



# THE EDGERYDERS GUIDE TO THE FUTURE

A HANDBOOK FOR  
POLICYMAKERS &  
DESIGNERS OF  
POLICY-ORIENTED  
ONLINE  
COMMUNITIES

Funded  
by the European Union  
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Compiling this report from the wealth of stories posted on the Edgeryders platform has been both a pleasure and a challenge in equal measure. My aim has been to convey the breadth of Edgeryders' experiences in such a way as to draw together common concerns, framed in terms easily transposable to the policy domain. I extend thanks to the Edgeryders research team whose work has informed this report, the project team for their valued input, and, most of all, to the Edgeryders for sharing their stories so vividly.

Rebecca Collins

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# FOREWORD



Edgeryders has been a unique experience for many of us working in public administration with responsibilities for framing policies. This online platform, co-funded by the European Commission's DG for Social Affairs, Employment and Inclusion and by the Council of Europe, had a specific aim: to understand, via an innovative approach which deliberately sought not to impose any institutional forms of dialogue, the difficulties faced by young Europeans and the solutions they come up with, based on their experiences of the transition towards an independent life, in a rapidly changing environment in which insecurity is increasing all the time.

The platform was designed to freely encourage horizontal interaction and exchanges. Nevertheless, at a time when the speed of communication means that opinions are expressed in just a few sentences – often using shortcuts that are understandable only to the initiated – Edgeryders asked the young participants to focus their voluntary participation on six themes or “campaigns”: Making a living, We, the people, Living Together, Caring for Commons, Learning, and Resilience. They were asked to produce “mission reports” or comments, in response to open questions which were always formulated in co-operation, both within the Council of Europe and with the partici-



pants themselves.

Why did the Council of Europe create this prototype of an interactive dialogue with young citizens?

Here are some of the reasons:

- so that institutions can take a fresh look at those they serve, and in particular give voice to the valuable contribution that citizens can make;
- to have a better idea of the extent of insecurity in society. Exclusion, growing vulnerability and the lack of prospects are no longer solely the lot of those without qualifications. Rather, instability is becoming a way of life for many, and so there has to be a new political response;
- to draw attention to the political interpretation of statistics, particularly where they flag up a problem in society. For example, the statistics on NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training) place a large proportion of young people and their potential in a black hole. By adopting a different approach, the human potential and the solutions found to deal with the emerging insecurity can influence policy choices.

What has the Council of Europe learned?

Amongst other things:

- that legitimacy and institutional commitment can facilitate constructive dialogue;
- that it is possible to reconcile citizens and institutions if there is mutual trust and if each can learn from the other;
- that by considering citizens' experiences and imagination as knowledge tools, public policies can make a greater impact and bring about change;

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- that it is possible to work with vulnerable groups without necessarily stigmatising them and that – contrary to the widespread perception of “problem groups” – these sections of the community have interests in and opinions on a wide range of societal issues;
- that horizontal relationships (peer to peer, sharing, commons) and networked interaction can provide fresh meaning and new solutions in order to satisfy needs, without any additional pressure on existing resources;
- that learning is not necessarily top-down;
- that creativity is fundamental to policy design and a true knowledge tool in order to discover the full potential rather than just the limits of citizens and their situations;
- lastly, that in order to build the future, it is essential to co-operate with those whose future it will be.

There are also many questions raised by this type of on-line tool.

Responding to citizens’ expectations often presents public authorities with a real challenge. It is not merely a question of addressing existing inertia, but above all of establishing a balance between what authorities and elected representatives can do and what they can – in contrast - facilitate. In a spirit of co-operation, authorities and elected representatives can promote the sharing of responsibilities, ideas, goods and values so as to involve society in horizontal, inclusive, solidarity-based and social cohesion-oriented approaches.

Over and above the challenges of how to structure the response to the question of citizen participation, an interactive tool requires a good measure of internal institutional

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readiness to act in terms of follow-up and response, and above all a willingness to give fresh political meaning to dialogue. This presupposes giving value to solutions that emerge from interaction with citizens.

There are also questions about the users of online tools. Despite growing Internet access in Europe, the chances of interacting with citizens will depend on their level of interest in public affairs. It is not easy to reach vulnerable groups who feel they have no influence. In order to raise interest and maintain the dialogue in the long term, online interaction must be followed up by concrete measures and by a demonstration of the legitimacy of citizen action for fostering inclusion.

These few thoughts would not be complete without some words of thanks. The design and development of the prototype are thanks to the intelligence and passion of Alberto Cottica and Nadia El-Imam. Noemi Salantiu, Lyne Robichaud, Chara Oikonomidou and Vinay Gupta played their role as engagement managers. Rebecca Collins, Valentina Cuzzocrea, Barbara Giovanna Bello, Dunja Potocnik, Sladjana Petkovic, Magnus Eriksson, Piotr Mikiewicz and Prudencia Gutiérrez Esteban by using their research skills and applying ethnographical analysis methods to the data, gave meaning to the mission reports and participants' comments and in this way helped us understand their experiences, at the same time conserving the power of the individuals' messages. Ivan Vaghi and Paolo Mainardi contributed with their professional competences to the technical development of the platform.

Many other participants in what is now known as the “Edgeryders community” contributed their time, thoughts and passion to this work. Among the Council of



Europe staff, Malcolm Cox has put in a particularly large amount of effort.

I should also like to thank the Council of Europe's Committee for Social Cohesion whose members have lent their support for the process and have found in Edgeryders a means of generating hope and renewal.

This Guide is – like the platform itself – the result of coordinated but free expression. We have not sought to smooth any rough edges in the text, for without rough edges, humankind, like walls, cannot enable others to gain a foothold and develop.

In this way, we hope that we have contributed to the debate on the purpose of policies to facilitate transition and inclusion in response to growing insecurity. Above all, we hope we have been able to alert people to the urgent need for political and societal renewal in order to avoid sacrificing the knowledge and skills of the young generations. For without them, our European society will be unable to recover the ability to contemplate its future.

Gilda Farrell

*Head of Division*

*Social Cohesion, Research and Early Warning Division  
Council of Europe*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a result of multiple complex, interlinked socio-economic challenges, young people in Europe are, today, in a precarious position. Issues of education, employment, housing, personal wellbeing and political participation all have a part to play in this precariousness, and, as a result, the sheer number and scale of the problems young people are facing has meant that many feel paralysed by insecurity, angry about the lack of recognition of their plight, and frustrated by the lack of institutional support. It is in this context that the Edgeryders project was devised as a means of deepening understanding of the specific challenges young Europeans feel they face in their attempts to successfully navigate the transition to an independent active life, as well as some of the innovative and creative ways they face them. Edgeryders is fundamentally premised on the construction of youth as part of the solution, rather than an intrinsic social problem.

This report presents a range of Edgeryders' experiences as they have been expressed in the context of the project as a means of articulating the need for action in specific policy domains. It focuses both on the most important policy themes (such as education, employment and housing) and on the ways in which policy is made and delivered in practice. In doing so, it is hoped that the points raised will



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

inform the development of youth-focused policies which are not only well-targeted and responsive to current challenges, but that are also characterised by methods of delivery in which citizens are actively involved rather than imposed upon.

Drawing directly on Edgeryders' contributions, the report outlines four areas in which Edgeryders have described a particular mismatch between current policies and young people's actual needs and lived experiences:

1. There are conflicting ideas about what constitutes value in the realms of work, education and community. Edgeryders argue for the need for new concepts of value to accommodate more diverse forms of productivity, more collaborative forms of learning, and shared access to common resources.
2. Positive change can be brought about swiftly and efficiently by aggregating effort and sharing existing knowledge. Edgeryders suggest that policy mechanisms based on open data can empower communities to act in ways that fulfil their own needs more efficiently and with greater agility than can be achieved by institutions.
3. There is a mutual lack of trust between young citizens and institutions. Edgeryders need institutions to be allies, rather than enforcers of poorly targeted policies, and want institutional commitment to viewing the lived impacts of policies on the ground, bringing those findings into policy making.
4. There is a pressing need for new cultural norms which accommodate the location of young people's transitions in an increasingly difficult socio-economic climate. A key part of this should be the development of a new lan-

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

guage to describe young people's transitions, the kinds of lives and futures they are seeking, and the terms on which they want their contributions to be valued.

In a Call To Action addressed directly to policy institutions, the report underlines the need for new policies which respond quickly and fully to these imperatives. Edgeryders stress the importance of policy-making processes which make use of young people's lived experiences, and they call for policy makers to engage with these personally by engaging with young people in their own spaces (both real and virtual). Edgeryders need institutions to embrace what they describe as "Policy 2.0" and they are demonstrably willing to play their part in shaping innovative processes of citizen-institution collaboration.

The report concludes by reiterating the need for a pluralistic approach to policies concerned with youth in order to respond dynamically to the increasingly complex, variable and protracted nature of transition to independent adult lives. Some reflections are included on the ways in which Edgeryders as a research project has not only brought these important points to light but can be viewed as a successful model on which future collaborative exercises might be modelled.



**EDGERYDERS**



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# HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

## DOCUMENT ORGANISATION

This Handbook for Policymakers is an overview of a project called Edgeryders: an open and distributed think tank of young Europeans that works through an interactive online platform. Developed by the Social Cohesion Research and Early Warning Division at the Council of Europe, Edgeryders was tasked with looking at the transition of youth to an independent, active life with a holistic perspective. The project encompasses an arc of 13 months at the time of writing (September 2011- September 2012). An unusual project that embraced the Internet as the main meeting place and locus of coordination of all its activities, Edgeryders had to innovate the administrative modus operandi at every step just in order to stay viable. This document tries to summarize the operational knowledge gathered along the way as well as the implications for members of the policy community.

The Handbook is divided into three sections. The first, “Where we started” presents the political background to the Edgeryders project, the policy-led reasons as to why a risk has been taken on this unusual approach, as well as a guide to how the project was built for those who wish to replicate the Edgeryders methodology. Its purpose is to serve as a guide for managers of future policy-oriented online communities.





## DOCUMENT ORGANISATION

Through the numbers of participants engaged over the year, the sheer volume and richness of data generated by the methodology has allowed the Edgeryders project to achieve both a breadth and depth of research that most other forms of policy research have, to date, rarely sought to achieve. The second section, “Where we got to”, presents the research results from the ethnographic analysis of the data collected. It gives the reader an insight into why the young people who have become - indeed, who are and have been for some time - Edgeryders matter, and what their stories reveal about the current disconnect between their ambitions for an active, independent life and the socio-political arena in which they are attempting to make these a reality.

The third and final section, “Where to go next”, puts forward proposals for further action as suggested by project participants, the team of policy researchers and experts charged with devising the policy recommendations as well as the Social Cohesion Research and Early Warning Division of the Council of Europe. The Handbook ends with a call to action that speaks directly to points raised in the first section on the Edgeryders methodology.

While the first iteration of the Project is wrapping up, Edgeryders is a generative project both for institutions and for the individual citizens who engage in it. It has been invited to and continues to feed into other institutional projects. The Edgeryders methodology for crowdsourcing knowledge has been commissioned to feed into Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe report on addressing suicide and self-harm prevention



## DOCUMENT ORGANISATION

amongst young people Europe<sup>1</sup>, and has been picked up in a new joint project between the European Commission and the Council of Europe for combatting poverty, exclusion and precarisation. For the individual community members, Edgeryders as an initiative has had a far more significant impact than playing a role in policy research; it has already started to provide support for this community on peer to peer basis. This is supported by the high level of visibility and attention the project enjoys in different fora: project team members have been invited to present the project methodology and findings at Learning Without Frontiers<sup>2</sup>, TEDx Liege<sup>3</sup>, TedxBologna<sup>4</sup>, Social Media Week Berlin<sup>5</sup>, the Social Capital World Forum<sup>6</sup> etc. At the time of putting the final touches on this handbook members of the Edgeryders community are self-organising an event in which people from all over Europe are participating on a voluntary basis and travelling to at their own expense.

In this document we have used many quotations from Edgeryders conversation to render the lively participa-

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<sup>1</sup> *Learning to Live, A collaboratively produced report on suicide and Self-Harm prevention amongst young people in Europe* <http://www.scribd.com/doc/104169463/Edgeryders-Community-Paper-Learning-To-Live>

<sup>2</sup> *“How do Governments Learn to Do new Things?” - Nadia EL-Imam at Learning Without Frontiers* <http://lwf12.sched.org/directory/speakers/#.UKvCtc3tGZI>

<sup>3</sup> *“The Edgeryders Guide to New Europe” - Nadia EL-Imam at TEDxULG* <http://youtu.be/I5ffVJRLAdk>

<sup>4</sup> *“Designing Collective Intelligence- Alberto Cottica at TedxBologna”* [http://youtu.be/KKrM2c-ww\\_k](http://youtu.be/KKrM2c-ww_k)

<sup>5</sup> *“The Rize of the Citizen Expert”- Alberto Cottica and Nadia EL-Imam at Social Media Week Berlin* <http://socialmediaweek.org/blog/event/the-rise-of-the-citizen-expert/#.UKvDUM3tGZI>

<sup>6</sup> *“Rise of the Citizen Expert ” - Nadia EL-Imam at the Social Capital World Forum* <http://scwf12.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/scwf12-gothenburg-flyer-v121114.pdf>



tory atmosphere of the online platform and the physical meetings. These quotations are attributed to aliases used by participants in the online Egdderyders platform for privacy: Where full names have been used it is because participant chose them as their online monikers. In addition to the authors' own material, some photos used in the document come from various project participants flickr accounts (tagged "edgeryders" and "lote") and material posted on the Edgeryders platform, and are used under a Creative Commons license.



**DOCUMENT  
ORGANISATION**



# WHERE WE STARTED

*This section presents the political background to the Edgeryders experiment, the policy-led reasons as to why a risk has been taken on this unusual approach, as well as description of how the project was built for those who wish to replicate the Edgeryders methodology. Its purpose is to serve as a guide for managers of future policy-oriented online communities.*





# ENGAGING THE CITIZEN EXPERT

*A user's manual for the European scale*

Developing an online community for the design of public policies in a complex environment: a methodological account from the Edgeryders project. Developing an online community for the design of public policies in a complex environment: a methodological account from the Edgeryders project.<sup>1</sup>

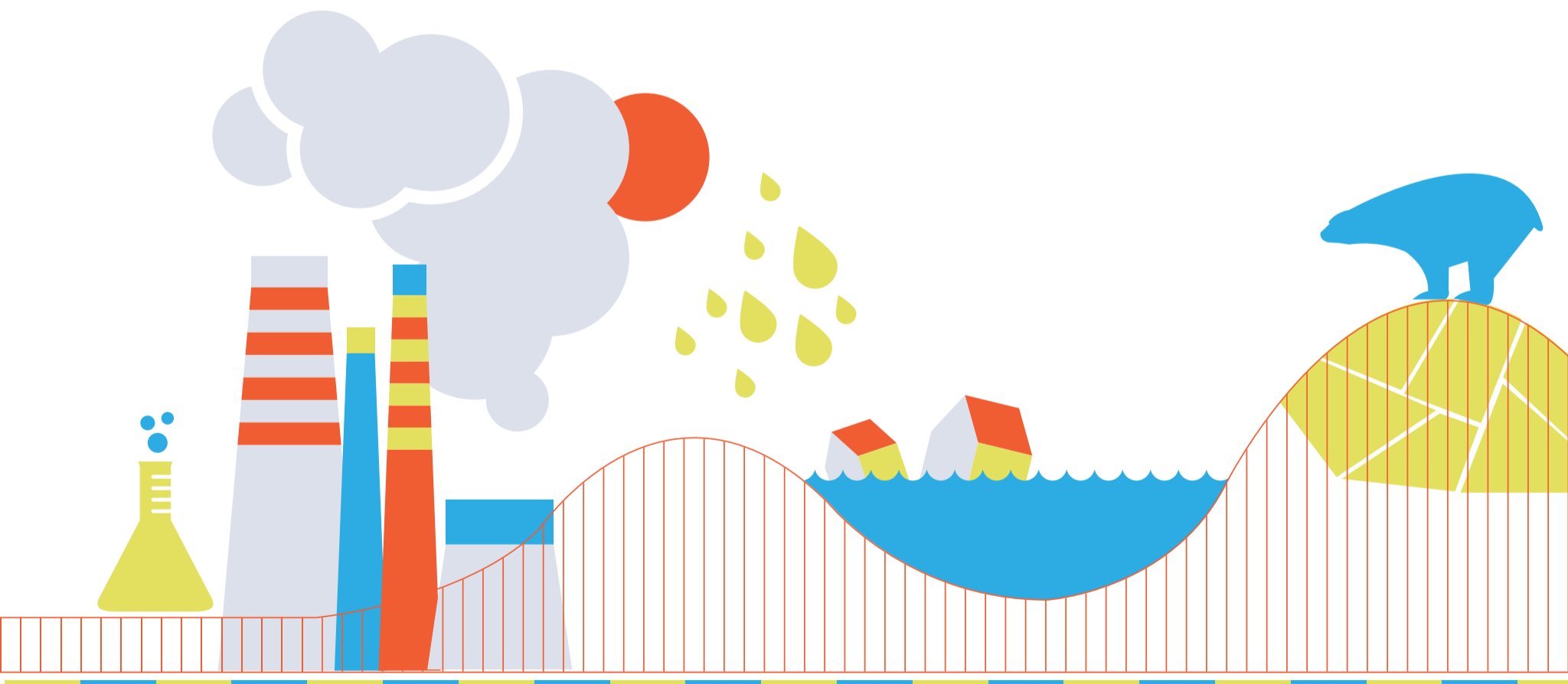
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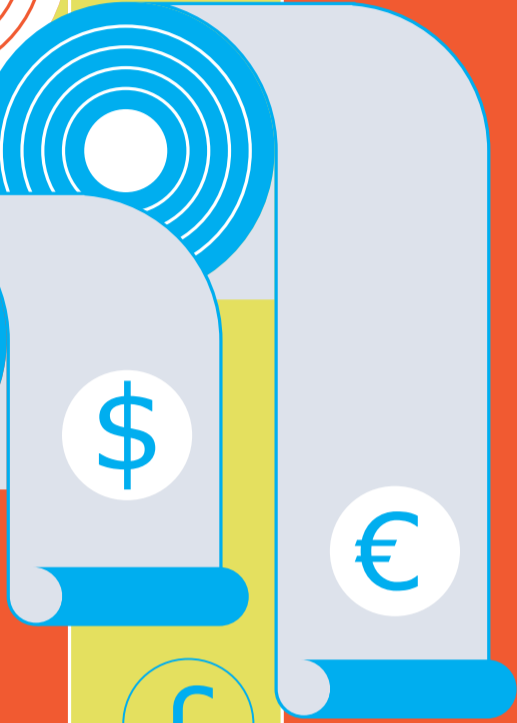
<sup>1</sup> “This section is contributed by Alberto Cottica, who was project manager at the Council of Europe for the Edgeryders project and online platform from its inception in September 2011 to June 2012”



## INTRODUCTION

This essay is an overview of the methodology of a project called Edgeryders: an open and distributed think tank of young Europeans that works through an interactive online platform. Developed by the Social Cohesion Research and Early Warning Division at the Council of Europe, Edgeryders was tasked with looking at the transition of youth to an independent, active life with a holistic perspective. The project encompasses an arc of 13 months at the time of writing (September 2011-September 2012). An unusual project that embraced the Internet as the main meeting place and locus of coordination of all its activities, Edgeryders had to innovate the administrative *modus operandi* at every step just in order to stay viable. This document tries to summarize the operational knowledge gathered along the way. Its purpose is to serve as a guide for managers of future policy-oriented online communities.



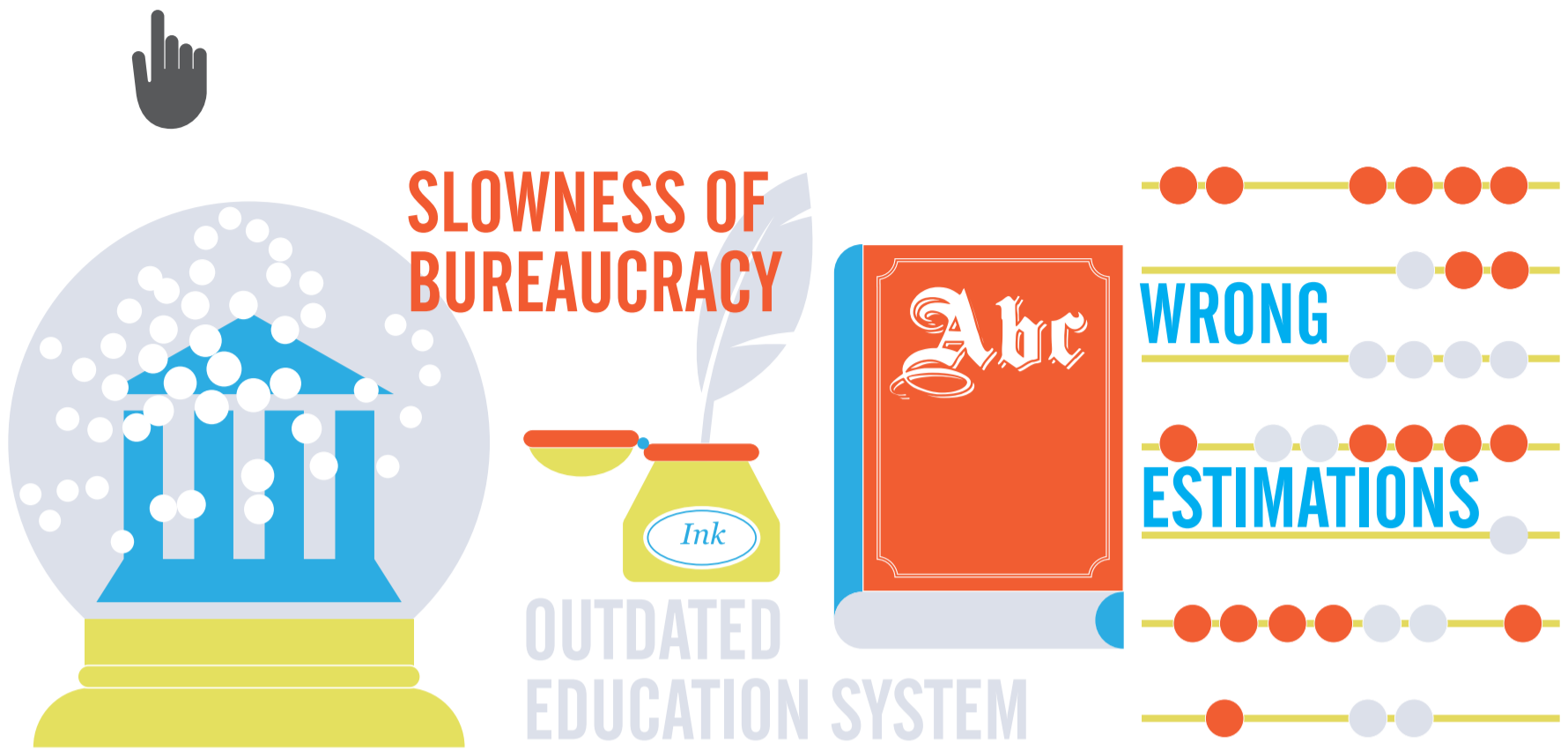


**FINANCE OUT OF CONTROL**



**SOCIAL INSTABILITY AND INEQUALITY**





**RATIONALE: THE WIKI GOVERNMENT**

Public policy has come under scrutiny in recent years. New global challenges loom large, from climate change to rogue finance and growing inequalities. And yet, government - humanity's main infrastructure for collective decision making - has failed, so far, to take credible action. Even day-by-day societal and economic management seems to be slipping from the grip of our institutions.

Keeping the education system in sync with the needs of the knowledge economy; estimating the costs of a large scale event; processing a patent application within a reasonable time; all of these tasks seem to have moved out of the reach of the governments of a normal first-world country with solid democratic institutions<sup>2</sup>.

Why this failure? Recent scholarly debate points to the decision making model that stands at the core of modern

<sup>2</sup> The budget for the London 2012 Olympics closed at £ 9.3 billion, almost four times the value estimated in 2005, as the city made its successful bid to host it (BBC, 2012). Noveck (2009) reports that a patent application in the United States takes an average of over three years to be processed.





*Max Weber Model*

**DECISION MAKING**

**V S**

**EXPERTS**

*The personally detached and strictly objective expert are the only people qualified for making decisions*

**CITIZENS**

*Lack the impartiality, expertise, resources, discipline and time for fully informed decision making*



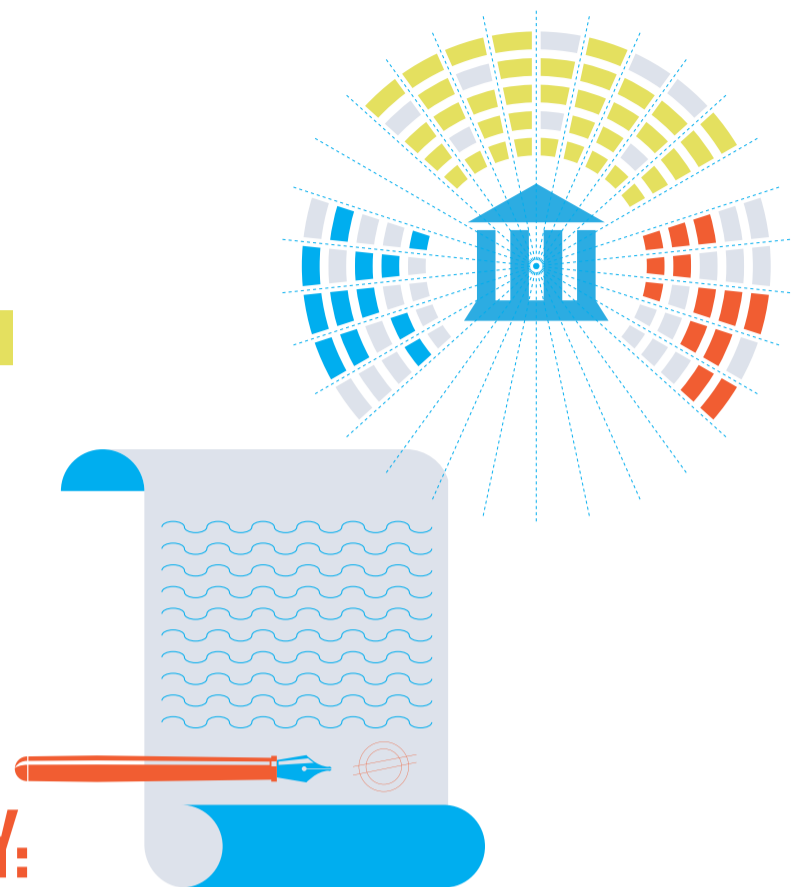
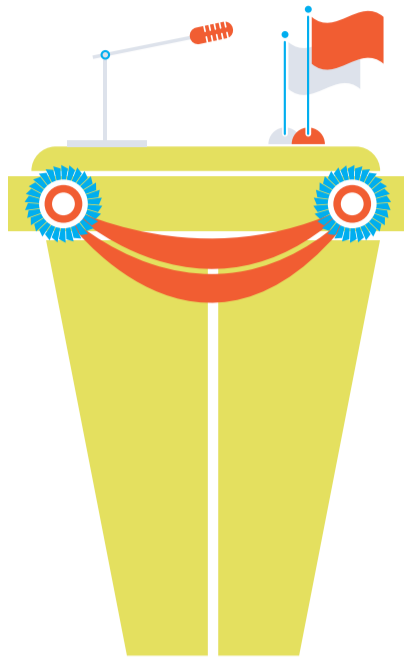
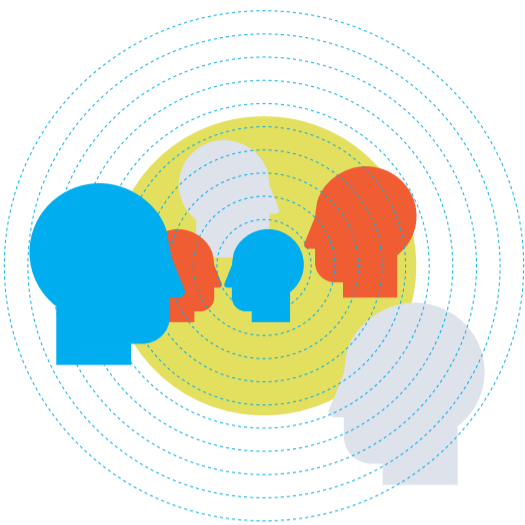
public institutions' architecture. This model, codified by Max Weber, states that professionals ("the personally detached and strictly objective expert") are the only people qualified for making decisions. While citizens may express personal opinions, they lack the impartiality, expertise, resources, discipline and time for fully informed decision making. Weber's position seems hardly controversial; and yet, it has been proven time and again to be factually wrong. For example, experimental test of the prediction ability of experts show it to be not significantly different from that of ordinary citizens, or even of randomness<sup>3</sup>.

