

# Vappu Taipale: Tireless advocate of gerontechnology in the political arena

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*H. Bouma. Vappu Taipale: Tireless advocate of gerontechnology in the political arena. Gerontechnology 2014;12(4):237-248; doi:10.4017/gt.2014.12.4.007.00* This short contribution sketches the essential role of Vappu Taipale in the genesis of gerontechnology and in its further development. This concerns only a small section of her life occupation that she shares with her husband Illka on providing a better life for people on the disadvantaged sides of society. She knows the political pathways and brings these to bear on the problems to be solved. Her impressive biography has been added.

**Keywords:** Vappu Taipale, genesis of gerontechnology, politics

The present concise contribution is to illuminate the essential role of Vappu Taipale in the genesis of gerontechnology and in helping develop it ever since. However, her role in making this world more generally a better place for many disadvantaged people reaches far beyond gerontechnology alone and also beyond Finland and beyond Europe. Her attached CV provides clear-cut proof of her wide interests, her essential missions in the political arena, her results, her zeal and hard work over a lifetime. In this, she has always found a warm and supporting base in her family, in which she shared with her husband Illka, psychiatrist, a commitment to peace, social policy, and mental health. He has also been a member of the Finnish parliament and longstanding member of the Helsinki city council and edited a book on social innovations<sup>1</sup>; Vappu met him at the beginning of her medical studies in 1960.

Their four children Sanna, Jussi, Riika and Mikko, born between 1967 and 1977, didn't largely follow the medical and political career of their parents, and are now very international academics in engineering, systems biology, diplomacy (!) and genetics. The Taipale family, with seven grandchildren, enjoys staying in a summer cottage built by Vappu's grandfather on an island without electricity but with running water and a wonderful sauna. Vappu loves catering, gardening and writing: apart from professional articles also popular articles on scientific issues. Vappu permitted us to present a recent photograph of her extended family (*Figure 1*) and of a meeting in Chicago with other prominent leaders on the long road of promoting peace (*Figure 2*).

### GT GENESIS

The beginning of the Gerontechnology (GT) movement was in the late eighties with preparations for the first international GT conference that took place in the late summer of 1991. The main quartermaster was the pre-eminent networker Jan A.M. Graafmans, who assembled many experts of various discipline and background in the endeavour. This would have remained a one-stage event as originally planned, if

not for the enthusiasm and vision of a few involved people who had seen GT contours of a future society. Vappu Taipale was one of these visionaries.

As a former minister of Health and of Social Affairs in Finland and director of the Finnish National R&D Centre for Welfare and Health STAKES, her background was in public health policy. As a result of the far-reaching shifts in East-West boundaries in Europe, Finland could join the European Union by that time, which it formally did in 1995. Vappu became familiar with the Brussels scene and saw opportunities for GT, which resulted in the COST-A5 action, which she chaired. The COST programme contained modest EU subsidies for content-directed network formation on important practical R&D themes. Content of COST-A5 was GT as derived from the main themes of the first GT conference, such as housing, mobility, information, and design. Over a period of four years, small-scale workshops were organized in quite a few European countries, later followed by a European subsidy for the build-up of GT educational curricula. In the mean time, Jan Graafmans, from his base in Eindhoven, took care of a regular newsletter for mutual cohesion and information exchange.

### TOWARDS GT CONTINUITY

Then, two important steps were taken to hold on to the resulting gains. In both, Vappu took a key role. The first one, in 1996, was the 2<sup>nd</sup> international GT conference in Helsinki with Vappu Taipale as main organizer. The second one, in 1997, was the foundation of the International Society for Gerontechnology (ISG). Vappu was one of the founders.

### The Helsinki GT conference in 1996

Apart from substantial scientific progress, the Helsinki conference was proof that GT had acquired a fruitful base as scientific interdiscipline. Just as the first conference in Eindhoven, the Helsinki conference was truly international or rather global as well, in that contributors and participants assembled from all over the world, including the USA/Canada and Japan. Concepts from various scientific backgrounds were

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Figure 1. Vappu Taipale together with her husband Ilkka, their children and 6 of their 7 grandchildren, at the occasion of the celebration of Ilkka's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday (Photographer: Magi Viljanen)

presented as insights ready to be included in the GT spectrum. The conference book<sup>2</sup>, edited by Vappu Taipale together with Jan Graafmans and Neil Charness, is witness to that. As three examples, I mention the keynotes of (i) individual and socio-structural lag of ageing people developed by Riley and presented by Powell Lawton, (ii) including critical ageing people in product design by Roger Coleman, and (iii) the importance of environmental support in maintaining mobility by James L. Fozard and Eino Heikkinen.

