



EUSJA News

Newsletter of the European Union of Science Journalists' Associations

Winter 2011

A word from the editor

I have said before that trying to get copy for EUSJA News is like watching the American film Groundhog Day over and again. In the film, despite his best efforts, the main character awakes each morning to find himself in the same situation – back where he started from.

That is exactly what happens with copy gathering from more than 2000 European science journalists. And it is strange because so much is happening – or not happening – in our profession. In bars and restaurants, in emails between colleagues...

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Upcoming events:

18–19 March: Eusja General Assembly in Budapest.

18–20 July: Study tour to EMBL and DKFZ in Heidelberg.

26 June to 1 July: Meet the Nobel laureates in medicine in Lindau.

27–29 June: World Conference of Science Journalists in Cairo.

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Zeitgeist

We hit the zeitgeist. However, the European Commission seems to make it better. This was my impression when I read its last calls for project proposals. Within the action "Science in Society", one area is entitled "Relationships between science, democracy and law". The various sub-topics under which the calls can be submitted, show a considerable change in the Commission's science communication policy. Things like public understanding of science and technology, or pure one-way science communication are out.

Instead the Brussels' bureaucrats formulated topics which scream for public participation: "Involvement of civil society organisations in research", "Regulating emerging scientific and technological developments", or the quite interesting "Forward Look at new ways of doing and organising research in our knowledge societies".

Even a research topic is dedicated to the new communication challenges: "Research aimed at enhancing inter-communication concerning science, both in its methods and its products, to raise mutual understanding between the scientific world, and the wider audience of policy-makers, the media and the general public."

This is a true search for visions, possibly a reaction of the Commission to the crisis of science journalism. EUSJA named visions, hitting this zeitgeist, during its session "The Missing Mediator" at ESOF 2010 in Turin and in my contribution to the last EUSJA News. But the Commission has taken action, which science journalists didn't, or couldn't.

REASONS OF CRISIS

In a blog contribution, the German science journalist Alexander Stirn listed some main reasons for the crisis of science journalism: The objects of its reporting became active themselves. Increasingly more scientists are blogging, and many of them are often better than journalists and even more credible. Press officers of universities and research institutes do not need journalists any more to bring their stories out.

As a result, journalists are not needed just to crunch press releases or explain the world to their audience.

SOLUTIONS TO CRISIS

Stirn: "What science journalists should do is starting to ask critical questions: Ranging in scientific developments, ask for contradictions, question the results and ask for motivations and backgrounds of research, including sources of funds and political frameworks."

"A science journalist who sees himself as critical attendant needs the people who share this position. Journalists have to go to their audience, they

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Hajo Neubert.

An everyday story of Newtonian physics

Every evening at 7 o'clock, a large number of people in the UK tune to BBC Radio 4 to hear the latest episode of one of the world's longest running "soap operas". 'The Archers', once billed as "an everyday story of country folk", recently celebrated its 60th birthday. Instead of the usual cheery nostalgia, they decided to mark the event by killing off a leading character, an affable eccentric who owned a large country house.

What has all this got to do with science? I hear you ask. It was the way on which the character, Nigel Pargeter, met his end, that set the calculators flying.

Always reckless, Nigel climbed on to the roof of the family pile to remove a banner. Anyone listening could hear it coming. They certainly heard it going as he plunged to earth making a deathly scream.

The length of that scream set one bunch of journalists thinking. The people who put together 'More or Less', an informative and often amusing radio programme about the use and abuse of statistics – yes, you can make number crunching entertaining – timed the duration of the

scream. They then went back to Newtonian mechanics and worked out how far Nigel might have fallen before an encounter with the ground halted his scream.

As the programme's blog put it: "Nigel's flailing form would have accelerated at almost 10 metres per second per second. He'd have started at a speed of zero and finished the first second at a speed of 10 metres per second – covering about 5 metres."

See "http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio4/2011/01/calculating_the_height_of_loxley_hall.html"

The upshot of this number crunching was that the stately pile, Lower Loxley Hall, must have been as high as one of England's most loved building's, the cathedral, or minster, in York. More prosaically, it was about 20 storeys high.

It would be an exaggeration to say that 'More or Less' provoked as much response as the contrived plot line itself, but it certainly got people talking about science. This is perhaps ironic given that 'The Archers' itself started life as a way of teaching farmers, and the public, about developments in agriculture.



Mike Kenward

Michael Kenward

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need to use the social media, twitter, blogging, and the direct contact."

Science journalists have to step into debates making clear that they are responsible and wise mediators and not solidly united with the matter – despite all sympathy and passion for science.

SCIENCE JOURNALISTS CAN PLAY A ROLE

Now, as the European Commission realised that the media crisis and the crisis in science journalism may be an obstacle to progress at a time when science produces knowledge faster than people are able to acquire it, it tries to bypass the media while searching for new communication models.

However, some of the project proposers still feel that science journalism has a wealth of experiences to offer, experiences which seemed to be of no need in the current media landscape. That is why EUSJA is asked ever now and then to contribute to projects as advisor, evaluator or mediator of projects stakeholders assemblies.

From my point of view, the participation in such roles is not only a way to forward respect for the craft and ethics of science journalism, but it also my help science journalism to prevail over its crisis and develop new visions.

These can of course introduced and discussed on the EUSJA mailing list or the EUSJA blog.

Hanns-J. Neubert, Eusja president

Sources:

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European Commission: Research for Civil Society Organisations: <http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/index.cfm?fuseaction=public.topic&id=1298>
European Commission: General Call page: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm>

European Commission: Call FP7-SCIENCE-IN-SOCIETY-2011-1: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.CapacitiesDetailsCallPage&call_id=360
EUSJA/TELI: The Missing Mediator: Science debates in a knowledge based society (Video of the ESOF 2010 session): <http://nubes.esof2010.org/stored?vid=196>



Sharing the bounty in Estonia

The Estonian Association of Science Journalists was one of the main organizers of a science-media-society conference in the capital city of Tallinn last October, under the headline "Sharing the Bounty of Science". More than 200 Estonian scientists, journalists and communicators attended the two day event just outside Tallinn's medieval Old Town.

