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# The Long Development of Prison Libraries in France

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## ABSTRACT

Libraries have existed in French prisons since the mid-nineteenth century, and for more than a century the French Penitentiary Administration has made an effort to structure and organize them as well as to monitor what books are made available to inmates. The role and impact of these libraries has evolved slowly over time, and over the years central control was gradually relaxed. In the early 1980s, cooperative efforts between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Justice opened the door for new political direction that facilitated the opening of correctional facilities to the eyes of the outside world and encouraged representatives of cultural organizations to become involved with the prison population behind the wall. Prison libraries subsequently underwent a profound transformation when public library professionals began to venture inside the prisons in order to reorganize the existing book storage areas (which had been inaccessible to inmates) into proper libraries, like those they managed in the outside world. An examination of the situation in the Rhone-Alps region of France serves as a useful starting point for an examination of the development of prison libraries over the past twenty years, as well as a discussion of the difficulties encountered and the prospects for the future.

## THE NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

### *The Origin of Prison Libraries*

The first mention of libraries inside prisons dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, as evidenced through the discovery on books stamped with the name of a correctional facility and the French Imperial

Eagle, the symbol of the First Empire. Different government documents (dated 1844, 1864, and 1873) show that the Penitentiary Administration quickly attempted to organize and control these libraries. The documents state that small libraries were established either through prison funds or by donations from prisoners. The library collections consisted of works selected by a committee that were then purchased, bound, and distributed by the administration. Books were selected that had a "positive influence on the prisoners' souls and minds," because reading such materials allows "an impression to be made upon the heart and spirit of the inmates that is conducive to their enrichment and instruction" (Henwood, 1974, p. 307).

Many other documents from the twentieth century specify not only the principles for the operation of these libraries (classification of books, identification of patrons, and damage prevention), but also their specific purpose and role. Above all, the books authorized were those that supported the practice of religion and the edification of morals. The intent was that such reading materials "through the advice and the examples that the inmates would find therein, would contribute significantly to their moral development" (circular dated March 11, 1949). Later, in the 1960s, the main goal of the Penitentiary Administration became that of keeping the inmates occupied: "We must support reading in prison, because this activity plays an important role in the provision of leisure activities for inmates" (circular dated June 16, 1965). By this time, therefore, reading for recreation had become a legitimate activity.

The hiring in 1963 of a professional librarian to run the central prison library service did nothing to change the controlling attitude of the administration. For twenty more years, the rule of the three "POs" would prevail: that is to say, the prohibition of the purchase of materials with content of a political, pornographic, or *policier* (detective story) nature (Dumanoir, 1994, p. 18). These restrictions would not be lifted until May 23, 1975, when a new decree was issued that stated: "Inmates may obtain, through the administration and under conditions established in guidelines, newspapers, periodicals, and books of their choice, both in French and foreign languages, as long as they have not been subject to disciplinary measures for the past three months" (Criminal Procedure Code, Article D 444). However, a decree of November 25, 1977 stipulated that "publications that represent a specific threat to personal safety or institutional security may, at the request of the prison director, be denied by decision of the Minister of Justice (Brugière, 1997, p.17).

*The Start of the 1980s: A New National Policy in Favor of Books and Reading and the Development of Cultural Initiatives in Prison*

At the beginning of the 1980s and coinciding with a shift in political attitudes that followed the election of François Mitterand as president, the Minister of Culture assumed a more prominent role and began a series of

unprecedented and dynamic changes. The Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, established various commissions and working groups (with representatives from cultural organizations and agencies, elected representatives, artists, and members of the general community) who proposed many new ideas and initiatives in the cultural and artistic sectors.

Related to the world of the book, a report by Pingaud-Barreau entitled *Towards a New Policy on Books and Reading* (first version October 1981, revised version January 1982) includes fifty-five new initiatives. These proposals relate to the publishing industry, the promotion of reading as a positive activity, employment, and the organization and mission of the Directorate of Books and Reading (one of the directorates in the Ministry of Culture). The report also mentions "other types of libraries" and recommends the establishment of libraries in hospitals as well as correctional institutions. Even though these proposals were not all implemented, they did succeed in directing public policy priorities toward the support of the publishing sector and the world of the book and reading. For example, the Directorate of Books and Reading encouraged the construction of numerous public libraries through financial support to municipalities (Ermakoff, 2009).

