The World Council at the Turn of the Turbulent 80s

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This is a personal memoir of my presidency of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES). My term as President began at the 4th World Congress in Tokyo in July 1980 and ended in April 1983. The first two years of that period coincided, with only a few months’ variation, with my position as President-elect and President of the US-based Comparative and International Education Society (CIES). Those years thus marked a time when I was President of both the World Council and of the CIES, the first and largest national comparative education society.

The Second Decade Begins: The Early 1980s
The way my World Council presidency began is plausibly the most interesting and important aspect of my term in office. As background to that period, it is important to know the context of my election, especially as it relates to my position in the CIES.

Preparing a Proposal for a World Congress in 1983
I was notified of my nomination to run for Vice-President of the CIES by a phone call from then President-elect Thomas La Belle in spring 1979, and was elected in March 1980. At the time La Belle called, I was professor of sociology and chair of the social sciences division at the University of Missouri-Rolla in the USA, but scheduled to spend a year’s leave of absence at the Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) in Mexico, beginning in August 1979. La Belle insisted in his call that if I were elected, my leave in Mexico would not present a problem to the Board of Directors and the membership, and with that assurance I accepted the nomination.

Around the time of my nomination and election, the CIES decided to change its constitution to include a Vice Presidential term prior to President-elect. The revised CIES protocol dictated that the Vice-President would succeed automatically after one year to President-elect, and then to President after another year. Prior to the change, individuals became President-elect and then President, with no
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provision for Vice President prior to President-elect. Under the previous constitution, the President was responsible for planning the national CIES meeting, but under the changed constitution, that responsibility was given to the President-elect. Hence, I was elected as President-elect in March 1980 and succeeded to the presidency of CIES in March 1981. Effectively, this meant that I would become the first and only CIES President who would not have to plan a national meeting.

The combination of constitutional changes which freed me from the most onerous responsibility of the CIES presidency cycle, being at a Mexican university during my election to high office in the CIES, and being delegated the responsibility of representing the CIES at the 1980 pre-Congress and World Congress in Seoul and Tokyo respectively, caused me to think hard about the convergence of these events. I began discussing with José Luis Quintero, the former rector and at that time director of the Division of Educational Sciences at UDEM, about the possibility of a World Congress in Monterrey. Such a conference, I argued, would stimulate widespread interest in comparative education throughout Latin America. The World Council had been stalled since 1975 with only nine constituent societies, and was eager to expand, especially in the developing world. Although in 1980 the Asociación Argentina de Educación Comparada (AAEC) was admitted at the Tokyo Congress, it afterward became defunct and was delisted from the WCCES membership list. Thus, outside the USA and Canada, there were no members from the Western Hemisphere. I felt that a proposal for a Congress in Mexico would be of keen interest to the World Council as a means of spreading the field beyond Europe, Asia, and North America.

A key issue in such a proposal related to sponsorship. Quintero and I believed that UDEM would be well-positioned as a host, and that the thriving city of Monterrey would be an ideal venue. However, Mexico neither had nor expected to have a comparative education society. Clearly, the only prospect for success would be if the US society were to be the host. A World Congress had not been held in the US, and the prospect for one hosted by the US society in the US was unlikely. Moreover, a World Congress in Mexico without the direct involvement of the US society would compete with the national CIES meeting, coming only a few months apart. I considered that the only alternative for a successful proposal for a conference in Mexico would be a combined CIES national meeting and World Congress. Such a combined conference would virtually guarantee participation of CIES members, who had not attended previous World Congresses in significant numbers. For the first time, I felt, the largest comparative education society might be directly and substantially involved in a World Congress.

At Quintero’s urging, I gave a proposal to UDEM’s rector, Iván Espinosa, who presented it to the university’s Board of Trustees. The proposal envisaged that:

- the 5th World Congress would take place in Monterrey in July 1983 and last for about five days;
- the number of participants would be approximately 500-800;
- the CIES would have the major responsibility for the academic pro-