

Workshop

Technology Assessment and Simulation: a Stable Solution or Only Relevant Under Pressure?

Local: RISTEX, Ichigaya, Tokyo (Japan)

When: July 11th 2014

Rational and topics to be addressed:

Technology assessment (TA) as one concept of interdisciplinary problem-oriented research, policy consulting (such as parliamentary TA) and public dialogue, has the goal of supporting society and policy-making by understanding the problems connected to the grand socio-technical challenges of our time, as well as in assessing the available options for managing them. The hope is to identify socially sound, “stable”, resilient and practical ways to deal with these technological challenges.

Within the last third of the 20th century, many countries showed interest in TA and TA-like activities. However, from time to time, these activities feared for their continuation, implementation and consideration in both science and technology research and political processes (e.g. the Office of Technology Assessment in the US, the DBT in Denmark, and the IST in Belgium). Currently, there seems to be an increasing demand in assessing technologies again in the European Union (EU) and in Japan. The EU has recently launched the PACITA project to support European countries with the implementation and formalisation of TA activities. The Japanese MEXT established the SciREX program to start rethinking about science and technology and their impact on society, and RISTEX also initiated a program on Science of Science, Technology and Innovation Policy. They have been discussed on many social issues, for examples, on aging society, on global environmental change and on resilience in social systems. The Fukushima case pushed for more TA studies and the need for a formal TA activity. For example, the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission (NAIIC) formalised a TA activity with direct connection with the national parliament, but there is still no TA unit at the National Diet.

One can observe that the concern for TA and TA-like activities has developed in waves depending on country-specific political circumstances, current frictions within the socio-technical system or resulting from catastrophes/accidents such as Chernobyl or Fukushima. The argument is that TA-like activities are a social response to technological challenges. Institutionalised or not, the capacity to handle technological challenges does imply the attitude to show alternatives in decision-making and to maintain the scientific capacity to reflect on several options. Therefore, it appears relevant to understand the conditions that must be met to establish TA permanently.

The organizers of the workshop would like to invite researchers from Japan and Europe to reflect together on country-specific developments to identify the conditions that must be created to anchor TA in science, politics and society: What are triggers and barriers to establish TA? Can technological accidents / disasters be more than the peak of a (TA) development? Would simulation play a role on foresight for TA? And what can countries with an established (parliamentary) TA learn from those countries that are currently institutionalising TA? The aim of the workshop is to learn about different cultural conditions that have promoted the formation of a reflective science: How important are sustainability, social acceptability, environmental compatibility in interdisciplinary research fields such as energy, mobility or health? Is there an understanding of TA relevant issues?