DEBIAN DEVELOPERS' CONFERENCE 2011
Final Report

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Words from the DPL

Stefano Zacchiroli

Once a year, Debian geeks from all over the world flock together for the (rather originally named) DebConf event: the annual conference of developers of the Debian project. For many of us, including yours truly, DebConf is simply unmissable. It is an event around which we (try to) negotiate family vacations, (try to) push aside work duties, and invest a good deal of emotions.

DebConf is so important because it feels like it exists in a suspended reality: a reality where Debian enthusiasts, who during the year fight hard to find free time slots to hack on Debian, can finally do so 24/7 for up to two weeks. Wait, there is more! Geek attendees also have the rather unique chance to hack in a context packaged with other people who are as enthusiastic about Debian as they are, giving birth to exciting synergies by the minute.

But DebConf is not only hacking. It is also, and primarily, a social event. People hack for a while, then move with friends to bars or other interesting activities presented by the context, then go back to hacking, and so on and so forth (the lack of sleep in such a simplistic description of the typical DebConf schedule is an intentional omission). By doing so, they strengthen ties within the Debian community and smooth grudges that might arise when communicating only over the Internet.

Stefano Zacchiroli, Debian Project Leader

DebConf11 has met the high standard that all DebConf attendees expect from a DebConf. Like the previous DebConfs, DebConf11 has also had its unique peculiarities to offer.

The one which struck me the most is the unique geographical context in which DebConf11 has happened: the Balkans. As for many other DebConf11 attendees, it was my first visit to the region. The Balkans are a kind of magic place, permeated by an incredible mixture of very different cultures and historical influences. I like to think of that mixture as a perfect match for the Debian Project, where one thousand volunteers from all over the world – with very different visions and cultures – unite together with a common goal: creating the best Free operating system.

All this has been made possible by more people than could possibly be listed here. From the organising team to the speakers, from participants to sponsors, from locals to government officials, and to everyone else whom I forgot to mention: thank you all. I hope you will enjoy reading this report to remember (if you attended) or try to imagine (if you did not) what DebConf11 has been.

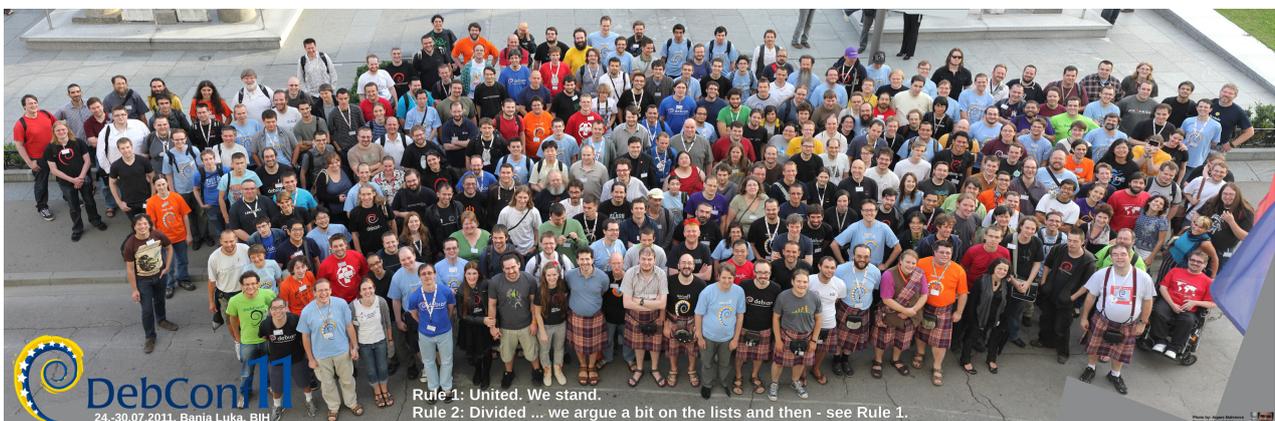See you next year, and don't worry: "everything will be fine!"

Stefano Zacchiroli
Debian Project Leader
December 2011

The role of DebConf

Over the last ten years, DebConf has grown from its origins as a small meeting on the sidelines of another conference to become a large event in its own right. A team of volunteers works all year round, dealing with administrative aspects of the previous DebConf and preparing for the next one. However, it is the conference attendees themselves, rather than the organizing team, who ensure the success of DebConf, with benefits for Debian which go beyond the conference period and beyond the walls of the conference facilities. DebConf enables face-to-face interactions between the attendees, broadcasts its talks live on the web and archives them permanently for future viewing. It also provides focused time when attendees can work uninterrupted on Debian, especially during the DebCamp week before the main conference.

Even brief face-to-face interactions at DebConf can have important effects by improving subsequent communications between project contributors. A short meeting, or even an informal discussion over a meal, often helps to quickly find solutions to issues which had been stuck in long circular discussions on mailing lists. In an international project where most contributors rarely meet, it can be hard for contributors to gauge the tone of others online; the experience of face-to-face interaction with someone makes it much easier to correctly interpret later written communications. Each year we set aside some of the DebConf budget to provide travel bursaries to project members who it is important to have at the conference, and who would not be able to attend out of their own resources – it's not only the recipients of the bursaries who benefit, but the whole project.

The talks and discussion sessions at DebConf are important opportunities to raise new proposals for development, to let contributors know about new technical advances they can build on in their own work, and to manage the wide cooperation required for each new Debian release. While they are important in setting the agenda for those attending DebConf, they are also watched by many others, during and after the conference. Those watching talks live during the conference even have the opportunity to submit their own questions to speakers over IRC, along with those present in the room. The recordings are viewed for years afterwards by Debian contributors and others anywhere in the world. The live streams and recordings hugely scale up the benefits gained from the money spent to arrange talks at DebConf.

Anyone visiting the hacklabs during DebConf, at almost any time of day or night, will find people engrossed in work on Debian – some silently by themselves typing, others peering at computer screens in pairs, and others sat in a ring arguing out the technical details of a design. Many attendees find it hard to find uninterrupted time to work on Debian in their regular schedule, and value DebConf as a period when they can put aside their other usual responsibilities and focus on Debian work. The DebCamp period of DebConf is provided specifically to enable this uninterrupted work – teams may choose to arrange their own meetings, but there are no centrally scheduled conference events on these days except for meals, and fewer people are present than during the main conference, all keen to progress their work. The work done on Debian during DebCamp and the main DebConf period has a far higher value than the amount spent to arrange the conference.

