

# A Website for ICLM Network

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Today, Internet appears of great importance to diffuse information and knowledge to the maximum number of people around the world. Being aware of this importance, the International Jules Verne Centre (CIJV, Amiens) and the Jules Verne Museum (Nantes) have recently decided to encourage the critical publishing of the entire work of Jules Verne on the Internet. This project was the subject of a symposium which took place in Amiens in March 2007; the Acts of this symposium were published in the *Jules Verne Review* n°26 last November. The principal conclusion of the participants was that we must now choose between the durability of a paper publication and the advantages of Internet, which makes real-time updating possible and facilitates round-the-world exchange and collective work, and at relatively low cost.

Then Internet is also primordial in touristic questions, with the development of prescriber sites like “Tripadvisor”, blogs, and so on. Each cultural place is obliged nowadays to have its own website if it wants to attract the attention of potential visitors in a very competitive context. Discussions and seminars about these subjects have been developing in France for several years. We now know for instance that about 80 % of people going on a touristic tour during week-end prepare their travel and visits exclusively on Internet, which is quite important thing to be aware of.

The CIJV and Jules Verne’s House have two websites, and welcome around 100.000 visitors per year at the addresses [www.jules-verne.net](http://www.jules-verne.net) and [www.amiens.com/julesverne](http://www.amiens.com/julesverne). In what concerns the French Writer’s Houses and Literary Patrimonies Federation Website, it is a very important tool; indeed, the site welcomes around 300.000 visitors per month and gives much visibility to the network and its numerous members.

## I. A brief History of the French Federation and its Website

### *The Writer’s Houses and Literary Patrimonies Federation*

In 1993 and 1994, symposiums, exhibitions and educational activities about the French writer Alain-Fournier were organized by the *Centre Départemental de Documentation Pédagogique du Cher*, and the school-museum of the novel *Le Grand Meaulnes*, located in Epineuil-le-Fleuriel, was restored and opened to the public. At the same time, on the occasion of the Louvre bicentenary, a symposium called “Literature and museums” was organized by the *Société d’Histoire littéraire de la France* and the Orsay Museum in Paris. During this symposium, the question of literary heritage was widely discussed.

After that, in October 1995, the French Minister of Culture included in his *Programme pour le Livre et la Lecture* the creation of a “national network of writers’ houses and literary museums”. The following year, Michel Melot, general curator of the *Conseil Supérieur des Bibliothèques*, was asked to issue a new report presenting proposals for writers’ houses; this report was called *Mission de réflexion et de proposition sur les maisons d’écrivains*.

On April 1996, the *Association des Bibliothécaires Français* (ABF) organized in Paris a conference called *Libraries and literary houses, places of memory, study and research*. This meeting gathered, for the first time in France, numerous representatives of writers’ houses and

literary places, who compared their experience and presented their collections. On October, the first *Rencontres des maisons d'écrivain*, initiated by the *Centre Départemental de Documentation Pédagogique du Cher*, took place in Bourges. Representatives, owners and managers of about thirty writers' houses as well as literary associations drew up a first evaluation of the situation. The debates were impassioned, sometimes divergent, but all participants agreed on the need to establish long-term relationship between the various places of literary memory. Then from March 5 to 7 1997, the National School of Patrimony organized a training seminar about *Biographic museums, houses-museums, literary museums* meant for preservation and communication staff in charge of these types of museums.

All these various initiatives converged to give birth to the *Rencontres nationales des maisons d'écrivain et lieux de mémoire littéraire* on December 4th, 5th and 6th 1997, with thematic workshops and a round-table conference gathering representatives of European literary places. At the same time, the general meeting officially created the French Writer's Houses and Literary Patrimony Federation on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1997. The purpose of the Federation is "to suggest and implement activities which aim at maintaining, protecting and developing the cultural influence of writers' houses, literary places or collections, whether state-owned or private, linked to writers and written works of famous persons of all cultural backgrounds. Its job namely consists in:

- collecting and spreading information related to literary places and collections,
- implementing research and study activities about literary places, works or people,
- organizing cultural events and training activities,
- promoting exchange and cooperation between members,
- representing members in negotiations with public authorities and other associations, even worldwide."

Since its creation, the Federation has developed projects in different directions. Every two years, it organizes the « *Rencontres des maisons d'écrivain et des patrimoines littéraires* ». The Federation also publishes documents, as proceedings of the *Rencontres*, newsletter and other types of documents (recently, a map of all French writer's houses). It develops an educational activities committee, to promote the relationships between writer's houses and the National Education service. For instance, it has published a *Guide of educational activities: direction for use*, composed of a series of technical slides about the possible supports, the institutional framework and how to prepare an educational project in a writer's house.

At the same time, the audiovisual resources committee is working to set up an inventory of audiovisual literary resources; to negotiate with the companies managing copyrights in order to set up a juridical framework and fix reasonable financial terms for the use of audiovisual documents as records and for public display; and to think about audiovisual resources as museographical and animation means for writers' houses and literary places. At last, the international relations committee is trying to set up active cooperation between writer's houses from different countries.

