



Maastricht University

FASoS

Research Institute

Report 2023

FASoS



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Introduction



2023 was an exciting year for those of us at the Research Institute at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS). We welcomed an international committee of our research peers in October. Their task was to review our research for the period 2017-2022, and to provide advice on how we can move forward. It was a pleasure to engage with them, and they provided excellent suggestions for how we can strengthen our collegial, diverse, international and interdisciplinary research environment in the years to come.

Preparing for such an event is a great deal of work by many people. It is also about putting our best foot forward in the [self-evaluation report](#) we prepared. Usually our annual research reports also celebrate the research achievements of colleagues. As such, we're not very different from all those who try to create impressions of living their best life on social media. Academic CVs tend to be stories of success: awarded grants, published and cited articles and books, invitations to give lectures, and standing ovations at conferences (the latter is very rare).

This year, we're doing something different. Following the example of [Melanie Stefan](#) who called for 'A CV of failure' in *Nature* back in 2010, four of my brave and brilliant colleagues are sharing some of their research 'failures'. When I finished my PhD, I naively thought I would never have to do an exam again. But academic life is full of trials of various sorts, most of which involve rejection, such as applying for jobs and grants, and submitting manuscripts to journals and book publishers. In the social sciences and humanities, the competition is intense. Most research funding agencies acknowledge that the majority of the applications they receive are high quality, and deserving of funding, but they have to distribute scarce resources and are forced to make difficult choices.

In addition, as researchers we have ideas that simply do not work out. After some preliminary research we may realise that many others have already had similar ideas and executed them much better. Or we might try new methods or forms of outreach, and discover they simply don't work as we had hoped. But that is all part of the process. Even with setbacks and disappointments, we continue to learn, and maybe new opportunities will arise, as my colleagues report in the following pages.

2023 was a good year for FASoS collectively, and for the many talented researchers who work here. The [evaluation by our peers](#) was very positive. Individually and collectively, we continue to apply for grants, often with success. We carry on writing and publishing, and others review and read our work with interest. Sometimes, some of the work of some FASoS colleagues is rewarded with prizes or membership of prestigious committees, professional associations and scientific academies. We engage with wider audiences about our work, beyond our own disciplinary training and beyond the walls of the university.

Our full 2023 research report is also available on [our website](#). But this is the last time I will be preparing this introduction. After four years in this role, it is time to hand over to one of my colleagues. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with such talented scholars and with excellent professional research support in policy, finance, data management, technology, and communication.

Prof. dr. Sally Wyatt

Associate Dean for Research

Research Programmes

FASoS consists of four distinct research programmes, each made up of an interdisciplinary team of researchers.



Arts, Media and Culture

Arts, Media and Culture (AMC) analyses the dynamics of cultural change by studying how developments in the arts and the media respond to socio-cultural and political changes, and also how cultural artefacts and practices shape social and political cultures. Research focuses on the practices in which cultural artefacts are produced, distributed, and received. Approaching these topics from an interdisciplinary angle, the group's research draws on insights from art and philosophy, literary and media studies, cultural history and gender studies, as well as the social sciences.



Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development

Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development (GTD) studies globalisation through the flows of people, goods, capital and ideas that connect localities around the world, with a special focus on flows between the Global South, and between Global South and North. Research focuses on transnational migration bridging migrant sending and receiving contexts, transnational exchanges for development and scientific cooperation, transnational communities and solidarities, and the multi-scalar consequences of globalisation on places. It draws on expertise in anthropology, critical theory, development studies, history, human geography, political science, and sociology.



Maastricht University Science, Technology and Society Studies

Maastricht University Science, Technology and Society Studies (MUSTS) studies how modern societies are shaped by science and technology; and vice versa, how social and cultural conditions shape technological innovations and scientific discoveries. MUSTS research draws on a combination of philosophical, historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches, focusing on cultures of research and innovation. The focus of MUSTS work typically moves between micro-level studies of local practices and macro-level questions of governance, policy, and morality, making it relevant for policy makers, academic debates, and society at large.



Politics and Culture in Europe

Politics and Culture in Europe (PCE) brings together political scientists, historians, and philosophers with an interest in Europe. The process of European integration since 1945 and questions of European democracy, governance, and foreign policy are central to the research agenda. Researchers study the European Union and Europeanisation, contribute to debates on multilateralism and the global order, and take an interest in transnational history. Methodologically rigorous, the emphasis of PCE is on fundamental research with societal relevance.

