

Conceptions of place in the information practices of the Mahamewnawa Asapuwa Temple community

Hilary Yerbury, Pethigamage Perera and Michael Olsson

Introduction. *The findings of a study of the information practices of devotees and monks associated with a Buddhist temple are used to examine the way place is understood, and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the conceptualisations presented in the literature.*

Methods. *An insider approach facilitated the collection of data through interviews of monks and devotees, observations and analysis of websites and social media platforms produced by the temple community.*

Analysis. *Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview transcripts, the researcher's field notes and online content.*

Results. *Place can be physical, modified by time, symbolic, created through the affordances of technology and organisational. Three categories of information practices emerged, being cultural, everyday life and organisational information practices. Existing conceptualisations of place in information research, including information grounds, information landscapes and space of flows were insufficient to cover the ways that place was expressed in this study.*

Conclusions. *Understandings of place and associated information practices are tied to cultural knowledge and beliefs. The outsider researcher may only make sense of data through the use of metaphor or analogy. Further analytical and empirical work is essential to develop guidelines for establishing appropriate metaphors.*

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to use the findings of a study of the information practices of a diasporic Buddhist temple community to explore the significance of place in information studies. Over time, in a shift that has mirrored a turn to the spatial across the social

sciences, conceptual evolution shifted the focus of research from the library as the place for purposeful action to recognition that everyday information called for expertise beyond that of librarians and sources found in libraries. This led to the rise of the use of context to situate sense-making, considered fundamental to an individual's use of information. There has been significant criticism of the use of the term context over many years: Dervin stated ([1997](#), p.14) that *'there is no term that is more often used, less often defined, and when defined, defined so variously as context'*. As recently as [2019](#), Huvila noted that the meaning of *'context'* was still being questioned.

The acceptance of a practice-theoretical approach as a worthwhile basis for the study of how people engage with information has prompted some reconsideration of the notion of place and context. Schatzki, in his consideration of social practices, identifies three meanings of site: the first is where something can be found, whether in time, space or thought, including language and the span of a life; the second is the physical space where activities take place; the third is more complex, because it assumes that site and activities exist inseparably, each being intrinsic to the other, and being created through a process of social interaction (Schatzki [2002](#), pp. 63-65). Schatzki's three meanings of site can be taken as loose conceptual explanations of how place can be understood from a practice theoretical perspective, acknowledging that the label, practice theory, encompasses several related theories. Thus, there is no single definition for any of the types of site. It becomes important, therefore, to consider what theoretical approaches are available for making sense of place in this study of the information practices of monks and devotees of a Theravada Buddhist Temple in Sydney, Australia.

This study is part of a larger ethnographic study of the information practices of devotees and monks of the Mahamewnawa Asapuwa Temple in Sydney. Data were collected by one of the researchers, a member of the Temple, during 2016, through observation, content analysis of Temple websites and social media sites and interviews with ten monks and fifteen devotees. Approval to conduct the study and gather data was granted by the university's Human Research Ethics Committee, with approval number: 2015000013. The approval process and the protocols of the Temple required that recruitment be done using an arms-length approach and as part of the recruitment process, participants were guaranteed their identity would not be revealed, thus statements are attributed only

to devotee or to monk, with no further distinction made. A thematic analysis of the content of the transcribed interviews was carried out, and that forms the basis of the findings presented here.

Making sense of place

Place is a social construct, made through the actions and narratives of people (Sack, [2003](#)). Cox and Fulton ([2022](#), p.1) quote Gibson and Kaplan ([2017](#), p. 131) who assert that there is no '*coherent, complex body of theory related to place, space and information behavior*'. Several metaphors bring together place or space, people and information. These include information landscapes (Lloyd, [2006](#), [2010](#); Lloyd, et al. [2013](#)), information grounds (Pettigrew, [1999](#); Fisher, et al. [2005](#); Fisher and Naumer, [2006](#)) and the space of flows (Castells, [1996](#), [1999](#)).

