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The Net as a space for political militancy: technology and participation in the electoral campaign

Abstract

The definition of political participation has moved from an institutional conception (on many occasions restricted to vote and party affiliation) to other broader forms, such as attendance to demonstrations or involvement in social movements. These categories are being overtaken by more flexible and modular latent forms of participation that define new modes of engagement, and become expanded within the usage of the Net. In the present paper, these trends are explored during the mayoral elections for the municipality of Madrid in May of 2015, and focused on the instrumental party "*Ahora Madrid*" ("Now Madrid"). On the basis of in-depth interviews with 24 citizens who participated in the campaign, it is sought to define the profile of militancy as well as its digital uses, in order to identify practices of participation and digital repertoires of action. In conclusion, it is shown how the Net assumed the new patterns of militancy contributing to its development and renewal in the context of an electoral campaign.

Keywords

Political communication, participation, Internet, social networks, campaigns, hybridization, democracy

1. State of the art

1.1. *Disaffiliation and participation in political parties*

The data show a level of abstention as high as irregular, depending on each of the elections held (Fábregas, 1995; Riera, 2012).¹ Skepticism,

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¹ For the Spanish case, in analyzing the last three calls for General elections (2008, 2011 and 2015), the abstention has remained steady between 25% and 29%. Meanwhile, in the last three European contests (2004, 2009 and 2014) the resulting abstention data fluctuate between 55% and 57%.

cynicism and lack of trust in the representatives,² regardless of which generation value them (Amna & Ekman, 2014: 2), might be influencing on both the decline of civic commitment and the decreasing affiliation to political parties. The low formal membership in these organizations would be explained by several elements: the professionalization of politics; the symbiosis of parties with the State, as well as their dependence upon it; likewise, the parties' gradual conversion into employing bureaucracies.

Among the functions of the parties, their ability to connect the demands of citizens with political representatives remained as the usually accepted. This role as a transmission chain, in turn, highlighted the role of militancy as "electoral agents" at street level. The professionalization within the campaigns, and the conversion of these into "permanent", throughout the entire legislature (Blumenthal, 1982), led to the outsourcing of marketing experts and *spin doctors*, who took over many of the tasks previously performed by volunteers and "amateur democrats" (Van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014: 2). The progressive increase in the power of consultants and its high dependence on technology blurred the function and role of the militants (Gibson, 2013: 2).

Along with the latter, affiliates have stopped being useful in terms of funding. Both the proximity to the state and a favorable legislation allow to shift the costs of internal operations from militants to citizens, who support via taxes the maintenance of these organizations (Whiteley, 2011: 25). The party leaders have little incentive to recruit and retain new members if taxpayers pay the costs of the organization. The participation of militants becomes limited to electoral periods (on which future revenues will depend), and this way a new kind of belonging and membership arises, presenting, other than ideological or social, professional aspirations (Van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke, 2012: 39). The interest of some militants (especially young people) to link their future employment to policy (as public offices, or consultants) (Bruter & Harrison, 2009: 1285) makes of parties a sort of employment agencies. This process entails a progressive "cartelization" of political parties. Such organizations no longer make civil society and State communicate with each other, but eventually becomes a part of the latter; while, the affiliates (barely tied to any domestic rights or obligations) are valued only for their contribution to the party's legitimation (Katz & Mair, 1995: 23).

1.2. *Latent political participation, hybrid organizations and subpolitics' practices*

Political parties have decreased their ability to integrate different social groups in their ranks, contributing to the erosion of party loyalties (Van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014: 206). Contiguously, the overt forms of extra-parliamentary political participation, despite its permanence, show discontinuities, loss of initiative, and progressive institutionalization. However, this pattern might not mean a decline in quality of democracy. As Ben Berger states, democracies can assume low levels of political engagement, as long as there is a citizenry with a high level of social commitment that could become political in the future (2009: 345).

