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Theses and Dissertations Management Overview in Kosovo

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ABSTRACT

Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD), which offer scientific information to students and researchers, are currently considered a crucial factor that influences the development and advancement of scientific research. Even though the ETD system is growing very fast and is implemented by many countries, this path in some countries still lacks the essential tools needed to foster innovation in the realm of digitalization.

The aim of the research is to examine the contribution to the field of the ETD system in general, presenting its development and benefits, and to compare it with traditional management of these collections in Kosovo and region, which is far from any favorable attitude towards implementation of this system.

The measurable parameters of this study are: examination of the international efforts to implement the ETD system within institutions, surveys with university units in Kosovo, interviews with representatives of the National and University Library of Kosovo (NULK) and the deans of the departments of the Public University of Prishtina, as well as interviews with representatives of national libraries of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. Other resources will also be used if necessary.

The research findings indicate that even though the ETD system is very useful in library and university premises, there are still countries or regions that are far from taking any step forward, or they are rather unfamiliar with this concept. Since the process of digitalization of theses and dissertations is very important and complicated, the management structures of universities and libraries must possess a wide knowledge and a background in information technology, a type of expertise without which knowledge cannot be developed and transmitted to new generations. Those structures must initiate discussion on the ETD system among students, reviewers, faculty members, library personnel and other subjects which will be affected directly by theses and dissertations.

Keywords

Theses and Dissertations, Digitalisation, Kosovo Education, Library, ETD system

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD), which was first discussed 24 years ago (1987) at a meeting in Ann Arbor -Michigan and caught even more attention and interest during the last two decades, is being used currently by many universities, libraries, consortia, and other relevant research institutions. Today, this system, as a fast and effective technology, enhances the management of these collections in libraries and already proved to be successful in many countries.

Nowadays, there are many universities worldwide where students are obliged to submit their dissertations electronically, in order for them to be archived. This type of creation and maintenance of the ETD database has a direct impact on the development of science, proper education and many other benefits mentioned below.

THE BENEFITS OF ETD IN THE ACADEMIC TRIANGLE: STUDENT - UNIVERSITY - LIBRARY

The creation of a thesis and dissertation in the electronic format and their online publication brings several benefits, especially if we compare it with traditional processes of collecting and maintaining theses and dissertations.

Firstly, the student can make his work available to faculty members and larger audiences, respectively to those who are interested in making research. Since it is in an electronic format, it will be accessed much easier and more frequently than paper-based theses and dissertations. In addition, the save on printing and copying costs is important for student's pocket money.

Secondly, universities benefit from the application of the ETD system, as well. In addition to the possibilities that students and academic community will have a 24/7 hour basis access, it is also expected that it will be easier to monitor and supervise the content of theses and dissertations in order to avoid any academic dishonesty.

Thirdly, from libraries' perspective, ETD provides a solution to address its space requirements. With ETD no physical shelf space is needed. Further, libraries do not have to worry about circulation, shelving, labeling, bar-coding and cataloging of theses and dissertations.

Even though this system is growing rapidly throughout educational and research institutions and it is bringing major changes compared to the traditional method of submitting theses and dissertations at the universities, there are still countries which are far from this process and do not have these benefits. It seems that the common feature for these countries is digitalization without vision. Kosovo is not an exception since the new thinking of digitalization is only just emerging.

THE CONCEPT OF ETD IN KOSOVO

It is well known that many library collections in the world have changed the size and shape of the information space available through the computer screen and have revolutionized access to information of all kinds and sizes to improve user services, thanks to the power and speed of communication technologies. But no similar services are offered by the Kosovo libraries and educational institutions. Library users in Kosovo are not using yet computer terminals to search online for the collections of electronic theses and dissertations. They use very little other electronic resources; such as e-books, e-journals, etc.

