Abstract: This contribution gives an overview of digital services in Italian libraries, about the problems involved and the need to keep pace with today’s inputs. MLOL is a highly structured organization that, in time, has grown to become the tool to introduce digital services in Italian libraries. This article reviews what is happening in public libraries, school libraries, academic libraries as well as their possible connections with social networks. Nowadays, the system is about to improve its performances through a new edition, called MLOL plus, which is described in the article as well.

Keywords: E-books; e-lending; digital libraries

MediaLibraryOnLine (MLOL). Das italienische E-Lending-Netzwerk

Zusammenfassung: In diesem Artikel wird die heutige Situation bezüglich der digitalen Dienste in italienischen Bibliotheken grundlegend betrachtet. Gleichzeitig wird auch die Notwendigkeit, mit den gegenwärtigen Bedürfnissen und Anforderungen Schritt zu halten, analysiert. MLOL ist eine sehr gegliederte, weitverbreitete Struktur die, wie sich gezeigt hat, am besten geeignet ist, die digitalen Dienste einzuführen und zu bündeln. Dieser Betrag beschreibt, was heute in Öffentlichen, sowie akademischen und in den Schulbibliotheken in ganz Italien vor sich geht und wie durch die Vernetzung in sozialen Netzwerken neue Arten der Verbindung entstehen. Zurzeit ist MLOL auf gutem Wege, durch die neue, im diesem Artikel beschriebene Formel, d.h. MLOL plus, noch bessere Leistungen sowie Dienste zu gewährleisten und anzubieten.

Schlüsselwörter: E-Books; E-Lending; Digitale Bibliothek

1 Foreword

MediaLibraryOnLine (MLOL) is the first Italian network of public libraries, comprising 3,900 libraries scattered in 16 Italian regions as well as 6 foreign countries. MLOL is the answer to the question about access to knowledge and information through public libraries, what kind of format of the document you ever need. MLOL enables remote access to digital resources (e-books, music, movies, e-learning, newspapers, magazines, images, audiobooks, and databases). Therefore, it can be regarded as an innovative tool in the field of Italian libraries, modifying the traditional approach to library services in order to pay more attention to the needs of users.

For decades, in fact, cataloguing and consequently, preservation used to be the keywords of Italian librarianship. Understandable as it is, given the considerable number of historic libraries in the country, quite a lot of them
founded in the Renaissance and the centuries to follow, inevitably these principles tended, automatically, to be extended both to modern and public libraries... only too often with pernicious consequences. In spite of the formidable technological advances worldwide, Italian librarians, in particular executive staff in libraries and politicians in charge of cultural institutions, proved rather unable to perceive the importance of innovative methods, stressing their professional commitments on the physical preservation of objects and book collections. This tremendously accurate and time-consuming work eventually produced first-class OPACs giving an excellent description of the contents of each institution through bibliographic elements. This attitude was not an isolated one but, quite often, enjoyed the vast support of a general lack of sensitivity on the part of large sections of users, till it became very clear – some sort of common knowledge – how backward the management of libraries had fallen. Eventually the importance of delivery (digital lending) began to dawn, stressing the importance of new tools to complete and optimize the effort of preservation through remote access to the documents belonging to a set of libraries grouped into systems, accessible through collective platform.

This new attitude changes radically the vision of libraries and the role they are called to play in today's world. Libraries can change the world because of the incredible amount of knowledge they possess. Sadly enough though, this treasure is virtually hidden and buried in places where it is stored passively in a sort of static shrines. Texts have to be made movable. They must circulate outside libraries, without forcing users to go physically to places, unless they decide to in full freedom. Libraries must become living organisms in today’s society, playing the old game by new rules, aware that digital texts, in addition to traditionally printed book collections with e-contents of various kind and formats, throws a new alarming light on the mission of public libraries. In fact, it is taken for granted by now that contemporary systems make contents available and indispensable to improve the level of competitiveness and wealth in our society.

New barriers, however, are being erected, making the access to these new means extremely problematic, because of a general climate of uncertainty across Europe brought about by the present copyright framework, which strongly depends on the traditional approach to this issue. A new copyright framework would obviously keep the right of remuneration to authors into proper consideration but it, at the same time, should guarantee access to e-books to the users of libraries, enabling them to enjoy this service and acquire data as well as knowledge so important for their lives. Libraries in Europe, in spite of local differences, have been consolidated for centuries now and their services are part of our daily experience. This legislative vacuum might jeopardize this consolidated experience depriving the users of libraries of the rights of using e-contents undisturbed and would prevent libraries from doing serious projects to work out plans to ease access to e-resources. Without going into further details unnecessary to this context, it is worth quoting
the final statement of this position paper: “EBLIDA [...] calls on the EU Commission for a clear copyright framework that allows libraries to acquire and lend e-books with an adequate remuneration to authors and other right holders. Just as with printed books, an updated copyright framework should allow libraries to continue to provide their services for the benefit of all the European citizens”.1 MLOL represents therefore the technical answers to this requirement, all the more so since its widespread usage has become a very common practice in Italian public libraries.

After this general introduction about the context that justifies and gives special importance to the use of MLOL, it is now time to enter into the more technical field and give further information about this service.2

2 The Italian e-book market and the evolution of MLOL service 2009–2015

The MLOL platform was launched in 2009, approximately one year before the appearance of the first consumer e-book sales channels in Italy. The objective of the project is to catch up with countries such as the USA, where libraries became involved in the mediation of digital contents around the year 2000. Right from the start, it was clear that the problem was not specific to Italy alone: there was a divide between the USA and Europe as a whole.

In the beginning, the service focused on e-book streaming, audiobooks, newspapers, and music. It was not until 2011 that an initial agreement with publishers allowed for the launch of the e-book e-lending service.

MLOL was created by a private company (Horizons Unlimited srl, in Bologna) in co-operation with several Italian library networks (in Lombardy and Emilia Romagna), which contributed to defining the basic service model with a strong focus on inter-library cooperation. From the outset, the main aim of the platform was to initiate dialogue with Italian publishers and distributors to develop specific digital distribution models for libraries.

