Title of the article: Youth transitions as 'wiki-transitions' in youth policies platforms

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Abstract (max 200 words): In recent years, a number of youth-focused online platforms have emerged which, in different ways, seek to support young people across Europe in building pathways to independent adulthood. In this article we draw on data from *Edgeryders*, a recent youth policy research project, to reflect on the extent to which online discussion platforms are useful instruments for understanding the challenges youth face in their transitions to independent adulthood across Europe. Noting the collaborative emphasis articulated by both the project designers and participants, we ask how we might make sense of the data – and the meanings conveyed by that data – produced by online projects. We propose the notion of 'wiki-transitions' as a means of theorising young people's use of online space to support their transitions to adulthood. (126 words)

Keywords: youth policy, online platforms**,** wiki, collaboration, youth, digital ethnography

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1. Introduction

For policies aimed at young people's successful social integration, the active participation of youth is a prerequisite of their design. In European youth policies, the centrality of reciprocity and collaboration amongst different stakeholders concerned with young people's lives is known as the 'magic triangle' approach (Chisholm 2006). This term emphasises the aspiration for balanced input (and resultantly effective and robust policy) from those who write youth policies (i.e., policy makers), those who study youth (youth researchers), and practitioners who are in contact with youth (such as youth workers). Most importantly, young people themselves are placed at the centre of the triangle. A range of techniques facilitate this process of collaboration, including 'structured dialogue', whereby youth are invited to literally sit at the same table with other actors engaged in consultation, and express their views about their needs and priorities

It is clear, however, that the 'magic triangle' – like many models of participation – works far better in theory than in practice. Some recent reconceptualisations refer to it as the 'Bermuda Triangle' (Planas-Lladó et al, 2014), to stress that attempts at collaboration are often slippery to manage and show only patchy success in meeting their aims. Yet there are also those who, with more optimism, see the potential for greater success by, not only positioning youth at the centre of policy design, but positioning youth *within the communities in which they feel embedded* at the heart of research, policy and engagement (Zentner, 2016, our emphasis). This version of the model is based on a particularly strong rejection of the idea that youth are merely passive recipients of policy measures, while strengthening the possibilities for activation of their capacities in multilevel consultations. Given these aims, continuous efforts are made by EU related institutions to elaborate policy research methods to include and engage youth. It is within these developments, we argue, that a proliferation of online research platforms designed to elicit access to young people's worlds and views can be seen. However, there remains a

knowledge gap around the value of these online experiments, and their potential to create meaningful policy and equitable social relations; a gap which needs to be closed if further, or more widespread, use of these techniques is to be considered[2].

We take up the specific challenge of reflecting on the discussions occurring within online platforms as instruments for understanding the challenges faced by youth in the transition to adulthood, reflecting on their hybridity as 'connecting spaces' (De Souza e Silva, 2006). The interactions and social relations that emerge in online discussion platforms possess specific features, which we characterise following a descriptive overview of some of the most widely used online platforms at the European policy level. Given the rigidities of several of these, and with the aim to foresee spaces for potentially transformative policy measures, we then introduce our case study, Edgeryders, an experimental, bottom-up youth policy project developed by the Council of Europe, which ran from October 2011 to June 2012 in its institutional form. Due to the strong emphasis on collaboration amongst its participants, Edgeryders invites a framing of the social interactions within its network as 'wiki' interactions. We continue our discussion with a critical analysis of how participants in the online platform discursively produced these 'wiki-traits', using these arguments to suggest how we might, more broadly, make sense of online platform data and its 'real world' potential, thereby interrogating the link between virtual space, European space, and the spaces of young adulthood.

2. **Online platforms for youth transitions: an overview**

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[2] In the majority of European countries there is no systematic monitoring of the results of these programs (Eurofound 2014).

Supporting young people's successful transitions to the labour market has become central to the European policy agenda in the last 15 to 20 years. A range of measures have been proposed by European institutions (e.g. the 'Youth Employment Package' of the European Commission) aimed at combating the 'unacceptably high levels' of youth unemployment and social exclusion among young people, challenges which have become further entrenched in some countries since the 2008 financial crisis. At the same time, participation and citizenship have become buzzwords in national and European youth policy discourses (Kovacheva 1999), acknowledging the need to actively create spaces for young people's agency. Today, dedicated institutions such as the Youth Department of the Council of Europe work to develop innovative and contemporaneous youth policies to address the specific, spatially and temporally located challenges faced by young people.

