

## UKSS Newsletter Issue 1

Summer 2019



Welcome to the Newsletter of the UK Systems Society. This is a communication for members containing reports from the Committee, short articles of general interest to Systems enthusiasts, notice of events and news contributed by members.

Following this introductory issue, it is intended that the Newsletter will appear twice yearly, in January and May. In September, the UKSS journal *Systemist* will be published, on an open access basis, containing longer articles by Systems practitioners and academics.

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## News from the Membership

Those who attended Dennis Sherwood's interesting presentation on Climate Change and Gaia at this year's conference may be interested in the following recent publication:

### **Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence**

**By James Lovelock**

**Published by Allen Lane, ISBN: 9780241399361**

James Lovelock, creator of the Gaia hypothesis, is one of the most well-known environmental thinkers of our time. He has produced a new theory about future of life on Earth. He argues that the *Anthropocene* - the age in which humans acquired planetary-scale technologies - is, after 300 years, coming to an end. A new age - the *Novacene* - has already begun.

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## ***A brief history of the UKSS<sup>1</sup>***

*The UKSS celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. In 1977 a group of about 20 people met at a small hotel in Barford to discuss a way of establishing a relationship between the four universities, Aston, City, Lancaster and the OU where 'Systems' was taught. Their aim was to promote the development of the systems discipline and to provide a focus for systems work at a national and international level. They decided to create a means of communicating and exchanging ideas between those engaged in the Systems field in the UK. This led to the establishment of the UKSS in 1979. The first council members were, Raul Espejo and John Watt from the University of Aston. Derek Bowers and Ewart Carson from City University, Ron Anderton and Mike Jackson from the University of Lancaster and Bill Mayon-White and Roger Spears from the Open University. A key feature of the new Society was that it should have an open membership and its structure should be such as to promote and encourage communication between the Systems community.*

*It was agreed to issue a newsletter three times each year containing information on membership, research interests, the establishment of special interest groups and publish details of courses seminars and plans for conferences. The newsletter would also contain news about activities of other systems groups in other countries. The newsletter would try to avoid a heavy academic bias and encourage practitioners to contribute and participate in activities. The editors of the first newsletter were Ron Anderton and Mike Jackson from Lancaster. After a shaky start the Society began to take shape and attracted systems researchers and practitioners not just from the UK but further afield. I joined the management committee in the mid 1980's and, for some reason, have remained a part of the management of the society ever since. This is my third 'tour' as president.*

<sup>1</sup> The contribution of the MBA thesis written by Sam Das, University of Hull, is gratefully acknowledged. Please note a full account of the development of the Society until 2000 is published in Systemist Volume 24 No.2 December 2002.



Professor Frank Stowell is the current President of the UK Systems Society

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## UKSS Conferences<sup>2</sup>

*In early 1980 the society had its first one day conference at City University then every year until 1988 when we held our first international conference at the University of Hull and organized by Mike Jackson (who was now a member of academic staff). For the years that followed our conferences were held in different universities across the UK. These conferences varied between one day events and international conferences spanning 2-3days, in the latter case these were well attended attracting more than 100 delegates from across the globe. In 2003 we decided that we would hold smaller, more focused, events and chose St Anne's college Oxford to host them. For several years these conferences were highly successful and attracted major keynote speakers including Peter Checkland; Raul Espejo; Pille Bunell, Peter Reason; Fritjof Capra; Umberto Maturana and Ian Mitroff to name just a few.*

*In 2018 we decided to revert to our one-day events hosted by different universities. There were many reasons for this decision but the squeeze in funding for academics attending conferences was an important factor. Systems, like several other learned societies, does not have a dedicated unit of assessment (UoA). This means that it is difficult for an academic to obtain funding to present a paper at a conference that is not recognised by the Research Excellent Framework (REF). Moreover, practitioners are, understandably, reluctant to give up more than one day of their practice to attend a conference. These two reasons alone make a regular three-day event difficult to sustain. To this end the new UKSS management committee decided, for the short term, to revert to one day events. BUT that is not to preclude returning to major offering international conferences offered every two years in the not too distant future.*

<sup>2</sup> Many Systems academics submit 'applied systems' papers to journals in areas such as Management, as a means of gaining REF credit.



Dr Marios Angelopoulos  
speaking at the 2019  
Conference

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## ***The 20<sup>th</sup> UK Systems Society International Conference 2019***

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**This year's conference took place at the Executive Business Centre, Bournemouth University, and took as its theme 'Systems Thinking and the Circular Economy'.**

The Keynote address was given by Dr Marios Angelopoulos, of the Faculty of Science and Technology, Bournemouth University, who spoke on the topic of *Transition to a Smart Circular Economy*.

