

OPEN DATA AND OPEN ACCESS: WHICH KNOWLEDGE SHARING FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION? DATA AND INFORMATION ORGANIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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ABSTRACT

The significant value of Open Data and Open Access, both as transparency tools toward public opinion, and as valorization of the results achieved by the institutions, is growing on a daily basis, at global level. Even the world of university cooperation can now take the opportunity to confront with the latter.

Regarding this topic, many are the questions upon which we would like to reflect together, especially looking at what we learned in the last few years.

Which could be the advantages and disadvantages for university cooperation, originating from a more and more intense data and information sharing? Which are the tools and the most suitable channels? Which indicators or objective systems will have to be monitored as priority in the next years?

Which will be, in the short run, the system of indicators that our institutions will need in order to address their policies and to make visible, within international contexts, the manifold initiatives promoted in the local contexts?

In May 2013 in Geneva, UNESCO launched at the world summit on the Information Society Forum its new initiative for Open Access.

UNESCO is the first organization of the United Nations to make available to everyone, free of charge, its publications, with the possibility to readopt and redistribute them. Does it represent an interesting stimulus, even for universities involved in the field of cooperation? If we really were able to share methodologies, tools, approaches how much more and better could we do?

In times of abundant resources, finding synergies among work groups and projects could be considered an interesting added value; now, in a phase of more and more scarce resources, the knowledge sharing commitment could turn out to be an essential operative modality to continue guaranteeing an effective presence of universities within the cooperation field. Starting from here, the panel proposes to delineate possible answers, confronting the point of view of the universities, national and international institutions and stimulating a cooperative reflection.

PROPOSER

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PARTICIPANTS

Lucilla Alagna – *International Affairs Dept. of CNR (the National Research Council)*

Gildo Baraldi – *General Director OICS (Osservatorio Interregionale Cooperazione Sviluppo)*

Paola Esena - *Programme Manager Polisocial, Fondazione Politecnico di Milano*

Federico Morando - *Director of Research and Policy & Research Fellow, Nexa Center for internet & Society, Politecnico di Torino*

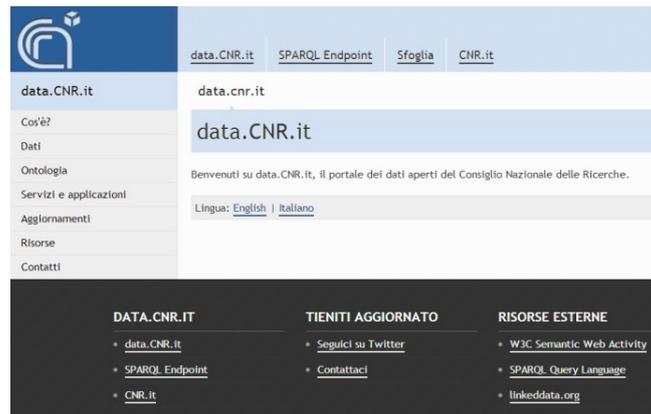
DISCUSSION

The panel opened up with an initial overview of the main initiatives on the theme of Open Data and Open Access, which have a direct impact on the Italian context.

Lucilla Alagna brought the experience of CNR on Open Data (<http://data.cnr.it>) and Open Access, starting from the underwriting by CNR of the *Berlin declaration*¹ and the *Position statement on open access to scientific research*

¹ Act which represents the European document of acceptance to the principles of open access for the research products financed with public funds and it defines the open access as an essential strategy to guarantee the diffusion and the reuse of research results from the scientific community and the civil society.

results in Italy (http://sito.entecra.it/portale/public/documenti/position_statement_0a_it.pdf), signed by CRUI (the Conference of Italian University Rectors) and the Italian research entities.



The motivations connected to the acceptance to the principles and strategies for OA defined within the scientific works and by the Global Research Council were discussed; more, Lucilla Alagna described the aims and actions of MedOAnet (Mediterranean Open Access Network <http://www.medoanet.eu/>), a national work group for the definition of guidelines to Open Access to research data in Italy.



The Science & Technology Digital Library (<http://stdl.cnr.it/>) project was presented; this is one of the initiatives of the Italian Digital Agenda for the use of ICT to favor growth, innovation and competitiveness, in line with the European Digital Agenda (EU Strategy 2020). The project includes the creation of a digital library which allows access and reuse of scientific data and the development of advanced technological solutions, in order of making the processes of scientific and technological research (open science) transparent and comprehensible, and the research financed by public funds (open access) available.

Afterwards, the attention was brought to a few aspects which deserve attention:

- the problem of the quality of research data in a reuse context: this means the need to keep a traceability of the sources and the process of re-elaboration of the data and researches. In this sense, it is necessary to encourage a participative approach and shared responsibility and to incentivize standard tools which could stimulate annotations made by those who own the data or reuse them;
- the identification of sharing processes which does not imply, necessarily, the free release, but which entails the study of business models able to sustain the Open Data approach;
- the possibility to create professional figures connected to such sector, arising from initiatives, projects and “lesson learnt” both national and international.

