Episode 13: “Quality in Teaching and Research in Communication Sciences”

[mix of introductory sounds]

Luís Pinto [host]: *Estados do Tempo*. Because quality in teaching and research in Communication Sciences is a basic necessity.

[music]

Hello and welcome to *Estados do Tempo*, the podcast from BIP and Communitas. In this thirteenth episode, we’re joined by three guests from different generations of researchers. We’ll talk about teaching and research in Communication Sciences as the Communication and Society Research Centre celebrates its 25th anniversary.
For this special episode, Madalena Oliveira, Director of the Communication and Society Research Centre, will host.

Madalena Oliveira [moderator]: Funding is a sensitive issue; the pressure to publish and the need to internationalise seem to create a whole range of demands for anyone starting a research career.

Luís Pinto: Our first guest is Cristina Ponte.

Cristina Ponte [guest]: I think our challenge is perhaps to be able to show, in a way that is accessible to a non-academic audience, the importance of thinking about contemporary phenomena from a communication perspective, but in a way that is accessible, as I said, to non-academic audiences.

Luís Pinto: Pedro Jerónimo also joins the conversation.

Pedro Jerónimo [guest]: Bearing in mind the opportunities and the constraints, I would reinforce this idea that, perhaps, there have been more constraints than opportunities, although we keep coming back to this idea of resilience… I think the scientific community in Communication Sciences in Portugal has been able to adapt and reinvent itself.

Luís Pinto: To round off this panel, Marisa Mourão.

Marisa Mourão [guest]: We have to recognise that, in fact, we are at a stage where precarity itself is a reality, both in research and in academic careers. So, it is anything but romantic. Tasks keep piling up, whether you are an early-career or a senior researcher, and that is constant. So, the conditions really aren't the most favourable, but I think it is, in fact, about resilience.

Luís Pinto: Madalena Oliveira is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Sciences at the University of Minho and regularly teaches semiotics, communication and languages, journalism, and journalism and sound. She researches sound culture and radio studies. She is an integrated member of the Communication and Society Research Centre, a research unit which she has directed since April 2022. She is also the director of the journal *Comunicação e Sociedade*.

Cristina Ponte is a prominent figure in media and journalism studies, having completed her PhD in Communication Sciences in 2002. She has been a full professor at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at NOVA University Lisbon since 2019. She has participated in several European Union Horizon 2020 projects, including the *Wise Skills* project, and coordinated the Portuguese team in the EU Kids Online network. She has authored or edited 15 books and published more than 40 peer-reviewed articles in national and international journals. She has also supervised 20 doctoral theses and participated in several COST Action projects focusing on audience transformation and social integration.

Pedro Jerónimo is an assistant researcher at LabCom, the Communication Lab at the University of Beira Interior. He has a PhD in Information and Communication in Digital Platforms, with a thesis on online news production in local newsrooms. He leads

WeTrust.local, the Observatory of Far-Right Political Disinformation, funded by the UBI-CGD programme, and previously led MediaTrust.lab, the Local Social Communication Laboratory for Civic Trust and Literacy, funded by the FCT. He works as an editor and reviewer and is on the editorial boards of several national and international academic journals, including Digital Journalism and Journalism Practice. He also advises the European Fact-Checking Standards Network, co-chairs the Media Production Analysis Working Group at IAMCR, and founded Sopcom's Local and Community Media Working Group. He started his career in local journalism.

Finally, Marisa Mourão holds a PhD in Communication Sciences from the University of Minho and is a visiting assistant professor at the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro. She is an integrated researcher at the Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture, and New Technologies (CICANT), deputy coordinator of Sopcom's Communication and Education Working Group, and vice-chair of ECREA's Children, Youth and Media Section. She coordinated Sopcom's Young Researchers Working Group and edited the journal Comunicando from 2024 to 2026. Her main research interests concern the media and citizenship, particularly media education and media literacy, and children and the media.

Madalena Oliveira: When the Communication and Society Research Centre was founded in 2001, Communication Sciences was still a relatively recent field in Portugal. Today, this field is firmly established in universities, both in educating students and early-career researchers and in scientific work on phenomena central to social life and to understanding a world increasingly mediated by communication.

In this episode of *Estados do Tempo*, we're using CECS's 25th anniversary to look back at how Communication Sciences has developed, the field's opportunities and challenges, the role of research centres, and how science policies have shaped communication studies.

With Cristina Ponte, Pedro Jerónimo, and Marisa Mourão, three academics who, in a way, represent three generations of teachers and researchers, we will discuss the *Estados do Tempo* for Communication Sciences in Portuguese academia.

