ELECTRONIC GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

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Abstract: Democracy does not enjoy the world of good health, as it has ever enjoyed in the past, but it is not on the verge of grave"[1]. These words are from the Italian master Norberto Bobbio, who, after this first part, states that "for a democratic regime, the constant transformation is your natural state: the democracy is dynamic, the despotism is static and always equal to itself"[2]. According to this idea, this article was written in order to show, objectively, that with the advent of the new Information and Communication Technologies – ICT's –, appears the possibility of creating brand new democratic institutions, imagined from the direct participation of citizens in politics through the using of new technologies[3], especially the Internet. It also shows that, due to the new electronic technology infrastructure, provided by networked computers and by a plenty number of communication devices and organization, storage and delivery of data and online information, appears the Electronic Democracy[4], a new concept resulting from this modern era of computing.

Keywords: Democracy, digital, governance, internet, technology,

I. INTRODUCTION

Within this concept, this study highlights the discussion about electronic governance (e-Gov), electronic voting, online voting, transparency of the

State and of the devices and initiatives for the extension of democratic opportunities, such as cyber activism, that ensures the participation of civil society in the digital age.

This article, therefore, ranges from the contemporary alternatives to the political game (parties, elections and campaigns in the digital world) to discussing the access regulation and Internet control, dealing with the issues of digital inequalities (digital divide). Unthinkable less than 50 years ago, e-democracy seems to emerge, as well as the system of the future, able to promote the people dreamed changes, people that is still looking for the well-being.

II. ELECTRONIC GOVERNANCE (E-GOV)

When people talk about governance, it is made, almost automatically, a reference to governance. In this case, there is the good governance as a requirement of the World Bank to countries in Africa and Latin America, which means in the fair conducting, transparent and effective in the State's affairs[5]. According to the brilliant words of Gomes Canotilho, "good governance means the direction and the responsible management, sustained, effective and fair of the public resources"[6].

According to Coppedge, the term *governance* deals with the relations among social actors, who, in turn, are distinct in their power resources. These relationships, as the author establishes, are governed by institutionalized rules and procedures[7].

It appears that governance is, undoubtedly, a determinant factor of governance, which adds the capacity of political, economic and social actors to the capacities of the government and the quality of

[1] Bobbio, Norberto. The future of democracy. Translated by Marco Aurélio Nogueira. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1986.p. 09.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] RAMOS JR. Helio Santiago; ROVER. Jose Aires Electronic Democracy in the Information Society. Available at: <http://www.infojur.ufsc.br/aires/arquivos/conpedi_democracia-helio-aires.pdf> Accessed: 05 Jun 2009.
[4] Also called of Digital Democracy, Virtual Democracy, E-democracy, Cyber-democracy, among others.

[5] See SILVEIRA, Alessandra. Toqueville and undesirable obstinacy by "outside debris" (contibute to a theory of an European constitutional democracy).
[6] Ibid.
[7] COPEDGE, Michael. Institutions and democratic governability in Latin America. Madrid: Síntesis, 1995.

active leaders in the society. Therefore, good governance implies that all segments of society be represented and be able to participate in management through an open and transparent government, that guarantees the participation of everybody.

The advent of Information and Communication Technologies – ICT's –, especially the Internet, contributed for the participation of citizens in the conduct of their destinations. Thus, occurs the improvement of democracy, which Chahin et al asserts as:Telematics - the marriage of information technology and electronic communication and digital convergence - provides powerful tools and increasingly cheaper to improve our democracy, to pay our social debt and stimulate our economy.[8]

The use of Information and Communication Technologies, in the scope of public managements that, according to Pereira et al, aims to improve the services delivered to society, is also called of e-government. "Although this term fosters a closer association with the Internet, the concept, in a broader sense, comprises a plenty of activities that go beyond the mere presence of government units in the vast network"[9].

Acoording to Castells, ICT means sets of converging technologies in microelectronics, computers (software and hardware), telecommunications / broadcasting and genetic engineering. For Negroponte, in turn, the new tools developed to integrate and harmonize all existing technologies approach the layers services that have been separated before the social evolution in modern times. Thus, the current doctrine believes that the use of Information and Communication Technology – ICT – by governments increases the efficiency of its services, developing or strengthening the representative and participatory democracies.[10]

As an emerging system, the Internet appears as a democratic and decentralized environment that allows the direct participation of everyone who is connected and interested about participating in

politics and helping to build this new network society[11].

