



CAF

Report Annual Forum 2021

Mobilities and mobilisations:
a transatlantic prologue to a
communitarian, cosmopolitan and
connected future



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Report

Annual Forum 2021

Mobilities and mobilisations:
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"We, members of the Ibero-American community, are privileged because of how we understand each other and how we relate to each other and to the rest of the world."

Enrique Ojeda

"Our present is ethically and historically charged. We are imbued with change."

Wadah Khanfar

"It is unbelievable that at this point in the 21st century we have to confront denialism by reaffirming our adherence to reason and culture, to science, to understanding, to the dialogue that has shaped progress throughout the history of humanity."

J. L. Rodríguez Zapatero

"We must maintain an inexhaustible will to change the world's trajectory."

Rafael Heiber

Introduction

The Common Action Forum 2021 started off at Casa de América with the event *Multilateral cooperation and regional recovery post-COVID19*. Among the participants were former presidents Zapatero and Lula and UNCTAD Secretary General Rebeca Grynspan.

The diplomat and director general of Casa de América, Enrique Ojeda, expressed his pleasure at hosting a gathering "with Ibero-American participants from both languages and both sides of the Atlantic, talking together in a shared space and moving forward in the same direction", and encouraged the panelists to "reflect, think and contribute from this Ibero-American perspective, which we are so proud of and which we advocate for at all times".

Next, Wadah Khanfar, president and co-founder of the Common Action Forum, reflected on the impact of the recent crisis, urging us not to succumb to naive interpretations: "If we believe, after this pandemic and all the economic inequality and political injustice it has generated, and despite climate change, that we will be able to resume our lives as if nothing happened...we are deceiving ourselves, and we are also deceiving future generations. We are damaging the essence of our very lives," he stated.

However, the Palestinian journalist noted that we are currently witnessing a change in world order, in personal communication, in the way in which power is both organized and structured, and that this moment of change is providing us with great opportunities: "It is a change on all levels, in all sentimental aspects of the human being," he added. He concluded with a plea not to let these opportunities slip away, but to take advantage of them "for the benefit of the human race".

Finally, Rafael Heiber, executive director and co-founder of Common Action Forum, encouraged both the panelists and the audience to continue "taking action and promoting an agenda that is more urgent than ever".

"Rebuilding the world post-COVID means stating that life is the most precious good that exists and that the intellectual property that financially rewards a minority cannot take precedence over the survival of all humanity."

"We cannot accept as normal that a select group of rich white men go sightseeing into space while here on Earth millions of poor people, mainly women and Black people, continue to die of starvation."

"I am young because I have a cause, and a man or a woman who has a cause never grows old."

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, former Prime Minister of Spain, followed by speaking of the need to "stop lecturing Latin America": "When will some politicians and intellectuals realize that the problem in Latin America is not communism, but poverty. Inequalities, racism and elites insensitive to the region's problems," he asked.

Regarding the European side of the Ibero-American axis, the former president highlighted the value of the institutions leading the process of European integration: "The European Union, the European Parliament, are the democratic heritage of Humanity," he added, arguing that these mechanisms of integration are now more important than ever in a world where nation-states are no longer enough.

"The extreme right-wing populists need to understand this, or else they'd better remain in their caves alone, with all the sovereignty they want," warned the former president, expressing that they are wrong to think that sovereignty will save them from pandemics, financial crises, migration, climate change or any other global phenomenon that knows no borders.

Keynote speech: Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, former President of Brazil

Commented by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero,
former Prime Minister of Spain

Public health "apartheid": vaccines as a global public good

In his keynote speech *The importance of progressive values for post-COVID-19 recovery and for facing the global challenges of the 21st century*, former President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, agreed with the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) in his description of the current global situation as a "true vaccine apartheid". Lula pointed out the paradox that "while in rich countries there is a denialist far-right that rejects vaccination, the poorest countries struggle to have access to immunization". He also condemned the fact that, even in the midst of a global emergency, the democratization of patent rights, which could guarantee universal and equitable access to vaccines, continues to be taboo.

"The vaccines that have saved and continue to save millions of lives have been developed through the investment of public resources and should, therefore, be considered an asset of humanity," maintained the former Brazilian president. For there is another great paradox in this regard: research is mostly state-financed, but vaccine profits and ownership remain private.

Having pointed out this irrationality, da Silva continued on to the central theme of his speech: inequality. "Even when the death certificates report COVID-19 as the cause of death, it is really inequity that kills, and it kills every day," he said.

Against the fatalism of hunger and the normalization of inequality

In a context in which the 22 richest men in the world have accumulated more money than all the women in Africa, Lula da Silva noted that there is no vaccine against hunger, yet this has not prevented countries like Brazil from freeing

themselves of this problem. It is a matter of political will, explained the former president, and of being creative enough to implement measures "as simple and revolutionary as the Bolsa Familia or Beca Familia programs," he said. The Bolsa Familia is considered the largest social inclusion program in the world and, as da Silva explained, "It was not only a peaceful revolution that changed Brazil; it transformed the State into an efficient, economy-driving power." Thanks to that program, the Brazilian public sector was able to generate more than 20 million jobs with all labor rights guaranteed. "All it took was to dare to include the poor in the budget," summarized Lula.

The former president also spoke against the inertia of more than 500 years that has regarded hunger as a problem with no solution – a natural disaster of sorts, inevitable, not unlike droughts and floods. However, although we have finally come to understand that droughts and floods are associated with human actions and can be avoided, hunger is still considered an endemic evil, impossible to eradicate from some areas of the world. "Hunger remains largely considered a tragedy with which we will have to live forever, as if nothing can be done to prevent the suffering of hundreds of millions of men, women, and children," Lula lamented. He then contrasted this fatalistic point of view with the example of Brazil, where 36 million people have been lifted out of extreme poverty thanks to public policies.

"I know it well. I know the pain that hunger causes in human beings because I have experienced it personally," said Lula da Silva. "I was born in one of the poorest regions of Brazil. The son of a poor, illiterate, and struggling mother who raised her eight children alone. I faced hunger, child labor, unemployment, and injustice. I grew up with the certainty that this was not normal, that the world was not made for the enjoyment of a few and the suffering of so many. I joined the trade union

"As women we do not want to go back to the old normal. We were not doing well there. Let's build a new normality, a better one."

