
Literature Across Frontiers
Ten years of making literature travel

10

A long-exposure photograph of a city street at night, showing blurred lights and traffic. The number '10' is overlaid in a large, yellow-outlined font.

10 years
36 countries
40 languages
5 conferences
65 workshops
700 events
1500 participants
100,000 audiences

**European platform
for literary exchange,
translation and
policy debate**

www.lit-across-frontiers.org

Mercator Institute for Media, Languages and Culture
Aberystwyth University, Wales, United Kingdom

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LITERATURE
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Introduction

Literature Across Frontiers (LAF) is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2011. During its first decade, LAF has become an indelible part of a European literary scene where a multitude of organisations provide support for writers, translators and publishers in order to create an environment in which quality writing and its translation can thrive. Residential centres, translation schemes, grants for various projects and actions are invaluable in assuring that structural barriers – market-raised, linguistic, socio-economic, barriers of prejudice and politics – do not hinder readers and audiences from gaining access to writing that would have otherwise remained out of sight. At the same time, resources that facilitate the mobility of translators and writers, and their cooperation with practitioners from other artistic fields contribute to the diversity of our cultural ecosystem, and point towards the pressing need to understand, appreciate, protect and sustain our multifaceted creative commons.

LAF has actively pursued all of these aims for ten years, creating a platform for organisations and individual practitioners which connects artistic practice with policy debate and reflection on the rapidly changing literature and publishing sector. As a catalyst for new contacts and collaborations, LAF has given rise to many initiatives and projects which have since gained a life of their own and are now strong partners in an ever-widening circle of resources that reach beyond Europe into the Middle-East, South Mediterranean and as far as South Asia, having in turn resulted in numerous events, journeys, debates, workshops, seminars, publications, and thousands of translated texts.

But LAF is significantly more than the sum of its parts and its accomplishments. What singles LAF out is its philosophy, its organisational and decision-making structures, and the unique balance of rigor and flexibility in the way it operates. Being a hub for contacts between individuals and organisations, as well as an interface between the civil society of cultural NGOs

on the one hand, and the government bodies and institutions which support cultural activities at national and European level on the other, LAF is not only a resource but primarily an enabler and multiplier.

The enabling role of LAF is, above all, a human resource attribute. The people and organisations clustered around it work as creative collaborators in a common pursuit of new ideas, developments and initiatives. That way the LAF network grows together, not just in numbers and volume, but in the deeper sense of sharing in a maturing process marked by a concept of sustainability which stems from the resilience and resourcefulness that has allowed us to thrive and develop for the past ten years.

The multiplier role of LAF is also a communication attribute, with a multidirectional flow of information and the resulting sharing of resources which makes it possible for each partner to rely on and contribute to an infrastructure much wider and stronger than the one available

to them locally. In this way LAF expands not only the scope of its activities but also the conceptual framework within which we think of literature and nurture its role in society.

On the following pages we highlight some of our major accomplishments, as a celebration of our first ten years and as a tribute to the creative efforts of the many people who have worked with, and who in essence constitute Literature Across Frontiers.

In the years to come we will face new challenges brought about by the recent political and socio-economic developments, as well as by the rapid developments of digital technology which fundamentally change the environment in which we work, communicate and create.

We are entering our next decade with an optimistic vision of strengthening, deepening, and sharing the scope and the core values that have formed LAF as it presents itself to you in this publication.

Alexandra Büchler, Director

Aims

Literature Across Frontiers was established as a network of organisations working in partnership with the aim to:

Advance intercultural dialogue through literature and translation within the EU and with third countries, and in particular with EU neighbours in the Mediterranean region

Promote literatures written in the less widely used languages of Europe and those underrepresented in the international context and encourage greater diversity in international literary events and in the publishing of literature for all age groups

Act as a catalyst for new multilateral contacts, collaborations and innovative projects bringing literature into interaction with other art-forms and exploring the social and political role of writing

Stimulate debate on relevant policy and financing at national and European levels

Create opportunities for the exchange of ideas, transfer of skills and knowledge, and sharing of experiences and resources amongst organisations, institutions and individuals active in this field both within and outside the EU

Structure

The LAF network brings together a range of partners based in Europe and beyond, including a core network of key national institutions and organisations engaged in the international promotion of literature, books and translation. Complementing this core network are partners such as literary festivals, book fairs, literary venues, magazines and publishers committed to the advancement of international literary exchange and the promotion of literature in translation. The LAF network of national institutions meets at least twice a year to discuss common aims and policy matters, and to plan joint activities.

