# Trajectories on *the field* in the field: academic meta-research on communication in Mexico

*Trayectorias sobre* el campo *en el campo: meta-investigación académica de la comunicación en México*

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The aim of this essay is to reflexively recover the processes of elaboration and conceptual as well as methodological development of a heuristic model of an "academic field", in search of interpreting the conditions and intentions of the institutionalization of communication studies in Mexico. These have been assumed for more than three decades in terms of a meta-research proposal, which in turn serves to recognize and articulate the research practices in their diverse contextual scales. The contribution of the journal *Comunicación y Sociedad* is located in this trajectory.

KEYWORDS: Academic field, communication, Mexico, meta-research.

*Este texto responde al propósito de recuperar reflexivamente los procesos de elaboración y desarrollo conceptual y metodológico de un modelo de "campo académico" para interpretar las condiciones y las intenciones de la institucionalización de los estudios sobre la comunicación en México, según han sido asumidos durante más de tres décadas en términos de una propuesta de meta-investigación, que a su vez sirve para reconocer y articular las prácticas de investigación en sus diversas escalas contextuales. En ese trayecto se ubica la aportación de la revista* Comunicación y Sociedad*.*
*PALABRAS CLAVE: Campo académico, comunicación, México, meta-investigación.*

*Este texto responde ao propósito de recuperar reflexivamente os processos de elaboração e desenvolvimento conceitual e metodológico de um modelo de "campo acadêmico" para interpretar as condições e intenções da institucionalização dos estudos de comunicação no México, como foram assumidos por mais de três décadas em termos de uma proposta de metapesquisa, que por sua vez serve para reconhecer e articular as práticas de pesquisa em suas diversas escalas contextuais. A contribuição da revista* Comunicación y Sociedad *está localizada neste caminho.*
*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Campo acadêmico, comunicação, México, metapesquisa.*

> "By undertaking socio-historical research, we seek to understand and explain a series of phenomena that, in a certain way and to a certain extent, are already understood by the individuals who are part of the sociohistorical world; we seek, in short, to reinterpret a pre-interpreted field" (Thompson, 1993, p. 23).

In 1987 *Comunicación y Sociedad* was first published, issued by the former Center for Information and Communication Studies (Centro de Estudios de la Información y la Comunicación, CEIC) of the University of Guadalajara, later transformed into the current Department of Social Communication Studies (Departamento de Estudios de la Comunicación Social, DECS). Thirty-five years later, the journal has proved itself as one of the most influential and renowned academic communication media in the academic field of its specialty, which extends from Guadalajara to national and international spaces.

By the same year, 1987, the author of this essay had already laid the analytical foundations of what in the following years would develop as his fundamental line of research or, more precisely, meta-research –or research on research (Fuentes Navarro, 2019a)–. The first product in this line was published under the title *La Investigación en Comunicación en México. Sistematización Documental 1956-1986* (*Communication Research in Mexico. Document Systematization 1956-1986*, Fuentes Navarro, 1988),[2] originally his master's thesis. Ten years later, another book, *La emergencia de un campo académico: continuidad utópica y estructuración científica de la investigación de la comunicación en México* (*The emergence of an academic field:*

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[2] Two more volumes, products of document systematization, were published by the author in 1996 (*Communication research in Mexico. Document systematization 1986-1994*) and in 2003 (*Academic research on communication in Mexico. Document systematization 1995-2001*). The references contained in these three books were converted to a digital format to constitute the initial database of the cc-doc repository, made available for open-access by ITESO in October 2003 (http://ccdoc.iteso.mx), and it has continued updating to the present day.

*utopian continuity and scientific structuring of communication research in Mexico*, Fuentes Navarro, 1998), in turn based on the doctoral thesis, presented the systematic analysis of the institutionalization of communication studies in the country, fully represented in a "field" model.

As a construct of "an intermediate level between concepts and paradigms [involving] a certain number of hypotheses, some of them visible, but others invisible or hidden" (Giménez, 1994, p. 36), this model aims to concentrate the explanations systematically generated by the aforementioned work, which, nevertheless, require discursive extension beyond (or perhaps better, "further into") it. For reference purposes, despite the changes experienced by its object over time, the model is reproduced as Annex No. 1 of this article. And while, by methodological decision, the preparation and evaluation of this model were guided by a heuristic logic (Abbott, 2004), the representations it offers of the field maintain *praxeological* characteristics (Ibáñez, 1985), defined in the project in which it originated, as well as in the reading frameworks that other researchers have used in interpreting, adapting and criticizing it. To that extent, the model is a tendentially collective resource.

## THE INDIVIDUAL/COLLECTIVE DIMENSION OF THE TRAJECTORY

In 1989 Enrique Sánchez Ruiz and myself published a text that we assumed to be the product of a shared search for ways to advance in the "constitution of a *scientific community* that promotes better attention to the innumerable social problems that are articulated with communication in Mexico" (Fuentes Navarro & Sanchez, 1989, p. 6). That text originated circumstantially in an invitation to collaborate with a chapter written in English for a book on the practical problems of "field research"[3] (Narula & Pearce, 1990), which we decided also to

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[3]  The expression "field research", refers to that generic empirical phase of information gathering in "the field" or "natural setting" of the object of study in the social sciences, which in any case is also a generic phase of "field research on the research field".

disseminate in Spanish, "thinking specifically of Mexican and Latin American colleagues as interlocutors" (Fuentes Navarro & Sanchez, 1989, p. 6).

