

Let's start from the AIB

Where shall we start from? Libraries or librarians? From the letter to be sent to one major for a competition announcement inconsistent with the professional skills required, or from the censorship statement announced by another major concerning public and school library collections? From supporting many projects promoting reading and information literacy that (also) lever on libraries, or from participating in the Forum del libro (Book forum) lobbying for the rapid adoption of the parliamentary bill on book and reading promotion, which would finally provide, among other things, a clear and primary regulatory rank vision of libraries', library systems' and Servizio bibliotecario nazionale's (National library service) roles? From the disagreement with the prospect of a fee-paying state digital library, as it seems to emerge reading some laws and some ministerial decrees, or putting pressure on national and European decision makers so that they adopt ameliorative measures about the copyright directives' 'package' currently being discussed by the various authorities? From the organization of events scheduled for 2017, or from a large scale reflection on the state of health of freedom of expression and on the ancient and very new library tasks in the information market? From resuming contacts, establishing or consolidating alliances, growing or abandoning partnerships, or else improving the internal organization to make our action more agile, careful and effective? From drafting a system view that can enter the political agenda of the republic institutions, outlining a clearer profile of the library service in different contexts and for different audiences, or else taking opportunities from time to time and facing risks coming up daily to librarians and libraries both at national level and in the territories?

Obviously, all these things have to be done – we did and we are still doing them – but the point is: how could we define an order of priorities and a consequent agenda, combining ordinary management, services to associates, support for section activities and other articulations, with the need to gather ideas and work on the drafting of a broad-based three-year program? Taking office in late May, with an annual program already largely prepared and partially suspended in view of the renewal of the elected offices, does not simplify the task: you must immediately orientate yourself among appointments, deadlines and minute questions on the most disparate topics, with little time to reflect and make decisions.

Yet, it is from everyday practice that little by little the very short lines of address we published a few days after the settlement begin to take body and substance. The AIB is a light organization (we are almost all volunteers), but also complex and very extensive, and this is its, our, main strength: here we meet intelligence and passions of generations of librarians with different sensitivity and origin, equipped with different skills and attitudes, which together offer a broad picture of the many abilities today committed to supporting research, learning, active participation of citizens in community life, of bibliographic resources' protection and enhancement and that give a clearer perception of the fundamental identity, richness, social and cultural depth of our diverse profession through the sharing of fundamental values and the commitment to contribute to associative activities, and also of that great ability, working together, to withstand decades of political and planning disinvestment on libraries, a disincentive that is not only proven by cuts in funding and by reforms

that have often ‘forgotten’ them, but is often supported by a considerable part (fortunately not all) of the public leadership, flattened on the administration of the existing situation or pledged to please the political leaders of the moment.

I have long been convinced that, if we want to build the national library system, a necessary infrastructure for the development of effective policies for civil growth, social inclusion and sustainable development, if we want to enhance the librarians’ professional activity and get their acknowledgement, if we want to assert the need of libraries and librarians to increase education, to spread the pleasure of reading, to foster dialogue between different ways of seeing the world and to ensure the widest availability of public use and the innovative reuse of information and intellectual works today and in the future in our country, then we must start by the AIB, with the awareness that AIB is our laboratory, our collective brain and our main tool of action, because today there is no public or private organism, equally representative of the plurality and uniqueness of the librarian world, equally capable of promoting dialogue and synthesis among different knowledge, needs and views, and equally capable of interacting, without conditions and without entrenchment, with all stakeholders and other actors in the knowledge chain.

So we need to quickly restart the associative machine, reorganize the secretariat after the appointment of the new national secretary, to distribute delegations within the new National executive committee, to confirm or renew the roles concerning the ‘operational tools’ – the library, publishing activity, training, events, observatories, commissions and working groups – to consult with their respective coordinators and the National council of regional presidents, to ensure that the regional and national assemblies see the active participation of the members, so that the three-year program may actually be the program of the Associazione italiana biblioteche (Italian libraries association – AIB) of and not just ‘the CEN program’¹, and that its own drafting be an opportunity for a critical review of the theses elaborated so far.

As a consequence, on the one hand, it is necessary to adopt solutions to increase communication and exchange between the various associative joints and their convergence on common projects and, on the other hand, to improve the association’s ‘inclusiveness’, listening to the reasons of those who may be kept away from it in recent years, from the most banal ones (the complexity of the form to be filled in for the recognition of the associated status; lack of correspondence between the services offered and those expected according to personal situations and different working contexts; lack of involvement; some lack of attention in personal relationships’ care and skills’ valorization), to those that will require a review of our operating rules, starting with the enrollment ones which, in my opinion, while guaranteeing full consistency with the legislation on professional associations, can and should be made more hospitable: both towards those who participate in associative life because they are interested in being an active part of a common project and not in obtaining attestations, and towards those who, despite not having all the required degrees, can prove to be fully-fledged librarians by means of unexceptionable learning and self-learning paths.

And above all there are the most exposed colleagues, those who are librarians today but tomorrow could end up in a call center because even if there would be a lot of work in libraries, the paid job offer is poor. Are we really doing just about everything we can to stay on their side, on libraries’ future side, or are there new ways to explore? We must strive to find answers to this question. For sure, in two-digit unemployment times and with labor legislation not helping to prevent perverse dynamics, or absurd competition forms among the last people of the chain that mortify enthusiasm and personal dignity, those of us who have

¹ CEN: Comitato esecutivo nazionale (National executive committee) [editor’s note].

had more luck and can count on steady and sufficiently remunerated work have a responsibility to assert first that, if the library has to be 'open', and it has to, it is necessary to ensure, through appropriate recruitment policies, the normal generational replacement that contributes to making it 'a growing organism'.

In short, things to do are so many, but some first small signs show that we are walking on the right path. Moreover, we do not start from scratch: we are heirs to an ancient and illustrious history and the AIB has come to be what it is thanks to the dedication of all those who preceded us: we must be up to our tradition, aware of our past to cultivate ambition to build the future.

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[Rosa Maiello, *Cominciamo dall' AIB*.

AIB studi, vol. 57 n. 2 (maggio/agosto 2017), p. 221-223. DOI 10.2426/aibstudi-11675]