18th May, 2024

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as a bookseller to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy. My bookshop, Readings has operated in Melbourne for 56 years. Readings has been awarded Bookseller of the Year numerous times; in 2016 it was awarded International Bookseller of the year at the London Book Fair, the only Australian bookseller to have been awarded this honour. The judges praised Readings' work with the community, particularly through the Readings Foundation, its events program, and its three literary prizes — the Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction, the Readings Prize for Young Adult Fiction, and the Readings Children's Book Prize. The official citation recognised it for its "community outreach, support of Australian authors and its help for non-profit organisations working on literacy initiatives." Readings employs over 200 full and part time staff; our events program hosts or supports around 500 events annually. Last year the Readings Foundation distributed $314,000 to community literacy and arts projects and this initiative was supported through Readings contributing 10% of its profits and by donations from our customers. We have initiated a successful community writers festival fully funded by us with no government support. These kinds of initiatives are not unique to Readings; local bookshops are not merely retail businesses. They are cultural infrastructure - community gathering places where Australian stories are discovered, where children fall in love with reading, and where literary careers begin. Yet every year bookshops close, undermined by online giants and discount chains that sell books at 40–50% below recommended retail price. Only this week Perth's premier bookshop, Boffins, announced that it was closing on June 6. Readings is a profitable business, but we struggle to be able to identify and fund significant investment in technology that would improve our productivity and our ability to pay higher wages; we struggle to fund meaningful professional development to enhance our employees professional lives and further increase productivity; we operate in a retail environment that tends to favour the interests of landlords over tenants and in which there are no national policies. Two of our branches are close to closing because they are unsustainable and a third is under threat. We cross subsidise them because we know they are important to the local community. We have invested heavily in our online business to augment the service and experience our physical outlets provide and to support Australian writers and creatives, but it is difficult to grow that business without the technology and infrastructure that global players such as Amazon have. As you can see by the report at the end of this document Australia lags comparable countries in protecting its book retail sector. France, Italy, the UK, Germany, and more have introduced proven measures - discount caps, tax offsets, and rates relief - that have stabilised their independent bookshop sectors. Australia should do the same. I support the Australian Booksellers Association's call to: • Fund establishment of a skills training and certification program development and delivery to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways. • Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and purchases of Australian-authored titles. • Examine the feasibility of restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles, aligned with established European models. • Investigate the case for GST reduction or exemption on books, consistent with international precedent. • Invest in refreshing legacy data systems across the Australian book supply chain. • Support an Australian Book Voucher Program, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide. • Fund ongoing grants to support bookshop event delivery including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs. In addition, I would urge support for technology initiatives that benefit booksellers and increase their competitiveness. I began my bookselling career 50 years ago at a time when the effects of significant support for the arts by the Whitlam government was beginning to bear fruit. The 70s presaged a new cultural era as increasingly confident Australia flexed its creative muscle. That is under threat; I see Australian authors struggling to achieve significant sales because there aren't the outlets to support and champion them. It concerns me that while Readings market share is around 1% often, we are selling 15-20% of print runs of many Australian authors; Readings alone can't support a creative industry! what you love about bookselling, what you fear losing, what you hope the policy will achieve. We need to make sure that we don't lose more booksellers and facilitate the establishment of new ones and support and encourage them, existing and new, to promote and champion Australian writing and literacy. The act of reading, too, is under threat I urge the government to act. I believe that local bookshops are essential in fostering Australian writers and culture - but without support, more will close. The measures proposed by the ABA are modest, internationally proven, and would deliver significant cultural and economic returns. If delivered, they would give confidence to a sector that has given so much and been so unseen.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Rubbo OAM
Chairman,
Readings Pty Ltd,
[redacted]

Government Support for Bookshops

& Culture Pass Schemes: A Global Overview

Research compiled for Readings, Melbourne | March 2026

1. Introduction & Overview

Governments around the world have taken markedly different approaches to supporting their book sectors and independent bookshops. This document surveys the major policy mechanisms in use — from structural tools like fixed book prices and VAT reductions, to active interventions like direct grants and youth culture voucher schemes — and examines their real-world impact. It focuses particularly on France (the world's most interventionist model), Germany, Spain, Canada, and Australia, with detailed analysis of France's Centre National du Livre (CNL) and the evolving culture pass landscape across Europe.

