



POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE ERA OF THE INTERNET

Bernardo Sorj and Sergio Fausto

Editors

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1. Introduction: the context of civic participation in Argentina

From the return to democracy in 1983 until the end of the century, civic participation in Argentina was marked by two major groups of actors. Firstly, there were the movements linked with human rights which were innovative in their format and in their demands when compared with the more traditional civil society actors, (unions and political parties), who were also very active in the 1980s. Secondly, as a consequence of the unemployment produced by the neoliberal policies of the 1990s, actors who had long been fundamental on the Argentinian political scene re-emerged and became known as the “*piqueteros*” because of their public actions of blocking Argentina’s main highways. This second group of actors comprised unemployed workers linked with unions, left-wing political parties and autonomous collectives, and their road blocks were aimed at demanding funding from the State (social programs) in the context of the severe economic crisis, poverty and indigence (while subsistence measures such as public canteens, popular restaurants and clothes distribution centers were organized throughout the country).

At the turn of the century, the union of the *piquetero* movements and unorganized citizens whose living standards had worsened significantly, resulted in the famous *cacerolazo* (banging of pots) in December 2001. This massive mobilization was interpreted as a reaction to the freezing of bank deposits, but it also constituted a popular reaction to the state of siege declared by the president. Banging their pots, thousands of Argentines gathered in the Plaza de Mayo and in many cities throughout the country during the protests on December 19 and 20, 2001, crying “*que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo*” (kick them all out [the politicians], not one should remain), leading to the immediate resignation of the minister of the Economy and the president Fernando de la Rúa, and leaving a number of people dead and injured as a result of police repression. This profound repudiation of all politicians was the apex of the crisis

of representation in Argentina, followed by a social effervescence that drove the emerging explosion in the form of district gatherings during a large part of 2002. In a certain manner, the “pot banging” in December 2001 constituted the last of the movements of the 20th century and the first of the 21st century. It was the last of the 20th century because, in part, those responsible were organized civil society actors, the remains of the organizational forms of the past, such as unions and left-wing parties; and the reaction to the declaration of a state of siege may be seen as heir to the human rights defense movements. It was also the first of the 21st century because the other participants were independent individuals who spontaneously joined in the protests against the measure as the images of the protest were transmitted by the media. In December 2001, television was still playing a role similar to the one the social networks would play years later, both in Argentina and in the rest of the world, as disseminators or even generators of mass social mobilizations.

When Néstor Kirchner assumed the presidency after the transition of Eduardo Duhalde, diverse changes occurred in relation to the situation at the end of 2001. On the one hand, economic recovery and fatigue had dehydrated the district assemblies, and the policy of inclusion and non-repression transformed many of the *piquetero* movements into pro-government social movements. On the other, the human rights policy implemented from the beginning of the new government had garnered the support of movements such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, which became key allies of the emerging Kirchner configuration. During the second Kirchnerist presidency, with Cristina Fernández de Kirchner at the head of the government, new organizations in support of the government emerged at critical conjunctures, such as the conflict with the agricultural sectors in 2008 (the group of intellectuals responsible for the *Carta Abierta* or Open Letter, for example) or the death of Néstor Kirchner in 2010 (the youth movement “La Cámpora”, led by his son Máximo).

In parallel, after the 2001 crisis, at the local level participative instruments began to emerge - and soon expanded - in which local authorities

would invite residents to discuss and decide on local issues. The paradigmatic example was the participatory budget, which emerged first in Rosário and in the capital Buenos Aires in 2002. In 2006, it was also adopted by the municipality of Morón in Buenos Aires province, reaching a further 50 municipalities in the 14 Argentinean provinces in the following years. This policy was further reinforced by the national government's creation of the Argentine Participatory Budget Network in 2008, but the implementation of this participatory mechanism took hold throughout the country regardless of the political leanings or party affiliations of local governments. The impacts of instruments such as participatory budgets (and others such as district councils, thematic consulting councils, participatory strategic planning etc.) were limited in their effects on public living conditions, given their generally limited resources and as their institutional design focused on isolated local or neighborhood problems (Annunziata, 2013).

To this form of participation “granted” by the authorities rather than “won” by society and, oriented mainly to addressing local issues, would be added in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century new cycles of spontaneous protests expressing different manifestations of malaise and repudiation of diverse situations, particularly concerning government decisions or measures. One of the first mobilizations convened by a common citizen involving no slogans, banners or political organizations had been the series of marches for public security organized by Juan Carlos Blumberg in 2004 after the kidnapping and murder of his son Axel. But later mobilizations against specific government decisions were more clearly interpreted as being in opposition to the government, bringing into question their legitimacy as “spontaneous” protests. This was the case with the series of *cacerolazos* between 2012 and 2013, the first protests named after the date on which they took place, underscoring their fleeting and intermittent nature: 13S (September 2012), 8N (November 2012), 18A (April 2013) and 8A (August 2013). These were also the first to be directly convened and promoted by the social networks and to present some

of the more salient characteristics of the contemporary social movements: the (at least apparent) lack of organized actors and official spokespersons, the multiplication of individual slogans and the gathering of heterogeneous groups in the expression of repudiation, the homemade preparation of signs instead of flags and banners etc.

In 2015 a crucial electoral year was beginning in Argentina, not only because the presidential and legislative elections would be held in October, and elections for provincial governors would occur throughout the course of the year, but also because both government and opposition agreed that a new era for the country would begin with the entry into office of a new president, given the impossibility of reelection and, consequently, the end of the twelve years of government by the Kirchner family, with Néstor Kirchner's presidency (2003-2007) and that of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2011 and 2011-2015). The death of the prosecutor investigating the attack on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), Alberto Nisman, at the beginning of 2015, gave rise to a new protest similar to the *cacerolazos* in 2012-2013, convened via the social networks with the hashtag #YoSoyNisman.

Online social participation occurred concomitantly with the rapid growth in access to and use of the new technologies and was increasingly resorted to by civic actors, both pro-government and opposition, which was particularly evident during the last stage of the electoral campaign, when online calls for support for the Kirchnerist candidate Daniel Scioli against his rival Mauricio Macri proliferated. In fact, online civic participation did not only produce manifestations of repudiation or ones narrowly associated with interim political divisions. Of particular note in this context was the #NiUnaMenos protest on June 3, 2015 (3) in response to violence against women. Neither was online citizen participation limited to calling for participation in protests, with platforms for societal participation being constructed to deliberate on bills of law, such as the Partido de la Red, or to pressure governments to bring about broader social changes, such as Change.org.

In the following pages we will explore these three innovative experiences with the objective of analyzing who these new actors in civic participation are. They emerge from the convergence between the online and offline, and are instructive not only for the way they highlight the virtues or potential of the new information and communication technologies, but also because they reveal the magnitude of the changes they have produced in the civic actors and in forms of participation. It should be noted that the electoral context of 2015 influenced the three cases analyzed in diverse ways: it revealed the tension between the electoral agenda and the civic agenda with the #NiUnaMenos protest, underscoring the absence of the issue of combating violence against women in the proposals of almost all the political parties; it enabled the Partido de la Red to take action to ensure its inclusion in a political scenario in which it could not compete electorally; and it leveraged the petitions on the Change.org platform related to institutional and electoral questions taken up by leaders of the opposition. This specific conjuncture will have ended by the time this work is published, but the emergence of new actors in civic participation will remain at the intersection of the online and offline universes, as will the challenges of a developing a theory for conceptualizing their innovative nature.

2. Access, use and the legal framework of the Internet in Argentina

The last *Latinobarómetro* report revealed highly significant growth in informal civic participation in the Latin American region, outside of institutional channels, providing a favorable terrain for the impact of the Internet and the social networks on participation. According to the report, 1 in every 3 people in the region considers that participating in social networks is a form of political participation. Of the interviewees in Argentina, 22% believe that social networks permit participation in politics; 27% state that social networks create the illusion of participation; and only 12% think that the networks are

inappropriate for political participation (Latinobarómetro, 2015). What these data seem to show is that social networks are increasingly constituting a tool for participation, even if, for many, skepticism in relation to their political impact remains.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider the degree of access and use of the Internet to form a realistic view of who the people are who may be included in the forms of participation offered by the social networks and online platforms. The above mentioned Latinobarómetro report indicates that there has been a 15% reduction in the number of people who declare never having used the Internet; in 2015, while the regional average was 46%, in Argentina this number was 38%, positioning the nation among the Latin American countries least affected by so-called “digital exclusion”.² However, these data may also offer a distorted view of the distribution of access to new technologies in the country. According to the National Survey on Access and Use of Information and Communication Technologies, between 2011 and 2015, both access to computers and access to the Internet in households increased significantly (from 56.4% to 67% and from 41% to 61.8%, respectively) for the 31 urban agglomerations covered in the survey (INDEC, 2015). Geographical concentration in urban areas and in the more heavily populated provinces, however, continues to be a factor to be taken into account: in September 2014, for example, 13,366,561 residential accesses to the internet were recorded, of which 77.7% were concentrated in the city of Buenos Aires and the provinces of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Santa Fé and Mendoza (INDEC, 2014).

Two specific national programs were launched in Argentina to combat digital exclusion. One was the Equality Connect Program, created in April 2010 via Decree n. 459/2010, aimed at promoting digital literacy in information

2 Facebook is the most heavily used social network in the region, and Argentina heads this list of countries with 59% usage of this network. Argentina is the third largest online audience in the region, after Brazil and Mexico, with 18.6 million single users (ComScore, 2014). According to the Internet Observatory in Argentina (OIA, 2015), Facebook has 16 million active users per day, and Twitter has 4.7 million active users per month.

and communication technologies (ICT), expanding access to technological resources, with no distinction as to social or economic group or geographical location. The program distributes netbooks³ nationwide to students and teachers at public secondary and special education schools and teacher training colleges, for use both at school and at home, the objective being to impact the daily lives of families and drive digital inclusion throughout the country. The Connected Argentina National Telecommunications Plan, also launched in 2010, for its part, was presented as an integrated connectivity strategy to improve communication for everyone in the country, with a specific focus on locations more remote from large urban centers, considered less profitable by the telecommunications companies. This involved a proposal to provide the necessary infrastructure and equipment, setting up a sovereign, strategic and secure fiber optic network. The impact of these two policies has not yet been measured, but as mentioned previously, household access to computers and the Internet has grown significantly over the last four years.

The legal framework related specifically to these new technologies is still recent in Argentina. Certain aspects have yet to be regulated and the impact of the existing regulations has yet to be assessed. On December 18, 2014 the Argentina Digital law (27.087) was passed. This declared the development of ICT, telecommunications and associated resources to be of public interest and was also aimed at guaranteeing the neutrality of the networks. One of its most important provisions was legal recognition of the neutrality of the web: “Every user is guaranteed the right to access, use, send, receive or offer any content, application, service or protocol via the Internet with no restriction, discrimination, distinction, blockage, interference, reduction in speed or degradation of service” (art. 56). Similarly, the law considers communications and telecommunications to be “human rights”, declaring that ICT are an “essential and strategic public service”. To a great extent, the law is dedicated to regulating the provision of these services under the Information and

³ Up to November 2015, this program had distributed 5,314,950 netbooks nationwide.

Communication Technologies Federal Authority or AFTIC (Autoridad Federal de Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación), an independent, decentralized body of the Executive (art. 77), as well as the Telecommunications and Digitalization Technologies Federal Council (Consejo Federal de Tecnologías de Telecomunicaciones y Digitalización) (art. 85), an agency supporting AFTIC in the formulation of public telecommunications policy. The main functions of AFTIC include: regulating and promoting competition and the efficient development of ITC; deciding on the concession, renewal, extension of licenses, registrations, permits and authorizations for companies; promoting and regulating access to ICT and telecommunications services, including broadband internet, under conditions of effective competition.

Freedom of expression on the Internet and the protection of users' personal data are covered by pre-existing standards, which were adapted but not formulated specifically for the use of the new technologies and the online circulation of information. Regarding the protection of personal data, there is the law 25.326/2000, which created the National Personal Data Protection Directorate (Dirección Nacional de Protección de Datos Personales) and the *habeas data* writ guaranteed by article 43 of the 1994 National Constitution. This law was aimed at protecting personal data in data banks, ensuring individual privacy and the right to control over any information in such data banks. On the other hand, law 26.032, sanctioned on May 18, 2005 established that the "pursuit, receipt, and disclosure of all types of information and ideas by means of internet services is considered to be covered by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression". However, it should be noted that private companies (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube etc.) are important where the freedom of expression of their users is concerned, to the extent that they have the power to remove contents published by users, for example, in the case of discriminatory or explicitly violent messages. But there is no regulation or specific standard as to the criteria for judging such content. The State may not censor any content on the web, but at the same time and for the same reason,

it has no tools to combat censorship by third-parties. In 2010, the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI), in the Executive sphere, created a Social Network Observatory to combat harassment on the web. Without the power to exclude pages or groups on Facebook, it proposed contacting the Argentinean social networks and the international ones operating in the country to act as users with special powers to denounce discriminatory content or comments in breach of the law.

The challenges evident in regulation show that there is no separation between a “virtual” and a “real” world in terms of citizens’ rights and democratic participation; the connection is permanent with problems in common between the online and offline worlds. Differently from the traditional public space, however, the online world, the new information and communication technologies and, in particular, the social networks boost internet users’ capacity to create content, while at the same time exposing their personal data and privacy more easily. The new public space shares and increases the need for guarantees for civil society and for citizens. Censorship, discrimination, freedom of expression, surveillance by governments or corporations and equal access to services are old problems now emerging in new formats, in greater numbers and in a context of rapid transformation.

3. Case studies

Case 1: #NiUnaMenos, the bodies in the streets

On June 3, 2015 there was a mass concentration in front of the National Congress (between 150,000 and 200,000 people), and similar protests in more than 120 cities nationwide, based on the slogan #NiUnaMenos (Not one less) against femicide⁴ and violence against women. The call to protest arose after a

⁴ The term “femicide” refers to the murder of women in function of their gender. The term started appearing in the communication media very recently, substituting the more common expression “crime of passion”. See lavaca.org (2015).

debate on the social networks between the journalists Marcela Ojeda, Florencia Etcheves, Ingrid Beck, Hinde Pomeraniec and Soledad Vallejos, the result of an increase in the number of cases of femicide. The main demonstration was marked by the attendance of relatives of victims of femicide and other cases of gender violence, feminist and women's groups and political organizations. This protest demonstrated the relevance of organized actors, citizens and politicians in the offline world, but also the capacity an event originating in the online world had of generating visibility and inclusion in the public agenda, something that had not been possible through traditional channels. Similarly, the mobilization revealed that the public significance of events like these extrapolates the intentions of their original proponents, generating doubts about the category "organizers".

