Table of Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 About the Edgeryders Project

This text will examine how edgeryders take political action and participate in political processes. It will also see how the kinds of participation that edgeryders are involved in differ from how European youth policy imagine political participation and if it is possible to bridge these differences.

That the Edgeryders project want to examine political participation seems natural. One of the major ideas behind Edgeryders is that the citizens are experts when it comes to their own lives and as experts they should be involved in the policy process. Edgeryders explicitly wants to define itself against a passive presentation of youth as a problem category that policymakers and experts have to figure out and come up with policies for. Therefor, Edgeryders itself is an experiment in policy making that is based on a new kind of political participation.

Within the policy field there is a wide-spread concern about the state of European youth. The economic crisis have hit the young people of europe hard with high unemployment rates and there is concern about the low numbers of youth participating in traditional political parties, institutions and organizations. The concept of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) highlights concerns about a generation left out of society, excluded from participation, influence and possibilities of self-realization. The way Edgeryders want to counter this image is to listen to the stories from young people themselves about how they build a common future; making a living, socializing, learning and trying to influence the world around them. By creating a platform that lets young people speak for themselves about the topics they care about, Edgeryders hope to show that youth are more active and creative in building this common future than the negative concept of NEETs suggest.

1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to paint a picture of how edgeryders, the young people in Europe creating futures on the edges, take political action; how they view political institutions, how they participate in protest movements and how they

invent new ways of engaging politically and invent new forms of political systems.

I will also undertake a critical reading of current European youth policy to see how they try to engage youth in policy and how they view the status of youth participation today. How is the relation between citizen activism and political institutions imagined and what is considered to be political participation?

From these empirical investigations I will identify gaps between how edgeryders take political action and how the youth policies imagine political participation.

From this I will identify possible bridges between the two realities. How can they interact with each other, under what conditions, on whose initiative?

1.3 Method

To get an overview of how edgeryders take part in political processes I have conducted a study of the mission reports and comments to those reports on the Edgeryders platform. This has primarily been focused on the campaign "We, the People" which specifically dealt with political participation. However, mission reports from other campaigns are also relevant, such as "Caring for Commons", "Making a Living" and "Resilience". This is an important point, because as we shall see edgeryders do not restrict their political participation to a separate sphere but keep a holistic view on all the whole of their lives. In exploring the site I have gone through all the mission reports in "We, the People" and followed links to other campaigns as well as following the most discussed mission reports. From this exploration, topics have emerged that I feel gives an overview of the most crucial aspects of how politics and participation are viewed from the edgeryders.

For the section of European youth policy I have analyzed several recent official reports and documents from the Council of Europe and the European Commission that focuses on youth policy. I have focused on but not limited myself to documents about youth political participation because those policies are also shaped by the general view of the situation of youth in Europe today. From this material I have constructed an analysis of how European youth policy considers the topic of participation in the political process and what the aim of the youth policy regarding participation is. I have also used some second hand material from research on youth participation that gives larger overviews of the field.

I addition to this primary material I have used secondary literature to aid in the analysis. This has been research focusing on youth policy and youth in general as well as the state of political institutions and citizen participation in the political process. I have also relied on political theory, primarily regarding new forms of political participation that we can see examples of on Edgeryders and how these forms can be interpreted. This comes in several categories that has been chosen for how they correspond to forms of political participation I have found in the mission reports. This is somewhat of a redundant approach. Since the edgeryders are "citizen experts", they are of course also self-reflexive and read and are inspired by theory, perhaps the same theory that I use to analyze the forms of participation they engage in. There are even references to this kind of literature in the mission reports and discussions on Edgeryders. The use of this material is therefor not only a way of externally interpreting the actions of edgeryders but also to bring forth some of the *source material* within these forms of participation. For example I rely sometimes on design theory that in recent years have developed into a theory for the practice of performing socio-technical interventions in a social field. I also use theory from the hacking and free software communities as well as contemporary political theory that form a part of todays protest movements.

1.4   Structure of the text

After this initial introduction, *section II* deals with the data from the Edgeryders platform. After a more detailed look at how the Edgeryders project officially talk about participation and how that has structured the project I will describe the forms of participation found in the mission reports on Edgeryders. I have devided these in three categories; protests, systems and social innovation. "Protest" deals with street protest movements, "systems" deal with the invention of new kinds of political procedures and systems and "social innovation" deals with attempts to directly improve a certain situation or living condition. After this description I will analyze the findings along several dimensions: *First* how politics is situated and performed in relation to other dimensions of life; *second* about process, goals and continuity of political participation; *third* about horizontal vs. vertical trust and the view of institutions and *forth*, taking a look at what kind of participations seems to be

missing from Edgeryders.

Section III deals with youth policy. This section begins with a description of the current state of youth and participation as seen from the perspective of youth policy. It then continues to describe the youth policy itself, its aim, methods and how it wants to improve youth participation. From this material I will deconstruct the idea of participation as it is presented within youth policy. What kind of participation is youth policy talking about? In what way and with what influence does it expect youth to engage in politics and how is it supposed that these process will be structures and managed? After this a comparison highlighting the differences with Edgeryders in several aspects is made. This deals with what counts as political, who sets the agenda for participation and influence and if the very idea of a separate policy for youth participation makes sense in light of the findings from Edgeryders.

