

PUBLISHING TRANSLATIONS IN EUROPE SURVEY OF PUBLISHERS

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Introduction

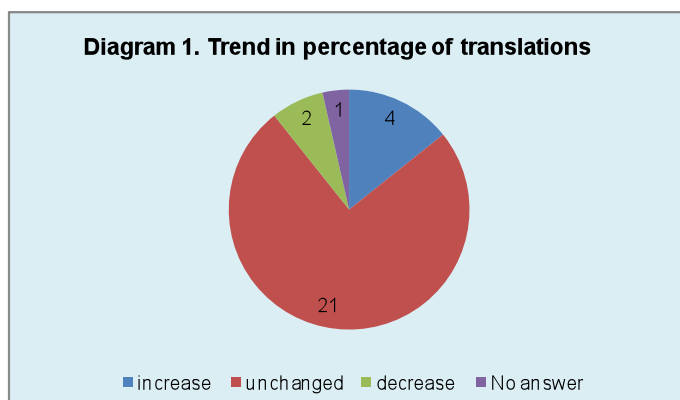
The aim of the inquiry was to acquire first-hand information from the field, from a number of selected European publishers that are directly involved in publishing translated literature. The survey was done in summer and autumn of 2010 with the help of an online questionnaire.

Description of the sample

28 publishers took the pains to answer our questions from eight countries: 9 from Germany, 8 from the United Kingdom, 4 from Switzerland, 2-2 from Hungary and Slovenia, and 1-1 from Austria, France and Macedonia. The biggest company was Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin with staff number 100, followed by Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart with 24 and Schöffling & Co. Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH., Frankfurt am Main with 12 employees. All other companies work with teams smaller than 10 persons. There is a big difference in the number of titles published, ranging from 20 to 5000 among the participating publishers, the average figure being about 2000.

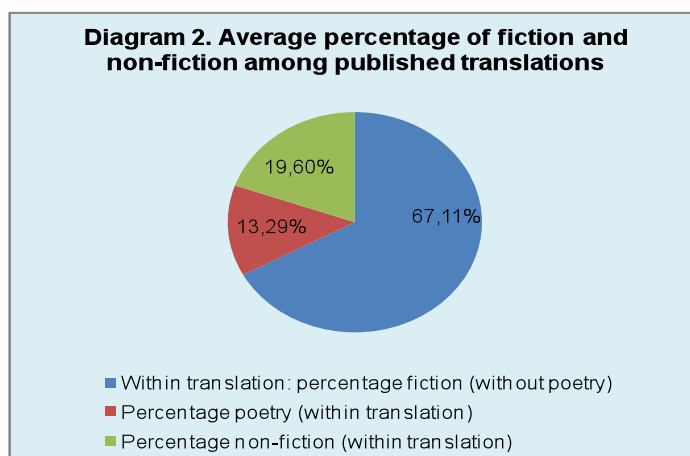
Translation trends

The number of titles published by the 28 presses in a year add up to 1137. The average publisher publishes 42 titles per year, the actual figures vary from 8 to 600. Regarding the trends most of them (21) work in stable circumstances and do not show dynamic changes in the number of titles. 4 of them reported increase in this sense but 2 felt a decreasing trend (1 press skipped this answer).



