CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RESEARCH

Edited by Laura Peja, Nico Carpentier, Fausto Colombo, Maria Francesca Murru, Simone Tosoni, Richard Kilborn, Leif Kramp, Risto Kunelius, Anthony McNicholas, Hannu Nieminen, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt

edition lumière

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RESEARCH

Edited by: Laura Peja, Nico Carpentier, Fausto Colombo, Maria Francesca Murru, Simone Tosoni, Richard Kilborn, Leif Kramp, Risto Kunelius, Anthony McNicholas, Hannu Nieminen, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt

edition Lumière
Bremen 2018

Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen National-bibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.ddb.de abrufbar.

ISBN: 978-3-943245-87-5

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION
AND MEDIA RESEARCH

Edited by: Laura Peja, Nico Carpentier, Fausto Colombo, Maria Francesca Murru, Simone Tosoni, Richard Kilborn, Leif Kramp, Risto Kunelius, Anthony McNicholas, Hannu Nieminen, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt
Series: The Researching and Teaching Communication Series

Series editors: Nico Carpentier and Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt

Photographs: François Heinderyckx

Print run: 600 copies

Electronic version accessible at: http://www.researchingcommunication.eu and http://www.comsummerschool.org

The publishing of this book was supported by Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan, Italy) and the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

The 2017 European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School was sponsored by the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan, Italy) and supported by the Department of Communication and Performing Arts of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Almed - graduate School in Media, Communication and Performing Arts, and Sky Italy.

A vindication of academic engagement in the European space

Victor Navarro-Remesal, Ignacio Bergillos

Abstract

In recent years, the European project has faced many threats and crises, but academic-related spaces (such as the Erasmus programme) serve as success stories where we can still hope for a recovery of the European ideal. The consolidation of the European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School invites us to reflect on the core elements that define it not only as a doctoral programme, but also as a facilitator that shapes our professional identity as communication researchers in a shared European space. Thus, the Summer School can be understood as part of the European endeavour itself: an intellectual environment not of *being* but rather of *becoming*, where different scholars "united in diversity" can find common ground and expand their scholarly tools and skills to face problems both distinct and alike. This aim does not come without obstacles: university today seems to be co-opted by neoliberal discourses and changes in academic culture that create high expectations, competition and a difficult work-life balance.

Keywords: ECREA Summer School, PhD Studies, engagement, internationalisation, collaboration, academia, Europe

1. Introduction

This chapter opens a conversation with current and former participants of the Summer School with regard to the shared values and inputs that it has provided to us as young researchers in a challenged Europe. It also follows former discussions at the Summer School book collection on the European university and its neoliberal turn (Carpentier, 2009; Zaloznik and Gaspart, 2011) and being a young academic (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2016). We frame our experience during and after the Summer School as an acknowledgement of its role in our professional development. We put forward three keywords that define it from our point of view: internationalisation, collaboration and engagement. These three values will be defined in light of our experience after Tartu in 2008, which we attended, as well as of some of our colleagues there. In doing so, we use our personal stories as case studies in an autoethnographic exercise, and our perspectives as early career academics as a viewpoint on the becoming of European scholars and European academia itself.

1.1 From SuSo '08 to SuSo '17

Last year's edition of the European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School (henceforth SuSo) closed a circle for us that began ten years ago. In 2008, we attended SuSo in Tartu, Estonia, while in the early stages of our PhDs. Although we studied and lived only 100 kilometres away from each other, it was in Estonia where we first met. Our projects focused on online citizen journalism and mainstream broadcasters (Ignacio) and characters as mediators of player interaction through a formalist approach to videogame fiction (Victor). Interactivity and participation were, thus, our shared interests and the topics of our first conversations. Since then, we have forged a close friendship and we work together in a private centre called CESAG (Center of Higher Education Alberta Giménez) in Palma, Spain. As early career academics, we are aware of the good chances we have had (and the privileges we have experienced) in this, since many of our Spanish colleagues struggle to find a job after their PhD.

