ISA - International Sociological Association

RESEARCH COMMITTEE 51 ON SOCIOCYBERNETICS

RC51

Newsletter 18

December 2005

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1. PREFACE FROM THE EDITOR

As the ISA World Conference approaches RC51 members become more and more active. By the time this Newsletter reaches you, an abstract committee will have the pleasure to read all the submitted abstracts, and start the difficult task of judging and selecting all those ambitious proposals for a paper presentation. One thing is for sure, the RC51 contribution to the World Conference will be memorable.

Similarly, 2005 has been a year that will linger in our memories, as a truly wonderful year for RC51. The year is recounted in the letter from our President, Bernd Hornung, in this newsletter, as well as in the welcome speeches at the Maribor and his report of the Paris Symposium. Based on his contributions to this Newsletter alone we can declare that he surely is the leader of our sociocybernetical communications.

Notwithstanding, there are signs that other sociocyberneticians are also active in this communication. Ksenja Pušnik, a member of the excellent Maribor Conference organizing team lead by Matjaz Mulej, wrote a personal account of her impressions of the conference. The cybernetician Ken Bausch asks your attention for 21st Century Agoras. We learn that a group of cyberneticians wants to create communities energized by vibrant participative democracy, using Internet. And finally contributing to the recent history of RC51 Bernard Scott announces the publication of the Festschrift to honor our past president Felix Geyer in Kybernetes.

Looking back at all the successful conferences organized by RC51 we fondly remember the enthusiastic discussions that were initiated in all kind of places, following an interesting lecture: in conference rooms, during lunches, over dinners and, of course late into the evenings, in café's and on terraces. This insatiable discourse made you wonder whether there was life and sociocybernetical science outside of those conferences. In fact that has been a concern of some of our members. Undoubtedly we are all very busy in our jobs and we each may practice sociocybernetics in our own way. But despite the inspiration we clearly get from the conferences, our efforts to realize the ambitions of the sociocybernetical enterprise, and to examine the scientific challenges it poses seem too fragmented and regrettably insufficient.

So, why don't we work together more often? Is it not possible to do our research as a joint enterprise ? That is precisely what our member Michael Paetau contemplates at in his contribution to this newsletter. He offers a number of possibilities for us to join together in a research program. As is always the case with scientific ambitions, however, we have to be mindful of deadlines. Of particular concern are the calls for 'Tackling Complexity in Science', 'Cultural Dynamics: From Transmission and Change to Innovation' and 'Measuring the Impossible' of the European Union (*go to*: http://www.cordis.lu/nest/publications.htm), which have a short deadline (February 15, 2006). As a Newsletter editor, together with Michael Paetau , I can link all those contacts, and when we are serious with our aspiration, perhaps coordinate a submission for this call in time. Mail me (c.vandijkum@fss.uu.nl) when you are interested.

And that brings me back to you, dear readers. I know that you are all very busy, perhaps surviving in this hectic, modernized world. But you are interested in sociocybernetics. So please help yourself and your colleagues by *practicing* sociocybernetic communication: express your interests and share your activities and your plans in contributions to this newsletter.

On a final note, you may know that I have served as the sole editor of the previous newsletter. In this issue I am joined by Alicia Menanteau F. in her role as copy editor. Living in Texas, she has survived Hurricane Rita and the aftermath of Katrina. I challenge you to play your part in the *survival* of sociocybernetic communication and to join us by writing (short) articles and impressions for the next newsletter. We look forward to that and in the meantime, we wish you all a *Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*

Cor van Dijkum, Editor-in-Chief
Alicia Menanteau F., Copy editor

2.   LETTER OF THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members of RC51

I write to you after an extremely busy, but I dare say also intellectually extremely challenging and rewarding summer full of RC51 activities.

In fact, we started in March with the ISA Conference and Executive Committee Meeting in Zaragoza, organized by our board member Chaime Marcuello, which was followed at the beginning of July by our annual International Conference of Sociocybernetics held as part of the 13th International Congress of Cybernetics and Systems of the World Organization of Systems and Cybernetics (WOSC) and at the same time the RC51 sessions at the 37th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology (IIS) in Stockholm, Sweden organized by our Vice-President Vessela Misheva. Just a few days ago I returned from Paris, where RC51 had a one and a half day of sessions, featuring mainly sociocybernetic methodology, at the 6th European Congress on Systems Science. A report on this event is given inside this Newsletter.