Through the joint efforts of Jack Lang and Minister of Justice Robert Radinter, this dynamic of change also reached into prisons: Gérard Soulier's 1982 report *The Development of Cultural Activities in a Correctional Environment* (Le développement des activités culturelles en milieu carcéral) encourages the introduction of many different cultural activities (books and reading, live performances, film showings, fine arts, etc.) in correctional facilities (Dumanoir 1994, p. 91).

Following this, the 1983 *Report on the Extension of Library Services: Hospitals, Prisons, Businesses* (Rapport sur l'extension de la lecture publique: Hôpitaux, prisons, entreprises) by Isabelle Jan described the situation of these "other libraries." The author notes that correctional libraries do not offer direct access to the library collections (inmates must choose their books from lists), that the books are unattractive (they are bound in "kraft paper"—thick, brown paper), and that the available materials are inadequate in both quantity and variety. Her proposals to remedy this situation are based on a single basic premise: the need to reform the prison libraries in accordance with the public library model.

For the Directorate of Books and Reading and the Directorate of Penitentiary Administration, this transformation meant finding ways to involve public libraries in the practical operation of the prison libraries, as well as in collection development and programs to promote books and reading among prisoners. It also meant finding funding sources for the acquisition of new books to improve and diversify the existing collections. Another required change was that inmates be allowed to visit the library in person and to choose their own reading materials (Dumanoir, 1994, p. 21–22).

Jan's report would be the starting point for a 1983 joint study by the two agencies directly affected (Directorate of Books and Reading and the Penitentiary Administration), which incorporated her proposals. The study's recommendations lead to the adoption of a new amendment in the Criminal Procedure Code concerning the operation of the libraries (decree 85-836, August 6, 1985):

- Article D 443: "Each facility will have at least one library where reading materials are freely available to the inmates. Library materials must be sufficient in quantity and variety to meet the needs of a linguistically and culturally diverse inmate population and for them to exercise their freedom of choice."
- Article D 445: "Each facility will develop internal library procedures that define the conditions under which the inmates may borrow or consult library materials. These procedures must reflect the importance of giving inmates direct access to the library's collections, while taking into account available local resources and conditions."

In May 1985, the "Rencontres internationales sur la culture en prison" (International Conference on Culture in Prison) was held in Reims with more than 150 participants, among others, the Penitentiary Administration, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, and various cultural organizations and artists. Four different committees were formed to discuss the following topics:

- The right to access culture in prison and how to provide such access; prison facility structure and physical space for cultural activities
- Promotion and support for reading
- Communication with cultural agencies outside prison; cultural events and deployment of professional staff
- The role of prison staff in cultural programs (Dumanoir, 1994, p. 75)

This conference offered the opportunity for the two ministries to reaffirm their joint commitment to establish a strong and viable policy that supports the development and implementation of cultural programs in prison.

*Defining the Framework for Cultural Programs and Reading Promotion in Prison*

*At the National Level.* The new policy was formalized a few months later by the signing on January 25, 1986, of an interdepartmental agreement between the Ministries of Culture and Justice. The agreement outlines the principles for the development of cultural programs in prison and specifies program objectives: to encourage the rehabilitation of inmates, to obtain adequate and secure funding for cultural events, to define the role of prison staff in this context, and to inform and involve local communities and organizations in these activities.

A second agreement, signed January 15, 1990, established four operational guidelines: (1) establish partnerships with local cultural organizations, (2) involve professional staff and resources, (3) develop an annual plan for high quality events and activities, and (4) evaluate the outcome of the programs.

Two additional directives of a more technical and practical nature were included in the agreements. The first was the *Operation of Libraries and the Development of Reading Programs in Correctional Facilities* (*Circulaire*, December 14, 1992), emphasizing the importance given to reading activities. The directive provides detailed instructions on how to implement libraries, specifically covering the location of the library, requirements for hardware and other equipment, development of collections, operating budget, staff requirements, library programs, etc. The appendixes contain the necessary details and are to be consulted as a reference. Also included in this document is the *Guide to Libraries in Correctional Facilities*, developed by the IFLA Working Group on Prison Libraries in Moscow in 1991 (this was an unpublished, internal working document that served as the foundation for IFLA's 1992 *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*).

