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Learning from history?

A historical view on Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) for Technology Assessment (working title)

– Abstract to PhD project

Technology Assessment (TA) and History of Technology are both disciplines that reflect technology. Even though working in many cases on the same subjects, they do this without any relation one to another. TA often uses in its studies only data about the recent past and ignores (academic) historical based knowledge. Thus it works ahistorical and waives available information. In turn, History of Technology mostly ignores possible relations, common approaches or even overlapping contents. So far there have been few considerations about this relationship on either side. People working in both disciplines are rarely to be found. Most likely the researchers from STS (Science and Technology Studies) who intentionally work with historical data (amongst others) can be seen as a link between the two disciplines. Especially as their work is received by academics from both sides. However, it will have to be proven that TA and History of Technology can benefit from each other. These considerations encourage to study if – and if yes, how – it is possible to apply History of Technology for TA – and if this approach also adds up to the benefit of TA.

In this context a lot of epistemological questions arise: Which common aspects can be identified in both disciplines? Are there common terms as a basis for discussions? Where might assistance (e.g. in communication) be needed? And in which respect could History of Technology be interesting for TA? How should a historical work be formulated, which questions should it contain to make its outcomes relevant for TA? Is learning from history in this way possible at all? Which new perspectives might open up for History of Technology in collaboration with TA? To be able to find answers to all of these questions, concepts of TA, History and their (often common) neighbouring disciplines have to be explored. These are, for instance, sociology or, as already mentioned above, STS.

The theoretical reflections about the relation of TA and History of Technology will be completed by a historical case study that has to be carried out yet and will be directly related to TA demands. It will be used to try out how the collaboration between the two disciplines could look like on a particular occasion. The case study itself will be a historical treatise that presents the history of (automotive) Driver Assistance Systems and will be written in the tradition of new cultural history and history of mentalities. Driver Assistance Systems are of high relevance to TA as they are currently discussed there in terms of 'Autonomous Driving'. So far the few historical publications on the history of motor vehicles dealt only marginally with Driver Assistance Systems. The case study will contribute to lightening up the hardly explored history of the automobile.

The presentation on "(Advanced) Driver Assistance Systems in History" at the 12th Annual T2M-Conference will highlight the historical case study of the PhD project presented above.