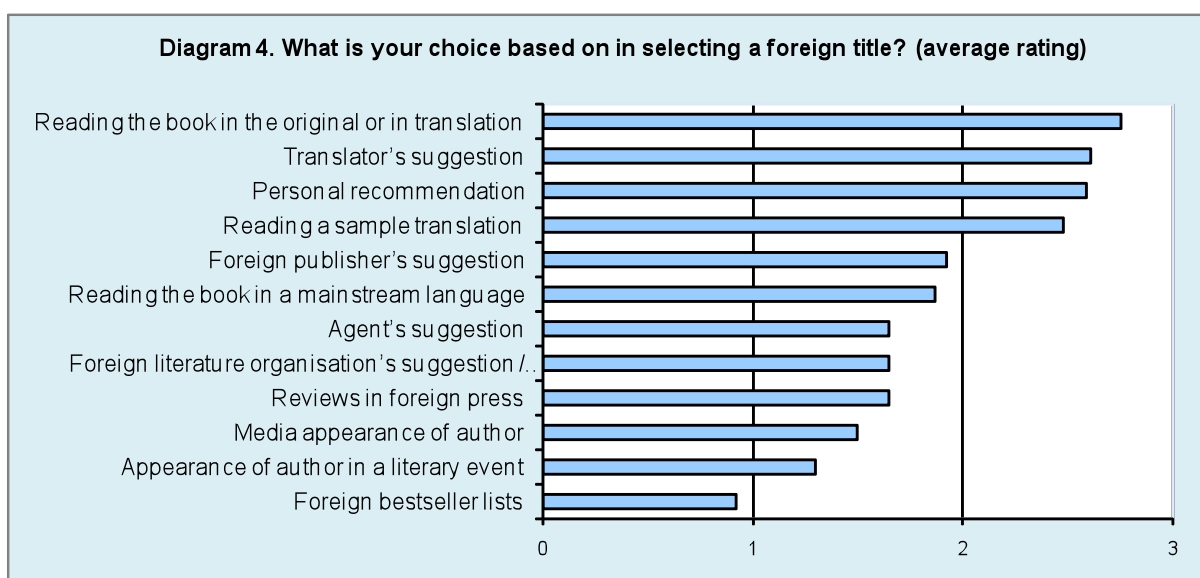
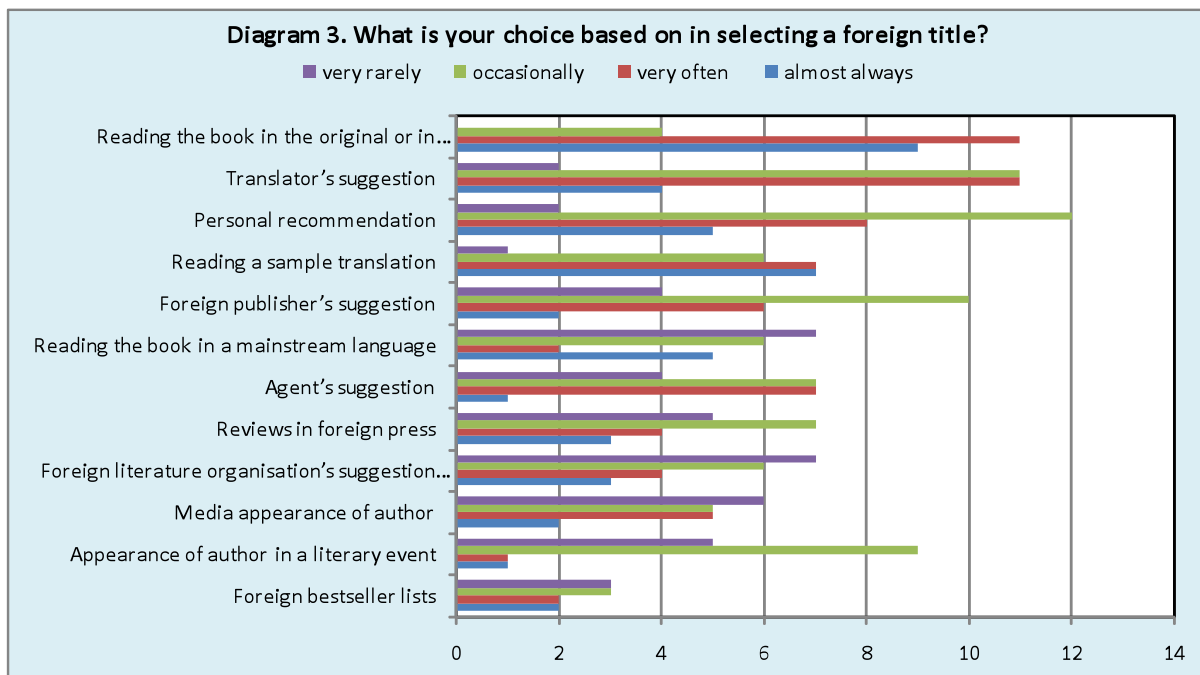
Fiction and non-fiction

The majority of the published translations are fiction (novels, short stories, on average 67,1%), while poetry (19,6%) and non-fiction (13,3) represent smaller shares.



Selection of foreign titles

In the next question publishers were asked about their methods of choosing foreign titles for translation. The companies responded that they very often read the book in the original or in translation, and this is the basis of their choice; a considerable share of publishers claimed that almost always this was the case. This means that in more than two third of the cases publishers prefer to read the original before they publish a title. A reasonable number of companies, however, said that it is in a mainstream language that they regularly (almost always or very often) read the books beforehand. A smaller group of respondents answered that they read a sample translation, which then also qualifies as a common practice when choosing titles to publish.



Less diffused languages in translation

The publishers answered questions regarding their experiences in translating less diffused (or less widely spoken) languages. By this we mean languages generally not spoken beyond their territory

and not learned as a language of communication beyond the territory where they are spoken. Respondents were supposed to answer the question “With which less diffused languages did you meet no or little difficulty in publishing a translation (name up to three languages)”. The most frequently mentioned “unproblematic less diffused” languages were Catalan, Danish, Dutch, and Russian with 4 mentions. However, if we calculate the 2 additional mentions of Flemish-Dutch, the Dutch language appears to be among the more translated of these languages. The next group of languages with 3 mentions includes Croatian, Finnish, Icelandic, Portuguese, Polish and Romanian. Turkish was named twice. Ten languages were mentioned only once, such as: Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Farsi, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Ukrainian and Welsh.

