Dorte Madsen
Shall We Dance?
Editorial

Introduction

It is with great pride that I welcome you to the inaugural issue of the Journal of Information Architecture. The Journal of Information Architecture is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, and its aim is to facilitate the systematic development of the scientific body of knowledge in the field of information architecture. The journal will focus on information architecture research and development in all types of shared information environments, such as for example social networks, web sites, intranets, mobile and Rich Internet Applications, from various perspectives such as technical, cultural, social, and communicational.

The Journal of Information Architecture has a dual — and ambitious — purpose to be both a scientific peer-reviewed journal and a forum for information architecture practice; the journal will serve as a forum to bring together Research and Scholarship on the one hand, and Voices from the Field on the other. To discuss and develop such a forum, and to discuss what is central to the development of the field of information architecture, we have organized an editorial team as well as an Editorial Board, the members of which enthusiastically accepted the task. The composition of the Editorial Board reflects the dual purpose of the Journal of Information Architecture.

Where is the Research in Information Architecture?

The initiation of the Journal of Information Architecture is primarily a collective effort of the Research and Education Group in Information Architecture, the REG–iA (http://reg–ia.org/), as also introduced in Resmini, Byström & Madsen (2009). As you may already know, most members of the REG–iA are involved in teaching information architecture, and our initial task was to discuss and define an information architecture curriculum framework. However, it soon became apparent in our discussions that our goals had to be broadened somewhat to also include the legwork it takes to provide a basis for establishing information architecture as a fully fledged academic discipline.

As most members in the REG-iA group are teaching information architecture and / or are responsible for study programmes where information architecture plays a central role, we, as university employees, also have an obligation to provide research-based teaching. And, in our daily teaching practice we need explanatory frameworks and theoretical underpinnings. Thus, as university academics involved in information architecture we have an obligation to systematically build a body of knowledge of the information architecture field. But where is the research in information architecture? In the journals of related disciplines such as e.g. Human-Computer Interaction, Computermediated Communication, Library and Information Science, Information Systems, etc., you may come across research involving information architecture or relevant for information architecture, but not necessarily written with a specific purpose of developing the field of information architecture, of adding to the body of knowledge about information architecture, developing concepts for information architecture, nor in general addressing the theoretical foundations of information architecture. Now, with a Journal of Information Architecture, we have a forum where we can publish what is central to the development of the field of information architecture.

A Scientific Peer-Reviewed Journal ...

The professional information architecture community has different outlets in the form of magazines, discussion lists, and blogs; and compared to those outlets, a peer-reviewed scientific journal is a formalized communication system with its own organization for assessing the quality of the papers before they are published. I use 'scientific' in the understanding of Whitley (2000:7) where 'scientific' refers to a conception of 'science' in a broad sense as all forms of modern scholarship, and not just to the natural sciences. And on a general level, when a statement is published in a scientific journal, it is critically different from other kinds of statements or claims, such as those made in blogs, discussion lists or other outlets. Science is more than just another opinion.

Peer review is an essential dividing line for judging what is scientific and what is speculation and opinion. Most scientists make a careful distinction between their peer-reviewed findings and their more general opinions. This basic distinction is no mean challenge to take on for a journal in the emerging field of information architecture which will be the field's first formalized communication channel. However, we have to start somewhere, and, on a continuing basis, discuss and develop our editorial policies with regard to the journal's dual purpose.

... and a Forum for Information Architecture Practice and Theory

In a caricature, we see theory and practice as opposites. Practice is what the practitioners are doing, and theory work is seen as confined to a dusty office in a university. Although this caricature contains an element of truth, it does not necessarily apply to a division of labour in the information architecture field. Nor do I think that we can or should just dismiss practitioners' statements as just another opinion.

According to Wenger (2004:3) a community of practice is not merely a community of interest. A community of practice

> *brings together practitioners who are involved in doing something. Over time, they accumulate practical knowledge in their domain, which makes a difference to their ability to act individually and collectively.*

What is especially interesting to this journal is to which extent the knowledge that members of the community of practice share and develop together, is collective knowledge that not only represents just another opinion but also the collective knowledge of the community of practice. Thus, the journal is an opportunity for practitioners to systematize and reflect on their practice, practical knowledge and the principles that guide their work.

Among the practitioners of information architecture are the true pioneers of the field, those who have built the field to what it is today; they are those for whom we have the greatest respect. And we want their knowledge and insights too in this journal. We want this journal also to be a forum where scholars and practitioners can meet to exchange ideas and — together — develop the body of knowledge of information architecture. Different aspects of that body will undoubtedly interest scholars and practitioners to different degrees.

Towards a Recognized Academic Discipline

In REG–iA, the Research and Education Group in Information Architecture, many of our initial discussions have revolved around the need for information architecture to be recognized as an academic discipline. Resmini et al. (2009), addressing the definition discussion that broke out recently — again — on a discussion list, suggest that "the IA community does not need to agree on a 'definition" because there is more to do."

