



3rd European Technology Assessment Conference

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CALL for PAPERS

“The Politics of TA”

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Word Count	Max. 400 words

From its beginnings in the 1970s the concept of TA has been strongly bound to and legitimated by the “neutrality” narrative. Being “a-political” in the sense of restricting itself to the role of a “knowledge broker” and refraining from taking a strong political stance in terms of recommending specific political action has been at the core of TA’s understanding of policy advice – in particular in the context of parliamentary TA. We would like to challenge this self-description by asking “Does TA have politics?”

The concept of neutrality itself has specific implications for the political role of TA. We would like to highlight e.g. the following aspects: Is “neutrality” at all possible? Is it a “regulative” idea and how then is this set into practice in policy advice? Or is it just a legitimacy myth? And how does this “myth” then affect TA’s political workings? Is neutrality indispensable as a core feature of the concept of TA or is it rendering TA a handy instrument of symbolic politics? Are there alternatives to the neutrality idea? Shouldn’t TA play an active role in provoking and pushing a critical societal debate on science and technology, and thus give up the myth of “neutrality”? Can we conceive of “partisan TA” - probably inspired by action research approaches - as a concept of policy advice?

Despite the centrality of the notion of “neutrality” there are other features of the concept and practice of TA which might well be read as indicating an implicit political agenda of TA. One might speak of a particular “TA-Ethos” that can be found in the TA discourse as well as in TA methodologies: What are the political implications of postulates like “Rationality” or “Inclusiveness” that are behind TA’s “scientific” or “participatory” mission? Moreover, there are particular concepts of modernity that TA obviously is related to. 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. This political labelling clearly has had and still has a strong bearing on the process of institutionalising or de-institutionalising TA as policy advice. More recently TA has played a



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central role in promoting and operationalizing the politically-loaded concept of “sustainable development”. Generally one might ask: If TA is implicitly bound to “democratization”, “empowerment”, “environmentalism” or “reflexive modernity”, why then not making this an explicit part of its mission? Or is this just another “myth” that is held by TA’s promoters?

We would like to invite contributions challenging TA’s self-concept and unraveling the “Politics of TA” by exploring these and related questions, e.g. with regard to TA’s historical development, from the perspective of parliamentary TA, from a TA-project management perspective, by reflection on the epistemologies of TA or with a critical view on TA’s mission and achievements from an STS or political science perspective.

Further information: Please send your proposal directly to the sessions’ organizers.
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