Report: There is a crack in everything - That's how the light gets in: 3rd European TA Conference, Cork, Ireland, May 17-19, 2017

Hebáková, Lenka; Sotoudeh, Mahshid; Priefer, Carmen; Scherz, Constanze; Nierling, Linda

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There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in[1]

3rd European TA Conference, Cork, Ireland, May 17–19, 2017

Carmen Priefer, *Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS), Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), Karlstraße 11, 76133 Karlsruhe (carmen.priefer@kit.edu)*

Linda Nierling, *Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS / KIT) (linda.nierling@kit.edu)*

Constanze Scherz, *Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS / KIT) (constanze.scherz@kit.edu)*

Mahshid Sotoudeh, *Institute for Technology Assessment (ITA), Austrian Academy of Sciences (msotoud@oeaw.ac.at)*

Lenka Hebáková, *Technology Centre of the CAS (TC) (hebakova@tc.cz)*

Technology assessment (TA) aims at generating knowledge about the consequences of technology as a basis for informed decision making. This task challenges TA to conduct inter- and transdisciplinary research, to include non-scientific actors, and to communicate with the general public. The 3rd European Conference on TA, which was understood as a project-independent continuation of the conferences carried out within the PACITA project, was hosted by the University College Cork (UCC) in Ireland. The event was dedicated to the theme "New technologies and societal challenges: Bridging the worlds of science, society & policy making" and sought new formats to respond to the growing importance of dialog. Nearly 250 participants discussed in 25 sessions about current developments in technology assessment. With the aim to enable intensive exchange, a two-phase session structure was conceptualized: In the first part, sci-

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1 This is a line in the song "Anthem" of the famous musician Leonhard Cohen. It was used by a speaker in the session "Politics of TA" as a metaphor to describe the core of technology assessment, and inspired the authors to choose it as title of the report.

entists presented their research. The second part was organized in a dialog format to include viewpoints of stakeholders. In this report, we highlight three selected sessions in order to illustrate the variety of topics and discussions.

Politics of TA

The session "Politics of TA", organized by Leonhard Hennen and Linda Nierling (Germany), reflected on an often unquestioned paradigm of TA in its political mission as parliamentary TA: its legitimation since the 1970s by its specific competence in neutral science-based policy advice. The session intended to shed light on the question of how this paradigm of "neutrality" can be (or ever was) attained in TA. Speakers from European TA organizations challenged this promoted "a-politicalness" of TA and addressed the question "Does TA have politics?" from a conceptual perspective.

Karen Kastenhofer and Anja Bauer (Austria) presented empirical results of their research on the implicit paradigms and the professional ethos of a TA institution, showing that TA can be defined neither as neutral nor as political because of the complexity of the surroundings in which TA is practiced. Rinie van Est (The Netherlands) argued that TA must be understood in a political manner, but a distinction should be made as to whether TA acts inside or outside the political system. Pierre Delvenne (Belgium) connected the TA tradition to the RRI discourse and, especially against the background of such competitive discourses, called for creating a "new spirit of TA" by connecting TA to Science, Technology and Innovation Studies and public discourse. In the following plenary debate, invited speakers (Helge Torgersen, Gloria Rose, André Gazsó, Austria; Les Levidow, UK; Stephan Lingner, Germany) provided further input, with examples from TA's work experience, such as in nano- or agro-biotech: On the one hand, the diversity of TA approaches was considered an advantage for context-sensitive reactions in either a political or a-political manner. On the other hand, it was stated that the analytical deconstruction of the neutrality of TA as a "myth" calls for an open debate of TA's (implicit) normative aims.

The following controversial discussion between speakers and audience showed that these explorations of the "politics of TA" surely struck a chord with the community and asked for a continuation of the debate on the self-understanding of TA.

