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Evolved Internet Future for European Leadership
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Final report on EIFFEL Office Tools and Support Activities

Abstract:

In this document, we provide the final report of the various EIFFEL office tools and support activities. It combines the information from D1.2 and D1.3, and gives an updated evaluation on the impact of these activities.

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RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
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1 Introduction

In this document, we provide a final report on the tools used by the EIFFEL Office in its daily operations, as well as an updated evaluation of the impact of the different tools and support systems that have been set up for the EIFFEL Support Action (SA) as a whole. This deliverable combines the information from earlier documents, namely deliverables D1.2 and D1.3, and provides updates where appropriate.

The rest of this document is organized as follows. In Section 2, the impact of the tools used to facilitate the operation of the EIFFEL SA is discussed. In Section 3, the focus is on the impact of the tools developed to assist the EIFFEL TT in its work. In Section 4, the impact of the additional support activities pursued by the project is discussed. Finally, the document is concluded in Section 5.

2 Tools for the EIFFEL project

The main partner for providing technical support and facilities for tools has been Eurescom. This choice was a natural one due to their substantial expertise in these matters. The intention was also to improve coordination by focussing support requirements towards a single partner. The specific choices for tools were made by the project as a whole, based on a careful consideration and review of the various requirements and functionalities provided by the available technical solutions.

Web Hosting and Content Management System (CMS)

The project has maintained a Web presence at two sites. The project site <http://www.fp7-eiffel.eu/> was used to provide the community information about the operation of the EIFFEL Support Action as well as schedule of the foreseen TT meetings. The project also maintained the European Future Internet Portal <http://www.future-internet.eu/> which focussed on the activities surrounding the Future Internet Assembly the project was in part initiating. The EuresTools CMS was employed as the technical foundation of the website and provided a Web front-end which is technically based on the Open Source software Typo3. This includes a user-friendly CMS and secure and flexible account and login administration. Typo3 is a Web-based CMS, which allows users with an account to create Web content via a text-based interface through a Web browser without any HTML editing involved. The CMS offers undo and transaction rollback capability and other advanced features.

Project Wiki

Especially during the latter half of the project, wiki-based tools were found to be excellent foundation for organizing collaborative work. EuresTools Wiki, again provided by Eurescom, is a Web-based groupware tool based on MediaWiki, the Open Source wiki software package originally developed to serve the needs of Wikipedia, the free wiki-based encyclopaedia. MediaWiki is one of the most popular general wiki solutions providing a rich core feature set and a mechanism to attach extensions to provide additional functionality. This ease of interaction and operation

makes a wiki an effective tool for collaborative authoring, which is precisely the main application for the use of wiki in the project. At present authoring of deliverables, CfPs for the TT meetings, tasks related to the project management etc. are all handled through the wiki of the project.

Mail List server

The project utilized mailing lists quite extensively for communication between core partners, and a number of *ad hoc* mailing lists for specific organizational activities such as for receiving registrations to TT meetings. The mailing list server software used, EuresTools Mail List, includes a customised e-mail list server with Web front-end management. Features include virus-scan, anti-spam filters, an e-mail archive, and an easy-to-use Web interface for list owners. Through the Web interface, individual mailing lists can be flexibly defined and maintained according to the demands of the project.

Audio Conferencing

The project also utilized audio conferences between physical meetings for decision-making and collaborative working. The platform used for audio conferences, namely Eurescom Audio Conferencing is an essential communication service for the project. It has proven its efficiency in several earlier projects and was thus a clear choice for the EIFFEL SA as well. The service is fully automated and available 24/7. This means, audio conferences can be flexibly set up on short notice. Each audio conference has a permanent phone number and a permanent dial-in ID. The audio conferences can be scheduled via a Web-based front-end, specifically implemented for the project. This front-end helps the coordinator and the work package leaders to plan audio conferences and keep track of conference dates and participants.

3 Tools for the EIFFEL Think Tank

In addition to providing tools for the EIFFEL project itself, the EIFFEL Office had the responsibility for providing support for the Think Tank operations. Like in the case of project tools, also for the TT support tools responsibilities for deployment and support for the infrastructure were focussed on Eurescom. The need for open tool support regarding the TT was seen to be even more crucial than in the project case, since the "tool is also a message" and can either enhance or hinder open communications between partners. After careful deliberation and discussions Wiki was considered as the best general tool for different collaboration activities pursued by the TT. Additionally, more traditional tools such as mailing lists and document management systems were set up. Of these, mailing lists were in the end used extensively to coordinate the work, and to indicated major changes or additions in the Wiki, while document management systems were used in lesser extent.

