

1, 10, 100, how many floristic databases are there in Italy?

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During the last workshop on management and mapping floristic and herbaria data by the Group for Floristics of the Italian Botanical Society (SBI) organized by Floristic Research Center of the Apennine (Gran Sasso-Laga National Park – University of Camerino) held in November 2012 in Barisciano (l'Aquila), the need for a survey on the floristic databases available in Italy emerged. In order to fulfil this purpose the Group prepared a questionnaire to be distributed among all those concerned. It included 36 questions about: type, structure, dimension, property, accessibility, present state and future developments of the Floristic databases. On the whole about three dozens feedbacks were collected and analysed.

There are chiefly two kinds of databases, institutional and personal. In both cases literature or original published or unpublished data are included. In addition, these databases are primarily floristic, while in some cases have been organized for other purposes and include also floristic data (karyological, ethnobotanical, seedbanks, etc.)

It emerged that the great majority of these data are accessible only by the owners and each scholar with his own system of data input and storage without the definition of a standard protocol.

We asked ourselves if we are really interested in sharing our data with the others and how this can be done. The not obvious answer to the first question was: yes, we want to share our knowledge. Two solutions would be technically feasible: a centralized system allowing everyone to input data, or a system showing the data hosted in different DBs systems using matching software capable of mapping and joining different fields (on the model of e-floras).

The latter solution is probably to be preferred, considering the individualistic attitude of many researches and their strong preference for their own systems of data-storage.

Taking into account the large ongoing projects on the Italian flora, the time is right for setting up a tool to make the data that up to now moved only from our drawers to our computers available. Suitable funding will be looked for, but this is not an unbreakable restriction for a scientific community accustomed to committing itself to the challenge of doing.