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This is an author-produced version of a paper published in WIDWISAWN, 1 (2). ISSN 1478-8055.

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Developing the Scottish cooperative infrastructure - the what, who, where, when and why of SPEIR

Authors: [Dennis Nicholson](#) and [George Macgregor](#)

What (in the name of the wee man) is SPEIR?

SPEIR (pronounced "speer") is a [SLIC](#)-funded project based at the [CDLR](#) - but it's much more than that. The acronym (yes, another one!) stands for "Scottish Portals for Education, Information and Research" - but portals are only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. [SPEIR](#) will develop an environment to underpin Scottish portals, creating the basis for:

"a coherent virtual learning, information and research landscape for all Scottish citizens, collaboratively built and maintained via an agreed country-wide, standards-based, globally interoperable, co-operative infrastructure".

The primary focus of the portals work is the Scottish Cultural Portal being developed by SLIC, but this, too, is only part of the story - the aim being generic support for any standards-driven Scottish portal. A project of many parts (to paraphrase someone or other), SPEIR can be described by listing the major ones:

- To bring Public Libraries, FE, Cultural "Players", and others who are ready into [CAIRNS](#), [SCONE](#) and [SCAMP](#)
- To develop the CAIRNS dynamic clumper to allow landscaping based on a wider range of elements - subjects, cooperative organisational, geographical, user levels, educational levels, alternative look and feel templates.
- To build an infrastructure to support the creation and ongoing development of a "Scottish Distributed Digital Library" or SDDL based initially on Cultural Portal material, [BUBL LINK](#), [SLAINTE](#), [Glasgow Digital Library](#), and Public Library "White Pages". It will also aim to incorporate material from [HaIRST](#) and other digital initiatives such as [NOF-Digi](#).
- To develop CAIRNS, SCONE, SCAMP and the SDDL into central support services for distributed portals - particularly the Scottish Cultural Portal but the use of standards and work with Public Libraries, the

[National Library of Scotland](#), the Glasgow Digital Library and others will ensure that the support is generic.

- To encourage and develop collaborative cataloguing through the SLIC [Connexion](#) subscription and work with [CIGS](#) and collaborative collecting through SCAMP and work with Public Libraries and organisations like [SHERAL](#).
- To provide support services for LIS professionals through the collaborative work of SLAINTE and BUBL.
- To determine, in conjunction with the various Authorities, terminology requirements for Public libraries and to draw up a terminologies server specification for Scotland as a whole.
- To turn the embryonic Scottish Cooperative Infrastructure in figure #1 (which many of you know and love), into the equally embryonic, but much more complicated SCI in figure #2.

The intention, however, is that the outcome of this work will be much more than the sum of these parts. In particular, there is a recognition that the technical aspects of this infrastructure - important though they are - are only one facet of the environment that SPEIR seeks to create. Of equal importance are the creation of online and offline mechanisms to support the professionals, organisations, and groups who will operate in the environment and collectively manage the distributed resources, retrieval tools and user landscapes. The aim, in other words, is to create, not just the technical infrastructure needed to support a coherent virtual Scotland, but the organisational, inter-organisational, and professional culture needed to take Scotland forward into the Information Age.



SPEIR will turn this...