In relation to the usage of electronic resources in the NULK, research indicates that 75% of the students do not use electronic resources at all; 15% report "yes, we make use of the internet", while the remaining 10% confirm to be using Google and Wikipedia as electronic resources. Research conducted with students reveals the following data: 74% of the students say they take their books and other supporting materials to the library, using it only as a place to read in peace. 22% report using their own materials with those of the library in combination. Only 4% of the students make use of the library's material.

According to professor Ismet Bujupi, unfortunately, university departments and colleges in Kosovo do not use electronic journals and rather get insufficient and inaccurate information from Wikipedia (Bujupi, 2011). On the other hand, Gani Abazi who studied Health Care Policy and Management at Harvard University considers that "literature review is extremely important to be done through electronic mediums, so that the most up to date publications are reviewed, compared and analyzed prior to making conclusions on the outcomes or experiments and specific research." Therefore, "libraries in Kosovo should get the necessary logistical support and in particular the necessary information technology expertise to design and implement components of ETD's in Kosovo". (Abazi, 2011)

Leskinen (2008, p.20) points out that "at the time I was in Kosovo, the libraries were not in adequate condition. There were not enough books and academic journals. Particularly, satellite libraries lacked even basic books. This had consequences not only for researchers but also for teachers (professors, lecturers) and students. Use of the WWW did little to help the situation. The internet is not without problems, because publicly available resources could be personal and biased accounts without scientific credibility".

Under the Law on Libraries in Kosovo, the universities and public libraries are considered to be prominent institutions which "collect, enrich, process, maintain and preserve their collections that belong to different fields of intellectual creation and different activities related to human experience and opinion in order to make them known and available for users who express the willingness to read, research and study these collections and also to leave these collections as a heritage to new generations. (Law on Libraries, 2003/6).

According to Signori (Signori), "it is the task of national libraries to preserve the intellectual and cultural heritage of their countries. Nowadays much of this heritage is expressed in electronic form and many national libraries have started projects to collect and archive electronic publications". So far, Kosovo libraries have not started the implementation of projects related to the collection and archiving of electronic publications.

Even though theses and dissertations which contain research and knowledge of students doing PhD and Masters Degree at universities and higher education institutions are of primary importance to libraries and in general to this process, it seems that relevant institutions in Kosovo do not pay special attention to this matter. Their treatment under the new standards hasn't been decided yet, including the priority list of the education agenda in Kosovo. It seems that their handling based on a form and access have not been changed and transformed since the establishment and application of doctoral programs in Kosovo.

The procedure now followed during the process of submitting and collecting theses and dissertations in Kosovo is as follows: The student is obliged to provide 7 copies of his work (hard copy); three copies are given to committee members, one is for his university personal file, one copy goes to the university library, one is for the students, and one goes to the national library. "The university department maintains evidence of the defended thesis and dissertation and all required information for such work, but there is no electronic database where we could search for them easily" (Zeqiri, 2011).

Based on the information obtained by the department dean," theses and dissertations remain archived and can be accessed by: administration personnel of the department, the secretary and the archivist. Further, one copy goes to the university library and it has been made accessible to interested library users". *(Kabashi, 2011)*

If we take into consideration these facts then we can summarize that: the work of a student is not available online, open access is limited while the student spends money on printing and copying. On the other hand, the university library has only one copy. It is difficult to find it since there is no, at least an electronic database to show the titles of works.

If we analyze the process of work related to Theses and Dissertations at the National and University Library in Kosovo, we come to the conclusion that the Library is still using traditional methods to archive and preserve Theses and Dissertations. Collecting of those works is carried out by the Department of Acquisition. Theses and Dissertations belong to the Special Collection, which means they are preserved in closed stacks and they are usually non-circular, while only properly-qualified, interested researchers can have access. So far, the library has no digital theses and dissertations, nor even in CD or any other digital format. According to Zejnije Qerimi, the person in charge of special collections, "only scientific workers or candidates who are close to defend their theses and dissertations can access these databases. Presently, the Library doesn't have any plan to change the management of Theses and Dissertations". (Qerimi, 2011)

Facts about Theses and Dissertations in Kosovo

The abovementioned findings generate these facts:

- Theses and dissertations are only on paper, placed on library shelves.

