

Multilingualism and Literature in Translation

PROGRAMME EVALUATION



CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION
UK BRANCH

Summary

Introduction

In 2014, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation commissioned an evaluation of the **Literature in Translation and Multilingualism programme**. Begun in 2010, the programme was completed in early 2015, with a total investment of £550,000. An evaluation took place over several months in 2014 and brought together evidence to demonstrate that the programme has had a significant impact, including generating a range of new initiatives and partnerships.

The Foundation has an excellent track-record of innovative funding programmes and is generally regarded as ‘leading the field’ in socially engaged arts; there is no doubt from the evidence (and the energy and commitment of contributing organisations) that this programme has exemplified that approach and added to the Foundation’s reputation. The report, undertaken by Josephine Burns, includes a detailed analysis of all the projects supported and a report of the short- and long-term outcomes achieved by the programme covering for example, skills and training, sector capacity building, and significant buy-in and leverage from a range of sources. For further information please email info@gulbenkian.org.uk.

Context

The programme emerged in response to a number of approaches from various organisations working in the field, and a subsequent research process (scoping). This led to a coherent programme in two phases – the scoping and implementation period 2010–2011 which included a number of pilots, followed by a series of more targeted initiatives in 2012–2014. The main aim of the programme was to support the ‘conditions needed to increase the quantity, quality and diversity of translated literature in the UK; and to promote multilingualism, focusing on children and young people’.

Overall, fourteen projects were supported with either a strong focus on multilingualism or literature in translation, and some projects that brought the two together. Most projects the Foundation supported at the pilot stage grew and expanded significantly and in the process, attracted support from other funders.

Main findings

Multilingualism

The Foundation supported a number of groundbreaking multilingualism initiatives directed at children and young people and in the main mediated through teachers and education structures. Because of these strong institutional roots, the initiatives had a real impact, not only on the children and young people but also on teachers and others engaged in front-line education work, and received significant interest from the academic and education research sectors. Of note is the range of teaching methods, tools and professional training programmes that were developed for translators and teaching staff, many of which are available online.

As a result, the cultural organisations that designed and undertook the initiatives were invited to participate in a range of conferences and professional development events and links with Higher Education Institutions evolved and are continuing.

While quantitative data available is not always consistent, there are some significant indicators of positive impacts that the multilingualism projects had on a variety of beneficiaries. Of particular note is:

- In general, teachers reported a positive impact of attainment in English and overall academic performance; children's identity, self-confidence and perception of their mother tongue were enhanced.
- Creative writing programmes in English for people with a refugee background had a similar positive impact on self-confidence and language skills.
- Involving families in reading programmes through providing books in their home/mother tongue language resulted in more positive attitude to reading in general and helped to promote family cohesion.

As the main focus for this programme was on young people, there were specific challenges.

Establishing collaborations with schools and local authorities were often difficult because of the limited time allowed within and by the curriculum, and the tight budgets. Secondly, the initiatives generally engaged with small groups of young people and teachers, and the resource issues of scaling up are considerable not only in terms of cost and skills but also developing effective models that can be evaluated, disseminated and used more widely.

Literature in Translation

The research found that the programme significantly enhanced the growth and empowerment of the literature in translation sector. The linkages and collaborations across and between the organisations active in the field were strengthened over the five years and resulted in an increased sense of community and connectivity developed. Of particular note are the joint initiatives - the clustering around the International Translators Day and the Literary Translation Centre at London Book Fair. Notably, such is the sense of trust and mutuality that four of the organisations shared their Arts Council bids before submission.

There has been real change in the perceptions of translated literature by publishers and book sector. All reported a much greater awareness, and an open and receptive attitude to 'foreign literature', which is new. For example, 'they now regularly participate in events and welcome contact'. While it is difficult to be certain about causality here, it seems that the development of literary translators has been instrumental including:

- Better skills and higher profile for translators and an increase in the number and range of languages.
- Significant growth in understanding and awareness of the potential of literary translation within the book industry including a model to measure the scale of translated publications in the UK, establishing a benchmark and providing evidence for case making.
- Greater awareness and appreciation of international literature by the UK public, particularly evidenced by the growth in interest from (and audiences at) festivals and other events e.g. in bookshops.

Legacy

This initiative brought together and then benefitted from a committed and able group of organisations and individual leaders who emerged through the programme and who are continuing to build on positive activities and structures that the programme produced.

An interesting impact of the Foundation's support is the reported level of interaction, crossover and synergy; despite the different structures of the two sectors, there was broad agreement that multilingualism and literary translation can be combined to great effect and this will continue to be explored.

The evaluation found evidence to suggest the potential for long-term impacts that are of particular interest to the Foundation including how this programme contributes to the aim of greater cultural understanding.

In terms of outcomes achieved, there is strong evidence that indicates how the Foundation's programme has driven a culture of influence in changing the perceptions of funders and (directly and indirectly) other players such as publishers and festivals about the validity, importance and viability of this work.

There is conclusive evidence that Foundation's support gave organisations the confidence to go further and to try new things – 'it was a catalyser' - and perhaps the greatest testament is the assertion from all involved that the programme has been transformational.