

Book Review

History of Assistive Technology; 5000 Years of Technology Development for Humans Needs. Vlaskamp, F., Soede, M., and Gelderblom, G.J., Zuyd University, The Netherlands, 2011, ISBN 978 94 6190 228 3., 98 pp., € 25.

This book exactly provides what its title says: an historical overview of 78 inventions that responded to human needs, especially of those humans with some kind of limitation or handicap. Each of the inventions is shown in nice pictures, annotated with interesting historical details and a couple of references, so that the reader can pursue further his/her exploration of the subject.

The authors, all of them active in the Research Centre of Technology in Care at Zuyd University (Heerlen, the Netherlands) have produced this interesting compilation of inventions starting 5000 years ago with an under-arm crutch in Egypt up to the GPS-supported white cane (2008).

The book also gives an interesting and well-structured overview of the major developments in the field. It even elaborates the quite general topic of how good ideas have to be to lead to innovations. That part concludes with some visions of the future: “What might

happen next”. However this is not glass ball gazing at all as the three specialists have collected here their educated guesses.

Another aspect that has been covered very well is the impact of general purpose technology with an assistive technology potential. Inventions such as the elevator, the telephone, Velcro hooks, the audiocassette player and the personal computer all are very useful for everyone but have proven to be of exceptional value to persons with limitations.

Also the big AT-domains are covered and explained. According to the authors the main domains are: mobility, communications, robotics and in the near future, direct body interfaces.

But the main part of this 100-page book is devoted to the “Canon of Assistive Technology”.

Overall this book is extremely readable, well-illustrated and constitutes a nice source for getting in touch with this rich but often unknown field of technology.

Jan Engelen
ESAT, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
E-mail: jan.engelen@esat.kuleuven.be