Transparency in the portals of Brazilian Federal Government:
The cases of E-procurement Portal and Transparency Portal

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Abstract
What are the possibilities of promoting transparency in the Federal Brazilian Government Portals? The objective of this research is to discover what possibilities exist to promote transparency in the Federal Brazilian Government Portals: ComprasNet (E-procurement Portal) and Transparency Portal. The methodology used was: 1) a literature review about e-government, transparency and the relationship between them; 2) an investigation of the features in these websites; and, 3) an evaluation of transparency in the government websites ComprasNet Portal and Transparency Portal. The literature suggests that e-Government can promote transparency in government. Exploratory research allowed cataloging various information that is available in the portals that enhance transparency, for example, glossary, legislation, communication tools and reporting, among others. We applied an evaluation method called Website Attribute Evaluation System (WAES) and concluded that these portals do not have the most items proposed to ensure transparency. Only ComprasNet Portal provides results superior to 50% in one of the proposed categories. We also conclude that information and communication technologies (ICTs) will not promote the rights of citizenship as the promotion of transparency by itself, but also depend on a culture of transparency that society is prepared to control and understand how the Government acts.

Keywords: Electronic Government; Transparency; Governmental Portals; Brazilian Federal Government; Websites Evaluation

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1. Introduction

The concept of Electronic Government (E-gov) is still in construction. In spite of conceptual discussions, many governments in Brazil use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve their obligations such as public services, access to information, internal efficiency, among others (VAZ, 2003a). Brazilian e-government is supported by the dissemination of ICTs use in the public administration and in some cases is a government obligation guaranteed by laws (RIBEIRO, 2008).

In this paper, we define e-government beside of modernization of Public Administration or greater public services. For us, “(…) electronic government should be a mean to guarantee an Open Government” (FUGINI et al., 2005, p. 302). It means that e-government is a model that propitiates maturity of democracy, citizenship and social control, i.e. not only to promote efficiency. Thus, e-government is also improving the relationship and interaction between citizen and governments. This article focuses on one of the benefits providing by e-government: promotion of transparency.

The literature review indicated that researchers believe in the use of ICTs to fight against corruption, promote transparency and achieve an effective social control because technologies, especially the World Wide Web, can enable citizen to access information easier than without this mean. The e-procurement portal, for example, through the use of Internet, makes possible the increase of social control, revelations of irregularities and allows that illegal actions can be inhibited. Therefore, it is evident that governments and civil society can use the ICTs to promote transparency. The Internet has the potential to achieve the promotion of a government more democratic and closer to society.

Succinctly, the literature presents that e-gov can influence Public Administration in different ways. One of these possibilities is to promote transparency. Through the use of ICTs, transparency can be increased because the technologies allow an easy access to governments’ information. For example, citizen can access in government information anywhere that they want without leave their homes.

For an example, government’s e-procurement has been seen as a form to promote transparency and social control because e-procurement portals allow access information to citizen about the products and services contracted by governments. In Brazil, many
governments use the ICTs to publicize their public tenders. For this paper, the most important example is the e-procurement portal from Brazilian Federal Government: Comprasnet.

Other important experience that promotes transparency in Brazil is the Transparency Portals. One of the most awarded was the Brazilian Federal Government Transparency Portal. It was developed by Comptroller General of the Union. One of Portal’s objectives is to fight against corruption through the information about expenditures and money transfers by Federal Government. In 2008, a journalist verified the use of government credit cards in the Transparency Portal. She discovered that civil servants, especially Ministers and Secretaries, spent a record of money through these credit cards between 2006 and 2007. The data from Transparency Portal, which culminated in a series of reports on the use of credit cards in the Federal Government, has become known as the scandal of corporate credit cards. One of the results is the dismissal of government officials (TRANSPARENCY BRAZIL, 2010). That is an example of how Transparency Portals can help to fight against corruption or denounce illegal actions.

This paper assumes that Comprasnet Portal and Transparency Portal from Federal Government present potential to promote transparency because their objectives and their information available. From this assumption, we will answer the next question: “What are the possibilities of promoting transparency in the Federal Brazilian Government Portals?”

The main objective of this paper is to discover what are the possibilities of promoting transparency in the next portals from Federal Government: Comprasnet Portal (E-procurement Portal) and Transparency Portal.

The methodology used was: 1) a literature review about e-government, transparency and the relationship between them; 2) an investigation of the features in these websites; and, 3) an implementation of an evaluation method for transparency in the government websites ComprasNet Portal and Transparency Portal.

However, Brazilian Public Administration presents many challenges to guarantee an effective transparency. Among these challenges, a part of them are not restricted to virtual life like: to overcome the administrative opacity; corruption; to regulate a Freedom of Information Act; promote a transparency culture in the governments and promote the civic engagement. According to Pinho (2008), Brazil does not have a technological problem, but a political problem, i.e. governments in Brazil, in the most cases, have the technology to promote transparency. So, the technological access is not the only requirements to promote an effective
culture of transparency, but they are very important to cover both society and governments because of the possibility to guarantee people access to information in any place or time.

2. Literature Review

2.1 E-government

2.1.1 Defining e-government

The concept of e-government is not unanimous. There are many words that this concept is related like information and communications technologies (ICTs), electronic governance, e-democracy, e-participation, among others. This means that no concept is completely accepted or refuted.

ICTs are the means for achieving e-Government. They can defined as the equipments (computers, data storage, network and communications devices), applications services (customer service, application development) used by organizations to provide data, information and knowledge" (Luftman et al apud Laurindo, 2002). The ICTs do not cover only computers and Internet, but also cell phones, palms and even digital television. Though, in the case of e-gov the ICT that is most used by governments and citizen is the World Wide Web (Ribeiro, 2008b).

E-government can be conceptualized as “(...) an intensive application of information technology in the process of services and the relationship from governments to citizens through the electronics intermediation, continuous and remotely (VAZ, 2005).

