

Doctoral Dissertations in Spanish Universities - Bibliographic Control and Access

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„The relatively high number of doctoral dissertations accepted every year in Spanish Universities and, with regard to scientific and cultural progress of the country, the undoubted value of any activity that may contribute towards sending out information on doctoral dissertations”, were the reasons which lead the Ministry of Education and Science¹ to create, in 1975, a mechanised datafile of Spanish doctoral dissertations; the State Board of Universities², through the State Subcommittee of Research Promotion³, were in charge of the permanent collection and transmission of data, and the General Technical Office⁴, through the Data Processing Centre, was entrusted with setting up, maintaining and running the datafile.

The result of this preparation is the TESEO database, which currently depends on the Governing Board of the University⁵, on a national scale, and which contains the abstracts of the doctoral dissertations passed in Spanish Universities since 1976. These are classified according to UNESCO and access is gained through authors, titles, directors, University, or various descriptors. From the database, annual abstracts of the dissertations read are published on paper.

The creation of the automated datafile of doctoral dissertations meant a great step in the bibliographical control of Spanish dissertations and, on including all the ones which passed, whether they are published or not, the datafile should prove a useful tool for disseminating and gaining access to them. However, it is somewhat less efficient in practice, at least for the moment, as the TESEO database is not yet as thorough as we would wish.

Obviously, doctoral dissertations represent documents of unquestionable interest as they are generated by all universities and are relatively recent⁶. The high number mentioned by the Ministerial Order of 1975 has increased constantly, especially over the last two decades with the great increase in the number of universities. This results in a high demand from university library users. However, the access to doctoral dissertations is not always easy as there is neither a general guideline nor a set criteria that users may follow.

The new regulation of Ph. D. courses, approved in 1998⁷, insists on transmitting the dissertations files from the Doctorate Commission to the University Boards and the Ministry of Education and Culture and extending it to the Autonomous Community. It has also announced measures to be taken regarding the adaptation of the doctoral dissertations datafile, which will hopefully improve its efficiency.

With the aim of finding out more about the present situation of doctoral dissertations in our university libraries, we carried out a survey during last April and May among all Spanish university libraries, sending a questionnaire to fifty-eight Directors⁸ of other university libraries, forty eight of which were public and ten of which were private. This questionnaire was about the levels of control, dissemination and access to dissertations. We received 46 answers, which represents 82.7%, forty-one came from public universities and five from private ones⁹. The data obtained reveal a great variety of situations and are good grounds for drawing attention from university libraries towards how doctoral dissertations are handled.

According to our survey, TESEO is sent information from 10 universities that publish all their dissertations, 15 that publish some, and 5 that do not publish any; two of them also send information to the database of doctoral dissertations of Michigan University. As local information, in order to gain access to the dissertations, 9 of the universities that publish all, 12 of those that publish some, and 6 that do not publish any have their own inventory. Some universities periodically publish the abstracts of the accepted doctoral dissertations using the same information as the database or elaborating on it themselves.

The survey reveals that, even if most universities publish their doctoral dissertations, only 13 publish all, 20 publish some and 11 do not publish any. Of the ones which publish all the dissertations, 5 of them do this by decision of the Governing Body, 4 by the Ph. D. Commission or according to their rules, 3 by decision of the Publishing Service or by their set of rules, and 1 through an agreement of the Research Commission. Of the ones which publish only some of their dissertations, 3 do this according to their Statutes, another 3 by decision of the Publishing Service or their regulations, 3 by an agreement from the Ph. D. Commission, 2 by decision of the Governing Body, 2 by the Vice-rector of Research, 2 on the author's request and another 2 by agreement from the advisory Committee of Publications; 3 do not give any information regarding the rules of publication.

Table 1: Universities that publish their doctoral dissertations. Regulations, medium, distribution and dissemination

		All	Some	Not Publish Doct. Diss.
<i>Publication regulations</i>				16
<i>Statutes</i>			3	
<i>Governing body</i>		5	2	
<i>Ph. D. Com.</i>		4	3	
<i>Research. Commission</i>		1		
<i>Publishing Service</i>		3	3	
<i>Advisory Committee of Publications</i>			2	
<i>Vice-rector of Research</i>			2	
<i>Author's request</i>			2	
<i>No rules</i>			3	
<i>Medium</i>				
<i>Paper</i>		1	4	
<i>Microfiche</i>		7	15	
<i>Computer Disc</i>		3		
<i>CD-ROM</i>		8	5	
<i>WEB</i>			1	
<i>Distribution</i>				
<i>Exchange</i>		8	16	
<i>Spanish Universities</i>		3	5	
<i>Foreign Universities</i>		2	2	
<i>Not distributed</i>		1		
<i>Dissemination</i>				
<i>TESEO</i>		10	15	5
<i>Dissertation Abstracts</i>		2		
<i>Catalogue</i>		9	12	6
<i>Inventory</i>			8	3

The most frequent medium is the microfiche, used by 22 universities for publishing their dissertations, although this is gradually being replaced by a CD-ROM, which has been adopted since 1998 by 13 universities; 3 publish their dissertations on a computer disc, 4 publish some dissertations on paper and 1, which used to publish all of them on this traditional medium, has changed over to CD-ROMS. Only 2 universities plan on-line access to their dissertations. Eight universities distribute their published dissertations to the

rest of the Spanish universities and 4 also send them to some foreign ones while 24 universities distribute them only to those with whom they have exchange agreements.

The access to published dissertations, whatever their medium may be, does not create any problems since they form part of the university collection and are included in the established information and circulation circuits of the library.

It is on trying to gain access to the unpublished doctoral dissertations where difficulties arise, since although their level of dissemination is comparable to that of the published ones, it is harder for users to consult them due to the low number of copies that are kept, the difficulty in locating them or because of certain legal limitations.