Here is a selection of short extracts from some of the presentations.

The chairman of Estonian Public Broadcasting, Margus Allikmaa, said that ever more media outlets in Estonia were beginning to show an interest in science. "While still a couple of years ago there was much concern about the scarcity of science in the media, now attention has shifted to the quality of the coverage," he said.

Literary theorist and magazine editor Märt Väljataga regretted the relative paucity of popular scientific books in Estonia. He said such books fulfilled a function in today's culture which formerly had been the domain of philosophy. "While modern philosophy is often overly technical," he told the audience, "it has become the role of popular scientific literature to offer wild speculations on infinity, immortality and the like."

Psychologist Jüri Allik saw a problem with Estonian universities which, he said, seem not to be too much concerned with publicising their science. University web sites, for instance, often tend to showcase on their front pages the results of their sports teams rather than scientific achievements.



Estonian president Priit Ennet and others.



Science journalist Tiit Kändler pointed out the importance of providing the reader with background information: "Just like the background radiation in the universe connects us with the beginning of everything, the background information in science reporting should serve as a bridge to the unitary realm of scientific knowledge."

Environmental technologist Erik Puura, one of the best known science bloggers in Estonia, was critical of the credibility of the Internet as a source of information on science. "Sometimes the science stories published by some online news sites are of so low quality that they could well be used as "find-the-mistakes" type learning aids in primary school," he said.

Philosopher and mathematician Andres Luure, a prolific Wikipedia editor in his spare time, responded to some of Dr Puura's concerns in his presentation by saying the online, freely editable encyclopedia would, eventually, become a very reliable source of information. For this, we just need to increase the number of active editors of the Estonian version of the encyclopedia, say, a hundred times.

Physicist Andi Hektor said the most important factor to get a scientist to get engaged with the public was his or her inner motivation. "Since I was a student in the early 1990s, I have seen a huge positive change in such motivation among scientists."

Tartu University journalism professor Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt spoke of a plan in the university to start teaching science communication to classes made up of both science and journalism students.

Sharing the Bounty of Science was a sequel to the conferences Science: Mute or Astute? (2008) and The Bermuda Triangle (2009). The Estonian association was involved in organizing those, too, but to a lesser degree than we were this time.

Apart from two presenters from Germany and Spain, we had just one participant from another country, Finland. Hopefully we can make the next conference more international. So, if you are interested, watch this space.

Priit Ennet,
president of the Estonian Association of Science Journalists

Brain Food

I have the world's worst memory. A friend once sent me pills to aid my problem and I literally forgot to take them. Recent research suggests that the food we eat can have an immediate and lasting effect on our mental health and help prevent cognitive decline, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Diseases. Nootropics is the name given to the foodstuffs, dietary supplements and drugs that enhance memory and cognitive function.

Nootropics are believed to work by altering the availability of supply of essential neurotransmitters, enzymes and hormones to the brain. They may also improve the supply of oxygen or stimulate nerve growth. However it is very difficult to assess their usefulness and research is hampered by the difficulty in quantifying cognition and intelligence.

Anti-oxidants such as vitamins A, C and E will prevent brain tissue from oxidative damage. There is evidence to suggest that the anti-oxidant lycopene could help prevent the damage which occurs to cells in the development of dementia, particularly Alzheimer's. Tomatoes are rich in lycopene. The strong anti-oxidant L-Carnosine is found in chicken and lean red meat. This has been shown to help in protecting the brain from the plaque formation that may lead to senility and Alzheimer's. There is a dietary supplement called Ethos Endymion which is especially useful for vegetarians. It also has dramatically positive effects on skin tone, cataracts and speeding up wound healing. Folic acid and B12 help prevent homocysteine building up in the body – levels of which have been found to be higher with people with Alzheimer's. Vitamin K is also known to enhance cognitive function.

A number of the protein amino-acids are beginning to look important in these studies. Acetylcholine is now known to be essential for memory formation and maintenance. The isoflavones may be able to decrease oxidation damage to the brain and tryptophan helps to stabilize mood and is likely to aid learning and memory. Studies have shown that a depletion of tryptophan in the body indicates a deficit in long term memory and information processing.

The mineral zinc is also vital for enhancing memory and thinking skills and iron is also needed to ensure the blood is carrying plenty of oxyhaemoglobin to the brain. Omega 3 may also help to retain brain function as these fatty acids are high in DHA. Low levels of DHA are thought to be linked to the risk of memory loss and Alzheimer's

Phenols in fruit and vegetables are very likely to help brain function. The darker the colour the richer the phenol content. A study was done on rats where a 2% blackberry supplement to their diet was shown to be effective in reversing age related deficits and neural function.

Blueberries have also been noted as having a beneficial effect.

It would seem that to conserve our brain power for as long as possible we should ensure our diet is properly balanced and rich in the following foods –fresh tuna and salmon, chicken and lean red meat, leafy green vegetables especially broccoli, blackberries and blueberries, brown rice, avocado, sesame seeds, mushrooms, sage, tomatoes, eggs, whole grains, seeds, nuts and chocolate. Well, the latter is known to keep us happy!



Brainy Berry Crumble

You can use any mix of berries you like but remember the darker they are the better for the brain! Mix in some slices of apple to keep the cost down.

- 1 tbsp. flaked almonds
- 1 tbsp. pumpkin, sesame and sunflower seeds
- 400 g blackberries, thawed
- 1 tbsp. sugar to sweeten, more if preferred.
- 75 g butter, diced and cold
- 100 g S.R. whole-wheat flour (or normal if you prefer)
- 25 g ground almonds
- 75 g caster sugar
- 1 tsp. linseeds

1. Turn oven to 200 °C/ gas 6
2. Spread the almonds and seeds on a baking tray and toast to a light golden brown. Allow to cool.
3. Place the blackberries in a baking dish and sprinkle over the tablespoon of sugar.
4. Put the flour, ground almonds and butter into a mixing bowl and rub the butter in.
5. Stir in the caster sugar, linseeds, toasted almond flakes and seeds.
6. Spoon over the berries and bake for about 30 minutes till lightly browned.

Get smart by eating!