The E-government’s concept can be general, i.e. all use of ICTs from Public Administration to provide services and information to entities that deal with is named E-government (INFORME-SF, 2000). For instance, one of the papers from United Nations (UN) adopted the general concept: e-government is the use of the Internet and the Web to offer information and government services to citizens (UN & ASPA apud CHEVITARESE, 2006). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also uses a general concept: ICTs use, especially the Internet, as a tool to improve the government (OECD apud CHEVITARESE, 2006). Florência Ferrer defines e-gov as a “(...) set of services and access to information that the government offers various sectors of civil society, by electronic means" (Ferrer, 2003).
These general concepts have in common the idea that the use of ICT by governments should improve their activities and their relationship with citizen. They clearly focus on online public services and access to information.

Vaz (2003) suggests that e-government can be understood as modernization of Public Administration. Both internal modernization and public services modernization are the best examples of this understanding. However, the same author defends that e-government is not a “free idea” (VAZ, 2003). This means that the idea of electronic government should not be associated only with the modernization of the administrative apparatus. In the public sphere and in the information society era, e-government can be used as a mean of strengthening democracy, increasing social control and propitiating the promotion of rights. When the governments use the possibilities of e-government only in the citizen-customer optic, they also ignore the possibilities of ICTs’ incorporation to promote changes in their relationship with society. To define a concept of e-government, we cannot forget the importance of modernization and efficiency that it can provide, but the governments should pay attention in others possibilities that the ICTs can improve, especially a better relationship between them and citizen, for example, through public consultations.

Other form that we can classify e-government is by the groups that governments deal. They are called transactions. Mainly, it has three types of transactions: Government to Government (G2G); Government to Business (G2B) and Government to Citizen (G2C). G2G refers to inter or intra-government relations, for example, systems integration between different government sectors. While G2B covers the relationship between governments and companies (especially government contractors), the main example is the e-procurement. Finally, G2C points the transactions between government and citizen as online public services.

This topic has already presented many concepts and considerations about e-government. Firstly, the general concept can facilitate the understanding about e-government while many governments did not use all the possibilities of ICTs in their activities. However, this is no longer a reality because many countries in the world has an e-government program. Only UN has been studying e-government since 2001. The first UN Global E-Government Survey was published in 2003. The last survey, in 2010, analyzed more than 180 countries in the world (UN, 2010). Therefore, the advances that exist may cover concepts less broad as
used by Mora, who called e-government of "the use of information technology in its various forms by the State" (MORA, 2005).

So, in this paper, as e-government’s concept, it is used the idea that e-government is not only an element of modernization of administration, or better public services, or government’s efficiency: "The e-government should be a mean to achieve the Open Government" (FUGINI et al, 2005), i.e. with a maturity model that is conducive to democracy, citizenship and social control. According to Fugini and others, the true electronic government is inseparable from the construction of an electronic democracy. From this idea, e-government is a mean to promote transparency, social control, citizen participation and other forms of use that improve the relationship between governments and citizen.

2.1.2 Benefits of e-government

The e-government has been seen as a promoter of citizen interaction with government, a way to improve the internal efficiency of public administration and integration with partners and suppliers. Furthermore, it has been seen as a tool with many possibilities for change public administration practices and even the transformation of the relationship between government and society (RIBEIRO, 2008).

Among these possibilities, e-government can:

- Improve efficiency (MORA, 2005);
- Universalize public service (MORA, 2005; RUEDIGER, 2002);
- Increase transparency (MORA, 2005; RUEDIGER, 2002);
- Promote State modernization;
- Improve the quality of citizen’s life (MORA, 2005);
- Improve quality of public services;
- Reduce corruption (FERRER, 2004; TEIXEIRA, 2004);
- Ensure greater impersonality of services (VAZ, 2002, p. 18).

Efficiency in Public Administration is one of the principles of new public management, the model adopted by the federal government since 1995. Efficiency means lower costs and standards (COELHO & OLENSCKI, 2005). E-government can provide
higher efficiency, since the integration and harmonization that ICTs can provide to ensure this increase.

The possibility of cost reduction also promotes greater efficiency. For example, until May 2007 the electronic procurement system of the State of São Paulo has saved 66 million dollars. The e-procurement portal used by this state, the first two days of operation paid investment (FERRER, 2004).

The modernization of the state occurs by using ICT to streamline processes and even bring new ones to ensure a public administration more responsive and efficient. It is also used to ensure the improvement of certain procedures such as collecting state taxes. For example, the Electronic Invoice (NF-e), which is already used by several municipalities and even states in the country, makes it difficult to tax evasion.

E-government promotes universal services because it allows enhancing services to the citizens through the use of ICTs. The provision of electronic services allows citizens to have access to government at any time and place, even if the government does not have service centers face to face in a locality.

E-government can improve quality of life of citizens, since the use of ICTs enables the citizen to perform some services and / or request information in your own home, for example, which decreases the time and costs spent on a travel. The improvement of quality of services offered by facilities that occurs ICTs can bring to the performance of services rendered. The Internet, for example, is an easy to use and relatively inexpensive to implement and can generate a range of services more efficiently.

Electronic government would provide a guarantee of impartiality in access to public services and information because it provides hinders the action of private agents that can control access to the services provided by the Government.

E-government has also been seen as a possible weapon against corruption by electronic control of public administration. For example, the fully electronic payment of property taxes difficult to tax evasion. It is also an ally in combating corruption because it enhances transparency.

The use of ICTs can create incentives for governments to promote transparency and social control. Through ICT's, transparency can be increased because it allows an easier access to data and information of Public Administration.
2.2 Transparency

2.2.1 Visions of Transparency

In the Democratic State of Law, transparency is the principle that legitimates the administrative act; allows the access to government’s information; helps the social control; among others (MARTINS JUNIOR, 2004).

In the end of the twentieth century, there was an increasing demand from society for more transparency of public administration. In the ‘80s, a global crisis occurred in many sectors of the life as economy, politics and public administration. In this moment, it started the process of redemocratization in Brazil. It also occurred a process in which culminates in the State Reform that was held in various countries.

In Brazil, the State Reform was introduced by a body of laws in 1995 (RIBEIRO, 2008a). Among the expected changes that appeared in this process it may list as welcome: 1) Focus on social control; 2) Less bureaucratic insulation and more efficiency; 3) Greater focus on the citizen in the provision of public services; 4) Greater accountability; and, 5) Greater transparency.

