HITEC Graduate School Retreat 2/2026 – Report: Connecting beyond disciplines: A retreat for exchange, inspiration, and new connections

From 24th to 26th June 2026, the second HITEC Retreat 2026 brought together 23 doctoral researchers from different institutes for three days of scientific exchange, networking, and shared experiences in Enkhuizen and on board the sailing ship *Eenhoorn* on the Ijsselmeer.

The retreat was organised by doctoral researchers for doctoral researchers, with the organisation team consisting of Kevin, Milan and Niklas. As a mandatory retreat for all participants of the graduate school, the main goal was to encourage participants to look beyond their own research fields, connect with colleagues from different institutes, and create a space for open exchange beyond the usual working environment.

A different kind of scientific exchange

The original programme was designed to combine scientific discussions with time for personal interaction. The plan included an initial get-together in Enkhuizen on Wednesday, followed by two sessions of scientific talks and discussions on Thursday.

However, due to the unusual hot weather, with temperatures reaching around 38°C in Jülich at the same time, the programme was adapted spontaneously. After an introduction round on Thursday morning, the group visited the *Nederlands Stoommachinemuseum*, a steam engine museum in Medemblik. Afterwards, the focus shifted towards personal conversations and informal scientific exchange.

This change turned out to be a valuable opportunity. Instead of traditional presentation formats, participants had more time for direct discussions, sharing experiences, and learning about each other's research backgrounds. The shorter official scientific programme allowed the most important part of the retreat to happen naturally: conversations between people.

Learning to sail — and learning from each other

A special highlight of the retreat was the sailing experience itself. With the help of Sailor Rosa, the participants received an introduction to the basics of sailing. They also helped with the operation of the ship, such as manoeuvres, setting the sails, and docking.

The sailing trip created a unique environment where teamwork, communication, and curiosity came together naturally. Away from laboratories, offices, and daily routines, participants experienced a different side of collaboration — one where everyone contributed and learned something new.

Powered entirely by the wind, the *Eenhoorn* was a quiet reminder that the transition to sustainable energy is not only a research challenge but also something that can be experienced — and enjoyed — first-hand.

A welcoming atmosphere on board

The incredibly warm and welcoming atmosphere created by the hosts, Captain Jan Willem, Sailor Rosa and Cook Ina, was a major contribution to the success of the retreat. Their hospitality, support, and positive energy made everyone feel comfortable from the beginning.

The group enjoyed excellent food prepared by Ina, relaxed evenings in Enkhuizen, and many informal conversations that continued long after the official programme had ended. One of the most memorable moments was jumping from the boat into the Ijsselmeer for a swim. With the heatwave conditions, the refreshing water was exactly what everyone needed and became one of the shared highlights of the trip.

Feedback from participants

The feedback from participants showed that the retreat successfully achieved its goal: Creating connections and encouraging exchange beyond individual research topics.

Selected feedback:

"*I really enjoyed the retreat. It provided a great environment for creativity, interdisciplinary exchange, making connections, learning about interesting aspects of others' work, and a welcome change from day-to-day office work*"

"*What I especially liked about this retreat is being on a boat, it was original and fostered meeting and discussion with the other participants (compared to a retreat in a city where we would have spread out in the hotel). Also, the fact that we all helped sailing was a good teambuilding activity.*"

"*It provided a respite from the grueling process of doing a PhD, through exchanging ideas with people who are in the same boat as I am.*"

"*I enjoyed the HITEC trip a lot! Scientific discussions, sailing and swimming was a great mix of activities! I think what we can take from this for everyday work is that we need more opportunities to connect, exchange in longer discussions and freely move around.*"

Conclusion

The HITEC Graduate School Retreat 2/2026 showed the value of taking time away from the daily research routine. Sometimes stepping outside the usual environment is exactly what is needed to gain new perspectives, meet new people, and have inspiring conversations. Beyond scientific discussions, the retreat strengthened the connections between doctoral researchers from different institutes and created a sense of community within the graduate school.

A successful retreat is not only measured by the number of presentations given, but by the conversations started, the ideas shared, and the connections that continue afterwards — and in that regard, the HITEC Retreat 2/2026 was a great success.

A big thank you goes to everyone who contributed to making these days so memorable.