

**IGF 2016: WORKSHOP 169**  
**Regional Participation in Brazil: Growing Initiatives**

**by Gustavo Paiva.**



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### Regional Participation in Brazil: Growing Initiatives

An inspirational group of activists, researchers and practitioners on Internet Governance have come together after IGF2015 and other IG events in Latin America to engage in different organizations in the area. This reveals the impact that debate arenas such as the IGF have and further presents the importance of regional engagement and effective strategies to achieve it.

The dialogues and actions of this group were revisited in events like Internet Freedom Festival, Rightscon, ICAN55, WSIS Forum and other arenas. These activists continue the debate in online groups, both mobile and on computers. Their work continues identifying leaders in Internet Governance and other groups which can be articulated so that regional engagement increases and future actions can be planned so as to fully integrate unrepresented regions in the Internet Governance future.

Our online activism communities on IG in the Global South are dispersed and do not easily communicate with each other. Through this Flash Session, we wish to expose a few of them and to bring them together, in order to strategize and create global ties independent from organizations and companies.

By showcasing these efforts, it's expected that new communication bridges can be built. As well, common goals and concerns, such as zero rating, increase in connectivity, cybersecurity and other can be addressed primarily.

### ***Accipitut Det:* Engaging Undergraduates Towards Internet Governance and Law**

by Gustavo Paiva.

#### **1 WORKSHOP 169 SPEECH**

##### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Greetings. My name is Gustavo Paiva, and I am an undergrad student at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, in Brazil. I study Law and I'm the founder of the Grupo de Estudos de Direito da Internet — a research group approved by Brazil's National Counsel of Technological and Scientific Development.

I've come here today to tell you the story of my research group — my students — and of how our work was impacted by the IGF 2015 at João Pessoa. I believe that our experiences so far can be used by university professors, post-grad researchers and undergrad students in order to create similar groups.



Hopefully, one of you, either here or watching this workshop online, will find what I have to say useful, and, who knows, maybe you'll end up making something similar.

## **1.2 CONTEXT**

So, let's begin with some of the context that led us here. This, here, is my beloved university — a sandy place amidst dunes and tropical woods. I enrolled in 2013, and, from day one, I only had a mind for Internet Law and Governance. In the Law course we have quite a few projects in which students can take part during their years — but absolutely none in anything related to Internet Law or Governance... And our course did have some big flaws, notably a lack of research and, even worse, lack of *authorship ethics*. It was not uncommon for professors to exploit their students.

Very frequently we would have students complaining that, if you wanted to have a career around this or that discipline, you were essentially forced to work with one or two professors. And since you had so little choice, it was not uncommon for these professors to make unethical requirements — such as forcing their students to include them as coauthors in papers when it was not agreed upon beforehand. Beyond that, it was not uncommon for professors to strong arm their students into researching some very limited subjects — frequently the very topics these professors were already researching for their post-graduate works, so that they could reuse their students' work. And, well, that's just no science at all, because the professor would never accept that you'd get to a different conclusion from his or hers, so effectively the results were already set well before the research even started. That would not do.

This created a very particular context in my institution, which was that my fellow students and I were eager for opportunities to research the topics we were *actually interested in* with professors that didn't make unethical or inadequate requirements.

## **1.3 IGF 2015 AND ESTABLISHING ENGAGEMENT**

Well, — where there's a will there's a way — and I took that as an opportunity. I got together with a handful of students who, too, wanted to follow this path. Our course didn't have anything resembling an Internet Law discipline, so we knew no one who could teach us the ways. We just studied by ourselves and, shortly after, talked with two professors of Administrative Law — who were known for their ethics— who agreed to guide us on research.

We traced a plan to make a group and to get it recognized by Brazil's National Counsel of Technological and Scientific Development, so that we could run for funding and certify our researchers' workload.

On our first year of work — that was 2015 — we mostly focused on recruiting students and going through the bureaucracy to get recognized by the Counsel. At first we were three and, before long, we were ten — ten students teaching each other, presenting lectures, writing papers, discussing ideas...

The veterans would teach the newcomers, and the newcomers would eventually be offered a handful of brief, easy topics. They'd pick one they were more attuned with and they would have to present a lecture on it — with the assistance of a more experienced researcher, of course. Now, the rookies would get nervous and anxious, but that experience — of studying in order to teach, receiving in order to give — left a positive and long-lasting mark on them, and they quickly became rather knowledgeable on Internet Governance topics.

This became the cornerstone of how we taught our newcomers. They would learn by doing, and once they were secure enough they would be capable of choosing the topics they'd want to study on the long term. It wouldn't be long before the newcomers would become veterans, and the cycle would begin anew in the following semester.