This type of citizenry on *standby* (awaiting institutions to assume their demands and develop channels for it) describes a "pre-political" behavior in which politics are discussed, and news related to this field are consumed, as well as social issues are addressed (Ekman & Amna, 2012: 288). Far from being a citizenry outside the decision-making process, it

² When we consider the benchmark of the months in which the last three Spanish General elections were held, the sum of the politicians plus the corruption (usually linked to the representatives) as problems perceived by the public has increased significantly, from 7.6% in 2008 to 28% in 2011, soaring to 53.6% in 2015. Source: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas

http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Indicadores/documentos_html/TresProblemas.html

[Consulted on 14/02/2015]

manifests a higher propensity to engage in political talks than other individuals associated with organizations, this way showing high levels of social trust in the environment (Ganuzo & French, 2013: 29) and political trust (Amna & Ekman, 2014: 278). A mode of doing politics with a lower degree of institutionalization, "outside and beyond" the representative institutions of the political system (subpolitics) (Holzer & Sørensen, 2003), and sometimes submerged in the context of subjective experiences and everyday life (subactivism) (Bakardjieva, 2009: 92).

Similarly, this trend may condition the traits of a future formal participation. Hybrid commitment identities do not preclude the inclusion of these profiles within certain initiatives on the margins of political parties and civil society organizations. A new profile, away from the heroic activist and the rewarded affiliate, which tends, instead, to avoid hierarchical organizations by replacing them with more informal and decentralized groupings (Pudal, 2011: 29). The "distant militant" would transit within a framework of organization definable as both post-bureaucratic (which combines multiple designs, blurs hierarchies and structures flexible networks) (Bimber, 2003) and hybrid (which merges different institutional modes-elements representing, in a somewhat formal manner, the adaptation to environmental uncertainty) (Minkoff, 2002: 382).

Several characteristics of this kind of militancy could be identified: intermittency and modular intensity, political promiscuity and bridge-activism. Firstly, the new types of militancy define the possibility to establish a personal route-sheet for political practices. Participation would be irregular moving between manifest and latent modes, while stressing the autonomy of integration and exit of the citizens. The intermittent presence of this militancy does not imply its demise.

In a second place, the total and lasting engagement of those who commit themselves to a cause is now replaced by a timely and specific commitment (Pudal, 2011: 29), that moves from one issue to another without any problems or conflict. The "political promiscuity" of this militancy profile allows to "collaborate" in a timely manner with concrete proposals, even without a specific commitment (Subirats, 2015a: 128), reaching beyond the limits of various movements and causes. This way, the so-called "cross-activists" or "bridge-leaders" arise; these are militants who would accomplish the function of intermediation between different movements, connecting them together, and sharing experiences (1049 Heaney & Rojas, 2014), while enabling coalitions between different networks.

1.3. *Digital repertoires of action and modular policy*

The latent, flexible and intermittent political practices meet an affine field of action, and alter their nature in the Net. The autonomy of citizens is enhanced through the use of the Internet by improving their capacity for personal actions, promoting the work within diffuse communities and improving the capacity of action within formal organizations (Benkler, 2014: 43). The usage of technology involves greater opportunities to define the political problems in their own terms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011: 773), to mobilize different audiences, and to plan actions autonomously at a lower cost, and outside formal organizations.

In parallel, the notion of policy broadens and extends (Sousa Pinto & Costa e Silva, 2013: 10) towards spaces and practices beyond unilateral replicas within the network of conventional politics (Sampedro, Sánchez Duarte & Campos, 2014: 80). The autonomy to configure the mode and intensity of participation defines groups in which no credentials are needed to partake in, nor excuses for quitting as a member (De la Cueva, 2015: 37) outside the formal procedures of "membership" (Flanagin, Stohl & Bimber, 2006: 30). The participation here assumes the modular logic within the Net:

Feature of a project, describing to what extent this can be decomposed into smaller modules, which can be produced separately before assembling them into a whole. If the modules are independent, the individual collaborators can choose when and how to contribute regardless of what others are doing, which maximizes their autonomy and flexibility to define the nature, scope and timing of their participation in the project (Benkler, 2014: 141).

