Finland Illuminated

Surrounded by majestic countryside, members of the KDE community met in Tampere, Finland. Sponsored by Intel and Nokia, this conference was all about the bright future of KDE and Qt.

By Markus Feilner

I t's early July – 61°N, 23°E, fewer than 400km from the polar circle – and the sun pounds on Tampere, the biggest city in Finland's hinterland, for 18 hours a day, causing the temperature to rocket to around 30° Celsius.

Tampere

In the Tampere suburb Nokia, Finnish engineer Fredrik Idestam founded the company that bears this name back in 1865. Exploiting the wide stretches of forest around the idyllically situated town, the company that has become the pride of Finland originally produced paper products and then "legendary" Wellington boots. The company finally shifted to mobile communications and took a detour via Norway (Qt) to open up to the Open Source Community.

This year's KDE developer conference, Akademy [1], owed its location in the forests 180km north of Helsinki to sponsorship from the cellphone manufacturer. Supported by the Finnish center for free software (COSS) [2], more than 400 committed programmers and major players from the community attended the conference.

The first two days of the conference were hosted by the university on a campus designed in 1970's concrete style with spartan buildings. The delegates standing in line for admission (Figure 1) were welcomed by a flock of yellow rubber ducks [3]. "They're from Qt," KDE developer Adrian De Groot explained in his welcoming speech, "and they can help you with debugging so take good care of them!"

The delegates were convinced of how seriously the corporations take their hard work when MeeGo CEO Valtteri Halla (Figure 2), held his keynote. The Finn outlined an ambitious scenario titled "Redefining the Linux Desktop," in which he explained Qt's role from handheld smartphones, through net-top TVs and PCs, to in-vehicle infotainment (IVI) on Intel or ARM platforms.

Qt for All

On top of this, Nokia promised to open up the not-entirely-successful Ovi app store to open source developers and integrate Qt in Symbian phones. "In the next few years, Qt-enabled handhelds will leave their competitors, Android and iPhone, well behind them," Halla prophesied. He then praised the KDE community, saying: "You made a major contribution to this."

This cooperation is also useful for KDE: The MeeGo KOffice project alone saw more than 1,000 patches float upstream, said Halla. MeeGo 1.1 will debut on handhelds and in vehicles in October of this year. If things go the way Intel and Nokia envisage them, Qt will establish itself as the standard interface on everyday electronics products in the next few years.

Desperately Seeking …

Intel wants to be part of this development, so they sent Dirk Hohndel, X11 and SUSE pioneer and now "Chief Linux and Open Source Technologist," to Tampere to spend several days. Intel wasn't being entirely altruistic; Hohndel had a mission to canvas Qt programmers. "We could use 30 to 40 experienced developers," Hohndel confided to *Linux Magazine*, "but unfortunately, we can't find any. But they would be in good company. Anybody interested in working in a large team with open source experts like Alan Cox should contact us; it doesn't matter where they live."

Figure 1: Delegates learning about the program while waiting to check in.

Intel is in good company; most of the corporations represented at Akademy were complaining about the difficulty they had finding good developers. Pressure is increasing in line with the demand for products. This is obviously a motivating factor, and the KDE Community was very optimistic.

Technology and the World Cup

The days were jam-packed with technical talks from developers such as Till Adam, Torsten Rahn, Thomas McGuire, Lukáš Tvrdý, and Sebastian Kügler presenting the latest developments from their own projects. The subjects included KDE PIM (Kontact and company) for smartphones; Marble, which will be learning routing as a replacement for Google Maps; Krita, with the ability to import Photoshop paintbrushes; and Qt Multitouch for mobile devices.

Some of the later talks fell victim to the World Cup, with many German and Argentinian participants keen to watch the quarterfinals. The organizers provided a room at the university with a video projector, a TV link, and a highly entertaining commentary in Finnish.

Night Time: Love Hotel

After one of the legendary Akademy parties in the "Love Hotel" [4], a popular disco in Tampere, the delegates were treated to one of Finland's amazing "silver" nights. Although the sun does disappear briefly behind the northern horizon, no stars are in the sky, which is a deep blue at three in the morning, and the streets of Tampere are by no means dark or deserted.

An Apple for KDE

A keynote on Sunday morning caused quite a stir: Canadian Aaron Seigo delivered a passionate appeal to users and developers to market KDE in a more forceful and positive way. "Just imagine a major US corporation marketing its latest product like we advertise KDE," Seigo said. "It would sound like this: Well, we have this phone, and it's really cool. But it doesn't do Flash, and it doesn't do multitasking, either, and the only way to get data of any kind onto it is by using our own proprietary software."

According to Siego, what counts is coolness: "That's marketing: Point to the

benefits. iPhone and iPad are deliberately limited by their vendor, of course!" But: "People just don't care," he said.

Seigo went on to appeal to the KDE community to focus on the more positive aspects rather than emphasizing the negative side. "More developers than ever are working on cleaning this up," he said. "The product is right, and now it's time for something new: elegance!"

Finlayson, Demola

After two days of talks and announcements, the week continued at breakneck pace, featuring Q certification, workshops, and BOFs [5]. This part of the conference took place at the Finlayson site, a former factory building (Figure 3) in the middle of the city.

The brick buildings of the Demola conference center hosted the Annual General Meeting of the KDE society [6], followed by a multi-hour workshop on "QT for Mobiles." The organizers deny rumors that the kids from the Manga conference next door to the university were the reason for the move, but there was no denying that a few bizarre-looking characters snuck into official photos of KDE developers [7] (lead image).

On Tuesday and Wednesday at Demola, the organizers turned to the Midgard [8] Open Source Content Management Framework and its integration into KDE via Qtmidgard.

Night Swimming

The sponsors were pleased with the feedback from participants. The sessions were packed, and leading developers were in attendance. The leisure activities fit the bill: People met in Tamapere city center (Figure 4) or at cool Finnish lakes, or they joined an organized trip to Helsinki. For more, check out the Akademy 2010 group on Flickr [9]. ∎∎∎

INFO

[1] KDE Akademy: *http://akademy.kde.org*

[2] Finnish Centre for Open Source: *http://www.coss.fi/en*

[3] QT Ducks: *http://developer.qt.nokia.com/duck*

[4] Love Hotel: *http://www.lovehotel.fi/tampere*

[5] Birds of a Feather: *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birds_of_a_Feather_%28computing%29*

Figure 2: Looking to redefine the desktop: MeeGo CEO Valtteri Halla.

Figure 3: The brick building of the Finlayson factory, a monument to the industrial past of uptown Tampere.

Figure 4: Midnight in Tampere. In the short and bright Finnish summer nights, Finns and others take to the streets of the city.