As a result of these efforts, in recent years a number of youth-focused online networks have emerged which, in different ways, seek to encourage and enable opportunities for young Europeans seeking pathways to independent adulthood (Petkovic and Cuzzocrea 2014). Some of these networks are directly focused on service provision for young people, such as the Youth Employment Inventory, which helps to 'troubleshoot' the challenges of securing a permanent job; and HeySuccess, a student work placement portal. Whilst these sites directly speak to young people's concern to secure stable work, they do not, however, invite direct interaction between those visiting the site. Other networks exist to unite youth practitioners, policy makers and researchers, around shared commitments to supporting young people. For example, the European Platform on Youth Mobility in the field (EPLM) seeks to increase the value of, and opportunities for, education- and training-based international mobility for youth. Eurodesk has a similar aim, operating country-based nodes in a network aimed at encouraging active citizenship amongst youth by learning through mobility. ERYICA, the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, is an independent network of youth organisations which

seeks to ensure young people have access to full and reliable information to make key decisions along their journey towards adulthood. These networks, whilst directly concerned with supporting youth, do not present them with a means to have their voice heard.

A third group of youth-focused online networks straddles the policy/information repository divide. These bodies provide 'go to' locations for information on contemporary youth policies. The EACEA (Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency of the European Union) Youth Wiki, launched in 2018, describes itself as "Europe's online encyclopaedia" for national youth policies. A similar network, Tranzit, is the online platform of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, and – like the Youth Wiki – collates examples of good practice of youth-centred policies. The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) describes itself as a "think tank" focused on understanding the needs of young Europeans in a context of specific contemporary socio-economic challenges. Like Tranzit and the Youth Wiki, it acts as an online database or repository for researchers or policy makers seeking information on these themes. On a more global scale, the Youth Employment Network is a partnership between the United Nations, International Labour Organisation and World Bank, and works to share ideas around policies that prioritise youth employment within global development contexts.

The proliferation of these online knowledge-sharing spaces illustrates the growing recognition of online networks as a valuable support structure and information-sharing mechanism, as well as of the underlying value of digital tools for young people (Connolly and McGuinness 2018). On this basis, our case study should not be seen as a stand-alone experiment. Rather, it is just one of many online spaces seeking to both understand and better support young adults' complex life trajectories. Indeed, our interest in Edgeryders is a function of its intention to be more than a mere information portal, instead seeking to be an *active* space of conversation, connection and ongoing, open-ended mutual support. We locate our reflections within discussions related to the potential of social media to reduce inequality (Xenos et al. 2014) and

transform the configuration of digital democracy (Loader and Mercea 2011) via 'technological optimism'. More specifically, in our case the growth in the use of online spaces to understand young adults' lives, alongside the characterisation of this demographic as 'digital natives' (Bennett et al. 2009) at home in the digital realm, underline the potential of wiki-based tools to service the aspirations of 'policy 2.0', where policies draw on dynamic interactions within the digital (often social media) realm (Ferro et al. 2013). Further, as Bennett et al. (2009) suggest, the modes of citizenship to which contemporary youth are commonly drawn tend to be "more self-actualising modes of civic participation" (p105) where young people define citizenship on their own terms (rather than deferring to state-imposed discourses), often connecting with like-minded – but not necessarily geographically proximate – others, via online space (see also Loader et al. 2014). Whilst there is a risk that the policy research approach characterised by Edgeryders may merely entrench the 'magic triangle' structure, use of youth-oriented practices such as blogging creates an opportunity for youth to 'break out' of the triangle, and, instead of being constrained by it, contribute to its structure and formation. We turn now to a more detailed overview of our case study, which we situate within recent methodological literature on digital ethnography.

