

## **Research group self-assessment:**

Research group title: TIK-STS (The Science, Technology and Society group) Research group leader: Kristin Asdal Research group institution: TIK Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oslo

### **1.1 Organisation, leadership, strategy and resources**

a) Please give a brief account of the establishment and the development of the research group.

TIK Centre for Technology Innovation and Culture was established in 1999 as an interdisciplinary research centre. The two research groups at TIK (the other in innovation studies) emerged historically from related intellectual concerns, namely a concern with the role of science in society. Whereas innovation-studies used to be predominantly concerned with how science could explain and contribute to economic growth, STS emerged from a more critical tradition and became intellectually more devoted to study knowledge-production in its right and the use and role of science in society more broadly. At TIK the two research groups have developed their own distinct academic and publishing profile. The STS group at TIK is recognized internationally as a key STS-environment in Scandinavia, renowned for its investments in actor-network as an empirical philosophy and for its interdisciplinary engagements with the humanities. Method-issues have been a shared intellectual interest of the research group, developed in close exchanges with a strong international network of scholars. Empirically three core topics can be identified: Politics of nature/the environment with a particular focus on the climate issue and its science-politics relations, cultural and historical studies of medicine, with a particular focus on experimental medicine and public health, and studies of the bioeconomy, with a particular methodological focus on valuation- practices. Currently the STS-group is in a very promising and important position as we are in a process of a unique situation of expansion of senior-positions, - so that we by the end of 2017 will have four senior full time positions plus one or two adjunct professor positions. The “normal” so to speak situation of the group has over the last years been that a much smaller group of seniors have had the main responsibility for running the group. The reason why this has worked relatively well nevertheless, is that the seniors have been very well connected to strong research-environments both nationally and internationally, and that post.docs and Phd-candidates have been very well integrated in the group and taken a large responsibility for shared activities and academic work. Success with acquiring external research grants (not the least an ERC-starting grant) has, together with the strong academic profile of the group, enabled the current expansion.

b) Please describe the leadership and organisation of the research group.

Professor Kristin Asdal heads the STS-group and takes part in TIK’s consultative leadership forum. Over many years the STS-group has met regularly for meetings, with agendas decided about at the beginning of each term. The agendas vary, from reading, presenting and discussing core journals in our academic field, to a focus on presenting draft manuscripts of our own. At the beginning of each term we discuss and present individual agendas and ambitions for the coming term, and at the end of each term we share experiences regarding what we have found most noteworthy, rewarding and inspiring in the term that has passed.

There is a strong focus on creating and sustaining a safe academic environment where it is challenging as well as inspiring and stimulating to present ongoing work. Both seniors and juniors regularly present drafts and there is a strong tradition both for taking active part in these meetings and for meeting well prepared. In addition there are seminars and workshops related to ongoing projects but opened up for the research group as whole, as well as to scholars outside. We also regularly use viva-events to invite opponents that are relevant to the research group scholars to give seminars and workshops.

c) Please describe the scientific goals of the research group and the strategy for scientific publication and knowledge exchange, including cooperation with non-academic partners.

The STS-group aims to be the leading STS-environment in Scandinavia and to sustain its position as a renowned STS-environment internationally highly recognized for its distinct academic profile and contributions. In order to reach this goal, international attendance at conferences and a high and visibly publishing profile is key. It is of course then a particular responsibility for the seniors of the STS group to help younger scholars into international networks and to help and make sure that their research is of high quality so that they can contribute to ongoing debates in the field. In the research group there is a particular focus on the post.docs in this respect as the post.docs do not have a regular supervisor at the same time as the post-doc period is key to a successful transformation into becoming a visible scholar in his/her field. Helping postdocs in their publishing efforts and strategies is therefore crucial and postdocs are given priority when it comes to presenting research in the research group. As for the phds, it is crucial that they are exposed to the larger international STS- environment of teachers and phd-candidates. In order to secure this, a core strategy of the STS-group in the later years has been to develop and provide phd-courses in STS that are well attended internationally and where TIK-scholars teach together with other renowned scholars in the field. This is also one of the strategies to build TIKs recognition as a rich and stimulating research environment important to ongoing debates and concerns in the field internationally as well as to put STS-concerns at TIK at the international agenda. The four last courses we provided were very well attended and we have had to have waiting lists for candidates all of Europe and the US wanting to take part.

