A Framework for Analyzing and Comparing Information Literacy Policies in European Countries

CARLA BASILI

ABSTRACT
Information literacy was conceived originally as a policy goal in 1974, when Paul Zurkowski expressed the need for establishing a major national program to achieve universal information literacy. Despite such early recognition of its political imprinting, the policy dimension of information literacy has been given scant attention in the academic literature. In order to pave the way toward concrete and coordinated policy measures, this article proposes a stratification of the information literacy discourse into three different perspectives of analysis: (a) sociopolitical perspective: analysis of information literacy as a policy goal (Education to Information); (b) disciplinary perspective: analysis of information literacy as a form of study of information (Culture of Information); (c) cognitive perspective: analysis of information literacy as a form of personal competence (Information Skills). Focusing on the sociopolitical perspective, this article moves on to discuss the view that information literacy is a policy goal crossing the borders of both information and education domains, in that it is an information policy issue that also enters the sphere of influence of education policies. The next sections propose a framework for analyzing and comparing information literacy policies in European countries. The overall aim is to apply a grid of analysis based on a set of variables, suitably defined in order to give a measure of what we call the IL-readiness of a country. Finally, the application of the proposed analysis framework leads to the identification of different policy axes for information literacy.
The Need for Information Literacy to Enter the Policy Agenda

It is time for information literacy to enter the political agenda and for governments to engage, since the role and importance of knowledge in economic development has significantly increased over time. In fact, an economic paradigm based on skills as enabling factors for economic development has gradually emerged and consolidated, as a result of two main trends: the pervasive development of technologies for information production, circulation, and access, and the prevailing positioning of the workforce in the service sector.

This has led to the conceptualizations of the Knowledge Economy, Knowledge Society, and Learning Society, developed respectively by economists, sociologists, and educators (Välimaa & Hoffman, 2008). In the literature, the most common conceptualization of Information Society sees technology—and particularly information and communication technologies (ICTs)—as its main intrinsic feature, thus concentrating on information infrastructures more than on information per se (as content and semantic), which is, instead, the specific focus of this article.

The concept of the Information Society has fascinated scholars and researchers since the beginning of the 1960s, with the work by Fritz Machlup (1962) and Marc Porat (1977) and their analysis of the emerging information industry from an economic perspective. A second line of investigation was based on the view that technology was driving a third-wave economy, which would follow the agricultural and industrial economies (Toffler, 1980). Another research line was influenced by studies on post-industrial society (Bell, 1976) and networked society (Castells, 2000).

The policy reaction to these theoretical inputs brought about a set of measures aimed at innovating every dimension of society through technology. In Europe, an indicative example of this trend is the 2002 Lisbon Agenda, made up of a number of strategic action lines, each representing a pillar of public life, such as e-government, e-learning services, e-health services (Commission of the European Communities [CEC], 2002). The guiding principle of these action lines is the network operation.

It is interesting to note that there is a direct connection in the CEC’s 2002 plan between the idea of an Information Society in the title (An Information Society for All) and the content of the communication, which is completely devoted to Internet infrastructures, as stated in the introduction:

To create a knowledge economy, eEurope 2002 focused on extending Internet connectivity in Europe. In order to generate growth, connectivity needs to be translated into economic activities. This is the focus of eEurope 2005: stimulating services, applications and content that create new markets and reduce costs and eventually increase productivity throughout the economy. (p. 6)
As will emerge in the next sections of this article, this perspective, based on the notion of information society as information technology society, has had a major impact on the scarce policy awareness of the information literacy discourse, in favor of an information technology literacy discourse.

An influential view of the information society originates in the 1970s from UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), through two major programs: UNISIST (United Nations International Scientific Information System) and NATIS (National Information Systems). The former was aimed at building a world science information system (UNESCO-Icsu, 1971), while the latter was focused on national information policies development (Urquhart, 1976).

