

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2007

*Focus on Participation*



# Global Information Society Watch

## 2007



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# SPAIN

Pangea<sup>1</sup>

Assumpció Guasch and Leandro Navarro



## Introduction

How can we make citizens' rights effective in the information society? Without a doubt, the answer is: with a wider and more direct participation by citizens. However, the development of the information society is dominated by a commercial and technical perspective that tends to be emphasised to the detriment of other perspectives that are much more important but more difficult to measure. These include: the definition of the rules of the game and the "social contract" (e.g. legal framework), as well as indicators of indirect impact such as production of and access to knowledge, changes in social relations and participation.

The first part of this report focuses on a review of statistics and indicators at the level of the Spanish state. We then move progressively towards citizens and their participation via the different territorial spheres which make up the state. We offer a general perspective of infrastructure needs, and an overview of the administration's own imperative to comply with its objectives of transparency and e-government, among others.

In the second part of the report we offer an analysis of the participation of different information society actors in policies associated with information and communication technologies (ICTs). We attempt to create an indicator for this participation on the basis of information available in the database of activities<sup>2</sup> of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The result obtained appears to be a good reflection of what is happening in Spain, and of the great imbalance in the participation of different actors in the construction of the information society.

We have considered data, indicators and information provided by the national state administration, the European Union (EU) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), among other relevant sources. All of the information is accessible on the internet. We have prioritised the most current data and information. All data, with the exception of the WSIS database, was reviewed during October 2006.

The section on participation draws on data offered by the WSIS's own inventory, in the version updated as of 17 November 2006. On the basis of this update we have considered 163 activities developed by the government of Spain or Spanish entities (i.e. those that include a Spanish partner or that develop their projects in partnership within Spain).

In the analysis of participation, some estimates have been added to make up for those that were left undefined in the WSIS database. These, as well as any refinement of classifications, have been based on complementary research.

## Country situation

Most of the information society development indicators for Spain fall below the EU's average levels, except for the development of e-government, which is above average. The indicators which are close to the EU levels are: "use of the internet for health consultations", "development

of electronic commerce between businesses or between businesses and consumers", "business and home security problems and their prevention" and "broadband services for business and home users".<sup>3</sup>

Spain is ranked 31st in the UN Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) Digital Divide Report: ICT Diffusion Index 2005 (UNCTAD, 2006).<sup>4</sup> It is classified as "middle income-best", indicating an information society development position (31st) which does not correspond to its rankings in other spheres (8th in nominal GDP or 22nd in GDP per capita in the same year). The Diffusion Index also shows that there has been little sustained improvement over the years: the ranking ranged between 28th to 31st for the period 1997 to 2004.

According to the Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Commerce (DGDSI, 2006):

Overall, Spain is at a disadvantage in Europe and in relation to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in regards to information society development indices, despite efforts made. This position does not correspond to its economic situation, nor to the indices of convergence with neighbouring economies.

## The role of autonomous communities

Given the political and territorial organisation of the country, it is essential to consider the ICT take-up in autonomous communities<sup>5</sup> and local entities, since these are closest to citizens and provide many of the public services for social well-being. According to the degree of political freedom of the autonomous communities, we should consider the existence of laws, regulations or specific directives, as well as diverse objectives and focuses in the development of the information society.

Existing reports show an effort by autonomous administrations to improve citizen access to ICTs and their services, including offering training. Funding for these initiatives may come from the federal government, the autonomous communities themselves, or from the EU.

Indicators (such as those provided by CEPREDE, 2004) show that the level of participation of these communities in the information society is evolving positively, although with different highs and lows. This can clearly be seen in the case of e-government roll-out. While Spain fares well in relation to other EU member states,<sup>6</sup> there are

1 <www.pangea.org>; Espai de dones (Women's space): <www.pangea.org/dona>.

2 WSIS stocktaking database. Available at <www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking/index.html>.

3 The 2006 Information Society Indicators Report from the General Administration for the Development of the Information Society (DGDSI, 2006) presents a classification of information society indicators.

