

RC51 *Newsletter*

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Editors' Introduction

Dear RC51 members,

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Felix Geyer, the great forerunner of our research field and honorary president of RC51. It is an honor to share contributions from authors who had long and close relationships with Felix. The world is still in turmoil, but Felix's work will be our lasting source of insights and encouragement to deal with the challenges we are facing.

In July we held the first virtual conference, the 16th International Conference of Sociocybernetics: "The Pandemic Era: Observations and Reflections from a Sociocybernetics Perspective". A thread of contributions related to the conference is another feature of this issue. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about all kinds of trouble to our research activities. But the efforts made for the conference and vibrant discussion we had showed that the pandemic cannot stop our progress. You can get both an overview of the conference and in-depth views from contributors' reports and essays. We appreciate all contributions from the organizers, moderators, presenters, and active participants!

We also include an interesting book review by Bernd Hornung about social theories. Social theories encourage us to rethink our society from different, using a word from the book, "alternative" views. The pandemic forced us to adopt "alternative" ways in various dimensions of society. Social theories in the pandemic era will be a thought-provoking topic also in sociocybernetics. Thank you, Bernd!

As ISA announced, the 4th Forum of Sociology in Porto Alegre was postponed to February 2021 and will now be held online. So, while we will not have chance to see each other in 2021 in Brazil, we are looking forward to meeting with you all online once again.

Best regards,

Toru Takahashi and Andrew Mitchell

RC51 Newsletter Editors

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Letter from the President

Dear RC51 Members,

This issue is marked by the loss of Felix Geyer. We thank Bernd Hornung for the obituary written on behalf of the RC51 Board and all those who have collaborated to reflect on the respect we have for him and his legacy: the basis of sociocybernetics. We only can affirm here that we will continue with working to amplify the scope of sociocybernetics; to understand, act upon, and transform complex social problems.

This issue is to update you on RC51 activities. In our 2020 conference we had the chance to work in a collaborative manner in order to propose an adaptive format to the worldwide circumstances that impede us in our ability to travel and meet. The RC51 2020 conference has proven that if we put technology on our side, we can create the conditions to discuss and share our research in a meaningful manner. Thanks to the efforts of our board we had a 3-day conference with 30-40 attendees from 11 different countries. Each day we held a session of two and a half hours in order to facilitate participation in most of the different time zones of the RC51 members. Each author produced a video to explain their paper. You can see them all in our RC51 Youtube channel, and contact the author if you want to continue the debate. You have also the access to 2 of our 3 sessions through the same link (visit <https://tinyurl.com/RC51youtubechannel>).

Despite the conditions, we were able to produce a discussion that has given us unexpected outcomes. We are on the way to forming an updated RC51 manifesto, a product of a collaborative online work, and we discussed during the conference research oriented to analysing COVID-19 effects in different places of the world, using a systemic and reflective approach. You can read the follow up in this very newsletter.

Now we are on the track of preparing the RC51 sessions of the ISA FORUM 2021 that due COVID19 will be held online from the 23th to the 28th February 2021. This requires an adaptation of the original format and program to the realm of online conferences. You can get the session titles and details in the following link:

<https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/forum2020/webprogrampreliminary/Symposium617.html>

If you click in each title you will find a description of the session. Soon we will provide information for new abstract submissions. We thank all session organisers and participants that have confirmed their participation!

Among other good news, we can now celebrate the first issue on the series Brill Research Perspectives with the title Sociocybernetics and Political Theory in a Complex World: Recasting Constitutionalism by Roberto Gustavo Mancilla Castro. Making the most of internet tools we invite you to the presentation of the book using this link on the 12th November 2020 <meet.google.com/snh-tqkd-kfi> (see also pg.34 of the newsletter)

If you have any queries related to RC51 remember that you can write to the board to propose and suggest activities. Let us know your thoughts!

On behalf of the RC51 Board

Patricia E. Almaguer

RC51 President

IN MEMORIAM: Felix Geyer, 1933-2020

By Bernd R. Hornung on behalf of the RC51 Board

We report with sadness the death of Felix Geyer who died at the age of 87 on August 23rd, 2020 after a long and colorful life as a scientist travelling the world.

Much more a friend than a colleague to most of his worldwide companions in science, Felix was a sociologist with a passion for systems and cybernetics along with a strong compassion and deep sympathy for his fellow humans. To his friends and colleagues, he was connected by his numerous activities and, once the internet appeared, by tirelessly sending and answering e-mails. He did not get too tired to answer and resolve all the big and little problems people from around the globe cared to bring to him about the conferences he organized, or any other questions related to scientific life.

The science he devoted his life to was systems and cybernetics, applied to the social sciences, in particular to sociology, which was his own original field. No wonder that the result was "Sociocybernetics", a term he coined together with his close friend and colleague Hans van der Zouwen and a journalist. It first entered the world of science as title of a two-volume book which was published in 1978. From there it was still a long way to what is nowadays the Research Committee 51 (RC51) on Sociocybernetics of the International Sociological Association (ISA).

Felix was an important teacher of sociocybernetics. Not by academic lecturing at a university, but by organizing numerous conferences and session-streams about systems and cybernetics, later "Sociocybernetics", where he not only taught us through his presentations and written articles, but also by insisting on and promoting the high quality of presentations and papers. This is something RC51 continues to do, not least by awarding once a year the "Walter Buckley Award" for didactically good presentations. Once in a while, however, I remember him saying: "And now we have to sit through another boring session!"

For me and some others involved in organizing scientific events and holding together scientific groups he was maybe even more important for sharing his skills and knowledge of organizing. Felix was an excellent, careful, and thorough organizer, even up to meticulously caring about the last details. It worked well! The results were enjoyable, and it was a pleasure to cooperate with him. During my time as president of RC51, Felix became my best friend in science.

We met for the first time at the International Congress of Cybernetics and Systems of the WOSC – World Organization of Systems and Cybernetics in Mexico City in August 1981. At that time, I was a doctoral student of Niklas Luhmann, who said to me "There are two Dutch guys organizing a conference in Mexico, why don't you go?" I went, and the two Dutch guys were Felix Geyer and Hans van der Zouwen. A close relation with Felix began at the memorable Bucharest Congress of 1996 of the WOSC. The social science section organized by Felix was a preparation for establishing ISA RC51 on Sociocybernetics later on at the ISA World Congress of Sociology in Montreal in 1998. There he asked me whether I would be willing to serve as president of RC51, he being the secretary. In the end, titles did not matter. We were running RC51 as a team of peers, and both of us enjoyed it very much.

Also, after retiring in 1998 from his work at SISWO, the Interuniversity Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Amsterdam, Felix kept close contact with "his" RC51, until age and health conditions made it difficult. The last one of the yearly RC51 conferences in which Felix still participated was held in Mexico City in 2008.

My last meeting with Felix must have been in summer or fall 2010, when I made a short visit to his home at Laren near Amsterdam, being on a trip in The Netherlands. Although he had been an enthusiastic communicator and e-mail writer during his active life, Felix spent his last years very much in retreat at his home.

Born on October 14th, 1933, near Amsterdam, the Amsterdam region had remained his home base for his worldwide activities. Felix had studied first geology and then sociology at the University of Amsterdam from 1951-1961. In 1980 he received his PhD with a thesis about "Alienation Theories, A General Systems Approach". Here he connected sociology to system theory by treating a classical sociological topic, which at the same time fitted with the humanist and emancipatory intentions of the fathers of systems theory and cybernetics.

After a few years of work in the private sector Felix joined SISWO in 1968, where he became head of the methodology section. He held this position until his retirement in October 1998. From SISWO as his home base Felix became one of the co-founders of the Dutch Systems Group in 1970. He also served as Executive Secretary of ISA. from January 1983 until January 1987.

Felix was also closely connected to the WOSC and organized social science resp. sociocybernetics sections at the triannual WOSC congresses in Amsterdam (1978), Mexico City (1981), Paris (1984), London (1987), New York (1990), and Bucharest (1996), where in a way the story of ISA-RC51 began.

So, after all, we have to say farewell to a good friend who loved life and its pleasures, and who always eager and willing to contribute to the good life of his fellow humans whatever he could. In this sense, Felix Geyer stands in a row with the fathers of systems and cybernetics, and we from RC51 feel obliged to honor and safeguard this heritage and to contribute what **we** can to a decent future for humankind and this planet.

