ECIL 2021. The Seventh European Conference on Information Literacy

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ECIL 2021: The seventh European conference on information literacy

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After a pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the _Seventh European Conference on Information Literacy (ECIL) 2021_ took place online from September 20 to 23. The Department of Information Management of Hacettepe University, the Department of Information and Communication Sciences of the University of Zagreb, and the Information Literacy Association organised the event. The conference's main theme was 'Information Literacy in a Post-Truth Era', and its contributions amounted to three keynote speeches, one invited talk, 84 papers and two doctoral forum contributions, 24 best practices contributions, six workshops, 12 posters, 7 PechaKucha presentations and two panels.

The ECIL conference series started in 2013 under the patronage of UNESCO and since then has maintained a tradition of attracting prominent figures in the information literacy (IL) community among its presenters. This year these contributors included keynote speakers Olof Sundin (Lund University), Markus Behmer (University of Bamberg) in dialogue with Till Krause (Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazine), Stephan Lewandowsky (University of Bristol), and the invited speaker Alexandra Becker (Media University in Stuttgart).

In his keynote speech, which drew upon his most recent books (Haider & Sundin, 2019, 2022), Olof Sundin connected the ongoing 'crisis of information' to the blurred boundaries between the roles of consumer and citizen in the information society. On the topic of citizenship, later in the conference, Stéphane Goldstein (InformAll) and Jane Secker (City, University of London) highlighted the historical development of IL policies in the UK in a compelling talk. The second keynote speaker, Stephan Lewandowsky, a co-author of _The Debunking Handbook 2020_ (Lewandowsky et al., 2020), offered a convincing investigation of the issue of 'post-truth' through the lens of the cognitive sciences. Lewandowsky drew a 'brief history of lies' from Richard Nixon's Watergate to Donald Trump's 'alternative facts' and presented his experimental research on 'information literacy inoculation', i.e., the exposure of experimental subjects to short videos where common strategies of disinformation are debunked. In a subsequent conference session, İpek Şencan (Hacettepe University) deeply problematised the concept of 'news', which is, in my view, a necessary precondition for understanding the fakeness of 'fake news'. The last keynote session, with Markus Behmer and Till Krause, concerned the 'overnewsed but underinformed' citizens of the information society and followed the path paved by Sundin and Lewandowsky. The invited talk by Alexandra Becker presented the findings of the research project _Lernwelt Hochschule 2030_ and was focused on the student's perspective on the development of teaching and learning environments. While not explicitly dedicated to libraries, I found her discussion of the current state of educational architecture of great interest for the library community, especially regarding the pandemic-related increase in _hybrid_ teaching (and, more broadly, working), which sees people functioning simultaneously in digital and in-person spaces.

If I turn my memory to previous editions of the conference, I find historical continuity: sustainability (the central theme at _ECIL 2016_) was discussed by Paula Ochôa and Leonor Gaspar Pinto (Universidade NOVA de Lisboa). Workplace IL (the topic of _ECIL 2017_) was discussed by Krista Lepik (University of Tartu and Lund University). Regarding IL in everyday life, the theme of _ECIL 2018_, Sheila Webber (University of Sheffield) and Bill Johnston (University of Strathclyde) presented their research on ageism, according to which older people

are often misrepresented as passive receivers of fake news and populist political messages (see also Johnston & Webber, 2019).

Moving on to this year's conference, the theme of the post-truth era emerged from different angles, from health literacy to copyright literacy, and including academic integrity and various other topics, some of which I mention in the rest of this report (see also the word cloud in Figure 1 below).
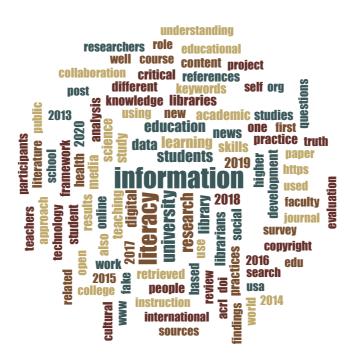

Figure 1: Word cloud of the terms in the Book of Abstracts (with NVivo 1.5).

Health literacy has been a reoccurring theme at this conference, but in 2021 it was, of course, more prominent due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the disinformation in the field. Arijana Pavelić (University Hospital for Infectious Diseases, Zagreb) and Sonja Špiranec (University of Zagreb) offered a well-defined conceptual framework for bridging critical IL with the domain of critical health literacy. Other presentations focused on the study of creators and consumers of health information, such as low-income HIV+ patients in the study by Venkata Ratnadeep Suri (Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology) and his colleagues.

Several papers pertained to copyright literacy, legal literacy and digital piracy in the context of higher education. Jesus Lau (Universidad Veracruzana) discussed the results of an online survey on plagiarism. Jean-Pierre V. M. Hérubel and Clarence Maybee (Purdue University) presented a valuable classification of institutional histories for graduate students.

Carolin Keller (Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education), a PhD student currently writing a dissertation on librarians' role in literature reviews, addressed the topic of the library profession in her excellent doctoral forum presentation. The thought-provoking paper by Alison Hicks and Annemaree Lloyd (University College, London)—based on their research on the deconstruction of Information Literacy in Higher Education (ILiHE) also discussed elsewhere (Hicks & Lloyd, 2020)—offered food for thought to anyone involved with IL instruction in university settings. In my view, their conceptualisation of IL as a *practice* situated in *information landscapes* is a valuable tool for rethinking the day-to-day teaching of IL. Moreover, this approach resonates easily with Becker's invited talk on the 'spaces' of teaching and learning.

The best practice sessions offered more concrete developments regarding the evaluation of IL skills and online tools and platforms. My colleagues Liza Nordfelt and Anna Volkova (Chalmers University of Technology) discussed the development of an online course on academic integrity

for undergraduates according to a user experience (UX) workflow. Essi Prykäri and Riikka Sinisalo (LUT University) presented their UX work with a widespread tool for IL instruction, LibGuides.

The poster by Minna Suikka (University of Helsinki) about a university course on meme literacy drew attention to a source of information (or mis-/disinformation) whose "viral" load at a time of information epidemics should never be underestimated.

In sum, ECIL has confirmed its role as a major venue for anyone interested in IL. The conference's organisers should also be praised for choosing a timely topic for this year's conference. In addition, in my experience the peer-review process was excellently managed, while the digital format did not affect the friendly and constructive tone typical of the event (as shown also by the great number of smiles in the pictures available from the conference's website). Most of the sessions were held in parallel, so I was unable attend all of the many interesting events on the programme. Luckily, the book of proceedings—to be published in 2022 by Springer and edited by Serap Kurbanoğlu (Hacettepe University)—will allow for a more comprehensive picture of the contributions than this short conference report.

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