

# RC51 *Newsletter*

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# Editors' Introduction

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Dear RC51 members,

This spring newsletter opens with an invitation to our 17th international conference. Thanks to our colleagues who have been working hard to build the framework, this year's conference will be held in hybrid format (in Zaragoza and online). The long difficult time due to the Covid-19 global pandemic has yet to come to an end in many parts of the world. The war in Ukraine has caused a humanitarian crisis. This crisis and increasing control of public opinion in Russia also reminds us of the title of ISA's next world congress in 2023, "Resurgent Authoritarianism". As once an American sociologist, P. A. Sorokin wrote, a grave crisis tends to increase state's control over society. We think our conference will be, whether in Zaragoza or online, a place to develop our research and collaboration to tackle the multidimensional crisis.

This issue shares three reports of sociocybernetic activities from our colleagues. Bernd reports on an online seminar on Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luis's book *The Systems View of Life: A unifying vision*. The most important point that his report presents to us may be the problem of how modern society can be integrated or live together with its natural environment (and this may include the human body). Beyond the disagreement over applicability of systemic concepts such as "autopoiesis" to society, the problem we share will invite us to work together from a sociocybernetic point of view. Juancho Barrón contributed a report of the seminar organized by the Centre of Research on North America (CISAN) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). His report tells us that active application of sociocybernetic concepts and tools is a driving force to improve our understaffing of transnational phenomena. Saburo introduces a short history and activities of the community created by the people who are interested in Niklas Luhmann's work in Japan. As he mentions, we hope that the future exchange between local research communities will extend the research network of sociocybernetics. He also shares sad news of our friend Machiko's passing. It is very hard to hear of the sudden loss of a friend in such a difficult time. We include her obituary in this issue.

In the announcement section, we also share two contributions which introduce you to sociocybernetic books authored by Bernard Scott and Czesław Mesjasz and his colleagues, and RC51's community survey which is important to boost our networking in future activities.

**Toru Takahashi and Andrew Mitchell**

*RC51 Newsletter Editors*

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# Letter from the President

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**Dear friends and members of RC51,**

We present to you the contents of our newest newsletter. It contains, among other things, important information about **our next congress that we will hold in a hybrid way (face-to-face + online) in Zaragoza, Spain, next June**. It will be three days of dialogue, meeting, collective learning and updating. We believe that, although travel conditions and restrictions are still complicated, the University of Zaragoza can offer optimal conditions for that encounter. We are working so that those who choose to participate online will also have a renewed dialogue experience. See (<https://sociocybernetics.org/conference2022>).

**These are complicated times in many ways.** To the lengthened process of the global battle against COVID-19 and its invisible aftermath, we add the war in Ukraine with a massive mobilization of people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. As always, reality shows us a greater complexity than we can assume. We have all witnessed that in a few weeks the geopolitical panorama has changed with implications to local levels in terms of energy supply affecting households, local commerce and industry, and even global supply chains.

We believe that today more than ever it is essential to promote an analytical view from the socio-cybernetic perspective. Our conceptual framework addresses all kinds of complex phenomena that are now potential objects of study. Members of our community have already worked on topics that are relevant to the processes we are hearing about: migration, armed conflicts, international relations, international cooperation, etc. However, more significantly, our conceptual framework proposes fundamental strategies for analyzing emerging issues: The concept of reflexivity, the concept of second-order observation, prospective analysis and anticipation are concepts that are necessary today to analyze all the information that is being generated through telecommunications and social networks, many of which are designed to generate manipulable emotions through what we call misinformation, disinformation, and fake news.

As you know, next year the World Conference of Sociology is scheduled to take place in Melbourne, Australia in June 25 July 1, 202. With the difficulty these days of making long term plans, we are working on the presence of RC51 in such an important meeting. This is the time to make proposals for roundtables and soon the chance to upload your abstracts will open.

In order to keep our links strong and to continue contributing to the promotion of socio-cybernetics in social analysis we invite you to stay tuned. In this issue of the newsletter, you will find very important information about our next events but also **a survey we are conducting to identify your most recent contributions to socio-cybernetics** (<https://tinyurl.com/RC51survey>). We will also identify possible thematic links that will help us to strengthen the network we are. The advances of this analysis will be presented at the Zaragoza Congress and also in Australia. So, either digitally or in person we hope to see you connected.

We count on your presence and energy to share views that allow us to give alternative visions to the world that contains us. A socio-cybernetic perspective that broadens our gaze in depth and length, is

fundamental to contrast those blind spots fed by increasingly reductionist, instantaneous narratives. We hope to see you in our next conference (June 20, 21 and 22nd in Zaragoza, Spain). It will be an opportunity to catch up and to elaborate future proposals.

