

Document Theory and Knowledge Organization. An Approach based on Epistemology and Sociology of Knowledge

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This dissertation is an attempt at an inquiry into the nature and foundation of knowledge organization in a library and information science (LIS) context. The objective is to contribute to raise the theoretical and practical understanding of knowledge organization within LIS.

The main line of argument to be pursued is that a theory of knowledge organization must be stronger connected to a theory of documents. Documents are information channels formed by technological innovations, cultural and/or scientific norms and domain specific needs. This must be taken into account in knowledge organization, but it demands an understanding of the production and use of documents in various social contexts.

The inquiry will be approached from an overall epistemological and sociology of knowledge framework. These two disciplines are both explicitly devoted to the study of knowledge. Put in rough terms, epistemology is the normative study of knowledge, while sociology of knowledge is the descriptive or empirical study of knowledge. The dissertation will thus argue that the nature and foundation of knowledge organization includes a study of knowledge and has both normative and descriptive elements with regard to knowledge.

Due to the role of libraries and the like information institutions in written communication, the study of recorded knowledge has a long tradition in LIS, in terms of knowledge organization in particular. However, several schools of thought have contributed to move attention away from the concept of document. Buckland's (1999) distinction between two traditions, 'A document tradition' and 'A computational tradition', in LIS can illuminate this. As the name indicates, the 'document tradition' is concerned with documents, with signifying records (Buckland, 1999, p. 970). The 'computational tradition' is concerned with finding uses for formal techniques such as mechanical or mathematical (Buckland, 1999, p. 970). Due to this distinction, Buckland links the concept of document to the 'document tradition'. About the 'document tradition' Buckland (1999, p. 971; emphasis added) writes that it "...has to do with knowledge, meaning, learning, description, and language and ambiguity, therefore, any view of it remains incomplete *unless some roots in cultural studies, in the humanities and qualitative social sciences, is acknowledged.*" Paying attention to develop various techniques and rules for knowledge organization has led to a separation of the systems for knowledge organization from the epistemic and discursive aspects of documents, which means that the nature and foundation of knowledge organization is not fully explained due to the unacknowledged socio-cultural roots of documents.

By viewing knowledge organization in connection with a study of documents, the dissertation contributes to underscore the importance for LIS to keep its attention on the connection between what is going to be organized and its content (the documents), *and* form (the knowledge

organizing system), in the study of knowledge organization. In practical terms, this implies that knowledge organization focuses on the universe of documents. This reinforces the relationship between knowledge organization and bibliographical control, and thereby illustrates the social character of the nature and foundation of knowledge organization.

In exploring the nature and foundation of knowledge organization, the dissertation will start off with an outline and discussion of the concept of knowledge organization in both a narrow LIS-perspective and a broader social perspective. Afterwards the study will take a step backwards from the present situation and put a culture-historical view on knowledge organization in order to illuminate its connection with the raise of various information technologies such as writing, printing and the World Wide Web. This will be done through an examination of certain features of the transition from oral culture to print culture, and print culture's connection with and manifestation in written communication as a primary mean for communicating knowledge. This transition resulted in the development of specific discourse communities, which implied specialization in knowledge production and use. The consequence being the communication of knowledge wasn't restricted to particular points in time and space anymore, implying that the single knower now being dependent on written records as sources to knowledge, and thus cannot be considered unique in epistemic terms.

Further, the transition led to an increase in document and knowledge production, which further led to the need of collections of organized knowledge in order for posterity to be able to retrieve relevant documents. In this way, the library and its organization of knowledge contribute to control the world of writings, and is thus an important agent in written communication. This leads to what the dissertation considers the key problem in knowledge organization in a LIS-context: *Under the assumption that knowledge organization, as an instrument in the control of writings, should help professional and cultural communication work optimally, how and to what extent does it contribute to ascribe to documents cognitive authority?* This is a question of documents as sources to knowledge and of the role of documents in professional and cultural communication. As a consequence of this, a LIS theory of documents should help explain the epistemological and communicative division of labor between the various types of documents in professional and cultural communication.

Reference

Buckland, M. K. (1999): The Landscape of Information Science: The American Society for Information Science at 62. *Journal of ASIS*, 50(11), pp. 970-974

Questions

1. Under the assumption that knowledge organization, as an epistemic instrument in the control of writings and reading, should help scholarly communication work optimally, how and to what extent does it contribute to ascribe to documents cognitive authority?
2. What characterizes the transition from oral culture to print culture in terms of knowledge organization?
3. What implications does written communication have as a mean for communicating knowledge?