Introducing Principles of Digital Autonomy

Karen Sandler, Molly de Blanc

>> This is where I normally ask questions. So since you're at home by yourselves raise your hand if this is your first GUADEC.

>> And is there a raise your hand function?

>> Yes.

>> There's a status button and then you set your status. You can see quite a lot of people --

>> Oh, my gosh. So great.

>> Raise your hand now if you've been to more than five GUADECS.

>> So let's go ahead and start. Shall we? Cool. So welcome, everyone to this additional GUADEC. I'm very excited to have Karen here and Molly. I'm the moderator of this session. So let's introduce a little bit about the session. We will be talking about introducing principles of digital autonomy. Karen organizing the Outreachy for globally. And Molly De Blanc works in the foundation of technology and is a developer. Welcome to Karen Sandler and Molly De Blanc.

>> Thanks, Claudia. This is the principles of digital autonomy. It's a project Karen and I have been working for a who I will now. We want you to have fun and if at any point we talk too quickly or we become robots, not cyborg robots, but the audio gets weird, Claudia, if you can monitor that.

>> Yes. If I see anything happening weird with you folks, I'll let you know, or I will start speaking a lot.

>> Okay. And some of these slides we tried to make them as accessible as possible. Some of them might be hard to read. In some cases we will explain what's going on.

>> So in our corner this is our title slide and at the bottom right there's a GEGL for those of you who don't know what this is, so it'll be swimming with our presentation with us. The GNOME community is really fun like this. There's a lot of these Easter egg type of things and what's fun about them is that anyone who is a newcomer will get to discover them. There's a bunch of these silly things, but if you're here in GUADEC you are in. These jokes are for you.

>> All right. Let's make a start. So an introduction to myself. I am involved in free software for many reasons but the thing about me that causes me to be passionate about this issue is I have a heart condition and I'm at a very high risk to basically dying and I have a device in my body that happens to notify if that happens. For example, when I was pregnant my heart palpitated but because I have a defibrillator it shocked me because of the heartbeat. So when I think about it only 15 percent goes to the people of this device. Our technology may not be made with us in mind. Nobody wants women to get shocked. It doesn't happen particularly often. And as we develop our technology, we're going to see more and more of these cases happen. Of course, I would be remiss that the slide says that a Karen would ask to see a source code in her defibrillator. I'm a lawyer as well as executive director. Sorry, Molly, now you.

>> Yes, and I'm Molly. So I think I'm great.

>> Yes, I wanted you to keep that text unchanged.

>> Okay. Good. So I work for the GNOME foundation but I'm not here as a representative of the GNOME foundation. As I mentioned a few minutes ago this has been a passion project that we've been working for a while now. And I think it's formed by both of our experiences but that's not the extent of it. So I'm a free software activist and a digital software activist. I had some friends who were really involved in technology and I liked computers. And eventually as time went on, I began to think about it differently and care about it more for a bunch of philosophical reasons. Next slide.

So why does digital autonomy matter, Karen?

>> Well, Molly, digital cull autonomy matters because technology has really changed a lot in the last decade or so. We now integrate technology and our devices are deeply connected. It's impossible to interact with the world without interfacing with software and technology overall. When -- it's more than just -- when we think about our technology it's more than thinking about software or code. I think the way we've been thinking about this before, it was in the context of my heart device. I realized that -- so when you have one of these medical devices they're constantly broadcasting. I had to work really really hard to find -- there was only one device on the market that had the ability to disable the radiogeology. Any other devices wouldn't do that. So this made me realize that I needed to make sure that my device wasn't broadcasting. And so I started thinking about how I should not have a right to be broadcasting. Like you shouldn't be able to connect to it at all times. In the end I had to get a device from a very small manufacturer. Often, I have to get the device representative to come drive 45 minutes to my doctor so he can bring the little thing. Often, we have to work to think about what information we're broadcasting and we're not. I realize that it was much deeper than that. What was it what I was trying to do? And what I realized it's in fact all about autonomy and my body and the technology. We had to see what information we're sharing and what we're sharing. We need to think about these issues holistically about this. And that's why I started talking with you, Molly, about autonomy and why it matters.

>> Yeah. So I was really interested in getting involved in this conversation in part because we have a bunch of tools and we have these kind of different desperate movements and different things on how technology should affect us. I think that's really necessary when it comes to the fact that we're building products and the concept we're building products. The movement building is not just around getting people aware of their (inaudible) but also getting people to care.

