Parliamentary Technology Assessment around the world compared & the case of ITA

Parliamentary Seminar on
“Discussing a proposal for the creation of a Parliamentary Sub-committee for the Future”
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Parliamentary Technology Assessment (incl. Foresight)

• is a concept developed in the 1970s, first PTA institution:
  Office of Technology Assessment of the US Congress (1972-1995)
• PTA spread to Europe in the 1980s:
  France, UK, Germany, EU, Denmark, …
• From 2000s onwards also beyond Europe:
  Japan, Mexico, Chile, US again, …
• Today all PTA institutions (one per country) are members of the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment network (EPTA)
• Full members: regularly working for their Parliaments
• Associates: either outside Europe or still developing into full members
  (22 members, of which 12 are full members)
Members and observers in Europe

- PACE (assoc.)
- EP (full)

Associate members and observers in the world
These PTA institutions vary a lot

- They fit the political culture, institutional landscape, size of the country etc.
- They develop over time: PTA is dynamic
- A recent systematic comparison of the EPTA members showed variations in the following overall dimensions:
  - Forms of institutionalisation
  - Topics addressed
  - Working methods
  - Handling of TA results in parliament

Forms of institutionalisation

- Parliamentarians as addressees or rapporteurs
- Entity within parliament or outside
- Responsibility within parliament
- Case-by-case funding/commissioning or framework contract
- Focus on parliament or open contracting structure
- Legal status
Topics addressed

• Identifying topics
• Technology reference
• Thematic time horizon

Working methods

• 'TA secretariat' or 'in-house TA'
• Methods applied
• Staffing and budget
Handling of TA results in parliament

- Written communication
- Oral presentation and discussion

Typical PTA institutional models

- Committee model
- Scientific unit inside Parliament model
- External contractor model
The „Committee for the Future“ type

- Two current examples: Finland and Chile
- Thematically not restricted to socio-technical issues, but much wider “future in general”
- Focus on foresight rather than on technology assessment
- …

The Institute of Technology Assessment (ITA)

- founded in 1988
- approx. 25 staff
- interdisciplinary team: both humanities, social sciences and natural sciences and engineering
- part of the Austrian Academy of Sciences
- financed by Academy budget and by third parties on a project basis (European Union, research funds, government, parliament, …)
  oeaw.ac.at/ita/en/
Clients of ITA

- Executive/Administration
  - Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development
  - Federal Ministries of Innovation and Technology, Research, Environment, Health, ...
  - EU Commission (in particular via FP)
- Legislative
  - Austrian Parliament
  - European Parliament (STOA Panel)
- Social partners
  - Federal Chamber of Labour
  - Economic and Social Council
- Research funds (national/International)
- OECD and other international organisations
- Internal funds for basic research

Some of ITA’s current topics

- Ageing and Technology
- Big data
- Cyberscience
- E-democracy
- Engineering Education
- Green Biotechnology
- Industry 4.0
- Information Society
- Nanotechnology
- Networked Environments
- Participatory Methods
- Privacy

- Safety and Security
- Smart Grids, Smart Meters
- Surveillance
- Sustainable Cities
- Synthetic Biology
- Technology and Sustainability
- Technology Controversies
- Technology Foresight
- Politics of Information Technologies
- Transdisciplinarity
- Web 2.0
ITA in comparison to other TA units

- academic focus
- large independent mother institution
- so far indirect links to politics
- large share of third-party financing
- middle-sized
- both expert-oriented and participatory
- in-house research (not a "TA secretariat")
- both national and international orientation

The ITA and the Austrian Parliament

- International tender → Framework contract 2017-2020
- Together with a partner (AIT Austrian Institute of Technology)
- Regular monitoring reports (twice per year) on socio-technical developments to be discussed in Parliament
  - Current report presents 30 topics, from blockchains to functional food
- Short TA studies (1-3 per year) to deepen the preliminary research in the monitoring reports
- Possibly and occasionally expert workshops on specific topics on the parliamentary agenda
Thank you for your attention!

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