

# Earth System Governance Project

**ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

An aerial photograph of a volcanic landscape. The foreground and middle ground are dominated by dark, jagged, and highly textured lava flows that appear to be cooling and cracking. A narrow, light-colored sandy path winds through the lava fields. At the end of this path, a small, dark-colored car is parked, providing a sense of scale to the massive volcanic features. The background shows more extensive lava flows under a clear sky.

“The largest social science  
research network on the  
politics and governance of  
earth system transformations,  
across local to global scales”

THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT

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# The Earth System Governance Project

## A Snapshot

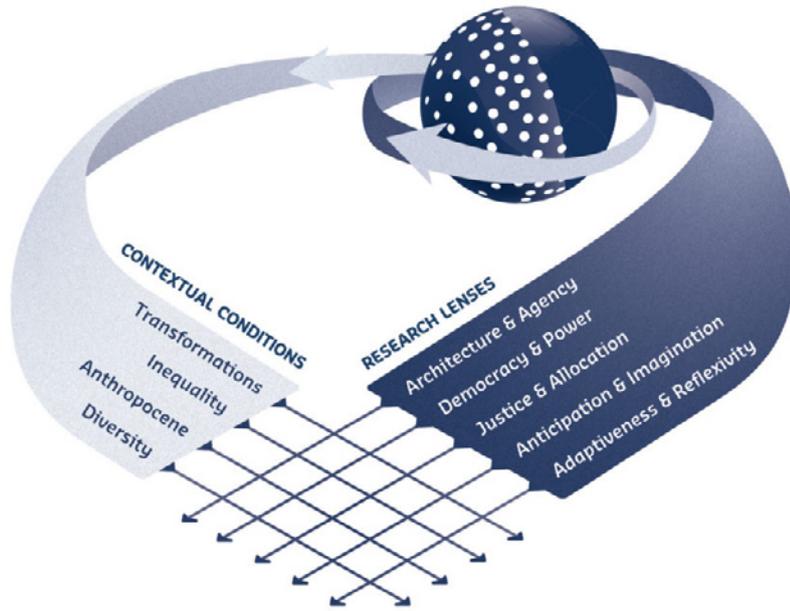
The Earth System Governance Project is a longstanding global research alliance focused on the politics and governance of earth system transformations, across local to global scales. Comprising the largest social science research network in the area of governance and global environmental change, the project brings together a highly interdisciplinary research community spanning disciplines such as international relations, political science, human geography, urban studies, development studies, and sustainability science, among others.

The Earth System Governance Project is implemented through a global alliance of Research Centres at leading institutions across six continents, an extensive network of Lead Faculty and Research Fellows, a vibrant annual global conference series, collaborative Taskforces and Working Groups, and a portfolio of affiliated/endorsed research projects (see [www.earthsystemgovernance.org](http://www.earthsystemgovernance.org)). It is managed and administered through an International Project Office, currently hosted by Utrecht University, The Netherlands (2018-2023). The Earth System Governance Project is overall steered by a Scientific Steering Committee comprised of 12 scholars spanning diverse disciplines and geographical regions.

The project is grateful for the support of Utrecht University, which hosts our International Project Office at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development at the Faculty of Geosciences.

The Earth System Governance project aims to:

- Expand the global mobilization of earth system governance researchers
- Stimulate and facilitate research collaboration
- Communicate and engage at the science-policy interface



#### RESEARCH FRAMEWORK OF THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT (2018-2028)

The Earth System Governance Project’s research agenda is driven by its 2018-2028 Science and Implementation Plan. This plan outlines the conceptual rationale, research agenda, and implementation mechanisms for the Earth System Governance Project. It revolves around a shared framework for conceptualizing and organizing Earth System Governance research. The framework articulates five Research Lenses which structure the activities of the Earth System Governance research community. Transversally, four Contextual Conditions characterize core contemporary challenges facing Earth System Governance: Transformations, Inequality, Anthropocene, and Diversity.

Overall, the Earth System Governance Project advances ground-breaking interdisciplinary scholarship spanning analytical, critical, normative orientations. Members of the Earth System Governance community – ranging across a wide range of sectors and scales, disciplines, career stages, and geographical regions – stimulate and lead international debates on environmental politics, advance insights into governance opportunities and solutions, and push the frontiers of our understanding of earth system transformations in the social sciences.



