



# EUSJA News

Newsletter of the European Union of Science Journalists' Associations

Spring 2013

A letter from the President

## In this issue

A letter from the President	p 1
A Science Media Centre for ERA?	p 2
Why science journalists must be vigilant	p 2
Ministers in South-East Europe urged to support science journalism	p 3
The passionate: interview with Angela Posada-Swofford	p 4
Sad news	p 6
Swedish science- and medical journalism associations merge	p 7
Not just a press trip	p 8
My first time on board	p 9
To travel or not to travel?	p 10
Our blog and the New Scientist	p 10
Members' new books	p 11
Board and delegates list	p 12

## Keep up with change

I am sure most of you know that the UK's BBC has been under attack for what has been described by the chairman of the BBC Trust, Sir Chris Patten, as "its shoddy journalism".

He says that the worldwide reputation the Corporation achieved for its first class journalism has been seriously compromised by basic mistakes, and he is deeply ashamed and apologetic. Basically the Beeb, as it has been affectionately known here in the UK, has become embroiled in a huge scandal that links one of its best known presenters, the late Sir Jimmy Savile, with alleged massive paedophile activity over many decades, some of it on BBC premises.

With continuing huge interest in sex scandals on social networks (and perhaps attempting to recoup some of its tarnished reputation), the BBC's respected Newsnight programme intimated that a certain Thatcher-era establishment figure had been involved in paedophile activity during the 1980s. The programme took its information from external sources and failed to contact the individual concerned for his comments. Nor did it bother to check the material it was given. Although the programme didn't name the individual concerned, there was plenty of innuendo sloshing around on social networking sites that identified him.

This person is completely innocent of any paedophile activity. Apparently one phone call would have been sufficient to demonstrate he was not where he was alleged to have been and when.

This furore serves as a timely reminder to us all that the basic rules of journalism we learn on the first day of our training – Who, What, Where, When, Why and How? – should on no account ever be forgotten or overlooked. It also is a warning that even on social networks we must all be careful not to pass on any rumours, innuendos or hearsay without first checking for ourselves.

### **We are trying to organise a series of "speed dating" sessions at the World Conference of Science Journalists in Helsinki**

With this in mind it is absolutely vital that all EUSJA members are up to speed with their training, particularly with new media. Our profession is in a state of constant change, we must all keep up. Many young journalists have entered journalism after completing only a science degree, and many have never undertaken any structured journalistic training. The board is now involved in looking at training, attempting to raise funds for training programmes linked with study trips. We are also trying to organise a series of "speed dating" sessions at the WFSJ conference in Helsinki. Here we hope to have well-established journalists giving short one-to-one interviews. These sessions will cover everything from how they entered journalism, how to get the essence of a story into the opening paragraphs, how to get and check information, to pitching a story, selling copy, and the laws of libel/defamation. We plan to use reporters and broadcasters covering the conference to act as our "speed daters", and we also welcome suggestions and offers of help from those of you planning to be present.

We are also pursuing our proposed Investigative Journalism Award. This will be particularly relevant in light of the bad press some investigative journalism is receiving at the moment. We will keep you all informed via emails to delegates and on the EUSJA website of our progress in these spheres.

A specific problem for many science journalists is accessing all the research articles

Continued on page 6

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual writers, and not necessarily those of the EUSJA Board, the Editor or the Layout and Design Director

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# A Science Media Centre for ERA?

TIM REYNOLDS (ABSW)

The UK Science Media Centre (SMC) has just celebrated its 10th anniversary and is widely acclaimed for its positive role in (re)engaging the media with science and acting as an intermediary between the research community and journalists. The SMC concept is being adopted in other countries too. But how would a SMC for the EU work and what would its role be?

This was the subject of a brainstorming workshop held in Brussels on 12-13 November 2012. The meeting followed an initial discussion in Berlin and an expert roundtable at ESOF in Dublin in July that year. Around the table in Brussels were representatives from the EU institutions, the European Science Foundation, COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) and a handful of media including EUSJA members. Also present was Ed Sykes from UK SMC and Sile Lane from Sense about Science. Erika Widegren of Atomium Culture, who initiated the EU SMC discussion, led the meeting.

The two-day meeting looked first at the mission, remit and services of an EU SMC and then at financial and governance issues. A clear outcome of the discussions was that trust would be a defining element in determining whether the centre would work or not.

The EU Chief Scientific Adviser, Anne Glover, joined the meeting briefly and is clearly a supporter of the idea. She is keen that initiatives such as an SMC are established to support the environment for evidence-based policy-making within all the EU institutions.

The mission of an EU SMC was jointly defined as: 'Serving the public by facilitating communication between European media and research communities'. The EU SMC should also cover 'Europe' as defined in the European Research Area (ERA), i.e. EU-27 + associated states.

Three core areas of activity were proposed. Firstly, activities relating to 'press office' functions and other services for journalists, secondly training services and provision of material for both scientists and journalists, and thirdly activities relating to coordination and support for existing and new national SMCs in Europe.

