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Ninth DELOS Workshop

Digital Libraries for Distance Learning

Brno, Czech Republic, 15-17 April 1999

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NINTH DELOS WORKSHOP

Digital Libraries for Distance Learning

Brno, Czech Republic

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Introduction

Pasquale Savino and Pavel Zezula

The 9th DELOS Workshop on Digital Libraries for Distance Learning (http://www.cis.vutbr.cz/delos/) was held in Brno, Czech Republic, 15-17 April 1999. The objective of the DELOS Working Group (http://www.iei.pi.cnr.it/DELOS/), part of the ERCIM Digital Library Initiative funded by the ESPRIT Long Term Research Programme, is to promote research into the further development of digital library technologies.

This year Brno Technical University held its 100 year anniversary. It also recently become an associated partner of DELOS. The workshop was organized in celebration of these two events.

The workshop addressed two very important and rather recent research problems, namely, Digital Libraries and Distance Learning. Access to education has become increasingly important for individuals who need to gain a competitive edge in the labor market through acquisition of specialized or new knowledge. This demand for new information, coupled with the ever increasing quantity of information available in digital form, has lead to a change in traditional teaching methods. Face to face teaching is gradually being replaced by distance education. In order to make this form of education both effective and efficient, advanced information and communication technologies must be exploited. To this aim, digital libraries of distributed complex multimedia data can serve as suitable repositories of continuously changing up-to-date information, which are indispensable for distance education.

The DELOS organizers cooperated with the Czech Association of Distance Learning Universities and the European Association of Distance Learning Universities in preparing the program for this workshop. The Call for Papers was circulated not only to all DELOS Project partners, but also to the electronic network, reaching hundreds of individuals.

The final program, organized into seven sections, contained contributions from nine countries. The invited talk, by John A.N. Lee, concentrated on distance learning experiences at the Department of Computer Science at Virginia Tech, USA. The remaining presentations can be divided in two categories. Papers in the first category concentrated on conceptual issues of distance learning, emphasizing the position of digital libraries in the global process of knowledge acquisition. Papers in the second category presented information about actual prototypes for distance learning or addressed some of the advance technology tools necessary to meet this aim.

One section, highly appreciated by the workshop attendees, was devoted to prototype demonstrations. Six different prototypes were presented.

The workshop inspired numerous discussions. The most important issues can be summarized as follows:

1. Closer cooperation between the Digital Library and the Distance Learning communities is needed in order to better understand learning needs and technology capabilities.

2. A stronger theoretical foundation of actual systems is needed, including data modeling, search strategies, network communication, and user interfaces. Moreover, the performance of the hardware is not always sufficient.
3. Most of the participants expressed interest in cooperating under suitable research frameworks.

Finally, we are grateful to Tarina Ayazi from the IEI-CNR, Pisa, Italy for all her organizational help in making the workshop a success.

The DELOS Working Group is a part of the ESPRIT Long Term Research Programme (LTR No. 21057) and is managed by ERCIM.

The DELOS Partners are:

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The European Research Consortium for Informatics and Mathematics (ERCIM) is an organisation dedicated to the advancement of European research and development, in the areas of information technology and applied mathematics. Through the definition of common scientific goals and strategies, its national member institutions aim to foster collaborative work within the European research community and to increase co-operation with European industry. To further these objectives, ERCIM organises joint technical Workshops and Advanced Courses, sponsors a Fellowship Programme for talented young researchers, undertakes joint strategic projects, and publishes workshop, research and strategic reports as well as a newsletter.

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