> *Key finding: Fixed book prices, not direct grants, are consistently identified as the single most effective structural tool for sustaining independent bookshops. Countries that have repealed these laws — including Australia (1972), the UK (1995) and Sweden (1974) — have seen significant decline in specialist independent bookselling.*

2. Structural Policy Tools

2.1 Fixed Book Prices

The Fixed Book Price (FBP) is a form of resale price maintenance applied to books, allowing publishers — not retailers — to determine the price at which a book is sold to the public. Its core logic is straightforward: to promote non-price competition between booksellers, enabling specialist independents (with higher costs, curated stock, and expert staff) to compete on grounds other than price alone.

The key argument for FBP is that without it, independents are forced to compete with discounters and online giants who stock only bestsellers at low prices. The FBP guarantees independents a sufficient margin on popular titles to cross-subsidise their broader, culturally significant stock. Countries with strong FBP regimes — France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain — consistently have denser networks of independent bookshops than those without.

Countries and their FBP status:

- France – Lang Law (1981): mandatory fixed price; max 5% discount permitted
- Germany – Buchpreisbindung: fixed price law with strong cultural rationale
- Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Austria, Greece – fixed price laws in force
- Australia – abolished 1972; no price protection for bookshops
- United Kingdom – Net Book Agreement repealed 1995; chain and online dominance followed
- Sweden – abolished 1974

The removal of FBP has consistently produced two effects: a drop in the price of bestsellers, and an increase in the price of all other books — exactly the reverse of what consumers might expect, and catastrophic for the long-tail titles that define a good independent bookshop.

In early 2026, the issue took on new legal urgency: the European Court of Justice is considering cases that challenge whether national FBP laws are compatible with EU rules on the free movement of goods. The outcome could affect every EU country's ability to maintain these protections.

2.2 Reduced VAT on Books

Most European nations apply a reduced or zero VAT rate to printed books, recognising them as cultural rather than purely commercial goods. Research shows that each one-percentage-point reduction in VAT on books is associated with a price drop of around 2.6% and a corresponding 2.7% increase in book expenditure — making it a measurable but relatively blunt lever.

- France: 5.5% VAT on books (reduced from standard 20%)
- Germany: 7% VAT on books
- Spain: 4% VAT on books
- Australia: GST applies to books (no exemption)
- Canada: GST/HST applies to books (no exemption)

The battles are increasingly over digital books: in many countries, e-books are taxed at the full standard rate even when print versions are reduced, creating a structural disadvantage for digital reading.

3. France: The Gold Standard

France has built the most comprehensive and deliberate bookshop support ecosystem in the world. Rather than relying on a single policy, it operates an interlocking system of structural rules, institutional grants, quality labelling, and demand-side vouchers — each layer reinforcing the others.

3.1 The Centre National du Livre (CNL)

The CNL is France's national book centre, established in 1946 as a public administrative body under the Ministry of Culture. It is the primary state-funded vehicle for supporting all segments of the book chain: authors, translators, publishers, booksellers, libraries, and literary event organisers.

In 2024, the CNL allocated €23.8 million across 24 aid categories and 3,098 individual grants. Its broader ecosystem of subsidies, credits, and zero-rate loans totals around €42 million annually. Decisions are made by 25 thematic committees on which more than 300 professionals — writers, academics, journalists, publishers, booksellers — sit. This peer-governance structure distinguishes it from most government grant bodies.

