

ISAHP2020 Virtual Conference

Rozann Saaty



Participants from more than 30 countries attended the first virtual conference of the International Symposium of the AHP (ISAHP) on December 3-6, 2020, sponsored by the Creative Decisions Foundation. It was the 16th ISAHP conference since the first that was held in 1988 at Tianjin University, Tianjin, China. The ISAHP2020 is a biennial event that takes place during even years, but it was cancelled in January because of Covid-19 fears. The conference was brought back to life in late summer when the board of the Creative Decisions Foundation agreed to sponsor a virtual conference in December. Planning a conference usually takes much more than the few months that remained until the end of the year, so expectations were modest, but the AHP community rose to support it in a major way.

The Organizing Committee

Dr. Enrique Mu, Professor and University Faculty Research Officer at Carlow University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA, served as the Chair of ISAHP2020 and was responsible for the event overall. He also served as the Chair of the ISAHP2014 conference in Washington, D.C. Dr. Elena Rokou, Executive Research Director of the Creative Decisions Foundation, planned the meeting. Dr. Antonella Petrillo, Professor at the University of Naples “Parthenope” (Department of Engineering) where she conducts research activities on multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA), was the program co-chair. Dr. Lirong Wei, New York, NY, was the manager, and Dr. Birsen Karpak, Distinguished Professor at Youngstown State University, Ohio, headed the scientific committee. Rozann Saaty, as president of the Creative Decisions Foundation, provided the funds for the event and shared her ISAHP know-how. It was a real team effort with a participatory decision-making process. Thanks to this team for the excellent conference that they organized in the record time of four months!

The theme of the conference was “The Next Generation” and many young people and first-timers attended. Special sessions were scheduled so students at the Masters and PhD level could make presentations.

Zoom, the cloud platform, provided visual and audio communication for the conference. The participants handled everything better than anyone could have expected. Still, Margarita Delgado, PhD, and Gabriel Conzuelo, PhD, from the University of Pittsburgh, provided technical support to the session chairs and presenters.

The Workshops

Six pre-conference workshops were given on December 3rd. The workshops were a rare opportunity for attendees to meet, engage with, and learn with some of the most prominent people in the AHP community, see below. Here is the link to the videos of the workshops on YouTube:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_J2c3IKvyPXx0zLO1v4j4Da_UcAljWWY

The Workshop Presenters



Orrin Cooper
Sensitivity Analysis



Luis Vargas
Negotiation



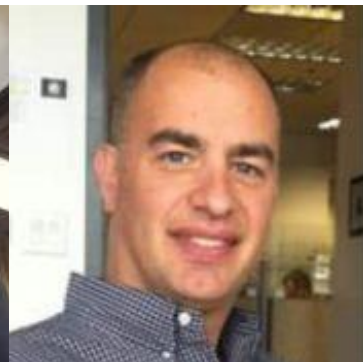
Enrique Mu
Getting Your Papers
Published



William Adams
ANP Row Sensitivity



Elena Rokou
Benefits, Opportunities,
Costs and Risks
Calculations Demystified.



Daniel Saaty
Facilitating Group
Decisions

Orrin Cooper gave the workshop on “Sensitivity Analysis.” Orrin is Assistant Professor in the Department of Marketing and Supply Chain Management at the University of Memphis in Tennessee. He obtained his PhD in Decision Science and Operations Management at the University of Pittsburgh with Thomas L. Saaty as his advisor.

Luis Vargas gave the workshop on “How to Conduct a Negotiation using AHP.” Luis Vargas is a Professor at the Katz School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh. He holds a PhD in Mathematics from the University of Sevilla (Spain) and received the Juan March Foundation Scholarship in Spain, which enabled him to move to the University of Pennsylvania in 1976-78 where he studied under Thomas Saaty and obtained a second PhD. He worked with Tom throughout his life, co-authoring numerous papers and books

William Adams, currently the Director of Algorithms at the software company Decision Lens, Inc., gave a workshop titled “The How and Whys of ANP Row Sensitivity.” Dr. Adams holds a PhD in Algebraic Geometry, with more than 20 years of experience designing mathematical software. Bill designed and implemented the SuperDecisions ANP software for the Creative Decisions Foundation.

