

## Attachments EU e-Gov Awards 07

CommunesPlone / PloneGov

### CommunesPlone PloneGov

To reflect the participation of other level of public administrations than local governments, the CommunesPlone project has been renamed PloneGov on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007<sup>t</sup>. It explains why articles refer to CommunesPlone.

We include in these attachments articles about CommunesPlone written by third parties :

1. The EU IDABC portal – <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/>
2. Flossimpact (report commissioned by the EU DG INFSO)
3. Public Sector and Open Source – PS-OSS (report commissioned by the EU DG INFSO) - <http://www.publicsectoross.info/>
4. A CommunesPlone case study published on the PS-OSS portal. - [http://www.publicsectoross.info/news/newsdetail.php?Id\\_news=10](http://www.publicsectoross.info/news/newsdetail.php?Id_news=10)

#### Weblinks

IDABC portal : <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/>

Flossimpact : [www.flossimpact.eu/](http://www.flossimpact.eu/)

PS-OSS : [www.publicsectoross.info/](http://www.publicsectoross.info/)

CommunesPlone.org (French, English, Spanish, Dutch) : [www.communesplone.org/](http://www.communesplone.org/)  
PloneGov.org (launched on June 1, 2007) : [www.plonegov.org/](http://www.plonegov.org/)

Description of the 3 projects founders of PloneGov.org : [www.plonegov.org/about](http://www.plonegov.org/about)  
List of towns and administrations involved in the project:  
[www.plonegov.org/references](http://www.plonegov.org/references)

News :

“3 open source e-Government projects merge and launch PloneGov.org”

<http://www.zeapartners.org/articles/launching-plonegov.org>

### I. IDABC information portal

<http://europa.eu.int/idabc/>

**(IDABC stands for Interoperable Delivery of European eGovernment Services to public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens)**

<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/5617/469>

BE: CommunesPlone project – Walloon Communes jointly opt for Open Source Software  
Open Source News – 13 June 2006 – Belgium – Policies and Announcements

Around ten Walloon (French-Speaking) Belgian Communes participate in the CommunesPlone project. In doing so, they aim to gain independence from IT services providers by developing, essentially by themselves and in a cooperative manner, applications and websites for their own use as well as for their citizens'. CommunesPlone's strategy mainly rests on two renowned multiplatform Open Source tools: Zope and Plone.

Zope, the application server, includes basic modules such as access management and security, as well as a workflow system, a web server, a database, etc. For the needs of his own project, a developer using Zope can utilize pre-developed modules that have been proofed by numerous users throughout the world. Plone is a content management system which allows people with no or limited technical knowledge to provide with content a tool interfaced in web mode, enabling them, for instance, to update the content of a website.

Apart from a greater independence from IT service providers, CommunesPlone's expected benefits are: to enhance the applications' consistency with the users' needs; to promote collaborative websites (managed by communal services, associations and businesses); to promote both the independence and the proficiency of the Communes' internal IT staff; to use the most recent technologies while avoiding licence fees; to ensure publication of sources with General Public License (GPL).

Until now, CommunesPlone has generated concrete and usable tools such as a module to order administrative documents on the Internet, a business directory and Communal websites (e.g [www.seneffe.be](http://www.seneffe.be)). Other tools are being currently developed including a certification module (through the eID card) and a documentary management tool. CommunesPlone is supported by the Union of (Walloon) Cities and Municipalities, which takes actively part in development.

## ***II. FLOSS Impact excerpts about CommunesPlone and Zea Partners*** [www.flossimpact.eu/](http://www.flossimpact.eu/)

The European Commission has commissioned the Flossimpact study to explore the impact of free and libre open source software on the EU economy.

In the Flossimpact report<sup>1</sup>, the project CommunesPlone, lead by local governments, is presented as an ICT project unusual in terms of opportunity for innovation, standardization and economy of scale.

In the report, Zea Partners is also presented as an ***innovative business model part of a thriving new economic ecosystem***. It also includes a number of references about Plone and Zope, outlining the maturity reached by these technologies in term of technical achievement and community organization.

