

2.12 Italy

Library Automation in Italy Towards the Digital Library

Anna Maria Tammaro

Background

From the unification of the Kingdom of Italy in 1860 until this day, whenever Italians speak of libraries we speak about them as “treasures” thus recognizing the value of the collection which all libraries, even the smallest ones, possess as a heritage of the past. The bibliographical heritage preserved in libraries is that upon which the attention of politicians, the public, and librarians themselves in Italy is concentrated, with the consequence that the preservation of the collection is held to be the most important library function, together with its organization by means of catalogs and bibliographies. Very often however, for example in the case of many libraries with an ancient tradition, libraries have been turned into museums and have lost contact with the public for which they were constructed and their collection is the result of varied aggregations, as for example the libraries confiscated from suppressed monasteries and convents. Another characteristic of the Italian library system in many institutions is the fragmentation of responsibility for management without any coordination and there are great differences between the North and the South of Italy. National and state libraries are managed directly by the Direzione Generale per le Biblioteche, gli Istituti Culturali e il Diritto d’Autore (DGBID – General Direction for Library Heritage, Cultural Institutes and Copyright) of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MIBAC – Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities); public and local government libraries are managed by the governments of local authorities; administrative and parliamentary libraries are managed by other institutions of the public administration, such as ministries and parliament; university and school libraries are managed by universities and schools. This situation, due to historical causes, has always weighed in a negative way upon service in Italian libraries, where efficient national services are lacking. Automation in Italian libraries began from this situation of the context, only briefly outlined here which can be studied exhaustively in the writings of various authors (Traniello 2005; Ammendola 1998; Guerrini and Frigimelica 2009).

Although it began from these structural problems, library automation in Italy was put into practice very early on, beginning in the early 50s and