Mediated stand-by citizenship

An interview study of the switch between political activity and inactivity in Sweden

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Södertörn University | School of 2019
Master's dissertation 30 credits
Media, Communication and Cultural Analysis | spring semester 2019
Abstract

Political participation and civic engagement are terms under constant negotiation in academic research. In order to understand how our active citizenship develops and affects our democratic structures there is need to go beyond seeing media as a tool or method of communication, and rather as an integrated part of the environment in which political participation is conducted. This study investigates how political participation can be channeled, from latency to activity. By interviewing citizens who have historically entered and exited a variety of participatory actions the study managed to identify a new aspect of the citizen’s perspective on citizenship and participation. Building on the notion of stand-by citizenship by Ekman and Amnå (2012), where educated, informed and skilled citizens are monitoring their surroundings until they see need to activate their engagement, I develop the term mediated stand-by citizenship. By this new terminology, the mediated aspect of political participation is conceptualized, and gives an additional approach to studying the stand-by citizens of today.

Keywords: political participation, civic engagement, citizenship, mediation
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1. Introduction

“Citizen participation is at the heart of democracy. Indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the government process” (Verba, Schlozman & Brandy, 1995: 1)

1.1. Background
The number of refugees arriving in Sweden’s harbors and train stations in the autumn of 2015 resulted in a shock response from the government, civil society organizations and citizens all over the country. 163 000 refugees were registered as asylum seekers in 2015 in Sweden. This can be compared to the 2014 number of 81 000 asylum seekers, or 2016 with 29 000 asylum seekers (Statistics Sweden, 2019). In the evaluation report of the refugee response conducted by the Government Offices of Sweden it states that no part of the Swedish government was prepared for the amount of people arriving to the country (SOU, 2017: 17f). The explicit situation was channeled to a powerful time for advocacy. News reporting, debates and campaigns were quickly organized in small and large scales. There was an unprecedented response from everyday citizens to help pitch in to the refugee response. According to MUCF, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Society, (2016: 26) municipalities most commonly referred citizens wanting to help to the Red Cross, Save the Children, the Swedish Church, IM Swedish Development Partner, and UNHCR – but also to local Facebook groups. It has been challenging to report direct numbers regarding how many citizens participated in the refugee response. According to a study conducted by the Swedish Defense University, the Red Cross in Malmö and Stockholm reports their volunteers to have spent 18 241 hours meeting refugees at the central train stations. Red Cross Malmö reported the most intense amount of activity, counting 31 650 encounters between volunteers and refugees (Asp, 2017: 17). Save the Children report having to cancel a meeting on how to become a volunteer in August since only two people registered. The meeting was postponed until September, right after the first large escalation of refugees in Sweden, and 300-400 citizens showed up (Schröder, 2016). Later on, when the Swedish government later restricted the possibility for asylum, the public campaign Folkkampanj för Asylrätt (2016) gathered 68 150 signatures in protest of the restrictions, 15 000 of those within the first 24 hours of the campaign (Dagens Arena, 2016). These are just a few examples of the citizen activity in relation to the refugee response. More
often than not, civil society organizations and individual citizens were the first on location, since government resources could not act as quickly (SOU, 2017: 20). Individual citizens who offered housing, clothing and other resources to help, were turned down by the Swedish Migration Agency (2017: 145) and municipalities (2017: 245) since they had no administrative systems in place to support that kind of volunteer support. Efforts by the public were instead purely made up and led by a mix of civil society organizations, temporary networks, and individual citizens.

Social media networks gathered according to Weinryb (2015) 9 000 members in Malmö, 13 000 members in Gothenburg and 17 000 members in Stockholm, many connected to the fast growing network ‘Refugees Welcome’. The structure of the network differed from what had often been seen in Swedish civil society. Weinryb calls this “spontaneous organizing without organization” (2015, my translation). According to a report conducted by Volontärbyrå (2016: 4) on volunteering in Sweden, 30 percent of those who volunteered in 2015 never volunteered before. 35 percent of those who participated in the study took part in the refugee response. Only 16 percent of the participants of the study were previous members of the organization they participated in, and 49 percent of the recipients either said they did not want to become a member or did not know how to become a member of the organization (Volontärbyrå, 2016: 15). These numbers should be read keeping in mind that only those who applied for a voluntary assignment through the Volontärbyrå website where surveyed.

The refugee response in 2015 is one of many examples of how civic engagement and political participation is expressed today. Citizens organize (or do not organize) in a large variety of ways, often quicker than can be expected in advance. Other examples of shifts in participation can be seen in Statistics Sweden’s reports, showing a consistent trend of declining membership in political parties. In the most recent study from Statistics Sweden (2016: 34) 5 percent of the population were members of one of the political parties. This trend has been slow but constant since the 1980s, when 15 percent of the population reported to have a political membership. At the same time, interest in politics and participation in the political debate is at an all time high. The same report show that a record-breaking 40 percent of the population actively participate in discussions about politics, and openly state their political opinion to others (Statistics Sweden 2016: 36). The trend is even more vivid amongst youth, where a recent report from the Swedish Agency for Youth and Society, MUCF (2019: 30ff), shows that half of all popel between the ages 16-19 think that citizens have an opportunity to
present their opinions to those in decision-making power. One third of young people now believe that they themselves can have an effect on decision-making powers, compared to one forth in 2013. Additionally, three out of four young people state that they have political opinions regarding societal issues and 78 percent state that they find it important for citizens to have knowledge in how the country is being run (MUCF, 2019: 35). Political interest is at a record high, but party membership is at the lowest recordings ever. This contradiction suggests that political engagements and participation takes on different forms than what we have as the established system of political influence in our democratic society.

Many, both in the public debate and in academia, have justified the interest in political participation with the concern of low turnout in elections, a lack of trust in politicians, decreasing numbers of members and a reduction in public trust in government institutions (Ekman & Amnå: 2012: 283). This perspective might be most famously argued by Robert Putman in his book *Bowling Alone* (2000). However, Putman and most of the scholars following his theories have viewed political participation as synonymous to institutionalized electoral participation, or with protest participation (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018: 8), leaving the definition of participation to narrow or completely outdated. As explained by Verba and Nie: “The more narrowly one limits the scope of what one considers participation, the smaller the amount one will find” (1972, in Theocharis & van Deth, 2018: 8)

Other scholars rather argue that participation and civic engagement is under a reconstruction, where participation rather takes on new forms, giving new shape to democracy and the role of ‘the critical citizen’ (see Dalton, 2008; Hartley, 2010; Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Collin, 2015; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018); the refugee response in 2015 for example. These scholars explain that participation generally is leaving politics through institutionalized avenues, and instead channeled through “extra-institutionalized, personalized, self-expressive and individualized forms” (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018: 6f). It can therefore be argued that participation itself is not decreasing, but simply shifting form and expanding rapidly into forums, which we traditionally have not understood as active citizenship (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018: 7). Bennett (2012: 37) states that this rise of personalized forms of participation can be the defining change of our era in political culture. With the rapid developments of the meaning of political participation and citizenship, our understanding of practices of the democratic system and how societal change happens is shifting. Participation today should
therefore be explored further, to possibly present lenses of democratic influence we have not historically experienced.

1.2. Problem description

In recent years, many studies have been conducted seeing to specific types of political participation, such as social movements, digital participation or new voting patterns, following a rapid expansion of forms of participation. As a result, the term ‘political participation’ has in itself become stretched to represent a large variety of different meanings. Ekman and Amnå (2012: 284) warn that terms like political participation and civic engagement are becoming useless concepts when scholars use them in completely different ways and contexts. Building on the same notion, Theocharis and van Deth (2018: 8) highlight that stability and change only can be studied once the subject of study remains over time, which explains why the academic research done on participation and engagement tend to be too divided to study consistently by today’s scholars. This basis lies a challenging setting for academic research to continue develop the field of study.

The divided academic field stems from the rapid changes participation is going through in the pace society evolves in. With the boom of digitalization as well as the contradicting simultaneous increase in individualization and globalization, our methods of communication and organization have been completely remolded. Many scholars have argued that traditional forms of organization are no longer the sole option to channel political action (Bang, 2005; Bakker and Vreese, 2011; Carpentier, 2011; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Kavada, 2016; Kaun and Uldam, 2018; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). This has led to the opening of new avenues of analyzing terms as political participation and civic engagement, as well as seeing to the meaning of citizenship and the shape of democracy.

Studying participation when change is inevitable and constant may be criticized since results might not offer any answers to great, underlying questions of citizen motivation of political action. However, this does not motivate a complete abstinence of academic study of the current political landscape. Studies of political participation should rather be argued as an aim of continuous study, to recognize the importance to track and identify the developmental events and changes throughout participatory history. While change is constant, and creates a
challenging setting for academic analysis, change is also an opportunity to highlight shifts in our democratic processes.

To understand how societal change is created, further investigation is necessary in seeing to how participation is created and awakened. Analyzing how active citizens themselves define participation, and which circumstances that can channel a political interest to active participation, can help creating deeper knowledge in how to mobilize citizens when their participation is needed or necessary for democratic development. What happens in ‘the switch’ between activity and inactivity? The results of this type of study can recognize citizens’ logic of civic engagement acts, as well as serve for governmental or organizational mobilization purposes of those actions.
2. Statement of purpose

This thesis explores the theoretical concept of political participation by analyzing the switch between latency and active participation amongst citizens.

In a broader sense, the thesis aims to investigate how, and in which ways, citizen participation continuously evolves as an ongoing process, and how individual citizens can come to fill multiple theoretical categories of participation simultaneously. With this thesis, I wish to contribute to extend the academic understanding of how active participation can be defined and channeled.

2.1. Research questions

The thesis aims to answer the following questions:

- How do active citizens define participation themselves?
- In which ways can pre-political engagements be channeled into manifest political participation?
- How do these processes relate to a media landscape?

As this study aims to investigate the perceptions by the ‘stand-by’ citizen on participation, the study will derive from a hermeneutic approach. This study is based on the notion that meaning and value is created through interpretation. I intend to be generally influenced by Raymond Williams rather well known notion of seeing culture as “a whole way of life” (1958: VI), but more directly draw from Stuart Hall’s theories on culture as a signifying system. Hall explains culture as “both the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes … and as the lived traditions and practices through which those ‘understandings’ are expressed and in which they are embodied” (1980: 63).

Originating from the idea that the world is socially constructed, and that those constructions are mediated, this study will not analyze any single type of media. An extensive number of studies on mediated participation give evidence that centering on single methods of
communication can of course be highly relevant in itself, but will not be able to investigate the broader motives for political behavior and participation.

This study is not centering on any one form of participation, but aims instead to have a wider analysis on the incentives, which lay behind actions of participation. Many previously conducted studies on participation center specifically on social movements. Here, social movements are merely one form of participation, and therefore too limiting for the aim of this thesis – just as it would be equally limiting to for example solely analyze the electoral system as an arena for participation.

This study is focused on the individual perspective on participation, by citizens themselves. While an organizational perspective would be highly interesting in regards to how to structure organizational approaches or mobilize large movements of active participants, this will not lead to greater understanding of the citizen’s perspective on the topic. I would however advise future research to be conducted on developments in political participation from an organizational perspective, since it will not be covered by this thesis.

2.2 The Swedish culture of civic engagement: a unique setting

Sweden has a long history of seeing civic engagement as an important aspect for citizens to contribute to society. Initial large social movements were formed during the mid and late 1800s, gathered though political, religious and social ideas through the sobriety movement, workers movement and Free Church movement, cooperation movement, and folkbildning movement (non-formal and voluntary education). Movements like these have shaped the developments of Swedish society by challenging the political establishment and giving voice to the common people. With time, these movements came to be an integrated part of the political decision-making process by cooperating with the government on policy decisions and developments on new rights and laws. The traditional movements have since then developed with new opportunities and challenges, amongst others with a professionalization now often employing staff for efficiency and impact, but at the same time fighting declining membership numbers (prop. 2009/10-55: 24ff).

Statistics of the exact number of the public who participate in these types of organizations and movements in modern society differ depending on the studies conducted. Participation is
difficult to measure since the actions considered as participation differ both over time and depending on the circumstances of the study. Studies dependent on membership numbers of organizations might not give a reliable result of how many are actually active in the organization, and miss those who participate without organizing formally. Self-assessment surveys can also be questioned since a person’s own perception might not always reflect reality.

Keeping the above in mind, Statistics Sweden reports that close to half of all Swedes do some sort of civic engagement work on a regular basis, which incorporates all participatory actions in civil society done without pay. That includes for example participation through elected positions in political organizations, being a soccer coach, or actively participating in a union organization (Statistics Sweden, 2018). A report delivered to the government by Svedberg, von Essen and Jegermalm (2010: 15), show that Swedes who have some sort of voluntary commitment often participate in more than one organization at once. They link the high amount of participation amongst Swedish citizens with a strong tradition of civil engagement, organization memberships and citizens’ influence over governmental decisions. A survey by Novus (2018: 4ff), commissioned by the Swedish Red Cross, shows that eight out of ten Swedes consider civic engagement actions to have had a considerable significance to assist aid in society for the last couple of years. The same survey shows that nine out of ten respondents would consider engaging in a societal crisis, but only 63 percent of the respondents know which organization they would choose to join.

In the EU’s comparative study of living conditions in Europe, social participation was measured and divided into different categories: active citizenship, which includes participation in political parties, local interest groups, public consultations, peaceful protests and demonstrations, signing petitions and contacting politicians or the media; participation in formal voluntary work, which includes con-compulsory, unpaid work for an organization, group or club to help others, the environment, animals and the wider community; and participation in informal voluntary activities, which includes helping others outside of the own household, helping animals, cleaning beaches and forests, volunteering at hospitals and taking people for walks or to go shopping (Eurostat, 2018: 110). Sweden was reported to have some of the most active participation rates of the EU countries, having 22,1 percent of all citizens 16 years and older participating in ‘active citizenship’ – second in the EU, only rated after France. Sweden was also in the top five countries for most active in ‘formal and
informal voluntary activities’, with more than one quarter of all adults participating in one way or another (Eurostat, 2018: 112ff).

The Swedish context will shape this study in some sense, with the cultural and historical relation to political participation and citizenship in place in the nation. I see this context of high rates of participation and engagement as an opportunity to get an in-depth exploration of the possible varieties of ways citizens relate to their participation in society. While reflections on citizenship and options for civic engagement and political participation might be similar in other democratic societies, this study has been directed towards a Swedish setting.
3. Theoretical context

There are a few basic terms and concepts that this study will draw on. Below I present previous research and theories on: media, citizenship, civic engagement, political participation, and mediated participation.

