KDE Contributor Conference

Sneak preview

Usually working in virtual teams, time spent together in person is precious to most Open Source projects. Linux Magazine asked contributors to the KDE projects of what to expect from the KDE Contributor Conference in late August.

BY PATRICIA JUNG

I t's supposed to become the biggest KDE get-together ever, and in its name, it does no longer promote the superiority of programmers over non-coding contributors to the project: The "KDE Contributor Conference" (*http://events.kde.org/info/kastle/*), to be held 22nd to 30th August in Nové Hrady, a little town in the South of the Czech republic, plans to be different from all other KDE developer conferences before. Nicknamed "Kastle" the conference will be held at a castle serving the University of South Bohemia as as Institute of Physical Biology.

Explicitely inviting translators, writers, testers, artists and all those "little" people investing time, money and effort to keep the KDE project running and innovative but never getting the fame, the conference might have the potential to mark a paradigm shift in Open Source development. Of course, coding will play an important role – after a weekend of technical talks, the remaining week has been labelled "Hacking Festival".

It's more than an educated guess that these days of intense discussing, architecturing, coding, (and hopefully also documenting, translating …) will be the major driving force towards the next KDE release 3.2 and beyond. If everything works out as planned, the day after Nové Hrady will see the feature freeze to kick off the alpha, beta cycle. The release-day itself, as the roadmap has it, is planned for December 2003.

The mantra: bugs, bugs, bugs

With so tight a schedule, attendees of the conference should travel prepared. Linux Magazine asked KDE contributors about their personal plans for the conference and what to expect as an outcome of the Hacking Festival.

Says *Eva Brucherseifer* who helped giving birth to both, the KDE edutainment core package *kdeedu* and the KDE Women project (*http://women.kde.org/*): "As a board member of KDE e. V., the non-profit organization representing the KDE Project in legal and financial matters, I'll be involved in the KDE e. V. membership meeting which is

Eva Brucherseifer

Nové Hrady castle, the location of this year's KDE Contributor Conference

taking place the day before the conference. During the conference I'll present the results of a usability study of Linux/KDE done with 80 windows users and discuss its results. Hopefully there will be time afterwards to implement some improvements."

We can't help being a little unsatisfied to hear Eva being the only one in this litle survey to mention usability improvements as an aim: a bad quota for user interface programmers it is. But there is still hope: Three talks at the conference will focus on this topic (see *http://events.kde.org/info/kastle/conference_program.phtml*), and finally: Aren't usability problems nothing but bugs?

And yes, bug fixing is a major issue, for example for jack-of-all-trades *George Staikos* (among many other things the maintainer of KWinTV): "I
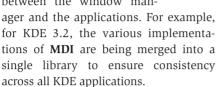
George Staikos

intend to focus almost exclusively on bug fixing and performance enhancements. Most of the fixing will probably be memory errors and leaks, Konqueror/JavaScript bugs, and general stability issues.

I also hope to spend some time working on scriptability of KDE applications. They are far more scriptable than most users realise, and with 3.2 hopefully we can extend this. This work will mostly be on peripheral parts – probably *KJSEmbed*, which is part of *kdebindings*. I have been working on some side projects that demonstrate that KDE is one of the most powerful scriptability platforms in existence when DCOP, JavaScript, XMLUI, and *KAction*s are all put together."

What a window manager might learn

Other issues that users usually never think about when working with their desktop, are to be solved when it comes to KDE's window manager KWin. This is

the application responsible for drawing window decorations, moving and resizing windows, virtual desktops, etc. KWin maintainer *Lubos Lunák* has the following plans: "My main intention is to discuss some issues concerning the interaction between the window manager and the applications. For example, for KDE 3.2, the various implementations of **MDI** are being merged into a single library to ensure consistency across all KDE applications.

Lubos Lunák

When this was discussed on the *kde-core-devel* mailing-list, one of the ideas was to add support for MDI in the window manager. Since the window manager specializes in handling windows on the desktop and can do certain things ordinary applications aren't able to do (at least not easily) this seems reasonable. So this is one of the issues I'd like to discuss in Nove Hrady, and if something useful comes out of it, I'll try to implement this feature for KDE 3.3.

