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The Inexhaustible Resources of Astronomical Libraries and Librarians in the Context of the “Third Mission”

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ABSTRACT

Public Engagement (PE) and valorization of cultural heritage are part of the tasks of the *Third Mission*, also defined as knowledge transfer of Research Centres and Universities towards the socioeconomic context and local territory. What role can the Library play in this process? This poster gives an overview of the large number of third mission activities and events carried out by INAF Arcetri Astrophysical Observatory Library (AAOL) in the last decade. These projects have a double level of development: national, in collaboration with the other INAF libraries, archives and museums, and local in osmosis with the Public Outreach (PO) Office of the Arcetri Observatory. The analysis of these activities can offer some indications on the growth and the multiformity of the relationship between a public research library and society.

1 Introduction

In 2010 at the meeting of Library and Information Services in Astronomy VI held in Pune, India, we finished our speech dedicated to a new scholarship of astronomical librarians asking this question: *“By using their scientific authority and consequently validation of information accuracy by the astronomers, can astronomical libraries build a bridge between science and the public? Are they able to expand their role?”* [\[1\]](#)

Today— ten years later— could we ask: *“Are astronomical libraries able to play a concrete role in the field of Third Mission?”*

This poster, describing the variety of activities carried out by Arcetri library in this framework, would give some indications on the development of the social and cultural roles of Research Libraries.

2 A bit of history

Even if the time frame is not clearly defined, Arcetri Library activity can be divided into two specific periods: before and after 2017.

Before 2017, Third Mission activities of AAOL essentially followed two directions: Public Engagement which has been developed in collaboration with the Public Outreach Office of the Arcetri Observatory, and the valorization and promotion of the Cultural Heritage.

During these years Arcetri Library opened its physical spaces to the city by participating in music festivals such as [Strings City Festival](#)¹, hosting art installations

like [Sonic Somatic](#)², and organizing public talks on astronomical themes (Figure 1).



Figure 1.

At the same time, the Library took part in various local cultural productions. *Visione notturna* (Night Vision) for example, is a show that mixes movies, drama, and academic talks together into an original science communication experiment. After its debut at the “Teatro del cielo” (“Sky Theater”) in Arcetri in 2013 (Figure 2) the show was invited by many planetariums, observatories, and science festivals in Italy.³ In the same way the publication of the children’s book *Come catturare il Sole* (“How to capture the Sun”), written by two astronomers in collaboration with Arcetri Library, was presented at [reading festivals](#)⁴ and in Public Libraries across the country during 2016.



Figure 2.

The valorization of Cultural Heritage followed the same direction. Arcetri Library opened its old treasures, showing historical research books, such as *Alle origini dell’astrofisica italiana: “Il carteggio Secchi-Tacchini 1861-1877”*⁵ (the publication focused on the correspondence of the two astronomers), and organizing local exhibitions.

3 “United we stand, divided we fall”

United we stand, divided we fall. This saying applies to Italian astronomical libraries that, since 2017, have been accessible from the web portal Polvere di stelle: the cultural heritage of Italian astronomy.⁶

Polvere di stelle, which was restyled in 2018, marks a very important step towards strengthening the Third Mission of libraries.

Collecting all INAF libraries, archives, and museums in a single platform, ancient and contemporary publications, biographies of Italian astronomers, archival papers, and scientific instruments like quadrants and telescopes from museum collections, are now

accessible through a common portal that provides a great opportunity for data-sharing and data-preserving of modern and ancient astronomical resources.

The national platform offers INAF libraries many opportunities, and presents them in a wider context together with archives and museums of INAF. Using these combined resources, they can extract more interesting stories from this enormous heritage and tell them to the public, consequently they have the possibility to amplify the visibility of their cultural activities.

4 Library Activities at the Covid Era

These benefits have become even clearer during the Covid emergency. Since it was impossible to reach the public directly, the Arcetri Library expanded its use of Polvere di Stelle, a precious tool for the dissemination of astronomical culture.

4.1 Universi da ascoltare: letture ad alta voce alla scoperta del cielo⁷

(Universe to listen to: reading aloud to discover the sky), is the title of a series of podcasts (Figure 3) released from the publications suggested in the Annual review of Italian astronomical children books compiled by the Library.⁸ The podcasts are accessible both from the portal and Anchor platform and are disseminated on other Italian cultural platforms.



Figure 3.

4.2 Racconti di astronomia⁹

(Astronomical Tales) is a series of short videos about historical and scientific events, ancient astronomical instrumentation, and astronomers of past centuries. It has been created from the heritage of INAF libraries, archives, and museums.

The portal has strengthened the communication among Libraries, Museums, Archives, and between them and the general public.

5 Conclusions

By performing all these public activities, a research library plays a concrete role in the development and the success of the Third Mission. Thus, the Third Mission offers research libraries the opportunity to reflect on the importance of their cultural role.

The growth of Third Mission activities creates new questions to be managed. They are concerned with the different professional figures involved in the daily work that are other than librarians, they are also concerned with programming and evaluation of the same activities. These are the issues on which Research Libraries in their new dimension will have to match in the near future.

Footnotes

1. <https://www.beniculturali.inaf.it/eventi/strings-city-2016-approda-ad-arcetri/> ↵
2. <http://www.sonicsomatic.org/sonicsomatic2015/> ↵
3. <https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/cdg/article/view/8734/8732> ↵
4. <https://www.festivaldellamente.it/it/evento-n-59-2/> ↵
5. *Alle origini dell'astrofisica italiana : il carteggio Secchi-Tacchini, 1861-1877* / Ileana Chinnici, Antonella Gasperini. - Firenze : Fondazione Giorgio Ronchi, 2013. ↵
6. <https://www.beniculturali.inaf.it> ↵
7. <https://www.beniculturali.inaf.it/eventi/universi-da-ascoltare/> ↵
8. <https://www.beniculturali.inaf.it/eventi/libri-di-astronomia-per-bambini-e-ragazzi-2020/> ↵
9. <https://www.beniculturali.inaf.it/eventi/racconti-di-astronomia/> ↵

Citations

1. Brunetti, F., Gasperini, A. 2010, LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN ASTRONOMY VI. ASP Conference Series, Vol. 433 E. Isaksson, J. Lagerstrom, A. Holl, and N. Bawdekar, eds.c2010 (San Francisco : ASP).
<http://aspbooks.org/publications/433/033.pdf> ↵