At the time the focus was on educating users of scientific and technical information, a goal conceived essentially within the context of national information policies, despite the fact that a number of UNISIST and NATIS recommendations were formulated as to how the education system should be accordingly modified. In brief, it was a voice from the library and information science (LIS) area, and—as such—it could only have a minor influence over the education sphere (Basili, 2009a).

Furthermore, the whole UNISIST program was addressed—as already mentioned—to users of scientific and technical information (STI), mainly scientists, researchers, and academic staff. Therefore, the two fundamental pillars of UNISIST—STI and its users—were both entities of controlled quality (Basili, 2008c).

Since then, a number of driving forces have significantly affected and transformed the information environment and its consumers, so much so that an increasing involvement of the education system was called for (Basili, 2008a). Among the factors having a major impact on the information environment, worth mentioning are the

• mass access to information through the Internet;
• need for lifelong learning;
• increasing proportion of available information with a non-controlled production life cycle;
• proliferation of information services and tools;
• prevalence of intellectual, that is, information intensive, activities over manual activities.

These factors call for a resolute broadening of the traditional idea of library user-education, in terms of four main factors:

• Extent of the intervention: a mass problem calls for a mass solution, in that a universal problem of this scale requires universal support to reach a solution
• Target population: not only library users, but users of whatever kind of information resources
• *Information environment:* not only scientific and technical information
• *Competences to be transferred:* not only information retrieval but also information analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and communication

In brief, the information literacy problem is greater today than in the 1970s in each of its dimensions: scale, target, matter, and results. It is, therefore, an information policy problem that also enters the sphere of influence of education policies. Consequently, given its scope and quality, we believe that the LIS community cannot cope with this problem without a coherent policy support (Basili, 2009a).

**Indicators as Tools for Raising Policy Awareness**

Policy making is a complex activity deriving from the interpretation and combination of numerous facts and events. The task of analyzing and comparing policies on a given issue can be better performed by adopting the so-called *policy cycle* as a means to articulate the reasoning. According to the European Commission Evalsed Glossary:

> The policy cycle is the term used to describe the lifespan of a policy, from its formulation, to the review. It comprises: needs assessment / agenda setting; planning / policy formulation; policy implementation; policy monitoring; and evaluation and feedback. (n.d.)

In the case of information literacy, the policy cycle is still in a pre-policy phase, since it is still necessary to raise policy awareness, a step that is indispensable for the first phase, that is, setting the agenda.

Two different positions emerge in the literature about how the best decision-making process takes place: by intuition—an innate personal ability of the policy makers—or by careful evaluation of all the available and relevant information. *Evidence-based policy making* falls within the latter category and has been defined in the literature as a process involving a number of chained steps:

• Gathering information on indicators, policies and plans from surveys, research documents, reports
• Identification of root causes and analysis of their connections
• Policy decision on areas influencing—and influenced by—the phenomenon considered (Basili, 2009b)

In evidence-based policy making, therefore, the documentation phase is crucial for the subsequent phases. Moreover, indicators play an important role both in raising policy awareness and in providing evidence for decision making.

The Eurostat Glossary defines a statistical indicator—as statistical concept—according to the following definition, derived from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (2000):
Definition: A data element that represents statistical data for a specified time, place, and other characteristics

broader: statistical data, statistical information
related: statistical macrodata, statistical microdata, statistical metadata, statistical metainformation
narrower: elementary statistical indicator, composite statistical indicator, identifier of a statistical indicator, attribute of a statistical indicator, value of a statistical indicator (Eurostat’s Concepts and Definitions Database [CODED])

The term indicator derives from the Latin verb indicare, which means “to point out,” “to call attention to.” The term is widely used in statistical analysis as a major tool for informed decision making in policy formulation. This means that having the right indicators will result in better decisions and policy making. According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) (1993), indicators are “parameters that give information on some phenomenon and reduce complexity in order to make problems quantifiable and communicable.” Averch (1980) conceives indicators as tools “to shape lines of arguments and policy reasoning” (p. 344).