Welcome, Cristina, Pedro, and Marisa. Although Communication Sciences has a somewhat shorter history in Portugal than in other countries, Brazil, for example, the

field can be said to have grown considerably and relatively rapidly. Today, we have several hundred researchers with PhDs and a high level of activity in terms of scientific output. Cristina Ponte, drawing on your extensive experience, what do you think has driven this growth? In your experience, as the longest-standing of the three guests, what has contributed to this field's development in Portuguese universities?

Cristina Ponte: Good morning, Madalena. Good morning, colleagues Marisa and Pedro. And thank you for the invitation, and congratulations on the 25th anniversary of the Communication and Society Research Centre.

Well, there are many factors. I would say that the main factor behind the *boom* in the number of PhD holders was — and yesterday I was looking back over some figures I had gathered some time ago — that, at NOVA University alone, in our PhD programme in Communication Sciences, we had already awarded more than 100 PhDs by 2018. So, since the programme began — the first PhD programme was launched in 2000 — that gives us 18 years corresponding to this *boom*. But I would say that… perhaps the main factor was the change in the regulations governing academic careers, which require university lecturers in Communication Sciences programmes, as well as in other degree programmes, to hold a PhD, right? We had strong demand from people who needed this qualification, particularly from polytechnic institutes. Many had previously studied at NOVA and completed their undergraduate degrees there, and some had also gone on to complete a master's degree. They then pursued a PhD precisely because of this need. So, that's one factor. The requirements for entering an academic career changed: a PhD became a requirement, so it became necessary to take this qualification into account. Then there was also… Some years ago, almost 30 years ago, when I conducted a study with Professor Mário Mesquita on journalism courses, we identified what we called the miracle of the expansion of journalism and communication courses from the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards. And these courses, not only in the public sector but also in the private sector, needed to have teaching staff, didn't they? In particular. And this also meant that, in conjunction with what I mentioned earlier, many private institutions, in particular, needed to account for new areas of communication, such as marketing, public relations, advertising, audiovisual media, and multimedia. So, the launch of many courses in this field also meant that the lecturers recruited were preferably expected to

hold PhDs in Communication Sciences, which is a very… It's an umbrella term, isn't it? It's a very broad field. We believe, and I think we all agree, that Communication Sciences has a theoretical foundation that runs across several areas of specialisation, but those areas also have their own particular characteristics. And, on the other hand, just… That's it. There are always many more factors. I'm also thinking of a significant number of journalism professionals who later in their careers went on to do PhDs in Communication.

So, it's difficult to identify just one factor, but I would say that the main one was perhaps the requirement to hold a PhD for professional reasons. Another interesting aspect was how polytechnic institutes, in particular, built on fields that had previously been important in attracting students, such as education. As student demand for these fields declined, they also turned towards areas of communication, such as sociocultural communication and cultural activities. So, I would say there were many factors, but perhaps, as I said, the one I would highlight most is the transformation of the university education system, of the higher education system, which made a PhD an almost compulsory requirement, as I mentioned. I don't know, and I think it would be interesting perhaps to conduct a survey of everyone who has completed a PhD in Communication Sciences to see where they are now and how many are outside universities. I have no idea, so I wouldn't want to venture a figure, but my impression is that it would be a minority.

Madalena Oliveira: Cristina has essentially been talking about factors that are fundamental to the university system itself, including explaining why so many researchers have sought to undertake PhDs. In any case, other factors may also relate to the transformation of the very object of study, in a journey that has taken us from traditional media to the internet, social media, digital platforms, and now even artificial intelligence. Pedro Jerónimo, do you also think the speed at which the object of study has evolved has contributed to an intensification of research in Communication Sciences?

Pedro Jerónimo: Hello! I'd also like to start by greeting my fellow panellists and congratulating you on CECS's 25th anniversary.

Yes. Clearly, technology is always a factor. Looking back on my academic and research career, I remember that my work has focused mainly on the intersection of technology and journalism, specifically within Communication Sciences. And, in fact, we can see that whenever something new emerges or there is a technological change, there is always… it always sparks greater research interest, not only in Communication Sciences, but I would also emphasise the importance of Communication Sciences in examining these developments.

We now have the example of artificial intelligence, as has been mentioned. We know it isn't something new, but it has become more accessible and has been expanding very rapidly. It has attracted interest mainly from Computer Science. Still, Communication Sciences also need to examine it, because we're talking about a technology that affects different fields within Communication Sciences… it impacts cinema, advertising, journalism, and all the other areas that make up Communication Sciences. So, I'd like to emphasise one point: technology is important, and these transformations — returning once again to the example of artificial intelligence, which we're now experiencing — can sometimes push Communication Sciences to the margins. If we think of artificial intelligence and technology as objects of study, they have… I agree they have accelerated this research interest, but they can also sideline Communication Sciences as a field that might actually be at the forefront of studying this phenomenon.