Getting ready for the group photo

Two other benefits from DebConf are worth pointing out here. First, coming to DebConf motivates Debian contributors. Many attendees find that their enthusiasm for working on Debian is renewed and increased, so that the impact of the conference continues long after everyone has gone home. Secondly, DebConf motivates the local community in the region where the conference is held. Some people attend DebConf because it happens close to them, without having previously worked on Debian at all, and then end up becoming Debian Developers. Some existing contributors attend DebConf for the first time because it is close to them, and end up increasing their level of involvement in the wider Debian project.

DebConf, with all these benefits, is only possible due to the financial support given by our sponsors. DebConf sponsorship is extremely efficient, as the benefits it produces are much greater than the amounts spent, go far beyond the conference venue, and last long after the conference period.

DebConf11 opening ceremony

DebCamp

Vedran Omeragić

As far as the preparations go, in technical terms, DebCamp turned out to be quite an event for me. As it was my first Debian conference, I expected DebCamp to be more of a technical nature, but it turned out to have a lot of *put that here* and *move that over there*. DebCamp also gives you time to familiarize yourself with surroundings, as well as meet the people with whom you'll be working for the next two weeks, or just catch up with old acquaintances.

During DebCamp, there was only one mindset: everything had to be done properly and on time. The organisers' team would usually meet early in the morning to discuss any remaining issues and to plan further steps. As the team of organisers and volunteers included a great number of personnel, coordination in and between the teams was tough. This problem was reduced using hand-held transceivers and SIM cards provided free-of-charge to all attendees by one of

Typical scene at hacklab

our sponsors, the mobile phone network m:tel. As is the case with every organization, eventually a number of problems arose. Thanks to the efficiency of the organisers' team and the volunteers, such problems were easily dealt with. Having been a part of that, I can say for sure that I have learned to truly appreciate volunteering.

Hacking means collaboration!

As for the organization itself, during the first two days we were more *observers* than organizers. The first day was exploration of the venue, the hotel and the local region; we had to acquire enough information before we could make any long term plans. The second day began with the meeting and the first plan of action. Basic teams were created, leaders chosen and chores assigned: beginning from the groundworks, proper power distribution, full wireless coverage, delivery of the furniture, delivery and setting up of the video equipment and setting up of servers. The following five days we worked full-steam and turned the venue, Banski Dvor, from a historical museum into a high-tech Roman Colosseum, but with all the wireless coverage a person could need.

Other then just being a division of labor, DebCamp turned out to be quite a social event. Since this was my first such conference, everyone I met was pretty much new. I had a chance to meet and socialize with some great people throughout the camp, and since I worked with them it made the whole thing easier and more pleasurable.

I guess what I'm trying to say in this text is that DebCamp doesn't come down to just setting up equipment and moving stuff around. It was and still is one of the most important experiences of my life. It's a great time to meet new people, socialize and work with them. It's also a great opportunity to learn about organizing such events, facing issues and difficulties and coordinating a great deal of volunteers. If the opportunity presents itself, I would undoubtedly like to be a part of it again.

Day trip

Víctor Manuel Martínez Martínez, Velimir Iveljić

During the marathon seven days of the conference (plus the preceding seven days of DebCamp) without much sleep and so much work to do, the Day Trip comes as a welcome break.

This year we decided to have two options available. The first option was a visit to the village of Krupa na Vrbasu. Attendees would have the chance to visit the 13th-century Orthodox monastery (*Manastir Krupa*) and the waterfalls of the Vrbas river, to walk in the woods, or to walk up the hill to the medieval ruins of Greben. The second option was to go rafting in the Vrbas river.

Manastir Krupa

The first option was a nice trip to the monastery, with a guide who explained most of the history and even told us about some legends of the area. The monastery and surrounding area was a good place to visit, but the really beautiful part was the waterfalls and the village of Krupa na Vrbasu, with its water mills and a very nice river and forest setting, excellent for walking, talking, rest, and relaxation. The only regret most of the people that like hiking had was that the time there was all too short.

Krupa na Vrbasu

The rafting option took an unexpected turn. We were expecting to go rafting all at once (about 75 people), but since we had a misunderstanding with the tourist agency we ended up having to take turns in groups (8 people in each group) until all of us got to experience the beauty of the Vrbas river in a boat. While waiting for their turn, attendees were either having drinks or swimming in the river and making new friends or just making old friendships stronger over a beer.

Rafting group

After all of the activities, we had a barbecue lunch at the restaurant on the Vrbas river.

The most important part is that most of us had a day off from DebConf work, and had time to sleep and rest for a day.

Talks

Gunnar Wolf

When starting to write this piece of text, the first question that comes to my mind is, "How many times and in how many different contexts will the question of how DebConf is different from other conferences appear, just in this report?"

Almost everything involved in the DebConf organization process is quite interesting and atypical, and the talk selection process for DebConf would not feel right if it were to betray that tradition. Our talk selection committee's task can be seen as even contradictory and pointless. How come?

Meike Reichle

Several years ago, we decided to strip the DebConf schedule of hierarchies. We do not have selected (as opposed to rejected) proposals, nor official talks (versus unofficial). We have a very small set of plenary talks (only three, out of a total 91 sessions scheduled during the five days of academic work). The plenaries were given to people and topics that our history has shown would surely leave other parallel activities empty: the annual DPL address, the Release Team report, which basically presents the guidelines and expected timeframes for Debian's work during the next year and how are we to approach the Wheezy freeze, and the Debian System Administration report, which outlines the status of the project-managed infrastructure and where is help needed/sought.

However, a diverse group of developers *did* invest quite a bit of effort into rating the talk proposals according to three factors: how relevant each of them is to the Debian community, how current the topic is, and whether we felt it had to be accepted. The top-rated talks were pre-scheduled, but – as we do every year – we tried to leave sufficient timeslots open to allow non-prescheduled talks to be held. Given DebConf's nature, even talks which were not proposed ahead of time can be officially scheduled – and, as a natural result of exchanging ideas among like-minded people, they are very often thought of on the spur of the moment. That's why we called them "ad-hoc sessions".

Neil McGovern

Continuing with an idea we had for the first time in DebConf10, this year we set up a list of tracks again. We grouped thematically-related talks in adjacent timeslots, trying to avoid the need for interested people to remember different points in the schedule. The tracks this year were:

Blends Presentations related to organizing and customizing subsets of Debian into derivative distributions or pure Debian blends, helping users find what they need for specific niches. This track was coordinated by Andreas Tille.

Debian/Society How does Debian work socially? How can we attract more contributors? How do we know whether we are heading in the right direction? What work is going towards large

projects involving Debian-wide contribution? This track was coordinated by Daniel Kahn Gillmor and Stefano Zacchiroli.

