

# An Introduction of the Special Issue on Ethics of Information & Knowledge Organization

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The texts presented in this special issue are drawn from the "Fourth International Conference on the Ethics of Information & Knowledge Organization" organized by the "The International Thematic Network on Ethics in SHS," the iSchool of the University of Lille & Geriico Team in collaboration with the following universities and people: University of Lille, Widad Mustafa El Hadi, Conference Chair, UNESP – São Paulo State University, Brazil, José Augusto Chaves Guimarães, Co-chair, University of León, Spain, Daniel Martínez-Ávila, Co-chair, and the Institute for Knowledge Organization and Structure, Inc. Lake Oswego OR, USA, Richard Smiraglia, Senior Fellow and Executive Director, Co-chair. The "Fourth International Conference on The Ethics of Knowledge Organization" picks up, not only after a global pandemic that changed the face of ethics worldwide, but also, after an eight year hiatus since the last of 3 conferences hosted by the Knowledge Organization Research Group at the iSchool at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

The first conference "Ethics of Information Organization" was held May 22-23, 2009. The "proceedings" were published in CCQ. The first conference was sponsored by the Information Organization Research Group and the Center for Information Policy Research, both of the School of Information Studies (SOIS) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Co-sponsors were the Milwaukee Public Library and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries. The event was organized by Hur-Li Lee, Associate Professor at SOIS. A selection of papers was published in a special issue of *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* (v. 47, no. 7, 2009). An introduction was provided by SOIS Professor and then Associate Dean Hope Olson (2009). Themes noted by Olson included evolving standards and the balance between standardized bibliographic control and the need for cultural customization, as well as ethical problems surrounding the human-computer interface (609). The conference, later dubbed EIO1, ended with an enthusiastic conversation among participants, setting the stage for what became a small series of conferences going forward.

The 2nd Milwaukee Conference on The Ethics of Information Organization" was held June 15-26, 2012 at UWM. The conference was opened by Hope Olson, conference chair and Professor at UWM; keynote speakers were Jens-Erik Mai "Just Classifications" at the conference opening, and Richard Smiraglia "Ethics in Information Organization: Visualizing Extension, Monitoring Shifting Intension" at the close. Proceedings of EIO2 were published in the journal *Knowledge Organization* (v. 39, no. 5, 2012).

Thus, the "3rd Milwaukee Conference on Ethics in Knowledge Organization" was held May 28-29, 2015, at UWM. The shift in language from "information organization" to "knowledge organization" was important, reflecting not only the change in the name of the research group at UWM but the discussion then ongoing within the KO domain concerning the difference in emphasis between the two terms. Hjørland at the 2012 ISKO International Conference in Mysore, India presented a bibliometric analysis of terms that seemed perhaps synonymous and argued based on the evidence that "knowledge organization" was the established term stabilized in the domain. Keynote presentations were given by Joseph Tennis ("Constructs and Construct Patterns for Ethical Knowledge Organization") and Tina Gross ("Naming and Reframing: A Taxonomy of Attacks on Knowledge Organization"), in both cases building on work from the prior conference. Proceedings were published in the journal *Knowledge Organization* (v. 42, no. 5, 2015).

It has been 8 years since the third Milwaukee conference. Of course, had not the pandemic intervened this fourth conference might have occurred earlier. That the conference under international auspices and sponsorship took place now is a sign of the resilience of the scientific community in knowledge organization. It also certainly is a reflection of the continuing need for the KO community to address the ethics of its science and of the applications of KO systems globally. In the current conference, we saw both the continuation of themes from before, especially with regard to cultural ethics in knowledge representation, as well as the natural extension of ethical issues related to algorithms and artificial intelligence, and earlier work on ethical issues in archives now extends to museums. It is a good sign that the ethics of knowledge organization continue to be front and center in the minds of researchers.

The 2023 edition, the fourth in the series initiated by Professors Richard Smiraglia and Hope Olson, intends to revive a theme carried by ISKO and by the founding universities of the International Thematic Network on Ethics in SHS (founded at the University of Lille in 2021). We are honored to follow in the footprints of ISKO eminent figures who contributed in developing and nourishing the theme of the Ethics of Information & Knowledge Organization. The conference thus was named the "Fourth International Conference on Information Ethics and Knowledge Organization" and the "First Conference of the International Thematic Network on the Ethics in SHS." Ethics was also the main theme of the British ISKO Chapter Conference in 2019: "The Human Position in an Artificial World:

Ethical Creativity and AI in Knowledge Organization,” London, (see Haynes and Vernau 2019 for the proceedings). Significant contributions on the topic were published in Knowledge Organization journal.