The second directive was the *Implementation of Cultural Programs for Offenders under the Authority of the Criminal Justice System* (*Circulaire*, March 30, 1995). Appendixes include examples of partnership agreements, implementation contracts, and legal requirements that may pertain to prison inmates (copyright law, right to privacy, etc.). The "Rencontres nationales sur la lecture en prison" (National Conference on Reading in Prison), held in Paris in November 1995, marked ten years of cooperation between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Justice and provided the opportunity to assess progress and achievements over the past decade in the area of prison library development and the related involvement of public libraries.

*At the Regional Level.* The proactive national policy was implemented at the regional level in the following way: partnership agreements were signed between the *Directions régionales des affaires culturelles* (DRAC, regional branch offices of the Ministry of Culture) and the *Directions interrégionales des services pénitentiaires* (DISP, regional branch offices of the Penitentiary Administration).

Following 1993, in many regions, the DRAC and the DISP delegated to regional or local cultural organizations the implementation and follow-up of prison library development. This delegation was extended in 1998 to include initiatives in all cultural domains (theater, music, dance, fine arts, cinema, video, etc.). In order to develop and deliver quality programs and events, the cultural organizations hired staff to facilitate interaction among all the parties involved, that is, prison staff, art groups, cultural organizations, and local government entities.

Within the correctional facilities, the Penitentiary Administration assigned the operation of libraries and the implementation of cultural programs to social workers. The director of the prison, however, had ultimate responsibility for these programs. Unfortunately, the cultural programs were not implemented in a consistent manner among the correctional facilities, due to insufficient staff and lack of regular funding. Another factor contributing to this uneven situation was that the cultural programs and services were not considered high priority activities by the facility management.

Cultural programming in prison did not achieve its own distinct mission until 1999, when the Correctional Department of Reintegration and Probation (Service pénitentiaire d'insertion et de probation, or SPIP) was established.<sup>1</sup> The official document (dated October 15, 1999) outlining the mission of the SPIP and its relationship with other legal authorities states that SPIP is not only responsible for receiving offenders and assisting them in legal proceedings, but also for developing and coordinating a network of service providers in the public and private sectors that can assist with the reintegration of offenders into community after their release, including access to social services, medical treatment, health education, job training, cultural activities, sports, employment, and education ("L'action culturelle," 1999). It is within this framework that "cultural programs and reading promotion," along with the operation of the prison library, became the responsibility of the SPIP.

The SPIP does not, however, have qualified staff (such as cultural coordinators or librarians) available to manage all these programs and run the library operation. But from 2000 to 2007, there was an opportunity to hire young people under temporary work contracts to provide a certain degree of cultural project implementation and coordination. So during those years, this service model did succeed in creating a number of significant cultural options for inmates. Unfortunately, when the contract-worker option was eliminated in 2008, social workers were again put in charge of cultural activities, with neither time nor sufficient training to carry out these duties.

#### *Recent Developments*

In 2004, the Ministries of Culture and Justice commissioned a report on "the efforts being carried out in the area of books and reading, whether in libraries . . . or areas connected to them. . . ." This task was entrusted to Claudine Lieber, from the Inspectorate for Library Services, and Dominique Chavigny, from the Inspectorate of the Cultural Affairs Administration. Their report, published in 2005, focuses on a number of alarmist findings about the state of libraries and recommends several possible solutions:

Even though they have carved out a place for themselves in correctional institutions, these libraries must now compensate for the considerable inequity that exists between them and public libraries, in regard to both operation and resources. Further, the goals of the 1992 national directive are far from being achieved. The writers of this report therefore recommend that a new library management structure be adopted and that collections be updated and adapted to better meet the needs [of] library users. The libraries should also function as information centers with resources that are current and relevant. In this role, the libraries would contribute to the improvement of prison conditions and would at the same time play an important role in preparing offenders for their reintegration into society. (Lieber & Chavigny, 2005, p. 36)

Twenty years after the meeting in Reims, a national conference entitled "Culture in Prison: Where are we now?" took place in Valence (April 25–26, 2005). This was an opportunity to evaluate the results of programs implemented in recent years and to share information, research, and ideas. All the participants had a stake in carrying out a common policy and were encouraged to cooperate in a new dynamic strategy that would reinforce existing partnerships between cultural organizations, local government entities, and the prison facilities.

