

Parliaments and Civil Society in Technology Assessment



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## Parliaments and civil society in Technology Assessment: Broadening the knowledge base in policy making

PACITA is a four-year EU financed project under FP7 aimed at increasing the capacity and enhancing the institutional foundation for knowledge-based policy-making on issues involving science, technology and innovation, mainly based upon the diversity of practices in Parliamentary Technology Assessment (PTA). The key practices in focus are interactive in the sense that they engage science, civil society organizations, stakeholders, citizens, parliaments and/or governments directly in the activities in order to activate different kinds of knowledge, engage the actors, create common ownership to the results and enhance the communication between the societal actors.

The three main methodological clusters in PTA – expert based methods, stakeholder involvement, and citizen consultations – will be respectively exemplified by 3 cross-European projects:



Public Health  
Genomics



Ageing  
society



Sustainable  
Consumption

TA PORTAL



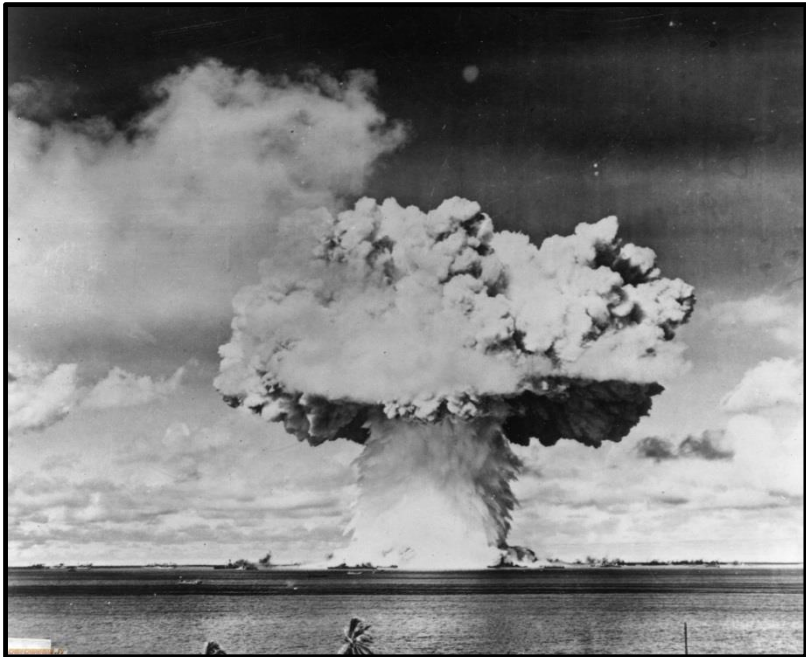
VOLTA MAGAZINE

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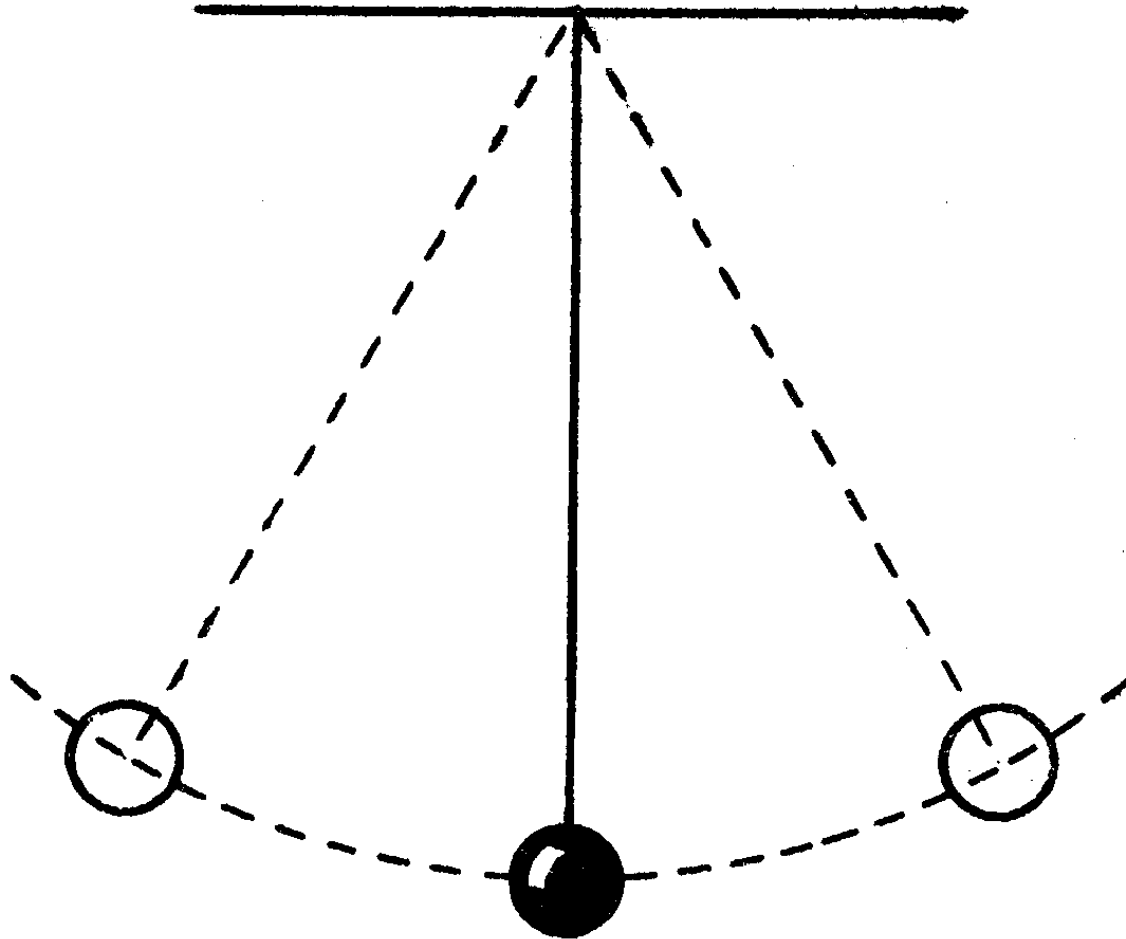