As Langdon Winner (2008: 13) indicated, technology is not only introduced into the culture in the form of tools, processes or devices, but also in the form of metaphors. The metaphors of political networking materialize with micropolitical actions (De la Cueva, 2015: 24), or using civic technologies (Magallon, 2014: 54; Bolaños *et al.*, 2015), in order to supersede the democratic deficit and the inability of response from traditional political actors. The Internet allows the emergence of action franchises, by which a collective with limited resources can maintain connecting structures (Tarrow, 2012: 14), by means of creating learning communities, as well as freeing data and providing guidelines for their replication. The repertoires of networking action employ more attractive and increasingly converging forms, and foster the confidence distributed through groups linked horizontally, merging discourses and subcultural politics, while creating sedimentary digital networks (diffuse structures that are connected and can be activated to meet new demands) (Chadwick, 2007).

However, these modes of network action may not be as effective. The lack of institutionalization can lead to higher levels of complexity at the setting of political negotiations (Mancini, 2013: 56); it also can subtract coherence from the collective messages, due to the multiplicity of actors involved (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011: 773). Their proposals for action would be unable to enter the spaces of traditional decision-making and political management (Christensen & Bengtsson, 2011: 900), being left as simple aesthetic proposals (Dahlgren, 2005: 155), without an option of continuity and permanence, besides remaining confined to the Net.

The mobilization and immediacy would replace the strategic organization (Mozorov, 2011: 195) ignoring the construction of long-term processes and favoring the emergence of meeting places, both polarized and very homogeneous internally (Sunstein, 2000), which would imply the fragmentation of public discourse.

As Jaron Lanier points out, the digital culture tends to slice the Net excessively, showing more interest in the mere model's abstraction than in real people connected (Lanier, 2011: 32). The "discount by illegitimacy" of which the "hybrid organizations" are accused, based on the perception (especially in the most attentive audience) that a weak identity diminishes coherence and strength within the political options (Heaney & Rojas, 2014: 1048), might be transferred to the new network militancy, by reproducing the existing patterns outside of it.

2. Methodology

2.1. *Brief context of political participation in Spain*

Spanish citizenry presents reduced levels of formal political participation that have remained steady over the last three decades (Ramiro & Morales 2014: 9). The significant lack of involvement in political parties (Torcal, Montero & Teorell, 2006: 17) combines with other forms of participation more deployed among citizens. Partaking in certain forms of protest has increased significantly since 1980 (Morales, 2005: 70-71). Especially, the participation in demonstrations as a common form of political expression (Sánchez Jiménez, 2011: 22).

Along with the latter, the opinion on the functioning of democracy, and the approval of the political institutions and their administrators, as well as the trust in them, have been undergoing a progressive erosion since 2008 (Lobera, 2015: 99). In this context, the indignant movement around the 15-M, emerged in 2011, implied a turning point regarding practices,

initiatives and political actors, this way arousing a very high level of acceptance across the whole range within the population (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014).

As indicated by Sindney Tarrow, the social movements tend to have long-term indirect consequences on citizenry, in terms of politicization and contribution to political culture (2012: 376-377). The horizontal mobilization, besides dynamic and free from leaderships' issue, in May of 2011 (Sampedro & Sánchez Duarte: 2011: 240), proved valuable with respect to several elements of importance: the widening of repertoires of political participation; the repoliticization of social segments dissatisfied with the system's presumed political advantages, and finally, the demonstration of limits within the social movements concerning their likelihood to set demands (Politikon, 2014: 205). Thus the 15-M became a meta-framework, generalist and almost inoperative, yet allowing to link diverse specific initiatives, endowing them with a renewed strength (Lobera, 2015: 102), by means of political expressions distributed and network-disseminated.