“Our vision is to understand,  
imagine and help realize just and  
sustainable futures by stimulating  
a pluralistic, vibrant and relevant  
research community”

VISION STATEMENT, EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT 2018 - 2028  
SCIENCE & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, PAGE 8.

# Opening word from the Scientific Steering Committee

The Earth System Governance Project has achieved a great deal despite the radical upheavals and unprecedented challenges of 2020. Some highlights include: holding a widely accessible and free global Virtual Forum in September 2020; welcoming a new Paris Research Centre hosted by The Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI); ongoing work by a variety of active Taskforces (including on Ocean Governance, Earth System Law, New Technologies, Anticipatory Governance, and Planetary Justice) and several vibrant new Working Groups (including on Economic Downturn and Climate Action, and Urban Governance); steady growth in network membership among Research Fellows and Senior Research Fellows; growing momentum of the Earth System Governance journal; launch of a new early career Mentoring Initiative; and several new releases in various publication series.

Importantly, the global Virtual Forum held in September 2020 in place of the annual conference, brought together the Earth System Governance community in a timely and important way. The theme of the event – “Between Precarity and Possibility: Implications of Disruption for Earth System Governance” – aimed to create an opportunity for Earth System Governance scholars to discuss the governance of global sustainability both in relation to the unfolding pandemic but also in relation to many other long standing issues. The nature of our collective challenge was well captured by the Keynote speaker Professor Rachel Kyte, who emphasised the need to shore up existing systems to get through current dislocation, while also building new systems that are fit for purpose for the coming decades. This idea stimulated much debate and ran through the entire event.

Notwithstanding these achievements, it is important to acknowledge the immense professional and personal challenges faced by members of the Earth System Governance community during 2020. This includes not only increased workloads in terms of research, teaching, and administration, but also the additional challenges of working from home and for many prioritising caring roles, personal impacts on those directly touched by the pandemic, and broader professional impacts in a variety of ways. As a scholarly community, we must continue to be sensitive to the differential impacts of the COVID19 pandemic on each other, not just in the immediate term but also over the longer term such as impacted research trajectories and career development (especially for early career researchers).

It is difficult to know how the world will look over the coming year. Already there has been noteworthy political change in the United States which could lead to new momentum on climate and sustainability issues. But many areas of contention in global politics and within specific countries persist, including continued threats to democracy across the globe. In addition, the coming year is likely to be marked by major global inequities in vaccine access which could interact with sustainability governance in complex ways. At a global level, there will also be a great deal of attention on the upcoming the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in October, the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in November (both delayed last year), as well as the annual meeting of the UN High-level Political Forum, and growing momentum towards Stockholm+50 in 2022, among others. Earth System Governance across local to global scales is embedded within this multifaceted context, and our community has an extremely important role in finding ways to respond.

In this light, we are very much looking forward to the 2021 Bratislava conference on Earth System Governance to be held in September. The theme of this conference is “Earth System Governance in turbulent times: prospects for political and behavioral responses”. While this conference was postponed from 2020, the theme has only become more salient and imperative. This event, Chaired by Professor Tatiana Kluvánková of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and Slovak University of Technology, is particularly exciting as it will mark the first time that an Earth System Governance conference is hosted in Central Europe. This is shaping up to be a very large event with an unprecedented number of accepted abstracts and an exciting opportunity to realise equitable global participation in new ways through virtual means. We are very much looking forward to this event!

Looking forward, we wish the entire Earth System Governance community well during the ongoing difficulties of the pandemic, and hope to interact – virtually and hopefully soon again in person – in the near future.

Scientific Steering Committee of the Earth System Governance Project,  
May 2021

## Scientific Steering Committee



**Prof. Sarah Burch**  
University of Waterloo, Canada



**Prof. Lorraine Elliott**  
Australian National University,  
Australia



**Prof. Aarti Gupta**  
Wageningen University,  
The Netherlands



**Prof. Cristina Yumie  
Aoki Inoue**  
University of Brasilia, Brazil



**Prof. Atsushi Ishii**  
Tohoku University, Japan



**Dr. Agni Kalfagianni**  
Utrecht University,  
The Netherlands



**Prof. James  
Meadowcroft**  
Carleton University, Canada



**Prof. David Nguatha  
Mungai**  
University of Nairobi, Kenya



**Prof. Chukwumerije  
Okereke**  
Alex-Ekwueme Federal University,  
Nigeria



**Dr. James Patterson**  
Utrecht University,  
The Netherlands



**Dr. Åsa Persson**  
Stockholm Environment Institute,  
Sweden



**Dr. Jonathan  
Pickering**  
University of Canberra,  
Australia

# Update from the International Project Office

The International Project Office functions as the central node of coordination, administration and management of the Earth System Governance Project.