At the start of 2015, MLOL was the main e-lending platform for Italian public libraries, with more than 4,000 participating libraries (in Italy and in five other countries).

The service has begun to develop considerably, also in the area of academic and school libraries.

The e-book publishing market in Italy – which accounted for some 2–3% of the trade publishing market in 2014 – is structured around a number of digital distributors that serve as a technological interface for all of the retail channels (including libraries).

The main operators are:

- Mondadori Publishing Group (which manages the distribution of e-books through its own platform).
- Edigita (which brings together the majority of large and medium-sized Italian publishers, including RCS, Gems, Feltrinelli, Giunti and De Agostini).
- Bookrepublic (a distributor that comprises primarily small and medium-sized independent publishers and the Gruppo Editoriale Espresso self-publishing platform).
- Simplicissimus (a distributor that comprises primarily Italian micro-publishers and manages an autonomous self-publishing platform).
- Torrossa (a platform that manages the distribution of small and medium-sized publishers in the academic sector).

Between 2009 and 2014, MLOL concluded agreements with all of the main distributors and currently has a collection of approximately 60,000 titles (update: May 2015).

MLOL comprises a number of e-lending models and encourages publishers and librarians to experiment with innovative models to identify the right balance between the demands of libraries, users and publishers.

The main e-lending models on the platform are as follows:

- 1 copy – 1 user at a time (permanent archival copy and a maximum of 60 downloads per copy).
- 1 copy – 2 users at a time (permanent archival copy and a maximum of 20 downloads per copy + 20 downloads for interlibrary loans).
- Pay per loan
- Flat rate for institutional subscriptions

We have also tested two innovative models on MLOL:

- A Digital Interlibrary Loan service with an algorithm that links the service to a Patron Driven Acquisitions service: every library is allowed to access an e-book title not present in its collection a maximum of two times; the third user request triggers an automatic purchase of a copy, which then becomes part of the collection.
- A “watermark lending” service (an alternative to the Adobe DRM, which is generally used for lending): 40

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2 Chapter 1 was written by Aldo Pirola.
small and medium-sized publishers have signed up to this licensing model that enables patrons to permanently keep e-books downloaded from the library.

The core element of the MLOL project is cooperation among the libraries. Those libraries that have signed up to the service meet through provincial, regional or even inter-regional conventions.

The MLOL conventions promote working groups on specific issues buying groups, groups for the development of ad hoc cooperative projects, and groups for the development of consortium purchasing policies, etc.

In 2009, the project was first implemented through funding provided by Fondazione Cariplo to libraries in Lombardy. MLOL has not received state or European funding; the individual member libraries are entirely responsible for operating costs. Libraries signing up to MLOL through library systems rather than individually have an advantage in terms of financial sustainability.

3 Statistical data 2014

In 2014 MLOL confirmed its trend of significant growth in terms of access to the platform as well as consultations of digital contents, as seen in previous years.\(^3\)

The platform, launched in 2009 as the first Italian network of public libraries to share digital contents, is now present in more than 4,000 Italian libraries – placed in 16 regions and 6 foreign countries – and is being used more and more.

In 2014 we saw a 24,5% increase of active users, that is the registered users consulting at least one content provided by MLOL; as we write, the total number of active users comes up to 216,823 out of 394,663 registered users. This fact has also produced a clear increase in the number of accesses and consultations: in fact, in 2013 we recorded 1,165,793 accesses to the website; in the twelve months of the following year MLOL scored 2,341,320 accesses, with an increase of 100,8%. Consultations of available medias on MLOL grew from 1,513,012 in 2013 to 3,062,886 in 2014 (+102,4%). Note that 36,6% of the users enter the portal and its resources between 7 pm and 8 am that is the part of the day off their working time when libraries are usually closed.

3.1 E-book lending

E-book lending is probably the main reason for such a growth in the service. MLOL is today the leading intermediary in Italy in the digital sector between Italian publishers/distributors and libraries and the whole number of Italian e-books available for the libraries adds up to 65,000 titles from about 450 publishers – including the first 6 groups: Mondadori, RCS, Gems, Giunti, Feltrinelli, De Agostini/UTET – with a vast range of subjects: fiction, essays, handbooks, material cultures, titles for children and teenagers and supporting school activity, professional and academic publishing; starting from March 2015 thousands of self-publishing titles have been made available for libraries too.

When we take a look to digital lending statistics\(^4\), we will see a remarkable growth (120,8%) by comparing 96,035 e-book loans in 2013\(^5\) with 212,056 reached in 2014. Various commercial patterns adopted by publishers/distributors contribute to this result in different percentages.

Digital Interlibrary Loan of e-books has also proved to be decisive for this increase. Introduced in October 2013 by testing the procedure in several library systems, Digital Interlibrary Loan started full-scale in May 2014 as one of the most innovative MLOL services, enabling all the libraries which decided to participate to have access to e-books bought by other systems with a little initial investment\(^6\): through Digital Interlibrary Loan users of each participant library can immediately access a catalogue of almost 12,000 titles. Though hardly comparable\(^7\) Digital Interlibrary Loan stats are revealing too, showing an increase from 7,777 loans in 2013 to 58,763 in 2014; the number of users of this particular service rose from 4,043 to 15,599 in 2014. It’s important to note how convenient this service is for libraries and users – because of the access to a much larger catalogue than the ordinary one – and publishers as well: a purchase is automatically generated when a title is very popular and requested. In 2014 this automatically generated purchase applied approximately to one out of eight loans.

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\(^4\) The data relates to e-book loans, except for the open collection titles.


\(^6\) Titles made available with pay-per-view system are not part of Digital Interlibrary Loan.

