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Earth System Governance

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Editorial to the inaugural issue of 'Earth System Governance'

Welcome to *Earth System Governance* – the new open-access journal for all those interested in the study of institutions, political processes and governance mechanisms related to environmental change, earth system transformations and the quest for global sustainability. *Earth System Governance* is open to scholars from all disciplines, empirical fields, and theoretical and methodological approaches. In addition, this new journal serves as the flagship outlet for the Earth System Governance Project, the leading global research alliance in this field.

Earth System Governance addresses governance at all levels of decision-making. We welcome papers that study local governance, from coastal zone management in Asia to decarbonization policies in North American cities, as well as research on national institutions and politics. We are also interested in studies of global environmental politics and the international agreements that shape such processes, from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or the Convention on Biological Diversity with their protocols, to more specific agreements on mercury, fisheries or endangered species. In studying such institutions, we also welcome papers from legal communities open to engaging with the governance approach in the social sciences. Importantly, because governance does not stop with governmental policy and intergovernmentalism, we expect to publish cutting-edge research on non-state institutions and private actors, from civil society organizations to myriad nongovernmental and transnational initiatives and partnerships.

Earth System Governance is not only about the effectiveness of policies and institutions. The Anthropocene framing has opened a host of fundamental questions about the relationship between humans and what was known as 'nature', along with disconcerting and novel ethical questions about the role and responsibilities of people and societies in this new epoch in planetary history. *Earth System Governance* will serve as a discursive forum for such debates, and welcomes papers that discuss, for instance, reformulations of notions of justice, responsibility and agency in the context of earth system governance. The democratic quality of earth system governance is another fundamental concern that this new journal seeks to explore, and we invite innovative papers on the legitimacy, accountability, transparency and democratic quality of institutions, processes and governance mechanisms from local to global levels. The normative turn in earth system governance research has led many to explore pathways for a deeper transformation of our societies and governance systems towards global sustainability. *Earth System Governance* welcomes such research that addresses fundamental transformations at all levels of societal organization.

Given the breadth of earth system governance as a research field, *Earth System Governance* does not locate itself in any disciplinary tradition. The research challenges are immense, and we

recognize that scholars with backgrounds in political science, public administration, international relations, law, sociology, geography, ecological economics and the humanities all need to contribute to the broader debate. Similarly, we are agnostic about fundamental questions of ontology and epistemology, positivism or poststructuralism, and welcome both qualitative and quantitative research. We also welcome transdisciplinary studies that involve insights and knowledge from outside the confines of universities, and critical reflection on the structural drivers of unsustainable developments and ineffective earth system governance.

In short, a unique characteristic of *Earth System Governance* is the integration of discourses, research lines and scholarly traditions. The journal brings together debates that cross disciplinary boundaries; integrates insights from local to global levels; combines analysis and critique with the quest for political reform and societal transformation; and shares insights for scholars and practitioners alike.

The broad inclusiveness of *Earth System Governance* does not imply lack of focus or specialization. We are less interested, for instance, in purely economic analyses or in studies of human dimensions of environmental change that lack a research question around concerns of governance, institutions or politics. Papers in human geography or contributions from environmental psychology that explain human behaviour without a focus on governance dimensions are likely to fall outside of the journal's scope. While we believe in the social and political function of science and the need for societal reform and governance transformation, *Earth System Governance* remains a research-based academic journal. We are more open to policy proposals and reform agendas than most comparable journals in the field; yet we do not publish policy research that lacks a clear link to research findings and the relevant scientific governance literature. We are also not an 'Anthropocene journal' as such – our ambition is to publish the best research on the political, institutional and governance dimensions of the Anthropocene epoch.

Earth System Governance is an open access journal. All published articles are freely available through the internet to anybody, anywhere, at all times. We have chosen this model for a variety of reasons.

First, our model breaks with the long-standing discrimination of scholars in the developing world who lack access to the well-funded university libraries in Europe or North America. If you are working at a research institution in the Global South, for example, our model is to your advantage: all research findings in *Earth System Governance* are freely available online immediately after publication. By adopting the open-access model, *Earth System Governance* follows the ambition and aspiration in our community to make earth system governance research a truly global endeavour

that is accessible to everyone while drawing on the perspectives and insights from people across the globe. This also applies to students who study at institutions that are unable to pay journal subscription fees. Open access to knowledge is a precondition for sustainability education worldwide.

Second, the open access model makes our research findings publicly accessible since our readers do not need a university library affiliation or expensive subscription. Whether you are a high school student, a teacher, a policy-maker, an activist or a private scholar, all the knowledge and research in *Earth System Governance* is only a mouse-click away. There is no need to sign up for a library membership or pay subscription fees for our journal. *Earth System Governance* will not be 'held' in libraries, as all our content is freely available on the internet.

Third, our open-access policy follows an emerging trend. In several countries – especially in Europe but more recently also in China – national funders have expressed their intention to turn towards open access as default for all research that is publicly funded. The European Research Council, for instance, requires all its funded projects to make research findings available through open access, with no exception. *Earth System Governance* follows this fundamental shift in publishing as part of the digital revolution, making expensive library collections and journal subscription fees a thing of the past.

Publishing *Earth System Governance* as a global open access journal comes with a cost for the digitalized production system, from submission to managing, copyediting, publication, indexing and outreach. Since individual readers, university libraries or research institutes no longer pay subscription fees, the production process for each article is instead to be subsidized by the universities or

research institutions of the authors, after acceptance of the article following double-blind review. Scholars who are resident in a developing country may be granted full waivers or discounts through the *Research4Life* programme or can request individual waivers if their institution does not qualify for this programme. Also for early-career scholars in OECD countries who cannot rely on externally funded projects or who are based at research departments that do not provide sufficient support for their doctoral students, we have agreed with the publisher on a quota of waivers.

In short, as an open access publication *Earth System Governance* responds to the needs of the complex, broad and challenging research field of 'governance in the Anthropocene', and follows the aspirations expressed in the first Science and Implementation Plan of the Earth System Governance Project that the 'globalization of problems can be countered only by the globalization of research'.

Earth System Governance has been launched as the key global forum for the scientifically rigorous but also solution-driven debate on how to respond to global environmental change and earth system transformation by making our governance systems, from local to global levels, more effective, more equitable, and more democratic. We look forward to your contributions.

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