Cherry Dobbins

Full moon in Sevilla

To visit the European Joint Research Centre "Institute for Prospective Technological Studies" (IPTs) is a challenge, because it is situated in Seville in the andalusian heart of Spain. But to see this city by full moon and with its avenues of bitter orange trees is really impressive.

After the EUSJA visits to Saarbrücken and Ispra it was the third tour with ICT focus initiated by the author and brought eleven colleagues to Seville. When we met in the early afternoon of Jan. 20, Kaianders from Sweden was the first to try the oranges and discovered that they are very bitter. So the tour started with discoveries from the very first moment and Kaianders decided to make orange marmalade when coming home.

Elena from the press office guided us to the nearby IPTs building, a remainder of the world exhibit 1992 that took place in Seville. With a warm welcome from David, the local information officer, we went in the rusty (a special kind of steel?) building and were placed in a tiny room, where David Broster as the Head of the Unit moderated all presentations. After a short introduction we immersed in a brand new study focusing on eHealth (remote patient monitoring and treatment). It's the first European study on this topic and will be followed by more detailed investigations but it already shows, that only with the help of eHealth it will be possible to assure a fundable medical care facing an ever increasing lifespan.

After a short break under the impressing cupola in the inner courtyard (did anyone ask for its benefit?) we learned more about ICT for Inclusion and eLearning. It seems to be a big gap in the mindsets of teachers and pupils towards the use and the profit of the different ways of e-learning. We discussed all this topics that are quite new and therefore waiting for new thoughts and experiments.

Our already frequently solved experiment for the remaining afternoon was to learn more about the Cathedral and to climb the huge tower. It seems, that all churches in Andalusia are built on the remainings of mosques and in Seville we even found a crocodile hanging over the entrance. As the muezzin had to climb up the tower several times a day, it was decided to build a ramp



Drawing Kaianders Sempler



"La Giralda", the clocktower of the cathedral in Sevilla, was earlier the minaret of the big mosque.

to go up by horse. So did we by ourselves and it was an easy way, perhaps a new idea for architects looking for alternatives to boring staircases.

Back on earth we were really impressed by the colossal (over 25 meters height) and gold-sparkling Altar in the world, financed by all the gold conquered by the Spanish armada in South America. The cathedral also houses the tomb of Columbus, known as the discoverer of America. But there is well founded doubt that Columbus was the first that entered America. I think that's another discussion, that will be an interesting challenge for us as science journalists to change good old traditions of knowledge... We finished this day with an excellent meal in the heart of the city, overlooked by a bull head remembering us being in a city famous for its bull fights.

On the second day we learned more about transnational collaboration in R&D and Corporate R&D. In a Videoconference with the Ispra Institute for energy we discussed the European codes of conduct for ICT companies. Finally we were given an insight in two sectors of the broad ICT industries sector: Videogames and Automotive. At the lunch we acknowledged that it was the first trip to Seville, but it will not be the last one.

Rüdiger Maier, Austria

We were delighted with the successful study trip to Catalunya, organised by Merce Piqueras. It was so heartening to welcome so many young people on their first EUSJA visit. The trip was full on with so much to see, attend and take part in. We eventually returned home – delayed by traffic control strikes – exhausted but so glad we went.

EUSJA study trip to Girona, 25-28th October 2010

The science of food and water

By Senne Starckx

When I arrived in Girona for my first EUSJA study trip, at the end of October, the first thing that attracted my attention was the bright, clear sky above this northern Spanish city. It looked totally different from the Belgium sky on a rare sunny day. Although it was not summer-hot, the landscape around Girona seemed to be bathed in a beautiful, rich mixture of yellow and orange sunlight. We saw this inspiring light – which is so typical for the south – again in the paintings of Salvador Dali, the Catalan surrealist who is immortalized and buried in a nice (but overcrowded) museum in Figueras. Another striking, typical feature of the weather in Girona is the 'tramontana', a strong wind from the north which gives a constant feeling of dryness in your mouth and throat.

So, why Girona? Our diverse group of European science journalists was invited to Girona by Miquel Duran, a local theoretical chemist – a pharmacist who comes up with complex mathematical equations for inventing new pills. He was acting as a host at the invitation of the Catalan Science Journalists' Association. But Miquel is so much more than a common scientist who works quietly on his subject and publishes his results in a journal. He is a great inspirer for science. And last but not least: he is a true magician – a magimathician, as he calls himself. Miquel is part of a theatre company which popularizes science and chemistry to the general public. Armed with funny and bizarre tricks, he pulls the legs of his spectators. It's entertaining, and it's scientifically correct. I myself enjoyed his illustration with a deck of cards of Schrödinger's cat, an (in)famous thought experiment in quantum physics – you only know which card it is, until you turn it over: measurement makes reality.

Ok, back to real science. Scientific research in Spain and Cataluña is often performed in large 'science parks', where researchers – mainly young women, I've noticed – with different backgrounds work together on interdisciplinary projects. One of those parks is the Agriculture and Food Research and Technology Institute (IRTA) in Monells, not far from Girona. More than a thousand scientists here do research on food security, animal health, a more efficient production of crops, ..., to put it briefly: the entire food chain. They work together with large food industries – yes, also with Monsanto – as well as with small, local farmers. Because many of their projects are sponsored by the European Union, the results are published freely, as one of the directors of the institute ensured me. But the big companies might receive the results a little bit earlier.

Of course, your science park looks ridiculous if you don't have a decent laboratory. After being put in white coats, hats, gloves and overshoes, we were allowed to enter the sanctuary of the food institute: the meat laboratory. Not a big difference with a common butcher, if you ask me. Everything was there: machines to cut and slice the meat, meat-mincers, and even a counter – with no meat in it (sold out?). The scientists who work at IRTA don't spend the entire day behind their computer. They get dirty hands, and sometimes they even have to slaughter animals themselves.

I'm not an expert in food science, but the quality of the dishes we had the night before, at a traditional Catalan restaurant in Girona, convinced me that it's not a bad idea to let the Spanish take care of our European gastronomic culture.

