ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE WEBSITES OF THE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FROM THE STATE OF BAHIA

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ABSTRACT

The information and communication technologies potentiate, from the Internet, a space to the discussion and political deliberation, approaching citizens and governments through interactive resources such as e-mails, forums, on-line ombudsman, chats and others. It is observed this way, the growing effort and investment of the governments and political representatives in organizing, managing, available information of public interest at the web, constituting the electronic government. Thus, the goal of this article intends to investigate the conditions of political participation of the citizens from the interactive tools available in the websites of the members from the state of Bahia. With a descriptive character, this research searched to identify only the sites of the members registered in Legislative Assembly from the state of Bahia (ALBA). In the tabulation of data, it was adapted the fourth level of the form: Level of participation of the citizens: the Evaluation School – proposed by Marques (2007) to a sheet in the software *Excel* and, to the discussion of them, used the analysis quali-quantitative. The results of this research show the incipient state of the website of the members from the state of Bahia to the opportunities of political participation in the web, lying to the principles which govern the electronic government. This work presents part of the studies which will help the project of research in developed by the present author in the Program of Pos Graduation in Information Science of the Universidade Federal da Bahia (PPGCI/UFBA).

Keywords: Electronic Government; Environment Web; TICs; Political Participation; Information Democratization; Information Access; Legislative Assembly of the State of Bahia (ALBA).

INTRODUCTION

The development of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) reveals, in the contemporary, substantial changes in the *modus operandi* of the several social instances, such as economy and politic. The internet configures itself

as a useful web to the transference of traditional human activities (health and education, for example) to a cybernetic culture (or cyberculture), because the same enables the production and sharing of information/contents informationals[i] from computers interconnected. These changes reconfigure, especially, the process of social relations for approaching virtually the individuals once scattered in the geographical space.

The advance of the internet associated to the information technologies causes, particularly, direct effects in the public sectors and in the civil society. According to Pinho (2008), these consequences meets to the reformulations of the governmental activities, in the access to the information promoted by the State, in the expansion of the transparence of information of the governmental activities, possibility of articulations and services charge from the public sector, among others. The citizens, this way, start to count on informative channels available directly by the governments, passing over the ideological sieve of the organizations which hold the traditional means of communication.

Consequently, the internet turned to be object of speculation in the political field. With the interactivity potential and sharing in web, the governments search to available to the citizens several conditions to the access to the governmental information, aiming to solve (in thesis) the deficit of the political participation of individuals – important initiative to the consolidation of the democratic process. Thus, the electronic government (E-Gov), from the information technologies, assists the development of restricted sites to do the diffusion of information produced by the governments, aiming the approaching and the interaction with the citizens (GONTIJO, 2002). This process, according to the author, includes the democratization of the information access, the universal in the providing of public services and the reduction of the social and regional differences. From these assumptions, the goal of this article intends to investigate the conditions of political participation of the citizens, from interactive tools available in the websites of members from the State of Bahia, in Brazil.

Exposed this introduction, the second section discusses briefly the relation between governments and citizens from the premises of the electronic government; the third explains the goal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Bahia (ALBA);

the following section reports the methodological procedures adopted in this work; the fifth section discusses the initial data, and at last the final considerations. This work presents part of the studies which will help out the Master Degree project (in progress) developed by the author in the Program of Pos Graduation in Information Science of the *Universidade Federal da Bahia* (PPGCI/UFBA).

2 ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC POLITICS: APPROACHES BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND CITIZENS

The Internet, unhook from the "*cyberenthusiastic*"[iii] presents advantage to the political participation. Gomes and Maia (2008, p.307-313) list seven important points of "new" means of communication to the democratization, summarized below:

1. Overcoming the limits time/space to the political participation;
2. Expansion and quality from the stock of information on-line;
3. Comfort, convenience and cost;
4. Easiness and extension of access;
5. Neither filters nor controls;
6. Interactivity and interaction;
7. Opportunities to minority and excluded voices.

Along with the advantage of low costs and higher speed in the diffusion of information, it seems to exist a growing effort and investment of the political representative in available information of public interest through the web, feature observed in the considerable growing of governmental sites to, in thesis, enlarge the popular participation.

Giddens (2001, p.83) lecturing about the relation of the State with the civil Society, states that this first

> […] should expand the role of the public sphere, what means constitutional reform directed to a higher transparence and opening, as well the introduction of new security against corruption, [because] the governments and citizens live now each time more in a unique information environment.

