

“The Future is being Shaped at Universities of Technology”

Christian Dayé explores what role the future plays for societies. For several years, he has been focusing on how technological advances impact on society. His book on this topic has now won an award.

Birgit Baustädter

“This award for my book from the History of Sociology & Social Thought Section of the American Sociological Association is a huge recognition of my work,” explains Christian Dayé, beaming. He is sitting comfortably in his office at the Campus Neue Technik of Graz University of Technology (TU Graz) – an office he is about to leave soon in order to move into the newly built Data House in Campus Inffeldgasse. But for now, there are three floors of old stairs to climb to his office. After that, a paradise of high bookshelves and bright old windows opens up. In the middle of all this sits Dayé and talks about his passion for the future.

TECHNOLOGY FOR THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW

“If you express it in a rather grand way, you could say the future is being shaped at universities of technology – here at TU Graz,” he says with admiration. “Technologies are being developed here that will shape our everyday lives the day after tomorrow.” Curiosity about things to come has led him into his current field of research. In his early years as a student, the sociologist studied how knowledge about the future is generated and how technical innovations affect society, how societies imagine the future and in which areas they invest resources, and how new technical developments can affect society and the environment of the future. “An interdisciplinary division of labour is important and right in these issues. Innovations can only succeed if researchers have as much time as possible to develop their ideas. Sociologists of technology like myself are here to sound out with them the possible consequences of their innovations on culture and society.”

DELPHI AND POLITICAL GAMING

Today, Dayé uses various scientific methods to investigate the future at the Institute of Interactive Systems and Data Science at TU Graz. In particular, the Delphi method and political gaming are popular methods of futurology. It was on precisely these two methods that Dayé wrote his book *Experts, Social Scientists, and Techniques of Prognosis in Cold War America* in 2020, which has now received the aforementioned Distinguished Scholarly



Christian Dayé is a sociologist at the Science, Technology and Society (STS) Unit.

Baustädter – TU Graz

Publication Award 2022. Specifically, the researcher looked at how research methods that are still in use today were developed in the Cold War era to assess possible developments, simulate courses of conflict and make decisions for the future.

ASTONISHED OBSERVER

Whether his own vision of the future was connected to the bright office at TU Graz is not an easy question for Christian Dayé. An enthusiastic musician, he started studying electrical engineering with a focus on sound engineering after graduating from a humanistic secondary school in Graz. But: “I lacked the background there and the studies were rather unsuccessful.” A blessing in disguise, as he recognizes today. After completing his doctorate in sociology at the University of Graz and occupying a university assistant position at the University of Klagenfurt, his career path led him back to TU Graz: “And today, as an amazed layman, I can experience technological innovations from the front row and reflect together with my colleagues from the natural and engineering sciences on what all this means for the society of the future.” Here he also found the opportunity to use the two methods interactively in teaching and to give students a sense of the interplay between innovation and society.

But there is one more thing... The award from the American Sociological Association is missing from both the desk and the bookshelves. Christian Dayé walks around his desk with a grin and fishes it out of a black cardboard package. “My son has forbidden me to hang it up here. He is afraid of it being stolen and would rather keep it at our apartment.” Perhaps as an incentive to make sure that the next generation doesn’t run out of ideas for the society of the future. ■