



# GREEN LIBRARIES IN ACTION: A STUDY OF THE IFLA BEST GREEN LIBRARY AWARD 2025 SHORTLISTED PROJECTS.

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## Abstract

This research paper explores the evolving role of libraries as leaders in sustainability, focusing on the 2025 IFLA Green Library Award's "Best Green Library – Grand-Scale Project" category. Traditionally seen as centers for knowledge and community engagement, libraries have increasingly embraced environmental stewardship, integrating sustainability into their core operations and outreach. The study examines twelve libraries from twelve different countries that were longlisted for the award, highlighting the diversity of their initiatives and the unique environmental and social challenges they address. Through a comparative analysis of their projects, the paper reveals how libraries are moving beyond green buildings to offer sustainable services, promote resource conservation, and foster environmental literacy. The research further analyzes the geographic distribution of longlisted libraries, noting a strong representation from Europe, as well as significant contributions from Asia, South America, and a transcontinental entry. Special attention is given to the three shortlisted libraries from China, France, and the United States, each of which exemplifies innovative approaches to sustainability, ranging from renewable energy use and community engagement to bioclimatic design and social inclusion. The findings underscore the global commitment of libraries to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their capacity to inspire behavioral change within their communities. By documenting best practices and creative solutions, this paper contributes to the growing literature on green libraries. It demonstrates the vital role libraries play in building a sustainable and resilient future for all.

**Key Words** - Sustainability, Sustainability in libraries, ENSULIB, Green Libraries, Environmental Stewardship, IFLA Green Library Award, Community Engagement, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

## I. Introduction

Libraries have long stood as pillars of knowledge, culture, and community development, serving as vital spaces for learning and social engagement. Libraries are the best example for Reduce-Reuse-Recycle as their core quality for sustainability. The circulation section of libraries reuses the same book many times. In recent years, their role has expanded to address one of the most tipping points (pressing) challenges of the time: sustainability. The integration of sustainability within library practices is not only a reflection of the sector's adaptability but also evidence of its commitment to global well-being (Hauke, 2019). As society grapples with climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation, libraries are uniquely positioned to lead by example, fostering environmental awareness and responsible citizenship among their communities.

Sustainability, in its broadest sense, encompasses the responsible management of environmental, economic, and social resources to ensure the well-being of present and future generations (Agyeman, 2013). The importance of sustainability in libraries extends beyond the physical construction of green buildings. It includes sustainable services, resource conservation, eco-friendly programming, and the promotion of environmental literacy (Hauke, 2019). Libraries, as trusted institutions, can inspire behavioral change, support lifelong learning, and empower individuals to participate in the global movement toward a more sustainable future.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has been at the forefront of advocating for sustainability in the library sector. IFLA, established in 1927, is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users worldwide (IFLA, n.d.-a). Recognizing the critical role libraries play in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), IFLA has prioritized sustainability as a key initiative, encouraging libraries to act as agents of change within their communities (IFLA, n.d.-b).

To further this mission, IFLA's Environment, Sustainability and Libraries Section (ENSULIB) was established, focusing on promoting environmentally responsible practices in libraries. ENSULIB launched the IFLA Green Library Award in 2016, generously sponsored by De Gruyter Publishing, to recognize and celebrate libraries and projects that best communicate their

commitment to environmental sustainability (IFLA, n.d.-b; Hauke, 2019). The award aims to create awareness of libraries' social responsibility, support the global green library movement, and encourage the development of sustainable initiatives at local, regional, and international levels.

The IFLA Green Library Award has become a prestigious recognition in the library world, highlighting best practices and innovative projects that advance sustainability standards within the profession (IFLA, n.d.-b). Each year, the award draws submissions from diverse regions, reflecting the universal relevance of sustainability and the creative ways libraries are responding to environmental challenges. An analysis of the shortlisted projects for the IFLA Green Library Award provides useful insights into the changing role of green libraries and highlights their important contribution to building a sustainable future.