>> So it's a time for a declaration of digital autonomy. We had a very powerful movement in the free open source software move to create great software and to have independence for our software. I have to say that's not enough now. So now we as the public, we as consumers, need to stand up and say, no, these are the principles by which our technology shower measured. It's not enough that this comes to the market with a useful product or something that we can use as a useful network. We have to do it right away. We can't do it piecemeal and we can't do it through the lens that we've had before. Now it's the time that we need to be coordinated because we're creating systems that we're going to rely on for a very long time. We're going to incorporate into the most aspect of our lives.

>> So the principles of digital autonomy is a framework. So I want people to go into this thinking that this is the way we're going to analyze technology. But that you can look at any given piece of technology within this framework and that hopefully you'll be inspired to apply when you're

creating things as well. Or when you're using things or just talking to people. We want you to come out of this with a new way of thinking.

>> And the principles of digital autonomy is a work in progress. It comes out in conversations between and, you know, every time that we revisit this we think of additional assets. This is something that's going to evolve and how technology changes in the years to come. This is not something that we're going to be able to articulate and move on from. This is something that we need to engage with and push forward the best we can so we can empower ourselves to see the technology that we can rely on.

>> And to add something to that. Karen said this is based on conversations we've had but it's nearly impossible like to add everyone to participate in these conversations with us. I think a lot of this comes from our combined 30 years but the times we've had leading up to that point, our experience with technology, our experience with ethics. And also because this is a work-in-progress we really want feedback. We want your ideas. We want your feedback.

>> Yes, I want to echo what Molly said and there's several people who have shaped my thinking.

>> Yes. So Wanda says you're confused but this is your normal state.

>> Wanda is an Easter egg. So it's a fun and silly GNOME thing.

>> So some background really what's going to happen right now is we're going to define some terms, so you understand what we're talking about and you're all on the same page. We're using lots of terms that comes from science and engineering and philosophy and several other things.

So I want to start about autonomy. We are talking about personalized but also collective autonomy. You can read more about this. The basic idea is that we're self-governing actors and we have the ability to make decisions. We have the right to make decisions and the right to be in control. So our intellectual and our emotional. We have the right to do simply because they exist.

>> When we talk about digital, we mean anything that is about us that we start interacting with technology. That means it's any information about us or any way that we're vulnerable or in any other aspect of cyberspace. It concerns anything about us that transfers to third parties.

>> And digital autonomy is really the idea that we control our own destinies in this regard. That we should have some degree of autonomy over what happens with that. We are in control because we have a right to it. So digital autonomy stands for that whole idea that we should step up and demand that we have adequate amount of control over what happens with not just our interactions and how that happens but also what remains behind and what anyone can do with our data or anything else related to it.

>> So rights, rights are these unalienable things, right. The idea is we shouldn't you don't need to justify why you're right. It's freedom and things that you're entitled simply because you exist.

>> Technology. As a cyborg I think a lot about technology. It's funny I was super panicked about needing a defibrillator. I was not cool about having this device in my body, but I imagined about what is a cyborg. One thing that I often like to point out is that some people to some extent glasses are technology. So we're constantly in a process of becoming cyborgs. So when we talk

about technology, we really need to be lost about what means because every single thing that we have is connected and it is digital.

For example, it's very common to have connected toothbrushes where you're subscribed to have a toothbrush sent out. So anything that has a connectivity or software or anything else related to that we consider a technology.

>> And this is really important because of the pervasiveness of technology that we're interacting with, but also the idea of our rights extends just beyond the software. It extends to the hardware and we're also going to talk about things like privacy and that's part of technology too.

So user is a term that we throw around a lot both here and in general. I don't love the term user because it pushes someone to the side but so what we mean when we say user in this case is anyone interacting with the technology whether you know or it or not. So your user of a monitoring system when like there are cameras doing speed checks on the highways.

>> The term user sounds very -- it's very dismissive. It sounds like the person who is the user and someone who has taken advantage, but we must acknowledge that users so often become contributors. And in a world where we have a digital autonomy in a line between users and creators of technology is very very thin. So if anyone is thinking of feedback. If there are other ways of talking about users, we've done. We'll definitely be will be to hear about it because GNOME is really good -- maybe we should talk about this later -- but with the vocabulary of user can be delineating. So Wanda says collect $200. Wanda wants us to move on.

>> So the first principle is in service of the people who use it. It's really based around the idea that a piece of technology and using it isn't about a company that designed it. It shouldn't be. It shouldn't be about the, like, the people funding it. It should be about the people who are actually using it and taking care of them and making sure that they have the things they need and make sure they're being respected.

