

Socialab: Making an Impact by Providing Solutions for the World

Valentina González 18 November 2019



SociaLab Team

Credit: SociaLab

Summary

Socialab works as a company with a strong focus on social impact, that researches and highlights problems that are affecting communities, regions, or the world. Then, with the help of different organizations, these problems become challenges that they tackle together. The collective calls upon creative minds, with talents and

diverse knowledge, that are part of the Socialab open innovation global platform and society in general, to submit ideas that might end or mitigate the effects of said problem. The focus is also that these ideas also have the potential to become companies that might provide new opportunities, similar to the organizations that once supported them. In other words, Socialab is concerned with broadening the impact and efficiency of sustainability strategies, innovation, and communications of both public and private organizations. This is achieved through the support of sustainable entrepreneurship ideas that could have the potential to position themselves on the public agenda.

Who Is Socialab?

In 2010, the TECHO Innovation Centre came up as an idea to amplify and diversify the impact that the TECHO foundation was generating in Chile through the construction of decent housing in all of the 19 other countries where it remains present. The purpose that brought together the founders was the same, to build a more just society with less poverty. Only this time, the proposal was to solve the main challenge in a different way: to outsource.

The hypothesis was the following, if there was a challenge within a community, neighborhood, or country and there was only one person or one team trying to solve it, it was more likely that the solution would come in a more costly

and time-consuming manner. Instead, if an organization was open these problems to a community of creatives, designers, and entrepreneurs that could pitch in, it would be easier and quicker to come up with solutions, generating an impact in broader aspects, not just housing. This would also bolster company development in the future, companies that not only care about profit but also social impact.

Since magic is made through acting quickly, especially in innovation, this hypothesis was proven since day one. During the trial runs solutions were created to solve basic service problems. Through mobile showers and access to drinking water that had been processed over a plasma system, families living in camps could access this very basic need.

Today, more than 205 challenges have been generated by open innovation calls which means that Socialab has challenged entrepreneurs and creatives directly over 250 times to solve real-world problems. Initially, these were challenges to reduce poverty, then, environmental, social, sustainability, and business challenges were added. These challenges have managed to not only bring solutions to problems but also to boost ideas, companies, and projects from social entrepreneurs around Chile, Latin America, and the world. By 2019, 800 start-ups and 57,752 proposals have been shared in the open innovation platform.

Julián Ugarte, Matías Rojas, Andrés Iriondo, and Askan Straume all belonged to "Un Techo para Chile" Foundation and worked to overcome poverty. Together they have formed the history of Socialab as its founders in the almost nine years of this platform, where Julián has become both a spokesperson and inspiration for the Chilean and continental entrepreneurship ecosystem. Julián, besides being a director and co-founder of Socialab, is also a founding partner of IF (first producer with a B certification in Chile), co-creator of the International Social Innovation Festival (FiiS, already in its 7th version), Ashoka fellow, +SocialGood ambassador (UN), and winner of AVONNI, one of the most prestigious innovation awards (obtained through his work with Socialab in 2013). Finally, his involvement in the country's wellbeing has led him to venture into politics, running for senator for the V region in 2017.

Currently, Socialab works as a company with a strong focus on social impact, that researches and highlights problems that are affecting communities, regions, or the world. Then, with the help of different organizations, these problems become challenges. It calls upon creative minds, with talents and diverse knowledge, that are part of the Socialab open innovation global platform, and society in general, to submit ideas that might end or mitigate the effects of said problem. The focus is that these ideas have the potential to become companies that might provide new opportunities, such as the

organizations that once supported them. In other words, Socialab is concerned with broadening the impact and efficiency of sustainability strategies, innovation, and communications of both public and private organizations. This is achieved through the support of sustainable entrepreneurship ideas that could have the potential to position themselves on the public agenda.

The logo for Socialab, featuring the word "socialab" in a bold, lowercase, blue sans-serif font.

Logo

Socialab has offices based in countries such as Argentina, Chile, Colombia, México, Uruguay and Guatemala, and also a massive online platform that gathers 850,000 creatives in 96 other countries. Today, Socialab challenges are not only focused on discovering and connecting impact partners who might finance projects, but it is also focused on these ideas being exported into the world and maintained for the long run.

Some social innovation projects that are being developed at the moment:

Papinotas: Education and Technology for an Essential Endeavour.

In Chile and the world, school digital transformation is a subject that has been key to modernizing education ever since the introduction of the internet and computers in the

mid-nineties.



PAPINOTAS Logo

The handling of this transformation has meant changes in the education plan, from methodology to curricula, including the government, ministries, parents, students, teachers, and school authorities.

With the need to adapt education to today's challenges, to improve and socialize within in it, Papinotas was created as an integrated management platform by Industrial Civil Engineer Natalia Espinoza. The platform gathers different services that support digital transformation in schools, strengthening the relationship between the school and the families, as well as improving administrative procedures. It was a massive challenge that needed a quick and effective solution, but it had to be smart enough to adapt to Chilean reality, where technology and the internet have become essential in everyday routine. More than 72,7 percent of Chilean population makes use of the internet, according to a study provided by Fundación Digital País. Worldwide, Chile leads the digital competitiveness ranking in Latin America and occupies the 37th place in a study that evaluates how a country explores and adapts to digital technologies that transform government practices, business models, and society in general, published by the IMD World Competitiveness Center in Switzerland.

