Debian Conference in Oslo

Summer, Schools and Debian

Those long summer days up North saw Debian programmers from all over the world gather in Oslo – to hack the distribution at Debcamp and chill out afterwards over talks and keynotes at Debconf3.

BY GUNN KRISTIN TJOFLOT

July in the Norwegian capital of Oslo turned out to be a busy month for the organizers (the Norwegian Unix Users Group NUUG) and participants of the "Debcamp" workshops 12th to 17th July and the "Debconf3" conference that followed 18th to 20th July [1]. With around 90 people taking part in the former and 140 visitors to the latter, attendance figures were far higher than expected and stretched the low 33,000 Euro budget to the limit.

Fortunately the Center for Information Technology Services (USIT) at the University of Oslo which hosted both events kindly offered some more seminar rooms. Soon all of them were filled to the brim with people and laptops, and the University's fast Ethernet provided good working conditions.

Participants from Japan, Brazil, Latvia, Germany, Austria, Mexico, Canada, Australia, France, USA, Italy, New Zealand, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary and Spain added an international touch to the event; as many as two-thirds of the attendees were members of the official Debian programmers group, a network of 800 contributors in total. Debian leader Martin Michlmayr gave a presentation on "tracking inactive maintainers", and Enrico Zini talked on usability, Javier Fernández-Sanguino Peña on internationalization, and Jonas Öberg on legal aspects of free software, to name only a few.

The biggest group of Debian developers – 25 altogether – gathered around the Skolelinux (Norwegian for "school linux") project (*http://www.skolelinux.no/index.php.en*), a fully-fledged Debian based Linux solution for schools. Straight from LinuxTag [2] came a German group of 15 programmers, among them Frank Matthieß and Kurt Gramlich from the German offshoot of the Norwegian project, to help with development. Their group brought along a wishlist from German teachers which was checked against existing solutions in the Norwegian version. The next step will be the Beta release of version 1.0.

Norwegian and German Skolelinux programmers in Oslo (from left): Harald Thingelstad, Frank Matthieß, Maximilian Wilhelm, Petter Reinholdtsen, Martin Herweg, Florian Lohoff, Kurt Gramlich, Knut Yrvin

Another project in the spotlight was the new Debian Installer. Plans were made to finalize its first beta version in the course of the meeting, but although a lot of bug-fixing and testing on different hardware was done, this goal turned out to be a bit too optimistic for the 15 programmers lead by Tollef Fog Heen, Petter Reinholdtsen of the organization committee, and Martin Sjögren. Bringing both, Skolelinux and the installer, together, Petter also gave a presentation on automated Skolelinux installations using *debian-installer* and *base-config*.

Another project intertwined with was presented by Mikael Snaprud: In co-operation with the Norwegian Rotary Club Lillesand, Agder University College, and the hospital in Agder in southern Norway, there are plans to provide a hospital in Kirov (a Russian town hit by the radioactive pollution from Chernobyl) with PCs to keep track of patient-information and results of blood-sample analysis.

Fortunately, not everything was about work: a barbecue and the party dinner offered time to hang loose, too. ∎

A growing project – interview with Martin Michlmayr

Linux Magazine: Martin, now that you have had a few months to settle into your new "job" as Debian Project Leader – how do you coordinate the work in the Debian network?

Martin Michlmayr: My work relies on good infrastructure and good communications with the various teams of specialists the Debian project has, such as the security team or the web masters. I regularly contact them to figure out how I can help and to coordinate other projects with them.

LM: This year there was a Debian conference and a hacking camp. How would you rank them?

MM: I think the camp actually was more important than the conference since it allowed us to work on various tasks together. Sometimes it helps to put people in one room.

LM: What's the most important challenge for the Debian network in the near future?

MM: Debian has to find ways to cope with the growth we've seen in the last months and years. Fortunately, the project's very solid infrastructure will allow us to scale.

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[1] *http://www.debconf.org/debconf3/*

[2] Andreas Grytz: "LinuxTag 2003", Linux Magazine Issue 34, September 2003, p85