

## **Interview**

**Radio France International.**

**Program: The World of Science.**

**Journalist: Ivonne Sanchez.**

**Interviewee: Alin Ake-Kob**

**Recorded at RFI headquarters in Paris, the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2022. Broadcasted the 6<sup>th</sup> of May at 12:15.**

**Topics: The role of the social sciences for the study of new technologies. Care work at the end-of-life and the use of sensors in Norway. Ethical, legal, and social aspects, COST report.**

### **Audio transcription : Alin Ake-Kob: the social sciences and the new technologies.**

Journalist: Alin Ake-Kob is Mexican but she has completed a relevant part of her education abroad. She spent several months in the North of Norway, in the Arctic Circle, carrying out observations for her doctoral research in the care services for people at the end-of-life. The starting point of her research was a group of sensors that sends alarms when a person falls or performs an unexpected movement. But what she wanted to inquire the most was the role of the social sciences in relation to new technologies. She came to our radio studios to talk about this topic.

Interviewee: My name is Alin Ake-Kob, I am PhD Candidate in Sociology at Nord University. I have received scientific training during my master degree in research at The University of Edinburgh, and previously I studied in Mexico Human Communication, and also Law at UNAM. Currently I conduct a research about the use of sensors in care facilities for people at the end-of-life, as well as the home services for this people, very aged. I am also member of the European Association in Science and Technology through a scientific network whose aim is to exchange knowledge about society, technology, and the development of these sensors.

Journalist: We have invited you to talk about a very interesting topic, how do social sciences can be applied as well for the study of technology. You have been studying as well your PhD in the north of Norway, could you talk about how the social sciences can be combined with science, technology and even with health?

Interviewee: Yes, the social sciences will approach technology, well generally when people talk about technology people associate the topic with engineering degrees, but the social sciences contribute with an understanding that goes further of a technical understanding like in an engineering degree. Social sciences will answer not if it is technically possible to develop an artefact or technological system, but will pose questions like “why is this going to be developed?”, “for what is this going to be developed?”. After all, technology has an object which is the human being, sociology studies human beings or the social sciences study human beings in groups,

communities of human beings, therefore, technology is not an objective in itself, but a media for a community, a society. Social sciences are very relevant in this moment that we are living of fast technology development in order to answer these questions that go beyond a mere technical aspect.

Journalist: Concretely you were interested in some artefacts, sensors, could you talk about what you chose to study.

Interviewee: Yes, at this moment Europe is facing a demographic change, an important segment of society will be very aged. Thus, the European Commission and different countries in Europe have implemented a plan to develop different type of technologies so that very aged people, very aged as a general concept, can conduct their everyday life without the need of a lot of help, with autonomy. It is a broad umbrella of technologies which are being developed, I selected to observe the use of a movement sensor that can send alarms if it detects a fall or any kind of movement. So how this sensor was being used in care facilities and home services in Norway? However, when applying the methods of the social sciences, because this is the important part of the contribution of the social sciences, to the field of technology. So when applying the method of anthropology, ethnographic, or participant observation, meaning that I went, and I became part of a group of health and care workers, being part of the group, I realized that the people for whom the sensor was being used, were people at the end-of-life.

Human life, understood as a cycle or a process has different stages, and I observed that this stage that would be the object, or the context of the use of this technology, is the stage of end-of-life. Then, yes, I started my research driven by the curiosity of “why is this being developed?”, precisely the typical questions of social sciences, “why is this sensor being developed?”, “for what?”, “and what is the effect, or what changes, positive or negative, will have or had in this community, group of health and care workers. That’s why I am doing in my PhD.

Journalist: Then, these sensors, allegedly or theoretically, were put into use to send an alarm if a very aged person fell down. So that people knew. However you found out that the context was different, there were not very aged, but at the end-of-life. And that maybe changes the objective of this technology?

Interviewee: Yes indeed it changed different things in the research, I had to search different theories, the focus changed. This is why it is important that the methods of social sciences, and the methods of natural sciences and engineering degrees complement each other. So that we can develop an understanding of the society and human groups more complete, integral, and that the human being is not seen only and merely as a biological entity, nor technology merely as a technical instrument. Technology is always seen as something that will make processes more efficient, or will make a group more efficient, but when you incorporate the methods of the social sciences, we can reflect in a more profound way about “why are we going to make it more efficient?” “If we apply this technology in this working place, in this care facility, in this school, what is it going to change? And why are we going to do it?” So that we can have a more critical perspective, more balanced, about the use of technology.