A detailed CV of Felix can be found in the Internet: <http://www.unizar.es/sociocybernetics/chen/felix/>

Marburg, Beginning of September 2020

Memories of Felix Geyer

*By Johannes van der Zouwen, Emeritus Professor of Social Research
Methodology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam*

I first met Felix Geyer in 1970, when he was Head of the Methodology Division at SISWO, Netherlands Universities Joint Social Research Centre. There he was doing what he did all his working life: bringing people with common interests together and trying to build an effective organization for these joint efforts. In this case, bringing together social researchers and methodologists of different universities, to work out a solid curriculum for research methodology to be accepted by all Dutch Universities. These meetings, organized by Felix, can also be viewed as the starting point of the formation of NOSMO, the Dutch Organization of Social Research Methodologists.

By that time Felix was very much interested in a topic that became the subject of his dissertation, i.e., alienation. He studied that topic with concepts and insights derived from General Systems Theory (GST). By that time, studying a social process with the conceptual tools of systems theory was quite novel. Remember that Walter Buckley's book on "Sociology and Modern Systems Theory" was published only a few years earlier (1967).

From that time on we see that two labels can characterize his scientific work: 1) coordination: bringing people together to form an effective organization and 2) applying systems theory to the study of social structures and social processes; what many years later, (in 1978) was coined as "sociocybernetics".

Felix used the context of two large organizations to reach these goals: The World Organisation of Systems and Cybernetics (WOGSC) and the International Sociological Association (ISA). Under the aegis of these organisations he (co-)organised many conferences. Most of these conferences resulted in publications about the ever-expanding domain of sociocybernetics.

I had the pleasure to work together with Felix organising many of these conferences and selecting and editing those conference papers that were fit for inclusion in special volumes. Therewith we applied a kind of "division of labour": Felix was especially keen on papers that were offering new perspectives, where I was looking after the empirical testability of all these sweeping theories. A bit like "the good cop and the bad cop"; Felix being enthusiastic about still another new approach, I posing all kind of critical questions: like "where is the evidence for this theory"?

In the many hours we worked together, preparing conferences and publications, I especially liked his good humour and his limitless energy. I remember one of his practical jokes that nearly went wrong. He was only recently appointed as the Secretary General of the ISA, and he had just acquired an answering machine with remote control, so that when he was out of office, he still could receive messages, and send out messages to the thousands of members of the ISA. To demonstrate this brand-new device, when working at my place, he recorded the general message: "Due to unforeseen circumstances, the forthcoming world congress of the ISA will be cancelled". Of course, this dramatic message had to be removed from the recorder, but he could not manage that from my work place. So in a hurry he left for his office, in order to get that messages deleted before it could produce a lot of unrest in the ISA.

As indicated above, Felix had the strong conviction that the application of GST to the description and solution of sociological problems would turn out to be very beneficial to sociology. That meant for him that sociocybernetics had to gain a proper place, both in the world of the cyberneticians, and in the world of the sociologists. The recognition in the cybernetics world was gained in 1978 as Felix and I were asked by Dr. John Rose, the Director General of the WOGSC, to organise a large section (rather a sub-conference) on Cybernetics and Social Systems, resulting in the publication "Sociocybernetics". From then on, we were invited to organise these sub-conferences during all subsequent WOGSC conferences.

Within sociology, i.e. the ISA, the process went more slowly. Felix knew that if the group of sociocyberneticians wanted to promote from an "Ad Hoc Group" into a Research Committee, the group had to acquire more scientifically active members, and to organise a series of successful meetings.

And here things come together:

- First, a loyal home base (SISWO) that provided Felix with organizational support, despite the fact that his activities, i.e. promoting sociocybernetics, could be seen as quite distant from his formal task description.
- Second, a large network within ISA, evolved in the four years that he acted as Secretary-General of ISA.
- And, last but not least, the contributions of the members of the Ad Hoc Group. Stimulated by the enthusiasm of Felix, more and more of its members participated in conferences, and the number of papers and other publications increased, such that the promotion from an 'ad hoc group' to a 'research committee', was only a matter of time.

For his contributions to sociocybernetics Felix was granted the title of Honorary Member of the WOGSC. In the *Festschrift for Felix Geyer* (Kybernetes, Vol. 35, 3/4, 2006) one can find much more information about his work. Let me conclude by saying that through his efforts sociocybernetics has gained in the social sciences the place it deserves.

Felix Geyer's Passing. An article in memoriam

By Dr Philippos Nicolopoulos

Felix Geyer has passed away. We lost a distinguished international social scientist, an unforgettable colleague, a friend. It is difficult to express our sadness with words, but it is "a must" for us to pay tribute (in scientific terms) to his memory. So, we should write in memoriam for his scientific contribution, for his work in the field of sociocybernetics, for his abilities in organizing, for his human contacts, for his personality.

Felix Geyer was the inventor with J. van den Zouwen of the term "sociocybernetics" and he contributed so much to the establishment of the RC51 of International Sociological Association (ISA). That's why he became worthily emeritus president of this committee (c. on Sociocybernetics). The aforementioned term was successful, and its meaning exactly referred to the **cybernetics of social systems** with a new way which was not identified only with the 1st order cybernetics (cybernetics of observed systems). Its meaning became broader and comprised the so-called **2nd order cybernetics of the observing systems**. This one was much more appropriate for the human systems. Its features fitted better mature human beings in their social dimension.

Felix in his works explained why the limited model of "input-output-feedback" (1st order cybernetics, observed systems with clear distinction between system and its environment) was not adequate for human actions, processes and formations. He was always trying to push social scientists, who were dealing with social systems, to develop their views and theories in that perspective, in which the "observer", his/her perception abilities, motivation and value world constitute a basic and crucial role in **the whole process of communication and control**, beyond the characteristics of 1st order Cybernetics (Cyb).

In a very comprehensive paper presented at Bielefeld (World Congress of Sociology, 1994), as well as in a similar paper presented in the Bucharest Congress of Cybernetics (1996), Felix, as I remember, described with a clear way the distinctions between the 1st and 2nd order Cyb. and underscored that the latter referred mainly to processes and concepts which are associated with "self" (self-organization, self-reference, self-steering, autopoietics, morphogenesis etc). Thus, **the cybernetic model doesn't remain a static one**, but embraces dynamical process as **positive feedback** or **change** which many times characterize the human systems. Thus, we see beyond the limits of the homeostatic equilibrium notion, which is connected mainly with mechanical systems.

In the same paper (which many times is included in citations of books and articles of mine, which refer to sociocybernetic model), he connects **his non- static perspective with chaos and complexity theory** and especially with the system situation **far from equilibrium**, in which **non-linear relationships** obtain. After a **bifurcation point** there is always a possibility (but of course no certainty) to reach a higher organization structure.

I remember that in discussions with him, when I insisted on the social change processes (change against the established interests which maintain unfair and unequal social conditions), he accepted the change possibility and he connected it with the **cross-catalysis process**. For him sociocybernetics and 2nd order cybernetics were associated with **complexity theory** and the systems theory beyond the equilibrium conditions.

Felix was intelligent and methodical but not dogmatic, he was open minded and prompt to discuss a different opinion from his own opinion or from the "established opinion". Thereby he liked to discuss new ideas or to push and support you in creative scientific work despite his different theoretical direction. So, he liked to share with

other scientists the scientific activity in their common scientific field (international meetings, conferences, congresses etc), regardless of their theoretical or ideological differentiations or disagreements.

That's why his contribution in organizing (conferences, symposia, scientific communication and cooperation through the internet) was great.

My memories from Felix were many. I met him for first time in Bielefeld in the World Congress of Sociology of ISA (1994), in which I became member of thematic group on systems theory and cybernetics. After the first discussions in the congress we continued our contact through emails, and we shared the common interest to improve the activities of the aforementioned thematic group. So, we cooperated as we were preparing our sessions in Bucharest Congress in 1996 on Cybernetics. After that, we had the World Congress of ISA in Montréal in 1998, in Brisbane in 2002, the 1st conference of Sociocybernetics in Colimbari, Crete and the 3rd in Corfu (for which I cooperated with him more, for I had personally more responsibility in organizing), Lisbon Conference in 2004, Maribor Conference in 2005. So, a part of my initial work in the field of sociocybernetics was connected with Felix. He encouraged me to present my ideas and my work of this field in international scientific fora and always he helped me in organizing. I use and I used some of his papers and works in my classes or in independent lectures and I mentioned him in some citations of my own works in Greek or English.

