



Dear colleagues, dear members of the WFSJ,

The work of a science journalist is complex, difficult and can be, at times, quite a lonely task.

This is the reason why the opportunities we have to meet and get together - be it at workshops, conferences and other events - are particularly important.

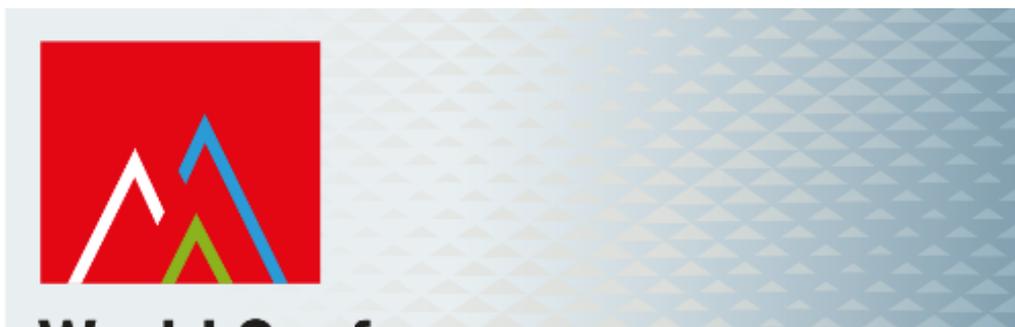
As I reflect on last year, I realise there has been a fair number of events in 2019, allowing science journalists to meet. They include workshops we organised such as the broadcast capacity-building event near Oxford (UK); the Kavli symposium in conjunction with the AAAS conference in Washington D.C and the Immunization seminar in Geneva (Switzerland). We also organised a session and facilitated attendance by a number of our colleagues to the World Science Forum in Budapest (Hungary). But of course, the most fantastic event last year was the WCSJ19 – your conference - so well organised by Olivier Dessibourg and his team, our colleagues from the Swiss, French and Italian associations (see articles below).

During all these events, we discussed and acted on matters of importance to our Community. As one of our colleagues said after one of these meetings: *“Being with you all and discussing these topics gives me the energy I need”*. How very true.

This year, the WFSJ will work to generate many more opportunities for our members to meet.

I wish you all a safe and happy new year.

Christophe Bourillon, Executive Director - WFSJ



# **World Conference of Science Journalists Lausanne 1-5 July 2019**

**A global summit to foster independent and quality science journalism**

**Olivier Dessibourg (SASJ)**

**Yves Sciama (AJSPI)**

**Fabio Turone (SWIM)**

“Reaching new heights in science journalism” was the motto of the 11th World Conference of Science Journalists in Lausanne. We are happy today to say that this promise has been fulfilled in many ways. We could mention here the overall number of registrants: 1360, almost the same as the 1365 for WCSJ2017 in San Francisco. The high overall participation of female participants at 59% is another thing we’re proud of, as is the budget we were able to secure, which was the highest ever for a WCSJ. That allows us to cite one more figure we are proud of: having been able to offer 110 travel fellowships to science journalists coming mainly from developing countries.

The success of WCSJ2019 was largely due to a very attractive and diverse core-program, complemented by enriching field trips and lab visits, as well as interesting pre-event workshops. All these programme items and sessions, some of which benefited from simultaneous English-French translation - another first - allowed each participant to open their mind to new ideas, engage in rewarding discussions, make the most of best practice from other colleagues, take part in lively debates and discover fascinating science. These were the most intangible but important achievements of this conference.

It would have been a pity to keep such accomplishments to ourselves, behind the doors of the stunning WCSJ2019 venue, the SwissTech Conference Center. Therefore, we made sure that some distinguished guests were able to join us. During the Opening ceremony on Monday 1 July, we were honoured to welcome high-level politicians and decision-makers, including Simonetta Sommaruga, vice-president of the Swiss Federal Council, Frédérique Vidal, French Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation. In their vibrant speeches not only did they underline the importance of science in our societies, but they also praised the role science journalists play in giving it context. The fact that they so vigorously made our message theirs – the need to foster independent and quality science journalism throughout the world – is for us one of the highlights of this conference.

This worldwide event was made possible thanks to the financial support of 101 different entities, always in full respect of the independence guidelines set to keep the conference and its core-content as free of external influence and as open as possible. We would like to thank them all for their fruitful collaboration.

Last but not least, we organised this conference under the umbrella-name of the Alpine Consortium, uniting the science journalists associations of our three countries, Switzerland, France and Italy, totalling about 700 individual members. Their representatives worked hard together on this immense project, sharing their passion and pooling their strengths to reach the goal: just as we did in August 2017 during the bidding process for the conference, when we climbed together to the summit of Mont Dolent, the

exact meeting point of the Swiss, French and Italian borders, as a symbol of our common efforts to organise a memorable WCSJ in Lausanne.