On the way back to Girona our bus had a serious breakdown. The bus company had to bring a new one. Fifteen journalists were stuck in the middle of nowhere between

Monells and Girona. Luckily, with its last effort, our bus managed to bring us to a roadside bar. Finally we were able to quench our thirst – thank you, tramontana – with an ice-cold Estralla Damm, a pretty good Spanish lager. I still don't know who sabotaged the bus...

Finish your evening with beer, the next

day you'll have... water. One of the big environmental issues in Spain is the desertification of the inland and the south – huge amounts of freshwater are used for agriculture (growing tomatoes and stuff like that). Wednesday morning we made a visit to the Catalan Water Research Institute (ICRA), where vice director Sergi Sabater told us about enormous amounts of Catalan water that are being transported every day to southern regions like Andalucia.



The chemistry of light, demonstrated during the nightly chemical walk through the old town of Girona.



Drawing Kaianders Sempier

Highlights of Europe: The cathedral in Girona, Catalunya, Spain.

But water scarcity is not only an issue in the south. A couple of years ago Barcelona had to receive freshwater from ships in its harbour, otherwise the people of the capital of Catalunya would have had to wash themselves in the Mediterranean, and the football pitch of Camp Nou would have become a barren field.

Barcelona was also the final destination of our study trip. The city and the region are very proud of the Barcelona Biomedical Research Park (PRBB), which is located in the former Olympic village, close the seaboard. And when I write 'close', I really mean close. Which scientist can say he has a view of the Mediterranean when he looks out of his office window?

Instead of having lunch in the cafeteria, researchers at the PRBB have their sandwiches on the beach. I don't know if such kind of distraction is either good or bad for the scientific outcome of this prestigious institute. But hey, who cares?



Photo Kaianders Sempier

Senne Starckx, Belgium.

Breathtaking All The Way

Medellín, January 5, 2011

It's been a long Christmas season in Colombia. It started, as usual, on December 1 with parties, dancing and firecrackers and faded out in the middle of January.

This time of the year is the holiday season, people take their vacation, schools and universities close, public life comes to a standstill. Xmas and New Year's turn out to be a religious carnival with roaring music, Cumbia, Salsa and Vallenato. Kids in the villages run around like sorcerers and witches, devils and monsters and have a hell of a time.

Despite of deafening noise in the streets, it was actually an extraordinary quiet and peaceful time. In the years before, tanks and thousands of soldiers lined the main highways which traverse the Andes and connect the major cities of this mountainous country. They protected the travellers against guerilla attacks. Recently, Colombia's armed forces have come down so hard on the FARC and ELN combatants that precautionary measures apparently were no longer warranted. Even the raging war on drugs and cocaine has calmed down. The notorious Medellín and Cali cartels have been wiped out and the hot spots have moved up north to Mexico and Guatemala.

To top this off, the day after Christmas Colombia's new president Juan Manuel Santos announced a swiping victory. The country's most dangerous narcotrafficker, Pedro Oliverio Guerrero alias „cuchillo“ – knife – was killed in a shootout in the remote jungles of the Amazon region. As a proof, the police chief presented on national television the pistol of the delinquent, which showed off pieces of gold and diamonds.

The only real turbulence during the Christmas season was the bad weather. The winter hit Colombia very hard. While central Europe and the US East coast were snowed in, torrential rains flooded the country, washing away highways, causing landslides which buried towns and, above all, raising the water levels at the Caribbean coast. Entire

regions disappeared affecting more than one million Colombians and leaving hundreds dead. Since October severe rains have drowned the country which is attributed to the global warming. The greenhouse effect is truly being felt around the globe.



Wolfgang C Goede

Colombia is used to disasters and tragedies which however never could stop the optimism of its people. They are hard working women and men who thrive ahead and demand a piece of the pie. It's a country in transition. While many rural parts remain poverty-stricken and cities are sprinkled with slums, the middle class is continuously growing, the economy booms, science and high technology become increasingly visible. Medellín, the country's second largest city located in a 1600 meter high valley, has the world's probably cleanest metro. Although almost 20 years old trains and stations look like spick and span – brandnew. Rather unique, it has various cable car extensions which run up the mountain slopes and connect the „City of the Eternal Spring“ with its upper sections and luscious parks.

Balanced temperatures, gorgeous views from the altiplanos around the metropolitan area with a population of four million, natural beauties such as the recently opened Arví park with adventurous trails attract more and more tourists from all over the world. Bit by bit Colombia's bad reputation is vanishing. The New York Times recommended the country as a prime destination for travellers picking up on the slogan of Colombia's federal tourist office: „The only danger is that you want to stay.“

Even more surprising, the media and the newspapers of the country cannot only compete with highest standards. They cover science and technology with a such a high frequency that many residents of any European city might become envious. Medellín's daily, „The Colombiano“, could be mistaken for a rather provincial gazette, but you'd be amazed at how often science and technology are on the agenda. Basically every day you find information on all straight of research such as the environment, education, health, nutrition, but also genetics, physics and cosmology.

Let's take a look at the editions of the last days. On January 3, an entire page is dedicated to the question of how the rural population can protect its homes against floods. If owners put a layer of empty plastic bottles underneath the ground floor their homes become floating when the tide rises. On December 30,



Photos by Wolfgang Goede



the science section reminds its readers to save natural resources, to treat the environment well and cut down on consumption and waste such as switching off the lights in rooms which are not used. As an iron rule the „3 R’s“ are recommended: Reduce – Reuse – Recycle!

And, of course, trips through space and time are also part of the package, yesterday for example the latest speculations on the „second earth“, Gliese 581g. „Black flowers adorn the new planet“, reads the headline. The Monday issue put the social communities into focus and introduced Victor Solano, Colombia’s master of twitter and his secrets of how to communicate with 30 000 people.

Medellin’s second daily is „El Mundo“ which set 33 years ago new standards in the production of newspapers. While European papers were still based on the 500 years old Gutenberg technique, this Colombian print media was one of the first ones to produce the entire edition with computers. Now its editor-in-chief of that time, Marta Botero, published an article on „El Tiempo“, which is printed in Colombia’s capital Bogotá.