Over a number of years, Savolainen ([2006](#), [2009](#), [2021](#)) has pursued a conceptual exploration of context and spatial factors in information seeking and sharing, including a focus on information grounds. The theory of information ground, proposed by Fisher (aka Pettigrew) and colleagues and brought together by Fisher and Naumer, ([2006](#)), is, according to Cox and Fulton ([2022](#), p. 3), '*perhaps the most well-known example of an information theory that relates the characteristics of place to information behaviour*'. In a model bringing together people, place and information, Fisher and Naumer ([2006](#)) propose a number of factors relevant to each category that contribute to their concept. The factors related to people assume a notion of membership of a group and of information sharing roles within a group; the factors related to information relate to content, perception of relevance and of role within the discussion; and while place does include location, there is an emphasis on comfort and privacy of interactions. This is not surprising, given that early studies of information grounds, such as Waiting for Chiropody ([1999](#)), were conducted in locations where at the same time both public acts and personal professional acts took place. Fisher's (as Pettigrew [1999](#), p. 811) original definition of information grounds presented them as '*synergistic environment(s) temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behaviour emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information*'. This original definition has remained influential, although it has been explicated as a conceptual approach and extended empirically in many studies.

A strength of the concept of information grounds in expressing a

notion of place is that it clearly emphasises physical space, but at the same time recognises the importance of temporality and transience (Savolainen [2021](#), p. 664). Savolainen's analysis of the concept acknowledged some structural constraints on information seeking but emphasised the capacity for human action to make changes to these constraints. He stressed the role of people in creating this temporary place and the importance of the '*social atmosphere*' that supports information sharing (Savolainen, [2006](#), p.5).

A different conceptual approach is found in the work of Lloyd ([2011](#)), whose definition of information practices, placed them in '*collective situated action*' (p. 285). Information landscapes provides the context for the '*situated action*' of the definition. According to Lloyd ([2006](#), [2010](#)), the term refers to a space where people interact. Information landscapes are constituted by the types and formats of information people use in a given context and by norms governing particular practices (Lloyd, et al., [2013](#), p. 130). The metaphorical notion of information landscapes seems particularly useful in circumstances where people need to navigate through the unfamiliar. As a metaphor, it seems appropriate for students learning the skills of information literacy or for refugees in the early stages of re-settlement in a new country, where, to continue the metaphor, key landmarks and features can be identified to orient people. Yet, the possibility of moving from information landscapes as a place-based concept to its operationalisation seems elusive. Savolainen ([2021](#)) proposes that the concept of information landscape actually '*exemplifies a sophisticated approach to space-related contextual factors of information practices*' (p. 665), and that the value of the metaphorical approach to spatial constructs in information practices requires further studies. Context and site both take spatial constructs beyond the physical.

Castells introduced the concept of space of flows which is often seen as being rooted in technology, but which is part of his consideration of social transformation brought about by information technologies, where people no longer need to be directly connected with others in their information-based interactions. He considered space of flows as purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors (Castells, [1996](#), p. 412). A key feature of the space of flows is that it is not bounded in the way that notions of place are, but rather is

based in networks where information flows in ways that can be perceived as instantaneous. A networked society, having no boundaries, is a global society, he claims (Castells, [2010](#), p. 2737). It might seem that Castells is using *space of flows* as a metaphor of place. Scholars such as Dutton and Dubois ([2015](#), p. 53) imply that it is a place, but Castells argues that *space of flows* is a process, created through interactions supported by a technological infrastructure. Like much of Castells' work, space of flows is an attractive concept, but one that is difficult to operationalise.

