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A PARTICIPAÇÃO POLÍTICA E AS TIC NO MUNICÍPIO DE PORTO ALEGRE, BRASIL
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND THE ICT IN THE CITY OF PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL
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Abstract

Amidst a crisis of representative democracy, and under the pressure from both social distancing and remote work brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are recognized nowadays not only as opportune tools, but also as essential features for social reproduction. In the political field, the inclusion of ICT for the articulation between the state and society accelerates the practices already in use. Nevertheless, despite its democratic potential, the question remains: are such new technologies effectively used by the state for this purpose, or are they used only to reproduce the same excluding practices? The present paper examines the use of ICT by the state for political participation, by analyzing the case of the Porto Alegre City Government [Prefeitura Municipal de Porto Alegre - PMPA], in Southern Brazil. It focuses on the increase of the use of ICT by the city government to ensure political participation in city planning and urban administration. The analysis comprises the period from 1999 (year of the launch of the official website) to the present day, looking into the enhancement and modernization of the platforms due to the advancement of the pandemic. Therefore, the paper aims to sketch a general panorama of the evolution of the usage of ICT by the state in the municipal sphere in recent history, focusing on political participation.

1   Introduction

The advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) changed fast and deeply all dimensions of human living experience, mainly in the last three decades. Nowadays, contemporary society cannot be considered without its technological tools, making it crucial to identify the repercussions of ICT insertion in daily life. Such technological development opened up possibilities for the transformation of the current political system, which is much criticized, especially due to low political participation of the people in a supposedly democratic model.

The performance of the government during the COVID-19 pandemic has been crucial in the administration of the city and its public spaces' uses, by informing about the number of cases – released daily both by local governments and the Health Secretariat –, and by regulating remote work, and social distancing. The Rio Grande do Sul was one of the fastest states to define strategies to respond to the crisis generated by the pandemic. The first case of COVID-19 in this state was confirmed on March 10th, 2020 in the Metropolitan Region of Porto Alegre, the capital city of Rio Grande do Sul state (Soares, et al., 2020). Two days later, the state government published its first decree (State Decree # 55115, from March, 12th, 2020), prescribing preventive measures for public agencies, later altered to reach all civil workers (State Decree # 55118, from March, 16th, 2020).

The alternative of the home office, globally adopted during the pandemic, is an example of how the ICT have been changing in a direct and profound way the local work relationships, the mobility in the cities, and the access to platforms and applications through the use of informational networks. Thus, understanding the mechanisms of interaction between state and society by remote means of communication is of great relevance to thinking about the political and participatory perspective in the current context of populations' lives.

This paper examines the use of ICT by the state to promote political participation. More specifically, it aims to investigate if the increase in the use of ICT by the Porto Alegre City Government [Prefeitura Municipal de Porto Alegre – PMPA], which started in the 1990s, effectively improved the political participation in urban administration and planning. To this end, historical marks related to the main digital platforms of PMPA will be identified, as well as the form of political participation enabled by these means of communication.

PMPA was selected because of its large history of ICT use and for its outstanding participatory initiatives, its main reference being the participatory Budget [Orçamento Participativo]. Implemented at the end of the 1980s, the experience of the participatory Budget in Porto Alegre demonstrated that real spaces of participation and deliberation in the civil sphere can be articulated with representative politics (Santos, 2002, p. 65). The initial frame of this time period is justified, because it is the period when the Internet gained popularity in Brazil and when the first government websites in the country were launched, thus being considered the first mark of ICT usage in Brazilian city governments. For this research, the techniques utilized were bibliographical and documentary research and digital platform navigation.

This paper has five parts. The first one approaches the crisis of the representative democracy model and the emergence of participatory models. The second part examines the technological revolution and the expectations in relation to the model of digital democracy. The third refers to political participation in the Brazilian context. The fourth part analyses the case of PMPA. The fifth shows a synthesis of the subjects examined and discusses the results obtained with the case study, drawing conclusions from the investigation performed.