This paper focuses only on the shortlisted "Best Green Libraries" under the category "Grand-Scale Project" announced by the IFLA for the year 2025. The sole objective of this study was to know the special features of these libraries and understand why these libraries were selected by IFLA for the award.

## II. Literature Review

There are many angles from which libraries can be viewed as sustainability drivers, such as: Green Library Buildings, sustainable design, services, inclusion of society, carbon footprint, care for nature, "Reduce-Reuse-Recycle", paperless work environment, and use of sustainable technology, creation of green spaces, etc. The researcher noted that literature is available on all aspects of Green Libraries. Footprints of sustainability are not only found in public libraries but also traced in the education sector worldwide.

The Mizoram University library system was studied by a researcher (Lalhampuii, 2017), which is located at Tanhril in the western outskirts of Aizawl, India. The author described that it is one of the first eco-friendly universities in India. It runs effectively on the solar power system for its energy requirements. The solar photovoltaic power plant supports all the academic buildings, hostels, administrative blocks, and streetlights within the campus for electricity.

In a case study of the Walker Library, researchers (Groves and York, 2013) provided a different view of the library to provide the services. They advocated a flexible, reversible, and equipped design of a library as a meeting space to provide library services.

Whereas researchers (Latimer and Niegaard, 2007) presented IFLA guidelines on library building. These guidelines assist library professionals as well as architects to build 'best-of-their-kind' libraries, to design modern libraries, including the best traditions of classic library buildings in it.

There are many rating systems while constructing green buildings, for example:

BREAM - Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method.

GRIHA - Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment

GBTOOL - Green Building Tool

CASBEE - Comprehensive Assessment System for Building Environmental Efficiency

HK-BEEM - Hong Kong Building Environmental Assessment Method

LEED - Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, etc.

Researcher (Edward, 2011) strongly believed that libraries can play an important role in mitigating global warming and strongly send the message for environmental care through good ecological design. Libraries show an environmental footprint where BREEAM or LEED mandates are implemented.

Case studies were compiled by (Hauke, Latimer, and Werner, 2013) from European countries, Asian, Australia, and the United States of America. These studies comprehensively demonstrate the different aspects of reducing the 'ecological footprint' in libraries. By greening everyday procedures in libraries could achieve a positive image and use sustainability in marketing the library. Thus, libraries become sustainable and fulfil their social role. Case studies cover a wide range of ideas and best-practice examples on 'how to green' libraries. This review highlighted the following focal points-

- Sustainable thinking
- Better buildings
- Budgets and beyond
- The role of standardization in supporting responsible library design.
- Energy saving concepts
- Energy efficiency measures
- The second-hand library
- Conversion of scrap into raw material
- Environmentally friendly renovation of the historic library building
- Green operation policy
- Creation of a library green image
- Sustainable library services
- Opportunities through the virtual world (Virtual services and collaborations)

The literature review accommodates different perspectives of Green Libraries. Similarly, each project selected by IFLA for the long list exhibits unique concepts implemented by the libraries.

**Table 1: Long List of libraries and projects with country**

Sr. No	Country	Library Name	Project Name
1	Brazil	Municipal Library Terezinha Municipal Terezinha Franca de Mendonca Duarte.	I Found a Hortolandia Book
2	China	Ningbo Library	Plas-Bottle Renaissance: Going to the Library as a Sustainable Lifestyle
3	Croatia	Public Library Ivana Goran Kovacic Karlovac	Green Festival – Karlovac Green Story
4	France	Maison de l'Environnement	Lire pour Agir: The Prize of the Socioecological Transition Book
5	Lithuania	Siauliai County Povilas Visinskis Public Library	The Library of Things
6	Philippines	Valenzuela City Library	I am a Valenzuelano, I Care for the Environment
7	Poland	Municipal Public Library in Opole	Recommitment to Paper as a Way to Salvage [Rezapis jako ocalenie]
8	Portugal	Manuel Viegas Guerreiro Foundation	Our Common Home, Heart of the Little Naturalists of Querenca
9	Romania	Octavian Goga Cluj County Library	"Little Readers' Garden"
10	Serbia	City Public Librar Zarko Zrenjanin	Librarians of the City Public Library Zarko Zrenjanin as Drivers and Bearers of the Mission to Achieve the Goals of Sustainable Development
11	Thailand	Thammasat University Library	From Waste to Wealth: Green Library Through Circular Economy
12	Turkey	Zonguldak Bulent Ecevit University	Community Power for a Green Future

