which must equally be utilised for the benefit of the current population.

To this end, Throsby identifies five key sustainability principles originally devised to aid in the sustainable management of ecological resources, but owing to their similarities, can equally be applied to the management of cultural heritage. These include ensuring equity in terms of access to cultural resources for both current and future generations; fostering cultural diversity, and applying the precautionary principle when managing cultural heritage to prevent irreversible damage or loss. In addition, it is also considered necessary to maintain an awareness of the interconnectedness of the cultural, economic, social, and environmental systems, and the consequent effects that any decisions made when managing cultural heritage may have on these other sustainability concerns (Throsby 2011). If, as has been suggested, the protection of cultural assets is as central to cultural sustainability as the protection of ecological resources is to environmental sustainability, then it would seem necessary for similar principles to be applied to the management of cultural heritage.

Interestingly, this is not the only comparison to be drawn between the cultural and environmental sustainability spheres. In a similar way to how organisms are linked together with their environment as part of an ecosystem, in the last decade the idea that 'cultural activities' are 'linked together' in 'dynamic ways' has also been recognised (Holden 2015,3). The AHRC's report entitled 'The ecology of culture' proposes that in order to understand 'the complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings' (2), rather than considering culture as an economy, it is far more useful to take an 'ecological approach' (2). The report suggests that rather than following the traditional linear and economically focused approach to evaluating cultural production, it is far more profitable to consider the cultural sector in terms of its dynamic nature, concentrating on the

'relationships and patterns within the overall system, showing how careers develop, ideas transfer, money flows, and product and content move, to and fro, around and between' the various organisations and individuals involved with the cultural sector. (Holden 2015, 2)

Just as those working in the field of ecology have realised that environmental problems must be addressed according to an awareness of the 'wholeness and interconnectedness' of ecological systems, so it is now becoming clear that cultural 'producers, advocates, and policymakers' must also take a similar stance to 'strengthen the arts and cultural sphere' (Holden 2015, 6). The AHRC's report makes a number of preliminary suggestions of approaches that could be taken in order to achieve this, based on considering the roles that different stakeholders play in sustaining culture, the complex networks that exist between them, and how best to increase the durability and productivity of these cultural systems. In practice, developing such perspectives of the cultural sector can aid those involved in its future development. For example, mapping local cultural ecologies, which involves 'Combining descriptions of activity, infrastructure, history, and demographics ... with data about cultural participation and its objective and subjective effects' (24), can help to determine the main strengths and weaknesses of the sector within a specific locality, and thus aid local authorities in deciding 'where their investment is best deployed' (32).

Just as an acute awareness of complex ecosystems and the careful management of ecological resources underpins environmental sustainability, so there would seem to be an increasing recognition that a similar approach is required for our cultural systems in order for cultural sustainability to be possible. If culture is as fundamental to enabling a sustainable society as has been suggested, then more strategic methods of encouraging cultural vitality and managing our cultural heritage, as key components of the fourth pillar, would certainly seem necessary.

Integration of cultural sustainability in sustainability policy and research for museums and libraries

The idea that culture should be considered as a distinct pillar within sustainable development agendas is now gaining widespread acceptance. Indeed, the need for greater consideration of cultural sustainability was a primary focus in the United Nation's post 2015 sustainability goals (IFACCA 2013). Along with the growing consensus surrounding the idea that the protection of cultural heritage is crucial for cultural sustainability to be possible (UNESCO 2013), this would seem to be a prime opportunity to demonstrate the value of the work of museums and libraries in sustaining culture beyond its impact on social, economic, and environmental concerns. Yet despite this, the focus of sustainability research within museums has tended to remain upon their relationship 'with primarily environmental and secondarily economic and social sustainability' (Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* 2014, 569).