As for everyone, the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic greatly affected the International Project Office in 2020 – and still affects us today – as we work from the confines of our homes. To best support our scholarly community, this year meant rising to the challenge to find our footing in digital ground, explore new arenas of interaction and connect in novel ways.

The International Project Office is therefore proud to have organized the 2020 Virtual Forum on Earth System Governance, together with Utrecht University. From a figment of an idea in March, through countless video-calls, shared documents and group discussions, we arrived at the largest ever event of the Earth System Governance Project in September of 2020.

## IPO YEAR IN DATA



### NEWSLETTER

**1390** Total subscribers

**176** Growth in subscribers

**6784** Total opened Email updates



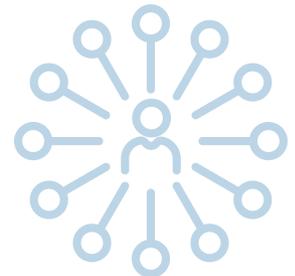
### TWITTER

**3595** Total followers

**457** Followers growth

**5979** Page visits

**289,900** Impressions



### COMMUNITY GROWTH

**26** New Research Fellows

**4** New Senior Research Fellows

For the Earth System Governance community, the greater access and inclusion offered by virtual events is a positive step towards a more globally represented network. Yet, the experience can undoubtedly feel anonymous and lack key human elements that help us build meaningful relationships. Looking forward, we hope to continue experimenting with blended forms of meetings and initiatives that connect us as a community. We were thus delighted to take up, implement and organise one such initiative ahead of 2021 – the Earth System Governance Mentoring Initiative – which connects Lead Faculty members with early career Research Fellows.

During 2020, the International Project Office is glad to have expanded our team by adding *Jane Butler* as Science and Communication Officer to the core team in December. This will greatly assist us in our mission to facilitate the collaboration in our global community of scholars, as well as to better disseminate the cutting-edge research efforts of the network. It is also important to acknowledge *Felix Zielinski*, who stepped in as temporary maternity leave replacement for *Lisa Bettoni* in the capacity as Administrative Assistant and Network Coordinator, as well as the support offered by *Indy van den Sande* and *Charlotte Stijnen* as Student Assistants.

Last but not least, we wish to recognize that nothing truly happens in isolation. The International Project Office is grateful that we could rely on the generous support and expertise of our host institution Utrecht University, and specifically the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development and the Faculty of Geosciences.



**Gustav Thungren**  
Managing Director,  
International Project Office



**Lisa Bettoni**  
Network Coordinator &  
Administrative Assistant



**Jane Butler**  
Science and  
Communications Officer



“Expanding the global  
mobilization of earth  
system governance  
researchers”

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THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT

# Global Alliance of Research Centres

The Earth System Governance Project strongly relies on a broad network that reflects the interdisciplinary, international, and multi-scale challenge that lies ahead. The project is therefore strategically growing regionally through its 17 research centres. Research Centres are a key academic and institutional mechanism by which the project's work is implemented.

## GLOBAL ALLIANCE OF EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE RESEARCH CENTRES



- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Research Centre Accra                      | 9. Research Centre Lund             |
| 2. Research Centre Amsterdam                  | 10. Research Centre Nairobi         |
| 3. Research Centre Australia                  | 11. Research Centre Norwich         |
| 4. Research Centre Bonn                       | 12. Research Centre Oldenburg       |
| 5. Research Centre Brasilia                   | 13. Research Centre Paris           |
| 6. Research Centre Central and Eastern Europe | 14. Research Centre Shonan Fujisawa |
| 7. Research Centre Chiang Mai                 | 15. Research Centre Stockholm       |
| 8. Research Centre Colorado                   | 16. Research Centre Toronto         |
|   | 17. Research Centre Utrecht         |



## Paris joins the Global Alliance of Research Centres

In early 2020, the Earth System Governance Project welcomed Paris as a new Research Centre, enriching the network with a global hub of outstanding expertise in the field. Sciences Po has developed a transversal programme on Planetary Transformations, in order to integrate global environmental and social challenges in all its education and research components. At Sciences Po, the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations is an independent policy research institute, it focuses on conditions and tools to put sustainable development at the heart of international relations and public and private policies. Dr. Carola Klöck and Prof. Sébastien Treyer lead the Research Centre.



