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# Environmental Communication From Latin America: Collective Reflections Through the Systematization of Experiences in the Academic Field

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## ABSTRACT

We present the results of a *Sistematización de Experiencias/Systematization of Experiences (SdE)* among twelve researchers from Latin America about environmental communication research carried out across the region. The purpose was to characterize the state of the field, providing a basis for identifying common axes among diverse approaches, problems, and epistemological perspectives of the academic communities, which make environmental communication a situated construct relevant to the Latin American context and its socioenvironmental problems. This process includes a critical analysis of the opportunities for development and the challenges facing this emerging academic field, together with a contextualized assessment of the region's place on the international stage, highlighting the tensions and necessary dialogs between countries in the Global North and South. As a result, the ethical-political background of certain lines of research related to issues of conflict and social justice is recognized, as well as the need to consolidate the field in Latin America. We conclude that the regional experience has the potential to critically contribute to the field in the international arena, as a proposal *desde lo propio* (from within) to other regions of the Global South and North, with whom it is necessary to establish a constructive dialog.


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Prior reviews of environmental communication scholarship in Latin America – primarily systematic reviews (e.g. Nepote et al., 2020) or narrative review articles (e.g. Takahashi, 2023) – have largely focused on describing thematic areas of research. However, few initiatives move beyond descriptive mapping to more clearly delimit the field, situate the region’s contributions within the international scholarly landscape, and examine the barriers that constrain their visibility and impact, particularly by drawing on the diverse experiences of scholars and practitioners in the field. Based on collective and situated reflection, through the *Sistematización de Experiencias / Systematization of Experiences* (SdE, hereinafter) (Jara, 2018), in this article we investigate what characterizes research in environmental communication in Latin America and how it can contribute to this academic field on a global scale.

The growing socio-environmental conflict generated by structural inequalities, injustices, the impacts of pollution and climate change across the region, the result of the predominant paradigms and models of development – neoliberal and extractivist (Ciccantell & Patten, 2016) – present increasingly complex challenges to the theory and praxis of environmental communication in this region. In this context, we understand research in environmental communication as encompassing a diversity of disciplines, perspectives, practices, objects of study, and epistemological referents that address the various socio-environmental problems of the subcontinent.

We argue this based on existing Latin American environmental communication research that highlights various points, such as the intrinsic relationship between environmental degradation and dynamics of exclusion, which result in unequal access to spaces for the legitimization of knowledge and in silencing alternative voices (Herrera-Lima, 2018; Takahashi, 2023). Some studies emphasize the processes of resistance and creative responses developed by impacted communities, who organize to defend their territories, cultures, and ways of life (Herrera-Huérffano et al., 2016), while others focus on the analysis of content on the environment published by news media (Takahashi et al., 2018).

We understand that the dispersion of the field is due, in part, to the asymmetries of power that exist at the global, regional, and intra-Latin American levels, as well as the heterogeneous development of the field of communication and the unequal influence of the academic communities that study it (e.g. the predominance of white researchers from the Global North, Chakravartty et al., 2018; Ng et al., 2020).<sup>1</sup> Although research exploring questions related to marginalized identities; power and agency; and justice, equity, inclusion, diversity, and access have increased in environmental communication, they are not central issues (Bhatti et al., 2026) This situation makes it difficult to characterize and understand the field, as well as to make its contributions visible on the international stage (Aparicio Cid, 2023; Loose, 2025; Nepote et al., 2020). In this context, and in view of the COP30 in Belém, Brazil in 2025, it becomes more urgent to recognize and position Latin American perspectives in global debates. This theoretical-practical work – as situated research – reveals differences, but also shows strong points of confluence that distinguish environmental communication both from other communication specializations within Latin America and from other spaces of environmental communication in the international arena.

In view of the above, it is necessary to reflect on the research in environmental communication produced from a Latin American standpoint, which enables us to identify the specificity of the practices and perspectives that convene in it, as well as the points of convergence and divergence within the historical trajectory shared across the region. This assessment will serve to infer the contributions of the field around shared problems, strengthening its practice and research at the interregional level. On a global scale, the learning and knowledge generated in these latitudes could enrich the perspective and work of environmental communication in other parts of the world, particularly in the Global North,<sup>2</sup> as well as promote dialogue with other regions of the Global South, such as Africa and Asia.

This reflection is part of the interest in investigating the existence of a Latin American perspective in the academic field of environmental communication, documenting the experiences of the researchers from a critical perspective. In addition, it seeks to promote a productive dialogue

that helps to overcome the current inequities that affect Latin American research production, such as lack of funding, infrastructure limitations, fragility of scientific policies, difficulties in publishing in high-impact journals, and low indexing of regional journals (Takahashi, 2023). Systematic and bibliometric studies in the field (e.g. Cuesta Moreno & Núñez, 2016; Nepote et al., 2020; Takahashi et al., 2025) present only a partial view due to limitations in the indexing of articles in databases, and do not explore the barriers mentioned above.

To this end, we start from a methodological strategy derived from the SdE, an approach developed in Latin America as a critique of the “universalist” postulate of hegemonic scientific production (Jara, 2018, pp. 119–120). Although SdE has been widely applied to the experiences of social or community organizations, there is also a significant history of the methodology being applied by popular educators as a way of generating knowledge and reflection from their practice (Jara, 2018; Torres-Carrillo, 2021). In this regard, the fundamental premises of SdE are productive, insofar as we are interested in reflecting on our praxis as researchers in environmental communication.

