The National Library Service (SBN) towards Digital

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INTRODUCTION

In the sector of technologies for the Information Society, the General Direction for Library Heritage and Cultural Institutes has promoted two programs:

- SBN: The National Library Service (Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale)
- BDI: The Italian Digital Library (Biblioteca Digitale Italiana)

and another project, which was approved on March 18, 2003:

- BDI&NTC: The Italian Digital Library and Cultural Tourist Network

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE

Today Italian libraries are totally different from what they were like 15 or 20 years ago. In the early 80s weeping changes were introduced in both organization and work methodologies. This involved the use of informatic and telematic technologies, the aim being that of offering national and international communities a wider array of information means and adequate knowledge. Particularly, during this last decade, since January 1993, new and coordinated initiatives were started which have led to the establishment of the National Library Service (SBN).

The National Library Service is the Italian library network promoted by the General Direction for Library Heritage and Cultural Institutes, in cooperation with the Regions and the Universities, and it is coordinated by the Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries and for Bibliographic Information (ICCU). The libraries that participate in the SBN project are the government, university, academic libraries, as well as those that belong to local entities, and to public and private institutions operating in different sectors. Initially, the National Library Service was a national project and was set up in 1980 with the aim of providing high-level cultural services for national and international users and tools for both scientific and management activities for all Italian libraries. The target is to overcome the fragmentation of libraries, typical of the ongoing cultural-political history of Italy, and offer a nation-wide service based on the management of a general on-line catalogue and on the sharing of resources so that documents are actually accessible and available.

Image 1

The libraries involved in the project are called Poles: each Pole is formed by greater or smaller number of libraries, which run all their services using automatic procedures through a computer network connected to a server, which is the Index. At the moment we have1828 libraries grouped into 51 Poles distributed throughout the national territory.

The Index is the Union Catalogue of the system which holds all the cataloguing items of the Poles involved in the project together with the location items for managing functions of research and book rental.

The Pole contains cataloguing items and all managing and specific details of the single libraries (inventory, local rent, allocation, etc.).

Databases

The practice of shared cataloguing adopted by these libraries has produced specialized online catalogues which refer to different materials:

- The **Modern Book** database contains information on books, periodicals and collections published after 1830. It is the largest database for its number of stored data: at 31 December 2002 it featured 2,000,000 authors, 7,000,000 title data, corresponding to a total of approx. 17 million records;
- The **Music** database, at 31 December 2002 featured 500,000 records relating to manuscripts and printed musical documents and librettos since the 16th century, located in over 500 public and private institutions. This database may be considered the primary source for the retrospective national bibliography of music, and is one of the most important research sources for the history of music;
- The **Ancient Book** database includes data relating to books published from the beginning of printing to 1830, the latter being the year conventionally adopted, at the international level, as the watershed between ancient and modern. At 31 December 2002 it featured 280,000 title data, corresponding to approx. 450,000 records;
- The **Manuscript** database, which includes about 5,000 records relating to the important national manuscript heritage;
- The **Italian Library Database** surveys all libraries nationwide. The project, launched in 1989, was developed by ICCU, which is responsible for the scientific and technical coordination of the project. The database contains basic information on the 15.000 Italian libraries: address, size, types of collections and user services.

Therefore the SBN is at present a worldwide library network, which can be accessed via the PC, at home or at work, where one can surf through millions of titles, millions of authors and millions of records (i.e. books and documents held by all the participating libraries).
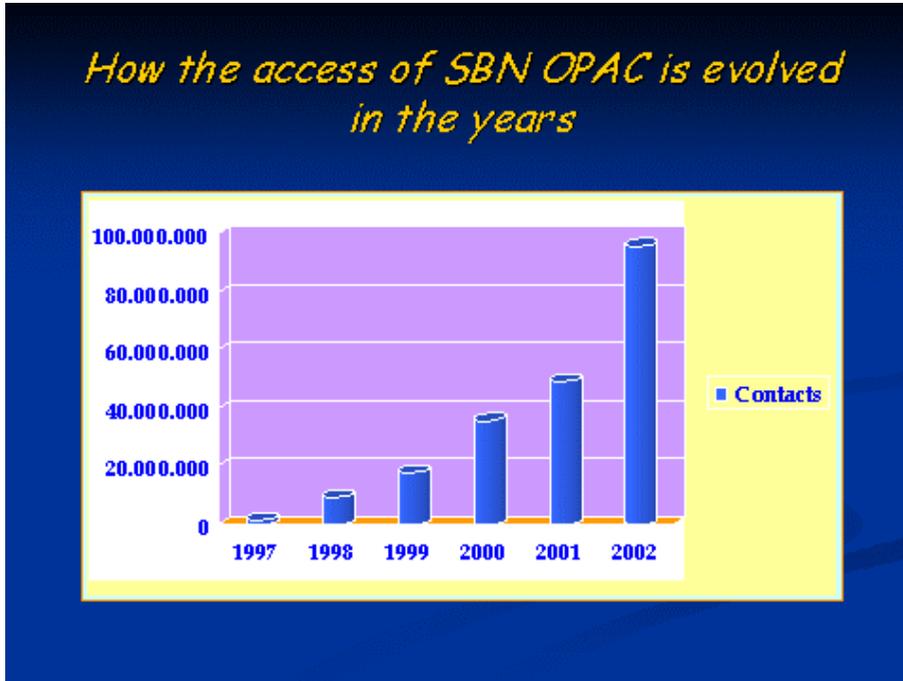
Image 2