### **a) CommunesPlone**

Flossimpact reports also the CommunesPlone experience: "Smaller public administrations, like SME (and often with SME) working together to develop innovative FLOSS-based solutions. This sort of "pooling" among (small and large) public sector organizations can lead

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/ict/policy/doc/2006-11-20-flossimpact.pdf>

to significant service improvements and cost savings, as noted by the “Pooling Open Source Software” study published by the European Commission.

The Communesplone project is an example: it is an initiative within local governments (in Belgium). After a year existence, over 12 local governments are involved, publicly sharing FLOSS applications built upon the Plone content management platform (supported by members of the Zea SME network).

The project has already attracted interest in several EU countries and abroad, and highlights the potential of innovation FLOSS can provide to public administration. Its impact is unusual in terms of opportunity for innovation, standardization and economy of scale while gaining independence from large IT providers."

## **b) Zea Partners**

Flossimpact explains that Zea Partners brings together SME from several countries that support or develop the FLOSS content management systems Zope, Plone and Silva. Founded by founders of those FLOSS projects, ZEA includes 25 SME from 10 European countries as well as 4 non-European partners: from the US, South Africa, India and Argentina.

Zea provides promotion, training and coordination services as well as some degree of technical support to members, each of who specialize in their own application domains, and usually (but not necessarily) their own regions. Acting as a network makes it easier to approach large clients, and their collective client list is impressive, said the report, from eBay.com, Philips Research and London-based IMS, Europe's leading investment multi-manager, to Oxfam America, ETH Zurich and the Rotterdam Police Department.

The Plone/Zope Floss ecosystem is much larger than the Zea association itself. SME and individuals involved in this ecosystem are thriving and growing. Based on available data – lists of Zope service providers – a conservative estimate would set a lower bound of about 500 SMEs worldwide exclusively providing services and consulting based on Plone and Zope. The real figure could be higher, as some SME do not advertise the FLOSS brand names, but focus on providing customized services.

## **III. Public Sector and Open Source - PS-OSS (draft report)**

[www.publicsectoross.info/](http://www.publicsectoross.info/)

The European Commission has commissioned a study to explore the potential impact if the Public Sector were to release its software open source (PS-OSS). The project CommunesPlone, based on the renowned open source applications Plone/Zope, is investigated as a practical example of mutualisation between local governments.

Here are excerpts from PS OSS draft version.

### **a) PS-OSS excerpts about CommunesPlone**

« The software development and maintenance capacities of the municipalities that form the core of the CommunesPlone network are limited. This lack has been balanced through a close interaction of these municipalities with the Plone OSS community and Zea Partners an international network of SME.

From the scratch, the whole project was modeled on the PLONE community organization and development practices. We like to consider this as a fourth type of programming and maintenance capacities for public sector OSS activities (...).

Another aspect in which this model resembles the Extremadura case is that it has a spatial – or in other words – societal – dimension right from the scratch, as it aims at integrating more and more municipalities and commercial partners across Europe. »

## b) CommunesPlone case studies (by Xavier Heymans)

### Case study:

## CommunesPlone an experience of software mutualization by local governments

[http://www.publicsectoross.info/news/newsdetail.php?id\\_news=10](http://www.publicsectoross.info/news/newsdetail.php?id_news=10)

**Xavier Heymans**  
**Zea Partners**  
**[www.zeapartners.org](http://www.zeapartners.org)**

### Abstract

*CommunesPlone.org success results from a close collaboration between Belgian and French local governments, the Plone Open Source Community and Zea Partners an international network of SME.*

*The towns of Seneffe and Sambreville (Belgium) jointly started the project. In 2 years, it spread to 15 Belgian and French local governments. This fast growing project has the potential to spread to new countries and to reach 10% of Walloon local authorities before end 2007. The roots of its success may be found in early decisions:*

- *to model processes on proven practices of a successful Open Source Community,*
- *to involve OS experts to coach the IT team of Sambreville,*
- *to be open to collaboration from other towns and experts,*
- *to maintain a close relationship with the local user group and SME.*