Section IV provides suggestions for policy improvements within the area of youth participation. The aim of this section is neither to broadcast my own views on youth policy, nor select specific form of participation from Edgeryders and suggest them. Rather it is to point to the rich source of experimentation with new political participation that edgeryders are and suggest some methods and procedures for how to begin to experiment with this. I highlight some themes of where there are gaps today and where bridges could be constructed. The first is if institutions should take the lead in the foreground or remain in the background as support structure for citizen initiatives. The second concerns how edgeryders and institutions could find common spaces and concerns and work together. The third theme regard open government as an u,brella concept for a new way of working together. And the forth theme regards the idea of "prototyping cultures" as a form of participation that embraces uncertainty, adhoc decisions and experimentation. Finally, this section contains a part of the role of a project like Edgeryders in shaping youth policy.

A final *section V* contains concluding remarks, a more philosophical discussion on the concept of participation and suggestions for further research.

2 Describing Edgeryders

2.1 Edgeryders and participation

As said in the introduction, apart from the topics discussed on the platform, Edgeryders as a project (uppercase E) deals specifically with participation from its users in the role of "citizen experts", here called edgeryders (with lowercase e). This is reflected in the presentation of Edgeryders as "the worlds largest think tank":

> Thanks to the web, we can collaborate on a massive scale to aggregate our expertise into the world's largest think tank. This is what Edgeryders wants to be.
>
> (". Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

Edgeryders is therefor both a way of gathering stories about responses to the problem of political participation by young people as well as an answer to its own concerns. These concerns are presented in a blog post on Edgeryders from January 2012 discussing the new campaign ""We, the People":

> The reasoning behind this inquiry is that surveys point to a growing lack of involvement on youths' part and a gloomy future of party politics. [. . .] Who will elect our officials if not a small minority? If indeed they are turning away, institutions are responsible to look into why this happens and how to bring them closer.

These concerns are also put in another light in a blog post in June 2012 reflecting on the then upcoming Edgeryders conference, calling for a new vision of political participation for Europe to arrive as a response to the crises it is now facing:

> We have so much creative freedom, so much scope to respond to our crises beyond the simple models of elections and parties, all the way through to new economies, wikipedia-type collaboration, changing cultures and changing goals. The future is wide open, and we hope to reach as far into it as possible, and lay the foundations for making it real at the European level.

Central to my survey of the mission reports and discussions on the Edgeryders platform has been the campaign "We, the people"("WE, THE PEOPLE Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.), as it dealt directly with political participation. The campaign presents a picture of how young people are rejecting traditional political participation:

> What is alarming for scholars and democracy advocates is that participation is no longer a natural result of stepping into adulthood, of taking up responsibilities, paying taxes etc, as it used to be.
>
> ("WE, THE PEOPLE Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

However, the campaign asks:

> The question is: to what extent they are disengaged? Or rather they are engaged differently?
>
> ("WE, THE PEOPLE Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

It then proceeds to suggest that the latter is true, citing examples such as *the arab spring*, *Los Indignados* and the *Occupy protests*. The campaign description also highlights how digital tools lower the threshold of participation and create new channels for communication and organizing, although it suggests that it is not certain if these new forms of participation will lead to any lasting social change. Digital technologies are also presented as something that can both create new forms of interaction by citizens with political institutions and new forms of surveillance by governments and other entities.

The campaign then presents four missions:

- Reactivating democratic institutions ("Reactivating democratic institutions Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

  This mission is about stories from traditional political participation.

- Taking it to the streets ("Taking to the streets Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

  This mission captures experiences from street protests

8

- Hacking for change ("Hacking for change Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

  This mission is about how technology aids political movements

- Spotlight: open government ("Spotlight: open government Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

  This mission takes a special look at how technical systems can foster participatory collaboration between citizens and governments

Apart from "We", the people" I have incorporated mission reports from other campaigns, the reason being that forms of political participation can also be seen in practices that is not necessarily framed as a political participation but is still about shaping the collective world we live in. Stories from the introductory life stories from the mission "Share my ride" ("Share your Ryde Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.) fits here, as well as mission reports form "Making a Living" ("MAKING A LIVING Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.) about jobs and social innovation, "Caring for the Commons" ("CARING FOR COMMONS Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.) about protecting and enhancing common resources and "Resilience" ("RESILIENCE Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.) about how society manages food and other vital resources.

2.2 Forms of participation

One thing that is striking about reading mission reports on the Edgeryders platform is the richness and variety of political initiatives being presented. It is not an easy task to categorize them and what I have done here can be nothing more than an arbitrary sorting that does not do justice to the heterogeneity of the examples. That said, there seem to be two dominating themes that occur throughout the forms of participation that is almost always mentioned. One is *the internet*, the other is *crisis*. In one way or the other almost all of the mission reports and discussions about political participation is either about new opportunities enabled by widespread internet access and digital technologies or about the challenges that some version of the triple crises of economy, ecology and energy presents. This has at least two consequences. One is that there is a lack of trust in established

ways of doing politics. Not necessarily lack of trust in the sense that institutions are mistrusted (although that is not uncommon), but a lack of trust that institutions and political structures are either equipped to face new political challenges, utilize new participatory opportunities or equipped to be able to adapt to the new circumstances. The other consequence is that no one really knows what to do next. Or rather, there are contending proposals of what to do next, but no consensus of how to proceed. This leads to a situation where there is lots of trial and error and many small scale experiments, both failing and succeeding rapidly. There is also a lot of imitation, adaption and mutation of each others forms of participation since the internet spread ideas rapidly and youth in different regions find themselves in similar situations.

