Becoming Engagable:

Discipline and Participation among Activists in Southern Stockholm

Jakob Svensson, Karlstad University, jakob.svensson@kau.se

Abstract

This paper is empirically based in a (n)ethnographic study of a network of middle-class activists in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen (southern Stockholm) acting to save the local bathhouse. These activists are also engaged in lobbying for a cultural centre, preserve green areas and the quality of life in the attractive and well located sister suburbs. The theoretical starting points will be found in the borderland between theories of late modernity (Beck; Giddens) and theories about discipline and power (Foucault).

The paper discusses the implications of increasing use of social networking sites for political participation emerging outside parliamentary arenas. The paper concludes that in tandem with the increase of social networking sites a new kind of network logic is developing, underlining identity negotiation as a dominant motivator for political participation. This logic contributes to rationalized practices for expressions of affinity, which in turn discipline the individual users to connectedness with like-minded people in the neighbourhood. This manifests itself more concretely through practices of joining e-mail lists, following twitter accounts, joining Ning- and Facebook groups. When negotiating individuality through network visibility, referring and tying yourself to activist groups online, you will inevitably become updated on their actions too, and hence may engage if interested and suitable. In other words, online social networking makes you engagable.

Keywords: Political Participation, Social Networking Sites, Network Logic, Updating
Introduction

I used to share an apartment in Aspudden, just two subway stops south of the Stockholm inner city island of Södermalm. This is a very pleasant suburb with some old architecture, green areas and access to the waterfront. Together with neighbouring Midsommarkransen, Aspudden is arguably the oldest suburb in Stockholm. Young couples with babies, largely populate these suburbs, having left the inner city when starting a family. This is illustrated by the large number of cafés, populated with mums chatting and sipping lattes together while their babies sleep in the trolleys next to them. These suburbs are a stronghold for the Green Party (Miljöpartiet), which got between 23 and 29 % of the vote in the latest elections (compared to 7 % nationwide).

One day at the end of April 2010 I got a message sent to me via Facebook suggesting I should sign an online petition against the plans to demolish the old community-run (but city-owned) bathhouse two blocks away from where I lived. I was also suggested to join the action group to save the bathhouse. Having recently enjoyed the thrills watching the horror movie Jaws in the pool area, on an inflatable mattress with a drink in my hand, my feelings towards the bathhouse and the different activities organized there were very positive. Hence I signed the petition, and also joined the Facebook-group and added many of the members as my friends. I also started to follow the Twitter feeds, read the bathhouse blog as well as signing myself for two shares in the bath house for 10 000 SEK each (for a potential take-over, buying the bath house from the city). Due to what many believe was the attractive location of the bathhouse it was destroyed. But what remained was a network of activists that later formed the group SÖFÖ (Södra Förstaden, the Southern Suburb) that has continued to act mostly against exploitation plans in the suburbs, in order to preserve green areas, playgrounds as well as lobby for turning an abandoned fire station into a cultural centre or a of non-commercial meeting place.

In academia, the rise of new media has been accompanied by a large number of claims of its impact on society and political participation. Since production and distribution of information are becoming more accessible to everyone, citizens are increasingly able to communicate directly with one another. Therefore some argue that we are witnessing the growth of a participatory culture that will fundamentally change citizenship practices (see Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2008; Shirky, 2009). Dystopian descriptions of an increasingly sceptical, distrusting and inward-looking citizenry in late modernity (Boogs, 2000; Bauman, 2001) is today countered by numerous accounts of a rising network society\(^1\) claimed to flatten out governance hierarchies and distributing power (Rheingold, 2002: 163; Bruns: 2008: 1). In network societies, action coalitions are claimed to rather rely on loose, non-hierarchical and open communities of participants often

\(^1\) van Dijk (2006: 20) defines the network society as a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organization on all levels (individual, group, organization and society).
making use of new technology for communication and coordination (Bruns, 2008: 362). Most notably the Internet is argued to afford possibilities for both reflexive identity negotiation and political mobilization (van Dijk, 2000: 36). Hence the Internet has been conceived of both as a signature tool for more lifestyle-based participation as well as a remedy for disinterest in politics with its portrayal of the citizenry as engaged and interactive.

Through theories of media logics and mediatization we know that media and communication technologies are intimately linked to politics and participation (see Altheide, 2004; Hjarvard, 2008). Hence new media will no doubt bring with it changing forms of political participation. But how to say anything useful about emerging conventions of citizenship without lapsing into futurology or engaging in the uncritical painting of democratic utopias? My answer has been to conduct a (n)ethnographic inspired case study of the network of activists\(^2\) in southern Stockholm. Rather than only to praise or hail utopias, the quest has been to understand the changes citizenship and political participation are undergoing in the wake of network societies.

