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- 1 Should we include social sciences in a science editors' meeting? This was the question that we, at the Organizing Committee, were facing when outlining the program for the 12th International Federation of Science Editors' (IFSE) meeting, which took place in Merida, Yucatán, in Mexico, in 2004. And the debate went on for several weeks. It was rather obvious that we should include Medicine; and Physics; and Astronomy; and nobody questioned the inclusion of such varied topics as open access journals or issues related to bringing science to the public (scientific journalism, museums of science, etc.) But, ... social sciences? The underlying question was, should this discipline be considered under the general title of Science?
- 2 This debate, as it happens to be, went far beyond the discussions of this specific Committee. For decades, "hard" scientists have arguing whether the "soft" science coming from the social arena should even be discussed by them. At least, this was the picture that I myself, as a trained physician and clinical pediatrician, with a PhD in International Nutrition, was facing in the late 1980's when I was working to try to understand more about one of the major killer diseases in childhood: acute diarrhea, and its accompanying dehydration. At the time, the scientific community had achieved a breakthrough that completely changed the probability of dying from this affection: oral rehydration salts. The finding was that the addition of glucose to a sodium solution greatly enhanced the absorption of water and salt, even by diseased bowels, in amounts able to reverse the severe water and electrolyte losses caused by such intestinal pathogens as cholera or enterotoxigenic *Escherichia coli*, gave new hope to thousands of patients affected by this condition, and motivated a well-publicized editorial by the prestigious journal, *The Lancet*, in 1975.
- 3 The finding was considered potentially the greatest medical discovery of the century. However, the practical issues that were still to be overcome were of such a nature that the medical sciences, alone, did not seem capable of resolving. Among such issues were

the decided opposition to the use of such a seemingly “house-based remedy” by physicians, who put more trust in the time-proven tools of their trade, a venous catheter through which to introduce the required solutions; and it seems that many mothers were not fully convinced by the use of a prescription which was not intended to “stop diarrhea”, but just to “reverse or avoid dehydration”; not to mention the distribution problems of trying to “take science where the diarrhea is”. Diarrhea, same as with many other afflictions, is most common in distant places, among the poor, and in places where access to health-care facilities is limited.

- 4 All of these issues certainly required a multidisciplinary approach to understanding and solving the problem. At the time, we were lucky to find support from the Applied Diarrheal Disease Research Project (ADDRP), which answers to the Harvard Institute for International Development and which funded a series of projects whose common denominator was to bridge the gap between social and medical sciences, to foster interactions between anthropologists from different disciplines (social, cultural, nutrition) and physicians. It was through this project that I came to meet a now dear friend and colleague, Dr. H. Russell Bernard, professor of Anthropology at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Dr. Bernard had a long-lasting relationship with Mexico, having done his graduate fieldwork in a rural area, and being well-acquainted with the local culture and language. Together with Dr. Pertti J. Peltó, professor of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, and aiming to foster cross-disciplinary research, we organized a training course intended for researchers who had applied for and received support from ADDRP, as well as to anthropology students from major anthropology schools and universities in the city. This was the beginning of a fruitful and long-lasting collaboration between disciplines.
- 5 So, coming back to IFSE: how did our decisions turned out? As the point of the meeting was to be inclusive, and we were looking for sources of funding, we decided that the more ample the program, the greater the chances of support. I was asked to draft a tentative session for IFSE that included the social sciences. I turned to Dr. Bernard and asked for help. He knocked on the doors of several colleagues who were well-seasoned in interdisciplinarity. We all agreed to put together a session in which the contributions of the social sciences to the broader field of science would be properly highlighted. The Committee liked the proposal. The session was a success. There are many more sessions to be organized. And much more fieldwork to be conducted. And qualitative/quantitative analyses to be run. And publications to disseminate methods, as well as findings and breakthroughs. But the bridges are there. And we are walking on top of them.

ABSTRACTS

International Federation of Science Editors (IFSE), associated with UNESCO, organized its twelfth conference in October 2004 in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. A debate among the organizers resulted in an opening toward the social sciences which had not been represented up until then. The following three articles constituted the first IFSE social science session.

Sciences sociales et les conférences IFSE : La Fédération Internationale des Editeurs Scientifiques (IFSE, "International Federation of Science Editors"), associée avec l'UNESCO, a organisé sa douzième conférence en octobre 2004 à Mérida, Yucatan, au Mexique. Un débat parmi les organisateurs a permis l'ouverture vers les sciences sociales qui n'y étaient pas représentées jusqu'à là. Les trois articles suivants constituent la première session sciences sociales de l'IFSE.

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