

Brazilian Digital Culture Forum: A New Way of Making Public Policies

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Abstract

This article discusses the Brazilian Digital Culture Forum, and the platform www.culturadigital.br, created by the Ministry of Culture to bring together managers, researchers, designers and artists in the discussion and formulation of cultural policies for the country. The aim is to present it as "a new way of making public policy" insofar as it proposes a dialogue with society about the new challenges of the digital scene, using for this, a collaborative tool, comprising the role of social networks today. However, the creation of a Digital Culture Forum to discuss and manage public policies cannot be separated from a larger process by which the country passed since 2003, when the emergence of networks using new technologies found then in government an opening to the institutionalization and augmentation of ongoing experiments. What quest to present here is the concept of "digital culture" built by the Brazilian government in this period, and also the context that led to the existence of this Forum, as well as identifying some consequences of this "networks policy" in terms of civil society.

Keywords

Digital culture ; communication policies ; cultural policies ; public policies ; Ministry of Culture, Brazil

Introduction

In Brazil there is a growing debate over the past eight years on the use of new technologies for enhancing public policies. From the implementation of free and open source software (FOSS) within the federal public administration to the support on creation of digital studios in communities, as it will be presented in the next pages, the discussion of the role of these tools in the democratization of communication and culture has been gaining ground in the conceptual and practical plans.

The so-called "digital culture" is a concept that includes the cultural dimension of the new digital environment, which will lead, in Brazil, the actions on government policy level, taking into account the role of society in these new dynam-

ics. Minister of Culture at that time, Gilberto Gil explains that:

To act in digital culture is the embodiment of that philosophy, which opens up opportunities to redefine the form and content of cultural policies, and transforms the Ministry of Culture into a Ministry of Liberty, a Ministry of Creativity, a Ministry of Boldness, a Ministry of Contemporary. A Ministry, finally, of Digital Culture and Creative Industries ... Digital Culture is a new concept. It comes from the idea that the digital revolution of technologies is cultural in its essence. The issue here is that the use of digital technology changes behaviors. The common use of the Internet and free softwares creates fantastic possibilities for democratizing access to information and knowledge to maximize the potential of products and services, to expand the values that form our common texts, and therefore, our culture, and also to enhance cultural production, creating new forms of art. (Gil 2004)

Thus, a cultural production that was restricted to the mass communication media within a broadcast system, finds in digital tools the possibility of spreading in a more decentralized way, with no need of a intermediary agent to circulate this information. This multiplicity of views and, in this case, cultural products, not always finds in the traditional broadcasting model the desired effect, and make use of new technologies, and in particular the Internet, to produce and circulate their creations.

However, the simple existence of available technologies and the possibility of creating networks are not enough to guarantee desirable public policies for culture or any other area. This democratization depends, among other factors, on a political involvement on implementing technological infrastructure and regulatory frameworks that will allow and support this production and circulation.

In this sense, it's important to remember that technology presents some possibilities for this democratization, but, it's its appropriation by people and also governments that will

reveal the real consequences of its usages – that might be not as positive as we would like.

Evgeny Morozov deconstructs what he calls the “net illusions”, which means those promises of freedom presented by internet, without a critical regard. In this discussion about public policies, he affirms that

we'll need to opt for policies informed by a realistic assessment of the risks and dangers posed by the Internet, matched by a highly scrupulous and unbiased assessment of its promises, and a theory of action that is highly sensitive to the local context, that is cognizant of the complex connections between the Internet and the rest of foreign policymaking, and that originates not in what technology allows but in what a certain geopolitical environment requires. (Morozov 2010)

What is observed in the Brazilian government's plan and, more specifically, the Ministry of Culture (also called as MinC in the country), is the attention to the cultural impact of these new technologies, that means, the perspective of access, promotion of diversity and networking.