The history of the professional and scholarly literature of Information Ethics (IE) in its first 20 years is increasingly linked to library ethics; information systems ethics; computer ethics; cyberethics; journalism, communication and media ethics; Internet ethics; and Web ethics. Each of these areas shares origins and relationships with others and with a wide variety of emerging fields, including engineering ethics (Didier 2008) and business ethics. It is, however, crucial to distinguish the research pertaining to IE from the broad field of KO ethics and its ever-growing literature. The concept of ethics covers many dimensions in Library and Information Science. Some of them are related to the transfer to a largely digital information environment. It is more related to the explosion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the Internet access. In this respect, it is important to highlight Floridi's Infosphere concept, which embraces these different information ecologies. The term Infosphere is a neologism coined by (Floridi 1999) on the basis of 'biosphere,' a term referring to that limited region on our planet that supports life. He added, "Minimally, it denotes the whole informational environment constituted by all informational entities (thus including information agents as well), their properties, interactions, processes, and mutual relations. It is an environment comparable to, but different from, cyberspace, which is only one of its sub-regions, as it were, since it also includes offline and analogue spaces of information." He distinguishes information as something (e.g., a structure), for something (e.g., an algorithm), and about something (e.g., a piece of news) (Floridi 2011; 2013). We can mention, for instance, the use of computerized issuing systems or the availability of many resources in digital forms. In this respect, the main areas of concern within information ethics, as Floridi (2013) pointed out, include the contradiction between censorship and intellectual freedom; privacy, confidentiality and data protection; ownership of information and the possible commercial use of public information; universal access, information poverty and the digital divide; respect for intellectual property combined with fair use; and issues of balance and bias in information provision, collection development and metadata creation. In relation to library and information science, these ethical issues have been identified and typically grouped by Floridi under the term of "information ethics." This concept has been initially developed in the study of the activities of librarians and information specialists to cover a wider concern for information in society as a whole, for which information specialists obviously feel a particular responsibility. These concerns are accounted for by laws such as copyright and censorship rules and regula-

tions, while others are covered by professional codes of conduct. Another dimension, which will be at the core of this special issue concerns the ethics of knowledge organization in different information stances such as archives, libraries, museums and documentation centers. Regarding KO, it is a process in which ethical dimensions are intimately linked to language and culture. We therefore invited proposals examining ethics within its cultural, linguistic and social frames. ISKO communities' interest for ethics in KO is rooted in the early criticisms of classification systems (Olson 1999; 2002). A major part of the criticism was focused on the fact that these systems do not offer a representation of language and that their structure alters our interpretation of language in a way that is superfluous or false. For this reason, we must consider the weight of cultures and languages in the design of KOS as suggested by Tennis (2013).

Ethical issues have been addressed by libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions, corporations, non-profit institutions, academia, government agencies at all levels, information science research, and in media. Increasingly, scholars from the discipline of Information Science are asking questions more specifically related to information and its life cycle. Library ethics focuses more specifically on issues of privacy, censorship, access to information, intellectual freedom and social responsibility. It addresses copyright, fair use, and best practices for collection development. In information science, ethics is framed by the philosophy of information, a domain that investigates the conceptual nature and basic principles of information, including its ethical consequences e.g., the ethical impact of ICTs on human life and society (Floridi 2011). Experience showed that authors who write on information ethics deal mainly with the impact of ICTs and of the Internet on information flows, with only some studies devoted to the cultural, social, and linguistic dimensions of ethics in information and knowledge organization. It is no surprise that this aspect has been for decades taken care of by the ISKO community who considers ethics as a component of knowledge organization research activities. Researchers from the ISKO Community (Beghtol, Olson, Fox, Tennis, Guimarães, Pinho, Smiraglia, Mai, Tognoli, Martínez-Ávila, among many others) have been extremely active in the research on KO ethics. Many conferences were organized by the School of Information Studies at University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Knowledge Organization Research Group, led by Richard Smiraglia and Hope Olson (2009, 2012 and 2015). Special issues of *Knowledge Organization*, journal and conference proceedings were devoted to ethics. Some were published in "*Knowledge Organization*" – Proceedings of the 3rd Milwaukee Conference on Ethics in Knowledge Organization, May 28–29, 2015, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA, Knowledge Organization, 5, 2015; Special Issue: Subject Ontogeny and Knowledge Organization System Change, Knowledge Organization, 8, 2016; Special Issue: A

Festschrift for Hope Olson, Knowledge Organization, 5, 2016.

