

Call for Applications: KHK-HIAS Research Fellowship Kassel/ Hamburg 2026 “Carbon Culture”

The Käte Hamburger Kolleg *Rohstoffwelten – Kulturen im Umbruch* (KHK) and the Hamburg Institute for Advanced Study (HIAS) appoint outstanding academics from all parts of the world to pursue their research projects on-site for 10 months (5 months at the HIAS in Hamburg and 5 months at the University of Kassel, Germany).

The Käte Hamburger Kolleg *Rohstoffwelten – Kulturen im Umbruch*, based at the University of Kassel and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology, and Space, will be established as an international and interdisciplinary research center with its official start in August 2026. The Kolleg is dedicated to interdisciplinary research on the global transformation of raw material worlds (*Rohstoffwelten*) and the profound cultural, aesthetic, political, economic, social, and ecological changes associated with them. Embedded in the University of Kassel’s strong profile in research on sustainability, critical arts, the humanities, and global political economy, the Käte Hamburger Kolleg brings together international fellows and early career scholars. It offers a space for collaborative, theory-driven, and empirically grounded research on the possibilities and conflicts of contemporary material and cultural transformations and energy transitions.

The Hamburg Institute for Advanced Study (HIAS) is an institute for advanced study that invites outstanding researchers from all geographic origins, career levels, and disciplines (including the arts) to Hamburg to pursue their individual research project in a creative and open atmosphere on-site at HIAS. HIAS’ profile is to be completely open in terms of discipline. Fellows from the social sciences, humanities, natural and technical sciences, and the arts, engage in an inter- and multidisciplinary community of researchers at the institute. HIAS’ mission is to strengthen the international networks of Hamburg’s research institutions; therefore, all HIAS fellows collaborate with a Hamburg tandem partner during the research stay.

At both institutions, fellows are offered excellent conditions in a vibrant intellectual environment, with diverse opportunities for cross-disciplinary and intersectional exchange. All activities take place on site and require a high level of attendance. Fellows are expected to participate in weekly seminars and internal workshops, interdisciplinary exchange formats, conferences, and events. The Kolleg strongly encourages fellows to develop their projects toward publication, supported by the Kolleg’s scientific coordination and targeted guidance on suitable publication venues for different audiences. Teaching activities in cooperation with departments at the University of Kassel are welcome. HIAS particularly supports the organization of workshops and public events in Hamburg, related to the research project of the fellow.

Research Program of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg

Over its entire funding period, the Käte Hamburger Kolleg *Rohstoffwelten – Kulturen im Umbruch* investigates raw material worlds not as purely technological or economic processes, but as historically embedded, socially contested, and culturally mediated transformations. The Käte Hamburger Kolleg's research program follows four overarching thematic orientations that structure its work over the next years, with a strong focus on energy and energy transition: *Carbon Culture*, *Great Transformation*, *Dark Sides*, and *Horizons*. Each year focuses on one of these orientations.

The first project year is dedicated to *Carbon Culture*. This focus examines the epistemic, cultural, political, and socio-economic foundations of fossilism and related raw materials, and seeks to explain their remarkable persistence despite decades of climate debates, technological alternatives, and ecological crises. We understand carbon culture as the historically grown and cultural entanglements of fossilism with everyday practices, political and social institutions, development models, infrastructures, imaginaries and worldviews, ideologies, and moral economies. The Kolleg examines carbon cultures as stabilized orders that shape social norms, power relations, modernization processes, and expectations of the future.

Profile Areas as Gravitational Centers

The research program is organized around three thematic profile areas and one cross-cutting methods area. Together, they structure the Käte Hamburger Kolleg's intellectual work and provide orientation for individual fellow projects. The three profile areas are conceived as gravitational centers rather than rigid subfields. They group research questions, concepts, and methods, foster intellectual exchange across projects, and create thematic coherence while allowing for disciplinary diversity.

Fellows are expected to anchor their research project in one primary profile area while actively engaging with the others. The research area *Critique/Reflection* transverses all profile areas and years by providing conceptual, philosophical, and methodological grounding. For the first project year (2026/27), all profile areas and the methods area contribute to the annual research focus on *Carbon Culture*.

Profile Area I: Raw Material Cultures (*Rohstoffkulturen*)

This profile area examines the symbolic, aesthetic, epistemic, and narrative dimensions through which raw materials become culturally meaningful. It understands raw materials as broader semantics and investigates how carbon-based material worlds are constituted through epistemes, representations, imaginaries, visual regimes, and material practices, and how these cultural formations contribute to both the stabilization and contestation of fossil modernity.

Guiding questions for *Carbon Culture* include:

- How does carbon culture manifest as aesthetics, narrative, ideology, or worldview across different historical and regional contexts?
- Which visual, material, and media cultures have emerged around fossil and carbon-based raw materials, and how do they shape perceptions of energy and modernity?
- How are petro-modernity, industrialization, and secularization culturally narrated and legitimized?
- In what ways do posthuman or more-than-human perspectives challenge anthropocentric carbon imaginaries?
- Which cultural blind spots, silences, and exclusions contribute to the persistence of carbon cultures, their epistemes, and knowledge production?