Eliane Costa explains that in the mandate of Gilberto Gil and Juca Ferreira (2003-2010) from the perspective of digital culture, the Ministry of Culture began to identify the access to computers and the internet not as a finish line, but as a departure point, incorporating thus the reflection on the absorption of new technological paradigms for the cultural field, and the prospect of user's autonomy, encouraging the consolidation of a network culture, grounded in the possibilities of sharing and coordination of the digital landscape. (Costa 2010)

The own technological development is not only the reason of many changes in the dynamics of societies, but also the result of sociocultural transformations that generate new needs, which in turn require technological advances (Foucault apud Costa 2010). And it is precisely this understanding that this is about a new scenario, with its challenges and implications to be revealed, that the Ministry of Culture has proposed a historical opening for civil society participation in formulating consistent public policies with the current social and technological context.

Gilberto Gil, two years after giving up the post of Minister, estimates that this Ministry "had a very important role in become these issues political, a general attitude that wants a government joined with a variety of social concerns and activisms, bringing agents builders of this new reality to sit around a table and discuss"¹.

We will see then the ways and actions that led to the creation of the Brazilian Digital Culture Forum, which consolidates the efforts in developing state policies beyond the transition of governments, in the way of a digital democracy.

It is important to consider, though, that this initiative has been actively developed with an always restrictive budget and no perspective of continuity after that. The mobilizations

network created and the infrastructure allowed by these projects in Brazil are learning to live by themselves, although it's already a gain that new people were brought into the scene, sustained by some little support.

The Free Software and the Digital Culture Action as a Public Policy

After two decades of military dictatorship (1964-1985) and two right-wing increasingly liberal governments (1985-2002), the last government opened paths for a series of actions in culture and technology – the discussion and adoption of free software in the governmental sphere – that would unfold in the following years and that still in progress, among them, the Digital Culture Forum.

One of the first actions in this direction was the resumption of the Ministry of Planning's project called “Eletronical Government”, established in 2000. Adding the perspective of digital inclusion, collective rights and the transformation of civil society in the use of technological resources, there were created sectoral chambers and among them, one dedicated to free software. Beyond a technical option, free software is a conceptual paradigm based on the logic of cooperation. Since from the availability of source code, the user is free to study, modify and redistribute it, adapting it to local needs.

Sergio Amadeu, sociologist and very known brazilian activist in the area, former president of the National Institute of Information Technology (ITI Brazil, for its words in portuguese) in the Lula's government and responsible for the implementation of free software in the governmental sphere, explains that

The free software movement is a movement about the sharing of technological knowledge (...). As the trend of the capitalist economy is becoming increasingly based on information and intangibles, the competition for knowledge of techniques and technologies for storage, processing and transmission of information takes the strategic center of national economies (...) However, the large sociocultural and economic consequence of free software is its focus on sharing intelligence and knowledge. It ensures our country the possibility of mastering the technologies we use. (Silveira 2004)

Although it has been more considerable in terms of political support that properly in effective action, this created a favorable environment for the institutionalization of political culture based on free software philosophy, generating visibility for the country also in the international arena.

The effective implementation of this policy exits then from the Science and Technology sphere, which was restricted, and finds space in the Ministry of Culture, then assumed by the musician Gilberto Gil, declared at that time a "hacker minister"(Gil 2006).

¹ G. Gil, interview to the author Aline Carvalho, at 23/08/2010

Gil, who in the 1960's had been ahead of the Tropicalia countercultural movement, showed remarkable openness in testing the boundaries between popular culture and new technologies, between tradition and modernity, and, notably, between art and politics.

In his mandate, MinC took part of several events as Tactical Media Festival Brazil, the Digital Inclusion Workshop and the International Forum of Free Software in order to meet and talk – often informally – with these "agents builders of new realities", showing the strength of social mobilization around free and collaborative culture.

