

**CITIZENSHIP AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE PARTICIPATION
AND DIGITAL GOVERNANCE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Innovative experiences in Southern EU Member States**

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ABSTRACT

Cyberspace has introduced new habits and relationships into traditional forms of social intercourse and modern symbolic practices and representations. The formation of a new *telepolis* constitutes the main challenge to be overcome by communication researchers. The breaking up of the internal and external boundaries of cities and territories, and the merging together and confusion of public and private spaces, which have always been traditionally separated in modern political discourse and communication, indicates not only new cultural trends in human organization and socialization, but also, through the various electronic forms of interaction and information exchange, the constitution of a new space for political identity and participation.

Therefore, the dynamics of capitalist globalization have contributed to the creation of an urban spatiality depending on networks that have no defined territory, borders, or territorial locations with an intense concentration of resources. These dynamics, in fact, are not totally new. The difference today is, without doubt, the intensity, complexity and global reach of these networks, as well as their use and ownership by local governments, social movements and active citizenship. As a result, in the current process of capitalist globalization, the new configurations generated in the economic and technological sphere affect the political level and the issue of governance. In this context, information and communication technologies are presented as little explored tools of governance, and economic and cultural development, for the construction of new models of partnership and participatory citizenship. Concepts like digital governance refer to new ways of interaction between citizens and governments, and new concepts of urban policy using electronic means.

As the main future challenge for the social and economic development of the common space of the European Union, this is how the European Commission identifies the articulation of participation-based local politics geared to a new governance that has a favourable impact on communitarian development processes, from a firm standpoint of participatory and plural democracy in the cultural era, as a resource that anticipates innovative ways of citizenship. The general aim is to study how these new cultural practices are materializing and the local development processes that define the current rationales of public space construction through new information and communication technologies.

In this article, several innovative experiences in Southern EU Member States are analyzed, presenting the preliminary discussion about the conceptual basis of a new strategic vision for social movements that tries to explore new local forms of cultural autonomy for citizens through the *appropriation* of new information technologies, in a social research applied to ICTs and citizen participation. This study points to a more efficient use of this potential by social movements versus its underutilization by local administrations and third sector organizations.

KEYWORDS

Digital Citizenship/ Electronic Government/ Electronic Public Administration/Information Society/ Local Development/Cyberdemocracy in southern EU/Innovative experiences/ICT's and citizen participation

I. INTRODUCTION

The intensive globalization processes of the last third of the 20th century have decisively affected the configuration of all that is local. This *glocalization* outlines a scenario in which the local is affected by global flow and concentration dynamics in which telecommunication networks play a decisive role. In the words of Saskia Sassen (2003), these dynamics have contributed to producing an urban spatiality depending on networks that have no defined territory, borders, or territorial locations with an intense concentration of resources. These dynamics are an exclusive feature of our historical period; since the encyclopedic work of Lewis Mumford (*Technics and Civilization*), the influence of techniques and machines on urban life has been analyzed. The current process' new feature lies in the intensity, complexity and global reach of these networks, as well as their use and appropriation by broad sectors of civil society, which in other historical periods would have been excluded from the use of technology.

In their studies on the new relationships between the local and the global, Jordi Borja and Manuel Castells (1997) suggested a double process of analysis. While cities position themselves in the global economy, at the same time they should integrate and structure their local society. This integration depends on the implementation of intensive processes of political democratization, administrative decentralization and citizen participation in municipal management. Using the terminology of these authors, it is necessary to interrelate the rationales of the *space of flows* with the corresponding rationales of the *spaces of places*; that is, accessing circuits of capital accumulation, market integration and reorganization of industrial production (space of flows), while at the same time designing new territorial forms of organizing citizens' daily lives and experiences (space of places). In the same way as Michel de Certeau talked about the invention of daily life many decades ago, nowadays it is necessary to reinvent it, based on the same humanist interpretation, but in a new technological, economic and political context.