3. Edgeryders and Digital Ethnography

3.1 Researching (through) digital networks

In contrast to the largely passive online networks described above, Edgeryders was designed to represent a 'prototype for interactive dialogue' aimed at 'understand[ing], 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 came up with' (Farrell 2013: 5). Edgeryders emerged – through a grounded project development process – as a form of digital

ethnography (or 'netnography', Kozinets 2010; see also Hine 2000, 2005; Beneito-Montagut 2011; Hookway 2008; Jones 1999; Mann and Steward 2000), where digital and online tools are used to generate insights into everyday life. Now an established methodology, digital ethnography (DE) has grown out of Sherry Turkle's seminal work *Life on the Screen* (1995), as well as studies in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC, Rheingold 1993). It considers the internet not only as a technological artefact which has broadened methods of communication and gathering information, but also as a creator of 'spaces' of interaction in which social actors, even if dislocated in space and time, meet and interact as if in 'real' (material) environments.

This has enabled research to be conducted – and policy devised – via online networks (including websites, blogs, social media) in ways that circumnavigate some of the barriers or frustrations of conventional 'analogue' research (Pettinger and Lyon 2012). Data generated online has the potential to be more inclusive than other forms of qualitative data (Gordon and Koo 2008; Borg et al. 2012), as growing populations have access to an internet-enabled device and thus the means to access spaces of participation. This potentially overcomes the difficulties of engaging youth in consultation (Dentith et al 2012). The scope presented by this increasing connectivity has been a crucial factor in engaging growing numbers of citizens in public policy problem-solving activities (Noveck 2009), as more and more people possess the means – and thus inclination – to offer their input. Further, the instant access to participants' lived experience enabled by digital technologies means that such activities can, from the start, be characterised by a 'need-solution' orientation (i.e. problem-solving) rather than a problem formulation phase (Von Hippel and von Krogh 2016).

3.2 About Edgeryders

Convened by the Council of Europe (CoE) and funded largely by the European Commission (EC) between October 2011 and June 2012, the Edgeryders platform was conceptualised to explore young people's life trajectories and biographies of transition as a means of informing future youth policy. It aimed to focus on examples of specific life transition projects that were perceived as successful, the reasons for that success, or, conversely, unpicking the reasons why some projects had failed. These experiences were elicited through a blog-style online platform, which participants were invited to join (via links pushed out through social media channels by the project team). The platform was constructed as a 'social game' in which participants were awarded 'points' for the quality or frequency of their contributions. There was thus an element of play which both distinguished this platform from its predecessors and contributed a sense of community from participants' earliest engagements with it. The game aspect of the platform both reflected and enabled a sense of reciprocity and mutual care which overtly framed it as a place of support, over and above its policy imperative.

During the nine-month period (Oct 2011 to June 2012) the platform was 'live', over 900 users registered, with around 200 of those becoming regular contributors. Participation was purely voluntary and self-selecting. Some engaged regularly throughout the life of the project, others participated intermittently, infrequently, or only once. Participants were most commonly based in France, Italy or the UK, but there were also large numbers from Spain, Germany, Sweden, Belgium and Romania, and some from the US and Canada. The ratio of male to female participants was approximately 2:1, and the vast majority were between the ages of 20 and 35. Most were university educated, with some holding one or more postgraduate or professional qualifications. Thus, whilst in some respects the sample was quite diverse, it was recognized that some voices were not well represented. Nevertheless, the breadth of experience that characterized the overall project sample was able to provide some valuable insights into the specific challenges and frustrations of contemporary European youth.

Edgeryders was structured around a series of key themes (termed 'Campaigns' on the platform). On the web page for each 'Campaign' was a series of provocative questions, quotes or statements, to which participants were invited to respond in the form of a blog post[3], also called 'Mission Reports'. Most posts were written in English; some (<10%) were written in French or Italian. Some posts were brief, informal and conversational (<200 words); others were more akin to a formal article (>2000 words in some cases). The majority existed between these extremes. Participants were invited to comment on each other's posts, thereby producing discussion, debate, and enabling direct channels of advice, guidance and support. They were also invited to 'self-tag' their posts with key words – akin to the coding process used in qualitative data analysis – in a process characterised by the Edgeryders project team as a form of 'open ethnography'[4]. Beyond these provocations, no further structure was imposed. This allowed key themes to coalesce organically, led by the concerns and interests of the participants, and oriented towards articulating/producing the support structures they felt they needed. Indeed, from the project's inception there was a strong aspiration to allow participants to define its direction by allowing the experiences shared to determine the focus of 'Campaigns' in a bottom-up approach. In that sense, it was a co-created space whose benefits were shared – albeit in distinct ways – between its participants and its policy-maker originators (Pais and Provasi 2015; Polizzi and Vitale 2017). This structure offered enough scope to elicit disagreement and challenge from fellow contributors, and responses were reflective and open to critique, suggestions and insights from peers. Whilst there can be a danger in online discussions that conversations become too polarized or converge on a single position (Sunstein

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3 A catalogue can be viewed in the project archive, hosted by the new Edgeryders website (requires signing up to a free log-in): http://edgeryders.eu. General findings are discussed extensively in Collins (2013).

