VOTA LISBOA

participatory research

Exploring fragmentation and Polarization through Digital Media: *Portugal citizens' perceptions on political communication strategies and informed vote.*

handbook

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What is "VOTA LISBOA"?

This report is the result of the project VOTA LISBOA. Exploring fragmentation and Polarization through Digital Media: the case of Portugal citizens and their perceptions on political communication strategies, which is part of the Transdisciplinary Field Research Training 2023: Fragmentation of Society & Resilience, a component of the MSc in Transition, Innovation, and Sustainability Environments (TISE Program), under the supervision of Professors Dr Marisa Torres da Silva and Dr Jorge Martins Rosa. The overall objective of the project is to implement a transdisciplinary approach to identify the threats of polarization through social network sites considering the involvement of affected communities and opportunities to counteract its effects in collaboration with citizens as stakeholders. As a result, we created Vota Lisboa, a creative participative process in which citizens in Portugal had the opportunity to engage in activities and conversation around the political communicative strategies deployed by the current Portuguese political parties, before and after the elections of March 10th 2024.

In order to design the activities mentioned, we researched the current political context through journalistic sources and social media content. We developed a stakeholders map and identified as relevant issues the far right use of digital media, the initiatives that serve as a counternarrative to it, and important insights from the institutional field. Taking into account that context, we defined as a vulnerability space the lack of awareness of populist political communication strategies.

Based on the aim of gaining socially robust solutions and collaborative systemic perspective we designed a participatory workshop in order to better answer the following guiding question: which are the current political communication strategies being used by Portuguese political parties in social network sites and how could this affect an informed vote within the citizens of Lisboa?

The structure of the mentioned workshop is as follows: 1) a synchronous meeting in which we and the stakeholders meet online to discuss based on the activities we designed, and 2) an asynchronous activity in which the stakeholders face hypothetical future scenarios to play with. These two activities were designed to thrive towards an informed voting process and a more engaging environment in which politics are placed into the conversation table. Additionally, the first activity and its results nurtured the second one, since we wanted to plan and think around the topic continuously, treating the project as a living creature. From the condensed results of both moments, as well as from the process of getting to them, we draw some reflections and proposals which can be found in the section "Reflections and Proposals" at the end of this report. The main proposal is the potentiality of Vota Lisboa as an incubator of ideas to strengthen an informed and conscious political participation of citizens. Therefore, we have included as resources a toolkit and a glossary, that will allow the reproduction of this initiative.

Why "VOTA LISBOA"?

According to some media, 2024 is "The Year the World Votes" (Agrawal, 2024), "The Ultimate Election Year" (Ewe, 2023) and the "Democracy's Super Bowl" (Tisdall, 2023), among other epithets. It is estimated that 49% of the global population will go to the polls during the year in at least 64 countries, plus the European Union. It is considered a historical event that takes place in a context with complexities we will not enumerate here but which can be described as strongly marked by social polarization and fragmentation. Two phenomena that find in social network platforms a fertile substrate for various political purposes, among them, right-wing populism.

Portugal was not on this global election map until November 2023, when less than two years after the victory of the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party - PS), the prime minister Antonio Costa resigned in a controversial situation, and it was decided to bring forward the parliamentary elections to next March. Antonio Costa was serving his third term as Prime Minister of Portugal. In his first term (2015-2019) the PS achieved the support of the left-wing formations (Bloco de Esquerda and Partido Comunista - Left Block and Communist Party) in an unprecedented agreement in 42 years of democracy that allowed Costa to become Prime Minister of the country despite finishing in second position; he governed with a simple majority against the right-wing coalition "Portugal à Frente" (Partido Social Democrata and Centro Democratico Social-Partido Popular - Social Democratic Party or PSD and Social Democratic Center-People's Party or CDS-PP).

In the second term (2019-2022) there was no legislature pact between the same formations, but Costa was able to govern with punctual agreements with his partners. The agreement, however, broke down in October 2021 due to disagreements on the approval of budgets. The last elections in Portugal were held in January 2022 and Costa obtained an absolute majority despite polls predicting a technical tie with the conservatives.

However, in November 2023, a political crisis erupted in Portugal, known internationally as Operation Influencer, which resulted in an ongoing investigation ordered by the Portuguese Public Prosecutor's Office into possible corruption in negotiations involving members of the Portuguese government. On November 7, 2023, Portugal's Public Ministry ordered a search of 42 locations, including the Prime Minister's office, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Action and the Ministry of Infrastructure, in order to investigate active and passive corruption and irregularities in four deals: two lithium mining concessions in the north of the country, a green hydrogen production plant project and a data centre project. The searches resulted in the detention of five people, including Prime Minister António Costa's chief of staff, who is the subject of an autonomous investigation by the Portuguese Supreme Court of Justice, on suspicion of having intervened in the unblocking of the procedures relating to the lithium mine and green hydrogen plant agreements.

The announcement of the investigations immediately provoked political turmoil, and some opposition parties, including the leader of the far-right Chega party André Ventura called for the resignations of the then Minister of Infrastructure and the Prime Minister (Marques, 2023). The fact that three of the people under investigation belong to the Socialist Party was an excuse to openly criticise the political party as a whole.

On the same day, Costa announced his resignation. Since the end of the dictatorship, only five out of 15 prime ministers have managed to reach the end of their term of office.

Who is Chega?

Chega is a far-right Portuguese party (Fernandes, J. & Magalhães, P. ,2020) that entered the party system of Portugal in April 2019, having elected a single Member in Portuguese legislative elections in October of the same year with 1.29% of the votes. Its big rise came in Portugal's 2022 parliamentary elections in which it became the third political force in the country by winning 7.15% of the vote and 12 members of parliament.

Since its beginning, Chega became the focus of media attention, especially due to the statements made by its leader Andre Ventura, who repeatedly presents himself as the voice of the people betrayed by the political elite of the system captured by political correctness (Marchi, 2019). Andre Ventura, the founding core and initial supporters of Chega did not come from the classic Portuguese ultra-right, but rather from Ventura's own personal network, from small groups of the parliamentary parties (PS, PSD, CDS) and from abstentionism (Marchi, 2019).

In July 2020, they announced membership of the far-right association Identity & Democracy (right-wing to far-right political group in the European Parliament). In September 2021, they signed with the Vox the "Letter of Madrid", against, according to its president Santiago Abascal, "socialist totalitarian regimes of inspiration communist" (Observador, 2021). The party claims to have good relations with Vox, direct support of Matteo Salvini party Northern League (Italy) and Marine Le Pen's from National Regroupment.

On November 9, 2023, after meeting with the Council of State and talking with the political parties represented in the Assembly of the Republic, President Rebelo de Sousa announced early legislative elections to be held on March 10, 2024. Following the president's announcement, political parties have announced new coalitions. In 2023 an alliance was created between 3 right and centre-right parties called Aliança Democrática (Democratic Alliance or AD), formed by: PSD, CDS-PP and Partido Popular Monárquico (People's Monarchist Party or PPM). According to several polls, this alliance was expected to have an advantage of 4 percentage points over the SP (32% to 28%). Other polls gave a slight margin of advantage to the SP over AD. However, all of them placed the extreme right wing populist party Chega as the third political force with about 16% of voting intention according to the poll of the Centro de Estudios y Encuestas de Opinión (Cesop), growing 10 percentage points since the last legislative elections.

Finally, in the March 10 elections, 59.84% of the registered voters participated at the global level (national territory and expatriates). According to the official results, the AD got 28.02%, the PS 28.00% and Chega 18.07% (SGMAI, 2024), which won more than a million votes and 50 members of parliament.

Polarizing discourses in the public arena in Portugal: gaps and challenges

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance Report on Portugal in 2018 (Council of Europe, 2018) presents a summary with data of aspects in which Portugal has improved regarding discrimination and a summary with more data considering aspects that need improvement.