Lawrence Lessig, creator of the Creative Commons license, printed his report to meet the Free Knowledge Laboratory, a collective and self-managed space, assembled in the youth camp in the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre: It is an extraordinary, grassroots movement devoted first to an ideal (free software) and second to a practice (making it real). They have the culture to do it. Again, there were geeks, but not only. There were men, but plenty of women (and lots of kids). They were instructing each other -- some about code, some about culture, some about organizing, some about dealing with the government -- as they built this infrastructure out. Think Woodstock, without the mud, and where the audience makes the music. (Lessig 2005)

The first participation of these agents in the construction of cultural policy really started in the project formulation of the Basis for the Support of the Culture, which included the construction of cultural buildings in major cities. On behalf of the Ministry, Claudio Prado, a Gil fellow at the time of the 1960's, there were invited hackers, activists and artists with whom he had had contact in the events mentioned above, to cooperate as "articulators" in the technical, structural and conceptual design of the project.

To bring these agents nationwide, collaborative communication tools were necessary, which proved to be a real catalyst for groups who, despite having considerable experience in collaborative processes, had never acted before in such a wide territorial dimension.

Although the real dimension this initiative would take was not known, it can be considered as an initial step in the appropriation of new communication technologies in public policy formulation.

Alexandre Freire, Ariel Foina and Felipe Fonseca, who acted as articulators in this process, explain which would be this "joint protocol" between these different actors - or points - of Brazilian society and justify the importance of networks for the development of the country:

a strong national urban identity is based, among others, in the ability that most Brazilians have (or believe to have) to find solutions at the most adverse social situations, in most cases improvising with available resources [...] Thus the first step, building the network itself is the key to start the process as a whole. Once running, this is a network that will connect the cultural producers, digital artists, Free Software developers

and computer technicians to create, in terms of know-how, a self-sufficient social structure. (Foina, Fonseca and Freire 2006)

Through this collaborative and decentralized process and based on the philosophy of free software, in which all 'user' is a 'developer' in potential, the initial design of these Basis for Support of Culture was restructured in order to aggregate the perspective that every "consumer" could be as well a "creator". In this sense, it was created the program "Living Culture" and the "Culture Hotspots", which reverses the logic of traditional political culture: bringing the word "Live" in its name, the program understands culture as a process, not just an event, and recognizes that it must come from who makes it – the people – and not pre-defined by public policy.

Seeking cover various civil society initiatives involving the community, the Culture Hotspots does not have a single, fixed model, and its main aspect in common is the cultural dimension and the shared management between the government and the community. Part of the funds received must be used to acquire the "Digital Kit", multimedia equipments in free software for registration, disclosure and to encourage the communication network between the Hotspots, and also to complement their digital-related culture works.

In this direction for the preservation of artistic and social heritage, the project also seeks to prioritize actions on activities registering and the cultural traditions, as stated Celio Turino, responsible of the project in the Ministry,

Strengthening cultural identity also means to reveal contradictions and break with a seemingly homogeneous cultural identity, built upon certain milestones representing the dominant culture. (...) The literary, audio and visual record of the artistic production of our time is a goal not to neglect.

The team of "articulators", who worked on the design of the program, assume now another important mission: a conceptual and practical application of this 'digital culture' through immersions, workshops and other actions, always based on the autonomy and free exchange of knowledge principles.

Claudio Prado explains it, in the hacker meeting in Holland, "What the Hack":

The Free Studio is the root of multimedia kit that we are distributing to non-privileged areas as a way to skip straight from the 19th to the 21st century, ignoring the dead-end streets of the 20th century. We are very interested in exposing our project especially in search of synergy around the world. Our project is both governmental and nongovernmental. It is unique in the sense of empowering movements activists in an anarchic process of building "islands" of free knowledge... I believe this is exactly the point of "what the hack" that is happening in Brazil. (Prado apud Foina, Fonseca and Freire 2006)

The Brazilian Digital Culture Forum

Created in 2009, the Brazilian Digital Culture Forum is an important achievement of the government's proposal to enter into dialogue with the paradigms of the digital landscape in the construction of public policies. In addition to the experience of Digital Culture at the Culture Hotspots mentioned above, the conceptual discussion on the theme continued in the sphere of public administration, academia and social movements.

