The Concept of Information Literacy in Policy-Making Texts: An Imperialistic Project?

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Abstract

Organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) put a lot of effort in advocacy and policy making for information literacy (IL). Their ambition to foster IL can be seen as a part of a multinational educational project. By exporting a Western IL model focused on textual information sources and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into non-Western contexts that to a great extent lack ICTs, the educational project for IL runs the risk of turning into an imperialistic project. A discursively oriented analysis of two prominent policy documents—discussed in the light of the so-called new imperialism and the idea of invisible technologies—indicates a standardized one-size-fits-all-model of IL. Through establishing a close contact between the policy-making strand and the research strand in the IL literature and by adhering to the broad concept of information literacies, the risk of imperialism and oppression might lessen.

Introduction

The prevailing view today is that education is a key driver for a brighter future. From both national and international perspectives, an important incentive for educational efforts aiming for the global expansion of formal schooling and higher education is the belief that well-educated people will contribute to the development of economies that are competitive, dynamic, and knowledge-based (e.g., Commission of the European Communities, 2003). Around the world, organizations and nations are formulating visions for the future that include the ideas of "knowledge societies" (e.g., Horton, 2007, p. i), and education is presented as being "at the core

of human progress, endeavour and well-being" (World Summit on the Information Society, 2005, p. 2). A central constituent in the formulation of this multinational educational project is information and communication technologies (ICTs), which are seen as crucial tools for the staging of a global knowledge society: "everyone must . . . learn how to utilize those incredibly diverse and powerful technologies efficiently and effectively" (Horton, p. i). These anticipations and this trust in education as salvation have been dubbed the "educational gospel" (Grubb & Lazerson, 2006), which, as pointed out by Brown, Lauder, and Ashton, is "consistent with a technocratic model of evolutionary social change" (2008, p. 131). Even though societies are assumed to gain economically through educational efforts, these are not the only values that are highlighted in the visions for how the world should be improved. Education is also portrayed as something that can secure and enhance equality, democracy, and human rights—in short, education is seen as an empowering and deliberating force on both a collective and individual level.

At the center of this project is the Western world's often self-assumed commission to carry out missionary work in the name of education. These ambitions are also clearly visible within the library and information sector. Organizations such as the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are key players in the so called "information literacy movement" (e.g., Garner, 2006). Both organizations have formulated strategies for their work for information literacy (IL). UNESCO focuses on "awareness-raising about the importance of information literacy at all levels of the education process" (UNESCO and Information Literacy, 2009). IFLA has formed a specific section for information literacy with "the primary purpose . . . to foster international cooperation in the development of information literacy education in all types of libraries and information institutions" (IFLA, n.d.). An obvious sign of the importance that is ascribed to information literacy is the statement that "information literacy is at the heart of UNESCO's broader mandate for the construction of knowledge societies" (Horton, 2007, p. ii). Another is the steadily increasing amount of policy making, advocating, and awareness-raising publications issued by these organizations.

Fully aware of many well-meant and ambitious contributions in the name of information literacy, we still believe that the time and need has come to scrutinize these kinds of normative documents and the discourses that underpin their lines of reasoning in order to unveil possible dimensions of power, inequality, and authoritarian tendencies of imperialism. The aim of the present article is thus to explore, gain knowledge about, and problematize the information literacy movement as shaped and constructed through texts published by these highly influential aforementioned organizations.

The concept of information literacy has evolved and been elaborated in a Western, industrialized setting where being information literate often is portrayed as being capable with ICTs and where the predominant focus seems to be on skills in relation to text-based sources. However, an increasing body of recent research indicates that information literacy should be understood as a situated, context-related phenomenon (e.g., Lloyd & Williamson, 2008). From our point of view, it seems that information literacy, the way it is communicated through the IL movement, might be running the risk of appearing as a commodity produced in the Western world aimed for exportation to the so-called third world or developing countries. However, if one wants to promote the liberating potential in information literacy, it is important to carefully analyze what it might mean to develop information literacy within the community that is in focus for one's efforts.

To meet the aim of the article, two research questions will be explored through an analysis of policy-making texts:

- How is IL conceptualized in policy-making texts?
- What are the plausible implications of these/this conceptualization(s) for the communities/societies that are the focus for the policy-makers' efforts?

The article can be seen as related to the relatively few texts that have so far critically investigated the concept of information literacy from a discursive, ideological, and/or political perspective (e.g., Buschman, 2009; Kapitzke, 2003; Lipu, 2010; Marcum, 2002; Pawley, 2003; Sturges & Gastinger, 2010). The approach taken is also allied with conceptual analysis from critical, interpretive perspectives taken within library and information science (LIS) (e.g., Haider & Bawden, 2007; Lindh & Haider, 2010).

In order to draw a background against which the first research question can be explored, we begin the article with a relatively extensive account of the information literacy literature. We then continue by introducing the concept of new imperialism (e.g., Tikly, 2004), and Bruce and Hogan's (1998) perspective of the risks of losing sight of technologies; two contributions that will provide us with the necessary tools for exploring research question two.

