

The Spodeli Project



Free Software Macedonia

<http://www.freesoftware.org.mk>

info@slobodensoftver.org.mk

About Spodeli

"Spodeli" is an ongoing project of Free Software Macedonia aimed at promoting collaborative culture and sharing of knowledge. It consists of several weekly events divided in two main groups of activities. The two main events are "Knowledge Exchange" and "Share cinema", they are designed to address needs of several target groups.

"Share cinema" is a weekly event where we show documentaries, cultural works produced by communities and movies licenced under the creative commons licence. The topics are on the crossroad between "sharing", "culture" and "technologies".

"Knowledge exchange" is a weekly open, free and public workshop where we provide training in new and innovative technologies. Experts give presentations of new technologies, usually in a practical manner with the aim of building a project around this technology. "Spodeli" is addressing the needs of sharing knowledge about publicly available cutting-edge technologies to people that want to learn or use such technologies to improve their work, learn something new or increase their competitiveness on the labour market which would improve their possibilities of finding employment.

Short Term Objectives

The "Spodeli" project needs, and is providing mainly opportunity for sharing knowledge through weekly events organized in a local open space (hacklab). The short-term objectives of the projects can be summarised in three points:

- Sharing of knowledge and skills between enthusiasts and those seeking education and skills in new technologies based on free and open source software;
- Providing public, free and open access to events where people can learn, show and share their knowledge, as well as provide space for showcasing examples of community driven production or collaborative culture;
- Helping people improve their knowledge benefiting their competitiveness and opportunity to find employment by enabling them to use new and innovative technologies based on free and open source software.

- A hackerspace (also referred to as a hacklab, makerspace or creative space) is a location where people with common interests, usually in computers, technology, or digital or electronic art can meet, socialise and/or collaborate.
- The hackerspace also offers tools and infrastructure to its visitors that would otherwise be hard to come by or unpractical for people to have at home or work. The idea is that by combining resources together bigger things can arise.

Long Term Objectives

The long-term objectives of the "Spodeli" project is to help build or improve a culture of sharing and cooperation as means of education, capacity building, skill improvement and production. This approach ensures faster development in the fields of technology, but at the same time provides a basis for more humane understanding about access to knowlegde, culture and technology.

In the sense of the long-term objective, we see a need of the project to grow outside the capital city, where, at this time, most of the activities are happening. We also need to find a sustainable way of maintaing an open space where we will continue to hold our events that are and always will remain open to the public.

At the same time, another objective is that the activities in thematic sense should diversify. These activites of alternative training, through sharing of knowledge and collaboration, would provide a sound basis of a much broader wave of literacy in new technologies enabling different populations access to valuable skills and knowledge. Among the population would be young people who could not afford to pay for training, but this skill is essential for them finding employment.

Project Idea

The idea of "sharing" is an inherent idea of the free software movement as well as the free culture initiatives. It is by these ideas that the GNU project was created, a project which inspired a plethora of free software. Similarly, Wikipedia was also born from the idea of sharing knowledge. Our organisation has been promoting these ideas since 2002. In this sense, all of the activities of our organisation were based around sharing of skills and knowledge.

We believe that it is of the utmost importance to continue to maintain an open space to hold our weekly events where we use the expertise of our activists in the weekly workshops. There was a need for combining these initiatives for sharing with issues like life-long learning and informal education that enables different populations access to technology beyond simple usage of personal computers. We were familiar with similar successful stories in Croatia, where a similar community organized "Razmjena vjestina" in the MAMA club in Zagreb.

Additionally, we thought that such idea would provide the opportunity for students and unemployed for improving their ICT skills in the fields of free software technology.

Current Status of the Project

The "Spodeli" project is still active and has so far met the short-term objectives. We've been organizing events on different topics in the local hacklab called KIKA for two years now, most of them being the workshops where we provided training to people in new and innovative technologies. We are maintaining a blog (<http://blog.spodeli.org>) in order to better promote the activities of the project. In addition, our activists have contributed in providing part of the content of the workshops to be available on-line, on sites that contain large knowledge base about free software technologies such as <http://wiki.spodeli.org> and <http://ubuntu.linux.net.mk/forum/>. Currently, we are working on "exporting" the "Spodeli" activities outside of the capital city. We have conducted workshops that showcase the "Spodeli" activities outside Skopje in the towns of Strumica, Kumanovo and Ohrid. However, The very limited budget consisted of contributions by the activists is preventing us from doing more, but according to our long-term plans, we have set objectives to aid local free software communities in other parts of the county to develop similar initiatives as part of the "Spodeli" project. Additionally, we see the future implementation of the project as becoming an elaborate schema of different workshops providing free training on specific topics to people.

We currently hold weekly workshops four days a week:

- **Monday** - GNU/Linux First Aid at hacklab KIKA
- **Wednesday** - Mobile app development / Art of Computer programming at hacklab KIKA
- **Thursday** - Ruby / Python programming at hacklab KIKA
- **Saturday** - Spodeli Znaenje (Knowledge Exchange) at hacklab KIKA
- Share Cinema or Spodeli Kino is held every second Wednesday of the month in

collaboration with NGO Compressor.

Context

The "Spodeli" project is being conducted in Skopje, the capital city of Macedonia. As mentioned in the long-term objectives, we have plans about broadening the activities outside Skopje.

The available knowledge base on the "Spodeli" workshops is providing opportunities for learning alternative usage of new technologies with emphasis of practical and real life examples. One very important effect is that people who could not afford to pay for formal courses could visit the workshops. This would enable them to acquire skills that would give them advantage in different situations, and would at least provide equal opportunities for employment for those that are unemployed. The unemployment in Macedonia is one of the key social problems today, so we regard our efforts as aiding to overcome such situation.