Table 1. With which less diffused languages did you meet no or little difficulty in publishing a translation?

Language	Number of mentions
Catalan, Danish, Dutch, Russian	4
Croatian, Finnish, Icelandic, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian	3
Flemish-Dutch, Turkish	2
Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Farsi, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Ukrainian, Welsh	1

On the other hand, the question about the most difficult languages went as follows: “With which less diffused languages did you meet the greatest difficulties in publishing a translation (name up to three languages)?”. According to the answers the languages, whose literatures posed the greatest problems to publishers were based in Asia and the Middle East: undoubtedly, publishing Chinese literature is the greatest challenge (5 mentions), followed by Arabic and Hebrew (4-4 mentions), and Japanese (3 mentions). The most problematic European source languages were Dutch and Estonian (2-25 mentions), and all the remaining languages quoted were European.

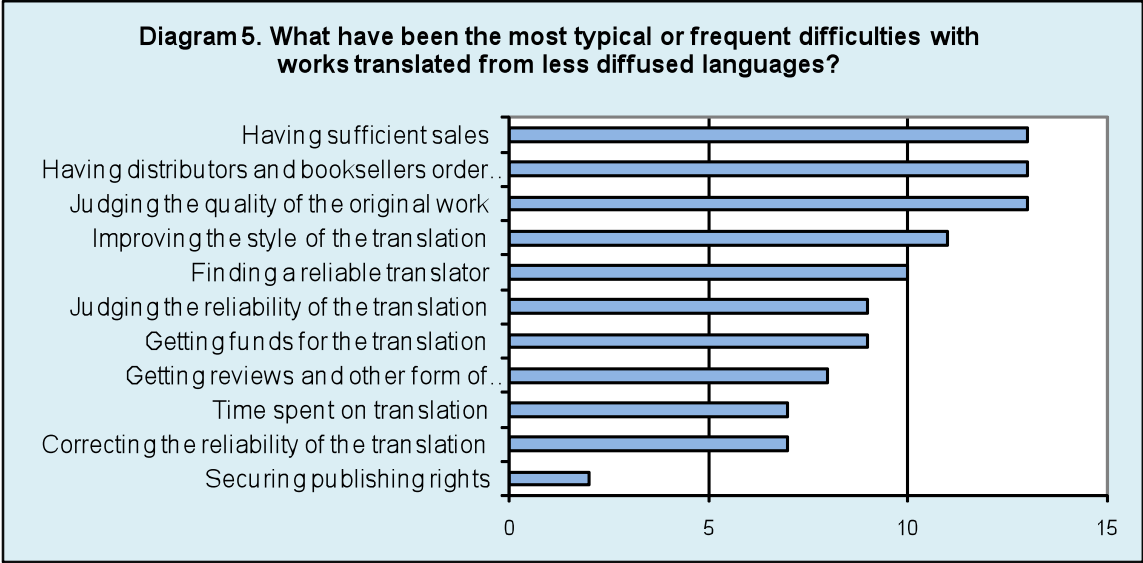
Table 2. With which less diffused languages did you meet the greatest difficulties in publishing a translation?

Language	Number of mention
Chinese	5
Arabic, Hebrew	4
Japanese	3
Dutch, Estonian	2
Albanian, Basque, Czech, Greek, Hungarian, Latvian, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Swedish	1

Three languages appear in both lists. Against three positive mentions, one publisher complained about Romanian. The balance of Czech is one to one. Paradoxically, Dutch collected two negative mentions against being declared as the least problematic source language in literature translation; at any rate, the high occurrence testifies about a strong presence of Dutch in the European literary scene, a situation clearly owing to the extensive promotional activities of the Dutch Literature Foundation.