>> Right. So what we're going to do is tell you these principles that we tried to distill and the reasons and components of digital autonomy. And as with any kind of framework, the prove is in the pudding. Like how does that work out when you have that technology? Molly and I were thinking a lot of predatory technology. We're thinking about technology where people use it and proprietary video chat that includes a surveillance component. So we try to articulate the principles that we needed. And then in order to determine whether or not we had really thought of everything correctly we decided why not -- think about GNOME in that light. Let's look at these principles that we need in order to have digital autonomy. So on this first principle about GNOME, you know, in service to the people who use it, GNOME is people as the tagline says. GNOME basically comes out of the community and it has good features. You can opt in and opt out of various reportings. Molly now is an employee of the foundation, I used to be an employee but now I am just a fan.

>> All right. So we want people to do analysis and we -- it wasn't always easy to come up with the criticism. But one of the things that I was thinking about was accessibility, right. So we need to make sure that technology works for everyone. If it doesn't work for everyone then it just doesn't work. So we're trying to do a lot of work on accessibility. We're trying really hard but there are still parts to it that need a lot of work. So that's a way to get involved.

>> Yeah, and I would add to the accessibility like I was at the first GUADEC after GNOME three came out and the accessibility put up a slide and it was simply a picture of stairs because

accessibility was so bad that basically all the great work that had been done in work two was no longer valid. So I just want to acknowledge that and how powerful of a statement I think that was like a really great way to describe the situation and so much work has been done since then.

>> The other thing is that GNOME is a big scombrid has a lot of different parts. So user requirements tends to get lost in this dynamic and also deciding what's easy. So there are some more ways that things can better address the needs of the people who are interacting and using GNOME.

Next slide. Wanda says this is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three hundred and 60-four. Mark Twain.

>> So this slide principle two is informed consent. I've been thinking about consent a lot. I've been talking about being able to understand how to use the technology and the things to play overtime. And what we mean as a principle is real consent. So, for example, when I got my defibrillator it was like do you want this device or not. Informed consent is a real consent because you have choices. That's not always the case. So we need to have -- we need to be able to understand what it is that you're agreeable to. We have terms and conditions that no one could read. There was a study that you would have to show nothing else for months and months and to read all of the terms and conditions that the person agrees to is not practical and doesn't work.

So we need to have understandable consent that we can agree. We need to be able to not sacrifice our autonomy.

>> And understandable I think is a real keyword there. If you don't know what you're agreeing to you can't agree to it. So GNOME is free open-source software. And at the top level of technology being something that we can consent to from a place of information, from a place of understanding, is that we have to be able to examine and audit and look at every part of it. So when something is proprietary, when something is closed source, we fundamentally can't understand it. We don't have that option or availability. So that's a great starting point for GNOME because we can look at it and we can try understanding.

It's worth noting really quick that we pick one or two for these but there's a lot more parts of it.

>> Yes, I don't want to interrupt what you're saying but we're running out of time. We have about ten minutes left. So feel free if you want to jump straight to the questions or if you want to continue talking because it's interesting to be honest.

>> We'll go more quickly.

>> Yes.

>> It'll be tough. So being able to see the source code is a really important component of it but that's not necessarily sufficient. In many cases it's very difficult to understand the source code by looking at it and on top of that in instances in machine learning in AI the ability to understand the code is not necessarily, it might be impossible any way.

>> So -- this is you Karen.

>> Wanda says, is everything working? Go a little faster. That's a relief.

>> It doesn't say go a little faster. It's worth noting that May 24th is my birthday, so I feel this is a birthday front for me.

>> Nice.

>> On the next slide we have principle three which is empowering individual and collective digital action. I think it's really important that this isn't just about you as an individual person but it's about the things that we create together, and we work on together. This includes in the technology to make sure that it works, having choices and autonomy around who is owning the devices, who is owning the technology. Is your community -- does your community at least have the opportunity to run its own server. That's an important question.

>> And so if we look at GNOME there are things in the positive aisle. There's no CLA. CLAs tend to shift the balance of power and that can be a real problem.

>> The GNOME foundation, this slide hasn't come up yet for me, but it's great because it's a body that empowers its members to take action on behalf of the project. It has corporate involvement at the advisory level which is great for empowering individuals. I would say that the awkwardness the foundation and GNOME I think that that is blurred even from when I was executive director. That's by design but it has good things and bad things about it. Overall, it's great for the stances that we take for digital autonomy.

>> One of the other things about GNOME is that there's lots of options for software but also for desktop environments. If you want it to be a thinking that works for the community you can make that choice, but you don't have to and that's okay. You should use it because it's awesome.

>> Totally. What else would we use. GNOME doesn't rely on centralized services. So thumbs up.

