

## **The History of ELAFOT and other Latin-American Photoevents (up to 2003)**

The ELAFOT series started in August 1982, with the "Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Fotoquímica" (First Latin-American Meeting on Photochemistry) organized by Eduardo Lissi and his group at the "Universidad de Santiago de Chile". The plenary lectures were on: "Atmospheric Photochemistry" by Jack Calvert (National Research Center for Atmospheric Research, Colorado, USA), "Biogenerated Excited State Reactions" by Giuseppe Cilento (Univ. de São Paulo, Brazil), "Photogeneration of H<sub>2</sub> in Sacrificial and Non-sacrificial Systems" by Juan Kiwi (ETH Laussane, Switzerland), "Use of Laser Flash Techniques in the Study of Organic Reaction Intermediates" by Tito Scaiano (National Research Council, Canada), "Photochemical and Structural Studies of Organized Assemblies: Interaction in Micelles, Microemulsions, Vesicles and Monolayers" by David Whitten (University of North Carolina, USA), "Reversible Photochemistry and its Biological Applications" by Gregorio Weber (University of Illinois, USA), and "Phytochrome: Photophysical and Photochemical Events of the Plant Pigment" by Silvia E. Braslavsky (Max-Planck-Institut für Strahlenchemie, Germany). Nineteen Latin-American research groups presented their research projects and results and as such (Research Group Presentations) are they listed in the book edited by the Universidad de Santiago de Chile. This meeting and all forthcoming ELAFOT meetings were always supported by the Inter-American Photochemical Society. A week before ELAFOT I a School on Photochemistry (Primera Escuela Latino-americana de Fotoquímica) took place.

This first ELAFOT meeting was relatively small, with about 50 participants from Argentina, Brasil, Chile, and Venezuela. As usual, the economic situation in Latin-America was very difficult, and in particular in Argentina it was miserable. The only participant from Argentina was Carlos Previtali. It was the first meeting in which the Lissi group, forced to leave Argentina in 1966 and later on dispersed over various countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Germany, and Venezuela) met (in part) again in a scientific conference. The photo shows the Conference participants who had been or were at the moment Lissi's collaborators. We were all younger !!



Lissi's past and present troupe (August 1982): Standing (from left to right): Eugenio Sanhueza, Julio de la Fuente, Carlos M. Previtali, Miguel (Mito) Neumann, J.C. (Tito) Scaiano, Elsa Abuin, Miguel González; Sitting: María Angélica Rubio, Teresita Cáceres, Silvia E. Braslavsky, Eduardo Lissi, María Jesús Aguirre, María Victoria Encina. Ist ELAFOT, Santiago de Chile; photo taken by Jack Calvert.

The second ELAFOT in São Carlos, Brasil, in February 1988 (2º Encontro Latino-Americano de Fotoquímica e Fotobiología) was organized by Miguel Neumann, Frank Quina, Adelaide Faljoli, David Nicodem, and Fergus Gessner from Brasil, plus Carlos Previtali and Eduardo Lissi. There were again about 50 participants (according to the photograph). Lecturers were Andre Braun (Switzerland), Frans de Schryver (Belgium), Carlos Previtali (Argentina), Tito Scaiano (Canada), Silvia E. Braslavsky (Germany), Franco Scandola (Italy), and Dick Weiss (USA, but also Latin-American by choice !). The 58 posters were lively (as usual) discussed in the poster discussion sessions.

The third meeting was organized by a group led by Enrique San Román in Mar del Plata, Argentina with 102 participants, 61 from Argentina, 18 from Brazil, 13 from Chile, and 10 from Europe and North America. Substantial financial support was obtained for this meeting from several international organizations such as AIP (Association Internationale de Photobiologie), TWAS (Third World Academy of Sciences), and research funding organizations in Argentina.

The IVth ELAFOT organized by Elsa Abuin, Eduardo Lissi, Patricio Sotomayor, and Eduardo Silva in Valparaiso, Chile, was also called the 1<sup>st</sup> Ibero-American ELAFOT Meeting. However, due to financial constraints, only two Spanish photochemists, that is J.L. Bourdelande (Barcelona) and one of his students, could join the meetings. There were 82 posters and a total of 90 Latin-American researchers and students plus a large number (14 European and North-American senior researchers) of photochemists and photobiologists from industrialized Countries.

The Vth ELAFOT in Los Cocos, Argentina, organized by Sonia Bertolotti and Carlos Previtali, counted, in addition to over 100 participants, with three senior Spanish colleagues (Ulises Acuña, Paco Amat, and Diego Armesto) and for the first time with a Mexican photochemist Miguel García Garibay, who works in Los Angeles. A Workshop on Photocatalysis and Environmental Applications with almost 40 participants followed the main Conference. Photobiology was almost absent and no additional participant from Countries other than the three from the South Cone.

The VIth ELAFOT organized by a Committee led by Ira Brinn in Teresópolis, near Rio de Janeiro, and the VIIth ELAFOT organized by Antonio Zanocco and his Committee in Viña del Mar, Chile, are recent history. The number of posters and participants (82 and ca. 120, respectively, in Viña de Mar) have steadily increased, the level of research is very high, the diversity of subjects is broad, the banquet is always a wonderful event. The Photobiology label is still there, but few groups do photobiological work in Latin-America although many groups work on chemical problems of biological significance.