All of us, who we have worked some years ago for the establishment of RC51 of ISA, we acknowledge his crucial contribution to the upgrading of the aforementioned thematic group to the RC51. Moreover, he was warm in human contact, cosy, and he had sense of humor. He was not only an "office scientist", but he was full of "liveliness and energy".

Felix Geyer passed away, but his scientific contribution and his warm personality are always present and alive. He will always live in the hearts and the spirits of all sociocyberneticians and is... always ready to help us for the organization of a new conference!

Dr Philippos Nicolopoulos
Former Associate Professor of the University of Indianapolis (Athens
Campus), Former Assist. Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of
Philosophy of the Univ. of Crete,
Attorney at Law at the Supreme Court of Greece

A letter from the Systeemgroep Nederland regarding the death of Dr. Felix Geyer

Kindly shared with us by Prof. Gerard de Zeeuw

On September 15, the Board of the Systeemgroep Nederland sent the following letter to Felix's family and friends and to his carer (translated from the Dutch):

Dear relatives and friends of Felix Geyer,
Dear Mrs Ria Meul,

It is with deep regret that we learned of the death of Dr. Felix Geyer on August 23, 2020. He was a highly regarded colleague and a good friend.

His contributions as a colleague include serving as one of the founding fathers of the Systeemgroep Nederland. He was one of the first in the Netherlands to understand the importance of system theory for sociology and subsequently worked hard to develop its implications. He introduced the now generally accepted term for this development, namely sociocybernetics.

He has also worked hard to pass on that theory to others. We recall the many conferences he helped organise, together with colleague Prof. Hans van der Zouwen. His contributions also include various courses on system theory that were presented in the first years of the existence of the Systeemgroep Nederland.

Finally, we would like to recall what made Felix such a highly appreciated colleague. He was always ready to explain matters or contribute to discussions with great humour and respect for others. This often happened during a meal and while enjoying a drink. Felix combined conviviality with sharp analyses, a sense of proportion and well-founded advice.

In recent years, Felix gradually withdrew from public activities. We missed him very much and we will in the future.

On behalf of the System Group Netherlands,
The Board
Prof. Loet Leydesdorff
Drs. Martha Vahl
Prof. Gerard de Zeeuw

An RC51 Conference in the Time of Pandemic

By Manuel Meza Cuervo

2020 will be remembered as the year of the pandemic; 2020 will be remembered as the year that challenged the social systems, the economic systems, and governments around the world. But most importantly, it will be remembered as the year that reminded this generation that one of the essential values of humankind is its resiliency.

This has been a year of many firsts. And for the first time, the RC51 decided to have an online conference.

The RC51 Annual Conference, set to take place in Porto Alegre 2020 World Forum, was put off due to the pandemic. In the two months after the postponement announcement, the RC51 board organized it virtually instead, taking advantage of modern communication technology. Two committees were formed: a scientific one, in charge of choosing the papers, and an organising one, responsible for promoting the conference and handling all the technical and administrative arrangements.

Some of us had some experience managing communication technologies such as Zoom and Google Hangouts; they are easy to handle, and almost all of the global academic community is familiarized with them. The real challenge was to design the conference so that we could feel close to each other despite the technological barrier. To achieve this connection, we prioritized the discussion over the exposition time in three sessions for three days.

We asked our participants to send us a five-minute video where they presented their work in addition to their papers. That allowed us to spread their contributions through our social media. We had never done this before. This idea came to life to overcome the pandemic challenges, and I hope this practice continues in the following conferences.

For the organizing committee, holding an annual conference was not enough. We wanted to tap the full potential of technology, so we decided to have the two first sessions in the usual format (splitting time between the presentation and Q&A) while having a third one as an experimental and collaborative open session. In the last session, we discussed the core concepts and methodologies of Sociocybernetics using a collaborative tool called IdeaBoardz.

With over thirty people in each session and 15 papers presented from 11 countries, the first RC51 Virtual Conference was a success. We also had a great experience connecting, collaborating, and working on a virtual board with stickers.

The pandemic gave us a challenge as a research committee and showed us a new way to stay in touch. Of course, nothing is comparable to the live experience, but with the XXI century technology, we now have a powerful tool to find new ways to connect despite the challenges that may arise.

A report on the intriguing experimental session

By Luciano Gallón

It was around last May that Patricia, our RC51 president, ask the RC51 board for ideas on a RC51 2020 conference after the postponement of the ISA Forum because of the pandemic. It was a provocative and interesting challenge because of the restrictions but also an opportunity for creating new ways for participation for member and non-members.

After some really key experiences working with documents about a “credo” or a “manifesto” of a field of knowledge, I shared with the board a proposal for carrying out an experiment on collaborative writing of a very simple but relevant document for our sociocybernetics field. It should be a very simple experiment, easy, and take little time. In the end we would have a two to three pages document with a set of ideas about the present, practice, future of, and vision for, sociocybernetics.

After a couple of board meetings, we as a team came out with the decision of holding a collaborative experiment with the purpose of writing a “Sociocybernetics Manifesto”. The other possibility was writing a “credo for sociocybernetics” but this was well discarded with solid arguments.


So, during June and July, detailed planning began with the challenge of setting up an experimental and collaborative session, two hours maximum, open to all participants, both members and non-members. Through an online collaborative debate process, the goal was to produce a short reference document about sociocybernetics as a paradigmatic framework: a Sociocybernetics Manifesto.

We held the experimental session on the third day of the online RC51 2020 Conference, July 16th. The core ideas the participants shared came from these three aspects of sociocybernetics:

- *Intentions*: What one has in mind as a purpose or goal to do or bring about with sociocybernetics (what for?)
- *Motives*: Something (such as a need or desire) that causes you to act based on sociocybernetics: (why?)
- *Views*: A mode or manner of looking at or regarding sociocybernetics (what?)

For me, as the experiment moderator, this was a wonderful experience. Seeing the way everybody was following the instructions, well, almost everybody, and how the flow of ideas started to increase with a lot of insights on sociocybernetics, was evidence of a useful way of creating value for RC51.

In the end we got 86 points about the three aspects: 34 *Intentions*, 30 *Motives* and 22 *Views*. So, at first, it looks like answering *What for?* is easier than *What?* We also got 294 votes for the different points.



What is next? The experiment has not ended yet. We have the following plan ahead: September: document what was done and the result as it is; October: debugging work; November: a new on-line session with guests to do a second round of review and consolidation; and, finally, December: publication of the manifesto.

I will conclude this report by remembering Felix Geyer. I had the opportunity to meet him in person during the RC51 2007 Conference in Murcia. I learned from him some key answers to the question *What is sociocybernetics?* Following Felix's insights, I invite all the participants in the manifesto session to share your ideas about the evidence, or not, of the presence of these concepts during the "intriguing experimental session: *Self-reference, Self-steering, Self-organization, Auto-catalysis and Cross-catalysis and Autopoiesis.*

Please feel free to share with me your ideas over luciano.gallon@hotmail.com. Thank you again for your support and participation.

16th International Conference of Sociocybernetics

By Mark Belitsky

On July 14-16, 2020 I attended the International Conference of Sociocybernetics for the first time. In reflecting upon the RC51 conference, which was dedicated to the Pandemic Era, I was very impressed at how well the participants from varying cultural and institutional backgrounds managed to work together to offer new perspectives and innovative ideas to address the ongoing global health crisis. But what impressed me the most as a newcomer was the way in which the participants were able to balance the humanistic and systems perspectives in their search for answers.

Systems perspective in sociology is sometimes criticized for not being humanistic enough but what the critics overlook, or perhaps do not want to admit, is that the humanistic perspective is also an evolutionary product. Evolution has given humanity incredible abilities to build but also to destroy, both of which giving rise to almost unlimited ambitions. A developed society cannot exist without high regard for humanistic values which promote social stability and human development. The participants in the conference have demonstrated a deep understanding of both seemingly conflicting perspectives and managed to offer views reflecting a balanced approach to the pandemic crisis.

I would also like to use this opportunity to reiterate some of the points made at the conference when I presented an example illustrating key concepts of the Functional Theory of Social Systems to highlight some important conclusions.


