

# Entrevista



## The media industry expansion and the international research in Communication

Janet Wasko

By Sonia Virgínia Moreira\*

Professor at University of Oregon in Eugene, where is leader of Knight Chair in Communication Research, Janet Wasko has a PhD (1980) from University of Illinois and is currently President of the IAMCR – International Association for Media and Communication Research. Researcher and teacher in the areas of political economy of Communication, theories of media and international problems of Communication, she is the author, co-author and organizer about 19 books. She conducted extensive research about the conglomerate The Walt Disney Company, which among results are the books **Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy** (Polity Press, 2001) and **Dazzled by Disney: The Global Disney Audience Project**, with Mark Phillips and Eileen R. Meehan (Leicester University Press, 2001). The production of the movie industry



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\* Professor and researcher at Journalism and media industry at Social Communication College (Journalism) and at the Program of the Post-graduate in Communication, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil. E-mail: soniavm@gmail.com

in the United States was central in other Janet Wasko's works and results in books like **Movies and Money: Financing the American Film Industry** (Ablex Publishing, 1982); **Hollywood in the Information Age: Beyond the Silver Screen** (Polity Press, 1994) and **How Hollywood Works** (Sage, 2003). She also organized, with Graham Murdock and Helena Sousa, **The Handbook of Political Economy of Communication** (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) and, with Vincent Mosco, **The Political Economy of Information** (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

The Janet Wasko's scientific work is too consistent with her academic activities and this helped even printing the 'tone' of the IAMCR in recent years – in support of regional studies, to encourage collaborative efforts and greater international exchange. These shares were listed on her platform for the Association presidency, which provided “increase efforts to reduce registration fees at conferences”, “promote multilingual publications”, “improve the promotion of membership in underrepresented areas”, “continue build strong relationships with regional organizations of Communication” and “strengthen and expand international research projects”. During the Congress Intercom in Manaus, in 2013, Janet Wasko presented the Association that represents today, as follows:

“IAMCR is a professional and global organization in the area of Communication and media research. Its members promote actions inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical research. IAMCR is really global and has members in mosto of countries. Its conferences regularly happen in different continents and regions, with the participation of scholars' communities in the area of Communication around the world. As a non-governmental organization, it has official relations with Unesco, which it has been established a consultative relationship since 1957. Because IAMCR is really global and especially committed to encouraging and supporting young scholars of media and Communication, the organization represents recent and growing trends in media research worldwide. The organization also tries to contribute to policy formulation activities for the

media and Communication at the global level by Unesco and also in national and local spaces”.

**Revista Intercom** – *Starting with the IAMCR, how has it been your experience working in the presidency of the Association?*

**Janet Wasko** – While national and regional organizations have grown recently, the IAMCR remains as the leading international professional association in media and Communication research and provides an umbrella for these other organizations. The IAMCR’s membership has increased around the world through a recent membership campaign and the recent conferences have been growing in numbers of participants. We have been working with Unesco on projects and have a new book series, as well as many other activities. We might say that the IAMCR is alive and well! We have active and dedicated Executive Board members who have been working to improve the procedures for the organization, providing transparency and building the association’s activities and visibility. However, it is sometimes a difficult and time-consuming work, and it is volunteer work. It has been good to work with the board members and to see the results of our work. However, it is sometimes a challenge to do everything and we need more resources to be able to be more efficient and to continue to grow.

**Revista Intercom** – *What do you think of movements like the international gathering of Communication academic associations at the University of the Basque Country, in January 2014, which considered the current context marked by globalization and the inequalities in access to scientific knowledge? Could you say something about the outcomes for the regional and national associations that are organized in a network?*

**Janet** – The number of organizations, conferences and meetings related to media and Communication has grown tremendously. One might say, it is out of control. However, it also says something about the growth and relevance of media/Communication around the world. The Bilbao meeting that gathered representatives

from international and regional associations was a good step in addressing some of the issues that face the scholarly community. Just becoming more familiar with the various associations is important and one of the projects is aimed at gathering accurate information about these associations around the world. But also, there is an initiative to influence Unesco related to codes used for the media and Communications research. At the moment, there are no specific codes, but such research is listed under other disciplines. There is a committee working on this and we will see what happens.

