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«DEMOCRATIC TSUNAMI» AS AN ONLINE STAGE OF THE CATALAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

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Introduction. Catalan independence is an issue that has shaken Spanish politics not even for years, but for centuries. In 2012, an overwhelming majority in parliament was received by MPs who announced the Declaration of Sovereignty. In 2017, the Catalan Parliament declared independence from Spain. In turn, the Spanish authorities arrested the initiators of this decision. Protesters took to the streets against the jailing of Catalan separatist leaders. Thus, it led to the emergence of a new protest group "Democratic Tsunami" that left a significant imprint in the struggle for the independence of the region.

Research aims. To describe the "Democratic Tsunami" from the points of origins, its members, organizational structure, strategies and tactics, published content, symbols, ideology, impact and state response.

Methodology. The main methods are secondary data analysis (two stages) and qualitative content analysis (649 tweets). The research period is from August 2019 to February 2020. The necessary data were collected from mass media websites and social media platforms.

Results. The available data allow us to single out the communication strategies of the "Democratic Tsunami" and present their examples. The scientific article describes the operation of various online communication tools (social media, mobile application) that were used by the movement to achieve its goals. It is important to note that the Spanish authorities were not ready to confront new technologies. The studied practices can be borrowed and used in any country of the world for similar purposes and processes.

Conclusions. Although the "Democratic Tsunami" lasted only six months, it was able to take the pro-independence movement to a new level of development. The main feature was the work with social media platforms and the mobile application. These movement's tools simplified the process of mobilization and coordination between leaders and protesters. They created the mechanism to transform the Catalan independence movement into a more private and highly protected protest community.

***Keywords:** Spain, Catalonia, Democratic Tsunami, social movement, online communication.*

Introduction. Catalan independence is an issue that has shaken Spanish politics not even for years, but for centuries. The topic is so broad that it can become a reason for another material. However, it is worth mentioning some important events of the most recent period in order to understand the main purpose of this article.

The turning point in the history of Catalan's struggle for independence happened in 2012. After the local elections, an overwhelming majority in parliament was received by MPs who

stand in favor of separation from Spain. The following year, the Catalan Parliament announced the Declaration of Sovereignty. It stated that the region is a sovereign political and legal entity within Spain. There was also an attempt to call a referendum on independence. However, the Constitutional Court suspended the process and found the document unconstitutional.

Despite the ban, the referendum still took place in 2017. Less than half (43%) of the inhabitants of Catalan region participated in it, 90.2% of whom favored separation from Spain [1]. Both sides of the conflict made emphasis on numbers. The Spanish government said that the event was illegal and majority of inhabitants chose not to participate in it, while the organizers celebrated the triumph of results.

After that, the Catalan Parliament declared independence from Spain. In response, the Spanish government dissolved it and introduced direct rule in the region. Article 155 was implemented for the first time in Spanish history. Moreover, eight members of the Catalan government were arrested. The President of Catalan Government Carles Puigdemont escaped to Belgium. At the time of writing, he continues to avoid extradition from different European countries.

It is interesting that the aforementioned actions of Madrid only increased the popularity of parties that advocate the secession of the region. Three of them won the majority of votes in the 2017 early local elections in the Catalan region. Quim Torra became the President of Catalan Government. From the very beginning of his term, he threatened Spain with a new referendum on independence: "We will return to the ballot box again on self-determination. If all parties and groups make it possible, we have to be able to finish this legislative term by validating independence. If we are condemned to 100 years in prison for setting up ballot boxes, the answer is clear: We must again set up ballot boxes for our self-determination" [2].

A new round of large-scale demonstrations erupted in autumn 2019. Protesters took to the streets against the jailing of nine Catalan separatist leaders to between 9 and 13 years in prison for their role in the 2017 Catalan referendum. As a result, it led to the emergence of a new protest group "Democratic Tsunami" that took the Catalan independence movement to a new stage of development. Specifically, all coordination activities were moved online.

Although news reports about the activities of the "Democratic Tsunami" disappeared as suddenly as they appeared, this social movement left an imprint in Spanish history. The main aim of this article is to analyze it in terms of organizational structure, technological development and innovative solutions, with special emphasis on communication activities and signals. Due to the short period of existence, we assume that these practices are unknown to many representatives of society, which constitutes the novelty of the research idea. It is important to understand their origins because these unique techniques can be applied anywhere in the world during turbulent times.

