

Values in Knowledge Organization Standards: A Value Analysis of Resource Description and Access (RDA)

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge organization standards are important community artifacts that set forth agreed upon specifications and protocols, and though they may appear neutral they have been shown to harbor specific perspectives. These perspectives are often covert but hold implications for the ways in which knowledge is conceptualized, organized, and represented. Values are deeply held preferences for ways of acting and ways of being, and represent an effective lens for examining the perspectives embedded in societal practices and artifacts. To date, however, knowledge organization standards have not been approached through value analysis. This study addresses this gap through an examination of the influential library standard Resource Description and Access (RDA), specifically focusing on what values are present within this standard, how these values are communicated, and how they are recognized and responded to by practitioners. To address these questions, a qualitative, exploratory, multiphase study was conducted, utilizing value and rhetorical analyses of the text of RDA as well as open-ended interviews with RDA practitioners. Findings show that RDA upholds its design principles through the expression of principles-based values and values associated with user needs. In their usage of RDA, catalogers place greater emphasis on access and values associated with users and their perspectives. At the same time, the relative absence of asserted community values such as privacy illustrates the challenged nature of human values in knowledge organization standards. Findings from this study demonstrate the integral nature of values in standards, and position value analysis as a useful methodology in the critical study of standards in all domains. In raising questions about the role of human values in knowledge organization standards, this study contributes to ongoing discussions of information ethics and professional values.

TOPICS

cataloging; metadata; information ethics; critical librarianship