Specific projects are planned and implemented by clusters of partners and individuals who are supported by the LAF office, based at the Mercator Institute for Media, Languages and Culture, Aberystwyth University in Wales, United Kingdom.

This arrangement allows us to be flexible and to respond to opportunities in a way traditional organisational structures might not be able to, while introducing a form of non-hierarchical, democratic governance which encourages an active involvement in all stages of planning and production, with input from a variety of sources.

The Word Express project which took young writers and artists from South East Europe on a journey across the Balkans generated a wealth of new work, including writing, translations, photos, video and music.
Photo: Owen Martell



Activities Working with writers and translators



Above: Tom Chivers performs his poem 'Athens Burns' at the Dasein Café as part of the Word Express project and Athens International Literature Festival, having spent ten days in Athens during the protests of April and May 2010 which turned the area surrounding the festival venue into a battleground

between protesters and riot police. Photo: Chris Chryssopoulos

Right: Poetry Connections India workshop in Adi Shakti near Pondicherry, 2010. The project brought together poets from India and Europe to create a multilingual poetry performance. Photo: LAF archive



Residencies

Many of our projects contain an element of short-term residency stay offering writers the opportunity to connect with a new environment and its literary life, and to collaborate with colleagues from other countries, cultures and linguistic backgrounds. These residencies are created in an ad-hoc manner, often in locations where there are no residency facilities available for writers and translators. Such opportunities are for example offered by our translation workshops

which bring together writers, mostly poets, who are also translators, to spend a week together exploring each other's work and the context in which they write through translation. Longer residential stays were central to the *Sealines* project in which six bilingual port cities around Europe hosted three writers, each from a different country, in a series of month-long residencies. Creation of new work inspired by the location and new encounters, as well as translation, are always the focus



of LAF residencies, complementing the more traditional type of residential stay available in writers' and translators' houses around Europe.

Translation training

The training of translators working from and into less widely spoken languages is one of LAF's major concerns, and developing models for recruitment and literary translation training is another initiative of the LAF programme on which we have been working with our institutional partners and universities.

Poetry translation workshops

The LAF programme of translation workshops brings together poets and sometimes prose writers from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, to explore each other's work and literary traditions through translation via a common major "bridge" language such as English, French or German. Every year, we organise some six poetry translation workshops in different countries. By the end of 2011 LAF will have organised over 65 workshops in the following

countries: Algeria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, India, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Morocco, Poland, Scotland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Turkey and Wales. Around 600 writers / translators writing in over 40 languages have participated in LAF workshops to date producing an estimated 5,000 translations of poems and short stories which are subsequently published in magazines, websites and books.

Activities Working with venues and forums

International book fairs

LAF participates in international book fairs with collective stands and displays, making it possible for its partner organisations to increase their visibility, present their activities and promote their support schemes to publishers and translators. A programme of readings and round table debates with writers, translators, publishers, and editors of literary magazines and digital publications often accompanies LAF's presence at a book fair, making a valuable international contribution to the programme of several book fairs across Europe. Our annual Frankfurt Book Fair debates, addressing topical issues, have attracted large audiences since the first debate held in 2001.

Our cooperation with the Prague Book Fair has resulted in an annual international programme related to the main theme of the book fair, featuring authors and book professionals from around the world. Since 2001, LAF has participated in the book fairs of Frankfurt, Gothenburg, Istanbul, Leipzig, London, Moscow, Paris, Prague and Thessaloniki, as well as Abu Dhabi, Cairo and Guadalajara.



LAF is also one of the founding partners of the Literary Translation Centre at the London Book Fair, which gained immediate popularity following its inauguration in 2010. The Centre, with its rich programme of seminars, presentations and panel debates attracts a large audience of literary translation professionals, as well as offering a space for meetings and informal networking.

Literary festivals old and new

Over the past ten years we have contributed to the programme of the *Vilenica International Literature Festival* in Slovenia with an annual focus on lesser known literatures, featuring authors and writing from the Basque Country, Flanders, Ireland, Lithuania, Turkey and Wales. Our cooperation with the Brussels-based biennial *Passa Porta Festival* has focused on regions in which we have been working, such as South East Europe and on connecting a writer's residence with the festival. Our cooperation with the *European Festival of the Short Story* in Croatia has given

support to an often neglected literary form and extended the capacity and possibilities of this small but vibrant festival with a huge following among young people.

