

A need for an intense collaboration: assessing the ways in which librarians are supporting research in Italy

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'A need for an intense collaboration'

Rossana Morriello assesses the ways in which librarians are supporting research in Italy

In line with other countries, in Italy many academic librarians are working inside and outside the library walls to support researchers in all aspects of the research lifecycle.

Involvement of librarians in such activities can follow different organisation models:

- Librarians work in research support services or other services supporting research assessment and quality;
- Research support activities are located in library services where a special office has been created to support research and some librarians are involved specifically in those activities; and
- Research support activities are located in library services with no changes in the previous organisational structure.

The most specific areas that require librarians' expertise are management of the Current Research Information System (CRIS) and the institutional repository, support in the assessment procedures, and support in the development of open access.

Most universities, in Italy, use the same D-Space-based CRIS, IRIS (Institutional Research Information System <https://www.cineca.it/en/content/iris-institutional-research-information-system>), developed by the Consortium Cineca (<https://www.cineca.it/en/content/about-us>), a non-profit organisation providing IT solutions for education and research, now part of the Ministry for Education, University and Research (MIUR <http://www.miur.gov.it/>). Each university has its own installation of the CRIS but the system has many common features so that universities can work together, and with Cineca, to implement necessary features through sharing and discussion in some national work groups. This allows us to share experiences and find common solutions to the many challenges we have.

Most challenges and activities are a consequence of the methods of research assessment lead by the national evaluation agency, Anvur (<http://www.anvur.it/en/>). Anvur collects data directly from the IRIS system of each university, for the main research assessment exercise, VQR (Valutazione Qualità della Ricerca – evaluation of research quality), as well



“Societal impact is becoming more and more important as a measure of return on public investment in universities”

as other kinds of assessment and career development procedures. Therefore, quality of data in CRIS and repository is crucial, and librarians are primary actors in guaranteeing the quality of what is nothing else than a kind of catalogue.

The first VQR research assessment exercise, covering the years 2004 to 2010, began in 2011 and the results were published in 2013. Researchers had to select their three best publications which were evaluated by a panel of experts called GEV (Gruppo di Esperti della Valutazione). There were 14 panels that conducted the evaluation of more than 180,000 outputs, based either on bibliometric indicators (with minor peer review) for bibliometric sectors or peer review for non bibliometric sectors. A second research assessment exercise in 2015/16 for research outputs covered the years 2011 to 2014 with mainly the same criteria (but researchers had to choose only the two best publications).

Italian national assessment of research is strongly based on bibliometrics (for bibliometric sectors, of course), and also

for the evaluation of research career advancement ASN (Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale), in the new framework set in 2012 by a law (DM n. 76, 7 June 2012) which states the kind of indicators to be used. Therefore, academic librarians involved in supporting research are required to understand and manage bibliometrics and databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, and have a deep knowledge of impact factors, h-index, SNIP and other indices. There is a great debate in Italy, as much as in other countries, about the effectiveness of this kind of evaluation and its long-term consequences on the development of science.

A point of attention in the evaluation is the 'third mission' of the university. The last VQR assessment increased the importance of the third mission, as a signal of the impact of the university on society, and particularly of public engagement activities.

Societal impact is becoming more and more important as a measure of return on public investment in universities, but also as an opportunity to increase and improve knowledge transfer and participation of citizens in science. Indicators for evaluating the third mission were still weak in the last VQR, but they will certainly become stronger in the next assessment exercise, expected in 2020. Anvur recently announced a partnership with Research England (<http://www.anvur.it/news/hascela-partnership-tra-anvur-e-research-england-2/>) to study and exploit models for the evaluation of the third mission. Research England has recently introduced the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) for assessment of the third mission, which will presumably be a model for Anvur.

Libraries and librarians are involved in supporting the third mission of the universities for the evaluation, but they can also have an active role in the organisation of public engagement events.

A recent topic that developed rapidly in Italian universities is Agenda 2030. In 2015 the United Nations published the Sustainable Development Goals, a set of 17 goals to be reached by 2030, with 160 targets and 240 indicators (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>).



→ Sustainable development goals (SDGs), defined by the UN as 'a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future', are strongly related to the academic world, as an important commitment of the universities towards society for the achievement of all goals through research, education and third mission.