2   The crisis of representation and the ascension of participatory models

Democracy is a government regime in which sovereignty is exerted by the people. The variations in the form of political participation (understood here as the participation of civil society in the political sphere) point to the existence of different democratic models, as will be seen below. The current hegemonic democracy model was structured during the 20th century when the democratic issue was composed essentially of two main elements: the desirability as a government form and the structural conditions of democracy (Santos, 2002, p. 39-40). In response to this debate, the *representative model* stood out as an alternative, which would basically tend to equilibrate the tension between the democratic government and the capitalist society. According to Santos:

The representative model was structured with a basis on the separation between the representatives and the

> This stabilization occurred in two ways: the priority conferred to the capital accumulation in relation to social redistribution and the restriction of citizen participation, be it individual or collective, with the objective of not 'overloading' too much the democratic regime with social demands which could put in danger the priority of accumulation over redistribution. (Santos, 2002, p. 59, highlighted by the author, our translation)

represented, on behalf of the preservation of the political system. In this model, the elections are crucial, because it is through them that society can exert control over the political leadership, the participation is limited to the choosing of the leaders, as a way to preserve the system and obtain the maximum efficiency in decision making processes (Pateman, 1992, p. 25-26). The minority of rulers (political sphere) concentrates the decision-making power and the majority of ruled (civil sphere) has a decision-making power limited to the election process to choose the rulers. Thus, in a representative democracy, civil society (considered as the center of democratic regimes) performs only the role of authorizing, and not of governing. Souza (2018, p. 324-325) criticizes this model, affirming that, in a representative democracy, there is an alienation of decision and freedom for the ruler to decide for others.

The increasing distancing between civil society and the state, stimulated by representative democracy, culminated in the contestation of the emphasis given to representation in the political system. This dissatisfaction resulted in the crisis of this hegemonic model and the emergence of initiatives for the renovation of the democratic model, mainly from the 1970s onwards. The resulting counter-hegemonic models of participation, known as participatory democracy, are characterized by the acknowledgment of human plurality and the rupture of consolidated traditions (Santos, 2002, p. 51), challenging political representation as to the only alternative, and evoking a greater openness for the participation of society in political decisions. For Pateman (1992, p. 60-62), this model has the following features: individuals and institutions cannot be considered separately; the maintenance of the political system could only be possible by the educative function of political participation; the emphasis on the positive aspects of political participation, as the integrative effect and the wider acceptance of the decisions taken; and the principle of political equality as equality of power in the determination of decisions.

In summary, the participatory models (contrary to representative democracy) defend the approximation of civil society to the political sphere, where participation is seen as essential to the maintenance of the political system. However, participatory models were also the target of criticism such as the ones pointed by Silva (2009, p. 49), who indicates that there is an overly positive view on the nature of human relations and the absence of alternatives to solve the question of 'scale'. The author also cautions about the danger of generating an ideal and hegemonic type of citizen participation in these models, which can distort participation into a majority tyranny. According to the author, these models, thus, could stir up the existing conflicts in the discursive clash of the different views.

As shown by Silva (2009, p. 53), participatory models are not necessarily excluding or incompatible with representative democracy, because they maintain certain principles connected to the basic idea of democracy. Although authors such as Santos (2002, p. 75-76) defend the articulation between representative and participatory democracies as a solution to the political crisis, participatory democracy faces difficulty in its insertion in the hegemonically practiced model. According to Souza (2018, p. 325, our translation), "it is tried to correct distortions and problems of the representative system through the injection of a dose of direct democracy", which many times has its purposes subverted. Among those distortions, the communication and information channels between state and society stand out.

3   Technological revolution and digital democracy model

To Santos (2013, p. 24), the geographical space, at the present time, constitutes a technical-scientific-informational medium, in which science, technology, and information form the basis of all the forms of use and functioning of space. Castells (2018, p. 109) asserts that the information technology revolution began in the 1970s. However, its fundamental milestones occurred two decades later with the expansion of the Internet and the outburst of wireless communication (Castells, 2018, p. 18). The Internet represents the basis of current communication. Among its features, it is possible to highlight its "penetrability, multifaceted decentralization and flexibility" (Castells, 2018, p. 439, our translation) as the key factors responsible for its dissemination. On the other hand, wireless communication is the main form of communication, which can be explained by its flexibility of use and the perpetual connection it offers (Castells, 2018, p. 23).

