means, and there are a lot of new kind of technologies that will enhance this process. So, we don't know where it's gonna end, but we're already that far along that we have to start catching up politically, you know, systematically, to that new way of thinking.[130]

8.4 Political Participation in the Digital Age

After elaborating on information and communication practices as prerequisites for political participation, this final analysis chapter concentrates on political participation. The chapter starts with an overview of the most prominent modes of political participation in participants' repertoires. Once more, it becomes strikingly apparent that the development of ICTS and the Internet furthers citizens' opportunities to adopt a mix-and-match mentality: in a bricolage fashion, citizens combine modes of political participation across ("physical" and "virtual") spheres according to their respective political objective and to how they perceive a mode's internal and external efficacy. Special focus is also placed on the continuum of online political participation between empowerment of the citizens and the simulation of participation, and the participants' preferences for participation at the local political level. Aside from the general analysis of political participation repertoires today, a large part of this chapter deals with analysis of participation in times of crisis in contrast to participation in times of affluence. Adapted from US-American sociologist Harold R. Kerbo's work, this concept has proven tremendously fruitful in characterising the different notions of political participation in the two research fields, and at explaining general societal and political phenomena over the last decade, such as political disinterest.

8.4.1 Political Participation Repertoires Today: A Mix-and-Match Mentality

Going to the polls, sign a petition, be in a flash mob, buy eco-friendly products, contact a politician, found a local citizens' group, take part in political party work, demonstrate, support an interest group – as Jan van Deth points out, the list of modes of political participation has become extremely long and is growing longer (cf. 'Partizipationsforschung' 169f.). Like their information practices, people's political participation repertoires appear to be constituted by a selective mix-and-match mentality. In this chapter, I provide a brief round-up of the most prominent modes in interlocutors' participation repertoires. These are voting, political party engagement (including running for an elected office), initiatives/working groups,

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130 Björn Levi Gunnarsson, personal interview, Reykjavík, 4 June 2014.

demonstrations, petitions, the online participation tools *Betri Reykjavík* and *LiquidFriesland*, and the online participatory budgeting tool *Betri Hverfi*. This chapter focuses on the participants, touches on their overall experiences with these different modes of participation, and the ways in which participants incorporate a certain mode both into their participation repertoire and their everyday lives.

Just as it is one of several media used by "media omnivores" (Linaa Jensen 1) which they combine to form their own "personal news repertoires" (Strömbäck et al. 1), the Internet is also one venue where people participate politically, through different participation modes, and in doing so, aim to influence political decision-making processes at various levels. As Stark notes, participants mix-and-match the modes of political participation that they deem promising in achieving their specific goal and in accordance with their personal resources, social surroundings, and individual values (cf. 64). In the manner of a bricolage, participants reuse, recombine, and remix modes of participation that they have been actively relying on much of their adult lives together with more novel modes of participation (which obviously include the myriad online modes now available to many). In this way, participants become *bricoleurs* with highly individualised repertoires of participation modes.

In other words, these modes of online participation do not replace but rather supplement other modes. Indeed, much of the "hype" and the fears connected with the replacement hypothesis (see chapter 2.2.1 *Simply Slacktivism?!*) can be refuted by insights into socio-cultural change in Schönberger's work and the transformation of everyday life in Damsholt's and Jespersen's work. Put simply, these scholars conclude that change simply does not happen overnight. Even if it may have become technologically possible, established modes of political participation will not simply be replaced by online equivalents, or significantly more numbers of citizens will participate. Rather, modes of online participation may become part of citizens' repertoires in a fundamentally open and combinatorial process (cf. Schönberger 207) – on the premise that they "can be integrated with the constitutive logics of everyday life" (Damsholt and Jespersen 23).

8.4.1.1 Voting

In both Reykjavík and Friesland, voting is (still) the most dominant mode of political participation, as several interlocutors pointed out. For Landkreis Friesland's former press secretary Sönke Klug, voting still remains a civic duty for most citizens (ger. "eine staatsbürgerliche Pflicht")[131]. Hans Meyer similarly argues that citizens should remember to show respect: respect for the luck they have in living in a democracy in which one can delegate responsibility by giving politicians

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131 Sönke Klug, personal interview, Jever, 25 August 2015.

a mandate for a certain period of time, and also the luck one has in being able to withdraw that mandate.[132] For Hörður Torfason, the right to vote "is the most precious thing you have as a person." To honour this, he suggests making voting in elections compulsory: "I think we should go and put in LAW, that if you don't vote, you will get a fine. Even if you […] put it [in] empty, that is a way of showing it. But you should be obliged to go there and vote – you belong to society. And you can't just pretend to be neutral, no one is neutral."[133]

These observations from my fields correlate with most of the literature. In an overview of several European comparative studies, Jan van Deth concludes that voting is the prime mode of political participation in Europe (cf. 'Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft' 173). The high relevance of voting in citizens' participation repertoires finds expression in high voting rates. As can be seen in Figure 10, voting rates in general parliamentary elections in Iceland have been over or around 80 percent over the last twenty years, with peaks in 2003 (87.7 percent) and 2009 (85.1 percent).[134] Voting rates in general elections in Germany have been around ten percent lower than in Iceland, dropping to their lowest level in 2009 with 70.8 percent, but going up again to 76.2 percent in the last election in 2017.[135]

However, local body elections in both fields do not seem to draw as much attention as general elections. While voting rates in the municipal elections in the Reykjavík Capital Area dropped almost twenty percent (82.6 to 62.9 percent) from 2002 to 2014,[136] voting rates in the district of Friesland appeared to be on the rise.

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132 Cf. Hans Meyer, focus group, Varel, 9 September 2014.

133 Hörður Torfason, personal interview, Reykjavík, 24 June 2014.

134 Statistics are only as good as their cultural contextualisation. While it would go beyond the constraints of this chapter to go into details about what might have influenced citizens' decisions (not) to vote in the specific years, these numbers will play a role in chapter 3.3, where I deal with the relevance of times of crisis and times of affluence on political participation.

135 Figure compiled by the author using official statistics on general elections in Germany (Der Bundeswahlleiter), on local elections in the district of Friesland (Landkreis Friesland, 'Wahlen'; Landesbetrieb für Statistik und Kommunikationstechnologie Niedersachsen (LSKN) 11), on local elections in the Reykjavík capital area (2002; 2006; 2010; 2014) and on general parliamentary elections in Iceland (Votes Cast) from Statistics Iceland.

136 Unfortunately, there were no coherent numbers to be found on voting in the 2018 municipal elections in the Reykjavík capital area at the time of writing. Accounts vary between 62.7 percent (cf. RÚV) to 67 percent (cf. Ćirić), which would either mean that the percentage of voters remained unchanged, or rose by five percent. Due to these discrepancies, I decided to exclude the 2018 election in my round-up.

Fig. 10: Participation in General and Local Elections in Iceland and Germany
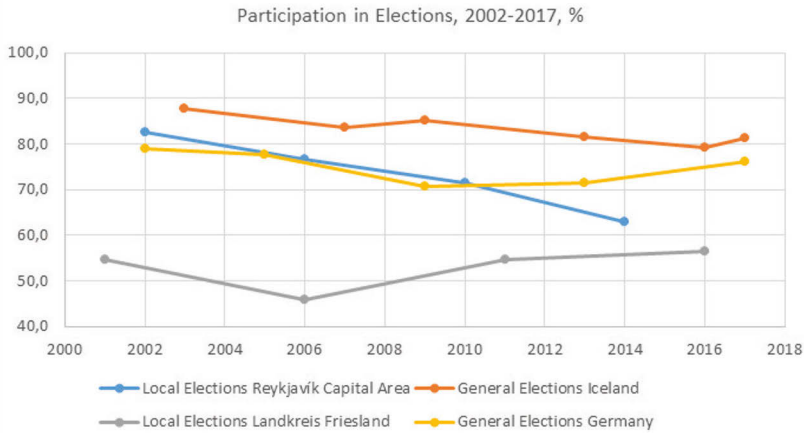
Indeed, voting rates in Friesland went up ten percent between 2006 and 2016 (46 to 56 percent), but were still around 20 percent lower than for general elections.

Without going into much detail about the reasons for these numbers, I think it is safe to say that, at least for some parts of society, local elections appear to be seen as less important than general elections. There are numerous and for the most part conflicting analyses of the apparent reasons behind decreasing turnout in local elections (cf. Altenbockum). In Reykjavík and Friesland, there are two commonly cited reasons for this decrease. First, that the quality of life in their municipality was so good that people saw no reason to vote. For instance, asked about possible reasons for the low voting rates in the municipal elections that had taken place just days before, Kristinn Már Ársælsson explained that the turnout for

the parliament elections are still at a high level. There is a very low decline. There is a decline, but it is way smaller as at the municipal level. And the things that they decide upon in parliament, are way more influential for our lives. For example, the health care system, taxes – these are directly influencing our day-to-day lives or level of quality of lives. At the municipal stage, it has been just too long since they implemented day care, we have swimming pools in every neighbourhood in Reykjavík, which is ridiculous. Just the quality, the level of quality of life in municipalities is properly, their influence on our daily lives is just way less.[137]

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137 Kristínn Már Ársælsson, personal interview, Reykjavík, 20 June 2014.

Second, another common explanation for low turnout in local elections is that participants were discontent with their action and impact frames through voting at the ballot, and were resorting to other modes of participation, such as the work in initiatives or starting petitions. Both these interpretations can, for example, be seen in the following quote from former Reykjavík mayor Jón Gnarr, referring to his personal life:

> For my parents, who are born around 1920, […] voting was very important to them, of almost spiritual importance. It's like going to vote was like going to church. It's just your responsibility as a healthy human, you vote. And I had these debates when I had got the right to vote, I said, 'Pf, no, I'm not going to vote, I don't care'. Then they said, 'but you have to go. You have to show up, you cannot just be nonchalant'. But then I look up at my kids, and I have loads of children, and they are between twenty and thirty, they're not so interested in voting. Because it's 'uncool', it's 'boring', and it 'doesn't change anything'.[138]

8.4.1.2 Political Party Engagement

Several participants have been directly involved with electoral politics within political parties. Several have won mandates on councils or committees. For example, a participant in the focus group in Varel had been in the district assembly in Friesland for around five years, and had stood (unsuccessfully) for the state parliament (Landtag) of Lower Saxony, both in 2013 and 2017. After almost 30 years of involvement in different political initiatives and as a member of the Green Party, a participant in the Jever focus group was elected to the city council of her hometown Varel in 2016. As was Djure Meinen, whose quote simultaneously points out that today, those who decide to engage within a political party are a minority:

> [Ich habe] mich immer politisch interessiert und auch politisch geäußert, also letztlich bin ich immer ein politischer Mensch gewesen. Hier in Varel war's dann plötzlich so, also im Grunde musste man ja nur Piep sagen und im Grunde war man schon dabei. Also die Zahl derjenigen, die sich wirklich politisch aktiv engagieren wollen, ist wirklich extrem gering. Je kleiner die Partei, desto weniger werden das und bei den Grünen musste man eigentlich nur sagen, ich würde gerne bei euch mitarbeiten und am liebsten gleich auch mal ein Amt übernehmen und damit ist man dabei. Weswegen ich eben auch seit September 2011 im Rat der Stadt Varel bin.[139]

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138 Jón Gnarr, personal interview, Reykjavík, 9 August 2012.

139 Djure Meinen, personal interview, Varel, 16 September 2013.

> I have always been politically interested and spoken my mind, so actually I've always
> been a political animal. Here in Varel, all you had to do was say one word and you were
> in. The number of people who really want to participate is extremely low. The smaller
> the party, the less people are interested. So with the Green Party all you had to do is say
> I want to take part and also take up a post and you're in. That is also why I've been a
> member of the Varel City Council since September 2011.

In these cases, holding a mandate is seen as part of political party engagement,
although most definitions of political participation "explicitly refer to citizens in
order to differentiate the relevant behaviour from the activities of politicians, civ-
il servants, office-bearers, public officers, journalists, and professional delegates,
advisors, appointees, lobbyists, and the like" (van Deth, 'Map' 354). However,
none of the participants referred to in this chapter are professional politicians, and
most are unpaid for their elected position, holding it alongside their regular job.

