

The cover features a photograph of a modern, white, multi-story building with a large, white, seated female statue in the foreground. The statue is holding a long, thin object, possibly a scroll or a book. The building has a distinctive architectural style with large windows and a curved facade. The sky is blue with some clouds. The entire cover is framed by a dark red border with a subtle floral pattern.

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User-centric approach:

investigating satisfaction with portuguese justice services

Abordagem centrada no utilizador: investigando a satisfação com os serviços de justiça portuguesa

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Abstract

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the civilizational modifications themselves drove to an increase in the flow of legal actions; however, the courts were not adequately prepared to support this increase, which resulted in an overload of cases and consequently in significant delays. This situation led to a latent dissatisfaction among litigants and seriously undermined the protection of rights. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to analyze the levels of satisfaction among the Portuguese population regarding their justice system. In order to achieve the proposed objective, a quantitative methodology was chosen, specifically employing the use of SPSS AMOS software to apply structural equation modeling techniques. The data used for this statistical analysis were gathered from questionnaires administered between the years 2013 and 2022. The research findings allowed us to conclude that many of the problems identified in the justice system in the 1990s seem to persist to this day. Regarding the public perception of the courts, it can be inferred that the population remains unsatisfied with two main aspects: lack of expediency and lack of access to information. As for ADR mechanisms, users seem to be quite satisfied with their functioning.

Keywords: justice administration; quality in justice; stakeholders satisfaction; performance.

Resumo

No final da década de 1990 e início da década de 2000, as próprias modificações civilizacionais levaram a um aumento no fluxo de ações judiciais; no entanto, os tribunais não estavam adequadamente preparados para suportar este aumento, o que resultou numa sobrecarga de processos e, consequentemente, em atrasos significativos. Esta situação gerou uma insatisfação latente entre os litigantes e prejudicou gravemente a proteção dos direitos. Assim, o principal objectivo deste artigo é analisar os níveis de satisfação da população portuguesa relativamente ao seu sistema de justiça. Para atingir o

objetivo proposto, optou-se por uma metodologia quantitativa, empregando especificamente a utilização do software SPSS AMOS para aplicação de técnicas de modelagem de equações estruturais. Os dados utilizados para esta análise estatística foram recolhidos a partir de questionários aplicados entre os anos de 2013 e 2022. Os resultados da investigação permitiram-nos concluir que muitos dos problemas identificados no sistema de justiça na década de 1990 parecem persistir até hoje. Quanto à percepção pública dos tribunais, pode-se inferir que a população continua insatisfeita com dois aspectos principais: falta de celeridade e falta de acesso à informação. Quanto aos mecanismos de RAL, os utilizadores parecem estar bastante satisfeitos com o seu funcionamento.

Palavras-chave: administração da justiça; qualidade na justiça; satisfação das partes interessadas; desempenho.

1 Introduction

By safeguarding the integrity of institutions and the observance of law, judicial power is a fundamental pillar for the preservation of democracy and democratic values. The judicial power serves as the guardian of legality and justice, and its significance lies in its ability to protect individual and collective rights, promoting equality before the law and the maintenance of civil harmony¹. However, the literature acknowledges that the judiciary has faced challenges that impact its functioning, such as the unsustainable increase in litigation that occurred in the 1990s.² In today's society, we live in an information-driven world fueled by knowledge, giving rise to new demands. We are members of an ambitious society in its claims, which often means we are more difficult to satisfy. This difficulty in satisfaction becomes even more pronounced when it comes to the performance of the governmental sector, given that it is funded by community tax contributions³. Thus, communities expect the governmental sector to provide institutions capable of operating competently and honestly, to meet public needs and contribute to community well-being⁴.

Somewhat in the final years of the 20th century, the transformations that took place globally, at a community and cultural level, resulted in the need to reshape the functioning of justice systems⁵. The community held a negative perception of the judiciary due to its idiosyncrasies, such as excessive red tape and stifling rigidity, which were seen as hindrances to agility in providing legal responses⁶. Various weaknesses were

¹ BLANK, J. L. T.; VAN HEEZIK, A. A. S. Policy reforms and productivity change in the judiciary system: a cost function approach applied to time series of the Dutch judiciary system between 1980 and 2016. *International Transactions in Operational Research*, v. 27, n. 4, p. 2002-2020, 2020. DOI: 10.1111/itor.12716. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/itor.12716>. TROISI, R.; ALFANO, G. Is "justice hurried actually justice buried?" An organizational perspective of the Italian criminal justice. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, v. 36, n. 1, p. 94-109, 2023. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-07-2022-0159>.

² SANTOS, B. S.; MARQUES, M. M. L.; PEDROSO, J. *Os tribunais nas sociedades contemporâneas*. Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra, 1996. Available at: <https://www.ces.uc.pt/publicacoes/oficina/ficheiros/65.pdf>. CATARINO, J. R.; DIAS, M. T. V. C.; CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Reforma de la Justicia en Portugal: la satisfacción de los usuarios de lo Medios RAL. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia*, v. 78, p. 115-138, 2020. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3575/357568455005/html/>.

³ SÁ, P. M.; ROSA, M. J.; SANTINHA, G.; VALENTE, C. Quality assessment of the services delivered by a court, based on the perceptions of users, magistrates, and court officials. *Sustainability*, v. 13, n. 2 (504), 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020504>.

⁴ SÁ, P. M.; ROSA, M. J.; SANTINHA, G.; VALENTE, C. Quality assessment of the services delivered by a court, based on the perceptions of users, magistrates, and court officials. *Sustainability*, v. 13, n. 2 (504), 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020504>.

⁵ LANGBROEK, P.; WESTENBERG, M. *Court administration and quality work in judiciaries in four European countries*. Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 2018. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324943360_Court_Administration_and_Quality_Work_in_Judiciaries_in_Four_European_Countries_Empirical_Exploration_and_Constitutional_Implications.

⁶ LANGBROEK, P.; WESTENBERG, M. *Court administration and quality work in judiciaries in four European countries*. Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 2018. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324943360_Court_Administration_and_Quality_Work_in_Judiciaries_in_Four_European_Countries_Empirical_Exploration_and_Constitutional_Implications.

pointed out in justice systems, such as the inability to timely resolve legal issues for users, resistance to change, and the mishandling of caseloads combined with unsustainable fees⁷. It has been argued that one of the main constraints to the efficient operation of the judicial systems centered, and still centers, on financial domain, particularly on the shortage of funds from public coffers⁸.

It is in this context that supranational organizations emerge with the aim of ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of judicial bodies, such as the International Consortium for Court Excellence (ICCE) (on the international stage) and the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) (in the European context)⁹. These entities operate differently but work towards a similar goal, which is to promote better justice for citizens. CEPEJ conducts research to understand the panorama of justice in the multiple European countries, assesses dysfunctions, and following this diagnosis, provides guidelines and develops instruments to address them and encourage the adoption of the most effective procedures¹⁰. On the other hand, ICCE has created an internationally recognized instrument for judicial quality management, the International Framework of Court Excellence (IFCE). IFCE is based on “seven areas of court excellence”, for which it provides surveys to be answered by the interested countries, aiding them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Of particular relevance to the current study, we emphasize that both organizations recognize the key importance of user satisfaction and the implementation of strategies to measure it.

The primary objective of the present research is to diagnose the satisfaction of Portuguese citizens with dispute resolution mechanisms, namely, courts and alternative dispute resolution means. It's also worth noting that studies focusing on community satisfaction within the judicial context have been quite scarce, which is unjustified given the importance of this topic. Thus, a second objective is to contribute to the expansion of scientific knowledge in the field of administration of justice, an area that has been relatively underexplored, especially concerning the Portuguese regime. Also, this research helps deepen the previous studies¹¹. Having outlined the objectives, let us now present the structure that this article will follow. The first section will delve into the theme of quality and satisfaction, providing both a general perspective and specific context, while also contextualizing dispute resolution mechanisms within the framework of Portuguese legislation. The second section will describe the methodology used. In the third section, we will present and analyze the results. Finally, the fourth section will encapsulate the concluding remarks drawn from this research.