\(^7\) The data for 2013 refers to the first period of the service from 30/10/2013 to 31/12/2013.
3.2 Not just e-books

This considerable growth in the number of accesses to the website as well as consultations of the different kinds of media enables us to move on to the data concerning other media available on MLOL. Besides e-book loan, in 2014 we saw a strong increase in the use of newspapers (+121,1%) and in the download of audiobooks (+27,7%). Instead the data concerning the use of musical resources in streaming (Naxos Music Library, Alexander Street Press) and download (Freegal Music) seem substantially stable; about that we would like to point out that in the first part of 2015 we’ll make available through Freegal Music a new service of music streaming and download for libraries, which will be able to compete with standards of consumer market such as Spotify or Deezer.

The OPEN collection is of particular interest for us: it gathers various contents selected from the ones freely accessible online (databases, e-learning, archives, music, videos, and others) and is going to become the basis of the new OpenMLOL project. In the course of 2014 many new resources were added to the catalogue, generating 192,793 consultations. Among these it’s worth mentioning at least the results achieved by open access databases (23,577 consultations), by Federica Web Learning (20,985) and OilProject (10,259) e-learning resources, by Project Gutenberg (15,909) and Liber Liber (12,614) e-books, by Rai videos (17,326) and open access newspapers (26,501). Also worthy of note is Wikisource title selection: added in December 2014, in the last days of past year it had already totalled up to 504 consultations; in the first quarter of 2015 this number had increased to 2,174, even before the collection grew further.

3.3 First quarter of 2015 and projections

The statistics of the first quarter of 2015 seem to suggest a trend of further increase in all the considered parameters, mostly in terms of consultations and e-book loans, with special reference to Digital Interlibrary Loan. Should the actual trend be confirmed, projections would lead to little less than 5,000,000 accesses to the site (with an increase of 110% compared to 2014) and over 300,000 e-book loans.

4 MLOL for public libraries: composition of the collection and innovative services

Public libraries were the initial target for MLOL, so the complexity of the MLOL offer can be better seized by looking at the collection and the services provided to this kind of libraries.

As for its contents the MLOL offer is paramount. The following table gives an overview of the composition of MLOL collection.

Tab. 1: Typologies of MLOL contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-books</td>
<td>Italian trade production (+60,000 titles) including the 6 first Italian publishersAbout 100,000 e-book in public domainAbout 100,000 in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiobooks</td>
<td>Largely Italian production Open AudiobooksAudiobooks in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers and periodicals</td>
<td>Over 4,000 newspapers and periodicals in 40 languages including the most important national daily newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific journals</td>
<td>Over 10,000 journals in open access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>About 10,000,000 musical tracks available in streaming and download (also through mobile applications for iOS e Android) available with licenses flat 24/7 for the users of libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films</td>
<td>Italian films in downloadFilms in public domainFilms in streaming from the main festivals of independent cinema worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical scores</td>
<td>90,000 musical scores in public domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videogames</td>
<td>Collections of videogames accessible via web, with particular attention to &quot;retro gaming&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apps</td>
<td>Collections of applications of reading for children both free and under payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>Collections of images in public domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Learning</td>
<td>Learning objects both free and under payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>Databases open access and under payment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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8 http://blog.mlol.it/2015/03/02/openmlol.
9 Wikisource collection started with 869 titles and was extended to 3,519 titles on 16/04/2015.
10 Projections are conservative estimates relating to the development of the service in 2014 and first part of 2015.
11 The conservative estimate of e-book downloads does not include data about the titles of the Open collection.
Fig. 1: E-book loans

Fig. 2: Access and consultation
In order to join MLOL, libraries pay annual fares according to their size—or the size of the system they belong to—and can fix a budget freely to buy contents, which entitles them to the following services without any further costs:

- **MLOL portal as well as web personalized web domain:** an access point to the digital collection acquired by the library, with graphics, news and other items published by the library itself. The MLOL portal is updated in real time whenever the library inserts new contents. The portal is available to users in Italian, English, and German.
- **API** set for the integration of the MLOL contents and services in OPACs
- **CMS** to edit the MLOL personalized portal
- **Access to MLOL SHOP** for one or more librarians: the cooperative tool for librarians enabling one or more operators to run acquisitions and collections in a single library or inside a system in case each library intends to deal with its own acquisition rationally, through checking the acquisitions of the other libraries in the system. MLOL shop enables to select and buy any kind of commercial item on MLOL through a single budget fixed by the library.
- **Statistics:** a set of statistic reports to examine, at different level of details, the state of the service in connection with the users. Analyses of accesses, single users, consulted resources, analysis by typology, top list, outline of time intervals, etc.
- **Authentication of users:** use of MLOL native tool or interfacing to access through the most common platforms in the library sector (shibboleth, LDAP, web services) etc.
- **Interlibrarian Digital Loan:** possibility of an interloan service—only for e-books—in agreement with publishers and libraries enabling the access to tens of thousands of titles without buying previously a copy of the e-book.
- **Help desk:** assistance system via mail (5/7) specially designed for librarians and final users of the service, so that libraries do not have to face technical problems about digital resources in case of need from the users’ side. The system is run through a formal model of ticketing, outline of requests and provides annual thematic reports to measure the level of satisfaction of users. In addition to that, a real time monitoring system is provided on demand to follow the help desk service that MLOL provides to final users.
- **App “MLOL Reader”**: application of reading and social reading (Adobe DRM compliant) intuitively connected with MLOL portal through a button “To MLOL Reader” enabling to borrow an e-book with a click.

That application can be used to run or share notes (even on a borrowed e-book!) on any book in EPUB or pdf format, whatever its origin (public domain, e-retailer, MLOL, Etc.).

- **Collection OPEN**: Registered libraries can use freely the metadata about open access contents indexed on MLOL and OpenMLOL (see under).\(^1^\)

## 5 MLOL for Italian School libraries: The digital solution to the “black hole” of Italian school

Today, a school library is the basic tool to develop in children and teenagers the habit and the pleasure of reading, and, at the same time, promoting the integration between their school curriculum and the new teaching fields in order to acquire the so-called “key competences”, including informative, digital, and multimedia ones.

