



Community Testing of CATALYST Tools

Final Report by the EdgeRyders team, 20 July 2015

Summary

During January - July 2015 the EdgeRyders community provided assistance with testing two CATALYST tools: Assembl and Edgesense, based on a collaboration agreement with Sigma Orionis. To join the EdgeRyders organisation team, we have recruited two community members to coordinate the process, Ruxandra Creosteanu (Romania) and Hazem Adel (Germany/ Egypt). Coordination was done openly and in collaboration with other members in a dedicated group on the Edgeryders platform, with discussions spanning over 16 posts, 7 wiki documents and approx. 150 comments. We involved directly circa 50-60 people in online/ offline conversations relevant to our testing process: 20 online for the two tools (see discussions [here](#)), and more in related events (e.g. online meetings, community calls).

Aside from involving members in the testing process, whose results we present below separately for each tool, the team also participated in several related events throughout the course of the project, such as [Masters of Networks](#) in Rome, 10-11 March, and [CAPS 2015](#) conference in Brussels, 7-8 July, where they held presentations of Edgesense and Assembl in front of international audiences.

Findings from Edgesense

An [initial report](#) on insights which the tool provides based on looking at the EdgeRyders network [installation](#) was submitted by Hazem early on in the testing process: the graph revealed the existence of several subcommunities which confirmed our intuition as community managers.

At the Masters of Networks 3 event in March where approx. 30 people participated, we departed from several databases installed on Edgesense in order to run comparative analyses and look at the effect (if any) of community managers work on community health or contributions member make in a given time period. Moderation policies across communities are very different, and so is the response: you would see high activity when moderators are little visible, or low, but consistent activity allowing the community to keep decent member ranks. In Edgeryders, a small

group go out of their way to make everyone feel welcome and encourage collaboration. Not surprisingly, a dozen moderators account for half of all relationships in the network, which means they know everyone and are part of most conversations. The different shapes of networks offer some clues as to how connections are made. Read more about the analyses we ran during the event [here](#).



[Edgeryders \(left\)](#), [InnovatoriPA \(centre\)](#), [ImaginationForPeople - correspondants Mailing List \(right\)](#).

Finally, an online hangout was organised on [9th April](#) with 10 participants in various countries - network scientists, community managers and Edgesense developers. The agenda was built around how Edgesense is beneficial in analysing the online “community” for community members and moderators, what the immediate gains are from looking at the interface; what kind of questions are not currently answered through use of the tool and could be submitted to developers for further work; what features/ add ons can be built for an even more effective instrument.

Challenges:

- The visual complexity of the network is a challenge in the beginning.
- The colors used in the network is similar to the ones used around it in the different tabs, it is better to use different colors to avoid confusion.
- For older and big communities, it is hard to know which are the old communities and which are new, and how many of the old members are still active in discussions.
- Double clicking on a node to show its network and moderators nodes are in black aren't mentioned in the tutorial, and this was something sent in as a recommendation to the developers.



- Overall, the tutorial helps a lot new users and especially existing community managers who even by intuition can overlap the graph on the mental image they have of their community
- The size of the database is a challenge, sometimes it requires some processing beforehand in order to have a cleaner database to be used with edgesense.

Lessons learned:

- edgesense provides an easy way for users to have more of a network thinking about their communities.
- It provides an overall understanding of the network, how big it is, how modular, and how information flows throughout the network.
- It provides a quick tool in knowing more the central members of the community and the load of communication done by moderators.
- It shows how the community develops, which could be used in various ways.
- It shows how sustainable the sub-communities are with or without the moderators. (sustainability here is about keeping the discussions going)

Some proposals

For the search feature:

- adding “auto complete” from the user data base would be helpful. (as in mentioning someone on the platform)
- highlighting the searched node would be helpful.

