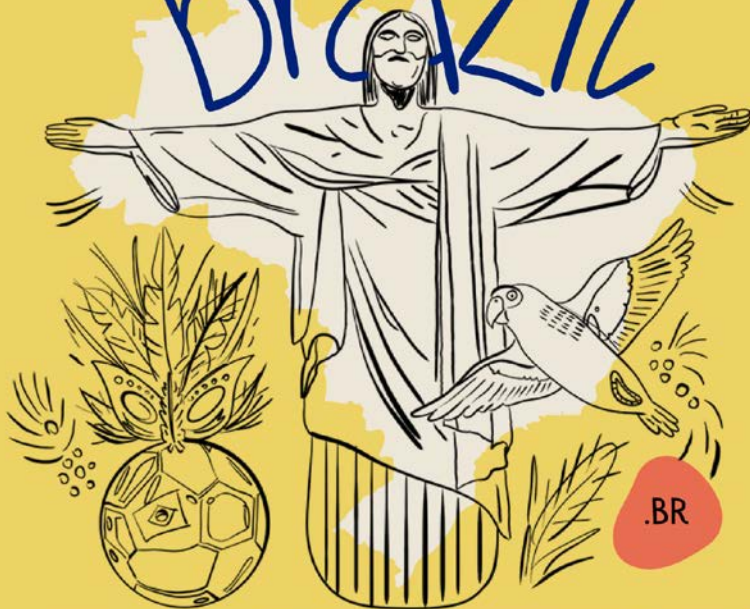




brazilil



HIGH PERFORMANCE NATIONAL
INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE CHALLENGE OF
SIMPLIFICATION

HIGH PERFORMANCE NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE CHALLENGE OF SIMPLIFICATION

Brazil's digital landscape showcases a rapid adoption of technology, notably in e-government initiatives like Gov.br. Challenges persist, including ensuring equitable digital inclusion and simplifying bureaucratic language. The nation consumes more digital content than it produces, particularly in the audiovisual realm. To foster equality, Brazil must spread digital advancements across governmental levels and prioritise language simplification.

Rodrigo Assumpção

.br

How would you describe digital trends in your country, especially concerning social impact digital ventures?

Brazil is a technophilic country, which sometimes can

be an advantage. We have a history of fast take up with new technologies, and e-government initiatives advance quickly. Today *Gov.br*, our service portal, is recognised as one of the largest use cases in the world, reaching 170 million people and providing access to over 5,000 government services that are constantly being improved. The main drivers are social security, labour, and social assistance. Applications relating to these public policies reach up to 70 million people/month.

However, this is happening more at the federal level; this reach is significantly lower at the state and municipal levels. Despite this heterogeneity, the government tries to be on par with the private sector, where digital services are usually quite advanced. There is less debate around first-level digital inclusion since connectivity is quite widespread, but the quality of use and interaction is still a big challenge. During the pandemic, it became apparent that many people were being left behind in the country's digital transformation process. In terms of social impact ventures, Brazil still has a tradition around inclusion and a robust environment. We need more networking and organising opportunities to strengthen these initiatives.

How would you describe the recent digital changes in your country?

My engagement with technology nearly 30 years ago, working with digital inclusion and organising community telecenters with access to computers and the internet in underprivileged areas. At the time, we struggled to access equipment and connectivity, and we tried to combine educational, communication, and entrepreneurship processes within this relationship with technology.

Nowadays, most of the population has some connectivity. There are differences in access speed, but it is mostly present. But we were naive then, thinking the connection would be enough and everything would come from that. That was certainly not

the case; the dynamics of communication, the information process and its integrity create huge obstacles. But even more obvious are the profound barriers of educational differences in preparation for a life mediated by these technologies. This became clear during the pandemic when it was necessary to adapt work and study, among other areas of life, to people's homes; this was only possible for a privileged few.

Factors such as socioeconomic differences and income distribution proved to be heavier and more brutal than anything else. Here's what's aggravating: the content, especially in government, does not use simple language but rather uses legal, bureaucratic languages that are obscure and pedantic and end up further excluding citizens. There is an imperative need to simplify the language of interaction between government and society. I see some hope for the use of AI in this task.

Describe and provide information about your country being democratic or the internet destroying democracy in your body politic.

