

Literature - Focus on Literature - Goethe-Institut
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Bridge-builders for German-language Literature



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Even though promoting contemporary German-language literature is considered a laborious business, there is actually a whole series of institutions in Germany and abroad that are committed to this with plenty of ideas and great enthusiasm. "Difficult to promote": this fairly unflattering label seems to have a tenacious hold on contemporary German literature. If you ask publishers and agents in German-speaking countries how successful their promotion of contemporary literature overseas is, then the answer will be unanimous: it's a complicated, laborious business.

Stubborn prejudices and language barriers

The number of licence agreements held by German publishing houses with their partners abroad is really limited. According to statistics provided by the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, a total of 6278 licence agreements were made in 2009. Of these, fiction made up just 10.6 per cent with 665 licences.

The reasons why German-language literature is not an export hit are diverse. These include for instance a widely-held prejudice that is in the minds of many editors and publishers abroad. Jörg Bong, the programme manager for German-speaking literature at S. Fischer Verlag, describes it like this: "German literature is considered hermetic, complicated and highly literary – it just isn't to the taste of many readers."

And literature agent Bastian Schlück highlights another problem: "The great difficulty is that there are not many people in the publishing houses who can read the original in German language."

Focused energy



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Verena Nolte is also familiar with these difficulties from her tireless involvement with literature promotion. "Even if we can rely on a great tradition in literature: to make sure that German literature of the present day remains in the consciousness of other languages then constant efforts must be made," says the long-standing co-ordinator of the Literature House Network.

Yet a whole series of institutions, information centres and networks worldwide is committed to promoting literature in German. Many of them work together closely to consolidate their powers. These include the Goethe-Institut, the Book Information Centres and German Book Offices at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Literary Colloquium Berlin, the Literature Workshop Berlin, the European Translators' Centre in Straelen, the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Literature House Network.

Exchange and dialogue

All promotion efforts have the common objective of contemporary German literature of the present day a topic of conversation abroad. It's less of a specific promotion for individual books, and more of a dialogue so that views are exchanged.

Good examples of this are for instance the bilateral *Stadtschreiberprojekte* (City Writer Projects), which the Goethe-Institut has organised in recent years in cooperation with the Literature House Network as well as partners overseas. For example in 2008, eight authors from German-speaking countries and eight authors from Turkey were able to immerse themselves in the society of their host country for four weeks as part of the *Yakın Bakış* project. The experiences and adventures of the city authors were published in internet diaries as well as in daily newspapers.



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In the *Verlagsmetropolen* project, which has been organised by the Literary Colloquium Berlin since 2002 in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut, five or six young German authors travel to a publishing city together. There they have a variety of opportunities to present themselves and their works – in the hope of convincing publishers and translators of their work like this in situ.



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Creating and maintaining networks

Creating networks is the focus of many projects. Within Europe the Literary Colloquium Berlin is cooperating with the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Polish foundation Borderland in the *HALMA* project to unite the most important literary centres in Europe to form a network. So far 26 literature institutions from 21 countries have joined this platform for authors, translators and literature promoters.

The German Book Information Centres and German Book Offices from the Frankfurt Book Fair, of which there are offices in Beijing, New Delhi, Moscow, Bucharest and New York, are also picking up on the idea of a network. For years contact-making trips for editors have been one of the promising tools used by these overseas offices, which are supported by the Foreign Office. For these trips, editors are invited on a trip to Germany to visit publishing houses, become acquainted with international literature initiatives and make plenty of new contacts in the German book and publishing scene.



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Promoting translation and translators



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Promoting translations is considered an extremely important measure. The focal point of this is the Goethe-Institut programme Translation of German Books into a Foreign Language, within the framework of which the publication of approx. 5000 books in 45 languages has received financial support in the last 35 years. This programme is supported by the regional programme to promote translation, Litrix.de, an online magazine with excerpts from key new publications, test translations and the latest information about the German book market.

Alongside this there are quite a few packages and programmes with which the translators are promoted as individuals. The European Translators' Centre in Straelen is not only the largest working centre for translators of literature in the world, it also awards prizes and organises seminars and further training for translators. As well as this, the Literary Colloquium Berlin and the Robert Bosch Foundation are also committed to networking, further training and promotion of translators.

Long-term commitment for sustainability

The unanimous opinion of committed, experienced agents is that if you are promoting German-language literature abroad, you need staying power. That's how Maja Pflüger, who is responsible for the field of literature and translation promotion at the Robert Bosch Foundation, describes it: "There is much to be said against one-off events, if you want to have a long-term effect on international understanding, you need more than just inspired ideas, you simply have to stick at it longer."

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Translation programme of the Goethe-Institut 
[/uun/ang/ueb/uea/enindex.htm](http://www.goethe.de/uun/ang/ueb/uea/enindex.htm)


"Communicating Literature in German Abroad" dossier 
<http://www.goethe.de/kue/lit/prj/vla/enindex.htm>

Book Information Centres and German Book Offices at the Frankfurt Book Fair 
<http://ww2.buchmesse.de/en.html>


Literature House Network 
<http://www.literaturhaus.net>

Yakın Bakış – Turkish-German City Writer Project 
<http://www.goethe.de/ins/tr/lp/kue/lit/sdt/deindex.htm>

Rayuela – Argentinian-German City Writer Project 
<http://www.goethe.de/ins/ar/lp/prj/ray/deindex.htm>


Literary Colloquium Berlin 
<http://www.lcb.de/homehome>

Europäisches Übersetzer-Kollegium (European Translators' Centre) 
<http://www.uebersetzerkollegium.com/english-information/kollegium/index.html>

Literature Workshop Berlin 
<http://www.literaturwerkstatt.org>

Litrix.de online magazine 
<http://www.litrix.de>

HALMA network 
<http://www.halma-network.eu/en.html>

Jump-starting Literary Networks: Halma (goethe.de) 
<http://www.goethe.de/kue/lit/slt/en6631903.htm>

Robert Bosch Foundation 
<http://www.bosch-stiftung.de/content/language2/html/index.asp>