It has become the leading print media of Latin America due to an excellently organized integrated newsroom which provides the content for the nationwide paper, a number of specialized regional and local papers which are for free, one television channel, 16 magazines, 18 online platforms as well as services for mobile telephones. All the information necessary is centrally stored and then prepared for the different media.*

This example demonstrates what students of journalism and communication in Europe are being taught at the universities: The journalism of the future is much more than ever before a highly technical profession. Colombia’s „El Tiempo“ belongs to the frontrunners. A country of the emerging world, sometimes still dubbed „underdeveloped world“, makes us realize the challenges ahead of us, especially journalists.

*) Botero’s entire article is available in „Zeitungs Innovationen 2010 Weltreport“, published by www.oberauer.com.

Wolfgang C. Goede, Teli

Comments

SCIENCE IS SEXY AGAIN – AT LEAST ON THE BBC

Whilst we are all complaining about reduced space for science stories in our printed media, it appears that the screen is the now the place for explaining science to the masses. The UK’s BBC has worked wonders in bringing leading youngish academics to our screen and making expert television presenters out of them.

Theoretical physicist Jim Al-Khalili, mathematician Marcus du Sautoy and particle physicist professor Brian Cox are fast becoming household names.

A new documentary on BBC Four, „Mad and Bad: 60 Years of Science on the Box“, was broadcast at the end of the year celebrating the rich history of how science has been represented on British TV. It was a fascinating glimpse of how the genre has evolved through the decades, up to the present day. Right now, though, television science is going through a golden age. Far from being dumbed down, we’re going through an era in which a particle physicist - Brian Cox, who presented Wonders of the Solar System on BBC Two, soon to be followed by Wonders of the Universe - can be a primetime TV star.

In 2010 alone, we have seen series with a range and depth as diverse as The Beauty of Diagrams, on BBC Four, the scientific investigation of the food we eat in E Numbers: an Edible Adventure on BBC Two, to David Attenborough’s Life, on BBC One. Let’s see what is coming up in 2011.

Stargazing Live: Brian Cox, with help from Dara O Briain

(also a trained physicist) and Jonathan Ross, explored the night sky with viewers in a live Springwatch-style event over three nights. (3-5 January, BBC Two)

Attenborough and the Giant Egg Documentary about the “elephant bird” egg that Attenborough assembled from fragments while on a 1960s filming trip to Madagascar. We now know this giant bird was alive as recently as 1,300 years ago. Coming soon on BBC Two

The Code: Marcus du Sautoy, who presented The Beauty of Diagrams, brings mathematics to primetime on BBC Four.

The Brain – A Secret History: Michael Moseley explores the development of psychiatry and neuroscience on BBC Two

Human Planet: A new epic-scale eight-part natural history series shot in high-definition for BBC One. Each episode will focus on one single environment: desert, jungles, arctic, grasslands, rivers, mountains, oceans and urban.

Wonders of the Universe: In BBC Two’s follow-up to the acclaimed **Wonders of the Solar System**, Brian Cox takes on the task of explaining the laws that govern the universe - light, gravity, energy, matter and time.

Planet Dinosaur: With the opening up of China and South America, new species of dinosaurs are being discovered all the time. This BBC One series uses CGI graphics to visualise them.

Frozen Planet: David Attenborough visits the Arctic and Antarctic in a major new series

Thanks to the Daily Telegraph for compiling this list. In addition to a mass of television programmes dedicated to science there are numerous programmes on BBC radio, many on the World Series too. And I have just discovered there is now an app on popular science to download on to an Ipad! However, I need a programme dedicated to telling me just how to use this latest wave of electronic aids!

Barbara Drillsma, ABSW

Twitter Versus Study Trips

Viola Egikova who has been responsible for organizing many of our study trips this year offers a few words of advice

Once during a VIP meeting one governor wrote to another in twitter and got a response. Both of them immediately received a chairman's message again in twitter: "Do not be wandering during such an important meeting!"

It is not a joke: I know exactly where it has happened. Do you think these gentlemen over the same table were just advanced users of new technologies? If you say "yes", then I can imagine that you prefer to look for stories on the internet and do not try to attend study trips. It seems today there are enough journalists who find travelling boring, easier to get ready news from the internet. Maybe that is why we are seeing a tendency towards the reduction of the applicants to study trips. If one will observe EUSJA trips happened in the last three months – to the research centers of Girona, Prague and JRC Seville – one will see there were vacancies.

Is it a lazy mood of journalists or maybe our information is failing? Why do we have a lower interest to meet scientists? And in the same time never before in its history has EUSJA had so many study trips. Since the last General Assembly in March 2010 when EUSJA had a study trip to Copenhagen's research centers, we had the trips to JRC Jeel (Belgium) in May and in June - to the JRC-ITU in Karlsruhe (Germany), EUSJA journalists attended the Millennium Prize celebration in Helsinki and the Nobel Prize Winners meeting in Lindau (Germany) in June; JRC Ispra (Italy) in July; Scan-Balt press-tour and the Brain devices workshop in Warsaw in September. In October journalists visited Girona; in December – Prague and in January 2011- Seville. There are several study trips in our planning: science journalists will attend the conference BioVision in Lyon and 2 rather interesting institutes in Heidelberg in July. And this June they will again participate in the Nobel Prize Winners meeting in Lindau. By the way it will be 5- years of the collaboration among EUSJA and the Lindau Council which is very productive. EUSJA has the same collaboration with some other institutions - with the Helmholtz Associations, for example. The first invitation was in 2009, next autumn we shall have another trip to Helmholtz Association centers with different topics.

Most of these trips were offered by the Board. But it is an obligation of the national associations. Last year the Danish, Catalan and Czech associations organized study trips. This year we expect trips at least from the Hungarian and Polish associations. Maybe it is useful to say a few words about the rules as we have some new members who never organized any international study trips.

So, once again: each national association has to organize a study trip at least once in 5 years. Usually we announce these trips during the General Assembly, but it is possible to send the information any other time, one must just remember: the announcement has to be sent out at least 2 months before to let national associations time to inform their members. The host association has to cover the accommodation, meals, and transfers inside the country. Travel cost is a responsibility of the participants. However if it is possible to cover also the flights, nobody would object.