Right now we, i.e. the board of RC51, turn our attention to the preparation of the next World Congress of Sociology in Durban next year. Unfortunately this has been much less of a success story so far, as the ISA is still disputing our right to have the maximum numbers of sessions in Durban as we had in Brisbane, having at that time about 140 ISA members in good standing. As you may remember, in Brisbane the ISA had taken the decision to make RC membership fees mandatory, and RC51 still has not yet fully recovered from the resulting formal reduction to four (4!) members in good standing and all the subsequent problems. These problems can be resolved only by a collective effort by all of you to:
      (a) immediately renew your ISA and RC51 memberships if they have expired, and in particular
      (b) recruit at least some new members to get our RC51 back to its Brisbane status.
Imagine if each one of you could recruit only one member ... and I *cannot* honestly believe that each one of us doesn't have at least three good friends among social scientists! The number of papers we can accept for Durban is contingent on this (i.e. number of members).

That said, with the exception of the membership issue, other developments - of which you can find more information inside this Newsletter - are progressing extremely well. In Maribor the board and business meetings had first discussions about proposals for the post-Durban RC51 board. I am very happy to be able to tell you that an extremely promising new team has been nominated for the positions of President, Vice-President, and Secretary, all of which will become vacant according to our statutes after the second term of office which ends in 2006 in all three cases. With unanimity, both the board and the business meeting nominated the following: Bernard Scott for President; Eva Buchinger for Vice-President, and Chaime Marcuello for Secretary. I congratulate all three for their nominations! According to our statutory procedures the board will make a complete proposal for the next board at its Durban meeting and at that point also ask for proposals of other candidates. The elections will take place exclusively by e-mail ballot after the Durban Congress. Moreover, it was discussed and decided to apply for RC51 membership in the IFSR - International Federation of Systems Research, to cooperate with ISSC - International Social Science Council in setting-up a task force on the sociology of the Internet. Lastly, the final version of a logo designed by Juan Miguel Aguado and his students was endorsed and will soon be presented to the public. Also, several projects of publications are underway.

It is now up to you to make Durban a great event for RC51 and I count on your full support.

Bernd R. Hornung, President, ISA RC51

3. COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT SOCIOCYBERNETICS

3.1 THE MARIBOR CONFERENCE ON SOCIOCYBERNETICS AND SYSTEMS THEORY

3.1.1 The Opening Speech for RC51 and Address to WOCS
by our President Bernd Hornung

WELCOME
TO THE 6TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SOCIOCYBERNETICS
organized jointly with the WOSC 13th International Congress of Cybernetics and Systems

Dear friends and colleagues:

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to our 6th International Conference of Sociocybernetics, dealing with 'Sociocybernetics and Innovation', which is held for the first time in cooperation with the International Social Science Council (ISSC) (http://www.unesco.org/ngo/issc/) and as part of the 13th International Congress of Cybernetics and Systems of the WOSC, the World Organization of Systems and Cybernetics.

Some of you may recall that we have previously organized one of our conferences together with WOSC. This was in Bucharest in 1996, when we were still a Thematic Group, not yet a Research Committee, of the ISA. Meanwhile our group has grown, there has been a substantial scientific output, as you can see on our website, but also our institutional work has become stronger, both inside the ISA, where we have been represented in the Executive Committee since the Brisbane World Congress of Sociology in 2002, and outside with other systems associations like WOSC and the ISSS, the International Society for Systems Science, and the International Federation of Systems Research - IFSR, of which we will possibly become a member before long. This is something our board and business meetings will have to decide here in Maribor.

Our newly-established relations with the International Social Science Council (ISSC), which is a non-governmental organization working closely with UNESCO, are much more directly research-oriented. RC51 will have the chance to host a Task Force on Sociology of the Internet under the roof of the ISA.

As you see, besides our annual conferences it is more worthwhile than ever to be or to become an active member of RC51 on Sociocybernetics, especially in view of the forthcoming World Congress of Sociology next year in Durban, South Africa.

But this year we meet here in Maribor to discuss innovation, and I think Maribor is a most appropriate place to do so. Maribor, here in Slovenia, is an old town in the heart of old Europe. Yet it is also part of a highly dynamic and innovating country which is quite a new part of the European Union. Moreover, Maribor, or in German, *Marburg an der Drau*, is a partner city of Marburg an der Lahn in Germany, where my own university is located.

Therefore I want to thank Matjaz Mulej, his colleagues, and his university all the more for the very generous invitation to come here to celebrate our 6th International Conference of Sociocybernetics, which I herewith declare open.

ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE
WOSC 13TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF SOCIOCYBERNETICS AND SYSTEMS

Mr. Rector,
Mr. Dean,
Mr. President,

Dear colleagues and friends:

I welcome you to this joint international conference of WOSC and RC51 on Sociocybernetics on behalf of our Research Committee 51 on Sociocybernetics and on behalf of our parent organization, the International Sociological Association - ISA - and its Executive Committee.

Moreover, it is my great pleasure to forward you the very special greetings of Lourdes Arizpe, President of the International Social Science Council, in which many of the most important scientific associations of the social sciences are joined together.

The International Social Science Council (ISSC) was established to foster international and interdisciplinary social science, through cooperation with its members composed of 13 international professional unions in core disciplines, as well as numerous regional and national organisations, and to represent the social sciences vis-à-vis international actors, particularly through an active participation in the implementation of the UN agendas.

Since its creation in 1952, the ISSC focused on consolidating the institutionalization of social science cooperation and creating international interdisciplinary research programmes, the current ones being on global environmental change (IHDP), poverty (CROP), and gender, globalization and democratization (GGD). Two new international scientific programmes, on 'Global Social Change' and 'Research on Ethnic Conflict: Approaches to Peace', are being developed. These are to become operational in 2005-2006. Interdisciplinary Committees were established on cross-cutting methodological issues, such as comparative research or concepts/terminologies, and on capacity building.

The ISSC's past activities have supported the internationalization of social science institutions, research, and teaching. However, both social science research and teaching and the context in which they operate have changed. They have changed in terms of interactions with governments, societies, as well as with inter- and non-governmental organizations.

First, social science has spread to other regions beyond Western Europe and North America. However, there are still huge imbalances between the North and South, in terms of the coverage and strength of institutions, the existence of adequate infrastructures, the supply of well-trained human resources, and research funding. Eliminating or seriously narrowing these gaps is a fundamental requirement for developing rigorous social science as a truly global scientific endeavour.

Second, in addition to the essential base of traditional, curiosity-based and publication-oriented vigorous academic research, there is a growing body of interdisciplinary, policy-relevant and problem-oriented social science research, in which many categories of stakeholders and users play important roles as participants, contributors, and advisors. Social science disciplines have become more open to each other, scholars in different disciplinary fields are interacting more frequently with each other, and many hybrid fields have emerged. However, there is still too much fragmentation and knowledge gaps between disciplines, hampering the advances in interdisciplinary teaching and research. Although the understanding of the role that the social sciences can play in society and in policy-making is growing among the political, economic, and social actors, there is still much to be done to raise the profile and status of the profession, in terms of research results and communication, both at the national and international levels. This is another area where action is a priority and the ISSC has a key role to play.

Third, contextual transformations have considerably altered the conditions under which the social sciences operate in several important ways, including relations with their users and funders. Globalization, de-regulated markets, the increasing prevalence of powerful private interests over a retreating State and public interests are having far-reaching effects on research and its organization. Given the central importance of science and technology in innovation and international competitiveness, the status of knowledge has shifted, in certain aspects, from public good to market good. The funding of research and higher education, as well as intellectual property rights, have become increasingly market-based and privatized, with serious risks to the free access to knowledge.

Social sciences have been caught in these changes, which create both opportunities and constraints for future developments.

As the main international body for the social sciences, ISSC must play its part in understanding the new pressures and in responding positively to the new challenges.

In order to adjust to such developments, the ISSC initiated a reform process in 2004. A renewed ISSC, with the active participation of all major social science actors, including the disciplinary and interdisciplinary unions, national and regional research councils, academies, and other relevant partners, is a body well suited to deal with this task.

The activities of the ISSC in the forthcoming years will strongly address the priorities that emerge out of the above-mentioned developments. The ISSC aims at:

1. Acting as an international, interdisciplinary *knowledge broker*, mobilizing and connecting interdisciplinary networks such as professional bodies representing teaching and research communities in all disciplines and hybrid fields, with diverse categories of partners, such as UNESCO and the UN system, national and regional councils, policy makers, private foundations, NGOs, and the media.

2. Contributing to *capacity-building*, in particular outside Europe and North America.

3. Developing *communication* and *connectivity* strategies to raise the profile and enhance the international impact of the social sciences.

Given the central role of new information and communication technologies in fostering the tasks of connectivity, networking, communication, and dissemination, the ISSC is giving priority to using such new technologies, and particularly the Internet.