Rebeca Grynspar

"There are certain denialist leaders who chose the wrong path in response to the crisis. But they are already receiving a lesson from their own people, who demand security and want health."

Pedro Marques

"Not even in the worst crises, not even in the midst of a pandemic, can we put on hold the struggle for the rights of those who need them most."

Cecilia Nicolini

struggle. I founded a party. I lost four elections before being elected twice by the people to govern Brazil. I dedicated every day of my eight years in office to liberate Brazil from inequality."

Nurturing the dream to change the world: re-humanizing humanity

With the legacy of these achievements, Lula da Silva faces the future with very clear goals: "to generate jobs in sufficient quantity, with decent wages and guaranteed labor rights, so that the workers are treated as people and not as disposable algorithms".

Regarding the current global situation, the former president advocated for the need to rebuild international institutions on new foundations. "Changing the world cannot just be a juvenile dream that we forget as time goes, as we reach a more mature stage. Changing the world must always be our pledge of faith, the very reason for our existence and for embarking on an arduous and continuous struggle," he said.

Lula called for the urgent convening of a world conference, with the representation of all states and the participation of civil society, to define a new, fair, and representative global form of governance.

"I do not want to urge anyone to be more revolutionary than they already are. I don't want to urge anyone to be more radical than they already are," he clarified. "I just want to urge humanity to become humanistic again, to feel fraternity, solidarity, care, compassion towards the suffering of others. To give a hand to those who need it."

Aware that democracy "is not a pact of silence with which we have to agree" but an effervescent social process that sometimes "involves shouting", Lula

da Silva encouraged the audience to do exactly that: raise their voices and take to the streets to win the only war that deserves to be fought, the war against hunger.

"Our greatest encouragement is the certainty that the construction of another world is completely possible," he concluded.

Multilateral cooperation and regional recovery post-COVID-19

From the “belly of the beast” to a regressive recovery

CAF_2021 carried on with a panel discussion, under the title *Multilateral Cooperation and Regional Recovery Post-COVID-19*. Moderated by Rafael Heiber, executive director of Common Action Forum, the conversation began with the question of whether, after the shock of COVID-19, we have gained global skills in cooperation.

UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan began by stating that “this has been a regressive pandemic, and the recovery is proving to be even more regressive.” She warned that food insecurity is worsening due to value chain problems in maritime transport, and lamented the great global asymmetries in the response to the crisis: “Developed countries have had programs to expand their monetary and fiscal policies, but developing countries just can’t do the same. We do not have the same capacity in our central banks as the United States or Europe, which have currency reserves. We Latin American countries have not been able to do anything like that,” explained Grynspan, a native of Costa Rica.

“Europe has always been like this; progress is made in response to crises,” replied Pedro Marques, Vice-President of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. The Portuguese MEP agreed with Grynspan that inequality is shaping the way out of the crisis: “The developed world has managed to unite in terms of research and recovery, to develop vaccines and to produce them...but it has left Africa and so many parts of Latin America and the Middle East behind,” he regretted.

Cecilia Nicolini, advisor to the President of Argentina, shared her country’s experience in dealing with the unexpected pandemic: “In Argentina we already had a country in intensive

care, and the pandemic just meant we had to put it on a respirator,” she said. “We started off with a very toxic, unsustainable and irresponsible debt; with a health system that was almost bankrupt, that had been downgraded from a ministry to a secretariat; and with a science and technology sector that, despite being internationally recognized with Nobel Prizes and other awards, had also been neglected and underfunded for years,” she explained. She also shared with the audience her greatest learning experience after “having entered into the belly of the beast, that is, the pharmaceutical industry”: “One of the most important things that the pandemic has left us with is the debate on how to democratize a sector that is extremely opaque, and whose incentives are truly perverse, because the more people’s lives are at stake, the more the pharmaceutical industry has the capacity to potentially accumulate wealth”, explained Nicolini.

Digital re-primarization: data as a new commodity

Another significant topic that surfaced during the conversation was that of artificial intelligence and other new technologies. Rebeca Grynspan explained that 90 percent of the world’s data is managed by just four platforms, belonging to two countries: the United States and China. The United States controls 65%, and China the remaining 25%. “Europe is not represented. The rest of us are not represented either, and that’s the data that’s going to become the AI of the future. It’s the data of algorithms and of the new economy. It’s the data that uses us as raw material,” the Costa Rican economist explained. “We are the raw material. We are witnessing the primarization of economies again, but with our data. At least before, with traditional raw materials, we were getting paid. For our data, we don’t get paid anything,” she added.

"The pandemic has raised red flags on the tremendous inequalities that exist in the world and on the gods that humanity worships."

Marcelo Ebrard

"One of the paradoxes brought forth by the pandemic is that, while everything seemed to stop, in reality, everything was transforming rapidly."

Ximena Caraza

"The COVID-19 pandemic brought us 20 to 25 years ahead in the digital realm."

Alfonso Zegbe

Pedro Marques agreed: "Artificial intelligence is going to need much more information about us because that is where it gets its value from," he stated, adding that regulating any element of the digital society is a highly complex matter, due to its dynamic nature. "Legislation on digital platforms is very difficult because consumption, necessities, and tastes change constantly. They change from one day to the next, and regulation cannot keep up. But we are going to have to do it," he said. He also concluded that it is not a question of being afraid of the digital, but of knowing how to act to guarantee people's rights as this digital economy develops.

All the panelists agreed that, on the global stage, not everything is a zero-sum game, but that international cooperation, based on values of friendship, audacity, and solidarity, is the key mechanism required to put an end to the pandemic. And that it will not end "until the last person on the planet is vaccinated," as Nicolini said. "The great challenge we face is no longer technical, it is political," she summed up.

Revaluing the public sector and future challenges

To conclude, Cecilia Nicolini sought to debunk "the old narrative that the private sector is the one that creates value while the State only spends or distributes". The presidential advisor affirmed that this liberal belief is simply not true, that States invest in security, education, health, etc. That this creation of value has just been proven with the development of vaccines against COVID-19, which have been made possible specifically due to public investment.

Rebeca Grynspan agreed that the most valuable legacy left by the pandemic was probably the revaluation of the public sector: "We have seen the best of humanity, we have seen solidarity, we have seen mutual aid, and we have seen how hyper-individualism was not going to take us anywhere," said the UN high official.