The list of meetings is given below. Reports on all meetings since 1988 can be found in the European Photochemical Association (EPA) Newsletters as listed below. The indices of the Newsletters previous to the electronic newsletter can be found at (<http://www.unibas.ch/epa/>). The electronic EPA Newsletters are available at the same address.

- I. Aug. 1982, Santiago, Chile
- II. Febr. 1988, San Carlos, Brasil      **EPA Newsl. 32**, March 1988
- III. Oct. 1991, Mar del Plata, Argentina **EPA Newsl. 44**, March 1992
- IV. April 1994, Valparaiso, Chile      **EPA Newsl. 51**, July 1994
- V. Sept. 1997, Los Cocos, Argentina   **EPA Newsl. 61**, Nov. 1997
- VI. Sept. 1999, Teresopolis, Brasil   **EPA Newsl. 68**, March 2000
- VII. Nov. 2002, Viña del Mar, Chile   **EPA 1<sup>st</sup> Electronic Newsl.** Feb. 2003

Appart from the occasional participation of few colleagues from Venezuela and Miguel García Garibay from Mexico-Los Angeles, it has been impossible for colleagues from other Latin-American countries to take part in the ELAFOT meetings, either because the distances are too large, the fares too high, or just because there are no photoscientists in many Latin-American countries.

In February 1999, Elena Vigil from La Habana, Cuba, organized Fotociencias 99, which was something like "get to know your photo-colleague in Cuba and think what can be done with the generous sunshine we have". It was a wonderful meeting in which cuban laser physicists and plant physiologists, plus organic chemists, medical doctors, and semiconductor specialists met for a week together with the invited speakers from Europe and the US (report **EPA** Newsl. **66**, July 1999). Second in the series was  $\Phi$ otociencias 2002 (I-APS Newsletter **25**, Fall 2002, <http://www.chemistry.mcmaster.ca/~iaps/nl-nov02/nl-nov02.pdf>) organized again by a group led by Elena Vigil. The Conference was complemented by a set of courses, all sponsored by the Inter-American Photochemical Soc. (I-APS), the International Union of Photobiology, the European Society of Photobiology (ESP), the International Commission on Optics, and the Centro Latinoamericano de Fisica (CLAF). The external financial support allowed the participation of young colleagues from Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Spain, and Chile. Several Mexican photoscientists were present in the meetings. A third  $\Phi$ otociencias is planned for 2005.

Coordinating-complementing ELAFOT and  $\Phi$ otociencias should be seriously considered since in this way the possibility of embracing all Latin-American countries could be increased.

We have gone a long way since it was realized that the photochemists and photobiologists in Latin-America needed to meet, know each other, join efforts and share equipment. It was also realized that especially in the far South of the American Continent, since decades in deep economic trouble, there is a need to give the students opportunities to meet scientists from the industrial countries working on frontier research areas. The scientists from the industrial countries have always fully financed their ways into the ELAFOT and  $\Phi$ otociencias meetings. The financial support obtained from various organizations for the ELAFOT and  $\Phi$ otociencias meetings has always been used to support young fellows and students from Latin-America to attend the meetings.

Fruitful contacts and deep friendships have been made between the research groups in Latin-America and the "gringos". Many new research

photo-projects have been developed in the last years stemming out of those contacts.

The two meetings organized by I-APS in Latin-America have strongly contributed to strengthen contacts between the research groups in Latin- and North-America. The first was organized by Frank Quina and Dick Weiss and held in Iguazú Falls (Brazil) in May 1996 (**EPA** Newsl. **57**, July 1996, I-APS Newsletter November 1996 <http://www.chemistry.mcmaster.ca/~iaps/nl-nov96/nl-nov96.html#4>). The second Southern I-APS meeting was organized by Pedro Aramendía and Miguel García Garibay (with strong input from the colleagues from Córdoba, especially Gustavo and Gerardo Argüello) in Ascochinga (Argentina) in May 2001 (I-APS Newsletter November 2001: <http://www.chemistry.mcmaster.ca/~iaps/iaps-newsletter-fall2001-clr.pdf>).

The contacts between the groups are now very fluid, lots of joint projects have flourished, there is a rich exchange of students who travel to other labs (in the own or other countries) to perform experiments not possible at home. The photocommunity is mature and lively and young students enter the field. These are all very good signs. It seems to me that the time is ripe to reorient some of the efforts into reinforcing some areas needing stronger efforts, such as photobiology in general and to help the absent Countries develop their own photocommunities. There is a lot of sunshine in Latin-America !!

*Silvia E. Braslavsky*

*Max-Planck-Institut für Strahlenchemie*

*Postfach 101365, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany*

*Fax: +49-208-306-3695, e-mail: [braslavskys@mpi-muelheim.mpg.de](mailto:braslavskys@mpi-muelheim.mpg.de)*