Journalist: I would also like to mention that a chapter of this study was to come to France to use a library, very peculiar, right?

Interviewee: Yes, the people working in that library in the information and data management services, helped me a lot through conversations that we held, and with specialized searches that they helped me to do. The place is the end-of-life and palliative care library. And it was an essential help so that I could theorize the fieldwork and what I observed in Norway.

Journalist: I would like to conclude with something, you are Mexican, you did a fieldwork in Norway and a theoretical part or a documentation part in France. Which is your point of view, from the point of view of the social sciences, about the care for very aged people and care for people at the end-of-life. Is it very different? What would be your point of view or what did you learn in general?

Interviewee: That is very important to identify that there are very aged people and that there are people at the end-of-life, that they could be people from different ages, because the end-of-life is a human circumstance, we all human beings will arrive to that circumstance, only that we don't know in what way, and not even the age. Then, I consider that it is important to differentiate this stage from a plain stage of "elderhood", so that we can, first identify it, understand it scientifically, in a better way, talk about it in society, and that the people in charge of public policy can develop technology development policy in a more adequate way according to the context, according to the type of people.

Journalist: After all we are talking about people.

Interviewee: Yes, from the point of view of the social sciences technology is an instrument, any kind of technology, in health, education, media, it is an instrument. And social sciences are very relevant to study technology because they will help us to understand "for what is this instrument going to serve?" "what changes do we want with the use of this technological instrument?" thus, is a more reflective use and development of technology.

Journalist: Many thanks, thanks Alin Ake-Kob for coming to our studios. Is it a Mayan name?

Interviewee: Yes indeed.

Journalist: I was wondering that because it is a bit unusual. Alin Ake-Kob, well Rodriguez is the second last name but at the beginning it can be a bit intriguing.

Interviewee: Yes from the side of my dad I am half Mayan, all that side of the family.

Journalist: Thank you for coming to RFI.

Interviewee: Thanks to you for the invitation.

Journalist: We listened Alin Ake-Kob, PhD Candidate in Sociology at Nord University.

### **Text transcription (web page).**

What do social sciences contribute in relation to new technologies? This is what the Mexican researcher Alin Ake-Kob wanted to know. She conducted observations in the north of Norway in a care facility for people at the end-of-life where sensors had been installed. A new trend in a context where the number of elders in Europe is on the rise, but not enough people to take care of them.

Alin Ake-Kob is Mexican but she has completed an important part of her education abroad. She spent several months in the north of Norway to conduct observations for her doctoral study in the care services for people at the end-of-life.

The starting point of her study was a group of sensors that alert when a person falls or performs an unexpected movement. But what she wanted to inquire the most was the role of the social sciences in relation to new technologies.

A part of her research was written in France through the use of a library specialized in the end-of-life and palliative care. Her doctoral study has the title: "The practice of care for humans at the end-of-life in the Norwegian welfare model and its digitalization".

Alin Ake-Kob carried out observations in a community in the Arctic Circle. Thanks to this remote position she could continue her observations and interviews despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

Her study explores how the provision of care for very aged people or aged people with dementia is changing in Norway. These changes are related to modifications in the infrastructure to perform care work, as well as to the availability of human resources. These changes run parallel to an intensive implementation of digital technologies in the care services, which are funded by the state up until now.

The study focuses in the implementation of a type of movement sensor with audio and video functionalities in private spaces of people at the end-of-life. The introduction of digital technologies in the care services of Norway is related with the downscaling of the Norwegian welfare model, which like in other countries of Europe, is giving back to the family a central role in the care responsibilities for very aged people with or without dementia.

Some months ago a group of researchers of an European network published a report for the European Commission about Ethical, Legal, and Social aspects related to the use of the sensors with audio and video functionalities. Alin Ake-Kob points out that even if the sensors may help people at the end-of-life in terms of autonomy, it is first necessary to question why and for what. It is here where the social sciences can contribute with a reflection about this social predicament, the increase of people at the end-of-life, the care they need, and the new technologies. It is important not to forget that behind all these variables, there is, a human being.

Interviewee: Alin Ake-Kob, PhD Candidate at Nord University. Alin Ake-Kob holds a Master degree by research in Science and Technology Studies from The University of Edinburgh, a Bachelor degree in Communications and a Bachelor degree in Law from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She is member of the European Cooperation in Science and Technology through the scientific network on Privacy and Ambient Assisted Living Technologies. She is also digital lecturer at UNAM, Faculty of Social Sciences.