

CRUI and Open Access in Italy

by Roberto Delle Donne

In the last years, the Conference of Italian Universities Rectors (CRUI) has acknowledged the importance of full and open access to the informations and data of general interest for research and scientific education. It has promoted a free dissemination in the web of the achievements of the research developed in Italian universities and research centres.

This is a turning point in Italian university practices, whose importance could hardly be overestimated; in fact, for the first time a guiding organ, that represents the whole university system, actually intervenes in the life of various disciplinary communities, in order to reorient the most consolidated *practices*, consisting of the communication of learning. Obviously, the promotion of open access is not devoid of any context, but fulfills some requirements already present in scientific communities. I am not referring only to physicists, who, from Los Alamos (1991) to Cornell (2001), took part in the open archives experience from the beginning, also in Italy, or to biomedical researchers, who created JOP (Journal of the Pancreas online) at the end of the Nineties. I am also referring to less “globalized” communities, such as the philologists and the historians, who put Italy at the forefront of the development of telematic networks as a means of scientific communication since the early Nineties (with Arachnion, Cromohs-Eliohs, Reti medievali and Scrineum). In the last decade many initiatives have been undertaken in order to support open access publications: I just want to mention the conferences organized by the universities of Florence, Messina, Trento and Bologna, by Sissa in Trieste, by the Superior Health Institute in Rome, and the Pleiadi project, carried out thanks to the commitment of Cilea and Caspur, Paola Gargiulo and Susanna Mornati.

In this cultural climate, in November 2004, CRUI fostered the adhesion of Italian universities to the “Berlin Declaration for open access to scientific literature”, on the occasion of Messina Open Access Conference, in order to increase the advantages that the scientific community could draw from open access publications.

In the last year, a convention between Crui and the three main Interuniversity Consortia (Ciber, Cilea and Cipe) has led to the constitution of Care, a coordination group, directed by Alberto Sdravovich, for the access politics to e-journals and for the negotiation of

purchase contracts on behalf of universities, which has already undertaken national negotiation concerning the renewal of contracts with different publishers.

At the beginning of 2006, within CRUI Libraries Commission, directed by the Padua Rector Vincenzo Milanese, the Italian Open Access Group was constituted, with the specific task of actuating the Berlin Declaration's principles. More precisely, the group that I coordinate has been working and is still working on drawing up some guide-lines, not only in order to spread the awareness of the advantages deriving from open access publications within the academic community, but above all in order to give punctual indications about the open access best practices, that is to say, about the ways of creating and managing open archives, about the kind of materials that should have been stored, and about the creation of electronic journals strongly integrated in open archives. Particular attention is devoted to the standards and protocols to utilize: first of all OAI-PMH, able to guarantee the harvesting and dissemination of metadata, the harvesting and interoperability among different Open Archives; but it is also devoted to the use of a markup metalanguage such as XML, able not only to guarantee interoperability among the data in different archives, but also to increase the *chances* of their conservation over time.

After having established the objectives, the works of the group - which is composed of the representatives of about 40 Italian universities - tended towards 4 main directions.

1) The **first direction** aims to institute synergies and collaboration relationships with groups that work with similar purposes in other European countries: in this view it is necessary to consider the opinion given for the recent study of the European Commission on the economic and technical evolution of the market of scientific publications. Other important aspects to be regarded are the participation in the restricted group of SCOAP at CERN and in Open Access Group at European University Association, the adhesion to the Bruxelles Conference (February 15-16, 2007) on Scientific Publishing in European Research Area, the organization in Padua of Berlin V, realized thanks to the support offered by Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, European Science Foundation, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Padua Rector Vincenzo Milanese, to Laura Tallandini, Antonella De Robbio and Susanna Mornati's commitment.