4 In general, the index is a function of a nation's connectivity and the ability of its people to have access and utilise it. The close relationship between the level of development of ICTs in a country and its level of income is clear. With the exception of Estonia and the Czech Republic, the 30 countries with a higher ICTDI fall in the high income category of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The 30 are classified as having a high level of human development, using the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), which is based on income, education and life expectancy (UNDP, 2004).

5 Spain's fifty provinces are grouped into seventeen autonomous communities, which have wide legislative and executive autonomy, with their own parliaments and regional governments.

6 <observatorio.red.es/indicadores/europe/internet\_jul2005/indicador\_d1.html>.

different levels of implementation across the autonomous communities, and the impact felt at the level of local entities is uneven.

Various autonomous communities participate in the Digital Cities programme<sup>7</sup> through the Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Commerce, which supports the development of the information society in municipalities. Some autonomous communities, such as Extremadura, are involved at an institutional level in the promotion of free and open source software (FOSS), while others stand out in other aspects. For example, Catalonia is a pioneer in the area of e-learning. Overall, advances in the Basque Country are very positive. It is not a coincidence that it was the organiser of the Second World Summit of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society (Bilbao 2005).<sup>8</sup>

While different levels of maturity exist among the communities, the rural/urban divide is common to most. Indicators from Cantabria and Catalonia show that the gender difference also continues to be notable (although it has diminished in recent years).

### *Challenges to participation in the information society*

The increase in the number of internet users in Spain is positive, and according to the Telecommunications and Information Society Observatory (OTSI), the latest data show the number of users has increased to 17.77 million, or 48.3% of the population (OTSI, 2006). There has also been a significant increase in internet use by groups traditionally more distanced from ICTs, such as people between 45 and 54 years of age, and homemakers.

Regarding the use of the internet at home, a divide can be seen between different age groups and socio-cultural sectors. Reasons cited for not using a computer in the home include a lack of interest, a perception that it is not needed, and even a lack of time in single-person households. There is also a proportion of businesses without access to the internet because they do not feel it offers them much value (Telefónica, 2005).

Overall, we still see low levels of participation in the information society among the general population. This study has identified the following reasons for the low level of participation:

a) *The government's difficulty in reconciling the interests of business and citizens, and its lack of confidence in defending citizens' interests in the face of the lobbying power of big business or specific groups*

Organisations defending the rights of internet users<sup>9</sup> are beginning to work collectively to protect citizens' interests. At the same time, the government has introduced protective measures for affected customers, though there have been few clear results.

There has also been a protest campaign against the introduction of royalties (*canon digital*) through the reform of the intellectual property law. Through this reform a royalty is charged on technological equipment (such as recordable CDs, digital cameras, scanners, etc.) as compensation for the user making digital copies of legally acquired content. As it stands now, consumers always pay the royalty, even when they copy content that they own or which is not subject to copyright.<sup>10</sup>

7 <[www.mityc.es/ciudades](http://www.mityc.es/ciudades)>.

8 <[www.it4all-bilbao.org](http://www.it4all-bilbao.org)>.

9 Such as the Association of Internauts (<[www.internautas.org/gobiernoyleyes](http://www.internautas.org/gobiernoyleyes)>), Internet Users Association (<[www.aui.es](http://www.aui.es)>) and the Commission of Liberties and Informatics.

10 For more information see: <[www.todoscontraelcanon.es](http://www.todoscontraelcanon.es)>.

b) *Weaknesses in local participation: lack of linguistic policies at a state level*

Spain's linguistic diversity is not reflected in national official statistics and indicators, although it is reflected in some autonomous communities. According to action line C8 of the WSIS Plan of Action (ITU, 2003), "cultural and linguistic diversity, while stimulating respect for cultural identity, traditions and religions, is essential to the development of an information society based on the dialogue among cultures and regional and international cooperation. It is an important factor for sustainable development."