Literature review. Researchers began to turn their attention to social movements at least in the 1950s [3, p. 1]. According to Pais [4, p. 60], their definition "is used to denote a variety of collective attempts to bring about a change in the existing social and political structure through institutional and non-institutional means". They are considered as a long-term set of activities. If institutional means include leadership, goals, organization, ideology, and program of actions, then non-institutional means consist of strikes, riots, protests, etc. [5 in 4, p. 60]. Each social movement functions on the basis of different logics and forms of protest, which are specified by Della Porta and Diani [6].

The word "social" is a connector of the terms "social movement" and "social media". The two can also be summarized under the term "digital activism", where Internet technologies play a major role in achieving goals. Nonetheless, the scientific literature is full of research papers that confirm [7; 8; 9] or reject [10] the impact of this tool on social mobilization. This scientific article is intended to contribute to the discussion.

Research methods. The main methods of this paper are secondary data analysis and qualitative content analysis. The research period is from August 2019 to February 2020. The necessary data were collected from mass media websites and social media platforms. The

first data collection period was from 20 to 30 December 2019 (active phase). The second period was from 9 to 15 October 2023 (passive phase, data update). After that, the data were processed by the authors and structured into the subsections below. The main idea was to describe the online phenomenon "Democratic Tsunami" from the points of origins, its members, organizational structure, strategies and tactics, published content, symbols, ideology, impact and state response. Regarding the content analysis, 649 posts published on the X platform[1] (@tsunami_dem) were analyzed. All of them were divided according to the typology presented in the article. Importantly, materials and posts in Spanish were translated into English using Google Translate and YouTube translation with the necessary corrections.

Results and discussion.

Origins of the "Democratic Tsunami"

The name "Democratic Tsunami" was used at first during the hearings in the case of Catalan politician and cultural figure Jordi Cuixart, who is in favor of independence. The prosecutor asked him about the expression that appeared in the e-mail conversation, and Cuixart responded: "To reproach that I want to carry out a *democratic tsunami*, well, I do not see what is punishable about this, or whether I should take back those words; quite the contrary. Yes, we want more democracy, more open and more participative societies, and it is one of the shortcomings we must make up for as a society" [11].

The corresponding online platform of the protest group "Democratic Tsunami" (https://tsunamidemocratic.cat, https://tsunamidemocratic.github.io) was launched in August 2019. Catalan separatists knew that investigations against the pro-independence politicians, who organized the referendum in 2017, would not end in their favor. Therefore, they needed to prepare a strong response to the final verdicts. At the end of the summer, there was an unofficial meeting in Switzerland attended by "Catalan President, Quim Torra, ex-President, Carles Puigdemont, the General Secretary of The Republican Left of Catalonia, Marta Rovira, the former MP of Parliament of Catalonia from Popular Unity Candidacy, Anna Gabriel, as well as various society leaders" [12; 13]. Their desire to answer unexpectedly resulted in the implementation of the Democratic Tsunami plan.

It is important to note that this is only a possible version, as representatives of the "Democratic Tsunami" have denied it every time. However, there are some reasons to believe not their words, but the version. First, Catalan pro-independence politicians were definitely aware of the initiative because they retweeted the first communiqué of the movement on X half an hour later. Second, such an innovative project requires huge financial investments and serious tactical preparation, which is beyond the power of ordinary supporters. Third, Puigdemont in particular, whose background is in journalism, has always been keenly interested in new forms of communication [14]. Finally, it allowed Puigdemont's center-right "JuntsXCat" and center-left "Esquerra Republicana" parties to "outsource" the protests and better protect themselves from further accusations of sedition, as well as from any further suspension of regional autonomy [15].

Ideology, aims and interests

The ideology of the "Democratic Tsunami" was Catalan nationalism with the ultimate aim of forming the independent state. The goal was contradicted by another ideology of Spanish nationalism that always wants to preserve a united Spain.