Studying these activists I found that power had not disappeared with the rise of network types of organizations, media and communication. Rather what I found was a shift from more tangible and easily observable hierarchical power structures to more non-transparent relations of power. The rise of SNSs (Social Networking Sites)\(^3\) and its access from mobile and hand-held computing devices, seems to encourage or even demand a social negotiation of the political self through practices of updating. By following twitter accounts, joining e-mail and SMS-lists, Ning- and Facebook groups, activist became updated on the activities in the neighbourhoods and could engage if suitable and interested, hence the title of this paper *Becoming Engagable*. New media practices both made it easier and seemed to push participants to engage in the activities of the network of activists in southern Stockholm. Thus the aim of this paper is not only to echo popular accounts of the mobilizing potential in communities of equals and like-minded using digital technology (see Rheingold, 2002; Shirky, 2009), but also to ground these findings in a critical analysis of power and discipline (see Foucault, 1994). I will argue that a kind of network logic is imposing behavioural patterns of reflexive updating and self-disclosure, disciplining activists to become engagable.

\(^2\) I use the term activist to refer to political actors outside the Parliament, but with an outspoken political aim, often relating their activities to parliamentary decisions and representatives (hence delineating activists from political actors within parliamentary institutions and actors within more popular culture spheres not primarily set up for political or citizenship purposes, see Svensson, 2011a)

\(^3\) Ellison & boyd (2007:2) defines SNSs as web-based services allowing individuals to create a (semi)public profiles, connecting this profile to other users, whose contacts in turn will be made accessible by the service.
Discipline and Power in Digital Late Modernity

From a sociological perspective it is common to conceive of our time as late modern (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1995; Bauman, 2001). Dahlgren (2006) characterizes late modernity by identifying two interrelated cultural processes: dispersion of unifying cultural frameworks and individualization. The first refers to the increasing pluralization, fragmentation and nichification of society along lines of ethnicity, media consumption, cultural interests, lifestyles, interests, tastes etc (ibid.). Individualization refers to lacking a sense of social belonging and a growing sense of personal autonomy (ibid.), a process where communities, personal relationships, social forms and commitments are less bound by history, place and tradition (Miller, 2008: 388). In other words, the collective and the traditional has faded in importance in favour of the individual identity formation project (Giddens, 1991). However, self-realization is an elusive goal since it can hardly be achieved once and for all. Thus the making and moulding of the self becomes a continuous and never ending process (Millier, 2008: 388). This underlines reflexivity as a dominant theme in late modernity. Reflexivity means that we consider our selves and our practices from different perspectives, always re-considering previously acquired knowledge, not taking anything for granted. It is especially our life choices and individual identities that are continuously being scrutinized, redefined and subject to our reflections (Giddens, 1991).

Arendt (1998/1958: 41, 49) noticed that already the public realm in ancient Greece was reserved for individuality and permeated by a spirit where everybody had to distinguish him or herself. Today this public realm has largely moved online. Who to text-message, who’s posting to comment on, and how to respond to messages and postings are used by young people as “the raw material for identity and group-shaping activities” (Rheingold, 2002: 25). In my own work I have labelled expressive rationality as the motivational force in digital late modernity4 (see Svensson, 2011b). With the increasing possibility of identity on SNSs, a kind of do it yourself-biographies emerge, especially online (see Hodkinson 2007: 627- 628; Livingstone, 2008). Hence Internet uses in general, are becoming more self-expressive. In the field of political communication, the need to feel connected to an issue, evoking some kind of citizen identity, has proven to be an important incentive for communication on websites set up by political institutions (see Hilts & Yu, 2010). I argue that choices of arenas and topics for political participation will be reflexively chosen since it is increasingly likely that we will share this in different social networks online. Hence, late modern individualisation is not only the liberation of the individual from social regulation in modern institutions (family, church, social movements) but also a demand for supplying our biographies, to import our selves into our biographies through our own actions (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, discussed in Leaning, 2009: 76).

4 By labelling our time as digital late modernity I wish to underline that societal and cultural changes in late modernity are happening at the same time as we experience a technological shift towards digitalization.
In this sense I argue that a kind of network logic is disciplining us to practices of reflexive updating and self-disclosure.

According to Foucault (1994/1973: 52, 57) we are in the midst of a disciplinary society, an age of social control that started at the end of the 18th century. What is constitutive of this society is that power is exercised through disciplining, normalizing power and the knowledge-power formations that support these largely discursive practices. The control of individuals started to be performed by a series of authorities and networks of institutions of surveillance and correction (Foucault, 1994/1973: 57). Disciplining should be understood as increasingly controlled and rationalized processes of adjusting activities, communication networks and power relations (Foucault, 1994/1982: 339). Power is a type of relationship between people, not properties of individuals or collectives as such, influencing others’ actions rather than acting immediately upon others (Foucault, 1994/1979: 324, see also van Dijk, 2000: 32). Hence through the exercise of power people are disciplined to act in certain ways, in turn structuring the field of further possible actions (Foucault 1994/1982: 343).

