The STS group at MDU: A position statement

We are living in extraordinary times, where the transformation of the world is constantly happening and accelerating. Technologies become nice companions and efficient co-workers but they can also turn out to be tools for (human) control and surveillance. We – as humans – produce tremendous innovations for a more sustainable and inclusive world that, meanwhile, is living through the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Sixth Extinction (mostly caused by the human species).

According to the philosopher Rosi Braidotti, "We need a subject position worthy of our times". Her plea urges us - as academics and scientists - to abandon our comfort zones, problematize our way of living, ask new questions, and radically change our mindset, practices, and the language used for centuries to talk about "us" as humans, other living creatures as well as mundane objects and advanced technologies as "less than 'us' humans".

Can we decenter the human subject to embrace the complexity on Earth without devaluing humankind?

Who or what counts as human today?

What language do we need in order to not reproduce "business-as-usual" at times when nothing is as "before" (especially after the pandemic Covid-19)?

What methodologies should we mobilize or even invent to generate knowledge worthy of our times?

How do we educate to a more democratic and sustainable future?

Can we - as academics - be brave and challenge disciplinary silos to appreciate different perspectives and create new synergies within and beyond Academia?

Back in 2021, some MDU scholars started a bottom-up initiative to "think together otherwise".

STS@MDU is a forum for interdisciplinary collaborations grounded on the growing and lively field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) aimed at studying technoscientific phenomena and the multiple relationships with and between human beings, objects, technologies, animals, soil, nature, culture, and possible others. Members of the group are rooted in several different disciplines – organization and management studies, language, literature, design, sociology, urban studies, social work, economics, education and didactics – but also work at the crossroads of some of them.

The group participates in conversations about posthumanist theorizing and conducts research by conceiving humans and their doings as inseparable from technologies, science, economic networks, nonhuman beings, the ecosystem, and many other entities.

Research interests of STS@MDU

The following are the three entry points to the broader study of the relationship between science, technology, and society within the STS@MDU group:

Sustainable transitions: An STS approach challenges the often taken-for-granted dichotomy of nature and culture. Members of the group explore the way ecological and societal scenarios can be appreciated only as complex interrelationships of humans, artefacts, economic exchanges, atmospheric movements, plants, animals, and geological conditions.

Heterogeneous relationships: An STS approach recognizes that for sustainable societal development to be possible, scholars within the social sciences, the humanities, the natural sciences, engineering, and medicine must cooperate to generate alternative approaches to multi-faceted matters of concern. Exploring such possible maneuvers, members of the group study how responses to societal challenges are associated with responsibilities distributed in complex sociomaterial networks.

Posthuman subjectivities: An STS approach exposes humans' interdependencies with technologies, economic networks, nonhuman beings, the ecosystem, and many other entities. What we have traditionally thought of as the autonomous, atomic human subject is better understood as a complex assemblage that is historically and societally contingent. In their work, members of the group ask what a human is, or should be, after this decentering of the human subject, and thus contribute to current posthumanist theoretical discussions.

Creativity and imagination are central to the group's engagement with challenges that STS poses against traditional ways of asking scholarly questions. Members of the group work with a wide range of methods, like ethnographic approaches, discourse analysis as well as alternative methods and creative forms of research communication through dance, theatre, film, and art.

Network and activities

The special interest group is part of the Swedish STS network and, at MDU, involves the four schools: the School of Business, Society and Engineering (EST); the School of Health, Care and Social Welfare (HVV); the School of Innovation, Design and Engineering (IDT), and the School of Education, Culture and Communication (UKK).

Since its inception, the main activity of the group has consisted of monthly reading seminars in which publications – selected among STS "classics" and more recent studies – have been used to engage participants in collegial conversations to foster ideas, share knowledge, and support learning. This has been a way to get to know each other and to identify specific cross-areas of interest.

The ambition is to consolidate the group by developing research collaborations within the group and beyond, attracting new members, expanding the exchanges with other STS groups in Scandinavia and in the broader international context, and strengthening the institutional position of STS@MDU to make it one of the cutting-edge research areas of MDU in line with the progressive vision of the university.

Founding members

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Selected publications of the founding members

Alarcón López, C., Decuypere, M., Dey, J., Gorur, R., Hamilton, M., Lundahl, C., & **Sundström Sjödin, E.** (2021). Dancing with Covid: Choreographing examinations in pandemic times. *European Educational Research Journal*, *20*(4), 403-422.

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Redmalm, D. (2015). Pet grief: When is non-human life grievable?. *The Sociological Review*, *63*(1), 19-35.

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