

# Information Literacy Policies in Europe: a framework for analysis

Carla Basili<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

It is commonly recognised that policy decision-making about a given phenomenon strongly relies on indicators that have been suitably defined to provide a measurable picture of the phenomenon in question. To date, the analysis of Information Literacy (IL) policies in Europe is lacking in certain aspects and the task of comparing IL policies in the different European countries cannot be other than qualitative.

Starting from the data obtained from the EnIL European Observatory on IL Policies and Research, the paper provides a common reference framework for analysing and comparing IL policies and research in European countries.

The proposed framework complies with the design criteria of the EnIL Observatory, launched by the author in 2006.

**Keywords:** Information Literacy - Policy Indicators - Academic Policies - Europe

## The Information Literacy concept over three decades

A major priority of the Information Age is the goal of achieving Universal Access to Information. This goal has been pursued for a long while, since the seminal work by Tom Wilson on behalf of Unesco aimed at defining guidelines for developing national information policies<sup>2</sup>.

We can identify three major dimensions of the problem concerning Universal Access, according to what we call the “3C model”. The main axes along which an efficient information policy articulates are:

- *connectivity*: measures aimed at ensuring a capillary structure – both institutional (for example, the libraries in a country) and technological (for example, the Internet) – acting as a “conveyor” (or distribution network) of information to every citizen;
- *content*: measures aimed at ensuring that reliable information is conveyed to “connected” users;
- *competencies*: measures aimed at ensuring that “receivers” are able to efficiently retrieve and fully exploit the conveyed information.

Elsewhere (Basili, 2003), we have already underlined that until now the third “C” has been neglected in European Union policies and that diffusing information literacy is a requirement of today’s Information Society (Basili, 2007).

### *1974: Information Literacy as a policy issue*

The origin of the “Information Literacy” concept dates back to 1974, when Paul Zurkowsky, 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 (Zurkowsky, 1974)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Italian National Research Council. Ceris Institute - Rome, Italy

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, T.D. (1981), *Unisist Guidelines for Developing and Implementing a National Plan for Training and Education in Information Use*. Preliminary version. Paris: Unesco.

<sup>3</sup> Zurkowsky, P. (1974), *The information service environment: Relationships and priorities*. Washington, DC: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. Government Printing Office (ED 100391- Eric Clearinghouse).