What the CNL Funds

The CNL's scope is genuinely comprehensive:

- Authors: discovery grants (first published work), creation grants up to €15,000 (two+ works), and sabbatical year grants up to €30,000 for established authors
- Publishers: grants covering editorial, prepress, and production costs, ranging from €500 to €22,800, at contribution rates of 40–70% depending on project risk
- Bookshops: the 'Aide au maillage du territoire' subsidises logistics costs for distributing books to underserved rural areas; separate grants support opening, relocation, succession, and renovation of bookshops
- Libraries: the 'Aide aux bibliothèques' scheme funds acquisitions of contemporary French literature and works in minority languages, focused on independent publishers
- Literary events: grants covering author fees, travel, and programming costs, with three application sessions per year
- Translation: grants covering 30–60% of translation costs for foreign publishers bringing French works to international markets; up to 100% of rights acquisition costs

The CNL is not without critics. France's Court of Auditors (Cour des comptes) noted in 2022 that the CNL had failed to evaluate the processing costs of its 20+ aid types, and the Senate's 2024 review recommended raising minimum aid thresholds to reduce the 'sprinkling' of very small grants. There are also concerns about urban bias in library grant distribution. Most pointedly, despite total state expenditure of approximately €1.1 billion on books and reading in 2024, regular adult readership fell to its lowest level since 2015 — a sobering reminder that supply-side support alone cannot reverse cultural trends driven by digital screen competition.

3.2 The LiR and LR Labels: France's Quality Kite Marks

France operates two tiers of quality accreditation for bookshops, both administered by the CNL. They were introduced at different times and carry different entitlements, but share the same underlying purpose: recognising bookshops whose cultural contribution goes beyond simply selling books.

LiR — Librairie Indépendante de Référence

The original label, created by ministerial decree in April 2009, applies strictly to genuinely independent bookshops. To qualify (valid for three years), a shop must meet the following criteria:

- At least 70% of total turnover must come from the retail sale of new books
- Stock a minimum of 6,000 titles for general bookshops with turnover under €600,000; 10,000 titles above that threshold; 6,000 for children's or comics specialists; 3,000 for other specialists
- Allocate at least 12.5% of annual book-sales revenue to staffing costs — ensuring knowledgeable, paid booksellers rather than a skeleton crew
- Be independently owned and operated (verified against tax code independence criteria)
- Play an active cultural role in the community through events, readings, and programming

A shop that achieves LiR status receives three benefits: exemption from the territorial economic contribution (a local business tax, subject to the local authority choosing to grant it); access to the CNL's VAL grant; and eligibility for better commercial terms from some publishers.

LR — Librairie de Référence

Introduced in 2011 to broaden the scheme's reach, the LR label extends recognition to bookshops that are culturally valuable but do not meet the full independence or financial criteria for LiR. This includes bookshops in small and medium-sized towns, certain publisher-owned shops that have genuine autonomy of choice and management, and shops that come close to but do not fully satisfy LiR requirements.

The LR carries the same quality recognition and gives access to the same VAL grant and improved publisher terms. The single material difference is that LR shops do not qualify for the local business tax exemption — that benefit remains exclusive to LiR.

The two-tier design is deliberate and intelligent: it allows France to recognise quality bookselling across a much wider geography and range of ownership structures without diluting the flagship LiR standard. A rural bookshop that cannot meet the full independence test can still be formally recognised and supported.

The VAL Grant: What 'Valorising' Means

Both labels unlock the aide VAL — aide pour la mise en valeur des fonds en librairie. 'Valoriser' is a French word without a precise English equivalent: it means actively promoting, showcasing, or making the most of something that already exists. In this context, the VAL grant supports bookshops in surfacing and presenting their existing stock to customers more effectively.

This might mean curated thematic displays, staff recommendation programmes, window displays built around particular titles or sections of the catalogue, or events designed to draw attention to less visible parts of the stock. Crucially, it is not a grant to purchase stock — the CNL assumes that a labelled bookshop already has deep, good stock. The VAL support funds the work of making that stock visible and desirable, recognising that great curation is skilled labour that deserves public subsidy.

> *The LiR/LR label system is significant because it makes financial support contingent on cultural performance — not just commercial survival. It creates incentives for bookshops to programme events, maintain deep stock, and invest in knowledgeable staff, because these are the criteria that unlock government support. The distinction between LiR and LR also shows sophisticated policy design: a single standard would either exclude valuable bookshops in smaller towns or dilute the benchmark for the best.*

3.3 France's Shipping Minimum: Closing the Amazon Loophole

The story of France's minimum shipping charge illustrates how a regulatory system has to be actively maintained and updated as market conditions change — and how determined platforms can be in finding workarounds.

