

Call for papers

Moral Communication. Observed with Social Systems Theory

Place: Inter-University Centre (IUC), Dubrovnik, Croatia

Address: Don Frana Bulića 4, 20000 Dubrovnik, Croatia

Dates: 15-18 September 2020

URL: [Click here](#) for the online version of this CFP.



Theme:

The conference committee invites contributions on the significance of moral communication in Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory. As readers familiar with his work will recognise, Luhmann's approach to morality is characterised by a profound moral scepticism and a certain neglect of moral communication not only as an occasional topic, but also as a distinct form of communication. As contemporary society is continuously producing moral communication, however, social systems theory is bound to adequately deal with this phenomenon if its claim to a universal theory is to be maintained. We therefore welcome contributions from scholars with an interest in moral communication at all levels of society.

The conference series has always been characterised by fruitful interactions of scholars with diverse paradigmatic and empirical backgrounds in disciplinary fields as different as political science, aesthetics, sociology, theology, history, economics, health, psychology, ecology, education, and organization studies.

Social systems theory is empirically open to new semantics, different codes, and multiple levels of analysis. Presentations could therefore focus, for example, on how the medium of morality emerges from situations of double contingency and/or in everyday communication; how the moral code of good/bad informs decision-making; how complexity is reduced and increased by morally coded communication; the paradoxes that emerge and unfold in conjunction with moral coding; the relationship between moral coding and computer coding *#computerethics #ethicsofartificialintelligence*; the relation between ethics and morality; etc.

The conference invites presentations of both conceptual work and empirical studies. Contributions are welcome that either build on the work of Niklas Luhmann or compare or combine social system theory with other theories, thus further developing systems theory by including thoughts from other traditions (e.g. Foucault, Bourdieu, Deleuze, discourse analysis, critical theory, critical management studies, posthumanism, etc).

Abstracts of 400–800 words should be sent to the *corresponding convenors** by **June 15, 2020**. Full papers should be circulated prior to the conference.

Convenors:

- Gorm Harste, Aarhus University, Denmark
- Markus Heidingsfelder, Xiamen University Malaysia
- Klaus Laursen*, Aarhus University, Denmark: klausb.laursen@mgt.au.dk
- Steffen Roth*, La Rochelle Business School, France, and Kazimieras Simonavičius University, Lithuania: roths@excelia-group.com
- Krešimir Žažar*, University of Zagreb, Croatia: kzazar@ffzg.hr

Background literature:

- Harste G. (2009). Kant's theory of European integration: Kant's 'Toward Perpetual Peace' and changing forms of separated powers in the evolution from military and politics. In *Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 17: 53-84.
- Harste G. (2016). The missing link in the philosophy of enlightenment. Reasonability, will and separation of powers in the philosophy of justice of H-F d'Aguesseau, Chancellor of France. In G. Baruchello et al. (eds.): *Ethics, Democracy, and Markets*, Aarhus University Press, pp. 104-143.
- Laursen K. B., and Noe E. (2017). [The hybrid media of economy and moral: A Luhmannian perspective on value-based-food-chains](#). *Journal of Rural Studies* 56: 21-29.
- Luhmann N. (1992). The code of the moral. *Cardozo Law Review* 14: 995-1009.
- Luhmann N. (1996). The sociology of the moral and ethics. *International Sociology* 11(1): 27-36.
- Roth S. (2019). [The open theory and its enemy. Implicit moralisation as epistemological obstacle for general systems theory](#). *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 36(3): 281-288.
- Roth S., Valentinov V., and Clausen L. (in press), [Dissecting the empirical-normative divide in business ethics: the contribution of systems theory](#), *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal*, DOI: 10.1108/SAMPJ-03-2019-0107.
- Roth S., Valentinov V., Heidingsfelder M., and Pérez-Valls M. (in press). [CSR beyond Economy and Society. A post-capitalist approach](#). *Journal of Business Ethics*, DOI: 10.1007/s10551-018-4068-y.
- Ward S. (2003). Honesty and dissimulation in upper-class interaction in early modern France: madame and the old German sincerity. *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 25: 247–258.
- Ward S. (2005). Madame chats with coquettes: the evolution of early modern theories of conversation. *The Seventeenth Century* 20: 281–293.
- Ward S. (2017). [From Fontainebleau to Facebook: the early modern discourse of sincerity and its echoes in the contemporary discourse of transparency](#). *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 34(2): 139-147.

Background information:

Social Systems theory after Luhmann

Systems theory has had a tremendous impact in social science since the 1950s. During the last decades, however, systems theory has been completely transformed. In particular, German sociologist Niklas Luhmann's system theory has transformed social studies. Luhmann's "Grand Theory" got its final form with his principal work *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft 1-2 (Theory of Society Vol. 1-2*, Stanford University Press 2013) in 1997, although additional books, articles and interviews have been published, including more than twenty books now in English. Whatever one thinks about the exact form of his analysis, sociological theory has to some extent been transformed by the "Luhmann effect".

Although Luhmann's general theory hitherto has seemed very abstract and distant, there is a strong drive towards analyses in empirical studies that make use of Luhmann's insights. This is evident in his seminal publication *Theory of Society*. Luhmann's systems theory is more an abductive applied theory than a deductively developed theory. Yet it seems that its very abstract character has a fruitful effect.

Organisational background

Every year conferences about the use of Luhmann's system theory have been held in, for example, Munich, Copenhagen, Tromsø, Stuttgart, Montreal, Boston, London or Stockholm. The Scandinavian and British network has developed fruitful discussions to which German, French, Italian, Canadian and Dutch scholars have also contributed. Translations of Luhmann's books are still more numerous, introductions and theoretical contributions are flourishing. The same seems to be the case with empirical studies applying system theory in comparative studies, case studies, historical studies or in concrete practice. Some of the current debates take place at the following websites:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/147050955334098/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2834060864/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/51117679788/>

The IUC

In the 1980s, Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht and Ludwig Pfeiffer organised a number of great conferences at the Inter-University Centre of post-graduate studies (IUC) in Dubrovnik in the former Yugoslavia, now Croatia. Since 1981, Luhmann attended these conferences. The contributions from those conferences were published in a series of five rather big volumes at the important Suhrkamp Verlag (*Der Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, 1983; *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, 1985; *Stil*, 1986; *Materialität der Kommunikation*, 1988, *Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche*, 1991). Quite a number of those studies were dedicated to semantic history and contributions to a system theory of art. Unfortunately, the Centre was bombed in 1991 and for some years the conferences could not take place. Today, the Centre has been completely restored physically as well as in spirit.

Practical information

The conference fee is 65 Euro, which is paid in cash upon arrival.

The IUC is located very close to the famous medieval city of Dubrovnik, about 300 meters northwest. You can find accommodation in one of the many hotels in Dubrovnik (Hotel Imperial is the closest to the centre, but expensive, Hotel Lero is cheaper, and about 1½ kilometer (1 mile) from the Centre. Another popular form of accommodation is one of the many private rooms, apartments, or "Sobe" that are quite affordable and can be found everywhere. Do make sure though to book well in advance to get the best price. The IUC also provides cheap but limited accommodation in the building itself.

All meals are taken at restaurants and cafés in town as the conference does not provide any meals. The Dubrovnik airport is situated about 20 kilometres South of Dubrovnik and shuttle busses run regularly. Travel by car and ferryboat is somewhat more complicated, though beautiful.

The weather in September is normally sunny with 25-30 C, though rain is not impossible.