In democracies, a natural way out of this dilemma is to turn to its citizens for help, recasting them as experts and allocating more decision making power over to them. This strategy, while helpful in some cases, has been largely impractical until the Internet became pervasive. Internet tools have led to fringe interests suddenly become visible. Likewise, they allow the minuscule minorities who know and care enough about a public policy problem to actually participate in the debate about that problem (Cottica 2010; Noveck 2009).

In the past decade, loose groups of citizens collaborating on the Internet, with no command structure, no legal status and no or very few financial resources have been able to achieve impressive results. The most famous is probably the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. At the time of writing, Wikipedia has about 23 million articles in 280 languages, all produced and maintained by 1.5 million

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<sup>3</sup> See Watts (2011). *In most experiments expert judgment predicts significantly worse than educated non-experts; and experts predict worse in the areas they are experts of. In almost all cases, a simple statistical model predicts better than experts.*



## STANDARD MODEL

### THE LEARNING AUTHORITY IN THEORY:

- 1) A new issue gains importance in the eye of the public opinion.
- 2) Politicians include it in electoral platforms.
- 3) Elected representatives embed it into law.
- 4) New law is enacted as policy by the executive branch.

active editors<sup>4</sup>. Allocating so many people to so many different tasks is a titanic coordination problem: Wikipedia's software and the social conventions that go with it solve it by simply allowing each person to decide freely whether, when and what article to contribute to. This guarantees that each Wikipedian positions herself exactly where she can have the most impact with the least effort: editing articles on topics she is knowledgeable of, or passionate about. The information on who is best paired with what article is not stored anywhere in the system: it is, rather, an emergent property of Wikipedia itself.

This approach, influenced by complexity science and Internet culture, is being applied to many areas of public policy, from street maintenance to intelligence, from support to firm creation in lagging areas to processing patent applications, from online citizen consultation to scrutiny

<sup>4</sup> Source: <http://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/TablesWikipediaZZ.htm>. The number of editors does not include people who contribute anonymously and without creating an account, known as "good Samaritans" in Wikipedia's parlance.



by crowdsourced inspection of government data (Cottica 2010). The degree of success has been varied, but most observers agree it is promising enough to keep working on.

## CONTEXT: YOUTH IN TRANSITION

In the summer of 2011, the Council of Europe and the European Commission agree to cofund a project called “Youth in transition”. The idea is to explore the condition of young Europeans, portrayed by the media as a “lost generation”. Many statistical indicators (youth unemployment rate, NEETS rate, turnout at elections) seem to support such a view. What does qualitative research have to say?

This question and its deployment in the form of a project were the brainchild of the Social Cohesion Research and Early Warning Division. The Division’s management suspected that the “lost generation” story was skewed by measuring young Europeans with the yardstick of the older generation. This, in turn, could lead to stigmatizing the young, writing them down as a problem to solve.

In this context, the wiki government approach held one clear advantage: it would inevitably embed the voice of the young themselves in the final output. By virtue of its transparency and openness, it greatly reduced the risk of adopting a stigmatizing point of view on the new generations: the latter would notice and voice their disagreement. There was also a cultural disadvantage. The Council of Europe was established in 1949 by a diplomatic treaty, in a cultural and ideological climate very different from today’s, and is still largely organized as a Weberian bureaucracy. Furthermore, it sees its role as a top-level international regulator, starting from prime principles of human rights, democracy and rule of law and deducting from these policy recommendation for its member states.



Recent evolutions in legal doctrine around the issues of transparency and openness of government have prompted the Council of Europe to recommend, both to Member States and to its own corporate structure, to “[...] ensure a bolder and more substantial input from civil society at large on topical societal issues. Thematic interaction should be organised around platforms related to priority themes.” (Council of Europe 2010)

Despite this, as of 2011 no attempt had been made by the Council of Europe to elicit citizen input through online social media. The organization does maintain a blog (with closed comments), a Facebook and a Twitter account; but they are designed strictly to repackaging content produced in the house and broadcast them onto the web. In fact, the nuts and bolts of internal policy for corporate web presence make it quite difficult to fully engage with citizens on the Internet.

- All content on the Council of Europe websites is copyrighted. The use of Creative Commons or other open licenses is implicitly forbidden. Apparently, no one had ever wondered if claiming legal rights on content contributed by citizens is appropriate practice for a public institution.
- At the time of rolling out the project, no corporate server existed with an open source stack of software that supports the most common free/open social software (Wordpress, Drupal, Wikimedia etc.).
- The organization lacks internal guidelines for the use of social media by staff members.
- Design guidelines for corporate website design do not allow the hybridization of the corporate identity. In the Edgeryders case this problem was circumvented by af-



firming the project's identity as a so-called joint programme between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and as such not subject to those rules<sup>5</sup>. If these operational difficulties can be overcome, however, the Council of Europe enjoys also significant advantages when engaging with the citizenry at large.

- It sees itself as the champion of human rights and democracy, foundational values of the European civilization and dear to the heart of a great many Europeans.
- Its clear distance from vested interests appeals to those citizens that feel big business to be overrepresented in the governance of the European project.
- With 47 member states and 800 million citizens, it connects a truly pan-European community, beyond the borders of the EU.
- It has critical administrative plumbing for managing long-distance interactions with citizen. Funding trips of third party experts to Strasbourg to attend meetings and seminar, as well as issuing small contracts is routine fare for the Council of Europe. Despite a not completely favorable corporate culture, the Edgeryders project was received reasonably well by the organization. Fruitful collaborations were achieved with some units.

Edgeryders even received some attention by senior management, looking into possible applications of the same methodology to other areas of intervention of the Council of Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> In May 2012, as Edgeryders approached its end, the IT directorate issued a new regulation that mandates not only design, but underlying technology as well - for all corporate websites including joint programmes. The stated aim of this move is to obtain "long-term savings". This, however, might have the immediate effect of stifling internal innovation, making projects like Edgeryders impossible.



## THE ARCHITECTURE OF TRUST

### THE EDGERYDERS SOCIAL CONTRACT: DESIGNING WEAK INCENTIVES

In this context, the Council of Europe decided in August 2011 to frame the Youth in Transition project as a wiki government one: a think tank of self-selected citizen experts would be tasked with exploring the problem and developing recommendations. The project was renamed Edgeryders.

It required that the Council of Europe enlist the collaboration of others, and reward them for their effort. One entity involved is the European Commission, Directorate General Employment and Social Cohesion, that provided the bulk of the funding for the project. The relationship between the two institutions is regulated by a written contract, in which the signatories agree on the scope of the work (investigating the transition of young people to adult life in a time of crisis), the funding provided and the deliverables. The contract lists two of the latter: a final document containing recommendations for policy to facilitate and smoothen the transition in question; and a conference.

The other entities involved are, of course, citizens. The social contract between exercises like Edgeryders and its participants move from the following three assumptions:

- 1** The citizenry as a whole contains more information and expertise than any small group of experts (“nobody is smarter than everybody” - Shirky 2008).
- 2** It is impossible to know a priori what relevant information might be out there, nor which citizens have it.
- 3** A large number of ordinary citizens will suffer from less of a cognitive bias than a small number of professional



experts (Watts 2011).

**4** Citizens are constantly prompted for “collaboration” exercises by government authorities that shares very little power, and end up being little more than window dressing. Over time, this has deteriorated the credibility of even well-meaning institutional agents as they try to engage the citizenry.

Assumption 1 provides the rationale for the participation of citizens as experts in policy design; assumption 2 dictates that such participation is open, enabling any individual who feels she has something to contribute to select herself to join in; assumption 3 dictates that its scale be large; assumption 4 that it manages to position itself as more credible to take part than the existing offers. Taken together, assumptions 1, 2 and 3 imply self-regulation, with participants deciding whether and how to contribute, with no top-down control other than freezing the accounts of individuals reported as abusive. In a self-regulated social environment, monetary incentives are difficult to deploy, because the sums involved could become large (Wikipedia has 27 million registered users) and because there is no easy, uncontroversial way to measure the quality of the contributions to ensure fairness and disincentivize strategic behavior. Furthermore, in most countries public sector agencies must follow lengthy (and costly) procedures to spend their money on accountability grounds.

With monetary incentives ruled out, the Edgeryders team attempted to make a case for citizens to participate in the exercise by promoting an ethics of civic engagement. Three promises were made.

**1** Participants experiencing trouble making their own





transition from youth to adulthood could get help in the form of advice from other participants.

- 2 Participants who enjoy mentoring others could get the chance to give advice.
- 3 Everyone's voice would be heard with respect and contribute to a document of policy recommendation, that would be legitimized by the role and prestige of the Council of Europe.

These promises were made very publicly and in writing, in the “About” page of the Edgeryders blog, launched September 2011<sup>6</sup>. The first two translate into the Council of Europe committing to **fostering a friendly, empathetic online environment where individual journeys would be made sense of in the light of macro scale social and economic phenomena**. For example, many participants experience precarious employment; by comparing notes across different cases and different countries, they were able to explain some of the precarity as the product of impersonal forces rather than of their own failings. The third is **a promise of political empowerment**: the Council of Europe was committing to augmenting the participant's influence over the political discourse by embedding their views into a formalized policy making process. The primal trust-building resource was the Council of Europe, a large government institution, showing signs of accepting the work style of youth in the connected age in a visible, credible way. Through visual language; the adoption of a personal communication style and of many-to-many conversation; and the involvement of individuals credible in their own communities (see below), the organi-

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6 <http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/blog/about>



zation was able to position itself for a fresh start.

Later in the process, the Edgeryders team proposed that the project conference involve some members of the community (initially 50), invited as “citizen experts”: their travel and subsistence would be funded by the project. The team agreed that being invited as an expert by an international institution would be a concrete sign of recognition of the high value of participation, and would have a large positive impact on motivation to participate. Furthermore, the effect would spread even to people that would not get an invitation, as it would show openness. After the proposal was accepted, the team attempted a more specific social contract with participants. In order to qualify for paid travel, participants would need to commit to writing at least three mission reports. Again, this commitment was made publicly and in writing<sup>7</sup> at the beginning of April 2012. The conference took place on 14th and 15th June 2012 in Strasbourg.

This was framed as a necessary but not sufficient condition to be eligible. The idea worked well, and a decision was reached to triple the number of funded travels to 150, so in practice everybody who wanted an invitation got one. Also, the condition was never strictly enforced, nor was it meant to be (the team sent out invitation emails mentioning “mutual commitment”).

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Having decided to approach the Youth in Transition project with an open government stance, we proceeded to build its specific methodology. We started by appointing

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<sup>7</sup> <http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/blog/get-invited/> retrieved on September 25th 2012.



some key principles, which would guide us in making operational choices. These were:

- **Self-selection.** Edgeryders is open to everyone, and refused to set participation limits or quotas (by age, nationality, educational achievement or other parameters). The underlying assumption is that whoever wants to engage with the Council of Europe on the issue of the transition of youth is the right person to do so, because everyone has some first-hand knowledge to contribute. Most participants are themselves young; other might have young children, or siblings, or friends. This allows for intrinsic motivation to be the primary driver of participation, and leads to building a reactive, enthusiastic community.
- **Free software.** Edgeryders needs social software to connect young Europeans scattered across the globe. For reasons of accountability, we did not feel comfortable with entrusting the data encoding citizen-institution collaboration to a for-profit corporate like Facebook or Ning. The obvious choice was to re-use and customize free and open source software: in this case, a Drupal-based general purpose social networking platform called Social Commons<sup>8</sup>.
- **Euro English (and respect).** Like all international organizations, the Council of Europe takes multilingualism very seriously and promotes language diversity. However, language diversity risks fragmenting and “freezing” the online conversation that is the social engine of the whole exercise. To address the problem, we did three things. The first one was to build one-click

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<sup>8</sup> <http://acquia.com/products-services/acquia-commons-social-business-software> retrieved October 2 2012.



Google Translate integration into the platform. The second one was to establish the social norm that writing in any language is fine; however, people who know a little English are encouraged to write in English, to facilitate others to read and comment and make the greatest impact. The third one is to establish another social norm, by which no one is allowed to look down on anyone else on the basis of language errors.

- **Evolutionary design.** The Edgeryders platform co-evolved with its community, taking into account patterns of usage and user feedback, and adapting to deliver a better experience. After the alpha version (October 2011) and a major redevelopment between November 2011 and January 2012, small changes and improvements were rolled out almost continuously throughout the project: for example, support for creating teams was added in the run-up to the final conference.

## THE TEAM

The Edgeryders team consisted of a core team of two people allocated full time to the project, a director and a creative director; a community manager (20% of the time); an engagement team (three people, at 20% of the time each). Website development and customization was contracted out. The Council of Europe provided administrative assistance and office facilities for the core team; and a research team, recruited on a per-paper basis (see below).

Recruiting a community by self-selection and keeping it engaged has been the responsibility of the engagement team. It consisted of three people, chosen for their online and offline communication skills and their personal networks in spaces of interest to the project; social innovation/social enterprise, open government, resilience and



lifestyle hacking. Engagement managers were asked to (a) involve their respective communities and (b) act as their reference point on the Edgeryders platform itself, engaging them in conversation. Most of the recruitment happened online, through social networks - predominantly Twitter and Facebook. At the time of writing, there have been 71,000 visits to the Edgeryders website, of which 38,000 through links found elsewhere on the web. Of these, 13,000 have come from Twitter and 12,000 from Facebook. The core team was based in Strasbourg; of the engagement managers, two were in the UK (one of the two later replaced by a person based in Austria), one in Canada. The community manager was based in Romania. The team was coordinated through a mailing list and occasional online meetings on Skype or Google Hangout. Two physical meetings, in the space of 18 months, were also convened in Strasbourg.

The outreach followed a simple, cost-effective design of “a tweet a day”. Every day, the team would choose an interesting piece of content on the Edgeryders platform, typically a mission report); this would be communicated to the whole team via the internal mailing list, and everyone would get word out through social networks, Twitter especially. Engagement managers were key in this, due to their relatively large number of followers (2-3,000 each) and credibility in their respective communities. It is estimated that more than 1,400 different Twitter users mentioned Edgeryders on Twitter over 15,000 times from September 2011 to June 2012 included.

Team members (most of which enjoy a relatively high-profile in their own communities) lent their personal credibility to the Council of Europe’s outreach effort. In order to get them to stand for the project and not just to work



for it, they have been managed with a light touch, encouraged to take initiatives and allowed to make mistakes. For example, one of the engagement managers spent a considerable amount of time trying to engage large youth organizations, like the scout movements or AIESEC. The management of these organizations did in general show interest and in some cases reached out to their memberships via newsletters and other means, but this resulted in practically no active users from those organizations.

#### AN OFFLINE INNOVATION: THE LIVING ON THE EDGE CONFERENCE

The Council of Europe had committed to delivering a conference as part of the Edgeryders project. This had initially been envisioned as a more or less traditional dissemination event attended by professional experts and members of the policy community; however, along the way it was recasted as a workspace for the Edgeryders community, and as a facilitated meeting ground for the institutions and Europe's young citizens, across the (increasingly called into question) border between policy makers and policy beneficiaries. The conference was titled *Living On The Edge*.

- It was allocated an important share of the total budget.
- The list of invitees was built through an open call on the web. Citizens who felt they had something to contribute were invited as experts. The Council of Europe offered a limited amount of funded traveling to those who committed to contributing, not only by attending the conference, but also by engaging on the Edgeryders platform in the form of mission reports.
- The agenda was carefully designed so that the confer-



ence would maintain an institutional character while opening itself up to voices of citizens, up to and including the openly dissenting ones. Breakout sessions on research issues were built into the program; session facilitators were recruited from the community.

- It included some techno-social practices borrowed from hackers' events: a lot of attention to a smooth Internet connection; systematic social media coverage deployed by volunteers from the community; and the adoption of a Twitter wall as a backchannel of participation. People could interact with the designated speakers through Twitter; their tweets were aggregated through a free online service and displayed on a giant screen behind the speakers.
- Critically, the community was encouraged to set up its own event back-to-back with the official conference. Titled Edgencamp, it took the barcamp format, and was organized in collaboration with Alsace Digitale, an association of digital entrepreneurs based in Strasbourg.

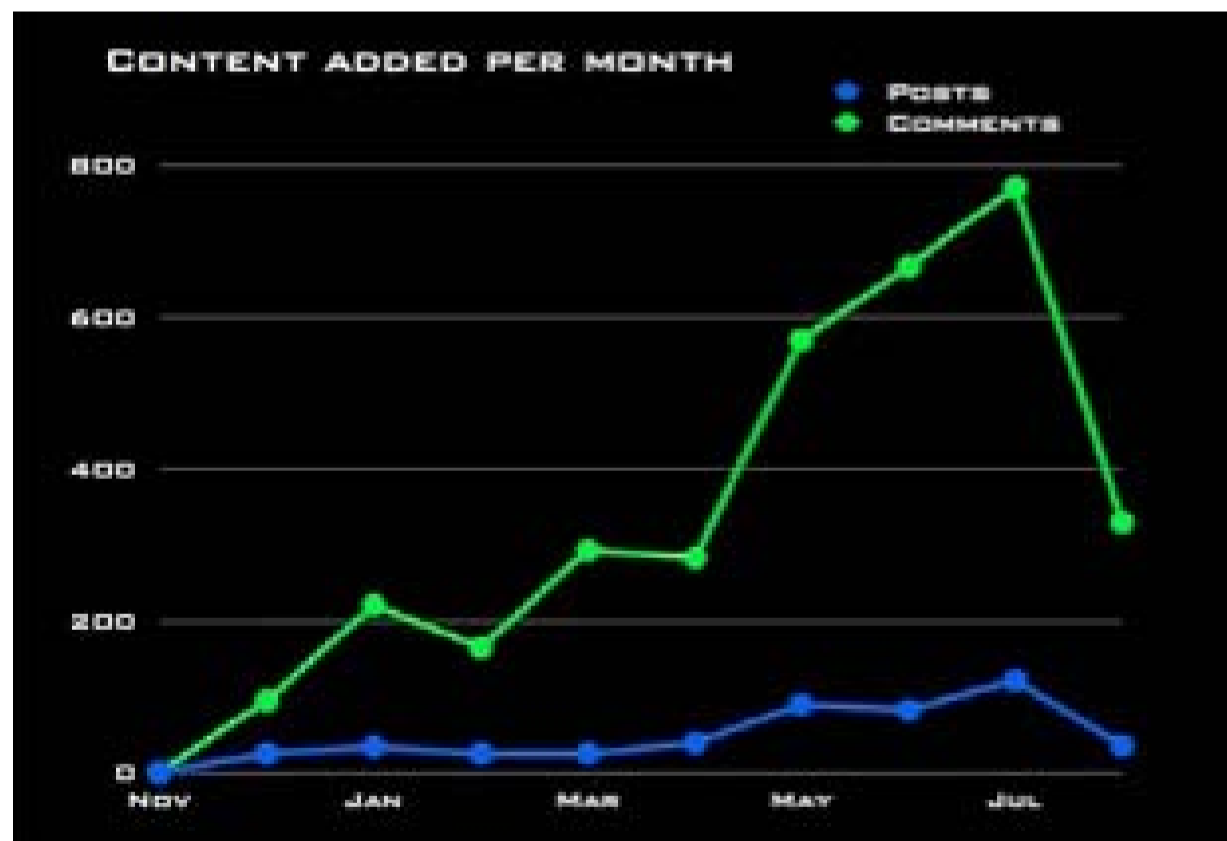
*Living On The Edge* and Edgencamp were impressive successes. The former provided a respectful, yet frank meeting space for representatives of the institutions and young citizens, many of them precarious, or poor, or living outside of the mainstream (two of the attendees declared themselves stateless and refused to use state-issued ID; one of them is also moneyless, and reportedly has not touched money for three years, living in a sort of oneman gift economy). By acknowledging attendees as citizen experts, the Council of Europe showed in a very concrete way attention and willingness to engage. As for Edgencamp, some of its sessions resulted in very concrete policy proposals from the Edgery-



ders community<sup>9</sup>. From a communication point of view, the double event was also a success. It became a Twitter trending topic in London, and brought a lot of attention from young changemakers. Figure 1 shows accelerating growth in mission reports and comments in after the conference was announced in early April.

The greatest value of *Living On The Edge* has probably been to give credibility to the inclusive stance of the whole Edgeryders project. The conference was announced in early April 2012, and gave new impulse to new signups and content upload, clearly visible in the time profile of activities on the platform. We recommend developing this prototype further, as there is a clear need for spaces of interaction between institutions and unmediated citizens that are inclusive and respectful, and yet do not deny conflicts or unpleasant truths.

*Figure 1 shows accelerating growth in mission reports and comments in after the conference was announced in early April.*



<sup>9</sup> The open letter to funders of innovation ([http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/help-build-june-conference/mission\\_case/funding-20-edgencamp-session-dear-funders-letter](http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/help-build-june-conference/mission_case/funding-20-edgencamp-session-dear-funders-letter)) and the UnMonastery project ([http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/mine-becomes-ours/mission\\_case/few-us-living-together-somewhere-andchanging-things-unmonastery](http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/mine-becomes-ours/mission_case/few-us-living-together-somewhere-andchanging-things-unmonastery)) were both results of Edgencamp sessions.





**DRAWING  
CONCLUSIONS: OPEN  
SCIENCE**

The Edgeryders project adopts an open science stance. The idea is to release valuable data from the project in the public domain, where scholars can reuse them, and perhaps add to the analysis performed by the project's own research team. This stance has its roots in the open data movement, and is fully consistent with European regulation on the reusability of public sector information; information collected in the course of the Edgeryders project, after all, was paid for by taxpayer money, and taxpayers have a right to reuse it if they choose to do so. In the context of participatory projects like Edgeryders, openness takes on additional value as it helps to build trust and gives the community a feeling of greater control over how they are portrayed in the reports.

#### NETNOGRAPHY

At the time of writing, the Edgeryders database contains more than 500 mission reports and nearly 4,000 comments. As a way to sift through it two young sociologists were tasked with doing an online ethnography of the Edgeryders community. Online ethnography, or “netnography”, seems like a good fit for participation democracy exercises, because:

- ethnographic studies are constructed to include the point of view of the community being studied; that's what defines them.
- online interaction comes with first-person statements by the community being studied, in writing; and that is arguably the most expensive part of ethnographic research.

The methodology of this study is explained in detail by the researchers themselves. What matters here is the

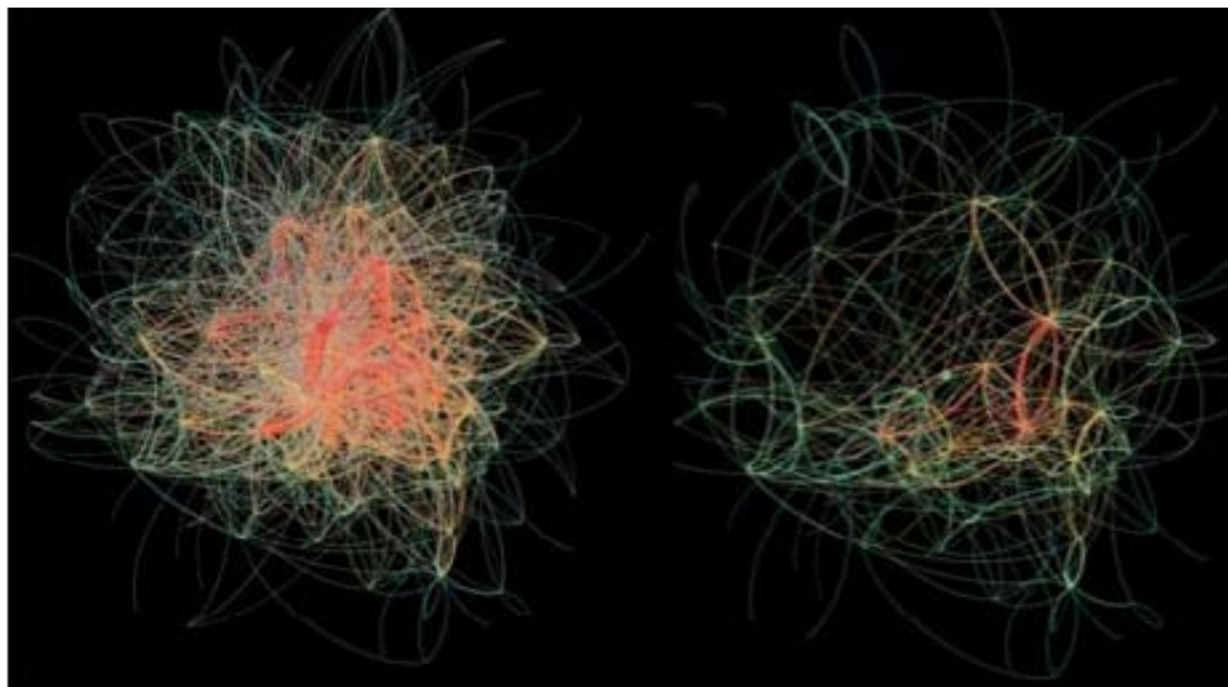


openness: the study started by reading through the content and assigning tags called “codes” to particularly relevant pieces of content. This is done using a software called WEFT-QDA. The files are being published on the Edgeryders website for the convenience of other scholars.

### MONITORING SOCIAL DYNAMICS

A network analysis of the Edgeryders community has been performed and published. To do so, the Edgeryders conversation was modeled as a network of comments (A connects to B if A comments B’s content). The Edgeryders platform contains a functionality that exports the results of any database query as a file in a format called JSON, amenable to parsing and analysis. Open source developers have then written software that parse the JSON files and encode them in file formats that standard network analysis software can read. Both the network extraction code and an anonymized dataset are available online for any interested researcher to work upon<sup>10</sup>.