The reconfigurations that take place in the economic and technological spheres affect, on a political level, the question of *governance*. In the 1970s, this term referred to the State's role in matters such as administrative efficiency and, in a broad sense, to its management capacity. Nowadays, governance incorporates other variables, such as state interaction with civil society and the marketplace. It has been precisely the crisis of governance and confidence in municipalities and local administrations that has favoured the implementation of different participatory and democratic regeneration initiatives.

In this context, information and communication technologies appear as (insufficiently

explored) tools of governance, socio-economic and cultural development, and construction of new supportive and participatory citizenship models. Terms like *citizen networks*, *electronic government* and *digital cities* refer to new forms of interaction between citizens and local authorities, to new concepts of urban policy, using digital means. Along these lines, one of the central debates revolving around the European Information Society is the provisional function of social capital provided by the new media, as expounded by community informatics or studies on confidence and good government in the digital era. According to Van Bavel/Punie/Tuami, the new information and communication technologies (NICTs) play an increasingly more important role in local development because of their capacity to mobilize material resources, information and knowledge. If social capital, as stated by Putnam, can be defined as one of the characteristics of any social organization based on co-operation for mutual benefit, citizen confidence and participation, and rules of reciprocity, the problem of participation in new technologies is currently a strategic challenge that obliges social organizations to articulate alternative co-operation and collective action networks, transforming the disposition of social capital into “interconnected social capital” (Van Bavel, 2003).

Nevertheless, even acknowledging some of the discoveries of Putnam concerning the problem being addressed here, above all for the study of processes of social change in the field of communication, this concept of social networks, forms of government and self-organization of local communities tends to consider power relationships apart, above all in the political and economic context, addressing all forms of exchange and association from a personal definition of the Neoclassical paradigm of Political Economy, which, in the manner of a black box, presides his analysis of social links. As Prof. Navarro has been right to criticize, the discourse on social capital tries, on principle, to replace the analysis of power between classes, races and sexes, and its consequences in terms of public policies, by an instrumental reading of social relations at a time when, as Yúdice has criticized, culture itself has become a resource for economic development. Along these lines, it is essential to shift from a “capitalized” appraisal of innovation processes to a structural vision of the process of *social appropriation* of new technologies, especially if the regions in question are peripheral or underdeveloped, as is the case of Andalusia in Southern Europe.

II. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN

ANDALUSIA

Sectorial studies conducted in the most important region of Southern Europe and the Common Market confirm the existence of structural failures and problems of integration of new technologies that contradict the democratizing discourse of the Commission on the future of Europe and the integration in the Knowledge Society, from the standpoint of its contribution to regional and local development in favour of an Information Society for All.

In the specific case of Andalusia, the distance with respect to national and European averages has widened over the last few years, reinforcing mechanisms and rationales of social and economic exclusion, both individually and territorially speaking, depicting a landscape of small technological and financial archipelagos and areas integrated into the global system in conditions of clear dependency and subordinate convergence, in accordance with transnational economic interests, which reproduces diffusionist political dynamics centred on the consumption of new information technologies (NICTs) and different forms of technological dissemination of knowledge. The dominance of this political-economic rationale results in mediation models that impede the exploration of creative and potentially liberating uses of digital networks, to the point of defining Andalusian citizens as clients or mere consumers of new technological devices and equipment, noting numerous contradictions between the public discourse and the effective reality as regards regional adaptation to the Information Society; like, for instance, the limited development of policies geared to boosting the use of free software, vindicating the creation of a dynamic corporate sector revolving around new technologies (Guadalinux project), or the appeal to the Third Sector and the scant or nonexistent participation of civil society in the definition of public policies addressing the matter in question (Andalucía Compromiso Digital), without mentioning the insufficient development of electronic administration from the standpoint of citizens' rights and public government.