2.2. Case study and method of research

The study focuses on analyzing the different types of militancy around the candidacy of *Ahora Madrid* ("Now Madrid"). This party, with a solely municipalist character, ran for local elections to Madrid City Council held on 24 May of 2015.³ Self-defined as a "civil candidacy of popular unity"⁴, it has several features that justify its choice for this analysis. First of all, it does not follow the traditional patterns of a conventional political organization in Spain. Its model of confluence, which lies beyond the limits of a mere electoral coalition, describes an attempt to configure a post-party (Gutierrez, 2015), or a post-bureaucratic organization (Bimber, 2005), rather horizontal, as well as viable without undue hierarchies, and replicable. *Ahora Madrid* (beside similar initiatives emerging in cities like Barcelona or Zaragoza) is constituted as a space for institutional experimentation with some specific novelties in terms of form-party (Subirats, 2015a: 130). As Eduardo Romans and Igor Sádaba (2015: 24) have stated, something shared by all these new political proposals is their reticulate organizational dimension, aggregating from the local sight, and accumulating micro-participations managed by centers barely visible; likewise, experiencing a new institutionality that combines political practice in the institutional arena with the forms of organization and functioning of social movements (Alabao & Carr, 2015: 245).

Framed in this trend, the processes for the preparation of the electoral programme as well as the selection of members for candidacy were carried out through collaborative practices, open to citizens, regardless of their party's formal membership. Within these processes, the intensive use of digital technologies was crucial in organizational terms, including the dissemination and the inclusion of agents external to the party. The operating structure and the usage of the Net bear similarities with - and represent a continuation of - political practices initiated by the 15-M movement (Martin, 2015: 111; Lobera: 2015, 105).

The study was conducted within the 4 months after the municipal elections (from 24th May to 24th September, 2015) in the city of Madrid. The method of selection of interviewees was guided by the "snowball" technique, thanks to three people who collaborated (with different levels of involvement) in the campaign. After the semi-structured interviews, these

³ The candidacy for *Ahora Madrid* was led by ex-judge Manuela Carmena, obtaining a second position in elections with 31.85% of the ballots (20 councillors), behind the conservative party Partido Popular (34.55%, and 21 councillors). After an agreement of investiture with the socialist party PSOE (15.28%, and 9 councillors) Manuela Carmena became the Mayor of Madrid on 13th of June, 2015.

⁴ <https://ahoramadrid.org/> [consulted on 10/12/15]. The party is composed by members of social movements, civil society organizations, and political formations such as *Equo* (ecologist left-party) and *Podemos* (Pablo Iglesias Turrión's party), ex-militants from *Izquierda Unida* ("United Left"), as well as participants in the municipalist initiative *Ganemos Madrid* ("Let's Win Madrid"), civic platform and initial germ of the confluence.

people provided the contact with other three subjects likely to be included in the study, and so forth. The objective was to have the highest number of profiles and different degrees of militancy, which, although not responding to any statistical parameter, turned out useful to reflect a multiple and varied sample. The validity of this type of research is not derived from its absolute generality or extrapolation, but from its precise referability and applicability (Alonso, 2003: 107).

A total of 24 individuals were interviewed. At the interview number 20, saturation point was reached within the discourse around the issues raised in the script. Despite the usual fact that adding units of analysis indiscriminately does not increase the quality of information (Alonso, 2003: 106), 4 profiles were added, to certify the reiteration of the arguments presented by the previous subjects. As Javier Callejo states, when the discourse's saturation is perceived, it signals the point from which a part, or the whole amount of the empirical work of a research, may be considered as complete, in light of the iterative practice of concepts and ideas (1998: 96).

The 24 subjects interviewed (13 men and 11 women) presented different ages between 19 and 61 years, although with a greater representation of people lying between 20 and 40.⁵ Their occupations were varied and diverse, although professional profiles with university studies and high qualification prevailed. In relation to the precedent political practices, almost all the components of the sample had collaborated in other political parties and social movements, showing a high level of engagement at the campaign (participating as representatives at polling stations, in party assemblies, or providing logistical support: pasting posters, distributing ballot papers, preparation of propaganda, etc.). Similarly, despite their high participation in the campaign, they held moderate levels of political usage of the Net, not at the intensity yet rather at the diversification of practices and the utilization of tools (beyond conventional social networks such as Facebook or Twitter).

