

Chapter 3.26

Storage and Access Control Policies for XML Documents

George Pallis

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Konstantina Stoupa

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Athena Vakali

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

INTRODUCTION

The Internet (and networks overall) are currently the core media for data and knowledge exchange. XML is currently the most popular standardization for Web document representation and is rapidly becoming a standard for data representation and exchange over the Internet. One of the main issues is XML documents and in particular, storage and accessing. Among data management issues, storage and security techniques have a particular importance, since the performance of the overall XML-based Web information system relies on them. Storage issues mainly rely on the usage of typical database management systems (DBMSs), whereas XML documents can also be stored in other storage environments (such as file systems and LDAP directories) (Amer-Yahia & Fernandez,

2002; Kanne & Moerkotte, 2000; Silberschatz, Korth & Sudarshan, 2002). Additionally, in order to guarantee the security of the XML data, which are located in a variety of the above storage topologies, the majority of implementations also provide an appropriate access control. Most storage systems cooperate with access control modules implementing various models (Joshi, Aref, Ghafoor & Spafford, 2001), whereas there are few commercial access control products available. However, there are some standardized XML-based access control languages that can be adopted by most tools.

This article focuses on presenting an overview related to both storing and securing XML documents. Such an overview will contribute to identifying the most important policies for storage and access in Web-based information systems (which

extensively use the XML as the data representation format). In addition, the most well-known related implementations are presented. A more integrated survey on these issues is presented in Pallis, Stoupa, and Vakali (2004).

BACKGROUND

Storage Policies

Several solutions for storing XML data have been proposed both in the scientific literature and in commercial products. In particular, storage approaches can be classified with respect to the type of system on which they rely and on the used XML document representation model. In this framework, they can be categorized as follows:

- **Relational DBMS:** Uses a collection of tables to represent both data and relationships among these data. More specifically, in order to represent XML data by using tables, it is necessary to break down the XML documents into rows and columns. The tree-like structure of XML facilitates both their decomposition and storage in relational tables. However, this process is expected to cause some performance overhead mainly due to the continuous translation of trees to tables (and vice versa). Due to its popularity, several models have been proposed to store XML documents in relational DBMSs (e.g., Bohannon, Freire, Roy & Simeon, 2002; Khan & Rao, 2001; Schmidt, Kersten, Windhouwer & Waas, 2000; Tian, DeWitt, Chen & Zhang, 2000; Zhu & Lu, 2001).
- **Object-Oriented (O-O) DBMS:** XML documents are stored as collections of object instances, using relationships based on the O-O idea (McHugh, Abiteboul, Goldman, Quass & Widom, 1997). O-O DBMSs have been designed to work well with object programming languages such as C++, C#, and Java. Inheritance and object-identity are their basic characteristics. However, O-O DBMSs cannot easily handle data with a dynamic structure since a new class definition for a new XML document is needed, and the use of O-O DBMSs for XML document storage is not as efficient and flexible.
- **Object-Relational (O-R) DBMS:** The XML documents are stored in a nested table, in which each tag name in DTD (or XML schema) corresponds to an attribute name in the nested table. Currently, researchers have showed a steadily increasing interest in O-R DBMSs, since they combine both the benefit of the relational maturity and the richness of O-O modeling (Pardede, Rahayu & Taniar, 2004). In O-R DBMSs, the procedure for storing XML data to relation mapping is modeled by an O-R model. In this context, a number of transformation steps from the XML schema to an O-R model are presented (Widjaya, Taniar & Rahayu, 2004). More specifically, each nested XML element is mapped into an object reference of the appropriate type. Then, several mapping rules are indirectly embedded in the underlying model.
- **Native XML DBMS:** In this case, the XML document is the fundamental unit of storage (Kanne & Moerkotte, 2000). Therefore, a native XML database defines a (logical) model for an XML document, and stores and retrieves documents according to that model. In particular, two basic steps are involved for storing the XML documents on a native XML DBMS: (1) the data are described by its structure (DTD or XML schema), and (2) a native database XML schema (or a data map) is defined. However, the native XML DBMSs have not yet become very popular, since these systems must be built from scratch.
- **LDAP Directories:** XML documents are stored in LDAP directories which can be

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