Table 1. Indicates that the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) longlisted a total of twelve libraries for the Green Library Award in 2025. Each of these libraries are from a different country, collectively showcasing a remarkable diversity of environmental initiatives and societal engagement. The projects submitted by these libraries address a wide range of unique and pressing issues, reflecting the distinct environmental and social contexts of their respective regions. Through innovative approaches and dedicated efforts, these libraries demonstrate how the library sector can play a vital role in promoting sustainability, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility on a global scale.

Each library on the list implements unique projects that address specific environmental and societal concerns relevant to their communities. This variety illustrates how libraries are evolving from traditional roles into dynamic institutions that foster sustainability, resilience, and community engagement. Their initiatives range from energy-efficient building designs and resource-sharing programs to educational workshops and partnerships with local organizations.

**Table 2. Geographic Location of Countries by Continent**

Sr. No	Country	Continent
1	Brazil	South America
2	China	Asia
3	Croatia	Europe
4	France	Europe
5	Lithuania	Europe
6	Philippines	Asia
7	Poland	Europe
8	Portugal	Europe
9	Romania	Europe
10	Serbia	Europe
11	Thailand	Asia
12	Turkey	Europe/Asia (Transcontinental Country)

Table 2. The longlist spans four continents: Europe, Asia, South America, and a transcontinental entry (Turkey). Europe leads with seven entries (Croatia, France, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia), highlighting a strong engagement with green library initiatives across the continent. Asia is represented by China, the Philippines, and Thailand, while South America is represented by Brazil. Turkey, uniquely situated in both Europe and Asia, underscores the interconnectedness of sustainability efforts across regions.

This geographical diversity demonstrates that the pursuit of sustainable library practices is not confined to a single region but is a truly global phenomenon. Libraries from both developed and developing countries are actively contributing to environmental stewardship and social responsibility. The inclusion of countries from different continents also reflects varying environmental challenges, cultural contexts, and innovative responses tailored to local needs. The table indicates the library's global commitment to sustainability.

Turkey's presence as a transcontinental country highlights the importance of cross-regional collaboration and the sharing of best practices. Such collaboration can help bridge knowledge gaps and inspire innovative solutions to global environmental challenges.

The IFLA's official website mentions that the International ENSULIB Award Reviewing Committee evaluates the quality, relevance of the project, initiative, or idea by following the IFLA Green Library Award Criteria as follows-

- Applicability to the goals and the scope of ENSULIB
- Contribution of libraries to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Quality of the overall presentation, public visualization via website etc.
- Relevance to IFLA's goals and values

**Table 2 Shortlisted Libraries by IFLA: "Best Green Library-Grand-Scale Project (Year 2025)"**

Sr. No	Country	Library Name	Project Name
1	China	Shenzhen: Shenzhen Yantian Library	The Growth Library: Reading Without Borders, Growth with Sustainability
2	France	Paris: James Baldwin Library	James Baldwin Library: SDGs Inside a Sustainable Project
3	USA	Nashville: Nashville Public Library Donelson Branch	Retro Roots, Green Future: A Mid-century Marvel in Sustainability

### III. First Shortlisted Library –

China, Shenzhen: Shenzhen Yantian Library, "The Growth Library: Reading Without Borders, Growth with Sustainability"

#### About the Project-

In 2024, the Yantian District Library, in collaboration with the Vanke Foundation, launched the Growth Library project based on the concept that "a library is a living entity that evolves."