The days preceding the enormous protest which assumed the name of the hashtag #NiUnaMenos, had been characterized by reports of new cases of femicide, on top of the dozens of other similar cases reported during 2015. On May 11, the press reported the murder of Suhene Carvalhaes Muñoz, a young woman who was beaten to death by her boyfriend. This coincided with the discovery of the death of Chiara Páez — a pregnant 14-year old who was buried alive —, which caused great social uproar. Upon hearing this, the journalist Marcela Ojeda posed the following question via her Twitter account: "Actresses, female politicians, artists, businesswomen, social references... women, everyone, . Aren't we going to speak out? THEY ARE KILLING US". This was the origin of the call for the protest that would take place on June 3 using the slogan #NiUnaMenos, with other women journalists joining via their Twitter accounts, and which by May 11 had gone viral on the web.⁵

The initial instigators of the protest were not members of an organized

5 As other journalists heading the mobilization observed, the idea arose based on the social commotion generated by the cases of femicide, particularly inflamed by the brutality of the crime involving Chiara Páez (see article by Hinde Pomeraniec in *Página/12*, May 15, 2015), which generated a visceral feeling that something had to be done (see article by Ingrid Beck in *Página/12*, May 15, 2015).

group. Most of them did not know each other personally before the call to protest. There was a group on Facebook which had originated with a reading marathon on March 26 of that year called “*Ni Una Menos*” (not one less). Writers, journalists and relatives of victims of gender violence (such as the mother of Lola Chomnalez and the father of Wanda Taddei, two other young victims) had participated in this group, but only some of the journalists from the group formed on the basis of this new call via Twitter had participated in its activities. The reason for the organization of this reading marathon was related to the cases of femicide involving Daiana García and Andrea Castagna, the first of which generated debate on the social networks after comments alluding to the “provocative” clothes the girl was wearing when the crime was committed. The hashtag #NiUnaMenos⁶ was initially used in this group on Facebook. But the viral nature of the group and the mobilization were generated above all via Twitter. As the journalist Paula Rodríguez says, the group on Twitter materialized “right before our eyes” and almost by chance, since it depended on the number of people connected at the moment the journalist Marcela Ojeda posted the comment on her personal account. But many of the initial movers “only met each other personally after the event”.⁷ The fact that they were journalists leveraged the potential of the Twitter social network: some of the articulators had a large number of followers, and others had very influential followers.⁸

On May 12 the leading newspapers rapidly gathered numbers and statements from the organization La Casa del Encuentro, a civil organization defending the interests of women which, given the lack of official numbers,

6 It is also possible to trace the use of the slogan “Ni una menos” back to the 2011 murder of Susana Chávez Castillo, a Mexican poet and activist supposedly silenced due to the denunciation of crimes and femicide in her country. The original phrase which became viral at that time in the Mexican social networks, from a poem of hers written in 1995, was: “Ni una muerta más” (no more dead women).

7 Interview with Paula Rodríguez (Sep. 14, 2015).

8 Interview with Hinde Pomeraniec (Aug. 18, 2015).

maintained femicide statistics for recent years: 1,808 women murdered in function of their gender since 2008. The annual report showed that in 2014 alone, 277 women had been murdered and, in the majority of cases, both the victims and the murderers were adolescents. Every thirty hours a woman was murdered in Argentina simply because she was a woman.

Photos and selfies of famous artists, renowned journalists, political activists and some legislators who had supported the cause since the beginning became viral on the web using the hashtag or watchwords; these included Gabriela Cerruti (FPV deputy for the city of Buenos Aires), Victoria Donda and Margarita Stolbizer (FAP national deputies). The official banner bearing the slogan #NiUnaMenos was one of the three which dominated the protests.. During the month of May, hundreds of personalities, institutions and organizations joined the cause, publishing selfies, promoting the hashtag and the movement.

In the following days, the communication media released news and services related to the issue, ranging from cell phone apps aimed at preventing femicide to interviews with directors of NGOs. They started to investigate older cases of femicide, boosting the visibility of previous activities around this issue (such as the aforementioned Reading Marathon, the activities of militant organizations advocating a law against femicide etc.), and in the meantime the number of public figures committing to the cause multiplied.

The press also began to discuss one of the points that was central to the call for protest, which was based mainly on the effective implementation of law 26.485 addressing the full protection of women. The law defines violence as “any conduct, act or omission that directly or indirectly, publicly or privately, based on unequal relations of power, affects a woman's life, dignity, physical, psychological, sexual or economic integrity, as well as her assets or her personal safety”. However, although the law had been approved by an ample majority on April 1, 2009, it had not been fully regulated, particularly in relation to the National Action Plan for the Prevention, Assistance and Eradication of Violence

against Women. The lack of regulation of this national plan engendered a state of paralysis, since there was a “legal gap” regarding the distinction between femicide and other types of crime. Accordingly, on May 15 a meeting was held between the four original writers and journalists and Fabiana Túñez, of the organization La Casa del Encuentro, to define the official document that would be read out on the day of the protest. The media also began to work with this organization, which was to gradually become a fundamental actor in the transmission of information about femicide. From the beginning of the call process the importance of various aspects of the offline world in boosting the impact of the initiative became clear, such as acknowledgement of the journalists, the treatment they began to receive from the traditional press, as well as the activities of civil society organizations.

The rapid viralization of the hashtag and the call to protest generated discussions in the social networks and the media about the legitimacy of certain actors promoting and assuming ownership of the cause. The support of certain women in the world of the arts whose declarations during their careers had furthered gender inequality was questioned, as was that of television show hosts considered to be sexist. In the social networks there was an increase in the number of memes with captions such as: “To say ‘*Ni una menos*’, you have to stop watching Tinelli”, “... you have to stop calling harassment of women in the street ‘flirting’”, “... you have to stop going to prostitutes, fueling the traffic in women”, “... you have to stop raising helpless princesses and violent young machos”, “... you have to legalize abortion”, “... you have to stop asking why Melina’s dress was so short”. At stake was a tension inherent to many contemporary mobilizations disseminated and multiplied on the internet: to what extent can individuals appropriate an issue online when they have never been involved in it offline? But most importantly: who are the “legitimate” actors entitled to appropriate an issue that does not seem to belong to anyone?

As the days passed, manifestations of support for the mobilization intensified. Institutional actors and politicians declared their support in public

as June 3 approached.⁹ But above all it was the political leaders of diverse parties who published selfies under the hashtag #NiUnaMenos. Generally speaking, the entire political spectrum joined in the mobilization to a greater or lesser extent: Daniel Scioli (governor of the province of Buenos Aires and later FPV candidate for president), Ernesto Sanz (president of the UCR party and national senator), Mauricio Macri (head of the government of the city of Buenos Aires and later PRO coalition candidate for president), Elisa Carrió (national UNEN deputy), Nicolás del Caño and Myriam Bregman (national PTS deputies), and Jorge Altamira (former deputy for the city of Buenos Aires and leader of the left-wing front). Sergio Massa (national deputy and Frente Renovadora presidential candidate) got together with 18 mayors from the province of Buenos Aires and on the day prior to the protest posted a photo with Mirta Tundis and other women legislators and militants from his party on his Twitter account. Other institutional actors such as the Catholic Church also joined in the mobilization. Through the Episcopal Commission for Family Pastoral Ministry (CELAF) and Catholic Action Argentina, the church spoke of the need to heed the speeches and actions of the new Pope Francis. The Supreme Court judges Elena Highton de Nolasco and Ricardo Lorenzetti posted a selfie with the hashtag, and judge Highton recorded a video broadcast for the Judicial Information Center (CIF) in which she listed all the judicial channels and support centers available for women under threat.

The different meanings the call to protest acquired as it was re-appropriated by different actors and personalities, were beyond the control of the original instigators. As one of them said: “When you launch a campaign

⁹ In the week before June 3, the National Senate, the National Interuniversity Council, the Federal Education Council and the Federal Health Council had indicated their adhesion. The media also intensified coverage of the theme on the eve of the protest; they aired interviews or statements from women who had suffered attacks or rape, including Mirta Tundis, a journalist and national deputy from the Frente Renovadora. This interview in particular caused great impact on public opinion, due to the format of a confession about the ill treatment and violence she suffered at the hands of her ex-husband.

like this, you kick the ball off and it's no longer yours".¹⁰ The selection of the "5 points" in the official demand sought to give the mobilization a precise focus, but at the same time one wide-ranging enough to attract a broad public. The five-point document put forward the following demands:

- Implement and monitor the National Action Plan for the Prevention, Assistance and Eradication of Violence against Women with all the resources necessary, as established in law 26.485
- Ensure the victims' access to the Justice system. Each public prosecutor and police station should have trained professionals qualified to receive reports. Cases should be unified in the civil and criminal courts; the victims should have access to a public defense lawyer free of charge during the entire judicial process.
- Elaborate a single incident report for victims of violence against women. Collect and update official femicide statistics. It is necessary to know the problem in order to draft and implement effective public policy.
- Guarantee and improve comprehensive sexual education at all levels of schooling to promote equality and freedom from male chauvinist discrimination and violence. Sensitize and train teachers and principals.
- Ensure protection for the victims of violence. Implement the electronic monitoring of aggressors to prevent the violation of court restraining orders.

For the promoters, the goals were to leave no issue out, but at the same time ensure that the central question of femicide was incorporated

¹⁰ Interview with Hinde Pomeraniec (Aug. 18, 2015).

into the public agenda. In practice this led to postponing certain problems for “future battles”, such as the decriminalization of abortion — which, although a consensus among the instigators, would have alienated a large section of society, in particular the families of the victims of femicide. It was this broad scope of the mobilisation¹¹ which, for the first time ever in a mobilization involving gender, enabled groups defending the decriminalization of abortion and young people from Catholic schools to protest side by side.¹²

Knowing that they could not fully control the dynamic of the mobilisation, the promoters thought they could at least influence it to a certain extent. They worked consciously to ensure that the mobilization did not assume certain connotations they wanted to avoid: “it ought not to be a march for public security, for the victims or for the “indignant””.¹³ They sought, on the contrary, to shape the mobilization as one addressing “the problem of human rights, rather than security”.¹⁴ Regarding the political actors who were joining the mobilization, care was taken to ensure it would not be deemed either pro opposition or pro government, as had happened in previous demonstrations. An effort was also made to prevent it from becoming an anti-political march, and so candidates were not required to leave aside their political banners. As one of the promoters argued, association with a human rights mobilization “is made possible by politics. We did not want it to be apolitical”.¹⁵ As social communicators they had the tools to emphasize certain meanings at the

11 Some feminist and women's organizations had been proposing a more radical interpretation of the problem of violence against women in their actions, but they saw the call as an opportunity to boost visibility of the problem and insert it in the public agenda. According to the director of Pan y Rosas, for example, the organization opted to support the cause and to add its own message: “if they interfere with one, we will organize thousands” (interview with Cecilia Mancuso, Oct. 27, 2015).

12 Interview with Hinde Pomeraniec (Aug. 18, 2015).

13 Interview with Paula Rodríguez (Sep. 14, 2015).

14 Interview with Micaela Libson (Sep. 17, 2015).

15 Interview with Micaela Libson (Sep. 17, 2015).

expense of others , and they assumed the responsibility of communicating their messages pedagogically.¹⁶ However, the proliferation of re-appropriations of the hashtag and the calls to protest revealed the limitations of the category “organizers” faced with the challenges of prescribing roles in contemporary civic mobilizations. “Many said: ‘give placards to anybody!’, as if they could control who would appear in the photos”, noted one journalist close to the original group of promoters.¹⁷

For this reason, the “5-point” document was also a response or a reaction to the large number of political leaders who “were in the photo”, aimed at forcing them to assume a concrete, public commitment to particular policies, capitalizing on their wish to show their support for the cause. This resulted in the sign with the five points and the hashtag #DeLaFotoALaFirma (from the photo to commitment). In the days prior to the mobilization, the organizers met with leaders of different political forces, specifically to gain commitment from candidates for diverse offices in an election year, as was the case in Argentina in 2015. In this respect, the organizers’ professional connections with the offline world were determinant.¹⁸

On the eve of the mobilization, president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner used her Twitter account to express her support. However, as part of the media pointed out, she was in an awkward position because responsibility for the non-regulation of the law basically lay with the Executive. Without alluding to the law, the president joined the mobilization. A large attendance was expected,¹⁹

16 Interview with Paula Rodríguez (Sep. 14, 2015).

17 Interview with Paula Rodríguez (Sep. 14, 2015).

18 Just as their professional knowledge enabled them to rapidly develop a strategy around the mobilization which emerged spontaneously, all of them had broad communication experience in distinct media, as one of the organizers observed (interview with Hinde Pomeranic, Aug. 18, 2015). Paula Rodríguez also underscores the importance of their professional experience, which included their address books as well as use of hashtags and advertising techniques. They were all editors, journalists and communicators in the mass media. The memes shared were meticulously created by professionals (interview with Paula Rodríguez, Sep. 14, 2015).

19 On the same day as the mobilization, the magazine *Página/12* published a survey conducted by the agency *Ibarómetro* about levels of awareness of the hashtag and the mobilization: 75%

but the magnitude June 3 acquired took everyone by surprise.

On June 3, the entrances to the city of Buenos Aires' subway stations carried the message "*Ni Una Menos*" on their illuminated displays. All the newspapers ran at least five or six articles on the protest. 129 meeting points had been arranged throughout the country.²⁰ All day long the social networks highlighted the "5 points" demanded by the mobilization, and once again the hashtag #DeLaFotoALaFirma went viral. At 2 p.m., people starting arriving at the Praça dos Congressos, the location selected as the epicenter of the protest, although it was only scheduled to begin at 5 p.m. The Argentinean Federal Police deployed only female police officers for the security of the event. And the hashtag#NiUnaMenos invaded the networks, going viral among organizations determined not to miss the chance to demonstrate their support (football clubs, magazines, schools etc.).

One aspect of this mobilization differentiating it from other recent social network driven protests in the country and the region was the visible presence of political organizations and civil society groups as organized actors wielding their flags and banners. Among the political parties, government groups (such as Unidos e Organizados, La Cámpora, Novo Encontro, Unidade Socialista para a Vitória) were present and visible, as were the opposition, in particular leftist groups (including the Partido dos Trabalhadores Socialistas, Partido Operário, Movimento Socialista dos Trabalhadores, Esquerda Socialista, Novo Movimento ao Socialismo, Frente de Esquerda, Autodeterminação e Liberdade). Organized social movements such as the Movimento Livres do Sul and the Movimento Evita also made their presence felt. Among many of the political parties, there

of the interviewees knew about the mobilization, 51% intended to participate in it and 61% knew the meaning of the word "femicide".

