

***FLOSS-CC: A Collaborative Network of FLOSS Competency Centers towards Open Source Software Adoption and Dissemination**

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Abstract – This technical paper proposes a novel strategy towards Free/Libre/Open source software (FLOSS) adoption and dissemination. Deriving upon current Europe wide experiences, and efforts, it suggests establishment of networked FLOSS Competency Centers for better collaboration, communication, and information dissemination at regional/national, European and global level. Objectives, tasks, and organizational structure of these prospective centers are put forward in order to raise open discussions on the issue.

I. Introduction

Globally the development and use of Free/Libre/Open Source Software (FLOSS) has reached significant proportions. The potential benefits and the level of maturity of the FLOSS model is recognized as a viable alternative, which will in many cases prove to be the preferred approach to software development and application.

Public Administrations (PAs) are the among the biggest computer and software consumers world-wide and every year spend a substantial amount of money on commercial off-the-shelf software licenses. By using appropriate technologies, such expenses might be either dramatically reduced or re-routed to further develop local business ecosystems. However, FLOSS adoptions in PAs are far below desired levels.

In the light of FLOSS related experiences and knowledge so far, this technical report conceives it compelling and proposes establishment of Regional/National FLOSS Competency Centers towards effective dissemination and widely adoption of FLOSS solutions.

II. Objectives of FLOSS Competency Centers

First of all, these FLOSS Competency Centers will take over and/or contribute to advocacy, guidance, and/or research activities towards FLOSS adoption and dissemination within public/private organizations and NGOs. Secondly, institutionalization of such or similar centers will provide sustainability to FLOSS based ICT development efforts. Thirdly, acting as FLOSS coordination and communication hubs, they will serve the community in decreasing resistance to FLOSS-based solutions and applications, thus lowering the entry barriers both in public and private sector. In addition to these stated hereby, it is possible to assign them many other FLOSS related dissemination and adoption activities. A list of objective and tasks of such competency centers are given by Table 1.

III. FLOSS Competency Center Organizational Structure

This study also wants to point the need of a central foundation, namely, a FLOSS-EU Center. Such a

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center will function as an umbrella organization for local FLOSS Competency Centers. This FLOSS-EU center will presumably act as the coordinating and the communicating hub. For instance, this hub may coordinate activities both in between National/Regional FLOSS Competency Centers and other EU/non-EU FLOSS initiatives, communities, organizations, and projects towards effective global collaborations. Figure 1 depicts a prospective EU wide organization of FLOSS Competency Centers along with FLOSS-EU Center.

Apparently, foundation of such Europe-wide FLOSS Competency Centers requires delicate and thorough organizational and financial feasibility analysis in advance. However, evidence of their feasibility is observable through akin organizations and efforts that are already exist. For example, IDABC-OSO¹ partially serves as an umbrella portal for FLOSS dissemination and adoption activities. IDABC-OSO intends to encourage the spread and use of best FLOSS practices in Europe. It also introduce new users to the concepts of FLOSS and presents interesting facts and references for experts through case studies, analysis, etc.

Table 1. Objectives and tasks of prospective FLOSS Competency Centers

<i>Objectives of prospective FLOSS Competency Centers</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conducting advocacy, guidance, and/or research activities towards FLOSS adoption and dissemination 2. Providing sustainability to FLOSS based ICT development efforts 3. Acting as FLOSS coordination, communication and collaboration hub
<i>Possible actions/tasks of prospective FLOSS Competency Centers</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taking a leading role in development of FLOSS implementation strategies ● Coordinating collaborations in between governmental, educational, and private institutions towards FLOSS adoption ● Benchmarking national/regional FLOSS related activities and actions ● Collecting and analyzing best practices ● Promoting, participating, and coordinating FLOSS related research & development activities, e.g: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FLOSS Business Models • FLOSS Organizational Structures • FLOSS technologies ● Providing consultancy for migration and implementation of FLOSS solutions ● Coordinating training activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Youth/Women Empowerment Centers – FLOSS Computer Driving License ● Providing consultancy for private and public enterprises or individuals in preparing FLOSS based proposals in government IT procurement ● Actively communicating and collaborating with FLOSS-EU Center and other National/Regional FLOSS Competency Centers ● Participating/coordinating activities that increase public awareness on clear benefits and possibilities offered by FLOSS based implementations

IV. Evidences to FLOSS Competency Center Like Organization

As it might foreseen, evidences to existence of National/Regional FLOSS Competency like

