



«*Libraries in Italy: a brief overview in the past , in the present and in the future*»

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Introduction¹

The Italian library network is complex and difficult to explain. Italy does not issue an annual report on the state of its libraries. The Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT - Italian National Institute of Statistics) the official statistical office, does not issue a specific annual report on libraries. The Associazione Italiana Biblioteche (AIB -- Italian Library Association) started the publication of a *Rapporto AIB (AIB Report)* only in 2001. The last report was published in 2006;² the 2007--2008 edition, expected to be published in Spring 2009, is still in progress. This *Rapporto* is gradually becoming a main source for professional update and a showcase of the Italian library situation for anyone in every part of the world. This publication is the result of skilled contributions from many associates, who monitor events occurring within various professional fields and who are happy to share this information with the entire Italian library community. The extraordinary and, in some ways, entirely unique chance to host the IFLA Congress (Milan, Italy, August 23--27, 2009) is stimulating the Italian professional community to always pay great attention to the international context, as strategic decisions taken during international meetings are later transferred into the national context.

There is a great amount of literature published on Italian libraries. What is missing, however, is a study that gives a concise outline of the overall problems. We offer here therefore some features of the Italian library network, a system that comprises State, university, special, public, school, and church libraries, as well of those of foundations and privately owned structures.

The Historical Context of Italian Libraries

The origins of Italian libraries are quite varied and reflect the condition of the cultural and political fragmentation that always characterized the Italian peninsula up to 1861, the year when the Kingdom of Italy was established under the House of Savoy. The year 1861 marked the beginning of a great united independent State. Full unity was in



fact only accomplished on 20 September 1870, with the incorporation of the last areas belonging to the Pontifical State and with the celebration of Rome as capital in 1871.

In the late Middle Ages, libraries attached to monasteries assumed special importance in Italy, as they did in the rest of Western Europe. Their main function was preservation and in many cases they were associated to *scriptoria*. Scribes working in *scriptoria* devoted their time to copying manuscripts, for the most part of patristic and liturgical literature. With the spread of printing with moveable type, book production greatly increased and this resulted in the creation of numerous important libraries promoted by the nobility and the Church. During the 17th century great libraries were opened to the public. Such was the case with the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Ambrosian Library) of Milan. Important libraries were also opened to the public in the 18th century. In the 19th century, with the Unity of Italy, libraries of the pre-unity States were handed over to the Kingdom of Italy and, following the suppression of religious orders in the second half of the 1800s, several ecclesiastical library collections were confiscated by the State. In many cases no consideration was given to the lack of education of a vast part of the Italian population, that is, to the literacy of the lower classes and to scientific training in the productive fields of agriculture, crafts and industry, in which there was a widespread state of backwardness. The bibliographical heritage of the newly born Italy was therefore characterized by an important cultural and historical heritage to be safeguarded, but which was actually not very functional as regards the requirements of the contemporary situation.

From the 1800s to the 1900s

During the second half of the 19th century the structure of Italian libraries was based on the *Regolamento organico delle biblioteche pubbliche statali (Rules of State Public Libraries)*, known at the time as ‘government libraries’. This had a legal value that covered all types of libraries, including public libraries. The *Regolamento* was issued a number of times: in 1876 and in 1885. The founding of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma (Central National Library of Rome) dates to 1876. This was the result of the need to provide the new capital of the Kingdom of Italy with a general library on a large scale that could be comparable to the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (Central National Library of Florence). As



regards public libraries, a census of 1863 counted 100 of them; about half of these showed as having been founded in the previous century, enlarged mostly by gifts, bequests and confiscations of ecclesiastical property; about 70 libraries did not have even as many as 10,000 books. A census of 1893 showed that public libraries had increased fourfold to 419, the most recent of which were formed from the collections of suppressed convents. Administrative law provided that the costs for a public library should be included among the optional expenditures of the local authority. This resulted in a chronic lack of financial resources for public libraries, and in the absence of a development policy for the collections. This in turn prevented the updating of the bibliographical heritage, unsuitable for the needs of a public library, because of the nature (chiefly ancient books) of the works present in the collections. This deficiency was only partly filled by the movement of *biblioteche popolari* (working class libraries); this, with its strongly pedagogical motivation, and in the absence of any notable and lasting support of a legal or economic nature, promoted the circulation of books in the lower classes of society.