20 See <www.lanacion.com.ar/1798115-niunamenos-los-puntos-de-encuentro-para-la-manifestacion-contra-los-femicidios>. In all the provinces there were online encounters for the mobilization. The methodology established for unifying the demands and the mobilizations had worked in the following way: the invitations were sent to niunamenos@gmail.com, which the organizers accessed to publish an updated list of the meeting places in the official Twitter (@niunamenos) and Facebook (Ni Una Menos) accounts, for those wanting to participate.

were women's organizations or gender commissions (such as Pan y Rosas or Las Rojas, associated with leftist parties). The same was true of the unions, whose presence was very significant.²¹ The pro-government political groups also decided to march to the Palácio da Justiça, to call attention to the fact that responsibility for this issue was shared with the Judiciary. In conjunction with the leftist political groups, these were the most visible organizations in the protest; other leaders participated as individuals rather than as part of a group, taking selfies during the event and posting them immediately on Twitter to attest their presence.²²

But the political parties, unions and the Catholic Church were not the only organized actors who were present at the protest. Major civil society organizations, such as La Casa del Encuentro and the National Campaign for Legal, Safe and Free Abortion were there alongside a vast number of smaller civil society groups, some defending the victims of femicide and others LGBT causes, student groups, the Buenos Aires Universities Federation (FUBA), cultural centers, groups of theater actors, women's groups from different regions etc. The groups defending the victims of femicide, carrying signs with photographs and the names of the murdered women, played a leading role in the protest, under the tutelage of the organizers.

In spite of the noticeable presence of political parties with their banners, slogans and symbols, they by no means predominated in the protest. Undoubtedly, spontaneous, independent participation was stronger.²³ There

21 Interview with Cecilia Mancuso, Oct. 27, 2015.

22 Several ministers and national congress members from the FPV, Frente Renovadora and UCR took part in the protest. The various candidates for president and many well-known legislators posted photos with banners containing the watchwords, or did this on the days preceding the event. Some of these may be seen at the address <www.lanacion.com.ar/1798454-los-tuits-de-los-politicos-por-el-niunamenos>. The consultancy El Viral collected statistics online: 687 politicians published photos with a sign with the hashtag #NiUnaMenos: 99 deputies, 34 senators, 180 mayors, 11 governors, 834 civil society organizations (such as clubs, unions and NGOs), 2,137 Argentinean personalities, 280 international personalities (Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia) and 67 artists and designers also participated.

23 The strong male presence at the protest was emphasized and described as "unexpected" by the

were many thousands of individuals and groups, bearing placards with creative phrases alluding to the hashtag, artists giving impromptu performances, nude women with their bodies painted, percussion groups, gigantic allegorical dolls etc. Some attention-grabbing phrases were to be seen on homemade signs such as: “Not letting me walk in peace in the street is violence”, “If he hits you it’s because he doesn’t love you”, “I’m marching for them. Not one less!”, “I belong to nobody”, “They say hitting means love. IT’S A LIE!”, “No more femicide, the State is responsible”, “No more travesticide”, “We are alive”, “No more hypocrisy, the system educates women killers!”, “Illegal abortion is gender violence”, “Without customers there would be no traffic in women”, “Institutional male chauvinism is not indifference, it is complicity”, “Patriarchy: even if you rape and kill me, I will be back”, “Control is not love”, “No is no”, “I want to stop asking if I will be next”, “Neither saint nor whore”, among others. Artistic performances took place spontaneously in different areas of the *Praça dos Congressos*. For example: the Cooperative Lavaca prepared a large banner with the name of each woman murdered, and any participant in the protest could dip their hand in ink and leave a print over the names.²⁴

The apex of the protest was the official act at 5 p.m., during which the well-known actors Juan Minujín and Érica Rivas and the cartoonist Maitena Burundarena read the manifesto and the five demands agreed upon beforehand between the organizers and La Casa del Encuentro, on a stage set up especially for this purpose.²⁵ The Argentine government illuminated all the official buildings and landmarks in the city with violet light. The promoters had decided that instead of politicians, the stage would be occupied by personalities from the world of culture and that the families of the victims of femicide would

communication media in the following days.

24 Interview with Claudia Acuña (19 ago. 2015). Another example was the performance of the “garbage woman”, which had also happened during the “Slutwalk”, in which the participants were “bagged” and forced to remain still on the ground to get first hand experience of the gender violence linked with femicide (see <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZrEyCeh5nE>>).

25 See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLQSyS8FtBc>>.

also have privileged positions. The organization of an official act, the epicenter of the mobilization, also shows that the promoters had to assume the role of organizers: the positioning of the stage, the sound equipment, the signs on the underground stations and the illumination of public buildings, the selection of the speakers and the people on the stage, as well as security, all entailed planning and forethought as well as coordination with different organizations and authorities,²⁶ once again demonstrating the relevance of the convergent processes that occurred in the offline environment.

Diverse consultancies estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 people participated in the act, fully occupying the Praça dos Congressos and the surrounding streets.²⁷ In other cities around the country, participation was also intense and, in some places, more than one protest took place spontaneously. The protests were similar to those in the city of Buenos Aires, but incorporating the particularities of each province and regional cases of femicide. In smaller towns and villages, where there was no organized militancy, the social networks were of great importance: pages were created on Facebook to mobilize the public. In larger cities the networks were one tool among many, but existing feminist organizations, already used to working together, collaborated on publicizing the protest.²⁸ After June 3, the magnitude of the mobilization became clear, it had spread to many parts of the country.²⁹ In addition to the impact of the protest in the city of Buenos Aires, the mobilization in many towns

26 Interview with Hinde Pomeraniec (Aug. 18, 2015).

27 In the protest in Buenos Aires, worthy of note was the presence of many women from the outskirts of the city, for whom this event represented their first visit to the capital (interview with Cecilia Mancuso, Oct. 27, 2015). Frequently, protests which were similar in some aspects to 3]—in particular, those originating in the social networks—, such as the “pot banging” in 2012–2013 or the mobilization #YoSoyNisman in February 2015, were interpreted as purely urban, middle class phenomena; in this respect, #NiUnaMenos clearly demonstrated its difference.

28 Interview with Paula Rodríguez (Sep. 14 2015).

29 The impact throughout the country was felt during the 30th National Women's Encounter, held in Mar del Plata in October 2015, with the participation of 60,000 people (interview with Cecilia Mancuso, Oct. 27, 2015).

and villages exceeded expectations. Compared with the anonymity of a large city, in the villages and settlement of many provinces, participation implied assuming a much greater risk: “In a village, you are a person, not a statistic”.³⁰ Nationwide, around one million people were involved in the mobilization.³¹

The international repercussion was also enormous: the event was reported by the press in diverse countries, ranking the Argentinean initiative among the main cases of online activism in defense of women, such as #FirstHarassed, #EverydaySexism or #YesAllWomen; there were simultaneous protests in Chile and in Uruguay, with strong repercussion in the social networks in Colombia, Mexico and Spain.³² There were more than 958,000 mentions of the hashtag #NiUnaMenos on Twitter, according to Agustín Giménez, the platform’s representative in the region.³³ On the day of the protest, the mentions exceeded 600,000 and at 8p.m. the hashtag had become a global trending topic, with more than 13,400 mentions a minute.

The most immediate effect of the mobilization was the increase in the number of reports of violence. Calls to the number 144, the national help line for victims of gender violence, increased from one thousand to 13,700 a day, and the number of calls to the city of Buenos Aires help line tripled. The Supreme Court Domestic Violence Bureau also saw an increase in the number of requests for information, including ones from provincial courts that were unable to access information on certain cases of femicide or criminal records. The mobilization’s

30 Interview with Paula Rodríguez (Sep. 14, 2015).

31 Interview with Hinde Pomeraniec (Aug. 18, 2015).

32 On Nov. 7, 2015 there was a mass mobilization in response to violence against women, which also used the hashtag #NiUnaMenos.

33 Different from other events that divided Twitter (such as the #YoSoyNisman mobilization), particularly between government and opposition (Calvo, 2015), in #NiUnaMenos there was no evidence of polarization. As Analía Gómez Vidal (2015) says: “In a sample of 993,578 tweets published between May 31 and June 6, 2015, it is possible to see how the Twittersphere accompanied those who mobilized for #NiUnaMenos, joining forces rather than dividing them, integrating rather than confronting accounts”.

impact on social control over cases of violence against women and the fact that it enabled people to talk about a hitherto invisible problem,³⁴ not to mention the debates it engendered in primary and secondary schools,³⁵ probably represent 3J's main achievement³⁶, as well as its most long-lasting effect.

The mobilization also triggered rapid reactions from political organizations and actors, who announced measures whose results are still uncertain: the Supreme Court announced the creation of the National Femicide Registry (one of the demands of the promoters of the protest) in coordination with the provincial courts, consisting of a readily accessible online system for the systematic registration of cases; a hitherto unpublicized unit of the national government, the Unit for the Registration, Systematization and Monitoring of Femicide and Homicide Aggravated by Gender, linked with the National Human Rights Secretariat, gained visibility; a bill of law proposing an obligatory course on gender violence before civil marriage was introduced in the Buenos Aires provincial legislature; the city of Buenos Aires legislature approved the creation of police units specialized in domestic violence and an "End Violence against Women Week" (from November 25 to December 1); the Ministry of Health updated and published a new version of the "protocol for caring for persons entitled to the legal interruption of pregnancy", which obliges the public and private health care systems to provide abortions for victims of rape or women whose lives or health is at risk; the Attorney General created the Specialized

34 Many women felt encouraged to tell their stories and break their silence on the day of the protest. As Ada Rico, president of the organization La Casa del Encuentro, says: "A woman came up to me, on the other side of the fence. She asked if she could come in. I explained that there were only family members there and asked: 'are you facing some kind of violent situation?'. She answered that she was. I met her again recently in a support group. She said: 'Do you remember me? I was with you in the square on the 3rd'. On this day, she summoned up the courage" (Rodríguez, 2015, p. 168).

35 Interview with Paula Rodríguez (Sep14, 2015). The journalist stresses that the greatest impact of 3J is on the younger generations.

36 The organizers also thought this (see the political manifesto on #NiUnaMenos published by the magazine *Anfibia* em <www.revistaanfibia.com/cronica/un-nuevo-nunca-mas>).

Violence against Women Unit (UFEM) aimed at upgrading investigation strategies and the process of bringing charges in specific crimes committed against women; several provinces announced the creation of databanks on gender violence, the offer of free legal assistance for victims, help centers and halfway houses and awareness programs; the University of Buenos Aires approved the creation of a protocol against gender violence.

The national law n. 26.485 has not yet been regulated by the Executive and no documents on its application are available for public consultation.³⁷ A significant institutional effect five months after the protest was the conversion into law of a bill for the provision of free legal assistance for victims of violence against women, presented by the senator Juan Manuel Abal Medina.³⁸

The protest may possibly have affected some election results, albeit indirectly and on a minor scale. Eleven days after 3J, the provincial election in Santa Fé, essentially a dispute between Miguel Lifschitz (Partido Socialista) and Miguel Del Sel (PRO), ended in favor of the former by a small margin, reversing the results of the opinion polls. Del Sel had been criticized weeks before for male chauvinist comments during his campaign. The consultancy El Viral analyzed comments on the candidate in the social networks, concluding that 98% of them were negative, characterizing him as a misogynist and asking people who had participated in the protest to show coherence and not vote for him.

In an electoral year of considerable significance for the country, the distance between a citizens' agenda and the campaign agenda of a number of candidates became evident. On August 3, shortly before the primary elections, the administrators of the #NiUnaMenos official accounts used Twitter to request that presidential pre-candidates show how they intended to address the issue

37 The provinces which had not adhered to law 26.485 continue not to: Córdoba, Salta, San Juan and Misiones.

38 See <infojusnoticias.gov.ar/nacionales/es-ley-el-proyecto-para-que-victimas-de-violencia-ten-gan-abogados-gratis-10423.html>.

of gender violence in their proposals by publishing them on their webpages and making them available to the press. The majority posted a direct link to their own online campaign platforms (on the candidates' official pages); others merely limited themselves to expressing support for the five demands made by the organizers of the protest.³⁹ Some political forces, such as the Frente de Esquerda, sought to differentiate themselves from the presidential candidates leading the polls on this point: "For Scioli, Macri and Massa, #NiUnaMenos is a slogan; for us it is an inalienable position".⁴⁰ As the date of the presidential debate grew closer, the organizers of the protest met with representatives of the diverse parties to get them to include the issue of violence against women in their agendas.⁴¹ Even though the political, institutional and electoral effects have so far been minimal, and there were new cases of femicide soon after 3], the major impact has been social and cultural, and the event itself may be interpreted as "a new 'never again'".⁴²

There can be no doubt about the role that the social networks played in the creation and escalation of the mobilization and the organizers recognized that Twitter had a much greater impact than Facebook . A Facebook group had been involved in organizing activities, but it was unable to produce the same immediate viral effect that took place via Twitter. According to one of the journalists, the Facebook dynamic was more oriented to the formation of

39 The journalists asked the same of the main candidates for mayor of the city of Buenos Aires, who also responded to the request.

40 *La izquierda diario*, Aug. 6, 2015.

41 For the day of the election, the organizers managed to reach an agreement with the electoral authority Dirección Nacional Eleitoral to have signs with telephone numbers for reporting gender violence at all the voting stations. The signs said "Voting is our right. Living without violence is, too. #NiUnaMenos".

