Call for Session Proposals

https://sts-conference-graz.tugraz.at

Dear colleagues,

We invite you to submit a **session** proposal for the upcoming STS Conference in Graz, held from May 4–6th, 2020.

We suggest a number of thematic fields as a guideline to address contemporary challenges of the interplay between science, technology and society. We encourage session proposers to address one of the thematic fields listed below.

Please follow the guidelines for session proposers as outlined below.

THEMATIC FIELDS

Open Science: Rethinking the Science and Society Relationship

Transparency of procedures, accessibility, and critical contestation of results lie at the heart of scientific knowledge production. However, scientific practices have often been found to fall short of these ideals. The metaphor of the ivory tower describes science as self-centred, inaccessible and not responding to social needs.

Investigating practices of knowledge production has a long history in social studies of science. At first, STS scholars challenged traditional scientific epistemologies and began to scrutinise social dynamics of scientific truth making in the laboratory. Controversial scientific practices, such as recombinant DNA technologies, raised questions of trust in and credibility of science, leading scholars to question what makes scientific knowledge socially robust. As a response to these scientific controversies, many European countries took active steps to advance policy-making. “Inclusive governance” has become an important goal for the European Commission since the early 2000s. As ELSA research in the context of genomics explored new approaches in public-policy, ideas regarding responsible research and innovation (RRI) began to materialize in fields such as nanotechnology. Aiming at “inclusive governance”, RRI in general and Open Science in particular promote the engagement of civil society in various forms of knowledge production with the aim of creating a wider and more inclusive process of research and innovation, as well as political decision-making. Open Science holds the promise to respond to these challenges and enhance science and society relationships by making science more open and accountable to the public.

With this call, we invite proposals for sessions that explore the potential of Open Science to allow for more inclusive, transparent and accessible practices of knowledge production and possibly contribute to responsible research and innovation, as well as critical assessments of where Open Science might fall short of these aims.

Digitalization of Society

Digital technologies are a central element of transformations in contemporary societies. Are these recent processes different from how information and communication technology has induced social change in the past decades? Current discourses about a “digital revolution” that encompasses every sphere of social life (“digitalization of work”, “digitalization of business”, “digitalization of education”, digitalization of healthcare”, etc.) suggest that such a digital transformation of society is underway. Empirical observations from quite different social fields support the conclusion that the transformative power of digitalization is still growing. Mobile devices, connectivity, social media platforms, big data and related developments, as well as the new practices and social innovations associated with them, are about to induce substantial changes in many spheres of society. Currently, for example, we can observe how Twitter changes political communication. In the economic sphere a revolution in industrial production and work is heralded (“Industry 4.0”) and new forms of platform economy are emerging. In the scientific domain, digital technologies may change the way in which knowledge is produced, justified, assessed, distributed and implemented in practical contexts. Algorithms promise higher degrees of control and predictive power but may at the same time go along with a loss of transparency and traceability. In everyday life, new social practices like those of the quantified self-movement can be found. Techniques and practices of gamification are emerging in different fields of society. It is important to understand how these socio-technical innovations interact with societal forces in bringing about this transformation and to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with them. In doing so, session proposals should focus on a particular social field, a particular phenomenon of digitization (such as big data or gamification), or a particular opportunity (e.g. democratization) or challenge (e.g. privacy).

Towards Low-Carbon Energy Systems

The analysis of social, technological and organisational frameworks of energy use forms the basis for proposals in this thematic field. They should focus on the shaping of sustainable energy and the mitigation of climate change.

Socio-economic aspects of energy technologies, strategies of environmental technology policy and the development of measures and strategies for the promotion of renewable energy sources and sustainable construction are in focus, as well as the transition to a sustainable energy system. Further important themes are climate-friendly consumption, sustainable lifestyles, regional governance, climate policy strategies, innovation policy, participation and in all fields the role of users.

Mobility: A Socio-Technical System on the Way to Sustainability?

The German term "Mobilitätswende" (mobility transitions) stands for several challenges of the ongoing and much needed fundamental change of our mobility system: decarbonization; changes of mobility behaviour; renaissance of walking, biking, tram, and train; digitalization of mobility and virtual mobility; justice of space; affordability; "Flygskam" — to name a few perspectives of interest.
Researchers are invited to propose sessions dealing with the analysis of social and political aspects of the mobility system and its historical and future development, or of specific aspects of this system.

Gender, Science and Technology

This area of research particularly focuses on a broad understanding of gender, including queer-feminist, post-colonial and 'crip' perspectives of science and technology. On the one hand, individual perspectives of actors in the technological field as well as in academia are taken into account; on the other hand, educational, organisational, societal, environmental, policy and governance issues are of utmost relevance.

Areas of special interest for this year's conference include:

- Studies and practical experiences about system change policies and practices in academia and research to overcome social injustices and increase gender equality and diversity (e.g. the debate of academic care-work; inclusion of gender criteria in research funding policies; academic ableism).
- Theoretical discourses of queer-feminist and crip techno-science (e.g. understandings of bodies, regimes of care, and modes of knowledge; utopias and dystopias) are welcome as discussions of empirical experiences.
- How these broad gender and social justice perspectives can enrich the mutual shaping of design and use approach (especially in the field of medicine technologies, robotics and A.I) and the debate, policies and practices around RRI and 'good science'.