The structural development of public authority libraries only began in the 1970s, when the Italian Parliament started to grant to Regions the autonomy which had been foreseen by the *Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana (Constitution of Italy)*. Many librarians and politicians wondered about the role that public libraries should play in modern society and reflected on the need to promote a functional policy in favour of public libraries. Although there were a certain number of difficulties, local decentralization marked a period of intense debate for Italian librarians. It even contributed to marking an evolution in Italian librarianship, that began to overcome its traditional attitude of being bound to scholarship, towards a new concept of library as a *service* with social, cultural and economic characteristics relevant to a certain territorial and user context.

During the 1980s and 1990s there was a marked development in university libraries, thanks to considerable investments -- originally in favour of the automation of catalogues and some services to the public and subsequently in favour of digital libraries and the gradual establishment of university library networks. Some Italian universities participated in the early 1980s in the birth, experimentation and establishment of the Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (SBN -- National Library



Service), a great new step for Italian libraries, which for the first time began to experience cooperation, and to think about their role in terms of cooperation and service to the Italian and international public.

The 1970s and 1980s were also, and especially, marked by the growth of the professionalism of librarians; the figure of the librarian of a public library, in particular, underwent a serious evolution, as did that of the librarian of a university library. They were united by the establishment of a library model based on the management and organizational culture of service to users, on quality, on the measurement and assessment of services.

The National Libraries and the General Management for Books, Cultural Institutes and Copyrights

Historical and political factors were, then, the reason for State libraries having an Italian distinctiveness. Italy does in fact have eight so-called 'National' libraries. The 'National' qualification is assigned to two types of university library: to libraries that carried out a national function in the old pre-unity States, drawn into the new Italian unified State in 1861; and to libraries established in the last decades of the 1900s in various cities, mainly in the South of Italy (for example Bari, Potenza, Cosenza) to mark their importance that was not always soundly motivated and not always due to specific functions. : Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF -- Central National Library of Florence) and the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II di Roma (BNCR -- Victor Emmanuel II Central National Library of Rome). : the Biblioteca Nazionale Sagarriga Visconti di Bari (Sagarriga Visconti Volpi National Library of Bari), the Biblioteca Nazionale di Cosenza (National Library of Cosenza), the Biblioteca Nazionale di Potenza (National Library of Potenza) (institutions founded in the 1900s), the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense di Milano (Braidense National Library of Milan), the Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III di Napoli (Victor Emmanuel III National Library of Naples), and the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana di Venezia (National Library of St. Mark's of Venice). There are 38 State libraries to be added to the eight National libraries, making a total of 46 libraries that are under the authority of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali. (MiBAC -- Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities).



The 46 libraries work under the Direzione Generale per i Beni Librari, gli Istituti culturali ed il Diritto d'Autore (from now on General Management for Books Heritage, Cultural Institutes and Copyright),³ which is a Department of MiBAC.⁴ The General Management deals with State public libraries, bibliographical services and national libraries, cultural institutes, promotion of books and reading, copyright and royalties, and conservation and promotion of library collections; it also assists publishers and fosters the diffusion of Italian culture abroad; it supervises cultural institutes such as academies and foundations.

Biblioteca Digitale Italiana (Italian Digital Library)¹¹

The digitization of historical catalogues has been singled out, considering that Italy lacks bibliographical information in digital format relating to historical collections owned by public libraries. Moreover the BDI Committee takes into account that digitization of such information is not only a service but also a preservative activity. The availability of this information would be essential both at national and international levels; it would also be important as a guide to further orientate digitization programmes in our country. On the basis of these ideas, underlined in the feasibility study, two pre-programmes on music resources and serials have been started.

Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico delle biblioteche italiane e per le informazioni bibliografiche (ICCU -- Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and for Bibliographic Information)

The Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and Bibliographic Information (ICCU) got its current name in 1975 when it replaced the Centro Nazionale per il Catalogo Unico (National Centre for the Union Catalogue), created in 1951 with the task of cataloguing the national bibliographical heritage. Its aim is to arrive at a union catalogue of all Italian libraries; this is sought through cooperation with different types of library (State, university, local authority, etc.). ICCU looks after the National Library Service (SBN), the network that links the libraries of MiBAC and of other ministries, those of local bodies, universities and other institutes which contribute to the creation of the Italian joint catalogue. Moreover, the Institute



promotes and coordinates national censuses of the manuscripts of Italian editions of the 16th century present in the country's libraries.

