
Reports of Meetings

Science for a better life

EuroScience Open Forum, ESOF 2008, Barcelona, 18-22 July

The Euroscience Open Forum (www.euroscience.org/esof.html) was launched a few years ago as a new concept in science conferences: it comprises a forum for discussion of topical issues, an embedded conference (with an exhibition) to showcase European achievements right across the scientific and technological spectrum, and an outreach programme.

The scientific publication game

Mercè Piqueras suggested that EASE should participate, and we agreed to organise an outreach activity and a practical workshop for young scientists, in collaboration with Mediterranean Editors and Translators.

The outreach session was based on a board game, "Get Peered", devised by Tom Jefferson, Karen Shashok, and Elizabeth Wager and published in the *BMJ* (2003;327:1439-41). Reme Melero and Paola de Castro adapted it so that it could be played on a big screen with participants from our audience. There are four players, representing scientists who are trying to publish their research. They throw dice, then move around the board, landing on squares that speed their progress (sleeping with the journal's editor, for example) or hinder it (being refereed by an enemy who rejects the paper and may even plagiarise it). Each square is cleverly illustrated by Malcolm Willett, who kindly gave us permission to use his cartoons. When a player lands on a square, the underlying "message" is explained by an EASE member – although salami slicing your paper and obtaining multiple publications for one piece of work advances you in the game, it is bad practice and should be discouraged.

Unfortunately, the entire outreach session was poorly attended, but this gave us a chance to practise playing the game live in multiple languages, with the help of some students. Originally, we had planned a different activity for the workshop, based on the concept of writing a science paper as a puzzle; however, we decided to have another session of "Get Peered", and this was far more successful. About 20 young scientists and a few older ones attended and most were persuaded to step up to throw the giant dice, then be rewarded with a certificate from Reme.

The game was certainly fun and has potential as a learning activity as well as some light-hearted entertainment. We're hoping to organise a session in Pisa, and expect some lively debate about the ethics of publication – see you there.

Science journalism

ESOF 2008 also comprised some hundred scientific sessions, including a series on communicating science. The publicity of exaggerated claims such as cold fusion is essentially a loss of objectivity, science's basic value, argued the German philosopher Marc Dressler in "Ethics in science journalism". However, when criteria are absent we must rely

on consensus, and when consensus is lacking we resort to the majority standpoint.

Freedom – the ability to refrain – is the prerequisite of morality, as illustrated by the German historian Christian Förster in his talk on German scientists during the Nazi regime. Researchers will use any opportunities if they promise more influence and success, whatever the moral price of their research: all cooperation with the regime was voluntary, not forced.

From the United States, James Cornell reported that only 11% of Americans can name a role model scientist, usually Al Gore and Bill Gates. Science journalists can easily become uncritical "loudspeakers" and neglect negative aspects, and journalists who are dependent on official information, such as from NASA, are most likely to trumpet their masters' views. At the other end of the spectrum, critical journalists identify themselves with the activist community.

Russian science journalist Viola Egikova gave similar examples from the former Soviet Union. The communist regime boasted about its scientific achievements, and both scientists and journalists joined in, which is why false science was so abundant in the Soviet media. Censorship was more threatening than in Nazi Germany.

In "The pressures on reporting research" Peter Marsh identified that some people enjoy getting upset by what they read, so stimulating the need for sensation. He also argued that Europeans have the right of access to accurate scientific information. Paradoxically, as Peter Reader pointed out, researchers fear that their science is trivialised by the one-liners in science communication, but most researchers can themselves describe the essence of their research in one or two sentences. And scientists associated with governments and industry are not trusted by the public, whereas those associated with NGOs and universities are (*Science* 2008;321:204-5).

Also interesting was the X-change on most evenings, organised by the British Council, where Sue Nelson interviewed some high-profile speakers. Nobel Laureate and rebel Richard Roberts, for example, found that all the Nobel laureates he had polled were aged under 40 when they made their prize-winning discoveries.

But by far the most remarkable statement came from UK television doctor Ben Goldacre: "The world needs fewer science writers and more editors."

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Towards a new information space – innovations and renovations

11th European Conference of Medical and Health Libraries, Helsinki, Finland, 23–28 June 2008

The European Association for Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL), which organized this conference, is a professional association of librarians and information specialists working in health and medical science libraries all over Europe. EAHIL's mission is to encourage professional development and promote cooperation and the exchange of experiences within its members. It has more than 1000 members in over 30 European countries and many other countries worldwide.

The scientific programme of the Conference – which was held at the impressive Finlandia Hall designed by the Finnish master architect Alvar Aalto and attended by more than 420 health professionals – was intense and stimulating. The first two days were dedicated to CEC courses, and over the next four days, plenary and parallel sessions took place, a variety of relevant topics were examined, and a broad range of high-quality oral and poster presentations were delivered, giving both participants and teachers a great opportunity to discuss and to learn and also to strengthen their relations with colleagues and friends.

From paper to virtual

The evolution from print to electronic has affected the whole scientific community, causing drastic changes not only in the publishing of science literature and – broadly – in the dissemination of information, but in medical and health libraries and information and documentation services as well. Editors, publishers, librarians, and information professionals have all had to adjust their roles to the new user's needs and behaviours. Traditional services had to be renewed, new features implemented, and, most of all, new information spaces created. The title of this conference represented well the challenges that health libraries have had to face, moving rapidly towards a new information space by innovation (for instance, through the use of new web-based tools and technologies with Web 2.0 elements) and renovation (services, resources, organisation, workflow, physical environments).

Libraries' holdings and print collections are diminishing drastically, as is the on-site presence of researchers, students, and clinicians who can more easily access journals from their own desktops. Core collections are available via intranet in most research institutes, academies, and hospitals, and expensive online subscriptions are regularly paid each year by most health libraries. "It is the virtual world of cyberspace and the digital sources on the global internet that now dominate the medical information sources," said

Suzanne Bakker, EAHIL President, in the opening address of the conference.

If the information environment is exploding thanks to the bewildering developments in information and communications technology (ICT), the libraries' physical spaces – once collection-centered – will soon have to be completely redesigned to capture the interest of the new generation of users. They'll have to become "new theatres of learning", pointed out Heather Todd, University of Queensland Library, Brisbane. "Libraries used to be designed for librarians, keepers of knowledge ... now they include cafés, a mix of individual, group and casual seating; have wireless access, computer zones, interactive display areas, multimedia booths, laptop powered lockers and so on."

Libraries and social networking

Not only will libraries need to be re-spaced (opening up their fortress-like appearance), they will also need to be spaced-up by implementing various types of social networking, as pointed out by Guus van den Brekel, Central Medical Library, Groningen, The Netherlands, in his presentation. Virtual communities and virtual libraries; virtual communities and collaborative practices; virtual communities and changing information services were the titles of three of the many parallel sessions. Mobile applications such as mobile web 2.0 access to content or PDA (personal digital assistant) services were examined in a dedicated session. Other subjects discussed during the conference included evidence-based practice (the role of the librarian as a facilitator) and education and professional development (the role of the librarian as research collaborator).

The best oral and poster presentations of the conference will be published in the August issue of the *Journal of the European Association for Health Information and Libraries (JEAHIL)*, and the proceedings of the conference are available online on the EAHIL website (www.eahil.net) This site should be visited regularly not only by librarians and information professionals but also by anyone interested in "innovations and renovations" involving the scientific communities at different levels.

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