

# **Écrit-public.net**

## **Public writing in the city of Brest, fr Juste another Expression network**



*From encounters between individuals, local initiatives, the network of Brest's public writing is being built at a crossroads mixing desires of social link, cultural production, and public debate.*

*Starting from the cooperative dynamics of the 60 Internet public access points<sup>1</sup>, about thirty interactive publication sites have given individual persons and non-profits the possibility to write and display cultural production on the web.*

*In a period of two years, pioneers have been replaced by multiple initiatives that emerged during Spip workshops<sup>2</sup>, journalistic writing courses or meetings with already existing district newspapers, always in the scope of catering for the expression of those who are less familiar with multimedia tools.*

*Public writing is also a convergence, beyond mere technologies, between cultural practices around writing, photography and image, that are intertwining during the process.*

*New questions are slowly emerging about edition policies, co-publication, what is public and what is private, public debate, open content licenses, and the extension of publicly shared goods.*

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<sup>1</sup> Called « papis », for 'points d'accès public à l'Internet'

<sup>2</sup> Spip is a free software enabling the user to publish articles on internet without having to learn any computer language : <http://www.spip.net>

## From guided public access to public writing

Our policy of social appropriation of Internet and multimedia tools began by the setting up of public access points, and an active networking of local schools. An objective of equity had been deemed valid by the left-wing town council majority, with no reference to the other concept of « numeric town »<sup>3</sup>.



The budget is not huge but was strongly based on local participants, and allows to gradually equip the dozens of public service places run by the city. Each year, 5 to 6 new public access points come to densify the network of those who, in a non-profit, a district facility or a local public service, get involved in guided public access.

We learned to take into account the long rythm of human appropriation, albeit technologies evolve so fast.. It took us five years<sup>4</sup> to open public access points in district town halls or in a trade union facility.

Thanks to a dynamic cooperative movement, linking a help to pioneers' initiatives, an enticement to diffusion and tutoring, those tools are today present in schools, district facilities, libraries and many non-profits places.

The 60 guided access points of the city of Brest form the basis of a rich network of people who are interested, at their own pace, in Internet tools and who have taken in charge an assistance to more remote persons. Its rich interest comes from the interest of sports, insertion, culture and education networks who became involved in the process.

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<sup>3</sup> Expliquer ici la différence avec le concept de ville numérique

<sup>4</sup> There is still today no guided public access point at the local county offices nor in state public services, despite the widely and quickly improving array of public services online. Should we talk of a digital social gap ?

Much remains to be accomplished. A mere one access point for 3 000 inhabitants is not enough to reduce the digital social gap. Social studies have assessed<sup>5</sup> this policy, and have shown immense inequalities between social groups, have endeavoured to understand what makes appropriation of computer tools difficult and have tried to convince the members of the City council of the value of a relevant policy in social housing and towards isolated persons.

Since we are persuaded of the discrepancy<sup>6</sup> between speeches that remain unconnected to practice (« talkers ») and the reality of tutoring (« makers »), we will organize this spring a meeting about the assessment of public access policies, under the responsibility of the « Créatif »<sup>7</sup> network.



A resource center linking together the 80 places (guided access points and cybertowns) of the area of Brest is currently being built. We now experience the long rhythm of decision processes (the cooperative elaboration of needs and resources was initiated two years ago) and of the obtention of human resources<sup>8</sup>. Monthly workshops of animators, training in taking in charge the visitors, support for multimedia (video, photography ..), mutualisation of hardware, diffusion of opensource tools, addressing remote populations, all these works have already started.

In Brest as in other places, the majority of elected officials is not convinced of the strong implications of a social appropriation of Internet and multimedia tools. This is why initiatives are developing thanks to the involvement of local actors and networked activity.

When 200 schoolmasters are registered in seminars at 17h00, when schools request hardware and the local network, when 150 get online with the local webhosting non profit Infini<sup>9</sup>, when 20 new projects are received each year, then the member of the council in charge of Internet policies can obtain the backing of the council in order to foster the social appropriation of information and communication technologies in his town.

### **Public writing: another network of initiatives and expression**

This introduction to the context was important to understand the dynamics now at work around public writing, since it remains difficult to describe a movement born just two years ago and still in evolution. Those initiatives must also be understood taking into account a whole background of previous work around several forms of tutored writing, in a region where education and schools play an important part. Hence this short insert below about other forms of writing in Brest.