4 https://edgeryders.eu/c/workspaces/open-ethnographer

2007), here, the breadth of contributions and openness to diversity of experience has reduced this potentially distorting effect.

As the lead analysts on this project, we coded the qualitative data constituted by the blog posts using WEFT QDA, a free qualitative data analysis software package. The coded data was analysed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006), and was simultaneously emic (drawing on codes 'from within' the data, such as tags participants applied to posts) and etic ('from outside' the platform, i.e. based on our interpretation and synthesis of themes emergent across the 'campaigns'). This allowed the participants' primary concerns – as 'spoken' through their posts – to direct our analysis, and thus form policy signposts directly based on lived experience (Collins and Cuzzocrea 2013). Beyond collaboratively building the online repository of knowledge within the platform itself, the participants learned, editing (their written content and their lives) as they went along, benefitting from input from others engaged in similar life projects. Others (Cottica et al. 2017) have called these 'semantic social networks'. While not attempting to assess the scalability of digital ethnography here (cf. Cottica et al. 2017), we nonetheless suggest that both the data and the processes that characterised Edgeryders as a network offer useful insights into the impacts of digitally-mediated social networks for research in youth studies and youth policy more broadly.

It should, nevertheless, be noted that the attempt at openness, dynamism and power-sharing that characterised the Edgeryders project remained the product of a neoliberal policy agenda. Participants were aware that they had to 'play the game' imposed by the Council of Europe in order to push their concerns into the policy domain and have their voices accorded credibility. However, there was no evidence that this in any way suppressed what participants wanted to convey. Rather, the openness of the discursive space in the platform was well-suited to the generation of wide-ranging, sometimes radical, often strongly-held views. Through these emerged a host of examples, some extremely detailed, of how young people are navigating

their transition to adulthood through creativity and entrepreneurialism, thus revealing much about the socio-economic contexts in which they are embedded (Collins and Cuzzocrea 2013).

As a result, the platform could be seen as offering a window into the real life settings in which young people's lives – with their challenges and innovative solutions – are played out (see also Blanchard 2004; Bortree 2005; Walker 2000; Kings 1996) and their identities negotiated (Snee 2011, Duggan 2013a, 2013b).

3.3 'A community of innovation activists'

The radical bottom-up approach taken by the project led to Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* describing Edgeryders as 'a community of innovation activists' (Pilati 2018). The nature of the information sharing and organisation characterised by this online structure, as well as the 'activist' framing suggested by *La Repubblica,* invites comparison with a wiki – a website, with no defined leader or owner, within which members collaboratively produce, organise and modify content for the benefit of a wider pool of users, where the structure of that content emerges according to users' needs. Wikis are premised on the understanding that a citizenry as a whole contains more expertise than any small group of experts (Shirky 2008). This similarity attuned us to the conceptual lens we apply here, namely the idea that, in piecing together fragments of independent adulthood(s), sharing ideas, experiences and support with their peers, Edgeryders participants were engaged in 'wiki-transitions'. This aligns with Hodkinson's identification of 'the potential for particular forms of online interactions to draw like-minded people into cohesive, stable and relatively insular forms of community' (2007:626), here oriented around the policy imperative of the project but also participants' own experience-sharing agenda. We further note that wikis are information-organising structures which emerge in the context of much larger, more disparate socio-information structures that do not, have not, or cannot otherwise enable(d) that specific coalescence of information. We

suggest that this anarchic coalescence of bespoke information through Edgeryders lends further weight to our conceptualisation of young adult lives as wiki-transitions, since participants' attempts to organise information about transitions to adulthood are situated within nested layers of national and regional socio-information structures that, evidently, were failing to meet their needs. On this basis we stress that it is not Edgeryders, the project or the platform, that we characterise as a wiki; rather, we use 'wiki-ness' as a metaphor for the lives and actions of our participants as reflected through their blog posts. We move now to highlight some of the lived experiences of Edgeryders participants as articulated in the platform, in order to disentangle the 'wiki-ness' of those lived experiences from the (institutionally-designed) organising structure of the blog platform itself.

