



Project no. 018340

Project acronym: EDIT

Project title: Toward the European Distributed Institute of Taxonomy

Instrument: Network of Excellence

Thematic Priority: Sub-Priority 1.1.6.3: "Global Change and Ecosystems"

C8.1.4 Proposal for an interactive online catalogue of training resources for taxonomy, updateable by all concerned parties

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Revision [*FINAL*]

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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)	

Context

(with some text adapted from: <http://www.e-taxonomy.eu/node/150>)

European science is facing a tremendous loss of taxonomic expertise. Despite the availability of a well developed information infrastructure in the field of taxonomy, European taxonomic research increasingly relies on an aging taxonomic community.

Efforts to find enthusiastic young people with an interest in becoming qualified taxonomists are thwarted by insufficient training opportunities and a lack of long-term professional prospects. To address this problem, education is an essential component of EDIT.

A first step towards the integration of the training programmes in taxonomy for Europe is to assess the current offer in training. A pan-European (and even broader) survey was made in 2007, and its result were described in the [EDIT C8.1.1 report](#), compiled by Vincent Zintzen based on a major contribution by An Tombeur and Patricia Mergen (Royal Museum for Central Africa, Belgium), and by Anne Franklin and Isabella Van de Velde (Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Belgium).

This report is only a snapshot in time, however - and its information will only be used to its full potential (keeping an eye out for the DEST - Distributed European School of Taxonomy - initiative as well) if there are regular updates, and if the information is easily accessible: an online, updateable courses list.

Issues

However there are multiple issues to be addressed:

- which mechanism will be used for the catalogue (static HTML? A Content Management System (CMS)? A self-developed interface to a background database?). It would be preferable to keep this technology in line with other EDIT online initiatives.
- the system for granting update access rights. People should be able to add their new initiatives to the list, but of course not just everyone should be able to alter the data. Again several options are possible (own development, existing access restriction systems like Shibboleth). And again it would be wise to see which kind of software is used in other EDIT projects, and if that is a feasible option for this particular website.
- technical issues pertaining to the interface and webserver: expected number of entries, number of concurrent users, number of hits expected, server capacity needed, server management and updates, long-term sustainability.

So the implementation of a website with controlled updateable list of courses is a complicated task, and for this reason it is better to divide it into smaller subtasks. Thus the technical components are better defined and more structured (and more aligned with the EDIT software development practice).

Current situation

Currently the resources identified in the report can be consulted online through fixed (simple HTML) web pages at a RMCA webpage:

http://edit.africamuseum.be/WP8_taxonomy_courses/index.html

The page offers a simple consultation interface (a single table) of the courses ordered by country, and a standardised spreadsheet document that people can download and use to add new initiatives (or alterations). The adaptations are then transferred onto the site manually: a process that is a bit too cumbersome in the long run.

Another web page (courtesy of Gael Lancelot) offers a preview of an improved version, with search possibilities, implemented in the Drupal CMS system (used in many EDIT workpackages):

<http://www.e-taxonomy.eu/node/162>

However as this is a demo/proof of concept site, not yet all information has been uploaded. And adding new courses still has to be done manually.

The underlying dataset containing the survey results that the report was based on, has been converted to a PostgreSQL database, and so is fairly standard to work with (and to convert to other formats if necessary).

In short, we currently have some interesting proofs of concept, and some interesting technology - but now things have to be combined into a single tool.

The process

C8.1.4.1: Proposal for an interactive online catalogue of training resources for taxonomy, updateable by all concerned parties.

C8.1.4.2: Consultation interface operational: a first most important result will be an improved consultation interface (with search options and such). The data behind can at this stage still be static.

This component would lead to the definition of a graphical chart, which could be materialized under the form of a standard CSS document that could be reused in the different possible versions of the website.

C8.1.4.3: Input interface operational: for this, the data processing must have been switched to a dynamic operation, which means there is some sort of database behind it, and an access control mechanism. So this is a big step.

C8.1.4.4: Well-kept fully operational system with continuity for the future. Here management issues are considered and further implemented: automated backup issues, low-maintenance managing strategies and such.

We should discuss if it would be relevant to host the website on training resources on a specific server way (in order to simplify its access and maintenance by the collaborators of EDIT WP8) or on the same physical location as other EDIT websites (to lower the cost and technical impediments related to backup strategies and technical upgrades of the underlying technical architecture)

Each step building on the previous one, with its own finality, will represent an improvement towards the goal we want to achieve, while the component-based approach ensures a smooth development and integration with other initiatives.