Our basic purpose was to argue that "the nature, orientation and possibilities" of communication research and social science research in general, are determined by "structural factors ranging from the level of development of the social formation being analyzed to cultural and ideological factors" such as the "general scientific culture in society and the professional ideologies of the research community" (Fuentes Navarro & Sanchez, 1989, p. 7). And to synthesize a kind of hypothesis about our national case, we elaborated a formula that turned out to have a surprising heuristic value: the *triple marginality*, "which means that communication research is marginal within the social sciences, the latter within scientific research in general, and the latter in turn among the priorities of national development" (Fuentes Navarro & Sanchez, 1989, p. 12).[4]

Two years later, under another fortunate formula in terms of its heuristic value, the process of development of a sociocultural framework then barely sketched as the foundation of a meta-research project on communication in Mexico that has lasted for more than three decades, took shape in a book. Completed in 1989, *La comunidad desapercibida* (*The Unnoticed Community*, Fuentes Navarro, 1991), sought to "present a general overview of the process of constitution in Mexico of a field of study,[5] specialized in the generation of knowledge

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[4]    In 2006, the CIC-Museum of the Autonomous University of Baja Califor-
       nia convened in Mexicali a "collective reflection" on the "transitions and
       challenges of the academic field of communication" where I presented a
       paper on "The triple marginality of communication studies in Mexico:
       a current re-vision", later published in the journal *Culturales*, in which "cer-
       tain trends, especially quantitative, indicate that some degree of marginality
       of our field is gradually decreasing, but the general scheme remains valid"
       (Fuentes, 2007, p. 42).

[5]    By this time, the "simple" sense of *a delimited area* was still in use to
       call an area a "field" of study because, following different traditions of the
       sociology of knowledge, the predominant theoretical models referred to

on communication", a purpose inserted in turn in a double context: on the one hand as "one more step" in the personal professional-academic project and, on the other, as a contribution to the *Comparative Study of Social Communication Systems in Brazil and Mexico*, promoted by INTERCOM[6] and CONEICC,[7] following an initiative by José Marques de Melo (Fuentes Navarro, 1991, p. 15).

This "descriptive exploration" of an incipient scientific community with comparative purposes between Mexico and Brazil, corresponding to the "communication research subsystem", was the first major product of the broad and extensive collaboration established and maintained to date with outstanding members of the Brazilian academic community, especially with Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, and at the same time as the fundamental stimulus for the formulation, as a doctoral thesis, of a project that recognized from the beginning "the collective character of the process of constitution of the field itself" and that tried, "in addition to providing elements of comparison with the Brazilian counterpart, to re-enter in a *praxeological* way in the process itself"[8] (Fuentes Navarro, 1991, p. 18). Even before discovering the relevance

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terms as diverse as "discipline," "paradigm" or even "system". A detailed reconstruction of the process that led to the adoption of a combination of contributions mostly from Bourdieu and Giddens, in the midst of the game of "fields, disciplines, professions" of communication, can be found in a text published in 1995 (Fuentes, 1995).

6   INTERCOM: Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação (Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Communication Studies).

7   CONEICC: Consejo Nacional para la Enseñanza y la Investigación de las Ciencias de la Comunicación (National Council for Teaching and Research in Communication Sciences).

8   The *praxeological* dimension in social research refers to methods that are, at the same time, instruments of knowledge and intervention on reality, such as "semiology, systems analysis, information theory and its derivatives". According to Martín Serrano (1978), "from the point of view of a praxeological epistemology, the social sciences are concerned with the knowledge that makes it possible to control the reproduction and change of social systems" (pp. 20-21).

of the contributions of Bourdieu and Giddens for the theoretical-methodological foundation of the analysis models of the structuring of communication research as an academic field, the *practical reflexivity* of knowledge through communication was adopted as a fundamental principle for this "exercise of the sociological imagination" (Fuentes Navarro, 1998, p. 339).

## THE CORE THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL REFERENCE

The final reflection of the work submitted in 1996 to earn the doctoral degree in Social Sciences at the University of Guadalajara, which was published for the most part as a book a couple of years later (Fuentes Navarro, 1998) alludes, in effect, to an "exercise of the sociological imagination", for:

> This work has attempted to "grasp history and biography and the relationship between the two within society" in a concrete study in which the "distinction between the personal concerns of the milieu and the public problems of the social structure" (Wright Mills, 1961, pp. 26-27) was self-reflexively attempted to construct in order to structure the field of academic communication research in Mexico (p. 339).

Wright-Mills (1961) had written that:

> What we experience in various and specific milieux, I have noted, is often caused by structural changes. So, to understand the changes of many personal milieux we must look beyond them. And the number and variety of such structural changes increase as the institutions within which we live become more embracing and more intricately connected with one another. To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a wide variety of milieux. To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination (p. 30).

That study focused only on a specific "milieu", in which both the researcher and his colleagues "esteem values and realize that they are threatened", that is, they experience a *crisis*, "either as a personal

concern or as a public problem" (Wright Mills, 1961, p. 30). An attempt was made, then, to formulate the problem from the concern and to look to understand them –problem and concern– articulately in reference to factors of the "social structure". Due to the method employed to do so, the research process resulted in the construction of a *model* (Annex No. 1), a representation that looks to objectify the problem while still subjectifying the concerns. The model represents an explanation, whose ultimate justification cannot be other than to support, in practice, the solution to the crisis experienced and, in this sense, the fulfillment of the "most general" objective of the work exceeds the limits of what can be contained in a few pages, indicated as a conclusion (Fuentes Navarro, 1998, p. 340).

