

Special Session: *Remembering Denis McQuail*

IAMCR Conference 2018

Saturday, June 23, 2018

10:30am–12:30pm • Location: Allen 221

By Helena Sousa, University of Minho

It is good to start this session with Denis favourite Irish band 'The Dubliners'.

Thank you for being here, for attending this session. All of us in this room have been impacted by Denis life or work in some shape or form.

We are here as friends, colleagues and members of the IAMCR to pay him a well-deserved tribute.

Obviously I don't need to introduce the speakers around this table as they are certainly well known to you. In any case...

Speakers:

Helena Sousa, University of Minho, "Denis McQuail: Defining the Field of Media and Communications Research"

Kaarle Nordenstreng, University of Tampere, "News and Journalism: Still Central in the Middle of all Theorizing"

Janet Wasko, University of Oregon, "Across the Pond: Denis McQuail in North America"

Johannes Bardoel, ASCoR/University of Amsterdam, Radboud University Nijmegen, "Denis McQuail in Amsterdam and the Atlantic Turn in Communication Science"

Graham Murdock, Loughborough University, "Media and Contemporary Life: Questions of Ethics and Responsibility"

Graham, will the last to speak and he will close this session.

Thank you all.

Denis passed away last June, on the 25th. He was 82.

I met Denis McQuail during an IAMCR conference in Seoul, South Korea, in the mid-90s. My Ph.D supervisor, Jill Hills, was a good friend of him and we were introduced. He was kind.

For me, it meant a lot to know personally an author I already respected so deeply.

He was a key scholar to me – he guided me through the highly dispersed and fragmented field of media and communication studies. He helped me making sense of the complexity; he helped me putting the bits and pieces of media and communication research in a wider map.

After Seoul, we were involved in common projects and Denis became well acquainted with the communication research carried out in my country, Portugal, having responded positively to several invitations from the scientific community.

At the University of Minho, Denis developed strong relationships and he had the profound respect and admiration from both students and teachers. He was a ‘compulsory reading’.

Denis became a frequent visitor of our research Centre and we enjoyed tremendously his visits. Being with him was intellectually stimulating but it was much more than that! Socially, Denis was unique, unique in his humor and sharpness.

In 2004, the University of Minho awarded Denis a very special Chair, called the *Carlos Lloyd Braga* (the name of the first Rector of the University). This chair is attributed to a leading academic in a particular discipline. For the very first time, someone from the social sciences and humanities received this Chair. We were thrilled also because it meant a lot in terms of the recognition of communication studies as a ‘mature’ cross-cutting discipline.

Denis wasn’t too impressed with the honors and celebrations but he was happy to take this opportunity to stay with us for a full week working every day, discussing in detail all collective projects of the Communication and Society Research Centre.

Within the framework of this Chair, he also had a very productive and enjoyable working meeting with the Portuguese journalists. He deeply cared about the quality of journalism... about the quality of the content in the public domain.

Since 2004, Denis has continued to be consultant in several projects in our research centre and he was an External Scientific Advisor up until the very end.

The impact of Denis in our Research Centre was enormous. He gave us guidance and confidence to move forward. We are in debt.

Well, but I was lucky to be with Denis in two other big ventures, in two projects he had co-founded (even if I joined later): the European Journal of Communication and the Euromedia Research Group.

These two projects are very telling about his vision and generosity.

So, in 1986, he founded the European Journal of Communication with Jay Blumler and Karl-Erik Rosengren.

Denis remained as editor until 2011 when he was supposed to retire. His role in the journal was so exceptional that we had to invent a title just for him: he became Emeritus Editor of the EJC. This title was invented specially for him.

I am glad we did this because he continued very much involved in the journal even after his formal ‘retirement’. He was still reading and commenting the articles, advising and supporting us.

He really loved the EJC and was keen to ensure that the best scholarship and research in the field would flow to the Journal. We are still fighting for this...and welcoming your research.

In addition to the European Journal of Communication, Denis was also a founding member of the Euromedia Research Group in 1982.

His enthusiasm kept the group alive for more than three decades. Today, with the coordination of Josef Trappel and Werner Meier, the network is still dynamic, meeting twice a year in different European countries and producing comparative media research across Europe.

Denis saw the need for cross-country comparative research in our field and the relevance of media policy and regulation, even before these topics were high in the academic agenda. He had the vision and the talent to inspire others.

I have mentioned very concrete contributions of Denis in European initiatives because they are telling about his vision, character and generosity.

Denis didn't become famous for his managerial skills, but he had this exceptional talent: a very distinctive capacity to aggregate and keep people together.

But obviously today we must recognize his massive academic work. Denis was a rock-solid academic with rigorous training in History and Social Sciences.

He studied History at Oxford University in the 1950s. He completed his Ph.D. in Social Studies at the University of Leeds in 1977 with a dissertation on television and public interest, a topic he would never abandon.

For 20 years he was a professor and researcher at the University of Amsterdam's School of Communication but Jo Bardoe will tell us about these years.

Denis wrote more than 20 books and he was translated around the world.

In fact, teachers, researchers, and students all over the world have benefited from his work.

Many began to study media and communication with some of his books like 'Sociology of Mass Communication', 'Media Performance' or the most encyclopedic of all, 'Mass Communication Theory'. It sold more than 100,000 copies, having been translated into dozens of languages. The influence of his work is enormous. He was not just an outstanding organizer.

He was also a brilliant theorist. Denis studied and theorized about audiences, political communication, public sphere, journalism, freedom of expression, social media responsibility, media policy, etc., etc.

The scope and vigor of his work made him a remarkable constructor of our field.

His productive and fulfilling life has expanded our understanding of the social responsibility of the media and the contradictory role that communication plays in the world today.

This is the legacy of Denis McQuail, an illuminating scholar and friend. Thank you.