The origins of EASE

Maeve O’Connor

The European Association of Science Editors (EASE) is about to celebrate 30 years of existence — but a lot happened before 1982. EASE’s ancestors were the European Association of Earth Science Editors (Editerra) and the European Association of Editors of Biological Periodicals (EAEBP). Both organizations started up at the end of the 1960s with examples from North America to follow. The Conference of Biological Editors (CBE) had been founded there in 1957 and in 1966 it gave birth to the Association of Earth Science Editors (AESE). Earlier, back in Europe, UNESCO was encouraged by the international unions IUGS and IUBS to promote similar organizations on this side of the Atlantic.

European earth scientists, sensibly, called their organization Editerra when it was constituted in Paris in December 1968. The biologists, who had formed their organization in Amsterdam in April 1967, first lived with the initialism EAEBP. To everyone’s relief they settled for the name European Life Science Editors (ELSE) at their first General Assembly at the Royal Society in London in 1970.

To start with, both organizations had various projects in mind. Editerra immediately produced a comprehensive list of subjects to be treated in a looseleaf handbook for editors. John Glen became editor of the handbook at Editerra’s second General Assembly in Lämmin, Finland. Various working parties also came into being. Similarly, ELSE set up working parties on style manuals, refereeing, relations between primary and secondary journals, medical ethics and copyright.

From its very beginning, Editerra produced typed
reports and announcements of meetings etc likely to interest members. Known as Circular Letters, numbers M1 to M43 of these reports were sent to all members from 1969 to 1978. In addition, Circulars C1 to C4 went to Council members from 1969 to 1972. ELSE, too, produced typed newsletters, numbers 1-10 being sent to members between 1970 and 1976.

One of ELSE’s projects was to produce a European version of CBE’s Style Manual and at its 2nd General Assembly in Norway in 1973 Knut Fægri produced a plan for this that led to the publication in 1975 of Writing Scientific Papers in English, by F Peter Woodford and the present writer.

In 1975, although circular letters to members were still being sent out, Editerra published the first issue of a twice-yearly newsletter, Earth Science Editing, which was typewriter set and printed by Brown’s Geological Information Service Ltd. ELSE soon became involved with this publication and the fourth issue (1977) changed its name to Earth & Life Science Editing. In 1981 the newsletter began to appear three times a year and it kept this name after the amalgamation of Editerra and EASE in 1982. In 1986, with issue 27, it became European Science Editing: Bulletin of the European Association of Science Editors. In 1997 it began to appear with volume numbers and continuous pagination, starting with vol. 23 no. 60. The bulletin was quietly transformed by its editor, Hervé Maisonneuve, into a journal with the first issue of 2002 (vol. 28 no. 1). Over the years the appearance of the publication has evolved too, and it acquired its present look in 2007.

The amalgamation of Editerra and ELSE

Editerra and ELSE had very early realised that their interests were very similar, as shown by their collaboration on the newsletter. Then Nancy Morris, who had long been Editerra’s Secretary, became Secretary and later Secretary-Treasurer of ELSE, too. Nancy was a prime mover in the amalgamation of the two associations that came about immediately after General Assemblies of the two associations in Pau in May 1982, at a meeting organised by Henri Oertl of Elf-Aquitaine. The event was recorded in the newsletter (E&ELSE No. 17, September 1982) by a poem from Nancy, as follows:

**Ponderings on Pau**
The guardians of the printed page
Must face the Electronic Age,
As evidenced when experts came
To play this automation game.
With word processors — join the Club!
Computers have become the hub,
Yet databases’ infiltration
May harbour useless information.
The editor’s now vital role
Is — keep the chaos in control
And penetrate this modern fog
To see the “tail won’t wag the dog”.
The meeting ran of course on oil
With thanks to Henri’s endless toil
And no arrangements left to chance
By ELF (Easy Life in France).
And, staying on the lighter side,
Some merry meals they did provide,
A trip to Highest Pyrenees
With snow-capped mountains, bread and cheese*,
And finally the Pays Basque
What more could anybody ask?
But one event we must record
Which came about with great accord —
The merging, after deep-laid plans,
Of ELSE/Editerra clans
And now we function under EASE
So rally round, support us PLEASE!

*a gross understatement!