The respondents of the sample answered to a battery of questions grouped into three thematic blocks. These, in turn, were divided into a series of questions in order to ensure coherence throughout all the members of the group interviewed. The three blocks transited from the previous political participation to both the personal and collective experience in the campaign of *Ahora Madrid*, as well as to the use of technology for political action.

3. Analysis

3.1. *Militating since the previous militancy: reserve structures and participation*

The profile of the people involved, with different degrees of engagement, in the campaign of *Ahora Madrid*, counts on several experiences of previous militancy. Their "service record" of participation shows tiredness with conventional forms of manifest political action (not only inside parties but also regarding social movements); moreover, other modes of doing politics at the margins of activities conceived as more conventional. As one respondent stated: "one does not get up in the morning and founds a party" (Interview 17). The political learning within militants had been mostly intensive, alternating different strategies and methodologies, and combining different modes of action.

The critical evaluation of classic or lifelong parties indicated the limitations to participate through these organizations. A significant number of those interviewed had a story of indignation about his experience in parties, for their inability to integrate new people and proposals, and their obsession for survival as an organization. But besides that, it appeared necessary to add something relevant to this perception: a criticism on the work

⁵ In order to consult the profiles of the persons interviewed, see Annex I.

within social movements from two sides. Firstly, for its low impact on both the political and media agendas, due to be structured in an obsolete manner; secondly, because of the control of these processes, from the most engaged militants.

As alternatives to these structures, several among the involved people channelled their membership in civic innovation projects outside the most institutional policy; neighbourhood experiences; initiatives linked to the free and digital culture, or aesthetic interventions.⁶ Actions as such which proved “very political, but without an link to any ideology or party” (Interview 2) at all, and combined with periods of latent politics, in which they solely devoted themselves to keep informed about policy, or conducted activities in the context of everyday life (subpolitics – subactivism). In the case of the militancy of *Ahora Madrid*, this type of policy is not as much a source to generate a civic spirit, but rather practices of temporary withdrawal to undergo the fatigue from a more active participation, or the disagreement with the actions proposed by parties or movements.

The emergence of *Ahora Madrid* meant partly the activation of “reserve structures” (Tarrow, 2014: 240) or “sedimentary networks” (Chadwick, 2007), mostly composed by parties’ and social movements’ ex-militants, with a previous affiliation experience, participation latent networks, constant but intermittent practices, and little difficulty in moving from one project to another (bridge- activists).

In short, only two of the subjects (out of the 24 analyzed) admitted having taken part in politics, for their first time, within the campaign of *Ahora Madrid*. The participants in the campaign showed experiences from previous militancy, taking the movement 15-M as a reference, while at the same time demanding new structures to surpass the limits of such participation. This fact complements the idea of 15-M as a “meta-framework” (Lobera, 2015: 102) from which multiple initiatives emerged, including those non-mobilized until then; and perhaps having failed to include and integrate (or having difficulty in doing so) those who now lie on the margins.

3.2. *Autonomy and “personal route sheet” in a campaign-community*

The way to participate in the electoral campaign of *Ahora Madrid* combined conventional practices of political activity in a similar period (attendance to meetings, pasting posters, etc.) with other kind of repertoires which, despite not definable as “new”, highlighted its intensity and importance within the development of that period. The process of convergence of these two ways of doing, as well as the converging characteristics of new repertoires, eventually characterized the different levels of involvement in militancy.

In the first place, self-organizing features appear while the campaign evolves. Although the party structure was necessary to launch a crowdfunding campaign for the financing, or to organize events with the candidate, there arose multiple experiences not only from the different neighbourhood assemblies, but also from both individual and group proposals. Autonomously, and apart from the central structure, posters were designed, leaflets distributed, or messages broadcasted, both on the streets and through the network, in an amateur and replicable mode.

I went to Reina Sofia because they had told me that there were people handing out posters of Manuela. As there were no more left, I decided to print them on my computer and get out to paste them, in my neighbourhood. The surprise came when I met some neighbours doing the same thing I had done (Interview 9).

