Obtaining a world-recognized X.509 credential for accessing e-Science resources within minutes

Content:
We are steadily progressing towards a world where a digital identity is an absolute requirement to gain entrance to a wide variety of services.

However, requirements by services on the technical representations of those digital identities are hardly homogeneous. This pushes the burden of managing and synchronizing various different identities in different formats down to the end-user. A key issue is hence to unify identity solutions across organizational boundaries without hindering the users in their daily work.

Especially the e-Science community faces this problem as many projects consist of members from several widespread organizations, often across national boundaries. The authentication process was solved more than 10 years ago by using X.509 certificates as its foundation.

Asserting the identity to obtain such a X.509 certificate from an issuing Certificate Authority remains a challenge, however.

To alleviate against that problem, we use established national identity federations as a part of the identity vetting process that is required when issuing certificates. Thus we have been able to build a European, cross-federated service where users from all over Europe can use the local username/password combination to gain world-wide recognized X.509 credentials within minutes.

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