

Community Informatics, Electronic Government and Inclusion: Strategies for the Consolidation of a Citizens' Democracy in Latin America

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Abstract: *This paper aims to show the links between the electronic government and the Community Informatics, through: (1) the introduction of a conceptual framework that connects the citizens' democracy, the three dimension of the State, the citizen-center electronic government paradigm, and the Digital Civism; and (2) the outline and the analysis of some innovative strategies – both citizen-led and government-led ones- , that shows the presence of social forces and political will within the region, that can create a favorable scenario for the re-shaping of e-government public policies in Latin America, and for the starting up of a virtuous circle oriented in favor of a citizens' democracy in the region.*

Keywords: electronic government, digital civism, e-participation, Ibero-American Charter, Latin America

Introduction

This paper aims at giving an answer, related to the Latin American context, to the core questions of the Prato 2008 CIRN Conference:

- How is 'social inclusion' or e-inclusion understood as it applies to communities in their interaction with technology?
- Are governments, funders, and policy makers, understanding the link between 21st century technologies and social development?
- How are developing regions addressing constraints for social inclusion and for e-inclusion?

To achieve the mentioned objective, this paper will enlighten on different strategies that are taking place at present in Latin America, both by governments and by society, oriented to improve the relationship between State and society through the use of ICTs, within what is known as electronic government.

At their first stage, the public policies on electronic government in Latin America have been strongly shaped by a traditional state-centric paradigm, producing scarce positive impact on citizens' life conditions, and on an equitable social, political, economic and human development.

At present, a new stage of public policies on electronic government is starting to be shaped, based on a new paradigm, a citizen-centric one that is gaining significant consensus among stakeholders and decision makers of the region.

The consideration of the electronic government having in mind the Community Informatics' approach, gives us the opportunity to move ourselves away from the State's point of view - which has been the traditional perspective to study electronic government -, towards a community's point of view, which allows us to consider the electronic government: (1) as a set of ICTs-based solutions - offered by governments, may be with public and private partners - for the community's problems; and (2) as a public policy that must pursue social, political, economic and human development for the whole society.

At the same time, the Community Informatics' approach and the community's point of view, lead us to consider not only the governments' strategies - "top-down" - around electronic government, but the communities' strategies - "bottom-up" - as well.

“Bottom-up” strategies around electronic government include:

- the ways in which communities and social groups take advantage of the different services offered by governments through ICTs;
- the ways in which communities and societies create paths in order to have incidence in the shaping of public policies related to electronic government.

Returning to the objective of this paper, we will respond to the core questions of the Conference introducing:

- A conceptual framework that helps to understand the link between electronic government and democracy, and the bridge that the public policies on electronic government can help to create. Bridge through which the Latin American societies could move forward from an inequitable democracy, towards an inclusive one.
- The analysis of some significant initiatives related to electronic government - both from governments and from society - that are contributing to build the mentioned bridge, as an enabler of an inclusive democracy in the region.

Lastly, some conclusions are presented, related to: (1) the links between the citizen-center electronic government public policies and the Community Informatics; and (2) the challenges that both governments and society are facing to re-shape their electronic government strategies in order to orient them towards a citizens’ democracy in Latin America.

The electronic government: a bridge to an inclusive democracy in Latin America. A conceptual framework

The panorama of democracy in Latin America

The state of Democracy in Latin America has been deeply analyzed through a consulting and participatory process – conducted by the UNDP - that has joined the most prestigious social scientists that focus their work on Latin America. The result of this process is the Report “Democracy in Latin America” (“*La democracia en América Latina*”) (UNDP, 2004a, b, c, d). In the mentioned Report, it is introduced a description of the state of democracy in Latin America, and some conclusions are reached, which are summarized as follows:

Main ideas about democracy in Latin America

- Democracy has become the dominant political system throughout Latin America.
- Democracy co-exists with a difficult socioeconomic situation. Poverty and inequality are crucial problems in the region.
- The dimensions of political, civil and social citizenship are not integrated. Progress has been greatest in the first category. All of the guarantees of civil citizenship are still not available to all citizens on an equal basis.
- The difficulty experienced by the State in satisfying social demands is due in part to its limited resources and limited tax base. The State’s power is also restricted by internal and external interest groups.
- Political institutions have been weakened. Party representation does not reflect the interests of much of society. New movements and forms of political expression are emerging but they still lack institutionalized channels of representation. There is a need to give politics back its content and capacity for change.
- There are several different models within the market economy. The strengthening of democracy necessitates a debate on these various options.

Table N. 1. Main ideas about Democracy in Latin America. Source: UNDP (2004c, p. 26).

Based on this panorama, Guillermo O'Donnell (2004a and 2004b, cited in UNDP (2004c)) states that:

Citizens' Democracy in Latin America

“democracy is more than a set of conditions for electing and being elected (“electoral democracy”), it is also a way of organizing society with the aim of protecting and expanding the rights of individuals (“citizens’ democracy”). This broader vision of democracy is based on four main ideas: (a) The individual has inherent rights; (b) society is organized in a way that guarantees the exercise of these rights and promotes the expansion of citizenship; (c) free and competitive elections, together with the rule of law, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for democracy; and (d) the historical specificity of Latin America in its nation-building processes.

If citizenship is the foundation of democracy, then the discussion on the state of democracy and the debate on democratic reforms must encompass its various dimensions: political citizenship; civil citizenship; and social citizenship.”

