PUBLISHING TRANSLATIONS IN EUROPE

a survey of publishers

Developed by Literature Across Frontiers and prepared by the Budapest Observatory

December 2012

Making Literature Travel

a series of reports on literary exchange, translation and publishing

Series editor: Alexandra Büchler

LITERATURE ACROSS FRONTIERS

Mercator Institute for Media, Languages and Culture, Aberystwyth University, Wales, UK

With support from the Culture Programme of the European Union

Culture

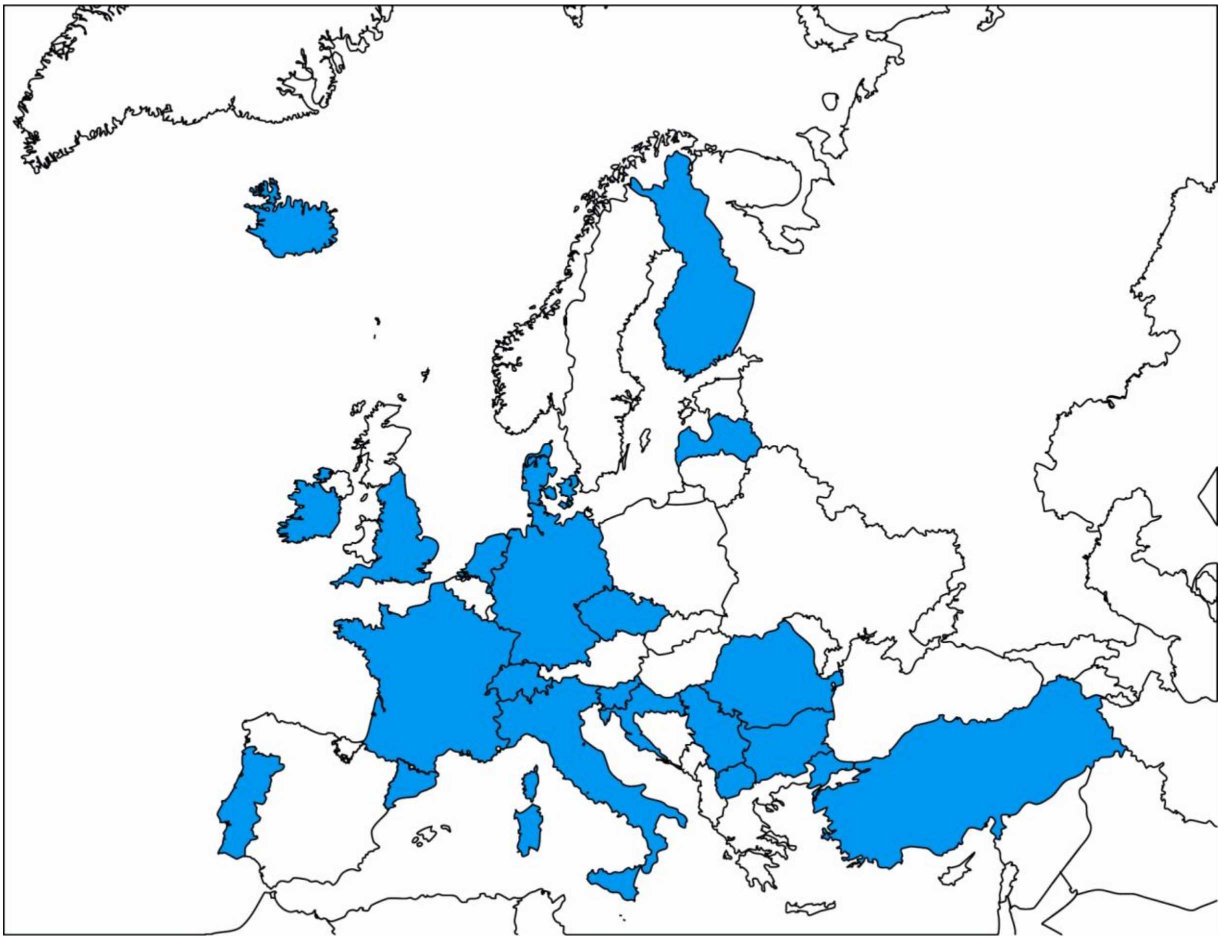
Contents

Introduction

The aim of the survey was to acquire information from selected European publishers directly involved in the business of publishing translated literature about the process of choosing and financing translations, and their relationship with translators on the one hand and translation funding agencies on the other. The findings can be seen as being particularly useful for these agencies, whether national, regional or European, in guiding their future policy deliberations. The survey was carried out in tandem with a survey of national bodies and organisations promoting literature and supporting translation and the two complement each other. Both surveys was conducted online in the first half of 2012 and processed in the autumn of the same year.

Description of the sample

Invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 300 selected publishers in EU member and candidate countries. 80 publishers from 22 countries responded to our invitation and completed the survey, representing a 26.6 % response rate and a fair geographical distribution in Europe.



The United Kingdom is best represented with 13 publishers, followed by Spain (8) and Turkey (7). Four countries produced responses from 5 publishers each. The low level of response from publishers based in German-speaking countries, France and Spain was particularly disappointing.

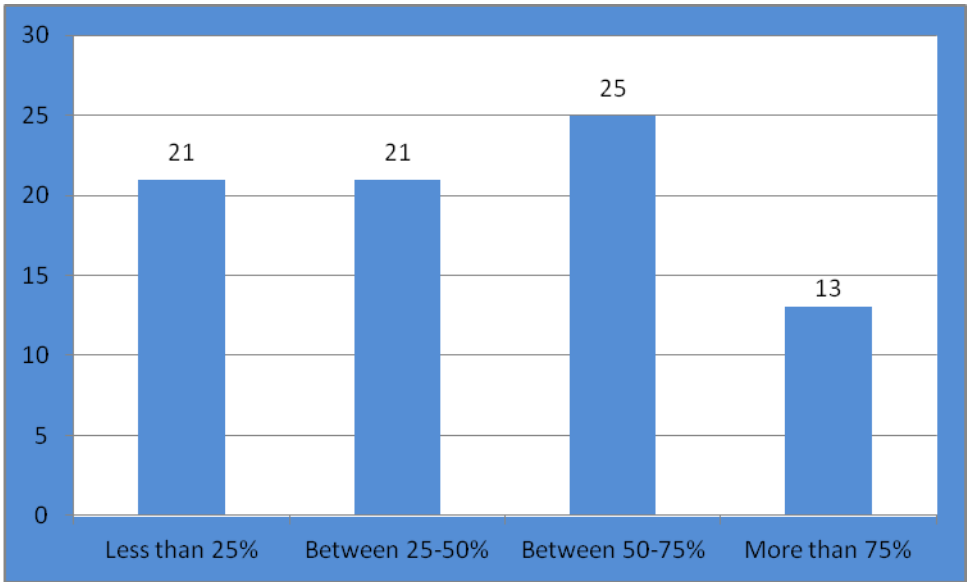
Bulgaria	4	Ireland	1	Romania	1
Croatia	4	Italy	3	Serbia	5
Czech Republic	3	Latvia	3	Slovenia	5
Denmark	1	Macedonia	4	Spain	8
Finland	1	Netherland	2	Switzerland	2
France	5	Norway	1	Turkey	7
Germany	5	Portugal	1	United Kingdom	13
Iceland	1				