Debian.org-related webservices A significant number of users' first contact with Debian is through the information and various services our website offers. Over the years, we have slowly given coherence to what was originally a group of disjunct bunches of information – this track focused on Debian's web-facing services. It was coordinated by Martin Zobel-Helas.

We also held skills exchange sessions. We did not organize them as a track because it consisted of talks appealing to very different audiences. As Debian is such a diverse project, each project member has a very distinct set of skills, and it is very common to see groups of jaw-dropped, eye-opened people looking at a colleague doing what he or she thought was most natural. We had seven sessions each intended as a "living howto", where there were often people drafting documents explaining what they had just learnt.

Finally, I must give a great "thank you" to Tássia Camões. She took the time not only to make sure all relevant talks were scheduled, but to minimise schedule clashes caused by concurrent talks aimed at a similar audience.

Peter Palfrader, Martin Zobel-Helas and Steven Gran

Debian Day

Velimir Iveljić

This years Debian Day was "a little" different to past DebConfs, mainly because we had a few government officials: the President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik, the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska Aleksandar Džombić, the Minister of Science and Technology Jasmin Komić and General Director of m:tel Pregrag Ćulibrk, who each gave a short welcome speech at the beginning of Debian Day.

The Minister of Science and Technology talked about how he thinks that Free Software is important and how he would like to see more of it in government institutions and IT infrastructure.

M:tel General Director Predrag Ćulibrk also explained how m:tel supports Free Software and uses it for conducting their business.

After the welcome talks, there was a press conference in front of the main talk room (Auditorium) with all of the speakers.

Later in the day, Adnan Hodžić opened Debian Day/DebConf and that's when everything really got going. Bdale Garbee held a talk about Debian, where he introduced it to the audiance of new potential Debian contributors, by explaining what Debian is all about, how the project started and what it is today.

Adnan Hodzic, local DebConf lead organizer, and Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska

The talks continued after a lunch break. The full list of talks is presented below:

Hour	Title	Speakers
10:00	Opening ceremony with government officials	Aleksandar Džombić, Jasmin Komić, Milorad Dodik, Pregrag Ćulibrk, Adnan Hodžić
11:30	Debian Day opening plenary	Adnan Hodžić
12:00	Understanding Debian	Bdale Garbee
15:00	Life in Debian: Snapshots of everyday life in Debian	Enrico Zini
16:00	How to contribute and get involved	Meike Reichle, Alexander Reichle-Schmehl
17:00	Debian in the enterprise: A Google case study	Jesus Climent
18:00	Austrian e-health system: How Debian runs the Austrian e-health system	Gerfried Fuchs

Gerfried Fuchs delivering a Debian Day talk

The talks were all held in English, because there was (to my great disappointment) little interest from the local community to give talks. I think the reason for this was mainly that the potential speakers who were contacted were either too scared to do it in front of 400 people, or were too busy to do it.

After we realized that no one from the local GNU/Linux/Debian community would talk, we did our best to schedule talks that had an introductory nature, such as what is Debian, and how to contribute to the Debian community, as well as some talks about how Debian is being used in different kinds of businesses, etc.

All in all I think that Debian Day was really good, the main talk room (Auditorium) was full for the entire day (it fits around 400 people), and there were a lot of people who came to see the talks and get familiar with Debian. At the same time there was another IT event happening in Banja Luka, "EESTEC[1] Workshop: Let the Penguin In", so we (Bojana Borković from the local team) arranged for them to visit Debian Day.

Debian Day audience

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[1] http://eestec.net

Attendee impressions of DebConf

Tim Retout[2]

"It feels good to be at DebConf again, this time in Banja Luka. This is my fifth consecutive DebConf.

Getting here was fairly painful; a flight from Split was delayed, so I had to get a later bus than planned from Zagreb. Still, I met a bunch of DebConf attendees getting the same bus, so at least there was conversation.

Packaging-wise, I have been working on adding KiokuDB (and associated backends) into Debian. I wrote a patch for libossp-uuid-perl yesterday to fix a bug with its Data::UUID compatibility; this probably means I'll drop the Data::UUID ITP. Having looked at the code, I don't see how it can be easily fixed for multi-user systems.

The Perl team's forthcoming move to git has come as a pleasant surprise; I've been trying out the new workflow.

Earlier in the week I went running with bubulle et. al. – I must have missed the bit in the email where the very steep hill was mentioned. And the rain. So I had to slow down and turn around, and probably didn't quite do 15km in the end. :)

Beer is half the price of Coca-Cola here. Awesome.

So generally, I've been decompressing, and introspecting. The cafes are good for philosophical discussions; preferably when it's not raining. More later."

Lucas Nussbaum[3]

"So, the fifth DebConf I've had the chance to attend is clearly over now. It was great, and all organizers (and sponsors) really deserve huge "thank you" for making this event so successful. I'm already looking forward to next year's edition.

DebConf has been very productive for me. I chaired 4 sessions:

- the usual Quality Assurance BOF, which was a bit depressing: even if work gets done, the QA "team" doesn't really feel like a "team". Maybe that's because a QA "team" is not needed, and

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[2]http://retout.co.uk/blog/2011/07/28/debconf11
[3]http://www.lucas-nussbaum.net/blog/?p=694

Loyal followers: Wearing the T-shirts for every DebConf since 2003 (right to left)

we should instead split it into smaller teams focusing on subsets of the QA work (archive-wide testing, QA services, etc.)?

- a BOF on Ruby, where I demoed the work we have been doing around gem2deb, our new dh-based packaging helper

- a tutorial on archive testing, hoping to get more people involved in tests such as archive rebuilds. If you are interested in helping with reporting bugs, please drop me an email

- a BOF on finding a 'standard' Git workflow for packaging teams. More work is needed on this, but it looks like a good start.

I've also made numerous uploads of Ruby-related packages, and reduced my backlog on UDD to a reasonable level. I even managed to make a developers-reference upload, integrating all the pending patches from the BTS."

Aigars Mahinovs[4]

Geeks bearing cameras, ready for the conference dinner

"Another year, another DebConf and now it is passed. Pictures are processed and all are now uploaded. We are still missing 25 names in the DebConf11 group photo. With 265 people and 86 Mpix it is the highest resolution image we have had so far (Spain image had a bit more pixels, but a lot of them were outside the actual photo) and the largest number of people (Edinburgh photo had 248 people). The video team produced hundreds of gigabytes of footage, we had very interesting talks and debates and sometimes the AdHoc meeting room on the side was overcrowded with people in BoFs that were not on the initial schedule. It has been a very special kind of conference. As it always is. :)

As always, there were also some problems. I did not read the debconf-team mailing list, but I hear there was plenty of 'fun' discussions to be had in the run-up to the event, some information on getting to the venue was not quite clear (that was quickly fixed as first people arriving to Debcamp were documenting their experience), the organizational dance with the food tickets was more ... elaborate than usually, both the day trip and the formal dinner were ... more self-driven than expected, vegetarian complaint level was about the same as usual (which is considered high by some) and the wireless in the hotel was very weak, also Saturday weddings are quite loud and run very late apparently.