The Information Literacy Literature in Perspective

Even though various stakeholders, as we will see, emphasize different aspects of IL there are also factors that contribute in unifying the IL literature. For instance, IL is generally understood as related to learning even though views of learning can vary. However, within the field of IL three main strands of literature are discernable. What has been labeled "the information literacy movement" (e.g., Garner, 2006) is manifested in the broadest of these strands: texts written by practitioners, predominantly

librarians at universities and other educational institutions, who give evidence of best practice. The IL movement is also strongly supported by another, narrower but increasing, strand: documents published or supported by organizations such as IFLA and UNESCO. A common denominator for these policy-making texts is their explicit stress on the importance of all people becoming information literate. Several of these documents comprise a rather formalized, albeit communicable, conceptualization of IL and of those who are considered in need of this competency. These ambitions tend to collide with the third strand of literature: a growing body of empirically and theoretically grounded research texts produced at university departments within the fields of educational science and library and information science.

An Information Literacy Narrative

These strands taken together can be seen as contributions to a narrative about information literacy, even though each strand has its own particular focus point, representing particular goals and interests (see table 1).

It can be claimed, somewhat schematically, that within educational practice, information literacy is viewed as a goal for educational activities, whereas IL through a research lens is considered as a study object. According to the same line of argumentation, policy makers to a considerable extent view information literacy as both a goal and a mean for politics, for instance as a "basic human right [that] promotes social inclusion of all nations" (Garner, 2006, p. 3). Within the IL narrative there are interrelated but also competing discourses. Different stakeholders—for instance, the American Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), The International Information Literacies Research Network, UNESCO and IFLA—produce their own discourses where the dominating stance is practice oriented, rhetorical, or research oriented.

Conceptualizations of Information Literacy

Without foregrounding the analysis needed in order to address our first research question on how IL is conceptualized in the policy-making texts,

Table 1. Different Foci in the IL Narrative

Professional practice	Policy-making (Rhetoric)	Research
"The information literacy movement"		
IL as a goal for educational activities	IL as a goal and means for politics	IL as study object
e.g., the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)	e.g., UNESCO, IFLA	e.g., The International Information Literacies Research Network (http://iilresearch. wordpress.com/)

the following section is meant to contribute to the necessary background for our analysis. What is accounted for here is based on our previously gained understanding of the IL literature. Accordingly, somewhat tentatively, the body of IL literature can be described and categorized in regard to how IL is conceptualized and presented. There is not necessarily a sharp and definite line between the strands but certain traits regarding conceptualizations of IL transpire from the literatures. As pointed out by Tuominen, Savolainen, and Talja "many, or most, texts on IL consist of normative prescriptions of information skills needed in modern society" (2005, p. 330). Our reconnoitering of the IL narrative indicates that the literature produced within the IL movement, including the policy-making texts, can be contrasted with the research literature regarding the aspects presented in table 2.

Before commenting on the table it should be acknowledged that there is a multitude of recent contributions to the research strand that conceive of learning information literacy as developing an understanding of the discursive practice in which the learner is active. Information literacy thus comprises an understanding of, and a familiarity with, how information is sought and used in a certain social context. (e.g., Andersen, 2006; Elmborg, 2006; Kautto & Talja, 2007; Lloyd, 2006, 2007, 2010; Lloyd & Wiliamson, 2008; Marcum, 2002; Simmons, 2005; Sundin, 2008; Tuominen, Savolainen, & Talja, 2005). This contextual aspect, or situatedness, does not appear to be considered to the same extent when IL is presented and discussed in the policy texts. IL can thus respectively be seen and conceptualized as:

Table 2. Conceptualizations and Understandings of IL (cf. Limberg, 2009)

Professional practice/Policy making	Research
Normatively prescribed	Analytically described
A rather fixed set of generic skills	Situated, related to contexts
Predominantly cognitive, emphasizing critical thinking	Social, discursive, corporeal (and cognitive)
Primarily related to digital and textual sources	Related to a manifold of sources
An individual and measurable competence	A social, collective competence embedded in practices
Transferable across practices	Variational according to situations, activities, and practices

Of course, different conceptualizations serve different purposes. Texts can be relevant in various ways. A research text must meet certain standards regarding objectivity and genre related criteria, whereas a policy-making text obviously has to be persuasive in order to meet its ends. However, one often emphasized objective for research is to inform and nurture professional practice. Ideally the conceptualization of IL in the research literature would correspond with how IL is conceptualized in policy-mak-

ing texts; whether that is the case will be pondered upon in the subsequent section.

Interconnections Between Information Literacy Discourses

One way of discerning relationships between discourses is to look for manifest intertextual elements (Fairclough, 1992, p. 84) such as references linking together documents. In order to investigate the reference lists of two recent prominent contributions to the policy-making strand (i.e., Catts & Lau, 2008 and Lau, 2008) and find out whether the texts under scrutiny are connected to articles produced within the research strand, a query was put to the Web of Science database. The database is an established tool that can be used to provide a view of, for instance, the research field of IL, at least as it appears in the shape of publications. The two policy-making texts were chosen because they both provide generous lists of references. The monograph by Catts and Lau was published by UNESCO; the other book, which was published by IFLA, was edited by Jesus Lau and contains ten chapters by altogether eighteen authors. The question was thus: are the two selected texts informed by the strand of research literature in so far as there are traceable connections in the form of references? The reference lists were compared with the results of the query accounted for below:

- Database: ISI Web of Knowledge: Social Sciences Citation Index and Arts & Humanities Citation Index
- Time span: 1999–2009
- Subject area: Information Science & Library Science
- Search term: "information literacy" as Topic
- Search results sorted after times cited[1]

The result of this small-scale investigation clearly shows that there are hardly any references to the fifty most-cited IL-articles (see appendix) in the two investigated documents. However, the investigation indicates that a reciprocal connection between practice and policy making is more evident than that between policy making and research contributions. There are, for instance, numerous references in the policy-making texts to professional, practice-related bodies such as the American Library Association (ALA) and Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy (ANZIIL), and these organizations' standards for IL (e.g., ACRL, 2000; Bundy, 2004). Also, the widely spread conceptualization of information literacy as a set of generic skills, which is continually promoted by the policy makers, is extensively adopted by the field of practice, as for instance can be seen at many library websites. A common feature at the opening page of a guide or tutorial for information literacy is a definition or statement about the characteristics of an information literate person, for example,

the American Library Association's formulation (an example that also can be found on the website of IFLA): "Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (ALA, 1989).

Another important possible link, which has been described by Lindh and Haider (2010), between policy-making organizations, such as UNESCO and IFLA, and professional agents, such as national library associations, is that it is reasonable to assume that policy makers are likely to influence "organizations operating on other levels since their viewpoints may be taken for some form of authoritative 'truth'. In other words, as global organizations they have the power to define the world. This means also their perspectives, definitions and policies influence smaller organizations; they provide norms and guiding principles" (Lindh & Haider, 2010, p. 5). What is stated about IL by UNESCO and IFLA is likely to shape actions taken by IL practitioners on an individual level, which then would be in full accordance with the hopes expressed in a foreword by Abdul Waheed Khan, the assistant director-general for communication and information at UNESCO, who explicitly stated that he "hope[s] that it [the UNESCO publication *Understanding Information Literacy: A Primer* (Horton, 2007)] will be widely used, especially by professionals in both the public and private sectors" (Horton, p. ii).

From a slightly different angle, it is also possible to view the IL movement and its literature as (at least partly) an expression for the professional project of librarians in which they can be said to develop and negotiate an expertise in relation to IL (cf. Sundin, 2008; Sundin, Limberg, & Lundh, 2008). IL thus becomes an important professional arena for librarians. Whereas, from a theoretical, predominantly library and information science perspective, IL research emerges as an interesting phenomenon to engage in because of its perceived societal importance with facets addressing learning, democracy, as well as information and communication technologies.

To conclude our overview of the IL literature, it seems reasonable to claim that the concept of information literacy as it appears in the policy-making texts seems to be rather static; a conceptualization of IL as a set of generic skills that—if globally adopted and adhered to—can contribute not only to empower and liberate people, but also to assist nations and "their institutions to meet technological, economic and social challenges, to redress disadvantage and to advance the well being of all" (Garner, 2006, p. 3). Moreover, the concept of IL, as it is presented in policy-making texts, also clearly expresses an ambition to carry out what we might call missionary work in the name of IL, with respect-worthy intentions of liberation and democracy building. Initiatives such as UNESCO's Training-the-Trainers in Information Literacy (2008), and handbooks such as

Principles of Awareness-Raising for Information Literacy: A Case Study (Sayers, 2006), which "introduces the principles of public awareness-raising with particular emphasis on global efforts to promote awareness of Information Literacy" (p. ix), illustrates this missionary ambition well. Information literacy can of course be regarded as a positive and liberating force, useful for various purposes, but without a sensitive analysis prior to the exportation of, or the campaign for, IL there is a risk that IL functions as an oppressive force (cf. Luyt & Azura, 2010).

THEORETICAL STANCE AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGIES

Through a discursively oriented analysis, recognizable from other LIS studies (e.g., Budd, 2006; Talja & McKenzie, 2007) of selected documents and statements about information literacy and related issues, for example concerning the use and advocacy of information and communication technologies, we will show how discourse is shaped and infused by relations of power and ideologies. With reference to Norman Fairclough (1992) our intention could be described as comprising the ambition to identify "the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief" (p. 12); or, as asserted by John Budd: "discourse not only reflects social relations and social action; it contributes to the construction of them" (2006, p. 73). A discursive approach is valid for more than one reason: its epistemological grounds are attractive because they background the myth of the rational individual. Furthermore, a discursive approach supports the idea that what is written (or said) does not necessarily and only communicate what we traditionally conceive of as the intended meaning; according to a discursive stance, as in our study, the correlation between the signifier and the signified is not stable. It is therefore possible to read a text in more ways than according to the conventional meaning of the text; our strategy thus embraces the idea that texts simultaneously may embody several meanings. Another aspect of the discursive approach we take has to do with our view of people's actions: actions are indeed concrete, individual, and context related, but they are also—at the same time—institutionalized and deeply rooted in social practices, such as information practices.

By using the concept of information practice, we emphasize the importance of taking a sociological stance when investigating information literacy; a stance that embraces historically shaped sociocultural aspects, such as norms, conventions, and routines, as well as sociotechnical, material aspects, including the use of ICT tools, and the interaction between physical setting and context in general, as well as the people acting in this setting or context. In accordance with this view, information literacy is understood as something more than a decontextualized set of skills. IL is rather seen as the capacity to understand and be familiar with how information is created, sought, used, and valued in a certain social practice.

