



## **TRANSPARENCY AS TO INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE AND USABILITY: CASE OF THE PARANÁ STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

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**Abstract:** The major part of public transparency literature only talks about legal requirements. It proposes to look at the case of Paraná State Legislative Assembly, specifically the institutional website, through the information architecture's and usability's perspective to investigate how the institution practiced website transparency. So, it uses systematic observation and checklist. Problems about the ambiguous nomination of menu categories, information order in secondary pages, and non-facilitated availability information have observed. This way, it is comprehended that the focus of online transparency is not restricted by legal requirements however it refers to agents' conception.

**Keywords:** Transparency; Information Architecture; Usability; Digital Democracy; Political Communication.

### **1 Introduction**

The Brazilian performance regarding transparency is not restricted to internal practices but encompasses international relations, such as working with the Open Government Partnership (OGP). The OGP is an international initiative to which Brazil is a founding member and presented the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Action Plan for Open Government in 2016. Commitment number 11 of this document has the main objective of improving the transparent and participatory opening of legislative houses through the sum of different actors' efforts in the search for innovative and open solutions (BRASIL, 2016). Such concern can be understood due to the changes resulting from the legal matters mentioned above that did not address increasing transparency in Legislative and Judiciary bodies.

The case of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Paraná (ALEP) is relevant not only because of the commitment but because of the interest of 82% of residents in Paraná to understand the institution better and for the institutional communication of the House not to use sponsored information to disseminate its activities in the media, which occurs in seven of the ten Assemblies of Brazilian States with the largest Gross Domestic Product (AERP, 2019). In 2019, ALEP launched the first call for proposals to provide institutional advertising services (RIBEIRO, 2019). Its purpose was to disseminate ideas, inform the general public, and make the communication of the Assembly more transparent (ALONSO, 2019). Such conduct demonstrates a change in posture regarding publicity and institutional transparency.

In this sense, we seek to answer the following research question: how is ALEP's

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institutional transparency practiced? The answer to the question may cross several areas of knowledge. Therefore, we conducted a descriptive study of the website from the perspective of information and usability architecture. Such concepts were listed according to the perspective that the establishment of transparency mechanisms can only be a means of complying with the legal order, without additional care for possible users. It can also be a sign that there is a degree of concern citizen access to such tools, which would provide the search to develop devices that comply with more than just legal requirements. For this research, the concern with the user is shown by providing interfaces that follow the common criteria of usability on the Internet.

Special attention is given to the provision and presentation of information on the Assembly's website since the public of activities linked to transparency includes from the supervisory bodies of such policies to the population as a whole. The following sections of the paper are organized to (I) offer a review of the related literature in which the reasoning regarding the research question is presented; (II) present the materials and methods; (III) exposing the data; (IV) discuss the findings with the literature, and (V) conclusion.

## **2 Digital Structure of the Transparency**

Observations regarding the use of the Internet in politics and its impacts on Democracy are found in the literature with various names such as "digital democracy", "cyberdemocracy", "electronic democracy", "teledemocracy", "virtual democracy", or e-democracy (BRAGATTO, 2011). Digital democracy is understood as "the use of digital communication technologies to correct, increase, or incorporate new procedures in the political process to better meet one or more principles of democracy better" (ALMADA; CARREIRO; BARROS; GOMES, 2019, p. 163). However, the expression "digital democracy" is not very enlightening until the idea of democracy that sustains it is distinguished, given that each model or emphasis has an idea of how the Internet should be used to be at its service (GOMES, 2011). Stabile complements this perspective and indicates that studying Electronic Democracy is to understand in which context Information and Communication Technologies benefit the democratic political environment and what kind of benefits they provide and who is the beneficiary (STABILE, 2012, p. 22). Technology will not necessarily bring democratizing solutions, requiring an entire set of actions and strictly political order referrals (SILVA, SANTOS, RABELO, LUCIANO, 2020).

The discussion on the relationship between technology and politics is not limited to political systems but can also encompass the issue of governments (e.g. CRUZ-RUBIO, 2015), especially related to the digitization of information (MARQUES; PEREIRA, 2015). However, the electronic infrastructure does not simply transport the social phenomenon but participates in its production (VENTURINI; BOUNEGRU; GRAY; ROGERS, 2018). The architecture characteristics of a platform directly imply the type of information and communication policy that permeates it, with the heuristic of digital architecture applicable to various areas of online

communication policy (BOSSETTA, 2018). In other words, such practices not only represent the digitalization of State activities but also help to configure them.

The public transparency debate is related to this discussion since it is seen as a democracy agenda (PINHEIRO, 1991; MOISÉS, 2008). However, as there is no single model of democracy (HELD, 1987), it is not seen only from one perspective, nor with a single meaning (GOMES, AMORIM, ALMADA, 2015). The concept of transparency in political theory was preceded by the notion of "advertising" (GOMES, AMORIM, ALMADA, 2018, p. 2), which can be understood as what is allowed to be seen and understood from the data and information available. This means that it stems from the opening of data and information and is used to address the condition of exercising public authority under the broad cognitive control of citizens and institutions outside the State (ALMADA; CARREIRO; BARROS; GOMES, 2019). Thus, transparency is more than the publicity of the act but concerns the opening and sharing of information, making the public better able to decide and make political choices, increases accountability, and reduces the scope of corruption (CAMPOS, PAIVA, GOMES, 2013).