3.1. Media

Media is something we live in, and not live with; a notion argued by Mark Deuze when he stated: “media are to us as water is to fish” (2012: x). Deuze goes on to explain that every aspect of our lives plays out in media, fused with “everything people do, everywhere people are, everyone people aspire to be. There is no external to media life” (Ibid, [original emphasis].). Understanding media as something more than simply technological or intermediary intensifies the complexity of media and communication studies, but can also open up to new understandings of how our culture and society is deeply intertwined with media. Couldry and Hepp (2017: 15f) explain this further, stating that even when our actions are done without direct media use, the “horizon of our practices is a social world for which media are fundamental reference-points and resources”. This means that our world needs to be seen and interpreted as “fundamentally interwoven with media”.

Furthermore, the authors explain the social world as intersubjective, where a variety of subjective perspectives get connected through communication by media, and develop shared understandings of representations in the social world. These understandings then effect our future actions and reflections. Our relation to the social world is founded on everyday life happenings of people – individually and collectively (Couldry & Hepp, 2017: 18f). Deuze (2012) agrees on this point, and claims that we have always seen and understood the world through media use, even though modern media use is farther integrated in our actions than it has been historically. Modern society has come to a point where it is increasingly hard to recognize when media is actually used or not – blurring the lines of what is media and what is not.

From an organizational perspective, Philippa Collin (2015) explains that media use has become vital for prosperity, demanding an increasingly flexible approach to media and communication. As not only the social world itself is communicatively developed, the citizens
within it have higher demands on how to reach and communicate with organizations. Zhao put it in the simplest of terms, stating that the face-to-face situation can no longer be seen as “the prototypical case of social interaction” (2006: 417). Similarly, Kavada (2016: 8) describe how the developments of digital media have destabilized traditional assumptions about how social movements and collective actions are shaped, as well as their capacity to create change. Kavada argues that communication (described as conversations and texts) in collective actions should be studied not as a section of the action, but as the basis from which collective action emerge. This conceptualization gives a comprehensive foundation to studying the process of which social movements are constructed through. Our understanding of political agency can then reach new avenues by placing communication as a centerpiece, instead of viewing it as a means or a tool for making claims or public statements.

In the academic field, recent studies show that online participation in general does not stand isolated from offline activities, but online participation does however come with an ‘entirely new set of affordances’ (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018: 29). Two research reviews conducted by Boulianne (2009; 2015) examined online and offline studies on the impact of the internet on civic and political engagement, and concluded that there is a profound focus on how the online participation influences offline participation, but research generally lack the perspective of how offline participation influences online participation. The separation of online and offline, or media and ‘face-to-face’, is therefore troublesome when researching social interaction, and therefore nonetheless when studying participation (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018: 30).

Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2016: 24ff) show concern for the public and academic perception of media, where they urge to acknowledge the wide range of opportunities people have to use media to engage in society, way beyond ‘the news’. The authors point out the need to see media as large a variety of routes for citizens to partake in to participate, which can happen through different tools, channels, times and extent. Along these concerns, other researchers have made thorough efforts to study participation and media beyond studying affordances. Kaun and Uldam (2018: 2189) studied civic participation considering four key terms: power relations, affordances, practices, and discourses. By not conducting a media-centric approach to the study, Kaun and Uldam suggest that their analysis could also be applied to analyzing participation in other arenas than social media. Similarly, Robertson (2015) reflects on the conceptual shift of ‘ordinary people’ in relation to media studies, and
suitably refer to these citizens as ‘the people formerly known as the audience’. When referring to publics as consumers of media products, Robertson (2015: 96) argues that the concept of consumption situates the group in relation to economics rather than political action. The ex-audience is probably more recognized when referred to as ‘prosumers’, a role developed through modern day technological advancements which sparked the participatory culture where citizens both produce and consume media simultaneously. Robertson argues that this new role neither is passive nor manipulated, and that prosumers are more active and creative by using media in unintended and unanticipated ways, compared to the historical understanding of the previous ‘audience’ (Robertson, 2015: 101).

Media can arguably not be the sole topic, nor can it be excluded, from a study of participation. Media is an interwoven part of constructing the social world, and its effect cannot be analyzed separately from the many other socially constructed aspects of that same social world. Carpentier (2011: 179) elaborates on this, claiming that the articulations made by citizens in society impact the level of participation in media that is socially acceptable and desirable through social norms. What we create in and with media sets the norms of what is socially possible for us to reach. Carpentier goes on to explain that media discourses also relate to topics that are not explicitly being addressed, but furthermore reproduce discourses on social categories, participation, power relations and other conditions that can limit or expand the participatory process.

### 3.2. Citizenship

“Citizenship norms [are] a shared set of expectations about the citizen’s role in politics” (Dalton, 2008: 78)

Citizenship can be discussed in a variety of perspectives and approaches. The term is both broadly used to define the norms that come with the status of being a ‘citizen’, but is also often described in the context of rights, responsibilities and freedoms, as well as the access to those rights, responsibilities and freedoms. Traditionally, democracies have evolved either by expanding the number of political rights available, or by broadening the extent to which people have access to those rights. Verba, Nie and Kim (1987: 5) describe citizenship as offering the full panoply of political rights needed to have political influence. This involves
voting rights, the right to form and operate in political organizations, petitioning the government, running for office, as well as the right to free speech and free press. Within this definition, citizens’ rights mean that the rights are universal and that “all citizens possess them equally” (ibid.). The authors further explain that such political rights merely represent the available opportunities that are presented for individuals. Whether citizens have the resources and interest to take advantage of those rights might vary depending on the individual. Political rights can therefore be reached by disadvantaged groups, by using their numbers as a political resource to create change.

In his article on citizenship, Dalton (2008) describes how our perception of political participation and behavior is channeled through the norms of citizenship. Dalton states that there are multiple norms in place simultaneously, and these norms shift in strength and influence over time. Norms play a vital part of creating the expectations of citizens in a nation’s culture, and tell what is expected of citizens who live there. Citizens must not necessarily approve of the norms that are ruling them, but their position stands either way. Dalton (2008: 80f) argues that previous research traditionally has focused on duty-based citizenship, which center on social order, placing citizenship in relation to obeying the societal standards. This regards for example the willingness to report a crime. Its opposite is engaged citizenship, where the norms of citizenship is centered on liberal or commutarian values, including for example measures of solidarity to others. In a similar discussion, Bennett (2012: 30) argues that older citizens have been urged by politicians, leaders and educators to vote, follow the news and join civic organizations, younger generations are now breaking free from these citizens norms. Younger citizens are instead drawn to personalized politics, which have few guidelines for fashioning a public life. Bennett describes how young citizens are “forging ahead in many areas of politics and making it up as they go along”, leaving older citizens troubled with keeping along as they move.

Studies of citizenship have lately often been vibrant and creative, where new versions and add-ons to the term have been presented to enrich the research field. Collin (2015: 19) however presents a rather classical definition, seeing that a ‘good citizen’ typically has been expected to become educated and employable, to then become a productive and economically independent member in society. The citizen is here expected to contribute to society, to vote in elections and add in to the community in their surroundings. Citizenship is here something ‘to produce’; it is built on actions, associations and identity. Collin (2015: 22ff) further
explains that the alternative networks of organizations that are accessible in today’s society thanks to digital developments have made citizens come to question norms of power, decision-making, and communications; and to question the norms of politics and citizenship in general. This can be presented in relation to Dalton’s (2008: 78) notion that participation in relation to citizenship is generally considered to be a measure of democracy. When citizens can participate in the shaping and appointment of public policy, the democratic system is generally seen as functioning. To question the norms and structures in place can therefore in itself be seen as an expression of a democratic society, assuming it is flexible towards change.

Verba, Nie and Kim (1987) question whether this influence to change standing structures are accessible (rights, responsibilities and freedoms) to all. The authors argue in their often-cited book that the resources and motivations by the hands of the individual citizens that are associated with political mobilization, depend on the type of activity, as well as who the individual citizen is. If the mobilization of activists is individual-based, the citizens involved will, according to Verba et al., be disproportionately represented by upper-status individuals. Here, ‘upper-status’ constitutes as wealth, education and higher-status occupations. If the actions of mobilization rather are group-based, motivation derives from belonging to a certain social group. Group-based mobilization can cluster on ethnicity, language, economic position or other factors.

The meaning of the term citizenship has expanded in the pace of new categories of political and civic rights, new social services and providing welfare for those in need. In this, citizenship has generally included a moral and ethical responsibility to others (Dalton, 2008: 79). In his article Silly Citizenship, John Hartley (2010) presents a historical overview of the term and how it has been changed and specified throughout societal developments. Media citizenship is a term presented as a form of citizenship based on identity-formation, relationships and occasionally even actions channeled through the use of popular media. Hartley explains these ‘active audiences’ as users of the media to connect with likeminded others and to stay informed on relevant and interesting topics. The use of media to ‘practice citizenship’ has grown in popularity since it allows everyone in the system to contribute to creating new meanings, systems and ideas. Hartley (2010: 240) names this ‘DIY citizenship’, and connects to Henry Jerkins similar term ‘participatory culture’.
This version of citizenship is often linked to groups in society who historically have been excluded from the more classic definitions of citizenship: women, immigrants, workers, and children. These groups are according to Hartley most likely to become engaged in the ‘citizenship of media’. van Zoonen, Visa and Mihelja (2010: 260) comment that political agency in these forms are not necessarily defined by their connection to established institutions, but rather forms of ‘unlocated citizenship’. DIY citizenship again presents its citizens as producers, where social media and other digital communications often channel dialogues, or other types of consumer contributions (Hartley, 2010: 239). Bang (2005: 159) draws a parallel between democracy and the development of viewing citizens from a marketing perspective; where citizens are presented as the customers of governments, and able to push political change if the state does not deliver on the demands and goods requested.

Just as democracy and citizenship have developed rapidly in the past, we can expect continuing developments for the future. Dalton (2008: 77) states that the democratic process only can be improved if we understand how citizenship, and the role of the citizen, is changing in the world. For democracy to continue to evolve we need to stay observant to cultural, technological and structural shifts. Dalton (2008: 83) explains this in his American study through the example of citizenship norms amongst different age groups. Older citizens in the US tend to feel strong positive correlation to duty-based citizenship, whilst younger citizens move towards engaged citizenship, especially amongst those with higher education.

### 3.3. Civic Engagement

Dalton (2008: 76) explains that public involvement is mandatory for democracy to have its guiding force legitimised. When considering the citizens’ role in society, civic engagement is the entry point to what constitutes active citizenship. The understanding of what could be categorized as *engagement* has continuously been broadened, and rapidly expanded into domains that are “extra-institutional”, being closely linked to aspects like identity, lifestyle and interest. van Deth explains this as including “non-political activities used for political purposes” (2014: 350) Understanding the political role of citizens in society therefore links with the broader perception of what constitutes engagement. This comprehension is vital in studying the individual citizen, as well as for the democratic structure as a whole.
The development of the term ‘civic’ stems from a multiplicity of change happening simultaneously. Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 23) describe how industrial and financial developments, free markets, privatization of public services and a driving force of strong consumerist culture has enhanced the meaning of individual freedom and responsibility. This means that goods and services, that were previously provided by authorities, now fall on the citizens themselves to find, and actively solve their individual problems. Citizens are here demanded to commit to the production of services and goods needed. Denters, Gabriel and Torcal (2007: 88) explain this shift as not only putting pressure on citizens to take ownership of their own affairs, but also be morally obligated to contribute to the common good of society at large. The historically persistent separating line of what is ‘public’ and what is ‘private’ is now blurring and shifting. Hartley describes that what was previously seen as “public institutions vs private markets, collective action vs individualism, emancipation vs exploration” miss the fact that most citizens experience both versions, where they are both “citizens and consumers, publics and audiences, workers and traders, all at once” (2010: 238). In this setting, politics has become increasingly difficult to classify – where being a citizen also means being a member of a political community (Robertson, 2015: 24).

Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 23ff) explain that parallel to these deep-laying changes in society, are patterns of change in the individual’s sense of identity and location in their community – particularly among younger citizens. Engagements in the developments of one’s surroundings are now being built on personal hopes and lifestyles, combined with the promise of one’s own opportunities and individual successfulness in society. In other words, individualization of responsibility and risk leads to more personalized choices and associations in political engagement – further distancing the engagement from traditional group forms of memberships or party loyalty. Bennett and Segerberg go on to compare electoral politics as increasingly resembling pure consumer markets, where parties brand themselves towards voting groups, and campaigns become gradually more costly to run. Similar trends can be seen all throughout civil society. A recent report published by FRII (2018: 27f) shows that revenues from membership feed in civil society organizations have steadily been declining for the last couple of years, while the revenue from private gifts and donations are on a record high. These numbers could indicate lower membership fees, or a lower number of memberships. Either way it presents new dynamics in the balance between funding from indoor membership and external financers.
As the definition of citizenship, the term civic engagement implies some sort of work or action, which is done for the benefit of the public, and conducted in consent with others (Ronan, 2004, in Adler & Goggin, 2005: 238). Adler and Goggin (2005) investigate the evolution of our interpretation of civic engagement, presenting it as: community service, collective action, political involvement, and social change. Definitions present a span from duty as motivation, “civic engagement [is] an individual’s duty to embrace the responsibilities of citizenship with the obligation to actively participate, alone or in consent with others, in volunteer service activities that strengthen the local community” (Diller, 2001: 21, in Adler & Goggin, 2005: 238), to instead focusing the term as a tool for action, “Civic engagement describes how an active citizen participates in the life of the community in order to help shape its future. Ultimately, civic engagement has to include the dimensions of social change” (Crowley, n.d. in Adler & Goggin, 2005: 239).