To compensate for that we had: very sunny Debcamp, cheap beer (!!!), great quality accommodations, very good looking venue, good network at the venue (after initial scalability issues with the wireless), good food (that did sometimes run out, though), short distances to all locations, oh and did I mention cheap beer?"

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[4] http://www.aigarius.com/blog/2011/08/04/debconf-11-postmortem/

Raphael Hertzog[5]

"I spent a full week in DebConf (from Sunday 24th to Sunday 31th) and as usual, it's been a pleasure to meet again all my Debian friends. It's always difficult to find a good balance between attending talks, working in the hacklab and socializing but I'm pretty happy with the result.

I did not have any goal when I arrived, except managing the Rolling BOF but all the discussions during talks always lead to a growing TODO list. This year was no exception. The technical committee BoF resulted in some discussions of some of the pending issues, in particular one that interests me: how to enable hardening build flags in Debian (see bug report #552688[6]).

At a BoF session

We scheduled another discussion on the topic for Tuesday and the outcome is that dpkg-buildflags is the proper interface to inject hardening build flags provided that it offers a mean to drop unwanted flags and a practical way to inject them in the ./configure command line."

Bdale Garbee[7]

"I spent the last two weeks of July 2011 in Banja Luka. The occasion was the annual Debian developer's conference, DebConf11 and preceding work week known as Debcamp. This was my tenth successive year attending DebConf, and I had a very productive and pleasant time! The facilities were good, the local team was friendly, enthusiastic, and very helpful, and in addition to giving three talks and hosting a couple panel discussions, I managed to put a burst of energy into work on FreedomBox. Several other developers working on FreedomBox were also present, and a good number of Sheeva and Dream plugs were evident in the hacklabs sporting new FreedomBox stickers. Working together in the same place for several days, we made good progress on several projects, and also had some great discussions about what we want to do going forward."

Steve McIntyre[8]

"In one word: AWESOME

Every year I worry that DebConf might not be as good as I hope, or not as good as previous years. Well, I've yet to be let down!

The road trip down to Banja Luka was good fun, even if it took a little longer than planned. We ended up travelling down through Germany on the same Friday as much of the country finished work/school for their summer vacation, so there was a lot of traffic. Meh, we got there in the end.

I made my usual mistake of planning some things to hack on during the DebConf week; by now I should know better... :-) I made a start on one small project, but then got so distracted by so many talks and side meetings with people that it's still waiting. As always, my own personal TODO list

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[5] http://raphaelhertzog.com/2011/08/05/my-debian-activities-in-july-2011/
[6] http://bugs.debian.org/552688
[7] http://www.gag.com/bdale/blog/posts/FreedomBox_in_Banja_Luka.html
[8] http://blog.einval.com/

Discussions at the hacklab

picked up huge amounts of extra stuff from those discussions. Catching up with, and socialising with, Debian friends from all over the world was also fun as always!

Lots of highlights of the week for me, both for technical and social reasons:

- Multi-arch is finally with us! Great talk from Steve Langasek, and a very useful meeting afterwards to unpick what work is still needed. Quite a bit, it seems... :-)

- Useful meetings with Otavio to discuss future changes to how debian-installer is going to work, and how the debian-cd and debian-installer teams can work together better on that.

- Catching up with Martin to work out what's needed to get pancutan finally integrated with our regular CD builds.

- Talking with Jimmy about where to go next for regular debian-live builds on our core CD build machine.

- The ARM BoF, where things have moved on from "why should I care about ARM?" to "when will you have armhf ready for going in the archive?". W00t!

- Doing our own day trip in the cars from the UK. We got to meet some very friendly and helpful local people, plus we found some incredible roads to drive on. Even if not all of them were technically roads yet... :-)

Banja Luka was a lovely place to visit, and a great host city for DebConf. Looking forwards to Managua now!"

Cheese and Wine Party

Vedran Omeragić

As a part of DebConf tradition each year, we organized the "Cheese and Wine Party", an event enjoyed by all of our participants. Though the focus of this party lies in tasting the vast array of wines and cheese brought by participants from all over the world, a great variety of different food and different alcoholic beverages was available. The party was held on the third day of the conference in Banski Dvor, and counted several hundreds of participants, who socialized and enjoyed the friendly party atmosphere and some quiet beats provided by our local DJ.

Full house

This year the conference attendees had the chance to taste some of the finest wines and cheese Bosnia and Herzegovina had to offer, as well as some unique and home brewed alcoholic beverages such as rakija. The aroma of the fondue could still be detected in the area days after the party. Aside from the local cuisine, more then a hundred different types of cheese and wine were brought by attendees. Each and every cheese was properly labeled, and those who brought it would happily elaborate what it was and how to properly enjoy it.

A small sample of the wide array of cheeses

Video

Holger Levsen

DebConf11 was the sixth DebConf with video coverage, and for the most part, the video work went along very smoothly. This allowed video team members to participate more in DebConf and to do more Debian work during the conference, while at the same time providing the quality videos everybody has become used to. The reasons for this are twofold.

Live video mixing

First, our workflows are well defined and documented by now. We had cheat-sheets printed in every recorded room for every device, plus a general checklist for the room coordinator. The role of room coordinator is new to our team and involves making sure that signed-up volunteers actually show up and providing replacements in case of absence.

The second factor was that this year we were able to ship to the venue a complete set of video gear capable of covering two rooms. We are very grateful to IRILL[9] and HP[10] for their generous donations that made this possible. In future, I expect the video team's work to go even more smoothly thanks to even better preparation, as the hardware will stay with us, resulting in even better videos and more DebConf participation by the video team members.

In total, we recorded and streamed 75 sessions on six days. These recordings are available in two different encoding qualities, resulting in 34GB for the high quality recordings and 6GB for the low quality ones. The team consisted of 49 "official" members and countless unofficial helpers.

We collected thanks from 23 countries from basically all continents on `http://wiki.debconf.org/wiki/DebConf11/Videoteam/Thanks`

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[9]`irill.org`
[10]`hp.com`

The venue

Velimir Iveljić

Selecting the venue for DebConf11 was more or less straightforward. Since the government of Republika Srpska was to sponsor a large part of the conference's costs, they gave us two options: the government building or Banski Dvor, the Cultural Center of Banja Luka. Considering the pain of having to show some kind of ID and needing to go past the security check every time one entered the government building, we decided to go with the Banski Dvor. The other reason for choosing this

Banski Dvor, in central Banja Luka

venue was that is was very close to the accommodation we had arranged for the attendees.

