

Phase 2 of the Covid-19 Emergency in Italy and the Reopening of Libraries

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Phase 2 of the Covid-19 Emergency in Italy and the Reopening of Libraries- The Rumors Blog (Guest Post)

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By: Guest Blogger [Rossana Morriello](#), Research Support Librarian, **Politecnico di Torino, Italy**

In Italy, we are in the so-called “Phase 2” of the coronavirus pandemic, as stated by the last government law dated April, 26th. This means that starting from May, 4th a few activities are allowed to reopen, like bars, but only for take away, wholesale traders, car repairs, and people are now allowed to go and visit relatives or go out for a walk or a jog, or to bring children to parks. Some other retail traders will reopen on May, 18th like barber shops and restaurants, as well as libraries and museums. Anyway, all activities need to be organized so as to guarantee safety conditions to avoid any risk. This has opened a



large debate, and quite an amount of creative solutions, as to how we can accomplish this task, which is not easy at all. We have seen images of beaches with spaces separated by plexiglass and the same for restaurants. Also libraries, then, will mostly reopen on May, 18th and the same debate is ongoing among librarians. Actually, in some regions, libraries already reopened on May 4th, but still for very limited services,

mainly book loans with previous reservations by phone, email, or web.

The number of cases of coronavirus in Italy are not increasing anymore but still remain high, particularly in some regions like Piedmont and Lombardy. The general idea of the government is to see what will happen in these days of reopening and then, starting from the 18th, to leave it up to regional governments as to the final decision and responsibility about what and how to reopen. Anyway, libraries are preparing for this new life and librarians are discussing the necessity to reorganize services so as to guarantee safety to patrons and to librarians, too, of course. This implies considering things like the sanitation of paper, plastic, and metal materials, as well as the possibility that the virus is spread through air conditioners and how to reopen reading rooms and restricting access to a number of people suitable to keep safety distancing.

One of the main topics discussed in librarians' communication channels is the sanitation of books after loan, that is the number of days of "quarantine" that books need after loan returns, and what to use to disinfect them effectively. Many scientific studies state that the period for which coronavirus remains on paper and on plastic, but the findings and recommendations vary. The **Italian Ministry of Culture and Tourism** published some [guidelines](#) on April, 23 based on recommendations of the **Ministry of Public Health**, stating that coronavirus can remain on paper up to nine days thus suggesting a quarantine of ten days for books. Other studies say that the virus remains on paper about 72 hours. Other institutions, like **IFLA**, and **NEDCC**, as examples, suggest shorter quarantines. **EBLIDA** collected some different approaches in European libraries and published them in their [newsletter](#). Therefore, the president of the **Italian Library Association** wrote a public letter to ask the Ministry to clarify this point, [quoting studies](#) that say different things.

The difference of approach to book quarantine has consequences for many libraries, as they have a certain standard level for circulation, for example, which could not be fulfilled if they must keep a book in quarantine for ten days. This means that patrons could wait a long time to borrow new book releases in public libraries, or books needed for thesis and dissertations of students. This is an argument frequently debated in the mailing list of Italian librarians and which divides librarians. On one side, there are people who think

that it is better to avoid any risk and adopt the maximum time for quarantine and, on the other side, there are people who think that a long quarantine period will create many complications and delays to service.

Other topics under discussion are the necessity to distribute protective devices like masks, gloves and disinfectants that libraries should buy in great quantities, how to organize reading rooms and the information desk, with a possibility of the necessity to use plexiglass dividers. The **Public Library Committee of the Italian Library Association** collected all information about Covid-19 related to libraries and published guidelines that collect laws, recommendations and articles which treat these problems and suggest behaviors to adopt for reorganizing library services. Some main points are the necessity to divide spaces with plexiglass dividers, to measure the temperatures of people entering the library and to use antibacterial gel. Also discussed is the necessity to organize loan requests remotely as often as possible, and a quarantine period for returned books. They also suggest a slow and progressive reopening of reading rooms, perhaps by appointment only, and a limited access to journals and newspapers, as well as a controlled access to internet points if a regular disinfection for keyboards is not possible. Generally, they suggest strengthening and preferring online service for reference, reading and information literacy activities, activities for children and exhibits, and always, when possible, waiting for a milder climate that could allow organizing some of these activities outside, thus making it easier to respect safety distancing.

These are the first basic precautions that libraries should adopt in reopening, and they are no easy task, as a beginning of this new life in Phase 2 of Coronavirus emergency. Therefore, some weeks of experimental reopening under these conditions will allow us to better understand how to proceed in future.

1 Comment

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Anthony Paganelli on 2020-05-25 at 8:40 pm

Thanks for the update Rossana. I wish everyone the best as Italy begins to reopen. It is very interesting at the logistics involved in the reopening of the libraries. I am glad that the Italian Library Association is diligent and cautious about ensuring the safety of librarians and their patrons.

We are on limited operations in our library, mainly interlibrary loans. The university plans to open the campus in August, while numerous universities in the United States are considering other options, such as ending the fall semester in October or continuing all classes online. Of course, each state has their own regulations for reopening businesses and we are watching the data to determine the effects.

Best wishes to you.

Ciao!

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