Among the strong points, one should notice that up until now a big quantity of data and research on various fields of knowledge was collected; more, exists a coherent legislation and a formal acceptance from the various research entities; the capacity of platforms implementation and data managing tools according to Open logics is concrete; there is the necessity to optimize resources.

The problems to be solved are related to the discrepancy of data and the complex interaction between the systems. This makes it difficult to create connections between different databases and the outward openness of well-organized sources.

Which are the suggestions for the future? First of all, it is necessary the study of actions which allow an always greater data circulation, homogeneity and compatibility of data and systems, and the creation of flexible indexes and search keys, universally accepted.

But even more important is the organization of moments and places, real and virtual, in which the discussion and the confrontation of the main representatives of the institutional and territorial entities connected to data management are kept alive.

Federico Morando shared the experience developed by Nexa Center for Internet & Society of Politecnico di Torino on the topic of Openness of public data, providing multidisciplinary insights on the good practices and on the most common obstacles. His participation highlighted the key points of a few concrete experiences, both local and international, drawing the recurring characteristics of the processes of public data access, in order to prevent or manage errors and the most common fears and highlight the opportunities of this scenario.

In particular, the reflections of Federico Morando originated from general considerations on the necessity to open data outwards in order to allow a greater new version and a better interpretation, to guarantee a stimulus of knowledge and innovation generation, and to have an impact both on the public as well as on the private sphere.

Regarding the specific context of the Italian Public Administration, it is significant to note the experience of Piemonte Region.



Data have been published in re-usable formats and organized in such a way so that they were easily searchable and re-usable without incurring in problems of misinterpretation.

The main difficulty consisted not really in the technological context - however complex, since it has to offer tools able to collect and catalogue data coming from different sources, - but from the cultural sphere. Many of the people responsible for data management involved in the process were hesitant about the publication of important data, because of the scarce overview on the possible alteration by others.

Therefore, Open Access for PA means not only a project planning of the technological tools, the re-organization modalities and data interoperability in order to allow its search ability and reuse, **but** also the design and plan of a learning path for data managers to promote a complex cultural transformation: this learning action which leads the data managers to understand that the opportunity offered by the Open Access movement is a landmark “not only to favor the private sector innovation, and a democratic participation of the citizens, but also to increase efficiency in the public administration itself” as described in the “*white book for the reuse of information in the public sector*” (<http://evpsi.org/librobianco>), by Federico Morando.

This document, in a clear, direct, explicit and exhaustive modality, highlights the given opportunities, expedients, risks and common errors briefly revisited during Federico Morando’s talk.

From the complex world of PA, the focus shifted to a similarly complex setting such as the one of cooperation for development.

Gildo Baraldi described the sphere of decentralized cooperation of the Italian regions, which consists in the creation and management of general partnerships between their territories and those of their foreign partners, finalized to the reciprocal social, economic, cultural and institutional development. It embraces all their International relations:

from cooperation for development to the support of international territorial processes, to the valorization of immigrant foreign communities and of the emigrant regional from and to the partner territories.

It is, therefore, fundamental to consult and inform the territory entities (ONG, universities, local entities, PMI, etc.) involved in the creation and actualization of these partnerships, to communicate their development and results, and adequately inform the citizenship on the use of public funds and the deriving reciprocal benefits.

The present economic difficulty plays a fundamental role in the cooperation: from the data elaborated by OCSE-DAC it is notable a direct relation between the crisis and the decrease of budgets that each Nation dedicates to cooperation and development. In this context it is important to understand that off-centered cooperation is not handouts, but it represents a reciprocal advantage of the partner territories. Thus, there is a synergy issue: it could happen that EU, Governments, regions, local bodies, universities, ONG support similar initiatives, therefore the effort goes toward data collection and sharing, in order to favor synergies and avoid duplications.

Starting from this context, that is wider and at the same time fragmented, it was easy to guess, how to insert with extreme “urgency” the discussion about Open Data: a free circulation of data and information, which does not spring from the collection mainly managed by the central entities, but which valorizes the input of the single local situations, could help to draw an image of a complex reality, with swamped places and resources. Open Data access can function as a stimulus for update and therefore for the acknowledgment of responsibility of the single local entities, while relieving the responsibility of the central organisms.

Numerous factors contribute to the diffusion of the Openness practice in the sphere of cooperation for development: above all, it stands out the diffusion of online services, which allow and stimulate circulation and publication of information and researches by the entities promoting cooperation and those who implement the projects.

Even in this sphere, a cultural change which stimulates a greater openness is however necessary: there is the need to understand that an Open Access Approach can lead to the creation of public and private subjects networks, active in the various territorial situations.

This was the main focus of **Paola Esena** participation who, starting from the direct experience of Polisocial (<http://www.polisocial.polimi.it/>), considered how much Open Data – hence the amplification of their impact thanks to their circulation, their reuse, and the discussion which originates around them – favors the creation of “network” contexts and project partnerships more and more effective and synergic.

Paola Esena also highlights the necessity and relevance to dispose of tools dedicated to share not only developed experiences and the related sharable and documented data, but even the new project ideas, to favor the creation of indispensable synergies to move around these complex settings.

