INFORMATION LITERACY AND ARTICLE NINETEEN

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UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

• Arguments from the idea of Human Rights make a powerful case for LIS work

• Article 19 of the Universal Declaration states
  – ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of expression;
  – this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference
  – and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.’

• A ‘passive’ right such as this arguably needs interpretation to produce active principles for the LIS profession
FAIFE and Article 19

• FAIFE is IFLA’s Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression core activity

• FAIFE represents IFLA’s commitment to Article 19
  – FAIFE seeks to defend libraries against threats to intellectual freedom
  – FAIFE interprets Article 19 as pointing to Access as the driving principle for libraries
FAIFE’s Workshop Programme

• To encourage the adoption of access-related policies, FAIFE has
  – Developed a Workshop series with
    • Learning Materials available via IFLA’s website
    • Train the Trainers Workshops in developing countries.
  – Topics so far are
    • The IFLA/UNESCO Internet Manifesto
    • Access to HIV/AIDS Information
    • Libraries and Transparency
    • Public Access to Health Information
Some conclusions from FAIFE’s Workshop programme

• There is a need for
  – A more specific rationale connecting Article 19 with access-related library policies
  – This rationale can draw on theory and on progressive legislative programmes (such as Freedom of Information laws)
  – The rationale points onwards to a link between
    • Access-related policies, and
    • Information Literacy programmes
Access and legislation

• New Clause 100 of the Norwegian Constitution (2005)
  – Affirms the principles of Article 19
  – Specifies the right of access to official documentation
  – Calls for ‘conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse’
  – Leaves open the exact nature of these ‘conditions’. 
Public Forums

- Habermas’s idea of the ‘public sphere’, (thriving in the eighteenth century, subsequently in decay and requiring renewal) offers an answer this question
- It calls for the same response as does the Norwegian Clause 100
- The ‘conditions’ for ‘public discourse’ and Habermas’s renewed public sphere both call for
  - Open government
  - Free media
  - Active civil society.
The Library as a ‘Public Forum’

• A case for publicly funded libraries can also be derived from this argument
• FAIFE’s programmes point towards access-related library policies
• FAIFE’s argument needs to be extended towards ensuring that people have the skills to exploit their Article 19 rights
• This points directly towards Information Literacy programmes
The case for Information Literacy programmes (I)

• Many programmes are driven by librarians’ priorities and are direct successors to User Education
  – “Information Literacy has been known by many different names: library orientation; bibliographic instruction; user education; information skills training.”
    www.informationliteracy.org.uk

• This is not the case proposed here.
The case for Information Literacy programmes (II)

• A modern definition of Information Literacy is
  – “A set of competencies that an informed citizen of an information society ought to possess to participate intelligently and actively.”

• This definition rolls together
  – Computer and digital literacy
  – Web Literacy
  – Media Literacy
  – Critical Literacy
  – Civic Literacy

• They all cascade naturally from Article 19
Statements justifying IL

• There have been several recent broad statements on the Information Society
  – The Prague Declaration ‘Towards an Information Literate Society’ 2003
  – Goals of the World Summit on the Information Society 2004
  – The Alexandria Proclamation 2005

• These adopt the Human Rights approach in relation to Information Literacy
The potential of this argument

- Implications in terms of research include
  - Investigations of the synergies between the different ‘literacies’
  - Explorations of the potential for alliances with formal education to promote IL

- Practical implications
  - Skills-related support for individuals making enquiries under freedom of information laws
  - Building citizens’ ability to understand rights and entitlements so as to evade corruption
Conclusion

• By deriving programmes from arguments based on Article 19 we gain
  – Intellectual rigour
  – A sense of the place of libraries, access and IL in a broader social perspective
  – Greater understanding of the scope for alliances and partnerships
  – Directions for research investigations

• Information Literacy and Article 19 have a natural fit, which is rich in potential.