Mutual Learning

The session "Mutual learning of stakeholders and citizens for a sustainable development" with a focus on inter- and transdisciplinary co-creation of knowledge through mutual learning was organized by Mahshid Sotoudeh (Austria), Tomáš Ratinger (Czech Republic), Ciara Fitzgerald (Ireland), and Natalia Goncharova (Russia). Mutual learning was discussed among policy makers, stakeholders and citizens as a concept for shaping innovations to deal with societal challenges. Experiences from using the participatory foresight method CIVISTI and its suitability for agenda setting in long-term EU research programs

Fig. 1: Intensive discussions in the poster area of the 3rd European TA Conference.   *John Roche Photography*

as well as participatory methodologies for the city management system were presented. Another approach to early engagement, which is based on the establishment of public platforms for crowd-sourcing solutions, was described for smart city projects in Russia. Furthermore, the concept of PACITA Summer Schools for stakeholders was presented to impart knowledge and create awareness of the potential of TA among various target groups in Europe. Discussions on the improvement of knowledge-based decision making by involving citizens in the design of measures to promote sustainable consumption in the Czech Republic showed opportunities and limits of participatory processes for mutual learning as well as the importance of accompanying research on the impacts of such tools.

In the dialog part, participants discussed with Petra Bayr (Austrian Parliament) and Anna Kárníková (Department of Sustainable Development of the Czech Government Office) about criteria for successful mutual learning in order to enable sustainable development. The invited policy makers presented their activities for the integration of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and highlighted the role of mutual learning between actors based on innovative participatory methodologies. The stakeholders identified the lack of cooperation between sectors as the main challenge. They emphasized that cooperation instead of competition is needed to deal with societal issues and that continuous mutual learning between stakeholders and citizens could support critical thinking in shaping innovations.

Bioeconomy

The session "Bioeconomy on the spotlight", organized by Carmen Priefer, Stefan Böschen, Rolf Meyer, and Sophie Kuppler (Germany), dealt with the hot topic of bioeconomy. The core idea of the concept is the replacement of non-renewable fossil resources used in industrial production and for energy supply by renewable biogenic feedstock. This switch-over is expected to pave the way for a more sustainable economy that helps tackling global challenges such as food security and climate change. In the first part of the session, Les Levidow (UK) presented rival trajectories of bioeconomy in the European debate and emphasized the existence of an agro-ecological perspective that questions the prevailing technology-based implementation pathway. Lotte Asveld (The Netherlands) picked up the discussion about non-technical aspects of the transition and talked about social learning in the bioeconomy. She pointed out that socially desirable innovations can only be reached by early involvement of civil society. Christine Rösch (Germany) argued that the orientation of the bioeconomy towards sustainability principles is a crucial precondition for a successful transformation. She highlighted the SDGs as an adequate reference for sustainability assessments.

In the second part, Thomas Arnold from the European Commission gave an overview on the various societal challenges the bioeconomy has to be aware of and called for a revision of the European strategy to take into account the ongoing controversial discussions about a sustainable bioeconomy. Michael Carus from the nova-Institute concluded that the economic and political framework conditions are not favorable for a bioeconomy and that competitiveness with fossil-based products can only be reached by setting environmental standards. Last but not least, Steffi Ober from the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union Germany (NABU) called for directing the economy towards natural limits by incorporating external costs. In her view, without changes in the economic practice itself also a bio-based economy will end up in overuse and exploitation of nature. The following discussion showed points of consensus, but also controversial views, and underlined that the scientific and societal discourse on bioeconomy are still in their infancy.

