

Toward a KOS Observatory: Panel Proposal

Two workshops sponsored by the EU COST project KNOWeSCAPE focused on the concept of an observatory for knowledge organization systems—“Evolution and Variation of Classification Systems” March 4-5, 2015 Amsterdam; and, “Observatory for Knowledge Organisation Systems,” February 1-3, 2017 Malta. Both brought together scholars and practitioners of KOSs from the academic and business communities to seek common ground. This panel incorporates two presentations from the Malta conference together with one respondent, to explore the concept of a KOS observatory.

“KOS on a Space-Time Continuum: Empirical Implications for a KOS Observatory.” Richard P. Smiraglia

An observatory allows observations at a point in time that capture at once many points in space time. Each point has its own temporal reality. Cultural synergy tells us each point in a KOS captures not just knowledge but also its cultural and social epistemology. An observatory, then, must capture not just the KOSs in their current states at given moments but also the cultural milieu attendant with each. Cultural synergy is the idea that information institutions can provide synergistic action through cultural interplay. This is based on the idea that information institutions are disseminators of the cultures from which they spring. Knowledge Organization Systems are a kind of information institution. The knowledge they acquire, maintain and disseminate is cultural property, shaped by shared understanding. Shared understanding is temporal. Temporality is one aspect of the role of a KOS in space-time. Social epistemology—shared culture—is another aspect of the role of a KOS in space-time. Therefore, we need not just a repository of KOSs, nor do we need a sequence of instantiations. Rather, we need a network of interfacing cultural snapshots with temporal milestones. An observatory of cultural temporality, in other words.

“Do We Have All the Terms for this Art?: Exploring the Nature and Continued Conceptualization of KOS through their Collective and Individual Histories.” Joseph T. Tennis

KOSs consist of schemes—e.g., indexing languages—and schemas, e.g., application profiles, crosswalks, mappings and registries. Research has brought forward specific cases like “eugenics” and “anatomy” and raised questions such as: 1) one schema to rule them all (DC); 2) metadata vs. description in archives; 3) gene ontology and reality; 4) unique expressions of the world. With all of these cases we have learned a bit about the complexity of this space. We do not know what holds true for the range of KOS across contexts and over time. However, we have some terms and techniques to start with and an observatory could be built to extend this analysis. When we think about how we might collect and interpret the histories of KOS we want to highlight the need for historiographical methods. We also need to come to grips with our implicit philosophy of language as it relates to what is changing and what is not when we track KOS through time. We can start with these case studies and the observations made through them to design analysis techniques in order to interrogate the nature of KOS over time and in various contexts and from this basic research gain insight into evaluation and steady improvement of this work.

NASKO Respondent, Thomas M. Dousa