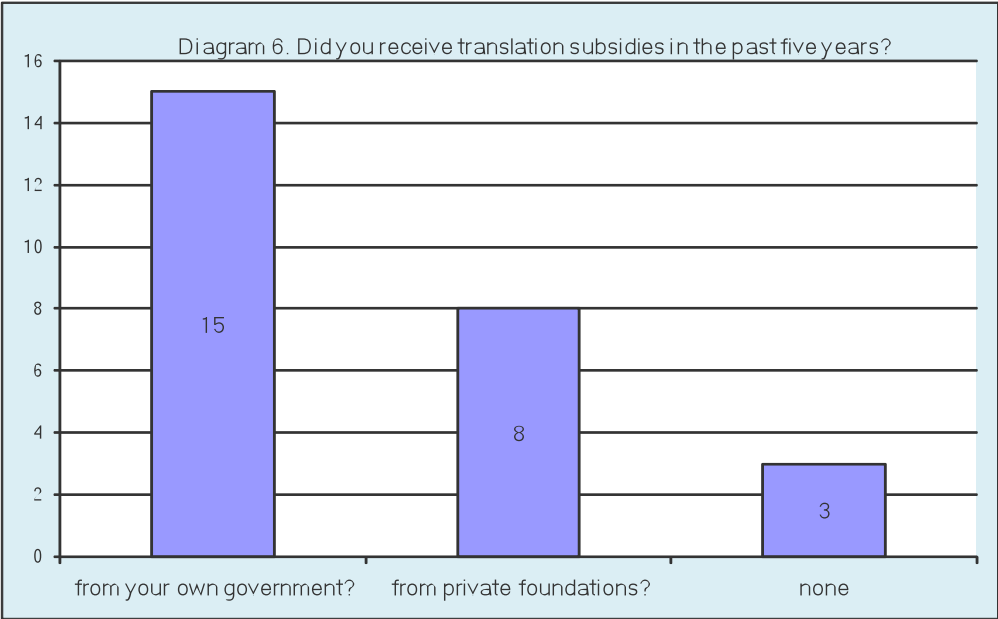
The survey also asked about the typical or frequent problems with those languages, or rather problems with translating and publishing literature written in them. The main anxiety is about appealing to readers; the two items about demand for translated literature dominate the answers.

Judging the quality of the original work is also a main concern. Less problematic but still essential issue is judging of the reliability of the translation, and improving its quality. Acquiring rights have proved to cause the least headache to responding publishers.



Translation grants and subsidies

The majority of publishers that participated in the survey received translation subsidies in the past five years; 8 of them received subsidies from private sources. Only 3 of 28 the organisations received neither governmental nor private subsidy for their published translations.

