Session I:

THE PLACE OF NARRATIVE IN SCIENCE

In this session we will explore what ‘narrative’ is and how it may, or may not, be of value to the communication of science at all levels. Should narratives be embraced in science as the most efficient, long-lasting ways of transmitting knowledge? Do people remember scientific information conveyed in a narrative format better than the ones transmitted in alternative formats like the common textbook?

The findings of science only become meaningful, if they are shared, and to be shared they must be communicated and contextualized. But what if narrative techniques impeded, rather than enabled, a proper understanding of data? Should storytelling - setting the stage for the importance of an experiment, presenting the listener with an unknown or an unsolved problem, and interweaving interpretation with the reporting of results - have a role in communicating scientific results at all? Or, alternatively, should scientists just describe their original hypothesis, detail their experiments in the order conducted and present the data in the rawest form reasonable for interpretation, and then state their conclusions?

But then again, a scientific presentation/paper is not simply a fleshed out laboratory notebook, that is, simply a record of what was done. Rather, it must place the research coherently into a larger context in addition to communicating the results and explaining its author’s
conclusions to other researchers so that they can assess and build on the findings, integrate them into the scientific meta-narrative. At the same time, hype and misleading claims negatively affect the scientific enterprise. As communicators, scientists need to approach the process with caution and precision: a scientific narrative is only as good as the data on which it is based.