In this environment, is developed the e-government, as defined by Ferguson as: The optimizing of the government delivery services, citizens participation and public administration for the transformation of internal and external relationships through technology, Internet and new communication medias.[12]

According to Rover, "the reality of e-government advances the same proportion as the silent reform of the State, as a result of the demands of society"[13].

To Chahin et al, the Electronic Governance in the scope of government includes, among others activities, all the digital support for the development of public policies, for the making decisions, for the public choices and for the workgroup, in addition to several public officials of different steps. To the authors, it also includes in governance the management of public, financial, human, informational and knowledge resources, besides the heritage and others resources[14].

According to this understanding, it can be concluded, then, that the so-called e-government brings itself not only the idea of a closest relationship between government and citizens, but it also brings an idea of strengthening the citizenship and the democratic process.

III. E-GOV IN BRAZIL

Intending to apply an electronic communication system, since the 90's, the Brazilian government organizations have been conducting websites on the Internet. This process, considered as a visionary one, was the first step toward developing a systematic policy of e-government, which culminated in the

[8] CHAHIN, Ali; CUNHA, Maria Alexandra, et al. E-gov.br: The next brazilian revolution. São Paulo: Prentice Hall, 2004.p. 3.

[9] Pereira, Sidnei, LOCKS, Rosilene, et al. Electronic Governance in Public Administration: A case study s Electronic Invoice - Nf-E. Available at: <http://www.congressocfc.org.br/hotsite/trabalhos_1/421.pdf> Accessed: 05 Jun 2009.

[10] See Castells, Manuel. Network Society. São Paulo: Editora Paz e Terra, 1999. Negroponte, Nicholas. The digital life. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006.

[11] The term "network society" was determined by Manuel Castells, which summarizes the morphology of this new society we are living, where everything is interconnected and systemic.

[12] FERGUSON, Martin. "Strategies for e-government: the international stage in development." In: Eisenberg, J.; CEPIK, M. (Ed.). Internet and Politics: Theory and Practice of Electronic Democracy. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2002. P. 104.

[13] ROVER, Aires José "Digital democracy: the problem solved. In: GALINDO, Fernando (Coord.). Gobierno, Derechos y Tecnología: Las actividades de los authorities. Thomson Civitas, Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain), 2006. p75.

[14] CHAHIN, Op.

publication of a key document entitled "Green"[15], on September 2000.

This document was grounded on the establishment of a new cultural paradigm of digital inclusion, focused on the citizen/customer, the reducing costs, the improving management and quality of public services, the transparency and simplification of processes.

The Green Paper also considered as a fundamental issue the social inclusion and expanded use of information technology by the Brazilian citizens, in order to enable the universalization and democratization of services access, with public or community kiosks, and the internalization of government services.

In this sense, the federal government released a comprehensive whole of services and information in an electronically way, through a website initially called the Government Network, which later became the e-governo portal[16].

In this website, there were already available many services, with emphasis on: a) Delivery of statement of income tax; b) Issue of certificate of payment of taxes; c) Dissemination of tenders for government procurement; d) Registration of suppliers; e) Monitoring of legal proceedings; f) Access to social and economic indicators and census data; g) Information provision on pensions and social security benefits; h) Messages sending by post, through public kiosks; i) Information about federal government programs.

According to Afonso and Fernandes, it was established in Brazil three major sets of initiatives that set the guidelines for the deployment of e-government in the country: the Information Society Program, the Transparent Brazil; and the Br@sil.gov. These programs share some common goals and are complementary to each other. The goal of the three programs is to allow that "(...) any Brazilian citizen has the opportunity to access new information technologies, becoming able to participate in the new dimensions of democratic life that is being established in the country and the world by such technologies"[17].

In this aspect, Brazil demonstrates, unequivocally, successful examples of e-government. Beginning with the electronic voting, Brazil is the only country that uses this type of resource in large-scale elections in an efficiently way, because is able to count and to add more than 120 million votes in a matter of hours. Certainly, soon it will have the option of voting via the Internet, through by the signing digital[18] of each voter.

