Open data as political web archives

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Open data as Political web archives:
citizen involvement or reputation's elected in a « digital public sphere » ?
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The access to digital data is an economic, social and political issue. Accessibility does not only focus on the online publication of these data in a database, but as well in the discourses made by stakeholders on the web, such as the French association *Regards citoyens*. Since 2009, this group aggregates data of the activity of French Deputies in the French National Assembly, on the website *nosdeputes.fr*. In this case, political people allow the circulation of data that are arranged by actors without professional requirements unlike journalists.

We are here interested in the enrichment of public data by citizens who participate in the public sphere in a form that differs from the mass media. We do not want to comment this public sphere but to describe it from the devices, the mediations that connect institutions and citizens.

Therefore, we discuss the opportunity that a website like *nosdeputes.fr* can become the holder of a "digital public sphere" and interrogate the form of citizen oversight it induces.

The frame of data on *nosdeputes.fr* questions the relationship between citizens, media and elected officials. On the one hand, these devices change the relationship between citizens and political action. On the other hand, we can assume that these devices bring politicians to adapt some of their practices in the French National Assembly according to the electoral agenda. We do not focus on the influence of some actors but on the oversight of citizens induced by this device. For example, *nosdeputes.fr* has listed activities of the 577 French Deputies since 2009.

This survey provides detailed analysis of political activity in National Assembly but it is also interested in the look of the "citizen", by the comments he leaves on MPs' action. Therefore this format of data questions the "public digital sphere" and a web archive object.

With the Open Data movement in France, we have focused on *nosdeputes.fr* as a particular entity of setting discourse of political data since 2013. The information circulating on it, the absence or presence of debates that are played on those are our first entry.

This communication aims to show what measure(s) this enrichment of public data involves a representation of political action and discourse, thereby conferring to the "digital public sphere" a new dimension?

We will discuss specifically the presence of traces of an elected and his political activity *i.e.* a reputation shaped by indicators created by this website. We consider political action as a collective issue, whereas political activity refers more to individual. In this paper, we question political activity. The citizen oversight on *nosdeputes.fr*, commentated by web users seems only themed and evaluative (depreciation / appreciation).

1. Open data as Political web archives

The original goal of *nosdeputes.fr* is to expose the activity of Parliament members (MP): attendances, interventions and requests for amendments. Yet, we think that there is added value in the comments written by users or citizens.

Could this website be considered as an archived object? "Unlike other well-know media, the Internet does not simply exist in a form suited to being archived, but rather is first formed as an object of study in the archiving, and it is formed differently depending on who does the archiving, when, and for what purpose" (Brügger in Rogers, 2001). For us, this website shows the interests of people, their judgement about the activities of MPs and Ministers. This "public opinion" is different from opinion surveys. All the data posted on *nosdeputes.fr* are not "natively" digital objects because they are mostly extracted from the activity at the National Assembly. However, comments are created on this website. These comments enrich the open data aggregated by the editors of *nosdeputes.fr*.
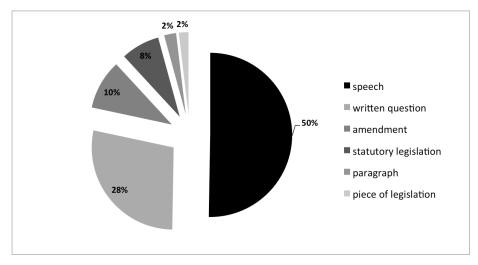

Figure 1. Percentage of 3057 comments of *nosdeputes.fr* according the activity of MP and Minister

On this graph, we can see that 50 % of 3057 comments collected on *nosdeputes.fr* are related to a speech of MP or Minister, and 28 % to a written question. These results show that MPs who care about their reputation should take the floor in the lower house. Could it be a constant surveillance defined by Foucault (1975)? Do these comments aim to judge the political activity or to create a debate? Do the comments affect the reputation of MPs?

