

Workshop: “Italian Universities for Open Access: towards open access for scholarly literature”

Messina, Italy, November 4th-5th, 2004

by Valentina Comba

[submitted to *Library Hi Tech News*]

This Workshop is the result of a long-term (and successful) effort of a group of Italian librarians¹ and Institutions who are pursuing the goal of innovation in the Italian e-publishing environment. Since the 3rd OAI Workshop in Geneva (February 2004) we have been aware that the many Italian initiatives in Universities and Consortia towards Open Access would be very weak without a National framework; our model is the Sherpa project in UK, and the DARE project in the Netherlands.

These are the reasons why we decided to present a “Manifesto” supporting Open Access and the Berlin Declaration to the Chair of the Conference of Rectors Commission for Libraries, Prof. Milanese, Rector of Padua University. During the Commission’s meeting on 9th July 2004 the invitation of the University of Messina to held a Workshop in Messina² to promote Open Access and the Berlin Declaration was accepted.

At the Workshop Rectors and delegates from 31 Universities³ and the Istituto Italiano di Medicina Sociale signed the Messina Declaration⁴, declaring “ *to agree to the “Berlin Declaration on Open Access to knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities” and wishing that this act will represent just the first and significant contribution from Italian Universities to a broader and faster dissemination of scientific knowledge*”.

The signature ceremony was preceded by Prof. Milanese speech about the academic publishing and the problems that Italian Universities are facing: lack of research funding and diminished impact of Italian research in the world; Open Access services and journals may help to face the e-publishing changing environment and give more impact to research papers.

In the same afternoon David Prosser, Frederic Friend and Jean Claude Guédon gave their contribution to the Workshop. Frederic Friend made special reference to the JISC role in supporting Open Access, and particularly the development of institutional repositories in the U.K. Universities through the FAIR programme; he also pointed out the conclusions of the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, where a support policy for institutional repositories is proposed. David Prosser gave a general overview of the commercial publishers changes about

¹ The same are in the Messina Organizing Committee: Benedetta Alosi and Nunzio Femmino' (Messina), Paolo Bellini (Trento), Valentina Comba (Bologna), Patrizia Cotoneschi (Firenze), Antonella De Robbio (Padova), Paola Gargiulo (CASPUR), Ezio Tarantino (Rome) and Susanna Mornati (CILEA)

² Conference website: <http://www.aepic.it/conf/index.php?cf=1>

³ Italian Universities signing the Messina Declaration: Bologna, Brescia, Calabria, Firenze, Foggia, Genova, Insubria, Lecce, LUMSA, Messina, Milano I, Milano Bicocca, Milano Politecnico, Milano Vita-Salute San Raffaele, Modena, Molise, Napoli “Federico II”, Napoli “L’Orientale”, Napoli “Partenope”, Padova, Palermo, Parma, Piemonte Orientale, Roma LUMSA, Roma Tor Vergata, Roma Tre, Siena, Torino, Trieste, Trieste SISSA, Tuscina, Venezia Iuav

⁴ Messina Declaration in English: <http://www.aepic.it/conf/viewappendix.php?id=49&ap=1&cf=1>

the self archiving and stressed some important Funding Agencies initiatives towards a wider use of open archives (i.e. the US NIH Open Access Plan). Jean Claude Guédon suggested some innovative views for the Academic communities in the use of national (and transnational) collaborative perspective for managing open access peer reviewed journals; experts collaboration may create autonomous editorial boards for overlay journals as virtual and high quality journals freely accessible, where the selection and management costs are shared by the Universities.

On the 5th November the Workshop offered the participants four sessions and a panel discussion. The sessions were devoted to technical issues in the institutional repositories development, to service providers and the CILEA-CASPUR initiative, to the advocacy role of libraries at local, national and international level. Special mention should be made for the Antonella De Robbio's paper about copyright's issues, which are still the hottest topic discussed by the Authors.

At the end of the afternoon the panel discussion about economic models gave the participants some practical insights and data about costs and pitfalls of some open access projects; it was stressed which are the main costs for institutional repositories development and pointed out the need of accurate project management in these times of poor funding for Italian Universities.

As Workshop organizers we are conscious that the Messina Declaration is just the start of we like to call "Messina process": a growing awareness about the e-publishing changes and the new economic models which may hopefully provide more impact for research papers, providing a viable (and less expensive) solution for the information provision to Authors and Readers.