## The foundation of ISG in 1997

The formal foundation of ISG in 1997 was the step toward continuity. Vappu was one of the founders of ISG and took on the responsibility as first president, from 1997 till 2002. Researchers and innovators in GT had now found a formal body that took on the tasks of keeping together the interested members and taking responsibility for the organization of further conferences, at first every 3 years starting at Munich 1999, and followed by Miami (2002), Nagoya (2005), and Pisa (2008); from then on every two years in Vancouver (2010), Eindhoven (2012), Taipei (2014), and probably Nice (2016). Also, in 2001 the scientific journal *Gerontechnology* arose from the ISG by the initiative and sustained enthusiastic effort of the editor-in-chief Annelies van Bronswijk.

Rightly, Vappu has been awarded the honorary membership and the honorary presidentship of ISG, now followed by the ISG grandmastership.

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## THE YEARS AFTER

I have sketched the early history of GT in some detail because Vappu has taken on such essential role in its formation and organization. She has continued in the same mindset ever since. Since modesty is her style, many of her contributions will remain hidden. Fortunately, she herself has sketched also some of her later activities in the present issue<sup>3</sup>. Her content focus has remained in public health including public health engineering, and her network focus in international bodies, in particular the European Union and the United Nations. She has represented both her country and the sector of public health as her home base. We are proud and thankful that she has always added gerontechnology to her sector of dedication as well.

She has maintained zeal and motivation despite frequent disappointment in many public sectors characterised by lack of vision and dominance of short term interests. Nevertheless, progress has been made and massive fruits are already being reaped whereas the problems to be attacked are ever more urgent. There is the saying ascribed to William of Orange (1533-1584), the great founder of the Netherlands: 'One need neither have hope to begin an undertaking, nor a guarantee of success to persevere'. Throughout the years, gerontechnology has remained the sustainable investment in the future that Vappu formulated in the nineties. We are fortunate that Vappu Taipale has lived to see the wisdom of her early foresight.



Figure 2. Vappu surrounded by Lech Walesa, Mikhail Gorbachev, F.W. de Klerk and Jayantha Dhanapala (Pugwash) at a meeting of Nobel Peace Laureates, individuals and organisations in Chicago 2012 (Photographer: Enzo Curzio)

3. Taipale V. Global trends, policies and gerontechnology. *Gerontechnology* 2014;12(4):187-193; doi:10.4017/gt.2014.12.4.001.00

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## Education and training

Year	
1966	M.D. Doctor of Medicine, University of Helsinki
1971	Specialist in Child Psychiatry, University of Helsinki
1979	Subspecialist in Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Helsinki
1980	Ph.D. in Medicine, University of Helsinki
1988	Adjunct professor in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Tampere
1990	Adjunct professor in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Kuopio

## Honorary degrees, titles, orders, awards and prizes

Year	Honour
1981	Finnish State prize for information popularization (Adolescent psychiatry)
1982	Speaker of the year in Finland
1998	Grandparent of the Year Doctor h.c. of Administrative Sciences, University of Vaasa, Finland
2002	Honorary Member, International Society for Gerontechnology
2004	Doctor h.c. of Social Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
2005	Professor h.c. by the President of the Republic of Finland
2008	Doctor h.c. of Public Health, Nordic School of Public Health, Gothenburg, Sweden Honorary President, International Society for Gerontechnology
2009	Commander First Class in the order of the White Rose of Finland
2011	Doctor h.c. of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland Pohjola Prize for longstanding medical work, Finland
2014	ISG-Grandmaster of Gerontechnology