Transparency is one of the administrative principles of new public management model. Transparency involves the reduction of the opacity of Public Administration, i.e., disclosure and access to information from the public administration to society. Alberto Teixeira (2004) presents a concept of transparency in cities that was proposed by the World Bank: “It is supported on condition of access to all information about how government works. Transparency means that the city government operates in an open manner, based on ethical principles, and can be challenged at any time, depending on the facility which citizens and other stakeholders can access information(...)” (TEIXEIRA, 2004, p.13).

In the search of a transparency’s concept it was found many papers and books that did not define exactly what it means this term that is very important to many contemporary governments. In others cases, it was found many different concepts associated with ideas from various areas of studies.

So, in this research, the concept of transparency has been grouped into three perspectives: a) transparency as publicity; b) transparency as accountability; and, c) transparency as openness.
a) Transparency as principle of publicity

According to Bobbio (1986), a Democratic State of Law must have the publicity as one of its principles. The principle of publicity differentiates the democratic government from the monarchy. One of the features from monarchy is the State Secrets because it is an essential instrument of power, unlike the modern state or any concept of democracy in which the publicity is a rule and the secrecy is an exception (Bobbio, 1986). The publicity allows appearing public scandals because the scandal is perceived only when a hidden activity is presented to the public like corruption acts, crimes against life, among others. Bobbio (1986) cites the example of Scandals of the Italian government's relationship with the mafia in his country.

Brazil’s legislation follows the principle of publicity that was presented by Bobbio (1986). In the Brazilian Constitution, among the principles of public administration, has the principle of publicity. This principle means that all acts of Brazilian governments should be disclosed. In some cases when the acts are not disclosed, the acts can be considered null, for instance, if the rules of public tender’s disclosure are not obeyed, the public tender is annulled.

According to law scholars reviewed, the principle of publicity is closely related with transparency (MELLO, 2008; ARAUJO, 2006; DI PIETRO, 2006). The principle of publicity ensures that government information is disseminated widely to society allowing, for example, the social control that can prevent many vices of Public Administration, among them, corruption acts. Some authors link transparency directly with the principle of publicity contained in various democratic states of law. However, this is not the synonymous that this paper adopted.

Although the principle of publicity is very important to guarantee governments’ transparency, the effective transparency is beset of challenges and obstacles. According to Bobbio (1986), even though he defines democracy as “government of the public sector for the public”, he points that democracy also has problems. So, transparency as synonymous of principle of publicity is useful to guarantee the citizen rights about access to public information, but it does not cover the possibilities of use electronic means to promote transparency. It did not answered our question about the possibilities promoted by ICTs.

b) Transparency as accountability
Brazilian authors emphasizes it does not exist a Portuguese word that translate the term accountability (CAMPOS, 1990; PRADO & LOUREIRO, 2006; PINHO, 2008; PINHO & SACRAMENTO, 2009). Using the conclusion of Pinho & Sacramento (2009), accountability cannot be translated to Portuguese, but it also possible to explain its meaning. Although, this term has not yet been translated into Portuguese (PINHO, 2008, p. 478) and is a topic for discussion without a definitive conceptualization (PRADO & LOUREIRO, 2006, p. 359), it is defined as: "(...) a principle that is expressed in institutional mechanisms that must continually embarrass governments accountable to society and other actors in the political system" (PRADO & LOUREIRO, 2006, p. 360).

Accountability, transparency and social control are closely related. The decrease in the administrative opacity provides greater opportunity to the citizen's knowledge about the governments. With the information available and clear about the public entity, society can control the acts of public administration and be more prepared to exercise their right to participate. Accountability comes along with the transparency of the actions that builds trust between the governments and society.

According to Prado & Loureiro (2006, p. 360) some authors define transparency from the concept of accountability. The authors discuss that the literature about transparency, frequently, is automatically associated with the accountability. The relationship between accountability and transparency is also emphasized by Akutsu (2005): “Another feature of accountability is the essential transparency of decisions and actions taken by public officials. It is not enough to merely comply with bureaucratic requirements; it is necessary to show that the administration acted with economy, efficiency and honesty (AKUTSU, 2005, p. 5).

For these authors, the transparency of public information is one of the steps of accountability. There are other references in the literature that separate the concept of transparency and accountability, we can mention: UN (2010) and WONG & WELCH (2004). It is noticed that although the relationship between the concepts of accountability and transparency exist, these concepts are not synonymous.

(c) Transparency as openness
Laporte et al (2000) describe a broader sense of transparency that proposes using the term called openness. It can be defined as “(…) the provision of information, understanding this term as a free and universal provision of information to their audience” (VAZ, 2002). To achieve this, there are two basic categories: transparency and interactivity (VAZ, 2003, p. 70). Transparency is the information available on the agency about its activities and interactivity refers to information that can be accessed easily by citizens in a government site (LAPORTE ET AL, 2000).

To be an openness government, it is necessary a government’s declaration that public information belongs to the society and therefore should be provided in accordance with that law (Laporte et al, 2000). The government must assert the right of citizens to information and create ways for citizens to have access to information in a clear and easy way clearly and easy way. Governments should be proposing that the public may know their structures and their decisions.

Governments should not only promote transparency through the availability of information, but must provide this information in a clear way. For example, the budget can be fully available in the Portal of the public agency. Via the Internet, in theory, any citizen can check, but could the average citizen understand the technical terms contained in these online documents? This information is not fully transparent even it exists the data in the Web, but there is not an understanding of your target audience, i.e., society as a whole. The same Government that provides a portal into your data will not be more transparent if the information is hard to find or not to be updated constantly (Laporte et al, 2000).

In this research transparency will be defined based on the concept of openness advocated by Laporte et alli (2000), i.e. a transparent government is one that provides information, updates them and create facilities for citizen access. Thus, it can be stated, for example, that the information made publicly updated comprehensive internal and widely accessible is an empirical indicator of an agency's attitude toward openness (LAPORTE ET ALL, 2000). The central argument of this paper is to determine whether transparency really means only information available to the citizen.

3. Methodology
The paper aims to verify what are the possibilities of Federal Government transparency through two case studies: ComprasNet Portal (E-procurement Portal) and Transparency Portal. Firstly, these portals are chosen because they have as one of their main objectives the transparency’s promotion. Therefore, we can deduce they will have several features that promote governamental transparency. We also chose them because we researched about them in others articles (RIBEIRO, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c).

