

“It is About Solidarity. It is About Being Part of a Community, However Diverse That Community May Be”. Interview With Nico Carpentier.

“Se trata de solidaridad. Se trata de formar parte de una comunidad, por diversa que esa comunidad pueda ser”. Entrevista con Nico Carpentier.

“Trata-se de solidariedade. Trata-se de fazer parte de uma comunidade, por mais diversa que essa comunidade possa ser”. Entrevista com Nico Carpentier.

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Abstract: This interview with Nico Carpentier explores the role of academic cooperation, international scholarly associations, and transnational research networks in shaping the field of

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² Nico Carpentier is Extraordinary Professor at the Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic). Before, he held positions at Uppsala University (Sweden) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB – Free University of Brussels, Belgium). Currently, he is also a visiting professor at Tallinn University (Estonia). Throughout his academic career, he has played a leading role in several international scholarly associations. He served as Treasurer of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) from 2005 to 2012 and as ECREA Vice-President from 2008 to 2012. Within the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), he served as Chair of the Audience Section from 2010 to 2012, as Treasurer from 2012 to 2016, and as Chair of the Participatory Communication Research Section from 2016 to 2020. He was elected President of the Association for the 2020–2024 term, becoming one of the most prominent international leaders in the field of media and communication research. Carpentier has also been actively involved in fostering international academic cooperation beyond formal associations. He was one of the initiators and members of the ALAIC-ECREA Task Force, a collaborative initiative aimed at strengthening dialogue, joint research, and institutional cooperation between the Latin American and European communication research communities. In addition to his academic and institutional activities, he is the director of the non-governmental organisation Squidge, contributing to projects that connect academic research, civic engagement, democratic participation, and creative interventions in public spaces. His research focuses on participation, democracy, discourse theory, media studies, conflict studies, community media, communication rights, and the relationships between discourse and materiality. He is internationally recognised for his contributions to participation studies and critical media theory.

communication studies. Drawing on his experiences with organizations such as ECREA, IAMCR, and collaborative initiatives with ALAIC, Carpentier reflects on the importance of dialogue, solidarity, multilingualism, and democratic academic cultures in the production and circulation of knowledge. The conversation addresses challenges facing global scholarship, including academic precarity, epistemic inequalities, linguistic hierarchies, nationalism, and threats to academic freedom. It also highlights the value of plural epistemologies, multimodal forms of scholarly communication, and collaborative practices that bridge regions, traditions, and institutions. Ultimately, the interview argues that academic cooperation is not merely an organizational strategy but a fundamental condition for critical, inclusive, and socially engaged knowledge production in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords:

Academic cooperation; communication studies; scholarly associations; internationalization; multilingualism; academic freedom; knowledge production.

Resumen: Esta entrevista con Nico Carpentier explora el papel de la cooperación académica, las asociaciones científicas internacionales y las redes transnacionales de investigación en la configuración del campo de los estudios de comunicación. A partir de sus experiencias en organizaciones como ECREA, IAMCR y diversas iniciativas de colaboración con ALAIC, Carpentier reflexiona sobre la importancia del diálogo, la solidaridad, el multilingüismo y las culturas académicas democráticas para la producción y circulación del conocimiento. La conversación aborda los desafíos que enfrenta la investigación global, entre ellos la precarización académica, las desigualdades epistémicas, las jerarquías lingüísticas, los nacionalismos académicos y las amenazas a la libertad académica. Asimismo, destaca el valor de las epistemologías plurales, las formas multimodales de comunicación científica y las prácticas colaborativas capaces de tender puentes entre regiones, tradiciones e instituciones. En conjunto, la entrevista sostiene que la cooperación académica no constituye únicamente una estrategia organizativa, sino una condición fundamental para la producción de conocimientos críticos, inclusivos y socialmente comprometidos en un mundo en transformación.

Palabras clave:

Cooperación académica; estudios de comunicación; asociaciones científicas; internacionalización; multilingüismo; libertad académica; producción de conocimiento.

Resumo: Esta entrevista com Nico Carpentier explora o papel da cooperação acadêmica, das associações científicas internacionais e das redes transnacionais de pesquisa na configuração do campo dos estudos da comunicação. Com base em suas experiências em organizações como a ECREA, a IAMCR e em iniciativas colaborativas com a ALAIC, Carpentier reflete sobre a importância do diálogo, da solidariedade, do multilinguismo e das culturas acadêmicas democráticas para a produção e circulação do conhecimento. A conversa aborda desafios enfrentados pela pesquisa global, incluindo a precarização acadêmica, as desigualdades epistêmicas, as hierarquias linguísticas, os nacionalismos acadêmicos e as ameaças à liberdade acadêmica. Além disso, destaca o valor de epistemologias plurais, formas multimodais de comunicação científica e práticas colaborativas capazes de construir pontes entre regiões, tradições e instituições. Em síntese, a entrevista argumenta que a cooperação acadêmica não é apenas uma estratégia organizacional, mas uma condição fundamental para a produção de conhecimentos críticos, inclusivos e socialmente comprometidos em um mundo em constante transformação.

Palavras-chave:

Cooperação acadêmica; estudos da comunicação; associações científicas; internacionalização; multilinguismo; liberdade acadêmica; produção do conhecimento.