There are other theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of research practices, but they do not offer a perspective that is relevant to the purposes of our study. We highlight here the sociology of science applied to the analysis of the history of the field of communication (Löblich & Scheu, 2011) and collaborative autoethnography (Chang et al., 2016) as an approach that addresses research practices themselves. However, these perspectives continue to be dominated by the construction of the object of study from a dualistic epistemology, which separates the researcher from the object, or emphasize a therapeutic and restorative approach for academic subjects (Karalis Noel et al., 2023).

In contrast, since around the middle of the last century, the tradition of critical thinking in communication studies in Latin America has been characterized by the development of work committed to social movements and the issues that emerge from people and their communities. The commitment and involvement of researchers goes beyond understanding science as an aseptic and distant exercise, as can be seen in the prolific work of communication researchers such as Beltrán (2012), Mattelart (1980), Freire (1969), Martín-Barbero (1987), Díaz Bordenave (1982), and Alfaro (1993), to name a few. Following the long, but sometimes unknown in the Global North, tradition of communication work developed on the continent, we gathered the guidelines of the SdE, which is distinguished by being a research modality that draws on a tradition of Latin American thought, as it “it produces meaningful knowledge and learning that enables people to critically appropriate their lived experiences (their knowledge and feelings), understand them theoretically, and orient them toward the future with a transformative perspective” (Jara, 2018, p. 61).<sup>3</sup>

Within the SdE we position ourselves as “agents of transformation” in the academic field of environmental communication, seeking to intervene in the transformation of the realities of inequality and environmental conflict in the region: “We reconstruct our experience as an object and rebuild ourselves throughout the process, so that we are no longer the same people, in a process that is neither mechanical nor linear, but always a creative challenge” (Jara, 2018, p. 56).

In summary, we understand SdE as a facilitator of “the critical interpretation of one or more experiences” (Jara, 2018, p. 61), with an emphasis on investigating the “logic of the process experienced” by the protagonists, rather than the logic of conventional research based on the delimitation of an external object of study.

In the following section, we synthesize the methodological strategy inspired by the SdE. The presentation of the results is organized into three main sections, which responds to a structure that describes (point i), interprets (point ii), and critically analyzes (point iii) the field:

- i an overview of the most relevant lines of research in academic production around environmental communication in Latin America;
- ii a reflection on the opportunities and challenges of the emerging academic field of Latin American environmental communication; and

- iii a situated balance of the position of our region in the international arena, emphasizing the counterpoint between Global Norths and Souths.

## Methodological strategy

This article is the result of the collaborative work of twelve researchers in the field of environmental communication from seven Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay), convened by Michigan State University, to participate in the Counter-Hegemonic Environmental Discourses in Latin American Contexts Symposium and Workshop, held on March 31, April 1, and 2, 2025 in East Lansing, Michigan, USA.

The workshop organizing committee selected nine Latin American researchers in environmental communication (including three from the host university) based on three criteria: (1) their scientific and applied contributions to the field, identified through previous systematic studies; (2) diversity in research areas and theoretical–methodological approaches; and (3) diversity of countries represented.

Following a proposal from the organizers, the group discussed potential collective outputs, initially considering a systematic literature review. This option was ultimately rejected in favor of an approach capable of capturing the lived experiences and challenges faced by researchers in the region, in dialogue with the existing literature. The adoption of the Systematization of Experiences (SdE) methodology thus opened possibilities for deeper reflexivity, while also introducing challenges for its application.

Although the SdE is often applied to experiences with more bounded spatial and temporal scopes, there are precedents for broader undertakings – particularly collective reflections developed in national and continental meetings of popular educators (Jara, 2018, pp. 39–40). In this sense, the workshop as a “meeting event” became foundational to the systematization process.

A shared diagnosis of the field’s fragmentation led to one immediate outcome of the workshop: the creation of the *Red Latinoamericana de Estudios en Comunicación Ambiental* (Red LECA)/Latin American Network of Studies in Environmental Communication, which assumed responsibility for producing this article as its first collective task. This study is therefore a reflective examination of our own practices as researchers.

This exercise is central to examining our dual positionality: as researchers situated near the social actors we study (e.g. activists, communities, Indigenous peoples), and simultaneously as peripheral academics in the global knowledge system. Such decentering requires acknowledging that “in every experience, the perceptions, sensations, emotions, and interpretations of each individual are present” (Jara, 2018, p. 53). Methodologically, this does not represent a loss of objectivity but an opportunity to produce a different orientation to research – one that stems from direct, contextualized understanding rather than external inference (Jara, 2018, p. 62). The SdE still involves a degree of “distancing” through relative objectification (Jara, 2018, p. 76).

Throughout the SdE process, a set of common elements emerged concerning our professional and academic trajectories as Latin American environmental communication researchers. These included experiences with scientific writing and publication, engagement with literature in our subfields, participation in associations and academic meetings, integration into university settings, teaching, and interactions with diverse social actors. Prior systematic, scoping, and narrative reviews – some authored by members of this group (e.g. Nepote et al., 2020; Aparicio Cid, 2023; Takahashi et al., 2025) – also served as a starting point. We approached these works as efforts to define and characterize the field and as resources for reflecting on our own paths, which have often been pursued in relative isolation. Our goal was to learn from this collective trajectory and foster more coordinated and transformative action in environmental communication.