Around that time, we learned about the Internet Governance Forum. It was set up to happen on João Pessoa — less than two hundred kilometers from our town — so we started preparing ourselves for it.

The preparatory process, by itself, was a learning experience unlike any other. For a newcomer like me, the idea of attending such an event was daunting, even scary, while still being exciting and stimulating.

Still, even after months of dedicated study, I had not grasped what the IGF experience really was. On my first day I quickly met people I had read so much about and heard from them their perspectives. I got to interact with activists with so many years of experience who selflessly offered me help and guidance, and I came in contact with projects which I would look up to.

The IGF was an invaluable learning experience, and, today, all of my



lectures for my students are somehow based around on what I learned there. I still consult workshops from last year, to refresh the content in my mind, and I've modeled my classes around offering more participation and interactivity. And, of course, today I always emphasize the multistakeholder model.

In my opinion, there is no better way to teach a rookie researcher about Internet Governance other than exposing him or her to the reality of our community and it's essentially multistakeholder framework. And, were it not for the IGF 2015 happening at João Pessoa, most likely I wouldn't have learned it myself.

Our participation at the IGF triggered a cascade of drastic refinements in our methods, which in turn resulted in plentiful fruits.

Concerning how we communicate with the students, we fully accepted a light-hearted, informal and accessible approach. We can be easily reached through social media, which is the student's preferred communication tool, and the marketing we did for our roundtables and events was always somewhat comedic — this approach has proved to be extremely effective in engaging the population, and there have been quite a few recruits who have explicitly stated that they became interested in joining us because of our accessibility, because we avoid the “ivory tower” stereotype.



Inspired by Harvard's Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society, we divided our staff in a few Research Lines based on their preferred subjects — Internet Governance and Human Rights, Law and Economy in the Internet, Cybercrime and Safety, Electronic Process. We also instituted a Secretariat — inspired by the IGF, of course — who would serve as both Research Lines leaders and would deal with all the administrative and





editorial work. Most recently, we created an Events Committee, because we plan on making an Internet Governance Forum of sorts in our region next year. On funding, we're amidst talks with the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee and a few other institutions — hopefully that'll work out! We're also writing our first publication on Internet Law, and as of 2015 we've been assisting with other university projects — recently two of our students started helping local start-ups on their intellectual property issues, we've helped with assembling roundtables about revenge porn and, most recently, we've started helping on writing our university's cybersecurity policy.

Also, remember that I said that we didn't have any classes regarding Internet Law? Well, because of all our work that's about to change — we'll have two disciplines, starting from the second semester of 2017.

You can guess how proud I am of that. Three years ago, when I enrolled in my university, there really wasn't any future for me there, my academic interests were woefully inadequate. But, today, a student like myself is quite capable of finding a place to fit in — a home, of sorts.

Nowadays, our group is composed of over 25 researchers — mostly undergrads, but we do have a few post-grad researchers too, and soon we'll put efforts towards recruiting researchers from other states. We already have a diverse staff, composed of people from a wide array of creeds, ethnicities and sexualities, and we have a compromise with equality. Our numbers will most surely increase. These people, my students and I, we're slowly working our way towards becoming Internet Governance activists.

## **1.4 LESSONS LEARNED**

So, what's the lesson to be learned by this experience? Well, what I intended to show is that, if we look at our institutions of higher learning, there's a quite appreciable number of potential activists and researchers. They're students who don't quite know

where to go, what to read, what to do, and if we only give them some guidance, they can carve a path for themselves. But so many of them are being wasted because they're in the dark.

The Internet Governance Forum has served, for us, as the founding stone, a shining light, for our group. We're raising a generation of activists which are born from it, and we would not be here at all if João Pessoa hadn't been picked as the IGF 2015 host city.

That said, having an IGF nearby is not a requirement for assembling your own group. If you're an undergraduate student, a post-graduate researcher or a professor in any field minimally related to Internet Governance, please consider that there might kindred spirits nearby you, looking for the same thing you are. You need only to come together, look around and see what're your fellow's needs.

My colleagues needed ethical authorship and academic freedom, and they wanted to truly put their time and efforts into research. These were their demands and I was quite happy to work towards them, which is quite fitting with what's written on my university's shield — "*accipit ut det*", which means "receive to give."

So, to close this up, let's take a last look at my beloved university — "a sandy place amidst dunes and tropical woods." When I got here, all I saw was old buildings, sun, sand and heat — seemingly so little of value, so little of use. But, today, I know better, because I've found gold where everyone else saw dust and sand. So, today, I see my university for what it truly is — a sandy, fertile and very gentle crib cradled by hidden gold and a beautiful landscape.

Thank you, all. It's been an honor.