For the purpose of analysis I have divided the forms of participation in three categories: *protests*, *systems* and *social innovation*. I have chosen not to have a category for participation in formal political institutions partly because there are few accounts of this and partly because the story of those participations have already been widely researched. I will however mention some examples in passing.

2.2.1 Protests

The first category is one that on the surface at least feels familiar: street protests. This area has in the recent year in Europe been dominated by three big phenomena that are all represented in Edgeryders: the Anti-ACTA protests, Occupy protests and Los Indignados. The ACTA protests has had a peculiar relation to political institutions, so I will wait with that and begin with the two latter which has been more strictly grassroots oriented and has had an antagonistic or at least indifferent stance towards political institutions.

Both the Occupy protests and Indignados has several characteristics that is typical for movements of this generation. They are both exploratory in the sense that a clear problem space has been identified (although not strictly defined or limited) but there is no formal demands directed to any decision makers. Instead, both movements experiment with new ways of tackling the political problems with new forms of participation, new ways of connecting issues and struggles and from there trying to articulate, in practice and in theory, alternative ways of being and acting

politically. Both movements also seem to have broken through a tipping point of social tabu, releasing personal frustration and emotions in broad segments of the population and exposing things in public that has previously been kept private. They have by and large been successful in capturing and directing currents that already existed in society but in an unarticulated form. Currents whose direction was ambiguous and could just as easily have been captured for example by far-right movements. Both movements started as central public gatherings and has since dispersed out into several diverse initiatives.

The Anti-ACTA protests differ from Occupy and Indignados in the sense that they are primarily directed toward influencing decision makers within political institutions, rather than articulating alternatives within the movement itself (though this is not saying that alternatives are not articulated and worked out in the process). The Anti-ACTA protests, like other net activism movements before them, is interesting because they target issues that are normally perceived to be just an administrative matter and turn them into contested political issues. The the case of ACTA — the negotiations of a trade agreement. As a consequence, there is no clear divide among the political parties on this issue. No one "owns" this issue or a position on it and this can create interesting political alliances.

> An unintended consequence of this political diversity on the streets was that neither politicians nor media had a clue how to describe the movement, how to narrate about it nor categorize it. [. . .]It turned out that neither media nor politicians are able to handle truly grass-roots, spontaneous initiatives focused on particular issues, functioning over (or away from!) the usual political and social divides.
>
> ("Anti-ACTA in Poland - seen from the inside Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

Not only does issues like this create new political alliances but since neither media nor politicians have an established routine for handling them, especially when they target an part of the political process that rarely interacts with citizens, it opens up political space for unexpected turns. In the case of Anti-ACTA in Poland, this is best exemplified with the 7 hour long debate between the activists and the polish prime minister.

Drawing from my own personal experience of the ACTA protests as well as engaging as activist in the process of negotiation of the European Telecoms Package, I can also tell that these are great collective learning experiences where a loosely connected but tightly interconnected swarm of people learn about the political procedures, committees, reports and power relations within the European policy body *in real-time*.

2.2.2 Systems

This category captures initiatives that in some way involves constructing new systems for political participation. They often involve digital technology and some actual software, but must not necessarily do so as long as it involves constructing some formal procedures and rule sets for enabling participation. This participation can both be participation in the formal political process of political institutions from the city level to the European, but it can also be structured participation among peers. The inspiration for these systems comes from the online world and the many social networks and communication platforms found there and how they seem to be able to organize and create participation in ways and on a scale that was not possible before the internet. The distributed encyclopedia of Wikipedia, the free operative system of GNU Linux and similar initiatives are highlighted as forerunners.

One recurring theme here is that of *sharing*. Free software and the internet in general has created an inspiring culture of sharing and co-production that these system builders tries to adapt to other phenomena in society. As one edgeryder puts in:

> [
>
> I]t's possible to create a whole lifestyle based on sharing without joining a commune. Car sharing, co-housing, co-working, yard sharing, bike sharing, tool sharing and other innovations are growing in popularity. And they do not require you to give up your privacy, individuality or even ownership of your stuff.
>
> ("Interview with a Sharer Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

One prolific cluster of initiatives are the ones that go under the banner of *Open*

Data. This is initiatives that see a participatory potential in governments opening up their information databases for the public to use and engage with. This would allow citizens to engage directly with the heart of political institutions in their daily labour instead of only interactive with representatives. The motivation for this can be that citizens have the right to follow the governance institutions work in real-time to be able to hold them accountable, but it can just as well be seen as a cooperation between government and citizens to create better services and use of the data where small citizen initiatives can act in more agile ways than institutions:

> With open data it seems quite clear that hacktivists and civil society organizations are just way better and faster than government agencies in performing some of the related operations
>
> ("Spaghetti open data: a little thing that feels right Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

The way these initiatives have proliferated so far is in many cases that a group of citizen enthusiasts manages to get in contact with an "insider" who is either knowledgable in software or ust enthusiastic about the idea. An example from the Italian "Spaghetti Open Data" initiative showed how "a couple of civil servants joined forces with hackers from the Open Knowledge Fondation and the Guardian's datablog to release a fantastic dataset on public expenditure in a fully open and interactive form" ("Spaghetti open data: a little thing that feels right Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.).