42 In Argentina, "never again" is the expression which sums up the repudiation of State terror during the military dictatorship. See the political manifesto on #NiUnaMenos published by the magazine *Anfibia* in <www.revistaanfibia.com/cronica/un-nuevo-nunca-mas>. In addition to being a cross cutting event in terms of human rights issues, it was the first time that women occupied public space as *women* and not as *mothers* (interview with Paula Rodríguez, Sep. 14, 2015).

groups, while Twitter combines the massification effect of a hashtag with the incapacity to control the meaning attributed to it: “after it is published it no longer belongs to you”.⁴³ Thus a logic involving argumentation and discussion is opposed to one of social leadership. In this respect, another journalist observed that while Facebook entails a closer, more trusted circle, Twitter is public. But the voice here needs to be personal rather than institutional to mobilize people: on Twitter, you have a “personal voice that speaks out loud at other people’s parties”.⁴⁴

But the online world was not the exclusive terrain for the event for a number of reasons. Firstly, offline conditions made possible the great repercussion of the call to protest and influenced the way in which it was developed. The initial organizers were journalists and social communicators recognized both within and outside the social networks; this gave them the specific professional expertise required to conduct an appropriate dissemination strategy, as well as the contacts with political and social actors to organize the event and create pressure for the targeted changes. Additionally, the traditional communication media, both press and television, were kept informed about what was happening in the online space, amplifying the mobilization to an extent that would have otherwise been inconceivable. Secondly, many feminist and women’s organizations, within political parties, unions and civil society, had already been engaged in combating violence against women, albeit on a smaller scale.⁴⁵

Without all this background work, the hashtag launched on Twitter

43 Interview with Hinde Pomeraniec (Aug. 18, 2015).

44 Interview with Claudia Acuña (Aug. 19, 2015).

45 Interview with Cecilia Mancuso, Oct. 27, 2015), with Claudia Acuña (Aug. 19, 2015) and with Paula Rodríguez (Sep. 14, 2015). Although, in this respect, Paula Rodríguez also points out that the social networks had previously been working as spaces for the circulation of divergent arguments, in particular in relation to the coverage given by the traditional media to cases of femicide, imputing guilt to the victims.

would not have mobilized these organized actors as quickly as it did,⁴⁶ however, only the event created on the social networks was capable of producing an initial reaction of this magnitude and its inclusion on the public agenda. On the other hand, the organizers unexpectedly found themselves required to assume a role of responsibility and social representation. The political actors sought them out, they gave talks in schools and, above all, they themselves began to receive reports, accounts and requests for help, to which they had to respond.⁴⁷ Whatever the case, the relationship between the online and offline worlds was characterized by convergence and mutual leverage. The mobilization required that they put their bodies on the line. A journalist close to the initial organizers stresses that from the beginning the objective was to generate a non virtual event, to get people on the streets: “the aim was not to become just a trendy topic”.⁴⁸ And, as another one of the activists observes: “In the physical world, you need bodies, and change happens when you have bodies on the streets”.⁴⁹

Case 2: Partido de la Red, democratic experimentalism

The Partido de la Red was constituted originally with the goal of disputing the 2013 legislative elections in the city of Buenos Aires, but did not obtain enough votes to elect candidates. Its party proposal was totally innovative: the party claimed its legislators would vote on each issue in accordance with deliberation and voting processes executed by means of a web platform created specifically for this purpose. When it did not win any seats,

46 Claudia Acuña's interpretation was this: “What emerges is the result, [...] it never starts there, it finishes there, this is it” (interview with Claudia Acuña, 19 ago. 2015).

47 In this respect, the social networks also played a fundamental role. As Paula Rodríguez says: “The Facebook and Twitter accounts were not just for issuing things; they also received things: support, requests for support, pictures, photos” (interview with Paula Rodríguez, Sep. 14, 2015).

48 Interview with Paula Rodríguez (Sep. 14, 2015).

49 Interview with Claudia Acuña (Aug. 19, 2015).

the party reformulated its strategy to create other participative platforms, such as *Demos* (aimed at discussing and voting on bills in the city of Buenos Aires legislative) and *Qué proponen* [what they propose] (a website presenting the proposals of all the candidates in the 2015 elections enabling people to identify the candidate with which they felt the greatest affinity). In parallel, work was begun on developing a territorial strategy with meetings in the districts of the city of Buenos Aires, along the same horizontal lines promoted by the web. The case of the Partido de la Red may show the potential and the limitations of political parties emerging from the online world.

The Partido de la Red emerged as an initiative of a group of entrepreneurs, political scientists, advertising executives, sociologists and web programmers whose idea was to capitalize on the enormous advances in technology to reinforce democracy. This group of friends, acquaintances and colleagues sought to “create a software capable of hacking into the existing party political system and transforming it”.⁵⁰ There were five people at the first meeting; in the second, each one of the original participants brought along another person.⁵¹ Their pre-existing personal or professional relationships were determinant in the formation of the party. From the beginning there was an internal tension which would later shape their proposal: on the one hand, the vision of the “technologist” entrepreneurs, more optimistic about the possibilities offered by technology to produce changes in the political system; on the other, the vision of the social scientists, or those with experience working with other political parties, more skeptical about the exclusive virtues of technology. In February 2013, they reached an agreement on the founding manifesto, based on a set of interconnected concepts: #DemocraciaEstancada (stagnated democracy); #Red (network); #Pares (peers); #DemocraciaEnRed (networked democracy); #PartidoDeLaRed (networked party). Their principles

⁵⁰ See <partidodelared.org>.

⁵¹ Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

were based on the supposition that: democracy is not currently stagnant, but technology has advanced and radically transformed daily life, something that has not yet occurred in the political sphere; therefore it is necessary to think in terms of a networked democracy in which all individuals are and act as peers. From the beginning, the concept of “network” had two interpretations for party members. On the one hand, it referred to the Internet and to an organization that would use this tool to enable civic participation. On the other, “network” evoked the type of party organization they were proposing, horizontal and open, as opposed to the traditional hierarchical and elitist parties. The members referred to themselves as “peers”, seeking to avoid personalism, and to the work teams as the “nodes” in the network.

In principle, the idea was to use the internet to create spaces for civic participation in decision making within the city of Buenos Aires and offer them to political parties and organizations that were interested. However, they soon realized that the initiative was not popular with the traditional parties: “they are groups who have become used to taking decisions behind society’s back, in a concentrated, vertical and personalistic power structure” (Siri, 2015, p. 95). Therefore, they opted to build a new political party to dispute the 2013 legislative elections in the city of Buenos Aires.

The Partido de la Red’s proposal was unprecedented: by means of an application created with the software *DemocracyOS*, developed by members of the party, they intended to list all the bills of law under discussion in the city legislature to enable registered citizens to obtain information, voice their opinion and vote on them; subsequently the legislator elected by the Partido de la Red would vote in accordance with the results of the voting on the platform. Thus, the legislator would be a transparent representative whose only function would be to transmit the results of the votes; in accordance with this proposal it would make no difference if the legislator were a robot or a person.⁵² Whatever

52 This possibility was a kind of provocation from the more technologically oriented, rejected by the social scientists, which would never in fact be used in the 2013 campaign.

the case, the idea of representation as it is understood in contemporary democracies would be brought into question with this proposal. As the party members argue: “these tools permit individuals to be their own representatives, eliminating tutelage”.⁵³

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Partido de la Red's proposal is its presentation as a party without a defined ideological orientation. Although current political parties and leaders may employ a similar “transideological” discourse or one “beyond ideology”, in the case of the Partido de la Red the question was more profound, given that, if elected, the candidates would be committed to acting in accordance with what society decided via the platform. In his text, Sebastián Zírpolo described the Partido de la Red as a “a party with a method rather than an ideology”, since it did not engage in debate based on ideological positions. Gastón Silberman, another of its founding members responded to this author that “the ideology is that we decide better collectively” (Zírpolo, 2013). But this definition underscored two problems. First, the party would not be characterized by its own initiatives. In fact, it is possible to conceive the experience of the Partido de la Red as a “meta-democratic” experience”: its proposals have more to do with the way democracy works than with concrete policies. Its differential in relation to other political forces was in the importance attributed to societal participation. According to its members’ diagnosis, the current state of political ties meant that improving the relationship between representatives and citizens no longer constituted an option, but rather an obligation. However, the current crisis was related, above all, to “the response to civic participation”.⁵⁴ The specific differential of the Partido de la Red was not simply the employment of new technologies in politics, but the fact that, thanks to these, it could be presented as a party that would take society's decisions seriously: “today a representative can say that

53 See <partidodelared.org>.

54 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

he represents society, but later this is just a figment in that person's memory; the Partido de la Red proposes using society's real input".⁵⁵ Thus, even if for the members there was "much of the essence in the form",⁵⁶ the ideological or political definition was concentrated on the form. The only questions in which the party defended having a substantive agenda were those related to the conditions for its own existence, such as access to public information or the dissemination of technology.⁵⁷ The second problem was hypothetical, but was still a challenge for the traditional way of understanding representation: what would happen if a legislator were elected and the majority of the persons registered on the platform voted against this legislator's position or that of the party leaders? The heads of Partido de la Red in the 2013 elections guaranteed that having to vote against their own position in the legislature would not be a problem as long as they were entitled to express the fact that their personal opinion did not correspond to the vote.⁵⁸ During its two years of existence, the question of the ideology of the Partido de la Red generated debates among its members, influencing some of its positions, as we shall see further on. Nonetheless, the members continue to emphasize that the non-ideological posture is predominant and, in particular, and that they maintain an open mind about experiences that could be tested in the future. As they themselves pointed out: "the Partido de la Red seemed to set off all the alarms, something that did not happen with the traditional parties, and this makes it difficult to test and experiment with new things".⁵⁹

55 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

56 Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

57 Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

58 Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015). However, it should be pointed out that this hypothetical situation avoided considering how representative the votes of users of the platform were and assessing diverse degrees of active commitment: thus, a majority that had discussed just one specific project and disappeared from the scene would have a more effective weight than the party's regular militants.

59 Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

Nonetheless, the proposal seemed to lead to totally transparent representation, which called into question the actual idea of representation.⁶⁰ This, however, did not contradict its diagnosis and its position on contemporary politics: “with delegation to a formal representative, part of communication is jeopardized”, said one of its members.⁶¹ This was particularly important when considering a less salient aspect, but one which was part of the overall proposal: the possibility the users would have of delegating their vote⁶² to other users of the platform to decide on specific problems (it would be possible to delegate one particular vote or all the votes related to a determined subject to another person considered better qualified in this area). Would this mean reopening the gate of delegation to representatives and leaders, but based on epistemic virtues and specialized knowledge rather than politics? For the party members it would be necessary to envisage a user who could vote in the name of others more as a delegate than as a representative, particularly because this prerogative could be withdrawn at any time.⁶³ For them, the differentiation⁶⁴ was not necessarily based on expertise in the subject,⁶⁵ but on trust which might be “either technical

60 In particular, modern political representation, based on the rejection of the imperative mandate.

61 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

62 This idea is inspired by the experience of the Berlin Pirate Party, whose platform allowed for “superselectors”, actors who, according to the members of the Partido de la Red, have acted responsibly, informing those they represent about their vote (interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

63 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

64 Which also brought into question the maxim of modern democracies: “one person, one vote”.

65 However, it should be noted that the party members recognize an educational function in their proposal. One of the founders, Martín Galanternik, asked: “What kind of civic education are we proposing, if we let people feel that they have participated by the simple fact of having logged on to the platform?” (Sebastián Zírpolo, “Partido de la Red: Los hackers de la política”, *Revista Brando*, 29 jul. 2013). Another founder argued: “For the Partido de la Red’s mission, politics is education, educating people to be more aware of their rights and of the effects of collective decisions” (Agustín Frizzera, “Por qué votar al Partido de la Red”, *Bastión Digital*, Oct. 23, 2015).

or moral” in origin;⁶⁶ they also understood that this knowledge could be diverse in its origin, not all of which associated with expertise: a neighbor’s “wisdom based on experience” with respect to the square on the corner of his street is sometimes more valuable than the knowledge of the town planner or the legislator when it comes to taking decisions about this square.⁶⁷ Whatever the case, the delegate should never “stop being a peer”. The same discussion about the relationship between “peers” took place inside the party, but without delegation of the vote. One of its members argued: “We don’t shun leadership. We are here to debate representation and the kind of leadership desired. What does not exist is the figure of the uncontested leader”.⁶⁸

This disruptive proposal—binding online participation and transparent representation — led to the beginning of the creation of a formal political party which would face the challenge of finding four thousand members to be able to ensure provisional registration in order to participate in the elections. Simultaneously, the members initiated a campaign to rapidly make their ideas known to the citizens of the city of Buenos Aires. They managed to collect the signatures a little before the elections, in September 2013. The electoral campaign was very characteristic of a young party arising from the social networks. Since they did not have a large budget,⁶⁹ they organized a “Comunicación”, a communication marathon to define their strategy,⁷⁰ two open sessions that brought 45 people together to generate ideas and develop themes,

66 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

67 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

68 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015). For the interviewee, the situations in which the leader is uncontested are ones in which the subject is debated in meetings, but what really matters when it comes to taking a collective decision is the leader’s position.

69 The budget they had came from funds the city of Buenos Aires provided the party with to print the voting slips, in addition to the party founders’ personal funds and a crowdfunding campaign.

70 Inspired by the “hackathons”, meetings in which many programmers get together for 48 hours and work in small teams on the development of information systems (Siri, 2015, p. 214).

signs and spots. Worthy of note among the campaign slogans were: “Everyone in”, “May the web awake” and “On offer: representatives who represent”. Aimed at building a symbol that would attract people’s attention anywhere, that would become viral not only on the social networks but also in the offline public space, they created the “Trojan Horse”.⁷¹ This was to visit all the districts of Buenos Aires, with a megaphone announcing: “Just as the Greeks penetrated the fortress, came out of the horse and opened the gates of the city, we are here to present a strategy for the inhabitants of Buenos Aires to penetrate a fortified legislature. We don’t want all the politicians to leave, we want all the citizens to enter”.⁷² Another challenge for the Partido de la Red was raising funds to print the number of voting slips required under Argentinean electoral legislation. To do this they resorted to crowdfunding. In ten days, they managed to raise all the 35,000 pesos required from 280 contributors (Siri, 2015, p. 215). The selection of candidates was another question that had to be resolved during the process; the decision about who would head the list was made by consensus within the party and the “natural” candidates were its founders.

The end of the campaign consisted of the presentation of the Partido de la Red’s online deliberation and voting platform. In the week before the elections, the platform went on the air, simulating what would occur were any of the party’s candidates to be elected. In the words of one of the members: “Our proposal does not consist of promises, but rather actions. Instead of talking about a hypothetical tool, we showed everyone interested how *DemocracyOS* worked with the laws then under passage. This demystified the idea that laws address complex issues requiring specialization or that using an online application was complicated” (Siri, 2015, p. 216).

On deciding to form a political party to dispute elections, the members

71 The allusion to the Trojan Horse is also derived from the IT term which refers to a program that is presented in a certain way but executes other tasks in the background (Siri, 2015, p. 214).

72 The Partido de la Red’s Facebook page, Dec. 28, 2013. This slogan alludes to a phrase that became well known during the December 2001 political crisis in Argentina, which went: “*que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo*” (out with all [the politicians], we don’t want any left).

of the Partido de la Red faced a series of challenges in the offline world: obtaining provisional registration in just a few months, selecting candidates, raising campaign funding etc. All of these challenges obliged them to test solutions and try out courses of action aligned with their principles. Finally, in the legislative elections held on October 27, 2013, the Partido de la Red obtained 21,943 votes, the ninth highest number among the 27 alternatives,⁷³ but none of its candidates managed to get elected.