Pedro Marques, in turn, reflected on the idea that fake news has also provided us with a useful lesson in how to behave from now on: "I believe that, in looking to the future, we must have an ambitious and courageous attitude, but at the same time the capacity to control excesses," he said.

Mobilities and mobilisations: a transatlantic prologue to a communitarian, cosmopolitan and connected future

A rebellion against cynicism

The Common Action Forum 2021, *Mobilities and mobilisations: transatlantic prologue for a communitarian, cosmopolitan and connected future*, was inaugurated by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Marcelo Ebrard. The Mexican Foreign Minister, who participated remotely while in attendance at the United States-Canada-Mexico Trilateral Summit, stated that, "This forum always raises the question of what we can do differently, of how the world in which we live could be different, which, for those of us who are engaged in political action, as well as for those who are engaged in citizen activism, is a decisive question."

"That is to say, it is a kind of reflection that forces us to commit. You can't ask a profound question if you are not willing to compromise, in different ways, to change things," said Ebrard, who concluded his message by appealing to the audience to rebel "against the cynicism that has taken hold of much of the world's intellectual establishments and political rhetoric".

Afterwards, General Director of the Casa de México Foundation in Spain, Ximena Caraza, welcomed the audience to the headquarters of the institution, where the forum was hosted. The Mexican diplomat welcomed the participants and encouraged them to imagine "with reason, audacity and a look to the future, to what our future will be like, given the many innovations and trends of our time".

Before giving the stage to Alfonso Zegbe, head of the Unit of the Executive Directorate for Strategy and Public Diplomacy of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Caraza recalled the words of another famous Mexican, renowned writer Rosa Montero: "The world moves, society moves, and the more democratic, the more mobility and the greater the capacity for change."

Zegbe, however, decided to address the conditions preceding this seminar dedicated to mobility, namely (and quite the opposite of mobility) the lockdown and restrictions on freedom of movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic that characterized the whole of 2020. "With the pandemic we all realized that housing is not just about having a roof over our heads, that being happy is not just about having enough to eat or having a job. Now, after being confined, we all yearn for a space where we can bask in the sun and listen to the birds. We long for the solidarity needed to live together with others, among neighbors, and we want all this without our freedoms being curtailed."

The Mexican diplomat ended his speech by reminding us that there is still much progress to be made in the field of human rights on a global level. "According to current forecasts, it will take 256 years to make real progress on the equality agenda," he said. This fact illustrates how far we still have to go in terms of equal opportunities, especially in the case of women, people of color and other groups that were particularly affected by the pandemic.



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1st session

Trade as peace and migration as conflict

New limits of mobility in the face of an increasing environmental crisis.

"Most of the people who migrated because of wars in the Middle East stayed in the Middle East. Most of the people who left Syria are not in Paris; they are in Jordan, in Lebanon, in Iran. But Western media does not show that reality."

Pedro Brieger

"Our consumption patterns contribute to the growing inequality between North and South, which is what drives migration."

Zenia Hellgren

"Migration is a force that shapes who we are."

Rodolfo Pastor

"How important it would be if all residents of the country, even those not born here, could have a defining voice in the policies and future of these societies."

Felipe Llamas

Migration as a primordial instinct and as a rational choice

The first session, *Trade as peace and migration as conflict: new limits of mobility in the face of a growing environmental crisis*, was moderated by Felipe Llamas, member of the Madrid City Council and university professor.

Llamas introduced the debate by stating that, "These two ideas which sometimes find themselves at odds (trade and human mobility), have characterized the history of humanity and nations, has brought us closer culturally, has created disputes...and is an undeniable part of human nature."

Pedro Brieger, sociologist, journalist, and director of Nodal, agreed that migration is "inherent to the human being", pointing out the paradox that "capital comes and goes continuously while people encounter serious difficulties moving across borders".

Rodolfo Pastor, Honduran and Mexican political scientist, diplomat, and politician, admitted that he does not understand those who question people's reasons for deciding to migrate. "If you go to the places in Mexico or Honduras, the starting point for most of the people who decide to undergo this dangerous journey, leaving behind home, family, customs... It is very obvious why they do it because you would also want to leave a place like that. Anyone would want to get out of there," he asserted.

"People who migrate don't do it to be more comfortable, to eat better, or to be more fashionable. They leave because they are hungry, because they live in poverty, and because they are subjected to countless forms of violence," Pastor also explained. "And this strikes me as something fairly human because it is simply a survival instinct in itself, primordial, but at the same time, logical and rational."

Zenia Hellgren, researcher at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, agreed with the Mexican-Honduran diplomat that the system that pushes so many people to migrate in order to survive is the same one that allows others to live comfortably, and that this is where its cruelty lies. "The current capitalist system is wicked, because it operates in such a way that we all reinforce it daily with our consumer practices," she said. That is why the sociologist has questioned whether it is at all possible to humanize migration as long as the current economic and political system remains in force.

From dreams to demographics: the new Europe is already pluralistic and diverse

Next, addressing the link between the migratory crisis and environmental collapse, Felipe Llamas recalled that "more than 140 million people will be forcibly displaced by natural disasters in the coming years". A clear example is Honduras, where two hurricanes in a row recently devastated the country's infrastructure and economy. "The climate situation will continue to deteriorate, and this will mean that many more people will continue to leave countries where they can no longer feed themselves with beans or corn, because they no longer grow, or simply because there is no water anymore," warned Rodolfo Pastor. This is why it is more imperative than ever to embrace and integrate all these people, since the migratory flows caused by the climate crisis appear to be unstoppable.

For Zenia Hellgren, the positive side is that this "pluralistic and diverse society is no longer just an ideal. It is a demographic fact." In cities like Barcelona, 30% of the population is now foreign-born. The same is true of Amsterdam, Paris and London, said Pedro Brieger, pointing out the paradox that these types of metropolises have been

enriched by the “colonial heritage of the places they occupied” in terms of multiculturalism as well.

Another example is that of Madrid, as pointed out by Felipe Llamas. This also is a city where, in many neighborhoods, more than 30% of the population comes from another country. “I believe that the old Europe is now new, insofar as it has been enriched by these migratory flows,” said the Spanish councilman. He went on to condemn the fact that these citizens of foreign origin “do not enjoy the political rights guaranteed by our constitutions or by our legal frameworks”.

