Global/Local Knowledge Organization: Contexts and Questions

ABSTRACT
This panel features junior and senior scholars from the United States, Denmark, and Brazil, who will come together to discuss some of the central tensions between local and global knowledge organization systems. They will be in conversation around three key questions: 1) What are the contexts in which local and global knowledge organization systems matter? 2) What can we learn about the stakes of global/local knowledge organization from those contexts? 3) How can we conceptualize the relationship between the universal and the particular? The panelists will provide brief overviews of their perspectives, and the majority of the time will be reserved for an interactive discussion of the epistemological, practical, and ethical dimensions of global and local knowledge organization. The contexts addressed will include libraries, archives, and digital, social, and popular media. Within those settings, the panelists are concerned with such issues as access, hegemony, intended and unintended consequences, and meaning construction in particular domains, spaces, and communities.

Keywords
Global knowledge organization systems, universal knowledge organization systems, local knowledge organization systems, classification

INTRODUCTION
The organization of knowledge for the purposes of access, use, and sharing across languages, communities, locations, and formats is fundamentally paradoxical: standardization and uniformity to facilitate wide-ranging access to information across cultural and educational institutions, industry, government, and the Internet. This carries important practical and ethical implications for global discourse and exchange, including the loss of localized meaning and practices. Standardization and universality are used in knowledge organization systems to overcome problems related to communication. As a consequence, local communities must standardize their language and meanings for the sake of a global system that can be universally applicable, i.e., a
system that can be used globally. However, the universal approach in knowledge organization has been questioned, as it has been argued that authors seeking universality seem to imply that diversity (as opposed to universality) is something that must be avoided (Olson, 2002). Diverse (local) communities have to sacrifice meaningful aspects of their cultures while adopting and accepting the efficiency of the standards on a global scale.

To be sure, these tensions have existed for centuries, as knowledge organization techniques like indexing and classification were invented as responses to information needs and to manage anxieties about information overload. The overlapping and conflicting needs of particular users and imagined universal publics have been inherent to knowledge organization system creation and development. The digital realm simultaneously magnifies and masks these tensions in remarkable ways. For example, the Internet provides space and opportunities for endless expressions of particular perspectives, while the organizational infrastructures supporting the Internet are based on universalist principles and aspirations. In other words, the classificatory infrastructures and metadata, though largely hidden from view, work in concert to make the various particulars universally accessible. This panel will highlight certain contexts in which the interactions between the universal and particular (the global and local) provide insights into knowledge organization practice and theory.

As Mai (2013) writes, any classification “inevitably privileges or brings into more prominence some concepts, perspectives, experiences, viewpoints or issues, and marginalizes or moves out of view others” (p. 244). He suggests that the task of a classificationist is not to strive to produce a value-neutral, objective system of naming and ordering, but to attend to the ethical dilemmas inherent to such knowledge organization. Berman (1971) brought visibility of biases and limitations of Library of Congress (LC) standards into public view in the 1970s, when he published his treatise on LC Subject Headings and petitioned the LC for change. Since then, scholars have examined global knowledge organization systems from a variety of critical perspectives: Critical Race Theory (Furner), Queer Theory (Keilty, 2009; Adler, 2009), Disability Studies (Koford, 2014), Indigenous Studies (Doyle & Metoyer, 2015), Feminist Theory (Olson, 2002), Postcolonial and Transnational Studies (Olson & Fox, 2010; Smiraglia & Lee, 2012; Pinho & Guimarães, 2012), and general theoretical perspectives (Mai, 2013; Tennis, 2013; Beghtol, 2002; Bowker & Star, 1999). Others have looked at genre theory and certain historical contexts to think about the relationships between the global and the local (Skouvig & Andersen, 2015; Olesen-Bagneux, 2015). In addition to critical and theoretical work, there has been a proliferation and appreciation of local knowledge organization systems that are designed by and/or for specific communities. Among some of the most notable local systems are those of indigenous communities, such as the Maori Subject Headings and the Mashantucket Pequot Thesaurus of American Indian Terminology Project, which use terminologies and structures of indigenous languages.

This panel is part of an ongoing conversation, which has gained traction in recent years. An international conference and workshop on Global/Local Knowledge Organization was held in Copenhagen in August 2015. (All of the participants in this panel were speakers at that conference.) Universal/global classification was the topic of the SIG/Classification Research workshop organized by Jonathan Furner at the ASIS&T annual meeting in Seattle in 2014. One of the aims of the panel is to bring the wider information science community into this conversation. We will solicit input and questions from the audience.

**STRUCTURE OF THE PANEL**

The panel will begin with the moderator’s brief introduction of the key issues with regard to global and local knowledge organization. The ensuing discussion will be structured around three large questions: 1) What are the contexts in which local and global knowledge organization systems matter? 2) What can we learn about the stakes of global/local knowledge organization from those contexts? 3) How can we conceptualize the relationship between the universal and the particular? Each of the panelists will provide a five-minute overview of an aspect of global and local knowledge organization in a context. The discussion will then proceed among panelists, with contributions from the floor. The moderator will provide a five-minute conclusion, with an emphasis on reviewing key ideas and recommending questions for further study.