Another example from Edgeryders where open data is combined with a structure for participation is "the concept of "Participatory Budgeting". [Explain the concept] Participatory budgeting is an attempt to, in a systemic way, structure the interaction between governing institutions and citizens. This is not without its critics and participatory budgeting has been criticized sometimes for being too much of a top-down initiative that is focused on improving and enriching the work of political institutions rather than focusing on citizens own initiatives. This view is expressed in a comment on Edgeryders:

> My strong critique is that PB is [. . .] just like a nice tool in the hand of politicians to better involve citizens, and not the contrary. [. . .] The-

13

refore, citizens come to award them, rather than themselves, and keep thinking [PB] as a service offered [rather] than a right achieved!

("Participatory Budgeting worldwide! Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

This problem of how participation is facilitated, on whose initiative and on what term is something that will be dealt with more in the section on European youth policy and the one with my suggestions for improvements.

2.2.3 Social innovation and direct improvements

The final category is what I call social innovation and direct improvements. Like the name suggest, this is about initiatives that directly try to improve the living conditions in a certain situation, together with other peers and without going through the representing phase of trying to influence a decision makes within a political institution to do something about the problem. Social innovation has become something of a buzzword lately and often refers to projects that both improve social conditions *and* make a profit. However, the way interpret the term, it doesn't have to involve making a profit. The profit is there to enable the project to sustain itself over time and this can also be accomplished through other means such as pubic funding or by volunteer efforts.

An example of social innovation is found in an Edgeryders report from Sicily about the Addiopizzo initiative ("Addiopizzo. Aware consumers against the Mafia system. Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.). This can be described as a variation of the *Fair Trade* motif but being about supporting Sicilian restaurants who refuse to pay bribes to the mafia. The initiative is started by a group of young people in Palermo.

Addiopizzo is a non-partisan movement and a volunteer association that opposes the Mafia System and promotes a virtuous economic system free from the control of the Mafia through a project called "Critical Consumption"

("Addiopizzo. Aware consumers against the Mafia system. Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

14

The "Critical Consumption" project started as a way to index and support those restaurants that dared to challenge the practice of paying bribes to the mafia.

> Critical Consumption is a project that wants to support merchants who do not submit to the extortion racket, creating a network of aware consumers who commit themselves to go to those merchants for their purchases.
>
> ("Addiopizzo. Aware consumers against the Mafia system. Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

Addiopizzo incorporates several characteristics common to social innovation projects.

- They start in a single, but radical, issue or demand.

- They present an achievable solution but that is challenging structures

- They involve multiple stakeholders, tend to go viral, and are based on building a community

- They practice "Design in use"(Björgvinsson, Ehn, & Hillgren, 2010) and expand issues as more stakeholders become involved

Social innovation is also the form of political participation that blends most with other aspects of life. It can be hard to distinguish social innovation as political participation from other ways of simply improving ones living conditions together with others. An example of how a social innovation initiative that directly improves living conditions is the one of the occupation of Teatro Valle in Rome, which is part of a series of theatre occupations across Italy. The mission report about this occupation paints a picture of how what started as occupations to try to prevent the closure of theatre turned into a hub for social experimentation in the neighborhoods where they were located:

> Meanwhile, every day these spaces are clean, open and alive with a varied, continuous, hybrid programmation, accessible to all with the help

15

of all the artists and workers, including some of great fame: works-hops, performances of all kinds, Sundays for children, after-school care for children (in Sicilian spaces), the barter markets (Naples), seminars on copyleft and creative commons, a desk to legal support and business planning support (Coppola Theatre), history lessons (Nuovo Cinema Palazzo), readings, projections, trump tournaments in the summer for the elderly (Nuovo Cinema Palazzo).

("THE LEGITIMATE ILLEGALITY. CULTURE AS A COMMONS. A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ITALIAN SPACES OCCUPIED BY KNOWLEDGE WORKERS # 2 Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

Through direct improvements of living conditions, new forms of participation and political relations can emerge:

The social and cultural value is produced because these spaces have become places of artistic and sociological research and experimentation, places where we take care of his own cities and citizens, places where you implement new social policies based on co - operation and identification of real urgencies.

("THE LEGITIMATE ILLEGALITY. CULTURE AS A COMMONS. A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ITALIAN SPACES OCCUPIED BY KNOWLEDGE WORKERS # 2 Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

2.3 Analysis of Participation on Edgeryders

2.3.1 Where is politics located?

One striking aspect of the mission reports about political participation is that the political can turn up anywhere in relation to other practices of life. Political participation is not seen as a special sphere of life and it does not have a designated time and place such as it would have if one would engage in a political organization after work or school. There are clear examples of this on Edgeryders, for example a post called "Being paid for doing what you like - still impossible" ("Being paid for doing what you like-still impossible Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.) where

the mission report starts out with a quite personal discussion about the dilemma of having to choose between getting paid for doing a job you are not uncomfortable with and doing what you like but not get rewarded financially for it. The options that the poster sees is only getting by with temporary jobs while trying to find time for ones passion or moving away to a place where one can live of very little. The discussion in the comment field however quickly turns to a discussion of the political situation that brought this dilemma about and political actions and alternative economic systems that could solve this it such as time-banks, alternative currencies, ways of sharing resources. The Edgeryders platform has also been successful in encouraging people to tell stories from their own life situations and then have an active team and community that encourages wider reflection in the discussions.