Regarding the relationship between the internet and political action, it is worth remembering that the internet is a given fact, and it defines the context where communication processes happen today. There are many positive sides, such as the possibility of political engagement and participation in social discussion with numbers never seen before. However, it is also clear that this expansion of participation does not increase the average level of knowledge, critical capacity, and intelligence within the debate. It also incorporates the limitations, prejudices and knowledge gaps of a much larger portion of the population.

The intense use of technologies and the virtualisation of the world are destroying the enlightenment concept of "voices of authority". "Truth" and "reality" become fluid concepts; there is a widespread lack of understanding of these issues in academia, media, financial circles, and certainly, the government. The

very parameters of what is truth or fact are now open to debate. There is a multiplicity of “opinions” and, simultaneously, the possibility of sheltering in bubbles that isolate dissonant voices.

Many of the consensus, ideas and possibilities for political and social negotiation need to be redefined. Without “truths” or old-fashioned argumentation, there are different conflicts and interests that clash. This terrifies the Western world created under the aegis of the enlightenment, of “right” and “wrong”. When the limits of the traditional ways of debating are broken, there is no longer space for political negotiation, with known conflicts worsening and new and even more complex conflicts arising. This explains a lot about the times we live in.

Digital tools are considered empowering. Can you describe which sector in your country has been helped most by digital?

My perspective comes from my work with governments and public institutions. When I think about digital tools, I see Brazil has been consolidating and building a national data infrastructure for decades.

This was proven highly important during the pandemic, where six days after the law was enacted, Brazil paid more than 11 million emergency benefits. There were decades of data collection behind this, and more than 68 million benefits were paid in the following three months. We managed to qualify a huge amount of self-registration applications and determine that 36 million people who were not previously registered and needed this assistance met the eligibility criteria.

The consolidation of these wide-ranging and diverse databases is the modern infrastructure that allows the execution of public policies. There is no longer any possibility of a government without public digital infrastructure. In Brazil, when social policies target the population most in need, it is through the consolidation of these databases. The possibility of abuse always

exists in any technology or even in any human endeavour. The constant political struggle to avoid abuse and misuse of technologies is the price we must pay for these advances. There is no other path.

What are the biggest challenges in your country in terms of digital transformation?

Brazil's main challenges in terms of digital transformation, at least from an e-government perspective, are spreading the advances across different governmental levels and simplifying language to overcome cognitive barriers. Some of the homework has been done on the federal level. However, spreading this transformation to the state, especially the municipal level, is still daunting.

However, even at the federal level, all the content was developed using exclusionary language. This challenge is more complex. This is not about different languages. We are fortunate to be unified in those terms; practically, the whole country speaks Portuguese. This is about the heavy use of excluding bureaucratic jargon in government e-services, which is one of the main cognitive barriers to transparency, participation, and citizenship. So, simplifying the language used is crucial. Of course, like most countries, we also need more investment and technologies that reach persons with disabilities.

Does your country consume digital content more than it produces, or vice versa?

We consume more digital products than we produce, especially in the audiovisual area, especially from North American culture. We are very much within Western culture and values, with all the positive and negative aspects this entails. Transparency and data protection laws are in place, and their use and adoption are expanding fast. Media is mostly under corporate control and culture wars; fake news and the integrity of information are very hot topics here and everywhere.

Can you recommend how your country should make digital policies an equaliser?

We are moving fast to consolidate the national data infrastructure. Hopefully, this will start a good social conversation around the availability of government data as a platform for socioeconomic development. The use of AI to simplify language is one of the advances I hope to see implemented soon.

Rodrigo Assumpção, WSA24 Grand Juror and Board of Directors Member;
President of DATAPREV of Brazil, Brasilia

Rodrigo Assumpção is the president of Dataprev, an IT company focused on the social area of the Government of Brazil, since December 2008. Previously, he held the post of Deputy Secretary of Logistics and Information Technology in the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management of the Brazilian government, for which he was appointed in 2003. Ahead of Data Prev, he received the Professional Award for Information Technology for three consecutive years, which was granted by the Editorial Forum. He was the director at the Florestan Fernandes Institute and at Sampa.org, NGOs located in Sao Paulo; an educator at Cajamar Institute; and the E-government coordinator of the Municipality of Santo Andre in the Metropolitan Region of Sao Paulo. He holds a degree in History and a master's degree in communication sciences from the University of Sao Paulo (USP), with a dissertation on digital division.