RC51 *Newsletter*

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Editors' Note

Dear RC51 members,

This newsletter includes a letter from our new president, Patricia E. Almaguer-Kalixto and important information related to the 15th International Conference of Sociocybernetics in Urbino.

Last year, we had vibrant and productive sessions in Toronto. Patricia sent us her photos to us (below). Thanks! You will also find an extended abstract of the winners of the Walter Buckley Memorial Award 2018 (Ksenia Sidorova, Francia Peniche and Astrid K. Rivero) in this issue.

We received an invitation to *Brill Research Perspectives in Sociocybernetics and Complexity* from its Editor-in-Chief, Chaime Marcuello Servós. Please consider contributing to our new research platform.

We are glad to deliver reference information on sociocybernetics from Bernd R. Hornung and a book announcement.

Please do not miss the deadline for the Urbino conference which is **February 15th** (extension included). See you in Urbino!

Best regards,

Toru Takahashi and Andrew Mitchell
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Letter from the President

Dear RC51 Members,

20 years of Sociocybernetics

In 2018 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the RC51. The RC51 responds to the interest in developing the "socio-cybernetic" perspective. During these years, the concept of Sociocybernetics has been shaped as the intersection between sociology, systems science, systems theory, first and second order cybernetics, constructive epistemology, information and communication sciences. In these two decades it has attracted a wide range of interdisciplinary academics that also reflect a geographical diversity suggesting that the socio-cybernetic approach has no borders. We maintain a debate about the subject, about the theoretical frameworks and the methodological practices of sociocybernetics.

The 20th anniversary coincided with the World Congress in Toronto, so we took the chance to have an *ad hoc* space to reflect on past and future times with a round table with past presidents of RC51 Bernard Hornung, Bernard Scott, Eva Buchinger and Chaime Marcuello and a lively participation of our attendees, both RC51 members and visitors. We agreed on keep on working on the theoretical consolidation as well as application, strengthening our network by engaging new members and other ISA networks.

The RC51 activities in Toronto were intensive but also of excellent quality, proving our RC51 is lively and active and that it is not only a theoretical perspective "in abstract" but also a very much applied approach to address cross-disciplinary issues: community movements, cultural transformations, systemic violence, the role of technology in society, media representations (network metaphor, models, fake news...), environmental challenges, socio economic inequality, urban planning among many others issues. You can have a look at the program on our website. We had 66 registered presentations with researchers from all around the world, current members of the RC51 and new faces as the WCS is always the opportunity to explore other RCs contents. We also had a book presentation by RC51 members: in this case "New Horizons for Second-Order Cybernetics" edited by Alexander Riegler, Karl H Müller and Stuart A Umpleby (see book announcement in this newsletter)

Through 2019 we want to keep celebrating and reflecting on being RC51. This year is a decade since the RC51 conference in Urbino, and we go back again to this charming historical city. As the CfP states, the topic of the conference 10 years ago was the impact of the, then emerging, social media technologies on society. A decade later, having witnessed the first impact of social media on society, it is about time to call for a new sociocybernetics forum to reflect on what we learned so far and the future perspectives. So we expect to see you there. It will be the ideal place to reflect on the potentials and current challenges of digital and social media as well as on the present and future of Sociocybernetics. **Please check the CfP in the next pages.**

Finally, I want to take the chance to thank our new board members Martina RAPONI, and Luciano GALLÓN who will be re-thinking our presence on social media; Toru TAKAHASHI and Andrew MITCHELL who are the current Newsletter Editors; Fabio GIGLIETTO, who is our Journal of Sociocybernetics Editor and this year, Chair of the local organization team for the 15th International Conference. Chaime MARCUELLO-SERVÓS as past president, Manuel MEZA CUERVO, secretary, Saburo AKAHORI, Treasurer and Raija KOSKINEN, as vice-president are already engaging in interesting proposals to improve some administrative aspects of our RC51. We are all looking forward to work as a team to provide the RC51 the conditions to keep growing and consolidating.

