

# EPTA Practitioners' meeting 2018

June 13-15th, Bergen aan Zee, the Netherlands



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## Preface

What is the role of scientific policy advice in our present day, high-tech society? This question can be heard all across Europe, and is particularly on top of the minds of our colleagues from the various technology assessment institutes. This report of EPTA's Practitioners' meeting teaches us that here are many answers, which shouldn't come as a surprise since our continent is famous for its diversity and hence no two European countries are the same. It also shows the importance of asking this question time after time, since technology changes so rapidly, and consequently our societies do as well.

In this report we'll present you with the main messages of the presentations and the outcomes of the discussions during this recent meeting. They are of great value to all practitioners, and there are some valuable lessons I'd like to share with you here.

First of all, it would be good if we all take sharp notice of the reports that are being published by our colleague institutions. They offer valuable insights, and even if the local situation might be different from the one in our own country, we can still find inspiration and gain insight by reading each other's work. Secondly, it is always important to reflect on the methods being used and make sure they are up to date, aligned to the most current practice and insights. And finally, it is of eminent importance to always respect the national context, while looking for clear messages that policy makers, politicians and the public can relate to, without making actual choices for them.

It has been an honour and a pleasure to host this year's EPTA's Practitioners' meeting and I would like to thank everyone for their input, insights and participation. I'm sure that this report will help you to gain valuable knowledge even if you weren't able to attend yourself and I would like to encourage you to share this report extensively.

**Dr Melanie Peters**

Director, Rathenau Instituut

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# Introduction

From June 13<sup>th</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup> 2018 the Rathenau Instituut organized the 13<sup>th</sup> EPTA Practitioners' meeting in Bergen aan Zee, the Netherlands. A practitioners' meeting is a three-day meeting for professionals working for technology assessment (TA) institutes around Europe. The idea is to exchange ideas and experiences in order to learn from each other in an informal and cheerful atmosphere. Full members, associate members and (European) observers of the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment (EPTA) network were invited to take part in the meeting.

The venue of the meeting was hotel Nassau Bergen in Bergen aan Zee. 29 TA practitioners, representing twelve organisations from eleven countries, actively took part.

The meeting in Bergen aan Zee honours a long tradition. Previous practitioners' meetings were held in Schiermonnikoog (the Netherlands, 1998), Drosendorf (Austria, 2000), Emmental (Switzerland, 2002), Stuivenskerke (Belgium, 2004), United Kingdom (2006), Sjusjøen (Norway, 2008), Berlin (Germany, 2010), Lisbon (Portugal, 2012), Sofia (Bulgaria, 2013), Vilnius (Lithuania, 2013), Prague (Czech Republic, 2014) and Burg Schlaining (Austria, 2015).

This report gives an overview of the main features and the central theme of the practitioners' meeting (Ch. 1) as well as the programme of the meeting (Ch. 2), the main findings of the presentations and discussions during the meeting – including 'tops' and 'tips' – (Ch. 3), and the participants (Ch. 4).

# 1 Features and central theme Practitioners' meeting

## 1.1 Features of the meeting

During the three-day meeting, TA practitioners from European technology assessment institutes gathered to present and discuss the various ways their institutes bring TA into practice.

They did so by:

- giving presentations on theoretical and practical insights on what it means to bring TA into practice;
- working together in small groups on TA topics and methods;
- exchanging ideas and experiences in order to learn from each other;
- experiencing the various ways in which TA institutes operate within different national contexts;
- learning to balance research, policy advice and communication;
- looking forward to the new challenges the field of TA is facing;
- socialising and having fun together!

## 1.2 Central theme of the meeting

The central theme of the meeting was *Technology Assessment in a Changing Socio-political Context*.

Relevant issues in this respect are:

- How do we operate within a (mostly national) socio-political context that is characterised by more or less conflicting interests?
- How do we cope with this variety of interests in our research and policy advice?
- In which roles do we act: neutral knowledge-brokers, facilitators, agenda-setters, ...?
- Do we aim at having impact on the policy agenda and the policy debate – and if so, is this possible without taking a position on the topic in question?
- Is it possible to maneuver in such a way 'in between' the different political and societal interests that our project findings, conclusions and recommendations have relevance for the policy process without compromising our impartiality?