### 3.4. Political Participation

“The most important benefit of voting [is] ... a feeling that one has done one’s duty to society ... and to oneself” (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980: 7f, in Dalton, 2008: 85)

Participation is often presented as a version of civic engagement, but by many seen as difficult to define singularly because of their close relationship. Kaun and Uldam (2018: 2188) problematize this (lack of) distinction; referencing to Putman’s observation that volunteering, for example, is often done on the basis of political interest. In other terms, the action itself can be either political or non-political. While civic engagement is often defined as closely linked to the duties of citizenship, political participation strives towards influencing others, potentially without the element of working for a ‘societal good’. Dahlgren (2009: 58) states that political communication research generally defines civic engagement as a form of voluntary action, to solve community problems and help others in need. In contrast, political participation refers to actions “oriented towards influencing governmental action in some way”. Further on, Dahlgren specifies that engagement as a prerequisite for participation, which signifies “a mobilized, focused attention in some object”. For an engagement to be channeled into a participatory act, there is need for a doable activity that citizens find empowering (Dahlgren, 2009: 80f). Others have refused to make a distinction between the
terms, and instead insist on linking the two concepts. Macedo for example state: “we do not draw a sharp distinction between “civic” and “political” engagement because we recognize that politics and civil society are interdependent: a vibrant politics depends on a vibrant civil society” (2005: 6). Similarly, Carpini (2004: 397) judged the need for a completely new term, and merged both civic and political engagement under the heading of “democratic engagement”.

Academic research of political participation has historically almost exclusively been focused on electoral participation, but in recent decades been broadened to include a more multidimensional seeing of the term, entailing non-electoral actions as well (Teorell, Torcal & Montero, 2007: 334). van Deth (2014: 354ff) presents four ‘rules’ for defining the minimal requirements for an action to constitute as political participation. These are for the definition to (i) reference to behavioral aspects, (ii) be based on free will, (iii) refer to citizens (rather than for example politicians or journalists) and (iv) that the activities are located in the political sector of society. These rules can be presented in relation to the often-cited definition presented by Verba, Nie and Kim (1987: 46), referring political participation as “those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take”. Importantly, the authors go on to explain that “For the individual or for particular groups of citizens, the most important political activities may be those in the between-elections period, when citizens try to influence government decisions in relation to specific problems that concern them” (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978: 47 [my emphasis]). The definition however distances from what the authors describe as “support” or “ceremonial” participation, such as joining parades, expressing support to the government, or participating in youth groups that have been organized by the government (ibid).

In their historical overview of the term political participation starting in the mid 1900s, Theocharis and van Deth (2018) demonstrate how the term has expanded to now include a wide range of activities, such as “voting, signing petitions, blogging, demonstrating, boycotting products, blocking traffic, joining flash mobs, attending meetings, donating money” (2018: 17), and many more. This rapid expansion has flamed an intense debate within the academic field regarding the definition of the term. Definitions of participation are now either accused of being too narrow, or being far too wide. Accepting the definition as purely based on the intentions of the individual executing them would be, as pointed out by van Deth, “an
extrreme form of subjectifying our main concepts” (2014: 350). van Deth goes on to admit that ignoring the intentions of the citizen would be equally unhelpful. Similarly, Huntington and Nelson commented already in the 1970’s that the term is “nothing more than an umbrella concept, which accommodates very different forms of action constituting differentiated phenomena, and for which it is necessary to look for explanations of different nature” (1976: 14, in Teorell, Torcal & Montero, 2007: 334). One of the more forgiving versions is the definition of Ekman and Amnå, who conclude that political participation involves an action, and essentially “refers to attempt to influence others” (Ekman & Amnå, 2012: 286).

Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2007) reflect on the meaning of the political in participation, arguing that political participation historically has constituted an action towards an authoritative entity of value. Teorell et al. (2007: 336) further reason that authoritative power could be held by a variety of actors, and is not the sole responsibility of the public sector or state. Participatory activities can therefore not be restricted to be directed only towards political authorities, but could just as well target private or non-profit actors in hold of corporate power. The authors here showcase how political participation also relates to whom the action is referred to influence.

In attempts to classify the term, participation is often categorized into dimensions or groupings based on the method used in the action pursued. A popularly used typology is Verba, Schlozman and Brandys’ (1995: 72ff) four dimensions of participation: voting; campaign; contact; and community. Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2007) present a similar, but somewhat more extensive version by categorizing: electoral participation; consumer participation; party activity; protest activity; and contact activity. An often-occurring problem with these types of categorizations is that many activities either can go into multiple categories at once, or are challenging to categorize at all. Casting a blank vote at an election can either be seen as a protest activity, or a way of electoral participation, depending on the intention of the voter. A blank vote can also be seen as an un-political statement, where participation is not intended as a way of channeling a political opinion, but rather a rebellion.

Equally challenging in the field is the variety and development of new forms of participation being identified, often through mediated forms. With the introduction of digital participation we have seen huge trends in amongst other forms, hashtag activism, digital petitions and viral campaigns spreading messages of participation – which would not have been predicted just a
decade earlier. However, as pointed out by Theocharis and van Deth (2018: 18), new forms of participation do not necessarily mean that there is a new mode or category of participation. The #BlackLivesMatter movement can for example be categorized as a protest activity, boycotting/buycotting campaigns as consumer participation, and Donald Trump’s twitter account as electoral participation. Analyzing changes in the democratic system has to look beyond single new forms of participation, and investigate how actions link together in a broader analysis of what changes in participation.

New forms of participation develop in parallel with the perception of individual influence in the political system. Dalton (2008: 85) explains that, as the level of education, political skill and policy orientation rises, citizens seek new avenues of influencing politics and society in their surroundings. Understandably, merely voting every fourth year can be seen as quite a low level of political involvement for someone dissatisfied with actors with the current electoral power. Here again, the traditional categorizations of participation can be questioned. Would merely voting in national elections really be categorized as being politically active more than on the particular day of the election? While many citizens might still be voting because of the status of elections in the democratic process, their participation also includes more individualized and direct forms of acting. Dalton (2008: 92f) describes these citizens as ‘cognitively mobilized’, preferring direct action before committing to a specific party or electoral campaign. As modernization reshapes norms of citizenship the options for participation alters. For example, participation outside the electoral system gives more control for the citizens of their actions, and the influence they can conduct over the political process - and in society at large. Dalton describes this as the participation linked to ‘citizen influence’, which represents an expansion of the democratic options of participation.

Rapid shifts in participation can also arguably be so hurried that it risks segmentation amongst citizens in the perception of what options one has to participate in the democratic structure. Bang (2005: 161ff) presents a theory of seeing a change amongst citizen participation where some individual citizens become ‘expert citizens’, which he compares to a republican elitism. Being an expert citizen requires specific competences and professional skills in understanding what citizenship entitles. In other words, one who knows and understands how political power structures work, how decision-making is routed, can take part in shaping the rules of society. Building on a similar discussion, Carpini describes a democratically engaged citizen as: “one who participates in civic and political life, and who has the values, attitudes, opinions, skills,
and resources to do so effectively” (2004: 397 [my emphasis]). Equally, a parallel can be drawn to Kaun and Uldams’ (2018: 2203) study in 2017, where an interviewee described ‘volunteering as any other business’. Kaun and Uldam reflect upon this statement as not only being true from the volunteers’ perspective, but that it also could reflect on the professionalization of volunteer work, as well as its methods of communication and coordination.

Identity and lifestyle has in recent years begun to play an increasing part in discussions of political participation, placing power to change in the hands of individual actions. *Lifestyle politics* is a term often linked to consumer behavior, where lifestyle values are commonly echoed in political and product advertising (Bennett, 2012: 22). Giddens (1991: 214) describes lifestyle politics - or life politics – as “a politics of choice”, and goes on giving the definition: “life politics concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualization in post-traditional contexts, where globalizing influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realization influence global strategies” (Ibid.). Here, Giddens explains this version of political participation as born from the realization that the decisions one makes can have global consequences, and that lifestyle should be taken into consideration as to have political influence. Portwood-Stacer (2013: 5) provides a similar definition, stating lifestyle politics to refer to “the whole cultural formation around individuals’ use of everyday choices as a legitimate site of political expression”. Portwood-Stacer further argues for the academic field to rethink the meaning of political activism, since personal choices are shown to hold political meaning for citizens. ‘Activism’ is here described as being dependent on the meaning people attribute to the action, rather than its effect. Micheletti and Stolle (2011: 126) describe citizens involved in lifestyle politics to “view their personal life as a political statement, project, and form of action”. Lifestyle politics are therefore a sort of political commitment, where one decides to live according to a number of consistent principles and rules (Micheletti & Stolle, 2011: 127). Building on this notion, de Moore (2017: 185) argues that lifestyle politics are regularly used to convince companies and governments on political actions, by mobilizing groups of individual consumers to lead by example. This type of action emphasizes consumer power, and argues the efficiency of collective forces to implement social change.
3.4.1. Towards new categorization of participation

Newer categorizations of participation distinguish institutionalized modes of participation in relation to non-institutionalized modes (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018: 24). The typology suggested by Ekman and Amnå (2012: 287) follow this approach, presenting latent forms of participation as a new type on the spectrum. They explain the term as being the “kind of engagement that may be regarded as ‘pre-political’ or on ‘stand-by’. The category answers to the types of actions citizens take that are not directed at change or to influence political decisions, but still can have political significance in future activities. The notion of latent political participation is built on the perception of citizens as interested, informed and skilled in political influence – even though it is not executed directly in each action.

The opposite of latent participation is described by Ekman and Amnå as manifest political participation, which simply clusters all actions that are directed to influence political outcomes. Manifest political participation is divided into formal political participation (electoral participation) and extra-parliamentary participation (activism), which reminds us of other more traditional categorizations of political participation. Ekman and Amnå (2012) build their typology in reference to Schudson’s theory of a large public playing the role as ‘monitorial citizens’; not directly active in the shape of the political game, but closely following its developments. Only when it is judged as necessary do these citizens “step in” and act politically. This type of categorization of latent vs manifest participation can help tackle a common issue in defining political participation, which Martín and van Deth touch upon when explaining “A person may be very interested in politics and still reject the actual political world when asked how he or she feels about politics” (Martín & van Deth, 2003: 303). Ekman and Amnå challenge the more traditional forms of categorizing participation depending on the action taken, and instead shift focus to the intention and interest of the individual citizen.

Other scholars have made similar categorizations. Bang (2005) describes a citizen role he names ‘everyday makers’, which is explained as a lay form of citizenship built on the everyday actions of the citizen. Bang describes how the everyday makers: “want to do things in their own way, right where they are, when they have the time or feel like it. Their engagement is more ‘on and off’ and ‘hit and run’ than that of the expert-activist” (Bang, 2005: 163). This citizen role cannot be defined by the government, they see themselves as apathetic, and have no interest in committing resources on participating in formal institutions.
or organizations. Consequently, this citizenship characterization limits the scope of political actions that can be included in the action spectrum. Here can categorizations like the one presented by Ekman and Amnå assist to better cover the full range of possible political acts of participation. Other scholars have also critiqued Bang’s categorization, pointing out that everyday makers who are momentarily inactive are difficult to identify and separate from those who are simply not participating (Li & Marsh, 2008: 252). To make a qualitative study of the everyday makers there is need to study not only their present activity, but also whether they previously have been engaged. Li and Marsh (Ibid) propose an expansion of Bang’s categorization, presenting: political activist, expert citizens, everyday makers, and non-participants as an updated categorization of citizen types.

3.5. Mediated Participation

Networks have always been part of helping people navigate within and between groups, which is equally true in studies of political participation of today (Bennett & Segerberg, 2014: 44). The role of the collective has however been argued to change. In studying collective action, Kavada suggests addressing “the collective in looser terms, as a process rather than as a finished product” (2016: 9). She further argues that this approach can be used not only in studying social movements, but as conceptualizing the collective in various organizations and institutions as well. Communication is here given a new role, and is placed as a central player in understanding social processes. Participation through mediation is in other words an inevitable perspective in studying civic engagement and political participation.

Bakker and Vreese (2011: 455) highlight that the relationship between media use and political behavior has been a fairly unexplored subject of study. The authors urge researchers to take both online and offline political participation into account when studying participatory behavior, since it could develop better understanding of changes and challenges present in modern political participation. From the time of their observation there has been a boom in interest for this combination of study. Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 43) comment on this development, explaining that new technology networks very well may take the place of formal organizations in organizing complex networks of people, technologies and organizations – and therefore is a natural interest of study. Further elaboration has been made by Kaun, Kyriakidou, and Uldam, stating that there should be a shift of focus “from the
question *if* digital media enable political agency towards *how* political subjectivity is negotiated in digital media ecologies” (2016: 5 [original emphasis]). The rise of digital media and user-generated content has also arguably increased the interest in citizens’ political expression. Kaun et al. further explain that this development has led the field of media and politics studies to broaden its perspective to include ‘ordinary people’, and now not merely study interrelations between established political institutions and organizations.

In the light of the technological and societal developments in participation, new media has challenged the roles traditionally played by strong social structures, like family, political parties, schools, unions, clubs or churches. Citizens would now rather connect through mediated networks, through friend’s circles or through trusted recommendations (Bakker & Vreese, 2011: 454, Bennett & Segerberg, 2013: 24). This shift has partially been reasonable since media is constructed circling many of the ‘raw materials’ that attitudes, and social and political beliefs, are made up of (Carpini 2004: 408). Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 24f) explain that these newer channels of connection match lifestyles and demographics, which generate loosely tied ‘opt-in/opt-out networks’ to be the connecting point for activities and political partners. This leads the networks to become more personalized than cases where traditional organizations, based on for example memberships, create action campaigns. Action through networks based on lifestyle or demographics connect a large amount of people, but they are connected through a more diverse and inclusive ‘large-scale personal expression’ than through membership or ideology affiliation. The authors name this ‘DIY politics’, where the content and relevance of the network is built around the participants themselves, through technological platforms with the ability to quickly mobilize large groups of citizens (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

While the validation of online participation generally has been questioned, other authors have turned perspective and presented strong arguments in their favor. Beyer (2014: 3) studied the political mobilization of online communities, and found that mobilization in these channels follow different rules and standards than those typically applied in offline mobilization. Beyer highlight the political importance of “non-events”, which broadens the platform for political mobilization to file-sharing websites, posting boards, video games and other types of social spaces often overlooked when searching for political mobilization in online forums. She further argues that these forums are disregarded since they might not stem from traditional definitions of civic society, which has researchers of political participation tend to search in
the wrong places to locate political discussions. Beyer also connects the loss of understanding of online mobilization forums with the lack of understanding of younger citizens’ political participation, since the age group typically are the most common to participate in the types of online interaction she has identified in her studies. Judging this age group as the least politically engaged is therefore a misconception of the parameters when studying political participation in itself. Beyer (2014) also discusses the common misconception of expecting low levels of anonymity and small-group interactions to nurture group behavior. Beyer argues that low formal regulation and high level of anonymity can just as well promote political mobilization, where societal and behavioral norms do not generally influence the discussion to the same extent as it would with low levels of anonymity or in smaller groups.

Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 25ff) have studied newer forms of mobilization for social movements, and present a new terminology thereafter. When previous acts of participation and mobilization of groups have been done through collective action, They identified that newer mobilizations are rather created through connective action. Connective actions tend to be digitally organized, as well as more personalized. New participation forms also generally scale up quicker than traditionally organized formations. They often center on inclusiveness, and they demonstrate uncommon flexibility for political targets. The dynamics of the action is completely changed by digital media, since the basis of the organizational process is played out on digital structures, and does not require organizational control to construct unity - a sense of ‘us’. The core of this logic is to admit digital media ‘as organizing agent’. Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 196) here argue that when the logic of connective action is built on its own independent dynamics, it deserves to be analyzed on its own analytic standings. However, connective action and collective action logics are not opposed to one another, but can complement each other and broaden the range of how action can be analyzed.

The connective action is built on contributing to changing society and the common good. In that, it becomes an act of self-validation and personal expression produced together with others by connecting ideas and actions. Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 36f) highlight two elements in producing connective action formations on large scale: symbolic inclusiveness; by creating content easily relatable to personal ideas, and technological openness; by basing communication on a variety of technological platforms.
New structures and forms of participation might present themselves with a new pallet of opportunities, but they come at the same time with their own challenges. Bennett (2012) reflects on this shift of action, where the individual become a catalyst for collective action, centering on a personalization of politics. Bennett claims that the more diversity present in mobilization, results in an increasingly personalized expression of the action. While connective action lowers the barriers of identification, fosters diversity, and validates the individual’s personal ideas and emotions, it subjects political change to new rules regarding which tools are used for political mobilization (Bennett, 2012: 22ff).

Weinryb (2015) analyzed the challenges of newer forms of participation in the case of the Swedish refugee response in 2015, typically through participatory networks rather than traditional organizations. On a general basis, ‘organizing without an organization’ mobilizes forces quicker, but tends to lack structure that comes with an existing organization. In cases of Facebook mobilization, logistics were typically problematic, since the structure of the social media platform is built to emphasize popularity. Many organizations were therefore overwhelmed with the amount of clothing, toys and other resources that the public was bringing to support the cause. Weinryb also highlights the structural issues of accountability when individual activists are collecting money donations for a cause, leaving donors to question whether they can trust that the resources are placed where promised. There is also the organizational misdistribution of volunteers, where some volunteers were overworked, while others did not seem to find a place willing to receive their contributions (Weinryb, 2015).

In summary, participation moves in cycles, where acts of participation flow between direct active action, and periods of latency or inactivity. This leaves citizens in a notion of ‘stand by’, as coined by Ekman and Amnå (2012). When seeing to civic engagement and political participation as living concepts, we can begin to restructure how action is activated. This thesis will now present how these concepts can be seen through mediation, analyzing how citizens themselves define and relate to active versus inactive participation.
4. Material and method

Qualitative communication studies are conducted to study meaning, which is done with a basis of human interpretation. Jensen (2012: 266) explain this process to be twofold, where the humans participating in the study interpret the ordinary and extraordinary events of their lives, which in turn is interpreted by researchers conducting the study. As this study aims to investigate the perceptions by the ‘stand-by’ citizen whilst discussing participation, the study will derive from an inductive approach. Originating from the theoretical framework of this thesis, heavily influenced particularly by the work of Ekman and Amnå (2012) as well as Bennett and Segerberg (2013), it has been my intent to explore the perception of the stand-by citizen on what connective/collective participation entails, as well as what happens in the ‘switch’ between active participation and inactivity.

Knowledge can be studied and obtained in a variety of ways. In the oral tradition, knowledge is seen as collective and verbally transmitted. The oral tradition is often seen to have large significance in transmitting knowledge historically, but is just as well executed through language and demonstrations today in modern society (Stokes: 2013: 7ff). Jensen (2012: 272) explains oral history use in media studies as relying on verbal, often lengthy, testimonies from ‘ordinary individuals’, to present stories of other realities than what is available to the researchers themselves. Oral history, as a research method, opens avenues to interview subjects about their past memories and experiences, often through very loose terms of interview outline. This allows the interviewee to speak freely on the topic and present unanticipated testimonies. Interviews are generally seen as a suitable avenue to learn about people’s opinions, ideas and attitudes (Stokes, 2013: 92ff).

Using oral history as a method can be criticized since it requires the researcher to interpret the answers given correctly, whilst “people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say” (Jensen, 2012: 270). However, as stated by Jensen: “There is no way around language when it comes to studying communication and culture. Language is a condition to be embraced, not an obstacle to be removed through formalization or abstraction” (2012: 271).
4.1. Methodological choices

To identify suitable subjects of study I have executed a sampling method inspired by the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is traditionally conducted by having participants recruit other people s/he knows to participate in the study, who in turn refer to additional possible participants. This method builds on the social networks of the participants, and can give researchers access to otherwise hard-to-reach groups or populations (Tenzek, 2017: 2). I have however decided not to interview the initial contacts as subjects of this study, but merely asked them to reference to others who would be suitable to interview. The three consultants are all actively working with the target group, but have carefully been chosen to represent different perspective of organization of participation: one government employee; one active member of civil society; and one working with the private sector. They are, however, not part of the target group of the thesis themselves and therefore not relevant to interview because of their rather professional relation to participation as a topic. All three were presented with the purpose of the study, as well as the main challenges identified in the current academic field before they were asked to reference potential interview subjects. Contact with the consultants is seen as part of the background research made in preparation for this study, but their contributions do not play a part of the thesis itself.

Seeing to the definition provided by Noy: “A sampling procedure may be defined as snowball sampling when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (2008: 330), one could claim that the consultants of this method could be seen as informants in the definition. However, I do acknowledge that this use of the snowball sampling method is not done in the most classical sense of the method, and therefore claim to my standpoint that my own version of the method is an alteration of the traditional use.

Noy (2008: 329) further presents a valuable reflection on the uses of the snowball sampling method, stating that it brings forward two important concepts: social knowledge and power relations. Since the method builds on the social networks of the subjects who participate, the relations they possess, their social knowledge, and the power dynamics of their relationships will affect the results of the study conducted. Here, Noy (2008: 335) also emphasizes the notion of ‘social capital’ amongst the research subjects. Further more, the SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods specifically mention that the snowball sampling method can be disadvantaged by the possibility of participants only referring to
others with similar experiences and beliefs, resulting in similar results from all respondents (Tenzek, 2017: 4). I am aware of the possible tendency of getting referenced to others which the referrer identifies with. I see that the use of the three consultants is a reasonable effort made to protect the integrity of a study of the scope as the one I have conducted. By asking for multiple subjects from each consultant I aimed to get a wider range of types of participation amongst the participants. I estimate that this strategy gave good results, presenting me with a reasonable spread among the interviewees.

When reaching out to the consultants for recommendations, I specified that interviewees should be individuals who have gone in and out of different forms of participation, and that this thesis stems from the refugee response of 2015, since it was a typical example of large gatherings of participation among Swedish citizens. It was however not a concrete criteria that the subjects interviewed actually took part of the event. The selection of the refugee response as entry point for this thesis will be described further shortly. In total the three consultants recommended 17 people. 10 of those where contacted and asked to participate in the study and 6 of them approved and completed individual interviews. Subjects were contacted throughout the time period reserved for empirical gathering of the thesis, and I stopped contacting potential interviewees once I experienced information saturation.

4.2. Entry point: the refugee response 2015

Proven in the theory section of this thesis, the term ‘participation’ has been defined in a large variety of ways, leaving the academic discussion around participation fragmented. To answer the set out research questions of this thesis, I have designed interviews intended to provide openness for different definitions of participation to take place, depending on the perspectives of the participating subjects. To the best of my ability I have set out to let the interviewees themselves show me their definition of participation, with the intent to present further depth to the analysis of participation as a concept in the academic field.

To find balance between not influencing the subjects responses in the interviews, and still present clear example of what I intended to study, I have used one of the most well known examples of citizen engagement and political participation enunciated in the context of Swedish society as an entry point for the thesis – the refugee response in 2015. This happening gives example of a large variety of activities that were conducted by citizens to
influence the outcome of the events. The refugee response channeled participation through protests; governmental participation; illegal activities; petitions; humanitarian action; debates and many more examples than can be listed efficiently here. To reach a in-depth discussion of participation in a wider sense, it has been of utmost importance for me to avoid any particular form of participation as study for this thesis. If I would choose to for example center the study on a particular protest this thesis could not claim to be a study of the perception of participation in general. The 2015 refugee response has therefore been an example to explain the width of the interest of my research, since the amount of activities conducted during the event were so varying that the association people have with the response will differ greatly depending on their relation to participation.

The case of the refugee response in 2015 is particularly interesting for this study because of the massive response that was mobilized unusually quickly, and because of the large variety of activities that were organized. Activities described cover all types and forms of participation presented in theory, from the electoral spectrum (advocacy towards government offices and political parties), to protest activities (large physical gatherings in support for asylum seekers), to social movement actions (handing out food and clothing, offering housing or social gatherings and games) and illegal activities (helping refugees cross state borders and hide from authorities). The example was presented to the three consultants when searching for suitable interviewees, but was not presented to the interviewees themselves. One aspect of intending to let the subjects themselves explain their interpretation of participation is to see whether they bring up any activity related to the refugee response. If I were to set focus on the refugee response during the interviews the essence of having the interviewees themselves define participation would be damaged. As presented in the analysis of this thesis, this approach gave some interesting results, which in itself affected the outcome of the study.

It could be argued that this example could serve as a case study for the thesis’s purpose. However, as the SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods explains, there is lack of consensus for what the basic characteristics of a case study entails. This can be explained by the many different practices of the term in research contexts. The SAGE Encyclopedia does define a case study to be used as a research approach where a phenomenon is studied in depth, and argue that case studies can provide a “pedagogical strategy in education and social learning processes” (Blatter, 2008: 2). With this basis, I have decided to describe the use of the refugee response in this study as an entry point, both as introduction of this thesis itself,
but also to explain my topic of interest for the consultants assisting me to identify research subjects. To claim that the event has been used as a case study would be misleading of the research that was conducted.

4.3. The interviews and interviewees

In preparation for the interviews each interviewee was asked to write a list prior to the interview of all activities they perceive as participation looking back for a duration of the last five years (2013-2018). The interviewees were free to list whatever activities they found suitable. The only instruction was to have the list in written form, which should be handed over to me later as potential material of analysis. Some of the interviewees presented lists that could be compared to a resume or CV, whilst others wrote down different themes of activity they have had, rather than specific actions. In addition they were asked to prepare any notes, posts, pictures or other items they would have made in connection to their time participating, or which they relate to their participation. This resulted in the interviewees bringing pictures, texts, videos, diary notes, links, and entire social media profiles, to show examples of media posts they relate to participation. Each interviewee was given these instructions and the definition of participation as “actions with the intention to influence others”. Having the interviewees prepare these materials in advance had them reflect over their relation to political participation in advance of the interview, which Stokes (2013: 100) recommends for preparation of a well-conducted interview. The materials also served as a tool for the interviewees to explain and show to me what they associated as participation. Using materials presented by the subject themselves draws parallels to a type of archive research. The list and posts/pictures/texts by the interviewees were however not used as material for analysis, but merely a tool for discussions on the topic of participation. Stokes (2013: 99) elaborates on the differences in archive history and oral history, since what is being told often might differ from what has been documented in archives. The criteria for ‘truth’ will differ in the stories told in interviews compared to what has been documented, when the subject has authority of their recollections. Archives can therefore present results one would not expect, demanding flexibility by the researchers focus depending on the discoveries made (Stokes, 2013: 88).

This method used could be compared to the associated diary method, where the subjects are asked to document their experiences on a particular issue or topic. Berg and Duvel (2012: 72f) argue that qualitative media diaries can provide rich descriptions of information on how
individuals use certain services or devices, and give insight on how to understand mediatization as long-term historical developments connected to other processes like commercialization and individualization. The diary method goes beyond the classical ethnographical focus, which traditionally has been centered on particular locations, and instead can create links over mobility of for an individual. Diaries should however generally be used as an additional means of data collection for reasons of accuracy (Berg & Duvel, 2012: 78). This thesis moves away from the sense of diary as tool for measuring or live-documenting behavior. I have instead asked the participants to present a form of ‘reconstructed diary’, a form of show-and-tell presentation, for the interviews. Inspiration for this alternative method is however still due to the original diary method. I would argue that the use of additional material to the interviews gave additional value to the interviews, showing alternative ways of presenting how the subjects defined participation and told their history. The materials also offered new avenues of analysis, where textual or discourse analysis could be conducted on the material presented. This study has however had the demarcation not to involve multiple aspects of analysis, but I would recommend further research to elaborate on how to develop the method I used here.

Jensen (2012: 270) argues that interview statements are created in their particular context, which is developed in interaction between the subject and the researcher. Here, responses from interviews should be viewed as ‘data’, which later becomes the source for interpretation and analysis by the researcher. The semi-structured interviews conducted for this thesis were run from an interview guide with a handful of prepared questions (see appendix 1), but with flexibility to take on other questions as well depending on the nature of the conversation and what the interviewees were focusing in on. The subjects were asked to present themselves, the lists and post/pictures/texts they brought with them. Thereafter, they got to elaborate on their experiences going in to new activities, as well as their quitting or periods of inactivity. The interviews were conducted in Swedish. The citations that were chosen to be presented in the analysis were translated into English after transcription.

1 To translate text can risk changing the meaning of the statements made. This thesis used the Swedish words påverkan/engagemang to discuss participation. A more direct translation would be to use the word deltagande. However, translating participation to the term ‘deltagande’ would lose its meaning in the Swedish context, and challenged when presenting the topic of discussion to the interviewees. Påverkan/engagemang were therefore identified as more suitable terms to present and communicate the interest of this study.
Four of the interviews were conducted in person with the interviewees, all at local coffee shops. The additional two interviews where done via video chat since the interviewees were located in other geographical areas. The interviews lasted in general one hour. The interviewees were all between the ages of 21 and 31 years old. Five of the six identified as female and one as male. There was an overrepresentation by women amongst the suggested subjects from the consultants, but also seemingly a higher interest amongst women to accept an interview. Stokes (2013: 66) elaborates on this, arguing that people tend to respond positively when they have similar lifestyles and interests as the topic of study. Further on, those with positive experiences tend to be more willing to be interviewed about it than those with negative outcomes (Stokes, 2013: 97). The topic of this thesis is in itself closely linked to lifestyle, identity, passions, behavior and feelings. I would claim that just having a discussion about your personal life and thoughts with a stranger for an academic research can be challenging for some, especially if the experiences in question are seen as a sensitive or vulnerable topic. Although multiple interviewees who decided to take part of the study described a variety of experiences, good and bad, it would be interesting to have more resources to study the more sensitive aspects of participation, but I judged that this thesis would not have the resources or intent to study that aspect of participation at this time.