Part of the research on the area focuses on the restrictions or potentials on the idea. Regarding the potentials, it is maintained that transparency provides and disseminates information about the government (BERTOT, JAEGER, GRIMES, 2010, p. 267) and indicates its relevance to the credibility that people give to institutions (FAIRBSANS *et al.*, 2007) and the possibility of stimulating efforts to increase the moral level of institutions (MEIJER, 2009).

However, it is also said that transparency alone is not enough and that the dimensions of evaluation and projection are necessary to have real meaning (MARSH, 2011). Transparency decreases the level of trust in the government because citizens would feel alienated from government institutions and suspect political practices. Therefore, some individuals or groups could regain this trust by providing accountability (MARGETTS, 2011). In conclusion, the potentials and limitations are directly related to what is considered transparency.

Ananny and Crawford (2016) present a typology of the different understandings present in the literature. A first meaning considers the information that is made available (if it is reliable or is disclosed only by name). The second considers the type of accountability made possible (the organization is only responsible for responding or has the power to sanction and demand compensation for damages). Another distinction regards the direction in which the information is made available (vertical - internal agents from different hierarchies can observe each other's conduct; horizontal - possibility of accessing information beyond the limits of the institutions that protect them). The form in which organizational transparency is configured (punctual or integrated with the institutional routine) and the regularity in which information is presented (published retrospectively or synchronously) also serve as distinguishing characteristics.

That said, it is clear that the perspectives of the works on transparency share, to some degree, the idea enunciated by Ferracioli and Herman (2018) that only compliance with the

legislation by the federative entities will not result in democratic gains if not accompanied by a public who knows how to use the tools. The use of these tools can be restricted to a select group of individuals, such as journalists and civil servants. Therefore, Marques (2016) argues that the methods and strategies for setting up digital transparency mechanisms can benefit from the findings already made in e-participation since the levels of transparency are related to the efforts and profile of each institution's technicians and the objectives inherent to them.

In this sense, Noveck (2014) suggests that the screens through which people interact with the government are probably designed to be less effective for citizen participation and produce less manageable comments for regulators. Furthermore, she defends the need for those who understand and care about democracy to be involved in creating technology if the interest is to strengthen citizen-centered digital democracy rather than just a customer-centered digital democracy.

Additionally, the author emphasizes that the creation of information tools must have as premises that (I) provided information must be delivered in a useful format to the recipients; (II) not all beneficiaries are specialists; (III) the information is successfully disseminated among the interested communities, which, as far as it is concerned, will pass it on to its members; (IV) the information must be linked to the social context of communication in the rule-producing process; and (V) improving the use of the computer screen will facilitate the connection with the people involved (NOVECK, 2004, p. 9). Such considerations are related to the concepts of information architecture and usability.

Specifically, when it comes to information architecture, the information must be organized and presented to be easily assimilated, given that the main objective is to meet the needs of website users (CINNANTI, 2011). In other words, it is possible to understand the information architecture with the logic of the information's disposition in a given context, which encompasses the decisions of where and how to dispose of certain data. Thus, knowing the audience (user dimension) - how the tasks are approached, what vocabulary is used, and whether the existing architecture makes any sense - is essential for the area. In other words, knowing who will use the product, even if minimally, is vital for Information Architecture (CALDAS, 2007).

Concern with the user motivated investigations in different areas of knowledge, providing different focuses and contributions (CAMARGO, VIDOTTI, 2011). Camargo and Vidotti (2011) show that the distinction between information design and interaction design is marked among the differences in perspectives. The first focuses on the content, the presentation of information to facilitate the user's understanding, while the second focuses on the relationship between the content and the system, defining the interaction with the environment's functionalities. Thus, the authors understand that Information Architecture involves both since it addresses both the form of presentation of information presented by the user and the organization and structure of the data (CAMARGO, VIDOTTI, 2011).

In this context, usability can be understood as "the ability of an interactive system to offer the user, in a certain context of operation, the performance of tasks in an effective, efficient, and pleasant form" (SOUZA, 2009, p. 20). Therefore, while the information architecture works with the mental scheme or logical organization of what will be offered, usability addresses the product/service itself. This means that the concern with usability is contained in the information architecture scope but that the latter is not limited to the former since usability parameters do not encompass the logic of informational organization.

However, despite the rise in concern with facilitating the user's interaction with the websites, it cannot be said that such resources are neutral since the form of constructing the information, displaying it, or even accessing it is not universal, but related to cultural schemes (FRICK, 2008). Research that addresses transparency from the perspective of information architecture and usability is essential since the required information is often on the website. However, the path to reach it is long and not obvious, making it difficult to locate. There are also cases in which excessive information can hinder e-transparency since the location of what is of interest to the citizen is scattered or requires advanced research to find, making the search process arduous to the citizen (AMORIM; ALMADA, 2016, p. 66). Moreover, e-government sites have several usability issues, such as inconsistent formats, low navigation capacity, and orientation (SCHNEIDER; OLIVEIRA; BARNI; FERREIRA; TEZZA, 2018).