Profile Area II: Raw Material Regimes (*Rohstoffregime*)

This profile area analyzes raw material worlds as historically grown, politically contested, and institutionally stabilized regimes. It focuses on the political economy of fossil energy orders, their governance structures, and their extraordinary resilience. In the first year, carbon culture is understood here as institutionalized fossilization: a regime in which fossil resources underpin state capacity, economic growth, social cohesion, and political legitimacy.

Guiding questions for Carbon Culture include:

- How and under which historical conditions did fossil raw material regimes emerge, consolidate, and contribute to the persistence of carbon cultures?
- Why do raw materials regimes follow such strong path dependencies despite ecological crises?
- Which institutional arrangements (state policies, infrastructures, international regimes) stabilize carbon cultures?
- How do fossil raw material regimes shape political coalitions, elite strategies, and social conflict management?
- How do fossil raw material regimes differ across industrial centers, oil-exporting states, and resource-dependent economies in the Global South?

Profile Area III: Raw Material Practices (*Rohstoffpraktiken*)

This profile area focuses on actors, everyday practices, and social struggles surrounding raw material worlds. It examines how carbon cultures are reproduced or challenged through consumption patterns, labor relations, infrastructures, identities, corporate strategies, and political mobilization. In the first year, the emphasis lies on the practices and actors of fossil persistence, including contemporary fossil backlash dynamics.

Guiding questions for *Carbon Culture* include:

- Which actors sustain fossil energy systems, and what interests and power positions underpin their continued commitment to oil, gas, and coal?
- Which strategies are employed by these actors to stabilize or expand fossil energy use despite the escalating global climate crisis?
- Which factors shape fossil-based everyday practices, routines, and understandings?
- What conflicts emerge around negotiating the dynamics of carbon cultures, and how are these struggles shaped by multiscalar power relations and social inequalities related to class, gender, race, and ethnicity?

Cross-Cutting Methods Area: Critique/Reflection

The methods area, Critique/Reflection, transverses all profile areas and annual themes. It provides conceptual, philosophical, and methodological grounding by reflecting on the normative assumptions, epistemic frameworks, and conceptual architectures that shape how carbon cultures and transformations are understood.

In the first year, the focus lies on clarifying key concepts and categories central to *Carbon Culture*.

Guiding questions for *Carbon Culture* include:

- What conceptual operations turn elements of nature into “raw materials”?
- On which epistemic and normative levels does the concept of the raw material operate?
- Which historical and social conditions have shaped carbon-based conceptions of nature and resource use?
- What normative assumptions underlie dominant carbon imaginaries and transformation discourses?
- Which critical concepts are needed to grasp stability, crisis, exhaustion, and transformation beyond technocratic frameworks?

Formal Conditions and Application Requirements

We invite researchers from the humanities and social sciences to apply. Applications are welcome from scholars at the postdoctoral (applicants must have completed their PhD by the time of application) and senior levels. Applicants should have international visibility in their respective fields, along with demonstrated creativity and originality. They must have relevant publications related to the topic of the call and their proposed project. Additionally, they should be willing to actively participate in a dynamic community of scholars, scientists, artists, and cultural professionals. A strong command of written and spoken English is essential.

Fellowships begin on 1 October 2026. The preferred duration is 10 months, with a minimum stay of 6 months. Fellows will receive either a competitive monthly fellowship (for applicants

without regular income during the fellowship period) or, alternatively, KHK/HIAS may cover the costs of a temporary substitute at the Fellow's home institution, in line with established KHK and HIAS regulations. KHK/HIAS actively supports fellows in finding accommodation. One-time travel costs to and from Kassel/Hamburg will be covered in accordance with the University's applicable public travel expense regulations. During their stay, fellows are provided with a fully equipped workspace and access to the academic infrastructures of the University of Kassel and the University of Hamburg.

Applications must be submitted by **15 April 2026** by email to (khk@uni-kassel.de) and include the following documents, combined into one single PDF file:

1. Motivation letter
2. Research proposal (maximum 3 pages):
 - clearly related to one profile area,
 - explicitly addressing at least three guiding questions from the chosen profile area,
 - must include a brief work plan with a statement about the planned output.
3. Curriculum Vitae, including relevant academic and professional information (max. of 10 publications relevant for the proposed research project).
4. Short description of the applicant's current professional position.
5. Brief information on how the project matches with research activities at one of the nine HIAS member institutions in Hamburg (whereby it is not necessary to already name a tandem partner).
6. Short statement on how the research project would benefit from the interdisciplinary exchange with a multi-disciplinary fellow group at HIAS.
7. Syllabus for potential teaching interests or topics.

In addition, applicants are required to complete the [application form](#).

Key Dates

- Application deadline: **15 April 2026**
- Selection results: **15 June 2026**
- Fellowship dates: **October 2026-February 2027 (Hamburg), March-July 2027 (Kassel)**

Further information on the CALAS/HIAS fellowship: khk@uni-kassel.de