1. Introduction³

Nico Carpentier is known for his research and practice regarding communication, power, and mobilisation, as well as for his ongoing efforts to foster academic cooperation both within and beyond universities and scientific associations. He spent an hour in conversation with Fernando Oliveira Paulino, with whom he has been collaborating since 2006. Their joint initiatives include debates and panels featured at ALAIC, IAMCR, and ECREA conferences, as

³ The interview was conducted on 9 June 2026, and the edited version can be read below; the original video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AN8I6dehcOA&feature=youtu.be>

well as exhibitions and publications.

2. Interview

Fernando: We are recording this important and essential interview with our great colleague, Nico Carpentier. Nico, it is a pleasure to count on your contribution to this edition of our Journal of Latin American Communication Research. And to begin, could you please tell us a little about your interest in academic and scientific cooperation?

Nico: I am happy to be part of this conversation. Thank you for making your time and space available for these modest thoughts. Still, I hope this interview will be more of a dialogue and less of a monologue from my side. I am actually counting on you to express and perform scientific collaboration through the interview itself, so that it is not just us talking about collaboration, but us enacting it (smiles).

Then, to return to your question: It is a good question, and it is a strange question at the same time. It is good because it is important to talk about how we, as academics but also in different other capacities, within other societal fields, how we collaborate. At the same time, it is a strange question because collaboration constitutes the very nature of academic work itself. Academic work can only exist through collaboration. It can only exist through dialogue. So if we would be locked into a solipsistic self, there would be no science. There would be no academia. It is only through dialogue that learning and knowledge production becomes possible. So, if you ask me ‘when did it start’, I would have to reply that I cannot remember when it did *not* start, because collaboration is so deeply ingrained in what academic work is about.

But, of course, I think you also have to consider that scholars, and maybe especially early-stage scholars, are a bit locked into their own environments, their own universities, their own national communities. In the beginning of my academic career, cooperation activities were an important way to reach out to colleagues, outside my university, not to get suffocated. When I was a PhD student in Antwerp (Belgium), we created the *Kritisch OnderzoeksCentrum Communicatie en Cultuur*, or, in English, the Centre for Critical Studies in Communication and Culture. Its abbreviation (KOCCC) worked very well in English (smiles). The KOCCC was a group of PhD students who decided to work together, going beyond and through the walls of the university. There was a bit of resistance from some of the senior staff members, from some of the professors who thought we should stick to our ‘own’ environment, but we managed to

overcome that resistance without great difficulties. From the very beginning, I think that that group of Belgian and Dutch early-stage researchers and scholars was deeply interested in the world, and in all its contradictions, differences and similarities. It was a nice centre to be part of. And, by the way, it was also the starting point of what is now the commlist.org. I think that that is my preferred way of being an academic: Being interested, being fascinated, ... and not being locked in any kind of fortress, whether it is a country, or a university. We should be free spirits (smiles).



Image 1: Logo of the ALAIC ECREA Task Force.

Fernando: Taking into account these perspectives, you were one of those responsible for creating initiatives like ECREA and the ECREA summer school. Could you tell us how these ideas, which are so important for cooperation, came about?

Nico: There are different histories. ECREA, the European Communication Research and Education Association, was a merger of two existing small-scale initiatives, ECCR and ECA. Both of them were actually too small to be viable. I was invited into the ECCR by my former PhD co-supervisor, Jan Servaes, who was then president of ECCR, or the European Consortium for Communication Research, as it was called. And I stayed ... I started working for the organisation, I started organising events. I have actually very nice memories of the Deconstructing WSIS conference that I could organise in the European Parliament, in 2004. And I became involved in the ECCR Executive Board. By then, we had realised that scale was important.

ECCR needed to grow and we could only grow if we merged with the second European association, ECA, the European Communication Association. This was about creating a

European platform. Just as Latin America needs dialogues within Latin America, we understood, at a very early stage, that also European communication scholarship needed to speak with itself.

As all continents, Europe was divided. Europe was (and is) characterised by diversity and conflicts. We were very much aware that ECREA was not the solution to all conflicts, obviously. At the same time, ECREA was a contribution to opening up dialogues and recognising European diversity in the field of communication and media studies.

The creation of ECREA triggered an avalanche of new members, once ECREA was established, in 2005, at its first conference in Amsterdam (the Netherlands). The strong increase of members caused quite a bit of trouble for us, though, because, as a very small team, we had to manage this avalanche of interest, but at the same time it was most enjoyable to see ECREA becoming so popular in such a short time. I was (and still am) very happy to see that it worked out and that ECREA became a stable and large-scale association. But it had very humble beginnings: The starting point was actually a group of only four people: François Heinderyckx and myself from ECCR, Pertti Hurme and John Rosenbaum from ECA. While there had been many other initiatives and meetings before, and many had called for the creation of a European communication and media studies association, it was only when those four people sat together and talked about merging ECCR and ECA—putting collaboration in practice—that ECREA could be established. I am very happy that these four people trusted each other, and I was very much honoured to be part of this small team. I must say that it was remarkable how quickly we managed to agree on building something together, that has now become quite a beautiful organisation (smiles).

Fernando: And there is also the ECREA summer school? Was that one of the results of this emerging activity or not?

Nico: The European media and communication doctoral summer school, or the SuSo, which were the names we used, existed much earlier. This summer school was initiated in the early 1990s, by a group of 10 universities, led by the universities of Stendhal (Grenoble, France) and Westminster (UK), with, among others, Vincent Porter and Bernard Miège. They were dealing with the same issues we just discussed, growth and sustainability. They wanted to grow and they approached ECCR, seeking collaboration. That opened up spaces for ECCR to become more involved in their summer school.

