

## Addendum to Gerontechnology 2008; 7(2)

*H. Bouma. Opening Address Pisa Conference. Gerontechnology 2008; 7(3):328.* It is both a pleasure and an honour to address you briefly at the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the ISG. We are all grateful to our Italian Colleagues of the famous Scuola superiore Sant'Anna in Pisa for all their efforts in organizing the present congress and to the editor-in-chief of our journal for the impressive book of abstracts. Before Pisa, earlier ISG congresses took place in Eindhoven, Helsinki, Munich, Miami, and Nagoya, reflecting the international reach of ISG over countries and continents. This is not insignificant. The ongoing technological innovations have created mass markets for a variety of new products and services on a worldwide scale. These are causing rapid changes in societies all over the world. However, cultures are different, and the effects of these changes for citizens depend on their own specific culture. Unlike young people, old people have been embedded in earlier phases of their societies and, consequently, they have to bear the bulk of the efforts to keep track of the ongoing change. This task has to be carried through while their abilities to keep up with the ever new technology of the present era are less than those of their younger companions. This results in a double disadvantage for ageing persons, which a decent society cannot accept. So we have to make every effort to turn technology toward the older segment of the population. The supporting role of sociology and politics in this effort is important. As for culture, differences in religion may lead to very different outcomes particularly for older women, and the same is true for differences in wealth. Another difference concerns the relationships of older persons with their children and extended family. We all know that roles of older generations in societies vary significantly from Europe to Africa to China, and moreover these roles have changed in the last decades. In this respect, we are satisfied that the conference in Nagoya (2005) has succeeded in strengthening gerontechnology efforts in East Asian countries. This also resulted in the establishment of regional ISG chapters in Japan and Taiwan and yearly gerontechnology masterclasses in Taiwan. Another extension of gerontechnology concerns new areas of technological innovation. One area that has come to the forefront is the area of robotics: technology that is not just smart in information processing, but getting smart in movements and mobility as well. For this subject matter, we are here at Pisa at the very centre of the expertise centre of biorobotics. One intriguing area of application of robotics is compensation for failing limb musculature. In fact, compensation for bodily restrictions had been an important research theme before the term gerontechnology had ever been coined. A second area of early attention and progress has been ergonomics or human factors. This remains as important as it always has been, but it is now increasingly recognized to be an important component of the much wider problem area of technology acceptance including actual use. And, in its turn, technology acceptance is part of the way new products and services are taken to the ageing persons, called 'the market'. Without proper knowledge of the target population, responsible professionals cannot seriously hope to reach the older segment of the population. In this respect, gerontechnology is quite open to discussion with providers of technology products and services from both public authorities and from business. The methodology of 'inclusive design' has been worked out in the last decade and is ready to be utilized. Perhaps we have to emphasize again and again that most persons in their 3<sup>rd</sup> age are healthy and active and are living an independent life. So they are not pitiful and there is no place for paternalism. Indeed ageing persons have to be taken seriously both by politics and by business, as individuals on whose shoulders the present generations and societies are standing and functioning. Our leaders in society will have to take a long term interest in these matters, stretching not only over a few years but over two or more generations of people both in the future and in the past, and their interest should not be restricted to the supposed financial burdens. I trust you will leave with more knowledge and effective networks than those you arrived with.

*Keywords:* international, culture, innovation

*Address:* International Society of Gerontechnology; E: H.Bouma@gerontechnology.info