Besides working with existing festivals, LAF has been instrumental in setting up new events around the Mediterranean. In Malta, LAF and its partner Inizjamed have launched the *Harba Festival of Children's Literature* and the *Malta Festival of Mediterranean Literature*, the first literary festival in the country, which now celebrates its fifth year and enjoys great popularity. *DaseinFest* or *Athens International Literature Festival* is a collaboration with the lively cultural space-cum-café in Athens which broadens the context of the written word, connecting it with other media. The *Istanbul Tanpınar Literature Festival* is another new festival founded by the Kalem Agency in association with LAF. These new festivals have become an important feature in the arts calendar, enriching the cultural life of the Mediterranean region.

Left: Books in many different languages await readers at the Harba Children's Literature Festival in Malta, 2010, a cooperation with Inizjamed. Photo: LAF archive

Below: Riga, 2010, The Berserkers perform the outcomes of the Language of Music workshop held in Scotland the year before. The Chinese poet Yang Lian with his translators at FRA Café in Prague. Photo: LAF archive



Activities Projects

Apart from its regular activities and translation workshops, LAF initiates and manages large, longer-term projects, which revolve around residencies, collaborative practice and translation.

Sealines connected six bilingual European port cities through a series of writers' residencies, creating opportunities to discover the local environment, both social and literary, and to collaborate with colleagues from other linguistic and cultural background. As always, translation was a strong element in this project, as well as connection with other art forms.

The **Cross Border Art Project** explored the role of art and culture in conflict situations, bringing together artists and writers in three locations in the Middle East for workshops and to produce work which was immediately showcased in an exhibition and a publication.

Metropoetica is a project focusing on poetry exploring the ways in which women inhabit urban spaces. An ever-growing group of poets has been meeting in different cities – Riga, Krakow, Wroclaw, Ljubljana and Athens – creating new work which brings poetry into interaction with video, photography and sound art.

Word Express took young authors from South-East Europe and the United Kingdom on a train journey through the Balkans to Istanbul, creating a viable network of writers, translators, artists, musicians, photographers and filmmakers, as well as literary magazines, festivals and venues which continue to work together and publish translations of a growing list of young writers working in some twelve languages, from Armenian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Hebrew and Greek, to Croatian, Macedonian, Bosnian, Serbian, Romanian and Turkish, in addition to English and Welsh.

Poetry Connections are long-term projects which bring European poets into contact with poets from other regions in translation workshops and performances. Poetry Connections India started in 2010 in Pondicherry and continues with further encounters, translations and publications in other locations in India and Europe.

Poetry Unlimited explores experimental approaches to producing and performing poetry with events and a series of publications, CDs and DVDs published by LAF.

The **Arabic Comics Project** involved leading illustrators, comics artists and writers for teenage readers from Arab countries and Europe in two workshops in which they created a series of graphic stories for teenagers, tackling difficult, sometimes taboo subjects.

LAF participated as a partner in the **Beirut39** project organised by the Hay Festival of Arts and Literature, which highlighted the young generation of Arab writers in an anthology and festival held in spring 2010.

Top: Anahit Hayrapetyan and Raman Mundair in the Word Express project. Photo: LAF archive

Bottom: Arabic Comics Project. Photo: LAF archive

Claire Armitstead presents Beirut 39 authors Yassin

Adnan, Abdelkader Benali and Ala Hlehel at the Manchester Literature Festival. Photo: MLF archive

