

Government in the metaverse: perspectives and challenges

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Governments around the world have the Metaverse's technological innovations and its transformational potential on their radar. The Metaverse promises to revolutionize not just the way people relate to each other and produce and consume products, but also the way they access services, inspiring speculation as to how public services can be imported into this new reality.

Discussions over user security also raise questions about the challenges involved in regulation and supervision of an environment in which decentralization is an absolute given. Will there be a place in the sun for States in this new technology? How can government administrations make use of this new space?

Some of the experience gained by Brazil and other countries allows us to sketch a preliminary overview of how governments can benefit from the new technology. The Metaverse can certainly help in providing public services, even the most complex, such as health and education. With the immersion made possible by sensory equipment, there are opportunities for more precise diagnoses and provision of therapeutic treatments, especially in the areas of psychology and phonoaudiology.

By reducing the barriers imposed by the physical world, the Metaverse also holds out the possibility of democratization in access to public services by citizens who may have difficulties travelling to centers. Platforms could be created to bring government closer to the people, with integrated ombudsman channels and access to public documents.

Governments could also take advantage of the new technology to automate bureaucratic procedures, making them less time-consuming for citizens and reducing costs related to physical facilities.

Decisions will have to be made on regulation of activities in the Metaverse, and it has become clear that policing powers will also be needed in these virtual spaces. The news that cases of sexual harassment in the Metaverse had led Meta to create personal boundary tools to maintain distance between avatars, recently reported in Brazilian media¹, has generated debate over the need for a regulatory authority in the Metaverse to create laws prohibiting malicious conduct by virtual users. A state presence and the creation of a body of regulations may give the population a greater sense of security, attracting more hesitant users to the platform.

From another perspective, the integration promised by the digital environment may also facilitate government contracting, since investors from around the world will be able to dialogue with government authorities and make contracts via the blockchain. Government projects could be shown in a type of project marketplace, without the limits imposed by physical

borders.

Although the Metaverse is in an embryonic phase, its potential to transform relationships of all kinds, including public-private relations, requires us to reflect on the opportunities and challenges the Metaverse will bring. Investors around the world see the revolutionary potential of this new technology, which promises to be the successor to the internet and to profoundly reinvent means of production, consumption and access to services.

Given the magnitude of these changes, governments cannot ignore the new reality. They too must be prepared to be part of the process of developing

NOTES:

¹ G1. Após denúncia de assédio sexual no metaverso, Facebook cria ferramenta para garantir distanciamento entre avatares. Available at: <<https://g1.globo.com/tecnologia/noticia/2022/02/08/apos-denuncia-de-assedio-sexual-no-metaverso-facebook-cria-ferramenta-para-garantir-distanciamento-entre-avatares.ghtml>> Accessed 18 February 2022.

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