In brief, the ICCU is responsible for:

- promoting and coordinating cataloguing and documentation and overseeing the unification of methods
- publishing and overseeing the sale and spread of the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries
- corresponding with public and private foreign bibliographical institutes, and with international bodies working in the sector.

Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (SBN -- National Library Service)

The Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale was born in the 1980s. SBN is the most widespread network of Italian libraries; it is promoted by MiBAC, Regions and universities. It is coordinated by the ICCU, whose aim is the creation of one union catalogue of Italian libraries (called *Indice*). Its members include (in 2008) over 3200 State, university, local body, public and private institution libraries, of general or specialist nature and in various fields, gathered into 61 *poli* (nodes).¹⁴

Member libraries share the same database model and the same bibliographical format (SBN-MARC). Above all they share the same idea of cooperation and the same objectives: to provide citizens with a joint national catalogue containing millions of records, and the related services of resource searching, finding and circulation.

At the end of the 1970s Angela Vinay, director of ICCU and AIB President, drew up the project for the National Library Service clearly and far-sightedly; SBN was to be primarily focussed on three premises:

1. Bibliographical control based on a national book archive and on a national bibliography; this was not to be limited to the mere reception and description of current publishing output, but to work towards the retrospective cataloguing of books published in the past. This would have made it possible to build a more or less exhaustive integrated structure of documentary collections and controlled descriptions of the resources collected.



2. Universal availability of publications based on a national service of interlibrary loan (ILL) and on the support of related international programmes.
3. Professional education of librarians entrusted to innovative academic programmes.

The SBN Network

The first local *poli* (nodes) were activated in 1985. These are formed of one or more libraries and linked to the union catalogue, also known as *Indice SBN* (SBN Index). In 1992, with the start of *Indice SBN*, the Italian national network was created. Initially, the *Indice SBN* only held identification (essential) details of the bibliographical records; starting from 1992, it contains a complete bibliographic description.

SBN supports standardization and cataloguing simplification; these are considered the basic necessity for the provision of services to users and for the participation of Italy in the world programmes of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) and Universal Availability of Publications (UAP).

The creation of an integrated union catalogue was not foreseen; in the 1980s coding of cataloguing data was still a goal to be achieved. Angela Vinay writes:

Before SBN the majority of [Italian] librarians did not know the national cataloguing rules or even, in some cases, use any rules for the description of documents. Cataloguing in SBN coincided therefore, for many, with learning RICA (*Regole italiane di catalogazione per autori; Italian Cataloguing Rules for Authors*) and ISBD.¹⁵

Libraries that form part of SBN are gathered into local nodes; each pole consists of one or more libraries, grouped on a territorial basis, that manage all the services with automated procedures through terminals linked to a server. The network has a stellar architecture that foresees communication between a central network (*Indice*) and the peripheral *poli* (nodes). When the user accesses the *Indice* he can search a bibliographic resource, find it in the SBN libraries that possess it and read its bibliographic record.



SBN libraries work independently and at the same time are united in a cooperative system based on a national network. The main functional characteristic that makes this integration possible is shared cataloguing. In SBN a resource is catalogued only by the first library that acquires it. Other libraries take its bibliographic record from the *Indice SBN* and add the local call number. The *Indice SBN* comprises three main databases, which are:

1. *Base dati Indice--Libri moderni (Modern Books Data Base)*. It is the main and the largest database; it is in constant growth. It contains information regarding books published since 1831, and old and modern periodicals. In September 2008 it contained 3,051,966 personal authors and collective bodies, and 9,031,143 titles showing more than 42 million call numbers in SBN member libraries.
2. *Base dati Indice--Libri antichi (Antiquarian data base)*. It contains information on books published from the beginning of printing with moveable type up to and including 1830, the year conventionally adopted at the international level as the demarcation line between early printed and modern material. In September 2008 the database contained information on 665,147 titles and 1,820,235 call numbers.
3. *Base dati Indice--Musica (Music data base)*. It contains information regarding manuscript music, printed music, librettos for music published from the 16th century, and sound recordings of over 500 public and private libraries. It is the main source for the retrospective national bibliography of music. In September 2008, the database included 656,764 items.

The databases can be consulted on the Web at <http://opac.sbn.it/opacsbn/opac/icc/informazioni.jsp>.

The *Anagrafe delle biblioteche italiane (Registry Office of Italian Libraries)* is very important. It contains information on Italian libraries and their essential information: address, size of the bibliographic collection, type of collection and services to users. Since September 2008 the libraries covered by the database numbered 16,421.

