technische universität dortmund

Sozialforschungsstelle Dortmund

European Forum for Studies of Policies for Research and Innovation

Early Career Event

10 June 2025

Dortmund / Germany

Shaping Societal Futures as a Career Path?
Between academia and social impact

FINAL REPORT

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1 Introduction

Alongside the organisation of the 2025 Eu-SPRI Conference, TU Dortmund University, Social Research Centre invited early career researchers to take part in an Early Career Event (ECE). On June 10th 2025, 19 international early career researchers (PhD candidates and Postdocs) and 8 senior scholars gathered at the Social Research Centre of TU Dortmund University. As the ECE was organised as part of the main conference, and participants at the ECE also participated in the main conference (participation in the main conference was a precondition for acceptance at the ECE), the ECE did not focus on the content or the topics of the work of the early career researcher, but rather on the challenges they may face as young scholars in an academic world that increasingly demands both scientific excellence and societal impact.

The ECE therewith aligned neatly with the topic of the main conference ("Shaping societal futures with STI policies") and asked how this 'shaping of societal futures' features in the career paths of (young) researchers. Supervised by a group of international scholars with experience in transdisciplinary work, the early career researchers were offered a protective space to exchange with peers and senior researchers about the challenges they face in their daily working practices. With short impulse inputs and in a world café setting, the senior researchers also shared their personal visions and experiences.

A total of 18 submissions to the conference were originally received, all of which were accepted. One participant was added in the day of the ECE as she had not realized the need to submit a letter of motivation but signed up for the event on the conference website nonetheless. The ECE was truly international with participants from across the globe; the participants came from 10 different countries (Australia, Brazil, Finland, Germany, India, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and the UK); supplemented with senior Experts from Argentina, Austria, Germany and Spain.

2. Overview of the ECE

Goal of the ECE was to bring young scholars together for a one-day event prior to the main conference. As such, the program was somewhat dense, but all participants got the opportunity to present and reflect on their own experiences and to subsequently discuss with senior researchers.

The event was kicked off with a welcome address by the director of the Social Research Centre Jürgen Howaldt. The event was moderated by Rick Hölsgens and Karina Maldonado-Mariscal of TU Dortmund University, Social Research Center. After the welcome address, parallel sessions took place in which the early career participants briefly introduced their research and the challenges they experienced with regards to ensuring both scientific excellence and societal impact. These sessions included peer feedback, as well as feedback from senior researchers, who were spread over the parallel sessions.

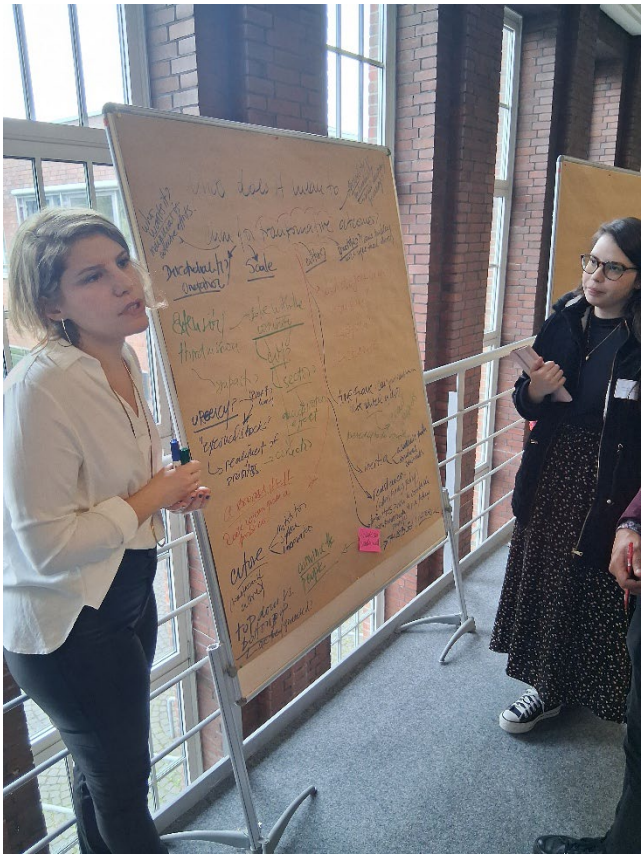
After two rounds of parallel sessions and a well-deserved lunch break, 5 senior researchers presented short impulse inputs under the following titles:

- Toni Caro: *Social Innovation and multi actor collaboration for positive impact-driven Science, Technology and Innovation for an Era of Transitions*
- Klaus Schuch: *The difficulty of positioning social innovations in research projects – a testimony of ZSI-Centre for Social Innovation*
- Alejandra Boni: *Leveraging Social Innovation to Drive Transformative Innovation Policy*
- Gabriela Bortz: *From 'Inclusive' Innovation to Transformative Outcomes: Engaged STI for Societal Change*
- Christoph Kaletka: *Roles of Academia in Social Innovation Ecosystems*