In Italy, in order to promote and spread the culture of sustainability, the Conference of Rectors of Italian University (CRUI <https://www.cruai.it/cruai-english.html>) created in 2015 a network of universities for sustainable development, RUS (<https://sites.google.com/unive.it/rus/home>). RUS is working on mapping the state of the art (for example, mapping publications and research outputs upon SDGs), promoting instruction, and planning actions to support Agenda 2030. Some universities are also involved in the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development, ASviS, (<http://asvis.it/asvis-italian-alliance-for-sustainable-development>), an association that includes different kinds of public institutions, foundations and associations. Among them is the Italian Library Association, which is working on the topics via a study group, of which I am a member (<https://www.aib.it/struttura/commissioni-e-gruppi/gruppo-asvis/>), to set indicators for culture and libraries and to spread Agenda 2030 principles in all libraries.

Finally, another hot topic for academic librarians supporting research in Italy is, of course, open science. After the Budapest Open Access Initiative and Berlin Declaration, in 2004, most Italian universities signed the Messina Declaration on Open Access. In the same year, a couple of university consortia (now merged into Cineca) launched the portal PLEIADI (Portal for Italian Electronic Scholarly Literature in Institutional Archives <http://find.openarchives.it/>).

In 2006, the Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities (CRUI) established a Working Group on open access (OA) as part of the CRUI Library Committee, which released guidelines. Some non-profit organisations are also working, at national level, on OA, such as AISA (Associazione Italiana per la promozione della Scienza Aperta – Italian Association for the promotion of Open Science <http://aisa.sp.unipi.it/about-aisa/>) and IOSSG (Italian Open Science Support Group - <https://sites.google.com/view/iossg/home>), and the Italian Library Association has a study group on OA ([https://www.aib.it/struttura/commissioni-e-gruppi/gruppo-studio-access-pubblico-dominio/](https://www.aib.it/struttura/commissioni-e-gruppi/gruppo-studio-commissioni-e-gruppi/gruppo-studio-access-pubblico-dominio/)).

Despite many initiatives to support and implement OA practices, there is still a lot of



The Castle of Valentino, home to the architecture faculty at Polytechnic University of Turin

“There is no way to face the many challenges without a collaboration between all components of academic institutions”

work to do to spread the awareness of OA culture. Most obstacles to spreading OA are due to the national research assessment lead by Anvur, which does not consider OA as a good practice to reward at all. Being strongly based on bibliometrics, the Italian evaluation system does not promote OA practices, so researchers are not encouraged to publish in OA. Consequently, often they have not enough knowledge of this opportunity and have many prejudices about publishing in OA, especially because some consider the quality of OA journals to be lower, and fear copyright infringement.

A strong advocacy campaign is then essential in universities and academic librarians are the most involved professionals in this task. Many universities have released their policy for OA (the list here http://wikimedia.sp.unipi.it/index.php/OA_Italia/Regolamenti_e_Policy_sull%27Open_Access - including my institution, which released it on 1 June) but often this did not create significant change. With a lot of effort and advocacy by librarians, policy makers try to foster in researchers the habit to store papers (either in post-print or pre-print version) in the institutional repositories and, in the short-term, achieve green OA, while working to attain gold OA in the long-term.

A further theme, which is gradually becoming a central issue in universities, and partly involving librarians, is open data and data management. Few universities in Italy have a policy for open data, but a couple have a specific policy and are working intensively with data, such as the University of Milan (<https://www.unimi.it/it/ateneo/normative/policy/policy-sulla-gestione-dei-dati-della-ricerca-rdm>) and the University of Padua (https://bibliotecadigitale.cab.unipd.it/bd/per_chi_pubblica/rdm).

For sure, inputs coming from the European Commission and related to European programmes such as Horizon 2020 and the future innovation framework programme Horizon Europe will help to spread the awareness and practices of OA and open data that will become more and more relevant in academic research.

Therefore, the near-future scenario for academic librarians will be a greater and greater involvement in all of the research life cycle, from data collection to the final outputs. This means, for librarians, the necessity to keep pace with fast change, through continuous updating and training, and the need for an intense collaboration between librarians and faculty staff, as well as strict a collaboration with other services of the university, such as areas involved in supporting research and evaluation.

The complexity of academia is increasing and there is no way to face the many challenges without a collaboration of all components of academic institutions. **Ri**

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Do Rossana's experiences chime with you?

Would you like to share your thoughts as a librarian with the readers of *Research Information*? Email tim.gillett@europascience.com