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BOOK AND SOFTWARE REVIEWS

Glushko, Robert J. (Ed.). *The discipline of organizing*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014. xx, 539 p. \$40.00. ISBN 978-0-262-51850-5 (hardcover)

As an inherently traditional task for library professionals, the activity of organizing information resources is becoming more and more of a multidisciplinary concern. More or less complex subtasks, such as the development of controlled vocabularies, the analysis of the contents of resources for information access, and adjustments and applications of descriptive cataloguing rules, cannot avoid taking account of recent technological development and increasingly more multifaceted user expectations. For instance, the reformulation of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, that reflects primarily obsolete technologies, into *Resource description and access* and the subsequent work on a new data model, substituting the *MARC21* standard, is an attempt to bring library standards into compatibility with the evolving *semantic Web*. Still, this is a fairly slow process and many objections have been put forth within the library professional community expressing fears that these changes will seriously affect established library standards. Partly this may be due to a lack of understanding other perspectives. This book is a promising attempt to transcend traditional thinking.

This book (or should we say information resource, to avoid confusion) was conceptualized a few years back as an attempt to introduce a '*new terminology and set of abstractions*' (p. xiv) in order to overcome boundaries between disciplines occupied by similar issues but using different conceptual frameworks. It is a textbook, in the sense that it is explicitly aimed for use in educational settings. As such it is an unusual contribution to the bulk of candidate textbooks for the study of how to organize things, otherwise usually focussed on implementation of specifics for one discipline, be that library and information science, computer science, information systems or any other discipline.

However, it is not only a book, it is in fact a joint adventure involving several dedicated authors and editors from different disciplines, giving rise to a [Website](#), enhanced value-added extensions to the contents, study material and derivatives in different kinds of packages. A new enhanced ebook edition is planned for August 2014. A workshop was arranged at the earlier iSchool meeting in Berlin with the explicit motive to promote future collaboration on new editions of the *book*.

The Website lists several educational programmes using the book, both undergraduate and graduate programmes, while the reviewer is not entirely convinced that its level is appropriate for bachelor programmes. The fairly high Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level score it gets is a witness on this.

Most of the chapters take as a starting point the organization of things in everyday life, such as your own closet or kitchen, and the decisions it necessitates in ordinary life, in order to generalize to the tasks of describing and organizing information resources into an *Organizing System* (capitalization recurrently used throughout the book), which is defined as '*an intentionally arranged collection of resources and the interactions they support*' (likewise referenced recurrently). From the reviewer's perspective, many examples serve well as a demystifying strategy for explaining the activities of e.g., library professional work and the



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sometimes esoteric organizing systems employed in such domains. The contents are well furnished with footnotes that are labelled in order to indicate a target discipline and intratextual cross-references that ties the different chapters together.

The book covers in general terms everything that is encompassed with terms such as knowledge organization and information organization. Which means that the themes range from the selection of resources over the description and arrangement of resources to the design of systems for interacting with the collection and its interfaces.

However, specific implementations of resource description in library settings (such as the RDA) or classification schemes (such as the DDC) are only addressed in general terms. This can in fact be advantageous, because such details may bore many students when they do not directly recognize its relevance for their own needs. Previous Anglo-American textbooks on knowledge organization have never been successful in Swedish settings, due to the special local settings at the implementation level that characterize professional library work – but it also means that additional study material is needed, with local perspectives.

The book presents a view on the design of information systems where a recurrent emphasis is put on a layered framework, separating concerns on different levels of abstraction. Since this is a crucial point in understanding most modern applications, this is an important concern, often disregarded in mainstream textbooks on library and information science, and increases the value of the book for library professionals as well. The importance of separating presentational and organizational concerns in knowledge organization is probably largely overseen and particularly difficult to have students to understand, as the reviewer has experienced in lecturing situations. Systems technicians have extensively addressed the intermingling of presentation and organizational concerns where library professionals adapted unconventional and inconsistent strategies for resource description because the data did not *present* itself in the catalogue as they expect it to do.

Probably the greatest advantage of the book is that it brings into the areas of study both valuable linguistic knowledge and models from computer science that are becoming increasingly relevant for library and information science in these times, but in many cases are ignored in mainstream textbooks. For other disciplines explicitly declared to be targeted, such as computer science, linguistics, cognitive science, law and business, it must be assessed by specialists in these fields, but with some insight into computer linguistics I cannot but recommend it as a highly reliable textbook.

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