This aspect is also not included in regulations issued by the European Parliament, which simply considers territorial and regional differences, without taking into account possible cultural and linguistic differences. The World Bank (2006), on the other hand, considers this to be an important dimension of the information society, and specifies that when cultural indicators are included, often language differences are not taken into account and that the most developed countries are not used to considering these dimensions.

c) *Limitations in the vision of women's participation in the information society*

Women's participation in the information society is low, though it is considered a positive step that data have begun to be disaggregated to show their gender component, in line with EU directives. Although there are some studies and experiences that offer a cross-cutting gender analysis (Castaño, 2003), the most common tendency is to consider women as being affected by the "digital divide" in the same way as men.

d) *Weaknesses in the implementation of the spirit of WSIS*

For the harmonious construction of the information society it is essential to have the full participation of civil society in the conception, implementation and follow-up phases. Citizen participation is crucial, and their buy-in is important. Citizens and communities should not be invited to participate only after objectives have been determined, agreements made and activities planned.

e) *Weaknesses in information regarding the active participation of organised civil society and small business*

The information offered by the e-government programme is increasing. However, it focuses mainly on the public administration's own knowledge and procedures. Access to this information facilitates transparency and the participation of civil society. Nevertheless, the information available is descriptive of previous planning, with few documents regarding "best practices" or "lessons learned" from projects already developed. This type of information must be incorporated, along with the methodologies and tools used, to meet the challenge of moving from diagnoses and speeches to action.

f) *Weaknesses in the distribution of economic benefits generated*

A balanced distribution of available economic resources among different actors would serve as an incentive to participation in the information society. Requests for proposals and competitions generally defined as large projects favour big business in the ICT sector, and serve as disincentives for small businesses. ICT workers are also affected by this, since the relocation of jobs to other countries is common practice in larger companies. This process reaches 54% in cases of computer systems maintenance and 44% in customer service centres (Ricart and Agenese, 2006).

### ICTs as tools for citizen empowerment

Resources such as computers and connectivity, capacity and the mastery of the necessary tools is not enough to entrench democracy in any information society. Legislative transparency, public debate, and a significant share of citizens who are motivated and able to make informed decisions on the process of constructing the information society are also needed.

The information society should respond to human needs, and people should participate actively in its construction, not merely as consumers or spectators. One of the challenges is for participation not to remain limited to “collaboration” with local administrations; grassroots communities should rather take the lead in discussions regarding policies and regulatory and legal frameworks for the information society, which should be developed and implemented with respect for human rights and basic freedoms.

Up until now the population has received little information regarding essential information society issues, such as legislation. This legislation is generally based on laws established by the EU, and proposals for legislation have come from limited circles of experts. They remain unknown to the vast majority of people, who look upon them somewhat askance. The legal framework becomes known primarily through actions taken by some civil society organisations when problems arise from applying norms to the virtual world that do not take its specificity into account.

The public administration’s priorities are the implementation of electronic voting, electronic national identity documents, digital signatures and the establishment of control measures. Although some proposals for facilitating citizen participation by electronic means do exist, the measures to empower citizens are modest.

### Participation

The WSIS stocktaking database,<sup>11</sup> maintained by the ITU, aims to provide information regarding action taken by governments and other interested parties to implement the Geneva decisions (WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action), as well as to take stock of progress achieved. This database provides elements for analysing the participation of different actors in the implementation of the WSIS commitments.

The WSIS participants are classified, very generally, as governments, international organisations, civil society entities, business sector entities and miscellaneous. In this report we argue that for a better understanding of the real complexity of the Spanish context, some of the groups of participants should be subdivided or regrouped.

For example, the actions and decisions of the Spanish government, at both the federal and autonomous community level, are very fragmented among the different ministries and administrations with their associated organs, institutions and various public entities. The agreements reached at these different levels take on myriad forms such as consortiums, foundations, or partnerships with businesses, and are greatly influenced by the political and economic climate at any given time.

