



In this Newsletter:

- A blog by Mari Heikkilä: Let's stay together
- EUSJA General Assembly in Helsinki 13.-15.3.2023 – welcome!
- News from WFSJ
- A blog by Peter Knoll: A lot of Hype about an old Hat
- Upcoming events for Science Journalists
- News and articles from EUSJA member associations:
- TELI (Germany): Interview with EUSJA President Mari Heikkilä - Fighting Fake News
- TELI (Germany): New TELI Board elected: "Counterbalance to fake news and social media bluster"



BLOG

Let's stay together!

Mari Heikkilä

Where is our world going? What does the future look like? I cannot help but think about the current wars, conflicts and climate crises in my own quiet home office. Actually, I should be writing a science story about Alzheimer's disease right now, but it's hard to focus. I constantly glance at my phone for the latest news.

I don't suggest turning a blind eye to the world's injustices and distressing news. The crises, such as that Russian invasion of Ukraine, demand our attention. However, in today's information age, it's crucial to shield oneself from the overwhelming flood of information. As the saying goes, "the more information, the more pain." One must be cautious not to get addicted to the adrenaline burst triggered by sensational news. It is important to remember that despite the bad news, the world is not all bad, there are good things and developments happening all the time. And the world is not simply black and white, even though current discussion in media often seeks to polarize issues. Social media, in particular, tends to amplify topics that evoke strong reactions. The algorithms favor content that stirs irritation or, perhaps, even rage — that is: emotions in the reader. It is easy to create bitterness and hate, and in today's world, especially on social media, it is popular.



In this era, I believe it's my duty as a journalist to be constructive, not destructive. It is important to try to find solutions, which could make our world more sustainable, and to build cooperation. I cannot bring peace to the whole world, but I think it's important to quiet one's mind and contribute to peace in one's immediate surroundings. Small actions matter: before engaging in a heated social media debate, consider whether it will lead to a positive outcome or merely serve as fodder for the entertainment machine designed to provoke anger. Instead of immersing oneself

in online confrontations, try to be constructive and offer solutions or maybe redirect that time toward meaningful connections, like reaching out to a long-lost friend. The latter choice is likely to leave you feeling more fulfilled. Life is a series of choices.

I personally find international associations, such as EUSJA, to be valuable platforms for fostering understanding and cooperation. International meetings facilitate encounters with diverse individuals—those with varying perspectives and cultural backgrounds. Ideally, these encounters lead to personal growth and the acquisition of new knowledge. The upcoming EUSJA GA meeting in Helsinki (Finland) 13.-15.3.2024 is an opportunity not to be missed. I hope we get EUSJA delegates from many national member associations to the meeting. EUSJA still has much to accomplish. Together, within EUSJA, let's not only

enhance the standing of science journalists in Europe but also foster a spirit of mutual learning.

Wishing you a delightful end to the year!

Mari Heikkilä

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Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists (vice president)

EUSJA president

P.s. Regarding this piece of writing, I would like to express my gratitude to ChatGPT for helping me refine and enhance the structure of my text :). I think the digital world brings us some great things, as well (not just frustration). ChatGPT is not a perfect, but it can help science journalists in some tasks. Read also Peter Knoll's interesting blog about AI "A lot of Hype about an old Hat" in this EUSJA newsletter.

P.p.s. How's the weather in Finland? I live in Jyväskylä (Middle of Finland) and we have currently snow cover (a bit like in this picture below). In Helsinki (which is in Southern part of Finland) there is usually less snow. Usually we still have snow (at least in the northern parts of Finland) during the March, but it depends on the year. Those who will participate the GA+study trip will be informed about the weather beforehand (what to expect).

<https://en.ilmatieteenlaitos.fi/seasons-in-finland>



EUSJA General Assembly in Helsinki 13.-15.3.2023 – welcome!

