

Igino Poggiali  
*National President of the Italian Library Association*

Authorities, dear colleagues,

first of all I wish to address my deep thanks to the Councillor of Tuscany Region dr. Mariella Zoppi, to Professor Augusto Marinelli, Rector of the University of Florence, to Professor Paolo Marrassini, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities of the same University, to Professor Francesco Sicilia, General Director for Book Patrimony and Cultural Institutions of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities as well as to dr. Luciano Scala, Director of ICCU and dr. Antonia Ida Fontana, Director of the Central National Library of Florence for organizing this extremely important international conference together with the Italian Library Association, and its Tuscany Branch.

I thank then Professor Mauro Guerrini for the determination and far-sightedness in carrying on in these years the debate on professional themes which are of strategic value for the development of the library service in Italy and in the world, by organizing some prestigious events like the one we are going to open.

I wish to thank together with him all those who have collaborated to the organization of the conference and clearly the renowned guests and delegates that will make Florence in these days a place for reflections and a laboratory for innovation in the management of our institutions. By going through the programme we can see what is the level of the contributions of scholars and foreign and Italian colleagues, and by the list of registered people we can have an evaluation of the international importance of these conference days to which some 400 librarians and scholars will participate, coming from various European countries, and from very far countries like China, Corea, Japan.

I would finally like to thank M.me Christine Deschamps, IFLA President, for taking under its prestigious auspices this event.

With regard to that, I have the honour to announce you that Italy and Canada are the two destinations in competition for the assignation of IFLA Conference in 2008!

This conference certainly helps to increase the weight of our possibilities to win this competition whose result will be decided in the IFLA Conference in Berlin next August. Previous initiatives of this level have contributed to this goal, starting from FRBR Seminar in 2000, to the Conference on electronic resources in 2001, whose proceedings have been published both in Italian and in English specifically for this occasion, to Dublin Core Conference, most of them organized in Tuscany thank to the Region and other Local Institutions and to the Universities.

The final result will depend also on the support that AIB will receive for this competition from the Government, the Regional Authorities, the Universities, Italian libraries and all librarians that will put into play their international relations to support our candidature. Among significant initiatives that everybody can take there is the participation to the Conferences under organization, from Berlin to Buenos Aires. The number of registered people for Berlin, because of easiness of access, will be determining in evaluating the interest of the Italian profession in a Conference on its territory. During these years we have deeply intensified participation in IFLA structures of scientific elaboration, from the Standing Committees to the presentation of contributions to the Conference, to the support to IFLA and UNESCO initiatives for the development of the profession and of libraries, like @t Your Library, then the World Book and Copyright Day on the 23 of April of every year, the support to the promotion of Alexandria Library in the occasion of its opening last October during the days of BIBLIOCOM.

There is a lot more that I should say on this subject but I refer you to AIB website where you will find from the next days all information and news on the role and international projects of the association.

Coming to the contents of this meeting, and beyond the technical aspects that will be brilliantly illustrated by delegates, I would like to underline the value of elaborations and strategies which will be discussed here also on a political, ethical and professional level.

The overcoming of a gerarchic vision of authority entries, the renunciation to searching a unique entry in favour of a "cluster" entry in which all related headings have among them equal dignity changes completely the perspective of librarian work. It takes to the level of management of information data the auspices of opening and ability of inclusion that lie at the basis of our values and that libraries have learned to practice on a logistic level, of documents selection, ability to support free circulation of ideas and knowledge. To give equal dignity to languages and cultures in which differences of access to data arise means to contribute to that globalization based on the dignity of the human being, which is the real alternative to the collision of civilizations that darkly impend over our horizon in these days.

All that is clearly possible thank to the help of new technologies but without the theoretic elaboration that will here have a relevant stage of development, those opportunities would have been totally or partially unusable.

Two developments, I think, could be largely favoured by this research: co-operation among libraries and industrialization of external supports to our activity.

Many papers will treat already existing co-operative experiences among library systems in implementing national and international authority files and I believe we can say that the phenomenon is already far ahead and makes its way towards concrete results whose benefits are already visible, beginning by the university environment.

Alike I think that these processes would find their best way to become concrete in the outsourcing by the single library of a work which is certainly of great value but extremely complex and costly so that it could simply not be possible to realize. To outsource is not necessarily a synonymous of privatisation. Much could be done for example with specialisation in these duties of national bibliographic services, possibly separated by the present administrative and bureaucratic setting. The ideal choice would be to use the most suitable solution according to the activity in order to pursue the purposes of quality, cost-saving and timeliness. This is obvious but never actually happens!

Whether the work is done inside the library or the task is in outsourcing the real problem is the availability of a really professional staff able to face the complexity of these new challenges. The series of problems in which treatment of authority control is set requires a high cultural level of preparation of operators and a large opening to cultures and ways of thinking different and remote. How many of us are really prepared at this level?

During the last ten years the University has been able to take in charge in an increasingly punctual manner, though with light and shade, the problem of the training of librarians. However, the level of complexity requires now a jump in quality that lead to prefer the training of a fewer number of learners really interested and qualified, able to start working by taking a contribution to innovation and efficiency, rather than young people, certainly enthusiastic but having a generic preparation and requiring strong interventions of training for work.

The creation of the two-year Master in Cataloguing at the University of Florence seems an important answer in this direction. It is of essential importance a continuous communication between academic and professional world so that these moments of learning hit the centre of the desired goals. With regards to this, I believe that, in Italy, quite differently from the Anglo-Saxon context, greater importance than is given today should be addressed to training in the workplace and to its evaluation in the curriculum and profile of future colleagues.

Thanks all again and good work.