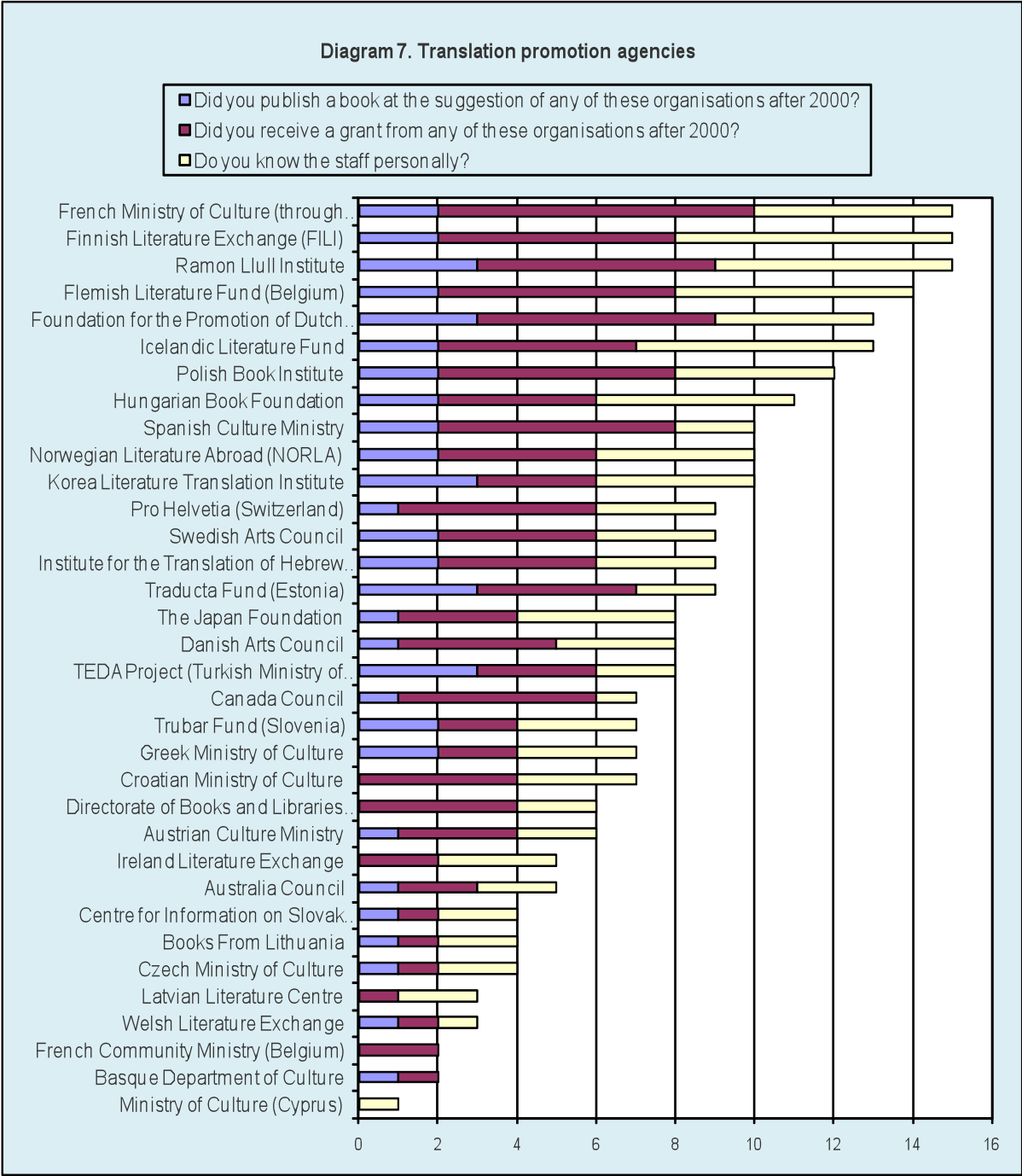


To measure the effectiveness and impact of the organisations promoting their literature and supporting translation, 33 of them were listed and publishers were asked about their relationship: personal connections to staff, grants, and suggestions received from them to publish specific titles.

After FILI, the Finnish organisation, the Flemish, Icelandic and Catalan language institutions are the best known among the respondents, while the French Ministry of Culture provided grants to the

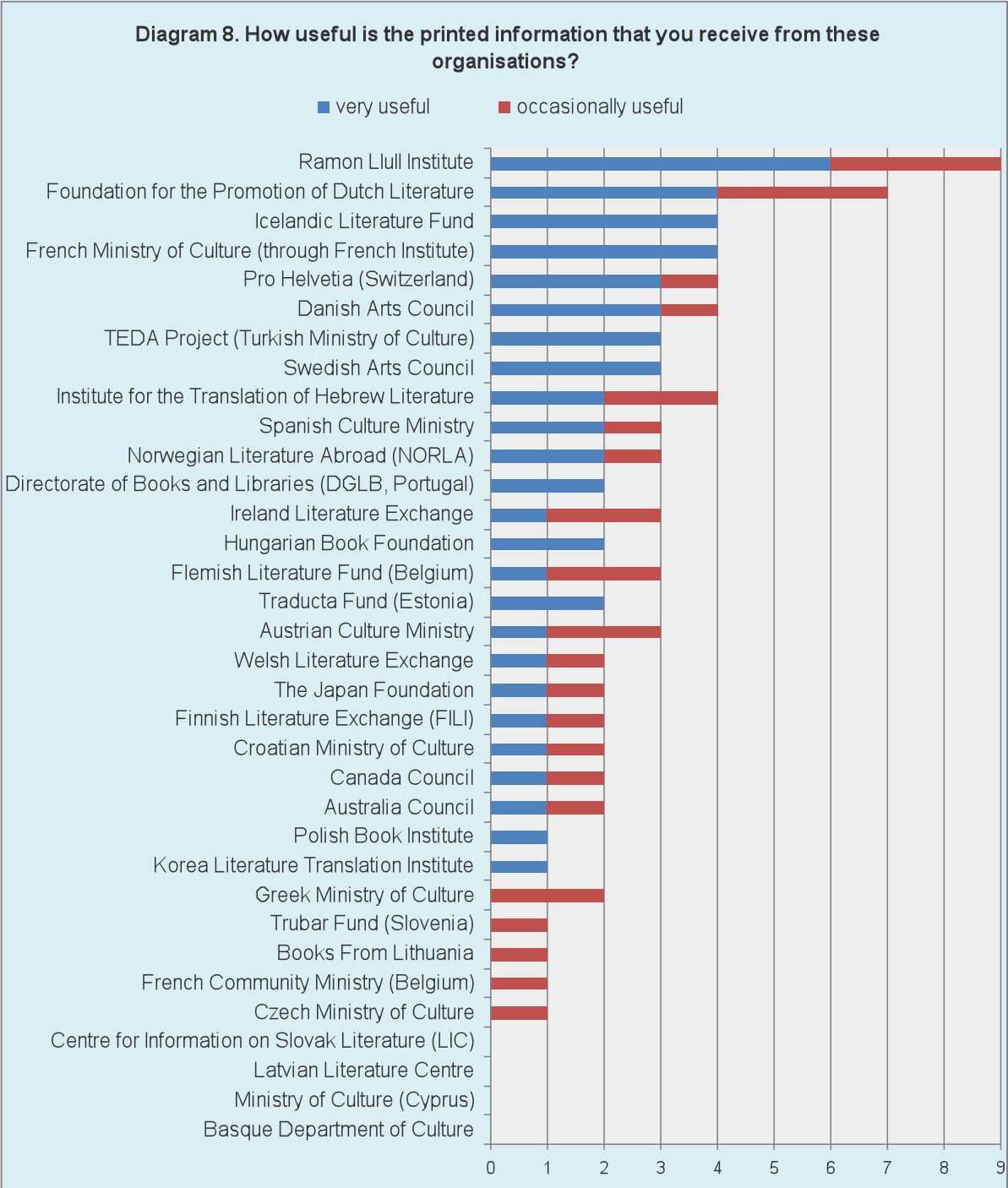
highest number (8) of publishers. On the other hand, the agencies of the Basque Country, Cyprus and the Belgian French community proved to be the least visible.

