

A Challenging Future for IAMCR

We had a very delightful and big 50th Anniversary celebration in Paris in July 2007 thanks to the hard work of the Local Conference Organising Committee. We marked IAMCR's history and we paid tribute to former IAMCR President, Professor James Halloran, who died on 16 July shortly before the conference. There will be a lecture in his honour during the 2008 conference.

In dozens of ways during the 50th Anniversary plenary sessions and in paper and panel sessions we heard about the challenges we face as the field of media and communication studies grows and our members tackle new research questions. The need to put questions of ethics centrally on our agenda was noted by many presenters as was the need to revisit the histories of media and communication as well as to develop new theoretical frameworks and conceptual models, acknowledging and giving space to distinctive approaches that embrace local as well as global developments.

Questions of gender, human rights, and cultural diversity were very much in evidence, reflecting IAMCR members' strong interest in these areas alongside issues of oligopolisation/globalisation and the need to study the policies of governments, the changing roles of non-governmental organisations, and the ways that transformations in the older and newer media are working themselves out within different regions. In many sessions, including a joint ICA-IAMCR session, there was a strong call for more attention to regional issues.

In particular, and very clearly in the Plenary focusing on the contribution to our field by French scholars, the continuing need to develop socio-political approaches to information, politics and power was stressed especially with respect to different modalities for the production of information, changes in journalism, and different perspectives on media culture and media practice. Especially important was the emphasis on the need to understand editorial freedom and the autonomy of journalists as a relative concept and to develop stronger links between studies of the 'micro-practices' of media production and consumption and studies of the nature of unequal power relations as they are played out internationally.

During the conference we held a special session for the presentation of four reports commissioned by Mr. Abdul Waheed Kahn, Unesco Assistant Director General for Communication and Information. These focused on Communication Strategies for HIV/AIDS (Natasha Bolognesi and Leslie Swartz, South Africa), Communication for Development (Linje Manyozo South Africa), Media, Communication and Literacy (Sheena Johnson Brown and Hopeton Dunn Jamaica), and the Information Society and Ethics (Africanus Diedong, Ghana). The reports will be finalised in December 2007. I have been invited by Mr. Kahn to convene a special workshop with between 7 and 10 IAMCR members in December 2007 at Unesco to brainstorm a future and critical research agenda with his staff. Our conference also benefited substantially from Unesco's generosity in making its conference facilities available to us without charge for the space.

Our next conference – or Congress – as we now call the General Assembly year, is hosted by the University of Stockholm in July 2008. In the run up to this Congress, we are reviewing the remits of sections, working groups and our new category of emerging themes. I hope this discussion will generate enthusiasm and lots of creative thinking about how we move through the first decade of our next 50 years!

On the operational side a few highlights that I can report are:

- Thanks to Bruce Gerard and Alvaro Mailhos and their team based in Uruguay, we launched the new online membership database and membership directory in early July 2007. The new membership directory automatically updates itself every time a member alters the database – magical software!
- With the help of Bruce and Alvaro, we collected membership dues for the 2006 and 2007 more successfully than in the recent past and reported a healthy increase in revenues for 2006 and the first half of 2007. The International Council voted for a modest increase in our budget, but we have a surplus of funds over and above ‘normal’ running costs. It was agreed that when good ideas emerge that have the support of members and the Council, we may decide to invest in them.
- The International Council agreed to create a new ad hoc group on Cultural Diversity led by Vice-President, Divina Frau-Meigs which will focus particularly on media, ethics and elearning.
- We made new reciprocal agreements between ALAIC and AMIC in Latin America and initiated further discussions with ECREA and ICA with respect to collaboration.
- We agreed that the IAMCR newsletter will be distributed only online, except for those who explicitly opt for a hardcopy.
- Vice-President Annabelle Sreberny reached agreement with Blackwell-Wiley for a new Handbook series.
- We are continuing with the Hampton book series under the leadership of Marjan De Bruin and Claudia Padovani.
- Our Task Force on Media and Communication Policy is continuing, led by Andrew Calabrese with a particular focus on bilateral agreements, government/industry partnerships and media institutions in the coming months.
- We decided that IAMCR General Assembly year conferences will be 5 days and be called Congresses and that years without a General Assembly will be 4 days and called conferences.
- We renamed the Membership and Participation Committee as the Regionalisation and Membership Committee with a view to emphasising a regionalisation strategy (chaired jointly by Cesar Bolano and Daya Thussu).
- We disbanded the Health, Technology and Communication Working Group at the request of its Chair Milton Campos and created a Visual Culture Emerging Theme led by Sunny Yoon.
- Journalism Research and Education Section is the new name for the former Media and Professional Education Section, giving journalism a stronger profile in IAMCR.
- The former Junior Scholars Network is now called the Emerging Scholars Network Section.

- The International Council agreed to have a past-president in a non-voting capacity for two years from 2008. 2008 is an election year and I am grateful to Depak De, Cees Hamelink, and Janet Wasko for the work they will do as members of our Election Committee to ensure that all runs smoothly.
- We made some changes in the statutes all of which will be reported in the International Council minutes, but special thanks to Philippe Maarek for preparing an up to date French translation and harmonising the versions.

Finally, I announced during the International Council that I will not stand for re-election in 2008 despite the 49% of my brain which tells me that I enjoy serving the IAMCR membership and should seek to carry on! The other 51%, however, tells me that from 2008 it will be time for a new President to lead IAMCR into the future. I will be honoured to serve as Past-President and thank all members of the Council for their support and for their rapid move to make this institutional innovation as we have not had this position previously.

Professor Robin Mansell
President IAMCR