The following is a short summary on each of the interviewees, based their own presentations they gave from the interviews:

**Sofie, 23 years old** – trained firefighter, previously volunteered as a medic and fighting forest fires. Sofie volunteers without an organization, working with refugees at a refugee camp where she collects donations, lectures at schools, and designs fire safety plans. Participation is somewhat of a lifestyle for Sofie, where she moves to places where she is needed, gets educated in topics closely linked to her activities, and she dreams of continuing working in the same circles in the future as well.

**Saga, 21 years old** – involved in a variety of organizations, mostly regarding climate politics, Saga sees her participation from somewhat of an outside perspective. Saga has participated in conferences, arranged debates and focuses a lot on giving others the opportunity to take action by sharing opportunities and wanting to be a role model for younger girls. Her actions have consequences, and she struggles in finding he right balance of doing ‘the right thing’ and being ‘enough’.
Fanny, 28 years old – has had a wide variety of commitments, generally through joining or forming formal organizations. She has participated to create change in many different types of societal issues. Fanny describes her participation as being locally centered, to make change happen where she lives. Ideas can easily become reality to Fanny, where organizing is never too far away from whatever she decides to do.

“Jasmine”, 31 years old – describes herself as participating with ideological motivations, has been engaged through demonstrations and sharing stories on social media. Jasmine works with civic engagement, but mostly discusses her voluntary commitments. She prefers structured, organized actions, where there is a long term-plan in place for the participation. Jasmine is not her real name.

Josefin, 24 years old – currently actively participating in her student union and describes her previous commitments as closely linked to herself and her current lifestyle. This results in Josefin changing commitments when she moves or start a new school. Josefin sees participation as something that can happen in most everyday situations, it is just a question of seeing the opportunity.

Adam, 23 years old – passionate about giving others a platform to participate rather than himself. Adam does this today through his employment, but also up to recently on a voluntary basis. Generally Adam sees participation as a way to develop on a personal level, and he sees actions as strongly connected to the ripple effect. Adam likes the saying “if you want change, be the change”.

4.4. Ethical remarks and method critique

The method chosen for this thesis has, as presented, been a combination of a variety of influences in methodology. I have judged the inductivity of the study to be of highest importance, and focusing the efforts of the empirical gathering on the perception of the citizens interviewed themselves. This focus formed the method of the thesis around the subjects of study, rather than by risking influencing the results where I identified weakness in traditional ways of working. I have however constructed this study from my own intentions,
but naturally after careful consideration of which possibilities arose when exploring the thesis’s purpose.

The purpose of the thesis touches upon topics like identity, passion, lifestyle and emotion. The interviewees who participated in the study gave testimony that at times became deeply personal and exposing of their feelings and person. To preserve the anonymity of the subjects that they rightfully uphold I have decided not to include any names, organizations or other information that could identify them. Each person participating in the study has also been given the option to use an alternative name instead of their own, to further protect their anonymity.

All subjects have been informed in advance of the purpose of this thesis. Each interview was recorded with the consent of the subject, and I explained the right to at any time stop the interview, as well as the right of the interviewee to not answer any question they would be uncomfortable with. The interviewees were all informed about the timeline for the thesis, and offered the opportunity to add in additional information or comment on their interview until the deadline of submission.
5. Analysis

This chapter will present findings from the empirical gathering in relation to the theoretical context presented above in this thesis. Initially, participation will be presented and concretized as a concept to create understanding of how the interviewees relate to the term. Secondly, previous participations of the interviewees will be presented in relation to: the self, their communities, and society.

5.1. Defining participation

During the interviews for this thesis each participant was asked to bring a list of previous acts of participation, as well as pictures, posts or texts that they relate to their participation. When describing his history of their participation, one of the participants summarizes participation to be divided into different categories:

*Firstly there is the type of participation where you run yourself for different assignments, or make sure to represent as many as possible in different forums. I think that is one type of participation, but the second type of participation is to assist and support others who participate, or those who should be the change and stand up for the change. That is done indirectly; you make sure they have [for example] a boat ticket or somewhere to stay. You make sure that the action is doable, plan and fix stuff for it. I can see that cluster in my list, I experience it as that I have done a lot to make sure others also can do. I haven’t done that much to influence direct change. But it’s also these issues that interest me the most. It’s also about what I want to achieve. It’s also participation to be strengthened in deciding what you want to do yourself, in what direction to go. It’s kind of cool. – Adam, 23 years*

In Adam’s deliberation of participation he shows examples both in participation as something done with the interest in influencing – either a certain issue, or other people – and also involving the wants and interest of the person doing the action themselves. Adam expresses himself that most of his listed activities have been revolving giving others a chance to participate, and that his participation can be clustered on that regard. His description of
personal interests and wants is something another interviewee touched upon when discussing the underlying structures necessary for participation to bloom:

*I think the drive itself is something that everyone has more or less, but it depends on your environment and childhood, or what others around you have, what circumstances you are in, and it can effect whether you are in a position where participation is encouraged. In that case it might be easier to participate and easier to be in that type of situation, and easier to go forward from that - Josefin, 24*

Josefin explains participation to be something that could be accessed by most people, but that the resources available in your upbringing or attitudes in your surroundings might affect in what extent ways of participation are accessible. Verba, Nie and Kim’s (1987) theories on political participation are being mirrored here, as the authors separate political mobilization on group-based mobilization and individual-based mobilization. Individual-based ways of mobilization is described relatable to how Josefin reflects on participation, where those who can access participation tend to be disproportionately those with access to education, wealth, and occupations with high status. A key word in Josefin’s testimony is if ‘you are in a position where participation is encouraged’. This as well is reflected by Verba et al., where the authors specify that there is need for resources as well as motivations for participation on an individual basis to develop. Here, both Josefin and Adam show interest in participation as something to access, and place the discussion of defining participation in relation to a wider public. They both reflect on participation as something outside themselves, and describe it almost as a tool to be used by citizens to accomplish goals.

A discussion the interviewees seemingly disagree upon is whether participation requires results to be reckoned for. Sofie gives these examples of defining results as necessary for participation when asked:

*I think you define what constitutes as results yourself [...] it is not enough that I think that I did a good job, but it also has to be acknowledged from others. I can’t just say ‘I’m going to help you now’, but you don’t feel helped. It has to stem from your needs – Sofie, 23 years*
Which can be compared to the reflections of another interviewee:

“You don’t have to affect someone for it to count, just that you want to make a difference. I think that’s reasonable – Saga, 21 years

Both Sofie and Saga stem from seeing their participation in relation to others, and the influence it would have - or not have - on their surroundings. Saga’s example includes that the participation does not have to affect someone, and Sofie explains that her actions need acknowledgement from others. This shows that participation here is external from the individual self. Participation according to these statements would not include actions that only involve the individual. This perspective reminds of Collins (2015) discussion on the role of a ‘good citizen’, where citizenship is active, something to produce to contribute to society. The examples given by Collin are citizens voting in elections, become educated and employable to economically independent and productive members of society. The citations from Sofie and Saga are more direct, presenting their participation in relation to directly targeted others, almost as if it is in dialogue. Actions of participation are put in relation to more concrete examples of other individuals, rather than society on a vaguer level, as presented by Collin.

Relatedly, Ekman and Amnå (2012) include the intention to influence in their definition of political participation. Participation is presented as actions that: “refers to attempt to influence others” (2012: 286). This perspective is present in Sagas citation above, but not included for Sofie. Instead she actively distances participation from actions where her own intention is good, but not recognized by the recipient.

One participant found somewhat of a middle ground for the two different versions of the need for results in participation:

“If you say that the effect or the impact is really tiny or non-existent, it could still be a kind of impact, but it is rather an addition to the debate [...] So yes, participation should have an impact to be real. How big or small doesn’t matter, it is still participation, something has happened – Adam, 23 years

Here Adam distances himself from being the judge of whether his participation has effect or not, where even non-existent impact could ‘still be a kind of impact’. This contradiction gives
credit even to those actions of participation where successful impact is lacking. Adam exemplifies this as making an ‘addition to the debate’, showing that the culture and environment of the debate can be influenced, even if the action is not the catalyst event for large societal change. This can be connected to the writings by Kavada on collective action, where she urges to address the collective “in looser terms, as a process rather than a finished product” (Kavada, 2016: 9). Social change here is explained to happen over time, where the collective is constantly developing and in a ‘state of becoming’. This notion of ‘becoming’ can be equally relevant to present for participation and citizenship. No one of these concepts acts in isolation to the other. Adam gives the example of seeing societal change as a process, where even if an act of participation might not be the revolutionary event that creates instant progress, the act in itself can play a part in a much larger impact. Participation can therefore both be presented as a single action, or as interconnected with many others, working towards a larger cultural shift. An example of many people’s combined actions is the force large demonstrations can come with. One interviewee reflects on this:

Now when you said it, participation could also be... for me, I probably thought of participation as changing someone’s mind about something, but participation could also be to change someone’s actions. You could say that in the case of the demonstration in Gothenburg, one of the many purposes was to stop the nazi demonstration, and it affected them in the way that they couldn't move any further. I haven’t thought about it in that way, but it is also one way to do it – Jasmine, 31 years

This example by Jasmine gives testimony to how the actions of a group of individuals become something different when combined, compared to them single handedly creating change through participation. To view participation as something purely individual is therefore misleading, and misses out on many of the forms of participation that should be accounted for.

One interviewee even presented acts of participation that never happened, but saw them interesting as a contribution to the discussion:

I also wrote some stuff I tried to get done, but haven’t made anything solid of, but I think it still counts as participation because I tried [laughs] – Fanny, 28 years
Adding these non-actions to the list shows Fanny’s perspective on participation as something different rather than pure action. In her examples, participation could just as well be a thought or idea of action. These examples never crystalized, but stayed in an idea stage, which Fanny still sees as participation. This is in itself a testimony to participation not dependent on results, but here participation is also not dependent on actual action. In the sense of Kadava’s theory, this could in itself be a part of the process of constant becoming of the collective action.

5.2. Motivations for participation

The incentives to participate can vary depending on the situation, and also be a combination of multiple reasons. The interviewees discuss representation, both in the sense of what they experienced themselves, and also the role they see themselves play for others. One of the interviewees explains this further:

*I remember that I thought that it was so very important that I was there as a girl, and could show younger girls that ‘hi, you can be a girl and you can be good [at judo] and you can have a black belt’, because I never had a female role model in judo myself. I remember feeling this strong ‘this is important’, even if it might have been an unknown need for the sports club – Saga, 21 years*

Here Saga deliberates on how the norms of participation are shaped by those who take part. Her actions of participation are closely connected to seeing herself in the eyes of someone else, and she connects her participation to the lack of female leaders in the club previously. Carpentier (2011) has similarly presented that media discourses relate to a multiplicity of topics, even when they are not directly being addressed. This could for example touch upon social categories, power relations and participation, which can change the opportunities or restrictions for accessing the participatory process. Saga’s participation gives a clear example of seeing that the action itself conducted can have multiple effects at once.

Others relate participation to a clear sense of duty, and as something you owe from being given a lot by others. These feelings can be connected to what was stated by Saga, but the incentive to participate is rooted in continuing on something already done, and not the lack of it, as in Sagas case. Duty has historically been a well-argued expression of citizenship. As
presented by Dalton (2008), the norms of citizenship channel how we perceive political participation and behavior. Duty-based norms of citizenship can therefore play a crucial part in how citizens express their participation in society, following the norms that are under constant recreation and reshaping. Fanny, 28 years old explain it as:

*I do a lot of stuff in [my organization] out of duty. You get the feeling that ‘I was given so much from this movement, so now it’s my time to pay it forward’* – Fanny, 28 years

Other interviewees have given similar statements, describing histories of feeling chosen, trusted and valued by others, and therefore wanting to show gratitude by their own actions. The common dominator is to talk about appreciation of the actions by others, and how actions by different people intertwine. These types of connections take part in shaping the norms of participation, which has a vital part in setting expectations of how citizens should act.

Participation seemingly does not always have to be an active choice, but could rather happen without any real deliberation. One interviewee explains how she prepared for her interview:

*I asked my partner yesterday what he thought I should say [laughs]. If I forgot about something, and he summarized it as I try to better the situations I come in contact with, because ‘why not?’ You can choose to see the potential in situations and people instead of ignoring it* – Josefin, 24 years

Josefin goes on to explain that her participatory acts have followed her throughout life, where commitments often change depending on her occupation and living location. Therefore, she tends to get involved in whatever is closest to her life and lifestyle. Bang’s (2005) theory on the citizen role of ‘everyday makers’ can be connected to this way of thinking, where Josefin gives example of a citizen who does things right where they are, in their own way. Bang sees this type of citizenship as ‘on and off’, which Josefin describes her activity as. This often changes form or expression depending on her life circumstances. As her quote states, her view on participation is rather based on asking ‘why not?’ instead of ‘why?’.

Personal development is also presented as a reason for participation, where personal growth can easily go hand in hand with participation. Jasmine, 31 years, explains that her choices to
commit to new participations needs to present some sort of personal connection. When presenting her reflections on previous engagements, she explains:

*I also learned a lot from it, and it had meaning for me. I learned, had fun, or grew with it* – Jasmine, 31 years

Personal gain is described by Jasmine as an opportunity for learning, growing, or simply having fun. An aspect of enjoyment or gain is therefore also an aspect of choosing to participate. Josefin presents a similar elaboration on the personal situation, when commenting on the list she was asked to prepare for the interview:

*I feel that the list depends a lot on who you ask. Five years is a long period, and its pretty long when you go from being 19 to 24. It's a big difference from who I was as a person when I was 18, 19* – Josefin, 24 years

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) describe how newer forms of participation match lifestyles and identities clearer, which results in faster changes in entering and exiting networks of participation. Networks of connective action can therefore become more personalized, and summon large numbers of people. As the examples of both Jasmine and Josefin explain, their commitments have then been dependent on where they are in their lives, and what situation they can, and wish to, connect to. Josefin argues that the five years of looking back has covered important years of her life in ‘becoming’, and that she changed a lot during that time period. As expected, both Josefin and Jasmine explain further on in their interviews that their commitments look different today compared to the types of activities they have done previously.

