

Written Spaces: The Network for Catalan Literary Heritage

Introduction

Written Spaces: This Catalan literary heritage coalition is a non-profit association based in Catalonia—a country without statehood located within Spain. Its work focuses on promoting Catalan literature and the Catalan language.

In a global context, Catalan is spoken by approximately 11 million people in four states. In Spain, it is a co-official language alongside Spanish in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Valencia. In France, it is considered a regional language in the Department of the Eastern Pyrenees. In Italy, it is spoken in the city of Alghero (Sardinia), where it is recognised by both the regional and national government. In Andorra, it is the official language.



Picture 1: The places where Catalan is spoken and our uniqueness.

Catalan literature boasts a rich tradition spanning over eight centuries and it has produced great literary figures across various stylistic movements. However, as it is the language of a nation without a state and it lacks official recognition within the European Union, it remains largely unknown to many. The absence of legal support and historical challenges have left Catalan in a vulnerable position.

Growing awareness of the fragility of the language and a fear of losing literary and cultural heritage sparked a Europe-wide movement in the 20th century which aimed to preserve writers' tangible and intangible legacies. This interest was particularly strong in Spain, where Catalan is a minority language. House museums of the first Catalan writers began to emerge in the early 20th century, although most were established from the 1960s onwards, with a significant proliferation in the 1990s. During this period, several of the female directors of these house museums recognised the need to create a network to coordinate the needs and interests of their institutions. This led to the founding of Written Spaces, an organisation which is supported by the Catalan Government, in 2005.

Written Spaces

Written Spaces: The Catalan literary heritage network Espais Escrits unites associations, local councils, and other organisations that protect and promote the reading and study of Catalan classics. It is located in the Catalan countries (Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, the South of France, Andorra, and Alghero in Sardinia), which are now distributed across various countries.

The association was established in order to:

1. Claim Catalan literary heritage;

2. Create a network to enhance the value of diverse and geographically dispersed literary centres across Catalan countries;
3. Ensure the significant presence and influence of Catalan literary heritage in the media, public administration and society at large;
4. Serve as a collaborative platform for professionals engaged in literary heritage and facilitate the exchange of ideas, concerns and projects.

Written Spaces currently represents 108 writers across 80 institutions. These institutions differ significantly from one another, so we categorise them into three different groups:

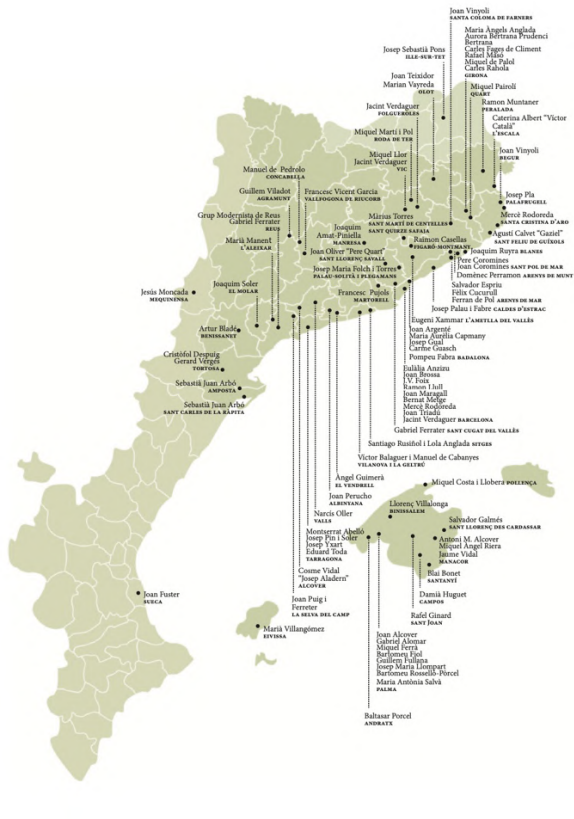
Heritage centres: This group includes writers' museums that are open to the public and which have permanent activities. We have 24 of these centres, which can be easily identified by an iconic house. They are similar to the house museums of illustrious personalities created in Italy.

Research centres: This group includes research centres which focus on studying writers' legacies. It includes universities, archives and libraries, some of which keep the writers' books, documents, manuscripts and personal items.

Promotional activities: This group includes associations, local councils and other organisations that promote engagement in literary activities and events.

Our network helps to preserve the legacies of Catalan writers. These writers, who have all passed away, have left behind works published in Catalan that continue to be celebrated and studied.

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Picture 2. Centres located in the territory which are members of the network.

The origins of Catalan literature were inspired by the medieval writer Ramon Llull (1232 –1316). Some of the literary greats include Jacint Verdaguer (1845-1902)—a 19th century Romantic poet whose works have been translated into 11 languages—and Mercè Rodoreda (1908-1983), the most translated Catalan author, whose novel *In Diamond Square* is available in 37 languages.