The largest company to take part is JP Sluzbeni glasnik, Belgrade, with a staff of 373, followed by Timas Yayin Grubu – Timas Publishing Group, Istanbul, with 140, and Profil Knjiga, Zagreb, with 80 employees. However, the majority of the companies operate with fewer than 10 persons, and 33 of them with less than five.

There is wide variation in the number of titles published in a year. This indicator ranges from 1 to 350 among the participating publishers. The average house publishes 49 titles per year, seven more than those surveyed in 2010 in a somewhat smaller, but similar, sample.

The proportion of translation

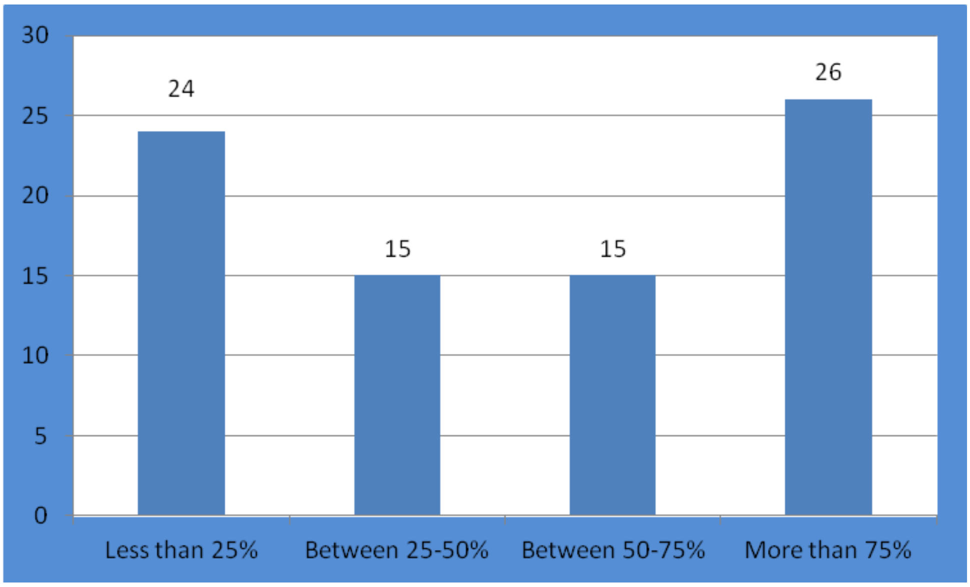
The range of the share of translated titles in the past three years is broad, from a symbolic 2% to the not less symbolic 100% (reported by a tiny English press). Within these extremes, however, there is a relatively balanced spread, with about half of the 80 publishers displaying over 50% translated titles in their lists of published books, as seen in the diagram below. (The figures above the column indicate the number of publishers in the category.)



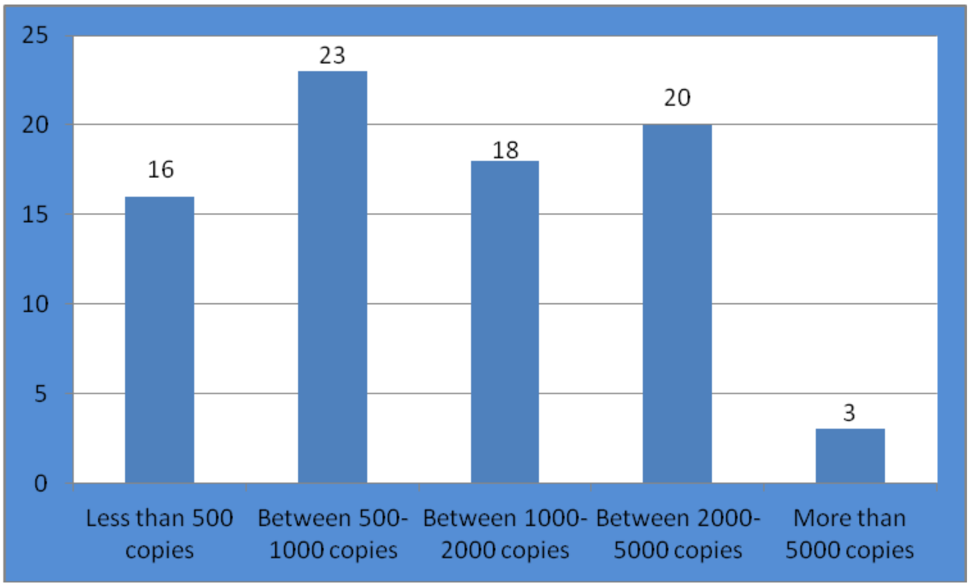
The translated genres

Fiction

The majority of the translated titles are fiction. In the cases of 26 publishers it represents more than 75% of translations.