The entire above-referred study, as well as the academic-professional trajectory from which it emerged at the time, and its sequels, was also formulated as "a bid for the production of meaning", which also implies a double level of analysis: that of the social practices of communication, and the one of the social practices of study of those practices (Fuentes Navarro, 2003). Both levels, that of communication and that of meta-communication (Wilmot, 1980), or that of research and meta-research (Fuentes Navarro, 2019a) are understood specifically situated in contexts where the agents produce the meaning.

> In short, this work is (subjectively) based on the conviction that, in a situation of crisis –not only of "paradigms" and "infrastructures" such as the one that the social sciences and university institutions in Mexico are going through– but also of crisis of the very meaning of critical and rigorous intellectual endeavors, trying to answer the question about the socio-cultural determinations of the *academic field*[9] itself implies an effort

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[9]   Here, "academic field" (*champ académique*) is the concept constructed and adopted for this study, derived specifically from Bourdieu's "scientific field" (1975) and "university field" (1988), consistent in a sociocultural space of objective positions where the agents fight for the appropriation of common capital, referred in turn, following Giddens (1984), to the institutional structuring of a specialty of production and reproduction of knowledge.

to recognize them as systematically and deeply as possible in order to seek how to reconfigure the practices that structure the field, and this effort makes sense as long as the contrary is not demonstrated (Fuentes Navarro, 1998, p. 12).

More than two decades later, such formulation maintains its praxeological validity, which from the beginning has been defined in terms of a search for comprehensions and explanations, and simultaneously of practical interventions, which turn the researcher into a "methodological device", since:

> The unity of the research process is neither in the "theory" nor in the "technique" (not even in the articulation or intersection between the two): it is in the person of the researcher, which in turn is socially determined by the system of social relations (Ibáñez, 1985, p. 218).

Following Ibáñez (1985), if: "the researcher is the true research machine", and if "the conditions of possibility of this research machine are socially determined", it follows that there is a need for "a continuous epistemological vigilance" (p. 218) on the part of the academic community to which the researcher belongs, socially responsible for his work, mediated by such a community.

## The "academic field" as a construct and empirical referent

The doctoral thesis work, carried out between 1992 and 1995, sustained the intention of explaining how it is that in the sociocultural environment of Mexico, "in global transition", within a national system of higher education characterized by strong internal and external tensions, academic communication research emerged in the seventies in some universities as a project articulated by utopia, went through the "crisis" of the eighties, paradoxically laying the foundations of its institutionalization, and faced, in the nineties, the challenges of its consolidation as a professionalized and legitimized academic practice.

Hypothetically, this multidimensional, complex and contradictory process of development of the academic field of communication in Mexico has been determined, in its most general scale in the last twenty-five years,[10] by the coincidence of intense and extensive *processes of change*, on the one hand, in the conditions of the national academic market and, on the other, in the epistemological and theoretical-methodological frameworks of the study of communication. Thus, economic and political factors have converged with intellectual and cultural factors in the conformation of the sociocultural "scenario" in which Mexican communication researchers have constituted themselves as responsible and relatively self-conscious agents of the *academic practices* that in turn have structured the field (Fuentes Navarro, 1998, p. 26).

In one of the "exemplary" works whose reading guided the development of this project, *Homo Academicus* by Bourdieu (1988), the fundamental challenge of reflexive sociology is admirably synthesized in one paragraph:

What scientific advantage can there be in trying to discover what belonging to the academic field implies, that place of permanent struggle for the truth of the social world and of the academic field itself, and the fact of occupying a certain position within it? (p. xiii).

The answer posed by Bourdieu is twofold: "in the first place it is an opportunity to consciously neutralize the probabilities of error that are inherent in a position", *a point of view*. "But, above all, it reveals the social foundations of the propensity to theorize or intellectualize, inherent in the very position of the academic who feels free to depart from the game in order to conceptualize it..." (Bourdieu, 1988, p. xiii).

*Participant objectification*, a methodological principle that for Bourdieu is:

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10    This time reference comprehends, approximately, the 1970-1995 period.

> Undoubtedly the most difficult exercise that exists, because it requires the rupture of the deepest and most unconscious adherences and adhesions [of the researcher]... all that which he least pretends to know in his relation with the object he seeks to know (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 51).

It refers to a fundamental epistemological condition: *reflexivity*, an "obsession" of Bourdieu's, defined by Wacquant (1992) as the "inclusion of a theory of intellectual practice as an integral component and necessary condition of a critical theory of society" (p. 36). That is, it refers to an inescapable *praxeological* dimension. Consequently, in *constructing* the object of research "it is not a matter of proposing grand empty theoretical constructs, but of approaching an empirical case with the intention of building a *model* that does not need to be clothed in a mathematical or formalized form to be rigorous", of linking relevant data in such a way that they function as a program of research that poses systematic questions; "in short it is a matter of constructing a coherent system of relations, which must be tested as such" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 32).

Three decades after having adopted such premises to analyze the *constitution of the academic field* of communication in Mexico (Fuentes Navarro, 1991, 1998) through the construction of *heuristic models* (Abbott, 2004; Velasco, 2000), it can be verified that the fundamental questions, those that meta-research makes it possible to attend more and more analytically and to respond in increasingly convincing ways, have been present in much of the history of "communication sciences", especially in relation to its *theoretical* identity, thought-out in various languages (Craig, 1999; Martín-Barbero, 1987; Martín-Serrano, 2007; Miège, 1995; Moragas, 2011; Nordenstreng, 2007; Pasquali, 1978; Sodré, 2014; Verón, 1987; Vizer & Vidales, 2016; Waisbord, 2019).

