Guest editorial: Exploring inclusive publishing practices with early career disaster-studies researchers

1. Platforming early career researchers for more inclusive disaster studies

Growing numbers of scholars are keen to study the causes of disasters and explore pathways to reduce disaster risk. As a result, there has been an influx of people with different academic backgrounds and fields of expertise who have entered the interdisciplinary field of disaster studies. For decades, disaster researchers have studied the barriers and drivers of disasters with the aim of transitioning to a safer future (Hewitt, 1983; Tierney, 2007). However, the field of disaster studies faces a number of major challenges linked to power, prestige and values. Recently, the questions of *who* develops research and *how* have become central to debates in disaster studies (Gaillard, 2019).

Research impact and success are often measured on the basis of the perspectives and priorities of leading institutions in high-income countries. Yet, research informed by local realities and local knowledge potentially has a larger impact on both practice and scholarship. It is often difficult for individual researchers to make space for local perspectives due to their need to publish and attract funding. Therefore, research is rarely led by those who are actually vulnerable to disasters.

A recent manifesto [1] – signed by a large number of leading disaster researchers – calls for a radical rethinking of research agendas, methods and the allocation of resources, stressing the importance of advancing more inclusive approaches. This manifesto draws attention to fundamental flaws in the western research system, that underrepresents perspectives of people

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affected by disasters and minorities. Disaster scholars need to incorporate local voices and more diverse epistemologies, expanding approaches that allow for more collaborative research processes and practices. As yet, however, this is far from the norm.

Compared to established disaster scholars, early career researchers (ECRs) are uniquely positioned to challenge established practices and foster innovation in their research field. They are new to academia and, as such, have not (yet) internalized the myriad of negative practices that mark academia and spring from its profound power imbalances. ECRs have, to some extent, an "outsider perspective", which enables them to see those things which old hack insiders regularly overlook. This enables them to regularly bring new ideas. This is especially true for ECRs from backgrounds that are not often platformed in academia. As ECRs ourselves, we recognize the constant pressure to disseminate research and publish scientific papers to advance our career trajectories – which is often a process filled with fear and lack of confidence (Drosou *et al.*, 2020). Yet, we concur that this is even harder for ECRs without our privileged study facilities, who face multiple obstacles to getting their voices heard and valued by publishing in academic journals. We observe that access to high-end mentorship or academic collaborations are not a given. The advanced academic English language requirements of most prominent disaster-studies journals limit publication possibilities for many important voices. Moreover, while ECRs generally have intentions to develop ties with other peers and to network with established scholars, finding those collaborations can be time consuming and does not necessarily align with the widespread publish-or-perish culture that institutions in academia fuel all too often.

In contrast to discussions led by established scholars, this issue exclusively features critical perspectives of ECRs in disaster studies, including many contributions from low-income countries. Master students, doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers and ECRs working as practitioners have been included. This selection of contributors is motivated by our belief that ECRs can push the field into transition, as they bring novel reflections and methodologies into its sphere. As guest editors of this special issue – and ECRs ourselves – we recognize the need for change in the field of disaster studies, as informed by our diverse research experiences and geographical foci. We aim to create a welcoming and collaborative publication space for our peers.

We conceived this special issue as a practical attempt to make disaster studies more inclusive by solely publishing ECRs' voices. We aim to enable their agency through a rather unconventional publishing process, inviting them to present their work in a dialogic (final) format that nurtures further debate. Before introducing the paper contributions of this issue, we reflect on how we redesigned the publication process.

2. Exploring inclusive publication practices
Publishing papers is a key part of doing science. Yet, publication procedures are still far from inclusive. For this special issue, we as guest editors explored the boundaries of changing the traditional editorial process with the journal editors and the publisher. The resulting format of the issue is innovative in at least three ways: First, this special issue primarily targets authors from low-income countries, inviting personal reflections on research experiences and papers using unconventional formats. Second, authors received high-quality mentorship and peer feedback to express their ideas to a scientific audience. And third, papers include a written dialogue among authors at the end of each paper.

    (1) *Author selection:* Despite a generally modest call for papers, almost 100 abstracts were submitted from an array of outstanding ECRs, in different languages. This shows how appealing and important more inclusive disaster studies are to ECRs. Giving the possibility to submit non-English abstracts allowed for a wider audience.