By integrating varied social resources, the initiative promotes the idea that "everything can be read," transforming the library into an expansive green space and a motivator for community sustainability. It serves 20,000 residents across a 21-square-kilometer area and attracts over 20 million visitors annually.

By supporting paperless reading, The Growth Library offers an 85% renewable electricity usage rate, a 60% energy reduction rate, and a 50% water conservation rate. Its innovative approach has drawn numerous partners, contributing to its continuous expansion.

The Yantian District Library's Growth Library project has expanded to include low-carbon tour routes and Green Reading Spots, which promote sustainability within the community. It incorporates facilities such as an on-site black soldier fly kitchen-waste recycling station and China's first "Four-Zero" McDonald. These efforts provide public engagement opportunities and professional services in environmental protection, sustainable living, and green education, fostering stronger community involvement in sustainable practices.

### IV. Second Shortlisted Library –

France, Paris: James Baldwin Library, "James Baldwin Library: SDGs Inside a Sustainable Project"

#### About the Project-

The James Baldwin Media Library and Refugee House in Paris is a unique space that combines a neighborhood library with a place to integrate refugees and displaced people. Located in the 19th arrondissement, the library, which stands on the site of a former school, is designed with bioclimatic principles, preserving the original structure while enhancing natural light and ventilation. The project also incorporates an ecologically responsible approach, using bio-sourced and "geo-sourced" materials.

More detailed features of the library are as follows:

- **Dual Purpose:** The library serves both as a cultural center for the neighborhood and a place for refugees to integrate and learn French.
- **Preservation and Modernization:** The architects preserved and renovated the original school structure, incorporating elements like reinforced concrete posts and beams.
- **Bioclimatic Design:** The library is designed to utilize natural light and ventilation, optimizing its energy efficiency.
- **Ecological Approach:** The project utilizes biosourced and "geosourced" materials to minimize its environmental impact.



- **Refugee Integration:** The library provides space for refugees to learn French, cook, and socialize, fostering a sense of community.
- **Landscape and Biodiversity:** The project reverses waterproofing on a portion of the lot to promote biodiversity.
- **Location:** Situated on the site of the former lycée hôtelier Jean Quarré in the 19th arrondissement.

#### V. Third Shortlisted Library-

USA, Nashville: Nashville Public Library, Donelson Branch, "Retro Roots, Green Future: A Midcentury Marvel in Sustainability"

About the project-

The Nashville Public Library Donelson Branch's project, titled "Retro Roots, Green Future: A Midcentury Marvel in Sustainability," stands as a model for sustainable civic architecture and has been recognized with the IFLA 2025 Green Library Award in the Grand Scale Project category. This 25,000-square-foot facility, designed by Hastings Architecture and opened in June 2024, is located in Donelson Plaza, a revitalized 1960s-era shopping center. The library's design draws inspiration from mid-century motifs, notably featuring breezeblock elements and argyle-patterned white brick, which not only evoke the area's heritage but also serve functional purposes such as passive shading for the building's southern façade (Good Design Awards, 2024).

Sustainability is central to the library's mission. The building is pursuing LEED Gold certification and incorporates a variety of advanced green features. A rooftop photovoltaic array generates renewable energy, while a geothermal system with thirty wells provides efficient heating and cooling. The library targets a site Energy Use Intensity (EUI) of 35, representing a 65% reduction from standard benchmarks. An on-site sustainability dashboard, "Socket," educates visitors about the building's energy and water use, fostering community awareness around environmental stewardship (Good Design Awards, 2024).

Beyond its environmental achievements, the Donelson Branch serves as a vibrant community hub, offering unique programming spaces for children and teens, a community room, and a front lawn designed for outdoor reading and events. The project exemplifies the IFLA Green Library Award's goals by integrating environmentally sustainable building practices with community engagement and education, positioning the library as a leader in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (IFLA, 2024; News Channel 5, 2025).