But the project goes beyond this with providing more than simple ICT skills. In our efforts to maintain the project within public cultural spaces in Skopje and put it on the cultural map of the city, we are promoting technology literacy, sharing of knowledge and collaboration in production as important part of social life itself.

Originality and Replicability

The "Spodeli" project was being developed partly as an implementation of a similar project in Croatia. It is now part of a regional cooperation of similar activities in Belgrade and Zagreb of people in the free software communities.

The original aspect of the "Spodeli" project (and similar ones in the other countries) is that it is developed in public cultural spaces and therefore put in a broader context than a simple training in PC skills. It is a common thread of the activities to show the connection between culture, sharing and technology, which in essence is the core motivation for the future development in the communities.

The openness as a key aspect of these activities ensures that the ideas, methods and

products of the activities of "Spodeli" could be replicated by others interested to continue or further develop similar events. We regard that replicating the achievements and experience of the "Spodeli" project would ensure easier growth of the project by others. The initiatives of other free software communities in other towns is the key of sustainable growth of the "Spodeli" project elsewhere.

In addition, we've already organized a few events in larger Macedonian cities including, Kumanovo, Shtip, Strumica and Ohrid and we hope to continue to collaborate with the local communities there to help them replicate an open space where they could perform all the activities that can only be found in the capital at the moment.

Output

During a period of five years, under the umbrella of the "Spodeli" project, we have organised more than 500 events. Numerous people had the opportunity to share their know-how or show others in order to help them increase their knowledge.

On the "Share cinema" events, we have shown numerous documentaries providing information on various topics related to new and innovative technologies, media and culture. In addition, these types of events are providing space for promoting cultural or educational works that are a product of communal or collaborative efforts or are being open and publicly available for use. These weekly events started at the end of 2006 and are ongoing project of our organisation.

On the "Knowledge Exchange" events, in the form of workshops, we have provided training in the latest technologies based on free software and, by methods of sharing knowledge helped many people solve their problems or enabling them advance their skills. These workshops are weekly events that started at the end of 2006.

One of the notable effects of these events was that they became a service center for the "One Laptop Per Child" (<http://olpc.org>) pilot implementation in Skopje, where we were helping 50 children if they had troubles with their laptops, solved one of the main networking problems of the OLPC implementation and translated the software interface in Macedonian.

Additionally, being part of a broader "Knowledge Exchange" effort in the region, we have been involved in regional meetings in Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Hercegovina where we meet with the local communities there and exchange experiences, ideas and knowledge about technology, managing hackerspaces and basically trying to bring up the

regional collaboration and communication between communities from all these countries.

Participation of the Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries are involved in two different roles. Their primary role is to learn about different topics that are discussed on the workshops. The motto of the workshops is "who doesn't know asks, and who knows explains". So, the main principle is that people that want to learn something new, ask for it and someone from the community then tries to explain. This ensures that the workshops address practical problems that the beneficiaries face in their course of study or work. At the same time, the principle of sharing knowledge is involving the beneficiaries in the other way around, and frequently they are in a position to share their skills to other participants and try to solve others problems. This is also beneficial to the growth of the community, which is very important part of the sustainability of the project.

Sustainability

The activities of sharing are inherent to the free software movement and have been a major method of project conduct in the organization and voluntaryism has been the primary way of involvement. Therefore, there is a dedication of our members to continue this project and provide their expertise to the "Spodeli" workshops.

In addition, if there is a funding for such activities, on which we work on acquiring, we plan to further develop these activities. Such funding would be used to rent permanent space for these activities. In these conditions, the project "Spodeli" could then diversify into a number of specific weekly workshops ranging from "advanced Internet usage", through system administration to introduction to simple programming, where practical, real life usage is the underlying principle. Unlike the current situation, such space would provide opportunity for at least 5 weekly events and continuous work on same topics during a longer period. The products of the workshops, being publicly available could also be used as part of commercial projects of companies that could aid further sustainability.

Background Information

The activities of the NGO are divided into two different areas. The first area is covering Free Software on a technical, technological and logistic level, and the other is dealing with the policy, social and ethical issues concerning Free Software and issues related to Open Standards and Free Culture.

We participate in activities organized by other entities for which we have received an invitation:

- In 2010 and 2011, we have worked together with the "Metamorphosis Foundation" and the Macedonian Ministry for Information Society and Administration in developing the National Policy for Free Software
- In 2007 we worked with UNDP Macedonia on their OLPC Project. We were responsible for upgrading the software on all of the XO laptops that we used in the selected primary schools;
- In 2006/2007 we worked on the project "Support to e-Governance initiatives based on Free/Open Source Software at the local level in FYR Macedonia" that was implemented by UNDP Macedonia;
- In 2006 we organized an international workshop on FLOSS usage in Government and Education in Macedonia;
- In 2005 we collaborated with the task force that prepared the e-Citizens pillar of the National Strategy for Information Society, a document later adopted by the Macedonian Parliament.

Most of the work is publicly promoted on events such as Software freedom day and annual installation festivals. The organization also works on organizing informal education workshops and such as free trainings, presentations and workshops as a part of the "Spodeli" project.

Collaboration with the Universities in Skopje and Bitola has been established in the form of lectures for the students of these public academic institutions. The students at the department of journalism and e-business in Skopje and at the Technical faculty in Bitola attend these annual lectures. The work in Bitola is done by a local GNU/Linux Users Group - Lugola.

Public awareness initiatives are also a big part of the work of the NGO. Also we monitor government activities in implementing e-government solutions by releasing software that is for obligatory use. We achieved world fame with our Free Software Flood in 2004.