In our jobs, we have shared our Summer School experiences with those students with an interest in developing a career in academic research. In 2017, following in our footsteps, one of our former students successfully participated in the Summer School. Guillem Suau graduated in Media Studies at CESAG in 2015 and achieved a Master's Degree in Social Communication at Universitat Pompeu Fabra the year after. He is now a PhD Student in the Department of Communication of the same university and he attended SuSo during the first year of his PhD pro-

gramme. His participation in the ECREA Summer School makes us proud and also invites us to reflect on the reasons that might have helped it to happen. Our careers as young researchers and university lecturers have evolved in a close relationship with the core values of the SuSo project. Not only did it serve as a stimulating environment where we received theoretical and methodological feedback, but it also provided us with an inspiring setting for personal and academic exchange. In Tartu we participated in a new and encouraging way of approaching research, quite different from the standard way of working at our home institutions and their formal, and sometimes stagnating, academia. Although we have had a peripheral involvement with ECREA or other associations linked to it during this decade, we believe that the Summer School and the people whom we met there, both mentors and co-participants, have similarly shaped our vision of what academia ought to be.

The official description of SuSo (as found on its website) is, in this regard, very fitting: "The European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School is a student-centred summer school. In contrast to many other summer schools, the lecturers' main task is not to lecture, but to provide support to the participants in their PhD trajectories." SuSo was, for us, an informal workspace where we could test our research designs and pre-understanding. This nature is described in its goals as well: "The main emphasis of the European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School is on providing structural and individuated PhD-support for young European scholars combined with numerous opportunities for informal dialogues with lecturers and peers." It is useful to bear in mind here two of the four main objectives of the Summer School, as described on its website: a) to provide a strong learning and research environment for PhD students at an internationally renowned research facility with the objective of fostering an optimal exchange between participants from all over Europe; and b) to provide innovative mutual support for doctoral studies in the field of media and communication, with additional organizational support from the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

Based on these objectives, we have tried to retain the values of SuSo to our own professional careers. It is not an easy task to find a balance between achieving these ideals and the expectations of a competitive and changing context in Spanish and European universities. According to Díez Gutiérrez et al. (2014), academia is suffering a triple crisis: of its traditional hegemonic function, of legitimacy and an institutional crisis (2014: 64). This crisis is caused by (and shown in) drastic budget cuts, a rise in public tuition fees, a reduction in scholarships and a reduction in staff combined with a precarization of the workforce in public universities (2014: 9-10). The neoliberal academia interlinked with this crisis is not unique to our country, Spain, nor even to Europe. However, some Spanish critics, such as Enrique Díez Gutiérrez et al. and Remedios Zafra (2017), emphasize the greater

impact of the economic crisis on national grants and investment in research, and especially the lack of generational replacement and professional career plans within Spanish academia. There is a "dual system" divided into an elite of star teachers and a majority of teaching staff in precarious conditions, dependent on continuous renewals by their superiors, poorly paid and overworked, with serious difficulties to maintain a certain amount of academic freedom and independence (2014: 46).

As discussed by Zaloznik and Gaspart (2011), there are growing tensions between the institutional conception of university and its strategies of marketisation, on the one hand, and the goals and hopes of scientists, on the other. These tensions appear in relation to the different conceptualizations of publicness, authority and engagement in the public sphere. While institutional strategies tend to understand their role as being responsible for satisfying the requirements of the Knowledge Society, "the self-understanding (or perhaps aspirations) of many social scientists is represented in the role of the 'scientist as public scholar', addressing public issues, informing public understanding and engaging with the public beyond the pure dissemination of facts" (Zaloznik and Gaspart, 2011: 212). Zafra writes about a "capitalist turn of knowledge" that is chiefly based on systems that seek above all to appear "objective" and to camouflage themselves as "impartial" (2017: 76), translating into simplified data "those aspects of thought that are more complex, ambiguous, nuanced, and even contradictory".