In the LIS literature, however, information practices, as noted by Talja, Tuominen, and Savolainen (2005) are "often analyzed from a behavioural perspective [and tend to] look different and reveal new sides when looked at as part of the social negotiation of meaning" (p. 92). Our approach in this study conceives of information practices as they are represented in the scrutinized texts, as prescribed versions of social reality, which we intend to discuss with the guidance of the two theoretical contributions presented in the subsequent section: Leon Tikly's (2004) take on new imperialism and Chip Bruce and Maureen Hogan's work (1998) on "the disappearance of technology."

New Imperialism

The project of awareness raising and the export of information literacy can fruitfully be discussed in relation to what has been labeled the new imperialism: "a new form of western imperialism that has as its purpose the incorporation of populations within the formerly so-called 'Second' and 'Third worlds' into a regime of global government. Central to the new imperialism is education, which has become for . . . multilateral development agencies a key aspect of their vision of 'development' " (Tikly, 2004, p. 173).

Tikly emphasizes the discursive dimensions of the exercise of power, and new imperialism is seen as an aspect of a "western discourse around 'development' manifested in . . . multilateral development agencies" (p. 177). However, the concept embraces the identification of both economic and political power relations. Whereas the former mainly is exerted by agencies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the latter is to a considerable extent exerted by the UN and its agencies that "operate under the belief that public intervention is necessary to ensure basic needs and human rights" (p. 177). Tikly continues and states that "low-income countries are often caught between the policy imperatives of these global organizations in contradictory ways including in the sphere of education and training" (p. 177). By separately identifying and pinpointing the cultural sphere, and the ways in which it is discursively expressed, it becomes possible to distinguish the new imperialism from earlier forms of Western imperialism and colonialism. From this perspective information literacy education appears as "a key site for discursive struggle over versions of social reality" (p. 178). Is it perhaps so that the concept of information literacy, which has its roots in an industrialized part of the world, might bring with it ideas, values, and norms that do not necessarily fit in well with the societies and the social realities to which it is exported? Compare, for example, the frequently referred statement that it was Paul Zurkowski, former president of the U.S. Information Industry Association, who coined the term.[2]

Invisible Technologies

Bruce and Hogan (1998) discuss technologies in a broad sense. For instance, they describe stairs as an example of architectural technology and pen and paper as literacy technologies. With their work as our point of departure, we limit our discussion to information and communication technologies (ICTs), since these are the kinds of technologies that seem to infuse policy making concerning information literacy. These technologies are often regarded as neutral, autonomous, and concrete tools that can be used in order to carry out certain tasks. However, as convincingly argued by Bruce and Hogan, technologies such as computers, networks, and databases "are also ideological tools; they are designed, accessed, interpreted, and used to further purposes that embody social values" (p. 270). ICTs can be viewed as embedded in discourse and activity. The more ICTs are used, the more they become an integrated part of peoples' lives, and eventually, when the use of them becomes routine, they tend to become invisible—in short, they become taken for granted. They also become deeply rooted in our anticipations and assumptions about how things are supposed to be. They find, so to speak, their ways into the prevailing orders of norms and prescriptions. Bruce and Hogan point out that this is one of the ways in which we can conceive of ICTs as ideologically embedded: "effective use of the dominant . . . technologies then becomes the defining characteristic for new forms of literacy" (p. 271). Consequently, those who are not proficient users of ICTs run the risk of not being regarded as information literate, at least not in accordance with how information literacy often is conceptualized, that is, as "a survival skill in the Information Age" (ALA, 1989) or as a "basic human right in a digital world" (Garner, 2006, p. 3). Rather, these insufficient users become portrayed as people in need of "sound schooling" (Horton, 2007, p. 4) and proper information literacy.

There are, as can be seen, many expectations invested in the opportunities provided by ICTs. Through these technologies it is possible to use and produce information and knowledge, and to share and disseminate information over vast geographical distances. This is certainly true for a large group of people in the world, but at the same time we note that even though there are more than 110,000,000 people in Africa who use the Internet, this figure only represents 10 percent of the whole population of the continent (World Internet usage, June 2010). That means that the vast majority of Africans—as in our example—do not lead a life in which ICTs, such as the Internet, are a constituent of everyday life. Since the meaning of information practices can never be separated from the social life around these practices, it is necessary, as stated by Bruce and Hogan, to ensure that "discussion about participation in any [information] literate society [is] referenced to that society's current and emerging [information] literacy technologies" (p. 271).

Selection of Documents for Analysis

A policy can be described as a set of principles or rules that are expected to promote, guide, and inform future actions within a particular area and with particular interests. Policies normally focus on what ought to be done rather than on what has been done. Within the field of information literacy, the organizations that we have already identified, IFLA and UNESCO, have published several documents that can be identified as policy documents. An illustrative example is the IFLA publication *Information Literacy: International Perspectives*, edited by Jesus Lau (2008), in which we read that "this book is part of the action plan of the Information Literacy Section to promote the field in the international arena" (p. 13). We have already referred to this book, and it might seem a plausible candidate for our empirical material. It did, however, in competition with the two texts that we finally decided to analyze, end up somewhat outside the immediate focus of our investigation. So did other texts that we sometimes refer to, for example the report from the *High-Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning* (Garner, 2006), and *Principles of Awareness-Raising for Information Literacy: A Case Study*, which was written by Richard Sayers (2006) for UNESCO. Even if it does not qualify as a clean-cut policy document, as it consists of reports from an activity program, the documentation from the *Training-the-Trainers in Information Literacy* (2007–2009) program is also highly relevant in this context, not least as an example of what we, in this article, talk about as an ambition to export the concept of information literacy. The program is another UNESCO initiative with the purpose "to 'train the trainers' in the information literacy concept and best practices—600 worldwide in total—so that they, in turn, following successful completion of the workshop, can directly educate various 'ultimate beneficiary audiences' in their respective home countries and regions. Those audiences will thereby become more information literate" (UNESCO, 2008).