To better meet the new and dynamic processes implemented, it was required an institutional reorganization of this Ministry. Among other measures, it was launched in late 2008, within the Cultural Policies Secretary, the Department of Digital Culture.

According to the Ministry's description, the objectives of this new management would be:

A. Qualify the role of the Brazilian government through a public policy of universal access to culture and knowledge in digital medium, B. Formulate a national strategy for the (broadband) connectivity for all citizens; C. Affirm and guarantee these digital rights and consolidate the common sphere (public, non-state) in the digital environment; D. Guarantee means and instruments to ensure the full digital expression of cultural and regional Brazilian diversity; E. Identify and articulate the best emerging practices at local, regional, national and international to promote digital culture, F. Formulate a broad policy memory and history's digitalisation in its various language, oral, visual and ethnics expressions, G. Formulate guidelines for the reformulation of legal frameworks.

To this goal, it was established in 2009 the "www.culturadigital.br" platform. Entitled "A new way to make public policies", it intended to add government, academia and society in the discussion on digital's public policies. Aiming to be a privileged space for discussion and interaction among its members on forums, groups and blogs, the Forum was organized under five main focuses: Digital Memory (regarding to collection, history and future), Economics Digital Culture (sharing, public interest and market), Infrastructure for Digital Culture (information highway, access and inclusion), Digital Art (language, democratization and remix) and Digital Communication (language, media and convergence).

Jose Murilo Carvalho, Manager of Digital Culture on the Ministry, explains that

the Forum seeks to better understand the various parts that make up the mosaic of digital culture, and facilitate the participation of the public interested in track and collaborate in the construction of public policies and legal frameworks that forms this sector. (Carvalho apud Savazoni and Cohen 2009)

The goal is being a public social network with this aggregation purpose, where any citizen can register and create a profile with informations, links and articles, and also interact

in forums, monitor the transmission of online events, and participate to the public consultations in the network.

The project is also the result of partnership with the RNP (Education and Research National Network, Rede Nacional de Ensino e Pesquisa, in Portuguese), responsible not only for technological infrastructure maintenance of the network, as well as the conceptual collaboration in the area.

Being a government network of research and technological development, Álvaro Malaguti and Antônio Carlos F. Nunes, network representatives in the Forum, explain that

one of the factors that leads RNP to participate in the construction of the Brazilian Digital Culture Forum is the need to understand the demands of citizens that live culture, and then be able to search alternatives solutions, according to the needs of the creators of the 21th century. (Malaguti and Nunes apud Savazoni and Cohen 2009)

Along the platform, it was launched in September 2009 the book "Culturadigital.br" organized by Rodrigo Savazoni and Sergio Cohn. In an effort to represent much of the Brazilian contemporary thinking about digital culture, the publication includes over 20 interviews with representatives from government, university, market and civil society, and can be downloaded free at the website².

Savazoni explains the relationship of the book with the platform:

The book CULTURADIGITAL.BR is an intervention work. It was designed to provoke reflection and action in his readers. Like it or not what you'll read here, join the discussion about contemporary culture with us at the web address WWW.CULTURADIGITAL.BR. There, the book continues. With others, networking, horizontally.

In addition to the virtual platform, face to face interaction is also provided, among other events sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, at the International Seminar on Digital Culture, already held in November 2009 and November 2010. Understanding this as an international movement, the event has already received John Perry Barlow (the founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, USA), Bob Stein (Institute for the Future of the Book, London and New York), Raquel Rennó (from the Association of Digital Culture Projects ZZZinc, Barcelona), Amelia Andersdotter (Member of the Swedish Pirate Party), among others, to discuss issues and challenges of scenarios, from artistic creation to digital the rights on the Internet.

