The Third Sector and Online Citizen Empowerment: the Case of mySociety

A report produced for the ESRC Knowledge Exchange Programme and Project Partner *mySociety*

By Rachel Gibson, Marta Cantijoch, and Silvia Galandini (University of Manchester)

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This report, can be downloaded at

https://www.mysociety.org/about/research/online-citizen-empowerment/

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the impact of mySociety on the users of its sites. The report is part of a wider Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded study that has been conducted by researchers at the University of Manchester over the course of one year (2013-14).

Key Objectives:

The study had three main goals:

- To provide the first in-depth overtime account of first-time and regular users of online political and civic 'self-help' sites to assess how they use the site and what effect (if any) it has on their propensity to engage in wider social, community and political activities.
- To develop and apply an innovative and replicable mixed methodology that integrates qualitative and quantitative evidence about the activities of mySociety users overtime and allows for a richer and more detailed insight into their experiences.
- To provide advice for researchers conducting future evaluations of this nature on 'best practice' and also practical recommendations for mySociety as to how they can enhance the effectiveness of their sites.

Key Findings:

- Users of mySociety sites are typically highly mobilized politically; however, the sites do attract a small significant proportion of first-time users who have less experience of interacting with public officials (17% of total users).
- Regular users of mySociety sites are very satisfied with their experience and regular use of mySociety websites appears to help already engaged citizens further develop their participatory skills.
- First time users of mySociety sites express lower levels of interest in politics and are less likely to experience feelings of empowerment than regular users.
- Little change is observed across the three months of the study in users' attitudes towards politics, politicians and perceptions of how far they understand and can influence policy. However, feelings of involvement with one's local community and how far one can help improve it appear to increase for frequent users of mySociety sites.

Key Recommendations:

- Sites could provide a more immediate and efficient way for users to connect their online activities with their offline communities. This could involve development of online facilities that connect people from the same areas or facilities to invite others from the area to join the issue that has been reported as in petition signing.
- While users are clearly satisfied with mySociety and understand that non-responsiveness rests with elites i.e. local councils or MPs, if mySociety could intensify and increase their efforts to get responses from authorities this would clearly enhance their perceived usefulness and effectiveness.
- A mixed methodological approach that has an overtime component is more appropriate than relying on large N surveys for assessing the impact of these types of sites. The time diaries in particular provided rich evidence of how these sites were used and affected individuals.
- In judging the impact of these sites it is important to widen the concept of empowerment to take into account the existence of different levels of empowerment: the local community matters.

Introduction

This report is the culmination of a year-long study of the users of mySociety websites. The study was conducted by researchers at the University of Manchester as part of an Economic and Social Research Council funded grant project. The main goal of the study was to better understand how individuals use and can benefit from four main mySociety sites in terms of resolving personal, community or wider societal issues and problems. A key supporting aim was to develop a transparent and replicable set of tools for measuring the impact of these sites that would help to develop a 'best practice' for mySociety and other 'e-democracy' organizations in evaluating their societal impact. The report provides a summary of the work we undertook, including a description of its wider social and academic significance and the key findings we produced. It also presents detailed description of how we conducted the research and the innovative combination of methodologies that were used to answer the central questions posed.

Background and Significance of the Project

Over the last decade there has been a growing number of websites and applications that have been developed that promise to help people become more democratically engaged and empowered as citizens. These online civic 'self-help' resources are designed to help people undertake a range of important tasks that include contacting politicians, sending complaints to public bodies and making government more accountable and transparent by opening up information for public scrutiny. The British charity mySociety has been a global pioneer in this field in developing these services for UK citizens and now attracts traffic of almost 5 million annual visitors across its sites. While we have evidence of who uses the sites, how it is used and how often, we lack a detailed understanding of the subsequent and wider societal impact these services have on their visitors. This project has been designed to provide this understanding through a systematic quantitative and qualitative study of mySociety users over a three month period.

While the results of the analysis are clearly of direct interest to mySociety and other organizations sharing its approach and aims in the UK and elsewhere, they are of particular significance for scholars of civic and political participation. The democratic impact of the internet has attracted considerable speculation and debate within academic circles since it first emerged as a mass medium in the late 1990s. Although most observers are in agreement that the internet and particularly newer social media platforms have produced profound changes in how individuals and particularly young people communicate and interact, whether this has really led to any

substantive changes in the quality and intensity of citizen participation is the subject of some scepticism.[1] Of course this 'minimal effects' thesis may well be a true portrayal of situation to date, however, most of the work producing these conclusions has relied on large scale mass survey evidence and rather unrefined measures of internet use. The questions posed have also typically centered on quantifying how much change in national attitudes or behaviors can be attributed to online activities.

The approach we take here constitutes an entirely new and highly original insight into how digital media is working to effect change in society. Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered on individual users' experiences over time we have gained a unique 'window' into how such sites are typically used and more importantly re-used. What hooks users in and then keeps them coming back? While our results do not suggest that these sites are radically expanding the numbers engaging in community or political action in the UK they do show the sites are having an effect in subtler and potentially more meaningful ways. In particular we do see evidence that they are widening the repertoire of ways people can take action to resolve issues affecting them, and offering an easier mechanism for those people who might not otherwise have bothered, to take public action. Furthermore they seem to be providing an additional 'booster shot' to those who are active in politics or local affairs, leading them to increase their levels of investment, particularly in more communal or collective forms of action.

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[1] See: Boulianne, S. (2009). 'Does Internet Use Affect Engagement?: A Meta-Analysis of Research', *Political Communication*, 26 (2): 193-211.

Methodology and Data

The principle purpose of this research project was to establish whether mySociety's suite of online tools are having a societal impact in terms delivering on their aims of lowering the barriers and costs for people to exercise their basic democratic rights, whether that be to fix a local neighbourhood problem or call on their elected representative to take action on a national issue. The key question we were interested in answering was whether the sites make a difference to a person's feeling of competence and efficacy in being able to tackle social, political and community problems, and particularly whether it enabled those starting from a lower confidence base to do so. As a supporting aim we sought to develop a transparent and replicable set of tools for measuring the impact of these sites that would help to develop a 'best practice' for mySociety and other 'e-democracy' organizations in evaluating their societal impact.

In order to address our questions we needed find out how individuals use and benefit (or not) from mySociety sites in terms of resolving personal, community or wider societal issues and problems. We did so using three key methods: surveys, time diaries and focus groups.

Surveys

Surveys were designed and run from four mySociety websites: FixMyStreet, WhatDoTheyKnow, WriteToThem, and TheyWorkForYou. The questionnaire asked about usage of the site, socioeconomic status, levels of political and community/group involvement, social capital and levels of interest and perceived competence in addressing societal, political and personal problems.[2] Table 1 shows the size of the sample and the proportion of respondents recruited from each website.

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[2] See full questionnaires in the appendix.

Table 1. Number of survey respondents, total and for each website.

	N	%
TheyWorkForYou	3,525	56.5
FixMyStreet	1,367	21.9
WhatDoTheyKnow	717	11.5
WriteToThem	630	10.1
Total	6,239	100

Over six thousand respondents completed the online survey, which was fielded between February and March 2014.[3] Most of these users found out about the survey via a banner displayed on each of the four websites. Registered users of TheyWorkForYou who had previously signed up to receive email alters could also find a link to the survey on these emails. This resulted in an overrepresentation of TheyWorkForYou respondents in the sample.

We asked respondents in the survey whether they consented to be contacted again for a second survey and other activities as part of the project. 30% of the sample – 1,878 respondents – agreed to be contacted again and provided their email addresses. Three months after conducting the first survey, we sent an invitation to these respondents asking them to fill a new questionnaire. This second survey repeated most of the questions from wave one and added a few new questions designed to capture their levels of satisfaction about their experience using mySociety websites. A total of 719 participants completed the second survey which accounts for 38% of those contacted. Results from this data source allowed us to examine levels of satisfaction among mySociety users and whether the sites made a difference in their feelings of competence and efficacy in being able to tackle political and community problems.

Time diaries

We also invited respondents in the survey to complete an online weekly time diary over a three month period (12 weeks). Time diaries are increasingly used by social scientists to collect data at the micro level and identify types of individuals in terms of their uses of time. For this study we focused on time spent engaged in political, community and social group interactions offline and

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[3] The data collection process started on 13th February and ended on 31st March when banners were removed from the sites and no more responses were recorded.

online and the types of exchanges and actions that were taking place (where, how and with whom).

We invited all respondents to the survey who consented to be contacted again (1,878). At the end of the 12-week activity, 389 diarists had completed at least one weekly entry. The average number of weekly entries completed per participant was 6. The minimum was 1 and the maximum was 12.

The diaries were in the format of a set of questions with some closed and open-ended response options. Topics rotated every week to avoid contamination in participants' behaviour and to gather information about different types of experiences and activities. On alternate weeks 1 to 11, respondents were asked specifically about their interactions with other members of their local community and the extent to which they got engaged in different activities such as helping their neighbours (e.g. lending a toolbox, feeding pets) or helping solve problems in their communities alone (e.g. reporting a crime, contacting a councillor) or with others (e.g. neighbourhood watch, cleaning parks). In weeks 2, 6, and 10, diarists were asked how much impact they thought people like them have in making their community a better place to live. In weeks 4, 8 and 12 the diaries focussed on forms of engagement beyond the local community and asked about online and offline political participation.

Responses to the closed questions, i.e. survey questions, provided a longitudinal dataset that was used to obtain a rich picture of any change occurring among users of the websites, and particularly to identify the triggers that proved important in sustaining or deepening their feelings of empowerment over the period. This was in turn complemented with a study of the open ended responses provided in the diaries during these weeks. The qualitative findings presented in this report are based on a selection of diarists which were selected as they mentioned mySociety or any of its four websites at least once in any of their weekly entries.

Focus Groups
Online focus groups were conducted for selected survey respondents to further explore and understand their experience. Based on the responses to the first survey, 387 people were selected and contacted inviting them to register their interest to participate in this activity. Of those, 44 people registered and finally 21 activated their accounts on the online platform used to run the focus groups. These participants were split into different groups based on the websites they used and on their prior levels of political engagement.

The focus groups were run using a platform developed by the market research company LiveMinds[4] which is similar to an online forum. Participants could take part as many times as they wished by writing comments in response to questions posted by members of the research team or to comments posted by other participants. The discussion was active for a period of 7 days and was asynchronous, i.e. participants didn't need to be all online at a specific time each day, but they could post their comments at their convenience. Members of the research team acted as moderators of the discussion, asking questions and prompting new responses when interesting topics emerged in the discussion.

