CSPO DC - New Tools for Science Policy

Inspirations from European Technology Assessments: Institutions, Practices and Key Debates

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Overview

• **Context:** The story of European TA begins with OTA
• **Aim:** Reversing the perspective – inspirations form European TA
• **Structure:**
  – The European TA Landscape
  – Key Debates
    • Democratization of expertise
    • Politics of TA
    • Relation to RRI
  – Discussion
EUROPEAN TA LANDSCAPE
How familiar are you with European TA, the institutions and activities?

1 – I am interested, but have hardly heard anything about it

2 –

3 –

4 –

5 - I regularly talk with European TA practitioners, attend their conferences, read their papers
TA in Europe
(EPTA network)

Full Members
- EPTA network
- POST
- TAB
- DBT
- OPECST
- STOA
- SPIRAL
- Rathenau
- CAPCIT
- Oficina C

Associate Members
- GPCRT
- TA Swiss
- ITA
- BAS
- Committee for the Future
- Committee for the Future Seimas
TA in Europe
(EPTA network)

Full Members

Associate Members

Cellule Scientifique

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OPECST

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TAB

POST

Committe for the Future

Committe for the Future Seimas

BAS

GPCRT

www.aau.at
• Founded in 1990
• Operated by ITAS/KIT (contract-based)
• Political steering - Committee on Education, Research and Technology Assessment (ABFTA)
• Initiation through any committee or parliamentary group
• Expert-based analyses (often external)
• Review and comments on final reports by TA rapporteur group
• Consensual approval by ABFTA
• TA report - publication of the Bundestag

https://www.tab-beim-bundestag.de/english/topics-and-projects.php
TA in Europe
(EPTA network)

Full Members
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- SPIRAL
- Rathenau
- DBT
- ITA
- TA Swiss

Associate Members
- Tehnologiradet
Rathenau Instituut

- Founded in 1986 by the government
- Attention to the general public and politics - the Upper and Lower House and the European Parliament
- Focus on research and dialogue relating to the societal aspects of STI
- Own research agenda based on work program and third-party requests
- Programme council and board (academia, NGOs, media, etc.)
- Leading in developing and applying participatory methods
- https://www.rathenau.nl/en
TA in Europe
(EPTA network)

Full Members

- SPIRAL
- OPECST
- STOA
- Cellule Scientifique
- OAT

Associate Members

- CAPCIT
- Oficina C

Additional research institutions, think tanks, networks, associations

Committe for the Future
Committe for the Future Seimas
BAS
ERS
Tehnologiradet
TAB
POST
Rathenau
TA Swiss
ITA
GPCRT

www.aau.at
Varieties in Boundary Arrangements

- Organizational embedding
- Access to parliamentary consultation processes
- Freedom and independence in deciding on topics and activities
- Orientation at scientific community
- Emphasis on participation and various publics
- Size and equipment

**Figure 2.2** (Parliamentary) TA between parliament, science & technology, government and society 
Ganzevles & van Est (2012)
Summary European TA landscape

- TA as well-established institution, part. in Western and Northern European countries
- Broad variety of institutions, approaches -> parliamentary expertise and beyond
- Not „untouchable“, risk of losing political support: Abolishment of parliamentary DBT 2011 -> Restructuring in DBT Foundation
- TA in Eastern Europe – weakly institutionalised
Debates

- Democratization of expertise
- The politics of TA
- New governance approaches – Responsible Research and Innovation
DEMOCRATIZATION OF EXPERTISE
“POST sources reliable and impartial scientific research evidence for the UK Parliament”. ([https://post.parliament.uk/about-us/](https://post.parliament.uk/about-us/))

“TA throughout its history has been held suspicious of both, being just another mode of technocratic politics as well as being exactly a democratic antidote to technocracy” (Kehl et al. 2021)

“Two sides of European TA

“The Rathenau Instituut supports the formation of public and political opinion on socially relevant aspects of science and technology. It conducts research on this subject and organises debates on science, innovation, and new technology”. ([https://www.rathenau.nl/en/about-us/what-we-do](https://www.rathenau.nl/en/about-us/what-we-do))
Advancing participatory TA

- TA as part of deliberative turn, leading DBT, Rathenau
- Participatory or deliberative TA as distinct from expert-based TA
- Attention to the ambiguities, contradictions and blind spots of expert knowledge
- Broadening the methodological canon
- Broadening actors involved
- Broadening the function and definition of TA -> mediator in societal debates
Persistent questions

- Purpose of participation: democratization, knowledge, legitimacy – towards pragmatism (Bogner 2021)?
- pTA as democratization or methodological toolbox
- Epistemic validity and hierarchies
- Legitimacy
- Power relations
- Political cultures and structures

http://www.civisti.org
THE POLITICS OF TA
TA as honest broker

- Neutrality as a central narrative in the establishment of parliamentary TA
- TA as honest broker
- Effective boundary management to avoid politicization
Challenges to the neutrality narrative

- **Empirically**: diversity of TA activities and practices – varying distance to politics
- **Paradigmatically**: positivist -> constructivist/reflexive understanding of knowledge, expertise and their politics
- **Politically**: rise of populism and post-truth
“TA has politics“, “TA is politics“

- Clarifying neutrality – redefining neutrality
- Openness and transparency in regards to normative commitments
- Reflecting the ethos of TA: democracy, sustainable development, fundamental rights, (commitment to proper science)
- Recognizing the political role of TA
- TA as „bastion of democratic politics“ in post-truth era (Delvenne & Parotte 2019)
RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
RRI as a new governance concept

- 40 years of TA in Europe -> changing STI governance system, emergence of new tools, concepts, approaches
- 1990s ELSI/ELSA
- 2010s RRI -> EC Framework Programmes

- What relation to TA? What role for TA?
RRI as an area of TA activity

- Defining and refining the concept
- Methodological development and implementation -> societal engagement
- Funding opportunities
- New cooperation partners
- Diffusion of TA ideas (e.g. Eastern Europe)
RRI as a critique of TA

- RRI as a re-appreciation of ethical deliberation and highlighting the ambiguous consultation of stakeholders
- TA has ignored moral ambiguity
- New role of stakeholder participation (van Lente et al. 2017)

RRI as a travesty of TA

- RRI – innovation as a social good, deflects attention from the ‘social bads’ of innovations
- TA could be reduced to the role of a mere provider of ex-ante impact assessments
- RRI – potential endanger for TA institutions in the long term (Delvenne 2017)
Concluding summary

- European TA – inspiration from OTA, not duplication
- Coexistence of various institutions, models and approaches from the outset
- Plurality of modes and activities of TA (expert-TA, participatory TA)
- Coexistence of modernist orientation with more reflexive orientations (politics)
- Varying opportunities and challenges in changing STI governance (RRI)

- Formal legislative TA bodies quite stable over time in institutionalization, modes, activities, paradigms
- Institutionally independent TA institutions – add variety to the modes of TA and drive debates within European TA community, more affected by new tools, concepts
References


References

Thank You!

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