

## A 'Digital Participatory Culture'

<http://eco-rama.net/2009/09/08/a-digital-participatory-culture/>

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**“Free software is a possibility that those kids will reinvent things that need to be reinvented.”**

Lula da Silva – [Speech at 10.FISL, POA, Jun/2009](#)

**Digital culture is a new, emergent term.** It has been used in different forms by different sectors, and incorporates different perspectives about the impact of digital technology and networking in society. The Ministry of Culture sees, as its role, the convening of a collective reflection on these broader perspectives, encouraging the participation of all stakeholders in an innovative process of collaborative construction of public policies for the digital sector.

The cheapening of the personal computer and cellular phone, combined with the rapid development of applications using free software and free services on the network, has promoted a radical democratization of access to new means of production and access to knowledge. The digitization of culture, combined with the global race to connect everything to everyone all the time, turns open networks at this moment in history into something too big, which now requires specific consideration.

A recent **debate** in the blogosphere about an article in Wired Magazine – **“The New Socialism,”** by Kevin Kelly – raised the issue of lack of appropriate terms to communicate the ongoing phenomena within the networks. Re-framing the term ‘socialism’ to refer to the innovative arrangements for sharing and collaboration typical of a collective connected by the Internet has generated controversy and has been challenged **strongly** by Lawrence Lessig, the American lawyer known for his activism in the debate over the revision of copyright laws.

Lessig argues that we are facing something entirely new, and that it is not appropriate to reuse terms loaded with former meanings to describe the current situation. His concern seems to be related to the typical American notion that establishes an inverse relationship between individual autonomy and state power — a notion that is also the essence of the classic contest between right and left. However, as Kelly argues, the so called ‘digital socialism’ (‘stateless socialism’?!) seems to host both classical libertarians who hate government in general, and the global political movements that are critical of excessive market logic.

Finally, there is a real lack of conceptual characterization for the phenomena encountered in digital culture. Yochai Benkler, reflecting creatively about the possibility of a political theory of the network, sees the emergence of social networks and peer production of an alternative to both the proprietary systems fundamental to the logic of the state and to the market. An innovative new cultural ‘operating system’ would be able to foster both creativity, productivity and freedom, while also satisfying the demands of both individuals and collectives. Benkler speaks of a ‘participatory culture’.

With the arrival of ubiquitous, instant and inexpensive collaboration tools, it is possible to promote opportunities for debate and a collective model where public decentralized coordination can create innovative solutions to the issues presented by the 21st century. The implementation of this technology in the digital network environment, coupled with the concept of ‘participatory culture’ of Benkler, creates the possibility of bridging policies that once seemed mutually exclusive, inviting open discussion by opposing interest groups that have specialized in fighting in the trenches.

## **The Forum for Brazilian Digital Culture**

In order to better understand the various parts that make up the mosaic of digital culture, to facilitate the public participation of those concerned with monitoring, and to assist the construction of public policies and regulatory frameworks that will format the sector, the Ministry of Culture is launching the Forum for Brazilian Digital Culture.

The process begins with the launch of the social network ‘culturadigital.br’, and the invitation of experts and networks of cultural activists to register and profile their digital identities and references (their blog, twitter, delicious, youtube, etc...) into the Forum. The environment was built to aggregate people and their socialstreams linked by the tag #culturadigitalbr, thus organizing and documenting their participation in the debate. Live presentational and virtual online events during the second half of 2009 will propel the discussion into the proposed five guiding themes: memory, communication, art, infrastructure and economy.

We have made several interviews with specialists, agency ministers, people from academia and artists, which turned into a book: culturadigital.br. The goal was to collect and provide initial inputs to warm up the debate, which will be consolidated at an international seminar to be held in November. Notably, the process of ‘Brazilian Digital Culture Forum’ will happen in parallel with major debates on regulatory frameworks and public policies that directly affect the landscape of digital culture.

The new draft copyright law which will be presented by the Ministry of Culture for public consultation and the cyber-crime law (Law azeredo) — to be voted on in the House — deals with structural issues for the governance of the digital environment. The national conferences of Culture and Communication coincidentally will also be going on, which makes the second semester of 2009 a special time for proposing, contemplating and debating visions of the future we want for the country.

The coordination of the ‘Brazilian Digital Culture Forum’ now is making available the ‘culturadigital.br’ network environment for all who wish to organize and document free conferences and/or other specific events related to these processes. We believe that the time is right to be motivated toward new ways to develop consensus and build proposals. MINC seeks to introduce into the prospect of digital culture the innovative elements that facilitate and promote greater engagement and more effective participation of interested citizens.

The most creative people are never all together in a single company or government or organization, or country. To open the processes of constructing public policies in the network, and facilitating the collaboration of stakeholders, is almost obvious as an initiative appropriate and necessary at the dawn of this century. Promoting innovation in processes and creating tools for distributed governance can refine democracy and transform society.

**This article** is foreword to the book ‘CulturaDigital.BR’,  
an edition that is part of the process of the  
[Brazilian Digital Culture Forum](#)