Layer 1: The Lang Law (1981)

Fixed book prices prevent price competition on the book itself. Amazon's initial response was to subsidise delivery instead — free shipping was effectively a price cut by another name, one that independents couldn't match.

Layer 2: The 2014 Free Delivery Ban

France banned online booksellers from offering free deliveries on book orders. Amazon's response: it charged one euro cent for delivery. Technically compliant; commercially meaningless as a protection.

Layer 3: The Darcos Law (2023)

Named after Senator Laure Darcos, this law requires online retailers to charge a minimum of €3 in delivery costs for book purchases under €35. It came into force in October 2023, closing the one-cent loophole. Amazon notified customers by email and began charging the fee — but simultaneously found another workaround: offering free pickup from Amazon lockers in supermarkets and hypermarkets that technically qualify as 'book retailers' under the law. The French culture minister has challenged this as circumventing the legislation's intent.

The Darcos Law is now subject to legal challenge at the Court of Justice of the European Union, where Amazon argues it violates internal market principles. In 2025, an EU Advocate General issued an opinion that the fee could be legal if it meets conditions of proportionality and non-discrimination — and crucially found that since the rule regulates physical delivery (an offline step), it falls outside the EU's E-Commerce Directive. The full court ruling is pending.

Taken together, France's three regulatory layers — fixed book price, free delivery ban, minimum shipping charge — force Amazon to compete with independent bookshops on the total cost of a single book order. This is the precondition for the independent's genuine advantages (curation, expertise, community) to be commercially meaningful, rather than overwhelmed by price and convenience gaps.

3.4 France's Pass Culture

Emmanuel Macron campaigned in 2017 on a promise to give every 18-year-old in France a cultural voucher. The Pass Culture was trialled from 2018 and fully rolled out in 2021. It has since been extended to 15-17 year olds (with smaller amounts), with €20 at age 15, €30 at 16, and a lump sum of €300 at 18.

Key design features: the pass can be spent on cinema, museum and theatre tickets, books, art materials, musical instruments, and cultural activities. Critically, it cannot be used for home delivery — goods must be collected at physical venues like bookshops. The app uses geo-localisation to show subscribers nearby cultural venues. French-language streaming platforms are eligible; global platforms like Netflix are not.

The impact on bookshops has been significant, though the breakdown of spending has surprised some observers: 71% of users have bought books, but half of those purchases were manga and comics. France has become the world's second-largest consumer of manga as a result. The scheme has been credited with a boom in graphic novel sales more broadly.

The Pass Culture is currently under budget pressure. French publishers have decried cuts that effectively halved allocations for individual recipients, and expressed particular alarm that 15- and 16-year-olds — described as 'the most alarming risks of dropping out of reading' — have been excluded from recent rounds.

4. Culture Pass Schemes: The European Picture

Youth culture voucher schemes — often called 'culture passes' — have emerged as one of the most distinctive and debated policy innovations in European cultural policy. The idea is simple: give young people a fixed sum to spend on culture, channelling public money directly to consumers rather than to institutions.

Italy pioneered the approach in 2016; France, Spain, and Germany followed. The EIBF's RISE Bookselling project, which analysed all four schemes, reached a headline conclusion: culture voucher schemes have brought young people into bookshops in a volume not seen before, with young people starting to read for pleasure — not just for school. For many, entering a bookshop to collect a voucher purchase is the first time they have ever set foot in one.

4.1 Scheme Comparison

Country	Name	Launched	Value	Key Design	Book Impact
Italy	18App / Bonus Cultura	2016	€500 (18-yr-olds)	Universal (now means-tested)	47% of spending on books; reading among 18–21s rose from 46.8% to 54% (2016–19)
France	Pass Culture	2021	€20–€300 (ages 15–18)	Universal; no home delivery	71% of users bought books; France now 2nd largest manga consumer globally
Spain	Bono Cultural Joven	2022	€400 (18-yr-olds)	Universal; 1-year limit	€27M spent in <1yr; books = 31.3% of purchases
Germany	KulturPass	2023	€200 (18-yr-olds)	No Amazon/Netflix; local suppliers only	Books were most popular item (48.7%); scheme now abolished

