

## **OAF Workshop Pisa, May 2002 - Breakout Session Communities and Services**

The breakout session on Communities and services was facilitated by Donatella Castelli, and reported by Michael Popham of the Oxford University Computing Services, and Paul Child of UEA at Norwich, United Kingdom.

Three questions were raised to start the discussion: i) Which kind of services can be built on OAI-PHM compliant archives? Under which hypotheses? ii) Is OAI-PHM a basic tool for supporting interoperability among archives or it is just a component of a wider infrastructure? iii) Do we need open services?

It emerged clearly at the beginning of the session that at the moments there is not yet much experience to answers these questions. The services that have been developed until now are mainly cross-archive search services. These services works on the Dublin Core metadata records. The quality of these metadata is the crucial point for these services. Dublin Core only defines a set of optional metadata fields, not restricting their content any further. Thus the use of Dublin Core differs significantly among the individual archives. For example, several archives list all the creators in one single tag of the metadata record – sometimes not separated by delimiters - whilst other repeat the creator tag; the format of the date is often different; etc. It was noticed that, Dublin Core as it is now only allow for free text search. Projects like Cyclades will provide better insights on the questions formulated above. Certainly, everyone agreed that the quality of metadata records will play a significant role. This quality is measured in terms of richness (the information provided) and consistency (subject scheme, authority files). There was a general agreement on the statement that the service providers need to identify and to select the archives that offer metadata with the required level of quality. This implies the possibility of retrieving these archives and getting information about them.

During the Workshop the OAI-PHM protocol was presented not only as a protocol for cross-domain discovery but also as a protocol that can be used to achieve intra-community interoperability. Some members of the astrophysical community commented this point by point out that the protocol is based on certain assumptions, like the use of the http protocol or the use of XML, that are not necessarily acceptable for all kind of applications. They also pointed out that the Dublin Core is not sufficient to cover the descriptive needs of data archives.

A lot of discussion was raised about this last point. We noticed that people tend to identify OAI-PHM with Dublin Core and often to confuse harvesting issues with search issues. The criticism to OAI-MPH often are really criticisms directed towards Dublin Core.

The break-out session ended by discussing about the idea of extending openness also to services, i.e. make services available to other service providers. It was felt that a lot has still to be done before being able to reach this goal.