

# Country Overview Uruguay

**VOICE OR  
CHATTER?**  
**STATE OF THE ART**

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MAKING ALL  
VOICES COUNT

A GRAND CHALLENGE  
FOR DEVELOPMENT

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# State of the Art: Uruguay

This State of Art Report explores how information and communication technologies (ICTs) have enabled civic engagement in Uruguay. The first section provides an overview of the political and civic liberties framework in Uruguay. In the second section the landscape of ICT mediated citizen engagement is mapped through the Open Government Action Plan. In the third section, the report engages with implications of technology mediations for deliberative democracy and transformative citizenship.

## 1. Overview

Uruguay is a particular case within the Latin American context in terms of how strong, stable and traditional its democratic institutions are, the level human development - and its recent implementation of policies to promote development by the spread and use of information and communications technologies. An enabling policy framework, an emergent digital culture and accumulated experience in civic engagement also contribute to the implementation of open government action plans in the country.

### 1.1 Participation, policies and institutions

Uruguay is a representative democracy with a strong, traditional and legitimate institutional order. Regular general elections are held every five years with very high electoral participation rates (90.5% in 2014). Uruguayans' participation is not limited to general elections. Plebiscites and referendums are also guaranteed by the constitution as direct democracy's mechanisms.

Since 2002, Uruguay's democracy has ranked among the top three countries in Latin America according to the *Latin American Democratic Development Index 2015*<sup>1</sup>. Uruguay has recently risen to the number one position in this ranking because of the variation of economic and social dimensions assessed by the index.

Uruguay and Chile are the only countries classified as 'Highly Democratic Developed in South America'. In the "Institutional quality and policy efficiency" dimension, the country ranked first among the eighteen countries analyzed in the regional ranking on indicators such as: perception of corruption, accountability and destabilization of democracy. In the social dimension it is ranked as a 'Highly Social Developed country'. Post 2002 (the year of a big socioeconomic crisis) the country improved on the economic dimension by 37%. The improvement on the public debt indicator explains this variation; other indicators such as income gap and investment remained on positive levels.

Also in 2015, *Corruption Perceptions Index* by Transparency International<sup>2</sup>, which measures corruption in the public sector on a scale from zero (highly corrupt) to one hundred (perceived lack of corruption) ranked Uruguay 21<sup>st</sup> (74 points) among the 169 countries measured by the index, making it the country with the lowest rate of corruption in Latin America. This index also measures freedom of the press, access to budgetary information, levels of integrity in public office and independence of the judiciary system.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.kas.de/parteien-lateinamerika/es/publications/43323/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.transparency.org/what-is-corruption/>

In the 2015 edition of the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) <sup>3</sup>, Uruguay is ranked 19<sup>th</sup> among 167 countries worldwide, positioning the country in the first place among the Latin America and the Caribbean countries and classifying it as a full democracy, reaching the highest scores on political participation, electoral competition, pluralism and civil liberties indicators.

To summarize, these economic, social and political indicators offer evidence of the country's extremely favorable conditions to achieve citizen involvement and e-participation. Citizen and civil society organizations advocacy is enabled in a context of political freedom and of implementation of policies regarding access, infrastructure and connectivity to digital technologies and Internet. In this context is also reasonable to explore what are the existing actions and public policies that involve ICT mediated citizen participation?

## 1.2. E-policy and regulatory framework

Uruguay has a long tradition of unions, with most of them integrated into a single national workers' union (PIT-CNT) since 1959. Production and consumption cooperatives, corporations, cultural and artistic movements, student unions, parents-teachers associations, retired workers associations, etc. have taken part in different participatory experiences on different institutional, electoral or direct arenas but have always been limited and non-binding upon public policy decisions. Recently new organizations advocating on issues such as human rights, environmental protection, sexual diversity, abortion and the legalization of marijuana have emerged. (Calderon, 2016).

The earliest National Wages Councils in 1943, were created (law number 10.449), as a multi stake-holder mechanism (government, unions and employers) to set minimum wages for every industry (Ermida, 2006). This mechanism had proven to be efficient in order to negotiate agreements and avoid confrontation among stake-holders. However, National Wages Councils were abolished during the last dictatorship (1973 to 1985) and restarted for a short period (between 1985 and 1990) when democracy was reinstated. In 2005, this mechanism was permanently reinstated and began working to set frameworks for labor practices.

In 2002 one of the deepest economic and social crises affected the country after years of neoliberalism inspired policies. Mass mobilizations and protest of the social organizations derived in a change in electoral preferences of citizens. A left winged government won the elections in 2004, and introduced a more human development oriented strategy.

