INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF E-PARTICIPATION TOOLS BY PARLIAMENTS IN BRAZIL AND THE UK

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Abstract: This paper aims to present the role of officials from parliaments concerning the development of e-Participation mechanisms. The analysis is a case study of two national parliaments – the Brazilian House of Representatives and the British House of Commons – from the observation in field and interviews with public officials involved in the construction of institutional online tools for public engagement. The results show that there is constant involvement of external agents with the institutions to contribute to the modernization process, the teams have expertise and are updated about the world changes concerning digital technologies, and these practitioners believe that developing e-Participation tools is opening an important channel between the parliament and the citizens. Finally, we conclude that the integration between sectors is one of the essential actions to the success of initiatives since they connect different agents over the same problem and expands the publicity of the mechanisms.

Keywords: Parliament officials; Brazilian House of Representatives; British House of Commons; e-Participation.

1 Introduction

The adequate supply of input mechanisms confers greater legitimacy, in addition to granting efficiency to political decisions (AVRITZER, 2008; BENHABIB, 1996; ROMANELLI, 2015). During the trust crisis involving institutions and questions surrounding their legitimacy (LESTON-BENDEITA, 2016), these bodies have increasingly developed projects that bring citizens closer to the core of political decisions, overall through digital platforms. An issue, however, that has not been given due attention in the literature addressing this context is that the characteristics of each parliament can influence how these institutions open to civilians, especially when speaking of the participation of those represented in the process of legislative construction.

The work of many sectors within the legislative houses is of utmost importance for the development of public engagement tools (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2007). It is through them that projects are created, perfected and, based on the political skills of some consultants, reach the Board's agenda. Thus, this article aims to analyze the role of technical sectors in the process, so to identify institutional characteristics that influence the daily development of digital engagement and participation tools. For this end, a case study is carried out on the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies and the British House of Commons, two examples of parliaments that have allocated teams to prepare and manage online initiatives, identifying the entire structure responsible for e-

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Participation initiatives in each house and discussing the actors involved, their roles in said process and the understanding that legislative agents have of political participation.

It is recognized that not only online characteristics, directly related to the tools, matter. Under the perspective pointed out by Leston-Bandeira (2007), there is a need to observe the impact of offline characteristics of the Legislatures, meaning institutional factors that would influence the way these representative institutions develop projects to foster public engagement, especially. This argument is based, overall, on research like that of Braga, Mitozo and Tandra (2016), who have already shown the low significant relationship between external socioeconomic variables and the expression of legislative roles by these institutions through their websites.

In this sense, the article first discusses the implications of the involvement of sectors within the parliaments under analysis involved in e-Participation projects, based on works previously carried out in this area. Next, an analysis is made on how public servants of the legislative branch perform in the two national cases highlighted above, based on *in loco* observations in both houses and interviews held with agents who operate in the sectors involved in the development of digital initiatives for e-Participation in the parliaments in question.

2 Public engagement and internal parliamentary dynamics: possible relationships

The Legislative Houses have increasingly used internet tools to modernize internal processes, especially in relation to expanding public engagement and transparency (ROMANELLI, 2015). The changes that this new dynamic brings to parliaments can result in reducing the historical distance between principals and agents, based on a better understanding that citizens can also have on how the institutions work.

The growth of social demands related to the public engagement process has led parliaments to invest mostly in three points: 1) providing information about the institution, 2) developing political education programs and/or events through the legislative branch, 3) openness to participation in the law-making process (LESTON-BANDEIRA; THOMPSON, 2015, p.2). However, government institutions, especially parliaments, are hierarchical bodies, which means that internal dynamics are important factors for the development of participation tools.

Studies, however, have not concentrated efforts on investigations beyond the structure and use of tools. Chadwick (2011) is one of few authors that have developed research by observing the institutional dynamics that are behind the initiatives. Breaking away from the tradition of studying the success of a project, said author conducted research on an initiative that did not work as expected. The tool consisted in discussion forums promoted by the local Executive branch in a large North American city. The methodological strategy adopted by the research consisted of holding semi-structured interviews with tool managers and developers, through which it was found that the failure was not only due to the mechanism, but to institutional factors that involved the process.

Despite the initiative having been an action of a government body, a private company was hired to develop and manage the engagement tool. During the process, the project underwent changes in direction caused by factors inherent to government institutions. First, because there were (1) unexpected budget cuts, which compromised the initiative's continuity. Consequently, there was an (2) organizational instability generated in the project, also due to (3) outsourcing the forum's development and management. (4) Changes in the body's policies were also negative factors in maintaining the original project, to which the private sector was unable to adapt. The proposal was also distorted, since the political field was more concentrated on controlling than listening to the population's demands through the initiative, which Chadwick (2011) called (5) political ambivalence. Finally (6) legal risks and depoliticization were factors pointed out by managers, given that due to the management being carried out by a team from the private sector, there was more concern for technical constitutional issues, such as freedom of expression and protection of personal data, than the political character of the debate. Therefore, an experiment can only be successful due to a complex matrix of institutional variables.