At the end of the Valence conference, two task forces were formed to revise and finalize the 1992 and 1995 government directives. The deliberations of these task forces were not made public for "political" reasons, but they served as the basis for a third government directive, signed by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Culture on March 30, 2009 (*Protocole*, 2009). This document once again specifies the practical steps to effectuate a cultural policy, stating that "this joint policy aims at strengthening reintegration programs and improving access for incarcerated persons to artistic and cultural programs by developing, enhancing, and making permanent appropriate quality offerings. The policy also aims at raising awareness among local cultural agencies of these programs and involving them in collaborative projects, as well as training." The directive also affirms that "access to culture is the right of all incarcerated persons, just like the right to education and to medical care." In addition to contributing to the inmates' moral improvement and recreation, culture is now defined as an "instrument for personal renewal, as well as social and educational integration. Access to culture also contributes to the prevention of repeat offenses" (*Protocole*, 2009).

Recently, the Directorate of Penitentiary Administration declared that modernization of prison libraries would be given high priority as a cultural initiative between the years 2008 and 2010. This initiative would give each library new multimedia resources, a specific annual budget, and resources to develop joint projects with a local public library.



## THE DIFFICULT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW LIBRARY AND READING POLICY: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES IN THE RHONE-ALPS REGION

As in other regions, the interdepartmental agreements of 1986 and 1990 were approved in the Rhone-Alps region in December 1997 by the DRAC and the DISP. Representatives of the two agencies met at that time to formulate a strategy for the development of artistic and cultural projects in the region's correctional facilities, and the Rhone-Alps Agency for Books and Documentation (*Agence Rhône-Alpes pour le livre et la documentation* or ARALD) was given the responsibility to carry out this mission. For over twelve years, ARALD has acted as a coordinator between the SPIP (in charge of developing inmate programs) and cultural organizations in the community, such as libraries, theaters, museums, performing arts companies, and festival groups. An ARALD representative acts as liaison between these "two worlds" by facilitating meetings, accompanying staff, and assisting with project development.

The focus of the following sections will be on the current situation of the region's correctional institution libraries and will describe specific accomplishments over the last ten years, while at the same time pointing to challenges that still exist.

### *Correctional Institutions in the Rhone-Alps Region*

There are fifteen correctional facilities in the region: eight local jails, one detention center, three correctional centers, two half-way centers (see the Glossary below for the definition of these), and one juvenile correctional facility. Three of the facilities are new constructions and were opened between June 2007 and February 2010. On March 5, 2010, the facilities had a total capacity of 4,597 spaces, while actually housing 4,776 inmates. (At the national level, the total capacity available on March 1, 2010, was 55,932 places, while the actual number of incarcerated individuals was 61,343).

### *Institution Libraries*

The library is the only area specifically designated as a "cultural space" inside the prison. The library is mandated by the Criminal Procedure Code (article D. 441-2, as amended by decree 99-276 on April 13, 1999):

Each facility shall be equipped with a library where reading materials are available for the use of inmates. The location of the library must permit direct and regular access for inmates to all collections. A librarian, or in the absence of such a person, staff from the department of integration and probation, is charged with the purchase of materials, as well as the training and supervision of inmate workers who perform daily operational tasks.

The Criminal Procedure Code, however, does not contain any directions concerning the ideal location of the library. Consequently, the condition



and location of the library space vary significantly from one facility to another. In some institutions it is located in an area used for social and educational activities and in the vicinity of activity rooms, the school, or offices for social workers. In other institutions, the library is located off a central hallway with easy access or even in a housing unit next to the cells. Another location makes the library accessible from the prison yard or places it at a central intersection where it can be easily reached by different groups of inmates (men, women, juveniles).