Some critical recommendations are:

1. specific recommendations to political institutions about how to improve policies

2. the need of transform certain organizations to make them independent, e.g. CICDR

3. the need to have better data tracking hate speech in public arena

4. responses to hate speech: Mentions the importance of schools to teach history of racism in the country and of authorities in the role of information campaigns

5. police abuse and targeting of black people

The report also communicates that there are two existent regulation mechanisms to prevent, detect and take down hate speech on the Internet and in the traditional media: The Ethics Council of the Union of Journalists and the Portuguese Regulatory Entity for the Media (ERC).

One of the relevant points that we want to address from the report is the acknowledgment of the fight against discrimination facing significant hurdles in Portugal. Despite strides made with the introduction of anti-discrimination laws, there are glaring gaps in coverage, leaving certain areas of life vulnerable to prejudice and injustice. The Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination, meant to be a bastion of fairness, is criticized for lacking independence, casting doubt on its ability to effect real change.

Meanwhile, "far-right and neo-nazi groups spread hate speech on the Internet and threaten migrants and the organizations working to uphold their rights, among others." (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 9) Hate speech thrives online, serving as a breeding ground for threats and intimidation against vulnerable communities and the organizations supporting them.

The far-right use of digital media

The far-right populist party, Chega, strategically leverages social media platforms to advance its political agenda, through Instagram and with a particular emphasis on TikTok and Facebook. This involves leveraging both official party accounts and the personal accounts of key figures, namely Andre Ventura and Rita Matias, each with more than 100,000 followers, who serve as prominent representatives of the party. To comprehensively analyze Chega's digital instrumental strategy on these platforms, we conducted a meticulous examination by systematically scrutinizing and categorizing content from the official four party pages, seven hashtags, on both TikTok and Facebook with overall 97,800 followers. Additionally, we extended our analysis to include private Facebook accounts belonging specifically to Andre Ventura and Rita Matias. Furthermore, our investigation encompassed analyzing a public group named Grupo CHEGA Suíça with 1,300 followers created by the party's upholders on Facebook, out of current other 97 groups, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted social media landscape utilized by Chega to disseminate its political messaging.
According to the analysis from TikTok and Facebook, it was readily apparent that the nationalist moral code of "Good portuguese" embedded with the religious elements and Ventura´s reminiscence of national heroes from the Portuguese past such as Afonso Henriques and Vasco da Gama is used to create the legitimate entity and pertinency of the party with those figures (Palminha, 2022).

Furthermore, the campaign rhetoric revolves around employing strategies of assigning responsibility and censure in the context of corruption and purported "altruism." The deployment of altruistic actions serves to strategically distance the party from any affiliations with radicalism and fascism. This approach involves the emulation of a "unified front" through a narrative of struggle.

The appeal to the audience of their populist discourse is also employed through TikTok trends, memes, "patriotic" music and metaphorical use of nature to depict the "spirit" of Chega. The activation of their populist message is also spread through high school students and celebrity singers, such as Carolina Deslandes, who although denied her alleged support to Chega, went viral with more than 1 million subscribers on Instagram for using the word Chega (Enough) in one of her concerts (Ferreira, 2023).

But what is even more minacious is the spread of islamophobic, racist and xenophobic messages towards migrants which disseminated not only through the party's social media accounts but also through public groups as Grupo CHEGA Suíça and not only, enabling the hate speech discourse to be reinforced and spread through without the party being directly involved, simultaneously strengthening the far-right populist campaign and encouraging the "solidarity" of Chega supporters.

NÃO PASSARÃO! response

Taking into account the latter, we wondered what is the counter narrative to the Chega! political discourse and who is identifying and/or living the consequences of the right-wing populist anti-immigrant discourse in Lisbon? How are they mobilizing and speaking up about the potential repercussions of such discourse?

Our research allowed us to find the NÃO PASSARÃO! [THEY WILL NOT PASS], movement against racism and Islamophobia, that came to be as a response to a fascist group plans to stage a racist and Islamophobic march in Lisbon, targeting areas populated by South Asian and Islamic communities on February 3rd of 2024. The "neo-nazi march" (Vadio, 2024) was planned to target areas populated by South Asian and Islamic communities. This violent action aims to spread hatred and prejudice, terrorizing these populations and highlighting failures in public security and care for migrant residents. Recent incidents of aggression against South Asian individuals have been ignored by authorities and civil society. The statement of NÃO PASSARÃO! calls for active resistance against the rising tide of racism and extremism infiltrating European discourse, asserting the dignity and humanity of all individuals.

In response to these challenges, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued recommendations aimed at strengthening Portugal's legal framework. These include expanding criminal legislation to encompass discrimination in public office, incorporating additional grounds for prosecution, and recognizing racist motives as aggravating factors in offences, considering that according to §18h of GPR No. 7, "racial discrimination in the exercise of one's public office or occupation should be made a criminal offence." (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 14). Moreover, ECRI emphasises the urgent need for comprehensive education on human rights and equality, calling for mandatory curriculum reforms that address historical injustices, particularly those stemming from Portugal's colonial past.

Despite these calls for action, a significant gap remains in monitoring and addressing hate speech, particularly online.

The absence of systematic monitoring by civil society, media regulators, and law enforcement hampers efforts to combat this pervasive threat effectively.

Therefore, from the context we identified in this section, we also wonder how the citizens are getting access to this other(s) perspective(s) and whether they see repercussions of their vote not only towards themselves but also other people in different situations.

We carried out our project in response to a complex context marked by the tensions described above. An additional challenge, which we consider fruitful, was to develop our work in the moments immediately before and after the elections. The following sections will guide the reader through these challenges, processes and proposals.

What is the purpose of "VOTA LISBOA"?

The rise of populist and anti-democratic movements in politics is not limited to Portugal or Europe alone; it is a global phenomenon. This widespread emergence of ideologies rooted in nationalism, migrant discrimination, xenophobia, sexist discourses and other related sentiments highlights the systemic nature of the issue. Addressing this phenomenon requires a trans-disciplinary approach to facilitate comprehensive analysis and understanding of these issues in this case, based on political communication strategies.

With Portugal's elections approaching on March 10th and political parties vigorously employing communication strategies via social media to influence potential voters, we recognized the need for intervention with our initiative Vota Lisboa, based on vulnerable areas requiring attention in order to better answer the following guiding question: "Which are the current political communication strategies being used by Portuguese political parties in social network sites and how could this affect an informed vote within the citizens of Lisboa?"

The intercession has been identified within the system under analysis, characterized by a lack of awareness regarding populist political communication strategies, as a way to a more in depth questioning and posing of an analysis how social media content utilized by current Portuguese political parties may have an impact on affecting citizens' perception around certain variables.

Thus, one of the main missions set on participative process of "Vota Lisboa" was to establish a workshop by bringing diverse groups of people together, mainly citizens of Portugal with voting rights, to initiate a space for an open dialogue by actively participating in discussions and activities focused on analyzing political communication strategies of different parties through social media platforms, to extend the reflection towards awareness of hate-speech, as well as the importance of an informed voting decision within a collective systemic understanding of the issue.

For whom is "VOTA LISBOA"?