In the same investigative aspect, Mundkur and Venkatesh (2008) analyze the case of a city hall in India, in which they also consider internal factors linked to the elaboration of mechanisms for e-governance as variables. In this case, the authors concentrate on the relationship between the political actors and consultative actors, sponsors, and tool managers, respectively. It was concluded that, although employees working on the digital democratic innovations for e-governance reach a level of autonomy to present ideas and develop new channels at some point, the progressive vision of these servers is barred by constraints imposed by the strictly political sector. This is because representatives are concerned about the demands that must be met due to this opening and the political results that acting unsatisfactorily can generate.

Leston-Bandeira (2007), with a vision on public engagement specifically in parliaments had already referred to the possibility of studying these institutions from the inside. Thus, this would enable the understanding of the dynamics that comprise the engagement promotion process, surpassing the analysis of the effectiveness of the tools. The researcher then proposes that nine overall points about the legislative institutions, that can influence the digitization of their activities, be observed. Among them: 1) Parliament working structure (commissions, resources); 2) Administrative organization of the parliament (departments and relationships between them), and 3) Human resources and infrastructure of the House (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2007, p. 663). Based on the analysis of these variables in a later work, the researcher presents an interesting finding about the European Parliament: the role of the Bureau as a motivator of engagement initiatives in this supranational parliament. This sector was identified as an important element in the provision of participation mechanisms, since it coordinates most of the institution's decision-making actions, such as appointment of high administrative positions. One of the actions stimulated by the Bureau is the use of digital social networks to disclose its activities. These

networks, however, can provide a two-way channel for communication between the European Parliament and citizens (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2014, p. 426).

Based on this empirical evidence, it is impossible to ignore how much still needs to be explored when considering, especially, the promotion of digital activities for engagement and participation, which requires specific skills. It is notable that several variables can fit into each of those larger factors pointed out by Leston-Bandeira (2007), in addition to adding more than one of them, as can be inferred from the characteristics found by Chadwick (2011). This is also the case, for example, of the institutionalization pointed out by studies with characteristics that can guarantee the establishment of projects as an effective part of legislative processes. Coleman (2005, p. 188) characterizes this phenomenon as an "institutional adaptation of a political, procedure and cultural nature." This way, the institutionalization of e-participation practices involves at least 1) constitutional powers, 2) institutional structure and 3) working structure of parliaments.

Although large investments have been made in engagement platforms, the parliaments' internal actions still seem disconnected, which can cause several damages to the projects. Regarding the actions of services and sectors of the European Parliament, Leston-Bandeira (2014) presents that each one began to create its own social media profile, which provided a very fragmented audience between these profiles. Other parliamentarians are going through the same problem: despite, for example, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies having two websites for communication and participation, the Chamber's Portal and the e-Democracia Portal, contact between their managing teams to schedule joint actions is something very recent action (FARIA, 2012), that started with the creation of the Communication, Transparency and Participation Managing Committee (Interview with *LabHacker* managers, 2017).[2]

The efficient coordination of engagement and participation actions within the legislatures is due, therefore, to recognizing participation as the parliament's new role, as it would be consolidated in the Houses, expanding the role of legitimation when observing the parameters established by Leston-Bandeira (2007, 2009). This phenomenon would also contribute to greater credibility before the represented population.

In this sense, many issues still need to be resolved, especially when thinking of the relationship between institutional factors and e-participation tools themselves. If the mismatch in the team that managed the tool studied by Chadwick (2011) was one of the factors responsible for the discontinuity of the program, there are leads indicating that the development's structural characteristics and use of mechanisms of this nature by institutions exercise influence on its success.

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[2] The LabHacker laboratory is an initiative aimed at promoting digital innovation in e-Democracy within the scope of the Chamber of Deputies. The sector is currently responsible for the E-democracia Portal, which, among other activities, manages the interactive public hearings held by the Commissions.

Brazil and the United Kingdom have some of the most promising experiences in public engagement on digital platforms. This has attracted international attention since the digitization of Brazilian participative budgets. This is a phenomenon that stands out, because

> [...] with the progressive trend of horizontalizing and network formations that has flooded Brazil in the 1990s, the possibilities of social participation in the preparation of public policies and exercise of citizenship were increased, as in the always mentioned case of the Participative Budget, for example. These factors gain even more strength with the abrupt development of information technology (FARIA, 2012, p. 75).

Considering that the research developed here will be based on the comparison of two distinct parliamentary structures, the actions of the parliaments analyzed regarding digital engagement and participation tool management is analyzed next.

## 3. The cases studies and their particularities

3.1 The Brazilian Chamber of Deputies

The House has been modernized and digitized as the result of a long tradition, which ensures technical and administrative capacity to rapidly develop political responses using digital means, as took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, when institutions began to meet through an online platform (PEIXOTO, 2020; MITOZO, 2020). The sectors connected to the Chamber's communication with those represented are the Secretariat for Communication (SECOM), the Information Technology Center (CENIN), the Chamber's Portal, the *Hacker* Laboratory (or *LabHacker*, that manages the Portal e-Democracia), and, recently, the Open Data sector, with the two last being coordinated by a planning team: the Management Committee for Communication, Transparency and Participation (MITOZO, 2018).