## Professional activities and career

Period	Activity
1965-	Member of Duodecim, the Finnish College of Physicians
1966-67	House Officer, Helsinki University Children's Clinic, Finland
1967-	Member of the Finnish Society of Child Psychiatry and Pediatrics
1970-74	Medical specialist, Aurora Hospital, Adolescent Outpatient Unit, Helsinki, Finland
1971-73	Member of the State Committee of Child Day Care, Finland
1972	Acting professor of Child Psychiatry, University of Tampere, Finland
1975-79	Medical specialist, Helsinki University Children's Clinic, Finland Member and Secretary of the Working Party for Mental Health Research, Medical Research Council, Academy of Finland
1978-82	Member of the board of the Finnish Society of Adolescent Psychiatry
1980-82	Associate professor of Child Psychiatry, University of Kuopio, Finland
1980-83	Advisor for Women Research, State Council of Equality, Finland
1981-82	Secretary of the State Committee of Mental Health, Finland
1981-92	Vice-chair of the Physicians for Social Responsibility in Finland
1982-83	Minister of Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland
1983	Head of Finnish Delegation to the World Health Assembly, Geneva, Switzerland
1983-84	Minister of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland
1984-91	Director General, National Board of Social Welfare, Finland
1984-05	Member of the Advisory Board for Rehabilitation, Prime Minister's Office, Finland
1985	Chairperson of the State Committee of Social Workers, Finland
1985-91	Member of the Mixed Commission in the Field of Health, Medicine and Social Security between USSR and Finland
1985-91	Member of the Mixed Commission in the Field of Health, Social Welfare and Medicine between the GDR and Finland Member of the Mixed Commission in the field of Health, Medicine and Social Security between Hungary and Finland
1985-06	Member of the Nordic Committee on Health and Social Affairs
1985-08	Member of the Nordic Director Generals on Health and Social Affairs
1986	Member of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) Global Campaign, China and Japan
1986-87	Chairperson of the State Committee of People with Severe Disabilities, Finland
1986-91	Member of the Research Council of Social Sciences, Academy of Finland
1987	Member of the Working Party on Aging and Research, Academy of Finland Head of Delegation to the Warsaw Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Social Affairs Member of the Bureau of the Warsaw Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Social Affairs
1987	Member of the Delegation to the Interregional Consultation on Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes, Vienna, Austria

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## Professional activities and career (continued)

Period	Activity
1987-91	Chairperson of the State Council of Refugees, Finland
1987-96	Member of the Board of the European Centre for Social Policy Research, Vienna, Austria
1988	Member of the IPPNW Global Campaign to India and Pakistan
1989	Head of Delegation to the International Expert meeting concerning common goals and different roles for Social Welfare Policies in the European Region, Bonn, Germany
1989	Member of the Finnish Advisory Committee for the Development towards Economic Integration in Western Europe
1989-92	Member of the Commission for Social Development, United Nations
1989-05	Member of European Cooperation in the Field of Science and Technology (COST) Technical Committee, Social Sciences
1991	Member of the United Nations Mission on Social Development, Moscow, USSR
1991	Member of Delegation, World Health Assembly, Geneva, Switzerland
1991-92	Director General, National Agency for Welfare and Health, Finland
1991-96	Chairperson of COST A5 (Ageing and Technology)
1991-02	Member of the Board, Finnish Committee for UNICEF
1991-94	Chair of the Delegation for Information Technology in the Field of Social Welfare and Health, Finland
1991-97	Member of the Board, Institute of International Economic Law, University of Helsinki, Finland
1991-08	Member of the Council for State Employer and Personnel Policy, Ministry of Finance, Finland
1992-98	Member of Delegation to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe
1992-08	Director General, National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), Finland
1994	Member of the Board of Advisors in Health Care Technology, VTT, Finland Member of the Steering Group for the Finnish Information Society Strategy, Finland
1994	Member of the Distinguished Advisory Board, IPPNW Member of the Board, SatelLife, ( IPPNW low-earth-orbit satellite providing Health Net connections )
1994-96	Chair of the Support Committee of the 1996 Congress of the World Association for Infant Mental Health (WAIMH)
1994-98	Member of the HEART ( Horizontal European Activities in Rehabilitation Technology) Honorary Council
1994-00	Member of the Advisory Committee on Social Security Research and Development, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland
1994-00	Member of the Board, Tampere School of Public Health, University of Tampere, Finland
1995	Chair of the Democratisation Meeting, the 1 <sup>st</sup> Follow-up seminar to the United Nations' Secretary General's Report on New or Restored Democracies, UN and Finland
1995-99	Member of the Rural Policy Committee, Ministry of the Interior, Finland
1995-01	Chair of the Subcommittee for Socially Just Development, Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSO), Prime Minister's Office, Finland
1996	Rapporteur of the State of Mental Health Services in Finland for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland
1996	Rapporteur of the Proposal for Cooperation within the Nordic Committee for People with Disabilities, Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen, Denmark Conference Chair of Gerontechnology - A Sustainable Investment in Our Own Future, 2 <sup>nd</sup> International Conference, Helsinki, Finland Conference Chair of HUSITA 4 Conference (Information Technology in the Human Services), Finland Chair of the UN Mission on Social Developmental Issues in Macedonia
1996-99	Member of the Research Institute for Legal Policy, Ministry of Justice, Finland
1997	Member of the Steering Committee for the 3 <sup>rd</sup> TIDE Congress, Helsinki, Finland Chair of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Follow-up Seminar to the United Nations' Secretary-General's Report on New or Restored Democracies: Democracy, Economy and Civil Society in Transition in Russia and the Baltic States - Working Well Together?, United Nations and Finland Member of the Finnish National Delegation on the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, New York Member of the Finnish National Delegation on the UN Special Session (UNGASS) on Sustainable Development, New York
1997-98	Member of the Board of the Project for Revision of the National Information Society Strategy in Finland, Finnish National Fund for Research and Development (SITRA)
1997-88	Chair of the working group of the European Technology Assessment Network (ETAN) Action on 'Ageing population and Technology Challenges and Opportunities', European Commission Chair of the Evaluation Panel on Evaluation of Action Against Drug Abuse in Europe (COST A6)

