

STS in Germany: Ve vill go on!

Jörg Niewöhner on behalf of the members of the initiating group¹

*Over 110 people gathered for a lunch meeting at Lancaster's EASST 2018 marketplace to discuss the need for **STS Germany** - a body dedicated to the advancement of STS scholarship in all its facets in research and teaching in Germany. Enthusiasm was shared for a dynamic network driven by early career researchers that promotes STS scholarship across disciplines and institutions, increases visibility and opens STS in Germany up to international exchange.*



EASST Lancaster
2018 lunchtime
meeting STS Germany

photo: Jörg Niewöhner

Learning lessons

Judging by the response to the lunch meeting, STS is alive and well in Germany. More than 110 people attended the meeting - mostly early career researchers at different stages from graduate students to experienced research associates, including a significant number of people based at research institutions outside of Germany or not German-speaking, but based at German institutions. That a vibrant mix of people gathered is the first important insight that we have taken from the meeting: some people knew each other already, but many did not. Some are based at long-established STS 'strongholds' in Germany, but many are not.

¹ The members of the initiating group are listed at the end of the document with their contact details.

We take three points from this attendance: firstly, there is significant potential in further integration, coordination and mutual support within a diverse community of scholars. Secondly, any STS Germany needs to have early career scholars in its driving seats. Thirdly, STS is not anchored in any solid and comprehensive way at senior level in German institutions.

The meeting was opened with Estrid Sørensen (Bochum) giving a brief introduction along the initiators' position paper, emphasising that STS in Germany is not sufficiently visible and setting out the initiating group's reading of STS as characterised by interdisciplinarity, explorative engagements, international scholarship and reflexivity/performativity. This was followed by brief statements from existing networks supporting STS research in Germany: the German Society for Science and Technology Studies (GWTF) has recently celebrated its 30th anniversary and brings together STS scholars with a strong focus on the sociology of technology. Much more recently, the international Science & Democracy Network, originally developed out of Harvard, has touched ground in Munich (MCTS), collating research interests in the context of governance, policy and democracy. INSIST continues to grow out of Bielefeld with its strong focus on masters and early graduate students and the desire to open STS up towards history and philosophy or *vice versa*. Further collectives of elective affinities exist, e.g. in the form of the mailing list gender & technoscience and sections of the German Sociological Association.

Following the introduction, participants were asked to discuss, at their respective tables, whether they saw the need for an overarching body organising STS research in Germany and what the functions of such a body could and should be. We distill here what we consider the key points:

- None of the existing networks currently represents a significant majority of the people who attended the meeting.
- The majority of people who spoke articulated the need for exchange, cooperation and support within this emerging community.
- The relationship of a potential new body with existing networks needs to be clarified. In any case, anything new needs to respect and work together with existing ones.
- Most people favoured a decentralised, rhizomatic structure (network) strongly building on and caring for early career scholars from MA/Sc students to senior research associates.
- The network ought to support knowledge, mentoring and exchange on the inside, function as a port of call for people abroad, over time represent STS in Germany to the outside world, and improve STS's standing with funders.
- The network should facilitate online collaborative support, for instance through an online platform/database (projects, people, degrees, syllabi ...), foster possibilities to link and exchange, organise meetings and prepare joint grant applications. Innovative formats for exchange, mutual inspiration and knowledge production are to be developed.
- An annual meeting and smaller workshops (e.g. around methods) seemed desirable. Some saw the need to set up a journal.

Future developments

Where will we, STS scholars in Germany, go from here? How do we develop our capacity to aspire? The initiators of the meeting in Lancaster have discussed the results of the meeting and are currently thinking this through at three levels:

Institutional design: STS Germany in becoming

First of all, the initiators of the meeting in Lancaster do in no way represent the interests present at the meeting. This needs to be adjusted. Secondly, a balance is needed between the desires for a rhizomatic structure that adjusts to situated needs and ideas with the need for representation and responsibility towards the outside world, e.g. funders, policy and the corporate sector. An organisational form resembling an association for collaboration and inspiration may be preferred over a scholarly society (Fachgesellschaft). Thirdly, whatever configuration we decide upon, to a significant degree the momentum needs to come from/be sustained by early career scholars. We have to find an organisational form and sets of activities that can curate and pursue new ideas; formats, where institutional standing operates as a collective resource and obligation, not as a status. Fourthly, representation and Politics with a capital 'P' follow not as an effect of structure, but as a result of processes – when something emerges that is worth representing and arguing for. Fifth, we need to find ways of productively interfacing with international scholars and communities: to foster new thought styles, to build international collaboration and attract funding, to function as a point of contact and to encourage 'returns' and 'emigrants' to explore Germany as an attractive part of the academic landscape in STS.

Intellectual practices: rhizomatic quality

STS in Germany should develop as a platform for collective support for production of (even) better papers and monographs. It should furthermore be a space to find experimental forms to develop the courage to create new forms of re-presentation and performance that support epistemic imagination and innovation that is good for others to invent around. The objective should be to contribute to a next international wave of STS writing that is read beyond the inner circles of STS itself. This has to do with networking and exchange, but it also needs to go beyond it.

Practical steps: get involved

- Everyone interested in STS Germany, please register for the newsletter at [dests.de](https://www.dests.de):
<https://www.dests.de/newsletter>
- The next steps will be communicated through this newsletter.
- A new platform and mailing-list should be set up that reflects the desired functions.
- Anyone - particularly younger scholars - are very welcome and encouraged to contact any member of the initiator group if you would like to be part of organising STS in Germany.

We thank the EASST 2018 meetings team in Lancaster for their support of our efforts and are very much looking forward to the future!

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