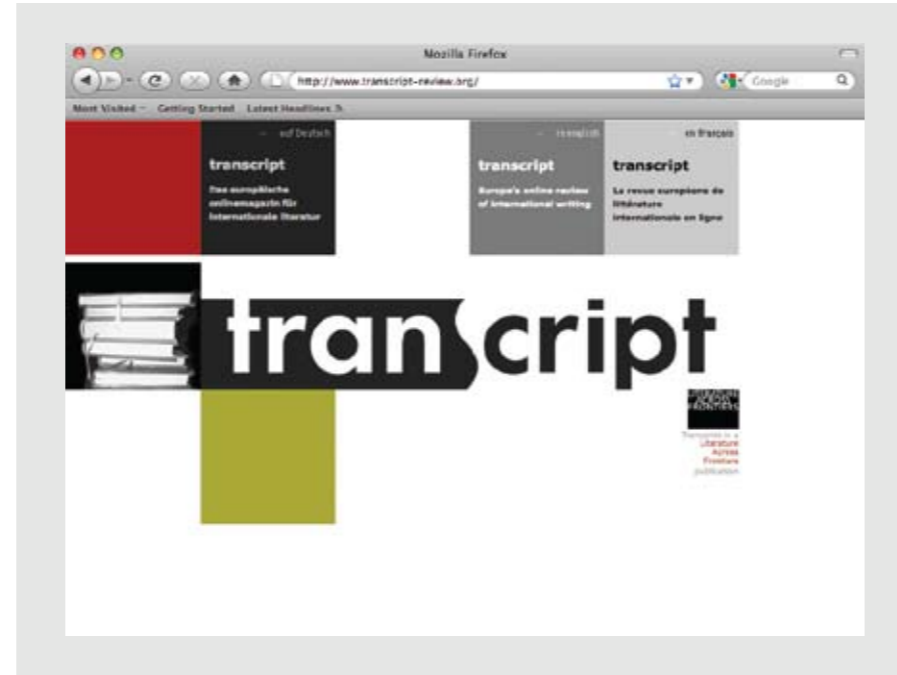
Overleaf: Poetry Connections India performance in Chennai. Photo: LAF archive

www.word-express.org
www.metropoetica.org





Activities Publications



www.transcript-review.org

Left: Art & Conflict Publication documenting the Cross Border Art Project. Online review Transcript homepage. 'Under the Evening Sky' CD, outcome of the Language of Music workshop.

Right: Arc Publications series of bilingual poetry anthologies.

LAF cooperates with other organisations, literary magazines and publishers on the publication of literature in translation into the languages of Europe, as well as Arabic, Turkish and some Asian languages.

One of LAF's on-going projects is the contemporary poetry series in English translation, New Voices from Europe and Beyond, from Arc Publications. The series presents the contemporary poetry scene of a country through the work of six poets, and so far, the Six Poets series has brought English readers poetry from the Basque Country, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland and Slovak Republic.

Transcript: Europe's Online Review of International Writing, published by LAF, is a trilingual internet magazine featuring fiction, poetry, essays,

articles, interviews, reviews and reports on literary and book events, translated into English, French and German. Discovering new voices in translation, exploring and interconnecting literary scenes, *Transcript* brings exciting new international writing to its readers, wherever they are, keeping them up to date with developments in the literary mosaic of Europe and other regions.

By the end of 2011, *Transcript* will publish its 40th issue, having featured the work of over 400 authors and 300 translators from Europe and beyond in issues focusing on literature from Basque Country, Catalonia, Czech Republic, Finland, Latvia and Macedonia, on the genre of the short story, on children's books and on the literature written in the minority languages of nations without a nation state, to name just a few of *Transcript's* themed issues.





Catalan performance poet Eduard Escoffet at the Poetry Off The Page event at Nova Sin Gallery in Prague, 2007. The event, like many other LAF projects, explored the relationship between literature and other art forms. Photo: LAF archive

Activities Policy research and development

LAF is active in the field of European cultural policy development and is represented in several key networks and bodies, such as the arts advocacy organisation Culture Action Europe, the network of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures, where LAF contributes to the development of a translation strategy for the Euro-Mediterranean cultural space, and on the Translation Working Group of the EU Multilingualism Platform, which submitted its recommendations to the European Commission in 2011.

We are often invited to speak at international conferences and professional gatherings of the literature in translation sector, and our electronic series of surveys, reports and studies 'Making Literature Travel' disseminates the outcomes and findings of our research work, which includes collection and analysis

of data on the publishing of literary translations, and the monitoring of European, national and regional literature and translation policies and relevant financing. The series started with *Publishing Translations in Europe: Trends 1990 – 2005*, a comparative analysis of data from UNESCO's Index Translationum database: surveys of organisations engaged in the international promotion of literature, and presses which publish translations, and will continue to release further studies. The report *Literary Translation from Arabic, Hebrew and Turkish into English in the UK and Ireland, 1990 – 2010*, was completed as part of the translation mapping project conducted within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Translation Programme, a cooperation with the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures and Transeuropéennes.

