



CÓDIGO DE ACCESO
YOUNG PEOPLE AND INFORMATION

IDEASS COLOMBIA

Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation



Introduction

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Código de Acceso (Access Code) is an innovation introduced by the El Tiempo newspaper, Columbia's widest selling national daily and the only paper covering the entire country. El Tiempo opened its doors to young people to give them a chance to get into journalism.

Código de Acceso was set up in 1999 as part of an initiative jointly set up by Editorial El Tiempo, a media company owning the El Tiempo newspaper, the Fundación Restrepo Barco, a Colombian non-government organisation that organises educational and social participation programmes for children and teenagers, and Plan Internacional, a private non-profit organisation

concerned with childhood in Asian, African, Latin American and Caribbean countries. The idea for the project sprang from a survey, carried out in 1994 by Atlántida, on teenage school culture in Columbia, which revealed how little the youth of Columbia participated in shaping public opinion.

Access Code is an innovation open to young people between the ages of 15 and 20 who are keen to build a better country through their commitment, responsibility and skills in design, photography, and writing.

Their participation in this innovative programme has transformed the structure of El Tiempo, giving all the sections of the newspaper a broader perspective which encompasses the views of young people.

In 2003, Access Code expanded operations from Bogotá to cover three other important cities, Medellín, Cali and Barranquilla, involving a total of 285 young people. Coverage was also extended to the conflict areas of the departments of Sucre, Bolívar, Atlántico, Nariño and Chocó. In each city, the initiative was backed by major organisations from the public and private sectors, such as the Empresas Públicas de Medellín, the Fundación La 14, and Comfamiliar.





In concrete terms, Access Code is responsible for developing the following products in all the regions where it is currently operating: Reprints, Web Page Project, Access Code Press Club, National Forums, articles in the most important national newspaper, proposals and production of programmes in CityTV, and an information bulletin called Información Codificada.

These young journalists have produced more than 800 articles for newspapers belonging to Editorial El Tiempo, and have taken an active part in organising political, economic, social and cultural discussion forums. These forums have become hugely popular in the country and a much appreciated vehicle for discussion on a multitude of subjects, such as the debate on teenage education and policies during the election of the Mayor of Bogotá, and the forum on armed conflict and youth.

Access Code is an innovation that has gained wide popularity with the young people of the country, giving them a chance to express themselves on topical issues concerning various cultural and socio-economic scenarios. Access Code has also managed to transform the structure of a well-known Colombian newspaper, opening the doors of its editorial offices to young people who work, debate, criticise, and offer their contributions to the actual design of the newspaper.



What problem does it solve?

According to the results of the survey carried out by Atlántida on the youth culture of Colombia, carried out in 1994 with the backing of Conciencias and Fundación FES, Colombian teenagers had no opportunities to express themselves in the field of communications and so their views of the world were little considered by adults, who control the information system that shapes public opinion. This situation meant that youngsters were kept from taking an active part in the construction of society.

In previous generations, youth had a role to play in the social construction of their environment through various activities which they carried out in the company of adults, such as entering the workforce at an early age or taking part in

traditional cultural events. Then, during the 1970s and 80s the situation began to change; youth became a world apart, with its own identity, specific consumer markets, policies, and exclusive areas of participation for this vaguely defined age group. This meant that there was no longer any dialogue between young people and adults nor did they share the same areas of social interaction. As a result there were no daily transactions to guarantee cultural transmission from one generation to another.

The conclusions of the Atlántida survey led to creation of a journal called Camaleón, written and published by young people for adults, which became the predecessor of what today is known as Access Code. This initiative was taken up by Casa Editorial El Tiempo, which opened its doors to the group of young people running the magazine. For a year they had the chance to draft proposals together with EL Tiempo journalists, layout artists and photo reporters. Although the scheme to distribute the magazine together with the newspaper did not prosper for economic reasons, the experience of youngsters and adults working together in editorial offices to design and devise the magazine led to a trial run of the Access Code school of journalism. Nowadays the newspaper's reporting staff includes teenagers from schools and universities, who produce news articles that express their views of the world.



Compared to other initiatives involving young people in the field of communications, which are usually short term and just involve a page or so, a supplement or a magazine about and for young people, Access Code has brought teenagers into the very structure of the newspaper, allowing them to learn the tricks of the trade and take an effective and active part in all the sections of the newspaper, giving them space to express their opinions.

Access Code is a pioneer pedagogical and communicative innovation in Latin America that introduces new work methodologies among young people.

