
Session D1

Room: Brookfield, Friday 9.30-12.15

Getting the Story across – Challenges and Benefits of Communicating Technology Assessment

Chairs: European TA Communicators(ETAC)

- Christine D'Anna-Huber TA-SWISS, Centre for Technology Assessment
- Henry Lau POST, the British Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology.
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In an era of “post-truth”, communicating research findings and scientific evidence to a broader society is neither trivial nor futile, but can be viewed, maybe more than before, as the social and moral responsibility of science. It might be argued that Technology Assessment, the subject matter of which is the analysis of different kinds of possible technological futures and the ways they can impact society, is intrinsically even more beholden to promote public debates. But to do so, it must be able to communicate its results effectively. How to best communicate science, how to be sure to be heard – and understood? This session proposes to look at the question from three different angles. The first part will analyze in which way and with what means scientific content can be brought across to an interested but non-specialist audience and also dwell on the question of why it is crucial that this translation process should be undertaken at all – for the sake of science as well as that of society and all the institutions involved. This part of the session will lay the fundament for the next two parts which, in turn, will look at two particular and specific cases of communicating TA, each addressing a different target group: People (society and media) and the Parliament (policy makers). The subject matter of Part 2 are participative TA-projects, projects i.e. which aim to involve citizens in a dialogue with scientists, policy-makers and stakeholders. It will show that although these methodologically elaborate projects are often very successful in fostering rich exchanges among participants, yet the complexity of sharing the overall results with the media and a larger public is often underestimated. By neglecting what should be seen as a mandatory component of the success of the whole process, participative TA-projects run the risk of remaining largely self-referential. In the third part we will examine how successful TA is in communicating the results of its studies to policy makers and what kind of impact it can – as one voice in a whole choir of differently motivated evidence providing bodies – wield on legislative processes.