Graduate School



FASoS has its own [Graduate School](#) that provides training for PhD candidates associated with all of the research programmes. In 2023, we had 33 internal candidates. We also welcome external PhDs, and currently have 43.

Research Centres

The faculty is home to six dedicated research centres.

These centres act as hubs to bring together researchers from FASoS and other UM faculties. They also facilitate interaction with external academic and societal partners.

[The Maastricht Centre for Arts, Culture, Conservation and Heritage](#)

The Maastricht Centre for Arts, Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH) brings together (art) historical, philosophical, sociological, economic, legal, and practical expertise in response to the increasingly complex challenges facing the fields of arts and heritage today.

[The Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development](#)

The Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE) brings together scholars working on migration from legal, citizenship, development, and family life perspectives. Researchers study the dynamics of transnational migration and mobility in a European and global context.

[The Centre for European Research in Maastricht](#)

The Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERiM) provides substantial input to the UM's focal point of 'Europe and a Globalising World'. CERiM is an interdisciplinary research venue creating synergies and stimulating joint projects between political scientists, historians, lawyers, and economists analysing the past and future of European and international cooperation in a changing global order.

[The Centre for Gender and Diversity](#)

The Centre for Gender and Diversity (CGD) studies mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion from an intersectional perspective. Our feminist research concerns the making of cultural and social differences in cases of embodied experience, art, language, law, institutions, science, and technology. We aim to use our research as a vector of change – to not only describe and explain social issues but to engage stakeholders and intervene for the sake of social justice.

[The Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music](#)

The Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music (MCICM) studies the dynamics behind changing classical music practices and their societal contexts, and works with orchestras and others to actively shape classical music futures. To do so, MCICM combines academic research on innovation of performance practices with artistic research to renew classical music practices and music education in artistically relevant ways.

[The Centre for the Social History of Limburg](#)

The Centre for the Social History of Limburg (SHCL) is a documentation and research centre that focuses on the history of Limburg and neighbouring regions from the 18th century until the present day. It offers expertise and assistance for academic researchers and the general public by providing access to historical sources, maintaining a library collection, and the publication of an academic yearbook.

The tale of the fox and the grapes

Tullio Viola



This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report. For the full interview, please see [here](#).

Tullio Viola, Assistant Professor in Philosophy, is a historically minded philosopher. On the one hand, he focuses on the history of late 19th- and early 20th-century philosophy, in particular on the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences in North America and Europe. On the other hand, Tullio looks at how knowledge is shaped by social and cultural forces.

This combination of being a philosopher as well as a historian can at times be challenging. Especially in grant applications, choosing the right discipline to hand in the application can be a difficult decision. “My profile doesn’t easily fit predetermined categories, and whichever I choose, there will always be someone who doesn’t recognize my profile,” Tullio explains.

Tullio likes to understand a philosophical question by starting from the historical case. “Take for example my current research. I look into how knowledge is affected by a very specific domain of culture, namely folklore – and folk narratives in particular. Recently, scholars have suggested that folk narratives

do not only include the sagas, legends or tales that we all know, but any kind of narrative that is transmitted informally within a community. In a way, social media nowadays may be seen as a major channel of folklore transmission.”

Being understood by those who are different

After finishing his master’s degree, Tullio was set on taking his interest in interdisciplinarity to the US to do a PhD there. This, however, proved more challenging than expected. “US applications were very competitive. On top of that, I was unaware of how the PhD process in the US worked and what philosophy departments were looking for. I tried to present myself as a philosophy scholar grounded in history, but I probably came across as someone who couldn’t make up his mind as to which discipline he preferred.”

When many of the US applications failed, Tullio decided to apply for PhD positions in Germany. >>

“I received a scholarship from a research centre in Berlin. I had done my master’s exchange at the same institute so I knew some of the people there. That was in a sense the biggest pitfall of my PhD: I was recognized for my value by people who were like me, but it was difficult to learn how to be understood by people who are different. Don’t get me wrong, my Berlin years were extremely formative and I have no regrets, but I did – and still do – see this as a limitation.”

Grant application setback

Tullio explains that “this difficulty in making myself understood by those who have a different background goes hand-in-hand with not fitting in predetermined funding categories. The interplay of the two has probably led to my failure in past grant applications, all the while grants are such an important aspect of academia, which is starting to become problematic. There not only goes a lot of time into writing grant applications, but assessors also spend a lot of time and energy reviewing applications. This makes the grant application culture unproductive, because only a handful of grants are awarded.”