With this in mind, the ISSC, in cooperation with the International Sociological Association, has decided to establish a Task Force on 'Social Sciences and the Internet'. It is my great pleasure to be entrusted with the responsibility of chairing this Task Force and to implement it in cooperation with the ISSC and the ISA, whereby our Research Committee on Sociocybernetics is intended to serve as an operational basis. This will hopefully bring a wide array of social science disciplines together, which are currently working in some way or another on topics related to the Internet. The Task Force will permit in a first phase an exchange of information and establishing closer relations by networking. In a second phase it is also intended to lead to coordination and cooperation in substantial research and to the development of appropriate research programmes. I do hope very much to see quite a number of you, who are here for this congress and working in a systems framework on issues of innovation, participate in these future activities which may open up new horizons and innovations in global information and knowledge society.

3.1.2   A Short Report of the Maribor Conference
by Ksenja Pušnik

The Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management at Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Maribor held the Thirteenth International WOSC Congress and the 6th International Conference of Sociocybernetics, the latter being organized by the Research Committee on Sociocybernetics (RC51) of the International Sociological Association on July 6-10 2005 in Maribor, Slovenia. This joint event brought together more than 140 participants from Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, USA, Canada, Singapore and India, a diversity which enabled a productive discussion on how systemics and cybernetics deal with innovation throughout the world. The 6th International Conference of Sociocybernetics was an independent part of the WOSC Congress and organized by the Research Committee on Sociocybernetics (RC51) of the International Sociological Association.

The exchange of ideas and experiences with colleagues from other countries and cultural environment proved to be a valuable source of learning and generation of new ideas. Months later, both events continue to be an inspiration and source of energy. It was very interesting and promising to be a part of a historically important momentum: for the first time in history, systemics and cybernetics tried to answer questions on the role of innovation in stimulating (sustainable) development of the society at local and national levels. The variety of paper topics indicated that

innovation was a good topic for many streams of thinking also in terms of systems theory, cybernetics and their applications.

Participants, among which many were students, discussed all aspects of sociocybernetics and innovation: paths toward sustainability; communication and innovation; past and future developments of sociocybernetics; governance and innovation; entrepreneurship and management; methodological problems in the social sciences and sociocybernetics; technology and innovation; the role of psychology, personality, and collectivities in innovation; theoretical considerations; and a panel on the future of innovation in systems science and global society.

The Thirteenth International WOSC Congress constituted eleven symposiums where participants presented 115 papers dealing with the following aspects: Contemporary Natural-Artificial Dualism (10 papers and 2 workshops), Economic Systems (10 papers), Education Cybernetics (8 papers), Engineering and Information Systems (13 papers), Grey Systems Theory (3 papers), Management Systems (20 papers), Mathematical Systems (8 papers), Natural Systems (11 papers), Tourism Cybernetics (10 papers), Viable Organizations (7 papers) and the WESS Panel (4 papers).

For the Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management at the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Maribor, it was a great challenge and pleasure to host such a distinguished audience.

3.2 REPORT OF A PARIS SYMPOSIUM ON CYBERNETICS
SOCIAL COMPLEXITIES: FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO CYBERSPACE
by Bernd Hornung

The symposium took place in Paris, France, at the 'Ecole Nationale Supérieure d´Arts et Métiers' (ENSAM) as a part of the 6th Congress of the European Systems Science Union (ESSU) which was held from September 19 to 22, 2005. It permitted the ISA Research Committee 51 (RC51) to deal with five major themes: Sociocybernetic Principles and Practice, Sociocybernetic Approaches to Scientific Disciplines, Sociocybernetic Methodology, Sociocybernetic Epistemology, and Sociocybernetic Perspectives. A panel discussion about "Sociocybernetics - Science of Social Complexities ?" concluded this series of sessions and allowed the participants to express their views on the symposium as a whole.

Our symposium included 13 papers presented by speakers from ten countries: Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

Two of the five sessions were in French. One of them was the opening session of the symposium, which took place in the big amphitheater with simultaneous translation. The translation was highly appreciated by our participants and permitted a much larger public to attend the presentation of the session on sociocybernetic principles and practice. The panel discussion, held in English, closed the symposium and also attracted participants interested in knowing more about RC51 and sociocybernetics. The sessions on sociocybernetics which took place on Tuesday, September 20, all day long and on Wednesday, September 21, in the morning, were attended by 10 to 25 participants.

