



Vienna, 17 May 2020

Dear members of the EASST community, dear colleagues and friends,

I hope this letter finds you well in these difficult and complex times. COVID-19 has actually transformed from a standard introductory sentence into one which points directly to the importance to care for each other.

I am writing this letter to give our membership a clearer idea of where developments are going in our community, in particular with regard to the – now virtual – EASST/4S conference in Prague (<https://www.easst4s2020prague.org/>). I will keep calling it “the Prague conference” as much of the thinking, preparing and caring has a place and many of the lines of work that happen in 4S and EASST council across many countries all come together there and are turned into the reality of a meeting in Prague. In particular Tereza Stöckelova and Filip Vostal have been working relentlessly to not only make this special event happen under such experimental conditions, but to make it happen in the best possible ways.

In fact, well before COVID-19 transformed the world in which this conference should have happened, we were thinking how we could create a conference which could give more space to virtual elements, as increasing concerns were raised among our membership and beyond about the environmental sustainability of our conference travelling. As was already visible in the submission process, we offered – under specific limitations – the possibility to join the event from all parts of the world without needing to physically travel there. This was well accepted and I am sure we will continue to think about these aspects, and how to institutionally support them, during the conference and in the future (see also the statement of EASST Council on COVID-19 <https://easst.net/covid19-easst-council-statement-and-call/>).

Under conditions of “new normality”, as this in-between status we find ourselves in is often referred to, we had to quickly rethink and rearrange many things. While we were in the middle of the review process for the submissions of far more than 2000 papers in different formats, we had to start cancelling the contracts already in place in Prague and start searching for the best socio-technical option to go virtual. Cancelling the conference was never seen as a real option. STS needs exchange and this challenge will make us reflect even more thoroughly about the world we inhabit. What does it mean to convene such a big community of people, who actually wanted meet to not only present their papers or sessions but to also meet each other and exchange, to cherish the companionship, to get to know new people and to be in the great city of Prague? And how can we think in new ways about the conference title “Locating and Timing Matters”?

We are all aware that turning the conference into a purely virtual event will not be the same and much of the informal interactions will not be as easily possible. However, it will also become an important collective experiment for our community. How can we as a community make the virtual space of the conference into something special, lively, engaging, inclusive? It is up to all of us to make this happen and to turn the Prague conference into an event that will not only be remembered because of COVID-19 and because the Prague conference actually was not in Prague. It should be remembered, because we managed to transform the virtual space, appropriate it in new ways and make it our own. More will be communicated via our conference website about the socio-technical possibilities over the next weeks.

The registration is open and the fees were announced. There were reflections on the fees rates tacitly assuming that a virtual conference should be far cheaper than the fees announced. Without wanting to enter into a detailed discussion, let me give a short explanation. The aim of EASST is to support the STS community life and to offer possibilities to engage with the issues that are close to all of us. For this purpose EASST supports two fully open access journals "Science & Technology Studies" and the "EASST Review". The association also sponsors every year about 6 satellite events (workshops, smaller conferences, launch events of national associations, ...) and we organize every second year a conference together with local organisers (and carry the financial risks involved in doing so). We give three awards for interdisciplinary or collaborative forms of STS research and we support parts of our community with fee waivers for our conferences. To do all this work, we use our membership fees which are the essential basis for being able to do this work and, if conferences produce a surplus we use this to put it back into the work for the STS community.

The fee structure therefore reflects the costs we already incurred in Prague (e.g. reservations), the usual conference costs for running the submission process, the making of the program and the software infrastructure which you will navigate when joining the conference as well as the costs of having very good technical support for our conference. All this was the basis for our calculations of the fees needed. EASST will also have together with 4S a support scheme for fee waivers which is also already announced.

As the registration has a membership category, I also kindly ask you to renew your membership with EASST as soon as possible. We will communicate EASST membership to the conference registration platform so that you can benefit directly from the lower rates. Thank you in advance for supporting the STS community through your membership fees and through joining us at "the Prague conference".

I am looking forward to seeing as many people of our EASST and the global STS community at "the Prague conference" – "Locating and timing matters!"

All the best,

Ulrike  
(EASST president)