This would also appear to be the case within library research, with the majority of studies focusing on 'greening' initiatives (Jankowska and Marcum 2010, 162). Even research or initiatives focusing specifically on the maintenance of either physical or digital collections within libraries again tend to focus on the environmental, economic and social aspects of the sustainability of these collections (Hamilton 2004, Jankowska and Marcum 2010, Chowdhury 2014). Little reference is made to cultural sustainability either as a way to guide the development of more sustainable practices or to provide explanation for why this work is necessary, despite the fact that such projects are often dealing directly with the preservation of cultural artefacts.

A similar story is told within cultural policy, with the Museums Association's (2008) document 'Sustainability and museums: your chance to make a difference' again focusing on 'Economic, environmental and social' concerns (5). Aspects of what could be considered cultural sustainability are included in their 'Principles for sustainable museums', such as the need to 'Acknowledge the legacy contributed by previous generations and pass on a better legacy of collections, information and knowledge to the next generation' (Museums Association 2016). However, the methods of measuring sustainability in their 'Sustainability Checklist' remain rooted in attributing objectives and targets to 'the three main aspects of sustainable development', which are considered to be 'social, economic, and environmental' concerns (2016).

It is arguable that cultural sustainability concerns are innate within the practices of museums and libraries, and as a result do not need further coverage in sustainability policy. Indeed, as the Museum Association's 'Museums Change Lives' report suggests, initiatives working towards 'improving lives, creating better places and helping to advance society' are built on 'the traditional role of preserving collections and connecting audiences with them' (2013, 3). However, such an approach continues to value the role that organisations play in sustaining culture according to wider 'social outcomes and impact' (3), rather than according to its own merit.

Sustaining culture may be central to the work of museums and libraries, yet cultural sustainability is rarely considered as a definitive outcome within sustainability research and policy within the sector. The role that museums and libraries play within sustainable development continues to be valued according to its social, economic, and environmental impact, perpetuating the notion that culture can only be valued according to its ancillary benefits. This denies organisations the opportunity to be valued according to their unique contributions to sustainable development that explicit recognition of cultural sustainability as an equal pillar would allow.

Encouraging steps have however been made within recent museum research. Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* (2014) provide a theoretical model by which the sustainable development of museums can be assessed according to all four areas of sustainability, with a particular focus on identifying gaps in the 'parameters of cultural sustainability' (566). These parameters are 'constructed on the basis of the broad discussions of culture as a fourth pillar of sustainable development ... the recommendations of museum associations and the most recent debates about multiculturalism, inclusion and community participation' (569–570). The aim of this model is to provide a list of the key responsibilities of museums within the cultural sustainability sphere, and these are broken down into seven separate areas, which are

described as 'Heritage preservation', 'Cultural skills and knowledge', 'Memory/identity', 'New audiences/inclusion', 'Cultural diversity/intercultural dialogue', 'Creativity/innovation', and 'Artistic vitality' (570).

Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* conducted their research across the museums sector in Cyprus, and the model was developed in order to aid cultural policy-makers in identifying 'weaknesses or gaps' in particular areas of cultural sustainability within different museum environments (Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* 2014, 572). For example, the research found state museums to 'place their emphasis on heritage preservation, the passing on of specialized cultural skills and knowledge, as well as the construction of public memory and a sense of national identity'. However, they were considered less active in 'the development of new audiences, the representation of cultural diversity, as well as creativity, innovation, and artistic vitality', which would suggest that policy would need to be amended in order to encourage development within these areas (582).

This study marks a significant move away from the use of the triple bottom line approach, to include cultural sustainability as an equal concern within sustainable development models for museums. Further replications of this study are however required in other countries as well as in other cultural heritage organisations such as libraries. In addition, a range of linked studies might support the development of a better understanding as to how cultural sustainability might be delivered in different contexts. This would seem vital to generate greater understanding of the different pressures affecting the sustainability of cultural heritage within the diverse institutional contexts explored earlier in this article.