The first session encompassed three papers in French. The first one, by Bernd R. Hornung, outlined the basic principles of sociocybernetics. This was followed by an illustration of the application of sociocybernetics in practical consulting work done in business organizations, known as 'Socioanalysis'. For many years 'Socioanalysis' has been practiced successfully by Jacques and Maria van Bockstaele and their team. Next, Diane Laflamme showed how sociocybernetic theory can be used to analyze the constitution of meaning under conditions of complexity as they are found in complex contemporary society.

The second session focused on the disciplinary environment of sociocybernetic research with a first paper by Bernard Scott and Simon Shurville who argued for the need of epistemological unification of the scientific disciplines and discussed the potential of sociocybernetics to contribute to such a unification. Matjaz Mulej, in collaboration with Vojko Potocan and Bojan Rosi, deepened this issue by discussing the more specific problem of specialization versus systemic thinking in science.

They proposed a view of interdependence in order to overcome this conflict by means of cooperation of mutually different specialists.

After this analysis of scientific disciplines, attention then turned to methodology. The concepts of cross-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity were clarified by Marilena Lunca who, in the main part of her paper, developed a definition of problem-solving and the respective methodological theories. Arne Collen then analyzed the process of empirical research from a sociocybernetic perspective. The session finished with a report by Lucio Biggiero and Enrico Sevi about the effects of different kinds of complexity on group performance which was based on research with a simulation model.

One might say that all of these contributions dealt with the issue "How". This was followed by session four which dealt with epistemological issues as being the foundations of sociocybernetic theory and methodology. Klaus Anders presented reflections about the circular question "Why". He was followed by Francisco Parra-Luna who demonstrated how sociocybernetics can be used to answer the question "Where?", i.e., more concretely: where was the town of Don Quixote de la Mancha, the name of which was never given by Cervantes in his novel? Nicholas Paritsis closed this first day of sociocybernetics speaking about the epistemology of social holons, the question of "What" is the object of sociocybernetics.

On Wednesday morning at 8:30h French was resumed as a working language for the early birds coming back to the conference with a little delay after a reception, a good dinner, and a long night in Paris. Sociocybernetic perspectives were now to be presented and discussed from a more practical and empirical point of view. Marie-Noëlle Sarget presented a systems approach to marginality and Marie-Claude Dupré developed from an ethnological background "The Three Limits" of human action and development. She made clear that society and social development do not exist and cannot occur in an empty or ideal space. Instead they are part of an ecological environment which has to be taken into account seriously and which puts very clear limits to any human endeavours. Systemic/holistic thinking has to replace the currently prevailing one-sided and partial thinking. The discussion which followed this presentation led directly to the topic of the panel discussion which took place immediately afterwards.

The panel discussion, held in English, was intended to summarize essential points made during the symposium with regard to the present state and further development of sociocybernetics. The panel dealing with "Sociocybernetics - Science of Social Complexities ?" brought together five scientists from different subfields of sociocybernetics: Lucio Biggiero, Italy; Marie-Claude Dupré, France; Matjaz Mulej, Slovenia;, Marie-Noëlle Sarget, France; Bernard Scott, United Kingdom. Bernd R. Hornung, Germany chaired the panel.

The discussion, which was opened to the floor after a first round of the panel, brought forth a number of important issues to be taken into account in future efforts to develop and promote sociocybernetics as an approach to the social sciences. Matjaz Mulej argued very clearly for removing the question mark in the title of the panel, as according to him sociocybernetics, defined as the application of systems and cybernetics in sociology and the other social sciences, is clearly *the science* to deal with social systems and their complexities. Only systems science has the capacity to cope with the high degree of interdependence which also requires a particular kind of ethics - an ethics of interdependence. Following his arguments, there is not so much a need for further self-reflection of sociocybernetics, but its proponents, in particular RC51, should rather concentrate on the question of how to promote sociocybernetics among other sociologists and other social scientists.

Nevertheless, it was pointed out in the discussion that an empirical approach to sociocybernetics still would be largely missing. This was true to some extent for the present symposium, which concentrated on theoretical and methodological issues, with the exception of three French papers which took a more or less empirical approach: van Bockstaele et al. presenting 'Socioanalysis' as an approach to consulting work for companies; Sarget dealing with the issue of marginality, and Dupré presenting a framework for the analysis of societal development.

