

Participatory TA – status and future from a practitioners perspective

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Participatory technology assessment has for long been established as an important section of tools in the TA toolbox.

The assets of this section are connected to the possibility of providing knowledge about the rationality behind public opinion on technological issues, to expand the knowledge-base into the private and local reality, to receive democratically legitimate value-based assessments and judgments, and in some situations to empower the participants. The participatory method does this authentically, whereas research based approaches to the same content do it via the researcher as an interpreter - and in a political setting that is a difference that matters. pTA can be said to place the role of the 'assessor' into the public space – whereas research based TA places the assessor role in science, stakeholder involvement places it in the club of corporatists, and parliamentarian based TA places it among the elected. Likewise, on other dimensions pTA should be seen as a complementary, rather than as a competing approach to TA. There are no signs of fatigue of the pTA tools - quite the contrary. This is not reasoned in the pTA tools being better than other tools - rather in the combination of them being just as good as other tools, and the fact that policy-making increasingly has to deal with wicked problems, which demand societally negotiated political answers.

During the last ten years pTA has moved from the national scene to the international and global scene. This may be interpreted as a function of a quality of pTA, which other TA approaches cannot deliver - they always contribute a little bit to filling up democratic vacuum. pTA is still developing, the praxis is being spread across institutions, nations and cultures, so it is reasonable to assume that not alone has it come to stay - it will even take up more space in the TA toolbox in the future.