Debian - The Universal Operating System?

Do we provide what users need?
Do users get what they really want?

Andreas Tille

Debian Conference 7

Edinburgh, 22. June, 2007
Overview

1. Different views onto Debian
2. Universal ?
3. Structure of Debian development
4. Deriving versus staying Debian internal
5. Supporting very special applications
6. Future
Poor users view

- Why does the friend of my son not install Debian?
  → Because his father is no DD.
- Why do multimedia enthusiasts not prefer Debian?
  → We have no real chance to help them.
Poor users view

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Lucky users view

- Lucky to have obtained supported hardware
- Finally reached tasksel
- And now?
Lucky users view

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Upstream developer view

- Vehicle to bring my software to the user
- Quality assurance instance
- WTFM
- Ports to other architectures
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Developer view

- Missing link between upstream and user
- Principles of Free Software at distribution level: Independence of commercial interest of producer
- Hunter and collector of Free Software
  … or rather …
- Designer of comprehensive system
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Derivers view

- Debian is nice, but fits not really my needs
- Nice starting point to do something else
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Universal

WordNet: Similarity of adj universal

1. comprehensive (vs. noncomprehensive)
2. general (vs. specific)
3. adaptable (vs. unadaptable)
Universal (2)

WordNet: The adj universal has 3 senses

1. cosmopolitan, ecumenical, oecumenical, general, universal, worldwide, world-wide
2. applicable to or common to all members of a group or set
3. adapted to various purposes, sizes, forms, operations

Example 1: Teachers point of view

- handle student accounts
- enable students to run educational software
- teach students basic skills in information science
- ...

adapted from teachers point of view, but ...
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- potentially scientific workbench
- served in pieces
- no concept to guide scientific users
- only *adaptable* from scientists point of view
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Do we scale well?

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2. Number of packages
3. Number of architectures
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6. Number of derivatives
7. Number of flame wars
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Sub-structuring Debian

- Change of quantity into quality (Hegel)
  - To determine at the right moment the critical point where quantity changes into quality is one of the most important and difficult tasks in all the spheres of knowledge (Trotzki)
- Evolution . . . through quantitative transformations passing into qualitative (Darwin principle)
  - CDDs can deal with nearly all dimensions of growth inside Debian
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For the most part, Debian is a Bazaar of Cathedrals; with a few procedures in place to override the low level cathedral in exceptional situations. Each developer has, within reason, full control over his packages, modulo following Debian Technical policy, thus creating the low level cathedral. The Technical committee, and the General Resolution Protocol offer means of overriding developer decisions about their own packages.

— Manoj Srivastava; 8 Oct 2003
Structure of Debian development

1. Originally: 1:1 (maintainer:package)
2. Group maintenance: n:1 (maintainer:package)
   - complex packaging (X strike force)
   - reliable team work
   - stays on technical level
3. CDD: n:m (maintainer:package)
   - complete suites covering use cases
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The poor, diligent deriver

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- Conflicts with human beings (yes we are 😊)
- Keep derivative continuously up to date
- Rather try to cooperate
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The impatient, desperate deriver

- Show stoppers in Debian
- Deriver has timeline
- DoOcracy
- Hint: Leave open the way back
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LiMux, Wienux, LinEx, Lliurex, . . .

Authorities are something else

Alternatively Debian-eGov

Similar situation: Funded projects (DeMuDi)
The authority employed deriver LiMux, Wienux, LinEx, Lliurex, . . . Authorities are something else Alternatively Debian-eGov Similar situation: Funded projects (DeMuDi)
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Live CD cool
- Demonstrating / showing off your nice product
- Testing your hardware
- Boot your favourite OS on random computer
- Kiosk system
- Linux course in a random computer lab

Problem: Keep read-only system up to date

Use *live-helper*

Join the effort (DoOcracy)
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The clever, commercial deriver

- Turn Debian into sellable product
- Linspire, Mephis, Progeny, Ubuntu, Xandros, ...
- Add some value (non-free drivers helping poor users, etc.)
- Sell some service (24/7 for enterprises)
- Basically re-branding
- Debian supports those derivers
- Debian competes with those derivers

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Andreas Tille (Debian Conference 7)
Derivers lessons to learn

\[ \Delta(\text{Debian} - \text{Derivative}) < \varepsilon \quad \forall t \]
In other words: Keep the diff always small!

- We are on your side.
  Talk to us.
Derivers lessons to learn

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Pros and cons for special applications

- Debian becomes larger and larger
- How many packages are good for Debian?
- Bring special applications under quality control
- Attract wider user base
- How many packages are good for our users?
- Large user data (why #38902 wont-fix)

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Basic goal of CDDs

- Debian > 15000 packages
- Users interested in *subset*
- Groups of specialised users
- Easy installation and configuration
- While *Debian* stays general support specialists as well
- **No derivative** from Debian

Basic idea: Do not make a separate distribution but make Debian fit for special purpose instead
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This talk can be found at

http://people.debian.org/~tille/talks/
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