Some of these entities, according to the criteria established by the WSIS, end up being classified as international organisations or civil society. While this is not correct, it should at the same time be possible to differentiate local administrations, and see which among them has the level of government that is closest to people, and which play a crucial role in the education and mobilisation of citizens.

Civil society itself is not monolithic either. According to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the following organisations can be properly considered as civil society: social agents, grassroots community organisations, local non-profit associations, non-governmental organisations and religious communities. Nevertheless, these criteria do not coincide with the classification in the WSIS database, and only 17% of the activities considered by the WSIS as “civil society” would be considered as such according to the EESC.

It is worth highlighting the need to separate small and micro businesses from other business entities,<sup>12</sup> and to be able to see opportunities for their participation in building the information society. Yet in the WSIS database these are included under the general heading “business sector entities”, independent of their size. Spain has a higher percentage of small businesses than many other European countries, and it is important to motivate their participation in the construction of the information society.

### Analysis of the WSIS stocktaking database

We have analysed existing activities in the WSIS stocktaking database according to the WSIS Plan of Action<sup>13</sup> indicators for each activity. For this purpose the original classification has been reorganised to reflect the origin of funding for the activities and who manages them.<sup>14</sup>

The objective of this analysis is to see how the aims of each group of organisations, according to the above criteria, influence the orientation of their activities (according to the WSIS action lines), and specifically how they are a protagonist in the construction of an information society. We have considered activities developed in Spain and/or involving Spanish actors.

The analysis of the WSIS participants and of the projects in the database (Graph 1) shows a diversity and complexity which cannot be ignored.

For this analysis, we have further differentiated the actors included in the WSIS database to consider: general governmental entities (GOB); educational governmental entities (G-EDU); governmental international cooperation entities (G-COOP); governments of autonomous communities (specifically Junta de Castilla y León and Junta de Extremadura) alone or in diverse types of collaborations with various entities (CCAA); international partnerships/entities (INT);<sup>15</sup> business entities (COM); foundations established by business entities

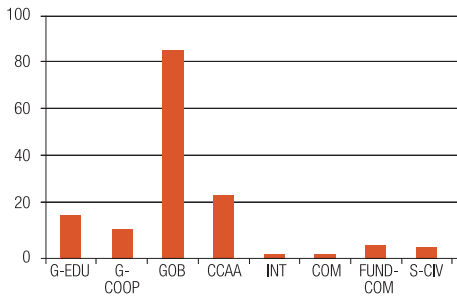
12 Using the definitions of the European Commission Recommendations of 6 May 2003, small businesses are those with less than 50 employees and a business volume no greater than EUR 10 million (USD 13 million), while micro businesses are those with less than 10 employees and a business volume no greater than EUR 2 million (USD 2.6 million).

13 The Geneva Plan of Action (ITU, 2003) sets out the following action lines: C1: The role of governments and all stakeholders; C2: Information and communication infrastructure; C3: Access to information and knowledge; C4: Capacity building; C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs; C6: Enabling environment; C7: ICT applications; C8: Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content; C9: Media; C10: Ethical dimensions of the information society; C11: International and regional cooperation; Section B: Achievement of WSIS goals and objectives; Section D: Digital solidarity programme; Section E: Follow-up and evaluation; Section F: Towards WSIS phase 2 (Tunis).

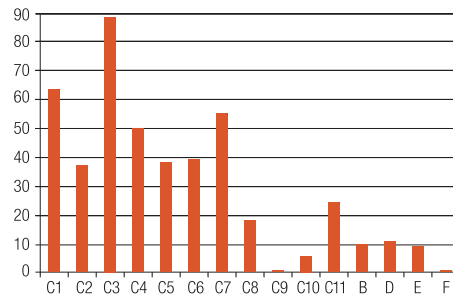
14 This rather than reflecting the legal title of the organisations that carry them out, or according to strict territorial criteria. The latter is incongruent and poorly defined when activities are carried out over the internet, or are cooperative activities that may have an international reach, or when organisations, though they may be international, act within Spain or have Spanish partners.

