

## HOW TO DISSEMINATE KNOWLEDGE

In a recent editorial (*Interciencia* 33: 787) the imminent need to disseminate scientific and technological knowledge among the population and the increasing importance of popularization or social appropriation of science and technology were considered. The co-responsibility of media specialists, educators and scientists in reaching concrete goals and the importance of the valorization of traditional knowledge was also pointed out.

Formal education, which practically comprehends all the population in school age is, without any doubt, the most widespread and powerful medium able to achieve the appropriation of knowledge by society. Notwithstanding, certain factors determine education to be insufficient. Among such factors are, on the one hand, the fact that the educational system excludes most of the population once the classroom has been left behind and, on the other hand that, currently, knowledge is being generated at a very high speed and that matters that are of interest to the population at a given moment cease to be so very fast and are replaced by other matters for which an important amount of information for its rational treatment and decision taking is required.

The need for actualization in matters that concern science and technology, thus permitting citizens to participate with adequate bases in the decision making that affects their communities, make it necessary and appropriate to search for ways to permit enough knowledge to be available in an opportune manner to the highest possible number of people. This transmission of information differs from the specialized diffusion of ideas and results of studies and research, which corresponds to publications of science and technology such as scientific journals, whose sphere of influence is usually restricted to that of the researchers themselves and to the higher education community.

It pertains to media professionals to carry the banner in the process of diffusion of knowledge among citizens in post-school age, although certainly the responsibility is not

exclusively theirs. The difficult job of expressing in an intelligible manner that which is not commonly so, establishes the necessary bridges between researchers and the general public. For their work to be effective they should be able to count with the decided support from an academic sector ready to collaborate, as well as from those who manage the media, whether they be governmental or private.

The universal character of information networks and the access to them provides an invaluable basis for the pursuit of knowledge dissemination, and many efforts carried out by governments and foundations for the increasing development of networks and of means of access are outstanding. There is still a lot to be done in order to establish programs that will allow to train the population so as to make good use of these important resources, which in time are called upon to be more determinant of the capabilities of a society.

During the last two decades an interesting evolution of the traditional museums of science and technology has taken place. They have been transformed, usually with the decisive support of the academic sector and also, to a large extent, thanks to the resources offered by the technologies of information and communication, into interactive centers ready to attend important numbers of people. These centers, excellent examples of which are present in our region, offer the possibility to implement, with a relatively small constructive effort, a dynamic and changing program with a high intellectual content. Their demonstrated capacity to arouse enthusiasm in publics of all ages and to permit a greater retention of the acquired knowledge are some of the advantages offered by this modality of dissemination.

Around the world, thousands of interactive science centers are already in operation. They attract hundreds of millions of visitors per year and have gained great relevance as an educational tool and as an efficient medium for the demythification of science and for social inclusion.

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