The independence of an EU SMC was vital and although it was likely that EU funding would be needed to initiate the organisation, the medium to long-term financial model should look to that of the UK SMC where funding was obtained from a very broad spectrum of bodies. Following the Brussels meeting, Atomium Culture is putting together a project plan for the start-up of an EU SMC with a five-year timeline. The plan should be available for discussion in the near future.

The SMC debate continued at a major science communication meeting that took place in February 2013 as part of the Irish Presidency of the EU and could be part of the agenda for WCSJ in Helsinki. If plans run smoothly, the ideal kick-off for an EU SMC would coincide with the new EU research framework programme (Horizon 2020) in 2014.

For more information on the proposed EU SMC contact Atomium Culture at [eusmc@atomiumculture.eu](mailto:eusmc@atomiumculture.eu) or contact me via email at [tim.reynolds@intacom.net](mailto:tim.reynolds@intacom.net).

## Why science journalists must be vigilant

FABIO TURONE, EUSJA BOARD MEMBER

Let's say it clearly from the beginning: I have a big interest in the whole issue because I have been working at a project for establishing an Italian Science Media Centre managed by science journalists since before the Doha World Conference in 2011.

I have been actively working with the existing International network of Science Media Centres and with several fellow science journalists to increase the value of this model: I think it can be very useful for a well informed society, upon the condition of being applied in full transparency, and with the goal of serving the journalists first, and the science second (and industry third, if ever). I produced a panel on the SMC model at the PCST conference in Florence, in April 2012, with among others The EU Chief Scientific Adviser Anne Glover and Fiona Fox, Executive Director of the UK SMC, and later was at several meetings, including the "secret" one (not in the official programme, and on invitation only) that was held at ESOF Dublin, and the one in Brussels where I personally invited Tim Reynolds to write for EUSJA. At the end of the Brussels meeting, we were all told that the project would not be discussed in Dublin - as it was originally intended by the organisers at Atomium Culture - because many among the participants agreed with me that after two full days it was still too much a preliminary project.

As I said repeatedly in Brussels, all the crucial issues about the beneficiaries of the project (many insisted that good journalism needs a National angle and strong root), its goals and its independence were systematically skipped, while the attention was put almost exclusively on bureaucratic matters.

Erika Widegren agreed that the project was still too immature, and reassured us all citing a time frame of 5 years.

Now the crucial questions are still there.

I can only repeat once again what I said repeatedly in person to Erika Widegren: if you use expressions like "proactive transparency" and promise to send the info about "your" conference to the critical journalists, then you have to keep your word (especially when that conference is heavily funded with public EU money). If you don't, instead of establishing the good base for a healthy relationship with journalists, you end up being perceived as a threat, as someone willing to hide things and to cut corners. My friends who run the UK Science Media Centre and the SMCs in other parts of the world know well - probably because they live in countries in which the power of the media is still quite strong and respected - that every attempt at avoiding open debate would be very counterproductive.

I hope the science journalism community will be consulted and actively involved starting from Helsinki (I suggested Atomium Culture to do so), and **I am sure that the debate will continue online.** You're all invited to contribute.

# Ministers in South-East Europe urged to support science journalism

MIĆO TATALOVIĆ (ABSW, BALKAN NETWORK OF SCIENCE WRITERS)

UNESCO's Venice Office is behind a new drive to get science journalism on the agenda of science ministers in the Balkans. A two-day UNESCO meeting in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (22-23 November 2012) brought together experts, including science journalists and EUSJA members, to draft and present a list of priorities for regional collaboration and funding to science ministers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. Supporting science journalism was one of the five priorities highlighted in the outcomes as a "UNESCO roadmap towards the establishment of science communication and science journalism in the macro-region of the South-East of Europe".

The aim is "To increase the quantity and quality of ethical science reporting in the media; to better educate journalists and media-savvy scientists; to train both specialised science journalists and general reporters and editors; to increase science literacy of readers; and to increase media access to quality science news from the region's institutes, journals and researchers".

The document calls for the development of "macro-regional networks of science journalists in synergy with national and regional science journalists associations; for funding of conferences and workshops for science journalists and journalists' meetings with scientists, as well as funding of science journalists through direct funding of travel costs and grants; and establishing a prestigious prize for science journalism".

It also calls for "setting up a regional science newsletter or PR

service, modelling on independent, government-funded online based media services" such as ScienceNordic.com or SciDev.Net.

The ministers acknowledged the expert advice and signed a joint declaration that mentioned that "Knowledge production and accessible diffusion play a key role for the enhancement of innovation, sustainable economic development, and social well-being" and agreed to "Generate and encourage public understanding and awareness of science". See [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Venice/pdf/news/SEE\\_Ministerial\\_Round\\_Table\\_-\\_Joint\\_Declaration\\_\\_23\\_Nov12\\_Sarajevo\\_.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Venice/pdf/news/SEE_Ministerial_Round_Table_-_Joint_Declaration__23_Nov12_Sarajevo_.pdf)

Gretchen Kalonji, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, said: "I was intrigued to see that at the experts' meeting there were quite a few presentations on science journalism, which is an important part, of course, of the popular understanding and support [for science]". She said that building popular support, understanding and participation in science was one of the three pillars to strengthening capacity in science, technology and innovation, alongside policy and institutional capacity building. Sanja Vlahović, Montenegro's science minister, said the key elements suggested by the expert meeting should warrant further collaboration.