This way, we opened the door for authors who have English as a second language, with a limited publication record, with fewer opportunities to network and who do not benefit regularly from technical and editorial support. Authors were selected on the basis of the extent to which their abstracts pushed boundaries and presented critical reflections on theory, methodology and practice within the field. In addition, we also looked at the novelty of ideas and arguments and relevant geographical diversity. In total, 22 papers were selected out of which 19 made the final cut. Altogether, 34 authors have been published.

(2) *Mentorship and peer support*: Understanding the typical difficulties ECRs experience in publishing, we designed the whole publication process as a learning endeavour rather than as an assessment. Before submitting their papers to the journal, all the authors received feedback from senior disaster researchers from around the world. We are grateful for the positive mentorships, the time engaged and the willingness of these established scholars to be involved in the process. Mentors provided the emerging scholars with feedback on their initial manuscript drafts, helping them strengthen their arguments, providing additional references and discussing strengths and weaknesses to guide them through the publication process. The mentorship provided both valuable training to ECRs and ensured the quality of the final publications. Each contributing author also committed to reviewing one of the other articles submitted to the special issue. As shown by Drosou *et al.* (2020), a supportive peer review process can enhance ECRs' confidence and help them overcome fears when they start to write and publish. In each published piece, the authors included acknowledgements for their mentors and peers. After the feedback from mentors and peers was addressed, improved manuscripts were submitted to the regular double-blind peer review process. This constructive feedback process has helped improve both the quality of the manuscripts and the ability of authors to engage with comments and criticism to get their work accepted. In total, 20 mentors were involved.

(3) *Open dialogue:* Finally, with the aim to involve ECRs in a more public scientific debate, we organized a discussion section for each accepted article. Before publication, authors were asked to write a public reflection on one of the other articles submitted. The lead author of that manuscript was then asked to write a response. This dialogue is included at the end of each paper. This exchange proved to be a fruitful way of encouraging an academic discussion in an open, constructive, critical and horizontal manner, which we think paves the way for more inclusive and transformative research.

3. Opportunities for transitioning toward inclusive publication practices
Our editorial process for this special issue is an experiment. This volume of our special issue and the next one aim to create new, more inclusive modes of disseminating scientific knowledge in the field of disaster studies and beyond. We collected reflections from both authors and mentors engaged in our special issue through a survey to understand if we had met our initial objectives. The responses from 14 ECRs outlined their prior experiences and challenges when publishing in the field of disaster studies, their motives for responding to our special issue call and how they experienced the mentoring process. Similarly, 11 mentors gave their reasons for engaging with the initiative, their experiences with the mentoring process, their perceptions of the quality of their mentees' originally submitted work, their views on publication practices and challenges and how these challenges could best be

overcome. In this section ,we expand on three publication challenges that emerged in the surveys and during the overall process, as well as one additional challenge related to our collective positionality as guest editors of the issue.

(1) *Pushing boundaries by adapting traditional editorial processes.* Journals rarely experiment with formats. We are grateful that *Emerald* and the editors of DPM have agreed to tweak some traditional rules and practices. However, some challenges have remained.

Although many publishers have adjusted fees for scientists from low-income countries, publication remains unaffordable for most. The fees automatically make publishing in academic journals a privilege and part of a Westernized model. In addition, established publication criteria inherently limit inclusivity. Despite our aims for an inclusive editorial model, papers still needed to go through a formal review process, in line with the journal's norms and criteria. Papers were evaluated on the basis of conventional criteria for what constitutes a "*good*" academic paper by both the blind peer reviewers and ourselves. Therefore, platforming people in disaster journals who are not (yet) used to writing and thinking in line with the established writing conventions in academia is challenging. At first, having an abstract accepted feels empowering. However, even though this quality threshold has been met by new authors, the next steps in the process remain complicated without proper support. As one ECR mentioned, "*I was not familiar with the process and it was intimidating, especially as a first-generation college student who just immigrated to a new country. No one explained the process to me at my university. I did not have an opportunity to co-author with my advisor before*". Unfortunately, mentorship only partly enabled authors to meet the standard criteria. The final selection of papers therefore still predominantly features ECRs from world-leading universities and organizations based in high-income countries.