**PANELISTS, CONTEXTS, AND TOPICS**

**Joseph T. Tennis:** What can we learn from examining the records of classificationists as they assembled their schemes? Case studies may reveal that particular concerns at the local level were weighted heavily in contrast to the universal aims purported in wide-spread adoption.

Tennis is an Associate Professor and Director of Faculty Affairs at the Information School of the University of Washington. He is the President of the International Society for Knowledge Organization (2014-2018). He is an Associate Member of the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Study at The University of British Columbia. He has been an occasional visiting scholar at the State University of São Paulo since 2009. He is the Managing Editor for Advances in Classification Research Online, and on the editorial board for *Library Quarterly* (USA), Knowledge Organization (Germany), *Scire: Representación y Organización del Conocimiento* (Spain), *Informatio* (Uruguay), and Zagadnienia Informacji Naukowej (Poland). He is also a member of the Dublin Core Usage Board and Oversight Committee.
Laura Skouvig: How can one bring the global world into the familiar settings of the well-known local sphere? This is discussed in the context of illustrated news weeklies as major media from the mid-19th century. Illustrations and genres as biographies and news covers brought the world into the living rooms of the well-educated citizenry in Copenhagen.

Skouvig is Associate Professor in the Royal School of Library and Information Science at the University of Copenhagen. Her primary scientific interest is the field of information history as a sub-field of history. From this perspective she investigates information historically focusing on themes as the information age and information society, information networks, surveillance and communication of information with theoretical inspiration from rhetorical genre theory and Michel Foucault. She is member of the editorial board for Library and Information History.

José Augusto Chaves Guimarães: Using index terms that correspond to different concepts in time and space, and strategies for addressing this in scope notes, Guimarães will demonstrate the need for knowledge organization systems to promote global dialogues without forgetting the local cultural contexts.

Guimarães is Professor at the Graduate School of Information Science at São Paulo State University in Brazil. He is a member of the Executive Board of ISKO and President of ISKO-Brazil. His research interests include the epistemology of knowledge organization, ethics of knowledge organization, and legal information. He holds a Bachelor in Library Science (1981), a Bachelor in Law (1982), a MS in Communication Science (1989), and a PhD in Information Science (1994).

Daniel Martinez-Ávila: Among all the diverse local communities that contribute to global systems, there is usually one, the dominant culture, that it is usually globally assumed and self-perceived as neutral. This dominant culture reflects and imposes its views in the standards and the process of translation of meanings of the diverse cultures. Thus, what should be a tool for cooperation and global communion becomes a device for cultural imperialism for the sake of global communication. In this scenario, how can we understand the tension between global standardization and local representations and meanings in knowledge organization? What are the advantages of universality for interoperability in a global scale and what are the disadvantages for the interests of specific groups of users?

Martinez-Ávila is Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Science at São Paulo State University (UNESP), Marília, Brazil. He has published in Knowledge Organization, Crítica Bibliotecológica, Scire: Representación y Organización del Conocimiento, Annals of Library and Information Studies, Cataloging & Classification Quarterly, El Profesional de la Información, Revista Española de Documentación Científica, Área Abierta, Journal of Documentation, and Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice. He is also the editor-in-chief of the Brazilian Journal of Information Science: Research Trends, and serves as International Coordinator of the Satija Research Foundation for Library and Information Science (SRFLIS) in India.

Ole Olesen-Bagneux: How have the humanities changed over the last ten years – in topics, methods, and materials – as manifested in public communication, and to what degree are changes in media usage intertwined with changes in the topics discussed within the humanities?

Olesen-Bagneux earned his Ph.D. at the University of Copenhagen in 2015 and is a lecturer in the Royal School of Library and Information Science at the University of Copenhagen and the Copenhagen Business School. He has worked for the multinational pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk in data organization and management. He has published in Knowledge Organization, the Journal of Documentation, and Nordisk Tidsskrift för Informationsvidenskab og Kulturformidling.

Melissa A. Adler: How can we theorize the tensions and dependencies between the universal and the particular in terms of struggles for hegemony? The Library of Congress Classification provides insights into forming a theory of the universal as particular.


Jens-Erik Mai: Moderator. Mai is concerned with the state of privacy and surveillance given new digital media, with classification given the pluralistic nature of meaning and society, and with information and its quality given its pragmatic nature.

Mai is professor of information studies at the University of Copenhagen. His publications into the nature of classification have been recognized by Emerald’s “Outstanding Paper Award” for the paper “The Modernity of Classification” published in Journal of Documentation — and by the International Society for Knowledge Organization’s (ISKO) “Best Paper in KO Award” for the paper “Ethics, Values and Morality in Contemporary Library Classifications” which was published in Knowledge Organization. He is the editor of Emerald’s Studies in
Information book series, and is a member of the editorial boards for Knowledge Organization and Aslib Journal of Information Management. He was the general Conference Chair for iConference 2012 held in Toronto and the general Conference Chair for 77th ASIS&T Annual Meeting held in Seattle.

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REFERENCES


