About Knowledge Organization: An Editorial

Richard P. Smiraglia,
Editor-in-Chief

What exactly is "knowledge organization?" It turns out there are many different definitions and not all scholars within the domain agree. The Consulting Editors of this journal have asked the ISKO Scientific Advisory Council to consider a concise definition of knowledge organization, and especially to consider its relationship with the more recently evolved term, "knowledge management," as well. The debate will likely be lengthy; I invite readers to watch these pages for developments as they become available.

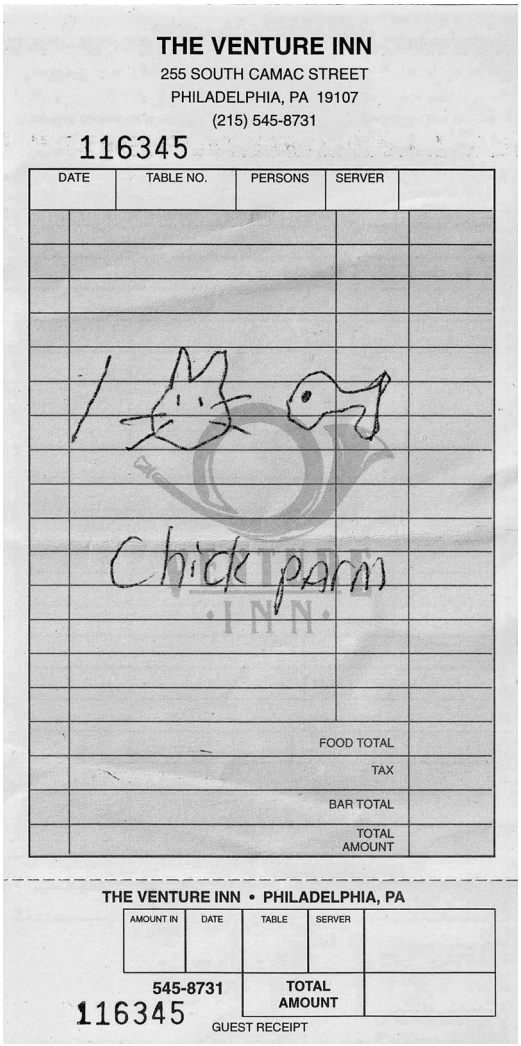
Of course, ISKO members have a common sensibility about the meaning of knowledge organization. Our Society's organizing charter (ISKO 1989, 165) says that "it is the aim of the Society to promote research, development and application of all methods for the organization of knowledge in general or of particular fields by integrating especially the conceptual approaches of classification research and artificial intelligence." The charter also specifies that "The Society stresses philosophicological, psychological and semantic approaches for a conceptual order of objects." Our journal's statement of scope and aims suggests we are interested in "questions of the adequate structuring and construction of ordering systems and on the problems of their use." Our aim as a journal is to provide "a forum for all those interested in the organization of knowledge on a universal or domain-specific scale, using concept-analytical or concept-synthetical approaches, as well as quantitative and qualitative methodologies." What we can gather from these statements is that the core of our domain is the ordering of what is known, that that ordering might be accomplished in various ways but that concepts are critical lynchpins, and that a wide variety of scientific approaches fall within our embrace. Still, as all scholars know, a definition of a term may not include the term being defined; ergo, we cannot define knowledge organization as the organization of knowledge [!] – consequently we have charged ISKO to consider whether The Society can provide core definitions.

Two recent studies shed some light on the definition of our domain. First is a large-scale study reported briefly by Zins (2006, but see also a series of articles forthcoming in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology)*, in which a topological map of the domain of information science is developed using critical Delphi method. The disturbing (if not exactly surprising) aspect of this study was the total diversity of opinions among the 57 scholars who took part. In fact, there was literally no agreement on the definition of the discipline, although some common foundations emerged from the data. Among these is the relationship among a set of concepts that are considered to be the fundamental entities of information science. These are "data," "information," and "knowledge." The mere fact that knowledge is here defined over and against the definitions of data and information suggests that the fundamental element of our domain, that which we seek to order conceptually, is distinct from either the banal (data) or the mediate (information).

Elsewhere, Bates (2006) describes the fundamental forms of information in a very broad and multidisciplinary essay. Most important for the present discussion is the distinction she makes among three types of information that she calls genetic, neural-cultural, and exosomatic (terms she derives from a paper by Susantha Goonatilake (1991). It is the exosomatic (stored externally to the bodies of animals – cf. Bates 2006, 1039) that is of interest to us, because here we find recorded information. Recorded information can be preserved in a durable medium (Bates 2006, 1039), can be represented by symbols, and therefore, can be stored with more or less efficiency so that its impact on human cognition can be managed (Bates 2006, 1040). I have done no justice to either the work by Bates or that by Zins but I hope to call their work to the attention of the readers of this journal. Surely if our domain consists of the scientific effort to undertake the ordering of

knowledge, it is critical for us to comprehend the distinctions among entities in the discipline of information science, and understanding the role of knowledge will be key.

Of course, as I mentioned before, ISKO embraces diversity. This editorial will appear in the final issue of volume 32 of *Knowledge Organization*. The volume has included research into the usability of ontology editors, hierarchies in search engines, building taxonomies for business, the genres of author abstracts, an essay about experientialist epistemology, historical reflection on Otlet's approach to knowledge and linguistics, an empirical analysis of industrial classification, a case study about organization of knowledge resources in Taiwan libraries, and an experiment to identify the distinction between core and anchored concepts. To this array I add a touch of whimsy by pointing to the visual display of information – exosomatic information, as it were. Not too long ago after dinner in my favorite restaurant I received the following check:



Now, catfish is a popular choice in some parts of the United States, although it is somewhat rare in the Northeast where I reside. Delighted with my dinner, I was even more delighted to discover the visual display of information; or perhaps I should say the visual representation of information edging its way into the public sphere. So I was even more delighted, subsequently, to discover a classification of books about quilts from the period of America's Underground Railroad (the passage north for escaped slaves during the era surrounding the U.S. Civil War in the 1860s). An excerpt is printed here as a feature to remind us that sometimes, the visual representation of the exosomatic is the essence of knowledge organization.

References

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Zins, Chaim. 2006. Knowledge map of information science: issues, principles, implications. In Budin, Gerhard, Christian Swertz, and Konstantin Mitgutsch eds. *Knowledge organization for a global learning society: Proceedings of the Ninth International ISKO Conference 4-7 July 2006 Vienna, Austria*. Advances in knowledge organization vol. 10. Würzburg: Ergon, pp. 141-49.