Photo credit: Federico Kukso

### **Identity, quality reporting and public engagement: this is what science journalists need**

*There are more and more scientific papers and less and less science journalists. Making the public and media outlets understand how important is science journalism might be the solution for this community.*

**Vera Novais**  
@VNOVAIS

Science journalists agree that better quality science reporting is needed and that they don't want to be replaced by science communicators or other journalists. The first step is to create an identity, to define who is a science journalist and what guidelines could be followed, then to show that science journalism, as journalism in general, is vital for every society in the world. It is the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) commitment to advocate for science journalism, as it was discussed on November 23, in Hungary.

The WFSJ sat down with some journalists from its member associations to continue the discussion started in the previous day, at the World Science Forum, on [ethical issues](#) in science reporting, but the first questions raised were more related to who are the science journalists and who should be doing science journalism.

The diversity of people in the room was welcomed and has shown that there's no strict rule that fits them all. There are some people that see science journalists closer to science communicators because they are both writing on science, others think that science journalists are closer to political or economics reporters because

above all they are journalists and should follow journalism rules and not be science cheerleaders.



*Photo credit: Federico Kukso*

There are countries where some science journalists are working also as science communicators for universities, institutions, and companies. For freelancer journalists, this might be the only way to survive but it raises questions about conflict of interests. Among the represented countries, only Portugal seemed to have [legislation](#) on who could be a journalist and what journalists couldn't do. For other countries is up to each journalist to avoid losing independence. But the journalists fear that blurring the line that separates journalists from communicators can kill science journalism as it is and science journalists with it.

Creating a manual with best practices that each journalist could adapt to the reality of its own country could be a step to help science journalists to settle the quality that is demanded from journalists and from science reporting. But that also means that media outlets should be looking for science journalists. How? First by engaging people with quality science journalism and then showing the news media outlets that it is worth to have science journalists in their staff or to rely on freelancer science journalism work.

Of course there will always be some media outlets that won't hire science journalists but still continue to write about science. So it might be better to train journalists in those places to do a fairly good science reporting because when the general quality of science news increases there might be a greater chance to science journalists to be working on longer and more in-depth articles.

The WFSJ goal is to understand the needs of their members and then to address them. For now the Federation is planning a survey on science journalists: Who are they? How much do they earn? What are their needs? Do they have ideas on how to solve their problems? Then other projects will come in the way and members are invited to take part in them.



## The Association from Portugal is the newest member of the WFSJ

*SciComPt defined as one of its goals to create a science journalism nucleus to promote good quality science reporting and to help science journalists.*

**Vera Novais**  
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The Portuguese Network of Science and Technology Communication - [SciComPT](#) is the newest member of the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ). The association aims to support science journalism and help implement solutions that help science journalists overcome the difficulties they face.

SciComPT was born on November 18, 2014, as an official support for the annual Science Communication Congress that will have its 8th edition on May 7-8, 2020, in Azores (Portugal). “The association's goals are to promote science communication in all its aspects, to promote exchanges between science communication professionals and to promote informed citizen participation in all matters involving science and technology,” as written in their statutes.

The current board committed to reinforce the community: either by creating nuclei of professionals within the association — the science journalism group was the first one to engage in this process —, and by building partnerships with fellow associations like the Spanish science communication association (Asociación Española de Comunicación Científica, AECC).

As a result of this effort, in 2019 SciComPT had its first Journalism Award. And together with AECC had two editions of the Iberian Meeting on Science Communication and Science Journalism — and produced two [reports](#) as a result.

### Science journalists also have to report on other topics

The science journalism nucleus had conducted an informal survey on who are the journalists specialized in science, environment, health (if not only health policy) and technology (if not only gadget reporting). 24 journalists answered.

More than half of the journalists dedicate over 75% of their time to report on their fields of expertise but still, a quarter of the journalists couldn't even dedicate half of their time to their field of expertise. Newsrooms have been shrinking in size and journalists are demanded to report on other topics besides the ones that they are

specialized in.

Most of the science journalists are working in printed media (19). And there is only one science editor in the country, working in the newspaper Público. Science journalists are usually integrated into the Society or National/International News desk.

### **Fewer journalists but more work done**

In the survey, journalists were asked to point out the main difficulties they face in their daily job. The shortness of time was one of the most frequently mentioned problems, which is related, albeit not exclusively, to the lack of human resources. Newsrooms are getting smaller and smaller but in this online era, journalists are producing more content than ever.