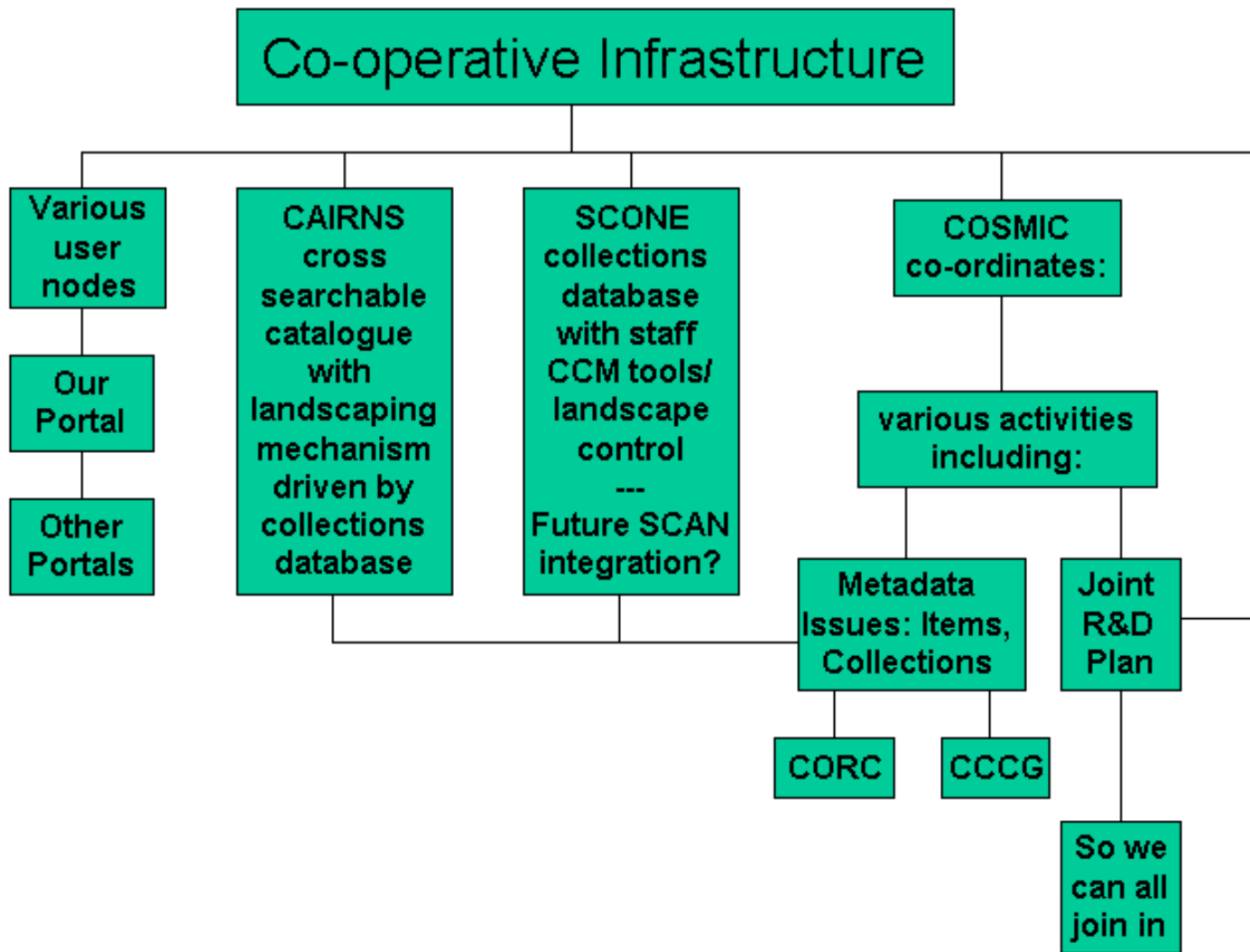


Figure #1

... into this ...

