



REVIEW

Histories in the wind: a long overdue book about science communication across Ibero-America

Reviewed Book

Massarani, L., García Guerrero, M., and Reynoso Haynes, E. (Eds.). (2025). *Comunicar la ciencia en Iberoamérica: un sobrevuelo por la región*. Fiocruz – COC

Reviewed by

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Abstract

Comunicar la ciencia en Iberoamérica: un sobrevuelo por la región is the first book-length, regionally authored history of science communication across twelve Ibero-American countries, published to mark the 35th anniversary of RedPOP. Written by practitioners and researchers from within the field, it traces how science communication has developed, and often survived, across vastly different political landscapes, from colonial-era natural history museums to today's social media ecosystems. Particularly striking is how several chapters frame science communication not just as public education but as a form of cultural resistance and democratic resilience. The book has geographical and thematic gaps, but it fills a long-overdue space in the literature and should be on every science communicator's shelf.

Keywords

History of public communication of science; Public engagement with science and technology; Popularization of science and technology

Received: 21st May 2026

Accepted: 25th May 2026

Published: 15th June 2026

1 - Introduction

Science communication has long suffered from an uneven global historiography, focused largely on the English-speaking world, leaving the histories of Latin America, the Iberian Peninsula, and the Caribbean relatively underexplored. *Comunicar la ciencia en Iberoamérica: un sobrevuelo por la región*, addresses this gap. Shortly after the publication of “Communicating Science: A Global Perspective” [Gascoigne et al., 2020], which brought together histories of the field from roughly forty countries, contributors from Ibero-American nations essentially said: we need to do this properly, in our own languages, for our own region. The result is this book, timed to celebrate RedPOP’s 35th anniversary in 2025.

The editorial team between them represent decades of Latin American science communication scholarship and practice. The book is published jointly by five institutions across the region, and is written in both Spanish and Portuguese (each chapter in its author’s language).

The editors are honest about the conditions under which the book was made. Some contributors have spent years painstakingly reconstructing national histories from archives. Others had to write their country’s chapter from limited documentation, or simply from memory accumulated over long careers. The editors call these the histories “that until now existed only in the wind”. That candor makes the book feel rooted in the multiple and complex realities of the region.

2 - Placing Ibero-American science communication in the global field

One of the things this volume does well is refuse to treat Ibero-American science communication as a curiosity on the margins of a story happening elsewhere. That argument has particular urgency right now. The preface names the three forces reshaping science communication worldwide: COVID-19, a ‘tsunami of disinformation and science denialism’, and the rapid advance of artificial intelligence. These are woven through in the chapters, making essays feel current rather than purely historical. Argentina’s chapter closes with a stark political moment: a new government elected in late 2023 is actively dismantling the national science and technology system, and the authors ask whether science communication might now need to become “a key space to build a counter-narrative in defense of science”. Venezuela’s chapter describes science journalists working around censorship and one of South America’s slowest internet connections. Cuba’s chapter describes doing science communication under a decades-long economic blockade — and doing it anyway, with ingenuity. These are not abstract or historical scenarios; they are the field’s present tense.

3 - Deep roots and recent beginnings

This book shows just how different the histories of science communication look from country to country: in age, in depth, and in what drove their development.

Some countries have remarkably old traditions. When the Portuguese royal court came to Brazil in 1808, it brought with it the impetus to build the Museu Real, the Real Horto (predecessor to Rio de Janeiro’s Botanical Garden), and the Real Academia Militar — the first

formal infrastructure for scientific knowledge and public display in the country. Mexico's chapter traces the roots of science communication all the way back to pre-colonial Indigenous knowledge systems, lamenting that much of that history was destroyed by the conquistadors. The colonial-era Museo de Historia Natural, opened in 1790, marks the first formal Mexican public science institution. Cuba was communicating science in periodicals and public debates in the mid-1800s and established the first Academy of Sciences in the Americas in 1861. Spain's chapter finds science news in the press as far back as the eighteenth century and suspects perhaps even earlier.

Elsewhere, the field is newer. Panama and Uruguay built their science communication infrastructure largely through government agencies in the 1990s and 2000s. Ecuador's chapter is frank that the country still lacks a dedicated postgraduate program in science communication, even as university-based communicators and digital networks have been growing fast. These differences don't reflect deficits; they reflect history. Countries that experienced longer periods of political stability, state-led modernization, or revolutionary institution-building tended to build science communication infrastructure earlier. Where colonial legacies, authoritarian interruptions, and economic crises repeatedly swept the floor, the field has had to keep rebuilding.

4 - Science communication as resistance

The thread that resonated with me the most is the recurring appearance of science communication as an act of cultural, civic, and political resistance, not just public education.