"One of these is the development of scientific journalism, where we would have better relationships with journalism to promote science, because we came to the understanding that a common challenge in our countries is that changes are more difficult to implement than in some other regions of the world," Vlahović said.

Mario Scalet, head of science at UNESCO's Regional Office for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice), told the ministers that one of the issues the expert meeting discussed was "a new network that could be launched soon – the network for science media – that we consider a very important aspect in society. One of the main critical points in this region is also awareness about the importance of science, so this network could help us in order to increase awareness of the importance of science in the region."



Mario Scalet, head of science at UNESCO's Venice Office (left), organised the Expert Meeting in Sarajevo, where Mićo Tatalović and Fabio Turone (President of SWIM and EUSJA board member, right) were invited to discuss science journalism



# The Passionate

*Angela Posada-Swafford is one of Latin America's leading science journalists. From Miami, the Colombian writes for the North- and South American as well as the European media. She will be part of the EUSJA workshop "Blood Infusion for Staggering Science Journalism" at the World Conference of Science Journalists in Helsinki this summer and will lecture on the art of storytelling in science. Wolfgang C. Goede interviewed her on her strategies in times of crisis, and on the strengths and opportunities of the profession. "You have to put your heart in science journalism", she recommends.*

## WOLFGANG GOEDE, EUSJA HONORARY SECRETARY

**How do you assess the state of the art of science journalism in Latin America and Colombia? Can it live up to European and US-American standards as far as revealing the other side of the coin, digging for the truth?**

In a recent Sci.Dev.Net survey, most science journalists in LatAm see the role of science journalism as informing people about science and translating complex information. Only a few respondents (3 per cent) say science journalists should provide a more critical perspective.

Compared with a decade ago, the region has more science journalists, and perhaps more science reflected on its pages (certainly not on TV or radio). But some 60 per cent of that science is not critical, it is not always accurate, it confuses science and pseudoscience, and it pays homage to scientists without questioning. Way too many reporters get excited with the science, they swallow the information whole and they just repeat it.

For example, a highly respected Colombian neuroscientist announced recently that he is involved in researching ways to add oxygen to water and that this modified molecule promises to cure a host of diseases, even though he can't give any details yet. The news went viral this November, with perhaps just one or two outlets tepidly attempting to explain, though none of them asking themselves how this can be.

LatAm journalists have a three-headed problem. On the one hand they are not specialised in science. On the other hand, they are not given enough column inches. The third problem is that university communication officers in general do not do a great job outreaching the press. They do not have the best bond with professors and researchers, so there is a disconnect among these three parties to the detriment of the general public.



The report by Sci-Dev Net can be downloaded at [http://issuu.com/scidev.net/docs/learning\\_series\\_global\\_journalism](http://issuu.com/scidev.net/docs/learning_series_global_journalism)



Angela Posada-Swofford (right), whose image is displayed in the entrance lobby of the Bogota International Airport El Dorado along with other outstanding personalities from Latin America, such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez



**From your observatory in Miami, with a genuine triangle as your base, how do you look at the work of US-American and European colleagues?**

US science journalism has had perhaps a longer time to evolve. In general it is solid. A lot more specialised than in other regions. I read fantastic pieces here and there. Of course I also see huge mistakes, and total dependency on press releases. But job opportunities in traditional media are shrinking, while creative minds are making a modest living in the electronic media platforms. I think US media needs to be less reactive to news and more proactive. More creating the news to explore issues. I move among all kinds of journalists, and the impression across the board is that everybody's job is dying away. Even that of the gossip journalists. We seem to be replaced by bloggers, and in our case by scientists themselves. The other problem is that of jobs and academia. Several senior editors and staffers at mainstream media places here feel that we're already at critical mass -- that the job market, annually, can't sustain a higher rate of science-writing graduates. I think those who should report on science are simply those who do it WELL. No matter if they are journalists or scientists. And I also think journalists are quite capable of understanding complex science -- if they put their heart in it ... and those journalists that copy and paste from the internet (a surprising number, actually, and all over the world) certainly do not have their heart in their profession.

**Science and technology have become the major promoters of change, which is unfortunately not always progress. Megacities still endorse individual rather than public transportation, and very liberal GMO policies, especially in the US, impact the daily lives of campesinos [peasant farmers] in the South. How can science journalists cope with this?**

Two words: with knowledge. A science journalist who knows the science issues, who knows the parties involved, who knows the consequences of this or that regulation and its effects on people, is a person with the tools to be critical and questioning. As a journalist, you begin to become immersed in the issues and

the science way before you even ask for an interview. Then you start talking to people. I find that one source always leads to another one and so on, until the issue is seen under all angles. But the more you know about the issue, the better angles you will be able to find. One of the greatest tools journalists of all kinds can use is simply banding together, forming associations, sharing their knowledge base, their connections, and their insight. I take a look at the e-mail exchanges in the National Association of Science Writers [NASW] and the Society of Environmental Journalists [SEJ], and I see a treasure trove of information, advice. Another fantastic tool is the Knight Science Journalism Tracker, which selects the best (and worst) examples of science reporting in English, Spanish and German, helping us to develop a critical eye to what our peers are doing, and learning from them. In short, the job of a science journalist needs the kind of commitment you have when you are genuinely passionate about it.