Power relations are rationalized through different logics operating in different contexts. For example social control was used at the end of the 18th century in relation to the formation of capitalist society as a way to protect economic wealth (Foucault, 1994/1973: 69). The question here is what social control is used for on SNSs? To be successful online, you need to master a new form of sociability, through database and friend management and through continuously updating, negotiating and maintaining an attractive self on as many stages as possible in order for peers or like-minded people to visit your SNS profile and leave comments (see Livingstone, 2008). This is a kind of power that reveals itself in the continuous preoccupation with expressing and negotiating our selves and our positions, as well as interpreting others through the production, maintenance and sustenance of network visibility. Social control today would be the constant monitoring/supervision of both oneself and others through practices of updating. Foucault’s discussions of power can be applied remarkably well in digital arenas. He outlines a form of power that makes individuals into subjects, ties them to their identity by conscience and self-knowledge (1994/1982: 331). In other words the late modern reflexive subject is, following Foucault, a result of a form of power exercised upon it.

Visibility and power has always been connected but in different ways through history (see Thompson 2001/1995: ch. 4). When in antiquity the visibility of the few to the many was connected to power, in modernity being watched was connected to a subordinate position of being disciplined, a more subtle normalizing power of the gaze (in schools, armies, hospitals, penal institutions et cetera). On the Internet we are all visible all the time through a type of connected presence, but we are also watching others. We are objects of the constant gaze of others, and we are participating in this disciplining by free will in order to secure a place on the
social arena. Whether we are exercising or being subordinate to power all depends how skilfully we navigate the new social arena and manage our databases of friends and connections, how skilfully we govern our visibility in the different contexts and front stages SNSs offers. Foucault (1994/1973: 84) states that the individuals over whom power is exercised are those from whom the knowledge they themselves produce is extracted and used in order to control them. The central question to deal with today is thus to decide what shall be public and to whom (see also Thompson 2001/1995: 174). This decision is to a large extent put in the hand of the everyday Internet user. This is a balancing act on what to publish or not in order to avoid this information being used to control you but at the same time keep your social place in the network and manage a continuous identity. Studies have shown that working class kids are not as successful as middle class kids in using SNSs for enhancing capital(s) (this indicating a second digital divide, see, Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008).

Another way of illustrating power relations in network societies is through the metaphor of a filter. Networks of peers and like-minded people influence our decisions because they work as a filter (see Anderson, 2006: 108). Life choices seem to be multiplying and the responsibility for making the right choices is increasingly put on the individual when modern institutions lose in relevance. In the late modern society, every citizen can construct her own custom lifestyle and select her ideology from a large number of choices (Manovich, 2001: 42). We are thus experiencing an ever-expanding range of elective identities on offer together with the ease with which they may be embraced or rejected. This logic of identity can be liberating (see Beck's treatment on subpolitics, 1995) but also loaded with stress about making the right choices. When tradition and modern institutions become less prominent we need other guiding mechanisms and this is where our networks are starting to have increasing influence over our decisions and us. The network functions as peer pressure, both informing us about the variety of choices but also what others before us have done with these choices (Anderson, 2006: 174). In this way, pictures of like-minded people’s and peers’ likes and dislikes together with aggregated past choices and behaviours make us anticipate our future needs and wants (Hands, 2011: 128). Hence, needs might be created with this information from peer-groups, like-minded people and past choices.

Notes on Methodology

I have followed the action group for saving the bathhouse, later SÖFÖ, from early 2010 both online and offline. SÖFÖ largely consists of loosely affiliated neighbours, many who have kids in the same school or kindergarten or live close to each other. The community-run (and owned) cinema Tellus serves as a natural meeting place for SÖFÖ. This is where offline meetings take place and many in the core group also work in their free-time running Tellus and the attached
café. Online communication is mostly done through their Facebook- and Ning-page. First the group used a Facebook-group named *Save the Aspudden Bathhouse* (my translation: Rädda Aspuddsbadet see fig. 1).

Later after the bathhouse had been demolished and SÖFÖ created, the group used a Facebook-page named *the Southern Suburb* (my translation: Södra Förstaden, see fig. 2).

Ning is a website where you can create your own social network but focused around an issue. And SÖFÖ did create a Ning-site for their community where members had their own profiles, could connect and message each other as well as start discussions, groups and forums within the site (see my profile page fig. 3)
Digital technology and social networking sites are neither neutral artefacts nor do they have inherent capacities for social organization and change (Coleman & Blumler, 2009: 10). Technology and society evolves in tandem (Svensson, 2011a & 2011b), hence new media and communication technologies should be understood from its uses and social contexts. These technologies are constructed, maintained and given meaning through a range of complex and social processes (Coleman & Blumler, 2009:10). To avoid an essentialist, causal or technical deterministic study, it is therefore important to inquire into how and under which circumstances technology is used. Causal models of explanation are potentially misleading since it is impossible to isolate Internet and media use from other social practices and determine what causes what (Anduiza, 2009). One way of proceeding is through a case study. When focusing on a case, the web sites to study are almost given in advance, and researchers may concentrate on events and practices in a more empirically constructive manner (Gerodimos & Ward, 2007: 118).