## Earth System Governance Speaker Series at the Utrecht Research Centre

As the host of the International Project Office, the Earth System Governance Speaker Series events took place on-site at Utrecht University, Faculty of Geosciences. The first session of 2020 was titled “Fair Limits in the Anthropocene – What are the just boundaries of our ecological footprint?”. Speakers were Prof. Ingrid Robeyns and Dr. Fergus Green who shared their insights from the ongoing Fair Limits project, including how distributive justice can be linked to ecological resources in the context of the Anthropocene. An ensuing panel debate with Dr. Agni Kalfagianni as discussant, chaired by Dr. James Patterson took place after the presentation.





## International Workshop hosted by Research Centre Brasília

The Earth System Governance Project endorsed the international workshop, “The Sustainability Governance of Inter-Regional Linkages: Lessons from the Brazil-Europe Soy Complex” hosted by the Research Centre Brasília. The workshop organized collaboratively by professors and researchers from the German Universities of Osnabrück and Lüneburg and the University of Brasília lasted two days. There were sessions for researchers and professors to present the results of a 3-year-research project on telecoupling and governance of agriculture; and sessions for stakeholders to discuss the project’s findings as well as the governance challenges faced by the actors involved in the soy complex. Before the workshop, there was a field trip to a Landless Worker Movement (MST) camp and a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm.

EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE SCIENTIFIC STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER, CRISTINA INOUE COMMENTED ON THE WORKSHOP: *“On the first day, we got to know a rural settlement where a family produces organic food (part of a Community Supported Agriculture) and also a Landless Movement camp. The second day was a workshop between members of the Earth System Governance Research Center Brasília and other researchers including Professor Braulio Dias, former Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Professor Mercedes Bustante (member of the Brazilian Academy of Science). The third day, the group focused on society engagement, including NGOs, bilateral cooperation agencies and one federal public prosecutor. This last day was the beginning of the lockdown in Brazil, where the university had a blackout. It was fortunate to have had such activities before the year was to change course! We have been working separately in telecoupling/ governance related to soy and commodities in the Amazon and look forward to regrouping after the pandemic.”*

# “Stimulating and facilitating research collaboration”

THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT



# Taskforces

Through taskforces, the Earth System Governance Project seeks to push the frontiers of research in specific areas of its research agenda. Taskforces are led by Lead Faculty or Senior Research Fellows, with numerous Research Fellows participating. Taskforces are open for all and often interact with other research communities, organizing events, webinars, and publications, and facilitating research all over the world. In 2020, despite the pandemic, we had active taskforces hosting meetings and seminars accessible on a global level.

## TASKFORCE ON NEW TECHNOLOGIES

This taskforce focuses on the diverse roles of emergent technologies in causing and responding to environmental change in the global epoch of the Anthropocene. It is led by Dr. Jesse Reynolds, University of California and Prof. Eduardo Viola, University of Brasilia.

## TASKFORCE ON PLANETARY JUSTICE

This taskforce brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars who are concerned with questions of justice in the context of profound transformations of the earth system. In 2020, the taskforce published a special issue with the Earth System Governance Journal “Exploring Planetary Justice” with seven articles from varying disciplines. It is coordinated by Prof. Frank Biermann and Dr. Agni Kalfagianni, Utrecht University.

## TASKFORCE ON OCEAN GOVERNANCE

This taskforce seeks to address the multi-level challenge of oceans governance in the Anthropocene. It brings together scholars from the Earth System Governance network, with outside researchers and practitioners to advance knowledge and develop policy solutions in the marine domain. In 2020, the taskforce connected with the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. They also hosted a meeting at the Virtual Forum. The Ocean Governance Taskforce is led by: Prof. DG Webster,

Dartmouth, Dr. Leandra Gonçalves, University of São Paulo, Dr. Judith van Leeuwen, Wageningen University, Prof. Atsushi Ishii, Tohoku University and Dr. Candace May, South Dakota State University

## TASKFORCE ON ACCOUNTABILITY

This taskforce explores approaches to accountability, to assess the necessity and potential for greater accountability in the system of global environmental governance that has been riddled by fragmentation and duplication of efforts, dispersed political authority and weak regulatory influence. This taskforce is coordinated by Prof. Teresa Kramarz, University of Toronto and Prof. Susan Park, University of Sydney.

