

STUDY ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE BOOKSELLING SECTOR :

STATE OF PLAY, CHALLENGES
AND SECTOR IMPROVEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

A systemic issue

This report presents many steps individual bookshops can take to reduce energy and resource consumption and cut waste.

That must not however hide the fact that a genuine ecological transition cannot be achieved through environmental gestures alone. It must be implemented across a whole production and consumption system.

Book production

Studies in several countries have all come to the same conclusion: across a book's life cycle, the most environmentally impactful phase is manufacture.

The first challenge to ensure the sustainability of the book ecosystem is therefore to manufacture *less, and better.*

So what can bookshops do?

It is tempting to say that the ball is in the publishers' court: after all, they are the ones who put books onto the market that generate all these environmental impacts.

But that would neglect the fact that booksellers are part of this ecosystem made up of interdependences, and that they are free agents capable of taking action themselves. Yes, they are the penultimate link in the value chain, above the end customer, whoever that is (library, business, consumer, etc.), and as such, they are subject to the impacts of the actors higher up. But the legacy of common and **widespread practices, habits, economic constraints and the pace of daily life often cause us to forget that it is possible to change.**

This report offers many examples of actions aimed at reducing the environmental impact of bookshops. Some are small, everyday actions. Other actions need to be carried out collectively, within professional networks and in cooperation with suppliers or peers.

The long version of the report – which can be downloaded from the RISE project website developed by EIBF – contains concrete and detailed examples, and a self-assessment table. The methodology of this study is also explained in the long version of the document.

Changing to prepare for the future

As we have seen, the manufacturing, storage and shipping of books have many environmental impacts. But books are also a vehicle for culture, education, transmission and exchange. They are an invitation to ponder and ruminate, to share, to feel, to escape and to reflect.

These proposals do not aim to point a finger at the book industry. The ecological transition is a systemic and holistic movement, and books are just a drop in the ocean in a world facing multiple crises.

Engaging bookshops in the ecological transition addresses a fundamental challenge: guaranteeing their future.

The ecological crisis and climate change require us not only to mitigate our environmental impacts, but also to adapt to this new context. Today, our activities rely on the use of fossil fuels, on globalized supply chains, and on excessive consumption of natural resources. This makes us vulnerable in the event of energy, geopolitical and economic crises.

Reducing such dependencies paves the way for the bookshops of tomorrow.

The most important thing is to get started, and we do have a few suggested routes!

risebookselling.eu/sustainable-bookselling



CHAPTER 1

ENERGY

Why?

Bookshops use energy for lighting, heating and cooling. This has several environmental impacts, including:

- Use of fossil fuels and therefore greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming;
- Consumption of resources (metals and minerals) and space to produce and transport energy;
- Air pollution from burning oil and coal.

How?

Save on electricity

Bookshops' electricity use is linked to several needs.

Simple steps can be taken to reduce lighting consumption: reducing light intensity when there is sufficient sunlight, not lighting up windows outside opening hours, and always turning off the lights in certain unoccupied areas. Replacing older lightbulbs with LEDs can also generate significant energy savings, and they also produce less heat in summer. Depending on the systems used, hot water can account for a considerable share of electricity consumption. You can also think to track your electricity consumption.

Save on heating

Major work may not be required to reduce energy consumption for heating. Options include : Turning down the thermostat, do not heat all the time, do not heat the whole building: look for areas that are not worth heating, like store rooms, identify where heat is being lost, and finally, if your building's thermal efficiency is poor, renovation and isolation will no doubt be needed.

Save on air conditioning

Climate change is increasing the frequency and duration of heatwaves and affecting many bookshops. It can be tempting to use air conditioning when temperatures get too high, but air conditioning is an example of "maladaptation": while it improves the short-term situation, it also contributes to worsening the problem in the medium to long term. Therefore, you can stop the premises heating up during the day, cool the building down during the night and finally cool people.

