

25 years of EASST conferences (1983-2008)

Patterns of participation and their strategic implications

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There have been thirteen international EASST (& EASST/4S) conferences held in Europe between 1983 and 2008. These are shown in Fig.1 This analysis is based on participation data for these events.

Participants are defined as named individuals listed in the published conference programme as authors/presenters. This is accompanied with data on their organisational affiliation at the time (not available for the Gothenburg 1992 conference). Further analysis is made of national location and disciplinary orientation.

Over the 25 years there were 4619 unique individual participants in total. These were associated with 1203 different, independent institutions (e.g. universities).

Significant expansion is evident in the scale of participation over the 25 year period which has been fairly consistent since 1990 (Fig 2). The number of individual participants continues to increase showing a sustained growing interest in the field. The figure for the 2010 Trento conference shows a continuation of this trend. The EASST joint conferences with 4S attract higher levels of participation.

We are fortunate that EASST is an organisation which is buoyant and involves growing numbers of people. A priority is to consolidate this for EASST as an organisation on a stable long term basis.



Fig. 1 EASST (&EASST/4S) conferences 1983-2008

The number of independent institutions represented shows a more uneven pattern. An institution is defined as an independent organisation at the most general level of affiliation for an individual participant. They are usually universities but there are also independent research centres, national academies and a few private organisations.

For EASST- only events it shows a consistent increase since 1998 at more than double the rate of increase of individual participants. For EASST-joint 4S conferences the rise in the number of institutions is much more similar to that of individuals. In both cases it suggests that individuals are increasingly attracted who are not associated with institutions which host the established centres & departments in the field. The 2004 Paris conference attracted the highest number of institutions but not the most individual participants. (Fig 3)

At the same time as increased institutional diversity there is also a counter trend of highly concentrated groups of participants in certain institutions (Fig 4).

EASST therefore faces two growing challenges. First, an increasing number of individual participants are located in institutions which are not the traditional hosts of established STIS centres. EASST needs to give increased attention to the needs of such 'isolates'. Second, there is a set of institutions which host larger numbers of STIS participants which consequently have different expectations about the services and role of EASST.

The range of countries represented increased markedly between the 1980s and the early 1990s. However this dropped in the late 1990s but subsequently shows signs of recovery (Fig 5).

This suggests that initiatives to create a more diverse European mix have not been effectively sustained. For example

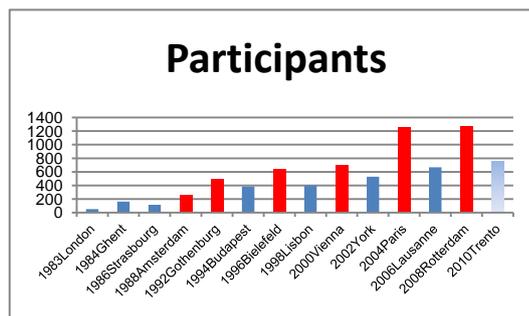


Fig. 2 Number of individual participants 1983-2010 (blue – EASST only; red-EASST joint with 4S)

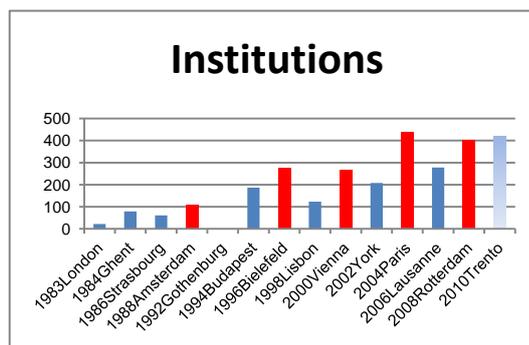


Fig. 3 Number of independent institutions 1983-2010 (blue – EASST only; red-EASST joint with 4S)