2.3.2 Process, outcome and continuity

Most of the examples of participation on Edgeryders, although there are exception, could be called process oriented. Rather than using any means to work towards a well defined goal, they aim to establish procedures and form of interaction where political discussions and actions are made possible. This can be seen in protest movements as well as the system building and social innovation. As is expressed in an interview with a participant of Los Indignados posted on Edgeryders ("Indignados: 'A methodological revolution' - interview in Brussels Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.), in examples such as occupy and Indignados, this has been criticized from outsiders as a weakness. But from within the movements it is rather seen as an indication that they are trying to address the roots of the contemporary political situation rather than trying to fix problems on the surface. One can link this to a larger societal trend of moving from formal modes of interaction to experiment with open-ended forms of participation. Not only in political action but also regarding for example innovation in the business world (von Hippel, 2005). This is of course correlated to the rise of networked communication technologies. For political action though there are some problems associated with this form of participation and that is a widespread problem with continuity. Since participation is mostly based on time- and resource consuming volunteer efforts and a process-oriented practice is based on continuous involvement without ever really reaching a plateau where

political gains are institutionalized and secured, it can easily lead to individual and collective burn-out. For the corporate world, this is rarely a problem because they have an abundance of resources to throw at this process year after year, but in the time- and resource scarce world of volunteer political engagement, this becomes a real problem. Open-ended, networked and process-oriented participation is very prolific in getting things started, gathering people, spreading information and working up an energy for a new form of participation in the beginning of a project, but after the initial phase it can be problematic to solidify the initial achievements. In the comment section of the post on Addiopizzo this is discussed:

> finally, it's also a metter of energy and forces: at the very beginning ADDIOPIZZO was something innovative and very fascinating, now there are less people involved (for different reasons....) : the increase in the number of shops in the list was much higher in a couple of years and it was not proportional.
>
> ("Addiopizzo. Aware consumers against the Mafia system. Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

This problem is also recognized in my field of design research where participatory research projects that work with social design intervention in people lives have become more common the last years. Sometimes called "The Project Fallacy", a re-occuring problem is that between interventions that require long-term commitments to achieve the desired impact and funding structures that premiers short-term contracts. As a result, many projects end up involving a lot of stakeholders in a promising effort, but when the funding is drained and the project ends, the situation goes back to what it was before the intervention and no change has actually been achieved. I will present some ways that researchers have been trying to solve this in the section on "Prototyping culture" when I discuss suggestions for policy improvement.

2.3.3 What participation is missing?

As I mentioned in the introduction, what I present is inevitably a simplified overview of how political participation is presented at the Edgeryders platform, but it

must also be said that the stories of the edgeryders are not covering all the forms of political participation that youth in Europe is active in. It can be worthwhile to ask also who is and is not present on Edgeryders and what forms of political participation is missing from these accounts.

Since Edgeryders is a technical platform on the internet and a platform that one becomes aware about mostly through social media, there is naturally a risk that non-techsavvy communities becomes excluded. Communities that are either don't have access to or are unable to use computers and the internet as well as people who use the internet but are not well-connected or connected in other ways than with those links that lead to the Edgeryders platform. Perhaps people who mostly use media for consumption rather than interaction. It is also quite telling that most forms of participation presented on Edgeryders make heavy use of social media and other internet tools to organize or communicate.

The other forms of participation that potentially is excluded from Edgeryders are the ones that are not represented in a public way, either because they are illegal or because there is a social stigma associated with them. While it is possible to use pseudonyms on Edgeryders, most users have their real name and/or a profile picture showing their face. Either case it is rarely hard to find out who is behind a post. As an example, while people on Edgeryders are open about participating in protest movements such as Occupy and Los Indignados, I find no accounts from any of the young people that took part in the London riots. While I am sure many policy makers would denounce that activity, their voices are important to get a full people of the desires and feelings of young people in Europe today and what view they have on formal political institutions.

Beyond being a problem of representation, many of the accounts of political participation on Edgeryders deal with responses to the current economic crisis and some the communities that are not present are perhaps the young Europeans that are hit the hardest by the crisis, already being in vulnerable living conditions and without much space for social maneuverability.

3 Overview of Youth Policy

3.1 State of youth and participation

Before getting into how European youth policy view political participation it is important to understand how policymakers understand the new landscape of young people. There is a widespread notion that the life of youth today is radically different than previous generations, a change fueled by information technology, media and markets. As summarized by Linda Herrera:

> There is indeed something new about youth and part of this newness, as articulated in the World Youth Report 2005, can be found in the ascendancy of youth oriented media, markets and ICT worldwide, in the formation of ever newer forms of youth cultural production from music to fashion and film, the emergence of new forms of political organization and social movements, and consequently, new patterns of youth socialization.
>
> (Herrera, 2006)

Another dominating theme in youth policy apart form this new landscape is the notion of crisis. As the European commission writes in the report "An EU Strategy for Youth":

> Globalisation can bring growth and jobs, but it can also bring about specific challenges for vulnerable workers such as youth, as demonstrated by the crisis.
>
> (Commission, 2009)

Youth, with little work experience, has been hit hard by the crisis. Some youth is more vurneable than others, but as cuts in education affect who is able to go into studies when the job market for young an uneducated is poor, more and more young people become part of the group of youth that the crisis affects hard.

This all lead to a situation where youth is facing great uncertainty, which is reflected in the concerns of the youth policies. As summarized by Titley in a background paper to "8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth":

Indeed if there is a core theme running through the different issues youth policy and work will have to address in relation to the work priorities, it may well be the idea of precariousness.

