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Italian Astronomy Libraries Webpages: Results of Two Surveys

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Abstract. Two surveys have been designed, one to be filled by astronomy librarians and the other by researchers and users, with the purpose of understanding what librarians want to communicate through their webpages and what is really perceived and used by their patrons.

1. Designing the Surveys

This poster is the result of two web surveys on Italian astronomy libraries' webpages. At the beginning of 2002 all the 12 Italian observatories merged into INAF (Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica – Italian National Institute of Astrophysics) with 3 CNR Institutes (National Research Council),¹ each one having different locations in our country:

Bologna	Observatory, IRA and IASF
Cagliari	Observatory
Catania	Observatory
Firenze	Arcetri Observatory
Milano	Brera Observatory and IASF
Napoli	Capodimonte Observatory
Padova	Observatory
Palermo	Observatory and IASF
Roma	Monteporzio Observatory, IASF and IFSI
Teramo	Collurania Observatory
Torino	Pino Torinese Observatory and IFSI
Trieste	Observatory

Italian observatories have a very long history, some of them dating back to the 18th century. Before the merger they were self-governing and independent. Each one has always had a library and at least one librarian. CNR Institutes are much younger. They have always been part of a large National Institute and have a CNR Area Library facility. This is why they have neither libraries nor librarians of their own.

In the last 6–8 years, almost every observatory library has built its own webpage. I thought that it would be interesting to know the researchers' opinions

¹CNR Institutes which merged in INAF are IASF (Istituto di Astrofisica Spaziale e Fisica Cosmica), IFSI (Istituto di Fisica dello Spazio Interplanetario) and IRA (Istituto di Radioastronomia). For more information see <http://www.inaf.it>

of their libraries' webpages and to compare the responses coming from each institute. Therefore I designed two surveys, each one consisting of 10 similar questions, one to be filled by astronomy librarians and the other by researchers and users. In both cases questions 9 and 10 were made to validate the survey with contact data (names and affiliations) in order to avoid duplicate answers.

Both surveys have been created and published with Perseus SurveySolutions Express and were open from March 21st to April 30th 2006. I sent my colleagues an email with the links where they could find the two surveys, asking them to forward it to all the researchers from their observatory.

The comparison of the responses given by librarians with those given by researchers was very interesting and useful for planning website improvements.

2. Survey for Librarians: Questions and Answers

I received a total of 18 responses from all 12 observatories and from one CNR Institute. Some observatories sent me more than one response, one from the librarians and the others from library assistants.

1. **Does your library have a website?** 11 of the 12 observatory libraries have their own website: only Rome does not have one.
2. **Please write your library homepage web address.**²
3. **Who designed your library website?** 4 websites are designed by librarians and 7 are designed by others with the support of the librarian who decides the contents.
4. **Who is currently updating your library website?** Websites are also updated by librarians in 6 cases, while 5 decide the contents and somebody else writes the pages.
5. **Which is the average updating frequency of your website pages?** Pages are updated at least every month and even more frequently in 7 cases. The other websites are updated 5–8 times a year.
6. **Please check which links are available from the library homepage.** *OPAC, List of current serials, Core catalogs, Services (DD, ILL), Publication lists, Other libraries' websites, Other services (ADS, star catalogs), History, Other.* With this question I wanted to know which links were available in the libraries' homepages. Comparing their responses with those given by the researchers, I wanted to understand if users could easily find all resources.
7. **Using a scale of 1 to 6, please rate how easy is to find what users are looking for on your library website.** Librarians generally consider that their library website is very user-friendly, as they replied that it is easy or very easy to find what someone is looking for. Only Palermo librarians think that it is difficult.

²See Martines (this volume) for a list of homepages.

8. **What changes, if any, would you suggest making to your library website?** Palermo librarians declared that their website should be almost entirely rethought and redesigned. The Trieste librarian is also willing to reorganize the site, while the Bologna librarian said that she would like to change some graphic aspects.

3. Survey for Researchers: Questions and Answers

I received 109 valid responses: 105 from the 12 observatories and 4 from 2 CNR Institutes. A higher percentage of responses originate from Firenze, Padova and Torino Observatories. Generally, one fifth to a quarter of research and scientific staff replied to the survey.

1. **Does your library have a website?**
I received 107 'yes' replies and two 'no's, the latter coming from Napoli and Teramo (even though their libraries actually have a website).
2. **Please write your library homepage web address.**
This question was made to validate the response.
3. **How would you rate your library website in the following graphic aspects:** *Fonts used for text, Text dimension, Text colors, Images, Background.*
Customers generally appreciate the graphics, as they globally rated them as *Good* or *Excellent* in 90% of cases.
4. **How would you rate your library website updating frequency?**
Excellent, Good, Medium, Poor, Very poor.
An average of 56% of responses were *Good*, 22% *Medium*, 20% *Excellent*, and only 2% *Poor*.
5. **Please check which links are available from the library homepage.**
I listed the same links as in the Librarians' survey: *OPAC, List of current serials, Core catalogs, Services (DD, ILL), Publication lists, Other libraries' websites, Other services (ADS, star catalogs), History, Other.*
Comparing the researchers' responses with those of librarians to the same question, it emerged that not every researcher can find all the links actually available on the website. In some library websites, 50% of researchers have marked an existing link as not available. In my opinion this has happened because the link wasn't clearly visible or was "hidden" in a subpage, or even because they may not know the meaning of a word (e.g. OPAC). On the other hand, some of them marked as available a link that does not exist on the webpage.
6. **How often do you use the following library webpages or services?**
OPAC, List of current serials, Core catalogs, Services (DD, ILL), Publication lists, Other libraries' websites, Other services (ADS, star catalogs), History, Other.
The responses show that very many researchers don't use a large part of the library resources or possibly don't know that they are available. Even

if the data cannot be considered as absolute because they are related to different locations, a review of some library websites should be done in order to improve the organization of pages. For example, on some sites links are not displayed in the home page or index, but are located in subpages and for this reason users cannot easily find them.

7. Using a scale of 1 to 6, please rate how easy it is to find what you are looking for on your Library website

Answers to questions 5 and 6 in some ways clash with responses to question 7 where, generally speaking, researchers declared that information can be easily found on every site.

8. What changes, if any, would you suggest making to your library website?

I received a few suggestions from some researchers: to keep the site updated, to have more direct links to the most commonly used links, to have a less complex structure, to have a database of local publications, to have a list of borrowed books.

4. Results and Final Considerations

Researchers generally appreciate the design and graphics of library websites, but do not have a good knowledge of a website's structure and available services. This could be solved with the following improvements:

- Library websites should have a very simple structure and architecture
- Links to resources and services should be available on the homepage (or on an index page)
- All services available at the library should be listed
- An FAQ page could be very useful

Moreover, now that all INAF Libraries are part of a National Library Service, it is possible to imagine in the near future one of the following scenarios:

- A web architecture of library webpages jointly decided by librarians and web managers in order to offer the same quality services to their researchers
- An unique website for all INAF Libraries with different contributions and specific tasks assigned to the librarians.