Obviously, I'm biased in saying this, but I disagree with that tendency, because we're talking about the importance of examining Communication Sciences' role in mediation, as mentioned in the introduction. And, above all… I'm thinking here of a specific area that has also been growing within Communication Sciences in recent years, namely media literacy, alongside digital literacy. And, for example, thinking of an even more concrete and more recent issue in our country's social life — and perhaps I mention this because I have two young children — the question of banning mobile phones, more specifically smartphones, in schools. Now, this isn't just a technological issue, even though technology is at its centre. Above all, we need to reflect and conduct research so we can develop evidence-based public policies that help society understand the best way to deal with this. First, by encouraging a critical perspective and the critical use of these kinds of devices by people in this particular context and at this age, and by considering the consequences. And, of course, other scientific fields come into play here,

Psychology and others. But as far as… When I think about Communication Sciences, I believe they have a very important contribution to make.

To sum up my contribution: technology has helped accelerate things, and there is indeed always a sense of fascination whenever something new emerges. For that reason, it makes perfect sense for Communication Sciences to examine these transformations too and contribute, because only in this way can we build a better-informed and more aware society, including of the impacts these technologies are having. Sometimes we cannot anticipate those impacts, but through this ongoing research we can better understand them and, at the very least, strive to become a better society.

Madalena Oliveira: From what Pedro has been telling us, this is indeed a complex and very broad field of knowledge. However, those who have worked in this field longer have often complained, to some extent, about the difficulty of achieving public recognition for Communication Sciences, particularly compared with other scientific disciplines.

Marisa, given that you have the most recent experience of the three guests, is there still a struggle to assert the relevance of Communication Sciences in today's society?

Marisa Mourão: Hello, everyone. Naturally, I'd like to start by congratulating CECS and everyone who has contributed to its development, thanking you for inviting me to join you today, and, of course, greeting my fellow panellists.

I think Communication Sciences have long suffered from this problem: they are not sufficiently recognised within the broader Social Sciences and Humanities, are they? This isn't something unique to Communication Sciences.

I would say that Communication Sciences are still struggling to gain recognition today, but I don't think this is solely a matter of institutional recognition. I also think there may be a lack of public recognition, and that, to some extent, this may be partly our own responsibility, but also a consequence of science policy, isn't it? Because, in fact, science is measured not only by what we publish, but also by what we do for the community. So public recognition must also come from, or at least depend on, what we can do for the communities around us. In that respect, I would say we have two problems here: the traditional lack of recognition within the Social Sciences and Humanities, compared with

the Exact Sciences in academia, and, at the same time, this lack of public recognition of what Communication Sciences can actually do for the community.

Of course, we can argue that, increasingly, and Pedro was talking about some of the issues on the public agenda, these do show, to some extent, that people recognise what Communication Sciences can contribute to the community. But the scientific community does, in fact, have to contribute so the public can recognise this. I don't think the question is simply whether we are recognised in comparison with other scientific disciplines within academia. I think we increasingly need to ask whether there is genuine public recognition, whether the community recognises the need for Communication Sciences in the development of those very communities.

Madalena Oliveira: Pedro, might this recognition be more susceptible to trends, and to the concerns that prevail at any given moment?

Pedro Jerónimo: Yes. I was listening to Marisa and, thinking back on what I said earlier, we had the issue of artificial intelligence. But I'm also reminded of something that has become increasingly prominent, and more so in our country… Internationally, this has been going on for much longer, but here it intensified particularly from 2019 onwards, when a new party entered the Portuguese Parliament. And something that has marked its trajectory considerably in terms of communication, information and, above all, disinformation. We know that disinformation is something… it is a phenomenon that is not new either; it has always existed. But since Trump's first election in 2016, we've seen a growing trend, not only in this respect, but also alongside technological developments… And if we bring these two dimensions, or realities, together — disinformation on the one hand and artificial intelligence on the other — we're talking about a level of sophistication in editing and manipulating information that can have serious consequences. I'm also thinking, still in the context of disinformation, of what was perhaps the first instance on a significant scale. It wasn't very widespread, but it was noteworthy. I remember colleagues at ISCTE who studied this in the context of the pandemic… The first time something like this occurred on a more or less widespread scale in Portugal involved deepfakes, with audio recordings circulating in WhatsApp groups. Although this wasn't as widespread in Portugal as in other countries, such as

Brazil and the United States, audio clips were shared on WhatsApp, spreading disinformation. How do we verify it? So, here we have… These aren't necessarily trends, because the two examples we've discussed — artificial intelligence on the one hand and disinformation on the other — are not new. But, also greatly fuelled by technological growth and development, they have led to an increase not only in the production but also in the quantity of information and content circulating. And, of course, Communication Sciences have naturally not shied away from following these phenomena and studying them, looking at their implications for different areas, as I mentioned: journalism, advertising and the various other fields.