*Figure 2 - Visualization of the full Edgeryders network (left) and of the “induced conversation” involving only community members but not the project team (right). The role of the team in connecting participants and keeping the conversation going is clearly visible. Redder colors represent comments written by more central members of the Edgeryders community.*



<sup>10</sup> <https://github.com/dragontrainer/edgeryders-mapper>



Close monitoring of the relationships on the Edgeryders platform turns out to be a valuable management tool. It becomes easier to identify the most central members of the community; to assess the work done by the project team in connecting community members and enhancing their experience (Figure 2 visualizes what happens to the conversation network when the project team is removed from the picture); to make educated guess about the sustainability of the conversation (would it keep going if we suddenly removed the contribution of the team?) and its scalability (does it stay manageable as the number of participants and the quantity of shared material increases?) (Cottica 2012a, 2012b). The impact of management decisions can also be assessed quantitatively, improving accountability. For example, it seems likely that the sequential structure by campaign (a broad issue was launched for discussion every 4 weeks) has channeled the conversation into sub-communities that have self-organized at different points in time. The community's growth seems to have resulted in the growth of the number of sub-communities, rather than in the increased (and overwhelming) interaction of everyone with everyone else.

### A PROTOTYPE FOR ENGAGING CITIZENS ONLINE?

We suggest Edgeryders might be a prototype for online citizen engagement at the European level, well beyond the youth policy context that generated it. Traditionally, citizen engagement at the European level is done through **representative agents** for the stakeholders (for example, trade association representing businesses, or trade unions representing workers), holding **offline large meetings**, where - inevitably, given the scale - few people talk and many are talked to. This setup has many flaws. To review but the most obvious:



- Representation works relatively well in simple, massified societies. 21st century Europe is not one of them, and the legitimacy of all representation is declining fast.
- Even when representation works well, using representative agents in modern sociology is deprecated, because representative agents assume away all of the complex phenomena arising from the interaction between many agents (Watts 2011). For example, “the banking sector” might benefit from a stable environment, but all the agency is the hands of individual banks, who stand to gain a lot from market instability and are likely to try to push the system towards it.
- Meetings don’t scale: involving more people tends to dampen the interaction between any two participants.
- Meetings are expensive and hard to organize, so they tend to be few, far between, and highly ritualized.

Edgeryders can claim, at least in theory, superiority in each of these areas:

- There is no representation. **Participants represent themselves, and their experience is validated by their peers.**
- Interaction happens mostly online - and, as we have seen, online interaction scales relatively well. To date, about 250 members of the Edgeryders community have actively contributed content (counting only mission reports and comments on the Edgeryders platform). So, all other things being equal, **many more people can be active in online participatory environments.** This is valuable, because human cognition is affected by many biases (framing, anchoring, confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, loss aversion, halo effect and many



others), and at least some of them cancel each other out when a large number of respondents are pulled together.

- Another positive side effect of online interaction is **diversity of participation**. Online it is more difficult than offline to display the markers of social status; as a result, people feel it is acceptable to interact across all kinds of social divides<sup>11</sup>. All other things being equal, diversity not only is desirable per se, but it helps to reduce further the cognitive biases associated to all participants looking, so to speak, in the same direction.
- **Interaction online is vastly more traceable and even measurable** than its offline counterpart. Everything that happens on the Edgeryders interactive platform is encoded in its database: this means having a perfect and instantly verifiable collective memory of who has been saying what. This improves trust among participants; improves accountability for institutions; and is amenable to precisely set and easily verifiable quantitative measurements of the project's performance (for example “we want each mission report to receive at least two comments”, or “the average number of interactions of all users on the platform must be at least 10”).
- Once put on the web, **all knowledge produced becomes much more reusable**. Thanks to an open science/open data stance, Edgeryders is potentially able to help scholars, researchers and citizens in the future.
- Finally, **participation on the web is asynchronous, always-on and cheap to maintain**. No need to wait for the next conference to make a point or ask a

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<sup>11</sup> *The very first public policy designed by citizens online, in 1989, was the (unintended) result of a collaboration between homeless and homed citizens that would have never interacted offline (Van Tassel, 2004)*



question; no need to sit through an uninteresting presentation to get to the interesting one.

Given the scale and physical distances involved, we propose online communities as a general purpose tool for citizen engagement at the European level. Our experience suggests that physical conferences like *Living On The Edge* fit very well in an online engagement model, boosting participation that the online platform will channel and archive.

The Edgeryders experience could and should be improved upon in several ways.

## SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

### UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER: THE MEETING OF TWO WORLDS

The Edgeryders project showed how citizens and officials feel the need for a frank, constructive dialog with each other. However, it was not completely successful in designing a platform that supported this dialog in a satisfying way for everyone.

On the online platform, dialog has been, indeed, frank and constructive. It has resulted in high quality research and several concrete and innovative proposals. However, such dialog happened by proxy; outside the Edgeryders team, no one in the Council of Europe or the European Commission has engaged with the community on its own terms, i.e. by creating an account and writing.

*Living On The Edge* performed better in this respect; there was interaction across the institutional divide, and the community had been socialized to what constructive conversation is in the context of the project. However, some of its more radical (and creative) members felt that



the agenda was still disproportionately allocated to “political speech” from senior officials and elected representatives, and that the discussion, both in style and in content, still unwilling to face hard truths and propose bold, radical measures.

We suggest allocating more resources to internal championing of the methodology - which already has more acceptability than it had in 2011. A better knowledge of the project by more people in the organization will lead to more online participation and more creativity in designing online interaction. A more active involvement of more colleagues would certainly reinforce the project’s narrative of constructive collaboration.

#### PROXIMITY TO PUBLIC DECISION

Edgeryders is a consultative exercise: it has no mandate whatsoever to make decisions. Citizen collaboration is invoked to produce a policy document, but neither the Council of Europe nor others can promise that the recommendations in that document will become policy. The payoff of democratic participation could be increased by attaching it to a concrete decision: this would empower citizens, making them feel that they have been to influence a real-life decision maker making a real-life decision. While there is added value in comparing notes at the European scale (and therefore it makes sense that the community is European) the decision itself need not be. A local decision would work too, especially if seen as an experience that could then be scaled up through European-level networks of local governments.



## TIME PROFILE

The time profile of the Edgeryders project (four months for design, internal selling and testing; eight months for citizen engagement; six months for research and writing the recommendation) is not necessarily the best suited to building a large-scale community and reaping its benefits. For example, the project went into shutdown mode just at the time of peak community activity; it would have been more efficient to keep the engagement going to reap more data. We recommend a two- or three year time horizon for Edgeryders-style projects (with decreasing funding) to climb the learning curve.

## PRIVACY

Online privacy is a thorny issue. Several respected members of the Edgeryders community refuse to use Facebook, or use it sparingly, and the decision to run Edgeryders from an entirely government-funded and self-hosted platform was well received. As is often the case on the Internet, openness and privacy are somewhat at odds with each other, and this restlessness has occasionally surfaced on Edgeryders<sup>12</sup>. The team's response has been to encourage the community to design rules that they felt are acceptable: it has been assessed that trust creation trumps data granularity in this case. So, if even just a few people in the community are not comfortable with a particular form of open science, we engage in discussion until we find a solution that everybody can live with. This stance seems to have worked well, and we recommend it for future engagement projects.

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<sup>12</sup> See in particular this discussion: [http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/spotlight-internet-common-resource/mission\\_case/what-can-happen-your-edgeryders-data-and-you](http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/spotlight-internet-common-resource/mission_case/what-can-happen-your-edgeryders-data-and-you) retrieved October 7th 2012.





### CONTINUITY: DESIGNING FOR A SPINOFF?

There are signs that Edgeryders might develop into a sustainable model of citizen engagement at the crossroads between consultancy and citizen consultation. It has the attitude for solution design of the former, and the openness of the latter, and it is imaginable that it would be deployable to help policy decisions in various contexts. In fact, since *Living On The Edge* the community has been discussing the possibility to spin itself off from the mother project, giving rise to a nonprofit think tank<sup>13</sup>. If this were to really happen, it would be prestigious for the Council of Europe: it would prove that Edgeryders as a policy is really demand driven - so much that citizens would adopt it as their own initiative. We recommend encouraging the community in this effort.

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<sup>13</sup> See this discussion: [http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/where-edgeryders-dare/mission\\_case/can-weand-should-we-pull-official-edgeryders-organisation](http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/where-edgeryders-dare/mission_case/can-weand-should-we-pull-official-edgeryders-organisation) retrieved October 7th 2012.



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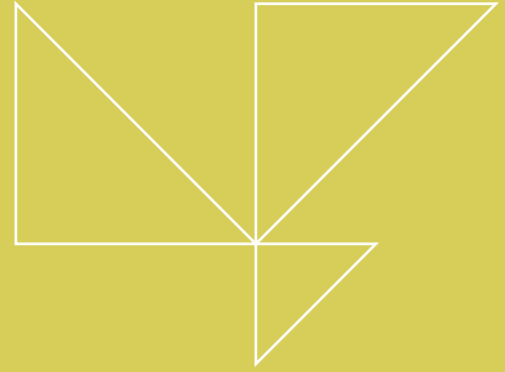
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# WHERE WE GOT TO

*This section presents the research results from the ethnographic analysis of the data collected from the Edgeryders experiment. It gives the reader an insight into why the young people who have become - indeed, who are and have been for some time - Edgeryders matter, and what their stories reveal about the current disconnect between their ambitions for an active, independent life and the socio-political arena in which they are attempting to make these a reality.*





# ON BEING EDGERYDERS

*A picture of young Europeans navigating their transition to an independent life*

Rebecca Collins & Valentina Cuzzocrea<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This work results from a joint collaboration of the two authors, who share the views expressed here. The sections were roughly divided as follows: Risks, Resources and Scale (Rebecca Collins, University College London); the Many Layers of the Edgeryders Platform, Values and Motivations, and Responses (Valentina Cuzzocrea, University of Kent). Both authors contributed equally to the Introduction and Conclusions.

**ABSTRACT**

This report provides a summative picture of Edgeryders users. Edgeryders is a “social game” and “peer-to-peer learning environment” implemented by the Council of Europe as a policy research project from October 2011 - October 2012. Its aims have been to provide information, encouragement and support to its young participants; to explore their stories in order to better understand their specific situations; and, ultimately, to use the information generated by the “think tank” approach to inform policy initiatives around young people’s transitions to an independent adult life. In this paper, we reconstruct the identity of the Edgeryders community by outlining the commonly-held values and motivations which emerged in their posts, conceptualising the risks they face in the course of their transitions, and shedding light on the resources they employ to respond with positive action. We also consider the scale(s) at which Edgeryders act, particularly the relationship between global socio-economic challenges and local action, mediated by global technology networks. Focusing on the ways in which they work in pursuit of an active and meaningful life for themselves and their communities, we illustrate Edgeryders’ ability to be creative, dynamic and innovative, even when acting in a context of sporadic external support.



## INTRODUCTION

Edgeryders was launched in October 2011 as a “social game” and “peer-to-peer learning environment” with three main aims. The first of these has been to provide information, encouragement and support to a generation of young Europeans who are striving to build futures based on meaningful work and political participation in the most challenging socio-economic climate in several decades. The second aim has been to explore the stories of project participants in order to better understand the specific challenges they feel they face, as well as their goals and aspirations, and the resources they draw on to support their pursuit of a satisfying and successful life. The third and overriding aim has been to use the information generated by the “think tank” approach adopted by this project to inform policy initiatives around young people’s transitions to adulthood.

Although it is increasingly acknowledged that the notion of transition is applicable throughout the life course (Worth 2009), this project is concerned specifically with youth transitions. International literature identifies five thresholds which have to be navigated in order to reach adulthood: completion of education, reaching a relatively stable working position, leaving the family of origin, creating one’s own partnership and becoming parents. This concept of transition has a strong regulatory framework, in the sense that it is characterised by specific expectations about what should be achieved and in what time frame. However, since passages to full adulthood are becoming more fragmented, reversible and generally delayed (Cavalli and Galland 1996; Miles 2000), this framework has become increasingly problematic. As a result, a growing body of research around youth studies has emerged which is devoted to the exploration of the issues



specific to current youth (Walther 2006; Arnett 2007; Côté 2009; Wyn 2004; White and Wyn 2008; Leccardi and Ruspini 2006), sometimes called the ‘Y generation’<sup>2</sup> to distinguish it from previous generations of youth, each of which has its own characteristics. In this report, we present an analysis of Edgeryders’ experiences while navigating these transitions, as expressed through mission reports in the online platform and in response to the invitation to “get help, inspire others, make sense of it all”.

First, it is important to be clear who Edgeryders are. Since this is a European-funded project<sup>3</sup> it is unsurprising that the vast majority of participants have been based within Europe. Edgeryders have been most commonly based in France, Italy or the UK, which is likely a reflection of the networks employed to generate participation in the project.<sup>4</sup> Following these three countries with the greatest number of participants, also in the top ten are: the US; Spain; Germany; Sweden; Canada; Belgium; Romania. There have been over 900 registered users in the platform, with almost 200 of these being regular contributors. The ratio of men to women participating is approximately 2:1. Edgeryders are not asked to divulge their age in order to participate in the platform so an accurate statement about typical age is not possible. However,

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the Y generation at work, see Kelan 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Edgeryders is funded by the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The implementation of the project is the responsibility of the Council of Europe, Social Cohesion, Research and Early Warning Division, and falls within a Social Cohesion Joint Programme called Europe of Welfare for All: Facilitating Youth Transition to Active Life by Reinforcing Shared Social Responsibilities.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that the country in which an Edgeryders was based at the time of their participation did not necessarily correspond with their nationality. Many Edgeryders were extremely mobile and travelled within and beyond Europe a great deal.



based on the life events commonly discussed in mission reports, it is clear that the majority of participants are between the ages of twenty and thirty, although there are some regular contributors in their forties and fifties. A more detailed analysis of the characteristics of the network's participants has been produced by Gaia Marcus and Ben Vickers in the form of a network analysis.<sup>5</sup>

Like age, it has not been a prerequisite for participants to state their levels of education, although, given the nature of the Edgeryders project, this has often been incorporated into mission reports. As such, it is possible to summarise Edgeryders' levels of education in general terms. A significant majority are university educated, with many holding postgraduate qualifications. Perhaps more important than formal qualifications, however, is the fact that many participants engage in forms of learning or education via online services/networks that demonstrate their high intellectual abilities. This, in turn, gives an indication of the types of young people who have engaged with the Edgeryders project - highly ICT-literate, knowledge-hungry, and keen to contribute to knowledge as well as receive it. However, and very much in line with other studies on the theme of education-to-work transitions (Bynner and Parsons 2002; Heinz 2002; Lehmann 2004; Pinguart et al. 2003) this high level of education does not correspond to economic security. Edgeryders' accounts often problematise such difficulties, thus framing the platform as a dynamic space in which possible solutions to this complex issue can be discussed.

In this report we present the key findings of the Edgery-

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<sup>5</sup> [http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/help-build-june-conference/mission\\_case/edgeryders-social-network-analysis-fullreport](http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/help-build-june-conference/mission_case/edgeryders-social-network-analysis-fullreport)





ders project based on an analysis of the textual material generated through the online platform. New media have become a rich methodological resource for social scientists over the last two decades (Turkle 1995), and in particular they have helped to open up new ways of researching and interpreting human conduct and identity issues. More recently, researchers have begun to propose specific forms of online ethnography which acknowledge and aim to address the challenges faced by researchers in these contexts (Beneito-Montagut 2011; Hookway 2008; Jones 1999). This special attention is justified by the importance of inclusive participation (Borg et al. 2012), which, in the case of Edgeryders, is particularly relevant given the difficulties in engaging youth in consultation (Dentith et al. 2012). We have dealt with the richness of the data created by Edgeryders by using WEFT QDA, a free qualitative data analysis software package. All of the data produced within the platform up to the *Living On The Edge* conference in mid June 2012 has been coded<sup>6</sup>, although we also incorporate in the present discussion comments which appeared after this date, as well as comments made during the two Edgeryders conferences (15-16th March and 14-15th June 2012). The coded texts will be shared online to allow the community to conduct their own searches based on our codes (i.e. keywords or tags identified with concepts), as well as allowing other researchers to consult, further edit and use them for subsequent projects. Having taken a grounded approach in

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<sup>6</sup> This date is in accordance with the original project plan. It must be remembered that Edgeryders is a prototype; as such, it was difficult to anticipate the quantity and quality of data that would emerge over the course of the project, including the meeting(s) Strasbourg. Overall, there has been a high number of very good quality reports and it is a testament to the success of the project that mission reports are still being created more than a month after LOTE.



which the direction of analysis is led by the content of the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006), the themes presented here represent the dominant issues of concern to participants, and some of their most common responses. The main body of the report is structured around what we have identified as the five core facets of Edgeryders' transitions.

First, as a means of framing the analytical themes we employ through Edgeryders' own perspectives, we outline the commonly-held values and motivations that underpin the ways in which participants engage with society.

Second, we present four key risks that Edgeryders face in the course of their transitions.

Third, we discuss the range of resources that they draw on in their attempts to manage these risks and respond with positive action. Here we also consider what limits these resources and how institutions might be able to provide valuable support. Fourth, we present some of the ways in which Edgeryders make use of their resources to respond to the risks they face. Focusing on the ways in which they work in pursuit of an active and meaningful life for themselves and their communities, our aim here is to illustrate Edgeryders' ability to be creative, dynamic and innovative in the context of sporadic external support. The fifth theme concerns the scale(s) at which Edgeryders act, specifically the relationship between global socio-economic challenges and local action, mediated by global technology networks. We conclude with a discussion of the ways in which Edgeryders' actions can be interpreted as building both personal and collective (community) resilience.



## THE MANY LAYERS OF THE EDGERYDERS PLATFORM

To any reader of Edgeryders' posts, the contents of their discussions appear rich, informed, and, above all, genuine. Edgeryders has configured itself as an expressive tool for its participants, one which allows - even encourages - respectful communication and exchanges. However, this is only the surface appearance of a complex machine which is made up of several layers, each of which has its own meanings and function (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: The Layers of the Edgeryders Platform Interactions (Arrows show the feedback flows of information)*

Since this project is framed as an exercise in democratic public participation, it is important to acknowledge that the open and collaborative space of Edgeryders as a platform has worked to generate conceptual understandings of contemporary youth transitions capable of directly and usefully informing youth policies beyond the thematic analyses and discussions presented by the research team.

It should be noted that Edgeryders' stories are often extremely detailed and tell us a lot about the socio-economic contexts in which they are working through their transition to independent adult life. As a result, the platform constitutes more than a site in which interactions between peers are played out around specific discussion foci. It is also a documentary source offering a window into



the real life settings in which young people's lives – with their challenges and innovative solutions – are played out. In the analysis presented here our aim has been to synthesise commonalities within the data while also creating space for individual stories to be visible. We feel it is also important to acknowledge the richness of the data gathered through this project; with the community's permission much further productive use could be made of it.

## VALUES AND MOTIVATIONS

Edgeryders is an experiment created *in* and *because* of a persistently difficult economic climate across Europe. Notably, youth are being affected more profoundly in this crisis than other groups. In particular, youth unemployment rates have reached dramatic levels, with several countries reaching 30% and some others, such as Greece and Spain, in excess of 40%<sup>7</sup>. At least in countries where education is free or relatively cheap, some young people presently excluded from the labour market have entered into prolonged periods of education.

While it cannot be said that increasing one's education is, in itself, a mistake, there are forms in which such a situation does exacerbate the problems from which it originates, as education also nurtures personal and professional aspirations which are currently increasingly difficult to fulfil, at least following traditional pathways. Of course, this catch-22 situation assumes slightly different contours in relation to specific countries, and, more generally, to the models of welfare which govern socio-political areas in Europe.<sup>8</sup> The generalised lack of em-

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/youth-unemployment-rate\\_20752342-table2](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/youth-unemployment-rate_20752342-table2)

<sup>8</sup> Traditionally, these are divided following Esping-Andersen's categorization



ployment opportunities is therefore to be seen not only as an economic problem, but also as a socio-cultural problem bound up with established generational relations (and associated social expectations and norms), as youth today could be viewed as in line to achieve less (money, security, status, etc.) than their parents' generation, despite having studied longer. Furthermore, there was a strong sense across the platform that business and government have remained wedded to the *status quo* in terms of the forms of employment promoted - both institutions are perceived as being nervous about supporting forms of work that they see as "too innovative". One Edgeryder, Tiago, expressed this in his presentation at the March mini-conference when he suggested that young job seekers are being told by potential employers "*I am sorry, you are too ahead of your time*"<sup>9</sup>.

In this section, we seek to identify the values and motivations that drive young people's actions in the context of such pervasive socio-economic difficulties. This allows us to create a broad framework within which subsequent discussion of Edgeryders' responses to these difficulties can be situated. The core characteristics shared by participants are presented in Figure 2.

First, it is clear that Edgeryders strive to be part of a movement for change bigger than their individual efforts alone. They are committed to using their skills and knowledge to address economic, political, social and environmental realities, and doing so in ways that draw on their own diverse career experiences in order to offer support for oth-

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(1990, 1999).

9 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/85580648/Edgeryders-Making-a-Living-by-Making-a-Difference>



*Figure 2: Traits shared by Edgeryders participants*

ers. Many Edgeryders' paths are characterised by frequent change, uncertainty and instability but these are associated with particularly high levels of personal satisfaction as a result of bringing a diverse skills set to bear on varied projects. There also seems to be a shared aspiration amongst Edgeryders to feel more alive or more human as individuals, in large part in response to a general working culture which is perceived as conformist and dehumanising. But not only are Edgeryders' desires to be part of a 'community' of change about creating a context to which they want to contribute; it seems equally to be about a personal quest for self efficacy and validation - in many ways a personal journey embedded within a shared one - for which individuals are frequently prepared to make material sacrifices. Whether the focus is urban farming or knowledge sharing, Edgeryders' projects are often directly or indirectly linked to production of new cultures of living and working, such



as Lucyanna's<sup>10</sup> and Bridget McKenzie's<sup>11</sup> on a form of family life that prioritises human relationships over work demands, edwin's<sup>12</sup> cooperative living-working space, and Carlien Roodink's musings on why we have ceased to think that an alternative model to the employment society can actually work<sup>13</sup>. As such, Edgeryders are individuals who strive to understand existing systems and work out solutions as to how they can be improved, made more egalitarian or more accessible, in ways that better respond to human needs. Ultimately, we draw attention to three key values: integrity, passion and autonomy.

**Integrity** not only encapsulates the wider set of values many Edgeryders appear to hold, it is seen as foundational to individual prosperity. A key question during the *Making A Living* session at the *Living On The Edge* (LOTE) conference was "How does this [form of work you are inventing] create value?" One Edgeryder, elf-pavlik, has lived for more than three years strictly moneyless and stateless:

*"... he gets the things he needs through sharing. He works on projects without asking for anything in return, supporting causes he cares about. Similarly when people support him with food and shelter, he hitchhikes to travel from place to place, it happens just because people want to support him and what he does. No money is exchanged."*<sup>14</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Lucyanna, *Spotlight: Meet my family!: Family Life - A myth*

<sup>11</sup> Bridget McKenzie, *Spotlight: Meet my family!: Creative home-based living*

<sup>12</sup> edwin, *Mine becomes ours: A few of us. living together (somewhere) and changing things?: The (un)Monastery*

<sup>13</sup> Carlien Roodink, *The quest for paid work: We should organize our society around something else that employment*

<sup>14</sup> Cataspanglish has posted a video interview with Elf Pavlik as a mission report here - *The Quest For Paid Work: (Making A) Living On The Edge - Elf Pavlik*



Elf refuses citizenship and holds no passport. Another Edgeryder, Jean Russell, expressed the extent to which focus and self-awareness are foundational to her personal sense of integrity in her Share Your Ryde mission report:

*“I had felt like everything I had been doing was intentional and aiming toward a good life, but my perspective had been narrow. I went through a massive overhaul toward a much deeper level of integrity. And along with it suffered a great deal of guilt. [...] The guilt was accompanied by a lot of gratitude, so I never would have spoken of it as guilt at the time. I was grateful for what life had given me. But underneath that was a guilt over the privilege I felt.”<sup>15</sup>*



Equally revealing are the stories of Alessia Zabatino, who in a mission report called *Addiopizzo. Aware consumers against the Mafia system*<sup>16</sup> talks about a volunteer association which opposes to the mafia system in Sicily, or Noemi Salantiu’s, when she discusses her career aspirations:

*“I never thought of salary as a reward for my work because I just had other priority indicators to measure my satisfaction with own work - not revenues, but quality. For me, an indicator of success in making a living so far has been knowledge and personal growth in no matter what I would do. What’s very important is to be able to do my work well, really well, and gain some recognition”<sup>17</sup>.*



<sup>15</sup> Jean Russell, *Share your Ryde: Transparency and living well*

<sup>16</sup> Alessia Zabatino, *Reactivating Democratic Institutions: Addiopizzo. Aware consumers against the Mafia system*

<sup>17</sup> Noemi Salantiu, *The Quest For Paid Work: I look for recognition in my work.*





**Passion** is widely evident in the narratives of Edgeryders' paths, especially in the mission brief *Share Your Ryde*. It is a primary motivating force; not only in terms of giving direction and maximising opportunities to find meaningful work, but also as being worth much more than money. Passion is central to sustaining openness within one's own lifestyle, as Noemi suggests: *“Even when you don't have a career plan, things may turn out well just because at any given time you're where you want to be and doing what you love.”*<sup>18</sup> The legitimisation of following one's passion implies diversification and the acceptance of diverging paths as a normal part of one's personal growth. In *My Work Is My Hobby!* Ioana Traistă states that what is important for her is:

*“Contributing to social change is the only way that I can feel my personal and professional life will have a purpose. Communications for NGOs, NGO organizational capacity building, community engagement, social entrepreneurship - these are the things that bring joy in my life. I definitely know that along the way, I will discover other things that will add up to these ones, but I know for sure that we cannot afford ourselves the compromise not to do what we are meant for.”*<sup>19</sup>



Dario Mazzella is equally outspoken about his motivations for engaging in international civil and political action:

*“Experiences like these can empower the youth, by giving*

<sup>18</sup> Noemi Salantiu, in a comment on *higiaco*'s mission report, *The Quest For Paid Work: Passion->Volunteer->Job->... Passion Again?*

<sup>19</sup> Ioana Traistă, *Share Your Ryde: My work is my hobby!*



*us the chance to shape the future we want and to influence the civil society. It's not about age or political parties, it's about to be passionate and responsible!!!*<sup>20</sup>

Luna Islands Tsukino comments here on Irene Fazio's mission report *To be an innovator you must be volcanic!*, where Irene talks about a business plan competition called Vulcanicamente, which supports bright ideas for start ups:

*"I really like the idea of VulcanicaMente!! I think is great in such difficult time periods to give hope and support for people to build their own ventures! I'm working at Hub Vienna and I see daily this hope on their faces when they enter the place and this gives me so much enthusiasm and power to move on!"*<sup>21</sup>



**Autonomy** was the third key motivation which underpinned Edgeryders' stories. Despite systemic difficulties, many Edgeryders are eager to achieve on their own terms without being dependent on external forces, suggesting that they possess real confidence in both themselves and their plans. As Pete Ashton argues:

*"... it's about taking control and responsibility for your activities and presence and not complaining that the system doesn't let you do that - forget the system, I'll make my own way."*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> DarioMazzella, *Share your Ryde: G8 & G20 Youth Summits: a best practice to share because the time for youth involvement is now!*

<sup>21</sup> Luna Islands Tsukino commenting on Irene Fazio's mission report, *Spotlight: social innovation: To be an innovator you must be volcanic!*

<sup>22</sup> Cataspanglish has posted an interview with Pete Ashton as a mission report



However, it is important to emphasise that this autonomy, rather than being self-centred or short-sighted, takes a communitarian and forward-looking perspective. This is not a contradiction in terms. Autonomy here is about more than just an individualised transition; it is a personal journey embedded within a shared one. Whilst it is partly a personal quest for self efficacy and validation, it is also about being part of a “community” of change; about creating a context to which Edgeryders want to contribute. In this sense, the desire for autonomy is an ethical response because it is developed in the name of common good. It is an autonomy that does not depend on others, but is encapsulated in collaboration with others, as the discussions on the many forms of co-working, co-housing and other forms of sharing demonstrate. In this way, one’s own path is invested by collective value, and, as a result, what Edgeryders both express and seek might best be described as **collective autonomy** - the freedom to share and collaborate on their own terms. Notably, the diffusion of the internet and of the possibilities to interact through this means has meant that the flourishing of autonomy is increasingly facilitated, as many examples in the *Caring for Commons* campaign reveal. Said Hamideh’s post and the community’s comments on crowd sourcing offers a prime example.<sup>23</sup>

The centrality of integrity, passion and autonomy to Edgeryders’ transitions are eloquently summarised here by Alberto Masetti-Zannini:

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here - *The Quest For Paid Work: (Making A) Living On The Edge* - Pete Ashton

23 Said Hamideh, *Spotlight: The internet as a common resource: Towards a crowdsourced problem-solving platform that promotes citizen action and participation within politically fragmented nation-states.*



*“In conclusion: what do I look for in a job? Today - having gone through the rabbit hole and come out the other way - I look for meaning and purpose. I only want to do things that fit into a bigger scheme, and that make sense for our future. I want to do things that are not morally dubious. I look at the people I will be working with: I do not want to work with people I don’t respect and value.”<sup>24</sup>*

Examples such as those discussed here imply a positive attitude towards change and the willingness and sincere desire to shape the world in a way that it makes it more equal and prosperous for everybody. However, Edgeryders’ attempts to implement this do not come without difficulties.

