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IT training in small librairies

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Abstract :

The net set itself up progressively in France. By 1998, the local authorities, warned by several reports had-become aware of the numeric gap. They then tried to promote access to internet. Within the French territorial context, each local elective representative is free to define his or her stand on politics of culture. Small territorial divisions, such as parishes or very small communes (97% of which have less than 10,000 inhabitants in France) have been able to redefine their libraries' cultural programmes so as to democratise the use of these new IT tools. To achieve this, the library staff had to be trained, and the new national measure in favour of youth employment enabled the libraries to recruit specialised IT staff members. These small libraries offer supervised training courses so that each person can step into the cyber society. Their small size thus becomes an advantage as they can easily offer made to measure training courses in a friendly atmosphere.

This millennium has been marked by a thorough renovation in village and small town French libraries. As the amount of internet connections in France and all over the world has increased these small establishments have been able to survey how the IT pioneer libraries have made place for these new

computer and communication sciences. How did these places welcome informatics and how did they manage to boost it so as to efficiently serve the general public.

First of all, an inventory introduces the state of public libraries in small territorial divisions with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. Then a presentation of training courses for staff and library users will demonstrate the role of these new technologies in such premises.

1. **An inventory**
   a. France – a fragmented country.

If France is only considered a medium-sized country as regards to its population (60 million) and its surface area (547 026 square kilometres) it is none the less one of the five first most economically powerful ones. Since 1958, this republican state has been a parliamentary democracy combined with a presidential regime. The organisation of its territory is inherited from its history. This organisation is cut up into three layers of local authority : "Les communes" or municipalities created in 1789 (of which there are 36,779), "Les départements or counties introduced in 1790 (of which there are 100), "Les regions" or regions introduced more recently in 1992 (of which there are 26). These divisions were juxtaposed and it was not until 1992 that the establishment of a decentralisation plan redefined and strengthened their powers. Their autonomy was reinforced and state control was enlightened. The French metropolitan population is 59,951,435. 97% of the municipalities have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants and only 37 towns have more than 100,000. 26,5% of the French population live in municipalities which count under 30,000 inhabitants.

Break down of French population by municipalities
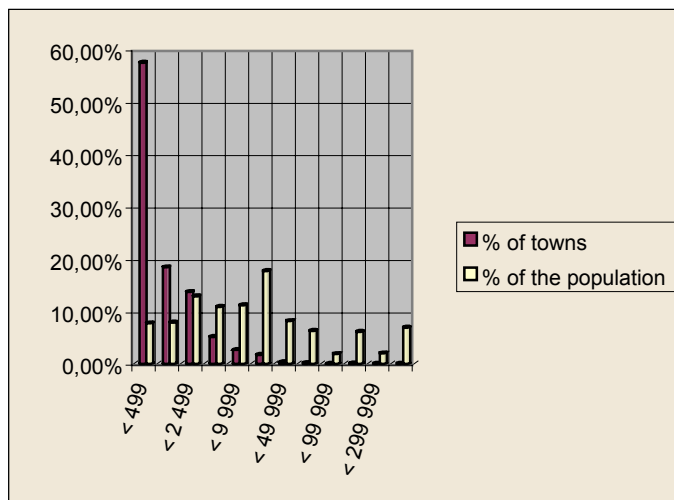
   b. Small libraries

The libraries in small towns and villages have a municipal or associative statute. At the "Ministry of Culture and Communication", "The Book and Reading authorities" role is to advise, evaluate, and inspect the libraries. The state finances part of investment for construction, computerisation, reinstallation and acquisition of rare books. Last year the average rate of investment was 33,3% of the amount of projects.

The policy for public reading depends on the local elective representative in consequence of which each town situation differs. Some towns have no library at all, and there is no law to install such establishments nationwide. "The Book and Reading Authorities" evaluate municipal libraries' activities in towns of over 10,000 inhabitants and those of county libraries. The latter present statistics for the state of their network for towns which have a population of under 10,000 inhabitants. The mission of these county libraries, created in 1945, is to deliver books to towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. This traditional mission

is changing. The county libraries are becoming resource centres. They link traditional missions to new ones. First "The Reading Plan" (which involves giving grants for purchasing, entertainment, or building) secondly training courses, and thirdly help and technical advice in order to develop libraries. The present situation is as follows.

