
Editorial

WISDOM

«**W**e, the participants in the opening of the Cultural Olympiad, organised on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture of the Hellenic Republic, solemnly reject any idea of the fatality of conflicts between civilisations.» This explicit paragraph opens the so-called Olympia Letter, sponsored on 23 September 2001 by representatives from all over the globe –short days alter the tragedy of the Twin Towers in New York– in the legendary city that saw the birth of the first Olympic Games in the history of humankind.

Two days earlier, the Hellenic minister, Evangelos Venizelos, and the rector of the University of Europe, Hélène Ahrweiler (ex rector of the Sorbonne and honorary president of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris) had brought us together in Athens, a meeting organised long before the events of that historic 11 September were to be engraved on the memory of all our generation, the events which really opened the 21st century.

«We are contemporaries, but it is possible that we live in different eras... The only way we can respect each other is to get to know each other and the only way to achieve this is to understand each other's cultures.» With these words, Minister Venizelos opened the meeting of 21 September 2001. Some Sixty representatives of culture, thought, science, artistic creation and politics from the most varied geographic and cultural backgrounds were invited to debate for three days on «Re-thinking Culture», first in Athens and then in the legendary Olympia. The conclusions, in the form of a statement, became the Olympia Letter, and representatives of diffe-

rent cultures of the world shared the desire that it become the platform from which to be able to listen and be listened to, and to contribute to the 21st century being the century of mutual knowledge and dialogue between the world's cultures and not the century of intolerance and lack of communication and understanding, leading to the continued clash of the different ideological, religious and economic fundamentalisms that threaten the world.

From the first minute of the meeting, it became unanimously clear that «reflection and dialogue between cultures is now more necessary than ever». The phrase was pronounced almost in unison by the Greek Minister of Culture and the Spaniard, Federico Mayor Zaragoza, ex-director general of UNESCO. We could only smile at such coincidence, but what neither they nor the rest of the attendees knew – while they showed their complete agreement with the necessity and opportunity to talk and to listen in order to get to know each other better – is that I was already familiar with these words. They had been pronounced some days earlier, immediately following that fateful 11 September, by the Mayor of Barcelona, Joan Clos, on the occasion of the public presentation of the programme for a new and ambitious challenge: the Barcelona 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures.

Circumstances have dictated that, now more than ever, we must be ambitious and demanding so that the Barcelona event becomes a model to follow, as, in a way, was Athens in taking up the idea of the previous Cultural Olympiad in Barcelona 92 and which, according to the expressed intentions, Beijing 2008 will also continue with a marked cultural content, with special reference to

science and technology. The 21st century has begun with some very tough trials – 11 September in New York, the war in Iraq, 11 March in Madrid – that are the product of religious, ideological, economic and cultural clashes, handed down from the bloodiest century of the history of humankind, the 20th century. But the strength with which the Barcelona 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures has begun leads us to hope that the wing armed only with human intelligence can help to overcome those who preach and promote the clash of civilisations, and reconfirm us in the belief that the path we took some time ago in Barcelona is the right one: to aspire to be a bridge between cultures from the Mediterranean and Euro-pean position which has given us an innate understanding that the defence of cul-tural diversity is one of the great values which must mark the century.

Despite the un-doubted difficulties involved in inventing a completely new world event, as the 2004 Uni-versal Forum of Cultures aims to be, and ensuring that Barcelona is remembered in the future as the city that took the first step (just as the city of Olympia did for sport in the distant past), Barcelona wants to show the world once again what it is capable of and to leave a legacy for the future, so that other cities take up the torch of dia-logue between cultures. There was another phrase that influenced us in Olympia: «a voice that is not listened to becomes a cry». *Learning to listen to others* could thus be the principal theme of the Forum which will be held in Barcelona over 141 days, from 9 May to 26 September 2004.

For this reason, the initiative of the Barcelona 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures that we presented in Athens and Olympia was considered to be the epitome of the aim expressed in the document: to encourage dia-

logue between the different cultures of the world. This desire has become a necessity due to the events which have shaken and continue to shake the beginning of the 21st century. Today, this is a dynamic reality with a more than notable participation.

