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► **To cite this version:**

Margarida Romero, Enric Vidal. Together Toward Equity, Peace, and Sustainability in Times of Crisis. Opening of the ISCAR Southern Europe and West Asia Conference.. ISCAR 2025 Southern Europe and West Asia conference, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Nov 2025, Sant Cugat del Valles, Spain. <hal-05361800>

HAL Id: hal-05361800

<https://hal.science/hal-05361800v1>

Submitted on 15 Nov 2025

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Opening Address

Together Toward Equity, Peace, and Sustainability in
Times of Crisis. Opening of the ISCAR Southern
Europe and West Asia Conference

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Distinguished colleagues, esteemed members of the ISCAR community, keynote speakers, dear guests,

It is our great honour to welcome you to Sant Cugat del Vallès, to the Faculty of Education of the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC Barcelona), and to the ISCAR 2025 Southern Europe and West Asia (SEWA) Conference, “Towards Equity, Peace and Sustainability in Times of Crisis.” We are delighted to host you here and to open this conference together with the ISCAR President, Professor Annalisa Sannino, whom we warmly thank for her presence and support. This conference brings together scholars and practitioners from Southern Europe, the Middle East, and beyond, who are engaged in sociocultural and activity research at a time marked by multiple crises. These social, environmental, political and educational crises call for renewed ethical, intellectual, and practical commitments. Our theme invites us to consider how our research can contribute to more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable futures.

From an axiological standpoint, we see this conference and our research community as grounded in strong values and ethical commitments. Human development is not neutral; it is historically situated and value-laden. Communities working for equity and sustainability are, in this sense, our natural allies in education and research. They remind us that engagement should go beyond individual self-interest and contribute to collective forms of responsibility and care.

Ontologically, ISCAR SEWA is rooted in a sociocultural understanding of human activity. We study learning, development, and practice as profoundly social and historical processes. Epistemologically, our community embraces diversity. We value the coexistence of multiple ways of knowing, and we see epistemological pluralism as a strength: it enables richer, more integrated forms of interdisciplinary inquiry. Rather than falling into “methodological tribalism,” we aim for a pluralistic coexistence in which openness, dialogue, and constructive criticism foster innovative cross-fertilisation of methods and perspectives. Our conference is therefore not only an academic event, but also a space for the cultivation of a community with shared values and a diversity of voices. It is a space where each researcher, at whatever point in their journey, can develop within a plural and supportive environment. In the spirit of Lev Vygotsky, we might say that to truly understand one another at this conference, we must go beyond each other’s words to engage with each other’s thoughts.

We are also honoured to highlight our keynote speakers, whose trajectories embody the kind of engaged scholarship we wish to promote:

- Professor Sylvie Barma, from Université Laval in Québec, recipient of the Raymond Gervais Prize for excellence and academic trajectory in science and technology education, and currently counselor to the Ministry of Education in Québec.
- Professor Katerina Plakitsi, from the University of Ioannina in Greece, former ISCAR President (2017–2024), elected board member of the University of Ioannina, and Director of an international master’s programme on One Health Education for Global Sustainability developed in collaboration with George Mason University and the University of Florida.

We thank both Professors Barma and Plakitsi for accepting to join us as keynote speakers and for inspiring our reflections on equity, peace, and sustainability.

This conference is a collective achievement, and we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all those who have contributed to making it possible. From the Faculty of Education at UIC, we wish to thank: Enric Vidal, Dean of the Faculty of Education, Sergio Cruz, manager of the Faculty of Education, Marta Teruel, secretary, Patricia Díaz, Maria Domingo-Coscollola, Marc Grau, and Monica Fernández for their valuable advice, Alex Sánchez for communication, Cris de las Heras for web design, and Eric for technical support.

From ISCAR SEWA, we extend special thanks to Professor Katerina Plakitsi and Caroline Duret for their continuous guidance and support. From the ISCAR Executive Board, we give special thanks to Brett Bligh and Professor Annalisa Sannino for their trust, encouragement, and collaboration.

We are also deeply grateful to the research and support team whose work has facilitated the organisation of this event: Thomas Frøsig, Saint-Clair Lefevre, Guillermo Pech, Joseba Cejudo, Sara Cebollada, Amaia Uzcategui, Oksana Strutynska, Chengcheng Li, Guillaume Isaac, and Patricia Díaz. Their efforts in coordination, communication, and participant support have been essential to this conference.

Let us now share some organisational and logistical information to help you navigate the next days:

- Wi-Fi access: The Wi-Fi network is “UIC”, and the password is “Connectat.”. Beyond its practical purpose, “Connectat” (to be connected) resonates with the spirit of this event. It symbolises the human, intellectual, and social connections that we hope will flourish here: between disciplines, institutions, regions, and people. We invite you to keep this idea of connection in mind throughout the conference.
- Programme and sessions: All essential information about sessions, rooms, and times is available in the programme via the EasyChair Smart Program for ISCAR2025BCN : <https://easychair.org/smart-program/ISCAR2025BCN/> . Please consult it regularly for any updates and to orient yourself within the scientific programme.
- WhatsApp group: A conference WhatsApp group has been created to facilitate communication among participants and to provide quick updates. The link is provided in the conference materials.
- Photo album and image policy: A shared online album has been set up so that participants can upload and view photographs from the conference. The link is included in your materials. If you prefer not to appear in photographs, please indicate this at registration. You will be given an orange dot on your badge. We kindly ask all participants taking photos to be attentive and avoid photographing individuals wearing an orange dot.
- Sustainability and campus facilities: In line with our commitment to sustainability, we encourage you to use refillable water bottles. There are watering stations at different locations around the campus where you can refill your bottle during the day.
- Gala Dinner: For those who have registered, the Gala Dinner will take place on Thursday at 19:30. The walk from UIC to the venue is approximately seven minutes, and we will depart collectively from UIC at 19:10. Dietary constraints have been taken into account (two participants have indicated specific dietary needs), and the venue has been informed accordingly.

Throughout the conference, we invite you to engage in the spirit of #ISCAR2025BCN: to connect, to collaborate, and to co-construct knowledge oriented towards equity, peace, and sustainability. May these days be an opportunity not only to present and discuss research, but also to nurture a scholarly community that is critical, caring, and committed.

We thank you warmly for being here and for contributing your time, your work, and your perspectives to the ISCAR SEWA community. We wish you a stimulating, collegial, and memorable conference.

Margarida Romero (#ISCAR2025BCN Chair) and Enric Vidal, Dean, Faculty of Education, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya