GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2007

Focus on **Participation**

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Global Information Society Watch 2007

ARGENTINA

Nodo TAU[1]
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Introduction

The concept of the information society is frequently included in the initiatives of different Argentine government agencies. Nevertheless, in Argentina there is no consistent and coherent public policy for the development of the information society.

The national government has participated in both meetings of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The delegation to the first summit was led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which attempted to bring together a working group that was to include civil society organisations (CSOs). This group was short-lived. In the second phase the representation of the country fell to the Ministry of Education.

Argentina is currently participating actively in the process of coordinating the Regional Action Plan for an Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC2007), and is responsible for three working groups – Creative Industries, Telework, and Financing – with different areas of the government attending to each.[2]

Research methodology

In writing this report we prioritised certain aspects of the wide field of policies related to information and communication technologies (ICTs). We begin with an analysis of statistical information regarding existing infrastructure, an initial factor in the widening or closing of the digital gap. Then we analyse the educational policies of the national government. Finally, in addressing the involvement and participation of civil society, we describe official e-government initiatives, as well as strategies developed by social organisations in relation to access to public information and the passing of a new broadcasting law.

Our primary sources of information have been the websites of government institutions. For our analysis of these sources we have identified indicators legitimated by the scientific community[3] and also relied on research and articles by journalists which enrich the analysis of statistical and documentary sources. Information regarding actions promoted by civil society is based on submissions by those same organisations as well as media releases.

Country situation

National infrastructure

Statistics from the National Communications Commission reveal that teledensity (the number of landlines per 100 inhabitants) did not vary between 1999 and 2004 (SECOM, 2007). According to a 2005 report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), this indicates coverage of 22.8% of the population of Argentina (ITU, 2005a).

In contrast, mobile phone density has grown at a very rapid pace. Looking at a similar timeframe, in March 1999 there were 2.8 million mobile phones, and in March 2006, there were approximately 23.9 million, an increase of 854%. In the last year alone another 12 million mobile phones were added to the national totals. These statistics place Argentina, in March 2005, as the country with the third highest mobile phone density in Latin America after Brazil and Chile (CNC, 2005).

The World Economic Forum tries to measure ICT development more broadly, using the Networked Readiness Index (NRI), which attempts to measure how prepared a country is to benefit from better use of ICTs. According to this indicator, in 2005 (latest available data), Argentina was ranked 71st globally and 9th within Latin America. If this index is disaggregated and we look specifically at infrastructure, our country ranks 53rd globally (WEF, 2006).

Data regarding access to the internet is not available as far back as 1999, but from the end of 2001 to the end of 2005, residential access increased by 143.9%, for a figure of 2.2 million residences with access in December 2005 (INDEC, 2006).

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Argentina is a vast country, incorporating very different realities. Table 1 reflects current disparities, and was developed based on official data from the Secretariat of Communications and the National Statistics and Census Institute (INDEC). Provinces with less teledensity generally correspond to those with a larger proportion of the population living in poverty and extreme poverty. It is also relevant to note the huge difference in lines per square kilometre reflected in the table.

Some consultants indicate that there are 2,250 towns with only one telephone line that provides semi-public long-distance service, and at least 500 towns or areas without a single telephone line (Simonetti, 2006). The development of communications network infrastructure by the two large telephone companies in the country, Telecom and Telefónica, is based on the criteria of developing only profitable areas.

The situation in poorer areas would be more serious were it not for telephone cooperatives which operate in small localities, and which have developed networks to connect areas using criteria other than mere profitability. In Argentina there are approximately 350 of these cooperatives, which provide 10% of existing landline capacity. The role of cooperatives is very important, because their presence guarantees the employment of workers from the localities in which they operate and the development of national industries associated with them.

It is worth highlighting that the absence of fixed networks in poor areas has meant that today a great many mobile phones are in the hands of poor or extremely poor Argentines, as this is the only means of communication available to them.

Government actions

In 2000, Decree 764 established the country's "universal service" goals. One of these is that the "inhabitants of the Republic of Argentina throughout the national territory are able to access telecommunications services, especially those who live in areas where access is difficult, or who have physical limitations or special social needs" (CNC, 2000).

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1   <www.tau.org.ar>.

2   The coordinator of the Argentine delegation to eLAC2007 is Olga Cavalli, adviser to the Office of Technology Policies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Cavalli is also coordinating the working group on Financing, while the Creative Industries group is being coordinated by Pablo Recasens, the president's press secretary, and the Telework group by Viviana Laura Díaz of the Ministry of Labour.