- How does the rising popularity of 'fact-free' and 'post-truth' politics, that increasingly becomes part of the political landscape, affect TA and how can we relate to it?



Hotel Nassau Bergen, Bergen aan Zee

## 2 Programme meeting

**Wednesday, June 13<sup>th</sup> 2018**

**11:00 – 13:00** Transfer from Schiphol airport to the venue

**13:00 – 14:00** Lunch

**14:00 – 15:00** **Welcome and introduction by Geert Munnichs, Timo Maas and Magda Smink (Rathenau Instituut)**

**15:00 – 15:30** **Presentation by Geert Munnichs (Rathenau Instituut)**  
*Revisiting 'The Honest Broker' – A general framework for scientific policy advice*

**15:30 – 16:00** **Presentation by Leo Capari and Daniela Fuchs (ITA)**  
*Beyond tornado and abortion: reflecting on specific project constellations and relating TA practice – a report from Pol[ITA]*

**16.00 – 16.15** Coffee and tea break

**16:15 – 17:15** **Group discussions** on the presentations

**17:15 – 18:00** **Plenary discussion** on the main findings  
Moderation by Magda Smink (Rathenau Instituut)

**19:00** Dinner at the hotel



**Thursday, June 14<sup>th</sup> 2018**

- 9.00 – 9.30**    **Presentation by Catherine Pugin, Christina Tobler and Elise Gortchacow (TA SWISS)**  
*Stakeholder involvement at TA-SWISS*
- 9.30 – 10.00**   **Presentation by Joakim Valevatn and Adele Flakke Johannessen (NBT)**  
*Stakeholder involvement – Autonomous vehicles and urban transport*
- 10.00 – 10.15**   Coffee and tea break
- 10.15 – 11.15**   **Group discussions** on the presentations
- 11.15 – 11.35**   **Group statements** as input for plenary discussion
- 11.35 – 12.30**   **Plenary discussion** on the group statements  
Moderation by Åke Refsdal Moe (NBT) and Geert Munnichs (Rathenau Instituut)
- 13.00 – 14.00**   Lunch
- 14.30 – 16.30**   **Dune exploration** (social event)
- 19.00**            Dinner at Strandpaviljoen Noord ([www.strandpaviljoennoord.nl](http://www.strandpaviljoennoord.nl))



A rainy dune exploration on Thursday

**Friday, June 15<sup>th</sup> 2018**

**Before 9.30** Check out from hotel

**9.30 – 10.00 Open Space with 5-minute pitches**

- Åke Refsdal Moe (NBT) on the increasing use of Foresight
- Magda Smink (Rathenau Instituut) on The Smart Idiot Effect
- Mara Almeida (CFCUL) on the Interdisciplinary Genome Editing Network
- Jack Miller (POST) on the use of POSTnotes

**10.00 – 10.30 Group discussions** on the pitches

**10.30 – 10.45** Coffee and tea break

**10.45 – 11.30 Plenary session on possible future directions in the field of TA**

Moderation by Tomas Michalek (SAS) and Timo Maas (Rathenau Instituut).

**11.30 – 13.00 Plenary wrap up: what did we learn? What suggestions for the next practitioners' meeting?**

Moderation by Lenka Hebakova (TC CAS) and Timo Maas (Rathenau Instituut).

**13.00 – 14.00** Lunch

**14.00 – 15.00** Transfer to Schiphol airport

## 3 Presentations and discussions

This chapter describes the main findings of the presentations and discussions during the sessions.