Science, Technology and Society in Europe

**2nd European  
TA conference**  
Berlin, 26 - 27 February 2015





# The story of TA?







# TA – the original view

- «...a form of policy research which provides a balanced appraisal to the policy maker. Ideally, it is a system to ask the right questions and obtain correct and timely answers. It identifies policy issues, assesses the impacts of different courses of action, and presents findings. It is a method of analysis that systematically appraises the nature, significance, status and merit of a technological program.»

# Another example

- «[TA] is a category of policy studies intended to provide decision makers with information about the possible impacts and consequences of a new technology or a significant change in an old technology. ... TA provides decision makers with an ordered set of analyzed policy option, and understanding of their implications for the economy, the environment and the social, political and legal process and institutions of society.»

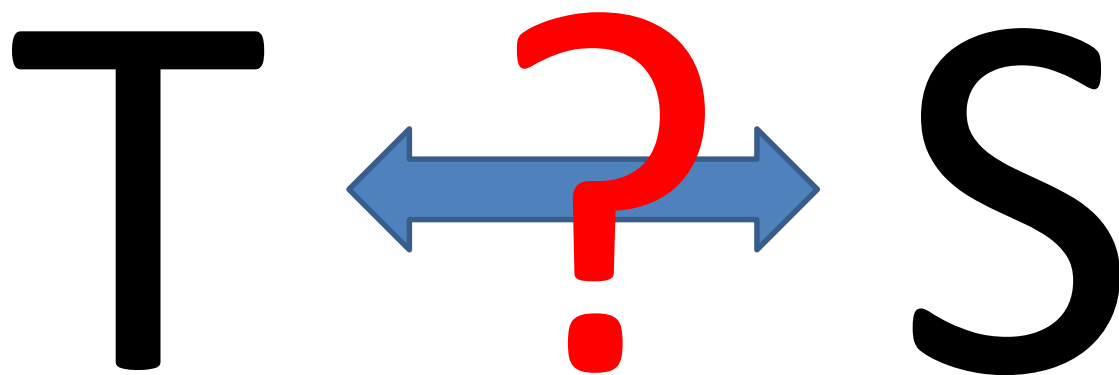
# Core elements of the original view

- A policy tool to improve decision making
- Focused on consequences of technologies
- An academic activity – search for “complete” and “reliable” knowledge

