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Brazilians learn about science through samba and carnival

Scientists join the carnival to engage people in science Copyright: Brazilian Association for the Advancement of Science/Espaço Ciência

By: Luisa Massarani

[RIO DE JANEIRO] Around 300 scientists hit the streets of Recife in northeast Brazil last week (6 February), some of them inside giant figures of their famous peers, including Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Marie Curie and Galileo Galilei, as well as Brazilians Milton Santos, Naíde Teodósio and José Leite Lopes.

They were part of the city's carnival where they used dance and music — and the oversized costumes that are common at the event — to promote science.

The scientists joined the celebrations to invite people to the 65th annual meeting of the Brazilian Association for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), to be hosted by the city in July, and to advertise the National Week of Science and Technology that is held each year in October.

SPEED READ

- Scientists are taking part in Brazilian street carnivals to promote science
- They use giant dolls and samba music to inform about famous scientists and their work

The group of scientists called themselves Com Ciência na Cabeça e Frevo no Pé (With science in mind and carnival music in the feet) and were organised by the SBPC and the hands-on science centre Espaço Ciência.

- Science communication works best when it connects to people's lives and interests, says an expert

"It is a super cool way of doing science communication, with science and carnival music, which reaches thousands of people," José Antônio

Aleixo da Silva, a board member of SBPC and a professor at the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco, tells *SciDev.Net*.

"I believe that people are interested in our initiative because it is something different," he says. "They are curious about who the giant figures are, so we distribute leaflets about the scientists, with short biographies."

Science-inspired themes and costumes have emerged in other recent carnivals throughout the country.

In the southern city of Joinville, the Unidos pela Diversidade samba school chose butterflies as its theme, and performed to a song called "Butterflies, every Fritz has a bit of Darwin" that referred to entomologist Fritz Plaumann, a German who came to Brazil as a young man.

According to the samba school, the goal was to use "a lot of colours, happiness and information" to get to know "Plaumann, the most famous entomologist in Latin America".

And in Rio de Janeiro this week, the Unidos de Vila Isabel samba school was named as champion of the city's carnival for its parade based on the theme of agriculture.

"Science communication works best when it connects to people's lives and interests," says Bruce Lewenstein, professor of science communication at Cornell University, United States. "Carnival is about as interesting as it gets! So linking science communication with carnival is a great way to engage people in science."

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