The cover of the "Democratic Tsunami" on X included three basic principles: rights, freedom and self-determination. The protest group published their communiqué on 16 October 2019. They specified three aims of the movement: the exercise of the right to Catalan self-determination, freedom for the jailed and exiled prisoners, and the full exercise of fundamental rights. The movement promised to grow stronger by the day and guaranteed "mass civil disobedience" [16]. Their demand was simple and direct: "Spain, sit and talk" (see Figure 1) [17]. In other words, they were looking for negotiation with the Spanish government in order to find solutions to the Catalan problem.

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1   Formerly known as Twitter.

Figure 1 – One of the demands of the "Democratic Tsunami" movement

These goals caught the attention of the famous football coach Pep Guardiola, who is also a popular supporter of the Catalan independence movement. Among other things, he agreed to take part in a video produced by the "Democratic Tsunami". It was posted on X and shared on other social media platforms. The football coach criticized the decision of the Spanish Supreme Court and asked the international community to help resolve the conflict between Catalonia and Spain. "There is only one path – sitting down and talking, sitting down and talking", he stated [18]. The video was in English and included Catalan as well as Spanish subtitles for greater distribution. Such a tactic, namely the support of a celebrity like Guardiola, could convince ordinary people that their participation in the movement is the right decision. As a result, the video was viewed around 1.33 million times as of 28 December 2019. Four years later, this statistic disappeared. Either the movement tried to hide them in order to avoid prosecution, or the technical features of the social media platform were the reason. The fact is that the only available numbers on X are 1351 comments, about 21 thousand shares, and 35 thousand likes as of 12 October 2023.

In addition, the "Democratic Tsunami" proclaimed a strict framework of the discipline of non-violence as the basic strategy of the movement. At the end of their communiqué, they referred to the words of the pacifist leader of India, Mahatma Gandhi: "Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind" [19].

Symbols of the social movement

The central element of the movement was the tsunami that washes away everything on its way. The association with it was chosen because the platform overcomes all obstacles on their way to independence. As already mentioned, they used signs with inscriptions like "Spain, sit and talk".

Another important symbol that is common for all Catalan pro-independence protesters was a yellow ribbon. It expresses solidarity with the "political prisoners", and opposes the "unjust" and "illegal" actions of the Spanish authorities.

There were two flags at the protests. The first one called "Estelada blava", which is the old flag of the right-wing Catalan nationalists, separatists and supporters of an independent Catalonia. The second flag is "Estelada vermella", which is a newer modification proposed by the left-wing Catalan separatists, socialists and anarchists. Catalans also hang these flags on the balconies of their homes.

Organizational structure

There is not much information on the organizational structure of the "Democratic Tsunami". Although they rejected all ties with other pro-independence groups and political parties, this did not stop them from informing people from other secessionist parties and

groups about their activities and accepting their participation. Moreover, they stated that the platform refused to represent itself as an organization and instead defined itself as a permanent, continuous and inexhaustible campaign without leaders [20]. "The key to everything is not in a pyramidal organization, but in horizontal coordination", one of the anonymous protesters said [21]. The connection was not only between people inside the country, but also outside its borders.

Such an approach gives many benefits to the movement. First, positioning yourself as a leaderless campaign creates a strong vocabulary of effectiveness and relevance because people feel like the ultimate leader. The course of events depends on the activists who can bring real changes. Each participant is important and responsible for the development of the situation. They are a concrete part of the solution. Second, the anonymity of the "online people" standing behind the movement and the lack of coalitions with other pro-independence movements or groups avoid suspicion. For example, it practically eliminates the possibility of a situation where people choose not to participate in the movement based on personal beliefs about someone else's ideas. Third, it fills the vacuum in the absence of strong leaders. Fourth, the decentralized character and technical possibilities of the movement create better mobility and flexibility.

The "Tsunami Democratic" stated it was privately funded [22]. Moving to their official page, there was the button called "Make a donation" and the signature: "We are all Tsunami and we need a fund to meet the expenses and prepare new actions" [23].

How to become a member?

The process of mobilization in the "Democratic Tsunami" protest group took place in two ways. However, these are not some traditional steps from the literature such as: 1) contact with the movement at a turning point in life, 2) initial activism, 3) development of movement's beliefs, 4) sustained activism [24]. The main features of the "Democratic Tsunami" are their progressive use of social media platforms and mobile apps. The majority of its participants are inhabitants of the Catalan region with the strong feeling of patriotism and desire to be independent. Most likely, this attitude is instilled from childhood. Thus, it is easy to play on their emotions. The political manipulations with the topic make a visible impact.