Madalena Oliveira: Because of the complexity of their subject matter, or because they cut across so many different aspects of life, Communication Sciences are, by definition, interdisciplinary fields. They are pluralistic disciplines, perhaps more so than Sociology — or certainly more so than Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy or Mathematics, for example. They engage with other areas of knowledge and other academic disciplines. Cristina, is transdisciplinarity or interdisciplinarity an opportunity or a constraint when it comes to establishing the field's identity?

Cristina Ponte: Well, I was listening to Marisa and Pedro and thinking that we have a problem at the heart of our identity. On the one hand, there's communication. Communication is an everyday word. I imagine we can all remember students arriving at university and choosing Communication Sciences because, as they said, "I chose this degree because I like communicating". So it's something that seems natural and accessible, almost a matter of personal characteristics, of personality. And we know that this is a rather naïve attitude. But when people ask me what I teach, I admit that I find it somewhat difficult to explain what I teach if I say that I teach Communication Sciences. It's something that isn't… This also has to do with the fact that the field is relatively new, but here I would associate both its novelty and its broad designation with something Marisa mentioned. The Social Sciences and Humanities are seen as secondary to the Life Sciences or the Exact Sciences, to the sciences associated with technological development. In short, they tend to be undervalued. For example, if we look at the science pages, or the science stories published in the media, or even the programme "90

Segundos de Ciência" (90 Seconds of Science), and consider how often we come across scientific topics that do not belong to the Life Sciences or to fields related to technological development — the Life Sciences are what I come across most often — we find very few references to the Social Sciences and to the research we conduct, particularly research involving audiences: what people do, how people live in this environment saturated with communication and media. I think it helps to consider this in a particular way, and I agree that it is impossible to isolate Communication Sciences from the broader scientific landscape, isn't it? We can see that it is impossible to say, "This is where Communication Sciences begin, and this is where they end." But I think it is important to keep in mind a framework I often use when thinking about communication. It comes from Sociology itself, and from the sociologist Norbert Elias, who argues that the separation between the individual and society is impossible and does not exist. And he talks about… The concept he works with is that of configurations between the individual and the surrounding environment. In this sense, I think the concept of social configuration, applied to the field of communication, is a very interesting way of operationalising this approach, so to speak. Here we can see the connections with other areas of knowledge. For example, in the framework of communicative figurations, the authors who have worked on this, Andreas Hepp and Uwe Hasebrink, identify the need to consider, in any communication situation, whether at an interpersonal level, within a family, a group of friends, a company or an institution, who the actors involved are and what roles they play. Here, we see a strong connection to Sociology. We also need to consider their communication practices, in terms of language, both verbal and non-verbal, and here we see an entire field connected with Linguistics. Another aspect is the framework of values underpinning that domain, and here we see links to all the work related to culture: deep-seated cultures and the values that lie beneath the surface are deeply rooted and often almost invisible because they have become so naturalised. This framework can be applied to any field, not dogmatically, but creatively, by relating it bidirectionally to the media environment. Pedro spoke a lot earlier about technology, and I couldn't agree more, particularly because it is an area in which I have done a great deal of research: specifically, the relationship between young people and technology. If we think about youth culture within this framework, considering young people as actors, their relationships with one

another, their language practices and everything that characterises this stage of life — adolescence and youth — in relation to the media offerings available and the incentives provided by the platforms they use, encouraging them to explore, engage with, identify with and reveal themselves through these platforms, and then the downstream consequences of all this… We can see that this is a very rich framework that brings together a wide range of fields. There is one area we haven't mentioned yet, but which is obviously fundamental: political economy, which underpins all of this, doesn't it? I think our challenge may not be… I don't know; perhaps it is to find ways to show, in a way that is accessible to non-academic audiences, why it is important to think about contemporary phenomena from a communication perspective. Because I think academic publications are undoubtedly very important, but if we stay focused solely on our own academic world, we cannot show audiences with other concerns why this knowledge matters or why it should inform public policy, as Marisa was also saying.

Madalena Oliveira: Marisa, you have worked, and perhaps still do, very closely with issues relating to literacy. So, when it comes to this relationship with audiences, is a certain level of literacy also needed to understand Communication Sciences?