Lucio Biggiero´s call for more openness of RC51 towards the outside and more dialogue with other approaches and disciplines was discussed at some length. It became clear that the strategy followed by RC51 so far basically corresponds to these ideas. The basic issue is to find an appropriate equilibrium between developing a core of common knowledge inside the Research Committee, which

requires closure, and communication and dialogue with others, which requires openness. Too much closure may inhibit the further development of sociocybernetic knowledge and may lead to sterile discussions and self-reflections instead. Too much openness may not permit anymore creative innovation and may simply result in diluting and losing the core of sociocybernetic knowledge. This means, that in a systemic sense a certain optimum needs to be found - the necessary degree and equilibrium of both.

In fact, after a first phase of trying to collect a maximum of members - diversity - RC51 had closed itself in a series of annual conferences which permitted self-reflection and joint efforts at developing a core of sociocybernetics. In particular this past year, however, RC51 has participated in several international conferences organized by other associations. The risk to be taken into account in this situation, however, is that too much the possibilities of our members to participate in conferences are strained, both in terms of time and resources.

In this context it was also raised and discussed that many colleagues use systems and cybernetics but do so only implicitly. Such implicit use can be intentional, when intervention and innovation are successfully applied without bothering colleagues or clients with an overhead of theoretical discussion which could be counterproductive. In other cases, however, the unintentional use should be an opportunity for sociocyberneticians to make the application of systems science explicit. When it is explicit, the users can profit much more from all of its advantages and they really know what they are doing.

Opening up more towards the outside also corresponds to another point made during the panel discussion. Discussants expressed the desire to inform decision- and policy-makers on the basis of sociocybernetics, particular in international institutions like the UN. Some steps in this direction are currently underway, as RC51 is preparing both to become a member of the IFSR - International Federation of Systems Research, and to cooperate with the International Social Science Council, ISSC, which acts as a consulting body to UNESCO and other UN institutions.

Another observation made by some discussants at the congress was that the average age of congress participants seemed to be very high. This, however, does not hold for RC51 after all. RC51 has made deliberate efforts over the past years to recruit young members and to encourage students and young scientists to participate in our annual International Conferences of Sociocybernetics and to cooperate also in other ways. These efforts appear to show success.

3.3   AGORAS OF THE GLOBAL VILLAGE
By Ken Bausch

The city square (*agora*) of Athens is the reputed birthplace of democracy.   Athenians participated in their government. They discussed issues, decided courses of action, and carried them out. Democracy made Athens a dynamic, creative force 2500 years ago. Even then, however, democracy was fragile, sometimes stupid, and short-lived. Plato held it in low esteem and Aristotle likened it to 'mob rule'.

Why, then, do we want to create 21st Century Agoras? What we want to create are communities energized by vibrant participative democracy. In our Information Age as old hierarchies prove dysfunctional, it is imperative that human communities have flexible ways to tap their wisdom and power. We do not believe that unstructured discussion of the Athenian model is adequate for dealing with the complexities of the Information Age. It was not adequate even for the simpler (by an order of magnitude as determined by a metric called the Situational Complexity Index) situations of that bygone age.

We believe the Information Age offers us a way to make participative democracy work today. Research and proven methodology aided by computing power have solved the basic dilemma of democracy: how can we hear perspectives of all the stakeholders, dialogue about them, and still reach decisions and act on pressing issues?

The approach that overcomes this dilemma and multiple other hindrances to dialogic democracy is called the Structured Design Process (SDP) that the Agoras Institute calls 'Co-Laboratories of Democracy.' This process is a refinement of Interactive Management, which was developed over the last 30 years by John Warfield and Aleco Christakis. A book , *Co-Laboratories of Democracy: How*

People Harness Their Collective Wisdom and Power to Create the Future (2006, Information Age), explains this process in detail including its origins and the science behind it.

Using Co-Laboratories, the Institute for 21st Century Agoras works to establish islands of democratic communities (agoras). We intend to plant agoras around the world that will spread like crabgrass as people exercise their newly discovered wisdom and power. Our efforts are in their early stages, but progress such as that pioneered by the Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO; http://www.aio.org/) is spreading in the global indigenous world.

For further information:
Aleco Christakis: Aleco@cwaltd.com
Ken Bausch: ken@globalagoras.org
http://www.globalagoras.org/

3.4 ANNOUNCING A FESTSCHRIFT FOR FELIX GEYER, RC51 HONORARY PRESIDENT
by Bernard Scott

As we are sure any of you involved with RC51 will agree, Felix Geyer has been the main driving force that has sustained and developed the RC51 Sociocybernetics community. Felix has shown extraordinary energy and commitment in his various roles within RC51. In retirement, as an Honorary President, he continues to make major contributions to RC51, encouraging, motivating, advising, monitoring and mentoring.

