

University, *Philia*, and *Parrhesia*, The INTRACOM Proposal

Universidad, *Philia* e *Parresía*. La propuesta de INTRACOM

Universidade, *philia* e *parresia*, A proposta da INTRACOM

Juan Carlos Suárez Villegas
Universidad de Sevilla
Spain
jcsuarez@us.es

Abstract: This paper reflects on the public responsibility of the university through two concepts rooted in the classical tradition that remain highly relevant today: *parrhesia*, understood as an ethical commitment to truth, and *philia*, conceived as the bond of trust and cooperation that makes human community possible. From this perspective, knowledge transfer is examined not only as an institutional function but also as a democratic responsibility aimed at strengthening critical citizenship. Finally, INTRACOM is proposed as a project of academic *parrhesia* and *philia* designed to foster research, knowledge transfer, and scientific cooperation across the Ibero-American sphere.

Keywords:

Parrhesia; philia; public responsibility of the university; knowledge transfer; critical citizenship; scientific cooperation

Resumen: Este trabajo reflexiona sobre la responsabilidad pública de la universidad a partir de dos conceptos procedentes de la tradición clásica que conservan una notable actualidad: la *parresía*, entendida como compromiso ético con la verdad, y la *philia*, concebida como el vínculo de confianza y cooperación que hace posible toda comunidad humana. Desde esta perspectiva, se analiza la transferencia del conocimiento no solo como una función institucional, sino como una responsabilidad democrática orientada al fortalecimiento de una ciudadanía crítica. Finalmente, se propone INTRACOM como un proyecto de *parresía* y *philia* académica destinado a fortalecer la investigación, la transferencia del conocimiento y la cooperación científica en el espacio iberoamericano.

Palabras clave:

Parresía; philia; responsabilidad pública de la universidad; transferencia del conocimiento; ciudadanía crítica; cooperación científica

Resumo: Este trabalho reflete sobre a responsabilidade pública da universidade a partir de dois conceitos oriundos da tradição clássica que conservam notável atualidade: a *parresía*, entendida como compromisso ético com a verdade, e a *philia*, concebida como o vínculo de confiança e cooperação que torna possível toda comunidade humana. Nessa perspectiva, analisa-se a transferência do conhecimento não apenas como uma função institucional, mas como uma responsabilidade democrática voltada ao fortalecimento de uma cidadania crítica. Por fim, propõe-se a INTRACOM como um projeto de *parresía* e *philia* acadêmica destinado a fortalecer a investigação, a transferência do conhecimento e a cooperação científica no espaço ibero-americano.

Palavras-chave:

Parresía; philia; responsabilidade pública da universidade; transferência do conhecimento; cidadania crítica; cooperação científica

1. Introduction

The university is undergoing a profound transformation. In a context marked by the digitization of social life, information overload, and the growing complexity of public problems, academic institutions face the challenge of redefining their role in society. It is no longer enough to produce knowledge or to guarantee its preservation and transmission. It is necessary to ask how that knowledge contributes to strengthening critical understanding of reality, enriching democratic deliberation, and responding to the needs of the communities it serves.

2. The Democratic Responsibility of the University

If the university aspires to remain a relevant institution for contemporary societies, it must reclaim a mission that goes beyond the mere production of specialized knowledge. Throughout history, universities have played an essential role in generating, preserving, and transmitting knowledge. However, reducing their function to these tasks would be insufficient to

understand the scope of their public responsibility. Since its origins, university activity has also been linked to a less visible but equally decisive task: exercising a critical gaze upon social reality and contributing to the education of citizens capable of understanding, questioning, and interpreting the structures of power that organize collective life.

This critical dimension takes on renewed importance in a context characterized by the expansion of digital systems, the growing complexity of political processes, and the concentration of informational power in the hands of large technology corporations. Never before has there been such an extraordinary capacity to produce and distribute information. Yet it has also never been so difficult to distinguish between knowledge, opinion, propaganda, and manipulation.

As Daniel Innerarity (2022) has noted, one of the paradoxes of contemporary societies is precisely that the exponential increase in available information does not necessarily translate into a greater understanding of reality. We live in increasingly complex societies, where the central problem is no longer the scarcity of information but the capacity to interpret it critically and transform it into socially meaningful knowledge.

The central issue is no longer merely to guarantee freedom of expression, but to preserve the conditions that make authentic democratic deliberation possible. In this scenario, the university is called upon to perform a function that goes beyond the generation of specialized knowledge and to become an institution capable of fostering critical understanding of the processes that shape contemporary reality.

