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Figuring on Insight through an Insightful Figure

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Baker, K.S. and Millerand, F. 2007. **Scientific Information Infrastructure Design: Information Environments and Knowledge Provinces.** Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology ASIST 2007. <http://cce.lternet.edu/docs/bibliography/033ccelter.pdf>

From 'Scientific Information Infrastructure Design: Interdependent Provinces and Knowledge Environments', Figure 2 (pictured here) is so simple yet brings up so many questions, and furthermore seems to hold potentially weighty implications for our work as Information Managers. The paper itself offers condensed insight into different conceptual models of information and data flow, but the figure encapsulates in particular a number of topics and tensions

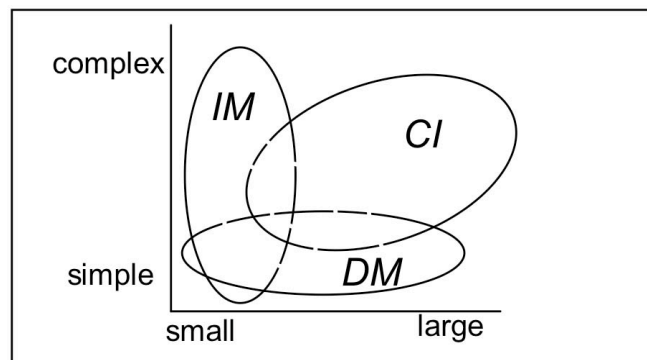


Figure 2 is 'a multi-dimensional perspective with distinct data handling provinces...[it] provides a conceptual platform for pluralism.' The 'information infrastructure landscape' is defined as a 2D field with axes of size and complexity with distinct areas of uniqueness. Areas of porous and portentous overlap are made conspicuous for information management, data management and cyberinfrastructure. This layout serves not only to visually define the boundaries and ambiguities between these three fields but suggests, through the common framework, how, where, and why they interrelate and separate.

In looking at the commonalities and differences displayed in the figure, critical questions arise: Why is information management limited to the 'small' end of the spectrum, ie. what about information management makes it inapplicable or inaccessible to large datasets? Does the figure in fact refer to dataset size and complexity, or possibly physical ecosystem, digital network size/complexity or a combination? IM and DM have been recognized on some level as roles; what new roles (if any) will come with cyberinfrastructure, and how do these roles fall within the LTER structure of networked sites? Would adding a third dimension help, ie local v. general users, short-term product-based v. long-term curation timeframes?

This too brief paper touches only on disintermediation vs. intermediation issues but many others come to mind for defining and developing such provinces. This figure encapsulates too much, but in so doing prompts much needed further discussion.