4.2 What the Research Says

A rigorous academic study of Italy's 18App (published in the Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization) found strong causal evidence the scheme worked, using nationally representative survey data covering 2013–2019:

- Cinema attendance: +5.6% participation
- Non-classical music concerts: +4.1% participation
- Book reading: +4.2% participation
- Online purchase of books and e-books: +7.1% participation

The most policy-relevant finding concerns distribution: effects were significantly stronger among young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, for whom the voucher increased not just participation but frequency of attendance across popular and niche cultural forms alike. The researchers argue for a universal (rather than means-tested) design because cultural consumption is inherently social — when some people participate, they bring others along.

Between 2016 and 2019, reading among Italians aged 18–21 rose from 46.8% to 54%. When Italy's Meloni government moved the scheme to a means-tested model, Italian publishers reported the loss of 23.2 million unit sales.

4.3 Current Status and Vulnerabilities

The schemes have proven politically vulnerable across Europe:

- Italy: the universal 18App has been replaced by two separate schemes — a means-tested Carta Cultura Giovani and a merit-based Carta del Merito — significantly reducing reach
- France: budget cuts have halved per-recipient allocations and excluded 15-16 year olds; publishers and booksellers are actively lobbying against further cuts
- Germany: the KulturPass has been deemed unconstitutional by the new government and abolished, despite books being the most popular category of purchase
- Spain: the Bono Cultural Joven has been renewed for successive years and remains the most stable of the four schemes

The RISE report notes a structural vulnerability: 'There is unfortunately no guarantee that the schemes will run permanently.' When budgets tighten, culture vouchers are often treated as low-hanging fruit for cuts — despite strong evidence of their effectiveness.

5. Canada: A Comparison

Canada offers a useful comparison to both France and Australia: a large English-language market with significant geography, strong Amazon penetration, and a distinct national literary culture that governments have sought to protect. Its approach is notably less interventionist than France's, but more structured than Australia's.

5.1 The Canada Book Fund

The primary vehicle is the Canada Book Fund (CBF), administered by Canadian Heritage (the federal culture department). The CBF has historically focused almost entirely on publishers, not booksellers — funding the production and marketing of Canadian-authored books rather than the retail infrastructure that sells them.

A structural tension runs through Canadian book policy: in the English-language market, Canadian books account for only around 20% of sales in independent bookstores, partially due to the strong presence of foreign-owned online booksellers. In Quebec, by contrast, Canadian books make up around 50% of sales in independent stores — reflecting both French-language protections and stronger local cultural identity.

5.2 Support for Booksellers: A Historic First

The most significant recent development was the creation of a bookseller-specific funding stream in 2022 — the first time in Canadian history that bookshops received direct federal support. The $12 million Support for Booksellers initiative reached 180 booksellers operating 467 stores across Canada. Amounts ranged from $1,000 to $150,000, based on past sales of Canadian-authored books.

The initiative was specifically directed at improving online sales infrastructure — websites, digital marketing, and shipping cost relief — rather than cultural programming or physical shop survival. It ran for two years (2022–24) and was framed as a 'temporary recovery initiative' post-pandemic. Despite bookseller associations and author groups arguing for its renewal, it has not been made permanent.

As one Canadian bookseller put it in Quill & Quire: "You can get a grant to write a book, you can get a grant to publish a book, but from my perspective as a bookseller, there is absolutely no care given to whether or not that book is well distributed, whether or not there is significant uptake or sales of that title — there is no investment in where the book is going."

5.3 Budget 2024 and Ongoing Gaps

Budget 2024 included a one-time $10 million increase to the CBF, to be administered over three years. The Association of Canadian Publishers welcomed this while noting it was a fraction of the 50% permanent increase ($19.2 million per year) promised in the Liberal Party's 2021 election platform.

Canada has no fixed book price, no VAT reduction on books, no culture pass scheme, and no dedicated national book institution comparable to the CNL. The Canadian Independent Booksellers Association (CIBA) was established only in 2023. Its IndieBookstores.ca platform — a discovery tool connecting readers with independent bookshops — represents a step toward collective infrastructure, but remains far from the layered permanent support system operating in France.