4. **Wiki transitions: a discussion of participants experiences**

'The reality of today's world is that all of our lives are entangled. [An] Individualized worldview keeps us stuck in an outdated paradigm that just is not working anymore.' (Unnamed commenter)[5]

'I think that Edgeryders is a precious opportunity to better understand other realities and to understand if the experience of mine can be useful to other people, and the experience of other people can be useful to me.' (Renato)

Participants in Edgeryders shared two key points of view, summed up in these introductory quotes. First, they saw that wholly individualized transitional pathways are unsuited to the

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[5] Participants' names are reported as displayed on the Edgeryders platform; some used their actual names, others employed pseudonyms. A small number remained anonymous.

contemporary socio-economic context. The increasingly free movement of people, ideas, information and capital presents opportunities and challenges produced through the intersections of those mobilities. Embracing those opportunities and tackling those challenges requires flexibility, dynamism and acknowledgement of the profound influence of structural factors. Second, they saw the value of peer-learning as a means of accessing – and offering – support in relation to navigating these transitional pathways. We have discussed elsewhere how this suggests the importance of forms of peer to peer collaboration which are understudied (Cuzzocrea and Collins 2015). The discussion below critically discusses how participants constructed their transitions to independent adulthood as 'wiki-transitions', in turn shaping the online space of the Edgeryders platform in the mould of their everyday embodied space. We organise the discussion through two subtopics: how the 'wiki-ness' of participants' young adulthoods emerged through digitally mediated interactions that built their confidence (described as 'wiki-transitions') (4.1); and how the interactions within the platform induced participants' mastery of 'plug-in' information (4.2).

4.1 'Wiki-transitions'

Participants were united in their acknowledgement of how being inhabitants of the digital age helped foster new kinds of enabling connections across space. Often they drew on examples from their own work, study or life experience to discuss how the co-learning enabled by digitally-mediated interaction produced a new-found sense of both competence and confidence. Drawing on her experience of participating in an online collaborative experiment in music production, Jessy said:

> '… we have no idea how experienced the contributors are and first time participation
>
> is bound to be somewhat intimidating. The idea that we can anonymously contribute to

something with the knowledge that those more advanced in their skill are also contributing goes some way to building a community of improvement.' (Jessy)

Parallels are evident between Jessy's experience with this music initiative and the 'wiki-ness' of the life-stage it sits within, suggesting that the wiki metaphor does echo off-line realities reasonably well. She highlights, first, the unknown nature of the end product – whether a piece of music, or a life goal. She notes also the sense of security enabled by anonymity, as fear of judgement is removed. In turn this encourages greater risk-taking, meaning – as Jessy notes – improvements happen as experimentation leads to the development of skill. As such, there is an impetus to contribute without having to be an 'expert'. Finally, she articulates a sense that experienced collaborators will join in and help.

A similar example was offered by Bridget, whose comments reflected on her experience of self-directed but peer-supported learning through online discussion networks. She described being 'helped to progress by a 'more able other'', which, beyond being 'totally efficient', allowed her to follow 'personal flight paths of learning'. The clustering of 'like-minds' around topics of shared interest, combined with the means to engage at variable paces depending on individual learning speeds/styles, contributed to what Bridget described as an 'efficient' means of working towards and through questions, and finding solutions suited to her "personal flight path." Here, 'wiki-ness' takes the shape, on the one hand, of a somewhat instrumental approach to knowledge-seeking or knowledge-production. Bridget had a clear idea of what information she wanted and she was focused on locating it – much in the same way we might navigate a wiki in search of a specific piece of information. On the other, it suggests how the idea that life transitions are individualized is not necessarily redundant as a theorization; rather, that individualized aspirations – or 'personal flight paths' – may simultaneously be unique *and* constructed through complex, shifting and multi-layered interactions with others.

