



KIT HUMANS AND TECHNOLOGY FOCUS

“OUR SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE HEARD”

PROFESSOR ARMIN GRUNWALD DISCUSSES AN INTERFACULTY CROSSOVER STRUCTURE UNIQUE IN GERMANY.

BY DOMENICA RIECKER-SCHWÖRER // PHOTOGRAPHS: KIT // TRANSLATION: RALF FRIESE



“The KIT Humans and Technology Focus wants to conduct prospective research for sustainable development.”

Armin Grunwald

Special relationship: man and technology.

Besondere Beziehung: Mensch und Technik.

More than 30 institutes, more than 400 scientists: The KIT Humans and Technology Focus established last July combines a wealth of competence. This is no mean job for Professor Armin Grunwald, head of the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis and spokesman for the Focus.

Mr. Grunwald, what is the idea behind the KIT Humans and Technology Focus?

First and foremost, and quite generally, it is about technology and its impact on man. In the past, that relation frequently was taken into account too late. We want to conduct prospective research for sustainable development, want to be involved in shaping future topics so that some things will not be overlooked. It is characteristic of science to focus first on very specific issues. However, this attitude is fraught with dangers. We want to create links, for instance, by establishing contacts



Spektakulär: Technik fordert den Menschen heraus – zum Beispiel beim Transport des KATRIN-Hauptspektrometers 2006.

Spectacular: Technology challenges man – for example 2006, when the KATRIN main spectrometer was transported.



between engineers and their capabilities, on the one hand, and proponents of the humanities, on the other hand.

What is the structure of the Focus?

There are, first of all, the six overarching topics: Work, Health, Culture, Environment, Economy and Knowledge, each of them related to technology. In addition, there are the two cross-sectional topics, i.e. Sustainable Development and Processes of Innovation and Technological Design. Each of these topics has a spokesperson associated with Focus projects in their respective divisions, communicating with scientists, and helping devise new projects. This is the level below the Topics. Independently, the link between the KIT Presidential Committee and the Humans and Technology Focus is represented by Dr. Peter Fritz, KIT Vice President for Research and Innovation, as the executive in charge of this Focus. Professor Caroline Robertson-

von Trotha and Professor Christof Weinhardt are spokespersons for areas of competence, Dr. Oliver Parodi is the Managing Director of the Focus.

What departments are involved, and are there any first projects?

We have a number of Focus projects from various departments. In the Work and Technology Division, the topic is changes in global value chains and their impacts on job profiles or, in the Culture and Technology Division, it is technology development and technology reception in light of sociocultural diversity. Besides the "Technology, Culture, and Society" area of competence, the departments of Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences as well as Architecture are involved. In addition, other institutes play a role, such as the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis, and players in other areas of competence and departments.

How do you see your function as spokesman of the Focus?

This is where all the different lines come together. I must motivate my colleagues, I work a lot with the team spokespersons of the Topics. However, I also try to give internal support to, and advance, funding. Externally, my role is that of a spokesman, who represents the focus. At some later point in time, it will be necessary to publicize the findings of our work and transfer them into society.

What is your vision of the Humans and Technology Focus ten years from now?

If, at some point in time, we could achieve the importance to society once enjoyed by the Starnberg Institute of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker and Jürgen Habermas in the Seventies, this would be a great idea. We want to be heard with our scientific knowledge. We do not think we can tell politicians what to do, but we want to provide an input into their debates.

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As Head of the Technology Assessment Office with the German Federal Parliament, you are experienced in working with politicians. That office is now also part of the KIT Humans and Technology Focus: How does your work in Berlin relate to that in Karlsruhe?

Work in Berlin is precisely about technology and its consequences to man. Recently, for instance, we were invited to study the consequences of a long-term power failure in Germany. Nobody would have believed that something like this could happen in this country until, some years ago, many transmission towers collapsed under the weight of ice during a cold winter. However, we also receive inquiries about subjects, such as unmanned military platforms or energy plants. We assume an assessment function, helping politicians to distinguish between expert opinions and opinions interjected by lobbies. The extent of the need can be judged from the fact that we just received more than fifty inquiries about new topics, but are able right now to handle only twelve of them. This is all the Federal Parliament is willing to finance so far.

Where do you see the opportunities and benefits of this Focus?

This Focus enables us to address constructively the criticism expressed of what has been an insufficient representation within KIT of economics, the humanities, and social sciences. In this way, we make it possible for KIT to reach a preeminent international position in the field of non-technical research about technology. Nothing comparable on this scale exists in Germany. This also constitutes a framework within which excellent researchers can be invited to Karlsruhe.

WIE WISSENSCHAFT GEHÖR FINDET

DER KIT-SCHWERPUNKT MENSCH UND TECHNIK

Welche Auswirkungen hat Technik auf den Menschen? Um diese Frage zu beantworten, will der im Juli 2009 gegründete KIT-Schwerpunkt Mensch und Technik die Kompetenz von 30 Instituten und über 400 Wissenschaftlern zusammenführen.

Als Mann, der „den Laden zusammenhält“, versteht sich der Sprecher des Schwerpunkts, Professor Armin Grunwald. Bei dem Leiter des Instituts für Technikfolgenabschätzung und Systemanalyse laufen die Fäden aus den Themenfeldern Arbeit, Gesundheit, Kultur, Umwelt, Wirtschaft und Wissen zusammen. Hinzu kommen die beiden Querschnittsthemen Nachhaltige Entwicklung sowie Innovationsprozesse und Technikgestaltung.

Über Fakultätsgrenzen hinweg beteiligen sich Wirtschaftswissenschaftler wie Ingenieure, Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftler ebenso wie Architekten. Der Schwerpunkt will durch diesen interfakultativen Ansatz „vorausschauende Forschung für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung“ betreiben. Ziel ist einerseits, wie Grunwald sagt, „an der Themengestaltung der Zukunft“ mitzuwirken, andererseits auch, eine Beraterrolle für die Politik einzunehmen und zu helfen, „Experten- von Lobbyistenmeinungen zu unterscheiden“.

Mit dem Schwerpunkt Mensch und Technik werde am KIT „im Bereich der nichttechnischen Forschung über Technik“ nicht weniger als die Grundlage dafür geschaffen, „eine internationale Spitzenposition“ zu erreichen, meint Grunwald: „In dieser Breite gibt es in Deutschland nichts Vergleichbares. Das bietet auch einen Rahmen, um exzellente Forscher nach Karlsruhe zu holen.“

DOMENICA RIECKER-SCHWÖRER