6. Australia: The Current Position

Australia's approach to bookshop support is among the most minimal of comparable English-speaking nations. It has no fixed book price (abolished 1972), no VAT exemption for books (GST applies), no culture pass scheme, and no direct bookshop-specific grants.

Federal support for the literary sector flows primarily through:

- Creative Australia (formerly the Australia Council): general arts grants available to literary organisations and events; not bookshop-specific
- The Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund: supports Australian writers, publishers, and literary organisations through 1.5% of its annual revenue; not directed at retail bookshops
- The Albanese government's Revive policy (2023): $286 million committed to arts and culture, establishing Writers Australia and improving author income; no bookshop-specific component
- Regional Arts Fund: over $6 million annually for arts projects in regional and remote communities; not book-retail specific

Australian independents operate without the structural advantages of French or German counterparts. Their resilience depends on community loyalty, events programming, bookseller expertise, and local identity rather than any government-designed market protection. The contrast with France is stark: where French bookshops benefit from fixed prices, shipping minimums, quality labelling, renovation grants, and cultural event funding simultaneously, Australian bookshops operate in an unprotected open market.

The abolition of Australia's Fixed Book Price Agreement in 1972 predated the digital revolution, but its effects have been amplified by the rise of Amazon and other online retailers. There is no political momentum currently for reintroduction, and no culture pass scheme has been proposed at federal level.

6.1 The Australian Booksellers Association (ABA)

The national peak body for Australian booksellers is the Australian Booksellers Association, also known as BookPeople. It has operated for over 100 years and represents independent and chain bookshops, children's specialists, academic, secondhand, and online stores. It is headquartered in Melbourne.

The organisation went through a notable rebranding in 2022, adopting the consumer-facing name BookPeople, but has since pivoted back: CEO Susannah Bowen announced in early 2026 that the association would revert to the ABA name for industry and advocacy purposes, while retaining the Love Your Bookshop brand for consumer-facing campaigns. The reversal followed member feedback that the ABA name carried more authority in advocacy contexts.

The ABA's current advocacy positions centre on three priorities:

- Placing bookshops firmly within the arts sector — arguing that bookshops should be recognised and funded as cultural infrastructure, not simply retail businesses
- Maintaining Australia's Parallel Importation Rules — the regulations that require Australian publishers to be given the right of first refusal on supplying books to the Australian market, protecting the local publishing industry from being undercut by cheaper overseas editions
- Seeking fair funding for literature and small businesses — including pushing for updated ABS data on the book industry, which has not been comprehensively measured for almost two decades

The ABA operates as part of the broader Books Create Australia coalition alongside the Australian Publishers Association and Australian Society of Authors, which has lobbied collectively on copyright, parallel importation, and cultural policy. The ABA also runs practical member services including a group buying scheme, seasonal reading guides, the national Book Gift Card program, and the annual Love Your Bookshop Day in October.

The 2026 ABA Conference — to be held in Canberra in June, with the theme 'Bookshops Are the Future' — is notable for its location in the national capital, a signal of the association's intent to press its policy agenda directly with government ahead of the federal election cycle.

> *The ABA does not have the structural resources or government backing of an institution like France's CNL. Its advocacy is industry-led and unfunded by the state, operating through submissions, coalitions, and direct lobbying rather than through any permanent government partnership. The contrast illustrates how much of Australia's bookselling resilience depends on the sector itself rather than on policy design.*

7. Global Policy Comparison

The table below maps all major policy mechanisms across the six countries covered in this report, grouped into four categories: structural price protections, institutional support, direct bookshop grants, and demand-side culture pass schemes.

