

**ASSESSING THE REGIONAL DIGITAL DIVIDE ACROSS
THE EUROPEAN UNION-27**

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ASSESSING THE REGIONAL DIGITAL DIVIDE ACROSS THE EUROPEAN UNION-27

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Abstract

Over the last years great efforts have been devoted to the analysis of the digital divide at the international level. In contrast, the evidence about the regional digital divide is still scarce, especially in the case of the European Union. Within this context, the aim of this paper is to remedy this deficiency, trying to throw some light on the state of ICT adoption across European regions. On the basis of a set of ICT-related indicators, we perform a factor analysis that leads us to the development of a ranking, identifying best-and-worst performing regions. The Top-10 mainly corresponds to Dutch regions, while Greece and Bulgaria occupy the Bottom-10. Hence, results show that the regional digital divide reflects to some extent the income gap. However, regional policy towards ICT seems to be having some positive implications for technology adoption. Finally, we assess the regional divides within each Member State.

Keywords: Information and communication technologies (ICT), regions, digital divide, European Union, factor analysis.

JEL classification: L86, O33, O52, R12.

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INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have seen the revolutionary spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The developments in hardware, software, and computing fields have resulted in affordable general purpose technologies (Bresnahan and Trajtenberg, 1995) that can be used in most sectors and whose benefits may extend everywhere. Thus, activities such as e-government, e-learning, e-commerce, e-banking, and e-tax have become part of daily life. Likewise, e-mail, web-surfing, social networks, internet news, and online dictionaries are more and more a major component of life for many citizens.

Hence, ICT have been recognised as a major contributor in social and economic development (OECD, 2004, 2007b; Greenstein and McDevitt, 2009). Furthermore, several authors have stressed the importance of these technologies as a catalyst for growth in the economic current crisis (World Economic Forum, 2009). In fact, both American and European recovery plans from the crisis have considered ICT as part of their strategic actions: for instance, the European Commission has earmarked EUR 1 billion of extra spending for investment in broadband, with special attention to the improvement of high-speed connections in rural regions (European Commission, 2009).

ICT are increasingly determining the ability of individuals, firms, and territories to remain competitive and to do things in a more effectively and efficient way, which, in the end, turns into the creation of wealth. Therefore, their path of diffusion suggests how the future distribution of wealth may take shape (International Telecommunications Union, 2006).

In this context, a proper assessment of the state of ICT in a territory has become crucial. Comparing the ICT achievements of individual territories with those of others stands as an important benchmark to gauge regional and global competitiveness. Consequently, call for monitoring and benchmarking have become more and more frequent at international, national, and regional levels. Special attention has been paid to the measurement and track of the digital divide, that is, the gap between individuals, households, businesses, and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access and use ICT for a wide variety of activities (OECD, 2001). In this sense, the outcome plans of the World Summit on the Information Society requested the international performance evaluation and benchmarking of the information society developments (and the resulting divides) through

comparable statistical indicators¹. Such demand led to set a list core of ICT indicators (Partnership on measuring ICT for development, 2005), and to the development of several composite indices in order to summarise the multidimensionality of a phenomena such as the information society. Examples of such indices are the Information Society Index (IDC/World Times, 2005), the Technology Achievement Index (United Nations, 2001), the Infostate Index (Orbicom, 2002, 2003), the Networked Readiness Index (World Economic Forum, 2008), and the Digital Opportunity Index (International Telecommunications Union, 2008)², among others.

Likewise, the European action plans for the information society (eEurope and i2010) have highlighted the importance of measuring and comparing the diffusion of these technologies across the Member States: only once the situation of ICT is properly assessed and measured, policies can be designed and implemented effectively in order to foster the progress of those territories lagging behind. Hence, the current i2010 plan has considered a set of indicators to track ICT diffusion, and has commissioned the development of an “e-business readiness index” in order to give a broad picture of the level of ICT adoption and e-business development at country level (Pannoni et al., 2005).

However, very little has come of these actions in terms of the regional benchmarking of ICT penetration. Most evidence refers to the US (Progressive Policy Institute, 2002; Atkinson and Andes, 2008), while the references to the European Union are few. This is due both to the limited availability of comparable statistical data across European regions and to the lack of instruments for systematically quantifying ICT diffusion, even though considerable efforts were devoted to that end by some European projects (BISER, 2004; UNDERSTAND, 2006). As a consequence, most research has focused on the analysis of regional ICT disparities within a particular Member State (Vicente and López, 2007) or has just considered one indicator to assess the development of the information society (Billón et al., 2009), neglecting its multidimensional nature.

In this context, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the literature on the digital divide by analysing the state of these technologies across the regions of the 27 Member States of the

¹ The World Summit on the Information Society took place in two phases: Geneva 2003 and Tunisia 2005.

² See Vicente and López (2008) for complete survey on the development of ICT indices, and Archibugi et al. (2009) for a state-of-art on composite indicators of the technological capabilities of nations in general.

European Union (EU). Hence, we try to assess the level of ICT penetration in each region, and identify best-and-worst positioned regions. Moreover, we use a set of ICT-related indicators in order to capture the multidimensionality of the information society. Therefore, we first present the conceptual framework to measure ICT (section 2) and details of the data (section 3). From this, we perform a factor analysis (section 4) in order to deal with our multivariate data, and we finally summarize our principal findings (section 5).

