

Good vibrations:

CEATL during the pandemic

Francesca Novajra

I once read that the mother of Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys told him that dogs can sense people's vibrations, especially the bad ones. Wilson figured that human beings were also able to sense good vibrations and he worked extremely hard on this song to translate these *vibes* into music. At our AGMs we have a ritual that we call 'Good Vibes': each delegate is given sixty seconds to share a valuable experience from their association, an example of good practice that could inspire other countries. Now, our 'best practices' had to be adapted to the Covid-world of 2020 and 2021.



A view of Åland
Photo: Juliane Wammen

Translators as inquiring minds

While the pandemic hit us all hard, the way we carry out our work didn't change significantly during the lockdown: after an initial moment of shock and dismay, we continued to translate at our desks, at home. However, even though our job is a solitary one, we are not hermits. Our need to exchange ideas is physiological.

Translators are the most enquiring minds you can meet. And it couldn't be otherwise: to immerse yourself every day in someone else's words, to distil them into another language without losing a single drop, you have to be curious, you have to travel a lot, physically and with your imagination.

With the arrival of Covid the usual windows to the outside world were closed: no more fairs, no more festivals, no more gatherings or meetings with authors, no more seminars with colleagues, and no more conferences. Thankfully, we are also flexible beings and we started to take breaths of fresh air through virtual Zoom sessions. At first we were slightly intimidated, shy or even wary, but little by little we

made this tool our new window to the outside world and we realised that there were so many of us out there, that we could talk to colleagues who lived in another region, in another country, even on another continent.

Zoom, a window to the outside world

Since March 2020, Zoom entered our homes and translators have benefitted from it. Interviews, videos, festivals, meetings have multiplied like never before. Live video conferences, Facebook, Twitter, email exchanges. For instance, in the wake of a project involving the translation of a [nursery rhyme on the Coronavirus](#) into over 35 languages, the Bologna Children's Book Fair (BCBF) invited CEATL and [FIT](#) to an [international forum on working \(and surviving\) as a translator of children's books](#). In Catalonia, the AELC launched a [consultancy programme](#) that will allow exchanges between pairs of translators from and to Catalan. In Portugal, the [Francisco Magalhães Literary Translation Prize](#) created a promotional banner that will be placed on the winning book for the first time. [APT](#) will sponsor an Afghan refugee translator and has launched a partnership with young Chinese translators in Macao. In the Netherlands, [Auteursbond](#) is in the process of negotiating a new contract for translators and has created a committee to further reach out to writers and translators of colour and provide them with opportunities and visibility. In Germany, translators have recorded their experiences in [translation diaries](#) and short [videos](#) about their work, and [Translationale](#), the first German literary translation festival, was launched in Berlin. In Croatia [DHKP](#) translators broadcast a series of radio programmes [Književni](#)

[trenutak](#) ('The literary moment'), and the Slovenian association [DSKP](#) produced a video on the new translators' residence [Sovretov kabinet in Hrastnik](#). In the United Kingdom, the [Society of Authors](#) with author Mark Haddon and translator Jennifer Croft launched the [#TranslatorsOntheCover](#) campaign calling for the name of the translator to appear on the front cover. And CEATL, FIT and [Petra E-network](#) were all invited to the first international congress of Italian literary translators [Dall'italiano al mondo](#). CEATL's Copyright working group assisted Romanian colleagues in negotiating the transposition of the DSM and two important surveys were conducted among our members: one on their [legal and contractual situation](#), the other on working conditions. In Switzerland 84 cultural associations (literature, visual arts, dance, theatre and music) joined in a 'Taskforce Culture' to better coordinate and plan a new start. But the most important thing that



CEATL delegates in Åland
Photo: Juliane Wammen

has emerged from the testimonies of colleagues is that European national governments have been granting financial aid to literary translators



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Photo: Lorenzo Cecotto

and this has been a lever to demand fairer working conditions: in many countries such as Poland, Finland, The Netherlands, Denmark, Italy and Spain, literary translators have engaged in negotiations to obtain better conditions and status or to be included in the general aid packages targeted at cultural freelancers and artists.

Åland and ruska

Following virtual AGMs, our colleagues from Sweden (SFF – translators' section) and Finland (SKTL and KAOS) worked for months to organise an in-person meeting knowing that it might be cancelled at the last minute. Finally the meeting was held on a magnificent archipelago in the Baltic Sea in the middle of *ruska*, a Finnish word that describes the explosion of colour of the Autumn foliage. Åland : 6145 islands, of which only 80 are inhabited, an autonomous, demilitarised and neutralised region of Finland (with its own passport, flag, stamps etc.)² where Swedish is the official language (Finnish

is spoken by ca. 5% of the population). A model of peaceful cohabitation. What better place to meet after a year and a half of pandemic! We were about thirty delegates from all over Europe and we enjoyed ourselves, so happy to meet up again in person, almost astonished to be able to once again work side by side in the working groups, enthusiastic about our visit to the [Mariehamn Library](#) to listen to Ulla-Lena Lundberg, author of the book *Is* ('Ice'), and to chat with its Polish and Finnish translators, Justyna Czechowska and Leena Vallissari. And, of course, we feasted on the tasty *pannakaku* while switching from one language to another, between a Finnish sauna and a dive into the icy sea.

It felt as though a volcanic energy was generated among the translators in Åland, and, as my colleague Andreas Jandl just wrote to me, "the good vibes of Mariehamn are still vibrating".

*Translated from the French original
by Penelope Eades-Alvarez*

² Matthieu Chillaud, 'Les îles Åland : un laboratoire insolite du désarmement géographique?', AFRI (Annuaire français de Relations internationales), volume VIII, 722-735, 2007.