

# Partnership with society – A social and cultural approach to iSchool-research

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## Abstract

In Scandinavia, research in library and information studies has mainly had its roots in the soft social sciences and the humanities. By entering the iSchool movement, the Scandinavian iSchools are obviously being shaped by the official slogan information, people and technology and by other iSchools. But it is also important to emphasize the value of a cultural and sociological approach to information, people and technology as a necessary supplement to the 'hard' or behavioral side of information and information technology. This event is aimed at all those who have an interest in discussing, critiquing and questioning sociological and cultural understandings of the study of information in the 21st century. The goal is to identify the benefits and opportunities connected to a broader interpretation of iSchool research and if possible to build a network for the further discussion of questions related to this.

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## 1 Overview

During the last couple of years, schools of library and information studies from Scandinavia have joined the iSchools organization. The iSchool movement has been founded on the slogan information, people and technology. The various iSchools in the world interpret this slogan from their particular local and institutionalized points of view. The main interpretation of the slogan seems to have been voiced by iSchools with an emphasis on the 'hard' or behavioral side of information and information technology, perhaps due to the faculty and programs of many iSchools. This is something that has led to discussions in the Scandinavian iSchools around various ways in which iSchools can address their focus of "information, people and technology".

Although researchers have shown that the iSchool community is intellectually diverse and also have pointed to the potential inherent in this diversity (e.g. Beaton, Jeng & Champagne, 2014; Wiggins & Sawyer, 2012), some disciplines have been more dominant. For instance, Wiggins and Sawyer (2012, p. 11) showed that among the faculty of iCaucus schools in 2009 (all but one from the US), many had a background in computer science or science and engineering (39%) whereas only 7% had a background in the humanities (although the figures are partly distorted by the characteristics of a few iSchools). 21% of faculty had a background broadly in library and information studies. Furthermore, the epistemological and methodological traditions that library and information studies researchers build on can vary greatly, and researchers may find their main inspiration either from the sciences or from the humanities (see also Heckman & Snyder2008).

In Scandinavia, a strong tradition has developed historically for addressing information problems from sociological and cultural perspectives. These perspectives contribute to addressing issues raised in the current information landscape where cultural policy and information studies concerns coincide, for instance around practices involving cultural production, consumption and distribution as well as information policy (e.g. the use of e-books), or when informational artifacts shape culture and perceptions of culture in particular ways (e.g. in relation to algorithms or search engines), a diagnosis also referred to as 'algorithmic culture' (see e.g. Hallinan & Striphas, 2014; Striphas, 2015). All this raises some important challenges regarding the nature and future of iSchool identity.

The workshop will focus on the following questions:

- What do social and cultural approaches contribute to the study of information, people and technology?

- What kinds of questions are we able to pose with such approaches that have not been posed before? Which phenomena may be studied more fully?
- What kinds of critiques are sociological and cultural perspectives in iSchool research vulnerable to?
- What is the relationship between the profession of librarianship and its social mandate, to which our educations traditionally have been linked, and the iSchool approach?

## 2 Purpose and intended audience

The session aims to bring together a group of researchers interested in or working within the parameters of a social and cultural approach to the study of information, people and technology. The overall objectives are to

- Initiate a discussion about what social and cultural approaches imply for the study of information, people and technology
- Create a network within the iSchool community collaborating on the social and cultural study of information, people and technology; and
- To stimulate a reflection on what iSchools can be in the future

The event is aimed at all those who have an interest in the humanities, cultural policy, cultural studies, science and technology studies, media & information studies, and similar approaches.

## 3 Goals or outcomes

The workshop will work toward a suggestion for a new interpretation of iSchools respectfully grounded in the established local traditions and interpretations of the study of information in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It will also aim to address new challenges and phenomena concerning information, people and technology, which cultural and social perspectives can contribute to.

## 4 Proposed format

After initial introductions to the event, the session is organised in three parts:

- Fish bowl talk (60 Minutes) in which 5 approaches by the organizers will be shared, followed by possibilities for the audience to join the fishbowl;
- Group discussions (60 Minutes) in which participants are invited to discuss and reflect on the fish bowl talks but also providing their own views on a social and cultural approach to information, people and technology.
- Idea generation round (45 Minutes); how can we, if at all, build a strong community of iSchool-researchers working within the frames of a social and cultural approach or socio-technical approaches
- The final 15 minutes will wrap up the discussion and discuss the next steps in text production

Position statements will be invited beforehand to ensure that there are willing audience participants for the fishbowl talk.

## 5 Relevance to the conference

The workshop provides an opportunity to create an iSchool brand that is, more than today, shaped by social and cultural understandings of information, people and technology. It is specifically aimed at the iSchool community and addresses issues related to its self-image and understanding. The workshop also relates to the theme of the conference, “partnership with society”, in that it concerns various stakeholder positions, including the policy level, the professionals we educate, and society at large.

## 6 Preferred number of participants

15-40 participants.

## 7 References

Beaton, B., Jeng, W., & Champagne, R. (2014). Exploring the Use of “Acknowledgement Analysis” to Map Intellectual Diversity and Cross-disciplinary Activity Within the iSchools. In *iConference 2014 Proceedings* (p. 700–707). doi:10.9776/14330