

KDE Contributor Conference “Kastle”

There's an aim called 3.2

It's not too surprising, the KDE Contributor conference attracted mainly KDE programmers, who in return produced a lot of code. But usability aspects are becoming increasingly important. **BY PATRICIA JUNG**

Have you been wondering why the so called HEAD branch of the KDE CVS repository felt a bit unstable in late August? The reason is obvious: From 22nd to 30th August, KDE contributors from 19 countries and – apart from Africa and Antarctica – all continents gathered at the Academic and University Center Nové Hradky in South-Czechia – to meet each other, to learn about what's going on in the manifold universe of the desktop project and to bring the next version 3.2 to a feature-freeze.

After the weekend 23rd/24th August, which was filled to the brim with interesting presentations [2], the number of participants decreased from 104 to 76. There was real work waiting to be done: a week of intensive coding – the Hacking Festival – followed.

In the advent of the conference, nicknamed “Kastle”, Linux Magazine had asked KDE developers about their plans [1] for the hack-fest. Now we wanted to know which of them had actually materialized.

Unsurprisingly, the focus changed often. But this did not mean playing soccer (“World vs. Germany”, see Figure 1) or drinking real Budweiser beer ruled out every other activity.

Quite the opposite was true: Instead of fixing bugs all the time, *George Staikos* stuck to his two conference goals: “I spent most of



Giovanni Venturi

Figure 1: Yes, they play soccer, too! (And Germany lost it again...)

my time implementing the changes that other developers had proposed for KWallet, the KDE wallet system (Figure 2) that will be in 3.2 and, as such, mark the end of flat text files for storing passwords. And – as promised – I did do a bit of work with scriptability, although not all of the resulting code had gone into CVS yet.”

The reason for this became obvious when George and *Zack Rusin* presented the early stages of KaXUL (pronounce: “casual”), a library that reads XUL, the language Mozilla's user interface is written in, and converts it into the Qt Designer .ui format (which in return, the

Qt user interface compiler *uic* translates into C++ code). “As KaXUL utilizes many of the scripting features in KDE, there have been a lot of discussions with developers about scripting and script interfaces.”

By the way, Mozilla developers, keep an eye on KDevelop! In preparation for their talk, Zack implemented basic XUL support within the IDE.

In his own inimitable manner, George has been working on some other code at the same time, “I've also been doing some work on a new SSL class (originally written by *Mirko Böhm*) that provides a Qt ‘Input/Output Device’. I spent some time cleaning it up and ‘kdeifying’ it. It will be very useful in the future for developers who wish to write SSL enabled applications with *QSocket* classes. A KDE SSL server socket is also in CVS and will be enabled once the cleanup is done there.” And when the enhanced laptop support in KDE 3.2 makes its way, the users might like to say thank you to George, as this was yet another project he had his hands in.

Due to the efforts of KWin maintainer *Lubos Lunák* a major

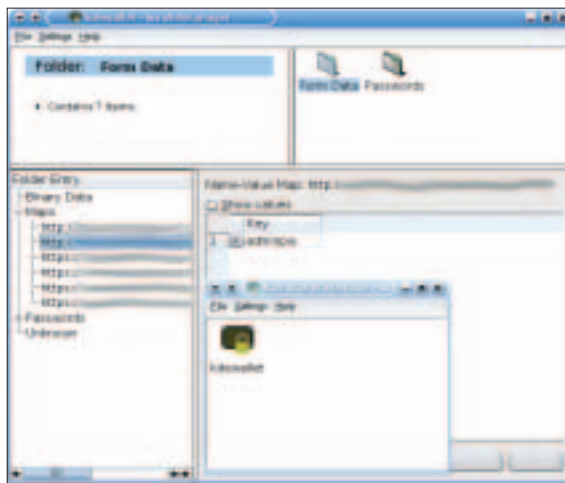


Figure 2: The time for plain-text password storage is up

source of annoyance will disappear with KDE 3.2: Imagine you have been concentrating on your work only to discover that you're no longer typing into your editor window – your web browser has been telling you that a certain host is unreachable, and the pesky dialog box has grabbed the focus.

"I also worked a lot on finishing the new version of the KDE window manager, called *kwin_iii* after its CVS branch", Lubos reports. „As there have been some internal changes since KDE 3.1, I had to design a new API for the decoration plugins. This work is currently being finalized with the help of some decoration plugin developers. The visible result will be a preview within the decorations configuration module."

While Lubos did not find time to discuss and maybe implement support for the "Multiple Document Interface" into KWin (see [1]), other developers stuck more closely to their original plans. Says KDE PIM developer *Cornelius Schumacher*: "The good news is that we will definitely release the new PIM-framework *Contact* with KDE 3.2. And the bad news? Unfortunately, the code from the Kroupware client that's needed to make *Contact* a fully usable client to the Kolab server [5] hasn't been merged into the main development tree yet. If this integration does not happen in time, we hope to make a separate KDE PIM release after 3.2. that contains these changes."