⁷ SANTOS, B. S.; MARQUES, M. M. L.; PEDROSO, J. *Os tribunais nas sociedades contemporâneas*. Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra, 1996. Available at: <https://www.ces.uc.pt/publicacoes/oficina/ficheiros/65.pdf>. LANGBROEK, P.; WESTENBERG, M. *Court administration and quality work in judiciaries in four european countries*. Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 2018. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324943360_Court_Administration_and_Quality_Work_in_Judiciaries_in_Four_European_Countries_Empirical_Exploration_and_Constitutional_Implications. CORREIA, P. M. A. R.; LOPES, J. R. S.; MENDES, I. O. M. A identificação das dimensões da gestão da qualidade na reforma dos tribunais judiciais: o caso dos tribunais portugueses. *Lex Humana*, v. 10, n. 2, p. 60-86, 2018. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7880943>.

⁸ CORREIA, P. M. A. R.; LOPES, J. R. S.; MENDES, I. O. M. A identificação das dimensões da gestão da qualidade na reforma dos tribunais judiciais: o caso dos tribunais portugueses. *Lex Humana*, v. 10, n. 2, p. 60-86, 2018. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7880943>.

⁹ LANGBROEK, P.; WESTENBERG, M. *Court administration and quality work in judiciaries in four european countries*. Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 2018. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324943360_Court_Administration_and_Quality_Work_in_Judiciaries_in_Four_European_Countries_Empirical_Exploration_and_Constitutional_Implications.

¹⁰ LANGBROEK, P.; WESTENBERG, M. *Court administration and quality work in judiciaries in four european countries*. Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 2018. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324943360_Court_Administration_and_Quality_Work_in_Judiciaries_in_Four_European_Countries_Empirical_Exploration_and_Constitutional_Implications.

¹¹ PEREIRA, S. P. M.; CORREIA, P. M. A. Sustainability of portuguese courts: citizen satisfaction and loyalty as key factors. *Sustainability*, v. 12, n. 23, e10163, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122310163>. CATARINO, J. R.; DIAS, M. T. V. C.; CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Reforma de la Justicia en Portugal: la satisfacción de los usuarios de lo Medios RAL. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia*, v. 78, p. 115-138, 2020. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3575/357568455005/html/>.

2 Revision of Literature

2.1 Quality and Satisfaction

The relevance of the quality topic in the context of globalization cannot be overlooked¹². Currently, trade is opened on an international scale, which poses additional challenges for both private and public organizations, pushing them to elevate their performance standards to attract clients and users¹³. However, we cannot assert that the concern of delivering a product recognized as excellent by the customer is a recent one; in fact, it has been considered a fundamental preoccupation since the 1980¹⁴.

Before analyzing the relevance of quality within the justice sector, it is essential to comprehend the concepts of quality and satisfaction. However, it's important to note that the concept of quality is open to more than one interpretation, and its inherent subjectivity makes it difficult to arrive at a singular, universally accepted definition¹⁵.

Despite multiple interpretations, there appears to be a consensus that the perception of quality involves organizational efforts to understand what the user needs and wants¹⁶. Institutions recognized for their quality are those that base their strategic decisions on the desires and aspirations of the customer, relentlessly seeking to enhance their experience¹⁷. This entails maintaining active communication, dedicating time, and valuing customer's opinions. Strategies of this nature enable the creation of an emotional bond with the consumer, who comes to appreciate the organization that demonstrates care and listens to their recommendations. This, in turn, allows greater value extraction from the user and the development of a thriving business¹⁸.

The customer's judgment of "quality" arises from the ability demonstrated by the organization to efficiently carry out the tasks it set out to accomplish¹⁹. In other words, the customer's assessment of the organizational performance is derived from the comparison they make between the value proposition communicated by the organization and the actual performance and excellence exhibited at the moment of execution

¹² PEREIRA, S. P. M.; CORREIA, P. M. A. Sustainability of portuguese courts: citizen satisfaction and loyalty as key factors. *Sustainability*, v. 12, n. 23, e10163, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122310163>. SÁ, P. M.; ROSA, M. J.; SANTINHA, G.; VALENTE, C. Quality assessment of the services delivered by a court, based on the perceptions of users, magistrates, and court officials. *Sustainability*, v. 13, n. 2 (504), 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020504>.

¹³ LAMSAL, B. P.; GUPTA, A. K. Citizen satisfaction with public service: what factors drive? *Policy & Governance Review*, v. 6, n. 1, p. 79-89, 2021.

¹⁴ ZEITHAML, V. A.; BERRY, L. L.; PARASURAMAN, A. Communication and control processes in the delivery of service quality. *Journal of Marketing*, v. 52, n. 2, p. 35-48, 1988. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224298805200203>. BERRY, L. L.; PARASURAMAN, A.; ZEITHAML, V. A. Improving service quality in America: lessons learned. *Academy of Management Executive*, v. 8, p. 2, p. 32-52, 1994.

¹⁵ HARVEY, L.; GREEN, D. Defining quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, v. 18, n. 1, p. 9-34, 1993. HSU, J.; KALE-SNIK, V.; KOSE, E. What is quality? *Financial Analysts Journal*, v. 75, n. 2, p. 44-61, 2019. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015198X.2019.1567194>.

¹⁶ CORREIA, P. M. A. R.; MENDES, I. O. M.; LOPES, L. M. M.; PEREIRA, S. P. M. Fatores potenciadores da atratividade das Instituições de Ensino Superior: um estudo de caso das universidades públicas portuguesas. *Synesis*, v. 11, n. 2, p. 148-176, 2019. Available at: <https://seer.ucp.br/seer/index.php/synesis/article/view/1853>.

¹⁷ HERNON, P.; NITECKI, D. A.; ALTMAN, E. Service quality and customer satisfaction: na assessment and future directions. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, v. 25, n. 1, p. 9-17, 1999. DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333\(99\)80170-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333(99)80170-0). CORREIA, P. M. A. R.; MENDES, I. O. M.; LOPES, L. M. M.; PEREIRA, S. P. M. Fatores potenciadores da atratividade das Instituições de Ensino Superior: um estudo de caso das universidades públicas portuguesas. *Synesis*, v. 11, n. 2, p. 148-176, 2019. Available at: <https://seer.ucp.br/seer/index.php/synesis/article/view/1853>.

¹⁸ CORREIA, P. M. A. R.; MENDES, I. O. M.; LOPES, L. M. M.; PEREIRA, S. P. M. Fatores potenciadores da atratividade das Instituições de Ensino Superior: um estudo de caso das universidades públicas portuguesas. *Synesis*, v. 11, n. 2, p. 148-176, 2019. Available at: <https://seer.ucp.br/seer/index.php/synesis/article/view/1853>.

¹⁹ SOUSA, C. V.; XAVIER, L. M. S.; PEREIRA, J. R.; RESENDE, L. C. B. Qualidade dos serviços ambulatoriais no município de Acaiaca/MG. *Pretexto*, v. 16, n. 4, p. 119-137, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21714/pretexto.v16i4.3357>.

of service, resulting in a judgment regarding the organizational performance, which can be either favorable or unfavorable²⁰.

The pursuit of quality is now one of the most challenging and delicate missions for governmental organizations, as taxpayers expect good services without being open to the possibility of paying more for them. This forces the government into a complex juggling act when it comes to revenue allocation²¹. Consequently, governments have been intensifying their efforts to ensure the Best Value for Money in their services and purchases, implementing measures aimed at stimulating practices focused on continuous improvement. This is done to keep users satisfied, ensure their trust, and build a favorable reputation on both the national and international stage.