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<sup>5</sup> Resource centers for the 80 public access points in the area of Brest :

<http://www.a-brest.net/article278.html>

1<sup>st</sup> part of the evaluation : the 60 guided access points and their functions

<http://www.a-brest.net/article390.html>

Favorizing access to Internet : two studies from Marsouin on Brest and cybertowns

<http://www.a-brest.net/article428.html>

<sup>6</sup> This public access plan is now in danger. Thousands of agents recruited with former government's junior worker status are now left without a certain future. The stop in co-financing by the State endangers the work and personal involvement of these numerous enthusiasts.

<sup>7</sup> Créatif is a network of hardware or public access executives who wish to contribute avoiding exclusions: <http://www.creatif-public.net>

<sup>8</sup> It is so much easier to finance a road or infrastructure, I dream of budgets that would give as much credit to social networks animators as to technical engineers.

<sup>9</sup> Infini webhosting non profit (<http://www.infini.fr>) was created in 1996 to provide an Internet access that was rare in provincial towns at the time, and evolved towards webhosting and assistance to non-profits, remote populations and public writing workshops.

## Multiple forms of public writing

*This city is rich with multiple initiatives in the area of writing. Retired volunteers in schools, local TV from canal-Ty Zef, walls artists in the commerce port, classic paper writing, video, are part of the culture of a town and a Western Brittany area where families attach much importance to the schooling of their children.*



What a pleasure to walk your way along travel notes. Photo-reporting for the inhabitants of Pontanézen district, away for a day in the neighbouring county to meet a local woodcarver, three-dimensional writing with a whole series of materials by sight impeached children. Sound records and multimedia, district papers are just a part of dozens of writing forms with reflected display, along with travel writers and their most

remote journeys.<sup>10</sup>

On the previous Saturday, the school, the social center, family organizations and the inhabitants of Kérourien district were organizing a district party to celebrate the publishing of their book « Couleur de quartier<sup>11</sup> », a collection of inhabitants' life stories. Publishing this book meant a rejoicing in reading one another, a restored self-esteem, a pride to find their own words to stress the value of the district they are affectively connected to.

On another Saturday, about a hundred volunteers from district papers were able to ask questions to invited photographers, to get initiated to online writing, to handle digital cameras. Now grouped in an organization of fifteen papers, they organize by themselves their yearly party, invite people, debate, and mix skills in paper, photography and video workshops.



*Extact from an article on tutored public writing in ATD Quart Monde Review<sup>12</sup>*

Our society invented in a few years many communication means, cellular phone, computer, digital photography, e-mail, world wide web, but how much energy was spent on helping people to speak out ?

Those are just a few examples that show the diversity and wealth of desires to write. Rather than speeches on « information society », I prefer this patchwork of expressions, that reveal the diversity and wealth present in each of us.

<sup>10</sup> Il faut revoir la pagination ici. On ne comprend pas où commence et s'arrête l'extrait. Je propose ce tableau.

<sup>11</sup> For 'district color'

<sup>12</sup> Magazine of ATD Quart Monde, non-profit specializing in poverty inside rich countries

## Reading and Writing

The development of the web, of e-mail and public service portals led to the question of guided reading (access to Internet).

The simplification of writing tools on the web, the availability of multimedia devices make it possible today to produce documents mixing text, photographs, sounds and images.

Learning to read is compulsory for work, studies, orientation, and understanding the world. Being a member of human society also requires to know how, to feel the desire of and to have the opportunity to write. Participating in the life of the city also means being listened to, debating thanks to public and private writing.

Internet is not only a new distribution medium, a communication market, the development of its networks is above all an answer to the need for exchanges between persons. Undisturbed by the financial peaks of major telecom corporations, the network increases by 100 million users each year. Each time a more powerful connection medium or lower prices are introduced, new practices of music, photographs exchanges, network gaming appear at the district as well as the global level.

In a period of two years, thousands of non profits websites have been created thanks to **Spip**, with often a collective writing. Thousands of people opened «blogs», sometimes as a subjective journal, sometimes as a news website <sup>13</sup>.