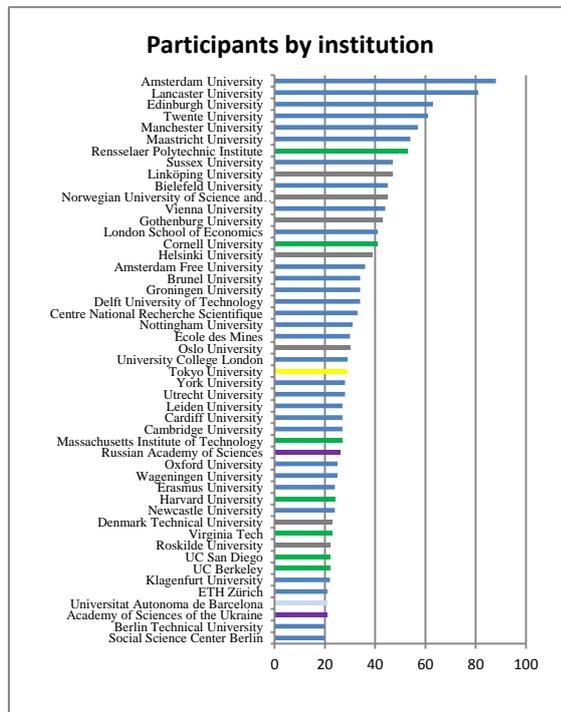


Fig. 4 Institutions with at least 20 participants (1983-2008)

the first East European conference of EASST, 1994 Budapest, involved a much wider range of countries than hitherto. However it then declined by the next conference, 1996 Bielefeld. The first South European conference of EASST, 1998 Lisbon, did not show any evident increase in the number of countries represented.

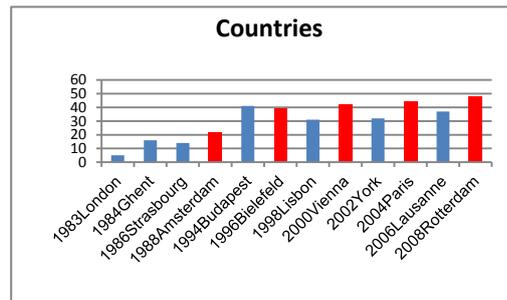


Fig. 5 Number of different countries represented (institutional affiliation)

The location of a conference outside West Europe facilitates but does not guarantee the participation of a wider range of countries. EASST needs to ensure that hosting in such locations builds such diversity effectively. This shows that there is a big challenge for EASST to find an effective way to continue to increase its international diversity.

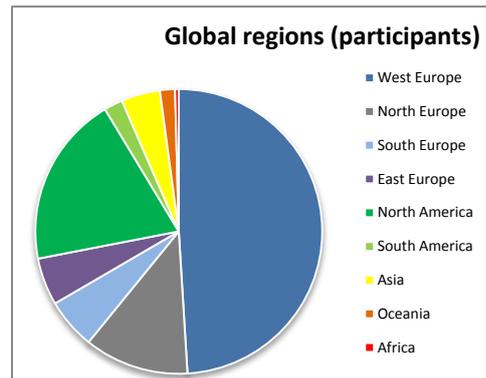


Fig. 6 Global distribution of participants (institutional affiliation)

The largest proportion (>70%) of participants represent institutions that are European. These are mainly West European, but with significant presence of North, South & East Europe. North American (mainly US) participants are a significant group which partly, but not completely, reflects the EASST-joint 4S conferences. (Fig 6)

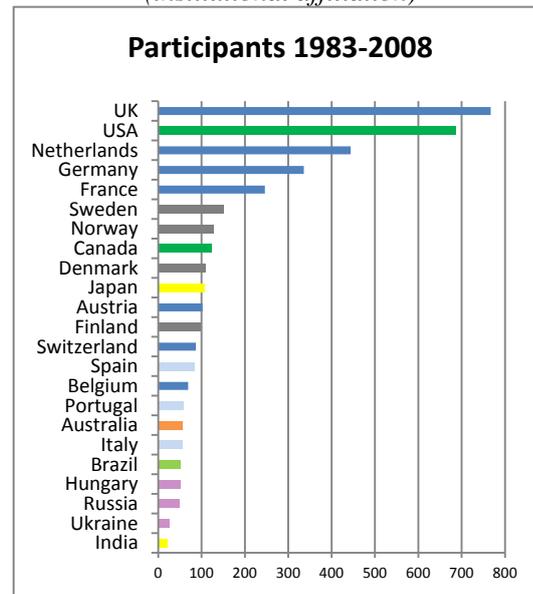
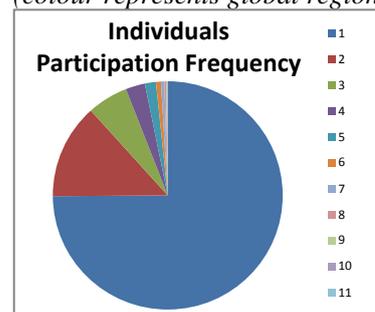


Fig. 7 Participants by national location (colour represents global region)

EASST continues to sustain a distinctly European identity which although it embraces all parts of Europe remains West Europe dominated. In order to express the breadth of the new Europe more effectively, EASST needs to pursue serious initiatives in the East & South.



