

Postdoctoral Fellowships, Käte Hamburger Kolleg "Rohstoffwelten", Kassel

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Application deadline: Apr 15, 2026

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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 Käte Hamburger Kolleg "Rohstoffwelten – Kulturen im Umbruch" offers fellows a vibrant intellectual environment and diverse opportunities for exchange. All activities take place in Kassel and require a high level of attendance. Fellows are invited to participate in weekly seminars and workshops at the Kolleg and the University of Kassel; in lecture series, conferences, and public events; in collective publication formats; and in transfer-oriented outputs. Teaching opportunities in cooperation with the departments at the University of Kassel are possible. The Kolleg supports fellows to advance their individual scholarly and artistic projects related to Rohstoffwelten and the Kolleg's first phase on energy. It invites fellows to collaborate with the team to advance the Kolleg's research perspectives.

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 alterna-

tives, 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 multiscale 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 and senior levels; applicants must have completed their PhD by the time of application. Fellowships begin on 1 October 2026. The preferred duration is 10 months, with a minimum stay of 5 months. Fellows will receive either a competitive monthly fellowship or, alternatively, the Kolleg may cover the costs of a temporary substitute at the Fellow's home institution, in line with established Käte Hamburger Kolleg regulations. The Kolleg actively supports fellows in finding accommodation. One-time travel costs to and from Kassel 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 full access to the University of Kassel's academic infrastructure.

Applications must be submitted by 15 April 2026 by email to rohstoffwelten[at]uni-kassel[dot]de and include the following documents, combined into one single PDF file:

Research proposal (maximum 3 pages), which

- is clearly related to one profile area,
 - explicitly addresses at least three guiding questions from that profile area,
 - includes a brief work plan that includes a statement about the planned output.
1. Curriculum Vitae, including all relevant academic and professional information.
 2. List of publications.
 3. Syllabus for potential teaching interests or topics

In addition, applicants are required to complete the application form.

Further information and application form:
<https://www.uni-kassel.de/forschung/rohstoffwelten-kulturen-im-umbruch/call-for-applications.html>

Reference:

STIP: Postdoctoral Fellowships, Käte Hamburger Kolleg "Rohstoffwelten", Kassel. In: ArtHist.net, Mar 5, 2026 (accessed Apr 29, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51888>>.