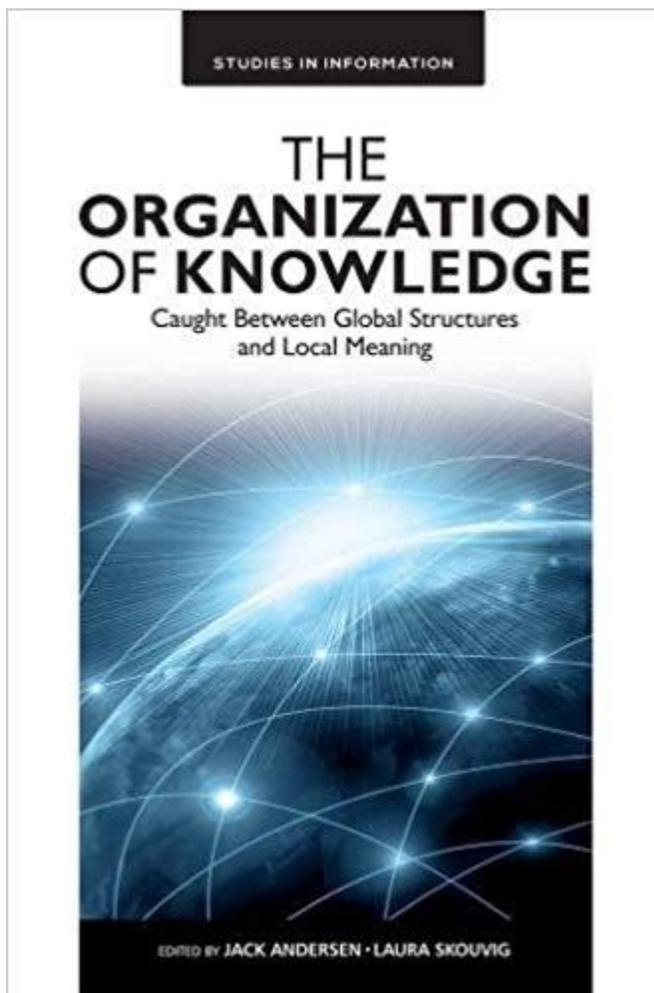


The Organization of Knowledge: Caught Between Global Structures and Local Meaning

There was a day when government and educational institutions held the keys to the global information and organization castle, but today knowledge organization is evolving to end users demanding more relevant information to serve their needs in their everyday lives, and they have come to expect that terms fit modern times and cultures. These needs sparked a one-day conference in 2015 in Copenhagen and covered Global and Local Knowledge Organization.

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*The Organization of Knowledge:
Caught Between Global Structures and
Local Meaning*

Jack Anderson and Laura Souvig,
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demanding more relevant information to serve their needs in their everyday lives, and they have come to expect that terms fit modern times and cultures. These needs sparked a one-day conference in 2015 in Copenhagen and covered Global and Local Knowledge Organization. Extended conversations following the conference revolved around the tension between global and local information structures; as a result, *The Organization of Knowledge: Caught Between Global Structure and Local Meaning* was written. The book included six chapters of articles written by scholars in information studies on how to approach today's problems of classification, categorization, and description in libraries and similar types of institutions that have controlled organizing knowledge in the past.

One of the chapters written by information scholar, Jack Anderson, argued that the public at large makes sense of the world using digital communication; this means that digital communication is a tool and not an objective to achieve human communication, and this objective pointed to the organization of knowledge being a genre. Anderson pointed out that the organization of knowledge should be seen as both “an analytical concept to understand communication in digital culture and as a particular genre in digital communication” (p. 14). Numerous examples in this chapter show how digital communication has become a way to order and archive daily lives.

Laura Skouvig shared how information cultures were formed and perceived through the 18th and 19th centuries. Skouvig discussed “how the concept of information culture might provide a way of formulating a genealogic strategy” (p. 18). Lust for information was the norm then and now as information creates action, but it's made clear in this chapter that technology merely framed information gathered for specific purposes in specific settings.

Melissa Adler discussed some of the history on the Library of Congress (LoC), how the organization impacted libraries around the globe, how the LoC subject headings have and could continue to serve as a template for local information adaptations in libraries worldwide. The downside is the LoC has American-centered views that contain colonial biases that must be addressed to create effective local adaptations. Adler uses a local New Zealand case study to demonstrate how practices, dating back to the Spanish American War in the United States, resulted in missing effective classifications for the indigenous population then and now, but still acknowledges benefits to globally recognized standards.

Daniel Martinez-Avila focused on the historical tension between local classifications versus global standardization. He introduced the reader-interest classifications concept, how important the interest of the users become when integrating this concept in libraries, and how the book industry influenced standards. Libraries surveyed users and found “that the majority of users were not satisfied with public library service” (p. 55-56), so the reader interest concept was explored. Challenges were cited in case studies that focused on the variety of local community needs, how the book industry classification model was considered, and the library workload issues that arose when creating hybrid reader-interest classification and standardized models.

Fabio Assis Pinho added photographic documentation to the conversation, shared a case study, showed systems proposed to effectively document images, and argued that photos must be properly represented and organized in local and global systems.

Jose Augusto Chaves Guimaraes argued the need to balance local and global information to alleviate biases to create supportive environments for diverse groups and communities. Guimaraes pointed out that knowledge organization is naturally slanted because world views are slanted, “by the author/document, [by] classifications...[by] the environment (e.g., institution), and [by] the users” (p. 95); however, there is a difference between being slanted and bias. Bias is a detour that drifts toward prejudice. To manage this bias, one must consider the context of times when certain values and social factors existed. Ultimately, to address a slanted Knowledge Organization (KO), one must become aware of words and terms that establish bridges between local and global needs; one must understand and classify terms that carry different perceptions, and understand and classify terms that change over time.

The format of *The Organization of Knowledge: Caught Between Global Structure and Local Meaning* is easy to follow with each chapter providing: an abstract, keywords, a chapter outline, a clear introduction and conclusion, clear arguments and discussion points, and references. In the introduction, it was clearly stated that there is no perfect solution to achieving a global and local knowledge organization balance. However, time and cultures change, and library classifications, categorizations, and descriptions established over 120 years ago are not serving global or local needs today. As a result, end users have become less tolerant of outdated classifications, categorizations, and descriptions of libraries, or similar institutions. The challenge is that completely standardized, global approaches are no longer of service; there must be local threads of information and modern classifications that may, or may not, be standardized among all institutions. The next step is to find the resources, the time, and the money to dedicate to this immense issue.