### 5.3. The (unclear) meaning of participation

Just as presented by Josefin’s reflection on reasons for why she participates, another interviewee has difficulty describing what participation constitutes:

*I cannot remember what it is like not to be committed […] I always do something, but if that is participation or rather a course or a camp for my own
When participation is linked to personal development, it could be challenging to draw the line between what could be established as participation. Saga expresses an example of this, when she explains that her personal development, for example attending a course, could also fit under the term participation in its own way. This can be connected to the *latent forms of participation* presented by Ekman and Amnå (2012), which refers to actions not directed directly towards influencing political change, but still might have significance in future developments. These types of commitments can be referred as on “stand-by”, or be described as “pre-political” activities. An important aspect that becomes clear when combining interviewee results with the term of Ekman and Amnå, is that participation seemingly stems from the *intention* of the citizen. If Saga sees her taking part in a particular course as political participation, it could be clear enough to be categorized as participation. Another interviewee presents similar reflections:

*Participation for me is directed to a specific person, that I will change you. That you will think differently. And I almost never do that. Or well, maybe it shouldn’t be called participation, but I do engage in discussion if people do or say things I don't agree with based on values - in public spaces, at work [...] But I don't know if I would call that participation, it’s more... it’s not to start something, but I still do it. I think a lot about it.* – Jasmine, 31 years

Jasmine reflects on her definition of participation, which shows how complex the term can be. What she initially sees as participation is clearly stated, but she goes on reflecting on other types of behavior that also might be relevant, even if she stays clear from calling it participation. Here it becomes evident that the action she is conflicted about is “not to start something”, which suggests the need for some type of result for the action to be characterized as participation. Here again, the notion of latent forms of participation can be reflected upon, where Jasmine shows example of being interested and informed in influential systems in society. In contrast from Saga, the actions Jasmine is describing are not done with the direct intent to create change.
Participation is also described by some of the interviewees as a part of their identity, something that is purely part of who they are and how they are perceived. Fanny elaborates on this:

*People typically describe me as a person who is like ‘oh but you are so active in so many things!’; and even if I’m not active in that many things people still think I participate in a bunch of stuff [laughs]. I think it might be connected to how you describe your life to others – Fanny, 28 years*

Hartley (2010) describes how citizens play the part of producers, communicating a ‘DIY citizenship’ to others through dialogues on social media and other digital communications. This aspect of participation as communicated citizenship is evident in many of the interviews conducted. The quotation of Fanny exemplifies how the perception of the ‘active person’ is part of the participatory process, where the image others perceive might not always match the perception of the active citizens themself. Fanny also claims that the view others have of her is dependent on the message she spreads while describing her life. Similarly to this, another interviewee shows confliction in how much participation is part of her identity:

*It is obviously a part of me, but it’s not a construction of my identity for me, that I would be ‘the activist’, or I don't talk that much with others about it. It’s not like I am hiding it in any way, but there are vegans who are vegans because they live that type of life, and then there are vegans who are vegans because it is an identity. And its great to be a vegan, so both are good, but they are different – Jasmine, 31 years*

This type of participation that Jasmine is distancing herself from is what Bennett and Segerberg (2013) describe as an ongoing deep-laying change in society. An individual sense of identity is built on personal lifestyles and hopes combined with the promise of one’s own opportunities and individual successes. Actions become more connected to ones personal identity than what they have been traditionally. Not wanting to identify as ‘the activist’ is in this sense a way for Jasmine to present that her participatory actions are in itself separated from her identity and person.
Another aspect of participation presented by the interviewees is seeing actions as a form of sacrifice, where what you do when participating also come at a cost. Sofie gives examples of this:

It is this thing about sacrificing your own comfort. What is rough for the moment, but that it can be made into something bigger, for someone you do not know, for someone who might or might not come – Sofie, 23 years

This example shows how previous categorizations of participation can be problematic to contextualize in reality. Seeing to Dalton’s (2008) categorization of citizenship as either duty-based, centering on social order and obeying societal standards, and engaged citizenship, focusing on solidarity and commutarian values, Sofie’s quote belongs in both categories. Her action is done as the essence of solidarity, showcasing what Dalton would call engaged citizenship. However, while describing her action as a sacrifice, where her discomfort can be made into something better for strangers, can be argued to be a demonstration of participation as duty. Here again the interpretation of the outside analysis should be questioned, for others than Sofie herself could categorize her example differently depending on the interpretation of her statement.

5.4. Participation in relation to the self

I would claim that the common denominator is me. How can I phrase this without sounding egotistical? It is that it is me who can do something. I am the one who did something. And it is often something others don't do – Sofie, 23 years

When discussing their participation, many of the interviewees give testimony to how the actions they choose to take often are dependent on their personal preferences and interest to how they want to participate. Jasmine gives an example of this form her participation in the refugee response in 2015:

In 2015 I was also at the central station and worked with the people who arrived, but I kind of quickly when away from it. I am a lot more organizational, so I
rather quickly went from being... I’m not super-delighted to distribute food. I mean, someone needs to do it and it’s super important work, but I am more interested - and think I am better at, or my knowledge will be used better, if I work more organizational – Jasmine, 31 years

Jasmine explains that her preferred ways of working influences, which commitments she decides to take, or in this case, sticks to. Most interviewees have similar reflections, mentioning the need to fit their participation with their current life situation, occupation, relationships, and interests. Many of the examples given, in regards to how to choose which commitments to take, revolve around organizational and structural issues. Jasmine prefers working more structurally. Another interviewee presents a different perspective on the issue when describing a job offer to work with a humanitarian organization:

*I chose to turn it down because I was to limited. I felt like I couldn't do what I was good at, in my own way, without having someone checking on me... And I wasn't allowed to talk about things I thought were important, or share things I thought were significant. Everything was about ‘think about the organization, the organization, the organization’. That's why it felt so nice to not have an organization, or to have my own instead, where I can share what I feel to be important here and now, and I don't have to go through someone who has ‘other agendas’” – Sofie, 23 years

What Sofie describes is the ongoing lively discussion on how ‘organizing without organization’ gives other avenues to active citizens to influence the political system and society. Typically mentioned both in academia and in other interviews is the lack of reactivity from larger organizations, along with the stricter guidelines and rules on how to act that Sofie explains. Collin (2015) explains similarly how media use has become vital for organizations to show a flexible approach on communication methods. Collin’s writings connect the developments of the social world to how citizens demand reachable and available organizations, but this of course applies equally to those who actively participate and contribute to the organizations themselves. Sofie describes feeling forced to focus on the organizations priorities, and not given the freedom she seeks to influence in the way she herself wants. This ultimately led to her turning down the position she was offered, to be able to continue working in the way most suitable for her. Combined with the example from
Jasmine, the need for personal preference is clear in how and why citizens decide to contribute to a cause or not.

In a similar discussion, Fanny describes how others often see her as a very active person, who participates in a large variety of actions or organizations. She sees the relation between the self and participation as largely dependent on how you present yourself:

_I also think it might depend on how you tell others about it. Others might participate just as much in all types of ways, but... they don't phrase it as if they are part of an organization, or I mean, as soon as I do something I call it an organization or I found an association or club. If you do that, it becomes much easier to talk about as participation, but others might participate just as much, but they don't use the same wording – Fanny, 28 years_

In communicating their participation, the interviewees vary greatly in how they relate to, for example, posting information regarding their participation, or sharing their advocacy campaigns to others. Some interviewees listed communicating and sharing information as their main way of participation, while others struggled to present any texts, pictures, videos or other material related to their commitments. Building from Couldry and Hepp, this thesis sees our world as “fundamentally interwoven with media” (2017: 16). By that, how one presents themselves through media is in itself not directly different from how one presents themselves in any other aspect, and could rather be argued as impossible to analyze completely separately. How a person communicates regarding their commitments can therefore not be separated from how they relate to their participation in a larger sense. Adam gives an example of this when reflecting on how he communicates publicly about his participation:

_I really don't publish things in my own channels. I think it might be about the fact that I’m not driven by issues that have myself as a sender – Adam, 23 years_

Here, Adam relates his lack of publishing posts to his drive. He is in himself not motivated by issues where he is portrayed as ‘a sender’, as he describes it. He does however regularly post on the site of his organization, where he himself is anonymous. This, in relation to how Adam presented his views on different types of participation previously, shows more about how he works in relation to participation. By adapting a broad perspective on participation, this study
can identify results like these, where for example the communications of participation clearly links to how one defines participation in itself, and which methods one chooses to put that participation into action.

One aspect of participation that quickly became clear in the interviews, is that the act is defined by the person themselves. When presenting his list of previous commitments, Adam describes his activity in a political youth party:

*I didn't include it here because don't see it as any type of participation to externally effect others. Now when I look back at the time when I was involved in a political youth organization it was extremely internal. We did most things for each other, and indirectly there were a few people who were elected to a couple of positions – Adam, 23 years*

The way Adam relates to his time as a member of a political youth organization is highly interesting, since he discards it immediately from his list of participations. The debates on participation though political party memberships have previously exclusively regarded the dropping membership numbers, creating a reasonable worry regarding how (and by whom) politics are shaped and rule the democratic process. Martin and van Deth’s statement gets to represent the large variety of theories that have been developed along these lines, when they state: “A person may be very interested in politics and still reject the actual political world when asked how he or she feels about politics” (2003: 303). Adam’s statement is however completely different, presenting that his intentions and interests with his previous membership merely regarded as internal actions within the organization. This example opens up for a more diverse debate on what the membership status truly represents and means. Adam would traditionally be clearly categorized as politically active during his time as a member, even though he himself would not agree to that categorization. This again presents how the intention of the individual is a crucial element to defining and identifying participation, and who feels entitled to influence societal developments.

Harley presents another aspect of this distinction of identifying the purpose and intention of actions. He describes how citizens experience an unstructured mix of “public institutions vs. private markets, collective action vs. individualism, emancipation vs. exploration”, where the citizens are “citizens and consumers, publics and audiences, workers and traders, all at once”
Citizenship and participation fall into this labyrinth of orientation, where everyday citizens play a part of a larger political community, intentionally or non-intentionally. Robertson (2015) comments on this change to have made politics increasingly difficult to classify, and rarely a clear-cut subject. One of the most striking examples brought up in the interviews regarding this problematization is the distinction between participating and reaching societal change through paid work versus volunteer basis. One of the interviewees elaborate on her view of participation through the list she prepared:

*It feels like I really only listed volunteering things. I haven’t written anything like, say if you applied for a position where you want to influence others or change the living conditions of others. I think that when you wrote to me about this with ‘participation’ and ‘influence to affect others’ I connected it immediately to doing it voluntarily […] I didn't choose to write it down, because it feels like participation where you get paid and participation that are done nonprofit are in a way different types of participation – Josefin, 24*

When asked to elaborate on what makes the difference between doing actions with and without pay, Josefin responds:

*I believe that I am afraid to be perceived as not doing things out of pure passion […] then it becomes that you work with something, but really want to do other things […] It feels like ‘an ugly type of participation’, because I get paid for doing it, even though I would have done it anyways – Josefin, 24 years*

Josefin raises a number of points here. Participation is demarcated as something you do out of pure passion, when you do something you really want to do – without compromise. Getting paid risks changing the priorities of the work, resulting in actions done without pure intention – an ‘ugly type of participation’, as Josefin says. This reaction was given by multiple interviewees, and most problematized the role of being employed in politics or civil society in one way or another. This type of reasoning could be interpreted as a reaction to what Bang (2005) refers to as ‘expert citizens’, who knows and understands political structures, and can take part in shaping the rules of society. Bang compares this a ‘republican elitism’, pointing to a careerist way of learning the tricks and powers of citizenship. He further on warns that rapid shifts in participatory structures will risk segmentation of who can take place and influence
the democratic structure. The reserved, and sometimes negative, outlook on paid activism or participation is an interesting and problematic aspect of seeing ‘true’ change and effect. Reasoning that participation has to be non-paid to be real could almost be interpreted as counterproductive, or at least as limiting the scale of how much impact ones actions can have. Participation is here discussed by the interviewees not as an act, but rather as a motivation. To stay true to your motivations you must make sure not to get too influenced by other, more tempting or rewarding motivations (like money). By keeping participation ‘clean’, the essence of your actions are protected. This demarcation also shows clues on a separation between ‘us versus them’ regarding those who volunteer and those who are employed. Some of the interviewees who are currently working with civic engagement have similar reflections to how they relate to the purity of participation. Adam elaborates further when explaining how he sees his capability to add in these interviews:

*That he would recommend me [to interview for this thesis] felt a bit strange, because most things I have done regarding this topic has been as an employee. I am drilled that you can’t participate as an employee, and that you are definitely not idea-based as an employee, because you are getting paid for doing this. So we discussed back and forward about the topic and then I came to the realization that getting paid to be able to work with these issues has to be the ultimate proof that you have a commitment and you truly want to. Someone has chosen you to do this full-time, so then you have to be quite good at it – Adam, 23 years*

This example shows how fractured and multidimensional the discussion of ‘pure’ participation can be. Adam explains that he too has been thinking that he as an employee should not be the main actor in contributing to the cause, but rather stay behind and let others stand in the spotlight. He then elaborates further that he in a way is appropriate in the very highest sense, since he chose to work with his actions full-time.