On behalf of the RC51 Board  
Patricia E. Almaguer Kalixto  
RC51 president

## ISA statement on the Russian military offensive happening in Ukraine

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The International Sociological Association (ISA) expresses its deep concern about the Russian military offensive happening in Ukraine. We stand with the international community in condemning this war. War is never an acceptable solution and is against all the values we uphold. The ISA stands in solidarity with the Ukrainian social scientists, and with our colleagues elsewhere, including in the Russian Federation and Belarus, who have raised their voices against this war, and have defended democracy and human rights.

Today, more than ever, we are in need of critical interventions by social scientists. The ISA, as an international community of more than five thousand sociologists, declares its commitment to maintaining the resolve of its global membership, to strengthening international dialogue, particularly with and among those of our colleagues who are affected by this war, to making critical voices heard in our global scientific communities and on our social media, and to facilitating the dissemination of critical analyses in its publications and scholarly events.

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Source: <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/about-isa/isa-human-rights-committee/isa-statement-on-the-russian-military-offensive-happening-in-ukraine>

## 17th Conference of Sociocybernetics Reflection on Global Challenges and Local Answers to Sustainability



information and abstract submission: <https://sociocybernetics.org/conference2022>

Organizers:



Collaborates:



**ZARAGOZA, Spain June 20-22, 2022**

## PRESENTATION

The Research Committee 51 on Sociocybernetics (RC51) of the International Sociological Association (ISA) invites you to participate in its 17th conference focusing on contributions that systemic science and thinking can make to address global and local challenges. Particular attention will be given to processes that reinforce social innovation and collective knowledge to address local and global -glocal- challenges in correspondence to the Sustainable Development Goals as stated by the UN. The key to tangible change lies in social reflexivity.

The Sustainable Development Goals are broad and interdependent. However, one of their biggest challenges is to reach the local level. Therefore, the objective is to identify, discuss, and showcase the most recent conceptual and practical developments in systems thinking (particularly sociocybernetics) applied to the advancement of such goals connecting the local with the global. This includes the dialogue with related perspectives and projects that address glocal challenges through open innovation, citizen science, and/or applied systems thinking.

How is society orienting interventions to address glocal challenges in a more systemic way? Sociocybernetics or second order cybernetics incorporate key concepts that are useful to address social innovation processes such as: reflexivity, adaptation, emergence, self-organization, pro-action (feedforward), among others.

Taking the expression "Think globally, act locally" as a reference to glocal interactions, sociocybernetics promotes making explicit such interrelations by analysing the drivers and barriers for connecting both levels with a second order perspective. From a systemic perspective, those interactions refer to relations that bring together characteristics of both realities. As the sociologist Roland Roberson stated, that means the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies.

Glocalization has been theorized by social scientists as a process that combines the concerns of localism with the forces of globalization, or a local adaptation and interpretation of global forces. It gives important attention to digitization processes, advancing computer and media understanding enabling more distributed, multidisciplinary, trans-border, cross-institutional, and inter-temporal innovation processes connecting both areas.

Global challenges are highly heterogeneous, from the dynamics that threaten the Earth as a whole, such as climate change, to other social processes that affect in an unequal way the effects of COVID19, systemic violence, insecurity, negative effects of the globalized markets, the deterioration of the quality of life in cities and towns. In addition, all these phenomena are experienced by social groups with uneven access to information and reliable knowledge in an era of wide disinformation, fake news, and new online "metaverses".

The goal of this conference is therefore to bring scholars together to explore, within a sociocybernetic approach, the issues at stake. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Systemic views on globalization and regional effects on local dynamics
- Global Challenges and Local Answers to Sustainability
- Local strategies for global challenges
- Social innovation and Sustainable Development Goals
- Democratic participation and digital governance
- Social reflexivity and environmental crisis (from responsible consumption to climate action)
- Glocal strategies to monitor quality of life and sustainability in rural and urban areas
- Social reflexivity on communication, disinformation, fake news, online communities, social media platforms
- Social reflexivity related to gender, migration, ethnicity, and disability
- COVID19 effects and local answers to sustainability
- Education on sustainability in local contexts
- Social reflexivity and art, cultural practices and/or cultural heritage.

Other topics (conceptual, methodological, practical) related to sociocybernetics are also welcomed.

## **ABOUT THE FORMAT**

Traditionally, the RC51 Research Committee on Sociocybernetics meets yearly in a special place somewhere on the globe. In these meetings we have interesting discussions about the theory, practice, and application of sociocybernetics and its ability to observe, understand, and try to overcome pressing needs of society.

Due to COVID 19, the 16th RC51 Conference and the ISA 2020 FORUM were organised as virtual conferences with a three-day programme of online sessions. In 2022 we want to give the first choice to

a hybrid meeting, while carefully monitoring official recommendations regarding the COVID-19 situation for the health and well-being of our participants attending the conference personally in Zaragoza. Those who prefer online participation will be able to present live online and to get involved in the program through different online tools. This hybrid organisation of the conference will allow to maintain dialogues between people around the world, in-place and online, also giving the opportunity to our scientific community to meet personally.

