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## BLOG

# Science journalism needs support

Mari Heikkilä

The EUSJA General Assembly and study trip in Helsinki are now behind us. Thank you to all participants: it was really nice to see everyone, hopefully the trip was memorable to you! We had three intensive days: our GA meeting was fruitful and we saw many things on the study trip. We had the opportunity to get to know each other and discuss about science journalism.

During a panel discussion about the science journalism many problems were brought up: in some media, the interest for science journalism is low, science journalists are being laid off, regular journalists are covering science stories without adequate expertise, freelancers face difficulties as the fees are too low to make a living, and so on. However, at the same time, there are many important topics that require science journalism to communicate to the general public: climate change, biodiversity loss, new technologies, the development of artificial intelligence, medical advancements. It's clear that we are needed. Without reliable, well-informed science journalism, there is more space for fake news and misinformation.



What should be done? I think that more funding is needed for science journalism. Especially we would need more funding directly to individual science journalists for producing science stories. More and more journalists work as freelancers and the fees in media are too low. Poor pay drives science journalists into communications roles.

One option for funding science journalism are foundations, which could play a crucial role by actively funding science journalism. For example, in Germany, there is a Science Journalism Innovation Fund of WPK (<https://innovationsfonds.wpk.org>) that provides funding for independent science journalism. The money comes from six foundations, two of them from the foundations of former newspaper or magazine founders. In Finland, our national association FASEJ is in a good position because we can provide grants to science journalists for in-depth coverage of science topics, thanks to copyright royalties. Of course, if journalists transition into grant recipients, the question arises: will we become in the future like authors who rely mainly on grants? I suspect that might happen at least to some extent if we want to continue producing in-depth, well-researched science journalism.

It's also important to highlight the difference between science journalism and science communication. Science communication starts from the needs of a research institution or university. Its goal is to highlight the research of the institution. Science journalism, on the other hand, starts with the topic: What should people know about the world? What do we know too little about? What isn't being talked about? What's new in science? Good science journalism provides readers with new information, expands their worldview, and encourages critical thinking. It's not just about reporting on individual research results but providing context and exploring cause-and-effect relationships, offering a broader understanding of the subject.

Nationally and within research institutions, money is readily allocated to science communication: there's a desire to highlight own research results and achievements of the research institutes.

Funding for science communication is easily added to EU projects and other research funding. There is currently lot of EU money available for this kind of things. But science communication is never the same as independent science journalism.

Don't get me wrong: I value science communication and I am also engaged in science communication projects myself as a freelancer (to improve my earnings as well). However, independent science journalism is needed now and in the future. If the media would only rely on press releases and base their stories on them - easily and effortlessly - many important issues would remain in the dark and untold. It's dangerous if science in the media is reduced to mere press releases about research. Then there's no science journalism — it would be almost the same as if business journalism only reported on press releases of companies.

So, we have a task: we need to defend science journalism. This task falls on every national association. We need to highlight why science journalism is necessary in our own country. Our resources are varied, but nationally, we can work to strengthen science journalism. I hope that through EUSJA, we can also share experiences, support each other, and find good models for improving the situation.

It was good to meet at the GA, and I hope you can share your thoughts and strategies through the EUSJA — blogs and other writings are welcome, I'm happy to put them on our website and



newsletters. It would be nice to hear greetings and wishes from your own national association. In this newsletter, Fintan Burge will share the news of Irish association — and there are also interesting videos available for viewing. Thank you, Fintan!

Next year, there will be next GA meeting, most likely in March. At that time, a new board and a president will be elected for EUSJA. I hope you can already start considering among your national association whether you or someone else could be a candidate for the board. I will step down from my position then, but I'll do my best to support my successor. New people are

welcome and needed on the EUSJA board! The association needs people who are willing to maintain international connections. Everyone contributes in their own way and continues the decades-long tradition in this umbrella organization, European Union of Science Journalists' Associations (= EUSJA). I believe EUSJA is still important today. We need to continue the conversation and learn from each other. Hopefully, you agree. Your contribution is needed.

Have a nice spring! Let's keep in touch!

Mari Heikkilä

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President of Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists (FASEJ)

President of EUSJA

p.s. What do You think? It would be nice to hear your thoughts and hear about the situation in you own country — maybe you could write a blog about it to the next EUSJA newsletter or to EUSJA webpages?



## EUSJA study trip & GA in Helsinki 13.-15.3.2024, a report

A report on the General Assembly meetings and study trip is available on the EUSJA's website: [https://www.eusja.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/HelsinkiGA\\_report\\_small.pdf](https://www.eusja.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/HelsinkiGA_report_small.pdf). Please provide information ([maripheikkila@gmail.com](mailto:maripheikkila@gmail.com)) if you have written an article on the topic, and I will add the link to the [EUSJA website](https://www.eusja.org)! There are already reports, videos, blogs etc. written by Peter Knoll (Germany), Gabriella Bernardi (Italy) and Lucia Torres (Spain): <https://www.eusja.org/well-how-did-it-go-eusja-ga-study-trip-in-helsinki-13-15-3-2024/>.