Since 2005 new institutional mechanisms have been created in order to enable an increasingly active and responsible citizenry. Citizen advocacy over the public agenda and their collaboration in the design, implementation and evaluation of sectoral policies has strengthened.

In 2006 Local Social Councils were created by the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) as a mechanism of participation in public policy, with the intention of contributing to the consolidation of social policies with citizen participation. 329 civil society organizations from 107 towns and cities all over the country took part in this initiative (MIDES, 2008). Local Social Councils promoted citizen participation, transference of learning, citizen monitoring of public policy and enabled advocacy in the local level. In 2013, Local Social Councils' framework was modified and as a result participation in councils decreased and many of them disappeared. (MIDES, 2015).

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<sup>3</sup>[http://www.eiu.com/public/topical\\_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2015](http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2015)

In 2006 the Debate on Education initiative, conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and organized by the Committee of Education Debate (CODE) created an inclusive space for deliberation and convening on a National Education Assembly in 2007. Over 1,200 citizens took part in the meetings and assemblies contributing to the debate through two citizen participation mechanisms: the territorial assemblies, which extended deliberation throughout the country and sectoral meetings (De Armas et al, 2009). Citizen inputs were referred to an open digital repository on the Ministry's website<sup>4</sup>.

The National Education Assembly was established as permanent body by the General Education Act of 2008, its third edition is in progress.<sup>5</sup> The Open Cabinet Hearings, which take place regularly in remote locations throughout the country, are another instrument through which direct citizen participation is enabled. Local social leaders, businessmen and community members request audiences with the president and his/her ministers or participate in the open cabinet hearing. Diverse citizens' demands regarding design and implementation of public policy that affects that particular region are heard and subsequently addressed by the concerned authority.

The Social Dialogue<sup>6</sup> is the most recent participatory initiative, where all members of society are called to think upon and problematize the future of Uruguay and it is organized and convened by the President. The aim of this initiative is to set the basis for creating – with citizens and their inputs – the country's development strategy. Officers of the Executive Branch and Republic's University academics lead the commission created to organize the initiative. On September 20th 2016, the sixth session of the Social Dialogue started. Ninety organizations participate in this session focusing on citizen security and coexistence.<sup>7</sup>

All the initiatives mentioned are evidence of different arenas where citizenship has engaged or is regularly involved in processes of deliberation on matters of public interest. The scope of influence and participation has been diverse and varied, and some processes have admittedly not continued over time. In almost all of them, digital technologies have been used as auxiliary tools but have not been the centre of attention in any of the initiatives.

### 1.3. ICTs in Uruguay

Over the last ten years, Uruguay has consistently achieved significant improvements on online delivery of public services according to global connectivity and e-participation indices. This is a result of transformations in ICT policy programs which have occurred in conjunction with greater political shifts of the country's development strategies that have focussed on human and informational development. However, the impact these initiatives have produced for effective citizen engagement in public policy and ICT-mediated democratic governance processes has not yet been explored fully.

Digital infrastructure in Uruguay increased significantly over the last decade, as well as citizens' use of ICTs. Public policies have focused on reducing the digital divide and an increasing private market have contributed to the widespread expansion of ICTs. According to the Survey of ICTs use in urban households (EUTIC) 2013, conducted by the National Statistics Bureau (INE) and AGESIC: while in 2010, 43.5% urban households had access to the Internet, by 2013 that number had raised to 64.7%. In Montevideo (the capital city) 74.8% of households had access to the Internet - 19.7 % higher than other urban areas in the country.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.debateducativo.edu.uy/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://centrosmec.org.uy/>

<http://www.anep.edu.uy/anep/phocadownload/normativa/ley%20de%20educacion%20modificada%202015.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.presidencia.gub.uy/comunicacion/dialogo-social>

<sup>7</sup> <http://dialogosocial.gub.uy/mesas-de-dialogo/mesa-6/propuestas-a-tratar>

According to statistical research, 83.0% of Uruguayans had used a cell phone over the last 3 months (2.5% higher than in 2010) and about one third of them (31.1%) had done so through a smartphone. 75.6% of Uruguayans living in urban households had used a computer at some point in their lives (5% higher than in 2010), while 65.5% of total population had done so over the last month (6.8 % higher than in 2010). The percentages of ICTs use was higher (at least once over the last 3 months) among younger users versus older users (9/10 among users under 35 years old, 96.7 % for those between 14 and 19 years old, users over 65 years old showed the lowest level of use 21.0%).