The summer school always rotated to different locations, and when it moved to Helsinki, in Finland, a group of people started rethinking the formats, objectives and design of the summer school. There I had the pleasure of working with Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (who is actually at this very moment the president of ECREA), Bart Cammaerts (who is now at the LSE, in the UK) and Hannu Nieminen, who is still in Helsinki. That group of people started rethinking the summer school model to ensure that it became more supportive of the PhD students, and their projects, and maybe a bit less centred on the lectures and the lecturers. You can read more about these SuSo principles in the introduction of our SuSo books (e.g., Carpentier, 2009), if you wish. These interventions turned the summer school into what we now know, thanks to a very small group of people who decided that the summer school should be there for the PhD students and not for the many different lecturers. But this story is actually much older than ECREA.

Fernando: It goes back to the period before ECREA and these very early stages, but how can we understand the need to establish English as “the lingua franca” in these activities? Because I think this was a very important step in setting up these structures?

Nico: Yes, you are right. That had to do with several elements. In the case of the SuSo, originally the summer school was bilingual. It had two working languages, French and English, because there was a strong influence from the French University of Stendhal (in Grenoble), and the people being part of that group. The bilingual model turned out to be too much of a challenge, and caused serious communication problems. A lot of the participating PhD students did not speak French at all, or did not speak it that well. Our resources were too limited to allow for translations. We had to make the hard choice for English, as, out of the two languages, it was the best option. Or the least bad. In retrospect, this was a bit regrettable. But, at that moment, with the people we had, with the PhD students we had, switching to English-only was the best option.

What also played a role is that the people who were creating ECREA were all fluent in English, and not really in French. There was only one exception: François Heinderyckx, who later became ECREA president, and even later president of the International Communication Association (ICA). He was French-speaking, but he was the only one, and he was fluent in English. Our Finnish colleagues, which was where ECA was de facto based, had little knowledge of French (as far as I know), or Spanish or Portuguese, for that matter. Also, the use of English

was not that politically sensitive, maybe with the exception of France, at that time. All this made the creation of a multilingual association more difficult. In practice, I must confess, this also aligns very closely to my own language practice, which also made things easier for me, so, I guess that I am partially to blame for these choices (smiles). It was a restrictive policy, choosing one language, given Europe's linguistic diversity, but it did work. It did allow, at least in the European context, to have conversations with all Europeans and with many of those interested in Europe.



Picture 1. Miquel de Moragas, Claudia Alvarez, Nico Carpentier, Fernando Oliveira Paulino, Patria Roman, Eliseo Colon, and Leonardo Custodio, after the panel organised by ALAIC and ECREA during the IAMCR Conference in Istanbul 2011

Fernando: Nico, in the year of 2026, we celebrate 20 years of shared activities, including round tables, summer schools, publications, which also involved you, ECREA, and the Latin American Communication Researchers Association, and the colleagues here, especially from Latin America like César Bolaño, Delia Covi, Gustavo Cimadevilla, Gabriel Kaplún, Daniela Monje, Eliseo Colón, Tanius Karam, Miguel Vicente Mariño, and Leonardo Custodio. How do you evaluate these activities carried out in partnership with the Latin American colleagues and especially with ALAIC support?

Nico: I think that there are two levels. First, there has been a structural collaboration between ECREA and ALAIC. You and I were both part of that collaboration and I believe that that collaboration was fruitful. And important. This is at the level of the regional associations. I

think that it is absolutely vital for regional associations to exist, in order to support their region but also not to close the door to other regions. The task of regional associations is to serve their members, and one way of serving these members is to create bridges—the famous “sqridges” (Carpentier, 2014)⁴ if you want—to create connections between associations and between continents, and that is one crucial area. The ECREA-ALAIC collaboration is an excellent example. And I was very fortunate to have been part of that set of initiatives at the level of ALAIC-ECREA, being able to engage in these dialogues.

But of course, there is a second, more global level. IAMCR is equally important in this story. After all, I think it is fair to say that Latin America and Europe provide strong foundations of that association. It is through these dialogues that we have managed to make IAMCR, during these more than 70 years of its existence, into what it is. We have seen, during the last years, structural changes in our field and in IAMCR, which have to do with the increase of the importance (and output) of Chinese scholars, but also with the significant increase in the quality of research that is produced in China. That is a vital transformation, which makes me actually very happy, because it even more globalises academia and IAMCR. Still, if you look at the history of IAMCR, the European and Latin American axis remains a cornerstone of that association. That axis has always been vital in strengthening IAMCR’s two main characteristics, namely its global and its critical nature. The global dimension is, of course, represented through its membership and through the connections with, for instance, ALAIC and ECREA and many other regions. But it is in particular the critical dimension where both the Latin American and European scholarship have played a substantial role. Criticality is strongly present in both regions, which is one reason we have found each other in and outside IAMCR. And both regions continue to provide a structural and very necessary critical perspective on the world of communication and media, and beyond.