During 2014, the Partido de la Red kept its discussion platform open and updated. Each week the bills of law that would be debated in the legislature were inserted in the platform and people were asked to discuss and vote on them, in an attempt to show how the party would have functioned if it had elected representatives. An analysis of the discussions that took place on the platform during 2014⁷⁴ suggests that the majority of the messages were not limited to giving an opinion in favor or against a bill, but proposed suggestions or modifications, something not originally planned for the platform. The members of the Partido de la Red participated actively in these debates. Other messages, fewer in number, fulfilled the function of providing information. In some cases, the data came from specialists in the subject, but in general the personal experiences of individuals affected by the questions addressed in each bill of law predominated. There were also messages questioning the relevance of the topics addressed by the legislature, instead of concentrating time and resources on questions the users of the tool considered to be priorities. Messages questioning the validity and rejecting the legislature as an institution were widespread. The fact is that online deliberation (one of the party's most constitutive demands) continues to be a technical, conceptual and practical problem: messages taking into account or responding to prior communications were rare, others indicated that the users had voted before participating in the

73 The Partido de la Red's Facebook page, Dec. 31, 2013.

74 The study was exploratory. Only messages related to bills of law in which more than 300 people had participated were considered (11 bills in all).

discussion, and many were in fact from party members. Tracking conversation topics among the messages was not easy and hardly anybody posted more than one message.

Significantly, however, during 2014 the party had continued to develop the Network Democracy Foundation, (Fundação Democracia em Rede)⁷⁵. Since it was not an election year and no representatives had been elected, activities as a political party were not the party members' main concern. The foundation sought to improve the system, elaborate new initiatives and get in touch with other parties and institutions at local and global level. The foundation is the institution effectively responsible for developing and maintaining the *DemocracyOS* civic participation system, promoting and facilitating its use in different institutional spheres in the city of Buenos Aires and worldwide.⁷⁶ As one of the founding members of the party and the foundation states: "we took the fundamental decision to separate the software from the political party: our goal, in fact, is to get all political spaces to incorporate this tool into their practices, not just the Partido de la Red" (Siri, 2015, p. 75). The foundation is a good medium for raising funds to develop the software and is capable of obtaining support from diverse actors. In this sense, the Partido de la Red is simply one of many actors seeking to deploy the *Democracy* tool, with the particularity that the party's proposal implies use in a binding manner where societal decisions are concerned.⁷⁷ But other political parties started to employ the software for organizational decision making. Furthermore, condominiums, organized district community associations and other collective actors have

75 The foundation has the format of an NGO, it is financed by donations and remuneration for its services. It is run by some founding members of the Partido de la Red and its president is Florencia Polimeni, who was a legislator for the city of Buenos Aires.

76 "We can implement *DemocracyOS* both for internal use and to consult electors about any type of question. [...] In Mexico, the federal government implemented *DemocracyOS* to initiate a debate about its public data policy. And in Tunisia the organization I WATCH used the tool for a debate on the new national constitution with the Tunisians" (Siri, 2015, p. 218).

77 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

increasingly sought to use the tool, with assistance from the foundation.⁷⁸

The initiative called *Demos* was a Fundação Democracia em Rede project. Based on the *DemocracyOS* software, for some weeks during November 2014 the legislature of the city of Buenos Aires made a platform available over which any user could obtain information about the 16 bills of law under debate in the house. Of these only the three considered most relevant would be debated and promptly submitted to a vote by society. The initiative was developed in collaboration with the president of the house and legislators from different parties who had submitted bills of law, although the decisions on the platform were not to be binding. 13,289 Buenos Aires residents accessed the platform, which received a total of 26,833 visits, including users from other cities around the world. The majority were young people aged between 25 and 35 years, and the breakdown between men and women was more evenly distributed than in other participative societal environments — 55% and 45% respectively.⁷⁹

The main medium for disseminating the project was Twitter: 4,569 tweets bore the *Demos*, #YoVoto hashtag. Since this new actor generated suspicion among party political leaders and the intention was that *Demos* should have an institutional presence, it was necessary to negotiate with the different party leaders to get them to include their bills and select the ones they considered most appropriate for discussion on the platform. It was not possible to do this online⁸⁰. It had to be done face to face,⁸¹ knocking on doors, speaking to aides, convincing legislators by bringing into play the diverse political ties each member of the Partido de la Red had. One of the first aspects of *Demos* that demonstrated the importance of interplay between

78 Different from the Partido de la Red, whose organizational structure will be analyzed further ahead, the foundation does have a hierarchical structure comprising a president, a board of directors, an executive board and working groups. However there is a very large overlap between the members of the foundation and the militants of the Partido de la Red.

79 Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

80 Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

81 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

the online and offline worlds was the inevitable interaction with political and institutional actors.

But even more evident in this respect was the result of the deliberation process and, particularly, the vote. The winning bill, which attracted the highest participation and number of votes, was a bill to improve working conditions for nurses in public hospitals, which had been introduced by Marcelo Ramal, a legislator for the Frente de Esquerda. This bill achieved the participation of 1,434 people, a result made possible because the leaders of the Frente de Esquerda urged their militants to vote and to mobilize, engaging those directly affected by the bill of law by organizing campaigns to publicize the question in hospitals. In the words of one of the members of the Partido de la Red: “an offline group took over the platform”.⁸² This was interpreted as proof of the relevance of organized offline actors and of actions undertaken in the offline environment, the “physical correlate”⁸³ of the success of the online activities.⁸⁴ This was also the opinion of some of the representatives who took part in the initiative, such as the legislator of the The Civic Coalition for an Egalitarian Republic, CC-ARI (Coalición Cívica para la Afirmación de una República Igualitaria) and third vice president of the house, whose bill of law seeking an increase in the education budget came in second place in number of votes: “Neither can the cyber-militant substitute the militant, nor can the cyber-legislator substitute the legislator; the networks cannot take the place of the territory and face to face contact, they can only complement them: the incorporation of the new technologies serves to amplify the public space”.⁸⁵

82 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

83 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

84 The CC-ARI aired spots on the social networks disseminating the bill they were advocating, but this implied prioritizing another strategy in the online world.

85 Interview with Maximiliano Ferraro (Sep. 22, 2015).

In the case of the deliberation and discussion of the bills, the dynamic was similar to the one described previously in the use of the Partido de la Red platform: deliberation did not attain the depth expected and it was difficult to establish dialogue; although there was a button to respond to comments, the system did not generate notifications, resulting in a reduced number of responses to comments.⁸⁶ The commitment assumed by the legislators was to follow up on the three bills elected by popular vote after the consultation. The bill receiving the most votes, which had been awaiting approval by the parliamentary commission responsible for six years, was once again obstructed by the legislature after the *Demos* experience, and did not reach the plenary session; similarly, the bill that came in second place did not pass the commissions. A vote was taken on the bill that came third, but it was not approved. Nevertheless, the main positive effect of the initiative was the fact that society did manage to establish an agenda that diverged from that of the political representatives, providing visibility for bills from small parties that otherwise would not have been the case. However, as one legislator observed, “the ball comes back into the political court”;⁸⁷ it is the politicians who see themselves as bound to provide society with some kind of response.

2015 saw a new conjuncture for the Partido de la Red: it was an election year, but the provisional registration they had obtained no longer permitted them to run unless they managed to increase party membership. Thus the members had to implement two strategies simultaneously: firstly to try to reach the number of 4 thousand members required by the city of Buenos Aires Electoral Court; and then, when they realized that it would not be possible to

86 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015). The legislator of the CC-ARI, whose bill was also discussed, admitted having participated in the debate, discussing it article by article and responding to questions and criticisms and observed that many who were accompanying the project were well informed (interview with Maximiliano Ferraro, Sep. 22, 2015). One of the significant results for the representatives who submitted their bills for discussion and voting was precisely the receipt of the report prepared by the Fundación Democracia en Red which presented the main positive and negative arguments with regard to these bills.

87 Interview with Maximiliano Ferraro (Sep. 22, 2015).

dispute the 2015 elections, to implement some type of new initiative which would enable them to be a visible actor on the electoral scene even though they were not presenting candidates. The first strategy required a change in the format of the party and the development of a territorial dimension, which we will address further on.

In order to participate in the 2015 electoral process, even without having candidates, the Partido de la Red launched the *Qué proponen* platform, which provided users with information on the public proposals put forward by each of the candidates for executive positions in the city of Buenos Aires and in the Argentinean national elections. The proposals could be filtered by party, by candidate or by subject; it was also possible to visualize which issues drew more proposals from a particular candidate or party. Links were also made available for users to communicate with the candidates via Twitter. *Qué proponen* received more than 600,000 accesses, it was shared more than 9 thousand times on Facebook and there were 1,200 tweets with the link to the platform for the local elections in Buenos Aires. The accesses peaked at 11 a.m. on election day, indicating that people used the platform to obtain information on candidates' positions. These numbers also demonstrate the influence of the Partido de la Red on the election process, in spite of having no candidates.⁸⁸

Based on *Qué proponen* the application *Tu Media Naranja* (your soul-mate) was developed in the city of Buenos Aires. This enabled users to identify the candidates they had greater affinity with based on their interest in proposals related to specific topics. These initiatives are aligned with one of the mottos adopted by the Partido de la Red since its foundation, "we debate ideas, not candidates", and which provoked an impact in an electoral campaign criticized for not debating proposals.⁸⁹ To build this platform, the organizers started collecting

88 The initiative was mentioned by the press and also imitated, for example, by the newspaper *La Nación*, which proposed a similar tool by which readers could measure their affinity with the diverse candidates.

89 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

information from the candidates' websites and organizing the information available on the electoral platforms. But as the audience for *Qué proponen* grew, a number of candidates started to contact them (offline) to insert their proposals, and to correct or complement the information provided on them.⁹⁰

Although the challenge of obtaining the number of affiliations required to ensure the party's registration seemed possible in 2015, the ease with which it picked up "likes" and followers in the social networks was not transferred to the offline world. Up to that moment, the party had managed to sign up between 800 and 1,200 members. The Partido de la Red then opted to obtain registration with its sights on the 2017 elections, while in the meantime developing a territorial strategy.

Compared with its original proposal, the decision to hold meetings and constitute territorial cells was a landmark which would have an impact on the political conception of the party. In this respect, the Partido de la Red is notable: while the traditional political parties need to incorporate the new technologies into their communication and the way they operate, the Partido de la Red is heading in the opposite direction, seeking to occupy physical territory and promote face to face contact. The party members' diagnosis was that "attracting people online needs to start offline; this will enable the more intense consolidation of a community";⁹¹ and that, without occupying this territory, the party runs the risk of "losing its sensitivity", which is something that you cannot develop "sitting on the couch at home".⁹²

Therefore, they started establishing cells or nodes based on the city of Buenos Aires' 15 administrative divisions or comunas. To date, there are active nodes in comunas 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13 and 14. At the meetings in these nodes⁹³, the

90 Interview with Inti Bonomo (Aug. 31, 2015).

91 Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

92 Interview with Inti Bonomo (Aug. 31, 2015).

93 On average, 20 people participate in the territorial assemblies. At the same time, the Partido de la Red holds general assemblies in November, in which around 70 people generally participate.

issues discussed may be either related to the comuna and/or to the party in general, but with a local emphasis. They discuss collaboration with district and civil society organizations, propose walks around the district to map the area and identify local problems. By saying that “to know how we can improve living conditions, it is necessary to know how we live”, one of the members of the node for comunas 13 and 14 is alluding to a party whose role is to formulate proposals to improve living conditions for citizens.⁹⁴ In fact, it is in these territories that cooperation with other civil society and political organizations emerges, aimed at providing solutions to specific problems. Examples worthy of note are the measures to prevent the closure of a hospital in the Villa Urquiza district, or the relationship initiated with a waste picker cooperative.⁹⁵

In fact, the development of a territorial dimension required that the party review and rethink its aforementioned lack of an ideology. A party member responsible for the territorial strategy stated that this conception was being transformed and that members considered that the party needed its own ideas, even if they were developed using collective online writing mechanisms.⁹⁶ Upon coming into contact with the territory, the party was obliged to adopt positions on the problems raised about the districts in the assemblies.⁹⁷ In parallel, the party's positioning on the problems or public events in 2013 changed. The foundation document stated that “the Partido de la Red will only adopt positions on questions that affect the minimum conditions for a networked democracy”, but the party's positions on the social networks increased both in number and in the range of topics covered. In 2013, the party's official Facebook page contained only two positions, both related to the conditions

94 Participant observation of a territorial assembly in the districts of Belgrano and Núñez and interview with the coordinator, Enrique Elvas (Aug. 22, 2015).

95 Interview with Inti Bonomo (Aug. 31, 2015).

96 Interview with Inti Bonomo (Aug. 31, 2015).

97 Participant observation of a territorial assembly in the districts of Belgrano and Núñez and interview with the coordinator, Enrique Elvas (Aug. 22, 2015).

for the existence of a networked democracy. In 2014, seven positions related to various local issues were posted, including more controversial ones, such as the shortage of places in the city of Buenos Aires public school system. Lastly, in 2015 four positions were published, addressing even more controversial issues, such as the death of the prosecutor Alberto Nisman, and the #NiUnaMenos mobilization. Consequently, the definition of ideological positions is one of the points under discussion within the party. For one member, “society is beginning to demand traditional ideological definitions”;⁹⁸ for another, the Partido de la Red will need to start adopting ideological positions, but not necessarily in a traditional sense, because it will always be subject to a referendum by society;⁹⁹ the fact is that “if you are in the political system, you cannot be an actor who just says yes or no, you have to be proactive, to take the initiative”.¹⁰⁰

During 2015, the Partido de la Red also modified its internal organizational structure. The executive council in operation in 2013, which was composed of 60 to 70 people who took decisions on all issue in assemblies was replaced in June 2015 by an executive committee consisting of the coordinators of each one of the 7 thematic nodes, as well as the coordinators of the territorial nodes.¹⁰¹ The sovereign body in terms of responsibility and

98 Interview with Inti Bonomo (Aug. 31, 2015).

99 From the standpoint of its members, this is perhaps one of the aspects that most differentiates the Partido de la Red from other parties emerging from the web, such as the European Podemos and Movimiento 5 Stelle : “they clearly have charismatic leaders and act like traditional parties in some respects because they are disputing power and have an ideological perspective” (interview with Felipe Muñoz, Sep. 21, 2015). Nevertheless, these experiences are clear references for its proposal: the structure in circles of Podemos inspires its nodal structure, for example (interview with Inti Bonomo, Aug. 31, 2015). At the same time, they have frequent contact with all these experiences by means of the Fundación Democracia en Red: the parties seek the Foundation for assistance, as do the 5 Stelle representatives in the city of Trieste or, in other cases, they themselves assume the development of the code, since it is essentially an open code (interview with Felipe Muñoz, Sep. 21, 2015).