## RISKS

Edgeryders reported encountering a number of risks in the course of their transitions. These varied in nature from the ways in which young people are characterised by institutions as cheap labour or as a threat to law and order, to the effects of failing to conform to a variety of widely-held social norms.

One of the most commonly-shared anxieties was **fear of exploitation**. There were two specific areas of concern. First was the sense of obligation attached to taking on low value, low paid work in order to either gain work experience or simply make enough money to pay for rent, bills and food. Sometimes low grade work was a means of making enough money to live while more meaningful work was pursued simultaneously for no money. For most Edgeryders it has simply not been possible to gain experience or

<sup>24</sup> Alberto Masetti-Zannini, *The Quest For Paid Work: Like Alice in Wonderland*



develop their own projects with no financial support. The second area of concern concentrated on working for free.

While volunteering was described in resoundingly positive terms as an experience where much more was learned than skills for a particular form of employment (e.g. self-awareness; sensitivity to particular social issues, etc.), unpaid internships were widely criticised for being exploitative and discriminatory. As IdilM said:

*“I honestly do not understand how they expect young people just coming out of education (with huge debts) to be able to work full time for free, pay for their flights, accommodation and daily sustenance. These organizations either assume that everyone is rich or they are turning a blind eye to the plight of the disadvantaged and financially less well-off in society, thereby entrenching social inequalities”<sup>25</sup>*



While it was agreed that internships generally constitute a valuable opportunity for skills development and networking, the lack of financial recompense was pricing large proportions of young people out of this opportunity. Moreover, anxiety about acquiring the broadest range of experience in order to increase future employability perpetuates back-to-back interning through which institutions are able to take advantage of young people’s precariousness.

For a smaller group of Edgeryders, **criminalisation** was a concern. For some this involved being cast as ‘work-avoiders’ through the removal of state welfare support from those unwilling to reduce their work with commu-

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<sup>25</sup> IdilM, *The Quest For Paid Work: Unpaid internships are discriminatory and should be ended.*



nity or social enterprise projects in order to comply with state employment programmes. More common, however, was anxiety about the criminalisation of young people's appropriation of public resources, particularly buildings and other public spaces, which several Edgeryders use for community benefit.

The third risk to which many Edgeryders were sensitive was **marginalisation**. Specifically, there was anxiety in response to the apparent lack of support for those unwilling to conform to existing models of employment or comply with state programmes. In other words, Edgeryders feel distanced from peers and communities as a result of their commitment to a different form of transition and working life. Several expressed significant worry about choices they had made about their working lives in the past, and it was an equally large source of concern for those facing similar decisions in the near future. In one sense this is a broad socio-cultural issue but it is one that has its roots in resistance to alternative ways of working within the labour market and state systems. The strength of current career norms which attach higher social status to what might be termed 'traditional' careers (often office-based, 'white collar' roles) have meant that some Edgeryders feel compelled to conform, taking jobs that are neither fulfilling nor developmental, and sometimes detrimental to their well-being, simply because opting for the lesser trodden path is paved with even greater risk and uncertainty.

A second form of marginalisation exists in which Edgeryders' actions within (fairly) mainstream physical or virtual spaces are deemed 'inappropriate' to that space by intervening authorities. While on the one hand this relates closely to the appropriation of public spaces de-



scribed above, it was equally applicable to virtual spaces on the internet. In a mission report entitled *Write or Die*, for instance, Nirgal reports being asked to remove his writing from a website he had been posting on.<sup>26</sup> In these circumstances Edgeryders' actions are pushed into more marginal spaces, reducing the impact they are able to have. If Edgeryders' work is continually pushed to the margins, blocked, or described as 'inappropriate' by institutions, will disenchantment set in such that the innovative ideas demonstrably possessed by this group never get developed or exposed? The potential exists for young talent to be wasted and potential solutions to social challenges to be overlooked. This is as true when it comes to issues of funding as access to spaces in which to act. This is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this report.

The risk that emerged most commonly - if sometimes implicitly - throughout the platform was that of **failing to make a successful transition** to an independent adult life. For some Edgeryders a constant preoccupation was whether there would be opportunities for family life in their future - would they ever achieve sufficient security to allow this? In one sense this would seem to be a private concern, and, as such, one which does not immediately attract public attention. Yet personal, especially family, relationships are closely interlinked with many other spheres of life, particularly those related to employment, since family support can be fundamental to fulfilling career aspirations or expectations.

Most commonly, Edgeryders were concerned about achieving a transition that allowed them to pursue mean-

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26 Nirgal, *Share Your Ryde: Write or Die*



ingful work. However, if gaining stability and security remains a priority for young people, and if these are increasingly difficult to achieve through available forms of work, do Edgeryders face a lifetime of precariousness? If this is the case, there are significant implications for state institutions who may find themselves with greater welfare bills for those unable to secure permanent paid work - indeed, this is already happening in the UK. There are two key issues to note here.

The first concerns the notion that existing norms about the pathways to achieve stability and security are increasingly defunct. One Edgeryder describes “the idealistic view of how university translates into professional status”<sup>27</sup>, emphasising the extent to which current economic circumstances have put an end to the time when a university degree was a guarantee of a secure career. Much discussion within the platform crystallised around a strong sense that present formal education systems fail to prepare young people for the challenges they face when embarking on their key life transition in the current socio-economic climate.

Some Edgeryders clearly feel considerable social pressure to conform to existing norms around stable employment and the lifestyles associated with these forms of work, but at the same time there exists a growing realisation that even the most historically stable forms of employment - so-called “jobs for life” - may themselves be increasingly tainted by uncertainty. Edgeryders seem to acknowledge the trade-off between stability (which is anyway fading fast) and fulfilling and meaningful work, but an overrid-

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27 Noemi Salantiu in a comment on Di Bere’s mission report, *Share Your Ryde: ‘Crossroads’ sounds so cliché*





ing concern is the need to make enough money to live. (Certainly they do not want to depend on state provision and entrench the view that young people are a social problem or national burden.) As another Edgeryder, Edwin, says, *“I don’t want money for its own sake, but I don’t want to get kicked out of my apartment either so I’ll need some.”*<sup>28</sup>



The second issue concerns the problem of wasted talent. Nirgal writes: *“There are also millions of wasted talents. [...] I could write an encyclopedia about all the talents wasted because they just can’t find their place or because they are not used for something good.”*<sup>29</sup>



The kinds of risks outlined above constrain young people’s attempts to make use of their talents, which not only risk the creation of an unfulfilled and disillusioned generation, but also inhibit the ability of society to address its own problems by drawing on the talents, entrepreneurialism and enthusiasm of its young.

The forces that drive the most profound risks to young people’s transitions are often embedded in institutional rules and norms. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Edgeryders feel that a gulf exists between their aspirations and world views, and the ways their lives are perceived by those institutions (i.e. often in problematic terms). While the two do not generally come into direct conflict, the lack of understanding that maintains the gulf should be a cause for concern. The risk for policy makers and govern-

<sup>28</sup> Edwin, *The Quest for Paid Work: Mo Money, Mo Problems*

<sup>29</sup> Nirgal, *Share Your Ryde: Write or Die*



ment institutions in particular is that young people will increasingly turn to ‘anarchic’ politics and simply step outside the system.

## RESOURCES

In a mission report uploaded after the *Living On The Edge* conference, Charanya Chidambaram states “*I am my own resource*”.<sup>30</sup> This comment underlines the extent to which Edgeryders not only recognise and value their skills, creativity, competences and the autonomy these provide, but also that being one’s own resource is a fundamental necessity for contemporary transitions to an independent life. However, while Edgeryders are clearly adept at acknowledging and making use of their own competences, they equally realise that, in order to move forward and have the impacts they desire, external resources are also needed. These resources take several different forms but the key connector that links them is **people** - people as **allies** and people as **networks**.

Networks emerged as one of the most significant themes across the project - such that a formal network analysis of the Edgeryders community has formed a key part of the project research.<sup>31</sup> Networks - both ‘real’ and virtual - constitute a fundamental support structure offering inspiration, motivation, tips and guidance, mentoring, technical information and emotional support, as well as being the conduits through which ideas and innovations are communicated and money (sometimes) is generated. As such, they are the life blood of an individual’s desire

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<sup>30</sup> Charanya Chidambaram, *Where Edgeryders dare: Paid Work - Challenges & Path Forward*

<sup>31</sup> See G. Marcus and B. Vickers’ report, *THE EDGERYDERS SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS #FULLREPORT*



to ‘craft’ him-/herself a particular future. Further, it was clear that, at a time of great instability where more people are working autonomously, it is unfeasible to rely on the stability of institutions - instead Edgeryders rely on stability provided by social networks, especially families and peers. This was particularly visible in the Unconference following *Living On The Edge*, which swiftly generated a working list of ways in which the Edgeryders community could develop outside the remit of the project itself<sup>32</sup>.

In large part the stability on which Edgeryders leant in their interactions with various networks was generated through a pervasive understanding of **reciprocity**. In an age of social media, it has never been easier to build a community suited to one’s own requirements. Maintaining these networks in ways that result in positive feedback from peers and in the form of work opportunities requires a commitment to reciprocity - contributing and delivering on one’s commitments, as well as benefitting - but doing so offers manifold benefits. In particular, in an online environment characterised by collaboration and mutuality, and where **reputation** is all, being a good peer requires giving as much as taking.

Edgeryder Jorge Couchet sums this up in his mission report *A World of Peers*, when he writes, “*I’m dreaming of a world where we are all peers...*”<sup>33</sup> - and indeed there is a strong sense across the project as a whole that learning, working, collaborating on a peer level offers a more dynamic, responsive, as well as equitable and sustainable form of work.

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<sup>32</sup> thejaymo, *Help build the June conference!: Edgeryders in a box - Starting local Edgeryders community groups*

<sup>33</sup> jorge.couchet, *Bootcamp: A World Of Peers*



While peer networks play an important role in driving forward Edgeryders' projects, **families** are commonly the key **allies** even before this stage is reached. A large proportion of participants have written warmly and appreciatively of the support provided by family members throughout their transitions. Emotional support is, of course, a key component of this, but it often extends to other essential resources including accommodation, food and money. Mission reports posted as part of the Living Together campaign have suggested that, for some Edgeryders, peer networks are taking on characteristics associated with families, in terms of the emotional support and solidarity they provide, and this is perhaps a reflection not only of our networked society but also of the increasing mobility of global citizens within and beyond Europe.

**Families**, however, often remain the cornerstone of Edgeryders' activities because of the often unconditional support they are willing to provide. The issue of **financial support** is worthy of particular discussion. For some Edgeryders, financial support (or support in kind such as living with parents rent-free) from family members has allowed them to pursue work that inspires them, often setting up ventures of their own with family "seed" money. However, present day economic challenges mean fewer young people have access to family-based financial support through periods of study or sporadic employment. These young people have to balance making enough money to live on in the present with pursuing the opportunities that will hopefully build them a longer term future - often saving money to fund those opportunities at the same time. But for another group of Edgeryders, access to resources - from family members or other



sources - is still much more problematic. While the internet goes some way to alleviating this sort of inequality, it should be remembered that internet/ICT access is still far from available to all young people.

A key question, therefore, exists around whose responsibility it is, or should be, to provide the resources - and thus a fundamental part of the support system - that young people need to make a successful transition to an independent life. Edgeryders stories make clear that it is still the oft-cited triad of family, friends and fools who take the risks to back their activities. Andrea Paoletti notes in his mission report, *The serial exploring co-designer*<sup>34</sup>, that applying for funding can be a full-time job, and it can take time to accumulate enough money to pay for even a part-time fundraiser. In essence, it takes money (or at least resources of various kinds) to make money. In this sense, differences in access to credit, rather than being an outcome, are exacerbating existing social differences associated with unequal access. In light of the multiple benefits that Edgeryders actions are already making to numerous individuals and communities, perhaps the resounding question of the whole project is **who else should be bearing some of the risks - and enjoying some of the rewards - of Edgeryders initiatives?**

Since this is a policy-funded and policy-focused project this question can be taken as rhetorical, yet the scant institutional support for youth initiatives makes it worth emphasising. There is a clear need for those in need of money and those with the money to communicate more effectively such that a more productive and efficient

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34 Andrea Paoletti, *Share Your Ryde: The serial exploring co-designer*



(maybe even collaborative) working relationship can be achieved. Edgeryders and external funders must better understand one another's needs, abilities and limitations in order to allow both to do their jobs. During the Unconference that followed *Living On The Edge*, several Edgeryders collaborated on an open letter to funders which is as much a call to find new, more productive ways to work together as actually identifying and accessing funding<sup>35</sup>. Yet while actions such as this letter demonstrate commitment from participants to do their bit towards a more collaborative working relationship with institutions, there remains a deeply entrenched institutional culture that frames conceptualisations of trust, risk, profit (or other social rewards) and reputation in terms that fail to accommodate Edgeryders' ways of conducting equally if not more legitimate business.

It should be acknowledged that Edgeryders possess very sophisticated **knowledge** of many institutional systems - business, government and civil society - but a resounding comment across several campaigns surrounded the extent to which this knowledge was self-sought and self-taught through experience. Particularly within the *Making A Living* and *Learning* campaigns, Edgeryders voiced concern about the inability of formal education systems to provide them with a grounded knowledge of how the 'real world' works.

While many expressed appreciation for their experiences of higher education, acknowledging the positive impacts it has had on navigating their transition, there was considerable frustration that they were entering a

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<sup>35</sup> demsoc, *Help build the June conference!:* Funding 2.0 Edgencamp session: "Dear Funders" letter



labour market highly qualified yet unable to respond to the challenges posed by the current crisis. In her mission report, *There's gonna be some changes made*, Adria Florea<sup>36</sup> argues that making use of resources, networks and allies is far easier for those who possess an understanding of how they fit into the bigger system, and she notes a major opportunity for innovation in this space. Some Edgeryders are already active here - *higiacomo*<sup>37</sup>, *benvickers*<sup>38</sup> and *andrealatino*<sup>39</sup> have all developed services to support young people's post-education transitions. Nevertheless, there remains considerable scope for educational institutions to think and act creatively in the support they provide to students.

## RESPONSES

Edgeryders' responses to their frustrations with society are characterised by the sort of **innovative thinking** that permeates many of the experiences shared in the course of this project. As one participant stated in a comment on a mission report in the *Caring For Commons* campaign: "*young people are supposed to be a problem category, but they actually display more initiative than the people who are supposed to help them!*"<sup>40</sup>

Edgeryders naturally seek to implement their values in their own field of interest. Andrea Paoletti, for instance, a

<sup>36</sup> Adria Florea, *First Lessons In Work: There's gonna be some changes made*

<sup>37</sup> *higiacomo*, *The Quest For Paid Work: Passion->Volunteer->Job->... Passion Again?*

<sup>38</sup> *benvickers*, *Spotlight Social Innovation: Professional Reality Development*

<sup>39</sup> *andrealatino* *Share your Ryde: "What we have done for others and the world remains, and is immortal"*

<sup>40</sup> Alberto Cottica commenting on FelixWaterhouse's mission report, *We, The Sharers: The Housing Estate - Nexus of Commons*



designer from the North of Italy who specialises in planning co-working space, has located the centre of his work activity in the deep south of Italy - a counter-intuitive decision given the severe economic disadvantages faced by this area - and aims to encourage social innovation to flourish there. At one of the plenary sessions at the *Living On The Edge* conference, James, an artist and activist who runs a free, open digital lab which repurposes trash technology for the community, declared that “paying is so last century”, a statement that clearly resonated with many in the community, who re-tweeted it several times throughout the conference session. These examples are indicative of Edgeryders’ commitment to realising their own projects, leaving behind traditional patterns of entrepreneurship and creating pathways which challenge established employment and money-making norms.

More generally, however, the focus is often on forward and collaborative thinking. LucasG writes:

*“Thinking about next year, I think I need to look at the hard realities and start some kind of **dialogue** as to what to do next - where and how will be my questions. [...] I guess I’ll have to have conversations, join people who are already doing things, see why those who might are not doing things, and really find some leverage.”<sup>41</sup>*



Specifically, in practical terms Edgeryders seek to contribute to improving their lives, and those of their peers, by deploying their skills and resources in those contexts where they believe they can achieve meaningful impact. Here it should be noted that, in relation to previous gen-

41 LucasG, *Share Your Ryde: My Ride With Local Food*





eration, the lives of contemporary youth are often viewed as being characterised by the so-called individualisation thesis (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991), which postulates that each individual is in charge of his/her own destiny in a context in which no preconceived paths are given. A necessary tool with which to respond to this state of uncertainty is reflexivity, and, as the responses within the platform demonstrate, Edgeryders are adept at **self-reflection**: even when everything is running smoothly, Edgeryders questions why and how<sup>42</sup>, as in hexayurt's *The Subtle Art of Precarity*:

*“Some parts of my experience are very individual - my life path is deeply unconventional and likely unique. Other areas are very typical - unable to manage both my personal cause and acquisition of the trappings of adulthood like a mortgage and a car, never mind the fruits of adulthood like children. I exist as a perpetual boy, my possessions not all that different from what I owned in my 20s, even as I approach the last weeks of my 30s.”*<sup>43</sup>



Or as in K's mission report *Prototyping environments and finding good peers*<sup>44</sup>:

*“Education has its dangers:*

*- Get stuck in a subject bubble: when only your fellow researchers can understand what you're talking about. When studying is exciting there is a risk to become biased and to start collective polarisation amongst your*

<sup>42</sup> As in Paola Lucciola's *Share your Ryde: It's a problem of personal choices or of a lost generation?*

<sup>43</sup> Hexayurt, *Share your Ryde: The Subtle Art of Precarity*

<sup>44</sup> K, *Reality check: Prototyping environments and finding good peers*



*fellow colleagues/classmates.*

*The trick which works for me: to mingle as much as I can with those who studying subjects different from mine and work in a different field. If I'm losing the ability to explain to them what I'm studying and why it is exciting, it is a stuck-in-a-bubble alert."*

However, whilst Edgeryders are living the individualisation thesis, they are also subverting it through their desire for connectivity, community, collaboration and communication, and in this respect their response creates a noteworthy challenge to extant dominant theorisations of young lives.

It is also important to acknowledge that, not only are Edgeryders' actions concerned with addressing socio-cultural needs in terms of everyday human welfare, they also consider the scope for economic gains to be made in circumstances where opening up access to knowledge, data and politics may act as an enabler of innovation and enterprise. Indeed, it should be emphasised that not only are Edgeryders willing to take action to form the sort of future they want, this action goes beyond activism and campaigning to actually providing the services they feel are needed but missing. They are actively setting out how they believe things should be done rather than following existing channels which merely communicate dissatisfaction. This reflects a sea-change in terms of responses to civic disgruntlement; one in which Edgeryders are increasingly able to appropriate commons and networks to provide for themselves and others, and do this by working around the state (since these institutions are often the source of the problem).

In the realm of political participation, for instance, there



seems to be a general agreement that existing methods of participation in local and national politics could be improved with limited effort, if only institutions were more attentive to the emergent needs of citizens, particularly regarding means of communication and engagement. Edgeryders describe the limited success achieved in their attempts to contact politicians. There is clearly, therefore, significant difficulty in making one's voice heard through traditional politics. Certainly Edgeryders believe that state powers are not on their side - and that they continue to be viewed as a problem rather than part of the solution. This can be directly inferred from the evidence that so many of them position their beliefs and actions in direct opposition to those of their home states. The campaign *We, The People* contains many mission reports which articulate these frustrations, including hexayurt's provocative post, *Is democracy broken?*<sup>45</sup>

**SCALE**

***“...if we want to change something we have to start from our own environment even if the challenge is very hard to achieve.”***

(Irene Fazio, *From Local to Global, and back!*)

One of the most striking facets of the project as a whole has been the ways in which Edgeryders' actions have mediated between local and global concerns. As such, the **scale(s)** at which they act constitute an important analytical focus. Edgeryders are demonstrably keen to act at a variety of scales - local, regional, national and international - and in both physical and virtual spaces. What is

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<sup>45</sup> hexayurt, *Reactivating Democratic Institutions: Is democracy broken, or only mainstream political parties?*



important to note, however, is that even those focusing their energy on local projects are generally doing so in response to global issues. A key question that emerged in the early analysis of this project surrounded how these multi-scalar interactions knitted together.<sup>46</sup> Viewing the project in its later stages, one clear pattern dominated.

When it comes to detailed information on specific projects, the focus in participants' mission reports is most commonly on geographically local action or local challenges. In one respect this is likely to reflect the fact that limited personal resources make scaling up their action or broadening its scope extremely difficult, if not impossible. In another, it is important to acknowledge that differing national political systems and sensitivities will influence the levels at which young people are able to act. What has proved significant is the concentration of activity at local levels even amongst those Edgeryders with the means to act at higher levels within their national political contexts. Edgeryders' actions revolve around initiatives that strengthen communities, helping them re-engage and invest in the places they inhabit, leading to stronger forms of citizenship. Alessandra's mission report, in which she introduces the Italian language school for migrants she co-founded - LiberaLaParola - is a prime example<sup>47</sup>. LiberaLaParola unites migrants and locals in a context focused on learning and sharing, and in doing so also helps to deepen cultural understanding across the two groups.

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<sup>46</sup> We recommend also referring to Gaia Marcus and Ben Vickers's network analysis on this relationship.

<sup>47</sup> Alessandra, *Protecting and enhancing commons: La lingua come un diritto da condividere: scuola di italiano libera e gratuita LiberaLaParola*



Of particular interest was the fact that although Edgeryders are demonstrably very mobile and willing to relocate when necessary, there was a form of place embeddedness that kept a focus on acting locally and engaging people in the immediate community, whether or not it was that individual's home community. Talking about his work with the community of a large, urban housing estate in London, Felix Waterhouse said, *"The best way to change an area is to allow the people living and working there to come together and affect change themselves."*<sup>48</sup> Focusing efforts at this scale allowed Edgeryders to contribute directly to change in their communities and observe the positive changes as they emerged. Alberto summarised the benefits of concentrating action at a small or local scale by saying, *"Now I only commit to arenas where I can see my personal contribution making a change, even small. I will not be a number anymore. Not because I dislike it (I had great fun) but because it. Does. Not. Work."*<sup>49</sup> A key driver of Edgeryders' actions is thus the efficacy they achieve through their contributions - both for themselves in terms of personal competence and, perhaps more importantly, for the communities within which they aim to effect change. Nowhere is this more vividly represented than in a series of conversations in the platform around the (un)monastery<sup>50</sup> - a proposal for several Edgeryders to live and work together for a year in a small community with the aim of supporting local citi-

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48 FelixWaterhouse, *We, The Sharers: The Housing Estate - The Nexus of Commons*

49 Alberto Cottica in a comment on a mission report by T\_indigantx, *Share Your Ryde: How do we overcome the fear towards change? Call it magic!*

50 Edwin, *Mine Becomes Ours: A Few of Us. Living Together (Somewhere) and Changing Things? The (Un)monastery*



zens to address serious socio-economic problems, from youth unemployment to homelessness and computer (il) literacy.

Within Edgeryders' commitment to acting locally in response to larger scale issues, a desire to protect or enhance commons was a conspicuous connecting theme. Often this was explicitly place-based and there are several mission reports which present participants' efforts to enhance common spaces, including: Aubrey and Ginevra's Wiki Loves Monuments<sup>51</sup> project to reconnect communities with their local cultural heritage; Alessia Zabatino's two reports on the occupation of historical Italian building by creative knowledge workers<sup>52</sup>; Augusto Pirovano and friends' CriticalCity Upload, a "game of urban transformation" in Milan<sup>53</sup>; and SARCHA's Athens Travelers, where young people provide tourists with an experience of the city "from within"<sup>54</sup>. These examples testify to Edgeryders' efforts to promote cultural diversity and expression, as well as tolerance and understanding, across different groups of town or city inhabitants. There is a strong sense of local pride underpinning these actions which reflects the integrity that, as we discuss above, is a key driver for Edgeryders' projects.

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<sup>51</sup> Aubrey, *Spotlight: The internet as a common resource: Wiki Loves Monuments: cultural heritage upgraded*; Ginevra, *Spotlight: The internet as a common resource: Wiki Loves Monuments in a nutshell*

<sup>52</sup> Alessia Zabatino, *The acknowledgement of social value: the legitimate illegality. Culture as commons; a journey through the Italian spaces occupied by knowledge workers #1 and #2*

<sup>53</sup> Augusto Pirovano, *Protecting and enhancing commons: We create games for urban public spaces*

<sup>54</sup> SARCHA, *We, the sharers: Athens Travelers: Athens as introduced by its youth. Individual trajectories are turned into "in common" city explorations*



While the initiatives Edgeryders have presented in the platform have tended to be firmly place based (even those primarily located in the virtual space of the internet are usually tied to at least one physical location - a particular city, for instance), mobility has formed an essential component of the stories participants have told. Sometimes these stories have involved personal travel - moving between countries while growing up, or travelling independently to experience the world and embrace its diversity as a young adult. Edgeryders credit the opportunities presented by the mobility most Europeans are fortunate to possess with fuelling their enthusiasm for new discoveries, their creative thinking and problem solving dispositions - it has opened their eyes to the cultural diversity of Europe and the wider world, and this seems to invigorate them to direct their efforts towards the community with which they feel strong affinities. However, their travels also hold up a mirror reflecting the difficulties still faced by some young Europeans for whom movement across European borders is still problematic.

The benefits of travel and international mobility expressed by so many of the participants constitute an urgent call to promote mobility for *all* young people within Europe. This is particularly important in light of the education and employment benefits offered by schemes such as ERASMUS. ERASMUS was discussed in extremely positive terms within the platform and this is a ripe opportunity for policymakers to conduct their own analysis into the nature of its success and how it might be developed to offer more support and new initiatives at a time when such structures are in increasing need - both by young people and potential employers in need of appropriately skilled staff. In this respect, the Erasmus



for Young Entrepreneurs (discussed by Madalinab90<sup>55</sup> and Daniela Cantir<sup>56</sup>), a means of offering mentorship through work experience with established entrepreneurs, would appear to be especially pertinent.

