

# e-Consultation as a tool for participation in teachers' unions

The greater the focus, the greater the number of visits

Carlos Quental

Instituto Politécnico de Viseu  
Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão  
Viseu, Portugal  
quental@estgv.ipv.pt

Luis Borges Gouveia

Universidade Fernando Pessoa  
Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia  
Porto, Portugal  
lmbg@ufp.pt

**Abstract** — In the 2000's, the Internet became the preferred mean for the citizens to communicate. The YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, i.e., the social networks in general appeared together with the Web 2.0, which allows an extraordinary interaction between citizens and the democratic institutions.

The trade unions constantly fight governments' decisions, especially in periods of crisis like the one that the world, Europe and, in particular, Portugal are facing. In this regard, the use of e-participation platforms is expected to strengthen the relationship between trade unions and the education community. This paper reports the research about the planning and driving of a series of experiments of online public consultation, launched by teachers' trade unions. These experiments are compared with those of other countries, such as Australia, United Kingdom and United States of America. A quantitative analysis of the results regarding hits, subscriptions, and response rates is presented, and it is compared with the 90-9-1 rule, the ASCU model and data from government agencies. The experiments performed used the Liberopinion, an online platform that supports bidirectional asynchronous communication. A better understanding of the benefits of these collaborative environments is expected by promoting quality of interaction between actors.

**Keywords** - *e-participation, public participation; trade unions, teachers unions; unionism 2.0, digital mediation, Liberopinion.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, politicians begin to worry about the lack of interest, trust and participation of citizens in democratic politics. Consequently, governments and political institutions around the world are increasingly using the Internet in an attempt to revitalize democracy through online public consultation and citizen participation [1], [2].

The potential of online political communication was demonstrated in 2007 in the Australian elections, called "google election" by Gibson & Ward and, in 2008, by the Obama campaign, which brought great visibility to the use of electronic means [3]. Yet, it is relevant to note that most media used by politicians have few interactive features [4]. Goot states that, in the Australian elections, citizens participated online, on their own, in blogs and websites of activist groups like *getup* ([getup.org.au](http://getup.org.au)), *election tracker* ([electiontracker.net.au](http://electiontracker.net.au)), *you decide* ([youdecide2007.org](http://youdecide2007.org)), among others. Rainie and Smith claim that 46% of Americans

used the Internet, during the Obama campaign, to access news about the campaign, share views and mobilize other citizens [5].

Saebo and Skiftenes identified as significant activities of e-participation, the electronic voting (e-voting), online decision-making, electronic activism (e-activism), electronic consultation (e-consultation), online election campaigns (e-campaign) and electronic petitions (e-petitions) [6], [7].

Despite the e-participation being especially highlighted within the political context, its application has also been studied in other organizations. The current paper presents a reflection on this new paradigm of civic participation within teachers' unions, for which no related studies were found. The trade union studied here is the largest teachers union in Portugal, the National Federation of Teachers (FENPROF), which is composed of the Teachers Union of the North, Centre, Greater Lisbon, South, Region of Madeira, Region of Azores and the Foreigner. From these, the main focus is given to the Teachers Union of the Centre Region (SPRC). The participation results and the tools employed are analyzed.

## II. E-PARTICIPATION

The use of electronic media to support the government, and the central and local public administration, activities, allows the state to develop new forms of relationships with the citizens. Among these, it is relevant to highlight the direct and mediated digital interaction between each citizen, or group of citizens, and the different public bodies, which results in a new proposal for public participation called e-participation.

Several authors define e-participation, in general terms, as citizen participation in public service processes at different stages of the production chain (planning, decision making, implementation, evaluation), which according to them represents the slight difference between e-participation and e-Gov [8], [9]. Yet, we believe that the scope of e-participation is much broader and that it includes the participation of citizens in any public service.

Due to the crisis in the representative democracy, clearly visible in the declining participation in the elections [10], there is a considerable increase in the use of Internet tools for public consultation and citizen engagement.

