

Contribution ID: 101

Type: Demo

Licensing Research Software Made Easy: Introducing the License Checker-Tool

Developing research software involves crucial decisions about software licenses, posing challenges for both researchers and developers. Assistance with issuing and verifying licenses is crucial to empower scientists to legally publish and reuse software. A license serves as a clear way to state what is allowed with a piece of software, acting as a powerful tool for software developers. Software licenses play a crucial role in defining conditions, permissions and restrictions associated with code usage. However, it is also a legal document, and only a few research software engineers feel confident interpreting legal texts. Despite established open-source licenses, challenges persist, especially when research code includes external libraries with predefined licenses. The interoperability of open-source research software relies on the compatibility of licenses. Developers frequently integrate code from different sources to enhance functionality. Understanding and recommending licenses that align with the project's goals is crucial to seamlessly incorporate external contributions without risking licensing conflicts.

This contribution introduces the License Checker, a web tool designed to simplify the complexities of selecting an appropriate license and finding the compatible licenses, benefiting both research software developers and its users. The License Checker is developed within the ReSUS Project (Reusable Software University of Stuttgart) [1], integrated into the OpenTOSCA environment [2] and a part of a platform that manages the publication, search, citation, and automated deployment of research software. The tool can be used also standalone and serves research software developers by aiding in the discovery of an appropriate license for their software. Simultaneously, it assists users in finding compatible licenses, allowing them to seamlessly incorporate external piece of software codes without risking licensing conflicts. Existing code can be uploaded to the tool and will be scanned for available license files with the help of fossology, an open source license compliance software system and toolkit [2]. Based on a license ontology, the License Checker then takes this list of used licenses as input and provides a list of licenses as output that contains only licenses compatible with each of the input licenses.

In a talk (or alternatively a demo), we would like to present the current state of the License Checker-Tool and discuss the requirements of research software engineers around the licensing of their code.

References:

- 1. https://www.izus.uni-stuttgart.de/en/fokus/fdm-projekte/resus/
- 2. https://www.opentosca.org/
- 3. https://www.fossology.org/

Slot length

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Session Classification: Poster Session

Track Classification: Research Software (legacy): Policies and legal frameworks