

Why choose Free Software?

Free software is software that can be used, modified, copied and redistributed freely, for its authors have decided to give these rights to all users.

The concept of Free Software was formalized in the early 1980's. Researchers attached to the collaborative development model and the culture of scientific publication – which was then the norm – have decided to legally secure their practices and work. They drafted licenses based on copyright to share their software with all mankind.

Over time, and thanks to Internet development, this approach to software development has spread. This success is probably due to the rewarding for whoever is involved, the ability to pool resources, and of course because it produces quality software, most of which is available for free via the Internet.

Nowadays, the Free Software movement has become a full-fledged **social phenomenon**. Millions of users (individuals, NGOs, companies, governments...) throughout the World exercise the freedoms associated with Free Software. A **high quality supply** resulting from their cooperation through the Internet is combined with a **vibrant service economy**. The actors in this economy acutely compete dominant players of proprietary informatics, such as Microsoft.

Some software like the Linux kernel, the Firefox browser or office suite OpenOffice.org are famous examples of popular Free Software, daily used by both business- and home-users. The proper functioning of the Internet has always been based on free software, as those of market rooms (BNP Paribas) and aircraft (Rafale, A380). There is also free software in many household electronic devices such as ISP boxes, ATMs, mobile phones, personal assistants (PDA) ...

Everywhere in the world, whole areas of information systems, businesses, States and Local authorities switch to free software. The businesses sell support, training, integration, consulting and specialization of generic bricks. The user organizations adhere to the model for quality, but also because Free Software allows more independence and better cost control and maintenance of internal development.

This business sector is an economic reality: the sum of free software reasonable quality is equivalent to a minimum investment of **€ 12 billion**. This represents at least **131,000 people per year**, or an annual contribution of € 800 million. **Half** of this contribution comes from developers based **in Europe**. In terms of services, the free software share could be equal to **32% of the informatic services market** in 2010.¹

That said, even though everyone is free to do business on associated services, reduce costs, improve its productivity thanks to it, Free Software remains a common, non-merchant good. For this reason, Free Software is clearly a tool of choice to work towards reducing the digital divide.

Free Software has significant advantages for reducing the digital divide, both from the viewpoint of the community who can implement projects of greater magnitude, and for the diffusion of ICT to all

¹ « The impact of Free/Libre/Open Source Software on innovation and competitiveness of the European Union », janvier 2007 – <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/ict/policy/doc/2006-11-20-flossimpact.pdf>

citizens. It is also a great vehicle for the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

Finally, with the **pooling** ability it conveys, Free Software is an asset for public investment in information technology. Moreover, thanks to its model, its naturally global communities, and the many linguistic quality resources available, Free Software is easily **internationalisable**. All these characteristics make Free Software a real tool of **public policy** for EU Member States.

As MEPs, becoming users of free software will allow us to exploit these advantages for the benefit of the European Parliament, whether for a better control of our information system and its adaptation to our needs, security of our information, or for controlling our budgets. The French National Assembly precedes us in this direction: since June 2007, the computers of deputies and their assistants use a free operating system alternative to Microsoft Windows.

The European Parliament is also a symbol. Signing the 46/2008 declaration is affirming that Free Software is to us **an opportunity for the EU** to be competitive in the field of ICT, promote new uses, and strengthen its informational sovereignty.