Specifically, the first way of mobilization was related to social networks. It seems that people in the region are up-to-date on the news and announcements of the protest activities. It was not the problem for them to find the information about the "Democratic Tsunami" after the first release of the movement's communiqué on X, and, especially, after the retweets of the prominent pro-independence politicians. Since the protest group did not have strict methods of recruitment, subscription to their social media pages could have been the equivalent of this.

The second way of mobilization was more personalized and localized. It functioned through the movement's mobile application. This variant can be described based on an anonymous comment from the TechCrunch website. First, it was a sideload app, which worked only on Android smartphones. It is important that the program did not exist on Google Play. Second, the Tsunami Democràtic app required location permission to operate. Thus, administrators could map human resources available for the protests and coordinate them. Third, the program required a QR code to be activated. One activist of the movement could share the code with the only one potential member. This was a security measure intended to manage activation in stages and to introduce circles of trusted people. After all, the risk of penetration by state authorities was limited. Fourth, the users of the program were asked to indicate their availability (day and time) for carrying out actions of civil disobedience. People could also specify their resources (e.g. bicycles, cars) for possible utilization during protests. Fifth, the members were asked to confirm their availability for the upcoming event. They also needed to check-in when they get to the location. Administrators were able to cancel scheduled actions in case of insufficient participation or changes to the plan [25]. It is obvious that this type of recruitment is better than the traditional one because it coordinates the mobilization of people in a flexible and safe way with minimal risks.

Social media content

The social media accounts of the "Democratic Tsunami" were the main sources of information about the movement. The choice of three different platforms is obvious: Telegram stands out for security settings, X for the speed of posting, and Instagram for its visual content. Their Telegram account counted 412 459 followers, the X profile – 236 700, the Instagram page – 220 000, and the Facebook page – 16 828, as of 28 December 2019. In addition, there were many unofficial accounts. Four years later, the situation has changed. Their Telegram and Facebook profiles were deleted, the number of X followers dropped to 189 301, and the number of Instagram followers decreased to 140 000, as of 15 October 2023. The main types of content from their X page are shown in Table 1. It is important to note that many people remain followers of inactive pages. Nonetheless, foreigners can openly follow these pages too, which means that the numbers do not accurately reflect the population of Catalonia alone.

Table 1 – The main types of content from the "Democratic Tsunami" account on X

Type	Example
Symbolic content	Photos and videos confirming the appearance of movement's symbols and slogans in different parts of the region.
Media content	News, articles, interviews and other types of media content about the movement.
Informational content	Information about goals, representatives, actions and activities of the movement, "FAQS" (frequently asked questions), communiques.
Anti-government content	Negative posts about the "weak" Spanish authorities and their allies.
Historical content	References to motivational quotes from famous historical personalities. Information about historical protests.
Mobilization content	Calls to act in favor of the movement (participate in protests, block highways, hang posters, spread information, and so on). Helpful maps and locations.
Referential content	Reposts of messages from their partners, supporters. References to social movements in other countries.
Connectors	Links to other social media accounts of the movement, to their website, to their application. Hashtags (e.g. #TsunamiDemocràtic) that are monitored by the administrators.

Strategies and impact

The opportunities provided by the presence of social media can be seen on the example of the events on 14 October 2019. It was the first reaction of "Democratic Tsunami" to the sentencing of Catalan separatist leaders. Two posts on social networks were enough to organize the protest in one of the city squares called Plaza Catalunya, and send people to blockade the main airport El Prat (Figure 2) [26; 27]. The protesters were asked to use any possible means to get to the airport, even on foot. They could track the tasks on a mobile phone from any place in the city. The news material about the movement showed the message in which the "Democratic Tsunami" informed people that the action was over: "The Democratic Tsunami has reported that today's actions have successfully ended, goals achieved and tomorrow will be others" [21].

