

**After "Evolution and variation of classification systems" - a workshop report by Andrea Scharnhorst**

From March 4-5, 2015 a two days international workshop took place in Amsterdam, hosted by the [eHumanities group](#) of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The title of the workshop was

**Evolution and variation of classification systems – how stable is the organization of knowledge and how diverse is its representations? Toward a Metadata Observatory**

Its programme can be found here: <http://knowscape.org/evolution-and-variation-of-classification-systems-knowscape-workshop-march-4-5-2015-amsterdam/>

Inside of the field of Knowledge Organization there are only few researchers which have reflected about the change in Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS). Among them are Joseph T. Tennis from the University of Washington, Seattle and Richard Smiraglia. In his keynote Joe Tennis showed the *fate* of some concepts, such as eugenics, in classification systems as the Dewey, but also how catalogers creatively apply authorized classification systems in their daily work. The web enables to make traces of such work visible, it also allows to publish catalogs of libraries, archives and musea in a machine readable way. In this process the distributed efforts of those ordering knowledge become visible for the first time. But in lifting the information to the web, not always the local contexts of this distributed process of ordering knowledge are equally transferred, so contextualization is lost. But even where contextualization is not lost another problem emerges, if multiple instantiations of one work or objects are published, organizations as OCLC and Europeana in consequence struggle with record duplications and problems of data integration. The merging of local contexts into one global will never be complete, simple because the local documentations are not build to be transferred, they not complete either. To give an example: UDC numbers in [MARC](#) records (a data format for bibliographic information) almost never contain the number of the UDC edition from which they have been applied. But even universal classifications as the Universal Decimal Classification of Otlet change over time. How can the authority institution, the UDC consortium, publish the UDC as Linked Data, making available to others for re-use without increasing ambiguity? There is a need to further discuss the relevance and role of high-level KOS and the right application of provenance, so that semantic web technologies can unfold their power. Theoretically, there is a wide, virgin field to study the change of KOS. One first step would be to identify main general characteristics to compare them - a kind of *baseline statistics* for KOS, and later maybe *macroscopes*, maps for KOS. For the time being, we are confronted with many registries for KOS, for specific knowledge domains, for Linked Open Vocabularies, for specific projects, which are not indexed and mapped properly. A Hercules task for Knowledge Organization specialists - to order their own professional knowledge to make it better accessible for others building vocabularies, ontologies, classification systems. The success of books as "[The Elements of Knowledge Organization](#)" by Richard Smiraglia (2014, Springer) seem to proof the need to share knowledge about KOS among all those dealing with it. The last section of the workshop was than also devoted to a collective commenting to a current document of the W3C consortium concerning "Data on the Web Best Practices" (moderated by Christophe Gueret, WG leader in TD1210 and member of a writing group inside W3C). What else remains to be said can probably best be expressed by one of the speakers and attendees - Paul Groth (see his blog entry "Data analysis in the face of changing Knowledge Organization Systems" on <https://thinklinks.wordpress.com/>)

