Early Career Network

Mission Statement

Preamble

The Early Career Network (ECN) is a self-organised collaborative effort of early career IASC members to support and promote the next generation of scholars and practitioners with interests in sustainable governance and management of commons, other forms of shared resources, and social-ecological systems. In January 2019, for the first time in IASC history, an elected representative of the early career IASC members is on the IASC Council. Facilitated by the ECN Council representative (i.e. Student Councilor), the IASC-ECN was officially launched in Summer 2019 at the IASC Global Conference in Lima, Peru (3 July 2019).

Drawing on the insights from the IASC-wide survey conducted in April 2019 regarding the interests and needs of the early career members of the IASC, around 70 early career scholars came together to discuss motivations for joining forces within the framework of their own network. This mission statement lays out the core values, goals and main areas of collaboration of the Network that is our collective reply to common struggles.

Our Core Values

The ECN is an inclusive and supportive community, aimed at enhancing exchange between early career scholars and practitioners for forging research collaborations and weathering challenges faced in this precarious career stage. We envision the Network as a safe space where long-lasting professional and personal connections can flourish. For ensuring this, each Member is committed to respect and promote the following values:

1. The Network is a democratic and participative endeavour. Each Member's voice and opinion is heard. We cultivate a discussion culture that values respect, politeness, honesty, and transparency.
2. Heterogeneous backgrounds, academic interests, and career stages are considered valuable assets for a fruitful interaction among the Members. The Members, therefore, are committed to act respectfully towards each other regardless of backgrounds, prior disciplinary/interdisciplinary research record, and training.
3. The ECN activities are coordinated on the basis of clearly stated and specific objectives. Collaborative research and related activities are organized by ECN working group facilitators according to well-defined responsibilities and contributions.
4. All the activities of the ECN are pursued on the basis of the voluntary engagement of its Members. On this basis, we value every contribution to the further development of the ECN, especially in consideration of their personal and professional circumstances.
5. Likewise, we emphasise scientific ethical conduct in our collaboration and rule out abuse and exploitation of the Network or its resources without contributing to its further development.

6. The Network may want to collaborate with external scientists and practitioners for additional, insightful perspectives. In such cases, the aforementioned core values of the Network apply.

Overarching Goals & Activity Clusters

The Network brings together like-minded scholars and practitioners with interests in sustainable governance and management of social-ecological systems. Through our collaboration we are keen to tap into multi-/ inter-/ transdisciplinary potentialities for navigating socio-environmental changes across the globe. We seek to systematically connect and collaborate in working groups and communicate our thought processes and results with the broader scientific community dedicated to understanding the socio-natural entanglements that shape our lives. Thereby, we also aim to contribute to the research and practice agenda of the IASC.

In line with our overarching goals, the activities of the Network fall broadly into three activity clusters:
CLUSTER 1. Advancing research frontiers for navigating social-ecological challenges by bridging disciplinary perspectives.
CLUSTER 2. Enhancing dialogue among scholars at similar early career stages, as well as connecting early career scholars with more seasoned scholars, practitioners and policymakers to promote cross-generational scholarly and professional exchange.
CLUSTER 3. Promoting further professional development opportunities, including discussion on how to navigate job opportunities with inter- and transdisciplinary background.

Collaboration within these activity clusters may follow in the form of ongoing discussions at regular meetings and events organised by the Network such as webinars, podcasts, meetings and panel discussions. We also aim to facilitate collaboration through multi-stakeholder dialogues, development of research papers, journal special issues (for example, the International Journal of the Commons) and research grant proposals, to name some of the main possibilities. The collaborative work in the activity clusters will proceed in working groups with specific goals as well as stand-alone activities. Working groups shall be initiated with a brief concept note laying out the scope, goals, structure of the concrete initiative as well as the involved members.

Membership and Involvement

The ECN is open to all interested and motivated members of the IASC. Although there is ambiguity about who is considered to be early career, we define early career scholar or practitioner as somebody who is working towards a degree at Master or Ph.D. level or has finished their highest degree less than 10 years ago.

The Network is a platform to facilitate collaboration, knowledge production and mentorship among the Members as well as the IASC members. We thereby encourage active participation to remain true to our vision and best serve our Members. 'Active participation' can be achieved at different levels, for e.g. giving suggestions through the online platform, contributing to periodic meetings, actively collaborating and supporting the Network's initiatives, or taking responsibility for the promotion and development of the Network. If a Member is no longer able to actively participate, they are encouraged to communicate it to the other members. Members can discontinue their involvement by informing the Network representative and the Members; the exiting Member will be removed from collaboration platforms.

In recognition that early career scholars and practitioners are in a transitional phase of their career, the sustainability of the ECN is contingent on the simultaneous support of both the IASC Executive Council and the ECN members. ECN members will seek to identify and recruit interested and prospective future ECN members to ECN platforms of communication, which provides an open door for future ECN members to learn more about the network and become an active member if they are able and choose to engage at a deeper level in the Network's activities.

Organisation

Direct representation of early career scholars and practitioners at the Executive Council is an unprecedented move for IASC in an effort to support the next generation of commons scholarship. In 2018, the IASC bylaws were amended to allow for a Councilor on the Executive Council to represent the interests and idiosyncratic challenges we face in their research and professional career. Accordingly, on 15 January 2019 Beril Ocaklı assumed the office as the first elected Member of the Executive Council to represent the ECS within the IASC. With no prior structure to draw upon, the first year in office was dedicated to develop an understanding of the potentially interested researchers. Following a series of preparatory steps, the representation through the Council seat has been transformed into a broad-based democratic, self-organised network. By the end of 2019, the IASC-ECN started to take shape as a group of keen researchers joined forces to animate the Network.

Currently, the Network is coordinated by the elected councilor who at the same time represents the interests of the ECN at the Executive Council until January 2021. In the light of the internal discussions as well as consultations with the IASC President, the Network decided unanimously to move forward with developing its own democratic capacities. An important step to this effect is for the Network to organise and hold its own independent elections for filling the Coordinator and other future positions that might be deemed necessary for achieving the set goals. Members can nominate themselves or be nominated by other members given the prior consent of the nominee. The elections shall be coordinated by the outgoing Coordinator; over time as the Network grows, Coordinator might require additional support from Network members, forming an election committee.

At the moment, in addition to the Network coordination, there are designated members coordinating working groups (namely WG 1 on Navigating Interdisciplinary Research and WG 2 on the Study of Informal Rules). Over time, further functions are going to be increasingly crucial for supporting and facilitating the day-to-day operations and strategic development of the Network. We foresee, at a minimum, a treasurer as well as additional officers for communication and funding. That being said, the organisation of the Network including specification of further roles and rules will have to adapt to changing needs and capacities of its members while respecting the core values laid out in this statement. Key decisions concerning the Network shall continue to be discussed and reached together. Growing membership will require setting out further rules regarding decision-making for reinforcing democratic principles of the Network.

With Network members spread out across the globe, the meetings are necessarily digital. While this certainly enables carbon-friendly and flexible internal communication, online meetings are not seen as a substitute for personal meetings. We thus envision complementary in-person gatherings, workshops and retreats with the support of IASC and external funding. Especially in the initial phase, support from IASC will be vital and hence welcomed. The IASC President will continue to be the focal point for the Network and consult on organisational development of the ECN initiative.