This tactic of structuring tasks was a very smart solution that extended the life of the movement. The activists should always know that their collective action could produce the desired changes. Pessimism would decrease the probability of participation. As the Catalan issue continues for a long time, it must be even harder to convince people. However, everyday

tasks provided the movement with a new impetus. Daily rewards in the form of accomplished goals gave the feeling of a small but victory, useful participation and readiness to move on. "Probably, the most difficult is the time when the actions end because many people feel that they still have energy to withstand in the action more. But the key to success is to reserve this energy for the next action", one of the anonymous members of the "Democratic Tsunami" [21].
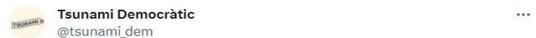

Figure 2 – An example of mobilization for an event

Another successful solution was to offer the time frame for the protest, which created strong coordination between people and organizers. The events took place at a time convenient for everyone. Hence, it possibly increased the number of participants and gave them an opportunity to plan what items to bring with them.

Next, the "Democratic Tsunami" put the emphasis on a non-violent form of protest. There was even a separate section called "Non-violence guidelines" on the platform's website. It listed the six rules that "must be accepted by the people who want to participate in action" [23] and could be considered as a winning decision of the movement. On the one hand, the non-violent form of protest has greater public approval than violent form. It is easier to encourage people to participate in them. In addition, the "Democratic Tsunami" removes responsibility for violent protesters. On the other hand, police must somehow respond to separatist actions. They could not give protesters the opportunity to do whatever they want, even in a peaceful way. As practice shows, after trying to push people away, the police may start to beat them. It transforms into

hostile pictures in different types of media (Figure 3) [28]. Journalists blame the police and people hate the police. Furthermore, these pictures are spread around world news and influence the world community thanks to the Internet. Unfortunately, foreigners do not delve into the reasons for such actions and formulate certain opinions that are contrary to reality. After all, it helped the movement to win in the psychological clash with the Spanish government.

Figure 3 – Portrait of the police according to the frame of the "Democratic Tsunami"

On the contrary, any movement cannot completely isolate itself from violence. As one of the protesters said: "It would have been really lovely if the peaceful approach had worked but revolution – if that is the right word – has never achieved its goals without violence" [29]. This form of protest can also be explained through the logic of numbers and the logic of damage. Among other things, the aforementioned march from Plaza Catalunya to El Prat airport was aimed to demonstrate the numerical strength behind the protest. A variety of photos and videos showing approximately thousands of protesters were posted on X by the organizers and ordinary users [30; 31]. In the case of violence against property, the costs are mostly economic, but there is also violence against people. The organizers of the protests at El Prat airport circulated fake boarding passes via Telegram in order to collapse its work [32]. As a result, more than 100 flights were canceled with economic damages. The blockade of El Prat Airport and the highway to France affected not only Spain, but other countries too. In such a way, the "Democratic Tsunami" tried to attract the international community's attention to the Catalan case. They also set cars and trash cans on fire, clashed with the police, threw Molotov cocktails, launched fireworks into police helicopters, occupied governmental buildings, and built barricades. All of these actions caused economic and physical damages. Additionally, it

had a symbolic dimension. All the lights from fire created locations for people to group. They showed that the protest was alive. All these actions of the movement participants could have the aim to show that they were the hosts of Catalan region and could do anything there.

Every blockade of an airport, an opera house, a football stadium, a railway station or a highway involved personal risks or costs (especially when it caused a fight with the police). However, the participants of the "Democratic Tsunami" movement and generally Catalan independence movement were willing to demonstrate their conviction to the ultimate goal – the independent state. These forms of protest belong to the logic of bearing witness.

Reaction of the state

The Guardia Civil (the oldest law enforcement agency in Spain) explained the status of "Democratic Tsunami" in their letter to the Microsoft GitHub website: "There is an ongoing investigation being carried out by the National High Court where the movement Tsunami Democràtic has been confirmed as a criminal organization driving people to commit terrorist attacks. Tsunami Democràtic's main goal is coordinating these riots and terrorist actions by using any possible mean" [33]. They asked the GitHub website to block the ability to download the mobile application of the movement.

There was an immediate answer from the "Democratic Tsunami" on X: "…Dear Spanish Government, trying to build a barrier on the Internet in the 21st century is like putting a door to the sea… We consider it very serious and disturbing that the state accuses hundreds of thousands of people who exercise their rights to protest and freedom of expression through strict non-violence and civil disobedience as 'terrorists" [34]. The movement released other download options. The core of the app was difficult to block because it was based on foreign servers.