Table N. 2. Citizens' democracy in Latin America. Source: UNDP (2004c) Based on O'Donnell (2004a) and O'Donnell (2004b).

Political, civil and social citizenship consists of a set of individual rights that guarantees freedom, considering freedom following Amartya Sen's (Sen, 2000) approach to development: as equal access for all to the minimum social, political and civil conditions that are necessary to be capable to exercise the full agency of people, meaning this, to be able to participate in the decisions that have significant impact on their lives.

These minimum civil, political and social conditions, as is said in the UNDP's Report (UNDP, 2004a) - that compose civil, political and social citizenship - must include, but are not limited to:

- Civil citizenship: consists of the right to individual freedom: freedom of a person; freedom of expression; freedom of thought and religion; the right to justice; equality before the law; no discrimination; freedom of the press and the right to information.
- Political citizenship: consists of the right to participate in the exercise of political power through open and clean elections (to be elected as member of the political bodies that are vested with political authority, or as elector of the members of such bodies); among others.
- Social citizenship: consists of the right to security; the right to have access to the minimum of economic and social well-being – basically health, education, employment, social services-; the right to fully share of the social heritage, among others.

Lastly, the UNDP's Report (2004) concludes that in order to manage the expansion of a citizens' democracy in the region in the context of globalization, the State – at the regional, national, sub-national and local levels- will have a significant role to play.

The State in a citizens' democracy in Latin America

In order to understand the role of the State in a citizens' democracy for the region, we will introduce here O'Donnell's (2004a and 2004b) approach to the State and its dimensions: The State includes at least three dimensions, historically contingent: (O'Donnell, 2004b, pp. 150-151):

- The State as a set of bureaucracies: complex organizations that hold legally assigned responsibilities oriented to protect a certain aspect of the general common good or public interest.
- The State as a legal system (the Law): a framework of rules legally sanctioned, that penetrate /permeate and co-determine a great number of social relationships.

As O'Donnell (2004b) explains, “Together, State bureaucracies and the Law, are presumed to generate, for the inhabitants of their territory, the great common good of the general order and

of the foreseeability of a large range of social relationships, [...]and] are presumed to guarantee the historical continuity of the corresponding territorial union, usually conceived as a nation". (p. 151)

- The State as a focal point of common identity for the inhabitants of its territory. Pointing to create a collective identity upon social conflicts and social cleavages.

As O'Donnell (2004a) states, "in all its three dimensions, the State is a space of complex condensation, mediation and production of power relationships"(p. 51).

The performance of the State, in each of its dimensions, as O'Donnell (2004a) states, is expressed as efficacy of its bureaucracies; effectiveness of its legal system; and as its credibility as a common identity focal point (p. 13).

The role of the electronic government in a citizens' democracy in Latin America

To clarify the concept of electronic government, we will consider the following definition: electronic government is the "Use of ICTs in the state offices and agencies in order to improve the information and the services offered to citizens, to orientate the efficacy and the efficiency of the public management and to substantially increase the transparency of the public sector and the citizens participation." (ICEG, 2007, p. 7).

From this perspective, the electronic government includes the three dimensions of the use of ICTs in the State, traditionally known as e-administration, e-services, and e-governance. According to what has been said up to this point in this contextual framework, about democracy and State in Latin America, ¿which is the role that the electronic government - conceived as a public policy - must accomplish in order to contribute to the consolidation of a citizens' democracy in the region?

As can be seen in the following figure:

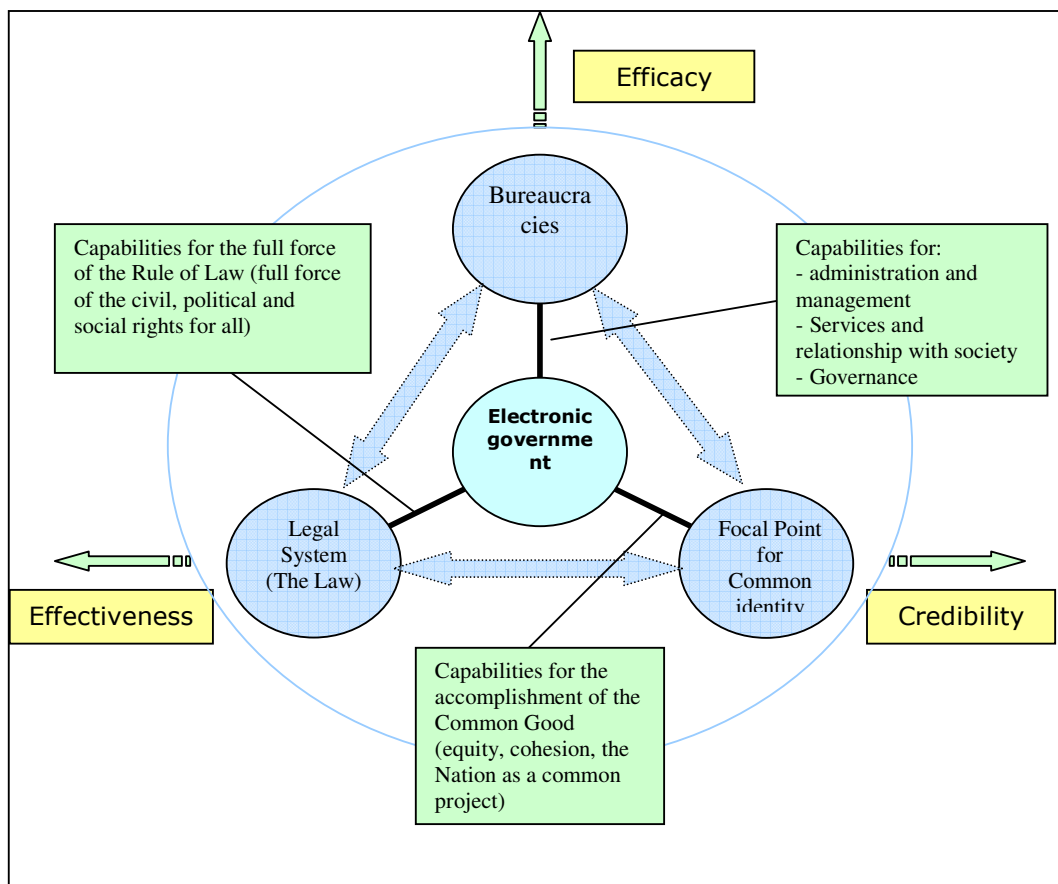


Figure N. 1. The role of the electronic government in a citizens' democracy in Latin America. Source: Goldstein (2008b).

Bridging the gap of democracy in Latin America. Government-led and citizen-led strategies on electronic government

As it was said in the Introduction of this paper, we will identify and analyze in this section some “top-down” strategies and some “bottom-up” strategies related to electronic government, which can be considered as part of “community informatics”, and which could have a strong positive impact on the consolidation of a citizens' democracy in the region – and thus, on social inclusion.

These strategies are:

I. “Top-down” strategies:

- A regional initiative: the “Ibero-American Charter on Electronic Government” (ICEG), in Section 2.1.
- National governments initiatives related to the improvement of the relationship between State and society, particularly, the most outstanding ones among those oriented to transparency, active citizen participation and policy networks. In Section 2.2.

II. A “bottom-up” strategy:

- An academic and civil society initiative: The Digital Civism Capacity Building Programme (the “*ForCiDir*” Programme), which has as its main purposes: (a) to extent the civic involvement related to electronic government: masifying its use, and preparing society to have incidence in the design, elaboration, implementation, and evaluation of the plans, programmes, projects and actions on electronic government; (b) to study how society appropriates the electronic government, and to nurture electronic government public policies with evidence, based on the experiences of the citizens when using the electronic government. In Section 2.3.

The Ibero-American Charter on Electronic Government (ICEG). A new citizen-centric paradigm

As José Luis Tesoro (2008) states, the adoption of the ICEG is a milestone that marks the declining of a traditional state-centric paradigm on electronic government, and the emerging of a new paradigm based on the citizens' interests and perspectives.

In this section we will analyze why.

What is the ICEG?

This Charter was signed by the Public Administration and State Reform Ministers and by the Chiefs of the Ibero-American Government Delegations, during the XI Ibero-American Conference of Public Administration and State Reform Ministers, at Pucón City, Chile, on May-June 2007.

The ICEG contains a set of concepts, values and orientations useful for the design, implementation, development and consolidation of the electronic government as a tool to improve Latin American public management.

In the Charter it is affirmed that the use of ICTs in public management must respond to the s' perspective of citizens and to citizens' rights¹.

Moreover, the ICEG signatories have re-affirmed their commitment to:

- The State Reform;
- the reinforcement of the public institutions;
- the modernization of the state management;
- the quality of public organizations, which is basic for development;
- the reduction of the digital divide;
- to make the Information and Knowledge Society an opportunity for all, specially by the inclusion of those at risk;
- the idea that information and knowledge are key factors for productivity and for human development in contemporary world; this means that it is necessary to avoid the deepening of inequalities; to make inclusion easy; and to reinforce social cohesion.

(ICEG, 2007, pp 3-4).

The ICEG pursues two main objectives (ICEG, 2007, pp 4-5):

- I. The recognition of the right – for all citizens - to relate themselves through electronic means with governments and Public Administrations. This right points to make easier the access to public information; the engagement with them; and the citizen participation in the public management. At the same time, electronic means must contribute to Public Administrations transparency, equity, efficacy and efficiency. Moreover, this right supposes that Public Administration interoperates, in order to simplify procedures (ICEG, 2007, p. 10). The scope of this right must be as extensive as possible considering the nature of each specific service² (ICEG, 2007, p. 10).
- II. The promotion of an inclusive, people centered Information and Knowledge Society, oriented to development.

The ICEG states a number of recommendations for the design of electronic government plans, instruments, applications, contents, processes, procedures and readiness. These recommendations follow an integral perspective close to Araya Dujisin's (2004) three axes: the society readiness - or "in front of the screen" - ; the back-end - or "behind the screen" -; the front-end - or "the screen".

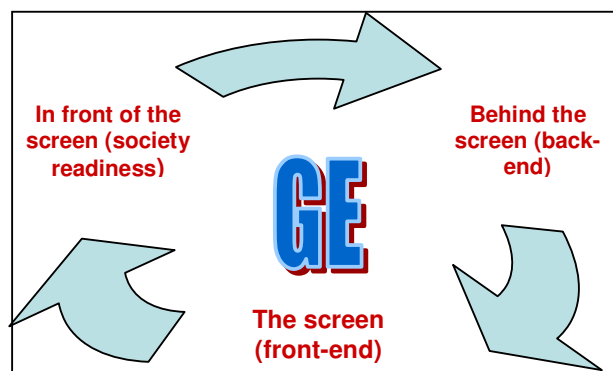


Figure N. 2. The ICEG and Araya Dujisin's (2004) three axes of electronic government. Source: Tesoro and Goldstein (2008).