Each day during the discussion different topics and new questions were suggested by members of the research team. These were:

- Day 1: participants' use of the MySociety sites
- Day 2: how useful the mySociety websites are
- Day 3: mySociety and 'making a difference'
- Day 4: participating online and offline
- Days 5 and 6: discussing social and political issues with friends, family, and neighbours.
- Day 7: final general thoughts

The goal of the discussions was to follow up in more depth any changes (or lack of change) that were captured through the time diaries and surveys in terms of the participants' civic and political activities after using the site.

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[4] www.liveminds.co.uk

Findings (I) – Who are the users of mySociety?

Using data from the full sample of respondents to the survey (N=6,239) we profiled the characteristics of users of mySociety websites. Table 2 displays findings in relation to gender, age, education, and ethnicity.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of mySociety users

		TWF	FMS	WDTK	WTT	Total
Men	N	2,263	845	425	319	3,852
	%	66.4	64.4	63.0	52.1	64.1
Women	N	1,143	468	250	293	2,154
	%	33.6	35.6	37.0	47.9	35.9
Age	N	3292	1260	644	594	5791
	Mean	55.1	54.7	50.3	51.2	54.1
Education: up to secondary	N	320	200	74	76	670
	%	9.2	14.7	10.4	12.2	10.8
Education: college	N	754	418	180	154	1,506
	%	21.6	30.8	25.4	24.7	24.3
Education: university	N	2,278	665	415	351	3,709
	%	65.1	48.9	58.5	56.3	59.9
Education: other or no information	N	145	76	41	43	305
	%	4.2	5.6	5.8	6.9	4.9
Members of ethnic minorities	N	120	26	38	39	223
	%	3.6	2.0	5.7	6.5	3.8

As we can see, there is an overrepresentation of male respondents in the sample overall and in each of the four websites. The mean age exceeds 50 years old in all cases which indicates an underrepresentation of young people. Users of mySociety websites also display high levels of education. About six in ten respondents has attended university. This figure is relatively lower among users of FixMyStreet (49%) and highest among users of TheyWorkForYou (65%). Respondents having attended up to secondary school or equivalent represent 10% of the sample. This bias is less pronounced among FixMyStreet users.

Respondents from a non-white ethnic background are underrepresented in the sample. Overall, less than 4% are members of an ethnic minority compared with around 13% in the population as a whole according to the 2011 Census.[5] Across websites we can see some differences with users of FixMyStreet being the least diverse (2%). Non-white users of WhatDoTheyKnow and WriteToThem represent 6 and 7% of these subsamples respectively.

Since mySociety operates entirely online, we were interested in exploring the levels of online skills of their users. The survey included a battery of questions about different activities that can be performed on the internet: writing a blog post; purchasing a product or service; logging onto a social networking site (e.g. Facebook); posting a comment on a social networking site; posting an audio, video or image file; sending an attachment with an email; and commenting on an article or blog post. By adding the number of activities each respondent indicated they had done on the internet, we obtained an index (ranging from 0 to 7) that measured their levels of online skills or competence to perform different tasks online. Table 3 shows the mean scores in this index for all users and for users of each website.

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[5] ONS (2013) *Key Statistics and Quick Statistics for local authorities in the United Kingdom – Ethnicity and country of birth*, Office for National Statistics. Available at
http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_330610.pdf [Accessed on 11/08/14]

Table 3: Levels of online skills of mySociety users

	N	Mean
TheyWorkForYou	3,525	5.0
FixMyStreet	1,367	4.6
WhatDoTheyKnow	717	5.3
WriteToThem	630	4.8
Total	6,239	4.9

Note: the online skills index ranges from 0 to 7

As we can see in table 3, users of mySociety websites display high levels of competence in their use of the internet. The overall mean score in the online skills index is 4.9 (out of 7). The score is lowest among users of FixMyStreet (4.6) and highest among users of WhatDoTheyKnow (5.3) but the differences are negligible. These results indicate that users of mySociety are exceptionally savvy in their use of new technologies. In 2010, data from the polling company BMRB using a similar index returned lower overall levels of online skills among British internet users than the ones we see among mySociety users. This survey asked about four different types of tasks that can be performed on the internet (instead of 7). The mean on the index (computed on internet users only) was 1.7 which indicates that on average, British internet users were able to perform less than two out of four different types of online tasks.[6]

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[6] Levels of online skills have probably increased since this survey was conducted in 2010.

The following analyses explore mySociety users' levels of political engagement using several indicators of attitudes and participation. Table 4 reports levels of political interest.

Table 4: How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics? (%)

	No interest	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal	N
TheyWorkForYou	0.1	5.6	52.3	42.0	3,504
FixMyStreet	3.0	24.6	54.8	17.6	1,356
WhatDoTheyKnow	1.1	11.6	54.6	32.7	715
WriteToThem	1.3	13.0	57.1	28.6	627
Total	1.0	11.2	53.6	34.3	6,202

According to the 2013 British Social Attitudes survey[7], which is representative of the British population, 37% of citizens declare having not much or no interest in politics, 32% have some interest and another 32% have a great deal or quite a lot of interest[8]. As we can see in table 4, levels of interest in politics among users of mySociety are much higher than in the population. Over half of the respondents in the survey report having quite a lot of interest and over a third declare having a great deal of interest. The proportions of users of these websites who report not having any interest in what is going on in politics are extremely low. This is particularly true for users of TheyWorkForYou, who display the highest levels of interest in politics. As in the previous analyses, FixMyStreet seems to be attracting a somewhat different type of user: levels of interest in politics are still higher among these users in comparison with general levels in the population, but we see that nearly 28% declare having not too much or no interest at all in politics.

In order to explore how competent in politics respondents believe they are, they were asked how complicated, if at all, they would say they find politics. This was measured using a 0 to 10 scale where 0 means not at all complicated and 10 means extremely complicated. A high score therefore indicates a lack of confidence in one's ability to understand what is going on in politics. The following figure presents the mean scores in this scale among users of each website and for the total of users:

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[7] NatCen Social Research [depositor], UK Data Service [distributor].
[8] Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

**Figure 1: Perceived levels of ability to understand politics**
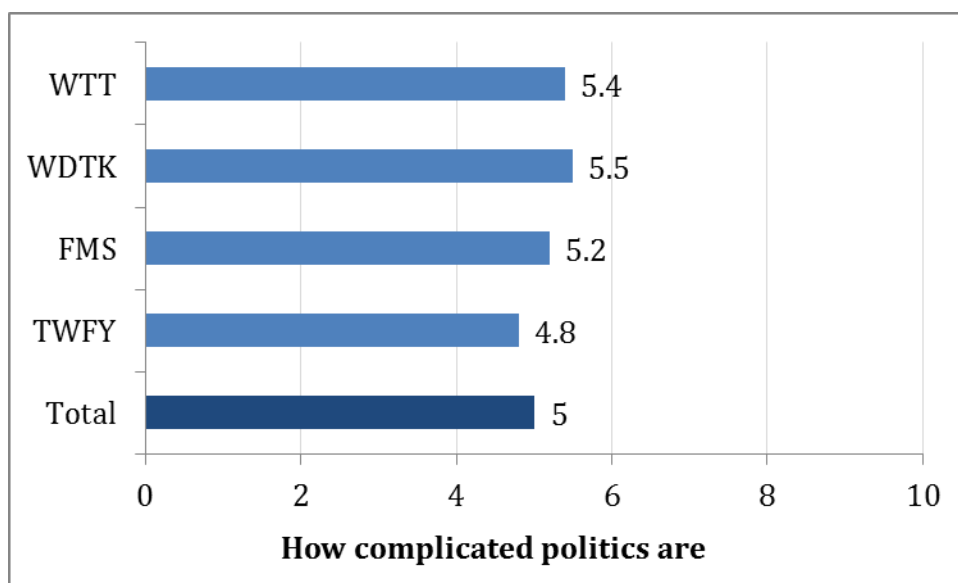
Note: the scale of political competence ranges from 0 to 10

Figure 1 shows that users of mySociety believe that their levels of competence in understanding politics are neither low nor high. On average, respondents place themselves in the centre of the scale. We obtain the lowest score among users of TheyWorkForYou (4.8) and the highest among users of WhatDoTheyKnow (5.5), but the differences are not very large. When we compare these results with data from a representative survey, we see that average levels of competence in politics among mySociety users are not very different to the levels in the population: the survey conducted by BMRB in 2010 showed that the mean for the same scale was 4,8 in the Brisitsh electorate.

The websites developed by mySociety seek to enable citizens to exert power over institutions and decision makers. We were interested in knowing what the users' opinions were in relation to their ability to have an influence on policy makers and authorities. The survey included a question asking how much influence respondents thought they have on politics and public affairs. This was measured again using a 0 to 10 scale – 0 indicates no influence and 10 indicates a great deal of influence. The following figure shows the results for the total of respondents and for the users of each website:

Figure 2: Perceived ability to have an influence on politics.
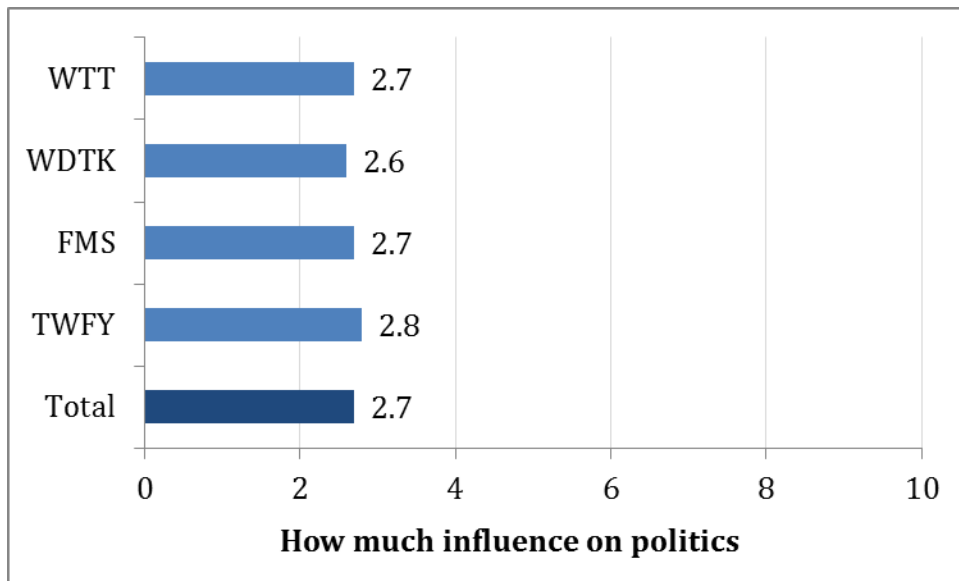
Note: the scale of political influence ranges from 0 to 10

Figure 2 shows almost equivalent results for users of all websites: the means for the scale of influence are in all cases below 3. This indicates that mySociety users do not feel that they have a great deal of influence on politics and public affairs. These results are not too different to the ones obtained in representative studies: according to the British Election Study survey conducted after the 2010 General Election, the mean in the same scale for the British electorate was 2. mySociety users are slightly more positive in their beliefs about their ability to exert an influence, but differences with the average citizen are very low.