The relationship between humans and world cul-tures, including, of course, the peace culture, is the *leit-motiv* of this encounter, where the participation of more than five million people is expected from all over the world. A significant aspect is that, for the first time, an event of this size and world scope includes the sciences under the global concept of cul-tures. Will this be a decisive step and one of the great legacies of the Barcelona 2004 Forum? Will we finally be able to over-come the dichotomy between humanities and sciences that C.P. Snow christened the 'two cultures' in 1959? Congresses, debates, exhibitions, concerts, festival and all varieties of partici-pation and dialogue based on cultural diversity – including, of course, gas-tronomy – come together in a city which, once again, hopes to demonstrate its ability to innovate and its willingness to be open to the world and to the genera-tion of ideas.

It is in this context that Barcelona hosts the 8th world congress of the international network, *Public Communication of Science & Technology*, which meets every two years and which, at its last meeting in 2002 in Cape Town (South Africa) brought together more than 400 specialists in scientific cultural dissemination from 42 countries and 6 continents. Barcelona will at least try to emulate the excellent organisation of Cape Town and, if possible, further increase the influence the *PCST Net-work* has acquired in the world since it was founded in Poitiers (France) in 1989. The theme of the Barcelona



PCST-2004 meeting is «Scientific knowledge and cultural diversity» which constitutes an excellent opportunity for analysing how one of the most universal bodies of knowledge (science) is known and applied in this diverse world in which we live. To this end, three large areas of dialogue have been set out: «Indigenous knowledge and current science», «Science communication: historical perspectives and new trends» and «Communication of science and social inclusion». Myths, beliefs, traditions and ideologies affect how we use science, yet we rarely stop to reflect on this, despite the fact that we face increasingly greater ethical challenges and dilemmas.

The official programme of the 8th world congress of the PCST – organised with the collaboration of the Universidad Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona and the Committee for Science Culture of the Barcelona City Council – is complemented by two other events of worldwide significance: one on journalism and the other on museums which popularise scientific, technical and medical knowledge, two central axes of the dissemination of scientific culture in our society.

The French government –in its cabinet meeting of 25 February 2004– adopted the «national plan for the dissemination of scientific and technical culture», which includes declaring 2004 as the «Year of Scientific Culture». This is the result of the report and recommendations previously carried out by the French Senate Commission on Culture under the heading «Scientific and technical culture for all: a national priority». ¹ This concern converted into top-level political action is considered strategic for driving the profound economic and social change that is taking place in our society in its transformation from the post-industrial era to the knowledge era. France thus follows the guidelines esta-

lished in the European Commission for the promotion of scientific culture and specified in 2002 in the Action Plan, «Science and Society». ²

Already fully immersed in this change in the 21st century, the media have become the essential vehicle, not only for the creation of public opinion, but also for the configuration of society's value system. Furthermore, journalism has had to take on a new function: that of being largely responsible for the configuration of culture and individual and collective education, in any area, from artistic and humanistic culture to social, political, economic knowledge, etc. and, of course, scientific knowledge.

The creation 25 years ago of the supplement *Science Times* of the newspaper *The New York Times*, would set off the process which was to give rise to the birth of science journalism in many places the world over. It is therefore appropriate to carry out a balance and begin a process of self-criticism with regard to this phenomenon and consider what role we want science journalism to play in the knowledge society, what we need to achieve this objective and what limitations and responsibilities we have to face.

The Barcelona 2004 Forum –as an event designed for thinking about and experimenting on the principal cultural and social challenges facing society in the 21st century– provides the ideal framework for a debate on the role of science journalism with a global perspective. This is, in summary, the main objective of the seminar «Science journalism in a diverse world», organised by the *Fundación Española de Ciencia y Tecnología* (Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology, FECYT) and the Science Communication Observatory of the Universidad Pompeu Fabra, with the collaboration of the *Asociación Española de Periodismo*



Científico (Spanish Association of Science Journalism) and the *Associació Catalana de la Comunicació Científica* (Catalan Association of Science Communication).