Break down of libraries by size of towns
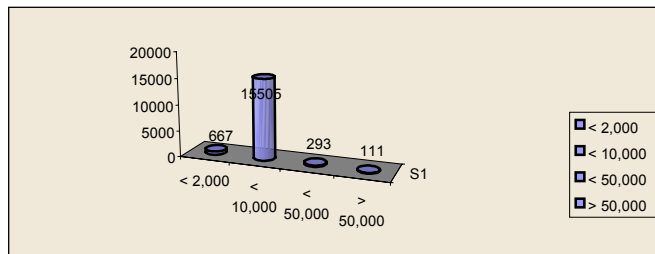
Break down of libraries in small towns of under - 10 000 inhab.
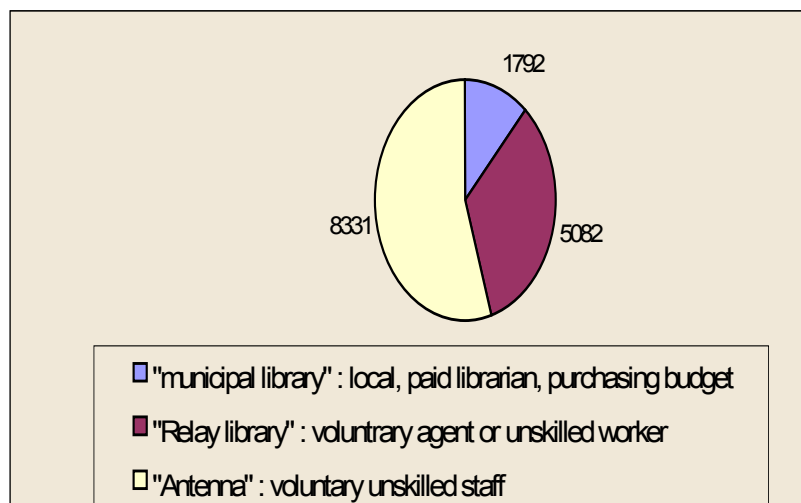
To established a list of the municipalities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants we will use "The Book and Reading Authorities' " criteria. "A municipal library" must have a budget for purchases and a paid librarian, "The relay library has a voluntary agent who has been trained or an untrained paid worker, "The antenna" library operates with voluntary workers who have not been trained to manage a library. Since 1997, there has been an increase in the number of antenna libraries which have become relay libraries. We will study IT training as regards to small libraries in towns of under 10,000 inhabitants. That is to say a total of 16,172 libraries. These small libraries in the Val d'Oise County (north west of Paris) represent 46 facilities, 400 staff 53 of whom are trained, 1,2 € per inhabitants for acquisition and 12 hours average opening hours.

The heterogeneity of the network proves itself in practice. The politicians ask libraries to develop reading, to contribute to training efforts and leisure activities in their towns and more recently to democratise access to IT. Librarians and voluntary teams work locally to offer electronic collections composed of web sites and CD-ROM in order to complete pre-existing paper resources. This answers the users' needs for training as well as for their personal development. The library teams incite and maintain the taste for reading in their towns. The small size of these municipalities makes access to the library easier, as they are geographically and humanly close to people. The installation and valorisation of access to the internet is an opportunity for these small structures in spite of their limited budgets to respond as best as they can to their users' needs

C. Setting up IT in France

Originally, France was not one of the leading internet countries. It had a low rate of connection in both business companies and in private households. In 1998, French speaking websites amounted to 34, 000. A number of elements slowed down their development. This was mainly due to the heavy cost of equipment (1200 € to 1500 €), a specific vocabulary, the difficulty for novices to find information, the time needed for downloading, but also adults only sites and the permanently engaged telephone line. As early as 1998 reports highlighted the numeric gap emerging in France. In 1999, a White Paper, to the French prime minister about "the information society", offered several measures to develop internet France. This programme (PAGSI) consisted of