For time-related features:

- Having a 2 time sliders equivalent.
- Distinguishing between new nodes and old nodes using colors or the ability to ghost out the currently (choosing a time period of a year or 6 months) inactive nodes.
- Having the info of the “ time of changing the user to a node or the little active node into an active one” in real time. This would be helpful in on-boarding people and saving this info to check if there is a pattern in between signing up and contributing which could be helpful to know when to intervene as a community manager.

Findings from Assembl



In [March](#) we have explored the tool in order to make a plan on how to test it with real topics. The decision has been taken to test it with the ongoing discussion on the stewardship topic of the Edgeryders community that took place during the Living on the Edge 4 event.

In order to avoid to ask from the Edgeryders community to register on another platform, the [decision](#) has been made to import the discussion from Edgeryders platform directly to Assembl. There have been some development requirements in order to achieve this and the discussions were imported the 20th of May.

The Assembl setup for the Edgeryders community discussions is available here:

<http://discussions.bluenove.com/edgeryders>

Testing involved overseeing a conversation between 70 individuals in over 10 countries in 575 comments. As discussed with the team from Imagination for people, we planned to make 3 syntheses of the LOTE discussion through the Assembl tool. The first synthesis was published the [6th of June](#), the second was published the [13th of June](#), the third on [20th of June](#). We spread the syntheses over the weeks, and also offered to ask people who registered on Assembl from the Edgeryders community to give their impression of the tool. Feedback and reaction to the summaries was incorporated in the ideas table until June 30th.

Challenges:

- bringing a community from one platform to another is a true challenge. Cohesion and dynamics are not kept, and people are reluctant to register on a new platform. This is why integration from the Assembl tool into other systems is a true requirement. For the current test, the discussion of the Edgeryders community has been imported into Assembl. But then, Assembl requested the access to the users file, in order to add to the users export the usernames or names of the users to be able to show this information in Assembl (they considered that would be more useful than labeling the user "User 2526"). Our current recommendation is that Assembl approach in case of data import needs to be re-thought to be ethically acceptable to the communities supposed to use the tool . For communities like Edgeryders, there can be objections to the request to have all the user data on the server of Assembl.
- harvesting is not as easy as it seems to be:
 - as a harvester you can not delete sections of the table of content, you can just rename them
 - In case of imported content, most of the data goes into uncategorized posts, but there is no possibility to make search among the uncategorized posts. Thus it makes it hard for a harvester to harvest by theme, he needs to go through all the material in order to find which are the interesting topics to be harvested.

Lessons learned:



- the Assembl synthesis was indeed useful, it is allowing to have a very good overview over a discussion with multiple users in a structured manner. However, in the case of the stewardship discussion, it could not rekindle the conversation. This might be, because the discussion the conversation peaked over six months ago and we have since moved on as a community. We continue spreading the word to unfold and revive the conversation.

Any other thing to tell developers:

- The platform can sometimes be slow: when scrolling through the messages for harvesting sometimes it takes up to 1 minute until the software is responsive again
- It would be good to add a button to delete comments at least your own comments as a participant, if not as a harvester/admin as well
- There are often error messages. For example when trying to create a new message, I got an error: "Assembl has encountered a problem and needs to be refreshed. Do not worry, any messages that are in the process of being composed will not be lost. See you in a minute on Assembl! If you are in contact with the technical team, please let them know about the following message
- For some reason, just after publishing the synthesis, all entries seemed to be doubled (double introduction, double synthesis per thread, double comments, etc.). We tried to delete one of them, but then it deleted everything. We then realized that actually the double entries appear only at the beginning, and then if we wait they appear afterwards as just once. We would suggest to add a message letting people know that it is not doubled

Conclusion:

- A good news was to start up a conversation around the tool with other Edgeryders, and someone considered using it for their project at one point, which speaks of its potential: <https://edgeryders.eu/en/catalyst-collaboration/a-proposal-for-testing-assembl>
- Assembl is a collective intelligence tool to be used to discuss on topics among many people. You reach many people when you already have a lively community. In this case, you are probably already using an online platform. In this case, they need to work hard on integration of their tool with other platforms, and offer it rather as an API, than as a parallel platform.