Match Político

Descubra quem dá voz à sua opinião

Political Match

Find who voices your opinion

Clara Cristina de Souza Rêgo

Anhalt University of Applied Sciences
Department of Design – Master of Arts in Integrated Design
Prof. Hermann Klöckner and Prof. Rochus Hartmann

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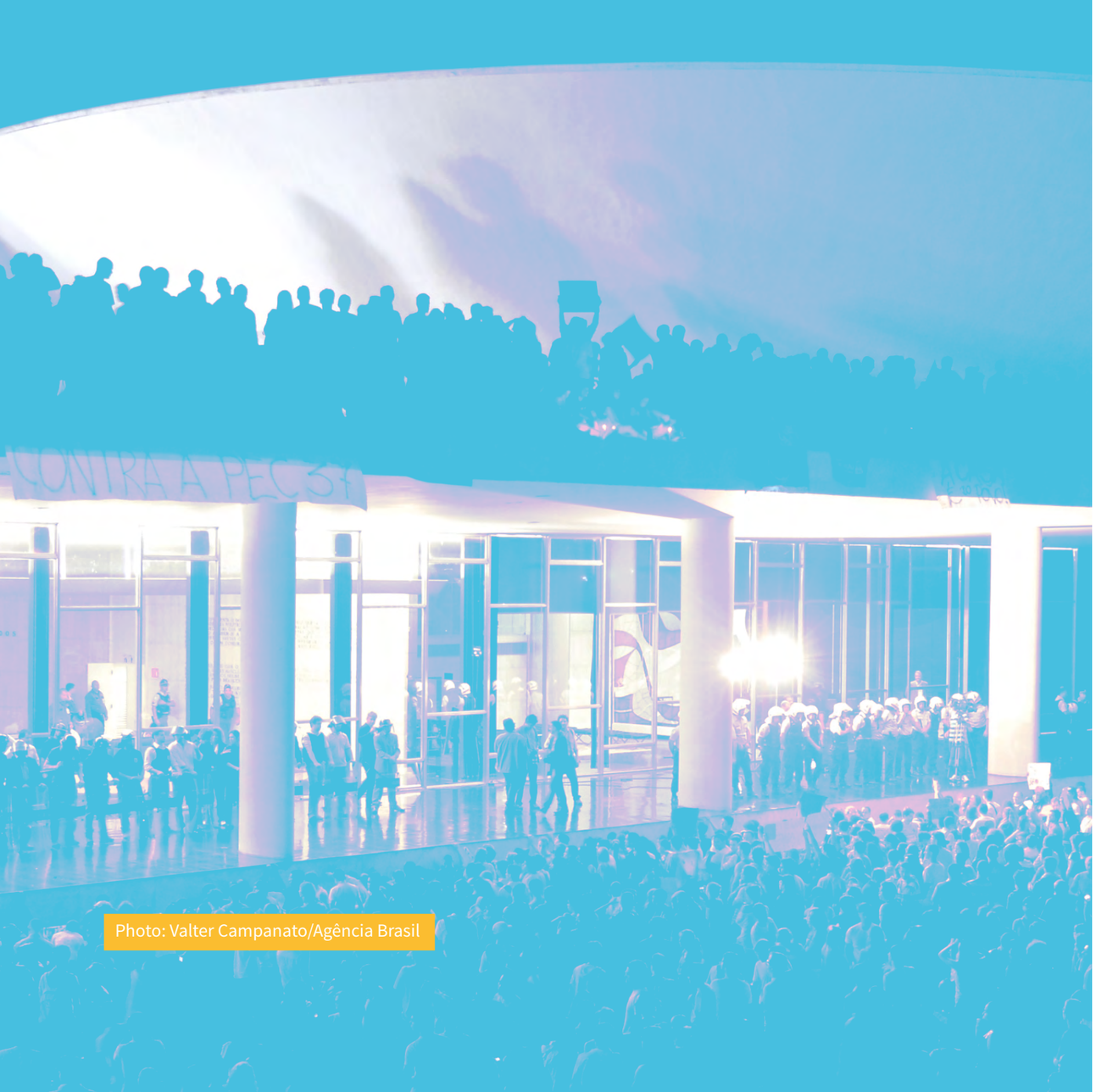
Dessau, Germany – 2017

Democracy must not be a spectator sport.

Anthony D. Romero



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Abstract

The current political landscape in Brazil is highly compromised. Due to major political scandals, unveiled in the recent past, and intrinsic corruption in the political class, concerns about the future of the Brazilian political system increased. On this note, this project explores how design can engage with politics as a civic act, in order to collaborate in changing the current reality.

In a representative democracy, the citizens should be informed about what happens in the government. In the current setting, however, accessing this information is complicated. This project was built upon the opportunity of providing people with a simplified way to discover how much affinity they have with their representatives, and at the same time inform themselves about what politicians are doing in office.

The ultimate goal is that, by offering fact-based and accessible information, people would strengthen their knowledge foundation, and this would enable them to make better informed political decisions, impacting the country's political landscape.

Keywords: democracy, civic engagement, digital service, information visualization

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muito obrigada!

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Not a day goes by that I don't think
of my beloved grandmother Hildete
and my beloved uncle Cassemiro.

I dedicate this achievement to them.

Preface

personal motivation

Growing up in the capital of Brazil, Brasília, politics was part of my daily life since I was a child. In my city, there are elections every four years and my family used to work for politicians and political parties to promote their candidates during this period. Among other tasks, they organized election parades, motorcade processions, rallies, marches; all to support their candidates and advertise in their name.

Although there was no direct payment in exchange for this work, the people involved often did so in order to receive a commissioned job in the government, in case their politician was elected. I have seen my family engaged in this activity across four elections. I have also seen how heated the discussions between two parts of my family were, because they supported different parties.

Back when I was four, I didn't understand much of what politics was about.. However, seeing my family work so hard for an uncertain 'reward', the heated – and often ugly – discussions between my family members, and the amount of times I heard people complaining about how untrustworthy and careless with their promises politicians are, generated negative associations in my head regarding politics.

These negative associations were brought to surface every time someone started a political discussion later on. This innate negative feeling discouraged me to get involved in the topic. I did not want to be played by political promises, and I also wanted to avoid the kind of conflict that was able to tear close relatives apart. I did not know how to engage with politics, let alone learn how to have a constructive political argument with someone.

Against this backdrop, I grew less and less interested in politics. In the past, I voted for politicians without making a critical analysis of their ideologies and proposals, because I didn't have an ideology myself, and didn't believe that they would do anything to benefit society. I voted for politicians just because a friend said they were cool, or invalidated my vote because I didn't want to have anything to do with the next corrupt individuals that would fill the seats in the congress.

Fast-forwarding a couple of years, I moved to Germany in 2016 to take part in the Master of Arts in Integrated Design program, at the Anhalt University of Applied Sciences. Since my arrival, I was instantly put in contact with cultural and political information of at least twelve countries. The exchange was intense, and made me realize how little involved with the politics from my own country I was, and how little could I tell my new friends about it.

I felt I needed to read more, to understand more, to follow what was going on, even from a distance. Underscoring this feeling, some major political events happened worldwide and they made me fear about the near future. In this setting, a person has two options: ignore what is going on and hope for the best, or take action and try to make a contribution. I decided to take action. The moment, in which I would intentionally lower my 'anti-politics' barrier and would expose myself to as much content on the topic as possible, finally arrived. This book is the documentation of this process, what I learned throughout and my contribution in the collective discussion on politics today.

1. Introduction

the starting point

From passive observation, scrolling up, down and eventually touching some buttons, it is possible to observe – and feel – a shift in the relationship between population and government. It is even possible to perceive change in the relationship among different groups within the same population, the same culture.

Tangible results of this shift can be seen in several scenarios. By instance, the deep partition between left and right wing supporters in Brazil, which resulted in a temporary wall installed in the heart of its capital in April 2016 to avoid physical conflict between demonstrators[1]. A few months later, the world witnessed an unbelievable plot twist as the result of the elections in the United States came out, introducing Donald Trump as its new president. The world also watched the British voting in favor of the Brexit. The first female Brazilian president being impeached, and the list goes on.

Disruptive technologies and its side effects, aligned with poor political education and engagement, are putting democracies at stake. People are locked in their social bubbles[2], reading and listening to like-minded content in their comfortable echo chambers[3],

1 Watts, J. (2017). *Brazil's 'impeachment wall' may be new but divisions have always been there.* [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/12/brazil-impeachment-wall-dilma-rousseff-vote [Accessed 14 Jun. 2017].

2 Hess, A. (2017). *How to Escape Your Political Bubble for a Clearer View.* [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/03/arts/the-battle-over-your-political-bubble.html [Accessed 4 May 2017].

3 (Ibid.)

being influenced by fake news[1] so well crafted that the unsuspecting ones would easily end up liking and sharing this kind of content. This creates a chain effect that floods the online world with information that is causing more harm than good.

An experiment performed in the United States by the company Cappra Data Science erased the online lives of 30 people, restarting their profiles in all of their social media accounts. The person who took longest used 48 hours to be back in the same bubble they found themselves into before the experiment started. As a conclusion, Cappra says that one of the causes of online bubbles is not necessarily only the algorithm running in social networks, but people too. The algorithm only learns from what it's fed, so if the person constantly unfollows, unfriends or dislikes content, it will stop offering this kind of content[2].

The patterns found in past events make people fear for the future, with the arise of conservative forces that spoke directly with the part of the population who felt forgotten by its representatives. "Democracy itself appears to be unraveling – helped along by resurgent authoritarianism, weakened liberal democratic values,

1 Hunt, E. (2017). *What is fake news? How to spot it and what you can do to stop it.* [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/dec/18/what-is-fake-news-pizzagate [Accessed 15 Jun. 2017].

2 Cappra, R. (2017). *CPBSB1 - 15/06 - Palco Principal - Dia 2.* [online] YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE62X6NjyHg&feature=youtu.be&t=9h33m54s [Accessed 16 Jun. 2017].

rising populism, and contagious illiberalism" (Carothers and Youngs, 2017). These events put at stake democracy the way society knows it, and calls people to action.

The aforementioned situation can be seen in many different countries, including Brazil. Undoubtedly each country will have their own specificities, but the overall issue is present, in lower or higher intensity. For the development of this project, Brazil is the chosen political landscape into which you are invited to dive, discover and reflect upon.

1.1 Current political landscape

In Brazil, the political scenario was ever hardly close to ideal and it has gotten worse over the past few years, as several acts of corruption were revealed and brought to people's attention. Operation Car Wash[1] unveiled a corruption scandal involving the state-controlled oil company called Petrobras[2], unleashed a domino effect

1 Watts, J. (2017). *Operation Car Wash: The biggest corruption scandal ever?.* [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/01/brazil-operation-car-wash-is-this-the-biggest-corruption-scandal-in-history [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

2 Segal, D. (2017). *Petrobras Oil Scandal Leaves Brazilians Lamenting a Lost Dream.* [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/09/business/international/effects-of-petrobras-scandal-leave-brazilians-lamenting-a-lost-dream.html [Accessed 1 Jun. 2017].

Protesters divided by a provisory wall in Brasília, Brazil.
Picture: Juca Varella/Agência Brasil

in the Brazilian politics. The series of events that followed got the first female president Dilma Rousseff[1] impeached, transferring the most powerful position in the country to Michel Temer, the former vice president. His first months in the presidency were notable for his support to utterly unpopular reforms – which dragged his never-high popularity to single digits. The overall disapproval Temer was – and still is – facing, in the eyes of the population and the media, was aggravated by the recent outcome of an investigation that revealed audio records of him encouraging the payment of hush money[2]. This revelation plunged even further the country's economy and provoked instantaneous protests across the country, demanding Temer to resign[3].

