

SAGGI

The present-day role of Academies in a changing world

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Il 27 marzo 2025 si è tenuto a Bologna il workshop internazionale The actual role of Academies in a changing world, organizzato dall'Accademia delle Scienze dell'Istituto di Bologna in collaborazione con l'Università di Bologna "Alma Mater Studiorum", con il contributo della Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna. Il Presidente dell'Istituto Lombardo Accademia di Scienze e Lettere, Professor Stefano Maiorana, ha partecipato alla sessione pomeridiana con l'intervento che si pubblica in questo volume.

More than to dictating general rules on the role of Academies in a changing world, I would simply like to offer my opinions on the matter, and the main actions which we have taken in the four years of my Presidency at the Istituto Lombardo Accademia di Scienze e Lettere. Today, these actions qualify the role of my Academy in the context in which it operates. The Istituto Lombardo is without a doubt an Academy of ancient origin. The 27th of February, a little over a few months ago, we celebrated our 222nd Academic Year at the Institute.

1. GLIMPSES OF THE PAST AND OF THE PRESENT

The Istituto Lombardo Accademia di Scienze e Lettere was founded in 1797 by Napoleone Bonaparte who, in the Constitution of the Cisalpine Republic (art. 297), established the birth of a national institute, Istituto

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Nazionale, «charged to collect and connect discoveries and perfect the arts and sciences», based on the model of the Institut de France, with its headquarters in Bologna.

On December 25, 1810, the Istituto Nazionale became the Istituto Reale di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, and Napoleon moved its headquarters to Milan, in palazzo Brera. In 1959 the Istituto Lombardo acquired a second location in the prestigious palazzo Landriani, in via Borgonuovo 25, which was received by grant by the city of Milan in 1960.

Having enjoyed such a long history means that we are conscious of combining tradition and modernity. The union of the two is evermore present and vital for all Academies, not just here in Italy.

The beginning of fast paced and profound transformations in every area of human life due to the introduction of digital and information technologies, which has reached new levels, if I might say so, with artificial intelligence, has had evident consequences.

There has been a complete paradigm shift in regard to the production, management and use of data, of knowledge and of information, which are key elements which have always defined and continue to define human relationships, economic structure and the fabric of modern society and science itself.

In this view, therefore, a heritage of knowledge and respect of tradition still constitute an indispensable point of reference, not only in the case of our Academy, but for all of mankind's actions. At the same time, our present brings us to face new questions, and their answers will define the real positioning of each institution, not only today, but in the future.

The Istituto Lombardo has chosen to open its doors to the outside world in order to listen and communicate, seeking to be a present and active element of the outside world alongside institutions, schools and citizens. Our Academy has chosen to act with the strength of our tradition and our interdisciplinary culture; by that we mean our historical and cultural heritage not only regarding our library and archive, but also, and especially, the knowledge and commitments of our members and associates.

This represents a great potential, used and valued by a working method which is that of formulating projects which begin with the needs of the territory, and which ultimately produce high-quality, well-reasoned responses. That is to say, the Academy must meet the needs and consent access to knowledge to all those who wish to access it. It is not by chance that *Accedere al sapere*, *Access knowledge*, is the motto which has been

created for the Institute over which I preside. It must be underlined that all the current problems that are face represent future challenges.

These are not empty words, rather the opposite, they reference concrete action relating to the management, the production and the diffusion of the culture, which represent a great human and financial effort.

2. THE MISSION AND ACTIVITY OF ISTITUTO LOMBARDO ACCADEMIA DI SCIENZE E LETTERE

The mission of the Istituto Lombardo (which inspires the institution's activities) is summarized in art. 1 of the new Statute (updated with the modifications approved by the regular members in their meeting of January 26, 2023) and foresees «the development of studies, of basic and applied scientific research, the protection and the enhancement of our own archival and library heritage».

All of the activities of the Istituto Lombardo, from the more traditional ones to those meeting new expectations, are developed in the light of this rational, rather than simply programmatic, framework.

As I said in the beginning, one should pinpoint, according to the context, those important requests coming from the outside world which are compatible with the academic structure, so that in the most appropriate way, we might meet real and widespread needs.

I present as examples, two recent instances of our Academy's reading and meeting new, present-day expectations.

In the first case the reading room was refurbished in 2023 with an eye to modern accessibility (both physical and digital) for its users, thanks to financing from the National recovery and resistance plan.

At the end of December 2022, we received the good news that Istituto Lombardo had won the selection of the National recovery and resistance plan Mission 1, Component 3, Culture 4.0 (M1C3), Measure 1, Investment 1.2: *Removal of physical and cognitive barriers in museums, libraries and archives to allow wider access and participation in culture*.