All these activities are presented and explained on the Federation website, [www.litterature-lieux.com](http://www.litterature-lieux.com).

## ***General presentation of the French Federation Website***

Even when it is a museum, a writer' house is not a mausoleum; on the contrary, it is a house presenting written world. It shelters text, reading, literature, and it must be a place for curiosity, encounters, imagination, and encourage the discovery of particular worlds as real journeys. For all these reasons, our houses are alive, and one way to show this topicality, this presence, this dynamism, is today to offer a website open on the world.

The French Federation website, created in 1998, is animated by an "Internet committee". The first aim of this committee is to manage the website of the Federation, which is the information, exchange and promotion tool of literary places and collections, and also of the Federation's activities. The second one is to organize the networking of members. It is thinking about cooperation with other European countries, particularly in order to set up a real network for European writers' houses on the web. The person in charge for the Internet committee has been for a long time Mr Robert Tranchida; the present manager is Antoine Soriano. Content and updating of the pages is made by two or three people, videos are provided by Jacques Mény, and the manager and webmaster of the site is the external society Latelier Multimédia.

The website is divided in seven principal parts: actualities, guide-book, literary circuits, portal to the different literary places, history and life of the federation, resources and contact. The site has been thought to cover all the different types of activities of the federation and its members. It tries to answer literary as touristic questions that visitors can ask themselves.

## **II. A Detailed Approach of the Website**

### ***Choices about the Visual Aspect of the Website***

As a website gives a visual and interactive interpretation of a specific content, precise choices must be made concerning the graphical chart and the general presentation. (By the way, it is a good thing that ICLM adopted in 2006, during its General Assembly, a logo and a graphical chart.)

The French Federation made different artistic choices that give a certain tone to its site. For instance, the home page gives an impression of life and movement thanks to the bandeau of illustrations (documents, houses, writers...) moving permanently on the top of the page. In fact, the same bandeau appears on the top of all pages of the site, to have a better coherence. In its architecture, the site is quite simple to grasp; it proposes different information about:

- the federation itself, its working, juridical status, history...
- literary places and writers in France
- literary resources, in line or not (publications, bibliographies of writers, educational activities...)
- news concerning writer's houses and federation
- more frequently asked questions (eg: what is a writer' house ? a literary place? a literary patrimonies? a writer's road? a writer' residence? What is the federation? How it is organised? Who are its partners? Who can adhere and how? How costs the annual contribution?)
- propositions of literary circuits, roads and trips

Three languages are proposed at present: French, English and Spanish. If some interesting pages and texts are offered only in French, it is because of the high translation costs. Languages on Internet are really an important matter. Indeed, it is not easy to offer news and

updating in many different languages, because the principle is to change the news at least two or three times a year. Consequently, it seems difficult to translate each time everything.

For ICLM website, a question to solve will then be the languages used on the site. We could think of proposing the site – at least at the beginning – in four or five languages (English, Russian, French, Spanish, Deutsch) for all the main pages, that do not change very often. In parallel, the site would let each member give its actualities in the languages it wants; a Swedish writer's house could for example have its actualities both in English and Swedish on the site, the only condition being to give the texts ready for insertion in both languages.

### ***The Importance of Interactivity***

On the whole, the Federation chose to prioritize interactive pages, in order to make the site more attractive and alive. A search engine gives the visitors the opportunity to search through the site for a particular place, writer, historical period, and so on. Furthermore, you can download educational activities and literary games. Thus each house can use the site to show the different things it proposes to children or other targeted publics. It is a simple way to show people that literature can be associated to game and fun, and not only to boring and school. Then two rubrics allow people to enter in contact with the federation: the rubric “please contact us” (address, phone number, e-mail) and the rubric “please register in our mailing list”.

Currently, the main interactive tool of the site is the interactive map of writer's houses in France, which appears in each page of the site on top left. This map permit the visitor to click and go in any literary place he wants at any time, making a selection by region. The visitor can go somewhere, then come back and choose another place very quickly.

To complete the site, one interesting thing could be the creation of a discussion forum, open to anybody interested in talking and exchanging about writer's houses. Concerning Jules Verne for instance, discussion forums are very important: two or three main forums (based in France, but also in Israel and Germany) manage to get together most of people fond in Jules Verne throughout the world. Thanks to these forums, we discuss with Jules Verne experts in China, South America, Poland, Scotland, and so on.

### ***The Website as a Place for Exchanges between literary Places***

The French Federation gathers around 260 literary places and writer's houses. Through the website, these structures get in contact thanks to three different steps: the rubrics “last news”, “resources” and “literary circuits”.

For the rubric “last news”, each house can propose information any time it wants during the year. It also has the possibility to update regularly its “resources” (audiovisual, literary games, bibliographies...). Both tasks permit the houses and museums to know what the others are doing and planning, what are their originalities, in what ways they are developing. It has a stimulating effect for each place, which can get ideas and advice from the other members on different and precise subjects. In our structures, we are often isolated and we don't have time to know what is going on elsewhere, everywhere in the world. The website is a good way to have quick and updated information about the others and to contact them easily.

