



10th International Conference of Sociocybernetics
SOCIOCYBERNETICS AND THE INCREASING COMPLEXITY
OF SOCIAL LIFE

Cracow, Poland, 20-25 June 2011

CALL FOR PAPERS

In the early 21st century the challenges of predictability have acquired a new significance. This is caused by an increasing awareness of environmental threats, terrorism, vulnerability of the techno-structure of modern civilization, barriers of strategic management and, last but not least, by the recent turmoil in the financial markets. Summarised as the growing complexity of the world, they lead to questions such as: “Are we living in a risk society?”, “What does the concept of Predictable Surprises mean?”, “Do we have to accept Imperfect Knowledge Economics?”

In such circumstances, the term “complexity”, used frequently as a kind of “buzzword”, has gained a specific role in the language of modern science and policy making. At the same time “complexity scholars”, i.e. the authors claiming to study the complexity of nature and society, purposively or not, directly or not, stimulate expectations of policy making by attributing marketing-like titles to their works and courses – “Hidden Order”, “Harnessing Complexity”, “Order out of Chaos”, “Understanding Complex Organizations” (repeated in various contexts), etc.

The demand from practitioners (policy makers, managers, financiers) on the one hand, and attempts to provide relevant responses made by the academic community on the other, is nothing unusual by itself. A new element in that discourse between practice and “complexity studies” is resulting from awareness of the limited possibility, or even impossibility, of the prediction of social phenomena, especially at macro- and meso - scales. Such an epistemological pessimism can be acceptable in academic discourse but

cannot be transferred to practice. Economic, social and environmental policy, and finance and management are most representative examples of the areas in which prediction is a foundation for actions, where an “early warning” is sometimes essential.

Many problems arise in defining terms associated with “studies of complexity”, “complex systems studies” and the like. Terms such as artificial life, fractals, bifurcations, co-evolution, spontaneous self-organization, self-organized criticality, chaos, edge of chaos, instability, irreducibility, adaptability, far-from-equilibrium-states are now widely used. In his search for explaining the meaning of complexity in 1989, Lloyd identified 31 definitions of complexity; later, according to Horgan, this number increased to 45 – many of them following a quantitative approach. Therefore, complementary to the advancement of quantitative “complexity sciences”, the exploitation of theories/principles already elaborated within cybernetics and systems thinking is advisable.

The first attempts to study complex entities go back to the works of Weaver (disorganized complexity and organized complexity), Simon (the Architecture of Complexity), Ashby (the Law of Requisite Variety) and Wiener and others (on self-organisation).

In the social sciences, and particularly in sociology, special attention is given to the concept of the complexity of social systems proposed by Luhmann for whom complexity is strongly linked to self-observation. This phenomenon is representative of the epistemology of modern social sciences, where observation and self-observation, reflexivity and self-reflexivity, and, subsequently, self-reference are playing a growing role. According to this interpretation, social systems are becoming self-observing, self-reflexive entities trying to solve arising problems through the processes of adaptation (learning).

A question thus arises. If unpredictability or low reliability of prediction is the key feature of the complexity of social phenomena, what ideas drawn from sociocybernetics can help the social sciences in achieving a better understanding of change in modern society? This question is of a special significance in policy-oriented sciences dealing with social phenomena – economics, management, finance and security studies, which aim, not only at description and explanation, but also at providing guidance for action.

Papers dealing with the complexity of social phenomena at all levels of the societal hierarchy are welcome. Taking into account the theoretical background of RC51, the role of information, technology, innovation and governance in social systems may be of special interest.

Authors intending to present papers with a strong sociocybernetics orientation addressing other topics (conceptual, methodological, practical) are also encouraged to participate.

ABSTRACTS AND REVIEW PROCESS:

Length of Abstract 500 to 600 words.

All abstracts must be sent to the Conference Organizer Czeslaw Mesjaz (mesjaszc@uek.krakow.pl) as well as to the Head of the Abstracts Committee Karl-Heinz Simon (simon@usf.uni-kassel.de). The review process is double-blind and the feedback to the authors may include suggestions for improvements and modifications.

Accepted abstracts will published in an abstract booklet.

DEADLINES:

28 February 2011: 500-600 word abstracts
1 April 2011: Notification of acceptance
15 May 2011: Definitive registration
1 June 2011: Submission of full papers

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:

Conference fees:

- RC51 Non-members EURO 100
- RC51 affiliated members (non-ISA): EURO 50
- RC51 regular members in good standing (ISA and RC51): No fee

In special cases (e.g., students) exemptions can be granted upon request.

Methods of payment will be announced in the second Call for Papers – January 2011

CONFERENCE LANGUAGE:

The official language of the Conference will be English.

CONTACTS AND INFORMATION:

For information updates please consult the RC 51 website at (<http://www.unizar.es/sociocybernetics/>). For specific questions you may also directly contact the Chairman of the Local Organizing Committee.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

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VENUE AND ACCOMMODATION:

The conference will be held at the Cracow University of Economics located near the City Centre, <http://nowa.uek.krakow.pl/en>

Kraków – Poland <http://www.krakow.pl/en/>

Kraków (Cracow) is the old capital of Poland, full of tourist places, including, among others, the Wawel Royal Castle, the Jagiellonian University – established in 1364, and a unique Salt Mine of Wieliczka. http://www.kopalnia.pl/index.php?id_language=2&id_news=&action=&id_site=&language_change=1&

Access to Cracow is simple. By road – there are relatively good highways and roads from all places in Europe. By train either directly from most places in Europe or through Warsaw. Cracow Balice Airport has direct connections with the main European airports (<http://www.krakowairport.pl/en>) and is indirectly connected to all continents by major airlines.

Several types of lodging will be offered – hotels and hostels.

Details on hotels and lodging prices will be provided at the RC51 website (<http://sociocybernetics.unizar.es>) in January 2011 and in the second Call for Papers.

Depending on the suggestions of participants lunch can be also served on the premises of the Cracow University of Economics.

EXTRA PROGRAMME

TOURIST PROGRAMME

A visit to the Wieliczka Salt Mine – a half-day trip during the Conference. To be announced later.

A post-conference tourist programme can be also offered - city of Krakow, other places in Poland. To be announced later

SPECIAL VISIT

A special visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau – after the Conference. To be announced later.

USEFUL LINKS AND LOCATION

<http://www.cracowonline.com/>

Please forward the information to your friends and colleagues, whom you find able and interested to contribute.