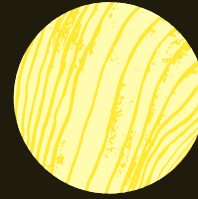
Change energy suppliers

Depending on where your bookshop's energy comes from, the carbon emissions caused by its electricity use may vary considerably. In some countries, emissions will be low because of hydroelectric or nuclear generation, which produce little greenhouse gas. Other countries use coal or gas to produce electricity, which has a much higher carbon intensity. If you are in a country where electricity is very carbon-intensive, it may be worth using renewable energy. If the building allows, you could install solar panels. Otherwise, you could choose an electricity supplier that invests in renewable sources.

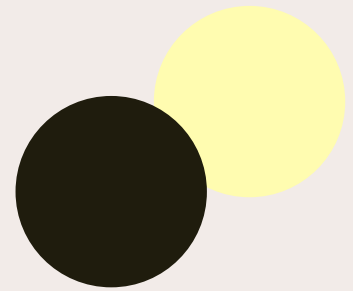
Change heating systems

How is your bookshop heated? Wood? Oil? Gas? Electricity? That makes a big difference on the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from your heating. Oil-fired heating emits more greenhouse gases than other heating sources. The impact of electric heating varies considerably from one country to the next, as it depends on how the electricity is produced. Changing sources of heating can therefore be a good way to reduce your global warming impact.

CHAPTER 2



WASTE AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY



Why ?

Reducing waste helps cut the extraction of natural resources and the energy needed to process, ship and recycle them. It is also an important way to reduce pollution.

To address this issue effectively, the priority is to reduce the quantity of waste, before focusing on recycling. The “5 Rs” apply here: reject, reduce, reuse, recycle, restore to the earth.

How?

Cardboard Boxes

This is the tip of the iceberg, and something all booksellers are well aware of: the daily influx of boxes in which books arrive at and leave the shop. Many bookshops organize reuse of boxes. Some use them to package the orders they dispatch. Others offer them to their customers for personal use. Some distributors, however, use boxes that are not designed to be reusable. Feel free to ask your distributor to stop that.

When reuse is impossible, it is essential to organize recycling of boxes by taking them to the rubbish tip or entrusting them to a specialist recycling company.

Gift wrapping

Booksellers and customers are often very attached to this service, but wrapping paper unfortunately has a very short life-span and is often difficult to recycle. You can reduce the environmental impact of wrapping without giving up on it:

- Offer cloth wrapping: the Japanese furoshiki technique is increasingly trendy. The item is wrapped in a pretty cloth that can be reused.

Some booksellers offer cloth wrappings for sale. The Les Lisières bookshop in France collects cloth from its customers to produce coupons of various sizes which stand in for wrapping paper, at no extra cost.

- Wrapping in reused paper such as advertising and newspaper can be an alternative to single-use wrapping paper. Increasing numbers of customers like to have an environmentally friendly option.
- If these solutions appear a hard sell for your customers, you could keep the traditional wrapping paper as an option. Ideally, in this case, you would offer the most environmentally friendly option by default, but offer traditional wrapping paper to the customers who want it.
- If you want to continue offering traditional wrapping paper, use recycled and recyclable paper with no plastic coating and without printed designs across the whole surface, for example.

Bags for customers

Providing a carrier bag, typically made of plastic, goes without saying for most bookshops, but it has real environmental impacts. Plastics are today a major cause of pollution with serious consequences for biodiversity. Regulations on plastic bags are changing in many countries. There are many possible strategies to cut down on them:

- Paper bags. These are easier to recycle (so long as they have no plastic coating and are not covered in printed designs) and are sometimes made of recycled materials. They can be a good alternative.
- Reusable cloth bags. These reduce plastic use, but also have downsides.
- Asking customers to bring back bags.

- Charging for plastic bags.
- No longer offering bags.

Limiting the quantities of plastic packaging

If your bookshop offers a delivery service, you probably use plastic products to protect the products. It is possible to protect books well while using less plastic.

Composting

Composting is a way to make further use of organic waste by collecting it so that it breaks down and produces natural fertilizer. That helps limit the amount of residual waste and thus reduces CO₂ emissions and fumes. Food waste is compostable, as are coffee grounds and paper filters, teabags, boxes and absorbent paper (without printed designs), tissues, toilet paper rolls and cut flowers, for example.

