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Topic (i): Web technology in statistical information systems

WEB-BASED DATA DISSEMINATION SERVICES OF THE STATISTICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM GENESIS

Supporting Paper

Submitted by the Federal Statistical Office, Germany[1]

Summary

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   Internet, as a medium to transmit data between administrations, business and citizens and the use of web-technologies and standards to support the corresponding working processes, has rapidly changed the process of communication between administration, business and citizens. In Germany, the Federation will be offering 376 services over the Internet within the framework of an e-government initiative called BundOnline 2005 until the year 2005.

2.   A long tradition and experience in using IT to support working processes such as data collection or data dissemination exists in statistical offices. It is, therefore, not surprising that these offices began to use and to draw benefit from web technologies very early.

3.   In the Federal Office for six centralized statistics, the respondents are asked to answer the questionnaire via the Internet or to upload a file with their figures (e.g. external trade, distributive trade, cost structure). Since the beginning of 2004 we have been implementing one common application for the offices of the Länder and the Federation called IDEV, which shall handle the data collection for centralized and decentralized surveys.

4.   In the area of cash statistics, web-technology was used to implement a pilot application, which covers all steps of the working process to build up that statistic, e.g. survey management, data collection, data editing, data aggregation and handling of metadata. Through the use of web technology, subject matter statisticians in

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[1] Prepared by Ernst Schrey (ernst.schrey@destatis.de).

the decentralized offices of the Länder are able to use the application, which has to be maintained in one office only.

5.   In the field of data dissemination and publication there are three different applications, which are based on web technology. First, is the homepage of the Federal Office, which contains a lot of static information and serves as the entry to other services using the technique of HTML. Second, there is the statistic shop, where printed or electronic publications can be ordered by the user via the Internet. The goods can be downloaded or are disseminated by traditional post. For some products the user has to pay a charge; paying by electronic cash is possible. This service was set up using a commercial shop software. Thirdly, there is GENESIS, which covers different services to access data and metadata of the statistical information system GENESIS online or via a delivery service. The information transmitted is dynamic, which means it is tailored directly to the user's needs.

6.   The last point will be discussed in more detail in the full paper.

II.   DISSEMINATION SERVICES

7.   The description of the dissemination services will consist of five parts:
- Comments about the basic information system GENESIS, focussing on the data model;
- Consideration of some aspects which are specific for the dissemination via the Internet from the user's point of view;
- Use scenarios for the dissemination services and how they were developed;
- Data objects and formats which are offered;
- IT-architecture and security aspects of GENESIS-Online.

III.   CONCLUSIONS

8.   Internet and web-technology provide new opportunities and chances to meet the demands of users of statistical data for the statistical offices. Nevertheless, it is also a new challenge to meet the needs of a wide range of users - from the specialist in statistical matters to the layman in that field. Users are known or anonymous. The dissemination services should be available all the time and in different languages.

9.   The different services described in the paper were developed taking into account our own experiences in the last few years with the former Information System STATIS-BUND and many discussions and contacts with different users. They are formed as a toolbar of complementary services, as we are convinced that the variety of users needs a variety in services to build an entirely user-friendly system.

10.   Having finished this development at the end of last year, we are already aware of new needs such as automating the access or delivery of data on the side of the user or to use the retrieval facilities of GENESIS Online within the framework of a general portal to combine statistical data with geographical data to build up a geographical data infrastructure. For this purpose, the use of a web-services technology seems to be adequate, but many questions concerning security matters, have to be addressed.

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