USEFUL SCIENCE

While in developed countries society considers scientific activity as an important endeavor and the discussions are centered on the orientation and the magnitude of the support to science and technology, in developing countries we question the usefulness of research and discuss about which science should be carried out, who should do it, for whom it should be done, and the value of peoples' ancestral knowledge is exalted. Such is the case in Venezuela, for instance, where institutions that already have a long presence in the scientific world are questioned regarding the fundamental values and subjected to conflicts that, although obeying the need to control them and exert a political hegemony, are focused on the meaning and the usefulness of what they do, on who does it and how they do it.

In this framework it is appropriate to question what a scientific publication like the *Interciencia* journal is good for. This is a matter that is difficult to measure through quantitative indexes, but it turns out to be fit to analyze periodically its contents in order to appreciate their degree of usefulness, banality or elitism.

The papers published in the current issue of *Interciencia*, to use a concrete example, are the product of works by researchers from Brazil, Spain, France, Mexico and Venezuela, and were written in English, Portuguese and Spanish. The material corresponds to the agro-alimentary, energy and society areas.

In the agro-alimentary sphere results are presented that refer to the culture of maize, derived from a study at the molecular level, based on the identification of the genes that characterize them, of the varieties of a fungus that is widely used for the natural control of a largely disseminated disease, produced by another fungus that attacks this crop, markedly reducing productivity. A different approach, this time combining geo-statistics with the study of the quality characteristics of seeds of soy bean, another species of great relevance for human nutrition, and the damages induced in the seeds by arachnid parasites, represents an example of how to assess the spatial variability of the crop damages produced. A third paper presents the results of studies on different diets in the development of earthworms used as a complement in fertilizers for organic vegetables widely used at present. Finally, a report explores the volatile compounds of vegetal origin that could be responsible for unpleasant organoleptic properties in meat of frequent consumption by the inhabitants of the Andean Altiplano.

In the all-important domain of energy are published results of a field study about the efficiency and the contaminating emissions production of fuel mixtures of hydrocarbons and vegetable oil in school transports in urban areas.

The direct links of contemporary science with matters of social nature become apparent in publications that deal with diverse themes. One is the transmission of information that takes place among members of small rural populations dedicated to artisanal fisheries. Another one deals with social inclusion: what to do in order to incorporate rural populations into the age of communications, through information and communication technologies and the educational empowering of the population. The last paper in this group analyzes environmental management in civil engineering enterprises of an urban area.

Finally, an essay that focuses on the handling of inter-disciplinarity in education, from a cultural, historical and epistemological perspective, in search for elements and references that could be useful for educators, is published in this issue of *Interciencia*.

Of course, the answers to the questionings about the interest and the usefulness of the papers published in *Interciencia* will not be given by us. This corresponds to our readers and to the scientific community that looks for the journal as a means for the dissemination of their findings.

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Editor