

ConT_EXt meeting 2023

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17th ConT_EXt meeting took place from 10 to 16 September 2023, again in Sibřina near Prague.

Per aspera ...

On the one hand, this meeting was “same as every other year”, since we had already met twice here, in the homestead of the Škoda family. The same cosy rooms, the same catering in the pub vis-à-vis, mostly the same old acquaintances, the usual excursion, the usual garden party and the usual internet problems. On the other hand, a few things were different, of course: there were new faces and a lot to learn.

It hasn't been a good year for our context group. There were ongoing troubles with our bank; the RAID controller in our Dutch server *Zapf*, which was due to be replaced, broke down; and shortly before the meeting, the Slovenian server *Lioness* died. *Lioness* was running important parts of our infrastructure, including the build farm that is also used for T_EXlive.



Fig. 1. Working on details



Fig. 2. What will we drink for breakfast?

The meeting was slightly afflicted by Taco cancelling on short notice due to illness, and also Jano, the organiser, didn't feel fit. But we were in good spirits anyway and could react flexibly to the organisational and technical challenges.

My journey seemed likely to end at Frankfurt main station, since the ICE tracks were blocked and all long-distance trains were delayed for several hours. Originally I had planned to take the train for the whole trip, and was looking forward to trying Czech

public transport. Therefore I booked an early train, in case I missed a connection. But then Harald offered to pick up Wolfgang and me in Schwabing, which sounded faster and more comfortable. Then, I had allowed time for a walk in Nuremberg on the way. Since I had to travel by local traffic from Frankfurt to Schwabing in the end, Harald and Wolfgang waited two hours for me. Finally we arrived just in time for dinner.

The next challenge was waiting: In my understanding there was already a solution for online participation. I didn't understand that I should prepare it. But we already had experience of streaming the meeting via Senfcall's BigBlueButton servers. Hans brought a video mixer, which simplified switching between several computers (but of course there were laptops with video outlets for which nobody had an adapter).

The DSL connection of the venue worked on the evening of arrival. But it was dead in the morning, and we had to use our mobile phones for internet access on the first day, until a hurriedly acquired LTE router brought us back online. Its prepaid credit was exhausted far too quickly, but luckily the DSL connection was working again. This additional fun factor caused repeated changes to the programme, because the contributions of Taco and other remote participants weren't possible when scheduled. And since the programme website, temporarily moved from *Lioness*, was only accessible by Taco via SSH, we lost our overview a bit.



Fig. 3. Lunch break in a hidden backyard



Fig. 4. Astronomical clock at the town hall

... ad astra

Our excursion, however, went smoothly: On the only somewhat rainy day of the week, a small tour coach brought us to Prague, where we met a city guide at the monument for Johannes Kepler and Tycho Brahe, to have a guided tour where these astronomers had lived and worked.

We saw several stations from the life of the two astronomers and learned a lot about the history of astronomy and its protagonists. Then we enjoyed our lunch break in

a backyard craft brewery, which Jano introduced to us as his second living room. We could savour the beer from the craft brewery later ‘at home’ in Sibřina. There was alcoholic and non-alcoholic beer. Even though some participants wanted a nap, the guided tour continued afterwards. Seeing at least Charles Bridge and the astronomical clock is an obligatory part of a visit to Prague.

In the evening we were exhausted. But we didn’t miss the garden party in the neighborhood, where Jano’s friends, ‘as always’, had prepared a delicious buffet. The evening got late...

Giving away secrets

But I’m jumping ahead. Before the excursion we already had two content-rich days behind us.

Hans and Mikael (remotely), of course, explained extensively their new ConT_EXt features, for example, the enhancements in typesetting math, and multi-stage (‘granular’) paragraph breaking.

Besides the unscheduled server problems, some Pragma servers that are partly used for ConT_EXt projects were replaced, not by new servers but by used laptops. This reduced energy consumption so much that it more than compensated for the much increased price of electricity, and even processing speed improved a bit. The same laptop recipe proved itself in a commercial T_EX project, where thousands of pages get processed nightly.

In this context, Hans explained what he could optimise in the code of ConT_EXt and LuaMetaT_EX, and what he could not. For example, layout calculations are generally not able to be done in parallel in T_EX, so that all variants of T_EX can only use one processor core.