Visit the webpage espaiscrits.cat to find pictures and information about the centres, writers, literary activities and literary routes, as well as information about authors, texts, quotations and interviews.

The goals of the network are:

1. To influence the management of literary heritage by fostering debate and reflection;

2. To enhance the visibility and appreciation of Catalan literary heritage in society by facilitating contemporary readings of canonical writers;
3. To expand the network and foster collaborative projects with a connection to the territory from which the literature originated.

We cooperate on several projects in order to achieve these goals:

a) We generate debate and reflection:

Workshops and Seminars

We organise an annual autumn conference discussing various topics such as the importance of reading out loud, designing literary tours, literature in education and how to bring literature closer to vulnerable groups.

We used to organise seminars on literature and territory that culminated in the publication of *Literature, territory and identity. The management of literary heritage under debate* (2011). This book gathers all the theoretical reflections that arose from the seminars.

Publishing

We published a second book as a result of a PhD thesis (*Management of Catalan women's literary heritage, conceptualisation and proposal for analysis*) entitled *Management of literary heritage: Conceptualisation and comparative analysis of the Catalan and English models*, by Mireia Munmany Muntal.



Picture 3. Annual autumn conference: *The art of telling stories. The importance of reading aloud*, 2023.

b) We also run different projects to promote the knowledge of Catalan literature in society:

Reading Clubs

We run reading clubs focusing on Catalan classics with literary specialists in libraries across Catalonia. We are conducting this project alongside the Catalan Government Department of Libraries.

Education

We collaborate with the Catalan Government Department of Education to provide training courses for teachers on Catalan literature, which incorporate modern teaching tools and approaches.

We offer different types of courses so as to make classics attractive in the classroom. They include courses about writers and about literary works and periods, among others.

Communication

We also run other projects, such as *Contemporary Writers Encourage Exploration of Literary Heritage* because, as Virginia Woolf said, "For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice."

c) The following projects value the country in which this literature originated:

Literary Routes

We promote literary tourism through approximately 100 curated routes across Catalonia, which enable people to explore the settings that inspired our celebrated writers.

Literary Journeys

We also organise annual literary journeys that delve deeper into the connections between specific works and their geographical inspirations.



Picture 4. *The Geneve of Aurora Bertrana and Mercè Rodoreda. One city, two writers, Literary Journey 2023.*

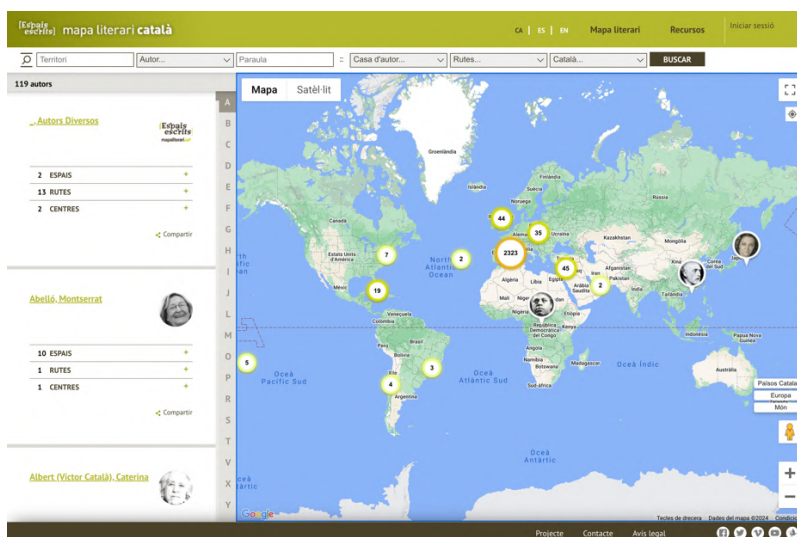
Catalan Literary Map

The network's most important project, the Catalan Literary Map, is an internationally recognised model of literary cartography that merges literature with landscape. The Catalan Literary Map was designed in 2007 and made its online debut in 2010.

The website hosts nearly 3,000 texts along with a vast array of audio and video content from 119 Catalan writers, all linked to specific geographical points on the map. Each literary work is situated within the context of its setting, either directly referencing the locale or drawing inspiration from it.

The map offers an enriched experience with pictures, videos, audio recordings and supplementary documentation, so as to provide a comprehensive understanding of the literary landscape.

For example, you can go to Florence and see different Catalan writers who wrote about the city. A number of these literary pieces have been translated into various languages so as to reach a broader audience and make cultural exchange possible. The underlying concept of this project is to discover the world through Catalan literature.



Picture 5. Catalan Literary Map, 2024: mapaliterari.cat.

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You can find out more about Written Spaces on the webpages espaisescrits.cat. We are open to collaborating with similar projects and those who are committed to preserving and promoting literary heritage. You are more than welcome to reach out to us at info@espaisescrits.cat.

INTERNATIONAL COMISSION

ESPAIS ESCRITS

2024