In the first phase of the transdisciplinary project, a stakeholder mapping was carried out in order to obtain a preliminary view of the social actors that could be intervening in the context we were approaching. As a first step, a list of stakeholders was created, based on previously reviewed literature and social network content. We then placed each of the actors on the list into specific categories, which helped us to delimit the scope according to the research question. The broad categories were: "social communities", "state institutions", "social organizations", "academic community", "economic condition", "political ideology" and "vulnerable population". The result of this activity was the identification of the social actors who would participate in the following workshop and with whom we would co-construct a system map.
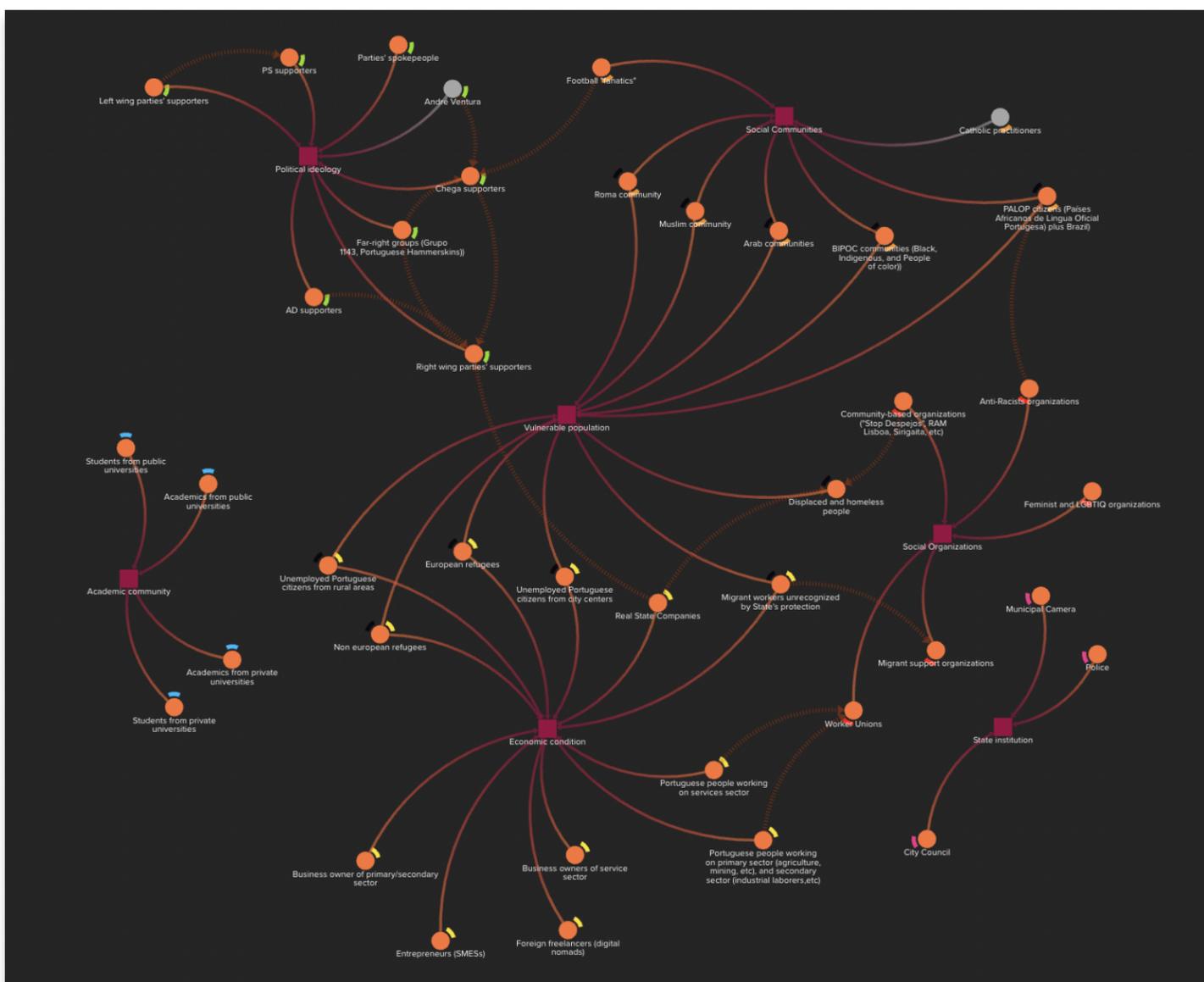

Figure 1. Stakeholders map. *Source: Self-developed by TRANSMUTAR Research Group*

Since our goal was to have a diversity of citizen profiles and perspectives, we conducted snowball sampling to reach our target population. We invited 18 individuals and 3 organizations to participate. The individuals were selected under the criterion of being Portuguese citizens entitled to vote in the 2024 parliamentary elections. Regarding the organizations, one of them belonged to civil society and the other two to the academic community. In addition, Professor Jorge Martins extended the invitation to students of the Communication degree program at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

It is worth mentioning that we decided, as part of our methodology, to participate in the activities of the first workshop, together with the stakeholders.This decision was based on an ethical stance of horizontality in which we sought to promote a space for dialogue and joint effort, instead of positioning ourselves as external observers. We consider that this decision had a positive influence on the development of the workshop, as it facilitated the active participation of the stakeholders and minimized the risk of establishing a hierarchical dynamic.

However, stakeholder engagement posed a great challenge for the team due to geographical and logistical constraints, that is, not having a bridge of access to the target population, nor close contact with stakeholders in their social context. We also believe that the language barrier was a factor that limited the participation of some stakeholders, given that the planned activities had to be conducted in English.

In the first workshop there were 7 participants, two of whom were Portuguese men in their thirties, coming from urban environments in the city of Lisbon, and working in the technology area. We took into account this characterization of the participants for the design of the next activity of the project, which consisted in the construction of scenarios through a roleplay questionnaire, and in which we obtained 8 contributions.

Pre-electoral Participatory Workshop

Co-mapping a Complex System

As part of the trans-disciplinary approach, our research process was heavily based on participatory processes that allow for a broader and diverse perspective. We believe that sharing the process of the design, execution and results of the participatory activities add to the efforts of engrossing the bridges between academic research and society. In this section the details of the first Participatory Workshop designed for VOTA LISBOA are shared.

Activity 1 ·Scrolling the feed·

This first activity of the workshop consisted of showing participants a 6-minute video that collected a series of multimedia content found in the digital media of various political parties and stakeholders, in relation to the March 10th election, and collecting them through the Mentimeter platform to create a wordcloud. These videos were extracted from the parties' official digital platforms on Instagram, Tik-Tok, Facebook and Twitter. For the elaboration of the video, we covered a diversity of political spectrums, actors and social problems.

The participants were asked to put on the platform Mentimeter their very first feelings, thoughts and perspectives that come to their mind while watching that short reel video. The aim of this activity was to set us in the mindset of reflecting about the social media we see regarding elections and to get a brainstorm of thoughts and feelings that allows us to grasp the importance of Social Media influence on our voting decision. The expected result was to recover the "first thoughts" as unfiltered information.

The tool provided for participants to collect their ideas facilitated the creation of a cloud of 50 keywords, which would later be systematized together with the system map.