The Chamber's Portal[3], on the air since 1996, was an innovative initiative in Latin America. Something remarkable is the fact that, from the beginning, this website has direct communication channels between parliamentarians and citizens, such as chats (MARQUES, 2008). In 2009, the e-Democracia[4] Portal, a participation tool that shows how the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies has taken important steps in a process that would be replicated in other parliaments around the world, even if in different shapes, was inaugurated. The Portal is unique, which places the country in a prominent position in the development of this type of mechanism (FARIA, 2012). The most recent evolution was the creation, in 2013, of the *Hacker* Laboratory (*LabHacker*), an internal body of the Camera, meant to perfect the online projects, which, therefore, manages and develops strategies and channels for the e-Democracia Portal.

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[3] Data to access the Portal: https://www.camara.leg.br/ Acesso: 4/6/2021.

[4] Electronic address: http://www.edemocracia.leg.br/. Acesso: 4/6/2021.

Figure 1 –Bodies linked to the development of participative mechanisms in the Chamber of Deputies
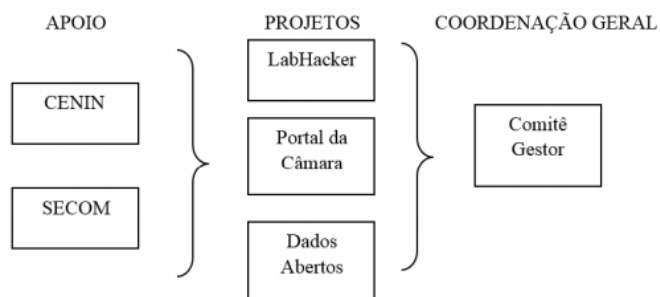
Source: Mitozo (2018)

SUPPORT   PROJECTS GENERAL   COORDINATION
PORTAL DA CÂMARA = Chamber's Portal
Dados abertos: open data
Comite Gestor - Management commission

Based on this infographic, it is possible to see that the participation development structure within the Chamber is centered on the most technical sectors, with no direct institutionalized connection with the strictly political sphere. This phenomenon, therefore, lacks investigation since this connection is essential for the success of the projects. On the other hand, this points to the importance of internal instances in the legislatures in the process of developing mechanisms that allow open participation and their actions to have managed to reach a level where the Chamber is in relation to these tools.

3.2 The British House of Commons

Regarding the participative opening, since 2005, the legislative house has invested in debates about the development of online initiatives that bring the parliament and those it represents closer. In 2006, for example, the House divided to begin a pilot project to expand and reach out to citizens. In 2007, the Administration Committee held a meeting that listed points to be improved in relation to citizens' access to the parliament: 1) modernization of the institution's website, 2) programs to bring the parliament outside its physical space, and 3) a guided visitation program inside Westminster Palace. After formalizing these needs, the *Parliament Outreach Services* (POS)[5]was established, becoming a permanent fixture, given that "simply provided information about the parliament is too little for a connection between citizens and the institution" (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2016, p. 19), following the new goals of a parliament that incorporates the goal of reaching all of those it represents.

After the development of a sort of online Public Consult regarding children's laws in the United Kingdom, in 2013, known as *Public Reading*, an important initiative was set in place to

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[5] This is the body that promotes educational services regarding the British Parliament, with fixed activities in the Parliament Houses themselves, and itinerant activities.

perfect the British Parliament's digitization activities. The *Speaker's* Digital Democracy Committee (DDC) was then conceived, idealized and led by John Bercow[6], in mid-2013, was a special instance that worked between the beginning of 2014 and 2015, collecting perceptions, bringing together specialists and citizens in debated (the committee's background itself was mixed, with parliamentarians, academics, businessmen from *Startups*, technology, and representatives from the organized civil society[7]), aiming to outline practical objectives for this parliament to be able to improve the mechanisms already available, and their reach.

This way, in January 2015, this advisory Committee's final report was released, entitled *Open Up!*, which presented five main recommendations, goals to be achieved by the parliament in five years: 1) until 2020,the HoC should guarantee that all citizens understand what it does, 2) until 2020, the parliament should be completely interactive and digital, 3) the HoC elected in 2015 should immediately create a new public participation forum to debate the institution's functions, 4) until 2020, safe online vote should be an option for all voters, 5) until 2016, all information published and all transmissions produced by the parliament should be freely available online in formats suitable for reuse (DIGITAL DEMOCRACY COMMISSION), 2015). The Hansard[8] documents should be available with open data until the end of 2015. Not all goals were met, overall in relation to the digital vote, one of the biggest resistances in relation to digitalization in the British Parliament[9].

