

## NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: FINLAND

# The Finnish Connection

## Profiles from our new and not-so-new associations

### KAOS – A Labour Union Chapter for Literary Translators in Finland

In 2010, when the Union of Journalists in Finland started to open its doors to a broader range of freelancers working in the media industry, a group of literary translators decided to seize the opportunity. And so the spring of 2014 saw the birth of **KAOS**, the Literary Translators' Branch within the Association of Freelance Journalists in Finland, which is one of the most notable member organizations of the Union of Journalists. For the first time in Finland, literary translators had representation with trade union status.



*The board from left to right: Riina Vuokko (secretary), J. Pekka Mäkelä, Outi Järvinen (vice-chair), Jaakko Kankaanpää (chair)  
Photo: Anna Skogster*

In Finland freelancers and other self-employed workers in creative fields have always had a problematic relationship regarding collective bargaining, as the national reading of anti-trust laws has been extremely strict, resulting in a notable chill factor – the fear of litigation by authorities over any attempts to collectively further freelancer rights, fees and working conditions. However, one of the long term goals of KAOS, alongside with its parent organizations **AFJ** and **UJF**, is to gain the right to collective bargaining for freelancers and other self-employed creators, especially when they are facing large media houses on a wildly uneven negotiation basis. We are hopeful that the tide in this matter, largely with help from the EU and European cooperation, is slowly but surely turning in our favour.

In addition to the trade union side of things, i.e. pushing for collective bargaining rights and better social security for freelancers, KAOS also organizes a wide array of training courses and workshops for translators, both beginners and established professionals, members and non-



*Jaakko Kankaanpää, MA, Cultural History, University of Turku, is a professional literary translator from English to Finnish of both fiction and fact, with over 100 titles under his belt.*

*Jaakko Kankaanpää  
Photo: Private archive*

members alike. The most recent one of these was a master class for beginner Swedish to Finnish literary translators, a group currently much in demand due to the continuing popularity of Nordic Noir flowing in from our Scandinavian neighbours.

KAOS also hosts a yearly summer event for literary translators nationwide, alternating between a two-day seminar in Helsinki and a longer summer camp in a rural setting in Laukaa, Central Finland – which we can proudly claim is the largest and most notable professional get-together for literary translators into Finnish. In addition to this (barring Covid-19) we have monthly informal bar meetings in Helsinki for everyone working in the field.

A new and exciting development is the Genius Loci Travel Grant, awarded for the first time in November 2021. The grant was established by means of a donation from the legacy of Anja and Erkki Haglund, a late married couple, both notable literary translators, and its aim is to provide translators with the opportunity to immerse

themselves in language and culture in some location relevant to their source language or a specific work, for a longer period of time. The grant is a joint venture between KAOS and the [WSOY Literary Foundation](#), one of the major literary funds in the country.

KAOS  
kääntäjien ammattiosasto

KAOS has a steadily growing membership, currently a little less than a hundred, comprising of a significant portion of professionally active literary translators in Finland, and is the only translators' association in the country exclusively representing literary translators. Its board is made up of a chair plus three members, elected yearly by an AGM, and no paid staff. The various activities are mainly financed by grants from both government and private sources on a one-off basis. KAOS has representation on the board of its immediate parent organization,

the Union of Freelance Journalists in Finland, as well as in the General Assembly of the Union of Journalists in Finland. KAOS is also part of various artists' and copyright associations.

## “A long term KAOS goal is the right to collective bargaining for freelancers”

Having joined CEATL in 2020, KAOS is one of its newcomers, but is looking forward to a long and fruitful membership.

*Jaakko Kankaanpää*

### SKTL

The Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters SKTL, founded in 1955, is the oldest association representing translators and interpreters in Finland. It includes an exceptionally wide array of translating and interpreting professions, including teachers and researchers in the field.



*SKTL's newly elected board at the autumn general meeting in 2019  
Photo: Maarit Laitinen*

SKTL's approximately 1800 members are professional literary, document and audio-visual translators, court, conference and community interpreters, and researchers. In addition, SKTL also has student members. The association has five sections, one of them being the Literary Translators' Section, which currently boasts over 350 members. The sections, as well as the local branches in Turku, Tampere and Vaasa, organise a variety of informative events each year.



SKTL promotes the conditions and valuation of translation and interpreting in Finland. It is in contact with authorities, cultural organisations, businesses, and trade organisations. SKTL provides on-demand guidance and pre-arranged training sessions on, for example, negotiations and contract issues for its members, as well as a community of professionals that makes up a prominent networking forum for translators and interpreters in Finland. SKTL also produces publications and awards grants.

SKTL participates actively in international organisations and maintains strong contacts within the translation and interpreting sector throughout the world. SKTL is a member of international organisations such as CEATL, FIT, Baltic Writers' Council, EULITA, AVTE, Norne and NFÖR, and literary translators represent SKTL in many Finnish organisations. In 2020, SKTL joined the CROWD project (2020–2024) that is part of an international literary network.