All of the documents mentioned above would be suitable study objects for our purposes, and from a methodological point of view a substantial selection of documents could have been an option. The process of selection is, however, closely related to the purpose of the analysis. Since our intention is to accomplish a sharp and penetrative analysis, and not a broad identification and review of themes, we have decided to concentrate on a purposive selection of empirical material including an informed choice of documents from which we can substantially learn about the phenomenon under scrutiny. We believe that the two recent publications that we have selected offer a multitude of illustrative examples that are useful in order to meet the aim of the present article. Both texts are published by UNESCO. *Understanding Information Literacy: A Primer* by Woody Horton (2007) is a ninety-four-page document that explicitly aims at "explaining what 'information literacy' means." The author deals with issues such as

"Advocacy and Awareness-Raising," "Priority Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning Initiatives," and there is a substantial set of annexes that account for, for instance, "The information literacy life cycle explained" and "Some models of best practice." The other document under scrutiny has a more particular focus and aim, which is to identify indicators of information literacy. *Towards Information Literacy Indicators: Conceptual Framework Paper* prepared by Ralph Catts and Jesus Lau (2008) comprises a little more than forty pages. The text is divided into three main sections. In the first section, the concept of information literacy is discussed and contains a definition of IL. The second section accounts for IL in relation to various IL standards. There is also a short part about IL and "Oral Traditions," which we find particularly interesting. The last section focuses on the issue of potential IL indicators.

Information Literacy in the Two Policy Documents

Our reading of the two texts is guided by the interests expressed through our research questions, but also by the analytical tools provided by Bruce and Hogan (1998) and Tikly (2004). This means that we have searched for passages and statements that can tell us something about how IL is conceptualized with respect to both ICTs and to political, ideological, and cultural aspects of the project of exporting information literacy. Our reading is simultaneous in the sense that both the scrutinized texts are discussed parallel to each other.

Political rhetoric is normative by nature. The previously mentioned ideals of democracy and human rights may—according to an ideologically shaped logic—be connected to various initiatives aiming at dissemination and measurements of IL. Catts and Lau (2008), in *Towards Information Literacy Indicators,* thus present a dedicated line of arguing for the implementation of certain universal indicators of IL, that indirectly also may serve as a meter of the advancement and well functioning of a society in a wider perspective. During our reading of the sections on various cultures and traditions in the document, two contrasting pictures emerged from the text; on one hand the picture of an ideal, effectively organized society, connoting modern ICT and individual textual skills, and on the other hand a type of developing society, without sufficient technologies, that still builds upon an oral tradition. In the following extract Catts and Lau describe the limitations and the immaturity that characterize oral traditions. Primarily the extract concerns access to the kinds of information resources considered by the authors to be the most relevant, and this consideration is intertwined with both the economic competitiveness of the societies in question and the individual ability to be organized and solve every day problems:

> In a society that depends upon an oral tradition to disperse information
> it is possible for a person to be information literate, and necessary for

> effective decision making. . . . However, although such people may be
> information literate within their oral tradition, the limited information
> sources available to a person living within an oral tradition will restrict
> their capacity to compete in a global economy. Within a culture that
> relies on oralcy, the individual is dependent upon others to source
> alternate views and consequently this may be considered a special case.
> Normally people need to be able to read, to plan and organize and to
> use problem solving skills in order to demonstrate information literacy.
> (Catts & Lau, 2008, p. 21)

The above quotation thus illustrates a clear polarity where the IL concept
is associated to textual (re)sources, efficiency, and material competitive-
ness as well as cognitive and societal virtues, while the oral tradition is asso-
ciated to economic, societal, and cognitive inadequacy. According to Catts
and Lau, the downside of oral traditions encompasses the individuals' de-
pendence on the collective for information provision—which in turn may
be understood as an expression of the rationalistically influenced idea of
free individual choice. The chosen excerpt—one of several plausible—has
strengthened our conviction that these documents articulate not only a
deeply felt concern for fellow people and democratic values, but also may
be understood as expressions of the power to evaluate and judge people's
practices in a rather authoritarian way. "Such people," as it is phrased in
the quotation, may be considered to be information literate within their
own limited context, but could not possibly be held as worthy actors within
a global community; that is, in comparison to better equipped and orga-
nized nations of the world.

Throughout both of the analyzed documents, IL is frequently pre-
sented as a competence that relates to ICTs. Especially in Horton's text,
there is a plethora of examples. Even though it is explicitly stated that in
order to understand "what information literacy means . . . understanding
technologies is not enough" (Horton, p. i), we can also learn that IL is
"critically important to every nation, its institutions, and its citizens, in
order to perform competitively and productively in a Digital World and a
21st Century Global Information Society" (Horton, p. 1).