Like Jessy and Bridget, Ela highlighted wiki-like characteristics of her experiences working as part of a 'Free Culture Incubator', a workshop series for freelance creatives and cultural workers. She stated:

> 'I have learned from my own experience that each collaborative process 100% relies on good facilitation. This starts with bringing people together, creating the right space and atmosphere for the work, then moderating the process and following up on the results afterwards. In most cases, this work is unpaid and based on mere enthusiasm.'
>
> (Ela)

Contributing time or other resources for free in the hope of some kind of reciprocity is a key wiki-trait. Perhaps because of the *pro bono* nature of many of their activities, so too was the formula 'enthusiasm first, process second'. We see a risk that persistent *pro bono* enthusiasm – and the labour required to make ideas a reality – entraps young people in socially valuable but monetarily unrewarded limbo (Murgia 2015). There was, however, widespread consensus across a diverse range of participants' experiences that identifying the means of organising people's contributions to a project or initiative would follow from what those individuals sought to contribute. Like the early stages of building a wiki, it is necessary to have a sense of the resources, knowledge and expertise available before seeking to organise them in a structure useful to others.

Whilst there was widespread discussion of growing expectations that young workers, and/or workers in creative/socially-focused industries, would work for free at least some of the time, particularly whilst gaining experience of their field and developing their skills (e.g. Hesmondhalgh 2010; Siebert and Wilson 2013), this expectation was also problematized by some contributors. Alison, for instance, is the founder of 'Pesky People', which campaigns to

encourage institutions to better accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. She primarily uses social networks to connect and influence. She stated:

> '…I really do feel there is a big perception that people expect you to do it for FREE! I mean, the great bit about social media is that we help each other but we all need to be able to keep the roof over our head.' (Alison)

This reveals a fundamental problem with part of the wiki-transition model, i.e., that some of the practices that characterise it are also exploitative and serve to entrench the precarity that other aspects of a wiki-transition seek to counter being, for instance, based on pro bono labour.

4.2 A 'plug-in' attitude

A key characteristic of the wiki-transitions that participants articulated was a sense of 'trying and testing' solutions to newly emergent socio-economic and generationally-specific challenges – what we describe here as a 'plug-in attitude'. The ways in which social structures are changing – including the growing diversity within the workforce articulated by Alison – was widely discussed theme on the Edgeryders platform. Specifically, participants talked about their sense that they wanted, or saw that they needed, to be part of a dynamic society capable of responding to emergent demographic and socio-economic changes. One unnamed commenter stated:

> 'The key task of making a thriving home life is to disregard conventional thinking and to innovate, to find new ways of arranging your living space, your daily routine and your collaborations with your family members. Because my mum now has dementia, we're continually adjusting her care and routine as her condition changes. As the world becomes more changeable, we will all have to continually adjust and shuffle how we express our care for each other and our daily routines. We have to be open to change and try not to judge other people for their choices.' (Unnamed)

The stripping away of social welfare structures in some parts of Europe, alongside the increasing fluidity of the labour market means younger generations may no longer live close to home in order to care for older family members (e.g. Benería 2008; Bailey and Boyle 2004). The unnamed commenter cited above emphasises the need for flexibility, openness to doing things differently, and learning from others' approaches as means of addressing these uncertainties. The adaptability demanded, alongside the expectation that different approaches may have to be tried and tested, prefigures a life phase characterised almost as a series of 'plug-ins'. During this 'plug-in' phase, which might be seen as akin to what others have described as a 'social switchboard' (Wellman and Gulia 1999, quoted in Hodkinson 2007), individuals like the commenter above trial one solution, which may be successful for a limited period before another solution is 'plugged-in' to see whether it works better. Such a process may continue indefinitely, enabled by social (online) networks in which a constant source of 'plug-in' ideas are shared. Indeed, this model was articulated by Patrick, who shared his experience of Kfé Innovación, a global network of gatherings of <20 people who meet (in person) to discuss a topic related to social innovation. Others are invited to join the meeting remotely via social media. Patrick said:

> "I do believe that these venues around the world can create 'nexus' of innovative networks that will help change society, improving it far better than governments and rigid institutions could, particularly in a local way but with models prone to replication and export."(Patrick)

The conceptualisation of this kind of experience-sharing as replicable, exportable knowledge repositories represents a commonly-shared motivation amongst participants to contribute to something beyond their own life transitions, based on an activation of weak ties networks (Haythornthwaite 2002). They were motivated to secure futures other than their own. A participant named on the platform as 'Rete G2' introduced an organisation called Seconde

