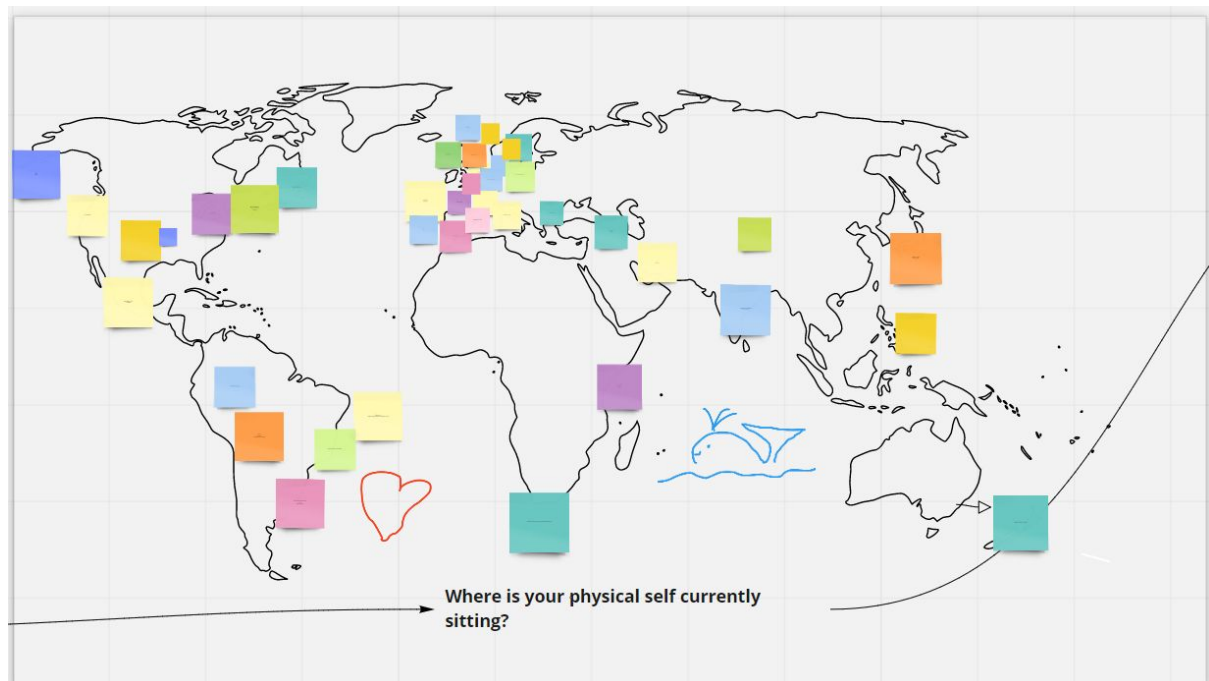


Engagement of Early Career Researchers in the 2020 Earth System Governance Virtual Forum

Reflections from the early career worldcafe

Before the 2020 Earth System Governance Virtual Forum officially started, early career researchers attending the conference had the opportunity to meet up in an informal setting in the context of a dedicated early career event. Using an interactive online brainstorming tool, participants could get to know each other and get their socializing skills flowing in a couple of speed-dating sessions. We were happy to see familiar and new faces from people around the world -- not to mention the excellent drawing skills!



The editors of the [Earth System Governance early career resources](#), together with four ESG lead faculty members, then hosted four breakout rooms dedicated to relevant questions for early career researchers.

Collaboration

How to establish collaborative projects within and across academia is a question that many early career researchers have asked us about, which is why our first breakout room was dedicated to this topic. We were joined by Arthur Petersen, Professor of Science, Technology and Public Policy at University College London, whose multiple disciplinary homes and professional background in the Dutch Government provided a treasure chest of experiences to draw on.

A number of key questions crystallized from the discussion: How to establish meaningful collaboration with stakeholders and policy makers? How to transition from small-talk to collaborative research in an academic context? How to navigate collaboration in an

interdisciplinary setting? How to balance critical research with maintaining a good relationship to stakeholders? And how to ensure academic rigor without losing the richness that comes out of a multi-stakeholder project?