The national location of individual participants (through their institutional affiliation) is dominated by a small number of countries from West & North Europe and North America. (Fig 7)

Only a minority of individuals participate in more than one conference. This dropout rate is less marked for institutions but overall the pattern shows low durability.

Although some level of non-recurrence is to be expected for any sequence of events, this rate is far too high for EASST to maintain a stable pattern of growth and consolidation. It probably arises from the current reliance on conference registration as the primary route for membership recruitment. Such high turnover prevents the pursuit of a long term strategy of European diversification. It is also likely to result in weaker long term identification with EASST by any participant. To encourage a more durable organisation EASST must move toward a robust annual membership system and offer a clearer range of services in addition to a biennial conference. As well as the general institutional affiliation it is also possible to identify the affiliation of participants with specific centres, e.g. departments or research groups, within these institutions.

As the range of institutions continues to become wider, there is also a growing number of 'big centres' which have significant numbers of participants. For 2002-2008 there were 26 centres which had at least 10 participants. 23 of these are Europe based (Fig 12).

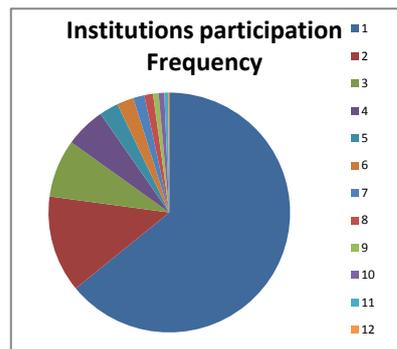


Fig. 8 Participation by number of events

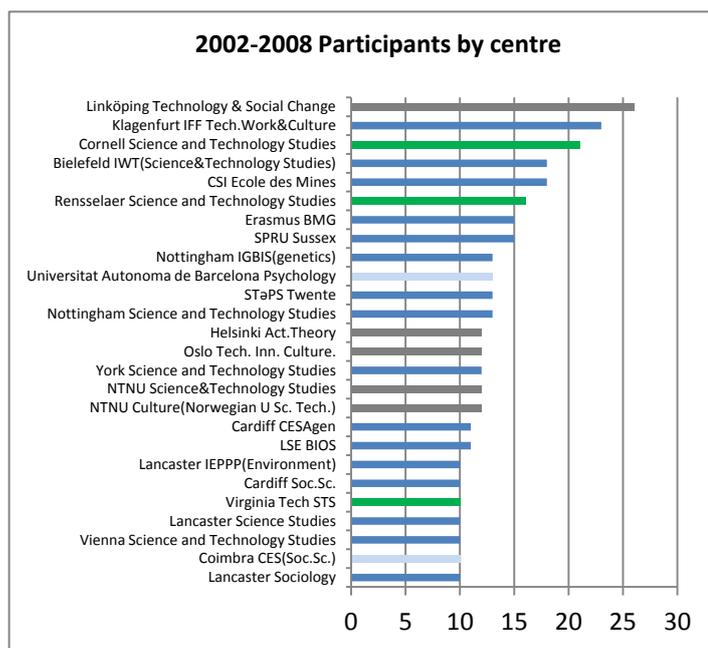


Fig 9 Centres with 10 or more participants 2002-2008

The co-participation by these centres in EASST conferences enables an event based network analysis to be undertaken. The growth of the core network of centres over the past three decades is shown.