Since then, greater attention has been devoted to cybercamera projects, such as the creation of a specialized team to deal with online and *Offline* activity management, known as *Your UK Parliament*, with the use of Twitter to disseminate and discuss activity (@YourUKParl) and agendas from the House and the organization of the Parliament Week[10], respectively. All activities of this nature, however, can only be developed due to the support of two central bodies in Parliament: *Parliamentary Digital Services*, the House's digital technologies team, and *Parliament Outreach Services*. This bodies are responsible above all, for the educational actions about the parliaments and for in-person public engagement actions, such as guided visits to the British Houses of Parliament. Based on the investigation of the components of the provision of mechanisms, both online and *offline* from a few years ago, the structure that can be inferred

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[6] According to the two interviewees, the *Speaker* (President of the House of Commons) at the time "cheated" the House's internal legislation regarding the process of putting together a mixed Committee, aiming to constitute said committee as quickly as possible.

[7] The list of DDC members is available at: https://www.parliament.uk/business/commons/the-speaker/speakers-commission-on-digital-democracy/members/ Access: 4/6/2021.

[8] Hansard is the body responsible for the compilation of the debates, speeches, and meeting in the British Parliament.

[9] There is great resistance even in relation to the PMs online vote itself since it is an important ritual of contact between parliamentarians and ministers. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/02/mps-join-90-minute-long-queue-to-vote-to-end-virtual-voting Access: 4/10/2021.

[10] An event that promotes the public's engagement with the activities of the houses. Available at: https://www.ukparliamentweek.org/en/. Accesso on: 4/11/2021.

presented in a systematic way in the figure below[11].

Figure 2 – Bodies linked to the development of participation mechanisms in the *House of Commons*

Source: Mitozo (2018)

Aconselhamanto planejamento - Advisory/planning
Apoio - support
Projetos - projects

The observation of the set of sectors and projects presented above allows us to state that the British House of Commons has worked on a process of modernizing its activities, especially public engagement strategies, through digital mediums. If there is still fear surrounding the digital vote within the House, this is due to a more procedural mentality and how it works, which points to a change in internal regulations, legislation and, consequently, the rites followed for centuries during House sessions, so that greater importance is given to digitization and institutionalization of post-electoral participation in this Chamber.

4 Methodological Strategies

This work aims to analyze the elements related to the development of participative online initiatives in the Brazilian and British parliaments, specifically in their lower chambers. Chamber of Deputies (BR) and House of Commons (UK). The objective is to identify institutional characteristics related to internal sectors that influence the daily development of digital engagement and participation tools.

It is noticed from the literature that these two legislative Houses are among the greatest exponents in digital democracy initiatives, but what is most striking is the absence of other initiatives promoted by parliamentarians that would open permanent spaces for debate or that have teams directed at planning channels and strategies, such as those found in the cases highlighted in the figure of the *Hacker* Laboratory (Brasil) and the Digital Democracy Committee (United Kingdom).

This way, it begins with the following research question: how internal arrangements

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[11] It should be noted that the petitions system was not included in the research corpus and, therefore, does not appear as a project in this chart, since it is a joint action between Parliament and Government. This would make it difficult to observe internal dynamics as influencing factors in the process, given that characteristics of the Executive should also be investigated, which would go beyond the scope of the investigation carried out.

compose the development of online public engagement tools? To answer this question, interviews were then carried out with agents connected to the participation projects, both on the technical and parliamentary levels, in both Houses. The method adopted was the semi-structured interview, since there was a need for a script, even if it should be made more flexible during the conversation, to allow better "dialog with the interviewee, diving deeper into aspects considered important for the understanding of their thoughts [...] on the issues at hand" (VEIGA; GONDIM, 2001, p. 5). The narratives of these characters matter (PRIOR, 2017) and are important sources for clarifications on characteristics such as hierarchy and the "complex game between different actors and interests in a given organization" (CHADWICK, 2011, p. 23).

After mapping the sectors and each of their main actors, as well as prior contact with these agents by email or online *chat*, four interviews were held in the British parliament and two in the Chamber of Deputies. In the British Parliament, aside from two consultants (Lucinda Blaser and Tracy Green) and one consultant (Edward Wood), called *officials*, an interview was also held with Meg Hillier, who was part of the Digital Democracy Committee (DDC) and held the position of President of the Public Accounts Control Commission during the 56th legislature (2015-2017), period in which the interviews were carried out. Based on this, it is possible to understand the House's motivations and strategies for thinking about digital democracy projects, such as the DDC and the Cybercamera practices recommended by the committee, and how parliamentarians reacted to the practice of these projects. The interviews were held in the British Parliament between January and February of 2016.