And, also, that the interest in the search for international and transnational constants in the institutionalization of the study of communication has led to a wide proliferation of meta-investigative approaches (Averbeck-Lietz, 2017; Eadie, 2022; Gehrke & Keith, 2015; Koivisto & Thomas, 2008; Miike & Yin, 2022; Park & Pooley, 2008; Simonson & Park, 2016). These and other recent contributions to communication meta-research were systematically reviewed by

Corner (2019), who highlighted in particular the expansion of historical work on communication study to include international contexts and "the examination of how teaching programs and research activity have contributed to institutionalize the area as one with a discreet, though much debated, academic identity" (p. 1).

The three factors highlighted by Corner are the diverse contexts in which the teaching programs originated, the historical links of research with professional practices, and the impact of new media on the recent history of both teaching and research. Meta-research thus contributes, finally, to "make us more aware of the various, and sometimes precarious, ways of institutionalization by which the study of public communication has developed, breaking the oldest academic and professional frameworks while continuing to draw on them" (Corner, 2019, p. 9). The last part of this assessment inevitably recalls the "persistence of the denied theory" that Martín-Barbero (1982, p. 101) denounced in Latin America many years ago.

Likewise, the diversity of objects of knowledge that have been grouped under the term "communication" and the diversity of institutional arrangements to organize their academic study in different countries and regions have inevitably become the focus of attention for the "History" sections of major international academic associations.[11] Although "until now, most of the histories have been national, with a predominant focus on North America and Western Europe" (Simonson & Peters, 2008, p. 764), recently a perspective has been strengthened that "helps us to see how the organized study of communication has simultaneously reflected, refracted and promoted transnational geopolitics, institutional patterns of education and professionalization and ways of knowing and acting" decisive in collective life (Pooley & Park, 2013, pp. 85-86).

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[11]   Such as the International Communication Association (ICA), the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación, ALAIC) and the Ibero-American Association of Communication Researchers (Asociación Iberoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación, AssIBERCOM).

Along these lines, the search for adequate sociohistorical frameworks to ground a *transnational* investigation of the processes of constitution of the academic field of communication has gained strong momentum (Craig, 2015; Curran & Park, 2000; Löblich & Averbeck-Lietz, 2016; Löblich & Scheu, 2011). And a similar search can be found in and on Latin America (Bolaño et al., 2015; Crovi & Cimadevilla, 2018; Crovi & Trejo, 2018; Enghel & Becerra, 2018; Fuentes, 1992, 2006, 2014; González-Samé et al., 2017; León Duarte, 2006, 2007; Marques de Melo, 1992, 1998, 2007; Orozco, 1997).

## HEURISTIC MODELS OF FIELD *STRUCTURES* AND *PROCESSES*

*Heuristics* is, in Spanish, the "art of inventing"; it derives from the Greek *heurisko*, "to find out" (Moliner, 1992, pp. 11, 37) and from there arises its technical meaning in scientific discourse, which Greimas and Courtés (1983) defined as follows:

> A working hypothesis is heuristic if the discourse that develops it has the effect of producing and formulating a process of discovery... In a more general and vague way, a scientific attitude is sometimes qualified as "heuristic": a structural approach, for example, which seeks first of all to grasp relationships, and thus obliges one to foresee the eventual positions of the terms of a category (terms whose manifestations are not evident at first sight) can, in this sense, be called heuristic (pp. 216-217).

In this way, the theoretical-methodological options chosen to guide the search for answers to the central questions of the research on the constitution of the academic field of communication in Mexico led to the formulation of two *heuristic models*. The first of them ("structural") had the purpose of differentiating (and relating to each other) three modalities of academic practices: focused on the *production*, *reproduction* and *implementation* of knowledge on communication (Figure 1). The assumption of this model is that each of these modalities is subject to diverse determinations (both "internal" and "external"), and that they would have to be related to each other through a common

nucleus of shared basic meaning, which would constitute what could be called "disciplinary matrix", rather than "paradigm" (Kuhn, 1982).

FIGURE 1
STRUCTURES OF THE ACADEMIC FIELD OF COMMUNICATION
(FIRST HEURISTIC MODEL)
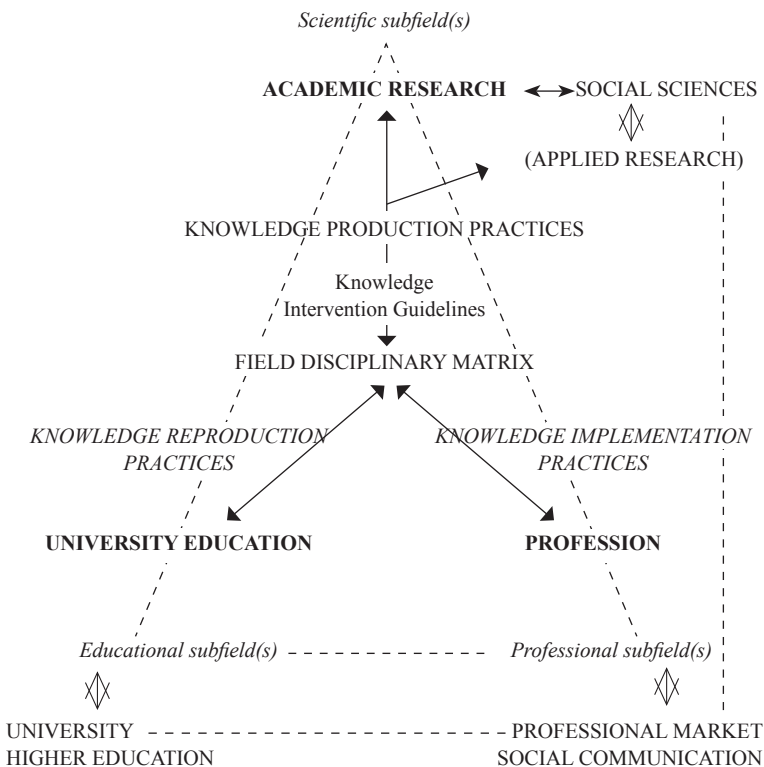


Source: Fuentes Navarro (1998, p. 69).

