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Technology Assessment as applied ethics of technology in the Czech Republic

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- The idea of the close relationship between technology and ethics has in the Czech and similarly in German intellectual environment its nearly century-old tradition.
- For example, in 1920s in Germany, F. Dessauer emphasized that technology is a cultural phenomenon, closely linked with the ethics.
- At the same time, in our country, J. Fleischner came with his concept of "Technological Culture" or V. Verunáč with his concept of "laboretism". [V. Verunáč 1928]

- The first modern theoretician who dealt with technology from philosophical and ethical points of view was German philosopher Ernst C. Kapp. In 1877, he in his work „Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik“ for the first time boldly linked concepts of philosophy and technology.
- It is clear, however, that in the Czech Republic there is no comparable tradition of philosophy of technology such as for example in Germany. It's one of the reasons why Germany is the „promised land“ for TA.
- In the Czech Republic it is possible to follow up considerable experience with the study of social assumptions and consequences in development of science and technology – STS studies.

- Technology assessment (TA) in its initial concept didn't explicitly reflect normative issues of the technical development.
- It was rather apprehended as a collection of value-neutral knowledge on relationships between technology and society as well as on expected consequences of the technology.
- In the developed countries with institutionalised TA we can observe transition from proclaimed neutrality of assessment to adoption of evaluating attitudes.

- „It turns out that the normative challenges are intrinsically linked with TA and therefore participation of ethics in assessment of technology processes is indispensable.“
[A. Grunwald 1999]
- „Naturally, relevance of ethics in TA can differ in different areas of TA. Nevertheless, now it is generally accepted that ethics of technology and TA are inseparable.“
[C.F. Gethmann 1999]

- It is possible to agree with A. Grunwald, the role of ethics in technology should not be overestimated. [Grunwald 2000]
- The concept of "responsible innovation" is often seen as a bridge connecting TA, applied ethics and STS (Science, technology and society) studies
- The postulate RI adds explicit ethical reflection to TA and Science, Technology and Society Studies (STS) and includes all of them into integrative approaches to shaping technology and innovation. [Grunwald 2011]

- It is not easy to explain the great technological optimism and, at the same time, the lackluster interest of the Czech public in the problems of TA.
- What is missing is probably a sufficiently developed awareness of personal responsibility for development of the concrete form of science and technology. The Czech public takes science and technology as a hardly influenceable matter.
- Experience in developed countries shows that the most effective form is the direct work with the public.

- A significant technological optimism has been proved within the Czech public already in 1995. This optimism results from the relatively high prestige of science and technology in our country.
- In 1995, the public opinion polls in the Czech Republic showed that the low public interest in **active participation** in problem solving of technical development persisted.

[Provazník, S., Machleidt, P. 1998]

- It became also clear that as for solving of urgent social problems, the large section of the public in the Czech Republic continues to hold their passive attitude, and rely on the role of the state.
- The state should (by using science and technology) eliminate social, economic and environmental problems. And all of this should be made with the assistance of experts.
- Survival of the illusion of the “paternal role” of the state has deep roots in the Czech society.

- According to the 2010 Eurobarometer, in general the residents of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Czech Republic and Slovakia were well-disposed towards new technologies.
- On the contrary, the greatest degree of scepticism was measured in Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Greece, Croatia - and surprisingly also in Germany – which was a traditional supporter of technological innovations

- Nuclear energy, according to the 2010 Eurobarometer, came out as the most ambivalent technology. It was supported by only 39 % of respondents from 27 EU countries.
- But 58% of the public in the Czech Republic favoured using of it, which means that the degree of optimism and confidence in nuclear power in the CR was on the highest level all over the Europe.
- The Czech technological optimism also applies to other areas. In the area of genetically modified food is our support (amounting 41%), twice of the average of the EU-27 countries.

- Thus the Czech Republic appears to be in Europe, together with Scandinavian countries, the place of extraordinary enthusiasm for the new technologies .
- The public knowledge of issues in the field of new technologies in the Czech Republic represents rather an average.
- Jan Beránek comments it in his commentary on the 2010 Eurobarometer research both truthfully and jokingly: „The Czechs excel at granting an uninformed consent“.

- Other questions in the Eurobarometer 2010 concerned new technologies; whether decisions on them should be taken rather by scientists (experts), or rather by the public. This question was connected with the problem whether more emphasis is to be put on pragmatic or ethical considerations.
- It turned out that half of the EU 27 citizens was willing to delegate the decision-making to scientists and to decide according to pragmatic criteria, while a quarter of the citizens wanted to participate in decision-making and favoured ethical approach.
- The Czechs along with the Finns and the Dutch (all identically 77%) had the greatest willingness to delegate the decision-making process to scientists; mainly Germans and Austrians wanted to decide themselves.

- It could seem that the important role for TA - to win public for new technologies – does not represent current problem in the Czech Republic.
- As result from the above mentioned facts, the main task in the Czech Republic should be the **information role** of TA.
- And it is also the case of convincing every citizen of the CR about his **personal responsibility** for the future form of technological development.

When will end the technological optimism of the Czech public? So far it looks like an never-ending story...

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