In Brazil, two interviews were carried out, one with the *LabHacker* coordination, a body that currently develops and manages the e-Democracia Portal in the Chamber, and another with Deputy Ricardo Tripoli, one of the parliamentarians that was part of the team that discussed and created the e-Democracia Portal in mid-2008. The interviews were held, respectively, on March ninth and sixteenth of 2017, in the Chamber itself. The first took place in *LabHacker* itself, at less busy time in the sector, when the three main managers could be brought together. They were Cristiano Faria, Simone Ravazolli and Walternor Brandão. As for the Deputy, contact was established through two advisors to the parliamentarian's office. Due to the week's hectic energy due to the possible voting of a controversial project (Welfare Reform) and a trip by the deputy that was anticipated by an unforeseen event, considering the interviewee was, at the time, leader of his party in the Chamber, the conversation was held over the phone, from *LabHacker*.

The interviews were analyzed through *Nvivo* software, for the possibility of more precisely identifying the following categories: 1) actors mentioned and their origin (the institution sponsoring the initiative, political party, technical sector, organized civil society, deputy/MP, academia, business, other), 2) role of the mentioned actors, 3) role of the interviewee in relation to the participatory practices of the legislative institution to which they belong (or belonged at the time of the interview), 4) expectations of the interviewee in regards to improvements in the

institution and in the democracy provided by participation projects, 5) vision of the projects of which they are part of, 6) concept/comprehension of the interviewee's participation.

To complement the information collected through documents and interviews, a short observation of the work routines within the two parliaments was also performed as an auxiliary technique. It took place briefly over two days in the House of Commons, January sixteenth, and February eighth of 2016 (due to the opportunity of interviews and an evaluation meeting of the House's actions against the recommendations of the Digital Democracy Commission) and for nine days in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, between March sixth and sixteenth of 2017, specifically in the *LabHacker*, which coordinated the main online activities in this House.

Thus, besides the identified interviews, there are also records of informal conversations with public servants during these days, without these professionals being identified when mentioning excerpts from informal dialogs during the work. It is noteworthy that the use of these excerpts was consented by the agents, if they were not identified in the work. These conversations contributed to a broader view of the processes, which will be presented in the following analysis:

5. Analysis

5.1 Characteristics of the involvement of sectors within the legislatures with the development of tools

The interviews carried out in the Chamber of Deputies presented some agents as important in the process of developing engagement initiatives. Institutional actors (Executive, Judiciary, Chamber T.V. And radio channel, Commissions, deputies, the Chamber's Secretariat of Communication - SECOM, the Information Technology Center – CENIN, the Chamber Portal Management Committee, President of the Chamber, Shorthand Department, General Board, Senate, academics (universities, professor Rafael Sampaio, professor Wilson Gomes), from society (hackers, Serenata do Amor Operation[12]) and other representative institutions (Chamber of Deputies of the Federal District) contributed to the Chamber's projects. The role exercised consisted of a portion of responsibility regarding the publicity of the e-Democracia Portal, the understanding of e-participation projects, the implementation of online debates and the stimulation of more actions on the part of the Chamber for inspiring new projects beyond their physical limits, such as the new participative portal of the District Chamber. Among these agents, the last presidents of the House, responsible for leading projects aimed at opening participation, should be highlighted: Itinerant Chamber (2015) – Eduardo Cunha – and Open Chamber (2017) – Rodrigo Maia.

The interviewees, some of them also mentioned in other conversations that they had a

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[12] The Serenata de Amor Operation is a project that developed an "artificial intelligence for social control of the Public Administration", which specifically analyzes invoices referring to the expenses of deputies for whom reimbursement was requested. Available at: https://serenata.ai/. Acesso: 4/10/2021.

leading role in relation to the online engagement and participation projects of the Houses under study. In the Brazilian case, the *LabHacker* team, that manages the e-Democracia Portal is made up of two heads: the laboratory director and the coordinator of the portal's actions. At the time of the conversation, the portal's coordination was transitioning, therefore, the recently replaced coordinator, now former, was also invited to participated, especially because he continued to be an employee of the sector and developed projects with the programming team. It is important to mention that the new coordinator of the Brazilian portal under study had already been a journalist for the Chamber's Secretariat of Communication, the body responsible for publicizing the House's activities. The interviewed deputy was one of those who comprised the commission that discussed and approved the deployment of the e-Democracia Portal in mid-2008. At the time of the research, the parliamentarian was the leader of his party in the Chamber.

These interviewees presented a positive view of the initiative, although they were exposed to the challenges and limitation of work within the House.

> Today, right- and the left-wing parliamentarians arrive with the belief that this is the way to go. They don't yet know how to use it, they don't know how to adopt it, but they know it's inevitable. They know we're really at a time of transition. So, I think it's really cool to see the work accomplished. There is still a lot to do, but we're still at the beginning. I believe the best is yet to come and we are still far from this idea. But many people are inspired by this, they're insisting on it, doing it. I'm not talking exclusively about e-Democracia [portal], but of all the work that is being construed here in the Chamber. It's the result of the work of other bodies, other people. This is causing many repercussions in our next-door neighbor (we were in the District Chamber helping to inaugurate its *LabHacker*) (Cristiano Faria. Interview with *LabHacker* managers, 2017).

