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Adapting Public Library Knowledge Organisation for Diverse Communities

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Abstract

As knowledge organisation systems in public libraries are designed to be controlled and consistent, they struggle to keep pace with the needs of diverse and changing communities. With a theoretical basis in post-structuralism, this literature review explores the ways that adaptability can be built into these rigid systems to appropriately honour community truths and create more useful and welcoming collections. Adaptations can be global, regional, or local in scale, and may alter standards or make standards more accessible. Three broad avenues of inquiry are presented. Librarian-led adaptability explores librarian training and initiatives. Tools like folksonomy and crosswalks are suggested to augment current systems. Finally, historical, international, and critical adaptations to Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) are discussed. The field of critical classification overwhelmingly centres on knowledge organization in academic libraries, leaving a gap in the literature related to public libraries and DDC adaptations focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion. This review seeks to demonstrate this topic's merit for more rigorous study and calls for the strengthening of a community of practice.

Keywords: adaptability; critical classification; critical librarianship; Dewey Decimal Classification; equity, diversity, and inclusion; knowledge organisation systems; public libraries

Library classification and cataloguing, grouped together as "knowledge organisation systems" (KOSs), are designed to sort the breadth of human knowledge into searchable categories with consistent, controlled, and objective names. When perfected, these standards should enable intuitive browsing and efficient targeted searching for all users. However, critical scholars argue that all knowledge organisation systems will inevitably reflect the biases of their creators (Bullard et al., 2020; Thornton, 2024). Controlled vocabularies and subject hierarchies reflect wider

power structures, and diverse needs are often held in tension between competing stories: terms become outdated, subjects are reclassified, and the nature of truth is called into question. If one standard cannot serve everyone, then what has been written about flexible options in KOSs, particularly in public libraries which often serve very diverse populations? Inspired by this conundrum, this review explores the question: how can public libraries adapt their knowledge organisation systems to better serve their diverse and changing communities?

In this literature review, adaptability refers to a system's capacity to support changes to accepted KOS standards so that they align with and meet community needs. Can the system function without strict adherence to universal standards? And if not, can the standards themselves change, or be made more accessible? Kublik et al. (2003) describe three approaches to adaptability in KOS: global (addressing the most obvious instances of marginalisation), regional (making changes within a specific area of study), and local (options that contextualise the KOS for a specific library). Satija and Kyrios (2023) position official options for KOS adaptation as the midway point between unaltered standards and entirely eclectic practices.

Due to its focus on public libraries, this review places particular emphasis on Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). According to OCLC, Inc. (2019), DDC is the most widely used classification system in the world, used in 138 countries and translated into 30 languages. It is hierarchical in nature, with facet tables incorporated more recently so that call numbers can specify the geographical or temporal range of a work when needed. DDC's global reach compounds the need for adaptability, as its biases towards particular languages (Kua, 2004), religions (Dong-Geun & Ji-Suk, 2001; Thornton, 2024), races (Adler, 2017; Furner, 2007; Joseph, 2021) and other human attributes do not readily serve all communities.

Peer-reviewed studies in critical cataloguing and classification generally focus on academic library contexts, and actionable recommendations are rarely directed at public libraries, Dewey Decimal Classification, or patron communities outside of academia. In reviewing relevant published works, the author hopes to highlight this research gap and demonstrate the topic's merit for future study. The dearth of recent and relevant

research is reflected in the consulted sources, many of which were published over a decade ago.

Theory and Methods

The research question addressed in this literature review was developed with theoretical foundations in post-structuralism and Queer theory in knowledge organisation. Post-structuralist thought rejects the structuralist assumption that there are immutable laws and singular truths underlying knowledge systems (Olson, 2001); instead, structures can be examined, critiqued, and re-imagined. This framework lends itself to critically examining knowledge organisation, the laws of which only appear immutable because of long-standing hegemonies. This review, therefore, considers literature that suggests ways of organising knowledge that challenge these hegemonies. In complement to this theoretical background, Queer theory in knowledge organisation asserts that truth is not final, but rather discursively produced and undergoing constant revision (Drabinski, 2013). The literature demonstrates that an adequate KOS should have adaptability built in to honour the evolution of the truths it classifies.