The Brazilian government's efforts to meet the demands for more transparency and participation in public management are varied (enactment of laws that make it mandatory to disclose government data, information, and actions in real-time over the Internet; partnerships that provide for the disclosure of government data and information on the Internet to make governments more transparent and accountable). The development and restructuring of the Federal Government's Transparency Website (to improve its usability and interactivity) is one of Brazil's commitments as part of the Brazilian Action Plan in the Partnership for Open Government (SILVA, DOMINGUEZ, 2017).

In this sense, the actions taken by the government are possibilities for modifying the existing institutional culture (ALVES, 2012) or as a means of visibility for the "spectacularization" of the democratic process, increasing its legitimacy before the public opinion, but only complying with the legal requirement for information disclosure (ABDALA; TORRES, 2016). Thus, the practiced institutional transparency can be understood in line with Abdala and Torres's perspective, focused solely on disseminating data and documents, or closer to Alves, in terms of fostering the culture of access. In the next section, the research methodology is presented to answer the question previously listed.

### **3 Material and Methods**

Given that information architecture is a concept that can be observed from many

perspectives, there is no single form to analyze it. The systematic observation technique was adopted to identify the possibility of interaction offered by the website and, consequently, observe the practiced transparency. During this stage, conducted through a personal computer at the beginning of November 2019, a small field diary was created with notes referring to the structures present on each page and the symbolic elements perceived in the interaction. Subsequently, such data was ordered to portray the information architecture. The screen capture data is justified by the change in the institution's website structure that occurred on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019, in the testing phase, and official presentation on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (BUDOLA, 2019).

As for usability, the inspection method was used, characterized by concepts and rules previously established to identify usability issues in the interfaces, i.e., the user does not participate directly in the evaluation. The checklist was chosen among the possible techniques, which consists of a set of rules based on recommendations, applied directly to the interface (SOUZA, 2009). The technique is considered more efficient in detecting usability issues than the generic recommendation guides (DIAS, 2006, p. 59). It is one of the most comprehensive in terms of the number and types of problems identified, is one that allows greater repeatability and reproducibility, and is the easiest to apply (CYBBIS; BETIOL; FAUST, 2010).

The list presented by Nascimento (2010) (108 statements) was adapted with that of Camargo and Vidotti (2011) and Caldas (2007), 49 and 54 items, respectively, to add similar elements and remove those that are overlapped or that Nielsen and Loranger (2007) found no longer had an impact on usability due to the user's adaptation to platforms or the creation of predominant patterns and design conventions (colors that should be used or avoided, image resolution, page loading time, specifications for the multimedia elements, number of clicks to reach the content on the sites), and elements present on websites of a nature different from those of the governmental ones (content from other sites, either as advertisements or as search engines that research on the internet and not inside the site, but also notes on library service, specifically regarding the reservation and return of material). The resulting list consisted of 47 points to be verified.

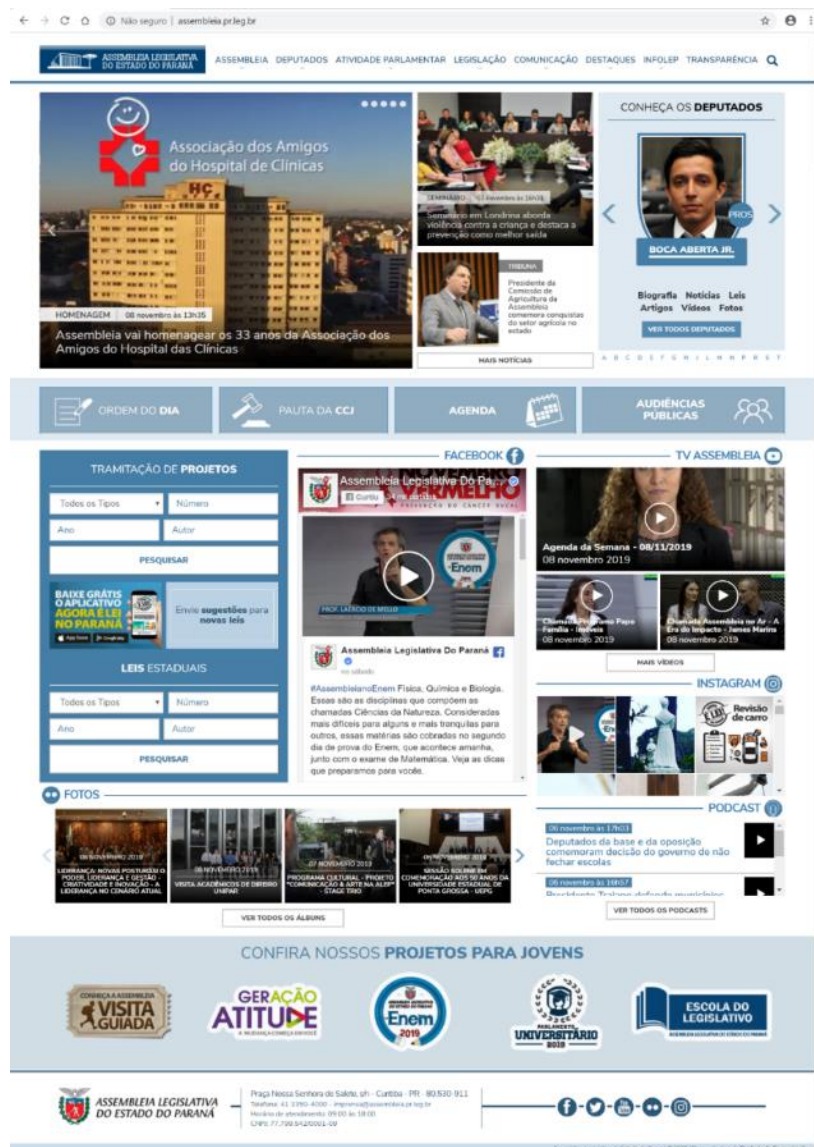
The usability inspection took place through new navigation, conducted in November 2019 on a different day from observing the symbolic elements and information architecture. Such an action was taken to lessen the influence of one analysis on the other. The answer to the research question is given by the site's description and the identification of obstacles during navigation. We did not seek to measure the quantity or magnitude of such impediments but observe them in the face of the concept of transparency and thus seek to identify whether there is any intention to facilitate users' interaction with the platform. In the following section, the data collected by systematic observation and the checklist are presented, along with situations that cannot be covered by the method.

