

EUSJA GA and study trip in Helsinki 13.-15.3.2023

Report by Mari Heikkilä, president of EUSJA, president of FASEJ



EUSJA study trip participants visiting VTT quantum computing division. Foto: Katri Jurva.

Visitors from nine different European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden) gathered for the EUSJA GA and study trip in Helsinki 13.-15.3.2024. During the two-day study trip we visited Aalto University, University of Helsinki and Yle (Yleisradio, Finland's national public broadcasting company), we got to know each other and engaged in profound discussions regarding the state of science journalism, politics, the association's activities and future prospects. The meeting was organized by FASEJ (The Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists).

Thank you to all who participated in the trip; you made our meeting unforgettable! And I want thank the other organizers in FASEJ, especially Helena Raunio, who organized our leisure activities etc. and Ville Wittenberg, Ulla Järvi, Sanna Tyyri, Riitta Tirronen, Satu Lipponen, Riina Linna who participated in planning the study trip!



In the Otaniemi, which is the campus site of the Aalto University, we heard about the architecture of Alvar Aalto. Aalto planned the entire area and many of the buildings are designed by him. Foto: Mari Heikkilä.

EUSJA General Assembly meeting

The program began in Thursday 13.3. with the EUSJA GA held at the hotel Klaus K (Bulevardi 2, Helsinki) at 9:30-12:00. The agenda included matters according to the constitution of EUSJA: the annual report of year 2023, financial report of 2023, and updates and annual reports from the member associations.



EUSJA GA-meeting. Foto: Peter Knoll.

Regarding the financial situation, it was noted that there were no transactions from the account of EUSJA (other than bank charges) in 2023. We have about 2000 euros in our bank account. EUSJA

GA authorized the Board to seek new banking services and establish a new bank account for the organization because dealing with the current bank is difficult — for example, making transfers and paying bills is very challenging. The board aims to find a better solution and establish a new bank account. After this, the association will collect membership fees from member associations for the year 2023.

There was also a proposal at the meeting to a minor modification of the constitution because currently, the rules state that the EUSJA's headquarters are in Strasbourg (France). In fact, EUSJA does not have a permanent premises or headquarters there, and currently, the association's address is in Italy by FAST (EUSJA c/o FAST, P.le R. Morandi 2, Milan, Italy). According to the proposal, EUSJA GA would allow the Board to change the headquarters if necessary. However, during the GA-meeting it was acknowledged that changing the association's headquarters is a bigger process than expected, as it would also require changing the EUSJA's registration in a different country (if the new headquarters are elsewhere than France). It was decided that the Board will further investigate the issue: what official actions would be needed to change the headquarters and where could be the new headquarters. The Board will present a proposal for a new headquarters to be decided at the next General Assembly (2025).

During the meeting, it was also discussed that the GA in 2025 will likely be held online. There, a new board will need to be elected for EUSJA. Candidates and proposals for the new board members are welcome, and some inquiries have already been made. Please send an email to maripheikkila@gmail.com if you or someone in your association is interested in board membership: the board consists of a chairman, vice chairman, honorary secretary, and treasurer. The candidates should receive support for the position from their own national association. The aim is that we will have candidates for the new board before end of the year. Then we could have introductions of the candidates in advance of the online-meeting in March 2025.

Visit to Aalto University — world's largest ice and wave test basin, small satellites and quantum computing

The study trip part began with a visit to [Aalto university](#). Firstly, we learned about the architecture of [Otaniemi](#) by the [famous Finnish architect Alvar Aalto](#). Following that, we had the opportunity to visit the [world's largest ice and wave test basin](#) (See also a [video about the Ice Tank research](#)).



Associate professor Arttu Polojärvi (on the right) introduced us the world's largest ice and wave test basin at Aalto University and explained why studying ice composition is crucial. Foto: Mari Heikkilä.

Associate professor [Arttu Polojärvi](#) explained why studying ice composition is crucial: for example, a significant portion of goods imported travels by sea, and transportation must function smoothly even during the winter time. Moreover, research is vital not only for maritime traffic but also for understanding the effects of climate change on the Arctic ice cover.



Feels like being in an ice hockey hall. There was about -3 degrees Celsius in the ice tank. Foto: Mari Heikkilä.

Although it was only slightly cooler inside the ice test basin compared to outside, the weather was more pleasant as there was no rain or wind in the basin. I can tell you, dear colleagues, that I didn't order that kind of weather for the EUSJA study trip. Something went wrong in the ordering process...



Finnish spring weather: rain and wind. Foto: Peter Knoll.

At Aalto University, we also explored microsattellites. These are small satellites, approximately the size of a milk carton, which can accommodate various research instruments, detectors and cameras. Researchers and students at the Aalto university have built and launched [two satellites into space \(Aalto 1 and 2\)](#), with [Aalto 3 to launch soon](#). [Professor Jaan Praks](#) told us that there is already a huge number of small satellites orbiting the Earth, and more are being launched into space constantly.