Arthur Petersen could test his mentoring skills on us by providing some sound advice. Humility and empathy, as well as creativity in the use of academic formats, figured prominently in his answers. Important take-aways included the need to put yourself in the shoes of your stakeholder or collaborator. What are their interests, what are their needs? A policy-maker is not interested in theoretical or methodological quarrels; a co-author appreciates early involvement and the possibility to substantially shape the publication; a stakeholder would like to present their own perspective in response to a critical analysis. He also reminded us that annexes provide space for rich detail, and that we shouldn't hesitate to simply contact people if we want to interact with them. For more tips along this line, see our previous [brief on how to navigate networking and project collaboration](#).

Alt-Academia

Although many early career researchers often get asked whether they “want to stay in academia,” there is generally little follow-up to that crucial question. Yet it is an important topic to discuss. Not all researchers working toward a PhD will pursue university careers. In fact many won't. Either by choice, because they want to use their skills in another context, or by default, driven out by the (deplorable) state of the academic job market. To begin with, there are many things to consider in trying to formulate a career objective for oneself. Getting a clear picture of employment opportunities for example. And reflecting on what aspects of “the academic career” you like, and whether there are other places than universities where you could explore those. Having a clearer picture of what your plan A is is helpful to sort out what skills and experiences to prioritize in your “early career” phase to prepare your way toward that goal.

In the breakout group addressing this topic, Karen O'Brien, Professor at the University of Oslo's Department of Sociology and Human Geography, shared insights into her own career trajectory. Her key message was “be entrepreneurial” in trying to shape your own career trajectory. She for example highlighted teaching gigs as an opportunity to “keep a foot in the door” of the university world, whether as a side project to your main work outside academia or with a view to landing a more stable position within the university. Funding is another topic in this regard. With a PhD in hand you can apply for individual grants with foundations or national research funding schemes, and this way create your own position at a university. We also spoke about employment in environmental consultancies and think tanks or NGOs as a prominent avenue for policy-oriented research work outside the tenure track system. Many participants noted they lack an overview of alt-ac options. (Though quite US centric,) Karen Kelsy's website [The Professor is in](#) is a good reference in this regard, as it provides a breath of material to think about academic career trajectories - from [featured interviews](#) of people who have left academia, to tips on how to [negotiate](#) academic job offers.

Questions of work-life balance undercut much of this breakout discussion. How flexible do you have to be if you want to pursue an academic career, for example with regard to moving location? How are you supposed to prepare for an alt-ac career when you already have your hands full working on your PhD? How long can you cope with precarious employment conditions?