The Circular Economy is a paradigm for sustainable growth that envisions the transformation of design, production and consumption of goods and services in modern societies towards a regenerative economic cycle. Future and emerging technologies, such as 5G, the blockchain, and crowdsourced sensing systems; as well as innovative models and paradigms, such as the Internet of Things, Industry 4.0, and community networks, will play an important role in the transition to a Circular Economy by enabling and facilitating digitization (e.g. for efficient asset management, open data, etc.) and collaboration (e.g. for co-innovation, shared value creation). Dr Angelopoulos introduced the paradigm of Smart (i.e. data-driven) Circular Economy, and reviewed corresponding technological enablers and will present data-driven circular business models.

A selection of presentations from the Conference can be viewed on the UKSS Website at [www.ukss.org.uk](http://www.ukss.org.uk).



I got a massive amount from the UKSS Conference. The variety of presentations was staggering, from using VSM at the Nigerian space agency to causal loops applied to climate change, from systems thinking in SME food waste to utilizing the Internet of Things in a circular economy. But in addition to the excellent sessions I learnt so much from the very generous attendees who were happy to chat and share. It was my first year and I'll definitely be back in 2020. Rob



I went along to this. A fascinating and thought-provoking day. In particular, Dennis Sherwood's argument for geo-engineering as a significant contribution to dealing with the climate crisis, presented using systems dynamics succeeded in changing my view entirely. Paul



*I am delighted to make this contribution to the first UKSS newsletter. To be exact it isn't the first newsletter, as indicated earlier, as that was published soon after the UKSS was established 40 years ago. The first newsletter was called Systemist and edited by Ron Anderton and Mike Jackson. Editorship then transferred to Paul Keys, then on to Paul Leddington (only for one year as Paul emigrated to Australia). I took over in 1989. By now the UKSS had become well established and I thought deserved a journal-like publication in which members of the UKSS could publish their experiences and opinions about Systems theory and practice. Clearly it ceased to be a newsletter and became the main publication of the society. Systemist proved popular and many members enjoyed receiving the Systemist blue journal delivered though their door up to 4 times each year.*

*But eventually increasing publication costs and the continuous increase in postage meant hard decisions had to be taken. And at our annual conference at St Anne's, Oxford in 2011 the membership endorsed a proposal to move its publication from hard copy to electronic access through the American publisher IGI. IGI specialises in supporting 'niche' areas of academic interest and in 2013/14 Systemist became a part of our new commercially marketed journal entitled the International Journal of Systems and Society (IJSS). It is important to note that we were careful to retain ownership of the Systemist title, the livery and our list of gold medallists.*

*With hindsight this transfer was a mistake. A society like ours thrives on intimacy and Systemist helped to foster that feeling of togetherness. Our conferences were as much about meeting old friends with a common interest as it was about Systems theory and practice. An electronic version of Systemist was never quite able to foster that camaraderie. Systemist was published within IJSS from 2014 until this year, but over this time we had become increasingly concerned that it was not making the same connections with our members as Systemist once had. Following a discussion with the new management committee, (established in 2018), we decided to cease our links with IGI and relinquish the IJSS and revert to Systemist and produce a new newsletter. To this end we today introduce a 'new' newsletter edited by Pauline Roberts and Christine Welch. You will read the details of what this means for you and how to send in your views and suggestions; it can only survive with your support. You will find details of this later in this first newsletter.*





## Systemist 40 years on

In addition to the newsletter we have decided to reinstate Systemist. It will be published once each year, be open access, and in an electronic form, but for those wishing it, a hard copy will be available - unfortunately the hard copy will be at an extra cost (details will follow). We feel that this decision offers an opportunity for members and colleagues from the wider community, to publish their thoughts and experiences of Systems without the straight-jacket of commercial publishing. It will also offer practitioners the opportunity of publishing their experiences without rewriting it in a pseudo academic form. Systemist will have a board of editors who will ensure we maintain standards, but within the context of the 'real world'. To this end we invite UKSS members wishing to become part of one of the editorial panels to pass their name and area of interest on to me and we will do our best to accommodate you. We will publish more details of the way in which the editorial panels will function in the next newsletter. But please note that action is in hand to publish the first on-line issue of Systemist. Our intention is to continue from the volume numbers of the last Systemist in 2012.

Frank Stowell

### **Calling all UKSS members**

This is your newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you with news of events, with short articles on Systems practice or new aspects of theory. Please email: [ukssnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:ukssnewsletter@gmail.com)

# Meet the Committee

## Professor Frank Stowell

*President and Trustee, and Editor of the Systemist journal*



Frank Stowell has been a member of the UK Systems Society since the early 1980's and is currently its President. He is a keen advocate of the main aim of the UKSS which is to communicate and promote 'Systems' ideas to the wider community. He has published many Systems papers and papers in the Systems and Information Systems field and presented them at international conferences in Europe and the United States. He is still research active and continues to publish regularly. His two most recent texts are: *A Managers Guide to Systems Practice* co-authored with Christine Welch (2012) and *Systems Research for Real World Challenges* (2018), which he edited and also contributed to the content. Frank has been co-chair of a number of research council funded projects notably the Systems Practice for Managing Complexity project, which is now self-sustaining and offers short workshops for managers wanting to learn about the application of Systems ideas. He has also supervised a variety of research projects ranging from modelling complex decision making in mental health care through to the use of soft Systems ideas in organizational inquiry. He is past President of the UK Academy of Information Systems and past chair of the Council of Information Systems Professors. He is based at the University of Portsmouth where he is Emeritus Professor of Systems and Information Systems. Prior to his academic career he was employed by central government as a consultant within the Management Systems Development Group and has practical experience of defining and developing management information systems in the real world.