For Tullio, grant application culture resembles the fable of the fox and the grapes: a fox tries to eat grapes but can’t reach them. Instead of admitting defeat, the fox simply says he didn’t want the grapes anyway. “I am trying to avoid becoming the fox, regardless of the setbacks I have had in applications.”

These setbacks should actually be seen as an opportunity, Tullio thinks. “Writing grant applications is an exercise in which I explain my research to others who are not in my discipline, as well as to a non-academic audience. I do feel like I have got a bit better at it, also thanks to the tremendous help from within the faculty – especially from colleagues in the research panel, in the philosophy and history departments, and in the AMC research group.” <<





Memories about failed grant applications

Aline Sierp



This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report. For the full interview, please see [here](#).

Aline Sierp, Associate Professor in European History and Memory Studies, is renowned for her contributions to the field. As the co-founder and co-president of the Memory Studies Association and the Council of European Studies' Research Network on Transnational Memory and Identity in Europe, she has delved deep into the intricacies of collective memory, particularly in the context of European integration.

Despite her notable successes, Aline acknowledges the inevitability of setbacks. One of the most memorable instances was a failed grant application, where she took what turned out to be a risky approach.

Memory politics

Aline's research interests cover collective memory after experiences of mass atrocities, questions of identity and European integration. Specifically, she examines how societies confront their difficult pasts,

such as wars and human rights violations, and how these memories shape European integration. Aline has published extensively on European memory politics. She explores the disparities between Western and Eastern memory narratives, and also investigates the EU's dealing with the memory of Colonialism. Aline also writes about the Dachau concentration camp memorial site (where she worked as a researcher before joining Maastricht University) and Munich's delayed reckoning with its Nazi past.

Stepping (not too much) out of the comfort zone

Every academic knows that grant applications are brutal. "Competition is fierce and basically everyone is fishing in the same pond. Success often depends on the interview stage." Aline recounts her experience with an ERC Starting Grant, where she advanced to the interview but ultimately fell short. >>

The ERC emphasizes innovation balanced with feasibility, pushing applicants out of their comfort zones. However, Aline feels she may have ventured too far, facing tough questions and feeling the pressure mount.

“The surroundings of the interview feel like they are set up to make you nervous: all applicants need to arrive at the same time, your competitors are in the waiting room with you, and there is a big clock behind you when you are presenting your proposal, which everyone just keeps staring at. I was taking a huge gamble with the methodology that I proposed. It could have worked both ways: either the panel would have loved it, or there would be someone in the room who would be able to kill it.

