

Interstitial Organizations as Conversational Bridges

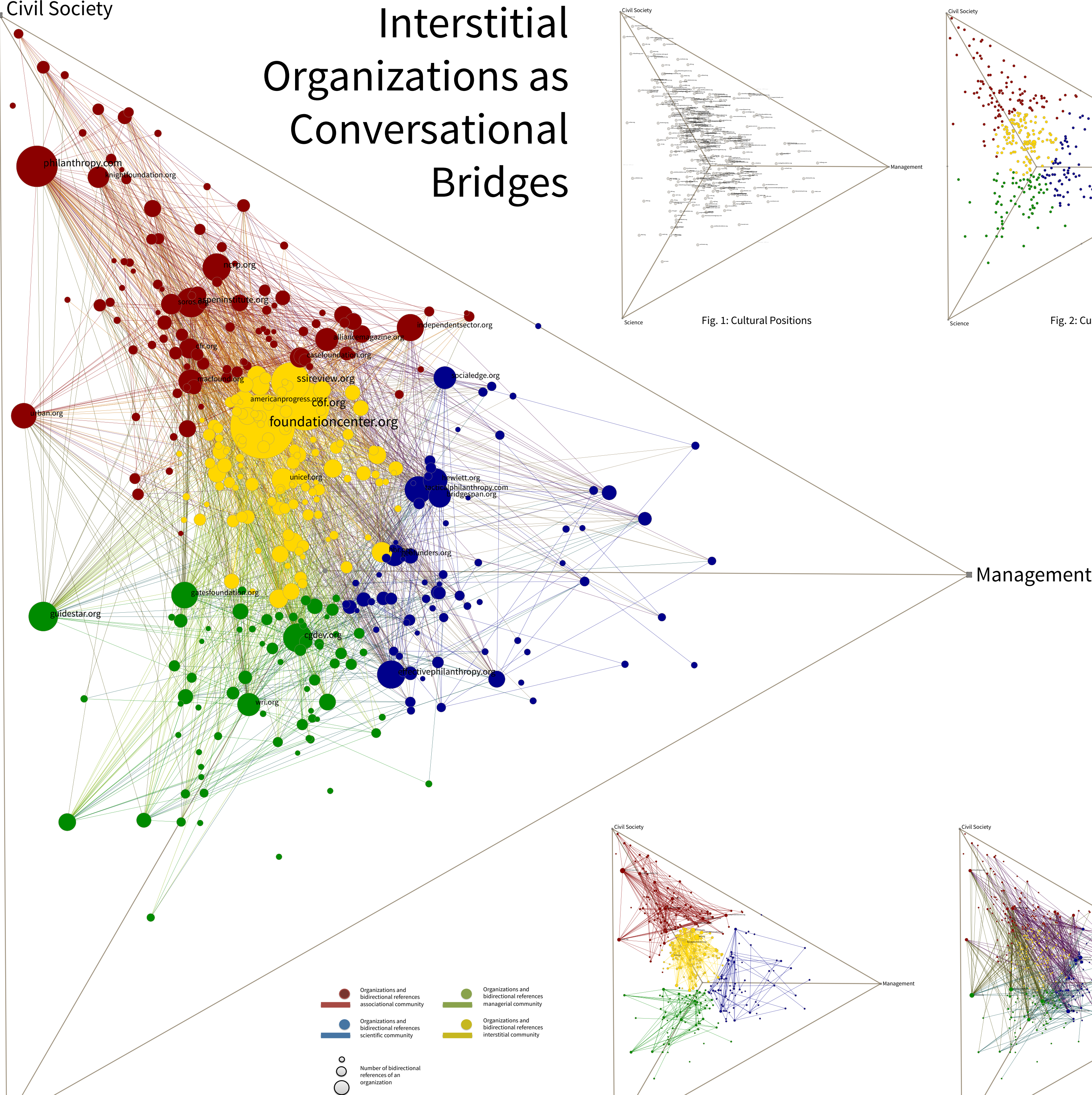


Fig. 6: All Bidirectional References

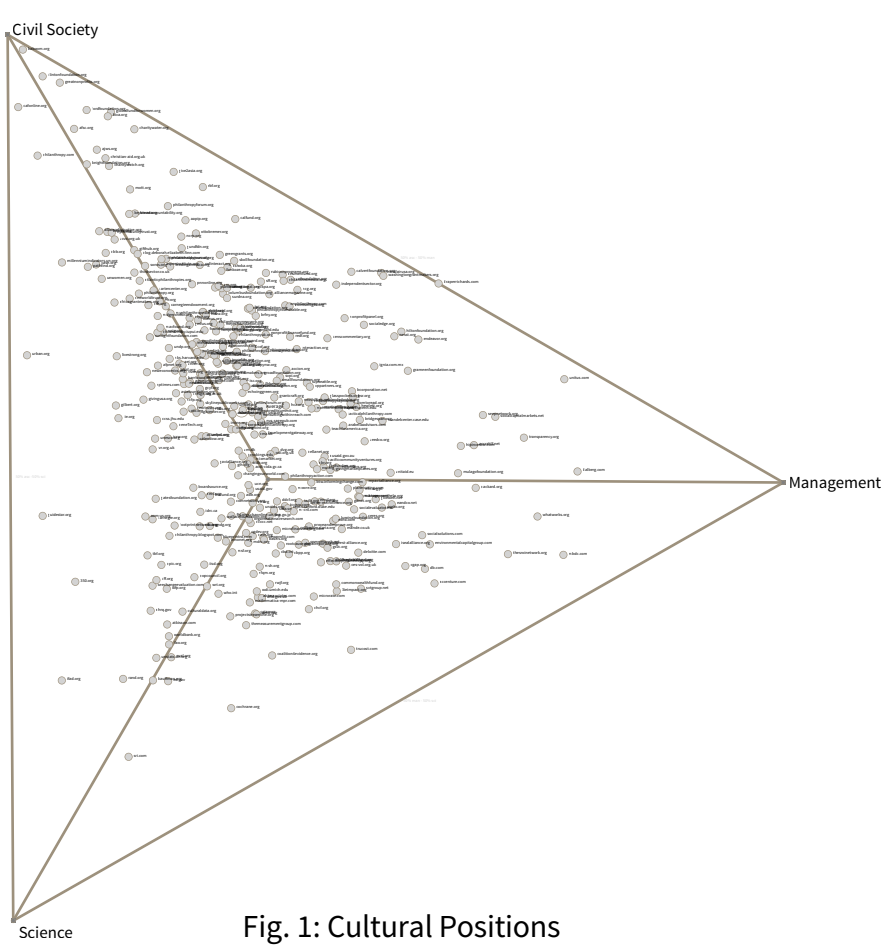


Fig. 1: Cultural Positions

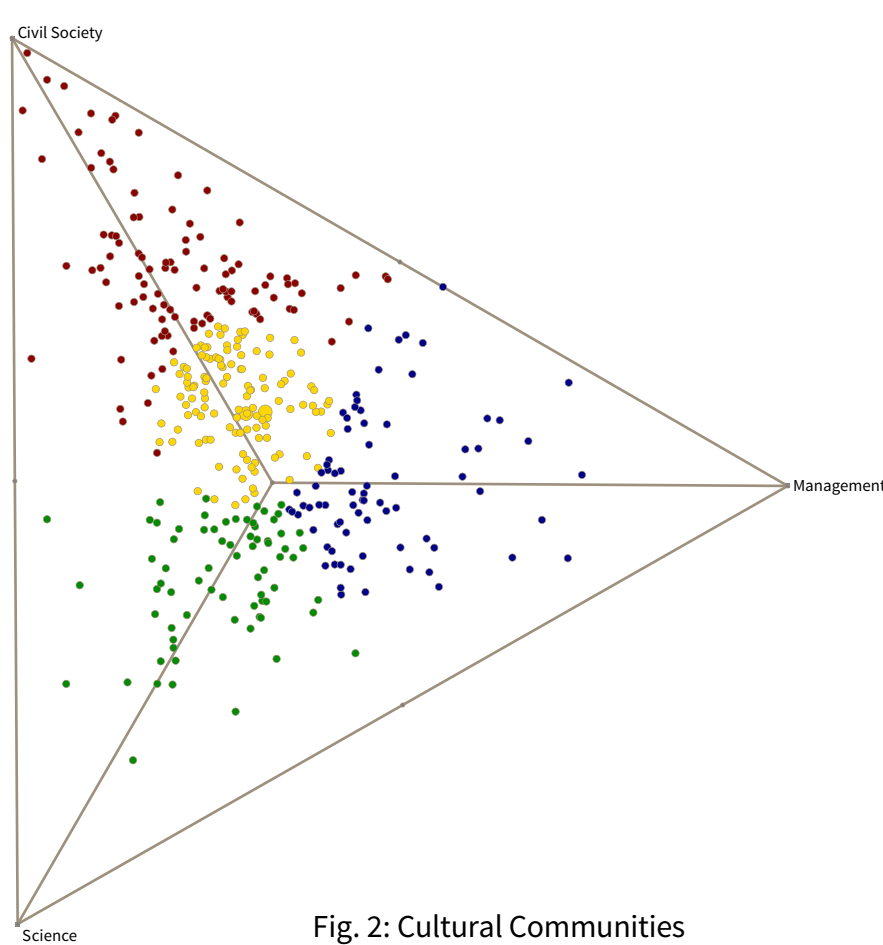


Fig. 2: Cultural Communities

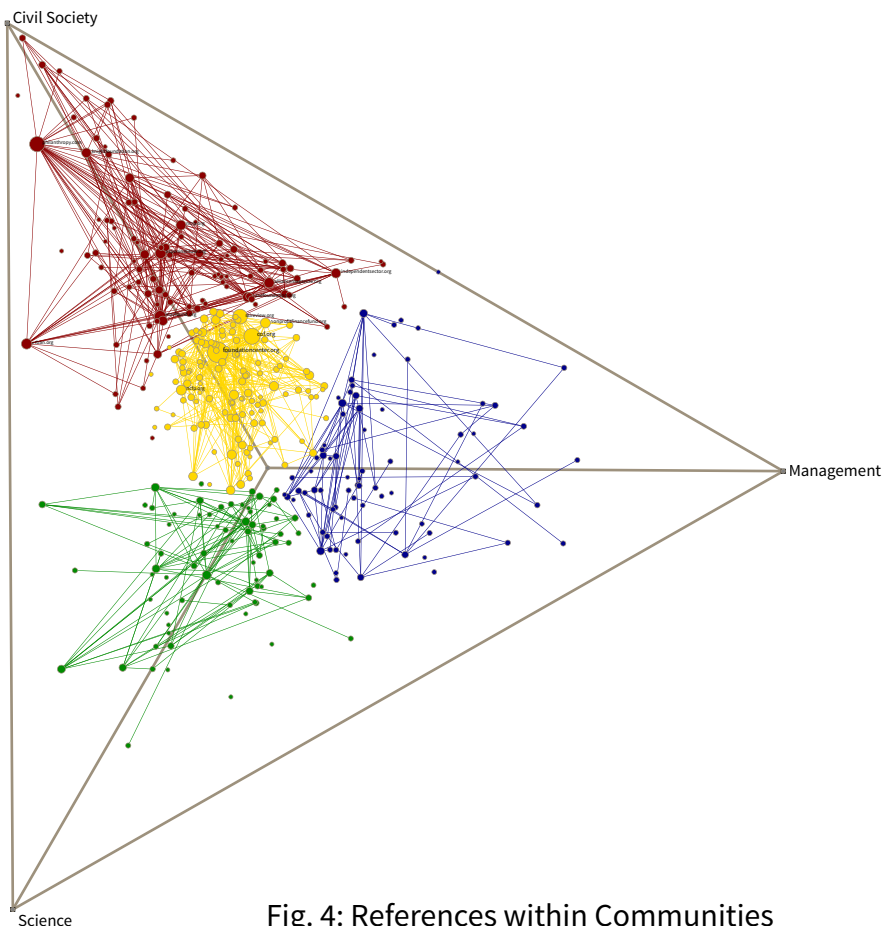


Fig. 4: References within Communities

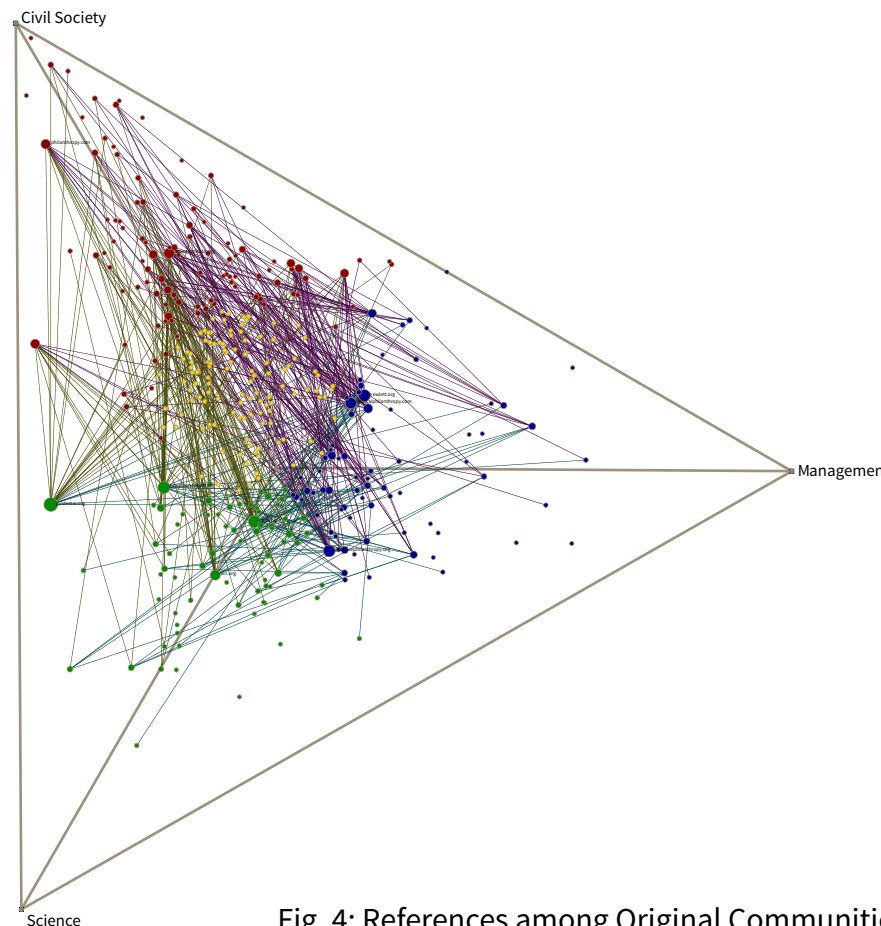


Fig. 4: References among Original Communities

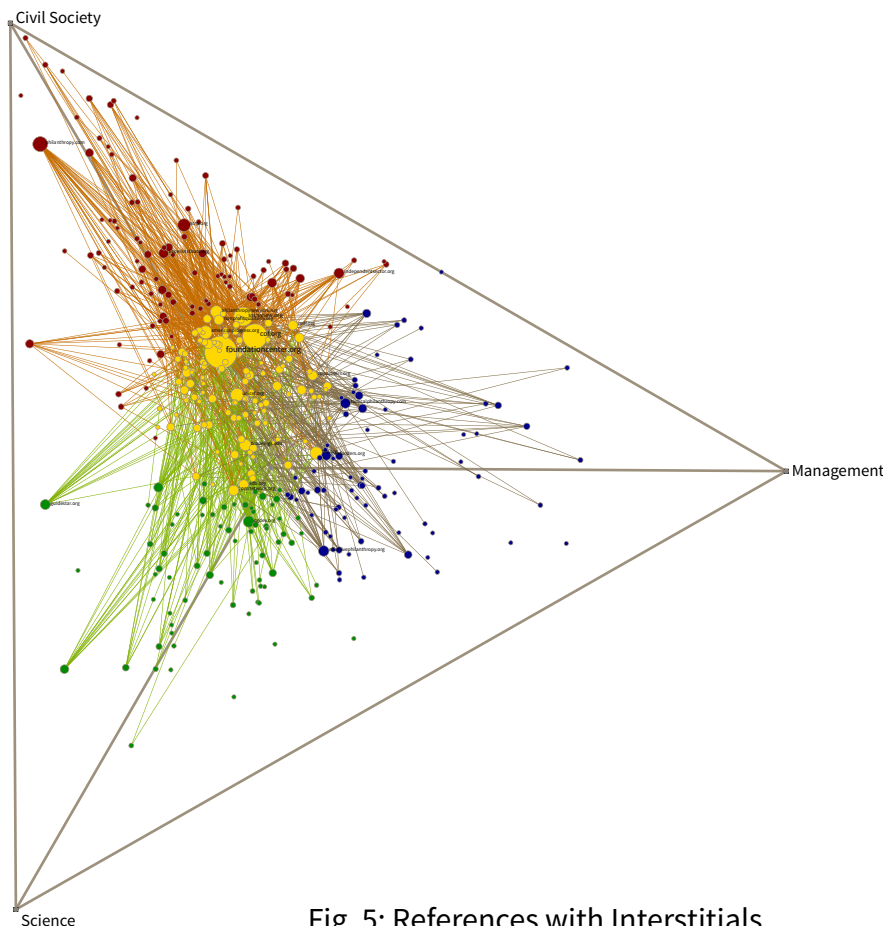


Fig. 5: References with Interstitials