In this context, we propose three values that illustrate the ambivalent and tense relationship with our identities and careers as young researchers: internationalisation, collaboration and engagement. The application of these values in our work and our mindset as lecturers has been negotiated in a context of uncertainty, but taking into account the academic and personal lessons learned during and after SuSo '08.

2. Internationalisation

The first key concept, internationalisation, is a strategic component of many universities in Europe, but also an undefined aspect of some activities that do not necessarily recognize the complex nature of the term. It has become a buzzword and its implementation has been linked with strategies of expansion, innovation and adaptation to the challenges of globalization. For us, the Summer School illustrates the twofold character of internationalisation: it is not only a way of 'going abroad' and creating networking opportunities, but also a personal process rooted in understanding the importance of openness and reception. Internationalisation is, thus, a mind frame. It can put local problems and phenomena in a broader perspective and highlight the interdependencies and connections between different regions of the Union, and of Europe within the world.

Internationalisation was a main point of the Bologna Declaration of 1999, in which at least three out of six objectives were directly related to it. First, the Declaration highlighted the "promotion of mobility" for both students and teachers, specifying the "recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context". The implementation of the plan has created a system that stimulates international collaboration, but which, at times, makes it difficult to incorporate individuals. In a personal communication, Guillem Suau told us that "although universities are establishing more and more agreements to cooperate between them, they fail at conveying the importance of these networks and practices to students". There is an increasingly important administrative and managerial culture that comes with internationalisation programmes. As Carpentier (2009: 318) points out, we need to critically evaluate how the process of Europeanisation has privileged homogenising forces "which can seriously disrupt the balance of our un-balance".

Thus, a focus on internationalisation as a mindset is very much needed to counterbalance its use as an obligation of cognitive capitalism and neoliberal academia. This is something stressed by Anne Kaun, a lecturer at Södertörn University in Stockholm, who attended SuSo '08. In a personal communication, Kaun argued: "I probably wouldn't speak of internationalisation, [it] sounds so bureaucratic and that wasn't my experience of the SuSo at all. I would call it transnational or intercultural experience. It wasn't [so] much the departments and schools we came from but the shared and, at the same time, diverse experiences that were gathered in one spot that made it such a great experience."

Zafra (2017: 81) suggests this distinction as well when she criticises how, nowadays, "researchers who are tempted not to participate in international conferences for a fee, or not to write in academic journals but in books, assume the risk of being excluded by the university evaluating bureaucracy". For her, academic culture, in Spain and worldwide, "is being turned into pre-packaged culture, endorsed by committees that feign being by just "being there", by evaluators as precarious as those who write the articles that they evaluate" (2017: 79-80), thus creating a "culture driven by databases" in which "the appearance is the message, the internationalization the incentive, the indexation the engine". In a similar vein, Díez Gutiérrez et al. (2014: 11) have criticised the Bologna agreement for not being a scientific nor a political reform process but rather one based on *exclusively economical* reasoning: the need to compete with the United States, too, in the education market.

Universities tend to treat internationalisation as something that is needed to remain competitive. Jannie Møller Hartley is a journalist, researcher and lecturer at Roskilde University who attended SuSo '08 with us. In a personal communication she discussed internationalisation with us: "Internationalisation is a buzzword at my university at the moment, as we have probably been quite national previously (all our courses are still only taught in Danish), but still for me as a Journalism re-

searcher I still need to keep a close connection to the field here in Denmark, [since] the field of practice is not as internationalised as academia." For Møller Hartley, internationalisation, collaboration and engagement are "interrelated": "internalisation is impossible without collaboration. Sure, you can go to conferences and present your research, get input and inspiration, but what really matters is the people you meet. It has amazed me how much research moves forward as a consequence of collaborative international work".