This exploration is narrative in nature, seeking to synthesise relevant works and highlight research gaps, particularly related to DDC adaptations for the sake of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Most of the sources referenced in this review are academic journal articles, however some professional blogs have been consulted for examples of localised adaptations and individual librarian action. As this review focuses on adaptation and evolution, the sources used span several decades. Contemporary KOSs are incrementally revised versions of historic frameworks and cannot be understood without historical context.

Challenging Hegemony

Recalling the assertions of Drabinski (2013), it can be said that truth changes as the communities who hold it evolve, interact, and redefine themselves. As a result of this fluidity, vocabulary in politicised communities rapidly goes out of date, inhibiting the ability of classification standards to stay relevant (Drabinski, 2013; Edge, 2019). The imposition of “synthetic” controlled vocabulary onto changeable “natural” language is an instrument of hegemony, where dominant beliefs about value and knowledge are affirmed, and minority views are overlooked or ignored outright (McAuliffe, 2021; Olson,

2001). This may make it difficult for marginalised communities (diverse genders and sexualities, racialised identities, people with disabilities, etc.) to see themselves truthfully reflected in library records, and more difficult still to locate relevant materials in the stacks. The discrepancies between the community and the academy, as well as generational and localised trends in terminology, can lead to frustrating search attempts by librarians and patrons alike (Lember et al., 2013). It is not difficult to understand how repeat instances of frustrating, hurtful, or humiliating information seeking can drive some community members out of libraries entirely.

This is not to discount the advantages of standardised KOSs, or of Dewey Decimal Classification. Shareable catalogue records, decreased need for staff re-training, and interoperable software can save time and resources, particularly for smaller systems that do not employ their own cataloguers. That is why this review works with existing systems, even when a complete overhaul may be preferable. Critical practice that is prohibitive for systems with lesser funding is critical in name only.

The critiques, studies, and suggestions addressing standardised KOSs in public libraries can be sorted into three broad categories. The first emphasises the individual librarian's role as an intermediary and interpreter between the established KOS and diverse information seekers. The second explores ways that technology can build flexibility into rigid systems. The final and largest category examines the ways that DDC itself can be adapted, including historical and international examples as well as future suggestions from critical scholars.

Librarian-Led Adaptability

When systems are as widespread as Dewey Decimal Classification, radical changes are not implemented overnight, and other means are needed to adapt them in the meantime. As discussed below, many scholars have highlighted librarians as fundamental resources when it comes to bridging this gap, although the majority of these studies discuss academic, and not public, librarians. McAuliffe (2021) notes that librarians are often the deciding factor in whether a library will reproduce or rebel against the traditional structures reflected in knowledge organisation.

Librarians must be aware of how traditional classification methods function so that terminology and shelf location can be critically explained to patrons when questions or concerns arise (Howard & Knowlton, 2018; McAuliffe, 2021). This does not necessarily mean celebrating the standards in place, but it does mean coming to terms with the rationale behind the standards, and being willing to explain why certain decisions were made in one's own space. Furthermore, librarians must be aware of relevant controlled vocabulary, vernacular synonyms, and optimal search methods when it comes to contested subject areas. Howard and Knowlton (2018) and McAuliffe (2021) mention this specifically in relation to Queer and racialised topics. While public librarianship is more diverse today than in the early days of the profession, it remains unlikely that any one librarian will share every intersecting identity with every patron they encounter. Said librarians must therefore sensitively combine their own expertise and experiences with those of their diverse patrons to make their KOS reflective of the community in all its complexity.

