



CHESS lecture

Thursday, 26 November 2026
5.00 – 6.30 p.m.
followed by a reception

Alte Kantonsschule
Rämistrasse 59, RAA-G-01
Universität Zürich

Dr. Viktoria Cologne
(EAWAG) and
Prof. Dr. Niels G. Mede
(Wageningen University and Research)

Public trust in scientists: Insights from a global survey and learnings for Switzerland

Moderation

Prof. Dr. Mike S. Schäfer
(UZH/CHESS)

Following the lecture,
a roundtable discussion with
Dr. Philipp Burkard (Science et Cité)
Prof. Dr. Sonia I. Seneviratne (ETHZ)
Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Stark (UZH)

Scientific knowledge informs many of today's most consequential individual, organizational, and societal decisions – from health and education to climate policy, emerging technologies, and economic governance. At the same time, science depends on public support: for funding, institutional autonomy, and the legitimacy to contribute to policy advice and public debate. Yet science is also a prototypical “expert system”: for most people, its processes and evidence are not directly accessible in everyday life, and assessments of scientific claims therefore often rely on trust in scientists and scientific institutions. Understanding how trust in scientists is distributed across societies, what shapes it, and what the public expects from scientists is thus central for both democratic governance and the future of research.

This has become increasingly important given popular narratives which suggest a widespread crisis of public trust in science in many countries globally. Viktoria Cologne and Niels G. Mede set up a consortium of 241 researchers from 179 institutions across the world to investigate this narrative with a global Many Labs survey of more than 70,000 respondents. It examined people's attitudes to scientists, including perceptions of scientists' trustworthiness and their desired role in society and policymaking, in 68 countries, including Switzerland. In this lecture, Cologne and Mede present key insights from the study, with a focus on the Swiss results, and discuss implications for scientists, science communicators, and higher education and research institutions.

Dr. Viktoria Cologne, Group Leader “Climate and Societal Change” at the Department Environmental Social Sciences at EAWAG

Prof. Dr. Niels G. Mede, Assistant Professor of Science Communication in the Strategic Communication Group at Wageningen University and Research (WUR), the Netherlands

Prof. Dr. Mike S. Schäfer, Professor of Science Communication and Director of the Center for Higher Education and Science Studies at University of Zurich

Dr. Philipp Burkard, Managing Director of Science et Cité, Berne

Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Stark, Vice President Research at University of Zurich

Prof. Dr. Sonia I. Seneviratne, Professor of Land-Climate Dynamics at ETH Zurich and Vice-Chair Working Group I of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Das CHESS will die Selbstreflexion der Hochschulen und der Wissenschaften stärken und die Herausforderungen thematisieren, welche durch die veränderten gesellschaftlichen Erwartungen von den zunehmend autonomen Hochschulen bewältigt werden müssen.