After receiving my Ph.D. in library and information science in 1989, I started my academic career at the University of Tampere, Finland, where I have taught since that time. My early studies focused on library issues such as the socio-economic dimensions of charging for library services [1]. Quite soon, however, my research interest expanded to library as a channel of information seeking. One of most important sources of inspiration was the now classic ASIS&T Annual Review of Information Science article on information needs and uses by Brenda Dervin and Michael Nilan [2]. They strongly advocated a paradigm shift from the traditional system-centered approach to a user-centered perspective on information behavior. The above article also ignited my long-time interest in Dervin’s sense-making theory. In 1991, our department organized the first international conference on the Conceptions of Library and Information Science (CoLIS). I presented a paper focused on the potential of sense-making theory as a user-centered approach to information seeking. Tefko Saracevic, editor-in-chief of Information Processing & Management, participated in the conference and encouraged me to write a paper reviewing the above topic [3]. Somewhat later Brenda visited our department and provided invaluable ideas about how to approach the complex processes of information seeking and use from the perspective of the sense-making methodology.

The critical reflection of the above issues helped me to identify significant gaps in information behavior research. From the 1950s, most studies had focused on work-related information needs and seeking, while issues related to information seeking in non-work contexts were seldom examined. However, there were a few prominent investigations indicating the significance of the non-work context. The development of my research ideas was influenced by the pioneering surveys on citizen information needs.
conducted in the United States in the 1970s [4, 5], as well as Elfreda Chatman’s [6] studies characterizing information seeking among low-skilled workers. To elaborate this research stream I preferred the term everyday life information seeking (ELIS) because concepts such as “citizen information needs and seeking” are associated to an individual’s specific role in society.

To strengthen the theoretical basis of ELIS studies, I drew on sociological studies examining the nature of ordinary life, more specifically, people’s “way of life”. To this end, Bourdieu’s [7] habitus theory appeared to be particularly useful for the development of an ELIS model. Later on, it was tested in an empirical study based on the interviews with industrial workers and teachers [8]. I was delighted to note that the acronym of ELIS was internationally recognized as a label for a sub-field of information behavior research focusing on information needs, seeking and use in non-work contexts such as health and leisure. A growing interest in the ELIS issues could be identified, for example, in the international conferences on Information Seeking in Context (ISIC) held since 1996 [9]. Like ASIS&T Annual Meetings, I have found the ISIC conferences to be inspiring arenas for the discussion of theoretical, methodological and empirical questions of information behavior research.

With the breakthrough of the internet, people’s everyday information practices began to undergo changes in the late 1990s. Supported by a research grant from the Academy of Finland (the Finnish counterpart of the U.S. National Science Foundation), I examined the role of the networked sources in ELIS [10, 11, 12]. Taken as a whole, these studies confirmed the ELIS model’s assumptions about the importance of social and economic factors in information seeking. Somewhat unsurprisingly, however, it appeared that the internet had not replaced traditional sources but rather complemented them.

To elaborate the picture of ELIS, I made a series of in-depth qualitative studies by interviewing diverse groups of people such as environmental activists, prospective home buyers and unemployed people. These studies examined how people identify, access and use information sources of various types in order to obtain orienting information (“what’s happening in the world today”) and to solve everyday problems. The findings refined the picture of people’s information source horizons, that is, their conceptions and experiences of the significance of diverse sources, ranging from core to peripheral sources [13]. The above studies also identified people’s strategies for coping with information overload in everyday contexts [14].

The empirical findings were used to revise the ELIS model in my book Everyday Information Practices published in 2008 [15]. To this end, I combined the ideas of practice theories [16] and social phenomenology [17]. Information practices are viewed as tools that people use to further their everyday projects. Essentially, people’s information practices draw on their stocks of knowledge that form the habitual starting point of information seeking, use and sharing. To judge the value of information available in external sources like newspapers and the internet, people construct information source horizons. They set information sources in order of preference and suggest information seeking paths, such as “first check the net, then visit the library.” The book shows that everyday information seeking practices tend to be oriented by the principle of “good enough.” Overall, my book suggested that the role of routines and habits is more significant than has earlier been assumed. Thus, everyday information seeking practices tend to change quite slowly.

More recently, I have examined the role of social media in everyday information practices. Empirical studies have been made to find out how people use blogs, online discussion groups and social Q&A forums such as Yahoo! Answers to seek and share information. The findings indicate that the forums of social media can provide useful informational and emotional support to people with diverse everyday projects such as slimming [18], coping with depression [19] and travel planning [20]. As the use of online forums is a discursive practice, attention has also been devoted to the nature of rhetorical strategies and argument patterns used in social media forums [21, 22]. The findings suggest that the identification of such strategies is important for the evaluation of the credibility of user-generated content.
As online discourses often deal with emotionally sensitive topics, for example, consumer issues and immigration, the processes of information seeking and sharing are colored by affective factors [23, 24]. More generally, my studies on this topic provide further support for the assumption that everyday information practices are driven by a complex set of cognitive, affective and social factors. However, such practices cannot be accomplished in an ideal form because they are constrained by contextual factors. To examine their role, my recent investigations have focused on cognitive, affective and socio-cultural barriers to information seeking [25, 26, 27]. To deepen our understanding about the complexities of everyday information practices, it is important to find out how cognitive, affective and social-cultural factors both drive and impede information seeking, use and sharing.

The domain of ELIS touches the whole spectrum of human life. Therefore, it provides almost an endless list of interesting topics for interdisciplinary research. To elaborate research on everyday information practices, it is important to make use of ideas developed in diverse fields such as communication research, sociology, psychology and HCI. As in all scientific research, the most fruitful ideas are often found in the intersecting areas of related fields. Since the beginning of my research career I have tried to orient my studies from this perspective. While drawing on the concepts originally developed within library and information science, I have intentionally stepped out of the box of LIS to get insights from research on human motivation, affect theories, argumentation theories and rhetoric research, to mention a few. In the end, however, the crux issue is how to integrate the ideas obtained from diverse sources into a coherent model for everyday information behavior or practice. In this regard, there is still much work to be done for our research community.

References:


Resources Mentioned in the Article, continued


For a list of my publications, please visit [www.uta.fi/sis/reijosavolainen/index.html](http://www.uta.fi/sis/reijosavolainen/index.html)