

(traducción no oficial)

The citizen: Main target of the Information Society

Symposium held in Madrid, 13th of April 1999 about the Information Society for the Citizen with the participation of President **Mr. José M^a Aznar**, the Minister of Industry and Energy, **Mr. Josep Piqué**, the Minister of Transport and Communications, **Mr. Rafael Arias Salgado** and the Minister of Education, **Mr. Mariano Rajoy**.

Part I: General assumptions. Where are we?

- War at the Balkans.
- Important ecological disorders: hurricanes, shower rain, high temperatures and frost¹.
- Intensification of the intercontinental migratory tendencies and crises in the European countries².
- A monopolar world with increasing regional war conflicts all over the planet³.
- Out of space research “with fix dates”⁴.
- Telecommunication’s explosion together with an amazing increase of it’s use⁵.
- Several attempts to establish certain politics to favour by *consensus* “the Right to free information” for the on-line citizens⁶.

Part II: How did the citizen access the Net?

I. Remote origins and latest examples.

The citizen has, only in part, been the main “player” in the new information and communication electronic systems through several experiments which were carried out in the USA at the end of the 80’s. These tests will be soon arrived to Canada (at the beginning of the 90’s) and later, in the middle of the 90’s will get to Asia and Europe. We do not have to forget that the Internet was first used at the Pentagon, arriving later in the 80’s to the National Science Foundation, not being it’s use transferred until the end of this decade from “official” institutions to a world in more direct contact with the average citizen.

Previously, and due to the special geopolitical conditions of the North of Europe, as well as to the need for establishing extend and effective communication systems, countries like Finland, Sweden and Denmark got in to the BBS world, creating

¹ See “Wire Magazine”, April 1999, pages 118 to 122.

² See “International Herald Tribune”, April 9th, 1999.

³ CNN

⁴ Participation of Mr. Vint Cerf on the “Computer, Freedom and Privacy”, 7th of April 1999.

⁵ Ibidem. On year 2008 the Earth-Mart Net will start working, which is the “backbone” for the starting of an interplanetary internet system: the InterPlanet.

⁶ This symposium?

sophisticated local information systems with a world-wide range by the use of Internet. Legendary servers as the ones from Oslo, Helsinki or Vienna, witnessed the first and pioneering civic participation in the incipient Information Society at the end of the 80's.

The Cleveland FreeNet, www.cleveland.org in Ohio (USA) and the National Capital FreeNet (NCF) <http://www.freenet.carleton.ca/> in Ottawa and Canada, were two examples of some innovating LAN, through an intelligent service supply, offered for the citizen, in that developing Information Society.

In Spain, it would be very useful not to forget three pioneering examples, which have favoured the actual circumstances of the citizen from the beginning of the Information Society:

- The *Red Iris* (Iris Net), that with Mr. José Barbera and his team gave Internet access to the Spanish university students around 1987-1988.
- The Spanish Searcher, *Donde?* (Where?) www.donde.es created by Mr. Jordi Adell at the university “*Universitat Jaume I*” in the city of Castelló, around 1990, and
- The first Spanish civic Net, the Tinet www.tinet.fut.es from the city of Tarragona, which was funded by Mr. Manel Sanroma, Professor of the University of Rovira at Virigil and a group of friends, in 1995.

From that time until 1999 there is a lot to see and say. The spreading speed of the Internet phenomenon as an access channel to fast, extend and accessible information+formation+education+ new working-stations + municipal services + leisure + health and trade, is so important that it has produced in a few years, neither more nor less, than a special Commission at the Spanish Senate and this wide, substantial, intense and expectant Symposium.

In less than four years the Internet has almost become the “digital Village” described by *Mc Luhan* for half a century ago, as well as the generalised objective for a broad education, and health services for which access there has been developed a net from and for the municipalities, who in some cases already have the systems that facilitate the personalisation and access by intelligent electronic cards already in use in many institutions and cities, in a world where information is offered to the citizens in a generalised and different way.

At present this seems to be an undeniable reality.

If any doubts still remain concerning this matter, it is only necessary to go briefly over the previous speeches in this Session “A” of the symposium about “The Information Society for the Citizen”

For this reason it would be very useful to ask our selves the following question: *Is really the citizen the main character of this Information Society?* Can it openly be said that the individual is the centre of this new Society? In this case, what information can we use to support this affirmation?

You might have read, heard and verified other important examples former to this speech. Consolidated examples, specially in areas like education, medicine,

municipalities and individuals. But what is that impulses this computer “richness”? Where can we find the forces that maintain

and develop them? Is the citizen really able to be the creator, generator, manager and promoter of the Information Society?

I think so ... though it will not be easy to prove it!

My opinion could be questionable, but it is based on the experience of “bottom up” citizen movements that started civic actions in a developing Information and Communication Society through essays like the one on www.ciez@net.com which was very ahead for the time in what it was created on September 98. This essay presented a civic net conducted by consensus among all the political, cultural, and economic forces to such point that it received the support of the “Co-ordination Commission” of Cieza@net which still tries to ... move on!

But there is a serious danger: the excessive bureaucratisation of the Civic Nets which can dry out the best sources of creativity, innovation and even interest. To make it short I would say that to more bureaucracy less creativity and specially in areas as information, education, ... etc.

For this reason it is necessary to find an innovating way for giving orders without obligating and to lead by means of authority and experience.

II. The citizens’ position with regard to the Information Society

Despite all these facts many of the projects, both pioneering and recent, need to be able to survive the challenge of such fast changes and what is even more important, they have to be able to create an *internal active power* such as the innovating electronic communities of The Internet Society (ISOC), The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), The Internet Architectural Board (IAB), the GSI’s, the News or Chatting groups and specially the communication that is generally generated through the Civic Nets in which the citizen’s has a more important role.

In the short term, that is to say from today until year 2002 is necessary to be able to count on:

- *Quick installation of cable infrastructures* in all the Autonomic Communities of the Spanish State.
- Generalised grant of a reasonable access to the Net for all citizens.
- Give priority to the *financing* of “campaigns” for circulation, information and use of the Net at Primary and Secondary Schools, among young unemployed or handicapped people.

In the medium term, around the year 2005 the following ideas should already be settled:

- A digital community concentration surrounding freedom areas – as the ones in the Chapters of the ISOC (Internet Society) – which will maintain the net free of restrictions, compromises or regulations.

- At that time it would be positive to start getting use to the freedom of speech and the right to be listen to.
- The citizen will already posses a technology as easy as broad, which will allow him to communicate with other people without limits, at any time, from any where and in any language.

EPILOG: the long term Vision (2010) of the citizen as the centre of the IS (Information Society)

The citizen of the first decade in the coming Century, is by now able to establish **values** which today are only detectable in the civic Nets, such as optimism, tolerance, global vision and local compromises, as a result of an innovating and anticipating training during a decade.

However, it is necessary to favour from today a new dimension in the conduction of the Nets, which could be contained in the following hypotheses:

- Give priority to the “bottom up” digital movements together with the private sector and the public administration initiatives.
- Give a bigger support from the respective City Halls and autonomous Governments to new kind of associations as the ISOC, the IETF, the IAB, the GIS’s, News groups, ...etc.
- Settle the connection between all these citizen Nets to the Universities, and specially with it’s education and R+D areas.

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