First of all, it was researched about transparency and electronic government and their relationship. The literature review permitted the identification of the main possibilities of transparency’s promotion through e-government applications. To verify the possibilities of Federal Government Portals, it was done: 1) a research about the features of Transparency Portal and Comprasnet through the structured observation of the Portals; and 2) application of a method of transparency evaluation in Portals.

It was listed all the features from both Portals. The objective of this list was to know the features from Federal Governmental Portals that propitiate the rise of transparency. Features were defined as the information available on the websites for the society.

The transparency’s evaluation of the Portals was based on Websites Attribute Evaluation System (WAES), the method created by Cyberspace Policy Group Research from Arizona University and George Mason University, United States.

The aim of this group, created in 1995, is studying the spread and use of Internet in government, especially in terms of openness of government (as defined in the topic concepts of transparency) and internal efficiency. Among the methods to achieve this objective is the creation and application of WAES. Other methods used by this research group are: interviews with webmasters from governments and global survey of webmasters. The hypotheses of this group are:

- Web technology diffusion into public organizations increases organizational openness, which exists to the extent that organizations provide comprehensive information about their attributes and maintain timely communications directly to key public audiences.
- Openness in public organizations produces an expansion of web-oriented “new knowledge management” practices likely to result in consolidation of managerial authority.
- Organizational openness is only indirectly associated with democracy, due to the variety of possible institutional arrangements (LAPORTE ET ALLI, 2000).

From these assumptions, the WAES was created in 1997 to assess the level of openness of the Web sites of public organizations. It measures the degree of openness from...
the government created two categories to describe this concept: transparency and interactivity. Transparency: "(...) measures the organization's public effort to make information available through their website. It is divided into five categories with twenty-three criteria divided among these categories" (LAPORTE ET ALLI, 2000). While interactivity “(...) measures the facility in which citizens can use information provided on the site. There are five categories divided into twenty-three different criteria” (LAPORTE ET ALLI, 2000) The group used a questionnaire to analyze the Web sites of government agencies in countries with five categories and five categories of transparency in interaction with a series of questions in each category. The site of this group since 2001 is outdated, so there's only official data of the ranking of 1998.

The level of transparency in Brazilian Federal Government Portals was measured through using an adapted version of the WAES. This instrument was adapted and applied in Transparency Portal and ComprasNet. When the Portals were visited, it was used the structured observation’s technique. Alberto Teixeira used this technique to map the best transparency’s experiences in the state of Ceará, Brazil. The observation “(...) is a systematic process used to get information related with the investigation problem and oriented by a question, purpose or problem (TEIXEIRA, 2004, p. 21-22). The portals were visited between March and April 2011.

Succinctly, to discover the transparency’s possibilities in Federal Government’s Portals, the next stages were occurred to create this article:

- Literature review about the keywords: electronic government and transparency;
- Structured observation of the next Federal Government’s Portals: Comprasnet and Transparency Portal;
- Features’ map of the Portals;
- Transparency’s evaluation of the Portals;
- Portals’ analysis;


This topic presents the Federal Government Portals: the e-procurement portal called ComprasNet and the Transparency Portal. Before starting their evaluation, it will be presented the history of these portals.
The analysis will be divided in two steps: 1) the exploratory investigation of the portals’ features that would provide increased government transparency; and, 2) the application of the method of evaluation that will measure the government openness. These steps aim to understand what possibilities exist for promoting transparency in the portals of the Federal Government.

It is worth noting the differences in the functions of these portals mentioned by Prado (2009). For the author, the Federal Government Portals can be classified in three categories according to their relation to the transparency’s promotion: a) Business Portals, b) Portals of Entry and c) Transparency Portals.

Business Portals are designed to facilitate "(...) business by the government" (Prado, 2009, p. 122). Simultaneously, they should promote transparency of the purchasing processes and agreements, for instance, the e-procurement and public covenants portals. Ribeiro (2008b) argues that while private entities use the electronic procurement in order to reduce costs, the public can not be guided only by efficiency, but also the transparency of public procurement. Thus, the promotion of transparency cannot be considered a secondary objective of these portals, but the main goal with others objectives. Therefore, in this paper, the Brazilian e-procurement portal is understood as a portal with great potential for promoting transparency.

Portals of Entry, which will not be studied in this paper, correspond to the websites whose function is to redirect to public services or information provided by government agencies (PRADO, 2009, p. 122). This characteristic of possessing a large quantity of information demonstrates its importance in transparency promotion.

Transparency Portals are considered separate initiatives on transparency because it has the sole purpose of provide transparency and accountability of government (PRADO, 2009, p. 122). The example is the Federal Government Transparency Portal which will be presented in the following pages along with ComprasNet Portal.

4.1 E-procurement Portal

In public administration, relations between suppliers and the government are called Government to Business (G2B). E-procurement is to use ICTs to make the procurement’s process, mainly using the Internet. It can be understood as "the acquisition of goods and
services through the Internet” (FERRER et alli, 2004, p. 51). The use of ICTs in this process may allow a rationalization of the procurement’s steps and resources, reduce costs, promote efficiency in public administration, monitoring costs, increase transparency, improve the quality of service, among others (DINIZ, 2000, p. 16).

According to Lopes and Santos (2006), the private sector has as greater motivation to make purchases through electronic means is to reduce costs. For them, the essential difference between private sector and the public one is the objective. Private sector aims the best prices while public sector also focuses on the transparency. The reduction of costs is also very important, but the transparency is simultaneously an important objective.

Public administration can make the e-procurement portals through exclusively portals. Among others, the main reasons for the use of electronic procurement are the reduction of costs, the possibility of increasing transparency and combating corruption. The e-procurement allows that information to be open and can be verified both by society and by the suppliers.

ComprasNet Portal (E-procurement Portal) was created in 1998 to achieve the following objectives: "(...) to progress in improving the logistics of governmental actions and also to achieve greater scale, disclosure and transparency in procurement and contracting of the federal government” (BRAGA, 2001, p. 4). The Federal Government has used e-procurement since 2000.

The website is maintained by the Department of Logistics and Information Technology in the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management. The first step of the site was characterized by disseminating warnings and notices of bidding procedures of the Federal Government and summary of Public Administration contracts Federal Direct and Indirect through the Internet.

