



**Sister Libraries Project: Community Center STEJ, Togo & Gutenberg Library, France**

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Session:

*195 — Sister Libraries Programme – new developments and evaluation of an international network for children and libraries — Libraries for Children and Young Adults*

**Abstract :**

*During this presentation, I would like to discuss the partnership forged through the Sister Libraries Project<sup>1</sup>. Two libraries are involved in this project. One is located in Togo: the community center library – STEJ - d'Agoe Nyivé. The other one is in the Paris XVeme arrondissement. First I will introduce each library and the historical development of this partnership. Then I will explain the actions taken (books donation, professional exchanges, interlibraries exchanges...) to complete the partnership (blogging, visiting each other, new activities...).*

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1 <http://www.ifla.org/en/node/1746>



Let's start with an introduction. The STEJ Community Center<sup>2</sup> started in 2007. The library has a significant youth section as well as an adult section. 90% of public coming to the library is younger than 15 years old. Events relating to books, street libraries, reception of classes and reading clubs help to enhance the library. Our cyber-section also adds value, offering Internet access, computer courses, and help to users.



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2 <http://www.stejtogo.org/?q=fr/la-maison-de-quartier-agee-prefecture-du-golfe>

A team of dynamic and talented activity leaders supported by external staff offer the children many sociocultural events every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and also every day during school holidays. Literacy courses are held three times a week for both women and girls who are not at school.



The Gutenberg Library<sup>3</sup> in Paris is 20 years old and has a surface area of 580 m<sup>2</sup>. It is a specialized youth library, but also have some novels for adults and books for parents, focusing on topics such as education, health, tuition and different topics. There are 40 000 documents in the library, especially albums, novels, documentaries, comic strips and mangas and also some magazines, CDs, and books on CD. There were 172 065 loans in 2011. 68930 visitors came to the library in 2011.

Many different events are organised for colleges, nurseries, groups of young handicapped people, and for all age groups, such as reading sessions for specific age groups and workshops. 3973 people attended these special events in 2011. The team consists of 10 well-trained and motivated people! This dynamism attracts a lot of people to the library and gives it the opportunity to carry out its mission.

At the launch of the project, both the STEJ Community Center and the Gutenberg Library were registered with the co-partner libraries<sup>4</sup>. Before I left for Togo, I met Viviana Quinones at "La joie par les livres/Joy by Books" in Paris. I told her about our desire to play a part in the Sister Libraries Project. She immediately called Marie-Christine Gaudfroy who is assistant director of the Gutenberg library. Two days later, on the 6th of October 2010, I visited this youth-oriented library for the first time. I was welcomed by Marie-Christine

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3 [http://equipement.paris.fr/Biblioth%C3%A8que\\_Gutenberg](http://equipement.paris.fr/Biblioth%C3%A8que_Gutenberg)

4 <http://www.ifla.org/en/node/1752>

Gaudefroy and Michèle Laffage who is in charge of events. They showed me around the library and we took the time to exchange information about our respective events. We also compared and exchanged documents about our respective organizations. These documents reached Lomé simultaneously with me on the 2nd of November 2010. I then informed the STEJ team about this partnership, and the idea received a warm welcome.

After I arrived in Togo we exchanged information by Internet on a regular basis about our activities and about life in general in a library, including our problems at work. Librarians in Europe and in Africa don't have the same pressures. So it was an excellent opportunity to put things into perspective. However, our emails were relatively short and infrequent, mainly because of our workload. We mentioned this several times in our emails. This is a rather good sign, meaning that our organizations are very active, but it is a reality that partnerships need time to develop.



At the end of 2010 we were happy to accept the Gutenberg library's offer of a donation of books that were no longer needed after their annual sorting-out. Their librarians asked us what our needs were and they selected eleven boxes of books. These books finally arrived in February 2012 !

When school started again in 2011, we thought about setting up exchanges between the different classes coming to our libraries. Unfortunately no Parisian teacher was interested in this project. The STEJ team came up with another idea - create an exchange between users of our respective libraries.

The library warmly welcomed this idea. This activity allows the children to exchange knowledge across continents, and it also allows them to see what is happening in another youth-specialized library, from the point of view of the children who go there regularly. It also allows them to broaden their knowledge in a recreational way, and to write their own articles. The first event took place at the Gutenberg library on March 24th. An agreement was drawn up to formalize this activity as a partnership.

At the STEJ Community Center, Edem Adjeoda, the librarian, is leading the session. He starts by explaining again to the children about the project, and reads the correspondence received from the Gutenberg Library. Then he helps the participants write an answer and to summarize what has been done in the past month. A short informal note can also be added by two or three children who wish to talk about their favourite book. This activity is very popular with the children.

At the Gutenberg Library, it has just organised the second meeting with the youngsters. There were more participants, ten of them and they were very motivated. They were greatly motivated by the stories and the questions of the children from Lomé. They talked a lot about their tastes and their daily life and they wanted to know more about the children in Lomé. It's a very good start, we could feel they had a real urge to communicate, and the desire to have exchanges that went much further. So they all have been shocked to hear about the possible closure of the library.



From now, Edem will be in charge of this partnership. My contract finishes on October 1<sup>st</sup>. When I get back to France, it will be a real pleasure to go back to the Gutenberg Library and attend a session. Here in the STEJ Community Center, we all really want to continue this activity in the long term. Once in a while, we would like to put place articles on the blog<sup>5</sup>, both to inform and get ideas for new activities. We are also willing to receive a delegation from the Gutenberg Library. We will give them a warm welcome as they did for us on October 6th 2010. We are definitely ready to start new activities in the context of this partnership, for our mutual benefit.

One thing is sure, this partnership is just starting.

Agoè Nyivé and Paris, June 12th, 2012  
Céline HUAULT and Marie-Christine GAUDEFROY  
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5 <http://sisterlibraries.wordpress.com/>