From a user's point of view, this could lead to at least something similar to Fluxbox tabs, but the potential of the idea is larger, though I'm not sure what exactly to expect from it yet."

Less detailed plans has Konqueror and KWord maintainer *David Faure*: "Given that I'm paid to work on KDE (by Troll-tech, indirectly), finding time to work on KDE isn't a problem for me. On the contrary, Nové Hrady will be the opportunity for working on problems on which I require help from other developers, so what I do will mostly depend on who else is there.

David Faure

I might try to find a solution for text rendering issues in KOffice we've been discussing on the *koffice-devel* mailing-list lately. Likewise I can think of

improving the JavaScript and DHTML support in Konqueror or rework some of the core KDE functionalities like the XML GUI merging technology together with Simon Hausmann. And since Werner Trobin will be there, I'll probably also work on the MSWord import filter for KWord."

A new star to rise: Kontact

Software for the office desktop looks like becoming the key development area in Nové Hrady: Not only KOffice developers will meet, also the KDE PIM developers are eagerly looking forward to push Kontact (*http://www.kontact.org/*), KDE's new framework for the management of personal data like e-mails, dates, tasks, notes, and contacts, to newer heights. Unlike Microsoft's Outlook and Ximian's Evolution, Kontact implements a modular instead of a monolithic approach and provides a framework for already existing applications like KMail, KOrganizer, or the KAdressbook, allowing the user to choose which apps to integrate and which to use separately (or not at all).

Cornelius Schumacher

Two of the developers who plan to work in this area are *Cornelius Schumacher* and *Daniel Molkentin*. Says Cornelius: "My personal aim is to bring Kontact into a state that allows to ship a first stable version with KDE 3.2. There is still an entire bunch of open problems, but as many developers of the different components will attend the conference, we have the unique chance to solve them." Daniel assists him: "One of them is the configuration aspect. Imagine if we just merged all configure dialogs of the standalone apps for Kontact, the user would be lost! The other thing I hope to get working in Nové Hrady is support for Kolab" (*http://kolab.kde.org/*), a free software based groupware server developed for the BSI, a German governmental institution to promote security in information technology. "Exchange 2000 support would be nice, too, but this is not our primary goal at present. We will focus on consistancy, stability and Kolab support for the first Kontact release."

Apart from Kontact, Cornelius has additional plans: "I think of spending

time on KitchenSync [1], the KDE tool to synchronize data, e. g. between KAddress-book and the mobile phone, or the Zaurus. And most certainly I'll fix one or another bug in KOrganizer."

Daniel Molkentin

And here we come to the world of desktop applications again. A message for all fans of the web-editor Quanta has the project's Lead Developer *Andras Mantia*: "Because our user-base is quite large, I have to keep Quanta runable on earlier versions of KDE as well, and this means I can't really use the latest and greatest KDE features which might be developed during the hacking fest. But even if it was not for them, Quanta needs to improve in several areas: The core (i. e. the parser) must get faster, better and support even more languages. In addition I'm planning to add group functionality to the project handling, a new feature that (hopefully) will be appreciated by web-developers working in teams. Another idea is to add a visual site and document planner. If Nicolas Deschildre will be in Nové Hrady, you may expect to see more

Andras Mantia

work on the Visual Page Layout mode (the WYSIWYG mode as we call it)."

As if this wasn't more than enough work for just one week (well, to be honest: When asked, news had just broken that a donation from David Guttandin would allow Andras to actually attend the conference, so time had been too short to make plans) he also cares for KDE as a whole: "Although Quanta doesn't, KDE in general has numerous reported bugs, and reducing them is very important. I will bring up the idea to organize a bug fixing day or two at Nové Hrady." ∎

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[1] Carsten Niehaus: "KitchenSync", Linux Magazine, Issue 32, July 2003, p24