

SESSION DESCRIPTION

ID: E4

The Earlier Career Lab: Skills, Identity, and Growth for the Next Generation of Ecosystem Services Researchers

Hosts:

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Abstract:

Ecosystem services (ES) research connects directly with nature-positive futures. As global challenges intensify, the field can be strengthened with fresh perspectives, innovative applications, and stronger connections across practitioners. Early-career researchers (ECRs) stand at the forefront of this transformation, helping to shape future directions of ES science. Hence, we need to acknowledge the main difficulties, challenges and opportunities that make the researcher, build valuable skills, and increase the real-world impact of our work.

This session, organized by the Young Ecosystem Services Specialists (YESS), moves beyond the traditional focus on presenting research outputs to highlight the researchers themselves. Here, we provide a dynamic space for ECRs to explore how to approach challenges and opportunities in ES perspective by discussing new tools, approaches, collaborations, and future perspectives. As being an ECR is also a deep personal journey, we will raise awareness into the personal growth aspects such as identifying strengths or addressing weaknesses. Additionally, we promote critical reflection around the scope and applications

of ES research, exploring two complementary dimensions that might contribute for future ES research activities:

- 1) ECRs development and innovation – building core competencies for ES science. This includes: a) identifying research gaps; b) preventing redundancies; c) connecting missing links; d) exploring opportunities; e) leveraging AI for academic research.
- 2) Strategic engagement – strengthening the position of ES research. This includes: a) fostering effective networks and collaborations; b) strengthening the science–policy interface; c) improving science communication; d) sharing knowledge and expertise across disciplines.

Throughout this session, YESS seeks to amplify the voices of early-career researchers by promoting dialogue on the evolving identity of ES science, spanning both personal interests and career perspectives. We will also facilitate and encourage participants to foster new collaborations by co-planning conference sessions, organizing journal special issues, preparing project proposals, co-developing research manuscripts, and engaging in the development and participation of summer schools, workshops, and similar capacity-building initiatives.

The session will begin with scholars sharing their personal perspectives and stories, offering inspiration and lessons learned for other ECR. This will be followed by interactive data collection through a live questionnaire designed to capture participant views and experiences, generating insights that can be quantified and later integrated into a potential co-authored paper. Finally, a World Café discussion will provide space for groups to explore challenges, propose solutions, and co-develop ideas for the future of ES research. By enhancing this collaborative approach, we can expand our engagement with a broader network of researchers in the field. This helps build valuable connections and opens up more opportunities to work together in the future, leading to stronger and more sustainable research results.

Goals and objectives of the session:

- Empower and motivate ECRs to shape the future of ES research
- Strengthen the YESS community through networking and new collaborations for new knowledge exchange
- Capture and synthesize the perspectives of ECRs on the primary challenges and opportunities in contemporary ES research through data collection
- Reflect on the state of ES research
- Explore strategies for science–policy interface and science communication
- Share experiences and perspectives to inspire and guide the next generation of ES researchers

Planned output / Deliverables:

- An ECR shared manifesto outlining guiding principles, identified challenges and related strategies for the future of ES research
- If feasible, a perspective or opinion research manuscript synthesizing the main outcomes and insights from the session. All participants, presenters and hosts will be given the opportunity to join as co-authors

Session format:

Different activities and engagement with the participants

Voluntary contributions accepted:

Yes, I allow any abstract to be submitted to my session for review

Related to ESP Working Group:

YESS - Young Ecosystem Services Specialists