Gained in practice

Ton Otten presented the very pleasingly designed ConT_EXt manual for the contributors of the Math4All¹ project. Unfortunately, it won’t be open to the public, because it’s focused on the special requirements and macros of this project.

Massimiliano Farinella offered a retrospective on the completed MEO² project: 50 volumes of 500 to 1000 pages each, processed in HTML and typeset in ConT_EXt (or InDesign) via an online environment that he developed. Even though it had been used for additional books, Massi wanted to redesign the system. Because the system had ‘proliferated’ in an ad hoc way and had become sprawling. He’s working on a graphical editor that uses the internal format of Pandoc and can thus use its conversion features

¹ www.math4all.nl

² *Marx-Engels Opere*, edizionilottacomunista.com/edizioniELC/public/libri_opere_marxengels.php



Fig. 5. Ton Otten reports from the Math4All project

for a wide range of text formats. The current state is already used in production, but the code³ isn't yet published.

Pavneet Arora introduced us to his documentation of extensive installations of light and sound systems. And independently, how he organises information on paper.

Wolfgang Schuster showed step by step how to setup a business letter layout with layers and setups, similar to his `letter` (AKA correspondence) module.

Jean-Michel Hufflen demonstrated his workflow for the GUT⁴ magazine, “Lettre GUTenberg”, particularly the extraction of information from single (L^AT_EX) articles for the table of contents. IMO, an evitable effort if you specify the style (L^AT_EX document class or ConT_EXt environment) to use, for example with DANTE's “Die T_EXnische Komödie” or our ConT_EXt Journal.

I repeated my talk from the TUG meeting on the production of architectural guides and gave a report about the T_EX village at Chaos Communication Camp.

Miscellaneous

There is a tradition at ConT_EXt meetings of a little handicraft task, so that we use our hands for something other than computer keyboards and beer glasses. This time, Willi Egger had prepared little bases, with a 10-by-10 hole grid on which we could glue coordinate labels. We placed juniper berries in the holes, to form simple digital pictures (“Junipercode”). Why? The MetaPost library in LuaMetaT_EX now contains functions from `potrace`, to convert pixels to vectors. The result of vectorising only a few pixels (here, berries) is often exciting. Sometimes it is hardly recognisable, and sometimes it is amazingly good, like the smiley that Mikael's daughter contributed.

³ Electron or web application in TypeScript, using Prosemirror and Vue.js

⁴ Groupe francophone des Utilisateurs de T_EX, L^AT_EX et logiciels compagnons

**Fig. 6.** Tinker time**Fig. 7.** High tech and low tech

Willi also gave a lecture on numbering systems in general and the Kaktovik numerals in particular. Additionally he reminded us about historical lead typesetting and its (limited) possibilities.

For diversion, we watched films about thread art, typography and math, and Harald gave us a quiz about programming languages.

On Thursday we had a visit by Tom Hejda of Overleaf fame, who didn't want to miss the opportunity of a $\text{T}_{\text{E}}\text{X}$ event near his home. We had an interesting discussion on online IDEs. No, Overleaf won't support $\text{ConT}_{\text{E}}\text{Xt}$, the effort would be too big for the few users. And COW^5 , our little alternative from Brno, couldn't cope with a big number of users. On the other hand, if work on it would resume, Docker containers with $\text{ConT}_{\text{E}}\text{Xt}$ and COW could become an interesting 'standard solution'.

Except for Willi's partner, we were all men this time. It would be nice if that would change again! At least there were a few students, to lower the average age.

Organizational matters

The members meeting of context group went by without much ado. As an association under French law, we don't need to adhere to many formalities. Arthur took on the treasurer duty from Taco, and will keep trying to communicate with French Postbank. They probably didn't answer any letters because we had a different name deposited with them as assignee. As soon as possible, we will move the account to a bank that doesn't require correspondence in French.

Since we hadn't fixed date and location for the 2024 meeting, Taco promised to take care of it. And indeed, at the online meeting in October, Hans and Taco could announce that the next $\text{ConT}_{\text{E}}\text{Xt}$ meeting will probably take place from 17 to 23 August in the water tower of Lutten (between Zwolle and Emmen, The Netherlands). This date is in the summer holidays for many. Some can only attend during holidays and some can not. We wanted to allow a different circle of attendees for once. And, since our excursion always seems to involve mining or astronomy, the excursion in 2024 will have a subject accordingly.

⁵ context-on-web.eu