## TASKFORCE ON ANTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

This taskforce seeks to foster a generation of researchers and practitioners with anticipatory expertise and experience around anticipatory governance that is crucial for the future of the planet. A Slack community exists for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, activities and more. This Slack community now has nearly 500 members - researchers and practitioners from all around the world working in different areas related to anticipatory governance. It is led by Prof. Aarti Gupta, Wageningen University and Dr. Joost Vervoort, Utrecht University.

## SPOTLIGHT - TASKFORCE ON EARTH SYSTEM LAW

The Task Force on Earth System Law held its fourth annual meeting as part of the 2020 Virtual Forum on Earth System Governance. The members of the Task Force presented their research projects, took stock of the ongoing work at the Task Force level, and planned for the next year. In 2020, the Task Force has grown significantly both in size and diversity, and it currently consists of over 60 scholars from around the world (all six continents represented) engaging in cutting-edge research on earth system law from various disciplinary perspectives including law, philosophy, and political science. The Task Force's two core projects have been the Special Issue on earth system law with the journal "Earth System Governance" (Kotzé, Kim, and Blanchard, co-editors), and the edited volume "Earth System Law: Standing on the Precipice of the Anthropocene" with Routledge (Cadman, Hurlbert, and Simonelli, co-editors), both forthcoming in 2021. The body of literature on earth system law has expanded in 2020, which collectively aims to offer a new legal paradigm for the Anthropocene. The Task Force on Earth System Law is currently coordinated by Prof. Louis J. Kotzé at North-West University in South Africa and Dr. Rakhyun E. Kim and Dr. Catherine Blanchard at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

# Working Groups

## WORKING GROUP ON ECONOMIC DOWNTURN AND CLIMATE ACTION

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic in early March 2020, Earth System Governance Project scholars and experts gathered in the Working Group on Economic Downturn and Climate Action, led by conveners Dr. Sander Chan (Utrecht University & Global Center on Adaptation) and Dr. Marjanneke Vijge (Utrecht University). The group seeks to identify research needs and options to strengthen climate action in the wake of the outbreak of the pandemic and possible economic downturn, examining how it may affect capacity, political will and support for climate action, or may lead to the entrenchment of carbon lock-ins.

Through a participatory process involving more than 50 researchers, the Working Group on Economic Downturn and Climate Action raised key knowledge gaps and research questions, which were addressed in sub-working groups. These sub-working groups respectively discuss (1) economic downturn and options to avoid new carbon lock-ins, and to lock-in green and socially just recovery pathways; (2) the role of business in climate action during and after the pandemic; (3) changes in multilateral funding and development cooperation for the sustainable development goals; and, (4) the role of social science in supporting a green recovery.

The Working Group has already hosted a well-attended discussion at the 2020 Virtual Forum on Earth System Governance, through the Semi-Plenary session, titled “Strengthening Climate Action During Economic Downturn and a Green Recovery”. Since then, researchers of the Working Group have been awarded a grant from the Volkswagen Stiftung on the topic of “Sustaining and Strengthening City Climate Action in the COVID-19 crisis for a green and climate-resilient recovery”. Moreover, members of the different sub-working groups are working on various academic articles.

## URBAN WORKING GROUP OF THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT

The Urban Working Group of the Earth System Governance Project was created at the end of a meeting on urban transformations and disruptions held during the Earth System Governance 2020 Virtual Forum. The foundational meeting of the working group gathered 15 scholars during the meeting and has since expanded to over 20 scholars who have been advancing an exciting collaborative agenda for Earth System Governance in the urban domain. The Working Group includes early career researchers and senior scholars from the Earth System Governance community broadly concerned with the relationship between urban and environmental issues. Areas of interest include micro-local to global perspectives on how environmental issues affect urban areas, innovation and transformative urban experiments and policies, the elaboration of actionable knowledge and practical solutions to governance issues, to name a few. The group is led by Dr. Rachel Macrorie, University of Sheffield, Dr. Marielle Papin, Université Laval and Dr. Linda Westman, University of Sheffield.

## WORKING GROUP ON DEMOCRACY AND EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

The working group on democracy and earth system governance brings together researchers from various academic disciplines who are interested in how questions of democracy, power and legitimacy bear on the challenges of governing contemporary social-ecological risks. They explore the tensions and synergies between democratic and environmental values at local, national and global levels. The group has published two journal special issues, as well as working together on an ongoing publication project on democratic transformations in earth system governance. The working group co-convenors Prof. Karin Bäckstrand, Dr. Thomas Hickmann and Prof. Jonathan Pickering.