The above passage not only highlights that information literate is some-
thing that one is supposed to be in a "Digital World," it also expresses a
clear rationale, that is, people are supposed to be information literate in
order to "perform competitively and productively." IL is portrayed in this
way as a driver of economic growth in both of the studied texts (cf. Catts
& Lau, 2008, p. 11). We do not question the possible correlation between
information literacy and economic growth, but as shown by Matusov and
St. Julien (2004) in their study of literacy, many authors argue that it is
questionable to uncritically assume that there is a causal connection be-
tween the two.

The rather one-eyed focus on digital media as the preferred tools for
information access and seeking tend to enhance the inequalities between

cultures and different information practices. Catts and Lau present access to powerful ICT tools both as a prerequisite for and as an indicator of IL in society (2008, p. 35). The question of *what* people in other parts of the world actually need, in order to develop in a positive and democratic direction, is frequently addressed by the authors—but their main interest seems to concern *when* (and *how*) they will be able to learn and reach the prescribed goals, given the appropriate tools: "When these technologies can be accessed by traditional communities they may be quick to adapt these to their needs" (Catts & Lau, p. 22).

In Horton's text, in a passage where definitions of IL are reflected upon, it is claimed that "virtually all definitions [of information literacy] have in common one aspect, which is that there are several steps or stages through which the application of the Information Literacy process progress, in a more or less progressive sequence" (2007, p. 9). This process is labeled the "information literacy life cycle." The author takes the reader along a journey through this life cycle and provides examples of steps and stages that the learner is supposed to go through; broadly speaking these steps correspond with the skills accounted for in the most common definitions of IL, that is, recognize, locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. Horton also suggests the use of various "tools, methods, approaches, [and] techniques" that might help the learner solve different problems encountered along the way. He provides the reader with several examples of possible "helping human resources." Among the tools, etc., that Horton suggests, the overwhelming majority amount to ICTs. Accordingly, in this list, we find for example: "Internet," "PC," "Online/Print Catalogs," "Indexes," "Search engines," and "Filing system." Among the "helping human resources" we find: "Colleague," "Friend/Family," "Teacher," "Mentor/Coach," but also "Librarian," "Other Info. Professional," "Knowledge Engineer," "Webmaster," "Audio-Visual Spec.," "System Analyst," "Experts," "Consultants," "Archivist," and "Preservation Specialist" (Annex B). We also find that "the librarian is fond of pointing out that there are certain 'tricks' . . . that ideally you should use" (p. 10), which is a statement that well represents the documents' prevailing library-focused view of IL. In relation to the stage that deals with finding the needed information, we learn that "this is where having done your 'homework' by attending an information literacy workshop will come in handy. Or, short of having been able to physically attend such training, perhaps you will have located an online tutorial that teaches you how to search for information known to exist" (p. 10).

A conceptualization of information literacy with such a heavy emphasis on text and print-based resources and computerized information and communication technologies will hardly make much sense in a culture dominated by oral communication, or that lacks a developed range of ICTs. It is rather remarkable that this aspect is not considered in regard to

educational efforts aimed at fostering information literacy in parts of the world other than the so-called Western world. It seems as if the exporters of the concept, that is, the policy makers, assume that being information literate is the same as being able to use a computer. According to this conceptualization, being information literate seems to be on an equal footing with the abilities to produce texts through typing, to use texts through reading on a screen, and to access texts (and images) via digital libraries and computerized bibliographic databases.

In the analyzed texts, people living in societies and cultures where ICT tools are not extensively introduced tend to be described as marked by their lack of these technologies. From the perspective of the so-called developed parts of the world, and in relation to how far the process of technology introduction has reached, these people are seen as more or less marginal, or even nonparticipatory in society (cf. Bruce & Hogan, 1998, p. 271). It is henceforth from the perspective of the policy makers that the meaning of the level of participation is established. The policy makers speak from their authority and with their power of the position in, or mandate for, a respected organization with the established mission of doing good and the authority of knowledge that supposedly comes with this position or mandate.

We can see efforts from the exporters, that is, the authors of the documents under scrutiny here, formed as negotiations aimed at recreating the existing practices—such as a predominance of oral communication—into something that is like (or if not perfect, at least similar to) the order that prevails where the exporter is; negotiations that clearly bring to mind the exertion of power. Education runs the risk of expressing a reproductive force that serves to perpetuate existing social, political, and economic conditions (cf. Bowles & Ginits, 1977). By exporting a model of information literacy teaching, as in (the very obvious) example in the Training-the-Trainers in Information Literacy project, a set of norms, values, and ideas developed in the westernized culture is also exported. As can be seen in the text by Horton, in order to lay the ground for the Western ICT and text-focused concept of IL and thereby make it possible for groups of people that are seen as outside the proper Western norms to become information literate, it is held as important for the exporters to "adapt pedagogical practices to the needs of particular groups such as women, minorities, and other people with special needs such as indigenous populations, people living in remote and isolated villages, prisoners and immigrants" (Horton, p. 19).

Even though the quote clearly indicates that people in other cultures have "special needs" other than those of people that subscribe to the norms in Western, capitalistic societies, the accounts in the text for what might constitute these particular needs are scarce.

