The Italian National Bibliography and control of access points

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The Italian National Bibliography (BNI) as a national bibliographic agency has never been in a position – and still is not today – to fulfill one of the functions that are peculiarly its own: authority control. The main reason for the lack of planning for this activity is the chronic shortage of staff available for it. This is a serious situation, one which it is embarrassing to admit and which is certainly too serious to be allowed to continue.

Following recommendations emerging from the National Conference on Italian Libraries (Rome, January 1979), which put forward the idea of the Servizio bibliotecario nazionale (SBN), the Ministerial Commission for Library Automation, established by the Ministry for Culture and the Environment, foreshadowed a national bibliographic archive file, expert responsibility for which would rest with the BNI**.** There was an implicit understanding from then on that the SBN and the BNI would have their own separate goals and operations and it was said that the presence of the National bibliography was "aimed at ensuring the quality, completeness and consistency of bibliographic description introduced into the archive file, within the dynamics of National bibliographic control".

Documenting national publishing output institutionally is essentially a scholarly operation, different from the essentially practical one which is required of any given catalogue, whether individual or collective. In this sense the position of BNI was not within SBN, but alongside it. So far, not even this close relationship between BNI and SBN has produced, or substantially provided for, any plan of action, whether shared or developed in consultation. In fact, the two Italian bibliographic agencies, one national and the other relating to SBN, each with its own area of expertise, would have been able to collaborate – and should have done so – in order to guarantee services, separate and/or in common, geared to the control of access points for bibliographic records.

The feasibility study on the reorganization of national bibliographic services in Italy (financed jointly in 1990 by the Central Office for Libraries and Cultural Institutions and the European Economic Community), beginning in 1991, concluded after six months' work in 1992 with a proposal to establish the Centro per il coordinamento dei servizi bibliografici italiani (CECOSBI), which provided for a whole range of roles and tasks to be undertaken in order to meet the needs of users.

The study identified two guiding principles for the National bibliography: a BNI that was current, timely and exhaustive in coverage, dedicated to monographs; and, in tandem with it, a series of bibliographic services dedicated to particular forms of document, to ensure coverage of national publishing output (*cf.* Carla Guiducci Bonanni and Giuseppe Vitiello. Servizi bibliografici nazionale. Dalla diagnosi al progetto, in *Accademie e biblioteche d'Italia*, July/September 1992, pp.55-70). The Study highlighted all the difficulties and shortcomings of the BNI and the disappointments to users over time; in

its turn the concluding report signalled a salutary moment of crisis, if only for having provided documentary evidence of heavy costs and unacceptable delays.

Of a matter which was to have involved the Central Office for Libraries, the National Central Library of Florence and the Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries, there has, as usual, been no more talk - thereby rendering vain the lengthy work and proposals, and the opportunities which had arisen.

In the following years there came into being the project EDIFICARE[1], which had its origins in the Feasibility study and was financed by a resolution of the CIPE in 1992. This project was to be an experimental start to the reorganization of national bibliographic services on the basis of the results of the Feasibility study.

The BNI, aware on this occasion that to speak of new services it would be necessary to intervene in order to review some parts of the SBN Index procedures, proposed to allocate one third of its total anticipated funding allocation in order to improve the cataloguing functionality of the system. As a result it was logical to hope, or indeed, to claim that the BNI was making progress in relation to the SBN: its own, clearly defined position – that of an autonomous bibliographic service alongside a library service, especially in the awareness that the bibliographic service is indispensable for an effective library service, and all the more so when both use the same technology and the same specifications for their work. EDIFICARE, carried out in 1993, was the opportunity to plan for a new BNI subdivided into series. The National Library of Florence, with its responsibility for national bibliography, having to produce diversified BNI services, at that point adopted the thinking of Luigi Crocetti, for whom to believe that a bibliography is national because of the body which produces it, is just habit, in that "The determining factor is the coverage which the bibliography pursues, whatever the means it adopts to achieve it." (*cf.* Antonella Agnoli (*ed.*). *Bibliografia del libro per ragazzi 1988-1992.* Palermo, 1992, pp.3-4). A view analogous to that expressed in other words by Diego Maltese: "Whether the copies upon which 'the bibliography' is based are owned by the library which produces it, is of itself of no consequence. What renders the publications described relevant to the purpose of the national bibliography is simply the fact that they provide documentary evidence of the national bibliographic output." (*Cf. La biblioteca come linguaggio e come sistema.* Milano, 1985, p.121).