The responsibility of the host association is to organize a program which will let participants write good stories. It is very important: if you want to get a good feedback, take care of the program! Nothing commercial please or journalists cannot write their articles. But sometimes it will be difficult to follow even very interesting topics: do not try to give people a greater amount of information than they can take. Try not to start the day of arrival; do not forget that people have sometimes to cover big distances, to change flights. The better way is to have a day of arrival and to start the next morning. You must send to participants a program and timetable long before the trip. It is a bad idea when the participants do not know what he has to expect every minute. Try to help people with printed materials, with discs and useful links. Fine if you could add any social event to study trip – a tour through the city, for example, a concert and so on.

We always ask to send applications via national associations. This is firstly because the associations know their members well. Secondly the associations are responsible for their members: if somebody applied and cannot come, association has to inform the organizer in due time in order somebody else could join the trip or the associations may to send a new candidate. These are very simple rules, but there is always a person who is cancelling his application the very last moment or just does not come. That is why EUSJA has a rule: the association could be charged if its member applied and did not attend or cancelled his application too late. Do not forget, it is a very difficult job to organize a trip!

And last but not least. Sure each organizer wants to get some publications. We cannot promise to write articles. . But better if the host association will get some publications, it is important for scientists. And it is very important for journalists who did not attend the trip – to read a few words in EUSJA blogs. In that case twitter is quite appropriate.

Viola Egikova
violae@mail.ru

Debate

RELATE final conference weighs up the future of science journalism

A pan-European experiment which sent nearly 80 young science journalists to laboratories over the past two years has come to an end, and the results and implications for European science and media were

discussed at a conference in Brussels on Friday (28 January). “Bridging the gap between science and journalism” conference brought together around 50 scientists, journalists, and European Union commissioners to discuss what happens when journalists and scientists are put together for a week.

“RELATE was a test, a pilot project, to see if this gap can be bridged,” said Hinano Spreafico, RELATE project coordinator with Minerva Consulting & Communications. The project took 78 young science journalists from 23 European countries to 12 research laboratories working on a range of scientific issues. Around 40% of students came from East and South East Europe, over 50% were female and a quarter managed to publish their final articles in various print and online outlets. Some 10% produced audiovisual materials instead of a written article. Howard Hudson, editor at the European Journalism Centre, who also worked on the project, said they aimed for a mix of people. They tried to match people who had some journalistic experience with media students that had none, and people holding science degrees with those who had a humanities background. The vital part of the project was to allow networking and learning from each other, he added.

Looking at participants’ daily blogs, Hudson said that there was a common acknowledgement of “a big gap between scientists and journalists”, something Massimo Izzi, a senior researcher at the Italian National Agency for New Technologies (ENEA), vehemently agreed with.

“Naturally, I had some problems explaining my job to [journalists],” he said. “I explained deeply and perfectly how electrons move between atoms, but the journalist was just looking at me.”

“I realised that what is simple for me is not the same for other people,” he said.

“As science journalists you have to approach issues with better knowledge of science than what you have now,” he told the participants. “The future belongs to technology,” he said, and if the West is to keep up with emerging economies and their investments in science and engineering, we have to appreciate the importance of science.

Elena Roda, a participant from Italy with journalistic training but no science background said: “I couldn’t understand everything at the beginning but could do so by the end of the week”.

Netta Ahituv, a regular freelancer for an Israeli weekly newspaper told the conference: “The biggest problem was getting published – newspaper editors consider science to be at the bottom of the hierarchy of newsworthy topics.”

Another challenge is making the research relevant to the reader, she said. Yolanda Alamillo, a participant from Spain, said that “as journalists we want to know the results, but often tests are ongoing. There are no results yet, so one has to focus the story on what the potential future applications of research in areas such as nanotechnology and its potential benefits for people.”

“What people know about science is what they read in the newspapers,” Izzi said. He added that the “role of young

journalists is fundamental” in today’s society and for future development. We have to strive to establish science as being as important as economics and politics in media coverage, he said.

But Ahituv suggested that editors are the main culprits in bad science coverage and said that if there were next rounds of RELATE they should bring editors on board. “There is underestimation of the power of the editors – they shape the articles, give them titles. If there is a need to convince someone that science is important, you need to convince the editors”.

Others suggested that sending researchers to work in the media for a week could be just as useful in bridging the gap.

One audience member observed that scientists and journalists are similar in that they tend to be arrogant and critical thinkers, but that there is a lack of communication between the two. The point was also raised that scientists are especially bad at communication.

But how did scientists respond to having journalists in their lab for a week?

“I wasn’t happy when I first heard that journalists were coming to visit,” said Irem Durmaz, a researcher at Bilkent University, in Turkey. Laboratory research ticks along according to a set agenda: test animals and cell cultures have to be checked regularly, and researchers feared that the visit would disrupt this, she told the conference.

Some senior colleagues who had had problems in the past with the media sensationalising their research, were “horrified” to find out that journalists would be joining them in the laboratory.

Other problems emerged after the journalists arrived. “I was telling them what I was doing but they had no idea, so I had to explain it in a very simplified manner” said Durmaz. “It’s our fault [there isn’t better science reporting]: we can’t simplify it enough, so the journalists don’t understand what’s going on. And while our concern is for them to thoroughly understand the research, they are mainly looking for what will make a headline.”

“When I proposed this idea to the researchers they were not really convinced it would be feasible,” said Fabiola Falconieri, project coordinator for the Italian National Agency for New Technologies (ENEA). “Several problems had to be solved,” she said, for example security concerns about journalists taking recording equipment into the laboratories. There was also concern about disruption of normal laboratory activities: researchers needed to continue with their usual work during the week, she said. This concern inspired the creation of a special space for the journalists to work in: a news room which, Falconieri said, continues to be used now.

“Researchers are sometimes afraid that the context [of their research] could be manipulated for aims other than scientific progress. RELATE established a relationship of trust, allowing researchers and journalists to work together,” Falconieri said.

should I tell the journalists?', and 'what do they need to know?'. But afterwards the researchers realised that they didn't have the skills or the time needed to explain their research."

On the other hand, "journalists lacked key words to understand everything that was going on". But the journalists had more success talking to people in the outreach department because the officers there could explain the science better, she added. "The journalists were happier with them".