However, whereas school libraries are playing an even important role in other European countries and in the United States, in the field of teaching and education to media as well as in the development for the competences necessary to lifelong learning, Italian school libraries are virtually not existing, badly financed and their basic role for the promotion of reading among children and teenagers can hardly be recognized.

According to a recent survey carried out by AIE (Italian Publishers Association) on school libraries in our country and published in 2013\(^1^3\), about 89% of the surveyed schools have a library. However, the data concerning their facilities, services, acquisitions, staff, spaces and available stations reveal very serious structural and financial limits as well as territorial dishomogeneity that make it clear how school libraries quite often consist of a small locker located in a corridor or a small room without resources and very limited opening times.

The amount invested by schools in their libraries—less than 6 million euro a year—affects less than 0,01% of the total expenses. The average collection in Italian school library consists of about 3000 volumes, just 0,4% of the titles on the market. Paradoxically this is the age in which the highest percentage of Italian readers can be detected\(^1^4\)

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\(^{12}\) Chapter 2, 3, 4 and 9 were written by Giulio Blasi.


\(^{14}\) “Over 50% of readers in the population between 11 and 19 years. Most readers are at the age between 11 and 14 years (53,5 %)” ISTAT National Statics about reading in Italy.
and, therefore, the efforts and the investments to promote the habit and the pleasure of reading should be focused on such age.

In the end, despite various appeals and initiatives by AIB (Italian Libraries Association) and MIUR (Ministry of Culture), there is no specific legislation about librarians and libraries in Italian schools. Until 2012 libraries in schools were run by teachers deemed unsuitable for teaching, mostly for health reasons. Since 2012 a Decree law limits the use of teachers unsuitable for teaching, transferring them to administrative and technical offices. As a consequence, libraries have been closed down or at best, opening times have been drastically limited and services are run by volunteers.

It’s now clear that campaigns promoting reading in general are not sufficient and there is still a serious need of strategies and specific communication systems to intercept and satisfy all users’ needs and requests. In this respect, some remarkable and commendable initiatives and projects for children have taken shape, but, as it has been quite often pointed out, any initiative to promote books and reading proves ineffective unless there is a good infrastructure, necessary to support it.

As things stand, it is quite evident that MLOL and digital loan could be a good opportunity, if not the only one, to bridge the gap of the lack of Italian school libraries in order to provide a real “infrastructure for reading” to Italian students.

Building a digital school library guarantee services to a much larger number of users, widening the space to be used by abolishing territorial limits well as creating collections for the students to have access to best sellers and new publications. By automatizing some processes such as loan procedures, the acquisitions of catalogographic metadata and – in the case of some services such as the Interlibrarian Digital Loan – the development of collections, MLOL solves in the twinkling of an eye lots of problems depending on lack of staff extending the access to the contents well beyond the space of the school library as well as its opening time.

Students and teachers, after getting the credentials to access the site, can enjoy the loan of digital resources any time and from any location. Therefore, digital resources can be used not only in the library, but also in classrooms, in laboratories and at home, through any fixed or mobile device. In this way MLOL widens and diversifies the perimeter of the libraries, pushing it well beyond the physical space where books and other documents are confined, making real a sort of “wildly circulated/distributed library” accessible anywhere by connected teachers and students. This is a fundamental aspect because students, in this way, can feel themselves fully inserted into a digital context overcoming the conflict between the hyperconnected world outside their school and the digitally isolated space inside, which is perceived as a thing in the past.

In addition to that, MLOL is going to become a valid support for teaching in the classroom that is a real “Infrastructure for teaching”, not just for reading. Teachers can connect their PC/tablet to their LIM (Interactive Multimedia Blackboard) and use MLOL together with the whole class to read a passage of a book, comment on an article or translate it from a foreign newspaper, browsing the museum databases and select multimedia images and files that can be used (in compliance with present copyright laws) to build conceptual maps, for instance. The daily updated MLOL catalogue includes 65,000 titles and can offer a solution to schools to make large digital collections available to students of every class. Among the 4,000 e-books in the section “Children’s, teenage and educational” the titles of publishers such as Fabbri Editori, Piemme, Salani, BUR, Edizioni Gribaudo, Il Castoro can be found and bought with a “pick and choose” model and can be lent to one user at a time (“one copy one user”). By adopting the “pay per view” system all the titles on the catalogues of publishers such as De Agostini and Giunti can be made available for loan at once, through the purchase of download packets, without purchasing the title previously and without any limits of contemporary users in the download of e-books.

In order to better understand trends and the future developments of the digital loan in school libraries, as well as for public and academic libraries, it is necessary to follow what is happening beyond the ocean where the service in libraries started 10 years earlier than in Italy.

The annual report on the use of e-books in American school libraries, made by School Library Journal in collaboration with Follett for the fourth year on end, registers a constant increase both in the number of school libraries using digital collections – in USA 66 % of them lends e-books (10 % more than 2013) – and in the sizes of collections, in which the average number of e-books passed from 32 titles in 2010 to 189 in 2014, with 325% increase. The

15 For example projects such as Nati per Leggere and Invitro.
demand for e-books on loan instead has been stable these last two years at around 45%.

About 51% of e-books lending school libraries adopt the “one copy one user” system, whereas 49% of them offer simultaneous access. The budget provided to the purchase of e-books is growing constantly and rapidly: in the period between 2014 and 2019 – that is five years – this budget is foreseen to triple. In many schools, printed books are being replaced by electronic devices (e-books and apps): in Florida, for instance, an existing project aims to a 50/50 balance between printed books and digital books within 2015.

Therefore, circulation and use of e-books tend to grow, especially where children and teenagers have access to e-readers and tablets.