¹ The ICEG states that, for the purposes of that document, the citizens include all the physical persons and all the legal entities, that have the need and the right to establish any relation with the public administrations, within the territory, or abroad.

² Including, for example (ICEG, pp. 10-11): to present documents, resources, claims and complaints, equally valid as through traditional means; to pay services, taxes, and the fulfillment of obligations; to received notifications –with the citizen consent-; to access to the general administrative information; to access to the proceedings; to access to high value added public information; to submit and use administrative resolutions in electronic formats, equally valid as traditional formats; to avoid repetitive submission of documents.

Each axis includes, among others:

- The “in front of the screen” axis: citizens e-readiness; diffusion, rapprochement and training on electronic government.
- The “behind the screen” axis: institutional interoperability; informational interoperability; systems and technical interoperability; reengineering of business processes; procedures simplification; access to public information; preservation of public information; readiness of public servants; capacity building for decision makers.
- The “screen” axis: accessibility; usability; public information contents for transparency; contact information; people in-charge; date of last modification.

ICEG (2007, pp 11-17).

Finally, the ICEG mentions several general conditions and complementary actions that should be taken by governments, which can be considered as the e-readiness - both for the public bureaucracies and for the society -, in order to create the necessary conditions to insure a positive impact of the electronic government for all. This section of the ICEG shows the necessary complementation between electronic government plans and the plans and programs oriented to the promotion of the Information and Knowledge Society (the Digital Agendas).

These general conditions and complementary actions include, among others:

- To achieve the full interoperability of the public services at all levels – international, national, sub-national and local;
- the preparation of the public administrations: careful planning, including capacity building and learning;
- the elaboration of plans and programs oriented to the full access for all to the electronic government;
- the prioritization, following citizen needs, of the services to be implemented;
- the re-organization of the public administration, creating the necessary organizational structures for the better management of the electronic government plans;
- the participation of the citizens and the civil society in the different stages of the e-government public policy life cycle;
- the acknowledgement that the information systems developed by the public administrations are part of the intangible capital of the State;
- the necessary reduction of the info-exclusion, including giving support to community centers for the public digital access;
- to take into account usability and accessibility aspects, specially those oriented to the multicultural needs;
- the design of complementary strategies, combining digital and traditional means to access to the public services.

ICEG (2007, pp. 17-25).

Traditional and emerging paradigms on electronic government. Before and After the ICEG

As it was said before, and following Tesoro’s (2008) analysis, the ancient and the new paradigms related to electronic government in Latin America are confronted in the following table:

Paradigms and beliefs on electronic government in Latin America Before and after the ICEG	
Before the ICEG Traditional state-centric paradigm	After the ICEG Emerging citizen-centric paradigm: The Digital Civism Paradigm
The e-government as a “gift”.	The e-government as a right: The State is responsible for the provision of

	adequate e-services, regarding social needs. Citizens are responsible to exert their right to use the e-services, to claim for their efficiency, and to claim for those e-services they need and are not available.
The e-government as a “path” and as a “trampoline” to efficacy, efficiency and transparency.	The e-government as dependent variable (on political, institutional, organizational, cultural and administrative key factors).
The e-government as a “mask” for the status-quo.	The e-government as an opportunity for institutional and cultural change.
The knowledge about e-government needs and objectives resides in the bureaucracies.	The knowledge about e-government needs and objectives resides more in citizens than in the bureaucracies.
The adequate use and the full appropriation of e-government is a society issue.	The adequate use and the full appropriation of e-government are State responsibilities and a State agenda issue.
The e-government as a “Troy Horse” that threatens public employment.	The e-government must contribute to the depuration of public structures, processes and procedures in favor of the public services quality. The required preservation of employment should not interfere with the services quality.

Table N. 3. Before and After the ICEG. Paradigms and beliefs on electronic government in Latin America. Own elaboration. Source: Tesoro (2008).

Through the analysis carried out in this section, it is possible to say that there is a growing consensus about the complementary aspects of electronic government public policies and Information and Knowledge Society Plans, in order to produce positive social impacts in terms of social inclusion and e-inclusion. In a research conducted by Martin Hilbert et al (2005), it is verified that the electronic government is gaining a significant role as inductor of the Information and Knowledge Society, being considered as a core strategy in most of the National Digital Agendas of Latin American countries.

National governments initiatives oriented to transparency, active citizen participation and policy networks

In a previous work (Goldstein, 2008a) we have analyzed the state of the art of e-participation in Latin America. The result of this work is introduced in this section.

Several government-led initiatives related to information, consulting and active citizen participation have been taking place in the region, as is shown in the following tables:

Information Initiatives	
Initiative	Description
Transparency Portal (“Portal de transparencia”) (http://www.portaltransparencia.gov.br).	This solution provides to the citizenry, through the Internet, financial information about the public resources transferred from the Federal Government to the sub-national governments. It allows the follow up of the financial acts of the decentralized governments.