3   European Statistics Laboratory (<esl.jrc.ec.europa.eu>), World Economic Forum (<www.weforum.org>), ITU (<www.itu.int>).

Table 1: Teledensity by province				
Province	Teledensity	Inhabitants	Area (sq. km)	Lines/sq. km
Buenos Aires – Metropolitan area	37.00%	11,800,000	3,833	1,139.06
Tierra del Fuego	26.00%	100,960	21,263	1.23
Neuquén	23.00%	474,155	94,078	1.16
Santa Cruz	23.00%	196,958	243,943	0.19
Santa Fe	22.00%	3,000,701	133,007	4.96
La Pampa	22.00%	299,294	14,344	4.59
Córdoba	22.00%	3,066,801	165,321	4.08
Chubut	21.00%	413,237	224,686	0.39
Buenos Aires w/o Metropolitan area	21.00%	830,404	303,668	0.57
Río Negro	18.00%	552,822	203,013	0.49
Mendoza	17.00%	1,579,651	148,827	1.80
San Luis	16.00%	367,933	76,748	0.77
Entre Ríos	14.00%	1,158,147	78,781	2.06
San Juan	12.00%	620,023	89,651	0.83
Tucumán	11.00%	1,338,523	22,524	6.54
La Rioja	11.00%	289,983	89,680	0.36
Jujuy	11.00%	611,888	53,219	1.26
Catamarca	10.00%	332,390	102,602	0.32
Corrientes	9.00%	930,991	88,199	0.95
Salta	9.00%	1,079,051	155,488	0.62
Misiones	9.00%	965,522	29,801	2.92
Chaco	8.00%	984,446	99,633	0.79
Formosa	7.00%	486,559	72,066	0.47
Santiago del Estero	6.00%	804,457	136,351	0.35

Source: **INDEC and the Secretariat of Communications (CNC).**

The mechanism for the implementation of this goal was very interesting. Telephone operators were to establish a fiduciary fund to which they would contribute 1% of their turnover. This fund would be used to develop the network in areas that were not profitable. If businesses did not want to contribute to the fund, they could opt to build the necessary networks themselves. An audit would estimate the value of the investment made and would consider it as a contribution to the fund. Not only did the telephone companies not comply with this commitment, but they also passed the costs on to their customers by tacking on a 1% charge to support a fund which was never created.

Beginning in March 2006, the current government forced companies to refund customers the 1% that they were spuriously charged. Many mobile telephone companies that incorporated the 1% into their billing were unable to return the full amount to their customers due to the mobility of portfolios and changes of ownership that characterise these companies.

On 14 August 2006, the national ombudsman filed a legal suit asking the government to bring the fund into compliance (Clarín, 2006). This is an excellent example of a development instrument that was misappropriated through collusion between government actors and private communications enterprises.

In 2004 an intention to foster the creation of a new telephone company, with the support of the government, was announced. The idea was to create an Argentine firm that could compete freely with foreign private companies. The core of this business was to come from an agreement between the two federations of cooperatives: FECOTEL and FECOSUR.

This was not to be a state-owned enterprise: the capital was to be private but of national origin, in keeping with the creation of a new national middle class. Although the government was not to invest capital, it promised to provide bandwidth that was vacant on the spectrum, which is necessary for mobile telephone services. This was a

key strategic move that gave the new enterprise a clear tool for economic development, given the difference in coverage rates between landlines and mobile phones in our country.

The advantage of having a new private operator in the game was that it would take power from the two international operators – it was to be an operator financed with national capital and of cooperative origins, which would align itself in better harmony with the communications policy that the government wanted to pursue.

According to various experts, this idea died in October 2004 when Telefónica informed the government that it would move ahead with its plans to invest EUR 800 million (over USD 1.03 billion). The cooperatives continue to wait for the promised part of the spectrum to be awarded to them, but the government has now floated the proposal that they will give that portion of the spefÈrum to FECOTEL and FECOSUR separately, and other portions to other actors who want to offer the service. Obviously, the cooperatives were not favoured in this move.

Looming much closer is the movement that appears imminent on two issues crucial to telecommunications: the supposed annulment of the suit against the Argentine government by Telefónica before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), and the merger of the two large cable operators in the country.