I used a hypothetical situation in which a person buys a house and several weeks later discovers that there is a chemical factory nearby occasionally producing an unpleasant and potentially harmful odor. The intent here is to analyze the Soft Forces (SFs) involved in the decision of whether to stay in the house or sell it. A social system is formed here between the person and the house with multiple positive (attracting) and negative (repelling) SFs. This example demonstrates how SFs of different origins interact on a level playing field and shows that the SF functions as a common denominator in the decision-making process.

The positive SFs here are:

1. Architectural beauty of the house, origin – sensory perception (visual).
2. Low interest rate bank loan, origin – Functional Idea.
3. Low property taxes, origin – Functional Idea.

The negative SFs here are:

- (1) Factory odor, origin – sensory perception (sense of smell).
- (2) Fear that the odor is harmful to health, origin – instinct of self-preservation.
- (3) Not enough bedrooms for all children in the family, origin – physical reality.



Dynamic psychological forces (SFs) are formed in the subconscious based on the above factors, which are being constantly reevaluated producing an “oscillating” effect not unlike atoms in a molecule. Resulting positive and negative SF vectors are also formed which are the sums of individual SFs. The final decision is made based on the magnitude or “pull” of the resulting SF vectors.

It is worth noting that there exists a phenomenon of SF “hardening” with time, which is to say that the longer a SF exists, the stronger its corresponding vector becomes. It is what we call in cultural terms, “forming a habit” or “getting used to” something.

This seemingly simple mechanism can explain the formation and disappearance of social systems and constitutes the basis for decision-making.

A GLIMPSE OF 'THE PANDEMIC ERA: OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS FOR A SOCIOCYBERNETICS' CONFERENCE

By Ilknur ONER, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Firat University, Elazığ/Turkey

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a very complicated situation in the world. The board of RC51 overcame this difficulty by holding a traditional yearly conference in three days (July 14-17, 2020) online. The 16th International Conference of Sociocybernetics focused on "The Pandemic Era: Observations and Reflections from A Sociocybernetics Perspective." The discussions revolved around the analysis of COVID-19 and its social effects from a sociocybernetics perspective. This conference was one of the pioneering virtual and online meetings of ISA as well by bridging the time gap of participants (70 people signed up) from different timezones and 24 countries (Austria, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Ecuador, Finland, India, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States) with very interactive participations taking around two and a half hours per day. Presentations and paper discussions were very interactive, inclusive of sincerity and exchange of knowledge in different languages. The usage of a new virtual technology was very useful for the manifesto. It was quickly adopted on the last day by the participants. The feedback from each session were precious. Technical virtual interruptions were eliminated. The conference program, abstracts, and videos were provided on the web page and virtual recordings were hosted on the YouTube channel of RC51.

On the first day, Patricia Almaguer-Kalixto (president and conference chair) welcomed the participants to the conference with her speech. Then, Sari Hanafi-ISA President /AUB, Beirut, and Bernard Scott (UK-Former RC 51 President) gave opening words. Sari Hanafi addressed Post-COVID 19 sociology and the importance of the occurrence of this conference.

Bernard Scott mentioned, "Inaugural intervention on Sociocybernetics: Widening Systemic Perspective."

On the first day, participants questioned sociocybernetics and its analytical usefulness.

Under the title of "How COVID-19 is making us think sociocybernetically" in his speech, Andrew Mitchell focused on how unnoticed social systems and organizations in normal times become visible during crises while trying to make sense of COVID-19 in the world both national and internationally. Importance of awareness of system/environment distinction, second-order, observation, contingency, and double contingency were emphasized. The complexity of the situation, multiple communications, and methodological modification necessities, broadening this approach and principles, were argued.

The second day discussions were on the second-order observations. Chaime Marcuello was chairing. Arguments were on observations and reflections of COVID-19 around the world by using sociocybernetics and system thinking.

Overall summary of the presentations can be as follows:

Patricia Eugenia Kalixto emphasized the usefulness and relevance of analytical frameworks, concepts of the sociocybernetics concerning emerging elements, holistic approach; differences of old and new approaches, and necessity of steering, adaptation, change, and movement in the times of COVID-19.

Chaime Mercuello-Servos developed three pillars metaphors: sextant, compass, and steering wheel. According to him, this allows us to build a conceptual structure to move on and reveals the importance of mapping the system. It is defined as "a declaration of intent which is not only what you want to do, but also what you want to be." These were emphasized in relation to the expected-unexpected event situation, the fragility of global routines of globalization, and everyday life with the complexity of the COVID-19 situation.

Saburo Akahori focused on questioning the infection pathogen, a second-order assessment of society's immune mechanisms, and as an observer, how society develops a cognitive framework for coping with the unknown threat. He emphasized the theory of media, the theory of observation to social system's meaning, and its construction. He referred to terror, fear, societal evolution concepts, and avoidance as a blind spot for society during the current pandemic.

Mark Belitsky mentioned the functional theory of social systems. He referred to information system and evolution, functional idea (FI) and soft force (SF) and interactions and evolving and changing them by referring to emotions, consciousness, negative-positive sides, viability and superiority, degree of freedom of the systems.

Under the title of "Observing Danger and Risk Managing: COVID-19 as Case Study" Jorge Cardiel starts with distinguishing between danger and risk by referral to Luhman's book and approach. Unverified status of the risk and other possible occurrences of the danger were discussed by example of SARS and COVID-19. In the process of COVID-19, how this revolved was argued by referral to ecology and technology.

Bernd Hornung although he had some technical problems during his presentation, focused on the pandemic as a crisis and "a Bifucation Point in the Evaluation of Modern Society." He argued situations before and after lockdown by referring to protests and increasing awareness following lockdown. The restructuring to overcome problems was mentioned as a necessity. A new society, sustainable development, and the possibility of speeding up destruction of the planet to make up losses, breaking three vicious circles, and degrowth movement topics were mentioned.

Martina Raponi focused on "Noise as Acoustemological Device" by merging epistemology and acoustic through discussion of deafness and voice in artistic practice and the systemic complexity. Findings were from the children of deaf adults, and deaf cultures. Disruption, inclusivity stigma of handicapped were examined. This discussion is meaningful when we consider the earliest disaster sociology examinations concerning vulnerable groups.

Elisa Margarita Maas Moreno gave her presentation in Spanish, which I cannot evaluate due to the language barrier.

Katuska King and Philipp Altmann gave their speech on the example of COVID-19, Ecuador, as imaginary differentiation. False reflection, official statistics and preliminary findings of ongoing study frame-up difficult ongoing situations with Luhmanian terms. Unclear relationship to observable reality approached as a product of imaginary differentiation. Functional differentiation in Latin America was mentioned by referral to informality and alopoiesis. Their inadequacy to explain the game of "as if" to define ongoing politics was another emphasis. They examine this game in the reality of a part of the population.


Sara Castiglioni focused on judiciary power and the game-changing role of the pandemic in Argentina's case. Imposed innovative engines (use of technology, open data, customer focus), implementation of innovative processes, user-citizen experiences, transparency of the process and forcing resisted judiciary power and lawyers to change and implement the changes during the pandemic by dividing them into groups for the delivery of the justice service and protection of people's rights and the benefit of the judiciary system were mentioned under the light of 33 interviews and 27 participatory observations.

Raija Koskinen examines the Finnish education system in COVID-19 springtime experiences to rediscover nature. Finnish cities were defined as close to nature, lake, and forests. However, the lockdowns of the current situation increase awareness of nature, ecosystem, and education. Koskinen exemplifies some research outcomes from the "Age of Ecological Crisis" published in 2018. The conclusion has been drawn on encouraging individuals and communities to take action for sustainable development to discover respect for nature.

Czeslaw Mesjasz approaches the pandemic as a social construct of the information society. He takes time phases and evaluation of the pandemic from the disease to pandemic and presents the difficulty of making long term predictions. Mesjasz indicates a large extent of the unprecedented phenomenon. He questioned the meaning of unprecedented by referring past pandemic experiences and comes out with an indication of influencing many factors. Biological information carrier has taken as a fundamental element as information affecting society. He reveals the importance of carrying on a deepened study to understand and discuss the situation further.

Juan Carlos Baron Pastor discusseed infodemic in the USA by the usage of sociocybernetic tools. He explores WHO's term of infodemic in the critical sociocybernetics. Pastor comes up with the outcome that infodemic for enhancement is necessary to control social space and netizens. He discusses digital capitalism, surveillance capitalism, and reflection with a second-order observation about the complex phenomenon.