In December 2000, it has become an accomplished electronic trading on the Portal. Until 2008, the Federal Government saved about 2.2 billion dollars with the use of e-procurement portal (BRAZIL, 2009).

According to Fernandes (2005), ComprasNet involves the provision of resources of about 8.8 billion dollars. These numbers demonstrate the importance of e-procurement in terms of volume and value. Currently, ComprasNet provides information about all procurement in the Federal Government, both the direct and indirect administration and makes the electronic system of procurement.
4.2 Transparency Portal

The Transparency Portal is maintained by the Comptroller General of the Union from Brazilian Federal Government. Among its goals is the purpose of fighting against corruption and increasing public transparency. It was created in 2004, but it was based on Decree number 5.482/2005 that officiated this site and describe its main objectives: "(...) provides for the disclosure of information from agencies and entities of the Federal Government, through the World Wide Web - Internet" (SANTOS, 2005, p. 12).

The Portal provides all financial plays of government programs at the federal level. Among the expenditures are available for access, all federal funds transferred to the Union states, municipalities and Federal District, information on federal resources directly to citizens and the direct expenditures made by the Federal Government.

The data available is received from the Federal Government entities. The organs and entities of the federal public administration shall provide the information to Comptroller General of the Union by the fifteenth day of the month subsequent to budget implementation, the data needed to fully achieve the objectives of the Transparency Portal. Despite the wide range of information, cases that the information is secrecy and it is prohibited to disclosure by the Constitution are not available for consultation. For example, the cost of intelligence activities or information about national security.

Among the possibilities for consultation are: the possibility of controlling the beneficiaries of Federal Government Income Transfer Program and the funds transferred to the municipality. About Transparency Portal, Culaus Fortes discourses: “The portal serves as an instrument of accountability of public officials, encouraging social control. The idea is that citizens can monitor the implementation of programs and actions of the federal government. The "citizen tax" is an important player in the process of monitoring the responsible use of public resources, acting as an inhibitor of corruption, fraud and embezzlement of public funds. Comptroller General of the Union, which acting as manager of the portal, has made efforts to reduce the lag of data, improve the quality of information provided and encourage the use of language easy to understand” (CULAUS FORTES, 2006, p. 9).
The total volume of data generated on the portal since its inception until October 2008 was 882.179.422 records, corresponding to 3.912.506.569.924.81 dollars. From this value, 14.5% of the values correspond to the transfer of resources, 84.5% for direct applications, and 0.5% for credit cards.

5. Results

5.1 Portals Features

The objective of the features’ analysis of the portals of the Federal Government is to present a map of e-government resources used in these portals for the promotion of transparency. Features are being understood as information provided in these portals to the society.

Based on the concept of transparency as openness defined by Laporte et al (2000), Ribeiro (2008a) evaluated the promotion of transparency of electronic government in the Departments of State proposing that e-government can increase transparency through three categories: 1) the availability and dissemination of information in the World Wide Web; 2) Access to information; 3) Fighting against digital divide.

These three categories are the ways in which e-government could increase transparency and, consequently, the possibilities of social control and citizen participation.

The availability and dissemination of information through the Internet is the first group in which transparency can be enhanced by the use of tools of e-government. In this group, among other issues, can be presented the following questions:

- The public entities provide information through the Internet?
- How depth is this information?
- Information is updated?

Access to information concerns about the efforts that the Public Administration takes for the information contained in the portals appeared easily and can be understood by stakeholders. In this group, it was presented the following questions:

- Is the location of information on the sites quick to find by citizens?
- Is information easily understandable to the average citizen?
- Can citizens submit questions and receive answers via the Internet or by other means?
Finally, the last group called the digital divide. If a citizen does not know how to use the technology, it also will not have access to Internet or rely on government services offered by e-government. The questions that can guide this group are:

- Do citizens have access ICTs (computers, Internet access)?
- Do citizens have the ability to use these ICTs?
- Is the government information only available on the Internet?

Except the last category that we cannot verified through the websites observation, these categories based on the concept of openness is indicative only, i.e. the indicator of openness based on this questions it was not established yet. They will serve to assist the division of features found in Brazilian Federal Government Websites.

### 5.2.1 ComprasNet Features

ComprasNet Portal presents a range of information from Federal Government procurement. The content of the portal services can be divided into three: a) Services to Government, b) Services to Supplier, and c) Services to Society.

The part of the Portal called “Services to Government” shows the possibilities of access to the registrations of the administrative units of the Federal Government. It is a space that only civil servants can access. While the services to suppliers show the possibility of access to suppliers when they register themselves to participate of e-procurement process.

Services to society demonstrate the features available to citizens without registration of the use, for example, electronic quotation of prices. Within the scope of services to society, the main features were:

- Open Access;
- Publications;
- Contact Us;
- Help, and links to other websites.

The area of Open Access provides links to the features that are accessible without registration or password. These features are: Auction, Consults; Quotation Electronic Registration and Materials, Materials Catalog, and Public Session. Among other information, the portal presents consultations about sessions scheduled, in progress, realized or unrealized,
for any reason, tender notices, extracts of contracts, the bidding results; public bidding sessions, invitations to bid.

This area of the Portal promotes transparency because it provides essential information for the conduct of government procurement as the edicts of the trading sessions and consultations at any stage of the bidding process. When the information is available on Internet, it allows for greater publicity to information about procurement process from the Federal Government.

The availability and dissemination of information can be considered a first group in which transparency can be enhanced by the use of tools of e-government. An example of how the disclosure of government’s purchases on the Internet can promote transparency is the publication of the call for bidding, called the announcement. It is extremely important for the transparency and validity of the bidding process. The notice shall be determined the rules for negotiation between Government and suppliers. They cannot be modified during the process due to the interest of any party.

The availability of e-procurement process on the Internet can increase the effects of disclosure. If the announcement of a purchase is not drafted in accordance with the law, for example it has preferential clauses, this process is null. The information available in this part of the Portal also serves as evidence to challenge irregular procurement processes.

The publications available are the drafts of the Law; Terms of Accession; Newsletter; and User Manuals. They can promote transparency by providing information about the rules of government procurement and its operation.

