EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Network of Excellence

FOCAL - FOcussing Competence for Advantages of Liberty

Free Software Foundation Europe, Germany
Associação Nacional para o Software Livre, Portugal
Association ABUL, France
Association For Free Software, UK
Association Pour la Promotion et la Recherche en Informatique Libre, France
Centro Tempo Reale, Italy
DIST-Università di Genova, Italy
Easter-eggs, France
Groupe des Ecoles de Telecommunications (GET), France
g10 Code GmbH, Germany
Intevation GmbH, Germany
MandrakeSoft, France
LinuxTag e.V., Germany
Prosa Progettazione Sviluppo Aperto S.r.l., Italy
Verein zur Förderung Freier Software, Austria
Verein zur Förderung Informationen und Software e.V., Germany
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1 Description

Free Software – sometimes also referred to as "Libre software" or "Open Source Software" [1] – is best defined by the following four freedoms:

1st freedom: The freedom to run the program, for any purpose.

2nd freedom: The freedom to study how the program works, and adapt it to your needs. Access to the source code is a precondition for this.

3rd freedom: The freedom to redistribute copies.

4th freedom: The freedom to improve the program, and release your improvements to the public, so that the whole community benefits. Access to the source code is a precondition for this.

Free Software provides a new concept, a new discipline as a stable basis for the information age and the knowledge economy. Its working principles are changing the IT sector towards a more stable, lasting and sustainable approach with higher dynamics and increased efficiency.

Any region adopting Free Software on a larger basis can benefit in terms of
- Greater independence from foreign interests
- Increased sustainability
- Freedom from foreign mono- and oligopolies
- Alternative hard- and software possibilities
- Strengthened domestic market and local industries
- Better cooperation between research and economy
- Encouraged transdisciplinary research
- Better protection of civil rights

For a more detailed explanation, please see the *Recommendation of the Free Software Foundation Europe (FSF Europe) and supporting parties for the European Community framework programme 2002–2006* of April 30th, 2002, [2] in which the FSF Europe with support of about 50 European companies, research institutes and associations explains in more detail why and how Free Software offers these advantages.

1.1 Rationale

It is obvious that the first region to adopt and support research and implementation in Free Software on a larger scale can profit enormously and get a head-start in the information age.
Other regions are beginning to get ready to capitalize on these advantages, as – for instance – the recent activities in Peru have shown. [3]

Europe, however, is given a uniquely favorable position to become the global leader in the Information Economy due to its vibrant Free Software community. It has already begun taking small steps in this direction within the 5th Framework Programme that should be built upon **now**.

Understanding a new discipline, a new market has always been a necessity for stable, lasting and wide success – economic or otherwise. Those who understand it best have the best chances to be most successful. Free Software is no exception to this rule.
With Free Software providing a new paradigm and new rules for the IT sector, it is important to create consciousness, understanding and awareness for this discipline upon which the future will be built, creating a solid basis for digital Europe.

This will be the main objective of FOCAL: Bring together the best expertise in and around Free Software and use it to further the understanding, adoption, use and coordination of Free Software in Europe.

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[1] For reasons that can be found online at `http://fsfeurope.org/documents/whyfs.en.html`, this document will use Free Software as the preferred term.

[2] Online at `http://fsfeurope.org/documents/fp6/`.

[3] For reference, please see the letter by the Peruvian Congressman Villanueva. Mirrored in several places like `http://pimientolinux.com/peru2ms/` .

1.1.1 Issues with integration of Free Software into FP6

Although the 6th Framework Programme and Europe in general would profit immensely from the mass-adoption of Free Software, the current structure of the FP6 makes it difficult to provide adequate support for Free Software. There are several reasons for this that we would like to bring into the FP6 thought process.

First of all, Free Software is not limited to a single domain or thematic area, its positive effects transcend research disciplines, markets, society.

The Free Software paradigm changes the workings and rules of software towards a climate that rewards cooperative efforts and stronger integration. This sort of climate change, although very obvious, is hard to quantify.

The paradigms are shifted away from a supply-driven IT industry towards a demand-driven model. In other words: The user truly becomes a determining factor. Therefore the direction of important Free Software projects is often hard to predict. Demand may overrule the ideas of supply and give the project a new direction. This very positive effect – some people go as far as calling it "collateral use" – makes Free Software harder to predict.

