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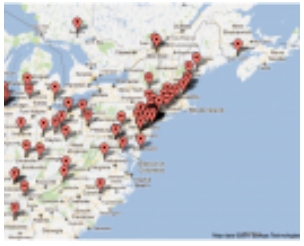

ONLINE ORGANIZING

BACKCHANNEL

Amidst General Distrust of Politics, the Socialist Party of Catalonia Takes Babysteps Towards Transparency

BY ANTONELLA NAPOLITANO | Wednesday, January 15 2014

NEWS BRIEFS

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MORE TRANSPARENCY ON AGENDA FOR NYPD AND NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

While there was a lot of hype about a report that the NYPD is testing Google Glass, in the short-term a policy-shift toward more accessible NYPD data has the potential to be more consequential for New Yorkers at large. GO

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ABOVE: A screenshot of the homepage of the website Espai Obert ("Open Space" in Catalan language)

The Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC) has launched a transparency portal, dubbing itself "the first open party of Barcelona."

The website, named Espai Obert ("Open Space" in Catalan language), provides data on the party's budget as well as on remunerations received by elected officials. Officials' contributions to the party are also detailed.

Another page of the site shows data on party members by age and gender.

This is part of an effort to renew the organization's image and public perception of the party at a time of profound distrust toward politics in the whole country due to several big corruption scandals that involved the Prime Minister and, lately, the Spanish Royal Family.

Lourdes Muñoz Santamaria, the organizing secretary of the Socialist Party in Barcelona, declared to the Barcelona daily El Periodico, "Democracy requires full citizenship. In order to form part of a responsible citizenship, you need to have access to this information. Access to information is a key element to build a full and healthy democracy."

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THE DAY WE - BUT NOT WIKIPEDIA - FIGHT BACK AGAINST MASS SURVEILLANCE

Drop by the Wikipedia main page today and you will find a featured article on the constellation Perseus. Conspicuously absent is The Day We Fight Back banner so many other websites like reddit, Boing Boing, and Upworthy are flying. Nor did they set Edward Snowden as the featured article, as someone suggested in a thread on what, if any, action should be taken today. Although it was discussed in multiple Wikipedia forums, no consensus was ever reached, and so Wikipedia is sitting this one out.

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SAFECAST LOGS ITS 15 MILLIONTH CROWDSOURCED DATA POINT FOR RADIATION MAPPING

In the wake of the 2011 earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear disaster that followed, residents of Japan needed a reliable source of information about radiation levels. Unfortunately, information was either unavailable or withheld from the public. The need for data compelled concerned citizens to create their own, and the need to take

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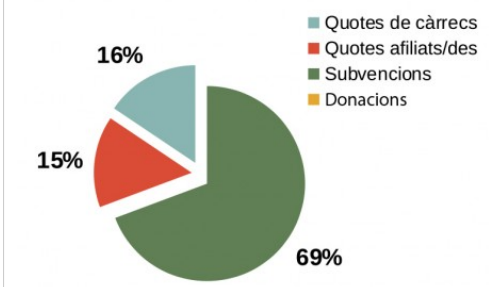
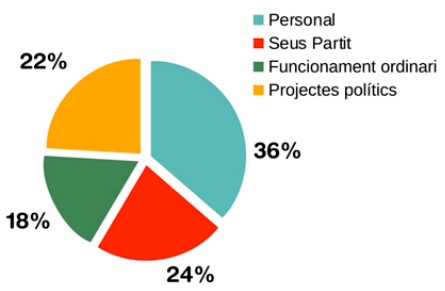
RECURSOS PSC BARCELONA			
INGRESSOS		DESPESES	
Quotes d'afiliats/des	135.000,00€	Personal	326.000,00€
Quotes de càrrecs públics	139.000,00€	Seus del Partit	210.500,00€
Subvencions públiques	618.000,00€	Funcionament ordinari	164.100,00€
Donacions i venda de patrimoni		Projectes polítics	200.661,61€
TOTAL	892.000,00€	TOTAL	901.261,61€





Data on party members on Espai Obert.