Understanding the temple as place

The Mahamewnawa Asapuwa Temple exists as a physical place. The website and Facebook pages give a street address for the Temple of the Sydney branch and show photographs of the buildings located on the rural outskirts of Sydney. Devotees recognise this as a place they can go to as part of their spiritual practices – it is always there, with a sign at the entrance to identify it. This might suggest that they see it as a geographic location, and indeed, devotees do list places they visit by name, such as Cherrybrook, a suburb of Sydney, or Kaduwela, a suburb of Colombo, in Sri Lanka.

The notion of physical place is modified by time, so that not every place is considered in the same way. Devotees convey a sense of the permanence of physical location when they make comments such as: *'I visit the temple whenever I'm free'*; or *'[going to] Polgahawela Asapuwa ... whenever we go to Sri Lanka'*. Other places may not have that sense of permanence, but they are, nonetheless, places that can be visited regularly, whether in Sri Lanka or in Australia: *'I took part in the monthly Sill [seela] program at the Businessman Mr Jinadasa's Building'*. The monks also establish regular programs in places distant from a permanent place.

We select one person to initiate and organise Dharma program close to their residence. He/She knows the area well and they know the people who live close by. So, we do programs at the selected areas every month.

Devotees and monks also refer to what might be considered “pop-up” Temples, a temporary place of worship or celebration set up in usually in someone's home, or in a community hall in the suburbs. This temporary place is recognisable as the Temple through the statues and other decorations installed for a couple of hours which *'managed to create the same temple atmosphere'*, and because of

the rituals carried out there.

The findings about place, with the monks emphasising routine and temporary places that are not permanent buildings, make sense when interpreted with the cultural understanding that Buddha himself preached that monks should go from place to place, and the only time they should stay in the Temple building is during the rainy season, known as *Kathina* to Theravadic Buddhists.

More than a physical place

Sometimes, however, the Temple is more than a physical place, being created through the spiritual practices involving Karma or merit: as the following statements from devotees show: *'[It is] where I can cultivate the good habits and practices and be engrossed with the dharma knowledge and a place where I can gather good Karma for my Samsara'*. The Temple is also created through the presence of the monks and the Guru or founder of the Temple. One devotee referred to it as *'[t]he place where the monks lived'*. For some devotees, the Temple is in Sri Lanka, because that is where the Guru is, or at least that is where his preachings come from: *'we have our television channel there in Sri Lanka'*. The Temple is also, by the same token, on the Internet: *'The main monk, Kiribathgoda Knaananda Thero not only publishes all his Dharma talks on books, ... or on a newspaper, but also on the Internet'*. Several devotees referred to listening to *'his preaching on the TV ... and most of the time in live sessions'*. *'Live streaming'* is important, especially when *'we can connect and ask questions'*. YouTube is a source of the Guru's dharma preachings: *'I can find lots of programs'*. Facebook is a very popular technology, with devotees making comments such as *'I often go to Facebook, ... they have specially Facebook page called Mahamewunaasapuwa'*. At the same time as acknowledging the technology, devotees emphasise its use in representing the Temple: *'Facebook is used to spoil the minds of the people. However, we use it to spread the dharma of the Buddha'*.

Thus, the Temple exists through the affordances of technology, with distance and physical location being no barrier to taking part in the practices of the Temple with monks and other devotees. The websites act as a surrogate for the main Temple in Sri Lanka and for the branch of the Temple in Sydney for some devotees, being *'how they distribute their work'*. Devotees talked animatedly about their engagement with the Temple online and with each other. The use of email and social media has been important in building

friendships and sharing information. A devotee remarked: *'We also use emails and Viber as well, whenever someone receives something in relation to the religion, we would share it with our friends as text messages'*. A monk observed that devotees also make use of technologies in support of the Temple: *'these devotees get together and have their own collection of dharma distribution methods such as Twitter, so others come to know about these programs. I don't know how this happens'*.