An aerial photograph of a large, paved public square filled with people. In the center of the square, a large, black and white panda mascot is sitting on the ground. The square is surrounded by a dense crowd of people of various ages and ethnicities, some walking, some standing in groups, and some taking photos. The pavement is made of dark, rectangular tiles. The overall scene is one of a busy, public gathering.

# “Communicate and engage at the Science-Policy Interface”

THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT

# Affiliated Projects & Endorsed Activities

## Affiliated Projects

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Affiliated Projects are projects and other structured activities existing independently of the Earth System Governance Project and undertaking research or other activities relevant for and relating to the Earth System Governance Science and Implementation Plan. Affiliated Projects can be existing research projects or research projects explicitly developed as Affiliated Projects by, or in cooperation with, researchers affiliated to the Earth System Governance Project. While no new affiliated projects were added this year, longstanding affiliated projects can be viewed on the website.

## Endorsed Activities

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The Earth System Governance Project can endorse activities (including conferences, workshops, lectures, research activities) or products (including books, articles, reports, websites) that are relevant for and explicitly relate to the questions and themes of the Earth System Governance Science and Implementation Plan.

### LOW CARBON ACTION IN ORDINARY CITIES

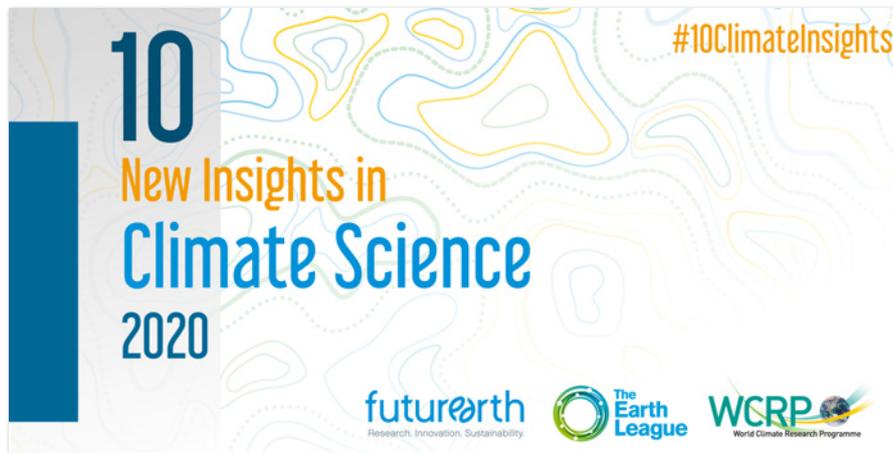


LO-ACT became an endorsed project by the Earth System Governance Project in March 2020. It is looking at the ‘ordinary actions’ taken by citizens to improve everyday life whilst tackling climate change. The project will examine specific examples of climate change actions and policies to find out how ideas, materials, technologies, and expertise can be transferred across urban contexts. LO-ACT will develop tools to design and discuss urban climate change politics. The principal investigator is Prof. Vanesa Castán Broto from Sheffield University.

### TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF TRANSPARENCY IN CLIMATE GOVERNANCE



In May 2020, the TRANSGOV project became an endorsed project of Earth System Governance, as well as hosting the Semi-Plenary titled “The Transformative Potential of Transparency in Climate Governance” at the 2020 Virtual Forum. TRANSGOV is a four-year project led by Prof. Aarti Gupta at the Environmental Policy Group of Wageningen University and Research in the Netherlands, involving collaborators from the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (India), the University of Melbourne (Australia), the University of Cape Town (South Africa) and the United Nations Framework Convention (UNFCCC).



### FUTURE EARTH - 10 CLIMATE INSIGHTS

As a core project of Future Earth, the Earth System Governance Project contributes much needed governance and social science perspectives to the field of global environmental change research. This report summarizes 10 new important climate science insights, and is a testament to how valuable scientific synthesis is for policy and society at large, by expanding and improving the knowledge of our planetary climate systems and the interactions with the human world. Earth System Governance fellows Otto Spijkers, Thomas Hickman, Michelle Scobie, Jakob Skovgaard and Pedro Henrique Campello Torres were among 57 leading global researchers who contributed to this interdisciplinary effort.

