It is wrong for us to think of accessibility in relation to elderly or disabled people only. Making our world accessible to all people may be an ideal that we shall never be able to reach, but making our world, our daily lives, our infrastructures—both hard and soft ones—accessible to more is something we can comfortably plan to happen.

The current austerity we face in our economies should only increase our desire to make innovation part of our daily routine in the family, in the office, and in all other occurrences of collective, participatory, or cooperative acts such as businesses, government, schools, health services, and all other instances of public infrastructures. An inclusive and accessible society can be regarded both as a means and as an end.

However, there may still be some space for a dark side regarding accessibility: by 2020, we may suffer the consequences of austerity measures, spending cuts, high unemployment, and low growth for the next 10 years while compliance will remain very poor and more or less ignored as it is today. The elderly and the disabled may suffer though reduced services and neglect and so may the young. The kind of violence seen in many countries in the last years could become commonplace all over the world. What is the place of accessibility in such a worst-case scenario?

Charles Dickens (1859) opens his Tale of Two Cities by saying: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way....”

It is thrilling how good Dickens describes our current situation: so close to make things accessible to more because the technologies, the tools, and the know-how are here; and so far as short-sighted attitudes and policies disable investments and make the prospects of accessibility even worse than 10 or even 20 years before.

In research, it is just as important to ask the right questions as to offer the right answers. Sometimes the right question matters more. Some questions that the book that Christos has written on Enhancing the Human Experience through Assistive Technologies and E-Accessibility is trying to shed light on are:

- Which are the trends that may affect the future of e-Accessibility (incorporating Web-accessibility, design for all, and assistive technology) in Europe and internationally?
- What may be the impact of those trends on the course of e-Accessibility?
- What visible interdependences exist between various trends affecting the future of e-Accessibility?
- What are the dynamics of e-Accessibility actors in Europe and globally? Where is the industry heading to?
Are there different “schools of thought” among e-Accessibility stakeholders/experts? And if yes, do these schools follow the typical categorisation? (e.g. industry versus academy)

What can be the alternative futures for e-Accessibility?

How can the industry and other e-Accessibility stakeholders influence the future of e-Accessibility? (simply watching and doing nothing?)

What relevant research priorities and policy measures are realistic and achievable by 2020?

Writing the foreword for this book that I have seen in all phases of its development, I would like to make four observations:

**OBSERVATION #1**

Many of the most significant accessibility advances of recent years have happened outside the domain of formal accessibility oriented research. Shouldn’t we wonder why this happened in the past, if it is likely to happen in the future, and if so, how might future accessibility research and innovation programs harness this energy for the benefit of user and consumer communities?

**OBSERVATION #2**

In some ICT domains, most notably in the domain of smart-phone technology, the pace of innovation is accelerating and looks set to continue to do so for the near future. Shouldn’t we ask ourselves what lessons this holds for the future of accessibility? And in particular, how it may be possible to accelerate innovation in other accessibility relevant domains leading to higher impact of research and innovation efforts and earlier benefits to users and consumers?

**OBSERVATION #3**

Compliance with accessibility guidelines has so far been very low. Shouldn’t we ask ourselves again why this has happened in the past, if compliance will get easier or harder in the future, and what needs to be done to turn this around?

**OBSERVATION #4**

Design is a recurring theme at European conferences on accessibility, in particular the concept of universal design or design for all. It is widely considered essential for progress in terms of social justice, work insertion for people with disabilities, and quality of life for people of all ages. Nevertheless, the adoption of universal design principles either in ICT or by the wider design community remains very low. Shouldn’t we ask ourselves why this is so, if this approach can ever be effective, and what would it take to bring about a sustainable change?
There is great concern regarding the cost(s) of accessibility. Living now in times where people live longer on less money and unemployed youth increasingly relies on older parents to support them in times of need, depleting the reserves they have set aside for medical emergencies, family crises, retirement, and old age, any accessibility solutions have to be affordable, even if there will always be a market for the odd Ferrari-like exoskeleton that enables a 120-year-old eccentric to potter about a 1000-hectare garden estate.

Trying to think outside the box, a 100,000-Euro exoskeleton may seem expensive as an impulse buy, but when offset against the total cost of care to the state of someone who cannot work due to their disability, it may seem like a very good price to pay if it enables them to return to work.

Enjoy the reading! And try making our world, your Apps, your offices, your services, and yourselves a little more accessible to other people! There is a cost in this, but believe me, it is seriously more fun!

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Adamantios Koumpis has, since December 2012, been a Research Fellow at the Digital Enterprise Research Institute of the National University of Ireland, Galway, Republic of Ireland with responsibilities for fundraising, research strategy design, and development of synergies with European industry for new projects design. Before this, Adamantios headed the Research Programmes Division of ALTEC Software S.A., which he founded in 1996 (an independent division of Unisoft S.A.), where he was responsible for the design, planning, and implementation of research and development projects for funding by the European Commission. His first position was at the Institute of Computer Science, FORTH, Heraklio, Crete, where he worked in the Rehabilitation Tele-Informatics and Human-Computer Interaction Group upon several of the European Commission’s RTD projects. He has successfully led more than 50 commercial and research projects for new technology development, technology adoption, and user uptake, both at the European and the national level in several areas such as E-Commerce, public sector, and business enterprise re-organisation and information logistics, involving the linking of data/information repositories with knowledge management and business engineering models. He lectured extensively for over 20 semesters in the subject areas of Management Information Systems, System Design, e-Commerce, Intellectual Capital and Knowledge Management, Intangible Assets, and Knowledge Accounting.

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