One could say at this point that it is understandable the aversion many Brazilians have when the topic is politics. It seems irreversibly corrupt,

1 BBC News. (2017). *Dilma Rousseff impeachment: How did it go wrong for her?* - BBC News. [online] Available at: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36028247 [Accessed 1 Jun. 2017].

2 Forbes.com. (2017). *Brazil President Caught On Tape Discussing Hush Money, Plunging Country Into Deep Political Crisis.* [online] Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/shannonsims/2017/05/18/brazil-president-caught-on-tape-discussing-hush-money-plunging-country-into-deep-political-crisis [Accessed 21 Jun. 2017].

3 Flora Charner, C. (2017). *Artists and activists call for Brazilian President to resign.* [online] CNN. Available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/28/americas/brazil-temer-protests/ [Accessed 1 Jun. 2017].

slow, complicated, inefficient, and more often than not, the citizens are left with the feeling that they are being cheated by their politicians at all times. During an interview conducted for the development of this project, Reginaldo Veras, a Brazilian politician who was elected in 2014 and is now in office, was asked how does he think the population pictures him, and his answer was "In the popular conception, every politician is a thief, every politician enters into political life to guarantee his personal interests or of corporations, and the politician does not work."

One of the side effects of political disbelief is that people slowly stop discussing it. Any kind of political engagement is perceived as a waste of time and energy. Contributing to the lack of interest is the nature of political discussions, which often ends up in heated arguments, name-calling, hard feelings, and no constructive legacy. Ezra Klein at Vox Magazine voices what many people think by saying that "Anyone who has ever found themselves in an angry argument with their political or social circle will know how threatening it feels. For a lot of people, being 'right' just isn't worth picking a bitter fight with the people they care about."

In the recent past it was common to see people shutting down any kind of political discussion, which is understandable given that many have fragile information foundation leading the discussions to be based on feelings and opinions instead of facts. Another factor that contributes is that many have no idea on how to handle this kind of conversation. As Suzanne Mettler says, people "should not fear conflict but rather embrace it: handled properly, it permits the best ideas to win out" (Mettler, 2017). Through this constructive collaboration is that other aspects of the problem and the solution will be brought to light.

Brazil has reached the point in which corruption seems to be deeply rooted in its politics and politicians. In recent years, corruption schemes are being exposed often, very publicly and in detail. This way, even the not-so-engaged percentage of the population can have a picture of the extent and severity of the problem, since technology enables information to arrive to everyone at the same time, instead of kept concealed in the highest levels of societal hierarchy[1]. This fact makes people who normally don't engage with politics become more open to possible involvement, as the political crisis is increasingly affecting the personal lives of citizens in a tangible manner.

Politics is a very broad topic, and can make one's head spin just by thinking of all the problems it faces. Just imagine trying to solve them alone. There are several variables to be considered, which are often entangled to other problems, and it is very complicated to really solve them, but it's possible to implement incremental actions in order to mitigate the issue over the course of time.

The overall feeling that a position, a vote won't change anything is widespread across the population. However, voting and accessing quality information are some of the most powerful acts for political change. In this context, how could design be combined with politics in order to provide people with online resources that could catalyze their engagement with the political landscape, laying foundation to more educated vote in the Brazilian general elections of 2018?

1 Cappra, R. (2017). *CPBSB1 - 15/06 - Palco Principal - Dia 2.* [online] YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE62X6NjyHg&feature=youtu.be&t=9h33m54s [Accessed 16 Jun. 2017].

1.2 Problem Investigation: understanding the challenge

In Brazil, great part of the population grew up associating negative adjectives to politics. This fact wires the brain to avoid the topic, to change the subject, to dodge discussions. By distancing themselves from politics, it is possible that people started understanding less and less of how it works, and what is going on in the Congress. The lack of pressing demand for accountability, inexistent effective evaluation of the performance of politicians, as well as the absence of effective legal punishment for all those who committed corruption crimes; put the political class in a very comfortable position.

After following the events in the political scene from varied news sources, both Brazilian and international, some patterns appeared, and could possibly be listed as problems Brazil is facing. Some of the observed issues are: intrinsic corruption, low political engagement from society, poor political education across the country, disbelief in the political system and its politicians. An aggravating factor is the common disregard of electorate for the past acts of politicians, resulting in re-elections of candidates with dirty political history. However this is not only the electorate's fault. The way the systems works, which allows this kind of candidate to run for political positions, contributes to this problem by oftentimes leaving the electorate with no better option to choose from.

People have access to the mass media channels and consume politics-related news, among others. However, these channels frequently publish facts placing the politician or party they support in a better light, and even omitting some of the facts in order to accomplish so. Meanwhile, alternative news channel arise and earn people's trust by offering another side of the story. Since these channels are not consolidated as the others, and don't have such reputation to care for, so they play with facts, offering alternative news that possibly won't be true all the time, but surely will defend their political point of view – and the view of hundreds of thousands who follow them.

Together with this issue, is the fact that people usually don't learn enough about politics. At some point in school everyone reads about democracy and the type of democracy existing in Brazil. However, as the years go by, the details of the system, and how the congress works become nothing more than a blurred memory. The lack of understanding – and possibly even interest – makes it very complicated to keep the politicians accountable. Nevertheless, due to the current critical political situation in Brazil, people are regaining interest. Not because politics has become so attractive that everyone wants to have a say in it, but because it has become so crucial, that people must step up and get involved.

These times in which information is as accessible as it is untrustworthy, it's imperative that people have access to the facts. This project investigates if citizens will feel encouraged and empowered to engage in political discussions, when provided with political information in an accessible, unbiased and visual manner.

The problem tackled surrounds the fact that people in Brazil have low access to factual unbiased information designed for the regular citizen to understand. Also, it is not a habit – yet – to demand accountability from politicians, mainly because people don't have a clear picture of what they are doing, and what can be done if the politicians underperform. Lastly, it is to be challenged the shortcut people take when positioning themselves in the political landscape. They should no longer blindly follow political flags and future promises, but base their choice in political performance.

INTRODUCTION

2. Methodology

tools and approaches used

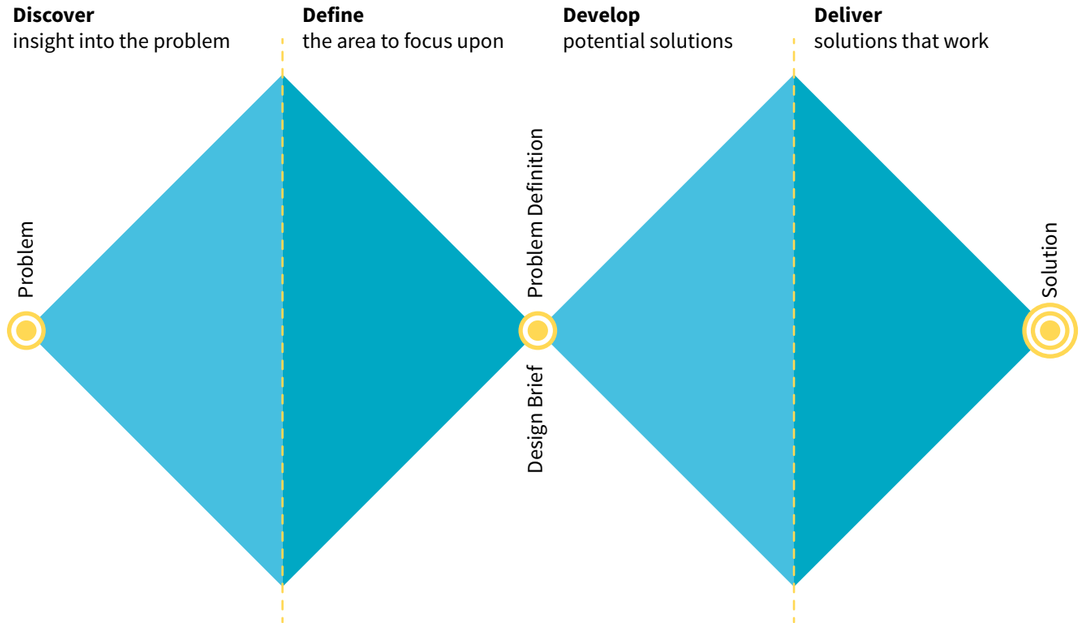
For the development of this project, some tools and concepts were held dearly in order to guide the way through the complexity that the political field can offer. At the same time, these ideas were used to broaden horizons and steer the idea to the right path.

2.1 Double diamond: divergence and convergence for a goal

There are several approaches to the design process. The framework used as the backbone of this project was the Double Diamond, as illustrated by the British Design Council.

In this framework, the four different phases illustrated the iterative path that this project followed. The discovery phase was used to get understanding on the topic and surrounding subjects. The research targeted in umbrella topics, such as psychology, design as politics, speculative design, service design, user experience, consumer behavior.

From this point, the project moved towards the definition of the problem to be tackled. For this phase, several courses of action were brainstormed, detailed and evaluated. With the defined scope, the brief for the project was created. It was then possible to move to the next phase, the development of viable solutions. In this step, several potential outcomes were conceptualized and exposed to key individuals in order to evaluate possible impact and feasibility, as well as collect qualitative feedback. This step laid a foundation for the definition of the proposed solution, which is presented later in this book.



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2.2 Speculative design: generating new visions

Speculative design takes the project to another level of possibilities, in which the thinking outside the boundaries of reality is highly stimulated, as well as the involvement with other 'methodological playgrounds' (Dunne and Raby, 2013). This approach enabled connections that otherwise wouldn't be possible.

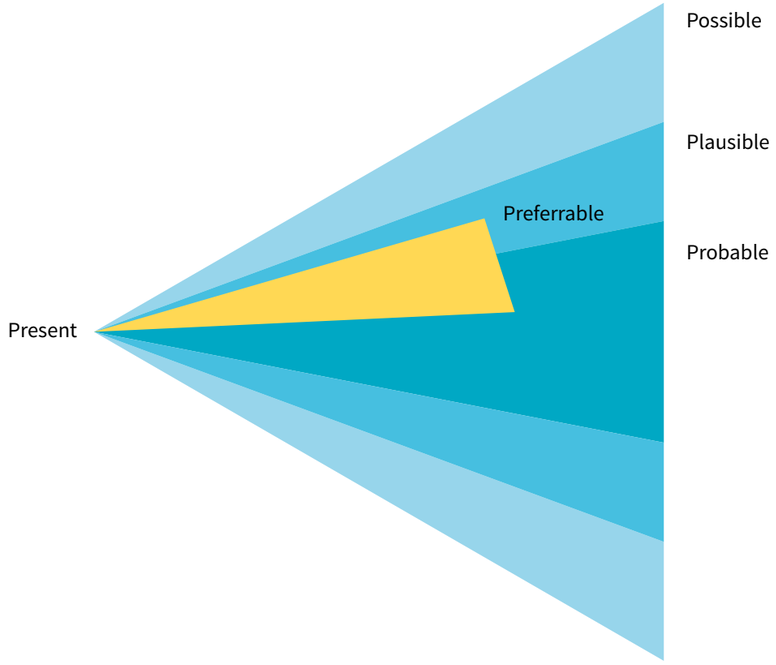
One key thought introduced by the futurologist Stuart Candy, and adopted by the speculative approach, is the diagram of the different kinds of futures. The diagram illustrates the overlapping of the probable, plausible, possible and preferable futures, fanning out from today into tomorrow.

As the designer navigates through this subjective levels of kinds of futures, one can frame the project accordingly to how further they want to raise the bar, how much they want to criticize reality, make people reflect, and discuss. The goal is not to forecast the future, but to "understand the present and to discuss the kind of future people want, of course, ones people do not want." (Dunne and Raby, 2013).