In Brazil, three periods related to the dissemination of ICT can be identified: their insertion (the 1990s), in which the enhancement of the technologies and the infrastructure gradually reduced the costs and improved the services delivered; their popularization (2000s), when the number of personal computers and cellphones increased significantly[1], as well as the number of households with Internet access[2]; and the all-encompassing

digital mediation (from 2010s onwards), when there was a boom in mobile devices dissemination[3], the popularization of service apps, and the generalization of Internet access in households[4].

The dissemination of these technologies caused the emergence of a new way of world communication via networks, which constitutes the new social, productive and political morphology of society (Castells, 2018, p. 553). In this way, emerged a new informational mode of development bound to daily practices, which simultaneously participates in the life of each individual and also suffers fast and continuous transformations.

During the 1990s, institutions worldwide committed to adhere to the ICT as a way of integrating themselves into the new system and guarantee their position of power. In this period, the ICT were seen as a way to reach the desirable approximation between civil society and the state, and enable the exercise of direct democracy in the present world (Souza, 2018, p. 332). The model of digital democracy arises, which can be characterized as:

> [...] any form of usage of devices (personal computers, cellphones, smartphones, palmtops, ipads…), apps (programs) and tools (forums, sites, social networks, social media…) of digital technologies of communication to supplement, reinforce or correct aspects of political and social practices of the state and of its citizens, in benefit of the democratic content of the political community. (Maia, Gomes, Marques, 2017, p. 25-26, our translation)

The democratic content attributed to the digital model could be related to aspects which could be mediated by digital technologies: the assurance and/or increase in freedom of speech, in public transparency or accountability, in the experiences of direct democracy, in the instruments and opportunities of citizen participation, in pluralism and the representation of minorities, and in the consolidation of rights of individuals (Maia, Gomes, Marques, 2017, p. 26).

In Brazil, the first proposals of Electronic Government arose in the federal sphere in 1995, during the first mandate of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The initial focus was the enhancement of state administration and it was just in 2003, more explicitly during the government of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, that there was a greater concern in the use of ICT for political participation and the enlargement of citizenship (Prado, 2009, p. 74-81). However, the actions of the state have not, in fact, prioritized or created strategies to bring citizens closer to politics and its operating mechanisms. According to a research conducted by the Regional Center of Studies for the Development of Information Society [Centro Regional de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento da Sociedade da Informação] (Cetic.br 2020), only 68% of Brazilian citizens utilized the electronic government in 2019. The predominance was in the search for services and information, and only 5% of the interviewed had written on forums or consultations, while 6% had engaged in polls and surveys. To such data, it can be added that Brazil reached the average of two digital devices per inhabitant in 2020 (Meirelles, 2020), which shows the impressive insertion of ICT in Brazilian society in the last three decades, with the Internet and wireless communication being the preferred means of communication.

With these data, it is possible to assert that the democratic potential of ICT are not being properly utilized. Research suggests that the political sphere, supported by digital systems, somehow reflects traditional politics, not instantaneously ensuring a sphere of fair, representative, relevant, effective and equalitarian public discussion (Gomes, 2005a, p. 221). Despite the absence of consensus about the possibilities of digital democracy, given that the use of ICT is currently insufficient to draw near society and state, there seems to be some agreement that this model can contribute to political participation. According to Wolton (2012, p. 184), communication is not just technical, it depends on cultural and social order, and digital democracy has limitations regarding its capacity to solve social and political problems. Currently, the democratic opportunities brought by the ICT have not been duly used by the state, as it will be demonstrated below.

