

At the Interface of Technology and Society

At KIT, Experts in Technology Assessment (TA) and Systems Analysis Have a Long Tradition. Their Institute, ITAS, now Celebrates Its 20th Anniversary



The ITAS office in the city center of Karlsruhe. (Photo: ITAS / Bernardo Cienfuegos)

Engineers develop technology. Sociologists and philosophers analyze man and society. This strict separation of disciplines is a thing of the past. Non-technical views of technologies and their interactions with man and society are gaining importance. At KIT, the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) assumes a pioneering role in this area. It considers its central task to be the investigation of scientific-technical progress for advising politics, industry, and society. On November 26 and 27, 2015, the members of the Network TA (NTA) will meet in Karlsruhe to celebrate the 20th anniversary of ITAS.

How can citizens participate in the transformation of the energy system or make their district more sustainable together with researchers? Which governance methods create transparency and understanding in the search for a nuclear repository? What may future cooperation of robots and humans be like? Is energy production from algae sustainable over the complete lifecycle of the facilities? What makes offers for online participation in parliamentary work attractive? These and many other questions are studied by ITAS in interdisciplinary teams, consisting of philosophers, engineers, soci-

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ologists, economists, and natural scientists. “Our work covers a large range of topics,” Armin Grunwald, who has been heading the Institute since 1999, says. “Common features of all projects are systemic view, thinking in alternatives, reflection of future scenarios, and consideration of various perspectives in advising and assessing processes.”

In 1995, ITAS emerged from the Department for Applied Systems Analysis (AFAS) of Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe. Today, it is part of KIT. The Institute initially headed by Herbert Paschen has succeeded in constantly increasing its number of employees (it more than tripled from 35 to more than 120 today) and its visibility. ITAS has made its area of work, technology assessment, grow out of its niche existence. Today, the Institute is involved in more than ten EU projects and maintains close relations to a number of international cooperation partners in e.g. China, the USA, and Latin America. ITAS issues the journal “Technikfolgenabschätzung – Theorie und Praxis (TATuP, Technology Assessment – Theory and Practice), a central publication for the TA community. In the Helmholtz Association, ITAS Head Armin Grunwald has been spokesperson of the “Technology, Innovation, and Society” (TIS) Programme since 2009. In 2012, ITAS started the ENERGY-TRANS Helmholtz Alliance, the biggest project funded by third parties so far. All four research areas of the institute participate in ENERGY-TRANS and analyze the society’s requirements associated with the transformation of our energy system.

Inspired by the Opportunities at KIT

“Systems analysis and technology assessment cover a variety of topics and, in principle, rely on close cooperation with partners,” Grunwald says. “Establishment of KIT was a stroke of luck for us and has been inspiring our work to this very date.” ITAS can accompany technical innovations in early conception and development stages, such as the development of the bioliq plant on Campus North for the large-scale conversion of straw and residual wood into fuels of the second generation, or support by systems analysis and innovation research the development of a cement production process with low CO₂ emissions within the Celitement project. In addition, ITAS is involved in education activities on Campus South and profits from the young scientists. Since the Institute has moved to its new office in the Karlsruhe city center in 2012, citizens as well have the opportunity to become more involved in the research activities of ITAS, through e.g. the series of lectures “technik.kontrovers.”

Advising Politics in Germany and Europe

“In our opinion, it is the responsibility of science to render advising services in a reflected and knowledge-based manner, in particular to politics,” Grunwald explains. In 1990, the Office of Technology Assessment with the German Parliament (TAB) was established. Since then, TAB has been an independent scientific institution advising German Parliament and its committees on matters relating to scientific-technical change, the objective being to inform the members of Parliament about alternative action options. These national activities are continued on the European level: Since 2005, the “European Technology Assessment Group” (ETAG) coordinated by ITAS advises the European Parliament on social, economic, and environmental aspects of new technological and scientific developments.

NTA Annual Conference

The members of the “Network TA” (NTA), a consortium of German, Austrian, and Swiss TA institutions, will meet on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of ITAS at the office of ITAS in Karlsruhe (Karlstraße 11) on November 26, 2015. The workshop on “Institutional Settings” of TA institutions of the network will be followed by an evening reception. On the next day, November 27, 2015, the international workshop “Technology and Work from a TA Perspective” will take place.

Representatives of the media are cordially invited.

For program details, click:

www.itas.kit.edu/veranstaltungen_2015_nta-jahrestreffen

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is a public corporation pursuing the tasks of a Baden-Wuerttemberg state university and of a national research center of the Helmholtz Association. The KIT mission combines the three core tasks of research, higher education, and innovation. With about 9,400 employees and 24,500 students, KIT is one of the big institutions of research and higher education in natural sciences and engineering in Europe.

Since 2010, the KIT has been certified as a family-friendly university.

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