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***ADOPTION AND USES OF ICTS BY THE PORTUGUESE UNIONS. ARE THE  
TECHNOLOGIES HELPING TO REVITALIZE THE TRADE UNIONS?***

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## Abstract

Most of the trade union movements in the advanced capitalist societies are living “*hard times*” (Chaison, 1996) since the 70s. Facing the problem, they are implementing a set of actions towards their revitalization (Frege and Kelly, 2003). The adoption of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) emerges in this context as an important tool for supporting those actions.

The unions adopted the ICTs later than their counterparts (Ad-Hoc Committee on Labour and the Web, 1999; Pinnock, 2005), but the competitive advantages they offer and their flexibility encouraged the unions to adopt them more and more.

Everywhere, the unions are making an investment in this domain, using ICTs in several areas with concrete objectives. Some studies reveal that this investment has a relevant impact in the organizational issues, but a more mitigate one in the overall unions’ efficiency (Fiorito *et al.*, 2002). However, some authors go forward and state that ICTs have a relevant contribution for a qualitative transformation of the unions’ structures. According to them, new union forms are emerging called “*cyberunion*” (Shostak, 1999, 2002), “*e-union*” (Darlington, 2000), “*open-source unionism*” (Freeman and Rogers, 2002) or “*trade unionism 2.0*” (Gutiérrez-Rubi, 2009).

In this paper we will discuss if the adoption of ICTs by the Portuguese unions are giving a contribution for their revitalization. Methodologically, we have allied an extensive analysis (survey of national unions; analysis of the Internet use) with an in-depth analysis (a case study on CGTP-IN).

## **1. Introduction**

This paper presents the first results of a research that intends to understand the reasons that led the Portuguese trade unions to adopt the information and communication technologies (ICTs), the relative slowness of that adoption and the factors that shape it. In this research we also intend to analyze the attitudes of the trade union leaderships towards ICTs and if these technologies are giving a contribution to the trade unions revitalization.

Several questions guided our research: which were the reasons that led the unions to join the technological revolution after an initial attitude of a great suspicion from the leaderships? How can we explain this change of attitude? The diffusion of ICTs occurs in an identical way across the trade union movement or there are differences that we may refer and explain? Which are the factors that shape the decisions about the adoption and utilization of ICTs? Are these technologies giving a contribution to the union revitalization?

We will put in evidence that the diffusion of ICTs in the Portuguese trade union movement is unequal, with some relevant asymmetries arising, particularly in what Internet is concerned, and that the way they are being used do not give a contribution to the unions revitalization.

Methodologically, we have allied an extensive analysis (survey of national unions; analysis of the presence on Internet) with an in-depth analysis (a case study on CGTP-IN).

## **2. The trade union movement: crisis and revitalization**

Since the 70s most of the trade union movements from the advanced capitalist societies are facing "*hard times*" (Chaison, 1996). As a result, we have not only the reflux of the membership, more or less pronounced and with differentiate rhythms depending on the countries, but also the loss of the social and political influence of the unions (Visser, 2006).

The decline has been basically assigned to a set of factors that are external to the trade unions; some of which are global tendencies although others refer to national specificities. In particular, we may stress the changes in the economic, social, political and cultural structures. However, some internal factors to the trade union movement also gave a contribution to the situation. According to Ebbinghaus and Visser, there is a deficit in the capacity of adaptation and innovation of the unions in order to face the actual challenges (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 2000).

As an attempt to stop the bleeding of members and the loss of influence and to recruit and accommodate new groups of workers, the trade unions began to emphasize the necessity of undertake a set of diversified actions in order to assure their revitalization. Among the actions we may mention those aiming the reinforcement of the collective power of the workers. Two strategies, not mutually exclusive, have been implemented. One, called *“organizing”*, is a *“bottom-up model”* having as objectives not only to recruit new members, but also to strengthen the trade union organization at the workplaces, to improve the links between the trade union officers and shop stewards and the membership, and the mobilization of workers. The other, called *“servicing”* is a *“top-down model”* and their objectives are restricted to the recruitment of new members using the supply of services as a form to attract them (Heery *et al.*, 2003).

Other actions refer to organizational restructuring, consisting on a wave of mergers; the establishment of alliances and coalitions with other social movements; the partnership with employers; political action and the strengthening of international cooperation (Frege and Kelly, 2003: 9). As a support for these actions, the unions began to adopt ICTs broadly.

### **3. The adoption and use of ICTs by the unions**

According to the Ad-Hoc Committee on Labor and the Web and Pinnock the unions only lately recognized the potential of ICTs (Ad-Hoc Committee, 1999; Pinnock, 2005), where we include all electronic devices used to storage, interpret and transfer information, like mobile phones, computers and Internet.

This fact reflects an initial attitude of suspicion, in certain cases of rejection of ICTs from many union leaderships. By the way, the major obstacle to the adoption of ICTs by the unions is exactly the resistances from inside (Rego et al., 2010) due to the skills that are required and to the potential they have for changing the structure of the organizations. It is necessary a specific knowledge, specific abilities like to write instead of to talk, and the trade union officials are in general individuals that give preference to the spoken words. Besides that, with the ICTs the deep-rooted routines could be changed, as they promote an action in real time, and the traditional vertical model of communication, in which the information ascend and the decisions descend, could be replaced by a networking model of communication.

