Vappu Taipale:
Director General, STAKES
User perspective and the development of gerontechnology

Innovation policy is currently the driver of information society development. The policy paradigm is changing constantly through an evolutionary process. The national science and technology policy was previously designed to respond to the needs of internationalising companies, the research policy designed to support national universities, and the welfare policy to address the needs of citizens. An innovation policy that is aimed at promoting current development should integrate all these policy sectors and also be able to operate in a globalising environment. This also means that the scope of innovation policy will be expanded to cover interaction (DUI, Doing Using Interacting). In this way, an increasing emphasis is placed on the user perspective and the need to develop it. In the ageing world more attention should be focussed on older people as users, consumers, customers and partners – as innovation policy players. To date this is rarely achieved.

In the field of gerontechnology the user perspective has been strongly involved. When the International Society for Gerontechnology was founded in 1997, its objectives included e.g. the following: "to promote cultural and scientific, international exchanges between researchers and engineers of all disciplines, designers and architects, related industries, organisations and professionals in the field of comfort, welfare and health for the ageing and aged, and to involve the older citizen in all relevant activities ".

If developments will be ideal, we will be faced with an operating model based on which a well-informed ageing citizen, the consumer of services, becomes a driver of development. There are interesting opportunities for everyday life, self care, and proactive prevention, as well as to create better living environments in social, financial and human terms. But the voice of the user has to become stronger, and a real partnership is to be cherished.

If development is driven by solely in technological and economic terms, the prospects may be different. In a ubiquitous environment, human beings are constantly sensored, monitored and measured, 24/7. Monitoring people's lifestyles results in lifestyle control and a large amount of data, but will it also create information for a better life of older people? A negative development would create a new divide, between 'good' and 'bad' human beings, whose behaviour and health can be regulated.

Independent living, however, is a characteristic shared by both individuals and society. It requires a multisectoral, transdisciplinary approach. It is generated by all policies, in all sectors. Responsibility for ageing well must be adopted everywhere, in transportation, commerce, community planning, education, culture, national security and in combating exclusion. Simultaneously, ageing will need to be understood to a much broader extent, in transdisciplinary environments not yet developed.

Ethical questions will emerge more powerfully in the context of new innovation policies. In determining the line between good and bad, broad-based social discussion at global level will be imperative. Responsibility and freedom of choice will require

constant redefinition. With these kinds of social discussions lying ahead of us, perhaps a new era of gerontechnology awaits us, with increased opportunities of networking, connecting people more effectively, and creating more communality between people.