A benevolent approach in the form of genuine educational efforts aimed at making it possible for people to become information literate can also be

seen as an exercise of power and control (cf. Lindh & Haider, 2010). That information need not necessarily be textually based and that it might be searched for and used in a variety of ways and by other means than ICTs is not taken into consideration. It is remarkable that at the same time as the previously accounted for small-scale investigation of the possible interconnections between the policy-making strand and the research strand clearly showed that there are hardly any connections, it is strongly recommended in Horton's text that "decisions concerning educational policies, pedagogies, and practices should be based upon research evidence examining the relationship among Information Literacy, educational achievement, and specific learning outcomes" (2007, p. 18).

If not an abundance, there are several contributions to the research field within LIS, which sometimes is labeled information needs, seeking, and use (INSU), that account for information practices that differ from those in the industrialized parts of the world. Meyer (2003, 2009), for instance, has shown that cultures dominated by oral communication have established information practices that differ from those in a text-oriented culture. Another example of a study that sheds light over nontext based or ICT related information practices is provided by Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2003).

When a conceptualization of information literacy, which is developed in parts of the world where ICTs are taken for granted, is exported into cultures where ICTs are not in use to the same extent as in the nations of the exporters, there will inevitably be consequences. Technologies embodied with values of the society in which they were produced (Dyson, 2003) contribute to reconstruct not only reading and writing practices, but also information literacy.

All through the text by Horton, information literacy is treated as a stable set of fixed skills that focus on text and ICTs. There is, however, a certain passage in the document where IL becomes specified as "health information literacy" (p. 25). It is interesting to note that all of a sudden it seems as if it is the source or the type of information needed—in this case health information—that constitutes the kind of IL that is described. No such distinctions are made earlier in the text; for example when IL is discussed in connection to formalized school work, schools are treated as a neutral context, or even a noncontext. In contrast to what is steadily more emphasized in the IL research literature, it is not the context, setting, or social practice—the life situation and interests of the information seeker—that interplay with the information-related activities asked for, but rather the information in and by itself. Referring to an established distinction in the LIS literature, we could claim that an information source centered, or system centered, approach to information seeking and use is expressed in this passage. Information literacy is thus not approached from a so-called user perspective, which to a greater extent pays attention to context and

social practices. There are clear connections, in this respect, to a passage in Catts and Lau, where it is stated that "access [to information] is a prerequisite to IL practice" (2008, p. 23). A consequence of this line of argumentation would hence be that societies that do not have access to information to the same extent as Western societies cannot be as information literate—it is thus information that makes a person information literate. To connect to the ideas of new imperialism, we could also envision how it is presented as unavoidable that these societies as soon as possible assume not only the preferred technologies but also the norms and conventions that are prevalent in the Western world.

Images
Even though our analysis thus far has exclusively focused on the written text in the documents under scrutiny, it is difficult to ignore the illustrations and pictures on the covers of the two publications. The same set of images is used on both covers. The illustrations consist of nine images put together in a decorative mosaic. Besides five close-up portraits of people that seem to have been chosen because they represent five different ethnic groups—which neatly illustrates the export ambitions—there are four photographic images of artifacts that presumably are intended to evoke associations with information literacy. The photograph at the top represents a pile of books put on a table in front of a bookshelf. In the middle row of the mosaic there is one picture showing a detail from a Web browser, and one depicting a stone tablet with chiseled out letters. The last picture shows a film or sound reel. What presents itself immediately is that the choice of pictures supports our evolving finding that both of the publications, through text but also through images, communicate a view of IL that is permeated with assumptions about ICTs playing a crucial role when IL is to be conceptualized and described, and that textual sources should be in focus for those who are expected to develop IL. If the pictures on the Training-the-Trainers in Information Literacy website are included, this conclusion is further confirmed; of the four photographs on the website, three show children or young people, of various ethnic backgrounds, who are all engaged in work in front of computers.

Discussion
Our analysis of the two texts makes it possible to provide a relatively straightforward answer to our first research question: how is information literacy conceptualized in the policy-making texts? The concept of information literacy that transpires from the two texts confirm what we learned from our previous encounters with the "information literacy movement" literature, namely that IL is described as a fixed set of skills or abilities that irrespective of situation or context, and without much regard to the information seekers' interests, should be applied in order to "perform competi-

tively and productively in a digital world" (Horton, p. 1). Even though it is occasionally stressed that IL encompasses other than ICT-related skills, an overwhelming number of examples are presented throughout the texts where IL is portrayed as a competency that cannot be developed without the capacity to use ICTs (e.g., Catts & Lau, 2008, p. 7). Catts and Lau even explicitly suggest "that for UNESCO the focus on IL should be as it relates to the written word and ICT" (p. 22). In accordance with the precepts underlying the concept of new imperialism, we can conclude that by exporting a westernized conceptualization of IL in the shape of a standardized one-size-fits-all-model to societies that do not adhere to a westernized lifestyle, which includes widely appropriated ICT tools, the exporters contribute to shape and invigorate already existing power relations.

