

# The Franceschini Reform and the year of the libraries

It is widely known that Italian librarians and the Italian Library Association (AIB) – which represents them – did not receive favourably the Franceschini Reform, and that they have made their position clear in various public statements since July 2014<sup>1</sup>. The decrease in executive positions – aimed at a corresponding decrease in Director posts for the main Italian museums – has been criticized from the start both in its substance – as it implied the unification of libraries whose collections and services were particularly relevant but also very heterogeneous – and for its method – namely the parameters that were chosen to define first-rate and ordinary libraries<sup>2</sup>. To be honest, at the beginning the procedure was merely bureaucratic, whereas a real reform should have, if anything, forerun the organizational compliances. The negative reaction and the appeals were copious and authoritative, but often spread only in a circumscribed environment, apparently of interest exclusively for insiders. The understandable exasperation from the field professionals was vented, moreover, in a context where for a long time the Italian State libraries have had to endure relevant budgetary cuts, dramatic lack of human resources, generalized political carelessness.

AIB pointed out in various circumstances its opposition to the procedure which was afterwards carried out, and underlined some other aspects:

- the downgrading of numerous sites, which involves the migration to other tasks and other institutions of librarians with long-standing experience, happening exactly when the inter-generational transfer of know-how could be crucial to contrast the ongoing desertification of the institutions;
- the elusion of the real problem, namely the lack of the minimum receptiveness to the reconstruction of professional staffing for libraries and to the recovery of adequate funding.

The stance of AIB – in our opinion not corporative – derives from the awareness that also the Italian State libraries have been called, like all other libraries, to a radical renewal, where the basic activities of study and preservation are supposed to merge with the development of services, with the new perspectives opened up by technology, and with the contribution to the spread of culture and to lifelong learning.

**1** Associazione italiana biblioteche, *E per ultime... le biblioteche*, 21 July 2014, <<http://www.aib.it/attivita/2014/43960-per-ultime-biblioteche>>.

**2** An example of contribution to the discussion is offered by: Giannandrea Erolì, *La riforma del Mibact e il decreto cultura: alcune considerazioni sugli effetti diretti e indiretti dei provvedimenti sugli istituti culturali in generale e sulle biblioteche in particolare*, «Bibliotime», 18 (2015), n. 1, <<http://www.aib.it/aib/sezioni/emr/bibtime/num-xviii-1/eroli.htm>>; more recently by: Luca Bellingeri, *Una riforma, cento riforme. Le biblioteche italiane nello tsunami del cambiamento continuo*. In: *Rapporto sulle biblioteche italiane 2013-2014*, a cura di Vittorio Ponzani. Roma: AIB, 2015, p. 49-59.

**3** Associazione italiana biblioteche, *Lettera al Ministro Bray sulla riforma del MIBACT*, 2 December 2013, <<http://www.aib.it/attivita/2013/39569-lettera-ministro-bray-mibact>>; *id.*, *Le proposte dell' AIB per i servizi bibliotecari nazionali, la promozione della lettura e il diritto di autore*, 19 June 2013, <[http://www.aib.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Proposte\\_per\\_il\\_Ministro\\_Bray\\_20130619.pdf](http://www.aib.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Proposte_per_il_Ministro_Bray_20130619.pdf)>.



Several times AIB had already made proposals for a general reform<sup>3</sup>, trying to set the problems and their possible solutions in an organic framework, pointing out in every circumstance that resuming professional staff recruitment was not only essential for the survival of the institutions, but a necessary basis for any innovation in the sector.

In the aftermath of the Reform approval, AIB strived, together with its sister associations in MAB (Museums, Archives, Libraries), that is to say ICOM Italia (International Council of Museums) and ANAI (Italian Association of Archivists), to be propositive and to prospect an application of the Reform respectful of the desire to increase the value of the museums and release the potential of museums and other institutions much to the advantage of their local communities<sup>4</sup>. The document underlined the common goals of all the different types of institutions: preservation and valorization of the enormous Italian cultural heritage, both material and immaterial, promotion of tourism, lifelong education, support to cultural development and growth and so on. Besides, various proposals were put forward, the first one being to define a collaborative framework that will necessarily include the Ministry of Education and University and the local bodies, in a perspective of condision and subsidiarity.

Overall, it is underlined that the single libraries and the single archives must not be placed in ancillary positions in relation to museums, but that they be valued for their specific characteristics and roles. A good way to strengthen bonds and promote overall efficiency would be to resume, and to update, the paper *Uniform quality levels for an integrated local promotion of cultural heritage*<sup>5</sup>. Another necessary intervention is to value the contribution which professional associations can and must give – a contribution foreseen by art. 2.2 of Bill n. 110 of 22 July 2014 – regarding the registration of professionals into the dedicated lists which Mibact (the Italian Ministry for Cultural assets and tourism) will have the responsibility to create.

