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

Universidade Lusófona

REPORT of External Advisory Board Visit

7 May 2021

The activity report that maps the CICANT activities is impressive, because of its level of detail, but also because of the number, span and quality of the activities mentioned in it.

There are a number of reflections to add, on the basis of our readings:

1/There is a need for consolidation of the recent changes, and care should be spent on avoiding a centre that is in permanent movement. The current structures need time to stabilise and to become an integrative part of the organisation's operations, especially in a context of (post-)COVID.

2/There are a number of issues in the report that remain a bit hidden, and might need more attention, namely internal communication, external communication and ethical positioning of the centre. There is a need for a slightly more developed vision (and mission).

3/There is a need to develop a method and process, for dealing with more specific issues. Here I would suggest to use "strategy notes", which are focussed on particular problems, analyse them and suggest solutions. CICANT's level of activity is excellent, the core structure is equally excellent, but in a more consolidated centre, there is a need to deal with the remaining issues, without losing track of the core activities of the centre (see point 1).

We also have a few comments about the first meeting:

1/There is clear satisfaction with the CICANT structure, leadership and centre as a whole.

2/There is a bit of concern about the organisation becoming too heavy and top-down. I see this as a legitimate concern resulting from this change process, and from the need to manage a large association. In a consolidation phase, attention needs to go to the informal / interactive part of the organisation, ensuring that staff can experience pleasure in their work.

3/There are a number of clearly formulated support needs, with (a) project development, (b) conference organisation and (c) journal management. There are two points we want to make. First, there is a need to decide which expectations are helpful (and which are not). If a staff member mentions the expectation (and 'promise') to receive help with building a network (for a project application), and this then doesn't work, and the staff member uses his own network, there might not have been a need for support in the first place, as using one own's contacts for project development is still a better option. Second, when creating admin support for conference organisation and journal management, there is a need to analyse the exact needs, and potential solutions. Hiring a conference organiser, for instance, might bring

more work and frustration that it would alleviate. Hiring an editorial assistant to handle the review(er)s might not work that well, and maybe there is a need for more associate editors. This needs to be properly analysed.

4/In the discussion, there was a bit too much emphasis on the outgoing dimension of internationalisation, and the outside network building. Incoming internationalisation ("internationalisation at home") is equally important, and a bit more could be done in diversifying the staff (I understood some plans were put on hold because of COVID). Also having staff to research in / on non-Portuguese settings might be considered (what I would call "nomadic research").

5/The small (exploratory) grants (in their two versions) are excellent tools, to motivate staff, do innovative research, and bring in early-stage researchers and students.

Finally, some comments on the entire process so far.

1/I appreciate the hard preparatory work, and the mobilisation of so many different people to talk to us.

2/If we do more online meetings after these two, we might need a bit more structure. We might need to agree on an agenda beforehand. We also need to find ways to better balance the different voices. Now, things were a bit improvised.

3/I think the CICANT should be a bit considerate about post-meeting reporting needs. First of all, we are only relying on online meetings and a written report, which gives us a very limited perspective on what is happening in CICANT. That, in turn, makes our comments rather tentative. Especially when they are put in writing, they might get too much weight.

Additional Comments on Students Meetings

Clearly, there is considerable support and appreciation for CICANT. The changes are appreciated. CICANT is considered relevant and responsive.

In particular:

1/The flow of information is appreciated; there is also emphasis on the integrative / connecting role of this flow;
2/Events (and invitations to events) are also appreciated, and there is the feeling that lots of things are happening. Maybe a bit more for Media Arts could be considered, though;
3/The use of remote teaching was very much appreciated. Even though we should not underestimate the importance of f2f interaction in teaching, in the return to the (new) normal.

I noted the following issue:

1/ A 'classic' issue is the language usage in more international groups working within a 'national' institution. There might be a need to develop the bi-lingual policy more (and/or make it more explicit), also finding a balance which doesn't erase Portuguese.

2/ There seems to be a need for a PhD student Seminar, allowing students to talk more about their research and generating a meeting point. we would suggest that this needs to be a mixed responsibility, with also PhD students taking some (organisational) responsibility. At the same time, institutional support still is necessary, to guarantee continuity & stability …

3/ The Arts-Academia relations might need some more reflection we noticed that the PhD students still needed to find a better language to position oneself as hybrid ("artademic"). For instance, arts-based research and artistic research are not the same (as they have different relations to the fields of arts and academia). How to stimulate respect for the diversity of knowledge producing and communicating practices might need to be addressed more explicitly. The request for clearer protocols (what is allowed, desired, validated, …) fits into this discussion.

4/ There was one comment on having better access to (media production) technology.

The External Advisory Board:

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