**ENDORSED OVER TWO MILLION TIMES**

That's 2,064,154 enquiries of Catalan public archives in 2015 to be precise. This is the statistical balance of access to information services managed directly by public archives in the Catalan archival system immediately following the passing of Catalonia's Law 19/2014 on Transparency, Access to Information and Good Governance. This is no minor detail. If we compare it to two years previously, 2013, the figure was 1,162,521 enquiries. We find this a devastating comparison. The Catalan Archive System received almost double the number of enquiries with scarcely any support in the form of human or economic resources. Had it had the support and resources received in other areas with the entry into force of the Transparency Act, who knows how many enquiries it would have had to deal with. The archives have taken on this increase in public demand with no problem, ‘as a matter of course’, that is, by doing their job and using all their description tools. [The data is from IDESCAT and is extremely valuable for understanding where we are today.](http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=782&t=2015) And we shall compare it to other data.

For instance, of those just over two million enquiries, 837,762 were made of Government of Catalonia archives. Those that belong to the Ministry of Culture and central administrative archives. [This week the Secretariat for Transparency and Open Government published the latest figures on provision of right of access to public information in Catalan Government ministries](http://exteriors.gencat.cat/ca/ambits-dactuacio/govern-obert/transparencia/acces-a-la-informacio-publica/Seguiment-i-avaluacio/). The results are epic. Between July 2015 and December 2016, the Government of Catalonia, not including archives, has dealt with 1,113 enquiries. Dramatic pause. There is just no comparison. The Government has an entire general secretariat to deal with the right of access to public information that generates just over a thousand enquiries. With not even an ad hoc directorate general to promote access to the information they manage, the Catalan Government archives deal with in excess of 800 thousand enquiries. There are obviously some serious differences in many respects in Catalonia, but this one takes the biscuit.

Since the Transparency Act came into force, the AAC has been warning all concerned that you can't segregate access to information according to supplier. What matters are the requests, not where they come from. It's not right that the General Secretariat for Transparency only counts a certain type of request, that is, those that follow the procedure established in the Transparency Act. It's not right that its meaning should be taken so *stricto sensu*, discounting those that follow a procedure that's infinitely shorter, more effective and direct. Why should they be computed differently? Why distinguish information by sector? What objective differences exist between them? Probably a lot more than appears at first sight, but in no case are they related to providing access to the information that government agencies have in their keeping. Let's say that, yes, there are differences, in response time and completeness, in direct mediation with the general public, with no electronic means or digital signature, amongst others. The archives of Catalonia provide access to public information with astonishing efficiency and in record time. Maybe this is not to the liking of those that insist on promoting access to information by the most bureaucratic means possible. It's incomprehensible that no one's thought up any improvements, more pragmatic ways to deal with requests for access. It's surprising that Open Government is still promoting such procedural access when voices continue to be heard in the Government itself demanding less red tape in public administration. The Catalan Government gives out contradictory messages in a key area.

Can anything be done? Of course. [Take the case of Terrassa Town Council.](http://governobert.terrassa.cat/transparencia/7-2-1-informes-seguiment-dret-dacces-a-la-informacio-publica/) In July 2015, when the mechanisms for providing access to public information came into force, a strategic decision was made. All requests that until then had arrived via various channels, including archives of course, would be dealt with the same way, generating a single type of access to public information request, which in Terrassa was given the name DAIP file. Between July 2015 and the end of 2016, Terrassa Town Council dealt with 1,504 requests for access to public information. Of these, 910 were answered directly by the Municipal Archive (Administrative and Historical), therefore answering 60.5% of the requests received. Of 1,504 requests, 836 were dealt with in under two days, that's 55.6% of the total. It's not all good news, though. In the last six months of 2015, the average response time for the Municipal Archive was 3.3 days per request, (2.9 days from July to September, 3.6 days from October to December). In the first four months of 2016, the average rose to 3.5 days per response. All of which is proof that the increase in workload, with no additional resources, means a longer response time. That needs to be taken into account too. Who carries the load of this new right of access to public information? The Archive. Who needs more support to deal with all this? The Archive. The case of Terrassa is typical in Catalonia, despite appearing to be a unicum. Combining access to public information in a single management channel simplifies the work, makes for quicker responses and gives exposure to the services that really deal with these requests. The figures for Terrassa show in black and white what was already common practice, but was not being indexed. The Terrassa example is a good practice that could be followed by many government agencies to improve provision of access to public information. However, archives need to be ready. As people see that the system works, the workload will increase.

Two million reasons a year. This will increase over time. More than 50% of requests for access to be dealt with by archives. An exponential increase in workloads. That's what's in store for us, what we're going to have to deal with. With our expertise, but demanding more attention and resources. And, above all, making this situation into a demand, not accepting ever again what appears in the press or is released by official channels saying that members of the public don't know what mechanisms exist for transparency and access to information. While some are licking their magnified wounds, others are getting on with the job. Take note.