There is a possibility of communication with citizens through the Contact Us, which explains how to contact for questions via email or telephone. It also has as feature a Help part, which provides the main issues and questions related to ComprasNet. These are other characteristics that would provide increased transparency by enabling citizens with questions about the process.

It is also considered an important feature for the promotion of transparency the disclosure of links, which redirects users to various sites related to e-procurement, as it provides greater opportunity for citizen reporting on the subject.

5.1.2 Features of Transparency Portal

In the Portal are available the following features:
• Consultation about Government spending;
• Consultation about Government revenues;
• Consultation about Covenants;
• Consultation about civil servants;
• Consultation about companies sanctioned by governments, i.e. companies that cannot sell to public sector.
• News;
• Graphics;
• What is the Portal;
• Data Origin;
• Information about transparency in the Government;
• Information about Participation and Social Control;
• Learn More;
• Contact Us;
• Frequently Asked Questions;
• Glossary,
• Links;
• Navigation and Manual;
• Links to specialized information as the Summer Olympic Games and the Soccer world cup that will be occurred in Brazil.

The consults provide information about public expenditure of the Federal Government through direct applications and transfers of resources. The direct applications refer to the direct expenditures of the federal government in purchasing or contracting of works and services, including expenses of each agency with daily supplies, office, purchase of equipment and works and services, among others, as well as expenditures made by corporate credit cards.

Transfers of funds represent federal funds transferred from national to states, municipalities, Federal District, or transferred directly to citizens. The features "what is the portal," "data source" and "manual" navigation present information about the functioning of the Portal to ensure their access and understanding by citizens.
The link Learn More refers to some definitions of key concepts of the various issues related to the portal; presentations with simple explanations on various government programs, how to monitor through the knowledge of the control procedures of federal government programs.

The functionality participation and social control explains what are the possibilities of social participation and control in governments. These features promote transparency about how citizens can do to exercise social control in public administration.

It is also available a glossary, a contact us, graphics, a frequently asked questions and topics to facilitate the understanding of citizens about the site and how to use information available there.

The glossary provides basic concepts on various topics related to the Transparency Portal. The purpose of the government is to facilitate understanding of the issues addressed in the portal for citizen. The Portal intends to guarantee the real conditions to citizen exert social control and supervise the proper use of federal resources.

The contact us allows any citizen can ask questions, criticisms, compliments or suggestions on various matters of the Portal. It has a link various websites related to the Portal. Finally, the functionality related frequently asked questions and answers some questions that seem to relate to the most common questions that people have: "(...) the presence of a page with frequently asked questions and a glossary (FAQ) with the most common terms used in statements may be helpful to the citizen who wishes to obtain information from the Portal "(Prado, 2009, p. 141).

5.2.1 Conclusions about the features

In the case of ComprasNet, it is important to note that public tenders are frequently associated with corruption and privileges. The tenders, electronic or face to face, should be publicized, according to law. The electronic procurement can facilitate the fight against corruption because it allows viewing the entire process by both providers and society in a way that allows easier access to information that is the Internet.

Some dangers of deviations in the tender process are listed by Bruno Speck (2004): the establishment of criteria in the announcement that restrict the potential suppliers and cover the requirements of only one or a few companies; decision about the process in is presented in the announcement with subjective aspects; the lack of clear rules regarding the monitoring of the
contract may permit deviations; lack of control mechanisms and effective audits; the existence of control only after the completion of the process; among others.

According to Speck (2004), the main way to fight against corruption in this case is "(...) the existence of regulations to ensure maximum openness to the participation of companies and the largest possible exposure for acts of administration to citizen (...)". The use of electronic procurement has several advantages, among them the possibility of increased transparency. They are encouraged by public agencies primarily through standards such as those of the Federal Government determine the preferential use of electronic procurement.

Public resources are scarce and governments must make choices and decide priorities for the allocation of these resources. Social control is essential to prevent those resources, already scarce, are used carelessly or irregularly. Participation can provide an aid in deciding the allocation of these resources. Transparency, as already discussed, may facilitate the use of mechanisms of social control and participation. The electronic procurement system allows information to be open and can be verified both by society and by the suppliers and a great help in the fight against corruption.

The Transparency Portal is a pioneering initiative in the availability of access to information concerning about government spending (SANTOS, 2005) and the objective of increasing transparency and combating corruption through a single portal that addresses Transparency Portal.

According to Santos (2005), the Transparency Portal is also being considered easily accessible for its user-friendly interface and access without the need for registration or password. These features are essential to achieve the goal of combating corruption, because the financial terms used often are unknown to most of society.

This paper defends the idea that a government will be transparent when not only provides the data, but also provides information that is understood by the target audience, which in this case is the citizen.

The Transparency Portal created specific features like the glossary that provides the concepts found in the Portal. This initiative strengthens the fight against corruption by the possibility of greater understanding of the content available for control.

In addition to providing data and translate the technical content, the Transparency Portal also provides information about participation and social control. It is an instrument of civic education that encourages the fight against corruption and the social control.
Using the Internet to combat corruption is also accomplished through complaints to the site of the Comptroller General of the Union. The complaint of abuse of corporate card in the federal government in 2008, which culminated in a Parliamentary Investigation Commission (CPI), for example, demonstrate the possibilities of the use of information technology and communications for increased social control that a portal can provide transparency to avoid possible irregularities in the use of public resources.

When the definition of transparency is not limited to disclosure of government information, but also depends on how the information is available, it is also necessary to find new features that determine the level of transparency in public sector. Transparency is characterized by the availability of information to citizens by public administration and assurance that citizens can access it. It is important to ensure that citizens have access to data disseminated and understood the information. That is the purpose of the Transparency Portal: in addition to providing data presents a number of features to facilitate understanding of the citizen for the Website and even proposes several manuals that promote social control of public administration.

5.3 Portals Evaluation

From the adoption of the concept of transparency as synonymous of openness, the authors conducted an analysis of ComprasNet and Transparency Portal using the Website Attribute Evaluation System (WAES) that was created by Cyberspace Policy Research Group at the University of Arizona and George Mason University to assess the level of openness in the websites of public organizations from different countries.

The WAES method was adapted for this research. In the original model, briefly, for each attribute is given a score, usually 0 or 1, which in the last phase of the evaluation will be added and divided by the total number of attributes. In this paper, the portals of the Federal Government will be assessed only if they have or not the criteria for each attribute. It is not given scores within the categories proposed in the WAES. After this first evaluation, the portals will be compared and checked what elements of government openness they have or not.