With the structure of the Internet in Brazil in the 90 Decade, the governments incorporate to the public administration the information and communication technologies to guarantee and enlarge the quality of the governmental services.

Engendered in the power of insertion and circulation, it became imperative to align the TIC to the political practices aiming the reduction of costs, accountability to the citizens and access to the information and governmental services, constituting the Electronic Government. It is observed, however that some governments use the resources available by the internet in a limited way, amateur, without mutual interactivity, as authentic political "window".

Pinho (2008) understands electronic government as recurrence to equipment and procedures coming from the informatics and electronic communication which aim to available governmental information and services to the citizens. Yet according to the author, the deployment of the electronic government is restricted to the installation of governmental portals to enlarge the efficiency from the government, as well increase of the transparence and participation of the civil society in the government.

The electronic government in the conception of Barbosa, Faria and Pinto (2004) matches the exploitation of the information technologies to the providing of public services, reconfiguring the interactivity between the government-citizen, government-company and government-government. The relations between government and citizens, according to the authors, provide changes in the public management from the public politic centered in the efficiency, transparence of the governmental activities and professionalization of servers and public managers. These authors present the model of reference which explores four categories of relation between government and society, as registered in the Chart 1.

Category	Characterization
G2B – Government-Company	Characterized by the interaction of the Government with the companies from the private sector in the Exchange of information and processing of electronic transactions, searching to reduce the most the barriers to make business with the government;
G2C – Government-Citizen	Characterized by the interaction from the Government, in a wide and complete way, with the citizen, providing to him information and public services which answer to his needs of contributor, controller of the government actions, beneficial and user of the public services along the course of his life – infancy, adolescence, adulthood, third age.
G2E – Government-Public Employee	Characterized by interaction of the Government with the employees from the public service, providing information and necessary services to the development of their professional activities and benefits due to their relation with the government;
G2G – Government-Government	Characterized by the interaction of the different governmental agents and government in the different spheres (municipal, state and federal),

| | providing information and services, processing of transaction to the development of their activities. |

Chart 1: Categories of Relation Between Government and Society.
Source: Prepared by the author, based in the model of Barbosa, Faria e Pinto – 2004.

Marcondes and Jardim (2003) endorse that the electronic government originated from the political public developed, especially, in Anglo-Saxon countries. The informational public politics, on their turn, constitute the cast of "[…] premises, decisions and actions – produced by State and inserted in the governmental agendas in name of the social interest which contemplate the several aspects […] related to the production, use and preservation of information of public and private nature" (JARDIM; SILVA; NHARRELUGA, 2009).

However, Gontijo (2002, p.181) based in Frohmann, advises that the literature existing in the Information Science interprets to the information politics in the prism of the documental and archival production from the government, and "[…] restricts the studies to the problems of production, organization and diffusion of scientific and technical information […]". The public politics should transcend these technologic aspects and concentrate in the "[…] information as transformer element of the society in the governmental, organizational and private spheres" (MARCIANO, 2006, p.44).

The activities inherent to the websites (transparence and content of the governmental actions) contribute to the improvement of the processes interactive between the government and citizens Gomes (2005), Marques (2005), and Pinho, Inglesias, Souza (2006). The websites should promote the interaction between the government and citizens and the governmental transparence by means of information, even that the "[…] attempts of democratization through digital environment do not work perfectly, or not all the citizens want to take part (or do not have how to take part) in a spontaneous and civic way" (MARQUES, 2005, p.139). For this reason, it would be counterproductive not to consider the importance of the politics of digital inclusion, because these ones reveal themselves fundamental to the political participation, increasing the access to informational contents to the less favored social classes. Like that, it competes to the government and political representative to answer to the informational potential of the internet, with initiatives

which promote interconnections with the citizens, encouraging the politics of socio-digital inclusion, the participation and the politic discussion.

This way, several studies approach the questions related to the Internet, information and political participation in Brazil, for example the works of Pereiras, Cardoso e Pereiras (2004), Borges, Nascimento and Silva (2005), Egler (2005), Polat (2005), Santos (2005), Marzouki and Méadel (2006) Amaral and Pinho (2008), among many others. The current research proposes, however, to investigate the websites of the members from the State of Bahia, from the information existing in the site Legislative Assembly of Bahia (ALBA). Adopting to the table of levels proposed by Marques (2007), more precisely the fourth level, which works with the "ideal" of political participation of the citizens through the pages from the internet with deepen political information, "[…] willing to involve it in the process of production of the political decision".