- Education : all schools connected to the net
- Culture : developing French cultural contents
- Modernisation of administration : electronic formulas
- E-business : government aid
- Law : adapt legal framework

The former prime minister Lionel Jospin took things in hand and set up measures to bridge the gap during his speech in Hourtin. The politicians began to realise that IT was really important for France. Both for enterprise, facing market globalisation and for individuals in order to optimise their employability.
The computer equipment in French households increased by two points for IT equipment and four points for web connexions per year. In June 2002, 36,1% of households had a computer at their disposal, 22% had access to the net. 33,4% of internauts aged eleven and over wherever they connect from : home, work, other (educational premises, public or private premises such as cybercafe, libraries friend's home) consult a site and 13,3 % download a file. Only 27% of these internauts use fast internet. Access to this is unevenly spread, essentially depending on users' socio-professional categories and their level of education. The typical web user more often has a high grade job, but the largest group of users with an average cultural level is to be found in Europe. The lower classes stay shy of this new tool. This inventory emphasizes the fact that 77% of French people still do not use the net.

Libraries, municipal facilities open to the public, do what they can to alter this state of things. Above all, they provide access to computer equipment and the net without discrimination. Staff have the key role as mediators, they act as guides during the discovery of these new medias. They suggest documents and training courses to facilitate the handling of these tools. Mastering the net becomes a reality when individuals can make sense out of data and contents. To acquire this know-how : viewpoint, critical analysis, the web surfer must be able to use all the functions of the net (web site, FTP, e-mail, chat rooms). These training courses represent a long term job as technologies change fast. Internet is not only a professional or academic tool it modifies peoples way of life (e-commerce, networked games, social behaviour with e-mail and chat rooms). The entire mastery of the net helps people to cross the threshold of the "information society".

2. **It Training courses**
   a. Training courses for professional

The situation in France is characterised by the heterogeneity of the intervening parties and their skills. In small libraries, the size of staff teams calls for polyvalence. Training needs are numerous and stem from different sorts of intervening parties.

The aging of librarians implies that part of these professionals have no IT skills. Voluntary staff have various background, the majority of them are retired, and some others are still bringing up children. It is often necessary to upgrade their skills.

Confronted with these new required skills Continuing Education Organisations they have set up vast plans of action. The main object being, that all current library staff be trained in IT. Different types of courses coexist. Courses that are free of charge, paying courses, four unit courses lasting from one to four days each unit. Training organisations work along with local authorities to offer a catalogue of courses. Demand is high and the courses are rapidly full up. The largest adult education training course organisation for civil servants in the Paris area has a catalogue offering no less then 409 days of training in computer sciences and sixteen days training on the internet. ,each of these courses for groups of up to fourteen. Contents vary according to organisations. The CNFPT alone provides 12 day training courses on business software such as Microsoft products. Some county libraries and the CNFPT organise one or two day training courses on how to operate the computer itself (peripherals, and operating system). The aim is to enable the user to switch the computer on, handle the mouse, understand the architecture of files and operations such as safeguarding and copy-pasting. The county libraries of Savoy and Val d'Oise, two French counties, train associates on a long term basis, setting up series of computer courses "how the computer works", Windows 98, an introduction to office automation further training, and finally manipulation and finding information on the net. The goal is to train novices from A to Z. Once the courses finished the return to the equipment must be linked to regular use of it. The courses help develop the libraries which are part of the county network. Organisations offer means of subsidies. County library Reading Plan contribute by conceding grants for the purchase of computer and software.

Most of the county libraries are conscious of the opportunities that the net presents in the further development of the library collection in municipalities of under 10,000 inhabitants. The county libraries have set up training courses in searching for information. These include how to use a web browser, directory and search engine, appraisal of resources and for certain courses e-mail.