Fernando: One of the results of this cooperation involving ALAIC and ECREA, was the book “Research Traditions in Dialogue: Communication Studies in Latin America and Europe”⁵. What lessons emerged from bringing together scholars from different

⁴ More information at: <http://www.sqridge.org/> and Carpentier, N. (2014). On Walls, Squares, Bridges and Sqridges A framework to think about North-South dialogues in communication and media studies. *Journal of Latin American Communication Research*, 4(1), 12-29. Retrieved from <http://alaic.org/journal/index.php/jlacr/article/view/88>

⁵ Version in English available at: <https://www.alaic.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Research-Traditions-in-Dialogue.pdf>; Spanish version available at: https://www.alaic.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Tradiciones-de-Investigacion-en-Dialogo_final.pdf

epistemological and geographical contexts, Nico?

Nico: I think because you were part of this, you need to answer this question yourself as well (smiles). But allow me to start: I think the model we used for that book was spectacular. We started with identifying six different research traditions: Functionalism, Critical Theory, Cultural studies, Alternativism, Postcolonialism and Feminism (see Oliveira Paulino et al., 2020a; 2020b). We then decided to find authors from the different continents to represent these traditions in contributions written by these authors, situated in one of the two regions, on their own, or as co-authoring teams. Then, for each of these six traditions, we put all ‘their’ authors together, with representatives of both regions, and we invited them to discuss their research traditions, and write a separate text, based on this discussion. The model was an absolutely vital process for generating in-depth dialogues, but it was a project outcome at the same time. Because what we did was creating the performance of cooperation and the performance of dialogical exchange between the different continents. The form of the book project—which was not just form, of course, because form is never just form—but the form was so important, in making visible that we can have these exchanges and we should have these exchanges.

The second point is that we should also look at the content of the book, and acknowledge how similar we are, in one way, but also how we strengthen each other through our diversity. I, myself, was part of the discussion on colonialism, post-colonialism and decoloniality, which I thoroughly enjoyed, in process and outcome. It was marvellous to be part of this process, because there are very different perspectives. I consider myself to be much more part of a post-colonialism tradition, in the ways that I think and work. That is my heritage, my background. Then, being able to have these wonderful dialogues with colleagues about decolonality and how that intersects with, and at the same time is structurally different from, the post-colonialism tradition(s) and how that criticality—which you can bring in through both decolonality and post-colonialism—can work in very reinforcing ways, that was intellectually very pleasing.

And these were, for me, the two main takeaways of this book project: the compatibility and the complementarity of these frameworks. Especially the complementarity, how different traditions could be critically activated to strengthen each other, was beautiful to see. Of course, that is only my reading, but Fernando, what did you learn from the book? You were very much part of this, so I cannot let you escape from adding your thoughts to this interview as well.

Fernando: OK, I think the process was very important to stimulate the creation of a method, to establish this “sqridge”, to use Carpentier’s suggested model. In other words, this project put the idea of the creation and stimulation of the interchange of ideas, in a very horizontal way, into practice. Moreover, I think this perspective and method could be useful for other kinds of regional comparisons, and in epistemologically and ontologically oriented activities. Maybe even in particular subareas of communication studies, we can deploy this kind of method, in order to create the interchange of ideas, with perspectives from each continent, and from different researchers.

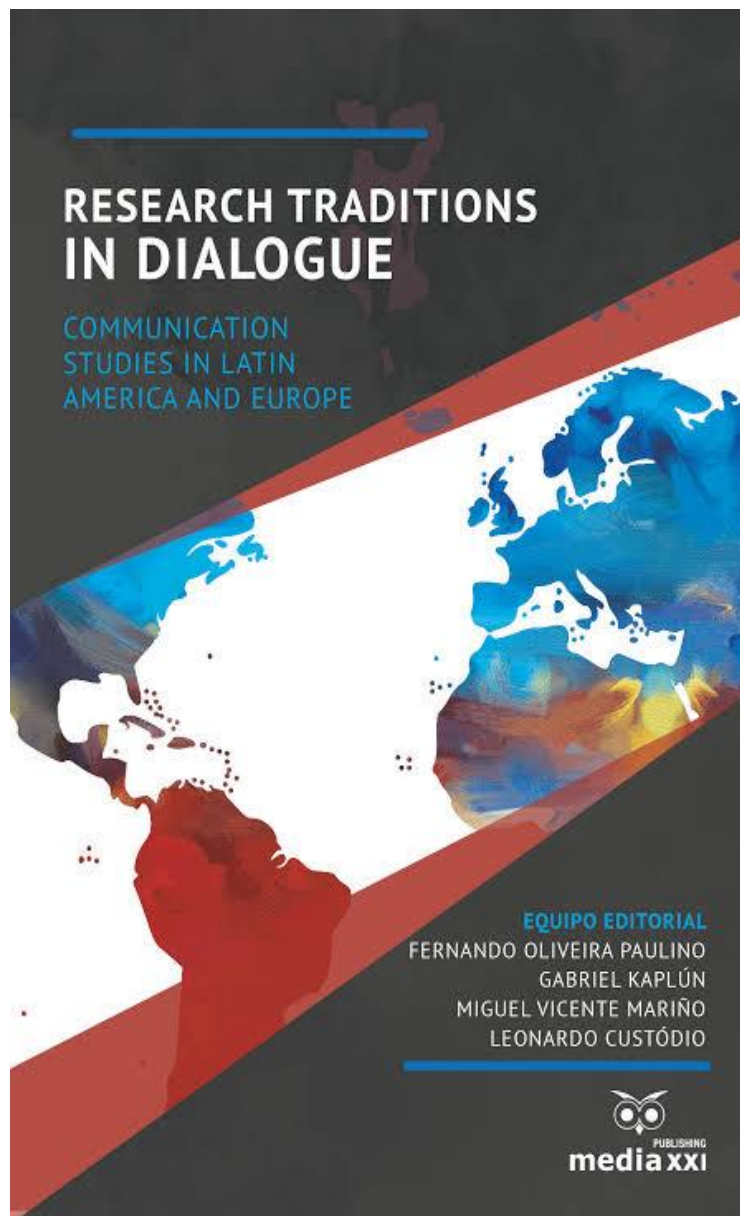


Image 2: Cover of the book.