All the panelists agreed that this hinders the integration of these citizens, since “these migrant communities do not end up being incorporated into their host societies or play the role of active citizens, because without political rights they cannot participate in this new context, and therefore social partnerships are unbalanced,” explained Rodolfo Pastor. “To build truly inclusive and egalitarian societies, the representation and participation of people of color and their views are necessary at all levels,” added Zenia Hellgren. This means that migrants should also be able to take on public roles, such as teachers, police officers, politicians, etc. “And for this to be possible, the local population has to give space to those who are grossly underrepresented,” the researcher pointed out.

Considering the needs of and representing non-white people, or non-white communities such as the Roma, would be the only way to ensure that migrants cease to be an instrument of fear for far-right discourses to capitalize on.

The geopolitics of generosity: being aware of our privilege and embracing one another again

To conclude, Pedro Brieger brought up the concept of “the geopolitics of generosity”, coined by Spanish economist Alfredo Serrano Mancilla, and linked it to the idea of making our cities “less *unlivable*” and of losing “the fear of being connected”. Rejection of those who are different or foreign has been exacerbated by the pandemic and all the ways in which it has affected us. “Societies that used to live in constant human contact are suddenly shaking their fists, whereas before we were accustomed to embracing each other,” added the Argentinian journalist.

On an optimistic note, and while acknowledging that “this process of building a more inclusive society will never be free of tension,” Zenia Hellgren observed that today “there is a growing awareness of structural institutional racism that was not so common a decade ago. I see it clearly in my city, Barcelona, by working with public institutions, which are very receptive when examining their own practices critically,” she stated optimistically.

To conclude, Rodolfo Pastor pointed out the challenge that we face to “make privileged populations see and be more aware of how fortunate we are,” and affirmed that this implies a certain level of responsibility: “the obligation to give back and to ensure that there is a balance”.

This includes the duty to work for narratives that serve as an alternative to the discourse of insecurity, and to strive for egalitarian societies where the phenomenon of migration is observed from a positive point of view with a focus on human rights, rather than seeing it as a threat.







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FILM FORUM

Migrant Humanity?

With CAF_2021 and for the first time in the context of one of the annual events of the Common Action Forum, the aim has been to bring about a critical space that goes beyond the paradigms of reflection to which we are accustomed.

"Art is a form of micro-politics that manages to open people's minds to different realities, in a more intimate or sensitive way."

Sonia Guggisberg

"I somehow let my visual and social memory translate into these audiovisual pieces."

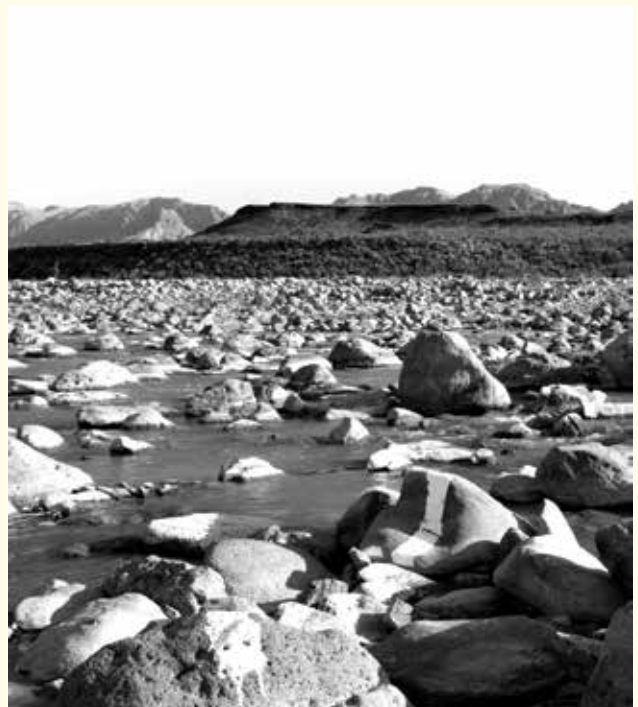
Minerva Cuevas

Life journeys: migration as a civilizing process

The arts are a unique vehicle for social transformation and communication, capable of appealing to the human conscience from two of the fundamental dimensions of change: empathy and creativity. By incorporating initiatives of togetherness and dialogue into the forum, such as the film forum *Migrant Humanity*, CAF seeks to go a step further in its reflections, integrating and highlighting the critical value of culture.

This gathering consisted of the screening of the documentary *The Wait*, by Brazilian Sonia Guggisberg, and the visual art piece *Bridging Borders*, by Mexican artist Minerva Cuevas. After showing the pieces, a discussion took place between the creators, moderated by Argentine social/cultural graphic designer Anabella Salem, who pointed out that the two artists, "instead of focusing on the boundaries themselves, hold onto the space between one thing and the other, which somehow speaks to sharing space between two places, about common ground".

Guggisberg shared with the audience his experience in the refugee camps of Lesbos, Greece. She explained that what struck her most about these people in situations of flight is how,



Bridging Borders by Minerva Cuevas

by becoming refugees, they are stripped of their identity: "Their culture, their profession, their status...none of that matters anymore. If they are doctors or lawyers, if they are biologists..."

Minerva Cuevas, for her part, explained that with *Bridging Borders* she wanted to portray the uselessness of frontiers. After all, the walls we build do not succeed in preventing migration, but only make the routes more dangerous. "The human path will continue anyway," she said.

In this way, understanding migration as part of human nature is how Cuevas became interested in how human borders also impede animal migration. "Animal migration is the type of migration that is really suffering from our barriers and walls. This not only affects large animals, as has already

been documented, but even the migration of bees. Because they only fly at a certain height, walls don't allow them to migrate and pollinate plants and flowers throughout an entire ecosystem," he explained.