Two clarifications are necessary. First, our collective reflection does not aim to represent all or a subset of researchers in the field. Yet the SdE is not restricted to individual experiences; rather, it considers “the link between particular initiatives and the historical and social dynamics of which

they form part” (Jara, 2018, p. 89). Second, many participants had not met before the workshop and represent diverse backgrounds, interests, and trajectories. The SdE does not seek “absolute or permanent consensus” (Jara, 2018, p. 53). Instead, debate and disagreement are viewed as signs of theoretical and practical vitality, strengthening the group’s capacity to argue, synthesize, and nuance (Jara, 2018, p. 53). This principle is reflected in the writing of this article.

## Procedures

Our systematization followed Torres-Carrillo’s (2021, pp. 41–45) seven-step procedure, with adaptations (see Appendix). The core working space in a SdE is the workshop, as it enables dialogue and collective reflection. A three-day in-person meeting was preceded by exchanges facilitated by the event organizers, and the collaborative writing process continued remotely for several months. Table 1 summarizes the stages, timeline, and main activities of the systematization.

In terms of thematic scope – understood by Jara (2018, pp. 146–147) as the “axis of systematization” – this article focuses primarily on research, with teaching and outreach as secondary focuses. Following Torres-Carrillo (2021, p. 42), our core systematization questions were: What are the main lines of research in Latin American environmental communication? What are the field’s strengths and areas for development? What points of connection or contrast exist with predominant practices in the Global North?

The following sections present the main results of the systematization, organized by key themes. Each theme employs the same methodological approach but varies in emphasis between descriptive–narrative analysis (“main lines of research”) and interpretive–critical discussion (“opportunities and challenges” and “proposals for internationalizing the situated”). The results report our collective experiences and our reflections in relation to existing scholarship that examines the critical points we make throughout the text (Torres-Carrillo, 2021).

## Results

As we reflected on our collective conversations, we recognized that there is an important diversity among Latin American researchers – ontological, epistemological, methodological, or thematic – as well as differences in positionalities, which must be recognized. This plurality is visible in studies that, at times, reproduce naturalized developmentalist visions or adopt instrumental approaches to environmental communication, thereby limiting its critical and transformative potential, a

**Table 1.** Process of the systematization of experiences.

No.	Stage (adapted from Torres-Carrillo, 2021)	Timing of the process and work modality	Main activities of the systematization
1	Prior planning and consensus to carry out the systematization	Instances prior to the workshop (online work)	- Zoom meetings - Exchanges via WhatsApp
2	Initial definition of questions and core themes of the systematization	Instances prior to and beginning of the first workshop day (in-person work)	- Symposium with individual presentations - Formulation of 5 guiding questions
3	Descriptive and narrative reconstruction of the practice	First day of the workshop (in-person work in conversation groups: A1, A2, A3)	- Conversation groups - Responses recorded on sticky notes
4	Analytical reconstruction of the practice	Closing of the first workshop day	- Formation of new groups - Plenary meeting Sticky notes grouped on posters
5	Critical interpretation to produce a first summary	Second day of the in-person workshop and start of online work (group work by core themes: G1, G2, G3)	- Writing of group reports - Use of Google Docs and WhatsApp
6	Interpretative summary and presentation of results	Two rounds of group writing (C1, C2) and plenary sessions (online work)	- Use of Zoom, Google Docs, and WhatsApp
7	Peer evaluation discussion and final review	Formation of review group: S1 (online work)	- Use of Zoom, Google Sheets/Docs, WhatsApp

point also made by Cuesta Moreno (2016). In other cases, many studies reproduce theoretical-methodological frameworks that do not fully align with the situated realities of practice and research in the region, or results in largely descriptive studies with limited conceptual development (Aparicio Cid, 2023; Loose, 2025).

With this landscape in mind, the themes outlined in the following sections should be read as our reflections of these ongoing tensions, convergences, and divergences within the field. They provide a starting point for understanding how environmental communication is being conceptualized, practiced, and debated across Latin America.

## Mapping main areas of research

The exercise of mapping the main areas or lines of research was one of the most debated aspects of the SdE. The initial challenge in analyzing environmental communication in Latin America emerges from the difficulty of delineating the field of study. According to previous systematic reviews (e.g. Nepote et al., 2020) and our diverse experiences in research groups and collaborations, its scope is so broad that it can include everything from the study of the promotion of expansive unsustainable activities to the analysis of alternative forms of expression based on Indigenous worldviews. This elasticity of the term – often substituting *environmental* with “green,” “ecological,” “sustainable,” or “socio-environmental” – helps explain, at least in part, the field’s dispersion and the limitations of existing systematic reviews.

As a starting point, this section aims at identifying and analyzing, from the perspectives of the 12 participants, key areas of research in environmental communication in Latin America, with an emphasis on producing new conceptualizations that allow us to theorize the field. This analysis does not aim to present exhaustive systematic review, an exercise that faces methodological challenges due to difficulties in systematically and reliably collecting research articles (Takahashi et al., 2025).