I also think we can stimulate the production of more books like this one, in the coming years. Maybe involving colleagues from Oceania, from African countries, even from North American countries, and especially from Asian countries taking into account the differences involving regional, national, local perspectives. Yesterday (8 June), for example, we organised a webinar including colleagues from Mexican universities, Mexican Association of Communication Researchers (AMIC) and other Latin American institutions. Sometimes the idea of difference, inside and outside the region, was part of these discussions. It is necessary to stimulate the continuation of these processes, in different directions, continuing to create this kind of bridges and squares, involving different entities and researchers.

In my point of view, more important than just looking for the differences involving academic traditions and perspectives in individual or collective terms, is to compare and to look for similarities. We also need to look at the barriers *in* academia, and *for* academia. For instance, the bureaucratism we are exposed to, having to dedicate so much time to filling out forms and doing evaluations, is simply wasting, I think, our time. We need to discuss these practices as well, and build unity and solidarity among us, so that we have more strength and capacities to resist these restrictions.

This also includes the need to face the threats to our activities that originate from outside the university, in political terms. In these times of bureaucratic and autocratic threats, we need to unite. Because sometimes the system, including those colleagues who are part of it, do not necessarily understand the problems, or worse, they are part of these problematic strategies.

Nico: You are right. Sometimes, we are our own worst enemies, and there is a structural need for academic unity and solidarity at different levels, whether it is in one particular institution, or whether it is in a country or region, or at the global level. There is a need for academics not getting locked into backstage fights, but to defend academia, as principle and as a practice. And there are many regions in the world where basic academic freedom is under threat. We do have the need to at least speak up, to express our solidarity and to help. I know this very well, because of my attempts to help Bahruz Samadov, an Azerbaijani PhD student at Charles University (in Prague, where I am based). Bahruz is in prison in Azerbaijan, convicted to 15 years' imprisonment for high treason, because of his ideas. There has been a lot of support for him, but unfortunately, this support has not materialised into his release. At least not yet.

Seeing, from nearby, a state abuse its resources to silence people, to silence academics, is horrible. To be so close to see the pain, the trauma and the suffering that this is causing, is just terrible.⁶ And I am only a witness, obviously, things are much worse for Bahruz himself, and the many others that are in similar positions. You can only imagine how it feels for people in his position, being prosecuted—and that is the irony of Bahruz's situation—for defending peace, for asking to stop the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. To be prosecuted for that is just appalling.

Fernando: And that is where academics really need to stand together and defend each other, defend academia and defend academic freedom. Yes. And Nico, beyond that, in your view, what are the other main challenges for international academic cooperation in the field of communication studies?

Nico: Well, there are a few ... The list is long. To start on a very materialistic note, there is a lack of resources everywhere. And we can complain about many things, but the lack of resources for academics, especially in the global south, is deeply problematic. That is one main threshold.

But we are also—and maybe this is at a more discursive or ideological level—we are still locked into academic nationalisms. We believe that our environment, our country, our national community has to be our intellectual starting point. There is the report by a commission led by Immanuel Wallerstein, that analysed the role of all these restrictions and limitations (Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences, 1996). One of the elements they discuss in their report is the focus on the nation-state for academic research. For instance, if we do comparative research, we compare countries. But why would we do that? Why only that? And why would that be taken for granted? We reaffirm our own starting points as being part of a nation-state through our own academic practices. There are so many other levels of comparison possible, which are equally important, but we do not use them, at least not that often.

Of course, the nation-state is an incredibly dominant and hegemonic force. It is how the world is organised. But as academics, we should also be able to move beyond that horizon. These are intellectual boxes that we create for ourselves. We box ourselves into very particular

⁶ See, for instance, this Amnesty International report: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/0922/2026/en/>

ways of thinking, where we define ourselves in intersection with the nation-state. We experience a lot of difficulties in moving beyond this nationalist—even if it is often agnostic nationalism—ideology. I would say that our cosmopolitan academic identity still needs substantial development.

In short, there are so many of these restrictions where we find ourselves locked in, as we sometimes lack curiosity and do not want to look outside the safety of these self-created containers. These containers prevent us from fully understanding how the world works. Instead, these containers make us look inward, make us look at ourselves, and those are like-minded. And these are just two examples of structural limitations. One is more material, money, and the other one is our mentality, namely how nationalism, for instance, still governs academia. But the list is endless. We were already talking about this, when we were talking about the research traditions book. We briefly talked about decolonality, and about the power differences between—for lack of better terms, and we can deconstruct these concepts—the global north and the global south.

We do see these structural differences, and we see that, for instance, theoretical and conceptual frameworks are still very western. Our language and our concepts are derived from western traditions. At the same time, I want to be careful here, because these concepts are also precious to me. After all, I come from a continental French philosophy tradition. I like these authors. I like their work. But I am equally interested to see how fluidity and hybridity have been defined, for instance, in the Caribbean, or in Latin America more broadly. I am just as interested in these rearticulations and confrontations, as I am in the European versions. Paulo Freire's work, and the concept of conscientisation, offers a fascinating example here. I must confess that I can hardly pronounce the word in Portuguese (laughs). It was created in a Latin American context, and it has entered into the vocabulary of the global north, which is both intellectually helpful and morally highly appreciated.

