



The Open  
University



AARHUS UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF AGROECOLOGY



ΓΕΩΠΟΝΙΚΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ  
AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS



University of Natural Resources  
and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna

# 13<sup>th</sup> European IFSA Symposium

Farming systems: facing uncertainties and enhancing opportunities

CHANIA, CRETE, GREECE

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## PhD course announcement

29<sup>th</sup> June to 5<sup>th</sup> July 2018, including 4 days of IFSA Symposium

### Systems Thinking in Practice (STiP) in PhD Research Appreciating uncertainties and opportunities and knowing how to act with Farming Systems Research (4 ECTS)<sup>1</sup>

#### Objectives

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Research has a key role to play in appreciating and knowing how to act in relation to uncertainties and potential opportunities relating to farming, food, rural areas and environment. Farming Systems Research uses systems thinking to focus on particular systems of interest, to be able to make relevant connections, to work with multiple stakeholders and to contextualize research activities without becoming overwhelmed by potential complexity and uncertainty. The contexts of: the increasingly multifaceted complexity of issues of sustainability, water, food and soil security and climate change in relation to food and fibre production and consumption; the maintenance or enhancement of ecosystems services and the concomitant enhancement of rural livelihoods are particularly challenging for PhD research. These contexts are, however, a core part of the IFSA community's experience. The purpose of this course is to help you, the PhD student, develop your STiP skills in contextualizing your research, to make connections among issues using systems thinking and to so improve your ability to work both strategically and purposefully in relation to transformations. The course is also designed to help you build on what other researchers have done.

Through joining this course you will:

- gain an overview of the intellectual traditions of Farming Systems Research
- make links to the history of IFSA
- strengthen your research through developing understanding of systems theories and methodologies

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<sup>1</sup> The certificate for 4 ECTS will be issued by Aarhus University



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- have opportunity to reflect on strengths and weaknesses of different systems approaches and methodologies in relation to your own PhD research
- get added value from your participation in the Symposium at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania by also becoming part of a parallel critical learning systems community that has a PhD research focus
- critically review potential contributions of your research to help meet agrifood challenges
- develop appreciation of multiple perspectives on contemporary issues
- work across multiple disciplines
- build and/or strengthen personal networks within the research community

## Process

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The course will be integrated with the 13<sup>th</sup> European IFSA Symposium and draw on the gathering of specialists and researchers within this field. Its design draws on tried and tested ways of experiential learning. The course will be grounded in examples, including your own and other students' PhD work.

In your time in Chania you will participate in an inquiry with three main parts: before, during, and after the symposium. It will also involve some preparation and submission of a final reflection.

1. *Before the course*, you will be asked to complete an assignment in which you describe and reflect on either (i) your understanding and use of system theories in your research; or (ii) the rationale you have followed, or would follow, in making a choice to include, or not, systems theories in your PhD research.
2. The pre-symposium part of the course will be offered in a workshop format consisting of a mixture of student presentations, lecture inputs and group work. It will take place over two and half days *starting on the morning of Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June at 09:00 hrs and finishing at 15:00 hrs on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July*.
3. During the symposium you will attend workshops of your own choosing. As part of the course, you will also have two sessions that will provide an opportunity for joint reflection and feedback as the symposium progresses. You will work with other participants to provide feedback to the symposium in the IFSA2018 closing session.
4. After the symposium, *on the afternoon and early evening of Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> July* you and the other students will gather to recapitulate and work in groups, and complete the assignment that has been agreed, on possible improvements of your own PhD study design, or future research trajectory, linking it to systems thinking in practice. *The course will end by 19:00 hrs*.

An on-line platform ([learn.boku.ac.at](http://learn.boku.ac.at)) will be used for uploading your assignments and for discussions between participants before, during, and after the symposium.