The group of seniors in the STS group has, as mentioned, been small, but highly visible publishing wise. One of the seniors in the group is among the top publishers among university of Oslo professors (according to the annual report of UiO). Five edited special issues were published in different high profiled STS-journals the last years – also in cooperation with colleagues nationally and internationally (STHV, EPA, Science in Context, Nordic Journal of Science and Technology Studies x 2). In 2016 the STS-group published two edited volumes with Routledge (one of the post-docs was a co-editor of both volumes) and a monograph is under contract with Routledge to be submitted this spring. A handbook in STS is under publishing in German, co-edited with one of the newly recruited associate professors in the STS-group. The same scholar is publishing another edited volume with Mattering Press. A sign of our interdisciplinary profile across the social sciences and the humanities is the fact that papers are currently under review in leading journals as different as British Journal of Sociology and History and Theory. The STS-group is very well connected to non-academic publics and are regularly invited to give talks as well as to contribute in papers and media-events. Only recently one of the newly recruited post.docs published, together with colleagues, a highly profiled chronicle in the daily newspaper Aftenposten, we are actively engaged in the debates on the emerging bioeconomy and of the post.docs in the group is at

the board of the science ethics committee and also internationally linked up with non-academics engaged in the issue of animal-welfare. In February we are co-organizing a stakeholder event in relation to the question of sustainable management of the fisheries. We do however not only cooperate with non-academic publics but find it important and valuable also to cooperate with and develop exchanges with scholars in the natural sciences. Therefore we are, for instance, currently engaged in several cross-disciplinary project-developments in relation to the University of Oslo's life science initiative and are actively involved in ELSA-activities.

One of the researchers is also vice-chair of the board of Cicero.

d) Please describe how the research group contributes to the strategic goals of the host institution.

The Faculty of Social Sciences and the University have strategic goals related to scientific excellence, cross-disciplinarity and internationalisation. The STS-group contributes to all of these through its activities and results. A key success in this respect is the fact that one of the researchers in the STS group has been granted an ERC Starting Grant, - a signal as we take it, both of excellence and a result of successful international exchange, collaboration and strong academic profile developed over a series of years.

e) To what extent does the research group incorporate external funding as a factor in its strategic planning? And, if relevant: please comment briefly on the support from the host institution in the development and running of externally funded projects.

As pointed out above, external funding is a key factor for the STS-group and the development of projects intended for external funding is made integral to our research strategies. The ERC-grant that was recently funded is of major importance both to the STS-group both also to TIK as a whole. Core senior researchers have always had a relatively large part of their research time externally funded, and externally funded projects is also of key importance to sustain international networks and collaboration. Three out of four post-docs in the group is currently externally funded. One of the current recruitments (a four year associate professor position) is enabled by the ERC-grant (on top of the position in the project as such). The group has also been partner in EU-projects. Both the TIK administration and the Faculty administration were of huge importance in the process up to the ERC grant application.

f) To what extent does the host institution assist the research group in providing relevant research infrastructure, such as databases, scientific collections or experimental facilities?

This is currently not so relevant for the STS-group.

## **1.2 Research profile and quality**

a) Please describe the research activities and the research profile of the group.

The profile of the STS-group was described briefly already above where three core topics were mentioned. It was also pointed out that method-issues have always been a strong shared interest in the group, a group which is particularly recognized for a tradition in empirical philosophy in the sense that theories and conceptual work is often developed from close empirical studies. In this respect the STS-group is closely linked to French traditions taken up both in the humanities and within sociology (in particular). However, whereas STS

internationally have invested in particular in ethnographic methods, STS at TIK has always been very well connected with the humanities and with a strong affinity for the study of archives and documents, and is increasingly making its imprint on STS in this respect. Also, there is a strong tradition in the STS group for the study of politics and political practices, just as much as science per se, hence the STS group have been more concerned with the ways in which science takes part in politics and serves as the foundation of politics (or not). Also in this respect it is fair to say that TIK-STS is increasingly making an imprint on ongoing discussions. Lastly, there is a strong tradition within the group of taking an interest not only in the natural sciences, but also in the social sciences, not the least economics. Lately this has developed into a renewed interest in studying economics as part of valuation practices, -also a key academic turn in STS more broadly.

b) Please describe how the research group has contributed to the development of the state of the art within its field. Examples of contributions may include (but are not limited to) theoretical and methodological developments, new empirical findings, interdisciplinary developments and production of datasets.