4   Participatory processes, ICT and degrees of political participation

It is considered that, in a democratic society, political participation is an inalienable right of every citizen. In accordance with Innes and Booher (2004), participatory democracy models, in an effective political participation, generate positive reflexes for both the state and the civil society, through the approximation of planners to the communities and of citizens to the political-economic reality. In general, a legitimate democratic process promotes the growth of the civic capacity of its participants; mutual learning and social capital, which can broaden the comprehension and acceptance of the decisions taken; commitment for the results, as well as the responsibility of the participating actors; and the improvement of decisions.

To ensure the social gains brought by the insertion of civil society in the political sphere, the state tends to promote participatory processes which, in its majority, have been presential, through public hearings, plenary sessions, conferences, congresses, assemblies, and seminars. Despite its advantages (such as a greater

leveling and learning of the participants), it also has serious and historical limitations (Innes, Booher, 2004; Souza, 2018), such as, for example, the need to go to places and in set times; the intimidation generated by the environment of exposure of data and proposals, both from the excessive use of technical language by the planners for the subjects of the discussion and from the dominant representation of hegemonic groups; the previous definition of themes that not always reflect the diversity of problems and the questions generated by the diversity of actors involved in the process. These situations result in proposals that are generally not qualified and an absence of feedback from the participants.

The remote interaction between state and the citizen usually occurs through electronic websites, which represent, in present-day Brazil, the main communication path between the state and the civil society (Maia, Gomes, Marques, 2017, p. 121). The participatory processes mediated by ICT[5] present characteristics which help overcome the limitations identified in in-person methods. However, it is important to highlight that remote methods also have disadvantages. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of remote participatory processes (Gomes, 2005b, p. 66-74).

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Overcoming of limits of time and space.	Dehumanization of social relations.
Commodity, comfort, convenience and cost.	Does not ensure the production of knowledge and the leveling of the population.
Opportunity for minorities and the excluded.	Inequality in access to technology.
Interactivity and interaction.	Demands capacitation, availability, investment and maintenance.
Extension and quality of information.	Control and monitoring of information by a select group.
Without filters or controls.	Easy distortion and manipulation of information.

Table 1: Characteristics of remote participatory processes. Source: Elaborated by the authors, 2020.

Both participatory methods (presential and remote) have qualities and deficiencies. Thus, there is no method more efficient than the other. The majority of publications which examine the difficulties faced in political participation, seem to assume that the participatory methods are not used correctly (Innes, Booher, 2004, p. 420). The sporadic participatory processes performed by the state (many times just as legal requirement) end up not attracting or satisfying the population, resulting in processes with minimal society representativeness or with predominance of certain organized groups.

The political participation varies in degrees according to processes performed by the state and this difference ends up being reflected in the democratic model practiced. As noted by Souza (2018, p. 338), the political participation which generally exists in representative democracy would be the consultative participation (restricted just to hearing the participants), while in participatory democracy political participation would be deliberative (in which the participants, in fact take, the decisions).

Arnstein (1969, p. 216) already pointed to the existence of a great difference between going through an empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the result of the process. His Ladder of Citizen Participation[6] (Arsntein, 1969, p. 217) was adapted to the Brazilian context by Souza (2018, p. 207), who proposed a Scale of Evaluation (also with eight degrees) that varies from nonparticipation to authentic participation. Concerning the participatory processes mediated by ICT, Gomes (2005a, p. 218-219) developed a Scale of Digital Democracy with five degrees:

+ 1. the state offers public services in the digital environment with access for the citizen, a model also called *delivery citizenship*;

+ 2. the state uses the virtual environment to consult citizens about certain political issues;

+ 3. the state acquires a high level of transparency with its citizens;

+ 4. corresponds to a combination of the representative democracy and participatory democracy models, with the state more open to popular participation and the civil sphere with the opportunity to decide on some topics;

+ 5. represents the model of direct democracy, in which the political sphere disappears and the civil sphere is responsible for political decisions.