This responsibility is connected to a long tradition of thought that has linked higher education to the quality of democratic life. Martha Nussbaum (2010) warns that democratic societies need citizens capable of thinking critically, understanding different perspectives, and participating reflectively in public affairs. The university is one of the privileged spaces for the development of these capacities.

One of the categories that best allows us to understand this responsibility is the notion of *parrhesia*. Recovered by Michel Foucault (2009) from the classical Greek tradition, *parrhesia* designates a particular form of relationship with truth. It is not simply a matter of saying something true, but of assuming the risk involved in doing so when that truth is uncomfortable for power, for dominant conventions, or even for the community to which one belongs.

The parrhesiast does not speak because they occupy a privileged position within a hierarchical structure. They speak because they believe that commitment to truth morally obliges them to do so. There is, therefore, an ethical dimension inseparable from the practice of parrhesia. To tell the truth means to expose oneself, to assume personal costs, and to accept that criticism may generate conflict.

The expansion of digital technologies has profoundly transformed these dynamics. Social networks promised to expand spaces for public participation and democratize the circulation of information. However, the subsequent evolution of these platforms has shown that digital communication can also foster phenomena of polarization, fragmentation, and informational manipulation.

Evgeny Morozov (2012) has questioned precisely the idea that technology possesses an intrinsically democratizing capacity. According to this author, political problems do not disappear simply by moving into the digital environment. Power relations continue to exist, although they take different forms. Algorithms, technological infrastructures, and the business models of platforms decisively influence the configuration of the contemporary public sphere.

From this perspective, the university cannot limit itself to studying the effects of digital communication. It must actively contribute to building critical capacities that make it possible to interpret these processes. Knowledge transfer takes on a particularly relevant dimension here. It is not enough to produce research on disinformation, polarization, or artificial intelligence. It is equally necessary to translate that knowledge to citizens in a way that is understandable, rigorous, and socially useful.

This concern is now closely linked to the international movement in favor of open science. UNESCO (2021) has emphasized that scientific production should be oriented toward more transparent, accessible, and participatory models capable of facilitating the social circulation of knowledge and its effective contribution to collective well-being.

The university thus faces a fundamental challenge: learning to engage in dialogue with society without renouncing its critical autonomy. Transfer should not be understood as the subordination of knowledge to external interests, but as a process of interaction capable of enriching both academia and its social environment.

In this sense, knowledge transfer cannot be separated from parrhesia. A form of transfer limited to disseminating technically correct but socially irrelevant information runs the risk of

becoming a mere exercise in institutional communication. Genuine transfer requires the capacity to identify relevant problems, the willingness to intervene in public debates, and a commitment to building critical citizenship.

Perhaps one of the greatest threats to the contemporary university lies precisely in forgetting this responsibility. The pressure to produce publications, obtain funding, or improve positions in international rankings can lead to a progressive disconnection from the problems affecting concrete societies. Academia then runs the risk of becoming a self-referential system that mainly speaks to itself.

3. Academic Philia and Scientific Cooperation

Among the many concepts Aristotle developed to understand human life in community, few have as much capacity to illuminate the challenges of the contemporary university as the notion of *philia*. Usually translated as friendship, this word has a much broader meaning in the Aristotelian tradition than its everyday use. It does not refer only to private affection between individuals, but to a form of social bond that makes political life, cooperation, and the shared pursuit of the good possible.

It is no coincidence that Aristotle devoted a substantial part of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to this question. In Books VIII and IX, he argues that no community can be sustained exclusively by rules, laws, or material interests. Every community needs some degree of civic friendship among its members. *Philia* constitutes that invisible fabric that fosters mutual trust, cooperation, and reciprocal recognition. Without it, human relations tend to be reduced to instrumental ties sustained only by interest or utility (Aristotle, 2014).

Aristotle distinguished three fundamental forms of friendship. The first is based on utility: people relate to one another because they obtain some mutual benefit. The second is grounded in pleasure: the bond remains as long as it produces satisfaction. The third, considered by the philosopher to be the highest form of friendship, arises when people mutually recognize the virtue of the other and desire the other's good for its own sake.

The first two modalities play an important role in any social organization. They are also present in academic life. Many projects emerge because there is a shared interest, a professional opportunity, or a specific need for collaboration. However, these forms of relationship have one

common feature: their stability depends on factors external to the relationship itself. When the utility or benefit that sustained them disappears, the bond usually weakens or vanishes.

Friendship based on virtue responds to a different logic. It is not founded on what people obtain from one another, but on what they build together. There is a mutual recognition that turns the good of the other into part of one's own good. Cooperation then ceases to be an instrumental strategy and becomes a shared form of fulfillment.