Think Tank Wiki

A separate wiki was started and is made available to the TT. It was used both for off-line work to share content and to prepare documents, but it was also heavily used

during the TT meetings to track the agenda, for taking notes, and by break out sessions to prepare and present the draft statements to the plenary and serve as repository of the TT proceedings. It was planned also as a way to bridge the time between TT meetings and to be the tool for preparation of TT meetings by the TT community.

The TT wiki has a more fine-grained access control enabled than the project wiki, enabling amongst other functionalities separation between open and password-protected areas for content. By default all TT members are given user accounts and access to the wiki, including the rights to add and edit content in the common working areas. Several TT members emphasized the need to keep draft forms of discussions confidential and to keep the identities of individual draft contributors non-disclosed for privacy reasons.

Mailing Lists

Separate mailing lists have been set up for the TT using the same server infrastructure as described for the project mailing lists in the previous section. The mailing lists were organized into general lists as well as lists for the internal communications for the different areas of investigations as described earlier in the Deliverable D1.1. Due to similar privacy concerns as discussed above, full email lists and addresses are not made publicly available.

Document management system

The project has also selected and set up an instance of the BSCW document management system to enable collaborative drafting of documents beyond the possibilities offered by the TT wiki. The BSCW server enables simple storage and access to documents through a comfortable Web-based interface, and also supports advanced functionality such as locking of documents, refined version control etc.

In the end much of the collaboration on material took place directly within the wiki, so BSCW was used rather little. While simple, the file hosting capabilities of MediaWiki were often found to be sufficient by the TT members for storing working drafts of more advanced documents and for other purposes.

4 Activities supporting the Think Tank

In addition to setting up the tools, the EIFFEL Office initiated a number of support activities to assist the TT in its work.

Bibliography and database on related initiatives

At an early project meeting a decision was made to start and potentially later make available to the TT community, and eventually to the community at large, a bibliography of the main articles on the Future Internet and related technologies, visions/proposals, and efforts. This task was started on the internal project wiki, but later evolved into a much more extensive action, namely the establishment of the Future Internet wiki FIPedia.org.

Publishing

The key long term outcomes of the TT are documents such as review articles and position papers etc. The caretakers, members of the EIFFEL project, and selected additional project resources have assisted and will continue to assist the TT in the production of such documents and publications through both technological and editorial contributions. The tools described in the previous sections were put in place to facilitate gathering of content and collaborative authoring, a process in which the caretakers will participate as needed. Once the TT agrees that a drafted text represents common view and is ready for publication in a selected forum, the caretakers will again be ready to assist in the process by carrying out the finalization of the draft in the appropriate format and by being in touch with the corresponding publishing contacts. This was the process applied to the joint papers and other written material produced by the Think Tank.

Travel support

For assisting the participants in the various travel arrangements related to the first TT meeting the project also organized a limited secretarial help-desk travel support made available through email and telephone line. Advice was given on the eligible use of possible travel grants, support on booking hotel rooms, ground travel arrangements etc. For some of the long distance travelers, especially with tight schedules, the help desk was able to pre-book ground transportation with economical pricing helping to bring down the overall costs for participants and the project. Full advice and support service to fill in the various travel reimbursement forms required by the arranging organizations was also arranged, so as to ensure that those followed the specific travel rules, and assisting in checking the conformance of forms and bills against the local and EC imposed regulations.

5 Impact of Project Tools

This section discusses the impact of the EIFFEL tools related to the EIFFEL CSA, primarily developed and maintained by Eurescom. We divide the discussion into three main categories in line with the division made above when these tools were introduced:

- Public dissemination tools
- Project core-partner coordination tools
- Think Tank internal collaboration tools

We will discuss the TT-related tools in the next section while focussing here on the former two.

We shall first discuss the *public dissemination tools*. As discussed above the project set up web presence at two sites. The first of these is the publicly accessible project site <http://www.fp7-eiffel.eu/>, providing information about the operation of the EIFFEL Support Action, schedule of the TT meetings, public deliverables, and links to the documents and publications from the Think Tank. The project also maintains the site <http://www.future-internet.eu/> focused on the activities surrounding the Future Internet Assembly the project was in part initiating. Both of these sites have

been instrumental in the operation of the project, although from the wider impact point of view the latter has had more exposure in the community since its target audience extends beyond the EIFFEL TT. The site has become the *de facto* key source of information around European Future Internet activities, including announcements of meetings, documents produced from the various initiatives in the Future Internet space, and so on. More than 50000 users have accessed the site yearly, currently resulting in more than two million hits per year.