RC51 membership

We are currently 100 members distributed around 34 countries. Although this is a good number we need to increase our membership in order to have a wider impact in the scientific community and also within the ISA structure. Remember that the number of sessions in WCS is related to the number of members "in good standing", this is ISA officially registered. As RC51 we have been very welcoming promoting nonmembers to participate in any conference, but we must remind them that with a 4 year subscription, as a member in good standing, interim conferences are free and forums and world congress have a considerable reduction. So help us by spreading the word about our RC51 and ISA membership among your academic networks and we look forward to see you all in Urbino.
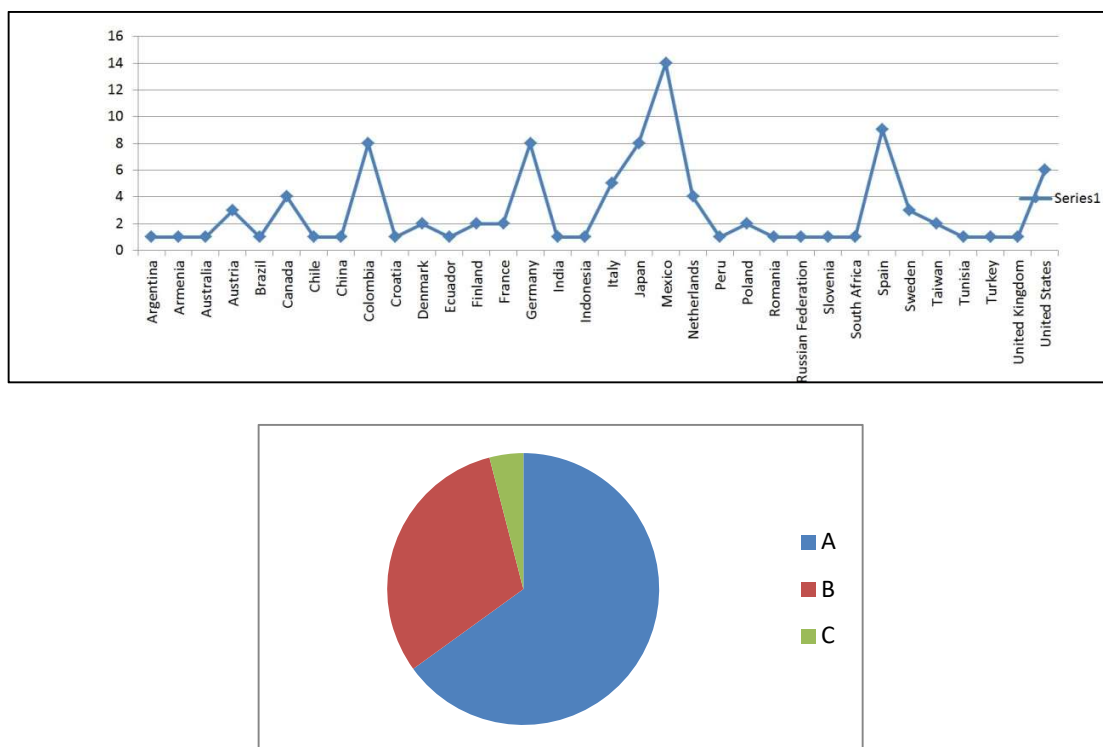
Patricia E. Almaguer-Kalixto

Fig 2. Distribution by ISA member description

"Dark Ages 2.0": Social Media and Their Impact

Information from the organizing committee for attending the RC51 15th International Conference of Sociocybernetics

Submission Guidelines

Abstracts should be sent in English. Please submit an Abstract of 200-300 words together with an Extended abstract of 750-1000 words (excluding references) for review purposes. The former will be published in the RC51 Newsletter, included in the abstracts booklet made available to conference participants and published as part of the conference programme on the RC51 website.

Important dates

Abstract registration deadline:	February 15, 2019
Submission deadline:	February 15, 2019
Notification of acceptance:	March 1, 2019
Conference registration:	May 24, 2019
Full paper (to be considered for JoS special issue):	June 1, 2019

Conference fee

ISA RC51 non members: € 150
RC51 associate members (non ISA): € 50
RC51 regular member in good standing: No fee

Travel information

There is a new direct bus service from the airport to Urbino:
https://www.shuttleriminibologna.it/en/.