Jose A Amozumurrutia and Veronica Espinoza exemplify their studies from a segment of Mexico and on qualitative analysis of Twitter publications. The conservations have been taken as a base and recklessness, politics, uncertainty, solidarity, economy, health measures, and statistics were the main points by using the Adaptive System for the Social Analysis of Cognitive Trajectories (SIAST).



The third day focused on a manifesto for sociocybernetics. Luciano Gallon chaired the session successfully by including online selection and adding points, voting, and changing places of underlined topics in a manifesto. This process produced a short reference document of sociocybernetics principals, relevant for the analysis of sociological and interdisciplinary work in contemporary times.

The manifesto covers intentions, motives, and views of currently revised sociocybernetics understanding. It covers sociocybernetics evaluation pathways for future studies by concluding remarks. Important issues mentioned were approaches, theories, concepts, micro-mezo-macro levels, short, medium, long term evaluations, multidisciplinary, methodological approaches, case studies, and merging points for the awareness of nature, ecology, and sustainability for the future studies.

These very fruitful discussions achieved their aims during the conference. It seems that following the conference, newly emerging arguments on theory, concepts, and results of ongoing studies will be followed at the social media level and other levels. The collaboration of the conference committee, scientific committee, the RC51 board, and ISA was very successful for their great effort to complete this virtual conference. However, there are many different points to discover on disaster issues and future collaborations with disaster sociology fields and others may emerge.

Book Review by Bernd R. Hornung

Matt Dawson: Social Theory for Alternative Societies, 1st edition

Palgrave Macmillan, London, New York 2016

English, 232 pages, 43,81 Euro, ISBN-13: 978-1-137-33732-0

Highly recommended

To cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and other severe counter-measures have been taken that brought social life and economies to a near-standstill in many societies. As the situation has been improving somewhat and social and economic life is gradually returning, discussions have come up how to restart the economy, and, much more importantly, whether to continue and boost business as usual or take the pandemic and the crisis it caused as a warning and a chance to change the course of the restart towards an alternative society and economy. Therefore, it appears worthwhile to look at what Matt Dawson found in social theory as proposals towards alternative societies.

The book is relevant for anybody looking for solutions or alternatives to the problems of contemporary society and who is interested in what sociological theory has to offer. It deals exclusively with the "socio-" part of sociocybernetics. It does not require previous knowledge about the subject matter and is thus readable also for the general public, not only for specialists.

Matt Dawson provides an overview of a substantial part of sociological theory, from Durkheim to Burawoy, with regard to what it contributes to the analysis of society and proposals for alternatives. The scope of the alternatives outlined, which are more or less detailed by the authors discussed, ranges from communism to the feminist request for a society free of pornography and the unconditional basic income, at present a timely topic.

The authors presented provide starting points and inspirations for alternative societies, not ready-made blueprints. The book is neither systemic nor cybernetic and consequently not sociocybernetic, but it provides a lot of reference points on which a *sociocybernetic* approach could build to develop sociocybernetic alternatives.

The book also contains a rather large bibliography which might be useful to social scientists and to sociocyberneticians as well as to the novice in this field.

Dawson starts with a discussion of Max Weber's quest for a value-free science in Chapter 1. The idea of a value-free science apparently contradicts the concept of a sociology – or also sociocybernetics - which works towards alternatives to the present society and hence in a way tries to propose new utopias. The latter is definitely a normative and value-laden endeavor. As Dawson describes, there are, however, different possible readings of Max Weber. One of them is limiting the request for freeness of values to the research process in a narrow sense.

This implies, e.g., using accepted methods, not ignoring contradicting and adverse data, an unbiased interpretation of data, etc. (*) Also important for Max Weber is to distinguish clearly between the role of scientist and the role of responsible citizen, which may involve political activism.

It seems to me that this kind of understanding Max Weber, which in my view does not contradict the design of an alternative society, is reflected in the general method for developing sociological (and also sociocybernetic) alternatives proposed by Dawson. His method consists of three steps, which are used in the remainder of his book: (1) A critique of a given society, which is based on explicit values and criteria, e.g. inequality. This provides a basis for (2) developing an alternative, which then (3) has to be evaluated without bias whether it can solve the problems identified in the critique.

In the following chapters relevant sociological authors or groups of authors are presented and discussed, including important aspects of their biographies: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Émile Durkheim, W.E.B. Du Bois (proposing a black radicalist alternative), George Herbert Mead and Karl Mannheim, Henri Levebvre and Herbert Marcuse, Selma James with Andrea Dworkin and other feminists, Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, Ruth Levitas and Erik Olin Wright (on sociology and utopias), and Michael Burawoy's public sociology.

The book concludes with a discussion of what sociology is for and which alternative it should be for. This question can easily be expanded to the other social sciences, sociocybernetics, and science at large.

The final conclusion, which in my eyes makes much sense, is, that sociology is for the good life. This means at the individual level for knowledge permitting to live the good life and at the collective level for the good society. On this, supposedly, everyone can agree (although for some people sociology (or science) may just be a way of making money).

But what is the good life and the good society?

Any answer to this question, according to Dawson, cannot count with unanimous or only widespread agreement within the discipline (furthermore such agreement might stifle the scientific discourse). "Sociology", Dawson argues, – or "sociocybernetics"- can only produce and hold open different alternatives without aspiring agreement of all (or a majority of) scientists on which one is the best. In other words, the choice for the implementation of one or another alternative (or for remaining with the existing solution) is a political decision involving – in a democratic society – the citizens.

So there is a lot to do for sociocybernetics, and Matt Dawson in his book provides quite a number of inspirations and starting points for drafting a sociocybernetic "good society" or a way to get there.

*) A detailed discussion of what is good scientific methodology (not only) from the point of view of sociocybernetics can be found in John Raven <http://eyeonsociety.co.uk/resources/Abuses-of-Science-and-authority-COVID-19.pdf>. Also available on *Systems Community of Enquiry* and *Research Gate*.



16th International Conference of Sociocybernetics

The Pandemic Era

Observations and Reflections from a Sociocybernetics Perspective

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Conference Program

Day 1 - Introducing sociocybernetics: widening systemic perspectives.

Tuesday, July 14 - 12:00 - 14:30 UTC Chair of session: Raija Kolskinen

In this first online session, the RC51 Members will introduce basic sociocybernetics ideas, concepts, authors, and tools to a wider audience. The goal is for participants to engage with sociocybernetics in a friendly way to discuss: a) what is sociocybernetics and b) how is it useful for analytical purposes. Online materials (video & readings) will be recommended to watch beforehand. Selected members of RC51 will create ad hoc video clips to support this introductory session. The online session will be directed to discuss such materials and the participants' perspectives on the relevance of sociocybernetics for today societal challenges. This session will be oriented particularly towards young sociologists and researchers who want to know more about sociocybernetics.

- Andrew Mitchell, How COVID-19 is making us all think sociocybernetically
- Patricia Almaguer-Kalixto, Why sociocybernetics is a useful and relevant analytical framework in time of pandemics?
- Chaime Marcuello-Servós, Sextant, Compass and Rudder: Pillars for 21st century Sociocybernetics
- Saburo Akahori, What kind of pathogen have we been infected with?: A second-order assessment of the immune mechanisms of society
- Mark Belitsky, Functional Theory of Social Systems
- Jorge Cardiell, Observing Danger and Risk Managing: COVID-19 as Case Study
- Bernd Hornung, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC - A Bifurcation Point in the Evolution of Modern Society
- Martina Raponi, Noise as acoustemological device

Day 2 - COVID-19: A Second order observation

Wednesday, July 15, 12:00 - 14:30 UTC Chair of the session: Chaime Marcuello

This session focuses on systemic analysis and/or sociocybernetics observations and reflections of COVID-19 around the world. Through short contributions previously submitted and selected, participants will be able to compare and contrast different perspectives on the pandemic. The goal is to share observational and analytical experiences using sociocybernetics and system thinking as a framework. You can participate by sending an abstract or as part of the audience.