Also forming part of this generic programme on science communication is the seminar «New models in health and life museums», held in collaboration with the Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau of Barcelona, which focuses on a particular type of museum, those devoted to medical, health and life themes. The aim of the encounter is to analyse their function and to think of possible future models.

These three initiatives of reflection and dialogue –centred around the 8th congress of the PCST– on the transmission of scientific knowledge to society form part of the celebration of a true world summit on culture and science communication in Barcelona, to be held between 2 and 8 de June on the occasion of the 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures.

It is our aspiration that scientific knowledge acts to establish bridges of understanding between the different cultures of the world and that different societies can understand and participate in the evolution of this knowledge which is essential for the survival of humankind, rationalising and improving the use of the planet's resources while developing new technologies which allow us to live longer and better, with the desire to reduce the large educational, social and economic differences and differences in opportunities in general which separate us from each other.

For this, we need citizens who are capable of being the true protagonists of their lives while participating in the decisions we take individually and collectively in our evolution towards the future, thus contributing to the general wisdom of humankind, each one of us from the place we occupy in the world.

This is the key to a better and more democratic future: being in a position to develop a critical capacity and to access public participation in the management of the knowledge and power that govern the world.

In the conference «Life sciences in today's society: modern biology and visions of humanity» the European Research Commissioner, Philippe Busquin, underlined «the need to promote scientific culture and public participation to achieve good scientific governance».³

It is clear that, thanks to molecular biology and contemporary physics, society now has a better understanding of the nature of life and the cosmos. Nevertheless, scientific knowledge has given rise and continues to give rise to much fear and doubt, moral, social and economic dilemmas. The consequences of some advances, such as the sequencing of the human genome, are very important but have thrown up many questions and indeed pose future arguments which go beyond scientific knowledge. The public is concerned about the possibility that biological discoveries may be abused and even question whether research should be subjected to a form of democratic control. Have we stopped to think whether advances in knowledge of genetics will be able to be applied –due to cost– to all those who could benefit from their possible application? Does it not seem probable that, in the future, these advances may further increase the chasm between those who can and those who cannot access these benefits?

«The life sciences have altered the fields of knowledge and power», said Busquin, «...they have placed in the hands of humans processes which require surprising precision and tremendous effectiveness on the part of nature. At the same time, the dominion of the intimate mechanisms of life tests our principles and our values. The public needs confirmation and reminding of the important opportunities that these discoveries imply, in terms of scientific knowledge, medical progress, pharmaceutical projections and economic growth. So it is necessary to reintegrate the sciences into culture, which is where they belong. And the effort should not only be academic. Hence the importance of the impulse of scientific culture. Promoting scientific culture means motivating the development of the public and is a part of good democratic hygiene. It is essential for allowing the public to understand and direct the process».

The privileged society in which some of us live is characterised by its rapid adaptation to the knowledge era and by its notable increase in life expectancy, two factors which should come together in the emergence of greater wisdom of our civilisation. However, we are all aware of the enormous contradictions in which we are immersed. Our industrial organisations and political and

economic organisations in general, seem to underestimate the intellectual contribution of other (even generational) knowledge and experience. We are egotistical and lack solidarity with those worst off, while underestimating the knowledge that they have accumulated, the exchange of which with our knowledge could help both of us. A paradox arises: If economic theory dictates that organisations must differentiate in order to obtain competitive advantages, why are they increasingly similar? This is a question which can be extended to many social conducts. The answer is complex, but simplifying considerably, we can say that the reason lies in the fact that they do not do what they should but what is expected of them. This becomes very clear, for example in the case of the media.

Perhaps we should learn from human societies and communities which are apparently less privileged than ours or even from the very evolution –with its successes and failures– that we have experienced as a species throughout the length of our history since our origins. These are perspectives we too often forget about.

For this reason, the international network, *Public Communication of Science & Technology* has been preaching throughout the world the need to learn from others and to reflect together, irrespective of the cultural

origins of the participants. This is an encounter which will continue in two years, in Seoul (Korea) in 2006 and which may leave behind –as well as a fruitful exchange of knowledge and the establishment of new interpersonal links– the legacy of an Academy of Scientific Knowledge and Culture in Barcelona. Because the Barcelona 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures intends to be a fertilising event and wants to leave behind traces of its passage through our city; local and universal legacies which can be extended in the future in many other cities, representing all the peoples and continents of the world.