In Iceland, two participants became members of political parties between field-
work in 2012 and 2014. Both did not only become members, but also actively en-
gaged in party work right away. The software engineer Guðmundur programmed
a mobile phone app for the *Dögun* party campaign in preparation for the 2014
municipal elections. He also agreed to fill the party's list of potential candidates
for the city council: "I was asked to be a part of the *Dögun* party and I did that. I
was supposed to be tenth or something, […] but they asked me to be higher on the
list, so I ended up fourth or fifth on the list." As it was highly unlikely from the
beginning that *Dögun* would win many seats – it was a new party standing for the
first time –, Guðmundur was not elected into city council. Still, he saw the whole
experience positively, had "a lot of fun", and in comparison to the interview two
years earlier, I had the feeling that the joy, affirmation, and self-confidence that
radiated from him was due to this experience. [140]

Another participant became a member of the Pirate Party. He received a man-
date in the parliamentary elections of 2013 and, after being elected in the 2014
municipal elections, was appointed head of the sports and leisure council as well
as vice head of the council for culture and travel. In his account, it becomes visible
that, at times, all it takes to participate politically are personal connections and
serendipity:

> I was involved in some protests, as a matter of things in the whole Wikileaks thing.
> When she [Birgitta Jónsdóttir] [141], Smári McCarthy and some others started forming the

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140 Guðmundur Kristjánsson, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 22 June 2014.

141 Birgitta Jónsdóttir was parliamentary chairwoman as well as general chairwoman of
the Icelandic Pirate Party on and off between 2012 until 2017. In 2017, she withdrew

Pirate Party, I was invited to those meetings and I never showed up. You know, didn't have time, didn't have interest, I was like, 'Baah, political stuff', didn't have much interest. Eventually, they finished the preparations and they had the founding meeting and I had decided not to go, but I was JUST in the neighbourhood at that time. So I showed up for the founding meeting and I realized, 'Wow, there is a bunch of people here I know' and at first, I started hanging out with them just a little bit and before I knew it, I was running for parliament last year! And I was just filling in on the list, to be honest. I was just like 'Oh, I'm gonna help them out, I'm just filling the list. I'm just gonna be on the list somewhere low'. But I got voted into second place in North-East. I had said something like that 'Can I take the North-East, my dad lives there, I have some connection there'. You know. And, ja, then I was like 'That's pretty cool', so let's go all in. And done, here I am. That's a little bit of a change and I was a little bit surprised about that.[142]

Several other participants have had negative experiences in party politics and have since retreated from further engagement. Active participation in a political party is challenging and time-consuming work: formal requirements are to be fulfilled, the proceedings and structure of committees need to be understood, and one needs a thick skin to endure the often personal comments made in debates and committee meetings. As Wolfgang Müller said:

Es schrickt viele ab die sagen, ‚da wie das da läuft in Varel, Da kannst du mal hingehen, das ist ein Abenteuer'. So. Aber nur für Leute die wirklich auch erlebnishungrig sind. Alle anderen sagen ‚Das tu ich mir nicht an'. Und genau das ist der Punkt, da muss sich vom Stil was ändern, von der Struktur was ändern. Die Verwaltung muss weniger Macht haben, die Ratsmitglieder müssten tatsächlich einfach auch besser honoriert werden und die Zeiten müssten angepasst werden, dass Bürger mal zu einer Ausschusssitzung kommen können. Um 17 Uhr können das die wenigsten, wir müssen immer den Laden zu machen, um da hinzugehen beispielsweise.[143]

The way things are going in [the city council of] Varel scares many people off, saying *Just go and attend a meeting, quite an adventure*. But only for those who really are in search of a thrill. Everyone else goes *Spare me!* And this exactly is the point, the

from politics, at least for the time being. She is a prominent public figure in Iceland; and outside the country, she is mostly known for her involvement with Wikileaks and for founding IMMI, the International Modern Media Institute which is "working towards rethinking media regulation, securing free speech and defining new operating principles for the global media in the digital age" (cf. IMMI).

142 Þórgnýr Thoroddsen, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 19 June 2014.

143 Wolfgang Müller, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

conduct needs to change, the structure needs to change. The administration needs to have less power, councillors have to be paid better, and times have to be adjusted, so that citizens can actually attend the committee meetings. Few have time at five in the afternoon. We, for example, have to close our shop each time.

While a number of participants were actively engaged in political party work, political parties across Europe are facing declining membership numbers (cf. Vetter and Kuhn). Like psephology, political party research is a complex research area of its own, so I can only be brief here. Niedermeyer points out that there has been a huge decline in member numbers for all but two German parties.[144] Since 1990, when West and East Germany were reunified, both the *Christlich Demokratische Union* (*CDU*) and *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland SPD)* (the established major parties) have lost around half their members in percentage terms (cf. Niedermayer). The decline was even greater in the liberal *Freie Demokratische Partei FDP* (68 percent) and the Left Party *Die Linke* (79 percent) which are both established smaller parties.

For my research in Friesland, this incongruence suggests two possibilities. First, that my sample was disproportionally politically active,[145] or second, that while the membership numbers of political parties are falling, amongst those citizens that consciously become or remain party members, many are motivated to actively shape their membership.

Arriving at a general conclusion is further complicated by the fact that statistics on party membership in Iceland paint a different picture, where membership numbers in all major parties increased – at least between 1979 until 2010 (cf. Kristinsson 127).[146] Although no newer statistics could not be found, one can well assume that overall party membership has continued to grow based on the

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144 Only the Green Party and the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), a right-wing populist party founded in 2013, have recorded an increase in members (cf. Niedermayer).

145 Due to my sampling process, almost all participants were members of *LiquidFriesland* or *Betri Reykjavík*. This suggests that those citizens who are politically active often employ multiple modes of participation.

146 Unfortunately, newer numbers do not exist, as the author Helgi Gunnar Kristinsson pointed out in an email: "The data which I used was basically an estimate of self-reported membership according to the ICENES. I don't think I have any more recent figures, and, as you know, there are no official statistics". ICENES stands for Icelandic National Election Study, which has been conducted after every general election in Iceland by political scientists around Ólafur Þ. Harðarson since 1983. It "is an extensive study of the electoral and political behaviour of voters in Iceland. Research topics include voting behaviour, attitudes towards political parties and democracy, the most

foundation of a number of new political parties in recent years. In comparison to Germany, whose federal party system is characterised by stability and low fragmentation, the party system in Iceland has become increasingly pluralised into a very compartmentalised system – apparently an observation true for most of the Scandinavian countries (cf. Alemann 13). Alone in the last municipal elections in Reykjavík in 2018, 16 parties stood for election (cf. Fontaine, 'The Reykjavik 16'). Moreover, three of the eight parties currently forming the national government are *newcomers* which were founded between three weeks and one year prior to elections in autumn 2017 (cf. Fontaine, 'Elections '17').

8.4.1.3 Initiatives / Working Groups

In this sub-chapter I move away from electoral participation to look at working groups or citizen initiatives, a mode that several participants were engaged in. In 2012, Guðmundur described the beginnings of his increasing political interest and participation:

> Before / in the collapse, I wasn't very much involved in anything, […] but after that I was participating in a group that was looking into the financial system and something like that and tried to come up with better solutions than we had, just to see how stupid some part of the financial system is. So I got involved in that group, and [...] they just had a meeting there and I went there and looked what were they talking about and try to get to know somebody and so on. That's why I also started using *Betri Reykjavík*, I saw something that could go better in the system.[147]

It was in this working group on financial reforms that Guðmundur met those who later founded the political party *Dögun*, which he later joined:

> I had been involved in this financial reform group. And we made a website and […] and I tried to come up with ideas to improve the financial system. […] We had meetings in common places, all the groups. So, that was the venue for the starting of the political party, *Dögun*. So I was just a lot around in that meeting place, so I got involved in the other / when they were trying to make their mission statement or what you call it. So, I just, because I was around a lot, I got to know them, so I just was kind of dragged into that also. Because they wanted to get information about what we thought about the

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important political tasks, participation in primaries and other issues on the political agenda" (The Social Science Research Institute).

147 Guðmundur Kristjánsson, personal interview, Reykjavík, 9 July 2012.

financial system, so they wanted to change that also and wanted to see what we had. It was […] how I got involved with that party.[148]

The following example illustrates perfectly how some working groups/initiatives thematically overlap and that being active in one working group can lead to subsequent engagement in another. Dominique Plédel Jónsson, who amongst other things is the director of *Slow Food Iceland*,[149] became active in a working group on urban agriculture only after she was invited to give an expert talk about Slow Food's stance on it:

> I was in a group of people/it was open, not framed or anything, but they wanted to look into urban agriculture. And then the group, they asked me to talk about Slow Food and the way Slow Food was active in that. Okay, I did it. And then it started. And I took part in the demand to the city, to get green space which is unused in town. And to be able to grow things, you know. And they had a lot of ideas and discussion and on *facebook*, the group is quite interesting in fact. And you know, people really focusing. And all of a sudden, the application was agreed. So, everybody just started and went in this small spot, a nice space within the city. The municipality went for it, WITH the people.[150]

What catches the eye here in these two examples is again the role of social connections and networks in mobilising people for political engagement, but also motivating already active people to continue to engage politically. These two quotes also reveal how the immediate neighbourhood or quarter is a frame of reference and action, and has a mobilising effect on participants. In both cases, participants were mobilised to participate through another different participation mode by peo-

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148 Guðmundur Kristjánsson, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 22 June 2014.

149 According to its international website, Slow Food is a global, grassroots organization, founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us. Since its beginnings, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving millions of people in over 160 countries, working to ensure everyone has access to good, clean and fair food. Slow Food believes food is tied to many other aspects of life, including culture, politics, agriculture and the environment. Through our food choices we can collectively influence how food is cultivated, produced and distributed, and change the world as a result ('About Us').

150 Dominique Plédel Jónsson, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 3 June 2014.

ple they had met in other surroundings (see chapter 8.5 The Role of Geographical Proximity in (Online) Political Participation).[151]

Several participants regularly attended neighbourhood citizen council meetings, which are a common form of working group in Iceland. After attending the neighbourhood council, Freyja registered and became highly active on *Betri Reykjavík*:

> I went to a meeting in my neighbourhood, […] in every neighbourhood there's a council and they were talking about this website now, that was just before Christmas. And I was living in Hlíðar, which is around Klambratún […]. And they were talking about that everyone should go and vote on *Betri Reykjavík*, because they wanted ideas through for this area. And then I suddenly realised, 'Oh, okay! 'Because me and a few other dog people were wanting to get some dog runs in Reykjavík. So I thought 'Well, that would be a good place to try to get something through'.[152]

As in a number of other cases, one mode of participation (attending the neighbourhood citizen council meetings) facilitated Freyja's engagement through another mode (setting in, commenting on and voting on ideas by others on *Betri Reykjavík*). Seeing her ideas on *Betri Reykjavík* lead to the construction of several dog runs across Reykjavík, Freyja became motivated to further expand the modes of participation in her repertoire.

While such experiences of success had prompted Freyja and several other interlocutors to further expand their participation, this was not the experience of all the participants who had become involved in different initiatives. Those participants who had been involved in several different initiatives or had been on working groups for a long time tended to be disappointed and disillusioned with the lack of attention paid to citizens' input within established structures of representative decision-making processes, as Karin Schmidt's illustrates:

> Wir haben das ja in dieser Agenda 21-Phase auch eben erlebt, sehr stark, das war ja eben das Konzept, wo Bürger dann auch auf die Kommunalpolitik einwirken, zusammen mit Kommunalpolitikern Arbeitsgruppen bilden und ihre Ideen einfließen lassen. Das Ding ist gescheitert! Das hat nicht funktioniert, weil die Kommunalpolitiker sozusagen auf

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151 However, the effects of the financial crisis in 2008–09 and its aftermath were crucial to Guðmundur's initial decision to participate politically. Guðmundur's case is one of many that strengthen the observation that crises have the potential to mobilise people not only for immediate actions, but also beyond (cf. chapter 8.4.3.1, Political Participation in Times of Crisis).

152 Klambratún is a park near the city centre of Reykjavík; Freyja Kristinsdóttir, personal interview I, 17 July 2012.

ihrem Status beharrt haben, nämlich ,Wir sind diejenigen, die das […] zu entscheiden haben, und Bürger, du kannst dann gerne wieder an die Urne gehen und uns wählen'.[153] In the Agenda 21 era, we had an intense experience of the concept of citizens influencing local politics, forming working groups together with local politicians, and interpolating their ideas. That thing failed! It didn't work because the local politicians insisted on their status, basically saying 'We're those who make the decisions and you, dear citizen, are welcome to go back to the ballot box and vote for us'.