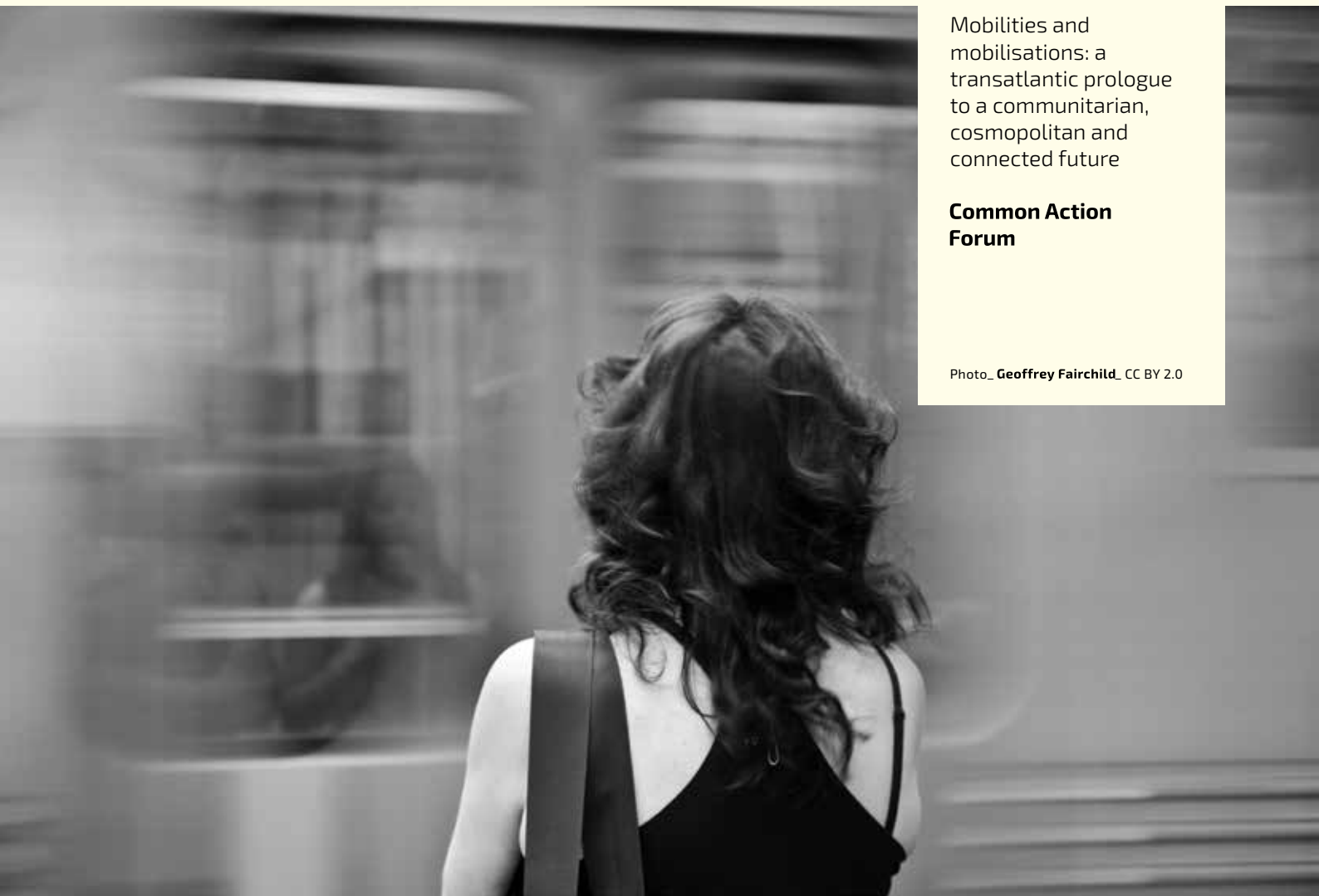
In the same way, Sonia Guggisberg wanted to go a step further in the research surrounding her work, taking an interest not only in the journey of refugees but also in "the dreams they bring with them". In fact, as the artist expressed, refugees "don't simply cross the sea, it's much bigger than that. It's a life-changing journey."

In this sense, the Brazilian filmmaker tried to capture in her short film *The Wait* the fact that refugees are people who have lost all their previous points of reference: their cities, their neighborhoods. "People who have to mourn their previous life, because it is a life to which they will not be able to return," she explained.

In closing, Minerva Cuevas wondered if it even makes sense to talk about "humanizing migration" when, in her opinion, "Migration itself is already a human phenomenon that basically gave rise to civilization." This implies, as the Mexican artist tries to capture in her work, that erecting walls and borders while pretending to avoid this ebb and flow of human movements is "an anti-civilizing process".



The Wait by Sonia Guggisberg



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2nd session

Here lie leviathans

Democratic challenges in the digital age

"The emergence of the internet meant that the power of data was put in the hands of the public to start revolutions of a different kind: without a drop of blood, without armed confrontation."
Renata Ávila

"For every action there is always a reaction. That is why all the emancipatory and revolutionary processes in history, which gave rise to civil rights, have encountered great obstacles."
Juan Carlos Monedero

"The big digital platforms are currently more powerful than oil and pharmaceutical companies. There are no bigger and more powerful companies right now."
Solana Larsen

"Blocking Donald Trump's accounts was a strategy within the business model of the big tech companies."
José María Lassalle

The Internet: from democratic promise to oligopoly

In the session *Here lie leviathans: democratic challenges in the digital age*, Renata Ávila, executive director of the Open Knowledge Foundation, looked back ten years to ask how the power of the net, which we once believed to be democratic, has again been seized away from us: "In November 2010 I was in England, in London, and we were about to publish the diplomatic cables on Wikileaks. We were in the middle of nowhere, in the north of England, with a bunch of computers. There wasn't a single gun. You heard accents of all kinds, keyboards of all kinds, and the only thing we had was a data set and internet connectivity. A set of data and connectivity that, 11 years ago, completely shook the world and gave the right to the truth back to the people," the Guatemalan attorney stated.

That massive leak by WikiLeaks represented, in a way, the right to know. However, "that energizing and democratizing power that technologies had," the lawyer pointed out, has ceased to be a tool for accountability. It has become, in the words of José María Lassalle, "an aristocratic, top-down power".

Lassalle, director of ESADE's Forum for Technological Humanism, recalled how on January 6, 2021, when the assault on the US Capitol took place, big tech companies, particularly Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, positioned themselves on the side of democracy "not because of a legal decision, but because of a strictly private decision," clarified the Spanish professor. That is, they took the side of democracy not as a genuine commitment to the rule of law, but rather "in consideration of the reputational damage they could suffer as a brand".