This example shows that there are cases where you see concepts originating from Brazil, for instance, and then moving into the global north. But they are too rare. We need more of these movements, going in both directions, where we can have the fundamental structures of our thinking—after all, that is what our concepts are—enriched by the experiences of different parts of the world.

Fernando: And Nico, your work has consistently emphasized dialogue across research traditions, and the need for societal impact.

Nico: We should start with the question why it is important to move beyond hierarchical or Eurocentric models of knowledge production, in academic communication research, but also in the relations between academia and other societal fields. I would argue that if we want to produce knowledge, we need to engage in dialogue, at all these levels. Knowledge production is not an individual process. It is a collective process. That is the ultimate starting point. But then the next step is that diversity strengthens knowledge production. It is not only about the individual and the collective. It is also about respecting the diversity of the collective.

And that means moving beyond frontiers, for instance, beyond national or regional frontiers. This means not getting stuck in Belgian academia, or in Portuguese, or in Brazilian academia. But it also means not being locked into academia itself. And I think you already know that I work as an academic and as an artist at the same time (because, Fernando, you organised the Iconoclastic Controversies exhibition with me in Brasilia; see Carpentier, 2021). I find that combination of academic-artistic work most stimulating. The idea that we, as intellectuals, can have hybrid identities, not being locked into one identity, not being locked into one profession, but that we can combine these, is for me absolutely crucial in enriching knowledge.

Because knowledge is not supposed to be One. That is the next step of my argument. Knowledge production is collective, and it is diverse, and out of that comes the idea that knowledge is not One, it cannot be hegemonic. We need a diversity of knowledges, and we need to acknowledge, following Haraway's (1988) work, that knowledge is situated. We need to respect the knowledge of different parts of society and the world, originating from different social groups, with, for instance, knowledge originating from indigenous communities, which form absolutely vital reservoirs of knowledge, for instance, in relation to human-nature relationships. We also need to acknowledge the knowledge being produced by the arts. I enjoy working with artists, as a curator, but also as an artist, because I can learn and deploy different perspectives that not only fascinate me but that change my way of thinking. One very recent example of all this, is the film essay, "Agon: Constructions of Democracy", which I directed with two Indonesian colleagues (see Minanto et al., 2025), which was quite a pleasurable and enriching experience.

To put it differently: There is no point in looking for academic confirmation all the time.

We need to look for differences, for contradictions, for misunderstandings, ... We can learn from the impossibilities of agreeing. And we need to help in finding agonistic solutions to these contradictions, where we do not try to strangle each other (smiles), or where we do not force each other into unconditionally accepting our own ways of thinking. We need to think about thinking together. But ‘together’ does not mean the same. It means to respect the diversity of knowledge. And that is why collaborations with different parts of society, driven by the acceptance that they all are involved in knowledge production, is absolutely vital to academia and to these other fields as well.



Pictures 2 & 3: Nico Carpentier in Brasília during the Opening of the Exhibition “Controvérsias Iconoclásticas”⁷

⁷ More information at: <https://noticias.unb.br/component/agenda/agenda/2028>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COXCZ5sbzN8>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6YdCMe-uxY> and <https://vimeo.com/290606097>.

Fernando: This discussion is also based on your participation in initiatives such as ECREA, IAMCR, and ALAIC, and other associations and universities around the world? What role can the international scholarly associations play, beyond the individual perspectives, in strengthening more democratic and plural forms of knowledge exchange, especially in these current times with tensions and threats from extremist movements?

Nico: This is actually a complicated question, because what these associations do, is that they create platforms. Now, the term ‘platform’ has been completely emptied because it became used in the context of the structures of digital communication. We should not forget that a platform is a place. More specifically, a platform is a place of elevation, connected, reachable, but still somehow separated. That is the original idea of the platform, or the plateau. And that is what our academic associations do. They create places of togetherness where people with different backgrounds, different ways of thinking, can meet and show their work, but where they can also collaborate. It is a place where they can be and work together.

That is what these associations do. Through the performance of (agonistic) collaboration, they already strengthen democracy. We have—at least so far—been very careful to ensure that our associations are democratically organised. Importantly, we ensured that they are not only election-driven in relation to leadership selection—which is important in its own right—but that there is also a democratic culture within these associations, allowing very different people to interact with respect for each other. Because democratic culture is not only about voting a particular leadership into office. Democratic culture is about mutual respect, and it is about mutual care. It is about solidarity. It is about being part of a community, however diverse that community may be. That is what these associations have been doing.

And as a minor footnote: The work that I have done, as an IAMCR president, was very much oriented at making sure that the democratic culture of IAMCR was further strengthened. It was, and is, important to me. It was about ensuring that different people are enticed to work together, in an environment that is safe, that is caring, that is warm and that is stimulating, all at the same time. During my presidency, that was one of my main agendas. And if I may say so myself, I am pretty pleased that, with the collaboration of so many people in IAMCR, we managed to contribute to strengthening IAMCR's democratic culture even further.

Fernando: And Nico, how do you evaluate the importance of multilingualism, including the circulation of knowledge in languages other than English, for the future of global communication research.