In 2002 the OPAC SBN (On line Public Access Catalogue), which utilises the protocol Search and Retrieval Z.39.50, had over 95 million contacts.

Aims and Guidelines in the evolution of the SBN network

Europe's cultural and scientific knowledge resources are a unique public asset forming the collective and evolving memory of our diverse societies and providing a solid basis for the development of our digital content industries in a sustainable knowledge society. In Italy a number of projects have been developed for the digitisation of cultural and scientific content, at all levels (regional, local, etc.): impressive amounts of initiatives have been taken already to digitise a number of educational, cultural, commercial, and research records. But for the development of a global information society, it is of great importance to digitise these resources by adopting programmes, standards and skills used

by the EU. It is also necessary to improve collection interoperability, service implementation and distributed access so that all citizens can share in that heritage.

However, while the digitisation process was under way, the experts perceived a great number of barriers and threats to this development, i.e., a fragmented approach, a duplication of efforts and investments, a lack of access, the problem of intellectual property rights and others. For these problems the Cultural Heritage Applications Unit of the Information Society Directorate General has organised, with Member States, an experts meeting of representatives from all countries, held in Lund (Sweden) on 4 April 2001. The conclusions and recommendations of this meeting were agreed as the Lund Principles and developed into the Lund Action Plan on coordination of digitisation programmes and policies.

In Italy, the General Direction for Library Heritage and Cultural Institutes has incorporated these principles (promotion of interoperability, of schemata designed to promote the integration of European data, of research policies) into its projects for the expansion of the SBN and for the digitisation of the cultural and scientific heritage: the Italian Digital Library, the Italian Digital Library and the Cultural Tourist Network.

THE ITALIAN DIGITAL LIBRARY

The Italian Digital Library (BDI) is a project that aims at putting documents of Italian libraries online through digitisation activities, which will be integrated into the SBN. The project, which started in 2001 after a feasibility study, has been coordinated by a Steering Committee, composed by experts coming from both state and regional libraries, museums, universities and research institutes. The main finding that emerged from the feasibility study was that, in spite of the fact that several initiatives are available, most of them focus on the collections of specific libraries and do not follow a coordinated general program.

In order to overcome such limitations, the Steering Committee started a coordinated programme to:

- promote collaboration between National projects and Community and International projects;
- provide standard and methodology guidelines;
- define statement priorities.

Among the initiatives promoted by the BDI Steering Committee the following programmes are worth mentioning:

- a coordinated scanning programme acquiring, in image format, 70 catalogues belonging to 30 institutes whose final target involves 8 million cards and 150.000 book pages;
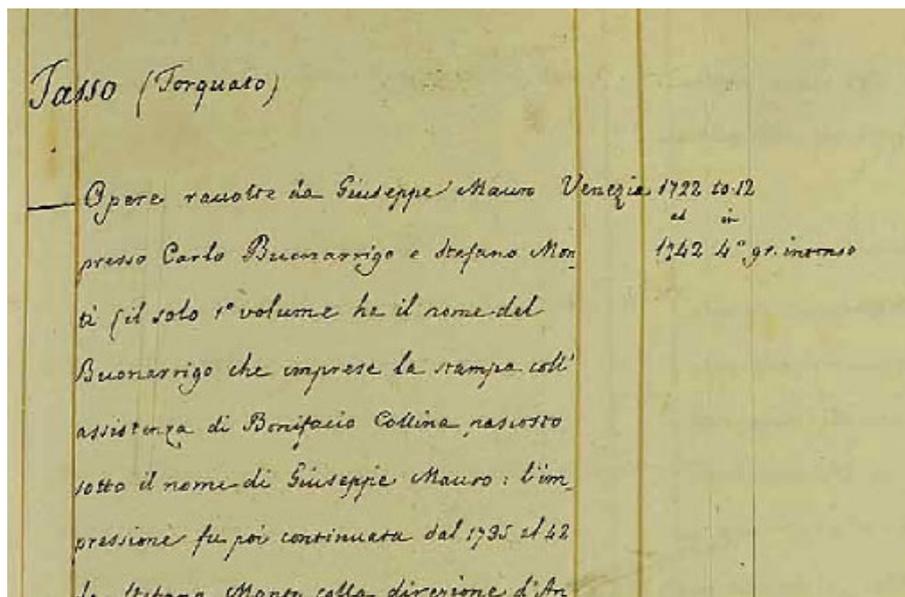
Image 3

