

Mining Evolution Data of a Product Family*

Michael Fischer, Johann Oberleitner and Jacek Ratzinger
Distributed Systems Group
Information Systems Institute
Technical University of Vienna
A-1040 Vienna, Austria
{fischer,oberleitner,ratzinger}@infosys.tuwien.ac.at

Harald Gall
University of Zurich
Department of Informatics
s.e.a.l. – software
evolution & architecture lab
{gall}@ifi.unizh.ch

ABSTRACT

Diversification of software assets through changing requirements impose a constant challenge on the developers and maintainers of large software systems. Recent research has addressed the mining for data in software repositories of single products ranging from fine- to coarse grained analyses. But so far, little attention has been paid to mining data about the evolution of product families. In this work, we study the evolution and commonalities of three variants of the BSD (Berkeley Software Distribution), a large open source operating system. The research questions we tackle are concerned with how to generate high level views of the system discovering and indicating evolutionary highlights. To process the large amount of data, we extended our previously developed approach for storing release history information to support the analysis of product families. In a case study we apply our approach on data from three different code repositories representing about 8.5GB of data and 10 years of active development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Unanticipated evolution of a single software system enforced through changing requirements can lead to diversification and will result in different closely related products. These related products require a high maintenance effort which could be avoided by building a platform for a Product Family (PF) from existing software assets. To identify assets from related products which can be used as basis for a PF, retrospective software evolution analysis can help to point out artifacts which exhibit a strong change dependency.

Most of the proposed mining approaches such as Zimmermann et al. [14] for mining the change history or Collberg et al. [3] for visualizing a systems evolution are justified to analyze data from a single source and would therefore require adaption to support data from multiple product variants. Analyzing a single product vari-

ant implies a strict order on historical information such as check-ins into the source code repositories. In contrast to this, multiple product variants can be roughly characterized through arbitrary and asynchronous release dates, unanticipated information flow between variants, different development goals and requirements. Given these constraints, with our *PfEvo* approach we address the problem of handling multiple, *asynchronously* maintained version control systems to identify change dependencies through “alien” source code.

Artifacts with a strong change dependency often have architectural dependencies as research by Briand et al. has shown [1, 2]. Another prevalent reason is duplicated code through *copy’n paste*. For the analysis of such change dependencies it would be beneficial if existing approaches and techniques can be adapted and reused to study their impact onto the module structure.

As a result, an expert may draw conclusions about commonalities and dependencies between source code modules based on results obtained from the change history analysis. Then, the identified software artifacts can be used as foundation for building a platform for a product family. A Representative of such a family of related products is the BSD operating system with its variants and derivations such as *MacOS X*, *SunOS*, or *NetBSD*.

In this paper we (1) apply and extend our approach [5] for extracting change history information and generating a release history database; (2) compare product variants on quantitative level for a coarse assessment of the historical development and assessment of the repository information for further research; and (3) apply our approach for the visualization of change dependencies [4].

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents our approach for studying product family evolution. In Section 3 we present our case study about three BSD variants. Section 4 presents related work and Section 5 draws our conclusions and indicates future work.

2. AN APPROACH TO STUDY PRODUCT FAMILY EVOLUTION

Our *PfEvo* approach is an extension of existing techniques for the study of the evolution of a single software system and comprises the visualization of different aspects of the evolution of a software system. Besides some quantitative aspects such as the number of artifacts, check-in transactions, etc., these systems can be compared qualitatively as well. These quality aspects can be related to the type and extent of information flow between different systems, the impact of other related products on a single product, or hot-spots in the evolution of a single system with respect to information from other product variants.