Even with the promise that the use of ICT by the State would ensure a closer relationship between the civil society and the political sphere, the scale of Gomes (2005a) demonstrates that digital democracies can also present extremely low levels of political participation. Silva (2005, p. 458), based on the Scale of Digital Democracy, analyzed the websites of the Brazilian capitals, and identified the existence of the first three

degrees, the first degree being the only one on its way to consolidation, presenting predominantly informative features.

In the evaluation carried on by Silva (2005, p. 465), the digital democracy model is limited to the availability of information or, secondarily, to the offer of public services in delivery format. Another important aspect highlighted by the author is the absence of clear information, or even traces of the effective use of ICT for political participation in public decisions, many times used in a complementary manner to in-person activities. The author points to the underutilization of ICT for the development of a more democratic politics, and to the similarity in the structural aspects of its use by the governments of the Brazilian capitals.

Therefore, regarding the Brazilian panorama, the potential for the use of ICT in democratic processes do not appear to be properly exploited. The utilization of these new technological tools by the state requires a structural change in government practices for the effective insertion of civil society in the political sphere, as will be examined in the case study of PMPA.

5   Digital democracy and the PMPA

Porto Alegre is one of the Brazilian capitals which seeks to explore these new digital tools for democratic practices, having an extensive history of ICT utilization by the city government. To achieve the goals of this article, there was the selection of some historical marks considered relevant regarding the use of ICT by the PMPA to open channels of dialogue with civil society. In total, nine historical marks were selected, which cover the last two decades. The initial mark corresponds to the launch of the PMPA official website in the WWW.

	Year	Type/Author	Source	Definition	Situation	Relevance
1	1999	Website/ Procempa	https://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/portal_pmpa_cidade/	PMPA's official website	Active	Environment used as a new channel of communcation
2	2002	Website/ Procempa	www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/op/	Website for submissions of demands for the Participative Budget [OP]	Active	Environment for civil society deliberation
3	2011 (March)	Website/ UNISINOS & PMPA	www.portoalegre.cc	Website for mapping demands, exaltation of places and complaints	Inactive (since December 2014)	Enviroment for citizen colaboration
4	2011 (November)	App/ Procempa	Porto Alegre App	PMPA's Official App for information about public works and services	Not found	Channel of communication with civil society via mobile phones
5	2012	Electronic address/ Procempa	mms://pwvideo1.procempa.com.br:8080/op	Link to watch the live Participative Budget [OP] meetings	Not found	Possibility of remote participation in the meetings
6	2015	App/Colab.re & PMPA	Colab.re	App to inspect problems, send proposals and make evaluations	Active	Channel for citizen colaboration via mobile phone
7	2017 (March)	Website/ Procempa	https://prefeitura.poa.br/	PMPA's official website	Active	Enhancement of this tool
8	2017 (March)	App/ Procempa	#EuFaçoPOA	PMPA's Official App for services, demands, to send information about suspicious vehicles, to ask for help and send project proposals	Active	Enhancement of this tool and addition of new functions for citizen colaboration
9	2019	Website/ Procempa	https//opdigital.prefeitura.poa.br/	Website to access information, send proposals and vote demands of the Participative Budget [OP]	Active	Environment exclusive for citizen deliberation and participation

Table 2: Historical marks of the use of ICT by the Porto Alegre City Government [Prefeitura Municipal de Porto Alegre – PMPA]. Source: Elaborated by the authors, from several sources, 2020.

From the information available on Table 2, the analysis will be divided in two time periods related to the political profile of PMPA. In the first period (from 1999 to 2004), there was the introduction of ICT in the city government, which was limited to the creation of websites. The Data Processing Company of Porto Alegre [Companhia de Processamento de Dados de Porto Alegre - PROCEMPA], founded in 1977, was responsible for the development of these platforms, aiming to provide another channel for dialogue with the population. In the second period (from 2005 to present time), there was the expansion of the existing platforms and the

inclusion of apps[7], alongside the websites. This period coincides with the boom of mobile devices' dissemination in Brazil, as it was already mentioned earlier. It is important to highlight the partnership of the PMPA with other institutions for the development of digital channels.

