Eu-SPRI 2026 - Early Career Event - 9th June 2026, Valencia

Imagining Futures:

How can Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation contribute to grand challenges?

A typical question addressed by Eu-SPRI researchers is "How can research and innovation policies cope with 'grand social challenges' in the areas of health, energy, security or the environment?"[1]. For example, regarding ecological challenges six of the nine planetary boundaries have been crossed (Richardson et al., 2023), underlining the major role played by humans in the degradation of natural ecosystems' integrity. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, we have witnessed "global-scale changes in the Earth System as a result of the dramatic increase in human activity" (Steffen et al., 2011). For example, between 1900 and 2011 world GDP jumped from USD 2 trillion to USD 55 trillion in 2011, and patents filed worldwide from 141 000 to 1 900 000 (ibid.). The post-war great acceleration has led humans to become a geological force (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016), notably under the impetus of science, technology and innovation policies.

To tackle those challenges new intellectual framings and practices are needed. Approaches informed by futuring highlight the importance of imagining long-term transformations rather than merely reacting to bursting crises. Futuring perspectives can help unblock imaginations constrained by dominant framings of growth and competitiveness, opening alternative pathways for the SPRI community: not only to mitigate damage but also to reimagine how science, technology, and innovation could contribute to just and life-affirming futures.

How do grand societal challenges affect —and how might they transform— the intellectual constructs and research practices of researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation ? The early career stage is a fruitful moment to discuss these questions with peers and nurture reflexivity and imagination. However, early career scientists face other challenges in the practice of their art, fuelled by enthusiasm but challenged by uncertainties. For example, "sometimes the publication process forces authors to think small and stay wedded to old ideas—just the opposite of what grand challenges need" (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). How can one overcome the "double hurdle" (Bansal et al., 2012) of combining robust and novel research with addressing societal impacts (Aguinis et al., 2014)? How can early career researchers cope with ethical questions related to applied research, or with the "obsession of productivity" bearing upon researchers (Aggeri, 2016)? The latter challenges the meaning of our profession (Moriceau et al., 2017; Rouquet, 2017), but constructing a robust publication portfolio will help junior scholars getting a position. What about handling the ups and downs of the thesis adventure, including the sometimes-delicate relationship with supervisor(s)? How can we make a responsible use of new research tools such as generative AI?

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[1] Source: https://euspri-forum.eu/about/, accessed on 29/09/2025.

This event will enable early career researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation to develop their own answers to these questions, supported by experienced scholars who will share their experiences and stimulate peer discussion. Participants will have the opportunity to (1) Question key contributions & epistemologies used by researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation in the face of grand challenges; and (2) Discuss the research practices of researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation and explore the diversity of careers it offers.

PLANNING OF THE DAY

The morning session focuses on theoretical discussions and the afternoon session on research practices and careers. Experts' presentations introduce creative discussions with and between participants, who design a *Creative Reflection and Imagination Wall*, on which participants contribute with drawings, keywords, and personal reflections. At the end of the event, the wall is presented as a collective artifact.

9:45 - 10:00.   Ice breaker *(main room, altogether)*

Prior to the event, participants present their research in a creative fashion by drawing their PhD or favourite research topic(s) and their vision of the future.They prepare a t-shirt or a poster (A5 or A4) about their PhD or favourite research topic(s) that they wear during the event like a billboard (back and front)[2]. One side illustrates key research ideas, and the other a 2040 headline about what research in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation might look like in 15 years' time. Here is an example from another conference of a t-shirt presenting a PhD topic:

During this ice breaker, participants pair up and get to know each other, by using their creative garment.

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[2] They can also use post-it notes that they will simply stick on their front and back sides.

Format:

- 5': teammate #1 introduces herself and her research topic;

- 5': teammate #2 introduces himself and his research topic;

- 5': each teammate tells the whole group (10'' max) one sentence about his/her teammate (e.g. "Eva comes from Ireland and works on transformative innovation policies in the defence industry").

10:00 - 11:30. Contributions & epistemologies of researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation (Session 1) *(separate rooms, small groups)*

In this first session, we discuss in small groups what grand societal challenges entail for the research and epistemologies of researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation.