To answer the research question of source code propagation within

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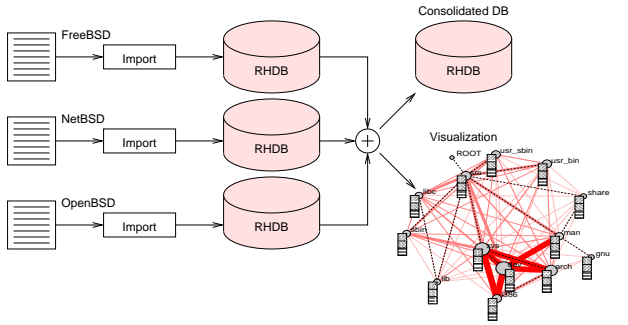


Figure 1: Process outline of *PfEvo*: results are a consolidated RHDB and visualizations

a product family we have adopted our earlier approach for building a release history [5] and visualization of evolutionary information of large-scale software [4] and propose the process depicted in Figure 1. Since all data sources must undergo the same pre-processing steps—log file extraction, import into Release History Database (RHDB), detection of change couplings—we use separate databases to store the results. For subsequent analysis transactional data from the separate databases are filtered and merged into a new *consolidated* database which is better suited for queries spanning multiple product variants. Currently we use modified variants of existing queries to gather data from the three product databases to compare them on a quantitative level. Another approach to compare system characteristics is by visually comparing graphs describing a systems history. We use a module graph indicating the impact of change dependency and their distribution with respect to different product variants onto the module structure of a single system.

In previous studies it was possible to use the release dates of the system under study as input for time scale information. Since the BSD variants are developed independently, an artificial, common time scale has to be created. This ensures comparability of the different system histories. Disadvantageous is that is not possible to examine and compare the processes between the release dates, since the release intervals of the different product variants are crosscut at arbitrary points. Since our requirement is the visualization of the resulting data-sets, we use a sub-sampling interval of one month.

To detect and relate information flow between BSD variants we decided to use lexical search in the change logs to find hints for information flow from other systems into the system under inspection. Alternatives to a pure lexical search are clone detection in source code, comparison of the structure of changes, or advanced indexing and text-analysis techniques.

3. CASE STUDY

For this case study we decided to use derivatives of the Berkley System Distribution also known as BSD Unix. The selected three variants—*FreeBSD*, *NetBSD*, and *OpenBSD*—of BSD are large software systems consisting of an operating system kernel and a number of external programs such as *ls*, *passwd*, the GNU Compiler Collection (GCC), or the X windows system. These variants have between 4800 for the *OpenBSD* variant and 8000 directories for the *NetBSD* variant. The number of files varies between 30,000 (*FreeBSD*) and about 68,000 (*NetBSD*). They are long lived, actively maintained software systems representing about 8.5GB of data stored in three different repositories. Furthermore, release information is available as CVS [7] data for all three variants with

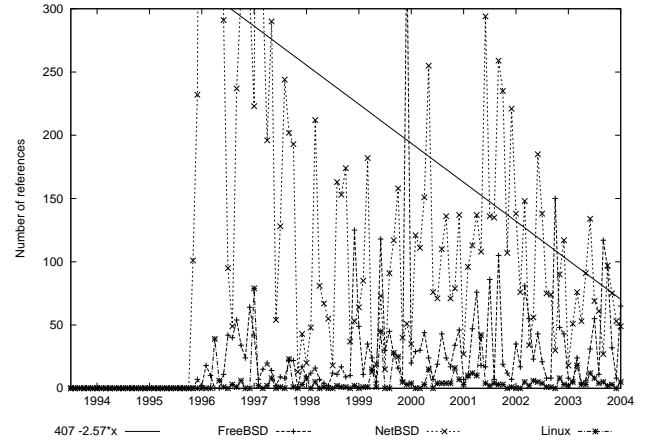


Figure 2: Number of references to keywords *FreeBSD*, *NetBSD*, and *Linux* found in *OpenBSD* change logs

direct access to the current repositories. The systems itself possess different characteristics which can be described as follows: The *FreeBSD*¹ projects aims to be more user application centric and thus it can be seen as desktop OS rather than server platform. Its first release was in December 1993. *NetBSD*² is targeted onto portability and supports more than 10 different CPU types with together more than 50 different hardware platforms. Among them are exotic platforms such as *Acorn*, *Amiga*, *Atari* or *VAX*. Its first release was in October 1994. As representative of a server platform the aim of the *OpenBSD*³ project lies on security and the integration of cryptography. Its first release was in October 1996. While *NetBSD* and *FreeBSD* were directly derived from the *4.3BSD* branch, *OpenBSD* was derived from the *NetBSD* branch in October 1995.