Pre-used furniture

The furniture used in bookshops is often bought new and requires the extraction and processing of natural resources. How can you reduce the impact of your furniture?

- Choose furnishings made with the environment in mind.
- Keep your furniture longer to reduce resource extraction.
- Buy second hand furniture.
- Buy furniture made out of reused materials.
- Organize a second life for your furniture.

Reduce the number of damaged and destroyed books

All bookshops face this issue: books that have been damaged in transit are difficult to sell. In countries where booksellers can return books to the publisher, they are typically sent back and destroyed. However, these books could often be sold, perhaps at a discount, depending on local legislation. You could, for example, put in place a dedicated bin for damaged books. Books can also be refurbished. Selling damaged books at a discount should of course be balanced with the economic impact: when it occurs occasionally, it will cause little harm, but if you have a lot of damaged books you should work with the distributor to resolve the problem.

Reduce the number of returned and pulped books

- Adjust the balance between new releases and existing collections in your orders. New releases are generally those most returned.
- Extend titles' life-span: given the volume and pace of new releases, there is a risk of one book displacing another. Can you slow down the pace of replacement and keep books longer before returning them?
- Reduce the share of books with a short "shelf life", such as illustrated albums for the return to school after the holidays, holiday exercise books, and annual "best-of" collections.

Offer second-hand books

Selling new and second hand books are two different professions, and you cannot just put up a second hand section without preparation. There are various ways to proceed and it is up to you to decide what suits you, your customers and your bookshop's identity best.

The development of the second hand book market is not a perfect solution. The first issue is how to remunerate authors and publishers. The current organization of the second hand market does not pay any royalties. This could change in the coming years, so as to rebalance the distribution of economic value.

Lastly, as for new books, transporting second hand books over long distances has significant impacts. The more the second hand market develops at local levels and with short supply chains, the more environmentally friendly it will be.

CHAPTER 3

SHIPPING AND ORDERING

Why?

While it represents only a small share of greenhouse gas emissions, shipping, particularly by road, causes many other environmental impacts.

- **Air pollution:** The World Health Organization considers that 99% of the Earth's population lives in regions where atmospheric pollution exceeds recommended limits, and 4.2 million deaths are attributed to ambient air pollution each year.
- **Sound pollution:** Sound pollution from shipping is one of the most significant environmental problems, as around 18% to 20% of the European Union's population suffers seriously from it.
- However, shipping also has many other impacts on our environment, including energy consumption, urban congestion, land artificialization and accidents.

How?

Bicycle deliveries

Did you know that shipping is more polluting per ton in small trucks than in large ones? Small trucks often drive in urban centres, where traffic is heavy and they have to go slowly and stop frequently. While they account for a small fraction of the distance books travel to bookshops, it is very useful to seek an alternative for "last mile" delivery. Cargo bikes are increasingly being used for deliveries in many countries. With adapted trailers and e-bikes, it is absolutely possible to transport even hundreds of kilos of boxes of books on a single bicycle.

Rail freight

It is generally nigh-on impossible for an independent bookshop to use rail freight. But it can be a viable solution for chains or associations of several bookshops.

Reduce the frequency of orders from distributors

How often do you make orders from distributors? Many booksellers order books every day to renew supplies and fulfil customer orders. That cuts waiting time for customers, but does have an impact on the optimization of the supply chain. It is therefore not uncommon for booksellers to order the same book several times in a week. The frequency of orders is often dictated by the desire to offer a quality service and meet customer expectations in a highly competitive environment. There are various strategies:

- Differentiate between urgent and non-urgent purchases, to group non-urgent orders and make fewer, but larger, orders;
- Try gradually reducing the number of orders per week.
- These issues are often studied closely by national and regional booksellers' associations, who can help you improve your purchasing practices.

Reduce the frequency of deliveries from distributors

The frequency of orders and that of deliveries are not always the same. Even if you make orders every day, you can choose to receive deliveries less often, helping to fill trucks better and reduce the number of journeys, as well as your delivery costs.