Generazioni, a cross-cultural network concerned with citizenship rights for second generation immigrants across Italy. One of the primary aims of the network is to increase the social capital of young second generation immigrants. Amongst other achievements it has been successful in leading a movement to create a Law on the so-called 'Jus soli' - approved by the Chamber of the Italian Parliament but not by the Senate - which would have given stronger citizenship rights for the sons and daughters of immigrants born and raised in Italy. In describing her/his work with the network, Rete G2 expresses, first, how that experience has fed into her/his own wiki-transition as the knowledge gained and connections made enable further progression down her/his life path. Second, the knowledge-sharing within the network illustrates the wiki-traits described above in relation to Patrick and the unnamed commenter's experiences. Third, by focusing on the generation of social capital amongst network members, a resource is built in which, like a wiki, the total is greater than the sum of its parts.

The framing of networks as 'multipliers' – opportunities to stand on the shoulders of others – was firmly connected with the practice of reciprocity. Nadia, for instance, said, "The bigger your network, the more generous you are with your own time and skills and equipment to help out others, the more generous others are towards you." It was also evident that Edgeryders did not need to feel they were giving and receiving in equal proportions. Lyne, for instance, writes: "I receive less than I give, but that's ok. People perceive me as the connector, and whenever I need some help, they are happy to give me a hand." These processes spanned online and offline space, as exemplified by Adria:

> 'And, since we do live in a network society, I would also encourage really making use
> of that network. Don't be shy to ask people around you even if you don't know them
> well, maybe they know someone who can help, or how to point you in the right direction
> in another way. Send a message to that 235th friend you have on Facebook whom you
> never talk to but who just might know something useful to you. If all else fails and you

do not have a network of people within the desired field, you can make a clandestine visit to the uni's Friday bar and share a beer with someone who can give you a hint ;)' (Adria)

An unnamed commenter added her/his view that, "… our virtual networking tendencies are not a disjuncture from how we would socialise in the physical world but an extension of it." This seamless movement across on- and offline social worlds was identified as a major benefit to young people obliged to enact their transitions to adulthood in a landscape of precarity. An unidentified commenter on the Making A Living campaign noted:

'Young generations grow up without many of the borders we did, for example there is no longer an online/offline perspective in the lives of many kids of today, and the open and easy access networks have formed a mentality of sharing and connecting, hopefully nurturing divergent thinking and imagination, things our generations have lost somewhere on the way…'

The 'borderless-ness' of Edgeryders' transitional support networks demonstrates that the notion of a wiki-transition is more than an online support structure for offline interactions. It is equally a manifestation of the 'plug-in' approach to life transitions, in which intersecting synchronous/ asynchronous online/face-to-face social networks/support structures represent a tool box of options, reported experience of which then feeds back into the network. As illustrated here through these examples of Edgeryders' lived experiences, wiki-transitions, though a useful means of characterising young people's positive practical action, might also be seen as a conceptual mirror held up to embodied precarity. The characterisation of wiki-transitions as constituted through trust in the input of (un/known) others based on subjective and often unverified guidance, (partially?) informed risk-taking, the navigation of highly individualized life trajectories, and the expectation of reciprocity given for free, may, in fact,

be viewed as an indictment of the socio-economic instabilities that, paradoxically, make the practical embodiment of wiki-transitions necessary. Nevertheless these online interactions can and do have empowering effects (Gordon and Koo 2008), evidenced by the quotes below:

'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)

The reflections of Edgeryders participants discussed here illustrate lived young adulthoods pieced together through fragments of shared experiential knowledge. On this basis we argue for the salience of 'wiki-transition' as a concept – not to describe the online space of interaction *per se*, but to describe the process of navigating young adulthood (as part of which, in the twenty-first century, digital networks are inevitably part). This was evidenced through the way in which peer-learning and guidance increased participants' confidence in organising their skills and talents, and their mastery of 'plug-in' solutions to emergent challenges. In our concluding section, we reflect on the digital ethnography approach used to highlight some key lessons for future Europe-focused youth research that, being oriented towards policy making, might seek to make use of similar techniques.

