

# The Permafrost Young Researchers Network (PYRN) is getting older: The past, present, and future of our evolving community

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# 1 The Permafrost Young Researchers Network (PYRN) is getting

## 2 older – the past, present, and future of our evolving community

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#### 77 Abstract

78 One of the lasting legacies of the International Polar Year (IPY) 2007-2008 was the formation of 79 the Permafrost Young Researchers Network (PYRN), initially an IPY outreach and education 80 activity by the International Permafrost Association (IPA). With the momentum of IPY, PYRN 81 developed into a thriving network that still connects young permafrost scientists, engineers, and 82 researchers from other disciplines. This research note summarizes (i) the development of PYRN since 2005 and the role of IPY, (ii) the results of the first PYRN census and survey in 2015, and 83 84 (iii) PYRN's resulting future plans to improve international and interdisciplinary exchange 85 between young researchers. The review concludes that PYRN is an established network within 86 the polar research community that has continually expanded and developed since 2005. PYRN's 87 successful activities led by enthusiastic "early-career" scientists were largely fostered by IPY and 88 its outreach efforts. PYRN and its alumni today continue to bring together and promote the next 89 generation of young researchers. With more than 200 of the 1,200 registered members active and 90 engaged, PYRN is capitalizing on the availability of social media tools, and increasing 91 environmental challenges to maintain its role as self-organized, visible, and successful network in the legacy of IPY. 92

#### 93 **1. Introduction**

The imminence of the International Polar Year (IPY) prompted the need for visible representation of the young permafrost community (Krupnik et al., 2011). From the onset, the IPY emphasized the development of 'the next generation of polar scientists'. This translated into a record involvement of young scientists in IPY projects. A rough estimation by IPY organizers showed that the entire IPY endeavor involved a greater number of young researchers than

99 'senior' ones (Baeseman et al., 2011). In anticipation of the IPY, the Permafrost Young 100 Researchers Network (PYRN) was established in November 2005 at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International 101 Conference on Arctic Research Planning as an IPY education and outreach activity of the 102 International Permafrost Association (IPA) and to represent permafrost young researchers within 103 the Youth Steering Committee of the IPY. At the time, the Youth Steering Committee was the 104 overarching program for youth and "early-career" activities in the IPY framework. PYRN was 105 focused on young permafrost researchers (i.e., scientists and engineers), but was integrated into 106 the overall IPY "early-career" networking effort from the beginning.

107 PYRN is an "early-career" network that fosters innovative collaboration and seeks to recruit, 108 retain, and promote future generations of permafrost researchers. From the beginning, PYRN 109 disseminated permafrost science and engineering information to the public and especially to 110 schools. Since PYRN's initiation in 2005, its membership, visibility, and activities steadily increased to 1,200 members at the time of its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015. PYRN reports regularly 111 112 to the IPA, its members and interested researchers on a regular basis at geoscientific conferences, 113 through a news bulletin, website (https://pyrn.arcticportal.org/), and social media (e.g., 114 Facebook, Instagram).

The strength of PYRN is based on its interdisciplinarity and its presence in virtually all regions of the world. PYRN members are interested in the frozen ground regions of the Earth, including alpine, submarine and polar latitudes. In the Northern Hemisphere alone, 23 million km<sup>2</sup> of the landmass is characterized by permafrost occurrence (Romanovsky et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2008); a vast region with an area almost twice the size of Antarctica. This large area is impacted by climate change, which fundamentally affects environmental and socio-economic systems (Hope & Schaefer, 2016; IPCC, 2013). With its global presence, PYRN has the ability to mobilize its members beyond borders and disciplines to tackle these issues in a progressive andinnovative manner.

124 PYRN represents permafrost science and engineering within broader international and regional 125 young researcher assemblies, such as the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS). 126 Both networks were developed during IPY and have a memorandum of understanding to 127 coordinate efforts. Further strong bonds exist with the Arctic Portal, which hosts PYRN's 128 website and database, the ArcticNet Student Association, the United States Permafrost 129 Association, Polar Educators International, Climate and Cryosphere, the Global Terrestrial 130 Network for Permafrost, the working group 'Permafrost' of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für 131 *Polarforschung*, the Bolin Centre for Climate Research, and various large research projects such 132 as the Horizon 2020 project Nunataryuk.