Case studies are most often generalizing in their aim. In this case the choice of activists to study is not based in choosing a representative case out of which generalizations can be made. Rather the choice is made for ethnographic reasons, through having lived and shared experiences with the group and the circumstances they found themselves in. Thus the results of this study may not be applied to political participation in general. But the results will point to interesting aspects of political participation in digital late modernity that I believe will resonate in similar settings. The overall aim is to understand political participation in the particular setting of activists in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen 2010 and 2011. Through this understanding the purpose is also to contribute to a discussion of power and participation in emerging network societies.

This study is inspired by both ethno- and nethnograpic methodology. In a nethnographic study we are released as researchers from the physical place to conduct observations in a virtual context on communities that can be understood as social in its character (Berg, 2011: 119-120).
The aim of nethnographic research is to understand the social interaction taking place online, hence a focus on user-generated information flows (ibid.: 120). The nethnographic approach thus suits the aims of this paper since I am studying how activists used Facebook, Ning, Twitter and SMS, the information flow they initiated and took part in.

Doing nethnography I followed the activists on all their different media platforms, took field notes and screenshots when I observed something I deemed particularly interesting. I used their SNSs (Social Networking Sites) as archives of information (see Berg, 2011: 126), but I have also created my own archive with screenshots since data and interactions on SNS are instantaneous and may be changed or disappear. As a participant researcher, I have participated in discussions on Ning, Facebook and the bathhouse blog, commented on postings and retweeted tweets and forwarded invitations et cetera.

Nethnography is different from ethnography in its exclusive focus on net-based social environments. The physical absence is compensated by different textual and figurative representations, which gives the user larger possibilities to reflect on, test and review different ways of action before they become part of the social interaction (Berg, 2011: 121). This also requires the user to make an active and conscious effort when presenting her-self online. In this way nethnography is a great companion to theories of reflexive individualization in late modernity. Here we can distinguish between asynchronous postings, allowing for greater reflection and planning (for example on the bathhouse blog and on SÖFO’s Ning-group) and synchronous postings, happening in real time (through Twitter feeds, SMS- and e-mail lists, see Berg, 2011: 127).

Nethnography works well in combination with a more traditional ethnographic method, especially since the online and offline world mutually influence each other (van Dijk, 2006: 39). This was especially the case here with the activists both using online media and communication platforms to communicate as well as meeting, discussing and acting offline. The observations and interventions online have thus been complemented with continuous offline interactions and participations in activities (such as meetings, discussions, lectures et cetera). I have also conducted five in-depth interviews (approximately 90 minutes each) with five different activists during 2010 and 2011.

Since the focus of this paper is on power and processes of identification, the approach to political participation is best labelled as cultural and critical, critical because of a preoccupation with power and forms of disciplining and cultural because of a focus on meaning making and identification. A cultural perspective has guided me when building the empirical foundation for analyzing power and participation in southern Stockholm. How to analyse a culture of contemporary political participation? I have used Dahlgren’s (2009) discussion of civic cultures,
intended for analytical and empirical study of civic agency, to guide my observations and interviews. Dahlgren (2009: 108) specifies six dimensions of civic culture - knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices and identities - as entry points in the study of political participation. By mincing the concept of culture into smaller units they are more easily observed and discerned. At the same time describing these dimensions as in a dynamic circuit, he emphasizes their interconnections and mutual dependence in a way that an overall understanding of the coherence of the culture is not lost.