Furthermore, the focus of the model devised by Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* is upon developing 'broader (external) cultural policies' (Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* 2014, 569), rather than on internal practices within museums and how these may need to be adapted in order for organisations to demonstrate their contributions to wider cultural sustainability agendas. Without detailed consideration of cultural sustainability at practice level, and the development of 'milestones, benchmarks or measurement facilities' in order to 'assist institutions in assessing their progress towards sustainability', many organisations find 'the practical application of holistic sustainability principles to their operations challenging' (Adams 2010, 26–29). In consequence, whilst such policies may aim to help institutions demonstrate their value to wider society, the translation of policy into practice remains problematic, and as has previously been the case with the triple bottom line, may lead to organisations failing to include it as 'a core part of their work and planning' (Museums Association 2009, 5).

Adams (2010) attempts to address this issue, and draws on existing publications and governmental guidelines within the sustainable development field in order to develop a set of indicators for use within museums that incorporates all four pillars. The benefit of this model is that it provides museums with clear actions in order to work towards sustainability. For example, in terms of increasing environmental sustainability, it is suggested that organisations review their total water use and non-renewable energy use over twelve months, as well as the ratio of waste recycled to waste sent to land fill over the same period (46). The overall sustainability goals are also specific to the organisations themselves, with, for example, the economic goal being defined as 'To have a balanced and diverse budget' (46). In comparison to the policy focused model of Stylianou-Lambert *et al.* (2014, 570), which includes 'Cultural tourism' and 'Economic revitalization' of the local community as the key parameters of museums' role within economic sustainability, the development of such specific goals and indicators as provided by Adams can help towards making sustainability more relevant and manageable to practitioners at an organisational level.

However, whilst Adams' (2010) model includes cultural sustainability as an equal concern alongside the triple bottom line, it does not adequately address the complex nature of culture, or fully explore the role that museums play. The main cultural sustainability goal for museums is defined as being 'to hold the collection in perpetuity and maintain its quality'. The suggested core indicators for doing so focus on conservation measures, such as the 'Proportion of collection surveyed for conservation in the last 12 months', or the increasing or decreasing percentage of items within the collection that rate highly in terms of condition (46). It is clear, however, that cultural sustainability and the role that museums as well as libraries play within it is far more complex than the preservation of cultural artefacts. As explored earlier in this article, museums and libraries are organisations that often have complicated

links to the cultural history of their local communities; maintaining historic buildings, hosting a diverse range of cultural events, offering a wide variety of opportunities for research, and providing cultural inspiration to academics, artists, writers and the general public alike. If the full extent of the cultural value of organisations is to be harnessed for the purpose of expressing contributions to cultural sustainability, then models and indicators need to be developed that more fully reflect the diverse and complex nature of this role.

Proposals for future research and development

For museums and libraries to receive adequate recognition of their unique value in sustaining culture, it is imperative that the concept of cultural sustainability is more fully introduced and developed within cultural policy contexts, and is considered as central rather than subsidiary to other sustainability concerns. However, further research is first required so that the value of the role that museums and libraries play in sustaining culture can be articulated in greater depth than the criteria currently provided by broader sustainable development agendas, and with greater breadth beyond preservation and conservation practices. Such research could enable the contributions of museums and libraries to cultural sustainability to be more adequately expressed within sustainability policies, thus enabling wider appreciation of the value of these organisations to society. This would seem especially necessary within the library sector, where the role of organisations in sustaining culture is often not as immediately discernible as it is in museums, and has consequently remained comparatively underexplored.

To achieve a deeper understanding of the role that museums and libraries play within cultural sustainability, it will be necessary to revise sustainability models. Models so far have concentrated on reflecting external sustainability concerns, which consider environmental, social, economic, and cultural concerns to be equally weighted. However, as the main strengths of these organisations lie in sustaining culture, it could perhaps be more productive to consider their role in sustainability first and foremost according to their role in cultural sustainability. This would not only ensure that their full value in sustaining culture is recognised and harnessed for the purposes of cultural sustainability, but would also help to make sustainability seem more relevant to museum and library professionals, who sometimes struggle to understand the applicability of sustainable development concepts to their organisations (Museums Association 2009).