What words or phrases come to your mind when watching these contents?
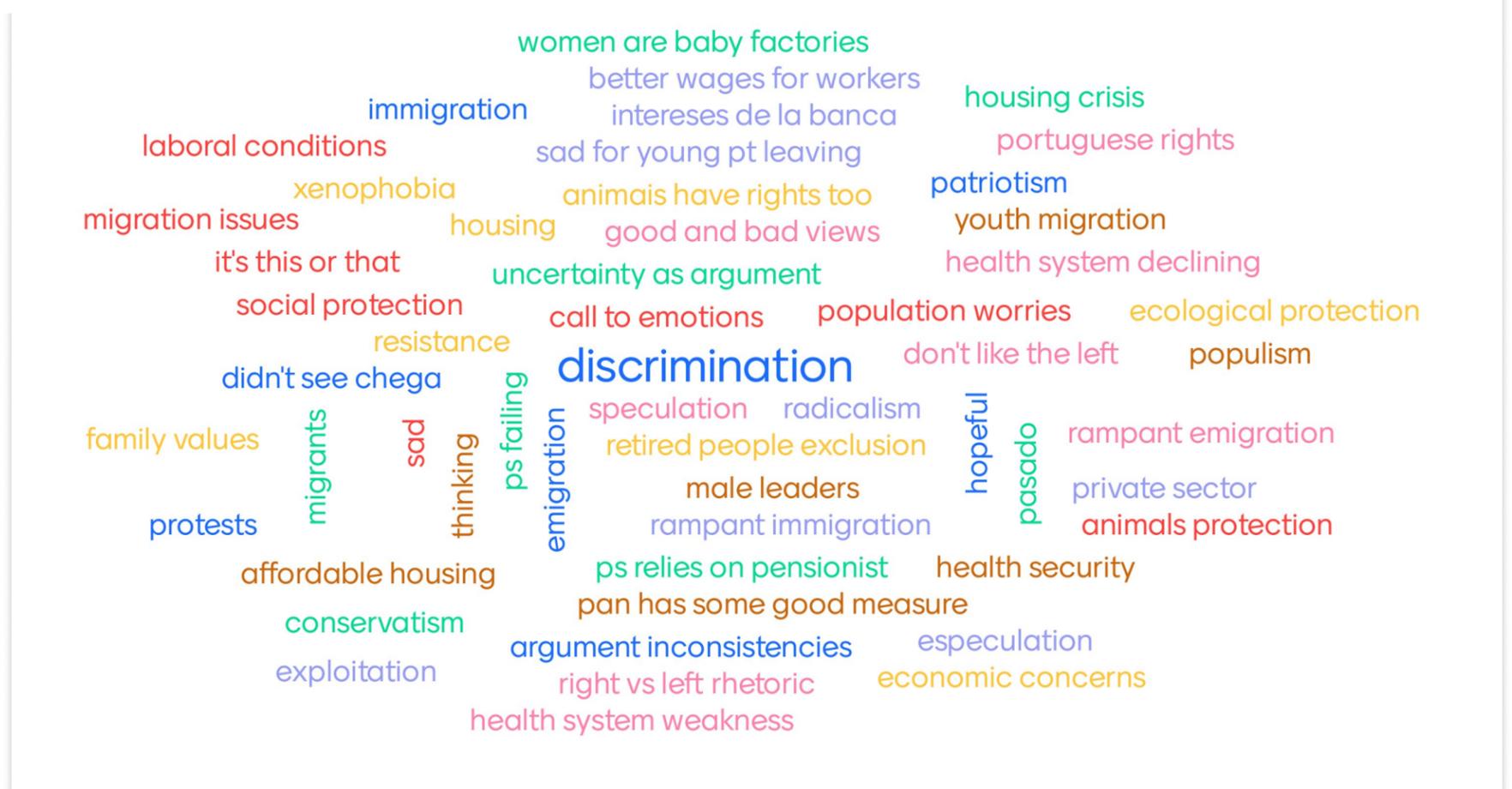56 responses

Figure 2. Wordcloud Source: Result of 1st participatory activity.

To facilitate the collection of words and begin the process of making connections, we created ad-hoc categories, which would serve to order the information and manage the dispersion of ideas that emerged during the first activity.

"Discrimination" was the most prevalent word, but there were others that, without being the same word, pointed to the same problematic; for example: "housing crisis" and "affordable houses".

The following table shows each word placed in qualitative categories.The explanatory potential of this exercise is not the table itself, but the relationship it will have with the results of the following activities, that is, the social and media factors defined by the participants.

Social state policy		Discourse analysis	
Health system	health system weakness	**Polarization**	economic concerns
	health system declining		good and bad views
	health security		ps relies on pensionist
Housing	housing crisis		right vs left rhetoric
	housing		it's this or that
	affordable housing	**Idealization of the past**	sad
Immigration	rampant immigration		pasado
	immigration		population worries
	migration issues		ps failing
Social measures	social protection		call to emotions
	retired people exclusion		didn't see chega
Animal rights	animals have rights too		hopeful
	animals protection	**Expectations for the future**	hopeful
Environment protection	pan has some good measure		resistance
			thinking
		Falacious discourse	argument inconsistencies
	ecological protection		uncertainty as argument
General economy		**Ideology-values**	
Laboral conditions	better wages for workers	**Conservatism**	family values
	laboral conditions		conservatism
Big capital	private sector	**Populism**	portuguese rights
			xenophobia
	economic concerns		populism
	exploitation		patriotism
	speculation	**Social mobilisation**	protests
	intereses de la banca		radicalism
	especulation		
Emigration	emigration		women are baby factories
	sad for young pt leaving		
	youth migration		
	rampant emigration		
	migrants	**Gender roles**	male leaders

Figure 3. Wordcloud categories. Source: Self-developed by TRANSMUTAR Research Group

Activity 2 ·What is it like to vote in Lisboa?·

The second activity of the participatory workshop had as an objective to define the factors that were relevant to the participants throughout the voting decision making process. Based on previously conducted research a set of preliminary variables were chosen and through a process of real-time survey, the participants chose those variables which were more relevant for them in two different moments of the voting decision making process:
1) knowing your voting options and 2) defining your vote.
The results of the surveys are as follows:

1. From the list below, please choose 5 (five) factors you consider the most important to get informed about your voting options: (Opciones múltiples)
*

5/5 (100)% han respondido

Political participation as a citizen	3/5 (60)%
Time-spent on social media	2/5 (40)%
Knowledge of candidates' background	4/5 (80)%
Access to social media	4/5 (80)%
Knowledge of Portuguese political history	3/5 (60)%
Social media publicity	2/5 (40)%
Party-system acknowledgment	3/5 (60)%

1. From the list below, please choose 5 (five) factors you consider the most important to define your vote: (Opciones múltiples)

5/5 (100)% han respondido

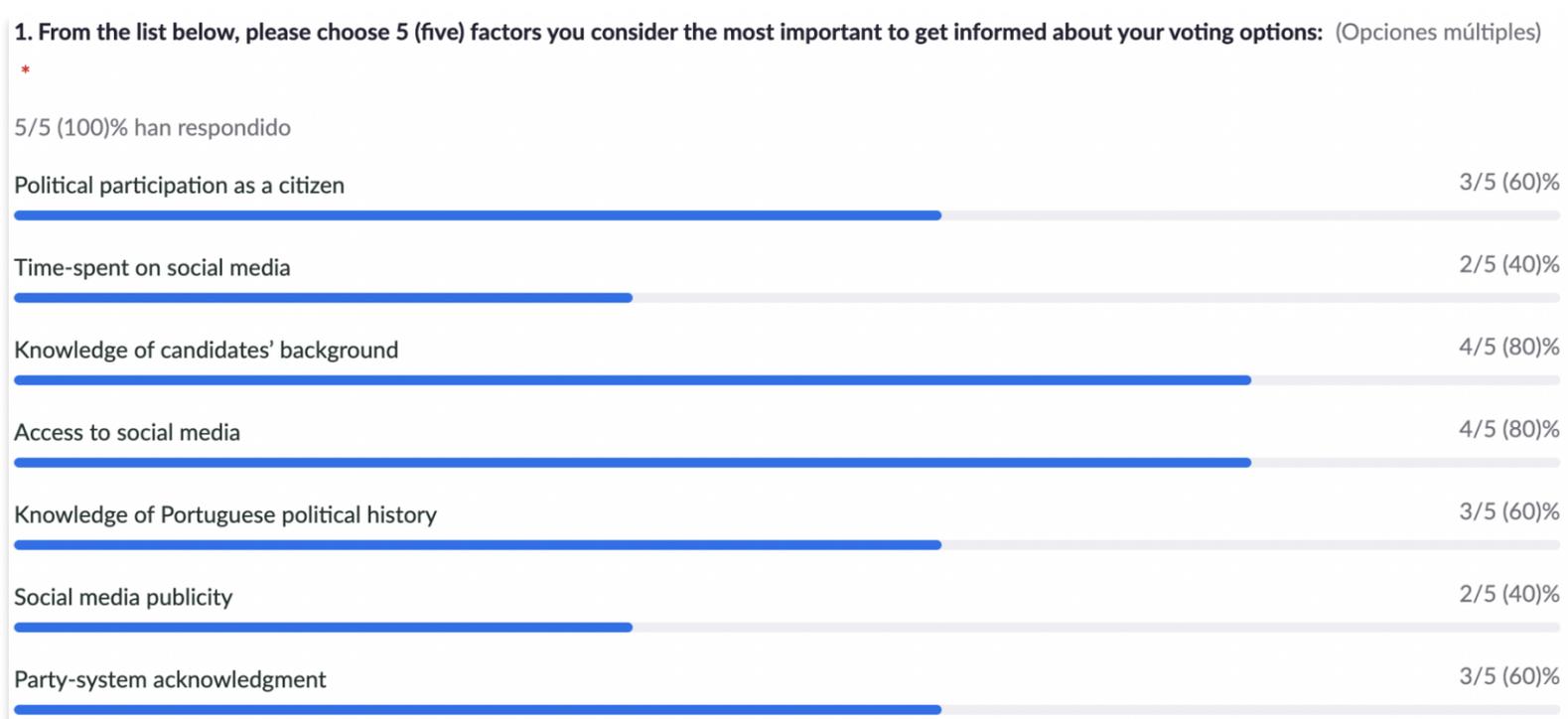|	
Patriotism	1/5 (20)%
Benefits for your community	4/5 (80)%
Sense of belonging to the city of Lisboa	1/5 (20)%
Migrant's rights as part of the political agenda	3/5 (60)%
Portuguese rights as part of the political agenda	3/5 (60)%
Values promoted by the parties	5/5 (100)%
Social groups that sympathise with the parties	1/5 (20)%
Inclusivity of the proposals	4/5 (80)%