But press releases and embargo rules were criticised by some for corrupting the reporting of science.

Stephan Van Duin, a Dutch freelance journalist who took part in the project, said that press releases create non-existent science news events. He argued that science should instead be reported as the ongoing, never-ending enterprise that it is. The definition of science news has to be altered, and editors need to be involved in this, he said.

When an individual institution sends out several press releases a day, there can be an over-saturation of science news which makes journalists cynical about science, said Mary Parlange, from École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in Switzerland (EPFL).

"Everyone promotes everything and nothing means anything any more," she said.

Gülnehal Ergen, assistant expert on science and society at the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) said that press releases in the country are very formal and issued in technical language. "Science journalism is a new concept in Turkey," she said. But the RELATE project has inspired stakeholders in Turkey to discuss establishing a national project to train a new generation of science journalists by sending them abroad where they can study on existing science journalism courses. The only problem is finding work for them back in Turkey where the science journalism job sector is non-existent, she said.

This should not stop Turkish scientists from communicating science, though. Sabine Hauert, a robotics researcher at EPFL, said that Youtube, blogs and Twitter are cheap and simple means of communicating science that anyone could use. "If you know where to go you can easily produce cheap communications work. They may not have the quality of journalism but it is a cheap way of communicating research, and you have the potential to reach a lot of people if you go viral" she said.

Michael Claessens, the European Commission's deputy head of unit in the Research Directorate-General called this use of technology "moving from past media to fast media". Internet and social media allow science communication to become a conversation, he said, but added that "it is still too early to see the impact of new online technologies" on science journalism.

And while there were calls both for formal science train-

ing for journalists and for media training for researchers, some argued that what is needed is not training but simply better communication between the two groups, something RELATE intended to promote.

"Some participants wanted greater journalistic impact while on-site in the labs," said Hudson (Some of these concerns were first raised in ABSW news, see: <http://www.absw.org.uk/news-events/absw/681-can-you-relate-to-this-research-labs-for-teaching-journalists-experience>). So similar future projects should invest resources to allow professional science journalists "to join and guide the participants throughout their study tours," he said.

Limited evidence from RELATE suggests that it would be useful to invite professional science journalists to join the project. Parlange said that at her laboratory participants had found it helpful to spend one afternoon discussing the differences between science writing and journalism, and exploring nuances of writing for different audiences.

"All good journalism is good storytelling, not cheerleading or watchdogging. It doesn't always have to have a critical element. [Writing about] something that is just 'cool' can also be good journalism," she said.

Disclosure: the author took part at the project and his article was one of the two winning articles announced at the conference.

Mico Tatalovic, ABSW

Trip report

Chemistry in Prague EUSJA study trip - November 29th – December 1st 2010

Our group of EUSJA delegates from Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Poland, Finland and Russia visited snowy Prague in early December. The old city was very impressive, especially with Christmas bazaars, hot wine and gingerbreads. We spent several nights in Villa Lanna - a famous palace. the guest facility of the Czech Academy in Prague.

This study trip was organized on the verge of the international Year of Chemistry in the heart of the Europe by the Czech science writer Marina Huzvarova (President of the Czech Science Journalists Club), the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry ASCR (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic) and the Centre for Administration and Operations ASCR.

The trip began in the modern building of the National Technical Library with such great facilities. Next day Zdenek Havlas, the Director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry welcomed us journalists. The Institute carries out fundamental research in organic chemistry, biochemistry and others, focusing on medical

and environmental applications. Havlas told us about the success of IOCB Antiviral Drugs active against B hepatitis, AIDS and diseases accompanying AIDS. Then we were lucky not only to listen to the interesting reports from different research areas but also to visit several laboratories and speak to scientists and students. I was really impressed by the researching activity in the field of chemical ecology of social insects (the team of Irena Valterova). The scientists do research trying to understand the chemical ecology of bumblebees and termites and using the modern methods and equipment.

I would like to thank Marina for the informative and well organized trip, all Czech scientists for their presentations and attention and all colleagues for the interesting discussions!

Olga Baklitskaya-Kameneva, Russia, Moscow

Science, Technology and Innovation in Greece

According to the recently published OECD Report, "Science, Technology and Industry Outlook 2010", Greece has made significant progress on innovation outcomes over the past two years. While triadic patents stood at only 1.2 per million population in 2008, scientific articles published per million population improved to an above-average 902, and accounted for 0.6 % of world output.

But is this enough in order to set Science, Technology and Innovation as one of the strategic priorities in order to make the economy more competitive, with a stronger international presence? Does innovation remains a priority? Data shows that it is for Greek Industry, but as far as it concerns the State, it seems that is not.

Since the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-13 started, the Gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) comes almost totally from abroad; either from the investors or from the European Commission's Framework Programme 7.

This fact shows that 70 % of the companies in Greece have new-to-market product innovations, almost 20 % higher than the OECD countries average!

The Science, technology and innovation strategies aim to improve industrial competitiveness, especially in terms of raising productivity growth, jobs and living standards. In Greece these strategies are clearly stated, under the responsibility of the General Secretariat of Research and Technology, which is starting to implement in terms of specific actions that could provide significant help to Greek companies. Though there are no funds provided until now (after 3 years from the start of the National Strategic Reference Framework).

But the positive issue is that even if we have the strategy and the plans that are not implemented, the Greek firms

are above the OECD countries average, in terms of products and services innovations.

Menelaos Sotiriou,
Secretary General, Science View
(info@scienceview.gr)

Miscellaneous

Hitched, Hatched, Honoured – and despatched

Yes we are supposed to be a family of science journalists so our new column will feature more personal style news. If you marry, have children or know of a member who has died, do let us know.

Hitched!

I shall kick off with the news that after 37 years together I finally married Dr Lionel Milgrom this autumn. This momentous event was quickly followed by the marriage of our baby daughter, Amy to Pierre Emmanuel-de Leusse, in Paris. No children yet!



Hatched!

However, Kaianders Sempler has become a grandfather. His son and daughter-in-law have produced his first grandchild, a girl named Ella.



Honoured!

Our much-loved and admired Italian member, Paola di Paoli has stepped down as president of UGIS and has been honoured with the title of President Emeritus.