2.3 Service design and User Experience: the journey of the user

Another approach held closely in the development of this project is Service Design. It can be described as 'an interdisciplinary approach that combines different methods and tools from various disciplines' (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2013). As The UK Design Council describes it, "Service Design is all about making the service you deliver useful, usable, efficient, effective and desirable" (cited in Stickdorn and Schneider, 2013).

Taking this idea into consideration, the project pursued a development path that involved other people and potential users, in order to truly understand the challenges, identify potential solutions, map the user



Cone of Preferable Futures (Dunne & Raby, "Speculative Everything")

journey and provide a collaborative space in which people's voices were heard and weighed, to assure the usefulness of the proposal in the given context to the specified target audience.

Inside the service, there was also the focus of the experience of the user when interacting with the proposed outcome of this project. As in the case of Service Design, User Experience also has variations in its definitions, which sometimes give the topic in a broader scope, and other times it's more specific. For this project, User Experience should be understood as "how a person feels when interfacing with a system. The system could be a website, a web application or desktop software and, in modern contexts, is generally denoted by some form of human-computer interaction (HCI)" (Gube, 2017).

As by thoughtfully designing the outcome and its surroundings, the aforementioned concepts, combined with complementary ones such as information design, were also explored and used as compass to create the outcome.

3. Contextual Research

what is known about the problem

There are many challenges surrounding the problem tackled in this project. In order to gain insight in a broader landscape, contextual research was conducted and the observations and insights were collected and exposed in the following pages.

3.1 Democracy: from greece to today

Democracy is a notable political system that dates from the 5th century BCE in some states of Greece, especially Athens[1]. Its literal meaning is 'rule by the people'[2], having "the direct exercise of decision by the power of all members of the elite" (Fry, 2011, p. 34). This was the birth of a regime that remained alive and developed for over 25 centuries. Tony Fry says that many see democracy as "the most highly developed form of political life" and that it "has become the normative figure against which all other socio-political ideologies are judged and positioned on an evolutionary scale." (Fry, 2011, p. 33)

Democracy is the current political system running inside governments in many countries today. For several nations, it is understood as the obvious choice, a given, and many can't conceive the idea of having any other existing political system instead. Democracy isn't a "one-size-fits-all" concept. Each country may have a different version of it, and oftentimes this fact is ignored, leading people to believe, for instance, that the same democracy in the United States would

1 Encyclopedia Britannica. (2017). *democracy | History, Development, Systems, Theory, & Challenges.* [online] Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

2 (Ibid.)

fit perfectly in Brazil, or any other country. "There is a need to restate the notion of democracy as fractured. It is not a unified political ideology." (Fry, 2011, p. 33) These variations exist in order to fit the concept to a country's reality, and with time it can evolve or devolve.

Depending on the number of people within a democratic system, which could mean a town, city, country or a student's council, it could be possible to apply direct democracy, in which people express their opinions on matter directly, without the need of a representative. As democracy systems expanded, including more and more citizens under the system, this type of opinion-giving became logistically very complicated to accomplish. In face of this challenge, democracy adapted and included the representatives as the middle person in between people's opinions and decision-making.

When democracy emerged, it could not be imagined that society would ever achieve the kind of technological advances of today, neither that it would disrupt societies in such high speed. Democracy took centuries to evolve, whereas technology takes major leaps every few years. The impact technology has in slowly responsive systems, such as democracy, can be harmful, and makes it necessary to have people investing their time and energy into thinking of the next big leap that democracy will take, if it is to continue thriving in the upcoming centuries.

Yasodara Córdova, a fellowship participant at Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, described in an interview for this project the need for change in democracy with the following metaphor:

> *Democracy is like a version of Windows 98. It is full of bugs, but it's running and has millions of users. You can't simply delete the system at once to offer a new one in exchange, otherwise all these people who need the system will be left adrift, and will get angry. For this upgrade to happen, you need to plan and execute a very smooth transition, to avoid the system to collapse.*

Democracy shows signs of obsolescence in the face of contemporary challenges. The problem, among others, is that it is a system whose responsiveness is extremely slow, especially when compared to technological pace. There are governments implementing measures, innovation labs, and initiatives to make the transition happen, but this change will take time until it is assimilated and consolidated to the point of providing the fruits of this effort.

The advantages and disadvantages of the country's political system should be considered when developing a project in this field. Oftentimes, keeping these specifications in mind increase the possibilities for a more challenging picture of the future.

3.2 Information Overload

Society lives in an era of "information overload" (Toffler, 1981). Since this term was first coined, the amount of information we are exposed daily increased exponentially. "Cognitive overstimulation interferes with our ability to think" (Toffler, 1981), and if we are not able to think properly, our ability to make decisions, which is the base of human activity (Forrester, 1971), is also affected. As one side effect of this information overload, we are often not able to focus for a long time into the same article, video, and image. People want to access information instantly, and understand it in a split second, otherwise it feels tedious and a waste of precious time.

The average attention span continues to decrease, year by year. Statistics have shown that the current average attention span is 8 seconds, which is

even less than a goldfish[1]. This fact can have several implications on how the population consumes information. For instance, it is possible to infer that people nowadays struggle more to read and comprehend several pages of plain text than they did in the past. This is one of the reasons why it is possible to find plenty of short and shallow texts online that can be summed up with a few key points, several images and whichever multimedia resource that can help draw attention to it. If this rule is applied to content that could even be categorized as entertainment, imagine how short people's attention spans would be to topics related to politics, an area that by years of disillusion in a row, made people averse of it.

In Brazil, for instance, political information is made available by the government with excruciating details, complicated lingo, in a way that is not relevant for the citizen – unless they're lawyers – and are also displayed in such layout that makes reading a much harder task than it should be. Curating this content and publishing it in a designerly way would already represent a big improvement, and some projects of social initiative are taken place to tackle this field.

3.3 Access to Public Information

The Lei de Acesso à Informação Pública (Law on Access to Public Information) regulates the constitutional right of access to public information. Since May 2012 it created mechanisms that make it possible for anyone to receive public information

1 Statistic Brain. (2017). *Attention Span Statistics - Statistic Brain.* [online] Available at: http://www.statisticbrain.com/attention-span-statistics [Accessed 25 Jan. 2017].

from public offices and entities, without the need to present a reason[1]. This law makes valuable data available that can be used to follow what is being done with public resources, and is a fertile ground for tools that could make it easier for the people to see what is happening in the Congress, since the availability of the data doesn't mean that it is designed and explained in a way that is easy to grasp. One downside of this data set is that after requesting the information, the public agencies and nonprofit entities have up to 20 days to provide the information.

Brazil also has, since 2012, the Projeto Dados Abertos (Open Data Project), that aims to provide raw data in open format for use in digital applications. With this resource, society-led initiatives will be able to access public data and, with them, develop intelligent tools[2]. The open dataset allow, for example, the development of tools to provide a more effective perception of parliamentary activity and the detailed expenses of the House, up to the voting results of the day over the Internet[3].

1 Acesso à Informação. (n.d.). *LAI: A Lei de Acesso à Informação.* [online] Available at: http://www.acessoainformacao.gov.br/assuntos/conheca-seu-direito/a-lei-de-acesso-a-informacao [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

2 Dados.gov.br. (n.d.). *Bem vindo - Portal Brasileiro de Dados Abertos.* [online] Available at: http://dados.gov.br/ [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

3 Www2.camara.leg.br. (n.d.). *Perguntas e Respostas — Portal da Câmara dos Deputados.* [online] Available at: http://www2.camara.leg.br/transparencia/dados-abertos/perguntas-e-respostas [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

These efforts to increase transparency in the government collaborated to place Brazil among the the top 10 countries in the Global Open Data Index. In this index, the country is evaluated by its data openness in areas such as government budget, national laws, election results, water quality, government spending, and others[1].

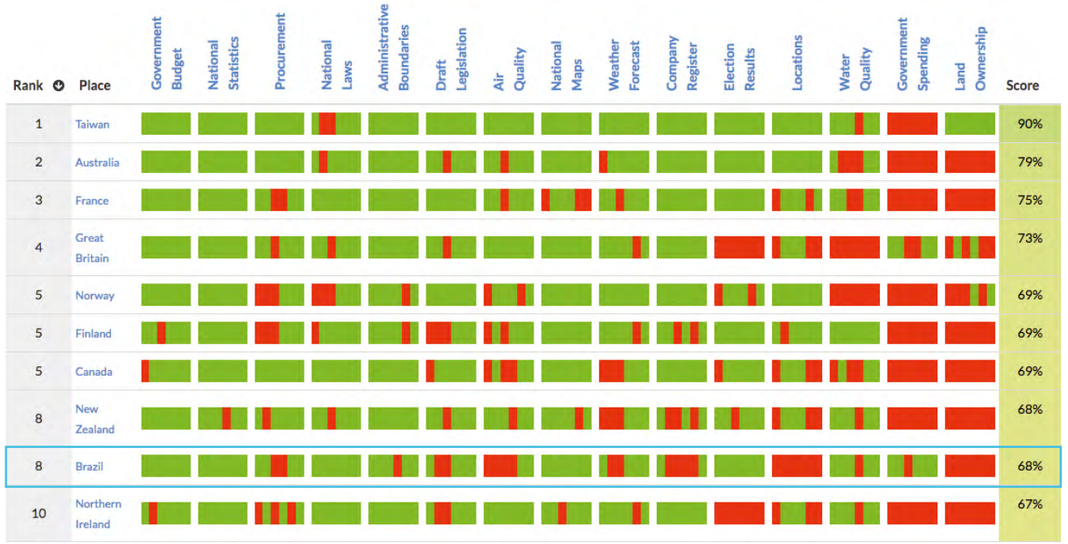
Ricardo Cappra says that "having a lot of data is useless if it is not transformed in information"[2]. Information comes to life when the data is filtered, analyzed, the insights are extracted from it, organized and then translated into something that allows people to actually understand what huge amounts of raw data have to say. This 'translation process' empowers people in the decision-making process, and helps mitigating the information overload of today.

3.4 Information accessibility and fragile foundations

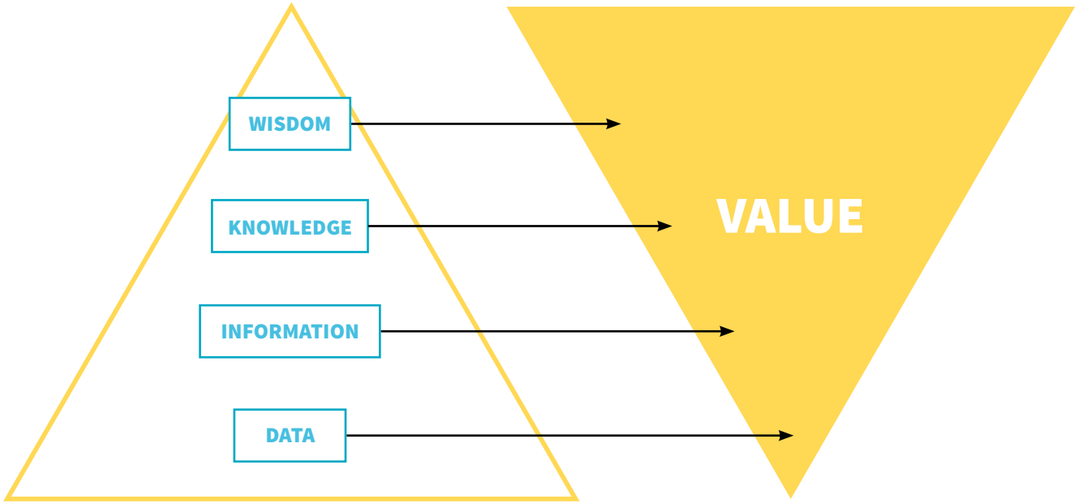
As democratic opinion-giving tools, social networks allow anyone to share their thoughts, and consume other people's ideas. While some people find this trait unfortunate, since people with fragile or no political foundation can also speak up and influence others, it is beneficial at the same time. Reginaldo Veras, one politician interviewed during the course of this project, said that, among other factors, "having the

1 Index.okfn.org. (2017). *Place overview - Global Open Data Index.* [online] Available at: https://index.okfn.org/place/ [Accessed 18 Jun. 2017].