Where to publish

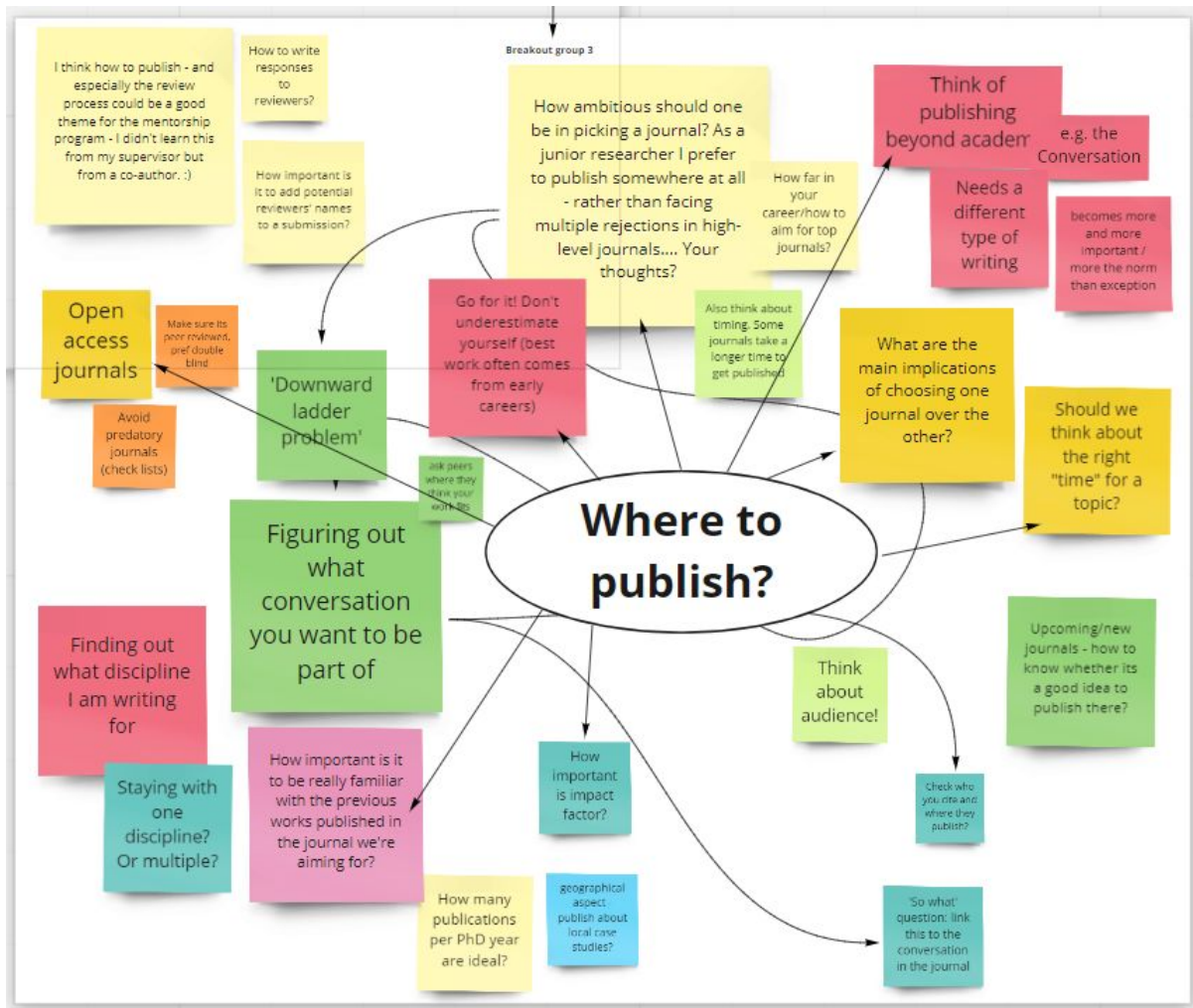
The question where to publish is on the mind of many early career researchers. When you finally have that important work written up, where should you send it to? (spoiler: you better think of this before you write up the article). Should you go for that high-ranking journal with an excellent impact factor, but also a high rejection rate? Or should you aim for a journal that maybe less prestigious but better fits your topic? What are the main implications of choosing one journal over another? And how do you decide?

Prof Matt Hoffman, Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto and editor of *Global Environmental Politics*, helped us think through these questions. His main advice? Think about what conversation you want to be part of. To which conversations does your work respond and contribute? In which journal(s) is this conversation taking place? This is where you will want to publish your work. If you can demonstrate that your work is part of an ongoing conversation, your article is more likely to get published. What is more, your article is more likely to be read and cited by other scholars that are part of the conversation.

How, then, do you know which conversation you want to be part of? For some of us the answer to this question might be obvious. For others it may not be so clear cut, especially when you are working in an interdisciplinary domain. One tip is to collect the 5-10 most important articles that you build on in your work, and check where they are published. The chances are that you will find some overlap, and these journals will probably provide a good starting point for your work. Another tip is to clearly define the “so what” question of your work, and link this to the conversation in a journal. This is how you can convince the editor that your work makes an important contribution to an ongoing conversation.

Another aspect that came up was to not restrict the question where to publish to academic journals. An important part of the conversation that you want to be part of is likely happening outside of the confines of academia. Joining these conversations by writing about your work in non-academic spaces is becoming more and more important and valued within academia as well. It does require a different set of writing skills, but that is a topic to cover in a future conversation.