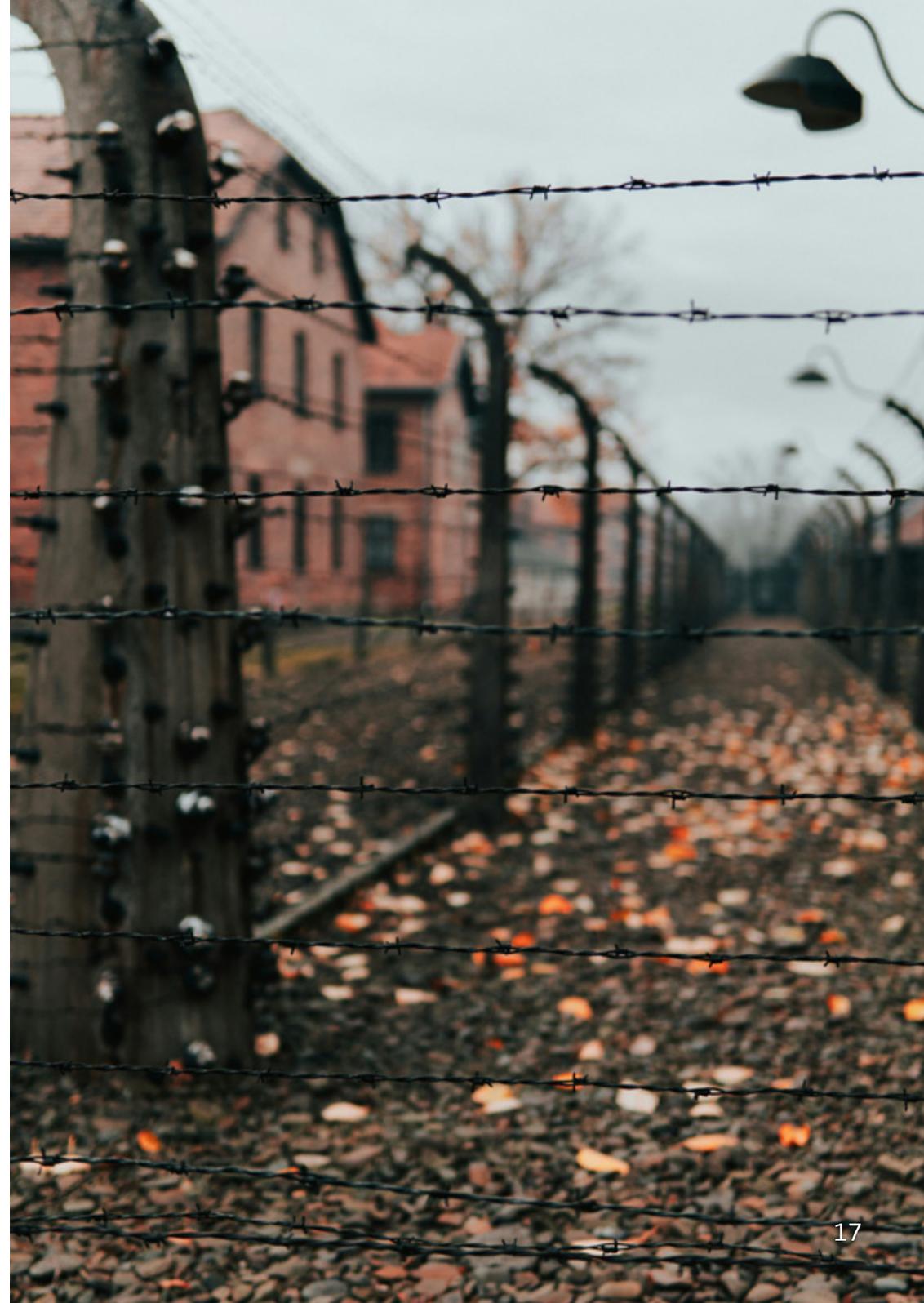
The latter happened, as the data analyst in the room dissected every bit of my methodology. In hindsight, I was offering something that I didn't know enough about, and the data analyst looked right through me. I should have stayed on the safe side with my methodology and should have innovated in my theoretical model. I knew right there and then that I wouldn't receive the grant.”

From ERC to Vidi to Aspasia

Aline refused to give up and decided to rework her ERC proposal and hand it in for one of the NWO (Dutch organization that funds scientific research) funding schemes. “The NWO is much less focused on the innovation angle, and more on solid research.” Aline initially applied for the Vidi, a funding instrument meant for more experienced researchers who want to develop their own line of research. She unfortunately didn't secure it, but the NWO did offer her another grant: the Aspasia. This grant is awarded to female researchers who have excellent proposals. “In a sense, I may even be happier with the Aspasia grant than the Vidi grant, because the Aspasia offers quite a bit of teaching buyouts.”

How to deal with rejection

Rejection is an inevitable part of academia, whether in grant applications or journal submissions. “It's important to not take rejection personally. It is a judgement of a project rather than the researcher. Regardless of how demotivating rejection is, feedback should be viewed objectively and alternative avenues for publication or funding should be considered. Setbacks are integral to the research process and can sometimes lead to unexpected opportunities. You get to learn from rejection and failure.” <<



Facts and Figures 2023



Amount of funding received

€6,099,884



Number of researchers, including PhDs

143



Academic publications

233



PhDs awarded

12

of whom 1 graduated
cum laude

The search for a publisher

Vincent Lagendijk



This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report. For the full interview, please see [here](#).

Vincent Lagendijk, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, has a special item on his bookshelf: a manuscript, written by himself. Finding a publisher for this manuscript is proving to be a difficult task. Vincent has already published several academic publications on the same topic, but has not yet managed to realize the original idea of a book publication.

Tennessee Valley Authority

Vincent received a research grant from NWO, the Dutch organization that funds scientific research, in 2009. The grant was awarded for his research on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), an American organization founded in 1933 to develop the area around the Tennessee River. The TVA in particular gained a name for itself with the construction of dams to generate electricity and control floods. Vincent is particularly interested in the international dimensions of the TVA.

Historiography portrays the TVA as a unique American model that river developers imitated in other parts of the world. This image, however, turns out to be clouded, according to Vincent.