- Margarita Maass Moreno, La emergencia de la pandemia del COVID-19 en personas adultas mayores y propuesta desde la sociocibernética para la etapa de post-pandemia
- Philipp Altmann & Katuska King, Covid19 and imaginary differentiation in Ecuador Sara Castiglioni, Innovativeness of the judiciary power. The role of the pandemic as a game changer
- Raija Koskinen, A chance to rediscover respect for nature in the field of education – Finnish experiences of COVID-19 spring
- Czeslaw Mesjasz, Complexity, ignorance and the Covid-19 pandemic as a social construct in Information Society
- Juan Carlos Barron Pastor, Discussing infodemic in USA using critical sociocybernetics' tools
- Jose A Amozurrutia & Fra. Veronica Espinoza, Qualitative analysis of twitter publications for a segment of Mexicans around covid-19

Day 3 – A manifesto for Sociocybernetics

Wednesday, July 16 - 12:00 - 14:30 UTC. Chair of the session: Luciano Gallón

This is a participatory session, open to all, to discuss the core concepts and methodologies of sociocybernetics. Through an online collaborative writing process, the goal is to produce a short reference document about “core” sociocybernetics principals, relevant for the analysis of sociological and interdisciplinary work in contemporary times. By signing up to this session you will be able to be part and/or witness this collaborative definition.



Map of the conference's participants

Abstracts for Day 1 - Introducing sociocybernetics: widening systemic perspectives

How COVID-19 is making us all think sociocybernetically

Andrew Mitchell (mitchell.andrew.neil@gmail.com)

Kumamoto University, Japan

In normal times the social subsystems and organisations which form the backbone of our society go about their operations unnoticed. Governments legislate, payments flow through the economy, and people rarely pay attention to the medical sphere unless they are ill. Society had sufficient complexity to deal with most of the problems that arose and without causing too much perturbation. Even when society suffers crises the damage was usually contained primarily within one social subsystem and often arose from that subsystem's own operations (for example the Lehmann shock arose due to a breakdown in payments and was solved through making payments possible once more). Yet with COVID-19 we face, as world society, the emergence of a pathogen which has led to crises emerging across multiple social subsystems simultaneously. The perturbations that COVID-19 is causing are both huge and fundamentally unknowable, both due to its ongoing nature and due to the fact that no such crisis has struck the world under such hyper-globalised (or highly destratified) conditions before. This has affected the way that people discuss society in the pandemic era. Sociocybernetic principals such as the system/environment distinction, second-order observation, contingency and double contingency, are now finding themselves being inadvertently used throughout the world when trying to make sense of COVID-19. For example, Friedman (2020), a geopolitical analyst, describes the interaction of the medical, economic, social and military "modules", how these modules are trying to manage COVID-19 while interacting with each other, and how they are managed by the political sphere from the local level to the international. The methodological nationalism underpinning geopolitical analysis has had to be modified to take account for the effects social subsystems are having on each other simultaneously, both within the nation state and within the international order. News

organisations seem unable to reduce the complexity to a single social subsystem and are instead forced to describe the complexity of the situation through reference to the multiple communications that are emerging from various organisations (WHO, White House etc.). Reporting now also seems to avoid observing such communications on the first-order, i.e. uncritically. They are now observed at the second order, as communications emerging from a certain subsystem - subsystems with their own observational coding and their own agenda. There seems to be an implicit acknowledgement of a world based on communicative social subsystems, where observation is always system specific and their communications are finding themselves rejected more and more. This presentation will discuss this phenomenon and consider whether sociocybernetics principals are being used more broadly in the world when analysing the pandemic, just how superficial or deep such uses are, and whether any broadening in their use will have a lasting effect on other areas.

Why sociocybernetics is a useful and relevant analytical framework in time of pandemics?

Patricia Eugenia, Almaguer Kalixto (almaguer@unizar.es)

Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain

The concept of sociocybernetics has been shaped over the past forty years at the intersection between first- and second-order cybernetics, constructive epistemology and systems science. This has produced a common language to bridge these different disciplines and a common basis for research analyzing complex social problems. Why sociocybernetics is a useful and relevant analytical framework in time of pandemics? Sociocybernetics perspective is able to explain interconnections between emerging elements in a systemic way, recognizing the importance of the observer in the definition and analysis of the system and promoting second-order observation of the social systems that need improvement. Sociocybernetics addresses social complexity in a conceptual and methodological way, seeking to theorize beyond the old lineal, monocausal, and multicausal scientific views via a more holistic approach including circular causality and emergence. What is the difference between sociocybernetics and other new systems theory approaches? Bailey (2006) emphasizes that sociocybernetics seeks to show how changes in systems come about. It analyzes, among others, negative feedback that returns the system to the status quo, but most importantly it observes feedforward processes that enable steering, adaptation, change, and movement. Through this paper we will present key sociocybernetics concepts that can contribute as an analytical framework in time of COVID-19 such as complex systems, positive and negative feedback, observer-observation and reflexivity, among others.

Sextant, Compass and Rudder: Pillars for 21st century Sociocybernetics

Chaime Marcuello-Servos (chaime@unizar.es),

Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain

“During the last few months we have experienced an unexpected and planetary event. The so-called Wuhan virus has broken the routines of globalization and everyday life in most countries. It is yet another element to the global challenges that requires an approach capable of addressing complexity. In this paper we propose three metaphors to underpin 21st century Sociocybernetics. Metaphors are the pillar of knowledge. They are a fundamental tool for understanding what is human even for abstract matters such as mathematics. This paper focus on Sociocybernetics as a paradigm to face global challenges connecting fields and perspectives. We want to go beyond the consensus and need to promote a ‘prescriptive’ notion open to deal with complex issues and emergent social problems. This paper develops three pillars Sociocybernetics: Sextant, Compass and Steering Wheel. These three metaphors allow us to build a conceptual structure to support the background and feed-

forward. And we will also need to map the system, knowing that the map is not the territory, just as a declaration of intent is not only what you want to do, but also what you want to be.

What kind of pathogen have we been infected with?: A second-order assessment of the immune mechanisms of society

Saburo Akahori (saburoakahori@gmail.com),

Tokyo Woman's Christian University, Japan

This presentation does not question how to overcome the new coronavirus crisis. Instead, from a sociocybernetic point of view, we are going to ask how society as an observer (world society as a social system) has developed cognitive frameworks to cope with the unknown threat. At the same time, we also explore what have remained unobservable. The theoretical tools used here are: (1) The theory of communication media which ""transforms the impossible into the possible and the improbable into the probable (Luhmann 1990). (2) The theory of second-order observation to social systems, in other words, the theory of observation to social system's meaning construction. The findings are as follows: (1) We can indicate "terror" or "fear" as a kind of "symbolic generalized communication media". (2) We are rapidly experiencing a societal evolution in the strict sense of the word (here evolution means transformation the improbable into the probable), but it seems to be a kind of blind spot for society itself.

Functional Theory of Social Systems

Mark Belitsky (mark_belitsky@yahoo.com)

We exist within the confines of an information system called human culture which has evolved over tens of thousands of years alongside humanity itself. Human culture functions not unlike an operating system in a computer, providing basic definitions and life essential tools such as language, as well as regulating social processes and behavior. The aim of this theory is to identify the building blocks, or "bits and bytes", of this system, as well as to understand the principles of how these components fit together and function. Evolution is a dual process comprised of the evolution of the biological systems along with the evolution of the information systems, both of which affect and support each other. The ability to process information is the defining quality of all the living organisms. Language is not simply a communication tool but also the source of the value system, reward and punishment mechanisms and many other social functions. So it is logical to look for the basic building blocks within language. Functional Idea (FI) – this is that smallest "piece of software", an evolutionary product, a concept developed to perform a function in society, may be identified as the basic building block. The first words a baby learns, like "mama", "milk", "bye-bye" are FIs that fit into other FIs forming more complex FIs. Soft Force (SF) – this is a psychological force, a vector that has magnitude and "direction". There is a direct correlation between FI and SF, with a SF vector being formed in the subconscious based on the FI. There are two kinds of SFs: connective and directional, which interact with each other on a level playing field, so this division could be quite superficial. This theory focuses on the connective SFs since they are instrumental in forming social structures. Idearchy – this is a collection of all the FIs comprising human culture. This term facilitates discussion concerning the evolution and health of the Idearchy and the way a society develops means to maintain it, not unlike the antivirus software, ranging from ridicule to execution of heretics and dissidents. The diagram below shows how a friendship between two individuals is formed by SFs. The same mechanism applies to any social structure, be it marriage, work, social clubs, etc. Also, it applies to relationships formed between individuals and material or conceptual things like houses, cars, the stock market and others. Positive or attracting SF vectors are formed in