Knowledge production practices are encompassed under the term "research", the institutionalization of which is divided into two aspects: "academic" and "applied". Although the former (carried out in universities, subject to the rules of academic-scientific activity, and

therefore public in its financing, objectives, procedures and results) is the one focused on in this work, the latter (generally carried out by specialized companies, subject to the laws of the service provision market and, therefore, private, confidential or even secret in its financing, objectives, procedures and results) cannot be ignored. In its two aspects, research practices are conducted as concretizations of logical, ideological, technical and ethical frameworks of the social sciences, to which they provide feedback.

Knowledge implementation practices are centered in the general field of the "profession" that operates social communication systems and are regulated by the market in which both institutions specialized in this function ("mass" media, advertising or news agencies, etc.) and individuals formally (university degree, college or professional association) or informally (recognized "experience") qualified as competent in one of the multiple specialties of this branch of economic activity concur.[12] Professional practices in the cultural industries have been the primary referent of the academic field, especially in its reproductive modality of the instrumental knowledge that constitutes them.

The practices of reproduction of knowledge and of the agents that carry it operatively in the field of communication, considered as "professional training", are those that mediate from the universities the conformation of the field in socio-cultural terms. To do this, academic practices articulate the scientific and professional levels, through institutional teaching and research programs. At this point, the traditional definition of the "three substantive functions" of the university institution (professional training or higher education, scientific and humanistic research, and service or university extension)

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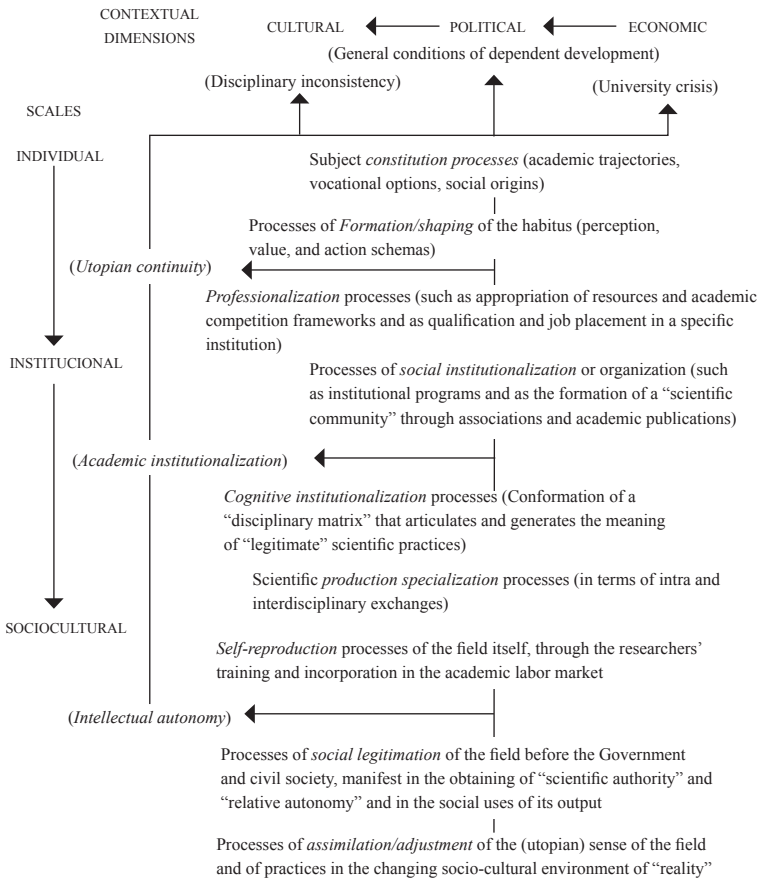[12]  According to Latapí (1979), "a profession –any of them–, is not the provision of a service by one individual to another individual. It is a set of stable relationships between people with needs and people with the ability to satisfy them. For this reason, the professions acquire modes of operation in accordance with the social formation in which they are inserted. That is why they are social structures" (p. 200).

and their integration are considered as determinants of the specific social insertion (function) of each institution.

The modes and degrees of articulation of the academic field (between "research", "professional" and "training" practices, which in turn are structured in the scientific, professional and educational subfields), serve as parameters of external contrast of the consistent *structuring of the academic field*, by providing indications of its "adjustment" to the conditions of development of the social practices (and *agencies*) it takes as objects, and consequently, by granting recognition and legitimacy in varying degrees to the differentially institutionalized academic practices. But it is specifically in the modes and degrees of articulation between the *scientific* and *educational* subfields (and between the practices of research and professional training), where the parameters of the internal consistency of the structuring of the academic field are located, by means of a disciplinary matrix, which would consist not only of "generalizations, models and exemplars" as established by Kuhn (1982, p. 321), but also and above all, in interpretative schemes, in a specific professional ideology, made up of systems of signification, valuation (moral and ethical rules) and power resources, which are the structural referent of the *habitus* and the *agency* of the subjects.

