



Community
Research

Newsletter

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October 2025 | Volume 54 | Issue 1

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Inside This Issue

Letter from the president.....	2
Announcements	3
Case study	4
Activities and news from RC03 members	7
Contacts	8

Letter from the president

Dear Colleagues,

This time I will allow myself to write in a somewhat different tone, as the circumstances seem to demand it. The news and updates from ISA and RC03 I will share separately.

As we approach the next cycle of our work within ISA RC03, I would like to share a few reflections on the role of sociology, and especially of community studies, in our turbulent times.

Sociology itself was born out of crisis. The discipline emerged as a response to profound social, political, and economic upheavals, when societies needed new ways of understanding solidarity, cohesion, and belonging. Likewise, the interest in communities has often grown out of disruption and uncertainty, moments when the question of who “we” are, and how we relate to others, becomes urgent.

Yet communities are never innocent. Alongside their capacity to provide shelter, trust, and mutual care, they also carry a darker potential: to close in on themselves, to draw boundaries sharply, to exclude or discriminate, and to slide into nationalism. In the face of armed conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine, escalating provocations from Russia and the growing sense of insecurity that the conflict might spill over into other countries, these ambiguities become especially clear. Communities may sustain people through violence and dislocation, but they can also reinforce lines of division and hostility.

This is precisely why our work as scholars of communities has a particular relevance today. We are tasked with observing and analyzing not only the solidarities that bind people together but also the exclusions that fracture them. Our responsibility is to bring critical nuance to public debates, resisting

simplistic narratives and showing the complex dynamics that underlie belonging and estrangement.

Allow me to share a thought from a letter I recently received from my rector, Prof. Ryszard Koziołek. It seems deeply relevant to our academic mission. Universities, he wrote, embody a fundamental duality: certainty and skepticism. On the one hand, we are obliged to establish truths beyond doubt; on the other, we must question every inherited certainty. This balance between proving and doubting is what gives the university its vitality and its social role. At times when dogmas dominate public discourse and the destruction of truth becomes a deliberate political strategy - as we see today in disinformation campaigns and organized industries of propaganda - the university, and by extension sociology, must speak with clarity and principle. Our role is to defend evidence against cynicism and to uphold trust in knowledge as part of society's immune system.

This is the spirit in which RC03 continues its work: to foster critical yet constructive inquiry, to build bridges between communities rather than walls, and to affirm the enduring importance of sociological imagination in times of crisis. I look forward to continuing this important work together, in dialogue and solidarity.

With collegial regards,

Marta Klekotko

President, RC03 International Sociological Association

Announcements

1. The ISA Research Council (ReCo) is currently working intensively on a new version of the Aims & Requirements document. This is a key regulatory text that defines both the mission and the organizational rules for all Research Committees (RCs), Working Groups (WGs), and Thematic Groups (TGs). The ongoing consultation process is intended to collect input from all RCs, WGs, and TGs, so that the final text reflects the diversity and needs of the ISA community. After the upcoming round of discussions, the draft will be revised and put to a vote at the January 2026 ReCo meeting. This work may sound procedural, but it is in fact crucial: the Aims & Requirements document sets the rules of the game for how we, as communities of scholars, work together within the ISA framework.
2. Another important initiative underway is the creation of a Journal Task Group. This working group was established by ReCo to develop a concrete proposal for how the ISA might support journals associated with RCs, WGs, and TGs. The aim is to strengthen scholarly publishing within ISA, ensure visibility for our fields of research, and provide sustainable frameworks for collaboration between research committees and academic journals. The Task Group will present its proposal at the January 2026 ReCo meeting. Within RC03 we are also reflecting on possible future cooperation with a journal – in order to have “our own journal,” where community studies could be more strongly represented and where our members would find a dedicated platform for publishing and exchange. While these ideas are still at an exploratory stage, we believe that engaging with the Journal Task Group process is an important step in this direction.
3. The ISA ReCo Webinar Series has now been launched. The first two webinars are already available to watch on the ISA YouTube Channel and in the ISA Benefits Page. The next two ReCo webinars are already scheduled:
 1. “Global Cities, People and Crises” – 10 October 2025, 10:00–11:30 GMT
 2. “GenAI in the Research Process: a Tool or/and a Co-contributor?” – November 2025 (exact date tbd)We warmly encourage RC03 members to participate in the upcoming sessions and to consider how our committee might showcase its research and perspectives through this platform.