#### VII. Conclusion

The analysis of the IFLA Green Library Award 2025, particularly under the "Best Green Library – Grand-Scale Project" category, reveals a dynamic and inspiring evolution in the global library sector. Libraries, once primarily seen as centers for knowledge preservation and community learning, have now emerged as proactive agents in the pursuit of sustainability. This transformation is not only timely but essential, as the world faces unprecedented environmental and social challenges that require innovative, community-based solutions.

The twelve libraries longlisted for the award, each representing a different country and continent, collectively demonstrate the remarkable diversity and creativity with which libraries are addressing sustainability. Their projects span a wide spectrum—from energy efficiency and resource conservation to community engagement and social inclusion—reflecting the unique environmental and societal contexts of their respective regions. This diversity is not merely geographic; it is also conceptual, as each library brings its own interpretation and priorities to the concept of sustainability. For example, while some libraries focus on green building design and renewable energy use, others prioritize circular economy initiatives, environmental education, or the integration of marginalized groups such as refugees.

A key insight from this study is the truly global nature of the green library movement. The longlist includes libraries from Europe, Asia, South America, and a transcontinental entry, underscoring that the commitment to sustainability transcends borders, economies, and cultures. Europe's strong representation highlights the continent's ongoing leadership in sustainable development, but the inclusion of libraries from China, the Philippines, Thailand, Brazil, and Turkey demonstrates that impactful environmental initiatives are emerging in diverse settings, including developing regions. This global spread is significant because it allows for the cross-pollination of ideas and practices, enriching the movement as a whole and ensuring that solutions are adaptable to a variety of local contexts.

The projects highlighted in this paper also illustrate the expanding role of libraries as community hubs for environmental stewardship. The shortlisted libraries from China, France, and the United States exemplify this trend. Shenzhen Yantian Library's "Growth Library" project in China integrates renewable energy, water conservation, and paperless reading with extensive community outreach, serving as a model for how libraries can become living entities that evolve with—and for—their communities. The James Baldwin Library in Paris, France, stands out for its bioclimatic design and dual mission of environmental sustainability and refugee integration, demonstrating that libraries can simultaneously address ecological and social challenges. The Nashville Public Library Donelson Branch in the United States showcases how the renovation of mid-century architecture can blend heritage preservation with cutting-edge sustainable design, inspiring other institutions to see the potential in retrofitting existing spaces for a greener future.

The IFLA's criteria for shortlisting—originality, community impact, and replicability—emphasize the importance of not only achieving sustainability within a single institution but also creating models that can inspire and guide others. The projects recognized by the Green Library Award are not isolated experiments; they are blueprints for broader change within the library profession and beyond. Through the sharing of best practices, case studies, and lessons learned, IFLA and its award-winning projects add to the growing knowledge base that helps libraries around the world take effective steps toward achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Another important theme emerging from this research is the role of libraries in fostering behavioral change and environmental literacy. Libraries are uniquely positioned to educate and empower their communities, offering resources, programs, and safe spaces for dialogue on sustainability. Their trusted status within society enables them to reach diverse audiences, from children and students to seniors and marginalized groups. By integrating sustainability into their daily operations and outreach, libraries can inspire individuals to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and become active participants in the global movement for environmental protection.

In conclusion, the IFLA Green Library Award 2025 longlist and shortlist provide compelling evidence of the library sector's growing commitment to sustainability. The projects analyzed in this paper demonstrate that libraries are not only adapting to the challenges of the 21st century but are also leading the way in promoting environmental stewardship, social inclusion, and community resilience. As libraries continue to innovate and collaborate across borders, their impact will extend far beyond their walls, shaping a more sustainable and equitable future for all. The lessons and models presented here offer valuable guidance for other institutions seeking to embrace sustainability as a core value, reaffirming the vital role of libraries as catalysts for positive change in an ever-evolving world.

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