Hope Olson showed through her publications that the fundamental principles of Western classifications that reflect a particular culture may negate other cultural identities. Olson's work on marginalization and exclusion of specific topics and groups of people in large library classifications has inspired many authors such as Fox (2016); Mai (2016). Other researchers have followed Olson's approach to ethics, e.g., the Brazilian Team at São Paulo State University (UNESP) at Marília or, at the University of Lille, the Axe 4 Geriico Research Team that holds a seminar on Ethics of Information and KO since 2018. In June 2021, the sub-team founded "The International Thematic Network on Ethics in Human and Social Sciences". Ethics was also the main theme for ISKO-UK's last biannual conference: "The Human Position in an Artificial World: Creativity, Ethics, and AI in KO", London July (see Haynes and Vernau 2019 for the proceedings).

In Archival Science, for instance, the ethical dilemmas revolve mainly two issues: privacy and access to information. Both aspects are closely related to Knowledge Organization as privacy issues, to a great extent, involve the representation of individuals dictated by standards and guidelines, and information access and retrieval is an indivisible part of knowledge organization. These connections have been widely, although never enough, explored in libraries and other information units but are sometimes overlooked in archives. The KO community should explore the theoretical possibilities and practical challenges that this specific type of information unit poses.

### Aims, scope and main topics

This KO special issue's objective is to renew research in the Ethics of Information & Knowledge Organization and broaden its scope to Social and Human Sciences (SHS). Ethics in SHS is a challenging issue and in line with the era of a society mediated by information and communication technology, and where we started living with technology, not only using it. In the field of Humanities, for instance, the notion of ethics is quite relevant to our stance. It is considered in as many different ways as the humanities are: we can deal with ethical questions in literature or philosophy by approaching criticism of texts production, in cultural history with the analysis of images regarding the misappropriation of images for example, and so on. What seems interesting to focus on, is that all the sciences –experimental or human – share questions, interrogations, and ethical issues which, of course, converge or, at the very least, resonate one with the other. Rather than assuming an ethical dimension specific to each science, it seems that the ethical questions are addressed in a more global way, and that all of them participate in the ethics of science in general.

This KO special focuses on the theoretical characteristics and approaches that can build a methodological and efficient model for examining Ethics and to highlight the various recurring issues related to the ethical dimensions of Information processing and organization. From an interdisciplinary perspective, this special issue aims to bring together researchers and teachers from different SHS disciplines working on Ethics: computer science, archives, artificial intelligence, business and engineering, humanities (literature, linguistics, archeology, museology, theology...) etc. The special issue is split into two parts and the authors and papers deal with the following topics:

Bagatini and Guimaraes, based on the international scientific literature, discuss algorithmic discriminations and their ethical consequences on the knowledge organization processes, tools and products, especially in terms of discriminatory biases related to issues on gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, religion, age, social class, socioeconomic profile, physical appearance, and political positioning.

San Segundo, Martínez-Ávila and Frías Montoya discuss some ethical issues and challenges of the use of algorithms on the web from the perspective of user-based approaches to knowledge organization, especially in terms of the problems they pose to the user, the technologies that have been developed to counter these problems and the initiatives from the knowledge organization field. The authors conclude with the necessity of adopting a critical and ethical stance towards the use of algorithms on the web and the need for an education in knowledge organization that addresses these issues.

Brito proposes a multidisciplinary reflection on the subject of ethics, based on philosophical approaches, using Spinoza's work, Ethics, as a foundation, especially in the context of an information society characterized by an abundance of data and a diversity of perspectives. The author concludes that artificial intelligence in KOS offers the potential for processing complex questions through the formal modeling of concepts in ethical discourse and the adoption of complexity analysis as a mechanism for understanding problems and empowering solutions.

Tran examines the integration of born-digital and digitized content into an outdated classification system within the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin under the perspective of infrastructure studies as a way to scrutinize the representation of diverse viewpoints and voices within the museum's collections. For this, an exploration of the case of category 74 is presented and analyzed as a way to illustrate the complexities of replacing pre-existing systems due to their intricate integration into the socio-technical components of the museum's information infrastructure. The paper reflects on how resource-constrained cultural institutions can take a proactive and ethical approach to knowl-

edge management, re-evaluating their knowledge infrastructure to promote inclusion and ensure adaptability.

Mustafa El Hadi, Elbeely and Abdelwahab introduce epistemicide as an emerging theoretical framework for critical library and information studies alongside the well-known ones extensively covered in the literature of our field. This phenomenon is examined through the lens of the ethics of information and knowledge organization (KO), based on the case of Nubia and Kushite kingdoms along the river Nile whose conditions led to racism, marginalization, and discrimination of the civilization of the Nile Valley in Sudan and its tangible cultural heritage. The paper concludes with an appeal to information scholars and professionals to address epistemicide as an ethical and crucial issue for information professionals responsible for the credibility and accuracy of the information they handle in every field of knowledge.

