

R02: Positioning the academic track. A reflexive space for graduate students at EASST'26

Contribution Review Sheet

Accepted Contributions

Beyond the dissertation: Advocating for Inclusive PhD Trajectories

Author

Tanya Lee (Leiden University)

Short abstract

This initiative, led by four PhD candidates at Leiden University, Netherlands, advocates for a more flexible PhD trajectory that formally recognizes and rewards the diverse activities and “non-traditional” outputs they generate.

Long abstract

Our initiative advocates moving away from a culture that equates progress within a PhD trajectory with increasing number of traditional outputs. Instead, we promote PhD trajectories that value learning, reflection, and diverse ways of doing research. We believe that the goal of a PhD trajectory should be to become well-rounded professionals, not just highly productive ones.

This diversity in PhD dissertations is particularly relevant in the context of the very interdisciplinary field of STS, where various forms of expression can showcase quality scholarly work. Together, we propose that work such as art, advocacy projects like this one, policy briefs, teaching, internships, public engagement, and others should have space and be recognized in a PhD trajectory. Taking the approach of “by and for PhD candidates,” we want to put PhD candidates at the center of PhD policy debates and their own trajectories. At the same time, we recognize that a PhD trajectory is shaped collectively by individuals and institutions. Moving toward more non-traditional forms of the dissertation therefore requires active support from supervisors, graduate schools, evaluation committee members, and universities as a whole. This shift also invites these actors to engage with a fundamental question: what defines a PhD in an interdisciplinary landscape?

How I learned to inhabit STS through Monograph Development: An Inquiry into conditions of possibility for Heterodox Career Advice

Author

Melpomeni Antonakaki (Technical University of Munich)

Short abstract

Years ago, a mentor challenged me to discern among STS theoretical problems and consider which would shape my PhD book. In times when STS is grappling with its publishing culture, I reflect on this formative moment and discuss it in relation to prevalent academic incentives & conventional advice.

Long abstract

One year into my PhD and upon return from fieldwork, I received the gift of instruction into STS monograph development. My mentor outlined the rough contour of a guiding principle for identifying the theoretical and analytical priorities I would ultimately pursue, and suggested ways to embed them within a coherent structure supported by compelling narrative development. This came in response to my excitement over stories from the field and material collection as candidate topics for different publications.

In turn, he asked: how are these different from one another? How do you know that they are not speaking to the same theoretical problem, and therefore belong in the same chapter, or that an either/or choice must be made between them? I did not know. This moment set me on a path of learning to discern among theoretical problems in STS, something that shaped my intellectual development since.

The dominant orientation facing researchers today is one in which the expectation is to publish articles early and often. The instruction I received instead assumed the monograph as a central intellectual form and treated the PhD as a period for learning to identify, differentiate, and innovate STS theoretical problems. In this contribution, I start from this moment of Heterodox Career Advice and consider what it meant to follow it and what it meant to defend it. Are there conditions under which such forms of guidance, running counter to prevalent academic incentives, and the resulting intellectual formations, become available and viable options within STS training?

Entering European STS from Elsewhere: A Situated Account of Academic Socialization, Surprise, and Belonging

Author

Salimata Diallo (Sorbonne université)

Short abstract

Drawing on my trajectory between Burkina Faso and France, I reflect on entering European STS through questions of hierarchy, student selection, and belonging, and on how these reveal unequal North/South conditions of academic recognition.

Long abstract

I would like to contribute to this roundtable by reflecting on what it means to enter French and European STS from a trajectory shaped between Burkina Faso and France. This idea came back to me while rereading journals and notebooks I kept during my early studies and in the years following my move to France. They captured my surprise at the differences in academic life: how hierarchy is expressed in relations between peers and supervisors, how student selection often relies on social and economic capital in more subtle ways, and how one learns, over time, to internalize these codes. I would also like to briefly connect this to a previous essay I wrote on why decoloniality seems more visible in STS teaching and discussion in France than in Burkina Faso. Taken together, these reflections offer a situated account of academic socialization and of how belonging, legitimacy, and intellectual agendas are unevenly shaped across North/South academic spaces.

STS Gone South: Crossing STS geographies during doctoral research

Author

Iñaki Goñi (University of Edinburgh)

Short abstract

This presentation reflects on the challenges of conducting STS doctoral research across Northern and Southern epistemologies. Drawing on my research on public participation in Latin America, I highlight the hard work of translating across the many STSs.

Long abstract

Calls to “go South” in Science and Technology Studies (STS) have emphasised the need to pluralise the field’s conceptual genealogies and empirical sites. Yet the practical experience of conducting doctoral research across Northern and Southern STS traditions remains under-discussed. This presentation reflects on the methodological and intellectual challenges of undertaking

research that moves between these different epistemic and geopolitical contexts.

Drawing on my doctoral research on public participation with technoscience in Latin America, I explore how dominant STS framings (historically rooted in European and North American debates) continue to shape how researchers approach cases from the Global South. This creates a tension for doctoral researchers: how to engage with established theoretical repertoires while remaining attentive to alternative intellectual traditions, historical trajectories, and political imaginaries emerging elsewhere? This 'double vision' is particularly important when 'elsewhere' is actually 'home'.