Figure 4. Live Survey Results. Source: Result of 2nd Activity of the Participatory Workshop

The chosen factors were then placed into a collaborative online board so that the participants could decide if there were some other factors beyond the preliminary ones that needed to be taken into consideration. This would then become our list of variables for our final co-constructed system map.
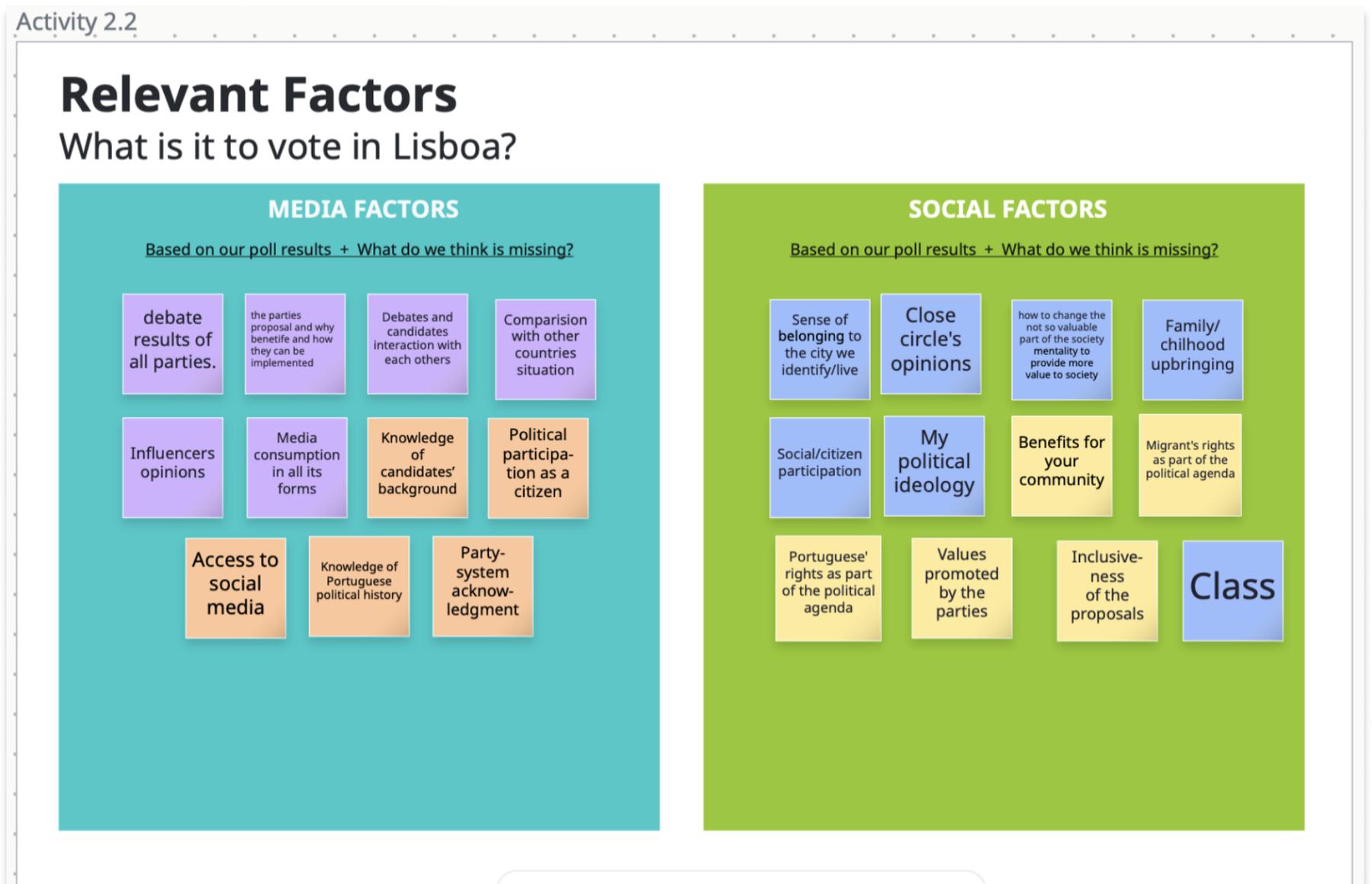

Figure 5. Relevant Factors. Source: Result of 2nd Activity of the Participatory Workshop

Activity 3 ·Connecting the dots·

With the previous factors that the participants chose, we created an interactive board in which participants could connect them, considering their perspective on whether they relate to each other. This short exercise resulted in the participants creating the following initial system map, as a reflection that built on the 1st and 2nd activity.
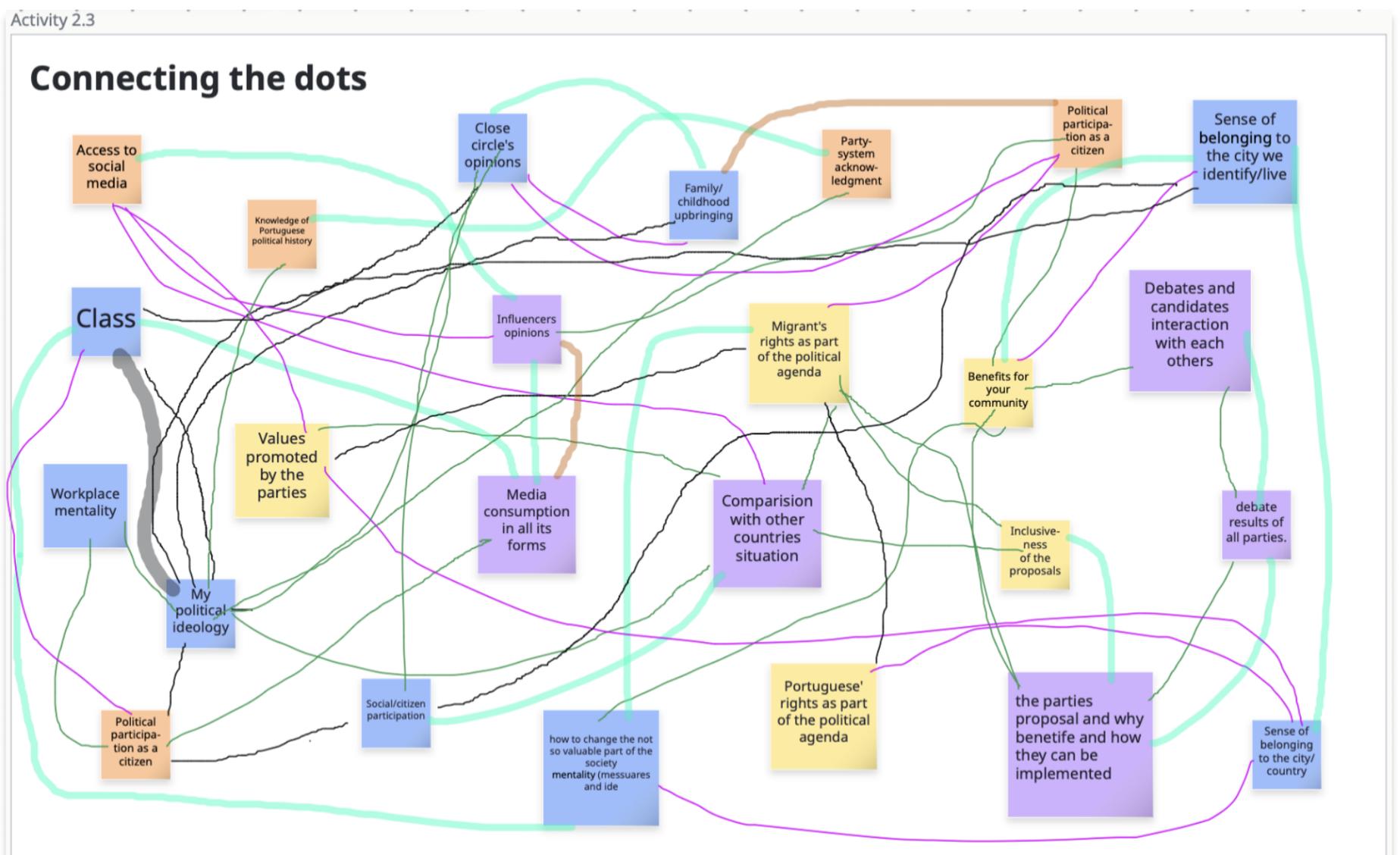