Following this, Solana Larsen, editor of the Mozilla Foundation's *Internet Health Report*, argued that the metaphor of an octopus with huge tentacles grabbing at the whole world is very apt to describe

big tech companies: "Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Facebook, Tencent and Alibaba, they are not just Big Tech, the biggest tech companies in the world. They are the biggest companies in the world, period. In every sector," she said. She also warned that the danger they pose lies not only in their monopoly of today's markets, but in their investments "in future markets, such as subway and undersea cables, satellites and cloud computing".

The abuse of power and the quantification of our lives

On this last point, Larsen explained that, "Every App that you have on your phone, whether big or small, or when you talk to Alexa, Siri or another service... All that information and that data goes through cloud computing, which means it's processed on computers that belong to Amazon, Alibaba or Microsoft." This phenomenon, according to Larsen, leads to "the normalization of the total quantification of our lives and our work at all levels".

Renata Ávila, as the session's host, was keen to investigate the effects of this "algorithmic content curation" on democracy: "We have an invisible hand reading us the news, basically selecting the content that is presented to us, and this is producing a democratic disaster," she said.

Juan Carlos Monedero, co-founder of Podemos and director of the institute República y Democracia, blamed this democratic deficit on "the growth of the firepower of those in positions of power", which turns new technologies (and their owners) into potential "creators of chaos".

The Spanish political scientist explained how these de facto powers, faced with the incursion of progressive democratic forces capable of gaining power of their own, could generate "a rise in the prices of basic goods, an increased national security

risk and such a state of ungovernability that people would call for a return of those who have always been in charge".

Another problem regarding how these large corporations can influence electoral processes is that, although they have no corporate offices in many countries, "95% of all electoral campaigns, in almost every country, are carried out on these platforms and social networks," explained Renata Ávila. This represents "a total surrender of the main mechanism used to make political proposals" in the run-up to elections, the lawyer warned.

As José María Lassalle explained, "The Frankfurt School already understood that technology is not a neutral power, but a power that is inclined to hubris and, therefore, tends to go beyond its own limits."

Reasons for optimism: democracy as the stuff of the future

Finally, Renata Ávila described "the transition of power among elites" that occurs within large tech companies, "which hire people who have worked for the government or very rich and influential people, so that they have a sort of corridor between spheres of power", through which the same powerful people always circulate. These are "graduates from Stanford and Princeton, from one of the five big universities in the United States," added Solana Larsen, and who receive funding and financing from think tanks and research centers co-opted by the United States.

This "digital colonialism", as Ávila called it, could also be defined as "digital Calvinism", in Lassalle's opinion, since the elites who are managing technological power are not only linked to Washington but also "are mostly male WASPs," said the Spanish professor.

While this whole scenario does not seem very encouraging, Juan Carlos Monedero encouraged the audience to find a balance "between pessimism, which alerts us, and optimism, which motivates us". Paraphrasing the French philosopher Alain Badiou, Monedero stated that, "There are moments when history *unfreezes*: history suddenly opens up and this unfolds the possibility of opening certain valves, surpassing certain limits, and moving forward."

Renata Ávila shared this vision of opportunity because, although "we tend to think of technology as something very new and futuristic, and of democracy as something that is already being left behind", the reality is that, in historical terms, democracy is still young. It is "a resource for the future with which we can still play, experiment, challenge ourselves, and explore, in search of new ideas," the lawyer said.

In this sense, for Solana Larsen, one way of democratization would be to break the dependence we have on large tech companies, "which do not care about the world, but at the same time are everywhere: in our countries, in our languages, in our communications". "It is essential to introduce a social function to algorithms, so that they do not remain in strictly private hands," added José María Lassalle, who also recommended an attitude "of caution, a vigilant approach" to what technological innovation represents.

If this session made one thing clear, it is that artificial intelligence and technological development continue to pose risks to public ethics and democracy, and that civic and intellectual empowerment is needed to reflect on and articulate debates around all of these issues. The goal is, ultimately, for our relationship with different technologies to not lose sight of human dignity.

In closing

CAF_2021 was an analytical bridge between the two sides of the Atlantic. The havoc of the COVID-19 pandemic was inevitably still very present in the reflections of forum attendees, and the memory of the lockdowns seemed to serve as a counterpoint to the main theme that structured the event, movement. Thus, by recalling the recent memory of how quarantines and isolation changed our perceptions of space, and how individual freedoms seemed to be reassessed precisely because they were restricted, this event concluded that some sectors actually transformed faster than ever in the midst of apparent paralysis.

This is the case of the tech industry, whose development is a recurring theme at CAF events, and which continues to stand out as one of the main factors in the transformation of our societies. In addition to the dramatic leap forward in the use of digital technology and digital practices the pandemic brought forth, CAF_2021 has once again highlighted the pressing need to regulate the digital realm. In this regard, one of the major warnings to be taken into account is the large-scale use of data and metadata, highly concentrated in the hands of a few. Big Data, as the raw material of the so-called “new economy”, is turning consumers into products and subjecting our personal information to quantification.

These risks are aggravated when we take into account that so-called Big Tech, the largest tech companies, are nothing but an inbred oligopoly, also owned by very few individuals and exhibiting a “revolving door” phenomenon of sorts: frequently, those who reach the top positions in these companies have already held senior positions in public administration, or vice versa. Thus, power continues to be confined to a small circle, in a closed and elitist circuit that runs through the most prestigious universities and the highest levels of institutional authority, as well as on the boards of large companies.

As we know, an indisputable sign of the immense power that these companies accumulate is manifested in the fact that most of current electoral propaganda, regardless of the country, is carried out on digital platforms and major social networks. This means, in a way, that democracy is mediated by these same companies everywhere, as political parties are at the mercy of biases and algorithms when it comes to reaching their audience of potential voters.

A decade after the massive Wikileaks leak, which to some degree revealed the democratic potential of the internet, it would seem that the internet has ceased to be the tool of accountability and citizen empowerment that generated so much hope. The colonial dynamics at the heart of large tech companies, and their interference in the political and democratic life of our societies (grimly portrayed in the assault on the US Capitol) show that the digital universe, at the service of models of domination and acting as their echo chamber, presents as many ethical dilemmas as it does existential dangers for our society. The fact that large companies, which appear to hold democracy in the palm of their hand, make decisions based on their own reputation and private interests, should keep us on our toes. It is crucial to be more than cautious about the problems of technological development and frictions that can arise between technology and human dignity, since the digital universe is undoubtedly one of the most liquid, volatile, and difficult to regulate spaces today. This is why it is essential to promote and coordinate more ambitious and creative regulatory approaches, capable of channeling and redirecting technology towards more democratic paths.