Finally, it is important to consider how Edgeryders connect their local actions with the global issues that inspire them. In one sense this is about making use of the networks of resources and collaborators that allow their projects to happen - discussed in detail above. The internet and other digital technologies are, undoubtedly, the key connectors here. Furthermore, it is in the realm of online collaboration and digital participation that Edgeryders' actions are holding up a mirror to the government institutions they are working around - because it is usually a case of working around them, rather than working with or alongside them. While Edgeryders are demonstrably highly competent - and innovative - in their use of virtual spaces and digital tools for seeking collaborators, finding audiences, etc., often their frustration with government and other formal institutions stems from the fact that institutional engagement via these tools is far behind. Emiliano Fratello articulates this eloquently when he says that government institutions in particular do not know "Policy 2.0".<sup>57</sup> "Policy 2.0" requires the bridging of local, regional, national and international scale issues through the digital tools Edgeryders are already adept at employing. Perhaps, therefore, there is something institutions could learn from Edgeryders' use of these resources in order to offer better support for young people's transitions, partic-

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<sup>55</sup> Madalinab90, *Share Your Ryde: Creativity and a smile can change the world*

<sup>56</sup> Daniela Cantir, *Share Your Ryde: Studying In Brussels*

<sup>57</sup> Emiliano Fatello, *Bootcamp: Live Not Survive*





ularly when it comes to transparency and accountability. Alongside this, it bears emphasising that Edgeryders' projects were consistently more durable in the context of community rather than political projects. It seems, therefore, that Edgeryders see their efforts as having a greater impact and more enduring legacy if they bypass official figures and get on with driving the change themselves. But policymakers should consider - just how much *more* Edgeryders' social enterprises, businesses and community initiatives could do to address contemporary socio-economic challenges if they were boosted by institutional support, particularly (although by no means exclusively) funding.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this report, our aim has been to emphasise some of the commonalities and shared experiences within the Edgeryders community. On the one hand, this could be seen as too ambitious a task given the breadth of experience and diverse backgrounds of the participants. On the other, there are some common traits which unite this community surprisingly well. The first of these is their desire to shape the world through their own positive contributions, and to do this in collaboration with peers with whom they share goals, experiences and values. Despite the persistence of social and cultural differences, Edgeryders share perhaps the most significant common background. This was most clearly illustrated at the end of the Edgeryders mini-conference in March in Strasbourg, when a small group of Edgeryders were invited to introduce themselves. One responded saying that he 'comes from the internet', followed by another participant's declaration that she 'come[s] from the internet too'. This



shared location in the virtual sphere which transcends geographical boundaries contributes to a convergence of both aspirations and expectations. It sets the stage for how Edgeryders perceive their roles in society - and, importantly, it defines the terms in which they want to interact with institutions.

We can say that what is most strikingly evident from Edgeryders' accounts is their commitment to progress - both in terms of their personal life projects and within the societies they are part of. Sometimes compromise may be required, but, as several Edgeryders stress, every compromise has the potential to offer experiences that pay dividends in future. As part of the rhetoric of the individualised society, certainly few expectations exist around obtaining stable pathways:

*“Try and fail is the only possibility we have to find our path. It is normal and it is absolutely right to fail. It is our society that is telling us that failing is for losers, but in fact it is just the way has to be. Failing without changing, that is for losers!”<sup>58</sup>*

*“We need to create a much larger framework, and then systematically, and in our own idiosyncratic ways, design and build new ways within it.”<sup>59</sup>*

The picture drawn by the participants is that of a far more complex transition to a full independent life than traditionally conceived by policy makers and institutions alike, and this mirrors recent theorisations by youth researchers (Miles 2000). The rhetoric surrounding individualised

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<sup>58</sup> Comment by Andrea Guida on Di Bere's mission report, *Share Your Ryde: "Crossroads" sounds so cliché*

<sup>59</sup> Comment by Markroest on Paola Lucciola's mission report, *Share Your Ryde: It's a problem of personal choices or a lost generation?*



trajectories may, in fact, jeopardise the efforts of young people by masking the limitations and barriers that Edgeryders have articulated and diverting attention from the support they need. The reality is that Europe's young people do need institutional support (of various sorts) to realise their plans, and the competence and commitment they already display in the projects described through the platform confirm that they are worthy recipients.

We feel that it is important to reiterate that Edgeryders' projects are invariably characterised by two aims - both of which should be of keen interest to policymakers in the context of current socio-economic turbulence. The first of these is about securing their *own* futures - making a successful transition to an independent life that allows them to provide for themselves and their families by working according to their values of integrity, passion and autonomy. In light of current unemployment rates such innovativeness deserves to be rewarded with institutional support to expand successful projects and promote entrepreneurialism amongst the young. The wider social benefits in terms of increasing employment opportunities in local areas are clear. And this leads on to the second aim of Edgeryders' projects - to make a positive difference to society in the course of securing their own transition. It is interesting to note that the final campaign to be launched during the Edgeryders project was called *Resilience*. Reflecting on the project as it draws to a conclusion (at least in its present phase), resilience seems the most appropriate term in which to encapsulate what the project findings reveal about the priorities of European youth.

Although participants in this project have represented a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences, they have also been a self-selecting group of privileged actors, which



means that inevitably some voices are missing. Furthermore, the mission reports have been shaped by the questions posed within the campaigns and, as a result, Edgeryders stories have usually been framed around the positive actions they are taking as they navigate their transitions. In short, it must be acknowledged that there is a risk of reading these stories in too positive a light. This is not to say that Edgeryders' actions are not important and valuable - certainly they are - but simply that in focusing on the 'good news' stories, attention may be shifted too far from areas where institutions retain significant responsibility and need to be held to account. It should also not be forgotten that, while the game element of the project might galvanise forms of communication which foster creativity and smooth relations between individuals and institutions, the corollary of this is the potential for playfulness to inadvertently overshadow the seriousness of some debates. There are few direct complaints in the platform about key issues being mishandled; instead Edgeryders concern themselves with how they can contribute to addressing the problem.

In sum, this project has been successful in demonstrating the energies, ideas and commitment to contributing to social life shared by European youth; presenting bottom-up recommendations on youth policies by shedding light on existing successful projects; facilitating networking; and giving a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment among participants before and after the community conference in June 2012. However, having one eye on the main goal of the Council of Europe - social inclusion - the risk implied in reading the material in the platform is that Edgeryders are viewed as representative of youth in Europe: this kind of passionate participation is far from being a widespread



phenomenon and institutions such as the Council of Europe and others should take this on board, remaining alert to the risk that too big a portion of youth in Europe simply walk away or step outside the system. They should, therefore, use all means available (particularly through the internet) to speak the same language as Edgeryders as digital natives - many young people, after all, now “come from the internet” - in order to keep the channel of communication open. Edgeryders as a project has shown that such a communication is not only possible, but also immensely fruitful.



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# WHERE TO GO NEXT

*This third and final section puts forward proposals for further action as suggested by Edgeryders participants, the team of policy researchers and experts charged with devising the policy recommendations in a framework and process set by the Social Cohesion Research and Early Warning Division of the Council of Europe. For those interested it is possible to follow current and future developments of the Edgeryders experiment at [www.edgeryders.ppa.coe.int](http://www.edgeryders.ppa.coe.int) and through the Edgeryders presence on various social media.*







# TRANSITIONING INTO THE FUTURE

*Implications of what we learned from Edgeryders on policies and policy processes*

Rebecca Collins



## INTRODUCTION

There is widespread agreement that European youth are in a precarious position. Unemployment amongst under-25s is at its highest since OECD records began, with rates in some countries (most notably Spain and Greece) having reached almost 50%<sup>1</sup>. The pronounced split between Northern and Southern Europe, and Western and Eastern Europe in terms of youth unemployment rates (with Southern and Eastern regions showing the highest numbers) illustrates how the consequences of the current global economic turbulence are hitting some groups particularly hard.

At the same time as economic challenges have precipitated a shift to increasingly uncertain working arrangements, there have never been more young people in search of a stable working life. With growing numbers of young people participating in tertiary (university) education, there has been inflation in formal educational qualifications (Gutiérrez-Esteban and Mikiwicz 2012) resulting in the perception that those with the means must remain in education for longer, accumulating more qualifications, in order to distinguish oneself within an ever-crowded job market. The result has been growing numbers of highly qualified young people chasing a series of short-term, poorly paid, low skilled jobs. Concomitantly, the term NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) has been coined to describe those left on the very margins of society as a result of low social, cultural and/or economic capital. These young people are, perhaps more than any others, vulnerable to exclusion from social and political participation and denied

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/youth-unemployment-rate\\_20752342-table2](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/youth-unemployment-rate_20752342-table2)



opportunities for self-realisation (Bello 2012; Bynner and Parsons 2002).

To a large extent, the precariousness that currently characterises young people's lives is closely associated with these educational and employment challenges. However, they are by no means the only causes and consequences of this precariousness. Difficulties in accessing and affording housing is also a central feature, as are the impacts of long term insecurity on young people's personal relationships (especially with families, partners and children) and personal well-being (such as their ability to manage long term stress). At the same time as European youth are facing these greater pressures and fewer opportunities, there has also been growing political dissatisfaction. In one respect this has culminated in large-scale public demonstrations of frustration at institutional handling of a range of socio-economic challenges which have taken on international political significance. Yet in another respect there is growing concern about the low numbers of youth participating in more traditional forms of politics, particularly party politics and direct involvement with civic institutions (Eriksson 2012). It would seem apparent, then, that there is a strong ambivalence in the ways in which contemporary youth feel about and enact civic and political participation, and this could be read as both the result of, or their response to, the precariousness they face.

It is in this context that the *Edgeryders* project<sup>2</sup> was devised as a means of deepening understanding of the spe-

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<sup>2</sup> In order to differentiate between *Edgeryders* as a project and the project participants, who are themselves known as *Edgeryders*, references to the project are italicised and references to participants are in normal script.



cific challenges young Europeans feel they face in their attempts to successfully navigate the transition to an independent active life, as well as some of the innovative and creative ways they face them. *Edgeryders* is fundamentally premised on the construction of youth as part of the solution, rather than an intrinsic social problem - a position that has, for some time now, been acknowledged as essential for the building of meaningful and effective youth-focused policies (Denstad 2009). As a project it has two closely-related and interlinked aims:

- To provide a space where young people from across Europe can share experiences of their transitions in ways that generate mutual support and understanding, and where solutions can be discussed and developed with like-minded peers;
- To articulate where current policy is failing - either to understand the nature of young people's problems or to deliver appropriate solutions - and to offer their own ideas as to how institutions might be able to offer better-focused and more effective support. In this respect *Edgeryders* aims to contribute directly to the evidence-based policy-making which is widely promoted by European policy institutions but, as yet, remains infrequently implemented.

What is important to note is the *inter-linkage* between these two aims. Much of the strength of *Edgeryders* as a project lies in its recognition of the power of collaboration and exchange. As this report will demonstrate, the conversations which constitute the project data have been spaces in which Edgeryders have, collaboratively, defined the nature of the challenges they face, frustrations they share and solutions they want to be part of.



There is an urgent need for social policy to take a progressive leap forward in order to proactively address the ways in which Europe's socio-economic problems are impacting on young people's lives. The young people who have become - indeed, who *are* and *have been* for some time - Edgeryders are demonstrably committed to engaging in action where they perceive social benefits and, as such, they are ready to play their part. What they ask of institutions is to be given access to appropriate support mechanisms (discussed in the Call To Action, below) in order to help them articulate the new social forms and cultural norms towards which society must collectively move.

The aim of this report is to present a range of Edgeryders' experiences as they have been expressed in the project platform<sup>3</sup> as a way of articulating the need for action in specific policy domains. The intention is to focus attention both on the most important policy themes (education, employment, access to commons, etc.) and on the ways in which policy is made and delivered in practice. In doing so, it is hoped that the points raised will inform the development of youth-focused policies which are not only well-targeted and responsive to current challenges, but that are also characterised by methods of delivery in which citizens are actively involved rather than imposed upon.

The opening section of this report introduces the Edgeryders community, describes who they are and why they and their experiences matter. This is followed by an overview of the youth policy landscape. This summary of the most recent developments in the European youth policy

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3 <http://edgeryders.ppa.coe.int/>



landscape provides the context within which *Edgeryders* is situated and upon which it aims to have an impact. The main body of the report is entitled *Living On The Edge*. Taking its name from the *Edgeryders* conference at which more than 120 Edgeryders gathered in June 2012, this section presents a range of project participants' own transition experiences as a means of illustrating some of the problems which characterise current youth-institution interactions. The section *Call To Action* constitutes a direct response to the issues raised in *Living On The Edge*. It sets out some of the ways in which institutional responses could simultaneously have a significant positive impact in smoothing Edgeryders' transitions and result in more effective policy outcomes generally. The conclusion to this report reflects on what *Edgeryders* as a project suggests about where next for youth policies, the extent to which the project has been successful as a citizen engagement mechanism, and how it has fulfilled aims beyond those directly concerned with informing future youth policies.



## WHO ARE EDGERYDERS?

### THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF EDGERYDERS' LIVES

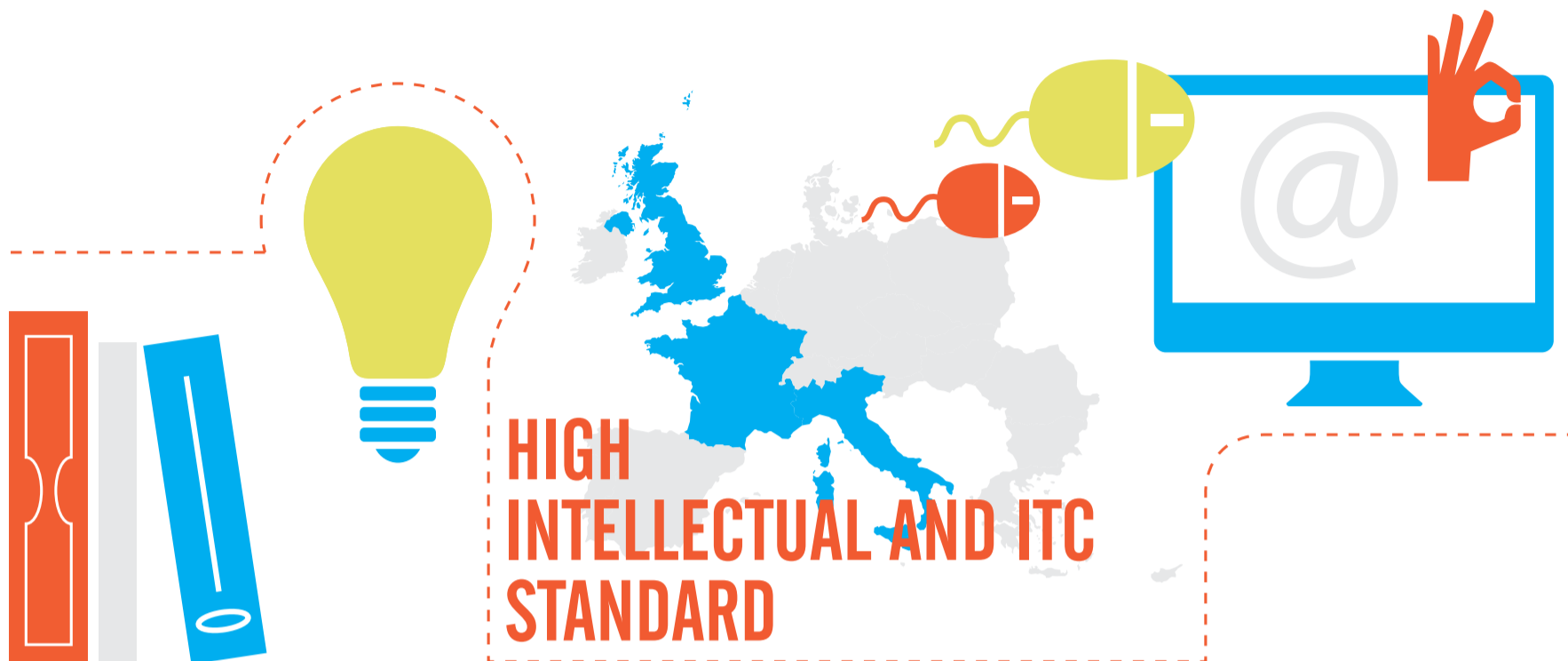
Today's young people's lives are characterised by a range of thorny socio-economic issues. These include: the emergence of new social structures as a result of changing work patterns; the growth of transnational mobility (often driven by the need to find work); the fragmentation of social groups as they have traditionally been defined; tokenistic efforts towards social inclusion for minority groups (see, for example, Bello 2012); the enclosure of commons; and intergenerational inequality. As a result of these (and other) pressures, the widely-acknowledged is-



sue of precariousness now afflicts groups of young people who would not previously have been considered a cause for concern.

It is in this context that young people in Europe are experimenting with innovative solutions and thinking creatively about ways forward. What is important is that, by and large, they are taking this action peacefully and in ways that lead to the betterment not only of their own lives but of others of all ages, within and beyond their immediate communities. That they are able to achieve this in response to polarising large-scale political issues makes their actions worthy of respectful attention from those who would still see them as representing a problem to be solved.

Young people's responses to these politically pressing issues have tended to belie the social position they would be seen as inhabiting in 'old' (arguably now redundant) social structures. In other words, class has less of a bearing on how young people are acting in the world; instead, values shared across class boundaries are the key determining factor. Participants in the Edgeryders project were, for instance, observed to engage in practices such as squatting (that is, occupying abandoned property) not out of financial need (the traditional driver, often experienced by the lowest class groups) but as a way of articulating the principles they want to live by - sharing, the right to a home, and revised concepts of property and value, to name but three. These principles are unequivocally based in the belief that outcomes bigger than fulfilling one's own present needs are at stake. Edgeryders actions are, without doubt, based on common concerns and shared values, and are directed towards building a world that they want to be part of and to contribute to.



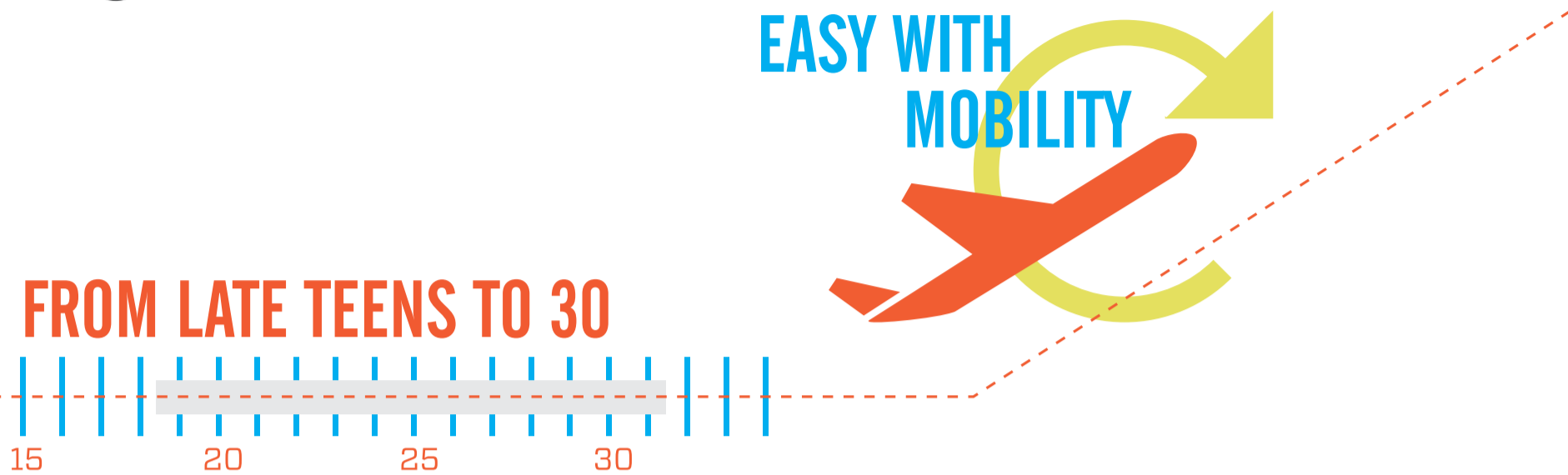
#### WHO ARE EDGERYDERS?

Participation in Edgeryders has been wholly self-selecting. (Further information on participant recruitment can be found in the Methodology section of this Handbook.) Edgeryders were not obliged to provide any personal information in order to participate and were free to remain fully anonymous, contributing to discussions under pseudonyms if they wished, although many contributed under their own names or otherwise identified themselves through information they shared in mission reports. The information Edgeryders shared about their age, education, careers, places of birth and residence, etc., was offered voluntarily in the course of their mission reports<sup>4</sup>. Since the aim of the project was to cast the net wide as a means of eliciting the most diverse range of experiences possible, the participants are characterised by as many differences as similarities.

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<sup>4</sup> Mission reports are the short blog-style articles Edgeryders posted on the platform in response to the questions posed in the themed campaigns.





Few participants stated their exact age but a sense of each participant's location in the life course tends to be evident from the experiences they share. The largest proportion of Edgeryders would seem to be those aged from their late teens to around thirty. However, there have also been regular contributors in their forties and fifties who have shared the same concerns as younger participants. Edgeryders are most commonly resident in the UK, Italy or France, but they come from twenty different countries and are extremely internationally mobile. There is huge variation in the nature of participants' careers or work experience depending on their age, countries inhabited, interests, education and skills. Indeed, some of the richest conversations in the platform were concerned with this topic.

On the whole, Edgeryders shared more similarities than differences. One of the most significant shared characteristics was education, or, perhaps more accurately, their attitudes towards learning. It is certainly the case that not all Edgeryders had followed the same path and received comparable formal qualifications. However, there were two characteristics that Edgeryders seemed to share:



- The vast majority who mentioned their qualifications had attended university as undergraduates, with many having acquired, being in the process of, or considering postgraduate study (Master's degrees or doctorates);
- Regardless of formal qualifications, there was a high intellectual standard displayed in the written content of the platform which suggests a common level of intellectual capital gleaned from a range of both formal and informal educational sources.

In essence, although their educational paths are varied, Edgeryders are bright, articulate and skilled - in other words, they have high cultural capital. The fact that most speak at least two languages to a very high standard emphasises this<sup>5</sup>. A third key facet of this cultural capital is Edgeryders' ICT competence. Since the gateway to participation in the project was a website, ICT competence (as well as access to the necessary technologies) was one of the few prerequisites for access. All Edgeryders were skilled in this regard, not only as demonstrated through their interactions on the platform but also through the resources, projects and initiatives that they discussed, and the networks they made use of. Indeed, often it was these that led them to *Edgeryders*.

This is best reflected in comments made by two participants at the *Edgeryders* mini-conference held in Strasbourg in March 2012. One Edgeryder, when asked where he came from, responded: "*I come from the internet*" prompting another to reply, "*I come from the internet too.*" These comments suggest that many of this group

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<sup>5</sup> Although most mission reports were posted in English, there was no obligation to do so. Participants were invited to post in whichever language they felt most able to communicate their experiences.



consider the internet as the space in which they feel most able to act, connect and have impact. This shared location in the virtual sphere transcends geographical boundaries, facilitates mutual understanding and contributes to a convergence of both aspirations and expectations. It sets the stage for how Edgeryders perceive their roles in society - and, importantly, it defines the terms in which they want to interact with institutions. The location of *Edgeryders* in the virtual realm was what made research on this scale possible; the feasibility of doing so reflects the fact that, compared with the recent past, digital tools have made social and political participation much more accessible, particularly to the young.

While Edgeryders' geographical locations are relatively diverse, what they share is an ease with mobility - more Edgeryders stated that they move between several European cities than stated they live in just one place. Furthermore, their mobility is not restricted to their physical location or movements; they are not only transnational in their mobility, but also trans-sectoral and trans-disciplinary (Potočnik 2012). This flexibility, combined with their apparently high cultural capital, mean that Edgeryders could, in some respects, be described as a privileged group. However, in today's highly technologically- and media-mediated social context, the notion of 'privilege' is itself in flux. A pressing task for social researchers (in both policy and academic domains) is a re-evaluation of what it means to be privileged in an age where growing numbers have internet access but no job or economic security.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A more detailed analysis of this topic is, regrettably, outside the remit of this report; however, see, for example, Jeffrey and McDowell (2004).



A more detailed discussion of the characteristics of *Edgeryders* can be found in Part II of this publication and in the network analysis (Marcus and Vickers 2012).

#### EDGERYDERS AS A SAMPLE

*Edgeryders* has not explicitly aimed for representativeness in the classic social research sense. The aim instead has been to be as inclusive as possible by making use of online tools to which growing numbers of young people, although admittedly not yet all, have access. This approach has offered the most time- and cost-effective means of reaching a large and disparate group, in sufficient numbers to allow the project to draw robust conclusions.

The fact that some young people will inevitably have been excluded from the project because of the methodological choices made has not been overlooked; indeed, it is something that project team has remained acutely aware of. Since the scope of the first iteration of *Edgeryders* was unable to extend the research to engage these harder to reach groups<sup>7</sup>, one of the most important recommendations is the development of further work to fill this gap. This first version of *Edgeryders* could easily act as a starting point where its findings could be tested

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<sup>7</sup> I.e. those who are low skilled and/or vocationally educated, those in rural areas with little access to civic institutions or consultation processes, those in Eastern and Southern Europe of which there were few representatives in the platform (an exception being Romania, perhaps a reflection of the personal networks of the project team), citizens of non-EU member countries, and those who, for various reasons, are on the other side of the digital divide (Potočnik 2012). There are also those whose political activity is illegal or socially stigmatised, such as those who participate in riots and other forms of social unrest (Eriksson 2012). While not condoning these actions, it is no less important to understand the views and experiences of the young people who resort to these acts.



with other groups.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, *Edgeryders* cast its net wide in order to engage a large and diverse group of young people who, more than any other characteristics that might link or divide them, are united by their shared experience of having to creatively navigate their transition to an independent active life in the most challenging socio-economic context in several decades. The group that emerged has produced a dynamic and illuminating space focused on the issues around which there is consensus that social and political change is most urgently needed.

## OVERVIEW OF THE YOUTH POLICY LANDSCAPE

Reflecting the fact that socio-economic modernisation has taken different courses across Europe in recent decades, constructions of ‘youth’ have themselves followed different paths and formed different patterns based on national mindsets and political discourses (Liebau and Chisholm 1993). As a result, cultural influences mean that, across Europe, there is no single definition of what ‘youth transition’ means, what it involves, or how to go about achieving transition successfully (McNeish and Loncle 2003; Walther et al. 2004; Walther 2006). European youth policy reflects this. Policies apply across national boundaries, having been formally agreed and adopted by member states (Chisholm et al. 2011), and aim to formalise specific ambitions or agendas shared across Europe, while devolving responsibility for fulfilling these to individual nations. As such, national gov-

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<sup>8</sup> Members of the *Edgeryders* community are being invited to make use of the experiences they gained as part of this project by supporting other citizen groups to discuss and collaboratively build their own projects aimed at combating the kinds of precariousness specifically associated with exclusion.



ernments are tasked with devising initiatives which address the unique needs of their own young people, thus responding to Council of Europe guidance suggesting that: first, public policies should be anchored in the conditions and aspirations of the target group; second, that these should align with the political objectives set by the respective public authorities; and third, that policy responses should differentiate in response to the increasingly complex, unpredictable and vulnerable trajectories of contemporary youth (Siurala 2006).

