The Dublin Core Metadata Element Set

Abstract: Defines fifteen metadata elements for resource description in a cross-disciplinary information environment.

An American National Standard
Developed by the
National Information Standards Organization

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Contents

Foreword

(This foreword is not part of the American National Standard Dublin Core Metadata Element Set, ANSI/NISO Z39.85-2001. It is included for information only.)

The Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (DCMI) began in 1995 with an invitational workshop in Dublin, Ohio that brought together librarians, digital library researchers, content providers, and text-markup experts to improve discovery standards for information resources. The original Dublin Core emerged as a small set of descriptors that quickly drew global interest from a wide variety of information providers in the arts, sciences, education, business, and government sectors.

Since the original workshop there has been steadily growing interest in resource descriptions that are easy to create and that almost anyone can understand. The potential to increase visibility of resources in a collection across sectors and subject domains, and to do so at low cost, is broadly appealing. Services needing semantically rich descriptions would continue to provide them, but would attract cross-disciplinary discovery by also providing universally understandable descriptions common across disciplines. The digital tourist metaphor is apt. Internet travellers seeking information in foreign disciplines can use the Dublin Core's constrained vocabulary to obtain basic guidance in a language that they understand. Full accessibility to the culture and its services still requires mastery of the local vocabulary and environment, but a set of simple facts inscribed in Dublin Core can bring to the tourist's attention a foreign information portal that might otherwise have escaped notice.

The interest in cross-domain discovery fueled growing participation in a series of subsequent DCMI workshops. The Dublin Core metadata element set described here is a set of 15 descriptors that resulted from this effort in interdisciplinary and international consensus building. As of June 2000 the Dublin Core exists in over 20 translations, has been adopted by CEN/ISSS (European Committee for Standardization / Information Society Standardization System), and is documented in two internet RFCs (Requests for Comments). It also has official standing within the WWW Consortium and the Z39.50 standard. Dublin Core metadata is endorsed formally by governments in three countries for promoting discovery of government information in electronic form, and Dublin Core is under consideration as a national information standard in at least five others.

The Dublin Core is not intended to displace any other metadata standard. Rather it is intended to co-exist — often in the same resource description — with metadata standards that offer other semantics. It is fully expected that descriptive records will contain a mix of elements drawn from various metadata standards, both simple and complex. Examples of this kind of mixing and of HTML encoding of Dublin Core in general are given in RFC 2731 [RFC2731].

The simplicity of Dublin Core can be both a strength and a weakness. Simplicity lowers the cost of creating metadata and promotes interoperability. On the other hand, simplicity does not accommodate the semantic and functional richness supported by complex metadata schemes. In effect, the Dublin Core element set trades richness for wide

visibility. The design of Dublin Core mitigates this loss by encouraging the use of richer metadata schemes in combination with Dublin Core. Richer schemes can also be mapped to Dublin Core for export or for cross-system searching. Conversely, simple Dublin Core records can be used as a starting point for the creation of more complex descriptions.

This standard was processed and approved for submittal to ANSI by the National Information Standards Organization. It was balloted by the NISO Voting Members July 1, 2000 - August 15, 2000. It will next be reviewed in 2006. Suggestions for improving this standard are welcome. They should be sent to the National Information Standards Organization, 4733 Bethesda Avenue, Suite 300, Bethesda, MD 20814. NISO approval of this standard does not imply that all Voting Members voted for its approval. At the time it approved this standard, NISO had the following Voting Members:

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The Dublin Core Metadata Element Set

1. Scope and Purpose

The Dublin Core metadata element set is a standard for cross-domain information resource description. Here an information resource is defined to be anything that has identity; this is the definition used in Internet RFC 2396, "Uniform Resource Identifiers (URI): Generic Syntax," by Tim Berners-Lee et al. For Dublin Core applications a resource will typically be an electronic document.

This standard is for the element set only, which is generally used in the context of a specific project or application. Local or community based requirements and policies may impose additional restrictions, rules, and interpretations. It is not the purpose of this standard to define the detailed criteria by which the element set will be used with specific projects and applications.

This standard supersedes Internet RFC 2413, which was the first published version of the Dublin Core.

2. Referenced Standards

[DCT] DCMI Type Vocabulary. DCMI Recommendation, 11 July 2000.
http://dublincore.org/documents/dcmi-type-vocabulary/

[ISO3166] ISO 3166 - Codes for the representation of names of countries.
http://www.din.de/gremien/nas/nabd/iso3166ma/

[ISO639] ISO 639-2 - Codes for the representation of names of languages, Alpha-3 code (ISO 639-2:1998). http://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/langhome.html

[MIME] Internet Media Types.
http://www.isi.edu/in-notes/iana/assignments/media-types/media-types

[RFC3066] Tags for the Identification of Languages, Internet
RFC 3066. http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc3066.txt

[RFC2396] Uniform Resource Identifiers (URI): Generic Syntax, Internet RFC 2396.
http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2396.txt

[RFC2413] Dublin Core Metadata for Resource Discovery. Internet RFC 2413.
http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2413.txt

[RFC2731] Encoding Dublin Core Metadata in HTML. Internet RFC 2731.
http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2731.txt

[TGN] Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names.
http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabulary/tgn/index.html

[W3CDTF] Date and Time Formats, W3C Note. http://www.w3.org/TR/NOTE-datetime

[XML] Extensible Markup Language. http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-xml