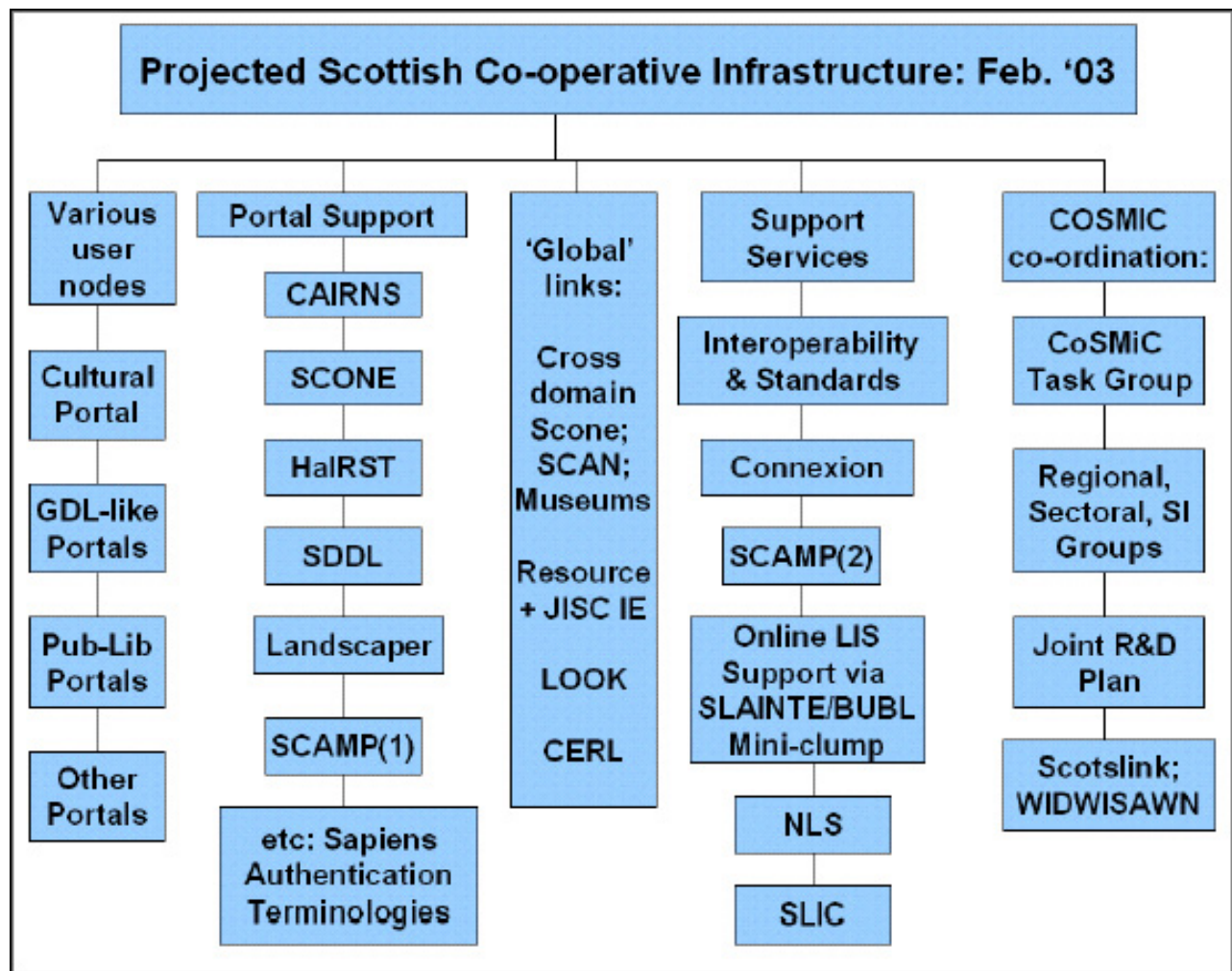


Figure #2

Who?

In addition to being funded by SLIC, SPEIR is supported by [COSMIC](#), the Confederation of Scottish Mini-Cooperatives, and the organisation's "COSMIC Task Group" provides a Steering Group for SPEIR. COSMIC is a group of independent organisations, services and projects working together to foster and sustain co-operation between Libraries, Archives, Museums, Electronic Learning Services and others actively engaged in building and developing "virtual Scotland".



members are:

- The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC)
- The Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries ([SCURL](#))
- the Glasgow Colleges Group ([GCG](#))
- The National Library of Scotland (NLS)

- the Ayrshire Libraries Forum ([ALF](#))
- Grampian Information ([GI](#))
- the South East Scotland Library Information Network (SESLIN)
- The Tayside and Fife Library Information Network ([TAFLIN](#))
- the University of the Highlands and Islands ([UHI](#))
- The Glasgow Digital Library (GDL)
- The Centre for Digital Library Research (CDLR).

The Scottish Archives Network ([SCAN](#)) is a possible future member, and discussions with others in the Archives and Museums communities are an aim.

In line with the aim of developing online and offline mechanisms to support the professionals, organisations, and groups who will operate in the Scottish distributed information environment, COSMIC both sponsors, and is a recognised element of, the developing Scottish Co-operative Infrastructure. It aims, through SPEIR and a range of other means, to build or develop:

- A CAIRNS-based distributed Scottish union catalogue with a dynamic landscaping mechanism driven by an associated collection descriptions database and potentially capable of generating virtual portals for member organizations where this is desired
- A SCONE-based collection descriptions database with an associated staff portal (SCAMP) that will ultimately offer staff updating facilities and support for collaborative collection management and user landscape modeling.
- Coordination of work on terminologies interoperability
- A collaborative approach to collecting and cataloguing electronic resources based on SCAMP (collecting) and the OCLC connexion service (cataloguing), and aiming to create a distributed digital library for Scotland
- Central co-operative support for distributed, otherwise independent, Scottish portals based on these core services
- A pilot 'interoperability advice service' that aims to ensure interoperability within the portal environment at all levels, including, in particular, technical standards such as Z39.50, metadata standards and terminologies
- A joint research and development plan to help improve these embryonic services and generally take forward a range of initiatives of value to COSMIC and COSMIC members
- Through this plan, the integration of other services relevant to the developing environment - for example, the plan in the JISC funded HalRST project to implement a pilot OAI harvesting service and integrate this with the CAIRNS Z39.50 based distributed catalogue.
- Communication channels with appropriate professionals, organisations and inter-organisational groups, through SCAMP facilities, the Scotslink email list, WIDWISAWN, COSMIC events, and the COSMIC website. In the context of SPEIR, the organisation will also encourage existing professional groups in Scotland - CIGS, [LOCSCOT](#), [MITS](#) and others - to highlight COSMIC issues and contribute to their resolution.