8.4.1.4 Demonstration

One participation mode that regularly acts as a starting point for further engagement is attending demonstrations. For example, it has been widely stated that for many Icelanders, participating in what came to be known as the Pots-and-Pans Revolution was a decisive politicizing moment.[154] As Bernburg and Víkingsdóttir point out: "[p]ublic participation in the protests was enormous, as was the level of support" (82). Studies conducted after the crisis suggest that around 25 percent of the inhabitants of the Greater Reykjavík area participated at least once in the protests, and 16 percent repeatedly did so (cf. Bernburg 239).[155]

Indeed, the Pots-and-Pans Revolution was a decisive moment in politicizing many of the respondents. Guðmundur, for example, "didn't care much about demonstrations or something before the collapse."[156] Many others were frequent participants in the protests, not least because the protests were essentially the only venue that one could get information about what was actually happening to and in the country. In other words, political participation also became an information practice. Hörður Torfason, the main organiser of the weekly protests from October 2008 until March 2009, recalls:

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153 Agenda 21 is a United Nations action plan which aims at leading municipalities and regions to sustainability. It resulted from the Earth Summit (UN Conference on Environment and Development) held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in 1992, and included numerous measures relying heavily on citizen participation (cf. Permien); Karin Schmidt, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

154 Large weekly protests outside Alþingi, the parliament building, began in October 2008. Eventually, the government stepped down due to the protests which became known as the Pots-and-Pans Revolution because protesters used kitchen utensils to make noise.

155 According to Bernburg's survey, around 57 percent of the respondents were in favour "of the actions of the protesters at the time of the demonstration" (82), another survey found support rates of up to 70 percent (Eva Önnudóttir as cited in Bernburg and Víkingsdóttir 82)

156 Guðmundur Kristjánsson, personal interview, Reykjavík, 9 July 2012.

I think it was the Eleventh of October, and at Saturday at 12 o'clock – I chose 12 o'clock because it's the lunch hour, and I said to people I will be there like 20 minutes. I have two questions, I asked people who came there or passed by, I asked 'Can you tell me what has happened in this country?' and 'Do you have any idea what we can do about it?' People were confused, people were angry; there was a lot of anger. Many many many foreign journalists trying to talk to people – it was a chaos. And I was there, I made a speech […] about the situation and I asked people to do a talk, step up and talk. We just used the benches there in front of parliament. And on Monday, the parliament members came out and I asked them, stopped them and asked them, and they said they didn't know, they had absolutely no idea what was going on. To me, that was a shock. I mean, these are the people who want to run our society and we trust them to do it and they have absolutely no idea what they are doing. I thought this calls for something more. So what I decided there and then, was to reach out to people, ask them to help me and put up an outdoor meeting. I found out […] people were willing to step up and make speeches, trying to explain to people, what was going on. And I rented car and sound equipment, I got permissions from police and the city authorities to do things like this and just arranging this whole thing.[157]

At demonstrations, one is likely to come into contact with others and learn more information that may lead to further engagement: a leaflet, a speech or a short conversation with the person standing next to you may well spark one's interest in finding out more, may well spark the motivation to do more. Reykjavík mayor Dagur B. Eggertsson believes that these protests "empowered and increased participation, at least in the short term".[158]

Participants also consider demonstrations a very effective mode of participation:

Ich wollte […] gerade dran erinnern/am heutigen Tage die Mutter aller Demonstrationen, was die gebracht hat! Hat natürlich einen Hintergrund und zwar in der Zielsetzung, die muss natürlich formuliert sein. Nur auf die Straße zu gehen und Radau zu machen halte ich auch für verfehlt. Für eine zielgerichtete Demonstration, für eine bestimmte zielorientierte Optimierung öffentlich das Wort zu ergreifen und auch ruhig mal auf die Straße zu laufen und auch mal Krach zu machen, hat mehr Wirkung als jede Petition, jeder Leserbrief oder sonst so etwas.[159]

I just wanted to say/on this day, the mother of all demonstrations, look what came of it! Of course, there was a background and the setting of a goal has to be well formulated,

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157 Hörður Torfason, personal interview, Reykjavík, 24 June 2014.

158 Dagur B. Eggertsson, personal interview, Reykjavík, 27 June 2014.

159 Jürgen Schneider, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

of course. Just being out on the streets, making a racket – I don't see any use in that. Beginning to speak publicly for a goal-driven demonstration, for a distinct goal-oriented optimisation, whilst walking the streets and making some noise, has more profound effects than every petition, every letter to the editor, or what not.[160]

8.4.1.5 Petitions

Petitions were another mode of participation popular with interlocutors. As the following quotes imply, they normally signed petitions online today. According to Karin Schmidt, the Internet makes taking part in petitions much easier, and that she subsequently signs more than she used to.[161] To further facilitate the ease of taking part in petitions, some participants of the Varel focus group mentioned having subscribed to *openPetition*, a free platform that supports people in starting, disseminating, and handing over online petitions to decision-makers from politics, industry and commerce, as well as society (cf. 'Über uns').

In Iceland, Dominique points out that the planned felling of an old tree in the city centre became the focus of a heated public debate only after a petition against it was started on the petition platform *Change.org*:

> Now [after the crash] I feel like that people have the feeling that their opinion counts. And when you realize it, then you move. There is a sweet, but very limited question which is in the papers today, which is very typically of that. There is an old tree in *Grettisgata*, beautiful, hundred years old, and […] it was [...], I think the day before Christmas, something of that kind, when nobody reads the paper, when they announced that the tree was to be uprooted and two houses moved to build a hotel, one more [sighs]. But the people of the streets [near the tree], when they realized it, started a petition and […] straight away, it filled up and everybody on the street, everybody around wrote their names. That's something you wouldn't have seen in, well four years ago, let's say. Because then, it was the decision from the top and down, and you would be angry, send a letter to the papers, that's it. Now, you have really people reacting and taking charge in reaction and that is a very little example, but it's very typical, I think.[162]

Dominique initiated her account with her perception of people's understanding of their own efficacy increasing in the aftermath of the financial crisis: people engaged more because they felt their voices and actions could impact decision-making processes. Due to the simple numerical requirements regarding citizens' peti-

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160 On 9 October 1989, the largest of the "Monday Demonstrations" took place in Leipzig, leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall only a few weeks later (cf. Curry).

161 Cf. Karin Schmidt, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

162 Dominique Plédel Jónsson, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 3 June 2014.

tions to make it on the decision makers' agenda[163], as well as the ease and speed of signing petitions on the Internet, petitions are a participation mode that has the potential to profoundly influence citizens' internal efficacy.

8.4.1.6 Online Participation Tools: *LiquidFriesland* and *Betri Reykjavík*

The primary advantage of modes of online participation appear to be that they are neither time nor location bound. One can participate from the comfort of one's own home, day or night. This opens up new opportunities for participation, especially for sections of the population that were hitherto excluded from political participation processes (cf. Coleman), such as people working shifts or long hours, at home caretakers unable to leave family members that need to be looked after, and physically and mentally challenged citizens or others for whom it is difficult if not impossible to attend committee meetings.

Karin Schmidt appreciated *LiquidFriesland* for just that,

> es ist etwas was mir leichter fällt, weil ich kann es zuhause von meinem PC ausmachen. Ich muss nicht irgendwo hinfahren, ich muss mich vielleicht mit Leuten nicht auseinandersetzen, mit denen ich mich gar nicht auseinandersetzen möchte und ich kann es zu den Zeiten machen wo ich es will/kann vielleicht auch nochmal zusätzliche Informationen bekommen. Ich kann dort, wenn man es sich durchliest was ist tatsächlich so bei uns im Kreis los/Das mache ich zum Beispiel regelmäßig mal, dass ich da einfach mal durchgehe und blick, *Ach, der denkt darüber nach, der denkt darüber* nach und bekomme so Anregungen. Das kann ich eben ganz bequem von zu Hause aus machen ohne wie früher eben halt Ausschüssen beisitzen zu müssen. Und ich weiß eben nicht, ob ich persönlich mir jede Ausschusssitzung antun würde. Aber diese Möglichkeiten, die man heute hat […], das finde ich ganz spannend.[164]

> It's easier for me, because I can do it from my PC at home. I don't have to drive somewhere, I don't have to argue with somebody I don't want to argue with, and I can do it at those times that suit me/might get additional information. When I go through it, I can read about what is going on in our council, which I do from time to time, to go through it [*LiquidFriesland*, JTK] and notice who thinks about what, and get inspired by that. That I can do from home without partaking in committee meetings as I did in the past.

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163 For example, a petition to the German Bundestag must have at least 50,000 signatories within four weeks after receipt to be publicly debated by the petition committee of the Bundestag (cf. Deutscher Bundestag).

164 Karin Schmidt, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

I doubt that I would do that to myself today. But these opportunities that one has today are very exciting to me.

For Karin Schmidt, who has participated in local politics for over 20 years – as a member of various initiatives and working groups, and most recently as councillor for the Green Party –, the increased use of online participation tools would be a welcome alternative to the occasionally hostile atmosphere in decision-making processes:

Man muss halt immer auch sehr viel Geduld haben und einen Biss haben um in so einem Gremium bestehen zu können und da finde ich müsste man anfangen und sagen, so wir müssen irgendwie eine andere Form finden. Und von daher hätte ich dieses *LiquidFriesland* in Varel wirklich gerne auf der Kommunalebene, da hätte man ganz viele kleine sachliche Anträge einbringen können ohne diesen ganzen Beleidigungsmüll drumherum. Sondern, dass man wirklich auf der Sachebene ist, nicht anfängt so das Persönliche/und wo man eben auch eine Sammlung dieser Sachfragen, die leider in diesem politischen Prozess sehr häufig untergehen, hat.[165]

You do have to be very patient and be determined to persist on such committees, and I think we should begin to look for another way to do this. And because of that, I would really like to have *LiquidFriesland* on a municipal level here in Varel, where one could have tabled a lot of small, objective motions without all the insults, but really be on a factual level without all the personal matters, where one could have all the factual issues that unfortunately often get lost within the political process.

Moreover, citing the potential of the "hive mind" effect, many participants appreciate the opportunity to discuss and deliberate with fellow citizens, even if it is only to a limited extent. Guðrún points out, "there are a million ideas out there and the people of the city council only have a small portion […] of it, but the people know what is going on in their immediate area and how to put that into the open, that this is the way to do that."[166] Helmut Weber has a similar perspective:

[ich] fand ich ja dieses Portal *LiquidFriesland* ganz gut, weil jeder Bürger die Möglichkeit hat, dort etwas reinzustellen, eine Sachkenntnis oder Kompetenz, die er vielleicht hat, zu formulieren und so auch der Politik oder den politischen Vertretern eine Unterstützung zu geben. Das ist oftmals vielleicht ja ein Aspekt oder das ist etwas was uns als Bürger bewegt um dort eben andere Momente reinzubringen und tatsächlich auch

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165 Karin Schmidt, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

166 Guðrún Sigurðardóttir, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 9 July 2012.

> vielleicht so ein Stimmungsbild, ein Meinungsbild zu geben was die politische Arbeit von anderen oder politischen Vertretern auch unterstützen kann. Oder eben halt das man das ein bisschen weiter fasst, dass man das Knowhow, das man in einem Landkreis, in einer Kommune hat, tatsächlich auch nutzt […] und das fand ich an dem Portal eigentlich ganz schön.[167]

> I liked the portal *LiquidFriesland* because every citizen has the chance to put something forward, an expertise or competence that he might have in there, and so can support the policies or the political representatives to get to know what's on the citizens' minds. To create a representation of public opinion, that might support the political work of others or political representative. In a broader perspective, to collect and use all the know-how that exists in the council, in the municipality – that is what I liked about the portal.

As pointed out in depth in chapter 2.2.1 *Simply Slacktivism?!,* the mobilisation hypothesis was prominent in the early days of research into Internet and politics. While proponents were optimistic that the Internet would help mobilise and politicise previously disengaged parts of society, data to support the hypothesis has only ever been found beyond concretely limited research fields and/or for low numbers of participants (e.g. Bengtsson and Serup Christensen; Feezell et al.; Saglie and Vabo; Xenos and Moy).

While not one participant in this study was completely politically disengaged before starting to use an online participation tool, engagement within online participation tools and the internal political efficacy participants drew from it further encouraged them to broaden their participation repertoire and to engage and participate politically beyond voting at the ballot. As Peter Lamprecht said:

> [i]ch habe mich vorher nicht engagiert und wenn man das abstimmen oder mal eine Initiative bei *LiquidFriesland* zu starten, als politisches Engagement ansieht, dann hat das bei mir dazu geführt, dass man sich politisch engagiert. Und insofern glaube ich schon, dass es eine zusätzliche Möglichkeit ist/sie werden sicherlich nicht die alleinige bleiben können, aber es ist sicherlich ein zusätzliches Angebot und dafür finde ich es sehr sinnvoll. Weil, ich hätte jetzt auch nicht den Nerv und auch keine Zeit, in irgendwelchen Ausschüssen da rumzukaspern, aber wenn ich auf diese Art und Weise zumindest meine Punkte vielleicht anbringen kann mit der entsprechenden Anzahl an Unterstützern, dann ist das ja schon mal ein Schritt in die richtige Richtung. Das […] gibt mir ganz andere Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten als wenn ich nur weiß, dass ich jeden zweiten Dienstagabend 19.30 hier im Kreistag antanzen [kann].[168]

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167 Helmut Weber, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.
168 Peter Lamprecht, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

I wasn't politically engaged before, and if you take the voting as well as the starting of initiatives on *LiquidFriesland* as political participation, very well, then this led to me participating. In this respect, I do think it is an additional opportunity, it will certainly not be the only one, but it is certainly a very useful additional opportunity. Because I wouldn't have the time and wouldn't be up to clowning around in committee meetings when I can bring across my issues with a fair number of endorsers, that is a step in the right direction. It gives me far more opportunities for action than showing up in city council every second Tuesday evening at 7.30pm.

