



# Newsletter

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Editors: Francesca Donati and Alicia Domínguez

## *RC03 Board (2023-2027)*

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**Newsletter Editors** Francesca Donati and Alicia Domínguez

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## Letter from the President

Dear RC03 Members,

I hope this message finds you well and engaged in your research pursuits.

As the president of the RC03 and delegate to the Research Council, I am pleased to share with you some key outcomes and initiatives of the RC03 Board as well as of the ISA Research Council.

I am pleased to announce that the Board acclaimed the nomination of the outgoing president Clemente Jesus Navarro Yanez to serve on the Honour Board. We believe his experience and dedication will greatly contribute to the continued success of our committee. Let me remind you, that according to the RC03 statutes, the Honour Board is formed by past Officers and Board Members who significantly contributed to the development of the RC03 and its role is to promote activities of the RC03 and to advise the Board.

As you know, due to an insufficient number of candidates in the last Board Elections, one of the seats could not be filled. Thus, the appointment of the missing member became the responsibility of the newly elected Board. After discussion, the Board decided to nominate Daniel Silver from the University of Toronto to take the seat. I am pleased to inform you that Daniel accepted this nomination and will join the Board.

At the last Board meeting we discussed possibilities of strengthening our committee within the ISA. The Board agreed that facilitating and fostering networking and collaboration among the RC03 members that would result in common publications and research is our priority. Some proposals regarding this issue will be sent out to you shortly for your feedback. We also discussed several ideas of promoting and developing the RC03.

## Announcements

1. Call for participation in **Re-Co-wide Webinar Series** is open! Join the Working Group!
2. Apply for the **Research Network and the Co-organized Activities**. Enhance collaboration between members!
3. **EDI** (equity, diversity, and inclusion) **Charter** has been approved by ISA research Council.
4. **ESA Conference** in Porto, Portugal, 27-30 of August.
5. **ISA Forum**, Marrakesh 7-11 July, 2025

Clemente Navarro and I will be working on a proposal to organise a **summer school in urban research methods** for PhD and postgraduate students. The first edition will be a pilot and will be dedicated to research in the paradigm of urban scenes theory, which is being developed by several members of our committee. If you would like to join the working group on the summer school, please contact me ([marta.kleotko@us.edu.pl](mailto:marta.kleotko@us.edu.pl)). Francesca Donati and Alicia Domínguez González will work on our presence in the social media and will develop our website. If you have any suggestions, ideas or want to help with this, please contact Francesca: [f.donati12@campus.unimib.it](mailto:f.donati12@campus.unimib.it).

The RC03 Board recognizes the importance of your input on future ISA congresses. **Wonho Jang** has been designated to attend to **the XX World Congress Program Organisers Survey Report** and provide

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## Letter from the President (Continued)

feedback as well as suggestions for improvements in organization of ISA congresses. Wonho will also collaborate with RC03 members in suggesting sessions for the upcoming ISA congress. If you have any suggestions related to these issues or would like to support Wonho in his efforts, please contact him directly ([wjang@uos.ac.kr](mailto:wjang@uos.ac.kr)).

As we continue to strengthen our Research Committee, I would like to remind you about the ongoing initiatives which were established at the end of the last term to foster collaboration among RC03 members: **Research Networks and the Co-organized Activities**. The first initiative provides an opportunity for researchers interested in a common theme or doing research in a specific stream to set up a platform for research collaboration. The second, on the other hand, supports RC03 members in taking joint actions. Both initiatives are thought to encourage members to collaborate across disciplines, regions, and research interests to create innovative and impactful proposals. The RC03 Board believes that they provide an excellent opportunity to showcase the diversity and richness of our community research endeavours. The Board will support any such initiatives, facilitating networking and ensuring that they are widely disseminated to RC03 members and on the committee's website. At the end of the letter, you will find the full text of the resolution establishing the two initiatives, as well as the forms necessary to apply for co-organised activity or research network. I strongly encourage you to read the details of these initiatives and consider engaging in them by submitting proposals to our Secretary/Treasurer Johann Zaaiman ([johan.zaaiman@nwu.ac.za](mailto:johan.zaaiman@nwu.ac.za)).

I am happy to inform you that in the pursuit for equity, diversity and inclusion the **ISA Research Council has**

**approved the EDI Charter**, the document that sets up the guidelines for good practice as well as provides tools for reporting and counteracting any malpractice within ISA. The document will now be proceeded by the Executive Committee. I would like to thank Maria Jesus Rodriguez Garcia and Francesca Donati from our Board for their work on the document on the part of the RC03. I would also like to thank Debra Davidson from the Research Coordinating Committee for her lead on this initiative.