Applied to the university sphere, this approach helps us understand that scientific communities are not sustained exclusively by economic incentives, evaluation systems, or bureaucratic mechanisms of recognition. They also need relationships of trust capable of fostering the exchange of ideas, constructive criticism, and long-term cooperation.

In some ways, this issue has become especially relevant at a time when scientific activity is subject to growing dynamics of competition. The pressure to publish, obtain funding, accumulate impact indicators, or improve positions within evaluation systems can produce important advances in terms of productivity. However, it can also generate less visible effects: fragmentation, intellectual isolation, and the weakening of the cooperative ties that have historically nourished academic life.

This situation is particularly problematic because the major contemporary challenges increasingly exceed the boundaries of traditional disciplines. Issues such as artificial intelligence, climate change, migration, transformations of the public sphere, and disinformation cannot be addressed from isolated compartments or through excessively fragmented academic structures. Understanding them requires cooperation, dialogue, and the capacity to integrate diverse forms of knowledge.

It is here that the notion of academic philia acquires theoretical and practical relevance. Understood as a form of intellectual friendship oriented toward the common good, academic philia designates a model of relationship based on trust, reciprocity, and mutual recognition among those who share the responsibility of producing and transferring knowledge.

Academic philia makes it possible to integrate these concerns within a broader horizon. It is not limited to promoting collaboration among researchers or facilitating the creation of scientific networks. It proposes a particular way of understanding the university: an institution in which knowledge is not merely a mechanism for professional advancement, but a shared responsibility oriented toward serving society.

From this perspective, academic success should not be measured exclusively by the accumulation of publications, accreditations, or hierarchical positions. Without diminishing the importance of these indicators, value should also be placed on the capacity to build intellectual communities, generate cooperative networks, promote collective projects, and foster the social circulation of knowledge.

The university of the twenty-first century needs competent researchers, but it also needs communities capable of thinking together. It needs scientific excellence, but also trust, reciprocity, and social commitment. Perhaps Aristotle was right when he affirmed that no community can be sustained solely by rules and interests. The university, too, needs friendship.

Not friendship understood as personal affinity or an exchange of favors, but as mutual recognition among those who share the same intellectual and civic responsibility. An academic *philia* capable of reminding us that knowledge reaches its fullest value when it ceases to be an instrument of individual promotion and becomes a tool for understanding, dialogue, and social transformation.

4. Toward an Ibero-American Campus of Knowledge: The INTRACOM Proposal

The reflections developed in the previous sections allow us to identify one of the great paradoxes of the contemporary university. Never before has there been such an extraordinary capacity to produce scientific knowledge, and yet significant difficulties persist in guaranteeing its social circulation, collective appropriation, and effective contribution to understanding public problems. The expansion of academic research has not always been accompanied by an equivalent expansion of its cultural, educational, and democratic impact.

This situation is especially visible in the Ibero-American sphere. Despite the notable growth experienced by the university systems of Spain, Portugal, and Latin America over recent decades, the circulation of knowledge continues to encounter obstacles that limit its transformative potential. Institutional fragmentation, bureaucratic inertia, and a research culture often centered on local spheres hinder the creation of stable spaces for cooperation. Opportunities for collaboration among researchers working on similar problems from different disciplines, national contexts, and academic traditions are frequently missed.

However, this reality also reveals an opportunity. If contemporary challenges require increasingly interdisciplinary approaches and more open forms of knowledge transfer, it is

necessary to build structures capable of fostering that encounter. It is precisely in this context that the INTRACOM proposal can be situated.

More than a technological platform or a repository of content, INTRACOM can be understood as a project aimed at building a shared space for research, cooperation, and knowledge transfer within the Ibero-American university community. Its main novelty lies not only in the tools it uses, but in the conception of the university it promotes.

INTRACOM seeks to facilitate this circulation by creating an environment capable of connecting scientific production, knowledge transfer, and academic participation. Its proposal is located at the intersection of three dimensions that often appear separated within university life: research, communication, and cooperation.

The first of these dimensions refers to knowledge transfer. As noted above, transfer does not simply mean disseminating scientific results. It involves generating communication processes capable of translating specialized knowledge into resources useful to society. It means building bridges between research and public life, between academic production and the real needs of communities; it means turning expert knowledge into an instrument for innovation and social change.

The second dimension corresponds to academic cooperation. INTRACOM does not merely aim to transmit information from the university to the outside world. It also seeks to strengthen bonds among researchers, working groups, and institutions that share common interests. From this perspective, the initiative can be interpreted as an infrastructure designed to foster the construction of genuine communities of knowledge.

The image of a shared campus is especially useful for describing this aspiration. It is not only a matter of sharing physical spaces, but of creating collaborative environments capable of connecting people, institutions, and forms of knowledge distributed across the entire Ibero-American space.

