# Call for Abstracts | Open Panel | STS-hub.de 2023

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## *Testing as a research subject of STS. Transdisciplinary perspectives on testal translation chains*

The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined a fact that was already manifest before, but now, since the beginning of the pandemic, is more evident than ever: contemporary society is significantly shaped by tests. There is in fact hardly a person who has not been tested in their life, hardly an area of society in which tests do not play a significant role (Pinch, 1993; Hanson, 1994; Marres/Stark, 2020).

From an STS perspective, tests are particularly relevant not only because of the considerable social consequences they are capable of evoking, but also due to the fact that they are inevitably socio-technical instruments, embedded in relational webs of human and non-humans, that do not test for extra-worldly phenomena. Instead, they utilize always and inevitably socially mediated indicators, which have to be understood as defined by humans and stabilized by conventions (MacKenzie, 1989). Test procedures are therefore inescapably subject to epistemic fractures since they per se only indicate a representation of what is the target information of the test procedure – which applies to the testing of people (Hanson, 1994; McNamara, 2003) as well as the testing of technology (Pinch, 1993; Downer, 2007). Consequently, testing implies closing epistemic gaps between the test result and the actual target information.

This closing of epistemic gaps in testing procedures, we aim to put forward in this panel, can be fruitfully conceptualized as a "chain of translation" (Latour, 1999), referring to "the work through which actors modify, displace, and translate their various and contradictory interests." (Latour, 1999: 311) This transformative journey is understood as a cascading, socio-technical process, in the course of which (scientific) reference is constantly being modified. Before this backdrop, testing can be understood as translation work as well, reformulating the argument of the necessity of closing epistemic gaps in testing procedure in a way that makes it sensitive to the heterogeneous web of human and non-human actors.

Although tests and testing procedures are highly relevant in contemporary society, tests have hardly been researched systematically in STS. This panel will therefore attempt to conceptualize the role of tests in present-day society, with a special focus on the transdisciplinary perspectives required to analyse the application of tests in detail, which especially includes the knowledge of the scientific and (bio-)technical test instruments.

We invite theoretical as well as empirical papers, focusing on one specific type of test or on practices of testing in general. Although not mandatory, we especially welcome contributions that address the sociotechnical closure of epistemic gaps in testing procedures.

Please send abstracts (max. 300 words) to [simon.egbert@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:simon.egbert@uni-bielefeld.de) until October 31, 2022.