Catalogue

The OPAC SBN (SBN OPAC) is the public interface of the *Indice*, the union catalogue of the libraries that participate in the SBN. The OPAC SBN contains: descriptions of the resources acquired by SBN libraries starting from the years around



1990 or from the entry of that individual library into SBN, other documents of the 16th to the 20th centuries and descriptions of books recovered from paper catalogues dating to before 1990.

The database of OPAC SBN is updated weekly. OPAC SBN allows to:

- identify the resources in which you are interested
- select libraries that have those resources and access the record of the individual library
- access local catalogues for additional information on the availability of the resource
- access the online loan service or document delivery (ILL SBN) if the library provides such a service
- access authority records (*Voci di autorità*) in the authority file, controlled form of names created to grant univocity and uniformity of access points in the catalogue.

At the present time, just a part of the records for persons are recorded and researchable. There exist only authority records for authors and only for a small part of them.

University Library Networks¹⁶

The situation is a rather complex one. Universities of Centre-North Italy have well-organized and efficient library networks. Among these are the Universities of Trent, Milan, Genoa, Pavia, Padua, Bologna, Florence and Siena. Universities of Southern Italy have difficulty in organizing themselves, in spite of some praiseworthy exceptions. This just confirms the historical gap between the different areas of the country, although a certain activism does emerge in the South and in the islands.

Only a part of university library networks participate in SBN; among university library networks that do not participate in SBN, Aleph ILS is a popular choice. Other universities still use different software, without participating in any cooperative program.

A census of Italian university library networks, held in 2007, resulted from the convergence of interests between the Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane



(CRUI -- Conference of Italian University Rectors) and the Gruppo interuniversitario sul monitoraggio dei sistemi bibliotecari di ateneo (GIM -- Interuniversity Group on Monitoring of University Library Networks)¹⁷. Investigated universities numbered 74 (73 of whom provided answers), the data being referred to 2006. Formal establishment of library networks appears by now to have been almost completed at national level. In fact only two universities declared that they formalized the existence of the library network in any of their by-laws.

Reorganization of Italian universities in recent years led to a decrease in the number of university libraries from the 1345 estimated for 77 universities in 2002 to 1227 for 73 universities in 2007. The number of service points also declined from 1902 to 1553 in the same period, and this process allowed to reduce costs while offering the same quality.

The total space assigned to university library services is estimated at 696,000 square metres. The total number of reading places declined slightly from 84,510 in 2002 to 80,614 in 2006. As regards the collections, the GIM estimated about 1,075,000 annual acquisitions and 209,000 active subscriptions to print periodicals for 2006. Total expenditure on bibliographic material for 2006 was EUR 116,448,425. Eighty-three percent of university libraries provide lending and reference services, while 76 percent provide document delivery services.

The commitment of Italian universities towards open access became a concrete reality with the signature by 72 of 77 rectors of Italian universities of the *Dichiarazione di Messina (Messina Statement)*¹⁹ in November 2004. The impact of this document on the situation of Italian universities was, however, less than expected, due to the lack of a national policy in support of open access and, above all, of a related “organizational infrastructure at national level that could support coordinated research and study projects inherent to the reform and diffusion of the scientific communication system, within whose scope funds for supporting repositories could be allocated”²⁰. In spite of this, in 2007--2008 a strategy of self-archiving showed a gradual and significant step forward in Italy. In July 2008, there were in fact 40 Italian archives indexed in the OpenDOAR, the Directory of Open Access Repositories²¹.



Public Libraries²²

According to statistics compiled by ICCU,²³ there are 4918 public libraries, most of which (4797, nearly 98 percent of the total) belong to municipalities. Of the remainder, 55 are owned by Regions, 10 by Provinces, 24 by consortia and associations of corporate bodies and 9 by unions of municipalities. As in the case of university libraries, there is a considerable gap between the various areas of the country: more than half (51 percent) are located in Northern Italy, 20 percent in the Centre and 29 percent in the South (the extent of the imbalance is to be related to the population to be served). Although public libraries of Southern Italy are not always functional, in certain areas of the South they are beginning to be a consolidated reality.

Public libraries offer a host of services, and bibliographic resources are available for reading on site or for loan. In most cases (58 percent) book collections do not exceed 10,000 volumes. Almost one third (32 percent) of the libraries have collections of 10,000 to 100,000 volumes, while only 3.3 percent exceed that threshold.