The Urge to Connect, Respond and Update

As mentioned earlier in the discussion of power in network societies, citizens use their network to find like-minded people with similar interests (Anderson, 2006: 53). Hence the network has become an increasingly important filter, through which citizens take part of information and conceive of the world. Through networks we reflexively organize our social life, interact with each other, share and get information. Interactivity and interpersonal communication deals with activities and issues going on between people. One value behind emerging network logic must therefore be connectedness. Connections are indeed the formal dimension of networks, what they consist of (van Dijk, 2000: 33). Talking to activists in southern Stockholm it becomes evident that they use digital media in general and Facebook in particular to connect to issues and people with similar opinions. One young student tells me that he is generally against the expansion of cars and motor traffic in the Stockholm region. Hence he has joined several groups on Facebook, for example one group aiming to save a local forest from being penetrated by planned highway construction and one group to stop a highway construction altogether. Hence whenever he logs in to his Facebook-account he will become updated on what is going on concerning these issues. Similarly a middle-aged Green Party politician and IT-technician says that he joined SÖFÖs Ning- and Facebook-group in order to get in contact with the group and to become informed about their various activities. During the battle for the bathhouse there was a wide range of different ways to connect to the issue and to the core people in the action group and to participate. Besides organizing a festival (see fig. 4), different cultural activities and producing a bathhouse song, there was a blog, e-mail list, SMS-list and Twitter-feed to follow. Hence since the Internet and mobile accesses to it make it easier to connect to like-minded people with similar interests in your vicinity it is also easier to tailor and filter what kind of information on what issues and from whom should reach you.
Today large networks are possible due to new technology such as e-mail, SMS and SNSs (Miller, 2008: 394). Large numbers of people in connected societies have devices that will enable them most of the time to link to places, objects and people (Rheingold, 2002: foreword xii). Given the increasing mobility of communication platforms and mobile access to Internet through smartphones, expressions and maintenance of network connections are taking place all the time, or at least have the possibility to take place all the time. During the battle for the bathhouse in Aspudden the SMS-list as well as the Twitter-feed served to connect the followers directly to the happenings around the bathhouse. For example if there was a new decision made in the City Council, if the Police were on their way. Returning to the issue of power and discipline, the argument here is also that being updated instantaneously about what is going on, making yourself engagable all the time, also pushed you to react and to take part in activities. Some activists I talked to outside the bathhouse during the police eviction of activists who had camped inside, implied that they felt compelled to come when the action group called for their participation. One young mother phrased it as if she had no other choice than to come and show her support for the cause and the action group. Also the young student implies that inherent in the SMS sent out by the action group with calls for participation to information meetings, to protests and blockades was a kind of request, invoking what he describes as a duty to respond. He felt he ought to go down to the bathhouse and join the activists on place, in order to show for them and others his support. This is also illustrated on the bathhouse blog which had a section on What can you do (my translation: Vad kan du göra) to e-mail responsible politicians (see fig. 5). Hence, continuous communication does not only lead to instantaneous information, but in this case also to a demand to act upon this information. This illustrates how needs and behaviours are disciplined by the increasing information flow in digital societies. Getting connected to issues and like-minded people also calls for responding to others and their postings.
as well as it calls for the development of the issues that are of particular interest to you. Given this I would like to underline *responsiveness* as an important value accompanying connectedness.

Following the above discussion I would argue that a central aspect of the emerging network logic is that it disciplines us to be *constantly updated*, in two different ways – to be updated of the doings in the network as well as update the network of our doings, thoughts and feelings. Digital communities are always evolving and decisions tend to be made ad hoc, in the moment, by a loose collective of those affected (Bruns, 2008: 44). Hence in order to know what is going on in your networks, you need to be updated (which not least the battle of the bathhouse illustrates). The Green Party politician underlines this by stating that if he is not constantly updated on what is happening on the Ning-group it is easy to slip out. He tells me that it is not always easy to start a discussion thread online, and if you have not followed the thread for a while you are left behind. This reasoning suggests disciplined practices of updating. You have to be updated otherwise your information might not be accurate and you would be left behind in the peer-group. I also recognize this urge to update in my own behaviour, how I during some periods was checking my Facebook and Twitter several times an hour to follow what was going on with the bathhouse.

Practices of updating through digital media are pivotal for organizing, mobilizing and coordinating participation. A middle-aged mother and part of the core of the action group to save the bathhouse, underlines the importance updating practices during the battle for bathhouse. Firstly important documents (committee statements, different laws and regulations et cetera) were uploaded on the bathhouse blog. Later the Twitter-feed and SMS-lists where pivotal in the practices of updating. For example someone read on the responsible politicians’ blog that the Sport- and Leisure Committee (my translation: Idrottsförvaltningen) would take the decision to demolish the bathhouse during their next meeting. This was then immediately sent out on the SMS-lists and Twitter-feed with a call for an emergency meeting. At that meeting it was decided to guard the bathhouse twenty-four/seven. From then on, the bathhouse guards (or lifeguards – badvakter- as they called themselves) started to manage the SMS-list and Twitter-feed in order to update and quickly mobilize activist to protect the bathhouse from the police. They would also send out messages to bring blankets and candles when the city had cut the electricity (see fig. 6).
During the final stages of the battle there were a lot of text-massages going out, both on SMS, Twitter and Facebook.

To be updated took different forms among the activist. The young student for example tells me that he is interested in decisions concerning cars and motor traffic in the Stockholm region. Thus he tries to follow the decision-making processes concerning these issues, especially by following Green blogs and joining several Facebook-groups. In this way he is updated on what is happening with the issue. When asking him what kinds of discussions are taking place on these Facebook-groups he says that there is not so much discussions as there is information and updatings on political decisions and committee statements. Hence SNSs do not seem to contribute to deliberation, rather what is going on is practices of updating among like-minded people. The student tells me that he would not have known about the plans to destroy the bathhouse if it was not for the Internet. Maybe he had been able to read some in the newspaper but he would never been able to get as much information on the issue as he got from the bathhouse blog. This information made him act. First he attended a meeting and later he signed up on the SMS-list and from then on he also tried to respond to calls sent out on that list.