According to [11], civic participation is the redistribution of power from the authority to the citizens. From the authors' point of view, there are eight types of public participation, which can be described as an 8-step ladder. These steps, all of which have been thoroughly discussed in the literature [12]–[14], range from manipulation to social control, and include intermediate steps such as information, consultation, delegation of power and partnership. Arnstein [11] argues that the closer the citizens are to the top of the ladder, the more capable they are of controlling their participation in the participatory procedures and of demanding intelligibility of the implemented procedures to those who participate.

The creation of public spaces that enable the civil society to express, conflict and negotiate, puts it in the middle of a process where the public actions cease to be the responsibility of the State, but are to be created and developed by actors instead, whose central objective is the promotion of democracy. As a result, citizens are to be allowed to democratically exercise their power through partnerships of public authority [15], [16]. This is the case of the current study.

#### A. e-consultation

Online consultations consist in using the Internet to inquire a group of citizens about one or more topics, thus allowing the sharing of information between participants through platforms on which they can make contributions, inform and influence policy and decision-making.

The e-consultations should take into account important aspects such as ensuring that all citizens can express their opinions about issues and policies that affect them; considering that the participants' time is valuable; keeping the portal or platform easy to use; showing the contributions; and allowing anonymity for those who wish, just to name a few.

The e-consultations have typically a well-defined period. The topics for discussions are pre-defined by the promoters and they may be moderated. Unfortunately, existing studies show that few citizens participate. Ferro and Molinari [17] concluded that only the activists (3-5% of the population) participate, based on the ASCU (Activists, Socializers, Connected, Unplugged) model. On the other hand, Cruickshank et al [18] argue that 1% participation in any initiative of e-participation is considered a success. Considering a six-step ladder of participation (Creators, Critics, Collectors, Joiners, Spectators, and Inactive), a Forrester Research estimated that in the United States only 13% are Creators (people who publish in blogs, have web pages, upload videos), 33% are Spectators (only consume information, such as reading blogs and news, watching videos) and 52% are Inactive (do not participate in any online activity) [19].

Comparatively, 90% of Internet users are “lurkers” [20] and 9% contribute a little [21]. In an e-petition submitted to the Portuguese parliament about the payment of motorway tolls, the authors obtained an effective participation of 2.6% in a population of 593.084 inhabitants with Internet access [22]. In turn, 7% of the UK population participated in the “Downing Street-House of Commons Government e-petitions” initiative, and Rainie and Smith [5] claim that, during the Obama campaign, 46% of Americans used the Internet to access news

about the campaign, share points of view and mobilize other citizens. Sebastião [23] state that the impact of online petitions in the political system, measured by the number of signatures, is low - only 6.8% resulted in discussion at the Portuguese Parliament.

There are several types of e-consultations. The simplest involves questions and answers in discussion forums integrated within a website, in which citizens are invited to post their opinions, questions and concerns, and are able to receive feedback from the promoters, who may or may not be governmental authorities.

The online polls are the second type of e-consultations, which essentially allow to quickly measure a specific question. Examples of this type of e-consultation include the online poll performed to teachers about measures to be taken against the government, which is discussed later, and the “Your Voice in Europe” of the European Commission<sup>1</sup>.

Although e-petitions are identified as e-participation activities, in some cases, they may also be considered another form of e-consultation [24], particularly if the participants are invited to discuss and enrich them. The e-petitions allow the citizens to interact and influence the policy decisions of governments or other political bodies, such as Parliaments. The e-panels are more sophisticated versions of online consultations [24]. A group of citizens is invited to exchange points of view through online discussion forums, polls, chat rooms or votes around a common theme or policy initiative. This is the case of a public participation initiative with FENPROF's leader, and other elements, in the Liberopinion platform<sup>2</sup>.