In this context, **Papinotas** installs itself as a fundamental support and technological development company for education, with the main goal of delivering real impact solutions for school management. Between 2011 and 2019, more than 60 million Papinotas have been sent, helping over 800 thousand families and gathering over 15,000 active users on the platform with its star service: School Family Communication, a system that enables text messaging to parents directly through three simple steps. This service has in particular been what has motivated 500 institutions to instill trust in the project and the other services it provides.

Pocket Science: A Revolution for Scientific Education

The importance of science in a country's development has been historically proven in different disciplines. Medicine, for example, with vaccines and treatments; astronomy, with the recent confirmation of black hole existence, thus changing everything we know so far, as well as research that has determined how we live and understand our surroundings. However, even being a part of OECD, where countries possess clear scientific institutionality, Chile only reaches 0,4 percent of GDP in investment, while the rest of the countries invest on average 2.4 percent. More daring countries, like Israel and Korea, invest more than four percent.



Lab4U Logo

Credit: Socialab

Only 12 percent of Chilean schools have laboratories, while 57 percent of students own a smartphone, according to numbers provided by the Inter-American Development Bank. This was a revelation for **Lab4u** founders, Álvaro Peralta, Komal Dadlani, Isidro Lagos, and Rodolfo Águila, who saw a solution to collaborate with science and reach different social realities by delivering scientific education solutions quickly and interactively. This initiative transforms any smartphone in a scientific lab by using sensors in smartphones to convert them into experimentation tools, combining resources and technology for educators to transform the teaching of science.



Lab4UBanner web

Credit: Socialab

Lab4u works as an app for students' phones and tablets, but teachers can benefit too. They can create activities on the platform so students can carry out experiments in their phones, sharing their results and experiences. More than 100 thousand students and 20,000 teachers in 20 different countries have enjoyed the benefits Lab4u provides.



Students using the app Lab4U

Aging Population. How to Deal with the New Scenario

According to the results delivered by the 2017 census, the population in Chile is rapidly aging. It becomes very noticeable when compared to the 1992 census, where 6.6 percent of people declared to be over the age of 65, while in 2017 it became 16.2 percent. Chile is aging, and with it social and cultural challenges are becoming more demanding. **Servisenior**, created by Avonni winners in its XII version, Innovate for the World, Ignacio Hinojosa and David Allendes, appears as an initiative that responds directly to this challenge.



ServisSenior Logo

ServisSenior already has more than 3,500 seniors subscribed to the platform which offers services provided by people over 50 years old, making a profit of more than \$175,567 USD, meaning 30,000 working hours for senior citizens.



Participants of ServisSenior.

Source: SociaLab

The members of this platform were also awarded by Huella, granted by the Corporación de Fomento de la Producción (CORFO) Chilean government agency, a multisector organism that promotes national production

and regional economic growth.

All three of the above-mentioned entrepreneurship endeavors have been supported by **SOCIALAB** in different instances and challenges. Servisenior, for example, was a first-place winner in “Emprende Social,” organized by Caja de Compensación Los Andes (2017) and from then on, Socialab strongly guided them to find financing and provide connections with institutions and companies that helped them make the triple impact project a reality. **Lab4u**, **Papinotas** conform the corpus of projects supported by Socialab, as well as other impactful innovation initiatives: **Freshwater**, for example, is an intelligent domestic use system that produces purified water through air, without the need to connect to a drinking water network and working with electricity; **Braveup**, mobile platform that improves communication and school understanding by teaching about responsible internet use, social networks, new technologies, and through the gathering of families around educational processes. Also, **Hora Fácil**, a completely automated and free app, solves the problem of long waiting queues in health clinics.

SociaLab Ventures: The Challenges Ahead

In early 2019, along with CORFO support, SociaLab created **SOCIALAB VENTURES**, an impact business accelerator in Chile.



Logo SocialLab Ventures

Socialab Ventures is the answer to the need for support of more advanced startups, that are facing daily new challenges to generate impact and economic profit. It also rises as a response to the higher demand of these kinds of businesses in the market, specifically investment funds that are continuously looking for opportunities to invest in startups that may solve social issues but also procuring to make a profit.

Matías Rojas, Socialab's CEO, considers that specific programs that cover the needs of each startup are fundamental *"We know the world is changing and we are aware of the potential our entrepreneurs have to become real actors of these changes. It is because of this that we develop diverse programs that support each stage to increase the chances of success and achieve continuous growth as well as their main goal: to positively impact society"*.

The main goal of Socialab Ventures has different facades, but straightforward: sales growth, raising capital, and/or startup internationalization. To achieve this, different programs were designed to support entrepreneurs in their

goal to generate an impact that can be measurable. The first-year goal is to accelerate and support at least 30 startups, besides measuring and identifying the impact of each company and the sum of the entire portfolio.

According to Matías Rojas *“It is also important to create a diversified portfolio, match it with investors, and make that portfolio open to new international markets”*.

Socialab Ventures will be financed by CORFO throughout its first three years with their fund Aceleradoras Corporativas de la Gerencia de Emprendimiento which is the main challenge for SOCIALAB this 2019.

Author bio

Valentina González is a business administrator with a master's degree in sales granted by Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, with experience in innovation and entrepreneurship, both in private and public sectors, as well as academics. In addition to working within the entrepreneurship ecosystem, she works as an academic, her other passion, prompting an entrepreneur culture within university students and compelling them to create their startups. Currently, Valentina is the manager of Socialab Ventures, an impact business accelerator of Socialab.

Previously she worked in CORFO supporting startups at their early stages, making connections with the main actors of the Chilean entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Valentina's prior experience also includes serving as an Assistant Director of Entrepreneurship at Universidad del Desarrollo, creating and developing different incubation and acceleration programs for students.