the subconscious for each FI such as, for example: the individual is a good athlete, popular with peers, likes music, etc. Also, the negative or repelling SF vectors are formed: the person is selfish, impolite or ill-informed. The SF vectors are summed up into two resulting vectors, one positive and one negative. These vectors are dynamic and constantly being reevaluated. All decisions, including the decision whether to stay as part of a social structure, are made on the Soft Force level, not on a logical level. With insignificant decisions, the SF vectors are so weak that they are barely noticeable, creating an appearance that the decision was made on a logical level. Also, only the resulting vectors are at play in the final decision process. The brain, like any other organ, communicates with our consciousness through a set of signals or symptoms. Emotions are only symptoms of the SF vector interaction. When positive SFs are prevailing, we experience positive emotions, with negative SFs causing negative emotions. There are two major reasons why the system of Soft Forces has evolved. First, social motives must interact and compete on a level playing field against basic instincts like hunger, fear and the urge to procreate. Second, the multitude of SFs comprising one resulting vector force creates stability in the fabric of social structures. This stability is very important in accomplishing resilience and viability in the real world where biological systems have to perform like any other physical systems, only the biological systems operate with greater degrees of freedom. Historically, philosophy has not been a science in the true sense of the word but performed as a generator of Functional Ideas in the society. Progressive and conservative segments of the population play an important role in the evolution of the FIs assuring that the process of change is properly paced and that new FIs are vetted before they become part of human culture. Social groups compete not only for land, resources and power but also to prove the viability and superiority of their Functional Ideas.

Observing Danger and Risk Managing: COVID-19 as Case Study

Jorge Cardiel (mfcardiels@gmail.com),

UNAM, Mexico

In 1991, Niklas Luhmann published his book "Sociology of Risk". By proposing the distinction between danger and risk, he analyzed how society makes a calculus of attribution, by applying this code. Unmanageable events that could potentially affect society (e.g. earthquakes, solar explosions, asteroids, etc.) are understood as dangers. Whereas events that can be foreseen, and might be affected by our behaviors, decisions and actions, are conceptualized by Luhmann as risk. Before its moment of irruption, the probability of emergence of a new and strongly contagious virus was pointed out by some observers. The risk was in a latent state; but society could not yet verify that, among a myriad of other possible dangers (still present), this particular one was going to be actualized. When the danger known as SARS-CoV-2 suddenly appeared in the horizon, the first reaction by numerous governments was the implementation of a state of exception, applying extreme measures for people to stay at home and reduce physical contacts. At this first stage, the objective was to prevent the formation of a pandemic and the state apparatus directly assumed the managing of risk. Today, we have a pandemic. But, instead of enforcing and prolonging the state of exception, we experience the attempt to redistribute risk management towards organizations, families and individuals with the proclamation of "The New Normal". With this global turn towards a society of risk, also a wide space for diverse public policies emerges. At the time Luhmann wrote his "Sociology of Risk", he focused mainly on technology and ecology. This proposal discusses some of his thesis in the light of the global crisis of COVID-19.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC - A Bifurcation Point in the Evolution of Modern Society

Bernd Hornung (HornungRC51@aol.com),

Marburg University (retired), Germany

“The COVID-19 pandemic has silenced climate and ecological protest, but the lockdown of large parts of the economies has also led to some improvement, like cleaner air, less use of non-renewable resources like fossil fuels, etc. Moreover it has shown that, in principle, life can go on under conditions of lockdown and with a reduced functioning of the modern economy. This involved inconveniences and problems and made evident an urgent need for restructuring not only the economy but also the way of life of the citizens to overcome these problems. But after the pandemic? Industry has already been lobbying with all forces for a big economic boost, for resuming business as usual, and even better and especially much more business than before - to “make up” for the losses due to the pandemic. A strategy speeding up even more the ecological destruction of our planet. Others aspire to learn from the period of the pandemic and take this crisis and experience as a chance to restructure society in a way that it will be more ecologically sustainable. In other words, they consider a new society as necessary. This requires the vicious circles driving the planet into ecological destruction to be broken up. Such vicious circles are: - The circle of financial production - The circle of consumerism - The circle of identifying human well-being with the GDP and material affluence. - The circle of waste production -... To analyze these vicious circles and to identify possible points of intervention a systemic and cybernetic, i.e. a sociocybernetic, approach is indispensable. This could complement and strengthen the scientific branch of the activist DEGROWTH movement which is pushing in such a direction. With regard to sociology It would also be in line with the quest of Michael Burawoy for a public sociology.

Noise as acoustemological device

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I will present artistic research from the point of view of acoustemology (a word merging “acoustics” and “epistemology”). When thinking and knowing the world through the sonic, and when processing this knowledge in order to produce artworks, texts, performances, events, it is possible to expand the possibility of understanding reality in a way that doesn’t ignore the systemic complexity that characterizes it. Specifically, the use of “noise” as a theoretical and practical tool to decode and disrupt reality, allows for entanglements to emerge at the forefront, and individuate all the relations among elements and actants of a system. I will mention briefly as a study case an ongoing research in my artistic practice on Deafness and Voice, analyzed through the lens of Noise as an acoustemological device. As an artist working with Noise, and a CODA (child of Deaf adults), I started a circular analysis of noise from the entry point of Deafness and un-cultured voices, while positioning Deaf cultures within systems using Noise as an acoustemological device. In ableist societies, the voice is a cultural product, and certain voices, perceived as “other”, flawed, “noisy”, can lead to the discussion and the negotiation of shared spaces, disruption, and inclusivity. The sonic space becomes then a social and political environment, where noise is easily detectable, especially in relation to rules dictated by normative sensorial capacities and regulations developed within the thresholds of audibility. The soundscape within the thresholds of audibility is a space which expels and rejects communities that carry the stigma of “handicap”, such as Deaf communities.

Abstracts for Day 2 - COVID-19: A Second order observation

La emergencia de la pandemia del COVID-19 en personas adultas mayores y propuesta desde la sociocibernética para la etapa de post-pandemia

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“Problema: Para finales de junio del 2020, cumplíamos en México 3 meses y medio de “reclusión” por el COVID-19. En el mes de marzo se decretó en nuestro país, como se había hecho en el resto del mundo, el cierre de escuelas, empresas, espacios públicos, centros comerciales, cines, iglesias, todo. La razón central era que los hospitales, centros de salud e infraestructura sanitaria en general estaba saturada y si nos contagiábamos de coronavirus y llegábamos a necesitar hospitalización no habría lugar para recibirnos. Un porcentaje de los pacientes graves en hospitalización, que se contagiaron de Coronavirus, tenían padecimientos previos de obesidad, diabetes o hipertensión y sistemas inmunes débiles, que agravaron la situación. Particularmente los adultos mayores y personas que tienen enfermedades crónico-degenerativas corren mayor riesgo no solamente de contraer el COVID-19, sino de tener complicaciones, ser hospitalizadas e incluso morir. ¿Cómo ha afectado a las personas adultas mayores la emergencia de la pandemia del COVID-19 y qué se propone para la etapa de post-pandemia?, ¿cómo reflexionar colectivamente, para re-configurar nuestro concepto de envejecimiento y vejez, y nuestras prácticas preventivas para una calidad de vida en las próximas décadas? Objetivo: Presentar, primeramente, una revisión de la situación que están viviendo las personas adultas mayores durante la pandemia y, posteriormente, una reflexión sobre lo que se propone para la etapa de post-pandemia desde el trabajo colectivo y reflexivo que propone la Cibercultur@ y la Sociocibernética. Metodología: Este trabajo está basado en entrevistas realizadas durante el covid-19, referentes a la relación abuelos y nietos durante la pandemia y el efecto de la tecnología en este proceso intergeneracional. Resultados: Las personas adultas mayores presentan síntomas y signos de soledad, depresión, aislamiento y olvido de sus familiares. Han tenido hasta el momento un mayor nivel de dificultad para valerse de la oportunidad que brinda esta tecnología digital para la comunicación con los más cercanos. La tecnología no se ha democratizado. Proponemos la formación de CECL desde el marco referencial de la Cibercultur@, las tecnologías de información y comunicación y la sociocibernética.