While this is difficult to organize in larger bookshops, which receive large quantities on a daily basis, it can be an interesting approach in medium and small bookshops, helping them to control the time spent on the logistics of delivery.

Grouping deliveries

CLIL is an association of booksellers and publishers that was created in France in 1990. It handles book shipping through a logistics platform called Prisme. This platform groups shipments to bookshops from publishers and distributors, as well as returns. Publishers send all orders to a single delivery point, and bookshops receive one delivery containing boxes from all publishers and distributors. That cuts shipping costs and limits the environmental impact of delivery by optimizing the loading of trucks.

Encourage staff and customers to decarbonize their bookshop journeys

Customer travel is therefore a key aspect when it comes to reducing a bookshop's environmental impact, even if it is not easy to encourage customers to use a different means of transport. Here are a few ideas:

- Communicate with customers to inform them of the bookshop's efforts and encourage them to take part by changing their habits;
- Create a dedicated section for cycling, with maps of cycle paths, books on cycle repairs and travel guides, for example;
- Offer a discount for customers who show a bus ticket or a cycle helmet;
- Improve arrangements for your cyclist customers by ensuring they have secure cycle parking.

Develop short supply chains

Buying local not only supports the local economy, but also helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution by reducing transport.



CHAPTER 4

DIGITAL SECTOR

Why?

The digital sector is estimated to represent around 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions – as much as civil aviation – and its emissions are growing fast. Above and beyond greenhouse gas emissions, digital technologies have other impacts on our environment, including the exhaustion of natural resources (including metals), water and soil pollution, and energy consumption.

The impacts are split between equipment and its use.

How?

Reduce the impact of your equipment

The first step is to limit purchases and replacement of equipment by asking yourself:

- If you think you could keep the current equipment longer, if necessary with repairs;
- If you really need this equipment, or if you could do without it;
- If you could purchase a smaller model (the environmental impact of screens is proportional to their size);
- If you could rent the equipment rather than purchasing it (reducing the risk of built-in obsolescence);
- If you could purchase second hand equipment;
- If you could choose equipment designed with environmental impact in mind and certified as such.

When you dispose of digital and electronic equipment, consider giving it a second life if possible by selling it on or donating it (even for parts). If neither is possible, make sure it is recycled appropriately.

Reduce the impact of digital communication

When it comes to communication, the production and hosting of media should be rationalized. Videos have a greater impact than emails when it comes to your carbon footprint. If you really want to share an interview or a video, try to keep it short and choose the right format: there is no point uploading videos in 4K when they are going to be watched on a tiny smartphone screen.

Of course, it is tempting to be on all platforms and social networks, but is it necessary? What is the real audience there? And for the social media you choose, use it responsibly: adapt image formats to make them as small as possible.

It is also possible to reduce the impact of your website, such as by limiting the number and size of pictures.

Reduce the impact of your mailing list

Another important area is your newsletter. That uses considerable amounts of energy. How many of your contacts never open the messages you send them? If your email marketing software offers this feature, clean out everyone who did not open the last 5, 10 or 20 emails. That will reduce your carbon footprint, lower the cost of your subscription, and improve your opening rate, which should reduce the risk of your emails being sent to spam.

Pick up your digital litter

Content on social media has a very short shelf life and soon becomes irrelevant. Content that is out of date can be deleted. Keep some recent posts, but delete announcements, photos and videos that are no longer needed. Try to clear up your cloud storage and computer to remove large and unnecessary files. Look for example for draft documents and other temporary files. You are not going to need them again, and they clog up the storage space of your devices and speed up their obsolescence.

It is up to you how you want to organize this. Do you want to do it regularly? Then put it in your diary. Prefer to do it once a year? Then Digital Cleanup Day is for you.

CHAPTER 5

MANAGEMENT

Why?

All the above changes have an impact on how the bookshop works, can require financial investments and reorganization of certain business processes, and have an impact on purchasing policy. They therefore need to be conceived as part of the bookshop's wider development strategy.