Three areas of research stand out, representing a significant portion of academic production and research groups (particularly in Brazil, see Bueno, 2024) across the region: environmental journalism, communication surrounding socio-environmental conflict, and Indigenous communication. The order of these areas does not correspond to a hierarchy of significance, but it is important to point out that environmental journalism, particularly in Brazil, appears to be the most consolidated area of research. Other areas that represent important contributions are also addressed, such as public communication of science, environmental education, and risk communication (specifically related to natural hazards and disasters).

*Environmental journalism.* To begin with, we highlight studies in environmental journalism, since they constitute one of the most researched areas of the field and exemplify the diversity of perspectives informed by various epistemological-theoretical schools of thought. For example, according to Aparicio Cid (2020), in Mexico this category excludes generalist coverage and corresponds to a group of practices not developed by hegemonic media, but rather to community, alternative, and militant journalistic initiatives, a stark difference of its conceptualization in the Global North (see, Neuzil, 2020). In Brazil, regardless of the type of media, environmental journalism presupposes a commitment to environmental protection in the same way as it happens with other issues, such as human rights (Bueno, 2007; Girardi et al., 2012). However, the most common interpretation among the researchers participating in the workshop and in the Latin American literature they know is the one that includes, within environmental journalism studies, the analysis of coverage of environmental issues in any news media.

With an approach that considers all these meanings of environmental journalism, this line of research includes studies on news coverage of pesticide contamination (e.g. Girardi et al., 2019) or on global events such as the Conference of the Parties (COPs) (e.g. Gavirati, 2012), or intersecting issues, as occurred with the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. Herrera-Huérffano et al., 2021). These content analyzes are the most recurrent in Latin American production, with less emphasis on climate

change than research on environmental communication from the Global North (Takahashi et al., 2025), where it is by far the main research topic (Agin & Karlsson, 2021). There are also studies on professional production routines (e.g. Palma & Salinas, 2024), news consumption and media effects<sup>4</sup> (e.g. Loose et al., 2022), and theoretical discussions on the role of environmental journalism and its militant or activist stance (e.g. Loose & Belmonte, 2023).

We concur that, in recent years, alternative, popular, and community media – an area with a long history across the region – have been focused on covering environmental conflicts, on issues such as resistance to mega-mining, agribusiness, and pesticides, among others. A report by the Fundación Gabo (2022) on local digital native media in Latin America shows that environmental issues consistently appear as a top issue to audiences, after politics, and observes a shift in this form of journalism that now seeks to “make the invisible visible” (p. 72).

*Socio-environmental conflicts.* Communication research on socio-environmental conflicts is another of the research cores with the most associated bibliographic production in Latin America. Gavirati (2016) reviewed dissertations in this area and identified a post-journalistic and advertising focus of research in environmental communication – in Argentina –, where community and political considerations take center stage, with an emphasis on addressing environmental conflicts.

This line of research stands out for its specificity in the Latin American context, a region that registers the highest rates of violence and criminality against environmental groups, also called “guardians of the earth.”<sup>5</sup> Socio-environmental conflicts transcend the legal-institutional domain, since collective mobilizations and protests include key actors, like Indigenous peoples, often with demands that question dominant economic models. Studies in conflict resolution recognize both the centrality of the economic dimension and the diversity of actors, discourses, and forms of resistance to projects promoted by extractive corporations or governments. The study of communication that resists extractivism, which adopts and/or adapts the concept of environmental justice associated with racism – originally developed in the U.S. (Bullard, 1987) –, has as protagonists not only Indigenous peoples, but also rural and traditional communities – such as fishermen and Afro-Latino communities (e.g. quilombolas, cimarrones, palenques, etc.) –, as well as urban mobilizations and social movements that operate both in the territory and virtually (e.g. Pedro-Carañana et al., 2024).

Diverse perspectives can be identified within this scholarship: the study of the corporate communication of extractivist industries (e.g. Lund et al., 2017); the study of communication from the perspective of communities, organizations, and social movements resisting extractivism (e.g. Ruiz-Dodobara et al., 2023); the study of the communication strategies of governments or public institutions (e.g. Muñoz Campos et al., 2016); and the study of the public controversies that put the above in dialogue (e.g. Costa & Teodósio, 2011). Without necessarily associating it with the term “public relations,” efforts to obtain or maintain a social license to operate, corporate environmental responsibility, and greenwashing by companies that often come from the Global North are relevant topics of research in Latin America. More recently, disinformation and the promotion of green financial instruments or more subtle strategies to promote green consumption are specifically included (e.g. Garzón Díaz & Gómez Márquez, 2023).

*Indigenous communication.* In Latin America, environmental communication includes very relevant scientific contributions in indigenous communication studies. These studies focus on the communicative practices developed by Indigenous peoples, aimed at both the defense of their territories against extractivism and the preservation and visibility of their cultures, identities, languages, cosmovisions, and ways of relating to nature and the more than human world (e.g. Escobar, 2018; Santi & Araújo, 2022; Yaniello, 2017).

The active recovery of Indigenous peoples’ cosmovisions and knowledge throughout Latin America has made them gain visibility (Bengoa, 2007). Thus, the voice of Indigenous peoples in their own diversity becomes fundamental (Herrera-Huérffano et al., 2016). This is the case of the notion of *Buen Vivir* (*sumak kawsay*, *suma qamaña*, or good living), derived from the cosmology of the Andean peoples (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011) and which has motivated a series of studies that

understand communication as a practice aimed at collective harmony, reciprocity, and balance with nature (Contreras, 2019).