Using the 2001 Argentine economic crisis that ended the fixed 1-to-1 Argentine peso-US dollar parity as an excuse, Telefónica and Telecom filed suits against the government in the ICSID courts. The Telefónica suit is better known because it is for a larger amount: USD 2.384 billion. The annulment of the suit received media coverage on several occasions but has never actually been put into effect.

In April 2006 a public hearing was held which resulted in a memorandum of understanding between the Argentine government and Telefónica that contained, for example, a reduction in hours for reduced-price calling and the tripling of the cost of incoming international calls. Both measures meant an increase in prices and, as was denounced in the national House of Representatives, the memo did not mention the collection of fines levied against the company nor the commitments undertaken in relation to infrastructure development (ARI, 2006).

The merger between Cablevisión and Multicanal – the two largest cable television operators, which now monopolise the sector – was officially announced on 28 September 2006. Together they make up a network of broadband services with a strong competitive edge. On that same day, the president of Telefónica International met with the president of Argentina and, according to several media reports, again emphasised the effort that Telefónica was making to suspend its suit before the ICSID, and the company's interest in the passing of a new communications law that would allow telephone operators to offer audiovisual services, thereby competing with cable television companies (Premici, 2006).

Community Technology Centres

In 1999 the government put forward a digital inclusion programme called "Argentin@Internet.todos" [Argentin@Internet.everyone] which consisted of 1,350 Community Technology Centres (CTCs) in social, educational or governmental organisations in less privileged areas of Argentina.[4] These organisations "hosted" the CTCs, and committed to assigning coordinators, providing training, offering community services and carrying out tasks which would facilitate the appropriation of these tools. The CTCs were each equipped with five networked computers, printers, a webcam, a digital camera and software (licensed Windows and Microsoft learning tools) as well as the necessary furniture. The programme also provided one-off training to the technical and training coordinators.

After the change in presidential administration in 2000, the initiative was renamed the Programme for an Information Society[5] and the original guidelines were dropped. In many cases connectivity was not provided, and the cost of this service had to be paid for by the organisations, along with the salaries of personnel and other costs.

Seven years later, not much is heard about the CTCs. Many were converted into computer areas for internal use by the host organisation, others were returned due to the impossibility of sustaining them, or were relocated with no better results.

In 2006 a group of approximately 50 coordinators from around the country formed the National Network of CTCs, with two inaugural meetings. The latter of these was funded by the Argentine government with the first economic support it had provided since the installation of the centres. The gathering was held in October in Nono, Córdoba, where the process of legally registering the network was begun.

Educational policy

The fact that the Argentine delegation to the Tunis phase of WSIS was led by Minister of Education Daniel Filmus is no small thing. Neither is it insignificant that the person responsible for articulating the Argentine position was Tulio del Bono, the secretary of science, technology and innovative production from the same ministry. Also present as noteworthy governmental authorities were the secretary of state for communications, the chief of cabinet of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Argentine ambassador to Tunisia.

"We are convinced that technology should be a tool for sustainable development, employability and social and economic inclusion" was how the secretary of science began his speech, which also mentioned the Ministry of Education's National Campaign for Digital Literacy and the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) programme, which Argentina had recently signed up to, as the most significant initiatives in this field. He also alluded to the "creation of a Forum for Competitiveness in Software and IT Services which will give rise to various programmes that will stimulate national production, as will the passing of a national law for the promotion of the software industry, offering financial and tax advantages for businesses in the sector" (ITU, 2005b).

Statements like these demonstrate that political actors in the educational sector approach the field of ICTs as an aspect of training, oriented towards a productive model that aims to develop employment skills in the field of computing. We now turn to a description of the most significant policies of this ministry.

Infrastructure in education

The Ministry of Education's ICT-related efforts have focused primarily on the National Campaign for Digital Literacy (undertaken during 2004 to 2006) (MECT, 2006a) The campaign is part of the Comprehensive Programme for Educational Equality.[6]

The campaign consisted of two phases. In the first, which was carried out in 2004, 10,200 computers were delivered to 706 schools, 300 technical education centres and 200 teacher-training institutes. In the second phase, which began in May 2005, 20,394 computers

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4   <www.ctc.gov.ar>.

5   <www.psi.gov.ar>.

6   <www.me.gov.ar/piie/>.

were distributed to 2,171 educational establishments and connectivity was provided to 5,000 establishments.[7] The proposal did not include the necessary technical support, which led, on occasions, to machines lying unused (PIIE, 2004).