Implementing such changes takes time and resources, requiring a team to be put together or certain persons to take on new tasks within the bookshop. This change needs to be steered to ensure the initiative is effective.

How?

Team training

Ecological practices are far from being central to bookseller training. It is difficult to be effective when you lack the necessary knowledge and skills. Training is therefore an essential first step before you put in place an action plan within your bookshop.

Designate a champion

It may be useful to identify one or more people within your team to act as "champions" for environmental issues.

However, do make sure that the whole initiative you put in place does not rest on their shoulders alone. Every member of the team needs to be engaged in the changes to be made, and should feel accountable for their success.

The champion will above all be responsible for coordinating the initiative, ensuring its coherence, and identifying needs and obstacles so that the whole team can move forward together effectively.

Carry out an analysis

The first thing you need to know when you set a course is where you are starting from! An initial analysis can be carried out in various ways, depending on the type of bookshop and the available financial and human resources, for example. Here are a few ideas:

- Carry out a carbon footprint analysis: this is a long and expensive process, taking months and costing thousands, but it does provide an exhaustive and precise account of the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions.
- Carry out an analytical tour of your bookshop: set aside a period of around two hours for the team to visit every nook and cranny of the shop and identify all the steps that have been or should be taken to reduce environmental impact.

Work with stakeholders

Bookshops cannot successfully implement environmental action plans without cooperating with all their stakeholders.

Adopt a charter

Drafting and adopting a charter can be a good means of sharing your commitments. It can be a very simple document. The aim is to recall the bookshop's values and how they are upheld every day.

Take advantage of quality certifications

If the library is in a quality or certification process, it can be an opportunity to put in place sustainable policies recommended by the specifications. Any managerial initiative can contribute to reflection on sustainable practices and their improvement.

CHAPTER 6

CUSTOMER AWARENESS

Why?

Your ecological choices can have an impact on your customers and their relationship with the bookshop, so it is important to explain your decisions.

Bookshops are major drivers of critical thinking, utopianism and imagination for tomorrow's world. You can play major role in the exchange of ideas. The principles of this last part can be summed up by the goal of better accompanying your changes to bring meaning and spread your ideas.

How?

Develop a thematic section

How are environmental issues represented in the books you sell? Many books published recently address themes like climate change, pollution and biodiversity and have aroused reader interest, including essays and documents, ecofiction, graphic novels and youth literature. Above and beyond theoretical knowledge, these issues can be addressed through many everyday themes. For example, you could offer practical books on vegetarian cooking, vegetable growing and permaculture, zero waste family life, cycle tourism and train travel.

Create environment-focused table and window displays

You could showcase selections of books on environmental issues in light of current events and international days. Each region also has its own calendar of events and thematic weeks. Booksellers are creative and know how to highlight and promote books. This can also be an opportunity to mix genres, such as novels and humanities, for example.

