

Letter from the President of LASA, Gioconda Herrera

Quito, June 1, 2020

Dear LASA Members,

Today I began my term as President of the Association in a difficult context for the region. These are painful times for our societies and times of great uncertainty for our academic community. In our region, COVID-19 has had heartbreaking consequences for the most disadvantaged, exacerbated already existing inequalities and devastated economies. The Latino community in the United States, which has such a strong presence in our Association, is also one of the hardest hit by the pandemic—its members now face extremely elevated mortality rates and enormous difficulties for the reproduction of their lives. Our Latin American diasporas in Europe have also faced great difficulties, especially in Italy and Spain, the migration destinations most affected by COVID-19.

These times, however, are also periods of reflection: of intense questioning of our ways of life, our unequal worlds and this new/old dimension of globalization brought to us by disease. Such a diverse, creative, and strong community as LASA cannot ignore the urgent need to continue its debates, to chart new paths and seek better worlds. Indeed, this global crisis has encouraged deep reflection on the importance of life at the center of economic and social models, and it has set forth the urgency of confronting social inequalities and the need to demand that states protect their citizens and guarantee democratic processes.

In fact, the current crisis intensifies several already-present tendencies in the region's social and political life. In recent years, Latin America and the Caribbean lived through moments of generalized social protest, and these protests had already raised several of the issues that have now taken hold. I invite you to continue these inquiries in the deliberations of our next congress, [Vancouver 2021: crisis global, desigualdades y centralidad de la vida](#).

The 2020 virtual congress demonstrated LASA's strength as an association, one that responsibly tackles the problems that come its way and works hard to offer the best possible solutions. In spite of the difficult times we found ourselves in, our last congress had 2,539 attendees, 623 sessions, and a record of spectators at the film festival.

Holding the Congress required deploying technology and logistics that were difficult to conceive of when opening our weblinks to enter and participate in discussions. This would not have been possible without the enthusiastic participation of Association members who generously embraced this new meeting modality. In times of uncertainty, LASA has been able to sustain the bonds between its members, which are critical at this time. We know, however, that a significant portion of our membership could not participate in this virtual experience for many reasons, and that we must work to overcome the obstacles that hindered full participation.

If current trends continue, the next Congress will have to be equally imaginative. Of course, we want the largest possible number of people in Vancouver. To achieve this, we will have a significant number of grants available for students and young researchers. However, to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances, LASA's Executive Committee approved moving toward a hybrid congress during its final session on May 21 and 22, 2020. A hybrid congress will make possible in-person encounters and discussions between the members of the Association in the city of Vancouver, while ensuring the possibility to present lectures, organize sessions and attend virtually. We want the Vancouver 2021 Congress to lay out new forms of participation for its members and to stimulate academic rigor and quality in its lectures and presentations.

But our Association is much more than its Congress. For several years, LASA has sustained year-round activities propelled by its different sections: thematic, regional and by country. These actions constitute the life of the Association and require more visibility and support. In addition, as you know, one of LASA's most important projects is its open access publishing policy for both its journal, *Latin American Research Review (LARR)*, and the books from its publishing house, *Latin America Research Commons (LARC)*. This project provides academic production with a significant regional reach that the membership should value. The Association also offers grants to sustain research networks among its members, which in turn broaden the dialog between researchers and academic institutions in different countries.

The growth of LASA's membership, especially among younger people, and in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the diversification of its activities compel us to reflect on the nature of the Association's governance and sustainability. The Executive Council recognized this need and resolved in its last meeting that LASA's governance and sustainability must be at the center of consultations with members within the Association's 2020-2025 strategic planning.

Upon assuming this office, I call on everyone who makes up LASA: on those who joined several decades ago, and through their work and presence bestowed prestige on it; on young academics and students; on members from Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Europe and other regions of the globe. I call on all of our members to participate, to generate proposals and initiatives, and to work to further strengthen this unique academic community in the world. I am here for you.

Gioconda Herrera
President of LASA

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