The most common type of e-consultation is the editorial consultation, in which citizens and civil society representatives are invited to comment, usually in the form of online discussions based on targeted policy documents. Another increasingly common trend points towards e-consultation initiatives that combine many of the aforementioned elements, either in the form of a complete portal dedicated to a specific political campaign or of multilevel features targeting different audiences. Some examples are the Liberopinion<sup>3</sup>, Madrid participa<sup>4</sup> or Ask Bristol<sup>5</sup>.

#### B. e-consultations vs traditional consultation

An important feature of e-consultations is that they give the opportunity to provide feedback and influence the political process outside the electoral cycle, i.e., not just during election campaigns, every 3 or 4 years. The online consultation is much faster than traditional communication between government and citizens [25]. The need for a head of a high-level department or even a minister imposes delays that are countless with the online nature [2].

For government institutions, the Internet promotes efficiency and effectiveness by reducing transaction costs [26].

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <http://fenprof.liberopinion.com/pergA.php?id=1, id=9, 10, 11 and id=12>

<sup>3</sup> <http://libertrium.com/>

<sup>4</sup> [www.madridparticipa.org](http://www.madridparticipa.org)

<sup>5</sup> <http://askbristoldebates.com/>

For ordinary citizens, who have their own lives, e-participation has the practical convenience of online communication, the immediacy of communication, 24 hours access and the location flexibility, assuming that citizens can reflect and participate in their spare time. Note that conventional meetings require a physical presence in a particular location, which implies short to long travels. Unlike traditional media, Internet applications enable multilevel communication. In the case of e-consultations, the Internet provides a level of reciprocity and involvement that would otherwise be difficult and expensive for institutions in offline communication.

Public consultations are associated with deliberative democracy, transcend geographical barriers and can accommodate large targeted groups more efficiently. In other words, they are a concept of virtual Agora where ordinary citizens, politicians and experts who are typically profiled in rigid power structures, can get involved [27]. In this regard, the e-consultations have a comparative advantage over their offline versions, for which the logistics of documents in paper format is costly, time consuming and possibly suppressed, if budgetary concerns arise.

The UK government, for example, has been successful in launching the “Downing Street, House of Commons Government e-petitions”<sup>6</sup> initiative to encourage civic participation – over three million signatures were collected (about 7% of the UK population) [24]. By the standards of e-participation, such participation rate is commendable. Yet, Smith and Dalakouridou [24] point out that the expectations raised about the initiative (that the petitions will influence the debates in the House of Commons) are misleading since the petitions have no constitutional basis. The same thing happens in Portugal, as discussed in [23].

The European Parliament, on the other hand, is better placed because the resulting proposals are brought to the attention of Parliament's committees and/or other EU institutions<sup>7</sup>. The European Parliament has an everlasting committee and a set of procedures specified in Rule 192 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament. Yet, the effectiveness of this process requires further research<sup>8</sup>.

The potential for e-consultation seems to be increasingly feasible from the promoters' participation perspective. If better participation can be achieved using low-cost means such as the Internet, then the cost-benefit purpose of large scale consultations can be achieved. The potential advantages of an e-consultation approach over traditional consultation methods include: extensive involvement, with easier contribution; better quality of expressed ideas, opinions and proposals; greater perception of democratic legitimacy and of equality (citizens and promoters); better sensitivity to time constraints and the participants' levels of interest; production of statistically significant quantitative results; and lower costs of promotion and guidance toward unrepresented voices. Furthermore, it is

based on a collective learning model, instead of a set of beliefs and knowledge.

### III. E-CONSULTATIONS ON TRADE UNIONS. UNIONISM 2.0

According to Pinnock [28], the trade unions only belatedly recognized the potential of ICT, and when they adopted them, they limited themselves to storing, processing and disseminating information through computers and the Internet. The major obstacle against their implementation lies essentially within the organizations [29], both because of the required skills and, mainly, because of the changes that they may induce.

