

Report on the ToE Early Career Scholars' Summer School, 27–28 June, 2022, Aarhus

Topic: Surviving and Thriving in Academia

The Summer School “Surviving and Thriving in Academia” was held on 27–28 June 2022, at the Division of Mathematics at Aarhus University. It was the 10th meeting organized by the ToE’s Early Career Scholars’ Group, and formed part of the 10th Tensions of Europe Conference. Planning and organizing the summer school was kindly supported by Matthias Heymann (Professor at Aarhus University) and Joao Daniel Ferreira Marques (student contact Aarhus University). We also want to thank Ruth Oldenziel, Anna Åberg, Nina Wormbs and Erik van der Vleuten for their valuable contribution to the individual sessions in the workshop.

A report by Saara Matala, Tirza Meyer, Jens Millkrantz, Ginevra Sanvitale and Hanna Vikström (names in alphabetical order)



Sessions, 27 June

- Introduction and welcome (Hanna & Tirza), 10-10.30
- Emotional wellbeing for early career scholars in academia (Ginevra & Tirza) 10.30-12
- Keynote: Surviving and thriving in academia ([Ruth Oldenziel](#), Professor in The History of Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology), 13-15

Note: Many of the discussions during the summer school were explicitly held in a safe space and among peers. Therefore, the report only reflects on general issues or topics that came up collectively.

Emotional wellbeing: We talked about the structural and institutional problems plaguing academia (including history of science and technology) during Ginevra’s (main organizer) and Tirza’s session (*Emotional wellbeing for ECS in academia*) and made mind maps of these

issues, along with potential solutions to them. Ginevra started the session by a presentation about emotions and how those have an important epistemic and performative role in our societies, including academic societies. She then continued with a workshop on regulating emotional practices (acceptable/desirable or unacceptable/undesirable emotional practices in an academic setting) where all participants were invited to share their thoughts and emotions connected to academic work. During the *wellbeing workshop*, a range of problems came up from work environment issues to the lack of stable jobs in academia. To address these challenges, the participants collectively came up with the idea to create a mentorship programme for ECS. A senior scholar at another university could act as a mentor for issues that cannot be resolved in the local work environment, or give suggestions on how to tackle difficult situations

The summer school participants developed a 'call for action' as the basis of a manifesto that is currently drafted by the core group of the ECS network. The manifesto idea was later revisited in the final discussion with Erik van der Vleuten (see section final discussion).



Figur 1 All summer school participants

Keynote Ruth Oldenziel: The summer school continued with an interactive keynote with Ruth Oldenziel. She shared a plethora of insights on how one might survive and thrive in academia. Some takeaways from the keynote that were collected by the participants include:

- Identify your *topic* rather than your *discipline* or *institution*. That way, you have a better chance of getting a job in a related discipline or institution, since History of Science and History of Technology are small disciplines in an institutional sense. Historians are not great at explaining their case study beyond their specialization.

- Write an abstract of your dissertation. Identify 2-3 areas/disciplinary domains and explain what's interesting about them. (Especially for non-specialists/scholars from other disciplines.)
- Think about how and why History of Technology (and its many topics) are relevant to other disciplines/a larger academic conversation. Oldenziel advised the summer school participants to make sure that they can communicate why their research matters to basically any group of people (at an interdisciplinary conference, for example); to motivate why people should read their research. If possible, try to get 2-3 groups/disciplines that usually do not communicate to talk to each other. Position your topic in a disciplinary fashion. (E.g., energy history, environmental history, sociology, STS, or political science.)

Advise on how to navigate interdisciplinary contexts, and how to make sure that you're not constricted into a research niche:

- History of Technology is a very small discipline in an institutional sense. Much smaller than IR or related, big, and institutionalized fields. Therefore, we will have to answer how and why history of technology (and its many topics) are relevant to other disciplines/a larger academic conversation.
- A new interpretation – not just new sources or empirical details.
- *Ask yourself: What is my contribution?* Motivate why people should read your research. Underline that you're looking at 'long-term developments' (rather than history) when communicating with, e.g., engineers and policymakers.
- History gives you a sense for how some choices are chosen over others (and for how things could have been different).
- History can help you understand how (and why) things happened as they did.
- History can be an inspiration.
- History helps us understand feasibility. The timespan involved in transitioning to (or from) a socio-technical energy system, for example. The future can be different; it can be re-imagined.

