Survey report ESP regional conferences 2016

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In 2016 ESP organised 4 Regional Conferences: in Asia (South Korea), Europe (Belgium), Latin America (Colombia) and Africa (Kenya). In total more than 1300 participants attended the regional conferences.

This report summarizes the outcome of the surveys held after these conferences. This is still a draft and comments are very welcome. Please send your comments to conference@es-partnership.org.

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Outcome of the surveys

During the 8th ESP World conference (held in Stellenbosch, S. Africa, 9-13 November 2015) it was decided to organize ESP World conferences bi-annually and to host regional conferences in the intermediate years. In 2016 ESP organized regional conferences for the first time.

The first regional conference was organized for the Asian region *'Ecosystem Services for Nature Based Solutions'* in Ansan-si, South Korea from 30 May to 3 June 2016. The second was organized for the European region *'Helping nature to help us'* in Antwerp, Belgium from 19-23 September 2016. The third for the Latin American region *'Healthy Ecosystem for Resilient Societies'* in Cali, Colombia from 18-21 October 2016. And the fourth and last regional conference of 2016 was organized for the African region *'Ecosystem Services for SDG's in Africa'* in Nairobi, Kenya from 21-25 November 2016.

Finally, from 5-9 December 2016 the ACES-ESP conference was organised in Jacksonville, Florida.

The European Ecosystem Services Conference was jointly organized with the University of Antwerp and three EU funded projects:, ECOPLAN, OpenNESS, and OPERAs. The EU ES conference did follow the structure of the other ESP conferences mostly, and many ESP representatives attended.

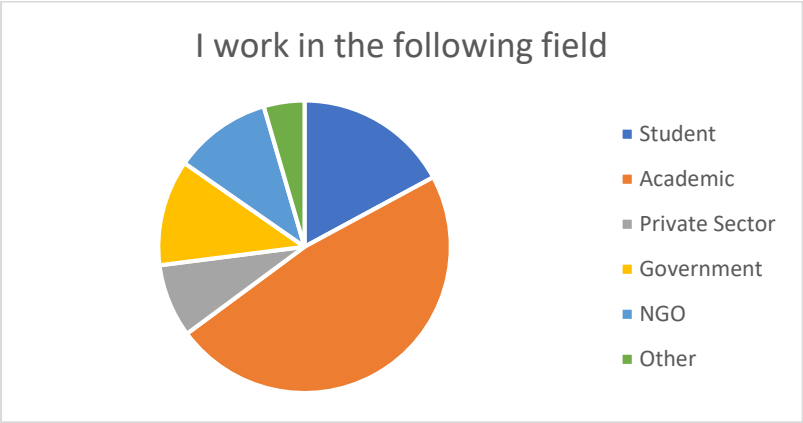
The past year, 1100 participants registered through the online system and hence received the request to fill in the conference survey of each respective conference. Overall 111 (11%) participants replied to this request. For the Asian conference, about 4% of the participants replied, 12% EU, 11% Latin America, 15% Africa.

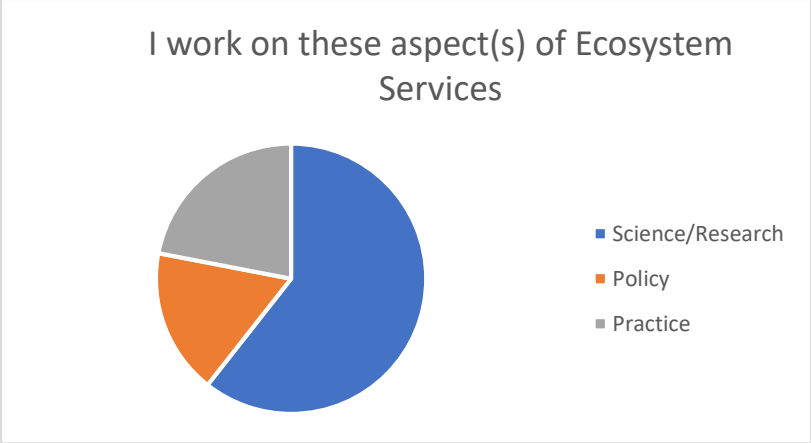
The questions in each survey were similar. Some conference specific questions have not been included in this report. This report consists of 4 paragraphs; (1) general participant information, (2) average scores per closed questions, (3) answers to open question, (4) lessons learned and recommendations.