The size of the library also varies considerably from one facility to another, from a few square meters (e.g., a few shelves in the middle of a corridor in a women's facility) to around 70 sq. meters for the largest library. The size of the library is not determined by a standard formula based on the inmate population, as recommended by IFLA guidelines and the 1992 government directive. The library is often located in the only available space, whether or not it is suitable for library functions.

In the newer facilities, there is no longer a single central library accessible to all inmates but many smaller library spaces (from 25 to 32 sq. meters) located in various areas throughout the facility. This model was designed by the Penitentiary Administration in order to limit inmate movement within the prison; each building is designed to function as a small self-contained prison. The recommended library space standard was not adopted.

Open access to the library is a national priority, as mentioned in the Criminal Procedure Code (article D. 441-2 cited above). Since the summer of 2006, the prison libraries in the Rhone-Alps Region have been directly accessible, that is, the inmates can visit the library and select books from open shelves. In 1998, the libraries in six faculties were still not open to the inmates, who had to request titles from a printed list that was often inaccurate or difficult to obtain. The requested materials were then brought to the inmate's cell.

It is not easy for the SPIP, or any correctional institution management, to provide direct access to the central library, since this operational model requires strict control and utilizes a certain amount of staff time in order to function effectively, including signing up inmates who want to visit the library, checking the lists, lining up groups of inmates and escorting them to and from the housing units. The size of the facility generally determines the frequency of library visits: once a week, biweekly, or according to available time slots and the number of registered library users. The time allowed in the library also varies, from fifteen minutes to one and a half hours, or even two hours.

This system, which requires inmates to take the initiative to register, can be problematic for those who struggle with reading and writing. Delay in getting access to the library also presents an obstacle. In smaller facilities access is often easier and more flexible: a guard just passes by all the cells

and signs up those who want to go to the library during its hours of operation. Here the system works well, and the library is regularly visited by 40 to 50 percent of the facility's population, and by nearly 100 percent in smaller women's facilities.

The direct access system does have some drawbacks. The library could be closed at any moment, or its hours changed without warning if no staff is available to supervise the inmates. This restricts inmate movement between housing units and activity areas. Other changes also occur regularly due to unexplained "security reasons." For these same reasons, some correctional officers in the past devised a rotating schedule where the inmates did not know in advance which day they would be allowed to visit the library. This practice had a disastrous effect on library use and immediately reduced the number of patrons.

Free access (without prior registration) is not possible at present except at those facilities where the library can be accessed from the prison yard. But then inmates who do not want to go to the yard cannot use the library. In the correctional centers, where a local jail and a detention center coexist, direct access (with prior registration) is the predominant model. Free access, however, would have been preferable for inmates in detention centers, which operate with more flexibility.

#### *Cooperation with Public Libraries*

Even with a library in each correctional facility, the plans of the Penitentiary Administration did not include the appointment of professional librarians. As a result, the social workers and educators within SPIP, who had been assigned to provide library services, had to seek support and advice from professional librarians elsewhere. Also, since the end of the 1980s, many public libraries (municipal or departmental) had begun working with the correctional libraries, primarily in response to the intergovernmental directives of 1986 and 1990. Several cooperation agreements were formalized in 1992 (one), 1995 (two), and 1997 (one), marking long-term partnerships with public libraries.

Since 1998, ARALD has been working with the SPIP and correctional libraries, but it was not until June 2009 that all of the facility libraries in the region had partnered with a municipal library or departmental library. Partners to these agreements were the local government, the SPIP, and the correctional facility. A new facility that has five separate libraries has partnered with five different towns. Three public libraries collaborate with correctional facilities without a formal agreement.

One should note that municipal and departmental governments are not obliged to collaborate with the correctional system, which falls under the jurisdiction of the national government. The local agreements are therefore vulnerable and depend solely on the goodwill and voluntary commitment of local agencies and their elected officials. The extent of

involvement depends on the human and material resources available to the library. The most common form of library involvement entails assigning public librarians to work in the prisons on a regular basis (a half-day each week for two librarians, a half-day every fifteen days, or just once a month). The SPIP may also request assistance with specific tasks, like acquisitions, weeding of collections, or library programming.