3. Collaboration

Møller Hartley told us that "most of the international work I have participated in has come out of the SuSo 2008, the people I met there". Kaun agrees: "I found some of my best academic friends in Tartu also across generations. I think that is something that will last." We defend collaboration as meaningful participation in different spheres related to culture, industry and education, inside and outside academia. The production, exchange and transfer of knowledge and ideas are of central importance in this. Sharing references, advising and even informally peer-reviewing others is part of this second aspect. Collaboration arises from internationalisation but can also happen locally, as in our case, keeping that international mindset: we are citizens of the same state but met at Summer School, and we have been working together in one way or another since we came back from it. We have co-authored texts, coordinated events and even informally peer-reviewed each other's work.

Co-authoring (and working together in specific actions, in general) is thus a big part of collaboration. Since we attended SuSo, we have tried to translate this idea into action. After his research stay at ITU, Victor co-authored a chapter on community practices for an anthology on transgressive games (to be published in 2018 by MIT Press) with Torill Mortensen, Vice Chair of the Digital Games Research section of ECREA. This understanding of collaboration is something we have slowly reflected on since 2008. In a similar vein, Enrique Canovaca, another SuSo '08 participant, sees collaboration as "key to promote transnational projects that provide more global visions", and he considers that SuSo has a delayed effect in this regard: "when I attended the SuSo it was too early for me to understand this". Collaboration also requires solid structures, be they official, informal, stable or project-based. In this regard, our view on collaboration could also be linked to formal engagement between institutions, scholars and dissemination channels. Considering once again the Bologna Declaration, we find that promotion of the "necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regard to curricular development, interinstitutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research" is one of its main objectives.

For Suau, collaboration was "possibly the most important" element of SuSo: "thanks to the experience of the Summer School I have met colleagues who have helped me improve my project by providing software I did not know before as well as suggesting authors and reading that will be very relevant to my work". Suau highlights the final speech of Nico Carpentier, director of the School, who stressed that "collaboration between academics is vital because it allows us to improve the quality of our work in addition to being more productive". The SuSo experience has already led to some changes in Suau's practices: "my time there made me see that we had to try to change things from below and that is why, when I returned to my university, I started working on setting up an association of PhD students in which we can get to know each other, cooperate and help each other in our projects".

4. Engagement

Finally, engagement represents the commitment and recognition of our affective involvement in the practices and activities in which we take part as scholars, teachers and tutors. It is chiefly an affective element. There is a growing discussion about such matters as work-life balance, mentoring, overwork and self-care within academia, and having an extended network of mutual support can be important in that regard. Engagement and affect have an impact on the transfer of knowledge (both to our students and to society in general) and on both our personal becoming as scholars and our collective becoming as European citizens.

Mental health issues, such as burnout, depression and stress, are attracting more attention within academia. A report commissioned by the Royal Society and the Wellcome Trust in the United Kingdom, entitled 'Understanding Mental Health in the Research Environment' (2017), reviews 48 studies and finds that the majority of university staff find their job stressful. A study conducted in Flanders, Belgium, and published in *Research Policy,* reveals that one in two PhD students experiences psychological distress; one in three is at risk of a common psychiatric disorder (Levecque et al., 2017). According to its findings, "most prevalent are feelings of being under constant strain, unhappiness and depression, sleeping problems due to worries, inability to overcome difficulties and not being able to enjoy day-to-day activities".

While these problems need to be solved on a structural level, we see personal engagement as a safety net that can contain their worst effects on scholars, especially early-career academics. "If in academia our work is our life, I think that for surviving it, we need to actively work towards containing it", writes Pruulman-Vengerfeld (2016: 245), "otherwise, we become frustrated victims of a neoliberal "monster" for whom more of everything is always needed". Although these informal networks are formed by scholars, they can act to give our environments and fields a more human

face and to provide a much-needed rest from our work, containing it. In them, we can also negotiate and influence academic culture by discussing it. Pruulman-Vengerfeld (2016: 240) defends the same idea: "I firmly believe that open discussions of mutual expectations are needed to shape academic culture in a favourable direction."