- 10:00 - 10:45. The contributions[3] of the SPRI community to grand challenges[4].

  - 10': **an expert** introduces the terms of the discussion & gives her answer[5].

  - 15': participants discuss **in pairs**:

    - one key contribution of researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation to grand challenges;

    - the potential contribution of their own research to grand challenges.

  - 20': **group** debrief: each pair selects one contribution to share with the group, explains in what manner it contributes to grand challenges (3' per pair), and sketches a quick metaphor or symbol for the contribution discussed & posts it on the *Reflection Wall*.

- 10:45 - 11:30. Critical reflexions on the epistemology of researchers of researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation.

  - 10': **an expert** introduces the terms of the discussion & gives his answer.

  - 15': participants discuss **in pairs** (keep the same pairs):

    - one epistemological feature[6] of research carried out by researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation;

    - their own epistemological approach[7].

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[3] New theory, approach, concept, case study, an author, a publication…

[4] For example: planetary boundaries, Raworth's doughnut, SDGs…

[5] For example, experts will reflect upon open epistemologies that account for positionality, the more-than-human and other dimensions in pursuit of an expanded notion of scientific "rigour"—one that embraces societal impacts and reflect upon who is impacted, in order to do collaborative science with societal impact.

[6] E.g. ontology (view of the world e.g. regarding the relation between humans and nature), approach to collaboration with actors, understanding of scientific rigour (e.g. what is a valid scientific contribution?), etc.

[7] A useful representation has been provided by Saunders & Tosey in "The layer of research design", cf. https://www.csd.uoc.gr/~hy109/resources/layers.pdf, accessed 29/09/2025.

- o 20': **group** debrief: each pair selects one contribution to share with the group, explains in what manner it contributes to grand challenges (3' per pair), and sketches a quick metaphor or symbol for the contribution discussed & post it on the Reflection Wall.

<u>Experts</u> (each animating one small group):

- ➢ **Cristina Chaminade** |Ingenio(CSIC-Universitat Politècnica de València)
- ➢ **Asuncion Lera St. Clair** | DNV
- ➢ **Bonno Pel** | Utrecht University

12:00 - 13:00.   Ethical & ecological issues of research approaches and tools: The cases of applied research & generative AI (Session 2) *(main room, altogether)*

In this session, two experts present their thoughts on these two issues in their practice of research, and a discussion follows.

<u>Format</u>:

- ▪ 20': Expert #1. **Laurens Hessels** |Rathenau Instituut & Leiden University, "Opportunities and risks of AI in the practice of academic research".
- ▪ 20': Expert #2. **Marta G. Rivera** |Ingenio(CSIC-Universitat Politècnica de València), "Doing research WITH actors: Trust, mutual respect and craft of compassion".
- ▪ 20': Discussion time: "Headlines from 2040".

After experts' presentations, participants are invited to imagine a newspaper headline from the year 2040 about the future of today's research practices in relation to the use of AI in academic research &/or to collaborative research practices.

In small groups (3-4 people), they create one headline and post it on the *Reflection Wall*. For example: "2040: Citizens' Assemblies Replace Peer Review in Global Research Funding"; "Generative AI Becomes A Standard Mentor for Early Career Researchers"; "Human Supervisors Shift to Well-Being Roles"; "A Historical Perspective On Research Practices: How AI Personas Replaced Human Interviewees".

14:00 - 15:00. How do we relate to our PhD or research project? (Session 3) *(main room, altogether)*

This reflexive session focuses on the practices involved in carrying out a PhD or research project, and not only from the perspective or early career researchers. We all relate in different ways to our research activity and are embedded in different contexts. How can we best enjoy our early career research experience while fulfilling its demanding requirements? To give us food for thought, an expert introduces a set of recommendations for supervisors and PhD students, also relevant for other early career researchers, developed as a joint reflection on good PhD practice

by Leiden University[8]. We also examine the expectations placed on early career researchers and consider what can reasonably be expected from supporting actors (supervisors & mentors).

Participants share their thoughts online and anonymously about their early career journey, by writing 3 keywords and elaborating with a few sentences. Clicking on this link https://chk.me/3kSFMYt or scanning the following QR code leads to a padlet that ensures anonymity of all comments.