Internet use was significantly higher among users who lived in high income households 80.8%, while Internet usage was 64.7% among those in the lowest income quintile households. Internet usage also varies according to the number of years of formal education of the users, (45.8% among those who completed primary school, versus 94.0% among those who attended university).

EUTIC 2013 also states that two out of three people used Internet on a daily basis (66.3% in 2013 vs. 54.6% in 2010) and the vast majority (93.3%, vs. 88, 0%) used it at least weekly. However, that daily use was much more frequent among teenagers and young adults (77.7% - among 14 to 19 years old users and 71.7% among 20 to 34 years old users). Internet usage is more frequent among users in higher-income households (79.8%) versus usage in low-income households (49.2%). Internet usage was also more frequent among users with more years of formal education, 83% among people how attended university or third level education, 65.8 % among those who completed secondary school and 47.5% among those who completed primary school.

A deeper look into the activities preferred by users (within the last 3 months prior to the completion of the EUTIC 2013), shows that communication and entertainment were the predominant activities. Searching information about goods and services, social networks, emails use and downloading or viewing multimedia content were Uruguayans' favorite activities: social networks (72.6% in 2013 vs. 57.6% in 2010), email (71.2%), downloading or view real-time multimedia content (65.7%), finding information about goods and services (65.7% vs. 57.2%), chat (64.3%), encyclopedias or wiki (57.7%) and reading news, books, magazines sites (53.1%).

EUTIC 2013 also shows that 44.2% of Internet users have visited a State website (43.0% in 2010) and 42 7% sought information on procedures, laws or similar (38.9% in 2010). 28.3% have downloaded files or public forms (25.7% in 2010), while 15.1% arranged appointments, requested work leaves or public certificates online (8.6% in 2010). 17.3% used the Internet to look for a public position (12.2% in 2010). Most off these uses increased in this three years but not much.

**Table 1: States' websites' usage (%) - 2010, 2013** (Source: EUTIC 2013)

ICT actions	Year	2010	2013
	Visited a State website	Total	100
Yes		43	44.2
No		57	55.8
Sought information on procedures. laws or similar	Total	100	100
	Yes	38.9	42.7
	No	61.1	57.3
Arranged appointments. requested work leaves or requested public certificates online	Total	100	100
	Yes	8.6	15.1
	No	91.4	84.9
E-mailed States' offices or civil servants	Total	100	100
	Yes	15.2	14.3
	No	84.8	85.7
Looked for a public position	Total	100	100
	Yes	12.2	17.3
	No	87.8	82.7

Downloaded files or public forms	Total	100	100
	Yes	25.7	28.3
	No	74.3	71.7
Complained	Total	100	100
	Yes	2.4	2.5
	No	97.6	97.5
Voted and or participated in an enquiry or survey	Total	...	100
	Yes	...	2.9
	No	...	97.1

#### 1.4. Landscape of ICT-mediated citizen engagement, policies and brief critique

In the period analyzed, public digital policies were focused on infrastructure creation, connectivity and access to ICT which enabled on-line service delivery. The implementation of participatory mechanisms is a recent phenomenon.

Public policies in Uruguay aimed to develop digital infrastructure and ICTs were implemented to reduce the digital divide. The Ceibal<sup>8</sup> program provided a laptop to every student attending public primary, secondary or technical schools and to their teachers across the country as a result of which Internet access was guaranteed for 100% of schools. Moreover, many Telecenters were opened by ANTEL (the state-owned telecommunications company) and the Ministry of Education and Culture. In 2015 the “Ibirapitá” Program was launched, providing low income retirees with tablets.<sup>9</sup>

The creation of the “Digital Agenda Uruguay” (DAU) as a strategic endeavor to promote informational development was carried out three times in the 2008 - 2015 period. The DAU (coordinated by AGESIC), contains strategic guidelines such as: to create more and better opportunities for ICT usage for the most disadvantaged members of society; to promote citizen participation; to develop and enhance technological infrastructure, to improve quality of services provided for citizens, among other goals oriented to boost the country’s development. In the creation and achievement of these strategic guidelines multi stake-holders are committed, actors from the private sector, social organizations and universities.

Four DAU were implemented (2007-2008, 2008-2010, 2011-2015 and 2020). The latest phase of implementation was drawn up on the basis of consultation with several key actors and the general public and put into practice by the Honorary Advisory Council for the Information Society (CAHSI). DAU’s strategic guidelines were aimed to boost citizen participation, “enabling public offices to engage with citizens’ concerns through the use of technology, promoting transparency and open data generation” (AGESIC, 2015), in order to achieve goals such as: equity and social inclusion, civic participation, state transformation, improvement of education, innovation and knowledge generation, territorial integration and international insertion.

