

EVENT REPORT

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

BRAZIL

GREGORY RYAN

MARIA CLARA MELLO

ALESSANDRA

SASSMANNSHAUSEN

Oktober 2013

www.kas.de/brasilien/en/

Virtual Democracy

HOW THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA GIVE RISE TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES

Since the invention of letterpress printing in the middle of the 15th century no paradigm shift has changed communication in such a lasting way as the invention of the internet. With the rapid spread of the network around the whole world also the dimension of the public sphere has been altered as it has been extended to the digital space. The new possibilities to rapidly spread news and opinions urge the structures of political participation to be redefined.

The debate has been opened by the presentation of Mr. Vinicius Braz, an activist of the P2P Foundation, who analyzed the structural transformation that nowadays is taking place on a global level facilitated by a new degree of connectivity – a phenomenon made possible during the last 20 years by means of the internet where the local turns global and the global turns local. A further analysis of the subject requires a historical dimension which is associated with a return to the origins of human life and acknowledging the collaborative habits as they have already been demonstrated by the hominids. Furthermore, every comprehension of the structure of the modern state and cities is based on a territorial approach, a local approach. He further argues that the educational system of the individual serves the education of the workforce as needed by the industry.

Mr. Braz further illustrates how the desire to settle down gave rise to the evolution of cities. Instead of continuing to live in symbiosis and interdependence with nature as other living beings men began to isolate from nature and to exploit it instead. Based on patriarchal/ matriarchal patterns social entities evolved which required the creation of administrative structures as a matter of the occurrence of shortages. Today's understanding of progress and civilization emanates from these social entities. He argues that there is a mutual consent today that social arrangements comprise dominators and dominated.

Our all perception of the reality is shaped based on the ideas of representation and mediation. Hierarchy is the fundament of the society we are living in today. The development of overarching social structure on the hand is accompanied by the evolution of empathy on the other hand. After having organized the life in groups and cities this process of representation and mediation in almost all social areas has become inevitable.

Democracy has been invented twice. The beginning has been made by the Greek model of democracy according to Pericles, followed by the model by Thomas Hobbes¹. According to Braz, we are witnessing today the third invention of democracy in whose development newly-created interpersonal networks and social media (Twitter, Facebook) take a decisive role.

He claims the citizens and not the cities/ the authorities to be the protagonists of this development. As an example, he refers to the occupation of many national chambers which according to his view is a demonstration of the direct, even liquid, democracy. He concludes

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

BRAZIL

GREGORY RYAN

MARIA CLARA MELLO

ALESSANDRA

SASSMANNSHAUSEN

Oktober 2013

www.kas.de/brasilien/en/

by saying that the recent movements are best described as social instead of political phenomena.

Subsequent to the analysis by Mr. Braz that took a macro perspective, Mr. Fabro Steibel, professor at the ESPM, continues by analysing the subject from a micro perspective with regard to the events that recently have been happening in the streets and in the government. He first remarks that he, being a researcher in political science, cannot say yet with certainty what has been happening on the streets and which were the decisive factors that led to its occurrence and that were crucial for it to arouse at that specific point in time.

It is possible that the demonstrations won't have an impact on politics due to a lack of means and mechanisms to reply to the claims of the people. For this reason, he suspects that this remarkable social movement that is taking place now will lead to an immense frustration on the part of both parties. In order to prevent this from happening there should be a person that is willing to listen and to engage in building bridges between both sides. When speaking of this intermediation process we should keep in mind that the general public is an essential receptor.

He points out that there exist three substantial impediments to the success of this process. First, only a few persons are online. Second, the community is controlled (the government will always want to have a say in it). And third, there is a multitude of networks, means and instruments an integrative common digital platform however does not exist yet.

With the protests the people have send a message; as well as the government did. An efficient way of communication between both parties however does not exist. The essential obstacle stems from the structural difference between the two groups. Whereas the government operates as an entirely formalized institution with pre-defined processes only slowly reacting to changes the community is organized as a network that is highly flexible and constantly in motion and subject to change. For that reason, the network is used to an instant implementation of its actions whereas every bureaucratic and legislative process takes time. As a consequence, it will be difficult for the two to collaborate in a satisfactory way.

Bearing in mind these aspects, Mr. Steibel supposes that there is still a long way to go until a solution to collaboration in legislative processes will be found. He refers to the example of "Marco civil", as a first (but still deficient) approach to performing an online consultation.

The third presenter Mr. Ricardo Weber, professor at IBMEC, points out that the occurrence of a movement of such a size appears to be contradictory given the positive economic situation in Brazil as expressed by an economical upswing and a redistribution of the social pyramid. As a possible explanation he refers to the only one-sided distribution of economic welfare from which the basis and the tip of the pyramid benefit whereas the middle class experiences stagnation already for several years. Furthermore, he diagnoses the emergence of a vacuum in the democratic process in Brazil due to an extinction of oppositional forces.

Mr. Weber argues that the movement itself is faceless and that the "black blocs" are increasingly assuming this position as they can be supposed to dominate and lead the movement. Given the lack of a clearly defined identity the demands and requirements of the movement remain very vague as well as the type of connection it has with the political parties. In Mr. Weber's opinion, the movement denies the existence of the political parties and insists on changes without offering any proposals themselves.

He perceives the violence happening on the streets as a spectacle. The attempt to achieve changes by means of violence is blundering. Consequently, he claims that this type of protests visible these days is antidemocratic as it refuses the democratic instruments that al-

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

BRAZIL

GREGORY RYAN

MARIA CLARA MELLO

ALESSANDRA

SASSMANNSHAUSEN

Oktober 2013

www.kas.de/brasilien/en/

ready exist. The manifestations which he perceives as some sort of entertainment rather than as a form of politics clearly illustrate the absence of politics. For that reason, he concludes that we need a modernization of the political parties instead of another movement.

In the end, Mr. Eduardo Murad, as well professor at IBMEC, presents his view on the subject. He asks whether the phenomenon happening on the streets right now can indeed be characterized as a movement or whether it is just an accumulation of smaller movements.

He states that there is a need to understand the logic of the media and how the different participants of the movement can achieve continuity. With regard to the question of the identity of the movement, he supposes that the specification of such an identity is still encumbered as the movement is still transforming. He concludes his discussion of social political movements by asking to which degree a Western capitalist society is capable of thinking collectively.

In the subsequent discussion, the questions posed by the audience and the corresponding responses by the presenters accentuate that essential aspects of this discussion focus on the practices by the Brazilian government, keeping in mind that Brazil is organized as a presidential democracy, and on the reactions by the protesters on these practices. There is an agreement that the major problems of the current Brazilian democracy can be summarized as corruption and the prevailing impression that the political authorities ignore the requests made by the public. The latter might be attributed to the fact that many actions taken by the protesters have been abandoned due to its shortcomings. For this reason, they simply appeared as an expression of a general discontentment with the government's actions and give the impression that a real desire to enter into dialogue does not exist.

¹ The western democracies is generally characterized as Hobbesian for two reasons: first of all in a modern democracy the sovereign power of Leviathan is represented by the state, featuring political authority and the capacity to reach all the areas of life of its citizens. Its authority is limited by the need to obey certain constitutional procedures and rules. Second, a particular characteristic of this type of democracy is that the sovereign power of the state is confided to a certain group which has been legitimized by the secret vote according to the rules of universal suffrage.