

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2008

Focus on access to infrastructure



Global Information Society Watch

2008



Global Information Society Watch 2008

Steering committee

Karen Banks (APC)
Roberto Bissio (ITeM)
Anriette Esterhuysen (APC)
Paul Maassen (Hivos)
Loe Schout (Hivos)
Magela Sigillito (ITeM)

Coordination committee

Pablo Accuosto (ITeM)
Inés Campanella (ITeM)
Monique Doppert (Hivos)
Karen Higgs (APC)
Natasha Primo (APC)

Editor

Alan Finlay

Assistant editor

Lori Nordstrom

Publication production

Karen Higgs

Graphic design

MONOCROMO
Myriam Bustos, Leticia da Fonte, Pablo Uribe
info@monocromo.com.uy
Phone: +598 (2) 400 1685

Cover illustration

Matias Bervejillo

Proofreading

Lori Nordstrom
Lisa Cyr

Website

www.GISWatch.org
Andrea Antelo
Ximena Pucciarelli
Monocromo

Printed by

CinnamonTeal Print and Publishing
Printed in India

Global Information Society Watch 2008
Published by APC, Hivos and ITeM
2008

Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Licence creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0
Some rights reserved
ISBN: 92-95049-65-9
APC-200812-CIPP-R-EN-P-0058

ARGENTINA

Nodo TAU

Danilo Lujambio, Florencia Roveri, Carolina Fernández, Iván Kozenitzky, María Victoria Escobar, Flavia Fascendini, Eduardo Rodríguez and Melina Dachesky
www.tau.org.ar



Introduction

A global view on the policies related to the information society, from the standpoint of access, leads us to think about three fundamental aspects when we analyse the Argentine state of affairs. First, we need to analyse indicators and statistics reflecting physical access to technology; second, we need to evaluate the regulatory and legal frameworks (as well as those being debated); and last, we need to look at educational policies dealing with information and communications technologies (ICTs).

Physical access to technology

Infrastructure

In Argentina there are 16 million people online, which is almost 40% of the population. This percentage places our country far below more developed countries – such as the United States (US) at 72.5%, the United Kingdom (UK) at 68.6%, and France at 58.1% – but in a favourable position regionally. The only country in the region that surpasses us is Chile (44.9%).¹

If we look at the information technology (IT) market, we see that in the last three years sales of computers have doubled (Clarín, 2007a). In part this is due to the fact that 30% of computers found in homes are old and cannot take advantage of new broadband connections.² It is also worth noting that many people first learn to use the internet at home, where they have access to computers (Clarín, 2007b). Two years ago, people used to have their first online experience in cybercafés and public telecentres.

These statistics account for an active market driven by commercial and business strategies. However, we ask: what is happening to the 60% of the population that has no access to the internet?

In our country, the internet is developing quickly: the number of users rose from 4.1 million in 2002 (Telefónica, 2003) to 16 million in 2007. However, this growth has not reduced the digital divide. In 2003, 73.5% of Argentine internet users lived in the urban region of Buenos Aires (INDEC, 2006), 63.6% were less than 30 years old, 57% of these were university students or graduates, almost all of them (94.3%) were professionals and 54.4% were male (Telefónica, 2003).

An official survey on cultural consumption stated that 47.2% of Argentines have never surfed the internet: these

people are mostly women, under 50 years old, and from low socioeconomic sectors (Clarín, 2007c). Among those who do surf the internet, 86.6% do it in cybercafés. Another study asserts that low and middle socioeconomic groups, mainly adolescents and including street children, use cybercafés and telecentres (Contrera, 2007) – one reason why these centres are considered invaluable in reducing the digital divide (Finquielevich & Prince, 2007).

Universal service

The lack of access to a telephone line, especially in areas that the telephone companies consider non-profitable, is another factor that contributes to digital exclusion. In 2000 the Universal Service Trust Fund was created to guarantee the supply of telecommunications services to all inhabitants. In June 2007 Resolution 80/207 was passed, obliging telephone companies to contribute 1% of their income, backdated to when the fund was legally constituted. As a result, the government has presented the telephone companies with a USD 750 million bill, representing the contributions that have not been turned over since 2001.

In April 2008 the General Regulations for Universal Service were published in the Official Bulletin, requiring the main telephone operators – Telefónica and Telecom – to expand fixed-line telephony to the whole country in 60 months. Voices from different sectors suggest that what is really needed is for licences to be renegotiated, and for them to better reflect the potential for offering triple play services (i.e., broadband internet, TV and telephone access), amongst other major policy developments.

The merger of Cablevisión and Multicanal

In December 2007, the government approved a merger between Multicanal and Cablevisión, the main cable operators in the country, creating a new operator that has 47% of the cable television market and 620,000 broadband subscribers (La Nación, 2007). The listed shareholders of the new entity are the Clarín Group (60%) and Fintech Advisory, a US investment fund (40%).

Some of the conditions imposed by the National Commission for the Defence of Competition – the body that authorised the merger – relate to universal access:

- “Social tariffs” for paid digital television, but only valid for very poor zones in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area.
- Free cable television connections for public schools, hospitals, health centres and nursing homes, as well as police and fire stations (Clarín, 2007d).

