Chapter 26
Digital Inclusion Programs in South America

María Gladys Ceretta
University of the Republic, Uruguay

Javier Canzani
University of the Republic, Uruguay

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to provide an overview of digital inclusion in Mercosur countries. It is particularly focused on the description of the Plan Ceibal in Uruguay which is considered a national public policy. It promotes the integration of Uruguayan citizens in a digital context, contributing to equity and democratization of information and knowledge. This plan is based on the experience promoted by Negroponte OLPC. It was adapted to the peculiarities and needs of Uruguay. It was implemented in stages, beginning with a geographical area of the country that served as a pilot one. There were delivered more than 350,000 laptops for children in all primary schools of the whole country. Currently, the Plan also applies to secondary education level. It is presented data on assessments and studies about the implementation of the Plan.

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the new millennium consolidates the so called Society of Information and Knowledge which has its origins in mid 1970s. This Society positions humanity in a context of continuous changes and transformations, almost uncontrollable. One of its most relevant aspects is the importance given to information in its diverse dimensions before the strong presence of the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in all aspects of human lives. Castells (1999) states “what has changed in our societies are not the kind of activities in which humankind takes part, but their technological capacity to use as their productive force what differentiates our species as a biological rarity, that is to say, their capacity to process symbols.” (Castells, 1999)

Apart from the fact that the ICT are tools that provide for, facilitate the access and retrieval of information in unmanageable quantities, it can be stated that they have taken a privileged place in society. In this sense, they have become an object of interest and concern in all the countries...
Digital Inclusion Programs in South America

around the world and because of them different state policies have been implemented in order to guarantee the digital inclusion of the society as a whole. Rivoir, Escuder and Baldizán (2010) state: “The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) are linked to deep in social, economic, political and cultural changes that have increased since the early 90s. They cross macrosocial processes such as their role in the consolidation of globalization process, the increase of the importance of information and knowledge in the production processes and the changes at a cultural and symbolic level, as well as changes in the daily lives of people. We can say that while on the one hand, these technologies represent a breakthrough for humanity, on the other hand it is a new factor of inequality that has been called digital gap.” (Rivoir, Escuder & Badizán, 2010)

The countries in Latin America, especially those members of the MERCOSUR (Mercado Común del Sur): Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and recently Venezuela, have not remained aloof to the new trends of this global society, in which the information mediated by technologies has become a strategic element in human development. (Baica & Beguerie, 2012)

Digital inclusion has become not only a desired goal but a necessary one. The so called digital gap has deepened the differences between the rich and the poor, and ways need to be found to try to diminish this gap. Nowadays it is not only a question of economic matters, but also of the intensification of the possibilities that some people have to access technology while others cannot, which directly affects their becoming an active part of a new world that suffers constant vertiginous changes.

According to Rivoir (2012) it is possible to know a detailed and recent outlook of the strategies that the Latin American countries have been implementing to become part of the society of information and knowledge. The author analyses the Digital Agendas of eleven Latin American countries where their evolution and development have been appreciated throughout time as well as the different statements that sustain the state policies of digital inclusion and the plans and programs that sustain the decisions taken by each country in order to achieve the concrete goals that will gradually allow all citizens regardless of their position in society to become an active part in it.

Uruguay has not remained aloof to the new paradigms that have become part of the society, and even though the expression “globalization” is not always accepted, it is an indisputable reality, since all the countries in the world follow the same paths in order to achieve the same goals. Martín –Barbero (2000) states “globalization disconnects people, institutions and countries that do not correspond to what this hegemonic reason values, especially in Latin America.” (Martín-Barbero, 2000)

One of the fields that have been strongly affected by the use of technology is Education in its widest sense. We start from the assumption that individuals must have tools to learn to learn and this learning has to be fed all through their lives. The document by the Organization for the Cooperation and Economic Development, (OCDE) (2010) specifically refers to what the apprentices of the new millennium are like, their characteristics and their needs. This document provides with general guidelines on the dimensions to be taken into account when forming these individuals in a society in which technology is here to stay. (OCDE, 2010).

According Area Moreira (2011): “Digital technology is already a substantial part of financial and business systems, administrative and management services of the governments, and of the leisure time of youth and many adults people, and of cultural and information industries. However, ICT are still absent from most classrooms, and when they are used, many teachers are not attracted to use them.”(Area Moreira, 2011)

After this brief introduction information will be given of the situation in Uruguay with respect to the background and evolution of the strategies