Political and economics reporters are still the core of the newsrooms in Portugal but other fields of specialized journalism are facing more difficulties to keep a place in the newsrooms. Media directors and editors were asked why news media should report on certain science topics and why science journalists are important to do that, the journalists stated.

Journalists also complained that they still find it difficult to talk to some experts, either because they use a lot of jargon or because they don't care about the journalists' times and needs or even because the communication office from the institution acts more like a locked door than as a bridge between the journalists and the scientists.

To solve the pointed out problems, journalists ask for more science, environment, health, technology journalists in the newsrooms and more time to create their stories — which is a problem that only directors and editors can solve. But this would be the best solution to improve science reporting quality.



*Photo credit: Henry Kenyon*

## Reaching new heights in science journalism. WCSJ2019 puts the spotlight on building skills and promoting investigations.

**Andrada Fiscutean**

The 11th World Conference of Science Journalists (WCSJ2019) took place in Lausanne in July 2019 and gathered more than 1,100 journalists from all over the world, with the aim to sharpen their skills, meet other professionals, and create innovative projects. Participants were encouraged to think critically about their work, to develop skills that could help them hold strongmen accountable, and to report on the dark side of science that deals with fraud, sexual harassment, and bullying.

The opening ceremony featured a panel discussion hosted by Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist Deborah Blum, director of the Knight Science Journalism Program at MIT. She talked about the role of science journalism in mainstream media together with Jérôme Fenoglio (director Le Monde), Monika Bauerlein (CEO MotherJones), Nathalie Wappler (director SRF Swiss Broadcasting Television), Francesca Unsworth (head of news at the BBC), and Uzodinma Iweala (CEO of Ventures Africa Magazine & CEO of The Africa Center).

"Science journalism is not the promotion of science," Blum said, encouraging journalists to look at how science is done and hold researchers accountable for their actions.

WCSJ2019 gave journalists tips for producing podcasts, writing science-related books, making magazines profitable, and crafting successful freelance pitches. The sessions were divided into five categories:

- "the state of our trade (ethics, economic models, biases)
- beyond cheerleading (skepticism and accuracy -- a critical look at how science is done and reported)
- skills and tools (practical advice)
- science (latest developments in a wide range of fields)
- fun and entertainment (how science journalists can borrow tools from Hollywood)."

The conference hosted multiple sessions that took a critical look at how science is done. Ivan Oransky, the co-founder of Retraction Watch, talked about reporting on scientific fraud, while other sessions dealt with science and EU agencies, fighting fake-news, unpacking the corporate manipulation toolbox, covering systematic reviews, addressing the intersection of science, politics, and nationalism, and reporting on innovation skeptically.

Harvard science historian Naomi Oreskes, the author of the book Merchants of Doubt, talked about the connections between climate change deniers and the organizations that claimed that smoking was not bad for people's health. She discussed the tactics they use, such as trying to appeal to journalists' values of

fairness and objectivity. Climate change deniers are often heard saying that more studies are needed to understand what is actually happening, a technique that was also used by the tobacco industry.

Some journalists tend to give both sides equal editorial space, which leads to false equivalence, Oreskes said. One of her slides read: “The framework of “two sides” makes sense in a soccer match, and it may make sense in a political debate in a two-party political system. But it has no place in science.”

Oreskes also said that if journalists tell both sides, people will believe that scientists don't know what is happening. She told reporters to quote scientists who have published papers on the specific topic their story addresses, instead of talking to think tanks, CEOs, politicians, and lawyers who might be biased or might lack the knowledge. Journalists should be seeking accuracy, not balance, she said.

The World Conference of Science Journalists had multiple sessions that tackled the challenges journalists face. The Enemies of the people: journalism in the age of populists and strongmen panel, hosted by Brazilian journalist Thiago Medaglia, looked at science journalism in the age of misinformation, given the rise of populist politicians and alternative facts. Medaglia was joined by Thomas Nilsen (editor of the Barents Observer), Barış Altıntaş (co-director of the Media and Law Studies Association in Turkey), Emily Gertz (founder of (de)regulation nation), and Pablo Ortellado (University of São Paulo).

“Authorities who are afraid of journalism are authorities with something to hide,” said Thomas Nilsen.

Media professionals need to ask hard questions not only when they interview strongmen, but also when they cover companies, including those that sell consumer products. Hope or Hype: The skeptic's guide to reporting on innovation, a panel hosted by Indian freelance science journalist Padma T.V., tried to address the over-optimistic manner in which some tech companies talk about their work, hoping that enthusiastic stories will lead to generous investments. Niall Firth, a news editor at MIT Technology Review, stressed the importance of journalists getting to the bottom of the stories they are covering, urging them to be skeptical and get the context right.