Although all the resistances, the competitive advantages offered by ICTs, rooted in their speed and flexibility; in their lower costs, when compared with the traditional means of communication; in their range and in the possibility they offer of avoiding the control from the management of the companies, led the unions to adopt them, what they are doing in a crescent mode. The adoption of ICTs could be explained basically by a necessity of rationalization, mainly in the larger organizations (Fiorito *et al.*, 2000).

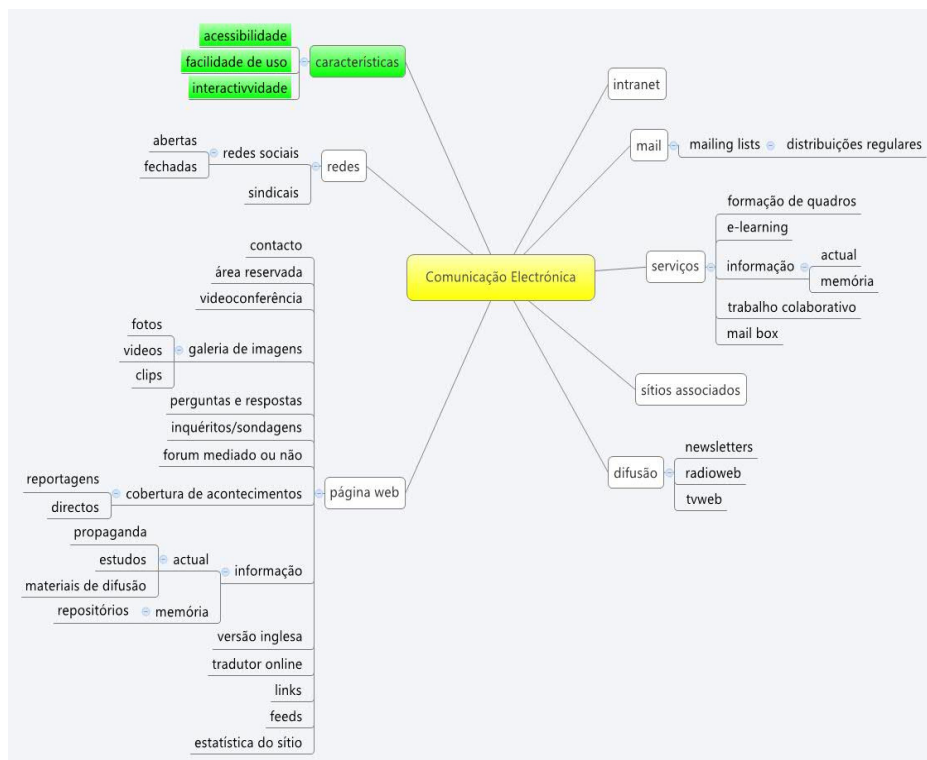
Apart from Chaison and Troy (Chaison, 2002; Troy, 2001 quoted in Cockfield, 2003), we see a broad consensus in the scientific community about the importance of the contribution of ICTs for the revitalization of the trade unions, with some studies revealing a major impact in the organizational issues and more mitigated in the unions' overall efficiency (Fiorito *et al.*, 2002). For Greene, the smaller unions are those who could take more advantages from the adoption of ICTs (Greene et al., 2003).

We may emphasize, however, that some of the available literature in this domain assumes a normative character, other are very speculative although some other is strongly informed by the paradigm of the technological determinism. For instance, this one stresses that the use of ICTs led necessarily to the deepening of trade union democracy, forgotten the social processes that underlie the adoption and use of these technologies. Effectively, the democratization only occurs if the leaderships of the

unions wish that would happen and if they define strategies for that purpose, as that represents “a challenge to existing power structures” (Darlington, 2000).

If ICTs are largely widespread in the trade unions, there are some significant differences in what concerns their use and the domains of action where they are employed (Fiorito *et al.*, 2000; 2002). The unions can use these technologies in several areas and with multiple objectives, as it is expressed in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Areas and objectives of the use of ICT by the unions



With the computers, the unions can automatize some administrative processes, produce specific information quickly, (Fiorito *et al.*, 2000, 2002), store information digitally, create and manage databases on the members and others, support organizational and bargaining tasks (Fiorito and Bass, 1999) and improve the coordination between the ranks of the trade unions through the use of an intranet.

The Internet can also give an important contribution in several domains. With it, the trade unions can disseminate freely their points of view without any kind of mediation or constraint (Ad-Hoc Committee, 1999; Darlington, 2000) and research information

they need for the trade unions action (Fiorito *et al.*, 2000). With the Internet, they can reinforce the services they already provide to the membership, like the diffusion of specific information on issues as the collective bargaining or legislation (Ad-Hoc Committee, 1999; Darlington, 2000; Diamond and Freeman, 2002), as well as provide new services like education and training through e-learning (Sawchuk, 2001). In particular, some groups of workers with constraints of time, for instance the women, can beneficiate significantly with the use of the Internet (Greene and Kirton, 2003).