Regarding Italy, out of a population of 61.5 million, there are as many as 97 million mobile subscriptions active, that is 58% more than the whole of the population, with an average higher than the European one (158% against 139%) and we spend more time online than people in Germany and France, where the percentage of penetration of Internet is much higher than ours19. If it is true, according to National Statistics (ISTAT)20 hat one family out of ten has not a single book at home, the objection that a service of digital loan to students can be discriminating has no foundation.

In the end, it is necessary to remind that in MLOL it is possible to detect and philter the e-books that have received the LIA mark, a certification of accessibility for blind or visually impaired users through different tools: vocal synthesis, braille bars, reading with magnified letters. Moreover, a lot of MLOL contents – from e-books to audiobooks and daily newspapers – thank to some tools like the vocal synthesis of the text, the possibility to change the font, spacing and the color, the highlighting of the text that is being listened at the same time, become the useful tools to support the special teaching methods21 for students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD).22

6 MLOL for academic libraries: trade publishing for humanities and social sciences/experiences

Severe cuts in the budget and limited expenditures are like a refrain when we talk about Italian university and, with the necessary distinction, this is also valid for a large number of European states. However we can notice that the amount of money spent on journal licensing is not so modest. According to an in-depth article in Rue 89, supplement of “Le Nouvel Observateur”23, the total amount of the contract to have access to the online version of a big set of journals established by French consortia with Elsevier is 172 million Euro: almost 35 million Euros per year just for one publisher! The amounts of other contacts are likely to be similar.

Obviously after spending such a lot of money to have access to contents mainly produced by foreign journals – not monographs – there is not so much left to buy journals, let alone digital monographs in Italian. However, the scientific output of a part of Italian academic world is produced through monographs and journals in Italian, published by Italian publishers.

Therefore there is disproportion between the purchase of Italian digital contents and their importance for teaching and research.

Historically the present situation is justified by the delay of Italian publishers in providing digital contents. At present, though, things have changed but it might take long for the offer of digital contents things to consolidate because of the financial trouble of universities and the Italian school and research system in general. Digital contents in English, instead, became available before and, in particular, before budget cuts became so effective.

It is also true that digital reading, regarding studying in particular, raises problems and involves changes of habits in reading and studying24, a cultural change which cannot take place within a couple of months. As it happened in the past, however, with foreign electronic journals, their digital versions have facilitated a change in the habits of research. Libraries, therefore, can be – or do they have to be? – motor of this change or, better, they have to ease things for this to happen. Actually, as far as we know,

20 http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/145294.
21 See the guide to the app for reading e-books. MLOL Reader, which enables a simplified way of reading.
22 Chapter 5 was written by Paola Pala.
siding with or against study and research with digital contents can be a daring move and it is necessary to make experiments on the spot, without prejudices in order to make appropriate decisions.

MLOL services for academic libraries must be located in this context. As we said, MLOL already gathers in its collection something like 60,000 Italian monographs produced by over 400 publishers, including important brands in the academic field, in handbooks and research publications, such as Laterza, Egea, Bollati Boringhieri, Einaudi, Il Sole 24 ore, just to mention a few significant ones. In this way the catalogue of academic publications as well as popular essays, real protagonists in the history of Italian culture since the end of the Second World War, is largely covered, with some important exceptions (that is Il Mulino and Franco Angeli, for the time being) as well as the deliberate absence of the publishers exclusively dedicated to academic research already aggregated in Torrossa platform by Casalini Libri, which is, however, available through MLOL portals, being one of the external resources aggregated by MLOL.

Therefore academic libraries, through MLOL, can provide their users the digital loan of the e-books adopted in the university courses, paving the way to the transition from printed books to the digital ones.

Most of the publishers of interest for academic libraries provide their titles according to the one copy – one user system, whereas the publishers providing their titles with a pay per view system have a catalogue more trade oriented. In the one copy one user system, academic libraries too, like many other kinds of libraries, can buy following a pick and choose model enabling a tight control of the development of the collections. MLOL can put at users’ disposal selection by discipline, an Approval Plan service as well as PDA (Patron Driven Acquisition) acquisition systems.

According to the analysis carried out by one of our customers who made his acquisitions with a “pick and choose” model, we notice that the selection has produced a catalogue as follows: 64,58% Law, Economics and Statistics, 30,09% Psychology, Sociology and information Science, 5,09% Sciences, technology, Medicine.

It has to be noticed that in this selection there are no titles of literature, literary criticism, philosophy and similar disciplines since the correspondent University courses of the former Faculty of Arts do not take place at the Milano Bicocca University. The selection therefore acts accordingly, even though many of these titles are available in MLOL both for purchasing and digital lending.

Still in the case of Milan Bicocca University we notice that the composition of the catalogue consists in texts adopted for the courses (around 25%) and texts of research in the disciplines of its researchers (75%). It is also worth reminding that the digital contents available through MLOL can be accessed to by academic libraries and, in fact, academic libraries use MLOL to make available to their users the access to the most important daily newspapers, national and international.

MLOL integrates with the systems in use in the academic libraries which characterize the digital library offer in these institutions. In fact MLOL interfaces via Shibboleth or LDAP with the authentication systems in use in the universities, enables the downloading of the MARC records for the ingestion in OPAC, integrates with the main link resolver systems and discovery tools. In addition to these services, MLOL provides for academic libraries, as well as other institutions, a help desk service specific for patrons, relieving librarians from this task.

Therefore MLOL presents itself as a solution to make the digital lending of Italian monographs possible, and ease the passage for academic libraries to digital collections for research and study monographs, along with daily newspapers in Italian language.

7 The MLOL Projects for the final user

From 2015 on MLOL strategy evolves to include – beside institutional/library services – two new portals directed to final users, in partnership with libraries and publishers.

The service MLOL PLUS – accessible with a pre-paid monthly card – will start in October 2015 enabling everybody all over the world to:
- Borrow Italian e-books from all the libraries registered in MLOL which will participate in the MLOL PLUS network as well.
- Buy e-books with reductions and credits accumulated by using library services.