As it can be seen in Table 2, the majority of the analyzed platforms remains available for access. These selected marks are related to: the evolution of the official platforms of PMPA (marks 1, 4, 7 and 8); the insertion of digital tools for citizen collaboration (marks 3 and 6); and the insertion of digital tools for citizen deliberation[8] (marks 2, 5 and 9). For this paper, the analysis was limited to the evolution of websites, because they represent the main communication channels between PMPA and the society, and because they enable an analysis of their evolution, as they are still available for access. Therefore, the contents available on the main page of each platform were classified according to Gomes' degrees of digital democracy (2005a), specified above.

In accordance with information provided by PROCEMPA, the PMPA website was launched in 1999 and modernized between 2003 and 2004. This version remained available online until 2019 (Figure 1). This was the version Silva (2005) analyzed in his study mentioned earlier.

Fig. 1: Main page of the Porto Alegre City Government website [Prefeitura Municipal de Porto Alegre – PMPA], online version available until 2019. Source: Image captured by the authors, 2019.

After the analysis of the main page, it can be concluded that this version of the PMPA website remains in the informational format mentioned by Silva (2005), of the first degree, with mainly informative character (represented by the availability of information about the city, its institutions, and other official communication channels) and focused in the delivery of services (for the variety of options provided). The second degree remains fragile. The available citizen consulting is secondary, indirect, and very limited. There is a space for citizen attendance – in which only service protocols are performed – and direct access to information about the Participatory Budget [Orçamento Participativo] is provided. A space for demands and manifestation of the society was not found and there was no highlight to public consultations. The third degree, related to state transparency, seems to be more structured, but it is restricted to the fulfillment of legal requirements of availability of financial administration documents (through the Official Journal [Diário Oficial], the Transparency Portal, and the Access to Information), not having any instruments to facilitate the comprehension of public accountability by the citizens.

As it was mentioned, a new version of the PMPA website was launched on March, 21st, 2017, along with the mobile device app *#EuFaçoPoa*. After a trial period which lasted more or less two years, the new version (Image 2) is currently available.
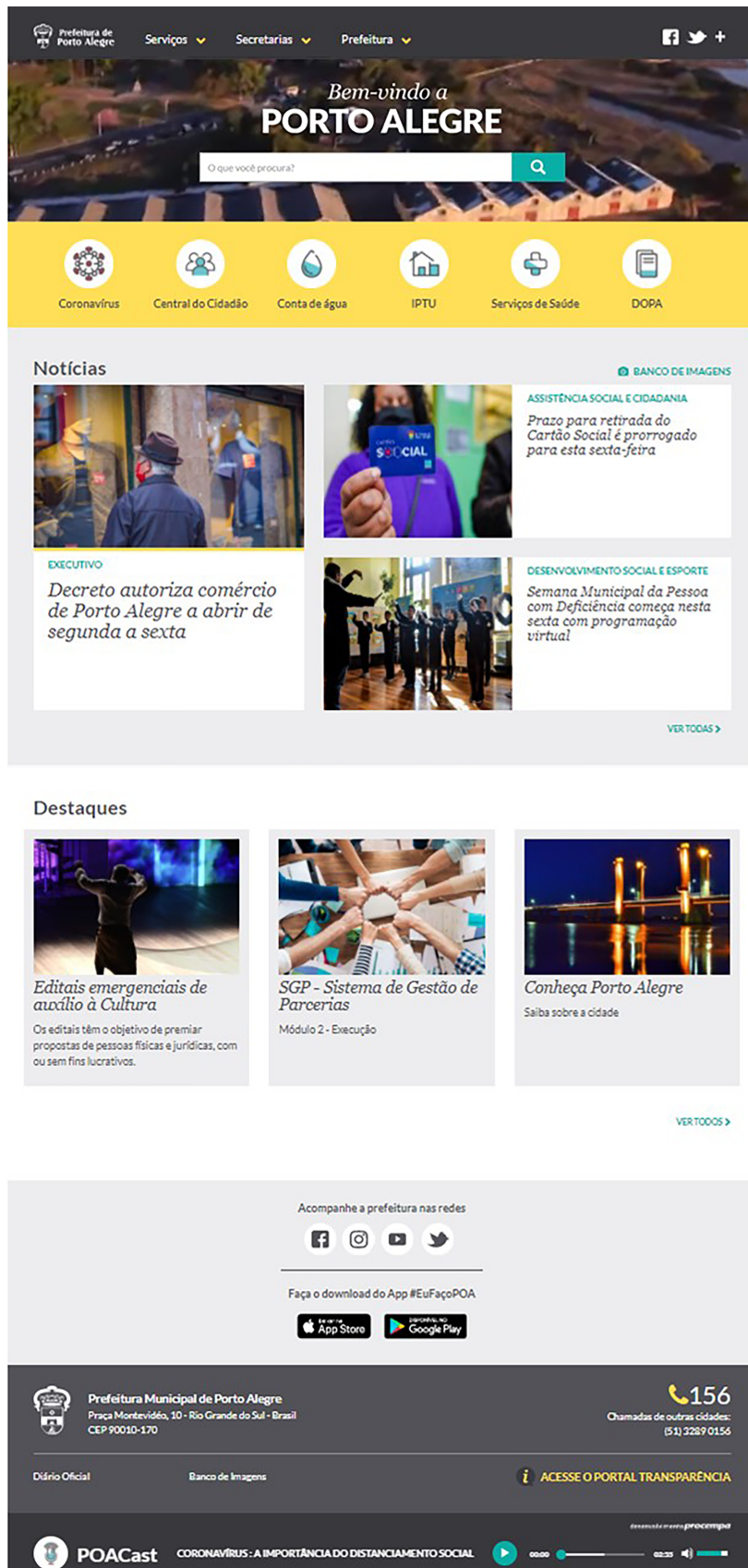
Fig. 2: Main page of the Porto Alegre City Government website [Prefeitura Municipal de Porto Alegre – PMPA], the version available from 2020 onwards. Source: Image captured by the authors, 2020.

