Book Review

Information Policies and Strategies, by Ian Cornelius, London: Facet Publishing, 2010. ISBN 9 78185604677 0. pp. 209s

Dr Cornelius is a senior lecturer at University College Dublin's School of Information and Library Studies. He is the author, inter alia, of *Meaning and Method in Information Studies* (1996), a research monograph of high calibre. The present work can be described as an introductory textbook enhanced by flashes of philosophical flair. Its audience will thus be students on library and information science (LIS) courses, practising librarians and, to a lesser extent, researchers. The book contains two main parts, topped and tailed by a brief general introduction and conclusion; I will concentrate on the main parts.

Part 1, 'Contexts for Information Policy', helpfully negotiates a range of normative and empirical dimensions of the wider background against which information policies emerge and operate. Chapter 2 addresses 'Globalization and Information Societies'. While the discussion of globalisation seems sound as far as it goes, there are some inadequacies in the treatment of the information society. Cornelius correctly cites Daniel Bell's *Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) and Fritz Machlup's *Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States* (1962), but omits the third person of the pioneering triumvirate, Marc Porat, whose *Information Economy* (1977) contains the first major treatment of information policy. Vital early Japanese work on the information society is also left out. Chapter 3, 'Information Policy and the Public Sphere', places – correctly, in my view – Jurgen Habermas' concept of the political public sphere at the centre of information policy debates. In such ways, despite any limitations, Cornelius raises the level of his book above the merely procedural and instrumental matters that preoccupy too many denizens of LIS.

Part 2, 'Information Policy Sectors', makes a clear response to the vexed question of where the boundaries of information policy lie. Given that, especially in a so-called information society, information drives virtually every aspect of government policy, what exactly should be included under the term? Freedom of information (FOI) is the most obvious answer, alongside the official secrets issues out of which it grew, and also – of course, these constitute FOI's antitheses – privacy and data protection. Most commentators also include copyright and intellectual property, but where the list goes next is anybody's guess. Cornelius himself incorporates 'intellectual freedom', a concept popular with US librarians, and more generally freedom of expression and its correctives, regulation and censorship. He also touches on aspects of telecommunications policy, a longer-established field which, in the Internet era, increasingly impinges on the LIS world.

Cornelius discusses all these issues competently. Some, however, might question his very heavy usage of 'Freedom of Expression', a 1993 journal article by analytical philosopher Joshua Cohen. Cohen's framework for evaluating policy arguments not only dominates Cornelius' chapters on censorship and free speech, but also crops up repeatedly in the chapters on privacy, FOI and intellectual property. Whatever their merits, there is always an accessibility issue with relatively rare, and arguably dated, scholarly journal papers, especially in a primer. Cornelius would have been better advised to stick with Habermas, or perhaps utilise John Rawls, an extremely influential and accessible political thinker. More generally, the book's scholarship has a somewhat arbitrary feel. The 'References and Reading List' at the end mentions none of the key contemporary authors in information policy, either inside or outside

LIS. Where, for example, is Robert Burger or Sandra Braman or Ian Rowlands or Cornelius' fellow Irish academic, Mairead Browne?

The preface wordily affirms that 'the aim of the book is to take readers to the point where they can develop the arguments that will lead them to the determination of what information policy should be, and where they can develop appropriate policies for the environment they are operating in' (p. xi). In the event, the book is more successful in the former than in the latter, that is, in analysing state information policies than in facilitating the formulation of local information strategies. In fact, Cornelius never really addresses the information resources challenges of individuals and organisations. I think he is correct not to do so, because these belong to the quite separate field of information management. However, it would have been better then to have removed the word 'strategies' from the book's title: it should do what it says on the tin.

The book is also let down by a rather loose style, suggesting a need for further drafting and a more compact product. Yet in spite of this and the other shortcomings identified above, I would recommend purchase by libraries, scholars and, if they can afford it, students. Even if the book is not perfect, it is good to see information policy studies bravely walking the mean streets of political philosophy.

Dr. Alistair Duff, Reader in Information and Journalism, School of Arts and Creative Industries, and Member, Centre for Social Informatics, School of Computing, Edinburgh Napier University.

E-mail: a.duff@napier.ac.uk