100 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

101 The thematic or functional nodes currently in existence are: Platform (coordinated by Agustín Frizzera, who is responsible for thinking, developing and maintaining the contents on the party's platforms), Finance, Territory (coordinated by Inti Bonomo), Networked parties (relations with

accountability became the General Meeting, in which all members participate. Party members are developing a specific online platform to prepare the themes and discussions for the general meetings, but warn that the general meeting “cannot be replaced by an online one; discussing things face to face offers a higher level of connection, it is different and not necessarily better; the ideal would be a hybrid model that would maximize the advantages of face to face and online communication”.¹⁰²

Another novelty has been the emergence of the Partido de la Red in other locations in the country: La Rioja, Mar del Plata, Rosário, Córdoba, Tandil, Necochea and Lanús.¹⁰³ There was discussion about whether there should be a hierarchy which would subordinate the new nodes to the original one in the city of Buenos Aires. The option was made to maintain the organization horizontal, enabling autonomous construction of the Partido de la Red in each location with specific characteristics for each individual context.¹⁰⁴

Who does the Partido de la Red represent or include? On the one hand, its members say that the platform is a tool for the weak against the powerful, given that the software it has developed is aimed at reducing the cost of participation for everyone.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, it is impossible to conceive a

other Partidos de la Red), Membership (coordinated by Gonzalo Arguello), Communication and Organization (coordinated by Martín Galanternik). There are also peripheral nodes, the active ones being Art, Academia, Design, Haiti (corruption of “IT” for information technology) and Software.

102 Interview with Inti Bonomo (Aug. 31, 2015).

103 In the city of La Rioja the party is a legally constituted organization. The node in Mar del Plata is also very active and developed an application to police the elections, which was also used by the Partido de la Red in the city of Buenos Aires, which thereafter started decentralizing the production of content. The majority of Facebook pages replicate the posts from the Buenos Aires party’s original page and provide information on local meetings. Some nodes are personal initiatives with around ten followers.

104 Interview with Inti Bonomo (Aug. 31, 2015). Nonetheless, the informal hierarchies persist; because of their capacity to speak in public or experience the founders of the party in Buenos Aires are always a reference.

105 Interview with Felipe Muñoz (Sep. 21, 2015).

body of representatives consisting entirely of legislators from the Partido de la Red: other parties are needed to represent those who have no access to or who are unfamiliar with the new technologies.¹⁰⁶ While digital exclusion persists, the Partido de la Red will be deficient in terms of representation and inclusion. In this respect, digital exclusion is a limitation the offline world imposes on the online world.

But from the experience of the Partido de la Red, we have seen that these worlds have to engage in dialogue in several ways: its initiatives imply establishing contacts with other political forces; electoral rules impose the need to seek members based on territory; territory proves to be necessary to boost “sensitivity”; which in turn obliges the party to adopt positions in relation to certain issues and to coordinate actions with other specific actors. In the words of its members: “online and offline are universes that intersect”.¹⁰⁷ But this is a terrain we may refer to as “democratic experimentalism”. What characterizes the Partido de la Red is its experimentalism. This can be seen, in the way the party conceives its internal organization and its positioning towards society or in the development and constant improvement of online applications that foster societal participation, In this, democracy itself is conceived as an experiment, a test, a process of trial and error, because “technology is fleeting, it is tool that is alive”.¹⁰⁸

Caso 3: Change.org, the digital cry

Change.org is an online petition platform which has been in place in Argentina since January 2013. It gained relevance rapidly as topics of major public importance started to generate petitions on the platform, examples being the regulation of mandatory presidential debates, the sanction of

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Inti Bonomo (Aug. 31, 2015).

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Agustín Frizzera and Ana Lis Rodríguez Nardelli (Aug. 4, 2015).

healthcare laws, or the demand for policies against gender violence related to the #NiUnaMenos mobilization (among the most recent ones). To date, there have been many positive responses to petitions, as well as significant institutional changes. The main tools for disseminating the petitions originating on this online platform are the social networks, but the relevance that it has acquired has ensured that many of the issues raised have also been reproduced by the traditional communication media. Change.org's great potential for achieving "successes" (positive results in the offline environment) is due to the way in which it exercises pressure on decision makers, but also to the appeal of its use of personal accounts, a predominance of images over impersonal argumentation, and individual experiences in contrast with the positions of organized actors.

In 2007, Change.org emerged in the United States as a blog on questions related to social change. The site had been created by Ben Rattray, a student at Stanford University. Over time, the petitions on the site became more popular (that is, they attracted more traffic) than the actual posts on the blog, leading to its transformation into a platform exclusively dedicated to petitions. The platform rapidly expanded to other countries, starting with England and Australia. In Spain, Change.org ended up merging with an existing platform called Actuable. It was based on this Spanish language version that the website expanded to Latin America. Utilization of the global platform by users in determined countries ended up generating local versions of the website.¹⁰⁹ In January 2013, the website came into operation in Argentina.¹¹⁰ One of the first petitions created was related to the problem of flooding in the cities of Buenos Aires and La Plata, demanding that the national government build aqueducts

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Change.org is coordinated in Latin America by Susana Fernández Garrido, a bachelor in Information Science, who worked previously at Amnesty International and, in Argentina, by Gastón Wright, a bachelor in Political Science from the University of Toronto. The coordinator of the platform in Argentina is responsible for selecting the local team, whose main mission is to promote the dissemination of the campaigns.

and sewage networks. This petition had been created by a Spanish journalist. In the beginning the platform's links with Spain were strong due to the fact that until 2013 Argentinean users used the Spanish version of Change.org, particularly for animal rights-related petitions.¹¹¹ There are currently 2.5 million active users in Argentina (out of a total of 2.9 million) and the greater number of petitions are related to: economic justice (19.1%), animal rights (16.4%), human rights (14.3%), health (13.2%) and the environment (13%).¹¹²

The platform is defined by its creators as a tool capable of promoting social change through citizens' individual actions. The website states that "Change.org's mission is to empower people everywhere to create the change they want to see".¹¹³ According to the coordinator in Argentina, Change.org was established to empower people to create the changes they want, but without defining *a priori* the type of change. It is a dynamic platform that seeks to influence decision makers and produce concrete results.¹¹⁴ By focusing on change, it is not a platform that carries petitions related to the status quo, although in some cases requests may arise aimed at preserving a current state where change may pose a threat.¹¹⁵

Different from other petition platforms, such as Avaaz, Change.org does not take an institutional position in relation to the petitions, neither does it create

111 Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015).

112 Report produced by Change.org and published by the newspaper *La Nación* on Oct. 21, 2015. See <www.lanacion.com.ar/1838364-changeorg-barometro-sociedad-argentinos-preocupaciones-elecciones>. Worldwide, the platform has more than 110 million users in 196 countries.

113 Extract from Terms of Service. See <www.change.org/policies/terms-of-service>.

114 Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015).

115 In this respect, the case of the Centro Cultural Kirchner is illustrative, since two petitions were created on the platform about the subject: one to change the name of the cultural center, based on its lack of representativeness in Argentinean society, while the other seeks to maintain the name, in order not to repeat the tactic used by the Argentine military dictatorship of banning references to the name of the former president Juan Domingo Perón.

new petitions itself. The platform prefers the actual users to take the initiative and simply collaborates in the dissemination of the petitions that manage to collect a large number of signatures, without “having a specific agenda”.¹¹⁶ The Change.org terms of use state: “We are not responsible for the content of our users and do not monitor it. [...] [we do not] support viewpoints, opinions, recommendations or advice published by users”.¹¹⁷ The platform does not take positions on the petitions, but reserves the right to exclude them in extreme cases, such as when the messages are clearly discriminatory in content.¹¹⁸

What is necessary to create or sign a petition? The first step is the creation of a user account. Users must be over 13 years of age, act in their own name and may not conceal their true identity. Each user may initiate a “campaign”, that is, create a specific petition on the platform and promote it via the social networks, via email or other communication media. The platform itself encourages the users to share their petitions, to “mobilize” their friends, family and community. Once created, the user is also encouraged to keep the petition up-to-date, “keeping supporters informed” about the advances and setbacks as regards the objectives of the petition. In addition to being “authors”,

116 Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015). The platform collaborates with the dissemination of some petitions by email; it has a mailing list of 2.5 million people, although it generally targets the recipients in accordance with their interests (defined in function of the signature of previous petitions or members’ social profile).

117 Extract from Terms of Service. See <www.change.org/policies/terms-of-service>. Another difference is in the method of financing. While Avaaz is an NGO that receives donations from individuals, Change.org has a “social business” model, which is not financed by donations. It has a sustainability strategy based on the sale of “petitions promoted”. This does not mean that Change.org is affiliated with the organizations responsible for these petitions even if it is in favor of them (interview with Gastón Wright, Aug. 10, 2015).

118 The platform establishes that certain petitions may be excluded if they violate the Terms of Service or the Community Directives. In principle, any illegal petition is included in this category. One case is that of protecting authors’ rights. Another case is direct profit: petitions seeking to sell a product or a service. A petition may also be excluded if it is defamatory or if it invades someone’s privacy (e.g.: publishing their personal data). Discourse promoting hate or discrimination that violates human rights, obscene language or the publication of explicit images (that is violent, sexually explicit or offensive) may also lead to exclusion of a petition (interview with Gastón Wright, Aug. 10, 2015). Users may easily report inappropriate content found in a determined petition.

users may also “support” other petitions. In fact, there are three different roles on the platform: 1) the authors; 2) the decision makers, those who the petitions are formally aimed at; and 3) the supporters. The authors may be either individual citizens or organizations. Whereas the decision makers are divided into: a) the state sector: government representatives, civil servants, legislators at various levels of government and members of the Judiciary; b) private companies offering public services; and c) civil society organizations. The petitions may be addressed to several of these actors. There is also a fourth type of petition addressed to more abstract groups, such as “the Argentinians”. However, to a great extent, the success of a petition depends on the precise identification of those responsible for an issue and the decision makers with the legal authority to respond to the petition.¹¹⁹ Lastly, the supporters may add comments justifying their support and may help to disseminate the petition.¹²⁰

Regarding the type of petition, the platform has diverse categories which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There are the “closed petitions”, those not receiving any new signatures. A petition may be closed when the user decides upon this (with or without a public justification) or when it has not been accessed for over a year.¹²¹ Others are the “highlighted” petitions,

119 Interview with María Pazo (Sep. 28, 2015). As this legislative aide observed: “Power is disseminated and it is not clear who is able to respond. This platform enables the organization of the demand and indicates who may decide” (interview with María Pazo, Sep. 28, 2015). For this reason, Change.org frequently helps the proponents to change the recipients when these are not well identified in the initial petition. It is likely that a petition will be more successful if it is addressed to second or third echelon employees who are in fact responsible for the question. Petitions addressed directly to the president or the head of the government are not usually effective. The same is true for petitions addressed to abstract groupings (interview with Gastón Wright, 23 set. 2015). In any case, “knowing who can give me the answer means I am 80% of the way to a solution” (interview with María Pazo, Sep. 28, 2015).

120 The platform sends active petitions that may be of interest to determined people or profiles who are registered in the Change.org user data bank. Change.org communicates periodically with its users by email, sending general information sheets, news about the petitions it is supporting and others based on these or others accessed previously.

121 Interview with Gastón Wright (Sep. 23, 2015).

which appear on the Change.org home page; for example, the website team may select petitions which are on the public agenda.¹²² Then there are the “popular” petitions, ones that are active and receive signatures constantly and have the most traffic—even though they may not have such a large number of supporters.¹²³ These petitions may be accessed via the home page and, like the highlighted petitions, they change constantly. Both the highlighted petitions and the popular ones are part of a larger universe: the active petitions, that is, the ones still seeking support. There is also the universe of the successful petitions, the “victories”, which have managed to achieve their main goal.¹²⁴

Argentina is the country that has the most victories in relation to the number of users. Worldwide, 38% of active user petitions were successful during the last three months, while the average in Argentina is 66%. There have been 403 victories in the country.¹²⁵ The platform offers important advice to increase the chance of success: it recommends that the petitions be addressed to the person/organization that has the concrete capacity to solve the problem; it recommends that the petitions be accompanied by images and that they tell a personal story.¹²⁶ But it is not only the form in which the petition is presented that increases the probability of success: a fundamental aspect is the platform's

122 They are not selected by the number of supporters, and include petitions with few supporters, based on a certain counter-majority spirit cultivated by the platform (interview with Gastón Wright, Sep. 23, 2015).

123 Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015).

124 In Argentina, the highest number of victories are concentrated in the health area. The Change.org directors believe that the growth in the number of users in a country means support is achieved more rapidly. But there is no direct relationship between the number of supporters a petition receives and its victory. Most of the victories are among petitions receiving between 15,000 and 70,000 signatures (interview with Gastón Wright, 23 set. 2015).

125 Interview with Gastón Wright (Sep. 23, 2015).

126 The recommended format for petitions is as follows: they should start by narrating a personal story of the user, and from there explain the problem affecting the user; use simple, down to earth language; propose solutions and emphasize the importance of obtaining support.

dynamic for exerting pressure on decision makers. Each time a user supports a petition, a message is sent to the email of the decision maker registered as responsible for the cause; not only is the request made public, but so is the name, surname and email of the decision maker, who is then inundated with messages. The pressure is increased via the social networks, through mentions of the decision maker. Twitter is prolific and lends itself very well to this purpose: the authors and supporters can tag the decision makers to boost the delivery of the petition and ensure that he/she receives it directly, or via an aide. The decision makers are responsive due to the high political cost of the public exposure created by the petition; government officials in particular may see the petitions as a threat to their reputation.¹²⁷ Therefore, while for the authors and the supporters the cost of participating is very low, for the decision makers the cost of not responding can be much higher.¹²⁸

Change.org has grown tremendously in Argentina (in number of users and victories) since it was launched in 2013¹²⁹. Some petitions on public issues rapidly gained prominence: in April 2013, a petition against the judicial reform under discussion in the country; in May a petition criticizing the homophobic content in questionnaires used for blood donations; in October a petition addressed to the president requesting her intervention to free an Argentinian Greenpeace activist detained in Russia; in November, a petition for a new diabetes law making it mandatory for providers of private and professional health insurance to guarantee coverage for patients. These high impact petitions in the platform's first year generated enormous visibility. From 2014, the number of petitions gaining repercussion in the media and whose topics came into public debate increased dramatically.

It is worth noting that petitions initiated by individual authors are

¹²⁷ Particularly in the case of municipalities, this fear may be greater because there is more chance that the employees will come across the authors or supporters in the street.

¹²⁸ The cost is higher for lower echelon employees (interview with Gastón Wright, 23 set. 2015).