Relatedly, some ECRs flagged clashes of epistemology and highlighted that the Western research system is not very inclusive. One ECR stated, "*interdisciplinary work, across physical scientists and engineers, can be very difficult given I work in qualitative methods. There is a lot of skepticism and different styles in writing/tone [. . .] it can be quite challenging*". Established publication practices can also discourage genuine interdisciplinarity as well as the inclusion of non-hegemonic knowledges. This is because this type of research generally does not match conventional expectations or centre the global North.

(2) *Breaking free from the structural isolation of academic writing.* Writing is a hard and often a lonely endeavour. The ECRs discussed this in relation to the kind of institutional support they had, which varied from case to case. One ECR stressed that "*My PhD advisor usually agrees to read and comment on texts I am working on. I have had a mentor for a year who is ready to help me with that, but there is no other support for writing and publishing at my university/department*". More critically, another one stated that "*I received zero support from my PhD supervisor till now for writing or publishing. In the past two years, he never gave inputs on any write ups that were submitted to him*".

Acknowledging the differences in the level and type of support ECRs received, we tried to connect authors with other peers from the special issue as well as with mentors. The ECRs let us know that, in their view, this process was extremely helpful, collegial, enjoyable and confidence-building. "*It's hard for me to receive comments on my work without being overwhelmed by insecurities and the imposter syndrome*", wrote one survey respondent, who further highlighted that the mentor's comments were "*introduced with a lot of kindness.*" Other respondents emphasized that their work was reviewed "*with care and consideration*" and explained that the feedback they received "*boosted my confidence that the argument I was making was a valid and interesting contribution*". Another ECR

found that the mentorship was "*mentally fulfilling*" as it meant that there was "*someone to discuss my work with*". Comparing the special issue mentoring process to their everyday experiences at their home institutions, the invited authors found that the former gave them more space to "*express*[. . .] [their] *thinking*" – "*unlike where the mentor wants the mentee to think in the manner of the mentor*". As outlined, some contributors already enjoyed good long-term mentorship from their institutional supervisors, which meant that for them the special issue process was just a "*one off meeting*".

Several respondents also stressed the benefits of receiving comments from their peers in addition to those from senior scholars in the field. We know that having the opportunity to receive informal peer review depends on the type of network ECRs have, and thus, it generally remains, unfortunately, an uncommon practice among new researchers. The important issue here is how they relate to each other, and as pointed out by one survey respondent, "*competition in the field* [can lead to] *minimum support among peers*". Shifting this underlying principle in academia is difficult and far beyond what we can do here. However, a constructive and horizontal peer review process can lead to multiple gratifying outcomes; as stressed by an ECR, "*in this case there was mentorship also among colleagues which created confidence*". Ultimately, to develop platforms where ECRs in disaster science can find each other can lead to future writing collaborations and simulate dialogues which are critical regarding the issues raised in the manifesto.

(3) *Establishing long-term academic mentorship.* Writing itself is a demanding activity that involves many doubts, which again ECRs normally have to face on their own. While mentorship alone is not enough to make publishing in disaster studies more inclusive, we do believe that it plays an important role. We realized that kindness and openness represent a great resource for inexperienced ECRs.

Through the mentoring process, some authors realized the opportunity to learn "about the art of writing itself", e.g. with mentors providing suggestions on how to improve the focus of their papers and narrow down their work to comply with the word limit for submitted articles. Other areas of learning included how to structure an article to support its main argument, how to clearly explain subject-specific concepts to audiences of varied backgrounds and how to refine one's description of methods and overall line of argument in an article's discussion section. As one ECR pointed out: "The mentor had a broader perspective on publishing, including how the article might sound to readers and reviewers who were outsiders to contexts (both geographical and field of study) that I took for granted as familiar to others".

The authors stressed that they greatly valued the support offered by the senior scholars who kindly volunteered to act as mentors for this special issue. One ECR stated:

The mentor was very specific and to the point about areas that needed improvement. This is often lacking in general mentorship arrangements when the feedback is quite generic. But at the same time there was no imposition of ideas or inputs from the mentor for this paper. It was entirely up to me how and to what extent I wanted to take the comments forward. He was also supportive about my career interests, and also suggested people to get in touch with to exchange ideas for paper writing etc. I had a great time working with him!

The feedback and meetings with mentors were vital learning moments for the authors and played a central role in our efforts to make this special issue more inclusive. Leading academics were very willing to volunteer their time in this manner.