Information Initiatives	
Initiative	Description
Brasil. (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 39).	
Public Transparency Pages (“ <i>Páginas de Transparencia Pública</i> ”) (http://www.cgu.gov.ar/transparencia). Brasil. (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 39).	Federal Government shows public information about Federal Public Administration – expenses of each office - through the Internet, following legal obligations defined in the Decree No. 5482 of 30/06/2005, and the Inter-ministerial Resolution No. 140 of 16/03/2006. Information is shown in a friendly, easy to understand, and continually updated manner.
Transparency Obligations Portal (“ <i>Portal de Obligaciones de Transparencia (POT)</i> ”) (http://portaltransparencia.gob.mx/pot). Mexico. (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 42).	The POT system allows the fulfillment of the Federal Transparency Law, which demands to public institutions to publish through electronic means a set of information concepts related to budgets, procurement, mission, vision, objectives, beneficiaries, public servants, address, and contact information, among others. The POT system has standardized the displaying and the navigation through information; centralizes the access to information; and makes it easier the processing and the exploration of information. The POT has about 70 thousand searches each week (2007 year).
Infomex (http://www.accesodf.org.mx). México. (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 43).	The Informex System is based on the Internet, and is conceived to receive, process and respond information demands. This system is designed to adapt to all the different Transparency Laws existing in the federal government system of the country (33 laws at 2007).
Transparency Sector in the Civil Service (“ <i>Área de Transparencia en el Servicio Civil</i> ”) (http://sercivil.go.cr/dgscnet/transparencia.aspx). Costa Rica. (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 40).	The Inter-institutional Transparency Network gives public access through the Internet to information of the public administration related to budgets, expenses, investments, procurement, payroll, projects, operational plans, documents, among others.
The Official Gazette of Panama (“ <i>Gaceta Oficial de Panamá</i> ”) (http://www.gacetaooficial.gov.pa). (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 32).	This system allows carrying out, by electronic means, the whole publishing management process for all the legal norms and acts established by the Constitution and the legal system of the country. This system is a Free Software solution, with the adequate security and protection systems for the information and data protection, and supports both back-end and front-end processes (contact with external users and internal management of electronic documents).

Table N. 4. Information Initiatives in Latin America. Own elaboration. Source: Red GEALC (2007) and Goldstein (2008a).

Consulting and Active Citizen Participation Initiatives	
Initiative	Description
<p>Web Platform for the collective building of the Decennial National Plan on Education (DNPE) 2006-2015 (<i>“Plataforma Web para la construcción colectiva del Plan Nacional Decenal de Educación (PNDE) 2006-2015”</i>). (http://www.plandecenal.edu.co). Colombia. (RedGEALC, 2007, pp. 22-23).</p>	<p>The participatory process for the building of the DNPE consisted of four stages: (1) documentation (production of intakes to nurture the debate); (2) institutional on-line consultation (agenda setting); (3) public debate; (4) Final Report Elaboration.</p> <p>ICTs tools and applications were implemented for all the stages. The use of those tools was planned from the beginning, in an integrated manner. ICTs were used for administrative tasks (participants’ registration, consultation management, agenda management, proposals management, publicity of the process and of the partial and final products and results, among others), statistical processes, and to give support to the participatory activities: on-line debates, enquiries, consultation, quantitative and qualitative analysis of contributions, summarizing and preparing of reports.</p> <p>The public debate was carried out combining traditional and innovative methods: presential debate, virtual debate – through the web platform-, and citizen proposals called and collected through massive communication means – TV, radio, e-mail, telephone, and surveys).</p> <p>This participatory public policy making process reached a high level of participation: 1,632 Colombian entities focused on education.</p>
<p>Information National System for Disaster National Information System for Disaster Prevention and Assistance (<i>“Sistema Nacional de Información para la Prevención y Atención de Desastres – SINPAD”</i>) (http://sinadeci.indeci.pe/PortalSINPAD/). Perú. (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 25-27).</p>	<p>This is a web platform application that allows: the participation of the State institutions, and the participation of citizens, allowing the conformation of a multi-actoral network for the disasters prevention.</p> <p>The system collects emergency/danger reports on-line throughout the country. And the process of all the disasters information in order to produce accurate, transparent and well-timed information to prevent disasters and to assist in case of disasters (risk management actions).</p> <p>The information - that is process through the Internet portal - is registered, maintained, and exploited by all the institutions of the SINADESI (the disaster national network).</p> <p>The ICTs-based application that supports all this operation responds to the most advanced requirements in terms of speed, flexibility, accessibility and usability, and interoperability. Moreover, it provides graphical information through the Internet, it is implemented over SOA, and it provides instant alerts when a disaster occurs.</p> <p>This solution combines traditional and innovative strategies: the web platform; the National Emergency Operations Center, which has an ICT-based network to support the personnel tasks to check events throughout the country on a 24x365 basis, and to take the necessary actions if an emergency or danger are reported; a mobile phone/satellite phone/radio-communication network that allows immediate communications throughout the country when facing an emergency.</p> <p>This application has reinforced institutional and citizen participation in the disasters prevention. The production of on-line reports has increased from 393 in 1995 to 3,316 in 2003.</p>