As regards attendances, the only information available at national level comes from the ISTAT investigation:²⁴ in 2006 11.7 percent of the population of 11 years of age and older (6,100,000 people) state they had been in a library at least once in the 12 months preceding the interview. Of these over half did so exclusively for reasons of study and/or work (51.7 percent), 36.4 percent only for recreational purposes, and 10.5 percent for both purposes. Libraries are used more in the North-East (16.1 percent), the North-West follows with 13.5 percent; the Centre is at 11.1 percent. Lesser percentages are found in the South (7.7 percent) and in the Islands (9.4 percent). The ISTAT survey showed that people go to the public library to borrow books (59.1 percent), read and study (44.5 percent), get general or bibliographic information (42.4 percent) and, to a lesser extent, consult catalogues (11.8 percent), borrow newspapers, magazines or other printed material (7.4 percent), and borrow audio-visual material (8.5 percent). A comparison with the data for 2000 shows an increase in the number of users who attend libraries to read/study (from 40.6 percent to 44.5 percent) and to borrow audiovisual material (from 4.2 percent to 8.5 percent),



while there is a decrease in the number of users who go to libraries to get information (from 43.8 percent to 42.4 percent).

Other Libraries

Many foreign universities, especially those of the United States, have a library in Italy, especially in Florence and Rome. Moreover, the library of the European University Institute, specializing in social and juridical subjects, is located in Fiesole (Florence).

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican Apostolic Library)

The origins of the library, located in the Vatican City, date to the early centuries of the papacy. The current library took shape with the humanist Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455), who organized a large collection of codices, the first nucleus of the Vatican Library. Pope Sixtus IV gave it juridical form through the bull *Ad decorem militantis ecclesiae* (15th July 1475). The library has acquired numerous manuscript and book collections: the library of Fulvio Orsini (1657), the library of Queen Christina of Sweden (1690), and the private libraries of numerous pontiffs. The Vatican Library specializes in humanities (history, history of art, classic literature, philology); it has volumes in many languages and in various alphabets. The patrimony consists of: 1,600,000 ancient and modern printed volumes; 8,300 incunabula (of which 65 are on parchment); 150,000 manuscript codices and archival papers; 300,000 coins and medals and about 20,000 art objects. Access is granted only to university teachers and scholars. Documents cannot be borrowed. The catalogue of the modern printed volumes is online since 1985, and includes over 800,000 records.

Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Ambrosian Library)

The Biblioteca Ambrosiana, located in Milan, was founded by Cardinal Federico Borromeo in 1609, and is one of the first public libraries of Europe. It was conceived by its founder as a study centre: he in fact desired that the library should be near to other cultural institutions, such as the Collegio dei Dottori, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Art Gallery. The cardinal collected many Greek, Latin and vulgar codices for his library and also codices in various oriental languages.. There is also an Arab and Oriental collection of great importance and the *Codice Atlantico (Atlantic Code)* of Leonardo of Vinci.



Biblioteca Sala Borsa (Sala Borsa Library)

Biblioteca Europea di Informazione e Cultura (BEIC -- European Library of Information and Culture)

The 'Milano Biblioteca del 2000' Association was founded in 1997 with the aim of promoting the creation of a European Library of Information and Culture, with its seat in Milan, occupying an area of 20,000 square metres. The international competition for its design, announced by the Municipality of Milan in 2001, was completed on 9th November 2001. The competition was won by the architect Peter Wilson of Münster, Germany. The final project was handed over on 18th April 2006 and the executive plan was consigned on 4th March 2008.

Legal Deposit

The new law on legal deposit (law no. 106 of 15th April 2004) replaces the law of 1939 and subsequent amendments of 1945. On 3rd May 2006 the D.P.R. (Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica — President of Italian Republic Decree) no. 252 was issued: *Regolamento recante norme in materia di deposito legale dei documenti di interesse culturale destinati all'uso pubblico (Regulations on the Norms Regarding the Legal Deposit of Documents of Cultural Interest Destined for Public Use)*, in force from 2nd September 2006.