The problem is also this: at present no library in Italy can claim to represent the sole existing bibliographic service, far less an all-inclusive one. CECOSBI wanted to ensure that there would be provided, at national level and as an official public commitment, a variety of well-defined, interconnected services, arranged through collaboration between public and private information producers. The BNI has always had to operate alone and still does, in that there have not been proposals for collaboration or agreement on the problem, and the six series of which BNI is presently composed (Monographs, Periodicals, Children's books, Printed music, Doctoral theses, Textbooks) are carried on by it alone, making use of some databases which differ from SBN ('Doctoral theses' does not describe national editions) and collaborating with foreign partners (the children's book list *Libri per ragazzi* is produced on the TINLIB database); unavoidable however, even for these two series, is the obligation to guarantee quality of service.

In number 0 (October 1993) of the new BNI, I maintained that an essential condition for the Bibliography was "the guarantee of a new organization and professional structure, with regard to both the resources and the services that a national bibliography is under an

obligation to deliver: one need only mention the problem of authority files...” – a problem which still remains one almost ten years later, that is, a question still to be put, let alone resolved.

Looking at the subject of control of access points, it is likely that the two Italian agencies may agree, perhaps even in the short term, to start making joint plans for dividing up the problem and also, hopefully, the tasks associated with it: to each its own. Furthermore, one should not allow to go unmentioned the first and practically the only reason for the silence on this matter: its economic aspect, always a central and driving force in projects of this type.

Nevertheless, whatever the actual situation, the Bibliography must draft and pursue a gradual program, minimal but sustainable, of involvement in the control of author and title access points: a program and a plan that will permit at least the first, indispensable step in authority control to be achieved and maintained - that is, the establishment of an authority record. An authority record which is such not only because it is from the BNI, but also in that it has been established in accordance with national and international rules. So we need to work out how to keep up the momentum in this regard.

These are, then, pressing reasons for reaching a definition of work protocols in SBN, since it is neither acceptable, nor opportune, nor economical, that the National bibliography should play out its role as an equal partner from inside the network. To concede to the Bibliography its natural role would also be appropriate for SBN as a whole; it would mean underscoring the principle that libraries have a right to be able to count on data that is certain and reliable, and has been verified and guaranteed by others.

This should not be taken as a criticism of the National Library Service (SBN), but only as confirmation of the facts surrounding the intertwined paths of two complex realities, the National index and the BNI, both of which require, for a fitting and productive understanding, guarantees and structures that are carefully defined.

The BNI today and its activity with regard to control of access points.
A. Internal control activity over BNI/SBN data
B. Cooperation beyond SBN

A.   Internal control activity over BNI/SBN data

The administration of the National Library in Florence, in anticipation of the commencement of the SBN Index and the EDIFICARE experiment, had only itself to rely on; and so, by agreement with the BNI and in the spirit of service which has always characterized both, it decided to redesign the internal flow of its cataloguing procedures, beginning in 1993. It adopted the results of the Feasibility study and, given the limited staff available, looked at new workflows. The Administration proceeded to structure the BNI by control areas, delegating the problem of descriptive cataloguing to another section. The BNI therefore has special, though small, areas of responsibility as a bibliographic agency: Description of monographs, Control of the archive of Italian collections (including those not relevant to the Bibliography), Control of the author file and Control of serial titles. The publication of some series of the BNI, in particular those produced outside of SBN, is entrusted to staff of other sections of the Library. Control of subject headings will be covered in the report of Anna Lucarelli.

The control structure, comprising only 10 staff in all, carries out continuous checking. These checks, however, are fragmentary and ephemeral, in the sense that they are performed on headings within individual issues**,** since it is impossible to plan the work on a larger scale**.** Hence this control is the result of an operation arising from immediate and specific needs, not from any ongoing or long-term activity.

The forms of name and titles of collections preceding the introduction of RICA and ISBD remain unaltered in SBN, unless they have recurred since. It is reasonable to regard this kind of formal inconsistency as tolerable in the SBN Index, but not in the BNI CD, where records have headings in both the original form - thus not in line with the changed rules - and in the updated version, if the data has been re-used; and, yet again, in the variants about which Mauro Guerrini complains in his volume *Il catalogo di qualità*. For instance, the CD has both *Beatles* and *Beatles <musical group>*. This shows what can happen in the absence of a dedicated automated file and this is the history behind it: when the BNI CD was planned, BNI's UNIMARC database, derived from the SBN, was only temporary, a working file that did not preserve any data beyond the end of the production phase of the issues or the annual printed cumulation. In addition, records from 1958 to 1984 had, through the so-called "Cultural deposits" program (1987-1990), been recovered one by one to be successively loaded into the SBN; and finally there became available the tapes of BNI work from the SBN from 1985. In short, when the BNI CD was designed in 1995, cumulating from 1958, it was necessary to take account of this complex situation, obviously no longer agreeing with BNI's 'historical' data, such as it was.