**For all its importance, science remains a niche that many people avoid confronting themselves with. Too complex, too difficult, are common comments. How can we address this dilemma?**

The latest conclusion from the NASW is that we need to make each news item somehow be personally relevant for the audience we write for. While this is truth in a good measure, it is also true that it is harder to personalise, say, particle physics. I think that the way to make science attractive to the bulk of the people is the old fashioned way: be seductive. Seduce the reader, the listener, the viewer, with the siren song of science, but well

**D**on't forget to make your plans to attend the **World Conference of Science Journalists in Helsinki** in good time. Why not block out the last week in June in your diary? The event runs **from 24 to 28 June 2013**.



**You are in a unique position with a unique career. How did you get to become the journalist you are?**

I became a science journalist when that specialisation did not even exist in any journalism programme. At first it was a strong attraction to the environment, and then that morphed into the hard sciences: astronomy, physics, earth sciences, paleontology, oceanography. I did my Masters in Journalism after having studied Modern Languages, and soon realised I had to learn the science pretty much on my own, at least in the beginning. This is where the passion part came into play. I made it my business to learn about those

done. Crafted like a good entertainment book, movie, or radio show. Give them science soap operas, science Reality TV, more shows like The Big Bang Theory. Give them Harry Potters of science, Tintins of science. Make it really fun while maintaining the quality and solidity of science.

**No mission without vision: how do you picture the world in the year 2030, its challenges and accomplishments, the role of science journalism?**

The principles of good journalism and good science journalism are the same now as they were in the 1800s, and as they will be in 2030. Society will always need to be informed. Science, for good and bad, will continue to surprise us and rule our lives. Our brains will be wired differently, as are children's today ... a new kind of 'homo evolutus' that processes information faster, that has different neuronal connections. Yet, even though the information delivery platform changes, the quality of the information will need to be preserved.

I think 2030 can begin in 2013 ... if the WFSJ in Helsinki places Latin American science journalism and science issues on the table, not as a timid side dish, but as a more solid main course. I certainly hope that 15 years from now we will have fully spanned the globe in terms of banding journalists more closely. And I further hope that Latin America will by 2030 have gathered the organisational strength to organise a world conference in the region. And finally, I do hope that news organisations worldwide get the support from private and government institutions to do their job on behalf of the society at large.

topics, at home.

I embraced all media platforms, learning on my own. I freelanced as a script editor, helping hand, translator and science content consultant for Discovery Channel Latin America; I sent pieces to National Public radio, and to a host of little known magazines in Spanish and English wherever in the world I could find them. My secret was always finding a great story. If you have something great to tell, and target it to the right publication, chances are it will get noticed because editors need good content. And you can't find anything great to say if you don't do your detective homework and learn the science behind the issue. Finally, I learned about the Knight Fellowships in Science Journalism at MIT, became the first Hispanic to get the year-long fantastic opportunity in 2000, and entered the big leagues of science journalism.

One day I decided to share all those expeditions to remote corners of the world, and amazing laboratory sessions, in a series of 15 novels for young adults ages 8 to 15. Los Aventureros de la Ciencia is being used in Costa Rica and Colombia as a teaching tool in schools because the novels mix the real life science and scientists with the adventure and adrenaline of an action book. It explains the good moments and the pitfalls of being a scientist and of being a journalist since the main character is a science reporter. I hope to get them published in English one day.

**Recently, Angela Posada-Swofford was honoured for her journalistic work as one of the top hundred Colombian citizens living abroad.**

[www.angelaposadaswofford.com](http://www.angelaposadaswofford.com)

Continued from front page

**Sad news**

It is with great regret that the EUSJA board has received the news of the loss of two former presidents, **Casper Schuuring** and **Arthur Bourne**, and we would like to offer our condolences to their families, friends and colleagues. The next issue of EUSJA News will carry their obituaries.

needed. I was invited to speak on "Open Access and Science Journalism" at a recent EU/Atomium conference in Dublin. Whilst applauding the concept of true open access I did raise the point that this could have an effect on members' jobs. I also mentioned the problems of "churnalism" - copy written without time to check information and place it in an historic context in a rush to get the story out. Will this lead to dumbing down? How does it impact on newcomers to the profession? I shall write more about this for the EUSJA website and for the next issue of EUSJA News. Meanwhile, I am eagerly looking forward to visiting Prague for the 2013 EUSJA General Assembly on 16 March. There are many interesting topics lined up for discussion and I hope we have a fruitful meeting.

**BARBIE DRILLSMA,  
EUSJA PRESIDENT**

# Swedish science- and medical journalists' associations merge

KAIANDERS SEMPLER (SMVJ)

After a year of discussions, SFVJ – the Swedish association of science journalists – finally merged in November with its sister association of medical journalists. The new association's name is SMVJ – Sveriges medicin- och vetenskapsjournalister (Swedish medicine- and science journalists). On March 7 the new association will have its first GA. A new website is planned, but has not yet been created.