Nico: The English language is an important “lingua franca”, which supports our academic communication, but it is only one of them. We need to look beyond that English language and bring more multilingual and multicultural dimensions into the circulation of knowledge, in the sharing of knowledge. There are a couple of things to discuss here.

First of all, as I mentioned before, I think that in a European context, the use of English is less problematic, and it is considered less problematic. Because in Europe, the English language is not that much associated with the USA. It is thus not so much connected to US dominance and colonialism, from which Latin America has suffered considerably. In other words, we should acknowledge that there are different political contexts. I think that this is an important comment, in order to better understand the European linguistic choices, for instance, in relation to the creation of ECREA in 2005.

Still, 20 years later, and with a longer experience in IAMCR, I remain convinced that we have to strike a proper balance between different key languages, keeping in mind that we are not only referring to language, but also to culture. It is thus not a multi-linguistic issue alone, it is a multi-cultural issue, allowing for different cultures and traditions to respectfully meet and engage. Of course, language does matter: As I said before, concepts are vital, which makes language vital. The different articulations of concepts is one of my areas of interest, and we need to think and talk more explicitly about which concepts we use and not use, in order to better understand the world. I already mentioned Freire’s example: There have been concepts created in other continents, outside the global north, that I find extremely useful. We need to look at our vocabularies and see how we can enrich them. This is not simply saying ‘oh, let us now use different languages’. We need to actively reflect about the words we use and investigate if we can use other words than our own, which originate from other cultures, from other languages. That is one area to consider.

The second is that, of course, translation has proven to be vital. For those who know the “Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy”—a wonderful book by Douglas Adams (1979)—, one of the creatures in this book is the Babel fish. It is a little bright yellow fish that you put in your ear, allowing you to understand every language spoken in all galaxies. That idea is, of course, the

ultimate communicational utopia. So far, translation has proven to be fascinatingly clumsy—for instance causing delays, impossibilities, errors and misunderstandings, but also in IAMCR, translation has remained vital, simply because language excludes. To add one more footnote: I experience this on a daily basis because I—a non-Czech speaker—work in the Czech Republic. I am also aware that we are using English for this interview, for which I am grateful. But, as a reminder, English is also not my native language. My native language is Dutch. I am using a different language than my native language every day, which is not always pleasant because even when I am used to speaking English, it is still not my native language, full stop.

All this to say that we need to find creative ways of bringing different languages into the international and global platforms. We need to move away from the exclusive usage of the English language. Even though I am less sensitive about this in a European context, at a global level, we need to be more sensitive, not less. At this global level, I think that, for instance, we need to have more language facilitators, people that help each other because, as I said before, language excludes. For non-native English speakers it is much more difficult to express themselves clearly and concisely in English and that is a disadvantage we need to be sensitive to.

In IAMCR, we also need to be aware that, with the strengthening of the Chinese academic community, we are facing a fundamental question. What role should Mandarin have in the future of IAMCR? How are we going to integrate this language, spoken by a large part of our membership, in IAMCR? I do not have the answer to that question, but I do think we have to find ways to linguistically reach out to that community and respect their language more. And this starts with small things, right? You know that our Chinese colleagues often choose an English first name, because colleagues from the rest of the world have difficulties remembering their Chinese first name. I really think that we need to do the effort of memorising their Chinese first name and showing our colleagues this kind of respect, at the very basic level. But we need to do more, I believe. This is one of the challenges of a new world order where China has become a prominent player, and where knowledge of the Chinese language is becoming more important. But no answer from me here. Not yet. It is a dialogue we need to have with our Chinese colleagues.



Picture 4: Nico recorded by UnBTV. (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COXCZ5sbzN8>)

Fernando: But do you already have a Chinese name, Nico? Did you choose your Chinese name?

Nico: I think my Chinese colleagues have Chinese names for me, but they refuse to tell me (laughs). Okay, we will have to check out this information after the interview.

Fernando: Nico, tell me, if you find out. Let me know.

Nico: Okay, deal.

Fernando: And looking ahead, Nico, what principles or priorities, beyond the ideas already discussed in this interview, should guide academic cooperation networks in communication studies over the next decade, in the next years? What are your ideas and plans for these possibilities, involving entities and researchers?

Nico: I think that we should defend what we have. We have an academic community which is global and critical. We need to continue to exist in that capacity. We should not take this for granted, as the pressure is mounting. We often refer to the situation in the USA, but I dislike using the USA as an exclusive example of democratic backsliding, because I know that at

the global level, the oppression of academics has a much longer history and there are many other tragic stories of scholars being oppressed, from all over the world. And I am always a bit hesitant to focus too much on the USA because it does injustice, for instance, to how Brazilian scholars and many other scholars in Latin America have had to deal with different dictatorships. These are histories we should not forget. We should remember these histories, with respect for those who courageously resisted these dictatorships, also those in academia. So, let us not focus too much on the USA. Still, the USA is one of the major forces in the world, and we do see academia being jeopardised there, which is deeply disturbing.

In dealing with these forms of academic oppression, we firstly need to protect critical dialogue in global academia, which also means finding ways to interact with scholars from all over the world, also those in countries that are authoritarian and that limit the capacities of their scholars to speak freely and to share our values publicly.