For Canovaca, "personal commitment to academia [in Spain] is complicated if you do not have some contacts". He joins the criticism of scholars like Zafra, who writes of her presence in academia as an "infiltration of difference" against a "disciplinary corset" that oppresses and restricts knowledge, mainly due to "endogamy and intellectual poverty" derived from "places of privilege where everyone looks too much alike and hardly notice that that matters" (2017: 78). Zafra criticised the "homogeneity of those who at the beginning of the 21st century still hold academic power". For Canovaca, SuSo opened up new possibilities in this regard.

Møller Hartley talks about the affective network she found at SuSo: "our career paths have gone in similar directions, we have helped each other, formed networks, applied for money together, co-authored things together, etc. We have been able to support each other, and … although we don't see each other that often, I always feel a quite strong bond with many of the people from that summer-school". Peer review and feedback also acted as a form of personal engagement for Kaun: "I think the set up with peer discussions has taught me to appreciate the investment and time that academics are giving to improve writing and knowledge production at large. It is hard to give good feedback but it is essential for academic knowledge. I think I have learned a lot about valuable feedback."

Belonging, especially as a PhD student, a time when one can feel isolated, was an immaterial reward Møller Hartley found at SuSo '08: "It was also at a time in our lives where we were insecure, just becoming academics, doubting everything and [so] being there with people who were basically the same created an enormous feeling of belonging to a larger plan and group. Especially since the PhD process can be quite lonesome and disturbing at times, it was amazing to have people around who were going through the same [thing at] the same time."

The informal nature of SuSo, according to Møller Hartley, helped to create something that would have been much harder in a fully professional environment: "I think that the collaborative network that came naturally from the summer school would have taken a lot of very difficult work, and might not have happened at all." Once again, Møller Hartley details the scope of this affective, personal network of like-minded scholars she found at SuSo: "I get Christmas cards from Anne [Kaun] in Stockholm and we send pictures of our children. I have gotten to know new people, who were not even at the summer school, but knew [each] other from other places and now some of us are even in the same department. We share hotel rooms at conferences, even now when we don't need to financially. It feels like my academic family."

We are seeing the full extent of the personal network we created at SuSo now, a decade later, while assessing how it has helped us in our lives, but engagement also has immediate benefits for the PhD students who attend the School. Guillem Suau, just a few months after returning from it, compares engagement to networking and "public relations", and for him it was very valuable to meet "other PhD students with similar concerns to mine and with whom to write and publish in the future, design research projects together, and so on". He stresses that at UPF, and especially at CESAG, "they put great emphasis on the importance and value of teamwork and networking".

5. Conclusion: being and becoming an academic in Europe

Without the Summer School experiences, our understanding of academia, with the demands and expectations associated with it, would have been much smaller. While some of the consequences and benefits of attending the SuSo are immediate, there are lasting effects that bloom years later, particularly after finishing one's dissertation. As Møller Hartley explains: "I think I did not really understand how much it meant until now several years later. At the time in 2008 it was just fun, amazing people and good feedback for my project, but it was also a place where I learned and understood the importance of those three concepts, having not thought that much about international conferences, big collaborative research projects. It's all a learning process, and the summer school started some thoughts and some networks, which are kind of materializing now, almost ten years later."

This slow but constant quality of the benefits of attending SuSo matches our understanding of academia and of what an academic is: not a definitive state, but a process. Not a clear *being*, not a state one achieves, but a never-ending *becoming*. As Enright et al. (2017: 1) defend, "there is nothing settled about an academic's identity" and "the process of becoming an academic does not stop because the being has been achieved". In our vindication of academic engagement, we find reasons for optimism, as opposed to a discourse of defeat and fault. Marina Garcés recently warned against the efforts to "preserve" academia and the humanities and instead proposed talking about "Humanities in transition" (2017), as a living space where society and the human experience are constantly analysed and negotiated and where meaning-making can occur. Internationalisation (as a mind frame or an outlook), collaboration (as working together and sharing structures) and engagement (as affective involvement) are key aspects and clear benefits of projects like SuSo, and they can help us all in our personal and collective becoming as academics, as critics of culture, and as European citizens.