The Brazilian tool's developers and managers believe in participation as the creation of a communication channel between the civil and political spheres, with *feedback* from the deputies, meaning "the citizen knowing that they are being heard, the deputy receiving this information and reinforcing what was heard" (Simone Ravazolli. Interview with *LabHacker* managers, 2017). This, according to them, is a component of democracy and involves an opening process that begins with information and transparency to expand engagement and participation activities. Based on these increments, citizens can send contributions so that legislative discussions result in better products.

In the conversations at the House of Commons, the list of actors mentioned closely follows those mentioned in official documents, which proved that these are agents that were in fact important to the development of engagement projects, especially those involving e-participation. Among them are civil society movements (*Mind*, an organization that works with people who have intellectual disabilities, *Mysociety*, that works with citizenship projects, *WeNurses*, a nurse organization), that integrate the DDC (Hellen Milner, of the *Tinder Foundation*, Justine McGuiness, John Bercow's media coordinator at the time he was President

of the House, who aided the DDC's initial work), bodies linked to the parliament or coordinated by the institution (Modernization Commission, Government, Internal Affairs Commission, DDC, PDS, Parliamentary Archives), other political institutions (*Scottish Nationalists*). The role that the mentioned agents have in exercising, alongside the parliament and, specifically the British parliament's representative Chamber, consists in the aggregation of expertise and participation in engagement activities.

There was mention to a multinational company (Coca-Cola) to talk about to talk about the humanization of the digital social network profiles of the parliament (such as using the profile of a character called "Bob" to communicate with the public representing said brand). This mention demonstrates that the engagement and participation development and management teams are up-to-date and use external experiences, that do not pertain to the political field, to think of their own activities.

As for the interviewees and their functions, the parliamentary occupied one of three seats in the DDC destined for Parliamentary Members (PMs) and is one of the encouragers for public engagement in digital environment activities. The consultant was former secretary of the DDC and acts in the British Parliament's information sector. His role during the special commission's works was to coordinate activities, especially in the initial periods of the internal debates and when forming the commission. One of the interviewed consultants specifically spoke of her role within the online public engagement actions at the House.

> I work in the *Digital Outreach* team (digital reach) and we do thinks like social media for the House of Commons' Twitter and the "UKParl" accounts, *live tweeting*, business and *stories* for the website about what is happening in the Chamber, publicizing information on law bills and also doing my specific work which has a greater target: forums outside the parliament that work from the engagement in digital spaces, where people already are. [...] So, I have been working in cybercamera actions, which I lead, but my team has also been working with terminology, preparing a glossary. We completely updated, just like the format of the House's tweets (Lucinda Blaser. Interview, 2016).

Likewise, the third interviewee, a Parliament consultant at the time, states that her team also monitored *hashtags,* but in relation to the profiles of the Commissions of the parliament, having managed one of the online discussions promoted by the House. The following functions were listed, among others: technological maintenance of the House's connection and project planning.

> You have a team taking care of the support department and dealing with technological problems that come up. The team manages the entire technological kit that PMs use (desktops, laptops, printers, etc.) and there are people who maintain the network that guarantees that the Wi-Fi works. So, you have a team focused on all aspects of project planning, which we call the portfolio team (Tracy Green. Interview, 2016).

These institutional actors showed expectations and visions of the projects they are part

of, mainly in relation to how these actions can contribute to improvements in the institutions and democracy. Lucinda Blaser, from *Parliament Outreach Services* (POS), states that there are still barriers to be transposed, but the initiatives are good opportunities to open space to listen to the demands of the population, such as the action of receiving essays of up to 3000 words written by citizens, promoted by POS.

Another issue raised in the interviews is the fact the phenomenon of modernization and participative opening should be embraced by the entire parliament, from advisory teams to the parliamentarians themselves, to construe more efficient initiatives. This means

> [...] enabling the Parliament to make actual good use of technology in how it engages with citizens, how it can be more transparent and open about what takes place here, and why this matters to people, and how it can engage with people. Also, in terms of building their capacity, the team that works here, developing their digital skills and expertise, such as the MPs (Tracy Green. Interview, 2016).

The expectation of *officials* in the House of Commons consist in seeing these initiatives completely different in twenty years, considering "the speed in which changes have happened", as mentions Green, even in face of the enormous dependence that the actions of these of these actors have in relation to the PMs. In the same way, it is believed that PMs should engage with the projects, trying to gain knowledge about them, although it should not be required that parliamentarians be experts in each of the themes presented[13].

The understanding of engagement and participation that can be obtained from the conversations with public servants and parliamentarians is that they expect digital engagement projects such as those in which people can say what they think (FOX, 2009). Therefore, they still consider incorporating these demands a huge challenge, due to the restrictions of the House itself, or even providing responsiveness on the fact that contributions cannot be complied with. This is a worry that comes, above all, from the PM interviewed.