Despite the simple definition by the OECD (1993) of indicators as “parameters that give information on some phenomenon” (p. 5), an indicator should be made up of a definition, a value, and a measurement unit. Indicators, therefore, are specific statistical tools, collected on a regular and systematic basis.

For the purposes of our research approach, it is important to underline the relation between indicators and statistical data (which we will call “variables”): the latter are the basic elements (“atoms”) through which indicators (“molecules”) are constructed (OECD, 1992). In fact, the framework proposed here is based on a set of variables that are further combined to generate indicators, as the next sections will show.

**Information Literacy Indicators: Developments to Date**

Within UNESCO’s Information for All Programme (IFAP), a conceptual framework for identifying information literacy indicators was drawn up in 2008 by Ralph Catts and Jesus Lau (Catts & Lau, 2008). Acknowledging the considerable development and implementation costs of a new international survey of information literacy skills, the authors decided to rely on an existing survey, to be adapted to suit the case. They used the LAMP (Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme) survey, developed by UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics) (2003), as they believed that it included “sufficient items to provide adequate coverage of information literacy, with the exception of the ethical use of information.”
In Europe, strong emphasis has been placed on “key competencies,” as identified in the Recommendation of December 18, 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2006), which lists the following set of eight competencies:

- Communication in the mother tongue
- Communication in foreign languages
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- Digital competence
- Learning to learn
- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression (p. 13)

In 2008, the European Commission released a set of indicators to measure a subset of these key competences, among which are those more contiguous to information literacy—science literacy and ICT skills.

Nevertheless, both the framework by Catts and Lau and the work of the European Commission focus on skill measurement, thus covering only one aspect—that is, the outcome—of the overall policy discourse on information literacy.

**Formulating Information Literacy Policy Indicators: Rationalizing the Process**

In the belief that coherent pragmatic decisions can be derived from coherent theoretical premises, our previous research has concentrated on some basic distinctions related to the notion of information literacy (Basili, 2008d). The English term *literacy* refers to a *state*, a *condition*, and English has no verb analogous to the Italian “alfabetizzare,” which means “to make people literate.”

First of all, for the purpose of this article, it is fundamental to draw a distinction between two meanings of the term literacy: the *state* (to be literate) and the *process* (to make someone literate) (Basili, 2008d).

**Definition.** *Information Literacy (as process):* educational process, of political derivation, that aims at spreading across a population a minimum level of competencies for the retrieval, evaluation, and use of information from a variety of sources.

**Definition.** *Information Literacy (as state):* social objective of educational policy; state or condition, result of a process; having acquired the competence to retrieve, evaluate, and use information from a variety of sources. (p. 36)

The distinction between the process and its result gives rise to various lines of intervention, based on different lines of reasoning. In fact, reasoning about the result is based on variables like, for example,
• expected competency level;
• aims of learning; and
• assessment procedures.

Reasoning about the process, instead, is based on other variables like, for example,
• planning of actions,
• target communities;
• curriculum design;
• course configuration; and
• teaching methods.

A second important distinction revolves around different ways of analyzing the information literacy issue: disciplinary, socioeconomic, and cognitive. A detailed description of the three perspectives, together with a set of supporting arguments for each, is given in Basili (2008d). Here, instead, only the main features of the three dimensions of information literacy are briefly outlined in table 1.

According to this rationale, different axes of decision making can be identified, as will be described in the “Emerging Axes of Information Literacy Policy Making” section.

THE EUROPEAN NETWORK ON INFORMATION LITERACY OBSERVATORY AS A TOOL FOR ANALYSIS

The three information literacy perspectives of analysis described in the previous section are included in the research activities of the European network on Information Literacy (EnIL).

EnIL is a research project started in 2001 by the Italian National Research Council, with the aim of adopting a common research agenda and sharing results among information literacy researchers in Europe (Basili, 2004a, 2005).