2. Analysis of the citizen involvement or reputation of elected

Previously, we have shown that the number of registered users on *nosdeputes.fr* increased as the elections approach (Hare & LeBechec, 2014). We continue to work on this subject. The first method used here is a qualitative one based on a semiotic-discursive analysis of the website interface. The second part of the study is more quantitative and is based on a textual analysis of 3057 comments sent by the 4999 members of *nosdeputes.fr* the February 19th, 2015.

Nosdeputes.fr crosses two types of device: one keeps a record of parliamentary activity, the other one focuses on interaction between citizens. The first device objectivizes political action, whereas the second one subjectivizes it. Yet, it is in both cases a picture of parliamentary occupation. We have to deal with a technical and human crossover which is not new in content but in form, and fairly unique in terms of ease of access to data.

The review of data has become a political necessity for some citizens. It plays in the action (the presence in the "hémicycle") and/or in the discourse (political intervention during the sessions at National Assembly). On this website, interaction implies a dialogal obligation: it means a "dialogue de sourds" between the political "spoken by data" and the members "commenting on these data".

In the figure 2, the heading "Les Députés" lists all members and provides summaries of MPs' activity. These data may be sorted by alphabetic order, grouped by district or keyword, or picked randomly. Political activity is also serialized in three dimensions: space (meeting/chamber), time (long/short) and speech (written/oral). Each graph of summary files allows a fine quantitative observation of activity per member or session on the 14th legislature. This is obviously important because it gives the citizens the elements that could help them in their electoral choice with a view to individual and collective political action.

The heading "Les Citoyens" constitutes the space for the interaction between a MP and members. The "citizen-avatars" are stored in columns, aligned next to each other, giving the impression of a reconstituted collective when the MP is associated to another MP as an item in alphabetical list.

Figure 2. Screenshot, Summary of MP's activity, *nosdeputes.fr*, 04/15/2015

On *nosdeputes.fr*, the MP is seen acting, set in statistics and commented. We may also access the comments by a double entry: through the dedicated heading "Les Députés" or the file of users. We wrote before that there was no dialogue between a MP and a user. The confrontation that exists is purely formal, when the action of MP is juxtaposed with the latest comments on the same page.

This juxtaposition is not possible with mass media. This website offers a new opportunity to express public opinion richer than opinion survey. Opinion surveys are merely a daily judgement (yes/no) (Derrida, 1991). These comments express more unstructured information than opinion survey and force the researcher to analyse them with quantitative and textual analysis.

These comments are dumped using a computer program developed by P. Barnoux to help us to crawl the website and build a database of 3057 lines and 13 fields. Amongst them, we use the users ID, the activity of MP, the date of comments and the commentary. We add an extra column to manually categorize comments from 41 themes. We process these data as part of a textual analysis using the software named Iramuteq (Iramuteq.org). This software allows multidimensional analysis of texts and comments and derived from the Reinert's classification method and algorithm (1983). This method analyses the words contained in comments using "stabilized lexical words" (Reiner, 2008). This corpus analysis consists of 363 759 occurrences whith 10433 hapax (45.95% of the 22,705 forms, 2.87 % of occurrences). Because of the large size of the corpus analysis we cannot propose at this stage a global analysis. Here is a cluster shaped visualisation of the similarity analysis of the comments.
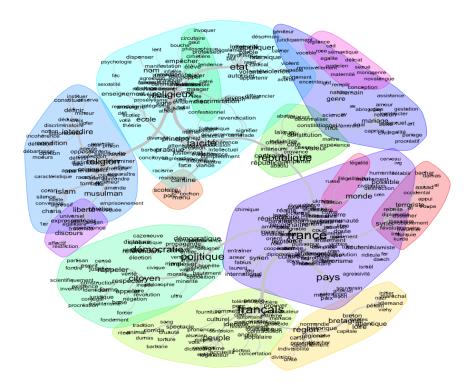

Figure 3. Graph of similarities about the comments of users, *nosdeputes.fr*, April 17th, 2015, Iramuteq software

Although we know that some bias in the visualization and interpretation may occur, this mapping can highlight relations we could not even explore using normal tools. We can show that these comments talk about the activity of MP while dealing with themes related to daily lives and ideals of users. A subset of occurrences is related to France, being French, regions or politics, democracy and citizen, whereas the word Republic leads the concepts of religious/religion, secularism and terrorism. The gender theme is transversal and spans religious, secularism and democracy clusters. This analysis also verifies some patterns identified manually. For instance, the bullfighting theme we observed manually is always clearly defined in resulting maps even when parameters are modified. This result seems to show a form of concerted collective action. Is-it a new "agencement" (Deleuze, 1990) in the "digital public sphere" created by the device built on this website?

