
The last decade at GUTenberg

Abstract

The French \TeX user group, GUTenberg, has elected a new board in November 2020. Since then, it is coming back to life and serves again the French-speaking community.

But in the meantime, a letter written by the former President of GUTenberg, Jérémy Just, still a member of the board, was published in *TUGboat* 42:1, pp. 12–13. Unfortunately, it was highly inaccurate and incomplete, and we are exercising our right to reply to it. (Indeed, we would say more about the character of that letter but it is best to avoid raising our voices on these pages.)

1 Local groups: inception and day-to-day work

A local users' group's day-to-day activity is made out of little things: replying to emails; updating a website; updating the members' register; preparing the next issues of the group's publications; caring for a server; doing some bookkeeping; preparing the next gatherings or training sessions; providing software to members; and so on.

These little things need to be sorted out, one by one, so that, one year after the other, the group goes on. It is a delicate mechanism that needs caring people to attend it.

Back in the days before the web, any local \TeX users' group, at its inception, was providing software (and information about it) to its members. The groups were lively: joining them was almost the only way to have the chance to use \TeX .

Then our international community of users made the software programs and their documentation available on the internet, so that anyone could have access to it, freely and instantly. This amazing achievement was due to the step-by-step process described above: some passionate users were dedicating some of their time to it.

2 \TeX 24/7 online availability and its effect on LUGs

When this goal was reached, when everything that was needed to use $(\text{\La})\text{\TeX}$ became available 24/7, local users' groups had to prove themselves to still be useful. Some members who had joined before in order to be provided with software and documentation were not to be seen any more.

A decreasing membership affected the fragile mechanism described above. It became even more fragile. And needed even more care than before. More dedication — at the very moment where its

workforce was decreasing. At the very moment where its usefulness was at stake.

It happened here and there. For example in France, at GUTenberg, a decade ago.

Luckily, since then, in most cases, the users' groups have proved useful: the dedication of their members, their good will, the love for \TeX that they spread around showed that the usefulness of a group goes far beyond providing software and documentation. When sharing them, we share much more than them: at the end, it's about looks and smiles, just as any human activity.

And that is the fun of it.

3 An agony

Unfortunately, a decade ago, things went on differently at GUTenberg. When more care was needed, care was diminishing. When lack of care was mentioned, dissent emerged — instead of better care.

It is a classic story, made out of classic issues that could have been fixed by people binding other people together. Minor issues that could have been fixed by patience, care and good will.

But surprisingly, in times when communication can be easy, misunderstanding prevailed. Passionate people left, tired of seeing their ideas not being replied to in the way that they would have expected before.

The fragile mechanism described above wasn't running smoothly any more. The group began to lack people to care for its day-to-day activities. At GUTenberg's board, more and more people were missing, some of them tired from seeing their projects being rebuffed by a president who was lacking time.

GUTenberg's activity was harshly decreasing. Its journal was seldom published — before ceasing publication. Some of its subscribers complained by email; some emails were not even replied to. During those hard times, calls for help were heard; some were granted hearing. Some not. GUTenberg's mandatory annual gatherings were not organized any more. And it is all about looks and smiles, just as any human activity: when the activity itself is missing, the good will fades out quickly. The president was by then alone. Because of his own inability to work with others. It is a pity to read his words about “the atmosphere among the board is far from the friendly one that we had when the board was working smoothly”: there was no work and no atmosphere at all. This is how a group dies: when only one person remains, you can't call it a group any more.

No publications. No gatherings. No financial reports sent to the members. No banking activity *at all* in 2019. A few subscriptions remained, but the

joint GUTenberg+TUG subscriptions weren't even reported to TUG. No emails on the board's mailing list from August to December 2018. These are facts. Not "personal point of views", such as the ones in the article that we are replying to.

4 Memory matters

The group was dead. But its memory remained. Former members were still around. Still using T_EX. Lonely, but remembering. And some started to talk together. To talk about the group that they were missing: GUTenberg. Its name was mentioned again. And again. Nothing blazing. But embers. And some breath blown on it. By some people still caring about a group that used to be. Each of them concerned about GUTenberg's unacceptable demise.

We were not many. But we were ... a group.

5 A call for change

On January 17, 2020, an email was sent to the association's only member still in charge:

Subject: AG GUTenberg

Date: Fri, 17 Jan 2020 09:44:53 +0100

Hello Jérémy,

We send you this email as a collective; you will find our names hereunder.

We first thank you for updating GUTenberg's website so that online subscriptions are now available for 2020.

We are well aware that you have spent and still spend a lot of energy for the association and that you are overwhelmed by your professional activity.

Our bylaws provide for an annual general assembly with moral and financial reports. Nevertheless, no general assembly was held since 2013, no report was published since then. In addition to that, the board members are only elected for a four-years term, i.e. since 2017, no one has a valid term any more.

It is therefore urgent to organize a general assembly to decide if we dissolve our association or if we restart GUTenberg on a sound basis.

To this end, it is necessary to have an accurate financial report: a clear view on our assets with a history of our bank transactions, but also a list of our debts to our members who subscribed to services that were not provided, such as our Journal, the *TUGboat* issues etc.