In the course of 2015 a completely free of charge second portal will be launched; that is the open MLOL portal providing initially the access to a selection of more than

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25 For the complete list of publishers distributed by MLOL see: http://shop.medialibrary.it/home/home.aspx#e-book.
27 My best thanks to Francesca Verga dell’Università di Milano Bicocca.
The open MLOL portal intends to become the most important selector and aggregator of quality open contents for the users of Italian libraries but, most of all, intends to provide users with value added services starting from the big data generated by the open digital contents.

The reasons to develop MLOL service directly targeted at final users are fairly clear:

1. In Italy the impact on libraries is very low (11.7% according to ISTAT, that is the National Institute of Statistics); it is necessary then to extend the impact of digital services to the 9/10 (Nine tenths) of the population that never go to libraries.

2. The same holds good for readers who in Italy represent 43% of the population, which means that three readers out of four never go to libraries: digital library services must try to intercept this part of users.

3. In the end there is also an economic reason: in times of recession and crisis in the public financial support for library systems, alternative resources must be found to develop digital services that cannot be financed adequately by the Government or the local Administrations.

4. The reasons might seem very abstract but the comparison between Europe and USA (where the average impact of public libraries comes up to 69%) where digital services are quite widespread in almost 100% of public and academic libraries and in over 50% of school libraries shows us that the risk – comparatively – is a real technological decline in the quality of Italian and European (despite some remarkable exceptions) library services.

### 7.1 OpenMLOL

MLOL devotes a large part of its collection to open resources, such as texts, books, audiobooks, and music in public domain, which copyrights have expired or have been issued under free licenses like Creative Commons.

The Open collection is one of the most important assets of the digital library, and expresses MLOL intention to provide, as much as possible, access to knowledge, open to everybody without distinction.

The resources available in this collection are completely free of charge, can be downloaded without limits and are partly accessible without login: they come from different websites, they are often produced by passionate or volunteers or, perhaps, by digitization of international libraries. On Internet, in fact, hundreds of websites and projects are available, because of the dissemination of high quality resources free of charge, in many languages. As usual, the problem is **how to explore these projects finding the book one is looking for**, without getting lost in the maze of the Web, nor getting discouraged by the language, which is often English (not always accessible for an Italian-speaker user). The increase of contents depends on different factors: Creative Commons licenses are more widespread, there are more canals of dissemination and more demand of materials online as well. Research centres are increasingly encouraged in digitalizing their documents. Therefore the presence of “free” collections, even academic and institutional, becomes bigger and bigger: the Open Access literature alone includes millions of articles (almost 2,000,000 in DOAJ).

Besides, these projects take place completely outside the librarian systems: libraries (apart from rare exceptions) neither catalogue nor index the resources present on the web, not facilitating access users who are not very familiar with the digital.

This is the reason why, in November 2014, the OpenMLOL project has started. This project aims to find and insert these resources (digital, free of charge, in public domain) into MLOL, together with the construction of a specific portal. The works can be found both through OpenMLOL portal and through MLOL itself.

These resources (for example, digital versions of public domain books) are detected through the net and selected by the staff, with the help and suggestions of the community of librarians working with MLOL.

They are gathered using websites APIs: in this way, MLOL staff acquires resources’ metadata, inserting them in the Open collection. However, it is not just gathering data: in order to have them in OpenMLOL, they have to be cleaned and polished, standardized them, to better find them. One of the problems is that open resources present “dirty” metadata or metadata needing heavy adjustments.

Therefore metadata selection and transformation of these collections is a very important work.

The MLOL team selects sources directly from the web, looking for the most interesting ones for users, as well as the most reliable.

Moreover, through a group on Google+, social networks and emails, many other resources are directly suggested and requested by the librarians who use MLOL daily.

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28 Chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 7 were written by Nicola Cavalli.
The plan of insertion will total up to about 250,000 elements including e-books, databases, musical scores, movies, apps, and much more. We think about e-books from the Gutenberg project, from Wikisource; databases from Internet Culturale (Cultural Internet); scores from IMSLP; videogames from Internet Archive; scanned books from the National Library of Florence.

Just to give an example, one of the most complex but successful operations was the import of more than 3,000 texts from the Italian version of Wikisource. Wikisource, a project of Wikimedia Foundation, is a digital wiki library, and as such can be modified by users, exactly like Wikipedia. Unlike Wikipedia, however, Wikisource is not an encyclopedia but a library: a place where to read books in public domain and where to copy/reproduce them to make them available to other people. Therefore Wikisource selects digitized books (for instance, from Internet Archive or Google Books) correcting OCR mistakes. They can be read directly on the site or can be downloaded in EPUB format to read them on one’s own e-book reader. The Wikisource Community chooses, copies, and corrects books: Wikisource people are partly librarians and partly digital amanuenses.

All the texts imported on MLOL from Wikisource have been formatted and corrected and nearly 1,000 of them had to be further validated by the Wikisource Community in order to make them available without errors.

Quite a lot of these texts are real books: novels, essays, anthologies. There are also single texts like songs, poems and legal texts, which are handled as a proper document.

Searching across MLOL, therefore, it is possible to find a single work, a popular song, a scientific article: texts normally found as parts of larger books are treated as single and independent works. Each of these texts has been extrapolated and checked by the Wikisource Community and has a dedicated page on MLOL, and it is immediately available in EPUB format, without login.

We have decided to provide our readers with a larger and accurate selection, peeking out some difficulties: these single texts have no cover because they have not been devised as complete books.

In a digital environment a cover is fundamental, because it is the first moment of interaction between an e-book and its reader. In order to solve the problem of the missing covers (avoid to create them manually, one by one) the OpenMLOL team, has decided to follow the approach of the New York Public Library and its Research and Development Sector, the NYPL Labs. The original explanation is long and complicated, but the principle is very simple: according to the number and type of the letters in both “Title” and “Author”, a pattern of shapes and colours is generated. Thus, covers are all different, generated algorithmically by the book itself (or rather by its title and author).