The trade unions generally invest time and human resources in more traditional communication tools. Since most organizations adopt a one-way communication, they do not exploit the Internet's full potential, and Rego et al [30] argue that it is difficult to know the impact of the trade union sites because there are not many online mechanisms to provide an effective user involvement. It is, therefore, essential to promote inclusion, participation and transparency. Note, nonetheless, that the presence of the union organization among workers is still crucial, regardless of the technological means used.

The Internet, by allowing new methodologies and forms of communication, will lead these organizations to consult their partners before making major decisions and to implement bidirectional communication tools, thus contributing to their qualitative transformation. It is the Unionism 2.0.

In a paper about the unions' presence in the Internet, Correia and Marques Alves [31] state that only 59.6% have a website, from which only a few have online registration (interestingly, only teachers' unions offer it) and publish information regarding their activity, such as annual reports or statutes. The SPRC has had a portal for about 15 years<sup>9</sup>, which provides not only information, but also the legislation to teachers, statutes, activity plans and annual reports. The SPRC has discussion mailing lists among union representatives for decision making on several subjects and distribution lists for sending information or clarifications to its members. During this research, the SPRC began a participation process that enabled its members to put questions about legal issues and make suggestions. Furthermore, they accepted the challenge of promoting their participation events using Liberopinion, an e-participation platform that enables effective participation in formal and informal deliberative processes via the Internet. The Liberopinion combines in a single, neutral and regulated, location, teachers and union representatives, and thus enables a multidirectional communication, as shown in Fig. 1.

### IV. PROCEDURE

The e-participation projects need to have a well-organized structure [32]. In particular: 1) the actors to be included must be defined; 2) the issue to be addressed must be framed; 3) and a shared understanding that gathers consensus must be sought. The actors were chosen based on their representativeness, and the lack of studies in this field. Note that the FENPROF<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu>

<sup>8</sup> See petitions at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/pt/00533cec74/Petições.html> and European citizenship initiative at <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome?lg=pt>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sprc.pt>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.fenprof.pt>

represents about 70% of unionized teachers. The actors are composed of the trade union representatives on one hand, and of teachers, on the other hand. The participants' selection mechanism, chosen among the categories presented by Fung [33], was the diffuse public sphere. It is the most inclusive as it covers all people. On the other hand, still considering the same categories, the participants can be framed in those that Fung calls mini-public and random selection, the best guarantee for population representativeness. Either way, all teachers can participate, even though the initial choice has fallen over the union members. The difference is that these are recorded automatically, and thus they have faster access to all content. Everyone can participate by making proposals, posting comments, voting on the questions posed by others, or following other proposals.

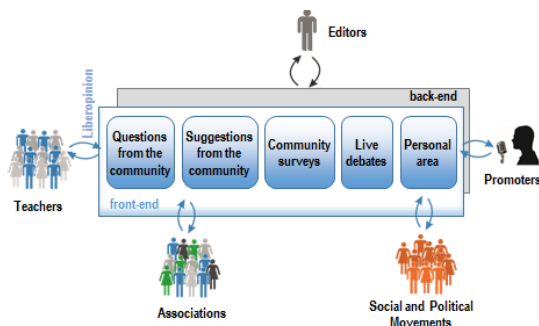


Figure 1. Multidirectional communication between teachers and their trade union in the Liberopin platform

Given the low participation levels in political and community lives, it is necessary to plan ways of dissemination to raise awareness and encourage citizens to participate [1]. Several means are used to promote the platform and the debates: dissemination through the Trade Unions portal; dissemination via email to teachers, who are enrolled in the mailing lists, and members; and dissemination through the social networks. The information concerning the platform access statistics is stored in databases and logs for further processing using software such as Awstats Log Analyzer and Google Analytics tools.

This paper presents three events performed with teachers unions, such as petitions and public consultations. These events, described next in further detail, aimed, first, to listen to the teachers so that the unions could make decisions according to the teachers' wills, and, secondly, to influence the government decisions, particularly those of the ministry of education.