(Titley, 2008)

Yet, in this precarious situation, Titley recognizes "the new range of opportunities and possibilities many young people have in what can loosely be termed our knowledge societies"(Titley, 2008) and that there is "[a] strong tendency towards freedom of cultural expression, creativity and individualism paves the way for young people today, who identify themselves as cultural producers and carriers of innovation and new forms of expression"(Titley, 2008).

This situation with crisis and uncertainty on the one hand and new opportunities and a new culture of participation on the other hand leads to a complicated relation to traditional political participation. Titley again:

Young people are highly positive towards democracy, although they are often critical towards the way institutions work

(Titley, 2008)

In the light of this, the challenge for youth policy could be said not to be so much about activating youth to participate (although for certain youth groups this could be the case) but to find a way to align the work of political institutions with the expectations and practices of todays young people in order to regain legitimacy among them.

This lack of trust in political institutions is partly due to disappointing experiences with engagement in political institutions and partly due to a feeling the political institutions are not capable of handling the new, complex issues that the world is facing today. Titley again:

The decline in memberships in formal organisations is often related to notions of individualisation in late capitalist societies, where people - not just the young - are compelled to fall back on biographical resources and solutions in response to wider structural and social issues, and

> where collective action does not seem possible in relation to opaque and distant agency in questions of economy and social resources.

(Titley, 2008)

The reluctance to engage in institutional politics is also due to a gap between what is perceived as distant social forces and the lack of influence over these from the institutional bodies. In the light of this it makes sense that youth participation both take on more local forms that directly improve living conditions and more global forms which rises over what is considered the day to day administrative notion of institutions.

This situation creates some challenges for youth policy since many areas outside of the traditional concerns of youth policy influence young peoples attitudes towards the political sphere. As the European Commission writes in the above mentioned report:

> Difficulties in education, employment, inclusion and health, further combined to problems in finance, housing or transport, make it difficult for young people to achieve autonomy, a situation where they have the resources and opportunities to manage their own lives, fully participate in society and decide independently.

(Commission, 2009)

As can be seen, many of these areas have neither to do with participation, nor with youth per se.

Another concern for youth policy is that within the globalized world of new networked subjectivities and new means of participation, a significant part of young people participate in reactionary movements that hardly embrace the new times.

> A major concern is how to ascertain the conditions without adult mediation, which type of youth identify with a given movement, for they range dramatically on the spectrum from peaceful, creative and progressive, to reactionary and violent.

(Herrera, 2006)

3.2 Intention of Youth Policy

EU programs for youth policy has been in place since 1988, however the intentions behind youth policy has varied(Commission, 2009). Sometimes, youth has been seen as problematic collection of people that needs to be guided through the transition to adulthood so that they don't fall into any traps(Besley, 2009). If this fails, the youth justice system has to take over and try to get the youth back on track(Besley, 2009).

Not all policy has this view of youth though. The report "An EU Strategy for Youth" from the European Commission has the following to say:

> Young people are not a burdensome responsibility but a critical resource to society which can be mobilised to achieve higher social goals.
>
> (Commission, 2009)

The Council of Europe share a similar view on youth:

> Fundamentally, the approach of the Council of Europe's youth sector to youth policy is one that aims to support young people's participation as a citizen and their - often complex - transition to autonomy.
>
> (Titley, 2008)

In the article "Moving youth participation forward", O'Donoghue et.al. States that "Youth development researchers have noted a shift in youth work in the past two decades from prevention (programs designed to treat and prevent the problems of "at-risk" youth) to preparation". Youth are to be prepared to face the challenges of the transition to adulthood in a self-governing manner. In this preparedness, political participation is seen as a key:

> Europe's youth need to be equipped to take advantage of opportunities such as civic and political participation, volunteering, creativity, entrepreneurship, sport and global engagement.
>
> (Commission, 2009)

The importance of participation from the perspective of youth policy is also reflected in its inclusion in the United Nations "Convention on the Rights of the Child".

The figure of the youth seems to embody the fears and hopes of our society. As Linda Herrera states in an assessment of youth policy:

> It is more likely that youth has been propelled into the development spotlight due to the mounting awareness of the potential roles of young people in forging more stable, democratic and economically prosperous societies. Conversely, when development goes awry, they can also represent forces of instability, radicalism and impoverishment.
>
> (Herrera, 2006)

Youth are seen as crucial actors living on the edge, invested with the responsibility of determining the future direction of our societies. Today, knowledge and education, entrepreneurship and initiative, innovation and creativity are projected on the youth. Precisely the properties that society hopes to see in the future.

XXX names this oscillation between stepping back and allowing self-governance while retaining control "governmentality". The term comes from Foucault. . .

Edgeryders hardly present youth as troubled and in need of guidance, but rather as capable of self-governance and taking bottom-up initiatives. The youth presenting themselves at Edgeryders hardly seem like these troubled youth and perhaps this is a gap in the representation of European youth at the platform. Edgeryders highlight the problematic position of governmentality between self-governess and control. Edgeryders presents youth that is quite capable of self-governing and participating in new ways in the political process, perhaps with some support structures.

3.3 The Idea of Participation

While it is considered a key factor for youth policy, it is still often unclear what is meant by participation. It can both refer to policy that "empower adolescents to take part in and influence decision making that affects their lives"(O'Donoghue & Kirshner, 2002) or supporting youth to take their own initiatives that shape their own future.