In her oft-cited work on "queering" the catalogue, Drabinski (2013) argues that contested subject headings should be left in place so as not to further perpetuate the illusion of a library's neutrality. While this is directed at academic libraries, which are more critical by nature, such an argument does bring attention to the more generally applicable concept of "mediated research," where librarians and patrons engage in productive, radical dialogue about knowledge organisation (Drabinksi, 2013; Lember et al., 2013). Not only can these interactions give patrons empowering insights into the inner workings of the library, but they can invite opportunities for community collaborations that may inform future KOS adaptations.

This is, of course, not a perfect solution, as few public library patrons have the time, energy, or comfort level to engage in this way for every information search. Howard and Knowlton (2018) note in particular that many African American students suffer from information anxiety and may not engage non-Black librarians out of concern that they are perpetuating a stereotype of incompetence, or that the librarian might be disinterested or lack expertise in their area of inquiry.

Still, something must bridge the gap between diverse patrons and imperfectly catalogued library materials. To this end, Adler and Harper (2018) advocate for

knowledge organisation courses to have an integrated social justice component. While social justice is worked into many other courses across many LIS curricula, they note that it is conspicuously lacking in knowledge organisation coursework. This may be due to a perception that such a technical subject does not lend itself to discussions of humanistic topics like social responsibility (Kumasi & Manlove, 2015). M.J. Fox (2016) argues that critical viewpoints need to be discussed at all levels of knowledge organisation education, not only in doctoral work, as they contribute to a foundational understanding of the nature of knowledge that is imperative to the discipline. If librarians consistently graduate knowing that there is a precedent for engaging with the social implications of knowledge organisation systems, most libraries will have reliable, built-in community advocates who know that KOS adaptations are possible.

Harnessing Tools and Technology

In line with the storage and processing capabilities of modern computers, many studies have suggested folksonomy and social tagging as ways to combat the rigid confines of controlled vocabularies (Adler, 2009; Clarke & Schoonmaker, 2019; McAuliffe, 2021). Folksonomy and social tagging are terms that refer to the creation and application of user-generated metadata, namely the tags that users assign to information for their own retrieval needs (Adler, 2009). While some scholars use the terms nearly interchangeably (Yu & Chen, 2020), others distinguish between the two, generally with folksonomy as the product of social tagging (Lin & Chen, 2012). Rafferty (2018) clarifies that the vocabulary surrounding social tagging was not fixed during the practice's infancy, and this may explain its inconsistent use. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this review, both folksonomy and social tagging describe a system of organising information that is responsive, non-hierarchical, and not defined by formal relationships between tags (Adler, 2009).

In a study of the tagging feature on the social cataloguing website LibraryThing, Adler (2009) found that allowing users to ascribe their own terms to materials made for much more flexible and nuanced searching of diverse transgender topics–in fact, transgender tags that were very popular on LibraryThing often did not exist in WorldCat. In the days when the subject of a work had to fit on an index card, it was practical to use

a few highly controlled terms and prioritise the “aboutness” of a work over other aspects of its content. For example, a book with transgender characters, but not specifically about transgender issues, would not have been catalogued to reflect this representation even if its visibility would be meaningful to the transgender community. Tagging not only allows communities to choose the terminology that best reflects content by and about them, but it can also reflect a community’s conceptual model of information (Yu & Chen, 2020). As the average person does not think of information as being strictly and hierarchically arranged, tagging habits provide data on how people imagine it organically. Finally, folksonomies need not replace controlled vocabularies, but rather complement them and build adaptability into the system (Yu & Chen, 2020). An example of this can be found in LibraryThing’s “tagmash” feature, which allows for more nuanced searching by combining user-generated tags and subject headings (Adler, 2009). As the website itself explains, verbose tags and subject headings like “Indian vegetarian cooking” tend not to exist, so a tagmash can search for works tagged or catalogued under “India,” “vegetarian,” AND “cooking” for better results (Spalding, 2009).

