Book reviews

Big Data, Little Data: Scholarship in the Networked World
By Christine L. Borgman
The MIT Press
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There can be few people working as information managers who have not heard of Big Data. When it makes the cover of the *Wall Street Journal*, you know it has become mainstream. But as Borgman points out in this book, having access to the right data is more useful than simply acquiring more data, and to explain her title a bit more, the right data can be "little data". We also have to accept, and as information managers we know this, that sometimes there is simply no data or at least none we can legitimately access. Moreover, data sharing is difficult, and incentives to do so are largely ineffective, and the practices of data management vary widely between disciplines. The author, considered an authority on scholarly communication, argues that data have no value or meaning in isolation; they exist within a knowledge infrastructure of organisations, people, research and data management practices, technologies, material objects and relationships. In the first chapter, she sets out six "provocations" meant to inspire a discussion about the uses of data in scholarship. They are: who controls the data that determine how the value of the data can be exploited and by whom; understanding the significant features of data helps us realise what can be shared across disciplines and what cannot; the function of much scholarly communication has remained unchanged, but the role of data as publication needs to be examined from the perspective of diverse stakeholders; providing open access to data has implications for scholars, librarians and others stakeholders that is still poorly understood; as the knowledge infrastructures evolve to accommodate open access, social media and other challenges, some stakeholders gain but others lose; research funding is usually short term, but the knowledge infrastructure needs long-term investment. The provocations are explored in the remaining ten chapters of the book. Four chapters offer an overview of data and scholarship. The next three chapters are case studies of data practices in the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. The author then considers the implications of her findings for scholarly practice and research policy, including the difficult topic of ethics. What Borgman is trying to do is provide an agenda for further discourse, as this is a subject that will only grow in importance as increasingly more data are produced. For such a complex subject, this book is very well-written and it should be comprehensible to an average undergraduate student.

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