24

The distinction matters because it leads to very different perspectives on youth policy. Consider this quote from a European Commission report on youth policy:

> Policy-makers must adapt to communicating in ways receptive to young people - including on civic and European issues - particularly in order to attract unorganised or disadvantaged youth.
>
> (Commission, 2009)

This sentence suggests a perspective where the working of the European institutions are in no need of change. It is only required that they communicate in such a way that it convinces young people to be attracted to the institutions way of working.

Titley also expresses something similar in his report for the Council of Europe:

> The unique co-management system in the sector - where governmental and youth representatives have equal votes - is evidence of meaningful experience in youth participation.
>
> (Titley, 2008)

Government and youth representatives have equal influence over the decisions being made, but this still says nothing about how the agenda is formulated and what decision to be made is decided or how the policy is worked out. Youth representatives are participating as a sort of focus group that should give their view on already formulated proposals.

There is reason to be careful of how the concept of participation is used so that it does not end up in participation without influence. As O'Donoghue et.al. Says:

> Inserting one or a few youth into an adult-created and adult-driven process runs the risk of involving youth as tokens or "decorations".
>
> (O'Donoghue & Kirshner, 2002)

Simply participating in a process that is already defined does not guarantee real influence. The Council of Europe charter on youth policy broadens the view of participation:

Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election . . . , it is about having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.

(Gozdzik-Ormel, 2008)

The definition of participation is broadened here to include "means" and "space" to participate in "actions and activities" that "contribute to building a better society". This also encompasses engaging in activities that influence the scope, agenda and process of political participation.

3.4 Differences between Youth Policy and Edgeryders

3.4.1 What counts as political?

As seen in the section describing the mission reports of Edgeryders, youth engage on a daily basis in initiatives that aim to better the lives of them and their peers. Political participation is not seen as a separate activity set apart from other matters of everyday life but an ongoing collective effort to improve conditions of life.

Youth policy tends to view political participation as a special form of activity that constitutes a clear break with everyday life. It is almost as if youth is understood to have to take a break from their lives to able to engage in political participation. What Edgeryders have shown is instead that political participation often is a continuation of everyday life.

3.4.2 Who sets the agenda?

One observation from the Edgeryders platform is that many of the issues that edgeryders engage with are issues that in mainstream politics are not considered as political issues. The way this generation has politicized copyright and intellectual property is an example and we are now seeing for example new concerns for the commons as an extension of this. A major issue with youth policy is therefor how to provide spaces for the formulation of these new issues.

As it stands now, youth policy is focused on fostering participation in decisions within areas that is already defined as influencing the lives of young people. The problem however is often not (only) that the wrong decisions are being made, but that there is no policy working on the issues that young people are discovering as important. The youth active on Edgeryders would hardly settle for being included as taking part in decision at the end of a process where the problem has already been formulated.

3.4.3   Where is participation taking place?

The natural perspective from youth policy is to think of participation as meaning participation in the political processes of institutions or in campaigns initiated by the political institutions. However, what we see on Edgeryders is that youth today is creating their own spaces for participation, creating their own platforms for expression and debate and are perhaps on their way of inventing new kinds of institutions.

Youth policy tries to bring young people into their political processes by various campaign and initiatives to increase participation while edgeryders are already active in their own spaces and platforms.

3.4.4   Should youth policy even exist?

When formulating new perspectives on youth policy, one has to also grapple with the whole concept of "youth" and how that category is changing. The category of youth is a historical construce that cheanges meaning in different eras. As Herrera points out in her examination of youth policy:

> The notion of youth as a cultural group emerged in the post-World War II era when young people with access to markets and goods were distinguished by certain tastes, lifestyle choices and patterns of consumption.
>
> (Herrera, 2006)

Youth assert themselves as a category when radical societal shifts map themselves on generations. Youth is not a fixed age category, but a social phenomena

whose age stretch varies over time. Today, rapid shifts in technology, new communications, media and new organizational tools as well as a particular position in relation to the current economical crisis makes it possible to speak of youth today. Although it must be said that this category is not mapped on a specific age group more than statistically in the sense that most people falling in the category of tech-savvy, precarious Europeans are of a relatively young age. But Edgeryders shows that this social group also consist of people up into their 40's.

Likewise, not all young people fall into the social group represented on Edgeryders. Titley elaborates on the difficulty of diversity of young people for youth policy:

> This diversity is a constant challenge for the work of the youth sector; to maintain an overall vision of the political, economic and socio-cultural processes which impact on young people without allowing these broader patterns to obscure local, national and regional differences, not to mention the specific material conditions, identities and life possibilities of young people in their environments.
>
> (Titley, 2008)

Youth participation should not have as an objective to represent a common voice for young people, since such voice does not exist. Perhaps instead of youth policy, it would be better to have policy especially for emerging forms of participation, whether that came from young people, senior citizens of a combination of the two.

4 Suggestion for Policy

4.1 Aim of this section

The aim of this section is to provide suggestions for how the gap between edgeryders and current youth policy can be bridge in a way that take into considerations the experiences of Edgeryders and the new participatory environment that edgeryders are creating. Since I am both speaking for myself as a reseracher here as

well as trying to sound the voices of Edgeryders, I will clarify what the aim of this section is.