Staff are also recruited to take charge of IT. These people are also present in small facilities. Their titles vary – multimedia organiser, IT organiser, reading outlet organiser – according to the towns. These rather precarious jobs are part of the youth employment plan to encourage the integration of under 25 years olds in the working world. The state pays part of their salaries. The jobs have been created to answer new needs. This wide spread plan of action has managed to satisfy an emerging need which had not found the right personnel. These jobs are filled by young people who are on the average under 26,6 years old and to a large proportion (70%) by young men. Traditionally boys are generally more attracted to technology than girls, and more so by IT. A large part of the organisers are recruited on the basis of their it skills they acquired by specialised tuition, self tuition or a passion for computer sciences. These skills must be linked to training and an inclination for mediation.

There are a few new specific courses for youth employees working in multimedia. They are an answer to the compulsory training acquired for subsidised jobs. From short courses in multimedia space management to longer ones in mediation, certain procedures certify knowledge which is linked with dual skills such as computer science, mediation or mediation and library sciences. This personnel is often torn between training for every day duties as opposed to taking broader courses that prepare for civil service entrance examination -a way of opting out of a precarious work status.

In order to pursue the training process a discussion list enables course mediators to exchange ideas about the contents of their jobs. Up to June 15th 2002 1630 subscribers are listed on " the multimedia centre in libraries discussion group" and from 5 to 10 e-mail are sent per day.

B. Training the general public

No two libraries have the same multimedia services. They partly depend on geographical, social and political location, as well as the libraries' set tasks. The library staff set up the multimedia services to suit their goals. Equipment is either grouped in one place or dispersed around the library. The computers give

access to electronic data. Small municipalities have between one and six computers. The mediators' presence is the deciding factor; it facilitates the users progress from basic functions to the accomplishment of a educational or creative project.

Training depends on offer of services, the type of access to the net and the available equipment. Pc can work in or out of a network.

Different profiles are established according to whether libraries wish to train users in IT or just to increase collections and documentation available. In the first case, libraries provide access to Microsoft's software cdrom and free access to the net. In the second case librarians limit offer to certain websites using graphical frameworks or OPACs. This software works as follows: either only preselected sites are available or the whole net is available excepting prohibited sites. A large number of libraries have a set of rules concerning the use of computers. These rules avoid having to buy security software at least in small structures where human surveillance is easy. They forbid chat rooms, e-mail, and adults only sites. These limitations could be put down to lack of knowledge about the tools.

Different types of training courses are offered according to surface area. The multimedia services have timetables and calendars for training sessions when more than four computers are involved. The fewer the computers, the more time management is important. Libraries organise rota to enable users to take appointments to use the Pc alone or with help. These accompanied sessions introduce IT to users. Finally, informal sessions are set up when users meet difficulties. Reduced multimedia services encourage know-how exchange between users who willingly help each other.

Contents of courses also vary. The larger the access the more important the course because it is the key to autonomous users. Various courses are provided. The basic ones familiarise the general public with IT. Contents such as : handling the mouse, office automation training. The trainees can then create CV or school files according to their needs. Secondly courses dealing with web browsing or web structure as well as how to use e-mail, and introduction to documents research. Theory alternates with practice during the group courses. One to one courses are made to suit needs. Each library and each librarian draws from personal experiences and adapt to trainees.

To harmonise experiences the certified labels EJM (Espace jeune Multimedia) or ECM (espace culture multimedia) have been set up by the ministries concerned. These labels take into account the premises which must fill a certain number of criteria (number of PC, courses, introduction to digital art). The guarantee of the courses' quality enables the establishment of IT passports which act as diplomas

These labels help to increase the number of access points to the net, some are limited to areas such as Cyber local, Picardie-en-ligne or cyber Cantal the region of a famous French cheese. Special events such as the "internet fête" "IT passports" federate these sites and make their existence more worthwhile.

Although they are far behind the pioneer multimedia libraries, such places work locally to bridge the numeric gap. Conscious that they only dispose of means adapted to their size for both equipment and personnel it is only by offering a personalised service that they are able to satisfy their general public