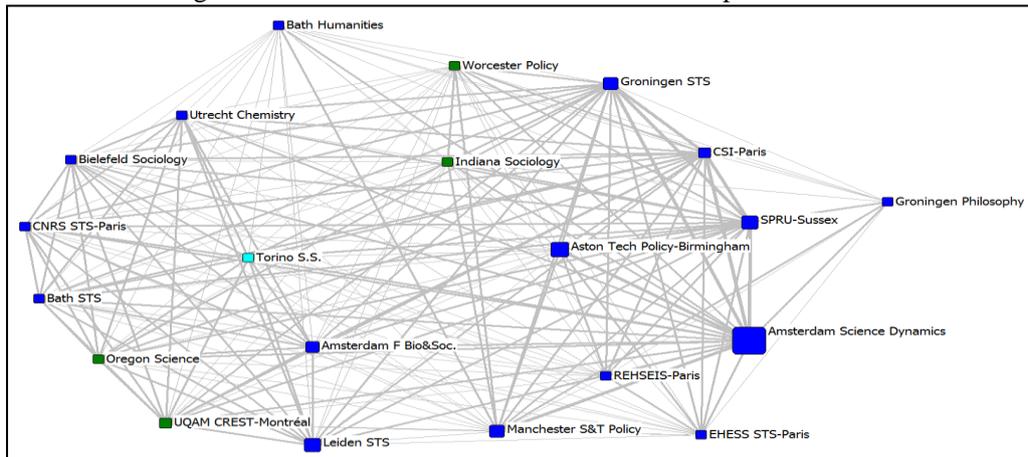


Fig. 10 Network of centres 1983-1988

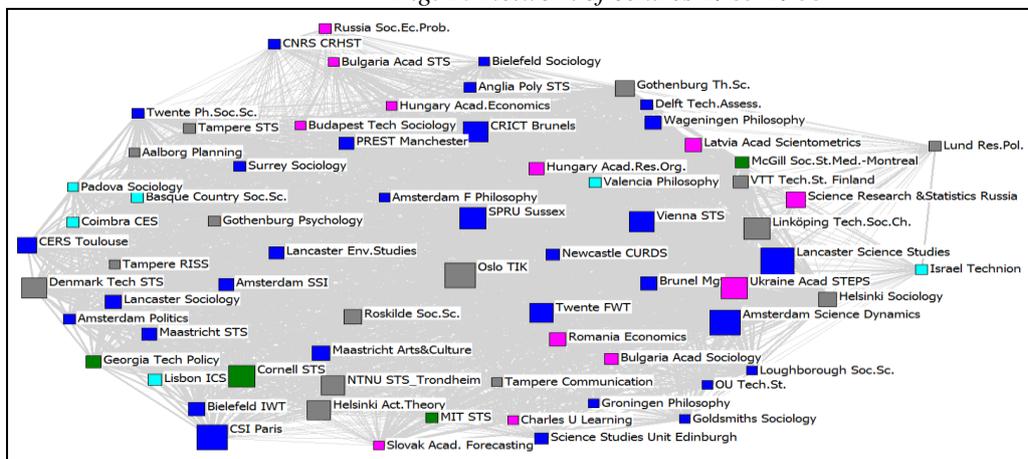


Fig. 11 Network of centres 2002-2008

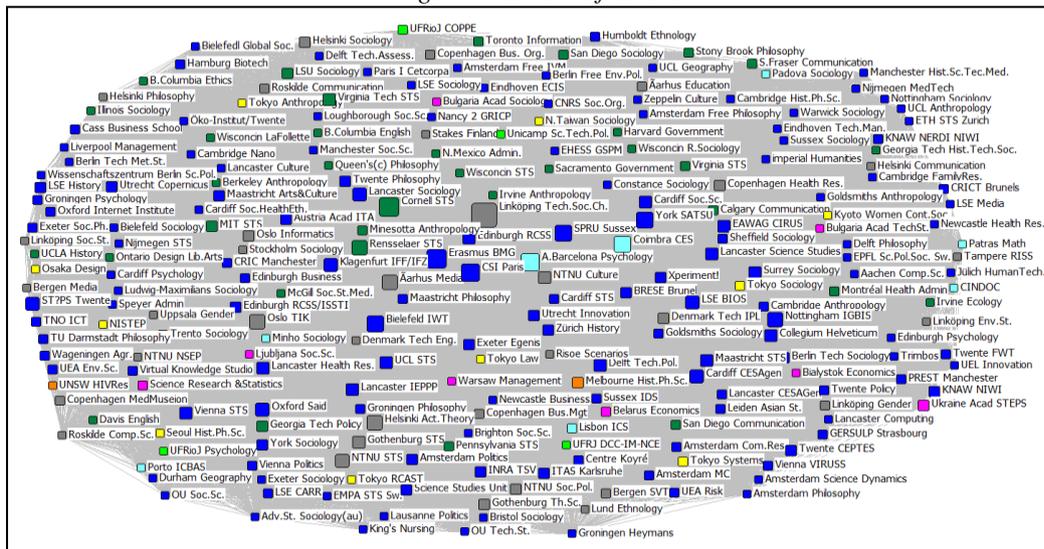


Fig.11 Network of centres 2002-2008

EASST's implicit role as a network of centres as well as of individual participants needs to receive more explicit attention. This should involve consideration of a new institutional membership scheme in addition to (not as an alternative to) the individual membership arrangement.