In MLOL we have decided to personalize a bit these covers while working on the original concept: for each letter M, L, O present in the both the title or the author, similar shapes are present inside the cover. You can see the results by yourself:

At the beginning of December, MediaLibrary had enriched its contents by adding over 800 books from Wiki-
source. 2,700 more have been added importing in fact the whole set of texts copied and corrected by the Italian community. Besides updating in future our contents, we will move now towards Wikisource in the most important European languages such as German, English, French, and Spanish.

Another integration will cover the collection of the National Library in Florence: 40,000 digitized texts made available in public domain. The gathering has been made possible by precedent uploading on Internet Archive, the reference site of open resources. This is good news for two reasons: not only we have the possibility to enlarge OpenMLOL making it more valuable for its users, but also we have access to National Library of Florence collection, one of the most important institutions among Italian libraries. This fact seems to open the way for the dissemination of library collections online, following more advanced examples such as the platform Gallica32 of the Bibliothèque Nationale Française.

One further development of the OpenMLOL project will be, moreover, to become a digital participated library: readers will be entitled to recommend books and open digital resources, librarians will interact online with the users of their library, so that everybody will participate to make a collection of texts a platform of people that talk about books.33

### 7.2 MLOL Plus

Subscription services such as Kindle Unlimited, Scribd, 24 Symbols and many others are currently posing new and interesting problems for libraries. MLOL has recently announced an agreement with distributors, publishers and libraries to launch a library subscription service. The service will be called “MLOL Plus” and it will enable libraries to operate with a type of ‘freemium’ model: the basic level of access to services will be free of charge, whilst additional or more advanced services may be purchased.

MLOL plus will focus only on e-books and will address to all the readers worldwide interested to read books in Italian language.

The basic subscription to MLOL Plus will cost 9.90 euro: In this way users are automatically registered to an Italian library, MLOL member, and have access to a very large catalogue of e-books in Italian to be borrowed.

The subscription will pay for the library service to users and will produce a profit for the library to purchase digital contents within MLOL.

Within MLOL Plus environment users will find e-books to borrow as well as a “traditional” shop with reductions and incentives based on the use of library services.

What we deem interesting in this model is the fact that libraries, through MLOL, can finance their own digital developments in times of recession exerting a sort of “social competition against the players on the market working on a very important competitive advantage: the access to the e-books of big publishers through libraries (thing that is not possible in the most common subscriptions).

The following table gives an overview of the essential differences between MLOL and MLOL Plus.34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MLOL</th>
<th>MLOL Plus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price</strong></td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>9,90 euro/month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target</strong></td>
<td>Users registered in a library of MLOL network.</td>
<td>Any reader interested in Italian e-books in the world. MLOL users who want to borrow several e-book a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Registration</strong></td>
<td>Registration by going to the library</td>
<td>Registration online (previous online registration in a library of Network MLOL plus requested) MLOL Plus subscriptions available in libraries, bookstores and other retailers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contents</strong></td>
<td>E-book, music, newspapers and periodicals, audiobooks, films, E-learning Databases, etc.</td>
<td>Only e-book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-books to be borrowed a month?</strong></td>
<td>In MLOL it depends on each library: on an average 2 e-books a month.</td>
<td>The basic subscription up to 9 books a month is allowed. Any credit can be accumulated and used in the following months.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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33 Chapter 7.1 was written by Andrea Zanni.
34 Chapter 7.2 was written by Giulio Blasi.
8 Communication

8.1 Meeting users online with social networks

As for the online promotion of the service, MLOL has chosen to be present on social network channels with different targets depending on the features of each platform, because of the enormous spread of these services, as we can see on Vincenzo Cosenza’s reports35; according to the World Map Of Social Networks36, in December 2014 Facebook has reached 1,4 billion users, 301 million of which just in Europe; moreover, according to data37 concerning the use of Facebook in Italy, 25 million users are active in our country every month (that is 86% of Internet users in Italy) and 16 million use it every day on mobile devices. These data inevitably suggest that whoever provides a service has to face the challenge of online promotion through social networking platforms, starting precisely from Facebook and Twitter.

MLOL Facebook official page38 is conceived as a real additional service for libraries and addresses librarians rather than final users. Our sharing content purposes are promoting the different kinds of resources available on our website and giving librarians useful information: they are therefore thought and written to be shared by single libraries who want to re-use texts and links to promote digital loan services for their final users.

That is why, ever since October 2014, we have been working on an editorial plan to provide a large overview of the variety of contents available on our platform. On the other hand, many library systems and libraries have already developed this kind of promotion and we try to pay particular attention to their work, starting mainly from BiblioMediaBlog39, a remarkable achievement we are going to talk about further on.

Statistical data are extremely encouraging: followers are increasing and, by the end of March 2015, 7,949 likes were counted on our page – apparently a small increase in comparison to previous month because of the new Facebook policy about inactive accounts40; again, in the month of March our posts on Facebook41 reached 61,983 users, whereas the total number of visualizations42 added up to 198,890, a great increase in comparison to previous months – before October 2014, we reached more than 100,000 views just in one case.

It is also worth mentioning the Facebook Group called MLOL-Ragazzi, in which members can talk about digital resources for children and teenagers in libraries. Although this group is not an official MLOL space, it is gaining more and more ground as a reference point for those interested in the subject, so that it has reached a quota of over 400 participants.

On the other hand Twitter43 is used as a “sounding board” for what is being said about MLOL. With our profile we try to establish an interaction with other subjects such as libraries, publishers and sometimes individual users too, through retweeting, mentions and hashtags proposed by the platform – to make our work simpler, we have created public lists of publishers44 and libraries45. Furthermore, we try to map contents produced for Facebook, adapting them for Twitter in order to reduce our work and increase the impact of our proposals.

Statistical data seem to confirm that we have chosen the right way in this case too; from October to March we passed from 955 to 3,067 daily visualizations46. It is even more interesting to note the increase of clicks on links (399 in March, the month that peaked on all analyzed parameters), retweets (389) and times our tweets have been added to Favourites (146).