Customer satisfaction is another fundamental aspect of organizational success and it's closely related to perceived quality. Satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) is an automatic internal reaction to the consumption experience. Before making a purchase, the consumer discovers the organization and, actively or passively, researches its value propositions. When deciding to make a purchase, the customer interacts with the entity and, through this interaction, determines whether the promises have been fulfilled.²² Satisfaction is the feeling achieved when promises are fulfilled, and one obtains what was desired and expected, while broken promises lead to dissatisfaction. Mangini et al. (2017) argue that the feelings developed as a result of the consumption experience will influence future behaviors. Therefore, these authors suggest that if the customer is pleased with the experience, they will be more inclined to repeat it.

The quality of justice refers to the level of excellence, manifested in the efficiency and effectiveness of judicial services in ensuring the agile, transparent, impartial, fair, and adequate application of the law.²³ The concept of judicial quality encompasses various aspects of the justice system's performance and the experiences of the citizens who interact with it.²⁴ There are multiple indicators proposed in the literature to assess judicial performance, and a compilation of these indicators can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 – Court Performance Indicators

Court Performance Indicators	Font:
I) Number of cases closed per period; II) operating costs; III) number of open cases; IV) time it takes for a process to be concluded; V) service quality and legal and professional quality; VI) capacity of the judicial system to meet the deadlines established for resolving cases.	Maayan (2012)
I) Satisfaction of court users; II) access fees; III) resolution rates; IV) case resolution within deadlines; V) pre-trial custody; VI) integrity of the judicial record; VII) number of pending cases; VIII) certainty of trial date; IX) employee engagement; X) compliance with judicial orders; XI) case costs.	International Consortium for Court Excellence (ICCE) (2016)
I) Number of cases archived; II) number of cases resolved per judge; III) resolution rates; IV) number of pending cases; V) number of pending cases per judge; VI) congestion rate; VII) average case resolution time; IX) cost per case.	Voigt (2016)

²⁰ SOUSA, C. V.; XAVIER, L. M. S.; PEREIRA, J. R.; RESENDE, L. C. B. Qualidade dos serviços ambulatoriais no município de Acaíaca/MG. *Pretexto*, v. 16, n. 4, p. 119-137, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21714/pretexto.v16i4.3357>.

²¹ LAMSAL, B. P.; GUPTA, A. K. Citizen satisfaction with public service: what factors drive? *Policy & Governance Review*, v. 6, n. 1, p. 79-89, 2021.

²² CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Using structural equation modelling and clustering to research users' and employees' views of the portuguese Ministry of Justice. *Sage Research Methods: Business*, p. 1-20, 2023. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529628326>.

²³ SERRANO A. B. Determinants of the quality of justice in Latin America: comparative analysis of the ecuadorian case from a sub-national perspective. *Justice System Journal*, v. 35, n. 1, p. 104-120, 2014. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0098261X.2013.868286>. CLEGHORN, L. L. Victims navigating justice in Island communities: na exploration of victims' experiences of the criminal justice system and quality of justice services provided in Trinidad and Tobago. *Island Studies Journal*, v. 18, p. 1, p. 52-73, 2023.

²⁴ ²⁶ SERRANO A. B. Determinants of the quality of justice in Latin America: comparative analysis of the ecuadorian case from a sub-national perspective. *Justice System Journal*, v. 35, n. 1, p. 104-120, 2014. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0098261X.2013.868286>.

Court Performance Indicators	Font:
I) Judicial independence; II) ethical responsibility; III) efficiency and effectiveness.	Blanke Heezik (2020)

Font: Elaborated by the authors.

As previously discussed, since the 1990s, judicial efficiency and quality have faced significant challenges on the international stage, due to various factors, with a prominent focus on the lack of expediency and the financial burdens that those involved must bear.²⁵ Consequently, governments have found it necessary to implement reforms, allocate investments, and consistently commit to improving the judicial system.²⁶ These reforms were inspired by the principles of New Public Management, which promoted the ideology that public service should be administered utilizing management procedures typical of private enterprises and with a central focus on the actual needs of citizens.²⁷ However, we can easily grasp the intricacy of upholding quality within the judicial system. It requires not only that the judgements delivered by judges (which must be just) are grounded in specific circumstances and aligned with legal principles²⁸, but it is also crucial to have an administrative body that formulates strategies to enhance the system's efficiency, it is essential to establish an image of integrity and operate based on suitable values, value public opinion, maintain appropriate resource allocation, among other aspects (ICCE; CEPEJ).

“Citizen satisfaction is the ultimate goal of the government with public service [...]”²⁹, therefore, citizen satisfaction is a crucial criterion for assessing the government's performance in its role as a service provider.

Given the general concept of satisfaction, we can infer that user satisfaction with the courts pertains to the degree of contentment or discontent experienced by individuals who interact with them, be they parties involved in the process, witnesses, lawyers, experts, and/or staff. User satisfaction can be influenced by range of factors, such as the clarity of procedural guidelines, the interactions and communication with court personnel and judges, the expeditiousness of case resolution, the availability of pertinent information and resources, and other aspects.³⁰ However, due to the multitude of stakeholders served by the courts, meeting their collective expectations can be an exceedingly complex endeavor.³¹

²⁵ BLANK, J. L. T.; VAN HEEZIK, A. A. S. Policy reforms and productivity change in the judiciary system: a cost function approach applied to time series of the Dutch judiciary system between 1980 and 2016. *International Transactions in Operational Research*, v. 27, n. 4, p. 2002-2020, 2020. DOI: 10.1111/itor.12716. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/itor.12716>. CATARINO, J. R.; DIAS, M. T. V. C.; CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Reforma de la Justicia en Portugal: la satisfacción de los usuarios de lo Medios RAL. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia*, v. 78, p. 115-138, 2020. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3575/357568455005/html/>. YEUNG, T. Y.; OVÀDEK, M.; LAMPACH, N. Time efficiency as a mesure of court performance: evidence from the court of justice os the European Union. *European Journal of Law and Economics*, v. 53, n. 2, p. 209-234, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10657-021-09722-5>.

²⁶ CATARINO, J. R.; DIAS, M. T. V. C.; CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Reforma de la Justicia en Portugal: la satisfacción de los usuarios de lo Medios RAL. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia*, v. 78, p. 115-138, 2020. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3575/357568455005/html/>.

²⁷ INGRAMS, A.; PIOTROWSKI, S.; BERLINER, D. Learning from our mistakes: public management reform and the hope of open government. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, v. 3, n. 4, p. 257-272, 2020. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ppmgov/gvaa001>. PEREIRA, S. P. M.; CORREIA, P. M. A. Sustainability of portuguese courts: citizen satisfaction and loyalty as key factors. *Sustainability*, v. 12, n. 23, e10163, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122310163>.

²⁸ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *The 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard*. 2019. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-05/justice_scoreboard_2019_en.pdf

²⁹ LAMSAL, B. P.; GUPTA, A. K. Citizen satisfaction with public service: what factors drive? *Policy & Governance Review*, v. 6, n. 1, p. 79-89, 2021.

³⁰ MOORHEAD, R.; SEFTON, M.; CARDIFF, L. S. Just satisfaction? What drives public and participant satisfaction with courts and tribunals: a review of recente evidence. *Ministry of Justice Research Series*, v. 5, n. 8, 2007.

³¹ SÁ, P. M.; ROSA, M. J.; SANTINHA, G.; VALENTE, C. Quality assessment of the services delivered by a court, based on the perceptions of users, magistrates, and court officials. *Sustainability*, v. 13, n. 2 (504), 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020504>.

2.2 Dispute Resolution Means in Portugal

Article 20(1) of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (CRP) establishes access to justice as a fundamental right, guaranteeing that all citizens have the right to seek and receive legal protection.