Metrics and Evaluation in the Nonprofit Sector
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Organizational life today is beset by demands for accountability: from health care and banking to humanitarian aid and higher education, there is a clamor to demonstrate and document effectiveness. This progressive rationalization has seen scientific practices of evaluation and managerial concepts of efficiency move into voluntary and charitable domains. The hesitant embrace of performance metrics in the U.S. nonprofit sector is an example of this recombination of practices.

Our maps reflect the presence of civic ideals, managerial concepts, and scientific assessments among 369 organizations actively involved in efforts at measuring social impact. Drawing on a sample based on weblinks on the World Wide Web, we identify how organizations are positioned vis-à-vis these three discourses. The resulting map reflects the linguistic topography of nonprofit performance evaluation (Fig.1). Density is high at the center of this triangle, in the interstice between the communities of science, management, and associations. Organizations in this position draw on all three discourses, representing an interstitial community (Fig.2).

These interstitial organizations share more than cultural similarities; they are densely linked through bi-directional weblinks, forming an integrated cluster of diverse types of organizations, including associations, foundations, consulting firms, think tanks, and the media. They share information and spread ideas (Fig. 3). Their capacity to proselytize practices that recombine civic, managerial and scientific elements becomes evident when we shift from examining their internal connections to external ties. Although some connections exist among the civic, scientific, and managerial communities (Fig. 4), each is more closely connected to the interstitial community (Fig. 5).

Organizations in the interstice are the center of the debate over social impact, recombining concepts and building new frameworks. These maps show that organizations at this interface are the engine driving the merging of the formerly separate domains of science, management and civil society (Fig. 6).