Rethinking Quality in the Built Environment. The Calgary Central Library as a Model for Inclusive Design

By Nooshin Esmaeili, Architect, AAA, MRAIC
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Faculty Team: Dr. Brian R. Sinclair¹, Dr. Enrica Dall'Ara¹,
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The built environment plays a fundamental role in shaping human experiences, fostering social cohesion, and promoting well-being. As part of the **SSHRC-funded⁴ "Quality in Canada's Built Environment"** partnership grant, a five-year pan-Canadian project, researchers across the country are exploring how quality can be understood not just in terms of aesthetics or efficiency, but as a lived, social experience informed by equity, inclusion, and resilience. While rooted in the Canadian context, these questions resonate internationally, where debates over quality, equity, and inclusion in the built environment are increasingly urgent. Moving beyond aesthetics, the project draws on architecture, landscape design, sociology, social work, and public health.



Figure 1: Aerial View of the CCL showing city train tracks running underneath (Courtesy of Snøhetta)

Together, these perspectives create more inclusive and human-centered spaces.

At its core, the project is transdisciplinary, seeking not only to bridge academic fields but also to incorporate the voices of community members, policymakers, and practitioners. For instance, sociological insights into inequality influence architectural decisions about access, while public health research on mental well-being shapes spatial design. Community narratives, in turn, push the framework beyond technical measures toward lived experience.

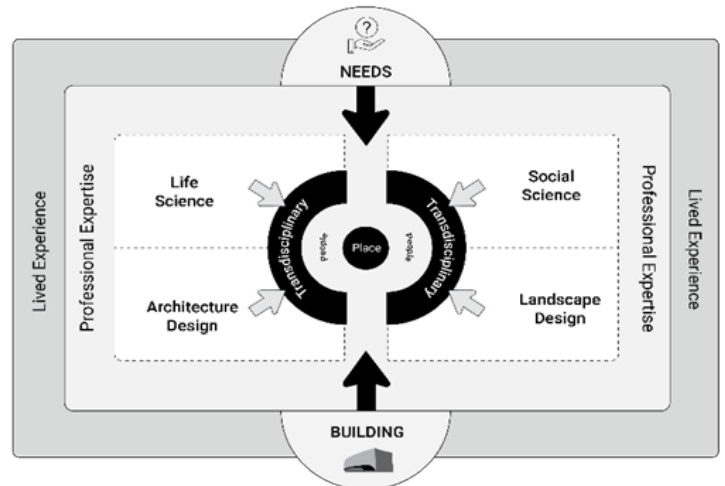


Figure 2: Transdisciplinary Framework (Designed by Dr. Brian R. Sinclair and drawn by Nooshin Esmaeili)

These ideas take shape most clearly in a current case study: the **Calgary Central Library (CCL)**, a landmark project that exemplifies how public architecture can catalyze social transformation. Opened in 2018, the CCL redefines the traditional role of libraries, evolving into a

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⁴ *Quality in Canada's Built Environment: Roadmaps to Equity, Social Value and Sustainability* is a research partnership funded by the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada (#895-2022-1003)

dynamic public hub that fosters learning, accessibility, and community belonging. Designed by **Snøhetta and DIALOG**, the library physically bridges the historically divided East Village and downtown Calgary, creating a welcoming space for all.



Figura 3: Open stair seating (Courtesy of Snøhetta)

Its open gathering spaces encourage social interaction across diverse groups, children's areas promote intergenerational exchange, and digital resources expand access for those historically excluded from cultural and educational institutions.

Importantly, the CCL houses an Indigenous Gathering Space, developed in consultation with local First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation communities. This center affirms the library's role in reconciliation by embedding Indigenous culture, storytelling, and knowledge-sharing into its heart. Beyond symbolism, it provides a physical and cultural space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can engage in dialogue, learning, and community-building. The inclusion of this space illustrates how architectural design can serve as a platform for cultural recognition and social justice, reminding us that questions of "quality" in the built environment must also grapple with histories of exclusion and the need for repair.