The partner libraries also lend books on specialized topics and materials related to special events. Some of the partner libraries also organize activities inside the prison as an extension of their own library programs, often in connection with national or local celebrations.

The more-or-less regular presence of professional librarians has made a great difference in the operation of the prison library, notably in the support they provide for the inmate library assistants and the collection development work they perform.

In each facility there is at least one inmate library assistant, a position that is funded by the general service (see Glossary) of the Penitentiary Administration. These inmate library assistants play an important role because they perform the daily tasks that keep the library operational: they provide direct user services, manage circulation, and offer reading advice. The professional librarians provide important support to these inmate library assistants. Because of the high turnover rate of inmate workers, this training in basic library operations may have to be repeated many times during the year.

In some cases, prison officers and/or directors of SPIP will allow the libraries to be open only if staff from partner organizations are present to supervise the inmate assistants. This means that volunteers are needed, since there are not enough professional librarians to cover all library hours. Library volunteers may be recruited from various groups, including people who regularly visit the facility in an official capacity, retirees, members of community organizations or, less frequently, representatives of a library network and retired librarians. It is important that these volunteers be supported, supervised, and trained by professional library staff to ensure that they follow prescribed library procedures and consider their library work to be not just an act of charity. Library volunteers work in seven regional correctional facilities, and this arrangement has been successful at all but one site.

Librarians from outside the prisons have made great improvements in the collections, weeding old materials and gradually replacing them with new titles through regular acquisition procedures. This work has been possible since 1999 through the annual SPIP budget allocations. These annual library budgets are between 800 and 11,200 EUR (year 2009 figure), depending on the size of the facility. These funds are used for book acquisitions, periodical subscriptions, library supplies, and occasional program expenses. The SPIP contributes between 800 and 3,200 EUR to

the total budget, with the remainder of the money coming from existing SPIP partners, such as inmate social and cultural groups, charitable associations, and various other organizations, as well as from acquisitions grants received from the National Center of the Book (Centre national du Livre or [CNL], n.d.).<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the CNL in 2009 adopted new grant guidelines that made it difficult for “small libraries” in correctional facilities to obtain grants, and now SPIP rarely submits requests. This is most regrettable, since eligibility for CNL funding mandated that the recipients comply with specific operational criteria (direct access to collections, a minimum number of operational hours, a designated acquisitions budget, etc.) and that they work with professional librarians to develop criteria for selection of materials. This enabled the librarians to develop a long-term collection development and acquisitions policy that followed public library standards: broad subject coverage, attention to user needs (including users with special needs, such as those with low reading skills, nonnative language speakers), and an equitable inclusion of fiction, non-fiction, and periodicals.

When librarians are not purchasing library materials, social workers from the SPIP simply visit bookstores a few times a year and select books without paying attention to the collection development plan. They base their selections on requests from individual library users or purchase titles according to their own preference and, sometimes, with little lasting value.

According to data from the correctional facilities, the library collections range in size from 2,000 to 7,000 print items. One of the local jails also has some audio recordings, but none of the correctional libraries in the region have video/DVD recordings. In two facilities, some encyclopedias and other educational/cultural titles are available on CD-ROM for use in the library. These resources, however, are difficult to manage and are not always available. The libraries are a long way from becoming the “multimedia centers,” which were high priority objectives in the Penitentiary Administration’s cultural policy for 2008–10.

#### *Cultural Projects Focused on Books, Literature, and Writing*

In order to introduce a larger audience to the institution libraries, the SPIP quickly took the initiative to develop a series of projects around books, literature, and writing. In doing so, the SPIP sought support and cooperation from organizers of community events, libraries, and various cultural associations. They also designed activities around cultural events at the national level, initiated by the Ministry of Culture, such as *Lire en fête* (celebrating reading), *Le printemps des poètes* (springtime for poets), and *La semaine de la langue française* (the week of the French language). The SPIP also attempts to promote reading and writing activities, often in collaboration with teachers who work with persons with special needs.