### 3.1 Wednesday, June 13<sup>th</sup> 2018

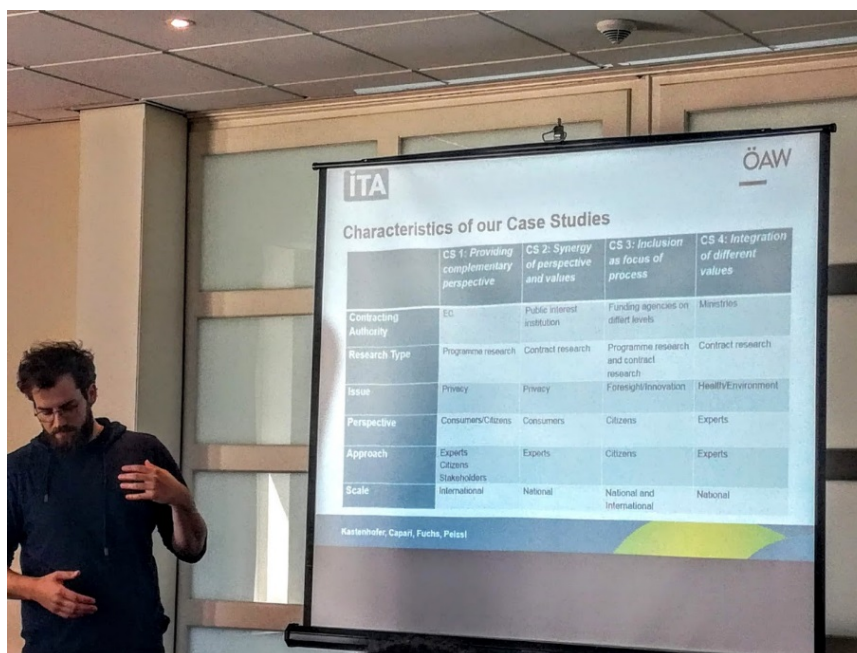
#### Revisiting 'The Honest Broker'

In his presentation, Geert Munnichs (Rathenau Instituut) discussed the role of scientific policy advice in our present day, high-tech society. For this purpose, he referred to the four modes of scientific policy advice as depicted by Roger Pielke in *The Honest Broker*. Pielke distinguishes the Pure Scientist (just sharing knowledge) from the Science Arbiter (responding to specific information needs of policy makers), the Issue Advocate (trying to *reduce* the scope of policy options) and the Honest Broker (*broadening* the scope of policy options). Geert argued that not all TA activities as brought into practice by the Rathenau Instituut can be caught within these four modes – e.g. when providing policy recommendations. Should there be a fifth mode, that acknowledges the normative aspects of doing TA?

During the practitioners' meeting, the modes of scientific policy advice as provided by Pielke and the arguments put forward by Geert in favour of a fifth mode, served as a general frame of reference for the discussions on the nature of 'doing TA'.

#### Reflecting on specific project constellations

Leo Capari and Daniela Fuchs (ITA) presented the main findings of the Austrian Pol[ITA] project. They argued that the precise role of ITA strongly depends on specific project settings like the type of funding, the kind of issues, the method used and the expectations of addressees. Dependent on the context, policy relevant 'options' or 'recommendations' might be provided. So, the practice of policy advice may vary with each project. In order to remain independent, it is important to have a diversity of clients, and to select clients carefully.



Leo Capari (ITA)

### Group and plenary discussions

The discussion in the group and plenary sessions made clear that different TA institutes make different choices when it comes to providing policy advice, depending, amongst others, on differences in socio-political contexts. POST (UK), for instance, presents in its reports the factual state of affairs and highlights policy challenges – while refraining from policy recommendations. Others provide a knowledge base for policymaking, containing policy options. TA-SWISS and NBT go further, by providing policy recommendations – even when dealing with controversial topics.

Most colleagues think that providing policy recommendations is at odds with the 'neutral' position of the Honest Broker. In order to remain independent when providing recommendations – and to be considered as such by the outside world – it is important to be transparent about the main project decisions made. This transparency should also include values underlying the project, such as the sustainable development goals. In most cases these values are broadly adhered to within society.

When involving experts or stakeholders in the project, it is important to have a balanced selection of experts and stakeholders. As expert or stakeholder participation does not necessarily result in consensual project conclusions, a way to remain impartial is to discuss and report the dissensus itself as an import result of the project.

## **3.2 Thursday, June 14<sup>th</sup> 2018**

### **Stakeholder Involvement at TA-SWISS**

The presentation by Catherine Pugin, Christina Tobler and Elise Gortchacow showed that stakeholder involvement is part of TA-SWISS' core business. For starters, the TA-SWISS Steering Committee, consisting of different stakeholders, decides on the projects to be carried out. Secondly, for each project a support group is installed, composed of a well-balanced group of 12 to 15 stakeholders. The role of the support group is to provide expertise and to ensure the quality of the project results. Thirdly, TA-SWISS often makes use of participatory workshops, involving experts as well as citizens and stakeholders. The workshops aim at providing policy recommendations. The TA-SWISS project team reports the main findings of the workshop discussions – from an impartial point of view – , highlighting the similarities and differences between the views of citizens and stakeholders. Finally, the Steering Committee decides on the policy recommendations and publication of the report.

