



Participatory Technology Assessment: A Bridge between Science and Society

by
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The Swiss Center for Technology Assessment **TA-SWISS...**

- is affiliated to the Swiss Science and Technology Council
- has a mandate to support (political) decision making related to new technologies

The Swiss Center for Technology Assessment

TA-SWISS...

- evaluates technologies using "classical" TA studies involving scientific analysis and expert discussions (interdisciplinary studies)
- evaluates technologies by participative methods (PubliForum, publifocus, etc.) involving the general public
- communicates its results to decision makers and to the general public

Our objectives are . . . (1)

- to provide scientific reliable, interdisciplinary studies for target groups in order to improve public debate
- to initiate a debate about technology at a pre-political level
- to support political decision-making by providing reliable, prospective and independant TA materials

Our objectives are . . . (2)

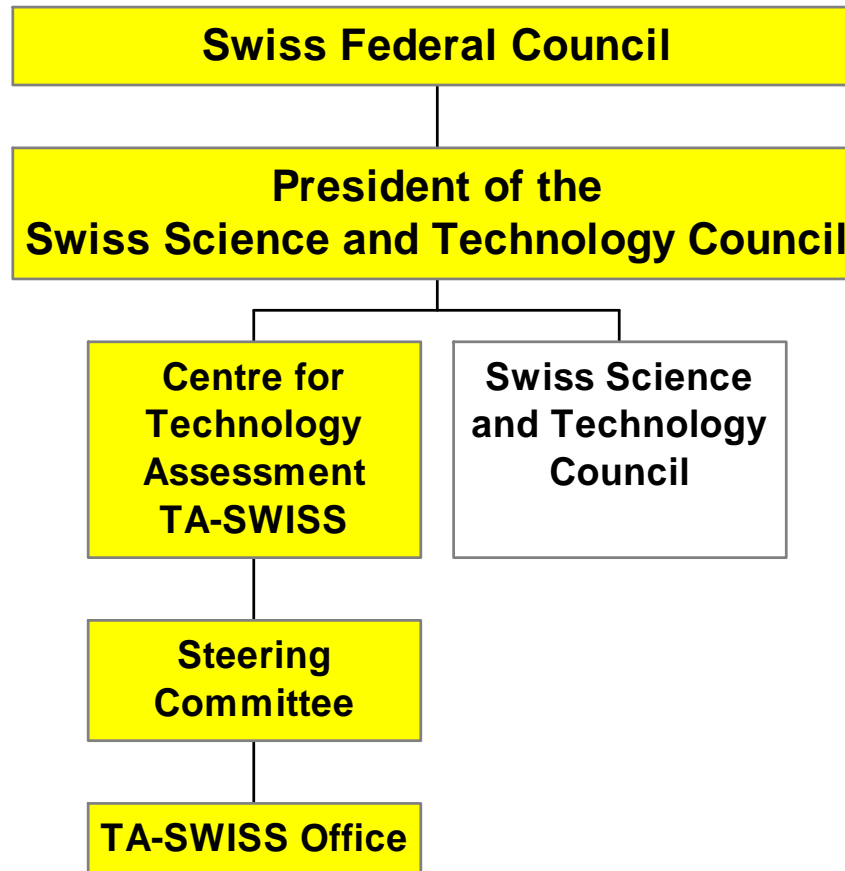
- to create platforms for a mutual dialogue between various groups by establishing participative forums (PubliForum, publifocus, PubliTalk)
- to enhance responsibility in R&D
- to strengthen national and international TA-networks