3.1 Quantitative comparison

First we give a quantitative comparison of the number of artifacts which are common for the different systems. To determine the number of common C files in the different RHDBs we use multi-database SQL queries. Table 1 shows the result for the different variants. While column “*all modules*” indicates the total number of common files found, column “*src/sys/ only*” indicates the common files within this particular subtree. Interesting is the high number of artifacts which are common in *NetBSD* and *OpenBSD*. This can be explained by the fact that *OpenBSD* was derived from *NetBSD* as mentioned previously.

Table 1: Common files in different BSD variants

Variant	Variant	all modules	src/sys/ only
<i>FreeBSD</i>	<i>NetBSD</i>	3810	1333
<i>FreeBSD</i>	<i>OpenBSD</i>	3839	1079
<i>NetBSD</i>	<i>OpenBSD</i>	6969	6847

3.2 Change report text analysis

As substitution for a detailed text and code clone analysis, we use keywords which were frequently used by the program authors and recorded in change reports. As useful keywords we identified *freebsd*, *netbsd*, *openbsd*, and interestingly *linux*.

Table 2 lists the number of referenced artifacts between product variants based on a lexical search for the chosen keywords in the

¹<http://www.freebsd.org/> [31 December 2004]

²<http://www.netbsd.org/> [31 December 2004]

³<http://www.openbsd.org/> [31 December 2004]

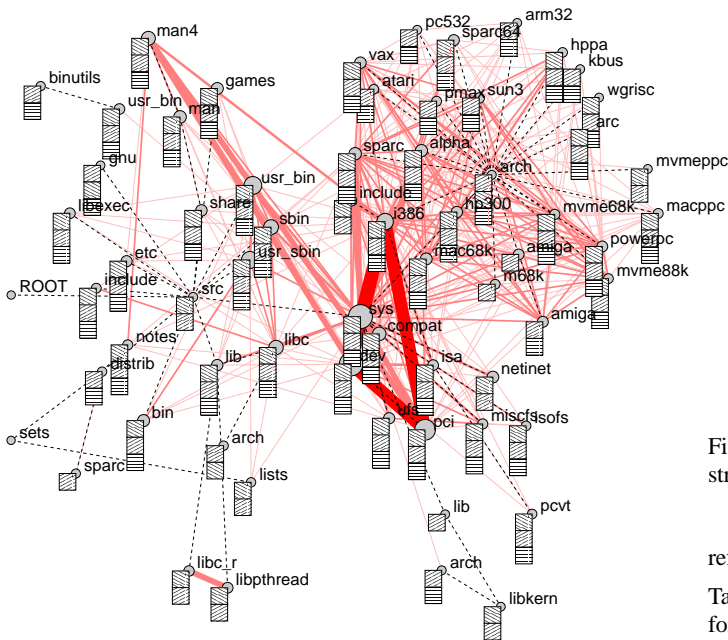


Figure 3: Change coupling between modules of the source code structure of the OpenBSD system with emphasize on the module structure

Table 2: Information flow between variants of the BSD systems based on lexical search

Variant	Keyword	all revisions	revision > 1.1
<i>FreeBSD</i>	<i>netbsd</i>	5131	3577
	<i>openbsd</i>	2729	1353
	<i>linux</i>	1791	1387
<i>NetBSD</i>	<i>freebsd</i>	2852	2186
	<i>openbsd</i>	2679	2224
	<i>linux</i>	1547	1125
<i>OpenBSD</i>	<i>freebsd</i>	2406	1933
	<i>netbsd</i>	16802	7423
	<i>linux</i>	775	463

change logs. Column one lists the name of the product variant used to retrieve the change logs and column two the respective keyword. Column three entitled “*all revisions*” lists the number of distinct artifacts found in the RHDB having change logs with the specified keyword. Column four titled “*revision > 1.1*” lists the number of distinct artifacts found in the RHDB having change logs with the specified keyword and not having a revision number of “1.1” (which denotes the initial revision). The significant difference between the values in column three and four can be interpreted in such a way, that a larger number of files were imported from other systems and further maintenance is decoupled from the originating version.