When choosing which commitments to take part in, the interviewees list a number of factors that can play a part on the decision. Resources are generally mentioned as one of the most common aspects to decide whether to take on a new commitment or not, which is exemplified as time, money, or energy. A common reason for quitting is simply because participation was
not necessary anymore when the need was filled or action accomplished. When describing quitting one of her commitments, Fanny described a different situation:

actively because I felt a bit burnt out, twice last year. And then it was as if I felt that I had to deal with stuff for real. [...] it felt like these kids will do alright anyways, I finally realized [laughs] that I wasn't essential for them – Fanny, 28 years

Participation is generally here dependent on the circumstances, no matter if it regards personal energy, financial resources, or interest. This exemplifies how participation lives in the present, and is therefore exposed to constant change. Other examples given were to turn down an opportunity because of values. One of the interviewees explained the need for clear political motives for them to be interested in participating. Another was dissatisfied with the leadership of their organization and decided to leave because of it. What is clear in this is that no matter the reason, choosing participations is done through personal connection. The actions required to participate need to match the circumstances the citizen is facing in that situation. In some instances the personal motives and passions driving participation clash between individuals who are working together, which leads to one opting out. One of the interviewees describe her experience in a previous organization:

Members become extreme, so I don’t know. But with that being said, I am also extreme, I can’t separate... what right I have to say this. And everyone is super important, but I often wish that it could be a more accepting culture, stemming from ‘yes, it is super important that you are here, that you participate in these issues, which are my passions, that is awesome. I might not agree with everything you say, but I appreciate that you are here’ – Saga, 21 years

Saga describes a clash that can be linked to the ongoing discussion on organizational culture and its effects on memberships. Bakker and Vreese (2011), as well as Bennett and Segerberg (2013), discuss, amongst many others, how organization today has changed the traditional structures of community. Previous social structures such as school, church, family, or political party are now exchanged for clusters built on networks and relationships from attitudes, as well as social and political beliefs. Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 24f) describe these connections to be dependent on lifestyle, creating loosely tied ‘opt-in/opt-out networks’.
Sagas quote shows an example of how she experienced her lifestyle and opinions to be expected to be expressed in a certain way to be accepted in the organization. She recognizes that other members did not accept her views and perspectives, but simultaneously acknowledged that she herself might be part of the structure as well, and also be ‘extreme’. Connecting to the theories of Bennett and Segerberg, Saga’s story does not as clearly give an example of being an ‘opt-in/opt-out network’. Even if the network itself might be loosely tied, the wording Saga uses to describe the situation is phrased with a lot of emotion and intensity. Both people and issues are described as ‘super important’, and the interest in the issue as a ‘passion’. Though the network itself might be an opt-in/opt-out basis, the issues discussed most certainly do not seem to be that way. With loosely formed organizations and relations, the participatory structures might seem to be floating freely, but the interest stays solid. Even if Bennett and Segerberg held their focus on the formalization of the actual networks, it is important to identify the difference it makes between a loosely tied network of modern participation structure, and traditional social structures like a family or a church. Leaving traditional, strong institutions would imply leaving the values, meanings and cultures of those institutes. Making a similar disconnect to, for example, an organization centered on a political issue today could in itself be challenging and problematic, but would be replaced easily in comparison. The point of Bennett and Segerberg holds up so far, but misses the fact that the values, meanings, and cultures might in fact not be left when ‘opting out’ from a network of modern day, but merely changes the scenery and be applied in another organizational setting. This argument is in no way flawless, but should be given to the differences between leaving a network and leaving for example a family implies.

5.5. Participation in relation to community

When discussing participation and the underlying motivations for it, many of the interviewees describe it to include a fun and social aspect. Some describe going into new commitments with the main motive of having fun and making new friends, and that the activities at a later stage became a political action. One of the participants describes how they previously reasoned whether to commit to a new action or not:

*It was a combination of ‘will I have time for this? Can I prioritize this?’ but also a good way to engage locally, which I gladly do. It’s fun to do something locally, because things often tend to be a lot bigger. I like the people there; it is also*
social. For me it’s about the social; at least where there are multiple meetings and some longer sessions. I can join a demonstration by myself, then it’s not too important [whether I’m alone or not], but it’s for such a short amount of time – Jasmine, 31 years

Another interviewee touched upon the same topic:

It’s not just about participating in a board – it’s also that you feel a responsibility for that summer camp, to plan for it, and that you... show up for different events of course, and feel for those people who have this place as their, what to call it, social point in life. You have to include them and think it’s important for them to feel welcomed – Fanny, 28

The community of participation is here described as both a motivation for ones own participation, but also as a part of the responsibility participation carries with it. Fanny describes how her participation also affects the experience for others who are part of her commitments. While Jasmine discusses her personal motivations for participation, there is a level of responsibility in Fanny’s statement. Similarly, another interviewee describe her role in relation to the people in her surroundings:

I typically say that I act as a peep-hole for people like myself, my family, my friends, my facebook friends, my followers and others – that they have been able to see what I see, so it all comes a bit closer – Sofie, 23 years

When previous acts of participation and mobilization of groups were done through collective action, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) identified that newer mobilizations are rather created through connective action, which tend to be digitally organized, as well as more personalized. The theories of Bennett and Segerberg can be discussed in the three quotes presented above, where the interviewees all present themselves in relation to others in their communities. Jasmine regarding effects on her personal motivations, Fanny taking responsibility for others’ social inclusion, and Sofie taking responsibility for channeling information to others. The three mention different forms of participation, ranging from facebook activity, summer camps, demonstrations, local activism and social events. Either way, all of them present example of how connective and collective action go together; precisely as Bennett and Segerberg
themselves argue can be the case. Interestingly, these examples showcase how the two logics also mix together in separate scenarios. Sofie explains for example that her *connective* actions have *collective* motives, when she uses digital channels to spread information to her communities and circuits.

Just as participation can be a tool used to influence others, some of the interviewees tell stories of when others have influenced them to participate:

> *What was I... 16 years when I became chairperson. It was something I had never been before, or even thought of. The approach when I was to be elected chairperson was very quick, and those who were about to quit the student council just said that I was supposed to take over* – Adam, 23 years

This aspect of participation happening in relation to others is a social process in itself to motivate participation. Adam gives the example of being ‘on the other side’ of what Sofie describes, where he was influenced by others to take on the position as chairperson. Dalton (2008) argues that new forms of participation develop in parallel with the perception of individual influence in the political system. When the level of education, political skill, and policy orientation rises, citizens seek new avenues of influencing politics and society in their surroundings. Sharing knowledge and opportunities with others to participate in political structures or decision-making processes has both become more accessible and easily shared. This is also presented in a large variety of ways – as done by the interviewees. Participation is a process that happens in relation to others, where one can both influence others, as well as be influenced themselves.

Similarly, Hartley (2010) elaborates on how a culture of ‘DIY citizenship’ has evolved, where active audiences connect with likeminded others to exchange information on interesting topics and practice citizenship. This is done with the use of media, which allows a growing number of the population to contribute to the creation of new meanings, systems, and ideas. This widening of public room for political discussions and debates has made opportunities to share experiences like what is discussed by Sofie. This theoretical concept was up for discussion in a number of interviews, and occasionally criticized for its efficiency in creating change. One of the interviewees elaborated further:
If you discuss participation as trying to affect as many as possible, then I might make more change at a UN conference where I meet people from all over the world, where I can write debate articles, where I can write blog posts, I can make vlogs - I can reach quite a few. But it’s not certain that I reach out effectively. I mean, it’s quantitative but not qualitative. As a judo coach it might not be very quantitative, but it is damn qualitative, because I can see which kid has problems with aggression and I can see which kid has problems with self-esteem – and I can choose what I say to those kids separately – Saga, 21 years

Saga brings up an interesting aspect in discussing these different scenarios of her participation. While she definitely would reach more people with her connective action/DIY citizenship, she argues the need for qualitative measures in seeing the results of participation. Interestingly, she does not take a definitive side in which action she sees as better, but rather keeps the discussion as an example of how to choose method depending on purpose. When seeing this discussion, one can remind themselves that the traditional categorization of political participation would most likely not accept being a judo coach as a form of participation. Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2007) reflect on the meaning of the political in participation, arguing that political participation historically has constituted an action towards an authoritative entity of value. Teorell et al. further reason that authoritative power could be held by a variety of actors, and is not the sole responsibility of the public sector or state. Participatory activities can therefore not be restricted to be directed only towards political authorities, but could just as well target private or non-profit actors in hold of corporate power. What Saga gives example of here is that the recipient of the action is decided by the actor themselves, where what has historically been seen as purely an entity of power can now be directed towards influencing any other actor in society – for example a judo training kid. Many of the interviewees give similar testimonies, seeing that the recipient of the participatory action can change depending on the action. This attitude could be seen as going hand in hand with theories of lifestyle politics and DIY citizenship, where people in themselves can have the capacity to create change. Power is here no longer exclusively for those with normative attributes, but seen as graspable for a larger mass of people.

When discussing power relations in participation, many of the interviewees reflect on their own power positions in being active. One interviewee reflects:
There are tons of things you can do as a person, but it’s only when you are in a position where others will listen to you... I don't know, someone might follow, or join an event you plan, or something, so it actually happens on a larger scale. Otherwise your participation can only affect what is directly in your close surroundings – Josefin, 24 years

What Josefin presents here is the essence that power is not just relevant in discussing the receiver of the participatory act, but also the sender. Participation is in other words not just about influencing power, but also about having the power to influence. Collin (2015) has identified the same trend, and explains that citizens can come to question and redefine norms of power, decision-making and communication, generally made accessible by the alternative networks of organizations that are accessible today. Collin describes this to question the norms of politics and citizenship in general. Josefin describes a very concrete aspect of power from a citizen; having someone join an event or follow you. Another example is given by another interviewee when describing a picture they brought to the interview:

When I posted the photo of my group, I remember that I sometimes used to think that it was important to take pictures when I was out, and I normally don't publish that much on Instagram. Something like maybe showing my friends and acquaintances that this is something you can do – Fanny, 28

Fanny describes her action as a way to potentially inspire others to act as well, and to present options on how you can participate. Regardless if it is knowingly or unknowingly, she partakes in creating the narrative of what participation looks like, whom it is for, and what it contains. Publishing the picture was in itself a participatory act, where she tried to influence others to see what they can do. This again is example of how participation has a social aspect, where the interviewees place their activities in relation to others, either as Josefin in finding fellow actors, or as Fanny inspiring to own action.

Another aspect of participation in relation to community is a reflection from Jasmine, on how she uses Facebook as a platform for her participation:

I share people who say good things or articles about stuff, but I never write anything myself, and when people comment on something I don't comment back.
It’s like... I would say it tells a lot about what I think, but very little about my personal commitments – Jasmine, 31 years

She then goes on reflecting on Facebook as a platform, compared to other arenas for participation:

I like it a lot better when you can meet up, and I think Facebook is a horrific forum for debate. It has happened that I have been in discussions with friends which have spiraled out of control where I get like ‘come on this is me! We are friends. How can you say this?’ So I’m like ‘I won’t have it’. I don’t think that is a good way to debate, I feel like it wouldn’t give anything productive ... Just like I am doing! You are just screaming in one direction ‘aaaaaah!’ – Jasmine, 31 years

Jasmine reflects on a couple of interesting aspects here. She first recognizes Facebook as a way for her to communicate her political stance by sharing augments and articles, but then adds in that she does not like the method, and would rather meet face to face. Secondly, she says that she is disinterested in interaction, and does not comment back when someone comments on her posts on a social media platform. Finally, Jasmine admits that she herself takes part of this culture of a bad debate climate, by ‘screaming in one direction’. The debate culture created on Jasmine’s Facebook profile is presented as completely different from what she prefers herself. On Facebook she describes how friends of hers act so bad as if they do not even know each other. This echoes some of the theories of Beyer (2014), who argues that political participation in online communities acts on its own standards and rules, and cannot be presented as aligned with offline participation. Beyer highlights the political importance of ‘nonevents’, and argues the need to broaden the platform for political mobilization. Jasmine’s everyday use of Facebook to present her political views and share them to others, could be applied to Beyer’s theories, since it in itself would be categorized as a ‘nonevent’, and rather as a dynamic constant. No one single post stands out when Jasmine shows me her Facebook posts, they are instead pieces of a puzzle that tells a story of what Jasmine believes and argues. As she states herself, her feed says very little about whom she is and what she does, but very clearly presents what she thinks.
5.6. Participation in relation to society

van Deth describes the broadening of engagement as now including “non-political activities used for political purposes” (2014: 350). These activities are described as ‘extra-institutional’, closely linked to aspects like identity, lifestyle, and interests. Understanding the political role of citizens in society therefore links with the broader perception of what constitutes engagement. This was concretized in some of the discussions of the interviewees. One example comes from Fanny, when she describes her political power in everyday actions:

I stopped flying [...] I guess it affected lots of my friends. Many of them don't fly to the same extent any more, and all our travels together have to be done by train. I think I'm in a position in my group where I have the power to, in some ways, affect others – Fanny, 28 years

This example shows how Fanny has incorporated her personal lifestyle choices as political participation, which she describes not only to affect her own life, but also the lives of her friends. By combining her actions with reflection of her power position in her group, Fanny shows precisely how versions of engagement have broadened in the sense of the writings of van Deth. Another interviewee approaches the same discussion from a different angle:

It's like this; I'm not a vegan. All my climate-friends are vegans. How am I supposed to deal with that? How am I supposed to - in any way - advocate for an issue? Even know what is reasonable and what is right? [...] I basically don't eat any meat, but I'm definitely not a vegan or vegetarian. And it's the big difference, in many ways I do live as I learn, but in some ways I don't. Not to 120 percent – and that aggravates others extremely much, and then you get excluded - Saga, 21 years

The pressure of lifestyle politics can become overwhelming. Saga tells about how her own lifestyle clashes with her political opinions and advocacy. Interestingly, she also connects her own participation to the behaviors and lifestyles of her friends. Being a vegan is here presented as being ‘true’, and the only reasonable way to be a real climate activist. de Moore (2017) explains that lifestyle politics stems from connecting political actions and motives to consumer power, where the efficiency of the collective forces social change. It is this notion of the collective that is the essence of creating effect when combining individual consumer
behaviors – which Saga’s testimony clearly showcases. Political participation in this sense puts high pressure on the individual to act accordingly with the political targets. Saga expresses her frustrations, stating ‘how am I supposed to deal with that?’ when describing the lifestyle politics practiced by her friends. For her, this aspect of participation has become a real difficulty, arguing that the ultimate result for not following ‘the rules’ is exclusion from the movement. This gives example to Carpentier’s (2011) theories on how citizens impact the level of participation socially acceptable themselves through the social norms applied to participation. What citizens themselves create and act upon defines what becomes socially possible to reach. The quote from Saga is an example of just this, how the actions conducted by citizens influence and shape the norms of participation that apply to all.