Nevertheless, to this purpose, two problems could arise and turn inefficient the investment that was made. The first is the existence of a “*digital divide*” in the society, as a consequence of the impossibility of access to the web, either by economic constraints or by the lack of skills. The second refers to the resistances that some, even with proper skills and economic resources have to their use (Martínez Lucio, 2003).

The Internet can also give an important contribution to the recruitment of new members, with the unions giving the opportunity to join online (through filling out an application form online or in Word or PDF formats) or promoting recruitment campaigns (Hendrickson, 1998, quoted in Fiorito *et al.*, 2000). The same is true in what concerns the mobilization of workers, in which the SMS by mobile phone is also relevant. The Internet can also give an important contribution for supporting workers on strike, for instance, trying to conquer the public opinion to their side (Diamond and Freeman, 2002; Shostak, 2002).

The Internet assumes a particular relevance in the recruitment and organization of workers in companies with anti-union policies or in the case of groups of workers with a more individualistic culture and more concentrated in their carriers. In these cases, the solution could be the launch of virtual unions like the *Rom* in Norway, for all the “*nomads of working life, individualists without a traditional sense of belonging in a specific occupation or industry (...)*” (Dolvik, 2002), or the *IT Workers Alliance* in Australia, the *Alliance@IBM* and the *WashTech*, for those that in the USA work in the ICT branches, as well as the *Walmartworkerslv.com*, for the workers of Walmart, the company that is the symbol of the anti-union policies in the USA (Diamond and Freeman, 2002).

Two other areas of the trade unions action that can benefit with the Internet are the building of the *“external solidarity”* (Levesque and Murray, 2003), the solidarity between the trade union movement and other social movements, and the increase of the coordination and the solidarity inside a national trade union movement or between it and its counterparts (Lee, 1997, 2000; Darlington, 2000; Hodkinson, 2001), creating what Waterman qualifies as a *“new internationalism”* (Waterman, 2001). With this objective, some websites were launched, like the Lee’s one (*“Labourstart”*) or *“Cyber Picket Line”*, *“Global Unions”* and *“Labournet”*, the first two with a more informative objective and the third with a more mobilizing purpose.

Besides the unions and the national confederations, the regional and international ones implemented their own websites, representing the website of the ancient ICFTU, in the Waterman’s point of view, a good example of a *“conservative response”* to ICTs (Waterman, 2001: 325). To note that Waterman regrets the fact that the trade unions websites represent *“a belated response to ICTs as instrument (faster, cheaper and further-reaching)”*, instead of being a *“cyberspace”*, what means *“another kind of space, with unlimited possibilities for international dialogue, creativity and the invention/discovery/development of new values, new attitudes and new dialogues”* (Waterman, 2001: 325).

For some authors, another field where ICTs, mainly the Internet, can give an important contribution is the deepening of the accountability and of the trade union democracy (Diamond and Freeman, 2002; Hogan and Greene, 2001; Greer, 2002; Lucore, 2002). Through what some of them call *“electronic democracy”* it will be possible to break the *“iron law of oligarchy”* that Michels stressed in the beginning of the XX century considering it as a structural feature of all mass organizations. This break would be possible because the Internet enables the existence of social networks and websites led by those who are in opposition to the unions leaderships, what would lead these ones to release more information about the governance of the unions, to consult the membership before taking important decisions and to implement user-driven interactive features such as user accounts, blogs or forums as well as the electronic vote.



However, as we mentioned before, if the Internet makes available the tools that could render possible the deepening of union democracy, this only happens if the leaderships want so and if they define the appropriate strategies to meet this goal.