>> And it works offline, right. With a lot of devices you have to be able to use something without having a connection to the Internet means that it works whenever you need it. This was just built on what Karen was saying earlier about technical direction and the relationship between the community and the foundation.

>> Yes. That's right. It's not necessarily an organized, you know, I think often GNOME makes progress because individuals are scratching their own edge, or a corporation is trying to accomplish something with GNOME and less about the collective actions of contributors. So it sort of depends on what the initiative is about and being cognizant of that tension I think is really important.

>> And on the downside one of the things that needs work is security. So if you want to work on those you should get involved. Security and privacy issues are huge especially for communities and individuals who want to do anything really because you can't create ideas in a space that is insecure.

Wanda says you've been leading a dog's life. Stay off the furniture.

>> I love that. So our principle four is to protect citizen's privacy and other rights by design. This means that we're gathering and recording data. So basically making all designs with privacy at the forefront from the beginning.

>> So to talk about GNOME in that context it has nice data policies. One of the quotes I like is unless you can set the foundation you'll never process or share the data blow. And so it comes down as long as it's necessary to work with GNOME services. I started reading a lot more privacy policies.

>> Right. And this should always be planned from the outset. I think looking at GNOME's privacy policy, I see it comes from a great organization. The policy only contemplates deleting data when requested. It should be something that's considered by everyone. Don't keep more than we absolutely need. Wanda, the fish says excellent things.

>> And that's it. That's the talk.

>> Do we have time for questions?

>> According to my clock we have time. I don't know if that's true.

>> We have five minutes. That's a great talk.

>> Oh, thanks.

>> You can type the questions in the channel. Feel free to make questions. There will be -- okay. We already have questions. Great.

>> Wait, so will you read them, Claudio?

>> Yes, I can do that. If you want. Sure, sure.

>> If you'll read some that would be best.

>> Great. First question, there's something called open source, or four freedom software is not enough for users, they get close to deliberation and unsupportive developers --

>> I'm sorry. Is this a question or is this a dement?

>> This is a question. How do we fix this for developers?

>> Is the question how do we fix here?

>> Yes, you is supposed to be GUADEC, but they haven't done an awesome job of having users around. Could anyone raise their hand if they use GNOME and not a developer?

>> I see a few hands.

>> I think they've done a great job with these talks and allows more people to show up and get involved.

>> Yes, I think this is a problem that GNOME has had in the past. I think they've been given a nonaffair rap of not listening to users. At the same time there really isn't much to it. You can't do everything that everybody wants. You have to make tough choices. But at the same time you have to have users to engage with the conversation and how it's carried on from there. I think GNOME is really good at it.

>> Is there another question.

>> Yes, explain GIGL.

>> How about we don't do that right now in case there's a question.

>> Just look it up. Look up GIGL.

>> It's a mascot. I'll say that.

>> And we're also not going to talk about the Swedish conspiracy. I'll just say that right now.

>> We also have a document and what you can do is e-mail us. Definitely between now and I guess a week from now we'll have a web page up.

>> More likely, yes. Coming soon.

>> All right. Next question. What are the next steps for these principles?

>> Molly don't laugh. In doing so we're going to do various pieces of technology with all of our different kinds of technology and we'll look at that and we'll take it from there. It's a tool to criticize technology and to use the new technology. It can be used as educational information when it comes for regulations and other legal initiatives. And on top of that there's a component of ethical analysis that will sort of permeate in other fields.

>> That's great. I jumped to what you do, and I haven't thought about at all about that part. So as part of this process, one of the things we did is we had several technologies in GNOME. We have one on Zoom and two on Fitbit. And there are a few more in the works. There's also more analysis to think about. Do we have time for one more question?

>> Yes, just one question. Let me just quickly check.

>> I'm glad there are a lot of questions.

>> Yes. So these two next questions, do you know what position to advance in a specific principle --

>> I'm sorry, what was that?

>> The question is GNOME well positioned to advance any specific principle you covered?

>> Yes, quite a few of them. GNOME does very well on our principles but there are areas for improvement. I think that as far as freedom project that's run by a diverse group of people from different places that are motivated as individuals, I think it is very well position to demonstrate.

>> To give two very specific examples, I think there's a lot of security and accessibility work that has happened but still has a lot to be done. Another thing is working on making the technology more understandable so that more people can approach -- can try to process -- I'm trying not to make it confusing. So more people can understand it.

>> Okay. Folks, sorry, we're out of time. I see we have more questions. Feel free to join us in the web chat too to answer more questions. Thank you very much to both of you. It was a very exciting talk. And everyone have an amazing, I don't know what your time zone is right now but thank you for the talk.

>> Yay.

>> Yay, Molly.

>> Okay.