Banski Dvor was almost perfect for DebConf. We had two lecture rooms, the Auditorium, in which we were able to fit more than 400 people, and the Round Room which could contain around 100 people. When DebConf started we set up one more small room for BoFs. The main hacklab was on the ground floor of Banski Dvor, which was open 24/7 every day. The only drawback of the hacklab was that it did not have any air conditioning. We set up several fans in the hacklab, so it was cool enough for everyone. There was another hacklab upstairs, which had air conditioning and was a bit larger than the one downstairs. It too was open 24/7.

During a presentation in the beautiful "Round room"

A local academic and research network/group provided us with a 1 Gbit/s link, so the internet connection was really good!

I have to mention that we had some problems regarding accessibility. Since the building was old, it did not have any permanent ramps, so we ended up using a portable one, which wasn't 100% what we needed.

We had two options for sleeping facilities. One was that we could put everyone in expensive hotels, the other one was a free of charge students dorm. Since we had enough sponsorship from the government, we ended up using the hotels, since they were much much MUCH closer to the Venue building (one hotel was literally across the street, the other two were 500 meters away). The hotels were the best ones that the city had to offer, and I didn't hear anyone complain :). The only problem, and I have to say a big one, was the accessibility of the hotel rooms, since none of the hotels had specially equipped bathrooms.

Food

Velimir Iveljić

During the planning stages of DebConf11, the local team tried to arrange the best food option for DebConf attendees. We had to keep in mind that there are a lot of people with special dietary requirements, and we wanted to keep everyone happy. After considering a few options, we decided to go with the Hotel Bosna restaurant, as we thought they (the hotel) would be able to quickly adjust to everyone's needs in case of any problems.

During DebCamp, food was really good and I asked around to see if people were happy, to which I received positive answers. However, when DebConf started, the food started to get worse at some point. We reacted quickly but the hotel didn't fix many of the problems in due time and I think that was a huge disappointment for some of the attendees. Also, there were some days when the food arrived really slowly and some attendees either waited for too long, or just gave up and went to eat elsewhere.

Lunchtime at Hotel Bosna

Lunch was served as a "normal" sit-down meal, meaning everyone got soup, main course with salad and a dessert. In the end I think the food was OK, but for the price we paid, it could have been much better.

The prices we paid was €7.50 per meal per person (both lunch and dinner) and we only paid for the meals we used – This means, we were not charged for the food for people who decided not to eat with the group. Breakfast was included in the hotel room price and everyone ate breakfast at the hotel they were staying in (since we used three different hotels). For lunch and dinner, we first arranged for people to take meal tickets at the hotel Bosna front desk, and give them to the waiters in the eating area. That didn't work very well, as we noticed that the hotel staff who were handing out meal tickets weren't checking the list of names of eligible people. We ended up changing the "routine" almost every two days, since a lot of people got involved in the "routine" planning and it was impossible to keep everyone happy at that point.

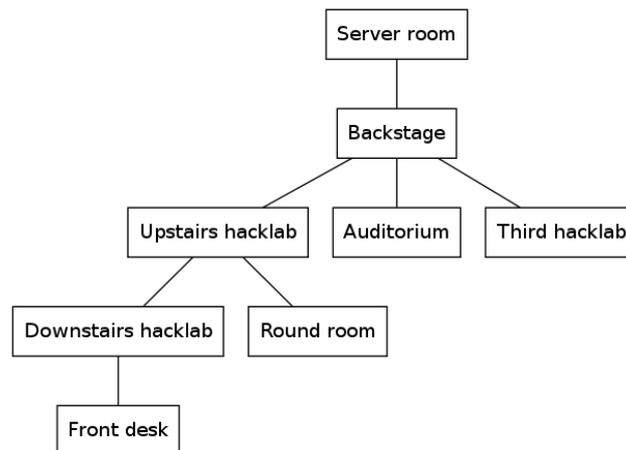*Formal dinner: A one-time fancy, different dinner*

The network

Daniel Kahn Gillmor, Andrew McMillan

We had a gigabit uplink from SARNET at Banski Dvor. The connectivity came into a 4-processor amd64 gateway (`dc11fw`) with a total of 7 gigabit NICs available. We were allocated an IPv4 /22 block. We assigned public IP addresses to infrastructure machinery (attached directly to the `dc11fw`). We connected the main internal network as a single flat ethernet domain, connected to `dc11fw` on an interface named `eth-users`. `dc11fw` provided DHCP for an RFC 1918 /21 range of IPv4 and a NAT for outbound traffic.

We did not have direct IPv6 connectivity, but `dc11fw` also had a 6to4 tunnel connected to a host in Germany. `dc11fw` ran radvd to announce public IPv6 addresses and routes to machines on the internal network.

The server room was wired with cat 5e directly to an unmanaged gigabit switch backstage upstairs of the main talks room, and cat 5e cabling ran from the backstage switch throughout the rest of the building. We had several Buffalo WHR-G54S acting both as access points for 802.11b/g wireless clients and as 10/100 miniswitches. The network topology looked something like this:

```
                        ┌─────────────┐
                        │ Server room │
                        └──────┬──────┘
                        ┌──────┴──────┐
                        │  Backstage  │
                        └──────┬──────┘
              ┌────────────────┼────────────────┐
     ┌────────┴───────┐ ┌──────┴──────┐ ┌────────┴──────┐
     │ Upstairs hacklab│ │ Auditorium  │ │ Third hacklab │
     └────────┬───────┘ └─────────────┘ └───────────────┘
        ┌─────┴──────────────┐
┌───────┴──────────┐ ┌───────┴──────┐
│ Downstairs hacklab│ │  Round room  │
└───────┬──────────┘ └──────────────┘
   ┌────┴──────┐
   │ Front desk│
   └───────────┘
```
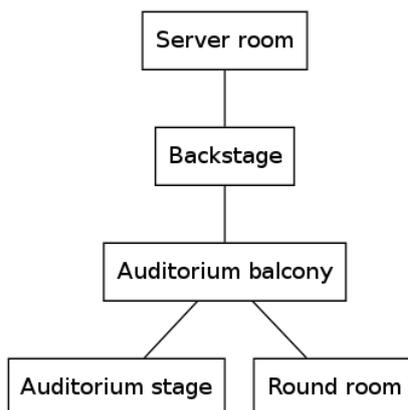
We had a 48-port managed 10/100 switch (Cisco Catalyst 3550) in each of the two hacklabs, each with a very simple configuration.

