

## NEXTGATe REPORT BACK

In strong support of our early-career ESEH members, the Next Generation Action Team (NEXTGATe) has been going almost six years now – or almost two generations of graduate students! An enormously useful and inspiring part of ESEH, NEXTGATe performs several key functions. First, it fosters a sense of belonging. To do so it focuses on networking, strengthens the cohesion of graduates and early career scholars in the (otherwise) often atomised and alienating space of academia. Second, it creates the institutional platform for ‘conversations that matter’: candid critique and advice (often on the practical side of navigating the stormy, murky, shark-infested waters of university life – on job hunts, issues of professional precarity, how to segue to cognate jobs outside academe and so on). Third, it creates opportunities for peer-to-peer intellectual collaboration and development. Finally, it offers a kind of mentoring – the kind we all crave but so often cannot find or ask for or receive, with ongoing projects receiving useful critique and guidance offered in the realm of teaching, lecturing and designing course curricula. The team is currently composed of Mona Bieling, Jabulani Shaba, Monica Vasile, Tanja Riekkinen, Goran Đurđević, Sebastian Lundsteen, and Jonte Palmblad.



Image 1. The current ESEH NEXTGATe team: top row, Mona Bieling, Jabulani Shaba, Monica Vasile, Tanja Riekkinen; second row, Goran Đurđević, Sebastian Lundsteen, Jonte Palmblad.

The initiatives this year were important and diverse. First, Sebastian Lundsteen (University of Copenhagen) organised **The Elusive Art of PhD’ing – on Supervision and being Supervised**. Finn Arne Jørgensen (University of

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Stavanger) and Lena Schlegel (Rachel Carson Center) offered reflections from the perspectives of supervisor and student respectively. The session was the first in a series addressing the hidden or unstated aspects of academia; those types of knowledge not readily available for early career academics. One outcome of the online event was developing a series of guidelines. These included: communication between you and your supervisor is key; understand the relationship between mentoring and independence (a good supervisor should help advance and develop a candidate's ideas); building relationships and communities is vital during these formative years; lastly, and perhaps most importantly, live with imperfection! A good thesis is a finished one (for more, see the website: <http://eseh.org/the-elusive-art-of-ph-d-ing-a-nextgate-initiative/>)

The second project was a **Teaching Support Programme for ECRs**, organised by Mona Bieling (Helmut-Schmidt University Hamburg). With over forty attendees, this workshop offered a salutary reminder of the important (and often neglected) topic of 'how to be a good teacher'. Two workshops were offered online for maximum attendance with lowest carbon footprint. Our own ESEH co-vice president Marianna Dudley (Bristol University) offered useful guidance on how to prepare a syllabus for an Environmental History course from scratch, including a helpful reflection of the power (young) instructors hold to introduce new topics to their students. During the second workshop, Shen Hou (Peking University) shared her insights on class design and the role of the instructor that changes depending on the size and level of students, as well as their disciplinary background. In a mid-semester meet-up, the participants came together to discuss current challenges of teaching among peers. The last session of the programme is scheduled for February and will draw up some 'best practices' that the team is planning to share with the wider ESEH community at the next conference in Uppsala (for more information on the teaching programme: <http://eseh.org/eseh-nextgate-teaching-support-program-2024/>).

At the same time, the illustrious and well-established **Writing Support Programme** continued, organised by Monica Vasile (ex-Maastricht University) with Andrea Gaynor (University of Western Australia), with a group of twelve participants. The workshop sessions are organised online on a monthly basis, with draft papers pre-circulated ten days before each session. It is a generous and shared experience of critique, as all contributors should offer commentary and had to commit to attending a minimum of four sessions (so ideally one could not just parachute in for one's own session alone). Two papers are critiqued in every session to be inclusive and take the pressure off a solo presenter. About 45 minutes are allocated for each draft chapter or paper. For the 2024 edition, topics included deep sea mining, floodplain pastoralism in Assam, colonial forest management in former Southern Rhodesia, Tasmanian devils, trumpeter swans in museum dioramas, Anthropocene histories of Lake Titicaca, to mention just a few. Generous environmental historians volunteered their time to give feedback as mentors: Sandro Antonello, Rob Gioielli,

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## SOCIETY PAGES

Sandra Swart, Brett Bennett, Andy Flack, Ruth Morgan, Faisal Husain (who woke up very early in the US to make the European morning hours), Jonathan Saha and Óðinn Melsted (for how it works, see here: <http://eseh.org/nextgate/calls-and-activities/call-for-writing-support-programme/>).