Figure 6. Preliminary System Map. Source: Result of 3rd Activity of the Participatory Workshop

Wrap up ·Us vs Them·

To conclude the participatory workshop, we proposed an instance of reflection for the participants to express themselves on the spot through oral or written comments. The objective was to address the notion of polarization by referring to its intrinsic narrative logic of "Us vs Them" (see glossary).

As a wrap-up, we invited the participants to take up again what had been addressed and constructed through the workshop activities and we shared a question to encourage intervention.

wrap-up!

Can you think of an example of **social media content where information is communicated** in terms of *"Us vs Them"*?

Two strong ideas emerged from the participants' comments. On the one hand, the identification of the polarizing discourse concerning a negative differentiation with respect to the 'other' ('we are not you'), as a pejorative burden and observable in both right-wing and left-wing parties. On the other hand, and still according to the participants, a strong anchoring of the political discourses - regardless of the party- in the responsibilization of the 'other' alluding to past events.

The lack of political parties' proposals and implementation of measures to solve present and future problems was a concern that emerged from this moment of exchange. This also allowed us to connect with the invitation to the activities related to scenarios and orientations that took place after the March 10 elections.

Final System Map

The initial system map resulting from the participatory workshop underwent some steps of refinements, primarily through consolidating factors with synonymous meanings, identical wording, or repetitions into unified variables that capture the overarching significance of the factors. Additionally, certain factors were reformulated to render them quantifiable without altering their meaning and message. Several contributed additional variables during the participatory workshop, ranging from full sentences to questions, were subsequently refined by our team into shortened versions of factors to attain a more quantifiable format. The comparative table of initial factors and refined factors can be seen below.

VARIABLES OF THE 1ST WS RESULTING SYSTEM MAP		FINAL VARIABLES TO 14th MARCH
Debates and candidates interaction with each others		Candidate/party performance in the public debate arena
Migrant's rights as part of the political agenda		Migrant's rights as part of the political agenda
Party-system acknow-ledgment		Party-system acknowledgment (Deleted, the one about portuguese history is enough)
Influencers opinions		Influencers opinions
Knowledge of Portuguese political history		Knowledge of Portuguese political history
Knowledge of candidates' background		Knowledge of candidates' background (DETELED, NO CONNECTIONS)
Media consumption in all its forms		Level of consumption of all type of media
Access to social media		Access to social media
Family/childhood upbringing		Family/childhood upbringing
Values promoted by the parties		Values promoted by the parties
Political participation as a citizen		Political participation as a citizen
Benefits for your community		Benefits for the voter's community.
how to change the not so valuable part of the society mentality to provide more value to society		Presence of value judgements on marginalised sectors of society
Comparison with other countries situation		Comparison with other countries situation
Sense of belonging to the city we identify/live		Citizen's sense of belonging to his/her place of voting
the parties proposals		Awareness of parties' proposals
Class		Social Class
debate results of all parties		Candidate/party performance in the public debate arena
My political ideology		Voter's political ideology
Social/citizen participation		Level of citizens political participation (DELETED, REPEATED SEE NUMBER 11)
Sense of belonging to the city/country		Citizen's sense of belonging to his/her place of voting
Close circle's opinions		Awareness of close circle's opinions
Workplace mentality		Workplace mentality influence
Inclusiveness of the proposals		Inclusiveness of the proposals
Portuguese' rights as part of the political agenda		Portuguese' rights as part of the political agenda

Figure 7. Variables evolution. Source:Self-developed by TRANSMUTAR Research Group

The next phase involved transferring the board of initial system map connections onto KUMU, a visually organized platform. This process incorporated the refined factors identified previously, while maintaining the same connections as during the workshop. The aim of this activity was undertaken to enhance the clarity and comprehension of the participants' connections, rendering them more visually coherent and identifying loops within the system.

Once all the connections were transferred onto new Kumu board, the clustering of factors into four groups as "Role of Media", "Parties Competence", "Subjective Dimensions", "Context Awareness" was undertaken in order to review the connections between factors on the system map defined by certain colors. And most importantly the three hubs as Social Class, Voter's political ideology and Migrants rights as part of the political agenda were defined as factors with a high degree of connections.
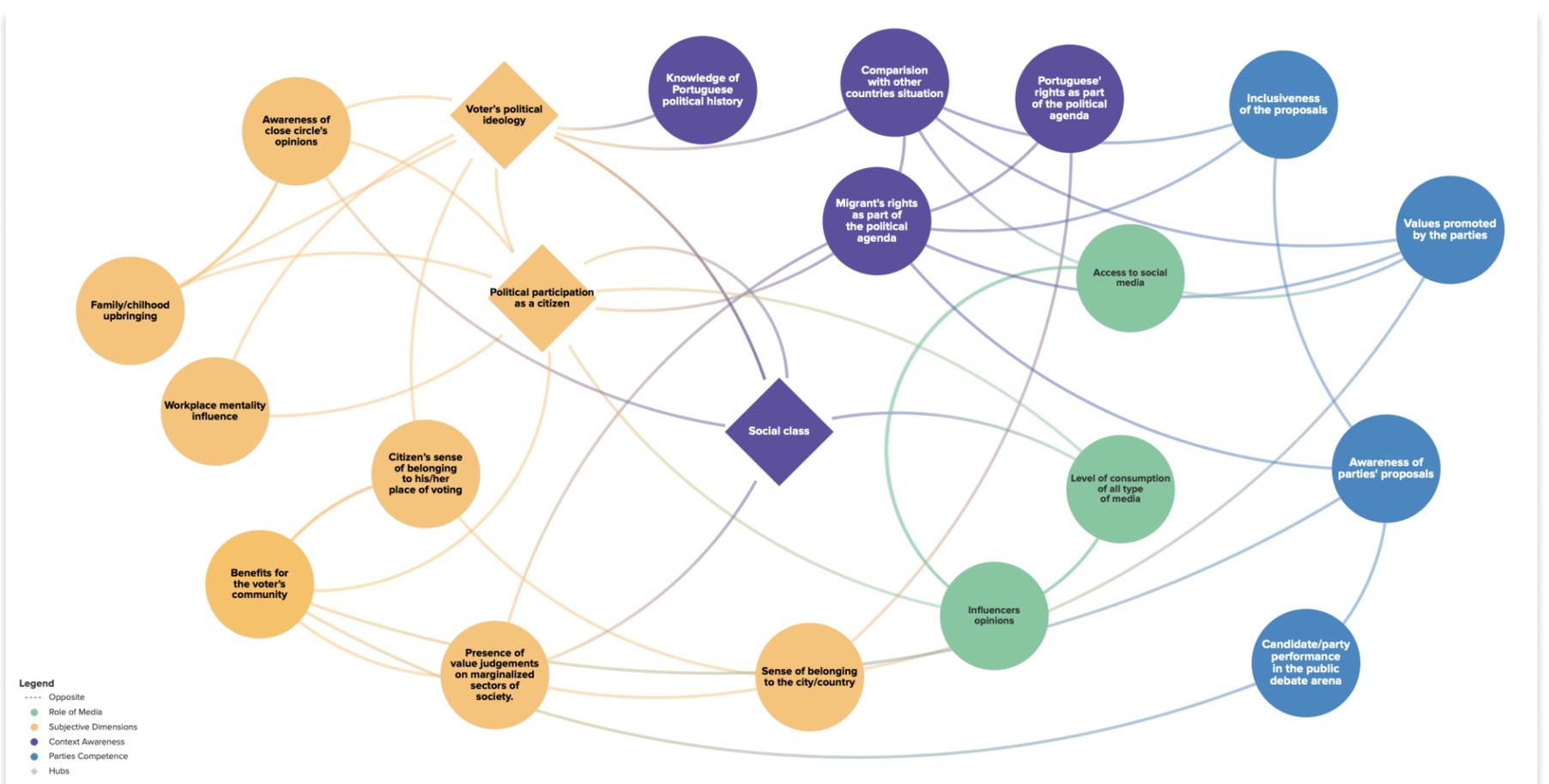