It is known that the originals of the dissertations that the authors hand in to the university form part of the documents that they need in order to obtain their Doctor's Degree, which may explain why they are provisionally located in the Ph. D Department, the Secretary's Office of the faculty or the General Secretary's Office; but this does not seem to justify why, once all the dissertations have been read and passed, they should not be found in a definite place, which would guarantee their dissemination and accessibility, such as the General Library, where 24 universities, 15 faculty libraries and 10 archives keep theirs, and should be kept in various places such as the department in 2 universities, the supporting Secretary's Office of the department in 5, and the General Secretary's Office in 5. There is no doubt that this is of little help to users in locating or gaining access to them. These various storage places only seem justifiable if they are for duplicated copies of the ones kept in libraries or archives.

Table 2: Provisional and final locations of unpublished doctoral dissertations and access regulations

LOCATION			Reading Room ACCESS						
	Pro- visional	Final	Reading Room	Rd.Rm. Research	Rd. Rm. General Authori- sation	Rd. Rm. Individual Authori- sation	ILL Author's Perm.ission	No Inform- ation	No Limit- ation
Ph. D. Office	3								
Faculty Secr. Office	5	5							
General Secr. Office	2	5	1						
University Archive	2	10	2	2	1	4	2	2	
Faculty Library	1	15	5	2	3	4		1	
General Library	1	24	6	2	7	7		2	1
Vicerrect. Research	1								
Deptments Secr. Office		1							
Depart- ment		2							

From the survey it is quite clear that there is a general rule which does not allow the originals of unpublished doctoral dissertations to be freely circulated, despite opinions that dissertations, which are publicly read and exhibited for public examination for 15 days, should be considered as published; or the exceptions stated in the Law of Intellectual Property¹⁰ in study or research material, where the author's rights are protected.

The access to unpublished dissertations is usually limited to consulting them in the library reading room, with the authors' general or individual authorisation; or to the user signing a statement on the scientific nature of their consultation.

In 15 universities the authors' consent is requested for each individual consultation, which can sometimes create serious difficulties in locating the thesis and which always causes delays in access.

In 11 universities the problems of obtaining individual consent have been overcome by means of a general authorisation to consult the thesis, which the

author signs and hands in on presenting the original which is then attached to it.

In 6 universities that allow the unpublished dissertations to be consulted in the reading room, it is the user that must fill in a form on which he promises to make only scientific use of the thesis or to quote it properly, etc.

In 2 university libraries the interlibrary loan of unpublished dissertations is allowed as long as there is another copy and the author has given his permission. Only in 1 university is the consultation of a thesis authorised without any restrictions.

Of the data shown, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. It is surprising that, despite the importance of doctoral dissertations, due to both the research activity of the university and the volume they have currently reached, there is no general set of regulations and that the internal rules are too scarce for the dissertations to be dealt with regularly, or to guarantee their dissemination and access and establish some sort of publishing regulations.

2. There is now a suitable instrument for controlling and disseminating Spanish doctoral dissertations. This is the TESEO database, which could be of great use by all universities simply following a set of regulations so that it may become more thorough and by those in charge of its maintenance keeping it permanently up-dated.

3. The decision to publish all doctoral dissertations, which several universities have already done using low cost media, such as the microfiche, computer disc, CD-ROM and, right now, electronic editing on-line, puts the results of the university research work within the users' reach and solves the problems for users and libraries on trying to consult unpublished doctoral dissertations.

4. The originals of the dissertations handed in to the university, once all the administration work is over, should be gathered together and kept in only one document or bibliographical place such as the university archives or the general library, which would guarantee the technical process, preservation, dissemination and access to the information that they contain.

REFERENCES

- 1 The Ministerial Order of 16th July 1975 (BOE 1-IX-75) explained these reasons in the introduction and included, as an appendix, the form model that universities should send in order to keep it up-dated.
- 2 Dirección General de Universidades

- 3 Subdirección General de Promoción de la Investigación
- 4 Secretaría General Técnica.
- 5 Consejo de Universidades. His regulations, approved by Royal Decree 552/85 on 2nd April 1986 (BOE 27-IV-85) in section i of article 17 includes the obligation to establish a datafile of doctoral dissertations and publish an annual report of those that have been officially passed.
- 6 Until the Law of Order of the University of Spain acknowledged in 1943 (29-VII-1943, BOE 31-VV-43) that all Spanish Universities should have the capacity to confer a Doctor's degree, it was only the University of Madrid that could do so and it was there that all the doctoral dissertations were presented. The meeting of the deadlines, which the actual rules imposed (Decree of 29th April 1944, BOE 7-V-44) would delay the appearance of Doctoral dissertations in provincial universities until the late forties and early fifties.
- 7 The Royal Decree 778/1998 (BOE 1-V-98) of the Ministry of Education and Culture in their article 11 *„The Doctorate Commission... will send the corresponding thesis file, established according to regulations, to the Board of Universities, the Ministry of Education and Culture and to the Autonomous Community on which the University depends.”* and in its 5th temporary provision: *„By the Ministry... the appropriate measures will be taken for adaptation... of running the datafile of doctoral dissertations carried out in Spanish universities”.*
- 8 I would like to thank those who have sent me their data.
- 9 One public university and another private one, created very recently, still do not have doctoral dissertations.
- 10 The Legislative Royal Decree 1/1996 of 12th April 1996 (BOE 22-IV-96), which approves the revised text of the Law of Intellectual Property and the Law 5/1998 of the Incorporation of the Governing Body to Spanish Law 96/9/CE of 11th March of the European Parliament (BOE 7-III-98) on legal protection of databases.

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