⁶ According to Casilda Cabrerizo, Azucena Klett and Pablo García Bachiller, many of these initiatives, arisen in an unstable environment of continuity, and previous to the launching of candidacy *Ahora Madrid*, have operated as true tools for change (2015: 163).

Such autonomy for participation also served to define the level of involvement besides the type of linkage, or the way to express it. The possibility to participate without having to be subject to the guidelines of an organization helped avoid conflicts from the previous militancy, and allowed to design a personal participation based on individual needs. Similarly, this autonomy potentiated sorts of engagement founded on issues and sectors. The profile of the "total" or "generalist" militant was intertwined with another kind of participation for causes, where *Ahora Madrid* was the framework for action to insert a specific claim (LGBT⁷ causes, feminisms, concrete neighborhood problems). This entire process was accompanied by aesthetic and playful forms of expression that helped to build a strong image of the campaign and the candidate, away from the formalism of other electoral candidates, who played a more "appropriate", or "standard" role.

To summarize, the personal involvement, rooted in the everyday life, as well as autonomous and personalized, contributed not only to enable an emotional community around a possible change of government in the city of Madrid ("for the first time we felt that our vote could be useful for something, and that there were many people like us, doing something precious" [Interview 21], but also to set up the candidate Manuela Carmena as an iconic leader. The discourses from participants in the campaign resorted to an epic set of the facts on which the possibility of triumph steadily blended with terms such as adrenaline, emotion, or hope. Feelings of story-appropriating within a collective that built a campaign-community with their own identity, rituals and iconography, which confirms the relevance of the sense of belonging and emotionality also given in more diffuse, and non-permanent, organizations (Alabao & Rodríguez, 2015: 148).

3.3. *The Net as an amalgam: modularity, permeability, renewal and convergence*

"In the end everything is more interlinked than what it seems" (Interview 10)

The use of the Net during the campaign turned out to be crucial for setting the profile and practices of militancy in *Ahora Madrid*. The digital tools served as collectors of spaces and profiles, as well as a useful glue to link conventional action repertoires, digital political practices, and prior experiences of affiliation. The arguments of the campaign participants highlighted the way the usage of the Net eased the development of a modular political action, the permeability of both practices and discourses, their renewal, and the convergence between different repertoires and ways of doing politics.⁸

As noted earlier, many of the practices of militants in the campaign were characterized by self-organization. This trait assumed, as a condition, the modularity of the Net, and transferred it to the strategy of political action in which the nodes of a network contribute to the whole, regardless of what others do (Benkler, 2014: 141). Social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, became the most important platforms for the development of this autonomy. The creation of original contents about the campaign and its subsequent diffusion through personal profiles were accompanied by the participation in groups and events –either or not convened by the party– and even by making calls for developing actions: these, especially by the interviewees who proved the most engaged.

The will to belong, although not in a formal manner, turns more feasible by means of the Net, and especially the social networks. These allowed not only to notice and participate without being part of the structure, but also to maintain a strategic plan that would lend continuity to practices that implied a more episodic and timely form of participation in the

⁷ Spanish acronym for "Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender".

⁸ Although the Net encouraged these more flexible and dynamic forms of political participation, it should not be marked out as the only factor to make other kinds of militancy arise. As it was referred above, the Spanish political context after 15-M: erosion of loyalties to traditional parties, emergence of new political options, development of alternative forms of organization, etc. sets a precedent as relevant as the usage of the Net for the political action.

campaign. Alongside this, those respondents who called for more inclusion in the electoral period were who "privatized" their participation in groups through applications such as whatsapp, telegram or e-mail lists. Spaces in which autonomy was no longer as such, since there was a line of participation designed and promoted by the organization itself. The proliferation of use of these applications led to develop a both integrated and multilayer form of communication circuit, similar to that used by Pablo Iglesias' political party Podemos (Toret, 2015: 131).