Consulting and Active Citizen Participation Initiatives	
Initiative	Description
<p>National Debate on Education (“<i>Debate Nacional sobre la Educación</i>”) (http://www.debateducativo.edu.uy). Uruguay. (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 35).</p>	<p>This participatory process was oriented to involve the citizenry in the public agenda education issue. It was a consultative process, which aim was to collect opinions and proposals to nurture the new National Law on Education.</p> <p>The process itself included several steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A call to all citizens to express their opinions and to make proposals on education. It was conformed a Coordination Commission in which the most relevant people from the educational field and from all political sectors, took part. • Some orientating materials, like a Discussion Guide, were made. • About 800 citizen assemblies and sectorial meetings were carried out, both at national and at local levels. • More than 400 documents were received. • A National Congress on Education was carried out, with the participation of 1,200 delegates. • Before the Congress, all proposals and opinions were processed and systematized in a Preliminary Report. And in a Final Report, adding all the new proposals and suggestions collected in the Congress. <p>A web site (www.debateducativo.edu.uy) was created to support many activities, among others: Promotion and diffusion of the whole process and of each of its stages; proposals and documents reception; information provision to citizens; contact with society.</p> <p>A data base was created for the systematization of all the proposals, the documents and the opinions received.</p> <p>Three Final Reports were prepared and were sent to the Education and Culture Minister and to the Legislative Power, in order to nurture the National Law on Education law project, which has received parliamentary treatment during 2007.</p>
<p>Integration of Medical Information (“<i>Integración de Información Médica</i>”) (http://wiki.sueiiddiss.org). Uruguay. (Red GEALC, 2007, p. 50)</p>	<p>This application has as its aim to promote, to develop, to investigate, to train and to certify the use of standards for the administrative data and information exchange among health social actors.</p> <p>Official communication is performed through a wiki, and e-mail as a second option. The web site and the e-mail are the official means even for notifications and for voting.</p> <p>ICTs are also used to support multi-sectorial and multi-actoral virtual discussions where both public and private organizations take part.</p>

Table N. 5. Consulting and active citizen participation Initiatives in Latin America. Own elaboration. Source: Red GEALC (2007) and Goldstein (2008a).

The analysis of the initiatives described above performed in a previous work (Goldstein, 2008), led us to some findings that are summarized in the following table:

Findings on Information, Consulting and Active Citizen Participation initiatives

Findings on Information, Consulting and Active Citizen Participation initiatives	
Information Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are oriented to public information transparency, mostly to fulfill legal requirements; • According more to the State needs than to social groups' needs; • Information systematization follows bureaucracies structures, instead of social issues; • They are a good starting point for social knowledge creation processes; • There is a need of more added value public information; • Information and content management systems could help in the knowledge creation using the available public information; • The permanent updating of the information is vital; • Resources –both from State and from society – must be assigned to control the fulfillment of transparency laws and regulations; • <u>Two remarkable strategies:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>POT-Mexico</u>: allows thematic searching, for all documents related to a certain topic within the public offices that are part of the Transparency system. - <u>The Official Gazette of Panama</u>: its design implied the reengineering of all administrative processes involving the management of the electronic documents that contains the information shown by the system.
Consulting and Active Citizen Participation Initiatives	<p>About this initiatives, can be added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to plan the integration of ICTs starting at the design stage of the process; • It is important to consider complementary communication strategies between State and society; • Applications must pursue accessibility and usability for all social groups; • The inclusion of Web 2.0 tools and strategies must be useful to allow a multi-directional communication and exchange of ideas, and to enrich the public space; • The use of ICTs-based strategies and tools must be carefully planned, guaranteeing equal access to information, equal opportunities of influence, and equal opportunities to be heard for all; • Complementary strategies to provide access to info-structure and info-culture must be considered, especially in contexts with large cultural, social and digital gaps. • Digital TV, community radios, mobile phones, and new digital technologies could be included for complementary or new strategies, as the cost/benefit relation evolves in favor of the access for all.

Table N. 6. Findings on information, consulting and active participation initiatives in Latin America. Own elaboration. Source: Goldstein (2008a).

A “bottom-up” strategy: The Digital Civism Capacity Building Programme

Electronic government initiatives developed in Latin America under the traditional state-centric paradigm, have led to a situation that shows, among others, the following deficits:

- About electronic government services:
 - lack of interoperability among government levels and government bureaucracies;

- lack of accessibility and usability;
- lack of digital access infrastructure.
- About society:
 - Lack of knowledge about electronic government services;
 - Lack of use of this services;
 - Lack of knowledge about citizen rights and State obligations related to electronic government;
 - Lack of proactive attitude towards the impulse of the improvement of the electronic government;
 - Lack of info-culture/e-readiness (as enablers of the electronic government appropriation).

The fact that - in the region - the electronic government has been shaped under a state-centric paradigm is one of the main causes of two important and related conditions of the present situation:

- the existence of a gap between electronic government services - the offer - and society needs - the demand -;
- the lack of knowledge about the society needs related to electronic government and the lack of knowledge about the society strategies for the appropriation of the existing electronic government services.

These two conditions of the present context hinder the starting up of a virtuous circle of continuous improvement of the electronic government, virtuous circle that would increase its positive social impact. Therefore, to improve the electronic government contribution to a citizens' democracy in the region, those obstacles – the gap between offer and demand, and the lack of knowledge about social appropriation strategies - must be overcome.

