

Forum 2003: Milano

CPTSC took a major leap forward this summer in meeting the challenges of globalization. Building on the success of its London2000 Roundtable, CPTSC took the lead, with help from the ATTW International Committee, in sponsoring the Milano2003 Roundtable, held on 30 June in conjunction with Forum 2003 in Milan, Italy.

The Roundtable drew 18 technical communication educators from six nations: Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Many stayed on 1-2 July for Forum, Europe's largest gathering of technical communicators. Both the Roundtable and the Forum took place at the Hotel Palazzo delle Stelline, in the heart of Milan, Italy's leading industrial, financial, and fashion design city.

Emerging Trends

The Roundtable's presenters covered a wide range of topics, many of them centering on international collaboration and curriculum and assessment issues. Following the CPTSC conference model, papers were posted ahead of time on the [CPTSC website](#), so that the majority of time during Roundtable sessions could be devoted to discussions.

The discussions proved revealing on several counts:

1. **Technical communication and translation/localization are merging.**

Technical communicators and translators in Europe have been educated and trained separately for what have till now been viewed as separate professions. Increasingly, however, they are being cross-trained. Indeed, new programs, such as one being developed by the University of Graz in Austria, are merging the two fields. While this trend is more obvious in Europe, it is beginning to become visible in North America as well. It is no coincidence, for example, that the current president of the Twin Cities STC chapter—one of the largest—is the owner of one of the biggest translation companies in the American Midwest.

2. **The need to cut translation costs is prompting more and more wordless or minimal words instructions.**

As a result, technical communicators are doing as much or more with graphic design as with writing. This same pressure to reduce costs is also what lies behind trend 1. While a technical communicator remains a person who can put him or herself in the shoes of the audience, doing so increasingly means becoming a graphic designer, translator, and localization/globalization specialist, as well as writer. Academic programs will need to adjust in response to this trend.

3. **Academic programs in technical communication are increasingly viewing international experience as essential.**

Without any prompting, 8 of the 13 presenters at the Roundtable picked paper topics centered on international collaboration. While the details of the papers varied, all presumed the importance of international exposure for students entering technical communication in this century's global economy. All of these presenters spoke about their programs' student or faculty exchanges or plans to institute them. Much of the discussion centered on ways to reconcile European and U.S. evaluation systems, tuition fees, semester schedules, and the like.

4. **While some nations are experiencing retrenchment in academic programs, others are experiencing growth.**

Between the London2000 and Milano2003 roundtables, the economic climate changed drastically, from exuberant optimism and growth to anxiety and job losses. (See "Roundtable keynote" at www.cptsc.org/international.html.) In the United Kingdom, this factor and others have led to the paring down of technical communication programs to just one bachelor's program at Coventry University and just one master's program at Sheffield Hallam University. In contrast, during the last three years new programs have started at the University of Graz in Austria, the University of Paris 7 in France, and Michigan State University and the University of Wisconsin-Stout in the United States. (There are no doubt others, but these were the ones represented at the Roundtable.)

European Membership

The European members of CPTSC took time during the lunch break to meet with CPTSC's president to discuss ways they might organize themselves. A consensus arose to participate to the extent possible in CPTSC and ATTW activities held in North America but with the goal of establishing a branch of CPTSC and/or ATTW in Europe within the next few years. Many persons present said that there was value in tapping into the experience and structure that CPTSC and ATTW provide. Michael Steehouder (University of Twente, Netherlands) noted that funds are available from the European Union to help coordinate activities between EU member countries, including activities involving tech comm education, but such funds could be distributed only to an organization based in Europe. Establishing CPTSC and/or ATTW chapter(s) in Europe would likely meet such a requirement.

Two European representatives, Charlotte Kaempf (University of Karlsruhe, Germany) and Lucy Veisblat (University of Paris 7, France), expressed interest in attending this year's annual CPTSC conference. Several others said they hope to do so in 2004.