It is clear that youth remain high on the agenda of both the European Union and the Council of Europe, as evidenced by, amongst other documents from the EU: the white paper, *A New Impetus for European Youth* (European Commission 2001), which in particular aims to promote active civic participation amongst youth; the *European Youth Pact* (Council of the European Union 2005), which re-emphasizes the need to consult young people and their organizations on the implementation and follow-up of the Pact at the national level; the recent *EU Strategy for Youth - Investing and Empowering - A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities (2010-2018)* (Commission of the European Communities 2009) as well as the subsequent *Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)* (Council of the European Union 2009). These communicate the EU vision for young people, which is based on two key aims: *investing in youth*, which means “putting in place greater resources to develop policy areas that affect young people in their daily life and improve their well-being” and *empowering youth*, which refers to “promoting the potential of young people for the renewal of society and to contrib-



ute to EU values and goals” (EUtrio.be 2011).

The Council of Europe has similarly made its commitment to youth clear in its report, *The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: Agenda 2020* (2008). This document outlines priority areas which include: promoting young people’s active participation in democratic processes and everyday lives; empowering young people to promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; ensuring young people’s access to education, training and working life, particularly through the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning; supporting young people’s transition from education to the labour market; supporting young people’s autonomy and well-being, as well as their access to decent living conditions.

While top-level aims and agendas are formulated at a transnational level, there is no universal approach to youth policy in Europe. The benefits of this flexibility in terms of allowing tailored responses to nationally specific needs are clear. However, it also carries with it a wide range of governance and delivery challenges, including: management, monitoring, work force development and grant allocations. In order to ameliorate potential deficiencies in programmes and practice, an ongoing, open consultation process between policymakers, delivery agents and young people as constituents is essential as a means of ensuring resources are appropriately targeted. The whole process of youth policy creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, therefore, should be one of creative interaction between *politics* (politicians and civil servants), *professionals* related to the issue in question (including youth researchers), *and young people* (not just youth NGOs). Best practice is only likely to emerge from a youth policy forged on the anvil of *mu-*



*tuality* between these groups. In order to facilitate this, maintaining a strong network of key partners is essential (Siurala 2006), as well as finding a common language through which to manage three-way co-operation (Williamson 2008).

It is clear, then, that within transnational European institutions there is top-level commitment to working together for common ends. Subject to less clarity are the capacities of national governments to respond dynamically to national specificities. It has been noted by previous Council of Europe research (Williamson 2002) that all countries in Europe have a youth policy by intent, default or neglect, meaning that whatever a country may do or not do by way of its provision and practice with young people, inevitably its (in)actions have an effect on youth and their futures. The reality in Europe shows that some countries do very little for young people (a policy of neglect), some may be reducing or diminishing their active focus on youth (a policy of default), while most of them frame policies purposefully on their behalf (a policy of intent). Furthermore, despite a shift in focus at the transnational level towards policies which encourage and promote young people's positive actions, some intentional policies remain preoccupied with the control and prevention of negative issues, such as behaviour deemed by institutions to be unacceptable, deviant or anti-social.

It has been suggested that *five* components are necessary for youth policies to move from political rhetoric and aspiration to impact and effectiveness:

1. **Coverage** - This refers to the geographical dimensions of social groups and policy issues. In spatial terms, how far does youth policy *reach* from the centre of admin-





istration? Do policy initiatives and measures actually reach all the young people at whom they are directed, especially when core objectives of particular policies are concerned with equalizing opportunities or combating social exclusion? What is the ‘reach’ of youth policy? Is it conceived within relatively narrow parameters, or does it embrace all those areas and aspects of policy that impinge on young people’s lives?

2. **Capacity** - Do the structures exist to ‘make youth policy happen’? What are the relationships between central administrations and those at regional and local levels? Where does authority lie? Is that the appropriate place for effective action? And what is the *structural* relationship between governmental processes and practices, non-governmental activity and youth organizations?
3. **Competence** - Are those in the youth policy field suitably skilled to deliver effective services? What is the relationship between professionals and ‘volunteers’? How do those working with and for young people build their knowledge, skills and attitudes - and keep them up to date?
4. **Co-ordination/Co-operation/Communication** - What is the nature of contact between different levels of administration and across different domains of youth policy?
5. **Cost** - The human and financial resources available for discharging the responsibilities of youth policy are essential for the generation of effective practice. A clear understanding of resource allocations and distribution, priority activities, and core and more discretionary budgets is necessary in order to permit the exploration of the four points above.



In light of the aspirations of policymakers for young people to be active citizens, the crucial question arises as to whether young people in transition have sufficient power and resources to accomplish all that is expected of them. Of paramount importance here is the need for the political championship of new agendas in response to the emergent needs of young people at this crucial stage. European research on change in young people's transitions from youth to adulthood in general, and from school to work in particular, largely agrees upon a diagnosis of ongoing de-standardization, individualization and fragmentation of transitions. This means that young people's biographical perspectives, their subjective appropriation of their own life courses, have to be taken seriously into consideration when formulating policy responses which will help rather than hinder their attempts to successfully navigate their transitions to independence. The diversification and uncertainty of biographical destinations related to the process of de-standardization (magnified all the more in the present socio-economic context) tends to transgress the interpretative repertoire of national cultures and policy structures, thus presenting a further level of challenge to nation states as they attempt to regulate transitions, especially in preventing and combating attendant risks of social exclusion.

Accordingly, understanding the complex, interlinked factors shaping the educational and labour market careers of young people in contemporary Europe, the unexpected ways that policy measures impact upon vulnerable youth, and the difficulties of managing the interrelations and interdependencies between key youth policy areas (including education, employment and housing) should be a priority. At the same time, the growing and shifting im-



pacts of globalization, mobility, migration and democratic renewal (amongst other global social issues) emphasise the need to constantly review the aims, scope, nature and means of delivery of youth policies. Furthermore, and perhaps most crucially, youth policies must shift their energy from being reactive to *proactive*. If young people in Europe are genuinely seen as a resource for social renewal by policymakers, frameworks and support mechanisms which help them to live up to this role must be more readily forthcoming.

#### EDGERYDERS AT THE (CUTTING) EDGE OF YOUTH POLICY?

Denstad (2009) recommends that amongst other objectives, European youth policies should:

- Involve young people both in the strategic formulation of youth policies and in eliciting their views about the operational effectiveness of policy implementation;
- Establish systems for robust data collection, both to demonstrate the effectiveness of youth policies and to reveal the extent to which “policy gaps”<sup>9</sup> exist in relation to effective service delivery to young people from certain social groups, in certain areas or in certain conditions; to display a commitment to reducing such policy gaps where they demonstrably exist.

These are important points to note in light of the power of the internet to aid participation and transparency.

While policy makers have always, in some respects, been

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<sup>9</sup> *The overall assumption is that a youth policy will fulfil the needs of young people and that all young people will be fully equipped to meet the challenges of adulthood. This is a utopian assumption, and there will be weaknesses in any policy designed to meet those needs. It is shortfalls like these in the effectiveness of policies which are referred to as “policy gaps” (Williamson 2008).*



answerable to citizens through the governments as part of which they operate (and for which citizens, to a greater or lesser extent, vote in elections), the possibilities presented by the internet for unhappy citizens to articulate their frustration means that the stakeholders in policy making and delivery are a more significant presence. Not only can they watch more closely, they can comment (figuratively speaking) more loudly. Only a decade or two ago the signals from the lived experience of policy back to the policy makers was slow and open to interference as a result of those signals being diluted by multiple intermediaries. Today, signals of citizens' experiences of policy land directly in the policy making arena, with far fewer intermediaries, perhaps only a website. If institutional commitment to evidence-based policy making is genuine, young citizens will be watching to confirm or deny whether the evidence on which policy is based is true.

As a result of this greater visibility, it is easier to identify where there is wastage - in terms of money, effort and human potential. One of the biggest threats to the ability of Europe to thrive in coming decades is what is happening to its young people in the current economic turmoil. If it is true that the way in which youth is conceptualised in youth policy has shifted from youth as problem to youth as solution or resource, it is essential that these resources are not wasted through being neglected or mis-targeted. One of the primary aims of this report, and the *Edgeryders* project as a whole, is to provide the policy audience with insights which could help to reduce, even eliminate, the wasted potential of young lives, as well as other forms of waste which result from the inefficient dissemination of institutional resources.



The urgency of this is well articulated by one of the project participants, James, who writes:

*“We realise now that the most valuable technology that is being discarded by our society is PEOPLE. We are seeing talented, skilled people unmobilised, and we think that this is a criminal waste. We also see deeply uninspiring, value-free jobs (like working in call centres) as the only structural answer put forward by mainstream business and industry, and we want people to work with us to develop more inspiring, creative, engaging, and socially valuable jobs as an alternative.”<sup>10</sup>*

The question emerges of which face a supra-national youth policy should have in order to formulate national youth policies which are acceptable for the governments of the (present and future) member states. It is important to note that at a European level youth issues enjoy perhaps a higher profile through the EU and the Council of Europe, than they do in many national contexts. As such, it is essential that these and other transnational institutions remain drivers and supporters of well-researched, well-devised, and well-targeted youth policies. More than this, however, it will be vital to go beyond commitments to structured dialogue between youth and institutions, as outlined in the European Commission White Paper on Youth<sup>11</sup> (and reiterated in the *Renewed Framework*) (Devlin 2010), to a system based on ongoing consultation, collaboration and involvement. Doing so will positively impact on institutional ability to devise

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<sup>10</sup> James, *Access Space, A New Model for Individual and Community Development*

<sup>11</sup> *Committee of Ministers Resolution (98) 6*; *Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1437 (2000) 1*; *The European Commission White Paper on Youth Policy A new impetus for European Youth (2001)*.



youth policies that actually achieve the desired results. This is particularly important since one of the most significant challenges for policy makers is the fact that many areas outside of the traditional concerns of youth policy influence young people's attitudes towards the political sphere. This is well illustrated by Edgeryders' experiences as revealed through their mission reports in the project platform. The following section, *Living On The Edge*, presents some of these experiences and highlights instances in which policy support was most crucially felt to be missing or misplaced.

## LIVING ON THE EDGE

In June 2012, over 120 Edgeryders from across Europe gathered at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to engage with policymakers face-to-face. Taking its title from the name of this event, *Living On The Edge*, this section presents four areas in which Edgeryders' experiences seem to be most profoundly at odds with existing policy structures. It has been suggested that, "*Young people are highly positive towards democracy, although they are often critical towards the way institutions work*" (Titley 2008). In light of this, the challenge for youth policy is perhaps less about encouraging participation amongst youth (although for certain groups this may remain relevant) but to find a way to align the work of institutions with the expectations and practices of today's young people in order to regain legitimacy amongst them. This section draws directly on Edgeryders' experiences in order to shed light on how and why a critical stance towards institutions has developed amongst European youth, focusing in particular on their direct interactions with a range of government bodies and administrative structures.



## REALISING VALUE IN WORK, IN EDUCATION, IN COMMUNITIES

It is clear from the nature of Edgeryders' precariousness that one of the fundamental points of friction with policymakers concerns what constitutes work of value. This extends far beyond young people's (precarious) place in the labour market to issues including: how different professional skills are valued, and by whom; the notions of value associated with different forms of education (or learning), and whether this value is perceived in personal (intellectual) or economic terms; and the extent to which unpaid work within communities should be valued monetarily.

### REALISING VALUE IN WORK

One of the most significant problems for Edgeryders is the fact that existing policies and labour market norms fail to value contributions to society (and thus, directly or indirectly, the economy) that do not conform to current definitions of 'work'. One contributor, Edwin, described the very different situations of two friends: one who is viewed positively by the government for being in work (despite the fact that the nature of that work may result in the need for government spending on foreign aid and mediation); the other who is threatened with removal of his welfare payments if he does not give up his unpaid work running a community cinema in order to take a menial job in retail.<sup>12</sup> The threat of withdrawal of financial support from those who work to improve social cohesion and wellbeing (work which is rarely acknowledged as valuable through the creation of paid roles) actively devalues

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<sup>12</sup> Edwin, *Mo Money, Mo Problems*



efforts to improve communities and marks out these individuals as a problem to be solved rather than a welcome (relatively low cost) solution. Edwin writes:

*“We need to stop fetishising paid work, and value socially-minded productivity more. That means we need a new way to value a productive human hour - not just the current measure, which is the hourly wage.”*

He argues for the need for better support for ‘informal work’ than the *“current, informal one (which provides very little security), where young people must survive, sometimes for years, on grants or benefits whilst doing wonderful things for others. What about a low, guaranteed wage for full-time community workers, or something similar?”*

Having their work devalued by being told it is not the ‘right sort’ of work is by no means the only problem Edgeryders are facing. Young people’s precariousness is both taken advantage of and exacerbated by the recent growth in short-term, unpaid or low paid internship or work experience placements. There are two dominant issues here. First, this fragmentation of the transition into work through the proliferation of short-term employment opportunities is flooding the labour market with a new form of ‘portfolio’ worker which, paradoxically, the market also seems unable to accommodate. Both public and private sector organisations are implicated as a result of current preferences for flexible contract working arrangements which keep the cost of employment down and mean staff numbers can be rapidly reduced at times of greatest economic difficulty. However, the transitory experience of work experienced by contract employees is causing major





problems in a crowded labour market.

One Edgeryder, Charanya, describes how the nature of short-term work opportunities has meant the emergence of young people who possess cross- or multi-disciplinary skill sets - what Charanya describes as ‘hybrids’ and what other Edgeryders have discussed in terms of ‘portfolio’ career workers.<sup>13</sup> While in one sense these might be viewed as offering an advantage in the current context, Charanya articulates the problem that several Edgeryders also reported:



*“Society favours classical titles and hybrids fit none making it difficult for them to find a place in the traditional job market.”*

Anca’s mission report revealed her first-hand experience of this frustration<sup>14</sup>:



*“I have been told I have too much experience, I have been told I do not have any, I have been told I am too young or too old. I have been told I am way ahead of myself to be applying for a certain job, or not courageous enough to apply for another. [...] I have been applying for jobs for 8 years in 3 countries and honestly I don’t have a clue what recruiters want.”*

In essence, both public and private institutions are complicit in creating a new form of worker which they then seem unable or unwilling to recruit.

The second circumstance in which young people’s precar-

<sup>13</sup> Charanya, *Where Edgeryders Dare: Paid Work - Challenges and Path Forward*

<sup>14</sup> Anca, *Surviving Recruitment: Advantage this Disadvantages*



iousness is being taken advantage of specifically pertains to the social inequality implications of unpaid and low paid work experience. Idil explains:

*“I remember feeling absolutely scandalised and disgusted when the head of a UN organisation who had come to give a careers talk at our university early on in the year, when asked about the culture of unpaid internships in the organisation, replied in a blasé manner that ‘we expect your parents to pay’. [...] This reeks of hypocrisy especially when the same organisation is claiming to fight poverty and social injustice across the world. So, whilst my colleagues were doing internships in Brussels and the Hague over the Easter break thanks to the bank of mum and dad, others like myself were denied these same opportunities by being inadvertently excluded through the unpaid internship schemes run by many governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.”<sup>15</sup>*



In a labour market flooded with young people desperate to secure permanent work, there is no shortage of highly-qualified candidates for institutions to choose from for their internship programmes. However, those most able to take up these opportunities for little or no pay are those whose (families’) social and economic capital is able to support them.

For those without these resources, these opportunities remain out of reach or at high personal cost, necessitating either taking on debt or risking personal health and

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<sup>15</sup> IdilM, *The Quest For Paid Work: Unpaid internships are discriminatory and should be ended.*



wellbeing by taking on paid work alongside the unpaid work.

### REALISING VALUE IN EDUCATION

A similar problem exists when it comes to education - or what might be better described as pathways or spaces of learning. Much discussion within the *Making A Living* and *Learning* campaigns featured on the Edgeryders web platform concerned the extent to which current formal education systems prioritise forms of learning that fail to meet the needs of today's young people.

There was a widespread sense in particular that university had a role to play in preparing students for the 'real world', including today's highly competitive labour market, yet the consensus was that this role was far from being fulfilled. Amalia, for instance, writes:

*"It's quite obvious that doing the basic mandatory studies isn't enough anymore. We live in a very competitive and dynamic world, which changes every day. For this reason, I firmly believe that we should do our best to acquire all necessary skills in this globalised world. But which are those skills? [...] Who can help us acquiring those skills which we need so much? Well, up to a certain point, school of course. I mean, particularly those technical skills. But, school is not enough. It's not enough for technical skills and it's clearly not enough for Important Skills or for Soft Skills."*<sup>16</sup>



Yet young Europeans feel compelled to stay within formal education systems, in part because of the resound-

16 Amalia, *Reality Check: Basic Skills, V.I.S. and Soft Skills*



ing message from those systems and potential employers that formal education is a necessary requirement for their transition to independent life, but also because at present there is simply no place for them in the labour market. At the same time, the old guarantee that formal qualifications constitute the passport to a successful and stable career is fast disappearing. The message currently being sent by the job market is quite the contrary with large proportions of graduates precariously employed in short-term, low-skilled jobs.

Some Edgeryders felt at a loss to know how to acquire the skills they need to give themselves the greatest chance of achieving stability. Others had already begun to explore how to fill their knowledge gaps by taking innovative approaches to alternative forms of learning. Edgeryder Higiaco was one of the most outspoken critics of current formal education systems, writing:

*“20 years at school didn’t teach me how to: [...] Face complex situations / setting the problem [...]. Where and how I learnt it: The first work experience I had taught me there’s no pre-defined solution for everything.”<sup>17</sup>*



Higiaco’s response was to develop an online repository for video courses to supplement the materials provided by his university, and since then he has devised an online career guidance service. Another Edgeryder, Ben, has developed a similar initiative, a course module called *professional reality development* which provides an innovative space *within* formal education to discuss the tran-

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<sup>17</sup> Higiaco, *Evaluation broke education*



sition to ‘real life’ outside university.<sup>18</sup> There is evidently a growing need from young people for support from institutions during this phase, and there is scope for universities to add value to the higher education experience by acknowledging and responding to this.

There may, however, be one further barrier to the expansion of these kinds of support mechanisms. The Edgeryders who are already active in plugging the learning gaps in higher education - such as Higiaco and Ben - are making considerable use of peer learning, support and collaboration. The idea of *sharing* in formal education has tended to be viewed with suspicion - avoided because collaborative working makes it difficult to conduct formal assessments of individual performance, which current educational norms view as being the best means of evaluation. Yet collaboration and idea-sharing is increasingly a fundamental part of what drives innovation. Furthermore, learning is nowadays less about preparation for a specific career and more a means of ensuring personal flexibility and resilience in an increasingly uncertain world. There is, therefore, a growing need for formal education to value and actively nurture forms of learning - especially those rooted in collaboration - that are better able to prepare young people for the world they must inevitably navigate. In essence, sharing as a means of learning needs to be reframed as a positive thing to be encouraged, rather than discouraged, as present norms tend to dictate.

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18 Ben, *Spotlight Social Innovation: Professional Reality Development*



## REALISING VALUE IN COMMUNITIES

It should be understood that Edgeryders are not only concerned about how their own skills, competencies and contributions are valued. They are equally concerned with how the notion of value is attached (or not, as the case may be) to common resources - buildings, monuments, public spaces, nature, and human potential. A particular preoccupation of some Edgeryders has been re-opening access to public buildings. Alessia, for instance, provides detailed accounts of how theatres around Italy are being opened up for community use; for classes, workshops, talks and discussions, barter markets, childcare and entertainment.<sup>19</sup>

The key point shared by Edgeryders working to re-open access to these common spaces is one of a double crisis of waste: first, the resource (whether a building, public square or rural green space) itself is being wasted through lack of use; second, human potential is being wasted as a direct result, since people are unable to access resources that they could otherwise bring into productive use, stimulating local economies and improving community wellbeing and cohesion. In a mission report by Jody commenting on the million empty homes in the UK, Alberto writes,

*“... it is hard, especially in a crisis-ridden country, to justify such a waste.”<sup>20</sup>*



While in some countries public administrations seem

<sup>19</sup> Alessia, *The acknowledgement of social value: The legitimate illegality culture as a commons. A journey through the Italian spaces occupied by knowledge workers #1 and #2*

<sup>20</sup> Comment by Alberto in a mission report by Jody, *Protecting and enhancing commons: 1,000,000 empty homes in the UK - authoritarian or co-operative housing?*



content to overlook the actions of groups which attempt to return commons to public use, in others Edgeryders risk criminalisation in response to their attempts to work for public benefit. It is clear that economic (property) value is being privileged over social value. What appears to remain unacknowledged by regional administrations, however, is the amount of local benefit that arises from access to these spaces, without the need for direct input from those institutions themselves. Indeed, often it seems that work goes on when requests for support from public administrations are ignored.

In one sense, public administrations could be seen as inhibiting the potential for their cities to develop new modes of economic prosperity. This is something that Edgeryders are all too familiar with, as they too find their opportunities to develop their own economic prosperity constrained by current policies. In frustration at the apparent inability of governments to acknowledge the different forms of value created by community activities, Edgeryders are participating in several other informal economic systems which do acknowledge this work. Amongst these are barter currencies (local currencies which directly stimulate local economic exchange) and time-banking (local currencies where the unit of exchange is one hour of work). Edgeryder neodynos underlines the benefits of these systems beyond the acknowledgement of the labour they represent:

*“They offer economic development options amidst all the current economic collapse and high unemployment, potentially also triggeri[n]g a revival of the formal economy.”<sup>21</sup>*

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21 Neodynos, *Spotlight social innovation: Alternative currencies to the rescue?*



Means of stimulating the formal economy from a grass-roots community level should be an important topic for reflection in policy circles, since economic concerns remain those highest on the agenda.

#### HOW ARE EDGERYDERS REALISING VALUE?

It is evident that there is considerable disparity between how value is perceived within the current norms of the labour market, formal education, and local or regional government, and in the ways in which Edgeryders want to contribute - and are contributing - to society. Edgeryders are, instead, creating and working within their own regimes of value - whether that is innovating new ways of learning or meeting their material needs through barter. They are drawing attention - peacefully but visibly - to where there is conspicuous waste in present systems by re-opening access to abandoned resources, and to instances in which policies are simply contradictory - such as encouraging community cohesion yet withdrawing support for those working towards these ends.

What is needed is a post-ideological institutional consensus on the definition(s) and meaning(s) of value, which avoids the issue of some definitions undermining or conflicting with others. Framing both economic and social value in more expansive and flexible terms would make a significant contribution to reducing the prevalence of waste in present systems. Doing so would not only make policy delivery mechanisms more efficient, but also accommodate the kinds of values and priorities - such as cooperation, community development, democratic participation and sustainability - on which Edgeryders are already basing their actions.





## MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

Edgeryders like to make things happen swiftly and efficiently. Sometimes this is through necessity; their precariousness requires fast action in order to ensure an income, a means of tapping into a new network, or simply somewhere to live. In other cases Edgeryders want to make things happen through frustration that nobody else seems willing or able to; this can involve anything from bringing public buildings back into active use to providing career support services for students leaving university. Whatever the circumstances, Edgeryders like to *do it now* and seek others in search of the same ends in order to realise their projects efficiently. This section presents some of the ways in which Edgeryders are making things happen for the benefit of others, as well as themselves, and discusses some of the institutional barriers that inhibit their success.

### AGGREGATING INDIVIDUALS

Most Edgeryders would contend that collectives of individuals can make things happen faster and more efficiently than bulky institutions - and several contributors offer evidence of this. Alberto, for instance, presented Spaghetti Open Data, a website which aggregates public data making it available for public use.<sup>22</sup> While Spaghetti Open Data took around two months to build based on wholly voluntary labour, it was over a year before the national government followed suit with its own open data portal. Open source communities (Wikipedia being the best known example) offer prime evidence of the power of aggregated individual effort in instigating huge projects

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22 Alberto, *Spaghetti open data: A little thing that feels right*



- and seeing them through to completion where a formal 'end' point is intended - achieving more faster and on a larger scale than a single (large) organisation would be able to manage. That this is possible is thanks to the organisational and participatory powers of the internet. Yet despite the fact that open source communities have been established as efficient 'making things happen' mechanisms for a number of years<sup>23</sup>, and despite their demonstrable efficacy in achieving their stated objectives, funding for projects remains heavily weighted towards established institutions - described in conversations between Edgeryders as "those with a letterhead" - rather than the newer, more innovative, and more dynamic organisational forms. In other words, there appears to be a deeply entrenched bias towards assumptions of institutional efficacy over individual (networked) efficacy.

The apparent lack of trust between these two organisational forms is severely inhibiting the ability of both to achieve their respective aims. Building this trust requires willingness to engage in a productive working relationship built on openness and collaboration. Edgeryders who are active in open source community ventures, as well as other forms of social innovation, need *institutional* support for *non-institutionalised* trans-national collaborations. Mechanisms are required to help individuals, small groups and networks address large scale problems, and funding streams which allocate funds to non-institutional bodies or projects should form a central part of these. Edgeryders are demonstrably keen to play their

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<sup>23</sup> Neodynos suggests that open source communities have existed for as long as computer programming has existed, but notes that growing access to open source hosting and other tools in the last 10-12 years has had a significant impact on its proliferation: comment on mission report *The history of open source communities*.



part in helping institutions understand their aims, ambitions, and modes of operating, and this has been best articulated in a letter to potential funders written by participants in Edgecamp, a two-day event which followed the *Edgeryders* conference in June 2012.<sup>24</sup>

The full text of the letter can be found in [Appendix A](#).

#### OPENNESS, UNDERSTANDING, ACCOUNTABILITY

The difficulties Edgeryders report in accessing funding or other kinds of support suggest that there is some anxiety amongst institutions about the level of risk involved in doing so. These anxieties could be reduced through more open and collaborative conversation between those seeking support and those with support to offer, with the result that funders better understand what they are being asked to support and perhaps feel reassured by evidence of existing success. This kind of communication not only helps projects to progress more rapidly, the development of individual relationships along with greater transparency means all parties are also more accountable. High levels of performance are incentivised in order to maintain reputations.

