Literature Across Frontiers
Fifteen years of making literature travel
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
Europe has a rich and diverse literary culture. From poets to playwrights and novelists, from non-fiction writers to spoken word performers, many voices in many languages contribute to the growing body of European literature. But how aware are we of the full wealth of writing created across Europe? To highlight the diversity of the European literary scene and to discover new voices, a group of individuals and organisations got together in 2001 to establish Literature Across Frontiers with support from the Culture Programme of the European Union.

Our aim was complex yet simple: to advance intercultural dialogue through literature and translation, and to highlight Europe’s literary diversity to new audiences. Fifteen years later, LAF is a unique platform which connects literary scenes across Europe and beyond, combining artistic practice with policy debate and reflection on the rapidly changing environment in which we work, communicate and create.

From our base in Aberystwyth University, Wales, we work with a range of partners abroad and in the United Kingdom, including our sister organisation, Wales Literature Exchange. We act as a catalyst, creating contacts, connections and collaborations across national and linguistic borders. We bring together individuals and organisations who operate in very diverse language contexts as far as numbers of speakers, literacy levels, cultural infrastructure, official and non-official status are concerned, and we actively advocate for linguistic and cultural rights, as well as freedom of expression. Our work has given rise to initiatives and projects which have gained a life of their own and are now part of a widening ripple effect that reaches beyond Europe into the Middle East, South Mediterranean and Asia.

However, LAF is significantly more than the sum of its activities and achievements. What singles LAF out is the distinctive balance of rigour and flexibility in the way it operates. Being a hub for contacts between individual literary practitioners, as well as an interface between independent cultural organisations, private enterprises and government bodies and institutions which support cultural activities, LAF is not only a resource but primarily an enabler and multiplier.

The enabling role of LAF derives, above all, from the people we work with in a common pursuit of new ideas, developments and initiatives; a community growing together not just in numbers and volume, but in the deeper sense of sharing in a maturing process of collaboration. A sustainability arises from this process of collaboration, a resilience and resourcefulness which has made it possible for us to thrive and develop for the past fifteen years.

In our common endeavour there is an on-going flow of ideas and information, we share resources and build an infrastructure that becomes stronger than what is available at a local level. In this way LAF expands and immigrates not only the scope of its activities but also the conceptual framework within which we think of literature and nurture its role in society.

As we celebrate our 15th anniversary, we find ourselves living in a landscape of great global change and uncertainty. Our work today in fostering understanding between cultures is more important than ever. In the following pages, we look back at our work to date and pay tribute to the creative efforts of the many people who over the past fifteen years have contributed to what Literature Across Frontiers is today and to its mission of making literature travel.

Alexandra Büchler
Director

“LAF is to literature what light is to a garden. No, it’s more. LAF is the gardener. What makes this organisation spectacular is a deep awareness of the literary terrain, a sense not only of what light can do, but also of what the seeds and the soil can offer. This kind of knowledge is not theoretical and abstract. It is experiential. It is about touch and experience, about tilling the ground, sifting the seeds, believing in the possibilities of cross-cultural contact, pollination and fruition.”

Amir & Khalil, writer and illustrator of Zahra’s Paradise, Algeria / Iran / United States of America
Our objectives

Our key objectives are to:

- advance intercultural dialogue through literary exchange and translation, and promote a deeper understanding of European cultural identity based on shared values and respect for diversity;

- foster the development of a vibrant European literary culture and ensure that it can be experienced by a broad range of audiences across Europe and beyond;

- connect diverse literary scenes through innovative collaboration projects which create, position and disseminate European writing, while mainstreaming the less translated literatures of Europe and highlighting emerging European literary talent;

- contribute to local, European and international debates on cultural policy and practice by conducting research, providing expertise to various international forums, and offering networking, knowledge-building and skills development opportunities to the literature and translation sector.

How we work

“The European Union is about sharing values among Europeans, creating dialogue and participating in a cultural exchange with its neighbours, then LAF has been carrying out the EU mission more vigorously and successfully than any other European organisation I know.”

Petr Kučera, translator of Turkish literature and university lecturer, Czech Republic

The LAF network brings together a range of partners based in Europe and other global regions, organisations engaged in the international promotion of literature, books and translation, literary festivals, book fairs, literary venues, magazines, publishers as well as groups of writers and translators committed to the advancement of international literary exchange and the promotion of literature in translation.

We work with core groups of partners on short and longer-term projects.