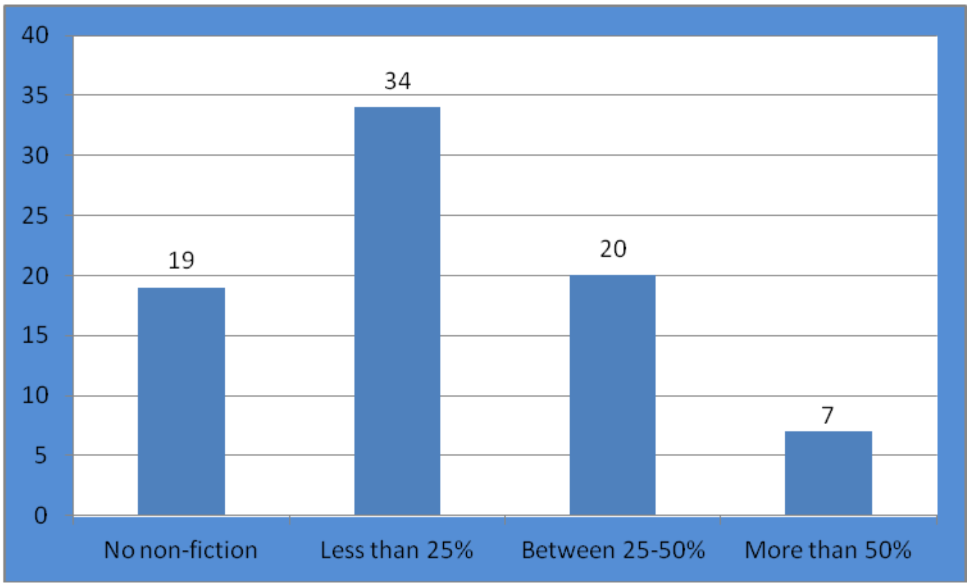


Print runs of translated fiction are also the highest in the sample. Only 16 publishers reported lower average print runs in the past three years than 500 copies. At the other end of the scale are three presses that claimed impressive averages of over 5000 published copies per work of translated fiction.



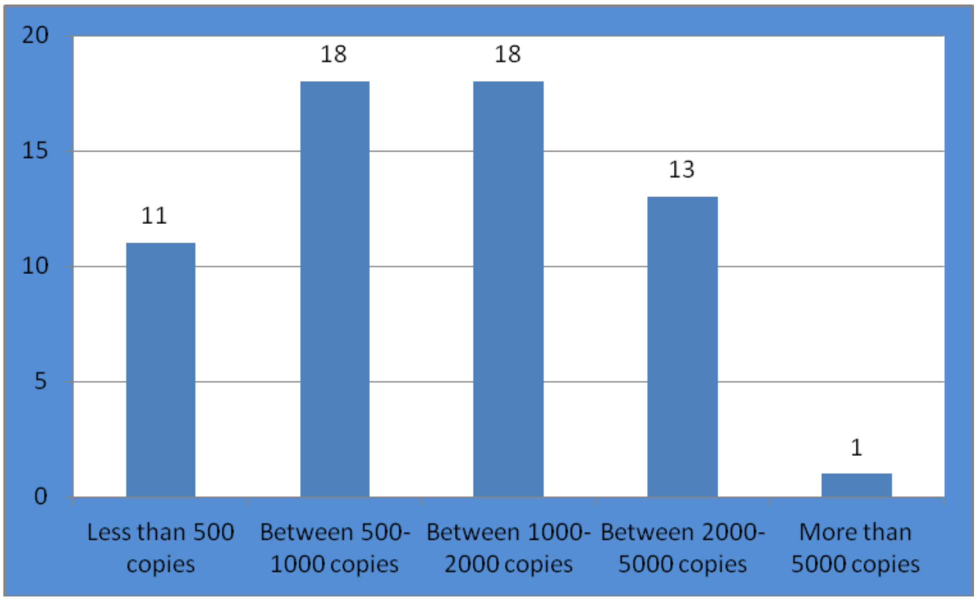
Non-fiction

19 of the publishers do not publish translated non-fiction, and for the majority of the rest this category, mainly humanities, represents less than a quarter of their output. Out of the 80 respondents only 7 specialise in non-fiction, which comprises 50% of their translations.



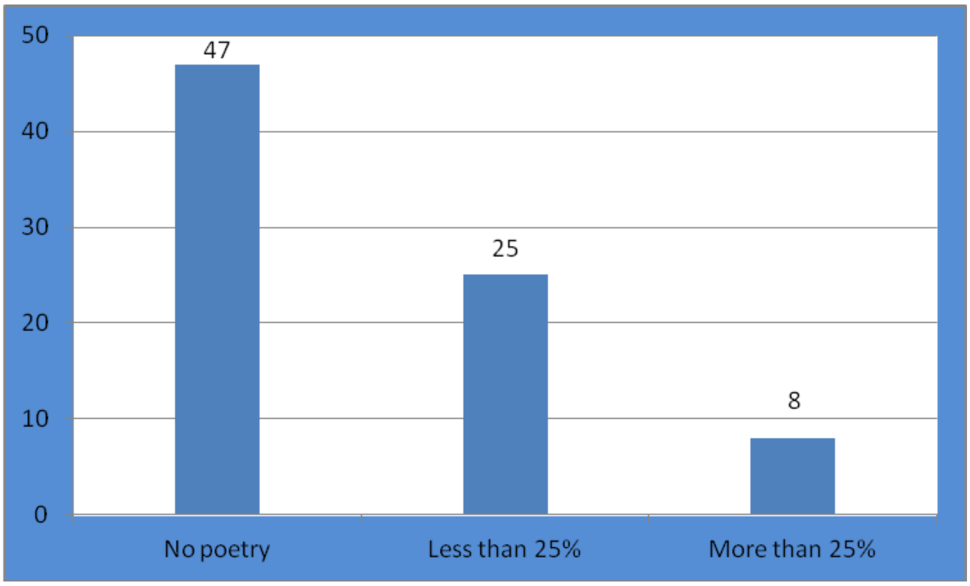
The quantities of books produced are lower than the figures seen for fiction titles. The diagram shows the distribution of the 61 presses that publish foreign non-fiction by the average number of copies produced in the past three years.

Only 32 publishers reported higher print runs than 1000 (compared with 42 publishers in the case of fiction), although a single press sold over 5000 copies of translated non-fiction titles.