Folksonomy also has its drawbacks. Community-based classification is influenced by a tagger's social capital, which can duplicate mainstream classifications in miniature (Lin & Chen, 2012). People who are comfortable with current classification structures will probably reproduce aspects of it for their own use. Users may adopt an established KOS’s interpretation of a domain to such an extent that it can influence how they interact with that information even outside of knowledge organisation contexts (Higgins, 2016). In addition, there is no guarantee that marginalised communities are the ones assigning the tags that describe their experiences, and this means that unsuitable terms could be assigned inadvertently, or terms could be assigned to irrelevant posts for visibility. Tags are often meant for personal use, and some of these tags will not contribute meaningfully to crowdsourced knowledge organisation (Clarke & Schoonmaker, 2019; Lin & Chen, 2012). Finally, folksonomy is characterised by the very issue that controlled vocabulary was created to remedy: inconsistency. The usefulness of folksonomy is diminished when a search for “trans” does not recognise

works tagged “transgender,” let alone more specific and specialised terms (Adler, 2009).

As the demand for more diverse and detailed metadata grows, Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) are becoming more versatile, with features that make their collections more accessible despite rigid cataloguing practices. Some OPACs keep transaction logs, which gather useful data about the search terms patrons actually use (Olson 2001). Some integrate user tags from sites like LibraryThing (Adler, 2009), helping to flesh out the lesser-used tagging systems built directly into cataloguing software. Still others integrate curated book lists with diverse themes (Clarke & Schoonmaker, 2019). Browsing is not the primary function of library catalogues, but integrated book lists provide opportunities for patrons to stumble across topics of interest without specifically searching a particular tag. These catalogue advances are owed in large part to Semantic Web technologies, which offer more interoperable metadata for better integration (Clarke & Schoonmaker, 2019).

In a study on Queer and unhoused youth, Nichols and Cortez (2013) suggest the implementation of “crosswalk ontologies” in OPACs. Schema crosswalks can be defined as “the mapping between conceptualization systems that describe at least partially overlapping domains, intending to identify points of contact and divergence to facilitate data exchange” (Moretti et al., 2024, p. 1). If one dataset classes books as “junior fiction” and another classes them as “children’s literature,” a crosswalk can formalise the link between these concepts so that relevant results can be retrieved from both datasets. Crosswalk ontologies improve system interoperability.

Nichols and Cortez (2013) explore building crosswalks between controlled vocabulary and the natural speech terms that vulnerable teens use for Queer topics, as identified in interviews. These crosswalks would improve the chance that an OPAC search would return a wide range of useful results even if a more colloquial term was searched. The researchers took this a step further when they noted that some colloquial terms tended to return results with negative connotations. In order to encourage a feeling of belonging and optimism in this vulnerable population, they discuss the possibility of having catalogues integrate “bibliotherapeutic” search terms more likely to provide positive sources. For example, if one searches for “at-risk youth,” the OPAC

may include works about “resilient youth.” Implemented thoughtfully, crosswalks could serve a diverse range of people who know broadly what they are looking for in the catalogue, but not how to form their query.

Adapting Dewey Decimal Classification

The most fundamental, and therefore most radical solution to hegemonic classification would be to adapt the classification system itself, whether globally, regionally, or locally (Kublik et al., 2003). Critiquing KOS standards is nothing new. Many of the works consulted in this literature review reference the seminal works of Sanford Berman and A. C. Foskett, both written over fifty years ago. Berman’s *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subjects Heads Concerning People* (1971) listed 225 Library of Congress Subject Headings that Berman felt should be altered, added, deleted, or more accurately cross-referenced to better reflect real people and experiences. He felt so strongly about this work that he considered inaccurate cataloguing to be a form of censorship. *Misogynists All: A Study in Critical Classification* by Foskett (1971) is one of the earliest criticisms of classification itself, not just the vocabulary selected for subject headings.

