

JOINT ERCIM ACTIONS

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The ERCIM Technical Reference Digital Library goes On-lineby Antonella Andreoni, Carlo Carlesi and Pasquale Pagano

One of the declared aims of ERCIM is to advance European research and development in the areas of information technology and applied mathematics. It is thus extremely important that results of the R&D activities carried out at the ERCIM member institutions can be made immediately available to the interested scientific community in an easily accessible form. For this reason, ERCIM has set up a digital library service for the technical reports and other similar reference material produced by its scientists: the ERCIM Technical Reference Digital Library (ETRDL). An experimental service was first set up in 1998 - it is now publicly available.

The ERCIM Technical Reference Digital Library (ETRDL) is a collaborative activity in which eight organisations (CNR, CWI, GMD, INRIA, SICS, INESC, SZTAKI, FORTH) currently participate. It is sponsored jointly by ERCIM, by the DELOS Working Group (ESPRIT LTR No. 21057), and by the participating institutions. The objectives of the digital library service were outlined in Ercim News, No.33, April 1998. We are happy to announce here that, after a one-year period of testing and refining the first prototype, ETRDL is now publicly accessible at <http://www.iei.pi.cnr.it/DELOS/ETRDL>.

The service runs on an infrastructure based on the DIENST system (Version 4.1.9) developed by the US Networked Computer Science Technical Reference Library (NCSTRL) Consortium, which has been extended by the addition of new functionalities to meet the needs of the European IT scientific community. These include the adoption of a common metadata description standard, the introduction of common classification schemes and methods to manage them, the implementation of interfaces for languages other than English. An author submission form has been included to facilitate the insertion of new documents by the users themselves.

ETRDL is a distributed collection, consisting of the set of the local collections. These are maintained on the local servers of each partner institution. This has comported the implementation of two levels of Home Pages. A centralised access point has been provided to the system through the DELOS Web site, whereas a local home page is installed on each local server. The user who accesses the system through the centralised Home page is directed to select one of the local servers in order to search the ERCIM DL collection. Depending on the local server selected, he/she is also given a choice of language as most local servers will maintain interfaces in English and in the local language.

The Local Home Page interface caters simultaneously for two user classes: information seekers and information providers by offering two main options: search/browse any collection; submit/withdraw a document to/from a local collection. From the local home pages, the search and browse

functions can be activated over the entire NCSTRL collection, over the ERCIM collection, or over the collection(s) of the local institution. In each case, the user is not only accessing a different collection (or sub-collection), but is provided with a different perspective on the information, depending on the functions that have been implemented at that particular level. When searching on the ERCIM or the local collections, the user can switch between user interfaces in English or his/own language. On-line helps in both languages are available.

Adapting an existing system to meet new requirements is rarely easy. We had to address a number of problems when implementing the ETRDL. These included the implementation of a powerful search mechanism which allows the user to perform a simple or a fielded search throughout the entire library or on selected collections. Queries can include terms from controlled vocabularies (ACM and MSC classification schemes) and free keywords. Constraints can be imposed on the type, date or language of the documents to be searched.

ETRDL is now active. The next step will be to build up the local collections. All new technical documentation produced by the eight ERCIM institutions mentioned above (but hopefully others will join the activity soon) should be inserted in the library. Institutions may also consider including their most important past technical reports (eg from 1990 on); this implies classifying them according to the ETRDL rules.

In the mean-time, we are working on the development of the next version of the system (which will include modules to handle multilingual issues such as mechanisms for the correct search and visualization of all character sets, the maintenance of separate and linked indexes to permit the definition of the search language, semi-automatic procedures to assist authors in document classification, etc.).

In this stage, the feed-back we receive from users will be very important. So please, try out the system, and send us your comments.

For more information on the ETRDL project and documentation on the system, see <http://www.iei.pi.cnr.it/DELOS/EDL/edl.htm>

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