In 1992, with an unerring bowshot, Barcelona lit the sporting torch of Olympia Today, Barcelona welcomes you and holds aloft the other torch of Olympia, that of culture, knowledge and wisdom! ¶

Vladimir de Semir

Editor of QUARK

Chair of the Dialogue,

«Scientific Knowledge and cultural diversity»

Public Communication of Science & Technology Network

Barcelona 2004 Universal Forum of Culture

Notes

1 Report «La culture scientifique et technique pour tou: une priorité nationale»: http://www.senat.fr/rap/r02-392/r02-392_mono.html

2 Action Plan «Science and Society»: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/science-society/action-plan/action-plan_en.html

3 The conference, organised by the European Group of Life Sciences (EGLS), was held on 22 and 23 March 2004 in Genoa (Italy) and brought together scientists and representatives from the world of the arts, humanities and politics to debate the growing influence of the life sciences on society and European culture. For further information, see: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conferences/2004/biology/index_en.html

OLYMPIA LETTER

We, the participants in the opening of the Cultural Olympiad, organised on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture of the Hellenic Republic, solemnly reject any idea of the fatality of conflicts between civilisations.

We consider culture and cultural creation to be bearers of values which overcome all differences. We are convinced that cultural plurality and polyphony, guarantors of the acknowledgement and respect of the right of all people, participate in the development of each person and allow open dialogue, excluding all sectarian and totalitarian ideologies. Convinced that the parity of cultures constitutes the condition *sine qua non* of peaceful coexistence and world development, we desire that Culture, representing one of the creative forces of human action, be considered more broadly as an essential process for the future construction of humanity and the advent of a culture of peace.

To this effect, we declare that it is essential:

- To provide the culture of the 21st century with the necessary means in all areas of intellectual and artistic activity, and also to provide the supplementary means for scientific research with no commercial or economic goals and to favour the development of a scientific and technical culture which integrates critical and ethical interrogation.
- To take into consideration the history and traditions of each people and to take care of the conservation or restoration of monuments and the safeguarding of non-material heritage, a component of different cultures which, all together, constitute the common heritage of the all humankind.
- To embrace the fight for peace and against plagues, such as violence, fanaticism, exclusion (in the form of sexism and apartheid) and terrorism, but also to ensure the conditions essential for the development of cultural life, fighting against underdevelopment, malnutrition, the lack of medical care, economic precariousness, pollution and attacks on the environment and, finally, to sustain the scientific effort and the fine-tuning of principles of precaution in order to ensure the conditions of life, respecting biological

integrity and the specificity of each human being, considered as a bearer of all that is humanity.

- To further promote, especially among the school-going public, the equality of opportunities for the equality of access to all knowledge, for the fight against illiteracy and ignorance, for the preparation of integrated actions, particularly aimed at the most disadvantaged peoples linking cultural or pedagogic programmes to economic development and for the widest possible diffusion of the new communications technologies.
- To encourage the media, private or public, to assume, with full awareness, their moral responsibility, their role as vectors for peace and dialogue and to guarantee the plurality of information and its independence from all pressures exerted by political, ideological or economic powers.
- To foresee for the future, at national and international level, the ways and means for dialogue and intercultural exchange, founded on respect for oneself and for others, both in terms of acknowledgement of individual and collective identities and legacies of the past and in terms of mutual aid and solidarity between generations and peoples.

As one, the signatories of this declaration launch a process of consultation and debate on the proposals of this **Olympia Letter** and furthermore decide to create a cultural *Agora*, in the form of a committee of persons charged with periodically evaluating the application of the principles set forth in this document, for the purpose of drawing up and disseminating a report which must both denounce attacks on these principles and bear witness to their just application.

Finally, they request that the different competent international bodies (UNESCO, the European Parliament, etc.) support and provide relief for their management, opening up their spaces to debates and resolutions of their own to promote the universal diffusion of a true cultural humanism.

Athens and Olympia (Greece)

21-23 September 2001