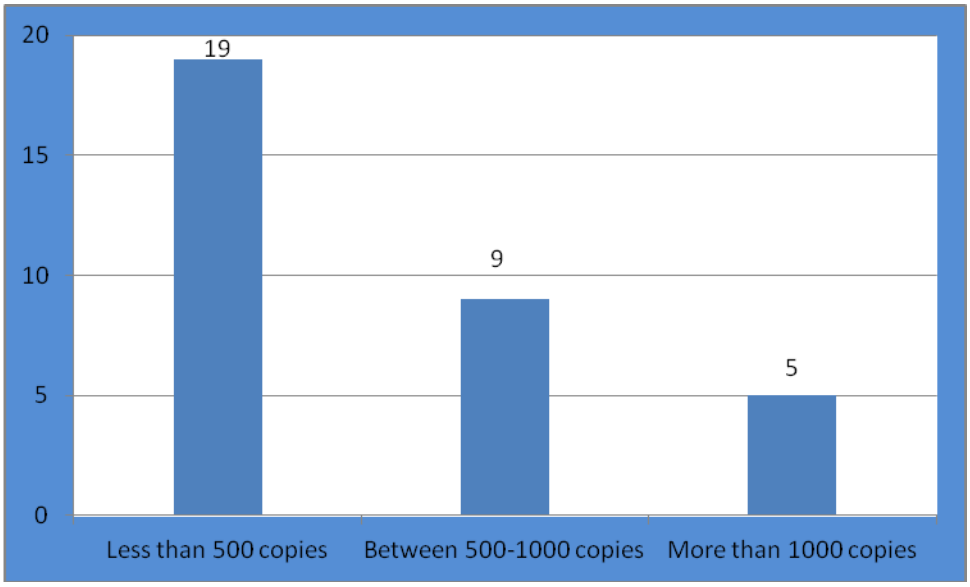


Poetry

If publishing literature in translation is a challenge, publishing poetry in translation is doubly challenging, and an activity widely accepted to be possible only with the help of subsidies. The majority of the publishing houses in the survey publish fiction and non-fiction. There are, however, eight companies where more than a quarter of their translated works are poetry titles.



The 33 publishers that venture in the field of poetry reported modest print runs. Nevertheless there are five presses that regularly publish over 1000 copies of their translated poetry books.



The effect of the economic crisis

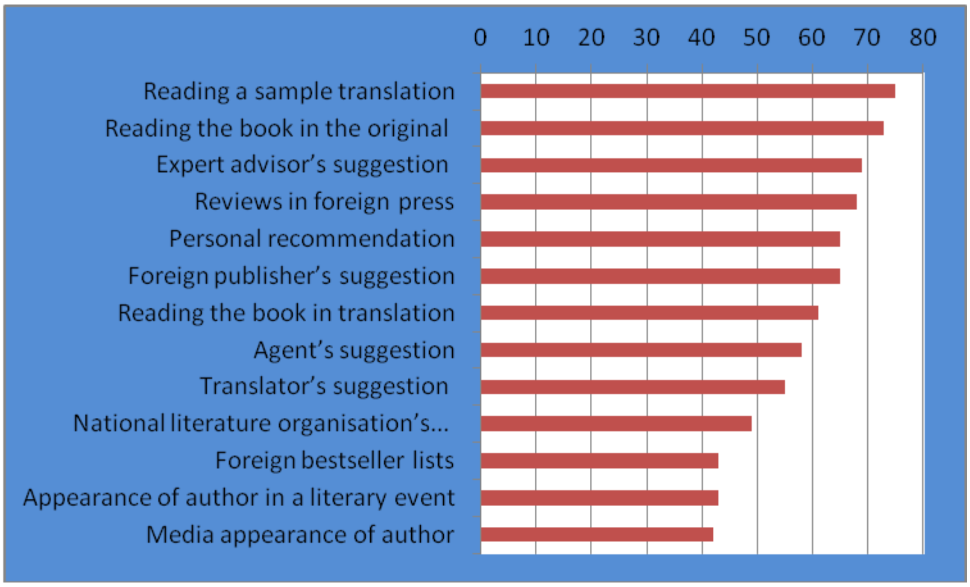
Most of the publishers in the survey have so far managed to survive the economic crisis without great sacrifices. 49 out of 80 said that they had not reduced their output of translated books in the last two years. Size matters relatively little in this regard, and both small and large publishers' responses did not differ much.

In some parts of Europe the crisis has been felt far more strongly than elsewhere. In our findings it was the publishers from France, Italy and Spain where the majority reported a decrease in their output of translations. Although the culture sector in the UK has in general been hit particularly hard due to cuts in public funding, the 13 UK publishers in our sample reported more positively:

Has your output of translated books decreased in the last two years as a result of the financial crisis?		
	yes	no
Latin countries	9	7
Eastern Europe	11	20
UK	3	10
The rest (including Turkey)	8	12
Total 80	**31**	**49**

Choosing titles to translate

Choosing a title to publish is the most critical decision a publisher makes. Choosing a title to translate is even more challenging. The next question in the survey asked about publishers' methods of choosing foreign titles for translation. The next table contains the ranked list of selection methods by the number of positive responses:

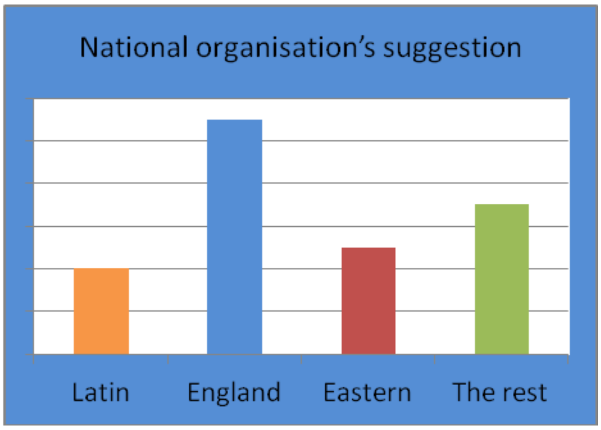


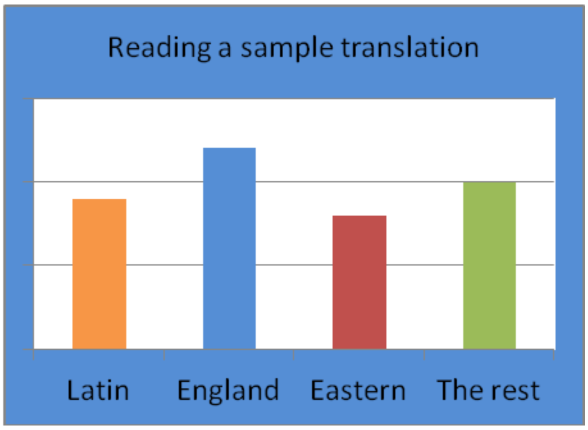
Reading at least a portion of the foreign text is clearly the preferred method. The personal impact of an author in the media or at an event counts for much less, although a little more than half of the 80 publishers occasionally rely on it. Translators' suggestions are followed to a lesser degree than we assumed when designing the survey, and the modest role that national literature organisations play is even more surprising, given the resources dedicated to promoting individual titles and authors.