Another difficulty is the definition of a "researcher." Considering the illustration of a typical financial regime of NoEs in FP6 given in the "Provisions for implementing Networks of Excellence - Working Document - version 280202," and in particular reference to par.3.2 (p.7) "Definition of the factors used in calculating the grant," a crucial factor for grant calculation is the definition of "researcher." Following the description of the above-mentioned document, the classical "researcher" in IT would probably be a computer science Phd professor. However, in software projects every other participant (developers, interface designers, usability testers and so on) could likewise and reasonably argue to be seen as a "researcher."

Free Software follows an enabling paradigm. It empowers people, companies, organizations, governments. This means that the quantification of a "researcher" is even less solid. The best way might be to differentiate by dedication and amount of contribution.

And last but not least: Players in the Free Software field can currently not be judged by their finances. Competence, not money is the most important capital of Free Software players today. Although this is likely to change with a greater adoption of Free Software, it is a problem we face in relation with the FP6.

The "Funding by size" paradigm is one that is likely to fail for Free Software, because in the current situation it would usually further the least competent parties.

These problems should be addressed and discussed to find a solution that will allow Europe to capitalize on the advantages of Free Software in the best and most efficient way.

1.2 Objectives

FOCALs main objectives in creating a visible European Free Software Network of Excellence will be:

1. Constituting a reference network for interested developers, contributors, end-users, companies, regional and national governments, etc.

2. Advancing the research agenda in IT hrough extensive use of the Free Software paradigms.

3. Promoting Free Software through all appropriate channels.

4. Coordinating Free Software development efforts.

5. Give impulses for Free Software development in thematic/key areas.

6. Providing assistance to regional, national and European legislation to help creating the best environment for the information economy.

7. Creating a sub-network of legal support to promote legislative changes that support Free Software in European countries.

8. Generate awareness for a new hardware mentality.

9. Study the extensibility of the Free Software paradigm to other domains.

1.3 General approach to achieve the objectives

The objectives stated in section 1.2 can be reached through the following actions:

- Creating a yearly international conference in Europe devoted to Free Software; while encompassing all problems related to Free Software development and use, the conference can be dedicated each year to a specific theme stressing its urgency.

- Creating a network of yearly meetings of Free Software specialists devoted to specific thematic issues.

- Creating developer exchange and travel programs.

- Organizing meetings of developers for important projects.

- Creating offices for legal support to promote legislation changes to promote Free Software and related issues in European countries.

- Setting up "road shows" with expert speakers on Free Software; these can be dedicated to special areas. Organizing speeches with Free Software experts at public events and in companies.

- Creating, printing and distributing information material like flyers, brochures and other forms of disseminating information.

- Creating a distributed press agency network to promote public meetings through all available media dedicated to Free Software issues.

2 Need and Relevance

Software has not only become a seminal economic and cultural property, it also provides the grounds upon which the information society and economy will be built.

Those who depend on foreign interests to uphold their own economy, communication, education and research will most likely not become key players in the information age. Becoming and remaining independent from foreign hardware and software oligopolies is a crucial step towards a sustainable and lasting approach.

Free Software offers these liberties and it is seminal for Europe as a whole, but also for each of its "components" – governments, companies, organizations, institutes and the people constituting Europe – to become aware of the advantages and importance of Free Software.

As laid out in the recommendation referenced on page 1 in section 1, Free Software offers protection from foreign and internal hardware and software monopolies, encourages freedom of markets, protects privacy and therefore trust in information technologies, furthers research and education and empowers all Europeans to become active participants in the information society.

Constituting a Network of Excellence for Free Software with the objectives stated in section 1.2 is not only advisable to allow Europe gaining an unprecedented role in information technologies, it may well be necessary.

3 Excellence

A Network of Excellence for Free Software requires the participation of knowledgeable organizations, companies and research centers with a solid track-record in Free Software. FOCAL consists of the European and often global leaders in Free Software and thematic areas.