Access Code in practice

Young candidates wishing to take part in the Access Code school of journalism are invited to attend a general meeting, which is announced in the newspaper itself. The selection criteria are determined by the organisations taking part in the initiative. These criteria take into account the socio-economic background of the applicants (to include applicants from the poorest families), the interest they show, their artistic, reading and writing skills, and aptitude.



The Access Code school of journalism currently takes on 80 young people a year from all over the country. Training lasts three months, after which a smaller group of 25 young people are chosen to take a direct part in the operations of the editorial offices of the newspaper for another nine months.

Training aims to strengthen the capacity of each youngster to take charge of community communication projects directed at resolving basic needs. Training also involves tuition on the rights of children and teenagers and their human and social development.

Training is divided into four cycles: awareness, emphasis, community and social development, production.

All 80 participants take part in the awareness stage, which aims to introduce youngsters into the world of communications and teach them the basic tools of journalism. In this phase, the students are given a grounding in journalism, in which they learn how to interpret news and find out about ethical codes of conduct and some principles of writing, investigative journalism and reporting. They are also given thematic workshops on economics, politics and culture, amongst others, which give them the basics to try their hand at journalistic practices. Most of these capacity building activities are carried out by the journalists working for the newspaper.

The emphasis stage. By this phase, the group has been reduced to 25 young people. Selection of this new group is based on how well they perform in the awareness phase. The youngsters have the chance to learn about different areas of journalism and develop their skills in writing, design, photography, radio and television. Capacity building is conducted directly by specialised journalists in the newspaper's editorial offices. Once they have found out about all the different areas of the newspaper, the youngsters opt for the one that is of most interest to them or for which they have the greatest capacity, and then try their hand at it during the production phase.

The production phase. The students begin to produce written texts, photos, drawings, broadcasting proposals and radio programmes, assisting the work of the journalists in charge of each group, who can then decide to use some of the ideas put forward by the trainees, channelling them into the paper's official selection procedures before publication. During these three stages, the youngsters are in permanent contact with their local communities, on the lookout for information to turn into news stories.

The community and social development stage. Contacts with the local community intensify during the last phase of training, when the participants have the chance to broaden their experience with the Access Code Press Club. The Press Club meets four hours a week for six months, during which Access Code trainees collaborate with school children and students.

Training involves 10 to 15 hours per week. At the same time, participants continue to study their own subjects at university or high school.

Once training is complete, the trainee journalists go on to integrate a network of young people that work on the creation of concrete social

development products. Ex-Access Code students can, at present, take part in the Press Club, the Web Page Project, the Creativity Group, which includes photography, and the TV Group.

The one-year training provided by the Access Code school of journalism, together with the chance to support community communication products, means that participants gain a unique experience of life. Although the training they receive in the newspaper does not represent a formal professional preparation that accredits them as journalists, the programme represents an experience of life that allows young people to find out exactly what it is like to work in the press and media.

In economic terms, the initiative is financed by Editorial El Tiempo. As well as allocating financial resources for tutors, capacity builders and coordinators, the publishers also provide premises for the activities. The publishing house has also received financial support from a national non-government association, the Fundación Restrepo Barco, and Plan Internacional. Their contributions as founding members of the Access Code School of Journalism have made the initiative sustainable.



Results

Access Code has achieved extraordinary results. These youngsters manage to get their articles published in all sections of the newspaper, offering opinions on issues that can only be seen from the perspective of youth, a view of reality that at times adult journalists do not have the capacity to see.

One result is that many young people have been given the chance to find out how a means of communication works, and provided with the opportunity of developing a great critical capacity towards public information and the media in general. All those taking part in the initiative gain this experience. By taking part in the dynamics of news production in a vehicle of mass communication, young people have been given the chance to experience an important training process. Over the last few years, communication activities have been projected socially, producing a strong impact on the dissemination of information, and creating a youth communication network. Youngsters taking part in Access Code have given



their support and advice to youth organisations and local community projects concerning the media, gaining an increasingly critical awareness of social reality.

Secondly, as result of this experience, many participants have decided to take up journalism or investigative journalism, both as a professional career or by directly participating in local or institutional communication media.

Thirdly, results have produced a youth communication network, headed by Access Code participants and ex-participants, which can give advice and support to school initiatives in the field

of communications. Thus, trainees taken on by Editorial El Tiempo give their support to college students and district youth organisations, teaching them what they have learnt and helping them improve their school or district magazines and broadcasts. In the past few years, communication projects have been developed in different cities, through the creation of a press club in which 12-16 year-old public and private schoolchildren from poor backgrounds in Bogotá, Cali, Medellín and Barranquilla are given a taste of the Access Code experience. Today, the press club has about 100 teenage members that share their experiences on a daily basis.