In late 2003, aware of the approach of Felix's 70th birthday, Vessela Misheva, Vice President of RC51, proposed the creation of a festschrift in his honor. Bernard Scott and Cor van Dijkum were recruited as co-editors. The journal, *Kybernetes*, to which Felix has been a regular contributor, was selected as the appropriate place in which to publish the festschrift. Happily, Brian Rudall, *Kybernetes'* Editor-in-Chief, readily agreed to the proposal.

A list of potential contributors was drawn up and Misheva lead the task of recruiting them. The letter of invitation asked for personal reflections, research papers or a mix of the two. Authors of research papers were asked to make specific reference to Felix's work or to the areas in which he has been active (sociocybernetics, alienation theory).

Twenty individuals eventually submitted papers for inclusion in the festschrift. All papers were reviewed by at least two referees. This process was managed mainly by Misheva and van Dijkum. As a native speaker of English, with prior experience of editing special issues for Kybernetes, Scott took on the tasks of delivering reviewers' feedback to contributors and of eliciting final versions of papers.

The festschrift will be published in 2006 as a double special issue, *Kybernetes*, 35, 3/4.

3. 5 A RC51 PROGRAM OF RESEARCH ?
By Michael Paetau

For some years we have been discussing how to intensify the research activities of RC51. But what do we mean, when we say 'the research activities of RC51'? Of course, some RC51-members have been collaborating for a number of years already on research and teaching. Some colleagues have been invited as visiting professors or guest researchers to the institutions of fellow RC51-members. And surely there are some joint projects by RC51-members. But beyond these traditional efforts, there should be a greater opportunity for a RC51-wide cooperation, one that is not exhausted by our annual conference and brings together our special capacities in sociocybernetic-related research and other initiatives.

In Lisbon we began this discussion and continued it in Maribor where we committed to evaluate the existing possibilities. Now it seems that there are three activity fields for a RC51-wide cooperation:

1. *First* are the activities around the initiative of the UNESCO International Social Science Council (ISSC) to build a 'Task Force on Social Studies of the Internet', which is working under the roof of the International Sociological Association (ISA) in close cooperation with the ISA RC51 on Sociocybernetics (cf. RC51-Newsletter No. 17). This initiative aims to collect and make accessible scientific information about the Internet and its relationships with global and local society, in particular its impacts on and pre-conditions in its social environment. It aims to promote global high quality social science research on all pertinent aspects of the Internet and related Information Technology (IT) by developing a global and interdisciplinary network of scholars who can advise on scientific and policy issues and who can make state-of-the-art of knowledge in this field available to both the academic and non-academic world.
2. Second, the collaboration agreement between the University of Zaragoza and the RC51 which aims to facilitate the scientific and research relationship between both partners amongst others to assist scientific research of high quality on the subject of sociocybernetics (cf. Newsletter No. 17).
3. The third possibility is found in one of the Programmes of the Research-Framework of the European Union, which can give us a platform to realize a closer research cooperation in a variety of forms.

The following remarks exclusively address the third of the three points listed above, namely,the Research Framework of the EU, which stands shortly ahead the transformation from the 6th to 7th Framework Programme. Although the structure, contents and the volume of the 7th Framework is still under construction, the following possibilities for collaboration may exist:

1. NoE for 'Sociocybernetics'

'NoE (Network of Excellence)' is an instrument which was introduced for the 6. Research Framework Programme of the European Union to strengthen excellence on a particular research topic by integrating the critical mass of resources and expertise. This expertise will be networked around a joint programme of activities aimed primarily at creating a durable integration of the research capacities of the network participants while, at the same time, advancing knowledge on the topic. I think, it is time to build up such a network on sociocybernetics. It would do the following:

- establish pan-European cooperation in the field of sociocybernetics including partners in developing countries;
- reinforce sociocybernetic research in the member states of the EU;
- create a number of best practice examples to demonstrate the utility of the sociocybernetic way of thinking in order to solve problems of complexity;
- establish cooperation with the ISSC of the UNESCO.

Upon review of these guidelines I see one problem which we cannot solve now: it is not possible to build a NoE without the attachment to a thematic priority (like 'Citizens and Governance' or 'Sustainable Development'). Currently it is not known which thematic priorities will exist in the 7th Framework, so we have to wait until it is passed the institutions of the EU.