But investigative journalists also need to protect their digital communications with sources. Washington Post's health, science & environment editor Laura Helmuth moderated a session on data security. Her guests were investigative reporter Dana Priest (Washington Post), political journalist Julien Martin (L'Obs), and journalist Wael Abouhadid, who agreed that newsrooms should have mandatory cybersecurity training. They advocated for the use of encryption and two-factor authentication, and recommended tools such as Signal, SecureDrop, ProtonMail, VeraCrypt, TOR, VPNs, and the traditional snail mail. Often, going low-tech can be the answer to conducting investigations safely, Washington Post's Dana Priest said.

She reminded the audience that reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein did face-to-face interviews in dark places when working on the Watergate investigation. To talk to their sources, they used payphones and codes such as moving the

flowerpot on the balcony.



*Photo credit: Henry Kenyon*

WCSJ also aimed to build bridges between science reporters and editors. The Freelancing from the Global South session got freelancers and editors together in an open dialogue where they expressed concerns and exchanged best practices, also hoping to address the cultural gap in the way journalism is done in different parts of the world. Pitches from the Global South often lack the “So what?” element, editors said. They also suggested young professionals ask for remote mentoring.

Even more skills building was done through the pre-conference language-oriented workshops held in Spanish (Jack F. Ealy Science Journalism Workshop, Latin America Edition), French (Atelier Francophonie), and English (Balkan Science Journalism Workshop). Also, there was a LGBTQ science writers meet-up. Other training sessions were created around topics such as augmented reality, artificial intelligence, science on television, the battle for open access, and the science of learning and the science of journalism.

But the conference also fostered creativity. One of the sessions, Meet the screenwriters taking sci-fi by storm, hosted by Richard Stone, focused on what journalists could learn from fiction writers. Screenwriters Kath Lingenfelter (Westworld, The Leftovers, House M.D.) and Nicole Perlman (Captain Marvel, Guardians of the Galaxy), together with Chinese sci-fi writer Anna Wu (Best New Writer of the Fifth Nebula Award for Global Chinese Science Fiction) discussed the tools they use to make their writing stand out.

Panelists talked about the tools that could be used to make stories feel more alive. Among the suggestions were to add specificity, to crack certainty, and to use emotions. Give the audience something to think about, was one piece of advice. Don't make a big deal about scientists being scientists; let the audience see

themselves in them.

During the Lausanne conference, the World Federation of Science Journalists elected a new president of the board, Milica Momčilović, an editor and presenter at Serbia's national radio-television service, RTS. She has been vice-president of the federation since 2017 and is now taking over from Mohamed Yahia, executive editor of Nature Research in the Middle East.

At the end of the event, the president of the organizing committee, Olivier Dessibourg, said he was proud that not only participants, but also decision-makers, politicians and scientists acknowledged that “quality independent science journalism in the worldwide media is vital.”

The next World Conference of Science Journalists (WCSJ2021) will take place in Medellín, Colombia.



### [New Board of Directors of the WFSJ meet during the WCSJ19](#)

**The Board of Directors for 2019-2021 had its first meeting during the WCSJ19 in Lausanne**

*From left to right:*

[Christophe Bourillon](#) (Executive Director);

[Harry Surjadi](#) – Indonesia;

[Andrada Fiscutean](#) – Romania;

[Bouchra Ouatik](#) – Canada;

[Milica Momcilovic](#) (WFSJ President) – Serbia;

[Federico Kukso](#) – Argentina;

[Mandi Smallhorne](#) (Vice-President) – South Africa;

[Mohammed Yahia](#) (Past-President) – Egypt;

[Ochieng' Ogodo](#) – Kenya

Not on the photo:

[Dr. Sunny Bains \(Vice President\) – UK](#)

Tim Lougheed (Treasurer) – Canada

**Three newly elected members joined the Board of Directors: Dr Sunny Bains (UK), Andrada Fiscutean (Romania) and Harry Surjadi (Indonesia).**

[Dr Sunny Bains](#) is a scientist, journalist, editor, and expert in technical communication from the United Kingdom. She is currently on the Executive Board of the Association of British Science Writers.



[Andrada Fiscutean](#) is a freelance science and technology journalist based in Bucharest, Romania. She serves as a board member of the Balkan Network of Science Journalists, a group that brings together journalism professionals from the Balkan countries.



[Harry Surjadi](#) specializes on environmental reporting in Indonesia. He has founded two journalists' organizations: the Society of Indonesian Environmental Journalists in 2006 and the Society of Indonesian Science Journalists in 2015.



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What did your science journalists association do recently? Let us know at: [info@wfsj.org](mailto:info@wfsj.org)



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