From a number of analyses conducted on the structure of the information economy in Andalusia (Román/Bueno, 2004), it is possible to note, along the same lines, the persistence of delays, inequalities and considerable imbalances that tend to reinforce themselves as a result of the implementation of digital media application policies inspired by a traditional development model which currently – owing to the new capitalist crisis – also highlights the lack of relevancy of this public policy by reproducing an economic structure historically defined by:

- low levels of production, employment and income;

- the weak organization of the economic fabric because of productive specialization and concentration;
- an insufficient growth rate;
- an intensive exploitation of natural resources and deterioration of the regional environment;
- a low-qualified workforce and an insufficient entrepreneurial culture;
- and a strong economic dependence.

In this framework, the regional bid for innovation and knowledge as pivotal points of the promotion of a new model of economic and social development in Andalusia is, at the very least, contradictory and inconvenient, since it follows principles and public strategies incompatible with the need for structuring and reinforcing autochthonous capital, in coherence – as would be expected – with the adverse conditions of integration in the Common Market. So, the Second Modernization of Andalusia points to the need for promoting the Information Society as the basis of regional development and economic progress by means of an implementation process of neoliberal policies that, since the 1990s, have been inspired by the spirit of the Bangemann Report, in accordance with a technocratic vision keyed to the privatization and commercial efficiency of new technologies, which, in the Andalusian institutional discourse, has resulted in a political and economic model that places the region in a subordinate position at the service of more developed centres, be they located in Spain or the EU.

The bid for implementing new information technologies has contributed in this way to strengthening a regional development model that has nothing to do with the reality or economic structure of Andalusia and that ignores the position and structural problems of the process of economic integration within the EU. In addition, “what really characterizes the Second Modernization project is the indiscriminate borrowing of principles and objectives belonging to exogenous models, principally the North American Global Information Society and the European Information Society” (Moreno, 2008: 284), renouncing its own indicators and policies adapted to the real necessities of the population.

I@landalus. Iniciativas estratégicas para el Desarrollo de la Sociedad de la Información en Andalucía (2002-2004) [I@landalus. Strategic initiatives for developing the Information Society in Andalusia (2002-2004)], the *Plan de Innovación y Modernización de Andalucía (2005)* [Andalusian

Innovation and Modernization Plan (2205)], and the *Plan Andalucía Sociedad de la Información (2006)* [Andalusian Information Society Plan (2006)] all establish a future outlook of a clearly dependent and subordinate nature. So:

“The strategy and the lines of action of the Andalusian Regional Government as regards the Second Modernization are more an imitation of state and European policies than an autonomous answer to the challenges and opportunities accompanying the revolution in information and communication technologies (...) On the other hand, this imitation also results in the assumption of the chief indicators established by official state or European instruments and in establishing as an objective the comparison of Andalusian statistics with the average figures of more advanced EU regions, with the consequent loss of autonomy due to the introduction of an exogenous modernization model” (Moreno, 2008: 9).

Along these lines of progress, the latest report on the current state of affairs indicates the dominance of several trends and obstacles in the development of the Information Society in Andalusia:

1. the Andalusian NICTs market and the role of the companies in the industry are marginal, weak and dependent;
2. the low levels of income per capita limit access to digital networks, resulting in a structural barrier for the development of digital citizenship;
3. the implementation of NICTs in the corporate sector is low and limited;
4. the generation of Andalusian content is a lot lower than national and European averages;
5. the investment in R&D&i places the region in a position of dependency in the development of Information Society programmes, content and applications.

Despite state processes of autonomy and political decentralization, as a result “Andalusia ends up by being a space of accommodation and co-ordination of the interests of supranational actors that control the process of elaborating and implementing public policies geared to the Information and Knowledge Society” (Moreno, 2008: 9).

