ReachHover: Preserving Context in Data-flow Analysis

James Yooa, b

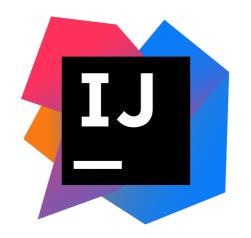
Gail C. Murphyb

^aUniversity of Washington

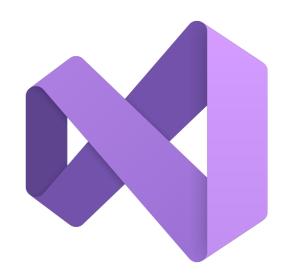


bUniversity of British Columbia



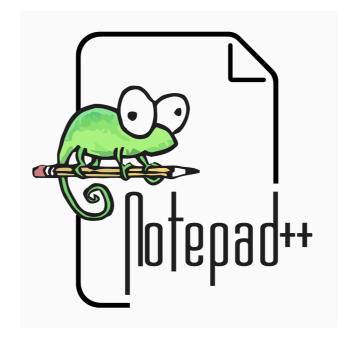






Who here has used an IDE?







Do You Ever Struggle To Maintain Context in Your IDE?

Files Classes

Do You Ever Struggle To Maintain Context in Your IDE?

Methods

Locations

```
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java.editor > src > org > netbeans > modules > editor > java > © JavaCompletionProvider > @ JavaCompletionQuery > m filter

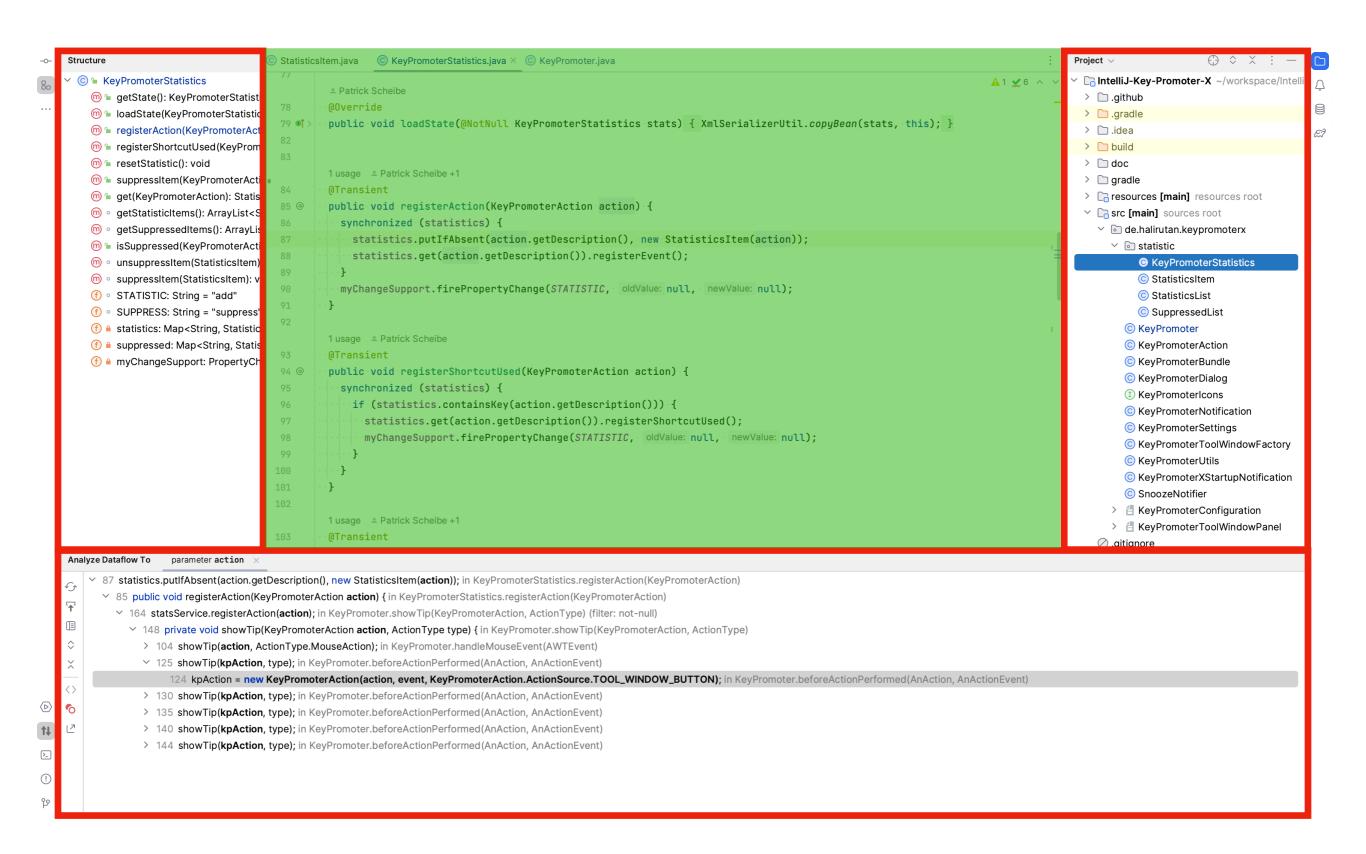
    JavaCompletionProvider.java

                 pgebauer
 319
                @Override
♣ 320 ○1
                protected void filter(CompletionResultSet resultSet) {
t 321
                     try {
                         if ((queryType & COMPLETION_QUERY_TYPE) != 0) {
                              if (results != null) {
 323
                                  if (filterPrefix != null) {
 324
                                       resultSet.addAllItems(qetFilteredData(results, filterPrefix));
                                       resultSet.setHasAdditionalItems(hasAdditionalItems);
 326
 327
                                  } else {
328
                                       Completion.get().hideDocumentation();