Likewise, it was only through *Betri Reykjavík* that Guðmundur started to become more interested and engaged in politics:

if you wouldn't have this website then I wouldn't know where/how to get my ideas or you know my things that I would like the city to notice. So I wouldn't do it if I just had to write an email to somebody that I don't know who is or where is or how to find the email address and then the email would just be received and then deleted [laughs]. And at *Betri Reykjavík*, it's still in there.[169]

Here, Guðmundur is also making a reference to the accountability that online participation tools like *Betri Reykjavík* and *LiquidFriesland* convey – and that many other participation modes do not. Everything is in writing and can be tracked: "[o]ne thing that is good about *Betri Reykjavík* compared to earlier attempts of getting feedback from the public is that you see what's going on, how things are followed through".[170]

8.4.1.7 Online Participatory Budgeting Tool: *Betri Hverfi*

The online participatory budget *Betri Hverfi* has been taking place annually since 2011. Each year, around 450 Million Icelandic Krónur (more than 3.6 Million Euro) "is allocated by citizens each year to implement crowdsourced ideas from the citizens to improve the various neighbourhoods of Reykjavík. To date, 608 ideas have been approved (2012–2017)" (Citizens Foundation, 'Portfolio: My Neighbourhood'). As Gunnar Grímsson told me in 2012, *Betri Hverfi*

actually came from the city. They have this annual neighbourhood pot which is dealt out every year. Usually, it has been the neighbourhood boards that have taken charge of how they got divided. So somebody […] came up with the idea 'Why don't we put this into *Betri Reykjavík*'? There was a threefold process actually: the ideas were called for on *Betri Reykjavík*, we've created a special part of *Betri Reykjavík* just for *Better Neigh-*

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169 Guðmundur Kristjánsson, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 9 July 2012.

170 Per Hansen, personal interview, Reykjavík, 23 July 2012.

*bourhood*s and the ideas came in from there. […] And then the plan was to take […] the top ones and evaluate them, but what turned out was that all of them went through evaluation. […] And then after the evaluation there was this electronic voting, which was a totally separate system, a new voting system.[171]

Within this voting system, citizens could then prioritise the ideas according to their preferences (like for example facilities for children, facilities for dogs, facilities for athletes); and indeed, the majority of accepted ideas have been implemented within the same year.

The idea of incorporating residents into opaque budgeting process typically reserved for parliamentary elites was first carried out in the Brazilian town of Porto Alègre in 1989 (cf. Neunecker 204). Since then, it has enjoyed great popularity across the world. Users of *Betri Hverfi* hold the online participatory budget in high regard for two main reasons. First, it enables participation at the micro level: one can only take part for the district that is one's main place of residence. That way, participants can actively take part in shaping their immediate neighbourhood and surroundings and thus contribute to improving the lives of their family, friends and neighbours. Here, participants seem especially motivated to participate on the local political level rather than the state or national political levels (see for more detail chapter 3.4, The Role of Geographical Proximity in (Online) Political Participation). Part of this motivation springs from the visibility of changes implemented through *Betri Hverfi*, like new bike lanes, benches, or trees. Second, the three-step process as described above by Gunnar Grímsson, including deadlines by which certain tasks have to be completed, is expressed and communicated much more clearly than on *Betri Reykjavík*.

Contrasting participants' statements from 2012 and 2014, it becomes clear that participants' engagement with *Betri Reykjavík* had decreased while their engagement with *Betri Hverfi* had increased. Whereas *Betri Hverfi* was rarely mentioned by participants in 2012, by 2014, the terms *Betri Reykjavík* and *Betri Hverfi* had often become used synonymously to describe *Betri Hverfi*. As shown in chapter 2.3, since its launch in 2011, *Betri Hverfi* has continuously diverted attention and resources away from *Betri Reykjavík*, with participants often unaware that *Betri Reykjavík* and *Betri Hverfi* were two different tools.

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171 Gunnar Grímsson, personal interview II together with Róbert Bjarnason, Reykjavík, 24 July 2012.

8.4.1.8 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the participants, touching on their overall experiences with the most prominent modes of participation in their respective fields, Reykjavík and Friesland. It provided insight into the ways in which participants include those modes in their participation repertoire and in their everyday lives. The persistence of established political participation modes like voting or party work in participants' participation repertoires was also highlighted. Comparing Icelandic participants' accounts of their repertoires of participation in 2012 and 2014 revealed increased politicisation through the expansion in their modes of political participation. The participants did not, in fact, exclusively extend their repertoires by 'simple', 'clicktivist' modes, but also by 'costly' modes such as taking up an electoral mandate (cf. Gladwell as cited in Baringhorst, 'Online-Aktivismus' 79).

The finding that all these modes of participation are practised in a fundamentally open and combinatorial process (cf. Schönberger 207) invalidates popular assumptions about the Internet, in particular, as responsible for an apparent degeneration of participation cultures and the political landscape in general (cf. Fox). Rather, as Stark argues, participants self-determinedly mix-and-match political participation modes that they deem promising in achieving the specific goal they are pursuing, in accordance with their personal resources, social surroundings, and individual values (cf. 64).

8.4.2 (Online) Participation: Enabled or Simulated?

This sub-chapter gathers together several discourses on the effectiveness of online participation modes. The attributions academics have found for those are highly heterogenous, ranging from enabling citizens to participate (more effectively) to stimulating citizens' participation in political decision-making processes and thus have a stabilising effect on existing representative power relations. Two practical examples from the fields, that is the scope of ideas put forward on the platforms *Betri Reykjavík* and *LiquidFriesland*, and the general observation that online participation tools increasingly simplify and reduce their (perceived) aspirations from representing public political deliberation to dealing with complaints about broken local infrastructure, illustrate this continuum.

As I have pointed out, despite its prominence, there has been little evidence to support the mobilisation hypothesis, except in concretely limited research fields and/or for low numbers of participants (e.g. Bengtsson and Serup Christensen; Feezell et al.; Saglie and Vabo; Xenos and Moy). By contrast, however, there has been strong evidence for the general empowerment effect of digital infrastructures, both on already active citizens' political participation and on social movements (cf. Castells; cf. Escher, 'Beteiligung via Internet'; cf. Theocharis). According to

Klaus Schönberger, the potential to enable is inherent in online communication modes, since those contribute to the widening of possibilities for agency and an increased visibility of participants/activists through the simultaneity of persistence and recombination of existent social practices (cf. as cited Näser-Lather 1f.).

In the preceding chapter, I outlined the main ways in which the use of online participation tools had helped participants feel empowered. German political scientist Tobias Escher argues that Internet usage increases political interests as well as internal political efficacy (cf. 'Mobilisierung' 461). As Freyja points out, she felt empowered and encouraged that the ideas she had put into *Betri Reykjavík* had hit a nerve with a number of other users: "You feel real progress, [like you are] doing something that matters."[172] It was not only Freyja's internal political efficacy that was strengthened by this experience, but also her feeling of professional competence in discussions about her ideas:

> The few comments that came against it, there were not many, there were much more for, and the few comments that were against it, they were not very critical, they were very easy to fight against, to prove your point. It is really common. When people don't like dogs or are scared of dogs they put something irrational down and often you know, they probably haven't thought it through or something. I'm a veterinarian and I'm also a dog trainer, so its maybe easier for me to formulate a good response. [173]

However, on the whole, neither tool was initiated with any real, larger claim about implementing deliberative and participatory strands into decision-making processes, but to assure them that the respective administration was aware of the need to include them more in decision-making processes, and to show that the municipality was up-to-date and does offer online participation. As Thomas Fischer notes:

> Manchmal möchte ich ganz ketzerisch annehmen, dass so etwas wie dieses *Liquid-Friesland* jetzt, dass es genau wieder diese schlechte Politik legitimieren soll, weil ‚Da machen die Leute ja auch mit und die dürfen ja auch mitreden, ne?' Über Krähen, über weiß nicht; kommt da ein kleiner oder großer Kreisel hin; wird das Haus rot oder grün; darf das Abfallding jetzt auch mittwochnachmittags aufhaben anstatt donnerstags – können wir alle super mitreden. […] Soll das nicht dazu dienen eben die Herrschaft dieser gewählten Kaste zu legitimieren oder wozu ist das eigentlich gut? Nur mal so.[174]

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172 Freyja Kristinsdóttir, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 17 July 2012.

173 Freyja Kristinsdóttir, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 17 July 2012.

174 Thomas Fischer, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

Sometimes I want to heretically assume that something like *LiquidFriesland* is supposed to legitimate exactly today's bad politics, because *'People do have a say and are allowed to take part, don't they?'* About crows and what not; whether a little or big roundabout should be installed; whether the house should be painted red or green; if the dump thingy is supposed to be open Wednesday afternoons instead of Thursdays – we surely all have to say something about that. Isn't that supposed to legitimate the power relations of the elected caste or what is it for? Just saying.

This apparent pseudo-participation, that is the attempt to cultivate an impression of openness while rulers are careful to retain decision-making in their own hands, reproduces and reinforces the status quo of power relations (cf. Heery and Noon). In this context, Jenkins and Itō criticises the "general rhetoric of participation", which often involves "'opportunities' for participation which do little to shift the balance of power, diversify the culture, or achieve any of the other democratizing effects I hoped for a decade ago when I wrote about a move towards a more participatory culture" (36).

This approach to pseudo-participation certainly has consequences for the design of municipal online participation tools, as Wright and Street point out: "[o]n the specific issue of public participation, councils have tended to commission sites that maintain existing institutional and cultural practices" (858). As discussed at length in chapter 2, Communication within Online Participation Tools, this results in the design of linear tools which offer little space for deliberation and discussion between users, but instead favour autotelic "clicktivist" actions such as liking, sharing, or voting up or down ideas.

In addition, the predisposition toward creating online participation tools which reproduce existing power relations also plays a significant role in limiting the scope of ideas that are put in and discussed on both *Betri Reykjavík* and *Liquid-Friesland*. For example, Birgitta Jónsdóttir regularly participated when *Betri Reykjavík* first went online, but she eventually stopped because she "felt the decisions being made there were minor stuff. Whereas with bigger stuff which people really wanted and were engaged in, and wanted to take further, it was very difficult to take it further. But we have now permissions to have chickens in the city!"[175] She feels that *Betri Reykjavík*

is sort of fake democracy, because we don't get to participate in the stuff that really matters. For example, when they were merging the schools, why couldn't we vote on that, you know? That kind of stuff is very important, and it would have actually forced them to be in much more collaboration with the people in the communities. And let's say, if it

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175 Birgitta Jónsdóttir, personal interview, Reykjavík, 18 June 2014.

would have been too expensive to run a school in a community we would have maybe been able to demand budgets from other projects for it. We should be able to have more influence on how the money is spent.[176]

Asked about the limited scope of the ideas discussed on *LiquidFriesland*, the press secretary of the district answered that

> Wir haben ja ungefähr 200 Vorlagen insgesamt im Jahr […] und nur ein kleiner Teil davon, aus unserer Sicht, ist irgendwo von so einem Interesse oder auch so greifbar oder auch von solch großer Relevanz, dass es sich lohnen würde, den dort diskutieren zu lassen. Denn der Gedanke dabei war ja nicht so eine Art Ersatzkreistag zu machen. Es gibt ja die gewählten Kreistagsabgeordneten, die sich durch alle diese 200 Vorlagen durcharbeiten, das ist halt auch mit viel Klein-Klein und auch Mühe verbunden.[177]

> We have around 200 motions in a year […] and in our view, only a small part of that is interesting, comprehensible, and relevant enough that mooting them in *LiquidFriesland* would have paid off. Because the thought was not to establish a deputy district council. Elected district councillors do exist that work through all of those 200 motions, and these come with countless detail and effort.

