

EuroDoc Conference Report for SiN, 2023

The EuroDoc conference focused on various topics related to sustainable academia, mental health issues, research assessment, and gender equality in European countries. Representatives from different universities and organizations shared their research and experiences during the conference. This report provides an overview of the key discussions and takeaways from the conference.

Date: 6th June 2023, Pre-Conference hosted at KTH in Stockholm

Sustainable Academia in Sweden and Europe

The pre-conference began with a discussion on sustainable academia, both in Sweden and other European countries. The KTH PhD Chapter and THS presented their initiatives to promote sustainable practices within the academic community. There was an emphasis on creating a research environment that addresses mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression.

Mental Health and Research Assessment

Aleksandra Lewandowska from the University of Białystok highlighted the prevalence of mental health issues among PhD candidates in Poland. She shared that more than 20% of PhD candidates in Poland suffer from depression. To address this issue, they launched a new mental health group and focused on providing support and resources for candidates.

Pil Maria Saugmann presented research results from a survey on mental health issues, specifically anxiety and depression, among PhD candidates in Sweden. However, it was noted that the research did not include all PhD-offering institutions in Sweden and avoided directly asking about mental health and sexual harassment topics.

Mohammad Abuasbeh, from the host institution, KTH, discussed the correlation between the number of supervision hours per month and stress/anxiety levels among PhD candidates. He suggested that supervisors should be available for at least eight hours a month, as both the quantity and quality of supervision play a crucial role in reducing stress levels.

Research Assessment Reform

Sebastian Dahle spoke about the need for assessment reform in academia and introduced COARA (Common Research Assessment Approach) as a platform for research assessment reform. The discussion touched upon the challenges of impact factors and the importance of considering the quality of publications and citations in research assessment.

Gender Equality and Academic Freedom

Sara Pilia discussed gender equality issues in academia, highlighting the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and as full professors in Europe. She emphasised the need for institutions to go beyond checkbox compliance and actively work towards creating an inclusive environment.

PhD Candidates' Concerns and Career Development

Karl Kilbo Edlund discussed the lack of proper program introductions for PhD candidates in Sweden and presented the Swedish PhD Handbook as a national-level resource to address this issue. The link to the handbook is phdhandbook.se

Date: 7th June 2023, Conference Day One, hosted at the University of Uppsala

Day One of the conference focused on employment conditions for post-docs, academic sustainability, and open research practices.

Employment Conditions of Post-docs

A panel discussion focused on the employment conditions of post-docs. The panelists discussed issues such as job security, social benefits, and the need for reform to provide better support and stability for post-docs. Members of the panel stressed the need for improved conditions, including pensions and portability of pensions across European countries.

Sustainability in Academia

A panel discussion centred on the sustainable agenda for academia, highlighting the need to address greenhouse emissions and promote sustainable practices within academic institutions. The discussion also touched upon reducing air travel and promoting digital meetings to minimise environmental impact.

Debates on Publishing and Open Science

The conference also featured a discussion on the debates surrounding publishing practices, including the choice between publishing in top journals and adopting open science practices. The panelists emphasised the need for more open peer review models and recognition of junior researchers' contributions in the publishing process.

Date: 8th June 2023, Conference Day Two hosted at the University of Uppsala

The second day of the conference continued with two keynote speakers and panel discussions on discrimination and academic freedom. Here is a summary of the key points discussed:

Keynote Speakers:

- Julia Obchennikova (via Zoom): Julia, a parliamentarian in Ukraine with a EuroDoc background, introduced the concept of ecocide. She highlighted that ecocide is being raised for unanimous voting in the EU and is also a topic of concern in Brazil.
- Kelly Woods on Open Research in Europe: Kelly discussed open research practices and the publishing process on Open Research Europe. She explained that data should be open as much as possible and closed as required, and each publication has its own DOI, making it available for others to comment on. Authors receive peer reviews, and once two approved reviews are received, the publication passes. The previous versions of articles are also open and available. Open Research Europe accepts different article types and covers all discipline types in Horizon Europe grants. Publishing on the platform has no cost, and it is an NSD 1 point for Norway. The Open Research Europe platform is indexed in Scopus and Google Scholar. However, only projects where at least one of the authors is on a project funded by Horizon Europe grants are eligible to be published on the platform. As for <https://f1000research.com/about> the Horizon Europe grant is not a requirement. It is also NSD 1 point for Norway.

Kelly mentioned that the EU will run the platform until 2024. From 2024 to 2026, a different provider will be responsible. Multi-lingual publishing of metadata will be available in five languages. The goal is to become a top-quality, trusted, pan-European open access publishing service. The platform is run by the research community, and there are no author-facing fees. Kelly can be contacted at Kelly.Woods@f1000.com. F1000 is working on a project with EuroDoc and is in charge of the budget.

Panel Discussion: Discrimination

The panel discussion on discrimination included Hanna Dort, a PhD student in Uppsala, and Nicola Dengo, Skills Officer at EuroDoc. Hanna highlighted the importance of funding opportunities that are not solely reliant on students and emphasised the need for improvements in parental leave, collective bargaining, and workers' rights. Hanna summarised the value and goals of a PhD as creating new knowledge, networking opportunities, and career-building.

Nicola discussed the varying experiences of doctoral students depending on the country and its implications for career opportunities. The duration of the PhD and the research output within that timeframe differ, and many PhD graduates do not pursue academic careers. Nicola emphasised the PhD process as a path to becoming a critical thinker.

During the Q&A session, there was mention of the Bologna Process and inquiry about the competitiveness of the European model on the global stage.

Panel Discussion: Academic Freedom

The panel discussion on academic freedom included Pil Maria Saugmann as the last panel speaker. Pil Maria highlighted that academic freedom is only as strong as the weakest link and should apply to all colleagues. She stressed that a PhD education is just the beginning and called for an ongoing conversation centred on dignity, trust, and tolerance.

During the Q&A session, the question of where academic freedom ends was raised. One response highlighted that it ends with ethical issues.

Informal Discussion and Collaboration:

After the sessions, Karl Kilbo Edlund mentioned that Sweden has organised guidelines for the relationship between supervisors and PhD candidates. This information was shared to facilitate the sharing of a template with SiN and Norwegian universities

Here is the link to the individual study plan from the Karolinska Institute. It has some general information available to those who are not able to log in because they are not a part of the Karolinska Institute.

<https://medarbetare.ki.se/isp-individuell-studieplan>

Conclusion:

The EuroDoc conference concluded with productive discussions on topics such as ecocide, open research, discrimination, and academic freedom. The conference provided valuable insights and fostered collaboration among representatives from various European countries, promoting sustainable academia and addressing the challenges faced by PhD candidates and early career researchers.