Some of the proposals that are presently being supervised by ex-Access Code students include: the Access Code Press Club, which replicates the innovation for teenagers from poor backgrounds; the Web Page Committee, which produces proposals for teenage journalism; the Creative and Artistic Committee, which is responsible for the project's image; the Research Committee which offers suggestions on how the project can best operate, and the Juvenile Relations Committee, which is responsible for relations with the youth of Colombia.

Access Code has received recognition for its promotion of children's rights and for its work in strengthening the country's school information media. Although the innovation has not received formal international recognition, Plan Internacional, Fundación Restrepo Barco, and the Community Relations Department of Editorial El Tiempo present the innovation in international events as an important result of its work on youth.

The most important result is the structural impact that the participation of the youngsters has generated in the newspaper itself.

International interest

Access Code gives participants an experience of life, but it is also a learning experience for the El Tiempo newspaper. The training that the youngsters receive is of great value, but it is perhaps equally important that a major communication organ such as El Tiempo takes into account a teenage perspective of things. The challenge of opening the doors of its editorial offices to a number of teenagers that work side by side with journalists, discussing things with them and offering their contributions has brought about fundamental changes to the very conception of the newspaper. It has led the newspaper to see society in a different light, from the point of view of youngsters that have things to say about this society, of which they are an integral part.

This initiative creates opportunities for enriching public opinion by offering contrasting views of reality. In this process, the youngsters consolidate their critical capacity towards the information produced by the newspaper and, at the same time, play a fundamental part in the process of generating public opinion by taking part in the activities conducted by the newspaper. This means that their views permeate the information system and the media as a whole, so that things may be seen from a different perspective. Even when Access Code articles and reports are identified in the newspaper by a logo, the journalistic results of the programme are not necessarily visible to public opinion. The way social diversity is perceived generates structural changes in the newspaper.



Access Code is of great importance socially and in the communications field, in a world where information and news tends to be seen from the perspective of certain groups, excluding large sectors of the population that remain silent before the events that affect them. This silence does not mean that these groups do not have an opinion about the events that happen, but that there is no vehicle for them to express their feelings.

It is particularly important for the young generation to play a role in shaping the news, because it gets them involved in the social, political and economic issues that affect all the community and not only a particular age group. Newspapers, more than the radio and television, still have a predominant role in shaping public opinion, and for this reason it is vital that they include different views of reality.

Adopting Access Code in other countries

Access Code has already been replicated in different areas of the country, in the regional publications of Editorial El Tiempo. The programme can be set up in other countries as long as an important newspaper publisher has the political will and managerial capacity to make it work. The presence of communications media company is also important to generate communicative dynamics.

In this process, Access Code team leaders can assist in two ways. Firstly, the El Tiempo team can

inform editors of important newspapers about the basic elements of the innovation and the impact that it generates within the newspaper.

Moreover, the Access Code team can explain the mechanics of the innovation to groups of journalists in other countries, help draft a training programme, advise on logistics, and put forward a plan of operations for each particular context. Advice can be provided by the newspaper's department of social responsibility, Access Code coordinators, or the youngsters that are or have been part of the programme.





To learn more

Those interested in finding out more about Access Code can visit our web page, where there are some examples of articles produced by participants, at:

<http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/educ/CODACC/noviembre/index.html>

Contacts

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The IDEASS Programme – Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation – is part of the international cooperation Initiative ART. IDEASS grew out of the major world summits in the 1990s and the Millennium General Assembly and it gives priority to cooperation between protagonists in the South, with the support of the industrialised countries.

The aim of IDEASS is to strengthen the effectiveness of local development processes through the increased use of innovations for human development. By means of south-south cooperation projects, it acts as a catalyst for the spread of social, economic and technological innovations that favour economic and social development at the local level. The innovations promoted may be products, technologies, or social, economic or cultural practices. For more information about the IDEASS Programme, please consult the website: www.ideassonline.org.

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ART - Support for territorial and thematic networks of co-operation for human development - is an international co-operation initiative that brings together programmes and activities of several United Nations Agencies. ART promotes a new type of multilateralism in which the United Nations system works with governments to promote the active participation of local communities and social actors from the South and the North. ART shares the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the interested countries, ART promotes and supports national co-operation framework programmes for Governance and Local Development - ART GOLD. These Programs create an organized institutional context that allows the various national and international actors to contribute to a country's human development in co-ordinated and complementary ways. Participants include donor countries, United Nations agencies, regional governments, city and local governments, associations, universities, private sector organizations and non-governmental organizations.

It is in the framework of ART GOLD Programmes where IDEASS innovations are promoted and where cooperation projects are implemented for their transfer, whenever required by local actors.