¹²⁹ It grew 401% in the first year.

more successful;¹³⁰ more so than when the authors are members of some organization or are engaged in actions with civil society or political actors. The more successful cases tend to be ones in which the petition is related to the author's personal history or a singular experience, an approach recommended by the platform.¹³¹ These individual authors include people who have been jeopardized in some way and face a concrete problem; they present the petition themselves or have it presented by a family member. They may be people who tell their own story, but also seek to represent a broader problem through their own example. There are also cases of people who have been jeopardized in some way or other who choose not to focus on their specific case, but rather on a larger group, for example, the local community in which they live, an example being a father who requested that his son's school not be closed due to its proximity to Almirante Brown football stadium. Other instances involving people motivated by a collective cause prominent on the public agenda (such as the request for protection of the team investigating the death of the prosecutor Alberto Nisman; the request for the reinstatement of the prosecutor José María Campagnoli, who had been investigating a case of corruption and was removed from his position; or the implementation of electronic urns in the elections) present the problem from the standpoint of the "common citizen". Alternatively, there are the petitions from civil society organizations, community groups or networks supporting a particular cause, the most common being those related to animal rights and the environment (such as the petition to prohibit greyhound racing in the country, initiated by the network Proyecto Galgo Argentina).

Overall, the majority of the petitions are individual initiatives. In line with the recommendations made by the platform, the predominant narrative

¹³⁰ Individual authors account for 95%, compared with 5% of authors organized in civic associations. Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015).

¹³¹ Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015).

form for the petitions and the one provoking the most impact is storytelling.¹³² This tends to generate empathy among potential supporters, differently from the typical register employed in petitions from non-governmental or civil society organizations: “Basically, we consume stories every day”, says the coordinator of Change.org.¹³³ If it is empathy that mobilizes the supporters, and the threat to their reputation that moves the decision makers, the authors frequently indicate that it is a feeling of indignation that drives them to create a petition.¹³⁴

Even if being a specialist in the subject is not a prerequisite for creating petitions, frequently professional, technical and legal knowledge acquired in the offline environment contributes to their success, even though it is not the platform's objective to transmit messages via texts composed by specialists. Two petitions from 2015 related to electoral legislation in the context of the general elections caused broad repercussion. One of them, which requested the approval of a law obliging candidates to participate in presidential debates, was initiated by the political scientist and university lecturer Diego Muzio. For the Change.org staff, this was an example of a very well-written petition with

132 In addition to the story telling, allusions are made to a broad and abstract set of common values, such as “justice”, “plurality”, “human dignity”, “legality” etc. But as the coordinator of Change.org in Argentina puts it: “by telling one's own story, one is also telling the story of other people who may face the same problem, who feel they are reflected in the account. The storytelling is effective because it produces empathy, which is the means of communication chosen by the traditional media. A part of the person's private life is exposed when writing the petition, so participation on this platform remains in a ‘grey zone between the intimate and the public’ (interview with Gastón Wright, Aug. 10, 2015).

133 Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015).

134 María Pazo, the author of a request to repair a manhole on a corner in her district, explains that she decided to make the petition when she became indignant about the risk involved in crossing the road; soaking wet from the rain, she entered her house and feeling indignant wrote the petition (interview with María Pazo, Sep. 28, 2015). Natalia Luque also describes that she decided to write the petition after returning home from voting, indignant about the confusion generated by the “*listas sábanas*” [see note 136]. She created the petition while she was eating: “it was to get it off my chest, I wasn't looking for 300,000 supporters” (participant observation of the meeting between the petition author Natalia Luque and Change.org to take the signatures to Congress and interview with the author, Oct. 23, 2015).

pertinent information; it could have been a petition from a non-governmental organization like Poder Ciudadano but, had this been the case, “it would have received 500 signatures”; what contributed to its success was the fact that it was “written by Diego as a normal person who is also a political scientist”.¹³⁵ The second petition causing wide-ranging repercussion, which requested the use of the electronic urn in elections, was initiated by a “common citizen”, as she describes herself, a housewife, with no professional experience in this area, no history of political militancy and no prior membership of any organization.¹³⁶ In 12 hours, Natalia managed to get more than 25,000 supporters, channeling public indignation against the so called “*lista sábana*”,¹³⁷ says the coordinator of Change.org. The expression of indignation, the narrative of a story and its creation at the right moment are elements with which technical know-how or specialized language cannot compete.¹³⁸

There are also cases in the which the actual dynamics of the campaign force the actors to become “specialists” in the subject, from a technical, scientific and legal standpoint, as Germán Montenegro, a layman who created the successful petition about the Transplant Law¹³⁹ explained. Diego Muzio adds that although professional or technical knowledge is not necessary to create a petition, it is an important element when giving interviews to the press.¹⁴⁰

135 Interview with Gastón Wright (Sep. 23, 2015).

136 Participant observation of the meeting between the petition author Natalia Luque and Change.org to take the signatures to Congress and interview with the author (Oct. 23, 2015).

137 In Argentina the party slip with a closed list found in large plurinominal districts is called the *lista sábana*. The list normally includes candidates for the different levels of government, both Executive and Legislative, one of the reasons why it is heavily criticized. The slip may be up to one meter long.

138 Interview with Gastón Wright (Aug. 10, 2015). The interviewee maintained that, on the contrary: “There are many petitions whose substance is not derived from an intellectual viewpoint, but from the story told by a person”.

139 Interview with Germán Montenegro (Sep. 29, 2015).

140 Interview with Diego Muzio (Sep. 24, 2015).

Germán agreed with him: although he was not a specialist in the subject, he began to study issues related to the law and medicine because, as he argued, when he was contacted by the press or other institutional actors “he had to have the pertinent information”.¹⁴¹

Change.org’s impact is leveraged by the repercussion of the petitions in both the social networks¹⁴² and the traditional communication media. The users, authors and supporters usually disseminate their campaigns via the social networks. In the case of Facebook, Change.org permits the association of the user’s account on its platform with their Facebook account, enabling them to share the link to the petition with all their friends and contacts. Without the potential to go viral enabled by the social networks, Change.org would not be capable of achieving the repercussion it does.

This direct connection with the online networks makes Change.org a porous, open platform, as opposed to a closed forum. The traditional communication media (newspapers, radio and television) also boost the repercussion of many campaigns initiated on Change.org., undoubtedly

141 Interview with Germán Montenegro (Sep. 29, 2015). The knowledge Germán acquired in the specific question that mobilized him and his experience in the venture he initiated led to his invitation to participate as an independent specialist on councils in the city of Corrientes. Another relevant aspect the author of the petition mentions is the fact that many normal people started to view him as a reference on the subject and to send him private messages asking about how to change their healthcare service provider and some doctors started to give his name as a contact for information about legal aspects of the rights of transplant patients. As we mentioned previously in the case of the organizers of #NiUnaMenos, social leadership built via the social networks led the actors to assume unexpected responsibilities. As such, political know-how and representative qualities may also be developed in the process of the online campaigns and in related offline activities. In the case of Natalia Luque, her concern that the petition should not be seen as either pro or anti government reveals the development of a political perception. “I am neither for or against any politicians, I am in favor of the people, the common citizens [...] Ha! I sound like a politician!”, she said (participant observation of the meeting between the petition author Natalia Luque and Change.org to take the signatures to Congress and interview with the author, Oct. 23, 2015).

142 For example, an analysis of traffic during the interview with the coordinator of Change.org in Argentina shows that 37% of the users came from Facebook, 6% from WhatsApp, 4% had accessed the link by email and 1.7% came from Twitter (interview with Gastón Wright, Aug. 10, 2015).

amplifying their potential.¹⁴³ While the platform coordinators and/or the authors of petitions look to the traditional media to expand the visibility of their campaigns, the press also uses Change.org as a source of news and debate.¹⁴⁴ In fact, Change.org frequently maintains intense offline relations with diverse media vehicles and the traffic is two-way, with journalists looking for information from the platform or the platform seeking to publicize high potential petitions by promoting press interviews with the authors¹⁴⁵.

In addition to driving dissemination, another interesting aspect of the connection Change.org provides to the social networks is the possibility of creating a space for deliberation, debate and an exchange of ideas that the platform itself does not offer. As the coordinator of the platform in Argentina states: "Change.org is not a space for discussion. Any exchange of ideas takes place via social networks such as Facebook".¹⁴⁶ Any comments made on the Change.org platform reinforce the original argument, because the space allows users to report the reasons for their support. But there is no way of expressing contrary opinions on the platform, because it is necessary for the user to support a petition in order to comment on it.

143 The press is normally interested in petitions that are aligned with their position for or against the national government. But it may be observed that greater press coverage does not necessarily translate into a successful petition.

144 Interview with Gastón Wright (Sep. 23, 2015). The offline relations with the traditional communication media were strengthened, particularly from 2014.

145 Participant observation of the meeting between the petition author Natalia Luque and Change.org to take the signatures to Congress and interview with the author (Oct. 23, 2015).

146 On the official Change.org page on Facebook it is possible to see petitions that do in fact generate debates, with arguments for and against, including some which are derogatory, and the comments may be answered by other users. However, not all the petitions become controversial, some are simply supported by the multiplication of "likes" or brief comments such as "supported", "good luck", "shared", "this is necessary" etc. Other people also comment on their own personal experiences, similar to the case in the petition. It is interesting to note that many of the successful petitions related to resolving an individual problem, such as health issues, produce a flood of petitions from other users in the same situation (interview with Gastón Wright, Aug. 10, 2015).

Politicians who receive petitions do not usually respond via the platform,¹⁴⁷ but through other social networks such as Twitter or Facebook. Civil servants or representatives usually look for less public channels to contact the authors of petitions, seeking to avoid exposure or to initiate negotiations aimed at having the petition withdrawn rapidly.¹⁴⁸ But the platform may be “used strategically” by the political actors who understand its reach. In this regard, it is “not intrinsically oppositionist”, as the Change.org coordinator in Argentina observed¹⁴⁹.

In the case of political actors, petitions may be addressed to a group of decision makers or representatives, generally in the Legislature. One example is the aforementioned case of Germán Montenegro, author of the successful petition on the Transplant Law, which was addressed to the Chamber of Deputies. There are also petitions addressed to the Judiciary, both at local and national level, as was the case of the petition related to the prosecutor Alberto Nisman, which was sent to the Supreme Court. A number of petitions identify a single recipient, generally in the Executive sphere.

For political actors, the fact that citizens may use a simple tool to send them petitions on issues for which they are responsible (such as the local Executive Power, for example) can work in their favor if they know how to

147 The only case of a response from a decision making recipient on the actual platform was that of Facundo Carrillo, president of comuna n. 2 in the city of Buenos Aires, to whom a petition about the repair of a manhole had been addressed. The recipient responded immediately and left his contact details so that neighbors could also send in their complaints. Facundo Carrillo states that he has received several petitions, which he always tries to reply to; however on other occasions he has done so by different means, mainly via the social networks (interview with Facundo Carrillo, Oct. 9, 2015).

148 They also end up contacting the platform itself to request the closure of a petition or to ask it to stop sending notifications about new supporters, demonstrating that Change.org exerts true pressure on them.

149 Interview with Gastón Wright (Sep. 23, 2015). We may mention the case of a firework show close to the Buenos Aires zoo, in which employees of the municipal government understood it would be possible to use the platform strategically. Faced with a petition created by an animal rights organization aimed at “raising awareness and providing information on the advance in animal rights in the country”, the then chief of staff and current mayor of the city, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, expressed his support for animal rights via Facebook and Twitter and announced that the show criticized by the authors of the petition had been cancelled.

respond to them. However, it can also put their reputation at risk and interfere with their planning since it does not permit them to present justifications. This is how Facundo Carrillo, president of comuna n. 2 in the city of Buenos Aires and the recipient of several petitions sees it. Even though he considers Change.org to be a valuable tool for society, he stresses that for political actors it can constitute a type of “virtual lynching due to the impotence people feel when confronted with a lack of response from public authorities”. He stated: “sometimes due to public pressure, civil servants are forced to prioritize something which is perhaps not so important”, adding that the platform does not allow the recipient of a petition to clarify all the pending demands he or she is faced with and that responsible public administration must be based on priorities. “The deepest pothole is not the one you see on TV, the one you see on TV is the one that is filled in first. The media have always done this”. From the viewpoint of one civil servant, “it is like jumping the queue [...]; it causes delays in work that is already underway, it diverts resources”.¹⁵⁰

But if this is the impression that the political actors have, it is also because the offline institutional effects generated by Change.org are very significant. The coordinator in Argentina states that an important aspect of the platform's effectiveness is the fact that the tool is neither intended to change democracy nor question the relationship between representatives and those whom they represent: what it seeks is to offer citizens yet another tool with which to pressure decision makers and produce the social changes the authors want.¹⁵¹ In general, what Change.org does is “accelerate” institutional processes that are already underway. This becomes clear when the petitions are focused on approving new legislation. Frequently, a petition on Change.org crowns a broader strategy combining online and offline channels. As María Pazo points out, the advantage of garnering support on Change.org is significant because it is free, greatly reducing costs for the public, “but this only works if it is part

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Facundo Carrillo (Oct. 9, 2015).

¹⁵¹ Interview with Gastón Wright (Sep. 23, 2015).

of a broader strategy”.¹⁵² This is also demonstrated by the case of Germán Montenegro, who managed to have the Transplant Law approved. However, before achieving this victory through Change.org, he had organized campaigns via Facebook, met with politicians in the provinces, written letters to ministers, contacted the media and organized protests: this was a process that lasted at least two years before the overall strategy was crowned with the success of the petition on Change.org.¹⁵³

Frequently a determined political conjuncture or maneuver involving political actors may confer prominence that a petition might not otherwise have: Diego Muzio had previously organized a petition on presidential debates which did not cause great repercussion. He created another one in 2015, this time in a context of greater pressure on the actors due to the forthcoming elections and with a bill of law related to electoral debates already on the agenda of the Chamber of Deputies; when the petition rapidly gained significant support, he met with the platform staffers to prepare a press strategy.¹⁵⁴ Actions on the platform should be part of a broader strategy, sometimes preceding the petition and at other times following it. When solution of the problem requires joint action involving various actors, Change.org can help organize support, “but, when the online part is over, then it is back to the offline work with the commissions [...]. The online part is great for the initial impulse but after that, everything happens offline”.¹⁵⁵ When it is a question of one-off, private demands, the response may be more immediate, “but not when the solution requires negotiation and support from several parties, such as in the Legislature or with the different actors in a federation”.¹⁵⁶

152 Interview with María Pazo (Sep. 28, 2015).

153 Interview with Germán Montenegro (Sep. 29, 2015).

154 Interview with Diego Muzio (Sep. 24, 2015).

155 Interview with María Pazo (Sep. 28, 2015).

156 Interview with María Pazo (Sep. 28, 2015).

Change.org is inserted into an already existent network of political links. As such, it should be noted that in some cases these same agents of the State may also be interested in promoting concrete public support for determined issues; thus petitions may be used to reinforce a process already underway in legislative arenas. For this reason, offline articulation with political actors may further the potential of petitions initiated by individuals. One of the measures promoted by the platform is the delivery of signatures to the decision makers to generate a public event that boosts the visibility of the problem: if the author of the petition agrees, Change.org is prepared to contact the legislators and the press, reserve a room in Congress, prepare the materials to be used (e.g.: the boxes containing the printed petitions) etc.¹⁵⁷

Use of the platform frequently accelerates the change intended by the author of the petition in ordinary institutional channels and at other times it may simply bypass them. This is the case with one-off requests, demands whose solution requires just a single action and which generally are aimed at a single decision maker. As María Pazo said about her petition to have a manhole repaired: “I could have gone to the local administration, of course. But I created the petition in five minutes. It is a much easier way to lodge a complaint and to get an answer”.¹⁵⁸ Compared with other means of online participation, the actors point out that precise definition of the problem and targeting the correct decision-maker help to bring about tangible institutional results, but the possibility of exerting direct pressure on the decision makers, bringing their reputation into play, also demands very precise objectives.