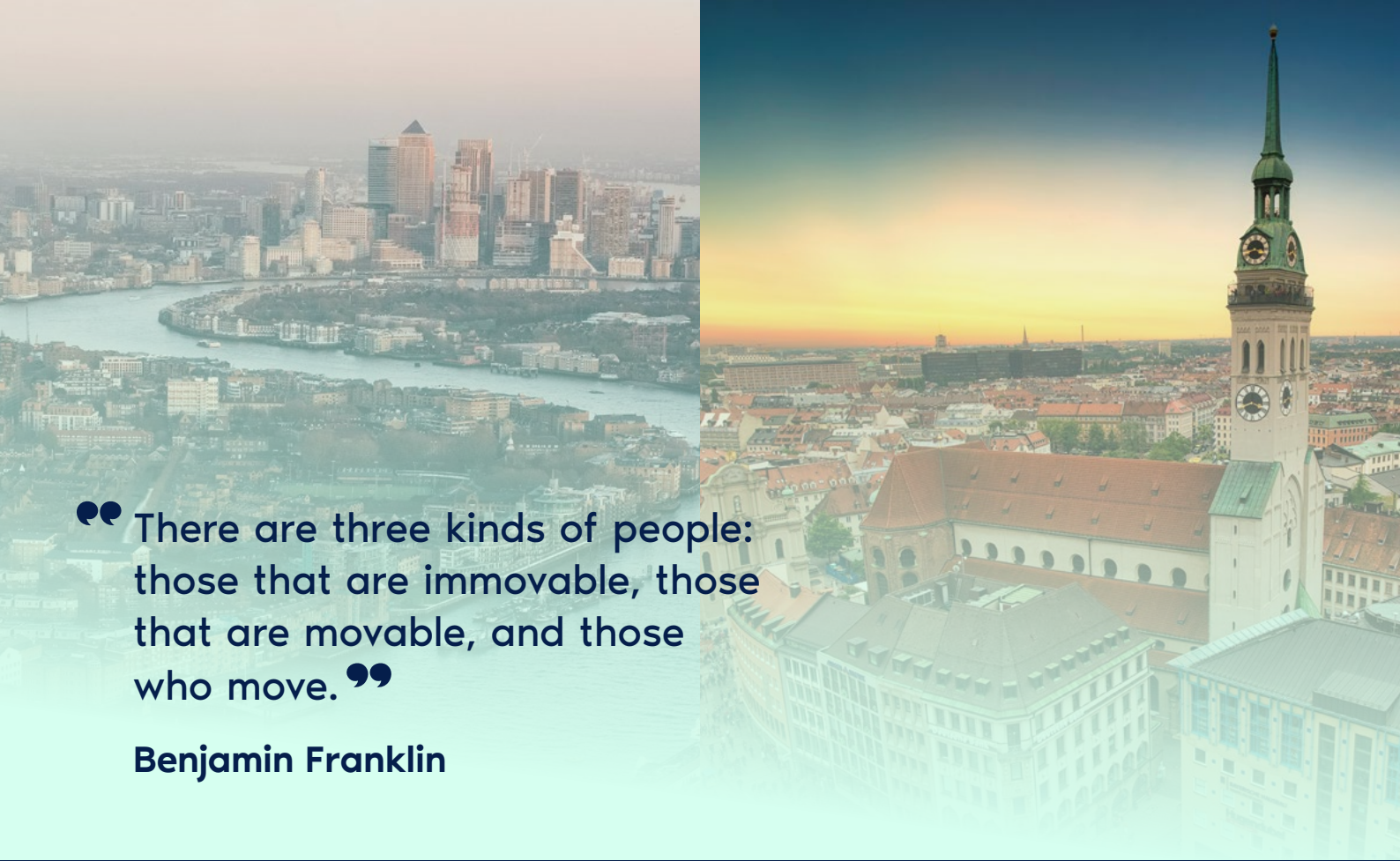
Communication and customer engagement

Remember to inform your customers of your commitments and actions, such as through posters in your shop, newsletters and website. You can also share the campaigns of your regional or national booksellers' association.

Do you want to get rid of plastic bags, change your wrapping paper or cut back on merchandise? These choices will be better accepted if you explain them to your customers.

It is not always easy to communicate around these subjects and you have to strike the right note and find the right words and posture to engage with customers. A team meeting can help shape your strategy for engaging with customers on this issue.





“ There are three kinds of people: those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those who move. ”

Benjamin Franklin

CONCLUSION

So now what?

We conceived this document as a practical guide for action. Use it however you want!

Of course, as we underlined in the introduction, booksellers cannot resolve all the problems in the book sector, many of which stem from higher up in the chain.

Your bookshop is unique, and we know many factors make it complicated to transpose innovations from one country to another, given the different cultural

contexts, laws, economies and competition.

But it is possible to get on board now and influence change, at your own level.

You can find the long version of this report with many concrete and practical examples on the RISE project website developed by EIBF, as well as the self-assessment table. You can also get in touch with your local or national association, which will be able to provide you with all the latest information and guide you



through the steps you need to take to make your bookshop more environmentally friendly.

It's up to you to follow up this document with working groups, training courses, workshops, experience-sharing and other innovative initiatives. We wish you all the best!

risebookselling.eu/sustainable-bookselling



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