*The project is a clear example of FLOSS enabling innovation within public organization and its benefits to the local economy. The project close relationship with the Plone OS Community and SME brings additional benefits as sharing best practices on collaborative work and speeding up international dissemination.*

### Keywords :

- *Plone : open source web Content Management System (CMS) built on Zope.*
- *Zope : open source web application server.*

### **The project CommunesPlone: why and how?<sup>2</sup>**

15 Belgian Communes and French Mairies (all local governments) participate in the CommunesPlone project. In doing so, they aim to gain independence from IT services providers by developing, essentially by themselves and in a cooperative manner, applications and websites for their own use as well as for their citizens'. CommunesPlone strategy mainly rests on two renowned multiplatform Open Source tools: Zope and Plone.

Apart from a greater independence from IT service providers, CommunesPlone expected

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<sup>2</sup> Based on IDABC Open source news, June 13-2006 :  
<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/5617/469>

benefits are: to enhance the applications' consistency with the users' needs; to promote collaborative websites (managed by communal services, associations and businesses); to promote both the independence and the proficiency of the Communes' internal IT staff; to use the most recent technologies while avoiding license fees; to ensure publication of sources with General Public License (GPL).

Until now, CommunesPlone has generated concrete and usable tools such as:

- a module to order administrative documents on the Internet,
- a business directory and Communal websites,
- a workflow to manage town deliberation.

Other tools being developed include a certification module (through the eID card) and a documentary management tool. CommunesPlone is supported by the Union of Walloon Cities and Municipalities UVCW, which takes actively part in the project.

### ***The beginning: why an open source solution? Was there a clear-cut strategy for the execution of the idea?***

The project leader had clear goals: to reduce supplier dependency and be open to collaboration. M. Lambillote, IT manager of the town of Sambreville, explains<sup>3</sup> his decision to move to Floss as “to solve problems related to suppliers dependency and that functional needs of the administration were not completely met by proprietary software”. Even if he had short listed Plone for technical reasons, the final decision to move to Open Source was only taken after attending in November 2004, a Plone Belgium Community meeting. The contacts with the Plone Community gave him confidence that he could get advice from “Senior” FLOSS Public Users<sup>4</sup> **and** local support from OS experts and SME.

### ***International dissemination and strategy***

CommunesPlone is raising interest in several groups:

**-Local governments-** the project provides a practical example of successful collaboration and benefits of mutualization.

**-SME-** are attracted by the project close relationship with the Plone Community and Zea Partners<sup>5</sup> an international association regrouping Plone SME.

In response to international interest, CommunesPlone.org internationalization started mid 2006 (French, Dutch, English, Spanish). The strategy is to extend CommunesPlone membership within and outside the EU in order to match international funding criteria for egovernment projects.

As local governments do not have much cross border contacts, the role of Zea Partners and its member SME should be outlined for disseminating the project internationally. SME from several countries are directly involved in CommunesPlone (Belgium, France, Argentina)

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<sup>3</sup> [www.sambreville.be](http://www.sambreville.be), based on a presentation at a Plone Community event in Brussels - Nov 2006

<sup>4</sup> Royal Museum for Central Africa, Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences, University of Ghent, University of Namur, ...

<sup>5</sup> ZeaPartners counts as members 25 innovative SME located in 14 countries and 4 continents. Zea headquarters are located nearby most CommunesPlone members.

<sup>6</sup> UWCM provides central support to the 262 Communes (towns) of Wallonia, Belgium. [www.uvcw.be/english](http://www.uvcw.be/english)

<sup>7</sup> The IPR protection was designed by Eben Moglen, lawyer of the Free Software Foundation (FSF)

<sup>8</sup> Open source project management: <http://www.zeapartners.org/about/methodology>

while a second group of SME is analyzing opportunities (Spain, UK, The Netherlands, South Africa). It is important to outline that SME from 10 countries already had a direct contact with CommunesPlone project leader.