Figure 8. Final System Map. Source:Self-developed by TRANSMUTAR Research Group

Post-electoral Scenarios Activity

Co-building Social Orientations Through Fictional Futures

Following the elections held on March 10th and guided by the outcomes of our system mapping analysis, the concluding phase of the workshop involved a post-electoral future scenarios activity. This was performed through engaging participants in a role-play game activity where they responded to a series of concise future questionnaires. The primary objective of this exercise was to put a light into the perspectives and visions of Portuguese citizens regarding the future trajectory of the country, particularly within the context of three distinct dystopian scenarios which were developed by our team.

Each scenario was developed by taking into account the three hubs of factors from the system map results which had the highest degree of connections such as "Social Class", "Voter's political ideology" and "Migrants rights as part of the political agenda".

Additionally each scenario consisted of two distinct characters, which was also created based on the above mentioned factors, allowing participants to select a character and respond to the questions based on the circumstances. Each character represented a different social background, including the profession, vulnerability and influence.

Each question appealed for a future imaginary process, in which the participants could take decisions by positioning themselves in different social contexts from the perspective of various actors. One of the main objectives of this activity was to allow space for creativity, imagination and vision to go open and broad as possible without limited restraints.

To achieve the diffusion of this activity the team put together a fillout form that is open access and can be shared and played whenever users might want. For the purpose of concluding the current trans-disciplinary exercise we sent the form to 13 participants including the ones who couldn't join the first online participatory workshop.

We look at the result of this gamified activity as a potential incubator for ideas, in which we can observe solution-imagination based concepts that could potentially turn into a socially robust co-design product. So far, we have received 8 responses, which can be access through this link that also holds some preliminary statistics on the answers collected.

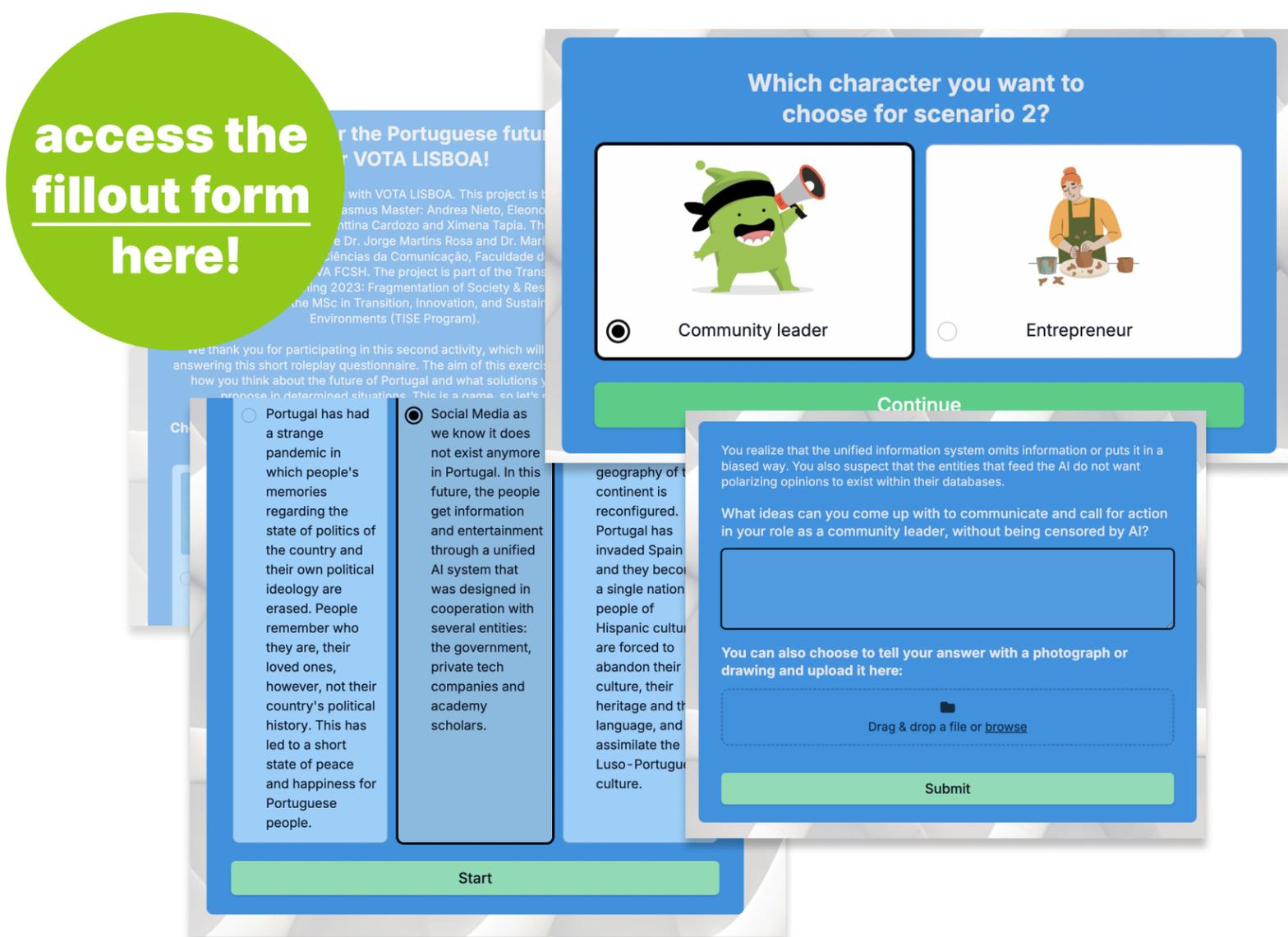*Figure 9. UI design for Scenarios Activity. Source:Self-developed by TRANSMUTAR Research Group*

Reflections and Proposals

General and Final Reflection

We think structured spaces for conversation about topics that may be considered hard to dive in - such as political environments and trends - allow a better understanding and communication within people. Vota Lisboa is a way of making this happen, fostering respect, union and healthy exchange of different understandings of the political world.

Participatory Workshop and Research Reflections

A "left vs right" binary rhetoric and the discourse specifics of the candidates was quite present in the 1st activity, yet it was not translated as an added variable in the map. We wondered, why is this not shown a relevant factor or which is the factor that reflects these aspects of the communication strategy? However, the notion of polarization between parties and political spectrum did come up again during the last activity "Wrap-Up", where the participants had the possibility to intervene by answering the trigger question "Can you think or fan example of social media content where information is communicated in terms of "Us vs Them".