The need for greater openness is not only confined to funding. There are other ways in which it can have significant benefits, not only for Edgeryders' projects but also wider communities and their relationships with administrative institutions. Open data is one key example which received considerable attention in the Edgeryders platform. Open data - where institutional data is made available for public consultation - helps groups or individuals take action of their own accord, allowing citizens

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24 *Demsoc, Funding 2.0 Edgecamp Session: 'Dear Funders' Letter*



to engage directly with the heart of political institutions on issues that matter to them, rather than interacting sporadically with government representatives. Edgeryder Demsoc articulated the value of this to citizens in the context of an open data network mapping initiative called We Live Here:

*“People don’t think about “democracy”, they think about needs. Although people felt that there were issues that they wanted to raise with the council and with public services, the civic activists we spoke to were largely uninterested in “democracy” conceptually. They were interested in getting solutions to community needs, and expressing community voices - goals that actually would need to be delivered by democracy.”<sup>25</sup>*



Not only do citizens have the right to follow the work of their local administrations in real time in order to hold them accountable, open data can equally be seen as a means of co-operation between government and citizens to create better services, using the data where small citizen initiatives can act in more agile ways than institutions. As one Edgeryder suggests:

*“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. [...] You would think institutions might react badly, but so far they actually liked it a lot. I think what is happening is this: civil society is emerging as an ally of the innovators within the public sector. They can go to their bosses and say “look, these guys are hell bent*



*on this stuff. Either we move fast or they will move first and leave us looking like idiots. The good news is, we can ask them to help us, and they will! So we can appropriate some political benefit releasing data, and everybody wins”.*<sup>26</sup>

While there is much talk in both public and private sector circles about the best balance to be struck between top-down and bottom-up approaches to engaging with publics, Edgeryders are employing approaches that are best described as ‘from-the-middle-and-out’. One participant, Pedro, presented his initiative called Kyopol, a system which uses the internet as a catalyst for civic engagement and citizen action. Pedro writes:

*“Kyopol promotes the development of “high quality” civic initiatives, by providing tools, methodologies and teaching resources that promote a participation which is transparent, informed, balanced, profound and documented. [...] Kyopol works, in short, as a decentralized and transparent “Facebook of civic engagement”, which would be regularly used by citizens and institutions of all kinds, to inform (/inform themselves) about civic initiatives taking place in the places they care for, and deal with subjects that matter to them.”*<sup>27</sup>



These multiple ways of creating more openness between institutions and citizens both empower citizens to find

<sup>26</sup> Alberto in comments on his mission report, *Spaghetti Open Data: A little thing that feels right*

<sup>27</sup> Pedro, *Creation of Kyopol System (aka: “Symbiotic City”): The internet as a catalyst for civic engagement and citizens’ activation - ckyosei.org*



and act on their own solutions to community needs, and offer a foundation on which institutions can build their own information-sharing initiatives. What is needed as far as Edgeryders are concerned is more active instigation of these activities and relationships by institutions, as well as more support for initiatives developed outside of institutional walls. One of the tools which might increase the willingness of institutions to invest funding in community-developed projects is the use of models, tried-and-tested scenarios or ‘prototypes’.

### PROTOTYPING PROJECTS

Prototyping offers the creators of projects a means of testing the feasibility of their ideas, working out the capacity for those ideas to be scaled up, eliciting feedback, and gaining acknowledgement of success as their project grows and is developed in new locations. Often the projects Edgeryders have devised or are part of constitute a prototype - an initiative that they hope will grow in impact but that requires refinement, as well as more investment, before that happens. Securing this investment is what often proves difficult. Yet some Edgeryders are involved in initiatives that prototype new forms of living and working and are able to achieve institutional support. The best known of these is the “Transition Towns” movement, which aims to support communities in increasing their resilience to economic and environmental shocks.<sup>28</sup> While Transition Towns are community initiated and led, they are often able to gain support from local municipalities. In part this seems to stem from their ability to take a holistic systems perspective of the interactions and ex-

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28 James, *Experiments in resilience in a small UK market town*



changes in a town and recognize how all involved stakeholders have a part to play in the ‘transition’.

The notion of a Transition Town was itself once a prototype (in Totnes, Devon, in the UK) and is now a successful and growing global movement. However, its innovative stance on what a community could be needed local institutional legitimacy and support in order to thrive. Innovation in all its forms requires a similar approach - one where ideas are given space to flourish organically, rather than prescribed in ways which extinguish creativity. It is also important to acknowledge that the reason for the level of success achieved by the Transition Towns movement is its fundamental basis in communities that want to take action for and by themselves, yet with an eye to wider social impacts and global concerns. *Edgeryders* might be seen as a similar such community with the potential to achieve impacts on a comparable scale.

Perhaps more importantly, however, is what Edgeryders as individuals might be able to take from the Transition movement to support the establishment of their own community projects. Transition Towns have mobilised local communities, networking them internally (forging crucial links with local public administrations, for instance) as well as externally on a global scale,<sup>29</sup> in ways that not only support the development of local initiatives but provide valuable information, support and guidance to like-minded others the world over. Edgeryders are already adept creators and navigators of networked communities; they simply require the kind of institutional support (at multiple levels) that helped the Transition

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<sup>29</sup> Transition Towns can now be found all over the world, from the US and Canada, to South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, as well as across Europe.



Town movement progress from prototype to a transnational model of achievable community sustainability.

There is also a second facet to the value of prototyping projects or scenarios. There can sometimes be several possible solutions to a particular issue, with no clear consensus on how to proceed. There follows a situation with lots of trial and error and many small scale experiments, some failing and some succeeding rapidly. At the same time there is much imitation, adaption and mutation of ideas, particularly when those ideas are developed and tried out in the open space of the internet. In essence, there are considerable opportunities to share the outcomes of prototypes - stories of success and failure - in order to help develop solutions more efficiently. While the internet provides the arena for these exchanges, what tends to be the barrier to more frequent sharing of problems, trials and failures is the need to succeed in order to secure progress or, often, a personal livelihood, and thus the lack of time to problem-solve and experiment some more. Failure is rarely a passport to an immediate income, yet this does not negate the fact that once-failed initiatives can still harbour the potential to be a future success, with a little more work. This is an important issue to be borne in mind by institutions when considering the nature of support to be provided to innovative projects.

### INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

So what support do Edgeryders need most in order to help them *make things happen*? It is clear that in many ways they are already achieving a considerable amount; the point is, however, that institutional support could help them scale up their projects considerably, increasing





their reach and impact. And since Edgeryders projects tend to be focused on filling current policy gaps, providing support to existing initiatives may offer institutions a relatively low cost and low effort means of addressing them. There are two key ways in which institutions could act to help Edgeryders here.

The first concerns freeing citizens from regulation that, at presents, constrains, if not criminalises, some of their actions. One prime example would be granting easier access to unused public buildings; another would be to promote and support more flexible ways of learning that redefine what it means to be ‘qualified’ to engage in particular forms of work. Allowing citizens greater scope to self organise and self manage means that citizens and institutions together can be far more dynamic than any institution alone in managing a whole raft of socio-economic challenges.

The second sense in which institutions could help Edgeryders is in the form of direct project support. To some extent this is a matter of funding. Edgeryder Alberto suggests:



*“People - especially young people - want to save the world anyway, and if they know their bills are paid a lot more of them will give it a go.”<sup>30</sup>*

One suggestion made within *Edgeryders* is that of a guaranteed basic minimum wage for those working on community projects. This would not only negate the threat of being forced to give up community work for paid work, but it would also acknowledge the value of that work by

<sup>30</sup> Comment by Alberto in a mission report by Edwin, *Mo Money, Mo Problems*



pricing it. However, money is not everything to Edgeryders. Other support is needed too, particularly mechanisms that can help them scale up their projects or continue refinement and experimentation when prototypes fail. Edgeryder James, talked about his UK-based initiative, Access Space, which makes use of unwanted ICT equipment by using it in IT classes for marginalised social groups. Despite having a proven methodology with results to show, the only way Access Space was able to access to European grants was to work under a regional development organization which shielded them from a “frightening” level of bureaucracy. James writes:

*“There was no way we could have accessed ERDF funding with our levels of experience. We came in as a minor delivery partner, insulated from the frightening bureaucracy of the project by more experienced lead partners.”<sup>31</sup>*

While making accessing grants and other sorts of funding easier would, undoubtedly, be welcomed by Edgeryders (see the “Dear Funders” letter, [Appendix A](#)), there remains considerable scope for policy-makers to think innovatively about how they can help Edgeryders, or indeed any individual or community group, as well as themselves as policy delivery agents, to make processes of up-scaling successful projects more efficient.

## **BUILDING TRUST**

The lack of faith in institutions which Edgeryders share is largely the result of the perception that institutional actions often undermine their own aims, either by failing to act on opportunities to live up to policy promises,

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<sup>31</sup> James, *Access Space: A new model for individual and community development*



or through policies which simply contradict one another. The result is a fundamental lack of trust amongst young people in established ways of doing politics. This does not necessarily mean that institutions themselves are mis-trusted (although that is not uncommon), but that they and the dominant political structures of which they form part are viewed as ill-equipped to face new political challenges, utilize new participatory opportunities or adapt to new circumstances.

Furthermore, these frustrations extend to organisations that, in some respects, position themselves directly as facilitators of communications between citizens and government - NGOs and other third sector entities. When partnerships with these kinds of organisations are required for reasons of fulfilling funders' requirements, additional unnecessary administrative barriers can arise, with third parties abusing their administrative power and undermining the project initiator's ability to deliver a successful project. How, then, can institutions - public, private and third sector - go about building trust such that the citizens who seek to work with them can believe that their work will be respected, supported and developed?

#### CLARITY, TRANSPARENCY, REFLEXIVITY

One major problem requiring urgent resolution is that of different levels or areas of government setting policies that fail to join up. Edgeryders have found themselves trapped between policies that make competing, often contradictory demands. In one sense this is an internal communication exercise for government departments (across all levels) and policy advice bodies. But in the short term, what should citizens do when they are caught



between policies? At the very least they should be assured of facing no negative repercussions (termination of welfare support, for example). What is missing is a space for those who devise and implement policies which conflict to negotiate resolutions which do not leave the problems in the hands of citizens. At present, Edgeryders are acutely aware that governments are incapable of solving - sometimes even noticing - their own internal contradictions. Yet resolution at this level is a fundamental part of building citizens' trust in institutions' means to deliver on their stated aims. Policy makers need to innovate here, devising their own hacks and bridges to address these problems.

In order to do this, policy makers must get closer to the lived impacts of their policies. This tends to be a significant gap in policy development, since current institutional cultures - the norms that are followed when thinking about how to make policy - hinder, if not prevent outright, policy makers from interacting personally with the complexities of how their policies are lived in real life. The benefits of institutions relaxing self-written rules about how policy is best made are potentially profound in terms of devising policies that work alongside rather than against each other. Policy makers should feel that directly engaging with the citizens who must live the repercussions of their policies is a legitimate - indeed, a vital - policy research tool. Rather than being condemned for attempting to drive forward new ways of developing policies that clash with institutional internal politics or norms, reaching out to constituents should be welcomed. As one policy maker who attended the *Living On The Edge* conference said to the assembled Edgeryders, "I need people like you to shake me up." Inevitably, those



who step into their constituents' world will find scenarios which are complex, requiring flexible, dynamic and responsive policy instruments. However, putting these instruments in place need not, in itself, be a complex exercise, since often what Edgeryders are seeking is less rather than more direct institutional involvement. What they need is for institutions to be allies rather than enforcers.

### ALLIES RATHER THAN ENFORCERS

Edgeryders were clear about their need for allies of all sorts during their transition to an independent life. While they acknowledged family, friends and peers as valuable allies in providing forms of assistance from food and a place to live to moral support and seed funding, they were equally clear about the difficulties of forming allegiances with institutions.<sup>32</sup> Alberto, for instance, expressed his frustration at the dismissal of a successful social policy prototype he designed (at tax payers' expense) when changes in government meant that projects associated with the previous administration were scrapped.<sup>33</sup> Simone relayed the story of his efforts to implement a rural local development plan, only to be obstructed and denied support from government institutions at several different levels.<sup>34</sup> Similar stories of Edgeryders' actions being blocked or simply ignored by the institutions with whom they wanted to work were remarkably common,

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<sup>32</sup> Further detail on Edgeryders' relationships with their allies can be found in Part II of this publication.

<sup>33</sup> Comment by Alberto in a mission report by Beckery, *Small scale vs large scale efficiency*

<sup>34</sup> Comment by Simone in a mission report by Beckery, *Small scale vs large scale efficiency*



yet opening up to the initiatives presented to them may in fact have offered those institutions solutions to social problems that they had otherwise been unable to solve, or even address. In this respect, Edgeryders and institutions could quite easily fulfil some of each other's needs; this would simply require institutions to stop thinking of themselves as enforcers of rules and inhibitors of actions, and reposition themselves as allies in bringing about positive change.

One way in which institutions could be better allies is merely by granting Edgeryders more space. There are two senses in which this is the case. The first concerns Edgeryders' projects or initiatives. These require a period in which Edgeryders and their collaborators are simply left to get on with it, in order to see whether the project is strong enough to gain momentum and become a success. If it is, there may be a strong case for providing institutional support to help that project develop, grow, or otherwise become sustainable. Edgeryder Alessia, talking about her work in bringing unused public buildings back into use, writes:

*“In this case I mean that before deciding to evict a space the Administration should give time for the project to evolve, if a project has been clearly presented. The Administration should observe how the district and the whole city react and it should dialogue with the occupants because they are the most direct interlocutors, they are the problem that is looking for a solution.”<sup>35</sup>*



<sup>35</sup> Alessia, *The acknowledgement of social value: The legitimate illegality culture as a commons. A journey through the Italian spaces occupied by knowledge workers* #2



Before a project has reached the stage at which it can be evaluated as a 'prototype', those behind it need support - or, at least, tolerance - from local authorities. This is not to say that authorities should turn a blind eye to citizens' activities until it suits them; rather, that there may be, for instance, a strong case for relaxing legislation that might otherwise inhibit the development of the project. Communication between citizens and institutions forms a fundamental part of ensuring this can be achieved, and being open to these kinds of conversations, as well as delivering on promises made, is a key means for institutions to be better allies. By giving citizens' projects' space to flourish and remaining engaged with project workers throughout, institutions potentially have a major role to play as facilitators of social cohesion, as well as collaborators in the reduction of waste.

The second sense in which Edgeryders would benefit from being granted more space by institutions-as-allies, is more personal. There was a strong sense within the Edgeryders community that they are expected to hurry their transition from youth to an independent life. Cultural expectations about the 'right' way to go about navigating this complex part of the life course, or what a 'successful' transition looks like, have been formalised in policies that add more pressure to achieve stability in a socio-economic context where doing so is increasingly impossible. Since there is no longer any guarantee of a secure career in almost every field of work, Edgeryders need the opportunity to experiment and explore, find out what their skills are and discover talents or interests they didn't know they had, get feedback and input from peers, and learn for themselves where and how they can best contribute to bringing some form of stability back



into their lives. In essence, more than any generation before them, Edgeryders need the space to learn how to become *resilient*. Confidence and self efficacy comes from acknowledgement of success having tried things and taken risks, but institutions often view what can be seen as a prolonged period of experimentation with suspicion. There is a clear link here with the challenges associated with portfolio careers, discussed above. In both realms there is a pressing need for widespread change in cultural norms and expectations. The private sector in particular has a key role to play in normalising acceptance in the professional sphere of transitions comprised of diverse - but demonstrably valuable - experiences. But there is far more to the establishment of new cultural norms that policy makers must become aware of.

## NEW CULTURAL NORMS

A raft of unrealistic pressures and expectations based in socio-cultural norms with fading relevance has proved to be a source of significant anxiety and unnecessary stress for many Edgeryders. Most commonly these have concerned topics such as career paths, educational choices and job models, but they also extend to issues such as having a family. Existing norms about how to navigate a 'successful' transition to independent life are counterproductive, since the socio-economic landscape has fundamentally changed and the resources to which Edgeryders have access are different. While expectations are perpetuated throughout every realm of everyday life - through family, peers, colleagues, global media - institutions have a key role in creating and validating those expectations through the ways in which everyday life is directed





through policy.

Edgeryder IdilM's concern with unpaid internships constitutes a good example.<sup>36</sup> Here the absence of a clear policy stance on fair payments for interns has allowed institutions to keep their own costs low, but at a high personal cost to young people seeking work experience. The acceptance of unpaid internships as a norm has been founded on the ability of more privileged young people to obtain familial financial support, yet such support is available to fewer and fewer young people as the economic crisis hits family finances hard. An urgent cultural shift is therefore required in which institutions reframe their expectations about young people's needs and resources based on their *current* precarious circumstances. A key part of this will be constructing new definitions of the multiple ways in which young people create value, as discussed above.

What may, in fact, be required is a whole new vocabulary for the articulation of young people's transitions. Edgeryder Alessia talks about having developed a new vocabulary in the process of navigating her own transition:

*"... in which "occupy" means "taking care" and "commons" are places for the construction of other economies and pure forms of cooperation and sociality, other forms of government, new forms of social enterprises."*<sup>37</sup>



This is a strong reflection of the fact that, for Edgeryders,

<sup>36</sup> IdilM, *The Quest For Paid Work: Unpaid internships are discriminatory and should be ended.*

<sup>37</sup> Alessia, *The acknowledgement of social value: The legitimate illegality culture as a commons. A journey through the Italian spaces occupied by knowledge workers #2*



the ways in which they spend their time is their means of voting for what they believe is important and what they want their institutions to support. It is clear that, for young people, political participation now takes a much wider range of forms than voting in elections, and that often it blurs into other areas of life, such as making a living or community involvement (Eriksson 2012).

If Edgeryders must make sense of their transitions by reframing the ways in which they describe their experiences, policies, too, must reflect this shift by updating their own vocabularies to accommodate these new meanings, as well as creating an enabling environment in which they can be lived in practice. Not only would this facilitate better understanding, better support, and stronger mutual trust, it presents an opportunity to bridge an intergenerational gulf which, at present, is a key factor in maintaining counterproductive, outdated cultural norms. Edgeryders' generation has embraced a paradigm of social innovation, as well as new ways of being political, which older generations still find difficult to understand. Leadership from institutions that, in literal terms, speaks the same language as that used by young people has the power to infiltrate the everyday understandings of the wider population as new norms are established.

Creating and embedding new norms is not, and can never be, the responsibility of a single group. However, the responsibility for beginning the process should begin with those facing the most significant risks if those new norms fail to take root. Edgeryders are already taking significant risks in order to carve out a new culture of which they want to be part - pushing new forms of learning, working, living together that still remain mar-



ginal to European cultures at large. But governments, too, face significant risks if they fail to keep pace with the ways in which contemporary young people's transitions foretell the changing shape of education, labour markets, politics and economies. The priority of most governments is a contented, employed, prosperous population, not one that is frustrated, disaffected and impoverished (not only financially). The economic impacts of a sense of insecurity are considerable - as the vulnerability of European economies continues to reveal. Part of the solution, at least in terms of the place of youth within the bigger picture, is for institutions, especially governments, to validate the ways in which young people are making sense of their place in a complex world by providing the kinds of support that acknowledge them as valued and valuable experiences.

At present, institutions appear content to play a key part in producing the challenging youth transition landscape, but less able to accept its results - young people with a multiplicity of skills but no single, natural 'slot' in society. There is, as a result, a pressing need for positive reinforcement of the new kinds of working life which Edgeryders' experiences characterise. As Edgeryder Ben suggests:

*“Whilst it is true that this generation is unlikely to be as economically prosperous as their parents’ generation, this isn’t necessarily reflective of a lack of productivity and creativity but rather a lack of visibility of how recent graduates have continued to work during recession.”<sup>38</sup>*




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38 Ben Vickers, *Professional Reality Development*



## LIVING ON THE EDGE... AND MOVING FORWARD?

A post on the Edgeryders project blog from June 2012 reads:

*“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.”<sup>39</sup>*

Edgeryders’ experiences as presented here demonstrate two crucial things. First, young people are responding to the challenges they face in negotiating their transition in a hugely difficult socio-economic context by taking action *on their own terms* to secure their futures. In other words, existing norms, systems and policies are less and less relevant to their needs, as a result of which they are formulating their own norms and systems, and articulating them with a new vocabulary. The second crucial point concerns the urgency with which institutions must respond by recasting the ways in which they make policy, as well as the policies themselves, in order to reflect the nature of contemporary youth transitions and provide the support mechanisms that European youth needs.

What we have seen on Edgeryders is how contemporary youth are active in creating their own initiatives and spaces that work with different kinds of procedures and practices than those which characterise institutional poli-

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<sup>39</sup> Blog post *At the beginning of the end, or the beginning of a new Europe?* by Edgeryder, Vinay, 4th June 2012.



tics. The question is, can institutions redefine their role as sources of information, guidance and support, rather than as orchestrators of forms of political participation that, for today's young people, serve little meaningful purpose?

Section V of this report constitutes a call to action which draws on Edgeryders' own suggestions as to how policies and institutions might more effectively and efficiently support the needs of their young constituents.

## CALL TO ACTION

*Edgeryders* as a project represents an experimental space in which the real-life experiences of European youth have pointed towards the necessity of new forms of policy research, development and delivery. This section presents some ways of moving forward in the immediate future which build directly on Edgeryders' own activities.

It has been clearly evident in *Edgeryders* that European youth are engaging in active citizenship based on self-formulated procedures and practices which are fundamentally different from traditional institutional politics and policy delivery. As a project, *Edgeryders* has provided an experimental space for the articulation and development of new modes of political participation and social action. What role, then, should be taken by institutions as the most effective means of supporting these? This section presents some ways for moving things forward in the immediate future.

## CHAMPION NEW CULTURAL NORMS

Of paramount importance is the need for political championship of new cultural norms, particularly those that



define accepted ways of learning and working, in response to the emergent needs of young people and the societies in which they live. This is about embedding diversity and flexibility within the cultural mindset through norms that better reflect the nature of young people's transitions and accommodate their abilities and needs, as well as responding to the present socio-economic situation, particularly issues such as the persistence (even growth, in some areas) of social inequalities. Focusing here on working and learning in order to reflect Edgeryders' widely-shared concerns about having the 'right' skills and knowledge for their transition, policy makers might consider addressing these concerns through the following mechanisms:

#### FLEXICURITY AND TRANSITIONAL LABOUR MARKETS

Flexicurity and transitional labour markets are concerned with accommodating multiple forms of work whilst reducing precariousness (van Lieshout and Wilthagen 2003). They are premised on permeable labour markets which allow individuals to combine different forms of employment, including paid and non-paid work (volunteering), and multiple income sources, such as wages and state benefits. Transitional labour markets are particularly able to support transitions between part-time and full-time employment, including circumstances such as studying part-time for additional qualifications, or moving from salaried work to self employment (or vice versa). Further, they incorporate legally enforceable entitlements for young people to choose among different employment options according to their needs, while fiscal incentives encourage employment rather than state-financed unemployment. These princi-



ples mean various transition pathways are possible, with young people able to switch between them depending on their changing needs. Flexicurity should provide a basic income for young people in transition who are confronted with the insecurities of flexi-jobs and who are denied working contracts (Stauber et al. 2003).

These mechanisms, with which the Netherlands and Denmark have already experimented, have a potentially significant role to play in integrating and, importantly, culturally validating diverse transition constellations. By reducing the personal risk associated with acquiring a diverse skill set from multiple contexts, they facilitate entry to the (necessarily more dynamic) labour market by permitting a range of alternative routes. For Edgeryders concerned with the impact of their ‘portfolio’ careers on their ability to achieve security, these approaches offer both a degree of security and the flexibility to continue developing their skills and experience. And for those like Edgeryder Edwin’s friend who are forced to choose between meaningful unpaid work and meaningless paid employment, they offer a means of reconciliation.

This is also the context in which to redress the issue of the undervaluing (in monetary terms) of young people’s work. A labour market attitude in which young people are expected to work for free, contributing to an organisation at their own cost (to draw on the example of unpaid internships), simply has no place in a context where transitional labour markets and flexicurity are established norms. Transnational institutions, widely viewed as popular internship destinations, have a leading role to play in counteracting the failure to recognise young people’s work through monetary recompense, through their own practice as much as through any policies that might be set.



Doing so would not only contribute to a more widespread revaluation of young people's work and provide them with the recognition and security they have the right to expect, it would also express clear institutional commitment to 'walking the talk' of addressing social inequalities.

### LEARNING COMMUNITIES

It was painfully clear from Edgeryders' stories that, in their experience, formal education (particularly the formal components such as secondary school) is oppressive, inflexible, and fails to provide the requisite knowledge to support their transitions in the 'real world'. Beyond the apparent inability of formal education to equip young people for independent life, the continued emphasis in policy development and educational institutions on education rather than learning has significant implications for social mobility which need to be addressed (Gutiérrez-Esteban and Mikiewicz 2012). In essence, the field of learning opportunities needs both levelling, in order to increase access to learning opportunities for those marginalised by mainstream forms of education, and widening, in order to legitimise a much more diverse range of learning opportunities as effective.

This is all the more important since, as Edgeryders demonstrate, dense social networks are increasingly a key means of gaining social capital (that is, knowledge, information and skills) and it is important that these networks are open to all who want to participate and contribute. The pursuit of social capital has been theorised as a quest for lost community (Coleman 1991; Putnam 2001) and there is vivid evidence of this sentiment within the *Edgeryders* community. As a means of tackling social inequalities and opening up access to social capital, policy





should move towards a view of learning as a multi-faceted, multi-method process, and, in recognition of this, reframe formal education in terms of dynamic learning communities. In these contexts the valorization of collaborative working is implicit and the value of informal learning spaces is acknowledged. Edgeryder Brightfutureforall described what this might look like in practice:

*“Schools could play an important role, working closely with local associations they can better direct students [to] opportunities in line with their interests, creating a more active community and giving kids a chance to prove themselves, feel passionate about a cause or help people in need. Incentives should be put into place to encourage students to take up these opportunities, also building on programs already into place, giving preferential treatment to students that enriched their education through languages and volunteer experiences.”<sup>40</sup>*

If, as the European Commission states, Europe’s youth needs to be equipped to take advantage of opportunities such as civic and political participation, volunteering, creativity and entrepreneurship (European Commission 2009), they must have access to learning opportunities to help them do so. Since consensus amongst Edgeryders has been that present systems are failing to deliver these opportunities, the system must be recalibrated by incorporating a wider range of components. As Edgeryders demonstrate, the internet has opened up access to a vast array of educational resources of which independent learners of all sorts are already making use. This should force the hand of institutions who have remained wedded to education as traditionally defined to catch up; they

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<sup>40</sup> Brightfutureforall, *Reality Check: Opportunities*



themselves have the opportunity to learn from the example of independent learners as to which are the most effective, engaging and, from a transferable skills point of view, *useful* techniques. Embracing these well-established, if still disparate, forms of learning will have multiple positive impacts: young people will be better able to acquire the skills they need to be flexible and resilient members of the labour market; social inequalities will be reduced as a result of the opening up of access to social capital; and a new culture of learning will be mapped out based on community and collaboration, which is a much closer match to the emerging demands of the labour market.

Beyond these forms of ‘personal’ learning for Edgeryders’ own futures, there is an additional need for (physical and/or virtual) spaces in which citizens and institutional representatives can learn, problem-solve and collaborate on an equal footing. These spaces should provide opportunities for citizens to increase their understanding of governance structures and policy architectures and processes. At the same time they have the potential to offer valuable opportunities for policy makers to gain awareness of the lived realities of current policies. Most importantly, however, they should exist to facilitate citizen participation in the design of new policy instruments characterised by creative responses to the most pressing social challenges. A fundamental part of this process should be collective sense-making of these challenges by citizens and institutional representatives *together*, as well as the joint presentation of potential solutions for democratic debate. A process of this kind would result in collaboratively mapped-out policies and delivery methods, as well as better mutual understandings of each party’s needs and constraints, thus maximising the chances of successful outcomes.



## REDESIGN POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES

It is not only the case that policies concerned with youth require reframing in light of the changing nature of their transitions. The ways in which policy is made also require urgent attention. Communication technologies, particularly the internet, have made it easier than ever before for citizens to observe and comment on how policies are designed, communicated and delivered. It is no longer necessary for citizens to leave power in the hands of elected (or unelected) officials for the duration of their administrations. As Edgeryder Carlien says, “*we can do better than that*”.<sup>41</sup>



Yet, as things stand at present, youth policy tends to focus on fostering participation in decisions within areas that are 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 consider most important (Eriksson 2012). The youth active on *Edgeryders* would hardly settle for participation in a consultation exercise where the problem has already been formulated.