# Critique of the original view

- Undemocratic
- Poor legitimacy of decisions
- Expert knowledge is limited/  
compartmentalized
- Reactive
- ... and technology as autonomous





# Autonomous technology

- Technology has somehow gotten out of control.
- «... in one way or another, far from being controlled by the desires and rational ends of human beings, technology in a real sense governs its own course, speed and destination.»

# How should a bike look?



# Technology as socially constructed

- Technologies evolves through a process of alternation of variation and selection
- Key concepts:
  - Interpretive flexibility
  - Relevant social groups
  - Technological frame
  - Closure



# Power and human agency

«... such an analysis stresses the malleability of technologies, the possibilities of choice, the basic insight that things could have been otherwise ... demonstrating the interpretive flexibility makes it clear that the stabilization of an artefact is a social process and hence subject to choices, interests, value judgments – in short to politics».

# Let the citizens in





# Participatory TA

- More democratic governance of technology
- Increased legitimacy of decisions
- Better informed decisions



# Methodological developments

- The establishment of TA institutions in European countries gave new ideas about how to do TA
- In particular: a rise to new methods for public participation
  - The new methods influenced by similar methods used by experts.
  - An ongoing development

# Participation: a multitude of approaches

- Jury-like models (consensus conferences, planning cells and citizen juries)
- Future-oriented methods (scenario workshops, future workshops, etc.).
- Methods focused at negotiating agreement among interested parties
- Citizen summits (large public meetings, often with voting).
- ... and there exists no panacea to public participation.

# Who participates?

- The non-organized citizen?
- The interest group representative?
- Those with special experiences?