The understanding of the Temple as place is also reflected in the way it is named. For the devotees, it is Asapuwa, while for the monks it is Mahamewnawa. *Asapuwa* is an old word, brought back into the language, referring to the ancient forest tradition of Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism, and meaning retreat or hermitage. Trading on the shared cultural understanding between the interviewer and the devotees, a devotee said: *'as the name implies, it was an Asapuwa to me'*. In other words, as several devotees said, *asapuwa* represents a sense of peace, *'a place of tranquillity'*. *Asapuwa* suggests a small, humble place, a label which is somewhat at odds with the fine buildings and emphasis on beauty in the physical surroundings. A devotee emphasised the imposing nature of the permanent buildings by referring to something quite mundane – the laying of tiles: *'If they build something, for an example need to lay tiles, they do it to maximum quality'*.

When the monks refer to Mahamewnawa, they may also be mindful of the meaning of the word, as it means “Great Cloud Monastery”, which is said to have been the name of the first Buddhist monastery established in Sri Lanka, but they also refer to the temple as an organisation: *'This is an organisation and we have branches all over the world'*. This organisation is financially successful, raising money in a variety of ways. Sales of the Guru's translations and preachings are a key source of income. Devotees describe how books are sold, for example *'in front of the place [where]they conduct the sill program'*, and a monk refers to the bookshop associated with the Temple building, noting that *'at the moment it is small. These are things we could improve in the future'*. Donations are also significant as income for the Temple, taking various forms, including sponsorship of bills for electricity, water, council rates and so on. A devotee explains that *'[t]here is a calendar at the temple premises where you can sponsor the meals for any day during the year and [sponsor] \$50, \$100, \$500, \$1,000, \$5,000 tickets for other infrastructure projects'*. Some devotees donate small amounts: *'it's hard for me but I contribute*

moneywise what I can afford', whereas another devotee is *'considering buying kind of an annual membership ... to improve the facilities and basic living conditions of the monks'*, and others refer to *'online donation'* which is straightforward *'because they have their account numbers online on their websites'*.

Acknowledging the organisational dimension to the Temple, a devotee commented: *'There are a lot of legal affairs to fulfil'*.

Thus, as shown, the Temple exists as a place in several ways. It is a physical place, existing in time as well as space, and a symbolic place, created through the presence of the monks or the guru. Physically and symbolically, it exists online. The Temple also exists as an economic and legal entity, holding a different kind of space. In all these instances, it is part of the practices of devotees and monks.

Place and information practices

Having set out the various types of place that emerged from the data, it is appropriate to consider the information practices that happen in these places. The Temple is clearly a place for spiritual practices, which are carried out in a variety of ways. *'That was the place where I could cultivate the good habits and practices and be engrossed with the dharma knowledge and a place where I can gather merits'*. Several devotees referred to the Buddha's entreaty to find a quiet place to meditate, *'even under trees, doesn't matter'*, with *'no people'*. When the Temple is *asapuwa*,

We do not focus or regard it as a meeting and greeting place. It is a quiet and unique place here. We don't come here to chat around. We appreciate silence and it is a place where promote peace of mind [sic].

When the Temple is an organisation, with headquarters in Sri Lanka, it has an intricate management structure, as explained by one of the monks, where groups of monks, sometimes including devotees, share information, discuss matters and make decisions.

There are Upasthayaka [Assistance] committees in these temples. We make decisions with them but sometimes if we need advice, we direct them to a board of monks who control and accountable in the temple operations. They are in Polgahawela.

The monks describe the meetings held globally to bring together all the monks, and one observes that *'Just in case we are not able to participate, they informed us the decisions they took during the*

meeting. Sometimes they send the audio file too'. The important role of the Guru, the head monk, in any important decision, is clear. A devotee, similarly, describes the decision-making process: 'we seek the head monk's guidance and directions, then we get together and discuss "how". Thereafter each person is being given a role as to what that person would do'. Another devotee has a different perspective, observing:

Monks will be priority and monks will tell which way will be good But it always allows devotees to give their ideas and they will be discussed and then they take other Monks' and devotees' ideas into consideration too. So, it is not monks ruling everything.