The creation of the Forum was inserted into a context where important frameworks for the area were being discussed and addressed.

In December of that year it was held the First National Conference on Communications³, that included representa-

²<http://culturadigital.br/blog/2009/09/26/baixar-olivro-culturadigital-br/>

³<http://www.proconferencia.com.br/>

tives of public power, social movements and business sector to discuss funding policies, allocation of grants, preservation of cultural diversity, among other regulatory frameworks for the area.

In the same period there were organized the preparatory steps for the Second National Conference on Culture⁴, held in March 2010. If the first Conference of Culture, in December 2005, was a landmark that met for the first time in Brazil's history, government and civil society in formulating public policies for culture, the second was an important step towards consolidation of these policies. It was created then on the platform the group "Communication for Culture", to bring together the main discussions and aggregate the preparatory steps for both conferences.

Also in the field of formulation of regulatory frameworks, it is necessary to mention the revision of the Brazilian Copyright Law (9619/98). Despite having entered officially for public consultation on the website of the Ministry of Culture⁵, between June 14 and August 31, 2010, the discussion around the review of the regulatory framework had already been held since early 2009. The debate over the revision of the Brazilian copyright law, which is among the strictest in the world, incorporates the extent of access to knowledge and the adaptation of this law to the current scenario of new technologies, bringing collectives, activists, researchers, lawyers and artists and others in the culturadigital.br platform⁶ and the reform's blog⁷.

An important policy of digital inclusion, beyond the Ministry of Culture, has also found on the platform an aggregation space: The National Broadband Plan, from Ministry of Communications, established officially by the federal government in May 2010, aims to expand Internet access for the population, promoting infrastructure for universal broadband. The blog "The National Broadband Plan: Participatory Formulation", adds then documents, articles, links, and users in discussions about the plan⁸.

Last but not least, the collaborative process of discussion and formulation of the Brazilian's Framework for Internet based on Civil Rights⁹ needs to be mentioned, as one of the main discussions in the forum. Resulting of a partnership between the Secretary of Legislative Affairs of the Ministry of Justice and the Law School of the Getulio Vargas at Rio de Janeiro (FGV-Rio), it was opened between October 29, 2009 and May 30, 2010 the public consultation process for joint development of the document via the Internet. The contributions received have generated a draft bill, currently under treatment by the staff of the Ministry of Justice, that is preparing the final version to send it to the Congress.

The construction of regulatory frameworks for culture also involves other levels of government, and the participation of society in this process contributes to the effectiveness of these actions as state policies, not government – those subject to discontinuity in the change of government.

Albino Rubim explains that in Brazil

the authoritarian tradition of national cultural policy has brought the impossibility of its discussion and negotiation with civil society, policies that may emanate from the government but as they pass by the scrutiny of critical debate with civil society, becomes real public cultural policies. Such policies, democratic, also have more chances of transcend this compromising tradition of instability (Rubim 2008)

Conclusion

This experience of dialogue between government and civil society in formulating and implementing policies, headed by the Brazil's Ministry of Culture between 2003 and 2010, was an effort in order to reaffirm its "public" character, not just built *for*, but *with* society.

Therefore, while recognizing that the Digital Culture Forum presents a different and qualified dynamic to articulate the social actors that influence policy formulation, it is necessary to observe the difficulties of the proposal's feasibility, characteristics of these processes, and based on the correlation of forces within the government.

In this way, a change in the direction on the management, even in a supposed government of continuity, might rewind an experiment still in progress, and without enough time for more concrete results – that's the situation we have today at the Brazilian cultural policy.

Indicated by the same Labor's Party in the head of the government for eight years, the new Minister of Culture Ana de Hollanda seems to have a different regard on the usages of new technologies and the civil society participation on this process. The new Ministry, a musician with some experience on public administration in São Paulo, announced to look forward the creator's rights, focusing her action on the artistic class. In this sense, Hollanda brings with her (or is brought by) some actors from the copyright scene in Brazil, and shows a visible effort to be different from the past administration.