                                       Completion.get().hideCompletion();
 329
 330
 331
                           else if (queryType == TOOLTIP_QUERY_TYPE) {
 332
                              resultSet.setToolTip(toolTip != null && toolTip.hasData() ? toolTip : null);
 333
 334
                         resultSet.setAnchorOffset(anchorOffset);
 335
                     } catch (Exception ex) {
 336
                         Exceptions.printStackTrace(ex);
 337
 338
339
                     resultSet.finish();
                3 usages 2 pgebauer
                private static boolean isJavaIdentifierPart(String text, boolean allowForDor) {
 342
                     for (int i = 0; i < text.length(); i++) {</pre>
 343
                         if (!(Character.isJavaIdentifierPart(text.charAt(i)) || allowForDor && text.charAt(i) == '.')) {
```

```
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Context is not preserved across views of content

Context is not preserved across views of content

Views of content are separated and spatially distant

 Formative study: what questions do programmers frequently ask?

 ReachHover: a context-preserving interface for dataflow questions

 User study: ReachHover helps developers answer data-flow questions

 Formative study: what questions do programmers frequently ask?

Where does a value come from?

Where does a value come from?

How is this object going to be modified?

Where does a value come from?

How is this object going to be modified?

Which parts of this object are accessed?

Where does a value come from?

How is this object going to be modified?

Which parts of this object are accessed?

How is this value used throughout the program?

10 difficult questions from the literature

- Refactoring
 Control-flow
- Data-flow...

Our work: Survey of 72 programmers

How often do you ask yourself this question?

Most frequent: data-flow questions

- "Where does this value come from?"
- "How is this value modified?"

•

- Formative study: what questions do programmers frequently ask?
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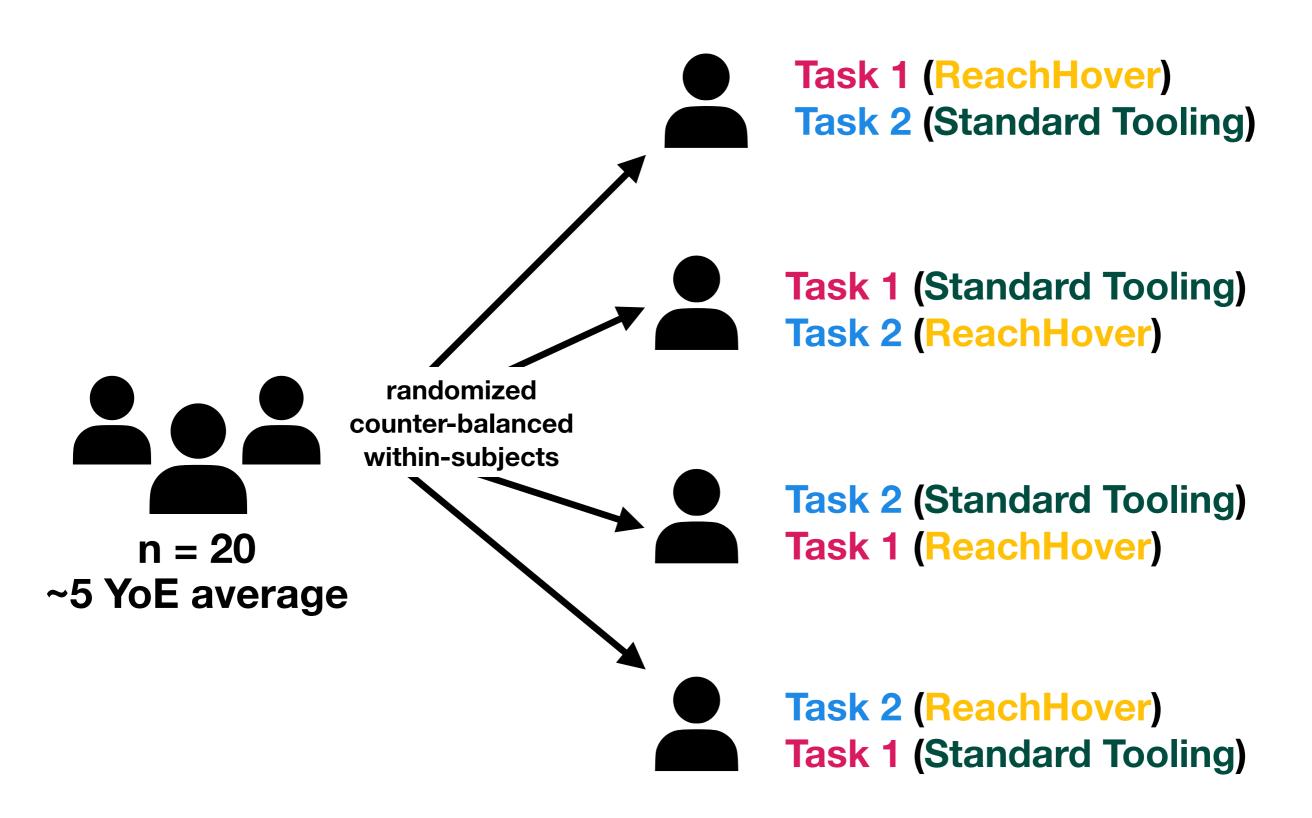
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ReachHover Live Demo

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Evaluating ReachHover: User Study



Evaluating ReachHover: Experimental Design

- Task 1: Questions along a backward data-flow trace
 - Q1 Locations where a method argument is instantiated
 - Q2 Where is a method argument used?
- Task 2: Questions along a forward data-flow trace
 - Q1 Locations where a local variable is checked for null
 - Q2 Where is a local variable used?

Evaluating ReachHover: Conclusions

 Programmers can accurately answer data-flow-related questions with ReachHover

Task 1: Backward Data-flow

