

AIB Studi, the libraries and research assessment

We are starting from two news reports which are closely related to us and which we wish to share with our readers.

The first is that AIB Studi, with a smooth transition from the Bollettino AIB, has recently been included in the updated list of A-level academic journals, a list which Anvur (the Italian agency of University and Research assessment) licensed on the 18th February this year.

The second breaking news is that the Content Selection & Advisory Board of Scopus, one of the main citation and abstract databases in the international scholarly literature, accepted our request, and AIB Studi will soon be included and regularly indexed in the database.

These two confirmations have great relevance and mark the epilogue of a long monitoring and assessment process; they provide proof of the role and consideration our journal enjoys in the area of Library and Information Science.

Nevertheless, we are aware that the activities of classification, monitoring and assessment of journals will never be over: these are the rules of the game, and we will strive to reinforce and widen the policies and requisites (quality and accessibility of contents, formal and traceable peer review, internationalization, publication ethics, copyright management towards authors and readers) which are by now universally considered as structural and fundamental components of any periodical with scholarly and research aims.

More generally, the issues revolving around the criteria for the assessment of scholarly literature and production in Italy are very important for our community – scholars and professionals – and for the world of libraries. We would like to recall some meaningful recent stages:

- the public consultation of researchers on the criteria to define the scientificity of publications and other research products, launched by CUN (the Italian National University Council) jointly with Anvur (the National Agency for the Evaluation of University and Research) in April 2013;
- the subsequent proposal relating to these criteria, formulated by CUN itself and forwarded in October 2013 to the then-Minister for University and Research Carrozza;
- the consultation and study day on research assessment in social sciences and humanities, organized by Anvur and held in Rome on 20th January 2014, with a morning session dedicated to the indexing of Italian journals in the international databases and an afternoon session where the project for a database of Italian humanities and social science journals was presented;
- the addresses expressed by the Anvur board on the 19th March 2014 regarding two themes treated during the study day, registering on the one hand a (perhaps) temporary stop in the database project and on the other the announcement of other initiatives, the former being mainly caused by the misgivings expressed by some disciplinary areas that the database might be used for bibliometric purposes, and not only to communicate/make visible contents; the latter aiming at supporting the investigation preliminary to the insertion of the Italian journals in the main international databases and to examine in depth the themes of assessment in the “non-bibliometric” subject areas.

Translation by Matilde Fontanin.



EDITORIALE

This process already produced a considerable critical mass of data, information and papers which are not only relevant for bibliometrics but also for bibliography and library science, and about which we should think and discuss more in depth than it has been done up to now. For example, the debate concerns the possible configuration of the above-mentioned database of Italian journals and the creation of a set of indicators (relating to production, citation, use, non-citation) to analyze the data; the ratio between the use of bibliometric indices and other assessment methods; the correct definition of document typologies and of the products other than publications; the existence of different levels and natures of responsibility connected to a publication; the link between the presence of a publication in the main Italian and international academic libraries and its scholarly quality, and so on.

These themes – along with the effort exerted until now by Anvur and CUN – put to test our specific professional competences.

In the meantime, the procedures connected to research assessment determined in various universities a consolidation of the institutional repositories; the latter, though with some disturbance from the debate around open access, are turning more and more into research catalogues (or the other way round) and are deemed to be the best possible solution to regularly feed the Cineca (the National Inter-university Consortium) National database. This choice might have important consequences in the future as it allows: *a*) to catalogue the research activity within a university and *b*) to increase a database which can be used also for other institutional activities.

This kind of repository can give exhaustive information to anyone interested in learning more about a specific university: the specific research, the themes, the possible innovative developments. As a consequence, the overall scientific production acquires visibility, the interaction with other databases is facilitated, research products increase circulation and the possibility that they be cited by others becomes bigger.

On the whole, the task of feeding such a repository is delegated to the end-users, who often draw their data from other databases; librarians are supposed to revise and validate metadata and bibliographic information.

Wherever this choice has been made, the range of librarians' activities was further diversified.

On the other hand, the feeling is that this opportunity was not favourably welcomed by teaching staff: inputting data is in many cases tiring, and the obligation to feed the repository – though included in the tasks Anvur determined are necessary for procedures of qualification and tenure – is felt by many as a constraint rather than an opportunity. The system is probably paying the price of a poor communication or, more likely, a scarce habit to this sort of assessment, together with some skepticism on the likelihood to put in place objective systems, which will be able to have some bearing on procedures not always deemed flawless.

The fact remains that the creation of an institutional repository with the above-mentioned characteristics represents a considerable advantage for a university, even because it enables the assessment of the quality, dimension and health of its research activity. In theory, it might also give the feedback needed to sustain certain research lines and direct investments in a more considerate way.

Even in these issues the commitment of CRUI, a full use of library competences, the initiative of university library systems, and the collaboration between librarians and teachers could be decisive.

The basic problem is the stalemate of university libraries, testifying a low awareness of the changes intervening in their role: they are structures which would require more strategic consideration and investments rather than budgetary cuts. Other than that, the realization

of the deep change affecting them will come too late: this twist is not smaller than the digital revolution and the university libraries have the chance to be leading actors in the process. On the other hand, if the systems for research archiving, assessment and communication will fail, the damage will affect every stakeholder, and the Country itself: we will again be compelled to run after the future without having the capacity to plan it. It has already happened too many times.

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[AIB Studi, le biblioteche e la valutazione della ricerca.

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