We have observed that, in a number of ways, the relationship between what occurs online in Change.org and what occurs offline may be determinant:

157 Participant observation of the meeting between the petition author Natalia Luque and Change.org to take the signatures to Congress and interview with the author (Oct. 23, 2015). The signatures on the platform have no legal value, but produce an important symbolic effect in which the authors of the petition deliver boxes containing a copy of the signatures received (interview with Gastón Wright, Sep. 23, 2015).

158 Interview with María Pazo (Sep. 28, 2015). In the opinion of the interviewee, for the recipient also “it is easier to read on your cell phone than from a pile of papers”.

relations with the traditional communication media, articulation between the platform and the public, the involvement of political and institutional actors, the relevance of some precise knowledge of legislation or of technical aspects of the petition in question etc. However, these universes are interconnected and call into question the existence of a clear separation between an online world marked by inconstant links and an offline world characterized by the commitment to “lay one’s body on the line”. As the Change.org coordinator in Argentina said: “On Change.org, you lay your body on the line, and with it your identity, your story and your photo”.¹⁵⁹ But, above all, the platform proves to be an effective channel for producing change when the political system is resistant via traditional channels: “faced with a lack of response and the insignificance an individual may feel, Change.org is a tool that frees you from this impotence; it is like a digital cry”.¹⁶⁰

4. Conclusions: online/offline convergences

The online world constitutes a space from which new actors and ways of participating in society emerge; but, as we have seen in these pages, it is not a world separate from another that exists in parallel outside the web, like a kind of virtual second life compared with an actual first life. Contemporary citizens and politicians exist in one single world, using distinct ways of communicating, interacting and transforming the community. What is unquestionable is that the actors have a new physiognomy: actors who did not exist in an organized form in the offline world are emerging from the web and rapidly learning how to negotiate its offline counterpart; actors we may refer to as “traditional”, organized in associations or political parties, see their identity subverted by the effects of the online world to which they must adapt.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Gastón Wright (Sep. 23, 2015).

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Facundo Carrillo (Oct. 9, 2015).

In this respect, the category “cyberactivism” does not capture the depth of the transformations: permeating our day to day existence, the expansion of the new information and communication technologies makes everyone a potential “cyberactivist”; at the same time, by aspiring to produce effects on the world, their activism is never just “cyber”. Nowadays it is difficult to distinguish between activists and cyberactivists: the new actors participating in society are either simultaneously the two things, or neither.

Nevertheless, in this work we have explored three cases in Argentina in which determined actors are effectively more “active” than others in the online environment. Leaving the hackers aside, Sorj (2015) differentiates two types of cyberactivism: (1) the creators of content; and (2) groups with affinities outside the web, but who use the web for their purposes. In the light of the experiences explored here, it would be pertinent to incorporate at least two other categories into this classification. There are (3) the creators of platforms and software aimed at promoting civic participation, who, by going beyond the creation of content, manage to create spaces in which other citizens produce content, exercising a “metademocratic” role. This is the case of the Partido de la Red and its diverse initiatives and, to a certain extent, also of Change.org, from the viewpoint of those promoting the platform. We also have (4) occasional activists who are not members of groups with affinities in the offline environment. In great part, the success of the #NiUnaMenos initiative is explained by the existence of this type of cyberactivist, as well as other mobilizations with similar characteristics in Argentina and elsewhere. The authors of petitions on Change.org are also occasional activists with no links in the offline world. In the case of #NiUnaMenos, however, different from many of the mobilizations convened by the social networks, the weight of the second type is very significant: many political groups, unions, civic associations, feminist organizations, personalities from the media and the art world mobilized both online and offline, expanding the visibility of existing organizations and actions.

One of the elements that has proved indispensable for understanding these transformations in the forms of social participation is the possibility of abandoning the category “social movements” to describe these experiences. As Sorj (2015) states, the notion of “social movement” itself is no longer clearly delineated and its relations with formal organizations are more ambiguous. Contemporary mobilizations disassociate the identity of actors from their expression in public space: some actors are created in public and are event-actors that exist only in the public sphere; others, who may have a stable organized existence around a particular cause, see their identity modified when acting in the public space. If the social movements were thought of as associations around determined causes, whose actions unfolded over a period of time and whose message was oriented in accordance with the deliberate strategy of its members, the current “citizen movements” are not only more ephemeral but also do not emerge as organized actors and neither are they - nor do they intend to be — the “organizers” of the actions they undertake.

The experience of the #NiUnaMenos mobilization throws light on this aspect and also indicates its limitations: many of the journalists who participated in the call to action met in function of this mobilization and could not have been its “organizers” in the strict sense of the term, they were unable to control the meanings attributed to it or the publication of selfies with the sign and hashtag associated with the demonstration. They were the promoters but, as they stress, the mobilization rapidly “took on its own existence”. However, the experience also showed that they had to assume new responsibilities that began to emerge: contact political actors, and decide on organizational details of the protest, such as security, among other things. This and the majority of similar mobilizations currently underway attribute their legitimacy to their “spontaneous” nature, the fact of being “self-convened”. Thinking of these forms of participation — both those that end with the event and those that persist, continuing with actions related to those that gave rise to their existence — as “civic movements” instead of social movements throws some light on

the fluidity of contemporary actors, in which their multiple belongings and intermingled identities ensure that the figure of the “citizen” prevails over that of any group brought together by a “social” cause.

But in this work we have not exclusively addressed new mobilizations emerging from the web, which are probably the ones that have most attracted the attention of researchers due to their strong public impact. Other experiences such as that of the Partido de la Red or Change.org draw attention to a fact that must also be taken into consideration in the interpretation of contemporary forms of social participation: the online world not only permits expressions of repudiation of situations or policies but also experimentation with and the emergence of *another democracy*, as of yet without a defined content or direction. The metademocratic traits of these experiences and others, including the original and innovative practices that individuals develop in the public space participating in meetings to make decisions and take actions together (the *Indignados* in Spain and the *Occupy* movements are good examples), still require further refinement and conceptualization..

In spite of their specificities, the mobilizations born in the networks and platforms on the web share several characteristics which we may summarize here:

A) *The dissolution of the boundary between the public and the private*, which places *stories* in the foreground. The experiences analyzed show the importance of singular stories, the narration of individual experiences and the exposure of the intimacy of the actors in their various forms. On Twitter “a personal voice” and not an organization is necessary for mobilization, as one of the participants in #NiUnaMenos stated. The same was evident in the petitions created on the Change.org platform, whose potential for mobilization stemmed from the telling of a story with which people could identify and empathize. Political actors also posted selfies with the hashtag #NiUnaMenos, but it

was the statements and the singular stories of the survivors and the families of victims that gained prominence. The names of the victims of femicide were transformed into symbols of a social problem and landmarks in the process of elaborating a new lens through which the problem could be understood. In the case of the Partido de la Red it was possible to observe another manner in which the boundary between the public and the private becomes indistinct: its proposal to introduce technology into politics seeks not to trivialize, but rather to make political activity a part of everyday life for the individual, discussing a bill of law while sharing a photo with friends or voting on a collective action while performing routine daily tasks in private.

B) Negativity (in differing degrees). Many of the mobilizations emerging from the web and the “civic movements” present a strong negative bias: not because they are indifferent to the transformations desired or because all their expressions or motivations are negative, but because the heterogeneous nature of the actors and demands makes rejection the driver of cohesion. “No!” and “Enough!” are the predominant expressions in these experiences which, as Sorj (2015) underscores, focus more on what is not wanted than on a proactive agenda. In the experience of #NiUnaMenos, although the organizers sought to give direction to the mobilization and establish an agenda with five positive public policy demands, it was the “no more femicide” which brought together those who were protesting against the fact that the deaths of those adolescents were viewed just like so many other cases of violence—femicide understood as the last possible link in a chain of violence against women in which they were seen as objects, and the repudiation of which implied rejecting harassment in the streets, as well as defending the right to abortion and autonomy over one’s own body. However, this was precisely an

exceptional mobilization compared with others currently underway, given that the negativity neither impeded the existence of a positive agenda nor did it shift the focus from the public policies that would have to be implemented. In this respect, it is necessary to analyze this characterization centered on negativity more closely, as is also the case with the experiences of the Partido de la Red (tools such as *Demos* show that individuals offer suggestions for improving projects instead of just rejecting them) and Change.org (although indignation is the driver of the action, the predominant use of the platform is not to impede, ban, reject or eliminate, but to propose, to legislate and to claim rights that have been violated).

C) *Representation as a problem.* In the cases studied it may be seen that representation appears as a problem. What may be seen, as Sorj (2015) observes is the disappearance of the category leaders in cyberspace. The Partido de la Red shows one possibility: the proposal of a totally transparent representation, which is equivalent to the disappearance of representation. In the case of Change.org, once again it is the “common people”, and not the representatives of political parties or social organizations, who are the protagonists. The representatives see their public reputation put into play on a permanent basis. Although the case of #NiUnaMenos may be understood as a movement “without leaders”, like similar mobilizations, the journalists responsible for its organization became a kind of social leadership. Social communicators, in their diverse formats, in practice fulfill a role of “non-electoral” representation, which has been increasingly attracting the attention of political scientists (Annunziata, 2015). “Non-electoral and non formal representatives” are frequently also the people who choose to mobilize by different means in order to transform a reality that transcends them, like some of the authors of

petitions on Change.org. Sometimes, having some social leadership capital may be translated into a new online leadership; in other cases, leaders born in the online world rapidly gain social recognition. The representation of these forms of participation is a problem: there is a tension between their expansion and pluralization and the risk implied by the informality of ties of responsibility. It is also necessary to point out another risk. As Justin Wedes, one of the participants and spokespersons of *Occupy Wall Street* warns: “Denying that leadership exists in a group is simply refusing to acknowledge its existence, and the benefit of this denial always accrues to those who already have power in society and do not have to ask permission to yield it” (Wedes, 2015, p. 245).

D) *The relevance of knowledge.* Similar to the previous point, the weight of the cognitive dimension may be noted in the experiences observed in relation to the appearance of leadership and success in the intended effects. At first sight, the online world may seem to be one without elites, but the cases we have reported here enable us to note that knowledge—technical, scientific, technological, legal or professional—makes a difference. Mastery of communication and publicity techniques, the drafting of slogans, the design of a campaign, were elements highlighted by the organizers of #NiUnaMenos as fundamental for the success of the call to protest. On Change.org, technical or legal knowledge is not necessary to create a petition; but if it becomes viral, the platform intervenes to identify those directly responsible, the policies in place, and the bills awaiting deliberation in the legislature etc. Some of the authors of petitions, although they were not specialists in the subject when they launched the campaign, acquired expertise during the course of the process. In the Partido de la Red the relevance of knowledge leadership is crystallized

principally in the ties between its members and the mode of internal organization. This does not invalidate the importance of other types of knowledge, which also play a fundamental part, such as the role acquired by the singular stories, as we mentioned previously: the “wisdom of experience” and in its extreme case, the “wisdom of the victim”. Whatever the case, knowledge as capital is revealed to be one of the factors in the offline world which may strongly impact online actions.

E) *The diverse links between the online and the offline.* We have said that knowledge frequently functions as capital which can affect results. But this is only one of the multiple links established between the online and offline worlds in the experiences analyzed. The need for articulation with political actors is another: it is evident in #NiUnaMenos, in the Partido de la Red (particularly with the tool *Demos*) and in Change.org. The journalists’ list of contacts, for example, enabled them to meet with diverse political powers and to demand commitment to the cause. The mobilization capacity of a leftist party with low representation in the legislature enables it to put the bill it defends in first place on an online vote. Articulation involving deputies or senators who have presented bills of law greatly increases the chances of success of a petition on Change.org. There are many more examples, but it is undeniable that no purely online initiative — one that does not establish connections with offline political actors — seems to have a chance of prospering. Other actors with whom interaction is inevitable are the traditional communication media: leveraging, latching onto or obstructing what happens online, the media always intervenes in the processes of civic participation we have described. And we must not forget one of the offline factors that most determines the offline world’s potential

for civic participation: the unfair distribution of access to the new technologies which, although not the most serious case in the region, still persists in Argentina. Public policy to reduce digital exclusion and enable homogeneous access throughout the country and in all social sectors is essential. Although many efforts are currently underway, we still cannot say that the new technologies provide everyone with an equal opportunity to make their voice heard (Breuer & Welp, 2014). There are those who inhabit the intersection of the online and offline world as if they were one, but there are also those who inhabit only one of these worlds. For this reason, we agree with Matías Bianchi when he recommends avoiding “the naiveté of cyber-utopia”. The online world reproduces and even exacerbates the distribution of power, culture and infrastructure existent in the offline world” (Bianchi, 2015, p. 118). But it would be very simplistic, as the experiences analyzed here show, to reduce the kind of connection that may exist between the online and offline worlds to the limits imposed by the latter on the former. In some cases, the offline world is the *boundary* of the online; in others, the offline moves towards the online world; in others, the online world is capable of changing the offline universe and even breaking down some of its limitations, making the former a reconfiguration of the latter; in yet others, the online world is the source of the offline world — of news, events, actors. And frequently, when civic participation is successful, this is the result of the production of a mutual potential between the online and offline universes. The new actors in citizen participation are the product of a convergence between both universes. After an initial surge of utopian enthusiasm related to the potential of the new information and communication technologies, it became evident that, in themselves, they are limited; but it is no less obvious that the action of more traditional organized actors is insufficient and often

remains invisible if it aspires to produce impacts in the contemporary world while ignoring the online world. It is in the *convergence* of these two worlds that the new actors in participation are born and grow.

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