

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

REPORT of External Advisory Board Visit

19 september 2022

The EAB congratulates the research centre, its members and its leadership with the growth and stability of CICANT, also given the challenges of the past 2 years caused by the pandemic. We have spoken with representatives of all constituencies within CICANT and its partnerships. We note that the final report of this cycle of the EAB is due in a year's time. As such our comments today are of an interim nature and will hopefully be useful for CICANT on the journey to the end of the current cycle.

We would like to highlight the following points:

1. One main comment is that the EAB recommends the (further) development of internal dialogues on internationalization, excellence, community-building, interdisciplinarity and open access. The EAB would appreciate being informed of the results of these more thematic sessions, so that CICANT can develop a more extended vision on these areas, e.g. what is internationalization for CICANT and why does it matter.
2. In the discussions with the staff, one of the main issues that came up was workload, stress and the balance between research and teaching, even though EAB's general impression was that the staff was doing fine (and expressed a general sentiment of happiness). A structured approach to teaching buy-out could be helpful in ensuring workloads of researchers remains viable.
3. Another point that was raised, not necessarily as a problem, was the diversity of topics and thematics, requiring permanent attention in order to be transformed into a strength. The creation of organically grown small "cells" (journalism, fashion, marketing etc.) seems to have generated new energy, and is recommendable. We note that this development is in line with our previous SWOT analysis, which recommended cross-fertilisation between themes and theories. We recommend that a structured approach towards interdisciplinarity as both a practice and a discourse is developed within CICANT to that diversity can become a real strength.
4. Several staff members expressed a wish for more internal dialogue and knowledge exchange, which we support, even though staff members might need to be involved in the planning and implementation of these events.
5. We observed that the cooperation between Lisbon and Porto is lively and supported by both locations. We recommend that a policy is developed for ensuring that the Porto group is (and remains) structurally integrated in CICANT especially in the post-Covid world. Site visits can be an important part of developing strong working relations.

6. The session with partners and lab representatives demonstrated that CICANT is collaborating with a group of institutions and colleagues that have a very high opinion of CICANT. A network of loyal partners is important to have, we believe. These partners see considerable potential in CICANT, and recognize its expertise. They also appreciate CICANT's diversity, arguing that the pool model (and the absence of pillars) is one of its assets. They do argue that CICANT's activities and projects could be communicated and promoted better (also through its website). It will be important in the coming year to ensure documentation and communication of all activities and projects is clear and easy to find for internal as well as external audiences.
7. The representatives of the labs provided us with a series of impressive examples of interactions with other societal fields, showing the importance of projects driven by mutual needs and interest, and by clear and particular objectives, and the need to select appropriate partners. A public engagement strategy could help to put these efforts into a structured context.
8. The session with the PhD students again showed a high degree of satisfaction, without denying the intense investment the PhD is requiring. We also believe that students are highly motivated, with a variety of motivations, in many cases finding their way through the system. We do note that delays in the PhD project occur, which places pressure on the centre's resources, and that CICANT should investigate methods to keep students more on (the time) track, without losing sight of individual needs and circumstances.
9. We have noted that PhD students mentioned an improvement in communication, both in language usage and more streamlined e-communication. Generally, there is also satisfaction with the supervision, although in some cases a need for more intense guidance was formulated.
10. One clear request was for more / better access to academic journals, where it was troubling to hear that there were differences in (student) access between the Lisbon and Porto hubs. The EAB recommends that these differences are removed as soon as possible.
11. Even though PhD students knew and used the opportunities that benefited their later careers (e.g., building up teaching experience, creating professional/academic networks) a bit more attention may need to be spent on post-PhD career support (without burdening the CICANT resources too much). Here existing researcher development frameworks that have been developed in the EU can provide input and inspiration.
12. On the basis of our more personal experiences, outside what we heard during the meetings we would also like to suggest to standardise some aspects of the support structure. The support team is highly skilled and very competent, but charged with a highly diverse workload. More developed / explicit checklists, scripts and protocols will help CICANT's performance excellence, ranging from day-to-day operations to the crucial administrative support for grant submissions.

13. We noted that interdisciplinarity and internationalisation came up regularly as helpful orientations to think about what CICANT does and why. Here we would want to urge CICANT to systematically explore these topics and the contribution that CICANT can make to them. Interdisciplinarity is an important part of the future of research in the communication field so will help early career researchers and CICANT can make a distinctive contribution. Internationalisation involves more than the balance between Portuguese and English, but addresses generic and contemporary themes in higher education around translanguaging, multilingualism and also questions around decolonisation of curricula, epistemologies and the self-understanding of disciplines. CICANT is uniquely positioned to make a valuable contribution to these global discussions.

In conclusion: In the previous phase the EAB focused on the question of the identity and ways of working of CICANT, its self-understanding and the balance between theory and practice. In the current phase we see an organisation that has taken significant steps and that will now benefit from the development of matrices across all its areas of activity, that will enable the developed of both structures and narratives: to allow for self-monitoring, the growth of narratives around key values and approaches (including more generic, theoretical reflections and publications as outputs, in addition to project publications) and the explication of what CICANT understands by excellence. In this way an organic context can be created in which there is cooperation and alignment where that is beneficial, but where individual units and projects can also bloom like the proverbial hundred flowers.

We would suggest that CICANT organises a series of thematic internal reflections (for instance on internationalisation), as part of a trajectory towards the final report of the EAB at the end of the current next academic year.

The External Advisory Board:

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