Based on this first heuristic (*structural*) model of the research object, the analytical emphasis on research practices (scientific subfield) was defined, but without "cutting them out" from the academic field to account for their role as a "structuring structure" in it. Consequently, nine structuring *processes* were distinguished in the second heuristic model, operating on three different contextual scales: an "individual" one (which includes the processes of constitution of the subjects; formation/shaping of the habitus; and professionalization). Another, "institutional" scale (specifying social institutionalization, cognitive institutionalization, and scientific specialization); and a "sociocultural" scale (in which the processes of self-reproduction of the field, social legitimization and "assimilation/accommodation" of practices are distinguished) (Fuentes Navarro, 1998, p. 73). At the same time, the nine processes are assumed to occur in specific social (economic, political, cultural) contexts (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

STRUCTURING PROCESSES OF THE ACADEMIC FIELD OF COMMUNICATION
(SECOND HEURISTIC MODEL)

CONTEXTUAL              CULTURAL ◄────── POLITICAL ◄────── ECONOMIC
DIMENSIONS              (General conditions of dependent development)

                       (Disciplinary inconsistency)

                                                    (University crisis)

SCALES

INDIVIDUAL                  Subject *constitution processes* (academic trajectories,
                            vocational options, social origins)

                       Processes of *Formation/shaping* of the habitus (perception,
                       value, and action schemas)

(*Utopian continuity*) ◄──
                       *Professionalization* processes (such as appropriation of resources and academic
                       competition frameworks and as qualification and job placement in a specific
                       institution)

                            Processes of *social institutionalization* or organization (such
                            as institutional programs and as the formation of a "scientific
                            community" through associations and academic publications)

INSTITUCIONAL

(*Academic institutionalization*) ◄──
                            *Cognitive institutionalization* processes (Conformation of a
                            "disciplinary matrix" that articulates and generates the meaning
                            of "legitimate" scientific practices)

                            Scientific *production specialization* processes (in terms of intra and
                            interdisciplinary exchanges)

SOCIOCULTURAL
                       *Self-reproduction* processes of the field itself, through the researchers'
                       training and incorporation in the academic labor market

(*Intellectual autonomy*) ◄──
                       Processes of *social legitimation* of the field before the Government
                       and civil society, manifest in the obtaining of "scientific authority" and
                       "relative autonomy" and in the social uses of its output

                       Processes of *assimilation/adjustment* of the (utopian) sense of the field
                       and of practices in the changing socio-cultural environment of "reality"

Source: Fuentes Navarro (1998, p. 73).

In this framework of "structuring", the central hypothesis of the
thesis postulated how the agents faced, through "utopian continuity",
"academic institutionalization" and "intellectual autonomy" as objects
of their main strategies, the corresponding social determinations:

"disciplinary inconsistency", "dependent development" and "university crisis", and through these dynamics constituted the "academic field" of communication in Mexico.[13]

The results of this analysis were organized for presentation in four chapters, whose order goes from the more "structural" or "objective" manifestations of the structuring of the academic field of communication in Mexico to the more "subjective" ones: respectively, teaching and research programs; academic associations and "disciplinary articulation"; academic publications and the "communicational configuration"; and finally, the "cognitive configuration" (Fuentes Navarro, 1998).

### DISSEMINATION, APPROPRIATION AND CORROBORATION *IN THE FIELD* OF THE FIELD MODEL

In February 2022, Google Scholar[14] documented 195 citations to Fuentes Navarro (1998), approximately 12% of the 2 344 total citations registered in the author's "profile", distributed in a relatively homogeneous way by year. If twenty-seven self-citations are extracted from the sum, the remaining 168 refer to more than one hundred authors, most identified as "communication researchers" in Mexico, twelve other Latin American countries or Spain, and a few as analysts of other academic fields, such as mathematics education or tourism. Up to this point, the "presence" of the proposal *on the field in the field* can be understood as "discrete and constant", although not particularly influential.

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[13] It should be remembered that the design and empirical instrumentation of the study were organized following the "analytical paradigm" proposed by Thompson in *Ideology and Modern Culture* (1993), as a "methodological framework of depth hermeneutics", in three phases and operations, logic, although not temporally successive, called "Systematization of Representations", "Structural Analysis", and "Reinterpretation" (Fuentes Navarro, 1998, pp. 75-77).

[14] https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=TqmG3w4AAAAJ&hl=es, accessed on February 17th, 2022.

Nevertheless, the key issues of the "field" have been taken up again, with or without reference to Fuentes Navarro (1998), in a suitable number of books published in Mexico, which are worth reviewing,[15] such as the one edited in 1988 by Sánchez Ruiz, *La investigación de la comunicación en México. Logros, retos y perspectivas* (*Communication research in Mexico. Achievements, challenges and perspectives*), and the 1995 book coordinated by Galindo and Luna, *El campo académico de la comunicación: hacia una reconstrucción reflexiva* (*The academic field of communication: towards a reflective reconstruction*). Fuentes Navarro's participation in both books, with chapters based on advances made before and after the doctoral thesis, raised some useful questions for discussion, but undoubtedly, he benefited more from the dialogue with the other participants, whose contributions were extensively incorporated in the thesis and its sequels.