Video network

We provided a separate physical ethernet domain for exclusive use of the video team. This was connected to `dc11fw` via a dedicated NIC, and ran between camera stations in both talk rooms. This subnet was allocated its own /24 of RFC 1918 addresses, and no DHCP service was run. Video-Team machines were manually-configured. The network topology looked like this:

Video team's needs put the highest stress in our network configuration

This network was unmanaged gigabit throughout. We tested point-to-point connections between machines with iperf, and saw performance of ~930 Mbps for unidirectional TCP streams.

Wireless

The wireless APs (Buffalo WHR-G54S) were configured and deployed to provide roaming capabilities, and efforts were made to ensure neighboring nodes used distinct channels to avoid interference. To provide sufficient access points for the expected numbers we used channels 1, 5, 9 and 13 in rotation around the conference venue, as is standard in dense environments.

Wireless networking with DebConf's density can be tricky

During DebCamp, we increasingly found the wireless was subject to severe packet loss and sometimes complete failure during times of peak use, which caused some people to switch to wired networking. It is important to manage attendees expectations of what can be achieved for a wireless network at DebConf, where there are 300-odd very network-active attendees, often with two or more devices attempting to connect wirelessly.
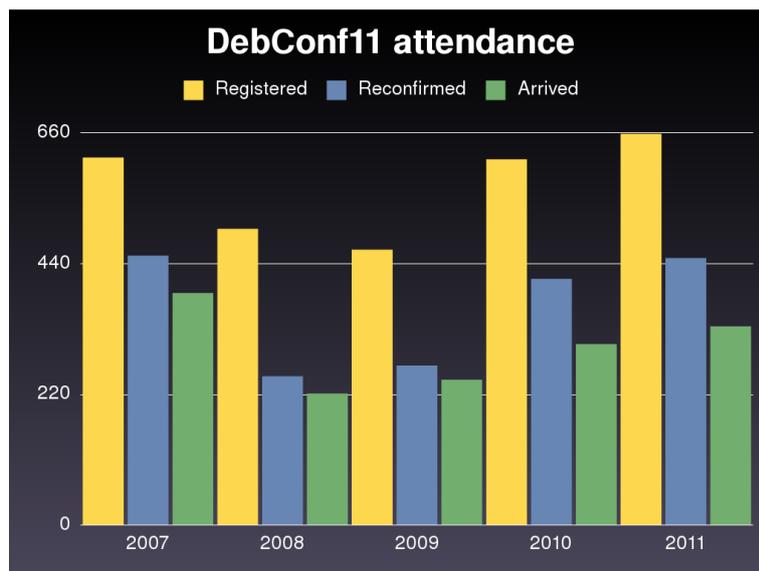
The APs were initially configured with OpenWRT 'backfire' with a 2.6.x kernel but the congestion problems experienced during DebCamp were significantly reduced when we switched to the older 2.4 kernel with proprietary drivers for the broadcom chipset. It should be noted that even when the access points were non-responsive for wireless they were still responsive to logins and continued to operate well as switches, where that was part of their function.

The Buffalo WHR-G54S access points are a somewhat older model now, first used at DebConf9 in Cáceres and we should start to think about finding replacement equipment for DebConf13 in Switzerland.
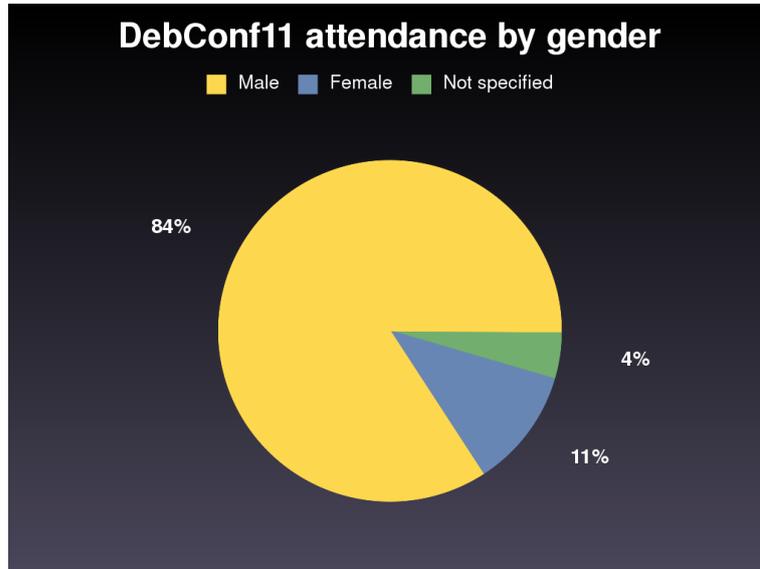
DebConf11 numbers

Gunnar Wolf

Year after year, our conference is clearly among the most diverse of the Free Software ecosystem. We had attendees coming from 46 different countries (and probably some more, as 59 people kept private their country of origin). And by looking at the distribution (see the table on page 26), besides our kind Bosnian hosts, the distribution was close to the DD distribution per country – DebConf has a loyal following among its previous attendees, and similar distributions will happen regardless of where in the world the conference is held. Of course, the long-standing unofficial policy of not repeating the continent for two successive years has the merit of balancing the costs to attend as evenly as possible for the largest percentage of attendees. While it is true that a large number of attendees participate only when the conference does not imply an intercontinental trip, we have among the highest rates of repeat attendance. This year, besides the 59 who withheld their origin, we had 217 people from Europe, 41 from the Americas, 14 from Asia, 3 from Oceania and 1 from Africa.
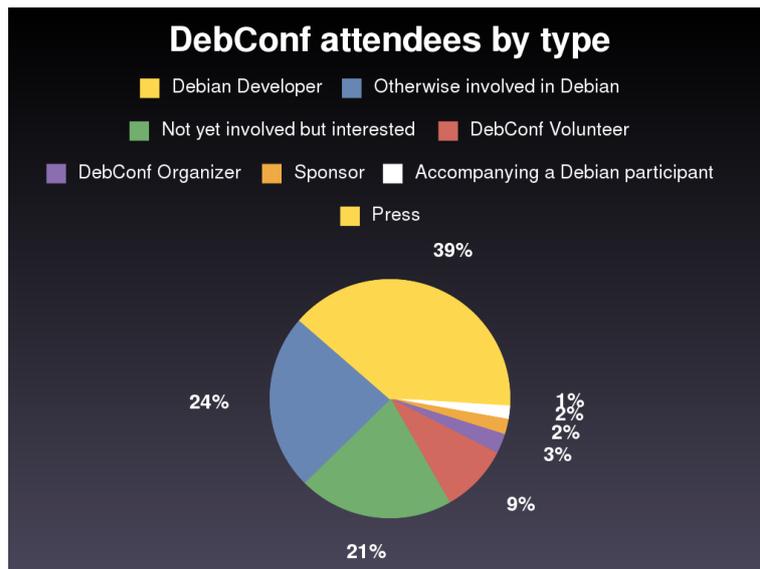