Rather than seeing all four dimensions of sustainability as equal pillars within the museum or library environment, it may in fact be beneficial to utilise sustainability models to consider how social, economic, and environmental structures within these organisations work to support their cultural contributions (Figure 3). In terms of social structures, it could be helpful to investigate the role of governing bodies, staff, the community, and other external bodies that play a supportive role through associations, partnerships, and collaborations in sustaining the cultural value of individual organisations. Economic

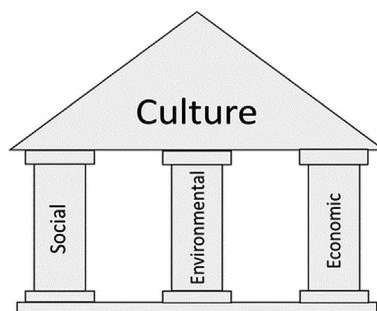


Figure 3. Re-imagining the four pillars: social, economic, and environmental structures supporting museums and libraries in sustaining culture.

considerations would include an investigation of funding and income streams, ways of reducing costs, and the development of business strategies in order to make the cultural contributions of organisations more economically sustainable. Lastly, environmental concerns would focus on the physical conditions and processes required for the conservation of collections, archives, and buildings, and providing the environment necessary for the physical survival of cultural heritage assets within organisations.

Such a model would still need to be informed by external sustainability concerns, as organisations would still bear a responsibility towards wider society, but it would enable sustainable development concerns to be better aligned with the strength of museums and libraries in sustaining culture. This alternative perspective could also help to highlight any conflicts that may exist between organisations' cultural missions and wider sustainability goals. For example, environmental considerations would need to incorporate both a concern for the conservation needs of collections as well as for wider responsibilities to the natural environment, which owing to collection conservation practices not always being eco-friendly, can often be opposed to each other. Trying to find ways to resolve these issues could help to make the application of sustainability measures more practicable within museum and library environments, and again help to increase the uptake of sustainability within the core strategies of organisations.

Conclusion

This article has explored the use of sustainable development concepts within cultural policy to provide justification of the value of museums and libraries to society. It argues that whilst cultural sustainability has become an increasing concern in wider sustainable development agendas, it has not yet been given adequate coverage within sustainability policy and research in museums and libraries. As a result, the work of these institutions in sustaining culture continues to be valued according to its instrumental role in social, economic, and environmental sustainability, rather than according to its intrinsic cultural value.

Museums and libraries have an inherent investment in sustaining and promoting culture, and the growing concern for cultural sustainability provides a compelling perspective from which they can re-establish an understanding of how crucial their work is to society. Formulating sustainability policies for museums and libraries that include cultural sustainability as an equal concern alongside their commitments to social, economic, and environmental impact would help to develop understanding of this role and appreciation of the unique value of these institutions to society, thus helping to secure their future.

Notes on contributors

Kirsten Loach is a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research is a collaborative AHRC funded project with The Portico Library, Manchester, and focuses on the sustainability of independent libraries. She has a background of working in both public and independent libraries.

Jennifer Rowley is Professor in Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University. She has wide ranging research interests within library and information science, education and business and management. Her current interests focus on trust in health information behaviour, sustainability and volunteering in the heritage sector, social media strategy and marketing, place branding and knowledge sharing. She has published widely in journals such as *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Tourism Management*, and *Internet Research*.

Jill Griffiths is Principal Lecturer in Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University. She is experienced in the fields of information behaviour and user experience of information systems in various contexts, including academic and cultural heritage. Her current interests focus on information behaviour across a variety of contexts including cultural heritage, sustainability and volunteering in the heritage sector, information literacy and collection access and description. She has published in a wide variety of journals such as *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *Library Trends* and *Journal of Academic Librarianship*.

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