We should mention here that in 2003 the Institut Ramon Llull replaced the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes or Institute of Catalan Lettres in promotion of Catalan literature abroad and provision of grants. The latter organization is still known to publishers and its website information used. This is the reason why they are both referred to in this survey, although it is the Institut Ramon Llull that has been promoting Catalan literature abroad and provides translation grants, bursaries and travel grants since 2003. Conversely, the two organizations promoting Dutch-language literature – the Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature (NLPVF) and the Fonds voor de Letteren (FvdL) – were merged in January 2010 to form the The Dutch Foundation For Literature, and are therefore referred to as separate organisations.



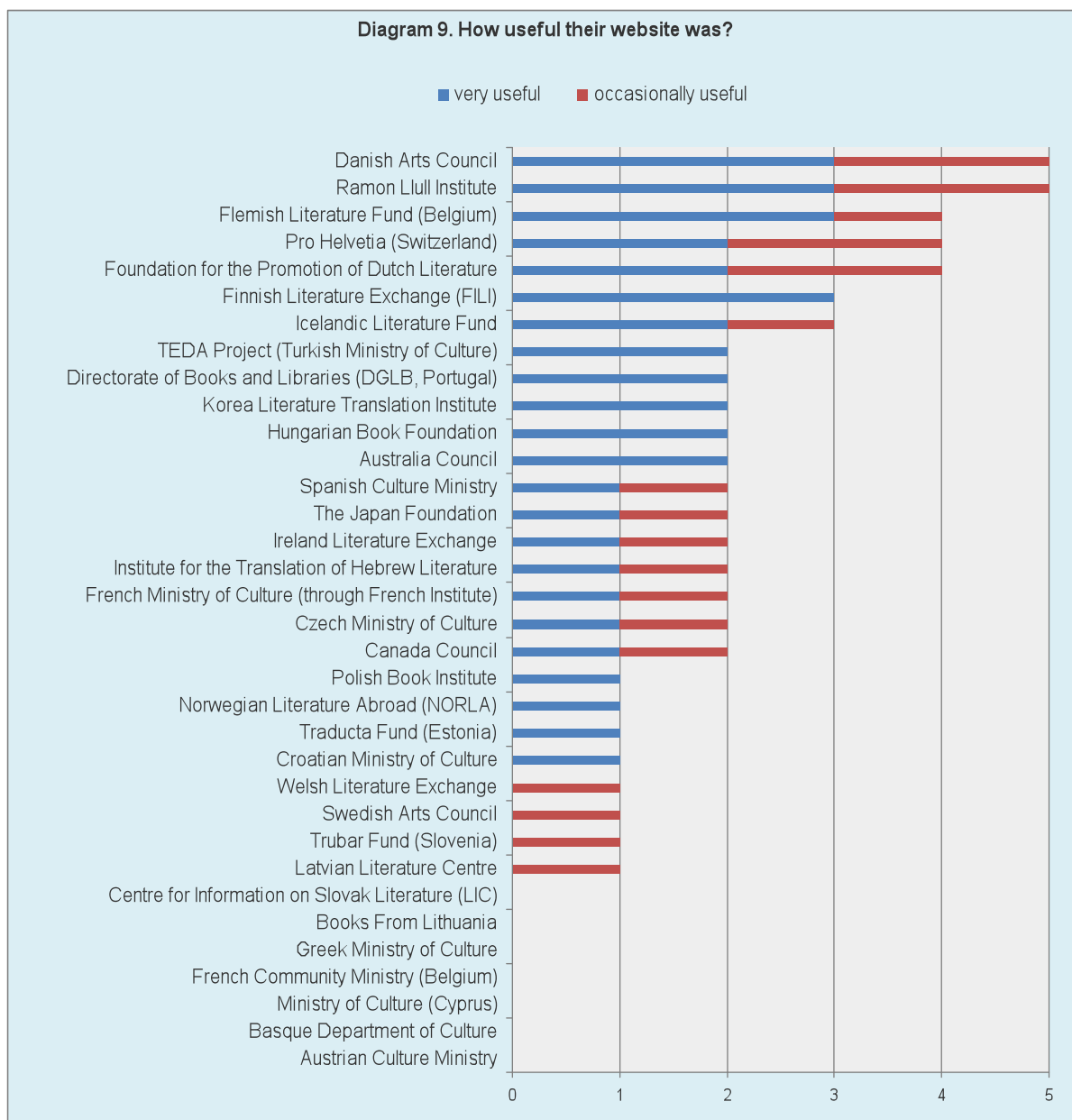
Printed promotional and information material