You can participate with:

- SESSION PROPOSALS, related to any of the previous topics.
- PAPER presentations related to the topics above, that will be oriented to sessions with a topic related
- ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS of activities either online or on-site. It requires an explicit orientation to sociocybernetics (also including innovative formats that go beyond traditional papers).

## Important dates

February 15th, 2022	Registration opens for abstract submission
February 15th, 2022	Registration opens for special session proposals
March 10th, 2022	Registration closes for special sessions
March 15 <sup>th</sup>	Notification of acceptance for special session proposals
<b>April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	<b>Deadline for abstract submission</b>
May 10th, 2022	Notification of acceptance for abstract
June 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2022	Registration closes
June 20-22, 2022	17th International Conference of Sociocybernetics

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

### For Special Sessions:

Please submit an Abstract of 500 words to include purpose of the session, scope, type of papers to be presented and if is part of an ongoing work (seminar, research, program, etc). Special sessions require

at least 4 papers to be included in the program. Please provide a name for the chair of the special session. Send your special sessions proposals to [pescrich@unizar.es](mailto:pescrich@unizar.es) and [almaguer@unizar.es](mailto:almaguer@unizar.es).

### **For Abstracts:**

Please submit an Abstract of 500-750 words. It should include purpose of the work, scope, method, results, recommendations and/or conclusions together with the essential bibliographic references. We suggest including sociocybernetics in your materials. The abstracts booklet will be made available to conference participants and will be published as part of the conference programme on the RC51 website. The final communication will have a minimum length of 4000 words and a maximum of 6000 words, to be considered. Selected papers will be proposed for the Journal of Sociocybernetics. Submit at: [tinyurl.com/2022RC51abstract](https://tinyurl.com/2022RC51abstract)

## **Participation fees**

- RC51 non members: 100 EUR
- Student fee RC51 non members: 50 EUR
- RC51 regular members in good standing (ISA and RC51): No fee.
- Interested in becoming an ISA RC51 member? Find information in: <https://sociocybernetics.org/how-to-join>
- For academic registration a student ID is needed to obtain the discount.

## **VENUE**

University of Zaragoza, Facultad de Economía y Empresa, Doctor Cerrada, 1-3. 50005 Zaragoza, Spain. Founded in 1542, the University of Zaragoza is one of the oldest universities in Spain. The Faculty of Economics and Business Administration constitutes an important centre of the university to enhance communication between the university and society.

## **Accommodation**

Zaragoza has a wide range of tourist accommodation. The organizers will provide you with information on hotels near the venue, in the logistics and accommodation section.

## **HOW TO REACH ZARAGOZA**

Zaragoza is located at an interesting crossroads. A range of airlines operate from the airport, offering services to Spanish and European cities. You can also access it via high speed train (AVE) and national highways from Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao or Pamplona".

## **Contacts and information**

For conference information and updates please check the official website:

<https://sociocybernetics.org/conference2022>



For specific questions you may directly contact the members of the Local Organizing Committee: Pedro J. Escriche Bueno ([pescrich@unizar.es](mailto:pescrich@unizar.es)) (Chair), Chaime Marcuello Servós ([chaime@unizar.es](mailto:chaime@unizar.es)) and/or RC51 President Patricia E. Almaguer Kalixto ([almaguer@unizar.es](mailto:almaguer@unizar.es)).

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**More information:**

<https://sociocybernetics.org/conference2022>

# A GLOBAL SYSTEM CRISIS – THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION

## RC51 Online Seminar 2021 on "THE SYSTEMS VIEW OF LIFE – A UNIFYING VISION" by Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi (published in 2016)

*Bernd R. Hornung*

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"What is life?" – A fundamental question which to answer from a systems point of view Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi set out to answer in a nearly 500-page volume (1). This book is intended by the authors as a contemporary synthesis of current interdisciplinary knowledge about the systems view of life. As a unifying vision of what is life on this planet Earth, it aims to be a foundation for a systems scientific and cybernetic analysis of the present global problems encountered by humankind and for a search for possible solutions. These problems do not only include the current worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, with which medical science and governments are facing an unprecedented task, both in scope and with regard to the very short reaction times required, but also the ongoing climate change and the pending breakdown of global and regional ecosystems.

The view developed by Capra and Luisi is very close to the ideas which have been discussed and developed over the last decades in the RC51 community. Therefore, a research seminar was organized on behalf of RC51 by Cor van Dijkum and Bernd Hornung, bringing together an international and interdisciplinary group of scientists to discuss the possibilities of integrating the approach of Capra and Luisi with socio-cybernetics. The intention was to eventually use it for analyzing the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the wider context of climate change and pending global ecological disaster.

