The shift from traditional, hierarchical forms of public management characterized by narrow opportunities for citizen participation in policy design and decision-making, to forms of networked public management, based on the cooperation, interdependence between public and private entities, and on new forms of citizen participation in public affairs described as the move from government to governance, is one of the faces of the ongoing reinvention of government. Another side of this process is the shift in the relationships between citizens and government, associated with the move from a paper based public administration to one based predominantly on information and communication technologies (ICT), including increasingly the use of web 2.0 tools. The new challenges associated with these changes ask for a rethinking of the meaning of citizen collaboration in public affairs. For that reason, the new forms and tools for citizen’s participation in public policy design and decision-making in the digital age has been the focus of intense debates in recent years.

This issue of IJICTHD is the first of two special issues dedicated to “ICT and citizen participation in local governance”. Both issues are in large measure a contribution for the ongoing debate on citizen e-participation in digital local government. The aim is to explore the role of information and communication technologies in citizen participation in local public policies and to address some of the key issues of that debate.

In this special issue, focused on “e-participation of children and citizens with disabilities”, we address the use of information and communication technologies tools to support children and youth participation in urban planning; the application of information and communication technologies in child welfare services; and the employment of information and communication technologies to enhance the participation of citizens with disabilities in urban governance.

These articles, written by researchers from different academic backgrounds, working in Australia, Europe and North America, offer a theoretically informed perspective of the role that ICT can play in fostering public participation and civic engagement in local and in urban governance processes. The discussion focuses on key dimensions of the digital divide, identifies patterns of online exclusion that affect the involvement of children and citizens with disabilities in local and
in urban governance processes, and examines the consequences of that exclusion from the point of view of human development.

The first article “Children’s Maps in GIS: A Tool for Communicating Outdoor Experiences in Urban Planning” by Kerstin Nordin and Ulla Berglund, addresses the use of children’s maps in Geographical Information Systems (GIS), as a method for children’s participation in urban planning. This study, based on a survey involving 600 children in Sweden, shows that this participatory methodology has the potential to make visible and accessible, for planners, the interests of children and youth.

Susan Tregeagle, in “Participation in Child Welfare Services through Information and Communication Technologies”, examines the use of ICT in the case management system, a system designed to open the way for increased participation of youths and their families in child welfare interventions. Sue Tregeagle reports and discusses the findings of a qualitative research project about the experiences of users of case management systems, in Australia, and how information and communication technologies could advance their involvement in critical decisions that can have an impact on the families of these children.

In the following article, “Deploying Information and Communication Technologies to Enhance Participation in Local Governance for Citizens with Disabilities”, John C. Bricourt and Paul M. A. Baker discuss the use of information and communication technologies to enhance the participation of citizens with disabilities in urban governance, arguing, based on a pilot study in the US, that it offers a promising opportunity for citizens with disabilities to participate in local e-governance, if basic issues of social exclusion and technology accessibility are correctly considered.

In the last article, “e-Accessibility and Municipal Wi-Fi: Exploring a Model for Inclusivity and Implementation”, Paul M. A. Baker, Alea M. Fairchild and Jessica Pater examine various business models for the implementation of municipal WiFi, in the US and Europe, and their potential impact on e-accessibility for disabled citizens. The authors argue that marginalization of disabled citizens in the field of e-accessibility, in addition to the inequalities they already suffer in education and income will create an even greater barrier to their access to information thus limiting their ability to participate in the life of the local community and in the activities of the municipality, including in urban planning.

In sum, these articles show why and how information and communication technologies can change the way children and citizens with disabilities participate in local governance processes, in different contexts. They provide empirical findings and guidelines that should be considered in public policy design in various policy sectors. Nonetheless, there are social, economic and technological barriers, among other factors, that limit the potential for change in governance processes and the development of a full digital citizenship. It requires technological access and skills as well as educational competencies, besides other economic and social conditions. Poverty and illiteracy, for example, and not only technology inequalities, are factors that prevent citizens to have a full e-participation in local governance. These findings will be of interest to students, scholars and practitioners in the field of local governance studies and for all those concerned with citizen e-participation and digital citizenship.

For these reasons, I thank the authors of these articles for the contribution they have done for the advancement of our knowledge about e-participation of children and citizens with disabilities in local and urban governance, as well as for their co-operation and for responding so patiently to the comments and recommendations during the peer-review process. To work with this group of scholars was a rewarding experience. I am also in debt to the colleagues that accepted my invitation to review manuscripts, within their field of research expertise, for the double issue on “ICT and Citizen Participation in Local Governance”, the first of which is focused on “e-Participation of Children and Citizens with Disabilities”, and the second centered on “Citizen e-Participation in Rural Areas and in Displaced Aboriginal Communities”, and whose names and affiliations are reported in the following page.
Reviewers of Manuscripts Submitted for the IJICTHD’ Double Issue on “ICT and Citizen Participation in Local Governance”

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