Regarding the usefulness of the printed information received from promotion organisations, publishers were most satisfied with the Catalan Institut Ramón Llull, followed by the Dutch equivalent. Publications of the French Ministry and the Icelandic Literary Fund were also highly valued.



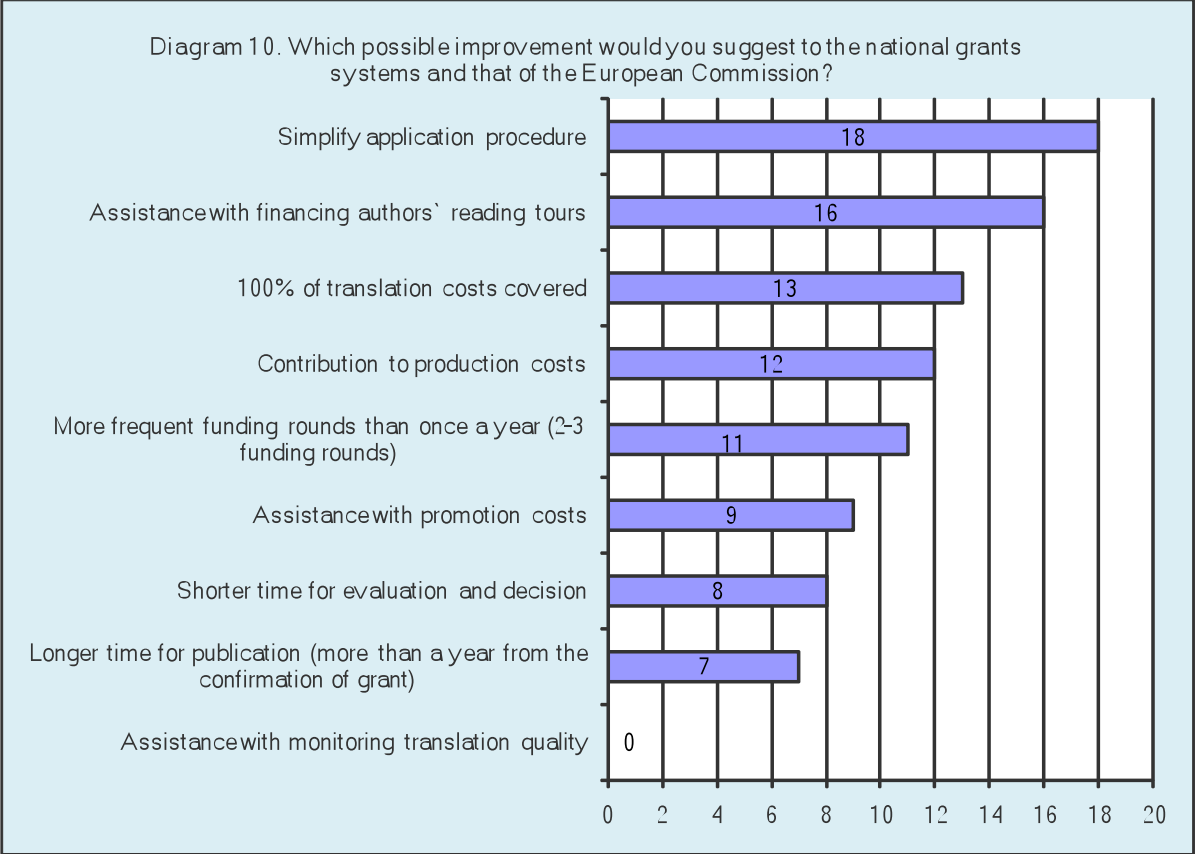
Websites - how useful are they?

The survey asked also about the usefulness of web sites serving literature promotion. The Ramón Lull Institute once again came out as the best, in this respect sharing the top position with the Danish web site. Publishers also highly appreciate the Flemish, Dutch, Finnish and Swiss web sites, while organisations from Iceland and the Institucio de les Lletres Catalanes (the organization promoting Catalan literature on the domestic front) received limited use evaluation.



