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Book Review

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Introduction to Knowledge Organization

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Book Title	Introduction to Knowledge Organization
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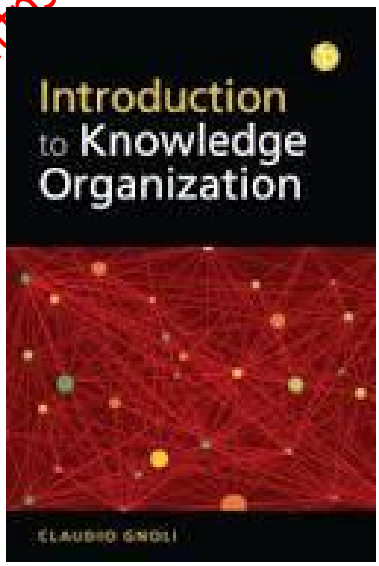

BOOK REVIEW

For more than a decade there has been a small spurt of books on various aspects of knowledge organization (KO). The trend is to be brief and concise (Smiraglia, 2014). The KO has become a dynamic field especially in response to digital and information revolutions. It is moving so fast that how so much you may learn and try to remain abreast of the developments, it is always ahead of you. It was to cope with this situation that the ISKO journal *Knowledge organization* turned bi-monthly from quarterly. Accordingly, many KO systems (KOSs) have emerged to answer the need of organizing and representing knowledge in an increasing number of diverse documents. The author aptly refers to "Basic Register of Taxonomies, Ontologies and Classifications" (BARTOC). In the digital age the KOSs riding on the brute power of computers have become more powerful and

indispensable—we are witnessing a second golden age of classification with its widened haunts and strong claws.

The book in hand is a concise and cute book exhaustive of all aspects and perspectives of knowledge organization such as scope, typology, mechanism, tools and applications. Given smallness of the book the treatment is broad than in-depth. Marcia Lei Zeng, herself an authority in the field, has in a prepublication preview, aptly commended, "The book uses a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining the theories of knowledge organization, the structural principles of knowledge organization and their impact on design of knowledge organization systems used both in traditional and virtual libraries". Divided into six chapters almost of equal lengths the book discusses the definition, scope, varieties of information sources and documents, concepts to be organized, and the diverse kinds of systems and their methods for organizing them. It further discusses threadbare their underlying principles and features and application of knowledge organization in ordering and retrieving information enshrined in various objects and databases. Their range of applications is not limited to organizing collections in traditional print, hybrid of virtual libraries but equally extends to many more situations and fields in non-library settings. KOSs equally apply to organizing or tagging multimedia with folksonomies; museum objects and archival materials with controlled vocabularies. All are beneficiaries of KO methods and systems for their meaningful organization and depicting their intra-relations --that is knowledge mapping. The first chapter, apart from the definition and scope of KO briefly describes the KO methods and views in the ancient West (Greek) and East (Egypt, India, China), then medieval methods and pre-modern beginnings of knowledge organization. It closes with an overview of the present day scenario and sources to keep up-to-date (pp.20-21). Knowledge being a social construct, its methods and theories of organizing it reflect the time and place of the knowledge architect—then hardly any KO system is universal in the true sense. Second chapter brings home the importance of theories. Beginning with defining concepts, the basic constituents of knowledge, it dwells on various theories of information architecture, varieties of information sources, mechanism of KOSs whether bottom-up or top-down. Further it dwells on designing ordered lists as humble as a restaurant menu card or a sophisticated system as Art and Architecture Thesaurus used for organizing wares in libraries, information and art centers. It may be noted classifications are cultural or user based approaches. Third chapter discusses structural principles of knowledge organization; features and processes of KO and vocabulary control, and role of the Natural Language Processing in organizing and retrieving knowledge. Methods rest on analyzing knowledge into concepts, arranging them in arrays and chains or breaking them in facets of categories and determining their citation order --this is mostly rehashing of Ranganathan methods. This chapter focuses on the structural principles in designing KOs and controlled vocabularies, and goes on to their various kinds and the principles of organizing concepts in a systematic network of arrays, chains or facets of predetermined categories. Fourth chapter dwells on varieties of KO systems such as classic classification systems for shelf arrangement, subject headings lists, thesauri, taxonomies, ontologies and now folksonomies, etc. etc. --list is long (http://bartoc.org/, pp. 72-73). KO also depends upon the collection context both in size and cultural bearings. These include culturally biased KOS such as the Russian BBK, Korean, Nippon and Chinese library classifications. The fifth chapter is bit complex which deals with representation or encoding of information in KOs, their layout and features ranging from catalogue cards to Marc formats, subject metadata of digital documents, Dublin core and linked data. The last chapter sixth is on applying KO and its various systems mostly on non-library resources. It brings out educational and learning applications of KOSs. KO systems support learning and help in designing of curricula as Ranganathan did in his design of APUPA pattern for shelf arrangement. S.R. Ranganathan has also demonstrated how facet analysis is an aid in reference service, and classification helps in editing library collections. Ranganathan always organized, as if his trademark, his papers and books in hierarchically numbered sections (Neelameghan, 1975). This method has been partially used by Gnoli in this book. Bernard

