

Social Technology in Brazil: a ground-based concept.

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Introduction

In recent years some Brazilian NGOs realized the importance of some technologies – identified as Social Technologies - as means to promote a better quality of life. This article aims to analyze the roots and the various definitions of the so-called Social Technology based on the review of the existing bibliography and interviews with NGO activists, namely Instituto de Tecnologia Social (ITS) and Fundacao Banco do Brasil (FBB).

The NGO Sector in Brazil

During the 1970s, the Brazilian civil society organized many initiatives in the grass root communities. The vast majority of these initiatives was taken as a form of resistance to the dictatorial governments, at that time, and was boosted by **Teologia da Libertacao** (liberation theology).

In the 1980's a democratic government was set up bringing back to the country many academic and political leaders. The return of these people and the democratic government resulted in the institutionalization of many social movements as NGOs, which were enhanced by the funds of the international cooperation agencies and also by some government funds.

In the 1990s the NGOs reached a new level pushed by some milestones like the United Nations Environment Summit that took place in Rio de Janeiro (1992), and the emergency of the Third Sector. Also, the agenda of the NGOs changed starting to struggle for new rights such as the access to public information and the modernization of the own NGOs.

Social Technology: origins and definitions

In this *scenario*, part of the Brazilian NGOs started to work with new small-scaled technological models based on three assumptions: (1) Technology is not neutral since who produces has its own values and beliefs; (2) the current technological model was environmentally unsustainable; (3) technology can be harmful causing problems such as air pollution, unemployment and alienation of the workers. The inspiration to this

movement was given by Schumacher (1973) with the concepts such as “intermediate technology”, “small scale technology” or “appropriate technology”.

In 2001 **Fundacao Banco do Brasil** has launched the first edition of the **Premio de Tecnologia Social** (Social Technology Award), which represents a reference to the conceptual development, and also to the development of database of Social Technologies. In 2004, **Fundacao Banco do Brasil** has launched **Tecnologia Social: uma estrategia para o desenvolvimento** (Fundacao Banco do Brasil, 2004)

Fundacao Banco do Brasil defines social Technology as follows:

“Social Techonology comprises products, techniques or methodologies ‘re applicable’ developed from the interaction with the community and which represents effective solutions for the transformation of society.” (Fundacao Banco do Brasil)

Also, in 2001 is the year of foundation of **Intituto de Tecnologia Social** (Social Technology Institute). The instute has as aims to promote the deployment of technologies and generation of knowledge linked to the necessities of underprivileged sectors of Brazilain society. Since its formation Social Technology Institute (ITS) has been striving for the recognition of the civil society organizations as producers of knowledge and technologies relevant for the poverty relief.

Instituto de Tecnologia Social define Social Technolies as follows:

“The range of transforming techniques and methodologies developed and/ or applied in the interaction with communities and comprehended by them which represent solutions for social inclusion and betterment of quality of life” (Instituto de Tecnologia Social)

Among its activities, ITS has been identifying and describing Social Technologies in different areas like assistive technologies, local development of communities, and food safety. Besides this ITS has been promoting seminars and events for the refinement of the concept of Social Technology.

This intends to raise the understanding about Social Technology meanings enhancing the comprehension of this concept and pushing forward the development, use and dissemination of its practices.

References:

Fundacao Banco do Brasil (eds.). 2004. *Tecnologia Social: uma estrategia para o desenvolvimento*. Rio de Janeiro. Sindicato Nacional dos Editores de Livros.

Schumacher. Ernst F. 1973 *Small is beautiful: economics as if people mattered*. Blond and Briggs.