It should be pointed out that in the creation process of DAU multi-stakeholder participatory mechanisms were used and state offices as well as civil society took part in the initiative. However, this was not measured by e-participation indices as they focus on on-line participatory mechanisms.

All public policies mentioned are developed within a specific regulatory framework which determines their scope of implementation and impact. The 2008 Access to Public Information Act and its regulation meant an important milestone in Uruguay’s regulatory framework for citizen

<sup>8</sup> [www.ceibal.edu.uy](http://www.ceibal.edu.uy)

<sup>9</sup> <http://ibirapita.org.uy/>

participation and established an adequate legal framework for citizen access to public information. It created the Access to Public Information Unit (UAIP), and compelled all public offices to publish information about their operations and to answer citizens' written requests, except information which was classified as "confidential". Information is classified as "confidential" when the competent authority formally states on a document the existence of objective elements to determine that "the disclosure of particular information could reasonably be expected to harm public interests". The Access to Public Information Unit is able to declassify information if it was inappropriately categorized.

According to the Head of the Electronic Government and Information and Knowledge Society Agency (AGESIC), this act contributes to the achievement of Open Government principles by the providing legal framework for related actions. The act was also positively assessed by civil society organizations with experience in this field, such as the Center of Archives and Access to Public Information (Cainfo). Also in 2008, the Protection to Personal Information Act - "Habeas Data"- created the Regulatory and Control Unit of Personal Data (URCDP) to protect private data and its use.

The Assistant Secretary of State, states that these laws have directly enabled Open Government policy:

"These Acts have laid a solid foundation for Open Government through the years, as they have a comprehensive approach on using technology in public administration, simplifying administrative procedures, sharing information between agencies, delivering public services and have also reinforced access to public information, personal information protection and information security; in order to promote a culture of transparency where information is available for every citizen, and secrecy is abolished. Citizens do not only want to have better information, but they are eager to become involved in the decision-making processes and in the governments' agenda. More information, better information, more democracy"<sup>10</sup>.

Some of the guidelines mentioned by the government officials have been measured by indices, but other initiatives have not been measured and assessed so far. In e-Government Development Index<sup>11</sup> developed by the United Nations Public Administration Country Studies, Uruguay ranks 34th among 139 UN member countries assessed. The index assesses governments' capacity to deliver public services through ICTs. Uruguay was assessed as the best among all the Latin American and Caribbean countries despite the fact it dropped from the 26th position in the 2014 ranking. Although, almost every indicator improved in comparison with previous assessments, the indicator assessing government's proactive citizen participation engagement on decision-making processes worsened.

The "United Nations E-Government Survey 2016"<sup>12</sup> highlights the importance of the "Agenda Uruguay-Digital" as an instrument of public policy through which an Interoperability Platform was created, public key infrastructure and the Response Centre to Computer Security Incidents were implemented. The website [atuservicio.uy](http://atuservicio.uy) is highly valued and was awarded with the Open Government First Prize in the category "Improving Public Services through Open Government" at the annual summit of the Open Government Partnership in Mexico 2015.

According to the last edition of the e-Participation Index<sup>13</sup> developed by the United Nations Public Administration Country Studies, Uruguay is ranked 39th among the 193 UN member countries.

<sup>10</sup>3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Americas Meeting of Open Government Partnership: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmlsm2Q4vuo>

<sup>11</sup> <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/Data-Center>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.agesic.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/5739/1/unpan96407.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [http://thewebindex.org/data/?indicator=UN\\_D&country=ALL](http://thewebindex.org/data/?indicator=UN_D&country=ALL)

The index assesses how ICTs usage boosts citizen participation and empowerment on public policy building with the intention of achieving better delivery of public services.

The survey assesses electronic participation in three levels: 1. Electronic information: providing information on the Internet; 2. Electronic public inquiry: organizing public inquiries online 3. Electronic decision-making, involving citizens in decision-making processes. It also assesses whether States' websites enable e-participation.

Uruguay's results on the last edition of the Index (2016) descended significantly from 3rd place ranked in 2014 to 39th, due to the assessment on E- participation in decision-making and e-consultation levels. In the Americas, Uruguay is ranked 7th after Canada, USA, Mexico, Colombia, Chile and Brazil. Additionally, we can inform that in 2010, Uruguay occupied the 48th position, so the mobility is important.