Does this mean that users of mySociety prefer not to get actively involved in participatory activities? Our results suggest the opposite. Table 5 shows levels of engagement of mySociety users in different forms of political participation: signing a paper or internet petition; taking part in a lawful public protest or demonstration; refusing to buy a product for political or social reasons; and buying certain products for political or social reasons.

Table 5. Engagement in different forms of political participation

	Petition		Protest		Boycott		Buycott	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
TheyWorkForYou	3,173	91.0	1,929	55.7	2,795	80	2,089	60.2
FixMyStreet	1,177	87.4	449	33.7	858	64	553	41.4
WhatDoTheyKnow	618	87.7	349	50.5	540	77.7	355	51.2
WriteToThem	550	89.1	287	46.3	464	75.1	322	52.9
Total	5,518	89.7	3,014	49.3	4,657	76	3,319	54.4

As we can see, despite feeling that they can't have much of an influence in politics, users of mySociety websites are highly engaged individuals. About nine in ten respondents declared having signed a petition in the past and half of the sample had taken part in a lawful protest activity such as a demonstration. FixMyStreet users are the least participatory in protest activities with only a third of them having attended a demonstration or march in the past. FixMyStreet users are also the least involved in boycotts. While the overall level of participation in a boycott is 76%, 'only' 64% of FixMyStreet users reported having refused to buy products for social or political reasons. Users of TheyWorkForYou display the highest level of engagement in this type of participation and across all four modes. Respondents to the survey are also highly engaged in buycotts. Figures are lower here as compared with the other three modes of participation. Still, over a half of the users of all sites (with the exception of FixMyStreet) reported buying certain products for political reasons.

Overall, these results clearly show a distinctive characteristic of mySociety users in comparison with the population. According to the British Participation Survey (2011)[9], 51% of the British adult population had signed a petition in the past, 15% had taken part in a demonstration and 26% had bought or refused to buy a product for political reasons. These figures indicate that users of mySociety websites are highly mobilised in comparison with the average British citizen.

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[9] Webb, P., British Participation Survey, 2011 [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], November 2012. SN: 7163 , http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7163-1

As can be seen in table 6, levels of engagement were also high in local civic activities. Users of mySociety sites display a high interest in the opportunities for civic engagement available in their communities: nearly a third of the sample had looked up for information about a local charity or community welfare organisation in the past twelve months, either online or in person. Between 22 and 30% of users of the websites joined, renewed membership, or donated money to, one of these organisations. Active forms of membership were also common among mySociety users: about a fifth of the sample had attended events and one in four had done some voluntary work for local organisations. Users of FixMyStreet were the least engaged in civic community activities.

Table 6. Engagement in local charities and community welfare organisations

	Looked for information		Joined or donated		Attended events or meetings		Volunteered	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
TheyWorkForYou	1,127	32.0	1,046	29.7	824	23.4	952	27.0
FixMyStreet	297	21.7	300	22.0	199	14.6	287	21.0
WhatDoTheyKnow	235	32.8	169	23.6	135	18.8	162	22.6
WriteToThem	183	29.1	163	25.9	121	19.2	143	22.7
Total	1,842	29.5	1,678	26.9	1,279	20.5	1,544	24.8

Overall, therefore, these findings confirm expectations that the individuals using the tools developed by mySociety are not a representative sample of the UK population. In particular there is an overrepresentation of males and more highly educated individuals. Users tend to be older and are less likely to be of ethnic minority background. They are also very active in politics generally and in civic activities in their local communities.[10] These tools seem to be attracting active and engaged individuals who are embracing the opportunity provided by mySociety to develop their pre-existing participatory behaviour. However, their feelings of competence and ability to have an influence on politicians and policy makers were not disproportionately high in comparison with similar measures taken from representative studies.

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[10] The extent to which the sources of bias in our sample are due to a self-selection of particular profiles into completing the survey cannot be determined based on the data available.

We were also interested in the extent to which mySociety are able to attract less engaged individuals. The tables and figures reported so far have shown totals and averages for the full sample of respondents obtained in the survey. But previous studies conducted on mySociety users had praised the ability of these websites to attract individuals who had never engaged in any of the activities they promote, such as contacting public officials and politicians.[11] In order to find out whether this was still the case, the survey included a question asking respondents whether the last time they had visited the website was the first time they ever did so or whether they had accessed the website before.

Table 7 shows that respondents to our survey were mainly regular users of these websites. However, 17% reported that the last time they had visited the website was the first time they ever did so[12]. This figure was much lower among users of TheyWorkForYou due to the method used to recruit them. First time users were more common among visitors to WriteToThem (60%). The subsamples for FixMyStreet and WhatDoTheyKnow included a fifth of first time users each.

Table 7. Number of first time users, total and by website

	N	%
TheyWorkForYou	260	7.7
FixMyStreet	279	20.7
WhatDoTheyKnow	136	19.3
WriteToThem	362	59.5
Total	1,037	17.2

Table 8 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of first time users of each of the websites. As we can see, some of the biases observed in Table 2 for the full sample of respondents are significantly reduced.

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[11] Escher, T. 2011. "*WriteToThem.com: Analysis of users and usage for UK Citizens Online Democracy".* A report commissioned by UK Citizens Online Democracy, London. (May) http://www.mysociety.org/files/2011/06/TheyWorkForYou_research_report-2011-Tobias-Escher1.pdf Escher, T. 2011. "*They Work for You.com: Analysis of users and usage for UK Citizens Online Democracy".* A report commissioned by UK Citizens Online Democracy, London. (May) http://www.mysociety.org/files/2011/06/WriteToThem_research_report-2011-Tobias-Escher.pdf

[12] The question specifically asked about the website they had just visited and in which they found the link to the survey. It could well be that some of these users had visited this particular website for the very first time but had used other mySociety websites before.

Table 8. Socio-demographic characteristics of first-time users

		TWF	FMS	WDTK	WTT	Total
Men	N	147	145	74	172	538
	%	58.8	54.5	56.5	48.7	53.8
Women	N	103	121	57	181	462
	%	41.2	45.5	43.5	51.3	46.2
Age	N	240	255	124	340	959
	Mean	50.4	53.9	51.4	50.3	51.4
Education: up to secondary	N	42	39	21	52	154
	%	16.2	14.0	15.6	14.6	15.0
Education: college	N	72	91	39	90	292
	%	27.8	32.7	28.9	25.2	28.4
Education: university	N	128	129	65	185	507
	%	49.4	46.4	48.2	51.8	49.3
Education: other or no information	N	17	19	10	30	76
	%	6.6	6.8	7.4	8.4	7.4
Members of ethnic minorities	N	13	7	6	24	50
	%	5.2	2.6	4.7	6.9	5.0

Table 8 shows that the gender gap is less pronounced among first-time users than it was when the full sample was analysed. In Table 2, results for the full sample showed that men outnumbered women by about 30%. In the subsample of first time users, this gap is reduced for each of the websites and even disappears for WriteToThem where women represent more than half of its first time users. The mean age for first-time users remains above 50 years old but is slightly lower than it was for the full sample. Similarly, while highly educated individuals are overrepresented among first-time users too, the differences are reduced and we see an increase of users who have attended up to secondary school or college. Members of ethnic minorities are heavily underrepresented in the subsample of first-time users, but the proportions of non-whites are once again higher than in the full sample.

In terms of levels of engagement, we can also see some interesting differences between first time users and frequent users of mySociety websites. Table 9 reports levels of political interest among these two groups:

Table 9: Levels of interest in politics, first-time users and frequent users (row %)

| | Interest in politics | | | | N |
	No Interest	Not much	Quite a lot	A great deal	
Frequent users	0.8	9.7	52.8	36.7	4,965
First time users	2.0	18.5	56.0	23.6	1,027
Total	1.0	11.2	53.4	35.5	5,992

Table 9 shows that first-time users of mySociety are generally more interested in politics than the population, as reported in the British Social Attitudes study mentioned above, but less than frequent users: one fifth of first-time users declare having not much or no interest at all in politics, as opposed to 1 in 10 among frequent users. In both groups, the most common category is "Quite a lot of interest" but the frequency of great levels of interest is about 13% higher among frequent users.

