

Opening Remarks – Stephen Schmidt, ITS Chair – 32nd European Regional Conference of the *International Telecommunications Society* (ITS), Madrid, Spain, 19 June 2023

Introduction

Buenos días! Good morning!

Welcome to Madrid!

Welcome to UNED (la Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia)!

Welcome to the 32nd European Regional Conference of the International Telecommunications Society (ITS).

And a heartfelt *gracias*, a very BIG thank you, to everyone who has made the effort to be here, in person, after such a challenging period.

As we come together from over 25 countries, **it's fitting and proper that we have a sense of place**, that we acknowledge and celebrate:

- Our conference themes
- Spain, its people and their digital achievements; and
- our esteemed academic host, la Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED).

Conferences Themes

Our conference theme, “Realising the Digital Decade”, expresses **an ambitious aspiration that is cast in both humanistic and digital terms** – asking about how we can create a **better world**, both a human-centric and a sustainable digital society.

Our conference theme echoes Europe’s Digital Decade programme – an very ambitious and comprehensive framework, with a focus that includes:

- cultivating **digital skills**;
- creating **secure infrastructures**;
- enabling **business transformation**; and
- and **digitising public services**.

ITS is a forum for dialogue – in friendship and scholarship – between people, nations, stakeholder communities and academic disciplines. It is, then, **an ideal context** for advancing a **holistic dialogue** about the digital agenda.

Our conference will touch on several themes, including:

- How can we ensure the **digital revolution is inclusive**?
- How can we ensure that it serves as a **catalyst for positive social transformation** rather than amplifying existing inequalities?

Our challenge (as scholars, practitioners and policy makers) is not merely one of steering, observing or recording the digital revolution, but rather of having a **moral vision** and **reimagining the narrative of humanity** – about our place, role, our essential nature and *what it means to be human* – in this rapidly evolving digital landscape.

In other words, we need wisdom:

The motto of UNED, translated from Latin, is "*wisdom moves more than all things that move*".

This signals our path forward.

Spain

Our host nation, Spain, can be a source of **important guidance and wisdom** on these questions because she **exemplifies how digital transformation can also forge a future that is inclusive, equitable and green.**

Spain is a nation of:

- **extraordinary beauty, warmth, vibrancy of culture**
- Those **beautiful qualities** are coupled with an acumen for technological innovation:
 - **Spain has made striking digital progress** in fields such as healthcare, renewable energy, and telecom
- **Tradition and transformation** meet in very remarkable ways, in Spain.

Noteworthy are:

- **Spain's is a leader in *healthcare technologies*:**
 - **Spain leads the EU in telemedicine adoption**, with 72% of its population receiving medical consultations online in 2021, enhancing healthcare accessibility and efficiency.
- **Spain is a leader in *renewable energy*:**

- **Spain is one of only three EU countries** (along with Germany and Ireland) to **generate 40% of their electricity from solar and wind technologies in 2023.**
- **Leadership is also demonstrated in the *rapid 5G and broadband deployment.***
 - **Spain is one of only six OECD countries to achieve greater than 80% population coverage of 5G** (according to the European 5G Observatory).
 - **National operators have rolled out 5G to underserved areas**, as well, ensuring equitable access to connectivity.

Spain provides powerful examples of how a nation can harness technology for the benefit of all – to build a future that is digital, inclusive, and human.

UNED

It is significant that we are gathered today not inside a corporate headquarters nor inside a government institution – *all important stakeholders in Spain's story of innovation and inclusion* – but rather within the vibrant intellectual ecosystem of a university – UNED.

Universities like UNED are crucial in the digital revolution. They are fertile ground for:

- **new ideas** to germinate and grow;
- for **innovation and social change**, and
- for **creating the next generation** of practitioners, policy makers and scholars.

UNED has become a global leader in the digital transformation of education:

- utilizing telecommunications and digital platforms to improve student outcomes.
- thereby aligning perfectly with the spirit of this ITS conference, which links technology, policy, and education.

UNED is this year celebrating its 50th anniversary, committed to universal quality higher education through an online and blended learning model.

UNED is a testament to the power of digital technology to democratize education, making it an entirely fitting venue for our conference.

Thank You's

As I draw to a close, I must express my deepest gratitude to the individuals who have contributed their time, expertise, and energy to this conference.

- I extend heartfelt thanks to my ITS Europe colleagues, **Professor Jason Whalley** of Northumbria University and **Dr. Volker Stocker** of TU Berlin. Their tireless efforts, especially during the pandemic, have kept the ITS flame burning brightly.
- I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to **Dr Covadonga Gijón** and **Dr Aurora Ruíz Rua** of UNED, our diligent local organizers. The conference owes its vitality to your vision.
- Gratitude is also extended to the wider **UNED** organizing committee, the **Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Economics and the Rectorate**, as well as to our conference sponsors.
- I would like to thank all of the authors, presenters, and participants. Your papers, talks, ideas, and camaraderie are the lifeblood of ITS – there would be no ITS conference without you.
- Finally, a very special thank you to all of the **students** presenting papers and in attendance today:
 - Your **fresh perspectives and innovative research** invigorate the ITS, UNED, and the world.
 - **You make us shine more brightly.**
 - We want ITS to be a **welcoming place** for you and we hope to play an **ongoing role in your academic journeys.**

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in the coming days!

Stephen Schmidt

ITS Chair