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APM 2009 - Academic Publishing in the Mediterranean Region: National Contexts and International Experiences

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Aula Magna, University of Florence, Italy

Distinguished delegates,

When we started organising this conference around one year ago, we did not expect that it took place in a so difficult moment from the economic point of view. Publishing is affected by the current crisis as all sectors, and - at least here in Italy - the academic publishing is probably the market segment that is more affected. Book sales are dramatically decreasing, both for research monographs and for student manuals.

Two years ago, so before this crisis started, in our bi-annual publishing conference, we proposed an econometric study - carried out by the economic departments of the University of Bologna - that analysed the relation between book reading and economic growth, demonstrating that reading is a factor that, qualifying the human capital of a country, contributes to the increase of productivity, and hence of GNP. The message was clear: in the knowledge society, knowledge is the key, and books (and journals) contribute to knowledge.

Academic publishing is at the very core of this concept. Because research and university courses are key elements of the competitiveness of the European economies. We all know that reducing the library budgets because of the crisis is the way for closing the last remaining doors for exiting the crisis. Nevertheless, very often this happens. And it is a suicide for our society. We can discuss about the best models for academic publishing, for STM research and, more important for the Mediterranean area, for humanities and social sciences, and - above all - for didactic materials. We might discuss about open access model or subscriptions to digital resources, about rights management and learning objects, and so on. And we might have very different opinions. But we need to make one point clear: that innovation, more advanced services, mass digitisation are impossible in a framework of decreasing resources.

One of the effects of the crisis is that people started again to cite John Maynard Keynes. I hope that people will start again also to read what Keynes actually wrote. And in particular what he wrote about the importance of universities, libraries, books, and even the Diaghilev ballets. And will behave in consequence.

My best wishes for a productive conference

Federico Motta