Enrique Mu’s workshop was titled “How to Improve Your Chance of Getting Your AHP/ANP Paper Published.” Dr. Mu is the University Faculty Research Officer at Carlow University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He obtained his PhD from the University of Pittsburgh where he was a close colleague of Tom Saaty. Enrique is the Editor-in-Chief and founder of the *International Journal for the Analytic Hierarchy Process (IJAHP)*, which means he is well-qualified to offer advice on publishing papers on the AHP.

Elena Rokou, Chief Research Officer at the Creative Decisions Foundation, the AHP/ANP research institute funded by Dr. Thomas Saaty, offered a workshop titled “Demystifying Benefits-Opportunities-Costs-Risks in ANP Calculations.” Dr. Rokou holds a PhD degree in the field of operational research from the National Technical University of Athens. She specializes in project scheduling, optimization algorithms, and ANP and group decision making.

Daniel Saaty, Thomas L. Saaty’s son, is the Chief Scientist and co-founder of the Decision Lens software company along with his brother John. Dan’s workshop was on “Facilitating Group Decision-making.” Dan is an expert in the implementation of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) and Analytic Network Process (ANP) as well as having over 20 years of experience in developing and implementing advanced decision methodologies.

The Speakers

The conference hosted an invited keynote speaker and two plenary speakers as follows:



*Blaženka Divjak
Keynote Speaker*

Dr. Blaženka Divjak of the University of Zagreb in Varaždin, Croatia, gave the keynote address “Leadership in Complex and Chaotic Situations.” She was the Croatian Minister for Science and Education from June 2017 to July 2020 and is the author of over 150 scientific and professional papers, including articles in multi-criteria decision-making (AHP/ANP). Dr. Divjak gave a fascinating talk about the rapid decisions the government in Croatia had to make during the complex and chaotic upheaval of the Covid-19 virus in 2020. Her previous experience in education was invaluable as Croatia planned and successfully shifted from classroom teaching to a mix of online and hybrid courses. The video of her talk is available on the Creative Decisions Foundation [YouTube channel](#).



*Alessio Ishizaka
Plenary Address*

Alessio Ishizaka gave a plenary address titled “Three Developments of the Analytic Hierarchy Process: Calibrated Fuzzy AHP, AHPSort and Group Analytic Hierarchy Process Ordering (GAHPO).” Professor Ishizaka is Head of the Information Systems, Supply Chain and Decision-making Department and Full Professor in Decision Analysis at NEOMA Business School, Ecole de Commerce & Management, France. His research is in the area of decision analysis, where he has published more than 100 papers and is the author of a key textbook, *Multicriteria Decision Analysis*. Professor Ishizaka is one of the most qualified people in the AHP community to talk about approaches that combine AHP with other decision-making methods.



*Bill Wedley
Plenary Address*

William C. Wedley gave a plenary address titled “AHP/ANP: Issues and Insights for the Future.” Dr. Wedley is Professor Emeritus of the Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada, where he specializes in operations management and decision making. He attended the first ISAHP conference in Tianjin, China, in 1988, and was also the chair of the 1996 ISAHP conference in Vancouver, Canada. He spoke about the AHP/ANP providing a comprehensive procedure for capturing the intensities of different properties on a ratio scale and then combining multiple such scales into a meaningful multi-criteria decision. The ratio feature, ease of use, and flexibility to measure many phenomena, has allowed the AHP/ANP to become the dominant MCDM procedure. During the last five minutes there was an interesting scholarly discussion between Bill and Luis Vargas. The video is posted on Creative Decisions Foundation’s YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/t-5WDIJXaug>.

The Sessions

The conference included 130 attendees, 72 presentations, including 9 posters that were organized into 19 sessions with two parallel sessions at each time. The conference schedule was limited to between 8am – 2pm (US Eastern Time) in order to offer the best possible availability to participants from other time zones. The online conference had positive aspects which included that the Powerpoint presentations were easier to see on one’s own computer, the audio was better than in the usual meeting room at a conference, and it was less costly for both the attendees and their organizations with no transportation, lodging or food costs. Universities will save a significant amount of money in the future by having their people attend virtual conferences instead of live ones. The less positive side was that participants missed the social interaction afforded by coffee breaks, lunches, and gala dinners, and the chance to visit a foreign country. In future meetings, virtual hangout rooms offered by Zoom might partially suffice for socializing, though individuals would need to bring their own beverages.