The best would be for you to call this general meeting, in Paris, before the end of

March, where you would present the current state of the association.

In the absence of a positive response from you before the end of January, we would have to call this general meeting ourselves.

Looking forward to reading from you, sincerely,

This message was signed by 8 names, now depicted as a "small group of people". Such a depiction is a common way to make people suspicious. Well, let's introduce those people. By alphabetical order:

Jacques André founder, board member 1988–2007; typography historian, Jacques has contributed often to the association's publications; his books have been reviewed in *TUGboat*, where he has also published articles.

Patrick Bideault co-opted board member, deputy assistant secretary in charge of the memberships paid by PayPal, now president and maintainer of the `coffeestains` package, `texnique.fr` moderator.

Denis Bitouzé board member 2010–2014, maintainer of several packages, co-creator and moderator of `texnique.fr`, organizer of the annual (and famous) Dunkirk L^AT_EX training, co-author of books about L^AT_EX, author of an open access L^AT_EX course and tireless L^AT_EX flag-bearer, now secretary.

Thierry Bouche board member 1997–2017, former editor of *Cahiers GUTenberg*.

Michel Bovani board member 1999–2003, maintainer of the `fourier` package.

Maxime Chupin board member 2009–2017, maintainer of the `bclogo`, `luamesh` and `matapli` packages, now deputy secretary.

Daniel Flipo board member 1993–2005, maintainer of many packages including `babel-french`.

Yvon Henel board member 2009–2017, maintainer of many packages, now deputy treasurer.

We sincerely hope that any suspicion has now vanished. We were only a group of honest people, worried about an association that we had in common, to which we were deeply attached.¹ Please notice that we never *asked* to dissolve GUTenberg. We only *mentioned* that it could be possible, just like Jérémy Just himself did before in several messages; this mention was due to the association's by-then current state.

Then, the horrendous article that we are replying to mentions a shadow cabinet. Yes, we have used

¹ Four among us have applied to the election and are now in charge at GUTenberg.

this expression once. As a joke. And we deeply regret it: to be understood, a joke needs views to be shared by the addressee. But anyone can understand that we have imagined ourselves in charge of GUTenberg. This is why we have published our election platform, which is not even mentioned in Mr Just's text: he prefers mentioning imaginary projects blocked on purpose and the abovementioned nonexistent friendly atmosphere among the by-then nonexistent board.

We recognize that J  r  my Just has spent time for the association. However, this time spent has slowly but surely led to the demise of the association. He has gradually disgusted many of us from working with him over the past few years.

As a matter of fact, J  r  my Just does not have the same conception of the association's work as we do: for him, it is mainly the sum of individual activities (his moral assessment of the General Assembly of 2020 was only an assessment of his T  Xian activities), whereas for us, it is a collective project, with collective choices, and collective stimulation giving body to the association and making it much more than the sum of the activities of its members.

6 GUTenberg's revival

To relaunch the association, for the General Assembly that we forced to be held, some of us put together a team, wrote a project and presented ourselves for the election of the board.² Their purpose was to rebuild, as a team, and we were glad to be joined by others at the new board, after the election. Nowadays the association serves its community again. But, to our great disappointment, one board member spits in the soup, as we say in French. It is hard for us to understand the acrimonious article we are replying to: why isn't its author happy to have new colleagues in the board? Why isn't he happy to see the association's revival? It's one thing to be overwhelmed by a job that you have applied for without being suited for it (and no one blames anyone for this, as it is very hard to know in advance what it means to serve an association). It's a another thing to blame others when they dedicate themselves to clean up the mess and rebuild the house. This is why we have exercised our right of reply.

We apologize to the readers that are not concerned by the matter. But fake news has to be fought. Always.

GUTenberg is back to life: 4 new issues of its bulletin have been published (see *TUGboat* 42:3, p.313–314), its journal is relaunched (see *TUGboat* 42:3, p.315), it is rewriting its bylaws, has a new server and a new url, `gutenberg-asso.fr`, selected by a poll among its members. Of course, it could do more and better, but at least, it works, and it works collectively.

The French-speaking community is lively, and its T  X user group is happy to be serving it again. Long live GUTenberg! Long live TUG and LUGs all over the world! Support your community: join your local TUG!

- ◇ Jacques Andr  
Founder, GUTenberg board member
1988–2007
- ◇ Patrick Bideault
President 2020–2022 at GUTenberg
`pb-latex (at) gmx dot fr`
- ◇ Denis Bitouz  
Secretary 2020–2022 at GUTenberg
- ◇ Michel Bovani
GUTenberg board member 1999–2003
- ◇ Thierry Bouche
Former editor-in-chief, *Cahiers GUTenberg*,
board member 1997–2017
- ◇ Maxime Chupin
Deputy secretary 2020–2022 at GUTenberg
- ◇ Daniel Flipo
GUTenberg board member 1993–2005
- ◇ Yvon Henel
Deputy treasurer 2020–2022 at GUTenberg

² See our election platform (in French) at:
`gutenberg-asso.fr/IMG/pdf/liste-gut-renouveau--
profession-de-foi-projets-equipe.pdf`