

FLOSSWORLD

Scope

Free/Libre/Open Source Software (FLOSS) is much discussed, especially in the context of development and economic growth. But very little hard data are available on the use, deployment and development of FLOSS outside Europe and North America. Flossworld aimed to reproduce a number of surveys previously carried out in Europe (and to some extent in the US) in selected developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Where in the world do FLOSS developers live? Does their contribution and motivation differ based on the countries and regions in which they live and work? What about the role of employers, higher education institutes and governments?

Flossworld aimed, for the first time, to collect comparable data from several countries in order to answer these questions.

Advances

The Flossworld surveys showed a surprising similarity between FLOSS developers and community participants cutting across national and regional boundaries. As in Western Europe and the US, FLOSS communities in developing and transitional economies are quite young (average age in the twenties) and well educated. Although a number of somewhat older professionals exist, for the majority participation in FLOSS provides a good opportunity to learn skills that are relevant on the labour market and that thus help to earn an income. Interestingly, not only FLOSS community members but also employers value skills that are informally learnt within the FLOSS community more than formal degrees.

It should be noted that there is no real equivalent to the FLOSS «open community training system» in the proprietary software environment, as development of software in that environment only takes place within companies or other formal structures, so developers need prior training.

The fact that worldwide, in repeated surveys, people say that they joined the FLOSS community because they want to learn and share their knowledge implies that “learning” is an important asset around which the FLOSS process forms. The Flossworld study shows that FLOSS participation results in skills improvements not only in the field of software technology but also in managerial, legal, and social skills.

The Flossworld developer survey found a high degree of homogeneity within the FLOSS communities, not only regarding demographic aspects but also aspects of “living FLOSS”, such as motivations to join the community, activities, preferences regarding learning methods and contents. Findings from similar studies in Europe and America indicate that there is hardly any significant difference between developed and developing countries in the FLOSS community - quite a contrast from much of the rest of the economy. The FLOSS community, probably due to its effective communication means, has succeeded in establishing common global standards and values that go far beyond the technological dimension and core of this community. Such values have spread despite the language barriers that frequently prevent individuals from collaborating directly with each other at a global level, especially among populations with low prevalence of English. And these common values have spread despite the presence of somewhat isolated, though large, communities of developers separated by language, especially in East Asia.

A number of other findings of the study related to the role of higher education institutes, which is often significant in developing countries as the initial point of access to computers and software to many developers.

Flossworld aimed at providing inputs to policy makers, and resulted in two main recommendations:

- education, skills and employment: Flossworld studies have confirmed that skills are developed through the participation in FLOSS communities, encouraged simply through increased FLOSS use especially in educational settings. Such skills lead to employment and potential growth of local businesses.
- eGovernment policy in several countries could draw on the reasons for FLOSS use, and in particular attitudes towards providing accessible government services to all citizens, the implementation of which is correlated with increased FLOSS use.

A final conclusion is that Flossworld has proven successful in generating international collaboration with target countries and EU researchers, building an extensive community to further explore issues of common interest. In this context, given the clearly high level of interest, participation and benefit of FLOSS in developing countries shown from the Flossworld studies, European R&D policy may be further served by promoting international cooperation on FLOSS-related issues.

Positioning in global context

The Flossworld project conducted the first ever - and so far, the only - set of international, inter-regional comparative surveys of developers, employers, higher education institutes, and governments in relation to FLOSS.

Target users / sectors in business and society

Flossworld findings are useful for all those interested in the role of FLOSS in business and society in developing countries. Flossworld results were published in reports intended to be read by businesses and policy makers as well as developers themselves; the data and analysis is also of use to researchers examining the impact of ICTs in economic development..

Achievements

The project resulted in a number of reports that were published on the website. Analysis of survey and study results was published for each survey in each country, as well as reports identifying regional differences and providing the global context.



title

Free libre and open source software
– worldwide impact study

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type of project

Specific Support Action

contact point

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project website and partner list

<http://flossworld.org/index.php>

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