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# cultura digital e hacktivism: um caminho para participação cidadã

## digital culture and hacktivism: a path for citizen participation

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**Bernardo Gutiérrez** is a Journalist, a writer, and a researcher on technopolitics, free culture, social movements, participation and politics. Born in Spain and naturalized Brazilian, his work is focused on the analysis of socioeconomica phenomena, especially social movements that have taken place since 2010 in Europe, the United States and Latin America. He was editor-in-chief of the Spanish newspaper Público and published articles in different newspapers such as El País, La Vanguardia, Eldiario, Al Jazeera, Clarín, Der Tagesspiegel and National Geographic. He was responsible for MediaLab Prado's communication and social networks in Madrid from 2016 to 2019.

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INTERVIEW HELD ON FEBRUARY 1ST, 2019

Living in Brazil, Bernardo covered the five elections of the PT cycle (from 2002 to 2016). Coordinated the Wikipiraça project by inserting citizen participation practices in territorial and digital spheres. Bernardo published about this subject in the Carpet section of V!RUS journal. In the journal's 10th issue, >DIY//DO IT YOURSELF!+, his article reports an experience of using the collaborative concept of wiki in the requalification of a square and the social relations it involves. In 2010, he launched the book *Calle Amazonas: de Manaus a Belém por el Brazil olvidado*, at the Spanish publisher Altaïr. In his last book, *Pasado Mañana* (Arpa Editores, 2017), Bernardo portrays the changing processes that the city of Madrid has undergone and makes a projection of a future based on the subjects discussed in each chapter, such as the formation of political parties, city in common, participation, among others.

Currently, his researches are focused on the identity issue, of which narratives and imagery we have to create to operate in the current political and social situation. He is currently preparing his PhD project, with an interest in researching the construction of narratives and political imaginaries during the period of global protests (2011 to 2015). He is also preparing a book with articles he wrote about the protests of June 2013 and will be published in Portuguese.

In our conversation, on a winter afternoon in Madrid, Bernardo spoke mainly about 15-M in Spain, possible political articulations and how we, citizens, can organize and resist to the oppressive political project we are

facing. In addition to his professional experience, Bernardo is a restless activist, an outraged fellow who seeks collective actions for other ways to hack the system.

**Juliana Trujillo** Bernardo, I would like to start this conversation talking about the 15-M, from the perspective of someone who was involved with the movement and, at the same time, accompanied it from far due to your work in Brazil. How was your trajectory during this period?

**Bernardo Gutiérrez** During the whole pre-15-M movement, I was in Madrid, but a few weeks before the occupation of the Puerta del Sol Square I was arriving in Sao Paulo, and stayed working there for six years. But this movement touched me a lot because I knew what was happening here, I was already a part of some of the collectives that had been organized through social media. Soon I realized that something very important was happening, and I got quickly involved. I came to Madrid in June of 2011, during the removal of the square camp, and got engaged thereafter to various activities within the 15-M movement. On my return to Sao Paulo, I also took part in the 15-O (15 October) global commission, one of the largest events in the world, and traveled to New York, Mexico, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, and back to Madrid twice a year for significant events. I also got very involved in the Take the Square movement, a 15-M global movement. The group I was a part of has been in charge for the maintenance of social media, Twitter, online platforms, and handbooks like How to occupy.

As an independent journalist, I lived between Brazil, Latin America and Spain at that time. I was a correspondent for several major newspapers, such as La Vanguardia, El Mundo, and later the Spanish Público, which appeared in 2008, and to whom I dedicated myself entirely. Even involved with this newspaper, I kept writing books, projects, actions like *Wikipraça*, and gave lectures and consultancies. Later, I wrote for the Eldiario.es, which was a newly created newspaper, from the new Spanish left wing. It knew a huge expansion, and has today a fairly large distribution. Since I started writing, I have always been involved with social movements and digital culture, hacker culture and discussions about copyleft. When I lived in Brazil, I covered the entire Lula period, the World Social Forum cycle in Porto Alegre, and the Latin American progressist cycle.