```
public void addBookmark(FileBookmarks fileBookmarks, BookmarkInfo bookmark) {
    checkModDuringFire();
    fileBookmarks.add(bookmark);
    BookmarkChange change = getBookmarkChange(bookmark);
    change.markAdded();
    bookmark.getFileBookmarks().getProjectBookmarks().setModified(true);
    structureChange = true;
}
```

T1.Q1 In how many locations does a call to the BookmarkInfo constructor exist?

- ReachHover: 10/10
- IntelliJ: 6/10

Task 1: Backward Data-flow

```
public void addBookmark(FileBookmarks fileBookmarks, BookmarkInfo bookmark) {
    checkModDuringFire();
    fileBookmarks.add(bookmark)

    BookmarkChange change = getBookmarkChange(bookmark);
    change.markAdded();
    bookmark.getFileBookmarks().getProjectBookmarks().setModified(true);
    structureChange = true;
}
```

T1.Q1 In how many locations does a call to the BookmarkInfo constructor exist?

- ReachHover: 10/10
- IntelliJ: 6/10

Task 1: Backward Data-flow

T1.Q2 Provide the names of the methods where the value of **bookmark** is used

		Incorrect Answers	Precision
Unmodified IntelliJ	13	8	62%
ReachHover	14	2	88%

Task 2: Forward Data-flow

```
FindReplaceResult findReplaceResult = new FindReplaceResult(new int[]{-1, -1}, replacedString: "");
findReplaceResult.setErrorMsg(NbBundle.getMessage(DocumentFinder.class, resName: "pattern-error-dialo return findReplaceResult;
```

- T2.Q1 How many times was findReplaceResult explicitly checked for a null value?
 - ReachHover: 7/10
 - IntelliJ: 7/10

Task 2: Forward Data-flow