15 INT includes not only activities developed by international intergovernmental organisations, but also all those in which there are participants from several countries, including Spain.

11 The database was established in October 2004. It can be consulted and updated at <[www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking](http://www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking)>.

**Graph 1: Number of activities by type of agents**

Source: ITU. WSIS stocktaking database (2006)

**Graph 2: Number of activities by action line**

Source: ITU. WSIS stocktaking database (2006)

(FUND-COM) and all the other entities classified in the WSIS database as civil society (S-CIV). In total, there were 163 activities analysed.

As can be seen, there is a considerable difference between the number of governmental activities included in the database and activities led by other stakeholders.

The interests of the different actors can vary greatly, as can be seen in Graph 2 (several activities are included in more than one action line).

#### Proposed activities by action lines

Graph 3 shows the number of activities presented by the government, including those presented by autonomous communities (alone or in various collaborations). All activities in which autonomous communities have decision-making power<sup>16</sup> have been included in the “government” section.

As can be seen, at the level of government there is little interest in a number of the action lines, and C9, in particular, is practically ignored by all of the decision-makers. This action line specifies that the media, in its various forms and various ownership regimes, also plays an essential role as an actor in the development of an information society, and recognises as important its contribution to freedom of expression and plurality of information. These are all very important aspects in the democratic development of the information society.

#### Budgets assigned to proposals

The form for listing activities in the WSIS database does not facilitate the systematic incorporation of information regarding the budgets of each activity. Surely, if the budgets assigned to the different action lines by the different actors could be included, the differences would appear greater still, and would give us a better sense of the economic and power distribution among these groups. It may also give us an indication of their interest in participating in the WSIS process.

For those activities that refer to very broad plans, specifying how the budget is assigned would offer clarity as to whether it is being spent on social priorities, infrastructure priorities, administration and management priorities, or others.

#### Differentiation of interests

In analysing the distribution of activities of non-governmental entities,<sup>17</sup> presented in Graph 4, we found that although the number of activities included is low for entities classified as civil society, these tend to be distributed more evenly among the various action lines. Supplementary information has been sought to analyse these actors at a finer level, more apt for our aims.

This exploratory exercise, carried out with a limited number of proposals, points to the necessity of considering the different interests involved in the development of the information society. These interests do not necessarily coincide, are often weighted in a particular area, and show tendencies which must be analysed if we want to foster active participation of the people, real civil society and small businesses in the construction of the information society in Spain.

#### Conclusions

It is important to highlight that to speak of broad-based, active citizen participation in the information society really means to speak of the opportunity for direct democratic participation in the construction of the information society. This entails a society in which information and democratic access to it are crucial to people, not merely as end-receivers of information and services, but also as participants in informed decision-making and deliberations.

Administrations are developing initiatives which are supposedly citizen-oriented, and modifying administrative services and procedures using the potential of ICTs for e-government, but it seems that they are far from considering citizens as “actors”.