This indicator measures the degree of openness from the government created two categories to describe this concept: transparency and interactivity.
Transparency is characterized by the efforts of governments to make the information public on its Portal, or if there is information available on the websites of public organizations (LAPORTE et al., 2000).

This category is divided into five attributes: ownership, contact/reachbility, organization or operational information, issue information and citizen consequences/responses.

**TABLE 1. TRANSPARENCY CATEGORIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>A visitor would want evidence that the organization cares about the site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts/Reachability</td>
<td>A visitor would want to know how and whom to contact with regard to the organization’s operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Information:</td>
<td>A visitor would want to know about the organization, its structure and operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Information</td>
<td>A visitor would want to know about the organization, its structure and operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Consequences/Responses</td>
<td>What responses a visitor can or may have to make</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cypgr (http://www.cyprg.arizona.edu/waes.html#Transparency). Date: 08.AUG.2008.

The second category, Interactivity, "(...) measures the facility that citizens can use information provided on the website. For example, if the link to a specific site related to organization works. This second category is dependent on the first, because if there is no information on the site provided by the transparency category, it is not possible to determine whether there is proper operation of links and accessibility.

There are five categories divided into twenty-two different criteria. It also has five attributes such as transparency: Security and Privacy; Contacts/Reachability; Organizational Information; Issue Information; Citizen Consequences/Responses.

**TABLE 2. INTERACTIVITY CATEGORIES**
Each attribute (10 attributes) presents a series of questions (46 questions). Each question represents an item that was analyzed by the method of structured observation of ComprasNet Portal and the Transparency Portal between March and April 2010. For each question, analysis of sites presents three situations:

- The Portal has the information and/or access;
- The Portal does not have the information and/or access;
- It is not possible to know through analysis of the portal on the Internet whether you have this information and/or access.

### 5.4 Evaluation Results

In the evaluation, adapted from WAES, were analyzed 46 items (questions) distributed among the attributes of categories transparency and interactivity. From the visit to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security and Privacy</td>
<td>More the site is accessible, the less citizens or visitors are obliged to provide personal information in order to easily download or upload material and responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts/Reachability</td>
<td>A visitor would want evidence that the organization is willing to receive input at the gateway (the webmaster within the agency) and the senior level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Information</td>
<td>A visitor would want to be able to contact members inside the organization easily with a click</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Information</td>
<td>A visitor would want to know how the organization deals with issues in its policy environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Consequences/Responses</td>
<td>A visitor would want to be able to easily follow the issue/organizational operations links with a click into these related sites. Here we place the organizational structure due to its representation of the structure of discretion within an organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cypgr (http://www.cyprg.arizona.edu/waes.html#Transparency). Date:08.AUG.2008.
Comprasnet Portal and Transparency Portal during March and April 2011 were possible to verify how these portals are in agreement with the concept of openness.

In the first category, transparency was evaluated 22 of 23 items. Through the Portal’s observation, it was not possible to know if the technical support was maintained by a private company. ComprasNet Portal had 13 of 22 items and Transparency Portal had 10 of 22 items evaluated.

So, ComprasNet Portal had approximately 56.5% of the items in the category transparency and the Transparency Portal represents approximately 43.4% of the questions. This means that in terms of availability of information as the criteria adopted by the WAES in category transparency, ComprasNet Portal has more items that provide openness than the Transparency Portal. The inability to check one of the requirements does not invalidate this analysis, because there are others differences between the portals of the independent analysis of this item.

In the second category, interactivity, it was not analyzed two of the 23 possible questions to verify that the webmaster is different from the main page that runs the government and accessibility for people with disabilities. ComprasNet Portal had 6 of 21 questions divided as follows and the Transparency Portal has 4 of 21 questions.

Again, the ComprasNet had more items than the Transparency Portal, respectively, 26% and 17.5% of possible questions. From the evaluation by the WAES, it is concluded that the portals have not reviewed most of the items proposed to ensure the openness of government. Only Portal ComprasNet, in the transparency category, has led to more than 50%. However there are limitations of evaluation and criticism of this model will be presented the next topic.

5.4.1 Limitation of the evaluation method

The WAES model was used because it is based on the concept of transparency as synonym of openness and this model verifies the degree of transparency from this concept. Some difficulties in analyzing these portals can be mentioned.

Firstly, the model is targeted to sites of organizations and not from other sites related to the organizations. The first limitation corresponds to the fact that the model is only...
directed at web analytics institutions. Therefore, it was necessary to adapt the model, pointing out that some information not found in the analyzed portals were present at the sites of the responsible organizations. The information mainly related to the contacts of officials and party leaders were present at the sites of the agencies responsible for Transparency Portal and Portal ComprasNet. This means that even without being evaluated the websites such information is available on the Internet.

The second difficulty was to determine whether or not the web sites had some questions. As discussed in the first category lack this item did not change the degree of openness of the portals, while the second, if it were possible to look through the site, could have affected the results.

Other limitations of this model can be listed: outdated, there is not an analysis of the quality or depth of information presented in the Portals; the method does not include accessibility as the codification of technical terms and not address in depth the issue of digital exclusion.

The latest update of the WAES method was released in 2001. Technological innovations and the theoretical discussions about transparency and openness have advanced since then, but they have not been updated in the evaluation model. For example, in 2001 did not exist today as tools like Twitter, Wikis, and social networks, among others.

Currently, there are a series of experiments in the use of these tools for public organizations that can promote transparency in public management. None of the questions presented in this model evaluates the quality or depth of information. According Akutsu, "the proper treatment of public information is essential to strengthening democracy in a new Information Society" (2005, p. 20). The depth of information refers to the value of your information. For example, a site only to have the link for more information about bidding or have given a summary of this auction with the object of bidding, dates, announcement, among others. Technical terms that are commonly use in public administration must be coded to the average citizen. Speck (2004) and Prado (2009) point to the need for simplification of the information provided to citizens by the government to enlarge the conditions of social control and citizen participation.

For example, if there was one item in the evaluation that required a glossary of technical terms or explanation about the Portal, the Transparency Portal would be the best
rated than ComprasNet Portal because it has a series of explanatory information on various subjects relevant to the theme of this Portal.