This analysis shows that the internal dynamics of the Legislative Houses are more than accessories for the development of participation initiatives, especially those in digital environments: these features gain a central role in the process. The next section concentrates on the discussion of one of the key characteristics found: the integration between sectors of the legislative houses in the development of online actions for public engagement.

5.2. The integration of sectors in the participatory opening process

It is possible to see, through the analysis of the agents and their roles in the dynamics of parliament modernization that the political field does not seem to be the only problematic issue

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[13] This is a role that belongs to the Lords, which, unlike the PMs, have specific training that is often removed from Politics. Furthermore, they do not need to entirely dedicate themselves to politics, in the sense that they do not campaign or need to meet demands of a specific constituency, for they do not retain representative offices.

in the implementation of participatory mechanisms in parliaments (FARIA, 212; MITOZO, 2018). The relationships that the sectors connected to these actions maintain are very important to the development of initiatives. For example, the Secretariat of Communication of the Chamber of Deputies (SECOM) is not very connected to the e-Democracia Portal/LabHacker. Consequently, this secretariat does not currently publicize the actions of this project appropriately. An example of this lack of connection took place while the researcher was in the observation stage, in LabHacker: SECOM published a *tweet* that addressed the launch of a new version of the e-Democracia Portal at 11 pm.

This was the reason for a discussion between the two sectors, which was witnessed by the researcher. "[This initiative] is part of the 'Open Chamber' that the president [of the House] is launching. That's when you see the lack of connection [among sectors]!" said a legislative consultant. It must be mentioned that SECOM was not in service at the time of publication. Still, the fact the publicity *post* of the portal was left for a time where there would be an insufficient audio, and considering that posts on *Twitter* were easily "lost", since the tool followed a chronological sequence at the time, is a symptomatic factor.

The integration between sectors in the Legislative houses is a problematic point, especially because of bureaucracy. Still in relation to Brazil, the Participative Legislation Commission (PLC), the most important permanent *offline* action for citizen participation has a very restrictive regulation, which leads to working within the shape of social movements in the 1990s, such as printed material. This is a common action in the PLC, even after twenty years of existence (2001-2021). However, this Commission's processes could be conducted more easily if it was integrated with the e-Democracia Portal.

In 2016, a Legislative Community was opened on the portal named PLC[14]. According to one of e-Democracia's managers, this action was interesting because channels that could meet the PLC's demands for the discussions made available were developed, and a partnership with researchers and universities, aiming to think of better strategies.

> But the project ended up not moving forward for other issues, that were not technological impediments or relationship problems of the PLC. This approximation was interesting, the idea was a good one, but fundamentally, the PLC needs a reform in its bylaws to revisit some of these thinks and this is a bottleneck in innovation, because innovation sometimes goes right against legality (Walternor Brandão. Interview with *LabHacker* managers, 2017).

This way, it is seen that, despite being considered an important step towards digitization, streamlining the work and integration between bodies with similar objectives, this activity will not be a trend, since the PLC's focus is not dealing with citizens individually, as e-Democracia proposes. This permanent commission dialogues with organized civil society.

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14 Available at: http://arquivo.edemocracia.camara.leg.br/web/clpdigital/inicio#.YJmdIO2Sk2x. Accessed on 5/10/2021.

> Who can present Legislative Suggestions? Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Associations and class entities, Unions, civil society entities, except political parties; direct and indirect administration bodies and entities, if they have equal participation of civil society (CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES 2013, p.14.).

Furthermore, the PLCs activity registration system, namely Minutes, are still traditional face-to-face mechanisms (CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, 2013), which brings more attention to the need to change the Brazilian House's bylaws. This is one of the factors that justify the anonymous declaration of a public servant in relation to other sectors, especially to the strictly political field: "If they're not getting in the way, that's an advance in itself".

On the other hand, the Itinerant Chamber project, from 2015, provided integration between the e-Democracia management team and SECOM, as there was intense promotion of the initiative's agenda, because the president of the institution at the time led the project's caravans to the federative units.

> [...] in all editions of the itinerary channel that took place, the e-Democracia [portal] was present, using SECOM to transmit what happened live, and interacting via e-Democracia portal. The participation rates were very good, participation was above average in the Portal e-Democracia Portal. A really cool think there was in this project were the reports. So, all participation, every event, every edition we would draft a report that was given to the president and everyone who participated. This is just so you have an idea of how this participation took place, what showing the tool's potential brought in as positive results (Walternor Brandão. Interview with *LabHacker* managers, 2017).

Therefore, the integration generated good consequences for the discussions from the portal under study. It is a fact that the sectors involved in the initiative occupy a prominent place in the promotion and development of these projects. Thus, the way in which they articulate their interests based on the diversity of views of the parliament and representation is an important point for establishing internal cooperation.

