Supporting Geomatics Education in Uruguay

While reading the latest Spanish edition of *GIM International* (June 2016) I came across an article expressing concern about the ability of education and geomatics to solve some of the main problems of our times. That article ('*La Educación es clave*/Education is key') encouraged me to write about some initiatives that are being supported in Uruguay and to somehow try to answer the questions raised in the aforementioned article.

By Sergio Acosta y Lara, Geomatics Department at the Ministry of Transport and Public Works (MTOP), Uruguay

One such initiative is the development of gvSIG Batoví, a geographic information system (GIS) applied to educational environments within the framework of the Plan Ceibal, based on gvSIG (free-of-charge and open GIS desktop software). It is an initiative of Uruguay's Ministry of Transport and Public Works (MTOP). Plan Ceibal is the first worldwide experience in the application of the OneLaptopPerChild (OLPC) project in which each child and teacher within public schools across the country receives a laptop for free. Today, this scheme also includes secondary and technical and professional education.

The MTOP-Ceibal relationship arose from an initiative of the MTOP's National Bureau of Surveying (Dirección Nacional de Topografía, DNTop.) to contribute to the country's education based on its own field of expertise. DNTop. is part of the Spatial Data Infrastructure of Uruguay and helps to promote it. It also develops and is responsible for MTOP's Geoportal. This resulted in an agreement between DNTop., Centro Ceibal and the gvSIG Association on the development of gvSIG Batoví.

After its launch, gvSIG Batoví became the first nationwide Uruguayan platform of its kind. It gave rise to gvSIG Educa, which aims to be a tool for educators that makes it easier for students to analyse and understand geographic information as well as helping to assimilate spatial concepts using visual tools. It gives both teachers and students the possibility to develop their own thematic maps from different layers of information and to share them with the wider educational community.

Based on open-source software**,** this gvSIG Educa tool was the result of collective work that included the coordinated participation of four institutions: DNTop., the gvSIG Association (Spain), the Geospatial Information Technologies Working Group of the College of Engineering (*Grupo de Tecnologías de Información Geoespacial*, FING/UDELAR) and Centro Ceibal. Since its release, it has been extensively disseminated through various presentations at conferences, workshops, courses and seminars: a workshop for geography teachers, a presentation for students and authorities, a course for students of geography education at teacher training college, and a workshop for secondary-school students.

At MTOP, we are continually striving to improve this tool, such as through a grant from Google Summer of Code. As a result of its international impact, gvSIG Batoví has been invited to be part of the Geoforall initiative. It is now an active member of this initiative, playing a leading role as part of its Advisory Board. More information about this initiative will follow in a forthcoming edition.

Batoví website

Batoví Blog

Batoví mailing list

gvSIG website