Through revealing data on the main national and EU indicators to this respect, Andalusia’s integration model shows that such a new technology incorporation process has been conducted in a subordinate and dependent way, generating growing divergences and asymmetries in the region’s hinterland. “The objectivised presentation of a developed and modernized Andalusia, on the same footing as the rest of the Spanish and European regions, and the designation of socio-cultural aspects as the main obstacle for completing the Second Modernization, is an attempt – expressed through the discourse – at resolving (silencing) one of the socio-political problems at the very root of the Second Modernization project: the structural deficiencies of the Andalusian reality” (Moreno, 2008: 279), and which, in some way, characterize the disparate development of the Information

Society in Southern Europe. The bid for changing the mentality of the Andalusian population ends up being a sort of inverted mediation by which the structural or objective conditions – the chief obstacle in the process of modernization and territorial development – are identified as a guarantee and factor of social change, while the subjective factor – traditional Andalusian culture – is shown as the cause of the underdevelopment of the Information Society. “With this panorama, the references that we find in this discourse both to citizen participation and to the consensus between the actors comprising Andalusian society, who will have to collaborate so as to reach the fixed objectives, begin to make sense (...) In this way, the idea is to reinforce the endangered consensus based on a new pact between citizens, enterprise and political powers, in addition to presenting the development of the Second Modernization as inevitable” (Moreno, 2008: 289).

In this process of ideological inversion, the appeal for participatory democracy and an active role of citizens becomes a catch-word for justifying the failure of a policy that reproduces the historical imbalances and asymmetries of regional backwardness and underdevelopment. According to the researcher Francisco Javier Moreno, the future challenge would involve, however, reinforcing the role of Andalusian citizen and popular culture “on which reflection on Andalusian development would have to revolve – for this is very frequently the space from which the most productive and innovative proposals and organization dynamics emerge” (Moreno, 2008: 291) – which would facilitate the definition of new formulas based on the creativity and expression of citizens, capable of structuring endogenous dynamics that reverse or restrain the dominant adverse tendencies in regional development. Although, for the moment, this does not appear to be the specific integration approach of the new governance and democratization policies of digital culture neither in Andalusia nor in other Southern European regions, nor for that matter in the EU municipalities themselves.

III. LOCAL EXPERIENCES

1. Citiz@move. The reality of the European map.

When trying to describe the processes involved in the appropriation of new technologies, the conclusions of the CITIZ@MOVE project are similar to those of the aforementioned studies on Andalusia (Sierra, 2006b). In a detailed analysis of the forms of participatory democracy in 10 Spanish and European cities (Seville, Graz, Derry, Toledo, Cosenza, Misterbianco, Siracusa, Valencia, Pecs and ASDA-Athens), geared to identifying from 2004-2006 good practices and experiences that local authorities can capitalize on so as to move ahead in the development of cyberdemocracy, the study entitled, “New information technologies, citizen participation and local

development (Let us all learn how to communicate better. Interactive Communication Programme designed by citizens, civil servants and public authorities)”, concludes by indicating the notorious absence of public policies addressing the Information Society and citizens’ rights at a municipal level.

The most relevant data and conclusions of the set of results obtained in the **Workshop on Diagnosis and Participatory Prospects**, using the EASW methodology, indicate that the weaknesses and deficiencies outnumber any significant progress made by the local authorities. The group of civil servants and public authorities, citizens and representatives of social organizations highlighted the following in their diagnoses, using the SWOT analysis technique:

STRENGTHS

- The existence in the majority of the cities of institutional websites with information on public services and provision of equipment for designing units of free access to new technologies, such as libraries, cultural centres (Cosenza), youth centres, or city information centres (Graz).
- The awareness of Public Administration and, in some cases, the existence of regulatory frameworks of obligatory enforcement that steer the actions of the local authorities towards implementing eGovernment and citizen participation models via new technologies.

WEAKNESSES

- The lack of infrastructures and provision of equipment and, as a consequence, the insufficient technological modernization of the municipalities.
- The lack of training and the technological illiteracy among citizens.
- The insufficient provision of financial resources for the “technological leap forward”.
- The hierarchical and vertical communication, totally lacking in interactivity, between Local Administration and citizens.
- The unequal and asymmetrical access of citizens to ICTs.
- And the lack of knowledge of the participatory use of the new media.

OPPORTUNITIES

- The implementation of global processes of participation (participatory budgets in Seville) and experiences in the use of ICTs (Valencia, Graz).
- The political will of the local authorities, the central government, and the EU itself since the Lisbon Summit.
- The creation of citizen networks via the Internet.

