

## Welcome to the 2nd Conference of the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project

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It started with a simple idea: connect two classes on opposite sides of the ocean to work jointly on creating and translating technical texts. It started small: with a single translation class in Ghent, in Flanders, Belgium, and a single technical writing class in Menomonie, in Wisconsin, USA. It started with minimal telecollaborative technology: email, with one class not yet even having university-issued email accounts. It started at the cusp of a new century and new millennium: January 2000.

When Sonia Vandepitte, teaching in Ghent, and I, teaching in Menomonie, first discussed the idea in 1997 and started making plans in 1999, we could hardly have imagined that our two-professor network would, by 2021, span five continents, or that it would eventually spread to 45 universities in 20 countries while involving scores of teachers and thousands of students. Nor could we have easily imagined the quickly evolving communication technologies that students would enthusiastically bring to their collaborations with partners, from Instant Messaging and Facebook to WhatsApp and Zoom.

The collaborative network that Sonia began referring to as the Trans-Atlantic Project—or TAP, for short—grew to the point that, in 2015, the moniker needed to expand to the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project—or TAPP, but with the acronym retaining its one-beat pronunciation. How did the TAPP grow so fast and so vast? As I pointed out in the opening keynote address of the first TAPP conference, hosted in 2016 by North Dakota State University, in Fargo, USA,

we see that the TAPP...flourish[es] because it follows a simple recipe: Pour in equal parts instructors, mix their students, and—voilà—amazing learning happens. It flourishes as well because it is not hampered by institutional agreements, administrative bureaucracy, or the agendas of non-teachers, such as grant-funding agencies and university governing boards. What's more, it is not subject to budget cuts, such as those that the State of North Dakota is now imposing on its universities. (Maylath, 2016)

In short, as one of the earliest publications on the TAPP points out, the TAPP's cooperative network "is very much like a grassroots movement: cheap, fast, and with

ample clout if the network members want it so” (Maylath, Vandepitte, & Moustén, 2008, p. 65).

That first conference has now led to a second. During the first AELFE conference in which I participated, in 2017, veteran TAPP member and former president of AELFE Elisabet Arnó suggested that the next TAPP conference take place alongside an AELFE conference. Co-siting the two conferences, with opportunities for cross-fertilization, seemed like a splendid and natural pairing. What’s more, Elisabet volunteered to host the joint conferences at her engineering college campus of Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC, or Barcelona Tech) in Vilanova i la Geltrú. Having grown familiar with the campus and the Mediterranean port city when I spoke at UPC’s InnoDays conference in 2013, I was thrilled by her proposal. As those of you now there can attest, there couldn’t be a better host or site for the side-by-side conferences.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, I regret that I am not able to return this summer for a third visit, but I’m delighted for those of you who are able to experience the place in person. I’m also delighted that Elisabet and the UPC-AELFE-TAPP organizing committee have been able to convert the conference to hybrid delivery, during such extraordinarily challenging times. The option to participate at a distance has enabled not only me but many others as well to take part in the dual conferences, including many who would never have been able to travel to Catalonia under any circumstances. Here too, there couldn’t be a better campus or organizing team to host a high-tech hybrid conference. My heart goes out to all the organizers and technicians in appreciation for all that they’ve done to prepare and all that they’re now doing to make hybrid delivery a success.

The pandemic has certainly been a challenge—all too often a deadly one—not only in Spain but all around the world. As the pandemic spread and country after country went into lockdown and closed campuses, several TAPP teachers emailed to say that their international TAPP telecollaborations remained the most stable part of their courses, as they were already conducted remotely and virtually. What’s more, the shared global experience of the pandemic tied student partners together socially even more closely as they described for each other how their lives were playing out during lockdown. While, by autumn 2020, some TAPP teachers felt overwhelmed by the hybrid technology that many of their universities were trying to employ and opted out of TAPP telecollaborations temporarily, the consensus was nevertheless that the TAPP model of virtual exchange was well suited from the start for the conditions of a pandemic.

The future of the TAPP looks bright, as does the future of AELFE and cross-fertilization between the two. As I said at the end of my opening keynote address at the 2017 AELFE conference,

the TAPP is dedicated always to connecting students across languages, cultures, and nations. We transcend walls. As long as there’s a free Internet, we will always arrange for our students to connect across any ocean, any mountain range, any national boundary, any time zone difference, and any language divide. *Je n’ai pas peur. No tengo miedo.* We are not afraid: We are the

Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project. We are international LSP professionals.  
(Maylath, 2017, p. 9).

Welcome to the 2021 AELFE-TAPP conference. May it be among the best you ever experience.

## References

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