Although the ministry gathers statistics on numbers of schools and teachers nationally and by province, it does not include information regarding technological infrastructure in each school, which makes a statistical analysis difficult. INDEC also lacks up-to-date measurements of these indicators.

Another aspect that has been questioned concerns the agreements and ever closer relationship between the ministry and Microsoft. CSOs that promote free and open source software have followed these developments carefully and denounced negotiations on educational initiatives that have private actors as protagonists (Busaniche, 2004).

Content and training

One action line that has united all other initiatives of the Ministry of Education since the beginning of its current administration is the strengthening of the educ.ar web portal,[8] created during the presidency of Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001) with a donation of USD 11.2 million from the Varsavsky Foundation. At that time the project gave rise to questioning due to poor implementation and the speculative movement of funds.

The portal was created with the aim of introducing the internet into schools and using the web as a tool for teacher training and the development of content at different educational levels. Much of its structure is based on blogs where content is developed with high levels of participation.

The programme includes the production of multimedia content, which is accessed through the portal or through thirteen CDs which the ministry produces and distributes free of charge to teachers who request them. There is no data as to the reach of this policy. There is, however, wide recognition of the quality of materials developed on a diversity of topics, such as an introduction to digital literacy, the inclusion of bilingual cultures in the classroom, free and open source software in education, talking about AIDS in schools, etc.

For teacher training, the programme offers training sessions through agreements with national universities. According to information on the site, 600 courses have been offered, providing training to 15,000 teachers from schools that had received computers. The content covered includes the use of new technologies in the classroom, basic PC concepts, internet and email, and educational resources on the web.[9] Another proposal for training is an "e-learning platform"[10] that includes four courses: basic PC applications; the internet as a resource for innovative teaching; communication, society and education; and WebQuest and the management of information. This proposal relies on the teachers' own connectivity and computer resources, as well as the time and finances they have available, since the Ministry of Education does not count the time devoted to these activities as training hours.

New national education law

The national education law is currently under discussion. The ministry issued a draft bill which was discussed by involved actors (directors, teachers, unions, civil society) in educational institutions and on a ministry web platform (MECT, 2006b).The teachers' unions and social coalitions question the purported openness of discussion, given that the time periods for the debate turned out to be impossible to meet.[11]

Conceptually, the inclusion of the phrase "equity and educational inclusion" stands out in the text of the draft legislation, as does the elimination of the reference to education as a "service", as it was viewed in the previous law. As for the "policies for the promotion of educational equality", the legislation establishes that "the state shall provide pedagogical, cultural, material, technological and economic resources to students, families and schools in need of such," widening its objectives from what they were under the previous law (MECT, 2006b, art. 85).

In relation to ICTs, the draft bill mentions the access to and spread of new technologies as one of the objectives of national educational policy (art. 13), in primary (chap. III, art. 27), secondary (chap. IV, art. 31) and rural education (chap. X, art. 55). In defining the "quality of education" (chap. II, art. 93) it establishes that "the access to and mastery of information and communication technologies shall form part of the curriculum content essential for inclusion in the knowledge society." The legislation recognises the educ.ar site and proposes the creation of an educational channel called "Encuentro" [Encounter], for the production and broadcast of educational television and multimedia materials (MECT, 2006b).

One Laptop Per Child

Argentina is one of the countries that has been invited to participate in the OLPC pilot project[12] of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) along with Brazil, India, China, Nigeria, Thailand and Egypt. The programme consists of the purchase by governments of "a machine specially designed for children: the size of a book, with a colour screen, that does not break if it falls, uses domestic electricity, and can connect to the internet via wireless where there is no telephone service. It has a system that allows the machines to connect to each other even when there is no internet connection".

Once governments decide to join the project, the machines will be manufactured with donations from companies like Google, AMD, Quanta, Red Hat and Nortel. According to official announcements each one will cost USD 100 (although the latest estimates are that they will cost USD 130).

Argentina will take in a million laptops, which is to say that it will make a USD 100 million investment. The project is managed by educ.ar, which will conduct technical evaluations of the prototype, including hardware, software, connectivity, the educational resources to be used, and the legal-economic framework that the contract implies (Mancini, 2006).