Marisa Mourão: Perhaps a certain level of literacy is needed to understand any science, I would say. Scientific literacy matters in every field. What matters, though, is for everyone to recognise that Communication Sciences are indeed a science, because when people talk about scientific literacy, some may well think that Communication Sciences in particular, and the Social Sciences more broadly, do not fall within its scope. So I see two issues here. Scientific literacy is necessary, but we also need public awareness of the importance of Communication Sciences. And this public awareness also depends on the work we can do with communities. I think the issue is the same one Cristina was talking about earlier: we really need to communicate… I'm not sure "communicating" is the right way to put it. I've just used that word, but perhaps it isn't about communicating; it's more about creating knowledge with or alongside people. Because, in fact, we are not exactly the holders of the truth, and very probably, when we engage with communities, we may realise we can adjust our work to ensure our

contribution is as beneficial as possible. Only then, in fact, can there be an understanding between the community and academia.
So I don't think that, although we may consider that there is an issue of awareness within the broader framework of literacy, the first priority is public awareness and the development of knowledge that must, first and foremost, stem from the work we do.

Madalena Oliveira: Has this cross-cutting nature, this relationship with other sciences and other fields of knowledge, and this need for public recognition — or, in a way, this awareness that communication is present in everyone's lives and across so many different dimensions of our lives – been an opportunity or a constraint when it comes to funding? Pedro Jerónimo.

Pedro Jerónimo: I think it was Cristina who mentioned one of the issues, namely the economy. Cristina brought that up. And, of course, when she did, I immediately thought of funding, which is critical. When we think about research, I see it as both an opportunity and a constraint. When we have funding, it is naturally an opportunity. And one of the things they ask of us, or encourage us to do — I'm thinking specifically of something that has come up recently, although I accept that this may be a topic for later — concerns the funding of research centres that have recently been evaluated. One thing they always ask us about is the diversity of our funding sources, and the need to seek out different sources. As we know, here in Portugal, we are heavily dependent on what was the FCT, now the newly established AI2, whose future remains to be seen. But the point is that funding is clearly a critical issue. When we have it, it's an opportunity because it lets us advance knowledge. When we don't have it, it is a constraint; and when our budgets are cut, that is also a constraint.
Above all, because science cannot be done without people. And, naturally, people don't live… Of course, air is essential to human existence, but people cannot live on air alone. Funding is essential. So I would say that, while I recognise both sides of the argument — opportunity and constraint — when I look at the Portuguese context, I think funding has been more of a constraint than an opportunity. That said, and going back a little to what we were discussing earlier, I recognise the rapid growth of Communication Sciences in

Portugal and share this view… The growth and internationalisation of the work that has been conducted.

I remember… I started my PhD, which we could say marked my entry into academia, and I also agree with what Cristina was saying a little earlier. I think one critical factor behind the increase in the number of PhDs was the requirement to hold one. I saw this straight away in 2009 and 2010, when I started my PhD: the vast majority of people on the programme were colleagues who were already teaching at a particular institution and had been required to complete a PhD. But this also brought an opportunity, one that I have followed and witnessed: rapid growth, as well as internationalisation. I remember that, back in 2009 and 2010, during those first years of my PhD, if I think about international conferences and compare them with the situation today, over the last few years, there is clearly a greater presence of colleagues from Portugal, or affiliated with Portuguese institutions, presenting papers and research at leading conferences in different areas of Communication Sciences outside Portugal, and establishing networks with leading researchers in those fields. So I think that, bearing both the opportunities and the constraints in mind, I would reinforce the idea that funding has probably been more of a constraint than an opportunity. That said, we hear a great deal about resilience, and I think the Communication Sciences research community in Portugal has shown that it can adapt and reinvent itself. These may sound like clichés, but the truth is that it has managed to adapt to these successive funding constraints, which are a critical issue for doing science from Portugal and in Portugal. And we can see this in what I've just been describing: the field has grown, internationalised, and gained recognition from our peers abroad. So the funding constraint is likely to remain — in fact, I think it has been a constant over the years — but I think we have shown we can manage to do more with less. Take the example of the research unit I'm part of, and, of course, LabCom, which faced a funding cut. The challenge is to adapt, to find ways of continuing to do the work well despite the reduced resources, by seeking other sources of funding while carrying on with the work.

Madalena Oliveira: Funding is a sensitive issue. The pressure to publish and the need to internationalise seem to create a whole range of demands for anyone starting a research

career. Marisa, what are the conditions like for researchers in this field when it comes to joining academia and building a career?