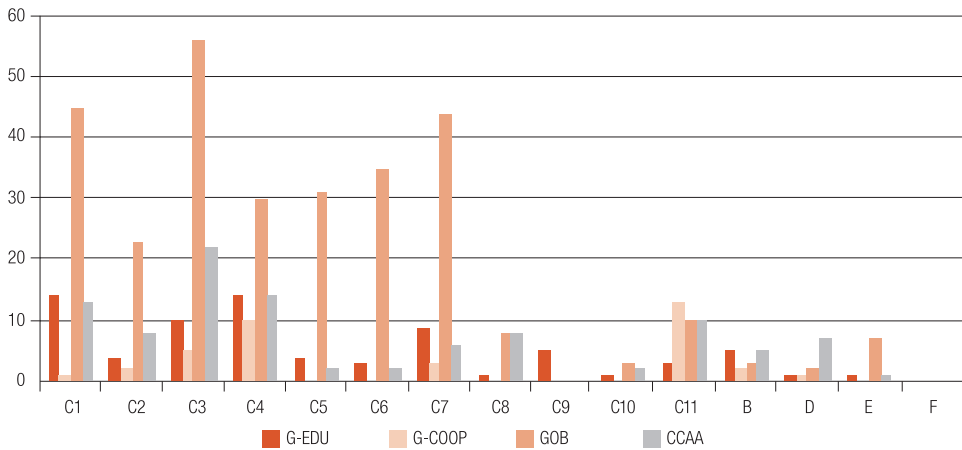
One condition necessary for people to feel more involved in the construction of the information society is their participation as subjects, not merely as objects of development measures. This participation goes beyond considering that people are participating merely because they “attend” certain activities or “use” certain telecommunications services or infrastructure. These conditions may be more or less necessary; they may even be essential, but they are not enough.

<sup>16</sup> The number of activities by the federal government and autonomous communities (alone or in various collaborations) is 148 in total. Disaggregated data only exist for the autonomous communities of Junta de Castilla y León and Junta de Extremadura. In the case of education activities, those activities in which autonomous communities participate along with the federal government have not been differentiated.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that the information obtained from the WSIS database is “contaminated”, given the inclusion of projects by foundations created by commercial entities in the telecom sector in the category of civil society entities. We have differentiated these different actors in Graph 4, including the category “business foundations” to refer to this particular stakeholder.

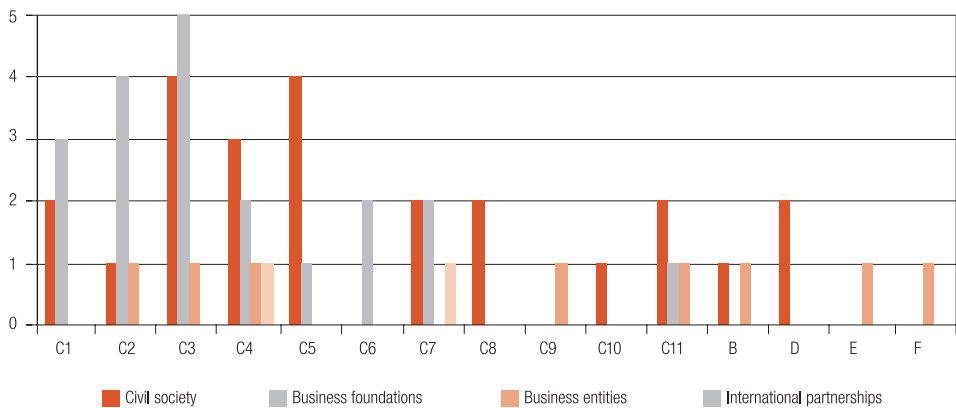


**Graph 3: Number of activities by governments (federal and autonomous communities) by WSIS action lines**



Source: ITU. WSIS stocktaking database (2006)

**Graph 4: Number of activities of non-governmental entities by WSIS action lines**



Source: ITU. WSIS stocktaking database (2006)

Active participation requires specific knowledge and skills, and digital literacy is only a first step. The concept of digital literacy can be compared to reading and writing. It is a powerful idea, if it also leads to understanding the “codes” and “keys” to the information society; but it is limited if it is only practically oriented to the knowledge and use of tools and devices. ICT education, training and capacity-building should be oriented around citizen empowerment broadly understood.

Groups that have access to the resources to participate in decision-making forums can come to have a major influence in defining actions and policies, given that a large number of citizens do not have a means of expression, or simply do not have the necessary information to decide.

This is why it is necessary to firmly develop citizen participation through specific legislation. We need to deepen the democratic tracks necessary for the information society to carve out a people-centred vision; but also to move towards a more just and equal globalisation that considers not only economic, technological or administrative factors, but also social, cultural, and legal dimensions, or any others that shape the context of people’s lives. ■



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