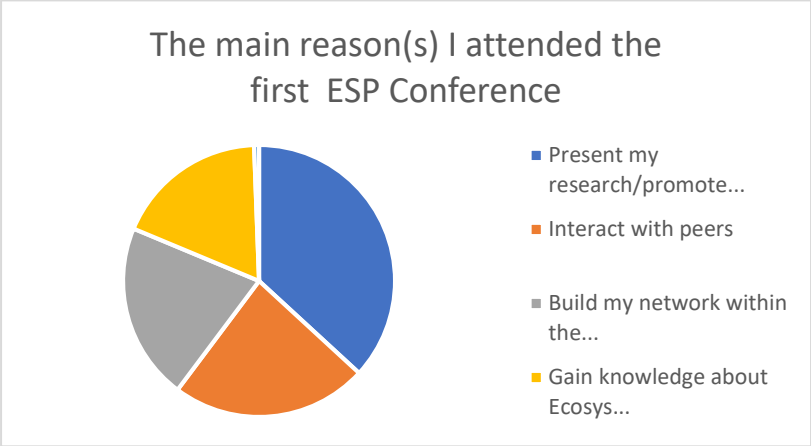
We would like to thank all respondents for their effort to complete the survey. Their efforts have provided us with valuable input to improve future (regional) conferences.

1. General Participant Information

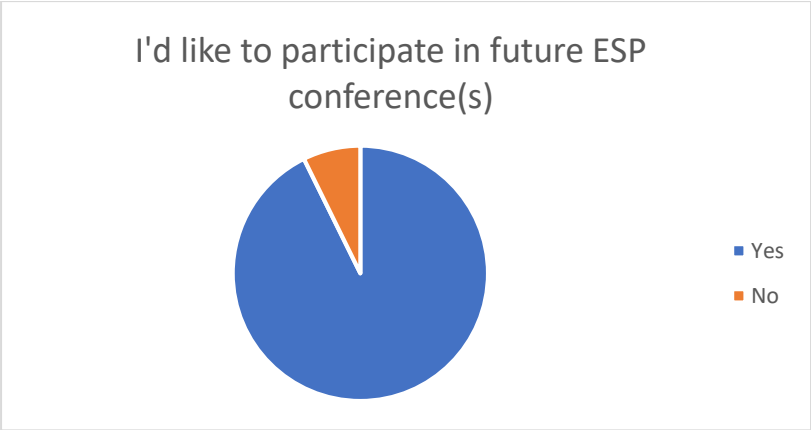
Below the compiled participant data is given of all four regional conferences.




I work on these aspect(s) of Ecosystem Services
Science/Research
Policy
Practice


The main reason(s) I attended the first ESP Conference
Present my research/promote...
Interact with peers
Build my network within the...
Gain knowledge about Ecosys...


Would you recommend the ESP Conference to others?
Yes
No


I'd like to participate in future ESP conference(s)
Yes
No

From these graphs we can conclude that most of our participants are academics, working as a scientist/researcher. Presenting their research is the most important reason to attend the conference. Nearly all participants would recommend the ESP conference and would participate in future ESP conferences.

2. Scores

The survey consisted of many closed questions, which were categorized by item.

The table below shows the question, average score per category, related conference and gives the average result from all conferences. All scores are based on a Likert scale from 1-5, with 1 lowest ranking and 5 highest ranking. All average scores with a result above 4 are marked green, and considered good. Everything between 3,5 and 4 is in light green, is considered average. There is room for improvement on these items. Everything below 3,5 should be given additional attention.

In general, the registration process, venue, field trips and communication are graded as good. Sessions, program and keynotes can be improved. The poster sessions should be given more attention in future conferences.

The Latin American Conference received the highest overall rating. From these survey we can't derive a reason why the Latin American conference was rated higher than the others. The difference between the Latin American conference and others was that it lasted 4 instead of 5 days. However, it can be derived from the survey if this is the reason for the higher scores.

Nice to note is that the rating of the ESP member forum and abstract handling improved over the course of the year. For some items the scores per conference vary a lot, like the sessions, sustainability, and field trips.

For the detailed scores, please look at the table on the next page.

