



Let's talk in Medellín: XIV RedPOP Congress "Art, Technology and Science: New ways to know"

Conference

XIV REDPOP CONGRESS
"ART, TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE: NEW WAYS TO KNOW",
MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA, 25–29 MAY 2015

Reviewed by

Martha Cambre

Abstract

RedPOP celebrates its 25th anniversary and the congress was a great occasion to commemorate it. More than 400 attendees from 23 countries around the world had the opportunity to talk about the relationship between art, science, education, public policy on science appropriation, science journalism, and new ways to reach the public audience. At the same time a Science Theater Festival was held. The Congress in numbers: 5 Magisterial Conferences, 245 simultaneous presentations, 8 Working Groups, 9 simultaneous Workshops, 22 poster and 6 theater plays. 10 countries from Latin America (90% of the assistants) was represented, 2 from North America, 7 from Europe, 2 from Asia and 2 from Africa. Conversation was essential in this congress and everything was prepared to motivate it. Participants had the opportunity to hear voices from Latin America an outside of it through the international keynote. The challenging issues that were raised in the plenary sessions as well as the opportunity to make heard their voices during the Working Groups and to be able to work in the Workshops with the keynote speakers, made this a motivational meeting.

Keywords

Popularization of science and technology

XIV RedPOP Congress "Art, Technology and Science: New ways to know" held in Medellín from May 25 to May 29 was a success.

Speak, talk, chat, conversar, hablar, charlar, platicar, falar, palestrar all of them synonyms of an action that is part of Latin American's roots.

Parque Explora the main organizer of the Congress through its director Andrés Roldán, explicitly "invited us to talk". The leitmotif of the meeting "Art, Technology and Science: New ways to know" had already given this hint, through a focus on dialogs between art and science, science and technology, museums and the public, education and museums.

A group of Latin Americans' does not go unnoticed in any part of the world. Overlapping dialogue, higher voices, hugs and laughter are always present. Maybe this is a false stereotype or maybe not; Latin American culture is associated with people more likely to strike up conversations with strangers or people they barely know. Conferences and congresses are ideal for this, to create environments that encourage conversations and promote networks and networking. Both are very important in an increasingly globalized world.

RedPOP in Medellín offered us this and much more. "The City of the Eternal Spring" waited for us with several surprises. In this sense was very faithful to one of the premises that all we handle for our actions. Surprise, an essential element to capture and captivate our audience.

As all of us know that there is no foolproof recipe for developing a good exhibition, as Andres Roldán presented brilliantly in his lecture "Fallible recipe to make science museums". But also we know there are some tips that help, especially in Latin American contexts where it is so important to draw the attention of the public. Surprise helps to attract and retain the unmotivated visitor or those less interested in experimenting. A curious fact, unexpected color change, or something that is in an unusual place are elements that capture the attention. After that it is easier for the visitor to get involved and continue experimenting. Something similar happened in Medellín, every day there were surprises waiting for us.

Parque Explora, had organized an international meeting more than a regional one, as those who participated in previous meetings of RedPOP as well as at international congresses can attest.

- The presence of international speakers with motivating and polemic speeches opened up new conversations.
- The Science Theater Festival, an opportunity to study in depth the relationship between art and science with the presence of plays from Argentina, Colombia, and Spain
- The International Programme Committee meeting with the participation of representatives from all Science Center Networks worldwide. This is the first time that this event was organized in the framework of a RedPOP's meeting

The meeting was opened with the key note talk "Art and science: another look" by Nicolas Witkowsky. He reminded us that sciences and art have faced two great myths, one is that both things are completely different, the other is that both are part of the culture and so they are similar. Witkowsky does not fully subscribe to these myths and he said that "Sometimes science becomes art and art becomes science. But don't ask why".

The second day María Acaso with "Other ways of reaching the knowledge, seductive skills to improve learning" proposed a controversial talk. We may agree or not with her, we can say that her proposal is outside of our context or far away from our reality. But we cannot deny that her presentation generated many discussions outside the plenary session. Something that we also want to happen

with our communication activities. If the public goes away of our spaces with more doubts than certainties, thinks and reflects, finds out and compares, we have done a better job than if the visitor goes out and does not question at all.

Stephen Ferry presented “Photography non-fiction: art and credibility. How to show the truth?” For him “the work of the graphic reporter is essential in a society that looks for transparency”.

Marcos Lucchesi with his particular style invited us to think about the role of science communicators with his “Poetry and mathematics are not enemies”. He suggests that we must “get our hands dirty, we are not bureaucrats” and we, science communicators, have social and political work to do. He invited us “to write, little by little and involving many hands, a book of science, art and citizenship”.

To close the keynote lectures, Andrés Roldán captivated the entire audience with his fantastic presentation and Parque Explora’s recipe to create exhibitions.

At the same time, “The Science Theater Festival” featured 6 plays in Parque Explora, the Planetarium as well as in other venues in the city. It was a great opportunity for sharing, socializing and reflecting on theatrical science performances. I particularly noticed the scientific monologues of “The Big Van Theory” from Spain who delighted all those listening. I also enjoyed “Scientific chef, physics and chemistry in the kitchen” by Diego Golombek, an extraordinary Argentinean scientist and science communicator.

As I mention before Medellín invited us to talk. Everything was prepared to stimulate conversation. In the plenary sessions, cross cutting dialogs were generated by the participants. The conference was streamed live, so both those present physically and virtually were able to interact with the keynote lecturers through #RedPop2015. This hashtag was a trending topic in Medellín during the days of the congress.

Another surprise, the Congress’ agenda incorporated two new formats. Working Groups and simultaneous Workshops, which further demonstrate of the horizontal dialog that this meeting offered us. Working Groups allowed all participants have a space to present their ideas. “Art and its relationship with science”, “Science and the mass media”, “Diversity and social inclusion”, “Experiences with communities”, “Training in Science communicators in Latin America”, “Research and evaluation”, “Museums & exhibitions what content for which public?”, and “Policies for the promotion of the Science & Technology” were the topics discussed in two sessions. These Working Groups were designed to generate guidelines for future work and to test an approach that could be implemented and assessed in future.

Simultaneous Workshops, were mainly led by keynote lecturers. It is unusual in congresses for participants to have such an opportunity to work more intimately with the keynote speakers. Workshop topics included “Poetry and mathematics, dialogs without fear”, “The challenge of appropriating a space to build”, “What computers can do for teaching”, “Photography, evidence, and falsehoods in Instagram’s era”, “Sexy Pedagogy”, “Jurassic Technology”, “Museographic Hackaton” and “Science to scene”.

The guidelines produced by the working Working Groups and short performances developed from Workshops were presented in a plenary session on the final day.

To close with a flourish, an exceptional Astronomical Concert were played by Medellín philharmonic accompanied by a navigation in vivo of the known Universe. A great way to demonstrate the conversation between science and art.

Future challenges? Yes of course, there are and always will be.

One of the most important will be to track the actions that the Working Groups suggested.

Another is to find a better balance between the quantity and quality of simultaneous presentations, and the people involved. In most cases, Latin Americans must give a presentation of their work to obtain funds to take part of the congresses; meeting this need resulted in a large number of accepted papers and as a result these had to be presented simultaneously. Naturally, this meant that the audience spread more thinly through rooms and had to make a difficult choices regarding which presentations to attend.

Another significant challenge is to increase the interest of the international community for RedPOP's meetings. For that reason, we invite you to come and talk with us in San Luis — Argentina in 2017.

Author

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