

EUSJA News

Newsletter of the European Union of Science Journalists' Associations

Spring 1999

EUSJA on-line

Best of the Net

Internet fever has hit Europe. According to the British news weekly *The Economist*, in the first quarter of 1999 sales of PCs rose by 20%, and sales to German consumers more than doubled.

Europe's science journalists seem to be following this trend. The number of contributors to the EUSJA Internet mailing list is growing, and 18 out of the 24 EUSJA board members now boast an e-mail address.

So how can newcomers to the Net make best use of this new resource? Once you are equipped with an e-mail program and a Web browser, here are a few suggestions. This is a very selective list, and I hope it will stimulate some future contributions to this column.

- spend time getting to know your software and the way the Internet works. Don't worry about Net addiction – you'll become bored soon enough; *turn to page 3*

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Editorial

Separating fact from fiction

“The media need to have a better understanding of the difference in credibility between published and unpublished scientific data” proclaimed an editorial in *Nature* last February. The editorial was written in response to the unprecedented media coverage about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) following release of unpublished data and the suspension of a scientist from the Rowett Research Institute in Scotland. Unfortunately, this particular science-based media storm was not an isolated incident. In these days, when information flows ever more quickly, the relationship between science and the press can be an uneasy one. Science journalists play an increasingly important role in illuminating the controversies and enhancing the public perception of science.

The Second World Conference of Science Journalists, to be held in Budapest on 2-4 July, organised by the Hungarian Science Journalists Association under UNESCO patronage, will offer a forum for discussing the duty of science journalists towards a variety of audiences. It will also highlight the importance of basing coverage of science issues on facts rather than on personal opinions, and address the need to discuss the advantages and potential risks of new developments in science and technology in a clear and easily understood way.

The growth of information technology and rapid communications has changed the nature of science reporting since the first world conference of science journalists took place in Tokyo in 1992. This second conference promises to offer a useful forum for science journalists to learn more about their profession and a means to help scientists and science journalists to find ways to achieve their common goal: improving the public perception of science. Because the second world conference of science journalists directly follows the UNESCO World Conference on Science in Budapest, it will provide a unique opportunity for scientists and science journalists to discuss ways to close the dangerous information gap emerging between scientists, decision- and policy-makers and the general public.

The French mathematician Poincaré once said that “science is a cemetery for hypotheses”. Science journalism could become a cemetery for credibility if poor reporting of science means that the public does not gain a clear understanding of the issues. The members of EUSJA national associations, whether “old hands” or new reporters, shouldn't miss this opportunity to meet and discuss their profession. *Paola de Paoli, President, EUSJA*

Keep in touch!

News, views, stories, announcements, ideas or even cautionary tales – they could all be of interest for the next *EUSJA News*, due out in early December. Send me yours by 10 November 1999. Get in touch by e-mail: ninamorgan@compuserve.com; phone or fax (the number is the same for both) on +44-1608-676530; or by old-fashioned post at: Rose Cottage, East End, Chadlington, Oxon OX7 3LX, UK. *Nina Morgan, Editor, EUSJA News*

What's in a name?

Despite its name, the American Geophysical Union (AGU) is a worldwide organisation – around 10,000 AGU members live outside of the United States, many of these in Europe – and its brief extends beyond most people's ideas of the classical geophysical sciences.

Along with geology, seismology, palaeomagnetism and tectonics, the society also covers research in subjects ranging from atmospheric sciences to volcanology, taking in space physics and planetary science along the way.



The AGU press office, based in Washington DC, offers an e-mail service providing many free services to journalists, including an e-mail service to deliver press releases about upcoming journal articles, with copies of the articles available on request; advance notice of the highlights in their cutting-edge journal, *Geophysical Research Letters*, with full copies of articles available on request; and information about the AGU autumn and spring meetings. The AGU press office will also put journalists in touch with scientists who can help them.

Unlike many other organisations, AGU press releases and papers are not embargoed. So whether you're a high flyer, someone prepared to sink to the ocean's depths to get a good story, or simply someone searching for some good down-to-earth science stories, have a look at the AGU website at: www.agu.org, and contact the AGU press officer, Harvey Leifert, tel: +1-202-939-3212; fax: +1-202-328-0566; e-mail: hleifert@agu.org

Science to the rescue

Environmental subjects generally receive little attention in the Spanish media. According to data from the Centre for the Study of Environmental News (Centro de Estudios de Información Ambiental, CEIA), only around three percent of the stories in the daily papers deal with environmental matters. Although no specific studies have been carried out for other media, it is probably safe to say that this is a reasonably accurate picture of the amount of environmental coverage in the Spanish media as a whole.