3 THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN THE STATE OF BAHIA

The Legislative Assembly of Bahia – ALBA, located in the Administrative Center of Bahia – CAB, in Salvador, represents the Legislative Power through the State members from the State of Bahia, superior organ from each state. Currently it counts on 63 State members, in the 16th legislature (2007-2011), elected by direct vote.

The State Member, according to the Brazilian Constitution from 1988 – is comprehended as the representative of people in the State sphere and the mandate includes four years, with possibilities of re-election. It competes to the State member, in the Legislative Assembly, "legislate, propose, amend, alter, revoke and waive state laws. Besides inspecting the accounts from the state government, create Parliamentary Commissions of Investigations and other attributions referring to the position" (FREITAS, 200-?).

The choice for the research of the State members from ALBA, as object of analysis turn into the liability of these to represent the people in the state sphere, exercising activities which enable the aspirations of the population, from discussions and approving of the economical and social areas. The focus of the research justifies

itself by the incipience of studies related to the assembly, presenting, like that, an object a little explored.

Then, the aim of this article intends to investigate the conditions of political participation of the citizens out of the interactive tools available in the websites of the members from the state of Bahia. Aspects related to the evaluation model, as well as the method, technique and instrument applied to the research, will be analyzed in the next section along with the methodological procedures.

4 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This work is presented as a research of field of descriptive nature. It used the method of surveys to meet all the members from the state of Bahia and check which of them have personal pages in the internet registered in the site of ALBA. To the collection of data, it was applied the form of **Levels of Participation from the Citizens: the Evaluation Scale** (instrument of research), developed and proposed by Marques (2007). It is important to point out that the tools of the fourth level were adapted because this one approaches "from what may be ideally offered to enhance the political participation of the citizens through the websites from the [members]" (MARQUES, 2007, P.8). For the data tabulation**,** it was adapted the form to a sheet from the program *Office Excel*, and to the discussion of these it was the used the quali-quantitative analysis.

The study involves only the members who have websites registered in ALBA to, in the subsequent analysis, check the possibilities of participation of the citizens starting from these pages. It is pointed out that this work presents preliminary data which will help out the research in progress from the project of dissertation developed by the current author.

5 ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

The raising of data in the page of the Legislative Assembly of Bahia – ALBA happened in two moments: May and December, 2009. The research accomplished in December aimed to confirm or upgrade the data obtained in the first stage of the

research. Important to point out that there were not advances in the interval from the months analyzed, in other words, the obtained data remained without changes.

Among 63 state members analyzed, only 22 had websites, about 35% from the universe. The pages of the state members Joélcio Martins, Fátima Nunes and Ronaldo Carletto were not active in the two periods researched, making it impossible the analysis of them. Follows the list of the members analyzed.

PARTIDO	DEPUTADO ESTADUAL	WEBSITE
DEMOCRATAS	Eliedson Ferreira	http://www.eliedsonferreira.com.br
	Heraldo Rocha	http://www.heraldorocha.com.br/
	Júnior Magalhães	http://www.juniormagalhaes.com.br/
	Rogério Andrade	http://www.rogerioandrade.com.br/
PMDB	Arthur Maia	http://www.arthuroliveiramaia.com.br/
	Virgínia Hagge	http://www.virginiahagge.com.br/
PR	Gilberto Brito	http://www.gilbertobrito.com.br/
	Sandro Régis	http://www.sandroregis.com.br/
PSB	Capitão Tadeu	http://www.capitaotadeu.com.br
	Isaac Cunha	http://www.isaaccunha.com.br/
	Waldenor Pereira	http://www.waldenor.com.br/
	Yulo Oiticica	http://www.yulo.com.br/
	Zé Neto	http://www.zeneto.com.br/
PP	Luiz Augusto	http://www.deputadoluizaugusto.com.br/
PSDB	Sérgio Passos	http://www.sergiopassos.com.br/
PTN	João C. Bacelar	http://www.joaocarlosbacelar.com.br/
PC DO B	Edson Pimenta	http://www.edsonpimenta.com.br/
	Javier Alfaya	http://www.javier.com.br/
PRP	Antônia Pedrosa	http://www.antoniapedrosa.com/

Chart 2: State Members and the Respective Websites Analyzed.
Source: Prepared by the author.