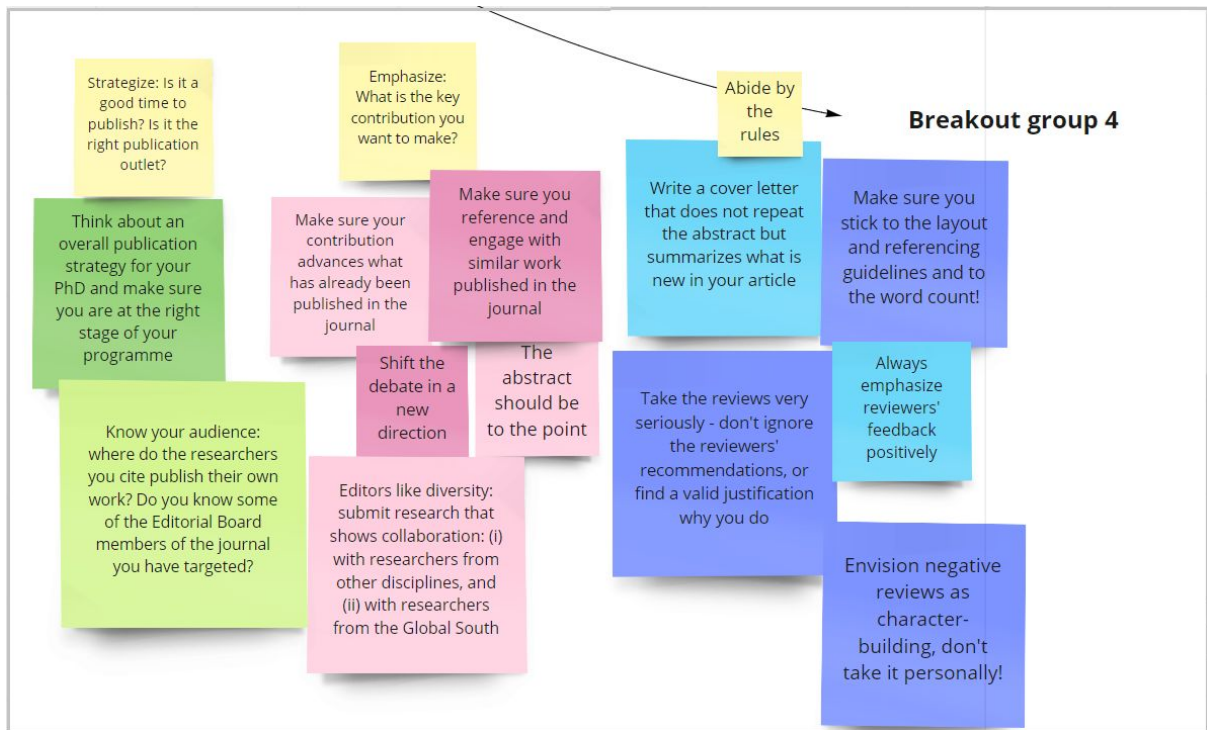
A final word of advice from Matt Hoffman: Don't hesitate to be ambitious in selecting a place to publish your work. The best work that journal editors receive often comes from early career researchers.



Convincing the editor

Writing for academic journals is highly competitive, and early career researchers have to overcome many hurdles. The first one is the editor. Some journals have very high desk reject rates. Desk reject is when your submitted manuscript is rejected by the editorial board before it is even sent to reviewers. Some high-profile journals desk-reject more than 90% of the submissions they receive. So how to convince the editor in a highly competitive environment? What are the key ingredients of a convincing submission?

In the breakout group addressing these questions, Peter Newell, Professor at the University of Sussex, and associate editor of *Global Environmental Politics*, reflected on his extensive experience and provided our community with important advice. Check out the mapping of the results of our discussions below.



For more tips on where to publish and how to convince the editor, read our previous briefs on [how to get published](#) and [how to respond to reviewer comments](#).