While Foskett went on to be quite critical of DDC, and he was not alone in this, scholarly critiques overall tend to focus on Library of Congress Subject Headings, and not the controversial nature of hierarchical classification. Olson and Schlegl (2001) suggest this may be because subject headings are clearly written on signs and catalogues, making their indelicacies obvious, whereas classification appears to many as a simple “shelf address” devoid of meaning that might influence how a work is perceived. As of DDC 23, the current edition, Anthropology has been moved from Biology to Social Sciences, but Human Ethnic Groups remains classed under Zoology, implying a biological basis for race (Adler, 2017). As problematic as this may be, one may not notice it immediately when browsing the stacks, and it certainly stands out less than an outdated racial term. Even if classification may be a less overt issue, unintuitive shelf addresses can still confound targeted information searches when they place sensitive works with unsuitable neighbours.

People-focused changes do occur with some regularity in DDC. For example, the conception of “intersexuality” has changed in 14 of 23 DDC editions, at various times being associated with monstrosities and deviations, self-fertilisation in plants, medicine and biology, and sexual orientation, sometimes falling out of the manual entirely (Edge, 2019). The tables used for the faceted portion of the DDC scheme have also changed over time: the table once called “Racial, Ethnic, and National Groups” has dropped “Racial” from its name, as well as some outdated racial terminology (Furner, 2007; Higgins, 2016). This comes with its own host of issues, notably that overtly racial topics are now filed as ethnic ones. Racial (or ethnic) subdivisions have morphed and expanded in every DDC edition since facet tables were introduced in DDC 18 in 1971 (Green, 2015).

Since the 1930s, Queer topics have also bounced between a wide range of call numbers. In DDC 13 (1932) they were generally found in 132 (Mental Derangements) and 159.9 (Abnormal Psychology); in DDC 17 (1965) many had moved to 616.858 (Neurological Disorders); and by DDC 20 (1989) they had moved to 363.49 (Social Problems and Services) where they were interfiled with obscenity and pornography (Sullivan, 2015). Today, they have generally found a home in 306.76 (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity). These official manual changes do not mean that all relevant materials are immediately reclassed and reshelved in libraries across the world, however, just that new options have been made official. Reclassing physical materials can be demanding work, and this is where individual librarian initiative is again necessary. In some cases, collection shifts can be held up for decades, either for a want of resources or for a lack of interest. In 2015, a senior librarian at Los Angeles Public Library noticed that many Queer books in her collection were still lingering in the 301s, which was a remnant of DDC 14 (1942). She made an effort to reclassify them that year during Pride Month and made signage to inform patrons of the change (Rudell-Betts, 2015).

International Adaptations

Relatively few peer-reviewed articles discuss contemporary adaptations to DDC, particularly when compared to commentary on Library of Congress Subject Headings,

and there are fewer still that call for classification to be more sensitive to diverse communities. Most focus instead on adaptations in international settings. Nevertheless, these national adaptations provide insight into DDC's limitations and offer solutions that can be modified for other contexts.

When the Swiss National Library adopted DDC 21, it was decided that Dewey's Second Summary (the Hundred Divisions) would provide appropriate subject access to its collection, with two major modifications: 914.94 (Swiss geography) and 949.4 (Swiss history; Heiner-Freiling & Landry, 2005). As noted previously, DDC retains a number of human-category biases even as it has become an international standard. This necessitates historical, geographical, linguistic, and religious adaptations in other countries so that their entire national consciousness is not relegated to a few headings.

This is obvious even today in DDC 23, where English is identified by the concise call number 42 (4 Language > 42 English), whereas Zulu is identified as 496.3986 (4 Language > 49 Other languages > 496 Other languages of Africa > 496.3 Niger-Congo languages > 496.39 Bantu languages > 496.3986 Zulu). In examining this reality in South Africa, Eunice Kua wrote, "What does it say to a child, when all the categories in a system seem to accentuate what is not yours, while all the practices and wisdom of your culture are relegated to a tiny sliver of space?" (Kua, 2004, p. 256). Kua continues that a common solution is for countries to assign the first language and literature subclasses (410 and 810, respectively) to that nation's standard. Of course, many countries have more than one major language. In these cases, it is all too easy to introduce a new classification bias as local languages are rearranged into a new hierarchy (Kua, 2004).