The organizing committee suggests the following hotels for your accommodation:
1) https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/albergosandomenicourbino.en-gb.html
2) https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/albergo-italia-urbino.en-gb.html
3) https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/hotelbonconteurbino.en-gb.html

Additionally, these are more affordable options for scholars travelling on a low budget:
1) https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/porta-santa-lucia.en-gb.html
2) https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/il-cortegiano.en-gb.html
3) https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/guest-house-domus-urbino.en-gb.html

Brill Research Perspectives in Sociocybernetics and Complexity

Editor-in-Chief: Chaime Marcuello Servós
FORTHCOMING IN 2020

Background

In 1948, Norbert Wiener published his book «*Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*». He coined the term 'cybernetics', a neologism, using the Greek as source to situate his discussions and works, with Arturo Rosenblueth, in different seminars. He underlines in the introduction: «*We have been forced to coin at least one artificial neo-Greek expression to fill the gap. We have decided to call the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal, by the name Cybernetics, which we form from the Greek, kybernetes, or steersman*». In 1961, in the Preface to the second edition he wrote, «*I believe the time has come to reconsider cybernetics, not merely as a program to be carried out at some period in the future, but as an existing science*». In 1974, Heinz von Foerster distinguished a first order cybernetics, "the study of observed systems", and a second order cybernetics, "the study of observing systems". Closely related to cybernetics are the systems sciences, which developed from Ludwig Bertalanffy's general system theory,[1] and also the work on the construction of knowledge by Rolando García, based on the genetic epistemology of Jean Piaget. Another development, has been the emergence of complexity science. In the 1980s, Felix Geyer coined a new neologism for the study of complex social systems: sociocybernetics.[2] Since then, there have been many advances in sociocybernetics, including innovative theories and methodologies and a growing body of empirical research.

The current state

In 2018, we celebrated two decades of the official recognition, by the International Sociological Association (ISA), of sociocybernetics as a distinct and coherent discipline within the social sciences. It was in 1998, during the ISA's World Congress of Sociology in Montreal, that Research Committee 51 (RC51) on Sociocybernetics was created. As Bernd Hornung has proposed several times in different conversations and conferences: «Sociocybernetics is not a particular field, it should be defined as a paradigm»… because it is a way of thinking and doing social sciences. RC51's own definition is: «Sociocybernetics can be defined as "Systems Science in Sociology and Other Social Sciences" – systems science, because sociocybernetics is not limited to theory but includes application, empirical research, methodology, axiology (i.e., ethics and value research), and epistemology.

In general use, "systems theory" and "cybernetics" are frequently interchangeable or appear in combination. Hence, they can be considered as synonyms, although the two terms come from different traditions and are not used uniformly in different languages and national traditions. Sociocybernetics includes both first order cybernetics and second order cybernetics. Second order cybernetics is explicitly based on a constructivist epistemology and is concerned with issues of reflexivity and self-reference, paying particular attention to the observer-dependence of knowledge, including scientific theories. In the interdisciplinary and holistic spirit of systems science, although sociology is a central interest in sociocybernetics, the other social sciences, such as

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[1] 1968, *General System theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, New York: George Braziller.
[2] To know more, read: Marcuello-Servós, Chaime (2006): Sociocibernética. Lineamientos de un paradigma. IFC-Zaragoza.

psychology, anthropology, political science, economics, are also addressed, with emphases depending on the particular research question dealt with».[3]

Foreseeable future trajectory

Felix Geyer wrote some years ago: *«Now, the first and only thing that comes to mind when reflecting about the future of sociocybernetics, for the time being at least, is rather the future of a world* without *sociocybernetics. Therefore, the main thesis of this introduction is indeed that the future of sociocybernetics and the future of the world are inextricably intertwined. As sociocyberneticians we don't just have an intellectual hobby: we have a calling! Either the systemic and long-term rational thinking espoused by sociocybernetics will prevail, and the world will in principle do fine, or at best short-term rational thinking and irrational emotional responses will gain the upper hand, in which case humanity will increasingly self-destruct in different ways. Cybernetics, after all, is usually defined as the science or art of steering, while sociocybernetics can then be roughly defined as the art of steering social and societal processes. Given the still rapidly increasing complexity of the modern world and the increasing interdependence of its "parts", it has already become increasingly chaotic and ungovernable and would even become more so without such steering. What should be done, paraphrasing Luhmann, is to reduce environmental complexity to more manageable proportions – which is done by gradually building up one's own internal complexity, i.e., by internally "mapping" the phenomena in the environment and their inter-relations»*[4].