Conclusions and Perspectives. Although the "Democratic Tsunami" has promised to continue its activism until all demands are met, their last post on X is dated on 17 February 2020. It was not even an original post, but a repost from the Alerta Solidària account [35]. Among their other posts were messages about the continued activity of the "Democratic Tsunami" and the preparation of the second wave of protests [36; 37]. However, it has been invisible since then and at least until October 2023.

As for the situation in the region, the coalition of pro-independence parties continues to remain in power. Nonetheless, the popularity of separatist ideas decreased. People had time to consider the consequences of such a step [38]. The number of participants in the march to the National Day of Catalonia was around 115 thousand in 2023, compared to 1.8 million in 2012 [39]. In turn, the Spanish authorities took a step forward and pardoned some Catalan separatists who organized a referendum on the independence of the region.

Although the "Democratic Tsunami" lasted only six months, it was able to take the pro-independence movement to a new level of development. The main feature was the work with social media platforms (symbolic, media, informational, anti-government, historical, mobilization, referential types of content as well as various connectors) and the mobile application. The plot from the TV series like "Black Mirror" became a reality. These movement's tools simplified the process of mobilization and coordination between leaders and protesters. They created the mechanism to transform the Catalan independence movement into a more private and highly protected protest community. They introduced the anonymous leadership that satisfies people with different values and views. The Spanish government has not found the organizers. It could not effectively counter the power of Internet technologies. The movement put the authorities into losing position with effective use of non-violent tactics. After all, the "Democratic Tsunami" has not announced the end of its activity yet. It means that their next appearance can strike at any time.

In the future, it is important to analyze the communication practices of similar protest groups from Ukraine, Hong Kong and other parts of the world. Since they are left without much resources and limited in their freedom by the authorities, their activists have to resort to creative solutions. They can be used in order to promote democracy as well as to prevent unlawful actions.

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«ДЕМОКРАТИЧНЕ ЦУНАМІ» ЯК ОНЛАЙН-ЕТАП РУХУ ЗА НЕЗАЛЕЖНІСТЬ КАТАЛОНІЇ

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Вступ. Незалежність Каталонії – це питання, яке хвилює іспанську політику навіть не протягом років, а протягом століть. У 2012 р. більшість у парламенті отримали депутати, які ухвалили Декларацію про суверенітет. У 2017 р. каталонський парламент проголосив незалежність від Іспанії. У відповідь іспанська влада заарештувала ініціаторів цього рішення. Протестувальники вийшли на вулиці проти ув'язнення лідерів каталонських сепаратистів. Це вплинуло на появу нової протестної групи «Демократичне Цунамі», яка відіграла важливу роль у боротьбі за незалежність Каталонії.

Мета дослідження. Основна мета цієї роботи – описати соціальний рух «Демократичне Цунамі» з точок його походження, учасників, організаційної структури, стратегії та тактики, опублікованого контенту, символів, ідеології, впливу та відповіді держави на його дії.

Методологія. Основними методами цієї роботи є вторинний аналіз даних (два етапи) і якісний контент-аналіз (649 твітів). Період дослідження – із серпня 2019 р. по лютий 2020 р. Необхідні дані були зібрані з сайтів ЗМІ та соціальних мереж.

Результати. Наявні дані дозволили виокремити комунікаційні стратегії руху «Демократичне Цунамі» та навести їх приклади. Наукова стаття описує роботу різноманітних ін-

струментів онлайн-комунікації (соціальні мережі, мобільний додаток), які використовувалися рухом для досягнення своїх цілей. Цікавим фактом є те, що іспанська влада виявилася не готовою до протистояння з новими технологіями. Досліджувані практики можуть бути запозичені й використані в будь-якій країні світу для схожих процесів та явищ у суспільстві.

Висновки. Хоча «Демократичне Цунамі» існувало лише пів року, воно змогло вивести рух за незалежність на новий етап розвитку. Головною особливістю стало ефективне використання соціальних мереж та мобільного додатку. Ці інструменти «Демократичного Цунамі» спростили процес мобілізації та координації між лідерами та протестувальниками, трансформували рух за незалежність Каталонії в більш приватну та високозахищену протестну спільноту.