But the Doñana disaster was a bit different. Although in the month after the mine reservoir burst, the percentage of environmental news stories in the general press did not increase greatly – according to the CEIA, it remained at around 4% – the Doñana disaster was the lead story on television news programmes. This is the

first time an environmental issue has been given such prominent coverage in Spain.

These facts suggest to me two things. Firstly, the Spanish media has no plans to increase their environmental coverage. Secondly, that environmental coverage only focuses on catastrophes, fuelling the general impression that the news about the environment is always bad. Continuously highlighting environmental threats could, I believe, have an undesirable effect: the public may begin to ignore the steady stream of bad news, and forget about the environment altogether.

So why is environmental coverage generally so biased in the Spanish media? The answer seems to lie in the way environmental news is gathered. The newspaper journalists tend to rely on the environmental pressure groups as their main source of information about environmental issues. But in their role as environmental vigilantes and advocates for nature, these groups do not always present the full and unbiased picture.

At first, the spectacular nature of the Doñana disaster added greatly to the environmentalists' credibility. But once government press officers finally stepped in to present their own version of events, the information battle began. In the face of the conflicting information coming from both sides, journalists found it difficult to present a clear version of the events.

Until, that is, the Council for Scientific Investigations (CSIC), the most important scientific body in Spain, appeared on the scene. Not only did the CSIC provide the necessary analysis and scientific insights to allow journalists to evaluate the conflicting information coming from both camps: their intervention also resulted in one of the most valuable and informative papers ever produced by the CSIC.

Rubén Camacho, journalist on Canal Natura (Nature Channel), Spain

East goes West

Support for cooperation between science journalists in eastern and western Europe is frequent talking point at EUSJA board meetings. At their 1998 meeting, the EUSJA Board decided to put EUSJA's money where its mouth is to support a programme of exchange visits between journalists from Slovenia and Ireland.

The two countries share many characteristics, notably of size, and both felt they had much to learn from one another's experiences in journalism. EUSJA's contribution was used to pay for two Slovenian journalists to travel to Ireland. At a later date, the Slovenian association will host a return visit by Irish journalists.

In this first phase two Slovenian journalists, Goran Tenze and Mojca Pavsic travelled to Ireland in February to spend a week as guests of the Irish Science and Technology Journalists' Association (ISTJA).

During their visit, Goran and Mojca stayed in the homes of ISTJA members, who accompanied them on a busy round of visits to research centres and newspaper offices. They also had the chance to meet members of other Irish science and science policy organisations.

"Staying in members' homes encouraged discussions

and was a fast-track way to help the Slovenian delegates learn more about our association, how we work as science and technology journalists, and Ireland in general," noted the ISTJA members. "Very importantly, it also helped to develop new friendships and deepen existing ones." Goran Tenze agrees. "This is the right way to cooperate", he says. "Individuals make things happen!".
Anna Nolan, ISTJ

