

Scientific Congresses: What is Our Future?

As we write these words, the COVID-19 pandemic has become part of our lives in a much more controlled way. For instance, some of our habits have changed and we are able to resume our activities in the way of a “new normal,” returning to social contact with family, friends, and colleagues. In returning to a life without the constraint of the virus at such a high level, the academy tries to resume its rituals, including scholarly events. Email boxes and physical boards at universities are once again filling up with calls for submission of abstracts for congresses, seminars, and workshops. As these events are happening again, academia seems to be reflecting on the pros and cons of onsite scientific events.

While acknowledging the importance of such scientific events and their potential for strengthening scholarly communities and collaborations, many academics have begun questioning the real impact of being physically present. This questioning seems to be based on several factors. On the one hand, it is clear that universities have been increasingly devaluing academics’ presence in congresses (unless by invitation). They allocate less funding for these activities, especially for those academics who wish to attend an event without presentation. With no presentation, institutions devalue attendance in performance appraisal processes. Increasingly, academic institutions value publications (indexed, despite some positive movement seeking to counter the tyranny of the “publish or perish” motto), and an academics ability to raise funding. Yet, not all congresses are associated with publication processes in indexed journals or proceedings. Books of abstracts (once edited by any congress) are almost extinct, namely because of their devaluation by institutes of higher learning (and funding entities).

On the other hand, the massive and necessary use of online scientific events in 2020 and 2021 allowed us to realize that it is possible, efficient, and effective to hold these events in a format different from the traditional one. The internet offers versatility and more and more congresses are now offered online or in hybrid formats. These formats allow academics to overcome financial and physical complications caused by in-person scholarly events. Academics can request less funding and, at the same time, mitigate concerns of acceptance without presentations, covering classes while away, or having to supplement university sponsorship with personal funds. At some universities, funding comes after attendance regardless of availability of those funds and academics are asked to pay registration fee, plane tickets, and lodging with the expectation of being reimbursed upon return. This is particularly challenging given the present economic situation around the globe. At the same time, while physically at the event and away from families, work continues to accumulate for academics. They then must wade through this excess upon returning home, adding to an already excessive workload. This makes maintaining a work-life balance challenging.

We at New Trends in Qualitative Research (NTQR) believe it is particularly relevant to discuss this topic within the context of the release of NTQR Volume 11. NTQR is an indexed journal associated with international scientific events in the field of qualitative research - Congreso Ibero-Americano en Investigación Cualitativa¹ (CIAIQ) and the World Conference on Qualitative Research (WCQR). Specifically, the volume that we edit here aggregates works that, having been originally presented at WCQR2022 (held in an online format), went through a double-blind review process. This volume, annually edited (as WCQR is an annual event), allows us, as editors, to condense a diverse set of qualitative research work, focusing on different topics, and with different methodological designs. And, our concern as editors has always been to assure the quality of the published works, namely through a careful review and editing process.

We do not know if we are ready to give up our physical presence at scientific events. But, with opportunities such as online presentations and online publishing venues, we may now be much more judicious in this presence. We may now take time to ponder the relevance of investing in attending a scientific event, and selecting (hand-drawn) two or three events per year, at most. WCQR has a strong

¹ Congresso Ibero-Americano em Investigação Qualitativa / Ibero-American Congress on Qualitative Research.

emphasis in the building of a scientific community (in this case, bonded by the interest in qualitative research), reconciling physical and online presence, and is associated with quality journals. These aspects help academics to select it as one of the events where it is important to be present.

Sincerely,

The Editors