Another interesting example is the electronic system for declaration of income. This year, across the country, were handed over 25,565,859 (twenty-five million, five hundred sixty-five thousand, eight hundred, fifty-nine) statements, resulting in an increase of 5.61% over the past year[19], saving a mountain of paper and a giant work of the Inland Revenue to process all this information, besides, of course, the comfort of the taxpayers, who can do the whole procedure electronically without leaving home.

Among the examples that Brazil gives the world, however, deserves to be highlighted the "Transparency Portal" (*Portal da Transparência*), released in 2004. It is a channel which citizens can monitor the financial implementation of government programs at the federal level. In this channel, it is also available information about the federal resources transferred by the federal government to states, municipalities and Federal District - for the decentralized implementation of government actions - and directly to the citizen, as well as data on expenditures incurred by the federal government in purchasing or hiring works and services, for example.

The management of Public Transparency Pages is regulated by Decree No. 5482 of 30 June and 2005[20] by the Interministerial Ordinance No. 140 of 16

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[15] BRAZIL, Information Society in Brazil - Green. Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.br/index.php/content/view/18878.html> Accessed: 05 Jun 2009.

[16] Currently, www.e.gov.br.

[17] AFONSO, José Roberto R, FERNANDES, Andréa G. e-Government in Brazil: experiences and perspectives. Revista do BNDES. Rio de Janeiro:

2001. Available in <http://www.bndes.gov.br/SiteBNDES/export/sites/default/bndes_pt/Galerias/Arquivos/conhecimento/revista/rev1502.pdf> Accessed: 05 Jun 2009.

[18] The digital signature is an authentication method of digital information typically treated as analogous to physical signature on paper, the use of digital signatures provides the undeniable proof that a message came from the issuer.

[19] BRAZIL, Internal Revenue Service. Available in <http://www.receita.fazenda.gov.br/AutomaticoSRFsinot/2009/04/30/2009_04_30_19_42_03_289906666.html> Accessed: 05 Jun 2009.

[20] See http://www.planalto.gov.br/CCIVIL/_Ato2004-2006/2005/Decreto/D5482.htm.

March 2006[21], which determine the dissemination of information and intelligence bodies and entities of the Federal Public Administration the Internet.

By accessing such information, the citizen stays informed on how public money is being used and becomes a tax of your correct application. Citizens can follow, especially, how public resources are being applied in the municipality where he lives, expanding the conditions for control of that money, which, in turn, is generated by the taxes payment.

The Transparency Portal is an initiative of the Comptroller General of the Union (CGU) to ensure the proper and correct application of public resources. Without requiring access password, the goal is to increase the transparency of public administration and combating corruption in Brazil. Thus, it is permissible for the citizen not only to participate in public policy formulation, but also to monitor, on an ongoing basis, the use of public resources, besides of exert control over state action, demanding that the public administrator accounts for their actions through reports to the Comptroller General of the Union (CGU), the City Councils and State Legislatures, the State Public Ministry (MEP) and Federal (MPF) and the Judiciary (Courts of Justice).

IV. DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION

According to Gomes, the premise is well known: the constitutional democracy is founded on the idea of popular sovereignty. The opinion of the people should prevail in the conduct of common pertinence business, the public wish should prevail in decisions that affect the public good.

For the author, the consolidation of modern democratic experience, especially through the forms of representative democracy, ended by setting up a sphere of political decision apart from society or civil sphere. Fitting to the parties, the political decision was limited to the role of principals civilian to decision, from time to time, about who will integrate the ball that makes the actual policy decisions.[22]

The examination of the reasons for the excessive autonomy of the political sphere and the increasing

atrophy of the functions of the civil sphere, concerning the State affairs, has become the central theme and the great novelty of the theory of democracy in recent decades.[23]

From this moment on, become to be known the renewal of models of "participatory democracy", the prospects for a "strong democracy" and, recently, of "deliberative democracy". In this context, it was natural that the discussion about the environment, about the means and modes of public communication, as a tool for improving the presence of the civil sphere in the conduct of public affairs, found the discussion on models of democracy concerned about increasing citizen participation[24].