Moreover, from an ontological vision shared by multiple Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, territory is not understood as a resource or a simple place of action, but as a living being that communicates, teaches, and sustains relationships (Herrera-Huérffano, 2022). Thus, researchers have studied a range of topics, from processes that integrate spirituality, pedagogy, and memory around the Earth as mother and teacher (e.g. Green, 2018; Muñoz, 2018), to territories that are configured as political subjects capable of articulating shared struggles and meanings (e.g. Araújo & Santi, 2022; Muñoz, 2018; Ramos & Yaniello, 2021).

*Emerging areas.* We identified three additional areas of research that merit discussion. We agreed on their importance and on their emergent nature. First, environmental communication research has increasingly proliferated within the broader domain of public communication of science. Socio-environmental issues have become prevalent due to recent trends in citizen science and the focus on public engagement, with the participation of Latin American researchers being still marginal but growing in recent decades (Herrera-Lima, 2018). Studies of communication in science museums explore their function as sites of environmental knowledge production (Nepote et al., 2024), the development of exhibitions (Correia de Souza & Marandino, 2024), and participatory audiovisual initiatives (Sato & Bizerra, 2024). This line of research also includes analyzes of citizen science projects and the ways in which such initiatives secure a presence in local media agendas (Comonfort-Galindo & Nepote, 2024). Similarly, from a science communication perspective, reviews of environmental disinformation research in Latin America show steady growth since 2016, with climate change emerging as a recurring focus (Urbano et al., 2024).

Environmental education, which is an especially strong and consolidated research area in Mexico (Aparicio Cid & Castro, 2019; Arias Ortega & Rosales Romero, 2019), presents an overlap with environmental communication. There are works published in the field of environmental education that transverse aspects of communication related to the use of media and their contents; for example, the analysis of narratives in digital social networks in proposals inspired by UNESCO for communication and education for sustainable development (Badillo Mendoza, 2012), among others. The culturalist approach to environmental education, which is committed to the involvement of society as a whole in a permanent process (Rodrigo & Machuca, 2018), favors closeness to concepts also associated with communication objectives such as raising awareness or popularizing science.

In Brazil, educommunication is a specific university major at the University of São Paulo, which has a discipline focused on the environment as a social issue (see, Brianezi & Marras Tate, 2025). In the specialized literature, environmental educommunication programs appear as educational interventions with communicational components that strengthen the construction of environmental citizenship (Henríquez-Coronel et al., 2023), promote critical understanding of complex problems (Quevedo & Loose, 2018), and are linked to community processes of communication for social change. Media literacy or media education experiences are also included (Viteri, 2021), expanding the scope of the field in different educational and territorial contexts.

Another relevant area of research involves risk communication studies. These are not always intertwined with environmental issues, but they present a strong intersection, considering that most disasters occur due to a combination of natural hazards, human interferences, and the existence of social vulnerabilities, which are closely interconnected with aspects of environmental injustice. Worsening climate change conditions have brought research areas closer together due to the intensification of disasters, which confirms disaster communication as an important, albeit recent, line of work in the field of environmental communication (Palma et al., 2022). Along these lines, studies on journalistic coverage of environmental hazards and associated disasters (e.g. Loose & Girardi, 2018), which is rather dispersed and occasional (Palma et al., 2022), also emerge. This recent development contrasts with what is happening in the Global North, where studies on risk communication have been consolidated since the 1980s, in some cases in connection with science,

technology, and society studies (STS) or sociological theories such as the world risk society (Beck, 2008).

Based on our review and assessment of the main areas of research in environmental communication in Latin America, we next discuss how this scholarship presents both opportunities and challenges that could allow or hinder the consolidation of the field. We take an interpretivist approach grounded in our collective experiences.

### **Opportunities and challenges**

From our initial exchange during the workshop and the subsequent discussion for the elaboration of the results described here through the SdE, and various rounds of revisions of this manuscript, we identified strengths that help shape a particular contribution of research in environmental communication from Latin America in international conversations. In this section, the critical interpretation of the experiences narrated in the workshop was key, through the addition of the “theoretical context” (Jara, 2018), which includes broader theoretical perspectives on the issue of the geopolitics of knowledge.

In Latin America, the recurrence and intensity of socio-environmental conflicts associated with natural resource extraction, a historically central component of the region’s economy (Svampa, 2019), create a rich context for analyzing power structures and discursive disputes. It highlights the communication that articulates, makes visible, and empowers social movements opposing extractivism and questionable development projects (e.g. Palma & Alcaíno, 2020). The tradition of mobilization for environmental rights has driven research in environmental communication that contributes to understanding socio-environmental conflicts associated with the tensions of sustainable development, with implications beyond Latin America.

The diversity of the continent in ecosystemic and cultural terms, including indigenous territories, also gives rise to an epistemic diversity present in Latin American environmental communication studies. This creates possibilities of questioning Western knowledge and articulating non-scientific views of science, with methodologies of knowledge production that incorporate principles of these other cosmovisions (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011).

*Center-periphery tensions.* We conceptualize that the interaction between environmental communication studies from Latin America with other academic communities, such as those of the Global North, is initially characterized by a center-periphery tension. This also invites us to think about how to establish dialogues and exchanges with other academic communities in the Global South. This was a central and key aspect of our discussions, one that aligns with scholarship from the Global South that critically examines this dynamic (e.g. Dutta & Pal, 2020).

