

JOINT ERCIM ACTIONS

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ERCIM Technical Reference Digital Libraryby Stefania Biagioni

New technologies, especially the Internet and WWW, are radically changing the roles of content providers and content consumers with respect to multimedia on-line services. For this reason, ERCIM has decided to set up an experimental system to link collections of technical reports and other types of grey literature of the ERCIM member research centres and labs on-line. The aim of this service is to assist ERCIM scientists to make their research results immediately available world-wide and provide them with appropriate on-line facilities to access the technical documentation of others working in the same field. Public access to this reference service will be provided through Internet.

Within the context of the DELOS Working Group, eight ERCIM institutions (CNR, CWI, GMD, INRIA, INESC, SICS, SZTAKI, and FORTH) are currently collaborating on the installation of an ERCIM Technical Reference Digital Library. The aim is to design, implement and test a prototype infrastructure for networked access to a distributed multi-format collection of technical documents contained in the research libraries of ERCIM. The collection will be managed by a set of interoperating servers, based on the DIENST system developed by a US consortium led by Cornell University and adopted by NCSTRL (Networked Computer Science Technical Reference Library). So far, pilot server sites have been set up at nearly half of the ERCIM national labs. Servers are expected to be installed at the other centres in the near future.

A meeting to discuss the installation of the ERCIM DL service was held on 23 January 1998, at IEI-CNR in Pisa. Representatives from CNR, GMD, INRIA, SICS, SZTAKI, and FORTH were present. At the meeting, a series of short and medium term objectives for the service were defined.

Short Term Objectives

As most of the interested ERCIM organisations have already installed the DIENST system, the main activities necessary to make the ERCIM virtual library operational are the integration of DIENST with the existing local systems, implementation of a classification scheme, and preparation and conversion of the technical documents into the appropriate electronic format. The points discussed at the meeting included:

- the implementation of common interfaces for end users (both information providers and seekers) and local administrators
- the definition of the naming and regional scheme
- the adoption of a common classification scheme to allow easy access to the scientific production of the institutes involved by enabling users to query the distributed archives as a single virtual collection.

It was felt that the collection should not be restricted only to technical reports but that other types of grey literature could be usefully included. For certain documents, only restricted access will be permitted.

Medium Term Objectives

It was agreed that the ERCIM virtual library should provide a testbed for DL research activities. The main issues discussed were the adoption of the Dublin Core Standards, the integration of the Z39.50 protocol, the implementation of additional retrieval functionalities and of a multilingual interface:

- There was general consensus among the group as to the advisability of adopting the Dublin Core element set. A group was set up with the mandate to decide on the appropriate subset that is meaningful for the ERCIM collection. Any decision should be compatible with the direction taken by NCSTRL.
- There was discussion concerning the integration of DIENST with OPACs through the protocol Z39.50. The EC Librarians Programme has officially adopted Z39.50 to access library information which thus becomes the official protocol for search & retrieval in European Libraries.
- The group intends to explore the possibility of inserting additional retrieval functionalities in the ERCIM DL; in particular, the STARTS protocol for Internet meta-searching developed by Stanford University will be evaluated.

The strategic importance for ERCIM of the inclusion of multilinguality in the Technical Reference Library was recognized. However, the common areas of scientific and technical interest for the ERCIM Institutes - Computer Science and Applied Mathematics - are not the most indicated for an activity of this kind as, especially in Computer Science, English tends to be the predominant language. A survey of the participants (representing institutions in France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Sweden), revealed that only INRIA (France) and GMD (Germany) had technical report collections of reasonable size in the Computer Science domain in their native language as well as English. CNR, FORTH, SICS and SZTAKI all reported that the majority of their documentation was in English. It was thus agreed that the activity should be limited to (i) the implementation of an interface capable of handling multiple languages and (ii) providing very basic functionalities for querying over all documents in whatever languages they are stored.

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