"Citizens" do not wait elections; they obstruct the traditional chronology of the "public sphere" inherited from the Press and suggest a form of "resistance" (Deleuze, 1990) against the political speech. The web users judge the activity of MP: the terms /good/ and /bad/ are mentioned 910 and 45 times respectively. This judgement seems more appreciative but we think it might lead to monitoring.

3. The political activity on *nosdeputes.fr*: commented and/or monitored?

The citizen-user of *nosdeputes.fr* is not only a commentator or an opponent of political action, he is also a form of political and citizen monitoring. He observes directly political action before sanctioning it first by the comment and then by the vote in parliamentary elections.

On this website, the user causes the exacerbation of political democratization, pushing at the height of a "naked transparency", this tyranny of transparency (Lessig, 2009). *Nosdeputes.fr* allows users to access to their elected representatives in the National Assembly and their speeches through the quantitative data. It is fully involved in this trend of web that engages in the formation of citizen judgment and claims the transparency of institutions, recalling the "glass house" of N. Wiener, which rests on the relationship and information flow. Nevertheless, the space for debate failed leaving room for the juxtaposition of numbers, speeches and comments, sort of a no-relationship or a confrontation between the political and the citizen.

Does the citizen become a political watchman? To show parliamentary activity on the web questions another dimension: the contemporary evolution of society of surveillance (Foucault, 1975). The principle of Panopticon is questioned by a unique monitoring system with websites such as *nosdeputes.fr*. Indeed, Foucault's notion of panopticism means the monitoring of the many by the smaller number. This phenomenon is still present in society (the prison world, the surveillance cameras on the street, *etc.*) but it is enriched by a digital form of the panopticon.

The website explores the "little things" (speaking time, attendance rate, *etc.*), building a "reputation" of the elect that better informs citizens about the completion of the legislative agreement than on the content of its achievement. What is expected of a MP, if not exercise his mandate on behalf of the community that elected him (*i.e.* delegation), be present at the different

sessions (physical monitoring) and express himself, defend and debate in the name of democracy (moral monitoring/activity requirement)?

The comparison with Foucault's concept of panoptical eye shows that new ways of monitoring (here, political and civic) born with Open data. Web archive exhibits politicians to the surveillance and, to some extent, allows citizens to take an active posture of defiance (Rosanvallon, 2008).

Nosdeputes.fr would - by its creators - ensure the proper functioning of democracy, the respect for the commitment of MPs. But does it really allow an understanding of the issues raised in National Assembly? Nothing is less sure when we analyse these comments. We focus on the tags "Political activity" and "holding multiple offices" to analyse a subset of 153 comments which reveals a citizen distrust attitude.

From the 19th century, this contestation stands out by affecting less system and society than transparency and reputation. The distrust of citizen is built on three parameters (Rosanvallon, 2008): vigilance, reporting and scoring. If we try to study when each point is "activated" on *nosdeputes.fr*, we can observe that vigilance would begin at the time of registration of the user on the website, denunciation would be the prerogative of comments reacting to the "deviant" political activity, and finally the notation would help to "appraise" the competence of the rulers. However, we note that a rating system or recommendation is not formally developed over *nosdeputes.fr*. The supervisory authority could be seen as an "opposing force that overcomes dysfunctions of the representative system (...): it is understood as a way to build confidence in the active democratic virtue" (Rosanvallon, 2008).

Conclusion

In one way, through initiatives like *nosdeputes.fr*, political web archives would sanctify democracy of opinion, and would freeze political memory in a form of commitment based on a power of surveillance. In another way, political web archives sanctify democracy of "vibration" (Boullier, 2015) forcing researchers to follow topics from trends, flows and metadata when we study web archive objects like Open data.

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