Moreover, the utilization of the Net into campaign served as a tool to permeabilize networks on *standby* (not activated, but strong at civic and even political engagement), as well as sectors among the citizens, and spaces outside politics. In the first case, the constant consumption of digital information and the saturation of messages on social networks aroused the willingness of a portion of the interviewees for campaigning. In a second place, the constant flow of information on the elections ended permeating communication channels and spaces that in many cases were flowing away from politics. The modular action not only saturated through messages, but also reached areas outside the conventional participation.

Sometimes I stop myself before sending political information. Many of my friends are bored of all these topics. However, in the campaign the photos of the Mayor, along with her statements, couldn't stop circulating across all my whatsapp groups, and no one ever protested. It was as if these were not political issues (Interview 6).

It might be that the key to this permeability resides in the renewal of the discourses and repertoires of action from its own development in the Net. The depletion of conventional formulas and processes expressed by interviewees was responded within more attractive modes, which also showed a minor involvement. It was set by means of more superficial, playful, joyful, and aesthetically attractive practices; all of these, far from forming second-category militants, enabled a precise channel of integration into the campaign, and from the network side. The ironic "memes" about the various candidates and, above all, the pictures, montages and videos of candidate Manuela Carmena, were configured as second order commons (Bimber & al., 2005: 371), playing the role of information resources transcending discursive, institutional and technological borders (Baym & Shah, 2011: 104), and helping to create a community of belonging.

Finally, it should be noted how the Net became useful as an amalgam for making various practices converge. The militants in *Ahora Madrid* represented a militancy based upon multiple supports and formats for the information about the campaign (social networks, whatsapp/Telegram groups, digital media) in which institutional channels (mailing lists) were mixed-up with profiles "self-organized" in the Net (*Movimiento de Liberación Gráfica, Madrid con Manuela* [Madrid with Manuela]⁹), which fulfilled the mission and task of collecting, filtering and disseminating the aesthetic and artistic experiences in the campaign. Similarly, these practices were combined with conventional forms of militancy such as meetings with the candidate; in short, an inclusive and multi-support campaign.

⁹ "Graphic Liberation Movement"; <https://www.facebook.com/MLGM-Movimiento-de-Liberaci%C3%B3n-Gr%C3%A1fica-Madrid-663597840432462/timeline/> [consulted on 10/12/15]; and <http://mlgmadrid.tumblr.com/> [consulted on 10/12/15] <https://www.facebook.com/Madrid.con.Manuela> [consulted on 10/12/15]; <http://madridconmanuela.tumblr.com/> [consulted on 10/12/15]

4. Discussion and conclusions

Some of the current trends in political participation (less institutionalized and bureaucratic, and outside parties and movements) meet a relevant field of action within the Net. The importance of the Internet does not lie in establishing a direct relation between connection and quality/ quantity of participation, but rather in articulating a favorable environment for the development of more latent and modular political activities, as also in providing patterns for the action and for the renewal of those already existing.

As shown in this work, the Net had become a space for action against the weariness from conventional politics and continuous disaffiliation. The participants in the campaign *Ahora Madrid*, in a significant number coming from other experiences of militancy, had found in the Net certain spaces for a withdrawal, whence they could keep connected with politics yet without a formal participation. This was crucial for the activation of that citizenry on *stand-by* (Ekman & Amna, 2012: 288) within the reserve structures (Tarrow, 2014: 240) or the sedimentary networks (Chadwick, 2007). Potentially active subjects who joined the campaign, seeking new opportunities, and who used the Net to achieve a continuity of action, from a discontinuity of voluntary affiliation.

The autonomy for participation was not only to be considered in terms of its self-organization. Its importance came from the possibility of collaborators in the campaign to determine different levels of involvement, and configure their own militant route-sheet not only in terms of time or effort, but also in terms of linking to issues and causes rather than generalist contents or programmes.