AIB contributed useful suggestions and proposals for the necessary amendments to the 1939 regulations. However, the law of 2004 did not really deal with today's problems of legal deposit; the context has indeed quite changed from that of 1939. Law 106/2004 therefore presents both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspects are:

- clear identification of the goals which should be achieved with legal deposit
- statement of the need for two levels of archive: national and regional
- transfer of the documents from the printer (simple executants) to the publisher (responsible for the work)
- full list of the different types of documents to be deposited for the formation of the archive, including also digital-born resources and web distributed resources.



The inclusion of electronic resources, in agreement with the latest IFLA/UNESCO guidelines of 2000³⁴ still has a taste of avant-garde; few laws of European countries include web distributed resources at present, because of the obvious difficulties of preservation, description and control of them. At the moment, however, a real digital repository does not yet exist.

The new legal deposit regulations are important because they increase the coverage of the national publishing output, especially as regards so-called lesser publishing and as regards the extension of the deposit requirement to graphics and electronic resources, excluded until now from the legal deposit, and for the positive effects on the national bibliographical services as a whole.

Copyright

A process for reorganizing laws regarding intellectual property and copyright started in 2002. Its aim was to adapt and bring Italian legislation into line with the general principles of the European Union.

The work of revising the text of the law in force (633/1941) on copyright has been intensified in recent years, thanks to a specially formed Commission within the MiBAC Permanent Consultative Committee³⁶ (ex art. 190 of l. 633/1941). In 2005 the Commission in office at the time tried to prepare a systematic reform project that was innovative in its form and content, but without success. It did however produce a draft that was judged negatively by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers then in office. The aim of the Commission in office for the three-year period 2007--2009 was to promote a serious discussion in order to arrive at transparent and shared solutions. Representatives of the AIB contributed to the drawing up of the proposals of the Working Group 'Libere utilizzazioni' (Free Uses); these proposals, together with those of other working groups were first inserted in wiki and then in the final document *Proposte per una riforma del diritto d'autore -- Proposals for a Reform of Copyright*³⁷ delivered to MiBAC in December 2007.

A correct application of the laws in force on copyright for libraries means limiting the activities of users, such as the reduction to 15 percent of the contents that can be photocopied and the prohibition to reproduce and lend printed music. Italy, like several other European countries, was convicted by the European Commission for not



having applied the European Commission directive 92/100/CE on public reading libraries (the law required to charge a fee for loans made in public libraries).

Following the sentence, the Italian government amended the national regulation in force, introducing the principle of remuneration of publishers for loans in State and local body libraries and establishing a national fund of EUR 3 million. The fund is financed 80 percent by the State and 20 percent by Regions.

The main reform proposals made by the AIB, and shared with the other associations participating in the 'Free uses' Working Group are:

- lawfulness of reproductions in order to aid the preservation aid the preservation of the works in library collections
- making available the backup copy in the place of the original
- gratuitousness of reading of works or playing of pieces of works of any type, carried out for cultural advertising in public libraries or in similar cultural institutes, after communication to owners of copyright
- legality of reproduction of indexes, summaries, abstracts, covers, etc. in OPACS
- communication to the public of orphan works or of those no longer on sale
- reproduction by libraries and communication to the public in favour of users with physical disabilities
- increase of the percentage of pages that can be reproduced for personal-only use
- lawfulness of electronic document delivery for personal-only use.

Professional Education and the Library Profession³⁸

In Italy as elsewhere, higher education is considered the basic path for the education of librarians. The Italian university system currently includes 80 universities associated with the CRUI. Many universities offer graduate courses in cultural heritage studies and some a postgraduate degree in archival science and librarianship. Other universities offer annual master's courses; the University of Florence, for example, has a two-year master's course. Since 1997, the University of Udine, in consortium with other Italian universities and, since 2007, the Università La Sapienza

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of Rome, offers a PhD program in bibliography, librarianship and archival science. The Scuola Superiore per archivisti e bibliotecari (SSAB -- Special School for Archivists and Librarians) of La Sapienza, once the only Italian postgraduate course in the field, now completely restructured, offers a very varied series of studies. Updated information on education opportunities in this field can be found through the *AIB-WEB Formazione professionale* (Professional formation) list.³⁹

The profession of librarian does not have juridical recognition in Italy, nor does it have a precisely defined educational curriculum. Every individual administration adopts different criteria for hiring new staff.

In this difficult context, Italian librarians and AIB have tried to contact labor unions and bodies that own libraries to define professional profiles.