# 2020 Virtual Forum on Earth System Governance



The main event and highlight of the community's year was the 2020 Virtual Forum on Earth System Governance, held 15 – 17 September 2020 and hosted by the Earth System Governance Project and Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht University. In the long-standing series of annual Earth System Governance conferences, the Virtual Forum was the first event ever to bring together the global research alliance in a virtual setting and stands out as the most globally accessible, largest and low-emission event in the network's history to date.

The planning of the 2020 Virtual Forum commenced in early April, following a decision to postpone the Bratislava Conference by late March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Building upon the preparations of the Bratislava Conference, this free of charge event ran for three days, and was designed to spur academic debate and discussions within the domain of earth system governance, meanwhile providing stimulating and meaningful opportunities for our community to engage and interact.

We were therefore delighted that our move from a physical to a virtual event could hugely increase the global accessibility of our annual event as well as earth system governance research. More than 1100 colleagues from over 85 countries across the world registered for the Virtual Forum.

The 2020 Virtual Forum addressed the theme “Between precarity and possibility: Implications of disruption for Earth System Governance” and was guided by the Earth System Governance Science and Implementation Plan. The Virtual Forum explored challenging questions about the current and ongoing nature of disruption in multiple domains of sustainability governance. This encompassed not only the impacts of the global COVID19 crisis, but also the ongoing climate and biodiversity crises, as well as broader issues of political polarization, economic downturn, and technological change, among others.

All in all, the programme for the Virtual Forum involved over 90 speakers and encompassed 27 sessions in total: 3 Plenary Sessions, 6 Semi-Plenary Sessions, 9 parallel Innovative Sessions as well as room for informal networking and breaks. In addition, side-events were also held, such as the Early Career World Café on the 14th September, the Taskforce & Meeting Day on the 18th September as well as the Asia-Pacific Perspectives on 16th September.

# 2020 VIRTUAL FORUM Earth System Governance



## 2020 VIRTUAL FORUM ON EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE - KEY NUMBERS

**1148**

Total unique registrations

**221**

Total registrations from Earth System Governance Fellows (Self-reported)

**85**

Number of countries represented via attendee registration

**27**

Total number of Sessions

**91**

Total number of Speakers



# Early Career Research Activities

## World Café session at Virtual Forum

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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. The coordinators of the Earth System Governance early career resources, together with four Earth System Governance Lead Faculty members, then hosted four breakout rooms dedicated to relevant questions for early career researchers.



### EARLY CAREER RESOURCES COMMUNICATIONS

With the early-career communications the aim is to collect and share resources and experiences including advice from mid-career and senior scholars, experiences from early-career colleagues, online resources relevant to our field, and more. Three Early Career Resources email updates were published in 2020, with tips on how to organize online academic conferences, navigate networking and project collaboration, and with reflections on the struggles and challenges faced by early-career researchers in pandemic times. There are 354 recipients of the ECR communications, an increase of 121 in 2020.



### EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE MENTORING INITIATIVE

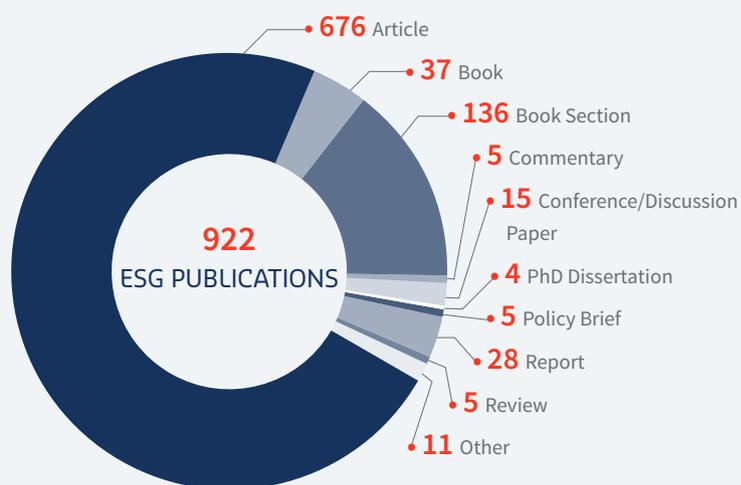
With planning and preparations commencing in May 2020 and via an official launch at the Early Career World Café Session at the Virtual Forum, the first Earth System Governance Mentoring Initiative is the first of its kind and began in January 2021, running to the end of the year. Lead Faculty members offer their time to act as mentors for groups of early career Research Fellows, assisting with support and guidance to advance the mentees' career trajectories. There are 12 participating mentors, and 33 mentees benefiting from the program. The Earth System Governance Mentoring Initiative contributes to the development of future leaders in our field and builds new relationships within the community.