When it comes to dispute resolution mechanisms, we should begin by citing the content of Article 202(1) of the Portuguese constitutional text, which states that “[...] the courts are the sovereign bodies competent to administer justice on behalf of the people”. However, in accordance with Article 202(4), “the law may establish instruments and forms of non-judicial conflict resolution”. Thus, we can comprehend that courts traditionally bear the responsibility for settling disputes between individuals, companies, organizations, or even the State itself. However, there are alternatives to the courts, the so-called Alternative Dispute Resolution means (ADR), that adopt different approaches and processes to resolve a dispute among two or more parties, without resorting to traditional judicial trials. These alternatives tend to be less formal than judicial processes, and they also have the advantage of being more agile and accessible, often allowing the parties involved to seek a mutually satisfactory solution.³²

The ADR emerged due to the incapacity and impracticability of the courts to address the disproportionately increased litigation.³³ In other words, ADR methods emerged as centers where many of the less significant cases overwhelming the courts could be channeled.³⁴

The term “alternative” already implies that there is no obligation forcing the public to resort to these methods, as this possibility depends on the decision of the conflicting parties.³⁵ According to the European Commission, “[...] alternative dispute resolution means resolving a complaint outside the courts with the assistance of an impartial body for dispute resolution, where dispute resolution is easier, quicker, and cheaper”. Its speed and lower associated costs should serve as strong attractiveness factors, capturing the attention of the citizens.

In Portugal, the mechanisms for ADR include arbitration, peace courts (“*juílgados de paz*”), and mediation, which operate as described in Table 2.

Table 2 – Alternative Dispute Resolution Means

Mechanisms	Functioning
Voluntary Arbitration ³⁶	In voluntary arbitration, the parties, through an agreement referred to as arbitration agreement, submit the resolution of their dispute to arbitrators who, while being independent, impartial, and specially qualified individuals, are not judges.
Mediation	In a mediation process, the parties in dispute are responsible for the decisions they construct with the assistance of the mediator. The mediator does not impose any judgment or sentence; they simply guide the parties.

³² CATARINO, J. R.; DIAS, M. T. V. C.; CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Reforma de la Justicia en Portugal: la satisfacción de los usuarios de lo Medios RAL. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia*, v. 78, p. 115-138, 2020. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3575/357568455005/html/>.

³³ CATARINO, J. R.; DIAS, M. T. V. C.; CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Reforma de la Justicia en Portugal: la satisfacción de los usuarios de lo Medios RAL. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia*, v. 78, p. 115-138, 2020. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3575/357568455005/html/>.

³⁴ FRADE, C. A resolução alternativa de litígios e o acesso à justiça: a mediação do sobreendividamento. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, v. 65, p. 107-128, 2003. Available at: <https://www.ces.uc.pt/publicacoes/rccs/artigos/65/RCCS65-107-128-Catarina%20Frade.pdf>.

³⁵ MESQUITA, L. V.; CEBOLA, C. M. Impacto socioeconómico da resolução extrajudicial de conflitos: o caso de estudo português. *Revista Direito GV*, v. 16, n. 3, p. 1-27, 2020. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2317-6172201971>.

³⁶ The Portuguese legal system also provides for mandatory arbitration as stipulated in Article 1 of the Voluntary Arbitration Law when the existing legislation so determines.

Mechanisms	Functioning
Peace Courts (“Julgados de Paz”)	The peace courts (“julgados de paz”) have the competence to assess and decide declaratory civil actions, except for those involving family law, succession law, and labor law matters, of reduced value. Peace courts (“julgados de paz”) are tribunals endowed with unique characteristics of operation and organization.

Font: DGPJ³⁷.

3 Methodology

To accomplish the objectives of the present research, a quantitative methodological approach was employed, for which secondary data provided by the Directorate-General for Policy of Justice (DGPJ) was utilized.

Annually, the DGPJ makes efforts to provide questionnaires regarding user satisfaction with various aspects of the functioning of the courts and alternative dispute resolution methods. This has been an ongoing initiative since 2013. Now, the responses to these surveys between the years 2013 and 2022 were made available for research purposes and were explored using statistical modelling techniques. The operationalized model follows the inspiration from previous works.³⁸

The questionnaires used are referred to as the “Courts Quality Barometer”, “Arbitration Centers Quality Barometer”, “Peace Courts Quality Barometer”, and “Mediation Quality Barometer”³⁹. These represent an adaptation considering the “Handbook for conducting satisfaction surveys aimed at court users in Council of Europe member states”. It’s worth noting that for each of the questions in the survey, users were expected to provide their opinion on a 10-point Likert scale (DGPJ, 2013a; DGPJ, 2013b; DGPJ, 2014; DGPJ, 2015; DGPJ, 2016; DGPJ, 2017a; DGPJ, 2017b; DGPJ, 2018a; DGPJ, 2018b; DGPJ, 2019a; DGPJ, 2019b; DGPJ, 2020a; DGPJ, 2020b; DGPJ, 2021a; DGPJ, 2021b; DGPJ, 2022a; DGPJ, 2022b). Collecting data through questionnaires allows us to gather a larger number of opinions in a short period. Additionally, as the questionnaires can be distributed and answered online it becomes easier to reach various corners of the national territory. Furthermore, it’s important to mention that the anonymity of the questionnaires administrated by the DGPJ instills a sense of security and greater freedom for respondents to express their true opinions.

It’s important to note that the “Courts Quality Barometer” consists of twenty-four response items⁴⁰, representative of “seven dimensions: 1) General aspects of the courts; 2) Access to information about the courts; 3) Facilities of the courts; 4) Functioning of the courts; 5) Judge responsible for the case; 6) Resources available; and 7) Loyalty” (DGPJ, 2013a; DGPJ, 2017a; DGPJ, 2018a; DGPJ, 2019a; DGPJ, 2020a; DGPJ, 2021a; DGPJ, 2022a).

The “Arbitration Centers Quality Barometer”, “Peace Courts Quality Barometer”, and “Mediation Quality Barometer” are, also, composed of twenty-four response items⁴¹, representative of “seven dimensions: 1) General aspects of ADR mechanisms; 2) Access to information about ADR mechanisms; 3) Facilities

³⁷ Direção-Geral da Política da Justiça (DGJP), which translates to General Directorate of Justice Policy, however during the article we will always use the abbreviation DGPJ.

³⁸ CATARINO, J. R.; DIAS, M. T. V. C.; CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Reforma de la Justicia en Portugal: la satisfacción de los usuarios de lo Medios RAL. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia*, v. 78, p. 115-138, 2020. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3575/357568455005/html/>. PEREIRA, S. P. M.; CORREIA, P. M. A. Sustainability of portuguese courts: citizen satisfaction and loyalty as key factors. *Sustainability*, v. 12, n. 23, e10163, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122310163>. CORREIA, P. M. A. R. Using structural equation modelling and clustering to research users’ and employees’ views of the portuguese Ministry of Justice. *Sage Research Methods: Business*, p. 1-20, 2023. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529628326>.

³⁹ These questionnaires are available for consultation in Annex I and II of this research.

⁴⁰ Questions relating to sociodemographic indications are not considered here.

⁴¹ Questions relating to sociodemographic indications are not considered here.

of the ADR mechanisms; 4) Functioning of the ADR mechanisms; 5) Responsible for the process in ADR mechanisms; 6) Resources available in ADR mechanisms; 7) Loyalty” (DGPJ, 2013b; DGPJ, 2014; DGPJ, 2015; DGPJ, 2016; DGPJ, 2017b; DGPJ, 2018b; DGPJ, 2019b; DGPJ, 2020b; DGPJ, 2021b; DGPJ, 2022b).

To provide a better comprehensibility of the research, it was decided to decompose the statistical modeling analysis into two studies: 1) the first study will encompass the analysis of the user satisfaction regarding the courts; 2) the second study will encompass the analysis of user satisfaction concerning alternative dispute resolution methods.