Therefore, to Gomes, the idea of citizen participation understood as a civilian occupation in politics finds on the Internet the technological and ideological possibilities of fulfillment a popular ideal of conduct and direct public affairs. Gomes asserts that: This view is primarily supported by the libertarian theories of democracy and its anarchic-liberal version of the Internet. In all models, the experience of the Internet is seen, at the same time, as an inspiration for forms of political participation stared by the civil sphere and as a demonstration that there are effective ways and means for popular participation in the public life.[25]

The "electronic democracy" is, in this aspect, a semantic-time used to make reference to the experience of the Internet and the devices that are compatible with it, all aimed to increase the potential for citizen participation in the conduct of public affairs.

V. ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY

Regarding the claims of George, we can discuss the e-democracy starting from some points. The first one is related to the electronic democracy characteristic to be presented as an opportunity to overcome the deficiencies of the current state of liberal democracy. In this sense, he says: It starts with the perception that the institutions, actors and political practices in liberal democracies are in crisis, mainly due to the low participation of the citizens and the dry and clear separation between the civil and the political sphere. (...) The model of representative democracy is, therefore, in crisis. The historical alternative to representative democracy is direct democracy, overcome historically inadequate mass societies and the complexity of the contemporary state - which requires professionalism (that is, dedication, training

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[21] 21 See http://www.cgu.gov.br/Legislacao/Arquivos/Portarias/Portaria_Interministerial.pdf.
[22] GOMES, Wilson.A digital democracy and the problem of citizen participation in policy-making. Available in <http://revcom2.portcom.intercom.org.br/index.php/fronteiras/article/view/3120/2930> Accessed: 05 Jun 2009.

[23] Ibid.
[24] Gomes, op. cit. p.216.
[25] Ibid.

and competence) of those who govern and those who legislate. The introduction of a new technological infrastructure, however, does re-emerge strongly hopes of alternative models of democracy, to implement a third way between a representative democracy, which derives from the people to policy-making and direct democracy, which either completely consigned to the citizen . These models revolve around the idea of participatory democracy and, in the last ten years, in the form of deliberative democracy, to which the Internet is definitely an inspiration.[26]

The second point is related to the assertion that electronic democracy is presented as an alternative to the deployment of a new democratic experience, based on a new concept of democracy. However, behind this assertion, according to the Gibson, there is a set of assumptions about the Internet and political participation status, namely: a. The Internet could solve the problem of public participation in policy that affects the contemporary liberal representative democracies, because this would make participation easier, faster and more convenient (comfortable, too). This is particularly important in times of civil society disorganized and demobilized or citizenship without society; b. The Internet would allow a relationship without intermediaries between the civil and the political sphere, blocking the influence of the economic sphere and, above all, the industries of entertainment, culture and mass information, that the time control the flow of political information; c. The Internet would allow the civil sphere was not only a consumer of political information, or prevent the flow of political communication was unidirectional, with a vector that usually goes from the political to the civil sphere. Finally, the Internet represents the possibility that the civil sphere produce political information for their own consumption and for the provision of its decision.

In the third point, the author points out that the e-democracy, as an experience, must ensure public participation in the production processes of political decision. According to Gomes, there are some levels of popular participation provided by the infrastructure of the Internet, which seem to satisfy different understandings of democracy. There are five levels of electronic democracy, corresponding to the scale of demand models of participatory democracy, arranged as it follows: The most basic level is represented by that citizen access to public services over the network (the State services delivered at home or citizenship). (...) the delivery of electronic democracy first degree is implanted at an accelerated

rate throughout part and is now more or less established in its essential dimensions, in most contemporary liberal states. (...) The effectiveness of management, lower costs of public administration and replacement of the terrible state bureaucracy in the new digital tape makes digital democracy first-degree advantageous for governments and comfortable to the citizen. (...) The second level consists of a State which consults the public over the network to ascertain their views about issues of public agenda and to eventually to the formation of the public agenda. In a digital democracy second degree, the political sphere has some level of porosity to the public and considers the direct contact with the public an alternative to opinion polls.