According to the PMPA, the new version of the website aims to broaden transparency and to facilitate access to city services. The focus on service delivery can be verified through the analysis of the main page, because of its informational character (by its prominent position and its predominance). However, the level of transparency had no update (the same access options were maintained). The first-degree digital democracy remained predominant, as well as the fragility of the second degree and the aspects related to the third degree. In general, only the visual aspects were modernized, but with the permanence of the structural logic of the old website.

Through the analysis of the evolution of the PMPA official websites, it is concluded that little or nothing changed from the first approaches. Despite some punctual advancements, the structure has not changed. The predominantly informational content, characteristic of first-degree digital democracy, remained in the period analyzed. Despite the recent modernization efforts and the inclusion of new tools, the reluctant posture of the city government pertaining to the insertion of political participation remains, showing that the simple fact of using ICT to open new channels of communication with society does not ensure more democratic practices.

Related to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced in the Rio Grande do Sul, the information about the new cases, the number of contaminated people, and available hospital beds are many and rapidly shared. However, there are differences between the data provided by the websites of the State Health Secretariat [Secretaria de Saúde do Estado] and the data provided by the cities' websites, which many times do not keep a historic record of registered data.

Another important factor in the present pandemic period is that social distancing complicates social and political protests and the isolated actions in vulnerable communities, from both the state or other social actors. In 2020, there has been an increase in political, legal, and even police pressure from the state and from sectors of society with particular interests regarding access to land, directly affecting the lives of communities that have households in vulnerable situations. These conflict situations, more and more recurrent, end up causing repercussions in the political field, implicating in the questioning of the limits of participatory democracy.

6   Final considerations

In this paper, the different degrees of political participation practiced in democratic systems were discussed. In the midst of the crisis of representative democracy (in which political participation is limited) and with the emergence of counter-hegemonic models of participatory democracy (which defend a greater involvement of society in political decisions), emerges the digital democracy model, seen as an opportunity for a desirable transformation in the political scenario, still hegemonically representative.