This arrangement allows us to be flexible and respond to opportunities in a way traditional organisational structures might not be able to. It also introduces a form of non-hierarchical, democratic governance which encourages an active involvement in all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation of projects, with input from a variety of sources.
Above: Poetry off the Page event at Nova Sin Gallery, Prague
LAF started as a network of literature organisations at a time when Eastern Europe had gone through a decade of transition in the publishing sector; the book markets and the culture infrastructure in general were being redeveloped, and new ways of financing and managing cultural activities were being introduced. Our aim was to bring the two halves of Europe together in a dialogue about promotion of literature and support for literary translation in view of EU Enlargement. The first LAF conference - supported by the European Cultural Foundation and the Open Society, and hosted by BookWorld, the organiser of the Prague International Book Fair - focused on exploring and comparing models of support for translation and brought together the first LAF network consisting of organisations from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, Norway, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia and other countries. The network, initially involving mainly national organisations and bodies from around Europe, later grew to include cultural NGOs, creating an interface between the third sector on the one hand and government and arms-length bodies supporting literary projects on the other. Today, LAF is a platform and a hub for multiple new connections and initiatives, with networking being a natural part of our activities.

We are members of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation Network, Culture Action Europe, EU Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism, and Associates of the Free Word Centre in London.

“Being part of LAF has made it possible for us to gain insight into projects, research and programmes that we were not directly involved in. All these have given us a perspective and showed us how we can improve our work.”

Agnes Füle, Petőfi Literary Museum, Hungary
Our 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 - mostly hosted by one of our partners - trace the trajectory our activities have followed over the past fifteen 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 to a wider neighbourhood later in the decade.

The event which launched LAF in 2001 – Literature Across Frontiers International Conference: The Future of Support for Literary Translation in Europe - was organised in cooperation with BookWorld and the Prague International Book Fair in the Czech Republic. Since then, we have organised a number of major international conferences in addition to seminars, public debates and professional meetings.

2003 – Multicultural Europe: National Literatures Revisited
This conference was held in Helsinki in cooperation with FILI - Finnish Literature Information Centre (later renamed Finnish Literature Exchange).

2005 – Re-Visions: Literary Exchange in an Enlarged Europe
A conference marking the entry of ten new member states into the European Union and examining the cultural implications of the European Enlargement. This event was hosted by the cultural NGO Inizjamed in Valletta, Malta.

2006 – Making Literature Travel: Support for International Exchange and Translation in a Climate of Cultural and Economic Globalization
Institut Raman Ull in Barcelona, Catalonia, hosted this event as part of its cooperation with LAF.

2011 – Literary Exchange and Translation in the Euro-Mediterranean Space: Challenges of the Next Decade
Held in Istanbul at the time of LAF’s 10th anniversary, the aim of this conference was to form an overview of the current state of policies and practice in the field of literary exchange and translation, discussing the environment in which literary works and books in general travel across the Euro-Mediterranean region, highlighting successful projects and best practices, identifying key challenges and issues to be addressed in the coming decade, and formulating recommendations.

In 2012 and 2013, the conference was followed by a series of strategy workshops in Istanbul, Beirut and Valetta which discussed literary relations between Europe and South East Mediterranean.

2016 – International Literature Forum on Audience Development
To mark our 15th anniversary, we held a conference in our home location of Aberystwyth, Wales, as part of our landmark Literary Europe Live project.
Literature Across Frontiers participates actively 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 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. We disseminate the outcomes and findings of our research work through our series of electronic surveys, reports and studies. These include collection and analysis of data on the publishing of literary translations; surveys of publishers on aspects of publishing translated literature; the monitoring of European, national and regional policies, and support for literature and translation. Analysis of data on the publishing of translated literature in the United Kingdom and Ireland and production of statistics is considered one of the most important aspects of our work.

The outcomes of our strategy workshops and conferences dealing with literary exchange in the Euro-Mediterranean region and with the position of minority language literatures are published on our website. The resources section of our website also offers a wealth of information for the international literary sector, including tools for writers, translators and publishers.

www.lit-across-frontiers.org/about-resources
Our activities
Collaborative projects and residencies

Many of our projects contain an element of short-term residency 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 or larger projects such as Word Express or Poetry Connections. The creation of new work inspired by new locations and encounters has been at the focus of LAF residencies, complementing the more traditional type of residential opportunities available in writers and translators houses around Europe.

Combining the practice of writing and translation

Our translation workshops bring together poets and sometimes prose writers from a variety of linguistic backgrounds to explore each other’s work and literary traditions through translation using a common bridge language. Every year, we organise several translation workshops in different countries. During the past fifteen years, we have organised around a hundred such workshops in some thirty countries involving hundreds of participants who have produced new work and translations in sixty different languages.

