

IAMS, past, present and future.

Jan T.Goldschmeding, first president of IAMS

(OPENING SPEECH AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF IAMS AT ZARAGOZA, SPAIN ON APRIL 20TH, 2012)

Twenty years ago IAMS, the International Association for Media in Science, was born here in Zaragoza. Today we celebrate her anniversary. But before we blow the 20 candles on the cake I will have a brief look with you at the past, present and future of the birthday girl.

Let us start with some digging in prehistory, looking for the family tree. IAMS is a descendant of a famous family of scientific film associations. Her grandmother was ADPCS. Full name : Association pour la Documentation Photographique et Cinématographique dans les Sciences. ADPCS was born in 1933 from 2 founding fathers : Charles Claoué and Jean Painlevé.

Charles Claoué was a plastic surgeon, specialized in plastic reconstructive surgery. Jean Painlevé was the son of Paul Painlevé, a mathematician and two times minister in the French government. Jean started studies in mathematics, but switched soon to medicine and then switched again towards biology. During his study in comparative histology he already was attracted by film making and at this time he already produced a feature film. His career as a scientific filmer began when he went to the biological station in Roscoff for a course. Here he started to make underwater films on sea animals like octopus and sea horses. Back in Paris in 1930 he founded the ICS (Institut de Cinématographie Scientifique) and became the first director. Meanwhile he continued film making and in Paris he also started to make medical films. From his collaboration with Charles Claoué the idea for ADPCS arose.

In the view of Jean Painlevé scientific cinema should serve 3 goals :

- 1 : to produce research footage, mainly to make the unseen visible by camera techniques
- 2 : to produce educational films for students
- 3 : to disseminate knowledge to laymen

These aims shaped the ADPCS congresses. In the 1st congress, 40 films on surgery were shown as part of scientific papers, presented by medical doctors (mainly surgeons). But in addition, 2 films (Birth by caesarian operation and Normal delivery) were shown to a large public to demonstrate the developments of medical science. In addition there were technical sessions to demonstrate new camera techniques and workshops to teach how to use them.

ADPCS was active until 1938. Further activities were interrupted by the outbreak of the 2nd world war. The 7th ADPCS congress did not take place until October 1945 in Paris. During this congress Jean Painlevé, John Maddison from Great Britain and Jan Korngold from Poland did meet each other and discussed how to raise again the awareness for scientific cinema. As a result of these discussions, two years later a new association was born : ISFA (or in French AICS). Full name: International Scientific Film Association or Association Internationale du Cinéma Scientifique. The 1st ISFA congress, which included the founding assembly, took place in Paris from October 2nd-7th, 1947. Jan Korngold became the first president.

ISFA was organized as a federation of national organizations. These could be central institutions like IWF (Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film) in Göttingen, Germany or ICS in France, national associations for scientific film (Netherlands, UK, Spain, Italy) or Academies of Science (Russia, Tsjecho-Slovakia, East Germany, Hungary). Starting with 12, the number of members reached a maximum of 30 in 1962. In the following 20 years the number of members fluctuates between 22 and 27. From 1983 on the number declined to 12 in 1992.

The interests of ISFA were reflected by the permanent committees. In 1949 3 PC-s were created for research film, technical and industrial films and medical films. In 1953 a PC for popular science film was created by initiative of Virgilio Tosi, followed by a PC for films on agriculture. In 1959 the number of PC's was reduced to 3 : research film, popular science film and films for higher and technical education. Finally in 1990 the PC's for research film and higher and technical education merged to 1 committee.

During the last 10 years ISFA three questions arose, which divided ISFA deeply.

- How to cope with the diminishing number of scientists and the growing number of specialized scientific producers?
- Should future developments foster research film or should a larger focus be on educational film?
- What to do with video and the upcoming interactive media.

The dominant position, taken by a number of Eastern European countries and Austria wanted ISFA to focus almost exclusively on scientists. The main interest should be on research film with popular science film in second place. Video should be disregarded since this medium never could battle the superior quality of film and interactive programmes should not be admitted because of a lack of a good linear storyline.

On the other hand, countries like the UK, The Netherlands, Italy and Germany argued that the interest of scientists for films outside their own subject area would disappear more and more and the future of ISFA should be in involving more science producers. They also argued that in practice most films were already educational and the upcoming video and interactive techniques would lead to major changes in filming techniques and in the way programs would be used.