The main aim of this research note is to illustrate that the momentum of IPY has promoted and sustained this young researcher network for a decade, which in turn facilitates intercultural and interdisciplinary exchange, reflecting the original charge of IPY. More specifically, the objectives are (i) to review the development of PYRN since IPY, (ii) to present the first membership survey conducted since the IPY, and (iii) to set a vision for PYRN as crucial part of the polar research community.

#### 139 2. The development of PYRN

140 PYRN has continuously evolved since its establishment at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on 141 Arctic Research Planning 2005 and IPY 2007-2008. At its 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary in 2006, it already had 142 250 members from 20 countries (Lantuit, 2006). During IPY, registrations rapidly increased, 143 with 620 members by the end of IPY in 2008 (Lantuit, 2007). PYRN largely benefited from the momentum of IPY with its members expanding to 1,200 at its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015 (Tanski et
al., 2015). Since 2005 there have been seven executive committees with each coordinating
PYRN for two years, except of the initial committee that governed the network from 2005-2009.
In the following section, the evolution of PYRN and its main activities are summarized and its
milestones synthesized in Table 1. All major activities and events since 2005 are listed in the
Supporting material Table S1.

#### 150 **2.1 PYRN activities from 2005 to 2010**

After the launch at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Arctic Research Planning in 2005, PYRN 151 152 focused on developing the network. It organized its internal structure consisting of an executive 153 committee and national representatives. It also established an online presence, a monthly 154 newsletter, a thesis bibliography (Grosse & Lantuit, 2006), and an annual PYRN award for 155 permafrost conferences. During PYRN's kick-off meeting in Abisko, Sweden (February 2007), 156 the first PYRN mandate was drafted, progress of ongoing initiatives was reviewed, and future activities were planned (Fig. S1). PYRN's first meeting during IPY was the 2<sup>nd</sup> national 157 158 representatives meeting at the Otto Schmidt Laboratory in St. Petersburg, Russia 159 (November/December 2007). The meeting set the stage for numerous 'IPA-IPY-PYRN' 160 activities that took place until 2009 (Lantuit, 2007), with one of the major initiatives being the 161 PYRN Thermal State of Permafrost project (Christiansen et al., 2007) and the establishment of PYRN Thermal State of Permafrost boreholes in Scandinavia (Christiansen et al., 2010). 162 163 PYRN's IPY activities were endorsed and supported from the beginning by both IPY and IPA (Baeseman et al., 2011), with PYRN officially representing the IPA during the IPY opening in 164 165 Paris, France (March 2007) (Lantuit, 2007). In addition to PYRN's IPY activities, new efforts

were initiated such as the creation of a list of senior scientist mentors (Bonnaventure et al.,
2009), as well as the organization of young researcher activities at the 9<sup>th</sup> International
Conference on Permafrost (NICOP 2008) in Fairbanks, Alaska (June/July 2008).

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#### 2.2 PYRN activities from 2010 to 2012

170 The period from 2010 to 2012 was characterized by a refocusing of the PYRN mission and 171 objectives and an internal restructuring process, following on the initial successful IPY years. 172 This meant adapting the network to create the conditions of sustainability and move on from the 173 "one-off" momentum provided by the IPY. Early in 2011, PYRN identified its major priorities, 174 which included an update of the PYRN bylaws, organizing a young researchers' workshop at the 175 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Permafrost (TICOP 2010) in Salekhard, Russia (June 2012), 176 and strengthening its ties with IPA and APECS. A major event was the PYRN workshop at 177 TICOP 2010, which kicked-off the tradition of holding workshops before major biennial 178 gatherings of young permafrost scientists. It also acted as the new transition point for the 179 incoming executive committee to meet in person and identify their priorities for the coming two-180 year term. Emphasis was placed on creating a more inclusive and team orientated approach to 181 governing the PYRN network and the new executive committee had triple the number of 182 members as the departing one. The large gathering of PYRN and polar researchers at TICOP was 183 leveraged to support the implementation of a memorandum of understanding between PYRN and 184 its official host IPA and APECS. The memorandum of understanding clearly established PYRN 185 as the primary organization for the coordination of permafrost young researchers for committees 186 and events surrounding IPA and APECS activities.

