



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Marta Soler-Gallart, President of the ESA

Introduction

During the last two years, European sociology has demonstrated its readiness to contribute to society and to social sciences to face the most unforeseen challenges. We have seen this in bringing respect towards the elderly and all human lives in a health emergency as well as in the new orientations of Horizon Europe research. It is incredible what sociologists from all over Europe and the ESA, representing all of us, have been able to achieve, turning many difficulties into amazing possibilities.

I would like to thank the current Executive Committee for the excellent collaborative work and the wonderful collegial environment which has made all the ESA accomplishments possible.

The 15th ESA Conference

We are very grateful to the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) and the Conference Committee for having a contingency plan with four possible scenarios prepared until the final decision could be made. For that, they simultaneously set agreements with local premises in Barcelona, explored technology for online and hybrid options, and contacted online event organizers. The health situation in Europe finally obliged the Executive Committee to decide for the Online Conference, which has been wonderfully organized and has met with a highly successful response on the part of ESA members and other delegates.

The 15th ESA Conference has been the largest in ESA history, with 3851 registered participants from 74 countries and 3517 papers presented. In addition, we are counting on more than 140 volunteers from all over Europe, which have also become an added value of this virtual event. There is a wonderful diversity of speakers of high excellence covering important timely topics as well as special sessions in the afternoons and evenings to adapt to the different time zones of the speakers.

Due to the digital environment, besides Twitter, we have created Facebook and Instagram accounts for the Conference, which have been active under the hashtag #ESABcn2021.

Mid-term Conferences and Summer School

During the lockdown in Spring 2020, the Executive Committee decided that the ESA should offer its members and Research Networks the infrastructure to easily turn these conferences into virtual events. The ESA purchased a Zoom plan that has been used by all the RNs which have requested for it. Furthermore, due to the permanent uncertainty faced by all, the Executive decided to allow for more flexibility in terms of timing, type of events, and eligible costs. Notwithstanding, I would like to thank the RN coordinators for the wonderful virtual mid-term conferences, which have been highly attended and very successful.

The Postgraduate Committee decided to hold the Summer School in September 2020 in Ljubljana in a hybrid mode, due to reduced numbers and sanitary restrictions. Nine students were able to travel and sixteen attended online in what finally became a truly profitable academic environment for students. Due to this positive experience, the 2021 Summer School has been also organized in a hybrid format in Barcelona. Congratulations to all.

The 16th ESA Conference

The call for bids for a Conference city host had to be extended several times. The situation of uncertainty with the pandemic made it very difficult for potential proposers to take a step forward. Consequently, the Executive Committee decided to postpone this decision to the next term and the 2021-2023 Executive.

Publications

In the Fall of 2019, the ESA faced a big problem: there had been a tender to move the ESA journals to a new publisher, but the contract previously signed with the current publisher had a clause that required compensation in case of transferring rights. For that, the association would have to pay more than 100,000 pounds to Taylor & Francis (for the compensation and digital archive). After a difficult negotiation, an agreement was reached in which services from T&F have improved and the ESA will be free to move to a new publisher without any charge by 2024. My gratitude to the Publications Committee for this achievement.

In the meantime, both *European Societies* and the *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* have advanced significantly in terms of readership and impact factors, thanks to the wonderful task of the editors. The Publications Committee has worked in close collaboration with the journal editors, who have been involved in meetings and strategic decision-making. Due to the changing landscape of the publication arena towards Open Access – especially in Europe with PlanS – the Committee has operated in the direction of moving the two ESA journals to full Open Access by 2024. The creation of a third OA journal has been postponed to guarantee a successful OA transition of the two existing journals and to ensure that a third journal does not overlap in thematic scope with the current ones.

Moreover, thanks to the profound dedication of the Communications Committee, the ESA e-magazine *The European Sociologist* became a forum for discussion about the impacts of Covid-19 in our lives and in sociology. The call for papers on this topic was a great success, which led to two special issues under the title of “Pandemic (Im)possibilities”.

Strengthening financial transparency

The Executive Committee decided, in its first meeting in October 2019, that the ESA needed a clearer budget to be able to take informed decisions which involved spending the membership money. The Executive also decided that the ESA should make the annual balance public, in line with many democratic international organizations. This has been accomplished thanks to the gigantic efforts of the Finance Committee, in collaboration with the ESA Office. They have been able to finally clarify the fixed costs of the association and track financial information. We have now a clearer picture of how the ESA has evolved (in terms of income and expenditures) over the last years.