In addition, the Bibliography had adopted RICA in toto in 1981 and, in 1984, ISBD; as a result, the heading or series title could have varied with regard to the earlier situation, for instance if reused in SBN. Returning finally to the abovementioned heading *Beatles*, the heading in the printed BNI for 1973 *Beatles (The)* and in 1979 corrected to *Beatles*, a collective pseudonym **(**in accordance with the earlier rules) was changed in SBN, from the beginning of its Index in 1994 to *Beatles <musical group>* on the basis of RICA 70.1, a form used by BNI in 1997. The simple form *Beatles* which BNI adopted in its 1984 printed list and in 1993 (SBN and printed list) is derived in the CD from recovery from the UNIMARC tapes. A long and involved story is that of the early days of automation and the results offered by its products.

Oddly enough, the activity of standardization and maintenance performed by the BNI for pre-1985 data benefited SBN more than the Bibliography itself. The BNI CD was, as one can see, simply a cumulating file, not even a list, and certainly not a fully processed, organized archive file. Paradoxically, on the other hand the OPAC database and the CD of the BNCF (National Central Library of Florence) have always been aligned in that, since they are both derived from the SBN and not from the tapes, both are updated periodically by the UNIMARC conversion program.

At this point I would like to thank Mauro Guerrini for bringing these problems out into the open; I sincerely hope that this Conference can help achieve the desired solutions.

The BNI currently continues with its usual operations as practiced in the time of the file of the print-only bibliography, with records rich in information, in indications of coverage and in history**.** Thus control of the Italian collections, whether processed by BNI or not, is regular; it is an opportunity for the insertion of work notes that are useful for cooperating cataloguers, or even for a simple indication to the effect that a collection

is not described by the Bibliography. BNI also takes care to insert details required by SBN: code for language or absence thereof (cited as a function of the principal object of the publication), type of publication code (frequently ignored, but relevant for research: conference proceedings, exhibition catalogues, dictionaries, etc.). For a new author all useful preparatory work is put in place to assist with authority control: date of birth and other relevant information found in the publication itself is always recorded on the entry in a note. - Small details that reflect both an awareness of the fundamental importance of control and the burden of an activity which in itself constitutes only a part of the job.

Particular attention is given to titles, given that they are increasingly coming to represent the users' alternative approach, if not their preferred one, after the author's name. Verifying and accurately recording what is presumed to be the principal title of a publication, as required by ISBD, becomes an advance form of authority control. One can say the same for original titles which, often in translations of modern works, create difficulties when verified on foreign databases, being almost contemporary editions; and it is not uncommon in certain types of publication for the original titles to be incorrectly cited if not, at times, modified.

Likewise, a title within the record can also be an access point, for example, a title which is particularly highlighted, or is included in the official name of a conference; a link to be made for sure is also that which applies between titles of periodicals that succeed one another, or are in some way connected. The form of series titles found in the chief source is always linked by means of a reference to a variant form present in another part of the document and, obviously, to the titles of its subsections; series titles, lastly, are always linked back to the body responsible by means of an added entry. The latter treatment is considered by the BNI to be an indispensable type of access in its own right, one essential for research purposes.

For uniform titles of modern translations, lengthy research is carried out. Sometimes even then there is a negative outcome, which causes the Bibliography to exercise caution and, in such a case, to place the original title in the note area, rather than making it a gathering or filing title. A separate issue is the decision not to use uniform titles in the BNI/Children's books series, which is produced outside of the SBN, given the typical requirements of its particular users.

Regular control is exercised over publications not entered in the SBN Index (the abovementioned Doctoral theses and Children's books), and over other material described by the Library within SBN (publications not belonging to the National bibliography), or described on particular databases (the so-called Groups). So much activity, so many checks, in SBN and in BNI, separately and jointly, which all in all benefit cooperation rather than the National bibliography, which is left in the uncomfortable situation of being unable to do more. A thankless and disagreeable task that costs: this is a jeremiad that underlines the difficulties of the Library and of the Bibliography, but which also serves to underline the vitality and enthusiasm of the staff involved.

A significant result, after more than seventeen years of work on SBN, was reached in recent months: the **specification** of the new BNI/UNIMARC database, still derived from SBN, but which will be able to preserve independently its own archive of authors and titles, including those of series produced outside of the SBN; an archive structured according to authority control principles, so as to be able to be organized and maintained:

no longer just a temporary working file for the production of BNI issues and the annual printed volume. It is said that for a long period we will not be in a position to set up the BNI authority file there, but certainly its indispensable platform: authority headings and references, capable of updating, for personal and corporate authors and the insertion as appropriate of informational notes and notes for the cataloguer; similarly for uniform titles (including those applying to titles by known authors) and also considering as such, titles of collections. The result may well be that authoritative reference archive, of which Diego Maltese always used to remind not only the cataloguers of the BNI but all of us (*cf. 'Lo schedario di controllo delle intestazioni' e 'Le schede di rinvio', in: La biblioteca come linguaggio e come sistema, op.cit.)*. The new archive will, furthermore, allow retrieval of information for transfer to the CD to be retrieved from that file and not from the SBN Index.