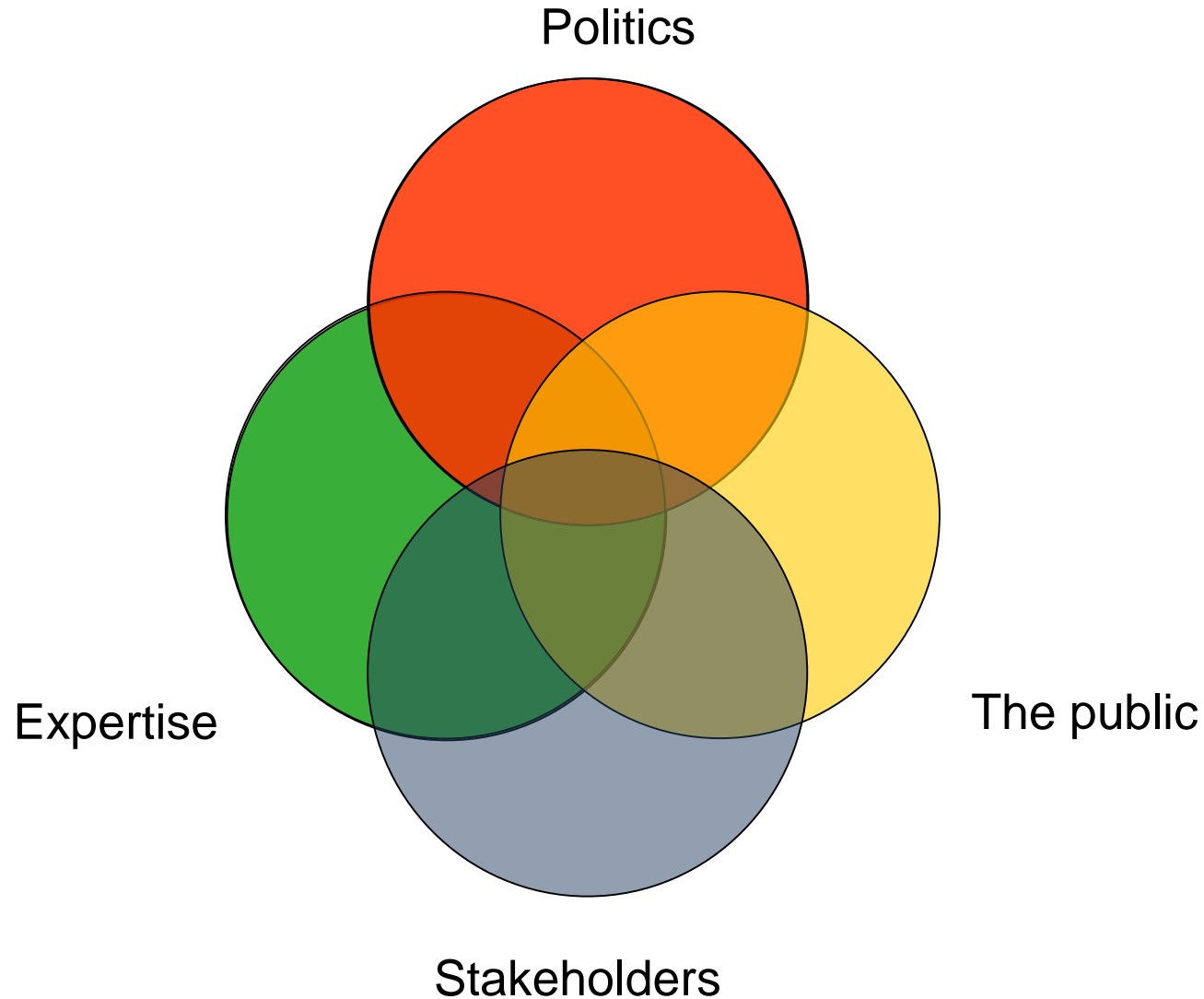
# Institutional developments

- US Office of Technology Assessment (1972-1995)
- From the US to Europe
  - France (OPECST) 1983
  - Denmark (Teknologinevnden) 1986
  - Netherlands (NOTA) 1986
  - ... and numerous others
- EPTA
- Cross-European projects

