Summer Source Software Camp for NGOs, Vis, Croatia

NGOs meet Linux

Bringing together activists from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and free and Open Source software proponents on a common ground for mutual learning and cooperation, was the mission 110 people from over 35 countries lead to the island of Vis.

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Figure 1: Each day after breakfast Gunner's morning circle helped to raise everyone's energy level suffering from last night's hangover

With "Summer Source", a software camp for NGOs on the island of Vis in Croatia August 29 through September 6 2003, its organisers, Tactical Technology Collective (an Amsterdam based non-profit foundation, *http://www.tacticaltech.org/*) and the Multimedia Institute Croatia (*http://www.mi2.hr/*), tried to promote free and Open Source software as important tools in NGOs, claiming its community-based expertise and consultancy will strengthen civil-society organizations and networks.

It was the ex-army base, ex-refugee centre "Samogor" that provided the framework for this unique possibility to share experiences and expertise in Open Source software technologies or NGO development. Single-sex accommodation in barracks with rooms labelled after different programming languages (the only female dorm was named Ruby), and a limited number of WCs and showers required everyone to develop social skills, and despite of sometimes passionate debates, interactions were built on mutual respect. Communication with the outside world was limited to 20 regular Intel/AMD PCs (most equipped with 1 GHz CPUs and 128 MB RAM each) and 50 plugs on switches/hubs connected to

the LAN which had ISDN dial up internet connection; there was no TV or telephone.

The camp's policy of an acronym- and jargon-free language dissolved many barriers: People learned that all of them knew something and none of them knew everything. Based on this understanding, the agenda had two specific audiences in mind: implementers who specify and deploy technology solutions in NGOs, and developers who create new and better Open Source platforms, applications and infrastructure for NGOs.

Apart from sessions with one of these target groups in mind, there were those intended for all participants. One, called

Figure 2: Hands-on training session

"the bazaar", was designed to bring implementers and developers together for discussion, brainstorming, alliance building and visioning. Lying on rugs, drinking Turkish tea, participants exchanged Open Source ideas, projects and visions, trading in currencies of creativity and learning.

A session in the afternoon of September 4 joined forces with protesters against globalisation in Cancún, Mexico, where the WTO ministerial conference took place September 4–11. Using an Open Source streaming audio session, participants greeted comrades on the other side of the cable in various languages and exchanged ideas on their activities – a unique experience to see technology empowering human communications.

The best way of learning

Most sessions for implementers concentrated on hands-on installation and configuration training for various Linux distributions which allowed them to practice their newly learned skills with a variety of software and hardware.

The developers' agenda, however, paid little attention to hands-on skills, instead focusing on how to make collaboration within Open Source development communities more efficient and how to improve cooperation and dialogue between developers and implementers.

To make visible what's already there, NGOs who have already implemented Open Source solutions such as Greenpeace, presented case-studies. One of the most notable came from *Candida Coronato*, the only female facilitator, talking about her work-experience with Digital Bridges e.V. (*http://www.dbev.de/*), a German NGO that implements IT education projects with Linux in developing countries, and their recent project in Nepal. E-Riders (*http://www.eriders.net/*) presented their global network of "roving technology consultants" who help NGOs to implement information and communications technology suiting their aims and needs.

As the camp came to an end, a new era of close cooperation between NGOs and the free and Open Source community had just begun. ■