### **Stakeholder involvement at NBT**

Joakim Valevatn and Adele Flakke Johannessen presented findings of an ongoing project on autonomous vehicles and urban mobility. The project deals with potentially controversial issues such as rethinking the transport system, reducing CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions and reducing car ownership. The introduction of new technologies such as self-driving cars might help to reach these targets. The project team organised a stakeholder workshop to discuss the issues. The participants were asked to give individual recommendations with regard to market regulation, data policies and behavioral change. When NBT reported about the workshop, however, the question was raised how to include disagreement about recommendations between stakeholders.

### **Group and plenary discussions**

During the group sessions participants discussed the different ways the various TA institutes deal with stakeholder involvement. Based on the group discussions, each group formulated two statements with regard to stakeholder involvement, that served as input for the plenary session.

The way stakeholders are involved varies between the TA institutes. E.g., for each project POST interviews 20 to 30 experts and stakeholders, although without bringing them together in a meeting. Other TA institutes do make use of expert- and stakeholder workshops, but choose to do so depending on the specific topic and aim of the project. NBT considers stakeholder involvement to be 'the real stuff'.



In order to make stakeholder involvement work, trust is important. For our colleagues from Poland, it is often hard to engage stakeholders, because people generally have low expectations about the impact they can have on policy making. This also means that cultural and societal differences – e.g. between the Western and Eastern European countries – must be considered in our work.



Plenary discussion on Thursday

An important question is how to select stakeholders. Participants weren't able to name clear cut indicators that could be used when selecting stakeholders. It is important to have a 'balanced' stakeholder group. According to STOA this means one should include as many different views as possible. The Rathenau Instituut suggests that all 'relevant' aspects regarding a certain topic should be covered by the selection of stakeholders. One of the statements from the group discussions stressed the importance of being as open and transparent about the selection process as possible. That is the only way to create trust.

Another group statement posed that citizen and stakeholder involvement should have added value from a societal perspective and should 'open the eyes' of politicians. It was generally felt that this is only conceivable when we dismiss the idea of being 'neutral'. That does not mean that TA couldn't be seen as independent. Being neutral is not the same as being independent. But, then, we



should be clear about what we mean by independence. It may mean that, unlike e.g. lobbyists, TA itself has no stake in the topics it is studying.

One of the group statements took it one step further, by stating that it is not possible to remain an Honest Broker 'when the stakes are high', e.g. when dealing with major challenges like climate change. This statement led to different responses. How should we deal with those in denial of climate change who challenge the scientific consensus? And is our 'balancing role' compatible with having influence on the debate?

In line with this, we shortly touched upon the possible implications of 'post-truth' tendencies and how to deal with them from a TA perspective. To what extent are these tendencies reconcilable with the scientific and deliberative reasoning that for many of us is key for doing TA? It should not come as a surprise that we did not reach definitive conclusions on this...

A group statement finally suggested that TA should not restrict itself to providing a range of policy options, but should be able to provide policy recommendations. At this point, the TA institutes differ strongly. Whereas e.g. POST refrains from giving any recommendations, the colleagues from Switzerland, Norway and the Netherlands do provide policy recommendations. But providing policy recommendations doesn't mean actually taking a stand in the political debate. Generally, recommendations are a product of an expert and stakeholder consultation resulting in consensual outcomes. If consensus is not reached, the differences between the viewpoints of the participants should be reported as well. This is also a sign of transparency.



Dinner time!

### 3.3 Friday, June 15<sup>th</sup> 2018

#### **Open Space with 5-minute pitches**

At the Open Space session, the participants got the opportunity to give a short presentation on a subject they thought to be relevant for the TA community. Four colleagues took to the stage and pitched their point:

- Åke Refsdal Moe (NBT) on the increasing use of Foresight
- Magda Smink (Rathenau Instituut) on The Smart Idiot Effect
- Mara Almeida (CFCUL) on the Interdisciplinary Genome Editing Network
- Jack Miller (POST) on the use of POSTnotes.