Conclusions

In this article we have situated a policy project in the context of a growing number of online information networks and repositories oriented towards youth, and we have highlighted its distinctiveness as an online space in which young people's *active* participation was, and is, fundamental to its past, and continued, success. In framing the everyday realities of young people's lives as 'wiki transitions', we have revealed the extent to which young adults have taken it upon themselves to build the support networks they feel formal institutions, such as national governments, have denied them. That in this particular case study the participants have achieved meaningful personal gains as a result of their engagement with the project is evidenced by the continuation of Edgeryders as a project, far beyond its initial nine-month life span (Cottica et al. 2017).[6]

On the one hand this could be seen as purely strategic networking by young people increasingly aware of how the right connection might lead to a longed-for job opportunity. Yet the emotions apparent in the blog posts suggests that such a reading would be cynical. Instead, the platform data casts light on the reshaping of the praxis of youth transitions in the context of shared experiences of neoliberal precarity, and resultant solidarity. As such, this echoes Hodkinson's

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[6] At the time of writing, it exists in the form of a social enterprise and collaborative research network dedicated to addressing a range of socio-economic challenges, from healthcare to sustainable food systems (https://edgeryders.eu/) using an 'open consulting' model, drawing on the expertise from its now vast network. The online community has continued to grow (to over 5,000 registered users in June 2019) and the platform has migrated to a service better able to cope with the growing number of workstreams, research projects and conversations.

observations about interactive online journals, that 'in the course of conversing with a plurality of online groups and persons, some individuals may manage to develop or sustain strong, intimate online relationships with others' (Hodkinson 2007: 628). Although outside the scope of our present analysis, there are clear parallels here, too, between the genesis of 'Edgeryders: The Social Enterprise' and the notion of wiki-style collaborative information-sharing (Cottica 2010; Cottica 2013; Cuzzocrea and Collins 2015) as a means of directly tackling the absence of targeted policy and/or action at a range of scales. The dispersed, collaborative nature of information-sharing characterised not just by Edgeryders but by young people's use of social networks and online space to reach out to each other, somewhat undermines – even shatters – the idea of the 'magic triangle' as a means of understanding young people's lives. Instead, we see a model of ongoing mutual participation more akin to an infinity loop, in which ideas and support are always flowing, and always feeding back into the same system.

It was evident from the ways participants communicated both through and around the Edgeryders platform that their digital competencies were often far more advanced than might be reflected by a basic wiki structure. This was evidenced through acts of dissent via Twitter during the end of project conference in 2012, where some Edgeryders participants in the audience used the live Twitter wall on stage to express points of critique during the formal presentations by EU policymakers. Rather than being interpreted as hostile or oppositional, we suggest they demonstrate the vitality of the participants and their ability to pursue arguments and goals within open and democratic discussions, as well as a general willingness to enter into conversation with institutional actors At the same time, they demonstrate the willingness to 'push from the bottom' to focus more attention to their needs. We believe that the Edgeryders platform experience itself – the building of confidence through community and peer-support – strengthened this. Indeed, the interactions that extended beyond the platform itself, including the Twitter wall at the conference, suggest that the basic blog-style structure

of the platform, or even a similar platform constructed explicitly as a wiki, may not be exhaustive of possible online-offline interactions. Rather, useful frictions may emerge when the power dynamic entrenched within the 'magic triangle' is exposed to vulnerability – such as unanticipated real-time dissent.

Beyond the conceptual value of 'wiki transitions' in the context of understanding contemporary young adulthood in Europe, and the legacy of ongoing relationships between participants seven years after the official project completion, the Edgeryders platform itself has revealed itself to be a mechanism for the generation of immensely rich and insightful data. As such, it is a model worthy of further experimentation in policy contexts, particularly those concerned with youth. Nevertheless, despite some hints from recent policy publications of alignment with the recommendations of the Edgeryders project, questions remain over the extent to which these will be taken up at an EU or national level. It must also be acknowledged that the Edgeryders platform was, ultimately, a space designed by *adults* who were trying to anticipate what form of engagement would attract young participants. The relative success of the platform design should not detract from the future possibility of involving young adults through more participatory approaches to designing policy research instruments. Indeed, the fact that social media platforms have grown still further in scale, scope and socio-cultural potency in the few years since Edgeryders emerged demonstrates how rapidly digitally-mediated social connectivity evolves. Were the project to take place today, the research mechanism may be less like a blog and more like a series of Instagram stories. Nevertheless, the social *project* around which such interactions hinge remains, we suggest, inherently wiki-like in its concern with organising and sharing information through willingly contributed free labour.

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