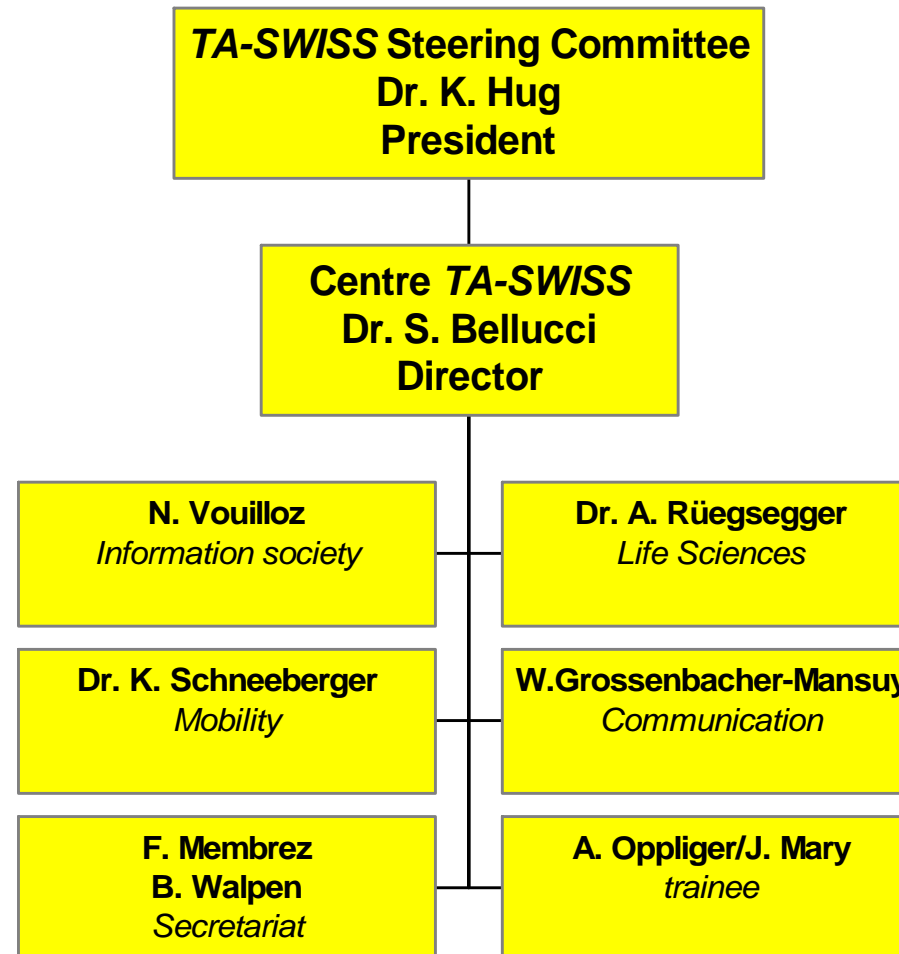
Our vision is . . .

- to seek public acceptance as reliable, prospective and independant TA centre (national and international)
- to facilitate the dialogue between the scientific community and society at large on controversial issues
- to integrate participatory TA in policy-making processes on science and technology issues (e.g. through parliamentary hearings)
- to become a useful and reliable partner for Swiss universities and universities for applied sciences

