Repositories and ETDs – a success story from Finland

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Electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs)

- ETDs have been around since the 1990s – often closely associated with the repositories, but still kind of a parallel movement.
- The work on ETDs has benefitted greatly from the use of repository technology, while ETDs have provided repositories with valuable content and genuine success stories.
- This is sometimes taken for granted or referred to as ”going after the low-hanging fruit”, instead of concentrating all efforts on the ”real” business of open repositories (mainly, Green OA).
A tradition of publicly available scholarship

- Finland has a long tradition of publicly available theses and dissertations, going back to the 1640s
- The theses were distributed with the help of the most efficient technology available at the time: the printing press

Available at http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2014-00004084
 Even today, doctoral dissertations must be made available to the scholarly public before the official public defense.

 For more than 350 years, doctoral dissertations had to be published as a printed book.

 In recent decades, the so-called “article-based” dissertations have become the dominant dissertation type in medicine, natural and technical sciences.

Available at [http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:fv-12728](http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:fv-12728)
The ”dissertation crisis” of the 1990s

- Then, the number of dissertations produced at each university was made to one of the main criteria for the state funding
- The number of dissertations nearly tripled in about 15 years
- The traditional distribution channels couldn’t handle all of the dissertations
  - The university libraries were warehousing hundreds of thousands of printed copies, which were no longer wanted in sufficient numbers by the international exchange partners
Doctoral dissertations in repositories (1)

- Starting from the late 1990s and early 2000s, most of the Finnish dissertations have moved to a digital format and immediate open access, with only a small number of printed copies.
In fields like medicine, natural and technical sciences almost 100% of dissertations are now issued in repositories.

In the humanities and social sciences the share of OA dissertations is somewhat smaller, but still more than 50%.
How about other types of theses?

- The progress with student theses has been somewhat slower at most of the research universities
  - The university administration has been reluctant to spend money on them
  - There have been faculty concerns about the quality of content and potential plagiarism
- Some of the research universities have been doing well, but the real success story can be found from the universities of applied sciences
Theseus (www.theseus.fi)

- The shared DSpace repository of 25 Finnish universities of applied sciences, hosted by the National Library
- Mainly concentrates on bachelor-level theses
- All of the students are required to upload their theses as part of the graduation process
The success of Theseus (1)

- After six years in operation, Theseus contains 90,000+ theses, with about 15,000 new theses added each year.
- By now, more than 1.6% of all Finns have uploaded a thesis to Theseus.
The success of Theseus (2)

- There were almost 18 million full-text downloads from Theseus in 2014 – more than the total number of downloads from all of the other Finnish repositories.
Why so popular?

- Not particularly sophisticated on a technological level - but it works
- Content highly visible in the Google search results, even for popular keywords
- Most of the theses contain little or no original research, but there is an audience for many of them
- Huge mass of texts containing useful information on many practical issues (health, food, IT, construction work, etc.), especially in Finnish
What has been achieved?

- The publication model of the doctoral dissertations has been transformed, moving from print to open access.
- Theseus has proved that co-operation and large-scale efforts can produce great results, even with content types that at first sight may not seem that important.
Thanks!

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