Marisa Mourão: Well, I think the conditions are anything but romantic, let's put it that way. But despite these rather unromantic conditions, I think it comes down to what early-career researchers, as well as senior researchers, consider important. And, in fact, although conditions are not always favourable, we have been very resilient, to use the word Pedro Jerónimo has just used. I think this resilience is particularly important for early-career researchers, because we often find ourselves caught between what is actually measured and what we ourselves consider relevant. There is a great deal of talk about social impact, university outreach, knowledge transfer and so on. But what is actually measured are publication indicators and citations. So, in reality, those starting their careers face the challenge of constantly weighing things up, and this is not necessarily guided by what we might consider relevant. And I think the biggest issue here is that, beyond this constant balancing act and this ongoing pressure, we also have to recognise that we are at a point where precarity itself is a reality in research and in academic careers. So, it is anything but romantic. There is an ever-increasing accumulation of tasks, whether you are an early-career or a senior researcher, and this is a constant. So the conditions are certainly not the most favourable, but I think, once again, it is a question of resilience.

Madalena Oliveira: What role can research centres play in supporting a new generation of researchers, Cristina Ponte?

Cristina Ponte: I think they can play a very important role, and they have indeed been playing that role. To begin with, several research centres in Portugal have been evaluated. Interestingly, this evaluation considered various factors and was carried out by an international panel. It considered not only what we might call scientific output, but also engagement with society, which I think is an important aspect, as well as the recognition that research centres have gained. These centres bring together several different areas… They are not monolithic. I can speak from the perspective of the research centre I coordinated for four years, ICNOVA, but I think the same is true of

other research centres. We have a very strong component in the arts, something we haven't discussed yet: the connection between Communication Sciences and the whole field of the arts and artistic creation, in its various forms. Strategic communication is also an important area, perhaps a more recent one at NOVA than, for example, culture and the arts. So these are very diverse spaces, and I think the challenge for research centres is to be able to build a shared culture by bringing together different generations and different areas of knowledge, and to identify what that culture is and what connects us across this diversity.

Speaking from our experience at ICNOVA, I think developing a strategic plan on this basis was a real challenge: identifying, beyond our specific areas, what brought us together. And then putting in place policies to support early-career researchers and PhD students, providing financial support whenever possible, but also recognising their work and ensuring that authorship is properly acknowledged. In other words, absolutely avoiding an extractive approach. Research centres should be spaces where people feel they are progressing together and building this scientific culture, as well as a connection with society. This may sound appealing and easy, but it isn't, because the university environment itself is highly individualistic, especially in career progression and competition for available positions. So we cannot assume that research centres exist separately from all the competition in the academic world. But I think making an effort to foster this kind of environment, creating a culture of internal communication and a shared internal culture that cuts across the different research topics, is a real challenge. And may I just mention one initiative we tried? Other research centres may well have done something similar: organising a retreat, bringing researchers together and spending two days away from our usual environment, reflecting on who we are and where we are going, preferably in an inspiring place. I think this was very important for us, both in getting to know one another better — which is also relevant — and in identifying what brings us together, what distinguishes us, but above all what constitutes our core identity across the different generations.

Madalena Oliveira: Competition is also a sensitive issue when we talk about the legitimacy of the field and, in a way, about the pursuit of funding, which forces us to compete with one another to see who can achieve the best results. Despite this, Pedro

Jerónimo, is it possible to work collaboratively, and can that collaboration also help strengthen the field, or not?

Pedro Jerónimo: That question has been put to someone who is clearly an advocate of networking. In fact, I remember that from my very first year as a PhD student, I was already involved in this kind of work, and I fully agree with what Cristina has just said, as well as with Marisa's comments. Both have essentially expressed the idea of creating a scientific community through research centres. It may sound romantic, but it is necessary: research centres should be more than places where publications are counted and projects submitted. I think networking is necessary and fundamental. And this sharing of knowledge between different generations is… I experienced it straight away; I was lucky. In my first year of my PhD, at a conference at the University of Porto, a more senior colleague invited me to join a research network. I became part of a network that is still active today, made up predominantly of colleagues from different countries across the Euro-American sphere. I think this is fundamental. In the Portuguese context, perhaps we might expect it to be more difficult, because we are a small country... If we think about Communication Sciences, there were, if I remember correctly, five research centres whose core area was Communication Sciences in the most recent evaluation. Other centres naturally conduct research along these lines, but they are not evaluated by that panel. One might therefore expect some difficulty in working together. But from what I have witnessed over all these years, I think it is possible. Of course, it often happens through individual initiative, with researchers reaching out to colleagues elsewhere who share their research interests... In other words, in the Portuguese context, some centres have established research track records in particular areas and are known for that work, but they do not bring together everyone interested in those areas. So networking makes sense. I can't resist picking up on a point that has already been raised here, namely technology and artificial intelligence. I'd like to mention a recent example that worked well, a successful example of networking and collaboration between colleagues from different institutions and research units in Portugal, where the research had an impact on public policy. I'm referring to the study presented almost a year ago, this coming December, if I'm not mistaken: the *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence in Journalism*. Researchers from the four institutions represented here were