Summarizing, the present situation can be described as follows:

On one hand, there is a gap between the electronic government - the offer - and the Digital Civism – the demand-. As it is shown in the following figure:

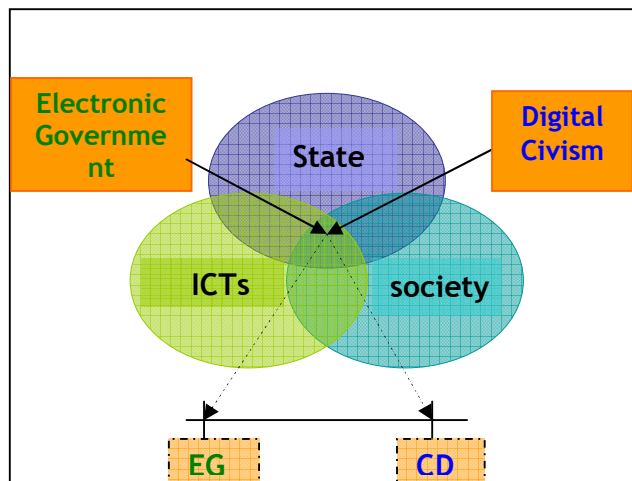


Figure N. 3. The “Electronic Government - Digital Civism” Gap. The electronic government and the Digital Civism are both in the intersection among State, society and ICTs. Source: Tesoro and Goldstein (2008).

On the other hand, there is a lack of evidence, based on citizens' needs, to nurture the electronic government public policies. Lack which is a consequence of the state-centric paradigm, and that must be overcome.

A way to start up: The Digital Civism Capacity Building Programme (the “ForCiDir” Programme)

The “*ForCiDir*” Programme, officially launched at the end of 2007, is developed by the Inter-American Training Network on Electronic Government (“*Red Interamericana de Formación en Gobierno Electrónico (RIF-GE)*”)³ of the College of the Americas (“*Colegio de las Américas (COLAM)*”) of the Interamerican Organization for Higher Education (“*Organización Universitaria Interamericana (OUI)*”)⁴, with the support of the “1@+tú=1€” Initiative, promoted by CTIC Foundation, from Gijón-Asturias, Spain⁵.

The vision and the mission of the “*ForCiDir*” Programme

The reduction of the existing gap between the Electronic Government and the Digital Civism, demands three different kinds of actions to be performed by society:

- An intensive use of the existing offer;
- The claim for the underserved demands and needs;
- The feeding back to the electronic government regional, national, sub-national and local strategies, providing evidence to nurture the electronic government public policies life cycle.

The building of the enabling scenery in which these three kinds of actions are triggered massively, demands:

- The knowledge about the offer;
- The perception of its usefulness;
- The capacities and skills for its appropriation;
- A proactive attitude towards the incidence in the public policies life cycle.

The acquisition within society of these four elements is what is called Digital Civism Capacity Building (“*ForCiDir*”).

Thus, the Digital Civism Capacity Building Programme (“*ForCiDir*” Programme), within Latin-American societies, is expected to activate a virtuous circle of:

- Better public services and better public information;
- For a better citizenry;
- For a better government;
- For better political and social institutions;
- For a better democracy;
- For a better quality of life for all.

This virtuous circle is expected to produce a concatenation of positive impacts that will enhance transparency; the efficacy and the efficiency of the State bureaucracies; the effectiveness of the democratic institutions; and the equitable access to the benefits of the Information and Knowledge Society for all. Thus, the Digital Civism Capacity Building is expected to improve the three dimensions of the State for a citizens’ democracy in Latin America.

The main objectives of the “*ForCiDir*” Programme

Based on its vision and its mission, the “*ForCiDir*” Programme has two main objectives:

- The diffusion within Latin-American societies - especially focusing on the less included social sectors -, of the electronic government services: (a) promoting their use; (b) promoting a social perception of their usefulness and potential positive impact on the realization of the citizen rights; (c) informing about the citizen rights and the State obligations related to the electronic government; (d) promoting the citizen engagement in the electronic government public policies life cycle.

³ To learn more about the RIF-GE, see <http://www.rifge.net/web>.

⁴ To learn more about the OUI, see http://www.oui-iohe.qc.ca/about/index-apropos_es.aspx.

⁵ To learn more about the CTIC Foundation, see <http://www2.fundacionctic.org/>.

- The elaboration of evidence-based recommendations for the feeding back of the electronic government public policies, to nurture the different stages of their life cycle (agenda-setting, analysis, policy creation, implementation, monitoring (Goldstein, 2008a)).

The pillars of the “ForCiDir” Programme

The “ForCiDir” Programme is supported by four pillars:

- **The human capital:** a network of people and civil society organizations (CSOs) - that shares the “ForCiDir” Programme vision, mission and values - performing different roles - the co-ordination team of the Programme, national and local coordinators, tutors, community leaders, digital facilitators -, shaping a social framework capable of spreading and making known the electronic government services, especially to the less included social sectors.
- **The knowledge capital:** a base of registered experiences of the use, by the citizens, of the electronic government services - available in each context - in order to solve a certain problem.
- **The methodology:** A set of strategies, tools, methods and contents that integrate a system to support Digital Civism Capacity Building plans and actions. This methodology can be adapted for its replication at each context, and is intended to become a basic instrument for all social organizations and the people involved in the “ForCiDir” Programme.
- **The electronic government services:** Available at the national, sub-national and local levels, whose continuous improvement the “ForCiDir” Programme intends to contribute, through the recommendations based on the evidence collected within the Programme.