So now…

We are living in turbulent times in which we need to face global challenges connecting fields and perspectives. Complex social issues require complex, multidisciplinary approaches to deal with their complexity. In recent decades, sociocybernetics has developed as a distinct discipline that aims to meet this challenge. Sociocybernetics is concerned with applying first and second order cybernetics, the systems sciences and complexity science in the social sciences. Brill Research Perspectives in Sociocybernetics and Complexity disseminates advances in sociocybernetics and consolidates existing research efforts, including theory and applications. Each issue addresses developments around a specific topic; thus, besides the audience interested in developments in sociocybernetics and the complexity sciences, each issue appeals to those in other disciplines who are engaged with a particular topic. The topics addressed range from foundational issues to applications in systems modelling, the arts, social interventions, environmental problems, social work and care, public policies, and urban design, at a local or global scale. Brill Research Perspectives in Sociocybernetics and Complexity is an invaluable resource for scholars, policymakers and practitioners wishing to learn about the latest developments in sociocybernetics, as well as a useful resource for teachers and those studying the social sciences and related disciplines.

Authors are cordially invited to submit proposals and/or full manuscripts by email to the publisher Jason Prevost. Please direct all other correspondence to Assistant Editor Jennifer Obdam.

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[3] See the website of the RC51 https://sociocybernetics.wordpress.com/about/what-is-sociocybernetics/ or http://sociocybernetics.unizar.es/whatis.html

[4] Geyer, Felix (2006) "Reflexiones sobre el futuro de la Sociocibernética", en Marcuello Servós, Chaime (compilador) *Sociocibernética. Lineamientos de un paradigma*. Institución Fernando El Católico. DPZ. ISBN 84-7820-871-2 pp. 23-40.
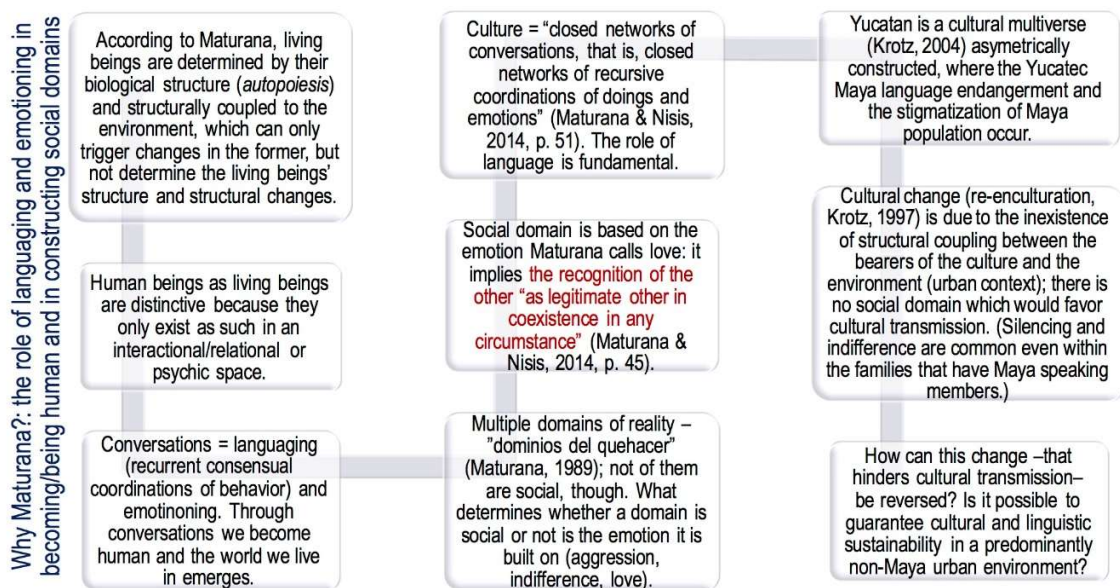
Walter Buckley Memorial Award 2018

*Every year the RC51 assign during our annual conference the Walter Buckley Award to the most effective and clear presentation. See our website to find about previous winners. Last year at the Toronto conference the award was given to Ksenia Sidorova, Francia Peniche Pavía, and Astrid Karina Rivero Pérez (Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Mexico) for their presentation titled "**Languaging to trigger change: second-order intercultural conversations with urban youth of Maya descent**".*

