

## Political, institutional and bibliotheconomic stakes in the area of electronic theses

### the French-speaking Swiss exemple

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#### Abstract

*The experiment of the University of Geneva around electronically structured theses has been scattered in the other universities of the French-speaking part of Switzerland, according to the same model. The network which connect the libraries of these institutions is now federating these programs of electronic theses. A collaboration with the Swiss National Library which is preparing a national archiving programm for e-documents is beginning.*

*In a federal country with decentralized political structures, library networks constitute themselves according to political and linguistic logic (German, French). These networks or some of their members are the expression of different programs in the fields of on-line diffusion and archival storage (structured documents in XML format, production of PDF documents and other formats). Questions are emerging on each other practices. Political institutions recommend to share informations, encourage collaborations and are preparing basic guidelines.*

*The running experiences challenge the traditional role of librarians and libraries faced with new perspectives of electronic diffusion and archiving and create new models of collaboration between rather different institutions.*

Geneva has decided to call this program Cyberdocuments as, in addition to the dissertations, there was a desire to put on-line the "Publications Catalog" composed of references to the publications by its professors.

The first proposals for the program were as follows: the infrastructure and the on-line edition should be set up within the libraries in collaboration with PhD students and the IT Center. On the other hand the Rectorate, for political reasons, did not wish electronically deposited theses to be compulsory. So the University of Geneva still considers the printed version as the official one.

Over the last 3 years we have been in close collaboration with Cyberthèses and Lyon2. Together we have created an on-line tutorial on the use of the style sheet Cyberthèses, set up on-line broadcasts to link Cyberthèses partners, and the IT Centre of the University of Geneva has programmed the web interface of the process line used by participants<sup>2</sup>.

#### Preface

The University of Geneva has been considering implementing electronic dissertations since 1999<sup>1</sup>, but the political board of the university was not ready at the time and refused the first proposal.

In March 2000 we first made contact with Cyberthèses Lyon2 Lumière which had the effect of a political catalyst: the university had a new team at its head, who at once accepted this form of international collaboration through an exchange of competencies, development sharing and active collaboration.

Since June 2000 the University of Geneva has been able to benefit from the political support of the rectorate for the use of the processing line produced by Cyberthèses allowing the on-line production of structured theses with XML format (in this same conference, see the presentation by Martin Sevigny). The University of

#### University of Geneva

The University of Geneva was founded on the initiative of Jean Calvin in 1559 and is the second largest university in Switzerland. It has a strong international vocation and is proud to be one of the twelve best research universities in Europe. Over 14,000 students attend the university, including 600 PhD students, and 250 to 300 theses are produced each year. The university is not centralized and its campus is widespread. It does not own one central library but has more than 50 libraries in the area. The influence of the faculties is very strong.

The initial idea was to introduce the electronic thesis program little by little, to inform libraries and faculties gradually and to find someone within each faculty to process the theses while training PhD students.

From the outset, the size of the team has been limited. Over the first 2 years only a 40% position was granted for coordination, administration and processing of theses.

1 Ulrich Niederer ; Ulrich Weigel ; Marie-Pierre Gillieron-Graber [sic] ; Karl Böhler. Electronic Theses : Swiss perspectives. In : LIBER quarterly - The Journal of European Research Libraries, Vol. 10 (2000) / No 1 Page 51

2 Viviane Bouletreau ; Jan-Paul Ducasse ; Marie-Pierre Gilliéron-Graber. Cyberthèses en Europe. In : Bulletin des bibliothèques de France, BBF 2001 - Paris, t. 46, no 6, p. 122-125

During the third year it acquired an additional 30% specifically for the processing of theses.

Synergies inside the University have nevertheless been developed around electronic theses, a contract of copyright has been drafted, the Faculty of Medicine accepted to be an experimental faculty for the electronic edition of its theses, and several workshops for training on the stylesheet have been organized. In addition, every effort has been made to disseminate information about the existence of the program and the possibility of the electronic edition of theses : information has been given to the libraries to find human resources, to the PhD students on the use of the stylesheet, to the studies counselors who mentor PhD students, to the board of faculties who relay the information to their professors, to the doctors to whom they submit their dissertations. An information website with access to theses has also been created.

For the moment the University of Geneva has only received 45 on-line theses by voluntary contribution from the authors. About 60 theses especially in the field of medicine are waiting to be processed.

During the last 3 years, we have encountered some major problems.