Where?

This may seem like a dumb question - what part of **Scottish** Portals for Education, Information and Research don't you understand? - but it's a little more intelligent than it sounds. Yes, SPEIR does focus on Scotland, but there are facets to this that may not be immediately obvious. On the one hand, although the aim of SPEIR is to facilitate cooperation through centralised coordination, there is also (as you might expect) a strong whiff of devolution about it - a recognition that, whilst centralised coordination is one requirement of a coherent managed distributed information environment serving all Scottish citizens, so also is inclusiveness. The infrastructure must meet the needs of every local institution, every professional group, every sector and domain, every region, every kind of user. In this sense, therefore, the answer to the question **where?** is (geographically, culturally, educationally, politically, economically) **everywhere** the Scottish "landscape". On the other, the Scottish virtual landscape is only one small corner of the international virtual landscape and must interoperate with the wider world if it is to meet the needs of its users. In this sense, therefore, the answer to the question **where?** is **in the Scottish facet of the developing global information environment**. The world - virtual or otherwise - doesn't end at the Scottish border.

When?

Although it isn't much in evidence yet, SPEIR is already underway. It began officially on February 1st 2003 and will end (as a project at any rate) in July 2004. The first three months have been spent setting up various groups, making contacts, preparing the SPEIR project plan, setting up the website, buying a new server for CAIRNS, SCONE and the SDDL, investigating how best to use the software to provide the required facilities, thrashing out details of the system architecture, and beginning to get the dissemination programme underway (the present article being the latest output on this front).

When will SPEIR activities reach your neck of the woods? As soon as possible. Watch this (and any other appropriate) space.

Why?

This final question is really a number of questions masquerading as one to lull you into a false sense of security.

Here are most of the questions and some of the answers:

Why do we need a cooperative infrastructure?

- Coherent distributed virtual 'libraries' won't just happen - we must co-operate to manage retrieval and user environments
- Distributed networked collections need collaborative management
- Our users increasingly need and use distributed resources and finding tools - so co-operation is now essential as well as desirable

Why a Scottish cooperative infrastructure?

- Like Wales, Northern Ireland, and the English regions, we are the right size to make the people and organisation level stuff work (Small but beautifully formed!).
- As much as we need to interoperate and cooperate with the rest of the UK, and Europe, and the world at large, we also need to ensure that the global web has a Scottish presence, reflecting our different culture, history, legal and educational systems, languages, and so on (a Scottish global village)
- For a' Jock Tamson's bairns - to ensure that the UK, European, and global web meets the particular (do we mean peculiar?) needs of all Scottish citizens.

Why operate beyond institutional boundaries?

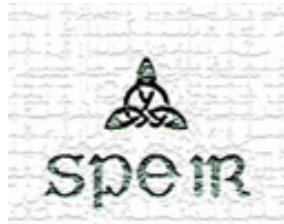
- Institutional and other boundaries are becoming a barrier to providing what users need
- Coherent distributed virtual 'libraries' won't just happen, distributed networked collections need collaborative management, our users increasingly need and use distributed resources and finding tools

Why a central support service for distributed portals?

- Organisations need portals tailored to the requirements of their own users and the users need facilities that support their particular perspectives and tasks, but central support services that improve interoperability, reduce duplication of effort and expense, and improve coherence are sensible.

Why do we need online and offline mechanisms to support the professionals, organisations, and groups who will operate in the environment and collectively manage the distributed resources, retrieval tools and user landscapes?

- People interoperability a pre-requisite of technical and metadata interoperability
- We increasingly inhabit the distributed networked environment, so do our users
- LIS professionals need to change their working perspectives, to learn to "Think globally before acting locally".



Why get involved in SPEIR, COSMIC and the SPI?

- It matters - education, information and research portals have a role in social inclusion and cohesion
- SPEIR provides an inclusive safe path for everyone interested in developing an effective, globally-interoperable, information environment for Scotland.

Why a distributed, voluntary, inclusive, confederated approach?

- It provides the right balance between the independence we need to support our own users and the coherent access to resources elsewhere we need to support our own users
- It's the Scottish way
- Nothing else will work - this is more than just a technical problem

Why "SPEIR"?



