

Call for Papers, **GWTF Annual Conference 2026**,
in cooperation with the Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re):

**Varieties of science and technology in Europe:
Shifting fortunes of STS in turbulent times**

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Conference (**12. & 13. Nov. 26**) and Winter School (**09.-13. Nov. 26**), RWTH Aachen

This year's GWTF conference is organized in cooperation with RWTH Aachen University's Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re) and its current thematic focus on "Globality and Varieties of Science." We therefore expressly invite members of national STS associations in Europe to discuss this topic with us.

Science and Technology Studies (STS) currently find themselves in a precarious position: Epistemologically, they are caught between multiple disciplines precisely because they have become highly specialized. Institutionally, as a relatively small field, this position is often weak. At the same time, STS are increasingly called upon to contribute to innovation and transformation processes originating in other disciplines, such as biosciences or engineering. This is less surprising than it appears at first glance, for science and technology themselves confront a range of tensions. On the one hand, STS are mobilized to address societal problems and increasingly help to play a prominent role in processes of collective problem-solving. Key terms here include transdisciplinary research, mission-oriented research, co-creation, and responsible research and innovation. On the other hand, science and technology face increasing attacks and challenges. Growing restrictions of academic freedom in many countries are evident in the Academic Freedom Index. In addition, universities have become battlegrounds for right-wing culture wars, in which slogans like "cancel culture" are used to stir up sentiment against those deemed undesirable. In this situation, research into the social and cultural dimensions of science and technology is growing in significance. Under these conditions, and in playing an integrated role for science and technology, STS must navigate more actively the tension between engagement and distancing.

In this context, we want to take a closer look at the question of the positioning of Science and Technology Studies against the backdrop of different circumstances in European countries. We want to learn about specific cultural and institutional embeddings of STS and also focus on developments where these embeddings are particularly salient. We suggest the following two thematic strands as exemplary cases:

(1) **Forms of hybrid knowledge production and technology development** in different European countries. It is truly astonishing how diverse the variants of transdisciplinary research have become under various labels (be it transdisciplinary research, citizen science, real-world laboratories, etc.). Modes of funding and innovation policy have provided stimulating impetuses for how specific academic systems and forms of civil society organization interact. How have these forms of transdisciplinary research developed and which variations can be observed? And what is the relationship between such variations and their respective cultural-institutional contexts? What self-conceptions of researchers have developed? What does the

balance between engagement and distancing look like, how did it develop, and how is it performed? For example, the conditions and limitations of academic freedom differ from country to country. Europe, too, is not free from authoritarian developments, which assigns science and technology research a significant yet precarious sociopolitical role in preserving academic freedom through its continued advancement.

(2) **Academic careers** (in STS) in different countries. Academic systems can be understood in terms of their form and orientation particularly through the academic careers that emerge within them—or fail to emerge. The conditions of socialization of aspiring researchers reflect the particular cultural and institutional characteristics of a scientific system. What career paths are typically institutionally pre-defined? What meritocratic signals must scientists in their early career paths demonstrate to accumulate the symbolic capital that is so crucial? Even if the prevailing impression is that these are measured by the respective disciplines using purely objective criteria (such as, publication and external funding success), a closer look is warranted here. What experiences and career paths exist in the various European countries? What key factors influence the similarity or dissimilarity of such career paths? And what is the situation in particularly specialized fields such as STS, where it can be assumed that career trajectories within the academic system—which are already highly complex—develop in even more intricate ways? In addition to disciplinary quality indicators, researchers often face other requirements that they must fulfill, which presents a significant problem in the academic careers of researchers in STS, as academic careers have traditionally been determined by discipline—that is, by a qualification in a specific academic field. Cross-disciplinary perspectives are often critical in this regard. However: how does this relate to the different fields of application and the disciplines involved? What differences emerge depending on funding formats?

Event format:

Unlike previous GWTF conferences, this one is preceded by a Winter School. The Winter School will focus in particular on the second topic regarding academic careers (PhD as well as Post-Doc). Taken together, the aim is to shed light on the position of STS, its form and development, in the various European countries and, in this way, to develop an agenda for its future positioning. Across countries, democratic challenges are currently emerging that can be observed through the various ways in which science and democracy are connected. These developments have significant implications for the embedding of science and innovation as well as the positioning of STS.

On the first evening of the conference, a panel discussion on the European dimension from the perspective of the individual professional associations is to take place.

During the conference, speakers' children can be cared for. The GWTF will cover the cost of childcare.

Proposals for papers, including a title and abstract (approx. 300 words) and an indication whether you submit for presenting at the conference or the winter school, should be submitted **by July 17, 2026**, to:

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