... Best of the Net

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- keep a sense of proportion – just as a phone call is often better than a fax, e-mail is not the best communication medium for every task;
- check your e-mail very day. There's no point having an e-mail address unless people can actually use it to reach you;
- ignore the newsgroups ("Usenet" in techie-speak) – most of them are full of junk;
- join some mailing lists instead; the best of these are a valuable resource. Choose the "digest" version of the list, which supplies the messages in batches once or twice a day. Start with the EUSJA list by sending the message "subscribe EUSJA-L DIGEST Your Name" (replacing "Your Name" with your own name) to the address <listserv@listserv.rl.ac.uk>. Find more lists at <<http://www.neosoft.com/internet/paml/>> and <<http://www.lsoft.com/lists/listref.html>>;
- go carefully with e-mail. Without the assistance of facial expression and tone of voice, it's surprisingly easy to upset people;
- when replying to an e-mail message, try to quote selectively. Sending the whole of the original message as well as your reply is tedious and often unnecessary;
- find a favourite search engine and learn to use it well. My own preference is Metacrawler (<http://www.metacrawler.com/>), but there are dozens of others – choose the one you like best;
- make yourself a home page on the Web to advertise your journalistic skills. Most Internet service providers give you some Web space, so take advantage of it. A home page doesn't have to be complicated, and it can bring you some work;
- watch for viruses, which breed on the Net. Never open a program (.exe) file sent to you by e-mail unless you're sure of its provenance; be careful of Microsoft Word documents from unfamiliar sources; get yourself a virus-protection program, and make a backup every day. Ignore e-mail alerting you to the latest virus threat, because 100% of them are hoaxes;
- keep track of Web addresses in your contacts file, not your browser's "favourites" list, which will otherwise quickly become clogged with addresses you will never visit again. Make a note of the site's usefulness, too;
- check the science writing job opportunities at Bonk Business, Inc., <<http://www.telegate.se/bonk/>>;
- campaign for better Web sites whenever you can. Most of them are full of pretty pictures but short on words and ease of navigation. There's an opportunity for science writers here!
Charles Butcher, ABSW
e-mail: charles@writer.demon.co.uk

What's new?

Science headlines in Finland and Switzerland

Stories about biotechnology, genetic engineering and global climate change were prominent in the Finnish press. To help the public understand what it's all about, the Academy of Finland introduced a public understanding of science campaign about biotechnology. The press also reported on the Finnish Global Climate Change Research programme, launched in December 1998. With Finns topping the list as enthusiastic users of computers, the internet and mobile communications, it's no surprise that information technology receives good coverage in the Finnish press. The results of research into inequalities in access to information technology carried by the Institute for Media Research at Tampere University attracted much interest in February. Earlier in the year, specialist conferences on allergies and vaccine developments also received widespread coverage.

In Switzerland the referendum on gene technology was high on the political agenda and received extensive coverage in the press. The papers also provided widespread coverage of El Niño and La Niña. The long running saga of Dolly, the cloned sheep and her offspring also continued to draw attention, as did the problem of BSE. In addition, a varied menu including stories about Viagra, the Very Large telescope in Chile, the international space station, eco-estrogens, chicken flu and male and female beauty were among the many science topics presented to whet readers' appetites.

Reporting by Jussi Nuorteva in Finland and Rosmarie Waldner in Switzerland

Who is my audience?

I'm a scientist from Spain and although I now work in the US, I have attended several meetings of PhD students in Europe where the aim was to create a favourable atmosphere for the exchange of ideas and knowledge. Unusually, perhaps, most of the talks at these conferences were great. They were well understood and very much enjoyed by most of the audience. Why? The answer is simple. All of us had a very clear picture in our minds of who were we talking to. One of the main things that I learnt from those meetings is that before any conference, talk or presentation, it is crucial to consider 'Who is my audience?', and act in consequence.

I've since attended many types of formal and informal talks by recognized scientists. In most cases, I found them to be disappointing experiences. Have scientists forgotten that communication is one of the most important purposes of a talk? Does the great urge to be understood that bursts out of PhD students, die when they become prestigious scientists?
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... Who is my audience?

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Many possible excuses for poor communication come to mind. I can understand, as a scientist, how difficult it is to explain very specialised research to a general audience; the temptation to save time by giving the same talk over and over regardless of the audience; and how easy it is to give communication of acquired knowledge a low priority. But is there anything else behind it?

I once discussed this with a more experienced scientist friend, who told me that the best way to gain credibility and scientific reputation is to always give incomprehensible talks. The less the people understand, he said, the more they admire you, and the more brilliant they think you are. I don't know how many scientists share this view, but I suspect there are quite a few.

I take a different view. I believe that the ordinary members of society, who – after all – pay for our science, have a right to know about our research. People are keen to find out more, and scientists should consider it a duty to find the best ways to present their work so that people can understand what they are doing. Which brings me back to what I consider to be the most important question to think about when asked to prepare a talk: 'Who is my audience?'

David De Lorenzo, Human Genetics Center, Houston, TX, USA; email: david@delorenzo.com

Lectura recomendada A good read

Orígenes de la especie

Si puedes leer español y estás interesado en conocer la historia de los orígenes de nuestra especie, el libro *La especie elegida* es una buena compañía. Sus autores, Juan Luis Arsuaga y Ignacio Martínez, nos explican por qué hemos podido devenir únicos en el reino animal.