Mari Heikkilä

Next EUSJA GA meeting will be held in Helsinki on Thursday 14.3.2024 at 9.30. GA and study trip will be organized by FASEJ (The Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists). EUSJA delegates or their representatives from each EUSJA member association (one representative per association) and EUSJA Board members are welcome to participate the GA-meeting. After the GA meeting the program will continue as a study trip. Depending on the amount of EUSJA delegates, we may also have an opportunity to invite other EUSJA member association members to attend the study trip. We would like to know before 29.12.2023 who will represent your national association in the GA meeting in Helsinki 14.3.2024. A hotel room is reserved for EUSJA delegate/representative for 13.-15.3.2024.

Please, **fill out the form for registration to EUSJA GA meeting + study trip (before 29.12.2023)**. Ask link to the registration form (for EUSJA delegates/representatives): maripheikkila@gmail.com.

Preliminary program (changes are possible):

Wednesday 13.3. Arriving to Helsinki. Hotel Klaus K (Address: Bulevardi 2-4, 00120 Helsinki) is booked for EUSJA delegates/representatives.

Thursday 14.3.

9:30-13:00 EUSJA GA Meeting.

14:00-17:00 A study trip part begins with a visit to Aalto University (<https://www.aalto.fi/en>) and VTT.

18:30-21:00 Dinner, EUSJA delegates/representatives meet FASEJ (The Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists) members.

Friday 15.3.

9:30-13:00 Visit to Public Service Media Company Yleisradio (<https://yle.fi/aihe/about-yle>), discussion about science journalism. Lunch.

14:00-16:00 Visit to University of Helsinki (<https://www.helsinki.fi/en>):

Official program ends.

Unofficial program (self-funded, there are some FASEJ members who will join you):

18:00 Those who would like to have a Finnish experience of sauna: Allas Sea Pool (<https://allasseapool.fi/?lang=en>)

20:00 Dinner

Saturday 16.3.

if you stay in Helsinki for a weekend, FASEJ has organized a group visit the home of well-known Finnish architect Alvar Aalto (<https://www.alvaraalto.fi/en/location/the-aalto-house/>) and studio Aalto (<https://www.alvaraalto.fi/en/location/studio-aalto/>) on Saturday afternoon. Pre-registration is needed (it is asked in the registration form), FASEJ offers this for EUSJA members.

Other places to visit (no guided tours arranged): Heureka science center (<https://www.heureka.fi/?lang=en>), Natural History museum (<https://www.luomus.fi/en/natural-history-museum>), the National Museum (<https://www.kansallismuseo.fi/en/kansallismuseo>), Ateneum art museum (<https://ateneum.fi/en/>)

News from WFSJ

Mari Heikkilä

New Board of Directors

WFSJ (World Federation of Science Journalists) has now new board. The result of the election has been confirmed.

EUSJA congratulates the six new members of the Board of Directors: MBENG BOUM Joslain Joseph – Cameroon; Nouha Belaid – Tunisia; Chhatra Karki – Nepal; Ximena Serrano-Gil – Colombia; Lesley Evans Ogden – Canada and Ben Deighton – UK.

Directory of science journalists

WFSJ has started an ambitious project of listing science journalists who belong to the member associations. The idea is that in that way science journalists from around the world have the option to identify themselves and each other in a safe, secure setting (protected web site). Read more about the project here:

<https://wfsj.org/news/wfsj-launches-a-directory-of-science-journalists/>

The World Conference of Science Journalists 2025 in South Africa

The next World Conference of Science Journalists in 2025 will be held in Pretoria, administrative Capital of South Africa, carrying the theme Science Journalism and Social Justice – our role in promoting resilience. See more information on WFSJ webpages: <https://wfsj.org/world-conference-on-science-journalists/>.



A lot of Hype about an old Hat

Artificial intelligence has been a reality for over 20 years and offers more opportunities than risks – and more jobs.