It is difficult to find the factors explaining such mobility in indicators and ranking scores. On the one hand, ICT mediated direct participation has not been among public policy priorities. On the other hand, multi-stakeholder mechanisms have been included and have actually increased in over the period. In order to understand the variation of Uruguay's performances in rankings is worth pointing out, first, that rankings are influenced by the number of countries assessed.

Between 2014 and 2016 the number of countries assessed increased and as a result countries with better performances displaced Uruguay of its previous position. Second, indices assess ICT-mediated participation mechanisms disregard face-to-face participation. Third, depending on how variables are specifically analyzed, e-participation is measured differently. In 2016 the UN e-government survey introduced new variables, meaning its results are not strictly comparable to previous surveys' results. As a result of all these changes, mobility and abrupt changes are observed in the performance of all countries assessed including Uruguay. Finally, civil society members, government officials and academics interviewed stated they do not understand and cannot explain the variation in the country's performance as they find difficult to comprehend how the variables in this index are measured. Furthermore, one of the civil society interviewees stated that the fact that countries under authoritarian regimes have good rates of e-participation according to the index, is striking. Undoubtedly this is worthy of further deep analysis.

## 2. The Open Government Action Plan

On November 22, 2011, the Executive decree 595/011 created an Open Government Work Group (lead by AGESIC) in order to implement Open Government in Uruguay. AGESIC was appointed to coordinate, manage and monitor the work group responsible for preparing the National Action Plan. The aim was to facilitate inter-institutional coordination and to enable interaction with the Executive branch.

In 2011, Uruguay joined the Open Government Partnership voluntarily, committing to create two-year national action plans in order to improve the government's transparency, accountability and responsiveness towards citizens. Through this action, the government committed to establish a long-term effort to embrace the open government principles as state policy, legitimized through the creation of agreements with multi-stakeholders (including government offices, civil society organizations, academics and private sector) which would differ from traditional policy implementation.

An example of new forms of citizen involvement in public policies mediated by ICTs that emerged from this process is *Atuservicio*. *Atuservicio.uy* is an app developed by the civil society organization DATA-Uruguay in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health using open data, and has come

about as a result of dialogues held on the Open Government National Action Plan process.<sup>14</sup>

In our case study of the creation and implementation of the Open Government Partnership National Action Plans (OGP-NAP), 2012 –2014, 2014- 2016 in Uruguay, we focus our analysis on the bargain process among stakeholders and how they are able to switch leadership positions, to adapt and to cooperate through the course of action. The OGP-NAPs are aimed to improve government transparency, accountability and responsiveness through multi-stakeholder participation.<sup>15</sup>

In consistency with Voice or Chatter project main questions we analyze if the transformations charted in this case as shifts in structures of signification, legitimation and domination, are ultimately deepening democracy, with regard to increased transparency, accountability, rule of law, responsiveness etc. and if these capture the complexity of the structuration processes in the network society and in the ways in which citizen's agency changes structures mediated by ICT.

Studying the development and implementation of the Open Government National Action Plans, we analyze the negotiation processes and the creation of values and rules and how participation and power distribution changes between the government and the citizens. We are interested in questioning the degree to which this kind of governance processes can have disruptive effects for citizenship. The analysis of this case can contribute taking into account the linkage between multi-stakeholder participation and policy development and its effectiveness in terms of achieving a greater degree of citizen engagement, both as part of the process and as one of its goals.

## 2.1. A Map of Actors and Stakeholders Involved

Many stake-holders participated in the design of the National Action Plan -- government officers, civil society organizations, representatives of the academic sector and representatives of the private sector.

Ministries, State Agencies-such as AGESIC, the Legislative branch, state-owned companies, the National Administration of Public Education, and Municipal Authorities represented the state in these instances. Civil society was also deeply involved in the process; especially the Open Government Network took the largest part in the process.<sup>16</sup>

The academic sector took part in the process through the participation of the Institute of Political Science of the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Communication Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities of the Republic's University. The Uruguayan Chamber of Informational Technologies (CUTI) represented the private sector. International organizations such as UNESCO and Electronic Government Network of Latin America and the Caribbean (RedGealc) also took part in the process.<sup>17</sup> The dynamics of the process are clearly detailed by AGESIC (the beginning of each stage, expected results and participation) in the following work flow (Figure 1).

<sup>14</sup> [ATuServicio.uy](http://ATuServicio.uy) allows direct access to the key performance indicators of every health care service in Uruguay including official and updated [data on](#) average wait times for treatment, user satisfaction, and fee structures by provider. The program's objective was to drastically increase access to the indicators of 100% of the health care providers in Uruguay, allowing those eligible to switch health care providers to make well informed decisions.

