

Wednesday morning keynotes: Trust in Science, Wednesday, Sep 24 2025, 9:30-11:00

Location: Main Hall

Session: Keynote Lectures

Chair: Krista Varantola

KY-06

Trust in Science and Technocracy Tolerance - two sides of the same coin?

Martin W. Bauer

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There is evidence for a wide-spread discourse of declining trust, but little evidence for an actual decline in trust in science, to the contrary, there might be in many places an increase of trust in science. I will re-frame the question of trust: can there be too much trust? And illustrate the answer with our attempt to measure 'technocracy tolerance' [TT] with Eurobarometer data (EB 2021 and 2025). High levels of trust express a deference to scientific authority, which could morph into a desire to confer legitimacy to actual governance by scientific-technical elites. Technocracy is in tension with democracy; and technocratic elites expect trust from a disenfranchised public who admires them for past achievements or out of need in an emergency. There is little evidence of an immediate technocratic takeover; however, there is historical evidence for a perennial temptation among scientific-technical elites to govern 'technocratically', and what is variable is whether they get away with it. Might a wide-spread discourse of declining trust, when actual trust is stable, express a latent desire or ambition for technocratic governance? and might public opinion support such an ambition? To construct a portable measure of 'technocracy tolerance' in public opinion remains unfinished business of global efforts to measure attitudes to science which started on a large scale in the 1970s not least with the help of Eurobarometer.