FRAMEWORK

Over the last decade, the rapid diffusion of ICT has gone alongside with the need for indicators, measures and analysis of such phenomena in order to support and inform policy making (Partnership on measuring ICT for development, 2008). According to the OECD (2005) the well-know S curve of technological diffusion provides a useful conceptual framework to analyze the changes driven by ICT. It considers the following three stages:

- ICT readiness, reflecting the level of networked infrastructure and access to ICT.
- ICT intensity, reflecting the level of ICT use in the society, and the extent to which ICT-related activities are carried out.
- And finally, ICT impact, reflecting the result of efficient and effective ICT use, and therefore indicating whether ICT make a difference in terms of efficiency and/or the creation of new sources of wealth.

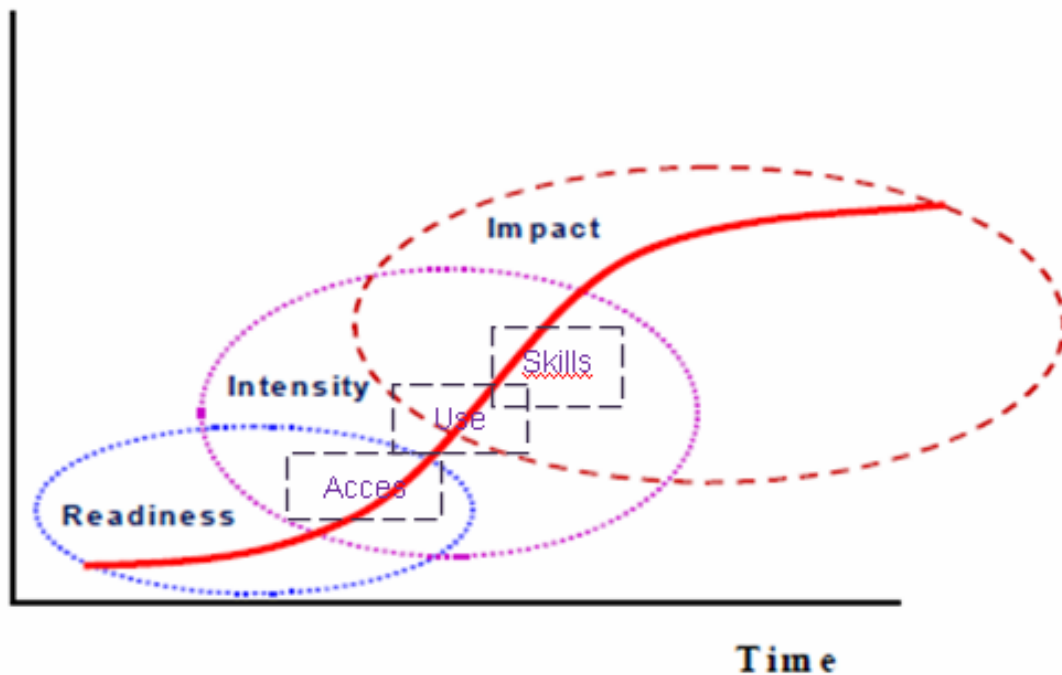
These elements reflect a time sequence in which they are closely linked: without infrastructure, there is no access; without access there is no use; and use will in the end determine impact. In particular, use indicates the level of absorption of the technologies, which at the same time involves increases in terms of the following three elements: numbers (i.e. more ICT users), level of intensity (for example, more SMS being sent), and sophistication of use (for example, online banking or purchasing) (International Telecommunications Union, 2009).

It is important to bear in mind that in addition to access and use, reaching the final state (ICT impact) depends on a third component: ICT capability or skills. ICT skills are needed to make the best use of ICT. They are critical to the potential impact that ICT can have on development: if the individuals in a territory are not capable to exploit the new technologies and realize their potential benefits, development and progress will be hampered in that area. ICT

impact therefore largely depends on the availability of skills and knowledge and the capability to use ICT efficiently and effectively. In fact several authors have pointed out that the gaps in individuals' abilities to find information online are opening a second-level digital divide in addition to the one in access (Hargittai, 2002; OECD 2007a).

Then, our framework of analysis considers three key elements to track the evolution of a territory towards the information society and the successful reaching of the final stage (impact). As shown in Figure 1, these three components are ICT access, use, and skills. Indicators on these three dimensions will be therefore indispensable input measurement to properly assess the state of ICT across European regions.

Figure 1. Framework of analysis: Stages of diffusion and related indicators



Source: Own based on OECD (2005).

DATA

One of the main constraints to the analysis of the digital divide is associated with the availability of data on a regional basis. In spite of the international efforts to develop statistical information about the information society, there is still a lack of comparable data on ICT adoption at the regional level in the EU. In fact, while at the national level there is much data, the regional authorities lack some of the basic information to understand the level of ICT adoption and to evaluate the impact and the effectiveness of ICT policies (Billón et al., 2008).

As a consequence, there is usually a “trade-off” between breadth and depth in the selection of indicators. That is, the more indicators we try to use, the less the number of territories we can include in our investigation.

Our analysis of the digital divide focuses on the EU-27 and uses data provided by Eurostat. We consider 164 regions at the NUTS-2 level (whenever possible) with the exceptions of Hungary, Romania, and Sweden, for which Eurostat provides no regional ICT disaggregated data. We have decided to include these three countries in the analysis in order to get a full picture of the EU. However, it is important to bear in mind such limitation when interpreting the results for those countries.

Data reports to the year 2008. Although information is also available for the period 2006-2007, the high number of missing values for those years prevents us from analysing the evolution of the regional digital divide.