(...) The third level of digital democracy is represented by a state with such volume and intensity in their reporting and accountability that, somehow, gets a high level of transparency to the average citizen. A state whose politics is guided by a principle of enlightened political advertising. In this case, however, the State provides services, information and accounts of citizenship, but she has to produce the policy.

(...) The fifth degree, of course, is represented by the models of direct democracy, where the ball would end professional politics because it would control the public policy making legitimate and valid within the state. This is the model of democracy plug in play, electronic voting, preferably on-line, the conversion of the citizen not only in controlling the political sphere but in producing policy-making on public affairs. The result of the establishment of an electronic democracy fifth grade would be, for example, a state ruled by referendums on-line in which the political sphere would remain exclusively the functions of government.

(...) An electronic democracy fourth degree corresponds to certain models of deliberative democracy. Unlike the fifth degree of democracy, deliberative democracy model combines participatory democracy with the model of representative democracy. The political sphere is still there, but the state becomes more porous to popular participation, allowing the audience to not only keep informed of the conduct of public affairs, but also can act intentionally in the production of politic decision.[27]

For the author, the plebiscite possibilities of the Internet have been proved as effective forms of democracy, as well as essential tools for the public forums of any kind. It is not known, however, which types of effects a very intense rate of transfer of the

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[26] Gomes, op. cit. p.p.217 and 218.

[27] Gomes, op. cit. p. 219.

policy for the civil sphere, by electronic means, would produce on the political society in its current form or how to reconcile the decision with a civil administration of the State made up of representatives elected.

In the fourth point mentioned by Gomes, the author states that the most democratic way to ensure participation in policy-making takes place through discussion and deliberation. In this sense, he asserts that: The Rousseau principle of popular sovereignty seems to require that people participate in an open and fair debate and deliberation on public affairs. On the other hand, it is easier to identify the resolution computer-mediated communication, understanding it as a debate or understanding it as a production decision argued and discussed, indicate that the determination as such precisely produces an effect on production of the policy that counts upstate.[28]

At this last point, George resents that exists authors dealing basically with the resolution, but do not bother to show how the popular decision on the Internet could generate effects on the sphere of policy makers.

VI. DEMOCRACIES IN ELECTRONIC OPERATION

Nowadays, it may be mentioned as examples of Electronic Democracies in operation the democracies in Sweden and Italy[29]. In Sweden, a party called Demoex, or Democracy Experiment, is an experiment with direct democracy in Vallentuna, a suburb of Stockholm.

The student Parisa Molagholi, that was nineteen by the time, was elected on 4 November 2002 with 1.7% of the votes for the City Hall of Vallentuna, and has been caused terror to the traditional politicians in the last years. Molagholi, who has been re-elected in 2006 with 2.9% of the votes, is the representative of Demoex, a group of young people that created an entirely new way to participate in politics. Molagholi does not vote according to her beliefs, and not even according to the instructions of her party: her official voting in the town hall depends on the result of online voting, which is held in advance of Demoex website. Any resident of Vallentuna who had completed 16 years can register on the site, and participate in the vote; any person, of anywhere in the world, can participate in discussions. Demoex's vision is to open the political process, creating opportunities to all registered voters express their opinion about a specific issue, voting by Internet.

One reason for the creation of Demoex, in addition to widespread disillusionment with traditional politicians, was the fact that in representative democracy the views of the people is consulted only once in every four years. And after being elected, the traditional politicians can act almost as they please until the next election.[30]

In Italy, it already exists an interesting project of Electronic Democracy, called Listapartecipata[31], which has as the motto "The government's control in the hands of the people (and not just on election day)", and whose principles are very similar to Demoex.

VII. ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY: POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS

According to Gomes, the Internet is a valuable resource for political participation, since it has a computer and cultural capital to use it within the democratic game. In the list of political advantages, the Internet can play an important role in the realization of deliberative democracy, because it can provide to interested parties to participate in the democratic game two of their key requirements: updated policy information and opportunity for interaction. It also occurs the fact that, with the Internet, acquiring and disseminating political information online has become quick, easy, cheap and convenient, besides of being devoid of the constraints of industrial means of communication. Finally, they speculate that a mediated political communication on the Internet should facilitate a grassroots democracy and bring together the peoples of the world political community without borders.