#### 4 Architecture of the ALEP Website

Observing the website's home page is important since it is how the user, mostly, will initiate their contact, as indicated by Nielsen and Loranger (2007). However, a more succinct description will be made for the rest of the website, with greater attention to the page regarding transparency.

There is the institution's stylized logo next to the top menu on the home page of the ALEP website (Figure 1), consisting of the categories "assembly", "deputies", "parliamentary activity", "legislation", "highlights" "infolep", and "transparency" (presented in more detail below), in addition to an icon for searching (magnifying glass). Below the menu are the institutional news highlighted on the left, bordered by other reports and followed by the shortcut to the deputies' page.

Figure 1 – Initial Page.



Source: Capture by the author on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

The central part contains guidelines for the agenda, agenda of the Constitution and Justice Commission, Calendar of activities of the institution, and public hearings; research areas on legislative projects and state laws, exhibition spaces for publications on the institution's digital platforms (profile on digital social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Flickr; and the TV Assembly videos hosted on YouTube).

Subsequently, are information regarding the "projects for young people" (guided tour, Geração Attitude, Assembly at the Enem, University Parliament, and School of the Legislature). The School of the Legislature is dedicated to making projects of courses for the general population and training for servants or political agents. The page ends with the official coat of arms, contact information (address, phone, opening hours), Corporate Taxpayer Identification Number, and shortcuts to accounts on digital social networks.

The history of the institution is presented in the "assembly" category, as are the people who held the position of President and 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary, directing the users to pages referring to the history, news, laws, videos, and photos of these parliamentarians when clicking on the photos; and a tab entitled "meet the assembly" that corresponds to the guided tour of the institution and the website map (Figure 2). Interestingly, all categories in the top menu are presented the site map, along with the subcategories, apart from "transparency".

Figure 2 – Site map.



Source: Capture by the author on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



The "deputies" category is made up of "Meet the Deputies", "Board of Directors", "Leadership and Party Blocks", and "Party Representation". They present the parliamentarians who make up the legislature, the Board of Directors, the parties, and party or party block leaders.

The first item contains the photos of all deputies and is organized focusing on the members of the table (President, 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary and 2<sup>nd</sup> Secretary in the first line and the other members in the second line), with the remaining members presented alphabetically. The second item presents the deputies of the board of directors in the same order as the previous item. The remaining two pages order the parliamentarians in a non-evident form.

The "parliamentary activity" contains the general agenda of what occurs at ALEP and the agenda of public hearings, with information regarding the date and place; and the composition and powers of each committee, parliamentary front and block (which distinguished the parliamentary fronts in terms of filing them without submitting a Final Report, as shown in Figure 3, which occurs with the Committees and not with the Fronts).

**Figure 3 – Parliamentary fronts.**



**Source:** Capture by the author on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

The section also shows the pages of the Internal Affairs and the Women's Attorney's Office, with the parliamentarians heading such posts and the description of their duties. The Internal Affairs Department is responsible for ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Internal Regulations, the Code of Ethics, and the Parliamentary Decorum of the House and investigating complaints to parliamentarians. The Women's Attorney's Office is a body designed to promote public policies, defend women's rights, and receive complaints of discrimination and violence against women. In the section on parliamentary activity, the researcher was surprised to find elements linked more to the institution and the bureaucratic functions mentioned above than

something related to the parliamentarians' agenda and activities developed by the deputies.

The section referring to the legislation showed both the State and the Federal Constitution in tables that reproduce the pages on which the texts are hosted, the State System of Legislation of the Civil House and Planalto, respectively. In turn, the popular initiative page presents the related rules and provides a link to the Citizen Service Center (CAC in Portuguese) as an aid to possible questions. However, this link redirects to an error page because there is a discrepancy between the URL placed on the page and the one corresponding to the CAC page. The tab in question also makes it possible to access the Budget Laws documents, conduct legislative research, access the Internal Regulations, and obtain information regarding the legislative technique.