THREATS

- The growing isolation of the population due to the centrality of municipal communications based on the individualized use of new information technologies.
- The monopoly of multinational multimedia conglomerates, such as Microsoft, which limit the process of public appropriation of new technologies.
- The implementation of e Government by local lobbies.

On envisaging the possible future scenarios, the conclusions were generally positive. The majority of the cities coincided in indicating that the future adaptation of the municipalities to the use of new technologies will, in one way or another, favour the participatory development of these new channels of interaction. For instance, the laboratory of Seville ended up by supporting the most positive scenario with 26 votes, while 12 envisaged an adverse future scenario. In the identification of future scenarios, the public authorities and civil servants were the most optimistic about the future of their city (11 votes to 2), followed by the social organizations (8) and the citizens (7). On the contrary, the representatives of non-governmental organizations were the most critical, envisaging a negative future scenario (7). So, although the participants in the diagnostic workshops confirmed progressive advances in this sphere, the final result was not totally positive. In fact, the conclusions of this study confirm the absence of active communication and development policies in the majority of the municipalities, in addition to scant knowledge in the cities on processes of participation with and via ICTs, which, without doubt, has limited the implementation of innovative strategies in this direction. And the fact is that, generally speaking, the municipalities have little or no information about their own community resources and channels (independent radio stations, informative websites, community newspapers and publications), and, in most cases, hardly possess any accumulated cultural capital as regards citizen participation allowing them to think up and define new forms of government by means of the implementation of those new digital channels of interaction currently available to them. This is most frequently seen in those centres of population or municipalities with the highest levels of inequality and poverty, where significant limitations in the processes of Internet appropriation by the citizenry also exist. And this situation tends to be reproduced in medium-sized and large municipalities that have tried to define new technology socialization programmes, as will be shown below.

2. City of Jerez

From the conclusions of a study conducted by the COMPOLITICAS team in the industrial city of Jerez, it is possible to observe that constants indicated in general for the European case are reproduced even in those municipalities with active policies in this field. In the analysis of the social uses of the Web, our research confirmed the following in this important centre of population, located in the province of Cadiz:

1. That the main reference reports analyzing the Information Society and the impact of the Internet at a global, national, regional and local level, reproduce in the majority of cases a quantitative perspective of analysis centred on measuring access to digital networks, purchasing computer equipment and several uses that revolve around the extension of the electronic administration. In these reports, the political uses of the Internet occupy second place, and the analyses, practices and visions of social organizations (Third Sector, social movements) are absent from practically all of them.
2. That the qualitative evaluation of the Information Society and the uses of the Internet in the local space, so as to overcome the difficulties identified in what has become to be known as the “Second Digital Gap”, is still a pending task.
3. That in the reference reports on the efforts to further the Information Society, insufficient emphasis is put on the importance of the role of the geopolitical scenario in which communication and technological development take place.
4. That full advantage still has not been taken of the communication potential provided by technology such as the Internet, above all as regards interactivity and the participatory communication of users.
5. That the contribution of the Participatory Communication approach, within the framework of Communication for Development and Social Change, serves as a theoretical basis for building new imageries revolving around the social uses of the Internet, as well as a theoretical benchmark facilitating the analysis of techno-communicative practices from more productive angles.
6. That the most frequent uses to which Jerez City Council puts the Internet fall into the Electronic Administration category, while those uses related to the political participation of citizens in decision-making affecting the city take second place.
7. That the uses to which the citizens of Jerez preferentially put the Internet are related to the possibilities that this channel offers them to communicate with their peers (friends, schoolmates, university friends) and family. They see the Internet as a tool that favours socialization, but only at the aforementioned primary level. Generally speaking, they do not

consistently use the Internet for matters concerning a secondary socialization process or for participating in social actions and virtual policies via the Web. Neither does their discourse include references to a process of socialization that leads them to participate in organizations belonging to the local social fabric.