Strengthening ESA democracy

The Executive Committee is highly diverse, with elected members from different countries, backgrounds, RNs, and therefore democratic argumentation by all is crucial. Due to the facility for online gathering, there have been numerous meetings during this term and decisions have always been made by a majority, after deliberation. The sub-committees have met more than ever, and all the seventeen members have actively participated in collaborative work and decision-making. In February 2021 four members of the Executive decided to resign, as they did not agree with the majority, which is a right in any democracy. According to the ESA Statutes, the following most voted candidates should fill in; they all accepted and have actively participated since then in excellent collaboration.

Also thanks to online facilities, for the first time the Council of RNs has met twice before the Conference, providing crucial inputs to the Executive Committee, which have also become an added value of this virtual event

The digital technology can also help to strengthen transparency. The Executive invested in ensuring that all democratically elected members can have access to the ESA documents and archive, in order to make better informed decisions. Furthermore, the public budget will be available from now on to all ESA members.

Finally, my appreciation goes to the Policy Committee for its rigorous contributions with legal expertise. The Committee has worked on updating the ESA journal guidelines, creating an internal code of conduct, framing a new ethical guideline called for by four RNs, and formulating a few requested updates to the Statutes, in line with other international organizations like the ISA.

Strengthening the ESA Headquarters

As a result of structural obstacles in the ESA administration, the Executive Committee has worked to overcome them through the following actions:

- President and Treasurer held online weekly meetings with the Office staff.
- Inclusion in the Office of one staff member with professional experience in accounting and budgeting.
- Establishment of a systematic procedure for authorizing payments.
- Conference assistant based at the city of the Conference, to work together with the ESA Office and the Local Organizing Committee, for nine months.
- Acquisition of a cloud space to store all the ESA archive documents with transparent full access to all the members of the Executive Committee.

The biggest obstacle overcome was:

- The website, with all the tools integrated (database with membership data, integration module to Conftool, voting function, etc.), had to be upgraded from Drupal 7 to Drupal 9. This upgrade created lots of errors in the system that posed huge challenges to the Office, due to previous flaws in the relationship with the web company. This has been solved with the following actions:
 - Signing of an agreement with the web company (until December 2021) through which all the source code now belongs to the ESA and the monthly services paid are clarified. My recognition goes to the Executive members involved.
 - Manual work and extra-hours in the Office.
 - Hiring support for the Office to fix errors manually.
 - Dedicating interns to fix errors manually.
 - One Executive member's full dedication on a volunteer basis (my sincere gratitude for her support).
 - New election tool system outsourced.

During the last two years, the following staff members have worked for the ESA Office. We are very grateful for their dedicated service to the ESA:

Andreia Batista: until June 2020

Myriam Meliani: July to December 2020

Dagmar Danko: until May 2021

Esmeray Yogun: from November 2020 until now

Elisabeth Torras-Gomez: January to September 2021

Gisele Tchinda: July to August 2021

Maria Vieites: August 2021

Amina Lahyani, Anna Pascual, Ignacio de Pouplana (Interns): May to August 2021

External Relations

The ESA has been actively involved with the European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH), which has been lobbying at the European Commission for the presence of social sciences in the Framework Programme of Research Horizon Europe, among other European-wide strategies. For instance, the ESA was invited to participate in a strategic meeting with publishers on OA prospects for journals in Europe.

Furthermore, in representation of the ESA, the President has been invited to participate and provide addresses at the following academic events:

- Polish Sociological Association Congress. Wroclaw, Poland, September 2019.
- Turkish Sociological Association Conference (video-recording address). September 2019.
- Conference of the Latin American Sociological Association ALAS. Lima, Peru, December 2019
- Italian Sociological Association Congress. Naples, Italy, January 2020.
- Lecture Series "Semana por la Esperanza". Centre of Latin American Studies, University of Cambridge, UK, Online, December 2020.
- ISA Forum. Online, February 2021.
- Portuguese Sociological Association Conference. Online, March 2021.

Afterword

My final words are of gratitude to all the ESA members who have been organizing academic activities, preparing conference sessions, strengthening networks, and promoting sociology across Europe. Today we are 3060 members in ESA. My recognition to all the sociologists who keep defending the democratic grounds and spirit of this wonderful association of which I am so proud to be a member myself.

Marta Soler-Gallart
President of ESA 2019-2021