- The information on theses and dissertations (common database, at least, for paper-based theses and dissertations) has not been made accessible to general public.

- Theses and Dissertations are not available, i.e. they have not been made accessible to general public. At the NULK, they have been made accessible only to scientific workers. At the university departments, they have been made accessible only to authorized members of university staff and external examiners for administrative purposes.

- There is a lack of coordination and cooperation between the Library and universities, a lack of joint actions which might initiate any action for theses and dissertations. The ineffective cooperation between the main library in Kosovo (National and University Library of Kosovo) and the universities and vice versa is quite evident.

- There is no foreseen initiative to deal with ETD projects since the main library of Kosovo lacks the necessary capacities to function as a sustainable institution similar to other national libraries and based on international standards.

- There is no foreseen online database that provides access to digital collections, such as theses and dissertations for online viewing and to provide the associated metadata regarding the documents (e.g. student and university name, year of graduation, document title, abstract, keywords).

- It has not been initiated, at least, yet any process to generate theses and dissertations entirely electronically, by using a word processor and/or electronically composed software, known as Born Digital Items.

- There is no plan yet to convert theses and dissertations into electronic files through scanning.

- There are no promises to create any digital databases, namely, create a digital archive of theses and dissertations. The application of processes, techniques and protocols to preserve the scholarly records over time is being done in a

traditional way which is considered more preferred by university departments administration.

- The dissemination of electronic Theses and dissertations on the Internet is not expected and planned in the near future.

THESES AND DISSERTATIONS MANAGEMENT IN THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

Even though there is a worldwide trend to collect electronic versions of doctoral dissertations, including those that have been stored on digital repositories of university libraries, unfortunately, it seems that the neighboring countries of Kosovo are in a similar situation.

The National and University Library in Zagreb (Croatia) at present has a bibliography of old collections of Theses and Dissertations (1880 – 1984) which are placed in closed stocks, and they are made available at the request of the user. In 1990 the bibliography of theses and dissertations was made available online but there are no online collections for distant access. (Cindori, 2011)

A similar practice is used in Serbia, too. Such a situation is not desirable (Kosanovic, 2011). The results of studies documented that extensive thematic bibliography remains unknown and hasn't been made accessible to the majority of potential interested users. There is a list of PhD's until 2006, which has been edited by university departments for years. Each record contains information on the name of candidates, dissertation title and number of pages. One can not search for this list, but it can be found only by respective university departments. In Serbia, theses and dissertations in the field of mathematical sciences are available in the full text form on the website of the Department of Mathematics, University of Belgrade. A list of doctoral dissertations and master's theses in the field of new materials of the Institute of Technical Sciences, SASA, can be seen on their website (some of the theses are available in the form of full text).

In Slovenia, theses and dissertations are integrated into a general catalog, thus there is no special catalog (Sotošek, 2011). There is a digital library in Slovenia providing free access to 686 doctoral theses and 125 master theses.

As regards Macedonia, theses and dissertations are processed like all other documents which are available in COBISS through the OPAC. There is a special collection of them and they have been prepared and stored separately. However, theses are not digitized (Dadasović, 2011).

In Montenegro, all universities within the academic units have graduate studies, as well as master's and doctorate degrees. The Central Library collects a copy of master's theses and doctoral dissertations, which are defended in Montenegro. Those works can be found, later on, in the electronic catalog: COBISS.CG, as part of a joint catalog of monographs and serials. "There is no digitalization of theses and dissertations on central library level or at the national level". (Vračar, 2011)

If we compare the management process of the ETD services offered by the education and research institutions of Kosovo and the region, slight differences emerge between Kosovo libraries and those in the region. Ambitious declarations to have a bright future for the library found in speeches made by library representatives, in this part of the Balkans, are far from realization and a long time is needed to achieve satisfactory results.