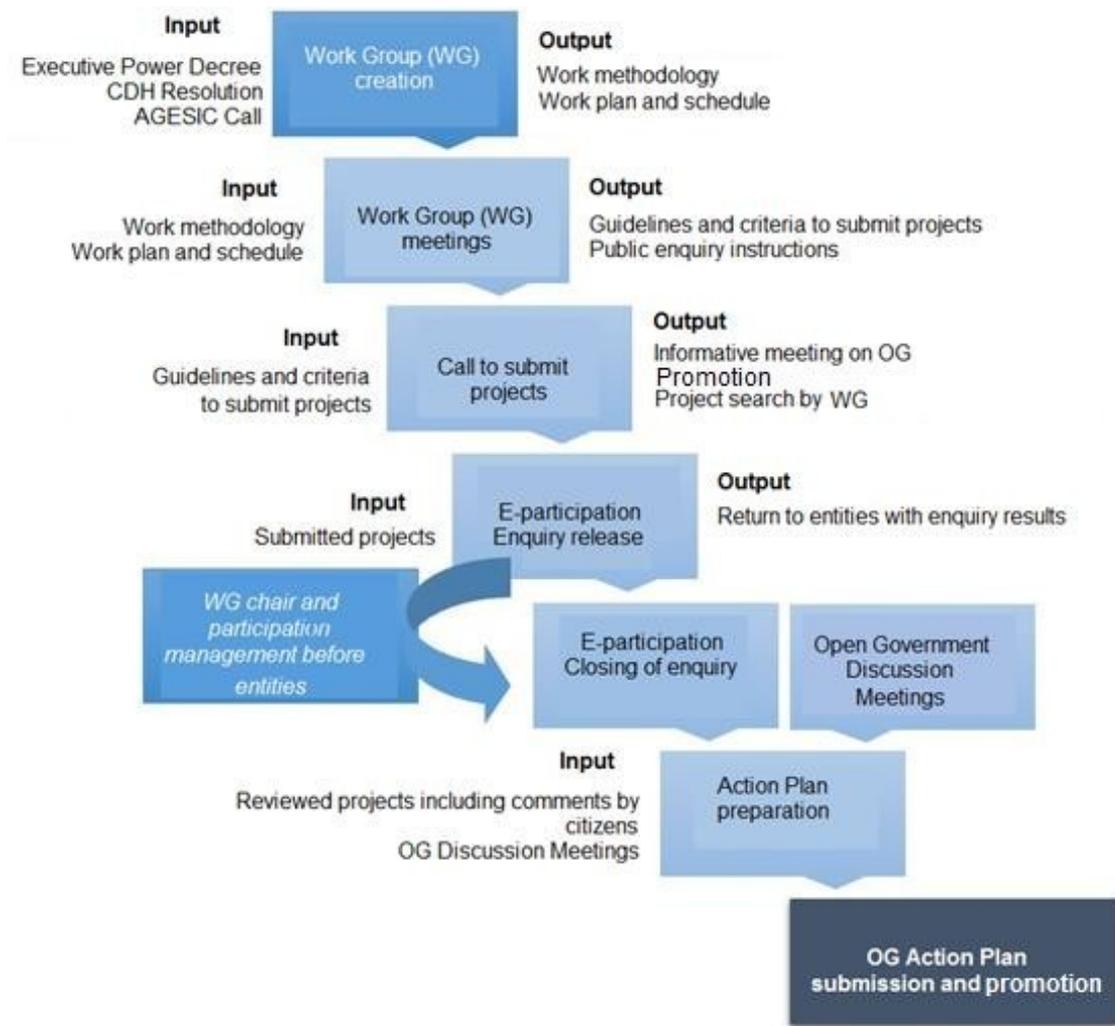
<sup>15</sup> Information on the objectives, relevance, specific impacts, responsible agencies, deadlines and progress of each of the projects and commitments in the Second Plan can be easily and quickly accessed online through the following website: <http://miradordegobiernoabierto.agesic.gub.uy/SigesVisualizador/faces/inicio.xhtml>

<sup>16</sup> (CAinfo, CESOL- Cotidiano Mujer, Creative Commons Uruguay (CC Uy), DATA- Uruguay, El Abrojo, Consumidores en Red de Confianza, Uruguay Transparente)

<sup>17</sup> See the organization list at:

[http://www.agesic.gub.uy/innovaportal/v/3801/1/agesic/plan\\_de\\_accion\\_nacional\\_de\\_gobierno\\_abierto\\_2014-2016.html](http://www.agesic.gub.uy/innovaportal/v/3801/1/agesic/plan_de_accion_nacional_de_gobierno_abierto_2014-2016.html)