The senior experts subsequently acted at hosts at the 5 world café tables, addressing the following topics:

- Toni Caro: *How can researchers develop multi-actor collaboration for positive impact?*
- Klaus Schuch: *The meaning of "social" in social innovation and its implication for social impact*
- Alejandra Boni: *Driving transformative innovation policy*
- Gabriela Bortz: *What does it mean to aim for transformative research?*
- Christoph Kaletka: *Social scientists in (social) innovation ecosystems?*

To close the event (before a joint dinner in the inner city of Dortmund), the main discussion points from the 5 tables were brought together in a concluding plenary discussion. The complete program of the ECE can be found in annex 1.



2.1. Networking and social events

At least equally important for young scholars as feedback on the content of their work, is networking and getting to know both peers and senior scholars. The ECE offered plenty of opportunity to this end, with several coffee breaks and a long lunch break. Additionally, also the world café setting was ideal to this end, as early career researchers could engage in fairly intimate and in-depth discussions with the experts in groups of 2-4 junior researchers per expert. The event was closed with a joint dinner to which all participants were invited in the inner city of Dortmund. In an informal atmosphere, the discussions and networking started during the day continued.

The success of the early career event could already be witnessed during the main conference in the following days, as connections made during the ECE were strengthened at the conference.

3. Evaluation

The ECE offered the participants a platform to discuss on challenges that clearly are being experienced by all (junior and senior researcher alike) in one way or another, but that are usually outside the scope of scientific conferences. This was well-received. Various participants reported how they sometimes struggle with a variety of day-to-day challenges, ranging from fitting within scientific disciplines to speaking the local language to ensure societal impact. The senior researchers could support them in this with reflections on their own experiences; even though one of the main conclusions remains that balancing scientific excellence with societal impact remains a real challenge and asks a lot from (young) researchers.

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Annex 1: Eu-SPRI Early Career Event 10th June 2025

Time	Topic	Location	Moderation/experts
8:45-9:15	Registration	Foyer	
9:15- 9:45	Welcome and Introduction to the Event Introduction experts Practicalities	Tableau	Howaldt Hölsgens
9:45-10:45	Early career presentations: Group 1: Zirngiebl; Nordling; Chamoli; Silva Group 2: Krüger; Gibson; Gopalakrischnan Group 3: Neudert; Theeuwes; Fang	 Room 40 Room 15 Tableau	 Schuch; Caro Boni; Maldonado-Mariscal Bortz; Kaletka; Hölsgens
10:45-11:15	Break	Room 79/80/81	
11:15-12:30	Early career presentations: Group 1: Papaioannou; Vazquez Villegas; Zdunek; Strecke Group 2: Cuypers; Fantini; Tagliani; Ekroos	 Room 40 Room 15	 Kaletka; Caro; Maldonado-Mariscal Schuch; Boni; Bortz; Hölsgens
12:30-13:30	Lunch break	Room 79/80/81	

13:30-14:45	Impulse inputs (10 minutes each + 5 minutes questions) Toni Caro ***Social Innovation and multi actor collaboration for positive impact-driven Science, Technology and Innovation for an Era of Transitions*** Klaus Schuch ***The difficulty of positioning social innovations in research projects – a testimony of ZSI-Centre for Social Innovation*** Alejandra Boni ***Leveraging Social Innovation to Drive Transformative Innovation Policy*** Gabriela Bortz ***From 'Inclusive' Innovation to Transformative Outcomes: Engaged STI for Societal Change*** Christoph Kaletka ***Roles of Academia in Social Innovation Ecosystems***	Tableau	Moderation: Hölsgens
14:45-15:45	World Café ➔ 5 thematic tables, moderated by experts Caro: ***How can researchers develop multi-actor collaboration for positive impact?*** Schuch: ***The meaning of "social" in social innovation and its implication for social impact*** Boni: ***Driving transformative innovation policy*** Bortz: ***What does it mean to aim for transformative research?*** Kaletka: ***Social scientists in (social) innovation ecosystems?***	Tableau / Room15 / Room40	Experts moderate
15:45-16:15	Break	Tableau	
16:15-17:00	Final plenary discussion	Tableau	Moderation: Maldonado-Mariscal
19:00	Joint dinner	Pfefferkorn, Alter Markt	

		(Markt 6, 44137 Dortmund)	

Annex 2: List of Early Career Participants

	Name	Affiliation	Mailadresse
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