

Towards an Institutional Repository of the Italian National Research Council: A Survey on Open Access Experiences

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a survey aiming at identifying documentation, organization as well as technological resources that could be the basis for a future development of a CNR IR. The survey makes use of a semi-structured questionnaire submitted to all CNR research units. Results show that, despite a limited number of OAI compliant repository developed under the autonomous initiative of some CNR research units, there is a mature environment for the development of an IR.

1. Introduction

Institutional repositories (IRs) constitute one of the most important applications of Open Access (OA) principles, which combines both scholars' and research institutions' concern to set up a new scholarly communication paradigm as well as enhance the visibility and impact of scientific research. However, although an increasing number of IRs have been developed internationally since 2002, the debate started by Lynch [Lynch, 2003] and Crow [Crow, 2002] is still open [Geudon, 2002, Harnard, 2005, Ginsparg, 2007, Suber, 2008], aiming at identifying the best way to make IRs an innovative channel for the dissemination, exchange and preservation of scientific contents.

In our opinion the major elements of success of Institutional Repositories (IRs) depend upon a sound synergy among the different stakeholders participating in the process of production, sharing and diffusion of the knowledge produced within the scientific organisation. In fact, in the activities of planning, designing and supporting a new IR it is necessary that a minimum set of conditions are fulfilled:

- The scientific institution has to declare its official commitment to the OA policy, advocating scholarly open access publication;
- Scholars have to be personally motivated and supported to populate IRs;
- An information network has to be built to support the activities connected with the submission and management of scientific contents, at the same time promoting an OA culture;
- A technological infrastructure has to be developed to support the implementation of OAI-PMH compliant repositories.

Even if there is no national policy on IRs, in Italy Open Access Initiatives (OAI) have been primarily promoted by Universities and intra-university consortia, which almost unanimously adhered to the Berlin Declaration [Berlin, 2003]. At the moment the ROAR registry reports about 40 operational OA archives [ROAR], which demonstrates a constant increase in these information systems, even if the number of scientific contents contained shows that they are still not fully deployed. Among other governmental research institutions only the Italian National Institute of Health [De Castro, 2007], has officially supported OA in 2007 making the depositing of its internally produced post-prints mandatory into its newly developed IR.

The National Research Council (CNR), one of the biggest multidisciplinary research institutions composed by a network of 107 geographically distributed institutes, has not expressed an official position toward OA yet. However, thanks to its scientific and organisational autonomy, some CNR Institutes might have made their scientific production freely available either through their own local repositories or through freely accessible web resources. In order to acquire a more precise picture of the AO CNR practice, a group of CNR researchers and librarians (hereafter called "supporter group") has promoted a survey aiming at identifying documentation, organization as well as technological resources that could be the basis for a future development of a CNR comprehensive IR.

2. Research hypothesis and objectives

Many surveys have been carried out in order to analyse scholars' behaviour and attitude towards publication submission in IRs, which could become "a set of empty shelves", if not adequately populated [Gibbons, 2005]. Other surveys are focused on inventory IRs at a national [Rieh, 2007, Zuber, 2008] and international level [Lynch, 2005; van Westrienen, 2005; van der Graaf, 2008] comparing national policies toward OA, IR characteristics and management.