3.1 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

“SEM is a multivariate technique that considers and estimates the linear and/or causal relationships between multiple exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) constructs through a simultaneous, multiple equation estimation process”.⁴² For several decades, this technique has been applied in the service of scientific research across various branches of knowledge, ranging from biology to the humanities⁴³. In these fields, there is a proliferation of experiments that rely on path modelling to assess the suitability and reliability in the real-world context of the assumptions under study.⁴⁴ The significant advantage gained from employing SEM is based on its capacity to gauge the extent of the impact of identifiable phenomena, to which a numerical value can be assigned, on an “unobservable variable, also known as a non-directly measurable or latent variable”.⁴⁵

When we talk about SEM, we are referring to a dual framework, specifically the “structural model and the measurement model”⁴⁶. The “measurement model” pertains to how the questions included in a survey form the “latent” dimension.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the “structural model” concerns the dependence and impact to be tested among the variables.⁴⁸

⁴² BABIN, B. J.; SVENSSON, G. Structural equation modeling in social science research: issues of validity and reliability in the research process. *European Business Review*, v. 24, n. 4, p. 320-330, 2012. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09555341211242132>. p. 321.

⁴³ BABIN, B. J.; SVENSSON, G. Structural equation modeling in social science research: issues of validity and reliability in the research process. *European Business Review*, v. 24, n. 4, p. 320-330, 2012. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09555341211242132>.

⁴⁴ BABIN, B. J.; SVENSSON, G. Structural equation modeling in social science research: issues of validity and reliability in the research process. *European Business Review*, v. 24, n. 4, p. 320-330, 2012. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09555341211242132>.

⁴⁵ CAMPANA, A. N.; TAVARES, M. C.; SILVA, D. Modelagem de equações estruturais: apresentação de uma abordagem estatística multivariada para pesquisas em educação física. *Motricidade*, v. 5, n. 4, p. 59-80, 2009. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=273020564006>. p. 61. AMORIM, L. D. A. F.; FIACCONE, R. L.; SANTOS, C. A. S. T.; MORAES, L. T. L. P.; OLIVEIRA, N. F.; OLIVEIRA, S. B.; SANTOS, T. N. L. *Modelagem com equações estruturais: princípios básicos e aplicações*. Salvador: FAPESB, 2012. Available at: https://repositorio.ufba.br/bitstream/ri/17684/1/ebook_SEM_2012.pdf. p. 5.

⁴⁶ CAMPANA, A. N.; TAVARES, M. C.; SILVA, D. Modelagem de equações estruturais: apresentação de uma abordagem estatística multivariada para pesquisas em educação física. *Motricidade*, v. 5, n. 4, p. 59-80, 2009. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=273020564006>. p. 62.

⁴⁷ CAMPANA, A. N.; TAVARES, M. C.; SILVA, D. Modelagem de equações estruturais: apresentação de uma abordagem estatística multivariada para pesquisas em educação física. *Motricidade*, v. 5, n. 4, p. 59-80, 2009. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=273020564006>. p. 62.

⁴⁸ CAMPANA, A. N.; TAVARES, M. C.; SILVA, D. Modelagem de equações estruturais: apresentação de uma abordagem estatística multivariada para pesquisas em educação física. *Motricidade*, v. 5, n. 4, p. 59-80, 2009. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=273020564006>. p. 62.

4 Study 1

4.1 Sample characterization

Regarding the quality of the courts, data related to 8702 responses was provided for research purposes, of which 3340 contained missing values. Therefore, with the application of the listwise deletion method, we were left with a sample of 5362 observations to analyze. Out of this sample, 2944 responses (55%) are from female respondents and 2418 responses (45%) are from male respondents, with an average age of 39 years old. Of these 5362 observations: 653 are from the year 2017; 1193 are from the year 2018; 1439 are from the year 2019; 982 are from the year 2020; 53 are from the year 2021, and 1051 are from the year 2022.

Table 3 – Sociodemographic characterization (Study 1)

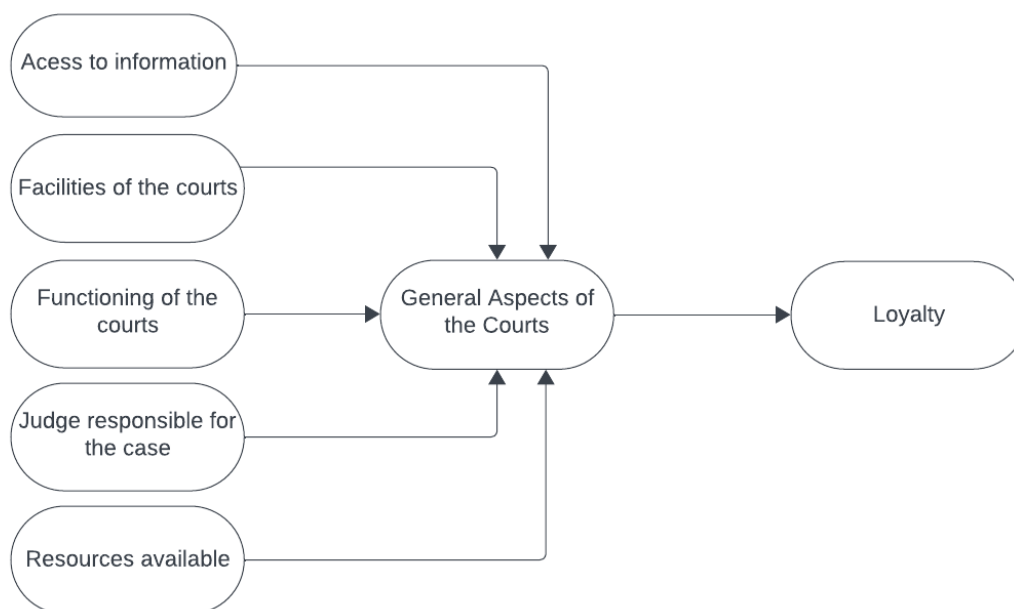
	Sociodemographicvariables	n	%
Gender	Feminine	2944	54,90
	Masculine	2418	45,09
LevelofEducation	Up to 9 years of completed schooling	715	13,33
	10,11 ou 12 years of completed schooling	2245	41,87
	Bacharel	1871	34,89
	Master'sDegree	446	8,32
	Doctorate	85	1,59
Age	Up to 20 yearsold	585	10,91
	From 21 to 25 yearsold	571	10,65
	From 26 to 30 yearsold	426	7,94
	From 31 to 35 yearsold	483	7,01
	From 36 to 40 yearsold	707	13,19
	From 41 to 45 yearsold	764	14,25
	From 45 to 50 yearsold	719	13,41
	From 51 to 60 yearsold	470	8,77
	From 61 to 65 yearsold	336	6,27
Over 65 yearsold	301	5,61	

Font: Elaborated by the authors.

4.2 Results

The analysis, structuring, and calculation of the structural equation model were carried out using the SPSS AMOS software (Version 28.0).

Figure 1 – User satisfaction model for courts



Font: Elaborated by the authors.

Table 3 – Adjustment indexes of the court user satisfaction model

Adjustment indexes	Values
Chi-Square	33233,320
QualityofFit Index	0,615
ComparativeFit Index	0,777
Tuker-Lewis Index	0,750

Font: Output SPSS AMOS.

According to Table 3, we can infer that the model presented and operationalized demonstrates an acceptable plausibility, falling within the values considered reasonable in the literature.⁴⁹

Table 4 - Results of the Estimation Model (Study 1)

Pathsofthemodel	StandardizedCoefficients	S.E.	C.R.	PLabel
Facilities of the Courts→ General aspects of the courts	0,076	0,006	7,369	***
Access to Information→ General aspects of the courts	0,672	0,008	48,619	***
Judge responsible for the case→ General aspects of the courts	0,256	0,007	23,551	***

⁴⁹ As indicated by authors such as CORREIA, P. M. A. R. *O impacto do sistema integrado de gestão e avaliação do desempenho da administração pública (SLADAP) na satisfação dos colaboradores: o caso dos serviços do ministério da justiça em Portugal*. 2012. Tese (Doutorado) – Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, 2012. and CAMPANA, A. N.; TAVARES, M. C.; SILVA, D. Modelagem de equações estruturais: apresentação de uma abordagem estatística multivariada para pesquisas em educação física. *Motricidade*, v. 5, n. 4, p. 59-80, 2009. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=273020564006>.