# The TA landscape in Europe

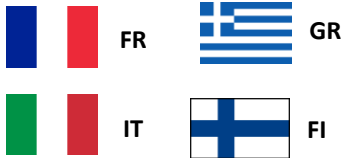


# The challenge for TA institutions



Parliamentary committees

Inside Parliament



Inform Parliament



Parliamentary  
offices/units



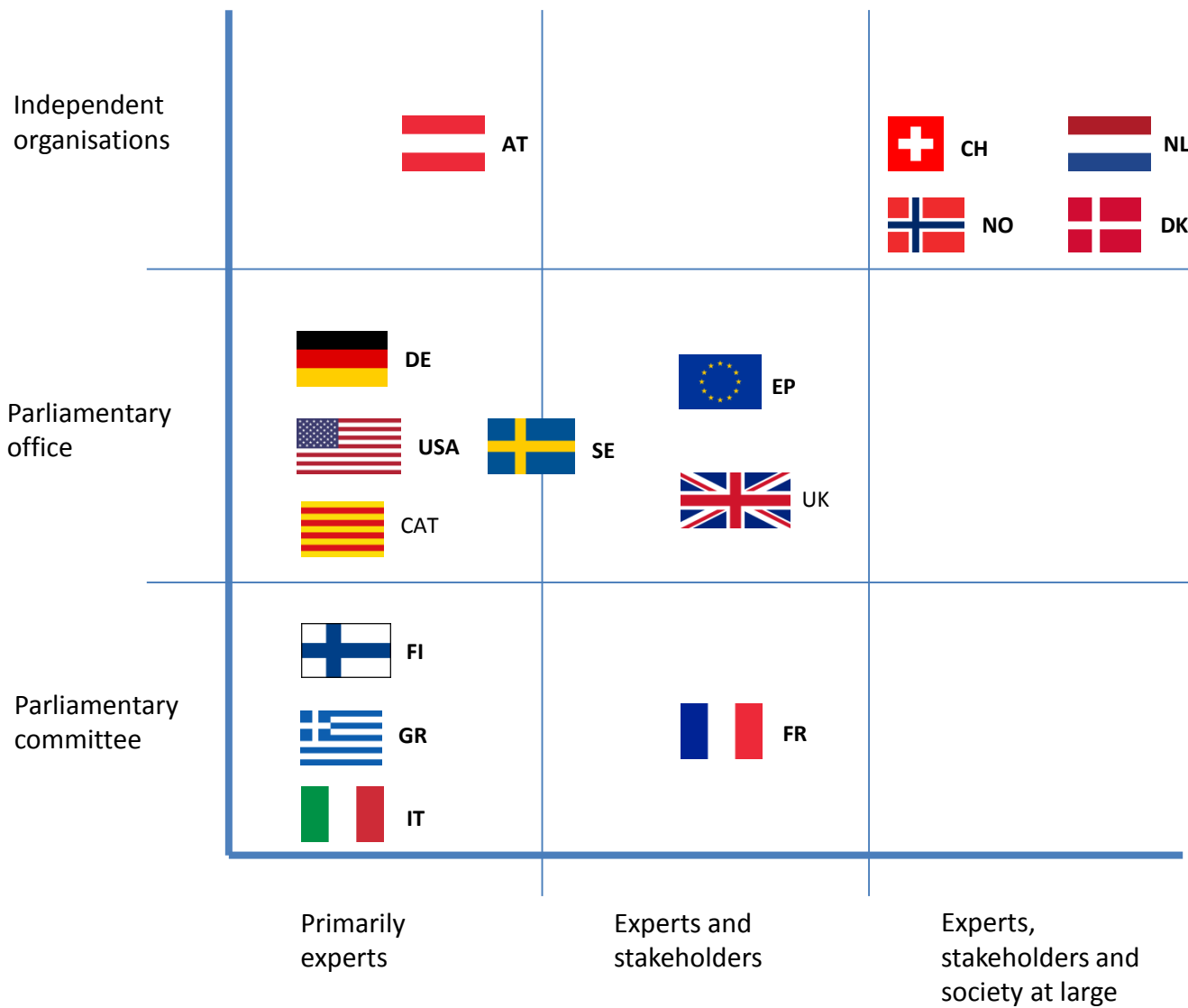
Inform Parliament and  
*and stimulate societal debate*