Practical advice to navigate pressure and time management:

- How to value (non-mandatory) tasks and projects? What do you say no to and when? Planning. Say no early. Have one point of focus and be polite. Common advice to early career scholars is to say yes to everything. In general, that's true. But use tactic above if it's too demanding or time-consuming.
- Learn to be proactive in your communication to colleagues and your supervisor. For example: Credit for institutional duties.
- Trust yourself to have your own voice, even if you're working on the same topic as someone else (or using the same archives as someone else). Let your interest in the topic guide you. Go back to what motivated you in the first place. That will get you through low points.
- Find out your best hours and clear your schedule during that time. Try writing in a café, out in the sun, or anywhere you prefer. (Productively for 2-3 hours is enough for deep intellectual work.)
- Create a dissertation group/peer group for writing. Without supervisors. Present work to each other. Low pressure. Abstracts/ideas, etc. A support group. Writing bubbles; ToE ECS reading group; et cetera.

Lastly, Ruth Oldenziel argued that “Historians are theoreticians of change (over time). Everyone wants change – so everyone needs a historian.” This statement can be useful to repeat to ourselves, when we wonder what we are working on. This is also a great reply, in case someone challenges our work.

Sessions, 28 June

- Writing successfully alone and together – from abstracts to longer texts ([Anna Åberg](#), Researcher, Technology Management and Economics, Chalmers University of Technology), 10-12
- Public outreach and digital presence ([Nina Cyrén Wormbs](#), Professor in History of Technology, KTH Royal Institute of Technology), 13:30-15:30
- Final discussion ([Erik van der Vleuten](#), Professor in History of Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology), 16-17:30

Writing and public outreach:

How do I make sure people read my dissertation?

Imagine a public outside of your discipline. (Write in an accessible way.)

Make a book outline ASAP. Do a chapter-by-chapter mock-up.

Helps you to strategically plan your research and possible publications to publish the research in.

Monograph advice: Write chapters that can function as articles, but with a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end.

Publishing a book

Dissertations very hard to publish. Stipends and grants allow you to rewrite the dissertation into a book that can be published by an international publisher.

First question: So what? Usually better to have an international outlook – explain why a national case matters to an international audience.

Advice on how the book could be taught in a classroom in the manuscript.

Might be that a national publication strategy is better (in native language).

Quality matters (both for books and articles)!

Make one’s work more accessible.

Not an either/or, but both quality and quantity (small niche articles for quick publishing).

Avoid jargon! Helps sharpen the mind and analysis to know the jargon, but don’t write in that style. Accessible prose helps find you an audience. Present your work in non-academic settings. This will be a test for your own work to learn what works and what needs to be reformulated to reach a wider audience.

Final discussion:

During the discussion with Erik van der Vleuten, the participants had different ideas about how to solve or improve structural and institutional problems. We talked about local workplace organizing (e.g. joining or forming local unions) to address local workplace issues, creating an international (or inter-university) committee to organize around common problems, and using ToE as a platform to direct attention/criticize structural inequities (e.g.

by writing joint op-eds about, for instance, the ‘publish or perish’ imperative). We talked about creating a mentorship programme, as mentioned above.



Figur 2 The final discussion with Erik van der Vleuten

We also talked about senior scholars’ role in upholding the lack of stable jobs in the European history of science and technology field. Senior scholars could, for example, write funding applications which include funding for postdoc positions. Erik’s answer was that while that was possible, postdoc positions are temporary and add to the precariousness of the academic jobs market. Senior scholars might therefore instead want to fund more tenured or tenure-track positions.

A final suggestion was to arrange a meeting between the ECS core group and the management once per year to discuss ECS issues.

Resulting ideas and materials

- Manifesto: in the works.
- Mentoring idea: further discussion within the ECS core group and the management group needed. Do we make a list of willing mentors and circulate to ECS people who would like a mentor/input from a senior scholar at a different university? If so, which senior scholars are willing to be mentors?