

# Access to Networked Resources Experiences at Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma

by

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Any National Library has traditionally the role of preserving documents that are part of the national cultural heritage and to provide different categories of users with advanced services to access in the most effective way the "physical objects", often rare and perishable, that are stored in the library.

More and more in the future, services offered to the users will comprise discovery and retrieve of "information resources" available in digital format both at local and at networked level. This will reduce the necessity of handling original documents (thus improving their preservation) and at the same time greatly expanding the number and the variety of reference sources.

I'd like to take this occasion to give you some information about some recent experiences of the National Library of Rome, driven by a strong and continuous attention to our users' requirements.

With the term "users", we refer to users of the library system in the largest sense. It includes end users as well as the library staff, with the possibility to access the system both from inside and outside the library.

The ultimate objective of our project is to provide internal and external users with advanced services to discover and retrieve networked information in the broadest possible way, ensuring the necessary levels of control and validation.

The steps that will lead us to reach the above objective can be summarized as follows.

## **Visiting users**

Even though systems for a remote access to library catalogues are well developed and intensively used, an important task of our library is still the delivery of advanced bibliographic services to the local users.

Every day, about 1.600 users visit our library for different reasons (study, search, business, etc.) and they expect to receive good bibliographic services through simple procedures and with high quality standards.

A new Local Area Network has been recently created, connecting over 400 computers in the 3 library buildings. The availability of 150 workstations for the public allows an easy and extensive access to Intranet and Internet applications (OPAC, CD-ROM server, SBN union catalogue, the Web site, etc.).

Some initiatives have already been started to digitise documents and make them available to local users in various multimedia format (text, images, sounds). A prototype with a limited but significant number of heterogenous documents (manuscript sea charts, music sheets, sound recordings) has already be implemented and is operational for internal use and test.

Documents have been selected from the Cartographic Manuscript Collection (XV-XVII century globes, sea charts, world atlas) and from Fondo Siciliani (XIX-XX century music collection).

The digital objects have been linked to the bibliographic records (in MARC format) and the resulting database is Z39.50 compliant, to ensure the necessary level of interoperability with other similar catalogues.

The intention is to explore and eventually define the most appropriate criteria for describing the various kinds of "digital objects" in relation to the different users' needs and navigation paths.

## **Remote users**

Like all major libraries BNCR is developing services for remote users that do not have the need or the possibility to visit the library.

The BNCR website gives the possibility, through links with the OPAC (Z39.50 compliant), to make searches on the library online catalogue to know the availability of documents, their shelf list number (to eventually request the document for reading or loan). Many users make their queries from remote (home, university, work) and come to the library already with the data for the request, saving time and reducing the engagement of the library staff.

### **Library staff**

The library staff already has full access to all available networked resources via Internet. In order to facilitate bibliographic search (both for internal and external users) a solution - based on the product LibriVision - has been implemented. It allows multicatalogue searching (on Z39.50 compliant databases) through a standard uniform interface.

There are also immediate plans for the subscription to online documentation services for several disciplines (librarianship, humanities, medicine, science and technology, etc.). The objective is to use the same unique interface to all online bibliographic and documentation sources.

### **Future developments**

As of today it is already possible to offer to internal and external users advanced services to search and retrieve networked information from a multitude of different sources with a variety of formats (bibliographic records, online information databases, multimedia objects), having implemented a Z39.50 search gateway.

The future steps will consist in a progressive extension of the service provided to include additional categories of heterogeneous sources and retrieve digital objects with a variety of characteristics, implementing an appropriate information portal.

The solution that will be adopted is still to be carefully evaluated both for the complex technical elements to be solved and for the numerous managerial and organizational aspects that it implies.

Nevertheless we are conscious that the final objective is worth investing time and resources, and we believe that events like the present Conference can significantly contribute to a mutual understanding of common problems and hopefully to the identification of shared solutions..

The edge is therefore moving ahead, aiming at more ambitious objectives to make more and more accessible the worldwide cultural heritage of which we all feel proud to be responsible to some extent. BNCR, like all other institutions represented in this meeting, having in mind needs and expectations of their numerous and differentiated classes of users, and paying attention to the evolution of Information and Communication Technology, is interested to the development of new applications that go in the following directions:

the management of documents in digital format, to improve at the same time their preservation and their level of accessibility, beginning with manuscripts and rare books, perishable and difficult to handle (an international data bank containing information about items already digitized or in progress would be advisable);

the possibility to describe the content of multimedia documents and to make their content available for searches, analysis, comparisons, through the definition and adoption of proper metadata;

the integration of information of different origin and nature, with specific reference to museums and archives sectors, through the adoption of common descriptors and the implementation of adequate mechanisms for interoperability;

the development of tools (for example, filters for data discovering/mining) and of application solutions (for example, thematic/vertical portals) to reduce the redundancy and complexity of information available to the users via Internet, increasing at the same time its accuracy and validity;

the solution of technical, organizational and legal issues that still today are a serious obstacle to a real diffusion of documents in digital format (copyright, e-commerce, security, privacy, etc.);

the exploitation of innovative telecommunications technologies for the access to digitized information, with particular reference to mobile communications (WAP, GPRS, UMTS) and to interactive television (satellite, terrestrial).

In the future, libraries will become also user education centres of increasing importance in the process of building up information and media competence in the society. At the 67<sup>th</sup> IFLA General Conference, held last month in Boston, activities of the User Education section have been followed with great attention and interest from many librarians between the 4.000 attending the Conference.

### **Conclusions**

The above mentioned issues are per se sufficiently complex and can not be afforded nor solved by a single library or documentation centre. They require big efforts of co-operation at national and international level, with the involvement both of cultural institutions - that will contribute the requested level of competence and the knowledge of user requirements - and of public or private entities capable of developing the proper technical solutions.

In any case consistent investments will be required through ad-hoc funding by public authorities (national and/or regional), European funds for research/demonstration projects, sponsoring from private/public entities interested in a concrete exploitation of achieved results.

In particular, the big and expensive projects of digitization open new scenarios for libraries and documentation centres, because they will be forced to evaluate the validity of the investment also in terms of the economic return that it may generate and therefore they will be requested to assess their own potential market, to identify the possible customers, to define and implement proper marketing strategies, etc.

During the annual ADLUG meeting I am sure that these and other themes of relevant interest will be adequately discussed and that many and valuable contributions will be given by the participants both from the world of cultural institutions and from the industry.

I wish to thank the organizers of this meeting for the opportunity I had to be here today and you all for your kind attention. I'll be glad to meet you again tomorrow during the visit to the National Library of Rome.

Traduzione di Giovanna Cordani

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