This multiple, flexible and diffuse militancy coexisted in a permeability of spaces, supports, and networking practices. Tools designed exclusively for the entertainment or mere communication became hybrid platforms where leisure and everyday, as well as emotional, communication, coexisted with political information. The "real" participation (attending to campaign events, pasting posters) lived together with multitasking processes, and technologies for the action, organization and co-production (Galdon, 2015: 115), in which making a comment on a political forum mingled with spreading a meme through telegram groups, or updating a profile on *Facebook*, with references to campaign issues. The "total and heroic militant" (Pudal, 2011) gave way to another kind of collaborator who would not really attend to any normative and prescriptive definition of how to participate in the campaign. The development of more inclusive ways of doing politics enabled the formation of broader emotional communities that merged discourses and subcultural politics (Chadwick, 2007); these communities approached a democracy of appropriation: founded upon processes of collective and personal involvement in public affairs, and with an extension beyond the strictly electoral-institutional (Subirats, 2015b: 325).

Finally, both limitations and potential of this work should be noted. Regarding the method of research, although it is true that the number of interviews were enough to appreciate a saturation of discourse, it would be also necessary to use complementary methods with which to obtain a typology of profiles based on the identified practices. A quantitative study would be valuable to identify the relevance of some sociodemographic variables on the modes of participation in the campaign. Similarly, it would be required to plan a similar study in a subsequent period. The proximity to the process, and especially with its results, has the advantage to describe the campaign with more depth and detail, but can also affect the story-construction from a triumphalistic and softening view. Finally it would be advisable to study other similar experiences, also in the field of electoral campaign and with similar results, as *Barcelona en Comú* or *Zaragoza en Común* ("Barcelona in common" and "Zaragoza in common") in order to identify similarities and differences in the processes and practices.

This article assumes an initial study on the profiles of militants and digital usages in electoral campaign, focused on *Ahora Madrid*. One might wonder if the trends identified would be replicated in contexts of low mobilization (out of the electoral period) or within a frame different from the erosion of institutions and politics at the time this study has been conducted.

Annex I. Description of the sample

Sociodemographic variables				Variables for research		
	Gender	Age	Profession	Previous militancy*	Level of engagement**	Political usage of the Net***
Subject 1	M	36	Architect	No	Low	Low
Subject 2	M	39	Designer	Yes	High	Low
Subject 3	F	22	Student	Yes	High	High
Subject 4	F	45	Primary School Teacher	Yes	High	Low
Subject 5	M	29	Sociologist	Yes	Low	Low
Subject 6	M	25	Student	Yes	Low	High
Subject 7	M	50	Assistant	Yes	High	Low
Subject 8	F	43	Technician	Yes	High	High
Subject 9	M	31	Freelance	Yes	High	Low
Subject 10	F	19	Student	No	High	High
Subject 11	M	35	Teacher	Yes	Low	High
Subject 12	F	36	Teacher	Yes	High	High
Subject 13	M	40	Office clerk	Yes	Low	Low
Subject 14	F	22	Journalist	Yes	High	High
Subject 15	M	61	Retired	Yes	Low	Low
Subject 16	F	41	Public officer	Yes	High	High
Subject 17	M	27	Technician in Equality	Yes	High	High
Subject 18	M	35	Lawyer	Yes	Low	Low
Subject 19	M	51	Secondary School Teacher	Yes	High	Low
Subject 20	F	30	Publicist	Yes	High	Low
Subject 21	M	28	Telephone operator	Yes	High	Low

Subject 22	F	33	Unemployed	Yes	High	Low
Subject 23	F	42	Saleswoman	Yes	Low	Low
Subject 24	F	37	Human Resources	Yes	Low	Low

* Previous participation in political parties, social movements, civil society organizations...

** -High: proxies in polling stations, participation in party assemblies, logistical support: posters' pasting, distribution of ballot papers, preparation of electoral propaganda.

-Low: Dissemination of information through social networks (*Facebook, Twitter*), *crowdfunding* participation in the financing of the campaign...

*** -High: Belonging to political action groups through whatsapp / Telegram / distribution lists, convening and organization of events in the Net, use of other digital tools (in addition to conventional social networks) for the organization and political action (*titanpad ...*)

-Low: Dissemination of information on social networks or whatsapp groups; consumption of political information.

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