Focus on KDE PIM

Nevertheless, a lot has been done in this area as we can see from *Cornelius'* report: "Thanks to *Matthias Kretz* *Contact* will automatically integrate all config modules available in the form of *KCModules* – we changed the *KOrganizer* ones appropriately. *David Faure* made sure *Contact* displays all toolbars in the right order and saves their positions correctly. *Tobias König* did a lot of work on *KAddressBook* and its accompanying library *libkabc*. *Reinhold Kainhofer* reorganized the *KOrganizer* printing support, while the *KMail* guys concentrated on code-refactoring and bug fixes. There still are some issues, but most of them

look like we'll be able to resolve them before the 3.2 release."

"I myself fixed the *Contact About* dialog with help from *Simon Hausmann* and integrated the *KitchenSync* synchronisation tool into *Contact*. There is a new backup/restore part (Figure 3), and I'm now trying to get the *Qtopia Connector* working again. However: I'm still not sure whether *KitchenSync* will be ready for the 3.2 release."

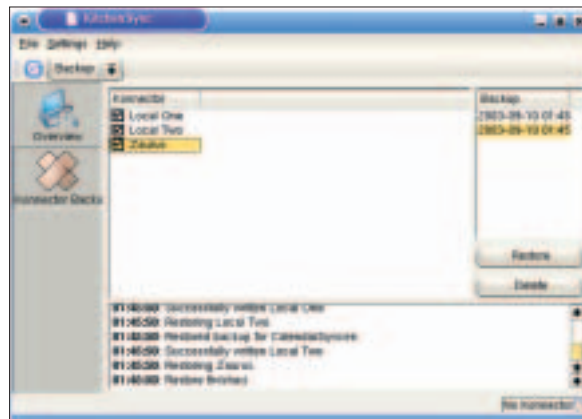


Figure 3: The new backup/restore part in KitchenSync

Cornelius was one of those developers well aware of usability problems in KDE, and further discussion has been started: Backing *Eva Brucherseifer's* and *Jan Mühlig's* presentation of the results of the *relevantive* usability study [3], "there was a KDE usability meeting where we developed the idea of switching the current *kde-usability* list to a general discussion forum on the issue, and setting up a new *kde-usability-devel* list, which developers can use as an 'oracle' for usability problems." The list [4] mentioned by *Eva* invites usability experts from universities, companies and other projects to share their knowledge with KDE programmers and help them to develop a better product. The makers of the study promised to give advice free of charge.

And already did. Says *Eva*: "We put together a list of possible improvements to the *Konqueror* sidebar and passed it to the maintainer who was quite busy hacking. But he wasn't the only developer with whom we discussed the problems discovered by the study, and I may report that progress has been made. I myself fixed some small usability bugs in *KOrganizer*. In addition, I implemented some GUI changes to the

configuration dialog of the background picture, based on a complete redesign by *Waldo Bastian*, although I haven't had time to commit it into the CVS yet."

Non-Technical Side

Lots of code has been written, and lots of discussions have led to interesting solutions – but as *Cornelius* puts it: "The most important thing wasn't the code we wrote but the strong community feeling that guides KDE. Everywhere at the conference I felt that we will have the power to develop good free software in the future, too."

And that leads us to the non-technical part of the conference and to unveiling the secret about what happened on the very first day, August 22, when the membership meeting of KDE e.V., the non-profit organization representing the KDE project in legal and financial matters, was held. As KDE e. V. board member, *Eva* reports: "Personally, I was quite relieved when the membership

assembly accepted the new rules. These changes enable KDE e.V. to be run more efficiently in an international and often virtual context. In addition, we introduced a new membership type, the 'supportive members', who can be natural persons or corporations." Wondering how to become a member? Go to [6] to find out, although the latest news might not yet have made its way to the website when this magazine goes to print. ■

INFO

- [1] Patricia Jung: "Sneak Preview", *Linux Magazine* Issue 34, September 2003, p86, <http://www.linux-magazine.com/issue/34/KDEContributorConferencePreview.pdf>
- [2] Conference slides: http://events.kde.org/info/kastle/conference_program.phtml
- [3] Linux/KDE Usability Test by *relevantive*: http://www.linux-usability.de/download/linux_usability_report_en.pdf
- [4] Usability advice for developers: <http://mail.kde.org/mailman/listinfo/kde-usability-devel/>
- [5] Kolab groupware: <http://kolab.kroupware.org/>
- [6] KDE e.V.: <http://www.kde.org/areas/kde-ev/>