2. NEST-Programme (New Emerging Science and Technology)

This is a current call for proposals proceeding in the 6th Framework dealing with some sociocybernetic relevant subject. The call for 'Tackling Complexity in Science' could be of interest to RC51, but also to some extent the calls for 'Cultural Dynamics: From Transmission and Change to Innovation' and 'Measuring the Impossible'. The EU will support the following three forms of research activities: 'Specific targeted research or innovation projects' (e.g., international cooperation activities; max. 50% grant); 'Coordination actions' (e.g., conferences, scholar exchanges; grants of 100%), and 'Specific Support Actions' (e.g., establishing new research groups; grants of 100%). Those who are interested in taking a closer look at the NEST-Programmes should click on http://www.cordis.lu/nest/publications.htm. The short deadline (February 15, 2006) could be problem for a joint application.

3. 'European Virtual Campus on Sociocybernetics'
This initiative could be a part of the eLearning Programme of the EU, which was part of the 6th Framework. We discussed this idea last summer, but the deadline was too short so we discussed submitting an application in the year 2006. The problem is that until now, it has not been clear whether there will be another call in the 6th Framework. Perhaps we will have to wait until the 7th Framework which will start in 2006. The objective of the project is to establish an 'European Virtual Campus' in the field of sociocybernetics with the intention of strengthening the sociocybernetic approach in research and university education. We believe that an 'European Virtual Campus' will draw upon a networked-cooperation of different institutions in several countries of the European Community, which can ultimately become a pan-European framework for research and teaching. Once established, this cooperation will enable and encourage the development of theories, methods and tools which, in turn, can improve the manner in which we deal with high complex and dynamic societal problems. Drawing upon the available network of ISA-RC 51 and the existing cooperation of several RC51-members, the virtual campus will be established by following a series of steps, including: inter- and multilateral cooperation to create a common sociocybernetic-curriculum; the exchange of experiences on the application of the first versions of this curriculum; its evaluation and revision; the exchange of scholars and students between the participating institutions, and the coordination of workshops and international conferences. In addition, since sociocybernetic research is always using modern computer-supported methods (e.g., simulation systems), a demonstration of the different R&D results and the exchange of scholars' personal experiences implementing theses tools in sociocybernetic research or teaching environments will be a integral part of the 'European Virtual Campus'. An important long-range goal will be to expand this virtual campus to non-European institutions that are involved in worldwide activities in the field of sociocybernetics.

4. Information Society Technologies
I suppose that the 4th call in the EU-Programme 'Information Society Technologies' will be announced in the next few days. It will be the last call for this programme in the 6th Framework. This programme is very technologically-oriented, but a lot of questions, related to the social consequences of new technology will be funded (http://cordis.europa.eu.int).

4.   A CALL FOR PAPERS

STIQE 2006, 8th International Conference on Linking Systems Thinking, Innovation, Quality, Entrepreneurship and Environment
Maribor, Slovenia, June 28 - 30, 2006

The STIQE 2006 Conference encourages an interdisciplinary discussion about mutual links of theory and practice of Systems Thinking, Quality, Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Environmental Care. The previous STIQEs gathered (systems) thinkers with diverse professional and intellectual backgrounds.

The **STIQE 2006** Conference aims to address some of the following questions:
1. Can Systems Thinking be a platform for necessary adaptations of national policies on their road towards knowledge society?
2. How processes of globalization support and oppose Systems Thinking, innovation, quality, entrepreneurship, and safe environment?
3. How to shape social and business environment for entrepreneurship to make it capable of serving as an agent of change and diffusor of new ideas and knowledge?
4. Are the application of Systems Thinking and its findings able to make the accomplishment of Innovation, Quality, Entrepreneurship and Environmental Care easier, not only regarding products, services, and management, but also the environment and life, and how?

5. How systemic is the entrepreneurship research and how entrepreneurial is the systems movement? Is there any innovative systems movement left, at all?

6. How systemic and linked to innovation, entrepreneurship, quality movement, is the sustainable development movement?

7. How systemic and linked to innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainable development, is the movement for excellent business quality?

8. Can the synergy of Systems Thinking, Innovation, Quality, Entrepreneurship, and Environmental Care reinforce the chances for prosperity of transitional countries in the age of globalisation?

Deadlines submission of Abstract:

10th January, 2006: (1 page) and a 1/3 page of the author's C.V. By e-mail to Prof. dr. Miroslav Rebernik (rebernik@uni-mb.si) or Prof. dr. Matjaz Mulej (mulej@uni-mb.si)

More information at: http://epfip.uni-mb.si/stiqe.htm