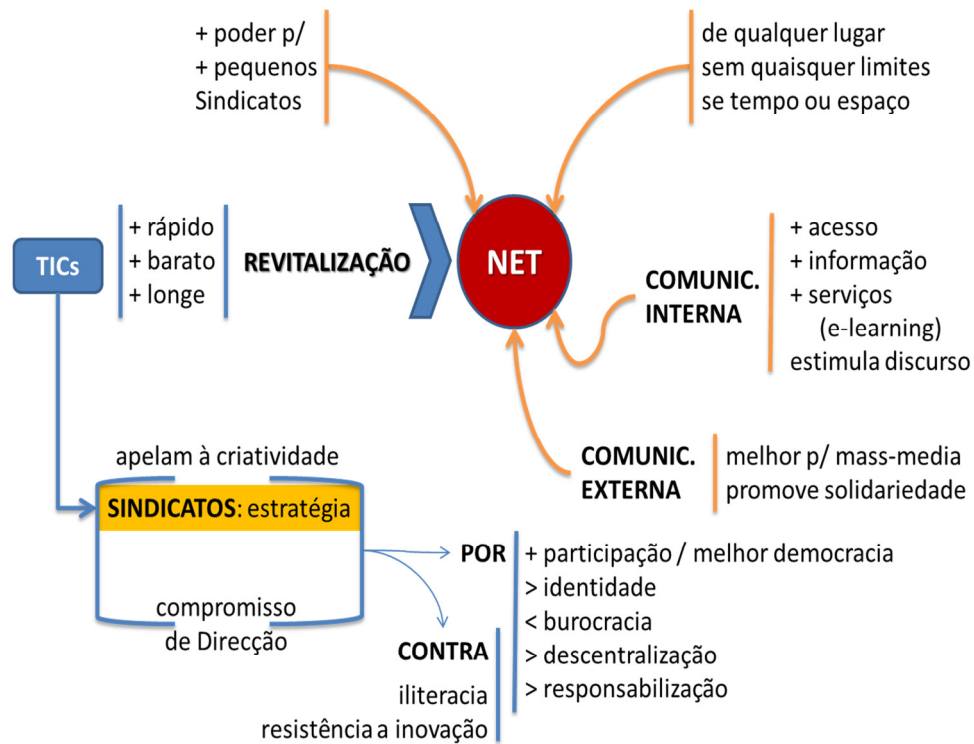
Furthermore, some authors argue that ICTs, mainly the Internet, beyond having a significant impact in the outcomes of the unions, give a major contribution for the qualitative transformation of their structures. New organizational forms are arising, described as “*cyberunions*” (Shostak, 1999, 2002), “*e-unions*” (Darlington, 2000), “*open-source unionism*” (Freeman and Rogers, 2002) or “*unionism 2.0*” (Gutiérrez-Rubi, 2009). Diamond and Freeman had even gone so far as to say that the morphology of these unions “*will differ as much from current union organizations as industrial unions differed from their craft union predecessors*” (Diamond and Freeman, 2002: 591). However, Pinnock rightly points out that the materialization of this transformation depends on the adoption of a strategy that allows to take advantage from all the ICT potentialities; on the contrary, we will assist to a “*cybervoid*” (Pinnock, 2005).

In its futuristic and speculative perspective, Shostak defends that the “*cyberunion*” is a union that adopts the so-called *F.I.S.T. – Futuristics, Innovations, Services, Tradition*, what means, a policy that allies the adoption of ICTs thoroughly, submitted to a strategy very well outlined by the leaderships, to the values and traditional practices of unionism. For the author, these unions are in the forefront of the technological revolution and they are more efficient. They are very different from other three types of unions: the “*cybernaught*”, those that stand outside the use of ICTs or adopt them in a very insufficiently mode, thus giving a great contribution to the reinforcement of a “*dinosaur image*” (Hurd, 1998 quoted in Fiorito *et al.*, 2000) of the unions; the “*cyberdrift*”, those that adopt ICTs in a large scale but without any coherence and not taking advantage from all the potential they have; and the “*cybergain*”, unions that are aware in what concerns the exploitation of the ICTs potentials but use them to conduct “*business as usual*”, so they “*do not deal with the future as much as they streamline the past*” (Shostak, 1999: 95).

The other perspectives are similar. They all emphasize the use of ICTs in a large scale. Darlington affirms that the *"e-union"* is a form of union where these technologies *"range from setting up electronic archives and intranets to creating websites and portals, to virtual conferences, network-supported services and e-learning programmes, all the way to using the Internet for organizing new members, for supporting campaigns and formulating demands and objectives through electronic surveys and elections"* (Darlington, 2000). For Freeman and Rogers, the *"open-source unionism"* uses the Internet extensively aiming to provide information and a large amount of other services to the membership and the improvement of communication between the militants at all ranks of the hierarchy of the union. Gutiérrez-Rubi considers that the *"trade unionism 2.0"* is based on the virtual protest, the video unionism, the cyber activism, the digital information, the network campaigns, the social networks and the cyber organizations.

Figure 2 represents in a synthetic way the potentialities and the challenges of ICTs to the trade union movement.