#### A. Liberopin usage experiments: Education Manifest, Teachers strike and Teachers Consultation

##### 1) Education Manifest

The manifest "A School for a Portugal with future" aimed, according to an official, "to join a number of individuals around the fundamental idea that was crucial to change the political course that was being given to education by the minister of education". Teachers and researchers subscribed it.

The trade union wanted to show the support given by people from the academic and political lives, and teachers in general, to the government using the slogan "As civically engaged citizens, people are today extremely concerned with the current course of the Portuguese education". For that purpose, the members appealed for the citizens and the structures of the Portuguese society, interested in changing the education policy, to actively participate and contribute to the adoption of measures that would open up prospects for a better future. People were invited not only to subscribe the manifest, but also to advertise it, enrich it, and discuss it in their workplaces and civic participation places.

The aforementioned petition ran, online, from March to June 2013, but was interrupted because "more urgent things appeared". The announcement was performed through the mailing lists and the union's portal.

##### 2) Teachers strike

In November 2012 and June 2013, the teachers went on strike. For the strike of June, they organized a rotation schedule among themselves so that 1) the review meetings would not take place and 2) the costs would be divided by all. During these strikes the access statistics, either to the SPRC's portal or to pages specifically dedicated to record relevant data, were accompanied. In this case, only teachers registered in the portal participated.

##### 3) Teachers consultation

After the strike of June 2013, the FENPROF, together with other ten trade unions, launched a survey, lasting 15 days, to hear the teachers' opinions about the measures to be taken next. The main goal, according to those responsible, was to "adapt the fighting directions according to the position expressed by the subscribers". The consultation was both online and offline.

## V. RESULTS

##### 1) Education Manifest

According to Pordata, only 62.1% of the Portuguese population had access to the Internet in 2013<sup>11</sup>. Considering that the total population<sup>12</sup> is 10.514.844 and that 8.398.245 are over 18, the population eligible for this study is of 5.122.929.

The results of the manifest "A school for a Portugal with future" are shown in Table I. The manifest was visited 5471 times, from which 4782 were unique. The number of subscribers reached 1346, which represents 28% of the visitors. Compared to other studies, the participation was substantial, but it was low if compared to the Portuguese people aged over 18.

TABLE I. RESULTS OF THE MANIFEST

Time	Unique visitors	Visits	Pages/hits
March	1361	1543	3355/5105
April	552	706	1593/2182
May	151	193	348/468

<sup>11</sup>[http://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine\\_indicadores&indOcorrCod=0006349&contexto=bd&seleTab=tab2](http://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_indicadores&indOcorrCod=0006349&contexto=bd&seleTab=tab2)

<sup>12</sup><http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Individuos+que+utilizam+computador+c+Internet+em+percentagem+do+total+de+individuos+por+sexo-1142>

June	2718	3029	6960/9863
Total	4782	5471	12256/17618
Subscribers total	1346		

## 2) Teachers strike

On the strike of November 2012, the platform registered 14.613 visits and 10.279 unique visits, as shown in Fig. 2. The pages related to the strike recorded 7.968 visits and 5.679 unique visits, which represents, respectively, 67.9% of the 11.740 registered users and 71.3% of the unique visits.

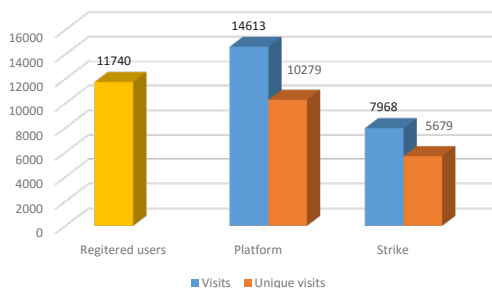


Figure 2. Access of registered users to the platform and strike related pages on the strike of November 2012

During the strike of June, the platform registered 18.714 visits and 12.991 unique visits, as shown in Table II, while the pages related to the strike recorded 7.409 visits, from which 5.174 were unique.

