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## **The 1st International Congress on Television and Childhood in Spain**

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by

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The 1st International Congress on Television and Childhood in Spain – organized by the Instituto de Estudios de la Democracia (ID, Institute for Studies on Democracy), a research centre at Universidad San Pablo CEU – was held in Madrid on the 17-19th of October 2007. It was a truly international congress, as all guest lecturers came from research institutions in European and Latin American countries.

Founded four years ago, ID has specialized in research on the relationship between children and television. At the same time, the topic of children and the Internet has come to the fore. Because we are just witnessing the beginning of this Internet transformation, which is enhanced by the astonishing technological development, the Internet had to be a topic at the Congress. The Internet is now available to most children in the West, as part of their educational process and as a new socializing factor.

Because the Internet is the latest development associated with the socialization of children, the organizers, considering the intellectual prestige of Ms. Sonia Livingstone, President of the International Communication Association (ICA), decided to open the Congress with her lecture entitled "Child Protection in the Framework of the EU Safer Internet Plus Programme".

### **Need for New Research Methods**

The Congress was then divided into three blocks covering different topics. The participants in the first group, "Child Audiences", dealt with an approach used by commercial research in which children are the targets of an advertising purpose measured by anonymous records. The short-sightedness of the goals and data on which this research is based, e.g., audio metrics, suggests the need for new methods of academic research to independently compensate for these commercial approaches.

In short, the lines of research in Spain dealing with these problems have mainly focused on:

- 1) Establishing the dimensions of the child audience
- 2) Studying successful children's programmes with regard to those who are responsible for them (mass media) and possible mediators (parents, tutors)
- 3) Analysing the conditions in the family environment that make it more difficult for

- those responsible for children to respond to their own responsibility criteria
- 4) Studying the context of reception, stressing the role of families
  - 5) Promoting the role of public television in the production of contents intended for quality children's programming
  - 6) Designing a strategy for the protection of children in relation to civic values easily vulnerable to programming

All these paths were discussed at the Congress. Firstly, child audiences were considered. Then there was a second group on "Programming and Children's Consumption", starting with a lecture by Piermarco Aroldi, University Sacro Cuore, Milán, Italy. Professor Luciano Elizalde, Universidad Austral de Buenos Aires, Argentina, introduced a third block on "Media Use and Children's Reception". A fourth block on "Educational Television" closed the Congress. Cecilia von Feilitzen, Scientific Coordinator of The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, was the lecturer. This topic was studied from the perspective of finding a way to establish standard requirements of "quality" television, a complex issue involving several proposals, which were discussed in a public debate held by Congress participants.

Television may be used as a means of communication, as a technological device. Television may also be used in other ways, one of them being "television for educational purposes". It was not the intention of the Congress to equate "quality" and "educational television" but to remark that a relationship between both concepts may exist and, in any case, that it is worth finding out if an integral notion of "quality television" for children does not require as an essential condition that, at least, it should not be misleading.

More than fifty papers and comments were presented at the Congress, which was attended by about two hundred persons. The closing session took place with the attendance of her Royal Majesty, the Princess of Asturias, who had agreed to be Honorary President of the Congress.

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## **Spanish Children as Captive Market of Screens**

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The article "Spanish Children as Captive Market of Screens" by Luis Núñez Ladevéze, Juan Cantavella and Tamara Vazquez presents results of recent investigations in Spain concerning the way child viewers use television. The research shows that there is a contradiction between the criteria used for regulations and the behaviour of parents and caregivers when it comes to their sons' and daughters' relationship with television. This contradiction has been defined by those engaged in this research as "pragmatic dissonance". The dissonance has also been found among programmers of different television channels, who on the one hand agree to sign codes of self-regulation and, on the other, show little concern in their programming tactics for the children watching.

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