

Open archives and SIGLE participation in Italy: Is there a subtle link between the two experiences?

Daniela Luzi, Rosa Di Cesare and Roberta Ruggieri

Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione e le Politiche Sociali , IRPPS-CNR, Italy

Abstract

This paper proposes on the one hand to outline Italian initiatives regarding open archives, with a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis, focussing in particular on data providers and on organisation and initiatives that lead to integration that encourage the development of IRs. On the other hand, it proposes to analyse the 20 years of Italian input to SIGLE in order to verify if and to what extent the Italian producers participating in SIGLE have contributed to the fostering of new ways of sharing and diffusing information sources produced within their organisations.

1. Introduction

Why have we decided to verify the existence of the weakest of links between the creation of Italian open archives and the Italian participation in the European SIGLE system? There are numerous differences between the two documentation systems, including the date of their development, the methods used for data collection and the technology that has been employed.

The SIGLE project (System of Information for Grey Literature in Europe) got underway in 1980 and was funded and launched by the then European Community. EAGLE (European Association for Grey Literature in Europe) came into existence in 1985 when the database was fully operative [1]. SIGLE adopted an operational system that was cutting edge for its time, with the collection and indexing of GL in the hands of national reference centres. The data was successively collected and elaborated centrally by a technical unit that provided a fee-based access to the database. Nowadays this would be termed a distributed system with centralised access to data.

Open archives, on the other hand, were the initiative of individual researchers (the most famous being Ginsparg, Harnard, Krichel), who, in a brief period of time, managed to collect a large number of documents from colleagues and make them freely accessible via Internet [2]. This gave rise to a movement, a new philosophy for the diffusion of scientific literature, known as the Open Archive Initiative (OAI). In effect, one of the most significant results of the development of e-print archives has been the consensus received from scientific institutions and the support of libraries that belong to them leading to the establishment of the Institutional Repositories (IRs) [3]. In fact, institutional commitment to making available and preserving the scientific documentation produced by each institute along with the active participation of libraries and that of academics can create ideal conditions for access to scientific literature without economic and technological barriers.

However, the SIGLE initiative and open archives - IRs in particular - have some elements in common. These can be traced above all in their common objectives, but extend to initiatives to guarantee the success of both documentation systems. Looking first at the objectives, the open archives - and in particular the Institutional or disciplinary repositories - aim to make available the internal documentation of an institute or a discipline. Similarly, the various national reference centres aim to provide a GL production framework that faithfully reflects the production in each member state. Setting aside the opportunity of a national information policy, historically lacking in Italy, conditions necessary for the successful performance of the two documentation systems are very similar. Both require the setting up of a network that is, particularly for the repositories, appealing to the various scholarly communities and that *convince*s them of the advantages of depositing their work in open archives. For the SIGLE national reference centres too, it was necessary to identify the GL producing institutes and either have them provide a constant stream of documents and/or make them actively participate in GL cataloguing. In order to do so, GL producers had to be convinced of the information value of GL and of the necessity for access to such documents via participation in the SIGLE European database. In both cases organisational and cultural changes are needed in order to assure the success of the initiatives.

A further common element of both documentation systems is precisely that both distribute GL. SIGLE only manages GL, while the open archives deal with GL together with conventional literature. While Gelfand [4] is correct in affirming that GL has found its home in the repositories, it is exactly because of the co-existence of GL and conventional literature that repositories provide an *ideal, complete coverage* of the research output of an institute or disciplinary community. It is in this way that repositories can become an alternative and/or complementary source to commercial publishers, responding to request for free access to scientific products.