Moreover, he argued that (online) participatory budgeting tools simulate engagement and participation in decision-making processes, as the following quotation from Sönke Klug illustrates:

> Also, wir halten […] Bürgerhaushalte hier für eine ziemlich gemeine Geschichte. Es ist natürlich unheimlich ambitioniert gestartet, Porto Àlegre und so weiter. […] Worüber können Leute abstimmen? Freiwillige Leistungen. Stellen wir mal die ganzen freiwilligen Leistungen ins Netz. Praktisch fragen wir den Bürger: ‚Wir müssen sparen, was davon wollt ihr streichen?‘ Und das ist gemein. Weil das ist eigentlich Aufgabe der Verwaltung und Aufgabe des Kämmerers im Besonderen, Sparvorschläge zu unterbreiten […]. Aber dem Bürger jetzt zu sagen, ihr dürft euch beteiligen und das was ihr machen dürft, ist euch selber das Zeug wegstreichen, das wird niemand machen. Die Leute werden also/oder aber nach Interessenlage bekriegen. Also die Leute, die nicht ins Hallenbad gehen, die werden sagen, ‚Ja, streicht doch das Hallenbad.‘ Und die Leute die in die Bibliothek gerne gehen, die werden sagen, ‚Ja, die müssen wir unbedingt behalten, aber meinetwegen kann das Freibad weg‘. Der Nutzen einer solchen Aktion erschließt sich mir nicht unmittelbar.[178]

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176 Birgitta Jónsdóttir, personal interview, Reykjavík, 18 June 2014.

177 Sönke Klug, personal interview, Jever, 25 August 2015.

178 Sönke Klug, personal interview, Jever, 25 August 2015.

So, we actually think participatory budgeting is quite mean. Of course, it started out really ambitiously in Porto Àlegre and so on. But what are people voting on? Voluntary services. So we put all the voluntary services in the web. Effectively, we are asking the citizens: 'We have to economize, what do you want to cut?' And that is mean. Because it is actually the tasks of the administration and especially the treasurer, to make cost-saving proposals. […] But telling the citizens that they are now allowed to participate and what they are allowed to participate in is to cut themselves services – nobody will do that. The people will be warring with one another according to their preferences. So the people who don't go the indoor pool will say, 'Cut the pool.' Those who like to go to the library will say 'Absolutely must the library be kept, but go and close the outdoor pool, from my perspective'. The value of such campaigning does not immediately reveal itself to me.

All of these reasons illustrate difficulties in establishing and maintaining online deliberation. The effects of simulated participation and the consequential limited thematic scope of the discussion certainly contributed to an almost total lack of users on *LiquidFriesland* towards the end and to *Betri Reykjavík's* inability to attract more regular input from citizens.

8.3.2.1 Regression and Simplification of Online Participation Tools

A consequence of the questionable efficacy and relevance of online participation tools, also illustrated in the limited scope of initiatives, is the regression and simplification of online participation tools like *Betri Reykjavík* and *LiquidFriesland*. In this sub-chapter, I will illustrate this regression and simplification by looking at the updated version of *LiquidFriesland* as well as the Icelandic online tool *Borgarlandið* (literally 'The City Land').

In the format of my research topic, *LiquidFriesland* was discontinued in Spring 2016. In December 2016, the URL *www.liquidfriesland.de* resumed working, but the new site bore almost no resemblance to the earlier version (see Figure 11, 164). Users could no longer register, nor deliberate in any form or communicate in any way with other users. Today *LiquidFriesland* can best be described as an open report-mapping software tool on which users can submit a form with suggestions or ideas to the council's committee (see Figure 12, 165). Those are either answered directly within a few days, or after being discussed at the appropriate committee's next meeting (see Figure 13, 166).

In the new version, the complexity of *LiquidFriesland* was greatly reduced. While the district's press secretary said there were no concrete plans to simplify *LiquidFriesland* to this extent, in August 2015, he contemplated a scenario which was strikingly similar to what later eventuated:

Fig. 11: Starting Page of the New Version of LiquidFriesland[179]

aus der Erfahrung, die wir mit *LiquidFriesland* gemacht haben, müsste man wahrscheinlich dann sagen/das Potential nach dieser Welle ersten Interesses, das Potential ist nicht so groß als dass es das rechtfertigen würde, als dass man so eine komplexe Möglichkeit wie *LiquidFriesland* zur Verfügung stellt, schätze ich. Wahrscheinlich müsste man sagen, wir werden versuchen müssen mit dem gleichen öffentlichen Effekt, also das man sozusagen den gleichen öffentlichen Zugang zu diesen Themen hat, aber mit weniger Komplexität irgendwo, diese Ideen einzufangen. Also, denn diese ganzen Möglichkeiten, die sie haben, der Interaktion, des Aufstellens von Alternativen – dahinter steckt komplexe Software. Sie müssen das auf einem Server betreiben, das

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179 Screenshot taken on 23 August 2018 at https://www.liquidfriesland.de.

Fig. 12: Form to Submit a Suggestion in the New Version of LiquidFriesland[180]

ist alles nicht zum Nulltarif zu haben. Möglicherweise müsste man dann mit der Einschränkung leben müssen, dass man dann sagt, wenn nicht so viel kommt an Ideen, sondern nur hier mal was, da mal was, dann wird man möglicherweise damit leben müssen, dass man mit diesen Ideen nicht so komplex spielen kann als Nutzer wie man das eigentlich wollte, aber sich dafür eben auch die Kostenseite angucken müssen.[181]

From the experiences we have had with *LiquidFriesland*, one would have to say that after the initial wave of interest, the further potential of the site was insufficient to justify offering such a complex opportunity. One would have to say that we should try to collect

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180 Form to Submit a Suggestion to the District Administration in the New *LiquidFriesland*. Screenshot taken on 23 August 2018 at https://www.liquidfriesland.de/tipps/tipp_abgeben.html.

181 Sönke Klug, personal interview, Jever, 25 August 2015.

Fig. 13: Completed Suggestion in the New Version of LiquidFriesland[182]

ideas to the same public effect, but with less complexity. All those features you have now, the interaction, drawing up alternatives – there's complex software behind it. We have to run it on a server; all that isn't free. When the trend continues that there aren't that many ideas put in, one possibly would have to live with the restriction that users cannot play around as complexly as one would like to, but we have to keep an eye on the costs.

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182 Completed Suggestion in the new *LiquidFriesland* with Description and Picture of the Problem Submitted by a Citizen and Commentary by the District Administration. Screenshot taken on 23 August 2018 at https://www.liquidfriesland.de/tipps/tipps/tippdetails.html?tid=900000103.

Fig. 14: Starting Page of Borgarlandið[183]

The regression and simplification of online participation is also visible in *Borgarlandið*, another report-mapping software tool (see Figure 14) that some *Betri Reykjavík* users had switched to between my research stays in Iceland in 2012 and 2014. In *Borgarlandið*, citizens can briefly explain what they would like to see improved in Reykjavík, mark it on a map, and receive a hands-on reply within a few days. For instance, Guðrún Sigurðardóttir preferred *Borgarlandið* over *Betri Reykjavík* in 2014 because it went straight to the point: "There are all kind of things you can put in there. That tree needs trimming, wash the windows, just about everything. That is a really good thing. […] It is just: pavement needs fixing – it's exactly there. You can put it on a map or just write a description. And it goes straight to the department. Easiest way to get small things done".[184]

Of course, suggestions that can be submitted over such a website are located on another level than the ideas that originally came in through *Betri Reykjavík*.

Suggestions differ heavily both in the complexity of expression and in the complexity of their implementation: too few park benches, broken streetlights, or overgrown grass is easier to fix than protecting an inner-city lot from development (cf. Allen) or reforming unemployment benefits (cf. magnús). In short, it is evident that the former suggestions require significantly less deliberation and debate than the latter do.

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183 Screenshot taken on 25 August 2018 at https://reykjavik.is/abendingar.
184 Guðrún Sigurðardóttir, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 30 May 2014.

These examples illustrate several obstacles to online participation, both regarding the facilitation of online participation tools and their impact. While most participants – at least that I spoke to – want online tools that enable them to discuss and deliberate on political matters, and which facilitate involvement in decision-making processes, the current software does not offer that. It is likely that innovations in software design that would enable such debate and participation are not promoted by administration and politicians, who may be more interested in consolidating the status quo of power relations. Report-mapping software tools like the second version of *LiquidFriesland* and *Borgarlandið*, which cannot, even with the best will in the world, be described as political participation tools, are the consequence of this tension between citizens' and politicians' demands and motivations.

8.4.3 Political Participation in Times of Crisis and in Times of Affluence

Another perspective on (online) political participation is the differentiation between times of crisis and times of affluence, as adapted from Harold R. Kerbo's work on social movements. Kerbo stresses that there are "differing socioeconomic conditions from which social movements are spawned. Depending on these conditions, the mix of conceptual tools needed in order to understand a social movement adequately may differ" (653). To Kerbo, times of crisis are characterised by "life-disrupting situations, including (but not limited to) widespread unemployment, food shortages, and major social dislocation" (653). In times of affluence, people "have their basic needs of life met, or even in abundance" (654). These "differing socioeconomic conditions" – the moment of crisis in Iceland and its absence in Germany – help explain the differences in general participatory behaviour in Iceland and Germany, as well as the different development trajectories of *LiquidFriesland* and *Betri Reykjavík*.

8.4.3.1 Political Participation in Times of Crisis

Today, few scholars would argue that political participation can be investigated without looking at the context of social, political and economic conditions in a society (cf. Almond and Verba; cf. Brady et al.; cf. Verba, Schlozman, et al.). Whether a society is in a state of crisis or in a state of affluence has a significant influence on the actual forms that political participation takes. In times of crisis, people appear more easily motivated to participate politically, and do so in additional modes than they might make use of in times of affluence. In this chapter, I argue that the primary reason for this increased participation is that people see themselves as more affected by the outcome of political decision-making processes on the daily-life level of their existence in times of crisis than in affluence; or, in

other words, there is more at stake in times of crisis. Before going into detail about these claims, and in order to provide context about the conditions in which participants were acting, this sub-chapter will provide a brief summary of the events that led to the crisis in Iceland and its consequences for society.

To be able to comprehend and contextualise the events that led to the crisis in 2008–09, it is crucial to take a brief look at the modern history of the Republic of Iceland,[185] which can be roughly divided into two periods: before 1940, and after 1940. The Icelandic historian Guðmundur Gylfi Magnússon points out that "[u]p to 1940 Iceland is best viewed as an essentially agrarian and to some extent an insular society." Illustrating his point, Magnússon marks pre-1940 society as "[...] grounded on the traditional peasant values of thrift and financial restraint" (238). This is accompanied by a conservative attitude towards society and culture. The situation started to change in 1940, when Iceland was occupied first by British, then by US-American forces seeking to secure allied control over the North Atlantic during the Second World War. Until their withdrawal in 2006, the presence of US–American troops had a lasting influence on Icelandic culture. Simultaneously to the presence of US-American troops, "the traditional values of agricultural society […] continued to play an important part in people's lives and perceptions" (ibid.). After the Second World War, a combination of three factors triggered a period of extended growth: first, Iceland received money through the Marshall-Plan for the establishment of the US/NATO military basis; second, demand for Iceland's most important export product, fish, was high, and third, Icelandic society remained small, but became increasingly well-educated with a deep-seated sense of national identity (cf. Wade and Sigurgeirsdóttir, 'Reykjavík-Gang').

With growing prosperity, Iceland established a welfare state oriented along the lines of the Scandinavian tax-financed model. During the 1980s, both the average income and income distribution in Iceland were on a par with the Scandinavian countries. However, state regulation and clientelism were much more pronounced, with the political and economic sector both controlled and tied up by a local oligopoly. This elite consisted of about a dozen families. This power bloc, known in the vernacular as "the Octopus", effectively controlled everything: banks and insurances, transportation and fisheries, the delivery of the NATO-bases and the import sector, and the political class, with most leading politicians also directly connected with "the Octopus". The oligarchs and their nepotistic web essentially had the same power as the clan chiefs of the earlier Iceland (cf. Wade and Sigur-

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185 In substance, the summary of the modern history of Iceland and the happenings of the financial crisis is adopted from my unpublished master's thesis "Decision-Making in Digital Democracy. Assessing the Online Participation Tool *Betri Reykjavík*", accepted by the Faculty of Humanities of the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen in 2012.

geirsdóttir, 'Reykjavík-Gang'). They controlled the (centre)-right *Sjálfstæðisflokkur* (*Independence Party*), which held power over the media and were responsible for making high-level appointments within the bureaucracy, the police force and the judicial system. The political scientists Robert Wade and Silla Sigurgeirsdóttir report that when a normal citizen wanted a loan for a new car or foreign currency for a trip abroad, they had to approach party officials first. The authors argue that this situation led to a wild entanglement of mistrust, cajolery and blackmail, apparently characterised by a culture of brute masculinity.[186]

From the late 1970s onwards, a group of business and law students calling themselves "the Locomotive" wanted to develop their careers by propagating radical market ideas without being dependent on the patronage of "the octopus". Probably the most prominent member of "the locomotive" is Davið Oddsson, who has had an astonishing career – he has been mayor of Reykjavík, Iceland's longest serving prime minister, and chair of the board of governors of the *Central Bank of Iceland* (see also chapter 1.3 *Filtering, Sorting, Contextualising*). In the boom years at the start of the 21st century, Icelandic businessmen started to expand into international financial markets. These businessmen would later go down in history as *Útrásavíkingar* or *Outvasion Vikings*, as businessmen setting out to conquer the world with Viking-like ambition. A new atmosphere started to pervade Iceland and a time of apparent greed, consumerism and recklessness began. The Icelandic population became enslaved by a collective frenzy of consumerism on credit (cf. Puhl 114). According to an international study in 2006, Icelanders were the happiest people in the world (cf. Wade and Sigurgeirsdóttir, 'Lessons from Iceland'). In his book *Boomerang. Travels in the New Third World*, the financial journalist Michael Lewis describes how, almost overnight, the majority of a generation of men did not go fishing any more, but invested in apartments in Beverly Hills, in English football clubs, Danish airlines, Norwegian banks, Indian power stations. Lewis argues that they proceeded in a way that reminded him of deep-sea fishing: fishing in every weather until the boat sinks (cf. as cited in Hüetlin 125).