**Figure 1: National Action Plan Work flow**



Source: Agencia de Gobierno Electrónico y la Sociedad de la Información y el Conocimiento (AGESIC).  
Open Government National Action Plan 2014-2016

Throughout the Second NAP implementation period, a work group (that included civil society representation by the Open Government Network, academics and civil servants) organized and executed three multi-stakeholders Dialogue Meetings in order to co-create open government commitments. The first dialogue meeting addressed open government and Access to Public Information and the second dialogue meeting addressed open government and e-government, some of their outcomes resulted in commitments included on the second NAP. The third dialogue meeting addressed transparency, accountability and anti-corruption efforts, and some of its outcomes resulted in commitments included on the Third NAP.

By collaborating in the creation of NAP’s commitments or by taking part in the dialogue meetings, multi stake-holders’ participation was granted. These participation mechanisms are analyzed in depth to assess its impact on transforming public policy-making, and to explore how or if it contributes to bring citizens closer to public management and policy design using the potential of digital technologies.

## 2.2 E-participation and citizens techno-mediated involvement?

In an evaluation of the open government process, one of the civil servants involved states:

It is very important to ease access to information and citizen participation. Therefore, the team suggests some actions to be included in the next NAP: creating protocols or regulatory frameworks to improve current practices establishing minimum conditions for citizen participation; enable decision making on policy-building with civil society; conducting a comprehensive campaign of the emerging tools as the catalog and calendar, to achieve citizens and civil society organizations' involvement.

The government officer in charge of the National Action Plan process revealed that although some research available showed that citizen participation was not a widespread tradition in the country, many spaces for civic engagement were found. However "those spaces were not active, active but engaging few citizens and fairly unknown by the general public". Because of this, an online standardized catalog was created to gather all existing information about formal and informal spaces for civic engagement. Citizens were able to add information to the catalog about how frequently they meet, how they are organized and the issues addressed in each space.

This survey continues to be active and has gathered information about 170 spaces for civic engagement (up to August 2016). It is not a list of ICT-mediated participation spaces but a list of civil society organizations involved in the elaboration or implementation of public policies. It could potentially be transformed into ICT-mediated participation, since many of them are located in the interior of the country and the sustained presence of people becomes very difficult.

Because of this, commitments on citizen engagement in the Second National Action Plan were more actively reinforced:

Commitment 2.2: Plan of improvements in instances of citizen participation and the relationship with the citizenship by means of inter-institutional meetings of public social policies. The Ministry of Social Development was in charge of this commitment, which included 2 Goals:

- Goal 14 - Development of 17 exchange workshops on the State-Civil Society relationship with local MIDES, 6 public launches of Local Strategic Agendas and 16 local meetings between MIPS and Civil Society Organizations)
- Goal 15 - Implementation of a website that allows for the promotion of information in dialogue instances with organizations of the Civil Society, as well as proposal exchange.

Commitment 3.1: Promotion and dissemination of the Public Information Access Right. The Access to Public Information Unit was in charge of this commitment which included several goals:

- Goal 19 - Implementation of the project "*Queremos Saber*" (We want to know), by means of which children and adolescents ask questions and request information online to the State)
- Goal 20 -Training course on the Public Information Access Right designed and executed with the participation of the Civil Society and the academia, for civil servants, academics and activists of the Civil Society)
- Goal 21 - Development of a Campaign for raising awareness on the right to public information: *Movida Ciudadana* (Citizens' Mobilization)

- Goal 22 - Replication Networks to develop agreements with other state entities to create replicators as MEC Centres, Ceibal Spaces, ENAP, that promote and train citizens on the citizenship right to public information
- Goal 24 - To create a single repository with open data of mails referring to the Transparency of State entities.

Commitments 4.1: Government Open Data. The Agency for the Development of E-Government and Information Society (AGESIC) was in charge of this commitment which included several goals:

- Goal 35 - To formalize the Open Data work group, considering the representation of the civil society, the academia and companies
- Goal 36 - To generate a participation space for identifying and prioritizing work areas and creating a collective Open Government National Action Plan for the period 2015- 2016
- Goal 37 - To create specific work groups in fields such as health, education, social policies and consumption.

Commitment 4.3: Open Land Registry. The Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs- Land Registry Office was in charge of this commitment which included several goals such as;

- Goal 48 - Implementation of participation tools for the valuation of data published by the General Board of Land Registry by citizens.

