

People started arriving at the weekend, but the real excitement began on the Monday morning as everyone arrived to register and greetings were exchanged and introductions made.

The welcome session included the mayor and the vice-chancellor of the university, and then a now-traditional session of everyone present having to introduce themselves briefly. "I hack on Gtk" "I read bug reports" "I work with Skolelinux" "I am hoping to learn about Gnome" "I translate Gnome" "I work on Abiword".

The list went on and on. Guadec grows every year, but this seemed the most international yet. From the introductions it was also clear we had a lot of people from projects which were separate from Gnome, here to find out how their projects and Gnome might help each other.

## A Lot To Do

It was impossible to get to every talk. There were three tracks going on simultaneously at times. Fortunately, I got to quite a few. For a lot of people, half the point of the conference is not the talks themselves, but the chance to meet up with people. People they know and work with over the net, in order to discuss things face to face. People they have never met before, where the conversation can be on anything, from who had the most disaster-filled trip there, to a sudden bright joint idea which requires an immediate trip to the hacking room or the whipping out of a laptop to try something new and exciting. Lots of code was being written outside the talks. From the number of laptops inside the talks, I suspect a fair amount was being written inside, too.

Announcements at Guadec ranged from the GPL'ing of HelixPlayer by Real to the release of Mono 1.0. A talk about translation technologies raised the offer of making some of Sun's tools available freely, and a BOF (birds-of-a-feather, a small discussion session) about bug triage discussed whether Novell's testcase database would help Gnome.

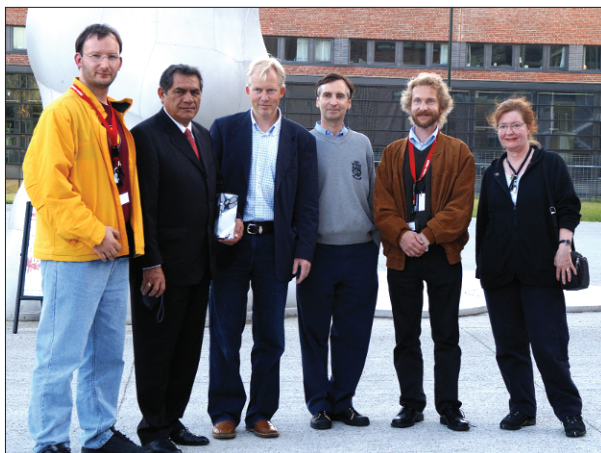


Figure 1: Guadec speakers and organizers with Dr. Edgar Villanueva (2nd left).

## Gnome User And Developer European Conference 2004

# A Wider Reach

The fifth Guadec, or Gnome User And Developer European Conference, was held in Norway, in late June 2004 [1]. Some three hundred and fifty people were at the Agder University College campus at Kristiansand. As ever, I was one of them. **BY TELS A GWYNNE**

There were a lot of discussions about legal issues, particularly on the third day of the conference, a day on which the keynote was delivered by Dr Edgar Villanueva, who had a great deal to say about free software's value worldwide and the importance of a truly global sharing of information. The importance of legal and political issues was emphasized by the Norwegian minister for transport and communications, who told the audience that they should be lobbying their national representatives who sit on the World Summit on the Information Society. I don't think I ever expected to be told it was time to start lobbying the United Nations.

## Evening Talks

In the evenings, the conference didn't stop. The talks stopped, but events at the bar had been arranged. It had taken most people about half an hour to discover the price of drinks in Norway, and so any free or cheap beer was immediately popular. More knots of people formed and more people introduced

themselves to each other and conversations continued.

A few things stood out to me at this Guadec in particular. The wider reach was one. Not only did we have people from everyone continent except Antarctica present, we had people from lots of different projects. There were people looking at sound architectures for X as a whole; people who were there primarily for the Skolelinux discussions; and enough Gimpers for an entire Gimp conference to go on at the same time.

## Real Life

One of the best things for me about this Guadec was hearing about the people who were using Gnome and free software generally because it was filling a need for people. It was being used by groups in Africa, because it is legal to pass it around and make copies without worrying about license fees and piracy. It has been used by so many different groups in the public and non-profit sectors that in the wrap-up session one person specifically mentioned that it would make sense for those groups to work together rather than to provide several slightly different ways to do it.

It is available in many different languages, and if it is not available in a particular language, all it takes is a single native speaker to get the ball rolling. This conference was a reminder that no longer are we working on something that one day might help to change the world: it is already something that has started to help change the world now. ■

## INFO

[1] GUADEC 2004: <http://2004.guadec.org/>