Here an extended abstract of their research and some images to show their research work.
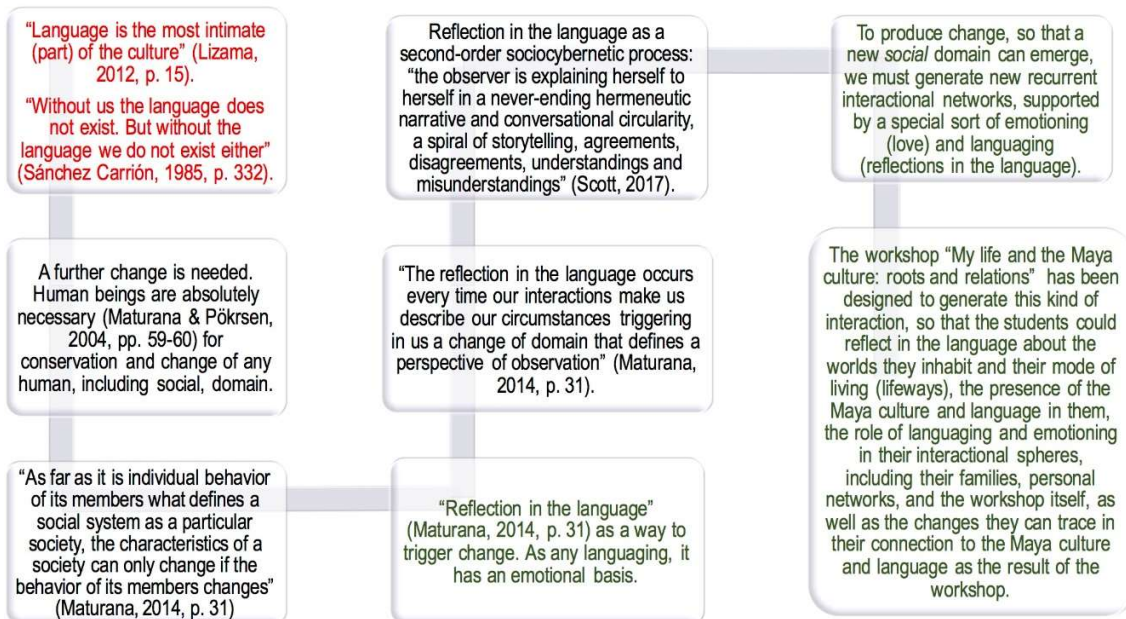
In the paper "Languaging to trigger change: second-order intercultural conversations with urban youth of Maya descent", we report the results of an applied research project that looks into the connection between the youth, born in the families of rural migrants, some of them Maya speakers, in Merida, Mexico, and the culture –and language– of their relatives of Maya origin. We wonder whether the Yucatec Maya language can become an identity factor for these young men and women, in the context which has been historically characterized by discrimination against Maya speaking population, and in the face of the Yucatec Maya language endangerment.

Previous research in one of the most marginalized parts of Merida, particularly with the students of a high school, created by the local public university for the youth who live in precarious economic and social conditions (see Sidorova, Quiroz & Rivero, 2013), showed that more than 60% of them had at least one Maya speaking relative. That is why the new project was designed to explore precisely the cultural roots of the youth in the same urban – and educational– context.

To frame the project we drew upon Humberto Maturana's thinking on human nature, language –and languaging–, emotions –and emotioning–, and conversations as modes to construct human worlds. In our presentation we specifically emphasized this sociocybernetic approach and its application to our project through the following slides that we reproduce below:

"Language is the most intimate (part) of the culture" (Lizama, 2012, p. 15).

"Without us the language does not exist. But without the language we do not exist either" (Sánchez Carrión, 1985, p. 332).

Reflection in the language as a second-order sociocybernetic process: "the observer is explaining herself to herself in a never-ending hermeneutic narrative and conversational circularity, a spiral of storytelling, agreements, disagreements, understandings and misunderstandings" (Scott, 2017).

To produce change, so that a new *social* domain can emerge, we must generate new recurrent interactional networks, supported by a special sort of emotioning (love) and languaging (reflections in the language).

A further change is needed. Human beings are absolutely necessary (Maturana & Pökrsen, 2004, pp. 59-60) for conservation and change of any human, including social, domain.

"The reflection in the language occurs every time our interactions make us describe our circumstances triggering in us a change of domain that defines a perspective of observation" (Maturana, 2014, p. 31).