As already mentioned, the availability of data was the main restrictive factor in the selection of variables³. Eurostat provides data on only five regional ICT indicators related to Internet access, use, and e-skills (Table 1). These indicators are based on the information coming from the annual survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals, collected by the National Statistical Institute or Ministry of each Member State. Part of the data collected is used in the context of the aforementioned i2010 initiative in order to track the progress of the EU in the ICT field. The survey is based on Eurostat’s annual model questionnaire on ICT usage, and is the only homogenous source of such kind covering the whole EU and able to supply regionally disaggregated data on ICT adoption. Specifically, the survey covers the population of all individuals aged 16 to 74 years, and all households having at least one member in such age group.

³ Such restriction is common to other regional analyses performed at the European level. For instance, the European Innovation Scoreboard includes seven variables at the regional level, while the national one is built upon twenty-five variables (MERIT/JRC, 2007; Zabala-Iturriagoitia, 2007).

The survey focuses on five regional indicators: percentage of personal computer (PC) non-users⁴, percentage of Internet users, percentage of e-commerce users, percentage of households with Internet access, and percentage of households with broadband access.

We note that there is no information available regarding ICT adoption by businesses. Although this lack of data could pose some limitation in our analysis, it is important to take into account that most research on ICT progress have focused on the diffusion of these technologies across population. Furthermore, ICT use by businesses can be expected to be highly correlated with the spread of these technologies across individuals, suggesting that it is not essential to include them in the analysis.

Table 1. Description of variables and codes

CODE	Variable
COM	Percentage of individuals who ordered goods or services online for private use*
NOPC	Percentage of individuals who have never used a computer*
HOME	Percentage of households with access to the Internet at home
BROAD	Percentage of households with broadband access
USE	Percentage of individuals regularly using the Internet*

Note: (*) These percentages have been calculated over the population between 16-74 years old in each region.

The descriptive statistics shown in Table 2 reflect some important differences across regions. Thus, the percentage of households connected to the Internet goes from a minimum of 15% in the region of Severozapaden (Bulgaria) to a maximum of 90% in Noord-Holland (the Netherlands). Moreover the percentage of individuals using e-commerce goes from 1% in Yugoiztochen (Bulgaria) to 69% in the South East of the United Kingdom. The uneven distribution of ICT does not impose any limitation on our analysis, as the methods employed do not make any distributional assumptions.

⁴ Eurostat considers the “percentage of individuals who have never used a computer” as an indicator of e-skills, and in particular, of the lack of digital skills across population. Nonetheless, it would be of more interest to have other indicators of digital skills, such as those available at country level at Eurostat, based on a self-assessment approach.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

	COM	NOPC	HOME	BROAD	USE
Mean	29.84	27.68	58.39	47.27	56.13
Median	23.00	25.00	58.50	47.50	57.00
Std. Deviation	18.66	15.37	16.38	16.25	17.03
Skewness	0.31	0.49	-0.22	-0.08	-0.01
Kurtosis	-1.29	-0.84	-0.32	-0.72	-0.85
Minimum	1.00	5.00	15.00	12.00	22.00
Maximum	69.00	61.00	90.00	79.00	97.00
Percentile 25	14.00	14.00	47.00	35.00	44.00
Percentile 50	23.00	25.00	58.50	47.50	57.00
Percentile 75	48.75	39.00	71.00	58.75	70.00

Source: Eurostat (2009).

FACTOR ANALYSIS

As stated in previous sections, the analysis of ICT development in a territory requires the evaluation of three key facets: access, use, and skills. In this context, factor analysis has revealed as a useful tool to capture the overall dimension of the digital divide (Corrocher and Ordanini, 2002; Soupizet, 2004; Vicente and López, 2006a; Trkman et al., 2008; Al-Mutawakkil et al., 2009).

Factor analysis is a multivariate technique that addresses the problem of analyzing the structure of relationships among a number of variables by defining a set of common underlying dimensions, known as factors (Hair et al., 1995). With this technique, which requires the variables to be highly correlated with each other to be appropriate, the separate dimensions of the structure can be identified, and the extent to which each variable is explained by each dimension is determined. Once this has been done, the two main uses of factor analysis can be achieved: summarization and data reduction. In summarizing the data, factor analysis derives underlying dimensions that, when interpreted and understood, describe data in a much smaller number of items than the original variables. Data reduction can be achieved by calculating scores for each dimension and substituting them for the original variables.

So, first of all, it is necessary to assess whether the variables are sufficiently correlated with each other in order to evaluate the appropriateness of this technique. In our case, the correlation matrix (Table 3) shows that all variables are closely related to each other, with correlation coefficients (in absolute values) larger than 0.8. For instance, the percentage of individuals who have never used a computer is high and negatively correlated with using the

Internet and having access at home because most people are connected to the Internet through a computer. Furthermore, the high and positive correlations of broadband with home access and use show the increasingly importance of high-speed connections: many of the most effective applications and services that can foster development are only available through a high-speed Internet connection, for example those related to e-commerce, e-government, or e-banking.

Table 3. Correlation matrix

	COM	NOPC	HOME	BROAD	USE
COM	1.00	-0.90	0.89	0.82	0.87
NOPC	-0.90	1.00	-0.92	-0.87	-0.96
HOME	0.89	-0.92	1.00	0.92	0.94
BROAD	0.82	-0.87	0.92	1.00	0.93
USE	0.87	-0.96	0.94	0.93	1.00

Note: All the correlations are significant at the 1% level.