These programs are usually held in the library, thereby exposing individuals who would not normally visit the library, to what the library has to offer. The format for these activities may be regularly scheduled workshops for inmates or single events organized by an outside group.

The regular workshops are generally run by volunteers who belong to organizations that promote and support literacy and writing programs. Following are some examples of activities:

- Workshops to improve the writing skills of inmates who are illiterate or have little formal education
- Reading groups where the inmates choose books for discussion books, sometimes in connection with an author visit or an important current event. For example, since 1995 volunteers have run a reading group in conjunction with the *Festival du premier roman de Chambéry*. The inmates are among a group of 3,000 people who read debut novels over the course of a year and then vote for the authors who will come and meet the readers during the festival. One or two of these author meetings are held at the correctional facility.
- Reading workshops where the participants practice reading aloud for the group or individually; these workshops have taken place for many years in two juvenile facilities.
- Storytelling workshops, primarily for inmates who have children.

These activities are open to all inmates who are interested, but like all SPIP activities, are subject to available space. Inmates must be proactive and sign up for the programs. Since these groups cannot have more than twelve participants, they often have long waiting lists. Spaces that open up are filled quickly.

One-time events that are organized in conjunction with local or national events—such as art and literary festivals, library celebrations—generally follow three formats:

- Meetings with writers, illustrators, cartoonists, etc., offered in conjunction with a national event like *Lire en fête*; a regional event like *Polar derrière les murs*; or a local event like *Fête du livre* in Villeurbanne, *Festival du premier roman* in Chambéry, *Cafés littéraires* in Saint-Etienne, *Quais de polar* in Lyon, and *Printemps du livre* in Grenoble. For example, the author Atiq Rahimi, who spoke at the *Printemps du livre* in Grenoble in 2009, also visited the local jail (*maison d'arrêt*) (see Glossary). The meeting was held in the gymnasium to accommodate a large audience of both inmates and staff, who wanted to hear the famous author who was awarded the Prix Goncourt in 2008. Other meetings have included authors of detective novels who, in connection with the *Quais du polar* event, have made special arrangements to participate in meetings in correctional institutions (six meetings in 2009, eight in 2010).

- Writing workshops held by authors as part of projects that involve creative writing or illustration. For example, the *Fête du livre de Villeurbanne* partnered with three prisons to produce publications featured during the festival, including large format books, dictionaries, and posters related to the annual theme. In another prison, inmates wrote a detective story, published by Editions Baleine as part of the Poupale collection. Some inmates wrote a play that was broadcast on a local radio station. Others wrote songs that were performed during *Paroles et musiques* concerts. A group meets once a year for poetry readings. Sometimes a bookseller comes to present recently published books, or a librarian talks about developing book collections.

These programs encourage the correctional facilities to become involved with community events just like any local school, youth organization, or neighborhood association. The event publicity often includes positive information about the correctional facility, something that has gradually helped to change the public's negative image of prisons and prisoners.

### WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF PRISON LIBRARIES?

Prison libraries present us with a paradox. On the one hand, these libraries represent the only "cultural" place inside the correctional facilities. Besides the sports program, the libraries offer one of very few leisure options available to the inmates all year long. On the other hand, the libraries do not have sufficient staff to function effectively. And the available professionals, who are responsible for the inmates' access to quality library services, rely solely on the goodwill and sometimes inconsistent support of local government entities who receive no compensation for their efforts. The 2005 recommendations by C. Lieber and D. Chavigny state, among other things, that

in the current system of partnerships between public libraries and correctional facility libraries. . . . the inextricable link between the city/community must be strongly re-enforced. In order to structure and standardize the role of library professionals, we must move away from the permanent reliance on patronage from local government and the use of volunteers. Plainly speaking, the involvement of public libraries (both municipal and departmental) must be permanently regulated, and a well-defined, coordinated national policy is needed to guarantee ongoing secure funding. (Lieber & Chavigny p. 33)

These recommendations have still not been adopted.

The inmates' right to direct access to the library is still not fully observed, and prison officers can close the libraries suddenly overnight for security reasons. Similarly, the limited and, in some regions, irregular financial support of the libraries impedes the development of useful and diversified collections, especially current materials in the areas of career information, job training and skills, and educational opportunities.