TABLE II. ACCESS TO THE PLATFORM AND THE STRIKE

	Visits	Unique visits	Pages	Hits
Platform	18 714	12 991	177 029	580 186
Strike	7 409	5 174	11 682	17 870
% of visits	39,6%	39,8%		

## 3) Teachers consultation

The questions shown in Table III composed the consultation performed. A total of 262 answers, distributed over the “Answers” column, was obtained online, which contrasts with the 8300 signatures obtained on paper, a

preference already pointed out by Sebastião et al. [23]. In the open questions 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.2.4 e 2.2.5, several suggestions were performed, of which we highlight “concentrations in the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC)”, “camp next to the MEC for a week, being each day ensured by a different region”, “nightly vigils in front of the Parliament or MEC”, “indefinite strike to prevent the beginning of the school year”, and “thorough discussion about public education”, just to name a few.

TABLE III. SURVEY FOR LISTENING THE TEACHERS AND THE NUMBER OF ONLINE ANSWERS

Questions	Answers
1. Strike to reviews	
Continue the strike indefinitely	69
Continue the strike until the end of June	82
End the strike in the week of 17-21	106
2. Other forms of fighting	
2.1 To be performed in this school year	
2.1.1 Concentrations	167
2.1.2 Vigil	113
2.1.3 Several actions next to the MEC (Examples)	80
2.1.4 Others	53
2.2 To perform in September	
2.2.1 Concentrations	129
2.2.2 Manifestations	164
2.2.3 Vigil	164
2.2.4 Actions on schools (which?)	92
2.2.5 Others	39

All answers were stored in a database. In addition to these, data regarding the school, the county and the district of each teacher was also stored. The visits were recorded in Google Analytics, depicted in Fig. 3, which monitored 8.326 unique visits and 11.645 visits, 11.472 of which were from Portugal, distributed by the regions of Coimbra (2564), Lisboa (1609), Porto (1207), Viseu (983), Aveiro (928), Setúbal (873), Leiria (709), Castelo Branco (551), Faro (464), Guarda (446), Braga (295), Santarém (247), Madeira (122), Viana do Castelo (107), Évora (88), Açores (80), Beja (79), Portalegre (68) and Bragança (52). The response rate was of 3.15%.

Overall, mobile devices were used only by 7% of visitors.



Figure 3. Overview of visitors between 1 and 30 of June



## VI. DISCUSSION

The results presented here show that the reference values have remained similar over time. The education manifest, which targeted the general population, was accessed less than 1%, while the remaining events, which focused on a more professional and educated group, with a high access level to technology, had participation percentages over 50%. In a report about the network society, the Centre for Communication (OBERCOM) states that the Internet use rate by citizens with a higher education is 96.9% [34], which may explain the high number of visits. On the other hand, the effective participation is rather low, as other authors report.

The teachers' consultation shows an interesting aspect. Although it was conducted by several associations or unions all together, which could allow a greater number of participations, the participation levels were not that substantial if compared with other events held only by FENPROF and / or SPRC. Possible causes for this result include: 1) FENPROF gathers more members; 2) the unions that integrate FENPROF have a more active action; 3) FENPROF has more visibility in the media (its leader appears many times on TV).

Does the data presented here support the 90-9-1 rule of Nielsen [21], which states that only 1% of users participate, regardless of the sample size? The effective participation in this study varies between 0.16% and 2.6%, which is not that much different from the aforementioned rule, as shown in Table IV.

As aspired, the teachers' consultation had an impact on the decision-making processes of the promoters, since some of the proposals came true. Furthermore, as stated by those responsible, "the goal was to adapt the fighting directions according to the position there expressed", which the FENPROF did. The impact on the government decisions was limited. As suggested by teachers, there is currently an ongoing petition, over the 20 regions of Portugal, to defend the public school<sup>13</sup>.

