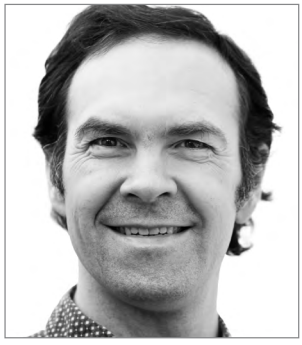
Editorial



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Innovative technologies such as information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) create expectations for improved standards of living in the Global South, but they are ambiguous. On the one hand, ICT4D could help improve the structurally disadvantaged position of these countries in the global economy by offering opportunities for local business and employment, democratization, ecological soundness, and emancipation. On the other hand, ICT could further increase resource exploitation and market dominance by transnational corporations and strengthen control and surveillance by authoritarian regimes. For nearly half the world's population, living on less than $5.50 per day and for more than 40 % of the sub-Saharan population living at less than $2 per day, the tension between these pathways is of existential concern.

Who defines social needs and the technologies that address those needs in the Global South? And who reaps the surplus value generated through innovative technologies?

As the special topic of this TATuP issue shows, an anthropology of social and technological innovation adds to TA's methodological and conceptual portfolio through site-specific ethnography and comparative approaches. By addressing the analytical level of everyday life, it sheds light on how power and empowerment can operate through technology, explores the diversity of technology cultures within the context of long-term patterns of change, complements quantitative data with qualitative information, and gives voice to marginalized actors.

When technology assessment (TA) leaves its familiar Western settings on the path toward a global TA, the consequences of Western externalization of environmental and social costs, differing perceptions of risk, and varying normative contexts of scientific policy advice come to the fore. This may also increase TA's awareness of inherent (non-)democratic potentials of technologies.

Global consequences of technologies increasingly question the standard economic model of making short-term gains by externalizing environmental and social costs. The Global South's long history of (under)development clearly demonstrates the role of technologies in global imbalances. TA in the Anthropocene must surely assess the impact of technologies in the long run. However, as the economist J. M. Keynes once said: "In the long run, we're all dead." The immediacy of survival, forced migration, and the dire need for development opportunities, prosperity, and democracy in the Global South pose urgent research questions for TA.

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