In Argentina, the framing is explicit: the chapter's authors argue that, in the current political climate, the field may need to become "the engine of resistance within the system". In Brazil, the history of science communication is inseparable from the history of democratic aspiration — institutions built during moments of opening, rolled back during military governments, rebuilt again. In Venezuela, Arístides Bastidas, a pioneer of Latin American science journalism, first turned to writing about science as a way to evade censorship under the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship in the 1950s. Cuba's chapter frames an entire national science communication tradition around the ideal of "science for the people", pursued under blockade, with scarce resources and limited internet access.

Colombia adds a different but related dimension. Its chapter introduces the concept of *Apropiación Social del Conocimiento Científico y Tecnológico* — the social appropriation of science and technology — formally embedded in Colombian science policy from the 2010s. This is a deliberate rejection of the deficit model of science communication (the idea that experts have knowledge and publics simply need to receive it) in favor of a participatory model where communities are genuine agents in the production and application of scientific knowledge. This Colombian framework feels like the most theoretically developed articulation in the book of what science communication as democratization might actually look like, and it connects to much deeper cultural currents across Latin America around epistemic justice, colonial legacy, and who gets to count as a knowledge-maker.

5 - How science gets communicated and studied

Reading across the fourteen chapters, certain patterns emerge. Mass media (TV, radio, newspapers) were the dominant vehicles through which science reached general publics

across the twentieth century, with universities serving as the main source of content. Science magazines play an outsize role in the region's history: from Argentina's "Ciencia e Investigación" (1945) to Spain's "Quark, Ciencia, Medicina, Comunicación y Cultura" (1995–2007), these publications carried much of the field's identity and intellectual ambition. The chapters converge on digital platforms and social media as today's main channels. However, Venezuela's chapter notes that slow connectivity and frequent power outages make digital science communication much harder, a useful reminder of the many ways in which context shapes science communication.

The book highlights the gradual institutionalization of science communication at government level in the region. Colombia created a full Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in 2019, with public engagement built into its core mandate. Panama's SENACYT has treated science communication as a government function since 1992. Peru's CONCYTEC and Uruguay's science policy infrastructure reflect a regional trend towards making public engagement with science a matter of state. That trend is fragile — Argentina's chapter documents its rapid reversal under a hostile government — but the fact that it has happened across so many countries is itself significant.

The book reveals how recently and unevenly science communication research has emerged. Spain, Mexico and Brazil are the countries where research into science communication is most robust. Several country chapters don't address it at all. The RedPOP chapter offers one explanation: the network notes that academic research into science communication in the region began to consolidate in the 1990s, alongside the growth of postgraduate programmes, new professional roles, and the network itself.

6 - What's missing and why it matters

The book has limitations, the most significant being geographical coverage. Out of the 20–21 countries typically considered Ibero-American, twelve are present and nine are missing. As someone from Puerto Rico, the absence of the Caribbean — beyond Cuba — felt significant in a book that claims regional scope. I hope a future edition makes this a priority.

To be fair, part of the explanation may be structural. RedPOP acknowledges in its own chapter that financial barriers to membership have prevented equitable participation across the region: institutions in some countries have struggled to maintain membership dues, which in turn limits their presence in the network's activities and publications. This is less an excuse than an indictment of the field's resource inequalities.

A second absence is Indigenous and ancestral knowledge. The Ecuador chapter is the most candid about this, calling for "intercultural science communicators' capable of engaging ancestral knowledge with the respect and cultural sensitivity required" and noting that most practitioners currently lack that training. The Colombia chapter touches on it through the lens of communities in conflict-affected territories with colonial land histories. But overall, the book's framing of science communication remains centred on Western scientific traditions transmitted through formal institutions.

Finally, the chapters vary considerably in depth and analytical approach. Some, particularly Argentina and Brazil, engage the international scholarly literature and work with clear theoretical frameworks. Others read more like institutional histories or professional memoirs.

Without a concluding editorial essay drawing the threads together, the comparative work is left to the reader. The patterns are there — the recurring role of political crisis, the shared precariousness of funding, the common challenges of professionalization — but they are never brought into focus. That’s a missed opportunity.

7 - Why this book matters

None of these criticisms diminish what the editors and their contributors have accomplished. This book fills a genuine gap, and it does so written from the field, in the field’s own languages. For readers working in or on Latin America or the Iberian Peninsula, it should be essential reading. For those based elsewhere, it is a reminder that science communication’s most urgent questions — about democratic legitimacy, about who science belongs to, about how to communicate under political pressure — have been lived acutely in this region for a very long time.

I hope *Comunicar la ciencia en Iberoamérica* will inspire a second edition — geographically broader, more integrative in its editorial framing, and more willing to sit with the hard questions about Indigenous knowledge, colonial legacies, and who gets to tell the region’s stories. The history it assembles is too important to leave incomplete.

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<https://doi.org/10.48779/5dac-8729>

About the author

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How to cite

Feliú Mójer, M. I. (2026). 'Histories in the wind: a long overdue book about science communication across Ibero-America'. *JCOM* 25(04), R02.
<https://doi.org/10.22323/410320260525101802>.



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ISSN 1824-2049. Published by SISSA Medialab. jcom.sissa.it