Libraries in correctional facilities are still not the promised “multimedia centers,” and audiovisual equipment is rarely available. And one should not even mention the topic of Internet access, something that is still unimaginable for the Penitentiary Administration.

The opening of three new correctional facilities in the region brought about changes in the design and operation of the libraries as well as the partnership arrangements with professional librarians. Instead of having one library accessible to all inmates, these facilities have several “satellite” library areas. Since the SPIP did not provide adequate funding for library collections in all these locations, the libraries have managed to create a small network with a central catalog that enables them to search titles and circulate materials. Since a single public library would not by itself be able to allocate staff to so many different correctional libraries, a more elaborate partnership arrangement was developed with the involvement of multiple cities. As these facilities have not been open very long, it is too soon to measure the full effect of the new design on the operation of the libraries. If the new model with the multiple library service areas works well, it is possible that the libraries may reach new user groups and become truly local libraries. A negative outcome of this library resource decentralization may also be that the small library areas become merely storage, which would be a serious step backward.

The Penitentiary Administration proclaimed the transformation of correctional libraries would be a priority for the period 2008–10. The wealth of the accumulated professional knowledge and the concrete proposals from the last twenty-five years provide all the information necessary to bring about this transformation. Hopefully, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Culture will finally provide the resources necessary to achieve this goal. Prison libraries in France are still “works in progress” that now need professional help more than ever.

### GLOSSARY<sup>3</sup>

*centre de détention* (detention center): houses for one year or longer convicted offenders deemed to have the best prospects for reintegration into society. As such, the *centres de détention* operate under a correctional system model that focuses on reintegration of inmates into society.

*centre de semi-liberté* (halfway center): houses convicted felons placed into the semi-imprisonment system (see *semi-liberté*) or in a community location without supervision.

*centre pénitentiaire* (correctional center): a facility that incorporates at least two wings with different incarceration levels (*maison d'arrêt*, *centre de détention*, and/or *maison centrale*).

*condamné* (convicted offender): an individual committed by the court to a correctional facility as the result of a criminal conviction.



*maison centrale* (long-term prison): houses the most difficult to control convicted offenders. Their custody level is based on strict security.

*maison d'arrêt* (local jail): houses defendants and convicted offenders with less than a year to serve.

*milieu ouvert* (open custody): includes all alternative-to-incarceration options that emphasize personal responsibility. Offenders are placed under the authority of a judge and are supervised by the SPIP in accordance to directions from the judge.

*prévenu* (defendant): an individual held in a correctional facility who has not yet been convicted or whose sentence is not definitive.

*probation* (probation): an option for serving a sentence in open custody under supervision and with various means of support. The reintegration and probation staff supervise individuals on probation.

*semi-liberté* (semi-imprisonment): a sentence structure that permits a convicted offender to be employed outside the facility, to participate in education or training, or to receive medical treatment. The convicted offender must return to the facility at the completion of these activities.

*service général* (general service): jobs performed by inmates in correctional facilities, such as maintenance tasks, restaurant work, or housing unit services.

*Service pénitentiaire d'insertion et de probation* (SPIP) (Correctional Department of Reintegration and Probation): created by decree number 99-276 on April 13, 1999, this service unit operates in both open and closed custody facilities and provides assistance to persons under legal custody in exercising their legal and civil rights and in preparing for reintegration. There is one SPIP unit per department.

## NOTES

1. The SPIP is an office at the departmental level (France and its overseas territories are divided into one hundred "departments" for administrative purposes) that replaced the earlier social services and educational services. The SPIP deploys social workers, administrative personnel, department heads, and directors.
2. The CNL is a public agency that functions under the Ministry of Culture. Its mission is to encourage the creation and dissemination of high-quality literary works through grants to those involved in the publishing industry and literary sector (authors, editors, booksellers, libraries, organizers of literary events).
3. The source of this Glossary is *Key Figures from the Penitentiary Administration, January 1, 2009* from the Directorate of Penitentiary Administration (n.d.).

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