In the year of the 15-M, the development of the digital world was very intense in Spain, it was viral. Every movement had a logic of hacker culture and free platforms, and the most interesting is that they involved people of different profiles, from adolescents to retired ladies. So this culture got expanded into a mass culture, and brought me closer to the logic of the common, the openness, the collaborative, the multitude, and the collective.

After the 15-M, I carried a research on technopolitics in Latin America, funded by OXFAM London and coordinated by OXFAM Latin America in Mexico. For one year and a half I could dedicate myself full time to the research, travelling and making interviews. The results of this work was publicized in the report "New dynamics of communication, action and social organization in Latin America", which deals with the global wave of uprisings initiated by the Arab Spring, 15-M, and Occupy Wall Street, in 2011. They have changed the logic of historical social struggles in Latin America. The #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico (2012), #VemPraRua in Brasil (2013) and #JusticiaYa de Guatemala (2015), among other protests developed through the net, have displaced traditional social actors, making visible another type of citizen organization, and dialoguing with the new "outraged" movements of the world.

This mapping of the new communication dynamics was altered by emerging processes resulting from the use of digital social networks and territorial collaborative practices. This helped me to try to understand the differences between more traditional movements and those which were arising.

**JT** What deployments post-15M would you highlight?

**BG** First of all, the rising of new organizational forms. After the 15-M, a part of the civil society started leaving organizations with rigid vertical structures, and moved towards more opened places, with other ways of holding assemblies, new forms of documenting discussions - with texts and filming, streaming, transparency -, which used to make available digital documents created at these meetings. All of this derived very much from this movement. And if it affected civil society, on the one hand, later it also reached institutions and the municipal wave. That is, the way people started organizing themselves provided a much wider communication process. What was once a discussion into small ghettos, such as the hackers', began to reach more people.

It also helped to develop new forms and articulations of political structures. The creation of citizen platforms (*Ahora Madrid, Ganemos Madrid, Barcelona Común*) connected to political parties (Podemos, EQUO, Pum+J), was strengthened for the election process. This happened on a local level, with connections to the territory, which was for me its most interesting aspect, the closest to the 15-M. Two years later, the movement got

stronger and fostered other movements, such as *Maré da Cultura* and *Maré Verde*, this latter on the education field. I point out, for example, the *Maré Branca* movement, that manifested in defense of public health and managed to stop the privatization process of hospitals in Spain, which was an attempt led by the government. Such movements went beyond trade unions. They brought together the doctor, the nurse, the patient, unionists and militants of parties with no flag, on the same side. All together under the same demands. It was very powerful. And after the Maré's wave, municipalism arrived, which, for me, is also connected to the 15-M.

Here in Spain, at that time, people conscientiously protested against the elite, the financial capital, the capitalist system. This is something that never happened in Brazil, in June 2013. That is to say, the early years of the Brazilian demonstrations were very interesting because they brought to the fore the discussion on the right to the city, such as the Augusta Park movement, in São Paulo, the #OcupeoCocó in Fortaleza, and the Occupy in Rio de Janeiro. But I think that, somehow, these movements were disconnected from each other, they were fighting for specific issues of their cities. In Spain there was a unified claim, 90% of the country's population was very conscious that the general crisis was due to that of the banks.

Such understanding came from a narrative built mainly by the *Podemos* party through slogans, texts, videos, documentaries, protests and events of great social impact, and inscribed such discussions on the media agenda. *Podemos* worked on a feeling that became a mass feeling in Spain. For me, the greatest newness of *Podemos* in those two years was this narrative, language and discourse. This political party still reproduces old structures: it is very vertical, and has no horizontality at all. It is a bit the old left wing but with a different imaginary and representational color. That was very clever.

It is quite clear that the 15-M marked a different era, but from what we are experiencing now, we realize how strong the system is, the elite, the banks, and the right wing that changes its own appearance and reinvents itself.

**JT** Could you speak a bit about the citizen participation culture in Spain?

**BG** We can not forget history. The assembly format, which in other countries may be a recent organization for discussion, has existed here in Spain from centuries ago. This format is not only used by political parties, especially the leftists, but it is also strongly and often used by community organizations. The notion of the common is also very strong in Spanish society. The forests of Galicia in northern Spain, for instance, have preservation councils that have been existing for a thousand years. Just as the Valencia Water Tribunal, which is considered to be the oldest legal institution in Europe, and was created to solve conflicts related to the use and harnessing of water by farmers. Given its importance, it was declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009.

