Exercise 2 – Dynamic Icons (optional)

(This exercise can be carried out in groups of students. If you have ideas and interesting findings on the topic please contact me at albrecht.schmidt@informatik.uni-muenchen.de. This may be the basis for further research.)

Theme: Dynamic Icons

In current operating systems and window managers most icons are static and their appearance does not relate to change of information related to the icon. Examples of exceptions are the paper bin (see figure 1) and thumbnail views (see figure 2). The first example is conveying abstract information of state, whereas the second is giving a preview of a document.
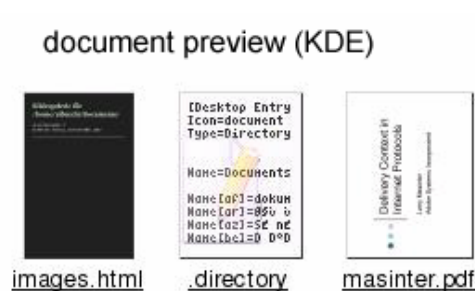

Figure 1

Figure 2

There is a potential for creating new icons that take information from the file system or from the documents into account.
Use as an example folders. Information (now available on request, see figure 3) about their content may be used to provide additional abstract information within the icon.

Task A: Design/develop a set of new folder icons
Design a set of new folder icons that can convey information about some of the following properties. Appropriate tools for the task may be a paper and a pencil or a graphics editing program. Find a balance between information transported and the risk to overload the icon:

- disk size used by the folder
- further folders contained in the folder
- number of documents contained in the folder
- security/privacy settings and ownership of the folder

Task B: How could you test the design?
Think how you could test your design. Don't be concerned with how your design can be integrated in an existing system.

- What and when would it help the user?
- What tasks could be sped up?
- Which tasks could be easier?
- What would be an appropriate way to do an experiment?
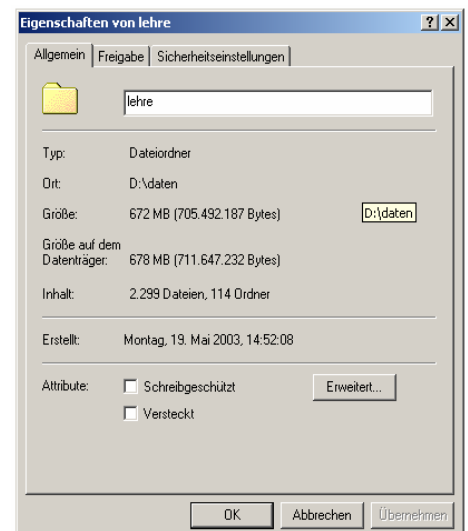- How would you implement the experiment?

Figure 3