As the correlation matrix reveals the existence of strong and significant relationships between the variables, factor analysis seems suitable. Further insights can be gained by using the Bartlett test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Mayer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (Table 4). Bartlett tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which implies that there is no correlation between the variables. The KMO measure requires values greater than 0.5 for a satisfactory factor analysis to proceed. The Bartlett test, with a statistical value of 1,386 and an associated probability of less than 1 percent, and the KMO measure, with a value of 0.85, suggest that the data structure is adequate for factor analysis.

Table 4. Kaiser-Mayer–Olkin Measure and Bartlett’s test

Measure		Results
Kaiser-Mayer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.85
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1,386.22
	df	10
	Sig.	0.00

Therefore, factor analysis is run. Results are shown in Table 5. For the initial solution there are as many factor as variables, that is, five; so the next step is to decide how many factors to extract. According to the the eigenvalue criterion, all factors having eigenvalues greater than 1 should be retained. This guarantees that any factor accounts for at least the

variance of a single variable. Meanwhile the percentage of variance criterion considers all factors accounting for at least 60 percent (typically, but sometimes 80 percent) of the variance of the original variables. In our case both criteria suggest retaining the first factor, which explains 92 percent of the total variance of the original variables.

Table 5. Results of factor analysis

Factor	Eigenvalue	Percent of variance	Cumulative percent of variance
1	4.60	92.04	92.04
2	0.20	3.91	95.95
3	0.11	2.22	98.17
4	0.06	1.27	99.44
5	0.03	0.56	100.00

Note: The extraction method is Principal Component Analysis.

Table 6 shows the factor loadings matrix, which includes the correlation coefficients between each factor and each variable, and the communalities. Factor 1 has significant positive loadings on all the variables except for the percentage of individuals who have never used a computer, which gets a negative sign. The variable with the highest loading is the percentage of individuals using the Internet, followed by home-Internet-access penetration. The communalities show that the retained factor explains between 87 and 96 percent of the variance of each individual variable. This highlights the quality of the results.

Table 6. Factor loadings matrix and communalities

	Factor loadings	Communalities
USE	0.98	0.96
HOME	0.97	0.95
NOPC	-0.97	0.93
BROAD	0.95	0.90
COM	0.93	0.87

Note: The extraction method is Principal Component Analysis.

By computing each region score on the retained factor, we can identify best- and-worst performing regions in ICT adoption, developing a ranking. The main advantage of building such a ranking is that it provides a clear picture of regional performance and facilitates the benchmarking exercise. Furthermore, it is easier to interpret the place of a region on it than the position derived from a battery of many separate indicators. However, such advantages can transform into disadvantages if simplistic conclusions are derived from it (OECD/JRC, 2008).

Table 7 shows that Europe's Nordic regions are the most advanced when it comes to ICT. In particular, Dutch regions stand out with seven places among the Top-10, including the first position of Noord-Holland. These regions show extraordinary high levels of Internet penetration with about 85 percent of individuals regularly using the Internet, and almost 90 percent of households connected to the Net, mainly by high-speed connections. These high levels of access imply both high levels of usage (more than half of individuals buying online) and digital skills (less than 7 percent of population has never used a computer). The rest of the Top-10 corresponds to two Danish regions (ranks 3rd and 9th) and the British South East (rank 8th).

On the opposite, the Greek region of Kentriki Ellada is in the last position of the ranking (rank 164th), preceded by five Bulgarian regions, two other Greek and one Italian regions. It is interesting to note that Bulgaria places all its regions among the Bottom-10 with the exception of the one which corresponds to the capital, ranking 20 places ahead (Yugozapaden in the 139th position).

Romania is also positioned in the Bottom-10, but is important to remember that there is no disaggregated information for this country: therefore, its 157th rank could be disguising serious regional digital disparities within it. The same could be happening with Sweden (rank 11th) and Hungary (rank 102nd) which, despite the lack of disaggregated data, were included in the analysis in order to have a full picture of the EU-27.

Figure 2 shows a diamond chart for the top and bottom regions, that is, Noord-Holland (1st) versus Kentriki-Ellada (164th). In order to give a clear picture of the magnitude of the regional gap across the EU-27, we have included the variable "percentage of individuals who have ever used a computer" instead of the "percentage of those who have never used it" (NOPC)⁵. The chart shows that the digital divides between the top and bottom regions are big indeed. In fact, the differences in all the five indicators exceed 50 percentage points. Moreover, the biggest gap is observed for home-Internet-connection with 71 percentage points of difference between Noord-Holland (90 percent) and Kentriki-Ellada (19 percent).

⁵ The percentage of individuals who have ever used a computer has been reckoned as the following difference=100-NOPC (percentage of individuals who have never used a computer).