# Upcoming events for Science journalists

Please send email ([maripheikkila@gmail.com](mailto: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>

## **30.6.-5.7.2024 Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting (Physics)**

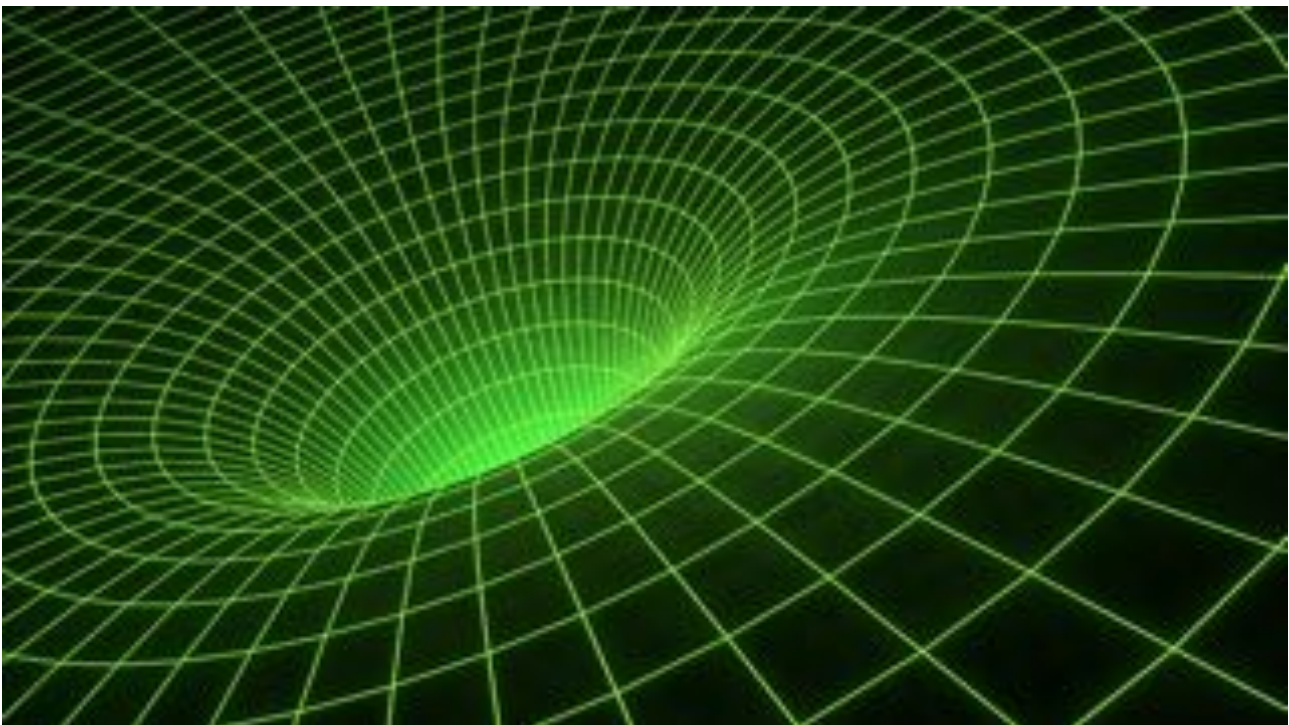
<https://www.mediatheque.lindau-nobel.org/meetings/2024>

**22.-27.9.2024** The 11th **Heidelberg Laureate Forum**. Applications for journalist travel grants are accepted from February 19 to April 28, 2024: <https://www.heidelberg-laureate-forum.org/journalists-bloggers.html>

**24.-27.9.** The **European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG)**: <https://www.ehfg.org>.

**7.-10.11.** **Falling Walls Science Summit Berlin** [https://falling-walls.com/science-summit/?\\_\\_s=ynbh55v6a5f5uym4u8yg](https://falling-walls.com/science-summit/?__s=ynbh55v6a5f5uym4u8yg)

**2025 The World Conference of Science Journalists.** 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/>.



## News from EUSJA member associations

What is happening in your national association? Do you have some news to tell others or something to share? 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](mailto:maripheikkila@gmail.com). I will attach your report to EUSJA Newsletter. Thank you!



### Greetings from the Irish Science and Technology Journalists Association ISTJA

by Fintan Burke

For almost 40 years the [Irish Science and Technology Journalists Association](https://istja.ie) (ISTJA, <https://istja.ie>) has helped to sustain quality coverage of science and technology in Ireland.

Part of this involves helping our members apply for grants and awards whether they are at a European or national scale. For example, ISTJA promotes the work of the Mary Mulvihill award, a €2000 award for student media projects on science-related topics.

Another part of this involves running a number of events and workshops throughout the year, so that journalists and the public are aware of current scientific and technological developments and issues.



During the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2021 ISTJA released a series of videos tackling topics and challenges in science journalism. This was part of a series of online events called 'Beyond Cheering' that took a critical look at science coverage in the Irish media. The videos focused on varied topics in science journalism. The first event was called "[Do scientists take enough of a stand on critical issues?](#)" with academic Dr Declan Fahy and investigative journalist Maria Delaney. They discussed if scientists can be political, the lack of science journalists in Ireland, and what can be done to prevent conspiracies taking hold.

Another event called "[What is the media's role in covering science?](#)" explored what role science reporting is playing in Irish media, and if this has changed in recent years. After the pandemic restrictions eased, the format was reimaged as an ongoing series of online talks by ISTJA members and guest contributors, such as science integrity volunteer Dr Elisabeth Bik.

One of our most popular talks was with author and ISTJA member Oliver Heffernan, about how to write a popular science book from the initial idea to the book launch. These talks are livestreamed via Zoom and are open to ISTJA members and the public. The videos are recorded and made available online through the ISTJA website and its YouTube channel.

Lastly, we have launched an online campaign called 'Member Spotlight' where members can briefly explain their work to the public. This campaign is currently running on [our X \(formerly Twitter\) channel](#).

[Irish Science and Technology Journalists Association](#) websites: <https://istja.ie>

More videos: <https://istja.ie/events/>