To be updated also goes the other way around. When asking the student how he should proceed if, for example, the city would close a bicycle path or plan to build a new highway (issues that he cares for), he says that he would first of all start a Facebook-group in order to update his network on what was going on and to see if there was any interest among his connections there. Similarly a female artist, entrepreneur and student in her 30s tells me that she uses Facebook partly because she does not want to be left behind on what is happening among her friends and in the projects she is interested in, and partly because of an urge to tell her friends and connections what is going in and happening in her different projects. She tells me that she wants to sow seeds and that I would be surprised how often people react and something actually happens when she starts something. This constant updating process is the right way to accomplish things, you have to be hyperactive she says to me. The artist tells me that before
taking part in an activity she makes sure that her friends and acquaintances know that she is going through some kind of status update on Facebook. She also checks who else is going to participate in the activity, adds them as friends and if they already are friends perhaps makes a comment on their Facebook-wall. In this way it will be easier for her to connect with them when seeing each other offline. Hence it seems to me that the urge to be updated is as much about disciplined practices following blogs, joining Facebook-groups and SMS-lists as it is about disciplined practices to provide the network with updates.

The implication on politics and participation of values of connectedness and responsiveness through practices of updating would be that we tend to reveal our political interests to a larger extent online than offline. Event though the middle-aged mother, the young student and the middle-aged artist where not outspoken sympathizers of any political party, their facebook network was very much updated on their opinions and what issues they were engaged in at the moment. An American study from the 2008 presidential campaign showed that twenty percent of the survey sample had discovered the political interests of their friends by using SNSs (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer & Bichard, 2010: 80). This seems to counter Eliasoph’s (1998) well-known ethnographic study of American volunteers, where she contends that people tend to avoid politics. Through a network logic, in which updating practices are highly valued, users are to a less extent shying away from making their political opinions visible to others in the network.

**Identity and Reputation**

Intertwined with the increasing importance of managing and sustaining our networks through practices of updating, the network logic underlines late modern processes of identification and reflexivity. A continuous emphasis of the self as something that can be managed, bears upon the individual to such a degree that the self becomes a reflexive project (Giddens, 1991: 32). It thus seems that the late modern self, anxiously trying to confirm who she really is, uses SNSs to both monitor her identity as well as testing it in front of selected others (peers). This takes the form of reflexive connectivity and reflexive responsiveness when making links to other users public (as well as causes, organizations, brands) and hence freeloading on their supposed connotations, connotations to which we wish to tie images of our selves (see Donath & boyd, 2004).

The choices of arenas and topics for political participation are reflexively chosen since it is increasingly likely that we will share this in different social networks online. From this perspective it is not surprising that Green Party sympathizers engage in battling extensions of the highway and trying to save forests and green areas in and around the capital. There is also a strong political identity as activists being nurtured in the SOFÖ network. The Green Party politician tells me that he has always been interested in acting for change and that he cannot
avoid writing to the City Planning Office (my translation: stadsbyggnadskontoret) when he reads about development plans he does not approve of. Similarly the mother talks about her engagement in SÖFÖ and Cinema Tellus as creating an environment she likes and wants to promote, a neighbourhood where fellow citizens can meet and interact with each other. She tells me she is not interested in shopping, she is interested in doing things together with her neighbours, such as showing movies and running a community café. Also the student talks about political activism through different organizations as something he likes to do. He tells me he prefers going to meetings and debates instead of playing badminton or soccer. Similarly the female artist describes herself as the type of person who always gets involved in everything that feels important to her. She tells me that this is who she is and what she does. She sees herself as a firestarter, and that she always becoming the centre of attention in projects she gets involved in. It is obvious that I am studying people who see their activism as a kind of lifestyle, as a part of their identity.

Identity also seems important in another way. The student underlines the importance to join political groups on SNSs online to show support, not only to get updated but also to tell to the members in the group that you are with them and to show for your friends that you support this cause. This was indeed the reason why I joined the Facebook-group to save the bathhouse. Individuality and identity is then both fostered, and dependent on the network, on network visibility with references to other users and causes. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the value of connectedness, space and prominence is put on links to others on SNSs sometimes more than on the text being produced (see Miller, 008: 393). What seem to be at stake are processes of identification through the positioning of yourself within the peer network. This is illustrated when talking to the artist. She describes what seems to me as a strategy of commenting (see also Livingstone’s study of British teenagers, 2008). She tells me that she comments a lot on friends’ and acquaintances’ postings on Facebook, and she follows the rule that all her comments should consist of some kind of feedback that also contributes with something, for example a link to an interesting article et cetera. By her commenting practices she also describes how she comes to occupy the centre of attention in many of the discussions, a centre that she then uses to promote different projects she is working and issues that are occupying her mind. Hence in order to keep this position she has to continuously comment and update. Similarly the Green Party politician claims that you have to be continuously updated on the discussions and happenings in the network otherwise your information might not be accurate and then you have to renegotiate the position in the network. Hence it is not only exchanges of information that is taking place when activists in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen log into their computers, they are also negotiating their social place within the network.