Table 7. Ranking of regions derived from the factor analysis

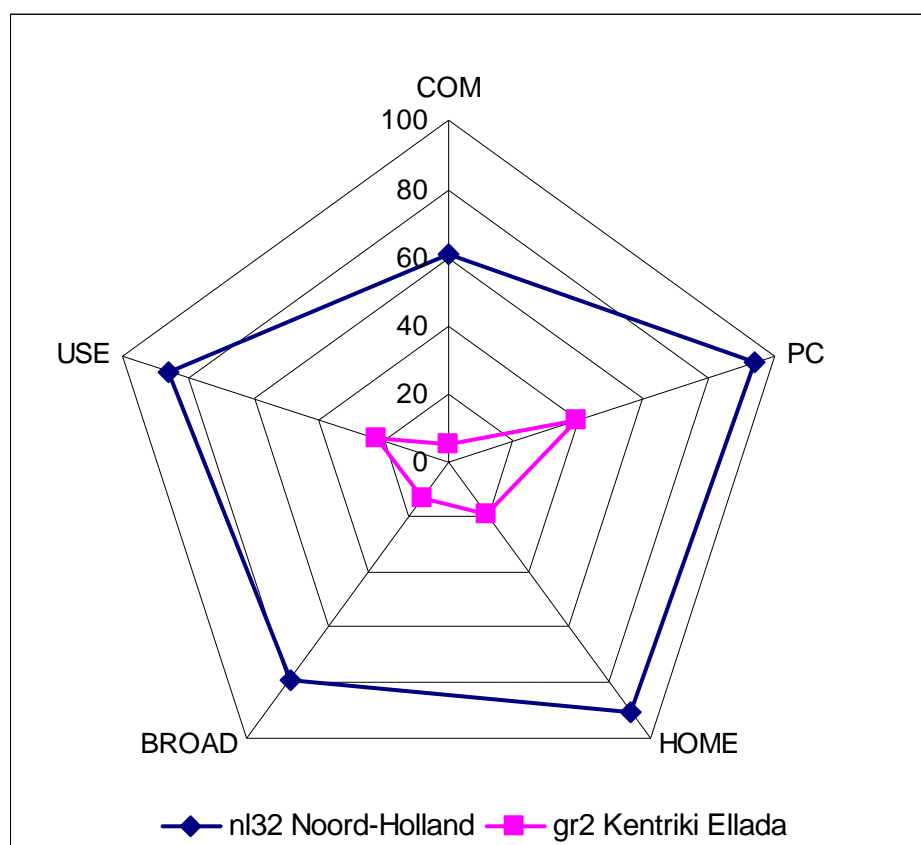
Rank	Region and code	Score	Rank	Region and code	Score	Rank	Region and code	Score
1	nl32 Noord-Holland	1.82	32	deb Rheinland-Pfalz	1.02	63	fr7 Centre-Est	0.38
2	nl31 Utrecht	1.80	33	ukm Scotland	0.98	64	at11 Burgenland	0.38
3	dk01 Hovedstaden	1.78	34	de6 Hamburg	0.95	65	fr5 Ouest	0.37
4	nl11 Groningen	1.78	35	dec Saarland	0.95	66	dee Sachsen-Anhalt	0.36
5	nl21 Overijssel	1.68	36	de1 Baden-Württemberg	0.95	67	ukc North East	0.28
6	nl33 Zuid-Holland	1.62	37	ukf East Midlands	0.95	68	be10 Région de Bruxelles-Capitale	0.28
7	nl23 Flevoland	1.61	38	at13 Wien	0.94	69	de8 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	0.25
8	ukj South East	1.58	39	de9 Niedersachsen	0.93	70	fr4 Est	0.24
9	nl22 Gelderland	1.58	40	de5 Bremen	0.92	71	es30 Comunidad de Madrid	0.23
10	dk04 Midtjylland	1.54	41	def Schleswig-Holstein	0.90	72	fr2 Bassin Parisien	0.23
11	se Sweden	1.51	42	ukl Wales	0.89	73	at21 Kärnten	0.22
12	nl12 Friesland	1.41	43	fi13 Itä-Suomi	0.87	74	de4 Brandenburg	0.22
13	dk02 Sjælland	1.39	44	uke Yorkshire and The Humber	0.85	75	fr3 Nord-pas-de-Calais	0.21
14	nl41 Noord-Brabant	1.39	45	ukg West Midlands	0.82	76	ded Sachsen	0.20
15	fi20 Åland	1.33	46	be31 Prov. Brabant Wallon	0.77	77	be25 Prov. West-Vlaanderen	0.13
16	dk03 Syddanmark	1.32	47	be24 Prov. Vlaams Brabant	0.76	78	fr6 Sud-Ouest	0.12
17	uki London	1.29	48	fr1 Île de France	0.75	79	ie Ireland	0.12
18	nl42 Limburg	1.27	49	at32 Salzburg	0.61	80	sk01 Bratislavský kraj	0.08
19	fi18 Etelä-Suomi	1.27	50	be23 Prov. Oost-Vlaanderen	0.60	81	es51 Cataluña	0.07
20	fi19 Länsi-Suomi	1.24	51	be22 Prov. Limburg	0.60	82	be34 Prov. Luxembourg	0.06
21	nl34 Zeeland	1.24	52	be21 Prov. Antwerpen	0.59	83	be35 Prov. Namur	0.05
22	ukh Eastern	1.24	53	at34 Vorarlberg	0.58	84	sk02 Západné Slovensko	0.03
23	ukk South West	1.19	54	deg Thüringen	0.57	85	be33 Prov. Liège	-0.02
24	dk05 Nordjylland	1.15	55	ukd North West	0.54	86	sk03 Stredné Slovensko	-0.03
25	lu Luxembourg (Grand-Duché)	1.12	56	at33 Tirol	0.52	87	ee Estonia	-0.04
26	nl13 Drenthe	1.11	57	at31 Oberösterreich	0.50	88	sk04 Východné Slovensko	-0.09
27	de3 Berlin	1.11	58	cz01 Praha	0.49	89	es53 Illes Balears	-0.10
28	de2 Bayern	1.10	59	fr8 Méditerranée	0.48	90	si Slovenia	-0.18
29	dea Nordrhein-Westfalen	1.07	60	at22 Steiermark	0.42	91	es21 Pais Vasco	-0.19
30	de7 Hessen	1.05	61	at12 Niederösterreich	0.40	92	cz02 Střední Čechy	-0.21
31	fi1a Pohjois-Suomi	1.04	62	ukn Northern Ireland	0.40	93	es22 Comunidad Foral de Navarra	-0.24