Without the term "field" in the title, but with the objective of exposing "how much progress has been made in Mexico in the analysis and research of the different fields of communication", ten years later, Lozano edited a volume published by CONEICC: *La comunicación en México. Diagnóstico, balance y retos* (*Communication in Mexico. Diagnosis, balance and challenges*) in which, among other "updated and critical diagnoses on the most varied topics" (Lozano, 2005, p. 17), Fuentes Navarro analyzed the available bibliography on the conformation of the field of communication "and its conditions of development as an academic-social project in Mexico", published in the decade 1995-2004. To organize this review, he used the models of the "three subfields" (Figure 1) and the "nine structuring processes" of the field (Figure 2). In conclusion:

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[15]  Although it is difficult to draw a clear dividing line, several studies published in Mexico that problematized the study of communication without referring to field models, can be considered relevant "antecedents", such as those of Jiménez (1982), Corral (1982), López Veneroni (1989) and del Río Reynaga (1993), all of them originated at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

> … it can be said that, in Bourdieu's terms, the academic field of communication in Mexico still has serious deficiencies in terms of the conquest of its *relative autonomy*, an inseparable key to its *legitimacy*, academic and social; that its gradual consolidation has as an inescapable condition the resolution in practice of disjunctions such as those characterized by some of its members; and finally, that in a context of accelerated changes in the *external* conditions of development, there is also much to reorient and reinterpret, self-reflexively, in terms of the *internal* constituents of the field (Fuentes Navarro, 2005, p. 46).

Both in the *Communication Research Yearbooks* of CONEICC, published since 1994, and in the books annually edited by the Mexican Association of Communication Researchers (AMIC) since 2002, and of course in the journals and other editions of several Mexican universities, there have appeared multiple contributions on relevant aspects of the field's problematic and analytical proposals that, explicitly or implicitly, argue about *disjunctions*, *conditions* or *perspectives* on its constitution.

The volumes edited by Chávez and Karam, *El campo académico de la comunicación. Una mirada reflexiva y práctica* (2008) (*The academic field of communication. A reflective and practical outlook*), and by Méndez Fierro and Vizcarra, *Huellas compartidas. Ensayos sobre el campo académico de la comunicación en Baja California* (2009) (*Shared Traces. Essays on the academic field of communication in Baja California*), are eloquent examples of the increasingly widespread willingness in the country to develop a well-founded and informed discussion on the development and future of the academic field. In both cases, the initiative and most of the authors identified "in some way with the *Network for Studies in Communication Theories* (Red de Estudios en Teorías de la Comunicación, Redecom) and the *Towards a Possible Communicology Group* (Grupo hacia una Comunicología Posible, Gucom)" (Chávez & Karam, 2008, p. 9).

This was the case, in the first of the aforementioned books, of Gómez Vargas, Galindo, Rizo, Soto, Figueroa, and three collectives with institutional curricular references: Serrano, León and González from the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC), Macías and Cardona from the Intercontinental University (UIC), and Chávez,

Covarrubias, Gómez, Rocha, Uribe and Zermeño from the University of Colima. This book closes with "an exercise of systematization of information authored by Gerardo León on a large body of bibliographic material related to the academic field of communication" (Chávez & Karam, 2008, p. 14), explicitly conceived as a continuity of the "General bibliography of the academic field of communication in Mexico (1986-1994)" elaborated by Fuentes Navarro and included as an annex in the book by Galindo and Luna (1995). Although the exercise by León Barrios (2008, p. 436) is subtitled "A ten-year balance of his production", it actually covers twelve years (1996-2007) and includes 119 documents.[16]

The book coordinated by Méndez and Vizcarra (2009) materializes the intention of "collectively take stock of the institutionalization processes of the communication academic field in Baja California", through nine essays written by 14 authors, all of them professors and researchers from the UABC in Mexicali, Tijuana and Ensenada, and from the Iberoamerican University at Tijuana: Ortiz, Ortega, Méndez, Espinosa, Paz, Vargas, Soto, Gutiérrez, Morales, González, León, Serrano, Calderón de la Barca and Vizcarra. The final chapter is a "reasoned compendium" that, as a subsequent stage to an "exploratory documentary analysis on the research and analysis projects that are developed in our field" in Baja California, updates and delimits the documentary universe to the realm of research peer-reviewed journals, "in order to deepen the descriptive analysis of the socio-scientific production on communication and culture in this state, in light of the current debate on the topics and approaches developed in the Mexican and Latin American academic scene" (Vizcarra, 2009, p. 227). Subsequently, Vizcarra published in two individual books (2014, 2020), broader research reports on *Estudios sobre Comunicación en Baja California. Referencias documentales 1943-*

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16  Although León Barrios considers that "the effect of field mediations is beginning to be noticed in the formation of academic agents who recognize the importance of reflecting on the meta-object", his own data report only nine "researchers with three or more texts" in the period, and thirty-seven of the 119 documents (31%) were authored by Fuentes.

*2014* (*Communication Studies in Baja California. Document references 1943-2014*), and *La producción escrita sobre comunicación y sociedad en Baja California: sistematización documental 2000-2019* (*Written output on communication and society in Baja California: document systematization 2000-2019*). At another public university in the north of the country, the Autonomous University of Coahuila, efforts have also been made and products have been published to rescue document references on the field on a regional scale (Carabaza et al., 2011).

But surely the most extensive project of this kind is the one coordinated by Portillo (2016) for AMIC, because it covers the entire country, in five regions studied by ten researchers (Guadarrama and Valero the Central region; Fuentes Navarro, Padilla and Flores the Central-West region; León Barrios the Northwest; Hinojosa and Chong the Northeast; and Echeverría and Karam the Southeast region). This work, subsequent to and complementary to the definition of communication research programs of the same Association, edited a few years earlier by Vega (2009), helped to identify the persistent inequality of conditions and resources and the various ways of institutionalizing communication research practices valid during the first decade of the 21st century in Mexico; the processes of *regionalization* that differentiate the horizons of development and participation in the "field", but also the prevalence of the principles of academic *collaboration* "above the competitive impulses that seem to be supported by the environment of culture and institutional policies" (Fuentes Navarro, 2016, p. 11).