Covid19 and imaginary differentiation in Ecuador

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Covid19 hit Ecuador hard – dead people lying in the streets were shown in international news, the official case numbers are much lower than the surplus death rates published by international organizations, hospitals in Quito are right now near a complete collapse. However, this case has been hardly studied. Based on an ongoing research on socio-economic impacts of Covid19 and the associated measures in Ecuador, this presentation will try for an interpretation of what has been happening in luhmannian terms. The actions of the government and other relevant actors and their unclear relationship to observable reality (like a softening of restrictions while case numbers are rising or actions based on data without any empirical foundation) will be understood as product of imaginary differentiation. The specific form of functional differentiation in Latin America has been described as informality (Mascareño) or alopoiesis (Neves). While both concepts have their strengths, they cannot explain the game of “as if” that seems to define politics at the moment. Using our data on credibility of political actors,

economic effects of the crisis, and means of information on Covid19, we will explore this game of “as if” in the reality of a part of the population.

INNOVATIVENESS OF THE JUDICIARY POWER. THE ROLE OF THE PANDEMIC AS A GAME CHANGER

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For several years, the use of technology, open data and customer focus as innovation engines has been imposed worldwide. The Judiciary Power as a key player in the system of administration of justice of the Argentine Republic does not escape this trend. As a consequence of this, it has implemented innovative processes in order to reduce their management times, improve the user-citizen experience and bring transparency to the process. Nevertheless, in Argentina these innovations are rare exceptions and the modernization processes take years to show results. The Judiciary Power is known by its hierarchical structure, bureaucracy and taste for the status quo. In 2020 the pandemic obliged the Judiciary Powers to implement many changes in no time in order to keep delivering the justice service and protecting people’s rights. As a result, changes that were resisted for years by members of the Judiciary Power and lawyers could be implemented. By observing this process, some questions emerge related to the innovativeness of the system: How does the pandemic impact on the learning capabilities regarding innovation of the Judiciary Power? Was it a game changer? Does it reflect a deuterio-learning at a systemic level? In order to answer these questions 33 interviews and 27 participatory observations (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014) were conducted, to analyze the mayor innovations produced from 2008 to 2020 (included those implemented during the pandemic).

As a result, members of the Judiciary Power were divided into groups: decision-policy makers (mainly the State Court Ministers), the implementation crew (teams dedicated to design and implement the changes), pioneers (innovators and early adopters) and other members of the judiciary system that adopts innovations and changes. The main finding was that although all the system got benefits from innovations only the implementation crew and the pioneers had experienced deuterio-learning.

A chance to rediscover respect for nature in the field of education – Finnish experiences of COVID-19 spring

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There are many aspects to reflect upon COVID-19. This is the situation in Finland as in all regions of the world. I have chosen to share observations of how the pandemic has awaken many Finns, including myself to rediscover nature, and its intrinsic value. These troubled times can be therefore seen as an opportunity to profound reflection in terms of human-nature relationship and the challenges in the age of ecological crisis. Finns do have a close relationship with nature to begin with. Finland is sparsely populated: 18,2 people per square kilometer of land area. Around 75 per cent of Finland’s total land area is covered in forest. We have lots of lakes. We have nature very close even in our cities. However, during this spring, when living under new kind of restrictions due to pandemic, many of us Finns have found nature in a new way. There is even new kind of thirst for knowledge of nature, of ecosystems and how everything is connected. In this paper, I scrutinize my observations and discussion shared with other Finns, especially with colleagues working in the field of education. Literature concerning nature, ecosystems and education is utilized in this scrutiny. The most crucial source is the latest monograph of a Finnish philosopher Veli-Matti Värrö. His title Education in the Age of Ecological Crisis published in 2018, focuses on re-conceptualizing the ontological, socio-cultural and ethical reference points for constituting ecological education in

the sphere of global capitalism. The pandemic is currently affecting our lives and there is a lot of uncertainty of the future around the globe. Our destiny as human beings is inevitably interwoven with nature. As conclusions, I describe some concrete ways how to encourage individuals and communities to take actions for sustainable development, to discover respect for nature.

Complexity, ignorance and the Covid-19 pandemic as a social construct in Information Society

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“The outbreak of the wave of cases of illness caused by the virus Covid19, which was later declared as a pandemic, constitutes a new phenomenon in social life. Since we are now in the middle of the process, it isn’t easy to make any long-term predictions. However, looking from multiple points of view, beginning from microbiological through medical and ending with economic, political, financial, and security, the Covid19 pandemic constitutes a new and to a large extent, unprecedented phenomenon. The first question which must be answered is – what is unprecedented with the Covid19 pandemic in comparison with other pandemics, e.g., the so-called “Spanish Flu,” bubonic plagues, typhoid, etc. There are many factors making it different, e.g., the intensity of sickness, the speed, and scope of spreading, etc. Looking from the vantage point of sociocybernetics and/or from the most profound ontological, epistemological and methodological point of view, the Covid19 pandemic is the first example when virus treated as a biological information carrier is affecting society, in which information is treated as one of most important fundamental elements. Obviously, a deepened study would require a more extended multi- and interdisciplinary analysis, but at present, some preliminary assumptions, descriptions, conclusions, and recommendations can be discussed.

Discussing infodemic in USA using critical sociocybernetics’ tools

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In this presentation it will be explored how critical sociocybernetics can explain infodemic, using USA as an example. This notion was proposed by the World Health Organization to refer “an over-abundance of information – some accurate and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it (WHO 13, 2020:2)”. Since the COVID-19 crisis began, infodemic has been part of it globally, and United States is not the exception. Critical sociocybernetics seek to offer an explanation about how certain social groups or populations are steered in specific territories, specifically by the means of functioning of the media system in the cyberspace. In USA the social and political reaction to the pandemic was maybe the worst worldwide, what was the role of infodemic in such dreadful response? The hypothesis to be explored is infodemic is crucial for the rise of digital and surveillance capitalism, because it impulses the enhancement and control of cyberspace and netizens. Digital capitalism for this presentation is “the collection of processes, sites, and moments in which digital technology mediates the structural tendencies of capitalism (Pace, 2018:262).” Surveillance capitalism will be understood as a management practice that unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data for commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales (Zuboff, 2019: 13).” The reflection can deliver us a second order observation about this complex phenomenon within the society of this country, but the rest of the world would do well to take note

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWITTER PUBLICATIONS FOR A SEGMENT OF MEXICANS AROUND COVID-19

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This document establishes an approach to investigate how people live through the difficult situation in the pandemic COVID19., and we analyze Twitter conversations in Mexicans. We used the methodology and the analysis with the “Adaptive System for the Social Analysis of Cognitive Trajectories” (SIAS). Some of the most relevant topics analysed were: recklessness, politics, uncertainty, economy, solidarity, statistics and health measures.

IV ISA Forum of Sociology

Porto Alegre, Brazil • February 23-27, 2021 • Events Center PUCRS



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RC51 Sociocybernetics SESSIONS

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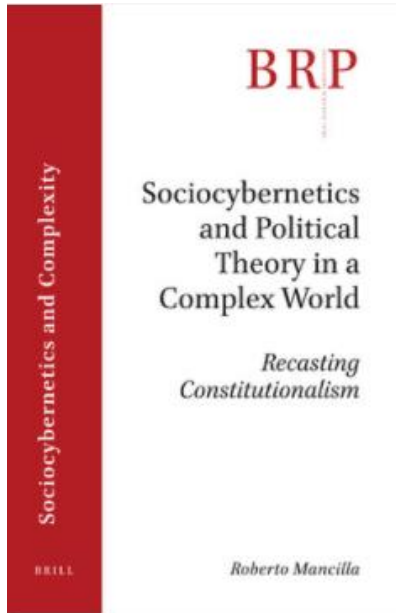
[Sociocybernetics: A Tool Box to Face World Challenges](#)

October 26 – November 12, 2020: Submission of new abstracts via online platform.

December 15, 2020: Presenters' registration deadline.

More information: <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/forum/porto-alegre-2021>

Book presentation by Roberto Mancilla



In *Sociocybernetics and Political Theory in a Complex World*, Roberto Mancilla posits that because current political and constitutional theory was crafted since the XVII century, in the age of globalisation, Google and Big Data, other arrangements are needed. He proposes a recasting of the ideas of the State, Separation of Powers, The Public/Private Distinction and Constitutionalism by means of cybernetics, a body of knowledge that gave way to the technology that we have today. This will be done by means of a general introduction to sociocybernetics and complexity and then through the critical dismantling of said concepts of political theory and then proposals imbued with newer ideas.

Join us for the book presentation with comments by the author, Chaime Marcuello and Bernard Scott.

12th of November 2020 meet.google.com/snh-tqkd-kfi
12.30 UTC

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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