Besides, the paper claims that the creation of a National Museum System need not happen to the detriment of the National Library System/Service and the National Archive System, the latter on the contrary offering a good basis to actually start collaboration and synergies among homogeneous institutions. An example could be the collaboration among State libraries, local libraries, private libraries, University and research libraries, ecclesiastical libraries which has been successfully tested for several years through the National Library System (SBN).

A relevant innovation could be to adapt the already existing systems, by creating integrated museum-archive-library local systems/poles, either organically or through a mere condision of resources. It will be necessary, however, to ban the mechanical decisions dictated by a beauracrat vision, and instead, as regards local planning, to embrace flexible strategies, promoted together by the institutions, the superintendences and the Regions.

In this sense, the Ministry for Cultural assets and tourism could take on an incisive – not beauracrat – role and coordinate also among sectors, favouring in the widest and most flexible way a balanced functioning of the vertical and horizontal collaborative networks. If we already were in such a perspective, maybe the issue itself of libraries, museums and provincial archives, which arose as a consequence of the Del Rio Reform, could have been faced more easily.

<sup>4</sup> MAB (Musei, Archivi, Biblioteche), *Appunti e proposte per il Ministro Franceschini sulla riorganizzazione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo*, 25 February 2015, <[http://www.icom-italia.org/images/newsletter/mab-proposte-mibact\\_2015-02-25\\_non-firmato.pdf](http://www.icom-italia.org/images/newsletter/mab-proposte-mibact_2015-02-25_non-firmato.pdf)>.

<sup>5</sup> *Livelli uniformi di qualità per la valorizzazione territoriale integrata del patrimonio culturale*, February 2014 draft.

Talking about the role of the Ministry and getting back to libraries: during an encounter with Minister Franceschini, on 16 April 2015, AIB had the possibility to illustrate a document meaningfully entitled *AIB proposals for Minister Franceschini. Notes for the year of the libraries*<sup>6</sup>. The latter emphasises the role of direction and support the Ministry should play in favour of the libraries, starting from library systems and libraries of the provinces. AIB offered to sit at a table which is supposed to point out the various cases and contexts and consequently the most appropriate destination of structures and staff, while in the meantime taking immediate action to support the continuity of the service. Besides, the paper also demands the fulfilment of the agenda on the library networks of the provinces, presented by Diego Zardini and approved on 4 April 2014<sup>7</sup>.

As regards more directly the topic of this contribution, the necessity to turn SBN from an infrastructure for catalogue automation into a tool for change of the Italian library policy was particularly insisted upon. It is about making the immense collections of Italian libraries visible and to enhance their use, also remotely; making available for all citizens real and adequate opportunities to access information and knowledge; guaranteeing services and resources for lifelong education. As regards the strict area of libraries and state services, specific proposals have been put forward:

- the foundation of the National Library of Italy;
- the institution of a table to discuss the upgrade of SBN;
- the reinforcement of the decision-making role of the Assembly of the SBN Poles<sup>8</sup>;
- the support to open access for datasets and software used by SBN;
- adequate financing of networks and systems, be they long-standing or newborn ones.

If the diverse institutional stakeholders will actually start working together, in a wider perspective than the one imposed by circumstances; if the new path will be based on the awareness of what libraries are, which are their specific goals and their extraordinary potential; if new economic resources and opportunities will be made available for new professionals; if we will go in this direction, the possibility that the libraries reconquer, renewing it, their social role still exists. But we need to make haste and change route. This is what we expect from 2015, the year of the libraries.

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<sup>6</sup> <[http://www.aib.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Proposte\\_AIB\\_MinistroFranceschini\\_20150416.pdf](http://www.aib.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Proposte_AIB_MinistroFranceschini_20150416.pdf)>.

The title of the paper was inspired by the statement of Minister Franceschini last February : <[http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/libri/2015/02/10/franceschini-2015-sara-anno-biblioteche-e-archivi\\_522b9099-8485-4938-b169-18c7b2dd701f.html](http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/libri/2015/02/10/franceschini-2015-sara-anno-biblioteche-e-archivi_522b9099-8485-4938-b169-18c7b2dd701f.html)>.

<sup>7</sup> <[http://dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic9\\_01542\\_B\\_006\\_17](http://dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic9_01542_B_006_17)>.

<sup>8</sup> A good signal was the recent summoning of the Poles Assembly, 24 June 2015, after a long period of inactivity.