MINERVA PLUS – WP3

Ireland: Report on multilingual issues

Official languages

As per Census 2002, Ireland has a population of some 3,917,203 inhabitants. The official languages are English and Irish. English is the most widely written/spoken language but 42.8% of the population speaks Irish with the highest proportions amongst students in the 10-19 age group. Galway County in the West of Ireland has the highest proportion of Irish speakers (52.7%).

Multilingual websites

Until very recently, Ireland did not have a national strategy for the production of websites or parts of sites in any language other than English. However, the implementation of the Official Languages Act 2003 will now change this situation. In fact, this legislation focuses on providing public services through the Irish language. All public bodies will be requested to provide any communications - including their websites - to the public in both English and Irish by 2006.

For the purpose of the Minerva Plus multilingualism survey, a quick scan of 50 Irish cultural websites was carried out. The results were as follows:

- 45 were mono-lingual websites
- 3 were bilingual websites (English and Irish) – two sites offering homepage and/or one specific section in Irish, one other site translating the full content in Irish apart from the search facility (www.nationalarchives.ie.)
- 2 were multilingual websites – one site (www.marshlibrary.ie) with only the homepage available in 26 languages, the other site (www.heritageireland.ie) with the full content translated into 6 languages.

These results confirm that there is no demand for multilingual cultural web sites at present. However, as mentioned above, all national institutions will soon be required to be at least bilingual. Furthermore, this profile will also change very quickly in the future due to the increasing numbers of EU and other international residents.

Although there is variety of controlled vocabularies and thesauri available to the English speaking community, the survey carried out for Ireland could not list any specific document/program for the purpose of multilingual web sites.