Independent institutes



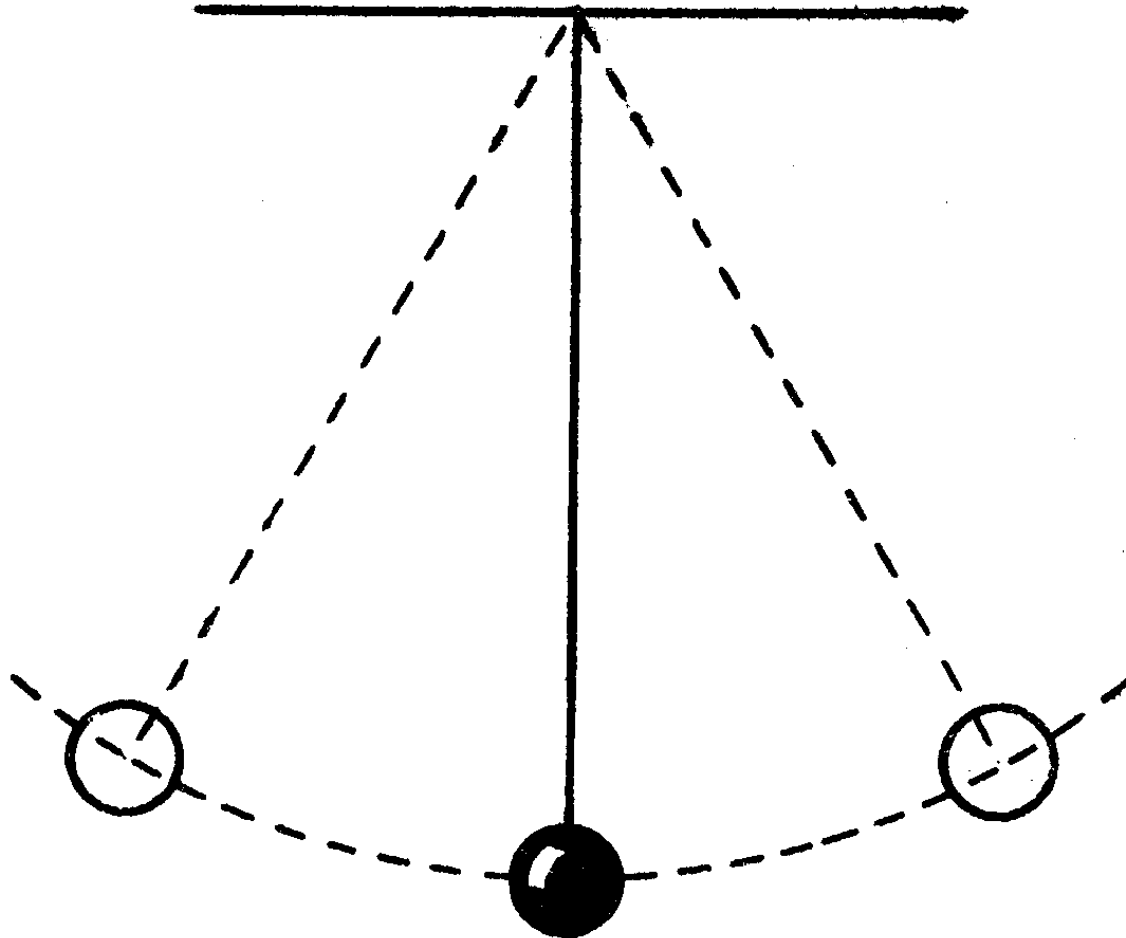
Outside Parliament



# Dilemmas

- Independence vs funding
- Freedom, but no automatic recipients
- Visibility vs neutrality?
- Usefulness at parliament vs “hairy” projects
- Broad vs narrow mandate: Are we experts?
- Always: Transparency and impartiality

# Back to the pendulum

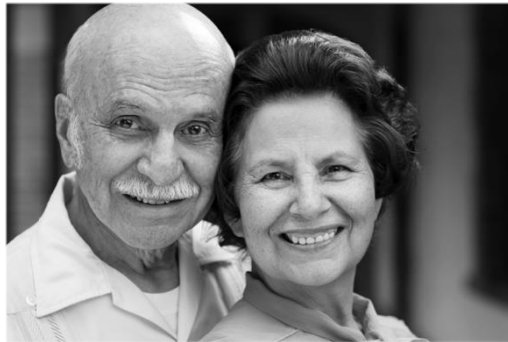


# TA today

- “Technology assessment” covers a multitude of activities
- TA institutions use a variety of methods
- The work of TA-practitioners differs hugely
- Still: a common ambition to put technology on the political agenda, provide policymakers advice and stimulate public debate



# TA of elderly care

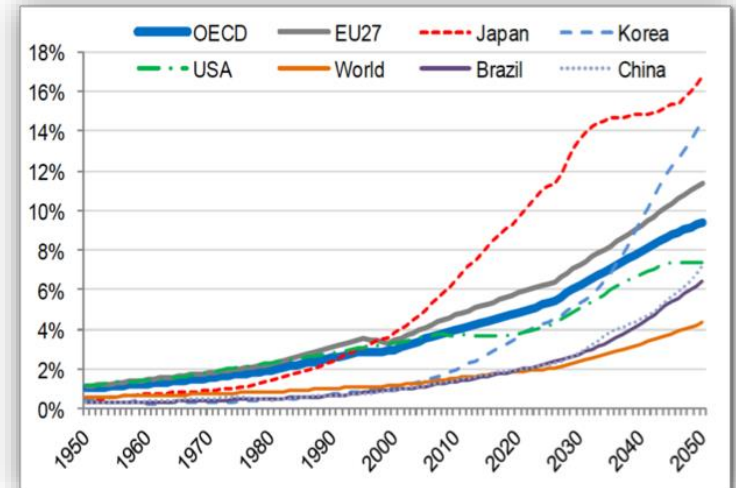


A mixed group...