#### 187 **2.3 PYRN activities from 2012 to 2014**

188 In 2012 PYRN's activities intensified. This invigoration was fostered by the new motivation and energy gained from the activities at 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Permafrost (TICOP 2010), 189 190 executing the memorandum of understanding with APECS that fostered and multiplied information exchange, and the forthcoming 4<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Permafrost (EUCOP4 191 192 2014) in Évora, Portugal (June 2014). The executive period 2012-2014 culminated in the 193 Permafrost Young Researchers Workshop at EUCOP4, co-organized with APECS, Changing 194 Permafrost in the Arctic and its Global Effects in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and Arctic Development and 195 Adaptation to Permafrost in Transition. Aside from bringing young researchers together, the 196 workshop aimed at determining future avenues of permafrost research from a young researcher's 197 perspective. This part of the workshop was mentored by the International Arctic Science Committee, which was leading the implementation towards the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on 198 199 Arctic Research Planning in 2015. A major outcome of the workshop was a strategy paper about 200 future avenues for permafrost science from the perspective of "early-career" researchers led by 201 PYRN members (Fritz et al., 2015). This strategy paper has been formulated in collaboration with the IPA as a contribution to the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Arctic Research Planning 202 203 2015.

#### 204 **2.4 PYRN activities from 2014 to 2016**

The 2014-2016 period was characterized by a professionalization of the network. A 4-year agenda and long-term strategy were developed to enhance the network's visibility, transparency, and cooperation with IPA. In turn, the IPA granted PYRN an annual and independent budget to support its activities and achieve its long-term objectives. Various strategic initiatives were achieved, including a major update of the member list because there had been no mechanisms to
'remove' young researchers that became 'senior'. This membership overhaul uncovered that east
Asian colleagues were strongly underrepresented within PYRN. To tackle this issue, outreach
activities were specifically designed to better engage permafrost research institutes in Korea,
Japan, and China, and the network advertised at the Arctic Science Summit Week in Toyama,
Japan (April 2015).

215 PYRN also improved its overall online outreach by better utilizing its website and social 216 networks, in particular its Facebook following, which rose from almost zero in June 2014 to 217 more than 600 in June 2016. Furthermore, PYRN expanded its partners by establishing an 218 information exchange program with the Global Terrestrial Network for Permafrost. The 219 executive term ended and a new executive committee was introduced (see Supporting material Fig. S2) at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Permafrost (ICOP 2016) in Potsdam, Germany 220 221 (June 2016; Fig. S2). During ICOP 2016 PYRN organized a 2-day young researcher workshop as 222 well as a soccer tournament. ICOP 2016 has been the largest gathering of PYRN members so far 223 (see Supporting material Fig. S3).

#### 224 **2.5 PYRN activities from 2016 to 2018**

Following the great success of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Permafrost and with the increasing importance of young researchers within the research community, recent activities have focused on strengthening the national representation of PYRN, establishing an improved presence on social media as well as preparing the PYRN workshop at the 5<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Permafrost (EUCOP5 2018) in Chamonix, France (June/July 2018). The Facebook following further increased during this period to more than 800 people. Many 231 workshops, events, and meetings were convened thanks to the continuous efforts of the executive 232 committee and national representatives (see Supporting Table S1). To better promote the 233 participation of PYRN members on a national scale, a coordinator position of the national 234 representatives was created and national representatives are encouraged to apply for funding and 235 to organize local, national, and regional events. To strengthen the social media presence, the 236 PYRN Facebook page (facebook.com/PYRNofficial), Twitter (@pyrn\_official) and Instagram 237 (@pyrn\_official) were improved. A major improvement was the update and launch of the fully 238 redesigned PYRN website. The increased social media and web presence throughout 2016-2018 239 helped to strengthen PYRN's role as a key promoter of international collaboration in permafrost 240 research. In addition to these media improvements and to better engage our members and 241 society, a major outreach and educational effort was devised - the 'Frozen-Ground Cartoons' 242 project (see Bouchard et al., this special issue). This project was officially launched in early 2016 243 as an IPA-funded Action Group, and later received financial support from many organizations, 244 including PYRN. Most of the contributors to the project are indeed PYRN (and APECS) 245 members. This international and interdisciplinary scientific outreach initiative aims at making 246 permafrost science accessible and fun for children, youth, their parents, and teachers through the 247 creation of cartoons and illustrated products (Nääs et al., 2017).