For information architecture to be recognized, a formal communication channel in the form of a scientific peer-reviewed journal is one important step in the right direction. We now have a forum where we can start looking at information architecture as a field of scientific inquiry, and build a central body of knowledge with its own theoretical bases for framing research problems, building arguments and explanations for the phenomena that information architecture deals with. Instead of just focusing on a definition of information architecture we could ask: which objects of scientific inquiry are studied in information architecture or should be studied? what are the grand challenges that we should address and conceptualize to further develop our understanding of information architecture and its role in our common future? "Disciplines are complex phenomena" as noted by Lattuca (2001:23). There are many ways to define a discipline, and in the literature on disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity there cannot be said to be agreement on what a discipline is. And disciplines are different. According to Klein (1990:105) disciplines have different degrees of receptivity, and they have different growth patterns. Accordingly, some disciplines develop without "definitional closure", and almost all disciplines have periods of definitional competition.

Lattuca (2001:23) suggests two different definitions of disciplines according to the most important aspect, the disciplinary infrastructure or the social network:

> *They can be defined as sets of problems, methods, and research practices or as bodies of knowledge that are unified by any of these. They can also be defined as social networks of individuals interested in related problems or ideas. The first definition stresses the infrastructure of the disciplines, the second their social, cultural, and historical dimensions.*

I suggest we use this rather broad dual definition of discipline as a guiding principle for this journal. And I hope that information architecture will never experience definitional closure; let us instead be enthusiastic about discussing and publishing papers about the grand challenges and problems, be they practical, theoretical, conceptual, methodological that are waiting for us out there.

In this Issue

The papers in this inaugural issue are invited papers only as we wanted this first journal issue ever to reflect a breadth of different information architecture issues and approaches, and thus we have gathered authors who focus on very different aspects of information architecture. Furthermore,

in this inaugural issue, the invited papers have received comments from reviewers and suggestions to improve the content or form of the manuscript. Gianluca Brugnoli's paper "Connecting the Dots of User Experience" presents a design point of view about analyzing and designing the user experience within pervasive networks made of distributed services and applications. The user is seen as the primary actor who freely and opportunistically connects and activates the system components following an activity-driven process. By means of a digital content case study, the author describes and illustrates the arduous task of understanding and mapping this system.

In "Towards an Architectural Document Analysis" Helena Francke gives an overview of how information architecture (IA) and document architecture (DA) provide two, partly overlapping, perspectives on the creation of document structures. Furthermore, an overview of early IA literature is given. The author shows how a model for analysing documents as sociotechnical artefacts can draw on parts of the theoretical and practical complexes of IA and DA. The aspects that are identified as particularly important from IA are organisation systems, navigation, and labelling. From DA, logical structures, layout structures, content structures, and file structures are all applicable aspects. In "The Machineries of Context" Andrew Hinton examines, in essayistical format, the contextual reality of the web and explores how a global network of user-created hyperlinks has changed our experience of context. The author contends that IA has always been less about organizing information than about designing architecture for a new kind of contextual space, and he focuses on organizing the contextual conditions that best empower users. It is proposed that IA study and practice develop tools and methods that improve our understanding and methods for solving these increasingly complex design challenges.

In James Kalbach's article "On Uncertainty in Information Architecture", information architecture is associated with the concept of uncertainty in information seeking. The paper proposes uncertainty as a unifying heuristic in information architecture and explores the idea of identifying a common, overarching principle in information architecture: uncertainty. It is discussed how measurements of uncertainty can serve a diagnostic function in both the design and evaluation of information technologies and user interfaces

Let's Dance

As the journal is just getting started, there will be a need, on a continuing basis over the next couple of years, to discuss and develop our editorial policies with regard to the dual purpose of this journal to serve as a forum to

bring together Research and Scholarship on the one hand, and Voices from the Field on the other. Thus, prospective authors will be asked to indicate when submitting manuscripts, if they submit their paper to academic peer review or to professional peer review, and future papers will provide a clear indication of the type of review.

So, with these four invited papers and this editorial, we are proud to open the ball, asking prospective authors and readers for a dance. As we cannot tell yet if we will be dancing the waltz, the tango or if we will be breakdancing, we ask you all to join us in taking some dancing lessons in the years to come.

Dorte Madsen
Editor-in-Chief

References

Klein, J. T. (1990). Interdisciplinarity: History, theory and practice. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Lattuca, L. R. (2001). Creating interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinary research and teaching among college and university faculty- Vanderbilt University Press.

Resmini, A., Byström, K., & Madsen, D. (2009). IA growing roots-concerning the journal of IA. Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 35(3), 31-33.

Wenger, E. (2004). Knowledge management as a doughnut: Shaping your knowledge strategy through communities of practice. Ivey Business Journal Online, 68(3), 8.

Whitley, R. (2000). The intellectual and social organization of the sciences. Oxford England: Oxford University Press.

Cite as