Below: Making Literature Travel series of surveys and reports produced by LAF and published electronically on its website.
Euronews report on the position of literary

translators filmed at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2007 focused on LAF and its work in the area of policy research and monitoring of support for literary exchange and translation in Europe.



Activities Debates, seminars and conferences



LAF organises public debates, seminars and conferences on subjects related to the production and publishing of literature in translation, the training and status of literary translators, international cooperation in the field of books and literature, and relevant cultural policy and financing. The locations and themes of the LAF conferences, each of which has been hosted by our partners, have traced the trajectory our activities have followed over the past ten years, from creating connections and initiating cooperation across Europe alongside the EU enlargement process in the early 2000s, to taking our activities beyond European borders and encouraging intercultural dialogue through literature and translation in our wider neighbourhood.

Since the LAF network was established in 2001 at the *Literature Across Frontiers International*

Conference: The Future of Support for Literary Translation in Europe, organised in cooperation with BookWorld, the International Book Fair, in Prague, Czech Republic, we have organised five major international conferences, in addition to numerous seminars, public debates and professional meetings.

Two years later, the conference *Multicultural Europe: National Literatures Revisited* was held in Helsinki in 2003, in cooperation with FILI - Finnish Literature Centre.

In 2005 our conference *Re-Visions: Literary Exchange in an Enlarged Europe* marked the entry of ten new member states into the European Union and examined the cultural implications of enlargement. The conference was hosted by the cultural NGO Inizjamed in Valletta, Malta.

The following year, the conference *Making Literature Travel: Support for International Exchange and Translation in a Climate of Cultural and Economic Globalization* was hosted by the newly established Institut Ramon Llull in Barcelona, Catalonia.

In 2011, our 10th anniversary conference *Literary Exchange and Translation the Euro-Mediterranean Space: Challenges of the Next Decade*, was organised in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey in Istanbul, with the aim to form an overview of the current state of policies and practice in the field of literary exchange and translation, discuss the environment in which literary works and books in general travel across the Euro-Mediterranean region, highlight successful projects and best practices, identify key challenges and issues to be addressed in the coming decade, and formulate recommendations.

Left: Historian John Freely in conversation with author and translator Maureen Freely at the Istanbul Book Fair 2010. Audience at LAF debate on translation of Turkish literature at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2008. Photo: LAF archive

Right: Discussing Europe - Eugenius Ališanka, Pauls Bankovskis, Roman Simić and Polona Glavan at the Prague Book Fair 2008. LAF partner organisations in a debate on the role of translators at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2006. Photo: LAF archive



Mission statement 2011

Without losing sight of its core aims and values, LAF enters its second decade with a vision of building on its achievements, broadening its partnerships and extending its activities. Our main challenge will be to adapt creatively in an increasingly turbulent world of economic and political change. In this light, ensuring sustainability of activities is the main task for organisations in the cultural sector.

Having a unique history of bringing official institutions into contact and collaboration with the independent sector, we will continue to develop our cooperation with key national literature organisations, universities, literature and translation networks, and with cultural NGOs which, because of their resourcefulness, flexibility and independence from governmental politics are well equipped to adapt to an environment of economic austerity. Nevertheless, we will continue to lobby against cuts in cultural budgets and to promote the central role of culture in society.

LAF has the unique advantage of enjoying long, strong and established ties in the South East Mediterranean and in the Arab World, and we will emphasize our work in this region as it emerges out of a period of instability through a transition that gives rise to new opportunities. In addition to continuing to cooperate with our European partners on activities across Europe, we will also continue to present European literature in all its diversity in regions which mostly see Europe in terms of the major languages and dominant cultures.

We will emphasise the training of translators from and into small languages within Europe and into languages of neighbouring regions, such as Arabic and Turkish, and continue connecting and supporting minority language literatures in the wider region.

LAF will build on its long-established tradition of combining practice and research providing a unique overview of the dynamics and socio-economics of the literary field in Europe and beyond, and acting as an information resource for our sector.



The Word Express project which took young writers and artists from South East Europe on a journey across the Balkans generated a wealth of new work, including writing, translations, photos, video and music.
Photo: Owen Martell

Acknowledgements

10 years of making literature travel

Text by Alexandra Büchler and Chris Chryssopoulos.

Cover photo: Anahit Hayrapetyan

Literature Across Frontiers would like to thank the Culture Programme of the European Union, as well as many international and national organisations and bodies for their support since 2001.

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