At the epicenter of the reflections made at CAF_2021 we also find one of the most pressing issues of our times, one that will only become more urgent in the near future: migration. This is a constantly changing landscape that, like today's democratic societies, is infused with dynamism and diversity.

Over the course of the forum, the main consensus reached in all the sessions devoted to analyzing this phenomenon was that there is a need to promote new visions of migration. Not only is migration a phenomenon intrinsic to human nature, which combines rationality and the primary instincts for survival into the search for better living conditions, but it is, in fact, a phenomenon inherent to millions of animal and even plant species, embedded in the natural cycles of the biosphere. Our efforts to manage migratory flows must be based on a comprehensive understanding of facts, capable of reconciling biological phenomena with a technologically advanced and globalized society and a set of ecosystems in permanent transformation due to the ecological impact of human activity.

The obvious link between migration and the climate crisis must be emphasized from a systemic approach. It is the capitalist system that generates structural inequality and environmental deterioration, problems that intertwine and feed off of each other, forcing millions of people to flee their homes when they become uninhabitable. From this perspective, it seems inevitable that, as the consequences of the climate crisis and global warming continue to worsen, we can expect increasingly intense, frequent and dramatic migratory flows. The consumption patterns of prevailing models foster a system that grants freedom of movement to capital and imposes barriers and borders on people, thus reinforcing the global asymmetries that provoke so many forced displacements in the first place.

In this sense, borders end up serving a ruthless purpose, for ultimately they do not truly prevent migration, but only hinder its pathways, making them increasingly deadly. This attempt at discouragement through danger, which neither addresses the nature of migration nor the factors that aggravate it, is a moral as well as a political failure. Human movements, like animal migrations,

are not going to disappear no matter how many walls we build.

However, migratory phenomena also involve a multitude of positive elements, and highlighting these benefits has marked the spirit of this meeting from the outset. Demographic diversity and cosmopolitanism are already par for the course in many of our cities, which have been culturally enriched thanks to the influence of migratory flows. This diversity, however, is not yet matched with equal rights of participation in many aspects of society, including the right to vote. This is the biggest unresolved issue highlighted by CAF_2021. In the wake of the resurgence of ethno-nationalist essentialism and rhetoric that fuels the same policies that have been hindering integration from the outset, let us advocate for migrants to be able to fully exercise their political rights in their host societies, the same societies that are already socially, demographically and economically richer, thanks to them. The inclusion of these communities is the most powerful way to prevent far-right forces from capitalizing politically on the marginalization that our host systems themselves generate, with consequences that go far beyond the escalation of anti-immigration discourse.

With regard to global recovery after the public health and multi-systemic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, CAF_2021 analyzed the regression in rights and the widening of the North-South divide caused by this calamity. The main conclusion reached in these meetings was the need to guarantee universal access to vaccines, prioritizing global immunization over intellectual property. In order to fight against growing global inequality, it is necessary to understand the vaccine as a Global Public Good and to democratize the pharmaceutical sector. Patents and private interests can no longer stand in the way of overcoming the pandemic, the consequences of which have been catastrophic worldwide, and

the ramifications of which we still do not fully understand.

There was also a desire to overcome the pandemic not only in terms of the economy and public health, but also on a socioemotional level. Losing the fear of the other as a potential vector of contagion, recovering human contact, closeness, and the warmth of social relations ought to be something that we also see as having repercussions on international relations, bringing different players closer together on a global chessboard still recovering from the recent emergency. In this sense, banishing the notion of zero-sum games and decisively choosing cooperation as a collective solution to present and future challenges is undoubtedly the right path in a post-Westphalian world, where threats are felt globally and extend beyond the obsolete framework of the nation-state.

With respect to Ibero-American relations, Europe's shared response of solidarity, in contrast to the austerity of the previous economic crisis, is a good sign and shows that Latin America could also gain from working to consolidate regional integration. However, for this to happen, it is necessary to completely eradicate Europe's prevailing paternalism towards the Latin American region and not lose sight of the fact that the response to the crisis has been so asymmetrical precisely because of the structural inequality that remains in the current world order, based on unfair terms of trade.

Finally, another topic that was highlighted in this edition of the Common Action Forum was the role of the State in generating innovation and creating value through public spending. The role of the state is not just to redistribute, but also to invest in health, education, and social programs that, as in the case of Brazil, can put an end to hunger in poverty-stricken societies.

This achievement of eradicating hunger through public policies and inclusion programs, proving that it is not an inherently chronic problem tied to the fate of humanity, is a fundamental example for the future, where food insecurity threatens to be one of the main challenges we will have to face.

These gatherings and the resulting ideas and reflections look towards a future far removed from political cynicism and to a new form of global governance in which civil society plays a leading role. The use of art as a tool of engagement, as well as openness to new ideas, has enriched this gathering, marked by a great diversity of participants who came together to renew their commitment to transformation. That social transformation we all work towards, each from our own trenches, in order to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the challenges we currently face, in order to take advantage of the possibilities presented by times of change.



Wadah Khanfar
Welcome
Casa de América

Wadah Khanfar is the Co-Founder and Chairman of the Common Action Forum. Former Director-General of the Al Jazeera Network, he was named one of the «Young Global Leaders» in the 2008's World Economic Forum and was first in Foreign Policy's Top 100 Global Thinkers of 2011.



Enrique Ojeda
Welcome
Casa de América

Enrique Ojeda Vila is a Spanish diplomat and current Director General of Casa de América. He has served as Spanish Ambassador to Chile, Bolivia and El Salvador, as well as Spanish Consul in Guatemala, Secretary General for Foreign Action of the Government of Andalucía, and Director of the Fundación Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo.

Participants

Once again this year, CAF would like to thank all the people who enriched our forum with their presence, ideas and hopes.



Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

Keynote speech
Casa de América

A union worker and union leader, Lula da Silva served as President of the Republic of Brazil for eight years, and is a founding member and former President of the Workers' Party (PT). He received an honorary doctorate from the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) for his "contribution to economic and social development in his country."



José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

Comentator
Casa de América

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero served two terms as President of Spain, and also served as Secretary General of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE). Milestones of his administration included ETA's disarmament and the international promotion of the UN's Alliance of Civilizations.