The monks do not talk about the discussions and decisions made in these meetings, but the legal and financial affairs of the Temple are clearly a focus, as a devotee indicates: *'We should think about the mortgage with Upasthayaka [Assistance] committee. All these buildings are on mortgage agreements'*. Another devotee gives an insight into a business aspect, that of running the bookshop:

[The new book by the Guru] has been sold out already ... Probably the person who manage it doesn't bring lots of them, but when the new translations are coming, he will bring them. People will snap it up quickly.

The Temple is clearly a meeting and greeting place for members of a diasporic community, as the field notes indicate. One devotee put it succinctly: *'I love to see Sri Lankan community in wherever the place'*. Another spoke at length about how the temple enabled them to maintain their Sri Lankan culture:

This temple, as far as I've seen, belongs to the Sri Lankan community. We live far away from our motherland. In this country, we just go to work and it's like day-to-day routine work. ... [it is good to] find a place that your own community from your country coming together and to see them working. They all are in the same position as you are and coming into that place and doing work with them makes me happy.

A devotee who is also a parent values the cultural practices of interactions in the temple: *'I want my children to grow up in Buddhist culture and learn what the life is all about. ... That's what makes [us] go to this temple'*.

The community events organised through the temple, such as blood donation and working bees, are important events for

devotees, because of the possibility of gaining merit through being of service to others. However, they also give opportunities for people to meet and talk, as the following example shows: *'Today we had a working bee program. We enjoyed meeting different people at the event'*.

Other devotees see the practices they engage in as *'building the friendship among us'*. One devotee explained in some detail how their conversations can lead to friendship. Although conversations may start on the topic of Buddhism, they soon encompassed other topics:

When we go to different programs, we also have intervals or break times. During those times, we see people and greet them by saying say "Hi", and then we start talking. Sometimes, if I see one of my friends, or relative of mine, they introduce their good friends, and in that occasion, we communicate with each other a little bit. But if we want, we can build the friendship by sharing contacts.

This is a strong theme, echoed by all the devotees: *'We see same faces and we also meet them at the temple after a long time. It's a good place to meet old friends and also create new friends'*. The researcher's field notes indicate that he overheard sharing of information on a range of topics, including work and study, neighbourhoods, Australian immigration laws, children, politics and so on. Thus, the topics discussed were broad. In the interviews, one devotee expressed it in this way:

We get to find people and their different skills and abilities and what they are good at. ... So, we get to know about other things and information through them not only related to Buddhism but also something that could be helpful for your career along the way.

This overview of information practices indicates that people seek and share information in three areas. The first relates to their practices as Buddhists, where they seek and share information about spiritual matters, including the preachings of the Guru and topics of interest and concern for Buddhists. The second relates to social interactions as members of the Temple community, where topics of conversation range from those of casual contacts, to those covered by people exploring developing friendships, including shared interests and concerns such as immigration laws and children's schooling, to those that take place in relationships of trust, including issues of Sri Lankan politics and gossip about mutual acquaintances. The third relates to the Temple as an

organisation, and the practices related especially to legal and financial matters.

From the perspective of the information sharing engaged in by the devotees in this study, the concept of information grounds would appear to offer some value. From the perspective of the practices of the monks of the temple, the concept also appears to offer some value, given the expectation that monks will not necessarily preach in a permanent, physical location, but in various appropriate places and at different appropriate times.

Discussion

The findings of the study related to place demonstrate the complexity of the perceptions that participants of the study have. To elucidate this complexity, the information practices of this diasporic community of devotees and monks have been brought together in three categories, *everyday life information practices*, *information-based organisational practices*, and the largest grouping, *information-based cultural practices*.

Everyday life information practices arise from the social interactions that devotees describe happening as they engage in social interactions with other devotees, around devotional activities or as they engage in community-oriented activities. Their information practices involve sharing information on many topics, including children, work, shared interests and even politics. These practices are seen as being physically located somewhere, even though some of the interactions happen online.