Both experts and early career participants then engage in a collective discussion based on these contributions.

Format:

- 30': introduction by two experts (**Inge van der Weijden**|Leiden University), **Andy Stirling** (Emeritus Professor) | SPRU-Science Policy Research Unit;
- 10': individual contributions on padlet;
- 20': plenary discussion about contributions.

15:30 - 16:45. Where is my research (career) going? (Session 4) *(main room, altogether)*

In this session, we explore various ways of becoming and of being an academic, which besides career paths also includes ways of collaborating with non-academic actors. The discussion starts with a **roundtable** comprising academics and practitioners:

➢ **Victoria Pellicer-Sifres** | València Clima i Energia)

➢ **Raquel Luján Soto** | Ingenio(CSIC-Universitat Politècnica de València)

➢ **Lidia García-García** | Ajuntament de València, València Innovation Capital)

➢ **Oksana Udovyk** | Ingenio(CSIC-Universitat Politècnica de València)

They introduce their background, explain how they got where they are now, and discuss the ins and outs of an exemplary project involving both academics and practitioners (40'). Q&As follows (15') before (literally) walking the wrapping up: To conclude the session, participants are invited to do a short Walk-and-Talk in pairs (10') to discuss the following question: "What future role do I imagine for myself in society as a researcher?".

They conclude the walk is by a mini-ritual "Postcards from the Future": each participant takes the role of their future self as a researcher in 2035, writes a short (anonymous) note to their 2025 self, and posts it on the *Reflection Wall*. For example: "Dear Klara, in your PhD you hypothesised that in the future innovation policies would by design integrate ecological issues, well the EU has been doing it for five years!" (10').

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[8] Cf. "Good Practice Principles for Graduate Schools in the Netherlands", https://research.utwente.nl/en/publications/good-practice-principles-for-graduate-schools-in-the-netherlands.

Programme

Time	Topic	Location	Presenters/Facilitators
9:00 - 9:30	Registration & welcome coffee		
9:30 - 9:45	Introduction to the Event & to Eu-SPRI	Large room	Davide Consoli Sandra Boni Jordi Molas Gallart & Organisers
9:45 - 10:00	Ice breaker	Large room	Organisers
10:00 - 11:30	**Session 1** Contributions & epistemologies of researchers in Studies of Policies for Research & Innovation	Large room + 2 small rooms	Cristina Chaminade Asuncion Lera St. Clair Bonno Pel
11:30 - 12:00	Coffee Break		
12:00 - 13:00	**Session 2** Ethical & ecological issues of research approaches and tools	Large room	Laurens Hessels Marta Rivera
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch break		
14:00 - 15:00	**Session 3** How do we relate to our PhD or research project?	Large room	Inge van der Weijden Andy Stirling
15:00 - 15:30	Coffee Break		
15:30 - 16:45	**Session 4** Where is my research (career) going?	Large room	Victoria Pellicer-Sifres Raquel Luján Soto Lidia García-García Oksana Udovyk
16:45	Closing of day	Large room	Organisers
19:30	Early Career Event drinks & dinner		

Organising team

Oksana Udovyk, Paula Otero, Cédric Gossart, Laura Soto Díaz, Sara Sanchez Lopez, Paula Garcia Silvan, Erika Celene Sánchez Rodriguez, Alejandro Fernandez del Rio.

Any question can be addressed to: cggossar@upvnet.upv.es

Venue: Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV).

Social media: Bluesky: @euspri2026.bsky.social; Instagram: @euspri2026; X: @euspri2026.

Logistics

- **Maximum number of participants**: 30.
    - 25 Eu-SPRI students;
    - 5 non Eu-SPRI students.

- **Participation fees**:
    - Free for participants from Eu-SPRI members, food and accommodation included (transportation excluded).
    - Registration fee: 60€ for participants whose organisation is not an Eu-SPRI member, which covers food but NOT accommodation or transportation.

- **Applications** should be sent through this online form: https://forms.gle/TaR2e87sjGTRnRTk7.
- **Closing Call** for Applications: End of February 2026.
- **Responses**: End of March 2026.

All participants are strongly encouraged to send a paper to the main conference (cf. https://euspri2026.webs.upv.es).

References

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