DebConf is eagerly anticipated by repeat attendees and by Free Software enthusiasts in the region who have never attended a DebConf before. Registration for DebConf usually opens several months before the conference actually starts, allowing both the interested individuals and the organization team to plan accordingly. As we can see in the "DebConf11 attendance" graph, over the last five years the average attendance rate has been close to 50% of the registered people (with the clear exception of DebConf7, where we had a 63% attendance). The trend we — both as organizers and as attendees – need to work on is the growing difference between reconfirmations and actual arrivals: In 2007, 2008 and 2009, the ratio was superior to 85%, but for 2010 and 2011 it fell to 73% and 75%. Given that we allocate our food and lodging costs according to the reconfirmation numbers, this shows that estimating the expenses has become harder. Of course, this does not mean we paid for 20% extra beds or meals, as those numbers were in the end adjusted appropriately with our service providers.

Regarding DebCamp participation, approximately a third of the attendees arrived in time for DebCamp. As DebCamp is a non-structured week where work is carried out by each person on the specific projects he/she works with, we request people to specify what their work plans are, or pay for the provided lodging and food. This year, we had 100 people attending with a specific work plan, 6 paying for their stay, and 230 attending only for DebConf. The ratio is very similar to what we have had over the previous years.

Regarding gender distribution, although at a first sight DebConf is clearly gender-imbalanced, we have achieved a much higher participation of women than in many other areas of Debian – and of Free Software in general. This year we had 38 women out of 336 total attendees, slightly over 11%, the highest percentage we have seen since 2007.

Regarding the relation with the Debian project: The largest sector, with 39%, consists of Debian Developers. 75% of the attendees already do some Debian-related work (including the 9% who are registered as DebConf volunteers); 21% stated they attended because they are interested in

getting involved. Planning forward towards next year, however, this metric should probably be updated, as venues for participation in Debian have strongly changed over the last few years, with the recognition of new types of participation.

Also as in the previous years, food preferences diverge strongly from the trends in the population at large: while 236 attendees specified no dietary restrictions, 39 were vegetarian and 3 vegan (strict vegetarian). This means that (taking into account with people who selected not to eat with the rest group or had other specific needs) we had 12.5% vegetarians in the group.

	Attendees by country of origin
59	Not specified
54	Bosnia and Herzegovina
35	Germany
26	United Kingdom
17	United States
16	France
15	Croatia
13	Austria
9	Switzerland
8	Brazil
6	Serbia
5	Finland, Spain
4	Italy, Japan, Nicaragua, Taiwan
3	Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden
2	Argentina, Australia, El Salvador, Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Israel, Thailand
1	Bulgaria, China, Greece, India, Latvia, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Martinique, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, South Africa, Turkey, Venezuela

Budgeting

Richard Darst, Velimir Iveljić

Budgeting for DebConf is a long, involved process. We have incomes in many different currencies and countries, pay many expenses in a local currency, and then reimburse expenses to many attendees all over the world. Furthermore, we use funds from various Debian accounts, and we need to keep track of the net flow to and from Debian.

This year, we kept all of our records in the journal format of the ledger/hledger programs. This allowed us to get quick, accurate reports about our current financial situation. However, these come at a cost of needing to actually keep track of all of this information, which can be hard given the many independent-minded people who are more interested in getting things done than keeping records.

Our budget officer insisted on correct, auditable records for all transactions, and these are reflected in our ledger. This required cross-checking with account statements from all of our accounts. Cash transactions also take place, and these are less easy to check on, as those that do them can forget to keep sufficient records, and transaction details can get lost.

Global accounting		
Account	Income (EUR)	Expense (EUR)
Bank fees		258.59
Miscellaneous expenses		415.71
Shipping		4,550.00
Taxes		839.86
DebConf Team travel, pre-conference		1,058.37
Video Team		698.27
Video Team shipping		365.91
Travel sponsorship		34,464.11
DebConf newbies program		2,219.87
Attendee (total)	19,622.01	
Corporate registrations	1,987.24	
DebCamp registration	450.00	
Professional registrations	17,184.77	
Donations	562.59	
Sponsorship	38,926.12	
Total	**59,110.72**	**44,504.77**

The local organization, DIVA, kept their own records for transactions they handled. These are listed separately, since they do not have the degree of detail expected of Debian project records. For areas they handled, DIVA reported only expenses, not details on the income received from local sponsors.

Local accounting (estimate)	
Account	Estimate expense (EUR)
Accommodation	112,095.32
Conference dinner	4,206.33
Debian Day	4,541.31
Insurance	3,558.23
T-shirts	4,055.87
Pre-DebConf visit	644.55
Local transportation	609.98
Power solutions through out the Venue	1,044.59
General expenses	1,273.63
Total	**132,029.81**

Under normal circumstances, we initially budget only for the bare essentials required for the conference. Then as we receive more contributions from sponsors, we gradually allocate money to travel sponsorship, making the conference more useful by bringing Debian contributors who could not afford to attend otherwise, and to improving the "amenity" of the conference for attendees, by adding for example a special conference dinner or a sponsored day-trip if we have sufficient funds.

Some extra money came from Debian enthusiasts who came with Debian merchandise to sell

Travel sponsorship is a special case for our expenses: Given that DebConf attendees come from every corner of the world, and that many of them do a lot of work for Debian as volunteers and have jobs from which they need to take time off (frequently unpaid), every DebConf we try to help them by sponsoring some of their travel expenses, since it's the least we can do for them as a community!

As DebConf is such an important event to the Debian community, and given the return on the investment the project gets, for the second time we ran the *DebConf newbies* program: a special travel sponsorship queue aimed at people who have not previously attended DebConf. It has proven quite a successful way to foster further involvement.

This year presented an exception to the usual procedure, thanks to generous in-kind support from the Government of Republika Srpska, one of the political entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This

DebConf organizers and attendees together with the President, Prime Minister and Science and Technology Minister of Republika Srpska after the opening of DebConf

in-kind support included the main conference venue, accommodation and food for our sponsored attendees, a conference dinner and day outing. This allowed us to allocate funds received from other sponsors directly to areas such as travel sponsorship, without the usual delays.