The project has generated controversy from the moment it was announced, with regard to such issues as the investment involved, classroom implementation, methodological strategies to be used, and how teachers will be trained. Another argument centres on the measure's reach. In Argentina there are 10 million children in the school system. The purchase of the laptops will only cover 10% of them,

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7   <www.educ.ar/educar/alfabetizacion_digital/equipamiento/nuevo.jsp>.

8   <www.educ.ar>.

9   <www.educ.ar/educar/alfabetizacion_digital/capacitacion>.

10 Distance learning platform at educ.ar Available at: <www.educ.ar/educar/plataforma-elearning/index.jsp>.

11 Forum for debate of the new education law. Available at: <debate-educacion.educ.ar/ley/foro/>.

12 <www.laptop.org>.

meaning that the project would have to be repeated annually for 10 years to be able to reach all of them, without taking into account the 850,000 who enter the educational system each year. The criteria for distribution of the laptops are also a point of controversy.

Although the government looks upon it favourably and expert voices applaud the initiative, nearly a year after the programme was announced officials are proceeding very cautiously. At the end of 2006 it was announced that 500 machines were arriving in the country.

Participation

An analysis of the information society stakeholders in Argentina leads to the following general findings:

- An information society is not yet an established topic on the public agenda.

- The CSOs that specifically address topics related to ICT policies are ahead of the government in dealing with these topics. Nevertheless, they have very rarely managed to coordinate the petitions and demands that they put forward to the government.

- There is evidence of a more fluid relationship between government and business than between government and citizens and CSOs.

- The mass media, despite being relevant actors according to this analysis, give the topic only superficial treatment.

- The academic and scientific fields are active in the development of an analysis regarding the information society, though they have little visibility in the community.

In Argentina there are a great number of social organisations, associations and coalitions that acquired greater visibility after what is called the "crisis of 2001",[13] in the face of the resulting economic recession, social crisis and absence of political leadership. This reality is not alien to the ICT policy arena, for it is these organisations that began to bring visibility to the right to communication and access to information technologies. Many of these organisations have closely followed the WSIS process, and have even participated in it.

E-government

The evaluation of e-government policies takes on particular dimensions in Latin American countries, due to the insufficient access to technology and competencies necessary for its use, on the one hand, and on the other, the bureaucratic and complex modes by which the government relates to citizens. Advances can be seen along three tracks: national decrees and programmes that declare the importance of the development of an information society; legislation that regulates administrative aspects of the interaction between the administration and citizens; and particular initiatives by provincial and municipal governments which offer services and are acquiring greater technical complexity and use.

Up until 2004 the lack of outreach was pointed to as a drawback to these policies, given that these services were accessible only to those who were already ICT users (Finquelievi, 2004). Currently, however, there is wide outreach being carried out by government agencies addressing the digitisation of their administration, although there continues to be a lack of promotion of the competencies necessary for citizens to appropriate them. The discourse that accompanies these initiatives, which are often no more than showpieces, centres around the themes of access to public information as a right of citizenship, transparency in management, and the streamlining of procedures through the digitisation of information.

National Plan

E-government, for the Argentine government, means the use of ICTs to "redefine the relationship of government with citizens, improving management and services, guaranteeing transparency and participation, facilitating access to public information, and supporting the integration and development of different sectors" (Government of Argentina, 2007).

On 27 April 2005, through Decree 378, the National Plan for Electronic Government was approved for the intensive use of ICTs in public administration agencies (Government of Argentina, 2005).The National Office for Information Technologies (ONTI) is the decision-making body in this area, and functions under the Subsecretariat of Public Management of the Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers. The ONTI's role is to "formulate policies for the implementation of processes for technological development and innovation for the transformation and modernisation of the State" and to "foster the integration of new technologies in the public sector, their compatibility, interoperability, and the promotion of technological standardisation" (Government of Argentina, 2007).

Specific projects include digital signature infrastructure, information security, and technological standards for public administration. The ONTI was also charged with developing the National Government Portal,[14] which organises all of the sectors of the state into a complex structure. It is a body of information that is of interest to citizens, though of little practical value in interacting with the government.

Legislation

Several regulatory proposals for e-government are circulating in both of the legislative chambers of Argentina. This is the case with digital signature legislation, regulated by Law 25.506 and modified by presidential decree, which defines who is licensed to emit certificates. The legislation defines the relationship between administrations and between the administration and citizens. The private sector is demanding norms that include businesses in the regulation of the use of this tool. There are also proposals to define the legal validity of digital documents, and even the certification of the date and time of documents sent by internet (Government of Argentina, 2001).