In 1854, shortly before the fall of the First Republic, the Political Boards that ruled the city of Madrid were organized through assemblies. In that year, there was a great protest, like the 15-M, in which the Southern Board did not recognize the government indicated by the monarchy, and Madrid kept on with self-government. A coincidence or not, the South Board is today the district of Lavapiés, a neighborhood where the notion of community is largely accepted. In Lavapiés, there are many collectives that manage the neighborhood's public spaces, meeting points for debates, cultural spaces and occupations such as *Esta es una plaza*, *Centro Social Autogestionado La Tabacalera*, *La Casa Encendida* and the *Biblioteca de Las Escuelas Pías*. The anarchist wave came over in the Second Republic and, by 1936, there was a very significant popular front, represented by anarchist male and female ministers. So Spain holds this legacy. Such collective notion has not been built recently, the community spirit has been cultivated since long time ago.

Regarding citizen participation in the 15-M, it was not a one-way movement. It is not possible to analyze it from a clear, linear logic. Participation came from several places. There was a moment in which several discussions occurred related to digital networks, emphasizing the actions of hackers. Here in Spain, they are connected to self-management and occupations, which is a peculiarity of our country and Italy. This can not be found in all European or Latin American countries. People who were involved in social centers and at the same time in hacktivism played a central role in the occupation of Puerta del Sol Square. The hacker hub of the movement had the idea of having a server, an open access blog, to schedule assemblies, putting in place a decentralized and distributed organization, and creating digital platforms for communication and transparency.

Therefore, the spontaneity of a younger generation, which in Spain is a very digital and networked generation, added to the hacker culture and the public space appropriation by the community, contributed to strengthen people's union against privatization and other neoliberal issues.

It is also interesting to see that, at that moment, the hacker community launched the platforms Propongo and Toma la Plaza. This community that have already been developing a methodology for organizing assemblies, through presencial and digital means, therefore hybrid, also decided to create online platforms for political

proposals, for open voting. These platforms intention is at the base of the creation of Decide.Madrid. After the 15-M, many people which were involved in the movement shifted to work on basically three fronts: as facilitators and mediators of collective processes, with face-to-face methodologies, as consultants of digital technology applied to citizen participation, or they went towards the areas of Architecture and Urbanism and the right to the city.

**JT** You have published in 2015 your research on technopolitics in Latin America. How do you perceive the culture of citizen participation and socio-political articulation through digital technologies, particularly in Brazil?

**BG** Well, I hold dual citizenship, I am Spanish and I got naturalized as a Brazilian, so I feel very close and at ease to speak about that. I see, on the one hand, that Brazil has a very strong and powerful community culture, for example, in relation to indigenous or Afro-descendant cultures, women's movements and the task force. The Lulista cycle was also very important for the implementation of the Points of Culture, for the support of free culture and the collectives. Many people around me, mostly young people, grew up in Points of Culture as well as within the hacking and free software cultures. The main difference for me is that in Brazil and Latin America much of the political innovation comes from the government, i.e. from a leadership that tries to implement public policies. Here in Spain such initiative often arose much more from the civil society, through self-management. So in Brazil, civil society experienced a moment of awakening, which was strengthened by institutional actions through public policy projects. Those actions formed a generation that has been awakened to the notion of collective work, and appreciation of minority cultures.

On the other hand, at the protests by June 2013, I realized that some structured and better articulated groups like political parties and nongovernmental organizations faced great difficulty. They hardly understood this new kind of organization, a more spontaneous one, with no leadership.

After 2013, I think there was an attempt to integrate different groups, but after a while, divergences became more evident. Brazil is a very complex, multicultural country, and a large territory. It is not simple to articulate debates and reach a general consensus overthere. There was an attempt to organize political collectives through networks, but then there was old disputes between states, such as Rio de Janeiro e Sao Paulo, or cultural differences between the Northeast and Southeast regions, so people failed to overcome these distinctions. On the other hand, the rightists built better articulations, and managed to arrive to the point they are today.