Figures 3 and 4 below show that first time users also feel slightly less competent than frequent users to understand politics and less able to have an influence on politics, although the differences are not large:

Figure 3: Perceived levels of ability to understand politics, first-time and frequent users
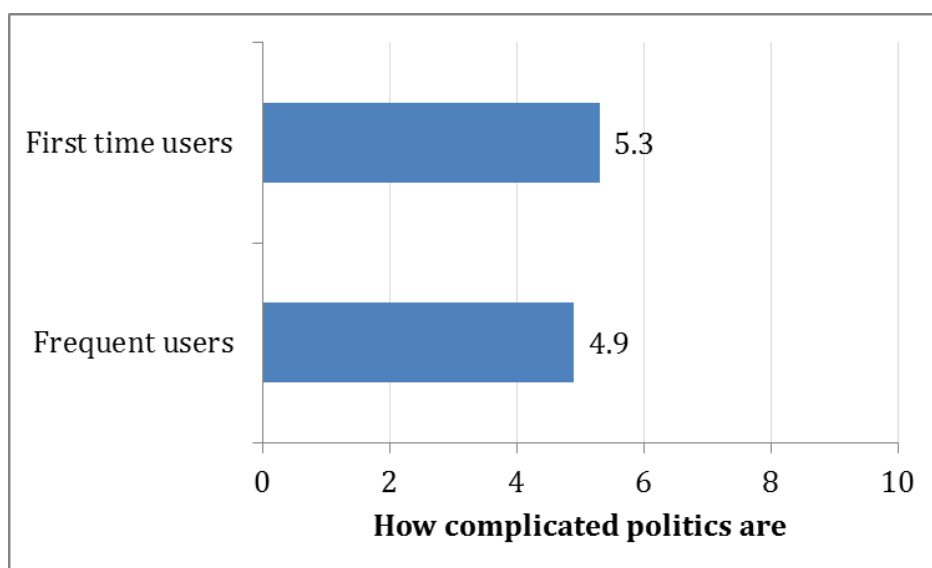
Note: the scale of political competence ranges from 0 to 10

Figure 4: Perceived levels of influence on politics, first-time and frequent users
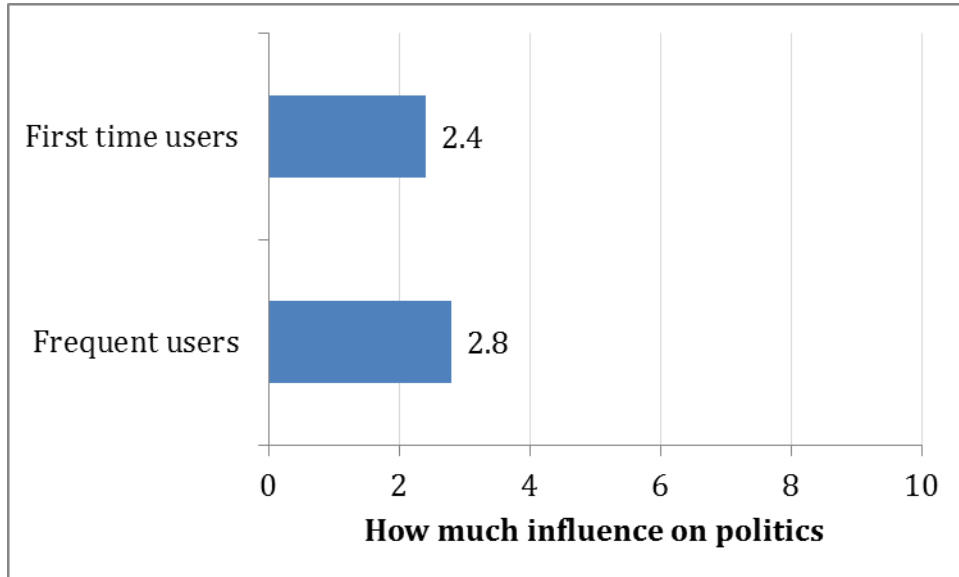
Note: the scale of political influence ranges from 0 to 10

A key finding from previous studies of mySociety users was that these websites seemed to be able to attract individuals who had never contacted a politician or public official before, therefore opening up new avenues for engagement in this type of activity for the first time. Table 10 shows that some newcomers into the experience of contacting politicians were attracted to the websites. Still, the majority of users, frequent or first-time users, had already contacted a politician before.

Table 10. First-time users who had ever contacted a politician or public official, total and by website.

	About issues affecting local community		About issues affecting country	
	N	%	N	%
TheyWorkForYou	148	58.3	144	56.0
FixMyStreet	145	54.1	109	41.1
WhatDoTheyKnow	77	59.7	58	44.6
WriteToThem	214	62.6	195	56.5
Total first time users	584	58.8	506	50.8
Total full sample	4,482	74.4	4,111	68.0

We can see in Table 10 that a large proportion of respondents in the full sample had already contacted a politician or public official in relation to issues affecting the local community (74%) and the country (68%). The proportions of respondents who had contacted public officials in the past among first-time users are lower. About half of those who visited these websites for the first time had no experience in contacting politicians and mySociety was offering them an opportunity to do so for the very first time. The number of first-time users without contacting experience is highest among those who visited FixMyStreet and WhatDoTheyKnow.

The websites developed by mySociety are not the only civic platforms available on the internet. It could be that first-time users were already actively engaged with other online political organisations such as 38 Degrees, MoveOn.org or a political group on Facebook. Figure 5 presents levels of different types of involvement in these organisations.

Figure 5. Involvement in online political organisations other than mySociety, first-time and frequent users (%)
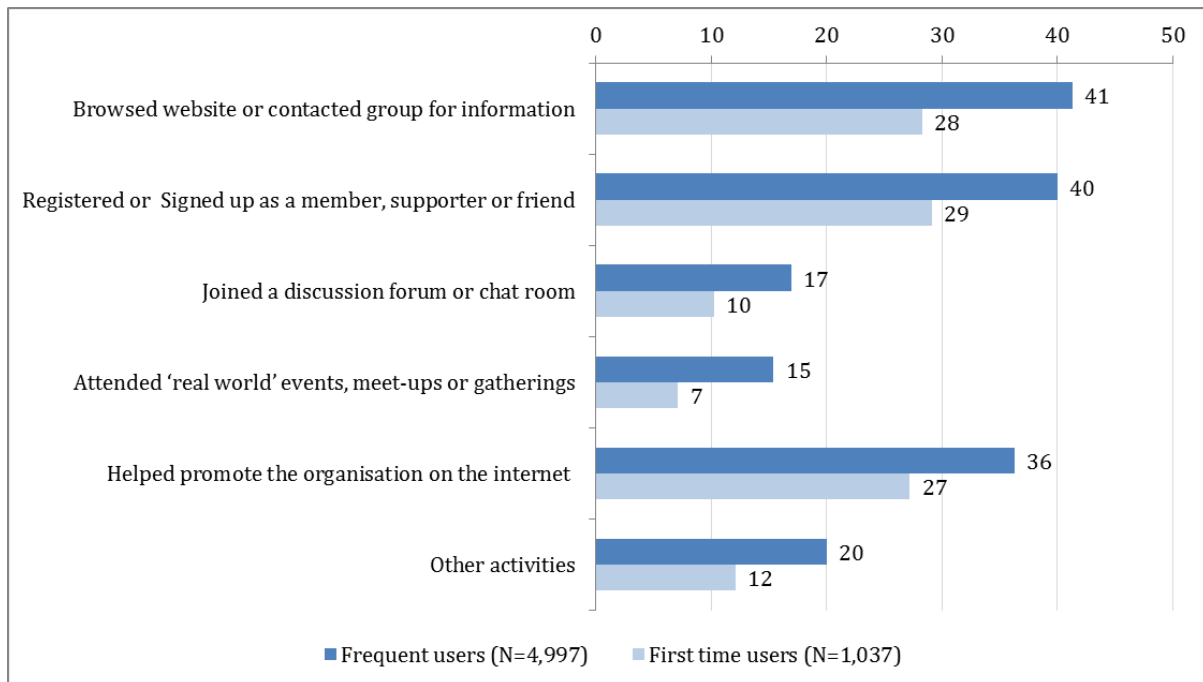
We've seen that users of mySociety are highly mobilised individuals who have undertaken different forms of traditional participation (e.g. signing petitions, attending demonstrations, etc.). The results presented in Figure 5 indicate that their online activism is also very high and not limited to their use of mySociety websites. This is particularly true among frequent users: around 40% of frequent users of mySociety have also been in contact with other online political organisations and a similar number are members or have recently signed up as supporters. Over a third of mySociety frequent users have helped promote these other organisations online, for example posting or forwarding links or messages about the group. Levels of participation in 'real world' activities organised by these groups are lower (15%) but this is of course contingent on the opportunities put forward by these groups to allow members to engage with others outside of the internet.

Interestingly, Figure 5 shows relevant differences between frequent and first time users. While there is a significant proportion of newcomers to mySociety platforms who were already engaged with other organisations online, the proportions are systematically lower than for frequent users: under 30% of first-time users have either contacted or browsed for information about these groups, registered or signed up as a member, or helped promote the group on the internet. Only

7% of first-time users have attended a non-internet event organised by one of these organisations.

Overall, our findings suggest that the websites developed by mySociety are largely attracting a very specific profile of people who are already highly politically engaged and well-resourced. The sites seem to offer them a platform in which they are able to expand their opportunities to become more actively involved in solving their own problems and those of their communities. Albeit less prominent, we also identified a group of first time users who had no prior experience in contacting public officials. The following sections will use the data collected in the second wave of the survey, focus groups and time diaries to explore the range of activities that both newcomers and frequent users of these platforms undertook after the first time we contacted them and the extent to which this contributed to an increase in their feelings of empowerment.

Findings (II) – How do people use mySociety and how satisfied are they?

Here we explore the 'user experience' of those who visit and use mySociety sites. We do so with a combination of both waves of the survey data and our focus group feedback. Looking first at the survey data in Table 11 we find that for most people, the driver to their using the site is based on their personal circumstances. A small number of people are using the site as part of their job and unsurprisingly this is particularly the case for the sites designed to provide information such as WhatDoTheyKnow and TheyWorkForYou. The numbers using FixMyStreet and WriteToThem for professional reasons is noticeably lower and indicates that these sites are succeeding in attracting people seeking to solve personal or local problems.

Table 11: Reasons for visiting websites

	Personal reasons		Professional reasons		Both	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
TheyWorkForYou	363	71.0	32	6.3	116	22.7
FixMyStreet	195	78.3	6	2.4	48	19.3
WhatDoTheyKnow	90	60.4	14	9.4	45	30.2
WriteToThem	188	71.8	9	3.4	65	24.8
Total	485	74.5	36	5.5	130	20.0

While we don't know the specifics of the personal problem or community issue that prompted them to consult one of the sites, Table 12 provides some clues in that it presents some details of the types of activities people undertook once on the sites. Here we see the most common activities undertaken on the sites were related to accessing information. People were most likely to sign up to receive information or updates from a site via email. Beyond this the type of information they appeared most interested to find was that relating to their MP with over half of users reporting that they had done this at least once. Around one third of respondents had made more active use of the site by sending an email to a public official or reported a problem in their street. Thus while the majority of actions undertaken by people visiting the sites might be considered as quite passive in nature, quite a substantial number involved some interaction or potential interaction with others and mobilization around a problem.