A word from the editor

Continued from page 1

...there is much concern and comment and criticism of our industry, yet nobody appears to want to write about

it in EUSJA News. Sure there are so many promises of contributions that Kaianders and I actually look forward to having to deliberate over which stories to publish. But as the deadline nears, the Groundhog pops up again.

However, we are two of life's optimists and we don't give up easily. Spring is nearly with us; there are many trips coming up; there is the world conference in Egypt to raise money for to enable as many members as possible to attend and there is the 40th anniversary of EUSJA to celebrate in Budapest.

There is also the problem to address of financial difficulties and cuts leading to restraints on our members. Some are losing staff positions whilst many freelancers are working harder than ever, competing for space and air space and being paid lower fees. Some of you are diversifying whilst others appear to be bucking the trend and doing quite well.

The enthusiasm of our growing number of younger members is evident in the support they give to study trips – some paying their own travel costs to attend foreign meetings. The days of swanning around on “freebie” trips are over. To succeed a keen journalist must go after the story and not wait for it to be handed over on a plate. It's a mean world out there and only the best will succeed. This is just one of the topics we hope to discuss further here on these pages and in our many meetings that volunteers organise on your behalf. Now it is really over to you.

Barbara Drillsma, Eusjanews editor

FINNS BID FOR WCSJ 2013

The Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists, FASEJ, is bidding for the 2013 World Conference of Science Journalists. FASEJ also made a bid for the 2011 WCSJ.

– In London 2009 we had a wonderful team and we found important supporters for our project, Vesa Niinikangas tells EUSJA News.

– And in our own opinion, we had a good programme, too. We did our best, but it was not enough. After a moment of frustration we decided, still during the London conference, to continue bidding for the 2013 conference. FASEJ is now bidding for the 2013 conference and I hope we win his time. We invite our colleagues around the Baltic Sea to work with us and we hope that all EUSJA member associations can support our project.

FASEJ has a plenary session about how journalists frame their stories in the 2011 Conference. Its title is “One gas pipeline – seven versions of reality”.

– Its a joint effort with our EUSJA colleagues: moderator is Barbara Drillsma-Milgrom (UK). Speakers are science journalists Marzena Nowakowska (Poland), Helena Raunio (Finland) and Kaianders Sempler (Sweden) and professor Janne Hukkinen (Finland).

A LETTER OF SOLIDARITY

It is just five months until the World Conference of Science Journalists (WCSJ) takes place in Cairo, Egypt. Currently science journalists from around the world are looking at Egypt, which has become a focal point in the protests which roam the Arab world. Among the protesters is the President of the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) and Co-Director of WCSJ, Nadia El-Awadi, who sent her tweets from the Tahrir place providing vivid impressions of the demonstrations.

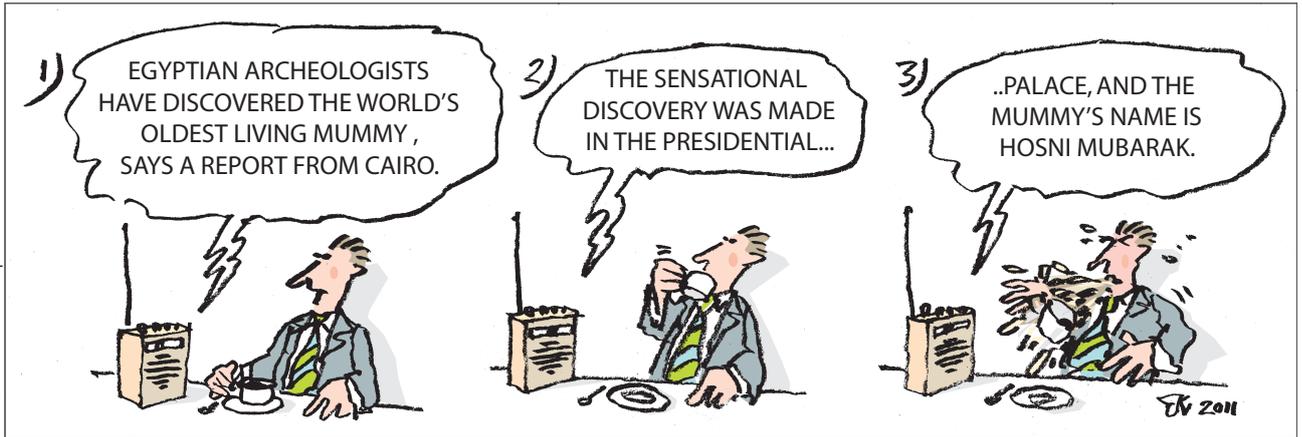
The European Union of Science Journalists' Associations (EUSJA) and its Board send its warmest greetings of solidarity to the brave people of the organising committee of the World Congress residing in Egypt, as well as to our colleagues of the Arab Science Journalists Association. We are hopeful that continuing with the organisation of the World Congress will not suffer from the turmoil. This is the time of our Arab colleagues, and we are looking forward to congratulating them personally when we meet in Cairo and celebrating a new democratic Egypt providing freedom, freedom of press, and freedom of speech.

But we should not forget that the fire of protests against authoritarian systems burns also in Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, where media coverage is less pronounced, and where also science journalists experience an arduous time. EUSJA's solidarity is also with them.

The European science journalists hope that the hesitancy shown by their national governments and the European Union to declare their full solidarity with the new movements in Egypt and beyond can soon be resolved.

With warmest regards

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Barbara Drillsma, Vice-President
Vesa Niinikangas, Treasurer
Viola Egikova, Honorary Secretary



Editors for this issue of EusjaNews have been Barbara Drillsma <drillsma-milgrom@lineone.net> and Kaianders Sempler <kaianders.sempler@nyteknik.se>



Manifestations i Cairo.

Will there be a WCSJ in Cairo?

The events in Egypt has turned the Arab world upside-down. It is yet not clear whether the World Conference of Science Journalists will be held as planned in Cairo, or moved to another location.

Information will be given at www.wfsj.org and on www.eusja.org

The leporello, the Eusja information leaflet, folds twice. It can be ordered from Eusja secretariat.



Eusja 2010

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