3.3 Reference distribution

During the lexical search for the given keywords we recorded in total 12,540 change logs for *FreeBSD*, 9,468 for *NetBSD*, and 20,906 for *OpenBSD*. Based on these results, Figure 2 depicts the distribution of references with respect to the observation period. Visually the histogram for *OpenBSD* suggest a strong decreasing trend in the information flow from other platforms into the *OpenBSD* source code repository.

To underpin the visual perception of the trends we use linear regression analysis to find the dependency between the number of

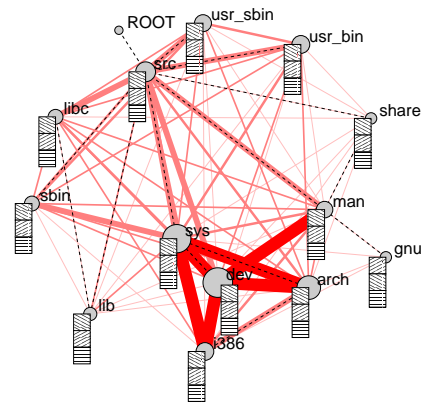


Figure 4: Change coupling between modules of the source code structure of the OpenBSD system

references and time-scale intervals.

Table 3: Linear regression for referenced keywords as $y = d + kx$ for the whole observation period, for the years 1995–2001 ($y = d_{1,2} + k_{1,2}x$) and the years 2001–2004 ($y = d_{3,3} + k_{3,3}x$)


Variant	d	k	$d_{1,2}$	$k_{1,2}$	$d_{3,3}$	$k_{3,3}$
<i>FreeBSD</i>	22.7	0.897	-2.67	1.46	387	-2.35
<i>NetBSD</i>	-22.7	1.28	-15.7	1.14	-21.3	1.31
<i>OpenBSD</i>	407	-2.57	543	-4.90	668	-4.48

To test the development of the references over the given observation period we computed the values for the whole period and two sub-intervals: the first interval accounts for about 2/3 (variables $k_{1,2}$ and $d_{1,2}$) of the observation period which corresponds to the years 1995–2001; the second interval accounts for about the last 1/3 (variables $k_{3,3}$ and $d_{3,3}$) of the observation period which represents the last 36 months of the development history (years 2001–2004).

Table 3 shows the results for the three variants indicating a strong increasing trend for *FreeBSD* and *NetBSD* ($k > 0$ for both variants over the whole observation period). For *FreeBSD* this trend reverses for the last 36 months ($k_{3,3} < 0$). The low number of total change logs found for *NetBSD* and the positive trend in the change dependency of *NetBSD* suggest that large amounts of source code are still derived from the other OS variants. This perception is also supported by Table 2 since *NetBSD* has the highest ratio between the two counted categories “*revisions* > 1.1” and “*all revisions*”. In contrast, *OpenBSD* exhibits a decreasing trend in both sub-intervals and the whole observation period starting from a high level (straight line in Figure 2).

In the next sections we provide a more detailed look onto the change relationships with respect to different products.

3.4 Change impact analysis

To show the impact of changes onto the module structure with respect to foreign source code we selected *OpenBSD* for a closer inspection since we counted here the most keywords referencing other OS (see Table 2). The relevant artifacts were identified through lexical search as previously described. Based on the search results and the change log data the impact of change dependencies on the module structure is evaluated. The result of this step is depicted in the Figures 3 and 4. It shows the module structure together with change dependencies derived from the change log data. While filled circles indicate the nodes of the directory tree, shaded boxes indicate different product variants. We use  as glyph for *FreeBSD*,

▣ for *NetBSD*, and ▢ is used for *Linux*. The approach for generating the layout for change dependencies information is based on Multi Dimensional Scaling (MDS) [9] and has been used by our group to visualize to impact of problem report data onto the module structure of large software [4].