Qué estructuras físicas nos permiten ver en tres dimensiones, por qué somos bípedos y cómo los brazos y las manos libres permitieron fabricar instrumentos de piedra y encender fuego, cómo se estructuraron el cerebro, los lazos sociales y el lenguaje, todas ellas características únicas de nuestra especie que permitirían a nuestros ancestros colonizar el planeta.

Y llegar hasta Atapuerca, en la provincia de Burgos (norte de España), donde está el yacimiento de fósiles humanos más importante del Pleistoceno medio, hace entre 800 000 y 300 000 años, en Europa (uno de los hallazgos fue portada de *Nature* en abril de 1993).

Arsuaga y Martínez, excavadores e investigadores en Atapuerca, nos cuentan de forma clara algunas interpretaciones que se han podido extraer de momento; por qué sugieren que se ha encontrado una especie nueva en la línea filogenética humana, que además practicaba el canibalismo.

Sin embargo, la provisionalidad de las conclusiones no le resta validez a esta historia de nuestros orígenes.

Cristina Junyent, ACCC

An annual event

News from the EUSJA Board meeting

The annual meeting of the EUSJA Board took place at the headquarters of the European Science Foundation in Strasbourg on 27 March 1999. The meeting was attended by representatives from twelve countries:

Austria	Finland	France
Germany	Hungary	Ireland
Italy	The Netherlands	Norway
Slovenia	Switzerland	United Kingdom

Topics discussed included extending EUSJA membership to countries such as Poland, and reestablishing contact with member associations in countries such as India, Israel, Belgium and Spain. Board members also reviewed the past year's activities, and discussed plans for future events.

To see a full copy of the Board meeting minutes get in touch with your national representative. Their names and contact details are listed on the back page.

Meanwhile, here are some of the discussion highlights. There was a growing acknowledgement among Board members that many members of EUSJA member associations are unaware of EUSJA and its activities. A number of Board members put forward ideas for EUSJA to be run in a more open and transparent way.

One suggestion was to take advantage of e-mail to allow Board members to keep in closer touch with both their national associations and with each other. We took some positive action here and, thanks to Andrew Smith of ESF, Board members are now in regular contact with each other via an e-mail EUSJA Board discussion list. If you have ideas to put forward or questions about EUSJA, contact your national representative.

There was also a lively discussion about the role of EUSJA. Board members are split on this issue. Some believe that EUSJA should play a key role in organising conferences. Others are strongly opposed to this, believing instead that EUSJA's main purpose is to put science journalists throughout Europe in touch with each other and to help them to work together. EUSJA has already taken some steps in this direction.

For example, a brochure giving profiles of EUSJA member associations is now being prepared by Istvan Palygai (Hungary). In addition Goran Tenze (Slovenia) has compiled a database of EUSJA members. Copies will be given to each national representative for distribution among their own associations.

However, there was lively debate about whether the database could be sold or otherwise made available to outside organizations. Distributing a database in this way is illegal in some member countries.

This issue was not fully resolved, except to agree that national associations could withdraw their members names from any database for sale. The debate has continued on the new EUSJA Board discussion list, and several countries have now withdrawn their members names. Democracy in action!

Nina Morgan, ABSW

Euro-English for all

Different words, but the meaning is the same

The *lingua franca* of the European Collaborative for Science Industry and Technology Exhibitions (ECSITE) is English. ECSITE's newsletter carries news, commentary, and conference announcements. Some articles are drawn from sources such as press releases and project reports; others are commissioned. Editing the newsletter requires a bit more than cutting to length.

English words fitted to German grammar read clumsily, and the text may be so awkward that its meaning is obscure to a Latin-language speaker. The converse is also true. Good British writers love sprinkling their pieces with puns and metaphors. These can be very funny...or totally unintelligible.

When editing I am wary of ambiguity. Does "control" mean "check" or "regulate"? Does "brief" refer to something short, a letter, or an instruction? I also keep in mind four particular readers – in Lisbon, Prague, Helsinki and Naples – for whom "Euro-English" is their third language. They appreciate short sentences, short paragraphs and the name/number/e-mail address to contact for more information.