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186 Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this book to take a detailed look at gender relations during the Icelandic crisis. Cynthia Enloe's volume Seriously! Investigating Crashes and Crises as if Women Mattered provides excellent food for thought on the matter, especially the chapter 'DSK, Vikings and the Smartest Guys. Masculinities in the Banking Crash of 2008' (cf. 49–85). Moreover, Kristín Loftsdóttir's and Helga Björnsdóttir's 2015 article 'Risk taking business Vikings: Gendered dynamics in Icelandic banks and financial companies' offers more in-depth information on the Icelandic case, although the entire paper (except the abstract) is written in Icelandic (cf. 231f.).

Earlier statements from Iceland's president, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, illustrate this point well. The speech he delivered to British businessmen in 2005, the hey-day of the Icelandic boom, can be seen as the epitome for this kind of self-regard and arrogance. In it, Grímsson lists the reasons for "Iceland's success story" (3) which include "a strong work ethic […] a heritage from the old society of farmers and fishermen," "personal trust" and "old-fashioned entrepreneurship" (4). For Grímsson, these characteristics, together with "the heritage of discovery and exploration fostered by the medieval Viking sagas", had led Icelanders to interpret "modern business ventures as an extension of the Viking spirit" (5).

Several participants that I interviewed had their own interpretations about how this consumerist mentality had developed. For Norwegian immigrant Per Hansen, Icelanders

> are newly rich. There's still [...] euphoria, because they now have the money which they didn't have when their grandparents or great-grandparents were growing up. They might have been living in houses made from turf and then came a lot of money from the Americans during the war and fisheries. And I guess there has been a general increasing in Western Europe as well. I think this is part of the reason for this mentality.[187]

Guðmundur Gylfi Magnússon compares the developments described above to "[...] something out of a fairy-tale" (256). And like a fairy-tale, it turned out to be too good to be true. Iceland, once one of the poorest countries in Europe, had embarked "on what has been described as 'one of the purest experiments in financial deregulation ever conducted'" (Addley). The British journalist Esther Addley continues: "Successive politicians privatised Iceland's natural resources and dismantled its regulatory mechanisms, sparking an economic bonanza for its bankers and mixing for its citizens the now-familiar toxic cocktail of bountiful credit, flaccid financial oversight and an unspoken collective agreement not to ask too many questions but just keep on spending". In the end, Iceland's "three main banks, controlled by a tiny elite cabal, had a paper value of more than 10 times the country's GDP" (Addley).[188]

Following the bankruptcy of the US-American bank Lehman Brothers in September 2008, foreign investors in Icelandic banks withdrew their money overnight. The value of Iceland's currency, the Icelandic Króna, crashed. Suddenly

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187 Per Hansen, personal interview, Reykjavík, 23 July 2012.

188 With a focus on macroeconomy and financial markets, Benediktsdóttir et al. provide a detailed account of how the crash came about (cf. 183ff.).

everything was far more expensive.[189] A huge chunk of the Icelandic population lost their savings, jobs, and homes, either because they were unable to pay high rents or because they had to sell their property. Even at the end of 2009, it was still impossible to obtain Euros or US Dollars in Iceland except at the international airport, where an outbound flight ticket was needed to prove one was leaving the country.[190]

In the blink of an eye, Icelanders had to realise they were "not necessarily the best in the world", as the title of an article by Kristín Loftsdóttir suggested (1). Aside from the measurable economic effects of the crash such as debt per capita, the crisis had a massive impact on the collective national identity. During the boom years prior the crisis, the economic adventure Icelandic businesspeople had embarked on "was seen as a joint project of Icelanders, reflecting the national Icelandic character as such, rather than the success of a few individuals" (Loftsdóttir 7). And as a consequence, many felt the crisis as the failure of the collective Icelandic nation, and not merely that of a few bankers and politicians.

Crisis as Disruption of the Quotidian

Having provided the historical background, I now turn to look at the crisis period itself. For the majority of the Icelandic population, the crash was experienced as a crisis because it was a disruption of the quotidian, that is, of "all the taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life; more specifically, […] daily practices and routines that comprise habitual social action, alongside the natural attitude of routinized expectations and the suspension of doubt about the organization of the social world and one's role within it" (Buechler 59).

The fallout from the crisis was not limited to those gambling with Iceland's national economy, it was so severe that it affected the entire population. As Bernburg and Víkingsdóttir point out, such an event can open up radical new possibilities:

> Stable routines of everyday life render most people unreflective in their perception of reality, which are, thus, based largely on taken-for-granted assumptions (for example, 'banks are trustworthy'; 'government acts in the public's interest'). But, events that disrupt or threaten routine life, 'the taken-for-granted substrate of everyday life', can undermine the habitual acceptance by individuals of their situations. When such disrup-

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189 This was the case for Icelanders at least. As an exchange student coming from the Eurozone, I 'benefited' from the weak króna in Reykjavík in 2009. In the end, life in Iceland was much more affordable than I had envisioned it to be when applying for the semester abroad. These exchange rates may have already triggered the tourist boom that was about to come (cf. 'Währungsverfall').

190 As I experienced on 22 December 2009.

tion is experienced collectively, as can occur in a crisis, an opening emerges for re-interpretation of shared meanings, beliefs, and identities, thus facilitating the emergence of radical or activist frames. (85)

So personally affected by the crisis – their standard of living decreased, their everyday sense-making practices disrupted –, large parts of society were also motivated to become active and to demand change. In social movement literature, this effect is often explained through relative deprivation theory, which "implies that when crises end long periods of rising prosperity, feelings of shattered expectations and blocked goals (relative deprivation) may lead individuals to experience injustice and frustration, mobilizing them to participate in rebellious action" (Davies as cited in Bernburg 232). In several other countries hit hard by the crisis, a new wave of politicised protesters and social movements emerged, particularly in Spain (cf. Calvo; cf. Romanos) and in Greece (cf. Rüdig and Karyotis). In some countries, "the level of public participation in some of these protests has threatened public order and political stabilities" (Bernburg 231); and in Iceland, daily protests on Austurvöllur (the square in front of parliament) during the winter of 2008–09 culminated in the overthrow of the national government.

Many Icelanders were shocked and felt disbelief once the extent of the negligence of bankers, the inertia of political decision-makers, and the immense cronyism underlying society became public. As prominent Icelandic chronical and journalist Alda Sigmundsdóttir notes: "[i]t was a collapse of the people's trust in its country's politicians, institutions and financial system. It revealed to the vast majority of us that we'd had no idea of the extent of the political corruption and neglect that had lurked beneath the surface of our society for decades". Bernburg and Víkingsdóttir point out that "framing the crisis as a 'moral shock', made it possible to appeal to values of justice, and associate protest participation with moral duty" (94). In that way, the crisis motivated many previously disengaged citizens to participate politically, such as by demonstrating in the Pots-and-Pans Revolution. Dominique Plédel Jónsson succinctly summed up the lack of political participation prior to the crisis: "activism is not an Icelandic trait".[191] Guðmundur Kristjánsson was also surprised by the high turnout at weekly demonstrations in front of Alþingi, the parliament building, but he also felt that the Icelandic protests were somewhat innocent in comparison to those elsewhere:

it was a little strange when everybody went to protest when the banks fell and see all the people protesting. But it […] wasn't no/like you sort of see it from abroad, that they are burning cars and just do a lot of damage, but it wasn't much done here. It was only one

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191 Dominique Plédel Jónsson, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 17 July 2012.

bench or one tree or something that burnt or something and they had to clean the Alþingi house because it was covered in eggs, that was all the damage, you know, all the force from the protest.[192]

Crisis as Liminal Phase

In the following, I draw on French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep's and British ethnologist Victor Turner's work regarding liminal phases to further analyse this state of crisis. As cited above, in times of crisis "an opening emerges for re-inter-pretation of shared meanings, beliefs, and identities, thus facilitating the emer-gence of radical or activist frames" (Bernburg and Víkingsdóttir 85). In a way then, a crisis can be understood as a liminal phase in the life of an individual, but also in the condition of a nation state.

The concept of the liminal phase goes back to Arnold van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* (1909). According to van Gennep, there are three phases "which accom-pany every change of place, state, social position and age": "separation, margin (or limen, signifying 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation" (Turner 94). In Ice-land, the first phase corresponds to the boom-years in the lead up to the crash, which can well be described as a "detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both" (Turner 94). [193] The second or liminal phase was the crash itself, as well as its immediate aftermath. The third phase describes the rein-tegration and 'normalisation' in a newly negotiated state of societal being, which arguably has been the case in Iceland since around 2010.

Snow et al. conclude that people become active once their everyday lives have been shaken. However, there is another dimension to social mobilization other than (the fear of) loss. Turner thinks that in times of liminality, in threshold situa-tions, a more open society exists, and in it, a wider range of socially acceptable be-haviours may appear: "the characteristics of the ritual subject […] are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state […] signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both" (94). In liminal times of crisis, when "an opening emerg-es for re-interpretation of shared meanings, beliefs, and identities" (Bernburg and Víkingsdóttir 85), people find it more probable that their engagement does make a

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192 Guðmundur Kristjánsson, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 22 June 2014.

193 The idea of interpreting the financial crisis through Arnold van Gennep's Rites de Pas-sage and Victor Turner's thoughts on the liminal phase was initially articulated in my unpublished master's thesis (2012). This section here is both a refined and extended version of my earlier work.

significant difference, that they can change something. In this way, their sense of internal efficacy increases, as Guðrún illustrates:

> See, the Icelandic soul, I think that is the word for it, from the eighties was 'Do this, do that, that's it'. And I think we are, like all these demonstrations are proving, we are discovering we HAVE a voice. And we CAN say, we can let them know, when they cross the line. So I think that's/it's going into the right direction. It will gonna take a period, a few more years, but I think they are gonna pay more attention to the people than they have.[194]

It appears as if a process of emancipation has begun in the wake of the crisis, with people finding their voice and speaking back to politicians and other elites who, for example, had seen "modern business ventures as an extension of the Viking spirit" (Grímsson 5). The fact that this statement about normal Icelandic life in 2005 – about the quotidian – comes from the former president exemplifies the intimidating confusion created and the interpretational sovereignty that prevailed. Guðrún's quote, however, illustrates how the crisis led many citizens to question the joint failure of political and economic elites, made people ill-content to remain obedient to those elites, and empowered them to claim their own right to speak up and to political power.

Intensified Sense of Community Created by Crisis

In the liminal phase, this emancipation can be interpreted as one element in the process of finding society's new position; as one new common denominator in the state of 'Communitas', signifying the society which will come into being within the search for new horizons (cf. Kaschuba 191). Citizens' new found willingness to not only fundamentally question what political and banking elites were doing and saying, but also to listen to other theories and advice empowered them with knowledge and helped them envisage a more active role in society. If before the crash, the majority just tended to mind their own business and pursue their own (materialistic) goals, then after the crash, when these goals had become out-of-reach in any case, there was a wave of people opening up to others and recalling community; and this community was consolidated by the shared experience of the crisis and its effects, including unemployment, lost savings, and lost homes. This consolidation of community not only helped console those in it, but also helped them summon strength and motivated them to improve their lives and the life of the community, which they had come to see as inextricably intertwined with.

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194 Guðrún Sigurðardóttir, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 30 May 2014.

