

CICANT review meeting 18 November 2019

The Centre for Research in Applied Communication, Culture, and New Technologies - Universidade Lusófona

REPORT of External Advisory Board Visit

18 December 2019

1. Introduction

We appreciated the opportunity to discuss the past, present and future of CICANT with so many team members during these meetings on 18 November 2019. We felt very welcome and we were impressed by the range of research carried out at CICANT, the collegial atmosphere, the doctoral culture and also by the facilities of the Centre.

On the basis of the conversations we had with staff and students, we have produced a short overview on the basis of a SWOT analysis structure, to help in guiding the future developments of CICANT. This table can be used to generate conversations within CICANT, and we have provided a limited list of questions that we either identified on the day in our meetings, or that sum up our collective impression of the visit.

Of course, as we only had a brief encounter with the inner workings of CICANT, our analysis (and report) has its limits, and should be seen as a contribution to an ongoing conversation. We look forward to continuing that conversation as CICANT works towards realising its strategy in the years to come.

2. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad and compelling range of research activities, from media production to media understanding, from literacies to the social history of aesthetics, from film to immersive media to educational gaming • Innovative approaches and projects, often combining theory and practice in a way that does justice to both • Activities to develop the national-language strength in a translingual context • Theory is integrated into applied research focus, allowing for a genuine theory-practice link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of an intellectual mission, resulting in overemphasis on technical objectives (created without the support of the intellectual mission) • The three units are looking for internal coherence, and their unit's missions, which needs to be established through an open and internal dialogue. Now there might be a 'false sense' of unity/identity • Theoretical perspectives clearly exist, but are not made visible to the outside world. The commitment to

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdisciplinary approach • Strong, established group, keen on collaborating, with good social dynamics and research enjoyment • Clear vision for growth, which is clearly legitimated • Strong and solid financial backbone • Clear links to industry and civil society • Highly supportive PhD group, within a (fairly) well-developed structure 	<p>theory is there, but needs to be made explicit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of a transversal (cross-unit) structure for 1/theory, 2/ethics and 3/knowledge sharing. This might include both teaching and research • A bit locked in the "small centre" definition, causing defensive responses • The international appeal for students/researchers might not be that strong, and there is a need for a more creative internationalization strategy, making CICANT more visible (e.g., residencies, visiting scholars, ...) • PhD skills and methods training could be enhanced, without being at the expense of the theoretical training
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for growth • Opportunities for internationalisation, via international research cooperation, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus Plus, etc. • Clear strengths in the study of movement, gaming, social history of aesthetics • Building an internal structure that is supportive and still respectful of thematic diversity • Becoming an example of a high-quality applied research centre, a centre of expertise in knowledge sharing and a critical friend of creative industry (which is taking off in Portugal now). The definition of “applied” can certainly include “critical”. • Enhance the learning experience for doctoral students by emphasising the “apprentice” aspect of doctoral study: the skills needed to 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding cuts after 2024. There is a window to establish CICANT visibly on the international stage and this opportunity must not be missed. The next four years will be crucial. • Development of a too strong internal structure / straight-jacket, which limits internal diversity and research pleasure, and thus ultimately success and growth • The label of "applied research" creates stereotypes that might limit opportunities (unjustly) • Dependency on external contexts (e.g., for internationalization of research/teaching, PhD training, etc.)

become a researcher/lecturer/academic could have more emphasis in the taught program.	
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

3. Questions for further conversations

The topic raised here can all be developed further. We have formulated a number of questions that might form the beginning of a conversation within CICANT.

1. Intellectual mission: which domains does CICANT want to excel, and be a (the?) reference point? What is the intellectual mission that meaningfully contextualises the richness of the research done in the Centre?
2. In this context the framing of the activities of CICANT is significant. We noticed the use of the idea of “R&D Dissemination”, which is a unilateral practice. Consider discussing of “exchange”, which is mutual and dialogic, would not offer more opportunities to develop a clear sense of mission and of the supporting structures that would enable it.
3. CICANT is a small group with a potential to grow. What does growth mean in relation to the regulatory framework and the definition of a “small” research centre?
4. How will you accommodate the projected growth in the number of doctoral students and continue to ensure the quality of supervision, teaching and research facilities for doctoral students?
5. With agreements, relationships, joint projects would be helpful for CICANT to develop? For example, it may be important to bring CICANT closer to associations such as the International Film Association of Film and Television Schools (CILECT), if this isn’t the case yet, as well as other associations dedicated to teaching and research in the field. Establishing more agreements and developing more joint projects strengthens the Centre and helps in the dissemination of research
6. What could the transversal structure identified as absent under “weaknesses” look like, and how would the three units MTL, MSC, MACI, contribute/benefit from each element of this structure? What would the internal structure of MTL, MSC, MACI look like?
7. How might you adapt/further develop the taught component of doctoral study? PhD students are very positive about CICANT but we heard several times that the taught component, while fascinating in its own right, remains too much at a “masters level” and does not offer enough of the training that is typical at the doctoral level. Some doctoral students remarked that the courses offered are not necessarily integrated with student research. While not all courses have to meet the needs of specific research, discussing this question may be valuable in order to think about the need to create synergy between courses, research, students and teachers.
8. What might an explicit career development support structure for postdocs and early career researchers look like?

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the External Advisory Board acknowledges the past successes, solid strategy, rich variety of high-quality research and doctoral training and the calibre of staff at CICANT. The Centre is

to be applauded for its strategy plan for the coming funding period, in which it can make a significant international contribution to its fields of expertise. As this process unfolds, the Board believes that the areas of attention identified in this report, reflecting our first visit, might help the Centre to further refine and render explicit its self-understanding and its creative potential as a unity-in-diversity. We welcome the opportunity to be part of the learning journey of the Centre in the time to come.

The External Advisory Board

Members:

Prof Maria Dora Mourão (University of São Paulo)

Prof Nico Carpentier (Charles University Prague, Uppsala University, Free University Brussels)

Dr Johan Siebers (Middlesex University London, School of Advanced Study, University of London)