

Open source in five municipalities in Groningen



This report was prepared by David Duijnmayr and Rishab Ghosh at MERIT, University of Maastricht, based on the study conducted for the Dutch OSOSS Programme published on August 30, 2004.

As part of an inquiry into the pragmatic applicability of Open Source solutions a Proof-of-Concept (POC) has been executed in five different municipalities located in the province Groningen, in the Netherlands. Although the five surveys/inquiries have different set-ups, they have enough similarity to be executed in a communal manner. The research is known as the “A7-project” and it is one of the reference projects of the Dutch Government’s OSOSS programme.

Organisational backgrounds

The five municipalities (Marum, Grootegast, Haren, Winschoten and Reiderland) have populations varying from 7.000 to 20.000 and ICT-management organisations from 3 to 6 FTEs. Some of the municipalities are co-operating closely in the field of (operational) automation. Grootegast and Marum, for instance, have identical environments set up which are supported by the same management organisation. The municipalities of Winschoten and Reiderland aim at a similar situation, and the first steps towards this goal have been taken. What the A7-municipalities have in common is their use of the CiVision applications from leading public sector IT solutions firm PinkRoccade. CiVision can be integrated with Open Source products. In addition, all municipalities indicated they would like to start using the Open Source office suite OpenOffice.org. Some of the municipalities would even like to take it a step further, which has been embodied into the scope of the research.

Table: Activities tested in the different municipalities

Municipality→	Grootegast	Marum	Haren	Winschoten	Riederland
OpenOffice.org under Linux & LTSP			X	X	X
Paired with Pink CiVision	X	X	X	X	X
Conversion of own formats	X	X	X	X	X
Novell eDirectory under Linux				X	X
Novell GroupWise under Linux				X	X
OpenOffice.org under Citrix	X	X			
PDA's paired with GroupWise				X	
Novell Bordermanager replaced				X	
Researching Linux Fat-clients			X		
Offering user applications			X	X	X

Research goals

The goal of the research is to gain new insights into a new Open Source/Open Standards orientated environment, without immediately phasing out all existing systems in the process. This would mean a nullification of previous investments, and also result in an elaborate migration path in a short period of time. Rather, by focussing now on the foundation for a new environment, it is possible to use the terms and strategy for changing from the existing systems and applications. In the short term, the emphasis is not on replacing, but on integrating with the existing systems. For the short term a “quick-win” policy has been chosen, with the possibility to expand the use of Open Source Software in the future. The total migration is spread over several years, in controllable isolated chunks, with minimal loss of capital.

One of the conditions is of course that the new products that will be selected in time fit within the strategy concerning Open Source and Open Standards. However, there will always be room for exceptions, since numerous Closed Source applications have no Open Source alternatives. In these cases, the rule is to choose a Closed Source application that applies Open Standards where possible, in order to promote the integration with other Open Source applications.

Approach

For executing the POC and drawing up the report the municipalities hired the company Footmark BV, an independent ICT-service company that has experience with the technical and organisational aspects of both “traditional” Closed Source and Open Source migration paths.

Because the five municipalities partly overlap in their technological details and wishes for their infrastructure, it is desirable to address the overlaps as such. By letting each municipality deal with a part of the entire project and the other municipalities trusting the functioning of that particular part, the available time has been used as efficiently as possible and as many topics as possible have been examined. This way a clear view on the (im)possibilities of the application of Open Source solutions has been created for these municipalities in a collaborative way. The reproducibility within these five municipalities is meaningful for other Dutch and possibly other European municipalities as well.

Altogether, the POC was executed over a six week period. In this period a test environment was set up for each municipality based on its own situation, in combination with its specific demands with regard to Open Source and Open Standards. In addition a report has been made for each municipality, in which the possibilities and investments for Open Source solutions are compared with the most common 'traditional' Closed Source solutions. In doing this the normal prices of the different products were assumed without taking into consideration bulk agreements or upgrade rights.

Conclusions

The results are similar for all municipalities. Migration costs (labour) are higher for Open Source (5-25%). However, the investments (hardware and licenses) are much lower.

Therefore, it is possible to save from 17.000 euros (municipality of Reiderland) up to almost 46.000 euros (municipality of Winschoten) in non-recurrent costs. The average direct cost-component of the TCO shows a reduction of about 308 euros per workstation in comparison to Closed Source. Again, this is not a replacement of all current systems, but an integration with those systems.

Introducing Open Source products always requires some getting used to the products by both users and managers. Managers need to acquire knowledge of, and experience with, the new environment. Besides training, it is desirable to take care of supervision, so as to fully embed the infrastructure in the user environment. Experience shows that supervision suffices for users, but additional training is possible. Training costs have been taken into account in the TCO calculations.

Moreover, the municipalities involved feel that OpenOffice.org is a good replacement for MS Office; with minor adaptations most existing files can be used in OpenOffice.org.

What does this mean for other municipalities?

Because the POC has been executed for five different municipalities it shows reproducibility, albeit on a modest scale. The results may be universally applicable to those municipalities of comparable size and complexity that use PinkRocade CiVision applications. At a more advanced stage this might also be true for municipalities which use the government IT solutions from the other main Dutch provider, Centric.

Further Information:

- [Dutch OSOSS Programme](#) (English)
- [Detailed study by Footmark](#) (Dutch)
- [PinkRocade CiVision product suite for municipalities](#) (Dutch)
- [Centric product suite for local government](#) (Dutch)

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