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Book review:

Dealing with Change Through Information Sculpting

Ian Ruthven (2022) Dealing with Change Through Information Sculpting. Emerald

Ian Ruthven's new book deals with the topic of Information Sculpting, which the author defines as "a process of creating information solutions" (p. 49). Very much keeping up with the times that emphasize individual and societal transitions and transformations, Ruthven too takes events and transitions as his focal point. Firmly nevertheless grounding his work on information studies, he uses the approach to discuss information phenomena and the importance of information to handling life changes, both positive and negative, as well as both momentary and prolonged. Using the metaphor of sculpting, Ruthven addresses information's role in how people adjust.

After a brief introduction, the second chapter of the book is devoted to theories of transitions. The most central of them to the topic at hand is the concept of coping. The challenge here is that information may either ease adjustment to a changed life situation - or complicate it further. Ruthven differentiates between meaning-making and sense-making, which allows him to distinguish between problem-solving and information that may lead to living one's life differently. A key result of this is nevertheless that the book seems to implicitly discuss problem-solving information a lot more often than it does orienting information, the role of which is present in many transitions.

The concept of sculpting is, surprisingly enough, presented in chapter three without references to the plethora of design theory that discusses the concept and many of its close relatives. This leads to some overt generalizations later, and one could argue that for example a reflection on Donald Schön's work would have strengthened the case. This noted, the book's description of the stages of

information sculpting processes comes very close to certain theories of iterative, developing design, particularly in the *Information Behaviour Theory of Transitions* (Fig. 9., p. 73).

From his rather eclectic set of sources, Ruthven nevertheless succeeds in creating a cohesive argument, which both the information scholar and the design researcher in me are able to appreciate. The work gains full speed when it moves to its example contexts, as the author uses issues such as relationship forming, health crises, downsizing and many sexuality-related themes to demonstrate how information phenomena function in action, and how varied people's strategies in similar situations may be. At this point, the diversity of references from the first third of the book becomes an advantage, helping guide readers who are not information professionals to understand the role of information in the discussed contexts.

This is an interesting, well-written and valuable book, and a solid contribution to the lines of thought that see information research as a broad discipline with much interactive potential in synergy with connected and sibling fields. I was, however, left to wonder what its actual target audience is. The pick-and-mix nature of the references does not lend itself to the volume becoming a course book on information studies, not even on an advanced level, and researchers in turn will be familiar with many of the cases and paradigms being discussed. The contrast to several highly streamlined recent contributions to information studies, such as Haider and Sundin's (2022) excellent *Paradoxes of Information and Media Literacy*, is stark. Yet it leaves this volume no less valuable.

The general feel is that more than anything else, Ruthven is here laying the basis of a research area, rather than summarizing work that has been done. If that is the goal, the book functions admirably as the first step to which other authors can then contribute, with both their fieldwork and their lists of further references. I, for instance, immediately wanted to start expanding on what was proposed in the short section on imagination as a response to uncertainty. *Information sculpting* is, first and foremost, a broad opening statement from which other scholars can find trajectories for numerous lines of further research.

References

Haider, J., & Sundin, O. (2022). *Paradoxes of Media and Information Literacy: The Crisis of Information*. Routledge.

Ruthven, I. (2022). *Dealing With Change Through Information Sculpting*. Emerald.