The main academic field of the centres to which participants are affiliated has been analysed. The ranking of these fields is compared over three decades.

This analysis shows:

- *Science & Technology Studies* and *Sociology* have remained leading academic fields of the participant centres/departments.
- *Humanities* and *Philosophy* remain important but their rankings have declined.
- *Business & Management* and *Innovation Studies* became more prominent in the decade 1994-2000 and then flattened in the subsequent decade 2002-8.
- *Health* and *Environment* both show a continued & significant rise in the rankings to the positions of 2 & 4 in the recent decade (2002-2008).

The institutional landscape of EASST's field has changed over the past 3 decades.

While the primary orientation has remained sociological and STS in nature, there are two shifts of importance:

1. The emergence of business/management & innovation studies
2. The new focus on social challenges in key areas of health & environment

EASST should ensure that its identity adequately reflects this – otherwise there is a risk that these participants look elsewhere for representation. Are we expressing the breadth of the field as effectively as we need to? This is an issue that deserves our attention.

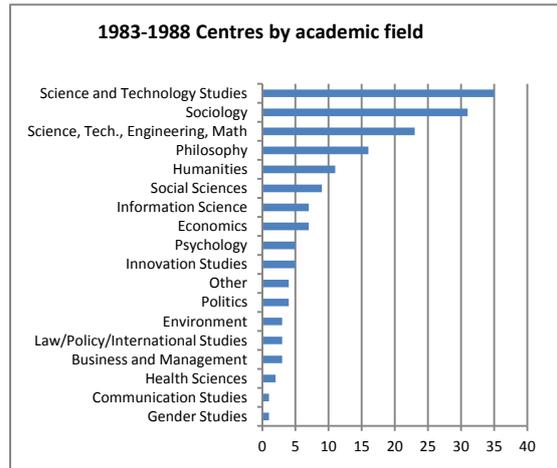


Fig 13 Number of centres by academic field 1983-1988

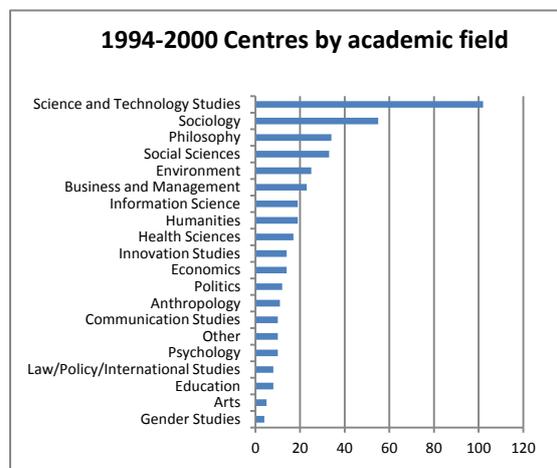


Fig 14 Number of Centres by academic field 1994-2000

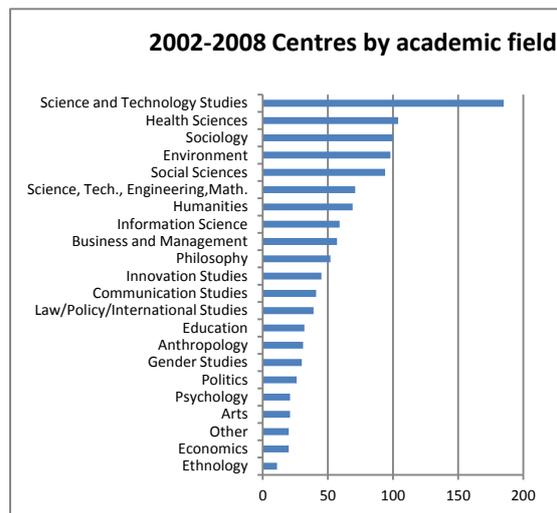


Fig 15 Number of centres by academic field 2002-2008