In the aftermath of the crisis, Dominique says that this sense of community could be seen in the residential neighbourhood meetings, which more people attended, and in the streets and parks: "all these people, they walk around the lake or on Sundays on bikes [...] and they were talking together. If you stop, sit down on a bench, someone sits at your side and discusses and so. It has been really opening speech, at least."[195] But she did not "know how it is in other areas of Reykjavík, because this is quite limited, you really belong to Arbær, you have this feeling towards it. But five years ago, everybody was just in his own corner, you would just say *Hi* and no discussion on a Sunday."

The idea for *Betri Reykjavík* itself was also born out of this time of "intense comradeship and egalitarianism" between people in transition (Turner 95), being part of a new vision for the state of communitas. Engaging online at *Betri Reykjavík* was envisioned as strengthening the renewed feeling of community and social cohesion, strengthened by the "need for many individuals to make sense of the crisis" (Bernburg and Víkingsdóttir 86). In other words, the Internet, and especially Social Media, facilitated this process of community building and maintenance.

First and foremost, the communities that come into being through *Betri Reykjavík* seem more stable than Howard Rheingold's canonical definition of "virtual communities". To him, a virtual community is a group of people that knows and communicates with each other, shares knowledge and information, and is one in which members, who meet and communicate primarily via computer networks, also care for each other as human beings, at least to a certain degree. However, the communities that come into being through *Betri Reykjavík* and *Betri Hverfi* are not solely virtual or confined to online space since, in most cases, they refer to geographically located spaces within the greater city of Reykjavík, the immediate mundane environments of the users. In that way, participation in *Betri Reykjavík* is not possible without encouraging offline engagement and producing an offline community, and it is not based on shared interests alone but also on local closeness (cf. Döring 369).

Several users illustrate this point. For Dominique in particular, participation through *Betri Reykjavík* means "a start to get out of your own little shell, or little house or little flat or little car and going to participate in the meetings in the suburbs or in your area".[196] She continues "you know, that's the thing that *Betri Reykjavík* did. It got the people closer". In 2011, online political participation was indeed able to strengthen solidarity between citizens. As Wellman and Haythornthwaite argue, "the Internet is not destroying community but it is responding to, resonating with, and extending the types of community that have already be-

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195 Dominique Plédel Jónsson, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 17 July 2012.

196 Dominique Plédel Jónsson, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 17 July 2012.

come prevalent in the developed Western world: for local and distant ties, strong and weak ties, kin and friends" (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 4). In other words, online communities do not repress local social networks of families, colleagues, neighbours or friends, but rather, those groups make use of online communities and integrate them into their everyday life, since these online communities make everyday life easier in the conditions of mobile globality which they also promote at the same time (cf. Deterding et al. 129).

Aside from Dominique, Guðmundur, Freyja, and Þórgnýr also found that the communal exchange of ideas and discussion in their everyday offline lives increased after the crisis; and they attributed this to citizens' activity on *Betri Reykjavík*. In their research, Italian sociologists Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani support this conclusion, that "virtual networks operate at their best when they are backed by real social linkages in specifically localized communities" (133).

Many interviewees affirmed this argument, saying that the close-knit community within Reykjavík, and indeed in the whole of Iceland, was one of the main reasons that a digital participation tool like *Betri Reykjavík* worked so well there. Icelandic society has a tradition of being relatively open, almost everybody seems to know everybody, and is often related to them within a few degrees of separation. I believe it says a lot about a society when everyone is called by their first names, even the prime minister, president, and the head of the church.[197] In his environment, it seems reasonable that it is easier to convince others and to make things move if other users are acquaintances, and not merely cyber-personalities with fake usernames (cf. Döring 369). For Þórgnýr, the smaller the society and the country is, the "freer you are, the easier is it for you to influence."[198]

Crisis and Innovation

This small and friendly structure of Icelandic society, and more so in its enhanced and empowered version after the crash, also allowed for increased creativity and innovation. In referring to innovation here, I understand it as "the invention and implementation of new things, knowledges [sic] and practices; innovations come about when unprecedented solutions to either known or new problems are devised and then put to work" (Welz, 'Cultural Swirl' 256). Gisela Welz argues that the conditions under which crisis lead to productivity and the generation of something

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197 The practice of calling everyone by their first names obviously has a lot to do with Icelandic naming conventions. Surnames are a rare occurrence, as "Icelanders use the patronymic system, where son, 'son' or dóttir, 'daughter' is attached to the genitive form of the father's or, less commonly, the mother's, first name" (Parnell and O'Carroll 338). Telephone books are subsequently also structured by first names.

198 Þórgnýr Thoroddsen, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 20 July 2012.

new, rather than to a collapse of meaning and sense making, are especially interesting for cultural anthropologists (cf. 'Wandel der Kulturen' 133).

Welz refers to the German sociologist Hans Joas who argues that people develop increased inventive capabilities and creativity when mundane routines fail on the resistance of the (social and material) environment (cf. 'Wandel der Kulturen' 132). Indeed, the ongoing popularity and relevance of *Betri Reykjavík* and *Betri Hverfi* are prime examples of the increased inventive capabilities and creativity induced by crisis in Iceland. But there are countless more, including a myriad of newly established working groups, the national forum in 2010,[199] the *crowdsourcing* of a new constitution[200], and the intensification of the tourist industry as Iceland's prime source of revenue.[201]

In this sub-chapter, I focus on the establishment of working groups and on *Betri Reykjavík* and *Betri Hverfi* as examples of innovations coming out of a time of

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199 In 2010, around 950 Icelanders came together to deliberate on the future of country and reflect on what they wanted to see form the basis of Iceland's new constitution. For more information, see www.thjodfundur2010.is (last accessed 17 August 2018).

200 As Iceland-based journalist Paul Fontaine points out, "Iceland's original constitution is more or less borrowed from the Danes. In the wake of the 2008 economic collapse, a public outcry to change the very structure of Iceland's socio-political system led to an initiative to write a new constitution. This led to the formation of a Constitutional Council. The council – comprised of 25 men and women from around Iceland, and appointed by then Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir for the task – got to work on writing a new constitution for Iceland" ('Constitution'). The American legal scholar Lawrence Lessig emphasizes that the crowdsourced "process for drafting this constitution is the most democratic process we've seen in the history of constitutions anywhere. We've never seen something like this. This process involved an incredibly intelligent mix between grassroots, citizen-driven input, expert-crafting direction, and an actual deliberative process for drafting the constitution that wasn't controlled by insiders" (para.2). For more in-depth information on the Icelandic experiment of crowdsourcing a new constitution, see Jón Ólafsson's 2016 article 'The Constituent Assembly. A Study in Failure' (cf. 252ff.).

201 Tourism has increased steadily since the crash and in 2016 amounted to 8.1 percent of the GDP (cf. Statistics Iceland, GDP). The number of employees in activities related to tourism (such as accommodation, travel agencies or tour operators) more than doubled from 14,600 in June 2008 to 30,700 in 2018 (cf. Statistics Iceland, Employees). To encourage year-round tourism, image building relied on Iceland's natural attractions, Viking history, and quirky culture (cf. A. Árnason et al.; cf. Grétarsdóttir et al.; cf. Kjartansdóttir and Schram; cf. Lund, Loftsdóttir, et al.; cf. Lund, Kjartansdóttir, et al.; cf. Schram, 'Borealism'; cf. Schram, 'Wild Wild North').

crisis. As I have shown, the crisis not only increased participation amongst people already interested in politics, but also prompted many who had previously been disengaged to participate. In short, in times of crisis, more people become more politically active in more different modes. In Iceland, numerous working groups and initiatives were formed to discuss and deliberate on the country's economic, social, and cultural future. As Reykjavík mayor Dagur B. Eggertsson pointed out, "everywhere in society people were creating their own think-tanks and deliberating on what to do now, how to move forward and what needed to be done and how new Iceland should look like, it was basically everywhere. All the universities, all the, ya, just everyone".[202]

As already touched upon, Guðmundur initially became active in a financial reform group, which sparked further participation in *Betri Reykjavík* and *Dögun*, a political party.[203] Another participant, Kristínn Már Ársælsson founded *alda – the association for sustainability and democracy*,

> a think and do tank, a hope and think and do tank […] in 2009 after the financial crisis. The government fell and right after the national elections, it was clear that it would be a leftwing coalition. I myself and a bunch of other people were immediately aware that they were not gonna make any structural changes to either our economic system or our democratic system, even so they were the first leftwing government and it was just after the crash, their main emphasis was on rebuilding the economy, not restructuring or changing it in any way. SO we thought, I thought there was a real need for some sort of organisation to put out ideas, emancipatory ideas about changing both the democratic system and the economic one. […] So I just got contacted a lot of people who I knew were dissatisfied and were interested in finding usable solutions. The main concept behind that was to create an organisation that would find models, institutional models that had been tried and tested somewhere that could deepen democracy or increase equality which would change our economic system in a way that would be more sustainable and more equitable and more democratic.[204]

Betri Reykjavík and *Betri Hverfi* were also founded in reaction to the crisis. In order to counteract the corruption and nepotism revealed in Icelandic economy and politics, Gunnar and Róbert originally wanted to facilitate an open contact and discussion forum for political parties and their potential voters in the run-up to the 2010 municipal elections. Today, the freeware *Your Priorities* that is behind *Betri Reykjavík* is used in over 20 countries to help "citizens get their voices heard and

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202 Dagur B. Eggertsson, personal interview, Reykjavík, 27 June 2014.

203 Cf. Guðmundur Kristjánsson, personal interview I, Reykjavík, 9 July 2012.

204 Kristínn Már Ársælsson, personal interview, Reykjavík, 20 June 2014.

to encourage citizens participation in governance" (Citizens Foundation, 'Home'). The software has been awarded multiple awards in the e-Democracy and social innovations sectors (cf. Citizens Foundation, 'About').

Another element that seems to contribute towards Reykjavík's readiness to innovate is locality. For Welz, "cities are most prone to be culturally productive in periods of social transformations – transformations that bring together within one place social actors and groups from a variety of origins, some far-flung and widely separated" ('Cultural Swirl' 262). That place was Austurvöllur, the square in front of the parliament building Alþingi, where protesters, journalists, artists, politicians, scholars and scientists met, discussed and deliberated for several months.

However, a space does not have to exist geographically to bring innovation. The Internet, and especially Social Media, work together with geographically located spaces to create such condensed places which "enable cultures to mix and people of various backgrounds to mingle and freely communicate with each other", and therefore belong to "the privileged locations and epochs of cultural innovations" (Welz, 'Cultural Swirl' 262f.). The Internet does not only enable communication between people, it also brings people with similar interests together to form a community who had previously been isolated for various reasons (cf. Passig and Lobo 125). As Hannerz points out, "the concentration of people in a limited space is important to cultural process not only because it provides critical masses for varied developments, but also because it offers forever new occasions for serendipity" (203). The response to the crisis that centred in Austurvöllur did so in collaboration with Social Media, and became the innovative cultural swirl that lead to new general elections, to an attempt to crowdsource a new constitution, to the formation of the *Citizens' Foundation* and the consequent development of *Betri Reykjavík* and *Betri Hverfi*. Furthermore, Lemi Baruh and Hayley Watson point out that

> [i]n the midst of a political crisis, new media technologies enhance individuals' abilities to network and offer new opportunities for citizens to organise, engage, and coordinate action as social activists. With the help of online networks, activists can locally and globally push grassroots ideas, organise and coordinate action (such as during the Occupy movements), and, crucially, through acts of citizen journalism, get their voices heard by the wider public. (250)

These catalysing effects Social Media has had for change and innovation are not unique to Iceland. In various countries hit hard by the 2008–09 financial crisis, Social Media played a fundamental role in mobilisation, information, and communication. As Yannis Theocharis points out for Greece,

[m]any of the people who later became organisers of solidarity initiatives and leaders of civic innovations visited the protests and met like-minded people with whom they kept in touch via social media. These communication channels gave them the opportunity to discuss their ideas publicly, find an audience using networks of friends or unknown others with whom they created loose online ties during the Aganaktismenoi mobilisations, and build new solidarity networks. (244)

It appears reasonable to argue that this condition of people meeting in condensed spaces, either out in the streets or online, is met much more by Reykjavík and *Betri Reykjavík*, than by the district of Friesland and *LiquidFriesland*. This is reinforced by statistics: Reykjavík has 462 inhabitants per square kilometre (cf. Vísindavefurinn; cf. Statistics Iceland, *Population*), while the district of Friesland has 162 inhabitants per square kilometre (cf. Landkreis Friesland, 'Zahlen'). Moreover, the number of registered and especially of active users speak for Reykjavík as enabling an innovative cultural swirl: more than 14,000 users were registered with *Betri Reykjavík* at the time it was still possible to check on this number (2013) and several new ideas were set in on a weekly basis. In contrast, no new ideas were posted on *LiquidFriesland* in the months leading up to its shutdown; and in the months before that, there were only around ten regular, active users.

