

# Internet and Society in Latin America and the Caribbean

Edited by Marcelo Bonilla and Gilles Cliche



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# Foreword

In July 1999 the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO-Ecuador) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada) decided to sponsor under their PAN programme <<http://www.idrc.ca/pan>> a competition for research projects on the social impacts of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The key objective of the competition was to foster efforts to identify and evaluate the changes that the Internet is bringing about in different areas that are strategic for the region's development (education and culture, public health, governance, democracy, productivity, human rights, administration of justice, and environment), as well as to promote research into methodologies and the development of applications in this field. The research-competition programme focused on issues relating to equity and the need to address the technological and socioeconomic divide that has traditionally excluded certain urban and rural groups.

A jury panel of international experts defined the parameters of the competition and, in early 2000, selected the eight winning projects. This publication presents the results of those research projects in the hope that they may help to break new ground in the region by stimulating debate about public policies for the Internet, its potential significance for encouraging citizen participation and, consequently, for building a new political culture based on the right to communication and culture and Internet rights that will provide citizens with free access to knowledge and information under principles of social and cultural equity.

The ideas and experiences presented in this book are the product of the eight winning research projects from the competition. They address the social impact of the Internet in the context of schooling (case studies from Colombia, Chile and Argentina) and local governance (case studies from Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and the Chilean towns of Rancagua, Puente Alto and El Bosque). The volume also includes a description of two tools that were developed in the course of the competition. The first was prepared in Colombia to measure the social impact of the Internet on the basis of social variables (gender, education, and media access, among others): It was developed

for Linux platforms and is available at <<http://www.colnodo.apc.org/registro>>. The second was prepared in Argentina as a multimedia application for introducing children to a culture of citizen participation in relationship with their surroundings and their local community: this tool has been published at <<http://www.telpin.com.ar/interneteducativa/proyectounq/unq/web>>.

The research projects themselves, as well as the tools described above, were presented during an international seminar on Communication, Internet and Society in Latin America, which was held in Quito on May 16 and 17, 2001. This book also contains articles written by six experts who participated in that event, relating to copyright and the Internet; a proposal for franchising telecentres; public policies for the Internet; an analysis of MISTICA, a virtual community experiment; and a description of a project for monitoring Internet policies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Fernando Carrión  
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We also wish to thank the FLACSO-Ecuador team, and in particular Wilson Pancho, manager of the computerization division, for their assiduous work in designing the competition's web site and the research programme's Internet communication systems. As well, we are grateful to Cristina Wholerman for her help with the organization and logistics for the planning sessions that were held during the project's preparatory phase.

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Nor can we overlook the unconditional support provided to us by all the research coordinators and teams from the winning institutions and by the speakers who so kindly took part in the results presentation seminar and in the preparation of this publication.

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