	Organisation Area of Excellence Role in Project	Country	Web page
1	**FSF Europe**	Germany	http://fsfeurope.org
	Competence center; Partner "AGNULA" (IST-2001-34879); Co-maintainer of GPL/LGPL and GNU Project		
	Coordination, Community-interaction, Competence, Vision, Integration, Business-models, Legal Aspects		
2	**ABUL**	France	http://www.abul.org
	Free Software association furthering Education; Organizer Libre Software Meeting		
	Events, Education, Community-interaction & local competence		
3	**ANSOL**	Portugal	http://www.ansol.org
	Free Software association furthering Free Software in Portugal		
	Community-interaction & local competence		
4	**AFFS**	United Kingdom	http://www.affs.org.uk
	Free Software association furthering Free Software in the UK		
	Community-interaction & local competence		
5	**APRIL**	France	http://www.april.org
	Free Software association furthering Free Software in France		
	Community-interaction & local competence		
6	**Centro Tempo Reale**	Italy	http://www.centrotemporeale.it
	Center devoted to music research, production and education. Coordinator AGNULA project (IST-2001-34879)		
	Audio & Multimedia		
7	**DIST-Università**	Italy	http://infomus.dist.unige.it
	Multimedia lab, EC projects: MEGA, CARE-HERE, MoSART		
	Multimedia and expressive/emotional software		
8	**Easter-Eggs**	France	http://www.easter-eggs.com
	Company for Free Software & GNU/Linux		
	Business integration		
9	**GET**	France	http://www.get-telecom.fr
	Consortium of the seven major French Graduate Schools for Information Technology		
	Communcation technology & research		
10	**g10 Code GmbH**	Germany	http://www.g10code.de
	Home of GnuPG, only supported major OpenPGP implementation; Project partner "Egypt" (BSI)		
	Cryptography & Security, Business integration		
11	**Intevation GmbH**	Germany	http://www.intevation.de
	Geographic Information Systems, Strategic Free Software consulting; Project partner "Egypt" (BSI)		
	GIS, Business integration, usability design		
12	**LinuxTag e.V.**	Germany	http://www.linuxtag.org
	Largest Free Software event organizer; Organizer of LinuxTag		
	Events & Conferences		
13	**MandrakeSoft**	France	http://www.mandrakesoft.com
	Producer and publisher of "Mandrake" GNU/Linux distribution		
	End-user interaction, packaging, business integration		
14	**Prosa**	Italy	http://www.prosa.it
	Services around GNU/Linux and Free Software		
	Business integration		
15	**FFS**	Austria	http://www.ffs.or.at
	Free Software association furthering Free Software in Austria		
	Community-interaction & local competence		
16	**ffis**	Germany	http://www.ffis.de
	Free Software association furthering Free Software in Germany		

	Community-interaction & local competence		
17	**V2**	Netherlands	`http://www.v2.nl`
	Free Software in art, culture, engineering		
	Multimedia, art, communication		
18	**VIPS Lab**	Italy	`http://vips.sci.univr.it`
	Coordinator SOb project IST-2000-25287; Partner ARROV; Organizer COST-G6 Conference in 2000		
	Computer vision, pattern recognition, image and sound processing		
19	**[wearlab]@TZi**	Germany	`http://www.wearlab.de`
	Center for mobile/wearable computing at University of Bremen		
	Mobile/wearable computing		
20	**werk21**	Germany	`http://www.werk21.de`
	Agency for communication & design, organizer "Bundestux"		
	Publications, material, end-user integration		

4 Integration and Structuring Effect

Integration and structuring will clearly be a FOCAL result.

Free Software already compasses a virtual network of very heterogenous nature. It is an inherent property of Free Software to further integration and self-organizing structures. FOCAL offers the chance to supplement this "virtual" network with a real one, based in Europe.

In order to reflect this goal, the list of partners contains a solid community base, the most experienced companies on this field and research institutes.

Through these, multiple effects will be achieved:

- **Better Integration of European Research and Industry**: the integration and cooperation between commercial and non-commercial partners made possible by Free Software is rather unique and partially responsible for the economic value of Free Software.

- **Strengthening transdisciplinary approaches**: the same mechanisms that allow integration and cooperation between the commercial and non-commercial fields will simplify transdisciplinary cooperatio n, making Free Software an excellent choice to encourage such activities.

- **Increasing the impact of scientific software**: with increasing reliance of science on software, software becomes an integral part of the scientific process. The scientific method relies on the ability to verify results, however, and only if this is possible will a scientific result hold any significance. If such a result is somehow dependent on or published as proprietary software, verification becomes impossible, greatly reducing the impact of the research effort. Free Software does not have these drawbacks, making it the best choice for all kinds of science.

- **Protection of personal data and privacy**: Since communication through software is always opaque, it is seminal that the software itself is entirely transparent so people retain the possibility to know what the software does when they transmit personal or private data. Currently, only Free Software is truly transparent and guaranteed to remain such in time.

- **Information society technologies**: Europe already has a leading role in Free Software development and the European Free Software community is the most active worldwide. In this context, Europe is well positioned to lead and shape the future development not only of technologies but also of their impact on our life and work.

More details can be found in the recommendation referenced on page 1 in section 1.