The previous table contains all positive responses, both "occasionally" and "almost always". It is interesting to see the difference (below) if only the "almost always" answers are ranked:

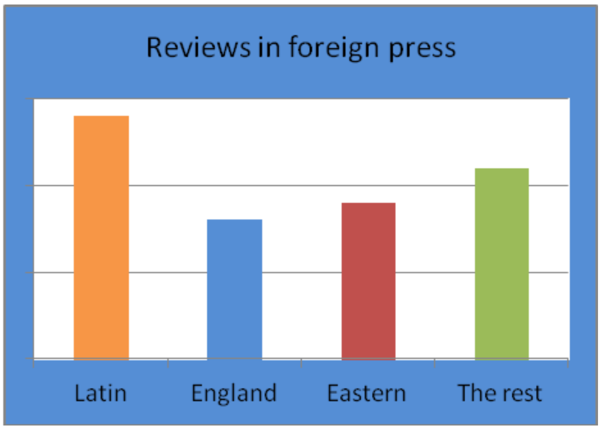
Again, the majority of the 80 publishers "almost always" read the foreign book in the original. Sample translations fall behind, as 60 respondents reported using them "occasionally" only. National literature organisations came even lower, as no more than five publishers follow their advice regularly.

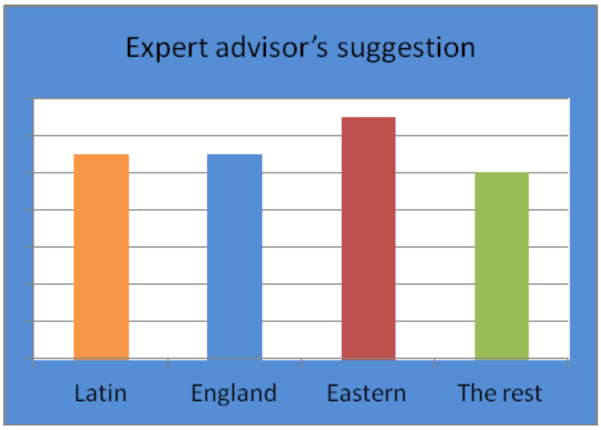
Considerable geographical differences could be discerned in two aspects. UK publishers are clearly keener to listen to national literature organisations' recommendations, especially compared with their 'Latin' colleagues. They read sample translations more than anyone else, too. (The columns are based on frequency of answers, whereby double weight was given to "almost always".)



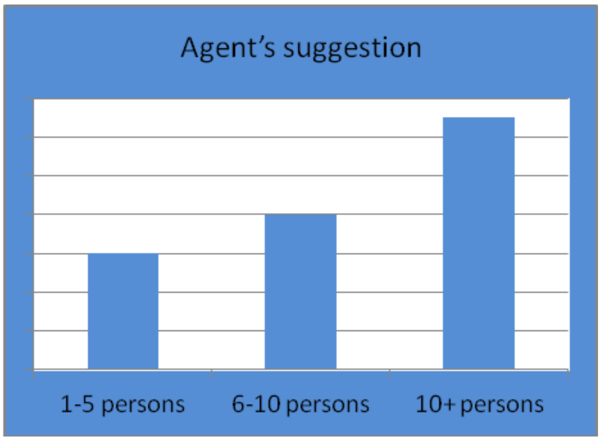


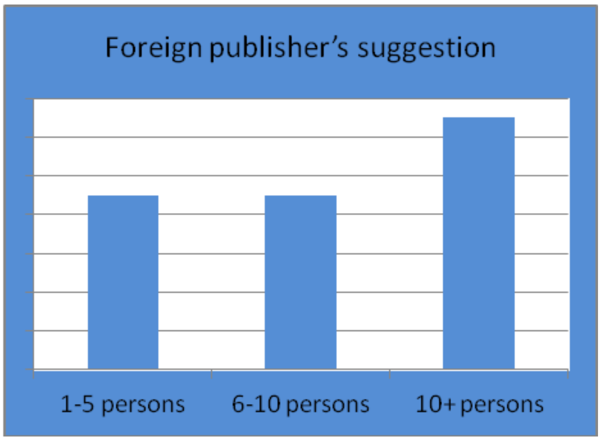
French, Spanish and Italian publishers are the most attentive to book reviews in the foreign press. The 31 publishers from Eastern Europe, however, did not share specific features as we could see with the patterns for companies from Latin countries and the UK. The only method that Serbs, Slovenes and their colleagues apply slightly more frequently than the rest is 'using expert advice in selecting titles'.





With regard to the size of publishing house, it is in two aspects that the larger ones differ in their methods from the smaller presses. The 26 companies in our sample with more than ten staff members listen to professional agents and scouts more regularly than the rest. Larger houses are also more often in business contact with foreign publishers, which includes exchanges of titles, too.





These two selection methods (above) are not the most favoured, and there is much less difference between small and large publishers' answers.

Among the many additional comments by respondents to this survey, the role of book fairs stands out. Seven publishers mentioned it as an important scene for selecting new titles. Authors as sources of information were also mentioned, for recommending both themselves and other authors. Various resources on the Internet also offer guidance, including social media. Several publishers also emphasized the importance of searching for new titles on location, in a foreign country.

Less diffused languages in translation

The next set of questions inquired about relative difficulties with source languages. Publishers could name up to three languages in response to the question "With which less diffused languages did you meet the greatest difficulties in publishing a translation?" The list is led by Russian, and 18 other languages were mentioned at least three times. Difficulties can arise from the linguistic or literary background, but the answers also reflect the services that publishers can rely on.

Russian	10	Chinese	6	Finnish	4
Japanese	9	Icelandic	5	Hungarian	4
Czech	8	Norwegian	5	Polish	4
Greek	8	Turkish	5	Estonian	3
Danish	7	Albanian	4	Korean	3
Swedish	7	Dutch	4	Serbian	3
Arabic	6				

We compared the list with its opposite, the register of languages with which publishers met the least difficulty in publishing a translation, given in response to the next question. Interestingly, publishers found it easier to highlight good experiences than problems. The 80 respondents mentioned altogether 156 unproblematic cases against 132 difficulties.