There is room to improve on quantity and quality, however: there is only a limited amount of data on the website, and only part of that is downloadable and it is in PDF format, which makes it difficult to utilize the data. The download button is not very visible either.

At the moment, though, PSC's efforts seem more advanced than those of other parties. The PSOE, the Spanish Socialist Party (and sister party to the PSC), for example, have a less detailed budget document buried in a subpage of their website and in PDF format as well.

In her interview with El Periodico, Muñoz seems to be confident that it is the start of a process of transparency, saying that the websites represent "a decisive step towards the socialist political regeneration from politics itself."

The launch of the PSC transparency website comes right before the party's open primaries, which will select a socialist candidate for mayor of Barcelona, the capital of the region of Catalonia and the second largest city in Spain.

The PSC primaries will be held on March 29th, after a six week participatory process for selecting the candidate. As Muñoz explains, the candidates must get a minimum of 1000 "avales de ciudadanía" (a sort of "citizens endorsement") from people who enroll in the primary register. If in the first ballot a candidate obtains 40 percent of the vote and is more than 10 points ahead of the candidate with the second largest percentage of votes, he or she is proclaimed the winner; otherwise, the two candidates with the most "avales" pass to the second round, and a second vote decides the winner. The general election will take place in 2015.

their own radiation readings compelled them to make their own Geiger counters. Safecast was born. Last month the global project logged their 15 millionth data point, with no sign of slowing down soon.

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TOMORROW THE INTERNET PUTS COLLECTIVE FOOT DOWN TO SAY 'NO' TO MASS SURVEILLANCE

Just over two years after the successful action against the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the PROTECT IP Act (PIPA), Internet companies are banding together once again to protest mass surveillance by the National Security Agency (NSA). The Day We Fight Back was announced January 10, the eve of Aaron Swartz's death, and will take place February 11. More than 5,000 websites will participate tomorrow in a concerted effort to get people to tell Congress to protest mass surveillance, oppose the FISA Improvements Act and support the USA Freedom Act. The Day We Fight Back is an even more ambitious campaign than Stop SOPA; participants are not trying to stop legislation, they're trying to pass it, no small feat in today's political climate.

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A political regeneration, as the PSC calls it, is much yearned for by the citizens of Spain but, apparently, politics has not fulfilled their wishes yet.

The Parliament approved a transparency and access to information law only last November, after more than a year of discussions both in the Parliament and in the public space. Before that, Spain was the only European Union country without an access to information law.

The law, though, has been strongly criticized by transparency organizations that deemed it not fulfilling international standards. Helen Darbishire, executive director of Madrid-based NGO Access Info Europe, declared that the "law that will have minimal positive impact on open government and do little to change a bureaucratic culture of secrecy."

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INDONESIAN TWEETER MOST RECENT TARGET OF DRACONIAN INTERNET LAW

After joining Twitter in 2008, former construction worker Benny Handoko amassed nearly 54,000 followers. On February 5 a South Jakarta court sentenced him to a year of probation for tweeting libelous statements about an Indonesian politician. The case, one of the first to be taken to court under the Electronic Information and Transaction (ITE) Law because of a tweet, has reignited a debate about the controversial Internet law, which has been in place since 2009.

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EU'S FIRST ANTI-CORRUPTION REPORT: WHAT ROLE FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY?

There are no corruption-free zones in Europe. The bottom line of the first EU Anti-corruption report might be somewhat predictable, but it also represents a first and significant (albeit small) step to launch a debate inside the EU institutions. GO

DIGITAL PLATFORM EMPOWERS WOMEN WITHIN PAKISTAN'S PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

In Pakistan, where many women are discourage from working outside of the home, technology has opened up different avenues through which

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women can enter the workforce. One start-up called the Women's Digital League is helping to facilitate this shift and to get more women working.

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