involved. It was led by NOVA University Lisbon and included colleagues from UTAD, the University of Minho and the University of Beira Interior, as well as from other research units. This is just one recent example of how we can work together on relevant topics. And I think this kind of networking makes sense not only for research itself, but also in relation to a point Marisa raised, which I think we, as the Communication Sciences research community, could perhaps address more effectively. Some centres may be doing this better than others, but collectively, as a community, we have a point of convergence, for example, in SOPCOM... Perhaps we need to be more visible in the public sphere and communicate more accessibly with non-specialist audiences, rather than limiting ourselves to the academic structures and practices we know so well, including the need to publish in journals. Opinion pieces in the media and media appearances, in whatever format, are one way to become more visible and communicate what we do. This would not only increase visibility for our work but, above all, reinforce the importance of the issues being studied and why they matter to the community.

Naturally, when a news story breaks, science communication becomes important. An initiative like this podcast, which has already been mentioned, can help keep more people engaged with the importance of these topics by reaching a wider audience. The programme “90 Segundos de Ciência” is another example: it gives people an insight into the work being done across the country. And then there are discussion programmes, such as “Sociedade Civil”, which cover a wide range of topics and rarely feature a subject without someone from academia contributing. These are opportunities to talk about the research being conducted and why it matters to society.

When it comes to anything that affects communication, I think we perhaps need to be more present in the public sphere, not only to reinforce this message but also to take a more active public stance. I recently came across something very briefly on Instagram involving a Brazilian university. A particular issue was affecting the community and, more specifically, journalists directly. Researchers and journalism lecturers came together and issued a collective public statement. Perhaps this is another way of transferring knowledge and showing the public that there is a group of people whose work involves researching, reflecting on, discussing and analysing issues that matter and affect people’s lives. I think these are avenues we could explore.

Cristina Ponte: I was listening to Pedro and thinking about precisely the opportunities and challenges involved in this communication, as has been pointed out here, right? I think opinion pieces on topics that are currently in the public eye offer researchers in the field an opportunity to have their articles selected and published. I'm thinking, for example, of technology, bans and the challenges posed by artificial intelligence. These are certainly appealing topics. But I would also draw attention to a certain risk that sometimes arises with some of the programmes we are invited to appear on. We don't negotiate the terms of our participation, and then the way our contributions are presented strips them of their meaning and relevance.

Madalena Oliveira: Visibility is indeed another important issue. However, as Pedro mentioned earlier, an association's role is not limited to this kind of public engagement. What other roles can we expect scientific associations such as SOPCOM to play? Marisa Mourão.

Marisa Mourão: Perhaps I'll start with an issue that is particularly close to me, namely early-career researchers. SOPCOM is a particularly good example in this respect, because its Early-Career Researchers Working Group is very active. So I think that, first and foremost, one of its roles is to build a community, provide opportunities for mentoring, and foster dialogue among peers so early-career researchers can build networks of contacts. I would also say it is a space for sharing, whether through the Early-Career Researchers Working Group or any other working group. A scientific association must be something that allows science to be more than the work of an individual researcher, because science cannot be carried out by isolated researchers or institutions. A scientific association must also play this role of building a community, creating a space for sharing and a network for collaboration, and, ultimately, giving the community a voice. And the truth is that, in this respect, the Communication Sciences community has a certain weakness in its ability to make itself heard by public funding bodies. So this must also be one of a scientific association's roles. But, first and foremost, its role will always be to bring the community together and create a sense of cohesion,

even though our fields are always very diverse, including within Communication Sciences.

Madalena Oliveira: We're approaching the end of our allotted time for this podcast. I have one final question, which I think we can put to all three of our guests. What challenges should be at the top of the agenda for Communication Sciences as an area of academic work? Pedro Jerónimo.

Pedro Jerónimo: Challenges. And, to be more specific, at the top of the agenda: I think I would have to go back to one critical point, because it ultimately affects everything else we've discussed: careers, stability and management. It's what Cristina was talking about — the economy. It's funding. And, above all… Well, funding is a rather broad term. I think we need… Because what we've been experiencing is a series of abrupt interruptions. I'm thinking specifically of our main… what has been the main source of funding for science in Portugal, the FCT. Funding policies have, essentially, been interrupted abruptly. Sometimes funding is allocated annually, and then the government changes and cuts it off. As a Communication Sciences community, we are challenged to study phenomena that have ongoing, continuous impacts. But then, what drives our work and determines how research centres operate… The resources they have, and above all, the human resources they can employ. Which, naturally, determines whether research can be carried out. I think we need stable basic funding arrangements. Ultimately, this would allow research centres — to use Marisa's words — to become places where researchers can meet and come together, and where they have a stable basis for their work. They need that funding framework in place, whether for three years, five years, or whatever the period may be. But they need to know that they will have that funding throughout that period, rather than having the kind of interruptions we've been experiencing. Although I have much less experience in academia than Cristina, I've been in it for around 17 years now, and I've witnessed several upheavals like the ones I'm describing. So I would say that, at the top of the agenda, there should be greater stability in science funding policies and planning in Portugal.