2 Cappra, R. (2017). *CPBSB1 - 15/06 - Palco Principal - Dia 2.* [online] YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE62X6NjyHg&feature=youtu.be&t=9h33m54s [Accessed 16 Jun. 2017].



Global Open Data Index 2017 (https://index.okfn.org/place/)



Source: Cappra Data Science

people with fragile political foundation speaking up their minds online – or at a bar – also contributes positively to mature democracy". As many other technologies, it takes time until it's solid, has a code of conduct, and has enough rules to restrain the advances of bad practices. Nowadays one great intervention is the development in the fake news area, in which social network developers and citizen groups are investing their time and energy to avoid lies flooding the network.

3.5 Social networks and political voice

Among several positive contributions brought by social networks, the democratization of opinion giving is one of them. Anyone signed up and with access to Internet has the possibility to share almost anything. This leaves enough space for opinions, and the spectrum is broad enough to find content about what one has eaten for breakfast to futuristic views of the state of planet Earth 70 years from now. Somewhere within the spectrum, is also information and opinions on the field of politics, and that is relevant for this project.

Social networks could have been a great platform for people to be exposed to political ideas that are opposite from their own, or bring to life complementary points of view. However, with these networks being optimized to show people what they like and agree, and also giving them the power of hiding from things they don't want to hear anymore, social networks fostered echo chambers and filter bubbles[1], described by "the tendency of social networks like Facebook and

1 El-Bermawy, M. (2017). *Your Echo Chamber is Destroying Democracy | WIRED*. [online] Wired.com. Available at: https://www.wired.com/2016/11/filter-bubble-destroying-democracy/ [Accessed 15 Jun. 2017].

Twitter to lock users into personalized feedback loops, each with its own news sources, cultural touchstones and political inclinations" (Hess, 2017). These phenomenons are not new, but had their popularity skyrocketed during and after the elections in the United States in 2016.

Some actions taken in social networks seem harmless, but over time they can cause acute deterioration to the plurality available in this environment. It can be an unfollow or unfriend to a person, or an unlike to a page. The algorithm behind the social network's interface learns about its users in every interaction, and by depriving oneself from this plural content, the algorithm will understand the message and in the future will do this job for the person.

It is an understandable feature, since there must be rather a limited number of people who would like to see things that would upset them more often than not. However, not seeing these opposite or different opinions increase the distance between people, strengthening clusters that do not exchange ideas between each other, a fact that can contribute to polarization.

People were told for a long time that they shouldn't be on the fence. They shouldn't be undecided, they should have a position. Now people are so sure about their own opinions, and are reinforced by their bubbles, that the fence, which used to be in the middle isn't even visible anymore, because people are going so far away in the extremes.

3.6 Political discussions

One of the reasons why political discussions are volatile and have the power to escalate quickly is not only because people may not have enough information, but also because they may not be open-minded enough, or not know how to conduct and behave in this kind of situation. A very important reason why political discussions can get so intense and aggressive is because political beliefs are easily entangled with personal identities.

"Most people are uninterested in politics and poorly informed about issues. So they act not primarily on the basis of individual preferences or rational choices but rather on the basis of 'emotional attachments that transcend thinking'" (Mettler, 2017). The referred emotional attachment is not merely a coincidence, or something expected to any opinion a person might build. Instead, Resnick says that political beliefs "get tied up in our personal identities. Which would mean that an attack on our strongly held beliefs is an attack on the self. And the brain is built to protect the self." (Resnick, 2017)

The fact that people's political identities get tied up with their personal identities could explain why one must proceed in a careful manner before starting a discussion. When people's personal identity is attacked, the immediate reaction can be defense or fighting back, but rarely would result in a peaceful agreement.

3.7 Mental Models

Mental Models are memory structures the human brain has developed to cope with complexity. These models are ways to simplify reality, so it would be possible for people to carry pictures of the external world in their memory. Through the mental models existent in people's minds, it is viable to let go of details, in order to process and understand what they are looking at or thinking of. People create these assumptions or preconceptions about how something is supposed to be, and use it as a ground for their understanding of reality, as well as for their decision-making process. Mental models can be defined as "internal representations of information and experiences from the outside world" (Rapp, 2005).

To illustrate the concept, one could imagine a house. The house in this person's mind is probably different from the one someone else is imagining. However, both images have similarities such as the core elements

a house possesses. If the person knows already the core elements of a house, but find themselves in a new area with different looking houses, they probably won't have to ask themselves, 'What is this that I'm seeing?' The brain won't have to process this additional information as much, because the core elements already exist in the person's brain. The picture they have in their mind is the mental model. If the need to think about each house individually is removed, it is possible to maximize the energy and processing capacity, leading the person to realize, for instance, that the houses in this foreign neighborhood have similar windows to the ones on the house they grew up in.

A mental model could also be seen as the sequence of thoughts, decisions and actions the brain takes after being exposed to a cue that will trigger its execution. For instance, every morning a large number of people face a similar routine, that consists of waking up, showering, getting dressed, preparing and eating breakfast, brushing the teeth, picking up their bag, keys and phone; and leaving the house to go to work. If a person would have to do each of these tasks as if it was their first time every day, the amount of energy invested on it would be excessively high for the brain to bare in the 20-40 minutes people usually have for their morning routine. However, after performing a task a couple of times, the brain learns about it and is able to do it, spending less energy the next time. The simpler the task is, the more optimized – from an energy saving point of view – the brain can perform it.

On this note, what was taken into consideration in the development of the project was the question: how the mental model for consumer behavior could be hijacked and used as a way to consider, evaluate and choose politicians?

3.8 Consumer Behavior: insights to reframe political decision-making

The idea of consumer behavior might sound unexpected in the context of this project. The connection happened during research, at the moment when two browser tabs were open, one with some article, and the other was Amazon.de. This sparked the idea of bringing politicians to the extreme side of product consumption, also inspired by a quote of Tony Fry in his book Design as Politics that reads "The media markets politics as commodity and politicians as salespeople. In this setting, democracy in the developed 'democratic world' has degenerated into televisualized 'consumer democracy" (Fry, 2011, p. 8). Delving into this field generated useful insight and inspiration for the following steps. Before describing the research, bare in mind the following question: What if decision-making in politics would be as fact-driven as buying a new product is?

In Western societies, people are taught to be consumers since an early age. However, once the consumption mechanism proved to be very profitable to companies, it started being overstimulated. People then stopped buying because they needed something, and started purchasing new things as a statement. From consuming to survive, consumption became one of the symbols of success. People no longer wanted to own an older version of a product when the new one came out, they no longer wanted to use brands that are popular among tribes they don't resonate with. They wanted their possessions to reflect where they wanted to be in life. The more consumption, the more success would be associated with the person. The race to show others how successful one was reached extremes.

However, there are some positive outcomes from the years of learning how to be a consumer. In the past, the relationship with companies and people was almost dictatorial: the

brand offered something that they believed the population needed, without necessarily talking to people to know if that opinion was accurate or not. As time went by, competition increased and technology developed, leading companies to realize that ignoring the person in the other end of the string was not the best idea, if they wanted to thrive in the market.

At the same pace, consumers started learning more and more about their rights, and found themselves in the position of the ones that should be pleased by the company, and not the other way around. Therefore more and more consumers started speaking their minds about the quality of products and services. With the Internet, social networks and public virtual spaces to interact, consumers made their voices heard in a way that was never possible in the past.

When complaints – as well as compliments – started leaving the secrecy of a phone call with the company, consumers were empowered to fight for what they wanted, and at the same time the companies were exposed to great potential to improve and impact positively the market. While consumers were learning that their voice mattered, companies started changing the way they hire labor force, their raw material providers, their work environment quality, and their ethics.

With the widespread usage of Internet, organizations were forced to be more transparent, as people react to every new piece of information. If it's positive, the company might surf in a wave of new admirers and even customers. If it's negative, they better have either a great explanation or a great public relations team. The relationship between customers and companies can even go beyond and transform itself in political

consumerism, "the act of influencing producers or choosing products on the basis of their ethical or socio-environmental credentials, to bring about change in power relations or in the distribution of public goods." (Echegaray, 2015)

Nowadays consumers know that when something is not correct with the product they have in their hands, or experiences they signed up for, they can always complain online, Twitter and Facebook being the most popular platforms for that. By publishing their opinion out there, they demand companies to deal with the issue, instead of just ignoring it. The person would also voluntarily warn others about possible problems or breach of expectations. This kind of interaction is also very important when someone else is trying to make a decision on what to buy. Many people affirm that before purchasing something new, they read the online reviews, watch videos about it, talk to friends and family.

Therefore, companies make their best to keep their customers happy and the reviews, positive.

In the retail market, how a product looks is still a very important trait, together with the function, usage and usability, materials, packaging, message, alleged durability. The advertisement of these traits helps customers to build their expectations, and to foresee themselves with such product. In the past, the picture sold by the company to the people would often be enough to motivate the purchase. Still, nowadays the performance gained higher relevance. Not that it wasn't important in the past, but today is much easier to have access to information about the true performance of any product. By searching online, one can easily find what other people who already bought the product have to say. This makes customers be much more demanding, and as a result they're willing to invest more time researching for the best and cheapest product available that will meet their needs.

People make a direct connection between what they buy and what enters their environment. Since they'll often be seeing and interacting with the product, it must meet their expectations. Remember that very few people would be willing to keep around something that upset them at some level. People know how much money they want to invest in a purchase, and they often want to get the best cost and benefit balance. In these terms, the product must deliver at least what it has promised. If it's an even a little away from the expectations it created, people promptly respond to it with lower rating and disapproval, removing any chance of endorsing the product to someone else.

This behavior leads companies to improve their products and practices, and adapt to please its audience. Companies and even whole industries are tuned to every bite of information they can get about who's buying their products, in order to offer goods that live up to the expectation and would keep the customer loyal to the brand.

The brand loyalty is core to companies to thrive. People, who have pleasant experiences with certain brands, often will be voluntarily spreading positive reviews in the company's name, and will use this to ease their product choice whenever they need to buy something new.

Of course, brands can also make mistakes, and people often understand that. The biggest difference in such situation is how the company handles crisis. Today it is pressing to do it fast, since the online speed is much higher than the offline. It is also imperative that they are able to see all the facets of the problem, and react accordingly. There are several cases of companies that had their reputation hurt just because of how they handled problems. Since brands are now closer to people than ever before, the interaction with customers starts being very similar to human-to-human conversations.

Now going back to the posed question, what if decision-making in politics would be as fact-driven as buying a

new product is? For instance, when people search for entertainment, it is rare that they engage with the first random option they find. If it's a movie, people check the ratings, synopsis, and maybe even watch the trailer before making a decision. The moviegoers might also search for the director, and if it was nominated for an award. Then they make their decision, if that movie is worth their money and time.

Tracing a parallel between consumer behavior and political behavior, the way society is choosing their politicians is largely based on how they look and how they speak, not necessarily on how they perform. One of the reasons why it is this way could possibly be the fact that tracking and rating politician's performance isn't an easy task. Often the information about what they're doing in office is hard to grasp and available in a way that makes it complicated for people to consume. How would political decisions be different if people could confront their opinion on political topics with what the politicians are actually doing – and not only promising – in their mandate?