8. That the predominance of an associationism of an administrative or bureaucratic nature in Jerez's third sector organizations leads to a reductionist use of the Internet, centred on the transmission of information, efficient internal communication management, virtual communication with the Administration, and the search for educational resources for their activities. Those uses related to online work, political activism and the collective building of knowledge are practically non-existent.
9. That the social movements of Jerez are the only ones that manage to establish fructiferous interconnections between the structural centres of research. The use of participatory online tools allows them to increase the densification of and boost social networks in Jerez, which are dedicated to civic commitment in the city and facilitate the recuperation of public spaces as meeting points and places of sociability, with a rationale far-removed from the efforts to commercialize the city's spaces of socialization.

In short, taking into account the results of the analyzed local experiences, seemingly it would be convenient to start by thinking about and reconstructing the meaning of participation in community management. The invisible threads of social reality, in which people try to find a meaning in daily life, can be activated by technological devices. But this will only be possible if the technological instruments are accompanied by communicative work incorporating the necessary communication codes to connect with the subjects and involve them in participatory processes, and by a political project that surpasses the limits of administrative modernization in order to promote new social imageries and practices of citizen participation in local government.

3. Third Sector and the social appropriation of new technologies

The hypothesis mentioned in the last epigraph was confirmed in a research action project, started up in 2003 by the Andalusian Youth Institute, entitled "Aprendiendo a incorporar las NTIC en los movimientos sociales" [*Learning how to incorporate NICTs in social movements*], with the participation of 17 social organizations based in Andalusia. Far-removed from the instrumental and technocratic visions of technological literacy and critical with the introduction of marketing in social organizations, this project's theoretical framework comprised the main socio-critical contributions of educommunication and Communication for Development. The aim of the resulting

research work was to answer three central questions: How are Andalusian social organizations using ICTs? What previous views do these organizations have of communication and ICTs? And how does the identity of these organizations and their project in society affect this process of technological and communication appropriation?

Firstly, the research's main conclusions confirmed the importance of the previous views that the members of the organizations involved had of ICTs. Generally speaking, we could say that a technocratic vision predominates in these organizations, which pay excessive attention to the media as communication tools above or beyond mediations in organization and exchange within and outside social organizations (Marí, 2005). Secondly, when evaluating the use to which these social organizations put ICTs, it was observed that, technically speaking, volunteers managed to master the necessary skills in a short time, as well as glimpsing the possibilities offered by new technologies to achieve their objectives; although this use and adaptation was notoriously inconsistent due to the imbalance between the intensive use of email and distribution lists and the sporadic use of chats and forums, as well as the manifest difference in the level of access to these tools by all the members of the organization. This type of use is widespread, as shown by other studies conducted in Spain. Along these lines, the report entitled “¿Conectadas?. Las ONG españolas en la red” [*Connected? Spanish NGOs in the Web*] identifies two deficiencies in the use of the Internet by Non-Governmental Organizations: difficulties with posting information with sufficient frequency and the underuse of this tool's potential for achieving greater citizen participation. On the other hand, on comparing our results with those of the report entitled “Usos de Internet de las organizaciones de Nodo50” [*Uses of the Internet by the Nodo50 organizations*] we arrive at the same conclusion as regards the different uses to which social organizations put online communication tools. According to the report, 100% of the organizations included in the study use email, 81.6% use mailing lists, 52.4% use forums, 35% use instant messaging applications, and 27.5% use chats. In our study, we have observed the same imbalance between the uses to which each one of these tools are put; that is, the greater popularity of email and an underuse of forums and chats. This imbalance is due to two basic factors: the greater technical difficulty involved in using forums and chats, and the necessary reflection implied by participation in these spaces. Judging by the results, we could say that the Internet is used more for transmitting information than for reflection or building collective knowledge. Therefore, the potential that new communication tools have for the social participation of users is underused.

