# Foreword

The potential and already realized benefits of broadband have resulted in an upheaval of excitement about the opportunities of this range of technologies. I remember doing my first video-conference with other universities in 1998. We had connections with 6 persons at 6 distinctive locations and were really impressed by the quality of voice and video, which was far better than the standard television at that time (not high-density). This simple application saved us travelling time and still we were able to view each other's reactions in the discussion we had. At that time only some of the Dutch universities were connected by a very high-speed network. Nowadays the investments necessary for realizing broadband and other thresholds to create broadband connections have significantly lowered. However, despite all advances the availability of broadband is not at the level we desire. Broadband connections are only available to a small part of the world's population. In this respect the topic has not lost any of its importance in the past years. Instead, further development of broadband might have a huge impact on our society.

In some countries, like the Netherlands, broadband penetration is high and many people have the luxury of fibre-to-the-home, like I do. Many of the students in Delft have broadband to their livings which enables them to view on-demand video-streaming of lectures. They don't have to wake up early to be in the lecture hall and can simultaneously view the lecturer, the slides and (book) material. In this way broadband enables all kinds of new and innovative applications that can advance economic growth and contribute to the creation (enhancement) of the information society. The potential benefits offered by the widespread diffusion of broadband are astronomic. Yet, we are only just at the start of this take-off at a world scale.

The Dutch government played a pivotal role in the adoption and diffusion of broad band in the Netherlands. The Ministry of Economic Affairs recognized the potential benefits to economic growth. Regional and local cooperations saw the benefits that could be realized by empowering the social subclass by providing access. The well-educated part of the population realized the potential and many companies started to develop applications and providing services to take advantages of availability of broadband. This also demonstrates a classical chicken and egg situation; applications and services taking advantage of broadband should be available to stimulate broadband development by the market, whereas broadband should be available to stimulate the development of new application and services by companies.

Over time, our knowledge has advanced in many areas of the broadband playing field. Nevertheless there still is a lack of knowledge in several areas within this field. Therefore there is a clear need to expand our research to gain a better understanding in the mechanisms at work. Due to the relevance of the work' presented in this book to both practice and theory it is my pleasure to write this foreword. Much can be learned from cross-case and cross–country comparisons. Policies that work, those that might work and those that do not work are important to deal with the social impact of broadband.

I hope this book will contribute to achieving higher broadband penetration and will help to outline policies and strategies to help to address societal issues at stake. In my view this book gives knowledge, but also inspiration to develop ideas to overcome the digital and social divide, stimulate rural development and think about  new societal forms.

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