# Community Publications

The following analysis serves to better understand the scholarly interests and research undertakings of the community. The data was gathered through web searches on the online repositories Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar, using the individual member name as search term and only including publications from the year 2020.

COUNT OF EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PUBLICATIONS IN 2020 PER CATEGORY

| Journal   | Number of publications |
|---|------------------------|
| Environmental Science & Policy                        | 17                     |
| Environmental Politics                                | 14                     |
| International Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics | 13                     |
| Sustainability  | 11                     |
| Earth System Governance                               | 10                     |
| Climate Policy  | 10                     |
| Energy Research & Social Science                      | 10                     |
| Marine Policy   | 10                     |
| Climatic Change                                       | 8                      |
| Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning            | 8                      |



## ENGAGING WITH THE URGENCIES OF THE PANDEMIC

Part of the vision of the project is to ensure that research is highly relevant. 75 publications this year engaged in contemporary discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic, a testament to the community efforts to engage with, and better understand the crisis' impact on themes of earth system transformations.

| Keyword     | Number of publications |
|-------------|------------------------|
| Coronavirus | 4                      |
| COVID-19    | 49                     |
| pandemic    | 19                     |
| epidemic    | 3                      |
| TOTAL       | 75                     |



# Earth System Governance Flagship Publications

The Earth System Governance Project is linked to four flagship publication outlets, presented below, in which the cutting-edge and collaborative research efforts of the global research alliance are disseminated.

## ESG MIT BOOK SERIES



- Kramarz, Teresa (2020) “Forgotten Values: The World Bank and Environmental Partnerships” MIT Press
- Partzsch, Lena (2020) “Alternatives to Multilateralism: New Forms of Social and Environmental Governance” MIT Press

## CAMBRIDGE ELEMENTS SERIES



- Park, Susan (2020) “Environmental Recourse at the Multilateral Development Banks” Cambridge University Press
- Macnaghten, Phil (2020) “The Making of Responsible Innovation” Cambridge University Press
- Baber, Walter F. and Robert V. Bartlett (2020) “Environmental Human Rights in Earth System Governance” Cambridge University Press

## EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE JOURNAL



### Issues released in 2020

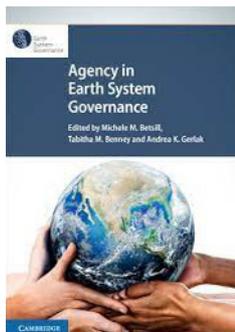
- Volume 3 & 4
- Volume 5: Special Issue: AI & Digitalization
- Volume 6: Special Issue on Planetary Justice

- **22 Articles in 2020 including two special issues**

A special issue in 2020 was “Exploring Planetary Justice” whereby the Planetary Justice Taskforce could outline their vision to move from “environmental justice” to “planetary justice”. This sets the trend for project taskforces to use the Earth System Governance journal in order to elaborate and explore new concepts from several disciplinary standpoints. The Taskforce on Earth System Law will be the next takeforce to publish a special issue so in 2021.

Given that the Earth System Governance journal has been launched only in 2019, no formal impact factor has yet been determined. Elsevier has agreed to initiate the required processes in 2021. The journal ambition is to achieve an impact factor in the range of 4-5. The journal aspires to be in the first quartile in General Social Sciences by the year 2025.

## HARVESTING INITIATIVE SERIES (CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS)



- “Agency in Earth System Governance” - Edited by Michele M. Betsill, Colorado State University, Tabitha M. Benney, University of Utah, Andrea K. Gerlak, University of Arizona
- “Architectures of Earth System Governance, Institutional Complexity and Structural Transformation” - Edited by Frank Biermann, Universiteit Utrecht, The Netherlands, Rakhyun E. Kim, Universiteit Utrecht, The Netherlands

A long suspension bridge with a metal mesh railing spans across a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. The bridge is viewed from a high angle, curving away into the distance. The forest is lush and green, with many trees visible in the background.

“Looking forward, we wish the entire Earth System Governance community well during the ongoing difficulties of the pandemic, and hope to interact – virtually and hopefully soon again in person – in the near future”

OPENING WORD OF SCIENTIFIC STEERING COMMITTEE,  
THE EARTH SYSTEM GOVERNANCE PROJECT



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The Earth System Governance Project has its International Office housed at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University. The Earth System Governance Project is a Global Research Project of Future Earth.

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