Duff, Alistair S. *Research handbook on information policy*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021. xviii, 441 pp. 978-1078990-357-1. £210.00 (Registered customers £189.00) (E-book £48.00)

This useful collection of twenty-eight chapters presents an insightful view of the history of the information policy concept, and theory and developments in the field. The authors are drawn from a variety of disciplines, from philosophy to journalism, via communication studies and information science. They also represent a wider range of countries than is typical of this kind of compilation, coming from Spain, Canada, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Israel, although the majority are from the United Kingdom and the USA. Consequently, the range of cultural, political, scientific, and economic factors that provide the context for policy are more diverse than one would find in a text devoted to any single country. The editor has done an excellent job in pulling these authors together and producing a text that will benefit researchers and students of information policy.

Following the editor's introduction, the book is divided into three parts: general theory, specific issues, and special information. The last, consisting of only three chapters, is the easiest to comment upon, as it deals with information policy issues relating to genetic information, official statistics, and news. Of these, genetic information probably involves the most complex issues, which are effectively dealt with by the author, Ruth Chadwick, who has served on the Human Genome Council.

In the Introduction to the book Alistair Duff outlines the general history of the concept and the problems of definition, reviewing the work of Porat, Maxwell, and Floridi, before outlining the contributions made in the subsequent chapters. Part I of the text, labelled General Theory, has nine chapters under the headings, The nature of information policy, The history of information policy, and The future of information policy. The first chapter by Ian Cornelius ranges widely over the field,

concluding that information policy has a dual nature: 'It both responds to and accommodates our taste in information and discharges a role in the communication structure, to sustain social and political discourse and so to facilitate information exchange' (p. 38). Of the other two chapters on the nature of information policy, Sandra Braman, also characterises the dual nature of information policy, but in terms of "ecstasy and entropy": ecstasy, "in the sense that there are no constraints on the directions in which agency can be expressed and processes unfold" (p. 43), and entropy in the usual sense of the degree of uncertainty relating to information. Finally, Steve Fuller also adopts a dual categorisation of information policy as either "prophetic" or "priestly", drawing upon Max Weber's use of the distinction in relation to religious leadership styles. Regarding information policy, Fuller suggests that "priestly" information, 'is highly context-bound focusing on resolving uncertainty in specific situations that demand a relatively immediate response' (p. 65). The prophetic view, on the other hand, relates to, 'the more strictly semantic idea of information as an inchoate potential of meaning' (p. 65). It will not escape the reader that there is a certain resemblance between Braman's "entropy" and Fuller's "priestly", and between "ecstasy" and "prophetic".

It will be evident that I cannot deal with all of the papers in this extensive work in the same way as above. I found the other more interesting papers in part I of the book, the historical essay by Alistair Black, and the treatment of the relationship between information policy and information literacy, by Jaeger and Taylor.

As for Part II, it consists of 15 chapters on privacy, freedom of information, freedom of expression, intellectual property, and information inequality. Here I can only select those that I found particularly interesting in each section: Alistair Duff's chapter on privacy as a progressive ideal for information policy, suggesting that privacy lies at the heart of information policy; Ben Worthy's chapter on the state of the art of freedom of information, with particular reference to its operation in the UK; Emily Knox's review of freedom of expression (which takes in misinformation and disinformation); Margaret Wilkinson's contribution on the reliability of content as an aspect of intellectual property; and Petr Lupač's contribution on the dangers of increasing information inequality through information policy. Of course, these are simply personal choices and no doubt other readers would select different contributions.

It is rather misleading that the text is called a "research handbook", since it has none of the characteristics of what is normally thought of as a "handbook". A handbook generally contains advice on how to do something, and we would expect a "research handbook" to give instructions on how to do research in an area, whereas this book is simply a collection of review essays on various aspects of the

subject: I found nothing on research methods and very little reporting of actual research projects. I suspect that the choice of terms is that of the publisher as there are several other "research handbooks" or "handbooks" of a similar kind on the list.

Putting that point aside, I reiterate that the text is an excellent compilation of contributions to the field and will no doubt become a standard reference on the subject. The price will probably rule out personal possession but libraries serving any of the contributing fields should certainly acquire it. Perhaps their budgets will run to the e-book version.

Professor Tom Wilson
Editor in Chief.