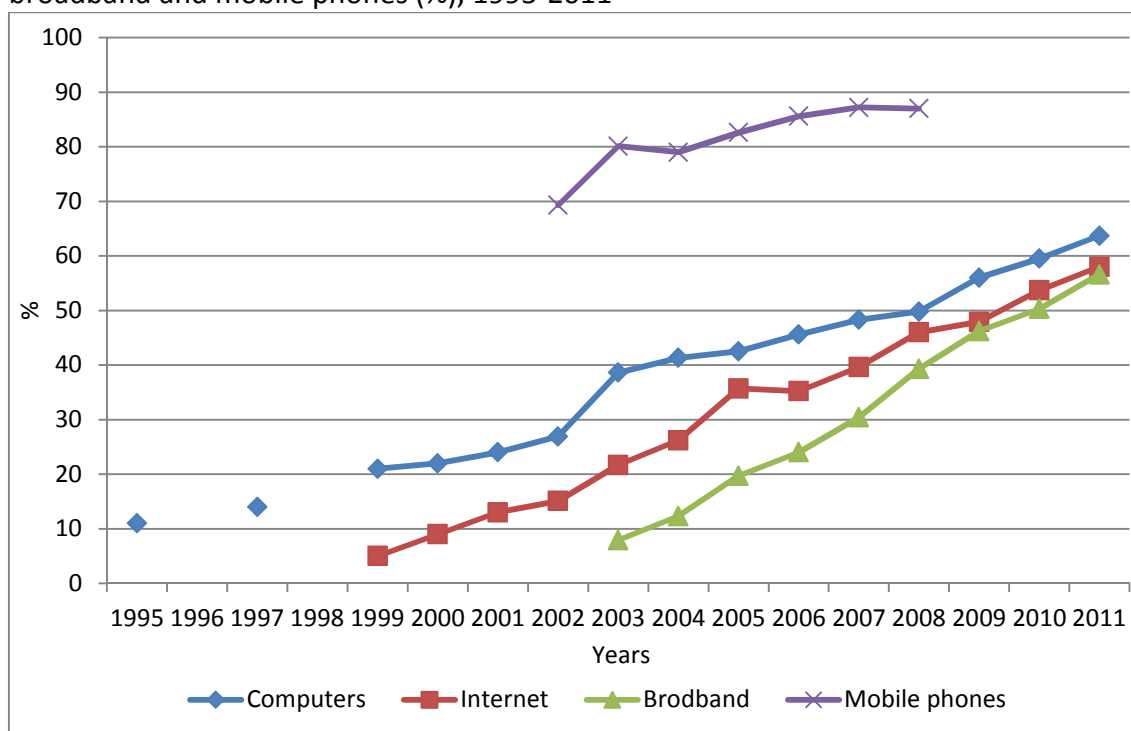
Figure 2 – Potentialities and challenges of ICT to the trade union movement



#### 4. The diffusion of ICT in Portugal

Since 1995 there has been an undeniable growth of the diffusion of ICTs in the households in Portugal, as we may see in Figure 3. A recent study, however, reveals that 3,9% of the Portuguese adults gave up using Internet in 2011, mainly due to the unemployment situation (OberCom, 2012). With some precautions, though the data of OberCom is not comparable to the one of INE, we can say that we are maybe in the presence of an inversion of the cycle of growth, due to the economic crisis. In consequence, the reduction of the “digital divide” in the society is in danger (Cruz, 2008).

Figure 3 – Households with computers, access to the Internet, access to the Internet by broadband and mobile phones (%), 1995-2011



Fonte: INE – Inquérito à Utilização de Tecnologias da Informação e da Comunicação pelas Famílias, 1995-2011

We may notice that the use of ICTs, particularly computers and the Internet, is strongly related to age and education degree. In 2011, 95,4% of the Portuguese with academic credentials used computers and 94,8% accessed to the Internet. The values established for the holders of basic education are respectively 40,9% and 37,3%. In parallel, in the same year, 95,0% of Portuguese respondents between the ages of 16 and 24 used computers and 92,7% accessed to the Internet. The values decrease as we advance in age, being the lowest, respectively, 13,9% and 12,5%, percentages achieved in the age group between 65 and 74.

ICTs are also widespread in the Portuguese public and private organizations. Computers and the access to the Internet are practically universal. The only exception to this trend is the institutional presence on Internet, a fact which is more relevant in business organizations (Table 1).

Table 1 - Diffusion of ICTs in Portugal, by type of organization (%), in 2010

		Computers	Access to the Internet	Presence on the Internet
Public Administration	Central	100,0	100,0	96,0
	Regional	100,0	100,0	Açores – 97,0% Madeira – 93,0%
	Local	100,0	100,0	100,0
Hospitals		100,0	98,7	76,3
Schools <sup>1</sup>		100,0	100,0	-
Companies with > de 10 workers		97,2	94,1	52,1
Hotels and similar accomodations <sup>1</sup>		98,0	97,0	96,0

Source: INE/UMIC - Survey on ICT use in Central Public Administration; Regional Public Administration; Municipalities; Hospitals; Companies; Hotelier Sector and GEPE/ME - Technological Modernization of Schools.

<sup>1</sup>2008

## 5. The Portuguese trade unions and ICTs

What about the unions and ICTs? After a period of time where there was a strong suspicion and even rejection by many of its leaders, attitude still very much alive in the mid-90s (Alves, 1994), the Portuguese unions gradually join the technological revolution, however with different rhythms and intensities, which ultimately is translated into the dualism that currently we can discern.

The great majority of the trade unions structures use computers, although at a lower rate than business organizations, and especially public administration (Table 2). The penetration of computers is total only in the district unions, a union structure with a regional scope that comprises the single unions that are affiliated to one confederation (CGTP-IN or UGT) in a specific region.

We can see the same trend regarding Internet access, measured through the existence of at least an e-mail address. As for the web presence, this is basically higher among unions (in particular the single unions and the confederations) than among firms with more than 10 employees, although smaller than those we can find in public

administration. The district unions and the federations of unions, these ones based on occupational or branch criteria, present very low values.

The provision of a mobile phone number on the unions' website counts slightly over one third of the sites, with the federations of unions and the single unions presenting much lower values. On the sites of the confederations any number is available.