Category	Item	ASIA	EU	LA	AF	Average
Registration	The registration process was clear and straightforward	4,5	4,4	4,4	4,5	**4,4**
Registration	The payment process was clear and straightforward	4,3	4,4	4,4	4,5	**4,4**
Venue	Conference venue	4,4	3,9	4,4	4,0	**4,2**
Field trip	The field trip was good value for money	3,8	4,2	4,0	4,3	**4,1**
Sessions	ESP sessions are an important means to advance research	4,0	3,9	4,4	4,0	**4,1**
Venue	The conference venue was conductive for encouraging information exchange, networking and collaboration	4,1	3,8	4,3	4,1	**4,1**
Field trip	The field trip programs were appealing and related to the conference theme well	3,5	4,1	4,2	4,5	**4,1**
Communication	Information prior and during conference	3,5	3,9	4,4	4,3	**4,0**
Keynotes	The keynote speakers provided a good introduction to the overarching theme	4,0	3,7	4,2	4,1	**4,0**
Abstract handling	Abstract submission and handling was easy and clear	3,8	3,8	4,1	4,3	**4,0**
Members	ESP member meeting: The presentations gave a good overview of ESP's current situation	3,0	4,0	4,3	4,5	**4,0**
Keynotes	The overall quality of these presentations was excellent	3,5	3,8	4,4	3,8	**3,9**
Venue	The catering during lunches and breaks at the conference was excellent	4,1	3,5	3,8	4,0	**3,9**
Field trip	The field trip was a good way to experience what happens in the field of Ecosystem Services at a local level	3,3	4,1	3,8	4,2	**3,9**
Program	Conference program	3,6	3,7	4,4	3,7	**3,9**
Sessions	The content of the presentations in the sessions corresponded well to the session description	3,9	3,7	4,2	3,6	**3,8**
Communication	Communication materials (website, program booklet, banners, etc.)	3,6	3,5	4,1	4,1	**3,8**
Venue	With regard to sustainability, the conference venue was well selected	4,0	3,8	4,0	3,4	**3,8**
Sustainability	Sustainability was clearly part of the conference organisation	3,9	3,7	4,1	3,5	**3,8**
Keynotes	The keynotes provided me with useful insights which I can apply in my daily work	3,8	3,4	4,6	3,3	**3,8**
Sessions	Workshops/Sessions	3,6	3,7	3,9	3,8	**3,8**
Program	Reporting from the sessions on Friday was useful	3,8				**3,8**
Members	The ESP member forum made me feel engaged as an ESP member	3,0	3,2	4,0	4,3	**3,6**
Program	The closing session on Friday was appropriate	3,6				**3,6**
Sessions	The ESP Working Group sessions were a good format for my presentation	3,6				**3,6**
Sessions	There was enough time to present and discuss research and new ideas during the sessions	4,0	3,1	4,1	3,2	**3,6**
Poster	Poster sessions	3,6	3,5	3,6	3,5	**3,6**
Registration	The height of the conference fee in relation to the benefits was	3,5	3,5	4,1	3,2	**3,6**
Poster	The format of the poster sessions was excellent to present my poster	4,3	3,0	3,0	3,8	**3,5**
Poster	The guided tours triggered me to join the poster sessions		2,9	2,8	3,2	**3,0**
Poster	The format of poster awards triggered me to join the poster sessions	2,5	2,6	3,0	2,9	**2,7**
Overall	I feel ESP should offer fully vegetarian catering at conferences	2,6				**2,6**
Members	There was ample opportunity to discuss ESP issues I thought were important	2,3				**2,3**

3. Answers to open questions

In the survey, after each section of closed questions, participant were able to leave some comments. At the end of the survey four more open questions were asked.

Below common threads per open question are listed and for each section one interesting quote highlighted.

a) Comments about conference organization

'The organisation was good overall. Practical aspects (venue, registration, abstract submission) were well-arranged even though communication was slightly unclear at times.'

Main points addressed:

- Less (overlap in) sessions and more focus in the conference program
- Clearer program booklet (EU conference)
- Improvement on the communication side between session moderators and presenters and abstract handling in general
- Well planned

b) Comments about keynote speakers/panel discussions during plenary sessions

'I really appreciated that the conference was embedded in keynote speeches/discussions by policy-makers (and funding organisations). This is how academic conferences should always be set-up. Scientists should not only leave conferences with a good understanding of what others have done and were there are still gaps but also what with the knowledge of what type of science policy-makers (and practitioners) need.'

Main points addressed:

- Important and interesting to include presentations from non-academia
- Quality of keynote presentations very variable
- A professional moderator is important
- Positive about the variety in backgrounds of the keynotes

c) Comments about the sessions

'A lot of overlap between sessions. ESP could promote more joint sessions.'

Main points addressed:

- The program of the sessions could be revised to shorter presentations, more discussion. Often there is not enough time for discussion during a session.
- Have less sessions with less overlap.
- Plan sessions according to participant ratio.

d) Comments about the poster sessions

'Really liked the guided tour approach; it made it easier to hear the presenters when everyone showed up at their poster at once, rather than the presenter constantly having to start over and catch people up, and allowed for a lot more context than just looking at a poster. The timeframe also guaranteed that there was time for questions, from which I also learned a lot.'

Main points addressed:

- Positive towards guided poster tours
- Information about poster tours beforehand can be improved
- Plan poster session separate from other events like networking or lunch
- The mainly positive comments about poster tours do not coincide with the relatively low average score the poster sessions were given.

e) Comments about the field trip

'The field trip was an excellent way to contact with local problems, people and context. It was also an excellent opportunity to share experiences with colleagues from other countries.'