QUO VADIS SUCH SITUATION?

Among contributors that have had an impact on this undesirable status of Electronic Theses and Dissertations in the Balkans is also the lack of cooperation between local and regional academic institutions, specifically in the issue of theses and dissertations. We can see that:

- There is no local or regional network in the Balkans, created by academic and research institutions, that would come up with a stand on theses and dissertations matter.

- The lack of online electronic databases of theses and dissertations on regional level increases the possibility of any eventual academic dishonesty, bearing in mind that Slavonic languages are 80% used in the Balkan region and people are very familiar with these languages.

- There is no interuniversity cooperation that could help detect any eventual similar work as in the neighboring universities.

Individual work generates many threatens which seriously damage the quality of scientific works. A common fear is that this situation leads to a slight plagiarism amongst universities in the Balkans. Theses and dissertations management is a

very crucial field of cooperation which has not been explored yet by regional universities and institutional universities of Kosovo and it seems that academic cooperation has been marginalized.

No space for scientific competition

If Higher Education Strategies in the European Zone are oriented towards access, values, quality and competitiveness in order to improve the quality of education, then, it is important to stress how much Kosovo educational and research institutions are dedicated to achieve these components.

The lack of cooperation between education institutions of Kosovo and the region boosts the chances for plagiarism, bearing in mind that there is no mechanism that detects or monitors the topics and contents of those scientific works. It can happen very easily that the translated pieces of theses and dissertations from Slavic languages, be appropriated by modification and adoption of key elements.

Perhaps the term "Copy/Paste" is not appropriate to describe the "real science" in Kosovo, but it is often the case. Probably the best term to describe the situation in the higher education system and the situation of the research is "plagiarism", omnipresent in the academic domain in Kosovo. However, this term does not apply to all researchers, since some of them are very original and professional. (Rama, 2010)

Thus, theses and dissertations are only on paper and they have not been made accessible to the public and, consequently, there are many opportunities for students to copy others' work and not be detected, or to cite those works, unless the author of the original work reads the copied version. If those works are available online, then, it is very easy to detect copy/paste or translations and adaptations from other languages.

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is necessary to promote ETD in Kosovo Higher Education System and the Balkans, through initiation of a discussion on ETD among students, reviewers, faculty members, library personnel and other stakeholders that will be directly involved in and affected by theses and dissertations.

2. The availability of information itself does not ensure the visibility of that information. Information must be made accessible. Therefore, education management in Kosovo must start to think about the ETD project in order to guarantee visibility across all academic institutions of Kosovo. It is anticipated that the visibility and availability of this information will result in a wider dissemination both nationally and internationally with obvious benefits for Kosovo.

3. It is important to initiate establishment of inter-institutional academic alliances, which would contribute to the creation of mechanisms which strengthen cooperation and implement policies and actions that contribute to the theses and dissertations process.

4. The regional cooperation, respectively, joint initiatives as a path to the achievement of quality in the Higher Education System of Kosovo and the region could reduce the gaps in theses and dissertations development. It seems that such option can not be achieved for the moment.

5. Libraries and universities, on state and regional level, must ensure close cooperation with each other and promote and offer assistance for the supervision of the process of theses and dissertations.

6. A database should be created, which will be available on the web and which will include accessible both digital materials and materials in printed form.

7. Since every library receives annually several theses and dissertations in printed form, alternative strategies are expected to be developed through many different institutional arrangements, which can expand considerably the pool of ETD resources in order for them to be available for academic users. All university departments must ensure that theses and dissertations are sent to the library in a digital form.

8. University and library management in Kosovo, in order to become as effective as possible, is supposed to have the following qualities: deep awareness of digital era in the education process; ability to accept new changes and to

initiate processes that lead to global education; re*adiness to create a positive* relationship with universities and libraries abroad; capability to adopt new digitalization systems needed for students and scholars; etc.

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