

Diversity Report 2018

Executive Summary

The scope and ambitions of the Diversity Report 2018

How is the position of translated literary fiction evolving as compared to literature in general? How are diverse linguistic communities finding their respective audiences, especially by comparison to a globalized culture with English as a predominant lingua franca? And how successful are sponsors of various forms of support to translated literature in the aim of sustaining cultural diversity through grants and other ambitious programmes that often use taxpayers' money? These are the key topics explored in the "Diversity Report" series since 2008.

In 2018, we could focus on three lines of research:

- Mapping the share and scope of translated fiction in selected countries, to better understand the remarkable differences in the appreciation of readers and publishers for foreign fiction, but also to at least tentatively match translated books with changing consumer demographics;
- Track which authors are readily translated, and where markets and gatekeepers throughout the cultural landscapes resist;
- Characterize support models for translated fiction in a handful of countries, by describing policies and compare where and how aims and practices differ.

Key findings

The share of translations as compared to fiction published in the original languages varies significantly between countries. While it is common knowledge that translations into the English language must overcome high barriers, this is not the unique characteristic of 'big' languages. Sweden also welcomes a limited number of works in translation in a small market, possibly because many of its most avid readers are used to read in English, too.

Tracking authors in translations stands, as in previous editions, at the core of this report. Together with earlier research, we now have followed over 500 mostly 'mid-list' writers of very diverse backgrounds, tonalities and profiles across a dozen European languages, to see what works in translation, and what does not connect.

Based on this field research, we started building a bibliographic database of translated fiction across those 12 countries and languages, aggregating by now close to 2000 bibliographical records, organized in a database.

The new, 2018 edition of the Diversity Report adds two features to the model of research and analysis:

- What insights can be taken from specifically emphasizing on two smaller countries, Austria and Slovenia, one a small market of 8 million inhabitants neighbouring a much larger Germany that is sharing the same language; the other, Slovenia, with a population of just two million, yet with strong ambitions to find a broad international audience for its literature and culture?

- How are new models of publishing in the digital age impacting on the old trade of translated literature?

This edition of the Diversity Report, which has been financially supported by public institutions from Austria and Slovenia, is giving special attention to translations of authors from Slovenia and Austria, yet in a wider Europe and global context. As Slovenia will be the guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2022, these findings will hopefully add value for calibrating the strategic compass in that extraordinary event.

Understanding translation markets at a critical moment of transformation

The opportunities and the challenges that we will tackle in the Diversity Report 2018 provide lessons for stakeholders in many different places and positions, across Europe, at a moment in time when anyone in culture and media is facing a deep and simultaneous change in readers' – and more broadly in consumers' – preferences and choices that coincide with a profound transformation triggered by digital technologies:

- Reading and books became immersed in a phenomenal offer of any kind of media and social interaction, obliging each to compete for attention and the time of consumers;
- Publishers find themselves in complex relations with both old established and newly emerging media operators of various scale;
- Smaller local actors face both the opportunities of catering their products directly to a dedicated community of followers, as well as the immense challenge of sustaining their visibility in a world where literature of any sorts, from pure entertainment to the greatest refinement, from any background or geography, become accessible somehow, in translations, or in the original, or as a media adaptation of a different format than the book;
- Public sponsors of translated as well as original literature, and of cultural diversity in general, may want to look at their efforts in the concert of others, who pursue similar endeavours, yet perhaps with different accents and experiences.

The Diversity Report 2018 aims at providing orientation in such a complex environment, by combining solid data research with unambiguous analysis, by offering fresh insights as well as a continuously growing resource of original data which are offered to specialists in the field of translation for further research.

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The Diversity Report 2018 and all previous surveys of the series are available for free download at www.culturaltransfers.org

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