Here I wish to return to the kind of reflexive expressiveness I have argued for is the dominant rationale for network updating practices (see Svensson, 2011b). Rheingold (2002: 35-37) claims
that at the core of collective action is reputation, something that lays in-between self-interest and altruistic goods. This is echoed by the Green Party politician when he describes his participation in the activities both as an ego-thing but with an idealistic component. He cannot just sit with his arms crossed and do nothing. Similarly the young student answers the question why he is engaged in different political groups, by stating that he is part in the formation of a new way of conceiving politics, that he builds his engagement on a positive feeling of promoting a society where people feel more included. According to Bruns (2008: 84) contribution to online communities build individual status. Being recognized as the originator of interesting new content or as key facilitators of the sharing (updating) process could be conceived of as individual rewards (ibid.: 249) important for constructing and maintaining a healthy activist identity. A retired media entrepreneur, who is also trying to launch e-voting initiatives in Stockholm, says that he will at least get a tombstone. He refers to his fellow pensioners who just sit and complain while he is having fun, hanging out with smart and interesting people more than half his age. Listening to him as well as the middle-aged mother hanging out with her neighbours in the community run cinema and café, it becomes evident that the social element of participation is increasingly intertwined with identity, lifestyle and reputation.

Taking social aspects of participation in southern Stockholm into account as well as values of connectedness and responsiveness, dystopian illustrations of late modern individualization of individuals as isolated islands (see Bauman, 2001) or the online as an illusion of community with users becoming more individualized with increasingly personalized portfolios of sociability (Hodkinson, 2007: 629), misses the point. The individual and community are not in a dichotomized relation to each other as well as the online cannot be separated from the offline when trying to understand the political engagement in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen. The activists are autonomous and dependent on each other at the same time. On the different media platforms they negotiated themselves, and incorporate other activists and causes into this negotiation at the same time. This underlines a form of networked individualism (see Castells, 2001: 129-133). Hence online communication is not so much about narcissistic self-absorption as it is about embedding the self within the peer group (see also Livingstone, 2008). Already Dewey (1927: 188) underlined that the individual could not be understood without considering his associations with others. Similarly Arendt (1998/1958) underlined the presence of others to “assure us of the reality of the world and ourselves” (p. 50). We are thus talking about identity through connectedness.

Concerning reputation it becomes important to study whether the highly esteemed contributors are also automatically positioned as the undisputed and indisputable leaders, in other words whether reputation is transformed into power (see Bruns, 2008: 314). The most popular girl in the class will probably be he most popular girl on Facebook as well, and Obama was retweeted more than any other democratic politician because he was the Democrats’ candidate for
president. Reputation turned into power in political communities online is illustrated by newcomers trying to relate to originators and frequent contributors, in other words the core of the political community. For example, when I joined the online battle against the destruction of the bathhouse, I soon realized who belonged to the core of the group, not only through observing who was posting messages but also whose postings were retweeted and echoed by thumbs up on Facebook. In hindsight, I also realize that I became part of this by posting encouraging entries on the Facebook page for certain members’ entries and not others, rather retweeting some activists messages than others. By echoing popular argument through #twittering and through posting encouraging entries on the Facebook page, I was not only showing my sympathy for the participatory and expressive values of the activist group, but I also reinforced these values and reinforced the authority of certain other active group members by commenting and retweeting their tweets. It could be argued that reputation systems are important to filter out anomalous participants and to highlight those who are seen as most creative, exciting and active (Bruns, 2008: 316, 329). In this way reputation, social filtering and peer-power is linked to each other (see also Rheingold, 2002: 114). My argument, though, is that reputation not always relies on merit but also on status and hence masks unequal relations of power.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

The possibility for quick reaction, easy reach of local (and global networks) has turned the Internet and mobile technology into efficient channels for social movements, citizen debates, political protest and mobilization as the study in southern Stockholm underlines (see also Heller, 2008: 35). In the words of Hands (2011: 3) “the power of digital communications, networks and mobile technology is a limitless snowball effect made possible by the design and structure of modern digital communications”. The uprisings in Arab countries early 2011 demonstrate the sheer power of cumulative connections. In this way network society is a society of coordinated movements of movements (Hands, 2011: 105, see also Shirky, 2009 and his well known claim captured in the title of his book *Here comes everybody*). Rheingold (2002) talks about smart mobs in this context, groups of people who are able to act concert even though they do not know each other. The bathhouse action group is an example of a smart mob, made possible because the activists carried with them devices with both communication and computing capabilities.