3.9 Interviews: understanding collective mindset

Important observations for this project were remarked by the monitoring of political-related news and events that were shared in mainstream news portals and social media. As a complementary step to this monitoring, 29 interviews were conducted, including male and female participants from 10 different countries, and one Brazilian politician currently in office. The goal of these interviews was to gain insight into how people understand the matter and to identify some behavioral cues. Contributing to that, the interviews with people of nationalities other than Brazilian were performed to allow comparison between how people from other countries see the same topic and how different or similar it is from the Brazilian mindset. Moreover, by interviewing an elected politician it was possible to gain insight into the other side of the coin and how politicians see society.

28 *interviewees*
01 *current Brazilian politician*

22 to 44 *years old*

10 *different countries*

Bolivia (1), Brazil (9), Colômbia (4), Costa Rica (4), France (1), Germany (5), India (1), Mexico (1), South Africa (1), United States (2)

29,5 *hours of interviews*

3.9.1 Interview analysis

The online environment many times is seen as a no man's land, in which frequently discussions of any topic tend to escalate rather quickly, they are dominated by emotions and boil down to arguments without solid foundation. The scenario is not different for political discussions online, and probably even worse. From the interviews, it was unanimous the opinion that they don't like and avoid getting involved in political discussions online as much as possible.

Another observation is that under specific and special conditions, people are open to discuss politics. For starters, all individuals involved must behave politely and with respect for other people's ideas, even if he or she completely disagrees with what is being said. Second, the interlocutor must either be someone with more knowledge or someone open to receive new information. Then, on top of all that, if the people involved would be friends, it would increase the chances of the discussion happening and being successful.

The goal of a discussion like this is not to impose someone's point of view, but to share different opinions in a constructive way to allow others to have a broader idea of the topic, and maybe change their mind. From the interviewees' answers it was also possible to observe that political discussions with family members, especially members from different generations (e. g. young adult and a grandparents), usually go wrong, and often happen during family gatherings.

From people's description of personal experiences, it was possible to identify some aspects that usually put the political discussion in the wrong path, and from there on it becomes very hard to revert the situation and transform it into something constructive. Some of these aspects are the tone and volume of one's voice when defending their idea, the body

language, and the spoken language itself. Extremely passionate discourses are often interpreted as imposition, which makes the interlocutor immediately defensive and closed to the ideas he or she is listening to. Many people try to stop the discussion as soon as these signs are identified. However, when the discussion goes against one or more beliefs that the other person holds dearly, it wouldn't be a surprise if the argument would end up as a disaster.

3.9.2 Conclusions from the 'Consumer Behavior' interviews

- When people need to make up their minds about which product to buy, most of the variables are objective, such as price, size, and material.
- People do extensive research if the product in question would cost them high amount of money.
- If they have access to the product before buying it, people can be more sure about the real quality and worth of the good, a factor that influences the purchase.
- People constantly think about how good or bad a product really is while using it.
- If a product doesn't perform as expected, people try to solve the problem, either by returning, repairing, reselling.
- People seek advice from others who have knowledge about the product they want to buy. They trust these people more than the brand marketing, and like when they are honest about the products performance, use, and features.
- People can easily change their product choice once they're provided with information they didn't have before.
- When put in contact with a product they bought before, and were disappointed by it, people are able to remember and they wouldn't buy them again.

- People would only give a second chance to a product that once let them down if the new version would have some major improvements, and someone else (friend or family) would endorse it.

3.9.3 Conclusions from the 'Politics' interviews

- When asked the first thing that comes to their mind when they hear the word "Politics", the majority replied with negative adjectives.
- Social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, plays a big role to keep people informed about politics.
- People feel like they must have extensive knowledge in the topic of politics to be entitled to discuss about it.
- Only 7 of the interviewees said they discuss politics on social media, and they do it occasionally.
- People don't feel offended when someone disagrees with their political opinion. However, this can easily change depending on how the opposing opinion is voiced, and how the arguments are crafted.
- People think other people don't know how to handle a political discussion.
- The process of changing opinions on political matters happen slowly, usually after being exposed to a different idea a couple of times, receiving bits of information that reinforces this new perspective, reflecting upon it until the new thought is absorbed.
- Before voting for a candidate, people often consider the candidate's proposals, history, personality, speech, and integrity. However, the final decision has a lot to do with gut feelings.
- The opinion of the family members doesn't influence very much political choices, whereas the opinion of close friends are more relevant.

Q: How do you feel when someone disagrees with you in a political matter?

"The same way as if someone agrees. I think it's very good to have opposing views, it's very constructive and necessary for progress and stability in a political process."

(I. 30 years old, Germany)

"There's a responsibility to demonstrate why do they oppose, but I don't like to get into political discussion with people. If it's something that affects me very personally, really offend me or opposes something that I hold very dear, it would make me engage."

(S. 28 years old, South Africa)

- People don't follow what politicians are doing unless it's highlighted in the news.
- When the politician isn't doing what he promised, people feel disappointed and angry, but often don't do anything about it. For people to voice this frustration, the matter would have to have great impact on their lives.
- People have very bad picture in their minds when they think of politicians and what they do when they are elected.
- People find it hard to be sure if a politician is good or not.
- People don't frequently question themselves about politics, but when inquired it sparks reflection and discussion.

3.9.4 The other side: interview with a politician

Reginaldo Veras is one of the Brazilian politicians are now in office. He started his career as teacher, and after 23 years lecturing, he was encouraged by friends and students to run for the position of district deputy, being successfully elected in 2014. Veras, in what he calls 'alternative mandate', gave up on all the financial aid offered by the legislative chamber that aim to publicize the actions of the deputies. Instead, he communicates with his electorate either via social networks or in person. When contacted via Facebook, Veras offered his personal mobile number for contact, and promptly had his assistant scheduling the interview.

The sequence of events until the interview happened is notable in itself. Besides Veras, other 8 politicians were contacted, 7 never replied and one replied but without a follow up, fact that reinforced the idea that politicians are not really accessible to the people.

It was an enriching conversation, in which was possible to gain insight on the other side of the coin, the point of view of a politician in office, whose job is to represent the interests of his electorate. An excerpt with the main takeaways is shared below:

"As a politician, I believe that the keyword is coherence. There is almost never a break in partisan position and my opinion. But when it happens, my opinion prevails, and I like to have an opinion. When it's my turn to choose the politician I will give my vote for, I consider the following variables: ideological affinity, the candidate's history, the party to which the candidate is affiliated, and the candidate's proposals."

"It is only possible to supervise if the voter has good information, and the politicians we have are the reflection of society. When the electorate criticizes the politician, they are actually criticizing themselves in front of a mirror."

"I believe that crisis turns out to be a good thing because it fosters maturity. I hope that we learn from it. We learn slowly, because people generally do not vote on a set of proposals, we do not vote in an ideological position. We usually vote for a product that is sold to us by a very well crafted marketing."

"In recent years, as a result of greater access to information, democratization of channels for political debate through social networks, I would say that society's engagement is increasing. However, it's a quantitative –and not qualitative – engagement because people still don't build their arguments in trustworthy information. But despite all this argumentative fragility, I consider this positive."

"The electoral system we have in Brazil is broken, but that's what we have, that we've had historically. A political reform to change the structure of the political system is urgent in Brazil, but difficult to do, because those who have the responsibility to carry out this project, that is, the parliamentarians, benefit from this fragile political structure. It is a system that was built very intelligently to perpetuate in power those who already are."

(Reginaldo Veras, Politician, 44 years old, Brazil)

4. Conceptualization

tackling the challenge

The political scene in Brazil is compromised by all the corruption scandals being exposed. In the one hand it is extremely disappointing, frustrating and enraging revelations for the Brazilian people. On the other hand it shows an improvement, because at least now it's harder to keep these crimes under the cover, and people can held politicians accountable. According to the deputy Reginaldo Veras, interviewed for this project, this is only possible because "the Brazilian democracy is a little bit more settled, and has control agencies, free press, an active public ministry, federal police with autonomy". Although the scenario looks gloomy now, "in times of crisis, new possibilities for us to transform our context appear. I don't know if it will be for better or worse, but change will happen, something new always come up from moments of crisis", concludes Veras.

When looking at this political landscape, and all the problems it conceals, it is necessary to narrow down the scope of action, in order to make it possible to tackle the challenge. Considering the findings from the contextual research and interviews, one can infer that some of the major problems within the Brazilian political scenario, in the eyes of the electorate, are:

- Corruption.
- Complexity of the information available.
- Insufficient accessible resources to track what politicians are doing.
- Insufficient means to demand accountability.
- Poor political education across the country
- Politicians disregard to the collective good, making people feel disempowered.
- Politicians overpromise and underdeliver.
- People are driven by promises and flags instead of tangible results.

It is difficult – if not impossible – to reset the political class in order to provide the electorate with options that have clean political history. However, election after election, by increasing people's awareness of what the politicians are doing in office, and strengthening the resources to keep politicians accountable, this scenario could improve with time. One of the means for people to be able to have a more educated vote in upcoming elections, combined with other initiatives, is to provide them with factual information, which is available today, but in a way that makes understanding a very complicated task for the regular citizen to grasp.

As part of the understanding of where to position the concept for this project, research on existing tools was performed, in order to gain insight on which data is available and what is being done with it. How are these tools adding value to the process of choosing politicians and keeping them accountable.

Combining the research insights, with people's opinion on the matter, and personal experience, the concept of the outcome was defined. To begin with, the main problems that would be addressed are:

- Complexity of the information available.
- Insufficient accessible resources to track what politicians are doing.
- Politicians overpromise and underdeliver.
- People are driven by promises and flags instead of tangible results.

Therefore, the following factors should considered:

- Accessible information, both in language and visuals.
- Information about the politician's performance in office.
- A way to follow what the politician is doing.
- Inputs to improve decision-making in upcoming elections.

To avoid reinventing the wheel, research to identify and analyze tools that are available – and working – was necessary.

4.1 Existing initiatives

This stage was important so identify where the solution of this project could be placed, as well as source of inspiration and identification of potential partnerships. The most relevant initiatives encountered were:

4.1.1 Politize!

Politize![1] is a Brazilian platform focused on political education. On their website, several articles explaining political concepts, laws, and events (national and international) are available and in different formats such as: text, infographics, videos, podcasts, e-books. One of the key features of the platform, besides the plurality in format, is the use of accessible language, a factor that allows a broader audience to be able to understand the information.

1 Politize!. (n.d.). *Politize! Educação Política sem complicação!*. [online] Available at: http://www.politize.com.br/ [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

Politize! Homepage

4.1.2 Operação Serenata de Amor

The Operação Serenata de Amor literally means 'Operation Love Serenade' – which is amusingly similar to the names given by the Federal Police to its operations, such as Operation Car Wash mentioned in the beginning of this book. Within this project a robot was created, it was "an artificial intelligence capable of analyzing each claim for reimbursement from congress people and of identifying it's illegal probability." (Serenatadeamor.org, 2017)

Although the goal of this project might seem modest, it is actually tackling an important issue, which are the small acts of corruption[1]. Each politician has a "Quota for Exercise of Parliamentary Activity (CEAP in the acronym in Portuguese) is a monthly amount of up to R$ 45 thousand that each Chamber of Deputies Member is entitled to reimbursement for expenses that are not fit for public bidding. A lunch or taxi payment, for example." (Serenatadeamor.org, 2017). However, when analyzing the reimbursement data, the Operação Serenata de Amor found bills claiming expenses of R$6.2015,00 (1.680€) for one meal, or congressperson that claims reimbursement of R$6.000,00 (1,621€) of gas per month, resulting in 30 full gas tanks per month in average[2], and so forth.