The purpose of this section is not for me as a researcher to suggest a specific policy improvement that I am in favor of. Neither is it to select a few of the many initiatives on the Edgeryders platform as suggest to implement them. Rather, my aim is to describe a process that could bridge this gap by highlighting 4 key themes or areas where policy needs to change.

4.2 Thematic suggestions

4.2.1 Foreground and background

The first theme is about the question weather institutions should be in the foreground or reside into the background of youth political participation. It used to be that youth policy around participation was focused on bringing youth into the institutional forms of participation. Herrera:

> In the past, political parties and formal youth organizations such as youth councils with links to formal government structures represented the standard form of youth partic-ipation, but this is no longer the case.

> (Herrera, 2006)

What we have seen on Edgeryders is how youth are active in creating their own initiatives and spaces that work with different kinds of procedures and practices than institutional politics. Can there then be a new role for institutions as background support for these initiatives, rather than trying to orchestrate a political participation?

Institutions have several downsides that makes them less fit to take charge of the process of participation. Compared to new forms of communication and organization they are slow. However once they turn to action they have an impact that small grassroots initiatives have a hard time aggregating.

Many of the initiatives displayed on Edgeryders is about creating new social infrastructures based on commons and sharing. Here is a possible point where institutions could provide support. To try to create policy that is fit to these new

29

lifestyles as well as trying to see what support structures are suitable. An example of edgeryders recognizing the infrastructural role of institutions can be seen in the mission report "Interview with a Sharer":

> And second, the time you free up by sharing and living more simply can be used to get engaged in issues that affect your lifestyle. For instance, going car-free is a lot easier if there's plenty of bike lanes and good public transportation. These are community issues that you can't work toward alone. You have to get involved in your community to make sure your tax dollars are spent in ways that make simpler living possible.
>
> ("Interview with a Sharer Edgeryders, Project Website," n.d.)

Even though voting levels are declining young people still seem to value the democratic foundations that institutional politics provide. As highlighted by this quote:

> While voting levels have declined in many countries, it is clear that young people have voted in significant numbers when elections are seen to be central to continued democratic functioning, and where single issues become closely associated with particular governments.
>
> (Herrera, 2006)

This shows that institutional politics for youth is a recognized important backdrop, a political infrastructure of sorts, but is unlikely to be the primary target for political engagement since youth find other more meaningful ways of engaging. Perhaps the issues of young people are both more global and more local than the national or regional level of institutional politics.

4.2.2 Common spaces and concerns

4.2.3 Open Government

4.2.4 Prototyping cultures

5 Concluding Remarks

Besley, T. (2009). Governmentality of youth: Beyond cultural studies. *I: Peters m. fl, red, Governmentality Studies in Education, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers*.

Björgvinsson, E., Ehn, P., & Hillgren, P. A. A. (2010). Participatory design and democratizing innovation. In *Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Participatory Design Conference* (Vol. 7, pp. 41–50).

Commission, E. (2009). An EU Strategy for Youth Investing and Empowering A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities.

Gozdzik-Ormel, Z. (2008). Have your say! manual on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Pub.

Herrera, L. (2006). Whats New about Youth? *Development and Change*, *37*, 1425–1434.

O'Donoghue, J. L. L., & Kirshner, B. (2002). Introduction: Moving youth participation forward. *NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT*, 15–26.

Titley, G. (2008). The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: AGENDA 2020.

von Hippel, E. (2005). *Democratizing innovation*.

. Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). . Edgeryders, Project Website.

Addiopizzo. Aware consumers against the Mafia system. Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Addiopizzo. Aware consumers against the Mafia system. Edgeryders, Project Website.

Anti-ACTA in Poland - seen from the inside Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Anti-ACTA in Poland - seen from the inside Edgeryders, Project Website.

Being paid for doing what you like-still impossible Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Being paid for doing what you like-still impossible Edgeryders, Project

Website.

CARING FOR COMMONS Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). CARING FOR COMMONS Edgeryders, Project Website.

Hacking for change Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Hacking for change Edgeryders, Project Website.

Indignados: "A methodological revolution" - interview in Brussels Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Indignados: "A methodological revolution" - interview in Brussels Edgeryders, Project Website.

Interview with a Sharer Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Interview with a Sharer Edgeryders, Project Website.

MAKING A LIVING Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). MAKING A LIVING Edgeryders, Project Website.

Participatory Budgeting worldwide! Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Participatory Budgeting worldwide! Edgeryders, Project Website.

RESILIENCE Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). RESILIENCE Edgeryders, Project Website.

Reactivating democratic institutions Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Reactivating democratic institutions Edgeryders, Project Website.

Share your Ryde Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Share your Ryde Edgeryders, Project Website.

Spaghetti open data: a little thing that feels right Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Spaghetti open data: a little thing that feels right Edgeryders, Project Website.

Spotlight: open government Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Spotlight: open government Edgeryders, Project Website.

THE LEGITIMATE ILLEGALITY. CULTURE AS A COMMONS. A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ITALIAN SPACES OCCUPIED BY KNOWLEDGE WORKERS # 2 Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). THE LEGITIMATE ILLEGALITY. CULTURE AS A COMMONS. A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ITALIAN SPACES OCCUPIED BY KNOWLEDGE WORKERS # 2 Edgeryders, Project Website.

Taking to the streets Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). Taking to the streets Edgeryders, Project Website.

WE, THE PEOPLE Edgeryders, Project Website. (n.d.). WE, THE PEOPLE Edgeryders, Project Website.