Palmer (1910-1979) had titled his book on classification as "Itself an education" (Palmer, 1962). Therefore in today' context Gnoli's book is unique in exposing knowledge organization and its tools and systems (p.107). Lastly it explains the basics of automatic classification which are mechanically based on term frequency.

The book, *sans* a preface, is refreshingly up-to-date and exhaustive of the field. Every page is swarming with new ideas and methods which show the fast pervading use and need of organizing knowledge in every sector our life and work ---without order nothing works. Numerous ideas run across its pages -- the list of referred sources (pp.129-139) is long. The density of thought is very high, that is how the author has been successful to encapsulate so many ideas both old and new in such a slim volume. Division of each chapter *la* Ranganathan, into hierarchically numbered sections and subsections with headings, is itself a learning aid. Concepts and methods have been illustrated with familiar examples.

However the author belongs to the group which thinks any object which yields information is a document. He quotes many authorities in his favour such as, Robert Pages (p.33) and Michael Buckland. (p.8, 33-34). One may ask which object / entity under the sun or beyond, abstract or concrete, cannot generate information? This diffused definition of a document is highly muddled and chaotic. For them even a cloud (p.8) is a document which is an indicator of rain; an animal in a zoo (p.33) or a plant in a garden is a document. For them, of course, all the objects on display in a museum are easily and obviously documents – Anglo-American Cataloguing Code (1978 / 2003) aptly terms them as 'realia'. They argue animals or plants cannot be kept in libraries only because of their physical and living dimensions. Michael Buckland (p.34) has not been correctly quoted who mentions about other uses of documents. Books, manuscripts and other graphic or textual objects are indeed documents. They are created by humans only to record, store and propagate information across generations. An invader vandalized a famous ancient library and used all the manuscripts as fuel to heat bathwater for months. Does this extraneous and improvised use of documents define them at all ? Traditionally a document is an object in which information has been recorded by a human being. No document can be created without human crafting. Other condition is it should be susceptible to preservation through time. By these criteria road traffic signals and body languages though highly informative do not make any document. Even a fossil, a source of enormous and vital information, whether buried beneath the earth or displayed in a museum, or being studied in a lab, is not a document—no human being recorded anything in it! But a photograph, sketch or description of the fossil is a document. Arguments in favour of hugely extended definition are flimsy. Another objection is to thesaural example on page 59 which shows Animal physiology as a related term (RT) to Animals. In principle, for two thesaural terms to be related must belong to the same category. For example, Italy may have the Roman Empire as a RT, but its Parliament *Parlamento italiano* cannot be its RT.

Despite these two disagreements, this well illustrated and lucid book is a gold mine of latest theories, methods and systems of knowledge organization for academicians and information architects.

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