With the accelerated dissemination of ICT and the emergence of a new communication order structured via networks, there was a deep social, political, and economic transformation. In this context, the state began to utilize ICT as a new communication channel with society. However, despite the existence of a consensus that ICT has the potential to a desirable closer relationship between civil society and the political sphere, in practice, there was no change. Since the first proposals of Electronic Government, in Brazil, studies prove that there is little political participation through digital resources (Cetic.br, 2020; Gomes, 2005a), demonstrating that digital democracy ends up reflecting the deficiencies of representative politics.

In fact, the use of ICT does not ensure a more democratic practice, and both participatory processes practiced (presential and remote) have advantages and disadvantages. The utilization of both formats deserves permanent actualization and adjustment to the advances and transformations of society. In this way, it is urgent the creation of a specific space inside the public administration system, in both the city and the state spheres, of tool monitoring, of the existing models, and of new practices experimented in the country and abroad.

Authors such as Gomes (2005a) and Silva (2005) consider that the state, in its planning processes, does not achieve effective political participation. According to the analysis performed in this paper, PMPA is not an exception. Despite being a pioneer in participatory initiatives and having a vast history of ICT use, PMPA advanced little towards digital democracy. With the analysis which looked from 1999 to the present days, it is concluded that the use of ICT by the PMPA is limited to websites, which were created at the end of the 20th century, during mandates of the Workers' Party [Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT] in the municipal sphere. Also, there are few options of apps for mobile devices, introduced by the PMPA only in the 2010s.

The platforms utilized are mostly developed by the municipal agency (PROCEMPA), demonstrating that PMPA has its own infrastructure, capacity, and facility for the introduction of ICT in its political activities. The repetition of the same functions in different platforms demonstrates that none of these options is seen as an effective channel of dialogue between the PMPA and society. Their predominant functions are to inform and to deliver services to the population, characteristics of Gomes' first degree of digital democracy (2005a), with the higher degrees either fragilized or entirely absent. These platforms could be better explored for the insertion of political participation.

The discussion presented here about the use of ICT by the state in participatory processes assumes a broader meaning in times of pandemic, pointing to services that could be performed remote and digitally and which could be available permanently, such as online services, the consult of information from different sectors of

the state and the remote monitoring of processes. The fragility, in this case, resides in the access and in the interfaces between the platforms and the users, especially those in income brackets and ages with more difficulty in the use of this kind of tool. The virtuality resulting from the technical-scientific-informational medium also raises the question of the sense of what is real and what is not, opening room for the creation of fake news.

Lastly, it can be affirmed that ICT use by the PMPA seems to contribute little, at the moment, to the approximation of society in the political sphere, reflecting the democratic model practiced, in which there are restricted spaces for political participation and social deliberation. There is a need for a deeper investigation of the motives and advantages for the duplication of political practices in the digital space.

The investments of the state in digital mediums are predominantly aimed at the enhancement and the agility of the delivery of services and the promotion of its own propaganda, with the use of the possibilities of ICT in political participation for a society still being underutilized, even with all the advantages it presents. How to make it advantageous for the state the use of the democratic potential of ICT seems to be a question that still deserves deeper research, so that, as it is desired, the political participation of society in political decisions can be amplified.

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1 In 2008, the number of personal computers reached the proportion of one to every four inhabitants and the proportion of cellphones to three to every four inhabitants (Meirelles, 2020).

2 The percentage of households with Internet access more than doubled between 2005 and 2010, from 13% to 27%, respectively, (Cetic.br. 2020).

3 In 2020, there is an average of 1.6 mobile devices per inhabitant (Meirelles, 2020).

4 In 2019, 93% of households had cellphones and more than half had Internet access (71%),99% of Internet access being performed through cellphones (Cetic.br 2020).

5 Such as chats, forums, debates, petitions, questionnaires, surveys and polls.

6 Composed by eight rungs, in which the higher the rung, the higher the decision-making power of the citizen.

7 Software for mobile devices.

8 Deliberation comprehends participation in decision-making processes, which distinguishes it from citizen collaboration.