The president of the new association is Erik Mellgren, former science reporter at Ny Teknik and editor of the magazine Teknikhistoria.

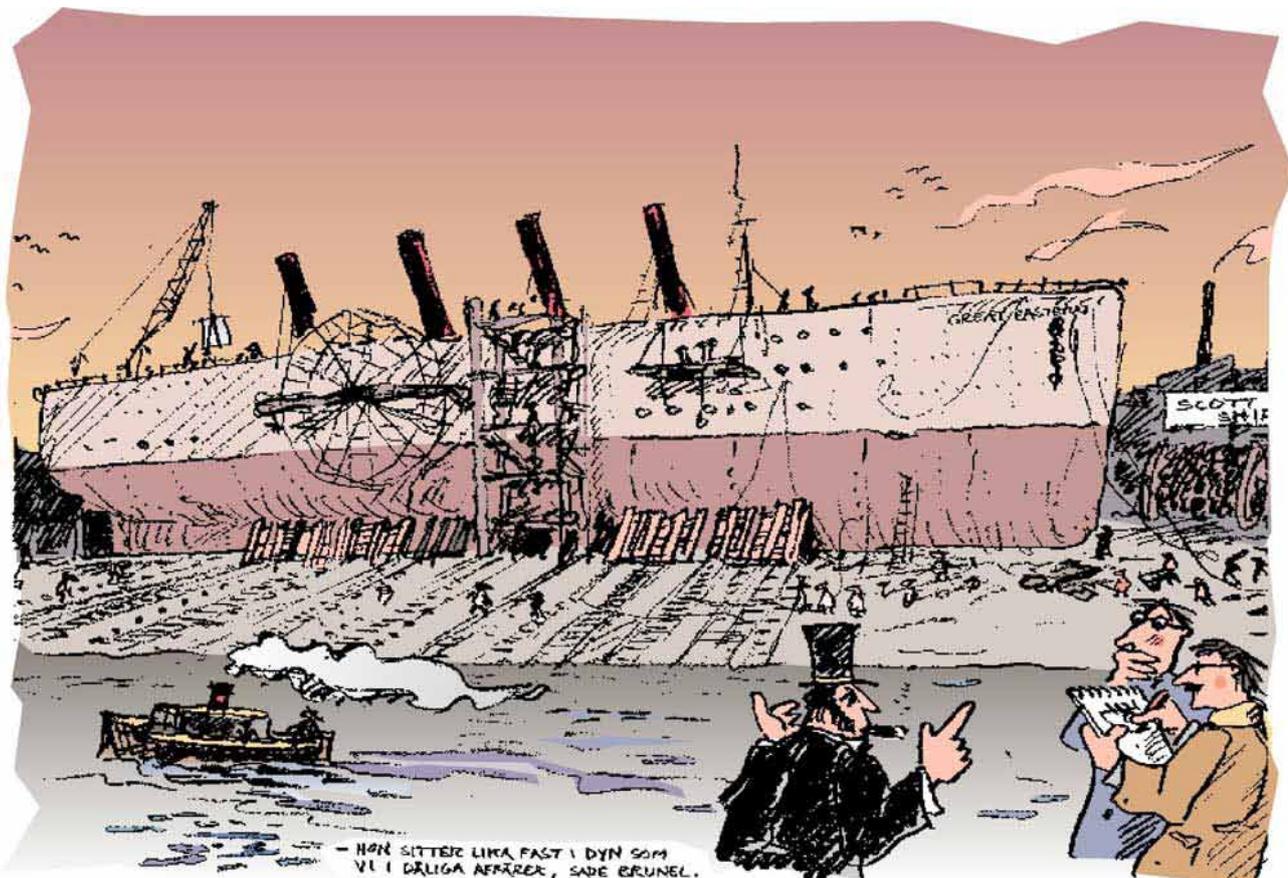
The reason for the fusion is to, hopefully, create a larger organisation with more clout and action. Both organisations' member activity has dwindled in the last years. With more than a hundred members we hope to be able to arrange attractive activities and regular events. We shall see this spring.

President Erik Mellgren and EUSJA national delegate Kaianders Sempler will, again hopefully, jointly guide a group of Swedish engineers on a study tour to England in April. The topic is the birth of the industrial revolution. The trip will start with a day in

London visiting the small museum at St Mary's hospital where Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928, then to the Royal Institution where Humphrey Davy discovered a number of chemical elements – sodium, potassium, calcium, barium etc. – and Michael Faraday created the first generator, transformer and electric motor.

Then off to the Geological Society to look at the William Smith's geological map of Great Britain and the first map of the underground, continuing to Greenwich Observatory and Harrison's chronometers. The following days the group will go to Bletchley Park to see the decoding of the secret Enigma codes during WWII, to Birmingham and the birth of commercial steam engines, and to Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale where the first high quality iron was produced with coal by Abraham Darby in 1709, thereby lowering the price of iron and sparking the industrial revolution.