All of the videos from the conference are available on Creative Decisions Foundation’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQheyejzvJjXsewVg06V2yg>. Select the Playlist tab to find the videos well-organized into categories of speeches, workshops and presentations.

Poster sessions were held during the last hour on Friday and Saturday of the conference. These, again, surpassed expectations. Young people had been invited and encouraged to make poster presentations and we are proud of the polished way they performed in public. New AHP software apps were demonstrated during one poster session.

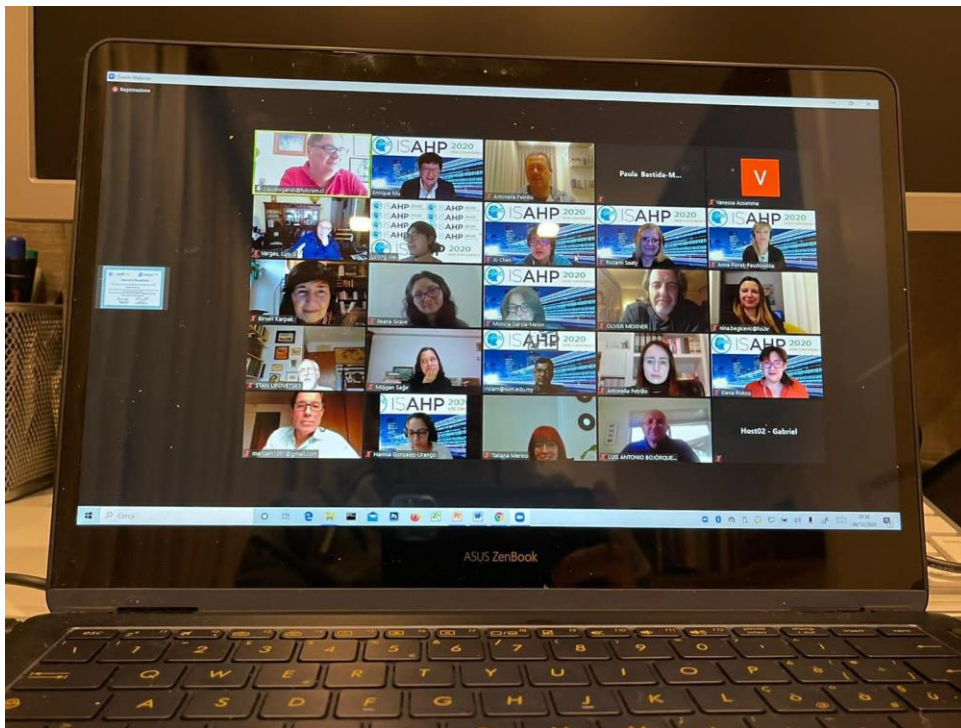
A new addition to the ISAHP events was a student roundtable in which undergraduate and graduate students discussed the benefits and challenges of learning the AHP during

their coursework. This roundtable was co-chaired by Dr. Enrique Mu (Carlow University), Dr. Elena Rokou (University of Pittsburgh) and Dr. Anna Florek (CENTRUM, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú) who invited their students to join in this lively discussion. The success of this experience may lead to similar roundtables becoming part of the program in meetings in the future.

The Closing Ceremony

During the last session on Sunday, best paper awards were presented and awards were given to the track chairs for their service. Each ISAHP awardee was able to say, “Hi,” while being on the screen as they received their award

ISAHP2020 was an academic success, but just as importantly, it was a great AHP/ANP community success!



ISAHP2020 participants saying, “Hi and Farewell until 2022”¹

¹ This screenshot shows the international nature of ISAHP2020. The 24 participants in the picture are from the USA, Italy, Chile, China, Perú, Malaysia, Mexico, Spain, Croatia, Turkey and others.