Italians speak about the capillary diffusion and vulgarisation of science; Americans about science literacy. In the UK it's public understanding of science; in France scientific culture. These terms seem more closely related to the intellectual climate of individual countries than to any real difference between our aims and activities as science communicators in the field of modern museology. Where we do differ, it's back to a question of English language.

In Finnish, "science" is *tiede*. The word spans the full spectrum of human knowledge from mathematics to humanities. It is derived from *tietää* meaning 'to find the way', 'to get to know'. The Dutch *wetenschap* and German *wissenschaft* have the same meaning.

Colloquial English is hampered by a narrow natural-sciences interpretation of the word, which is reflected in science exhibitions in the UK, USA, India and Australia.

No such self-imposed limits constrain science centres and museums in continental Europe: their best exhibitions are correspondingly rich and multi-layered.

"Try to make the dial which is under the glass to rotate by pressing the buttons on the table." Or maybe: "Press the buttons on the table and try to make the dial rotate." The first sentence was drafted by a Finnish exhibit developer. The revised version is mine. I edit Fin-lish as a favour to colleagues at Heureka, the Finnish Science Centre. It keeps me sharp-witted and is repaid with smoked reindeer and wonderful hospitality!

Melanie Quin, ABSW, e-mail: melanie@tquest.org.uk

If you would like to see a copy of the ECSITE Newsletter, contact Dr Melanie Quin, Special Projects Director, Techniquet, Stuart Street, Cardiff CF10 6BW, UK, tel: +44 1222 475477 (direct line), fax: +44 1222 482517, e-mail: melanie@tquest.org.uk

Lectura recomendada... A good read

Triunfar a toda costa

Dos poderosas razones han movido a Antonio Calvo Roy a escribir este libro sobre la vida de Santiago Ramón y Cajal. La primera, su inquietud por la difusión de la ciencia y su permanente curiosidad, que le llevan a buscar, recoger, expandir y alentar las palabras y las obras de los científicos e investigadores. La segunda, lo que él mismo define como 'indignación' por el hecho de que es imposible comprar hoy en ninguna librería una biografía del científico español más importante de todos los tiempos.

Bucear en la historia de este Nobel (1906) y reconocer su aportación científica ha sido para Antonio Calvo un placer, pero quizá lo ha sido más poner al hombre en su contexto, encontrar el perfil afectivo, social, ético o político de un peculiar personaje, fruto de su tiempo y de su férrea voluntad. Esa es la gran aportación de este libro: dar el salto cuántico desde la idolatría del sabio hasta el entendimiento del hombre en su realidad más cruda, con sus defectos y sus virtudes, sus manías, sus peculiaridades y su genialidad, por supuesto.

No es, por tanto, una mera obra de divulgación sobre la tarea de un científico, sino la muestra de una realidad mundana, en una acertada visión que no todo el mundo comparte. Ya se sabe que hay quien prefiere contemplar las glorias en las vitrinas de los polvorientos museos. Antonio Calvo ha optado por romper el cristal y hacernos partícipes del tesoro.

Fatima Rojas Cimadevila, ACCC

Ain't misbehaving?

The real victims of scientific misconduct

In my view a large number of scientists engage in serious public misconduct – probably unwittingly – on a more or less continuous basis.

To overstate the claims about research findings, to exaggerate the significance of their results, and even to suggest major impacts on society – that is the misconduct going on today. I work in the US and find it amazing that no US scientific body (as far as I am aware) has ever issued any policy guidelines in this area.

One wonders why not – and of course the answer is that hype in the cause of getting more publicity, possibly translating into 'more money for science', is not regarded as reprehensible.

Compare the relative harm done by 'scientist – scientist misconduct' and 'scientist – public misconduct'. At the most obvious level, hype distorts the truth, not for a tiny group of specialists who have ample means to respond, but for millions of people who have none. It skews public policies on R&D support, it colours attitudes towards different activities hiding under the label

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... Ain't misbehaving?

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of science. At the deepest human level it alters hopes and aspirations about what science and technology can do for society and individuals. Scientists have as their partners in this activity (crime?) the massive apparatus of the media. Together they form the Dangerous Duo – it is the synergistic interaction between unscrupulous or careless scientists and cheerleading journalists that has brought us to this sorry pass.