The "communication" section shows the news published on the website; samples of photos and content published on social networks or *TV Assembléia*. When selecting to see all the albums in the photos tab, the user is taken to the institutional profile on Flickr, which also occurs in the section referring to *TV Assembléia*, but the last redirecting to YouTube. The "podcast" section displays news with the possibility of being accompanied by audio. It also shows the telephone contact of the members of the communication board.

The redirection made to digital social networks is not recommended since it refers the user to using those specific platforms with characteristics that are not necessarily applicable to the website in question. The situation is similar to when users use Adobe, Microsoft Word, Power Point, Excel, and others focused on data manipulation, forgetting the user in on an online page and at the end, closes the page, in the same form as when using the original software (NIELSEN; LORANGER, 2007, p. 72). In this sense, when promoting the redirection to a third page, it allows the user to use interpretive schemes from other platforms, if he already has this knowledge, which causes a type of interaction for that page that may not be adequate.

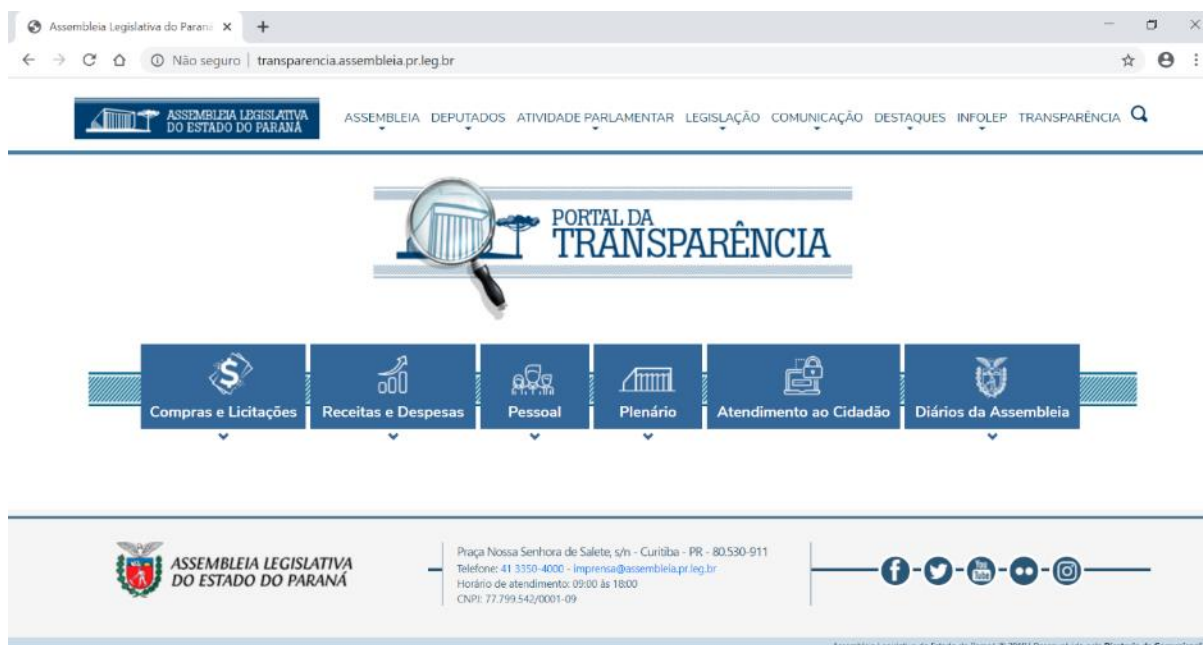
The "highlight" section presents the *Agora é Lei* application, developed by the institution's IT team, the Assembly at Enem, Geração Atitude, University Parliament Projects, and the School of the Legislature. In general, this group presents ALEP's initiatives to act outside the Chamber.

The "inforep" tab presents information and interactions for employees of the institution since the first three subcategories after "home" (SEI, e-mail, and systems) request an access key. This section also shows telephone extensions. The "among us" section is a news center directed at the servers. It also shows a concentration of communications and forms dedicated to the activity related to institutional dynamics and some useful links (calendar, e-protocol, SIAF, lowest price, price bank, documentary, federal and state constitution, statute of the servant, internal regulations, decree 52/84, and organization chart).

#### 4.1 Transparency in the Portal

As previously mentioned, the information on the part intended for transparency is not mentioned in the site map, making it difficult for the user to search. This section is composed of "Purchases and Tenders" (supplies and warehousing), "Income and Expenses" (subdivided into corporate cards, agreements, financial statements, reimbursement funds, travel allowances, airline tickets, budget laws, chart of accounts, fiscal management report, and budget balance), "Personnel" (commissioned, stable, inactive, pensioners, assigned by other bodies, stable assigned to other bodies, temporary, and salary composition of civil servants), "Plenary" (voting control, legislative research, and presence in the plenary), "Citizen Service", and "Assembly Journals" (Federal Gazette and journals prior to 2011) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4** – Transparency Portal.