A majority of the authors that have taken as their task to define, discuss, and bring forward IL have a similar point of departure. It rests upon assumptions and ideas about the westernized world and its culture of written language that has produced unique and advanced information practices. These historically and culturally specific and highly information-intensive practices are commonly described as the very mold for the concept of IL. In comparison with the research that has been carried out about these Western contexts—which are seldom problematized in the literature—the interest for investigating the information practices of other times and cultures, with regard to IL, has thus far been rather moderate. What is discernible, not least in our reading of the selected policy documents, is a kind of missionary approach toward those cultures and nations that fall outside the Anglo-American and the European culture spheres; an approach that encompasses ideas of spreading the "right" kind of IL to those that can be identified as in need.

With regard to our analysis and our line of reasoning, there is a particular question that manifests itself: if there is an oppressive force in the export of the Western IL model, why then, are the recipients willing to embrace the model? From the example Training-the-Trainers in Information Literacy program, we can see that there are several nations, often described as developing countries, that participate in the program. It seems reasonable to believe that these nations are not forced into the program. Matusov and St. Julien (2004) discuss a similar matter concerning the exportation of education in general and refer to Bunyi (2001) in stating that "colonial language and print literacy define upward social, institutional, and economic mobility and, thus, formal education is crucial to social status in the new order. Those indigenous people who acquired colonial language and colonial print literacy could get access to the institutions where colonial power was vested" (p. 216). Once again, we can refer to the established power relation between those who have and those who have not; from a perspective of a nation that is not economically viable, a model developed in a prosperous nation is likely to appear as desirable. However,

it is here that those who exert power in this unequal relationship need to take responsibility. Since every community produces its own ideology with certain values and norms, constituting a particular view upon what it means to be information literate, those who wish to foster information literate people through education need to "consider a range of options for learning, including a wide range of technologies" (Bruce & Hogan, 1998, p. 280) and also be able to conceive of societies where, for instance, ICTs are not in extensive use. In the subsequent section we discuss a way of taking this kind of responsibility, with regards to the matter of how IL can possibly be conceptualized.

INFORMATION LITERACIES

A more humble and careful approach to IL is to somewhat rephrase the concept, and instead talk about information litera*cies*. By using the plural form the concept is opened up and thereby invites more than one exclusive interpretation of what it means to be information literate. Information literacies are not activities; they cannot only be understood as what people do (cf. Lemke, 1998; Limberg, 2010). Information literacies must be seen as closely connected to the social practices in which they take place, and with regard not only to the historically developed norms and values that imbue them, but also in regard to the material and intellectual tools that are used in order to be information literate. If we want to identify and understand information literacies we also need to address the questions of where people do what they do, and what tools they use when they do these things, and for what purposes and with what interests they seek for and use information. If this kind of approach to information literacies is considered when educational and policy-making strategies are designed and enacted, it is likely to have implications for what these strategies result in.

The influential discourse according to which IL is a measurable entity that can be standardized is rightly being challenged by researchers of today. To talk about information literacies, in plural, is in itself a theoretical statement. Thereby, we wish to describe information literacy as a situated and contingent practice. With such a starting point, the most useful criteria for IL are not to be found in standards with universal claims or in once and for all defined sets of skills. On the contrary, people's information seeking and use and their conditions need to be understood in relation to the various practices in which information is sought for and found relevant. As much in research studies as in educational practices, there are always opportunities to open up the concept toward those who are expected to develop IL, and, from the perspective of learners, find out what it is that is viewed as competent information seeking and use in their respective contexts (Hedman & Lundh, 2009).

Concluding Remarks

Through a discursively oriented analysis of two policy-making texts published by UNESCO, and by referring to and discussing examples of passages in other texts that can be viewed as important contributions to the policy-making strand in the IL narrative, we have come to the conclusion that in order to make it possible for people around the world to develop IL with regard to their respective contexts and interests, there is a need for a more nuanced and flexible conceptualization of what it means to be information literate. In connection to our readings, we have noted that the two concepts "information society" and "knowledge societies" are cherished in the scrutinized texts. They are never clearly defined and they seem to be used interchangeably and to appear with a similar frequency. However, if we turn to another comprehensive UNESCO publication, *Towards Knowledge Societies* (2005), it is clearly stated that the two concepts should not be used as synonyms: "The idea of the information society is based on technological breakthroughs. The concept of knowledge societies encompasses much broader social, ethical and political dimensions" (p. 17). According to our understanding, the concept of IL presented in the analyzed texts, which clearly connotes an evident ICT dimension, fits well with the concept of "information society," "based on technological breakthroughs," as it is said to be. However, if UNESCO and other policy makers for IL wish to propose, advocate, and export a concept of IL that is in conjunction with the concept of "knowledge societies," our suggestion is that they should adhere more to the concept of "information literacies." One important step that needs to be taken in order to mark out such a direction is to establish a clear connection—or should we perhaps say, eliminate the existing disconnection—between the research strand and the policy-making strand within the IL narrative.

Notes

1. The original search result included some hits that cannot be regarded as information literacy research, but rather as general information needs, seeking, and use (INSU) research. These hits were retrieved because they include abstracts stating that the results might have implications for information literacy practice. These hits were removed from our list of most cited IL documents.

2. It is often asserted that it was Paul Zurkowski who introduced the concept of information literacy when he stated that "people trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solutions to their problems" (Zurkowski, 1974, in Eisenberg, Lowe & Spitzer, 1998, p. 22).

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