The world of the arts respects its art critics. However, most science journalists are not critics but unabashed promoters of 'science'. This misalliance, driven by the desire for by-lines on the one side, for fame and money for research on the other, is the main cause of this brand of misconduct.

The public are the truly innocent victims of scientists' hype. They cannot check or correct anything we say. It is the public that must be given special protection by the rules the science community makes about misconduct. Scientists can look after themselves.

[Thanks to the magazine *Chemistry in Britain* for permission to reprint these extracts from an article that appeared in March 1999.]

Rustum Roy, Evan Pugh professor of the solid state at The Pennsylvania State University e-mail: rroy@psu.edu

Holyscience

Where have all the critics gone?

I'm a child of the sixties. Those were the years when everyone believed that nothing was as it seemed, authorities were to be viewed with suspicion, and big business was the dirty symbol of human greed.

Scientists, or those who claimed to be such, believed that science should serve society and turned up their noses at all that dirty money. Journalists, including science journalists – then newcomers to the profession – kept a close and critical eye on developments.

Now it is all different. Big business is celebrated. Cuts in government funding mean that universities are increasingly turning to external sponsors to make ends meet. Under the guise of social relevance – a slogan stolen from the sixties – they undertake more and more research for 'Big Money'. As a result, democracy at universities is as good as dead.

This wouldn't be so bad if there was still a critical counter movement. But that hardly exists. Only environmentalists still show some of the sixties élan. Journalism, including science journalism, has become very servile. Science journalists who consider themselves as watchdogs of society have become rare. The general tenor in science journalism is that anything clever is also beautiful and beneficial. Science is now Holy Science.

As science journalists we know that science is difficult. But just because it is difficult doesn't mean that it has to be beautiful or true. Yet science journalists today seem to believe their role is simply to explain sci-

ence to ordinary people, rather than to act as a critical observer of what is, after all, an important social phenomenon. Like politics or any other social phenomenon, science should – and deserves to be – treated suspiciously and critically.

Just as a good sports journalist doesn't need to have been a good sportsman, a good science journalist doesn't need to have had a thorough scientific education, or to have worked as a scientist. Healthy horse sense is what counts. I think a good science journalist shouldn't specialise, but instead move around the different science disciplines regularly. By doing this you can avoid identifying too strongly with developments in one branch of science and avoid the risk of losing your critical perspective. Holy science is only human too, after all.

Arno Schrauwers, Dutch Science Journalists Association (VWN), with thanks to Annemarie ten Wolde, e-mail: tenwolde@tin.it, for help with Dutch translation

Top of the pops in Denmark

A popular science magazine wins the Genius prize

The Danish Association of Science Journalists award the Genius Prize from time to time to individuals, magazines, newspapers and other organisations for outstanding efforts in making science interesting for a wide audience.

Previous winners include Joachim Jerrik, a radio and television journalist, who has made science interesting for generations of Danes, and the daily newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* for its weekly science supplement *Universe*. In April 1999 we awarded the Genius again, this time to the popular science magazine *Illustreret Videnskab* (Science Illustrated).

Illustreret Videnskab has been published monthly since 1984. In the beginning the magazine was a clone of the American publication *Science Digest*, but it soon developed a style of its own. Today, *Illustreret Videnskab*, with headquarters in Copenhagen, is published in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany and France with print runs of 600 000 copies.

We thought *Illustreret Videnskab* was a winner on two counts: its own merits; and the profound influence the magazine has had on science journalism in Danish newspapers and television. *Illustreret Videnskab* has made science interesting to more people, including many young people, in Denmark and Scandinavia than any other publication. A major reason for this success is its unique interaction between text and illustrations, a feature which is second to none worldwide.

Over the past 15 years the success of *Illustreret Videnskab* has encouraged science coverage in the Danish daily press by demonstrating that science is indeed interesting to a wide audience. Its success may be an important reason why all national Danish dailies now publish a weekly science page or supplement. Before 1984, when *Illustreret Videnskab* first appeared on the scene in 1984, none of them did.

Rolf Haugaard Nielsen, Danish Science Journalists Association; e-mail: haug@post4.tele.dk

Eurolingo

A minority language speaker speaks out!