Thereafter, participants discussed the presentations in groups, with everyone free to choose the topic that was most interesting to them.

There are no minutes of the pitches and the group discussions.

#### **Plenary session on possible future directions in the field of TA**

At the plenary session all participants were invited to suggest new topics and future directions in the field of TA.

#### Artificial Intelligence

Many TA institutes are planning to study the societal impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI), or have started projects in this area already. Because AI may have impact on many subjects, the scope of items is rather broad:

- autonomous vehicles
- autonomous weapons
- face and voice recognition
- future of policing
- dark net
- text mining
- smart cities
- empathic robots
- health care
- education
- virtual reality
- computer modeling as evidence for policy
- public opinion formation
- democracy and echo chambers
- digitising direct democracy
- AI-strategies over the world (EU, US, China)
- algorithmic decision making, transparency and accountability

### Other subjects

Other subjects that were mentioned as TA topics for the next few years are:

- food preservation
- food waste reduction
- antibiotic resistance
- carbon emission and climate change
- circular economy
- sustainability and housing
- pop-up housing
- human brain
- mental health
- DNA-fingerprinting
- DNA-phenotyping
- biometrics
- genome editing
- blockchain
- cybersecurity
- warfare
- re-industrialization
- new space technologies
- feminist technology

TA colleagues agreed that we should be more aware of each other's projects, make use of each other's project results more often and should look for opportunities to collaborate.

One way of knowing each other's work better is to make use of the project information of EPTA members on the EPTA website [eptanetwork.org](http://eptanetwork.org).

### **Plenary wrap up: what did we learn? What suggestions for the next practitioners' meeting?**

At the plenary wrap up all participants could reflect shortly on the added value of the practitioners' meeting ('tops') and were invited to come up with ideas for the next meeting ('tips').

### Tops

The following 'plus points' of the practitioners' meeting were mentioned by the TA colleagues:

- great location, atmosphere and meeting
- getting to know each other (better)
- combination of plenary presentations, group discussions and short pitches
- formulating group statements as main results of group discussions

- pacing of the meeting, with room for informal contacts
- discussion on the Honest Broker, neutrality and impartiality
- topic of stakeholder involvement
- discussion on the ins-and-outs of policy recommendations
- learning about the different approaches of different TA organisations
- building up the TA community.

### Tips

The following ideas for the next practitioners' meeting were suggested by the TA colleagues:

- paying more attention to internal project dynamics and project decisions
- working together on a specific TA method, a specific topic and/or solutions for a specific problem
- how to improve the political impact of TA
- how to collaborate further as a TA community
- more exchange between TA institutes and STOA
- opening up to a wider group of TA-like people
- cultural aspects of doing TA
- socio-cultural differences between Western and Eastern European countries
- Artificial Intelligence as topic

## 4 Participants

Arnold Vonk	Rathenau Instituut
Geert Munnichs	Rathenau Instituut
Isabelle van Elzakker	Rathenau Instituut
Magda Smink	Rathenau Instituut
Michelle Habets	Rathenau Instituut
Tim Jacquemard	Rathenau Instituut
Timo Maas	Rathenau Instituut
Catherine Pugin	TA-SWISS
Christina Tobler	TA-SWISS
Elise Gortchacow	TA-SWISS
Nera Kuljanic	STOA
Christian Kurrer	STOA
Adele Flakke	
Johannessen	NBT
Åke Refsdal Moe	NBT
Hilde Lovett	NBT
Joakim Valevatn	NBT
Alina Betlej	Polish Association for TA
Urszula Soler	Polish Association for TA
Alicia Gutting	ITA
Daniela Fuchs	ITA
Gloria Rose	ITA
Leo Capari	ITA
Lenka Hebakova	TC CAS
Bernd Stegmann	TAB
Jack Miller	POST
Lorna Christie	POST
Pierre Delvenne	SPIRAL
Tomas Michalek	Slovak Academy of Sciences
Mara Almeida	CFCUL University of Lisbon



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