Some examples (in addition to the above): 1) Enacting the Good Economy: Biocapitalization and the Little tools of valuation. ERC- Starting Grant. 2016-2020. It is too early to say whether the ERC-grant will make significant contributions to the field. However, the granting of the project in the first place is a signal that the STS group is core to the STS-field internationally and is an example of the state of the art in the field at the moment. These are related to three ongoing debates relating both the methods (the concern with how “little tools, i.e. material-semiotic entities are preconditions to large transformations) and to ongoing debates on valuations. i.e. how STS can enrich the study of economics and the economy by merging the emerging field of valuation studies with studies of the bioeconomy. 2) One of the post.docs in the STS group has recently co-edited two volumes in profiled series on Routledge on human-animal relations. She has earlier published in *Science in Context* and currently in *STHV*, both core journals in the field and is a scholar who is now increasingly reckoned with in discussions on how care plays a decisive role in laboratory work with animals, hence we need to understand what is going in the laboratory in new ways. 3) One of the newly recruited post.docs to the STS-group has, together with one of the seniors in the group just signed a contract for a textbook on document analysis – which will take our contributions further in teaching. In underlining the role of documents we also approach politics in new ways: as a practice sustained and enabled by document trails. A monograph under contract with Routledge takes this further in an inventive study of parliament. 4) A recent special co-edited special issue on context and what is proposed to be labelled “contexting” (*STHV* 2012) has received a lot of attention and often taken up as a way of taking the controversial and critical stance to context further in STS. 5) Research on the climate issue by one of the senior researchers and one of the phds at TIK (e.g. *Social Studies of Science*) has been developed not only to cast light on the climate issue per se but also how we can conceptually understand and relate to different forms of science-politics relations. This research has been taken further into new projects.

### **1.3 Recruitment and training**

a) How does the research group contribute to recruitment and career development for temporary or permanently employed academic staff/researchers? And b) Please describe how PhD-students and postdoctoral fellows are recruited to the research group, nationally or internationally.

In addition to what was described above (collective work in and by the group and research training by providing phd-courses and international workshops and seminars as well as shared publishing projects) recruitment processes is linked to international and national networks – implying that candidates applying to positions relating to the group are from a large number of different institutions. The latest recruitment to associate professor from Frankfurt, the top candidate for 4 year position from Berlin/Toronto, the new permanent position recruited from Bergen and the newest postdoc from France.

b) What is the group's contribution to the training and mentoring of PhD-students and postdoctoral fellows?

See above.

c) Please describe the extent to which PhD students and postdoctoral fellows participate in international exchange programmes (including time spent at research institutions abroad).

STS phd-candidates are actively encouraged to have research stays abroad (shorter or longer periods of time) and such stays abroad is a common thing in the group.

d) To what extent do PhD-students take part in collaboration with partners outside of academia?

If relevant this is part of the projects they work on, e.g. currently e.g. with Veritas.

#### **1.4 Networking**

a) Please describe how the research group engages in research collaboration. Collaboration may include (but is not limited to) cooperation across faculty divisions, across institutions, with partners outside of academia or international cooperation.

It is difficult to give any full overview of this as almost all research activities involves collaborating with researchers and research environments in other countries and has long and established ties to Goldsmiths, Warwick, Oxford, Paris, Lancaster, Frankfurt, Berlin, Uppsala, Gothenburg, Linköping, Berkeley, Vienna, - to name a few.

#### **1.5 Impact on teaching (if relevant)**

a) Please describe how the research group contributes to educational activities. The group members regularly teach at TIK's master program, including a specialised course within STS.

This also involves evaluation of exams and group work as well as supervision of master theses. STS group members also teach irregularly elsewhere, including internationally.

b) How much time does the research group spend on teaching?

Name of study programme    Approximate time spent on teaching by research group members per year (hours including preparation)

BA-level

MA-level            TIK & ESST Master programmes            1500 hours (estimated)

PhD-level            TIK's PhD programme                            1000 hours (estimated)