Translation training

The training of translators from and into less widely spoken languages is one of LAF’s major concerns. We’ve been working with our institutional partners and universities to develop training models, particularly for emerging translators working between European and non-European languages.

Supporting the work of translators means that bridges can be built, linking writers and cultures, and fostering understanding and goodwill. In the politically dangerous world of today this is more necessary than ever. The work LAF does should not be underestimated.

Anna Crowe, translator from Catalan, Scotland, United Kingdom
LAF participates in international book fairs, making it possible for its partner organisations to increase their visibility, present their activities and promote their translation support schemes.

A programme of readings and round-table debates with writers, translators, literary agents, publishers and editors of literary magazines often accompanies LAF’s presence at a book fair, making a valuable international contribution to the programme.

Our annual Frankfurt Book Fair debates, addressing topical issues, have attracted large audiences since the first debate was held in 2001. Since then, LAF has participated in the book fairs of Frankfurt, Gothenburg, Istanbul, Leipzig, London, Moscow, Paris, Prague and Thessaloniki, as well as Abu Dhabi, Beijing, Cairo, Delhi, Sharjah and Guadalajara.

LAF was also the instigator and 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 has become a hub for the literary translation community, offering a space for meetings and networking, and programme of seminars and panel debates.

“We cannot think of any other enterprise motivated by the same passion for sharing literary works around the world: it is a unique platform on which one can always rely to find updates and developments in the many aspects of literature – including of course publications, but also and very importantly, translation. It is an invaluable resource for anybody working in this field.”

Marianne Catalan Kennedy and Beatrice Stauffer
Kitab, Abu Dhabi Book Fair, United Arab Emirates
Our activities
International literary festivals

“LAF is, in my experience, completely unique. As an organisation it offers amazing opportunities for writers and literary professionals to network across continents in ways which, otherwise, would simply not be available. As a source of international expertise, the organisation has a wealth of knowledge and the capacity to make a major difference to literature internationally.”

Emma Turnbull
Creative Scotland, United Kingdom

Over the years, we have formed partnerships with many literary festivals in Europe and further afield, contributing to their programmes. Our Literary Europe Live project has taken our work with festivals and literary venues to a new level which will benefit numerous authors - particularly European emerging talent - as well as audiences of live literary events.

We have worked with the Edinburgh International Book Festival, Ledbury Poetry Festival, Manchester Literature Festival, Hay Festival of Literature and Arts, London Literature Festival, Festival of the European Short Story in Croatia, Barcelona’s Kosmopolis Festival, Brussels’ Passa Porta Festival and others.

Our cooperation with the Bookworm International Literary Festival in China has been particularly productive, resulting in the Flash Europa 28 project and in a Literary Europe Live programme at Bookworm 2016. In India, we have been working with many of the spectacular festivals that have been established there in recent years, such as the Chandigarh Literary Festival, the Chennai Lit for Life Festival, the Hyderabad Literary Festival, the Jaipur Literary Festival, the Kolkata Literary Meet and Mumbai’s Literature Live Festival. We’ve also held events at Delhi’s India International Centre.

Besides working with existing festivals, LAF has been instrumental in setting up new events around the Mediterranean, which have become an important feature of the arts calendar, enriching the cultural life of the region. In 2006, LAF and its partner Inizjamed established the first literary festival in the country - the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival - which now enjoys great popularity.

The one-off Harba Festival of Children’s Literature was another initiative born out of co-operation between LAF and Inizjamed. The first editions of the now well-known Istanbul Tanpinar Literature Festival were organised by the Kalem Agency in association with LAF.

Closer to home, we have set up the North Wales International Poetry Festival together with Bangor University and the Poetry Wales magazine.
Apart from our regular activities and translation workshops, we initiate and manage large, longer-term projects which revolve around residencies, collaborative practice and translation.

2006-2007: **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 backgrounds. As always, translation was a strong element in this project, as well as connection with other art forms.

2006-2007: **The Cross-Border Art Project** explored the role of culture in conflict situations through workshops held in four locations in the Middle East where resident and visiting artists and writers collaborated on producing new work which was immediately showcased and which later resulted in a publication. Co-organised by Literature Across Frontiers with the Anna Lindh Foundation, Solidarité Laïque, Fondazione Pistoletto and other partners, the project also tested models of cooperation among cultural NGOs and institutional partners in a politically sensitive territory.

2009-2011: **Metropoetica** examined ways in which women inhabit urban spaces with a group of poets who met in Riga, Cracow, Wroclaw, ljubljana and Athens to create new cross-disciplinary work combining text, video, photography and sound art.