1 Vice Impact. (2017). *Scientists Are Using Twitter to Battle Brazil's Congressional Corruption*. [online] Available at: https://impact.vice.com/en_us/article/scientists-are-using-twitter-to-battle-brazils-congressional-corruption [Accessed 18 Jun. 2017].

2 Serenatadeamor.org. (2017). *Operação Serenata de Amor.* [online] Available at: https://serenatadeamor.org/en/ [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

This operation's robot is called Rosie, she publishes these findings on twitter, asking people for help on investigating, a way to engage citizens and make them aware of what they found. People then comment on the information they received, and oftentimes contact their representatives via Facebook or Twitter asking for explanations about the expense. The project also reports the findings directly to the House of Representatives, organizing the information from the highest likelihood of illegality found by Rosie[1]. Besides making people aware, due to Rosie's findings and popular demand, several politicians return the money to the congress.

The was also an interesting finding from the interaction of the project on Facebook. After analyzing the metrics, they realized that publishing posts about recent updates and developments on the project impacted negatively their publicity. They decided then to publish this information in another medium, and keep on Facebook mainly Rosie's alerts[2].

1 Serenatadeamor.org. (2017). *Operação Serenata de Amor.* [online] Available at: https://serenatadeamor.org/en/ [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

2 Operação Serenata de Amor. [online] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/operacaoSerenataDeAmor/posts/660342227491436 [Accessed 18 Jun. 2017].

Operação Serenata de Amor Homepage

4.1.3 Colour of Corruption

Reading news is part of the routine of millions of people in Brazil. To make it easier to see the politicians who are in trouble with the law, the project Colour of Corruption was created. "Colour of Corruption is a tool launched by the Reclame Aqui Institute which highlights, in every website, the names of elected politicians and Ministers of State that have unresolved issues with the law." (Colourofcorruption.com, n.d.) When navigating, the targeted names are highlighted, and with a mouseover the reader can have easy access to extra information on the issue the politician is having with justice.

4.1.4 Newsletter Incancelável

This project tackles the accountability issue. It allows people to input the politicians they voted for in past elections and every month it delivers a clip with news involving any of these politicians to the person's email inbox. Newsletter Incancelável literally means 'unsubscribable newsletter', a metaphor to remind the electorate that their choice is irreversible and has impact on their lives for a long time[1].

1 Newsletter Incancelável. (n.d.). *Newsletter Incancelável.* [online] Available at: http://newsletterincancelavel.com.br/ [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

Colour of Corruption Homepage

Newsletter Incancelável Homepage

4.1.5 Wahl-o-mat and I Side With: Foreign initiatives

The German project Wahl-o-mat[1] and the American project 'I Side With' were also researched and used as reference for this project as well. Wahl-o-mat provides the electorate with a questionnaire about political topics; the user can answer it and specify which topics are more relevant for them. After submitting the answers, the user is presented with an affinity graph, informing them how similar a party's answers were to their own. To be able to give the people the results, part of the Wahl-o-mat model is to ask the parties to answer the same questions presented to the audience.

I Side With is a tool similar to Wahl-o-mat in which people can compare the alignment of their beliefs with the politician's beliefs. The user answers series of questions in different topics, grade higher the ones that are more important for them, and in the end is presented with the candidates in a higher affinity scale. Some interesting features of this tool are the option to learn more about the question, in which is explained details and pros and cons are given; the stats, that shows the person how the results for that question look like; direct link to news related to the question. Also, this tool makes it less black and white regarding pre-defined answers: instead of yes-no-don't care, they allow the user to choose detailed answers, such as 'agree, but in X case, I disagree'.

1 Wahl-O-Mat | bpb. [online] Available at: http://www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/wahl-o-mat/ [Accessed 17 Jun. 2017].

Wahl-O-Mat Homepage

I Side With Homepage

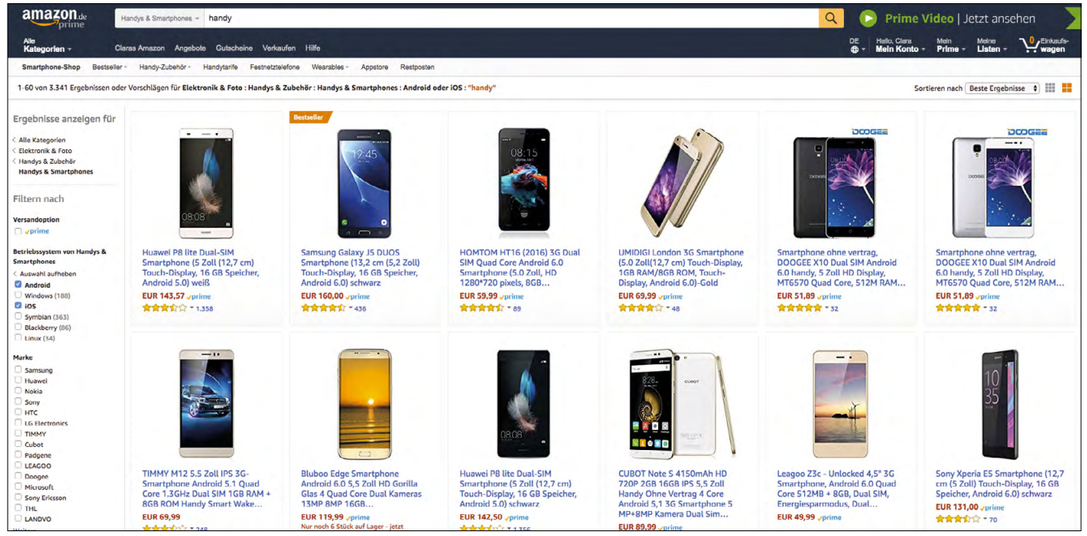
4.2 Concept evolution: the road to the solution

To arrive at the final concept, the idea seed was nurtured and taken care of, involving other people in the process, in order to gain insight on its limitations and possibilities for improvement. When a project is designed to reach such vast number of people, it is naïve to offer a final product without talking to people in as many stages as necessary. During the evolution of the concept, not only people with regular to low political engagement voiced their opinions, but also experts and highly engaged citizens.

4.2.1 The idea seed

Starting with a direct connection between politics and consumer behavior, the seed for the ideas that flourished throughout this project was a political e-commerce platform. The goal of this platform was to hijack the mental model of retail consumer behavior in order to reframe how people make their political choices, attempting to subtract the subjective appeal that politicians have (e.g. body language, look, charisma) offering a more performance-based variables in order to provide the electorate with objective information.

In this option, the idea was to use a model for an e-commerce, but instead of having real products, people would be presented to a set of politicians and their profiles. The correspondences between product profile and politician profile are exemplified below:



Amazon homepage

Product	**Politician**
Product page	Personal Profile
Features	Promises
Specifications	Public Information
Brand	Party
Rating	Rating
Filters: Color, brand, price, material, rating etc.	Filters: City, Age, Number of Votes, Number of Mandates etc.

The user would also be able to select preferred politicians and compare them side by side, according to a set of key performance indicators, such as rating, number of projects approved in the congress, years in office, number of votes, and so forth. The goal was to develop a platform that, despite its unusual approach, would provide facts and opinions to collaborate in more educated voting for an existing country.

Although the first reaction to this idea was often positive, the more detailed it got, the more compromising aspects surfaced. For instance:

Untrustworthy reviews: As it can be seen in online retail shops, oftentimes the ratings are manipulated, and people don't really receive what they expected. Also, the review system could become target and be exploited by bots and fake accounts, distorting the purpose of the evaluation.

Return policy: Without having the opportunity to try the product beforehand, it is very hard to be sure if the product fits perfectly the person's need. In retail shopping, this issue is mitigated by the possibility of returning the product within a certain period of time, fact that is not applicable to politicians in Brazil.

The customer is always right: Companies develop their products based on market needs, or in order to create a need. When there's a market opportunity, in which a vacancy of a product happens, companies rush to fill in that blank and increase revenue. Following this logic, it could be possible that an outsider politician, in identifying such vacancy in the political landscape, would say and do whatever it takes to please this unaddressed audience, a typical scenario for the rise of populist leaders, for instance.

As these observations were brought to light, the goal for this idea changed. From offering a platform that would provide real information related to the political setting of an existing country (i.e. existing politicians, proposals, parties, and so forth), the intention was now to use the platform primarily as means to criticize how decision-making in politics works today. That is, instead of using real information, the data fed to the tool would be fabricated, the politicians wouldn't be real, and people would be questioned about how they make their choices. In this setting, there would be a possibility to exaggerate the critique and still make a point.

4.2.2 A new glimpse

Although the updated idea seemed a fertile path for the growth of the concept, after being pitched several times, it was observed that in the aforementioned setting, the idea could probably lose its potential of impacting people. One of the main problems is that such a proposal would require a high level of abstraction and reflection for the idea to come through people's minds, and actually make them rethink how they choose their representatives.

Also, it was observed that when people are provided with information, such as ratings or party affiliation, they take the shortcut, and instead of going through the process of researching and learning about the candidate, they trust the number of stars or endorsement from certain political flag. Both options perpetuate the existing scenario, in which people don't challenge their opinions, but choose what's more comfortable instead. However, making the decision for the person isn't the goal of this project.

Last but not least, to make the tool fit the purpose, the metaphor was being overstretched, therefore losing its effectiveness. Not every characteristic of consumption can be translated to politics, and it can be critical to deny the disadvantages of such model. Therefore, a step back was taken, in order to move forward.

From the consumer behavior insights, the 'performance' parameter was kept. This is one of the cornerstones for the idea that unfolded from the aforementioned concepts, and was adopted for the proposed solution in this project.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

5. Match Político

Descubra quem dá voz à sua opinião

Brazil is in a peculiar situation, where the corruption levels are so overwhelming, that it is forcing the population to engage. If they are to participate in a constructive way, people must be granted access to political information that is easy to understand, and is as unbiased as possible. This way, they can inform themselves about what the politicians are actually doing, besides giving empty promises to save the country. With the goal to collaborate, and expand the options for the citizens to follow what is happening in the government, project Match Político was born.

5.1 The concept

Match Político is a digital service that offers citizens an opportunity to compare their opinions on laws, with the positions of the politicians who are responsible for passing or declining them. The user provides the necessary input when answering a questionnaire, which is constituted by a summary of the laws explained in a simplified language. After submitting the answers, the user is presented with an interactive graph, in which he or she will be able to visualize how much ideological affinity they share with the available politicians.

The cornerstones of the service are:

- Provide facts
- Facilitate comparison
- Trigger discussion and reflection

5.2 The naming

In Brazilian Portuguese, it is not unusual to mix English words in the informal speech. In the special case of the word 'match', its meaning became widely understood due to the popularity of the app Tinder. By understanding how Tinder works and what a 'match' is, people appropriated the term that is now used in different contexts.

Aiming to bring a more popular tone to the naming, in order to make it more inviting, the word 'match' was appropriated and combined with 'political'. Hence, Match Político, or Political Match. The name also represents well the first outcome of the interaction with the service, which is the combination of the user's ideology with the politician's ideology and the visualization of the potential matches.

5.3 Desired audience

The desirable audience for this project consists of every citizen between the ages of 18 and 70 with access to the Internet, both via mobile or desktop. The choice of this demographic is due to the fact that, in Brazil, every citizen is obliged to vote from the moment they turn 18 until they turn 70, moment from which voting becomes optional. Considering that this large percentage of the population must express their political opinion, at least once every four years, Match Político could assist them in learning more and better choosing their representatives.