Training on the use of the program for the PhD students is fundamental, all the more so since the writing of a thesis is influenced by the principles of the electronic edition program. How is it possible to contact the PhD students and train them without a pedagogical display at the level of the whole university? In fact precious time has been wasted in finding out who, within the university, should undertake the training of the PhD students on the electronic edition.

To find help for the treatment of theses has not been easy: this new task seems difficult to integrate into the current work process in libraries and is not considered useful enough to be taken into account.

A global lack of financial means and work resources has constantly been present.

Finally, the non-acceptance of the electronic version as the official version of a thesis has also been an obstacle to the extension of the program to the whole university. Students have not been under obligation to put their theses on-line and few have submitted their work.

These problems, induced by the political choices concerning the launching of the program finally came into collision with the will of the university board who now wants to promote the treatment of theses in this way and thus reach the target group.

From January 2003, initiatives could be set up at the university, linked to a change of personnel in the coordination of the program and to lessons drawn from a first assessment : creation of an administrative database for theses; 6 librarian students to be employed on a part-time basis for the formatting of theses for the Faculty of medicine, collation of statistics bound to theses, launching of a training program for PhD medical students. To reach as many students as possible the decision was

made to put the PDF version of the theses on-line when available.

## Spreading the program to other universities in French-speaking Switzerland

The experience of the University of Geneva, collaboration with Cyberthèses and projects that have been carried out together have sparked off the interest of other universities in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

In turn, the universities of Fribourg, Neuchâtel and Lausanne have shown their interest in what has been happening in Geneva in collaboration with Lyon2. Various presentations of the program have been carried out and these institutions have now decided to launch an electronic edition based on the same model.

The Cyberthèses processing line installed at the University of Geneva has been integrated into these new universities, opening a space on the document server for each one, dedicated to the on-line publication of theses. The University of Geneva has also provided training on the processing of dissertations to these universities.

Following in the footsteps of Geneva, libraries at the other universities have been given responsibility of their electronic edition and each university has adapted the copyright draft produced by Geneva to its own needs.

These other universities have a common characteristic in that they are smaller than the University of Geneva so they produce fewer theses and they are more centralized. These factors facilitate the implementation of a program such as this.

The University of Neuchâtel has put together a small team of librarians in charge of processing theses and of training the PhD students as soon as they are registered with the PhD program.

The University of Lausanne has, for its part, assigned an independent expert librarian to do the groundwork on the theses of the university. Information about the program is being spread and processing of the first theses is beginning.

One acknowledged exception is the University of Fribourg, which was the first to be interested in collaboration in 2001. This bilingual university (French and German) has experienced difficulties when implementing the electronic edition program. It was decided that theses produced by the university would be assigned to a publication service which is semi-independent to the university and bound to the private economy, while the metadata would be generated by the cantonal library which depends on another political entity. The tasks are clearly divided up, but coordination is not well defined the various partners are having difficulties getting the program

off the ground, a situation that is made worse as reference people at the University change frequently.

Libraries of these universities, like the one at the University of Geneva, have been part of the same library network for 25 years and are used to working in close collaboration. For this reason the network has been asked to implement a common technical solution for the electronic edition of theses and for stocking and archiving.

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## Collaboration in the framework of the library network

In September 2001, negotiations were started with the Réseau des bibliothèques de Suisse occidentale (RERO) with the aim of finding a mutual solution for the on-line publication of theses which could be managed at network level.

The University of Geneva and the other universities have expressed the wish that responsibility at the network level should remain a Cyberthèses extension so as to be able to work in the same spirit of active collaboration and with an exchange of competencies.

RERO accepted to relay this from 2002 under certain conditions: a version of the process line should be set up as soon as possible on one of the network's servers offering technical support only. RERO has few labor resources and it has been agreed that the University of Geneva should deal with certain developments on the process line for French-speaking Switzerland, providing that these developments are useful to all participants of Cyberthèses.

A working group dedicated to structured electronic documents has been set up at network level to combine efforts for the electronic edition of theses, and later other types of documents. This group began its work at the end of Summer 2002.

On a parallel and little by little, each university is implementing the processing of theses and there are great expectations related to the common electronic edition of theses, for the practical experience of Geneva and also regarding the new process line of Cyberthèses which is soon to be available.

In addition to the above-mentioned universities, 2 patrimonial libraries have joined the working group as they are very interested in producing, stocking and archiving other types of structured numerical documents. A French-speaking polytechnical high school, the EPFL, in Lausanne, has shown great interest and has joined the group as an observer.