To date the network includes information literacy experts from research and academic institutions in: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The network will be further enlarged to include all European Union countries (Basili, 2003).

The main research issues addressed by EnIL are as follows:

• Policy awareness: to what extent is information literacy a national policy issue in the different European countries?
• Higher Education Policies: what are the academic policies related to the integration of information literacy into university curricula?
• Best practices: what is the best implementation model of information literacy in higher education?
Table 1. Information Literacy Perspectives of Analysis

(a) IL as a discipline of study (*Culture of Information*)

(1): The culture of information falls within the disciplinary field of Documentation-Information Science

(2): The culture of information is a knowledge independent from other application domains

(3): The culture of information is a kind of transversal knowledge

(4): The culture of information is distinct from the informatics culture

(b) IL as a social objective (*Education to Information*)

(5): Information literacy is a requisite of the information society

(6): Information literacy is an objective of educational policy

(7): Information literacy implies a massive operation

(8): Information literacy refers to a minimum set of competencies

(9): Information literacy requires changes in the education system

(c) IL as cognitive acquisition of individuals (*Information Skills*)

(10): Information competencies (or i-skills) must be certificated

Source: Basili (2008d).

- **Barriers**: what are the main barriers to an effective integration of information literacy into academic curricula?
- **Literacy status**: what is the level of information literacy competency among university students in Europe?

Each research question contributes to our perception of what we call the *IL-readiness* of a country.

Among the EnIL research results, the European Observatory on Information Literacy Policies and Research (EnIL, 2006) was established in 2006 with the specific aim of providing a comparative representation of the degree of *IL-readiness* in European countries. To date the Observatory has been set up for Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Spain, and it consists of more than 600 Web pages.

The Observatory was conceived with a specific focus on the policy and research dimensions of information literacy and the higher education context of its application.

**Design Criteria of the EnIL Observatory**

The EnIL Observatory was designed according to a matrix of different criteria, which can be grouped in the following categories: purpose-oriented, geographical, and research-sensitive criteria (Basili, 2009a).

*Purpose-oriented* design criteria match the scope of the EnIL Observatory and therefore draw attention to the policy and research aspects of the information literacy discourse as well as to its higher education context. This means that initiatives either of a political matrix or within the academic environment are mainly considered.

*Geographical* criteria comply with the regional focus of the Observatory: Europe and European countries. This implies that the Observatory is hier-
archically organized on a country basis and includes European countries, though not exclusively European Union member states. However, a section related to the European Union initiatives is included.

Research-sensitive criteria comply with our view of what contributes to the IL-readiness of a country. Only those factors that can be considered as supporting the IL-readiness of a country are included in the EnIL Observatory.

Based on the above criteria, the structure of the EnIL Observatory is a gateway of information literacy initiatives grouped by country and arranged in sections (see table 2). The individual sections contain a set of entries, each describing an initiative related to information literacy in the country.

**Observed Variables**
The general format of the individual entries listed in the EnIL Observatory is given in table 3. Except for the title, each field has been identified and included in the format because it is functional to a variable that needs to be observed (Basili, 2009b).

The “start date” provides indications on the age of the information literacy discourse in the country, thus expressing the country’s timeliness in dealing with the information literacy issue.

The “body responsible” gives clues about the degree and nature of the involvement: a government initiative obviously reveals a wider involvement than a faculty or library initiative, while an initiative by the Ministry of Education, by the Ministry of Telecommunications, or by the Ministry of Innovation expresses the country’s perception of the nature and context of the information literacy issue.

The typology describes the scale of the initiative: a national policy document, a research project, or a library tutorial clearly have different effects and impacts on the country. The existence, distribution, and prevalence of different kinds of initiatives in a country are indications of the value attributed to information literacy.
Each initiative described in the Observatory is assigned a set of keywords, denoting its subject content. To date, the keywords have been freely attributed, due to the lack of a controlled vocabulary for the field of information literacy policies. Developing the said vocabulary is among the future tasks to be performed by EnIL, in order to ensure better indexing of the documents and allow for comparative searching among the various countries.