References

Carpentier, N. (2009) 'Oscillations between coherence and fragmentation, and between globalisation, glocalisation and translocalisation: The Europeanisation of the Communication and Media Studies discipline', pp. 309-322 in N. Carpentier, P. Pruulman-Vengerfeld, R. Kilborn, T. Olsson, H. Nieminen, E. Sundin, and K. Nordenstreng (Eds.) *Communicative approaches to politics and ethics in Europe.* Tartu: Tartu University Press.

Díez Gutiérrez, E. J., Guamán, A., Ferrer Llop, J., Jorge Alonso, A. (2014) *¿Qué hacemos con la universidad?* Madrid: Akal.

Enright, E., Alfrey, L., Rynne, S.B. (2017) 'Being and becoming an academic in the neoliberal university: a necessary conversation', *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(1): 1-4.

Garcés, M. (2017). *Nueva ilustración radical*. Barcelona: Anagrama.

Guthrie, S., Lichten, C., van Belle, J., Ball, S., Knack, A., Hofman, J. (2017) *Understanding Mental Health in the Research Environment.* Cambridge: RAND Europe.

Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A.,Van der Heyden, J., Gisle, L. (2017) 'Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students', *Research Policy,* 46(4): 868-879.

Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P. (2016) 'Time in Neoliberal academia – How to make the most of it', pp. 239-247 in S. Tosoni, N. Carpentier, M.F. Murru, R. Kilborn, L. Kramp, R. Kunelius, A. McNicholas, T. Olsson and P. Pruulmann-Vengerfeld (Eds.) *Present Scenarios of Media Production and Engagement.* Bremen: Edition Lumière.

Zafra, R. (2017) *El entusiasmo: Precariedad y trabajo creativo en la era digital.* Barcelona: Anagrama.

Založnik, P., Gaspard, J. (2011) 'Social Scientists and the European Neoliberal University: Tensions in Conceptualisations of the Public Role of Universities', pp. 203-215 in I. Tomanic, N. Carpentier, H. Nieminen, P. Pruulmann-Vergerfeld, R. Kilborn, T. Olsson and E. Sundin (Eds.) *Critical Perspectives on the European Mediasphere*. Ljubljana: Zalozba FDV.

Biographies

Ignacio Bergillos. Participant at the 2008 SuSo in Tartu, Estonia ("From iReport to Ureport. Major broadcasters in USA proposing citizen journalism through the net"), Ignacio Bergillos is a lecturer of Media Studies and Journalism at CESAG, Comillas Pontifical University in Palma de Mallorca. He holds a PhD in Audiovisual Communication and Advertising from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. His research interests focus on audience participation, media industries, television and innovation. Some of his work has been published in the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication and Observatorio OBS* Journal.

Email: ibergillos@cesag.org

Victor Navarro-Remesal. Participant at the 2008 SuSo in Tartu, Estonia ("The Role of Non-Avatar Characters in the Interaction Between the Player and the Videogame"), Víctor Navarro-Remesal

holds a PhD in Game Studies and is a lecturer at CESAG (Universidad Pontificia de Comillas) in Palma de Mallorca, where he teaches Interactive Narrative, Videogames and Animated Cinema. His research interests include freedom and ethics in videogames, gêmu or Japanese games and the preservation of videogames. He has published articles and book chapters on these topics, in addition to being a co-author of 'Game & Play: Diseño y análisis del juego, el jugador y el sistema lúdico' (UOC Press, 2015) and the author of 'Libertad dirigida: Una gramática del análisis y diseño de videojuegos' (Shangri-La, 2016).

Email: vnavarro@cesag.org