Table 2 - Diffusion of ICTs in Portuguese trade unions, by type of organization (%), in 2011

	Unions	Federations	District Unions	Confederations
Computers*	85,7	84,0	100,0	83,3
Presence on the internet	64,1	48,0	36,4	83,3
Electronic Mail	84,8	80,0	100,0	83,3
Mobile phones**	36,2	18,2	10,0	0,0

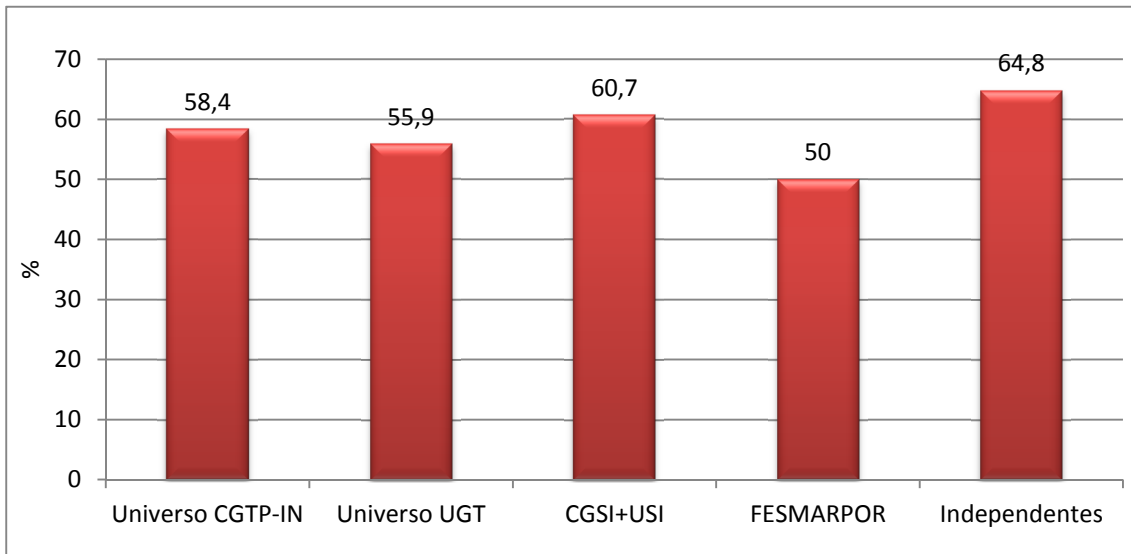
Source: Database of Portuguese trade unions

\* n = 390. The situation is unknown for 46 organizations (11.8% of total)

\*\* Referring only to the provision of some mobile phone number on the website

The web presence varies strongly according to the confederation. In Figure 4 we can see that in all the existing confederations the majority of the single unions have a website. However, the values range from 50,0% in FESMARPOR, a confederation that has seven affiliated unions in the inland, sea and coastal water transport and in the ports, to 60,7% in the group CGSI+USI, two confederations that claim to represent the *"independent trade unionism"*, and that together affiliate 21 unions with jurisdiction mainly in the services sector and public administration. But, is among the unions that are not affiliated to any confederation that we observe the highest proportion of unions with website (64,8%). The great majority of these unions represent technical, staff or clerical workers.

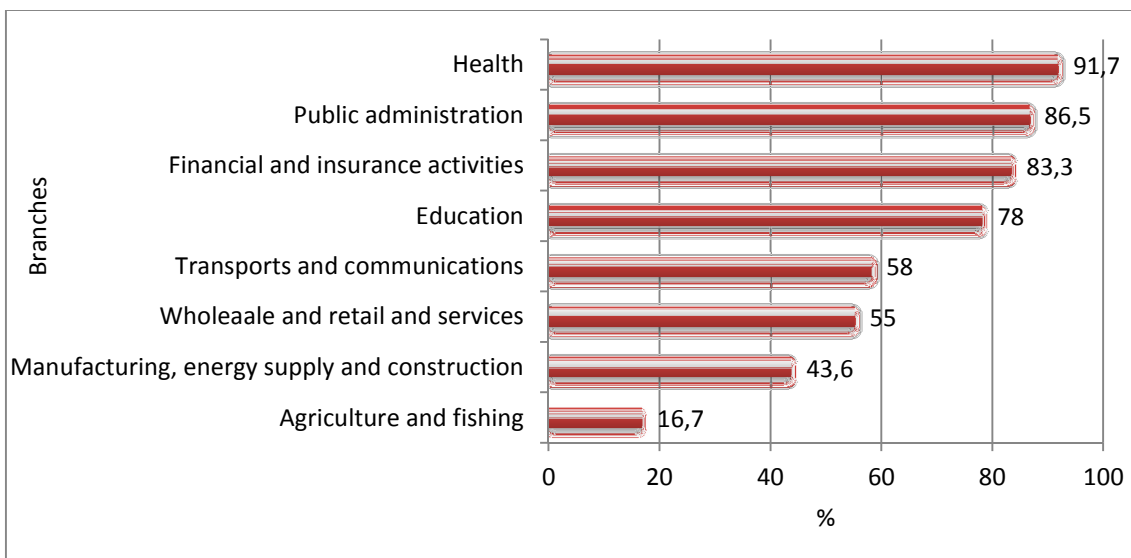
Figure 4 – Presence on the Internet by confederation (%), in 2011



Source: Database of Portuguese trade unions

The variation between branches is even strongly, ranging from only 16,7% in the agriculture and fishing or 43,6% in the manufacturing, energy supply and construction and 86,5% in the public administration or 91,7% in the health services (Figure 5)

Figure 5 – Presence on the Internet by branch (%), in 2011



Source: Database of Portuguese trade unions

The diverse social composition of the memberships and the level of resources of the unions, namely the financial ones, are probably the two main factors that explain this very relevant difference.

