

New Technologies – And Always Keeping an Eye on Society

2014 Annual Reception of KIT Focused on Interactions of Man and Technology



Panel discussion “Reflecting Technology – Shaping Society:” Presenter Markus Brock discussed with Ulla Burchardt, Professor Tanja Schultz, Dr. Stephan Fischer, Christoph Winterhalter, and Professor Armin Grunwald (from left to right; Photo: Sandra Göttisheim).

Autonomous vehicles, silent communication, and automatic simultaneous translation: Scientists of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) develop innovations to support everyday life and enhance the quality of life. And they always keep an eye on their relevance to and their impacts on society. Research relating to the topic of man and technology was in the focus of the fifth Annual Reception of KIT that took place yesterday evening at the Gartenhalle of the Karlsruhe Congress Center.

“Ideally, new technologies serve society and allow for a better life,” said the President of KIT, Professor Holger Hanselka, at the event. “The interactions between man and technology, however, have long since become rather complex. To optimally solve societal problems in science, cooperation of first-class scientists of various disciplines is required. It is our declared objective to concentrate on our research strengths, e.g. in the areas of energy, mobility, and infor-

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mation and communication technologies, and to combine them smartly for the transformation of our energy system. Also in other areas, such as environmental research, we will further sharpen our research profile.”

Hanselka added that nowadays, it is more important than ever to consider the consequences of technical developments for society. He emphasized that the KIT Humans and Technology Center analyzes these important issues for the future. Here, 420 scientists of various disciplines, from engineering to natural sciences to the humanities, pool their competences. “This is the only way to master the challenges.”

For the KIT, the Presidential Committee has formulated a ten-step program: The first step was the implementation of a clear organizational structure for the entire KIT as a basis of strategic further development. Hanselka added that also research-based teaching at all KIT locations will gain importance. “It will be strategically important to optimally position the KIT for international competition.”

Technology assessment has a long tradition at the KIT: The Office for Technology Assessment with the German Parliament (TAB) has been run by KIT’s Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) since 1990. This office has become one of the most renowned technology assessment institutions worldwide.

Assessment of potential impacts and imponderabilities of technical developments by the TAB, from the internet of things to the complete blackout, also was in the focus of the keynote speech “Mensch, Maschine! Innovation braucht mehr als Technik” (Man and Machine! Innovation Needs More than Technology) by Ulla Burhardt, contract lecturer of TU Dortmund and long-time chairperson of the Commission for Education, Research, and Technology Assessment of the German Parliament. “Technology developments as such are neither good nor bad. Whether they can be turned into innovations depends not only on developers and engineers, but also on whether customers and citizens see a benefit or a risk,” Burhardt said.

Are robots a help in the care of the elderly or are they inhuman? Can we do without a good educational background just because of Google? What are the objectives and impacts of Industry 4.0? Potential consequences of new technologies were discussed by presenter Markus Brock and the participants in the panel discussion “Reflecting Technology – Shaping Society”. These were experts from industry and science, namely, Christoph Winterhalter, Head of



*The President of KIT, Professor Holger Hanselka
(Photo: Sandra Göttisheim).*

Product Group PLC & Automation of the ABB Group and Member of the Board of the VDI/VDE Society for Measurement and Automation, Dr. Stephan Fischer, Senior Vice President TIP Strategic Innovation of SAP AG and spokesman of the software excellence cluster, KIT Professor Tanja Schultz, Head of the Cognitive Systems Lab of KIT and Google Research Award winner, and Professor Armin Grunwald, Head of the KIT Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS).

During the Annual Reception, President Holger Hanselka handed over the KIT Innovation Awards. The first prize in the category of Competition of Ideas was won by Dr. Ute Schepers and Professor Stefan Bräse. With their project for the early recognition of malign melanoms, they won over 40 competitors. Professor Steffen Grohmann, Andreas Janzen, and Andreas Ebersoldt were granted the Transfer Project Special Award.

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is a public corporation according to the legislation of the state of Baden-Württemberg. It fulfills the mission of a university and the mission of a national research center of the Helmholtz Association. Research activities focus on energy, the natural and built environment as well as on society and technology and cover the whole range extending from fundamental aspects to application. With about 9000 employees, including nearly 6000 staff members in the science and education sector, and 24000 students, KIT is one of the biggest research and education institutions in Europe. Work of KIT is based on the knowledge triangle of research, teaching, and innovation.

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