To these ends about a dozen participants from European and Latin American countries joined in Zoom sessions to intensively comment and talk about the core chapters of the book of Capra and Luisi. The chapters chosen for a comment of one of the participants, to be followed by thorough discussion, were Chapter 6: Complexity Theory; Chapter 7: What is Life?; Chapter 8: Order and Complexity in the Living World; Chapter 9: Darwin and Biological Evolution; Chapter 12: Mind and Consciousness; Chapter 14: Life, Mind, and Society; Chapter 16: The Ecological Dimension of Life; and Chapter 17: Connecting the Dots: Systems Thinking and the State of the World.

As already this series of selected chapters shows, both the book itself and the attempt of the seminar to analyze it with regard to sociocybernetics are tremendous challenges. Questions were whether it fits with the sociocybernetic approach, where aspects or theories are missing, where are possibly contradictions and mistakes, and where are needs to up-date the sociocybernetic approach. Such questions, however, could find only tentative answers within the short time available in a seminar.

It became soon evident, that even a book of 500 pages is not enough to summarize and synthesize the current literature. Relevant is not only literature on systems, cybernetics, and sociocybernetics (and maybe still a few others) but also knowledge which must be drawn necessarily from substantial sciences

like biology, sociology, physics, chemistry, information science, etc. Otherwise, a systems view of life in face of the contemporary global pandemic and ecological challenges would remain a mere formal exercise. So, Capra and Luisi had to be highly selective, and the participants of the seminar had to be tolerant and selective too in their comments and critique, taking into account this situation. Therefore, the seminar tried to focus on those issues which are decisive for the understanding of life on our planet and for identifying possibly solutions to the problems humankind is facing.

On the whole, the book was deemed to be a valuable and worthwhile foundation for understanding what life on this planet from a systems view is (in this text "system" is always meant as including cybernetics). Grosso modo it can be said that sociocybernetics differs from "The Systems View of Life" only slightly and in a few points. It needs to be taken into account, however: 1) That the systems view at large, and sociocybernetics as well, so far do not dispose of an integrated view of what is life, and they are not unified fields but represent a wide variety of different perspectives and approaches although on the basis of a common paradigm; 2) that open issues and discrepancies within those fields and within and among the different substantive social sciences, which feed into sociocybernetics (and "The Systems View of Life") cannot be resolved in such a synthesis; 3) that sociocybernetics, specializing in the application of the systems view to the social sciences, necessarily goes much deeper into the theories and topics of the latter than is possible for a single book written by a physicist and a biochemist.

These observations do not diminish the merit of the synthesis as a valuable effort to create a still readable overall view of a big system, the planetary system, in which life has developed and still flourishes. They have guided the discussions of the group, however, trying not to get lost in innumerable aspects which "also should be mentioned" – and could be mentioned on many more pages – but to focus on issues which appeared to be crucial for the synthesis as presented.

One is the issue of the "mind", about which Capra and Luisi could not fully agree. While there is no doubt that humans and higher animals have a "mind", Capra likes to expand this down the line to all living beings (p. 254). Of course, this depends last not least on the definition of "mind". In humans it tends to include, e.g., consciousness, unconscious processes, emotions, attitudes, and values. Luisi seems to understand "mind" more or less in such a traditional way. Reading Capra's arguments, one may get the impression that what he is talking about is information processing, not "mind" in a more psychological sense. If such a reading is correct, the work of Tom Stonier on information processing in plants and animals would fit the synthesis perfectly (2). Sure, it depends on the definition of the concept, and definitions are neither true nor false. They are only practical or impractical. This depends, among others, on the context, however. The discussion in the group remained open-ended whether autopoiesis, as developed by the Santiago School, is consistent with the theory of Capra and Luisi, or whether e.g. Bateson's approach or an information processing approach would be more adequate. This also raises the question to what extent these three different approaches are compatible with each other.

Another fundamental issue discussed but unresolved in sociology, is the application of the concept of autopoiesis to social systems. This view is based on the work of Niklas Luhmann after his "autopoietic turn". There is still strong disagreement within sociology as well as within sociocybernetics, whether such an application to social systems is viable and legitimate or not. Of course, Luhmann is well-known to the world because he had written innumerable books and articles, also available in English and Spanish. There are even translations into Japanese. But opinions about autopoiesis in social systems

are still very divided. Humberto Maturana, e.g., who originally developed the concept of autopoiesis together with Francisco Varela, clearly rejected its application to social systems, whereas his colleague was less negative about it. Opinions among the seminar participants ranged from full acceptance of autopoiesis also for social systems to limiting it to living systems and to complete rejection. Discussions indicated that a close look at the topics and arguments of Capra and Luisi might show that they could perhaps well do without using this concept, which raises a lot of subsequent theoretical problems (3). How, e.g., does the autopoietic closure of (social) systems fit with the "web-of-life", professed throughout the book by Capra and Luisi. The "web-of-life", after all, implies much openness of its components.