Health care, housing and labor also attracted attention in the first activity, as did polarizing rhetoric, but apparently did not translate into specific factors in making a voting decision, as reflected in the second activity. However, this could be because they may be contained in larger factors chosen by participants such as "Benefits for voters community" and "Inclusiveness of the proposals".

As a preliminary insight, in terms of the results recovered from activity 1 and 2 of the workshop, we can see a stronger connection between immigration aspects and a personal political ideology that includes certain values and perceptions that might reflect a big influence when taking a voting decision.

Proposal

Vota Lisboa: Open access and collaborative Trans-disciplinary research methods

We would like this report to be read as a trans-disciplinary proposal that could be adapted, transformed, and applied iteratively in the Portuguese context and/or in other spaces, and whose result, beyond being the outline of a system map or an academic document, would translate into intelligible and useful knowledge for social agents.

In this sense, it made sense to our team to configure it as a handbook of a minimum viable product (MVP), where the first pilot project serves as a knowledge hub and lessons learned based on the process, pain points and needs derived from this trans-disciplinary workshop activities and participant interactions with the aim for further refinements and readjustments to be collectively performed by other diverse communities and collectives with the aim of sharing into a continuing cycle of knowledge collaboration.

The following MVP handbook comprises detailing journey and steps of the activities, digital tools utilized, and procedures, to guide the actors, both those who actively participated in its construction, as well as other readers. Additionally, we created a toolkit containing the materials used and where the creative processes of the team in the planning and development of the workshop are disclosed.
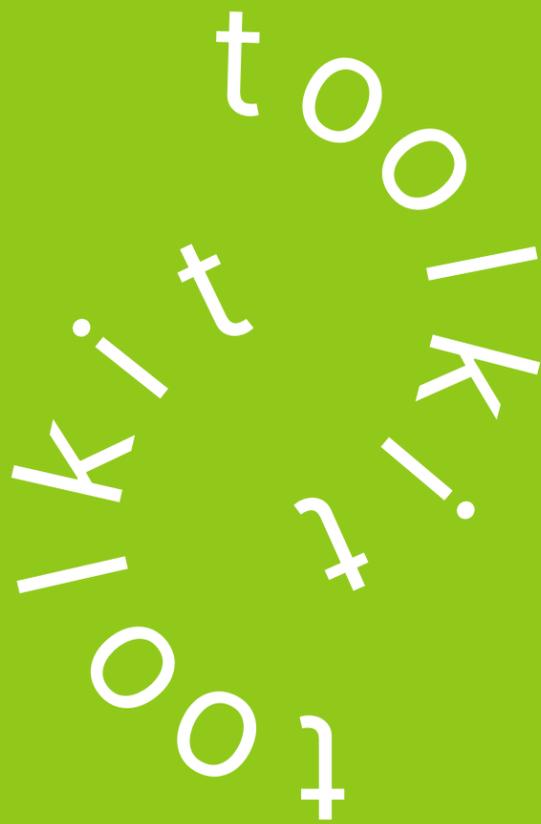
TRANSMUTAR *Research Group through the process of creating VOTA LISBOA developed resources and tools that are meant to be shared, for them to be used as examples or/and templates.*
On this link you can access them.

toolkit

Glossary: Key Concepts

In this section we share the link to a glossary that, without being exhaustive, is an initial proposal of systematization of terms and definitions that facilitate the conceptual foundation when approaching the topics covered by this project. We consider that it is a document in permanent and collaborative elaboration.

In the following paragraphs, we put in relation some of the concepts that are part of the glossary, as a practice of theoretical framing of the showcased research.

Populism is usually seen as a thin ideology that can articulate with other sets of ideas such as nationalism, liberalism, or socialism. Nicole Ernst and team explain that, as an ideology, populism is understood to view "society as ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the good people' versus 'the bad elite' and to posit the ultimate and unrestricted sovereignty of the people" (Ernst et al; 2017; p. 1348). To people, elite, and popular sovereignty as core dimensions of populism, the authors add the populist actor as a key component that "transports" the first three dimensions into the public agenda by using a set of populist communication strategies. These strategies are related to each dimensions, that is, people-centrism (closeness to the people, stress their virtues, praise their achievements, or describe them as a monolithic group); anti-elitism (discredit or blame the elite, detach the elite from the people), and restoring- sovereignty (the populist actor demands popular

sovereignty by advocating for the people's sovereignty, and/ or establish a negative and conflictive approach by denying the elite's sovereignty) (Ernst et al, 2017, p. 1349).

We link these strategies to the broad view on populist communication logic presented in the introduction to the 2017 special issue on populist online communication of the Information, Communication & Society journal. This perspective combines the already mentioned conception of populism as ideology (ideas and focuses) plus the actor factor (messenger), with the conceptions of populism as style (form) and strategy (motives and aims) (Engesser et al., 2017, p. 1280). As a comprehensive approach, it is useful for understanding the synergy between populist communication and what these authors call the online opportunity structure, which we will limit here to the factors inherent to online social network platforms, social network sites or SNS following danah boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007).

Thus, given that SNSs are often presumed to cultivate homophily -or the "tendency of similar individuals to form bonds with each other" (Engesser et al., 2017, p. 1284)- they are configured as the ideal environment for populist actors to find a quick, direct, and unmediated connection with the people they seek. At this point, it is pertinent to turn to the conception of populism as a style. As the aforementioned authors point out, "the list of stylistic features that have been attributed to populism is extensive: dramatization, polarization, moralization, directness, ordinariness, colloquial and vulgar language, etc." (Engesser et al; 2017, p. 1285). We focus on polarization, based on Jennifer McCoy and team (2018). The authors define this concept "as a process whereby the normal multiplicity of differences in a society increasingly align along a single dimension, cross-cutting differences become instead reinforcing, and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of Us versus Them" (McCoy et al., 2018, p. 18).

The above becomes particularly relevant when add-on ideology shapes right-wing populism. Besides the tendency to define the people as a nation, and to attack elites such as the current government or the mass media (Ernst et al; 2017; p. 1348), we argue that the focus on the so-called "others" as a second opponent of the people beyond the elites, is particularly relevant to the communicative strategy of right-wing populism. Drawing on Carsten Reinemann and team (2017), Engesser and co-authors explain that the "others" typically consist of 'ethnic, religious, sexual minorities' and that through exclusion "populist ideology addresses the human inclination towards in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination" (Engesser et al., 2017, p. 1284).

This reinforcement of solidarity among "us" and the exclusion of "others" takes on a performative and even destructive character through hate speech, conceived as "an oppressive act in itself" (Torres da Silva, 2021, p. 16). Understood under the dynamic of the contemporary oppression and privilege model, where all people in society take on one of each of those roles, systemic oppression is based on personal, cultural, and structural variables. Being the propagation of hate speech within the communicative strategy of right-wing populism a reinforcement of the personal level of oppression "that comprises thoughts, attitudes and behaviors among individuals that project negative biases onto subordinate social groups, often based on stereotypes" (Davis, 2018. p. 7) Further on, at the cultural level the polarization resulting from populist stylistic features, reinforces oppression by promoting specific "shared social values and norms with unanimity about what is right and normal" (Davis, 2018. p. 7)

We find that segmentation around those shared values is an expression of social fragmentation, as the state of institutional and interpersonal breakdown that, especially in a context where "polarized views of citizens prevail in cyberspace", translates into a diminished possibility of

"commensuration or communication between individual perceptions" (Jeong & Seol, 2022, p. 103). Perception, broadly conceived at this point as the act of apprehending by means of the senses, takes on a superlative interest when it comes to the influence of the media -specially SNSs for us- on voting citizens (Bos et al.; 2017). Therefore, we argue that addressing people's perceptions on populist actors and populist communication strategies is crucial in the exercise of understanding the polarizing use of SNSs by populism (right-wing in particular), but also for reframing the use of SNSs as an emancipatory possibility for the oppressed in a context of increasing social fragmentation.

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