The most frequently mentioned "unproblematic less diffused" five languages also figure among the most difficult ones, which suggests that the top position on the problematic list demonstrates interest, too: publishers encountered difficulties often because they persevered with the challenges they faced. We shall later see, however, that the eminent position of Dutch on the "no problem" list is well founded. (In green: those mentioned positively more often than on the difficulty register.)

Dutch	16	Hungarian	6	Icelandic	4
Norwegian	13	Romanian	6	Portuguese	4
Swedish	13	Turkish	6	Russian	4
Polish	11	Croatian	5	Serbian	4
Finnish	9	Czech	5	Arabic	3
Catalan	7	Estonian	5	Hebrew	3
Danish	6	Japanese	5	Slovene	3

Dividing publishers by geographic groups, we find some characteristic differences. Interestingly, the Latin group complained the most, naming 2.3 difficult languages each, while the average UK publisher cited a mere 1.5.

Russian was mentioned once among the 65 languages on the East European "difficult" list, while it leads on both the Latin and English lists. Similarly, Czech and Polish are absent from the large Eastern list but are high on the list of English and Latin presses. The Eastern complaint list is led by four languages with five mentions each: Greek, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish – and translating from Swedish tops the positive list of the same Eastern group with eight mentions.

The larger the publisher the more languages it mentioned, both in terms of positive and negative translation experiences. Of the 26 houses with a larger staff than ten, Russian and Japanese clearly lead the complaint list, while Dutch and Norwegian are undisputed leaders of the difficulty register.

Greek stands out as the most difficult for middle size presses, whose favourite is Swedish. For the small presses with fewer than five employees, translating from Czech is the greatest headache, while Finnish has presented the least difficulty.

In response to the question asking to specify the kind of difficulties experienced, the votes of the 80 publishers formed a broad span between anxiety about a reliable translator (53) to copyright (9 mentions):

Translation funding agencies

The survey asked about 40 bodies, centres and agencies operating translation funds, the great majority of which are administered or financed by national governments. When discussing the role of national literature agencies, we focused on both the information and the grants they provide. It appears that a number of publishers do not use the full range of the agencies' services, but the uptake of grants is relatively high. In the survey, 51 publishers reported having published a book at the suggestion of one or other of the 40 agencies in the list, since 2005; they also named further organisations, which explains the total 156 mentions made. The following 19 organisations were mentioned by at least three publishing houses:

Dutch Literature Foundation	20
Goethe Institute	10
Danish Arts Council	9
Pro Helvetia (Switzerland)	9
Ramon Llull Institute – Catalonia	9
Traduki	9
Book Institute Poland	8
Finnish Literature Exchange	8
Flemish Literature Fund	8
Norwegian Literature Abroad (NORLA)	7
Canada Council	5
Hungarian Book Foundation	5
Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature	5
Swedish Arts Council	5
Icelandic Literature Fund	4
Ireland Literature Exchange	4
Italian Ministry of Culture / Italian Cultural Institute	4
French Culture Ministry	3
The Japan Foundation	3

With regard to translation subsidies, only four out of 80 publishers indicated not having received any (as opposed to 39 not having received suggestions). There are 42 grants agencies on the list (besides the European Commission, see later). All in all, 419 agency – publishing house relationships have been recorded as supporting translation since 2005, affecting a much higher number of titles. The first 16 bodies, agencies or organisations on this list have granted financial support to at least ten publishers in the survey:

French Culture Ministry / French Book Offices	38
Dutch Literature Foundation	29
Goethe Institute	26
Book Institute Poland	21
Spanish Ministry of Culture	20
Norwegian Literature Abroad (NORLA)	19
Canada Council	17
Ramon Llull Institute - Catalonia	17
Danish Arts Council	16

Pro Helvetia (Switzerland)	16
Swedish Arts Council	16
Traduki	16
Czech Ministry of Culture	15
Ireland Literature Exchange	15
Finnish Literature Exchange	14
Italian Ministry of Culture / Italian Cultural Institute	12
Icelandic Literature Fund	11
Slovenian Book Agency / Trubar Fund	11
Romanian Cultural Institute	10

The leading position of the Dutch Literature Foundation is clear, although the French translation funding sources appears as the most generous sponsor of translations in all. Noteworthy is the high position occupied in both lists by several organisations which focus on books and literature (as opposed to bodies supporting culture in general where books and literature is one of supported sectors): the Book Institute Poland, Norwegian Literature Abroad or Finnish Literature Exchange.

Publishers were also asked to evaluate the printed or online information resources provided by these agencies on a three grade scale: of limited use, occasionally useful, very useful. Here is the top of the list generated from the marks that the 80 publishers gave on the scale:

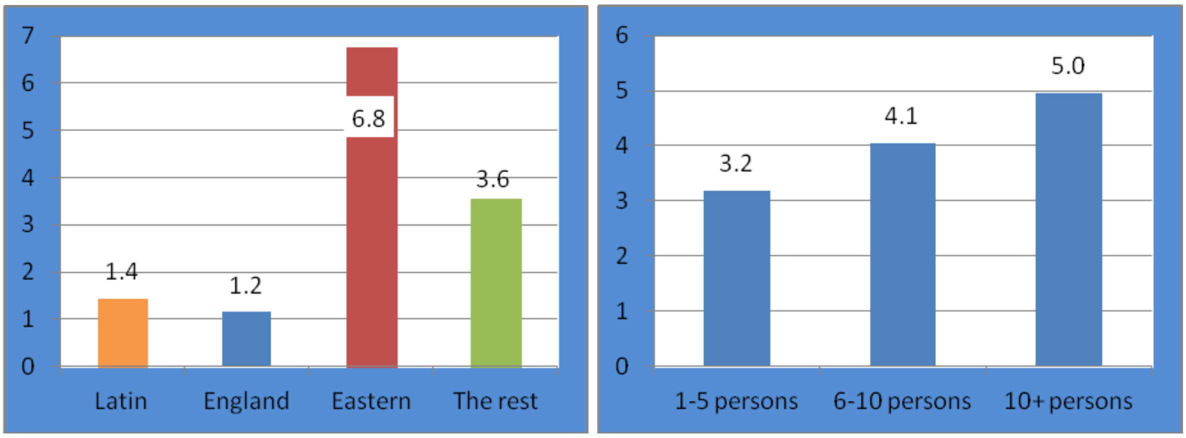
Dutch Literature Foundation	86
Goethe Institute	69
Book Institute Poland	56
Norwegian Literature Abroad (NORLA)	48
Flemish Literature Fund	43
Pro Helvetia (Switzerland)	43
Finnish Literature Exchange	42
Danish Arts Council	41
Ramon Llull Institute – Catalonia	40
Canada Council	37
Swedish Arts Council	34
French Culture Ministry	33
Traduki	29
Directorate of Books and Libraries (DGLB) - Portugal	26
Estonian Cultural Endowment Traducta programme	25
Icelandic Literature Fund	25
Ireland Literature Exchange	23
Slovenian Book Agency / Trubar Fund	20