Through fieldwork and interdisciplinary analysis, the University of Calgary research team has examined how the CCL fosters community integration, inclusivity, and

well-being. CCL's spaces are designed not only for quiet study but also for vibrant gathering, supporting diverse forms of social life, from concentrated learning and intergenerational exchange to cultural programming and digital access. The building's openness, natural light, and flexible seating promote comfort and belonging, while design strategies emphasize accessibility and inclusivity, helping users feel connected to the space and to one another.

Challenges remain, especially around security and inclusivity. Increased surveillance and law enforcement raise questions about access for marginalized communities, particularly unhoused and individuals experiencing substance use challenges, echoing sociological debates on how safety measures can reinforce exclusion. Visitors and commentators have also noted practical issues. The central staircase's "meandering circulation," while visually striking, can be inefficient for users with a specific destination. Accessibility concerns persist: some entrances are not fully accessible, elevators require long detours, and stair and seating designs pose risks for children and visually impaired users. In winter, certain facades and entrances are perceived as dark or uninviting, affecting comfort and safety.



Figura 4: View of the covered entrance (Photo: Nooshin Esmaeili)

The CCL has also become an informal service centre for unhoused people and others facing social and health

challenges. Many see this as a sign of inclusion, while others note tensions in how staff, users, and the broader community negotiate comfort and equitable access. These tensions and struggles, while evident in the library, certainly transcend it as broader societal crises.

These observations come mainly from secondary sources such as tourist commentary and user reflections on social media threads. In the next phase, we plan a more systematic investigation. Importantly, such challenges are not unique to Calgary but echo global debates on how civic buildings balance symbolism, functionality, and inclusiveness.

This research also brings forward critical questions for the next stages of the project. Rather than treating architecture, sociology, and public health as parallel disciplines, we aim to explore how they actively intersect and co-create knowledge. For instance:

1. How might sociological insights into inequality directly shape architectural choices about access and circulation?
2. In what ways can public health data inform spatial design to better support mental and physical well-being? And
3. How can lived community experience be integrated into formal planning processes to ensure that quality is defined not only by experts but by those who use and inhabit these spaces?



Figura 5: University of Calgary Site Research Team at the CCL Main entrance (Photo: Nooshin Esmaeili)

These questions will guide the next phases of our inquiry, moving the project toward a more integrated and participatory framework for evaluating the built environment. Lived experience will continue to build in importance as a key ingredient of design. While this is an initial phase of this case study, it illustrates the potential of a transdisciplinary framework that bridges design, sociology, and public health. Future phases of the project will extend this analysis across Canada, testing the framework in diverse social and spatial contexts.

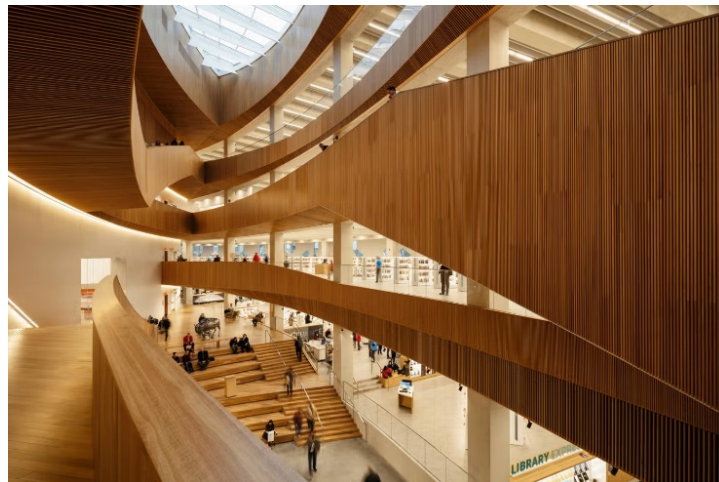


Figura 6: Main Stairway (Courtesy of Snøhetta)

Ultimately, the **Quality in Built Environment** initiative challenges conventional design paradigms and advocates for an expanded definition of quality, one that integrates **accessibility, social cohesion, and community resilience**.

These insights contribute to broader international debates on the right to the city and unimpeded access to the urban commons, raising questions relevant to societies worldwide. The lessons learned from the CCL case study offer preliminary lessons for future public spaces, demonstrating that urban design should be measured not only by **how a place looks, but by how it feels, functions, and fosters inclusivity for those who use it**.