As for the *project coordination tools of the core partners*, the tool with highest impact has undoubtedly been the project wiki site. The MediaWiki-based collaborative environment has been used to work on all the different aspects of the project, including meeting organization, managing membership and contact information on Think Tank members as well as performing collaborative work on deliverables. The project wiki was also used as a basic filesharing platform for hosting draft and final versions of project documents. For finalization of the documents normal Microsoft Office tools have been used, in conjunction with the project wiki, which also includes support for version control and other usual document management functions. Finally, for daily collaboration, mailing list tools as well as audio conferencing setups have played a major role. The selected tools have been found to be both effective and secure. For example, maintenance of the mailing lists has been straightforward, there have been no problems related to spam or malware, and overall reliability of both the management tools and the mailing list itself has been high. Similar comments apply to the audio bridge.

6 Impact of Think-Tank Internal Collaboration Tools

After experimentation with a number of different collaboration and content production platforms, the key tool in the daily operation of the EIFFEL TT has become the Think Tank wiki, based on the same Mediawiki platform as the project-internal wiki. Discussion forum type of tools that we originally envisaged did not fit to highly dynamic but structured discussions of TT, and did not support collaborative document production in conjunction with the discussions, which has become the working mode of the TT. We also learned that as the TT started generating more momentum, the TT members wanted to become more active not only in participation and white paper writing but also in shaping the meetings and their agendas. For this purpose, a wiki-based collaboration environment for maintaining agendas and keeping notes on discussion including sharing of presentations and documents has turned out to be a very successful choice. However, certain pages on the wiki are enriched with a discussion area where individual TT members can post comments and contributions similar to a newsgroup. This turned out to be helpful for discussion-related issues, such as whitepaper production.

The wiki is physically hosted on the same server as the project wiki, and the TT wiki is logically separated through Mediawiki access control mechanisms, i.e., only core partners can access the project wiki. The TT wiki is employed for practically all the collaborative activities pursued within the TT. For example, all the meetings are planned as well as documented within the wiki, and all the produced documents have been edited in collaborative fashion in the wiki. Only in the final stages of editing has the text been taken into a more common document preparation platform,

such as LaTeX or Office tools. The final documents produced are likewise stored in the wiki.

The mailing list set up for the TT is also in active use, with emphasis on short-term collaboration, and discussions on specific issues raised during the document production. A number of separate lists have been set up to enable differentiation between audiences interested in various aspects of the TT work, although in practice especially meeting preparation discussions invariably take place on the general TT mailing list. The same mailing list management tools are used for the TT mailing lists as for the project itself, as discussed above.

7 Impact of Support Activities

For the gathering of bibliographical material as well as for disseminating Think Tank outcomes, the project has initiated an open community-based platform for gathering material, disagreements, and discussions on all the issues related to Future Internet activities. This platform, organized in the site <http://www.FIPedia.org> and based on the same MediaWiki platform as the other collaborative spaces utilized in the project, was opened to the public during Fall 2009, and has already gathered quite some momentum. While still considered to be work in progress, the site has already received a large number of contributions from the community, both TT members and the community at large. The site contains already almost 100 articles on different topics in the FI domain, and we expect it to get more impact once the new patch of white papers is finalized, and key issues from those white papers are also moved as content items into Fipedia. More details on the FIPedia.org site can be found in the deliverable D4.5, and its impact is discussed separately in deliverable D4.4.

The support activities related to travel costs for key TT participants continued through the running of the EIFFEL project. However, as one of the lessons learned during the first operational year of the project, the travel support activities have been moved as being responsibilities of the local organization of the different TT meetings. This was done mainly due to regulatory reasons, to overcome different issues related to financial regulations in Germany, causing difficulties in reimbursing external participants for travel taking place towards another partner site.

8 Conclusions

In this document we described the different tools used by the project and the Think Tank (TT) in its daily operations, as managed by the EIFFEL Office and in particular EIFFEL partner Eurescom. The primary purpose of the selected tools was to assist in collaboration and communication in the project and, more crucially, within the TT and its different subgroups. We also discussed some of the initiated support activities towards the TT. We have also given an update on the impact the different tools used within the project and the Think-Tank have had, and on the lessons learned during the first two years of the Think-Tank operation.

Our key conclusion is that wiki-based collaborative environments seem to be very well suited for both the project work as well as for community outreach through sites such as the FIPedia. Having the same user experience throughout the process,

from planning of meetings to finalization of content production has simplified both the use and management of our set of tools. However, the wiki-based approach cannot completely replace traditional collaboration tools such as audioconferencing tools, or proper word processing solutions for finalization of the produced documents.

Finally, proper tools for maintaining easily updated and visually pleasing web-presence are definitely needed as dissemination platforms. Especially the popularity and usefulness of the <http://www.future-internet.eu/> information portal has shown this in a very concrete manner.