```
FindReplaceResult findReplaceResult = new FindReplaceResult(new int[]{-1, -1}, replacedString: "");
findReplaceResult.setErrorMcy(NoBundle.getMessage(DocumentFinder.class, resName: "pattern-error-dialogreturn findReplaceResult;
```

- T2.Q1 How many times was findReplaceResult explicitly checked for a null value?
 - ReachHover: 7/10
 - IntelliJ: 7/10

Task 2: Forward Data-flow

T2.Q2 Provide the names of the methods where the value of findReplaceResult is used

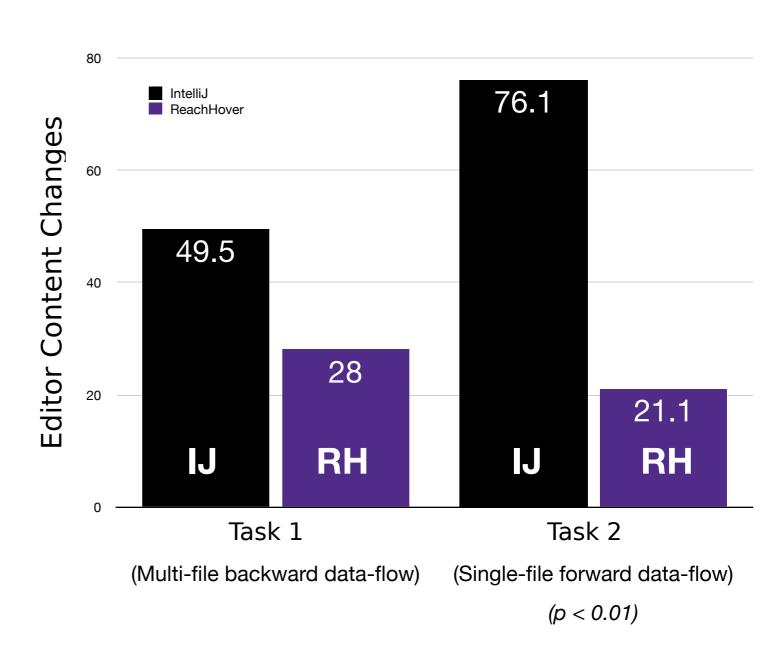
		Incorrect Answers	Precision
Unmodified IntelliJ	22	10	69%
ReachHover	24	3	80%

Evaluating ReachHover: Conclusions