A spectre is haunting us - AI (artificial intelligence). IT giants such as Microsoft and many others are firing thousands and thousands of employees for fear of its consequences. Certainly, AI can already do a great deal today; application letters, for example, probably have a better chance of success if they are formulated by ChatGPT.

AI-supported works of art can hardly be distinguished from self-painted ones, and even source code for software is already of an astonishingly high quality. "We are already saving ourselves at least one programmer," the co-owner of a small software company confirmed to me.

This can save a lot of resources and prevent rejects, for example in industrial production start-ups - the software analyzer from Contech Software & Engineering, to name just one example, has been proven to drastically reduce the error rate thanks to AI.

Dangerous suggestions

On the other hand, I find it reassuring that there are a lot of areas where the ChatGPTs of this world have so far and will probably continue to produce outright nonsense for the foreseeable future. One of my best friends, the Australian vet Ronald Schneider, has tested AI extensively and knows that it takes into account long-disproved studies as well as current, accurate ones. "So far, the results are pretty garbage - AI doesn't differentiate between accurate studies and long-refuted, false ones," Ronald told me with a broad grin. "If you want to kill your pet, you should definitely follow the AI's recommendations."

AI is not AI

Incidentally, AI is not just AI. Mostly, machine learning is accepted as a form of AI. A few weeks ago, I was at the it-sa security trade fair. A long-standing business partner of Trend Micro told me: "We have been using AI for 20 years. Since the number of known malware programs has increased from one million to 84 million within five years, we

would otherwise have had no chance of keeping up with this development. Of course, some jobs have been replaced as a result, but these have been created elsewhere. The bottom line is that more new jobs have been created than we had before."

Widespread ignorance

The spectre of AI? Rather a lot of hype about a rather old hat, but at the same time a ray of hope with huge opportunities to improve the quality of our work - and unfortunately also a flimsy excuse for managers who can't get their fill and want to rake in even more money via "redundancy productivity".

Does AI really replace human labor? I don't think so. Of course, work will change, just as technological developments have changed the world of work since the industrial revolution. After all, IT cannot replace empathy, humanity, creativity and imagination. Computers can only do "0" and "1" - two states, no more. The quality of the results is still determined by what the AI is "fed". The rampant fear of AI is therefore due to widespread ignorance - AI will enrich and improve our working world and make it fit for the future. And create additional jobs. Human labor and life experience cannot be replaced by anything - not even by AI.

AI is already widely used in many industrial applications

AI can save a lot of resources and prevent rejects for example in industrial series productions. AI drastically reduced the reject rate in powertrain manufacturing.

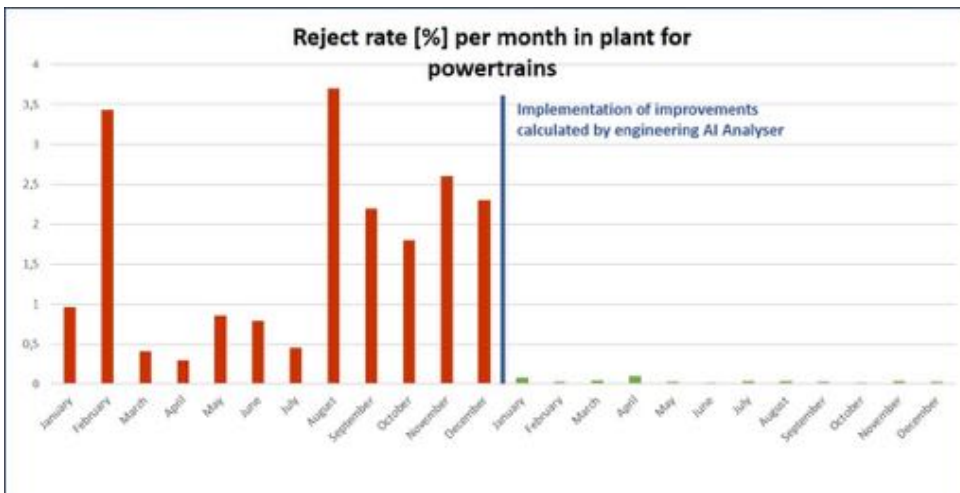


Figure 1. AI reduced the reject rate in powertrain manufacturing (Analyser AI System from Contech Software & Engineering).