**Source:** Capture by the author on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

The data related to tenders, agreements, financial statements, reimbursement funds, chart of accounts, fiscal management reports, budget statements, and voting control are available in PDF, a format that makes it difficult to work with the data, having image content that searches for keywords more difficult (NIELSEN; LORANGER, 2007). However, the institution approved a resolution that foresees the availability of information in open format files, which would solve the issue (ALEP, 2019). A complicated situation observed in the case of financial statements is the impossibility of accessing data before 2014.

Data on inventory control, travel allowances, airplane tickets, personnel, and presence in the plenary are presented in tables within the respective pages. In the case of salary composition before 2014, it is necessary to enter the name of the person seeking information, which makes

access to information impossible if the user does not seek data regarding a specific person or even if the name is misspelled. It is also difficult to access information on the presence of parliamentarians before 2014. When redirected to the page with this content, it is possible to select the desired period, month and year, followed by the day of the plenary session. Among the reference month options, it is possible to select from January 2011 to November 2019 but the data is only available between March 2011 and December 2013.

The penultimate section of the Transparency Portal is the space for citizen services (Figure 5), which contains the frequently asked questions and a form for any other information. There is the following warning before the questions: "Requests sent to the Citizen Service Center *may* be answered within a period of up to 20 (twenty) days, extendable for another 10 (ten) days. As soon as the information is available, it will be sent to the requestor's email" (emphasis added). This passage and emphasis is highlighted since LAI, in its article 11, regarding the deadlines for a reply, provides that:

Art. 11. The public body or entity must authorize or grant *immediate access* to the available information.

Paragraph 1. If it is impossible to grant immediate access, as provided for in the head provision, the body or entity that receives the request must, *within a period not exceeding 20 (twenty) days*:

I - communicate the date, place, and method to conduct the consultation, reproduction, or obtain the certificate;

II - indicate the factual or legal reasons for the refusal, in whole or in part, of the intended access; or

III - communicate that the information is not available, indicate, if possible, the organ or entity that holds it, or send the request to that organ or entity, informing the interested party of the referral of the request for information.

Paragraph 2. The term referred to in paragraph 1 may be *extended for another 10 (ten) days*, upon express justification, of which the applicant shall be informed. (BRASIL, 2011, [s.p.] emphasis added)

Thus, the meaning expressed by ALEP when using the term "may" is ambiguous since it does not indicate whether the information will be provided before or after the stipulated period. According to federal (LAI) and state legal matters (Decree nº 10,285/2014), it is mandatory to answer or provide access within a period of fewer than or equal to twenty days, allowing an extension expressed by the agency to the applicant.

Figure 5 – Citizen Services.

Assembleia Legislativa do Paraná x +

transparencia.assembleia.pr.leg.br/atendimento-ao-cidadao

ASSEMBLEIA LEGISLATIVA DO ESTADO DO PARANÁ ASSEMBLEIA DEPUTADOS ATIVIDADE PARLAMENTAR LEGISLAÇÃO COMUNICAÇÃO DESTAQUES INFOLEP TRANSPARÊNCIA

PORTAL DA TRANSPARÊNCIA

Compras e Licitações Receitas e Despesas Pessoal Plenário Atendimento ao Cidadão Diários da Assembleia

### ATENDIMENTO AO CIDADÃO

Início / Atendimento ao Cidadão

**As solicitações enviadas para a Central de Atendimento ao Cidadão podem ser respondidas em um prazo de até 20 (vinte) dias, prorrogável por mais 10 (dez) dias. Assim que a informação estiver disponível, será enviada para o e-mail do solicitante.**

Veja abaixo as perguntas mais frequentes feitas pelos visitantes:

**O que é a Central de Atendimento ao Cidadão?**

Regulamentada pela Lei nº 12.527/2011 - Lei de Acesso à Informação, a Central de Atendimento ao Cidadão é um canal de comunicação entre o cidadão e a Assembleia Legislativa do Paraná, para a obtenção de informações públicas por ela produzidas ou custodiadas.

- Como devo proceder para requerer alguma informação?
- Como posso acompanhar a tramitação de um Projeto de Lei?
- Como faço para localizar uma Lei Estadual?
- Como faço para acompanhar as Audiências Públicas e demais atividades da Assembleia Legislativa?
- Como faço para assistir as Sessões Legislativas ao vivo pela internet? E as que já aconteceram?
- Como faço para falar com os Deputados Estaduais?
- Como faço para visitar e conhecer mais sobre a Assembleia Legislativa?
- Como posso fazer sugestões, elogios, críticas, reclamações ou denúncias para a Assembleia Legislativa?

**Não teve a sua dúvida esclarecida com as respostas acima? Utilize o formulário abaixo e envie a sua pergunta.**

**Selecione o Departamento:**

Central de Atendimento ao Cidadão - Lei de Acesso à Informação

Ouvidoria

Nome

E-mail

Telefone

Data Nascimento

CPF

Mensagem

Enviar

ASSEMBLEIA LEGISLATIVA DO ESTADO DO PARANÁ

Praça Nossa Senhora de Saete, s/n - Curitiba - PR - 80.530-911  
Telefone: 41 3250-4000 - imprensa@assembleia.pr.leg.br  
Horário de atendimento: 09:00 às 18:00  
CNPJ: 77.799.542/0001-09

Facebook Twitter YouTube Instagram

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Source: Capture by the author on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Without dwelling on the usability criteria (later stage), selecting the department that will receive the message (Citizen Service Center or Ombudsman) corresponds to a single sector, the Ombudsman. Within it, there are servers responsible for addressing requests to the Citizen Service Center. Additionally, as the form only sends responses to the institution and does not open a system for monitoring the message, it is difficult for citizens to make requests for resources.