The British Parliament has recently articulated internal teams directed at coordinating digital public engagement mechanisms. Thus, it can be said that there are investments being made. The House of Commons, therefore, does not yet centralize the online engagement and participating works in a single activity coordination team, for is uses all sectors that work with information, parliamentary education, and digital resources. The *Parliamentary Digital Service* (PDS) and the *Parliamentary Outreach Services* (POS) seek to collect what citizens think about issues concerning the House or under discussion in the stages of project discussion, so called "readings", through *online* and *offline* actions. The unification of sectors around an objective point to a care for the development of the parliament's digitization, especially of the House of Commons, since it is the representative institution from which citizens can demand actions.

The reformulation of the former *Parliament ICT* as PSD itself shows how the institution has bet on the idea of modernization going beyond an investment in technological structure, with

a concern that is more focused on results, meaning what will be collected from actions promoted by it in an online environment.

> [...] previously, *Parliament ICT* was very focused on Information and Communication technologies, i.e., very focused on cables, computers, it wasn't much about the results it could achieve [through its actions]. So I think jointing this sector to the web team and redirecting focus to digital is a positive thing. [...] At the heart of this, there are two things: the first is about allowing the Parliament to make really good use of technology in the sense of engaging citizens and promoting more transparency and openness about what happens here, how it influences people's lives and how they can engage (Tracy Green. Interview, 2016).

It is important to emphasize that, to offer greater understanding of the parliament and how citizens can interact with it, this partnership between PDS and POS gave rise to a joint team to promote and manage a few public engagement activities, the *Your UK Parliament*, as presented previously.

Through the DDC, besides listening to suggestions and requesting advisory from external agents (teachers, businessmen, students, etc.) to develop their actions, the House of Commons tried to bring different bodies of the House together. Some *officials* were then appointed by the president as members of this Committee. They would be responsible for reporting the activities and thinking about how to apply recommendations, tasks about which there would be argument over later in a public event at the House, which took place on February 8, 2016.

The Brazilian institution's participatory opening actions analyzed have origins closer to technical sectors than to the political body. This is expressed, for example, by the fact that, although the e-Democracia Portal was implemented in the House through the mediation of some parliamentarians who embraced the cause, it was initially allocated within the scope of the Committees, with the idea being gestated among public servants of the Chamber (MITOZO, 2013; FARIA, 2012). However, the idea that public servants are the exclusive factors that condition the entire process is not defended. The political game and rules behind these actors, which ultimately guide all actions, should be considered. After all, we are dealing with parliaments, political, bureaucratic and, overall, hierarchical institutions.

6 Conclusion

The adoption of digital technologies does not consist solely in the mechanism developed. This is a greater process of change in the internal procedures of parliaments, since "Political participation on the internet is not only related to the degree of sophistication of the available tools" (MARQUES, 2011, p.116).

From the analysis performed, it is seen that the success of initiatives to provide openness to parliaments, public institutions, must necessarily go through the commitment of legislative public servants and the internal and external integration of its sectors. This is needed because

organization instability in the project, many times a consequence of outsourcing the development and management is an institutional initiative, and is one of the factors that can lead to negative consequences for public sector experiences (CHADWICK, 2011). Thus, human resources and the infrastructure that the analyzed Houses had available were central elements, although not exclusive, in the preparation and development of initiatives for the digitization of democratic activities promoted by the Legislative Houses under analysis, as foreseen by Leston-Bandeira (2007).

Additionally, a better integration between sectors would contribute to better quality advertising, as shown in the Brazilian case. The Chamber of Deputies' SECOM is a key body in relation to advertising means used to open participation in the CD. The channels that this sector generates have the potential to reach all citizens, not just those who already know the initiatives, as is the case pointed out by the profiles of the e-Democracia Portal. In this sense, the House of Commons' action of promoting debates on networks that, at first, were only used for promotion, had the potential to reach a larger number of users than a less exposed tool, as is the case of the Brazilian e-Democracia. This is the reason why digital social networks have attracted so many institutions willing to get closer to citizens, aiming to better promote their tools and activities, as in the cases analyzed in other studies (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2009, 2012; CAMPOS-DOMÍNGUEZ, 2011; BRAGA; MITOZO; TADRA, 2016).

However, the Itinerary Chamber project in Brazil showed that integration is not impossible, for, when executed, the actions showed to be very coordinated between sectors. This relationship was complementary to the involvement of the Chamber's president in activities, since the presence of this political actor, at the time, in caravans of said project had a great influence on the aggregating effect. Likewise, integrating PSD and POS team actions to the DDC's recommendations, as was the case in the assessment of what this committee's activities had added to the House, is connected to the own interest of the president of the House in promoting this integration. The *Speaker* himself was present at the meeting he convened a year after releasing the DDC report, in 2016.

It is noticed that the integration between these sectors would be more linked to the structural quality of the initiative, considering there can be a collective contribution to the improvement of tools regarding (1) promotion of the actions developed, and (2) sharing ideas about the channels that should compose the tools. A big step towards these partnerships, in the Brazilian case, was the creation of the Hacker Laboratory, in 2013, and the integration of Cybercamera services in the British House of Commons, although there is still deficiency in other points, such as laws that can actually make these actions part of the public decision-making process, which would take the projects to another level, more connected to political representation.

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