In this respect, some of us mentioned the decolonial turn as an example, defined as diverse positions that recognize the links between capitalism, colonialism, and racism (Quijano, 2000), which in turn has been articulated in relation with Latin American political ecology (Alimonda, 2011). This allows some scholars to explore and use the cracks or fissures of hegemonic systems as spaces of resistance, subversion, and action to build alliances with other communities that seek to generate a situated and non-Eurocentric critical theory. Conversely, it is also clear that the recovery of indigenous knowledge, as the result of the activism of native peoples to rescue their worldviews and knowledge (Bengoa, 2007), exceeds and challenges the capacity of the academy. These practices conceive ways of cohabiting the world that transcend the functional and developmental, creating the opportunity to reconfigure the field of environmental communication from a relational and biocentric ethics perspective. These, in dialogue with approaches from the Global North such as deep ecology, challenge modern anthropocentrism and propose a reorganization of the place of humans within the web of life (Naess, 1973).

We thus consider that what can be perceived in international research communities as epistemological and methodological barriers or limitations of Latin America environmental communication scholarship, can also serve as a catalyst for the opening of spaces, particularly with Africa (Iqani &

Judge, 2025). Our shared histories allow us to understand why there is greater affinity between environmental communication studies and practices between Latin America and other regions of the Global South. However, these affinities appear to be inversely proportional to the volume of collaborative production, which represents a challenge for the construction of cooperation and solidarity.

Confronting this center–periphery tension reveals epistemological barriers tied to the need for cognitive, ontological, and epistemological decentering in relation to both the naturalist ontological canon (Descola, 2013) and the epistemic commitments of modern science. Such decentering implies an interdisciplinary strategy from the perspective of scientific knowledge – natural and social sciences – and strength in dialogue and debate, recognizing that the aforementioned fissures can also help to amplify visions in which there is a commitment to a *diálogo de saberes* (dialogue of knowledge/*savoirs*) that also includes culturally situated knowledge (Leff, 2012; Olivé, 2009). This strategy must be applied in both the Global North and the Global South and their intersections.

Moreover, these interactions with the Global South do not subscribe to a geographic south. Some collaborations between academics from Latin American countries, Australia, Canada, the United States, and Europe respond to peripheral concerns and realities in all countries. The question of “ethnic minorities,”<sup>6</sup> their cosmologies and their forms of relationship with nature(s) or with other non-human or more-than-human beings, as well as the effects of capitalism on these entanglements, are some of the issues that cut cross the realities of a Global South present in various countries, beyond their geographical location.

Thus, one aspect that epistemologically and methodologically characterizes these interactions is the potential for exchange offered by Latin American scientific research that is more focused on addressing immediate local needs and problems. An example of this is the studies on risk management in Latin America that focus on the communicative practices of communities from their local realities (Moreno & Peres, 2011).

In this context, the centrality of the concept of territory acquires a particular meaning, as it resists being reduced to the mere commodification of land and bodies within the infrastructural logics of capitalism. Beyond a functional or instrumental conception, the territory is thus understood as a space of life, bonding, and meaning, articulated to an epistemology of situated and localized knowledge (Herrera-Huérffano, 2022). While this approach is crucial to understanding the differential impacts of environmental transformations in the Global South, it is often perceived as a limitation within certain academic circles that privilege more Cartesian or universalist frameworks of theoretical production (Dutta & Pal, 2020).

*Challenges to scientific production and inclusivity.* We agree, based on our experiences and dialogues in different academic spaces, that Latin American case studies are often questioned in terms of their capacity to generate theoretical contributions of global scope. Even during the SdE exercise, some participants stated that in some experiences submitting articles to international journals based in the Global North, they have received comments from reviewers who deny or criticize the possibility of theorizing from Latin America under the argument that it is unnecessary because it has already been done in contexts of the Global North. However, the theoretical developments of Latin American communication, especially the perspective of *mediaciones* proposed by Martín-Barbero (1987) and other work by Beltrán (2012), Díaz Bordenave (1982), and Alfaro (1993), represent another strength of the scholarship from the region. This theoretical approach enables us to understand complex communicative phenomena, such as media consumption and disinformation, from a critical and situated perspective. Despite the limitations imposed by the digital divide in Latin America, there are other reference studies (e.g. Gómez Isassi & Treviño, 2015; Gómez Márquez, 2022) that open up possibilities to apply this approach to the analysis of environmental communication in a *glocal* space, inhabited mostly by new generations, where meanings about the environmental crisis, social responses, responsibilities, and agency are negotiated.

This skepticism coexists with the paradox that, although there are theories formulated in the Global North that seek to overcome the nature/culture dichotomy – such as Bruno Latour’s

(2012) Actor-Network Theory – they rarely incorporate the knowledge of the South in a substantive way. In many cases, these perspectives are cited peripherally or with a bias that tends to victimize, rather than fully recognize, the epistemological power of these subjects (Todd, 2016). However, we perceive that many of these works open up possibilities for dialogue and theoretical convergence, especially around notions such as ecocultural identity and relational ontologies (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020). On this point, environmental communication studies developed in Latin America are distinguished by their emphasis on agency, epistemic plurality, and cosmovisions of local peoples and communities.