The one included in the book coordinated by Portillo (2016) can be considered the most updated analytical review available on the production of knowledge in the academic field of communication in Mexico.[17] Although "the results point to the concentration of production in a few cities, to fragmentation and disarticulation", Portillo points out that "another" phase of collaborative work opens up, "that of a more qualitative analysis":

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[17]  Analytical contributions of this kind are also found in the books coordinated by Martell (2004), Cornejo and Guerrero (2011), Padilla and Herrera (2016) and Vaca and Guerrero (2021a, 2021b).

... that allows to problematize the constitution of this academic community through its production, emphasizing the most recurrently addressed topics, the type of works produced, the connections, the fragmentation and forms of articulation of researchers, as well as the structural conditions in which they work, accounting for government policies that encourage, or not, certain types of scientific work (Portillo, 2016, pp. 16-19).

On the other hand, among the 617 articles published in *Comunicación y Sociedad* since 1987 (Gómez et al., 2022, p. 3), at least thirty-eight signed by Mexican authors contain analyses of some or several dimensions of the academic field. Without that cut of authors' nationality, five years earlier the count of articles on "academic field", in its two subcategories of "Epistemology, theory, methodology", and "Institutionalization, academic production", reached the sum of 51 (24%) of the 209 texts published between 2004 and 2016 in issues 1 to 26 of the New Epoch of the journal (Gómez et al., 2017, p. 32).
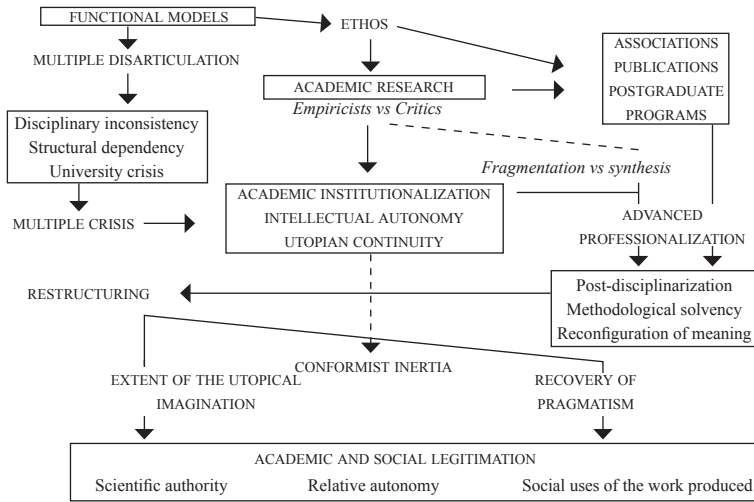
### OUTLINE OF A POSSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE

The account so far deployed, inevitably incomplete and biased, as a *reinterpretation of a previously interpreted field* and as an exercise of *academic reflexivity*, may lead to insist on the importance of making statistics and history compatible as fundamental methods of meta-research (Fuentes Navarro, 2019a), and of cooperative rather than competitive practices in the meta-communication processes constitutive of a *scientific community* committed as such to its socio-cultural environments, whose crises and "multiple disarticulations" are increasingly eloquently manifested.

Hopefully, in this framework, some *sharable sense* could be found and systematically verified about data referring to the academic field of communication in Mexico such as those cited in the commemorative panel of the 40th anniversary of the AMIC (Fuentes Navarro, 2019b): in a *corpus* consisting of 6 066 documents (844 books and 5 222 chapters and articles in academic journals), published between 1979 and 2018, the 40 years of existence of the Association, it can be observed a

steady increase in the proportion, which is already located close to 20% of the total, of research dealing with communication research itself, whether in terms of the processes of its institutionalization, academic organization and linkage, or in relation to its epistemological, theoretical and methodological development. To speak of meta-research in communication in Mexico is to speak of a growing collective effort to contribute analyses and reflections to the academic field itself that could be debated and shared, something that, nevertheless, still happens in a small proportion. And it seems evident that this limited capacity for collective learning would be even less if it were not for AMIC and very few other institutionalized instances, constantly aware of the contextual conditions of the field.

In the face of growing public questioning and the demagogic delegitimization of scientific and academic practices still so precariously institutionalized in Mexico, which reduce to Manichean stereotypes the increasingly complex science-society relations, inside and outside the academy, a consistent resource could be the strengthening of a critical communicational perspective, articulated with meta-research processes, with empirical evidence not only statistical and broad-scale methods not limited to historical interpretation, always discussed and evaluated collegially. Assuming the future viability of institutional, peaceful and democratic procedures in the country, this would be one of the most productive axes of development of the "field", to come in the following years.

ANNEX 1

MODEL OF THE STRUCTURING/DESTRUCTURING/RESTRUCTURING OF THE
FIELD OF ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN MEXICO

| FUNCTIONAL MODELS | → | ETHOS |

MULTIPLE DISARTICULATION

ACADEMIC RESEARCH
*Empiricists vs Critics*

ASSOCIATIONS
PUBLICATIONS
POSTGRADUATE
PROGRAMS

Disciplinary inconsistency
Structural dependency
University crisis

*Fragmentation vs synthesis*

MULTIPLE CRISIS →

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONALIZATION
INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY
UTOPIAN CONTINUITY

ADVANCED
PROFESSIONALIZATION

RESTRUCTURING ←

Post-disciplinarization
Methodological solvency
Reconfiguration of meaning

CONFORMIST INERTIA

EXTENT OF THE UTOPICAL
IMAGINATION

RECOVERY OF
PRAGMATISM

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL LEGITIMATION

| Scientific authority | Relative autonomy | Social uses of the work produced |

Source: Fuentes Navarro (1998, p. 345).

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