In light of commitments at the European level to involve young people in the formulation of youth policies and elicit their views about their effectiveness once implemented (Council of Europe 2008; Denstad 2009), it is essential that institutions deliver on these intentions. This is not only because of the greater transparency afforded

<sup>41</sup> Carlien, comment on a mission report by Alessia, *The acknowledgement of social value: The legitimate illegality culture as a commons. A journey through the Italian spaces occupied by knowledge workers #2*



by the internet, but also because consultation increases the likelihood of policies being implemented effectively and experienced positively. This means more than simply finding new ways of asking questions or measuring outcomes. The aim of redesigning policy-making processes should be to have a positive direct impact on the ways in which participation, citizenship, access to commons, etc. are valued by society. In other words, they should build trust amongst citizens that institutions are able to acknowledge the everyday realities they face. This section outlines some of the ways they might go about this.

#### ENGAGE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR OWN SPACES

In order to gain an accurate picture of how youth policy is experienced ‘on the ground’, policy makers need to go to those spaces and engage with young people in the context of their lived realities, rather than creating specifically designed policy consultation spaces, which, for young people already sceptical about institutional attempts at consultation, seem like little more than a box-ticking exercise. “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 et al. 2003), and as *Edgeryders* researcher Magnus Eriksson notes, “Simply participating in a process that is already defined does not guarantee real influence” (Eriksson 2012). However, if policy makers are genuinely keen to put expertise and evidence at the heart of policy-making processes, the greatest experts and the most compelling evidence is found in young people’s own everyday lives. As a result, this is where policy makers need to spend much more time.

It is clear from the frustrations articulated by Edgeryders



that institutions are, at present, less fit to take charge of the process of participation than they could be - or, indeed, than young people themselves could be. Compared with the forms of communication and organisation that Edgeryders and their peers wield so effectively, institutions are slow and rarely willing to experiment. However, once they turn to action they are capable of impact on the sort of scale that small grassroots initiatives have a hard time aggregating. The key question, then, is how to join up the spaces in which young people are already active with those of the policy domain, via channels through which real influence can be exerted. Even during natural lulls in the policy-making process, continually observing how policies are experienced in citizens' everyday lives potentially offers revealing insights useful for future policy iterations. A comment below from Edgeryder Neal, for instance, illustrates how observing the ways in which citizens live out relatively mundane aspects of their lives - such as the modes of transport they choose - can be vital signposts:

*“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.”<sup>42</sup>*

Yet exactly *how* to join up citizens' spaces with the policy sphere requires careful thought since, at present, each party remains wary of the motives of the other.

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42 Neal, *Interview With A Sharer*



Furthermore, involving the kinds of organisations which would perhaps naturally be positioned as intermediaries (such as NGOs) is not without its own set of challenges. There is little incentive, for instance, for an NGO to promote novel, low cost solutions it cannot take credit for.

On the other hand, an appropriate and mutually accessible online space has the potential to reach people far out in the frequency distribution of any given citizenry, including those who would not ordinarily seek out opportunities to express views on politics or civil affairs. All signs from Edgeryders point to this being the space in which these exchanges should happen. However, it is clear that there is still some discomfort within government institutions about how to respond to them. Edgeryder Carlien, who straddles the Edgeryder-institution divide, states:

*“Politicians (I am a member of the city council of Amsterdam) and government are used to cooperat[ing] with legal entities which are easily to define. For example: we know who the members of the board are of a foundation. In the case of a labor union we know the number of registered and paying members. Social networks and online communities can be far more vital and effective than those old organizations but are less clear to define.”<sup>43</sup>*



The boundaries of online communities may be far more blurred than those institutions are used to dealing with, inevitably making them harder to manage, but this is

43 Comment by Carlien in a mission report by Demsoc, *Networking The Networks*



a challenge institutions must grapple with, since on-line networks are only going to become more powerful. Working out how best to make use of these spaces is only the first part of the process, however. An essential part of closing the communications gap between institutions and citizens involves visibly *making use* of the data gathered. Not only will this fulfil any commitments made to evidence-based policy, it will reassure citizens that the contributions they make to policy processes are valued, thus establishing a relationship between citizens and institutions based on confidence and trust - which, to date, has been sorely lacking.

#### DESIGN AND DELIVER “POLICY 2.0”

Articulating his perception that young people are blocked from participating more fully in policy processes by institutions’ lack of knowledge of new media instruments, Edgeryder Emiliano suggests that policy makers “don’t know Policy 2.0.”<sup>44</sup> In essence, they have failed to keep pace with the ways in which decision-making has evolved to incorporate new technologies - or, at least, this is the way they appear to young people. This sense was widely shared amongst the *Edgeryder* community. Cataspanglish relayed the experiences of several Edgeryders through a series of interviews, with one of his subjects, Anne, revealing a view that:

*“... most of the policy makers and institutions are really far away from understanding the experience of people who have grown up with the Internet as a normal part of their lives.”*<sup>45</sup>



44 Emiliano, *Live Not Survive*

45 cataspanglish, *(MAKING A) LIVING ON THE EDGE: Anne Wizorek*



Ben, similarly, saw this as being a significant barrier to forging a more productive relationship between institutions and citizens:

*“... we’d like to create positive change but as it currently stands the jobs, institutions and organisations available to us do not appear to have the frameworks or courage to instigate that change and until they do we’re unlikely to build any meaningful allegiances.”<sup>46</sup>*



In one sense, then, using the full range of available technologies in order to engage young people in their (online) spaces is a fundamental part of moving towards “Policy 2.0”. An equally important part, however, is how these tools are used to address knowledge silos within the policy making process. The social policy landscape at present is beset by many complex, interlinked challenges - and not only those that directly concern youth. Managing these requires dynamism *across* departmental or portfolio responsibilities, and, at times, government jurisdictional boundaries. Uniting the collective intelligence and expertise from separate but interlinked agencies, policy domains and jurisdictional areas is likely to better enable effective responses to these most complex of social policy challenges.

The growth of open data has started to facilitate this. The more information that is publicly shared between government departments and other policy institutions, the easier it will be for them to identify not only how young people respond to one particular policy, but also how

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<sup>46</sup> *benvickers, Post Art School Hinterland: Earning in the grey zones of the art-world*





they respond to others which are concerned with similar or interrelated issues. Furthermore, combining this with the open source approach to collaborative problem solving presents a potentially low cost, low resource means of canvassing opinion on topics that cut across government departments. Edgeryder JOYE presented a case on the project platform that constitutes a good example of how this might work. He writes:

*“... perhaps the next time that the town council is deciding on the layout and location of a children’s play-area, they could source their ideas directly from the public by allowing a web-accessible location where people could actively contribute to the design and development of that area - not just through allowing comment, but allowing actual direct collaboration? An online blueprint with an interface that allows annotation, or from which items can be removed, added, upvoted or downvoted?”<sup>47</sup>*



In this scenario, citizens respond to information provided by a local authority (open data) by offering their own suggestions on a policy issue (open sourcing solutions), which in turn are then subject to comment and discussion by all stakeholders (a combination of open data and open source solutions). Not only does this involve the community in formulating decisions that best suit their needs, it makes the process of translating discussions into a workable policy visible to citizens - including, importantly, communicating those elements which for reasons of budget, safety or current legislation are simply not possible. Limited resources at local administration

47 JOYE, *The town as an Open Source project*



level mean that citizens need to reach consensus on their priorities and aggregate their effort prior to engaging in a collaborative policy planning exercise. This was recognized by Edgeryder Stefano in his mission report on participatory budgeting:

*“The democratic mechanism is quite simple: citizens formulate proposals, public servants evaluate them and citizens vote the priorities, those who must be realized right now. They must be aware of simple rules: the more they are, the more they get. That is to say, they should make the effort to gather and come up with a joint or common project which is much more likely to find widespread support from the bottom up. In this sense, being aware of the economic restraints (the budget) is a valid incentive to realize that we are part a world of limited resources and nobody can pretend to get simply what they want.”<sup>48</sup>*



Since these kinds of collaborative efforts are well placed to save local administrations both time and money, as well as helping them develop policies to which citizens are likely to be far more receptive, there is a strong case for investing in a framework which guides citizens through this process. However, any institution doing so would need to bear in mind the points discussed above - the need to use the right tools in the right spaces, and the need for the process to be collaborative rather than merely consultative. For young people in particular, who have much to gain as well as much to offer in these processes, the opportunity to be part of shaping the support mechanisms that can ease their transitions to an independent

48 Stefano, *Participatory budgeting worldwide!*



life cannot be put in place too quickly.

## **PROVIDE MORE TIMELY SUPPORT MECHANISMS**

One of the frustrations encountered by many of the Edgeryders who have set up (or attempted to set up) their own enterprises has concerned the difficulty of gaining the right kind of institutional support at the right time. Open-ended, networked and process-oriented participation is extremely effective in getting projects started, gathering people, spreading information and generating energy, but after the initial phase consolidating those first achievements can be more difficult. It is at this stage when institutional support is most needed. In other words, institutional support is needed for project *maintenance* and *sustainability*, rather than generating the first flurries of activity (although it is important to note that some kinds of projects would benefit from support here too, particularly in the form of accessible seed funding). What needs to be tackled is the problem of interventions that require long-term commitments to achieve the desired impact and funding structures that privilege short-term contracts (Eriksson 2012). As a result of the present imbalance here, many projects end up involving a lot of stakeholders in a promising effort but when the funding is drained and the project is forced to wind down, the situation reverts to what it was before the intervention and little change is actually achieved.

What is needed at this point is help in scaling up successful initiatives. Ultimately, governments want policies and delivery mechanisms that produce big impacts. But, certainly for Edgeryders, they are most engaged in tack-



ling problems for themselves and their immediate communities - in other words, localised issues - in large part because acting at this scale is difficult enough when there are few resources at hand. This is not to say, however, that their solutions could not be transferred or scaled up with the right support. Often they could, but it takes institutional resources and political power to achieve this.

There are two ways in which this could happen, and which method is most suitable depends very much on the nature of the initiative. The first method involves providing resources (financial, infrastructural, political, etc.) in a specific locale in order to grow the project, increasing its reach to larger numbers of people. This approach would be best suited to an initiative such as Access Space, an open digital arts lab in the UK which provides ICT workshops and drop-in sessions for local people on low incomes.<sup>49</sup> The second method is better suited to projects whose purpose is not to scale up but to multiply. Here, impact is achieved when enough people are involved in many small-scale, local initiatives. What remains a problem in this instance is the workload of coordination, something that a larger actor with more resources is better able to handle, since then every entity (i.e. each local chapter of a project) does not have to communicate with each other, only with a central point of contact. A key role for institutions in these contexts, then, is one of connectors or aggregators - much like the Edgeryder-initiated project 'We Live Here', which aims to *“create a civic space by networking the networks that already exist in the community.”*<sup>50</sup>

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49 Access Space homepage

50 Demsoc, *Networking The Networks*



While acknowledging that the administrative costs of providing support for many small initiatives can be seen as prohibitively high, there is nevertheless a pressing need to introduce appropriate administrative processes that remove some of the obstacles to providing institutional support to smaller initiatives. Some members of the *Edgeryders* community are already in the early stages of devising an international bridging interface between funders and local, small initiatives.<sup>51</sup> This presents a ripe opportunity for institutions to seize.

### **TAKE SOME RISKS!**

The ethnographical analysis of the data gathered through the *Edgeryders* project reveals that Edgeryders, as well as their families, tend to bear all the risk in their attempts to transition to an independent life (see Part II of this guide). Making best guesses about the ‘right’ education and career choices, moving from city to city in pursuit of better opportunities, and the financial risks associated with this instability mean that young people often remain dependent on the financial and emotional support of family or close friends, rather than achieving independence. Yet such is the depth of the economic crisis in Europe that it is reasonable to ask how long it will be possible to assume families can shoulder the added burden of supporting their adult children.

The imbalance in the burden of risk in contemporary young Europeans’ transitions reflects a glaring absence of institutional leadership, which, so far, has provided little

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<sup>51</sup> The conversation is posted in a mission report by Darren, *Can we and should we pull off an official Edgeryders organisation?*



in the way of formal policy safety nets (such as guaranteed wages for community work) or culturally validated alternative transition pathways. It is time for institutions to absolve young people of some of the risks they face by taking them on and dispersing them at an institutional level. The rewards that could be reaped are significant - more young people being economically active means lower welfare payments and much-needed economic, civic and political stimulus.

An essential part of this risk-rebalancing will require institutions to absolve young people's families of at least some of the financial responsibility for supporting their transitions. Funding for innovation and entrepreneurialism is an important component of this, as is valuing in monetary terms the work young people do to contribute to community well-being, sustainability and cohesion. Some of the topics discussed by Edgeryders could have a role here as 'wildcard' forms of financial support and economic stimulus: crowd funding, crowd matching, angel investors, basic income, barter currencies and time banking. These support systems must be visible and accessible in order to encourage innovation and active citizenship amongst a wider range of young people, and to ensure that engaging in these activities is an active choice because they know the support is there, rather than an act of desperation or frustration in the face of few other opportunities. One relatively low-resource solution here would be to use publicly funded websites as a communication infrastructure to support citizen initiatives. This kind of knowledge hub would be particularly beneficial to those for which gathering public support is fundamental to their reaching critical mass. Furthermore, it presents a low effort means of institutions achieving widespread



positive local impacts by supporting community efforts to help themselves.

However, taking risks on supporting young people's transitions is not simply about financial investment, or even the provision of other material resources. Beyond these, perhaps the risk that Edgeryders would most appreciate institutions taking is one of trusting the ways in which young people perceive and act in the world. Edgeryders want institutions to understand that the ways in which young people are going about navigating their transition to an independent life have manifold benefits at all levels of society, but that for these benefits to have their greatest impact requires young people as their instigators to be given the space, trust and resources to be able to demonstrate their potential. It is clear from the profound difficulties faced by contemporary youth in Europe, reflected by youth unemployment figures, that lack of support means wasted potential, and wasted potential means a generation whose ability to contribute economically, politically and socially is severely constrained. As one Edgeryder, Alberto, says:



*“A little social innovation in the policy world could really change the lives of millions of people. Policy-makers: what are you waiting for to really support social innovation?”*<sup>52</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Current EU and Council of Europe white papers, resolutions and other policy documents make clear that, at a transnational level, the importance of working *with*

<sup>52</sup> Alberto, *Who will really support social innovation?*



young people to formulate the policies which impact on their lives is now widely acknowledged. What is evident from *Edgeryders*, however, is that, despite this acknowledgement, these intentions are rarely translating into policies or forms of youth engagement that connect with young people's most pressing concerns. The purpose of *Edgeryders* has been to open up a space in which frustrations can be aired and solutions proposed, at the same time as demonstrating the value of maintaining open communication between citizens and institutions. This conclusion reflects on: what *Edgeryders* as a project has suggested about where next for youth policy; the extent to which *Edgeryders* could be described as a successful policy research mechanism; and the ways in which *Edgeryders* has fulfilled its other aims beyond informing policy

#### WHERE NEXT FOR YOUTH POLICY?

Youth policies will and should, by their very nature, remain concerned with young people's transitions to independent lives. What is now abundantly clear is that these transitions are more complex, variable and protracted than ever before. In order to maximise the potential for economic prosperity and social cohesion amongst youth and across Europe as a whole, policy institutions must respond effectively to young citizens changing needs. Policies concerned with youth transitions, directly or indirectly, should be judged according to the action space they provide for or withhold from young people in terms of the power and resources to which they have access in their attempts to be active citizens and live independent lives. An essential part of this shift will be a move by institutions towards a more *pluralistic* approach to policy. Pluralism allows greater dynamism, flexibility and re-





sponsiveness in the context of youth citizenries whose life trajectories may shift at every turn. In essence, pluralism contributes to the socio-political validation of multiple ways of achieving one's transition by providing more opportunities for young people to attain success and independence.

It is not only the fragmentation and de-standardization of youth transitions that requires a new, pluralistic policy approach. In light of the need for individual nation states to respond to their own unique circumstances while remaining engaged with shared European concerns, a transnationally sanctioned or even transnationally mandated pluralism has the potential to provide a framework, perhaps even a toolkit, from which nations can select and employ the most appropriate delivery vehicles. This is a particularly important means of driving new forms of policy delivery in national contexts, since youth policy garners more attention at transnational level than at a national level in some countries. At the same time, those formulating policy must remain alert to the interrelations and interdependencies between the multiple policy areas that affect young people's lives. For example, it might not be policy on education that influences the creation of alternative learning spaces the most, but urban development, property prices or intellectual property.

The implications of globalization, mobility, migration and democratic renewal, amongst other issues, highlight the need to constantly review the nature of youth policy, in terms of what it aims to achieve, its scope, how it is formulated and how it is delivered. This has to take place within a sophisticated understanding of the *changing patterns of youth transitions* and the new challenges facing young people across Europe. Further, *Edgeryders*



researcher Magnus Eriksson has suggested that, “Perhaps the issues of young people are both more global and more local than the national or regional level of institutional politics” (Eriksson 2012). As such, future youth policies must acknowledge the ‘glocal’ nature of young people’s transitions through the development of appropriately pluralistic, multi-scale support mechanisms. Such mechanisms, tailored to the needs of Edgeryders as presented here, should incorporate:

- Funding streams (grants and loans) specifically for initiatives that promote the pooling and sharing of resources, including (co-)housing, (co-)working spaces and (re) opening access to commons, as well as mechanisms to help successful projects scale up or spread to new locations.
- The means to aggregate and disseminate knowledge scattered across Europe which, once identified and directed appropriately, could be of significant benefit to citizen initiatives across the region (thus following the principles of open data discussed in section IV).
- A commitment to the reduction of waste; not only wasted funds, but wasted resources (buildings, green spaces and other commons), and wasted human potential.

#### EDGERYDERS AS SUCCESSFUL POLICY MECHANISM

It has been suggested that providing better support for young people’s transitions in Europe is not simply a case of formulating new policies, but instead requires the re-negotiation of the relation between youth and political institutions when it comes to political participation (Eriksson 2012). *Edgeryders* as a project has broken the mould here. By providing a space for discussion, collabo-



ration and the sharing of problems over the course of a year (the project started in October 2011), and by bringing Edgeryders face to face with some of the policy makers whose actions are shaping their lives (the *Living On The Edge* conference in June 2012), this project has emphatically responded to EU and Council of Europe aspirations to engage in policy making which moves beyond mere consultation. Beyond fulfilling its own aims in this regard, *Edgeryders* is already proving extremely useful as a means of responding to direct requests from policymakers for input on youth topics. As Alberto says in a comment on Nadia's mission report, *Learning To Live*, "It is a strong sign that the community has been able to convey credible, even authoritative advice in a very structured policy process, so much that it has been recruited into a second one."<sup>53</sup>



The question to ask at this stage is, to what extent could *Edgeryders* itself be used as a prototype for new modes of citizen-focused deliberative democratic forms of participation? How could it be adapted to different levels of governance and different types of government? The form of participation that comprises the prototyping culture of *Edgeryders* is adapted to uncertainty, chaotic organization, and trial and error. It is experimental in character, examines different ways of doing things and questions overarching goals. Being asked to embrace a process that, by its nature, is chaotic and experimental may discomfort institutions used to research methods characterised by low levels of risk and high levels of control. Yet, by participating in citizen-led exploratory initiatives rather than

<sup>53</sup> Nadia, *Learning to Live: The first Edgeryders Community Paper!!*



formal, institutionally determined decision-making processes, citizens such as Edgeryders learn not just how political processes are structured today, but also how they *could be* structured in ways that better fulfil both citizen and institutional aims and needs. In this respect, there is much for institutions to learn from collaborative research exercises such as *Edgeryders*, not only in terms of the lived impacts of policies but also how to make citizen engagement mechanisms smoother and more effective.

In the context of this project, Edgeryders are prototyping a new form of society and a new form of citizen-institutional engagement. Prototyping necessarily contains a performative element in the sense that a prototypical form of social organization is presented and put on display as a possibility, there to be critiqued or to inspire. Ultimately that test either fails or succeeds. Here, Edgeryders are taking the initial risks in striking out new forms of society, culture, working, learning, and political participation. In order for any of these to take root and have a lasting impact, institutional support is essential. Edgeryders have made a start; institutions have the far easier job of jumping on the successful bandwagons.

#### AIMS BEYOND POLICY

Edgeryders has always been more than a policy research tool. It has equally been a resource for European youth. Described on the web platform as a “peer-to-peer learning environment” and a source of help and inspiration, Edgeryders have gained far more from their interactions on the edge of the policy sphere than input into the next generation of youth policies. In concluding this report, it is only right to reflect on what the participants themselves have gained from their part in Edgeryders.



*“I feel like I have learned more about genuine and fair development co-operation, transnational networks and grassroots initiatives on Edgeryders rather than during my Master studies in International Development and feel like I have connected to [a] real-time account of the XXI Century social dynamics. [...] Edgeryders has reinforced my conviction/belief that there’s hope in this generation of ours and [...] room to grow and improve, through the sharing of ideas and resources among peers on platforms like these. It gave me a sense of belonging to a solid and caring community.” (TOOLosophy)*



*“I’ve learned that we have a lot of common aspirations that are not conditioned by national settings, by “my politician”, “my university”, “my potential employer”, “my church”, “my neighbours”, even “my family”. Also, aspirations are non-negotiable. Any individual, no matter what her background or opportunities, has the right and responsibility to do what she thinks is necessary to achieve them. Good news is, we stand together.” (Noemi)*



*“I feel on the edge, I feel the victim of wrong policies [...] I feel the need for more social [cohesion], [...] I feel excluded from and mocked by local and national politics. [But] I feel lucky because I live the change, I feel good because I’m on the right track [...] I feel good because I met a large governmental institution, [the] Council of Europe.” (Simone)*



*“This platform has been a light beacon in a dark ocean and I thank you for that.” (Nirgal)*



### AND FINALLY...

One of the most important contributions to the policy making process made by *Edgeryders* as a project and *Edgeryders* as individuals (as well as a community) is that of revealing a previously hidden agenda. They have asked, and in many cases answered, questions that no-one else had thought to ask - or had been able to answer. Youth in Europe demonstrably have much to offer in terms of skills, knowledge, insights, and, above all, willingness to live according to values and principles in ways that are forging new, and arguably long overdue, social and cultural norms. *Edgeryders* presents policy makers an invaluable opportunity to capitalise on these offerings. Yet there are still some young people, especially those on the other side of the digital divide, whose input remains more difficult to elicit. How might institutions develop innovative ways of entering into (and maintaining) dialogue with these particularly marginalised groups? Perhaps they could ask them and find out.



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## APPENDIX A

# AN OPEN LETTER TO FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS OF INNOVATION

*This letter was collaboratively drafted by participants in the EdgeCamp unconference and the Council of Europe's Edgeryders conference in June, and in online discussions thereafter. It represents the views of all who took part in its drafting.*

Dear Funders (and other supporters of innovation),  
It's just not working out.

The way that you provide support for innovation isn't working for you, or for us. We don't like the bureaucratic processes, high organisational requirements and over-specified funding calls - and we are sure that you don't like administering them either. The financial and social crisis is making reform and agile innovation even more important, but processes are still slow.

We'd like to find a better way to get support and resources to innovators who can make change happen, a way that's less bureaucratic but weeds out bad ideas by letting them fail quickly and cheaply.



We know it's a bit self-interested, because most of the people who signed this letter are innovators themselves - we're writing it at the Edgecamp/Edgeryders unconference in Strasbourg#. But we think it's in your interests too, because you have complex social goals you want to meet, but you aren't working in ways that create complex solutions.

So, we want to have a proper conversation with you about resourcing innovation differently, but here are some ideas to start with:

**FUND NETWORKED  
PEOPLE, NOT  
ORGANISATIONS**

None of the social problems that we face can be solved by single solutions, so we should start to focus on building up networks of ideas and initiatives (old and new). The sorts of successful innovation network we should emulate include: [Las Indias](#), [Open Source Ecology](#), and the [Arduino Community](#).

**LOOK FOR IDEAS  
THAT HAVE ALREADY  
GOT COMMUNITY  
SUPPORT**

We think crowdfunding has potential to be expanded. Crowdfunding demonstrates that an idea has community support before it even starts. We could work on a matched crowdfunding platform for innovation. Like the Unlimited programme in the UK, [Goteo](#) in Spain or [CrowdCulture](#) in Sweden, innovators could propose an idea and get pledges of cash or in-kind support from the community that it's intended to benefit, and then those contributions could be matched or increased by your resources.

**GIVE PEOPLE TIME TO  
THINK, NOT MONEY  
TO SPEND**

Lots of innovators have to take temporary work to fund their lives while they develop their ideas, but finding temporary work is time-consuming. Rather than providing



cash for spending, funders could support people's living expenses for a certain period of time - like a bursary or a sabbatical from a university. This is already happening with one project run by [Alsace Digitale](#) and is also the logic behind the successful Ashoka.org programmes on "social entrepreneurship".

**TELL US WHAT YOU  
NEED, AND SUPPORT  
US AS YOU SEE  
SOLUTIONS EVOLVE**

Challenge-driven funding models encourage the creation of solutions that actually work. Small grants could be given to a number of applicants to enable them to develop advanced prototypes, and following waves of funding would only be available for the most promising ones. This kind of 'create-then-fund' mechanism makes money follow results, not the opposite, crowding away the 'experts in proposal-writing' and attracting the innovative 'doers'.

**THINK WHOLE-  
SYSTEM**

Find organisations that can lead local action that has positive impacts across multiple priorities, and try to avoid focusing on specific outputs. Focusing on outputs presumes that your funding priority can be severed from the rest of the community's actions, and that you truly know the situation on the ground. It can't and you don't - but local community organisations often do. Find ways to receive as well as produce information, and don't assume best practice in one community is applicable to another - the fine details matter.

**SUPPORT PLACES  
WHERE INNOVATION  
AND CONNECTION  
CAN HAPPEN**

We'd like to see funding for a network of simple, cheap spaces where innovation can happen, and then we'll put regular meetups and events in them. We don't mean shiny well-staffed co-working spaces, just a simple space



with good wifi that can be used for regular events. Kultwerk West in Hamburg is a good example of the space we mean, and Third Thursday in Brighton the sort of event. If there were a Kultwerk in every big city, we'd know where to make connections into local innovators.#

## INTEROPERABILITY AND COLLABORATION AS THE DEFAULT

We want to create tools that work with each other, and where collaboration is the default setting. We take inspiration from well-known initiatives such as the [Open Knowledge Foundation](#) and [Free Software Foundation](#), but also less famous collectives like [Riseup](#) - providing autonomous secure services for over 4m people and working closely with UNICEF, and [Unhosted](#) - developing open technologies addressing issues of web monopolies and with support of NLnet and TERENA started providing RemoteStorage based services to universities in Europe.#

Developments in the field of distributed social networking and linked data have started maturing, and offer solutions for overcoming not only technical obstacles but also many linguistic and cultural barriers. Participants in institutions like [DERI](#) or [AKSW](#) (both funded by the EU's [FP7](#)) with their infrastructure could dedicate even more focus to support development of distributed collaboration and sharing tools. With broad and diverse support for such collaborations we could expect development of more projects supporting civic involvement like in case of Code for America - sometimes referred to as 'a peace corps for geeks'.

## CONCLUSIONS

We don't think these ideas are the answer, but we think they are different aspects of the answer: ways of look-



ing at problems that emphasise openness, collaboration, whole-system thinking and trusting, productive collaboration.

We think you will want to have a conversation about re-sourcing innovation differently as well. We're ready, online and in person, when you are.

We hope to hear from you soon. #

*Signed*

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