Australia Council	18
Spanish Ministry of Culture	18
Books From Lithuania	16
Hungarian Book Foundation	16
Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature	15
Wales Literature Exchange	15
Romanian Cultural Institute	14
The Japan Foundation	13
Austrian Culture Ministry	10

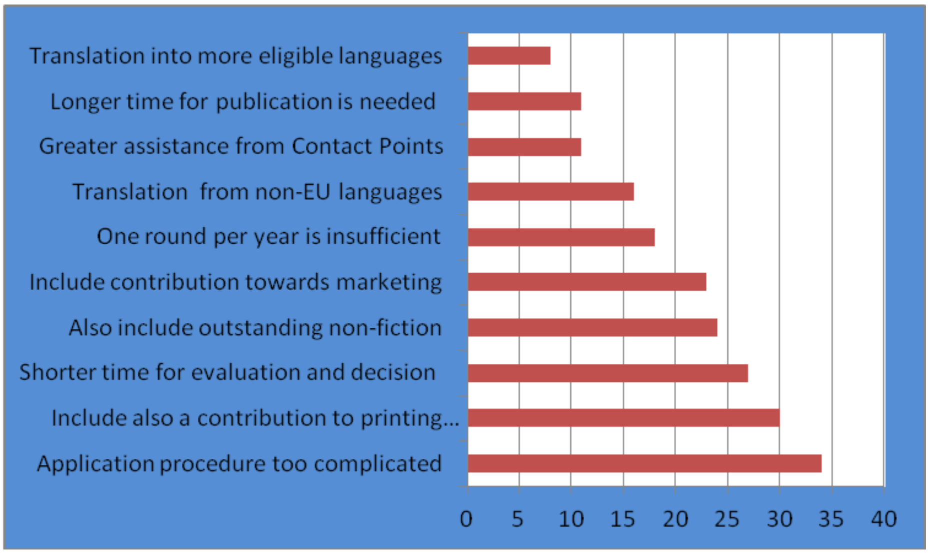
Translation grants

The survey revealed that 40% of the 80 publishers have received translation grants from the EU Culture Programme since 2007. The number of supported titles per publisher ranges from one (i.e. there were four publishers that received EU support for 1 title each) to about 60. A very high score was achieved by Colibri Publishers in Sofia, who have been particularly successful in publishing translations with EU backing. The second highest on our list, the Dutch De Geus publishing house, reported about 36 titles. The most typical response was 6 titles, reported by 5 presses. The 32 publishers brought out around 220 titles with the support of the European Commission.

The main beneficiaries of the EU translation grants strand of the EU Culture Programme are Eastern European publishers. The diagram below shows the average number of titles by publisher supported by the EU since 2007 in the various categories.

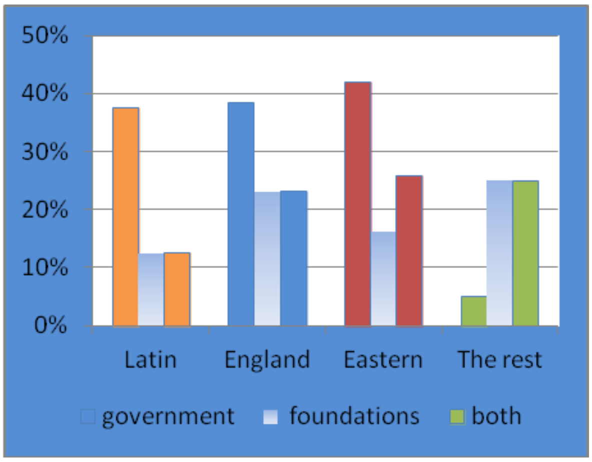


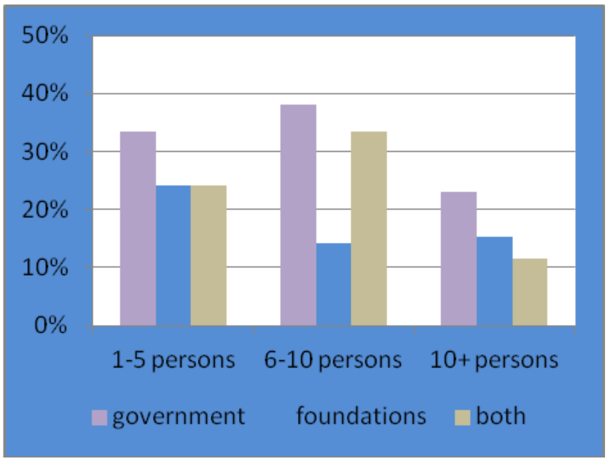
The survey also consulted publishers about their wishes and recommendations with regard to the translation grants programme of the EU. In this case too, the answers shape a regular hierarchy, with the evergreen hope for simpler administration at the top of the list, mentioned by 34 publishers out of the 80. Other responses of interest relate to additional contribution for printing and marketing costs, and broadening of the range of eligible languages.



Publishing translated books has been subsidized from a variety of other sources in addition to the Culture Program of the European Union. 58 publishers (72.5%) have received some other financial support in the past five years. More than half, 53.8% were subsidized by their own governments, with or without receiving additional funds from private foundations. Private foundations have supported 41.3% of the 80 publishers, with or without the other main source, the government.