The information-based organisational practices are multi-faceted. They involve monks and those devotees who are members of lay committees among others. The monks describe the meetings and other activities that circulate the information necessary to coordinate the operations of a globalised organisation and the technologies that make discussions possible and that disseminate decisions that come from Temple headquarters in Sri Lanka. The information on which these practices are based includes the legal, financial and operational information necessary for the running of a global organisation, as well as the information associated with the global publishing business run by the Temple. For the publishing business, there are nodes of supply and distribution which are described in physical terms, but the business itself, like the globalised Temple, appears as a network, with information practices taking place online. Although committee meetings can be

seen to happen formally at an agreed time and in an agreed manner, in other words they take place, the other information-based activities, from raising donations to selling books or making mortgage payments can be seen as networked transactions.

The information-based cultural practices are extremely complex. The devotees and monks are clear that the purpose of the spiritual activities in this group is gathering merit. This is an intrinsic part of Buddhism, through which the results of certain actions will not only improve this life, but will affect future lives. They describe activities as diverse as meditating, giving or attending Dharma talks, reading, watching and listening to devotional material, taking part in Temple activities and supporting the monks.

These activities draw on a range of cultural knowledges, some of which are enacted in a physical place and others in a symbolic place. The Temple exists physically in Sydney and in Sri Lanka, with a street address, and online through a website and Facebook page, with permanent URLs, but devotees refer to other places that “become” the Temple, either on a routine basis or for a single occasion, lasting only two or three hours. They also talk about the Temple in symbolic terms, existing as *asapuwa* in the inner peace they experience, for example, or through the presence of the monks. That the presence of the monks creates the Temple, as a place for cultural activities, can be understood from the advice of Buddha to monks, to meditate or preach anywhere, in an empty place or under a tree.

In this study of the information practices of Buddhist devotees and monks, there is no single concept that encompasses the understandings of the Temple as place. The concept of information grounds (Fisher, et al. 2005; Fisher and Naumer, 2006) has promise but is only relevant to the interactions related to the category of everyday life information interactions. Although the permanent Temple, and the routine places where cultural practices are enacted can be seen as information grounds, the notion of the one-off temporary instance of the Temple would seem to pose a challenge to the concept. In this instance, the information ground exists as a physical place, created by the information activities of people, but the empirical examples of information grounds indicate that they can be returned to, that they can exist as part of a routine of life. In the case of the temporary instances of the Temple, it is never possible to return, to re-create an information ground.

The notion of space of flows (Castells, [1996](#), [1999](#)) seems to work, at least at a general level, as a lens for understanding the networked processes involved in the coordination and management of the globalised organisation and its associated publishing business. The emphasis on the use of information and communication technologies by devotees and monks indicates the strong technological infrastructure, allowing people to have instantaneous access to information. The structure of the Temple organisation demonstrates a globalised organisation. Castells argues that the space of flows is a process, only existing when the process is in train. This argument is also found in the practice theoretical approach, where practices are social processes that only exist while they are happening.

In considering the appropriateness of this concept, it may be appropriate to acknowledge that Castells developed it in the early days of the Internet, when it was possible to make claims about the process and the power that flowed from it (Castells, [1999](#)), and that to some extent, there has always been a tension between the process itself and the emphasis on the technology without which the process could not exist. The following four aspects all make space of flows seem attractive for a study taking a practice theoretical approach: the unbounded nature of the network sustaining the space of flows, the insistence on process; the emphasis on the outcomes of this process; and the information-based human interactions. However, its emphasis on the technological infrastructure means that space of flows can only ever present a part of a notion of place.