We shall also look at some of the works of the great English engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the man who among other stunning things created the world's largest ships in the mid-1800s. If the tour works out we could perhaps repeat it as an EUSJA event.



She is stuck in the mud as deep as I am in bad business, says Brunel.

# Not just a press trip

ANNA NOLAN (ISTJA), EDITOR

**E**USJA study trips have a flavour all their own. As well as providing some of the features of a conventional press trip such as visits to labs, attendance at conference events, and meeting assorted scientific experts, they allow you to get to know your EUSJA colleagues a lot better. So as well as learning about your host country/city and its science, you gain insights into the journalistic cultures of your colleagues from around Europe.

"We European journalists took advantage of the study trip to deepen our reciprocal acquaintance and friendship and to exchange information and opinions," stated Valeria Fieramonte, in the course of her report on an EUSJA visit to Romania. "It allowed us to enlarge our vision of Europe."

Valeria's report was posted on the [www.eusja.org](http://www.eusja.org) website, where you will also find reports on recent trips taken to Stresa and Gastein.

Agnes Kittel, who attended the Stresa ESF conference on the neurobiology of emotion, called her report: "Little notes about a great opportunity: Mission (Almost) Impossible". In it, she explains the interesting differences she found between attending a conference as a researcher and as a science journalist.

There are two reports on the European Health Forum held in Gastein in October 2012. Wolfgang C. Goede gives the historical background to various science policies and developments, while Senne Starckx gives an overview of proceedings. "It's the opportunity to network with so many leading health experts that makes this event quite unique," Senne noted.

Among the older reports, the catchy short video by Liesbeth



Participants in the EUSJA trip to Romania, enjoying the breeze on the Danube Delta somewhere between Sfantu Gheorghe and Uzlina. Photo courtesy Pertti Ranta

Valeria's detailed report on the trip, which was organised by the Romanian association, describes her visits to University Politehnica Bucuresti, the Horia Hulubei nuclear plant and institute, and the GeoEcoMar Institute, where students learn the history, formation and life of the Danube delta.

In the accompanying photograph, the enjoyment of the EUSJA participants and their Romanian hosts is evident - though it has to be said that not all EUSJA trips include such exciting boat expeditions.

Jongkind takes you on a whirlwind zoom around the statistics of the Helmholtz trip of 2011.

**It's well worth keeping an eye on the [www.eusja.org](http://www.eusja.org) website.**

It lists forthcoming trips as well as carrying reports.

In the following pages of this newsletter Tatiana Chernova shares her impressions as a new science journalist on her first press trip abroad, and Viola Egikova gives an overview of the different types of EUSJA trips, and their importance.

# My first time on board

**What is it like taking part in an EUSJA press trip for the first time? A recent entrant to science journalism shares her experience**

TATIANA CHERNOVA (INTELLECT)

After finishing at university, I started work in Moscow as a correspondent on the Russian scientific newspaper Poisk. I had been working there for only about four months when my editor suggested that I take part in a press tour organised by EUSJA. I was



very happy to go, but I was worried because I was the youngest journalist and had limited experience. Would I be able to keep up with the more experienced science journalists on the trip? My specialisation is education, and the trip was to Saarland university in Germany, so I was interested in how its system works:

**Y**our voluntary contributions for consideration for inclusion in EUSJA News are welcome. If you have some suggestions to make or you'd like to write an article, please check first with the editor Anna Nolan about feasibility, angle and length (anolan@iol.ie).

If you have suggestions for, or queries about, the EUSJA website, please contact the webmaster Fabio Turone (turone@sciencewriters.it). Since its renewal last April, the website is being visited more and more, with over 12,000 visitors (including the editors at the "New Scientist", see page 10) and more than 24,500 page views overall..

how many faculties are there, is it difficult to enter or not, how many students are there and from what countries, and how does their future look after graduating from the university? And of course, I wanted to know about scientific achievements.

My trip started with travel problems, because there was a strike in the airport in Berlin but finally my colleague and I arrived at Saarbrücken. From then on, everything went very well.

The name of the tour - How computer science and materials science are improving the world - promised interesting information, and so it proved. Our programme lasted for three days. During

this time we visited the University to listen to several lectures and look at modern laboratories. We also drove to Schloss Dagstuhl. There were live discussions with the scientists from the beginning.

**Modern laboratories where young researchers showed us a variety of laser techniques.**

There was variety of hot topics, from 3D animations used in Hollywood and the latest retail technologies for the supermarket of the future to bioinformatics support of HIV therapy. All the scientists were open to dialogue, and interested in conveying information to us journalists. In the evenings they joined us

for interesting, informal discussions.

We also saw modern laboratories belonging to the Steinbeis Material Engineering Center Saarland and talked to young researchers, who showed us a variety of laser techniques.

Unexpectedly pleasant was the drive to Dagstuhl Castle - Leibniz Center for Informatics, which was built in the late Renaissance style. This is a unique place where computer scientists from all over the world come to seminars, which cover a lot of subjects from scientific visualisations to embedded systems. We had an excursion through all the halls, led by the scientific director Professor Reinhard Wilhelm. At the end of the day we spent a very nice evening with some scientists, drinking wine and eating cheese from France. That was a relaxing time after dealing with difficult topics.