Finally, digital divide is not a subject in the method. It is can be defined as "the effort to provide access to the information technology sectors and individuals who by their social and economic conditions, have barriers to develop skills and use it" (VAZ 2002). If a citizen does not know how to use the technology, it also will not have access to and / or rely on government services offered by e-government. The big question is: Does the Internet use by the government an expression of social inequality in the country, i.e., the extent of social inequality in the electronic medium?

6. Conclusions

The construction of the literature review about e-government and transparency proposes that the ICTs can influence the public administration in addition to saving resources and improving the efficiency of public services. E-government also promotes a change in citizenship rights; it can facilitate greater inclusion of social actors with the speed of data transmission and the facility of access the information about Public Administration through the Internet.

When the governments use the possibilities of e-government only from the perspective of “citizen-customer”, they are also denying the possibility of incorporating ICTs in changing society and its relations with the Public Administration. According to Vaz (2003), the idea of electronic government should not only be associated with the modernization of the administrative apparatus, because it can also be a promoter of social rights such as control of the government, access to information, citizen participation; among others.

The definition of transparency has become a crucial issue when the biggest question is: “What are the limits of this concept?” There are different visions about the concept of transparency. In this research, we adopted the concept of transparency as a synonym of openness. This concept defines information as a civil right, so governments must promote transparency. The concept of transparency as the understanding that information, personal or collective, is a civil right and also the State must provide information in an accessible and clear way, requires a positive role of governments that allows citizens to find and understand the information they want.
Even though citizens have not interested in accessing the information about government, the information must be available to be capable of questioning at any time. This means that the information in the case of e-procurement, for example, should not be presented anyway in the Portal of the government only as "goodwill" or even because the law requires, and therefore was considered as an example of transparency in government procurement. Even if a citizen does not want to see this information at any given time, it should be there by chance might be challenged at any time for all concerned.

To achieve the research objective, i.e. to check the possibilities for promoting transparency in the Federal Government Portals, they were evaluated by two methods: an exploratory investigation of the Portals features using the technique of structured observation of the Portals and the implementation of the Websites Attribute Evaluation System (WAES).

ComprasNet Portal can be considered a tool for combating corruption and promoting transparency because it allows that the tenders can be seen and questioned by an interested person. The exploratory research enabled the creation of Portal map with key features: Open Access; Publications, Contact Us, Help, and links to other websites. These features allow access to information on bidding by the Federal Government at any time of the bidding procedures, legislation and handbooks on the functioning of tenders, and opportunities for communication with the Site by electronic mail or phone.

The Transparency Portal is a pioneering initiative that presents information about government revenues and expenditures (SANTOS, 2005) with the objective of increasing transparency and combating corruption through a single portal that addresses the Federal Government spending. The features aim to provide a database of all Federal Government spending, explain the functioning of the Portal, to inform and encourage the possibilities of social control of public administration; provide tools for communicating with the Portal and to conduct a complaint.

The Websites Attribute Evaluation System (WAES) measures the degree of openness from the government through two categories to describe openness: transparency and interactivity. Each category has a number of attributes (10 total) divided into 46 topics. The evaluation of Portals with this method showed results of a low degree of openness. The portals had not most of the items proposed to ensure the openness of government. Only Portal ComprasNet, in the category of transparency, has led to more than 50%.
However, it were listed the difficulties and limitations of this evaluation: it is targeted to sites of organizations and not to other sites from it; difficult to observe through the site three of the forty-six items assessed, outdated model (the last was in 2001); not analyze the quality or depth of information, accessibility does not include the codification of technical terms and does not address the problem of digital exclusion.

For future studies, there is a challenge to identify a clear concept of minimum standards of transparency, especially in the context of using ICTs. This identification is also important for the construction of indexes and statistics relating to transparency in governmental websites: “(...) Adequate information is essential. A fairly independent media, as well as several institutions of research and dissemination, should play an important role, but that does not completely replace the existence of agencies that can be supported publicly, but are independent of government, responsible for collecting and organizing data, and widely available in a wide range of indicators - including, but not exclusively economic. That these indicators should be the methodology of its collection, its timing and the means by which they are transmitted must be decided by a pluralistic authority and not purely government” (O'Donnell, 1998, p. 50).

To determine the degree of transparency of the different public entities by the use of e-government, it would be interesting for a future study to construct another evaluation tool to check the possibilities of increasing transparency, i.e. the construction of indexes that measure the different levels transparency in which are government agencies. It should also catalog the existing features and adding others in order to create a possibility of further increasing transparency in public sites.

ICTs, particularly the Internet, can increase the possibilities for promote transparency by the facility of e-government because Internet can be readily accessed by anyone and anywhere. However there are a number of limitations including: digital exclusion; resource scarcity; interoperability problem, among others. The digital divide, for example, points that even if the government site and provide all the information in a clear and accessible way if the citizen does not have access to technology or its domain, the potential of increased transparency will be reduce.

The complexity involved in the practices of e-government must also make studies from the websites of governments to determine why some sites are more structured than others when it comes to transparency. In other research would also be interesting to conduct
interviews in public organizations to meet the purposes of those responsible for the information contained in these sites and provide a greater understanding of organ involvement in promoting transparency.

One of the most important discussions between electronic government and transparency is the availability of information on the site itself promotes transparency. According to Prado & Loureiro (2006, p. 355): "(...) e-government does not necessarily increase transparency. For them, this would only occur with the existence of institutional mechanisms to compel governments to account and the political will of governments to create an agenda focused on transparency.

Succinctly, information must be available to society. Not only by the provision in the law, which required publicity of the acts of government, but also the information available can improve social control and citizen participation. If the information is not available or is insufficient, the possibility of e-Government to facilitate the right to information is drastically reduced.

Pinho (2008) conducted a survey on e-government portals in Brazil from the states and concluded that despite the existence of ICTs’ use by the governments, they did not use it in proportion to its potential, i.e., the problem is not technological but cultural and political (2008, p.492). Thus, information technology and communication will not be promoting the rights of citizenship itself, but also depends on a culture of transparency in both the society is prepared to control and understand the Governments as the Public Administration guarantee the access to information.

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