Main points addressed:

- Most are very positive about the field trips
- More information regarding the logistics/expectations/physical challenges should be given to participants beforehand
- Learning experience about ecosystem services could be improved
- Logistics, like traffic, remain challenging

f) Comments about the ESP member meeting

'I enjoyed the meeting of the ESP members and it made me want to be part of it. But again, there was limited time for discussions and feedback. That could take a bit more time in future ESP conferences.'

Main points addressed:

- Meeting were held on the merit that participants are already familiar with ESP, whereas some were not
- Discussion during these meetings is important
- Important to have this meeting at the beginning of the week

g) Comments about the conference venue

'The hotel was too luxurious to be truly sustainable. Accommodation was expensive and forced several conference participants to stay outside. Sustainability management of the hotel was not that convincing.' (comment regarding venue in Nairobi, Kenya)

Main points addressed:

- A central location near to public transport and other hotel facilities is appreciated
- Warm lunches need to be provided at all times
- Sustainability is considered important, both in terms of venue management, logistics and healthy (and vegetarian) food, like fruits.
- Should be enough space to break out and sit and discuss with a small group privately.

h) What were your main needs and expectations prior to your visit?

'Present my work. Learn from others. Build network. Get knowledge.'

Main points addressed:

- Networking is listed very often.
- Knowledge sharing, presenting work and learning is important to conference participants.
- To be part of an international network is appreciated greatly.
- To find partners

i) What was the key strength of this conference according to you?

'Magnitude of participation and diversity of offered sessions and keynote speakers.'

Main points addressed:

- Opportunity to network and learn from each other
- Variety of participants, both in age group as in background
- Enthousiasm within the community
- The keynote speakers
- Good organization, and effort to organize conference bi-lingual (in case of Latin American conference)

j) **What would be the most important thing to improve for future ESP conferences according to you?**

'More discussion time. Less cramped programme extended over more days. Avoidance of clashes between sessions with similar topics.'

Main points addressed:

- The amount of sessions and the overlap between sessions should be reduced
- Stricter policy on acceptance of abstracts
- More diversity in participants; social scientists, policy and practice participants
- Discussion time should be provided
- Participation fee lower
- Improvement of communication between organization, sessions hosts and session presenters
- Make conference shorter/more condensed

k) Other comments and suggestions

'I appreciated the vegetarian-only food at lunchtime and for the drinks reception. That shows that the organisers are serious about protecting ecosystems.'

Main points addressed:

- Overall positive comments
- Concerns about our conference footprint when organized in China
- Make sure that venue is easily accessible

4) Lessons learned and recommendations

Below conclusions are drawn from this survey, but also from my experience at all the past four conferences, the talks I had with participants, and the interaction with the local organization.

Program/ Sessions:

- Make sure that there is less overlap between sessions and merge sessions where possible to avoid people getting lost to submit an abstract for an appropriate session, but also during the conference itself.
- Too many sessions and too much overlap between the sessions is a main point of critique. Have a critical look at the ESP working groups.
- Be critical towards the acceptance of abstracts. Think of a way that abstracts of marginal quality can still be presented during the conference, but don't take time

from discussions. Allowing some time for an abstract pitch in a separate session, or during a session might work. Some new ideas should be considered.
- If session hosts communicate poorly and don't reply to any messages, these host should be replaced.
- Continue with poster sessions and guided tours, but give the poster session a good slot so that people still have time and energy to attend the poster session.
- At conferences, many expressed a need for 'how to' sessions or trainings, like 'how to communicate my message to the media/wider public?', 'how to create good posters?', 'how to make use of online tools for information sharing?', etc.
- Balance the time between presentations and networking opportunities more. The latter is considered as very important, but isn't facilitated in the program much.
- Encourage policy makers, practitioners to partake in the conference by thinking of program 'streams' which appeal to their needs.
- Make sure that the keynote speakers have a diverse background with new information. Try to check YouTube video's or something to check if the keynotes are indeed good and engaging public speakers.
- Select good/professional moderators well in advance.

Communication:
- In order to avoid mistakes in the program booklet, make sure that the deadlines are met. If the organisation lives up to their set deadlines, the participants will be more likely to do the same.
- Check options and costs of mobile event app, to minimize printing costs

Field trips
- Ensure a learning experience during these field trips.
- Encounters with locals are highly appreciated
- Minimise transportation time
- Link sustainability/CO2 project to the field visit to increase engagement and integration between these activities and the conference in general.

Sustainability:
- Challenge the venue and local organisers even more with question regarding their sustainability policy, access by public transport, vegetarian food options, etc.
- Improve the CO2 compensation program and try to engrain it in the conference more.

Finances
- Engage sponsors in the program more to strengthen the link policy-practice-science nexus.
- Remain critical towards conference expenditures in order to keep conference participant fees as low as possible.