Madalena Oliveira: Cristina Ponte, what do we need for the next 25 years?

Cristina Ponte: Well, the outlook is rather gloomy, isn't it? Right, and here we are, back to political economy, right? The political economy of the media, the economy and the trends towards neoliberal ideological orientations, and, on the other hand, nationalism. We are living through a period which, perhaps looking back to the early days of CECS, in 2001, none of us could have imagined we would be living through the times we are experiencing now, times that bring with them many dark clouds.

The world is extremely complex. We are witnessing, as I say, new and challenging phenomena. I think that, to respond to them, one thing is very important — something that hasn't come up here yet, and perhaps that is no coincidence: adopting a multidisciplinary approach. Being able to work with others and build a shared foundation — what Pedro was talking about — is the importance of networks. Networks are spaces where people from cognitive sciences, a very important field nowadays, can work alongside people from media studies, information technology, and computing. There is a whole range of different fields that we cannot… and nor is it desirable for us to take an imperialistic view that we can be self-sufficient in conducting research and generating knowledge in this area. But I think that, in terms of research themes, I agree with everything that has been said about career precarity and, from the point of view of, let's say, career precarity and the funding difficulties faced by institutions, everything Pedro and Marisa have pointed out. I have been retired since last year, and so this issue, if I am sensitive to it, certainly… I see my colleagues, young researchers and lecturers at the beginning and middle stages of their careers, facing these constraints. But, from the point of view of research themes, I think one issue concerns us all and calls for precisely this multidisciplinary approach: the question of how technology and human beings are interacting and giving rise to forms of artificial intelligence, both generative AI and the forms that preceded it, which rely so heavily on algorithmic associations. So, I think this relationship between humans and machines, surveillance, surveillance societies and all these environments of control are issues that seem very relevant and very urgent for us to think about. And to think about what Marisa mentioned, and what has been referred to several times throughout this discussion: the importance of developing literacies in these areas, as well as taking political action to demand that technology companies be

subject to regulation and constraints, rather than allowing everything to be governed solely by profit and competition among the *big five*.

Madalena Oliveira: In terms of motivation, what can still inspire younger generations? Marisa Mourão.

Marisa Mourão: I think people can only be motivated if we continue to believe that what we do is relevant. And perhaps, to maintain that motivation, we need to connect this to the issues Pedro and Cristina were discussing, because there are indeed topics that seem important to us, but without funding, we can't research them. And I would say the issue goes even further than that: our research agendas are not usually shaped by what we consider relevant. Our agendas are often shaped by what seems to us to be, essentially, the right opportunity. Because it is about what might work to our advantage. So, when agendas are no longer defined by us, there is naturally a risk of thematic uniformity, less attention being paid to local issues that may seem more relevant to us, and a reduction in long-term research. So, motivation, I think, always depends on our feeling that we are genuinely doing something that fulfils us but also serves a wider purpose, because I believe those who devote themselves to our profession do so with that aim in mind. And as we maintain that motivation, we remain resilient, because that may be the only way forward. The conditions are not ideal, but with that motivation, perhaps it is just about enough.

Madalena Oliveira: Cristina Ponte, Pedro Jerónimo and Marisa Mourão, thank you very much for taking part in this discussion. Three different paths, three different perspectives, yet converging on a field that is perhaps more indispensable today than ever. We have talked about tensions, struggles for recognition, and the breadth and cross-cutting nature of a field that is, above all, a meeting point for several disciplines. In this episode of the *Estados do Tempo* podcast, we have looked back at the development of Communication Sciences in Portugal, at a particularly symbolic moment for CECS, which celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2026.

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Luís Pinto: That was episode 13 of *Estados do Tempo*, a podcast by BIP, the Barometer for Information Quality, and Communitas, which also marks the 25th anniversary of the Communication and Society Research Centre. Recording, editing and post-production were handled by Pedro Gaspar; the discussion was moderated by Madalena Oliveira, who this time brought Cristina Ponte, Pedro Jerónimo and Marisa Mourão together in the studio. Curated by Tiago Estevão, produced by Luís Loureiro and presented by Luís Pinto. Thank you for listening.
We look forward to having you with us again next month for another edition of *Estados do Tempo*.

[closing music]