### ***How are legal aspects being addressed?***

The code produced is covered by a GPL license. Investigations are underway to evaluate potential improvements:

- A lawyer working for the Union of Walloon Cities and Municipalities<sup>6</sup> is investigating Belgian regulations and possible impact on the project.
- CommunesPlone is closely related to Plone itself. The Plone Foundation<sup>7</sup> is protecting Plone IPR. An analysis is being done on the feasibility to extend Plone IPR protection to CommunesPlone.

### ***Best practices – factors of success***

#### ***1. A bottom-up strategy to move to open source***

***2. Be practical – start small-*** To maintain independence from suppliers while building up a project open to collaboration, CommunesPlone was modeled on the Plone Community organization and development practices<sup>8</sup>. BubbleNet, a local SME was involved and coached the town IT team on collaborative development practices. A second town Seneffe and the Union of Walloon Cities and Municipalities soon joined Sambreville, bringing in additional expertise and giving visibility to the project.

***3. Be attractive to new players-*** Newcomers get direct benefits in joining the project: the ability to reuse software and to participate to CommunesPlone activities. The project facilitates human resources development (training, coaching and exchange of best practices) by pooling towns IT experts. The result is a motivating team spirit.

***4. Values-*** Public Sector and OS communities share similar values on collaboration and work done in the public interest. These values are key in developing a trustworthy environment between actors from different working environment (public sector, SME, OS Community).

***5. Clear focus on results-*** Based on FLOSS community practice, CommunesPlone members meet regularly. Activities are focused on programming, resolving practical issues, sharing knowledge and expertise.

***6. Motivating environment - economy of scale-*** IT teams in local government are often small organizations with similar size to Floss SME. It facilitates collaboration between actors and the ability to exchange best practices from several backgrounds as local government, OS Community and SME. Results are a motivating working environment enabling innovation.

***7. Limited investment and low financial risk-*** The initial budget of CommunesPlone (involving already 15 towns in 2 countries) was low compared to traditional IT projects. The seed funding totaled 40k euro dedicated to coaching/training on collaborative development. So far, financial resources result mostly from a better use of existing manpower (no additional budget) by pooling resources and focusing investment on a limited number of developments.

***8. Economic benefit of involving SME-*** The involvement of SME has a positive impact on the CommunesPlone project. The development of a network of potential suppliers reduces the risk of dependency and speeds up regional and international dissemination.

### ***Factors of risks***

***1. Taking in charge the FLOSS project management-*** The model of Floss development is

new and often misunderstood. A risk would be to under evaluate the work required to sustain and manage a growing mutualization project. Some activities as coordination, information, training, ... should ideally be taken in charge by a central body. It is unclear who will take over this work and how it will be funded.

**2. Resistance-opposition-** The success of a bottom up project may raise opposition from traditional top down administrative structure. It is a risk although, as the project grows, obvious benefits are likely to help a change of mentality.

**3. Diluting focus-** CommunesPlone focus is to pool resources for developing applications. The project success is now attracting a new profile of towns interested in using software and requiring support for its installation. The coexistence of this new group will require addressing new issues.

**4. Human resources and missing skills-** A key factor of success was to model the project practices on the experience of an open source community. As the projects grows, new skills will be needed (example : for managing an open source project, coaching a community, ...) these skills are new for most CommunesPlone members as well as to the authorities supporting the project. It may be a challenge to address some upcoming issues. The involvement of OS Community experts may be necessary, but who should centralize this work and how to fund it is unclear.

### **Conclusion – Challenges**

CommunesPlone is an example of the benefits open source and mutualization offers to the Public Sector. The project also supports the development of an innovative economic ecosystem including several actors as local governments, SME and an open source Community. In this particular case, the Floss community took in charge and “at no charge” part of the initial investment in term of free promotion, community events to build up confidence, coaching, transfer of knowledge... A future challenge is that clear rules and funding models should support Floss initiatives in the Public Sector **and also** benefit the underlying OS community.

**Source :**

Case study proposed by Xavier Heymans to "Public sector and Open source", a report commissioned by the European Commission [www.publicsectoross.info](http://www.publicsectoross.info)