Table 12: Tasks performed on websites

	N	%
Just generally browsing out of interest or curiosity	212	29.7
Reported a problem in or near my street	209	29.3
Made a freedom of information request to a public authority	75	10.5
Sent a message to a public official	225	31.6
Signed up to receive emails or alerts	422	59.2
Looked for information about my representative	362	50.8
Looked for information about a specific topic	220	30.9
Looked for information about a public authority	64	9.0
Browsed to find out about problems reported by others	106	14.9
Browsed to find out about information requested by others	78	10.9
Other uses	53	7.4

Given the significant number of people who were using the sites in a more pro-active manner to resolve personal problems we were then interested to establish how far their attempts had been met with success. Had their action prompted a reaction and had this actually helped to fix the issue at hand? As Table 13 shows the answer is a quite resounding yes on both counts. Around nine in ten people did receive a response in reply to an action they took on the site and for almost all of them the response fully resolved their complaint or problem. This constitutes a very high success rate and suggests that the experience of using mySociety sites is a positive one the leads to practical outcomes of benefit to individuals. What precisely those benefits are is something it is difficult to divine from the figures in our survey. However, fortunately we have supplementary data from our discussion groups to help develop a richer view of users' experiences.

Table 13: Responsiveness to the problems reported by users of mySociety

	N	%
Have you received any response or it was followed up on in some way?		
No	41	11
Yes	332	89
Total	373	100
Did it help you to resolve your issue?		
Not really	10	3
Yes partly	101	30.7
Yes fully	218	66.3
Total	329	100

Online Focus Group Discussion

As expected from the figures reported in Tables 13 above, the views about the mySociety sites that emerged from participants in the online group discussion were largely positive. This was particularly notable when participants were asked about their experience of using the websites and whether these had been useful to resolve issues affecting them personally or their communities. Based on the feedback provided it was possible to identify a certain set of core functions that the sites were seen as particularly useful in performing and that appeared to be very positively regarded by users. One of the strongest and most important of these was their capacity to act as an information dissemination tool. This finding clearly dovetails with the survey results reported above which indicated that one of the main drivers for visiting the sites was to seek out information. The focus groups discussants clearly considered mySociety sites to act as an effective channel to keep them informed on issues of interest.

Again following from the findings of Table 12 the sign-up facility for newsletters and updates was seen as very helpful in that it helped people stay informed on the original issues they were concerned about but also prompted attention to a wide range of issues that then stimulated further searches and also 'offline' discussion, as a participant points out:

"I use the site updates mainly to discover the issues. If something attracts my attention I look into it further and often bring it to the attention of, and discuss with my friends." (id S4927 – Woman, 60)

The information acquired can also be used in a more 'practical' way to resolve issues that affect users directly:

> "(…) the 'WDTK' [WhatDoTheyKnow] site seems to hold great possibilities for giving me facts to help resolve issues that affect me." (id G3803 - Man, 58)

The positive experiences highlighted by participants in the focus groups are not limited to gathering information. Again, in line with our survey findings a second highly useful functionality of the sites is the contacting and reporting tools they make available. These are seen as very helpful in terms of how they simplify the process of reporting and fixing local problems. The information and tools are provided all in one specific space (i.e. the site) which is easily identifiable and readily available to be accessed and utilised. According to the participants this creates an incentive for at least trying to have a say on relevant issues. Also at a more affective level these tools help to make political institutions feel closer and more accessible. In this regard, two participants, among others, describe their positive experiences with both FixMyStreet and WhatDoTheyKnow:

> "I think that FixMyStreet is useful because rather than trawling through local authorities websites to find the different places to report street 'problems', it can be done all in one place." (id R3168 - Woman, 43)

> "FixMyStreet is a useful way to report things without having the hassle of calling the council about something broken every few minutes. WhatDoTheyKnow is another great way of circumventing the phone system and getting through to the right person first time and guiding you through the FOI [Freedom Of Information] process, and saving duplicate requests." (id T6117 - Man, 26)

The ability to make the process of dealing with personal or community issues much faster, simpler and less 'bureaucratic' is not the only advantage highlighted by focus group participants. A third and related functionality that emerged from the discussion was the way in which the sites allowed one to see the range and progress of other issues submitted by fellow citizens. This was typically cited as a welcome feature of FixMyStreet, where one could monitor reports submitted by other users. Seeing the range of concerns raised by others helped to make the experience of using the mysociety sites a less isolated and individualistic experience and enhanced the sense that they were taking action for wider public benefit. The sites thus provided a new space where

people can publicly act to help their local community. For one of the group participants this was instrumental in helping them to build 'a sense of community':

> "I think that seeing problems which others have flagged (and being able to contribute to them too) helps with a sense of community." (id R3168 - Woman, 43)

Another participant commented expanded on this point by referring to the possibility the sites give to increase the levels of information on specific issues, hence empowering citizens and allowing them to 'get together' and take active part in the decisional process:

> "Clearly, any source of information that holds a light to the inner workings of government has to be a good thing. Being able to produce real facts and data always helps to win debates and make points, so sites like yours clearly make it easier to bring together the local community to get behind a project or campaign." (id G3803 - Man, 58)

Thus, in keeping with the findings of our survey it seems that mySociety sites perform a number of important functions. At a basic level they are storehouses and also active channels for providing particularized information that can be used to individually (or collectively) tackle local or personal issues. They also offer a vehicle for helping to resolve particularized problems and finally they create a new space where people can connect to their communities, share their efforts and perhaps find motivation for further (collective or individual) action.

That said, it is clear that while for the most part individuals in the discussion groups were satisfied with the tools and opportunities provided by the mySociety sites, there was a downside if people felt that their efforts had been met with indifference and local authorities had failed to respond in a timely and satisfactory manner. Building on this theme, one of the group participants highlighted the need for the organization to take action to try to engineer a closer link up and connection with the local authorities:

> "I think what you guys do is great, I would love to see more tools to empower people like myself to have a say, I feel like there is also work to be done on existing tools and platforms (…) like Fix My Street that could really benefit from working with councils to get some action going. The inaction makes the service useless... It is only when you see change that people will think the site is useful." (id T6117 - Man, 26)

Another participant confirms that despite the experience of using the online platforms provided by mySociety can be extremely positive, the lack of action from local authorities can significantly undermine this 'sense of efficacy':

> "I was very happy to see action taken quickly after I made the reports on FixMyStreet but was very disappointed that the Councils concerned did not complete the job." (id G6219 – Man, 59)

Findings (III) – The impact of mySociety on its users

In this final section we move from addressing questions about who uses the sites, and how and why they are used, to looking at the impact of the sites on individual users. We should stress that our main focus in judging impact is on understanding individual experiences of the sites and particularly how far interaction with the four sites prompts changes in citizens' levels of awareness, interest and engagement in their local communities and society more generally. To do so we again turn to our survey data focusing particularly on whether any changes can be observed across our two waves.

While there are numerous items that we could use to look for signs of impact below we present two of the more important variables that deal with individuals' perceptions of their competence in understand and influencing politics. The questions, presented previously in figures 1 and 2, probed how complicated people felt that politics was to understand and in addition whether they thought they could influence politics and public affairs. Responses were measured on a 10 point scale in both cases with a higher score on the first variable indicating that the respondent found politics extremely complicated and a higher score on the second indicating that an individual felt they had more influence over politics.

The results reported in figures 1 and 2 above were interesting in that they showed that users of the sites are not necessarily hugely confident in their capacity to understand politics, opting mostly for a mid-level score. However they appeared to be distinctly unconvinced of their ability to influence politicians. As tables 14 and 15 make clear these views do not change a great deal over time and in one case – that of WhatDoTheyKnow - quite interestingly the feeling of being able to have some influence over politics has actually dropped over time. In effect those who have found out more about how politics work appear to be less likely to think they can affect it. Of course it is not clear from these results whether the drop was as a result of using the site and further tests reveal it is actually not a significant fall.

Table 14: Perceived levels of ability to understand politics, first and second waves of survey

	Wave 1	Wave 2
TheyWorkForYou	5.0	5.0
FixMyStreet	5.2	5.3
WhatDoTheyKnow	4.8	4.9
WriteToThem	5.1	4.9
Total	5.0	5.0

Note: the scale of political competence ranges from 0 to 10

Table 15: Perceived levels of influence on politics, first and second waves of survey

	Wave 1	Wave 2
TheyWorkForYou	3.0	2.9
FixMyStreet	2.8	2.8
WhatDoTheyKnow	3.4	3.0
WriteToThem	3.0	3.1
Total	2.9	2.8

Note: the scale of political influence ranges from 0 to 10

Analyses of other items included in the survey, such as levels of political participation or frequency of political discussion about national or international politics and current affairs with family, friends or neighbours, did not result in significant changes between the first and second waves of the survey. This was further confirmed when levels of engagement were explored separately among first-time and frequent users of the mySociety sites: no significant changes during the period were observed.

The lack of any marked change over time among our large N survey respondents is, as we noted at the start of the report, to a certain extent expected. Our scales while they are quite finely calibrated and able to register some change are still quite crude instruments for capturing the marginal but important overtime shifts that may occur for certain individuals after having used the sites.

We can however track these changes through our more in depth study of users conducted through the time diaries. Here we do see some quite notable evidence of a change occurring in site users' attitudes. This is particularly notable in their feelings toward their local community over the course of our research. Figure 6 shows the marked increase among diarists' in the view that they are having a moderate to big impact in making their community a better place. The figures reported are for frequent users of the sites where we see the trend most clearly. For first-time users we see a less clear pattern and our N of 29 makes it difficult to draw meaningful inferences.

What these results appear to show is that those people that are making most use of the mySociety sites are also developing an increasingly stronger level of commitment and involvement in their local community over time. So while the sites may not be mobilizing people from scratch who have no involvement and interest in local affairs, they do appear to help support and reinforce the commitment of those who are active in trying to make a difference.