To avoid cluttering of the figure with the several hundred modules of the source code package, we shifted relevant information from lower level nodes of the nested graph structure towards the root node until a predefined threshold criterion—at least 64 references through change couplings per node—is met. The node sizes indicate the number of references found for each node and its subtrees.

While dashed lines indicate the directory structure of the source package, solid gray and black lines (pink and red on color displays) indicate the logical coupling between different parts of the system.

Figure 3 shows the dependencies between modules with emphasize on the module structure (149 nodes). The distribution of the glyphs for *FreeBSD*, *NetBSD*, and *Linux* indicates a significant impact—though decreasing trend—of the other OS variants onto the development of *OpenBSD*. Only very few modules such as *libpthread*—POSIX threads are not part of the *Linux* kernel sources—or *lists* (on the bottom left in Figure 3) are not infected by “*Linux* virus”. This wide distribution of *Linux* related change dependencies is a surprising result since we did not expect such a distribution after the quantitative analysis. Interesting as well is that change dependencies occur mainly within the *src/sys* sub-structure which represents the kernel related source code parts.

After filtering of less relevant modules and shifting the information to higher level modules in the hierarchy we obtain the graph depicted in Figure 4 (14 nodes). Here, the graph layout respects the strength of coupling relationships—the stronger the coupling, the closer the nodes—between the different modules. This more comprehensible and less cluttered picture of couplings highlights the dependencies of the documentation in *src/share/man*, the system administration programs in *src/sbin*, user application programs such as *ls* in *src/usr_bin* and *src/usr_sbin* from the OS kernel related files underneath *src/sys*. Interesting to see is also the strong coupling via “foreign” source code changes between *src/sys/arch/i386* and *src/sys/dev* since this coupling spans across the module hierarchy.

Since the size of the nodes indicates the number of relevant change entries found, we can conclude that the strongest impact of change coupling was on *src/sys*, *src/sys/dev*, *src/sys/arch*, and *src/sys/arch/i386*. Table 4 lists an excerpt of the topmost referenced artifacts which suggests a high information exchange with other software systems.

Table 4: Topmost referenced files with one of the given keywords in the change logs of *OpenBSD*

Keyword	Count	Path
freebsd	59	src/sys/dev/pci/files.pci
.	52	src/sys/dev/pci/pciide.c
.	52	src/sys/dev/pci/pcidevs
netbsd	45	src/sys/arch/i386/i386/machdep.c
.	43	src/sys/dev/pci/pciide.c
.	39	src/sys/conf/files
linux	14	src/sys/compat/linux/linux_socket.c
.	14	src/sys/compat/linux/syscalls.master
.	5	src/sys/dev/ic/if_wireg.h

An example for the propagation of commonly required feature is the introduction of the PCI bus. Since this device type was not widely available at the time of the *OpenBSD* fork in 1996, support had to be added later requiring several separate changes as Table 4

suggests. Another interesting aspect is the relationship with *Linux*. The listing of *if_wireg.h* suggests that specific information about WLAN adapters are obtained from *Linux* as well.

3.5 Detailed change analysis

Since the three BSD variants originate from the same UNIX branch, it is to expect that also a number of source code changes exhibit the same or at least similar structure. For a manual verification we randomly selected one file which is available in all three variants. For this file—*ufs_quota.c* from the *src/sys/ufs/ufs/* directory—we manually inspected the revision history for significant changes.

One significant change was the modification of a function call in the *FreeBSD* version of *ufs_quota.c* on 1994-10-06 (revision 1.2 → 1.3) resulting in eight modified source lines. The *diff*-snippet—depicted below—for the affected source code revision shows a single change of a source line. The first line indicates the removed code, whereas the third one shows the replacement code. The three dashes in-between indicate a delimiter line.

```
< sleep(( caddr_t)dq, PINOD+2);
---
> (void) tsleep (( caddr_t)dq, PINOD+2, "dqsync", 0);
```

In the change log we found the following comment, which indicates the reason for the source code modification: “*Use tsleep() rather than sleep so that 'ps' is more informative about the wait.*”