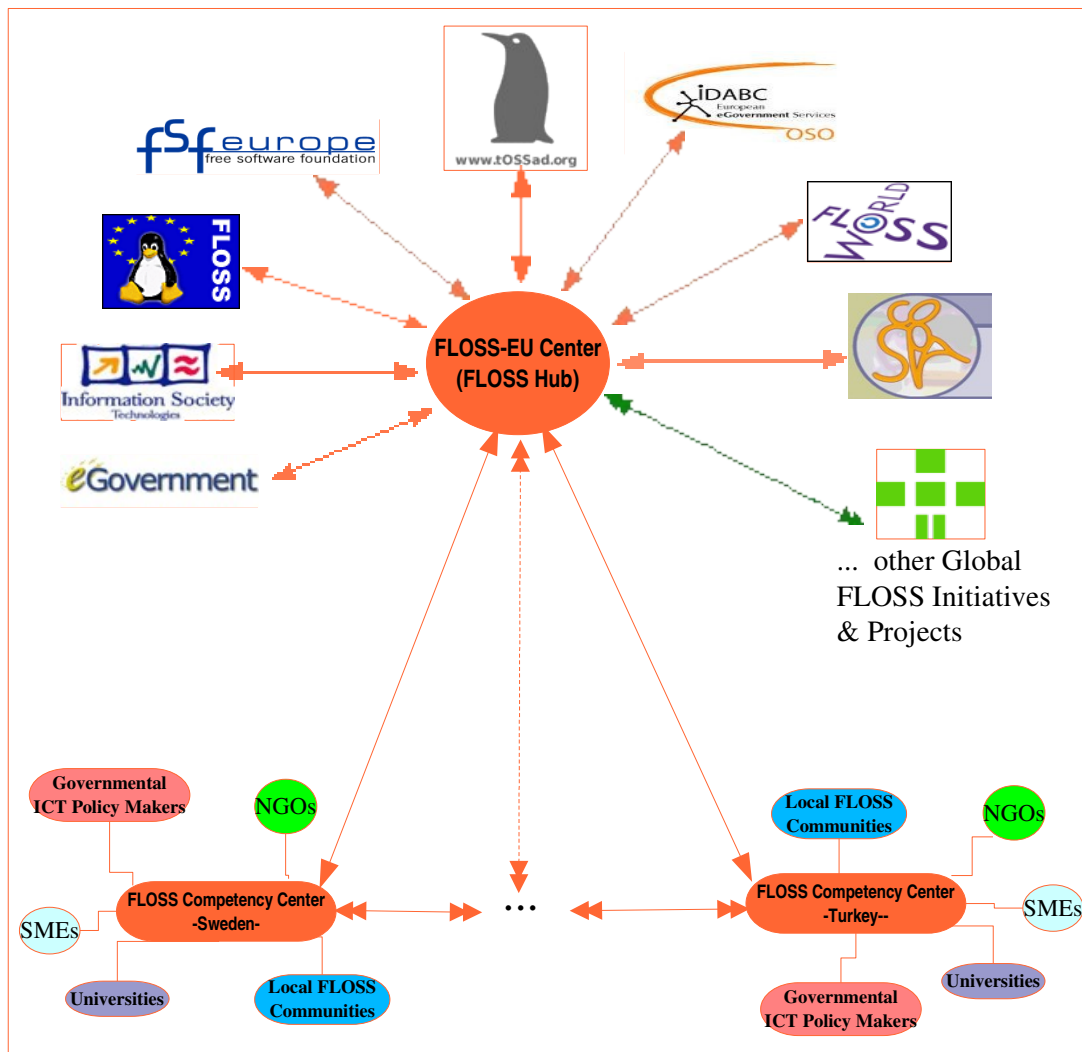
¹ IDABC stands for Interoperable Delivery of European eGovernment Services to public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens. It uses the opportunities offered by information and communication technologies to encourage and support the delivery of cross-border public sector services to citizens and enterprises in Europe, to improve efficiency and collaboration between European public administrations. And OSO stands for Open Source Observatory. For more details please see <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/chapter/452>.

organizations are more common. The example of the Dutch Programme OSOSS efforts on formation and functions of the competence centre on open standards and open source software for governments is outstanding. The mission of the center/programme, commissioned by Dutch ministries of Interior, Trade and Economics and Education, is to simulate use of open standards and to inform on open source software. The center consists of 10 team members and has a budget of €1,5 million a year between 2003 and 2005.

The programme/center is in fact a part of the Dutch organization for eGovernment (ICTU). Thus, it aims to cooperate with specific market organizations and e-government competence centers, such as, health, education, and SME's.

Among others, the primary task of this OSOSS Competence Center is to create awareness towards adoption of OS and OSS both in governmental and non-governmental bodies. The center plans to provide guidelines, and to derive best practices through case studies for both the initiation and sustainment of OS and OSS adoptions. Additionally, the programme prepares license manuals for various FLOSS licensing issues. The overall task of the center might be seen as a legal advisory through, for instance, guidelines on open source software liability and procurement. In other terms, the center aims to service anything needed: legal, technical, organizational for FLOSS adoption².

Foundation of Open Knowledge Centers (OKCs) in the rural area of Extermadura is another initiative which is essentially similar to the proposed prospective FLOSS Competency Centers. In order to prevent the gap of "digital divide" within the society, this experience and practice of Extermadura provides a sample action towards support and foundation of similar OKCs for other rural areas of relatively less developed regions.



² For instance for a catalog of open standards prepared by the center please check www.canos.nl.

Figure 1. Organization of prospective Local FLOSS Competency Centers with FLOSS-EU Hub and the network.

One another notable attempt towards formation of a legal body akin to FLOSS Competency Centers is the experience of FLOSS service providers in U.K. As the implementation of FLOSS in public administrations requires somehow a business organization based on FLOSS technology, therefore, over 60 FLOSS service providers in the U.K. have set up a non-profit representative body, the OS Consortium, to serve as an independent reference for all firms offering or considering OS consultancy and help them make business with the government³. Lastly, the German Federal Government funded the 'OS Kompetenzzentrum', the German FLOSS Competency Center, to support knowledge exchange in public sector on FLOSS.

V. Conclusion

This technical study aims to raise a discussion towards foundation of such Europe-wide FLOSS Competency Centers. The proposal acknowledges the necessity of a more delicate and thorough organizational and financial feasibility analysis. However, driving upon some of already existing instances of FLOSS Competency Centers, the proposal is promising towards wider FLOSS adoption and dissemination.

³ For details see www.opensourceconsortium.org