On Google+ we run a page47 to map contents shared on Facebook and our blog in order to generate more traffic on the website. We still have a few visits, but we actually use G+ as a tool for collective work. A community was created and has been active for some time now: it is accessible by invitation for library system representatives, individual librarians and community managers of library nets. In this community we can categorize conversations and have enough space for thematic work.

35 http://vincos.it.
The new MLOL blog\textsuperscript{48} plays an institutional function instead: it doesn’t host any advice for single items available on the platform, but tends to promote various types of new contents, as well as agreements for further services and new projects connected with MLOL (Open-MLOL, MLOL+); furthermore, it deals with institutional subjects and the coverage of significant events such as Convegno delle Stelline in Milan (one of the most important library congresses in Italy) and Salone del Libro (International Book Fair) in Turin. That is the reason why MLOL blog has not been conceived as a tool to promote services for users: for this purpose, Italian libraries providing MLOL to their users have created BibliomediaBlog\textsuperscript{49}, a means to promotion completely independent from Horizons Unlimited. It has been active now for more than one year and is intended for librarians and final users. It offers advice for various kinds of digital contents and detailed articles about the functioning of some specific MLOL services.\textsuperscript{50}

8.2 Communicating the digital in physical libraries

Nowadays, promoting reading in libraries forces to adapt to a whole new scenario: next to shelves full of printed books we can make use of computers, e-readers, and tablets that can contain hundreds of texts.

Thanks to the MLOL platform, the users of more than 4,000 libraries can have access to the service of digital loan without going to the library not just for e-books, but also for newspapers, music, films, databases, e-learning courses, pictures databases, and much more.

The brand awareness of MLOL become, in different librarians contexts, offering another possibility, that is the opportunity for many people to approach the public library at home, on a journey, on holiday, in the park, in hospital: not a diminution but an added value.

For MLOL it is extremely necessary to create a clearly defined image, a certain visual identity, consistent and uniform, in the presentation and promotion of a brand coinciding with the platform itself and the services provided to implement a system of effective communication.

Promoting digital reading means for MLOL redesign a “strategy” of promotion, adapting it to the different fields of the library and to the different ways users approach them. The research on the brand positioning and other informational materials will have to start in the library, first of all by choosing a physical space to make MLOL visible together with a good set of signs to show the users where to go.

Firmly believing that the corporate image and visual communication are essential to make the digital real and accessible, MLOL has created a shared web space, making available for libraries free promotion materials, template for posters, stickers, bookmarks, and web images which any institute can personalize autonomously. In this way MLOL has given his contribution to a “virtuous” collaboration to help libraries to approach their users.

Promoting digital reading for MLOL does not only mean to use, in general, printed supports, posters and brochures, bookmarks and pencils, but it also involves to locate them in the physical space of libraries, on the floors or putting them on walls as a well as screensavers, videos, animations, music, stickers, images to match and complete tweets and blog and Facebook posts, in a system of references between “physical” and “online”, that is the most important challenge for libraries in terms of corporate identity today.\textsuperscript{51}

Fig. 4: MLOL Brochure

\textsuperscript{48} http://blog.mlol.it.
\textsuperscript{49} http://bibliomediablog.com.
\textsuperscript{50} Chapter 8.1 was written by Francesco Pandini.
\textsuperscript{51} Chapter 8.2 was written by Paola Luschi.
Fig. 5: MLOL hanging MLOL signal

Fig. 6: MLOL Timetable
Fig. 7: Roll up a.di.su. MLOL

Fig. 8: Roll up capodistria MLOL
Fig. 9: Roll up SBT MLOL

Fig. 10: Roll up Vignola MLOL
9 Conclusions: a “competition”
Europe vs. USA

European data on the market of e-books and digital reading show a very clear picture compared to the market in the USA. All the vital parameters (number of e-book readers, circulation of devices, number of available tiles, shares of the digital in the publishing market) show that Europe is substantially late in comparison to the USA. Between 2012 and 2013, e-books represent something like 20–25% of the USA trade market and American readers have access to 2 million titles available on the market. At the same time, in Europe, the e-book market covers, more or less the 2% if the market trade (3.4% if we include the UK).

To make things worse, we must point out that the biggest players in the sector (Amazon, Google, Kobo, and Apple) are not Europeans and this represents an alarming element proving the serious delay in the European system of publication and distribution in terms of competition, globally speaking, in the market of reading.

The e-book in the USA had a substantial peak between 2007 (Launch of Kindle) and 2010 (Launch of iPad). Apart, however, from the evolution of the market and technology, we often forget that the USA, before 2007 had developed a large community of digital readers through the e-lending services in public libraries. The main USA operator in the field of e-lending in libraries, Overdrive, started its activities in 2000\textsuperscript{52}, 7 years before Amazon started with Kindle! Whereas the pre-kindle e-book consumers market is rather irrelevant, the e-lending services in libraries had already created a large community of users and fans of digital reading before 2007 and had made publishers see the problems of digital distribution long time before it had happened in the consumer sector. Most of all, American library system in 2007 was ready to act as social belt transmission of the digital initiatives of the big market operators, helping to generate the substantial percentage advantage over all the other countries in the world, which USA enjoy today.

The crisis affecting public libraries in many European countries because of the recession and the backwards condition of the library schools in a few member states, together with the data about the use of perception of public libraries in Europe, sufficiently explain the divergence between the American and the European data about digital reading.

\textsuperscript{52} http://company.overdrive.com/company/who-we-are/history.


These data make it extremely difficult to operate in the e-lending sector for countries like Italy. And yet, it is quite evident that digital reading is not just an indicator of the level of modernization of the publishing market but also a symptom of the state of the access to knowledge and, more in general, a symptom of the future of reading. In this respect, such numbers can announce a problem of competitiveness in Italy and Europe much deeper than the indications given by the market of books. For us, MLOL operators, it is a stimulus to continue with our work.