

Time for a change: the Italian CRUI-Open Access Working Group's action for a national e-theses provision service

Paola Galimberti, Marialaura Vignocchi

Università degli Studi di Milano, CIB – Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna

Abstract

The paper intends to present the status of e-theses collections in Italy, focusing on the major drivers for change that can contribute to create the basis of a national e-theses provision service able to collaborate with other international services. Finally, it illustrates the e-theses project of Bologna University as a case study of a viable integrated system offering added-value services.

Until very recently electronic doctoral theses provision has been an initiative of a few universities or of single departments in Italy. So coverage has been poor and the vast majority of current theses and older ones exist only in paper. Discovery and access services have not been much satisfactory and doctoral theses have been largely underused.

The situation is now changing rapidly. The major initiative has been taken by the Open Access Working Group sponsored by CRUI (Conference of the Rectors of the Italian Universities). The OA CRUI Working Group intends to provide Italian universities with guidelines and a tool-kit offering practical and legal support for managing and making theses available via Open Access IRs. Indeed, technology to set up IRs is relatively simple and most Italian universities have, or are planning to implement, one. The new legislation on legal deposit of publications is another driving force towards the development of e-theses collections. The lobbying action of the OAI CRUI Working Group is accelerating the adoption of new procedures for the legal deposit of electronic theses at the National Libraries based on OAI-PMH. These procedures will improve central discovery and access services and will guarantee accurate long-term digital preservation programs for e-theses. Finally, they will bring about a simplification of administrative work, which is greatly contributing to a reconsideration and a repositioning of IRs within the academical workflow and administrative information systems. Another driver for change is represented by the new spreading culture of research evaluation. Research assessment has begun to determine the funding system of departments and faculties generally appreciate initiatives that increase the visibility of their outputs, provided that IP protection is guaranteed. A national e-theses provision service will also enable Italy to participate in the larger context of European research.

In September 2006, Bologna University has launched the "AMS Tesi di Dottorato" project that has achieved a functional integration between the administrative information system of the Doctoral Management Office and the E-prints facilities developed to host the collections of the University Digital Library (Alma-DL). Doctoral students do the self-archiving into the repository reducing data-entry operations of administrative staff, while bibliographic metadata are enhanced by librarians. Administrative staff retain control tasks in order to guarantee that patents and IP rights are respected. Legal deposit is performed via OAI-PMH, while print-on-demand is provided as an added-value service to authors.