

EUROPTA Project

European Participatory Technology Assessment

Participatory Methods in Technology Assessment and Technology Decision-Making

Abstract

From March 1998 to December 1999, the EUROPTA project "Participatory Methods in Technology Assessment and Technology Decision-Making" was carried out on the issue of participatory technology assessment (PTA). The project received funding from the European Commission (Directorate General XII), TSER Programme. It was co-ordinated by the Danish Board of Technology (Denmark) and included partners from Austria, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and an associated partner from Switzerland.

Technology assessment (TA) traditionally have an analytical approach with the aim to "speak truth to the power". Since the eighties, PTA has been established with the aim of "finding solutions together" or "generating dialogue". There has been an increasing call for PTA world-wide. In this situation, the project was prompted by a relative lack of relevant theoretical and empirical analysis.

The overall aim of the project was to advance the understanding of the role of PTA by critically assessing the experiences to date of different European national participatory initiatives, to identify criteria for the practical implementation of participatory methods, and to contribute to the development of participatory methods and practices in technology assessment.

The project pursued three key objectives:

- 1) develop a theoretical and analytical framework on the role and function of PTA, as a basis of normative-conceptual discussion and empirical analysis.
- 2) characterise and compare 16 participatory arrangements in the countries involved, allowing for the study of a broad range of methods, as well as of comparable projects.
- 3) make recommendations about the use of PTA at a national as well as a (European) transnational level.

The policy recommendations made by the EUROPTA project support the following tasks:

- 1) To understand and implement PTA as a necessary methodological complementary to traditional TA, when a need for knowledge on public attitudes, social learning, critical (public) discourse, mediation and/or policy support with processes and input is found.
- 2) To support independent national implementation of PTA, with remit and a position to build up expertise in and perform participation. To diffuse participation to other areas.
- 3) To ensure improvement and diffusion of PTA methodology, and the conservation of well functioning procedures. To make use of known expertise and experience.
- 4) To achieve optimal method selection by comprehensive problem situation analysis.

Further needed activities supporting the EUROPTA objectives are:

- 5) Establish further research concerning:
 - a) Quality criteria relating to the outcomes of participatory technology assessment;
 - b) Development of impact evaluation tools and characterisation of impacts of PTA;
 - c) Comparative analysis of aims, function and impacts of classical *versus* participatory TA.
- 6) Transnational (European) implementation of PTA:
 - a) Pan-European PTA. Modify existing methods with pan-European citizen/expert panels.
 - b) Simultaneous PTA among EU member states, aggregated at European level.
- 7) The EUROPTA project should be seen as a starting point for additional activities, including:
 - a) Running dissemination and training seminars on the EUROPTA research outcomes;
 - b) Developing a methodology handbook on participatory TA;
 - c) Setting up a participatory TA network