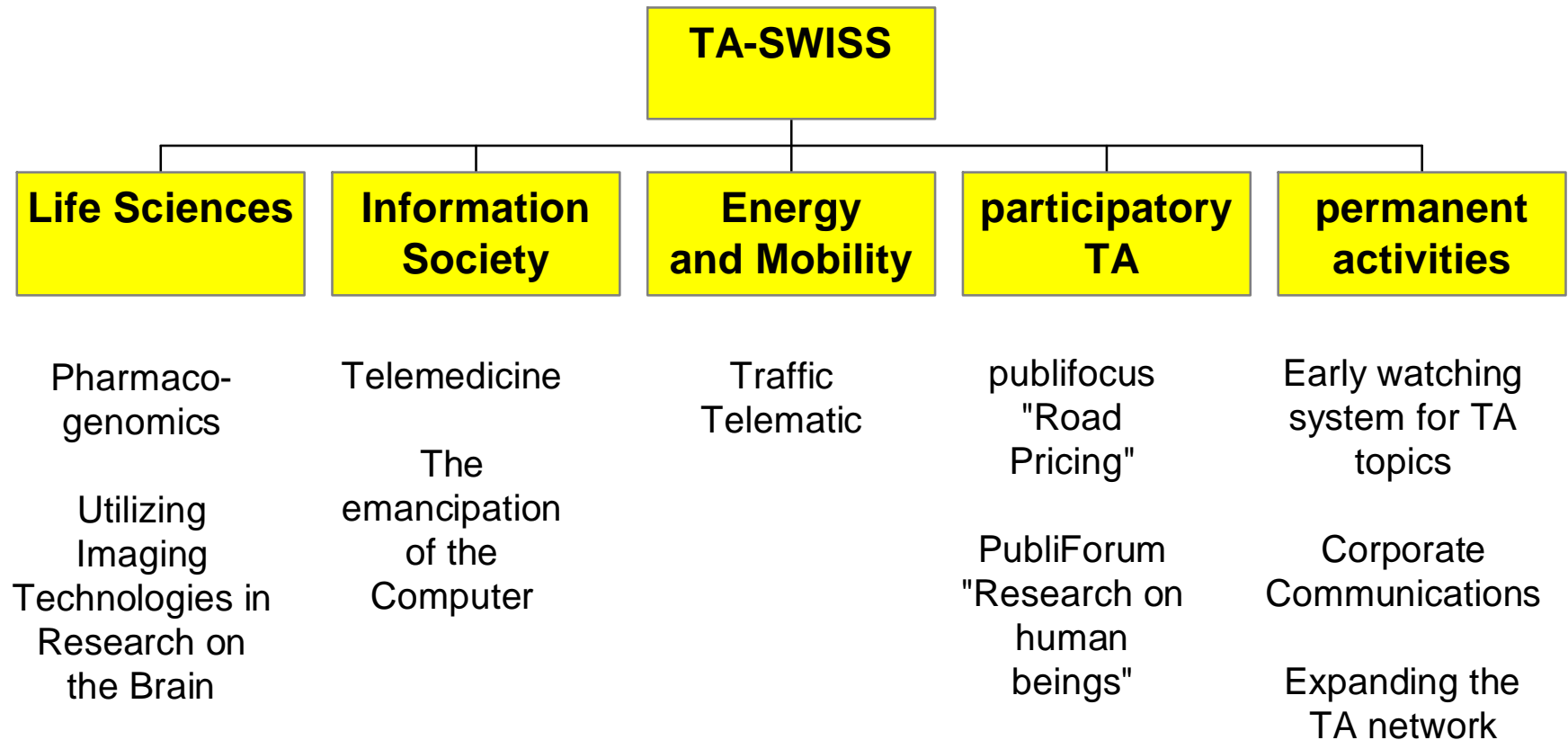
Organisation TA-SWISS



Internal Organisation



Overview of TA Activities in 2004



TA highlights in the past

Life Sciences

- TA-study «Functional Food»
- TA-study «Human stem cells»
- TA-study «Xenotransplantation»
- TA-study «Gene therapy»
- TA-study «Nanotechnology»

Information Society

- TA-study «Computer-based Patient Records»
- TA-study «The Transparent Customer»
- TA-study «Pervasive Computing»
- TA-book «Internet - Schöne neue Welt»

participatory TA

- PubliForum «Transplantation Medicine»
- PubliForum «Genetic Engineering and Nutrition»
- publifocus «Human stem cells»

Mobility

- TA-study „Technology Assessment and Transport“

Criteria for Selecting Topics

- Relevance, in view of:
 - pending political decisions
 - current research activities
- Degree of controversy involved
- Impact (number of people affected) of the probable consequences of a given technology
- Availability of foreign studies
- Possible synergies with other activities of scientific or administrative bodies

Preconditions for Successful TA

- Transparency
- Institutional independence
- Timely identification of topics and issues

Success Factors for TA

- Institutional Setting of TA Organisation
- Credibility
- Communication



TA-Products (1)

- **TA-Reports**
 - scientific reports
 - short versions
 - citizen reports
 - fact sheets
- **participatory TA**
 - PubliForums
 - publifocus
 - PubliTalk

TA-Products (2)

- **TA-Events and communication**
 - meetings with politicians
 - public conferences
 - media conferences
 - web-site
 - newsletter

The PubliForum



PubliForum: Definition

The PubliForum is a process involving about 30 lay citizens selected from the general public where they can:

- obtain information on a particular topic
- select experts and take part in an active dialogue with them
- formulate recommendations and include them in the citizen report



PubliForum: the preparation

Constitution of the citizens panel

- invitation sent to about 10'000 persons (randomly selected)
- selection of about 30 persons according to socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, region, education)

Fact sheets for the citizens panel

PubliForum: The main steps

Two preparatory week-ends

- basic information on the issue
- definition of the questions
- choice of experts

PubliForum (4 days)

- dialogue between lay panel and experts
- the lay panel writes a report
- the lay panel presents the report + discussion

PubliForum: results

Recommandations for decision-makers (in politics, public administration, industry and research) on :

- the general public's preferences,
- their understanding of the problem,
- their hopes and fears
- etc.