The last topic presented on the menu regards the Assembly journals. When selecting the Federal Gazette, the alert message "Your connection is not private" appears, which is not remedied with the browser change (Google Chrome and Internet Explorer), only allowing access through Firefox. As for the journals of before 2011, the search can be done through two mechanisms (specifying a period and navigation between the pages with the documents). The files are made available in .zip format and, after unzipping, are presented in PDF, which takes us back to the discussion on the data. Furthermore, the page in which the journals are presented changes from the "transparency" to "parliamentary activities" section, where there is no content on transparency in the subcategories of the menu (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Journals before 2011.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [assembleia.pr.leg.br/atividade-parlamentar/diarios-da-assembleia](http://assembleia.pr.leg.br/atividade-parlamentar/diarios-da-assembleia). The page title is "DIÁRIOS" under the "Atividade Parlamentar" section. A search bar is present with the text "Pesquisar Diários por período". Below the search bar, a paragraph explains that the official journal documents legislative acts and has been published by the State Official Press since February 2011. The main content is a grid of 21 journal entries, each with a date, a book icon, and a title. The entries are as follows:

Date	Title
01/02/2011	DIÁRIO 135
01/02/2011	DIÁRIO 134 - SOLENE POSSE GOVERNADOR
25/01/2011	DIÁRIO 133
18/01/2011	DIÁRIO 132
18/03/2011	DIÁRIO 131
18/01/2011	DIÁRIO 130
11/01/2011	DIÁRIO 129
16/12/2010	DIÁRIO -130
15/12/2010	DIÁRIO 129
14/12/2010	DIÁRIO 128
13/12/2010	DIÁRIO 127
09/12/2010	DIÁRIO 126
08/12/2010	DIÁRIO 125
07/12/2010	DIÁRIO 124
06/12/2010	DIÁRIO 123
03/12/2010	-DIÁRIO 122 SOLENE
02/12/2010	DIÁRIO 121 SOLENE
01/12/2010	DIÁRIO 120
30/11/2010	DIÁRIO 119
29/11/2010	DIÁRIO 118
24/11/2010	DIÁRIO 117

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the logo of the Assembleia Legislativa do Estado do Paraná, contact information, and social media icons.

Source: Capture by the author on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

The difficulties in accessing the journals in the virtual environment recall what happened in 2010 regarding the Secret Journals of the Assembly (KOHLBACH, BREMBATTI, ALBERTI, TABATCHEIK, 2010). The *Gazeta do Povo* (2010) series of reports reported on 2178 acts that were never published in the Federal Gazette, between January 2006 and March 2009.

Thus, this type of content is not a priority for the institution. Otherwise, the situation indicated by the research would not occur. However, the journals may also be considered important, but their access is made difficult in some way. Further investigations are necessary to understand which interpretation is the most appropriate.

#### 4.2 Checklist

The tables in the appendix present the evaluation questions, characteristics, or explanations about elements present in the statements to reduce possible doubts regarding the methodology, observations about usability, verification of the question, and evaluation regarding the conformity with the expectations to the listed characteristics, namely conformity (1) or divergence (0). The evaluation column is necessary because the items' characteristics do not present only aspects expected on the websites, preferring not to alter the construction of some of the items to not hinder understanding.

There were 28 points in conformity among the items listed, 19 contrary, and one not applicable. Situations in which the listed provisions are unable to encompass the ALEP device's reality were further studies to obtain more details to the findings. The first moment is the change in layout, which is essential both for loading the page, identifying the user, and keeping the user in the desired location (NASCIMENTO, 2010). Because the layout informs the citizens where the information is, changing this structure during navigation causes disruption in use. This situation occurs in Infolep and in the pages of the "Highlights" category.

Infolep's case can be understood as a demarcation that such an area would not be destined to the general public but to a specific set of users, the institution's servers. The pages under the "Highlights" section are programs or structures independent of each other (except the University Parliament and the Legislative School that have a structure integration that allows the page of one to access that of the other). The structure of the "Assembly at Enem" section is very heavy due to multimedia elements that do not help interaction.

Such a change also occurs on the pages of committees and parliamentary fronts, in which the solid white background comes to present the official coat of arms of the institution as a watermark, bringing such information from the institutional perspective rather than the activity of the parliamentarians, part of the observation made in the first item of Table 6 of the appendix. The other factors that demonstrate a more institutional character than a focus on the activities themselves are the agenda which reflects the actions that will take place in the institution (be it a visit by students from a school, be it an expedient) and not the agenda of individual



parliamentarians. In the case of public hearings, the Internal Affairs and Women's Prosecutor's Office predominates the institutional informative character to present the hearings' date and place or the attributions of the respective positions.