With regard to the relationship existing between technological appropriation and

organizational models, we discovered that, firstly, the rationale of commercialization currently predominating in the Third Sector (TS) organizations also appears in communication and the uses of ICTs. Civic vocation has been diluted by the influence of the rationales of colonization of the market (García Roca, 2001) and by the transfer of the responsibilities of the Welfare State to the TS. Taking this into account, it is understandable that a marketing communication approach currently predominates in these organizations; their communication processes and uses of ICTs are preferentially designed for attracting human and financial resources, disregarding other dimensions and approaches of communication. Secondly, we confirmed the current trend in the TS towards so-called *welfare associationism* and *organizational associationism*. The former is characterized by a predominance of professionals, as opposed to volunteers, in management, while the second model highlights the role of the association as a service company. With regard to NGOs, the predominant models are the *welfare model* and the *subsidiary, instrumental and opportunist models*. In the case of the latter, *subsidiaries* reclaim a progressive intervention in an increasingly large number of public spaces and a greater transfer of resources; *instrumentals* are created by companies, multinationals, or power or pressure groups, with the aim of reaching where they are unable to as a private company. Thirdly, *opportunist* NGOs acquire this organizational model due to circumstantial interests, although in reality they operate like companies. Not all the TS organizations and NGOs analyzed turn to ICTs tools to attract financial and human resources. But, in accordance with Erro Sala (2002), what it is indeed observed is that the communication styles and ICT uses of these organizations are strongly influenced by a *commercial* or *welfare* model.

In short, from the implementation and evaluation of the project entitled “Aprendiendo a incorporar las TICs en los movimientos sociales” [*Learning to incorporate ICTs in social movements*] it is possible to state that the following conclusions should be prioritized by TS organizations:

1. The preferential option for the *infopoor*. Social movements have to make a decided bid for those sectors of the population that are excluded from the European Information Society (above all, the lower classes, non-qualified workers, women, old people and immigrants) by bringing pressure to bear on public institutions so that they design digital literacy programmes keyed to the *empowerment* and *politicization* of these social collectives.
2. For the democratization and social appropriation of new technologies it is necessary to go beyond merely equipping people with technology for managing *information capital*.

3. The introduction and development of the subject of communication in the agenda of social movements. Since the 1990s – with the popularization of the Internet and its political uses by anti-capitalist globalization movements – an awakening of the *McBride spirit* has been observed. Nowadays, there is a proliferation of campaigns revolving around the defence of Communication Rights, and a great number of social networks are appropriating media channels, such as the Internet, in a creative fashion. This climate of hope should result in a systematic treatment of communication and ICTs in the action of social movements.
4. TS organizations ought to put the *media-centric* approaches to ICTs behind them and make a concerted bid for a political and cultural vision.
5. In the educational process studied, we have been able to confirm the validity and usefulness of dialectic methodologies linked to the tradition of participatory action research. Stemming from social movements and widely used in Latin American and European educommunication practices, these methodologies offer a potential frequently ignored in the social appropriation process of new technologies.
6. The hegemonic vision in the EU tends to present the Information Society as a project immune to economic tensions and interests. It is therefore necessary to cultivate a geopolitical vision, from the critical networks of *empowerment*, which lead to the establishment – as indicated by Mattelart – of connections between communication-world and the processes of capitalist globalization involved in those for determining local development.

IV. CRITIQUE AND PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

From the analysis of the case studies presented here, it is possible to conclude that the experiences of citizen *empowerment* and participation through new technologies for redesigning the development models of the Information Society are still insufficient in Europe, both quantitatively and qualitatively speaking. The dominant uses, the scant material and human resources available to this end, and, above all, the limited awareness of the potential of new information technologies in the processes of local development still have not allowed the implementation in European cities of innovative practices capable of significantly transforming forms of government and urban development with the potential of *habitus* and the creative capacity of the experience of subjects and social actors, with the aim of reformulating the conceptual and praxio-logic rationales of the transformation of democracy which, nowadays, in Europe tend to be associated with the liberating role of the “Internet galaxy” in public discourse.