Professor Jaan Praks from Aalto University told us how they build small satellites. Foto: Mari Heikkilä



Tauno Vähä-Heikkilä (second from left) told us about quantum computing. In the picture, he is presenting a radar device that can be used in landing of a spacecraft. Foto: Mari Heikkilä.

Finally, we visited [VTT](#)'s research center, where [Finland's first quantum computers](#) have been developed. [Tauno Vähä-Heikkilä](#) told us about research in the field and the potential future applications of quantum computers.

Dinner with FASEJ members

Thursday evening we had a dinner at Fat Lizard -restaurant with FASEJ (The Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists) members. Many members of EUSJA saw old friends, as Finns have been actively involved in EUSJA for a long time and organized for example, the World Conference of Science Journalists in 2013. Judging by the lively discussions, the evening was a success, and after a long day, it was nice to sit with a glass of wine and dinner. I think that during study trips, social interactions with people from different countries are very important. This way, bonds are formed, and at best, lifelong connections are made.



After a long day, it was good to relax, socialize, and sit down with a glass of wine. Fotos: Mari Heikkilä and Christine Heller del Riego.



Visit to the Finnish public podcasting company Yle

In the Friday morning, we had the opportunity to visit [Yleisradio](#) (Finland's national public broadcasting company). [Ville Alijoki](#) told us about Yle's activities in science journalism. We also had a panel discussion on the state of science journalism in different countries. The discussion was lively, revealing that similar problems exist in science journalism across all countries. In many countries, populist forces in politics seek to diminish the influence and funding of the media sector. There is a decreasing number of full-time science journalists in the media, and the fees for freelance science journalists are too low to sustain a living. Additionally, misinformation spreads easily, especially on social media platforms. Germany has currently taken steps to address these issues, recently passing [an initiative to strengthen science communication and journalism](#). The panel discussion was engaging and could have continued for the entire day. Thanks to all participants and the active audience for their involvement in the discussion!



A panel discussion about the state of science journalism in different countries. Panelists from left: Jens Degett (Denmark), Istvan Palugyai (Hungary), Dino Trescher (Germany), Lucia Torres (Spain), Ville Alijoki (Finland) and a moderator Mari Heikkilä (Finland). Foto: Peter Knoll.

Visit to the University of Helsinki — tree biology, antibiotic resistance and phages, “bacteria eaters”

During the visit to the university of Helsinki, [professor Yrjö Helariutta](#) told us about the importance of studying [the biological process of tree tissue development](#). There are significant differences among different tree species or individual trees how much carbon dioxide they absorb during the

process. That affects their ability to sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. By studying this biological process, more efficient methods of increasing carbon sequestration in forests can be discovered, thereby impacting climate change.



Trees growing at the green house of the University of Helsinki. We learned, that the trees are individual: some of them absorb more carbon dioxide than others. Foto: Mari Heikkilä

At the microbiology department of the university of Helsinki, we learned about bacteriophages, viruses that "eat" bacteria. [Professor Ville-Petri Friman](#) told us that phages are currently studied for various purposes, including protecting plants from bacterial diseases. Bacteriophages can also be used in treating human infectious diseases when antibiotics are no longer effective. Given the rapid spread of bacteria resistant to all antibiotics, this area of research is receiving significant attention. [Professor Marko Virta](#) explained us about the current problem of antibiotic-resistant bacteria and why bacteria evolve and develop resistance.



Professor Ville-Petri Friman showed us how phages had eaten the bacteria (clear areas in the bacterial growth plate). Foto: Mari Heikkilä

Leisure activities

The two-day study trip schedule was quite full packed, but we had organized some leisure activities for those who decided to stay in Helsinki for a bit longer time.

On Friday evening, the bravest among us took a dip in the +3-degree Celsius seawater in the [Allas Sea Pool](#) and enjoyed a sauna session. Afterwards, we dined at the unique tractor-themed restaurant, [Zetor](#).



The interior is quirky and playful at restaurant Zetor. There was Finnish food on offer and a traditional bar atmosphere. Foto: Mari Heikkilä.

On Saturday morning, we visited [Alvar Aalto's home](#) and [studio Aalto](#) in Munkkiniemi, Helsinki.



There, we saw where the architectural icon Alvar Aalto had lived and his workspace. An enthusiastic guide shared insights about the architect, his works, and his ideas.

A pleasant atmosphere of an ordinary home. Alvar Aalto's home felt cozy. Foto: Mari Heikkilä.



Full of light. The architect made sure that his studio had plenty of natural light. Foto: Mari Heikkilä



Aalto's tavern. Here, architects working with Aalto would come to eat. Foto: Mari Heikkilä

Throughout the entire visit, Finnish spring weather showcased its best: rain and wind. There were still patches of snow and ice, requiring caution to avoid slipping. Thanks to all the adventurous and brave travelers! It was so nice to have you here! Hopefully, we'll meet again in Finland at some point, and with better weather!