Upcoming events for Science journalists

Please send email (maripheikkila@gmail.com) if you know some event or webinar which could be of interest for other EUSJA members.

12.-15.6.2024 EuroScience Open Forum 2024 – Life changes science

Katowice (Poland) will host the EuroScience Open Forum 2024. More information will be available at: <https://www.esof.eu>



News from EUSJA member associations

What is happening in your national association? Do you have some news to tell others? Or did you have some interesting event? If you have some news/issues/events/happenings/articles which would be interesting also for other EUSJA member associations, you can write a report and send email maripheikkila@gmail.com. I will attach your report to EUSJA Newsletter. Thank you!

Interview with EUSJA President Mari Heikkilä

Fighting Fake News

By Peter Knoll, TELI, Germany

The EUSJA has been through turbulent times. A new board has been in place since 2023. The new president of EUSJA is Mari Heikkilä, science journalist and member of the Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists (FASEJ). TELI board member Peter Knoll spoke to her about initial activities and the next steps.



Mari Heikkilä (right) is delighted to have the support of long-standing EUSJA pioneers and is venturing a new start with numerous projects after the Covid pandemic.

Mrs Heikkilä, the EUSJA made a fresh start with the meeting in Milan in January. What was the mood like back then? What has changed?

The EUSJA meeting in Milan was great. The atmosphere was really nice and warm, and the study trip program for science journalists was excellent. The news in Milan was good: the financial difficulties of EUSJA are now solved. I think in that way it is a good time to make a fresh start. In Milan I really noticed the core role of these kinds of international associations: to enlarge one's view of the world. I heard so many interesting things! I had great discussions, for example with the delegates of Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Sweden.

What and who motivated you to become president of the EUSJA, which has experienced a great deal of turbulence in recent years?

I was highly motivated and supported – or maybe you could say that I was put under some pressure – by the other EUSJA delegates. Finland's FASEJ is the biggest association in EUSJA with about 1200 members, and therefore it seemed that it was our turn to take responsibility. On the other hand, one significant factor was that Jens Degett, former president of EUSJA, promised to become vice president. He, along with many other EUSJA delegates, promised to support me in every way. That was very important because I am a newcomer.



Successful EUSJA meeting in Milan: Nice and warm atmosphere. Photo: Cinzia Boschiero

What has been your best experience so far as the new EUSJA president?

It has been nice to work with the board, and I have also had discussions with other old EUSJA pioneers. Everybody has been extremely helpful, and I have a very good feeling about the whole EUSJA community; there are many extremely nice and friendly people there. It is a pleasure to plan things together.

An open statement by Russian science journalists that is very critical of Putin is published on the EUSJA website. How is the contact with regime-critical science journalists from Russia today?

Unfortunately, the situation in Russia is extremely challenging for journalists. The people are suffering because of the war, and they are desperately desirous of peace. We do have some contacts, but (for obvious reasons) I will not mention details.

What goals have you set yourself?

Our goal is to make EUSJA more vibrant after the challenges posed by the pandemic and other difficulties.

I conducted a survey in the spring, asking EUSJA members about the activities they would like the organization to implement. Many responses highlighted the appreciation for study trips to research centers, companies, and other destinations. Webinars, newsletters, and discussions about science journalism were also mentioned.

Next year, we are planning to host the EUSJA general assembly and a study trip to Helsinki on March 13-14. The general assembly on March 13th serves as the yearly meeting for EUSJA delegates from all member associations. Following that, we will embark on a study trip to various institutions, including Aalto University, the University of Helsinki and Yleisradio, the Finnish public broadcasting company. The Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists (FASEJ) is organizing this event.