Responsibility is presented as a main theme when discussing participation. Many of the interviewees discuss how their actions and communication can have a large influence of those they meet – both in understanding their message, but also in understanding them as individuals. Couldry and Hepp (2017: 15) presents our actions as defining the “horizon of our practices is a social world for which media are fundamental reference-points and resources”. Our interpretations and understanding affect our future actions and reflections – reflections, which are founded on everyday life happenings of people – individually and collectively. The rather general theories of Couldry and Hepp become specified by one of the interviewees, when describing her responsibility of what she chooses to not communicate regarding her participation:

Things that can provoke... like if you don't have all the information surrounding the event and stuff like that, then the wrong types of emotions can be provoked with people. It could provoke ignorance, or ‘this is what they are like’, to define them wrongly – Sofie, 23 years

Sofie explains how she knowingly chooses what to present to others or not in her participation. She identifies that some of the experiences she has had in her actions would be more challenging to communicate than others. When presenting her participation, she therefore actively chooses to exclude some aspects. These are still parts of how she herself reflects on her participation, but just not something she includes when communicating publicly regarding it.
The interviewees make it clear that they themselves define participation, and how they themselves affect society and their surroundings. An interesting aspect of defining participation is the view of electoral voting amongst the interviewees. While Dalton (2008) argues that many citizens may choose more individualized forms of acting over voting, they still participate in the electoral system that shapes our democracy. However, none of the interviewees listed voting as an act of participation they have done, even though all of them voted. When asked if voting counts as participation, one of the interviewees responds:

For one part I would say that I have rather little faith in the parliamentary system. I feel like we as ‘the people’ have extremely little participation through our ballot. Even if you say ‘your vote counts!’ it’s still ‘just’ a vote. I feel like I can participate and make a larger difference in so many other ways than through my vote. However, it is the system we have, therefore I vote. I don’t think you shouldn’t vote - there are those who think that way – but I don't think that, because it does matter, it makes a difference depending on how people vote. It’s just so little... I would say one ballot is like sharing one article. It is like, why do I share things? I really don't think it makes any difference. It might be more that I share these thing for my own sake, to feel that I’m active and know stuff, but also to present myself to others as ‘Look! I am woke’, even if I don't do it knowingly. It’s what social media is about to me. So voting, it’s also such an incredibly low effort. Go voting is like... anyone can do it. Too low effort to count – Jasmine, 31 years

Historically, academic research of political participation has almost exclusively been focused on electoral participation. Voter turnout is still used as one of the main methods to measure and analyze citizen participation in the democratic system. In recent years, the academic field has broadened the term to be more multidimensional, entailing non-electoral actions as well (Teorell, Torcal & Montero, 2007: 334). Nevertheless, a clear majority of the interviewees decisively discredit voting as a form of participation. When asked if she would add voting to her list of participation, one of the interviewees responded:

For me, most of the things I have listed are very personal, which I see as personal achievements. It is something I have accomplished, something I am proud of. And it is wrong of me to say that I am not proud of voting in the
election, but it’s so obvious for me that voting is nothing special. I wouldn't list it as participation, but if you are seeing to how I influence society on a principal note, then sure – Saga, 21 years

Responses like these reasonably open up for reflection on what the consequences of the development of political participation are to the democratic system in place. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) warn that individualization of responsibility and risk lead to more personalized choices and associations in political engagement, and distances the engagement from traditional forms of memberships or party loyalty. Arguably, when participation is done through new avenues, others are discredited. If active citizens themselves discard voting as a form of participation, it calls a reflection on how we use the form as measurement of citizen influence in society. When our society openly discusses the new developments of participatory actions, we should, to an equal extent, be able to question the relevance of traditional ones. Judging from the testimonies of the interviewees, one could carefully consider whether voting should be used as a measurement of political participation in modern society. Verba, Nie and Kim (1978: 47) already presented theories over 40 years ago that the most important political activities for individual citizens might be those “in the between-election period”, which rightfully holds in comparison with the interviews of this thesis. What can be argued is rather that electoral turnout might even not be a relevant method of measurement for political participation at all. This would not discredit the voting system in itself, but rather open up for reflection regarding what voter turnout means and symbolizes. When asked if voting should be considered participation, one of the interviewees gives an example of how she relate the act to participation:

No! [laughs] [...] it’s your obligation to vote, it’s what you are supposed to do.
But to fight for others to vote, or raise the turnout, or inform about different things, or to try to push for certain directions, then it’s participation – Fanny, 28 years

This reflection of Fanny’s shows how voting turnout is in itself still relevant for citizens participation, but she rather sees elections as a tool to influence politics, rather than the individual ballot.
There were other examples mentioned by the interviewees when they reflect over the effect their chosen methods of participation have. One interviewee reflects:

*I don't think that demonstrations are going to revolutionize the world or what to call it, but I think demonstrations are important for people to see and hear that 'that is one way to think, and there are others who work and fight for these things' [...] I believe a whole lot in organizing, that we have to work together, that I am not a lone person who is important, but that... you know, 1 + 1 equals 11 – Jasmine, 31 years

Generally the interviewees describe their participation in relation to other people preforming other types of participation. As Jasmine describes, demonstrations are important to show unity in fighting for a cause, but it wont ‘revolutionize the world’. Jasmine’s reflection gives the example of how the interviewees present a mix of actions as necessary to act politically from different angles. A typical example of that is the distinction between formal organizations and what Weinryb (2015) describes as ‘organizing without an organization’, which mobilize forces quicker than formal organizations, but tend to lack structure. While Jasmine prefers to participate through organizing, another interviewee described her frustration with formal organizations:

*If you’re not 18 no one will accept you. You have no education, nothing. I remember the frustration lasting days, and finally I decided to give a monthly donation for a children’s rights-organization. Then at least I did something. I have had that type of frustration quite a long while, that there are so many things [to do], and I want to give what I have, whatever that is – Sofie, 23 years

She then continues on to describe how she views these organizations from outside today:

*I see, meet, and work together with them - partially also to see how they are in some ways are limited. And I feel that in my age, and my non-existing education, what I do really works [...] ‘I can be here. I don't need an organization to get what I need’ - Sofie, 23 years
Sofie’s views on formal organizations link closely to how Bennett and Segerberg (2013) motivate the shift from collective to connective actions. The authors go on to comment that the logics of the two types of actions do not oppose one another, but can rather complement each other and broaden the range of how actions can be analyzed. This notion of collective and connective actions happening in relation to one another is one of the main themes in Sofie’s interview. She describes how the causes of the actions are shared, and that organized forms of participation and non-organized forms of participation can collaborate to succeed. She further reflects on how she has collaborated with formal organizations:

You can still work together and support one another. It is such a vulnerable situation so they take all the help they can get. But of course, in the future when I get older and have to make a living out of this, if I am to work with similar issues I will need to do it through a larger organization – Sofie, 23 years

This reflection shows how participatory action does not stand by itself, but happens in relation to others. Kavada (2016) presents interesting reasoning on how the developments of digital media have destabilized the traditional assumption on how social movements and collective actions are shaped. By studying communication in collective action as a basis from which the action emerges, our understanding of political agency can reach new avenues and new depth to how we understand social movements. This rephrasing of communication’s role in social movements can most definitely be applied to the example presented by Sofie. Participation in this sense happens in collaboration between formal and non-formal ways of formation for political action.

Bakker and Vreese (2011) similarly argue that societal and technological developments have challenged the roles traditionally played by strong social structures, and now allow us to interpret and analyze participation through new lenses. In some cases during the interviews, I would argue that it is rather the lack of those traditionally strong social structures that led to new mediated networks to develop. One of the interviewees describes why she is particularly vocal about her participation:

I would have needed someone to open this world to me when I was younger, so I try to do so for others in everything I do. I think that makes way more difference than writing a debate article – Saga, 21 years
Participation in relation to society and societal change has also been discussed by the interviewees with a lot of different layers and dimensions. When seeing to one’s own role in society’s development, the interviewees show a great deal of self-reflection. Just as some can describe themselves as being ‘the right person’, there are also examples of the opposite:

I am not the right person to participate in this way anymore. When I first started I was 25 years old and didn't have a permanent job or any place to live. It was all different [...] It almost felt like ‘this fight is not mine to take’. In that case I could do other things instead – Fanny, 28 years

Fanny’s reflection shows that just as society changes, the individual citizen changes as well. Her life looks different today than it has previously, leaving her to feel that her participation is misplaced in the same action as previously. Participation moves, either through personal motivation, or through changed circumstances.
6. Discussion

This thesis has been conducted with the aim to identify the happenings between active political participation and latency, in the setting of a media landscape. Participation has throughout been presented as act performed with the aim to create change in some aspect. Identified in the analysis, the participants of this study expressed their understanding of participation as something external – something bigger than the individual self. Participation is done in relation to others, to influence other people, or structures at play in society. An integral part of participation therefore becomes the interrelation between the actor and their surroundings, either towards co-participators or to targets of the action. Multiple aspects are interwoven in this discussion, where the highly social act of participation is placed in relation to questions of power dynamics, norms, ideals and visions of each citizen’s role to play. The citizens interviewed for this thesis disregard many of the classical ‘rules’ of participation previously specified in academic research. Issues of which acts are regarded as participation, towards whom the acts are directed, and which methods can be acquired to participate in society, are being questioned, or directly redefined, in some of the quotations presented in the analysis.

This idea of participation, as something to be defined by the citizen conducting the participatory acts themselves, opens up the concept, presenting it as a living, flowing and dynamic notion of expressing citizenship. The interviewees give examples of this both in the situations they encountered, where a need for participatory action was presented, but also as recognizing the different levels of political participation that exist. Here, participation is seen as something more colorful than merely black and white, and the interviewees describe participation rather as a tool than as a distinct action.

The social notion of participation builds on constant interaction between the citizen participating and their relationships to other people, their community, and their society at large. The interviewees give examples of communicating participatory opportunities to others, as well as being presented (or pushed) with possible participatory actions by others. Media is here an obvious environment, which becomes not only the entry point for communication, but makes out the entire arena where these contacts are accessed and carried into effect. Media is not merely a method of connecting to other people, but also a way to present one’s own participation, building the presentation of how one’s citizenship is conducted. Media is used
to present one’s own actions, view the participatory actions of others, connect to other active citizens, present and find societal issues that require new participatory action, and display these societal issues to others to maximize the outcome of the participatory action. The essence of political participation is here completely built on mediated communication, which is expressed through texts, pictures, videos, links and other posts.

A distinct example of media use in activating participatory action is basing the action on feeling a personal responsibility to show opportunities to participate to others. Media then becomes a way to channel information purely with the intent to ‘spread the message’ as far as possible, either reaching the wide general population, or specifically targeting those individuals or groups most relevant. The interviewees see mediated participation as a channel to activate action, and interestingly, expresses mediated communication as a way to give the type of support to young citizens that they themselves might have missed when growing up. This exemplifies how participation in a media landscape is linked to channeling and activating participation, and how a lack of participation in a media landscape links to inactivity. Seeing to this description, the analysis of this thesis also presents the idea of participation being for the many, but only accessed by the few. The interviewees talk of resources, surroundings, and environment of one’s upbringing as being crucial in how one relates to participation as an adult. Citizens lacking the education, skills, or adaptability to rapid change and new structures risk exclusion from the democratic process. This notion should be taken into consideration when large portions of political participation are being channeled through newer media, presenting new affordances, norms and cultures of participation available to the public. Many scholars have previously discussed the risks of dismissing these newer media platforms as places for political participation, but I argue that the risk is equally big in forgetting to see who is excluded in these new settings that are being developed for citizens to participate in. Mediated participation has also been described as creating inactivity, either by having the citizen opt out of an activity for concern it would provoke others, or because of a lack of association in total, where the citizen cannot relate to the activity or to the other participants of that particular ‘fight’.

The findings of this study can contribute to the developments of our understanding of what political participation is, and how it can be channeled from inactivity to activity. On a general note, media is described as a method to use to increase the level of participatory activity, both amongst friends and loved ones, but also to a wider, unknown public. With these findings, I
want to add on to the terminology by Ekman and Amnå (2012), who presented the notion of ‘stand-by citizens’, where citizens are on stand by, monitoring their surroundings until their skills and knowledge in the democratic system is needed, and then activates their participation. By centering in on what I call ‘the switch’, which is the in-between latent forms of citizenship and active political participation, I have identified the notion of the mediated stand-by citizen. Citizenship in the sense of the description presented by Ekman and Amnå is in the interviews conducted for this thesis is done through mediation, where media use cannot be separated from the activation of political participation. The media environment is described in the analysis of this thesis as to come with it’s own sets of norms, power dynamics, and relations – all opening the opportunities for new participatory activity, or excluding citizens leaving them inactive.

The concept of mediated stand-by citizens is an example of how citizenship and political participation has developed up until today. The term offers a new approach to discussing citizen participation, both in relation to media, as well as in relation to activating latent forms of participation. With this contribution I hope to add to the extensive and ever evolving academic fields of media, communication, and political studies.

6.1. Suggestion of further studies

Conducting a study that is centered on the citizen perspective has given great access to new knowledge on the activity and inactivity of political participation. Building on the results of this study, I find it highly relevant to build further on the concept of mediated stand-by citizens from an organizational or governmental approach. The findings presented here show reason to further investigate how participation can be mobilized organizationally, in relation to the reflections presented by the participants of this study.
Bibliography


Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Kan du presentera dig själv: vem är du, vad brinner du för?

Listan

- Vad har du listat som påverkan?
- Finns det något som du tycker står ut, som du känner extra starkt för?
- Finns det kluster eller kategorier?
- Hur var det att lista dina engagemang? Var det enkelt att komma ihåg vad du gjort?

Poster

- Kan du berätta om bilder/texter/poster du tagit med?
  - (Om det är många, välj ut max fem att prata vidare om)
- Vad gjorde att du valde att publicera dem?
- Vad känner du när du ser på dem nu?

Kliva in i engagemang

Definition: ”agranden med intentionen att påverka andra”

- Varför valde du att engagera dig? Minns du känslan och tankarna?
- När väljer du att kliva in i engagemang? Eget intresse, tips från andra, ser annonser?
- Finns det tillfällen då du inte gått in i engagemang?

Omvärdering av listan

- Finns det något du fungerade på att sätta på listan men inte gjorde?
- Är det något du saknar på listan nu?
- Valdeltagande är ett vanligt sätt att mäta påverkan inom akademin. Nu vet jag inte om du röstade i valet, men om du gjorde det, tycker du det passar på listan?

Kliva ur engagemang

- Vad har gjort att du avslutat engagemang?