Other aspects being considered include the protection of data and private information, an issue which is only regulated in three Argentine provinces (Neuquén, Misiones and Mendoza) and the city of Buenos Aires. Recently the House of Representatives approved a modification to the Criminal Code establishing sentencing guidelines for computer crimes, such as the violation of email, the theft of data or the circulation of child pornography over the internet.

Participation and lobbying by civil society

There have been occasions when different CSOs have worked in coordination around aspects of legislation that were under question or non-existent. We include in this report two noteworthy cases that have

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13 A period of political instability, with large-scale outbreaks of corruption in government and a severe economic crisis. Looting, strikes and popular protests erupted throughout the country at the end of December 2001. President De la Rúa responded by establishing a state of siege and fierce repression.

14 <www.argentina.gov.ar>.

brought together a wide range of organisations connected to the demand for public policies regarding ICTs. Both initiatives have achieved influence to varying degrees and have attained visibility in society.

Access to public information

The right to information is included in the "freedom of every individual to seek, receive and impart information," according to article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,[15] and is guaranteed in Argentina by article 75, section 22 of the National Constitution, which gives constitutional hierarchy to international treaties.

Argentina does not yet have a national law which regulates the exercise of the right to public information. Presidential Decree 1172 for the "Improvement of the Quality of Democracy and its Institutions", passed in 2003, "guarantees and regulates the right of all persons to request, consult and receive information from the national executive branch," and is based on the premises of "the elaboration of a solid foundation, simplicity and conceptual clarity, and respect for international standards on the subject." The government has concentrated its outreach efforts for this initiative on the "Mejor democracia" [Better democracy] portal[16] (Government of Argentina, 2003).

The decree establishes mechanisms such as public hearings, publication of meetings held with interested parties, participatory design of norms, access to public information, open meetings with regulators of public services and open and free internet access to the daily edition of the Official Bulletin. Nevertheless, it has been criticised because its scope is restricted to the executive branch and it carries no obligation for the legislative and judicial branches.

Parallel to this, some provincial administrations have adopted specific legislation and a number of municipalities have passed by-laws. In some cases there are laws in effect, in others legislation is pending, while in others discussion of the issue has not yet begun. The website accesoalainformacion.org [accesstoinformation.org] has a map which illustrates this legal panorama and provides access to all regulations and pending legislation.[17]

In 2001 the Anti-Corruption Office, which falls under the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, brought together businesspeople, academics, journalists, government officials, and members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in a process called "participatory norms design" to discuss a preliminary proposal to regulate the right to access to public information.

In 2002 the executive branch sent to the House of Representatives a proposal on which consensus had been reached, and which was respectful of international standards and principles. The House approved it in May 2003 and sent it to the Senate in December 2004, but with a great number of amendments that altered the consensus and principles agreed upon.

At that time a group of organisations published a document which critiqued the amendments, arguing that they "do not guarantee that any citizen has access to public information, they facilitate discretionality and strip the law of its meaning, given that the definition of public information is ambiguous, vague and confusing." In February 2006 the legislation lost parliamentary status (INFOCIVICA, 2006).

These organisations issued an outline of the minimum requirements for any law regarding access to public information,[18] and are also working to mobilise civil society to take up the demand for this right. In 2006, for the second year in a row, they promoted the celebration of 28 September as global Right to Know Day, a strategy which reached the mass media and which has opened up an opportunity to foster these discussions.

Broadcasting law

Television and radio in Argentina are regulated by Law 22.285, passed in 1980 during the last military dictatorship (Government of Argentina, 1980). The law is based on the National Security Doctrine, which concentrated media ownership into a few hands, and has given rise to practices associated with the commercialisation of information.

In 2003, 21 years after the return of democracy, a wide range of organisations[19] joined together to form the Coalition for Democratic Broadcasting[20] for the creation of norms to regulate the exercise of communication in Argentina as a public good. In August 2004 the coalition launched the Citizens' Initiative for a Broadcasting Law for Democracy, which put forward a proposal entitled "21 Basic Points for the Right to Communication". In summary, this proposal proclaims the right to broadcast information and opinions by radio and television and revindicates communication as a human right rather than a commercial undertaking. It also stresses the need to promote pluralism and diversity, guarantee local productions, and regulate the allocation of government advertising (Mancini, 2004).