Carrying mobile devices with access to the Internet and computing capabilities also made the activists more engagable. Take for example the student who says that he participates more in debates and information meetings because he joined different Facebook-groups and follows certain blogs. The Green Party politician would not have known about SÖFÖ and their different activities if he would not have joined, initially the e-mail list and later the Ning-group. By
following these groups, blogs and lists the activists were updated on the different activities in the neighbourhood and could engage if interested and suitable. In other words, by making sure they were updated, they also made themselves engagable. Referring to Heidegger, Hands (2011: 25) describes activists as *being on standby*. I like this expression because it captures what I have come across in Aspudden and Midsommarkransen. A lot of inhabitants are on standby, not least during the height of the battle of the bathhouse when quick mobilization was of utmost importance. When asked about his political engagement nowadays, the answers provided by the student nicely illustrate what it means to be on standby. He describes his engagement as sleeping (my translation: ligga på is) but that he follows the debate closely (updating) concerning the issues that are important to him. In other words, he is on standby. When something happens he is ready to write to politicians, attend a meeting or a demonstration. In a similar way he describes his participation in the Copenhagen climate summit. He was tempted to go, but it was not until some others in his network asked him to join them that he made the decision to go. With the Internet the possibilities to involve people increase, not the least since many activists are on standby, waiting to find the right circumstances to engage, favourable circumstances for reflexive updating and identity negotiation and maintenance.

We should not underestimate the disciplining effects of the emerging social practices online. It is almost as if SNSs would pressure us to be updated. When the Green Party politician talks about the bathhouse blog as something that could be followed, he also implies that he had to follow it in order to know what happened and become informed about the different activities there. To be updated here is also intertwined with the demand for reflexive self-presentations in late modernity. This disciplines us to always be ready to respond, connect and update. The artist talks about her online channel as something that has to be used in order to update her network, to get things done and get attention for it. Self-disclosure, to update the network on your doings and engagements, is thus equally important to gain trust and achieve authentic and contingent relationships with others in the network. This leads to an ever-increasing need for self-clarification, social validation and relationship development that is satisfied through acts of self-disclosure (Miller, 2008: 389). This is one reason to focus on an emerging network logic in order to underline that these practices also carries with them a logic based in other kinds of norms and values to which we have to position our selves.

In this paper I hope to have established that relations of power are at work even when activists use media and communication platforms that are supposed to be more equal, heterarchical and horizontal. However, one question remains unanswered. Who or what is benefiting from power mechanism pushing us to reflexive updating, identity negotiation and maintenance, making us engagable? Who is using the knowledge that these practices produce? These are questions that remain to be thoroughly addressed in the future, but to end this paper I would like to offer some reflections on these issues.
Identity, subpolitics and recognition are often used as positive notions when trying to understand politics in late modernity. However identity is also connected to capitalism in ways that might not always be considered positive. The most obvious cases are through acts of consumption and advertising where identity and lifestyle are tightly connected to things that we are made believed we have to buy in order for us to negotiate that particular identity or that particular lifestyle. Consumer society offers to the subject a range of choices from which to create biographies of the self (Miller, 2008: 388). Identity becomes a vehicle for how the capitalist system can penetrate the life-world and vice versa. And technology makes this possible by smoothing over alienations and antagonisms through highlighting consumer distractions (Hands, 2011: 33). Hence, from a normative horizon, Hands (2011: 103) sees a problem using identity as a primary component in digital late modernity, given that many identities’ positions are actually created by capitalist systems to begin with. In this way it can be argued that expressive rationality and reflexive participation becomes part of the coordinated system of interdependence of capitalist societies, capitalism constituting the power mechanism pushing us to reflexive updating, identity negotiation and maintenance. At least this is the case when the negotiation of political identities not only requires participation in different activities in activist groups or political collectives, but it is also connected to things that have to be purchased.

I would suggest though that the uses of commodities in which meanings and lifestyle values are invested, are more prominent when negotiating social place and identity among youth peer groups on SNSs than when negotiating political identities on activist groups online. I do believe that activist and political identities are not as embedded in the capitalist logic to the extent that Hands argues. In contrast many political identities are based in antagonism towards unjust distribution of wealth and a will to change society since equality is embedded into the very meaning of the political (see Svensson 2011a). According to Hands (2011: 38) technology is increasingly open for local change and adaptation. This then implies that technology very well may well be used to counter a capitalist logic. Important as it is not to be too negative, as critical scholars we need to be aware of the potential hegemonic embrace of network logic into a larger capitalist logic. Technology is not neutral; it is constantly evolving in a dialectical relationship with society and culture. And it is within capitalist societies that technology now is evolving. Commercial interests may very well be able to capitalize on the goods created by online communities and innovations.
References


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