2) The **second sphere** of investigation deals with the storage of Ph.D. dissertation in open archives – a very debated topic in Europe. As they are the products of original research, and are scarcely spread through the traditional channels of scientific communications, the attention of all the universities that created institutional archives, not only in Italy, has concentrated on such dissertations. For instance, the projects Promise of Science, EthOS, Dissonline, HAL (*Hyper Article on Line*), with its subsection *Thesis on line*, or the *Australian Digital Thesis Program (ADTP)*, which provides gateway services to the whole of Australian theses, are well known. There is also an European pilot project (European e-Theses) to link local collections of doctoral theses on an international scale. The comparison with foreign academic and research institutions must be very proficuous as regards platforms, the software standards of data and metadata. But legal aspects and ordinamental differences that distinguish so-called “common law countries” from countries, such as Italy, that have a romanistic tradition, have to be taken into consideration. Even if the European Community promotes the harmonization of different normative systems, and the net - *medium* in itself crosses the national horizons, it is necessary to face the problem within Italian set of rules, in order to give operative indications on the ways of storing dissertations in open archives. Thanks to the contribution of all the members of the group, above all Antonella De Robbio, Paola Galimberti and Matelda Grassi of the Crui legislative service, it has been possible to set this problem in its correct legal terms. Ph. D. dissertations are in fact at the crossroad of different juridical disciplines, the specific one of Ph. D., those of legal storage, of copyright, of the protection of intellectual inventions. Obviously, the discipline regarding Ph. D., as “special discipline”, prevails over others, which shape up themselves as “general” regards to the subject which “speciality” refers to. It is not possible here to prolong the analysis of different disciplines and their influence on Ph. D. dissertations. On the basis of these premises, thanks to Giovanni Bergamin and Maria Laura Vignocchi’s commitment, it has also been possible to carry out a completely telematic procedure of legal storage of theses at Florence and Rome National Libraries. In the next weeks a memoir will be published on the CRUI website.

3) The **third topic** about which the group is working deals with the integration of registry and research assessment procedures with the institutional open archives. Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine – on the basis of the experiences made by many Italian universities

(Florence, Bologna, Trento, Naples ecc.) – an architecture able to interact with Cineca data bank of publications of university teachers, and also able to unify materials of various origin (research, didactics, organizations) in a unique way of access, registration and data search. Such architecture could easily be integrated within a system of research registry, conceived in the widest meaning of this expression; it could thus constitute a basic instrument not only for scientific communication or for the efficiency of didactics, but also for internal and external assessment of the so-called productivity of the universities - an activity that has now become essential , in the institutional "silence" that precedes the creation of the assessment Agency, which should substitute the actual CIVR (Committee for the assessment of activities carried out by Italian research institutes). The creation of a research registry system could even constitute – for those universities that do not yet have one – an ideal occasion for activating an institutional system of university *e-prints* and *open archive*.

4) **As fourth and last topic**, the Open Access Group deals with electronic open access journals, thus exemplifying how open access already constitutes a new way of communication and diffusion of scientific learning not only in scientific and technological areas, but also in the humanistic field. Due to time limits, I cannot dwell on the reflections developed on this subject up to now above all by prof. Maria Chiara Pievatolo and Lorianò Bonora. I want only to remember that, also on the basis of some recent documents worked out by Cern and Sissa, there has been a long dispute about the possibilities to substitute the current practices of *author pays* – widely spread and predominant in the humanistic field – with an *institutions pay* model, wherein academic institutions cover the publication costs, instead of single researchers. Academic institutions might thus increase – in the case of turning to commercial publishers - their decision power in the politics of access to scientific journals.

5) Let's turn to **conclusions**. The lively contemporary debate about the realizability of an *open archive* space in the various possible forms, could result in a synergy between the needs of the academic research world and the requirements of the library world. The starting point should be a common acknowledgement of the principles of Budapest

(February 2002, but first version December 2001), Berlin (October 2003) and Messina (November 2004) Declarations. The spreading of *open archives*, in their complex articulation, may actually reveal its enormous potentialities only through the strengthening of these synergies, paying attention to safeguard them from possible sectorial contrasts between librarians, computer scientists and academics. Though in the presence of heavy economic constraints, it is probably a question of being able to transform the passages of institutional life (such as the procedures of assessment) into as many occasions for developing strongly innovative perspectives. It is also a question of creating and maintaining cooperation among at least three agencies: university *governance*, library and computer services, production-distribution circuit of the research outcomes - from the department to university publishing, where it already exists.

In the same way, on a larger scale, only the capacity to create synergies and collaboration between different universities and research structures will be able to overcome the current impasse: in fact, fewer than twenty Italian universities - out of 75 that adhered to the Berlin Declaration - have opened institutional archives. The Open Access Group fosters collaboration among universities whenever it is possible: it thus intends to get round the gaps in technological resources that prevent some academic structures from becoming operative. The Group has always been deeply aware that the skill in making system, and not competition, can contribute to the growth and development of Italian universities.