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LibWorld - Library blogging worldwide - France

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France

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French bloggers

French speaking liblogs in 2007, a personal take.

The first two librarian weblogs in French (liblogs) appeared in 2003, a good eighteen months to two years after the first liblogs emerged in the United States.

Nicolas Morin's was the first, in June 2003: he wrote it alone until 2004, when he deleted that first blog to write another one, *BiblioAcid*, with this post's co-author, Marlène Delhaye, before they both went back to their own "personal" blogs in 2006. Nicolas is a systems librarian in a university library, Marlène is an online resources specialist at another academic library. Computers and e-journals: that pretty much sums up the subjects covered in that blog; they are still the main subjects of most French speaking liblogs in 2007.

The second French liblog born in 2003 was *Figoblog*, still going strong and thus the oldest blog alive in the area. Manue, the author of "Figo", claims to write about "the internet, librarianship and fig jam". But she really does not cast that wide a net: aside from some odd posts about fig trees, the bulk of the posts talk about digital libraries, metadata, or repositories. Manue works for the digital library division at the national library (BnF).

During 2004, 2005 and 2006 the number of liblogs slowly increased. A lot of liblogs were born and died after a few

months. A few lived. Our feeling is that it's this year (2007) that things have really changed: in particular, we see a lot of incoming librarians starting blogs now and as a result the number of "living liblogs" is steadily rising. How many are they? It's difficult to say. Our own blogrolls contain about 20 French-speaking liblogs. We probably don't read all French-speaking liblogs, and it's very hard to put precise figures on this, but our bet (it's just a guess, really) would be that there's currently something between 30 and 50 French-speaking liblogs.

Most of them are French, but there's a bunch of Belgian, Swiss and Canadian blogs, about 10 to 15 in all.

Two particularly interesting Canadian liblogs come out of EBSI, the LIS Department at the Université de Montréal: one is a collective blog by the students, *EBSI 2.0*, the other is a blog by the Department's head, Jean-Michel Salaün: *le bloc-notes de JMS*. French LIS school students followed the way with the *DCBI6* blog.

Who are the French-speaking libloggers? Some, as we have seen, are LIS students: they represent a healthy chunk of the libloggers, varying from one year to the next as their authors become "real" librarians, obviously, but year in year out, there's always 5 to 10 of them. A few are teachers in LIS: the already mentioned JMS and Olivier Ertzscheid at *affordance.info* are the most influential. These two talk from time to time about libraries as such but are more focused on Information Sciences; JMS's specialty is the "economy of digital documents".

A majority of authors work in academic libraries. Some authors do work in public libraries, but they are in a minority so far. The reasons for this situation are unclear. I have hinted already that liblogs talk a lot about digital libraries, web sites, online resources and the like (that's also one of their limitations, more about that below): in France, public libraries lag far behind university libraries on these aspects. It might also have something to do with the lack of human resources in French public libraries: when one has to fulfill a daily workload that should normally be split between two or three librarians, one doesn't write a blog.

Paradoxically, there are more public libraries weblogs than academic ones : maybe the aforementioned overloaded public librarians just have time to feed the library's blog?

Pseudonyms

Most french liblog authors use pseudonyms. That's very unusual when compared to the practices of libloggers in the English-speaking world, who usually give their names and indicate where they work. Very few French-speaking libloggers do that: Fabrizio Tinti at the Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium), Jean-Michel Salaün at EBSI (Canada), Nicolas Morin at the Université d'Angers (France) are rare examples. In a few other cases, libloggers tell their names, but withhold information as to their library: so does Marlène Delhaye on *Marlène's Corner* ou Clotilde Vaissaire on Klog. But the vast majority use pseudonyms. That's

bizarre to us. When we asked them what they thought about it and why they did that, libloggers gave us a variety of responses:

1. To have greater freedom of expression, not really to criticize their hierarchy (they don't) but just because they think the fact of them having a professional blog will be frowned upon. Which is rather disturbing, because they seem to have made this choice right away, that is, before we could have any example of a local hierarchy actually saying anything; it's indicative of distrust rather than of actual "danger".
2. Some think that the fact that they use a pseudonym does not reduce the impact of their blog since, it is being argued, the web of liblogs acts a self-validating disciplinary field: you write good posts, you have an audience, other libloggers link to your blog; if you're talking rubbish, people just won't come. And it is true that the process of validation by the libloggers peers does play a role. But we argue (and have argued with our French libloggers colleagues) that it can only have a mitigating effect and should not be considered an alternative to the public statement of who you are, and where you are speaking from. We also argue that this mitigating effect exists only within the biblioblogosphere, and is of no value when speaking to librarians generally.

Audience

It's very difficult to have any precise indication about the audience of these liblogs.

Feedburner.com tells us Nicolas Morin's blog had 384 subscribers on average from mid-march to mid-april 2007, while Google Analytics tells us the blog had 94 daily visitors on average during that same period, with as high as 199 visitors and as low as 40 visitors in a day. As you would expect, visitors come from French-speaking countries: France (80%), Canada (4,7%), Belgium (3%), Morocco (2%). What do these numbers mean? Hard to tell. Our guess would be that it's in the top third of French liblogs but that's just what is it: a wild guess.

But then the targeted audience is rather small: the National Association of Librarians (Association des Bibliothécaires Francais) has a mere 2800 members, and French-speaking librarians are not as numerous as, say, French-speaking rock music fans. Global figures show a potential population of ca 8000 librarians in French public and academic libraries.

Are those libloggers influential? Yes and no. They do get invited to speak at conferences, usually on stuff relating to library web sites, wikis, library systems and, generally, things that have either "Open" or "2.0" in the title. But so far they don't seem to have any real impact on the profession at large: they still mainly talk to a core section of the profession that's interested in online systems and contents, and their word has not spread very far beyond that. For instance, none of the main libloggers has a managing position in the profession as library director, or as elected within the National Librarians' Association, or anything of the kind. But there's anecdotal

evidence that the libloggers influence is growing, or at least that they're beginning to represent a recognized "brand" among French librarians: since a year or two, both authors of this post rarely go to any outside meeting or conference where, upon meeting new colleagues, they're not being told something along the line that they know about their blog. We even attained "rock star" status once when someone came up to us at a conference because the person "just wanted to shake your hand" ... : weird feeling.

<http://blogbbf.enssib.fr/> offers a monthly roundup of the French-speaking biblioblogosphere with additional posts about many subjects of interest to librarians. It goes alongside the best-known peer-reviewed journal on librarianship in French: Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France.

Bibliopedia maintains an exhaustive list of French-speaking libraries and librarians blogs. Among these, and in addition to the blogs already mentioned in this post, we particularly like *Bibliobsession*, *Klog*, *Vagabondages* and finally *Le Bebouin*, which is written by two librarians working in a Medicine Library and is focused on the issues specific to this subject area.