“After consulting many archives of individuals, countries and international organizations, I came to the conclusion that nuance is in order. For example, regional actors, the World Bank, and the United Nations played a major role in the development of dam building on the Mekong, Danube, and Jordan rivers. Influences from other countries, including colonial contexts, merged to some extent with the American model. It turns out that the global contributions to the TVA’s legacy proved to be larger, while the American influence is a lot smaller than originally thought.” >>

Finding a publisher

In his manuscript, Vincent dives deeper into these three rivers. In particular, he looks at how their development was thought about and how this image came to be. In 2013, after four years of researching and writing, he was ready to send the manuscript to a European publisher. “A colleague, however, advised me not to do so, arguing that the book had potential and believed that if I would do more extensive research and consult more primary sources, I would have a chance of getting the book published by a major American publisher. These are generally more highly regarded than European ones, especially if it concerns an American topic.”

In 2019, Vincent finalized a new version and decided to approach an American publisher. “The publisher responded positively and asked me to send the entire manuscript. After sending it, I unfortunately never received a response. I tried calling and emailing, but all in vain. I was disappointed, but I didn’t want to give up, so I sent the manuscript to several other publishers. One rejected the proposal, another never got back to me, and the third didn’t respond until months later, when I was already in contact with a fourth publisher. Since there is an unwritten rule that you only consult one publisher at a time, I couldn’t get back to the third and the discussion with the fourth unfortunately fell through.”

Light at the end of the tunnel

Fortunately, there are some positive developments. During the corona pandemic, Vincent and a German colleague came up with the idea to organize an online workshop on the international dimensions of dam building. The workshop was very productive: each participant specialized in a different segment concerning the international dimension of dams, and so the idea of a joint book proposal grew. “We pitched the proposal to a publisher, and we pulled off what I hadn’t been able to do all these years. The first publisher we approached reviewed the proposal and offered us a contract even before we had written a single chapter. [The book](#) will come out this summer.”

Vincent has more hopeful news in store. “The publisher of the edited volume has also expressed interest in my manuscript. We’ll see where this leads. In any case, I’m still on track for the TVA’s 100th anniversary in 2033.” <<

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Norris Dam



Who wants to use my (m)ap(p)?

Brigitte Le Normand



This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report. For the full interview, please see [here](#).

Brigitte Le Normand, Associate Professor in History, researches socialist Yugoslavia in a global context. She has had three broad research agendas, all focusing on modernisation processes in the former socialist country. Her last big research project was about Rijeka, the main port in Yugoslavia.

The city, located in present-day Croatia, has a tumultuous past. It was part of the Habsburg Empire until the First World War. When the empire was dissolved after the First World War, the majority of inhabitants spoke Italian, but a significant number spoke Croatian as well – and many people spoke both languages. Initially, Rijeka became a free city, but it was later absorbed by Italy, and at the end of the Second World War, Yugoslavia took control of the city. As a result, Italians and Croatians hold contrasting memories of Rijeka’s past, shaped by historical events and cultural shifts.

Mapping Rijeka’s stories

Driven by a desire to bridge these narratives and foster a shared understanding of Rijeka’s history, Brigitte created an interactive online map. “Since I knew that there were so many strong and contrasting memories about Rijeka’s history, I thought inhabitants would be interested in contributing to the crowd-sourced map. Ultimately, only a few did so.”

Brigitte draws several lessons from this. “I think the problem was threefold. First, the platform that hosted the interactive map wasn’t as user-friendly as I thought it was. Second, potential users didn’t know what was in it for them when they would contribute to the map. They already had their own network and used other platforms to reach their audience. Third, my assumption that Croatians and Italians would want to interact with each other was wrong: they did not want to speak to those on the other language side.” Brigitte learned a key lesson from this: you need to clarify who your audience is as part of your project design. >>

Walking the history of Rijeka with an app

The failure of the map made Brigitte rethink her target audience. Who did she want to reach with the stories of Rijeka? “The people on the street. A map on the internet isn’t very usable then, so the idea of the creation of a mobile phone app about the history of the city emerged. I also learned from my previous mapping experience and decided not to rely on the Rijeka community to map this history. Instead, I invited historians to share their research. They would be able to craft high-quality content, transcending national narratives and offering a comprehensive view of the city’s past, showcasing the many different stories that can be told about it.”

Yet, while the resulting app is impressive, it has struggled to reach its intended audience. Part of the problem may have been the effort to appeal to a universal user, including locals, tourists, and individuals of all ages. However, locals perceived themselves as already familiar with the city’s history, while older demographics were less inclined towards mobile apps. High school students and tourists emerged as the primary users, albeit with varying degrees of engagement. “At least since we now know which groups use the app, we can tailor the content much better.”