Policy area	France	Germany	Spain	Italy	Canada	Australia
Structural price protections						
Fixed book price	Yes — Lang Law (1981)	Yes — Buchpreisbindung	Yes (since 1975)	Yes (since 2005)	No	No (abolished 1972)
Max. discount permitted	5%	Set by publisher	5%	5%	—	—
Minimum shipping charge	Yes — €3 (Darcos Law, 2023)	No	No	No	No	No
Reduced VAT on books	Yes — 5.5%	Yes — 7%	Yes — 4%	Yes — 4%	No (GST/HST)	No (GST)
Institutional support						
National book body	CNL — est. 1946; €42M/yr	Börsenverein (trade body)	CEGAL (trade assoc.)	AIE (publishers' assoc.)	CBF within Heritage dept.	Creative Australia (not book-specific)
Annual public investment	~€1.1bn total ecosystem	~€1bn+	Significant; regional variation	Significant; now reduced	~CAD$38M via CBF	Modest; not book-specific
Translation funding	Yes — CNL covers 30–70% of costs	Yes	Partial	Partial	Partial — via Canada Council	Minimal
Direct bookshop support						
Quality label / accreditation	Yes — LiR label (3-yr renewal)	No	No	No	No	No
Direct bookshop grants	Yes — permanent; renovation, rural logistics, events	Partial — via FBP margin support	Partial — regional grants	Partial — reduced post-2023	Temporary only (2022–24)	No

Tax relief for bookshops	Yes — LiR shops exempt from local business tax	No	No	No	No	No
Renovation / fit-out grants	Yes — via CNL	No	No	No	No	No
Demand-side: culture pass schemes						
Youth culture pass	Yes — Pass Culture (ages 15–18)	No — KulturPass abolished 2025	Yes — Bono Cultural Joven	Reduced — now means-tested	No	No
Pass value (at age 18)	€300	€200 (when active)	€400	€500 (now reduced)	—	—
Books as % of pass spend	71% bought books	~49% (when active)	31%	47% (2016–19)	—	—
Scheme status (2026)	Active; under budget pressure	Abolished	Active; renewed annually	Reformed; reduced reach	—	—

8. Key Lessons and Policy Implications

Several themes emerge consistently from the international evidence:

Fixed prices are foundational

Every country with a thriving independent bookshop sector has either a fixed book price or a very recent history of one. Countries that have repealed these laws have seen rapid consolidation toward chains and online retail. The FBP is not a sufficient condition for survival, but it appears to be a necessary one — providing the margin stability that allows independents to invest in curation, staff, and programming.

The whole chain matters

France's model is effective because it supports writers, translators, publishers, bookshops, libraries, and literary events simultaneously. Supporting publishers without supporting bookshops (Canada's approach until 2022) leaves a gap in the distribution chain. The CNL's logic — that books need to be created, published, distributed, and read — reflects a systems-level understanding of the ecosystem.

Culture passes work, but are politically fragile

The academic evidence from Italy is strong: culture vouchers increase participation, especially among disadvantaged young people, and create lasting reading habits. Books consistently emerge as the most popular spending category across all four European schemes. But the schemes require consistent political will to maintain, and have proven vulnerable to budget pressures in Italy, France, and Germany alike.

Online competition requires online-specific policy

France's experience with the minimum shipping charge shows that a fixed book price alone is insufficient in the age of Amazon. Each time a new pricing mechanism emerges that undermines the intent of existing regulations, new legislation is required. This ongoing regulatory effort — now playing out at the European court level — reflects a genuine commitment to maintaining a bookshop ecosystem, not simply passing a law and hoping for the best.

Australia's gap

Australia's independent bookshop sector operates without the structural protections available in France, Germany, Spain, or even Canada (which now has at least some direct bookseller funding). The evidence from Europe suggests that the abolition of fixed book prices in 1972 was a significant structural decision whose consequences compound over time. Whether there is political appetite for any of the policy mechanisms documented here — a culture pass, reduced GST on books, a quality labelling scheme, or direct bookshop grants — remains an open question.

Sources & Further Reading

This document draws on research from: Publishing Perspectives; the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) RISE Bookselling report; the Centre National du Livre (centrenationaldulivre.fr); the Association of Canadian Publishers; Quill & Quire; TIME; The Art Newspaper; Courthouse News Service; the Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization (Baldin, Marenzi & Zantomio, 2025); EuroNews; France 24; and the European Writers Council. All figures current as of March 2026.