

Digital Archives at the University of Pisa

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Abstract

At the end of the '90s, the Library System Centre of the University of Pisa began to create a system of digital archives in order to enhance and promote the Institution activities regarding teaching, research and administration: 1. ETD (Electronic Thesis and Dissertations); 2. UnipiEprints.

Keywords: digital archives; open archives

1 ETD (<http://etd.adm.unipi.it/>)

Due to the lack of a national system for thesis management and access in Italy, in the case of both paper and digital theses, the need arose for the University of Pisa to create a local system. This led to the choice of the NDLTD platform, an open source system developed at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, as it is a widespread international system specific to theses. The writing and discussion of a thesis is a significant moment in a student's career, and in the Italian academic context involves a series of administrative issues and many laborious bureaucratic processes. Therefore, the ideal system would need to implement a single work-flow, integrating the entire process of presenting, revising, discussing, cataloguing, giving access and preserving an academic and doctoral thesis: with this aim, a number of important software developments were necessary:

- The introduction of managing different deadlines: date for official deposit of the final version; date for public discussion; date for "last content revision" (the author can enter minor corrections within up to 48 hours before the discussion: immediate notification is automatically sent to the academic supervisors);
- In conformity with Italian copyright law and academic practices, the author can decide whether his/her thesis is open access (full text, only parts of the text), or only metadata are available: the system enables the author to change this option when required
- the most important development (in progress) regards interoperability between ETD and the other software systems used at the University of Pisa:
 - ESSE3, the administrative system for student records management
 - Aleph, the bibliographic system

Thus, when a student accesses ETD for the first time, the system retrieves all relative personal and academic data from ESSE3; moreover when the thesis is deposited, a UNIMARC record is created and sent to the Aleph catalogue.

The project entered the production stage in 2006. It has been recently registered in the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) register, and currently contains almost 3300 theses.

The digital deposit of theses is not compulsory: it is a shared decision of the academic supervisors and the student. The project group has been working on widespread promotion of the system in the academic community, with very different feedback from the various disciplinary communities: the STM community makes wide use of the system (to date around 60% of theses are native digital), while the humanities community appears to be more sceptical (around 10% of theses are native digital).

2 UnipiEprints (<http://eprints.adm.unipi.it/>)

The University of Pisa officially signed the Berlin Declaration concerning open access to knowledge in May 2005: this prompted the project to create a system of institutional archives devoted to scientific and educational documents produced at our University. Eprints, the open source software of the OA Initiative was chosen, in order to be included in the OAI services. No serious customization was necessary, with the exception of translating the interface pages and adding the discipline categories specific to the Italian academic context (degree courses, departments, research teams, etc.).

The top-down start-up has found the librarian community much more aware of access and publishing issues than the academic community; nevertheless on personal or Faculty web pages freely available and interesting documents can still be found, often used for teaching; naturally these are in no way systematically organised, with no possibility of easy retrieval or permanence.

Since our institutional open archives aim not only to meet the global demand for new scholarly communication models, but also to meet the more specific needs of our academic community, an architecture with double archives has been chosen:

- UnipiEPrints, institutional archive devoted to research works of teachers and researchers and to institutional documentation (in the production stage since December 2006);
- UnipiEPrints Didattica, a repository for the different typologies of educational documents (production phase scheduled for April 2007; access will be restricted to the University network - some software development is required).

We are now entering the promotion phase: a first official presentation of the system will take place at the University Senate; a series of meeting and seminars in the faculties and departments will follow, aimed at explaining how UniEprints works and making academic authors aware of the economic models of scholarly communication, the policies of publishers, and the issue of copyright. We imagine a promotion model strongly based on libraries and librarian support. We have already observed that the main questions posed by Professors concern academic evaluation of works, with a number of distinctions:

- The STM community appears to be more interested in the assessment of quality, impact factor and referee etc.;
- The Humanities community also publish in monographs or in journals which are not included in bibliometrics databases and sometimes have distribution problems; their main concern regards certainty of the publication status, above all in a situation where recent changes in legal deposit law are still awaiting case law and practices;
- We have found allies in a research group of the Political Science Faculty: their research field regards the social and philosophical aspects of knowledge production and communication, and the group has developed their own OAI disciplinary repository, also based on eprints software. This group is willing to interoperate and to support promotion.

The project group proposal to the academic government, which has shown interest, is to connect the EPrint system with "Anagrafe della ricerca", i.e. the official data which Italian Universities have to record as a base for fund distribution: this combination would significantly enhance use of the system.