<i>Pathsofthemodel</i>	<i>StandardizedCoefficients</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R.</i>	<i>PLabel</i>
Functioning of the Courts → General aspects of the courts	0,393	0,007	34,311	***
Resources available → General aspects of the courts	0,251	0,005	24,198	***
Aspetos gerais dos tribunais → Loyalty	0,655	0,028	39,705	***

Fonte: Output SPSS AMOS.

The data in Table 4 allows us to draw several conclusions, which we will explain. The obtained p-values (p-value < 0.01) allows us to conclude that all the analyzed relationships proved to be statistically significant. The standardized coefficients obtained enable us to conclude that:

- The dimension “Facilities of the Courts” had a small positive impact (0.076) on user satisfaction with “General aspects of the courts”.
- The dimension “Access to information” had a strong positive impact (0.672) on user satisfaction with “General aspects of the courts”.
- The dimension “Judge responsible for the case” had a moderate positive impact (0.256) on user satisfaction with “General aspects of the courts”.
- The dimension “Functioning of the courts” had a moderately strong positive impact (0.393) on user satisfaction with “General aspects of the courts”.
- The dimension “Resources available” had a moderate positive impact (0.251) on usersatisfaction with “General aspects of the courts”.
- Finally, the dimension “General aspects of the courts” showed a strong positive impact (0.655) on “Loyalty”.

These weights provide us with an understanding of the extent to which the independent variables influence the dependent variable. Therefore, the variables that have the greatest influence on user satisfaction with “General aspects of the courts” are the dimensions “Access to information” and the “Functioning of the courts”, while the dimension “Facilities of the courts” appears to have a less significant impact.

Therefore, it seems logical that if access to information is the area that has shown the most significant impact on user satisfaction with the courts, and the average of this dimension has been negative (Table 6), it would be relevant to invest in this aspect.

Regarding the construct “Functioning of the courts”, it also demonstrates a strong and statistically significant impact on citizens’ overall perception of the courts. In this regard, the questions that have been shown to cause dissatisfaction are the clarity of information, the time elapsed between the request and the first session, and punctuality in starting sessions (Table 6). On the other hand, those that have been found to satisfy citizens are the availability of service and the competence of court personnel.

Table 5 – Indirect effects of the User Satisfaction Model (Study 1)

<i>IndirectEffects</i>	<i>Functioningof-the courts</i>	<i>Judge responsbi- le for the case</i>	<i>Facilitiesofthe courts</i>	<i>Resourcesavai- lable</i>	<i>Acces to infor- mation</i>
Loyalty	0,248	0,175	0,047	0,146	0,407

Font: Outputs SPSS AMOS.

The analysis conducted also allowed us to assess the indirect effects of the dimensions “Court facilities”, “Access to information”, “Functioning of the courts”, “Judge responsible for the case”, and “Available resources” on user loyalty (Table 5). Thus, it was possible to determine that the dimension “Functioning of the courts” shows an indirect effect on loyalty of 0.248, which means that an increase of one point in user satisfaction with the functioning of the courts will have a positive influence of 0.248 points on loyalty. Similarly, an increase of one point in user satisfaction with the dimension “Judge responsible for the case” results in a positive increase of 0.175 points in loyalty. It is also worth noting that the dimension that showed the most pronounced indirect impact on loyalty was the dimension “Access to information”. This is easily understandable when we know that users are more inclined to trust an institution when this one is transparent and open, providing all necessary information through various credible channels. This way, it is straightforward to understand that if there is an improvement in public perception regarding access to information, this will result in a significant increase in user loyalty. In statistical terms, an increase of one point in user satisfaction with access to information will lead to a positive increase of 0.407 points in loyalty.

On the other hand, the dimension that reveals a less significant indirect effect on loyalty is the one related to court facilities, which means that improvements in facilities would positively impact loyalty, but this impact would be quite limited. In other words, while not neglecting the importance of maintaining comfortable facilities for users, if the goal is to increase loyalty levels, it may be more relevant to invest in other areas. However, the installations should not be underestimated as an important component in creating a positive experience for citizens.

Table 6 – Descriptive statistics by dimension (Study 1)

Dimension	Question	Mean	Meanbydimension
General aspects of the courts	Q5	4,65	4,34
	Q6	3,88	
	Q7	4,52	
	Q8	4,32	
Access to information	Q9	4,77	4,64
	Q10	4,51	
Facilitiesofthe courts	Q11	5,62	5,25
	Q12	5,55	
	Q13	4,77	
	Q14	5,06	
Functioningofthe courts	Q15	4,73	4,77
	Q16	4,06	
	Q17	4,68	
	Q18	5,02	
	Q19	5,34	
Judge responsible for the case	Q20	5,44	5,41
	Q21	5,43	
	Q22	5,67	
	Q23	5,58	
	Q24	5,57	
	Q25	4,74	
Resourcesavailable	Q26	4,66	4,66
Loyalty	Q27	5,49	5,32
	Q28	5,15	

Font: Elaborated by the authors.

Recalling that a 10-point Likert scale was adopted in the questionnaires, the means from 0 to 4 represent negative ratings (and consequently dissatisfied citizens), and the averages from 5 to 10 reflect positive ratings (and consequently satisfied citizens). Table 6 reveals that citizens are dissatisfied with four out of the seven dimensions considered, as the dimensions “General aspects of the courts”, “Access to information”, “Functioning of the courts”, and “Resources available” obtained average values below 5.

It is possible to verify that some of the factors that stood out negatively in this study were those related to the agility and speed in the resolution of cases, namely, “promptness” (Q6) and the “time elapsed between the request and the first session” (Q16). Another area that was unfavorably highlighted is the one related to the public comprehensibility of the data available about conflicts (Q10 and Q15). There was also a negative emphasis on popular skepticism regarding the justice system, indicating that the Portuguese citizens do not have confidence in it (Q8). On a positive note, the most favorable dimension relates to the behavior and actions of the judges, with the average score for the perception of their impartiality (Q22) standing out.

5 Study 2

5.1 Sample characterization

To assess the recognized quality of the performance of ADR mechanisms, different data was used, including those resulting from the application of the questionnaires “Arbitration Centers Quality Barometer”, “Peace Courts Quality Barometer”, and “Mediation Quality Barometer”, for the years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

As such, we must proceed with the sociodemographic characterization of the sample in Study 2 (Table 7). It should be noted that, similarly to the procedure adopted in Study1, the listwise deletion method was applied, and out of the 6 050 responses provided, those containing questions with missing values were eliminated, resulting in a final sample composed of 5188 valid responses. Of the 5188 valid responses, 2150 (41%) are from female respondents, and 3038 (59%) are from male respondents. A total of 268 responses were collected in 2013, 687 in 2014, 848 in 2015, 812 in 2016, 336 in 2017, 585 in 2018, 590 in 2018, 590 in 2019, 492 in 2020, 257 in 2021, and 313 in 2022.

