

## Present and past experiences in GL management and research. A questionnaire survey on Italian participants to GL events.

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### 1. Introduction

The widespread acceptance of Grey Literature throughout Italy is due largely to work undertaken by the Italian Libraries Association (AIB). In 1985, the Association set up a work group to analyse the sphere of grey literature. In 1987, the Association published a monographic issue of its in house magazine dedicated entirely to GL. The issue contained fundamental contributions from Italian library and document bank managers, who, we believe, are destined to become the leading national GL experts. The publication coincided with the Italian participation in System of Information for Grey Literature in Europe (SIGLE) and subsequent establishment of the SIGLE national reference centre at the central CNR library (Di Cesare, Lazzari 2000). Taken together, these initiatives constitute a key focus for the growth of Italian GL experts. Twenty years on from the initial publication, with the latest redefinition of the role and responsibilities of SIGLE and prior to the eighth international GL conference, it is natural to attempt to gauge past and current Italian contributions in GL at national and international conferences.

It was decided to seek the opinions, of those most qualified to speak from experience and position, on the difficulties and prospects of this sector, which in Italy has undergone fluctuations in fortune.

Above all the enquiry sought to establish how the participating experts view their experience in the study and handling of GL, and what developments they foresee in the sector.

Our qualitative survey aims to provide a profile of Italian GL experts and to gain knowledge useful for future Italian GL initiatives.

In more precise terms, the survey seeks answers to the following interrogatives:

- Quantification and classification of Italian GL experts;
- Quantification of the time they dedicate (or have dedicated) to research on and handling of GL;
- Manner of entry into the field and underlying motivation;
- Self-evaluation of work experience.

As is the case for all qualitative surveys, we did not seek specific indicators to define the appropriacy of GL management policy, nor to measure the efficacy of such policy. Our aim was rather to acquire subjective data from Italian experts and view this data in organisational and cultural contexts.

### 2. Methods and sample

The survey was carried out by means of a questionnaire sent to all Italian authors who had participated in national and international GL conferences.

The first phase was to analyse authors' contributions at national (Alberani, De Castro, 1993; 1996;1999) and international conferences (GL1 Conference proceedings; GL2, GL3; GL4;GL5; GL6; GL7) between 1992 and 2005. Contributions to the original 1987 monographic issue of the AIB Bollettino were included on account of its historical and pioneering value.

From the above proceedings it was possible to extract names of Italian participants. These number 129 and account for an overall 198 presences at various meetings.

We define participants as those who have signed at least one paper presented at a conference or who were present as moderators. The latter is a very limited category (5), with participation limited to national conferences.

The survey makes use of a semi-structured anonymous questionnaire. It includes 21 open and closed question items along with a small number of scaled response questions. Approximately 15 minutes are required for the questionnaire to be completed.

The questions follow a funnel sequence, from generic to specific, focusing on the field. In this way it is possible to record respondents' opinions and value judgements on their professional experience. These questions were followed by a further section containing structural questions. The final phase was to build a database to load and elaborate the data from the returned questionnaires.

The questionnaire was sent out on September 15<sup>th</sup> with deadline for return set at the end of October. Initially there was a healthy number of completed returns, thereafter this number declined significantly. This prompted us to issue a reminder, requesting participants to respond even if some questions were irrelevant in their specific case. The need for such a step had been foreseen and enabled the accumulation of a more than satisfactory total of returns.

Overall there were 129 Italian participants. Given that the survey contemplates a lengthy timescale, it was not sent out to 21 of these, who, in the meantime, had retired or moved to different bodies. It proved