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Activities and news from RC03 members:

SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

This is a book on South Asian's religion and cultural identities struggles, racism and white supremacy, postcolonial and diasporic identities, violence against women and labour organizing, and South Asian queerness.

- **Jamal, A., Ku, J., & and Khan, M.**, eds. (2025). South Asian Feminisms in Diaspora; Critical Perspectives from Canada. University of Alberta Press.

This paper explores how the cities of Barcelona, Valencia and Zaragoza integrated gender in their urban food policies (UFPs)'s policy design, and the governance processes that led to it.

- **Bergonzini, C. & Donati, F.** (2025). Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Food Policies: Governance Processes and Policy Designs from Three Spanish Cities. European Policy Analysis DOI: 10.1002/epa2.70016

These publications examine Otaru Canal's preservation movement, showing it as a progressive effort to maintain residents' sense of place while promoting controlled, community-led growth and change.

1. **Horikawa, S.** (2025). Place, Preservation and politics: My Fieldwork in Otaru (Japan) and St. Louis. Landmarks Letter, Vol. 55, No. 2, pp.17-19.
2. **Horikawa, S.** (2025). Preservation for What?: Paradox of Tourism and the Logic of Preservation. In Yago, K., & Thomann, B., eds., Social History of Industrial Heritage: History, Culture, and Issues in Japan and France, pp.87-103. Tokyo: Seikyusha. ISBN 978-4-78723551-0. (in Japanese)

This paper is on the analyses of policy integration in the field of sustainable urban development policies. The study analyses the multi-sectoriality in its substantive and procedural dimensions.

- **Dorado-Rubín, M.J., Guerrero-Mayo, M.J. & Navarro-Yáñez, C.J.** (2025). Policy integration in urban policies as multi-level policy mixes. Policy Sci 58, 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-024-09562-5>

These contributions emphasise the need for the inclusion of Black and migrant communities' perspectives, recognising the value of cultural capital, meaningful participation, and justice within educational and research practices.

1. **Jean-Pierre, J., Brisbane, M., Hassan, S., Bailey, J., & Barrie, H.** (2025). The influence of transnational cultural capital on Black immigrant and refugee youth perspectives of school discipline. In L.E. Bass (Ed.), Sociological Studies of Children and Youth: Migrant Children and Youth: Wellbeing and Integration around the World (Vol. 36) (pp. 103-123). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1537-466120250000036007>
2. **Jean-Pierre, J., Collins, T., Agnant, K., Boatswain-Kyte, A., Herman, C., Matthews, T., Salami, B., & James, C.E.** (2025). Broadening core research ethics principles: Insights from research conducted with Black communities. Ethics & Human Research, 47(5), 2-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/eahr.60011>
3. **Jean-Pierre, J., Boatswain-Kyte, A., Collins, T., & Ojukwu, E.** (2025). Designing afro-emancipatory qualitative research with and for Black people. Qualitative Research, 25(2), 520-542. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241264458>

This paper explores how the Calfee Community and Cultural Center revitalises a historic Black school to promote civic engagement, social justice, and democratic participation through community-driven democratic iterations.

- **Stephens, B., Stephenson, M., & Moayerian, N.** (2025). Learning from the Calfee Training School: Exploring One Nonprofit's Efforts to Reimagine a Historically Black School While Iterating Democratic Norms. Actes numériques du 7e Colloque international du CRISES. <https://crises.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Actes-de-colloque-2025-1.pdf>

SUMMER CAMP

We are pleased to announce the 6th edition of the international action research summer camp organised by our member Corey Dalgón in collaboration with the Suttner University. A new application round will open up this autumn.

For more information visit the webpage: <https://suttneruni.at/de/studium/weiterbildungen/action-research-summer-camp>

DIGITAL TOOL

The CPSL (Urban Governance Lab) at Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Seville, is developing a programme for the analysis of urban public policies — from the quality of design and administrative capacities for coordination and innovation, to the integrality of urban projects. Applications and further information will soon be available on this webpage: <https://esudepien.wordpress.com>

Check it out!

Contacts

New Website: RC03 has a new, revamped website. You can find it at: <https://www.upo.es/cspl/rc03-isa/isa/>

Please send future announcements to adomgon1@upo.es or f.donati12@campus.unimib.it