1 Internet World Stats: www.internetworldstats.com

2 Prince & Cooke: www.princecooke.com/mercado.asp

- The laying of 3,000 kilometres of fibre-optic cable alongside national and provincial highways.

It is worth noting that the Clarín Group is the biggest and most influential multimedia broadcasting company in Argentina, and the merger has been seen as a concession by former president Nestor Kirchner to avoid media criticism. Some sources suggest that the merger had irregularities, which include the breach of cultural industries legislation (Lanata, 2008).

Community Technology Centres

The Community Technology Centres (CTCs) programme, implemented in 1999, was an initiative that aimed to increase public access to the internet.³ The programme has remained unchanged for years, and has stagnated. However, the current government is attempting to revive it and has invited 50 CTC coordinators from different provinces to participate in a free “digital civics” course organised by the National Secretariat for Communications and academic institutions. Attempts have also been made to revive the programme’s website,⁴ but the site does not offer information on the policies to be implemented within the framework of the project or provide a schedule for future activities.

Legal and regulatory framework

The new broadcasting law

Broadcasting Law No. 22285 was part of the internal security legislation established during the last military dictatorship in Argentina. In 2005 there was a great step forward in the democratisation of communications when the national executive modified Article 45 of that law, which prohibited non-commercial entities from applying for licences.

In April 2008, President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner proposed a new broadcasting law, possibly as a consequence of official disappointment with the way big media houses had covered the economic conflict in the agricultural sectors (Katz, 2008). A change in the authority of the Broadcasting Committee, which regulates radio and TV frequencies, was followed by a round of consultations with different stakeholders, including the Coalition for Democratic Broadcasting, which had drafted a proposal called “21 Basic Points for the Right to Communication”⁵ during the government of Néstor Kirchner, but had obtained no concrete results. The current president has shown an interest in using it as a basis for the new law.

Judging from discussions regarding the new law, the issue of digitalisation clearly offers fresh opportunities for new forms of citizen participation in media, but also poses the danger of media monopolies being formed.

Digital television

“The radio spectrum is a good that belongs to the whole society (...) For a country as big as Argentina it undoubtedly has a strategic value” (Valle, 2008).

Argentina started discussing digital television in 1997. A commission created to investigate the matter determined that the US standard would be the best to adopt. The two main broadcasting channels tested this new format, but a schedule for the implementation of the new system was not set. In 2006 a new commission decided that the European standard would make more effective use of the radio spectrum. Many feel that the discussions have been influenced by different lobby groups, rather than focusing on the best strategic choice for the country. It was expected that there would be a cascade effect among the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) countries, and that all would try to adopt the same norm to share their cultural products via TV. The adoption of the European standard is seen as a way of encouraging the entrance of new television companies into Argentina.

Digital tax

At the end of 2007, the Association of Independent Musicians submitted a proposal for the creation of an Institute of Music which would “develop and expand musical activity in the country.” This institute would be financed by a “digital tax” applicable to any format or medium that stores or reproduces music and images (such as CDs and DVDs, CD, DVD and MP3 players and recorders, and mobile phones).

The proposal provoked strong opposition in the blogosphere community, which organised a “No Tax in Argentina” campaign that led to the conclusion that the charge was not feasible.⁶ Some argued that it would widen the digital divide, raising the price of technological goods; that it would legalise piracy; that the tax would be limitless and thus unfair; and that what would be collected would not go directly to the content creators (Berghella, 2008; La Barbarie, 2008).

Human capacity and training

Among government policy discussions, the issue of ICTs in education has been prevalent.

Digital literacy policies

The new Law of Education No. 26206, which regulates the national education system, was passed in December 2006. The law supports the idea that access to ICTs is important for equality and quality in education.

The government’s programmes involve equipping and connecting schools, training teachers, and developing educational material, as well as promoting digital literacy in the classroom (Landau et al., 2007). The following public programmes stand out:

- The Programme for the Improvement of Secondary Schools aims to install computer infrastructure in the

3 For more information, see the Argentina country report in GISWatch 2007: www.globaliswatch.org/files/pdf/GISW_Argentina.pdf

4 www.ctc.gov.ar

5 www.coalicion.org.ar/index.htm

6 noalcanon.org/no-al-canon

classroom. Teacher training and the development of learning materials are also key issues.

- The Comprehensive Programme for Educational Equality (PIIE) develops strategies for the strengthening of urban fringe schools by providing equipment. Within the PIIE framework, the pedagogic strengthening programme trains teachers in schools where equipment has already been installed.
- The www.educ.ar portal initiative also installs equipment and connects schools to the internet, trains teachers and creates educational content. The portal is responsible for the Digital Literacy National Campaign and coordinates the Encuentro TV channel, which broadcasts high-quality educational content.

Apart from these programmes, the Ministry of Education signed an agreement with the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) initiative in 2006, although the implementation of this project has not run smoothly.

