Chapter 15
Policies and Strategies for Digital Inclusion:
Regional Governments in Spain

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ABSTRACT

E-government has enhanced the availability of government information, and expanding access to services, offering greater transparency and accountability for public administrations. However, previous research indicates that there are significant barriers for citizens, assuming major obstacles. In this sense, the EU and, in particular, the Spanish government has formulated policies and legal frameworks to introduce in the field of the provision of public sector services, in order to customize and to access these services. These initiatives seek to promote the development of networks and services, to improve the e-administration and the adoption of digital solutions for efficient delivery of public services, and to promote the inclusion and digital literacy. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to obtain a vision of government strategies adopted by Spanish regional governments to reduce the digital divide.

INTRODUCTION

In the last years, the information and communication technologies (ICT), mainly Internet technologies, have become an incentive for public sector organizations to be more open and to publish information about their performance. The implementation of ICT into public administration has been called e-government (Chadwick, 2006), and it is understood to be one of the forms of expression of the information society, in addition to being a central part of the process of the modernization of public administration (O'Neill,

2010). The opportunities offered by these technologies have been taken by governments with the aim of increasing efficiency, transparency and competitiveness (Zhao and Zhao, 2010). In addition, Internet technologies have allowed governments to enhance the interaction with citizens (Chain Navarro et al., 2008; Estevez and Janowski, 2013), to expand access to public services (Scott, 2006), to improve pubic services (Hodges and Grubnic, 2010) and to make government information available onto the web (Gandía and Archidona, 2008).

Nonetheless, although the use of ICT to provide public services may help alleviate social exclusion (Selwyn, 2002; Sahraoui, 2007), over the years it has also become clear that the information era in itself has generated and reinforced new forms of inequality and exclusion (Chigona and Mbhele, 2008). Significant barriers such as access, service design, personal capacity, trust, skills, willingness, and awareness can create obstacles for the very people who could benefit most from public sector services on the web (Hsieh et al., 2011; Sipior et al., 2011). It has driven that digital divide and e-Inclusion be discussed widely in the information society agenda for nearly a decade since the emergence of e-services in the public sector (Bélanger and Carter, 2009).

In this regard, the European Union and, particularly, the Spanish public administration are formulating public policies and legal frameworks to introduce ICT in the field of public sector service delivery, in order to personalize and to improve the quality of public sector services and access to these services (European Commission, 1999; Spanish Act 11/2007 Electronic Access for Citizens to Public Services). Thus, in the framework of the European Union, many initiatives have been taken to regulate and coordinate the actions of the Member states to facilitate digital convergence and meet the challenges of the Information Society (European Commission, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2010). The concept of e-Inclusion is a basic concept of successive Action Plans of the Information Society of the European Union, up to the i2010 strategy, one of whose main pillars is "*promoting an Inclusive Information Society*" - in the belief that the lack of access to ICT or inability to use them increasingly constitutes a severe form of social and economic exclusion (European Commission, 2005).

Nowadays, European Commission has presented the European Strategy 2020 –*Digital Agenda for Europe 2020*- (European Commission, 2015). Its objectives are focused on the growth of the EU, trying to better exploit the potential of ICTs to promote innovation, economic growth and progress. This initiative is made up of seven pillars: achieving the digital single market; enhancing interoperability and standards; strengthening online trust and security; promoting fast and ultra-fast Internet Access for all; investing in research and innovation; promoting digital literacy, skills and inclusion; and ICT-enabled benefits for EU society.

In Spain, in 2005 the government formulated the *Plan Avanza* following successive failed initiatives launched during the 2001-2004 period, such as *InfoXXI* (2001-2003) and *España.es* (2004-2005). Nevertheless, the definitive impetus for the inclusion of ICT in the various levels of government –national, regional and local- both in terms of their relations with citizens and in their internal management, was made by Act 11/2007 of 22 June, governing Citizens' Electronic Access to Public Services (LAECSP), which guaranteed this right to all citizens. This initiative has continued with *AVANZA 2 Plan* (2009-2012), which has focused on the provision of digital public services and promotion of inter-administrational cooperation among Spanish Autonomous Communities and local governments, paying a special attention to the incorporation of disabled people into the Information Society.

In 2013, the Spanish central government published *A Digital Agenda* (2013-2015), which has sought to promote the digital inclusion and digital literacy. In the last years of the period 2013-2015, the government have published a second phase of this strategy called *Digital Agenda* 2015-2020, which seeks to

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