

SPIEZ 2024 – A WORD WITH CHRIS DURBAN

This year – not for the first time – we’re delighted to welcome Chris Durban as one of our distinguished speakers at the Financial Translation Summer Conference (FTSC) in Spiez. We got the chance to talk to her in advance, and in the process learned a lot about her background, her relationship to the FTSC, and the industry as a whole. That includes some valuable insights for financial translators and for people who aspire to move into the field!

Chris and I met on Zoom. We discussed a range of topics, touching on the past, present and future, including some of the big questions for our industry at the present time. Chris has done some serious thinking about these, and she’ll bring her conclusions to Spiez. She not only talks about the importance of education and work experience to truly specialise in your respective field, but has herself always been walking the walk: working while studying and studying while working. And seizing opportunities as they arise.

Looking ahead: whatever the topic, I’m sure all financial (or otherwise specialised) translators will benefit from hearing Chris speak on 5 July [in Spiez](#).

A: Hi, Chris, thanks for taking the time. Let me start by asking you what your connection to the FTSC in Spiez is.

Chris: The connection goes back many years. In SFT, we’d already been organising a financial translation conference for key stakeholders, but our event was biennial. It was attendees from ASTTI who came up with the idea of hosting it in Switzerland every other year. The two complement each other perfectly. For example, SFT’s conferences take place in major cities like Paris or Brussels, which is convenient for speakers since finance professionals can just pop by, whereas the Spiez one, in a small village in the mountains, has a truly unique atmosphere. You arrive in the Bernese Oberland and immediately feel “Wow, I’m in Switzerland.” That environment gives the networking a different tone. I attend as a participant whenever possible and this year will be my third time as a speaker. I’m really looking forward to it.

A: What is your most memorable experience in connection with Spiez?

Chris: A few years ago I was travelling to the conference by rail with two fellow translators. Our high-speed train from Paris was running late and we missed a connection, so around midnight we found ourselves on a train from Geneva to Interlaken with no stop in Spiez. We were tired and at a loss on the best option for reaching our destination – getting off in Bern and taking a taxi to Spiez or staying on until Interlaken and trying to work our way back from there – when a conductor came through our coach. I spoke to him in German, explaining our predicament and, half joking, took a chance: “Would it be possible to stop the train in Spiez?” He smiled and replied: “Let me check.” Long story short, as it was the last train on that route that night, it was an option! So this massive TGV proceeded to stop in the tiny little train station in Spiez where we got off in almost complete darkness, not believing our luck.

For me there are two very important lessons in this anecdote: first, speaking to people in their native language helps you connect in more meaningful ways. I'm almost certain that this gentleman wouldn't have been so inclined to go the extra mile for us if I hadn't made the effort to talk to him in German. Second, sometimes you just have to take the initiative – he would never have suggested stopping the train for us on his own.

A: Is there anything you would like to share with translators thinking of specialising in finance?

Chris: I see at least two points, for starters.

First, people – and that includes translators! – need to understand that finance is so much more than just numbers, and that it's not boring at all!

Sure, there are figures, but financial statements are just one small part of a giant whole; the rest can be everything from sustainability and green solutions to diversity and inclusion.

So if you're looking to make a difference and are in search of a purpose, you're sure to find something here that suits you. The positive impact that investments and the "financial world" at large can have is often underestimated. Contrary to a common image among translators, it's not all about making fat cigar-puffing Monopoly-men with top hats richer – it's also about empowering people and communities by putting the money where it matters. By shaping the world of the future. As a financial translator you can play an important role in that mission. You also gain unique insights into political and social issues.

Secondly, financial translation is a poor option if you're just in it for the money. Sure, if you do a great job and succeed in finding your niche within the niche, you can make good money – as I will be pointing out in [my presentation at this year's FTSC](#). But it's like every other sector: if your heart's not in it, people will know sooner or later and you won't deliver the quality that's needed to really create added value for your customers.

High rates are not a matter of course; you have to earn them. The good news is that if you've got the profile and skillset, and you're willing to put in the work, chances are that you will succeed.

A: Why should (aspiring) financial translators come to the Spiez Summer Conference?

Chris: For one thing, the ASTTI (and SFT) Financial Translation Summer Conferences are nearly unique in the translatorsphere in that they're not just translator get-togethers.

Spiez will bring together key stakeholders from the entire sector. Just look at this year's line-up of topics and speakers: alongside distinguished translation colleagues

you have experts and professionals from insurance companies, banks, business schools and universities. There are both buyers and sellers in the room, which creates networking opportunities that go well beyond the buzzwordy stuff. Attendees learn from the best, but also hear from and get the chance to directly talk to their target groups!

A: Thank you so much for taking the time, Chris, we can't wait to hear you in Spiez this summer!

Chris: My pleasure, I'm looking forward to it.

Interview by Anna Hubert

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About Chris Durban



Chris Durban is a freelance translator (French to English) based in Paris, where she specialises in publication-level texts for demanding clients, primarily in business strategy and financial/corporate communications. Her client portfolio includes some of Europe's top corporations as well as government, regulatory and regional development agencies. A member of SFT and a Fellow of ITI, she is also the co-founder and co-organizer of UETF, SFT's summer school for financial translators, as well as the Translate in... series of seminars for translators keen to hone their writing skills. Chris has written many articles about translation, targeting both peers and clients, and has given talks and workshops around the world. She is a former board member and president of SFT and served on the ATA board. She translates almost every day and enjoys it immensely.