At last, the rubric “literary circuits” shows that exchanges and projects are active between French houses. The site proposes literary circuits and itineraries from geographical criteria, but it can also be envisaged to propose circuits from historical period or writing style criteria (for instance romantic writers, poets, dramatic authors...). These circuits require coordination and voluntary cooperation between the places; they're a way both to reinforce the houses' network and to encourage visitors to go and see several houses and to take “literary holidays”.

### **III. A Website for ICLM**

#### ***Three main objectives***

After the experience of the French Federation, I think a dedicated website would be of most interest for ICLM in three domains.

First, a website would give more visibility and credibility to the network of literary places. These last ones could be easily identified, at the same time by other literary places, by potential visitors, and by potential partners and subsidizers. Anybody could have a quick access to full and precise information about writer houses and literary museums all around the world. A website would also be very useful to encourage the researches about writers and literary places, and the comparisons between them by countries, continents, and so on.

Secondly, a website is a very good way to encourage literary tourism if it is rightly referenced on search engines. Indeed, a good website received at least 100 000 visitors a year, and if it is really complete and often updated, we could expect in the long term about 3.000.000 to 5.000.000 visitors a year, or even more. The website is a practical tool for people to organize a trip, or to discover interesting places to visit in the region they will travel in. People have references of the museum, they can ask a question by e-mail, visualise the place and have access to practical information (opening hours...). If the site could offer a world map or writer's houses, in which you could click on a country, and then on the regions of this country to have access to the houses of the region, it would be a real tourist service offered.

Finally, a website is useful to reinforce the links between the literary museums all through the world, and to encourage exchanges and partnerships between the museums themselves. Not only the places can know each other and communicate more easily, but they also have a website to show to other partners (for instance the European Community) in order to convince them of their seriousness and of the interest of their projects. A website would reinforce internal cohesion, and probably provoke many adhesions from literary houses and museums because they would see more interest in an adhesion to ICLM if they can actively participate and be informed by the bias of a website. At last, a website would also increase the weight and the visibility of ICLM within International ICOM.

#### ***A program in four points***

In order to reinforce the international work and thoughts of ICLM, four tasks should be undertaken:

- The first task will be to make the most complete possible list of writer's houses in Europe and in the entire world. This list could include not only the houses open to visitors, but also houses known as "writer's houses", even if they can't welcome any visitor today. This could permit to have a faithful "cartography of writers" around the world. In order to be mentioned, it would be recommended to the places to adhere to ICLM.
- The second task would be to establish fiches indicating the same information for each place (short biography and bibliography of the writer concerned, situation of the house, juridical status, type of place, indications on the access, and so on).
- The concrete creation of the website would be the next task. It would permit to create links between the different places and to have an interactive map in which you can click to have a more precise vision of the writer's houses. Information collected about the houses would also be accessible on the site, and you could click to go directly on the own sites of the places.
- At last, the fourth task would be to organize a good and reliable system of updating of the website.

### *Financial and practical aspects*

In order to realize this program, a text was adopted at the General Assembly of 2006, a text that finished in presenting the wish of ICLM to obtain a financial support of International ICOM and of the national sections concerned. The objective is to obtain enough money to engage a student or a researcher to realise the website project. Indeed, it will be a long-time program, that will take at least two years to put in place, and then, ICLM will have to find money to make the website function.

To have a really good working and updating of the content (with each year more information on writers, more projects made visible, more detailed fiches on houses, more pedagogical experiences exposed, more language offered...), the website would need one person working at full-time. Moreover, a professional webmaster, not necessarily at full-time, will be necessary to assure a good working and maintenance of the site. The webmaster part can also be made by an external society, as it is often the case.

To give an idea of the costs, the French Federation website, which has been ameliorated little by little each year, has cost since its creation an average of 18 000 € per year. The most important items to foresee are site host, on-line subscription, access provider, integration of all interactive objects (maps, literary games...), the architecture of the site and the setting up of a search engine necessitating the making of an index, translations, videos and photos, the setting up on line of new documents, and so on. As the federation website is only in three languages, we could imagine that a website and its functioning would cost to ICLM around 35.000 to 40.000 € per year.

But the urgent thing to do in the first place is to recruit a person to study the website project more precisely, to make the most complete possible list of writer's houses in the entire world, and to take contact with them to get information as well as their thoughts and expectations concerning a future ICLM website.

To conclude, the setting up and maintenance of a website would have a real cost for ICLM, but it seems really necessary nowadays. As we saw in France with the Federation, most of the writer's houses are very interested by such a project, because it increases considerably their visibility towards the public, it creates links and encourages partnerships between the houses, and it gives more weight to each of them individually and collectively. A website would allow ICLM to federate more concretely writer's houses through the world, and it would certainly permit both to increase the number of adherents and to give more visibility to the writer's houses network, including houses outside Europe.