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## Ties to the IFSA Symposium

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This PhD course will benefit strongly from the fact that many outstanding researchers within farming system approaches will be gathered at the Symposium of the International Farming Systems Association ([www.ifsa2018.gr](http://www.ifsa2018.gr)). Contributions specifically to this course will come from experienced researchers who have been a part of the IFSA community for many years. They will include lectures and/or workshops that

- introduce systems theories
- consider different systems approaches and methodologies suitable for researching issues of farming, food, rural areas, and environment
- critically review the role of researchers
- explore how to handle complexity and the role that systems tools and methods can play in research
- critically review focuses on action, learning and reflexivity
- explicate learning systems approaches
- consider how system approaches can be applied in your own research situation

## Literature for the course

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- Blackmore, Chris (Ed.) (2010). *Social learning systems and communities of practice*. Springer: London.
- Darnhofer, Ika, David Gibbon and Benoit Dedieu (2012). *The farming systems approach into the 21st century: The new dynamic*. Springer: Dordrecht.
- Ison, Ray (2010). *Systems practice: How to act in a climate-change world*. Springer: London.
- Ramage, Manus and Karen Shipp (2009). *Systems thinkers*. Springer: London.
- Reynolds, Martin and Sue Holwell (2010). *Systems approaches to managing change*. Springer: London.
- Sriskandarajah, N., N. Giva, and H.P. Hansen (2016). bridging divides through spaces of change: action research for cultivating the commons in human-inhabited protected areas in Nicaragua and Mozambique. In: H.P. Hansen, B.S. Nielsen, N. Sriskandarajah, E. Gunnarsson (eds). *Commons, sustainability, democratization: Action research and the basic renewal of society*, Routledge.

Key reading material will be provided on the on-line platform.

## Course assessment

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To obtain the course certificate you will be required to:

- complete the assignments before the course and after the symposium
- participate in the lectures and group discussions
- participate in one or more of the workshops of the IFSA symposium
- work in group and present a feedback at the closing session of the IFSA symposium
- after the symposium, discuss improvements to your own PhD study, or future research trajectory design linking it to systems thinking and practice.



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## Registration for the course

If you want to participate in the course, please send an email to Ika Darnhofer, briefly (5-6 sentences) describing your background and what you expect from the course, i.e. how might it contribute to your research.

Contact: Ika Darnhofer (ika.darnhofer@boku.ac.at)

There will be a fee of 120 Euros for this course, in addition to the symposium registration fee and your accommodation fee. All fees will be charged when you register for the IFSA Symposium: [IFSA 2018 - Registration website](#)

## Core course team

Associate Professor **Ika Darnhofer**, Univ. of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Austria

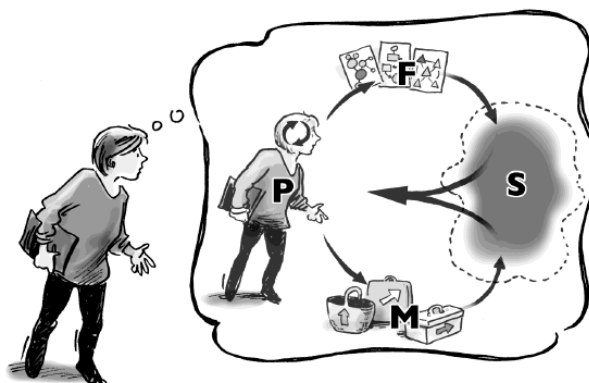
Senior Lecturer **Chris Blackmore**, The Open University Applied Systems Thinking in Practice Group, UK

Professor **Nadarajah Sriskandarajah**, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Senior Scientist **Chris Kjeldsen**, Aarhus University, Denmark

Professor **Alex Koutsouris**, Agricultural University of Athens, Greece

Professor **Ray Ison**, The Open University Applied Systems Thinking in Practice Group, UK  
(Ray Ison may not be present in Chania)



*During the course, you, as a research practitioner (P) will learn to use various conceptual frameworks (F) and methods (M) to assess your system of interest (S). While doing so, you will reflect on your own practice.*