Until recently, the exploitation of large textual collections was mainly limited to sorting and retrieving documents. On the other hand, systems capable of extracting meaningful document fragments dealt only with small domain dependent tasks and models.

On-line information is becoming widely available and utilized, and demand for tools capable of harnessing this information increases rapidly. As this information is inherently structured and complex, classic models are insufficient. New technological challenges arise, the solution of which require the cooperation of several research domains.

By the term "Textual Information Access" we denote here an emerging interdisciplinary community of researchers from different fields sharing an interest on textual data objects, and Machine or Statistical Learning techniques to develop automatic text analysis systems.

Among the new important challenges we will mention the need for automatically parametrizable systems (since hand-crafted models cannot cope with the heterogeneous nature of data and tasks), the exploitation of new structure formalisms for documents and collections (e.g. XML), and more generally the emerging text-mining and web-mining tasks; in order to solved these challenges, a combined approach is needed, exploiting technologies from different domains.

**Organizing Committee**

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