

AsoVAC: PRESENT AND FUTURE

The Venezuelan Association for the Advancement of Science (AsoVAC), founding member of the Interciencia Association, celebrated its 61 years of existence, during which it has been consequent with its goal “to work with universal scope for the scientific culture of the country”, specifically: “to foster the development of scientific research within the different public and private organizations dedicated to the creation, diffusion or application of knowledge”. Such commitment has been approached through the implementation of the Annual Convention, The Youth Festival, the journal *Acta Científica Venezolana*, and the Juvenile AsoVAC, areas of endeavor in which thousands of people have participated. Each activity has evolved in time, with moments of strength as well as of weakness, becoming institutional references in the process of construction of the Venezuelan science and technology system. The balance can be considered as positive, but for years the Association has been stagnant and we are far from being satisfied with the present situation.

There are exogenous and endogenous reasons for the standstill of the institutional development of AsoVAC. In the internal aspect, those who lead the institution do so *ad honorem*. Sometimes, their good will is surpassed by the requirements of a complex community of researchers and professionals who share the objectives of the Association. The characteristic philanthropy of the last century has given way to new management concepts that require more demanding abilities and material inputs.

Most of the available resources are from member contributions that are based on references from the middle of last century. The institution maintains a poorly articulated and weak infrastructure and logistics. Additionally, the communication with and convocation of the members is not expedite and the response from the community is weak.

Despite the fact that the by-laws foresee a fast exchange of directory members in the regional chapters, in some cases there is a continuity forced by the meager motivation to participate, a situation that has led to a vicious circle. On the one hand, permanence is justified by the lack of members ready to lead the institution and, on the other hand, the resistance to institutional change, placed in evidence by the permanence of the same actors, is criticized. The result is even more dramatic, given the very small participation of the new generations in the directories.

In the external aspect, a growing scientific community has organized itself in Associations or Societies by field of specialty that carry out activities (congresses, symposia, journals) that are more attractive and yield larger benefits to their members than those offered by AsoVAC. Venezuela is a country undergoing accelerated changes where the science and technology system remains weak and its parts poorly interconnected, despite some developments regarding the institutionalization of science, technology and innovation, such as the creation of a government department and the enacting of a new law. Additionally, the politicization of the management of the science sector has contributed to a marked decrease in the production of scientific and technological knowledge required by the country.

Beyond our frontiers there is a world where knowledge is valued, globalized, changing and demanding, with an accelerated technological development that accentuates the gap existing between countries. A world where research is approached in different ways, be it with public or private support, or the so-called free-science. Also, the existence of social networks supported by modern communication tools can potentiate any institution, or exclude it if it does not make use of them.

This reality poses difficult challenges to the scientific community and to AsoVAC. It is evident that the institution must be modernized, adopt management and communication schemes that will allow to obtain information and provide fast responses. The resistance to change has to be overcome, programs that are executed with the inertia of habituation be revised, and new and attractive activities that will incorporate new members, specially among the youth, be established. To grow in audience and increase collaboration to achieve synergies within the dense institutional tissue and society in general, is a must, as well as it is to consider and express views on changes, policies, programs and modes of funding used by the government in turn.

The central theme of the 2011 Annual Convention, ‘Venezuelan Science and Social Projection’, ratifies the orientation of those who do science and of AsoVAC: to offer Venezuelan society research and results, directly or indirectly, immediate or not. Next year the central theme will be ‘Science and Technology in the Future of Venezuela’, as we should dream with a country that participates actively in the society of knowledge.

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