### ***Proposals for internationalizing the situated***

This final section emphasizes the richness of the SdE as a means of transforming our praxis. To this end, it is particularly relevant that our methodological approach allows us to account for broad experiences that go beyond personal anecdotes but rather constitute an experiential record in which the descriptive-narrative gives way to finding those shared patterns for a critical interpretation of experiences.

In practical terms, an important part of the collaborative and academic exchanges with scholars from other regions has occurred through the participation of Latin American researchers in international communication associations and conferences, such as the International Communication Association (ICA), the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), the Global Network for Public Science Communication and Technology (PCST), and the International Environmental Communication Association (IECA). However, this participation has been limited due to various barriers.

These barriers refer to costs, language, time availability, among others, which together allow the participation of only a small group of researchers (Dutta, 2020). Those who can participate represent a relatively limited view of the various lines of research, epistemologies, and methodologies described throughout this article. In this way, researchers who become part of the conversations within these associations and conferences tend to align with the dominant research concerns in the Global North.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, research anchored in Southern epistemologies tends to be a minority, leading to their marginalization to small, peripheral spaces, such as in special panels at academic conferences, or at regional conferences such as those of the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIIC) and the Latin American Federation of Social Communication Faculties (FELAFACS), where environmental communication also plays a minor role. This leads to the creation of niches and insularity, which prevents the integration of these epistemologies and conceptual and theoretical frameworks with the dominant ones.

The gaps are also manifested in international academic publications. Access is limited by paywalls, language requirements, or format barriers (manuscript structure), favoring researchers from the Global North (Dutta, 2020). Conversely, Latin American journals, mostly university journals, are considered among the most accessible and inclusive globally under the diamond model. They are freely accessible and published, but most are not indexed in international databases (e.g. Web of Science, ProQuest), which limits their visibility (Moutinho, 2024). In addition, many universities across the region do not value them in academic evaluations. Therefore, a publishing strategy is required that eliminates these barriers and promotes more democratic access to knowledge.

Another point to highlight is the difficulty for researchers from Latin America to occupy leadership positions in international communication associations and journals – e.g. editorships or editorial boards.<sup>8</sup> This difficulty is apparently associated with the priorities set by publishers and associations, with notable exceptions, which creates a vicious circle. The lack of representation in these spaces limits the exposure of ideas that are developed in Latin America and other regions of the Global South. Peer review processes are made more difficult by limiting access to reviewers

with knowledge in the areas of research. Proposals for special issues that enable spaces for researchers from Latin America are limited as there is no such participation. At this point, the participation of Latin American researchers based in universities in the Global North can occasionally serve as bridges between academic communities.

In conclusion, we agree that the co-learning that can take place based on exposure to different schools of communication can generate synergies and complementarities that result in more robust theoretical frameworks. In recent years, conversations between academic communities at a global level have spread thanks to collaborative online technologies, the repatriation of researchers, or participation in regional conferences.

Similarly, the opening of new publishing spaces<sup>9</sup> attempts to break down some barriers to access such as language, publication costs, or review timeframes. For example, in the field of science communication, the need to be reflective in our research and practices has been identified in relation to differences in cultures, language, religion, sexuality, among others, and the potential political and moral difficulties that this recognition can create (Lewenstein, 2024). Finally, there is a need for more accessible spaces for the exchange of researchers and ideas in the field of environmental communication on an international scale.

## Conclusions

In this article, we propose a reflective and critical perspective of Latin American research in environmental communication from a collective exercise based on the Systematization of Experiences (SdE). Our discussions, which took place among researchers representing diverse epistemological, methodological, experiential, and language perspectives, suggest that the academic field of environmental communication in Latin America is going through a complex process of consolidation. This is marked by tensions but also by multiple opportunities to help the strengthening of critical, situated and transformative research agendas, given its thematic diversity, its intercultural nature, and its transversality to the various socio-environmental problems. The SdE, by its own nature, is delimited by the experiences of the collective. Different collective configurations could result in additional insights about the field. The participants in this SdE represent a diversity of positionalities, histories, and perspectives that together have created a rich tapestry of interrelated experiences, one that is valid in its own.

This effort has required adapting the SdE to the specific conditions of the academic experience; on the understanding that this approach “produces significant knowledge and learning that make it possible to critically appropriate the lived experiences (their knowledge and feelings), understand them theoretically and orient them toward the future with a transformative perspective” (Jara, 2018, p. 61). While traditional research can be defined as the production of knowledge, the systematization of this experience has implied a certain level of meta-cognitive reflection, including the review of the state of the art. However, the focus of the SdE shifts toward the sharing of the experience of research or the (inter)subjective vision of the participants around environmental communication.

During the SdE process, the existence of a set of common elements emerged among the participants, related to the specificities of our professional and academic praxis as Latin American researchers in environmental communication. It was an instance from which we could interpret our experiences in an experiential sense, including the processes of writing and scientific publishing, participation in academic and professional associations and meetings, insertion in our workspaces – mostly in universities –, the exercise of teaching, and other aspects of academic life, and its intersections with various actors and social spheres. All this, with the goal set on learning from the road well-traveled – so far, mostly in isolation – to promote transformative action – collectively – in the field of environmental communication.

