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Interdisciplinary Knowledge Organization . by Rick Szostak,
Claudio Gnoli, and Maria Lopez-Huertas

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Review

Compte-rendu de lecture

Rick Szostak, Claudio Gnoli, and Maria Lopez-Huertas. *Interdisciplinary Knowledge Organization*. Switzerland: Springer, 2016. 227 pages. US\$129.00.

This excellent book investigates a new approach to knowledge organization schemes (KOSs) that can better meet the research needs of wide academic interdisciplinary scholarship. The book addresses the increased importance of interdisciplinary research within university communities and the weaknesses and blind spots of current KOSs in serving interdisciplinary scholarship. As a result, it goes beyond and furthers the state of knowledge from previous books on interdisciplinary knowledge organization systems. The book offers a case for the advantages of an innovative and novel approach to the classification of knowledge.

The authors of this book rightly realize that complex problems in fields such as public policy and health, which increasingly are addressing topics at the boundaries of disciplines, often require interdisciplinary approaches that involve a wider scope, broader overarching vision, and coordination of multiple disciplinary knowledges. The challenges of postmodern research are well understood by the authors. They correctly state that research does not occur in “neat disciplinary bundles” but requires “the ability to draw connections across different areas of disciplinary expertise” (p. 14). The authors demonstrate that a classification that helps researchers to make connections across diverse literatures or disciplinary databases will increase the originality and uniqueness of research findings. The book addresses how librarians can inform researchers about the range of approaches and methods available for interdisciplinary study, foster thinking outside the disciplinary box, and allow online users to serendipitously discover relevant materials that previously may have remained largely outside the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge. By drawing on a classification grounded in phenomena and relationships, rather than specialized disciplines, undiscovered public knowledge can become revealed by seeing the “forest for the trees” and blazing new trails of research.

Although the focus of the book is on classification systems, the analysis is applied to other KOSs such as thesauri and ontologies (ch. 3). The book addresses how interdisciplinarity can benefit from the semantic web and how the KOSs proposed in this book may be well suited for that. The book addresses the challenges that differences in terminology across specialized disciplines can create, given that currently disciplines are organized differently within general classifications, which can prevent researchers from making new connections across disciplines.

One of the authors, Rick Szostak, is a world renowned scholar of interdisciplinarity from the University of Alberta, Edmonton. Thus, as expected, the work does cover Canadian materials and studies and incorporates Canadian examples. However, the book has a significant international scope as the remaining co-authors, Claudio Gnoli and Maria Lopez-Huertas, are from the Università di Pavia, Italy, and the University of Granada, Spain, respectively. All three authors display expert mastery of the literature in their fields and are up to date with the most recent scholarly findings. However, Lopez-Huertas's chapter (ch. 9) devoted to how the KOS recommended in this book addresses the interdisciplinary concerns of women's studies researchers is particularly outstanding.

The primary audience of this book will be (1) information science professionals and university students, (2) interdisciplinary scholars, (3) experts in knowledge organization, and (4) computer scientists and technologists. However, the additional interdisciplinary audience includes philosophers of epistemology who continue to build on the thought of Aristotle to Ludwig Wittgenstein and postmodern philosophers, building on, for example, the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard.

The authors reveal that knowledge organization that is intended to facilitate interdisciplinarity opens up a new horizon of knowledge by shifting and crossing between disciplinary boundaries to help discover related knowledge. The book recognizes that certain intellectual problems span disciplinary boundaries and the limitations of specialized disciplinary research. The authors encourage information professionals to better serve researchers as they follow questions across disciplinary boundaries and foster more collaboration between international scholars and exposure to disciplinary methods, models, and perspectives.

This book recognizes that we need KOSs that do not place arbitrary boundaries between disciplines that can sometimes limit scholarly inquiry but, rather, offer an enhanced perspective of interdisciplinarity. The authors understand that we are on the brink of a momentous sea change of a new system of knowledge organization, fueled by the digitization of document classification and other technological revolutions. The book shows that the rising tide of interdisciplinarity research, which can allow for novel, more unique, and original findings, challenges information scientists to explore the different ways our systems of classifying ideas and documents could better facilitate interdisciplinarity.

The work includes a well-organized table of contents, substantive running footnotes, various helpful charts, tables, and diagrams, succinct key points and references following each chapter, and an index (pp. 223–27). Although this reviewer would have liked a larger section on the history of classification, this outstanding book makes a most positive contribution to the scholarly literature and is highly recommended.

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