2009-2011: **Word Express** took young authors from South-East Europe and the United Kingdom on a train journey through the Balkans to Istanbul, creating a network of writers, translators, artists, musicians, photographers and film-makers, 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 Armenian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, English, Georgian, Greek, Hebrew, Macedonian, Serbian, Romanian, Turkish and Welsh.

“Literature cannot be created in a void. By connecting writers and poets from different countries, LAF creates a very unique space in which culture can prosper. As a writer from a country in constant conflict, I can’t think of any another organisation that not only allowed me to exchange ideas and inspiration with other artists, but also filled me with hope that literature can make this world a better place.”

Alex Epstein, writer, Israel
2011-2012: 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.

2012-2013: Tramlines Alexandria, Barcelona, Brussels, Istanbul, Prague, Manchester, Zagreb and Riga were cities with a tram system explored by writers during exchange residencies and the first on a growing list of locations in the LitNav literary app created with Comma Press to take readers on journeys navigating cities through fiction.

On-going since 2010, Poetry Connections is an open-ended series of workshops which bring European poets together with poets from other global regions to explore each other’s work through translation and to create a multilingual poetry performance. The project started in 2010 and continues with further encounters, translations and publications. Poetry Connections workshops have so far taken place in Algeria and Morocco and, above all, in India where we have been holding regular workshops in cooperation with major literary festivals. We hope to extend the workshops to other locations in Asia in the near future.

Launched in 2015, Literary Europe Live is our latest landmark project. LEU brings together sixteen literary festivals and venues from around Europe to foster and encourage programming that reflects the richness and diversity of the European literary landscape. The project highlights and supports outstanding emerging literary talent and develops live and digital audiences for writing in translation.

“If there is one literary organisation that I am most proud of having had the opportunity to associate myself with, then I would choose LAF above everything else. In a world whose power balance is fraught with tensions, as a woman of colour from the so-called third world, it was LAF that put me on a platform with writers from European languages and allowed me to work with them as an equal. I’ve rarely witnessed such a cultural exchange.”

Meena Kandasamy, writer, poet, translator, India

“What’s so interesting about working with LAF is the quiet attention to fostering productive and creative relationships, particularly between producers in Europe and the Arab world. Their commitment to best practice and exchange is extraordinary. And there’s never been a more important time to foster understanding along that axis.”

Peter Florence, Hay Festival of Literature and Art, Wales, United Kingdom
Our activities have resulted in online and print publication of numerous translations in a range of languages. One of LAF’s ongoing projects is the contemporary poetry series in English translation, New Voices from Europe and Beyond, from UK-based Arc Publications. The series presents the contemporary poetry scene of a country through the work of six poets. To date, the Six Poets series has brought English readers poetry from Armenia, the Basque Country, Catalonia, the Czech Republic, Galicia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia, with anthologies from Galicia, Georgia, Turkey and other countries on the horizon.

In 2002, LAF started publishing Transcript: Europe’s Online Review of International Writing, the first internet-only trilingual literary magazine featuring fiction, poetry, essays, articles, interviews, reviews and reports on literary and book events in English, French and German. Discovering exciting new international writing and connecting literary scenes across Europe and beyond were Transcript’s main aims.

Transcript ceased publication in 2015 after thirteen years of dedicated search for interesting new voices. It will continue being available as an archive while we focus on reporting news from the world of books, literature and translation on our main website.

“Over the years I have come to regard LAF as one of the most important organisations – if not the most important organisation – connecting publishers, authors, translators, funding bodies (governmental and otherwise) and other interested parties. I know of no other body that has a knowledge base that can match that of LAF – they know and have access to everyone involved at all levels in the field of literature in translation in Europe and further afield, and that network is unrivalled.”

Simon Smith, Peter Owen Publishers, England, United Kingdom

“Together with other organisations, LAF has been instrumental in generating interest among publishers for translated literature. LAF has also been a very particular forum where public institutions specialising in translation policy could interact with festivals, translator centres and non-European literary organisations.”

Sònia Garcia, Institut Ramon Llull, Catalonia, Spain
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15 years of making literature travel

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Inside cover image: Audience at the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival

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We are members of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation Network, Culture Action Europe, EU Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism, and Associates of the Free Word Centre in London.

Literature Across Frontiers is open to donations to be able to continue its valuable work.

www.lit-across-frontiers.org
Facebook: Literature Across Frontiers
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"Young authors need opportunities to have their work heard and to gain new understanding of their own writing in different contexts. LAF’s unique work has provided me with these opportunities, both in Wales and across the world."

Eurig Salisbury, writer, Wales, United Kingdom