#### 249 **3. PYRN's structure and the first census in 2015**

#### 250 **3.1 PYRN's international structure**

251 Since being founded in 2005, PYRN has undergone many changes in its executive structure to 252 become more dynamic and to more rapidly adapt to the evolving needs of its members. Whereas 253 the first executive committees (2005 until 2012) consisted of only two to three members that had 254 multifold tasks, the executive committees since 2012 consisted of 12 members that had more 255 specified tasks. Currently PYRN is led by an executive committee, supported by a Council and 256 several national representatives (Fig. 1). The executive committee directs PYRN's activities and 257 consists of 12 positions, including president, vice-president, secretary, newsletter-editor, 258 treasurer, web manager, representative for regional and international permafrost conferences, and 259 ordinary members. The Council is an advisory panel responsible for providing feedback from 260 PYRN members to the executive committee. National representatives are regular PYRN 261 members representing a specific country and are part of the Council. PYRN has implemented a 262 Constitution and Bylaws in 2012 to structure and organize itself, which have been first formulated in 2007 and reviewed with every new executive period since the IPY. PYRN also 263 264 hosts independently operating national branches with the most active ones being PYRN Russia, 265 PYRN D-A-CH (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), and PYRN NA (North America, i.e., USA 266 and Canada).

#### 267 **3.2 PYRN's regional branches**

268 PYRN Russia is the oldest branch within PYRN. PYRN Russia's goal is to improve the 269 qualifications of young permafrost researchers in Russia (Kraev et al., 2013). The network

270 maintains an independent web portal (http://vk.com/pyrn\_russia) for Russian-speaking 271 researchers and engineers, raises funding, and provides solutions to overcome language-barrier 272 problems. PYRN D-A-CH is a conglomerate of German-speaking countries and is the successor 273 of PYRN Germany that existed until 2013. PYRN D-A-CH's main aim is to bring the polar and 274 the alpine permafrost community closer together. It has gathered annually since 2009, at the 275 meetings of the 'Permafrost' working group of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Polarforschung – 276 German Polar Society. PYRN North America (PYRN NA) is the latest established branch and 277 was launched simultaneously in Canada (at Arctic Change 2017) and the USA (at AGU 2017). 278 Its main objective is to improve networking of young permafrost researchers based in Canada 279 and the US, which was lacking so far.

#### 280 **3.3 PYRN census and member survey**

281 The PYRN constitution and bylaws state that 'a young researcher is defined as early in their 282 career and is any individual currently enrolled as a post-secondary student or having completed 283 their most recent *post-secondary* degree within the last six years' 284 (https://pyrn.arcticportal.org/about-us/constitution-bylaws). Since the establishment of PYRN, 285 memberships cumulated without formerly young 'seniors' members bailing out. Thus, the first 286 membership survey (in English) since PYRN's establishment was carried out. The purpose of the 287 census was to review the PYRN membership and to improve the performance and networking 288 capabilities of PYRN. The objectives were to obtain a better sense of how many PYRN members 289 are currently active (i.e, receiving information and responding), where they are located, and what 290 research topics they study. The census identified areas where PYRN has been successful, and 291 likewise areas that need improvement. In addition to disseminating it to its registered members, it was sent through to various media channels (e.g., Cryolist and Facebook) to promote the network
and gain new members. The survey was conducted with support from the United States
Permafrost Association, and survey questions were revised through several internal and external
reviews and feedback from APECS and IPA.

296 In total, 200 members completed the survey (via Google online Forms) between June and 297 November 2015, of which 79 were female and 121 male, representing 26 countries across the 298 world (see Supporting material Fig. S4 and S5). The majority of participants was young (mean = 299 30 years old; Fig. 2). Most of the members were from the academic sector and had a master's 300 degree, followed by PhDs and undergraduates (Fig. 2). Of the 1,200 officially registered 301 members, we assume that a large portion does not meet the requirement of 'young researcher' 302 anymore, and another large portion is inactive. However, the survey gives a representative 303 sample of the active and enthusiastic PYRN members on which the network relies, and this number roughly matches the ~280 young researchers that gathered at the 11<sup>th</sup> International 304 305 Conference on Permafrost (see Supporting material Fig. S3). In the survey, several questions 306 were asked about potential improvements to the network, which have been considered and 307 implemented in PYRN's plans and strategies for the future (see following section). A summary 308 of all questions can be found in Table S2 in the Supporting material.