Ian is the director of The Schumacher Institute for Sustainable Systems, an independent think tank in Bristol, UK. The institute follows many of the ideas of E. F. Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful*. Ian has an MSc in Operational Research and (later in life) an MSc in Responsibility & Business Practice. He started his career at the Building Research Establishment before heading up strategic forecasting for Rank Xerox. He then co-founded a successful software company and ever since this was sold, he has pursued interests in applying systems sciences to problems in the environmental and social justice spheres.

Ian was president of the UK Systems Society from 2005-2008 and has been the treasurer for many years.

The Schumacher Institute has written into its charitable objectives the use of applied systems sciences for the alleviation of poverty and distress. Its bedrock theme is called 'Making Sense', which promotes systems and complexity thinking. This foundation is used in all the research and consultancy work that the institute performs. Of particular interest is the use of systems ideas in thinking about the future, how we can work with sustainability and resilience ideas to prepare for change in society.

Being involved with the UKSS is vital to maintain connections with others working in these fields of study. The cross-fertilisation of ideas that occurs through conferences, journal, workshops and forums makes an invaluable contribution to the status of systems thinking as a core theme and defining approach to complex issues.

## Ian Roderick

*Treasurer and Trustee*





## Gary Evans

*Conference Organizer*



Gary is a Senior Academic in Sport Management, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University. He is the current Conference Chair and in the process of organising the 21st UKSS International Conference following this year's successful conference on the 24th June at the Executive Business Centre, Bournemouth University.


Gary is research active, and currently, the Bournemouth University Contract Manager for the Sport England funded Active Ageing project for those 55-65 years of age who are considered inactive. Active Ageing launched in April 2018, and Bournemouth University is undertaking the evaluation of the project's impact in Dorset. The Faculty of Health and Social Sciences is evaluating the behavioural change in patient's element of the project, and the Faculty of Management the organisational system changes triggered as a result of the project. The Faculty of Management element of the evaluation is guided by a Systems Thinking, Systems Practice (Stowell et al. 2012) approach that Sport England later reflected was utterly unique to the Active Dorset and Bournemouth University joint bid. It is very likely the evaluation will have national implications for the delivery of physical activity interventions to those 55-65 years of age who are considered inactive. The review is scheduled to conclude in March 2021 and is proving both fascinating and incredibly rewarding.

Pauline is an independent systems thinking consultant who has worked with the NHS, Local Authorities, MoD, pharmaceutical industry, charity and voluntary sectors. She is a visiting lecturer at CASS Business School, City University, London, in undergraduate applied Systems thinking and an associate lecturer with the Open University on the MSc Systems Thinking in Practice courses. She spent a couple of years as Exec Director - Open Days for SCiO (Systems and Cybernetics in Organisations), a community for systems practitioners and is now membership secretary for the UK Systems Society (UKSS). She also runs a Systems Thinking in Practice Meetup Group in Leeds, which has a growing membership and a Systems Thinking Connect Up Scheme, which is a low-level mentoring scheme which links newer systems practitioners to those with more experience. One of Pauline's greatest areas of interest as a Systems practitioner is in supporting Systems thinkers to share their experiences with one another. The more outlets and ways we have of doing this, the greater our ability to learn and develop will become. UKSS has a long-standing reputation and a desire to bring together the areas of academics and practice for greater learning. The annual conferences are diverse and highly informative. In growing the membership, we will be supporting the learning processes and developing a network of informed systems thinkers for years to come.

## Pauline Roberts

*Membership Secretary*



<p>Petia Venkova Sice</p> 	<p>Petia holds a PhD in Systems and Complexity Thinking for Understanding Humans and Organisations. She is passionate about interpreting and applying insights from complexity theory for facilitating positive transformation in individuals and organisations. She is academic lead and facilitator of the Wellbeing, Complexity and Enterprise (WELCOME) interdisciplinary research group, Convenor of the UK EPSRC Systems Practice and Managing Complexity (SPMC) network, member of the advisory board of the Health for Humanity International Forum, and Senior Associate Editor of the International Journal of Systems and Society. She has served the UKSS as a Board member since 2004 as Convenor of the Northern Region. Her research interests focus on exploring quintessential insights and synergies between quantum physics, systems and complexity sciences, interpersonal neurobiology and the arts, and how these may inform a new paradigm of thinking in wellbeing and lead to new applications of technology.</p>
<p>Two further members have been co-opted to assist the Committee this year:</p>	<p><a href="#">Stephan Wennekes, who will advise on social media development.</a></p> <p><a href="#">Christine Welch, who will be Associate Editor of this Newsletter.</a></p>