Professional Associations

Associazione italiana biblioteche (AIB -- Italian Library Association)

The Italian Library Association (AIB) is the professional association of Italian librarians. It was founded in 1930, with the name of Association of Italian Librarians, and it took its current name in 1933. It has about 4,000 members, mainly librarians, but membership is also open to libraries and to persons or bodies interested in the field (students, international libraries, private companies, etc.). Corporate bodies (local and otherwise) form approximately 10 percent of the members. The Association has among its objectives the promotion of the organization and development of libraries in Italy; AIB works through commissions and study groups and through the organization of congresses and conferences. The institutional structure of AIB is divided into a Comitato Esecutivo Nazionale (CEN -- National Executive Committee) composed of seven members; CEN is flanked by the College of Arbitrators and the Union College, and Comitati Esecutivi Regionali (CER -- Regional Executive Committees), these too with seven members each, all elected every 3 years.

Regional sections have financial and political autonomy. It publishes two periodicals: *Bollettino AIB* (*AIB Bulletin*): a four-monthly bulletin; it deals with librarianship issues with special attention to the international sphere and to innovations in the field.



AIB notizie (AIB news): this is the association's newsletter, dedicated to news, information on the association and its activities, subjects of interest that emerged from online discussion lists, etc.

AIB organizes a National Congress every year. In 2008 it had arrived at its 55th edition. The annual national congress also hosts Bibliocom, a fair of products and services for libraries.

The AIB official website, AIB-WEB (<http://www.aib.it>) provides institutional information and documents on the activity of the Association, and also news on libraries and library professions. Among the major services are the *Repertorio degli OPAC italiani (Index of Italian OPACs)*, on whose basis MAI was created, *Segnaweb*, an index of websites selected by Italian librarians, useful for the information services of public libraries, but also directly for citizens.

A Current Overview of Italian Libraries

The current situation of Italian libraries probably reflects the more general problems and characteristics of our society: almost half of the libraries are located in the North; the remainder are located between the Centre and the South; there are no complete statistics regarding public libraries and surveys highlight a lack of homogeneity in geographic distribution and in the quality of services. All the information and indicators worsen gradually as we go from the North to the South of Italy; about half of the libraries possess less than 5,000 resources, a quantity that is insufficient for assuring even a basic access to culture. Lack of homogeneity of services and weak structures characterize Italian libraries, in spite of the undoubted points of excellence, especially within public and university libraries.

National Services

National services carry out an irreplaceable function even if currently lacking and inadequate, but they need to make radical changes.

What proposals can be put forward?

National Library of Italy and Italian National Bibliography.

The establishment of a single National Library of Italy is to be desired. This would encompass at least the current BNCF, BNCR, ICCU, the Istituto Centrale per i Beni

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Sonori e Audiovisivi and the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario. This Library would be guaranteed autonomy from a scientific, financial and administrative point of view. The State should concentrate its resources on the infrastructural services that are required for a National Library of Italy and for an Italian National Bibliography. Bibliographic control should be timely, distributed (but with a central agency that coordinates the bibliographical process), using skilled personnel. A first step in this direction is the upcoming creation of a single SBN node that will encompass BNCF and BNCR.

Final Comments

The complex situation of Italian libraries and the variety of bodies that manage them would require the establishment of a framework transversal to libraries of various types, possibly under the protection of a professional agency, in cooperation with university research structures. Italian libraries, like the entire cultural field, receive funding that is often inadequate to the service mission and to their information and cultural function. Moreover, the gap between the North and South of the country remains unresolved as regards the quality of sites and services.

In the last 20 years, however (and notwithstanding frequent negligence and confusion), numerous bodies (MiBAC, universities, municipalities, provinces, dioceses, etc.) have invested in the functional restructuring of historical libraries (for example, the Municipal Library of Trent, the Classense Library of Ravenna), in the inauguration of modern libraries that respect the quality standards established by IFLA (for example, the National Library of Bari, the Biblioteca Sala Borsa of Bologna, the Library of the University of Bolzano, numerous libraries of the University of Venice, the Biblioteca di Scienze Sociali of the University of Florence, the Biblioteca San Giorgio of Pistoia) and in the presentation of projects for new libraries (for example the University Library of Genoa). Again in the last 20 years there has been a considerable professional growth in Italian librarians, who, in many cases, have attained a commendable level of quality, due to the spread of librarianship in Italian universities, the introduction of professional courses by AIB, Regions and private agencies, the spread of periodicals specializing in LIS and the participation of an increasing number of Italian librarians in the international scientific and professional.

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