A similar discussion was held in the editorial board of the Encyclopedia Cinematographica, a collection of science films that had been initiated by the first director of IWF, Gotthard Wolff. Apart from Göttingen, copies of the collection were available for study in Vienna- Austria (ÖWF), Utrecht-Netherlands (SFW) and in London-UK. Gerlof van de Veen, Dutch member of the editorial board, remembered the discussions with Austria on one side and the Netherlands and the UK on the opposite side. When he resigned from the editorial board he made a plea for more room for educational media.

In 1986, the board of the Netherlands Association of Scientific Film and Video (NVWFT) under the presidency of Jan T. Goldschmeding had a meeting with Gerlof van der Veen, chairman of CAWO (the Dutch-Flemish standing committee of heads of av-centres) and Aart Gisolf, president of ISFA. In this meeting NVWFT and CAWO expressed their big concerns about the lack of developments in ISFA and argued that the Netherlands would retreat as a member if no changes in a more progressive direction would be made. Aart Gisolf persuaded them to stay at least until the 1986 congress in Leningrad and proposed that ISFA should invite the Dutch to demonstrate the new media in Leningrad. As a result, a rather big Dutch delegation attended the Leningrad congress and the Dutch brought a number of laser discs and laser disc players to Russia (despite of being well guarded by Russian police the latter disappeared for a day or two; when the police found and returned them they players had been opened for a close technical inspection).

The new developments were discussed during the General Assembly and it was agreed that an initiative group of Hans-Karl Galle (director of IWF), Virgilio Tosi and Jan T. Goldschmeding should work out a paper on the future of ISFA for the 1988 conference in Pardubice. In 1988 the initiative group was appointed as a formal working group and was asked to prepare formal proposals for the 1990 congress in Utrecht.

In Utrecht a majority of the GA voted for renewal and asked the working group to prepare a new constitution and new bylaws to be presented at the 1992 congress in Zaragoza. For this purpose Murray Weston and Werner Grosse joined the working group. However, there was still a fierce opposition, especially from the East German member and general secretary Kurt Eifert, the Austrian member ÖWF, represented by Siegfried Hermann and the office manager of ISFA Suzanne Duval. Especially one of these proposals turned out to be a bridge too far, namely to abandon the rule of 1 member per country and open membership for organizations such as national associations, institutions and universities. In addition, the working group had pleaded for a personal membership as well, both for scientist as film makers. Eastern European members feared a loss of privileges in their own country, the Austrian member OWF feared the competition with upcoming university av-centres in Austria and the ISFA office manager who had been in charge for more than 40 years, feared the end of her active life. For the moment the conservatives took the lead. In a kind of a coup Siegfried Hermann was elected president with 9 to 8 votes and also joined the working group.

Hermann, being the fighter of the conservatives, tried to get control over the renewal process and to slow down the activities of the working group as much as possible. During the next year he never attended the meetings of the working group. Nevertheless, the group went on without him and presented the draft version of the new constitution and bylaws at the yearly ISFA general assembly in 1991, held at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers at Paris. At this meeting, Hermann as well as Duval came out of the blue with another other draft, both made on personal merits. However, since the cold war had been ended and the Berlin wall had fallen down the former Russian, Eastern German, Hungarian and Czechoslovakian members had vanished completely and the draft constitution of the working group was accepted by all votes except the Austrian one (Duval had no voting rights).

During the next months when preparations for Zaragoza were made the members of the working group realized that even with the new constitution accepted it could take a long time before the changes could be effectuated. Moreover there was little trust that the ISFA president and the ISFA secretariat would be very co-operative to speed things up. It might take a long time before ISFA could be open for other categories of members and in order not to lose the momentum they prepared a proposal for a quick technical turnover in which the existing ISFA should be dissolved, immediately followed by the creation of a new ISFA under new rules.

The 42ND ISFA congress started at Zaragoza on Easter Monday, 20th April 1992. Before the congress two letters had been sent to all members. The first one, signed by Siegfried Hermann, announced the renewal of ISFA by a founding assembly. The second one, signed by Jan T. Goldschmeding and Werner Grosse, gave an explication of the main changes proposed and a draft version of the constitution and bylaws and also invited the members for an Informative Assembly and a Founding Assembly.

On Tuesday 21st April at 11 AM the Informative Assembly took place. The meeting was chaired by Hans-Karl Galle since the ISFA president Hermann did not turn up at the meeting. The working group presented the new policy, structure of the association and constitution.

There was big enthusiasm for the new proposals and many of the attendants wanted to join the association immediately. During the next two days the ideas were further discussed in the corridors and the support to change ISFA by creating a new association became stronger and stronger.