The workshop "My life and the Maya culture: roots and relations" has been designed to generate this kind of interaction, so that the students could reflect in the language about the worlds they inhabit and their mode of living (lifeways), the presence of the Maya culture and language in them, the role of languaging and emotioning in their interactional spheres, including their families, personal networks, and the workshop itself, as well as the changes they can trace in their connection to the Maya culture and language as the result of the workshop.

"As far as it is individual behavior of its members what defines a social system as a particular society, the characteristics of a society can only change if the behavior of its members changes" (Maturana, 2014, p. 31)

"Reflection in the language" (Maturana, 2014, p. 31) as a way to trigger change. As any languaging, it has an emotional basis.
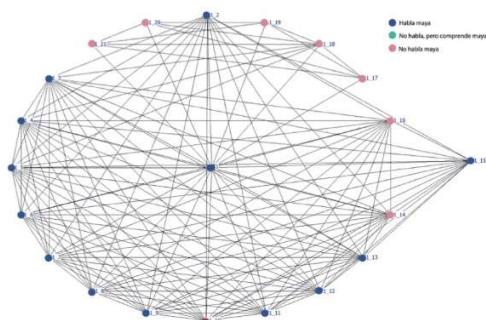
As to research methodology, in our presentation we explained that the participatory workshop sessions generated an intensive process of sharing –experiences, knowledge, stories, and reflections–, leading to a flow of recollections and ideas, that came afloat as the sessions advanced. The novelty of the psychic space created was in the recognition of the Maya origin as a shared trait, part of the life experience, and also an asset.

To illustrate the results, we included representations of personal networks and the characteristics of languaging within the students' families, where the Maya culture –and in some cases, language– are transmitted.

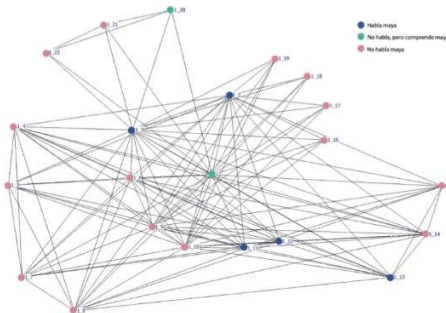**FIRST TYPE OF CONNECTION: LIVING THE CULTURE**

This girl's reality is constructed in Yucatec Maya; there is a constant natural transmission of the Maya culture and language in her family, so that the younger generation gradually passes from a receiver role to that of an equal cultural interlocutor and transmitter. All generations participate in storytelling, all members have stories to tell that have happened to them –both in rural and urban environments– that only can be interpreted and explained within the framework of the "unimaginable" (M.'s term) Maya culture.

THIRD TYPE OF CONNECTION: ONE PIVOTAL BOND

While having Maya speaking relatives, this boy has a different mode of living. What characterizes his connection to Maya culture and language is the existence of one significant other: his father.
His father is a Maya speaker who is also keen on reading and investigating about the Maya culture. His children listen to his stories and reflections in the language about the Maya culture on a daily basis. Those are conversations about the father's life (childhood, youth, his native town) before migrating to Merida and about Maya practices, history, customs, and what has happened to them in the urban environment.

We argued that the comprehension of the types of connection to the Maya culture and language is clue to the comprehension of the reflections in the language that the students generated during the workshop. In the slide above two networks appear, corresponding to two out of four types of connection: the first –the strongest– connection ("Living the culture"), and the third one ("One pivotal bond"), which is built through a particularly strong relationship with one close family member.

From the sociocybernetics perspective, our role as researchers has also to be considered. In our presentation we specified that in the construction of the research project and in the conversations with the urban youth of Maya descent, our role has been that of participants who –as inhabitants of Yucatan but not of Maya origin– recognize our part in the configuration of the psychic domain where changes need to be produced, so that every person and group would be recognized as legitimate other, and true interculturality –on equal terms– guaranteed. That is why we also included own reflections on the effect those conversations produced on us as researchers, teachers, and inhabitants of Yucatan.

We concluded the presentation with a series of reflections that might be of use to further develop the framework of what we would like to call "sociocybernetics of cultural and linguistic sustainability in the context of sociocultural inequality". These statements, drawn upon Maturana and the research results, are resumed in the following slide:

Final reflections: towards sociocybernetics of cultural and linguistic sustainability in the context of sociocultural inequality

- There is a need to provide the environment in which young people could participate in co-creating *truly social* domains, through conversations (reflections in the language + emotioning /love).