A related, but less severe, issue is the insistence of Capra and Luisi on "networks". They see all networks as complex and as somehow opposed to the concept of systems. This seems to have become a kind of fashion among network analysts. It was pointed out in the discussions that neither all networks nor all systems are complex. Another critical argument was that the nodes of a (social) network are usually systems (organizations, groups, individuals). Moreover, networks which are flat can be interpreted as one-level systems. Other types of networks are not flat or can cut across different systems levels.

In this context it was discussed that a number of important systemic and sociological concepts are missing or at least are not taken into account with sufficient explicitness.

Among these are, e.g., the necessary distinction and classification of different hierarchies like nested hierarchies, e.g., systems, flow hierarchies, control hierarchies (cybernetics!), and functional hierarchies. Dealing with feedback circles hyper-incursivity, i.e., feedback of future phenomena (expected) on current expectations, is missing. Also, the complexity turn in the social sciences to relational and analytical sociology does not find mention, although the book is basically on issues of complexity (4).

A fundamental gap, however, is in quite a different place of the theoretical building presented in the book. Arguing in some detail against the mechanistic world view, which, after all, is the Cartesian world view, the authors profess the rise of "systems thinking" along with cybernetics as the solution to the problems of the mechanistic world view. This without even mentioning the essential philosophical-epistemological foundation of these disciplines. Of course, at the beginning of systems thinking this foundation was not yet as clear and visible as it is now. It is radical constructivism as developed, e.g., by Ernst von Glasersfeld (5) and in the context of cybernetics in particular by Heinz von Foerster (6). Both names are not even mentioned in the large bibliography of the book and there is no entry of "constructivism" in the index. Taking this foundation of systems thinking into account, which meanwhile is represented in a rich literature (7), might shed a quite different light on the issue of autopoiesis as well as on a number of less problematic points around epistemology, mind, cognition, and consciousness. Also, Heinz von Foerster's concept of "Second Order Cybernetics" might enhance the analysis of (social) complexity.

The issue of radical constructivism is both relevant for the role of autopoiesis theory and, more fundamentally, for the philosophical foundation of the book or what Thomas S. Kuhn calls the "metaphysical assumptions" of a paradigm, here the systems paradigm. A synthesis requires coherence and also a coherent philosophical foundation. Indeed, not all of sociology or science needs to refer to such a foundation, but at certain points, like a big synthesis, life, mind, knowledge, etc., it is

indispensable. Moreover, the foundation of the entire theoretical building should not remain implicit or unknown if we talk about science.

In the last chapters on sustaining the web of life Capra and Luisi present quite a lot of propositions, based on the previous systems view of life. In many cases, however, their arguments take considerable shortcuts which are not in line with their previous elaborations. These shortcuts may be still excusable, if the respective propositions are read as illustrative examples only, and as otherwise at least another 500 pages would have had to be added to the book. These chapters contain very productive ideas of where to start looking for solutions and points of intervention to resolve planetary problems. They present many of the trends and issues that are around and provide many indications where to look for further information, persons, organizations, and publications. Desirable would be, however, to have the theory supported by more good quality data about the real world. Open remains in this book about life the question of what is – or can be – the purpose of life. Some ideas towards an answer in a systems framework can be found in Bossel's orientation theory (8)

So, what is really new? It is not the details which are really new, among which, of course, all participants, depending on their specialties, found things they did not know before. New to sociocybernetics – and sociology – might be the view of close integration of (modern) society into nature and biology. This shows the need for sociocybernetics and the social sciences to be much more aware of this integration and the need to take it into account in the theoretical as well as empirical investigation of social phenomena. Really new, however, is the synthesis and unifying vision, the emergent level of the overall view from a systemic and interdisciplinary perspective. Thus, the entire approach throws light on the interconnectedness of the global issues and predicament of humankind, the web of life, and the planetary world in which we exist.

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<sup>1</sup>) CAPRA, Fritjof; LUISI, Pier Luigi: The Systems View of Life, A Unifying Vision, 9th printing, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) 2019 [1/2014]; See also: <https://www.capracourse.net/> for clarifying videos.

<sup>2</sup>) STONIER, Tom: Information and the Internal Structure of the Universe, An Exploration into Information Physics, Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, Tokyo 1990; STONIER, Tom: Beyond Information, The Natural History of Intelligence, Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, Tokyo 1992; STONIER, Tom: Information and Meaning, An Evolutionary Perspective, Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, Tokyo 1997

<sup>3</sup>) HORNING, Bernd R.: The Theoretical Context and Foundations of Luhmann's Legal and Political Sociology, in: KING, Michael; THORNHILL, Chris (eds.): Luhmann on Law and Politics, pp. 187-216, Hart Publishing Company, Oxford, UK, Portland, Or. 2006

<sup>4</sup>) e.g. WIELAND, Josef: Relational Economics, A Political Economy (Series Relational Economics and Organization Governance), Springer; 2021, [1/2020]; BIGGIERO, Lucio (ed.): The Relational View of Economics, A New Research Agenda for the Study of Relational Transactions (Series Relational Economics and Organization Governance), Springer; 1st ed., 2022; DONATI, Pierpaolo: Relational Sociology, A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences (Series Ontological Explorations), Routledge, 2012

