

THIRTY YEARS OF SCIENCE COMMUNICATIONS FROM ALL ANGLES

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Heureka science centre's Senior Inspirer Harri Montonen offered a most entertaining science show. (Photo by Adolfo Vera)

The 30th anniversary of the Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists (FASEJ) in Finland was a party that in many ways demonstrated the nature of the organisation. It combined a seminar themed 'Back to the Future' that involved futurologists, forecasting professionals, media experts, journalists and scientists with an informal celebration and party – and excited official and unofficial discussions about the future of science and the role of communications in it.

This was a radical idea at the time. In the 1980s the boundaries between journalists and representatives of scientific publications, not to mention communications officers, were still very much visible. Back in 1974 journalists working for scientific publications tried to build their own association: however, it took another eleven years to register one.

FASEJ was established in 1985 in the historical premises of the House of Estates in Helsinki. From the very beginning it was clear for the 34 people that decided to put up the association that it would not be a professional organisation – after all, the Union of Journalists has a membership of over 90 per cent of journalists in Finland – but an association that promotes and advocates scientific communication in all forms.

The establishment of the association came at a moment when science in Finland took a giant leap from the chambers of the universities towards society as a whole. The first popular scientific magazines were born and two science centres were established in Finland.

The most famous one, Heureka, is both the arena for the 30-year-anniversary celebrations and the work place of the President of the Board of FASEJ Mikko Myllykoski works as the Experience Director of Heureka. An historian by education, he started working for Heureka as an exhibition co-ordinator in 1990. Today he is in charge of events and learning programmes as well as the planetarium of Heureka.

How does he find time to chair FASEJ as well?



“I have been a member for years, but after the World Congress in Helsinki in 2013 I was asked to become a candidate for the board. Actually I find volunteering for FASEJ professionally very rewarding. Most of my colleagues, science centre professionals, work abroad, so FASEJ gives me a place for professional networking here in Finland. FASEJ is a home of many new projects and ideas,” Myllykoski says.

Today FASEJ has over one thousand members. According to the secretary general, Ulla Järvi,

one third is professional journalists; one third consists of members of editorial boards of scientific publications; and one third is science communications and press officers of universities. Among the members there are also people representing civil society organisations, science educators, university teachers and others. The board consists of nine people representing the whole spectrum of science communications.

The everyday work of FASEJ concentrates on education, scholarships and grants. This is thanks to the peculiarities of the Finnish copyright system. Kopiosto, the agency in charge for copyrights, redistributes compensations for copyright use to its member organisations, FASEJ being one of them. The annual budget of FASEJ is around 350 000 euro; most of it returns to the members in the form of grants, education events and scholarships.

Strategically FASEJ defines its role as ‘promoting scientific understanding and critical thinking as a strong initiative-taker within the network of scientific communication,’ and also promoting open knowledge and freedom of speech.



Professor emeritus Paul Fogelberg was the first president of FASEJ. Because of his enthusiasm and strong vision, FASEJ is open to all professionals working in the field of science communication (Photo by Adolfo Vera)