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## Professional activities and career (continued)

Period	Activity
1997-99	Chair of the Network of Excellence Centres for Social Welfare and Health, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Finland Member of the COPINE project, Provisional Governing Board of the European Space Agency (ESA)
1997-00	Advisor of the Advisory Board on Public Health, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Finland
1997-00	Member of the Working Group on International Health Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Finland
1997-02	President of the International Society for Gerontechnology
1998	Chair of the Group for Client-Cooperation (Advisory Board for Rehabilitation), Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland Chair of the Mission to Albania to assess the social developmental situation of the country and to propose developmental projects, European Union and Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Invited Speaker to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, New York
1998-99	Chair of the COST Ad Hoc Working Group Environment
1998-00	Member of the Advisory Board, Research Program on the Innovation System, Finnish National Fund for Research and Development (SITRA)
1989-01	Chairperson of the Fifth Framework Programme External Advisory Group on 'The ageing population' of the European Commission
1998-02	Vice-chair of the Board of Directors, Program for the Prevention of Prostitution and Violence against Women, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland
1998-03	Vice-chair of the Board, Academy of Finland
1998-03	Chair of the Board of Directors, Mainstreaming Project of European Social Refund (ESR No 970702)
1999	Chairperson of the Working Group on a Plan to combat sexual exploitation of children, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland Member of the Working Group on Millennium Award, Prime Minister's Office, Finland
1999-03	Chairperson of the Working Group for a target and operating plan for social welfare and health (mental health), Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland Member of Studia Parliamentaria of the Parliament of Finland
1999-07	Member of the Board of Directors of the National Technology Agency of Finland (TEKES)
2000-01	Chairperson of the Commission for the Estimation of the Social Welfare and Health Care Demand for Labour, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland
2001-07	Member (since 2001) and Chair (since 2004), of the United Nations University Council
2002	Chairperson of the United Nations Implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child; Consideration of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> periodic report of Finland, Geneva, Switzerland
2003-07	Chair of the Advisory Board of the Research and Development Center at the Finnish Wellbeing Center, Sendai, Japan
2005	Member of the International Advisory Group, Evaluation of the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) project Evidence Based Policies
2005-07	Member of the Prime Minister's Delegation for Information Society, Finland
2005-12	Member, the 7 <sup>th</sup> Framework Programme Advisory Group on Health, European Commission
2005-13	Member of the Board of Physicians for Social Responsibility in Finland
2006	Member of the Board on the Revision of the National Information Society Strategy in Finland
2006	Member of the International Evaluation Team on the Evaluation of the National Information Society Strategy of South Africa
2007	Member of the Group for Evaluation of the Irish Strategy for R&D
2007-	Chair of Union for Senior Services, Valli
2008-	Senior Adviser of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Policies, Helsinki, Finland
2008-12	Co-President of IPPNW
2009	Member of the Group for an International evaluation of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health FIOH
2010	Member of the Working Group on Age Impact Assessment of Legislation, Ministry of Economy and Employment, Finland Chair of the Advisory Board of Gerec, the Ageing Research Center of Tampere and Jyväskylä Universities, Finland
2011-12	Member of the Working Group for Legislation on Older Persons Benefits and Services, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland
2012-13	Chair of the Occupy your own age movement, Finland
2013	Member of the Working Group on Intergenerational Finland, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland



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## Publications

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