Rather than just blankly stating that we need 'decolonial' STS, I examine what happens when different STS traditions encounter one another within the research process itself. In doing so, I reflect on issues of conceptual translation, the material limitations of articles, and the institutional pressures shaping doctoral scholarship. My argument is that conducting research across multiple STS geographies is hard work, especially because our European curricula and our 'canons' still have limited awareness of social theories outside 'the North'.

Am I doing STS? From environmental humanities to environmental STS

Author

Katie Kung (Rachel Carson Center, LMU Munich)

Short abstract

Reflecting on entering STS through environmental humanities and work beyond academia. I explore interdisciplinary translation, fieldwork with conservationists and scientists, and how STS reshapes how I do Env Hum and future career pathways.

Long abstract

This talk starts from a question I keep asking myself: am I actually doing STS?

I come from an interdisciplinary background, doing a PhD in environmental humanities, and my path into STS is neither linear nor planned. It grew out of past work experiences beyond academia and my current doctoral research, working with conservation workers and ecologists.

In these interdisciplinary collaborations, I often find myself in the middle of different ways of thinking and speaking. A big part of my work has become translating between disciplines, expectations, expressions, and things that are said but not meant to be published in certain disciplinary routes. Over time, I realise that these are not skills from a single program, but ones shaped by moving across academic spaces and my non-academic endeavours between degrees.

From this position, I reflect on what it means to "arrive" in STS through a non-linear route, and how I piece together my place in the field. I also think about the different forms of support that make this possible—supervisors, peers, and field collaborators.

Finally, I consider how STS has changed how I understand the environmental humanities (and vice versa), and how it is shaping how I may proceed in my career, such as the possibility of working more closely within scientific settings.

Positioning in Between: Translating “STS” for “Sociology”

Author

Vladislava Bobrova (European University at St. Petersburg)

Short abstract

I'm going to reflect on doing STS within a sociology program, focusing on how disciplinary expectations shape research practices,

evaluation, and self-positioning, and on the strategies to translate STS approaches for non-STS academic audiences.

Long abstract

I'm going to reflect on my academic trajectory within a nationally bounded context, focusing on the experience of studying STS inside a sociology program in Russia. I was trained in the only sociology program in the country offering a specialization in Science and Technology Studies (STS), based at the European University at St. Petersburg.

My research centers on laboratory studies. For my MA thesis, I conducted an ethnography of a laboratory, drawing on actor-network theory as an analytical framework. However, a key tension emerged from the institutional embedding of STS within sociology. Despite specialized training, all students are evaluated by a general sociology committee, often composed of scholars unfamiliar with STS theoretical and methodological approaches.

This situation produces a need for translation and strategic adaptation. Feedback from peers and supervisors suggests making STS work more "accessible" or less challenging for non-STS audiences, shaping how research is written, framed, and presented. There is a need for reflection on the boundaries between "sociology" and "STS" in this institutional context. I consider how these distinctions may influence students' professional development, limit dialogue and create barriers for those working across disciplinary boundaries.

From Uncertainty to Resilience: How Early Career Researchers in Microbiology and Social Anthropology navigate the German career system

Author

Clara Gutjahr (TU Berlin)

Short abstract

This paper shows how Early Career Researchers in microbiology and social anthropology actively produce resilience in response to epistemic, reputational, and organizational uncertainties, revealing how field-specific conditions shape research practices and career trajectories in German academia.

Long abstract

Researchers face multiple, overlapping uncertainties that require continuous adaptation: they must manage epistemic uncertainties resulting from the inherent unpredictability of knowledge production processes and even they successfully do so, they cannot be sure about the judgment of their results by their peers in advance leaving them with reputational uncertainties. Additionally, they face organizational uncertainties, having to secure their own future employment and access to resources in systems marked by fierce competition, performance-based funding, and short-term contracts. Shifting governance regimes have amplified these pressures while systematically placing the burden of coping on individuals who must sustain both their research and their career trajectories.

In Germany, long-term academic prospects are decided at a very late career stage, resulting in extended periods of precarity and frequent exits from academia, making it an interesting case for studying strategies of those facing the greatest pressures: Early Career Researchers (ECRs). Drawing on qualitative interviews with postdocs in microbiology and social anthropology in Germany, I analyze how the ECR navigate epistemic, reputational and organizational uncertainties. Looking at their decisions regarding research topics, methods, funding and publications reveals how they actively produce resilience in response to perceived uncertainties and the consequences this has for the produced knowledge.

By comparing the two fields with contrasting epistemic properties and research practices it can also be shown that field-specific conditions shape the nature of uncertainties as well as the corresponding strategies through which ECRs develop resilience,

highlighting the interplay between structural conditions and research practices in sustaining careers and knowledge production.

Link to Roundtable

Link to panel edit page: <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/easst2026/panel-update/p/18071>

