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# CLOSING SESSION

## Recommendations towards an agenda of research and capacity building

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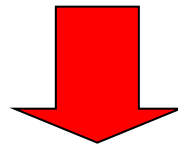
the *media* and the ENVIRONMENT

between complexity and urgency



One year on...

- ❑ Environmental problems have become even more urgent and complex.
- ❑ The financial and economic crisis may have surpassed them in the headlines, but has further exposed their social dimension.
- ❑ At the same time, the media spectrum is undergoing profound changes in its structure and workings.



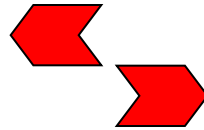
In times of change and uncertainty,  
**effective communication** is more decisive than ever.



## COMMUNICATION is now:

- ❑ more fought-over by **different powers**;
- ❑ more open, via the **new technological resources**
- ❑ more confronted with **new information needs**

Strong turbulence in the contemporary media spectrum  
highlights two opposing tendencies:



- ❑ The new configurations of power interferes with media activity, leading to **concentration and closing-up**. Even established publications are having trouble surviving (R. Cox).

- ❑ Technological changes open the field to a wide range of communication resources, most of them web-based, bringing **dispersion and openness**.



Therefore, we would like to advance some proposals:

- **1. The effects of the crisis in the media context should be closely followed.** The production of news is changing, and we must have a clearer and timelier idea of these changes. It is essential to track the news circuit from the original sources down to the public
- **2. The reception of environmental information should be monitored,** with the application of comparative methodologies at the European scale, and considering the socially diversified audiences and cultural contexts (despite the difficulties, as J. Burgess and S. Chevigné pointed up).



- **3. How to access the reliability of scientific knowledge?**  
While scientific controversy is essential to knowledge building, it is also vulnerable to manipulation. It should not be an arbitrary game at the service of public skepticism or agnosticism.
- **How to promote convergence processes?** Basic scientific 'givens' are vital for the credibility of scientific knowledge with the general public.
- **Maybe “lessons” need not arrive so “late” if the scientific research on “early warnings” is a priority** (whistleblowers and other “underdogs” need allies...).



- **4. Scientists and journalists should be brought together.** Environmental communication is simultaneously scientific and journalistic. Greater communicational capacity is expected from both, journalists and scientists.
- (To take up Anders Hansen's image, unlike what happens in tango, it takes two to dance but in this case both must lead).



Today, journalists find themselves in an extremely fragile position, among other reasons due to the des-investment in specialized investigative journalism. According to Hansen, journalism is becoming more “reactive” than “pro-active”.

It's not just a matter of packaging or news agenda (for ex. of “marriage” vs. “divorce” stories...). Due to financial constraints, we may truly be on the brink of the end of newspaper journalism as we know it  
- and this is current threaten to democracy



In our survey of environmental journalists in Portugal, replies were clear and unequivocal:

- ❑ Environmental issues are getting **less and less space**;
- ❑ Specialization is increasingly **devalued**;
- ❑ Everyone feels external **pressure** in environmental stories;
- ❑ **Contacts by PR and agencies working for companies** are ever more frequent;
- ❑ **Although the more credible sources are scientists, few of them are available to talk** to journalists.



## 5. This suggests the need of additional efforts:

- The scientific community should assume **increased duties and responsibilities in the public communication of science**. Scientists should make additional efforts to provide information, especially through dedicated offices for scientific extension (as CNADS report about Aarhus Convention suggests).
- Science popularization, while being essential, is not enough. The **more authorized scientific sources must be given a voice** and asked to provide regular, **credible information in digestible formats** (news / event-based formats), duly contextualized.



**The process of bringing together scientists and journalists must happen mutually.** Journalists must also do their share.

The results should be:

- To ease media reception of scientific knowledge
- To help prevent resistance on the part of the general public towards what it doesn't understand.



Peters' work on climate change risk-construct in Germany shows that, even when the warnings and “lessons” are “early” and clear enough, and the public is aware, the message may not get across. Most people kept thinking the solution was technological and didn't carry implications in their daily lives.

□ This means: **we need better information, more consistent and available, produced by scientists.**

And also, more creative ways to conceive and spread the messages (as Joe Smith notes), or even using celebrities, as Max Boycoff added).



These objectives point to **the establishment of a network structure** that is both light and highly capable of acting as a kind of observatory, on three fronts:

- **Following the reconfiguration of powers** associated with the media;
- **Monitoring the social dynamics of reception**, with different audiences and the psychosociology of denial taken into account;
- **Stimulating credible scientific information generated in ways more directly compatible with the media register** (it might be a good idea to create a pool of scientists and journalists and/or with other actors, using web resources).

This structure should function in close proximity to the EEA.



**Challenges, as well as problems, are urgent and complex.**

**Our debates in this conference have helped identify enough avenues of convergence and agreement for actions to be prepared.**

**That is, for build on concrete grounds some hope for our common future.**

***Thank you very much!***

***Muito Obrigada!***