Supervising Student Projects in the FOSS on Mobile Space

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Software development  Programming

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Some Questions for you ...
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- Who uses a device running a LinuxMobile system on a regular basis?
- Who uses it as daily driver?
- Who agrees that we have a lack of apps when compared with other ecosystems (such as F-Droid)?
- Who develops software for LinuxMobile?
- Who develops software for the LinuxMobile user space?
Objectives

- You understand that it is not trivial to motivate students to develop apps for FOSS on Mobile.
- You reason about some (anecdotal) hurdles that my students encountered.
- You see a „shining“ example for a successful project that produced a new app for programming LED badges (led_blink).
- We discuss what could be improved to attract more userspace software developers into our ecosystem.
Agenda

- Motivation
- Context
- Encountered Issues
- Shiny example: bit_blink
- Discussion
Context

- I am a huge (moral) supporter of LinuxMobile. However, making the switch is hard if essential apps are missing and hardware options are ... limited.

- Of course, it highly depends which apps are considered essential on the actual end-user.

- Since I have to supervise student projects anyways, why not let them develop some apps so everybody will profit from this?

- Finding the „apps gaps“ was not a big challenge.
Context (Cont’d)

- All mentions in this talk refer to our course „Bachelor Informatik“.

- I offer(ed) projects as „programming internship“ for 4th semester students (they can choose from different projects by different offerors). Unfortunately, the only group which showed initial interest withdraw quickly.

- I had more luck with students in their 6th/7th semester who took our „safe and secure programming in Rust“ elective module.
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Encountered Issues

- All-new technology stack (maybe except CSS)
- Hardly any industrial relevance
- Lack of general Linux/UNIX skills
- The LinuxMobile World is changing quickly (frequent releases of core components, many components haven’t reached their 1.0 milestone yet, libhandy vs. libadwaita, ...)
- Dev setup on Windows/macOS not documented well
- Lack of easy beginner’s guides
Encountered Issues

- Students don’t own any supported devices.
- Lack of skills to do the initial installation or to work on the device (e.g. copy app to device and start it there).
- Packaging the app was also not trivial (even for pmOS), mostly due to lack of “glue“ documentation.
- Students could not find out how to make the launcher icon work in Phosh.
- General programming skills have not been an issue!
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bit_blink allows to program LED badges

- Written in Rust
- Uses libadwaita
- Early prototype was based on python cmdline program but was later replaced with a native implementation
- (Imho) documented quite well
- Available here: https://github.com/JoGehring/bit_blink
bit_blink: Live Demo!
Agenda

☑ Motivation
☑ Context
☑ Encountered Issues
☑ Shiny example: bit_blink
☐ Discussion
PWAs: Another possible way out?

- PWA = Progressive Web App
- Very promising (supervised PWA projects often were more successful).
- Didn’t find any support for PWAs in Phosh/Plasma Mobile :-(

PWA = Progressive Web App
Thank you!

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