

A Glimpse at Knowledge Organization in North America

An Editorial

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June 14-15 saw a special event take place: the North American Symposium on Knowledge Organization convened at the Faculty of Information Studies at the University of Toronto. Fifty participants attended to hear 13 formal refereed papers. One session was set aside for a panel discussion on major issues in knowledge organization today. And the general assembly voted to create itself as the North American chapter of ISKO. A standing committee will bring forth bylaws and organize a second symposium for the summer of 2009. As it happens, 2007 has been a banner year for the organization of new chapters of ISKO (see the various reports elsewhere in this issue). A new chapter appeared in the United Kingdom, and one is planned for Mexico. According to reports received, national chapters have held exciting meetings in Spain and Italy. It seems that our corner of the intellectual spectrum is solidifying and growing and that is very good news.

Wondering whether it might be possible to arrive at any conclusions about the tenor of knowledge organization in North America I put the thirteen papers to some simple tests of domain analysis. (Incidentally, and curiously, all proposals submitted to the symposium that were specifically about KO in North America were rejected!) Of course, such a small number of papers from a single symposium cannot be considered to be representative in a scientific sense, not even of papers in KO in North America. But we can consider this symposium to be representative of the research interests of the attendees, all scholars who took the trouble to generate research for this event. Nine of the thirteen papers can be found online here: <http://dlist.sir.arizona.edu/view/>

conference/North_American_Symposium_on_Knowledge_Organization_2007.html. Three of the the four top-ranked papers appear in the present issue of *Knowledge Organization* and are represented online with extended abstracts. Here in simple tabular form is a list of the papers:

Feinberg Beyond retrieval: a proposal to expand the design space of classification

Pimentel Exploring classification as conversation

Campbell D.G. et al Everything old is new again: finding a place for knowledge structures in a satisfying world

Zhang, J. Ontology and the semantic web

Kasten, J. Knowledge strategy and its influence on knowledge organization

Kemp, R. Classifying marginalized people, focusing on natural disaster survivors

Kipp, M.E.I. Tagging for health information organization and retrieval

Smiraglia, R.P. Performance works, continuing to comprehend instantiation

Green, R. and Fallgren, N. Anticipating new media: a faceted classification of material types

La Barre, K. Faceted navigation and browsing features in new OPACs: a more robust solution to problems of information seekers?

Ménard, E. Indexing and retrieving images in a multilingual world

Abbas, J. In the margins: reflections on scribbles, knowledge organization, and access

Tennis, J.T. The economic and aesthetic axis of information organization frameworks

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Table 1. *NASKO refereed papers*

A quick glance shows the prominence of concepts of faceted classification and also a self-conscious focus on all things new, including social classification. Specific KO applications were demonstrated in a variety

of domains, from the performing arts to health-care to disaster management. It is probably safe to say that all of the papers are in some sense forward-looking, anticipating the future of knowledge organization.

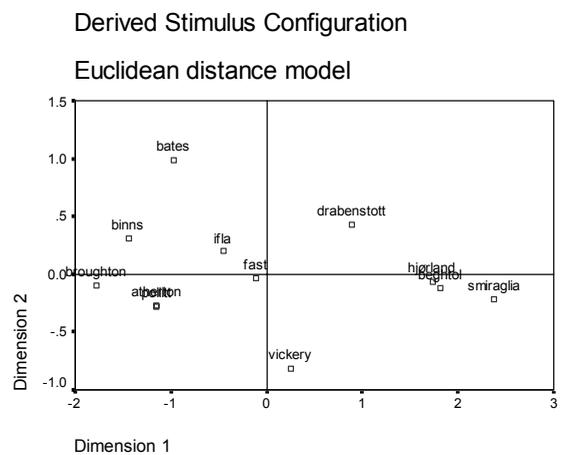
The authors of the thirteen papers cited 311 sources, ranging from Cutter's *Rules* (1876) to 21 papers from 2007, including Hjørland's *ARIST* paper on "Semantics and knowledge organization." The mean age of work cited in the group was 2.5 years, which shows that even when Cutter is factored in, this group is working very close to the cutting edge of the research front. Of the 311 citations, 130 were to authors whose work was cited more than once in the set. This tells us that approximately 2/3 of the citations were unique, so these authors are drawing heavily on their own resources. Forty-six authors were cited twice or more, and only 19 were cited three times or more. These are:

Hjørland, B.	7
Atherton,-Cochrane and Freeman	6
Olson, H.A.	6
Smiraglia, R.P.	6
Beghtol, C.	5
Abbas, J.	4
Broughton, Vanda	4
Drabenstott-Markey and others	4
Vickery, B.C.	4
Bates, M.	3
Binns, Jean	3
Fast, K.V. and Campbell, D.G.	3
Hearst, Marti A	3
Howarth, L.C.	3
IFLA	3
Kipp, M.E.I.	3
Mai, J-E.	3
Mann, T.	3
Pollitt, A. Steven	3

Table 2. *Most frequently cited in NASKO*

Broughton, Vickery, and Pollitt are from the United Kingdom and Hjørland (of course) is Danish. The rest of these authors (excepting IFLA of course!), including the most frequently cited, are North Americans. It is unclear whether that represents a regional social network, or whether it is just the luck of the draw, or whether it is representative of KO in general. Answers to these questions would be very interesting; further analysis of KO overall, as well as its regional groups, is clearly called for.

Author co-citation analysis is a useful tool for domain analysis because it deals with the perceptions of authors in the domain. If two people are cited together it means their work is considered to lie on some similarity trajectory. It is important to remember that this analysis shows similarity as perceived by the group of citing authors. And I must reiterate that this group is much too small to generate conclusions that can be generalized beyond its own domain. Still, working within this set of 13 papers a small but measurable amount of co-citation was discovered. The MDS plot looks like this:



There is not a great deal of cohesion here, so there is not much reason to overdo it trying to eke out patterns. But there are a few obvious implications. First, that there is not a lot of cohesion. So it shows that at least among this group, there is not a definable North American version of knowledge organization. In fact, there are some definable poles. I am in a cluster near two classic authors (Beghtol and Hjørland); the proximity of those two shows the likelihood that this North American group will cite the two of them with a sort of ritual deference. Note that, if the trajectory runs from right to left, that puts me at the outer edge of ritual deference!

Hjørland and Beghtol have tackled the thorniest problems in knowledge organization, most notably the issues of semantics and domain analysis, so they are rightly attributed proximal weight by this community. Notice that everybody else in the distribution is scattered about. That means that there are several competing nodes in this group – Drabenstott and Vickery, for instance on controlled vocabulary and facets, or Bates and Broughton, on searching habits and facets. Atherton (Cochrane) and Pollitt are the inde-

cipherable pair – they were concerned with the efficacy of classification as a player in information retrieval. And there is the semblance of a breakout group moving from Fast toward IFLA and Binns – the thrust here is new international standards and their repercussions, combined with increasing understanding of the role of faceted classification. It seems this group is interested for now in faceted approaches to classification, even as they have to be adapted for Web 2.0 applications. And this group is well-grounded in the issues of semantics and domain analysis. But they are not afraid to push off in their own directions.

What does KO research look like in your geographic region? López-Huertas and Contreras (2004) analyzed Spanish research in KO. They found, similarly, increasing productivity but low internal coherence, with activity directed toward documenta-

ry languages and thesauri. If your group is having a refereed conference that can produce 3-4 papers of substance please contact me about turning that into a theme issue of KO. And by all means, let us take up the analysis of our own domain wherever we can. Knowledge Organization has the potential to move from the confines of library classification to the expanding and evolving boundaries of a society dependent on tools based on scientific KO.

Reference

López-Huertas, María-José and Contreras, Evaristo Jiménez. 2004. Spanish research in knowledge organization(1992-2001). *Knowledge organization* 31: 136-50.