Life Sciences/Biotechnology

Following decades of public debate, the application of various genetic modification techniques in microbes, plants, animals and even humans continues to be a deeply controversial issue in the EU and beyond, partly fuelled by progress in science, technological innovation, and the opening of novel application areas. Examples include GM industrial and energy crops, synthetic biology, novel breeding techniques including genome editing, gene drives, and biohacking, among others.

Session proposals should call for contributions aiming at a better understanding of the regulatory, broader policy and governance challenges of biotechnology, and/or explore strategies to manage these challenges.

Sustainable Food Systems

There are growing efforts to make the food system more sustainable, and to tackle challenges related to food security, food poverty and justice, nutrition, food quality and safety, resource scarcity, loss of farmland and negative environmental impacts. To tackle these challenges, various strategies are developed at different geographies and scales. They are ranging from local level initiatives, such as communities reasserting responsibility for food policy, to national, supra-national, and global food policies and initiatives.

Proposals for sessions focusing on different forms of sustainable food systems, as well as on related social practices and socioeconomic/technical processes in the production, distribution, marketing, and consumption of food are encouraged. A particular focus lies on governance mechanisms, policies, and their (potential) contribution to a wider transformation towards more sustainable urban and rural areas, regions and societies.

Teaching STS

Teaching is an important part of academic life. Due to its diverse audiences, teaching STS courses is a highly diverse endeavour. We teach students with a great variety of disciplinary backgrounds, covering virtually all areas of natural and social sciences as well as the humanities. Those graduating from STS programmes pursue careers not only in academia, but also in the policy domain, public services and administration, as well as in the private sector. STS has also a long tradition in teaching engineers. In this way, teaching is conceived as an opportunity to engage with the shaping of technology. By making engineering students reflexive about their occupation, teaching is framed as an instrument of enhancing responsibility in research and innovation. Yet, is this the still the main function of STS courses, and will that remain the case in the near future? Given that STS as a discipline is itself evolving, do we see new challenges looming on the horizon that require changes in our teaching in order to reflect the discipline's self-understanding and academic position?

We invite colleagues in the field to submit proposals in order to address topical issues regarding teaching STS. Session proposals should specify a thematic focus and suggest a suitable format (paper presentation, panel discussion, workshop, etc.) by which a chosen theme may be disused. Issues of particular interest include, but are not limited to the following:

- Teaching the classics: much of the classical STS literature was written in the 1980s. As fundamental as these texts are and as much as they inform recent work, classical texts need revision. Updating may include empirical evidence, conceptual flaws, response to criticism and further development of initial positions.
- Teaching engineers: STS teaching material that appeals to engineering students is scarce. It may help if the material (e.g. a case study) relates to the particular type of engineering in a given course. It is especially challenging to keep up to date with new developments in engineering while at the same time introducing basic STS concepts. Proposed sessions are encouraged to facilitate the exchange of best practice examples.
- Sustainability learning: promoting socio-technical change towards sustainable futures does not only require the acquisition of formal scientific knowledge, processes of change themselves can be framed as learning processes. Sessions addressing such transformational learning are especially welcome.
- Networks: those who are members of a network or keen on creating one are especially invited to use a session of this conference for a gathering where others can join in. Matters of concern may also be specified for such open network gatherings.

Guideline for session proposers

Please observe the following guidelines when submitting a session proposal:

1) Use this online form and submit your proposal no later than October 30, 2019.
2) Session proposals must not exceed 500 words.
3) Your session proposal needs to be written in a way suitable for publication on our website as a call for abstracts. Address your desired contributors directly and be clear about the type of contributions you seek to be presented in your session.
4) Do not submit abstracts of your own paper. Even if you intend to present a paper of your own – you are certainly welcome to do so – submit your paper over the course of the call for abstracts after the session proposals have been assessed, accepted and published on our website. You may send additional information such as CV, list of publications and abstracts of intended paper presentations in the appendix to your session proposal.
5) The format of your proposed session does not need to be limited to academic paper and presentations. We encourage you to suggest interactive and innovative session formats, such as group discussions, world cafes, round tables, etc. Please specify your idea in case you plan an alternative setting by briefly describing it in your session proposal.
6) After acceptance, session proposers are invited to assist with reviewing papers submitted to their respective session and chair their own sessions.

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

Call for Session Proposals 17.09. 2019 – 30.10.2019
Notification of selected sessions: November 2019

Call for Abstracts 20.11.2019 – 20.1.2020
Notification of selected abstracts: February 2020

Online Registration 10.2.2020 – 20.4.2020

Submission of Full Papers (peer reviewed) 5.6. 2020

Conference Organizers

The STS Conference Graz 2020 is the joint Annual Conference of the Science, Technology and Society Unit (STS) – Graz University of Technology, the Inter-Disciplinary Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture (IFZ) and the Institute of Advanced Studies on Science, Technology and Society (IAS-STS).
Contact: sts-conf-graz@tugraz.at

We aim to organize the meeting according to the criteria of the Austrian Eco-label for Green Meetings.