The Flemish linguist Jozef Deleu once suggested it: use Dutch as the official language in the EU. I think he's onto something here. Language is an important issue in the European context. Because there are so many different languages used in the European Union it is no longer possible to consider each national language to be an official language, with all the consequent translation costs. The usual money-saving proposal is to drop the 'minority' languages, like Dutch, for instance.

But why not turn this idea on its head? Let's make Dutch the new official Eurolingo. In many ways, Dutch is ideal. The number of Dutch speakers (around 20 million) is small enough not to pose a threat to the 'big' languages, but still large enough to allow Dutch to be introduced as the official EU language quite quickly.

Admittedly, for use as a Euro language, Dutch would have to be altered a bit to make it easier for foreigners to use. But this shouldn't present any great problem. The South Africans have already achieved this with Afrikaans, a simplified version of Dutch that features simpler plural forms, more structured sentences and more regularly inflected verbs.

In my opinion, the EU doesn't take the language issue seriously enough. Instead, EU bureaucrats tend to busy themselves with more important things, like curvature of bananas. But they ignore these important language issues at their peril. If you want to know why, just ask the Belgians or the Canadians.

Arno Schrauwers, Dutch Science Journalists Association (VWN), with thanks to Annemarie ten Wolde, e-mail: tenwolde@tin.it, who helped to turn EuroDutch into EuroEnglish

Dates for your diary

Hungary: Budapest, 2-4 July 1999, Second World Conference of Science Journalists. For information about the programme and how to register see the conference website: <http://www.sztaki.hu/conferences/wcsj/>, or contact Eva Sos, tel: +361-209-6442; fax: 361-386 9378, e-mail: sos@sztaki.hu

Germany: Berlin 30 September-2 October 1999, A conference on the theme: *Kompass für die Zukunft? Journalismus im Spannungsfeld der Wissens- und Mediengesellschaft*. The conference will be sponsored by TELI, and 2-3 participants per country will be accepted. Full expenses are offered for participants from eastern European countries. Accommodation will be provided free of charge for all others. For more information e-mail Dietmar Schmidt at verwaltung.uni.muenchen.de

Italy: 15-19 December 1999: A study visit on the

theme of *Trieste: an international site for science, its role in the new Europe*. There will be 20-25 places for journalists. Applications for places should be sent by 15 October 1999 directly to: Globo Trieste, Mr Fulvio Belsasso, Padriciano 99, 34012 Trieste, Italy, phone +39 040 398 975, fax +39 040 398 987.

Other upcoming events include proposed visits to Denmark and Norway in 2000.

The science top ten

Where science is, science comes. There seems to be a sort of relationship between universities and research centres so that the more scientific institutions are represented in a given area, the more and more varied scientific production comes out of the institutions. So concludes a large Danish study of European research cities carried out by Professor Christian Wichmann Matthiessen, Institute of Geography, University of Copenhagen, and Annette Winkel Schwarz, director at Technical Knowledge Centre of Denmark, whose analysis. Their analysis has been published in the journals *Science* and *Urban Studies*.

The Danish researches have looked upon the scientific production in 39 European research cities, defined as urban regions where it takes less than 45 minutes to travel between universities. Examples include the Scandinavian Øresund region which spans eastern Denmark and southern Sweden, and the Amsterdam-Den Haag-Rotterdam-Utrecht region in the Netherlands.

With the American Science Citation Index as their guide, Wichmann Matthiessen and Winkel Schwarz worked their way through thousands of scientific papers to put together a picture of the scientific productivity in different university cities and to find out how often papers are quoted.

As a result, they were able to show that the larger the city, the broader the scope of scientific research tends to be. For example large research cities such as London, Paris and Amsterdam are complete research centres, with strengths in every scientific area, although perhaps with a slight bias towards medicine and life sciences.

Their research also uncovered a possible connection between economic growth and levels of scientific research. One conclusion from their study is that universities in northern Europe and Britain play a larger role in scientific research than those in southern and eastern Europe.

Intriguingly, they were also able to identify Europe's top ten science sites! With four out of the ten located there, Britain seems to be where it's at if you're serious about science. At number 1, according to the Danish study, is London, followed by Paris; Moscow; Amsterdam-Den Haag-Rotterdam-Utrecht; Copenhagen-Malmö-Lund (Øresund region); Stockholm-Uppsala; Berlin; Oxford-Reading; Edinburgh-Glasgow; and Manchester-Liverpool.

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