In terms of classing non-Christian religions, Indonesia has been adapting and pushing for reform on the divisions and terminologies used for Islam since the 1950s, when DDC 15 was still calling the religion Mohammedanism (Sulistyo-Basuki & Mulyani, 2008). Through every subsequent edition of Dewey Decimal Classification, Indonesian librarians have advocated for the expansion of 297 notation, as well as the rearrangement of subclasses where fundamental aspects of the religion have been nested into inaccurate categories. Various Indonesian institutions have adopted slightly different notations over the decades, and while these variations adequately serve their

specific contexts, Sulistyo-Basuki and Mulyani (2008) express concern that this level variation will cause upset and division in the international community. The disadvantage of variation is, of course, the loss of universality, and attracting the ire of professionals privileged by DDC can cause some institutions to think twice before adapting the system for their own needs.

Contemporary Criticism

While contemporary DDC adaptations and criticisms are not well represented in scholarly literature, a handful of thoughtful professionals continue to advocate both in writing and in action. Cases have been made for altering both "American Indian" terminology (Green, 2015), and "Asian-American" terminology (Higgins, 2016), particularly when it comes to their use in facet tables. Green (2015) writes that we continue to struggle to find an appropriate umbrella term for the Indigenous Peoples of the United States, in large part because they do not form an inherently natural group (consider the nations whose territory was split by the Canadian and Mexican borders, for example). Higgins (2016) notes further that DDC does not handily classify mixed identities. Using the current facet tables, “Asian-Americans” and “Asians in America” would both be given the same number (089950073), equating the experiences of, for example, an American of Chinese ancestry, and a Chinese student studying abroad in America. While local adaptations to this table are possible, they are not supported by DDC proper (Higgins, 2016).

Beyond terminology, all hierarchical classifications schemes must contend with the issues of ghettoisation and diasporisation, especially when it comes to categorising people. Should all Indigenous topics be gathered in one place (ghettoisation), where they will not contribute to the bodies of universal topics? Or should they be dispersed amongst various topics like art and sport (disaporisation) where their collective visibility may be less obvious? When the terms from A Women’s Thesaurus were mapped to DDC, the term “feminism” was classed under 305.42 (Social role and status of women). This became a particularly egregious instance of ghettoisation, with this single number covering 130 terms, including such diverse topics as “Black women’s studies, cleavage, courtesans, cross cultural feminism, debutantes, feminist ethics, first wave feminism,

supermom, and women's art" (Kublik et al., 2003, p. 19). Green (2015) writes that the decision to ghettoise or diasporise a topic must ultimately be made by individual institutions based on the colocation needs of their users. One must consider not only the size and specificity of one's collection, but also the message that certain arrangements might send about the value of a population.

Engagement, Action, and Confronting Challenges

When it comes to adapting Dewey Decimal Classification for diverse communities, there are ultimately two options: advocating for official manual updates and alternatives, and implementing local eclectic adaptations. At present, the OCLC is inviting the wider community to contribute to its efforts to make DDC relevant and respectful. As of early 2019, all of the OCLC's research on the topic has been made public, and users are invited to comment on proposals before they are implemented (V. Fox, 2019). In the blog post calling for this engagement, Fox explains that while the original iteration of DDC focused on productivity and efficiency, recent updates are far more focused on inclusivity. "Library workers around the world" are invited to email the Dewey team directly, indicating a willingness to consider opinions not only from MLIS-holding librarians (Fox, 2019).