#### **4. Future plans and visions in the legacy of IPY**

310 PYRN continuously improved its visibility, outreach, and impact during the years by constantly 311 exchanging with its own members and partners. The use of social media and Facebook in 312 particular improved the visibility of the network with more than 800 followers in 2018. The 313 PYRN membership survey helped to consolidate its own members and thus made the network

also more visible for its own members. This survey was part of a long-term strategy supported by 314 315 the IPA with a first independent annual budget in PYRN's history. This money, in return, was 316 used to support further outreach activities such as PYRN marketing for new members in general 317 and East Asian members in particular. Apart from that PYRN activities started to have a direct 318 impact on scientific decision making. With joint efforts of APECS and PYRN, which both had 319 one of its members as liaison on the other ones executive committee, it was possible to establish 320 PYRN members as session co-chairs at conferences and to develop its own priorities for the 321 future of permafrost research, which fed directly into research planning exercises such as the 3<sup>rd</sup> 322 International Conference on Arctic Research Planning (ICARP III, 2015).

323 The outcomes of the membership survey served as a guideline for PYRN's future developments. 324 The survey revealed that to PYRN members, information on funding as well as workshops and 325 meetings is most important. Less important are activities from social media, access to literature, 326 pictures and videos, or education and outreach. In the future PYRN is planning to establish 327 further branches such as PYRN Europe or PYRN Northern Europe (Scandinavia and 328 Fennoscandia) to facilitate efforts and promote regional gatherings, which was one of the 329 recommendations of the survey. As improved interactions with Asian members are an ongoing priority, PYRN also seeks to capitalize on the upcoming 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on 330 331 Permafrost in Lanzhou, China to establish a PYRN Asia or East Asia branch for its Asian 332 members (i.e., China, Japan, and South Korea). Recent PYRN activities during the Arctic Science Summit Week 2015 in Toyama and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian conference on permafrost 2017 in 333 334 Sapporo, Japan certainly reiterated the interest for an Asian regional branch.

335 One of the main legacies of PYRN is the creation of a community of practice, a strong 336 networked group of individuals committed to permafrost research who remain connected to 337 PYRN and its activities after their departure from the organization. This is visible through the 338 mentoring from former members taking place during workshops, through the informal 339 commenting and involvement in social media activities or through the involvement of many of 340 these individuals in large research projects. This community of practice has been very efficient at 341 articulating a strong vision for permafrost research (Fritz et al., 2015) and at proposing future 342 avenues for collaboration between early career and senior scientists. Ultimately, a PYRN Alumni 343 network would give a forum for PYRN members from all generations, many of whom connected 344 as 'young' researchers during the IPY 2007-2009. However, this project remains in its infancy.

345 In response to the survey results, PYRN will enhance its online media presence through various 346 channels (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, Facebook) that have been under development since 2014. 347 Although PYRN members indicated that social media is not necessarily a development priority 348 for PYRN and that the dissemination of information on funding and positions should be the 349 focus of the network, social media is nonetheless an effective mechanism to disseminate this 350 information, and offers opportunities to reach out beyond PYRN membership. It is clearly an 351 important tool for outreach to society and promotes permafrost as popular science. A good 352 example is the 'Frozen-Ground Cartoons' project (https://frozengroundcartoon.com/home/), led 353 by PYRN members.

#### 354 **Conclusions**

This research note demonstrates that PYRN has successfully grown and evolved since its establishment in 2005, and has become a strong and effective network within the polar research 357 community today. This development was catalyzed by the original IPY project, which helped its 358 membership grow and promoted exchange of PYRN and other polar research network members. 359 An important legacy of the IPY 2007-2009 is that it successfully united a young emerging 360 international community of researchers into PYRN, a network that promotes permafrost young 361 researchers in their "early-career" stages. PYRN today (data from 2015), as a self-governing 362 body supported by the IPA, relies on approximately 200 active members, which are mostly 363 responsible for the success of the network. Many of the first generation PYRN members that became 'senior' researchers are still affiliated with PYRN and pass on the legacy of IPY to the 364 365 new young generation. In the future, PYRN will strive to maintain its role within the polar 366 research community. Regional PYRN branches will foster stronger and independent support of 367 young researchers 'on site'. PYRN will promote the establishment of a PYRN Asia branch to 368 further thrive, and to complement its international diversity of members. Finally, new 369 technological developments and media tools will help PYRN improve its outreach and education 370 projects to promote the important role of permafrost that it deserves in the Earth system and for 371 society.