The EnIL Observatory as a Source and Base for Information Literacy Policy Indicators
The EnIL Observatory and, above all, its structure provide a set of useful variables to illustrate the IL-readiness of European countries, with special focus on the policy dimension.

The main IL-readiness dimensions, or variables, provided by the EnIL Observatory are listed in table 4.

While based on variables (atoms), the framework of information literacy analysis (FILPA) illustrated in previous sections can lead to the formulation of indicators (molecules). A pilot application of the framework to the EnIL Observatory entries is described in the next section.

Evidence Gained through the EnIL Observatory
The FILPA framework described previously can be used to analyze the set of data collected in the EnIL Observatory.

The total amount of initiatives included in the EnIL Observatory is 553. However, we decided to apply the framework only to the subset of comparable data, that is, 461 initiatives. The items excluded from the analysis fall into the following categories: Events, Special Interest Groups, and Tutorials.

The distribution of information literacy initiatives included in the EnIL Observatory for each country is illustrated in table 5.

A different representation criterion (distribution by type of initiative) gives account of the share of each type of initiatives: courses (66 percent), policy initiatives (11.7 percent), research projects (20.4 percent), for a total of 98.1 percent.

The remaining 1.9 percent regards journal special issues on information literacy and learning resources in various digital formats.
The set of initiatives recorded by the Observatory, but not considered in the analysis are: Events (20), Special Interest Groups/forums/committees (20), Tutorials outside the academic context (19).

It is important to take into account that the recognition of information literacy initiatives has been guided by the research criteria illustrated in the section “Design Criteria of the EnIL Observatory,” which implies a concentration on policy initiatives, research initiatives, and higher education context.

By applying the proposed framework of analysis to the EnIL Observatory entries, a number of tables and graphs can be produced concerning the input to evidence-based policy-making processes and, more specifically, each representing one of the variables listed in table 6.

When looking at the different phases of the policy cycle introduced in “Indicators as Tools for Raising Policy Awareness,” we have already emphasized that in most countries information literacy has not yet entered the policy agenda and, consequently, it is still necessary to promote policy awareness about the information literacy issue.

Nevertheless, a total of fifty-four policy initiatives including information literacy have been identified in the EnIL Observatory, although most of them do not focus specifically on it (see table 7).

Besides their number, which nonetheless provides significant information, the impact of individual initiatives is important, particularly when, like in Italy and Spain, the initiatives regard national education reforms in which information literacy is included.

The number of information literacy policy initiatives, combined with the temporal dimension of timeliness in perceiving the information literacy issue (see table 4), constitutes a (sort of) indicator of the degree of information literacy policy awareness in a certain country.

An important dimension related to policy awareness is the conception of information literacy by policy makers. This dimension can be identified by analyzing two main elements: the policy area of jurisdiction of the policy institution (see table 8) and the specific focus of the policy measure.

Table 8 shows that most policy measures (72 percent) are initiated by
Table 5. Distribution of Initiatives by Country and by Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>IL initiative</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total by country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning resource</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research project</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning resource</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research project</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>survey / report</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research project</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>survey / report</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>guideline / model</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research project</td>
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</tr>
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<td>survey / report</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>guideline / model</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research project</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>survey / report</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research project</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research project</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>survey / report</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
<td>course</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>guideline / model</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research project</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>survey / report</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of initiatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ministries of education. Nevertheless, the detailed descriptions of each initiative—summarized from the original EnIL Observatory texts—shows that the notion of information literacy mostly appears in policy measures focusing on technology (ICTs) diffusion and exploitation.