The working group has already met several times to link efforts to create documents destined to inform PhD students, with the possibility of setting up a training scheme for them at a later date. Collaboration with the Swiss national library has begun with laying out metadata specifically for Swiss theses and to collaborate on a national level (see presentation by Mrs Elena Balzardi at this conference).

The library network intends to set up a common document server OAI compatible (CDSWare from CERN) on which a Cyberthèses process line will be installed. Other numerical documents are required for this server for access to libraries that are linked to the network and to their users, for example numerical documents in PDF produced by patrimonial libraries such as the Bibliothèque publique et universitaire in Geneva (law texts from the 18th century).

Shared web pages of information about the different programs of electronic edition and for on-line access are also planned.

One of the problems in relation to the library network is, however, the coordination of the different programs dedicated to the electronic publication of theses. The network does not want to take on the role of coordinator but expectations are so high and some centralized coordination is needed. It is therefore within the framework of the working group that tasks have to be assigned, even if the expertise is for the time being in the hands of a limited number of people.

## Theses on the Swiss national level

Other electronic edition programs of theses privileging the PDF format and mass production are also in process in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. One of these experiments will be presented at this conference,

that is the project of the Federal polytechnical high school (ETH) of Zurich (by Mrs Alice Keller).

The universities of Basel, Bern, Saint-Gall and Zürich have also committed themselves to similar projects and are each proposing collections of theses from their respective institutions.

On a national level, political authorities dealing with the academic institutions within the country have been working on this question.

The Commission of University Libraries (CBU) has recently created a working group joining together the principal actors who produce electronic theses in Switzerland. This group is to reflect on the future of electronic theses in our country. A first report from this group has recently been submitted : it has established a state of the art question, suggests the exchange of opinion and experiences and in time hopes to establish a link between practices in French-speaking and German-speaking of Switzerland.

Guidelines have been laid out which deal with cooperation between the different programs, their support by academic boards, the implementation of an official deposit of theses in electronic form, the regulation of formats, the quality of metadata in use and long-term archiving on a national level.

It is interesting to note the parallel between electronic periodicals and their archiving in Switzerland : a national consortium has been set up with the aim of bringing together available resources and the leader of the consortium has been invited to join the CBU working group to facilitate work as a team to deal with issues of data storage and archiving.

## Conclusion

Both within the framework of the University of Geneva and in the experience of the other universities, and in library network reports, we have come up against recurring difficulties.

Even if people are convinced of the utility and the necessity of the use of structured documents for the future and for the retrieval of information, the length of processing theses and their format remain major obstacles to the final adoption of such a program and make it difficult to find human or financial resources for the processing of theses in the libraries. Is there no will to es-

tablish new procedures, or does the organization within our libraries still not allow for the integration of this type of new procedure ? One of the issues is to deal with the tension between the length of processing and group targeted.

Swiss PhD students seem to be a particularly complex species to connect with : when is the best moment during their lengthy cursus to train them ? The use of the tutorial is not widely spread. Doctorate schools have recently made their appearance in Switzerland and libraries have not yet been fully integrated within this SYSTEM. The problem with the electronic version as the official version of theses will certainly come under discussion within each institution if not on the national level.

We are living in a crucial era in Switzerland regarding the electronic edition of theses. Different programs are emerging, both with and without mutual cooperation, in the different linguistic areas of the country. An initiation process is being established in each university, particular to each one, to each structure, to each policy. For the French-speaking part it is now time to stabilize the programs within the university, and overall on the network. On a national political level there is a real desire to reach a good level of exchange of experiences, complemented by the National library and by the unifying one put forward by the Commission of the University Libraries. Perhaps we can even hope for mutual collaboration on the access to data and for work in co-operation with each other.

From an international collaboration initiated between France and Switzerland around the Cyberthèses program, extended at national linguistic level for one part, to the converging with other linguistics and international programs in the Switzerland for another part, a federation will surely be formed from all these different experiences with institutional and disciplinary diversity which will be useful to everyone and will perhaps even spread past our borders.

We have to underline the capital importance of strong coordination, if possible with the adequate resources, to move towards active collaboration and an exchange of skills which have been the key to everything that has been established between Geneva and Lyon<sup>2</sup>, and to what we are beginning to set up in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and also on a national level. We have to reinforce, bring up to date and grow within the new model for cooperation.