## Intertwinning of Local and Global

Initiatives in Brest always link a local practices dimension to larger networks, with a mutual profit.

- The yearly Internet project invitation to tender of the city of Brest <sup>14</sup> is a local relay of invitations to projects by the Fondation de France<sup>15</sup>, that also supports numerous projects of resource and co-publication centers.
- After the Créatif network during Autrans<sup>16</sup> 2000, I3C <sup>17</sup>, a network of agents of creative, socially responsible and cooperative Internet, was born during Autrans 2001.



- Debates were sometimes very lively on I3C mailing lists, around Radiophare<sup>18</sup> political dynamics during the Erika oil spill, and we perceived how many important functions were at stake in co-publication, in all tools for publishing, connection and expression.

The Scientific debates of Brest in november 2002 gave us the opportunity of a first presentation of co-publication in Brest, thanks to Valentin Lacambre and Olivier Zablocki. What a distance back then between those few people, the emerging ideas in the I3C network, <sup>19</sup> and local non profits !

<sup>13</sup> Read the « expression » page of the « Vie dans la cité » website <http://www.multimedia-vie-cite.net/>

<sup>14</sup> The 2003 call to tender [http://www.mairie-brest.fr/cnt/appelaprojets\\_2003.htm](http://www.mairie-brest.fr/cnt/appelaprojets_2003.htm). This form of support to local initiatives will also inspire the Belgian Wallon region during Rewics 2004.

<sup>15</sup> The major social and culture foudation in France

<sup>16</sup> Expliquer ici ce qu'est Autrans

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.i3c-asso.org/>

<sup>18</sup> Radiophare website on <http://www.radiophare.net/indexone.html>

<sup>19</sup> Uzine, original creators of Spip, website on <http://www.uzine.net>

As we were confronted ourselves to learning online writing in order to organize the first I3C « Remics » meetings in Bordeaux, we perceived ourselves the importance of a tutoring in order to help the first steps.

Those were the kind of discoveries that led to the public writing project in Brest.

### **October 2001 – November 2002. Year 0 of public writing in Brest**

During this first year, we rediscovered the pioneers stage mentioned earlier<sup>20</sup> with :

- Le Fourneau cultural non profit as a network for street actors ;
- Rue de penfeld town planning non profit to foster public debate on the Penfeld river valley, historical heart of the city that will become available again thanks to a restructuring of the Navy dockyards ;
- Infini webhosting non profit with its list of registered non profits ;
- Brest-ouvert, the debate website of Green members of the council in Brest ;
- The Trotteriou, 90 highschool students initiated to web reporting each year by teachers of professional schools Vauban, Lesven and Kerichen highschool, who showed quite a series of perspectives ;

The decision to organize one to two Spip workshops each month, the support to Infini non profit and the Local Democracy department at the Town Hall helped the creation of dozens of sites which were opened to writing in 2002.

### **November 2002 – December 2003. Year I of public writing in Brest**

Very soon however we got aware that the true difficulty did not reside in the handling of new tools, but in public writing itself. It is not so simple to publish yourself on the Web.

The success of initiations to journalistic writing that we set up as early as spring 2003 with Anne Dhoquois from Place Publique non profit<sup>21</sup> (within the more general framework of Ecrit-public.net I3C initiative) showed this need of human tutoring.

Writing a news, composing a headline, cross-interviewing, choosing the layout of an article are part of the 8 workshops that we elaborated.

And as months passed by, mere technology was succeeded by innovation in practices.

- Le Fourneau non profit, linking together public writing and cultural expression in each of the smaller towns of the Morlaix area.
- Online publishing of twenty news and articles a week, making of Brest-ouvert.net a weekly magazine.
- Cartography (inspired from tela-botanica<sup>22</sup>), displaying to each other the location of the 200 registered receivers of @-brest newsletter about Information and communication

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<sup>20</sup> Links to above mentioned websites :

- Le Fourneau non profit in the Morlaix area <http://www.artsdanslarue.com/participer/>
- Rue de Penfeld : <http://www.penfeld.net/>
- Brest-Ouvert.net : <http://www.Brest-Ouvert.net>
- The Trotteriou, local version of the webtrotteurs from Initial non profit : <http://trotteurs.ac-rennes.fr/>
- Newsbrief @-brest : <http://www.a-brest.net/> and its map : <http://www.a-brest.net/carte.php>
- Inhabitants and district councils : <http://www.participation-brest.net/>
- Local education project, coopération of 200 education actors in : <http://www.pel-brest.net>

