
Year 2020 at GUTenberg

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Abstract

Starting in January 2020, the French-speaking T_EX users group underwent a crisis that could have led to its dissolution. A vote rejected the idea of dismantling the association, but the past months left scars.

1 Context

The year 2020 has been stressful for many out-of-human-control reasons, due to the COVID-19 pandemics. Since the beginning of this period, I've been pleased to see people investing their forced spare time in new team projects, proactively looking for the satisfaction of pursuing a common objective with their fellows, remotely. I did get involved in such new team projects myself, translating documentation, providing help to L^AT_EX newcomers and solving problems with TikZ. I personally feel this involvement, this feeling of “working together”, has been instrumental in getting through this period with a healthy mind.

I've been taking care of GUTenberg, the French-speaking TUG, for quite a long time now, but surprisingly, my work for GUTenberg, this year, is not part of this satisfying involvement, even though it kept me busy for most of my spare time, and even more. The GUTenberg association underwent a crisis triggered by a small group of people. It is now mostly solved in itself, but it has apparently put an end to the friendly working atmosphere that had been the rule for years in the association.

2 The crisis

In mid-January 2020, five persons paid their membership fees on the same day, and then gathered with three others to send an email to our public discussion list, asking for the dissolution of the association. Five were inactive members of the board; some of them had not paid any membership fees since 2008 or 2012.

There followed a storm of messages on our mailing list, some of them very constructive, others containing near-insults.

In spite of the urgent need for a General Meeting (GM), it was as difficult as in previous years to agree on a date to hold it. The GM was finally held on November 14th, by teleconference. 35 persons attended it.

This meeting was a long-awaited opportunity to chat about our views for GUTenberg. We had some great moments of sincerity during the meeting, for

example when some members of the board explained that they had constituted a “shadow cabinet” (these are their words) and had been coordinating to block *on purpose* any project. As the former president who had to face this situation, I really appreciated finally having an explanation for all those blocks.

The question of the dissolution had been asked in advance to our 104 current members, through an electronic vote. Out of 54 persons who voted, 5 were in favour of the dissolution of GUTenberg, and 49 were against it.

We also had to renew the whole board of administrators. Elections at GUTenberg have long been a mere formality, as there are usually fewer candidates than the twelve open seats. People volunteer because they want to help on a specific project led by the association, or just because they're interested in helping in the general management of the association. But this year, seven candidates applied months before the GM and constituted an electoral list, asking voters not to vote for anyone other than them (some had co-signed the email that triggered the crisis, and had set up the “shadow cabinet”).

In the end, we managed to fill the twelve seats of the board and, more importantly, to have new persons elected. That's a personal point of view, but I consider it very important to regularly welcome newcomers onto the board, for the association to stay representative of the current community.

A more extensive report of our GM can be found in *La Lettre GUTenberg* n°41 (in French): www.gutenberg.eu.org/Lettre-GUTenberg

3 And now?

A few months have now passed since the General Meeting. I must admit that the atmosphere among the board is far from the friendly one that we had when the board was working smoothly.

I feel (personal point of view again) that newcomers haven't been integrated, and that too many discussions take place outside of our discussion list. An association cannot work based on exclusion.

I'm really worried about the future of GUTenberg. It's one thing to see 49 persons voting against a dissolution. It's a completely different problem to have the association *doing things* in the interest of the L^AT_EX community.

The best I can do is urge the community to gather around projects, and see how GUTenberg can provide support.

That being said, I can already see one project for which our General Meeting has been beneficial: we've been hosting a French-speaking L^AT_EX FAQ on our server for years (the project started in 2011). The

wiki was running at a low pace, with limited feedback from its users. But since last fall, we're seeing a dramatic increase in its activity plots, with more active contributors, and more significant updates to the contents (see the plots below)!

For those interested, the URL of the FAQ is:
faq.gutenberg.eu.org

I sincerely hope this project will be followed by others!

4 Acknowledgements

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