Mini-profile:

a day in the life of an e-resources co-ordinator

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I work for an Italian inter-university super-computing consortium, CASPUR, as an electronic information resources specialist. My current job is to liaise with and co-ordinate consortial acquisition of electronic resources for 27 Italian university libraries from Rome to Sicily, all members of the CIBER consortium. This involves an ongoing assessment of market trends, vendors' offers and how the needs of end-users are best addressed. I am also in charge of ensuring the smooth running of the digital platform 'Emeroteca Virtuale' hosted by CASPUR, which aggregates over 5,000 current academic e-journals. Furthermore, I am actively involved with CARE, the co-ordination group for access to electronic resources founded by CRUI – Permanent Conference of the Rectors of Italian Universities – and the three main Italian consortia (CIBER, CILEA and CIPE), with INFER, the Italian

National Forum on Electronic Resources and with SELL, the Southern European Libraries Link. As this would imply, I sit on several national committees that set policies on scholarly communication issues and electronic publishing not only for today, but also with an eye to the future. Another issue of current interest is of course the topical question of open access (OA), in which I am particularly involved as CASPUR advocates OA and provides technical support for implementing institutional repositories.

I am by no means an early riser! I like a gentle start to the day and after a slow cup of green tea and a brief but intense listen to a soothing piece of minimalist music I am ready for the short walk to my office, a mere stone's throw from my house. As anyone can tell you, the traffic in Rome is a nightmare, and for the sake of sanity I choose to

live close by, not only to get there quickly but, while I may arrive late I also leave late, and so I can get home quickly too. My flat is also near Termini station, where trains leave for all over Italy at every hour of the day: useful when you think that I often have to visit the many universities I liaise with. Useful, too, because the shuttle for the airport leaves every half hour and I am often abroad for meetings.

So, by the time I actually do get to the office, my e-mail, my voice mailbox and Skype chat are inundated with messages. As this is now the month of January, these are predominantly from irate librarians and often end-users too, complaining that their access has yet again been cut off by publishers X and Y and sometimes Z. Placating them takes some time and then I have to get on to the vendors and try to find out what they have been up to. Cut-offs like this for late payment of print subscriptions, applied across the board, often penalize the many universities that always pay up on time but are made to share the blame for others that are not quite as efficient. The lack of warning on the part of publishers means that I cannot work to prevent this from happening.

Thankfully, this is not an everyday occurrence, usually a beginning-of-the-year event and concerns only a small number of publishers. I am aware their servers do this automatically and, fortunately, the sales staff usually act quickly to resolve the issue. However, the effects are devastating and it means that my day has got off to a bad start.

I resume checking my e-mail inbox. Our e-mail filtering system works quite well, therefore there is not much spamming to deal with. On the other hand, as I subscribe to several Italian and foreign mailing lists, I end up spending quite a lot of time checking them regularly. My next task is to check what has been happening overnight, so I take a look at a couple of mailing lists subscribed to my US colleagues and other foreign colleagues in different time zones.

I reply to some urgent messages and place the remaining ones in different folders. The phone rings: a colleague from a research centre based in Rome wants to fix an appointment to discuss our offer for setting up an open archive at her institution.

A quick look at the time tells me that the programmed Skype conference is scheduled to start soon with some CIBER electronic resource librarians to discuss the latest offer from one of the leading vendors. Then just as the conference has begun my office phone rings and then my cell phone starts buzzing. What to do! And someone sticks their head over the door … Breathe deeply, I tell myself, remembering my yoga teacher's advice. But then the answering machine steps in and that takes care of that.

As usual, the conference (at least half an hour) was useful, except that I now have a new task: sum up the proceedings and get back to the vendors with the members' proposals and comments. There is still a long way to go before the contract will be signed. *Sigh*!...

At the end of this conference one of the virtual participants has reported to me that the most recent issues of journal A are missing from our digital platform 'Emeroteca Virtuale' whereas they are available on the publisher's platform. This reminds me that today I have just received an e-mail from another colleague reporting a similar problem for another journal. Generally every Friday I have an internal meeting with my IT colleagues on our digital platform, but these requests urge me to call a quick internal meeting to solve these unexpected delivery problems. We meet in a small wireless conference room, and the problem is detected right away: for some mysterious reasons the FTP delivery script failed to run and, strangely enough, the error was not automatically reported.

Paola head-to-head with Silvia Simonetti, an IT colleague at CASPUR

I have just returned to my desk when my colleague from the University of Messina skypes me to exchange views on a report she has prepared for the next CIBER newsletter about the latest thread posted in lib-licence. We both link to the Newsletter web page and while we comment over Skype, she makes some changes.

My rumbling tummy tells me it is time for lunch, but just when I have put my coat on, the phone goes again and I feel obliged to pick it up. I know I must be quick as my other colleagues are waiting for me below before heading off to a typical Italian bar for a stand-up lunch. At the other end of the line is an Italian colleague asking me to make a presentation on OA to mark the official opening of their university's institutional repository. This soon leads to a lengthy discussion on recent developments and trends in OA issues and my attempt to name someone else who can take my place and would be much more suitable fails. Not only that, but I have also missed my lunch slot. Thank God, it is not my stretching class day!

And worse – I have to call a taxi and rush to the centre of Rome, just behind the Pantheon in fact, to a meeting with members of CARE to work out together future policies and strategies to be adopted at a national level in negotiations for electronic resources for Italian universities.

Then I have to dash back to prepare, together with other members of CIBER, tomorrow's meeting with an important publisher. Only time for a quick coffee, then into the meeting – a real brainstorming session trying to streamline a winning strategy for the coming years. An e-only contract; print no, yes, but with DDP; cancellation clause … Let's get away from the historic spend. Core and PPV; usage pricing model, no! FTEs, but not official FTEs, but adapted to the Italian scenario, with thousands of enrolled students but very few actually attending full time. Sliding scale price cap, etc., etc. …

By the end of the session we are all worn out. Joking apart, a lot of effort goes into these occasions which, however, also have their enjoyable side – usually a nice dinner together in the evening in a beautiful Roma tavern, maybe overlooking the Colosseum, washed down with some local wine.

And then home. Another day over.

As soon as I get home, my cat demands attention, as I left him alone all day! While I'm stroking and making a fuss of him, I realize that today was the closing registration date for a Shiatsu workshop I want to attend. I decide to turn on the PC and register for it. Once I have done it, I surf a little bit on the net. I'm tempted to check my office e-mail again. I wisely decide to resist and go to bed. Tomorrow an early rise and demanding meeting are awaiting me.