Martínez-Ávila, Pinho, Nascimento and Smiraglia discuss the ethical challenges and risks for groups at the social margins such as the LGBTIQ+ communities based on self-identifying nomenclature from social media websites such as Grindr, XVideos, TikTok, and Scruf, in order to identify the act of defining and organizing the knowledge about the identity of the group based on what is desirable both in themselves and in others pertaining to the same. The resulting terms can be grouped into three classes: sexual desires/orientation desire, physical characteristics, and sexual roles or performances.

Fraisse and Timimi offer a broad overview of multilingualism and multiculturalism embedding into Digital Libraries (DL) and the attempt of LIS to ensure and sustain knowledge diversity as a driver for development. By means of a study on databases such as Science Direct, Google Scholars, Taylor and Francis, and Emerald Insight the authors have identified five research themes: (i) studies describing Cross-Language Information Retrieval (CLIR) in Digital Libraries, (ii) studies describing building, enriching and using multilingual resources in digital libraries (iii) studies focusing on multilingual digital libraries initiatives, (iv) studies on collaboration, minority languages and ethics issues in digital libraries, and (v) studies on multilingual user needs.

Campbell and Nord examine how structure data in knowledge organization can help us understand human rights violations in a way that engenders both rational comprehension and emotional empathy. The authors present a set of four possible effects: a) structured data allows for more accurate statistics; b) structured data provides links from one isolated incident to other similar incidents; c) structured data lends itself to regularity and consistency of display, thereby appealing to rational comprehension, but on a more direct emotional level; and structured data lends itself to memorial devices that rely on discovery and chance encounters, rather than through memorial installations that people approach purposefully.

Sundström analyzes the decolonial practices adopted by The Swedish National Museums of World Culture (*Världskulturmuseet*) related to its indigenous collection. When migrating its collection to a new platform, the museum needs to review its knowledge organization system, since some problems related to classification and terminology were identified in the current database called Carlotta. The conclusions point out the inappropriateness and obsolescence of the used to describe some of the objects and the importance of considering indigenous self-determination in cultural institutions as a guide of ethical issues related to the creation of a knowledge organization system in a museum.

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### The Ethical Dimension in Knowledge Organization

Significant changes that have currently influenced the field of Information Science have led to a questioning, in the international literature, on the role of the information professional, specifically regarding the ethical aspects of their practice, within a broader conception of well acting or well doing. Many authors (Guimarães 2006; Froehlich 2008), argued that problems arise from prejudice, dichotomous categorizations, too specific vision of the world, lack of terminological precision and indiscriminate use of political correctness in representations. Some theoretical approaches can be highlighted in order to face the challenges to promote processes, tools and products that are not tied to a given dominant ideology, and which respect the varied forms of knowledge: the transcultural ethics of mediation, the multicultural dimension of multilingual KOS, the cultural warrant based on a multi-ethical foundation for globalized KOS, the ethical use of “the power to name” because the representation of information itself presupposes a power which leads to constructing products that will act as a semblance of the document or as documentary surrogate. In this sense, although KOS can reflect the mainstream culture of a society, they need to be constantly opened to multiple cultural approaches to avoid marginalization and cultural imperialisms (Olson 2002).

### Ethical issues of information flow and control by algorithms

Automated information processing is not neutral. Human practice with its moral and ideological orientations is at the core of data use, algorithm design and the use made of the resulting information. Information processing in these ecosystems then appears to be both ethical and technical matters from which legal regulation can be derived. The increasing delegation of our choices and decisions to algorithms shows how the notion of the “information ecosystem” is more relevant than ever. The advent of autonomous machines based on “deep learning” (big data-driven) has revealed more crucially the consequences of this delegation of power to algorithms. It has led to the recent debate on the “ethics of algorithms”, which has focused essentially on two

ethical issues: on the one hand, the responsibility distributed among humans, algorithms and algorithm designers for the negative effects that these treatments can have, and, on the other hand, transparency, understood as the possibility of explaining to users the principles of algorithm ranking and the results that stem from them.

This special issue addresses ethical issues of biased decisions produced by machine learning from big data, two main areas have been identified: the transparency of algorithms to make them explainable and data quality management clean up data in order to improve the result of processing operations. This issue intends nourishing the theoretical growing interest in ethics and its relationship with what is called today “professional ethics». It addresses two major types of digital information ecologies: the infosphere (Information flow on the web) and the recorded knowledge in knowledge organization systems.

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