Despite all these initiatives, two aspects of digital literacy in the classroom still need to be strengthened: access and appropriation. Regarding access, there are noticeable differences between private and public school students. The difference between rural and urban students is still more noticeable. It is true that the policies to provide equipment have been strengthened, but resources remain scarce. Regarding appropriation, it is difficult to profit from the potential that ICTs have for improving education without adequate teacher training, and this needs to be improved.

It is worth mentioning that these government programmes operate independently from each other, which means the potential for synergies is lost.

Action steps

This report suggests that in Argentina there is no comprehensive public policy to deal with the digital divide. Policies that favour access to technologies by excluded population groups are very isolated, and have low impact. We believe that a great step forward would be approaching the problem from the point of view of universal access. Within the national government framework, the National Programme for the Information Society,⁷ which has not been operational for a while, is now slowly moving forward. It is this programme that needs to look at the issue.

Regarding policies that define the regulatory and legal framework, there are issues that have been gradually taken up by different civil society organisations (see GISWatch 2007). In some cases, they have given rise to interesting processes that have influenced policy – particularly when specific proposals have been made. The collaboration of civil society in policy development processes should be encouraged.

Lastly, regarding educational policies, we feel that ICT initiatives have been uneven. This is partly due to the fact that real educational management in our country depends on the provinces and not on the national government (the level we have evaluated here). However, national plans should find ways of resulting in practical implementation on the ground. Reaching the underserved 60% of the country is difficult because the people who are excluded are the poorest, and live in the least populated areas. As a result, we believe that the public education system would be the best way to include them. ■

References

- Berghella, V. (2008) ¿Canon digital en la Argentina? *Clarín*, 13 February. Available at: www.clarin.com/diario/2008/02/13/conexiones/t-01606184.htm
- Clarín (2007a) Computadoras: se duplicaron las ventas en los últimos tres años. *Clarín*, 24 December. Available at: www.clarin.com/diario/2007/12/24/elpais/p-01801.htm
- Clarín (2007b) Hay 2,8 millones más de usuarios de Internet. *Clarín*, 15 December. Available at: www.clarin.com/diario/2007/12/15/elpais/p-03602.htm
- Clarín (2007c) Casi la mitad de los argentinos todavía no navega por Internet. *Clarín*, 5 December. Available at: www.clarin.com/diario/2007/12/05/sociedad/s-03001.htm
- Clarín (2007d). Confirman la adquisición de Multicanal por Cablevisión. *Clarín*, 8 December. Available at: www.clarin.com/diario/2007/12/08/elpais/p-03601.htm
- Coalition for Democratic Broadcasting: www.coalicion.org.ar/index.htm
- Contrera, E. (2007) La brecha digital se achica porque crecen los locutorios y los ciber. *Página 12*, 17 May. Available at: www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/sociedad/3-85094-2007-05-17.html
- Finkelevich, S. and Prince, A. (2007) *El (involuntario) rol social de los cybercafés*. Available at: www.oei.es/tic/rolcibercafes.pdf
- INDEC (2006) Accesos a Internet: Diciembre 2005. Available at: www.cnc.gov.ar/indicadores/archivos/INDEC_internet_03_06.pdf
- Internet World Stats: www.internetworldstats.com
- Katz, C. (2008) Argentina: The clash over rent. *Links – International Journal of Socialist Renewal*. Available at: links.org.au/node/453
- La Barbarie: labarbarie.com.ar/2008/canon-digital-algunas-conclusiones
- La Nación (2007) El Gobierno autorizó la fusión de Multicanal y Cablevisión. *La Nación*, 8 December. Available at: www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=969301
- Lanata, J. (2008) Enemigos íntimos. *Crítica de la Argentina*, 6 April. Available at: www.criticadigital.com.ar/imprensa/index.php?secc=nota&nid=2290
- Landau, M., Serra, J. C. and Gruschetsky, M. (2007) *Acceso universal a la alfabetización digital: Políticas, problemas y desafíos en el contexto argentino*. Available at: www.oei.es/pdfs/acceso_universal_alfabetizacion_digital_diniece.pdf
- Prince & Cooke: www.princecooke.com/mercado.asp
- Telefónica (2003) *La Sociedad de la Información en la Argentina*. Available at: www.telefonica.com.ar/corporativo/sociedaddelainformacion/pdf/014-127.htm
- Valle, L. (2008) El estándar digital: un valor estratégico. *El Cronista*, 8 April. Available at: www.palermo.edu/ingenieria/eventos_noticias/nota_valle_tvdigital.html

7 www.psi.gov.ar

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2008 is the second in a series of yearly reports critically covering the state of the information society from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH or **GISWatch** has three interrelated goals:

- **Surveying** the state of information and communication technology (ICT) policy at the local and global levels
- **Encouraging** critical debate
- **Strengthening** networking and advocacy for a just, inclusive information society.

Each year the report focuses on a particular theme. **GISWatch 2008** *focuses on access to infrastructure* and includes several thematic reports dealing with key access issues, an analysis of where global institutions stand on the access debate, a report looking at the state of indicators and access, six regional reports and 38 country reports.

GISWatch 2008 is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos) and the Third World Institute (ITeM).

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

2008 Report

www.GISWatch.org