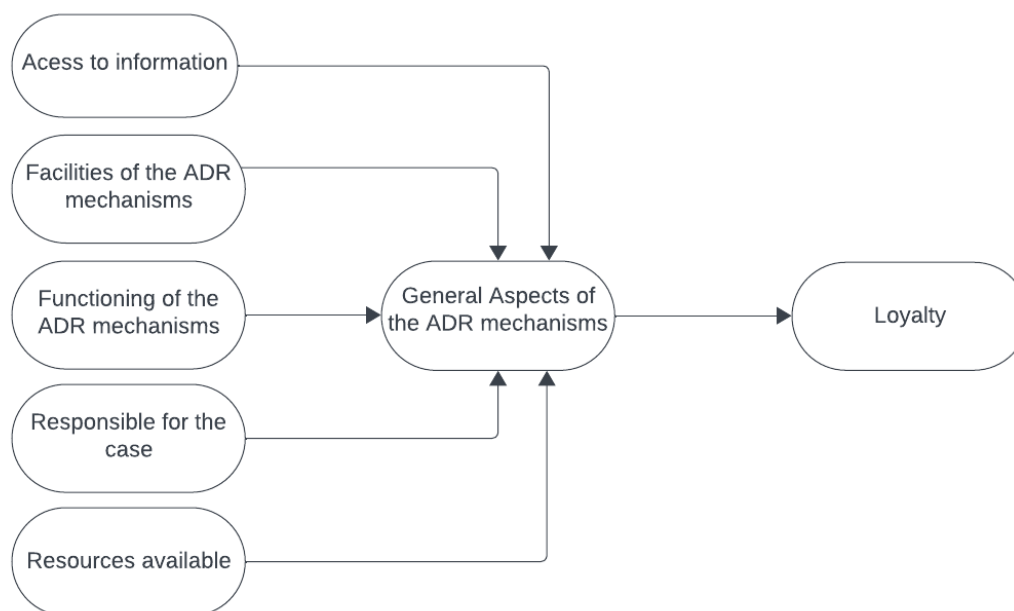
Table 7 – Sociodemographic characterization (Study 2)

Sociodemographicvariables		n	%
Gender	Masculine	3038	58,56
	Feminine	2150	41,44
LevelofEducation	Up to 9 years of completed schooling	1227	23,65
	10,11 ou 12 years of completed schooling	1445	27,85
	Bacharel	1807	34,83
	Master'sDegree	595	11,47
	Doctorate	114	2,20
Age	Up to 30 years	587	11,31
	From 31 to 50 years	2558	49,31
	From 51 to 65 years	1424	27,45
	Morethan 65 years	619	11,93

Font: Elaborated by the authors.

5.2 Results

Figure 2 – User satisfaction model for ADR mechanisms



Font: Elaborated by the authors.

Table 8 – Adjustment indexes of the ADR mechanisms user satisfaction model

Adjustment indexes	Values
Chi-Square	45651,831
QualityofFit Index	0,569
ComparativeFit Index	0,780
Tuker-Lewis Index	0,755

Font: Output SPSS AMOS.

According to Table 8, we can ascertain that the presented and operationalized model exhibits an acceptable plausibility within the values deemed reasonable by the literature as suggested.⁵⁰

Table 9 – Results of the Estimation Model (Study 2)

Pathsofthemodel	StandardizedCoefficients	S.E.	C.R.	PLabel
Facilities of the ADR mechanisms→ General aspects of the ADR mechanisms	0,017	0,004	2,457	**
Access to information→ General as- pects of the ADR mechanisms	0,471	0,005	48,886	***

⁵⁰ CORREIA, P. M. A. R. *O impacto do sistema integrado de gestão e avaliação do desempenho da administração pública (SLADAP) na satisfação dos colaboradores: o caso dos serviços do ministério da justiça em Portugal*. 2012. Tese (Doutorado) – Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, 2012. CAMPANA, A. N.; TAVARES, M. C.; SILVA, D. Modelagem de equações estruturais: apresentação de uma abordagem estatística multivariada para pesquisas em educação física. *Motricidade*, v. 5, n. 4, p. 59-80, 2009. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=273020564006>.

Pathsofthemodel	StandardizedCoefficients	S.E.	C.R.	PLabel
Responsible for the case → General aspects of the ADR mechanisms	0,460	0,006	52,957	***
Functioning of the ADR mechanisms → General aspects of the ADR mechanisms	0,470	0,005	57,631	***
Resources available → General aspects of the ADR mechanisms	0,502	0,004	62,485	***
General aspects of the ADR mechanisms → Loyalty	0,835	0,014	70,873	***

Fonte: Output SPSS AMOS.

The p -values (p -value < 0,05) obtained allow us to conclude that all the relationships under analysis were statistically significant (Table 9). Furthermore, the standardized coefficients obtained lead us to conclude that:

- The dimension “Facilities of the ADR mechanisms” had a small positive impact (0.017) on user satisfaction regarding the “General aspects of the ADR mechanisms”.
- The dimension “Access to information” had a strong positive impact (0.471) on user satisfaction regarding the “General aspects of the ADR mechanisms”.
- The dimension “Responsible for the process” had a strong positive impact (0.460) on user satisfaction regarding the “General aspects of the ADR mechanisms”.
- The dimension “Functioning of ADR mechanisms” had a strong positive impact (0.470) on user satisfaction regarding the “General aspects of the ADR mechanisms”.
- The dimension “Resources available” had a strong positive impact (0.502) on user satisfaction regarding the “General aspects of the ADR mechanisms”.
- Finally, the dimension “General aspects of the ADR mechanisms” had a very strong positive impact (0.835) on Loyalty.

Table 10 – Indirect effects of the User Satisfaction Model (Study 2)

IndirectEffects	Functioning of the ADR mechanisms	Responsible for the case	Facilities of the ADR mechanisms	Resourcesavailable	Access to information
Loyalty	0,289	0,293	0,011	0,269	0,265

Font: Outputs SPSS AMOS.

Regarding the indirect effects, by examining table 10, we can understand that the dimension that exhibits the strongest indirect effect on loyalty is the dimension “Responsible for the process”. In this regard, an increase of one point in user satisfaction with the dimension “Responsible for the process” will have a positive influence of 0.293 points on the dimension “Loyalty”. In contrast, the dimension related to the “Facilities of the ADR mechanisms” appears to have a less significant indirect impact on loyalty. Therefore, an increase of one point in user satisfaction with the “Facilities of the ADR mechanisms” will have a positive influence of only 0.011 points on the dimension “Loyalty”. In other words, based on the results obtained, the conclusion reached is that if the government is interested in enhancing citizen loyalty, it seems more appropriate to invest in the dimension “Responsible for the process”.

Table 11 – Descriptive statistics by dimension (Study 2)

Dimension	Question	Mean	Meanofthedimension
General aspects of the ADR mechanisms	Q10	8,541	8,396
	Q11	8,347	
	Q12	8,273	
	Q13	8,423	
Access to information of the ADR mechanisms	Q14	8,303	8,458
	Q15	8,614	
	Q16	8,271	
Facilities of the ADR mechanisms	Q17	8,219	8,230
	Q18	8,210	
	Q19	8,219	
Functioning of the ADR mechanisms	Q20	8,560	8,556
	Q21	8,313	
	Q22	8,257	
	Q23	8,836	
	Q24	8,817	
Responsible for the case	Q25	8,733	8,607
	Q26	8,756	
	Q27	8,661	
	Q28	8,521	
	Q29	8,476	
	Q30	8,492	
Resources available	Q31	8,507	8,507
Loyalty	Q32	8,770	8,778
	Q33	8,786	

Font: Elaborated by the authors.

We can conclude that the perception about the alternative dispute resolution mechanisms is quite positive, with all dimensions and questions receiving an average rating above 8 percentage points (Table 11).

We can observe that while alternative dispute resolution methods received positive averages above 8 points in all dimensions, the courts obtained negative averages in four out of the seven analyzed dimensions, and the positive averages did not exceed 5 points (cf. Table 6 and Table 11). There are several reasons that can explain the high levels of user satisfaction with alternative dispute resolution methods. Firstly, these are informal mechanisms, so they do not have the same intimidating character as a courthouse. Furthermore, the cost of a process in an ADR center is substantially lower than what it would cost in a court. In addition, extrajudicial conflict resolution tends to be much quicker, and the fact that solutions are built between the parties allows for mutually advantageous agreements, avoiding situations of frustration.

