Rationale and Objectives of the ECREA Section on

"CRISIS COMMUNICATION"

Rationale

In the recent past, the world society was confronted with utterly devastating crises whose social, economic and political consequences are still noticeable nowadays. In particular political crises such as the war in Syria and the subsequent migration crisis or the Russian invasion of Ukraine, environmental crises such as climate change or public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which triggered a series of organizational crises, called multiple audiences' attention worldwide and became dominating issues on both media and personal agendas. The appropriate communicative response to such crises turned out to be an extensive challenge for professional communicators, such as journalists, public relations practitioners, corporate communication managers, political spokespersons, civil society actors and business leaders alike.

Thus, from a scientific point of view, communication plays a pivotal role in the analysis of risk and crisis since they can be conceived of as social and observer-depending constructions (Palenchar & Heath, 2007; Schwarz et al., 2016). Consequently, crises can be caused, influenced, and mitigated by communication as a constitutive element of all crises.

Risk and crisis communication are overlapping and interdisciplinary fields of research that provide very much potential for the scholarly understanding of communication processes as well as perceptions and the behavior of stakeholders in turbulent and threatening situations. The increase of extreme weather incidents because of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic exemplify that risk and crisis are concepts that are closely connected, which has been increasingly visible also in the research activities of our community. Looking back on more than a decade of research on risk and crisis communication within the ECREA network, the state of research clearly has improved a lot over the years although there are still important gaps to fill such as cross-cultural comparative research, a stronger inclusion of scholarship from non-Western countries, especially the Global South, or further advances in theory and methodology, especially with regard to different risk crisis types and communicator roles (Diers-Lawson & Meißner 2021). Following the digitization of media, risk and crisis communication has increasingly become global. Crises as well as public communication about crises are regularly crossing national and or cultural boundaries and affect audiences in different countries and different cultural contexts. This international dimension of crisis communication urgently needs more research and academic discourse.

While organizational crises have increasingly been taken into account by crisis communication scholars, the study of armed conflicts, wars, natural disasters, pandemics, terrorism, data breaches etc. initially was not a primary focus. Therefore, we call for a broader understanding of crisis communication, which includes work in different sub-disciplines of communication such as journalism, public relations, corporate communications, organizational communication, audience research, media psychology, political communication, health communication, computer-mediated communication, and international/intercultural communication. The ECREA Crisis Communication Section is a platform to look for common patterns of how crises are socially constructed by involved actors, how means of communication can help to prevent, mitigate and managing crises, how the media bring up and frame crises, but also the way different audiences perceive and make sense of crises.

Goals of the Temporary Working Group on Crisis Communication

Because of the increasing relevance of crisis communication as object of study and the lack of interdisciplinary collaboration in the field, the ECREA Crisis Communication Section strives for the following goals:

- To broaden the perspectives on crisis communication
    - by discussing the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of crises in domestic as well as international contexts,
    - by including research on manifold crisis types on organizational and societal levels,
    - and by looking at crisis communication actors in different areas such as politics, business, and civil society.
    - by applying and developing new methods to empirically investigate crisis communication.
- To build a platform for European and international communication scholars to critically discuss and compare different theoretical approaches, methods, and empirical findings of coexisting research fields related to crisis communication, which usually have lacked reference to each other.
- To intensify academic discourse and stimulate interdisciplinary collaborative research on crisis communication, also by organizing regular conferences, workshops and seminars between ECREA conferences to advance the international exchange of ideas and knowledge.
- To collaborate with renowned scientific journals publishing risk and crisis communication research.To discuss instructional and educational matters in the field.

- To cooperate with other relevant ECREA Sections (e.g., Journalism Studies, Organisational and Strategic Communication, Political Communication, or Science and Environment Communication), other ECREA TWGs and Networks, and other international communication associations in both research and practice (e.g., ICRCA, IAMCR, IARCC).
- To encourage and support doctoral students or junior scholars in pursuing their research on crisis communication.
- To provide a platform to share information about faculty positions in the area of crisis communications
- To develop relationships with global firms that can provide internships and full-time positions for students in the area of Crisis Communications
- Provide societal actors with tools and strategies to better prevent, mitigate and manage crises.

References

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