Figure 6. Percentage of diarists who reported feeling that they have a moderate or big impact in making their communities a better place to live (frequent users).
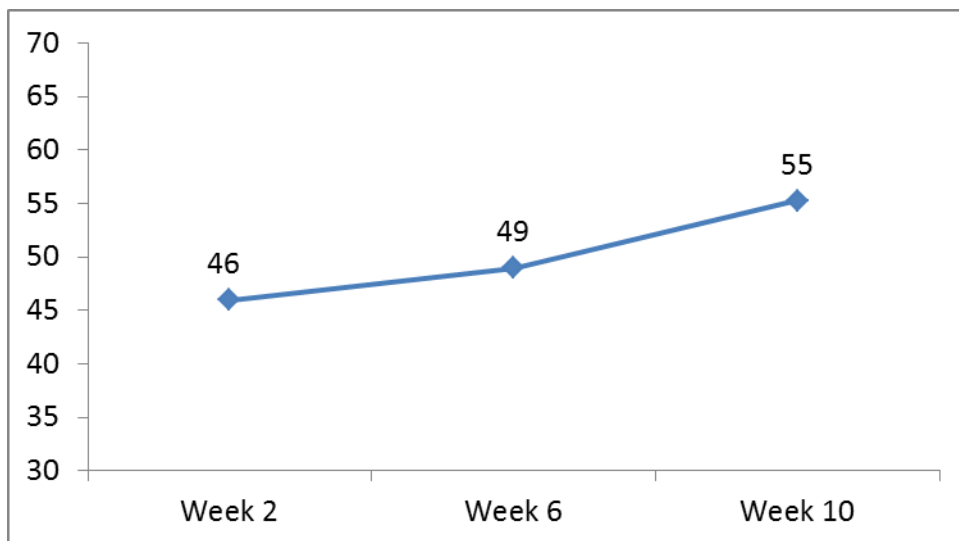
In order to explore further the increases we observed in the diarists' levels of community involvement over time and better understand the dynamics behind it we first looked more closely at the individuals responses in the open ended component of the diary where they were asked to reflect on their personal experiences of bringing change and 'making a difference' in their communities. Here we were interested to hear the reflections of diarists on what motivated them to get involved in community affairs in general, i.e. not necessarily in relation to their use of mySociety sites. What we discovered was something of a virtuous circle operating whereby

increased levels of commitment and a positive connection to one's local area flowed from getting involved in some type of collective action. The 'feel good' factor that people experienced through 'acting together' with others to generate change was clearly a strong motivational force to get involved, as the following diarist noted:

> "People when acting together can have big impact on their community, people power does work as it inspires people to move together and is rewarding at a very deep, emotional level" (id 3643 - Woman, 54, week 2)

While this cooperation may be targeted toward and fostered by some major project or event that requires local mobilization what comes across most strongly from the diarists is how far it is 'low key' regular daily contacts with neighbours and people in the local area that helps build and strengthen a connection with the community. As one diarist puts it:

> " It makes me feel I belong in a place when I meet someone I know walking down the street or on the bus - that sort of community is not necessarily deep enough to offer real mutual support, but at least it makes one feel more human." (id 3207 - Woman, 41, week 2)

Despite being a fairly loose form of connectivity it is clear that these linkages and interactions are crucial developing and sustaining what we might call a 'community-minded' context in which there is a system of informal networks of neighbours and residents that organise events, actions but also to spread information. As the above diarists continues to say:

> "(...) it's a lot easier to organise things where there are existing networks - both because that means there are already community minded people around, and because it provides a means of contacting them." (id 3207 – week 2)

The importance of an opportunity structure to get involved and the role of 'supply' side factors to sustaining a vibrant 'community-minded' context is a theme that recurs in the diarists accounts:

> "Having a shared community space (halls and rooms for use/hire) helps too - both for providing a place to meet and a place where different people go and can find out about what is happening local." (id 3207 – week 2)

Another diarist describes how social interaction between neighbours is encouraged by the presence of a communal garden in the block of flats where she lives:

"In my small community of flats, leadership varies around particular issues. I like to think I am a voice of reason in the spontaneous debates that happen outside our doors. The physical space makes this possible: all our doors open out onto a communal garden and cars are parked away to the side. This makes it a space for social interactions." (id 3643 – Woman, 54, week 10)

In addition to there being adequate 'space' to encourage the growth of a community-minded action it is also clear that individuals play a key role. The need for community 'champions' or entreprenuers to sustain the motivation of others is clearly significant as this diarist points out:

"(…) the evidence is plain that locals can, if organised enough, change their destiny. My wife and I led a very successful community group for 7 years (…). We handed our resignation to the committee, but no one has continued the group. (…) I think the two demons of apathy and opportunity are responsible for many local initiatives never taking off." (id 2554 – Man, 56, week 6)

Overall, therefore, it is clear from our qualitative research that some changes are occurring over time among the users of mySociety sites and these appear to center on (although are not necessarily limited to) their levels of involvement in the local community. To better understand how and why this might be occurring and the role that mySociety may be playing in this process we have examined some of the statements of those who completed a diary across the period of study. This has shown us that the individual level forces motivating people to get involved and help out in one's local community are not based on instrumental or utilitarian desires to procure particularized benefits for one self or one's family. Instead they would appear to be linked closely to self-validation needs and a desire to be part of a larger social entity or quasi 'family' structure even. That said, opportunity structures matter and having effective communication channels and the space to support and engage in these community building activities is vital. Finally and perhaps most importantly, however, beyond individual motivations and relevant external practical infrastructure, a key factor moving people into closer community involvement is whether or not they perceive the presence of a community that is cohesive and receptive to efforts for change. The more palpable this community context for them, then the more they will do to support it.

Having established some of the main internal and external drivers and barriers facing mySociety users in terms of taking a more active role in their local communities, the key question we turn to now is the extent to which the technological infrastructure provided through the mySociety sites can and does play a role in fostering such activity. Here we find again that investigation of the open-ended diary entries provides a further series of important insights into how the sites may be helping to facilitate and cement a circle of increasing levels of community engagement and feelings of efficacy.

Based on our focus group and time diary evidence it is clear that the trigger or catalyst to action on mySociety sites is for the most part designed to advance an individual's particularistic or what we might even regard as 'selfish' interests. This type of participation has been termed as 'parochial activism' in the wider academic literature.[13] The primary rationale motivating such action is to resolve issues that are literally close to 'home' and that directly affect one's material and aesthetic quality of life such as fly-tipping and/or graffiti or potholes in the street. Moreover, these actions are often undertaken in isolation through the website from one's home or residence rather than with others.

Despite this individualistic basis or origins to the action it is clear from the narratives given by those performing them that the motivation for their efforts and repeated attempts is actually conceived and understood in more 'collective' terms. In reporting these problems they are doing so with a strong sense of responsibility towards their community. In the following diary excerpt, for example, the regular use of FixMyStreet in the past year is linked by the diarist to a sense of civic duty:

> "On several days in last couple of weeks, and indeed over last 12 months on a regular basis, I have taken photographs with my mobile phone of the many potholes on our local roads, and submitted them to FixMyStreet. I feel it is important to notify local council of any issues that they are responsible for, especially health and safety, or dangerous road conditions. I think it is the responsibility of citizens to notify higher authorities about problems. It is a shame that more people don't keep the council notified about issues." (id 802 – Man, 52, week 1)

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[13] Verba, S. and Nie, N.H. 1972. *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality.* New York: Harper & Row.

Interestingly, a week later the same diarist describes his efforts to raise "awareness of the mysociety.org website, through mentioning it in conversation with friends and colleagues, and on social media sites" (id 802 – week 2) as his way to have an impact on the community.

Thus, mySociety sites offer a means for people to take action alone on an issue of importance to them, but also allows them to do so in a public forum which imbues the act with a wider sense of collective responsibility. This seems to be particularly the case of Fix My Street. Raising an issue here and having it responded to and dealt with clearly enhances individuals' feelings of individual competence and satisfaction but also perhaps more importantly a gratification is gained from the feeling of making a difference to their local area. This can be seen in the remarks of one diarist who made use of FixMyStreet to tackle graffiti during the course of the study. Her satisfaction at having the problem dealt with clearly extended from her initial feeling of personal reward to one of a broader communal 'good'.

> Week 1: "Contacted Fix my Street website to report several sites in my road that have had graffiti sprayed onto them, to have graffiti removed. Some has been removed in a couple of days after reporting the problem. Felt quite satisfied that I could get these things fixed."

> Week 5: "Contacted Fix my Street to have graffiti removed from fences, BT boxes, walls etc. which was quickly removed, felt good to have some achievement & influence to make area better." (id 3888 – Woman, 55)

The efforts to clear up local problems can have a further 'knock on' effect in that others then follow the example and assist in keeping the problem contained. One example of how an individual effort to report a problem inspired other residents to get involved came to light in a diarists weekly report about fly-posting in their local area:

> "A particular impact has been made by one lady who took on the fly-posters and graffiti artists (sic), got some Council money for anti-graffiti paint, persuaded landlords to allow the frontages of their empty properties to be cleaned up, organised clean-up and painting sessions, and forced the Council to prosecute prolific fly-posters. So, there are a number of us who now, if we see a fly-posted poster in the area (and there are a lot fewer of those than there used to be), simply pull it down and throw it away." (id 6009 – Man, 70, week 10)

While we would not claim from these data that the mySociety sites 'create' activists we would argue that they do help provide a new and important platform or channel that serves to transform or 'convert' private concerns into something that approximates a public 'good'. This conversion

mechanism helps to spark or trigger a more collective outlook and sense of public 'voice' among those undertaking the actions which then further fosters or encourages a commitment to helping in one's local community. This outward spiral of individual to collective action certainly offers one potential explanation for the increasing sense of community efficacy and involvement found among regular users.

Conclusions

This report has presented a uniquely rich and rigorous analysis of the users of four of the main mySociety websites across a three month time period. The combination of 'big picture' survey data with a series of in depth micro-level stories of individuals' experiences has yielded a fascinating insight into what brings people to the sites, what they do when they are there, and what effect (if any) this has on their propensity to engage in wider social, community and political activities.

Overall our findings have clearly underscored the importance and benefits of mySociety sites in that the vast majority of users are clearly satisfied with their experience and many return to use the facilities they offer repeatedly. Despite the positive response to the sites it was not clear from our survey evidence that use of the sites had produced any marked shifts in users' feelings toward governing authorities and their own competence and skills to influence such bodies. Part of this lack of an effect is likely to result from the fact that most of those using the sites already possess a significant level of participatory resources. Moving further up the scale of involvement is thus a rather hard task. Also part of the reason for not detecting impact may rest on the measurement tool itself. Large scale opinion surveys inevitably rely on capturing change quantitatively using bounded scales. As such they struggle to detect subtler but potentially profound changes occurring among a smaller group of individuals using the site.