**Revista Intercom** – *Based on your experience, do you think that there is a common trait in the international understanding of Communication as a science?*

**Janet** – There are a wide variety of traditions and classifications for media and Communication research around the world. While it is often considered a social science, there is a strand of research that emphasizes humanities. It is sometimes a challenge for these approaches to accept each other, much less work together. It is one of the challenges we face in terms of defining the discipline (or even establishing a discipline).

**Revista Intercom** – *As a prominent researcher in the field of political economy of Communication, which would you say are its present status and main trends?*

**Janet** – The study of political economy of the media and Communications continues to attract researchers. For instance, the Political Economy Section of the IAMCR has grown dramatically over the last decade or so, attracting numerous scholars from all over the world. Perhaps this is not so surprising given the growing importance of the media and its industrial development within an expanding international market system. In other words, a careful analysis of capitalism, its structures, the consequences of those structures, and the contradictions that abound, is more than ever relevant and needed, as the recent reinvigoration of Marxist analysis attests. In general, the study of political economy of the

media and Communication examines the relationships of power that are involved in the production, distribution and consumption these resources within a wider social context. These days, studies based on this approach are focusing on a variety of issues and areas, including (but not limited to) the development of media as a business, media and labor, media and state relations, and media and democracy. More specifically, critical political economists are interrogating lots of “C-concepts” (I just made up that term): commodification, commercialization, consolidation, concentration, convergence, creativity, and (still one of the most important) class. Importantly, political economists still privilege issues related to class power, it is not to the exclusion of other relationships – and the complex and contradictory nature of such relationships is often emphasized. Most importantly, this approach challenges media and Communication development that undermines equitable and democratic societies. It also might be noted that there is an increasing number of examples of studies that integrate various critical approaches. Many scholars working in cultural studies, international Communications, feminism, race/ethnic studies, and other forms of social research have produced work that integrates these perspectives with political economic analysis. In other words, they embrace a political economic perspective as only one of the lenses they use to understand media. In other words, for many scholars, the conceptual or methodological divisions between or among political economy, cultural studies, and social research no longer exist. Another point that might be made is that many Communication scholars have contributed valuable studies that call attention to political economic characteristics of media/Communication, but do not claim to be political economists. For instance, some international approaches are grounded in political economy or incorporate these concepts without declaring a commitment to the perspective. In other words, other researchers are realizing the importance of the issues addressed and questions raised by political economists.

**Revista Intercom** – *Based on the researches presented in recent conferences of IAMCR, would there be some topic that predominates or that is common to many studies?*

**Janet** – The IAMCR and other organizations have grown tremendously, as mentioned previously. Perhaps because media has become more important in various countries, but also more attention to media education has meant more students, more classes, more professors, and more researchers. It would be difficult to characterize the wide range of issues addressed by the research presented at IAMCR. Traditional sections, such as Communication Policy & Technology, International Communication, Community Communication, and Gender and Media have remained strong. Some of the most active and popular sections are Journalism Research & Communication, Political Economy and Political Communication Research. We also have a wide range of Working Groups that focus on everything from Popular Culture to Crisis Communication to Visual Culture. So, as you can see, it is another challenge to summarize the main issues represented by these various researchers.

**Revista Intercom** – *Considering this context, what is the significance of the IAMCR's main theme in 2014 ('Region as a Frame: Politics, Presence, Practice') and of the pre-conferences on sustainability and community media?*

**Janet** – The theme for the Hyderabad conference was chosen by the Local Organizing Committee and represents an especially important and significant area for India and Asia, as well as other parts of the world. The program features some exciting speakers, renowned Communications scholars and others who will address the range of issues related to this theme. Along with members from all over the world, there will be strong representation from the region in which we are meeting. The explanation of the logo for the conference (which depicts interwoven strands of different colors) may be helpful in understanding the significance of the



theme: “The different interwoven strands represent the movement of people across distance and time to draw and redraw the shifting boundaries of region. Within these imagined spaces people commune, connect and sometimes move away and beyond create new formations, new networks, that are in some ways the same, yet in others, diverse and unforeseen.”