The SdE allowed us to conclude that research in environmental communication in Latin America, as an emerging transdisciplinary territory (Gavirati, 2016), presents both possibilities of

divergence and convergence with the global field. On the one hand, as we argue throughout the article, there is evidence of a power dispute with the hegemonic centers of knowledge production in the Global North, marked by an epistemic, methodological, and linguistic tension between peripheral knowledge and dominant epistemological matrices (Palma et al., 2022). On the other hand, there are parallels and areas of significant agreement with some central aspects of the field at the international level, mainly thinking of environmental communication as a crisis discipline (Cox, 2007), a care discipline (Pezzullo, 2024), or a crucial form of environmental action (Irwin et al., 2018).

Conversely, it is necessary to highlight challenges and lines of work, remembering that the SdE proposes to interpret our experiences to articulate a transformative praxis:

- i One of the main challenges identified is the dispersion of research at the regional level, which limits the construction of a common theoretical–conceptual base. This is expressed in the scarcity of consolidated collaborative networks, as well as in the predominance of descriptive research that does not critically address the material, symbolic, and structural conditions of socio-environmental conflicts, which prevents us from grasping the complexity of the phenomena associated with their ecosystemic logic (Moraes, 2004).
- ii Another aspect that we identified is the need to strengthen analytical work and build methods that are in dialogue with the various ways of generating knowledge. This implies promoting participatory methodologies that generate mutual benefits and recognize local knowledge, agencies, and forms of action of communities (Palma et al., 2025). This implies critically reviewing one’s own epistemic positions and adopting care policies that question the extractivist logic of Western knowledge production (Dutta & Pal, 2020).
- iii Institutional strengthening is also necessary to achieve the consolidation of the field and overcome the current conditions of precariousness in terms of resources, access to databases, and recognition of this field within academic structures. The institutionalization of environmental communication as an area of study and action is still a pending task, which can begin to be remedied with the revision of curricula in higher education, the mainstreaming and specialization of training in environmental communication in undergraduate and graduate programs, and the promotion of the training of new generations of researchers, with consideration to the specificities of each country.<sup>10</sup>
- iv Articulating environmental communication from Latin America implies fully assuming its political dimension. Work in this field must not only produce critical knowledge, but also actively have an impact through transformative praxis. To this end, it is essential to consolidate the field, recognize both its contributions and its internal tensions, and articulate academic production with social struggles and processes of institutional transformation. In this sense, environmental communication in Latin America cannot be understood only as an emerging academic field, but as a space of dispute for the meaning, legitimacy, and power of naming the communicative and environmental from the perspective of the territories.

For all these reasons, we consider that this collective reflection demonstrates that Latin American research in environmental communication is characterized by its epistemic plurality, its emphasis on socio-environmental justice, as well as its interest and capacity to articulate South–South and South–North dialogues. Latin America not only interacts but has the potential to critically contribute to the international field of environmental communication. Their contributions are not marginal, but central to rethinking the field as an ethical, political practice situated in the face of a global crisis, with local consequences, that we face.

Last but not least, the ability to conduct research with limited resources emerges as a characteristic of Latin American academia, as an example of creativity and synergy for other academic communities. It does not only respond to the effect of circumstances of scarcity of investment in science that should not be left unquestioned, but reflects the personal, activist commitment of researchers

in this field. This committed positioning of the researchers is also evident in participatory action research perspectives, frequent in Latin American environmental communication research.

Finally, we highlight that one of the transformative results of the methodology's use is the creation and consolidation of the Red LECA. After an initial meeting, the methodology requires the exchange, reflection, and discussion of shared experiences, which has led to the creation of an academic learning community that recognizes each other and did not exist prior to the exercise.

We hope that this article, as the first collective publication of the Red LECA, serves as an invitation to researchers around the world to engage in robust and long-term collaborations to re-imagine and establish the field of environmental communication as a space in the struggle for survival, equity in diversity, and the decolonization of knowledge.

## Notes

1. For example, Brazil has several environmental communication research groups established in recent decades (see, Bueno, 2024).
2. We use this category to account for the geopolitics of knowledge, where academic institutions from central countries achieve a hegemonic place. Wallerstein (2001) points to the bloc of Western Europe and the United States to explain Eurocentrism in the social sciences. Other perspectives link it to the "Anglo-West."
3. Spanish and Portuguese language texts were translated to English by the authors for use as quotations.
4. These are not very common, in part because of the lack of funding to conduct studies with methods such as experiments or surveys.
5. See Global Witness (<https://globalwitness.org/en/>) and EJ Atlas (<https://ejatlas.org/>) for more detail.
6. At this point, in Latin America there are ethnic communities that can serve as bridges with other continents. For example, the case of Afro-descendant communities or as a result of Asian migrations.
7. On this point, some of the authors have also pointed out that, sometimes, the inclusion of researchers from the Global South is symbolically used as a sign of "pluralism," while in other cases there is a more genuine policy of collaborative work.
8. Goyanes (2020) reports that the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Germany account for almost 80% of the editorial boards of the 39 journals categorized as Q1 or Q2 in the Journal Citation Report.
9. For example, the Journal of Science Communication Latin America, and the journal *Frontiers in Science and Environmental Communication*.
10. Some emerging examples such as the Advanced Diploma in Communication, Environment and Sustainability from the University of Montevideo and the Diploma in Environmental Communication from the University of Chile, developed by two of the authors, are examples of efforts to offer a specialization in environmental communication.

## Author contributions

CRedit: **Bruno Takahashi**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Iasmim Amiden dos Santos**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Raquel Aparicio Cid**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing;

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


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