

44th History of Technology Conference

Low-Tech: Procedures, Actors, Concepts

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Venue Klostergut Paradies, Schlatt, Switzerland
Organizer Iron Library, Foundation of Georg Fischer Ltd
Deadline 28 February 2025

Call for Papers

On November 14 and 15, 2025, the 44th History of Technology Conference of the Iron Library (TGT) will take place at the Klostergut Paradies in Schlatt near Schaffhausen (Switzerland). Since 1978, it has provided an outstanding platform for exchange between research, teaching, and industry. The speakers and invited guests come from universities, libraries, archives, and museums or contribute their business and industrial experience. The conferences are renowned for the breadth and topicality of the papers presented. Information on previous conferences can be found at: www.eisenbibliothek.ch.

The event is organized by the Iron Library (Eisenbibliothek) Foundation of Georg Fischer Ltd. Responsibility for the content of the conference is in the hands of the scientific advisory board, whose members include Prof. Dr. Matthias Heymann (Aarhus University), Prof. Dr. Gisela Hürlimann (TU Dresden), and Prof. Dr. Marcus Popplow (KIT).

We invite interested scholars involved in research, teaching, and practice to apply to present a paper.

Conference topic in 2025: “Low-Tech: Procedures, Actors, Concepts”

Traditionally, the history of technology has focused on the emergence of *high-tech*, that is on ever more powerful, more complex and, not the least, more impressive technologies. It has now become common sense that such a focus is deficient: In all periods, more modest technologies and their adaptation to local and environmental circumstances were much more relevant for how people organized their daily material life. But how might one conceptualize technologies “other than *high-tech*”? Terminologically, *low-tech* seems an obvious candidate. In the history of technology, however, this term has not been widely used so far. The upcoming conference will discuss possible conceptual benefits of this term and invites to investigate related case studies as well as to pursue methodological reflections.

Low-tech primarily denotes less powerful, less complex, and thus less impressive technologies both used in former times and today. However, the term *low-tech* also has positive technical, political, and aesthetic connotations. *Low-tech* may involve smaller energy use and resource demands, be simpler, cheaper and easy-to-install and increase robustness, reliability, and safety. Countercultures have used the term in explicit opposition to *high-tech* for promoting simple, more user-friendly technology that is less dependent on complex infrastructures, simplifies maintenance and repair, and empowers its users. Today, the climate crisis might invite a re-evaluation of motivations and aims for preferring *low-tech* options over *high-tech* solutions. In architecture, for example, climate-friendly *low-tech* solutions have recently become a focus and fashion. Sympathies for *low-tech* and its political and aesthetic connotations have also become visible in more recent alternative terms such as retro-tech, wild tech, rebel-tech, small-tech, (s)low-tech, easy-tech and others.

As an analytical tool, *low-tech* could even be applied to a broader range of themes. In many stages of technological development, even in *high-tech* environments, choices between *high-tech* and *low-tech* op-

tions have had to be made continuously. In times of crises and war, *low-tech* might quite suddenly become indispensable to survive. In economic history, some enterprises have even favored high-tech features of arguable practical use for reaping economic benefits through patent protection. Meanwhile, *high-tech* has also built on *low-tech* elements, which have received little historical attention. In the discussion of national engineering styles, simple and robust choices like 19th century American railways or 20th century Soviet military technology have been set in contrast to more complex development paths by other nations. These perspectives emphasize the countless options producers and users face in dealing with technology, though neither the distinction between *high-* and *low-tech* nor their relations are well researched.

To deepen our historical understanding of *low-tech*, TGT 2025 invites discussion of questions such as: What characteristics does *low tech* have and which criteria might be helpful for defining it? How has the notion of *low-tech* been used and discussed in historical discourse so far? In which historical contexts have *low-tech* options been propagated, by whom and for which reasons? Which historical case studies seem instructive to test *low-tech* as an analytical tool? How have museums dealt with collecting and exhibiting *low-tech*? To which extent has *low-tech* been a literary topic and which connotations did authors attach to it? Is *low-tech* compatible with innovation and progress? Which symbolic values, from nerdiness and antiquarianism to empowerment and independency are attached to low-tech solutions and their users? To which extent might historical *low-tech* serve as a toolbox for responding to societal challenges today?

Case studies from all historical periods and world regions are welcome, as are discussions of methodological issues. We invite contributions from all historical disciplines and the museum sector and encourage speakers to explicitly reflect their understanding of *low-tech* and their methodological approach.

Format

The presentation time is 20 minutes. The conference language is English. Conference papers will be included in the journal [Ferrum](#), which is published by the Iron Library.

Synopsis and timelines

Applicants are invited to send their exposé of max. 3'000 characters (or 400 words) in English with a current CV to Franziska Eggimann (franziska.eggimann@georgfischer.com), Head of the Iron Library, by February 28, 2025. Speakers will be selected by the end of April 2025.

Organizational matters

We encourage dialogue and open discussion to deepen and develop the topic. Therefore, we expect speakers to attend the entire conference. The Iron Library will cover the travel expenses of the speakers as well as the costs for accommodation and meals during the conference.

Contact person

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