- a digitisation programme of musical documents, whose target is the acquisition of 57.000 manuscript pages coming from the Estense library of Modena, the National library of Rome, the Marciana library of Venice, and the National library of Turin;
- a digitisation programme covering serials of great cultural and historical value;
- providing support to the European Rinascimento Virtuale ('Virtual Renaissance') project set up for preserving and bringing out old palimpsests;
- coordination, through the MINERVA project, of all activities involving the digitisation of scientific and cultural documents.

By taking advantage of the experience achieved with the SBN, the BDI project precisely identifies the tasks of the different institutions involved: the central administration

supports the promotion and coordination activities and provides the software for database management and the implementation of the web site for online accessibility to the images, while the libraries that join the project choose and index the material to be digitised and provide suggestions for digitisation projects.

MINERVA

The MINERVA project, Ministerial Network for Valorising Activities in digitisation, is funded under the IST Programme and coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Culture. The aim of Minerva is to create a network of Member States' Ministries to discuss, correlate and harmonise activities carried out in the digitisation of cultural and scientific content, for creating an agreed European common platform, recommendations and guidelines about digitisation, metadata, long-term accessibility and preservation.

Minerva started with 7 countries and plans to extend the network to all Member States so as to provide a collaborative European framework for the Lund Action Plan and its working groups.

THE ITALIAN DIGITAL LIBRARY AND THE CULTURAL TOURIST NETWORK

For the future, the National Library Service plans to extend and to integrate, within the network structure, the actions promoted by the General Direction for Library Heritage and Cultural Institutes integrating them, where possible, into the more general policies of e-government, innovation, and technological development devised in the context of Cultural Heritage. In such a context, the General Direction, through ICCU, decided to expand the SBN network in order to bring together, in a unique architecture, the libraries and their catalogues, the new growing digital libraries, and the Knowledge Management centres.

The Italian Digital Library and the Cultural Tourist Network project was submitted in 2002 to the Minister Committee for the Information Society and was approved on March, 18th, 2003 together with other two library projects:

- library e-learning centres
- library network for schools

The project aims at creating a technological infrastructure and at producing components for:

- administrative control, covering aspects associated with copyright handling, royalty fees, incoming division, transaction security, handling overall economic relationships with users;
- knowledge management, i.e., the development of new strategies and instruments for locating and accessing information sources, both of catalogue and text/image format. The system foresees the setting up of centres of excellence, devoted to integrating and optimising thematic knowledge. In particular, a first centre of excellence is to focus on tourist-cultural tours concerning artistic images, landscapes, local history, movies, etc.;
- Italian Digital Library portal, i.e., a new integrated service for accessing digital and traditional resources, aimed at redefining available sites, in order to provide the end user with a user-friendly interface for both normal and disabled users.

Ultimately, the user will be able to access one single network which will contain traditional, electronic and digital documents belonging to archives, libraries, museums.

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

BDI- Biblioteca Digitale Italiana. http://www.iccu.sbn.it/bdi.html

Information Society Directorate-General.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information_society/index_en.htm

ICCU- L'Instituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico delle biblioteche italiane e per le informazioni bibliografiche. http://www.iccu.sbn.it/instituto.html

Lund Action Plan on coordination of digitisation programmes and Policies.
http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digicult/lund_ap_browse.htm

Lund Principles. http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digicult/lund_p_browse.htm

MINERVA - Ministerial NEtwork for Valorising Activities in digitisation.
http://www.minervaeurope.org/

The National Library Service (SBN). http://www.sbn.it/

OPAC SBN. http://opac.sbn.it/

Rinascimento Virtuale project. http://www.saunalahti.fi/~ikotivuo/rvrvrv/

SBN- Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale. http://www.sbn.it/