Summing up, the press tour went well. All my worries were in vain. The organisation was excellent, every day was planned very correctly and nobody was tired or bored.

But there was so much information to think about that three days were not enough for that press tour.

EUSJA and Saarland University made all the arrangements for our stay. The other journalists were very pleasant and I didn't hear any negative reviews. There was only one wish – to stay longer.

# To travel or not to travel?

.....

**VIOLA EGIKOVA, VICE-PRESIDENT OF EUSJA**

I definitely know the answer to that question. But I think it is better to repeat it, because there have been some queries asking what our study trips are like. We have heard sometimes rather strong demands to know what we have done already: what was wrong or what was inapplicable? Surprisingly these queries have usually come from those who never attended EUSJA study trips or never organised them. So it is probably useful to remember some facts.

First of all: study trips are the responsibility of the national associations, and each association has to organise a trip at least once in five years or so. The main goal is to show some promising science research centres in their country and to organise meetings with interesting scientists. One more important goal: help our colleagues from the different countries to meet with science journalists who are members of the national association, in order to discuss the practical problems of science journalism, and to improve contacts and communication between scientists and science journalists. The responsibility of the host association is to organise a programme and to offer accommodation and meals. The journalists pay for their own travel.

This is a classical EUSJA study trip, for which the rules formulated by EUSJA have been described many times (I shall not touch that topic now). The most recent one was organised by the Romanian association. But of course there are some other possibilities to help EUSJA members to encounter scientific views. These are, for example, events affiliated with any big conference or meeting, such as the study trip the Irish association organised last year during ESO in Dublin. Or the one or two day study trips before various EUSJA General Assemblies organised by the Italian (UGIS), Danish, Hungarian, Dutch, and Czech associations and others.

I can speak also about Russian trips: we organised a classical trip with a four day programme (25 EUSJA journalists attended), and two years later we organised a local programme for the journalists who attended the European annual competition of young researchers. That year the competition was in Moscow and we used the possibility to set up some meetings with the Russian scientists for our foreign colleagues.

In recent years we have added one more class of EUSJA study trips: these are the trips organised by the EUSJA board. I must emphasise that these trips are just some kind of addition to our classical trips organised by the national associations. But the

main goal is again the same: to visit the most promising science centres, to meet most interesting scientists, to let the journalists from the different countries meet each other.

The Board tries to organise these trips similarly to classical one: we develop a programme that is interesting for the EUSJA members and provide the accommodation and meals for the participants. I recall, for example, the study trip to Heidelberg where journalists met scientists in the famous European Molecular Biology Laboratory, the German oncology centre, the study trip to Helmholtz association research centres and so on. Besides the trips the board also administers the participation of science journalists in different scientific events such as the Lindau meetings with Nobel Prize winners, and in some interesting conferences in different countries (such as the BioVision conference in Lyon, the Gastein Health Forum in Austria or the ESF-FENS Conference on the Dynamic Brain in Stresa).

Sometimes we hear the opinion that trips were important in the past, but not today when we have the Internet. Yes, nowadays we have a lot of possibilities given by the Internet. Yes, we may get news the moment it appears. Yes, we communicate via social networks. But nothing can replace the visit to labs, the live discussions with scientists and meeting your foreign colleague not just on Facebook, but face to face. This is not only my private opinion as a journalist who always got some fine stories for my newspaper on EUSJA trips: I have heard the same many times from the participants of the study trips who shared their impressions. See for example, the accompanying article by Tatiana Chernova, who is in the early days of her science journalism career. A member of our Russian association, she describes her experiences of going on her first EUSJA trip.

I know for sure that EUSJA study trips are an important part of our activities. Could they be better? We have to try. But in the same time I know well what a difficult thing is to organise a trip! It would be naive to think that the science centres are ready to host journalists and to agree with us the programme of the trip. To set up and run any study trip is a very difficult and time-consuming task. It is a pity when somebody ignores this, and makes a late cancellation.

The Board as always will report on future study trips to our coming General Assembly. But of course the most important plans have to come from the national associations. We are open for some new models of the EUSJA activities. But let us also keep our classical study trips – a real school of science journalism, I would say.

## Grillo and NS

When the "New Scientist" recently published a controversial interview on science with Italian comedian-turned-politician Beppe Grillo, I reported on the blog of EUSJA about the criticism that emerged among science journalists in Italy. I thought - and wrote - that the pro-science image given of

Grillo (whose performances often included strong attacks on science and conspiracy theories involving bad science) was not balanced, and provided examples of the most controversial assertions. Almost immediately, the editors at the "New Scientist" contacted me and invited me to write a comment, that was published along with the interview (<http://www.eusja.org/beppe-grillos-five-star-movement-pro-science-or-anti-science-by-fabio-turone/>). FABIO TURONE