With only 20 days on the post, her first action was to remove the Creative Commons License of the Ministry's website, without further explications. She also takes back from the Brazilian government Civil House the project revision of the Brazilian Copyright Law, arguing that this debate, even after 3 years of seminars, forums and a two months public consultation haven't been enough.

Among other actions, the public declarations and positions of this still recent administration has already caused a big

⁴<http://blogs.cultura.gov.br/cnc/>

⁵<http://www.cultura.gov.br/consultadireitoautoral>

⁶<http://culturadigital.br/groups/reforma-da-lei-de-direito-autoral/>

⁷<http://www.reformadireitoautoral.org/>

⁸<http://culturadigital.br/pnbl>

⁹<http://culturadigital.br/marcocivil>

debate on the directions of the public policies for culture and technology in the country.

Her arrival to the Ministry cannot be dissociated of a larger plan, in a world scale, in which big corporations and powerful governments weren't satisfied with the directions on which Brazilian policies for digital environment were going. This international context makes undeniable influence on the national policies, especially in this moment on which the country starts to gain visibility, notably with the discovery of the pre-salt layer and the attainment of World Cup and Olympic Games in coming years.

In the opposite direction of the democratical efforts that were being constructed for and by the digital environment, the new Ministry answers then to this global movement on the net control. Once again, Morozov reminds us that

the lesson to be drawn is that the Internet is here to stay, it will continue growing in importance, and those concerned with democracy promotion need not only grapple with it but also come up with mechanisms and procedures to ensure that another tragic blunder on the scale of Abu Ghraib will never happen in cyberspace. (Morozov 2010)

But it depends on political will, not just from government but also from the society, understanding its role in implementing these policies, contributing to propositions and participation, in addition to simply pointing out gaps and demands.

When her name was announced, the 20 December of 2010, activists, researchers, technicians and artists from the so called "digital culture movement" organized at the network wrote an "Open Letter by the Brazilian Civil Society to President-elect Dilma Rousseff and Minister of Culture Ana de Hollanda"¹⁰. Welcoming the new women managers and announcing the society's openness for the continuation of a conjoint public policy making, this letter also previewed further problems that happened to come.

Since the conturbated beginning of her administration, every declaration to the papers, every meeting canceled with society's representatives and every action in the Ministry (notably in the digital area) is being carefully surveilled by these representatives. And the reactions vary between institutional answers in the newspapers, political articulation within the government and creative manifestations on the internet.

So far, these answers from civil society haven't done more than some noise in the media and a relative crisis within the Labor's Party culture area. In the plan of public policies, important progresses on the Brazilian digital experience are in risk to be lost in this way.

Nevertheless, these actors are connected not only by technological network, but by a comprehension of a specific cultural-making process, which involves sharing, empowerment and autonomy. Without the government's support on which

they could count on the past years, the need of making things by themselves is imposed. If the national picture is not favorable, local actions were potentialized by this knowledge network, and the crowdfunding, for example, appears as possibility for the continuity of their actions.

As a tool created for a public usage, the platform *culturadigital.br* still online and important debates about culture production, technological possibilities and government's relations are being conducted.

Thus, we see the opening of the way for a long discussion about democracy in the digital age. This is a scene still fresh and full of uncertainties, and the Brazilian experience here presented takes place in this bigger and more complex frame, in order to indicate a society perspective into public policies. For the researcher and former coordinator of Digital Culture within the Ministry of Culture, José Murilo,

the most creative people are never massed together in a single company, or government, or organization, or country. To open the processes of construction of public policies in the network, facilitating the collaboration of interested parties, an initiative is almost obvious in this new century. To promote innovation distributed in governance issues can qualify democracy and transform society. (Carvalho 2009)

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¹⁰<http://www.cartaaberta.org.br/?p=49>

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