SPEIR is Scots for "to ask" or "to enquire" - and all those Scottish Portals for Education, Information and Research will be used to ask questions and make enquiries. Appropriate, no?



Tell us about your projects

WIDWISAWN aims to cover research and development projects in Scottish Archives, Libraries and Museums. We are also interested in cross-sectoral and cross-domain projects and non-Scottish projects covering areas not well-covered by Scottish projects or projects that inform the development of the Scottish information environment ([JISC](#) projects being one obvious example). Write about them yourself for a WIDWISAWN main article or brief report or tell us about them and we'll do at least a brief report and sometimes a main article.

The contact for WIDWISAWN is george.macgregor@strath.ac.uk.

Brief reports: MetaMap

Has metadata been causing you sleepless nights? If so, you obviously haven't been using [MetaMap](#).

The MetaMap is an invaluable learning and reference tool created by staff and students at [L'École de bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l'information](#) (EBSI) in Montreal, Canada. Aiming to help those interested in library and information science to understand "metadata standards sets and initiatives" (MSSIs), MetaMap looks like a subway/underground map in which MSSIs are represented as subway stations. By moving the mouse over a station the user will be treated to an explanation of the MSSIs, links to official web sites and other related information resources. MetaMap currently contains 184 stations but is updated regularly to reflect international metadata developments. As well as being able to browse the Map, users can also browse the acronym index.



Glossary

ALF
Ayrshire Libraries Forum. See <http://library.paisley.ac.uk/alf/alfohome.htm>

BUBL
BUBL Information Service. See <http://bubl.ac.uk/>

CAIRNS
Co-operative Information Retrieval Network for Scotland. See <http://cairns.lib.strath.ac.uk/>

CDLR
Centre for Digital Library Research. See <http://cdlr.strath.ac.uk/>

CERL
Consortium of European Research Libraries. See <http://www.cerl.org/>

CIGS
Cataloguing and Indexing Group in Scotland. See <http://www.slainte.org.uk/CIGS/cigshome.htm>

CoSMiC
Confederation of Scottish Mini Co-operatives. See <http://cosmic.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/>

Cultural Portal

For more information contact Penny Robertson at scotearl@slainte.org.uk

GDL

Glasgow Digital Library. See <http://gdl.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>

GI

Grampian Information. See <http://www.grampianinfo.co.uk/>

HaIRST

Harvesting Institutional Resources In Scotland Testbed. See <http://hairst.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>

HILT II

High Level Thesaurus - Phase II. See <http://hilt.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>

JISC

Joint Information Systems Committee. See <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>

JISC IE

JISC Information Environment. See http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=ie_home

LOCSCOT

Local Studies Group of Scotland. See <http://www.cilip.org.uk/groups/lsg/>

MITS

Multimedia, Information & Technology Group in Scotland. See <http://www.slainte.org.uk/Slamit/slamhome.htm>

NLS

National Library of Scotland. See <http://www.nls.uk/>

SAPIENS

Scottish Academic Periodicals - Implementing an Effective Networked Service. See <http://sapiens.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>

SCAMP

Scottish Collections Access Management Portal. See <http://scone.strath.ac.uk/scamp/>

SCAN

Scottish Archive Network. See <http://www.scan.org.uk/>

SCI

Scottish Cooperative Infrastructure. See <http://speir.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/progress.htm>

SCONE

Scottish Collections Network. See <http://scone.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>

SCOTSLINK

Email list for members of the library, museum and archive communities of Scotland. Join by visiting <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/SCOTSLINK.html>

SCURL

Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries. See <http://scurl.ac.uk/>

SESLIN

South East Scotland Library & Information Network

SHERAL

Scottish Higher Education and Research Acquisitions Librarians. See <http://scurl.ac.uk/about/sheral.html>

SLAINTE

Information and Libraries Scotland - CILIPS/SLIC. See <http://www.slainte.org.uk/>

SLIC

Scottish Library and Information Council. See <http://www.slainte.org.uk/SLIC/>

SPEIR

Scottish Portals for Education, Information and Research. See <http://speir.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>

TAFLIN

Tayside and Fife Library and Information Network. See <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/taflin/main.htm>

UHI

University of the Highlands and Islands. See <http://www.uhi.ac.uk/>

WIDWISAWN

Who's Doing What In Scotland And Who's Not. See <http://WIDWISAWN.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>

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Last updated: Apr 2003