All in all, the crisis seems to have enhanced certain dispositions in Reykjavík society which favoured participation and innovation. If both come together, as in the case of the online participation tool *Betri Reykjavík* or the online participatory budgeting tool *Betri Hverfi*, the prospects for sustained implementation appear good. As I have shown, the crisis disrupted the quotidian lives of Icelanders with thousands losing their jobs, savings, and homes. Thus, it sparked increased political interest and participation as suddenly, something substantial was at stake. In the liminal phase of crash and aftermath, a wider range of behaviour became socially acceptable, such as protesting in the Pots-and-Pans Revolution. The success that this wave of political participation brought – including the resignation of a government which Icelanders held primarily responsible for the crisis – empowered and emancipated large parts of society. With new confidence, efficacy, and social cohesion, many citizens began looking for and offering solutions to help the society out of crisis.

8.4.3.2 Political Participation in Times of Affluence

In Friesland, the innovative online participation tool *LiquidFriesland* failed because it did not become established in the Frisian's participation repertoire. One of the reasons for this failure were the "times of affluence". Kerbo describes social movements in such times as "collective action in which the major participants are not motivated by immediate life-threatening situations of political or economic

crisis, but rather, have their basic needs of life met, or even in abundance" (654). While the crisis was the defining moment for the establishment of *Betri Reykjavík* and for participation in Iceland, such crisis was absent in Friesland. The financial crisis 2008–09 did not hit the German state and population nearly as hard as it did the Icelandic state and people. Of course, several "crises" have since skittered about the discourse regarding democracy: from the crisis of the political party system, the crisis of the welfare state, the Euro crisis, the refugee crisis, and the ever-present crisis of democracy. In short, the term "crisis" is overused in the political and social sciences , as well as in the media and politics itself (cf. Merkel 7).

Despite the occurrence of certain "crises" in Germany, none of those had such fundamental and palpable effects on the population as the 2008–09 financial crisis had on the Icelandic citizens, which could be classified as a "moral shock". For James M. Jasper, these shocks "generate a visceral unease strong enough to generate mobilization even in the absence of pre-existing networks. Individuals are moved emotionally by an act that violates conceptions of morality and those emotions explain social movement participation" (cf. as cited in Simmons 521). In other words, mobilisation depends on the "depth of participants' political grievances" (Portos and Masullo 202).

The political grievances of citizens of the district of Friesland were relatively shallow. In times of affluence, it is because citizens' basic needs "have been met that they have surplus resources such as time, money, and even energy to devote to social movement activity" (Kerbo 654). However, the issues at stake in these times "may be less personal and less severe, thus requiring more movement resources and encouragement to motivate their social movement activity" (661).

Strain theory, a prominent mobilization theory from social movement research, also appears adaptable to explain mobilization not only in exceptional times, but also in calmer, affluent times.[205] Although other researchers have not suggested adapting strain theory to explain social movement activity in times of affluence, it is possible to do so by conceptually expanding the term *strain* to

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205 One of the oldest and most prominent ideas in research on social movements, strain theory argues "that movements have their origins in troublesome, unsettling social conditions, traditionally conceptualized as 'strains'" (Snow et al. 1). This remained the prime view on mobilisation for collective action for decades, but had fallen out of fashion by the late 1970s. Snow et al. however argue that the abandonment of strain theory was empirically premature. With a focus on the quotidian, the authors offer a fresh and fruitful look at the link between strain and the emergence of social movements. The authors argue that "the kind of breakdown most likely to be associated with movement emergence is that which penetrates and disrupts, or threatens to disrupt, taken-for-granted, everyday routines and expectancies" (2).

include unpleasant and improvable social or political situations. Although these social situations do not threaten people's existence, they still substantially affect their "taken-for-granted, everyday routines and expectancies" (Snow et al. 2).

This can be seen in the cases of Icelandic research participants Per and Einar, who both see cycling primarily as a mode of transportation rather than a leisure activity: "I use mine [his bike] for commuting, I go ten kilometres back and forth, twenty kilometres a day. And it is just my way of travel".[206] Political engagement for the construction of new bike paths, the instalment of traffic signal systems favouring cyclists, and the ban of cars from the inner city, potentially leads to a substantial improvement in their everyday lives and those of their peers in the cycling community. Therefore, the strain of having to share a path with pedestrians, having to cycle on the streets without marked cycling lanes or on badly maintained paths on their daily commute, sparks both their interest in researching possibilities for improvement and becoming active and setting ideas into *Betri Reykjavík*, commenting on similar suggestions, and/or voting on these. Per has also been on the board of the Icelandic Cyclists' association for many years.

When defined this broadly, strain theory also works well at explaining peoples' motives for participating on *LiquidFriesland*. Citizens that start initiatives as diverse as suggesting that bike paths signposts be cleaned[207], lacking road markings be retouched[208], or that a school be expanded to a sixth form college[209] do so because they experience the absence of these structures as disadvantages, as strains in their everyday life which threaten "to disrupt, taken-for-granted, everyday routines and expectancies" (Snow et al. 2). For example, small retailers Karin Schmidt and Wolfgang Müller, fearing losses in sales, protested the planned construction of a shopping centre in their town, both in on-site demonstrations and on *LiquidFriesland*.[210]

However, for most Frisian citizens, the extent to which their lives could be improved through engagement on *LiquidFriesland* appeared insufficient to put up with the inconveniences and crudities of the tool (as explained in chapter 2, Communication within Online Participation Tools). Rather, a number of the citizens who used *LiquidFriesland* did so for reasons that cannot be identified as political

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206 Einar Magnússon, personal interview II, Reykjavík, 6 June 2014.

207 "Beschilderung der Radwege reinigen", Initiative i111, Bürgerverfahren '85 in the first version of *LiquidFriesland*, last accessed 16 June 2015.

208 "Nachbesserung fehlender Straßenmarkierungen", Initiative i96, in the first version of *LiquidFriesland*, last accessed 6 August 2014.

209 "Erweiterung der IGS Friesland um einen Sekundarbereich II", Initiative i31 in the first version of *LiquidFriesland*, last accessed 6 August 2014.

210 Karin Schmidt and Wolfgang Müller, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

per se. According to my participants, many registered simply out of curiosity,[211] because they had a strong affinity for all things technological and Internet-concerned,[212] or had time on their hands[213]. Clearly, any correlation with political interest or engagement is lacking here. For many of my interlocutors, the feeling of solidarity with and sense of obligation to acquainted leaders in local politics and administration,[214] often seen as characteristic of small communities, seems to have been sufficient motivation to register with *LiquidFriesland*.

As I have outlined above, *Betri Reykjavík* came into being because of a moral shock in times of crisis within a fragmented society in a threshold state. The initial aim of *Betri Reykjavík* was to provide a space for every political party running in the 2010 municipal elections to hold discussions with potential voters, to promote their ideas, and to develop their agendas out in the open instead of behind closed doors.

The thirst for transparency and fundamental change that was central to the creation of *Betri Reykjavík*, was absent in that of *LiquidFriesland* (cf. Killian et al.). *LiquidFriesland* was implanted top-down into a stable society "with established, unquestioned structures, norms, and values" (ibid.), because the Landrat Sven Ambrosy thought it would be nice to offer an additional way for citizens to communicate with the administration; and at that, drawing great media attention to the district of Friesland.

Political Disinterest as Sign of Affluence?

Aside from the relatively shallow political grievances of Friesland's citizens and the insufficient mobilisation and resources on the part of the administration, it appears likely that political disinterest played a role in *LiquidFriesland*'s failure. In the literature, political disinterest is often associated with dissatisfaction, voter apathy, and cynicism (cf. Kersting, 'Online Participation' 271). The main line of reasoning in these articles is that citizens lose interest in politics and stop participating politically because they feel that their interests and realities are insufficiently represented by elected politicians and governments (cf. van Deth, 'Politisches Interesse'). My research participants however suggested a different reading of political disinterest in times of affluence. This becomes especially understandable in Krístinn's line of reasoning, as he makes clear that political disinterest is not necessarily to be seen as something negative:

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211 For example Helmut Weber, focus group, Jever, 9 October 2014.

212 For example Peter Lamprecht, personal interview, Jever, 16 September 2013.

213 Pensioners and people on parental leave stated that they had time on their hands, for example Heinz Schulz and Anna Wagner-Becker from the focus group in Varel, 9 September 2014.

214 For example Susanne Engstler, personal interview, 8 October 2013.

one measurement of a healthy society could be political disinterest. Disinterest in politics does not necessarily mean that there is something wrong with the political system, it could simply mean that people are already satisfied. So they don't see the need to be interested in the political sphere or decision-making, they just go *'Life is great, I don't have to spend my life on politics, that's great.'*
We need to find a way to incorporate that into our system in the future. Because one of the reasons there is a declining interest in political parties and declining vote, is simply because of the level of affluence in the western world. Our life, our quality of life is at a level where what the politicians are doing doesn't really affect our quality of life that much anymore. They're tweaking something here and they are tweaking something there, doesn't really matter what they are doing. My quality of life is not going to change whether this one is in power or that one.[215]

Interestingly, Friesland's Landrat Sven Ambrosy takes the same line:

wann beteiligt man sich und wann beteiligt man sich nicht? Wenn ich unheimlich engagiert bin in einer Sache, dann beteilige ich mich. […] Wenn eine Unzufriedenheit mit Politik da ist, dann ist eine hohe politische Aktivität zu verzeichnen. Das ist ja auch richtig so in der Demokratie. Wenn aber eine hohe Zufriedenheit da ist, dann beteiligen sich weniger. Wenn die Bevölkerung schweigt, sich nicht beteiligt, ist das dann ein ganz schlimmes Zeichen für den Zustand der Demokratie oder sogar vielleicht ein sehr gutes? Weil die die sich nicht öffentlich äußern sagen: ‚Läuft doch'. Ich würde mal sagen hier in Friesland, es läuft, es gibt eine hohe Grundzufriedenheit. Und wenn nicht, dann hat man Beteiligungsmöglichkeiten.[216]

when does one get active and when does one not? When I'm very committed to an issue, then I get active. […] When there is political discontent, there are reports of high political activity. And that is what democracy is about. But when there is high level of content, less people are politically active. When the population keeps quiet – is that a terrible sign for the state of democracy or perhaps a very good sign? Because those citizens that aren't active publicly say: 'Everything is going well'. Here in Friesland, I'd say everything is going well, generally, people are very content. And if not, there are opportunities for participation.

As both quotations from the fields show, the weakening of representative democracy does not necessarily indicate that the idea of democracy as such is in danger. It could also mean that citizens orient towards strengthening participatory and

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215 Kristínn Már Ársælsson, personal interview, Reykjavík, 20 June 2014.
216 Sven Ambrosy, phone interview, 22 September 2015.

deliberative aspects of democracy, as is the case for Iceland and what Kristínn was hinting at. Or political disinterest could simply mean that citizens are relatively satisfied with the status quo. For Friesland's press secretary Klug, this is a legitimate position to say 'I only participate in the elections because I feel that is my civil duty, but right now I would rather like to mow the lawn or lay on the couch and watch sport on TV instead of participating through *LiquidFriesland*'.[217]

8.4.3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I illustrated how the concept of times of crisis and times of affluence are one way of interpreting different levels of participation in my research fields. While this interpretation has been heavily influenced by my research (fields and questions), the concept of times of crisis and of affluence is nevertheless transferable to other political participation frameworks. The key point here seems to be that the the more significantly their everyday life has been disrupted, more profound a citizen's personal (political) grievances, the easier it is for them to become engaged in or to deepen their engagement in politics. Or, from a top-down perspective: in order to mobilise affluent citizens with secure livelihoods, significantly more resources are required, and participation levels are more difficult to maintain.

8.5 The Role of Geographical Proximity in (Online) Political Participation

In this chapter, it will become clear that some modes of political participation appear better suited for influencing national or state levels and other modes appear better suited for influencing on the local municipal level. This connects well with the initial analysis of people's political participation repertoires as processes of negotiation, of mixing and matching (see chapter 8.4.1 Political Participation Repertoires Today).

At the national political level, people seem to prefer established modes of participation such as electoral voting, whereas at the local level, they appear to prefer other modes. A clear example of this is Hörður Torfason, the founder and main organiser of the Pots-and-Pans Revolution and of *Samtökin'78*, Iceland's national queer organisation. Aside from being a singer and songwriter, Hörður is also a political activist by profession. In chapter 8.4.1, Political Participation Repertoires Today, I cited Hörður's demand for compulsory voting. Somewhat surprisingly, he still admitted that

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217 Cf. Sönke Klug, personal interview, 25 August 2015.