Underpinning the cultural practices of these Theravada Buddhists, the information could perhaps be understood through the socio-cultural metaphor of an information landscape (Lloyd, et al., [2013](#)). From an outsider's perspective, it is clear that information practices involve norms of behaviour as well as different types of information (Lloyd, et al., [2013](#), p. 130). They are engaged in unquestioningly by devotees, who equally are aware when some epistemic, social or performative aspect of the practice is incomplete or even unknown to them. An information landscape would seem to exist, and to have boundaries that will cause difficulties when they are not understood or acknowledged by devotees or others.

At the same time, the innovative approaches to practices and the impact of being a diasporic community have shown the importance of being able to modify the taken for granted information practices

and develop new norms and rules of interaction. This suggests that information landscapes could have elements demonstrating the fixity of place as well as the creation of place through collective social interaction. As Savolainen (2021, p. 665) has suggested, further research is warranted to clarify the metaphorical nature of information landscapes and other special constructs in information practices.

Returning to the practice theoretical approach, and Schatzki's threefold conceptualisation to site (Schatzki, 2002), this study has shown that this conceptualisation has not provided clarity on how place might be represented conceptually and operationally in studies of information practices. There is more work to be done as scholars including Savolainen (2021), Burnett (2015), Cox and Fulton (2022), Lloyd, et al. (2013) and Huvila (2019) have asserted. One of the key challenges is that information practices and the sites in which they are performed are often '*invisible*' (Savolainen, 2008, p.3). While the use of this term might suggest that they have material properties, and could be made visible, information practices and their sites will always have an element to them that can only exist in the mind.

The study concludes that analogies or metaphors are important in explicating what can only exist in imagination. However, analyses of existing analogies or metaphors, such as those by Savolainen (2008) and Huvila (2019), have concluded that these have their strengths and weaknesses. A key problem for the field of information research is the sheer number of analogies and metaphors, which can only lead to fragmentation. Drawing from those analyses, and using the findings from this study, some characteristics for the future development of analogies or metaphors of place in information practices can be identified as a contribution to future debate. These include:

- place is something that humans can create or modify, although it may also be a physical space, such as a library or the location of an information ground
- information practices are processes rather than discrete events
- information practices may not be bounded by place or time
- information practices are often based on the taken for granted, so that a more appropriate consideration of the source of information may be how someone came to know, rather than where information originated from
- while information and information-based interactions may

follow socially accepted norms and rules, the sense that individuals make of the information on which they act may not conform to those rules.

Conclusion

Information research continues to grapple with the question of how to make sense of place in studies of information practices. Current approaches offer partial solutions, which weaken the complexity of the understandings of information practices, as well as affecting the dynamism at the heart of social interactions.

This study has shown that place can have several meanings for members of a group, associated with different categories of information practices, and may not exist in the material world. Information practices are tied to cultural knowledge and beliefs that can remain invisible to the group, leaving the outsider uncomprehending.

Metaphors and analogies are important mediating tools for creating understanding for researchers who may not share beliefs, norms and rules of interactions. However, metaphors are not concepts. This study has proposed a number of characteristics that could be included in the elaboration of a metaphor or analogy. Such a conclusion assumes that the search for an overarching metaphor should continue. Given this assumption, the findings of this study indicate that further analytical and empirical work is essential, so that field avoids risk of further fragmentation.

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About the authors

Hilary Yerbury is a Research Fellow in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney. Her background in European social and political cultures, information management and anthropology has given her a broad-based approach to the use of information in everyday decision-making and in social change. She can be contacted at Hilary.Yerbury@uts.edu.au

Pethigamage Perera has recently completed a PhD at the University of Technology Sydney and is an academic at Central

Queensland University and University of Sunshine Coast Australia where his expertise is in computer science. He can be contacted at Pethigamage.Perera@student.uts.edu.au

Michael Olsson is a Professor in the School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman. He is an active researcher in the field of information practices research. His work has appeared in international research journals and conferences in a range of different fields, including information studies, communication, leisure studies and knowledge management. He can be contacted at michael@slis.upd.edu.ph

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