Table 7. Ranking of regions derived from the factor analysis

Rank	Region and code	Score	Rank	Region and code	Score	Rank	Region and code	Score
94	es13 Cantabria	-0.27	118	pl2 Poludniowy	-0.66	142	ite3 Marche	-1.08
95	be32 Prov. Hainaut	-0.29	119	itd5 Emilia-Romagna	-0.68	143	cy Cyprus	-1.12
96	es24 Aragón	-0.32	120	ite4 Lazio	-0.69	144	itc3 Liguria	-1.13
97	es23 La Rioja	-0.33	121	cz07 Střední Morava	-0.70	145	pt11 Norte	-1.20
98	mt Malta	-0.34	122	es41 Castilla y León	-0.73	146	itf1 Abruzzo	-1.22
99	lv Latvia	-0.35	123	itd2 Provincia Autonoma Trento	-0.75	147	pt20 Região Autónoma dos Açores	-1.25
100	pt17 Lisboa	-0.35	124	gr3 Attiki	-0.75	148	pt18 Alentejo	-1.29
101	es12 Principado de Asturias	-0.36	125	es61 Andalucía	-0.75	149	pt16 Centro	-1.30
102	hu Hungary	-0.42	126	cz04 Severozápad	-0.79	150	itf2 Molise	-1.31
103	es70 Canarias	-0.43	127	itd4 Friuli-Venezia Giulia	-0.81	151	itf5 Basilicata	-1.31
104	cz03 Jihozápad	-0.52	128	es42 Castilla-la Mancha	-0.82	152	itf3 Campania	-1.48
105	itd1 Provincia Autonoma Bolzano-Bozen	-0.53	129	pt15 Algarve	-0.84	153	itf6 Calabria	-1.55
106	cz06 Jihovýchod	-0.54	130	es62 Región de Murcia	-0.87	154	itf4 Puglia	-1.60
107	es52 Comunidad Valenciana	-0.54	131	es43 Extremadura	-0.91	155	itg1 Sicilia	-1.62
108	es64 Ciudad Autónoma de Melilla	-0.56	132	itd3 Veneto	-0.93	156	gr4 Nisia Aigaiou. Kriti	-1.87
109	pl1 Centralny	-0.58	133	itc2 Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste	-0.94	157	ro Romania	-1.87
110	pl5 Poludniowo-Zachodni	-0.58	134	pl3 Wschodni	-0.94	158	gr1 Voreia Ellada	-1.88
111	pl4 Północno-Zachodni	-0.58	135	ite2 Umbria	-0.97	159	bg13 Severoiztochen	-1.89
112	itc4 Lombardia	-0.64	136	es11 Galicia	-0.99	160	bg22 Yuzhen tsentralen	-1.94
113	es63 Ciudad Autónoma de Ceuta	-0.64	137	ite1 Toscana	-1.01	161	bg12 Severen tsentralen	-1.96
114	cz05 Severovýchod	-0.64	138	itc1 Piemonte	-1.03	162	bg23 Yugoiztochen	-1.99
115	lt Lithuania	-0.65	139	bg21 Yugozapaden	-1.04	163	bg11 Severozapaden	-2.09
116	pl6 Północny	-0.66	140	itg2 Sardegna	-1.05	164	gr2 Kentriki Ellada	-2.09
117	cz08 Moravskoslezsko	-0.66	141	pt30 Região Autónoma da Madeira	-1.07			

Note: See Annex for country's abbreviations.

