



Project no. 018340

Project acronym: EDIT

Project title: Toward the European Distributed Institute of Taxonomy

Instrument: Network of Excellence

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M5.40 Prototype Shibboleth federation built up with further EDIT institutions

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Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

M5.40 Prototype Shibboleth federation built up with further EDIT institutions

Objectives

The general objective of the activity covers the design of a security infrastructure and the introduction of a secure Single Sign-On service (SSO) for the Platform. The task to be achieved within the fifth JPA concerns the integration of a Community Single Sign-On (CSSO) security infrastructure within the Platform. The CSSO enables the various EDIT service providers to protect their services and resources defining individual access control policies, while users can access different services using only one identity. The security infrastructure bases on the Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML) protocol family. In particular, SAML provides a federation concept to realise the community aspect.

This milestone reports on the activities fostering the extension of the EDIT federation to further EDIT institutions.

Extending the EDIT Federation

The first application addressed for becoming an EDIT Service Provider were the ATBI-Sites developed at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (MfN). It turned out that the web space provider hosting the ATBI-Sites could not comply with the minimum requirements for CSSO Service Providers. While a suitable provider was found quite quickly, MfN decides to host ATBI-Sites on a new server located at MfN. The preliminary result is that the integration of CSSO needs to wait the hiring of a server administrator at the MfN.

In order to motivate other institutional players to take part in the EDIT federation, the CSSO activities have been presented at the e-biosphere 09 (London) and TDWG 2009 conferences by poster sessions, computer demonstrations and talks (TDWG 2009 only). The response was not overwhelming, but we have received a handful of informational requests. We are in contact with RMCA Tervuren (EDIT WP8) to connect the web application International Taxonomic Courses Index. Due to the outdated operating system installed on the server running this service, this is waiting for an upgrade of the server.

The GRIB (Global reference index to Biodiversity) application, developed by EDIT's activity 5.3. (bibliographic tools) in close cooperation with the EU funded BHL-Europe project, is planned to be connected to the EDIT CSSO by the end of November 2010.

Finally, the EDITExpertNet application developed by EDIT WP2 is connected as a Service Provider to EDIT CSSO. The taxonomic experts registered to EDITExpertNet were imported and, when valid, registered to the EDIT CSSO as well. Of the 3000 user entries, only about 1600 were accepted for registration with the EDIT CSSO, with the remainder rejected due to incomplete entries, invalid email addresses or duplicate registration in EDITExpertNet.

Recommendations for the future

While working and talking with several external partners, it became apparent that many institutions hosting biodiversity data and services neglect even the most basic requirements for system security, such as operating system upgrades and application of security patches. On the one hand, this is due to a lack of resources necessary for upgrading system environments and adopting services running on these systems. On the other hand, there is often a lack of expertise on the part of the people these jobs were assigned to. Therefore, the implementation of a specialised security task force group, which is regularly running security audits, supporting service administrators and developing and publishing secure default system environments is highly recommended to prevent considerable damages that could otherwise be caused even by casual attackers.

Furthermore, it is a very hard job convincing people to join the EDIT federation. Those who are willing to participate need their resources to accomplish higher prioritised tasks of their project work plans. Only EDITExpertNet was required by the project plan to connect with EDIT CSSO, so it doesn't come as a big surprise that up to now only EDITExpertNet could be connected. In order to extend the base of EDIT federation partners in the near future, evaluating suitable services and imposing their CSSO integration should be a requirement at least for any newly developed service.

Details

For more detailed information regarding CSSO or the current development state of this activity, please refer to the CSSO section within the WP5 developer's wiki¹.

¹ Detailed CSSO description in the WP5 developers wiki (<http://dev.e-taxonomy.eu/trac/wiki/CSSO>)