Some indicators relating to the use of e-mail and mobile phones reveal a poor utilization of these features which are important in terms of connecting members to the organization. In what concerns mobile phone contacts, union sites provide from one phone number (38,2%) to 45 (1,5%), while the number of e-mail addresses provided vary between one (62,1%) and 41 (0,3%). For unions announcing e-mail addresses, only half of them (50,3%) have their own worldwide web domain, which is indicative of a certain degree of technological sophistication. A very small number of organizations (9,5%) provide the e-mail address of their leader, a figure that rises to 11,4% in terms of the addresses of the executive committees, or the ones of each of their individual members. On the other side, only 16,6% of the sites provide the addresses of the union departments (membership, treasury, leisure, ...) and only a quarter (25,1%) the addresses of regional structures.

The presence on the Internet is distributed as shown in Table 3. One first conclusion is the relatively limited presence in the social networks, with only 3,4%. Less common are also the weblogs (4,9%), that in the majority of the cases act as surrogate sites. Only 4,9% of the unions have a presence on the video sharing platforms, like YouTube, and 3,8% in the photo sharing, like Flickr or Picasa, All the unions that are present in these platforms share that with other kind of presence.

Table 3 - Presence on the Internet by type of presence (%) in 2011

Kind of presence	%
Site on the Internet*	59,6
Presence on Social Networks	3,4
Blogs	4,3
Multiple presence	32,3

Source: Database of the Portuguese trade unions

\* Counting of three sites that are currently under construction or in overhaul.

One of the Internet benefits is the ability of unions to reach potential members, providing them not only with information about its activities and the services offered, but also allowing online registration, especially for those who do not have the opportunity to contact the organization in person.



If the provision of information about the union activities and the available services are almost universal, the same is not true for the insertion of the online application form. Only 38,9% of the unions do it. Many others present this document in Word or PDF formats, implying their download, filling out and delivery directly or by mail to the union, meaning increased costs and bureaucracy. In few cases the membership form does not even exist. On the other hand, it would be predictable that the unions attach a text, in which they express the importance of unionization, to the form. Surprisingly this only happens in five cases, mostly in teachers' unions.

Another relevant area is that of union democracy. The Internet can enhance its deepening in two ways, the first of which is a greater transparency in the governance of the organizations. The analysis of the sites shows that no union shares online the minutes of the general meetings or the executive committee's proceedings. At most they only publicize the calling for the general meetings. There are few that provide the minutes of the electoral processes or the reports and accounts relating to their activity. For the members of the executive committees the rule is to list their names, sometimes accompanied by profile pictures, at the expense of developing a comprehensive biography for each one. It is further noted that some unions do not even offer their constitution online.

A second way to deepen union democracy is the direct participation of members in the decision-making processes, both in general meetings and by the features provided by the Internet. In this area, only half (50,6%) of the sites has a box for comments, suggestions or complaints. Electronic voting is totally absent, and in a small number of sites surveys are conducted but what is scrutinized are the governmental policies or the site itself and not the policies of the union. We should stress that only 6,0% of the sites have a forum, narrowed in most cases to formal terms, and 0,9% have a chat platform. The availability of a Skype address or alike arises only in 1,3% of the cases. In summary, the overwhelming unidirectional scheme predominates over the bidirectional communication, this one a major factor in the promotion of the deepening of the organizational democracy.

For the mobilization of the workers, the majority of the sites provide information on the trade union activity, the situation in the workplaces or about the developments in the collective bargaining, which allows a further identification with the union and increases the levels of solidarity. But are less numerous the sites (only 20,0%) where it is possible to subscribe to a mailing list to receive information. We shall point to the fact that 42,8% of the sites have a reserved area for union members, where they can find other kind of information not accessible to all the visitors.

This mobilization can also be carried out through social networks or by the presence on the pictures or video sharing platforms, presence that, as we have seen, is very weak. Other tools can also be used, such as the SMS sent through mobile phones, practice that we can find solely in a very small number of teachers unions.

Traditionally, unions have given their members a more or less extensive package of services. The Internet allows them to launch new ones, such as distance learning. However, only two organizations have an e-learning platform, to which we should add another of an institute linked to CGTP-IN.

Finally, the efficiency of a site can also be measured by its attractiveness and functionality. In 42,8% of the cases, navigation is not user-friendly enough and for many of them the information is either too sparse or abundant and is very badly articulated. It should be noted that only half of the sites (50,6%) has a search engine or digital animations and only 16,7% provide their own map of the site. Only 8,3 % of the sites have an enhanced accessibility, particularly important for people with visual impairments, and solely 6,1% have the FAQ function. Sound effects are also of exceptional character (11,7%), as is the video hosting (13,7%). More widespread are the pictures, present in 77,2% of the sites.

