

OUT & ABOUT

From nowhere to somewhere:

Setting up a Slovenian translators' residency

Six questions to Tanja Petrič

In June 2021 the translators' residency Sovretov kabinet ('Sovre's Study') in Hrastnik, Slovenia, opened its doors. Tanja Petrič, one of the founders, answered Counterpoint's questions.

What was the role of the Slovenian Association of Literary Translators (DSKP) in establishing this residency?

The municipality of Hrastnik offered us an unfurnished apartment in the newly renovated upper floor in the so-called 'House of culture' in the town of Dol pri Hrastniku. It's the birthplace of Anton Sovre, an important translator from classical languages, after whom our main translation prize is named. We accepted the offer and in 2020 we started furnishing the apartment and organising the formalities for the opening.

How is the residency funded?

The residency is part funded by the Slovenian Book Agency, the Municipality of Hrastnik and DSKP funds. As we don't have to pay rent, this is considered as

a contribution from the municipality. We do, however, have to cover all the maintenance costs. We also give the residents a small grant of 200 – 300 euro per month and a lump sum of 200 euro for travel expenses.

What was the biggest surprise you experienced while setting up the translators' residency?

Since the apartment the municipality of Hrastnik gave us was not furnished, our translators' team had to acquire the furniture ourselves, which, given our



Hrastnik and surroundings
Photo: Sovretov kabinet

very limited financial resources, meant a long, difficult and sometimes very funny process. But with a lot of improvising we managed. As the manager of the whole 'decorating operation', I sometimes felt like I was in a bazaar, begging and haggling in big furniture shops to try to get the price down! In the middle of the pandemic it was very difficult to find sponsors, and meanwhile delivery periods were extended. We waited nearly 6 months for a shelf.

Another interesting experience was the shooting of a promotional video, which we did in one day. With the whole camera team we marched through the surroundings, looking for interesting angles, which would not only shed light on the residency, but also on the many villages and nature around it. While our plans grew and grew, day-light faded. But by that stage we were used to improvising...

What are the criteria for being accepted as a resident?

We offer a residency to translators of Slovenian literary works into foreign languages. This is linked to the Slovenian Book Agency's application criteria for financial support. The residency is part of the co-financed programme 'International cooperation' which focuses on the promotion of Slovenian literature abroad. Through this programme we receive funding for 4–6 residents per year who translate from Slovenian. In the remaining months the residency is open to Slovenian and foreign translators of all language combinations.

Does your translators' association have contacts with translators from Slovenian literature living abroad?

Does the residency increase the contacts between members of your association and translators of Slovenian literature living outside of Slovenia?

As I have been organising seminars on translating Slovenian literature since 2010, with the support of the Slovenian Book Agency, our association has a large network of translators of Slovenian literature. Through these seminars I continue to discover new translators, make new contacts and keep our network updated. It is hard to say if the residency itself increases contacts between foreign translators and our members, because it is not connected to Ljubljana, where most of our members live. The residency offers a quiet environment for individual work, but we do try to include the residents in local and regional cultural events and in our activities as much as possible.



Façade of the 'House of culture', which houses 'Sovre's Study'
Photo: Sovretov kabinet



Tanja Petrič is a freelance translator, literary critic, and editor. She studied comparative literature and German language and literature at University of Ljubljana and has translated many well-known Austrian, German and Swiss authors including Bertolt Brecht, Milena Michiko Flašar, Friederike Mayröcker, Robert Menasse, Eva Menasse, and Annemarie Schwarzenbach. She was editor of the *Litterae Slovenicae* from 2011 to 2022 and received the Lirikonov zlat and Rodojka Vrancic awards for translation as well as the Stritar Award for literary reviews. She is currently president of the Slovenian Association for Literary Translators (DSKP).

Tanja Petrič
Photo: Matej Pušnik

We also interview them for the prominent Slovenian online magazine *Literatura*, which increases the visibility of the residency and its guests.

What is the position of literary translators in Slovenia?

Literary translators in Slovenia are well regarded. It is a respected profession, with significant visibility, news on translation prizes and interviews with translators appear in the mainstream media. Translators have received the highest state award (Prešeren Prize) for their achievement in the arts and culture. The economic status of literary translators is, however, getting worse and worse. Some publishers of translated literature have closed down, and others have cancelled their translation programmes. The government still subsidises translated literature, but unsubsidised fees are very low and don't reflect the current cost of living, nor did they before. The number of young translators appears to be dropping in recent times.

Sovreto v kabinet

The promotional video of the residency (with English or Slovenian subtitles) can be watched [here](#).

Residencies have a maximum length of one month. If the resident is accepted through the application procedure the residency is free.

A folder with more information on the *Sovreto v kabinet* can be found [here](#). [Hrastnik](#) offers more information on the municipality (in Slovenian); click [here](#) for information in English.