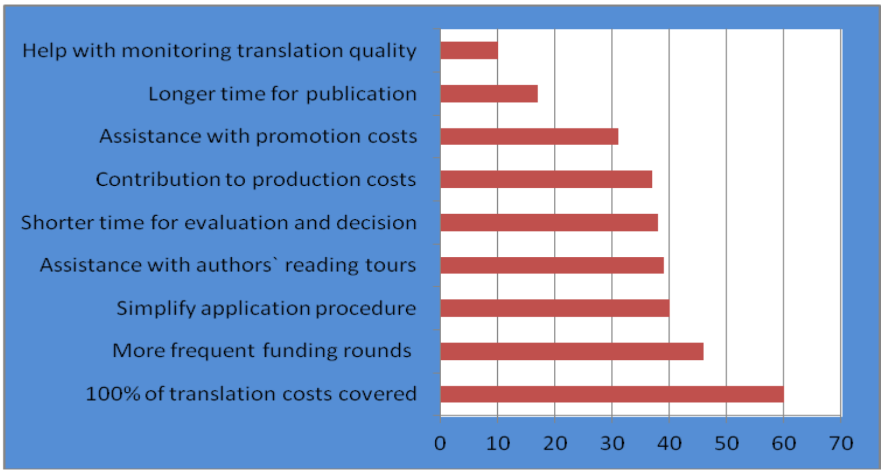
Private foundations counted less in the life of "Latin" publishers, whose main sponsor has been their own government – although to a lesser extent than the 13 English presses in the survey, who could in addition rely on private foundations, too. Governmental subsidies were, however, nowhere as significant as in Eastern Europe, while in the remaining 20 cases (mainly Northern Europe and Turkey) foundations have played the main role. It is important to see, however, that the data reflect the number of publishers receiving assistance from one or more sources; we did not ask about the size of subsidy in relation to costs in general, or publishing of translations in particular.





Larger houses are less reliant on governmental subsidies. The diagram shows, however, that presses in the 6-10-person staff range have been more regular beneficiaries of governmental aid than the tiny publishing enterprises.

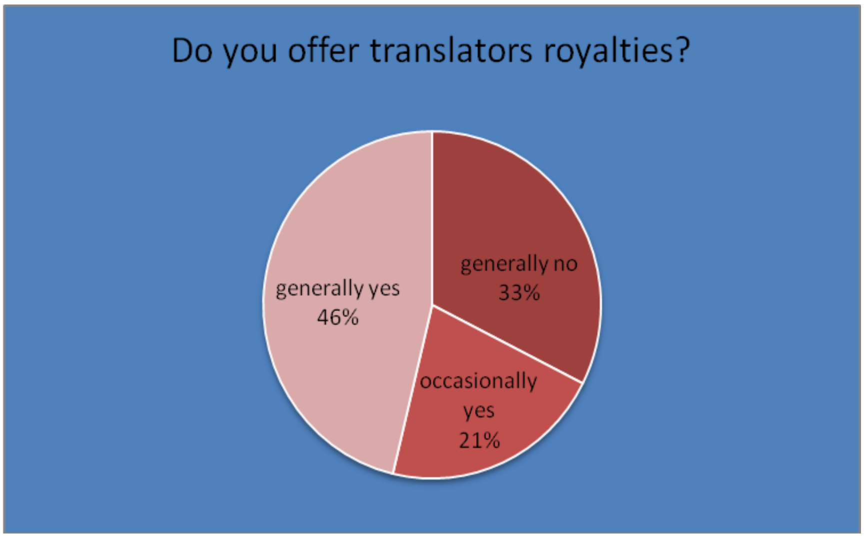
With regard to government funding, the wish to cover the full costs of translation is voiced by 75% of publishers in the survey. This request stands out from the list below:



Acknowledging translators' work

77 publishers out of 80 include information on the translator in the marketing and publicity of their books, and 56 of them stated that this is their general practice.

One way of motivating and gratifying translators is to offer them royalties. This also creates a lasting bond between the publisher and the translator. Only a third of the respondents admitted to not using this incentive.



When asked about other ways of acknowledging translators, publishers came forward with a great number of comments. The most frequently mentioned measure was putting her/his name on the cover (jacket) of the book. The second most frequent way is involving the translator in the promotion of the book. This takes various forms. The translator's name may be included in the promotional materials, sometimes highlighting the merit of the translation; or she/he is personally involved in the launch events and media interviews. Five responses referred to introducing the translator to the author, or — if this link has already been established — asking her/him to accompany the author at promotional events.

Six publishers responded that the translators are featured on their company website, also with regard to social media. Several times the translator's biography was mentioned, having been used in the front pages of the book or the publisher's website.

Nominating the translator for awards and prizes was also frequently mentioned. Nevertheless, only two publishers mentioned a more direct form of the translator being financially rewarded, namely raising their rate of pay.

Conclusion

The survey was not limited to publishers who specialize in publishing translations, but in our selection we focused on publishers who publish quality literary works. It is important to keep in mind that there is an essential distinction between publishers in the UK and in the rest of Europe, in that publishing literature in translation is a specialized activity in English-speaking countries, while in the rest of Europe the majority of houses publish books in translation with content drawn predominantly from English-speaking territories and with a high proportion of bestsellers. English-language publishers by contrast almost exclusively publish books of high literary quality with a small proportion of thrillers and crime novels, often literary in style.

The survey shows an improvement in acknowledging translators and in their relationship with publishers, and is particularly useful in giving an indication of how publishers select titles to publish in translation and what challenges they face vis-à-vis less widely spoken or less diffused languages. The to are connected to an extent: it is far easier to select from among titles written in languages the publisher can read and from which he can find qualified translators.

The survey confirms that subsidies — whether public or private — are essential to making it possible for quality literature in translation to compete on the open market. The financial support of national governments, foundations, and the European Commission has been crucial in dealing with the challenges of publishing translations, especially now in the middle of an economic crisis, for the majority of surveyed publishers, particularly in Eastern Europe. The survey has also underscored the importance of additional activities undertaken by the national literature bodies and foundations, such as provision of information and support for promotion and marketing of published books. In this context, it is also clear that now more than before publishers would appreciate assistance with full costs of translation, which would make the publishing of a translated title more commercially viable for them.

In this context, it is important to note that the past two years have seen cuts in public budgets, particularly in countries severely affected by the financial crisis, which have resulted in mergers of public bodies or the outright dismantling of government bodies responsible for culture, as is the case in Portugal or in Spain, where culture has been absorbed into a larger ministry where it has become a minor portfolio next to education and sport. In addition, the complementary survey of national organisations has indicated that further budget cuts are expected and this will in turn have an impact on publishers dependent on subsidies.

In this context, the findings survey can be seen as being particularly useful in helping translation funding bodies and arms-length agencies in their future policy deliberations as far as deciding where and how to invest their diminishing resources, and might lead to a further diversification of their provision and services on the one hand, and reallocation of funds on the other.