Wonderfully, NEXTGATe was able to meet in person in **Oulu**, Finland for the Fourth World Congress of Environmental History, from 19–23 August 2024. At this event, delegates were able to come together in a warm and welcoming networking party for about 25 attendees organised by Tanja Riekkinen (University of Oulu) at a local restaurant (with snacks, of course). This event not only offered a very convivial start to the congress, but created a cohort of support – especially for those delegates attending a conference for the first time or not yet well networked in environmental history.

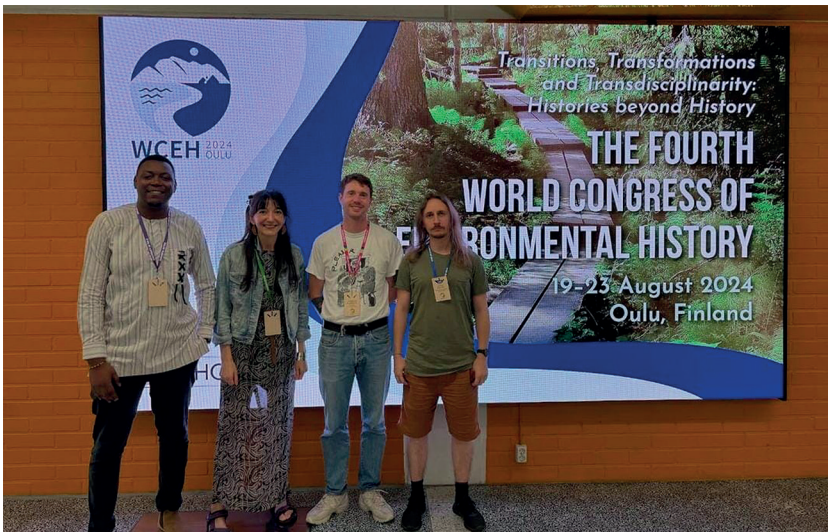


Image 2. A few NEXTGATe team members in attendance at WCEH2024 in Oulu, Finland: Jabulani Shaba, Monica Vasile, Sebastian Lundsteen, Jonte Palmblad.

In addition, at Oulu, there were two sessions which did not begin as ESEH NEXTGATe initiatives, but were co-organised with allies and directed at early career scholars. An opening session of the conference was organised by Roger Norum, with speakers Monica Vasile, Marco Armiero (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and Anna Krzywoszynska (University of Oulu) – and sponsored by ESEH NEXTGATe and Biodiverse Anthropocenes. This session, ‘Towards a Successful Understanding of Failure’ (see <https://wceh2024.com/programme#timetable/failure>), invited Ph.D. students and Early-Career Researchers to re-think ‘failure’. It tried to trouble the very concept of failure or failing – in the Darwinian race of academia to publishing and productivity in conditions

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of precarity. The speakers urged participants to try shed the fear and the shame and focus on potential for learning and change. The panel considered Imposter Syndrome and strategised for healthier, happier ways of being. After the talks, the attendees divided up into groups to share stories and strategies in a supportive space. The initiative was so popular that ESEH NEXTGATE will try to replicate it at the ESEH conference in 2025 in Uppsala.

The practical and useful session ‘Environmental Historians for Sustainable Academia’ was co-organized by NextGATE’s Sebastian Lundsteen, with former NextGATE member Elizabeth Hameeteman (Technische Universität Berlin) (see <https://wceh2024.com/programme#15001>). This was another very engaged session that took as its remit what sustainability means for working environmental historians in very practical ways, including a focus on conditions of labour, inclusion and accessibility, and how we not only understand academia slightly better – but make it a slightly better place.

SANDRA SWART