It was observed the undertaken analysis that the websites converted as political window of the members. The available information reported, priority, the performance of the politics in the governmental scope, besides building other pages of public utility, as the Service of Answering to the Citizen – SAC, Fireman, Military Police, others. About the possibilities of participation, the interactive tools offered in

the pages limited themselves, in general line, in making available e-mail and telephone.

Most of the members analyzed made available videos and audios related to their political activities. However, these audio-visual resources match to the model of asymmetric communication, in other words, of unique sense, distant from the conception predicted of the symmetric communication (interactive). Another important point observed match to the access to electronic report cards. The user would receive in his e-mail, out of the previous registration, upgrade information related to his political representative.

In the websites analyzed, there were not found public forums to discussion. The forum constitutes an important channel to political participation, because it permits the proposition of varied topics which, so to talk, would originate from the public interest. The forums of discussion also permit to establish webs between the social actors, as citizen-politic, politic-citizen and citizen-citizen. The main channel to the interaction used by the members to the use of e-mail and telephone, and in many cases the user should fill the blanks predetermined from the system to send the message to the member.

It seems to there be a little interest among the member when the topic is digital inclusion, because there was not registration in the websites indicating centers of access to the internet or even indication of public rooms offered by the own members. It is inferred this way, that the members analyzed do not answer to the importance of the politic digital inclusion. Marcondes and Jardim (2003) record that the stimulus to the access to the internet indicating points of access in public or community institutions constitute one of the main goals of the Electronic Government.

In the issue which refers to the availability of instructions to set an audience with the member, 53% of the analyzed websites allow establishing the contact with the politician only in the format on-line and 47% in both formats (off-line and on-line). About this assertive it is deduced again, the importance of the digital inclusion in the process of insertion of the individuals in the issue related to the political participation.

About the offering of opportunities of face meetings (face to face) with the members, 84% of the pages invite the citizens (in thesis) to the meeting with the member without the need of previous registration. This perspective will be

approached with the split of the current research, when they will be tested the electronic tools to the political participation.

The website of the member Antônio Pedrosa is the most distant from the conception foreseen in the electronic government and discussed in this work, because many links which allow the interaction with the citizens and even information contents of political stamp were not active, even section form the e-mail and "About the member".

A few were the websites of the politicians which presented a structure closest from the expected to the political participation. The members Heraldo Rocha (democrats) and Zé Neto (Party of Workers – PT), for example, obtained the percentage of 62% each.

In the site of the member Heraldo Rocha there is a section for Poll, TV Heraldo and the space of the surfer, channel used to solve doubts, do propositions, others. In the case of Zé Neto it is found a section to the accountability from the campaign of 2006 (with possibilities of download); information about the public debate; section "Talk to Zé" and "Radio Zé", appointment book and the Chat, but that was not active. It may be inferred that, however, the recognition of the member about the importance of this last channel in the process of political discussion.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The decrease of the barriers of access to the information reconfigures all the traditional structure from the political practice. To consult job opportunities; to contact political representative; to follow the use of political funds or to propose agenda of discussion of the public politics becomes possible starting from the technologies of information and communication, in the one which the governments appropriate from these channels to make available several services to the citizens.

The democracy in this context, pass through modifications influenced by the culture of cyberspace, in the one which the governments started to make available services of public utility turned to the citizens. This way, the electronic government (E-Government, E-Gov) includes any relation between the government and the citizen through the information technology, accountability of several public services,

higher participation of the individuals in the decision process, transparence in the governmental transactions and accountability.

The methodology adopted in the current research demonstrates itself efficient to the analysis of data collected. The results infer the incipient state of the websites of the members from the State of Bahia about the opportunities of political participation in web. The lack of forums of discussion in the pages analyzed, as well as opportunities to access governmental information, demonstrate the distancing of the proposes about the electronic government. It seems, anyway, that the politicians we studied realized, front these many changes, the influence that the technologies of information and communication exercise in the contemporary societies, even using the resources available in the internet in a limited way, without mutual interactivity, as authentic politic "window".

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[i] The present research adopts the information concept as fundamental dynamic process to the expansion of the individual conscience, proposed by Silva (2002).

[ii] Gomes (2008, p.314) states that "[...] the adversary in general is less the internet and more rhetoric about the internet". The "*cyberenthusiastic*" state that the Internet would revere the deficit related to the political participation, revigorating the democratic process. In this same line, Tsagarousianou, Tambini and Bryan (1998, p.42) also believe that the technology "[...] would ressuct the decline of the citizen participation in the political life, [redefining] to local politic […]", through the information access related to the political aspects and in the deliberation process.

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