When comparing the results achieved by the courts with those achieved by ADR mechanisms, it is legitimate to question why these last still have such low utilization rates. However, this question can only be accurately addressed by the users themselves through an in-depth qualitative investigation. Nevertheless, some hypothetical reasons can be invoked to justify this situation. Firstly, it is possible that many Portuguese citizens are not aware of the existence of these mechanisms. Another justification may be attributed to the sense of tradition and values of our ancestors, for whom a court represented the unique and ultimate instance that ensured compliance with the law, justice, and reason⁵¹. There is still a long way to go in terms

⁵¹ MESQUITA, L. V.; CEBOLA, C. M. Impacto socioeconómico da resolução extrajudicial de conflitos: o caso de estudo português. *Revista Direito GV*, v. 16, n. 3, p. 1-27, 2020. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2317-6172201971>.

of legitimizing ADR methods from the user's perspective, and it is important to note that the regulation of these mechanisms in Portuguese law is still relatively recent. It was only in 2013 that the law on voluntary arbitration was published, the new regime of peace courts ("*juílgados de paz*") was also institutionalized in that year, along with the creation of a mediation regime.

6 Conclusion

As expected, the transformations occurring in the social sphere have also had an impact on the judicial domain, which, as a result, has faced significant challenges. However, the courts have proven to be incapable of overcoming these challenges, thus hindering their proper functioning. Since the 1990s, there have been various deficiencies revealed by judicial systems worldwide, from inefficiency and delays to economic inaccessibility to a lack of transparency. This array of difficulties has contributed to eroding trust in the justice system and its legitimacy, making it important to increase user satisfaction levels to reverse this situation.

The systematic collection of user feedback about the justice system allows us to identify areas where investment would be more appropriate to build a judiciary that meets the expectations of its users. Therefore, this research aimed to contribute to this evaluation, intending to analyze user satisfaction during the period between 2013 and 2022.

In methodological terms, this research employed a quantitative approach to address its objectives. Therefore, two structural equation models were operationalized, allowing us to measure the impact of multiple factors on user satisfaction regarding the overall functioning of the courts and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

The results allowed us to conclude that users' opinions regarding the courts are quite negative, with two major issues standing out, related to informational inaccessibility (and consequently, lack of transparency) and delays. Therefore, it can be asserted that there is a disconnect between the population's expectations and the actual capacity of the judicial system to respond effectively, resulting in a loss of credibility in the judicial system. We understand that the system still presents barriers in terms of access to information and the comprehension of the data that is presented, which challenges the constitutional principle enshrined in Article 20 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic. The relationship between the lack of information and satisfaction of users has been studied in the literature, with the conclusion that the greater the information gap, the greater the public's dissatisfaction with the courts.⁵² From the analysis conducted, we can comprehend that the system remains highly complex, appearing to be designed primarily for those with legal education. Despite the efforts made by legislative simplification programs and data digitalization, citizens' opinions regarding the accessibility of information are still negative. It was possible to discern that difficulties persist in understanding legal language within the context of legal proceedings and in obtaining information about both legal actions and judicial functioning. On a more positive note, it was observed that citizens are satisfied with the "clarity of language used by the judges responsible for the case", suggesting that judges have played important roles in establishing more intelligible communication with users (cf. Table 6).

Regarding alternative dispute mechanisms, the opinions are quite positive, a premise that aligns with the findings of.⁵³ We observed that the dimensions that have the most significant impact on the satisfaction of

⁵² LECLERC, C.; NIANG, A.; DUVAL, M. C. Understanding the relationship between public opinion and experience with the criminal justice system. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, v. 30, n. 3, p. 473-492, 2017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/eds007>.

⁵³ MESQUITA, L. V.; CEBOLA, C. M. Impacto socioeconómico da resolução extrajudicial de conflitos: o caso de estudo português. *Revista Direito GV*, v. 16, n. 3, p. 1-27, 2020. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2317-6172201971>.

ADR users are the “Resources available” and the “Responsible for the process”, and that these dimensions, like all others, received very positive average ratings (cf. Table 11).

Studies like the one presented here today can have significant practical implications, such as providing information used to support decision-making processes within judicial reforms. By analyzing user responses, the government can better understand their needs and expectations to address them effectively. As for theoretical implications, this study reflects on the theme of user satisfaction with the justice system, an area with a limited number of academic contributions on the international stage. However, the theoretical implications of studying user satisfaction with ADR and the courts can provide significant insights for fields like legal philosophy, social and behavioral sciences, as well as contribute to the conceptual understanding of the justice system and its relationship with society.

We dare to assert that no research is perfect and exact; therefore, it is our duty to expose the limitations of our own. Studies 1 and 2 are subjected to common biases in social research, including the subjectivity inherent in the perspectives and opinions of the public, coupled with the limited number of participants compared to the population under study.⁵⁴ These biases affect the accuracy and validity of the conclusions when it comes to the generalization, making it impossible. One of the major obstacles to conducting this research was the lack of existing studies on the subject in the Portuguese legal framework.

Future studies could compare the satisfaction level of Portuguese citizens with the justice system to the satisfaction levels of citizens from other countries with their respective systems, always using judicial performance indicators as a mediating element. Studies of this nature could help us understand the influence of culture on the perception of judicial service functioning. Furthermore, it would be possible to examine the usage levels of ADR mechanisms in Portugal compared to other countries.

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Annex A – Courts Quality Barometer

Dimensions	Q	Questions:
General aspects of the courts	Q5	General functioning
	Q6	Speed of resolution of the dispute
	Q7	Access Costs (excluding attorneys' fees)
	Q8	Trust in the system
Access to information about the courts	Q9	The facility in finding information
	Q10	Clarity of the information transmitted
Facilities of courts	Q11	The facilities are easily accessible
	Q12	The facilities are well signaled
	Q13	The waiting conditions are adequate
	Q14	The facilities are well equipped
Functioning of courts	Q15	Communication is clear
	Q16	The time elapsed between the request and the first session was acceptable
	Q17	The sessions started at the appropriate time
	Q18	Availability and assistance of the personnel of the courts
	Q19	Competence of the personnel
Judge responsible for the process	Q20	Attitude and courtesy demonstrated
	Q21	Clarity of the language used
	Q22	Impartiality throughout the process
	Q23	Equal opportunities in discussing the issue throughout the process
	Q24	Clarity in the decision
	Q25	Speed with which the decision is reached
Resources available	Q26	Available resources
Lealdade	Q27	If necessary, would you use the courts again?
	Q28	Would you recommend it?

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Annex B – Arbitration Centers Quality Barometer, Peace Courts Quality Barometer, and Mediation Quality Barometer

Dimensões:	Q	Questões
General aspects of the ADR mechanisms	Q10	General functioning
	Q11	Speed of resolution of the dispute
	Q12	Access Costs (excluding attorneys' fees)
	Q13	Trust in the system
Accesses to Information about the ADR mechanisms	Q14	The facility in finding information
	Q15	Clarity of the information transmitted
Facilities of the ADR mechanisms	Q16	The facilities are easily accessible
	Q17	The facilities are well signaled
	Q18	The waiting conditions are adequate
	Q19	The facilities are well equipped

Dimensões:	Q	Questões
Functioning of the ADR mechanisms	Q20	Communicationis clear
	Q21	The time elapsed between the request and the first session was acceptable
	Q22	The sessions started at the appropriate time
	Q23	Availability and service of technician from the arbitration center/ peace courts (“julgados de paz”)/ intervenients in the mediation process (not considering the mediator).
	Q24	Competence of technician from the arbitration center/ peace courts (“julgados de paz”)/ intervenients in the mediation process (not considering the mediator).
Responsibile for the process	Q25	Attitudeandcourtesydemonstrated
	Q26	Clarity of the language used
	Q27	Impartialitythroughouttheprocess
	Q28	Equal opportunities in discussing the issue throughout the process
	Q29	Clarityofthedecision
	Q30	Speed with which the agreement isreached,or decision rendered
Resourcesavailable	Q31	After the experience with the arbitration center/ peace court (“julgados de paz”)/ mediation center, do you consider that the resources available are adequate
Loyalty	Q32	If necessary, would you use this arbitration center/ peace court (“julgados de paz”)/ mediation center again?
	Q33	Would you recommend this arbitration center/ peace court (“julgados de paz”)/ mediation center

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