

Welcome address to *Open research data: creating bridges for Open Science – Open CON2015 satellite event*

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Aisa (Associazione Italiana per la promozione della Scienza Aperta) is a non-profit organization that undertakes to advance open access to knowledge. Its mission is both to encourage a culture of open science and to foster all the activities that can promote it. It was founded in March 2015. Hence, it is a very young society. However, it was not born yesterday.

Its founding members are scholars whose research interests range from natural science to social and cultural studies. They have behind them an often long history of personal engagement for open science, as librarians, researchers, administrators and publishers. Its first president is a legal scholar focused on copyright and its flaws. The copyright question, as everyone knows, is crucial for the cause of open science. This “terrible right” was conceived in and for the age of the printing press, as a fairly painless industrial regulation. Now, in the Internet age, it has become - to quote Richard Stallmann - “a restriction on a public for the sake of publishers”. We, as authors, are still being held back by the hand of the past because of the power of oligopolies and their ability to influence - duly or unduly - politics.

Italian university, on the other hand, took an early stand on open access. The *Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities* was published in October 2003. Just one year later, the Italian universities chancellors signed a Messina Declaration supporting the Berlin Declaration on Open Access. The Messina Declaration was subscribed by almost every Italian university and research institution. Although the subscription involved a commitment to develop an institutional Open Access repository, now, more than ten years later, a little less than a half of the subscribers has not yet honored such a commitment (<http://www.openarchives.it/pleiadi/progetto-pleiadi/risorse-indicizzate>).

In November 2014, a second Messina declaration on Open access has been undersigned. It contains the further commitment to achieve an institutional policy in favor of Open access. After one year, such promise has been kept by fewer than twenty institutions: among them, only one university is located in Southern Italy.

In 2013, the subsections 2, 3 and 4 of the article 4 of the law n. 112 of 7th October 2013 came into force. The Italian law is both compulsory and programmatic: it requires universities and research institutions to achieve a green or a gold open access for scientific articles generated in the context of publicly funded – at least 50% – research. Such a law, however, implemented the *EU Commission Recommendation of 17th July 2012 on access to and preservation of scientific information* in a somehow peculiar way, by doubling, for instance, the embargo expiration terms. Moreover, unlike the German and Dutch laws on copyright, it failed to cope with the general question of copyright on publicly funded scientific works. Therefore, while being a step forward, it may be an ineffective tool: Aisa will try to further a debate on it by writing and submitting to a public review a new law proposal. Lastly, our research assessment system is heavily bureaucratized, heavily bibliometric, and heavily addicted to proprietary databases like Scopus and Thomson Reuters Web of Science or, in the fields of humanities, to journal reference indexes compiled in hasty, unilateral ways.

In such a situation, openness might be perceived just as an administrative burden among others, within evaluation agendas that, by now, are rarely written by researchers, or it could remain just a matter for signatures and declarations, or, even, it could be attained by the publishing industry for its own sake and its own interests.

Institutions are not enough: for this reason also we felt the need to found Aisa. Scientific

communities are not machines made of bureaucratic gears, but living communities of people who have the right and the duty to be responsible for their actions, by calling into question the human and social meaning of their research work. Why do we do research? To discover the secrets of Nature or to be published on “Nature”? Do we spend our nights with books to maximize our citations, to be able to write “Professor” on our tombstone, or for the sake of something beyond such poor rewards?

More than two centuries ago, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote that the dignity of human beings does not reside in their posts and positions in some particular collective organization, like a state, a church, a university or a corporation, but in the autonomy of their reason: in their ability to answer in person to the calling to think for themselves. According to Kant such a potentiality can only be fulfilled, both individually and collectively, through the freedom of the public use of reason: “that use which someone makes [...] as a scholar before the entire public of the *world of readers*”. In Kant's definition, it is neither necessary nor sufficient to get some university post to deserve the name of “scholar”. A scholar, regardless of his or her job, is every person endeavoring to speak to the autonomous reason of everyone else, to persuade them freely, without scaring, blackmailing, manipulating or buying them. The absence of secrets – the open access to data and texts on which we build our theories – is a crucial condition for such a freedom.

A young scholar still missed by many of us, Aaron Swartz, wrote something very important and wise in a 2006 blog post, “Legacy”:

So what jobs do leave a real legacy? It's hard to think of most of them, since by their very nature they require doing things that other people aren't trying to do, and thus include the things that people haven't thought of. But one good source of them is trying to do things that change the system instead of following it. For example, the university system encourages people to become professors who do research in certain areas (and thus many people do this); it discourages people from trying to change the nature of the university itself.

Naturally, doing things like changing the university are much harder than simply becoming yet another professor. But for those who genuinely care about their legacies, it doesn't seem like there's much choice.

In other words, a teacher, a professor, a scientist, a researcher, a librarian can leave a footprint in the world if he or she succeeds in entrusting a better system to the next generations. A system in which competition might stop being conceived as an intrinsic value, to become again just a tool among many others, including cooperation, to come a little closer to truth.

In such a spirit, while thanking Elena Giglia and all the organizers, I wish all the participants a good full day of free and fruitful debates, on behalf of Aisa and its president. *Nostra res agitur*.