Remembering that the ICT policy area is the most contiguous to the information policy area (in the common meaning of the term information society illustrated in “The Need for Information Literacy to Enter the Policy Agenda” section previously), it is important to notice the positioning of information literacy just at the intersection between education matters and “information society” issues. This connection—revealed by evidence from the EnIL Observatory—confirms our previous research on the positioning of information literacy at the crossroad of information and education policy (Basili, 2008a).

A further important factor is the “age” of the information literacy phenomenon in each country; this information is given by the “start date” variable in each initiative entry (see table 3).

This variable helps us understand the degree of IL-readiness of a country, since it represents its timeliness in reacting to the information literacy issue: an early reaction indicates early awareness of the issue.
Besides illustrating the temporal distribution and trends of new information literacy initiatives in the analyzed countries, figures 1a–1b also provide indications about each country’s reaction time.

Information literacy courses represent a relevant area to be considered, even though they are not per se the main focus of our research, but only serve to illustrate different curricular configurations.

With respect to information literacy courses, the EnIL Observatory distinguishes between two main types: *library delivered* courses and *institution delivered* courses. The former refer to academic library systems, central academic libraries, and individual academic libraries, while the latter refer to universities, faculties, academic departments, academic institutes, and centralized academic organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy area</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total by policy area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>architecture, city planning, territorial planning</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>Austria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>Estonia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>education; science and technology</td>
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<td>inter-ministerial</td>
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Total number of policy initiatives 54
Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the distribution of the two types of courses by country.

While the amount of courses delivered by libraries confirms the leading role of libraries in the information literacy discourse, the evidence from figure 2 indicates that institutional courses are an increasing phenomenon in academic curricula.

Another interesting element is the number of credit-bearing courses, which constitute a non-negligible portion (29 percent) of the whole set
of courses in the sample. The distribution of credit-bearing courses, delivered by both libraries and academic institutions, is shown in figure 4.

A credit-bearing course, in this analysis, is considered to be both an information literacy course integrated into curricula, and a module embedded into an institutional course.

For each library course, the EnIL Observatory also provides information about the discipline studied by the participants, as shown in figure 5.
Figure 2. Courses delivered by academic libraries (university library systems, academic libraries, central university library)

Figure 3. Academic courses delivered by institution (university, department, faculty, institute, centralized academic structure)
Not surprisingly, the dominant classes regard the configurations of information literacy at a basic level and address students from diverse disciplines. Also not surprisingly, ICT disciplinary area shows the lower frequency.

**Emerging Axes of Information Literacy Policy Making**

An overview of the results leads us to identify two fundamental intervention axes, corresponding to the first two information literacy perspectives of analysis among the three illustrated previously: the sociopolitical and the disciplinary perspective.

The third perspective, that is, cognitive, is outside the scope of our analysis, since it is extensively dealt with in the literature, particularly in relation to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy competency standards (ACRL, 1999) and the procedures for information literacy competency assessment, like, for example, the Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS) project (https://www.projectsails.org/).

**Sociopolitical Action Lines**

A desirable case is when information literacy is sustained by the government, that is, by a ministry or, more rarely, by the parliament itself, as in
Compared to the total number of cases under investigation, the number of policy initiatives is non-negligible, but none of them focuses specifically on the goal of educating people to information. Instead, it is quite common to find policy recommendations on information literacy promotion in programmatic documents on ICT in education. Once again, this confirms that a major barrier is the scarce policy awareness of the key role played by information literacy, independently from—though cooperatively with—digital literacy.
Given the position of information literacy between information and education policies and the need to show the distinction between information literacy and computer literacy, the most suitable solution seems to be a governance approach, resulting from the interaction of a plurality of stakeholders: policy bodies from different policy areas, teaching institutions, and libraries.

**Disciplinary Axes**

A vast amount of specialized literature deals with providing a universally accepted definition of information literacy. Nevertheless, most of the efforts to translate information literacy definition into teaching activities are rooted in Winkworth’s analysis (as cited in Wilson, 1981). Winkworth distinguishes the following steps in the research process (1977):

- Define subject
- Locate information
- Locate material in library
- Locate information in material
- Locate material outside library and school
- Select information
- Organize information
- Evaluate information
- Communicate results

It is remarkable that as early as 1977 Winkworth already laid out the basic model for most of the information literacy competency standards, syllabi, and tutorials currently available (Basili, 2009a).