I have restarted EUSJA newsletters and also reached out to the organizers of science events, such as Berlin Falling Walls, to inform our members about grants for science journalists. There are also plans in some countries to organize study trips, for example, in the Czech Republic. Hopefully we will see more study trips in the future.

Do you see AI more as an opportunity or a threat to scientific journalism?

I view AI more as an opportunity. I use tools like chatGPT to enhance my work as a science journalist, particularly when brainstorming topics for radio programs. For instance, if I'm interested in creating a program about black holes, I can ask chatGPT about the most intriguing popular science questions people would like to know about them. I can also request chatGPT to draft a short explanation of what black holes are. While the explanations may not be perfect and useful directly, they serve as valuable starting points and can spark new ideas.

I firmly believe that AI is a useful tool for science journalists. It won't replace us; it's essentially a sophisticated computer program with the sole skill of predicting the next word based on vast amounts of text from the internet and books.

Personally, I often use it to refine my English writing, fixing mistakes and making the language more fluent.

What strategy is the EUSJA pursuing against fake news?

I believe the most effective approach is to educate people through comprehensive and high-quality science journalism. It is our responsibility as science journalists to provide accurate and in-depth information. I hope that as a community, EUSJA can contribute to the fight against fake news by sharing information and promoting best practices.

What advantages does the EUSJA offer an association like the TELI?

As you may be aware, EUSJA is established by national science journalists' associations. The organization's existence is contingent on the goals and interests of these national associations.

It is crucial to understand whether they still perceive the importance of having such an international community for science journalists. The opportunity to meet, share insights, and learn about developments in science journalism across different European countries, from Eastern, Western, Southern, and Northern Europe, is invaluable.

This understanding becomes even more apparent against the backdrop of incidents such as the current war in Europe, reinforcing the significance of maintaining a united and informed international science journalism community.

New TELI Board elected:

"Counterbalance to fake news and social media bluster"

By Peter Knoll, Germany

The new board of the German science and technology journalism organization TELI is increasingly focusing on tried-and-tested specialist information.



Newly elected TELI board relies on proven formats: Peter Knoll, Katrin Richthofer, Arno Kral, Nina Eichinger (from left to right). Photo: Günther Klasche

Munich - Providing serious, scientifically sound information instead of fake news, agitation and rumors - that was and remains the goal of TELI. The organization for science and technology journalism with the longest tradition in its field has a new board that wants to dedicate itself to this task with fresh impetus in the future: The previous chairman - Arno Kral - will remain in office. The physicist and long-standing IT editor will be joined by a new deputy, Katrin Richthofer. The director and camerawoman is responsible for the press work of the NGO Klimamitbestimmung (Climate monitoring) and is managing director of AG-TK, which has the goal of sustainable real estate development. IT journalist and lecturer Nina Eichinger, publisher of Tom's Networking Guide, remains treasurer. The current secretary remains in office: journalist and political scientist Peter Knoll. The general meeting elected science journalist Wolfgang Goede, who attended the meeting online from Colombia, as an assessor. All elections were unanimous, with abstentions by those elected. The general meeting also elected Dr. Walter Rathjen as auditor, who will be assisted by Jan-Oliver Löffken and Eberhard Wühle. The Arbitration Committee will continue to be chaired by long-standing members Dino Trescher and Dörte Sasse. Günther Klasche, supported by Anke van Kempen, will continue to chair the TELI admissions committee. In his keynote speech, Arno Kral emphasized: "In times of fake news and social media, it is more important than ever to inform society seriously about science and technology topics. We at TELI want to form a counterbalance and offer more on-site events with top-class speakers!"

Sustainability and AI

The focus in 2023 is on sustainable construction and artificial intelligence. Therefore, TELI is offering two free panel discussions at the Munich Press Club and has in October 2023 already conducted an on-site tour of an award-winning, energy-efficient existing building.