As sources throughout this literature review indicate, however, one unified manual cannot perfectly serve all communities across 138 countries. Local eclectic adaptations are pragmatic, responsive, and can deviate as much or as little from the standard as the local community requires. Satija and Kyrios' *A Handbook of History, Theory and Practice of the Dewey Decimal Classification System* (2023) devotes a chapter to adapting DDC in one's own library, including both official options as well as suggestions for more specialised adaptations. The authors note that there are no "Dewey police" to reprimand libraries who deviate from the standard. When matching suggested adaptations to relevant communities, librarians can make use of the data provided by the tools discussed in this review to get a sense of search trends and preferred vocabulary.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that establishing and implementing adaptations to DDC is not an effortless process, and the more extensive the adaptations needed, the more demanding the process can be on resources. While the initial changes may be

treated like a one-time project, it is only the beginning of a long-term commitment, as new materials would not arrive shelf-ready for the new arrangement (Sahadath, 2013). There is little literature available documenting practical experiences of adapting DDC in public libraries, and so potential challenges and resource pressures must be extrapolated from a handful of case studies and tangentially related projects.

Thornton (2024) documents a “micro reclassification” of the 200s in a mid-sized public library using an official optional arrangement intended to reduce Christian bias. With a project manager and two library assistants, the recataloguing, reorganising, and application of new spine labels took approximately four weeks and left no more than three shelves inaccessible to patrons at a time (Thornton, 2024). On a larger scale, the project to redesign the KOS in the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Libraries would not have been possible without a grant of over $200 000 USD (Hinton, 2022). In adapting Brian Deer Classification for the Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute, Swanson (2015) found that a lack of case studies, practical guides to implementation, and dialogue between institutions using non-traditional classification was a notable difficulty in managing their project. The creation of new call numbers also proved to be a significant challenge for the library technicians, who were not yet accustomed to the new classification system (Swanson, 2015). Finally, in an article about adapting the classification system in Out on the Shelves, an LGBT2QIA+ focused library in British Columbia, Bullard et al. (2020) discuss the realities of volunteer-run cataloguing in scenarios when funding simply is not available. This can be turned into a community-building and learning experience, however it is usually not an efficient process. In cases where libraries are embedded in or affiliated with other institutions, some level of interoperability may place restrictions on the extent of adaptations, and consultation will likely be an ongoing process (Bullard et al., 2020).

Conclusion

While standardisation has advantages in knowledge organisation, it tends to reinforce pre-existing power structures, and cannot keep up with the ever-evolving truths of diverse communities. The literature shows that building adaptability into KOSs is critical to making public libraries welcoming and useful for the widest possible range

of people. As awareness of the need for equity, diversity, and inclusion burgeons in the discipline, it is imperative that public librarians have access to the tools that will enable them to implement KOS adaptations in their own communities. Some tools, like crosswalks, search logs, and folksonomy have been detailed in this review; others come from everyday professional discourse and the support of colleagues. The fact remains that a significant number of librarians fall into a narrow range of demographics (Buchel & Coleman, 2022; Kendrick & Hulbert, 2023), and even librarians from diverse backgrounds may understand that change is needed, but not know where to begin. In examining the lack of literature related directly to adapting public library KOSs for diverse and changing communities, this review serves as a call to action.

Experiments and eclectic adaptations are surely undertaken in local libraries around the globe, and sharing these experiences is critical to building a community of practice. Academic journals are an obvious outlet, as with Thornton (2024), and professional blogs and forums can be especially useful for sharing projects that are ongoing and regularly reevaluated. Solutions need not (and indeed will not) be universal; it is the paradigm shift that matters. Learning about a wide range of challenges, successes, and creative ideas in knowledge organisation will empower public librarians to think outside official guidelines and critically engage patrons to assess their unique needs. Historical and national adaptations can provide early guidance as the community finds its feet. Public library collections are built to reflect their communities, and appropriate knowledge organisation illuminates that reflection.

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