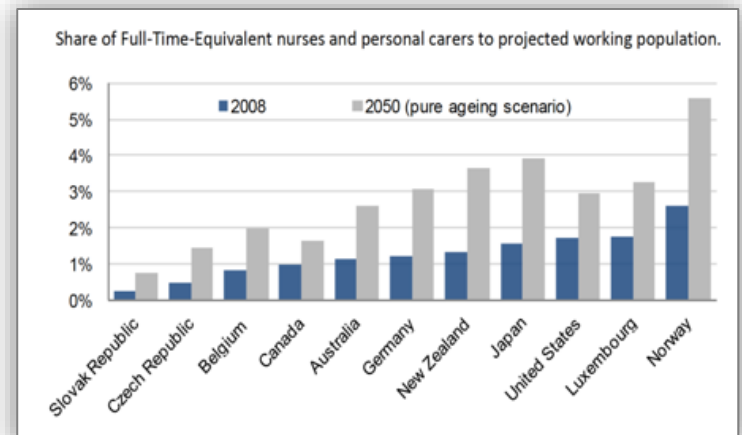


# A double demographic challenge

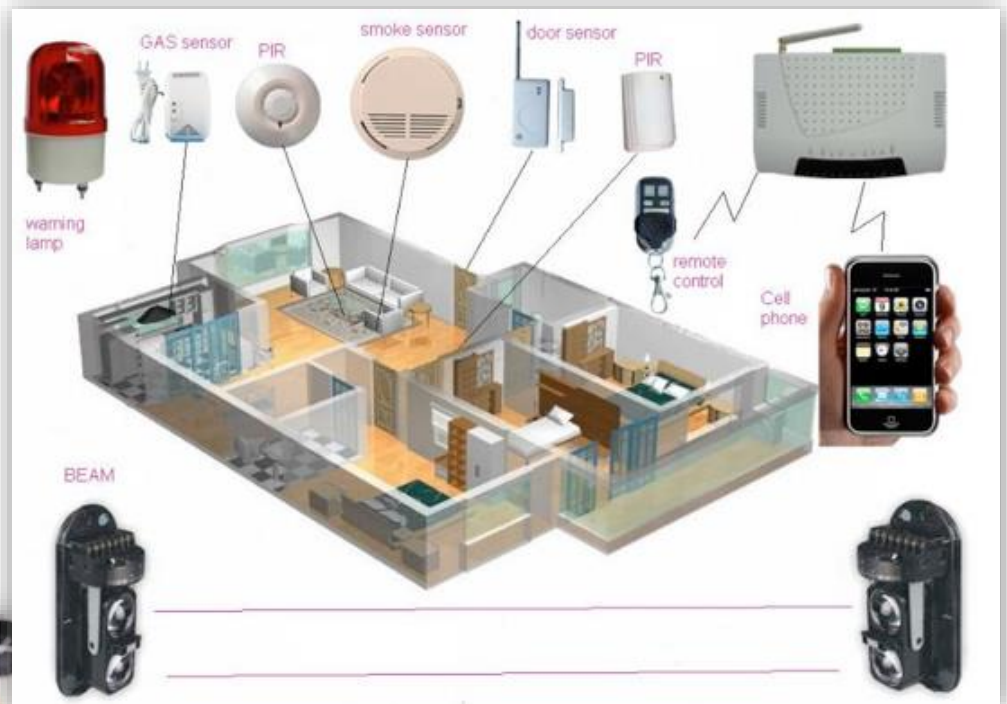
Rapid growth in number of citizens above 80



Increasing demand for people to work in the care sector



# Detectors and alarm systems



# Tracking devices



# Body sensors and mobile solutions





# Robots



# Sevices and applications



# How to do TA on elderly care?

- Several projects:
  - ...to be included