The strategic lines of the “ForCiDir” Programme

At present, three strategic lines are being carried out at the Programme:

- “ForCiDir”: specifically oriented to the capacity building on digital civism in the Latin American societies, including the consolidation of the human capital, the knowledge capital and the methodology of the Programme.
- “Accidir”: oriented to the elaboration of evidence-based recommendations, to nurture the e-government public policy life cycle, related to the accessibility and the usability needs from the citizens’ perspective.
- “Intercidir”: oriented to the elaboration of evidence-based recommendations, to nurture the e-government public policy life cycle, related to the interoperability needs from the citizens’ perspective.

The following figure shows the strategic lines of the “ForCiDir” Programme, and their relationship with the ICEG and the Electronic Government Plans, and with the government strategies for the promotion of the Information and Knowledge Society (Digital Agendas).

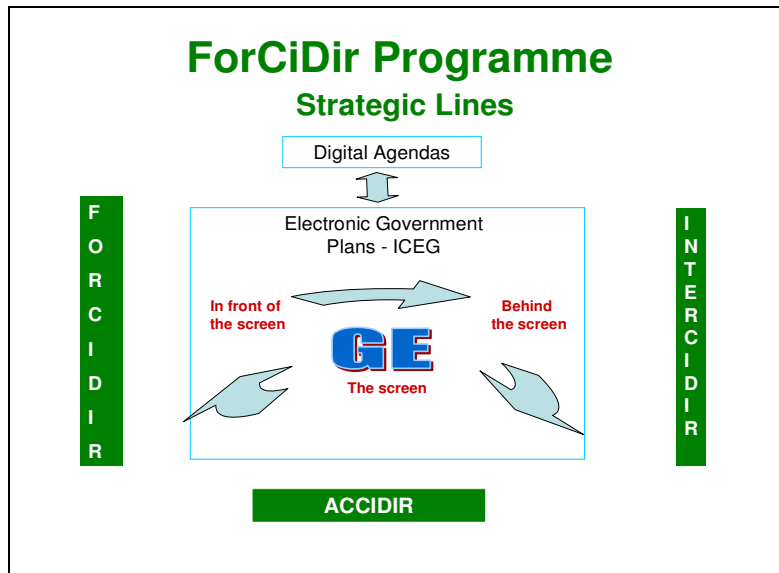


Figure N. 4. The “ForCiDir” Programme. The Strategic Lines. Source: Tesoro and Goldstein (2008).

It is good to mention that, in the region, government strategies - both the Electronic Government Plans and the Digital Agendas – are being developed at the national, sub-national and local levels. Thus, the “ForCiDir” Programme is intended to be a complementary “bottom-up” strategy at all levels of government.

Conclusion

This paper aims to show, from different perspectives – the conceptual perspective and the analysis of actual initiatives -, the emerging of a new development paradigm in Latin America that connects inclusion, democracy, the State and the ICTs.

From the theoretic perspective, a conceptual framework has been created, connecting some concepts:

- The citizens’ democracy
- The State - and its three dimensions- for a citizens’ democracy
- The citizen-centric electronic government paradigm
- The Digital Civism, conceived as the active citizenship concerning the issues related to the relationship between State and society through ICTs.

As it has been shown previously in this paper, the assertive connection/concatenation of these elements, gives the opportunity to contribute in the building of a bridge through which Latin American societies could move towards an inclusive democracy. Inclusive democracy that becomes an enabling scenery in which the access to the benefits of the Information and Knowledge Society is guaranteed for all.

From an empirical perspective, some innovative experiences are outlined, which have a significant potential positive impact, which can contribute to the common end of an inclusive democracy in the region.

These outlined experiences are led by governments or by society. And they are an evidence of the existence, both of social forces and of political will, to impel the new electronic government citizen-centric paradigm, for an inclusive democracy.

At the same time, the conceptual framework and the experiences outlined in this paper, allow to understand the connection between the electronic government and the Community Informatics, as long as the electronic government, focused by the citizen-center paradigm, can

be defined as the set of ICTs-based strategies and applications, oriented to solve the community problems that emerge in the linking between society and the governments and States.

The citizen-centric paradigm together with the prism of Community Informatics, make it possible to identify the following challenges, faced jointly by governments and by society, in order to drive the electronic government public policies to an inclusive democracy in Latin America:

- to enable citizen participation at all stages of the public policies life cycle;
- the elaboration of evidence-based public policies;
- to understand communities' needs and practices, and the mechanisms for the social appropriation of the e-government – considering the singularities of each social group;
- the elaboration of methodologies to accomplish the previous point;
- the elaboration of methodologies for the evaluation and monitoring of the public policies from the citizen-centric perspective;
- to re-shape (to re-form, to adapt, or to improve) according to the citizen-centric paradigm, the existing public policies (plans, programmes, projects and actions) at all levels of government - regional, national, sub-national and local;
- to create synergies between electronic government policies and the Digital Agendas, for example through the articulation of projects to promote inclusion through community's access centers – both public or private ones;
- to create synergies between government-led and society-led strategies;
- to give priority to the needs of the most excluded social sectors;
- to intensify the capacity building on digital civism for decision makers, civil servants and the society.

Many of these challenges are, at present, part of the agenda of Community Informatics, and are being discussed within the boundaries of this discipline still under construction.

At the same time, the mentioned challenges defy decision makers, making evident the need to conform interdisciplinary and multi-actoral working groups, capable of formulating innovative strategies, and to articulate different visions –technological, political, social, and anthropological - into an integral one, oriented to build inclusive democracies in Latin America.

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