Moreover, Gomes states that only the Internet access is not enough for the increasing in political activity, much less the political activity of argument. By the same token, it appears that not all political information on the Internet is democratic, liberal or promote democracy. And predicts "the same chance of anonymity that protects the political freedom against tyrannical governments control and corporate control is enhanced to substantial content and practices tyrannical, racist, discriminatory and undemocratic in the Internet".

The author concludes saying that the online information is, in principle, available to everybody who are equipped to do so, but it is not easy to access and manage vast amounts of information. "Organize, identify and find information is a task that requires

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[28] Gomes, op. cit. p.220.
[29] See http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demoex. Accessed: 05 Jun 2009.

[30] Ibid.

skills and time, which many do not," concludes the author in laconic tone.[31]

VIII. DIGITAL EXCLUSION

Inequality recorded between rich and poor is now entering the digital age and threatens to expand with the same speed communication technologies. Thus, the digital exclusion presents itself as one of the biggest challenges of this beginning of century.

According to Santos and Cardoso, the digital exclusion is directly related to income level, location and even, in some countries, the gender and ethnic. The technology gap is more common in poor communities, rural communities and towns far from large urban centers, where the high level of lack in infrastructure hinders access to technology. For these authors, the digital exclusion competes with other types of social exclusion for facilities which, in most countries where it is further, are scarce and necessary to meet various demands.[32]

For Ramos and Jose Junior Rover, there are several obstacles to the construction of electronic democracy, and among them one of the most significant is the necessity to ensure participation of excluded in this process because it is precisely on involvement, which are the majority, which gives legitimacy to the government, making this a truly democratic state.

However, the authors say is not sufficient that the public be included in the digital world and know how to use the new technologies. The public must be aware that technology is not neutral and that the access to knowledge confers a degree of power in the network society, so that the full exercise of citizenship and the influence of citizens in the democratic process using the ICTs will depend on what stage of policy processes they can participate.[33]

For Elisabeth Gomes, it should be clear that this movement to expand the access to computers and the Internet represents one way in which there is no return and that will probably change in the long run, the relationship between citizen and state, making it easier for groups of citizens with specific interests to

organize themselves to act in order to have the greatest impact.[34]

Therefore, the digital inclusion should be treated as a constituent element of the policy of e-government, so that it can configure itself as universal policy. This view is based on understanding of skills as a civil right and therefore an object of public policies for its promotion.[35]

XI. CONCLUSION

For Fernando Sabino, "democracy is providing an opportunity for everyone the same starting point. But this point of arrival depends on each one". Based on this assumption, the electronic democracy gives ordinary citizens the opportunity to participate in discussions and interactions with the political powers, he brought his voice, not only during election campaigns, but in all periods of his life.

According to this article, therefore, it can be concluded that e-governance is a consequence of electronic democracy and vice versa. It is also noticed that the electronic democracy is a process in construction, which comes to strengthen the conventional democracy and not to replace it.

For Vital Moreira, "does not existing the perfect democracy, the democracy always needs to be an unfinished task." In this sense, the electronic democracy is an alternative to strengthen and increase the potential for citizen participation in the conduct of public affairs.

However, there are several challenges to the implementation of government and electronic democracy, which call for the digital inclusion and participation of the excluded in the democratic process and the need to humanize the technologies they are used not as an end in themselves but as a way of strengthening the exercise of citizenship and democratic state.

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[31] See GOMES, op. cit. p.p.220, 221.

[32] SANTOS, Luiz Alberto dos, Cardoso, Regina Luna Santos. Electronic Government in Brazil: Modernization of the State and Policies for Digital Inclusion in the Context of Fiscal Adjustment. Available in <http://www.buscalegis.ufsc.br/revistas/index.php/buscalegis/article/viewFile/5149/4718> Accessed: 05 Jun 200.

[33] JR RAMOS AND JOSE ROVER, op.cit.

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[34] GOMES, Elisabeth.Exclusão digital: a technological or social problem? Available at: <http://www.iets.org.br/biblioteca/Exclusao_digital_um_problema_tecnologico_ou_social.pdf> Accessed: 05 Jun 2009.

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