The limited use of mobile devices was consistent with the statistics presented in the literature, but further study is necessary since the increasing use of mobile devices could influence the citizens' participation in these type of initiatives. As stated by Ferro and Molinari [17], even if citizens have no Internet, they may have cell phones, and if they are connected, they may migrate to any of the ASCU model profiles.

TABLE IV. SUMMARY TABLE OF THE RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVES

	<i>Teachers' consultation</i>	<i>November Strike</i>	<i>June strike</i>	<i>Education manifest</i>
Target population	163 175	11 740	51.833	5 122 929
Unionized teachers	81 587			
Unionized teachers FENPROF	51 833			
<b>Visits</b>	<b>7,1%</b>	<b>67,9%</b>	<b>14,29%</b>	<b>0,1%</b>
Visits vs total of teachers	7,1%	4,9%	4,5%	3,4%
Visits vs teachers unionized	14,3%	9,8%	9%	6,7%
Visits vs FENPROF	22,5%	15,4%	14,29%	10,6%
Signatures vs visits	2,3%			24,6%

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.escolapublica.net>

Signatures vs total of teachers	0,16%			0,82%
Signatures vs teachers unionized	0,32%			1,65%
Signatures vs FENPROF	0,51%			2,6%

## VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The analysis of the literature and of performed interviews indicate that no single solution exists for public consultation. A careful planning of methods and technologies to comply with the goals and needs of specific participants, such as teachers, and multi-platform approaches, such as the Liberopinion platform used by FENPROF / SPRC for online engagement, are likely to be the most effective [35].

Due to their foundation and organization, the trade unions will continue to put much emphasis on traditional forms of consultation, meetings with teachers, school debates, manifestations and concentrations in the streets. However, the authors defend that they are likely to lose their influence if they do not adopt new systems of public participation, like Liberopinion, because young people are increasingly focusing on online communication strategies.

The barriers to a greater online participation in policy making are cultural, organizational and non-technological [36]. In Portugal, the OBERCOM [34] states that 75% of respondents never participate in online polls and 72.3% never edit content. According also to OBERCOM [34], the Internet usage is a practice strictly related to each user's literacy level. These results are in agreement with Arnstein [11], i.e., that those involved are near the top of the ladder. Note that the results of the teachers' manifest are closer to the 90-90-1 rule of Nielsen, but, overall, the results obtained for the teachers' events are closer to those of OBERCOM [34] and Ferro and Molinari [17].

The citizens' participation is limited, as also highlighted by the low number of visits in other initiatives. For instance, the Global Parliament, a project created by large media groups, had 70.584 visits in 2012; from April to July, 2014, it had 117.518 visits, which represents an average percentage of less than 5% of visits. Nevertheless, the current study shows that: 1) the greater the focus, the greater the number of visits, which is consistent with other experiments carried out by the authors [37] – note that the number of visits represented 67.9% of the 11.740 SPRC members in the November teachers' strike, and 14.29% of the 51.833 FENPROF members in the strike of June, whereas it only represented 7.1% of the targeted population of 163.175, and 0.1% of a population of 5.122.929 in the teachers' consultation and education manifest, respectively; 2) the largest number of visits is from unionized members; 3) FENPROF has a substantial weight, which agrees with their size; 4) the effective participation and the percentage of lurkers are close to the reference values reported in the literature [18], [21], [38]; 5) there are more subscribers on paper than online, a preference already pointed by other authors; and 6) mobile devices are rarely used.

As future work, it is necessary to include the categories for the nonqualified or marginalized by the society in a new model

of policy-making participation through the development of *m-participation* systems. Accordingly, the Liberopinion platform needs to be optimized to be used on mobile devices (smartphones and tablets). Considering that the report of OBERCOM [34] notes that 99% of people have TV, 88.5% own a mobile phone, and the Internet is the main route for information, there are still questions needing an answer: What strategies should be adopted to capture the attention of these users? What methods should be used for them to participate?

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