

The Congress that Almost Wasn't: Ethnographic Elements from the first World Applied Anthropology Congress

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Abstract

In the past two decades, schools and educational curricula have become targets by right-wing and left-wing ideologies like national renewal through education; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and decolonization. Whatever one's position, the production and exchange of knowledge clearly emerges from a cultural context imbued with power relations. Academic conferences can provide important insight into the history and conditions of such production. Using my experience in supporting the World Applied Anthropology Congress (2023) organizers, this paper contributes a partial description of conference events and simultaneously highlights tensions that arose due to the multiethnic, multinational nature of the Congress. I argue that the organization and realization of the WAAC faced temporal, technical, social, political, and linguistic challenges. As such, this article contributes to the anthropology of education, political anthropology, and histories of anthropology. If knowledge production will ever become equitable on scale from local to global, attention must be paid to both the scholarship as well as the professional realms that showcase it.

Keywords: Anthropology, World Anthropology, World Applied Anthropology Congress, Association for the Anthropology of Humankind

Introduction

To begin a collection of essays in *American Anthropologist*, eminent Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for Public Anthropology, Robert Borofsky et al. (2001) framed his contribution and the subsequent discussion about it around the following question: assuming that anthropologists should invoke the term culture, when would be the appropriate time to do so? Should it be used inductively or deductively? He argues, among other points, that the term is “what various people conceive it to be... [so that] different people perceive it in different ways for different ends” (Ibid, 443). In a manner not unrelated, I have asked elsewhere (Jayaram 2023) when anthropology is applied, to which I replied in a manner similar to Borofsky. In this article, I step back to ask the question of

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