The performed extensive analysis allows us to conclude that the Portuguese unions are not taking advantage of the full potential of ICTs. This conclusion is reinforced by the case study carried out on CGTP-IN.

From the start it was found that the use of ICTs by this confederation does not follow a communication policy well-structured and defined. It is rather the result of *“a general*

*and theoretical formulation and policy guidelines, discussed and approved in the congresses”, which is translated into an insufficient guidance for action what is reinforced by the decision-makers misunderstanding about the potential of these technologies. They also show a short sightedness about timing and investment. As one interviewed said: “decision makers are often unaware of anything technological and choose the lowest price ... even if they have the opinions proposed by experts! So simply because they define previously and impose on to technical staff the rule of the cheapest ...”*

And although there are some positive experiences as such, there are no stabilized solutions in matters entailing advanced technology, or even nearby. And much of the potential offered by ICTs is thus wasted.

For instance, although there is a mailing list for expanded information distribution, it is not used regularly. Experimental coverage of live events on the website have been done and, regarding to “tvweb, CGTP-IN have a registered website - CGTP TV, which is idle, serving only as a memory store. The networks have not been promoted and developed. The wide distribution of internal documents such as financial reports or the report of activities, are not available and the calls for the meetings of governing bodies are not disclosed. The deepening of transparency regarding the activities enhanced by these technological options is not in place.

One respondent pointed out the *“closed character of the site, without the practice of videoconferencing, interactivity functionalities, or areas of restricted access for discussion, as well as a forum and surveys as a way to form an opinion and get information from the members”*. To this, one should add the fact that there are no associated blogs nor published opinion pieces sent by members. In fact, the lack of interactivity is well known and recognized, as one of the respondents noted *“the only way of interaction on the site goes through the contact form, but can we consider it really a kind of interaction?”* The website of this organization on the Internet is thus a protected space, whose design is based on the mere dissemination of official positions of the confederation: *“we can almost say that the site is more a vehicle for propaganda”* said one of the interviewees.

The FAQ function is also not available as well as the possibility of feeds subscription. There is a general e-mail address via a contact form. There is no version in another language or an installed translator, what is of great importance to fostering international solidarity, although there are some documents available in English.

The site of the CGTP-IN has pictures and videos related to events coverage (1<sup>st</sup> of May, demonstrations, congresses, press conferences, etc..) which are streamed in deferred or even live, but still unsatisfactory in terms of multimedia.

Sometimes campaigns are conducted, in particular requests and online petitions, which, according to the interviewees have not been succeeded, with the collection of signatures falling shorter than those collected directly on paper. The explanation for this failure is certainly rooted in a set of different factors, among which the fact that the site has no incentives for participation, whereupon the results could never be satisfactory.

The services available are scarce, not including, for example, union training, despite the existence on the Internet of a network of the training centers linked to CGTP-IN. The institutional site of the CGTP-IN provides links to these entities, but there is no real networking.

## **6. Conclusion**

Worldwide, but particularly in Portugal, the unions came late to the digital age. In the mid-90s ICTs were practically inexistent in these organizations, what could be explained by an insufficient or low level of computer literacy, what raises the question of the cultural change in the transition from the use of analogic devices and practices towards the new digital systems and approaches. To this, we may add an attitude of refusal of many union leaders, given that they considered the appearance of digital devices as one of the main causes of unemployment.

The current situation shows a marked change. These technologies are widespread, although some relevant asymmetries, in particular regarding to the Internet presence,

what raises new issues relating to their particular uses, styles, objectives, strategies and mastery.

The introduction of these technologies followed different rhythms. The factors that pushed forward and strongly influenced its adoption were on one hand, the organizational dimension and, on the other hand, the level of education of the union members.

In the overwhelming majority of the unions the adoption of ICTs does not obey to a strategic plan. The unidirectional devices are predominant, what contributes to the perpetuation of the organizational narrowing, avoiding the deepening of democracy and the development of trade union influence in society.

Thus, the Portuguese unions still have a long way ahead to become what Shostak called "*cyberunions*". For now, we can only classify them generically as "*cyberdrifts*" or, in some cases, as "*cybergains*".

However, in the context of the union crisis, ICTs alone does not constitute a panacea to overcome the situation. Its potential will only be materialized and they only may contribute to the revitalization of the trade unions if the investment made is creative and framed in a strategy to strengthen union organization. It involves the promotion of inclusion, participation and transparency; the increase in the capacity of representation; the intensification of the recruitment of new members and the physical presence of union activists in the workplace; the improvement of the link between members and their organizations; and the mobilization of workers, what means, the adoption of an "*organizing*" strategy. On the contrary of what is assumed by those who are fascinated by the "*brave new world*" of ICTs and advocate a *cyber-unionism* that they consider as replacing effectively the presence of the unions in the workplaces, these technological tools cannot in any way take the turn of the union organization there where the workers are.

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