

The first poster: A historic relic

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J.A.M. Graafmans. The first poster: A historic relic. Gerontechnology 2014;13(1):59-60; doi:10.4017/gt.2014.13.1.005.00 Recently, the first poster prepared for explaining gerontechnology (1991) surfaced in a cleaning-up endeavor. About a quarter of a century later, it is interesting to see how this poster emerged, and how from the beginning it was difficult to have a real marriage between technology and gerontology. Thanks to Vappu T. Taipale this succeeded little later in the European funded COST A4 network programme 'Ageing and Technology'.

Keywords: gerontechnology 1991, international conference, Vappu Taipale

In August 1991, at the first international Gerontechnology conference in Eindhoven¹ (the Netherlands) a gerontechnology poster was used that could be considered the first one in the domain (*Figure 1*, and back cover of this issue). It recently surfaced in a cleaning-up activity. In this 131 by 133 cm piece of fabric three streams of thought came together. They originated from the UK, the Netherlands and Finland.

THE POSTER

In the United Kingdom, Patrick Rabbitt, heading the Applied Psychology Research Unit of the University of Manchester, worked on cognitive changes with age together with Sylvie Collins. This included participation in the EU-RACE project 'Tudor 1088'² that started in 1990 to study the extent to which Europeans aged over 60 or being disabled, saw advantages in the new communication technologies available at that time. The study was gerontology oriented. Older adults were interviewed in Portugal, Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands. For the milestone report 'Age and Design' some cartoons were drawn in grey-tones by Martin Holmes.

We obtained consent from Holmes to use the 'Age and Design' cartoon as the basis of a conference logo and for further publicity. For the poster on fabric, Toon Manders, then an employee of the Technological University of Eindhoven, took the paintbrush to bring color in the cartoon. The first poster of Gerontechnology was born. During the first Eindhoven conference it welcomed the 140 participants from 3 different continents.

THE CONFERENCE

Since 1988, in the Netherlands, Tonny Brouwers and Jan Graafmans had been searching for information to organise an international conference on the marriage of technology and gerontology, which they had called 'Gerontechnology'³. One of the first informants was Patrick Rabbitt, who



Figure 1. Gerontechnology 1991: Poster welcoming the participants of the 1st International Conference on Gerontechnology, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (Poster originally designed by Martin Holmes)

suggested contacting Jim L. Fozard, who functions since 2010 as the first ISG-Grandmaster in Gerontechnology.

The Delphi approach was used to construct the first gerontechnology conference. We made an inventory of all possible scientific disciplines and policy makers, involved with aging or aging societies. We found the different experts by hearsay and asked them only one question: How can technology contribute to your research on aging? We compiled their reactions and invited them as keynote speakers for the conference after we had received enough financial guarantees from Eindhoven University and Dutch and European Union governments. In parallel, we made an open call for oral presentations. Herman Bouma, the 2nd ISG-Grandmaster of Gerontechnology since 2012, took the chair of the conference. After peer reviewing and editing, the technology and gerontology results of this first international

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conference were published in a book containing 52 conference presentations¹.

THE FINNISH CONNECTION

In the meantime in Finland, our 2014 Grandmaster, Vappu T. Taipale, a former Minister of Health and Social Welfare, was pro-active as the chair of the European project COST A5 on 'Ageing and Technology'. The kick-off of COST A5 took place in September 1991 in Helsinki. Because of the success of the Eindhoven conference in August, I was designated (through NWO, the Netherlands Science Organisation) as the Dutch representative at this start-up meeting. Again, mostly gerontology people appeared to be active. It happened to be that I was the only engineer in this new network; so in the closing session, to better combine technology with gerontology, it was decided that Vappu had to be the chairperson and I was convicted to be her vice-chair, never regretted.

Vappu Taipale had not been present in person at the first international gerontechnology conference in Eindhoven, but her earlier investment in policy development was overwhelmingly pre-

sent. Anja Leppo, who would become one of Finland's forerunners of gerontechnology, was there representing the National Agency for Welfare and Health in Finland. This fitted well in Vappu's earlier investment in policy development for aging and technology. The Finnish interest in the subject was clearly visible with presentations on a Finnish action program for the well-being of aging workers⁴, and e-planning of welfare and health services for older adults⁵. Both presentations fitted well with logo and poster chosen for this first conference.

The connection with Finland and Vappu Taipale intensified, leading to the 2nd International Gerontechnology Conference in Helsinki (1996), with Vappu as the chair and over 400 participants from all continents. The results of this 2nd conference were published in 'Gerontechnology, a sustainable investment in our own future'⁶.

It was and is a real honour to have worked so closely with the Grandmasters of Gerontechnology: Jim Fozard, Herman Bouma and last but not least Vappu Taipale.

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