Electronic Dissertations in the Netherlands

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THE START OF ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING OF DISSERTATIONS BY DUTCH UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN 1994

Several Dutch university libraries started full text electronic storing and publishing of scholarly information during the first half of the nineties; they aimed to build up collections of full text digital information and to develop digital user services. Doing so, they wanted to acquire expertise in the areas of producing, converting, indexing and providing electronic documents.

The University of Groningen decided to concentrate in the first instance on dissertations (and other university publications), because these documents are quality controlled and free of copyright. At this university each year about 200 dissertations are submitted in all kind of disciplines. From January 1994 Ph D. students were allowed to present an electronic version of their dissertation to the University Library Groningen for interlibrary exchange instead of 50 printed copies.

Supporting a multiformat platform, the Groningen University Library allowed authors to decide in what document format they want to present their theses. WORD, WORDPERFECT and LATEX proved to be the most common used word processors. In a leaflet authors were informed which requirements they had to fullfill. The most important requirement is that the document should be completely electronic. To teach scientists, students and researchers how to produce electronic publications, the Computing Centre of the University organised several courses. Besides, the Computing Centre and the University Library were prepared to give those who had problems the necessary instructions and help.

At the beginning, each electronic dissertation was stored on a document server in POSTSCRIPT format, together with ASCII versions of the bibliographical data, the summary and the table of contents. Soon afterwards PDF and HTML became de facto standards. For that reason, some years later the title page and the table of contents of the dissertations of the Groningen University are converted to HTML and the fulltext in PDF.

If other libraries or scientists, students etc. want to collect a dissertation of the University of Groningen, they can easily access by Internet the document server

of the university library on which the dissertations are stored. They are permitted to download or print a copy, with the exception of those few dissertations that are copyright-protected, because the whole or parts of it have been published before by copyright owning publishers. In these cases the dissertations are made non-printable and non-downloadable, so they can only be viewed.

Those users who prefer a printed and bound copy of an electronic dissertation, can order this by filling in an electronic order form. This printing-on-demand service has proved to be an important facility, which is used world-wide. About 500 dissertations are made electronically available by Groningen University Library up till now. More and more students - especially the younger ones - prefer to give the university library an electronic version of their dissertation instead of 50 printed copies. Each year about 150 dissertations are added to the document server. Besides that, two research institutes of Groningen University have decided to publish all their research memoranda electronically by the document-server-service the University Library offers. More than 100 research memoranda have already been published in that way. To get access to this material contact the website of the University Library Groningen: <http://www.ub.rug.nl>

Most other university libraries in the Netherlands have followed the example of Groningen University and started to store dissertations and other publications of their universities on their own document servers. Because all these electronic publications are indexed and made accessible by the Dutch Union Catalogue one Dutch Digital Library collection is the result.

As we have a strong tradition of library cooperation in the Netherlands, it was decided to professionalize and uniform the procedures and services of electronic publishing of dissertations and other university publications on a national level. To put this on a sound organisational footing, PICA, the Dutch Library Cooperative System, made a project plan.

THE PICA PROJECT FOR ELECTRONIC DISSERTATIONS

The main objective of the PICA project for electronic dissertations is to give end users online access to the collection of Dutch dissertations. PICA is making available and sustaining a central catalogue with bibliographical data and abstracts. The full text of the dissertations however is mounted on the document servers of the participating university libraries, using standard technologies for producing, converting, storing, indexing and providing electronic access. The Royal Library in the Hague, which fulfils the role of

national deposit library for printed and electronic publications, also functions as a host for electronic dissertations, which means that they too store copies of the full text of all Dutch dissertations on its document server, an IBM Digital Library system. Bibliographic data are stored in ASCII, its summaries in HTML and the fulltext in PDF.

Access to the electronic dissertations is possible by the local online public catalogues (OPC's) of the university libraries, the Dutch Union Catalogue (NCC) and the Dutch metacatalogue PICARTA (a catalogue that indexes all kinds of printed, electronic, audio, video, software and audio-visual material).

Searching in the NCC or PICARTA, the user can get direct access to the bibliographical data and the summaries of the requested dissertations. By clicking on a full text button the user can access the full text right away.

Searching in the OPC of a university library, the user will notice that the electronic dissertation has instead of a call number an URL (a http-address). By clicking on that URL he will be guided directly to the summary and the full text.

The user has the possibility to view, download or to print the dissertation, with the exception of those dissertations that are protected by copyright. In these cases the dissertation (or the relevant parts of it) can only be viewed, so that no copyright infringement will take place.

On the basis of the PICA project, the Dutch university libraries will provide an operational access service for dissertations. Most of them will integrate into this service other electronic publications of their university, like research memoranda, conference proceedings, lectures, readers etc. Acting so, they want to promote as much as possible the electronic production and publication of all kind of university publications and to offer to students and scientists the possibility to publish the results of their research quickly and on a favourable costing basis for themselves and for the scholarly community as a whole.

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