From a disciplinary point of view, the main policy issue is the curricular configuration of information literacy in terms of the following attributes: mandatory or optional; basic, advanced, specialized; parallel, integrated, or embedded. The Tuning project, funded by the European Community, might provide a useful guide for information literacy curricular configuration, besides endorsing a proposal for the inclusion of information literacy within the Bologna process for the European University Area (Basili, 2008a).

**Concluding Remarks**

The concept of “information literacy” originated as a policy concept in 1974, when Paul Zurkowski—then president of the Information Industry Association—coined the term suggesting that

the *top priority* of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science should be directed toward establishing a major *national program* to achieve *universal information literacy* by 1984. (Zurkowski, 1974; emphasis added)
As already mentioned, in those same years UNESCO recognized user education as a major priority of national information policies, and thus assigned a leading role to libraries for reaching the goal of a diffused education on scientific and technical information (Basili, 2009a).

So addressed, the information literacy problem was then tackled by the library community and mainly dealt with as a competency to be spread and diffused among library users. As a result, a vast amount of literature has been produced, in which information literacy is seen as a particular skill, according to the universally mentioned ALA 1989 definition.

Despite its political imprinting, information literacy has not yet properly entered the policy agenda in most European countries. Therefore, a major effort in raising policy awareness is still needed.

This article proposes a methodological approach aimed at rationalizing different axes of the policy course of action and at providing policy makers with comparative evidence.

By distinguishing among three different perspectives of information literacy analysis (disciplinary, sociopolitical, and cognitive), different decision-making axes are identified, involving different stakeholders (teaching institutions, libraries, education policy makers, information policy makers) and different policy areas of intervention.

Support to evidence-based policy making is given by the structure of the EnIL Observatory, designed to describe information literacy policies and research activities in European countries in a uniform and detailed way.

The different structural elements (variables) of the Observatory can be aggregated to provide a more general picture of the multiple dimensions represented in the Observatory. Furthermore, by combining different variables, more complex and significant elements of analysis can be obtained.

The examples of both elementary and aggregate analysis given here concentrate only on the most relevant dimensions, while a more extensive examination can be performed by combining other variables.

The proposed framework has been applied to a set of about 500 initiatives. Although non-negligible in size, this is just a limited sample, put together according to our specific research interests.

A more vivid and articulated picture could be drawn by looking at a larger set of data, which might also prove very useful in order to refine the framework itself.

On one hand, our analysis confirms the great efforts made so far by the library community, together with the persistence of a misconception of information literacy as ICT literacy. On the other hand, the analysis reveals an important emerging trend: the growing diffusion of accredited (i.e., credit-bearing) courses, both delivered by faculties and—notably—by libraries.

Except for a few sporadic cases, the road leading to the full recogni-
tion of information literacy as a policy matter is still a long one, and what emerges is the need for a governance approach that brings together the different stakeholders involved. This governance model will provide the library community with the support it needs to cope with information literacy issues and to pursue the ambitious goal of establishing a culture of information in Europe.

References


Carla Basili is senior researcher at the Italian National Research Council and associate professor of Methodologies of Scientific Information at Sapienza University in Rome. She has been associate professor of Documentation at the Macerata University (1995–2007) and the Lumsa University in Rome (1998–2008), vice-president of the
Italian Association for Advanced Documentation (1998–2004), and Italian delegate in the European Council of Information Associations (ECIA) (1997–2004). Basili is coordinator and initiator (since 2001) of the European network on information literacy and of the European Observatory on Information Literacy Policies and Research (since 2006). Her research interests focus on scientific information, information literacy, and scientific information policies.