Interestingly it does appear from our more nuanced individual level diary data and group discussions that more frequent use of the sites may have a wider collective benefit or 'spin off'. In particular it appears that more engagement with the sites is linked to an increase in what we have termed community 'efficacy' - the view that one can help to improve or make a difference to one's local community. The precise way in which this spiral of involvement works is not fully clear. However, based on respondents' account of their growing feelings of mobilization through using the sites we have argued that it may be happening through a shift in perspective whereby what are effectively particularized and personal concerns or complaints are moved onto a public platform and individuals become conscious of their wider collective voice and responsibilities.

Methodologically this study has pioneered a new approach to the analysis of mobilization that has been facilitated through our unique access to users of the mySociety sites. By combining online time diaries of users with more traditional survey tools as noted above we have been able to combine a broad and systematic overview of site users with a much closer over-time analysis

of users' experiences within and outside of the sites, and thus reach a richer and more comprehensive evaluation of the value and importance of these e-participation initiatives at the level of the local community. We hope that our study can provide a benchmark for future research into the effect and impact of the new breed of online resources that sites such as mySociety provide.

Finally we have used our findings to present some ideas for future development of the sites that are likely to enhance the users experience and potentially lead to more individual and wider societal benefits. In particular this involves facilities to better connect mySociety users to one another and allow them to more easily build online and offline communities of action. Through these new communal spaces users can bring to bear the collective spirit and fully exploit the feelings of community efficacy that the sites help to foster.

Appendix:
survey questionnaires (wave 1 & wave 2)

> **FIRST SCREEN:**

This survey is conducted by researchers at the University of Manchester with mySociety as part of a project examining how and why citizens use websites like SITE NAME. The main goal is to improve the users' experience and to help researchers understand whether SITE NAME offers a new way for people to become involved in their communities and in politics. The survey shouldn't take more than 10-15 minutes to complete.

Your individual responses will not be reported as part of the overall findings and never used in a way that could identify you. Further details of how we will manage the data we collect from the project and use it are accessible by clicking here <CLICK THROUGH TO **T&C for Management of Project Data** (see SEPARATE DOCUMENT)>.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Rachel Gibson (Director, Institute for Social Change, University of Manchester)
Tom Steinberg (Director, mySociety)

Contact details (link to another page with contact details - see below*)

Project funded by:

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* "Contact details"

Contact the research team by emailing survey@mysociety.org.uk

If there are any issues regarding this research that you prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Rd., Manchester M13 9PL or by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093

Return to survey (button) or open page in a new tab/window

I agree to participate in this survey and to my data being used according to the terms&conditions set out in the **Management of Project Data**<Click through to **T&C for Management of Project Data** (see SEPARATE DOCUMENT, as above. Add "Return to survey button" to this page or open in a new tab/window)>.

Check box: Yes   No

➢ **SURVEY STARTS:**

1. Thinking of the last time you visited [name of specific website], which of the following statements best describes your experience? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

    a. It was the first time I visited or used the website
    b. I had visited or used the website before
    c. Don't know/Can't remember

2. What was the main purpose of this visit? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

    a. Just generally browsing out of interest or curiosity
    b. Looking for information to deal with a specific or personal issue
    c. Following-up on an issue that I have been dealing with through the website
    d. Other purposes
    e. Don't know/Can't remember

3. How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. A great deal
b. Quite a lot
c. Not much interest
d. No interest at all
e. Don't know

4. Generally speaking, how complicated, if at all, would you say you find politics? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 means 'not at all complicated' and 10 means 'extremely complicated'. Only one choice permitted. Checkbox below the scale is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

Not at all complicated (0), 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, (10) Extremely complicated

(-1) Don't know (check box below the scale – this is exclusive, so either one option is picked in the scale or this box is ticked)

5. On a scale from 0 to 10 where 10 means a great deal of influence and 0 means no influence, how much influence would you say you have on politics and public affairs? Only one choice permitted. Checkbox below the scale is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

No influence (0), 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, (10) A great deal of influence

(-1) Don't know (check box below the scale – this is exclusive, so either one option is picked in the scale or this box is ticked)

6. Some people say that political parties in Britain care what ordinary people think. Others say that political parties in Britain don't care what ordinary people think. Using the scale below, (where 1 means that political parties care about what ordinary people think, and 5 means that they don't care what ordinary people think), where would you place yourself? Only one choice permitted. Checkbox below the scale is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

Parties care about what ordinary people think (1), 2, 3, 4, (5) Parties don't care what ordinary people think

(-1) Don't know (check box below the scale – this is exclusive, so either one option is picked in the scale or this box is ticked)

7. In general, do you think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others? If yes, please can you tell us which party? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. Labour
b. Conservatives
c. Liberal Democrats
d. Scottish National Party (SNP)
e. Plaid Cymru
f. Green Party
g. United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)
h. British National Party (BNP)
i. Another party
j. None/No
k. Don't know

8. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with… Only one choice per row permitted. Checkbox below the table is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

	a. Very satisfied	b. Fairly satisfied	c. Neither/not	d. Fairly dissatisfied	e. Very dissatisfied
...the way **the British government** (in bold) is doing its job?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...the way **your local council** (in bold) is doing its job?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (check box below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

9. Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted or can't you be too careful in dealing with people? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. You can't be too careful in dealing with people
b. Most people can be trusted
c. Don't know

10. There are different ways of trying to improve things in this country or help prevent things from going wrong. Have you ever done or have you considered doing any of the following? Only one choice per row permitted. Checkbox below the table is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

	a. Have done	b. Considered doing	c. Have not done or considered doing
Created or signed a petition in paper or online	☐	☐	☐
Taken part in a lawful public protest/march/demonstration	☐	☐	☐
Refused to buy a product for political/social reasons	☐	☐	☐
Bought a certain product for political/social reasons	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (check box below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

11. Have you ever contacted a public official or politician **using a mySociety website** (in bold) to express your opinion or ask for assistance ... Only one choice per row permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked – check box below the table is exclusive

	a. Yes, more than once	b. Yes, once	c. No, but I have considered it	d. No, I have not done or considered it
… about an issue affecting your local community	☐	☐	☐	☐
… about other issues affecting the country as a whole	☐	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (check box below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

12. And more generally, outside of your use of any of the mySociety websites, have you ever contacted a public official or politician by email, by post or in person to express your opinion or ask for assistance … Only one choice per row permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked – check box below the table is exclusive

	a. Yes	b. No, but I have considered it	c. No, I have not done or considered it
… about an issue affecting your local community	☐	☐	☐
… about other issues affecting the country as a whole	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (check box below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

13. Excluding any of the times you have contacted public officials and politicians, have you ever used social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), blogs or the email to share your own comments or promote content produced by others … Only one choice per row permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked – checkbox below the table is exclusive

	a. Yes	b. No, but I have considered it	c. No, I have not done or considered it
… about an issue affecting your local community	☐	☐	☐
… about other issues affecting the country as a whole	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (checkbox below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

14. Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last British general election in May 2010? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. Yes

b. No
c. I wasn't eligible to vote
d. Don't know/Can't remember

15. In the last twelve months have you been involved with any **online** (in bold) political organisation or activist group other than mySociety (e.g. 38 Degrees, MoveOn.org, political group on Facebook)? Can you tell us how you participated? Please tick as many as apply.
Multiple choices permitted except for option G which is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked.
ONLY IF respondents tick option F, go to question 14.2 below**. If option F is NOT ticked, go to the next question (question 15).

   a. Browsed website or contacted group for information
   b. Registered/ Signed up as a member, supporter or friend
   c. Joined a discussion forum or chat room
   d. Attended 'real world' events, meet-ups or gatherings
   e. Helped promote the organisation on the internet (e.g. posted or forwarded a link, message or other material about the group)
   f. Other (e.g. donated money)
   g. None of the above (exclusive)

QUESTION 14.2 (only if option F ticked in question 14)
You said you have been involved in online communities/groups in other ways than those listed in the previous question. Can you tell us how? [space for answers]

16. In the last twelve months have you been involved with any **online** (in bold) community or group related to health, your hobbies, social or personal interests (e.g. a parenting site like Mumsnet.org, Cancerchat.org or an online craft/DIY/sporting group)? Can you tell us how you participated? Please tick as many as apply.
Multiple choices permitted except for option G which is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked.
ONLY IF respondents tick option F, go to question 15.2 below**. If option F is NOT ticked, go to the next question (question 15).

   a. Browsed website or contacted group for information
   b. Registered/ Signed up as a member, supporter or friend
   c. Joined a discussion forum or chat room
   d. Attended 'real world' events, meet-ups or gatherings
   e. Helped promote the organisation on the internet (e.g. posted or forwarded a link, message or other material about the group)
   f. Other (e.g. donated money)
   g. None of the above (Exclusive)

QUESTION 15.2 (only if option F ticked in question 15)
You said you have been involved in online communities/groups in other ways than those listed in the previous question. Can you tell us how? [space for answers]

17. The groups we just asked about in the last question operate almost entirely or fully on the internet. Beyond these online-based groups we are interested to know if you have

been involved with any other more traditionally run types of community or political organisations over the past twelve months. For each of them, can you say how you participated? Please tick as many as apply.