The resultant records in UNIMARC format will naturally be shared with BNI's SBN partners, as is to be expected of a 'senior partner'.

An interesting enhancement to the BNI was initiated in 2000 with the ARSBNI program (Arricchimento Servizi Bibliografia Nazionale Italiana) (Enrichment services in the Italian national bibliography) which permits the OPAC display of some digitized pages (cover, half-title, title page, table of contents, preface, etc.) of publications described beginning with 1994, the year of the latest upgrade. The file at present consists of approximately 560,000 images relating to 70,000 volumes. The intention is to continue to implement this program regularly, but that will depend on the necessary funds being guaranteed. The availability of images is not relevant to the problem of control of access points, but it is certainly a recent service that facilitates use of the BNI and demonstrates the degree of commitment and inventiveness that have always been present and have been pursued by the Library, in order to offer a BNI which is suitable and responsive to users' needs. A direct commitment by the Director who, in the further capacity of director of the National bibliography, is under contract not only to supervise its production and distribution in accordance with international standards and programs, but, further, to investigate and test techniques aimed at improvement of national bibliographic and library services and, further still, to increase the consistency of the databases available on the network and to bring about access beyond the records, to the image as well, and also to enhance the Italian digital library.

B. Cooperation beyond SBN

As reported, it is clear what are to be, from now on, the new challenges for those responsible for ensuring the production of the Italian national bibliography. A considerable load that in its intentions would justify, once again, expectations of new possibilities for BNI.

Returning to control activity on access points, it is clear that the BNI has obligations outside of and beyond SBN, obligations that cannot be denied or delegated: the establishment of authority headings being a case in point. These obligations it is ready to act on with whoever declares their readiness to work together, to offer or facilitate favorable opportunities for users and for reciprocal arrangements.

The present Director of the Library, as director of the Bibliography with its updated and enlarged functions, has warmly welcomed a proposal for cooperation by the Region of Tuscany, resulting from a joint declaration by the State and the Region, on the occasion of the signing of their agreement for a joint management program. By this agreement, "the common purpose of improving the bibliographic and library services of the territory must take its impetus from the integration of the library networks present within the territory of the region and the national network consisting of SBN". As a result, the Library is working together with the Region, the University of Siena and the Biblioteca Forteguerriana of Pistoia, on a project for control of access headings destined for the users and librarians of Tuscany. A long program and long labours, with results to be reached step by step. National Library management accepted the proposal, recognizing the opportunity that it alone offered for revising BNI authors and titles from 1958 onwards. These headings, as already noted, require re-checking, if only for changes in form of name introduced by RICA and for new ISBD elements in the registration of titles.

Collaboration in the local centre, Tuscany, requires, as a preliminary activity, the need to define:
-       draft minimum data for the working format in accordance with IFLA recommendations;
-       acceptance of RICA as the standard for forms of heading;
-       coding of authors in the UNIMARC/A format;
-       updating of the controlled list with the acquisition of new headings and/or references;
-       the possibility of increasing the number of active partners.

The project hinges on the undertaking that all partners will be able to continue to use the forms of authors' names that they require, whether those authors are unique to them or not, provided that all are linked back to the controlled list. The program aims to achieve concrete results within a short time, making the data available – in controlled mode – even during the phase when the common archive file is under revision. Better and more detailed information about this will be provided by Guido Badalamenti of the University of Siena.

The Library therefore has a rare and fortunate opportunity to initiate the systematic control of BNI access points.

The National bibliography, even with its chronically slender staffing resources, seriously intends, for its part, to take on projects that are manageable and are characterized by usefulness - rather than venturing into programs which are ambitious, but without a realistic likelihood of eventually meeting expectations. It wishes to be able to benefit users and librarians, in particular the so-called end-users, a category which often seems insubstantial and inaccessible, but which is after all the focus of library activity.

In conclusion, BNI is now in a position to adopt the first objective recommended by the IFLA Working Group on an International Authority System more than twenty years ago (1980): to establish authorities, including references. The structure of these headings, however, will not always be able to be guaranteed as required by GARR, and the tracings will not necessarily be complete. In other words, minimum provisions for authority control will be pursued: the forms of name of authors as required by RICA, accompanied

by appropriate references, and the forms of title of monographs, works, series and of uniform titles.

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[1] EDIFICARE – Esperienza Di Immediata Catalogazione con Fiduciaria Attivazione di un Rapporto diretto con gli Editori (Experiment in immediate cataloguing with fiduciary activation of a direct relationship with publishers).