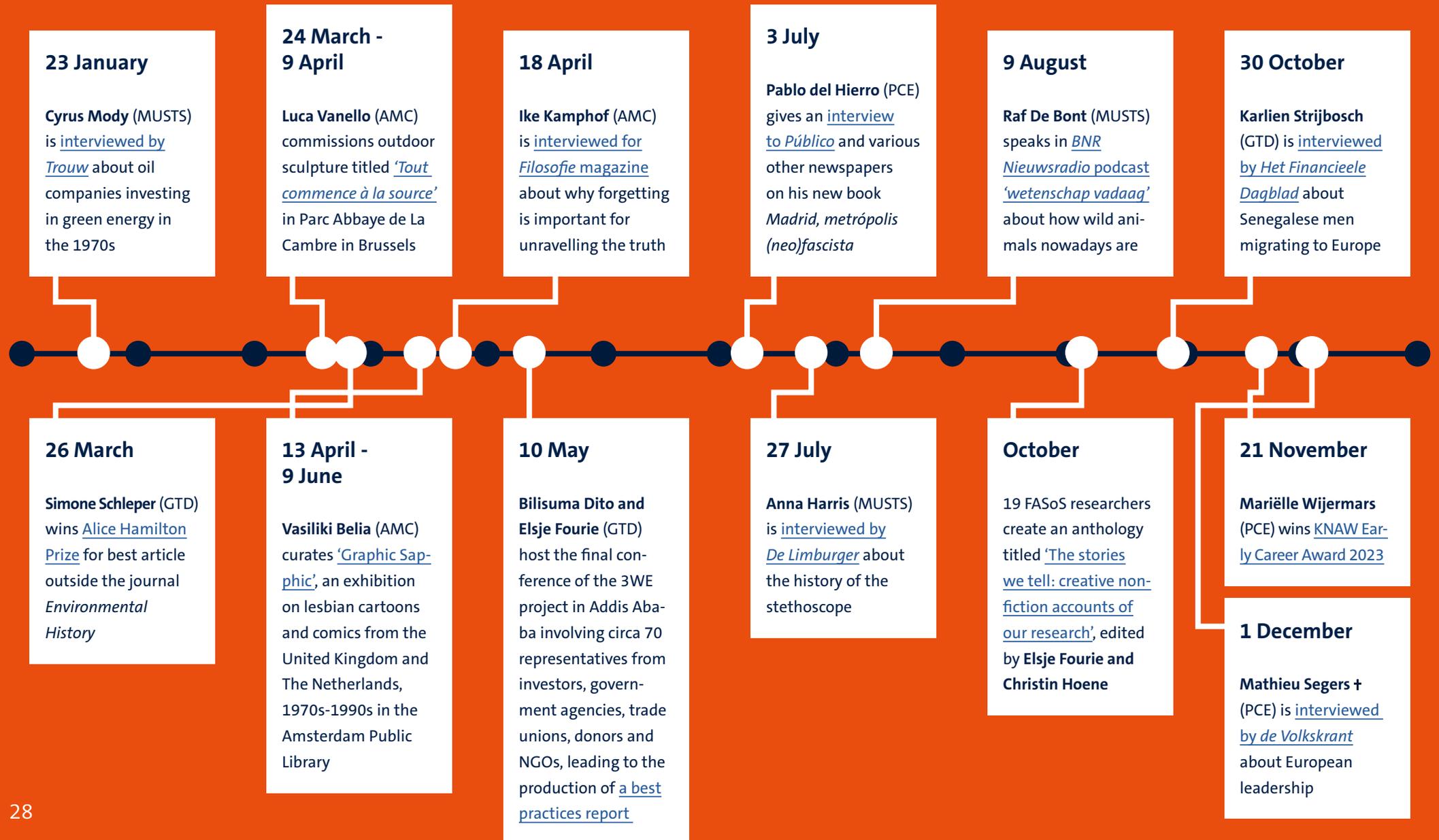
Lessons learned

The entire process has allowed her to reflect on the potential and the challenge of research impact. “As academics, we publish a lot and we try out new approaches to generate outreach. But the real question is: has your work resonated in society; has anyone read it?”

Despite her own critical self-reflection, Brigitte cautions against fixating on failure, viewing setbacks as integral to academic research. “We celebrate our successes but we don’t know what to do with failure. A more open dialogue about failure would be beneficial, as it helps us to reflect and ultimately contributes to success.” In her quest to elucidate the multifaceted history of Rijeka, Brigitte remains committed to engaging communities, transcending boundaries, and embracing failure. <<



Outreach



Colophon

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