Title: Building the Italian data stewards community.

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Abstract:
While the concepts of Open Science and FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) data are widely discussed in the research landscape, there is still limited focus on who actually supports and drives these processes. The data stewards play a critical role in ensuring the success of these initiatives, providing the necessary expertise and support for managing research data effectively and sustainably.

The Italian data stewards community was established in 2023 as a bottom-up initiative supported by the ICDI Competence Center and the European project Skills4EOSC. The community was created to identify and leverage the existing expertise in Italy, which, although present, remains fragmented and lacks a clear professional definition.

One of the community's initial efforts was to assess the existing data stewardship competencies and gaps related to data management practices in Italy.

This initial assessment revealed both strengths and areas for improvement, providing valuable insights for guiding future actions.

After one year, the community is evolving from a loose network into a more structured entity with a steering board, dedicated working groups and a manifesto outlining its key principles.

This community aims to foster collaboration among professionals in the field, particularly to address the following objectives:
1. To create opportunities for developing new, often unavailable, data stewardship competencies not typically offered through traditional educational programs.
2. To promote the convergence towards shared solutions in research data management.
3. To increase awareness and understanding of the Data Steward role both within and outside research institutions.

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to create a sustainable, supportive community that promotes the role of the Data Steward across Italy, ensuring that the essential work of supporting Open Science and FAIR data practices are recognised and strengthened within research institutions.