Figure 2. The Digital Divides between top and bottom regions

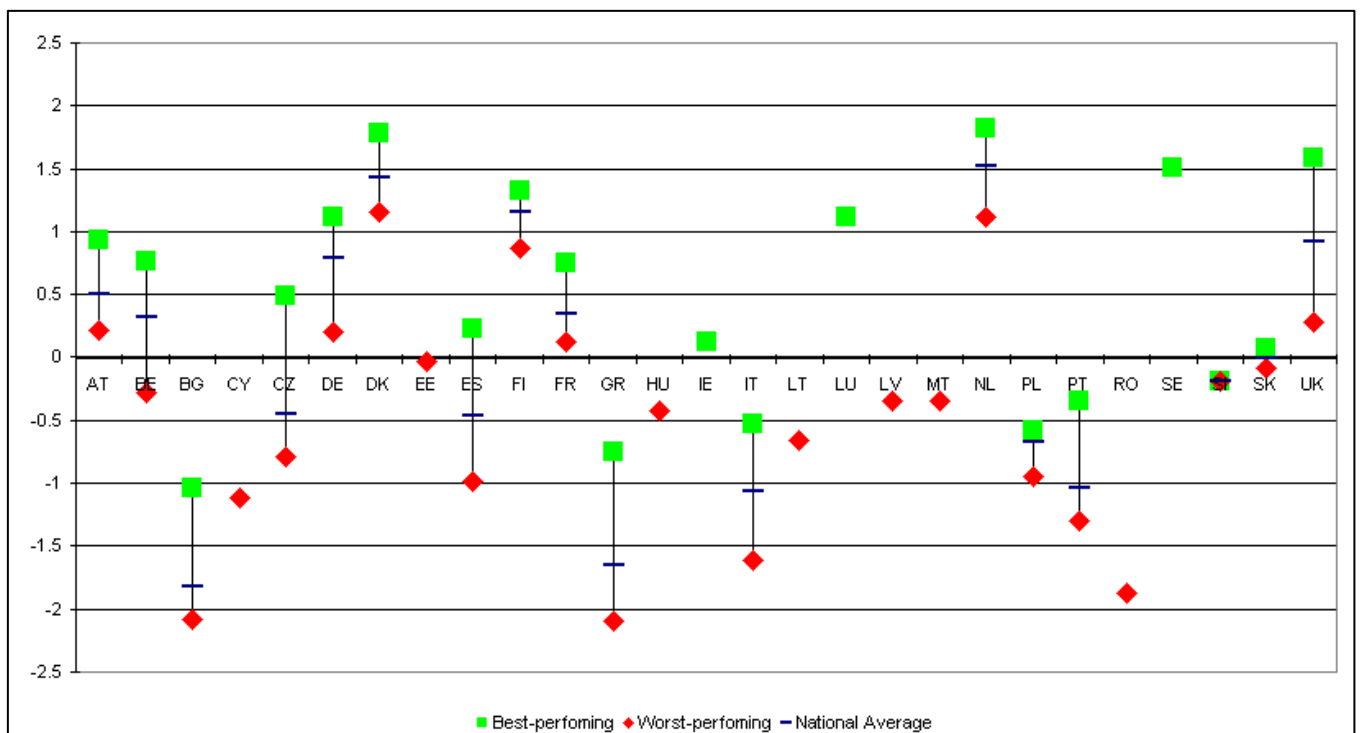


Looking further into the ranking we also observe that the first half of it mostly corresponds to regions from Northern and Central Europe countries. The only exceptions to this are Prague and Madrid ranking 58th and 71st respectively. From the place 86th on, all the regions belong to Southern countries and the New Members of the Union, with the only exception of the Belgian region of Hainaut which ranks 95th.

The fairly good place of Prague, ahead of some Northern regions, contrasts with the position of the rest of Czech territories which rank between 92nd and 126th places. The same happens with other countries such as Belgium, which regions rank between 46th and 95th positions. These results suggest the existence of important divides within countries. Further insights on such issue are presented on Figure 3 which shows for each country the best-and-worst performing regions, and the national average. The horizontal axis identifies countries by their abbreviations while the vertical axis displays factor scores with the value zero corresponding to the European average. Hence regions in the upper part of the diagram correspond to those over the average in what regards to ICT. If we measure the domestic digital

divide as the difference between the best and the worst performing regions in each country, Greece and the United Kingdom present the biggest divides. However, the regions of the former are all below the European average, while those of the latter are all above it. The Czech Republic and Spain also have big digital gaps with the peculiarity that the best performing regions are above the European average in contrast to the worst ones that are below it. The same happens in Belgium. Overall the chart points out the leading position of Northern regions in contrast to the Southern and Eastern ones.

Figure 3. The Digital Divides within countries



Note: See Annex for country's abbreviations.

In order to gain some more insights on this issue we have reckoned some correlations between the derived ICT scores from factor analysis and some socio-economic indicators. Tables 8 and 9 show the results.

Table 8. Correlation matrix (Pearson correlation coefficient)

	ICT factor scores	GDP per capita	GDP per capita (PPS)	Population density	RIS
ICT factor scores	1	0.67	0.59	0.17	0.73
GDP per capita	0.67	1	0.95	0.35	0.62
GDP per capita (PPS)	0.59	0.95	1	0.42	0.57
Population density	0.17	0.35	0.42	1	0.31
RIS	0.73	0.62	0.57	0.31	1

Notes: The number of regions considered is the 164 ones reported in Table 6, except for the correlations with the European Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) which considers 151 regions. GDP and PPS stand for Gross Domestic Product and Purchasing Power Standard respectively. All the correlations are significant at the 1% level.

Sources: Eurostat (2009) and Hollanders (2007). Data reports to the last available year (2006), excluding ICT data which reports to 2008.

Table 9. Rank Correlation matrix (Spearman correlation coefficient)

	ICT factor scores	GDP per capita	GDP per capita (PPS)	RIS
ICT factor scores	1	0.71	0.62	0.73
GDP per capita	0.71	1	0.94	0.71
GDP per capita (PPS)	0.62	0.94	1	0.65
RIS	0.73	0.71	0.65	1

Notes and sources: As for Table 8.

Research on the digital divide, whether within or across economies, has demonstrated that quite a strong relationship exists between the rates of ICT adoption and the levels of income, whether personal or national. In particular, correlation coefficients of 0.9 between the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and ICT penetration have been reported at country-level (Orbicom, 2005; Hanafizadeh et al., 2009). Our results show that such relationship is a bit less strong at regional-level: linear and rank correlation coefficients are between 0.6 and 0.7. Some regions such as Luxemburg and Bruxelles are not doing as well in ICT as they should be with respect to their level of income; while others such as Flevoland and Overijssel are doing much better in ICT than their incomes would suggest. Although these results must be taken with caution because of the time lag between the available data (the years 2006 and 2008 for GDP and ICT, respectively)⁶, they could be interpreted as an indication that factors other than income come into play to explain ICT adoption. One of these factors could be regional policy. This might be the case of the aforementioned Dutch regions of Flevoland and Overijssel. Both of them,

⁶ Such time lag has prevented us from further investigation of the role of ICT on regional economic growth in spite of the great interest of such issue. It makes little sense to regress 2006 GDP on 2008 ICT adoption.

being Objective 1 and 2 areas respectively with incomes below the European average⁷, received special funding for enabling ICT use and ICT infrastructure from the 2000-2006 Cohesion Policy Programmes (Applica-Ismeri Europa-Wiiw Consortium, 2008). Such funding could be the reason why these regions are performing in ICT better than the expected from their income levels.

