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Jump-starting Literary Networks: Halma



In the popular board game of Halma, pieces jump across the board and create a bridge. The game was the inspiration for the literary network of the same name which helps authors and translators from all over Europe to travel to other countries. Halma, however, is not alone.

Europe is often further advanced in the minds of its people than in its politics and administration. Anna Kim for instance, an Austrian writer who was born in South Korea, initially thought that, "as an EU citizen", she would need "no visa to visit Minsk in Belarus, a European country".

Building linguistic bridges

Kim is one of 44 scholarship holders given the chance by the Halma organization to travel to two other European countries. Her journey took her to the literature and translation centre of the Logvinov publishing house in Minsk and to the "Saint-Nazaire House of Foreign Writers and Translators" in France. She was able to spend a month living and working in each. Her scholarship also included money to finance a test translation from one of her books – to serve as a linguistic bridge to another cultural environment.



As Laura Seifert explains, the result of this for Portuguese author Filipa Melo, another Halma scholarship holder, was that "one of her books was actually translated in its entirety and brought out by the Slovenian Goga publishing house, with others likely to follow". Seifert is the director of the Halma network which links 26 European literary centres and is headquartered in Berlin.

"A network of friends"



"Halma's primary goal is to foster international relations through literature", says Seifert. As she goes on to explain, this can be done by promoting translation or by means of author exchanges. The initiative to establish the network came from the Literary Colloquium in Berlin, the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Polish Borderland Foundation in Sejny. This is where, on the border with Lithuania, the 16 founding members met in December 2006. "At first it was not always easy to bring together colleagues from, for example, Slovenia and Serbia", remembers Seifert. In the meantime, however, Halma has "evolved to become a network of friends." The personal nature of the contact has allowed a great deal of trust to be built up.

This is confirmed by the writer Mareike Krügel, who describes herself as a "reserved author". After her stay in Wales, she wrote: "For that too is something that can happen to one on a scholarship, no matter how well one hides behind one's manuscript: friendship." Thus a European literary network is gradually being established – no longer merely across Central and Eastern Europe, an initial focal area for Halma, but now, since the widening of its membership in 2008, also across Western and Southern Europe.

Promoting "artist mobility"

Halma is funded from a variety of different sources, among them the Robert Bosch Foundation. Money also comes from various national institutions and public sector organizations. The Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, for example, provided key initial funding in 2007, while the Austrian Ministry of Culture and the Pro Helvetia Arts Council in Switzerland are also involved.

"The fact that we received funding this year from the European



Commission within the framework of a pilot project for artist mobility was particularly important for us", stresses Seifert. This allowed the number of scholarships to be increased in 2010. Financing travel and work stays for authors, translators and those who disseminate literature – e.g. publishers and literary editors – is the central focus of Halma's networking activities.

Traduki – a network for South-East Europe



There are other institutions apart from Halma that are keen to see Europe grow closer together in literary terms. The Traduki network concentrates on South-East Europe, promoting translations of fiction, children's and youth literature and non-fiction books from and into the languages of participating countries, which include Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Switzerland.

Traduki, a five-year project, was launched in 2008. Like Halma, it also believes in personal encounters between authors and translators. The South-East Europe network was initiated by organizations such as the foreign ministries in Germany and Austria, the Swiss Pro Helvetia Arts Council, the Goethe-Institut and the German S. Fischer Foundation. The Federal Foreign Office in Berlin hopes that Traduki "will strengthen the sense of intellectual belonging and build confidence in a common European future."

Houses of literature join forces

Just how productive networking can be is demonstrated by the joint website of eleven houses of literature in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (www.literaturhaeuser.net). What started out as a loose affiliation became a registered association in 2008. It not only combines the programmes and activities of the individual houses of literature but also initiates its own projects.



Among these is the "Prize of the Houses of Literature", which is endowed with 11,000 euros. In 2010, the prize was won by the writer Thomas Kapielski. Like his eight predecessors – who include Ulrike Draesner, Michael Lentz and Sybille Lewitscharoff – he too will be packing his suitcase, as the prize involves readings in all eleven houses of literature.

In any case, Halma scholarship holder Anna Kim concluded after her travels that "the differences that people so often talk about appear exaggerated because they conceal something crucial – namely the similarities that exist above all."

Sabine Tenta

works as a freelance journalist, among other things for Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne.

Translation: Chris Cave

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✉ online-redaktion@goethe.de

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