Open Access in Italy: easier said than done?

2004 the Messina Declaration supporting the Berlin Declaration on Open Access is undersigned by a very large majority of Italian university rectors.

2013 a law including a regulation for Open Access imposes obligations on research institutions and universities about "articles" that are based on publicly funded research, allowing an unjustifiably long embargo period (18 and 24 months from the publication date) and without ever mentioning the management of intellectual "property" rights. Furthermore, as no sanction for non-compliance is provided, the OA obligations remain largely theoretical.

2014 the Messina Declaration 2.0 almost committed the signers to establish an open access policy: 27 universities have honored their commitment but almost no one is checking and analyzing their results - if any.

2017 while German, Swedish, Dutch and French library consortia are canceling their "big deal agreements", the Italian Consortium (CARE) and Elsevier reached an agreement entailing Hybrid Open Access and a confidentiality clause.

Closed Science in Italy: Big Business & Big Government in a shrinking research system

2006 under Romano Prodi’s second term as Prime Minister, a decree with the force of law establishes the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research Systems (ANVUR).

2008-2010 Berlusconi’s government severely cuts the higher education budget and promotes a centralizing university reform.

The ANVUR, whose board members are professors nominated by the Minister of Education, takes the shape of a governmental agency that is in control of all the facets of academic life. Their criteria are directly defined by ministerial decrees.

Automatic bibliometric tools are enforced as “objective” criteria for research evaluation, professorship qualification, and even individual micro-grants to researchers or pay raises. Bibliometric data depends either on proprietary, closed databases (Scopus, Clarivate Analytics) or on lists of journals compiled by the ANVUR according to questionable criteria.

The raw bibliometric data on which ANVUR's evaluations and rankings are based are neither open nor accessible.

The Italian governmental evaluation system replicates and intensifies the roots of the serial pricing crisis, by enchanting researchers and institutions to local and global publishing oligopolies.

Our proposal: opening science by empowering authors

Flipping to an APC-funded Open Access while maintaining the “core journals” system might just shift the serial pricing crisis from “readers” to “writers”.

The “core journals” system can be overcome only if researchers, politicians and institutions realize that commercial publishers are of use if and only if they do help scholars and the public to communicate with each other.

We need an EU-Wide copyright reform very different from the Directive on Copyright currently under discussion. Authors’ rights are not about a few monopolistic companies: it is about people.

Scientific authors’ rights need to be protected by recognizing their right to make their works available to the public for free, after no more than a year from the first publication (like in Germany, France and the Netherlands)

Research assessment criteria should be freed from the grip of Big Business and Big Government, to be given back to a technology-enhanced public use of reason

Some subscription and APCs money should be shifted to the task of enhancing the current infrastructures and raising awareness among researchers and decision makers, both political and academic.

Learn from the Italian experience: declarations and policies are not enough!