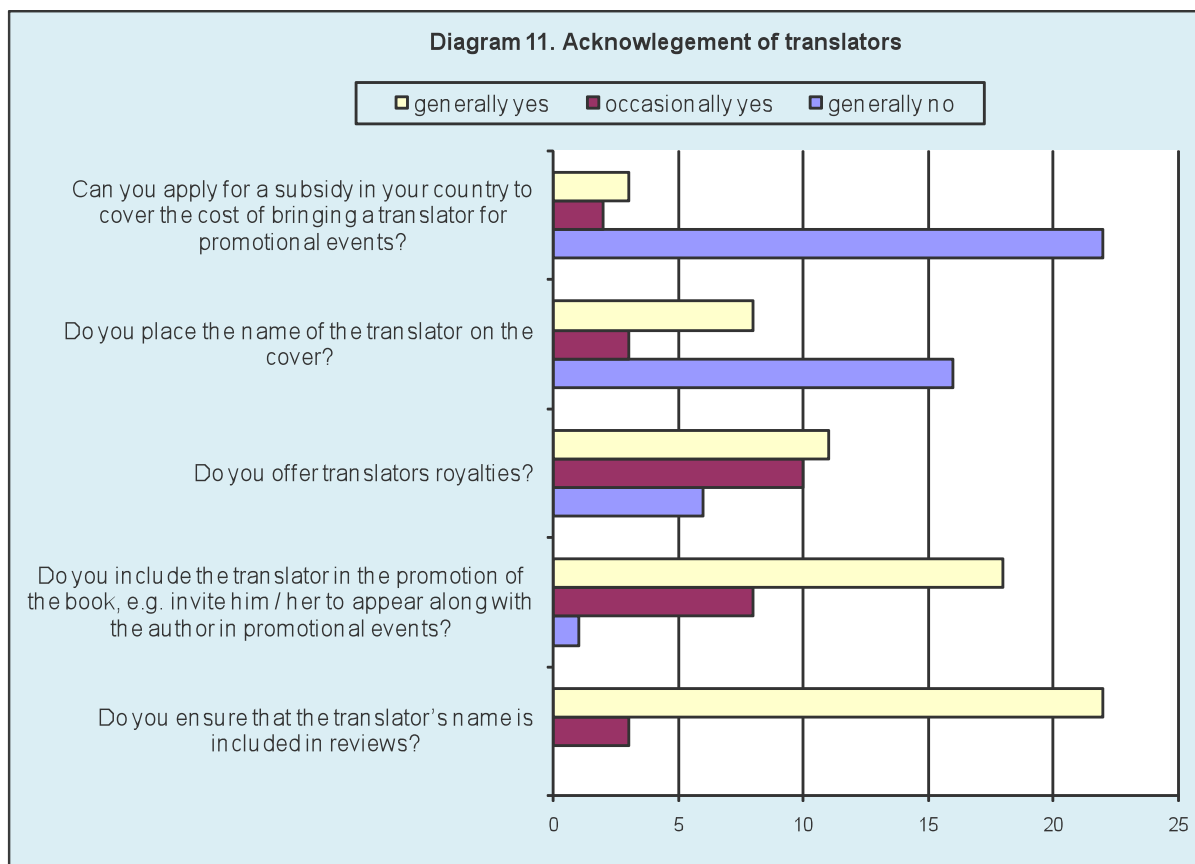
Recommendations to improve translation support

The last question required respondents to make recommendations to the European Commission, and to national promotion organisations in order to help improve the effectiveness of translation support. The majority of the group agreed that simplification of the application system would be a greatest help. Almost as consensual was the wish for financial assistance for authors' reading tours. About half of the participating publishers hoped for full coverage of the translations costs, contribution to production costs, as well as more frequent call for application. Somewhat surprisingly, no publisher acknowledged the need for assistance with monitoring translation quality.



Acknowledgement of translators

At the end publishers were asked to describe the way they acknowledge the translators' authorship. To arrange for mentioning the translators' name in the reviews was mentioned the most frequently. However, translators' travel to a promotion event is generally never covered, which implies that translators are not considered as creative actors in the process of translating literature.



Conclusion

The first obvious conclusion is the usefulness of such surveys for various stakeholders in the field of literature in translation, and especially for policy-makers and funders who need to keep adjusting their programmes in response to feedback from the sector they serve and support. The more publishers are involved, representing the greatest possible variety of backgrounds and locations, the greater is the value of the feedback to the agencies promoting translation and their supervising bodies about their performance - in addition to statistics about received applications and supported translations.