On the other hand, it has also been observed that, in the local experiences analyzed here, there is a certain dissoluteness in the political dimension of communication and technology directly related to the progressive commercialization of the public policies and social action of collective actors such as NGOs. For this reason, it is seemingly evident that, for implementing complex and advanced forms of participatory democracy via new information technologies, the contextualization of these social practices in the widest framework of communication and technological policies – which have been promoted in the European space and the rest of the world since the last third of the 20th century – takes on a strategic nature.

Seen from this perspective, social participation in new technologies is neither a problem of method nor an instrumental one, but essentially an epistemological problem, or to be more precise a conceptual matter which has to be addressed as a conflict of the Right of Communication. The problem we come up against lies in the fact that, in the context of the dialectics of production and modification of the space, the growing and intensive accumulation and territorial concentration of capital, and the symbolic projection of the cultural field as a space of mediation and resolution of conflicts, as a resource of local development – and then as a privileged scope of appraisal, in accordance with Yúdice – the democratization and equalitarian social participation of local actors in new information technologies constitutes a simple instrument of extension of representative democracy and the rationales of conventional consensus and hegemony. So, the challenge facing local communication policies geared to developing active citizenship via new representation media, lies in evaluating and defining participation as a bid for a radical and pluralist democracy transcending the definition of *culture as a resource* that international development policies impress on the management, storage, distribution and organization of the access to symbolic goods, depending on the conditions of transnational circulation and development of capitalism. Overcoming this objective regulatory framework of cyber-democracy would call for a radical reformulation of the precepts of representative democracy, decentralizing public information and decision-making systems beyond the models of extension and organization based on efficient rationality typical of the informational paradigm. Insofar as cyber-democracy designs a new scenario or public space, new methods and democratic possibilities for active citizen participation, and above all a new concept of space and mediation with the active participation of the citizenry, public policies should try to respond intelligently to this new emerging reality, questioning the notion of citizenship itself and the legal framework of participation in the social rule of law within the framework of the evolution of the nation-state towards the *mobile state* foreshadowing *Cognitive Capitalism* (Sierra 2006a).

In other words, nowadays citizen participation involves thinking about mediations and distances, cultural practices and cognitive frameworks of reflexivity and political imagination. The doors opened by new technologies for the collective building of local development necessarily involve citizen interaction with modern communication systems, the co-operation and organization of civic networks, and above all designing the organization of social change based on individual and group creativity.

Civic networks, community telecentres, or public anti-globalization platforms are leading to innovative forms of appropriation and use of new media, revitalizing creative processes of organization and social development that ought to be explored and adopted conceptually (Sierra, 2006a, 276), since, according to Mattelart, these new social actors are addressing matters related to information, communication and culture with an increasingly greater degree of precision and systematicity. In Southern European cities belonging to regions such as Andalusia, or provinces of Italy, the proliferation of groups and collectives keyed to defending digital rights indicates a future field of action that public policies should take into account, if the idea is to empower and strengthen the cultural capital of historically dependent and subordinate regions so as to define other processes of mediation and balanced development.

Faced with the technocratic project of the powers of the market, the critical networks of local *empowerment* thus set themselves the challenge of relating technological appropriation to social change, making the politicization of technological change in its design, development and application a reality, with respect to the complex array of potential interests, strategies and policies, as Imanol Zubero has suggested. The relationship between social movements and information, communication and ICTs reaches, therefore, way beyond the blinkered outlook of the instrumental perspective governing the majority of the experiences of introducing new media in local government and development. Since, as never before, nowadays it is the citizen who, from cultural consumer to creator, plays a principle role in the transformations of the new media ecosystem. As indicated by García Canclini, it is paradoxical at the very least that in the consumer era of the 21st century, Southern European municipalities and social organizations keep on imagining a political subject of the 18th century. The confirmation of this reality in regions such as Andalusia demands at the very least a radical shift in public policies related to the Information Society, starting with thinking from bottom up: making citizens talk.

A difficult challenge when the local authorities still believe that the Internet will make them

free, prosperous and integrated.

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[*autonomous communication tool of the social movements of Jerez*])

<http://patalata.net/>