(4) *Presenting collaborative research.* As a team of guest editors, we also reflected constantly on our own inclusivity and positionality while working on this issue.

All four of us think and write from different academic frameworks (land systems and livelihoods, post-disaster reconstruction, urban disaster governance and humanitarian knowledge management) but have been able to work collectively based on respect and mutual admiration. We hope that this collection of articles succeeds in highlighting the need for a facilitative rather than a directive approach to creating knowledges and mutual understanding between researchers and communities engaged in our work.

Part of our own learning while working on this issue was the insight that the publication system is not yet set up for teams that strive for equality in editorial and authorship work. Being the first author on a publication is usually an issue of pride, is valued higher and is often an academic necessity. Our work on this special issue is nevertheless based on a commitment to work as a collaborative and horizontal team. We prioritized a shared working process and making room for each other's views, knowledges and time constraints over concerns about authorship orders or keeping checks on each other's inputs at all times. Journal editors thus need to explore how author listings could be reformed, or even better, give space to authors to define how best to present their shared editorial, writing and intellectual processes. This includes, among other options, the use of pseudonyms (see e.g. Care *et al.*, 2021; Deville, 2014). That is why we chose to publish this editorial and our forthcoming shared work, under the pseudonym C. A. Eelaferi, which draws from the initials of our **C**o-**A**uthor team **Ee**fje, **La**ura, **Fe**mke and **Ri**cardo. In that way, no single individual of the team benefits from what has been an equal engagement from the beginning.

4. Emerging pathways to more inclusive disaster studies in this special issue research

In this special issue, ECRs explore different pathways to more inclusive disaster studies. This volume covers the approaches as follows: (1) careful reflection and use of research positionality in a disaster context; (2) the application of progressive theoretical frameworks to the study of disasters and communication of hazards and (3) the use of more reflective and inclusive methodologies.

As is the case with all research topics that have a significant social aspect, researchers working in disaster and post-disaster contexts need to consider how their positionality influences data collection, data analysis and dissemination of findings. One clear example of this is how a researcher's position as an insider or outsider affects the inclusivity of research.

Susie Goodall, Zainab Khalid and Monia del Pinto used their distinct research positionalities from different parts of the world as the basis for an open and horizontal conversation. Their "*cross-cultural conversations*" reveal the value of exploring alternative research pathways and challenging established ideas. Their paper format pushes the boundaries of publishing, giving space to a discussion of the varied perspectives the different authors hold rather than presenting one common voice.

Anna Torres reflects on the ways in which migrants are presented in disaster discourses and frameworks. She does this on the basis of her positionality as a migrant ECR. Anna is originally from the Philippines and has spent many years in regional Australia working with migrants in transition. In her article, she shows how her background allows her to see shortcomings in the ways in which migrants are framed and treated, which non-migrant researchers and practitioners are more likely to overlook. She highlights, for example, that migrant categories are often omitted or racialized and that this does little to address the unique strengths and vulnerabilities of different migrant groups.

Nimesh Dhungana is an ECR originally from Nepal. His paper describes how his experience of the 2015 earthquakes led him to switch his PhD topic to disaster governance.

In his article, Nimesh explores "*ethics in practice*", taking the reader on a journey of reflection whereby he discusses how the need to conduct time-sensitive research under rapidly changing circumstances needs to be balanced against ethical considerations. Nimesh highlights the limitations of following standardised codes of conduct and calls for ethical sensitivity and respect for local needs.

Whereas Nimesh conducted research as an "insider", Vanicka Arora reflects on her positionality in relation to her research experience in Nepal as an "outsider". In her paper, she highlights the importance of taking time to blend in and learn about the cultures in order to draw meaningful conclusions. Vanicka calls for a facilitative approach when doing field research. She argues that a community is so diverse that even when living in the community for a while you will still not see the whole scope of its diversity. She explores the example of heritage management in Bhaktapur, where at a municipal level local history and an unified heritage esthetic are promoted, ideas that have assimilated prevailing international frameworks, policy and technologies. She argues for respecting nuance in the voices we choose to include when representing "local realities", acknowledging the ways in which the global and local are entwined and related power imbalances. She stresses that this is crucial for fostering more equitable collaborations between the researcher and researched.