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PubliForum: Particularities

- Enables the general public to be drawn into the debate on controversial technologies at an early stage
- Fosters dialogue between the general public and the experts, contributes to an informed public debate
- Provides the population with a platform to express their expectations and concerns

Many PubliForums

- 1998** « Electricity and Society »
- 1999** « Genetic engineering and Food »
- 2000** « Transplantation medicine »
- 2004** « Research involving human beings »

publifocus: Definition

A series of discussions among citizens, modeled on «focus groups»:

- Structured discussions based on prepared questions
- Dialogue conducted exclusively among citizens (randomly selected or among those persons directly concerned)
- The organizers analyze the discussions (opinions, arguments) and publish a report

publifocus: Preparations

Recruitment of participants

- By mail (randomly sent out invitations)
- Via chosen organizations

Documentation for the participants

- Approx. 10 Information fact-sheets

Selection of one or two experts for an introduction to the topic

- Broad view
- Independent and neutral

publifocus: Procedure

Between 4 and 6 discussion groups

- In the different linguistic regions of Switzerland
- about 15 participants in a discussion group
- Introductory briefing followed by an approx. 2-hour discussion
- Discussion led by a moderator

Editing and subsequent publication of a report

- Assignment given to a professional editor

publifocus: Particularities

- Facilitates a compilation of contrasting and well-thought-out opinions on aspects of technology
- Possibility of comparing different population groups

publifocus: Results

Transmits to the decision-makers (politicians, administration, research, industry, etc.) quality information concerning:

- The opinions and the values of the population
- Typical supporting arguments put forth

Two publifoci, soon a third

Past

- Stem cell research (spring 2002)
- In-vitro fertilization (spring 2003)

Future

- Road pricing (2004)

PubliTalk –Research on human beings Aims and Objectives

- Learning how young people think about certain aspects of research on human beings
- Raising the awareness of youth and young adults for what the forthcoming Federal Law will say
- Publication and dissemination of a comprehensive report

PubliTalk – Procedure

1. Preparations (documentation, preliminary interviews, formulation of the questions)
2. Introduction with basic information
3. Discussion in 2 working groups; summary minutes drawn up by the youth
4. Presentation of the results in plenary meeting

PubliTalk – The Method

- Focus is on youth
- Introduced with a concrete case
- Experts provide background information
- Discussion in working groups
- Presentation and discussion of the results in a plenary meeting
- Summary report compiled by the organizers

PubliTalk – Results

Conclusionsb

- Youth/teachers applaud PubliTalk
- Youth are willing to participate in experiments provided there is: comprehensive information, independent consultative body

Impacts of participatory TA projects (I)

PubliForum « Electricity and Society »

- Contributed to the promotion of a new kind of dialogue between science and society

PubliForum « Genetic engineering and food »

- The results have been mentionned in the Parliament (in commission and in the plenum), when the Federal Law on genetic engineering was discussed.

Impacts of participatory TA projects (II)

PubliForum on Transplantation medicine

- Integration of the recommendations in the Federal Council's submission to parliament on the Federal Law on Transplantation
- Application by the St. Gall cantonal hospital for the setting-up of a department for the psychological care of those involved in a transplant

Impacts of participatory TA projects (III)

PubliForum on Transplantation medicine

- TA-SWISS has been invited to present the results of the PubliForum to the Commission on Social Security and Health of the Assembly of States

Publifocus on stem cells

- Part of the civil-society debate organized by the Foundation Science et Cité on stem cells (2002)

Impacts of participatory TA projects (IV)

Publifocus on in-vitro fertilization

- The Federal Administration is to take the results into consideration when deciding whether in-vitro fertilization is to be covered by the obligatory medical insurance policy or not

PubliForum on research involving human beings

- TA-SWISS will be invited to present the results to the relevant parliamentary commission.

Role of participatory methods

Wide range of possible political roles

- Early introduction of a theme into the political agenda
- Definition of objectives
- Evaluation of various options
- etc.

Indirect Roles also possible

- Fostering dialogue between science and society
- Raising consciousness of technology's social aspects