- Programmers can accurately answer data-flow-related questions with ReachHover
- ReachHover minimizes context-switching actions.

Evaluating ReachHover: Context

- Editor content changes as a proxy for context switching
- Lower average of editor content changes using ReachHover



(Lower is better)

Evaluating ReachHover: Conclusions

- Programmers accurately answer data-flow questions
- ReachHover reduces context-switching
- Users prefer context-preserving interface

Evaluating ReachHover: QualitativeResults

"Felt less cluttered and made the task easier"

"Was easier to use (maybe because I didn't lose the context)"

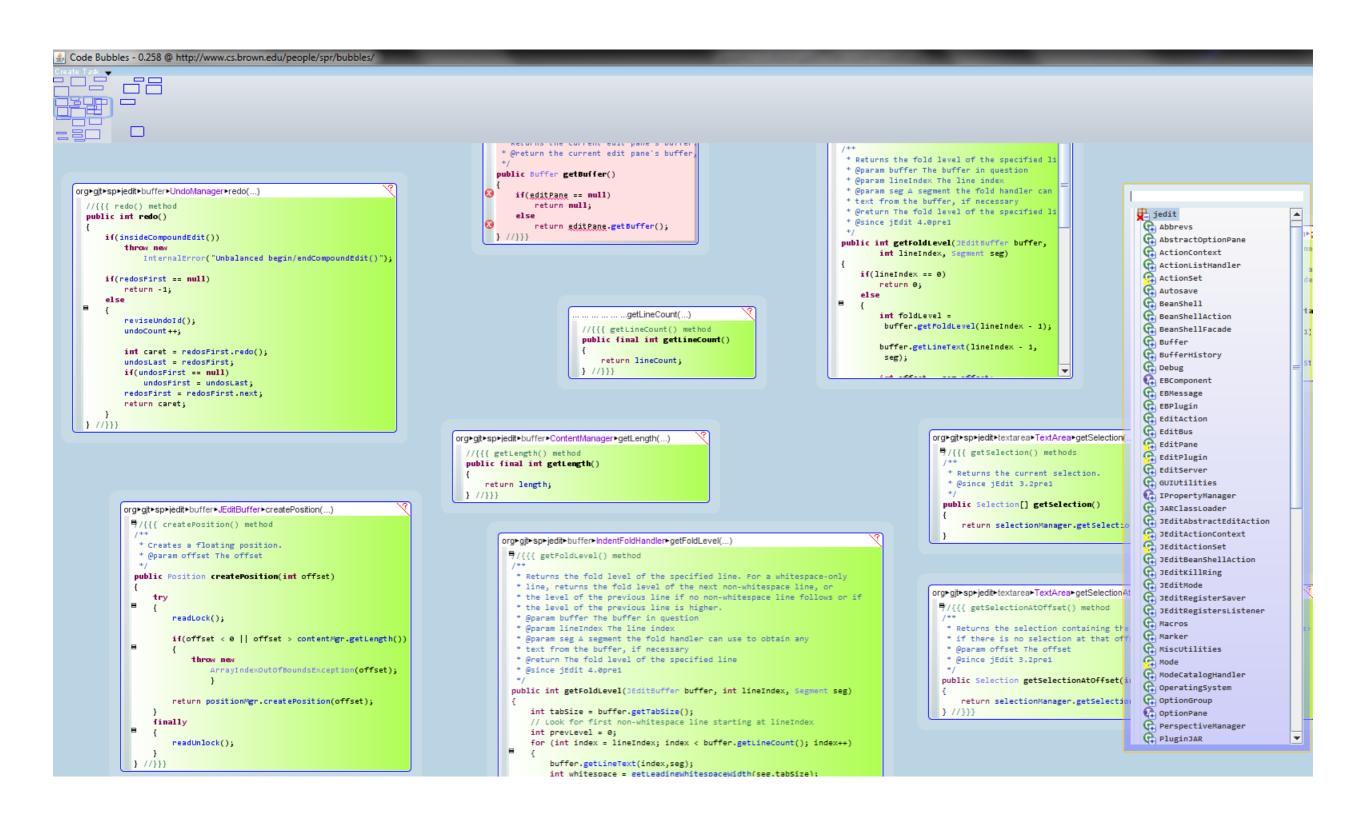
"I preferred that I could look at the matches in the same modal window without affecting the open file"

Related Work: Alternative Interfaces

Code Bubbles

• An infinitely-zoomable 2D canvas

Related Work: Code Bubbles



Related Work: Alternative Interfaces

Code Bubbles

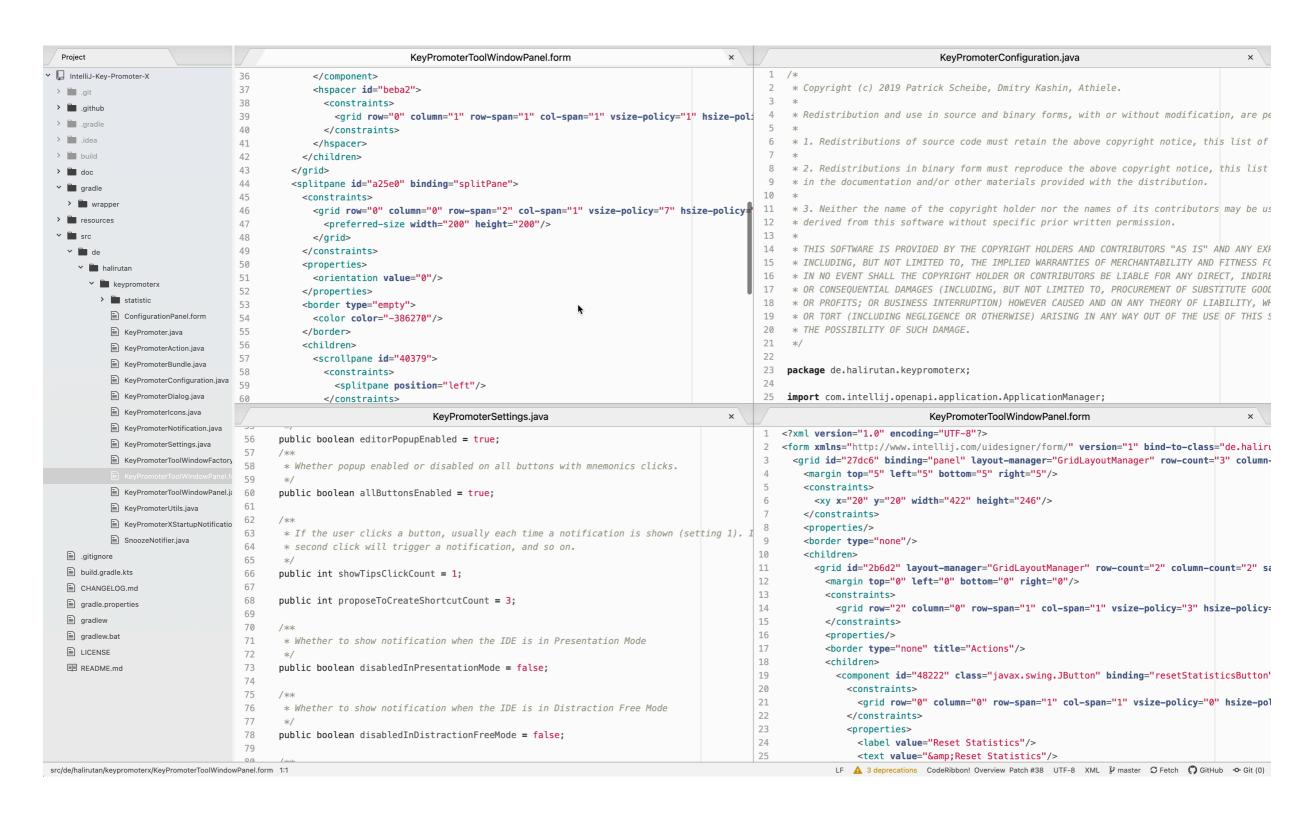
An infinitely-zoomable 2D canvas

Drastic re-design of a standard IDE

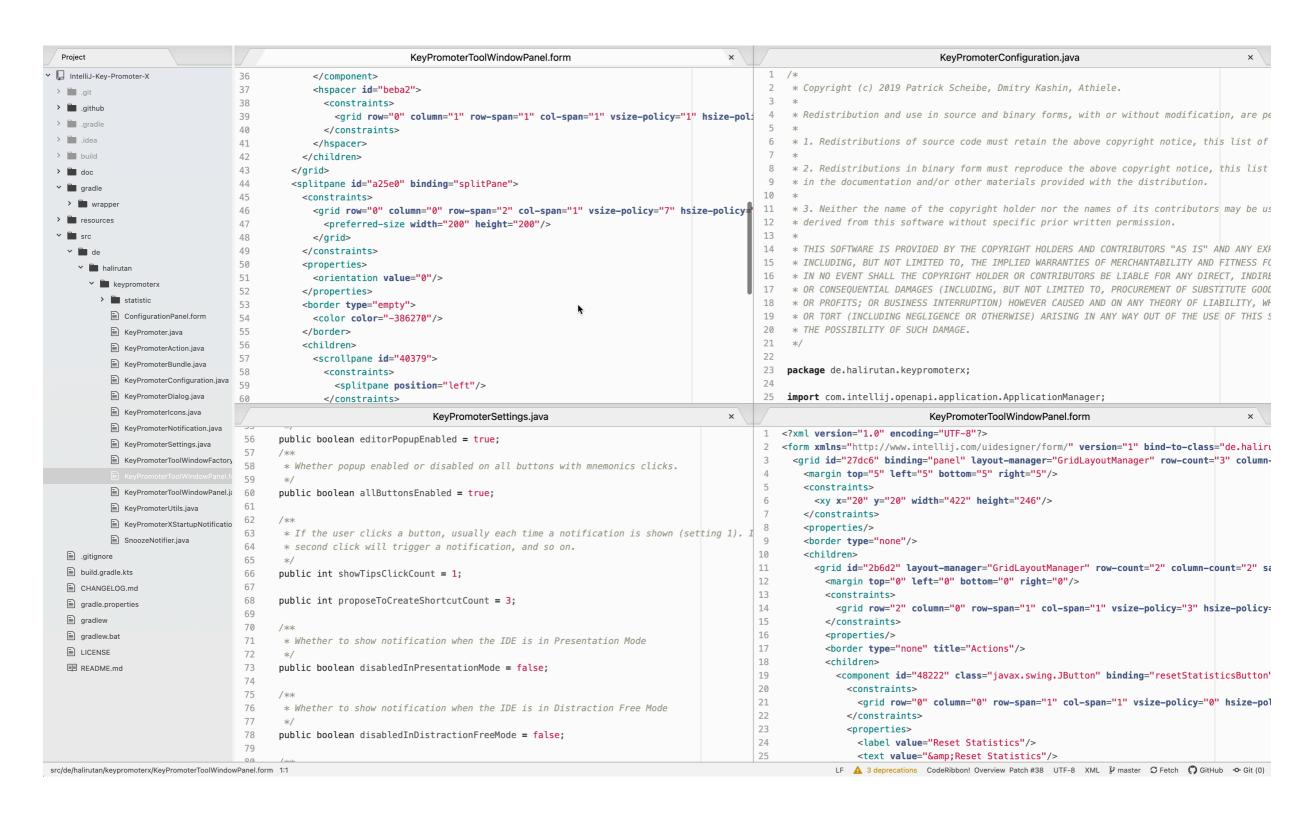
CodeRibbon

A tiled "ribbon" of code views

Related Work: Code Ribbon



Related Work: Code Ribbon



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ReachHover source code