<sup>5</sup>) e.g. GLASERSFELD, Ernst von: Radical Constructivism, A Way of Knowing and Learning, Routledge 2002 [1/1995]; GLASERSFELD, Ernst von: Key Works in Radical Constructivism, M. Larochelle (ed.), Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, Taipei 2007

<sup>6</sup>) e.g. FOERSTER, Heinz von: Understanding Understanding, Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition, Springer, New York 2003

<sup>7</sup>) e.g. RIEGLER, Alexander (ed.): Constructivist Foundations, An Interdisciplinary Journal, Centre for Logic and Philosophy of Science, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, available online <http://www.constructivist.info>

<sup>8</sup>) BOSSEL, Hartmut: Earth at a Crossroads, Paths to a Sustainable Future, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998

# The study group of Niklas Luhmann's work in Japan

*Saburo Akahori*

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It may seem surprising, but there are quite a few Niklas Luhmann readers in Japan. This is because many of Luhmann's books have been translated into Japanese since the late 1970s. According to Wikipedia, there have been more than 40 translations so far, more than English or Spanish translations. To be honest, some of them are poorly translated, but still, being able to read Luhmann in native language is a powerful advantage for the Japanese people. This also makes it possible to organize a study group on Luhmann, including non-researchers.

The first study group dealing with Luhmann was founded around 1997 as the *Luhmann Forum*, an online-based community. After several reorganizations, the current *Luhmann Society* was organized around 2013. There are about 50 members, and meetings are held every three or four months in Tokyo. About 10 people attend each meeting, with some participants coming from as far away as Osaka, Kobe, and Fukuoka.

Many of you may have visited Japan in 2014, as the World Congress of Sociology was held in Yokohama. At that time, several members of the *Luhmann Society* presented at the RC51 session. Since then, some of members have been participating in the RC51 conferences.

One of the unfavorable aspects of the *Luhmann Society* is that oral research reports are given only in Japanese, which tends to make it closed. However, this tendency has been quietly changing since the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently the meetings are being held online and reports can now be given in English as well.

It all started when a member of the *Luhmann Society*, a visiting researcher from South Africa who was affiliated with a Japanese university, returned to his home country. He recently presented his research online in English, connecting Japan and South Africa. In this way, the *Luhmann Forum* will also be operated in the future in a hybrid format, both face-to-face and remotely, with the possibility of reporting in English. It would be interesting to have exchanges between not only the *Luhmann Society* (in Japan) and the RC51, but also local Luhmann study groups in Scandinavia, Latin America, Germany, and other parts of the world.

Finally, I have an unfortunate news. Professor Machiko Nakanishi, who was not a member of the *Luhmann Society*, but a member of RC51 and an active participant in the ISA Forum at Vienna in 2016, the World Congress of Sociology at Toronto in 2018, and at the 2021 Remote ISA Forum, passed away suddenly in January of this year. May her soul rest in peace.



# 2022 RC51 Academic Community Survey

*Patricia E. Almaguer Kalixto*

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This spring we are launching a RC51 survey to identify common topics, possible contributions for publications and update some contact information. You can answer at

<https://tinyurl.com/RC51survey>

The first part is oriented to update your info and collect some geographical, sector data, as well as membership status. The second part is about sociocybernetics in your academic work. We ask you to share 5 key words/topics that describe your work related to sociocybernetics (i.e., migration, biopolitics, sustainability, etc) in order to find similarities, connections and potential synergies among members. We want to know how much you use sociocybernetics in your work. Is it core to your academic work or rather peripheral? As you might have a good length of production related to our field, we want you to share up to 7 papers/book titles of your authorship that contributes to the field of sociocybernetics and use this information to promote your work in our newsletter. Maybe we can share links to them or contribute to a Mendeley private group to strength our digital library of references which will be nourished with the titles shared by each of us.

We want to know and share the trajectory of those who participate in our Research Committee. Either if you are a young scholar or a senior researcher, we want to recover the section of Sociocybernetics Trajectories, sharing in a narrative how where are you from, have you come to this perspective, how do you use it in theory and practice. This information will also feed our newsletter and connect with people from other territories. Mind that you do not have to provide all this information in the survey! Just let us know if you are keen on sharing afterwards.

Within the current RC51 board we came with the idea to make short videos about key concepts or the use of sociocybernetic tools. If you would like to participate in this initiative, you can state it in the survey.

The survey also asks your publication interests pointing at Brill Research Perspectives in Sociocybernetics and Complexity and our RC51 Journal of Sociocybernetics and furthermore, it explores the willingness to participate in our next 17th RC51 Conference in Zaragoza, June 2022 and the World Congress of Sociology in June 25-July 1, 2023, in Melbourne, Australia.