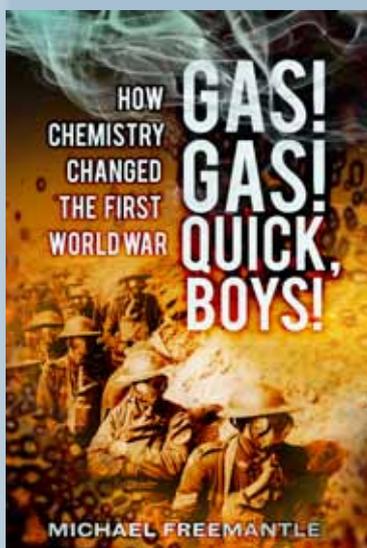
## Books by members

Below are details of three books written by members from Italy and the UK, dealing with the human-cetacean bond, the use of chemicals in the First World War and the history of female astronomers. If you have published a book related to science journalism in the last few months, and you would like it to be mentioned in a future issue of EUSJA News, please send an email to Anna Nolan (anolan@iol.ie).

### **Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! How Chemistry Changed the First World War**

by Michael Freemantle

The industrial-scale carnage and destruction of the Great War would not have been possible without the industrial-scale production of a vast variety of chemicals. In *Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!* science writer Michael Freemantle explains how chemistry and the manufacture of chemicals determined the shape, duration, and outcome of what became known as "The Chemists' War".



Freemantle reveals how the belligerent nations employed chemistry not only as a destructive instrument of war but also to help protect troops and heal the sick and wounded. He paints a picture of the horrors of the war and provides numerous examples of how trench warfare, tunnelling operations, the war in the air and at sea, and the care of the sick and wounded in casualty clearing stations and military hospitals all relied on

the use of chemicals.

Topics include high and low explosives, metals, chemical warfare agents, gas masks, khaki dyes, war photography, disinfectants, antiseptics, anaesthetics, and analgesics.

"As far as I know, *Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!* is the first book to bring together all the disparate components of the Chemists' War," Freemantle says. "The title comes from British war poet Wilfred Owen's famous poem about chlorine gas poisoning: *Dulce et Decorum Est*."

Further information: <http://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/products/Gas-Gas-Quick-Boys-How-Chemistry-Changed-the-First-World-War.aspx>

Publisher: The History Press, Stroud, UK

£18.99 (hardback)

ISBN: 978-0-7524-6601-9

### **Jack il delfino e altre storie di mare** (in Italian, translation: **Jack the Dolphin and other stories of the sea**)

by Marco Affronte

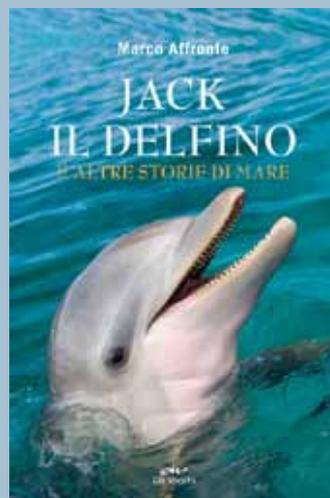
This book is about the touching bond between humans and cetaceans, analysed through 11 true stories.

The stories collected by the author are dedicated to the legendary Jack and many other cetaceans (Free Willy, Filippo, etc.). Dolphins, whales, and orcas are the main characters of these exciting, touching, gripping stories, which explain the

special bond between humans and these cetaceans. Chronicles and scientific information are combined in this book, which presents both famous and lesser-known cases.

There are also biological and ethological explanations that give us a chance to better understand the world of these magnificent sea creatures.

Publisher: De Vecchi, Firenze/Florence, 2012  
€11.90 (256 pages)



### **Il cielo dimenticato in un baule** (in Italian, translation: **The sky forgotten in a trunk**) by Gabriella Bernardi

Who were the female astronomers of the past? When and where did they work? What were their contributions to science?

Carolina Herschel, the best known female astronomer from the past, discovered eight comets, three galaxies and a dozen clusters, and compiled a catalogue of 2500 nebulae, but women's contribution to astronomy can be dated back long before her.

In Egypt, princess Aganice lived around 1900 BC, and she's often confused with Aglaonike, a Greek priestess of the second century BC, who was able to predict lunar and solar eclipses. Hypatia of Alexandria, according to some contemporary witnesses, made new discoveries about the movement of the stars.

Hildegard of Bingen lived around 1130 and as a nun she had the opportunity to study and to write treatises on cosmology influenced by the Pythagorean tradition.

In the seventeenth century Catherina Elisabetha Koopman Hevelius was married to a wealthy merchant. The couple started together an ambitious observing programme aimed at improving Kepler's planetary orbits, and at compiling a precise stellar catalogue. Despite the destruction of the observatory in a fire, and the death of her husband, Elisabetha finally succeeded at publishing the catalogue, which is still the largest one produced without the aid of the telescope.

In this book for children, the reader will find these and many

other examples of biographies, written in narrative form.

Further information: <http://www.edizionilaricotta.it/libri/il-cielo-dimenticato-in-un-baule/>

Publisher: Edizioni la Ricotta, 2012, <http://www.edizionilaricotta.it/>

Paperback/e-book  
ISBN: 978-88-96594-09-4





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