Since the EU has been paying special attention to bridging the rural-urban digital divide (Dabinett, 2001; Technopolis and IRISI (Europe), 2002; European Commission, 2006a, 2006b), we have also analysed the relationship between ICT factor scores and population density. In this case, the correlation coefficient gets a value of 0.17, indicating a very weak connection between these two variables, and therefore that the rural-urban digital gap is not that much. Although this result could be a sign of the success of the aforementioned institutional efforts towards bringing the rural gap, further exploration would be needed to draw robust conclusions about this fact.

Finally, we have examined the link between ICT and regional innovation performance. The economic literature on technological diffusion emphasizes the role of innovative activities in facilitating the successful use of external knowledge in general, and of new technologies in particular (Cohen and Levinthal, 1989; Karshenas and Stoneman, 1995; Lal, 1999). Hence, best-performing territories in innovation will be better positioned to adopt ICT and, therefore, to take advantage of the benefits that these technologies may provide (Maurseth and Frank, 2009). In these sense, Norris (2001) and Vicente and López (2006b) found, for a set of 179 countries and the European Union respectively, that those nations which spent more on research and development were more prone to adopt ICT. In order to take account of innovation performance across European regions, we have considered the Regional Innovation Score (RIS) developed at the initiative of the European Commission to evaluate and compare the innovation performance of the Member States under the Lisbon Strategy (Hollanders, 2007). The last year available for the RIS is 2006, when the Top-10 performing regions were Stockholm in Sweden, followed by Västsverige (SE), Oberbayern (DE), Etelä-Suomi (FI), Karlsruhe (DE), Stuttgart (DE), Braunschweig (DE), Sydsverige (SE), Île de France (FR), and Östra Mellansverige (SE).

⁷ During the period 2000-2006 the province of Flevoland was a (phasing out) Objective 1 region.

In this case the correlation is also high with coefficients around 0.7 but, as happened with income, the innovation measure is not able to fully grasp the regional differences in ICT.

Overall, these results reveal that the development of an ICT ranking, like the one we have built, is useful if we are to properly assess the regional digital divide since such gap cannot be wholly captured by income and innovation differentials.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Over the last years it has been recognised worldwide the key role that ICT can play in economic growth and development. Within this context, the European Union has paid special attention to building an “information society for all” individuals and territories, and therefore has implemented several plans to reach this aim. In particular, during the period 2000-2006 Structural Funds expenditure in the information society reached about EUR 5.5 billion⁸. Although such actions might have successful in increasing penetration levels across the Union, our results show that by the year 2008 the regional digital divide is still huge. For instance, the gap between the identified top and bottom regions (Noord-Holland and Kentriki-Ellada, respectively) exceeds 50 percentage points in all ICT indicators. Furthermore, such financial efforts have not been able to make the regional digital divide stop reflecting the regional wealth gap. Our ICT ranking clearly shows the leading position of Northern regions in contrast to Southern and Eastern territories. The correlation coefficients between ICT scores and income per capita are of 0.6-0.7. It is worth mentioning that these values are lower than the ones reported by previous papers at country-level. This fact suggests how cross-country comparisons of the digital divide (in spite of being indispensable in the definition of national strategies) tend to hide any other explanatory factors than the economic ones. In fact, in comparing small sets of countries or small units of analysis, slight variations in public policy and political environment seem to have significant casual implications for technology adoption (Guillen and Suarez, 2001; Oyelaran and Lal, 2005; Howard et al., 2009). In addition, we find little evidence that the regional digital divide is an urban-rural one. This result could be pointing at the success of recent European policies towards bridging such dimension of the digital gap.

⁸ Authors' calculations based on data from Sweco (2008).

Nonetheless, some limitations must be considered in our analysis. They are mainly given by data constraints. First, we only consider five variables. Hence some aspects of the information society may not be covered. Second, we assess the regional digital divide at a given point of time. However, a proper appreciation of the gap requires an understanding of its evolution. Furthermore, the time lag between the available data for ICT and GDP has prevented us from analysing the role that ICT are playing in regional economic growth. In a recent paper Forman et al. (2009) found that the use of ICT was only associated with wage growth in those American counties that were already well off in terms of income, education, population, and industry.

As new waves of regional data become available, future research should focus in analyzing whether the identified digital gaps are narrowing or widening. Moreover, a critical point to address is the analysis of the wireless digital gap. Internet access is increasingly offered over wireless technologies and this type of connection is likely to become even more important than wired. Therefore, it is crucial for regions to assess how well they are performing in the diffusion of these technologies. Likewise, it is a key matter to initiate the measurement of the quality of regional connections since those territories with good broadband penetration but with poor quality are in danger of falling behind in the new wave of interactive and media-rich online services and networks.

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ANNEX

Table 10. List of abbreviations

Abbreviations	Country	Abbreviations	Country
AT	Austria	LV	Latvia
BE	Belgium	LT	Lithuania
BG	Bulgaria	LU	Luxembourg
CZ	The Czech Republic	MT	Malta
CY	Cyprus	NL	The Netherlands
DK	Denmark	PL	Poland
EE	Estonia	PT	Portugal
FI	Finland	RO	Romania
FR	France	SI	Slovenia
DE	Germany	ES	Spain
GR	Greece	SE	Sweden
HU	Hungary	SK	The Slovak Republic
IE	Ireland	UK	The United Kingdom
IT	Italy		

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