Rebeca Grynspan
Participant

Casa de América

Rebeca Grynspan currently serves as Secretary General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development. She is a Costa Rican economist and politician, former Vice President of Costa Rica, and has served as both Ibero-American Secretary General and Associate Administrator of the UN Development Programme.



Pedro Marques
Participant

Casa de América

With an MA in Economics, Pedro Marques serves as a deputy for Portugal in the European Parliament, and is Vice President of the Parliament's Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. He previously held positions as Minister of Planning and Infrastructure under Prime Minister António Costa's administration, as well as Secretary of State for Social Security.



Cecilia Nicolini
Participant
Casa de América

Cecilia Nicolini, with a degree in Political Science, is currently a researcher at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She forms part of the President of Argentina's Advisory Council, where she contributes her experience in political communication, international relations, technology and innovation.



Marcelo Ebrard
Distinguished
Participation
Casa de México

With a degree in International Relations, Marcelo Ebrard Casaubón currently serves as Mexico's Secretary for Foreign Relations. He formerly served as Head of the Mexico City Government, and as Secretary of Social Development and Public Security. In December of 2010, the World Mayors Project recognized him as World's Best Mayor.



Rafael Heiber
Moderator Casa de
América – Welcome
Casa de México

Rafael Heiber is the Co-Founder and Deputy-Chairman of the Common Action Forum. Geographer and Climatologist with a MSc in Territorial Planning and a PhD in Sociology, his expertise includes the political links between technology, space and citizenship. He participates in academic activities and publishes in the international media.



Ximena Caraza-Campos
Welcome Casa de
México

Ximena Caraza is a Mexican diplomat and currently Director General of Casa de México in Spain. Previously she served as economic advisor to the Mexican Embassy in Spain, and as Regional Director as well as Director of Local Representation for ProMéxico. She is former Mexican Consul for Milan.



Alfonso Zegbe
Representing SRE

Alfonso Zegbe currently heads the Strategy and Public Diplomacy Unit at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is an expert in Environmental Law and International Relations, and has worked on energy and environmental diplomatic agendas for Mexico City, Washington DC, Ottawa, Paris, Brussels and the OECD. Between 2017 and 2019 he was Mexican Ambassador to Iran as well as served as ambassador in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.



Felipe Llamas
Host Casa de México
1st SESSION

Felipe Llamas Sánchez is a Professor at the Social and Juridical Sciences Faculty of Carlos III University, Madrid. He has worked on the World Forums on Urban Violence and Education for Coexistence and Peace I and II. A founding partner of PHARE Territorios Globales, he is an expert in participatory governance and international collaboration among local governments.



Pedro Brieger
Participant
Casa de México
1ra SESIÓN

Pedro Brieger is an Argentinian academic and journalist with expertise in international politics. He is Professor of Sociology of the Middle East at the University of Buenos Aires. A writer, commentator and producer of various radio and television programs, he has authored various books, and currently serves as Director of NODAL, a web portal for Latin American and Caribbean News.



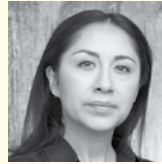
Zenia Hellgren
Participant
Casa de México
1ra SESIÓN

Zenia Hellgren holds a doctorate in Sociology and is Professor of Political and Social Theory at the Pompeu Fabra University, as well as principal investigator on the AGREP (Action Program for the Effective Denunciation of Anti-Gypsyism and Discrimination). Her main areas of research include migration, diversity, inclusion and exclusion, with special attention to discrimination and strategies to combat it.



Rodolfo Pastor
Participant
Casa de México
1ra SESIÓN

Rodolfo Pastor de María y Campos is a Honduran-Mexican political scientist, diplomat and politician. Former Minister of Political Affairs and Chargé d'Affaires at the Embassy of Honduras in Washington, D.C.; he currently works as Information and Strategic Analysis Director in the Executive Directorate of Strategy and Public Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE) of Mexico.



Minerva Cuevas
Participant
CINEFÓRUM

Minerva Cuevas is a Mexican conceptual artist. She studied Visual Arts at UNAM and is known for her projects based in social research and multidisciplinary practices. Her work forms part of public collections in the Tate Gallery, the Georges Pompidou Center and the Guggenheim Museum, among others.



Sonia Guggisberg
Participant
CINEFÓRUM

Sonia Guggisberg is an artist, videographer and researcher, participating in solo and group shows, lectures and workshops both in Brazil and abroad since the 1990s. She holds a PhD in Semiotics and Communication from the Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo and a Masters in Fine Arts from UNICAMP.



Anabella Salem
Participant
CINEFÓRUM

Anabella Salem is co-founder of El Fantasma de Heredia, a design studio that has received multiple awards for its social and cultural projects. She is Professor at the University of Buenos Aires and has served as President on the jury of the Warsaw Biennale, as well as various other competitions.



Renata Ávila
Host
Casa de México
2da SESIÓN

Renata Ávila is an international lawyer and expert in human rights and technology. She forms part the legal team that advocates for the freedom of Julian Assange and Wikileaks, as well as is a member of DiEM25. She serves on several Boards, including Progressive International, Article 19, Creative Commons and CAF. She is currently CEO of the Open Knowledge Foundation.



Solana Larsen
Participant
Casa de México
2da SESIÓN

Solana Larsen is a journalist and activist with expertise in leveraging the Internet for global dialogue. She is editor of the Internet Health Report of the Mozilla Foundation. She previously served as editor of the global politics website openDemocracy.net, and managing editor of Global Voices.



José María Lassalle
Participant Casa de México
2da SESIÓN

José María Lassalle is Director of the Forum for Technological Humanism at ESADE. He holds a doctoral degree in Law, and formerly served as Spain's Secretary of State for Culture and the Digital Agenda. A professor and researcher at several universities, he also directed the Carolina Foundation. He is a patron of Spain's National Library and has authored numerous essays.



Juan Carlos Monedero
Participant Casa de México
2da SESIÓN

Juan Carlos Monedero is a Spanish politician and professor. He holds a doctorate in Political Science and founded the political party Podemos. He currently directs the Instituto República y Democracia, a foundation dedicated to analysis, training and political and cultural creation. He also directs the television program En la frontera, and has authored several books.



Photo gallery





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