

CENL Task Force on Persistent Identifiers, Report 2007

1a. Introducing ‘The National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service: a CENL recommendation’

The Task Force on Persistent Identifiers was established, by CENL, in 2004. In the same year, the task force presented ‘*Considerations regarding a national library policy on persistent identifiers*’ incorporated within its report to CENL.

In 2005, the discussion paper, ‘*The use of Persistent Identifiers by National libraries*’ [05/14], was delivered to CENL. The task force continued its work and in 2006 it produced a paper titled ‘*Persistent Identifiers. Towards an Agreement on the Specifications for a European Resolution Infrastructure*’ [CENL 06/19].

As the next step the task force has described the resolution infrastructure envisaged. The document ‘*The National Libraries Resolver Service: a CENL recommendation.*’¹ is hereby presented to CENL.

1b. Explaining the essence of the recommendation

It is useful to recollect the reason that CENL started to work on a resolution service for the national libraries. It is because national libraries are responsible for guaranteeing durable independent access to their digital collections. As endorsed earlier by CENL, for this purpose, persistent identifiers, i.e. URNs primarily from the NBN namespace, will be used.

The fact is that each national library already has or will shortly set up a resolution service (hence its own resolver) in order to provide persistent access to its own digital collections. By simply agreeing on certain standardisation and coordination for the set up of the local resolvers, the national libraries automatically will achieve a joint international service; the National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service, which will allow users to utilize resolution service in any CENL library to access European cultural heritage. CENL has decided to strive towards a service to resolve URNs, first in Europe and eventually worldwide. The URN resolution service will also take into account other existing persistent identifier schemes.

An example of another persistent identifier scheme, widely used by publishers, is DOI. DOIs are resolved by the *DOI system*. In order to guarantee the long-term resolution of DOIs, beyond the commercial life or initial interest phase of digital publications, the requesters - under specified conditions – should be redirected by the DOI system to the National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service, and, therefore, to the digital deposit collections. The realisation of this ‘last resort resolving’ of DOIs has to be discussed further, both with the publishers and the International DOI Foundation.

1c. Endorsement of the recommendation

The Task Force on Persistent Identifiers proposes to CENL to discuss the document and endorse the CENL recommendation. Once endorsed, the recommendation may, in due time, be presented to CDNL.

¹ See the annex *The National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service: a CENL recommendation*. Note that instead of ‘European Resolution Infrastructure’, used in the proposal of 2006, the more general designation of the ‘National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service’ is used in the document presented to CENL today. This approach is therefore more generic and ultimately can provide a resolution service for the national libraries worldwide. In addition, it primarily refers to the function and not the technical infrastructure.

2. Implementing the National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service

Once the recommendation is endorsed, implementation of the resolver discovery service can start immediately. The European Library (TEL) Office has offered to provide information for the CENL members who are full-participants in The European Library about the proposed “National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service”. They will do this in the “partners-only” section of The European Library website. In addition, the TEL Office will maintain the proposed “joint table of the fixed base-URLs of the participating national libraries’ resolvers” (for instance, <http://urn.fi> for Finland). Ultimately, further support for partners wishing to participate in the “National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service” could be provided as an additional “module” in The European Library handbook.² The network of the National Libraries Resolver Service will expand gradually as more and more national libraries establish resolvers and make them compliant to the CENL recommendation.

3. Discontinuation of IDF membership

In 2002 a number of national libraries were approached by the International DOI Foundation (IDF) to join the foundation. After some discussion at CDNL it was decided that CENL would aim for a membership of IDF. For the time being a consortium of 3 national libraries (KB, DNB, BL) joined the IDF in 2002 as a General Member and jointly covered the annual membership fee. In 2003 the IDF accepted CENL as a member under the same terms and conditions as the consortium membership. The membership has been annually prolonged by CENL and the consortium members have provided the resources needed.

In April 2008 CENL’s membership of the IDF will expire. Even though the ‘last resort resolving’ (see under 1b.) needs further discussion and the practical implementation of such functionality has yet to be investigated, CENL’s membership of the IDF, now for a number of years, has not, as hoped, accelerated the realisation of the last resort resolving of DOIs.

The best strategy now seems to be to first make the National Libraries Resolver Discovery Service operational and foster establishment of URN resolution services on the national level. As the next step the national libraries should discuss the necessity for “last resort resolving” of DOIs with their depositing publishers. If the issue is acknowledged by the publishers, a request should then be made to the IDF to implement a “last resort” functionality in the DOI system. This functionality will enable requesters to be redirected to the national libraries’ digital deposit collections, in case that DOIs can no longer be resolved to a publisher’s service.

The task force has come to the conclusion that, to realise the last resort provision, CENL need not be an IDF member and pay a substantial annual fee. The task force therefore advises CENL not to renew its membership of the IDF. It is appropriate to inform the CDNL about this decision. Anticipating the discontinuation of the IDF membership, the Task Force has decided not to nominate CENL for re-election for the IDF Board (the deadline was 17th July 2007).

Task Force on Persistent Identifiers
September 2007

Reinhard Altenhoener (DNB)
Richard Boulderstone (BL)
Johan Steenbakkens (KB, chair)
Juha Hakala (NLF)
Gerard van Trier (KB, secretary)

² The European Library Handbook [www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/handbook/handbook.php] is a tutorial to assist national libraries in providing their collections in The European Library [www.theeuropeanlibrary.org].