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What's all the FUSS?

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[4]"Free Upgrade Southtyrol's Schools [5] (FUSS) is a project funded by the European Social Fund which has upgraded the computer systems of all the italian schools in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, removing all the software with a proprietary license used in the school activity with the FUSS GNU/Linux Soledad distribution. The first fundamental criterion used for the development of the FUSS distribution was to distribuite **only** free software." The distro, soledad-live-1.0, was released on Dec. 22, 2005 and is currently on Distrowatch's [6] waiting list. Today Tuxmachines took Soledad 1.0 for a spin and here is a summary of what we found.

Although being developed for use by teachers, students, and possibly parents, this is your full fledged morphix-based debian distribution utilizing a gnome desktop. It reminds me of Nepalinux quite a bit starting with the dozen or so boot options and continuing to the desktop and menu.

Soledad is delivered with a 2.6.11 kernel, gcc 3.3.5 and XFree86 4.0.3. It contains a mix of gtk and qt applications with an emphasis on educational programs. The menus are chocked full of apps ranging from graphic, through multimedia (including lots of music and video editing), to internet. There are the usual gnome configuration tools and Fuss included a customized wallpaper or three as well as a coupla Fuss themes. There was so much available, I found it difficult to summarize them all in a few screenshots.

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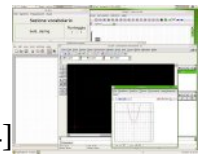
The games included were fun and could be consider educational. The educational programs were numerous as well. They included activities for kiddiegarden all the way up through the middle and even high school age groups. They encompassed such subjects as language, vocabulary, Science and Math. Some were 3D while others were 2D. Some were even browser based. I had fun playing with the lot. One stand-out is the suite of gcompris. This contains several activities for the younger student mainly in the area of Mathematics. Several applications were 3D and took over the screen, so I did not get screenshots of them.

[13] [14]  [15]

I was quite impressed with Soledad and even entertained notions of installing it on my spare computer for my grandbaby. I've been giving some thought to fixing that computer up for her to play with when she comes over. She is 15 months old and every since she could walk, the first thing she does when she comes over is walk back to my office, climb up in my chair, and begins computing. She pushes on the keyboard keys and moves the mouse around with her right hand while she stares at the screen. She thinks she's computing! It's so cute. I usually fire up FishFillets, KBattleship, and the like, anything colorful and noisy, and she'll point and laugh and push that mouse around and beat on the keyboard. She will soon be able to actually do something and I have been trying to plan out a distro for her. Of course we have to have Barbie wallpapers and little mermaid icons, but we need a good base install. Soledad would definitely be in the running for the distro. ...if it weren't for the installer.

The installer is the familiar morphix installer I've seen in Nepalinux, Elive and some others. Like Nepalinux, it is slow as molasses going up a hill in January. In fact, whereas it finally finished in Nepalinux, I gave up with soledad and hit the reset button. It starts off fine and begins the install. It quickly moves along to about 39%, but then it slows down. Along about 1/2 way through, it just practically stops. I thought it may have stopped but given time, the progress bar moved another percentage point. Also, I checked in top and found the morphix-installer still using most of the system resources with enough variation in values every few seconds to see that it hadn't locked up. But after 4 hours we were still only 59% finished and after another hour, I gave up. I'm fairly sure that if given another day or two, it would have installed! But this was a test install on my main desktop (with a gig of ram btw) and I had to check on my site and check my email - I couldn't have my machine down any longer. Disappointingly the system was unusable during this process. Perhaps this is the reason Soledad is still on distrowatch's waiting list.

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I tried several distros from Distrowatch's waiting list over the slow holidays, and I didn't have much luck here. I gather distros stay on that list until they pretty much work.

Another drawback for me was that despite starting with lang=us, some applications were still in Italiano. On a related note, Soledad has a nice keyboard localization applet right there handy in the desktop panel.

I liked Soledad better than the edubuntu although they were quite similar in a lot of ways. One good thing about Soledad that probably earned points in my book was the traditional user/root accounts. And stumbling across the default root password was quite easy. In fact, it was the first password I tried. In case anyone needs it, it's: fuss.

In conclusion, as a livecd, Soledad performed above average. It's responsiveness was respectable and it looked good as well. The fonts were nice looking enough and the eyecandy customizations were refreshingly different. The included applications seemed like a horn o' plenty to me and I could see where a computer with that installed would be real nice in my classroom. It'd make for a wonderful self-directed center activity or even as a resource for other lessons. If we could just get it installed... More Screenshots [19].

[20] [21] [22]

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