The proposal is also connected to some of the main international trends linked to open science, academic collaboration, and the democratization of knowledge. In recent years, various international organizations have emphasized the need to promote more transparent, participatory, and socially responsible scientific models. INTRACOM can be interpreted as a specific contribution to these objectives from the cultural, linguistic, and academic reality of Ibero-America.

In this sense, INTRACOM constitutes an institutional expression of academic philia: networks of knowledge that bring together researchers from different disciplines around topics of common interest. At the same time, this initiative can also be interpreted through the logic of parrhesia: knowledge as an authentic exercise of deliberative democracy. In other words, it contributes to the formation of an academic community more closely connected to the needs of society.

Likewise, INTRACOM proposes a more agile way of managing knowledge transfer processes. In contrast to administrative structures that often slow the circulation of initiatives, it proposes mechanisms capable of facilitating connections among researchers, institutions, and social demands. It also favors greater autonomy for academic actors themselves to identify, organize, and project their knowledge toward society in the form of services, projects, specialized advising, or social innovation initiatives.

5. Conclusions

Throughout these pages, we have argued that knowledge transfer cannot be understood solely as an administrative function or as a requirement derived from academic evaluation systems. It is, above all, a democratic responsibility. The university does not produce knowledge for itself. It produces knowledge in order to contribute to the understanding of reality, enrich public debate, and foster the human development of the communities of which it is a part.

1. Reclaiming parrhesia. In a context characterized by information overload, polarization, and the growing difficulty of distinguishing among information, opinion, and manipulation, the university is called upon to perform a function that goes beyond disciplinary specialization. Its responsibility also consists in contributing to the construction of a citizenry capable of critically interpreting the world it inhabits. It is not enough to produce true knowledge; it is equally necessary to generate the conditions that make it possible to recognize, understand, and place that knowledge at the service of the common good.

2. The centrality of academic philia appears as a particularly relevant need in a context dominated by competitive dynamics. Scientific collaboration, the construction of knowledge networks, and the social transfer of knowledge require forms of cooperation that can hardly prosper where criteria of individual performance predominate exclusively. The university needs

excellence, but also trust. It needs recognition of merit, but also the capacity to build shared projects.

3. The major contemporary challenges require intellectual communities capable of thinking together, engaging in dialogue with one another, and building collective responses. Cooperation thus ceases to be a complementary option and becomes a requirement inherent to the production of knowledge itself. In this sense, academic *philia* is neither an idealistic aspiration nor a rhetorical appeal to cordiality among colleagues. It represents a practical condition for addressing problems whose complexity exceeds the capacities of isolated individuals or disciplines.

4. From this logic, INTRACOM's main innovation does not lie in the incorporation of new technologies or in the creation of an additional platform for academic communication. Its relevance lies in its desire to recover what might be considered the most human dimension of university life: the construction of stable collaborative bonds among researchers who share the responsibility of understanding reality and contributing to its transformation.

In a certain sense, INTRACOM seeks to recover an idea as old as the university itself: the conviction that knowledge advances when dialogue exists; that research is strengthened when it is shared; and that transfer reaches its highest expression when it connects academic work with the real needs of society. Its proposal is not simply to create a scientific communication network, but to foster the emergence of an Ibero-American community of knowledge capable of articulating research, cooperation, and democratic commitment.

The decisive question, consequently, is not how many articles are published, how many projects are funded, or how many positions are gained in international rankings. All these issues are undoubtedly important and form part of the dynamics proper to academic activity. But none of them, by itself, answers the essential question: What is the university for?

The answer we have sought to develop in these pages can be summarized simply. The university exists to produce socially meaningful knowledge, transfer it to society as a whole, and contribute to the formation of citizens capable of critically understanding the world they inhabit. Its legitimacy does not depend solely on the quality of the research it produces, but also on its capacity to place that knowledge at the service of the community.

At a time when technologies seem capable of replacing some of the functions traditionally associated with intellectual activity, the university preserves a responsibility that no

machine can fully assume: the collective construction of meaning. Interpreting reality, deliberating on the ends that guide human action, generating spaces for critical reflection, and promoting forms of knowledge committed to the common good remain profoundly human tasks.

Perhaps that is the great challenge of the university in the twenty-first century: not to compete with machines in the accumulation of information, nor with markets in the pursuit of profitability. Its most proper mission is to help societies understand themselves better, deliberate about their future, and build shared horizons of meaning. In an age marked by uncertainty, fragmentation, and technological acceleration, few responsibilities are as necessary as this one.

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¹ In Spain, in recent years, the debate on the function of the university and its so-called “third mission,” understood as the transfer of knowledge to society, has intensified.

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