Istituto Lombardo ranked second among more than 300 applications from all over Italy, with the project entitled *Accedere al SAPere: spazi e strumenti nuovi all'Istituto Lombardo* (acronym "ASAP"). As mentioned before, *Accedere al sapere, Access knowledge*, has become the motto of the Istituto Lombardo.

The project was completed before June 30, 2023, as foreseen in the project schedule. Important work, though not structural, was undertaken, in order to conform to the call's aim by furnishing the reading room in order to make it accessible for those with disabilities. We have also implemented communication activities, with the renovation of the website, which is now compatible with a multilingual version and equipped with a W3C certification for users with sensory deficit.

The second example concerns the set up of a diagnostic laboratory of cultural heritage. This is another very current project. Right now in Palazzo Landriani, we are in the final stages of setting up a laboratory and research centre for the diagnosis of cultural heritage, which – due to the context in which it finds itself, namely, that of the Grande Brera – represents a one of its kind in Italy, offering effective answers to a real and widespread need, and acting as a point of reference locally, nationally and internationally. The project, currently under development, will constitute a new, modern structure for achieving the interaction between science and art, which – in a city like Milan, and in a country like Italy – is necessarily to be pursued as a development model appropriate to our modern times.

The project Grande Brera aims to make Brera the cultural hub of Milan and of Italy. With the Pinacoteca di Brera, the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, the Accademia di Belle Arti, the Istituto Lombardo and other prestigious institutions, the project is to make Brera a European cultural centre of global importance. New scientific projects and collaborations, like the diagnostic laboratory, also reinforce the commitment for innovation and research in the field of cultural heritage.

With these institutions, with the University of Milan and the University Milano-Bicocca, a network, with the possibility to expand even further, is being built. This will soon represent the initial scientific and cultural structure of the laboratory, with connotations of internationalisation, science, art, education and guidance for young people.

With regards to our Academy, the diagnostic laboratory of cultural heritage will certainly constitute a definite turning point towards active research, helping to fit the Academy in the complex cultural and social modernity of today's society as a broadminded, relevant and authoritative stakeholder.

I would like to underline that this project fits in perfectly with the general and secular strategy of our Academy: to renew tradition in the present day, in relation of course to the eras and to the context in which it operates, but always with an eye to nurturing interdisciplinarity. I deem the project of the diagnostic laboratory as the consistent outcome of these age-old guidelines,

and in keeping with them. The diagnostics laboratory is aimed at both private and public institutions, in Milan, in Lombardy, in Italy, and will contribute to the international diffusion of advanced models of protecting cultural heritage, which our nation is proud of.

The diagnostics laboratory will also have significant repercussions on the protection of our Institute's archival and library heritage, bringing further added value to an activity which characterizes and qualifies the work of the Academy: that of protecting archival and library heritage.

3. COLLABORATIONS WITH INSTITUTIONS, CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS AND PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS

The activities described above require an extensive network of institutional, professional and cultural collaborations. They have been made possible thanks to the human capital of the Istituto Lombardo Accademia di Scienze e Lettere and its external collaborators, and also thanks to a solid network of institutional relations, both with public and private individuals. This is another key point and instance of modernity.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, let me summarise the answers that I personally believe I can offer you for the indirect question which is expressed in our title.

Many Academies boast a long tradition. This is due to the fact that they have been able to combine tradition and modernity over time. The union of the two is more relevant and vital than ever, both for foreign and Italian Academies. In my opinion, the concepts and actions that qualify the function of Academies today and make them unique, are the following:

1. The mission of Academies is different and largely complementary to that of Universities. The Academy is a service structure open to all, which, thanks to the prestige of its members and its tradition, generates opinion, enhances science, expresses authoritative and up-to-date opinions on issues of scientific and social importance, and consciously involves citizens.
2. The Academy is the place of cultural interdisciplinary, a heritage of modernity and knowledge, to be valued in the best possible way,

considering the requirements of the context, of the territory, and potential users (I recall the Convention of Faro signed by Italy in 2020).

3. The Academy is a place of planning, networking and internationalization to carry out effective, useful and incisive information and training action, always with an eye to the future.

So, let's go back to the title of this paper: *The present-day role of Academies in a changing world*.

I would add a question: what could we do to raise the importance of Academies in a changing world?

Academies should be part of a network of particular relevance, with representatives elected at a national level who should have the authority to discuss, with the competent ministries, the modern role of Academies, their prerogatives, and their functions in relation to the needs of the territory, defining general objectives and strategies, enhancing the scientific research activity of their members and associates carried out in a synergistic collaboration with Universities and research institutions, at a national and international level. I think the programme would be clear, no doubt that its realization requires time and a precise will.