On Friday 24th April the yearly General Assembly of ISFA had been scheduled at 11 AM. Since the quorum was not reached no decisions could be made but the decision to found a new association was specified and a statement of termination of ISFA was made.

At 16 PM of the same 24th April the founding assembly of the new ISFA followed. The list of founding members comprised 14 organizations or institutions and 23 individuals. 12 countries were covered. After a short discussion it was proposed to change the word "film" in the associations name into "media" and subsequently the name IAMS was chosen : International Association for Media in Science. Constitution and bylaws were accepted and it was decided that the legal seat of IAMS should be in Paris (Meudon). Gerlof van der Veen offered to host the first executive office at the Institute for Educational Media at the University of Utrecht, which was thankfully accepted. The first board was elected : Jan T. Goldschmeding (president), Werner Grosse (General Secretary), Murray Weston (Treasurer), Fransisco G. Abati, Johan van Heddegem and Edoardo Ventimiglia (members).

During the following months the official steps were taken. To dissolve ISFA officially, an extraordinary General Assembly was held in Paris on 16th June 1992. Since here also a quorum was not reached a 2nd GA was held on 18th July 1992. Here decisions could be taken by the majority of members present. The official act of dissolving ISFA was dated 15th October 1992. The ISFA archives were handed over to ICS.

The official documents for the founding of IAMS were signed in Paris at the 1st board meeting on 29th June 1992 and the formal registration at the Prefecture de Police of Meudon is dated 3rd July 1992.

On Saturday 25th April the closing ceremony of the 42nd ISFA/1st IAMS congress took place in the University of Zaragoza. At this meeting Jan T. Goldschmeding made an official public announcement of the birth of IAMS.

A major difference between IAMS and ISFA was the idea, that member activities and initiatives should be the most important ones in IAMS. The board and the executive office would only have a facilitating function. Members could unite in special interest groups and organize their own activities under the patronage and, if required with the help of IAMS. According to the interest of the members immediately after the founding 6 of such special interest groups were established :

ADA : multimedia alternatives for the dissection of animals

CSFF : coordination of scientific film festivals

MED : medical programs

LT : languages and translation

ID : international distribution of audiovisual media

HST : history of sciences and technology

In the course of the following years, most activities took place in the interest fields of CSFF and MED. IAMS was represented in many film festivals and IAMS members were acting in international juries. IAMS helped to spread information among film makers and scientists and encouraged filmmakers to send their programs to festivals.

The yearly IAMS GA was usually held in connection with a member festival and at these occasions IAMS organized special sessions and round tables.

In the medical field, there was a close co-operation with WAMHF (World Association of Medical and Health Film festivals) which was expressed by sharing two board members of both organizations and free membership in IAMS for WAMHF members and vice versa.

And although in the last decade the number of festivals declined and many institutions, national associations and audiovisual centers closed down still a group of members remains active in this field and keeps IAMS alive.

In the mean time, due to the digital technology and internet the media world has dramatically changed during IAMS' lifetime. Two years ago, in Avanca (Portugal) I have shown a graph of these developments. Since IAMS was born, we got digital cameras, streaming media, handhelds, You Tube, Google earth and games and since then we can add augmented reality to the list of technological developments.

Nowadays, everybody is connected via internet. Mobile devices allow us to make contact around the clock wherever we are. We are surrounded by social media; our information is taken from or put into the cloud and the increasing number of QR codes shows how augmented reality becomes part of our daily life.

The paradox of all this is that imaging never before has played such an important role in communication, education and science but that at the same time the number of people who know how the language of moving images works and how they are produced is rapidly declining in our institutions of education and science. In many cases these have been replaced by learning centre staff or pure technicians. New groups have emerged where the new discussions take place like Diverse and Media & Learning (the latter connected with the Medea award).

During my whole career I have always plead for a close co-operation between people who know how to make media and people who know how to implement them in education. Regrettably, in this age where moving images are a major communication tool the use of media is reversibly proportional with the knowledge how to use them effectively. But I am convinced that people who know how to make moving images are still necessary as speaking partners, teachers and consultants.

Therefore, film festivals where films are discussed and judged, benchmarks are set and workshops are held are still important. IAMS can help since IAMS is a network of people who are aware of the power of media, who know how to make them and how to use them. And we can encourage them by continuing the attribution of IAMS awards.

In my opinion this has been our message over the last 20 years and it should be our message now and in the near future.

Sources :

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