An important achievement was gained in 2005, when the Supreme Court ruled that article 45 of Law 22.285 was unconstitutional, which led to its modification through the issuance of Law 26.053. The new law recognises non-commercial and non-profit entities as eligible for being licensed for broadcasting, thereby eliminating the restriction which limited this right to commercial entities (COMFER, 2005). In May 2006 the Federal Broadcasting Committee issued resolution 753/2006 whereby 126 community radios in the country were recognised and given legal title (COMFER, 2006).

There are currently several legislative proposals pending for a new law to replace the current one which would, among other things, treat advertising transmitted on cable and broadcast television comparably, guarantee a minimum of national, local and cultural content, guarantee the incorporation of cooperatives, unions and associations in the media arena, and bring up to date the regulation of technologies such as high definition radio, digital radio, and broadcast, satellite and digital television.

Conclusions

Based on the statistics reviewed, we can conclude that in Argentina there has been growth in infrastructure without a corresponding level of planning by the government. Although there appears, in speeches

15 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Available from: <www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>.

16 <www.mejordemocracia.gov.ar>.

17 Dynamic map of the situation in each province and existing laws or proposed legislation. Available from: <www.accesoalainformacion.org/mapa.php>.

18 Document by a group of social organisations regarding the minimum requirements for a law on access to public information. See: <www.adc.org.ar/home.php?iDOCUMENTO=466&iTIPODOCUMENTO=1&iCAMPOACCION=>.

19 Among them, the Argentine Community Radios Forum (FARCO), World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), Argentine Labour Federation (CTA), Federation of Communication Workers (FETRACOM), Centre for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), Chamber of Cooperative Radio Stations, Union of Journalists of Rosario and Institute for the Promotion of Cooperative Funds, as well as persons who participated as individuals, such as Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and Aníbal Ford, a recognised Argentine communications intellectual.

20 <www.coalicion.org.ar>.

and stated intentions, to be a concern with promoting universal access, the population generally remains at the mercy of a business mentality in an unregulated market that is basically an oligopoly.

In the first objective of the Regional Action Plan for an Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC2007), point 1.3 proposes "fostering the creation of sustainable frameworks and models for the penetration of ICT into the different countries in the region, as well as the creation of local associations aimed at creating better connectivity conditions, particularly in less privileged areas" (ECLAC, 2007a). This topic was not discussed in the teleconference for regional follow-through on eLAC2007, which was held in Ecuador in June 2006 (ECLAC, 2007b). It is worth noting that Argentina argued for working on Objective 1 of the plan, but with an orientation towards the development of regional infrastructure (as per points 1.1 and 1.2 of the objective), postponing consideration of the conditions for connectivity at the national level.

Argentina also presided over the 16th Meeting of the Permanent Executive Committee of the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL), where the 2006-2010 strategic plan was approved. Objective 8 of the plan promotes the development of connectivity in rural and less privileged areas.

For the time being, good intentions in the international arena seem to fade before the pressure of the large communications operators who, as we have said, only understand the development of infrastructure tied to profitability.

Bringing ICTs into the classroom has become a key concern in educational policy in our country, leading the Ministry of Education to launch the National Campaign for Digital Literacy and various teaching and methodology proposals for teachers. Nevertheless, the ministry's policies leave essential variables up to chance, particularly as these relate to economically and culturally excluded sectors. Although there is a concern for the distribution of infrastructure in relation to the socioeconomic conditions of the sectors which benefit, this intention continues to show evidence of discrimination in favour of those closest to large urban centres. The same malaise afflicts the concern for teachers, as it does not address the issue in its full socioeconomic and organisational complexity, nor take into account work regimes and hours, or the general working conditions of education workers.

As to e-government, there are several initiatives which are consistent with the principles of increasing public access. Nevertheless, in general terms they lack ambitious objectives and few actions become reality. It should be highlighted that, between speeches and actions, some steps have been taken that have also helped to raise the awareness of civil society as to these possibilities.

Civil society's experiences of coordination around and participation in ICT policies described in this report refer to legislative processes that included instances of participation by social organisations, but which suffered from legislative delays and amendments and executive twists and turns which modified the original spirit of the proposals, or ignored the demands of civil society. What these examples make clear is that in these processes, those CSOs that came together around clear goals and with specific strategies have managed to have an impact, and promote breakthrough legislation which respects the right to communication, access to information, and digital inclusion. ■

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