Finally, it gives space for your feedback and suggestions. Either activities you would like to promote within RC51 and/or the ISA community, or to promote in your city/country/region/academic community related to sociocybernetics.

Is not compulsory to be an ISA RC51 member in good standing to respond. There are many fellows who have participated in our conferences that have made important contributions to the debate of sociocybernetics, the growth of our perspective. Feel free to give feedback and suggestions. We hope to build with that information new strategies to reinforce our academic community!

# The Seminar on Critical Sociocybernetics and First Colloquium of Critical Sociocybernetics

*Juancho Barrón*

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The Seminar on Critical Sociocybernetics applied to the study of North American issues (SESOCAN) is hosted by the Centre of Research on North America (CISAN) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The seminar is regularly attended by 15 researchers, graduate, and undergraduate students, which started working together in January 2019, aiming to explore how concepts and tools proposed by systems theory and critical theory could be used and applied within the framework and interests of sociocybernetics to understand various transnational phenomena. On December 13 and 14, 2021, the seminar publicly presented research in progress at the First Colloquium of Critical Sociocybernetics hosted by the Faculty of Accounting and Management at UNAM. Patricia Almaguer, president of the ISA-RC-51, delivered the inaugural speech and Bernard Scott offered the keynote address.



# Call for participation: XX ISA World Congress of Sociology, Melbourne, Australia

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## XX ISA World Congress of Sociology

**Melbourne, Australia | June 25-July 1, 2023**  
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre



**Resurgent Authoritarianism:**  
*Sociology of New Entanglements of  
Religions, Politics, and Economies*



World Congress  
of Sociology



TASA The Australian  
Sociological Association



ISA International  
Sociological  
Association

[www.isa-sociology.org](http://www.isa-sociology.org)



### **May 10, 2022 Submission of proposals for:**

- Integrative Sessions which involve at least 3 Research Committees, 3 National Associations or a combination of the two
- Author Meets Critics sessions

**May 2-31, 2022 Submission of proposals for RC/WG/TG Sessions**

**July 1-September 30, 2022 Abstracts submission**

More information <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/world-congress/melbourne-2023>

# Obituary: Machiko Nakanishi

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Our friend and colleague, Machiko Nakanishi, professor at the School of Management, Chukyo University, Nagoya Japan, passed away suddenly in late January 2022. Three days before her passing, she wrote her afterword for a book edited with her colleagues which discusses the post-pandemic society. Fortunately, as she had finished her work, the book was recently published by the university.

In 2010, she spent a year abroad with Professor Scott Lash at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Since then, she has often visited the UK and interacted with sociologists such as Lash and John Urry. Urry died in 2016, but her interactions with Lash continued; in 2018, she invited Lash to Japan to organize several lectures in Kyoto and Nagoya.

She was actively promoting her research activities in Japan. In recent years, she translated Lash and Urry's book into Japanese in 2018, published a single-authored book titled "Research Thinking and Techniques: Recursive in Reversal" in Japanese, and in 2020 edited a book titled "Transformations in Global Society" in Japanese. Her latest edited book, which has just released in this March, is titled "Pandemics and Global Society".

She believed that **reflexivity** is the most important concept in sociology, and she wanted to connect this to sociocybernetics, so she joined RC51. Her first oral presentation at RC51 session was at the 2016 ISA Forum in Vienna, which was an impressive presentation, full of gestures and using *furoshiki*, traditional Japanese wrapping cloths. From then on, she became an active member of RC51.

Through her presentations in RC51, she revealed that the concept of reflexivity can be applied to various dimensions of society such as market and media. It is so regrettable that we will not be able to share and learn from future development of her study. However, her key concept "**reflexivity**" will continue to be our research interest.

Many of us may remember her active participations in the RC51 sessions and her smile that made our sessions always friendly and constructive. She will be missed by her friends and colleagues in our community. Looking back on memories of her, we would like to express our thanks to her contributions to the RC51. Many thanks to you, Machiko!

Toru Takahashi and Saburo Akahori

# Book Launch: Cybernetics for the Social Sciences

## *Bernard Scott*

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Image: Bernard Scott by Chaime Marcuello



Image: Cover Cybernetics for the Social Sciences, BRILL, 2021

In October 2021 the **book “Cybernetics for the Social Sciences”** was launched by our RC51 colleague and former president, **Bernard Scott**. We were delighted to have Professor Paul Pangaro (Carnegie Mellon University), Jason Prevost (BRILL Senior Ac Editor) and Chaime Marcuello-Servós Editor of Brill Research Perspectives in Sociocybernetics and Complexity in dialogue with the author to present this important contribution to our field.