During January meeting, the ISA Research Council presented the **ReCo-wide Webinar Series proposal**. Its purpose is to organize a series of cross-cutting seminars that would be of interest to ISA members and would facilitate cross-RC collaboration. The seminars would be recorded and made available to ISA members who could use them in their teaching or other forms of training/engagement. The Research Council have just announced a call for participation in a Working Group, which will begin to meet on a regular basis to prepare the detailed proposal for Webinar Series. The members of the Working Group will participate in meetings of the Working Group, contribute to writing of the Webinar Series Concept Note, the guidelines for content, format and use of the Webinars as well as participate in writing and running of the first year's program. If you are interested in joining the working group, please respond directly to Allison-Marie Loconto ([allison-marie.loconto@univ-eiffel.fr](mailto:allison-marie.loconto@univ-eiffel.fr)) by 15 February 2024.

Your active participation in the aforementioned initiatives is crucial to their success. **Let's work together to make meaningful contributions to the field of community research**. If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to reach out to the RC03 Board.

Thank you for your dedication to advancing community research within the International Sociological Association.

Yours sincerely,

*Marta Klekotko, President of the RC03*

# Cities as Spaces of Sociability

By Meng XU and Mervyn HORGAN

University of Guelph, Canada

(For more information on the Sociable Cities Project, please visit: <https://www.sociablecities.uoguelph.ca/>)

When we think about cities, it is often in terms of population density, complex networks of political, economic, social, and cultural resources, and their status as centers of both power and inequality. While cities are all of these things and more, at the level of everyday experience, cities are also spaces of everyday interaction between strangers. While sometimes fraught, these interactions are often sociable, running the gamut from providing directions to lost passers-by, helping newcomers to use a printer at a library, exchanging a few words with the person next to us in a lineup, or maybe a friendly nod to a familiar stranger in a park. These mundane interactions beyond the private sphere animate the everyday life of public spaces: sociability between strangers brings color, rhythm, and sometimes even joy to everyday urban life.

Funded by Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), The Sociable Cities Project examines interactions between strangers in Canadian public spaces. Led by Mervyn Horgan and Saara Liinamaa at the University of Guelph, alongside a team of past and present postdoctoral and graduate student researchers, the project draws on a range of methods, including naturalistic/participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and interdisciplinary knowledge-sharing panels to explore the dynamics and complexity of sociability in a diverse range of urban spaces. So far these have included public outdoor ice rinks, libraries, skateparks, sidewalks, and parks. Focusing on the endogenous interactional organization of urban collective life, we investigate the condition and potentiality of public spaces as forms of social infrastructure in promoting everyday sociable encounters.

In a world wracked by deep divisions and looming crises

on multiple fronts, a focus on everyday sociability may seem trivial at first glance. This focus matters though, as we develop a distinctive approach concerned with examining how sociability is generated and what it generates in our increasingly dense and diverse urban milieux. Based on our work over the last four years, we present three key insights into understanding public spaces as spaces of sociability.



Pandemic-facilitated sociability. Photo: Keira Burton on [Pexels](#)

## **Physical copresence is central**

Despite living in a digital world, physical spaces of copresence still matter. Digital technologies certainly open up possibilities for people to connect with one another in ways that transcend the limitations of any particular physical location. Nonetheless, we contend that the exponential increase in virtual social contact and relationships is of a different order, and so cannot replace copresent sociability in shared physical spaces in everyday urban life. We are embodied beings and physical proximity still matters. Moreover, there is mounting evidence that when mediated through information and communication technologies, people's interactions have a stronger tendency to align along partisan lines, deepening political polarization and jeopardizing everyday pluralism (Törnberg 2022). By contrast, the gathering-togetherness of shared physical spaces provides urban inhabitants with opportunities to

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## Cities as Spaces of Sociability (Continued)