The same modification in the *NetBSD* version has been applied on 2000-05-27 which is six years later than the original modification (revision 1.16 → 1.17) and in *OpenBSD* more than eight years later on 2001-11-21 (revision 1.7 → 1.8)—though without the *(caddr_t)* type cast listed in the preceding code snippet. The *diff*-snippet below depicts the modification.

```
< sleep(( caddr_t)dq, PINOD+2);
---
> (void) tsleep (dq, PINOD+2, "dqsync", 0);
```

In the *NetBSD* variant of the change log the comment is less informative: “*sleep() -> tsleep()*”. While in *NetBSD* this change still produces similar results when building the revision deltas via *diff*, in *OpenBSD* the change was part of a larger source code modification consisting of 380 added and 161 deleted source lines (CVS does not identify modified lines, instead every modified line accounts for one added and one deleted line). Analogues to the given example, many changes can be found with varying degree of similarity making it difficult to track source code propagation.

3.6 Discussion

During experiments with our RHDB we noticed some shortcomings which have to be resolved prior to a thorough analysis of the different product variants. First, through moving and renaming files in the CVS repository by the developers of the software systems, the historical information is segmented. Thus related segments have to be identified and concatenated to describe a continuous historical time-line of an artifacts history. Second, as result of the import process artifacts which have identical file names are assigned different IDs in the RHDB. This may negatively effect multi-database queries for comparison of artifacts since artifacts with common origins have to be identified for every evaluation of a database query. This mapping of IDs will be ideally stored in the consolidated part of the RHDB as indicated in Figure 1.

From the software evolution analysis point of view, BSD represents an interesting software system which opens a wide field for further analysis. Since detailed information about the source code

is available it would be beneficial to apply a tool for code clone detection such as [8] proposed by Kamiya et al. To improve the results of the lexical search we currently explore the application of techniques related to Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) [10].

4. RELATED WORK

Within the EU projects ARES, ESAPS, CAFE, and Families much work has been done in areas such as the identification of assets for product family architectures, evolution and testing of existing product families, or architectural models for product families (Van der Linden [12]). More related with our work with respect to product family evolution is the approach presented by Riva and Del Rosso in [11]. They investigated the evolution of a family platform and describe approaches which enable assessment and reconstruction of architectures. In contrast to their work, we investigate the evolution of different variants to identify candidates for building a family platform.

In [6] Gall, Hajek and Jazayeri examined the structure of a large *Telecommunications Switching Software* (TSS) over more than 20 releases to identify logical coupling between system and subsystems. This coupling is used in further processing steps to reveal evolutionary aspects such as hot-spots. For the detection and visualization of evolutionary hot-spots we have developed a methodology which relates software feature and release history information [4]. In this paper we used information from the release history with respect to different keywords instead of feature data. This information was reflected onto the module structure of the source code and visualized to generate the high level views of a software system. Independent from our research work Yamamoto et al. investigated variants of the BSD system for similarities as well [13]. They mainly use *CCFinder* by Kamiya et al. [8] to compute similarity metrics of the source code. In contrast to our work, their aim lies on the overall similarities between different products, rather than the type, amount and distribution of information flow between the variants.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Retrospective analysis of variants of related products opens interesting perspectives on the evolution of large software systems. With minimal changes and additions to existing tools it is already possible to recover the information flow between the different variants and evolutionary hot-spots with respect to the module structure. Through the application of a lexical search in the change logs we were able to reveal the increasing information flow of two variants of the systems. For the third system we found a decreasing flow starting from a very high level. For one selected system we applied an adapted method which generates high-level views of the module structure of a system with respect to their coupling and information flow from other product variants. To support these findings about the information flow we performed detailed change analysis of a randomly selected file. Interesting results are: the wide distribution of *Linux* related change dependencies in the source code; the strong change coupling within the subtree of *src/sys*; and the propagation of source code taking several years.

For future work we plan the application of a code clone detection process to identify related modifications. An analysis can reveal the degree and frequency of how tight product variants are coupled. Another interesting area for future work is the detailed analysis of change log information for commonalities. Since change logs can provide additional hints about a particular modification, they provide relevant information which enables the identification of a modifications origin.

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