Outlook

The 3rd European TA conference again offered an important platform for exchange within the TA community. The manifold session topics covered both scientific debates on conceptual ques-

Carmen Priefer, Linda Nierling, Constanze Scherz, Mahshid Sotoudeh, Lenka Hebáková

tions (e. g., public participation, RRI, politics of TA) and specific thematic areas (e. g., health, genome editing, bioeconomy). Furthermore, exchange on practical questions relevant to the community was fostered (e. g., communicating TA, advancing towards an international TA community). Due to the engagement of the sessions' organizers and the diversity in disciplines and societal perspectives, the conference was of high quality. This was also thanks to the long time slots for each session (in total 2.5 hours). On the downside, the format forced the participants to select only a few of the sessions offered, which limited the possibility to take a look at various topics. The inclusion of stakeholders turned out to be very enriching for the discussions and offered an adequate environment for inter- and transdisciplinary TA research. However, this format requires careful preparation and in some cases also financial resources (e. g., to enable participation of civil society organizations).

The conference showed once again that TA activities are internationally relevant. Participants from non-EU countries enriched the discussions with examples from their countries. In addition, the session "Towards a global TA – possibilities and challenges" explicitly discussed how TA can be thought globally. It showed differences, but also several similarities in the issues and challenges countries like India, China, Russia and Europe are facing. Moreover, it became clear that international exchange and mutual learning of TA practices should be continued.

While the dialog part allowed for intense topical discussions, a format for exchange among the community was rather missing. Such plenary exchange is considered crucial for identification of research questions and topics as well as community building. The authors hope that the European TA conference as a relevant exchange platform will be continued in 2019 and that the experiences made, but also ideas for new formats will be incorporated into its preparation.

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Further information

Conference webpage:
https://cork2017.technology-assessment.info
Book of Abstracts:
https://cork2017.technology-assessment.info/programme/
book-of-abstracts
Special Report:
TA conferences. Platforms for the future: http://volta.
pacitaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/VOLTA-num8_
def_web.pdf, p. 19

TA17 – Digitalisierung der Arbeitswelt

Neue Technologien und Organisationsformen

Georg Aichholzer, Doris Allhutter, Leo Capari, André Gaszó, Niklas Gudowsky, Walter Peissl, Gloria Rose, Tanja Sinozic, Mahshid Sotoudeh, Stefan Strauß,
alle Institut für Technikfolgen-Abschätzung (ITA) der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW), Apostelgasse 23, 1030 Wien.
Korrespondierende Autorin: Tanja Sinozic (tanja.sinozic@oeaw.ac.at),
ⓘ *orcid.org/0000-0002-1070-1340*

Die Arbeitsinhalte und -umgebungen werden zunehmend digitalisiert. Welche Folgen lassen sich aus neuen Organisationsformen und Technologien für Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und den einzelnen Menschen abschätzen? Mit diesen Fragestellungen befasste sich die diesjährige TA17 am 19. Juni 2017 in Wien. Die Konferenz war mit 130 TeilnehmerInnen aus der deutschsprachigen TA-Community und WissenschafterInnen aus den Forschungsfeldern Philosophie, Ökonomie, Soziologie, Medienwissenschaften und Betriebswirtschaft besonders gut besucht. Die breite Vielfalt der Perspektiven auf die Digitalisierung des Arbeitsplatzes sorgte für einen umfassenden Überblick über die aktuellen Debatten und stimulierte lebhafte Diskussionen unter den TeilnehmerInnen.

Roboter und Automatisierung am Arbeitsplatz
In seinem Eröffnungsvortrag präsentierte Michael Decker (KIT, Karlsruhe) eine TA-Perspektive auf autonome Systeme unter dem Titel „Im Wettbewerb mit Robotern?". Decker beschrieb Roboter als ein Zusammenwirken unterschiedlicher Technologien, wie Sensoren und Steuerungssoftware. Neue Roboterfähigkeiten konzentrierten sich auf Kognition, Lernen, Autonomie und künstliche Intelligenz. Es sei zu erwarten, dass viele Aufgaben, die derzeit von Menschen durchgeführt werden, in naher Zukunft von Robotern übernommen werden können.

In der zweiten Keynote beschrieb Annika Schönauer (FORBA, Wien) Wege, wie die Digitalisierung die Arbeit verwandelt. Die