Second, I think we need to become stronger communities of care, but also communities of self-care. We need, as academics, to become much more careful in how much pressure we put on ourselves and on our colleagues. And I think that international associations have important roles to play in making sure that we do not destroy ourselves. That we can function in optimal ways. There is a lot of pressure on academics, partially from other academics, partially from non-academic university management, partially from the world outside academia. In order to cope with this, we need much more solidarity in academia. We need to step in, when people are under threat, and we need to be caring for each other. There needs to be support, for instance, in order to protect our mental health. In some cases, we also need to provide physical support, when colleagues are in need.

In addition to all this, we need to continue to build bridges, or sqridges. We need to continue to reach out. Academia does not stand still. Academia moves all the time, and so does the world. There are new processes, new technologies, new practices, new people, new stakeholders, ... There is an endless reaching out to be done, also in order to bring in new people. And here, in particular, bringing in early-stage scholars is important, but we should not forget the scholars working in areas of the world that are under threat and in areas in the world that are considered to be irrelevant. This is the kind of scholarship where we need to actively intervene, to bring them and keep them into academia.

The last part of my answer—and you will have to forgive me for returning to this topic—

is that we need to experiment more with using different modes of communication. I have, as IAMCR president⁸ but also as an individual scholar, put a lot of emphasis on the importance of multimodal communication, because this is an innovation we need. An awareness of the importance of knowledge communication is a good start, but we need to translate this awareness into practice, and actively deploy different modes of communication, whether this concerns the written text, or the oral lecture, or photography, or film, or dance, or all these different modes that are at our disposal. One of my interests is the audiovisual essay, and I am happy to announce a new project of mine, namely the launch of an audio/visual essay section, in collaboration with the Czech Media Studies Journal.⁹

These initiatives are inspired by the idea that we need to learn to use these different modes of academic communication, and become better communicators, which will allow us to intervene in society, in better ways. Often, we write and publish our article, and then consider it done. And then we move on to the next one. I do not think that that is the kind of scholarship I prefer. I prefer a scholarship that is engaged, that intervenes, that talks to the world and listens to the world, but also that communicates in a way that works within the world, considering all its varieties and complexities.

I should add though that this is not an argument against academic writing. I think that in particular academic books, however difficult they are for non-academics to read, are vital, and we should protect them at all cost. At the same time, we should complement the different types of communication that we are familiar with, with the more novel ones that allow us to say things differently.

Fernando: Would you like to include some reference to slow science and this kind of movements, Nico, to promote more healthy working conditions in the academy, within the academic institutions and outside them?

Nico: The “Slow Science Manifesto” (Slow Science Academy, 2010) is definitely worth checking out. But if this is a question about the research that we do on ourselves ... Yes, there is some relevant material. To promote the work of one of our colleagues: I am happy to recommend Mark Deuze’s (2025) book “Well-Being and Creative Careers”, on psychological

⁸ See, for instance, the work of the IAMCR Multimodal Academic Communication Task Force, at <https://iamcr.org/MCR-report-2025>.

⁹ See <https://medialnistudia.fsv.cuni.cz/en/avessays/>.

health in the creative industries. This book provides us with an entry point to think about how we, in academia, are exposed to logics similar to those in the creative/cultural industries, and how we should take better care of ourselves. Another book that I found really helpful—I actually have next to me, accidentally, because I was still checking it out—is Dafna Lemish’s (2025) “Always an Academic Immigrant”. It is a study on academic nomads: People—academics—who migrate for their academic work. It is a really interesting piece of work, because it gives us an understanding of how we move beyond the restrictions of the nation-state, how we enjoy that privilege of mobility, how we learn from these experiences, but also about the difficulties that these mobilities create.

There is a lot to learn from the research that has already been done, but I also think that, at the same time, we already know how hard these kinds of academic jobs can be. We do witness people having burn-outs. We do see toxic behaviour and harassment. And, to be frank, we do see colleagues committing suicide. We do see this. But apparently, we do not learn, and we do not sufficiently rethink and restructure our academic work environments accordingly. We are also not activist enough, to demand change from the institutions, and from the governments that produce the rules that then create the conditions that are unsustainable. Maybe we should communicate more strongly that we are not lemons that can be squeezed out and thrown away.

It is also up to us, academics, to counter these tendencies. We need to translate the knowledge that we already have into political action, maybe not always in the most traditional sense of the word, also deploying more creative ways to generate change in academia.



Picture 5: Nico during the JLACR interview. (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AN8I6dehcOA>)

Fernando: Nico, maybe to finish, would you like to include anything else that you consider important for this interview and for this edition of the journal of Latin American communication research?

Nico: This is always a difficult question: ‘What do you want to talk about that we did not talk about, after about an hour of talking’ (smiles). I could come up with a few things, if you really want me to, but allow me to say two things. First of all: Thank you for this performance of dialogue. Thank you for giving me a platform, but also for being a platform in enabling these exchanges.

It is also your work that deserves the credit. This means that I have a very warm ‘thank you’ for you, Fernando. And second, because of your leadership in ALAIC, but also because of the work of many of your Latin American colleagues, ALAIC has grown tremendously and has become more than before, even more than before, a highly relevant factor in global academia. You have my warmest congratulations, respect, and admiration for the work that you guys and girls have done. And, of course, all the genders in-between (smiles).

Fernando: And thank you for your lessons, the cooperation, friendship, patience, and truth, Nico. I think it is very important to count on a real and true guy like you in our activities with

this kind of ‘no hard feelings communication’. It is very important, I think, to create and to run these projects together. Please keep in contact with us, because your participation and your activities are very important for us.

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