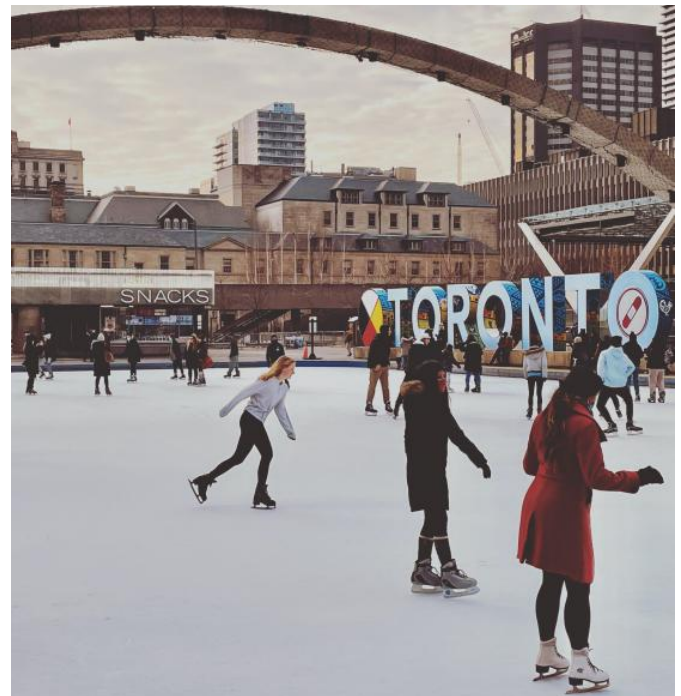
stretch themselves socially, thereby increasing their capacity to dwell amongst others bearing differences and enhancing individual and collective well-being (Anderson 2011). Bringing together over two dozen international urban social scientists in a series of panel discussions, our Spaces of Sociability report (Horgan et al. 2022) synthesized existing research on copresence and sociability. We reiterated the central role of public institutions, ambiguously public spaces, and the public realm as spaces of physical copresence in potentiating and facilitating social connections beyond primary relations in our urban life.

### **Urban sociability is contextually and situationally bounded**

Sociability reveals its forms, unfolds its patterns, and moves in directions propelled by various intersecting logics in different contexts and situations. Urban sociability emerges from tangible interpersonal interactions within concrete person-environment relationships. Thus it always condenses specific connections amongst embodied people, particular temporal-spatial features, and distinct social-cultural milieus. Unlike traditional approaches primarily concerned with developing decontextualized understandings of generic social processes of urban encounters, we work to account for variations in the endogenous organization of communal life in contextually sensitive ways. In this regard, our study of public spaces during the pandemic (Horgan et al. forthcoming) investigated how people improvised to negotiate new rituals, norms, and meanings of interaction around mask-wearing and physical distancing amidst pandemic uncertainties. Based on a series of interviews conducted during the pandemic, we proposed the concept of “pandemic facilitated interaction” to encapsulate the COVID-19 context not merely as a shared global predicament but also as a contextually-bounded and spatially-situated common ground fostering new forms and moments of sociability across different public spaces.

### **The pleasurable texture of public spaces**

Everyday interactions with strangers in public spaces are largely civil, mostly indifferent, and often convivial. News media often connect coverage of public spaces to heightened social problems, community crises, and catastrophic events. Likewise, difference-driven tensions, conflicts, and their implications and solutions are the foremost concerns of many social scientists. Yet, from the vantage of everyday life, for many the story of tension and conflict is incongruent with quotidian urban experience. Counterproductively, it may even hinder us from analyzing the social texture of our increasingly diverse urban milieus. Taking an alternative route, we tap into the lived social experiences of urban spaces by focusing on everyday sociability. For example, in our study of two freely-accessible public outdoor ice rinks, we documented and analyzed both material and social elements that facilitate positive interactions across lines of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and skill (Horgan et al. 2020; Liinamaa et al. 2021). We proposed that these ice rinks serve as a kind of soft infrastructure of sociability where unpanicked multiculturalism is enacted through the practice of learning to skate and various activities on and around the ice.



Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto. Photo: S A on [Pexels](#)

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## Cities as Spaces of Sociability (Continued)

Overall, our approach treats cities as spaces of sociability by emphasizing the centrality of physical copresence, the contextual situatedness of urban sociability, and the pleasurable textures of public spaces. However, ours is not simply a blinkered celebration reinforcing a romanticized view of social harmony. Nor do we claim that sociable cities are some kind of panacea that eradicates systemic urban oppression. As both the production and the use of urban spaces are embedded within broader structural power relations, urban sociability is bound up with the reproduction of inequalities and injustices and can perpetuate or counteract systems of privilege and disadvantage (Horgan and Liinamaa 2023). Sociability is far from being the opposite of the messy reality of urban exclusion; rather, by centering sociability, we develop a novel perspective for looking anew at how the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion shape and are shaped by everyday social experience.

Conceptualizing cities as spaces of sociability highlights a wide range of taken-for-granted spaces where inhabitants compose the quotidian rhythms of urban collective life. Studying cities as spaces of sociability enlarges our scope to explore the possibilities for people from widely divergent backgrounds to negotiate a sense of trust, community, and solidarity in the course of their everyday lives. Approaching cities as spaces of sociability is one way to make our cities more livable and meaningful, and to enhance a sense of belonging to a broader community with whom we share the spaces of everyday urban life.

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## 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](mailto:adomgon1@upo.es) or [f.donati12@campus.unimib.it](mailto:f.donati12@campus.unimib.it)