

Guest Editorial

The Future of *Knowledge Organization*

by Hope A. Olson



It is with some trepidation that I prepare to take on the role of editor of *Knowledge Organization* beginning at the ISKO 2000 conference in Toronto next July. *KO* is a respected journal in an important field. It is a journal with a truly international authorship

and readership. It reflects the interdisciplinary field of knowledge organization with its large and well-documented body of theory and research and its potential for new perspectives. In accepting the invitation to become editor-in-chief I considered what my goals will be in this position. With the strength of *KO* already established, I have defined four goals that involve maintaining existing strengths as well as moving forward in new directions. These four goals are:

- extend *KO*'s recognition as an acknowledged scholarly journal
- enhance *KO* as a journal that readers open with eager anticipation
- re-establish a reliable publishing schedule
- maintain and extend *KO*'s status as an international journal

I will discuss each of these in turn.

To establish *KO* as a widely-acknowledged scholarly journal I hope to build on the high quality of the journal that is well known within the knowledge organization community. In achieving this goal, the first priority must be to maintain that level of quality. Requesting participation by the consulting editors in soliciting manuscripts and wide distribution of a call for papers will be the initial efforts. Extending distribution of the call for papers in fields peripheral to knowledge organization will be a means of attracting scholars seeking interdisciplinary publication opportunities. Further, I invite *KO*'s current readers to consider making submissions and to encourage colleagues who have work relevant to the mandate of

KO to submit manuscripts. The refereeing process will be carefully applied and monitored to ensure that solicited manuscripts must continue to meet a high standard for publication.

To establish *KO* as an interesting, even intriguing, journal that readers open with eager anticipation will involve attracting a mix of articles that deal with the full range of knowledge organization in both traditional and innovative ways. The first step in this direction requires maintaining the publication of work central to knowledge organization and then moving toward less conventional approaches. Classification, as the oldest and best established aspect of knowledge organization, offers a conceptual foundation. Indexing and thesaurus construction are more recent, but nevertheless offer an established basis for organization of knowledge. Newer ways of looking at the field such as concept theory and knowledge representation are well-integrated into our work. The role of terminology in knowledge organization is also well-recognized. With these various perspectives incorporated into knowledge organization the very interdisciplinarity of what we already do suggests that there are likely to be other fields we can tap for theories, methodologies and means of application. Distributing a call for papers in unconventional fora will attract manuscripts that cross our conventional boundaries. Additional consulting editors who cross disciplinary boundaries may also help to attract new approaches. Such manuscripts will be welcomed as they demonstrate scholarly rigour through the refereeing process. The goal of making *KO* an interesting and intriguing journal will be attained when readers open a new issue knowing that they will find writing on ideas both sound and provocative.

To reassert *KO* as a reliable journal will mean catching up with the publication schedule after the recent period of editorial uncertainty and ensuring not only regular publication, but a well-defined process for refereeing manuscripts and communicating with authors. *KO* is not *unreliable* now. However, the recent changes in editors have taken a certain toll. It should not, however, be a difficult task to reassert reliable routine. Clare Beghtol, as the current interim

editor, has already begun establishing a pattern of efficiency. It will be my responsibility to completely regularize this pattern. The excellent work of Gerhard Riesthuis and the ISKO secretariat in Amsterdam and the technical support and efficiency of ERGON-Verlag further this goal. Further, the dedicated editors for Literature, Gerhard Riesthuis; FID/CR news, Nancy Williamson; Book Reviews, Michèle Hudon; and News and Reports, Jens-Erik Mai assisted by Alexander Sigel and Elin Jacob, all make reliability possible. Standardized procedures, funded editorial assistance, efficient use of electronic communication in the refereeing and publication process and good budgeting will attain this goal.

Finally, to maintain and extend *KO*'s status as an international journal is crucial due to the nature of the knowledge organization community's scope. We address both universal and particular instances. We explore the synergy of theory and application. We are interested in how knowledge is organized across societies and cultures. *KO* has a long tradition of publishing articles from around the globe. It is especially strong in contributions from Europe and North America, but also has always had a good representation of articles from Asia and has regularly included work from Latin America and occasionally Africa as well. The consulting editors show the range of *KO*'s interest. This basis is far more than a sound beginning, but it is not an end. It is my hope that *KO* can attract more contributors from Africa, Latin America and Asia while maintaining its representation of European and North American perspectives (which are in themselves diverse). Initial efforts will include the widespread distribution of a call for papers, encouraging the present consulting editors to encourage manuscripts from a diverse audience at conferences and other venues in which they participate, and gradually inviting consulting editors from other parts of the world as such scholars are identified.

I am very honoured to take on this work. I strongly believe that ours is an exciting and important field. Knowledge organization rests on a historical foundation of intellectual exploration and well-honed practice. From this foundation we continuously venture into new contexts using innovative approaches. People outside of our field are beginning to realize the importance of sound organization when dealing with knowledge and information. Browsers on the World Wide Web are attracted to the classification-like structure provided by some search engines even though these structures are frequently ill-conceived. The need for well-constructed controlled vocabularies and indexing practices is also recognized as Internet surfers, disenchanted by the novelty of information at their fingertips, want measured precision instead of wanton

recall. Globalization and the rhetoric of an "information age" or a "knowledge age" of interconnectivity have brought the recognition of cultural specificity and cross-cultural communication as topics meriting our scholarly attention. Developments as varied as knowledge management and indigenous knowledge structures indicate the need for our understanding and expertise in contexts and concerning types of knowledge and information that were not formerly considered our purview. Technology continues to expand the possibilities of our applications and to challenge our abilities to channel its power toward the effective linking of knowledge and those who seek it.

My own prognosis for the field of knowledge organization is that we are beginning a renaissance potentially more encompassing than any previous manifestations. The encyclopædists, Dewey and Cutter, the inception of information science, and even the innovations of Ranganathan were all concerned with more defined domains than we now face. *KO* has a vital role to play in this resurgence and I look forward to *KO* being a part of it by facilitating the dissemination of new knowledge about knowledge organization.