- Educational institutions must allow students discover and be *what they are* (Maturana & Nisis, 2014), since personal systemic identity is constructed, conserved, and changed in interactions. Emotioning is a clue to the identity construction.

- This process is of key importance: through it the students can gain self-respect and self-acceptance, which are, in their turn, the key to their liberty and responsibility (Maturana & Nisis, 2014, p. 63); the liberty to choose what each of them desires to be and do in her life; and the responsibility as co-creators of other/better worlds.

- In the case of the Maya culture and language, more than information (which the students get in their Maya culture class at school), new psychic –*truly social*– spheres have to emerge –at school, as well as in the media, in the street, at home– where the recognition of the origin of these young people and their Maya speaking relatives would be full and unconditional –"under any circumstance" (Maturana & Nisis, 2014, p. 45), so that the self-respect could be re-gained and the desire to re-activate the language or learn it form anew could arise.

In the end, we found it necessary to stress that both, individuals of Maya descent and those who are not, are to get involved in the creation of this new interactional sphere. Structural coupling is to be assured between different groups and concrete individuals – of all generations and very importantly peers (especially in the case of young people for whom their age group is a significant source of emotional support). This is a step towards constructing a more intercultural society, if we view interculturality form a critical perspective (Walsh, 2009); it requires structural changes at all levels of the social system, including the individual, on the part of all of its members, belonging to all sociocultural groups. In Maturana's thinking, this implies changing individuals' behavior. This can only be done if the emotional domain changes, leading to different conversations, where reflections in the language, based on love –not aggression nor indifference– would occur.

The references we used in the presentations appear in the last slide:

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LITERATURE – BERND`S TOP 10

The numbering reflects a certain priorization, which, however, is not very strict. With no. 5 a second group starts, inside which again the numbering reflects priorities only weakly. BOSSEL seems to deal with a different topic, contains, however, orientation theaory as an essential part of sociocybernetics, when dealing with values and normative issues. The whole book is based on a systems approach. KUHN, Thomas S., is not in a strict way systemic or sociocybernetics. In my view, however, it is essential to understand the scientific process itself, including systems, cybernetics, and soiocybernetics.

1) LASZLO, Ervin: Introduction to Systems Philosophy, Toward a New Paradigm of Contemporary Thought, Harper & Row, New York, London 1973

2) BERTALANFFY, Ludwig von: General System Theory, revised edition, George Braziller Inc., New York 1975 [1/1968]

3) BURNS, Tom R.; BAUMGARTNER, Thomas; DEVILLE, Philippe: Man, Decisions, Society, The Theory of Actor-System Dynamics for Social Scientists, Gordon & Breach Science Publishers, New York, London, Tokyo 1985

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Book announcement

Series on Knots and Everything: Volume 60:
New Horizons for Second-Order Cybernetics

Edited By: Alexander Riegler (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium), Karl H Müller (International Academy for Systems and Cybernetic Sciences, Austria), and Stuart A Umpleby (George Washington University, USA).

"In almost 60 articles this book reviews the current state of second-order cybernetics and investigates which new research methods second-order cybernetics can offer to tackle wicked problems in science and in society. The contributions explore its application to both scientific fields (such as mathematics, psychology and consciousness research) and non-scientific ones (such as design theory and theater science). The book uses a pluralistic, multifaceted approach to discuss these applications: Each main article is accompanied by several commentaries and author responses, which together allow the reader to discover further perspectives than in the original article alone. This procedure shows that second-order cybernetics is already on its way to becoming an idea shared by many researchers in a variety of disciplines."

Extract from: https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/9789813226265_0001

Visit that page to see the table of contents. You can get a Sample Chapter(s) by clicking this link
A Brief History of (Second-Order) Cybernetics (246 KB)

The **RC51 Newsletter** is open for permanent feedback to integrate new suggestions and ideas to achieve its goal: promote news among the ISA RC51 members and a broader scientific community interested in Sociocybernetics.

Please contact the Newsletter editor for any information you would like to include or any further suggestion.

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RC51 website http://www.unizar.es/sociocybernetics/
ISA website http://www.isa-sociology.org

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https://www.facebook.com/groups/ISARC51Sociocybernetics/