MATCH POLÍTICO

Brazilian direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting machine. Source: EBC (http://www.ebc.com.br/noticias/politica/2014/09/eleicoes-2014-saiba-como-utilizar-a-urna-eletronica)

5.4 The service description

The project has different layers of complexity. The first layer, the simplest and most relevant, aims to provide the user with an ideological affinity map. To simplify the use of the service, the user will not be required to register.

In order to build the ideological affinity map, the user must answer a set of questions. These questions are simplified versions of the laws that were voted by the congress. The answer options are equivalent to those of parliamentarians: Yes, no, and abstention. The users also has the option of giving more weight to issues that, for them, have greater relevance. In this way, the user profile begins to be delineated, and the more questions he or she answers, the more accurate the affinity map presented will be.

The data used to build the ideological profile of the politician corresponds to how they voted in law projects in the past. This way, it is possible to have the facts, because the outcome will be already public. To calculate ideological proximity or distance, the user responses are matched with votes cast by parliamentarians in session, using the degree of relevance as a multiplier.

As soon as the user submits his or her answers, he or she is presented with an interactive graph that represents the ideological position of all politicians compared to his or her own ideology. Politicians with similar opinions will be represented closer to the user and those with divergent opinions, more distantly.

At first, the standard visualization outcome will represent the user-politician affinity, not user-party affinity. By displaying it this way, there is a higher chance for people to be surprised by politicians who have a similar position to theirs, but who are not affiliated to their first-choice party.

The tool uses the results of the votes cast in the legislative sphere. This is the scope of choice because the legislative has the role to create and change laws, actions that are core to this project. Any additional factor sphere be superfluous at this point.

It was observed that, by providing the users results involving only with politicians in office, the service would minimize the possibility of political discovery, in which the person could find new possibilities for the political scene. Therefore, candidates who were not elected, or haven't yet participated in an election, would still be granted the chance to be part of the results chart. For this to happen, these candidates must answer to the same questionnaire as the user.

As the purpose of the service is to enable fact-based comparison, the non-elected candidates would be represented visually different, making it clear that in their case, the comparison was based on their intention of vote, and not the vote itself, resulting in a different level of reliability.

In a second layer, users willing to delve into the presented result would have access to complementary information. The public profile of the politician, as well as his campaign promises and achievements during his mandate, are some examples. In the case of politicians who were not elected yet, users would have access to the public profile and public history of the candidate, for instance.

In this layer, it would also be possible to access the party platforms. This way, the user could learn about their ideology, proposals and the affiliated politicians. With the data that will be fed to the platform, it would also be possible to provide visualizations that represent how each party votes on different issues, how often the position of the party's deputies corresponds to the result of the voting (i.e. how much the party agrees with the position of

the congress), and so forth. Still in this layer, the user could assess whether politicians are legislating according to the promises they made or not. It would also be possible to provide information about the candidate's opinion over time, presenting to it the user, in a visual manner, if the candidate maintained his ideological position or if it underwent change.

An environment gifted with fertile ground to develop and provide people with several different options, the challenge is to equip users only with what is crucial. As the desired audience is broad and covers diverse demographic groups, the sweet spot for the service to be positioned is in between what is easy enough to use, and what is relevant enough to add value to the user's knowledge base, allowing the engagement of as many people as possible.

With the development and prototyping of the service, it will be possible to find the balance between the available information and what really matters to people. With the service running, it will be possible to challenge political propaganda by confronting what politicians promise to do and what they actually do.

5.4.1 List of possible features

To build the service, a list of possible features was crafted. This list contains every insight that emerged in the development of the concept, and was keep as pool of options, in order to ensure that all relevant possibilities would be considered. The features follow below:

- Allow user to input the politicians they voted for in order to have them highlighted in the affinity map;
- Politician's promise-tracking available in their profile;
- How many law projects the politician passed;
- Stats on how much the politician agrees with the actions of the majority of his party;
- Access to how politicians voted in controversial law projects;
- The ideological position of the politician over time;
- How many times the politician changed political parties;
- How often a politician's vote corresponds to the majority of votes in the congress;
- Access to news related to a selected politician;
- Filters as key for the depth layers of the platform;

5.5 Platform

Considering that 95% of the apps are abandoned after 30 days, and one in every four apps is opened only once, it seemed the natural choice to design a website as first touchpoint of the service with its user.1 However, as a good portion of the Brazilian population access the Internet via mobile, the website will, of course, be mobile-friendly. This way, people could successfully access the service both via their phones or desktop computers. In the future, the development of an app would also be possible, as a way to benefit from the features mobile phones offer, such as push notifications and location services.

Contributing with the attempt of making the service as uncomplicated as possible, a mobile-friendly website

1 Think with Google. (2015). *Por onde começar: Site ou App?*. [online] Available at: https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/pt-br/articles/site-ou-app.html [Accessed 19 Jun. 2017].

would not only benefit from the browser that comes already installed on the phone, but also skip the step of downloading and installing a new app, which would take away part of the device's storage memory while the app remains installed.

5.6 Visual Exploration

With the briefing well defined, as well as the chosen platform, the next step in the development of the project was the visual exploration. This phase was the first step in the direction of the final look, feel and flow of the platform. In this exploration are also developments in the visual identity, and core user experience. What can be seen in this subchapter are the preliminary thoughts and progress made so far.

5.6.1 Logo

The proposed logo for Match Político combines its name and two speech bubbles, aligned on the same side to display agreement, in a subtle manner. As the tool enables the user to discover who are the politicians that have affinity with them, such metaphor would collaborate with the visual understanding of the concept. Moreover, the simplicity of the logo communicates with another goal of the service: offer simplified information in order to be accessible to as many people as possible.

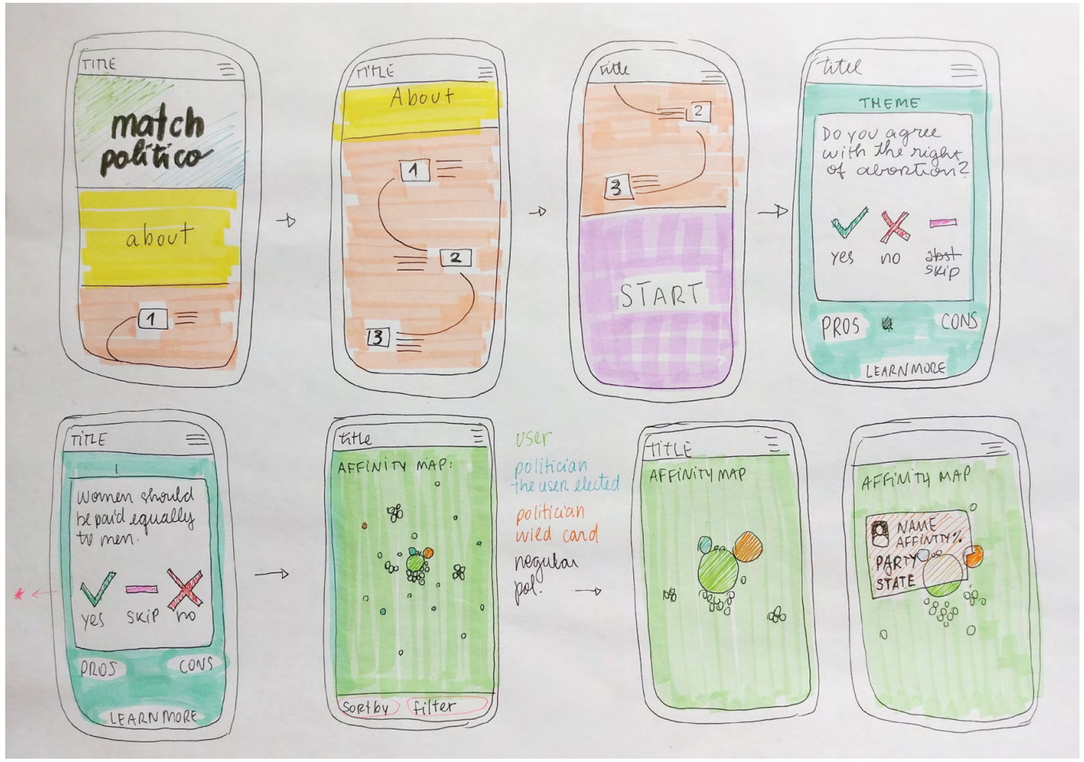
5.6.2 User experience

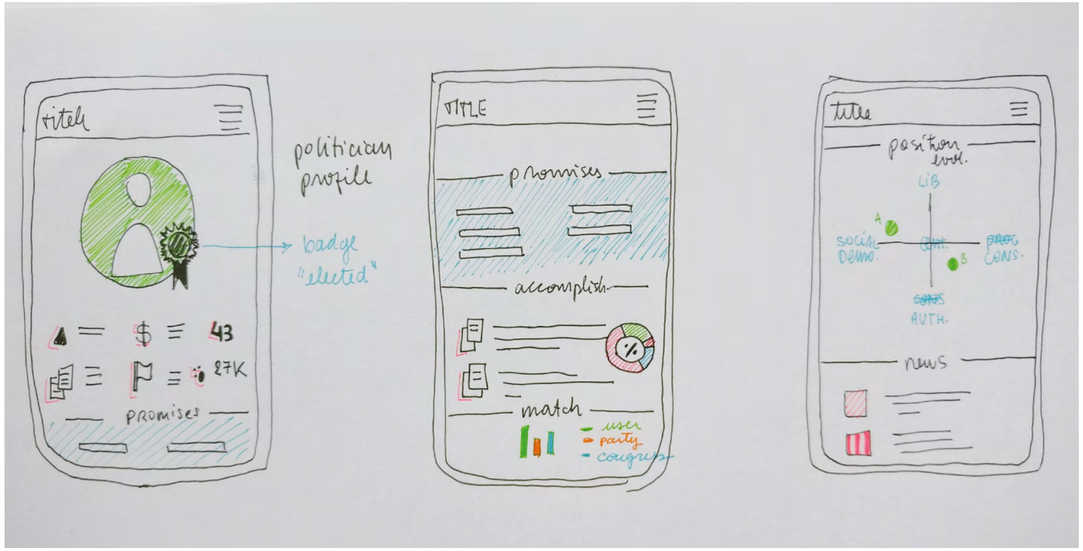
For the first stage of implementation of the service, the core feature will be designed and polished, in order to provide the beta users with a prototype that can simulate the usage as close to reality as possible. This way it will be possible to gain insight in the user interaction with the desired functionalities, as well as their understanding of it.

5.6.3 User Interface

Up to this point, the user interface is in embryo stage, in which a set of sketches were made in order to enable discussions about the fundamentals of the tool. Although the sketches are simplified versions of what the interface could actually look like, they are useful enough to evaluate the layers of complexity that the service possesses. By looking at them, it is already possible to weight the features, identify bottlenecks on the user flow, map the steps that are key for accomplishing the goal, and the ones that are only making the flow confusing for the user.

Since the visuals for the service are still incipient, there's certainly room for improvements. The goal for further steps in the project's timeline is to create and polish the interface and the user experience, testing with users and, again, enhance the proposed solution. Design is, after all, an iterative process.