Anuszka Maton-Mosurska reflects on a myriad of assumptions, tensions and positionality issues, creatively using entries from her diary during her ongoing research in Alaska and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. She discusses the limitations set by her donors and ethics committee that restricted her access to valuable data, preventing her from starting meaningful and more inclusive collaborations with local actors. She argues that in disaster studies, the research objectives should be more important than the pre-defined methodological steps. She calls on donors and universities to think along with disaster researchers, allowing for adaptation and flexibility of research execution.

The papers included in the special issue also reflect some critical theoretical innovations within disaster studies. The article written by Noémie Gonzalez Bautista centres on the experiences of the Atikamekw community (Quebec, Canada) with forest fires, following "*indigenous feminist theories*". By focussing on the different gender roles in such disasters, they discuss their positionality and show the double manifestation of colonialism and patriarchy. Such an approach not only addresses the multiple systemic oppressions experienced by indigenous women, but also invites a reconsideration of disaster research conceptions of marginalization and vulnerability.

The paper co-authored by Valentina Carraro, Sarah Kelly, José Luis Vargas, Patricio Melillanca and José Miguel Valdés-Negroni uses collaborative cartography as its primary methodology for analyzing disaster colonialism in Chile. They offer an innovative way of co-researching indigenous communities' experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a "*collaborative mapping exercise*" that shows events relevant to the Mapuche people in southern Chile, the authors expose the interplay of the pandemic with other long-standing colonial processes. These include colonialist state violence and the expansion of extractive industries, as well as resistance and territorial control practices. In doing so, this cartographic process enables scholars to decolonize disaster research and practice by using collaborative processes that incorporate indigenous epistemologies.

The paper by Mariah Jenkins, Sara McBride, Meredith Morgoch and Hollie Smith looks at how science-based institutions can better design and roll out more "*inclusive communication campaigns*" to inform and alert people about natural hazards. The authors highlight the lack of diversity among emergency managers and geoscientists, which can result in one-size-fits communications. They call for reflexive approaches to designing and rolling out campaigns and discuss two promising theoretical frameworks that could inform such strategies. Their paper discusses the example of ShakeAlert, the Earthquake Early Warning system for the USA.

Jennifer Ward George argues that researchers in the humanitarian sphere should seek guidance from practitioners who have come before them, read the wisdom of learnings from

across humanitarian aid and begin with the humble acceptance that they will always act as a secondary part to someone else's journey to recovery. As an example, she discusses the long-standing argument that "*shelter as a process should be prioritized over shelter as a product*", which is a returning challenge in engineering and architecture education. She suggests that improvements could come from interdisciplinary thinking, integration and creative teaching methods.

5. Recommendations for more inclusive disaster science

With this special issue, we set out to address the lack of inclusive publication practices. Our experience shows that many challenges remain. In line with the manifesto for disaster studies, which calls for research practices to be transformed, we suggest that the process of academic publishing in the field (and in general) needs to change.

We call for barriers to be lifted, and in the process discuss changing traditional publication formats. The present format is one way of stimulating inclusivity, but the possibilities for doing so are immense. We stress that alternative approaches to overcoming obstacles in the transition to inclusive publishing can be found. We urge others to explore "unconventional formats" and reflect upon those outcomes. To keep the discussion going, the 6th season of the *Disasters Deconstructed* podcast, is largely dedicated to pathways for more inclusive disaster studies. Many of the authors and the editors from our two special issues will share their ideas there, promoting their papers further and through a different medium.

With the changing landscape of disaster research and the inherent politics of studying them, we trust that the present special issue makes a substantial contribution to the inclusivity of disaster science. We showcase the potential of the new generation of researchers. Being an ECR is not about age but about (in)experience – and thus, about bringing a novel but enthusiastic gaze that can surely drive a community of practice forward. We urge other fields of inquiry to consider the inclusivity of their work and make space for emerging voices, writing collectively and publishing with their peers.

The papers in this collection describe research practices that can facilitate long-term cooperation between researchers and local communities. They offer examples and tools that can be used to establish more sustainable and equal collaborations. We hope this editorial encourages readers to engage with the articles included in this special issue.

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Note

1. *Power, Prestige and Forgotten Values: A Disaster Studies Manifesto*, https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/power-prestige-forgottenvalues-a-disaster (accessed 12 August 2021).

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