In 2014, we organized a book called "*Junho: potência das ruas e das redes*" (Alana Moraes, Bernardo Gutiérrez, Henrique Parra, Hugo Albuquerque, Jean Tible and Salvador Schavelzon), published by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation, which presents the origins and manifestations' continuities of June 2013 in eleven Brazilian capital cities. Many collectives already existed before that time, have grown after the demonstrations, and many others have taken shape from then.

Therefore, we can not say that everything went wrong. In micropolitics - for example, the feminist movement, #elenão and cooperative practices - there is still a possible basis to follow, albeit in the long run. New generations became very politicized from June 2013. When I visited in Sao Paulo the first high school occupied by students, I understood that it was a legacy from the June protests. I also noticed a shift related to intolerance against the LGBTQI+ community. Some studies indicate that about 70% of Brazilian residents support gay marriage. In these new generations I have hope.

**JT** There is a great diversity of online platforms for citizen participation today that broaden legal, already established instruments. The Decide.Madrid platform is a good example. Do you think these platforms can be a locus of resistance facing top-down decision-making processes? What role does MediaLab Prado play in relation to this platform?

**BG** I think every collective is a way to resist against the neoliberal system, which is based on individuals competing against other individuals. Digital platforms if used in an isolated way, that is, not connected to a territory, or without countervailing mechanisms, are not strong enough to articulate resistances. But because you have collective behavior within these platforms, you have the potential to create community, and arise new organizational forms.

Here at MediaLab Prado Madrid, the ParticipaLab (Laboratory of Collective Intelligence for Democratic Participation) produced a study about the Decide.Madrid platform's data and mapped the most important issues for people who actively engaged in the platform. We found out that a topic which raised lively discussion dealt with childhood and public space, and new educational possibilities. After this study, we contacted participants, parents, schools, and day care centers, and we created a group to establish a

communication among them. So we were able to build an affective community engaged in the debate about childhood and the city.

We organized afterwards an event to gather this community here at MediaLab Prado. The debate which had happened only in the digital sphere moved to a presential one, and have grown since then. From that meeting, two products were created: the document *Derecho a Jugar*, which included ten points about children's rights to the city, and a proposal that was included in the Decide.Madrid platform. This proposal has received 12,000 votes so far on the platform. It will be discussed by the government and will most likely be approved before May 2019. Other proposals have also found a place on the agenda, such as changes on children's play centers, other types of open kindergartens, and spaces for free play. It will carry a change to the 129 districts of the city, and it has emerged from digital mapping strengthened by face-to-face meetings. So I think digital platforms can contribute a lot. The case of the Decide.Madrid platform is very much connected to local forums and councils that were created by districts, where face-to-face meetings are held. In the voting period of participatory budget within the platform, there are many face-to-face meetings in those spaces. A concrete space was created allowing articulated associations or any citizen to attend and participate.

On the other hand, I think that a direct democracy made only by digital platform is not enough, because this is a different subjective moment. The idea of collaboration and collective decision-making does not stand alone, as some non-negotiable criteria, such as human rights issues, could not be addressed remotely. This is a very delicate topic. The MediaLab Prado is undoubtedly a reference in the city of Madrid, it is a meeting point for the civil society, social movements, students, institutions and groups that attend it on a weekly basis. Nowadays, the laboratory has more institutional support and coordinates some social innovation projects of the city of Madrid, whose majority focuses on public policies.

**JT** Bernardo, here is a last question: does the future look promising for you?

**BG** I wrote my book *Pasado Mañana* two years ago. It starts at the 15-M and covers until the time of municipalism, when Podemos still expected to win the pools for the country's government. But things change very quickly. I feel a little sorry for the political quarrels within the Podemos party, which are visible publicly. There is also the surprise of this new ultra right trend. Still, I do not think the political cycle of squares occupations and the 15-M is over, either in Spain or in the world. We must see everything from a more distanced perspective because everything is still very confusing. I still believe that this ultra rightist moment is temporary. I believe it will last for 3 to 5 years until another uprising comes. Let's try to be optimistic.

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