The book is organized in 12 parts. In the first part addresses what is cybernetics and the structure and aim of this work. Part 2 addresses how Scott encounters cybernetics and how he becomes a scholar of this discipline, giving a personal reflection of key intellectual encounters. In part 3 he introduces cybernetics and particularly Gordon Pask’s Conversation Theory. The next parts combine key concepts of cybernetics and its Integration of further Disciplines. In the next parts he introduces his proposal on sociocybernetics understandings of consciousness, reflections on the sociocybernetics of social network and some reflections of possible word futures and global problems.

Indeed, a key contribution to our field as is a didactic work that introduces and explains the trajectory of sociocybernetics, but also presents a solid proposal of thoughts in methodological and theoretical terms. Therefore, the work is very useful to those newcomers on our field as well as those who want to read Scott’s core ideas, that has been discussed in the past RC51 conferences in a piece of work nicely edited by Brill.

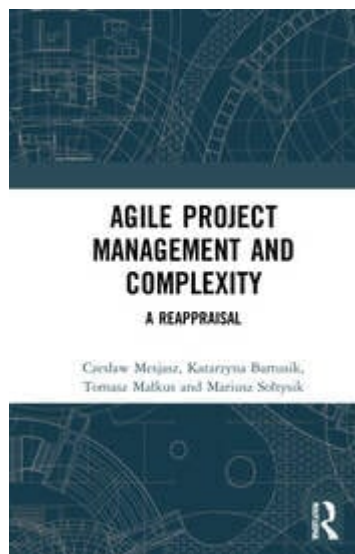
For those who may not yet know Bernard Scott, he is a former president of RC51 (2006-2010) contributing with his welcoming attitude as well as by being critically constructive, to many of us enrolling in this knowledge venture. He has been part of the International Center for Sociocybernetics

Studies. Previously he was Head of the Flexible Learning Support Centre, UK Defence Academy, and Reader in Cybernetics, Cranfield University, UK. He is a Fellow and founder member of the Cybernetics Society, an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, a Fellow of the American Society for Cybernetics and an Academician of the International Academy of Systems and Cybernetics Sciences. He is a member of the editorial advisory boards of the journals *Kybernetes*, *Cybernetics* and *Human Knowing*, *International Journal of Information and Learning Technology* and *Constructivist Foundations*. Dr Scott has more than 130 academic publications to his credit.

## Book Launch: Agile Project Management and Complexity

*Czesław Mesjasz, Katarzyna Bartusik, Tomasz Małkus and Mariusz Sołtysik*

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We want to congratulate Professor **Czesław Mesjasz** from the Management Process Department, Cracow University of Economics, Poland and his colleagues **Katarzyna Bartusik**, **Tomasz Małkus** and **Mariusz Sołtysik** for their new book titled “Agile Project Management and Complexity”, edited by Routledge.

This book is especially important for RC51 as Prof. Mesjasz included several references to sociocybernetics. If you have had the chance to hear his work in the latest RC51 conferences, you will find many of his proposals masterly presented in this collective work with **Bartusik**, **Małkus** and **Sołtysik**.

In this they present the beginnings of the Agile approach in software development. A theoretical background and methods of research including a typology of interpretations of complexity-related concepts. There is a good section dedicated to Cybernetics, General System Theory, and sociocybernetics which includes soft systems methodology, critical systems thinking, and System of Systems Methodologies.

The authors discuss complexity science, addressing different authors. From Synergetics of Hermann Haken to the Complexity of social systems with the concepts of Niklas Luhmann. We highly recommend this work for your library. Launched in 2022.

### **Book Description**

This research monograph presents an inter-disciplinary study of the impact, and current status, of applications of complexity-related concepts in the early stages of development of Agile Project Management (APM). The results serve as an introduction for exploring more profound relations between complexity-related ideas and APM in the future.

The increasing complexity of software projects and their environment in the 1990s constituted the main determinants of the development of the family of methodological frameworks called Agile Project Management. Development of APM has been shaped by a broadly defined area of research called complexity science or complexity theory based on complex adaptive systems (CAS) and on their characteristics: Complexity, chaos, the edge of chaos, emerging properties, non-linearity, self-organization, etc. In the 21st century, due to the expansion of Agile beyond software development, the challenges deriving from the complexity of projects and the environment are even more urgent and compelling. Such phenomena demand more profound inter- and multi-disciplinary studies. This book examines the impact of applications of complexity-related ideas deriving from intuitive complexity and from complexity science in the early stages of development of the Agile methodological frameworks in project management and considers the current status of those applications. It questions the usefulness of those applications for the practice and theory of APM, and then proposes a conceptual framework for further theoretical studies and several ways of improvement and refinement of the Agile Project Management necessary to deal with broadly defined complexity in project management.

Requiring a medium-level knowledge of complexity studies and knowledge of project management, this book is written for the research community studying the links between the various methodological frameworks included in APM and complexity-related ideas. It will also be interesting for studies of the impact of complexity on modern management, and for master's students on IT and management courses.

Source. [www.routledge.com/9781032006529](http://www.routledge.com/9781032006529)

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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*End of RC51 newsletter Issue 42*