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- 380 International Arctic Science Committee, Climate and Cryosphere, Horizon 2020 project
- 381 Nunataryuk, Arctic Development and Adaptation to Permafrost in Transition, Changing
- 382 Permafrost in the Arctic and its Global Effects in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, *Deutsche Gesellschaft für*
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- 385 young researchers during their early stages of their career.

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### **Tables**

**Table 1.** PYRN milestones since its establishment in 2005. PYRN assemblies mostly included

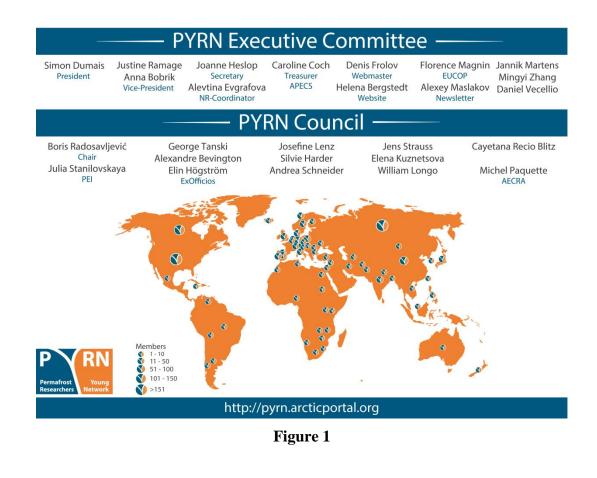
451 workshops and awards (see Supporting material Table S1).

Milestone	Year
Establishment of PYRN at ICARP II in Copenhagen, Denmark	2005
1 <sup>st</sup> anniversary with 250 registered members	
PYRN assembly at ACOP 2006 in Lanzhou, China	2006
PYRN officially represents the IPA at the IPY opening in Paris, France	2007
Kick-off meeting in Abisko, Sweden	2007
PYRN assembly at NICOP 2008 in Fairbanks, USA	2008
Establishment of PYRN TSP boreholes in Scandinavia	2009
5 <sup>th</sup> anniversary with > 600 registered members	
PYRN assembly and workshop at TICOP 2012 in Salekhard, Russia	2012
MoU between PYRN, APECS, and the IPA	2012
PYRN assembly and workshop at EUCOP4 2014 in Évora, Portugal	2014
Permafrost research priorities from a young-researcher's perspective report	2015
Long-term strategy submission and independent IPA budget	2015
10 <sup>th</sup> anniversary with 1,200 registered members	
First PYRN census and membership survey	2015
PYRN assembly and workshop at ICOP 2016 in Potsdam, Germany	2016
Update and launch of new website	2016
PYRN assembly at ACOP 2017 in Sapporo, Japan	2017
PYRN assembly at EUCOP5 in Chamonix, France	2018

### 453 Figure captions

454 **Figure 1.** Organigram displaying the latest organizational structure of PYRN (2016 to 2018).

- 455 Figure 2. Bar-chart (A) showing the distribution of PYRN members by age and stacked bar-
- 456 chart (B) showing the distribution of PYRN members by work sector and highest degree
- 457 completed (n = 200). The charts only show PYRN members that participated in the online
- 458 survey.
- 459



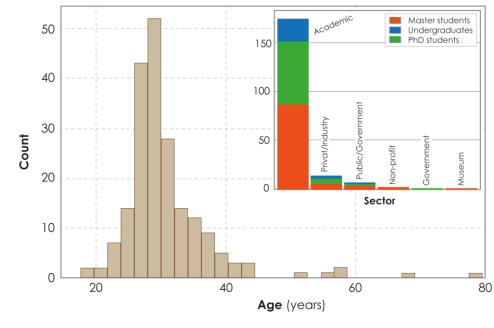


Figure 2