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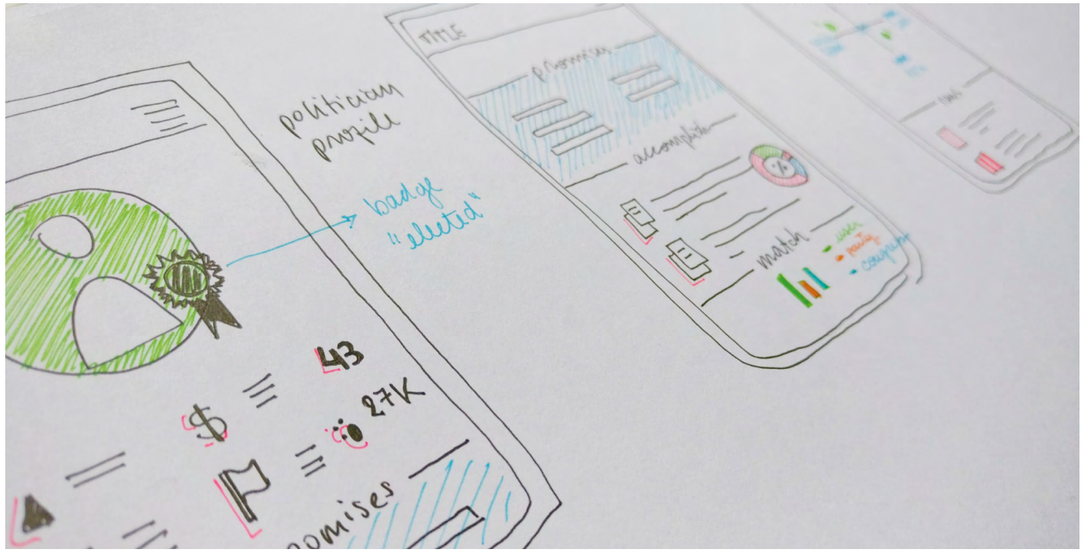
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5.7 Prominent aspects

Some of the prominent aspects and benefits of the proposed service are further detailed as it follows, in order to highlight their importance and benefits.

5.7.1 Accessible Language

All the information regarding law projects is available online. However, it makes use of complicated language, poor information layout, and it can be lengthy. As this feature is crucial for the project, it was needed to tackle this challenge. One of the considered solutions would be to use 'algorithmic summarization' to provide the law summary as an outcome. Unfortunately, this is not a feasible option in the near future, as algorithms are not fully capable to provide meaning from contextual data –yet.

The second option, and the chosen one for the time being, is to use people to provide this summary. There are already initiatives, such as Politize!, that decode what the law project means, and the impact on people's lives. Therefore, the solution would either count on the collaboration of volunteers to decode the laws or land partnerships with existing initiatives.

5.7.2 Tackling empowerment

One of the problems resulting from the way the political system is configured, as well as the overwhelmingly corrupt political landscape, is the overall feeling of disempowerment of the population. They believe their votes won't change anything, and that there's nothing they can do to improve the setting, especially if it's an action in small scale.

However, as the initiative Operação Serenata de Amor is proving, is that more than having the politicians to make up for small corruption acts, they're contributing at small but steady pace to mitigate the culture of corruption. On this note, Match Político would provide people with factual information, enabling them to reach out for their representatives to ensure that the promises are fulfilled, and if not, why. This way, at small but steady pace, politicians would start understanding that they're accountable to the electorate, and that empty promises will soon not be enough to grant them a seat.

5.7.3 Collaboration

Services designed to large groups of people certainly would benefit from collaboration opportunities. As another characteristic of the project, the code used to develop the matchmaking will be made available on GitHub. By having it there, other people could also collaborate into making it better or warning about possible bugs and inconsistencies, improving the solution at every new update. With this approach, other groups of people could also benefit from the code and discussion, opening the possibility to use and adapt it for other purposes, and hopefully to collaborate expanding the resources available to empower citizens.

5.7.4 Privacy

The vote is secret. In a country like Brazil, preserving this right is paramount. Therefore, this service won't retain personal information from its users, avoiding exchange between this data, external servers, and third parties. The information will be used locally on the user's phone or desktop computer. In case a need to utilize the data in any other way, the user will be notified before using the service and his or her permission will be requested.

5.8 What it takes: people that can make it happen

For the service to be successfully developed, a multidisciplinary team is imperative. As for the moment, professionals working in the fields of design, computer science, and political science would be of great aid. However, it is not limited to these fields. The beginning of the development of the platform, the first touchpoint of the service, would count on the volunteer work of two computer scientists, and a professional working in the field of international relations. These people expressed their will to collaborate after learning about the goal of the project, the challenges ahead and potential impact.

As for the time being, the goal is to make the service run only with volunteer work, as a way to offer another level of engagement with the political landscape.

5.9 Timing

For a service of such nature, it is challenging to remain relevant during the gap between elections. In the current stage, the aim is to further develop and iterate, having the upcoming 14 months as available timespan. With a more consolidated service in hands, it would be possible to make it available shortly before the Brazilian General Elections in October 2018. This moment means a great milestone, paramount in the consolidation and popularization of the service for the Brazilian electorate.

5.10 Forthcoming aspects

In a next phase of development, as the service gains popularity and relevance, it could also offer people the option to give their opinion on law projects that weren't voted yet. By submitting their opinion, the users would be provided with an option to receive notifications about status updates in given law projects, this way they can follow not only the result, but also the process. This data is as well made available via the Open Data Project.

Further in the future, the user opinions in matters that weren't voted yet could be made available, and politicians could benefit from this information by having a better picture of what the electorate wants, and perhaps voting accordingly. One critical aspect of this is that there could be breaches that would allow this feature to be exploited; therefore extensive research is necessary before making it available as a way to inform politicians.

MATCH POLÍTICO

6. Analysis

By offering factual data transformed in information (i.e. given meaning) and visualizations of it, the service has great potential to help people assessing their politicians, and improving the quality of their vote in future elections by analyzing what happened in the previous government. It is imperative, though, that the platform is tested, and iterated in order to polish the user experience and get it right with the user interaction.

When searching for political-related tools, the vast majority offers poor user experience. It is possible that this is one of the reasons why most of them are abandoned, or were never popular. By bringing the design approach into the development of the platform, the predicted added value will possibly increase people's engagement.

The events in the political context can be very volatile, therefore the service should remains flexible enough to add features or remove them, in order to adapt to the current situation, focusing on how the user could benefit the most of the information available. For instance, if the country's political regime or electoral system would undergo change, the service should respond to in order to remain relevant.

Although Brazil was the chosen political landscape for the development of this project, other countries could benefit of the same solution. Each country has its own specificities – political regime, electoral system, and information availability. Once made the necessary adjustments, the service could be translated into other contexts.

7. Conclusion

Amidst the severe political crisis that Brazil finds itself into, it is important to turn the attention to the ones on which real power relies: the people. Although the political class appears to be comfortable and protected in their ivory towers, people need to remember who were the ones that elected the representatives in the first place, and what they are actually doing. By being aware of the representatives' performance, people would have the opportunity to improve their political choices, and demand accountability from their politicians.

In this context, Match Político takes the unprocessed, but available, data about what the politicians have been doing in office, transforms it in information, by making sense out of it, and returns to the user with visual results to ease the understanding of the actions in the political landscape. Combined with other initiatives, Match Político contributes in the quest for empowerment, aiming to offer people quality information so they can make their decision in a more objective manner.

Some politicians do want to work with the people, for the people. They're working to improve the political scene and steer Brazil in a positive direction, and the population can assist them on doing so by engaging, visualizing, exposing problems, and expressing their opinions.

There is a long road ahead to improve the political landscape in Brazil, but it is not impossible. Awareness of the problem, access to quality information, and possibilities to take action could definitely cause major impact. People must rediscover their civil obligations, and be remembered that the responsibility for building a better country also relies on their hands. On this note, a hopeful thought for the future is that, generation after generation, politics stops being something that people believe that shouldn't be discussed, and starts bringing people together into collaborating to improve their reality instead. This project is a contribution towards this direction.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this thesis book is result of my own work and effort. I have not used other people's work without explicitly stating the sources. All references and extracts have been properly cited and all sources of information have been acknowledged.

Dessau, Germany – 22.06.2017

Clara Cristina de Souza Rêgo

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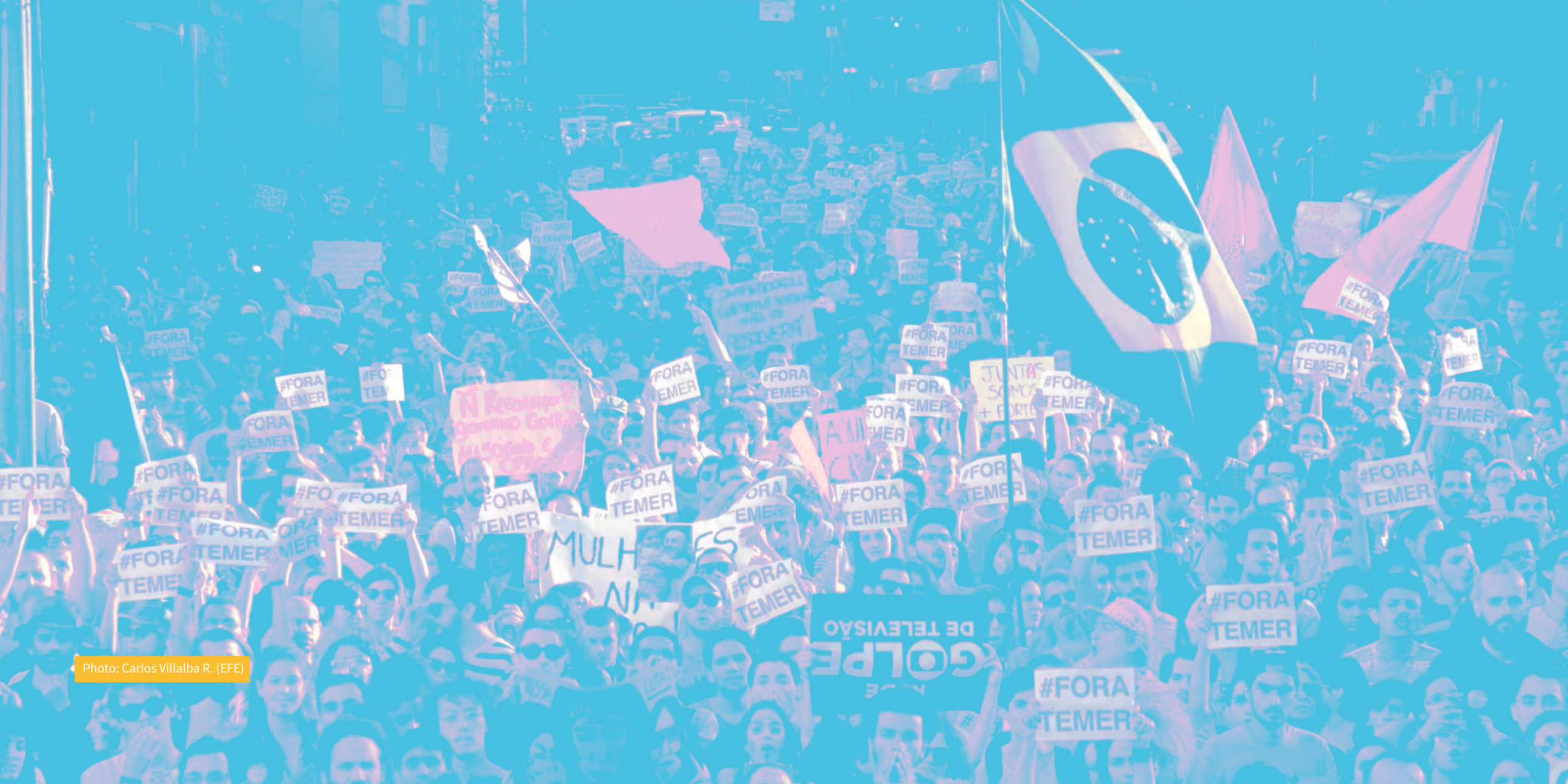

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Clara Cristina de Souza Rêgo