The report of the Independent Review Mechanism on the Second National Action Plan recommended:

If the government wants to reinforce the Open Government process and to engage more citizens in commitments' design, it should take action to deepen citizens knowledge on open government in Uruguay by: Training public servants of national and municipal level; holding meetings with legislators of all political parties; organizing workshops with academic institutions and universities; communicating effectively- through cases- what open government means to the general public. (ICD, 2013)

### **3. Observing shifts in meaning, rules and power in state-citizen engagement**

As stated by Giddens (1992), "The social environments in which we exist do not just consist of random assortments of events or actions (...) Social systems are made up of human actions and relationships: what gives these their patterning is their repetition across periods of time and distances of space". Following Giddens, we understand that the actions of all social actors involved in the Open Government National Action Plan governance do not reproduce the structural characteristics of the social system but, gradually, adapts, modifies and changes its structure.

Accordingly, ICT-mediated actions enable new ways of advocacy and influence over social structures, particularly over state structures in charge of creating public policies. Atuservicio.uy evidences how co-creation of public policies and ICT initiatives enable a new way of interaction between the state and citizenry. In this case, application software enables and broadens access to information, contributing to ease decision making processes for citizens, boosting their ability to access services and to further exercise their rights. We also understand that changes in social

structure –and restructuration- have occurred and will continue to occur through ICT-mediated civic engagement and through the actions of social agents taking part in the process.

One of the central dimensions of Open Government is civic engagement, this lead us to question: is it possible that civic advocacy contributes to shape policy definitions and thus contribute to transparency? What Open Government means can be approached from different perspectives depending on the analysis objective.

As Mariñez Navarro (2016) says, collaboration is the key dimension of the open government relational approach to civic participation through ICT. Collaborative participation is evident when citizens take part into decision-making processes. This implies a reconfiguration of technical, political and social legitimacy and furthermore transformations within public organizations. As Helsper and Van Deursen (2015) state, these transformations cannot be attributed to the introduction of technology. In fact, all policies put in practice to reduce the digital divide had been focused on providing services but users' voices were often absent. In the design-process participation of the underprivileged members of society was not addressed, often resulting in outcomes that did not meet their needs.

De Vera (2006) has argued that to infer that the generalized use of ICT in public policies will itself increase participation does not seem accurate. Literature suggests that by incorporating these technologies, citizens who are interested in politics and already taking part in advocacy processes are enabled to expand the impact of their activities. According to Subirats (2013) the extent of changes introduced by Internet-enabled citizen participation is unimaginable. Public space is expanded beyond political representation to a collective space to respond to common problems in direct dialogue with and among citizens – where partners are not always stable and attributions not always defined – which may put at stake the forms of intermediation and interaction that have characterized public institutions traditionally.

These arguments seem to be confirmed when exploring the Uruguayan case. In order to enable ICT-mediated participation in public policies, the need for infrastructure and connectivity becomes evident, either to enable access to public information and advocacy nor to produce and deliver public services. However, this is necessary but not sufficient. The introduction of digital technology does not substitute the need for a sustained and intensive work in order to engage citizens in the process. Although citizen participation through the use of technology (surveys and on-line services) eases access to their points of view, the process requires multiple mediations.

After the review of documentation on the ICT-mediated citizen engagement process and the analysis interviews with key informants conducted so far, we arrive at four preliminary findings.

1. The Open Government Plan has incorporated citizen engagement in its objectives and has created a multi-stakeholder process that promotes citizen participation and advocacy but finds difficulty in involving citizens directly on policy debate. So there is a political prioritization – at least at the narrative level – of citizen engagement. The Independent Review Mechanism had already stated the need to promote more participatory governance goals on its review of the First National Action Plan and suggested how multi-stakeholder dialogue mechanisms should be conducted to create the Second NAP that would effectively include civil society demands.
2. The implementation of dialogue mechanisms, collective construction of the National Action Plans and the use of digital technologies is a significant part of the process. So, the political will of search for citizen's involvement is put in action through them.
3. To achieve citizens' direct benefit through the use of digital technologies is faced as a challenge. With the experience of *atuservicio.com*, we understand how civil society organizations

seem to have developed more expertise on how to create apps that would enable citizen engagement and use of public information.

Finally, we found that the institutionalization of civic engagement tends to limit the participation of a broader range of actors and we also wonder if this indicates the State's incapacity to embrace innovation on public management and public policy. The process seems to be boosted by the apparent civil society organizations' ability to adapt and manage information. It becomes necessary to further study how participatory mechanisms operate, the actors taking part in the process, the difficulties they face in order to co-create public policies while using ICTs.

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