<sup>21</sup> Place Publique : <http://www.place-publique.net>

<sup>22</sup> Tela-botanica.org is a website initiated by Daniel Mathieu, intertwining multiple creative projects from 2 000 Francophone botanists. These initiatives in Brest from Tela-botanica plus the methodological work of Jean Michel Cornu were shown in multiple meetings, like this winter in Autrans : « Cooperation, organisation and life of a network » <http://www.a-brest.net/article382.html> with the following links.

technologies in Brest and the region of Brittany, facilitating the network activity of 100 actors in the 89 towns of the Brest area.

- Publication of the proceedings from district councils by the network of correspondants in each district Town Hall, emulating the participation-brest website.
- Use of cartography in order to display each district initiative on the local education project website.

And this is how we gradually arrived in the diffusion stage, with around fifty of our websites registered in the co-publication webring.<sup>23</sup>

### **YEAR II, a time for the cooperative project ... and a time for questions**

Of course the project goes on this year. But we learn as we try, and I can only give here a few indications on the various elaborated directions for cooperation.

We were lucky enough to get selected in a call to project by the Ministry of research in July, in a partnership with the laboratory of practices in Brittany : Marsouin, Infini and Place Publique non profits, and the town of Vandoeuvre.<sup>24</sup>

This will allow us to consolidate the local seminars<sup>25</sup> and to publish our courses online, to create in Brest a network called «Ecrit-public.net », consisting of places where a person desiring to write or open a website can benefit from tutoring.

But in order to go ahead we also need to exchange information, to confront our own history to that of others, and to build together a network of local public writing, giving its meaning to this project.

We are indeed confronted to multiple questions, each of them rich in its meaning :

- How should an edition committee function ? Which charta ?
- How to arrange a local network with all those sites and initiatives ?
- How to convince public departments to participate in this movement by publishing official content ?
- Is the project of a school, a district cultural center a « private » project, only known by the staff, the school or the administration council ? Or is it legitimate to publish it on a district website displaying projects, values behind the options of each actors, opening potential cooperations ?
- Will this or that study financed by a public authority about high-speed connection become public, this way reducing some copy/paste attitudes by private agencies ?
- Will town planning become public and be confronted to the expertise of users ?
- What are the public property information that should be published ?
- How to adapt the Creative Commons license for a convenient use by public departments or non-profits ?
- How to insert these practices in education institutions ? With teachers? Students ?

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<sup>23</sup> The co-publication ring : <http://www.a-brest.net/article5.html>

<sup>24</sup> For a short introduction to the project : <http://www.a-brest.net/article379.html>  
Marsouin, laboratory of practices : <http://www.marsouin.org>

City of Vandoeuvre les Nancy : <http://www.vandoeuvre.fr/mairie/>

<sup>25</sup> From March on we will propose a seminar each week with alternatively an initiation to basic and new tools, introduction to journalistic writing, and invited speakers (blogs, creative commons licence ..). Program and participants list are published on a-brest.net. <http://www.a-brest.net/article5.html>

### **Democracy at stake?**

This « Ecrit-public.net » attitude is not reduced to facilitating individual or community writing. It is also an opportunity of social and cultural innovation. Because we live in an era when elected officials and inhabitants get apart, when corporations privatize public wealth, is this not an opportunity for new initiatives ? for social capital, networking, participation, extension of common fields, elaboration of a shared meaning about a common district, town or area ?

A public policy concerning writing, initiative and cooperation can also imply :

- A reduction of the fears around the appropriation of computer tools of the many people who could not yet become experienced ;
- An enticement for persons, giving the desire to write, to be read, to communicate towards remote individuals ;
- A linking together of the multiple forms of expression ;
- An experiencing of new modes of participation debate ;
- A disseminating of this culture of cooperation, public writing into public departments
- An extension of the common public wealth.

And what about consenting to give one per cent of the budgets allowed to high tech companies, online markets, agencies studies, for a simple tutoring in public writing ?