

## Wizards of OS 3 Conference

# Programming for Freedom

The third Wizards of OS conference has just ended in Berlin, Germany. The event provided a platform for developers, artists, and political activists to discuss the future of free software and society.

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**R**ollergirls in bright red costumes carrying cases with a short antenna zoom through the corridors. Inside the cases, computers that build a wireless mesh community network. The spectacle at this year's Wizards of OS [1] comes courtesy of a London-based group of artists called TAKE2030. The event's organizers wanted to know if the principles of free software can be applied to other spheres.

Over 100 political activists, artists, and developers met between June 10 and 12 to find out.

## Free Wireless Networks

Activists have already started to deploy the vision of free networks, whether as mesh community networks or using the Open Spectrum [2] approach.

Dewayne Hendricks, from Open Spectrum, appealed to visitors not to allow current technologies to compromise their ideals. He warned of imminent disputes with broadband providers, if communities succeeded in setting up truly free broadband networks in urban areas. Thomas Krag from *Wireless.dk* pointed out how important free wireless networks are in emerging countries, pointing out projects in Indonesia and Namibia as examples.



## Digital Bridges

India-based Encoretch [3] published a free specification for the Simputer, a cheap and portable computer with special usability features such as voice output, on the Web a while back. A hardware device exists.

The price is more than expected, as production figures are low. This has led to a search for customers interested in launching the device on major markets, and for programmers capable of providing interesting applications to match.

Other people, other problems, says Munich's Green politician Jens Mühlhaus referring to the city administration's migration to Linux, which is not proceeding as quickly as expected. Mark

Bressers from the Netherlands also emphasized how important it is for public offices to cut the ties that bind them to a single supplier. He said that open standards [4] are thus more important than Open Source. Argentinian Federico Heinz went a step further down the road to Utopia stating that "You can't run a democracy with proprietary software".

## Against Patents

In many cases patents are a bigger hindrance than copyright issues. This has led *Xiph.org* to avoid patented algorithms. Ralph Giles demonstrated an implementation of the Theora video codec [4] to the panel.

Doug Cutting introduced the free search engine software Nutch [5], which is based on the Lucene Java framework.



Figure 1: Portable wireless nodes. Mini ITX computers are concealed in the Rollergirls' cases.

## Free Licenses, Goodwill

Many talks were non-technical. Creative Commons extends the ideas of free software to culture in general [6].

Jimmy Wales introduced the Wikipedia as an example of the Open Source ideal in other areas. Sunir Shah said that conflicts can not be solved by technical means such as bans. Instead, the guiding principle for interaction should be "Assume good faith". ■

### INFO

- [1] Wizards of OS: <http://www.wizards-of-os.org>
- [2] Open Spectrum: <http://www.greaterdemocracy.org>
- [3] Encoretch: <http://ncoretch.com/simputer>
- [4] Xiph.org: <http://www.xiph.org>
- [5] Nutch: <http://www.nutch.org>
- [6] Creative Commons: <http://creativecommons.org>