Sponsors play a very important part in DebConf organization; indeed, without them it would not be possible for us to put on an event of this size. All contributions we receive are used to host as many developers and other Debian contributors as possible, and to make a good atmosphere for them to work, enabling them to further develop and improve Debian as an operating system, and also as a community. None of the budget goes on administrative costs, since everyone involved in DebConf organization is a volunteer.

Some attendees, in order to support DebConf, pay a Professional or Corporate registration fee, which is further described in the Registration section of this report. This includes a significant proportion who are sent to DebConf by their employers as part of their job. However, our sponsors enable us to allow many other qualifying Debian contributors to attend DebConf free of charge. These Debian contributors include many who are students or from poorer countries, who could not afford to pay their own hotel bills for the conference, and would not be able to attend without the program of bursaries made possible by our sponsors' financial support. DebConf would be a far less useful event for Debian if it was only open to those who can afford to pay their own way, or who are sent as employees.

DebConf receives donations and makes payments in many different currencies. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Software in the Public Interest (SPI) and the Verein zur Förderung Freier Informationen und Software (FFIS) for being our representative, holding money for us in the USA and EU respectively, and for handling payments and transactions on our behalf.

Registration

Nattie Mayer-Hutchings

Registration to attend DebConf happens in several stages. Several months before the start of the conference, coinciding roughly with the Call for Papers, registration opens. People can then start to apply for sponsored registration via Pentabarf, a conference management system with a web interface. After approximately a month, the deadline to apply for sponsored registration passes. Those who register after this point are no longer eligible for sponsored registration, and are encouraged to use paid Professional or Corporate registration. Later on, the DebConf block bookings for accommodation are closed. Registration remains open until the conference period for those who will arrange hotel accommodation themselves, or who live nearby.

Preparing the T-shirts to give to the attendees

Corporate registration (€1000 in 2011, or about US$1400) is intended for organisations who wish to send their employees to attend DebConf. This registration fee optionally includes accommodation and food during DebConf. We also offer a *Professional* registration category (€450 in 2011, or about US$600), which covers only the direct costs to the conference from the attendee.

As DebConf approaches, some six weeks before the event, the reconfirmation phase begins. Attendees are required to log in once again to Pentabarf, and indicate that they really do intend to come to DebConf. The initial registration process gives the organising team an estimate of attendee numbers, while the reconfirmation process gives more precise numbers. This in turn facilitates the process of assigning rooms, arranging catering of meals, and so on.

Getting the front desk ready for the flood of arrivals

Finally, in the first few days of DebConf itself, the registration team's work flows into that of the front desk team, and the two teams tend to have a few members in common. Upon arriving at DebConf, attendees are checked in by members of the front desk team, and receive their name badge, and their conference bag, with a t-shirt, materials from sponsors, and information about DebConf itself and the local area.

Credits

It would have been impossible to make such a large event reality without the outstanding help of a great group of volunteers – starting with those whom we can't name here, since they just volunteered during the conference to do various tasks, and ending with the core team, who started organising this year's DebConf right after the last one ended.

It's impossible to list everyone who contributed to make this event happen; there were too many contributors. We apologise for every name we forgot to mention here.

DebConf11 organizers and volunteers at the closing session

DebConf Chairs	Moray Allan Gunnar Wolf	Holger Levsen
Global coordination	Moray Allan Gunnar Wolf Andrew McMillan Nattie Mayer-Hutchings	Holger Levsen Philip Hands Jörg Jaspert Richard Darst
Local team	Adnan Hodžić Vedran Omeragić Bojana Borković Vedran Novaković Milan Knežević Mladen Marković Marko Tutorić	Velimir Iveljić Adnan Sadžak Zlatan Todorić Aleksandar Milić Ivan Rajković Nemanja Brdar Enis Sahinović
Fund-raising team	Holger Levsen Steve McIntyre Jörg Jaspert Vedran Omeragić Héctor Orón	Clint Adams Adnan Hodžić Richard Darst Velimir Iveljić
Budget team	Richard Darst	

Registration queries team	Nattie Mayer-Hutchings Velimir Iveljić	Richard Darst Norman Garcia Aguilar
Accommodation team	Adnan Hodžić	Velimir Iveljić
Admin team	Jörg Jaspert	Micah Anderson
Graphic artist	Valessio Brito (valessio)	Miroslav Remetić
Website team	Hector Oron Leandro Gómez	Vedran Omeragić Damyan Ivanov
Talk selection team	Micah Anderson Blars Blarson Jörg Jaspert Andreas Tille	Luciano Bello Biella Coleman Daniel Kahn Gillmor Gunnar Wolf
Talk scheduling team	Tássia Camões Gunnar Wolf	Daniel Kahn Gillmor Velimir Iveljić (Debian Day)
Room allocation	Ana Beatriz Guerrero López	
On-site money handling	Phil Hands	
Networking team	Martin Zobel-Helas Daniel Kahn Gillmor Andrew McMillan	Micah Anderson Philip Hands
Day trip team	Moray Allan Velimir Iveljić	Adnan Hodžić
Front desk team	Bojana Borković Nattie Mayer-Hutchings Lior Kaplan Cheryl Petreman Norman Garcia Aguilar René Mayorga	Ivan Rajković Arne Goetje Judit Foglszinger Moray Allan Jose Antonio Quevedo Blars Blarson
Cheese team	Christian Perrier Judit Folgszinger Felipe Augusto van de Wiel Karolina Kalić Damyan Ivanov Sylvestre Ledru	Ana Caroll Comandulli Maida Hodžić Vedran Omeragić Marcelo Gutierrez Didier Raboud
Final report editors	Nattie Mayer-Hutchings	Felix Delattre
Final report typesetting	Gunnar Wolf	Moray Allan

Video Team Coordinator	Holger Levsen	
Video Team	Andrew Lee	Andrew McMillan
	Andy Simpkins	Beraldo Leal
	Christoph Egger	Cornelius Wasmund
	Daniel Glassey	David Prévot
	Dererk	Eduardo Rosales
	Felix Delattre	Gerfried Fuchs
	Gaudenz Steinlin	Giovanni Mascellani
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	Vedran Omeragić	Jeremy Baron
	Armin Haas	Ben Hutchings
	Jérémy Bobbio	Peter Palfrader
	Nick Bane	
Travel sponsorship team	Jörg Jaspert	Andrew Lee
	Bdale Garbee	Gregor Herrmann
	Neil McGovern	Alexander Reichle-Schmehl
	Meike Reichle	Velimir Iveljić
	Jimmy Kaplowitz	Faidon Liambotis

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