The organization of the website makes little sense for an external agent, given the difficulties in (i) organizing the page of leaders and party composition, in which the information is not presented intuitively (alphabetical order or number of members per party); (ii) when the terms "Party Representation" are used to indicate the composition of the parties in the house and "Transparency" to address various issues (documents related to the financial sector of ALEP, parliamentary presence control and voting, research on legislative matters, institution journals, and citizen services), note made in item 20.

Finally, it is worth noting that information services for people with disabilities are not available on the ALEP website, despite 21.4% of residents from Paraná stating in the 2010 Census that they have some level of visual, hearing, motor, and/or intellectual disabilities (KOWALSKI, 2019). The first broadcast by the plenary session TV Assembléia held with a sign language interpreter was made on August 5th, 2019 (FONTANA, 2019), but that such concern was not transferred to the website until the moment of this research.

## 5 Discussion

We return to the research question of how the institution practices transparency in the website. The findings on the ALEP Transparency Portal showed problems in the information architecture, mainly in the logical ordering of the information. We question the grouping of information under certain themes and the use of ambiguous terms for the sections. Regarding usability, the institution follows most of the listed requirements but the website lacks homogeneity in the layout and little attention is given to citizens with disabilities. Thus, the research corroborates the perspective of the authors with a pragmatic view on transparency that, despite the legal considerations about usability in the referring legislation, this concern is not central, given the availability of various data on the activities institutional, but with specific points in disagreement with the legislation, such as the warning before the frequently asked questions on the citizen service page or the issue regarding the availability of financial statements before 2014.

Regardless of the institution taking a series of measures with the discourse of "increasing transparency", such as sharing of the Electronic Information System (SEI) with the Federal Regional Court of the 4<sup>th</sup> Region (TRF4) (BUCHI, 2019), or regarding resolution number 21 of 2019, which implements the obligation to make information available in an open format, these initiatives do not aim transparency since the proposals for mechanisms that evaluate usability and information architecture are not new (e.g., NASCIMENTO, 2010; CAMARGO, VIDOTTI, 2011; CALDAS, 2007; NIELSEN, LORANGER, 2007), even on government websites (e.g., AMORIM, ALMADA, 2016).

The results of the usability analysis and functioning of the Citizen Services page corroborates the view of Noveck (2004) that the design of the screens through which people interact with the government is probably made to be less effective and to produce comments that are less manageable for regulators. In this sense, the institution's practices focus more on the autonomous provision of information (active transparency) than on the process related to requests made by the Citizen Service Center (passive transparency).

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the factors that influence the level of transparency, whether (i) personal factors (convictions); (ii) organizational factors (administrative impact, agency mission, communication structure, or internal policy); and (iii) resources (specifically time, personnel, and money) (FAIRBANKS, PLOWMAN, RAWLINS, 2007). In this sense, Frick's (2008, p.83) statement that it cannot be said that such resources are neutral synthesizes the results of the work since the construction of more accessible tools does not depend exclusively on the economic issue but on other circumstances involved. Thus, the perspective of Alves (2012) is questioned, in which LAI and related legislative measures make it possible to modify the existing institutional culture since the case of ALEP appears to be much closer to a digitalization of the process as presented by Marques and Pereira (2015), than a real change in institutional culture.

Additionally, Gomes (2011) indicates that every design of devices, applications, or tools for a political portal or website presupposes, first, a concept of digital democracy. Moreover, there is a model of democracy behind it, as far as it is concerned. In other words, neither can it be said that the perspective of Abdala and Torres (2016) regarding the portal is only a means of spectacularization since these tools comprise a concept of transparency, digital democracy, and, consequently, democracy.

## **6 Conclusion and Final Remarks**

This research showed that the ALEP website presents many possibilities for improvement in information architecture and usability. Such points can improve the institution's transparency, if meticulously worked with users, and impact the democratic culture of citizens, as occurs in CGU social networks, identified by Kniess (2019).

The present research did not verify usability from the users' perspective (e.g., SOUZA, 2009). Additionally, the research author does not represent all users of the Assembly's website. However, the investigation's findings and discoveries are essential since a systematic analysis of the case was conducted. Furthermore, the research corroborates Noveck's perspective (2004) regarding the importance of the involvement of those who understand and care about democracy to technologists in creating technology so that it is centered on the citizen instead of only focused on the client.

In other words, the research helps to defend the importance of collectively studying the

phenomena related to politics or connecting other areas of knowledge, given the possibility of enriching knowledge, improving tools, and expanding the area of interpretation of Political Science. In this sense, the work serves as an example within Political Science, while the investigations conducted by Lauriberto de Souza Brasil (2016) and Cristina Cinnanti (2011) play this role in the areas of Public Communication and Public Management.

We are aware of the limitations of the checklist tool, especially regarding the difficulty in establishing degrees of importance or severity between the different recommendations (DIAS, 2006). However, such appointment indicates areas to be explored by future research, with complementary methodology. Thus, the present work also serves as a starting point for objects to be worked.

Future works can take advantage of the findings in the present research and dedicate themselves to understanding the internal process of transparency and the values that influence the elaboration and maintenance of the institutional portals of the political powers. Also, it is necessary to understand the view that the institutions' agents have on transparency, as these perspectives may indicate important elements for the transparency policy that are not apprehended by the literature, given the local and cultural variations of each body.

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