	Looked for information online or in person	Joined or renewed membership, made a donation	Attended events or meetings	Done some voluntary work
Political party	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trade union	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local charities and community welfare organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐
NGOs and other environmental or humanitarian aid organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐
Religious groups or church organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recreational, social, sports and fitness clubs or societies	☐	☐	☐	☐
Health, weight management and disability support groups	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other community or civic groups	☐	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) None of the above (checkbox below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

18. How frequently do you discuss social and political issues **affecting your local community** (in bold) with family, friends or neighbours? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. Every day,
b. at least once a week,
c. at least once a month,
d. less than once a month,
e. never
f. Don't know

19. And more generally, how frequently do you discuss **about national/international politics and current affairs** (in bold) with family, friends or neighbours? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. Every day,
b. at least once a week,
c. at least once a month,
d. less than once a month,
e. never
f. Don't know

20. People learn what is going on in this country and the world from various sources (e.g. TV, radio, internet, newspapers, or magazines). How often, if at all, do you get information about news and current political affairs? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. Every day
b. Several times a week
c. Once or twice a week
d. Less often
e. Never
f. Don't know

21. What was your age last birthday? Please enter a 2-digit number (e.g. 18). Space for answer (numbers needed). Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

(blank) Don't want to answer (checkbox below the text box – this is exclusive, so either a number is typed in the box or this box is ticked)

22. And are you … One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. female
b. male
c. don't want to answer

23. What is the last type of educational institution (e.g. school, college or university) that you have attended or which type of educational institution are you attending now? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. Primary school or equivalent
b. Secondary school or equivalent
c. Special school or equivalent
d. Sixth form college or equivalent
e. Technical college or equivalent
f. Further Education College
g. Adult Community College
h. University or equivalent
i. other
j. don't want to answer

24. Which of these descriptions best describes your current situation? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. working full time (30 hours a week or more)
b. working part time (8-29 hours a week)
c. retired
d. unemployed
e. permanently sick or disabled
f. in community or military service
g. undergraduate student
h. postgraduate student
i. in full time education (not degree or higher)
j. in part time education (not degree or higher)
k. doing housework, looking after children or other persons
l. none of the above
m. don't want to answer

25. The incomes of households differ a lot in Britain today. Which figures best represent the total income of your household before tax? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

a. up to £12,500
b. £12,501 to £25,000
c. £25,001 to £37,500
d. £37,501 to £50,000
e. £50,001 to £75,000
f. £75,001 to £100,000
g. more than £100,000
h. don't want to answer

26. To which one of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

- White
  - British
  - English
  - Welsh
  - Scottish
  - Irish
  - Other white
- Mixed
  - White and Black Caribbean
  - White and Black African
  - White and Asian
  - Other Mixed
- Asian or Asian British
  - Indian
  - Pakistani
  - Bangladeshi
  - Other Asian
- Black or Black British
  - Caribbean
  - African

- o Other Black
- Chinese
- any other ethnic group
- don't know
- don't want to answer

27. Could you tell us the **first half** (in bold) of your postcode? (e.g. M13 or KA27) Space for answer (numbers and letters needed). Allow to continue to next screen even if NO reply is given

   (blank) Don't want to answer (checkbox below the text box – this is exclusive, so either a number is typed in the box or this box is ticked)

28. Here is a list of tasks that can be performed on the Internet. Some people have done these tasks, while others have not. Which, if any, of these have you done? Please tick as many as apply. Multiple choices permitted except for option H which is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

   a. Wrote a blog post
   b. Purchased a product or service on a website
   c. Logged onto a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google+)
   d. Posted a comment on a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google+)
   e. Posted an audio, video, or image file to the internet
   f. Sent an attachment with an email
   g. Commented on an article or blog post
   h. None of the above (exclusive)

29. Do you have a twitter account? If so would you be willing to provide your username to the research team? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked
   a. No
   b. Yes, but I'd rather not give you my username
   c. Yes, and my username is @_____ Space for answer (max 20 characters)

Privacy note: Your twitter account is requested simply so that we can better understand your use of social media on a daily basis and your interests and activities outside of the scope of the survey that may affect how you perceive/use SITENAME. Your username will not be disclosed to any party outside of the research team and will not be used in any manner that could identify you in any outputs of the project.

- ➢ **LAST SCREEN:**

Thank you very much for completing this survey! Your answers are very valuable to our research.

As well as your use of SITENAME, we would like to know more about your experiences of using the web in your daily life. To do this, we might contact you again to ask you to complete another survey and/or to get involved in other online activities (e.g. take part in an online discussion forum or fill an online diary) about some of the topics covered in this survey.

If you would like to be contacted by our research team again, please, leave your email address in the box below.

Box to write email address

➢ **END OF SURVEY**

> **FIRST SCREEN:**

This survey is the second part of a project being run by researchers at the University of Manchester with mySociety. The project is examining how and why citizens use websites like Fix My Street, TheyWorkForYou, What Do They Know and Write To Them. The main goal is to improve users' experiences and help researchers understand whether these sites offer a new way for people to become involved in their communities and in politics. This second survey shouldn't take more than 10 minutes to complete and is being fielded so we can better understand whether and how you have benefited or not from using the mySociety websites. Some of the questions are repeated from our previous survey which is important for us in measuring change and continuity over time.

Your individual responses will not be reported as part of the overall findings and never used in a way that could identify you. Further details of how we will manage the data we collect from the project and use it are accessible by clicking here <CLICK THROUGH TO **T&C for Management of Project Data** (see SEPARATE DOCUMENT)>.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Rachel Gibson (Director, Institute for Social Change, University of Manchester)
Tom Steinberg (Director, mySociety)

Contact details (link to another page with contact details - see below*)

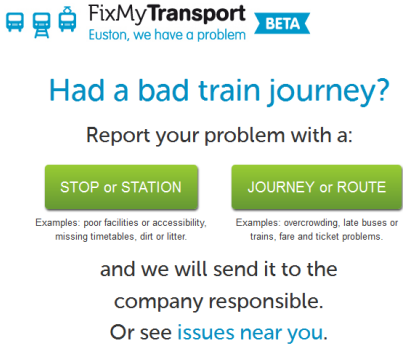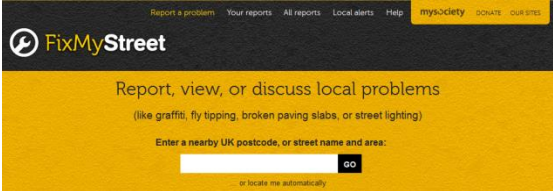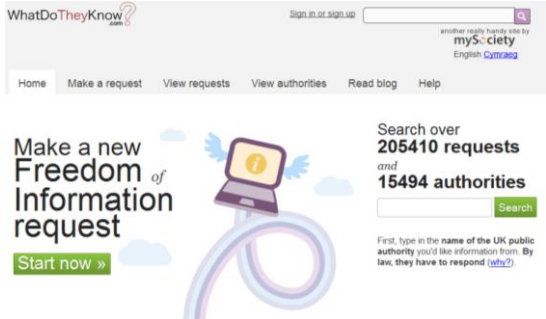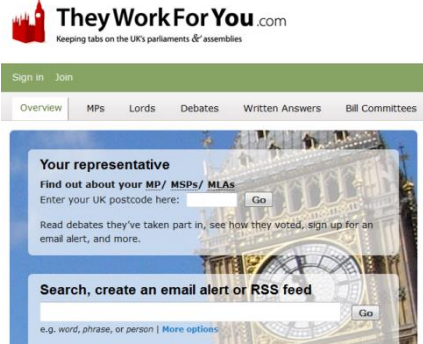*Project funded by:*

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* "Contact details"
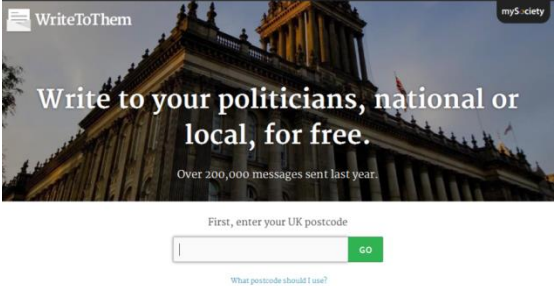
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Return to survey (button)

➢ **SURVEY STARTS**

1. MySociety is a UK-based charity that runs various websites. Could you tell us which of the following websites you have used or visited at least once? Tick all that apply.
   Multiple choices permitted except for option DK which is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked. If option DK is ticked or no option is ticked, skip questions 2 and 3 and go directly to question 4.

 WriteToThem ☐	 FixMyTransport ☐
 FixMyStreet ☐	 WhatDoTheyKnow ☐
 TheyWorkForYou ☐	Don't know/Can't remember ☐ (exclusive)

2. Thinking of the time(s) you have visited these websites, can you tell us whether you did any of the following? Tick all that apply. Multiple choices permitted except for option DK which is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked. Number of items displayed will depend on which websites the respondent has visited (question 1). See separate table showing which items need to be included for each website ticked.

    a. Just generally browsing out of interest or curiosity
    b. Reported a problem in or near my street (e.g. potholes, fly tipping, street lighting, etc.)
    c. Reported a problem with my transport (e.g. bus journey, train station, etc.)
    d. Made a freedom of information request to a public authority
    e. Sent a message to a public official (local councillor, MP, MEP or Lord)
    f. Signed up to receive emails or alerts
    g. Looked for information about my representative
    h. Looked for information about a specific topic
    i. Looked for information about a public authority
    j. Browsed to find out about problems reported by others
    k. Browsed to find out about information requested by others
    l. Other uses
    m. Don't know/Can't remember (exclusive)

2.A FILTER ONLY FOR THOSE WHO TICK AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:
Reported a problem near or in my street
Made a freedom of information request
Sent a message to a public official

You just told us that you took an action using a mySociety website such as requesting information, contacting a politician or reporting a problem. Could you tell us whether you received any response or it was followed up on in some way? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked.
a. Yes
b. No
c. Can't remember

2.B FILTER ONLY FOR THOSE REPLYING YES TO 2.A
Thinking about that response or follow up did it help you to resolve your issue? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked.

a. Yes fully
b. Yes, partly resolved
c. Not really resolved
d. Not resolved at all
e. Still being dealt with

3. In visiting these websites can you tell us whether you did so mostly for personal reasons i.e. to deal with an issue of importance for you, your family or community in your daily life or mostly for professional reasons in that it was helpful to you as part of your job? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked.

    a. I visited the websites mostly for personal reasons
    b. I visited the websites mostly for professional reasons (i.e. as part of my job).

      c.   I visited the websites equally for personal and professional reasons
      d.   Don't know/Can't remember

4. How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

      f.   A great deal
      g. Quite a lot
      h. Not much interest
      i.   No interest at all
      j.   Don't know

5. Generally speaking, how complicated, if at all, would you say you find politics? Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 means 'not at all complicated' and 10 means 'extremely complicated'. Only one choice permitted. Checkbox below the scale is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

Not at all complicated (0), 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, (10) Extremely complicated

(-1) Don't know (check box below the scale – this is exclusive, so either one option is picked in the scale or this box is ticked)

6. On a scale from 0 to 10 where 10 means a great deal of influence and 0 means no influence, how much influence would you say you have on politics and public affairs? Only one choice permitted. Checkbox below the scale is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

No influence (0), 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, (10) A great deal of influence

(-1) Don't know (check box below the scale – this is exclusive, so either one option is picked in the scale or this box is ticked)

7. Some people say that political parties in Britain care what ordinary people think. Others say that political parties in Britain don't care what ordinary people think. Using the scale below, (where 1 means that political parties care about what ordinary people think, and 5 means that they don't care what ordinary people think), where would you place yourself? Only one choice permitted. Checkbox below the scale is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

Parties care about what ordinary people think (1), 2, 3, 4, (5) Parties don't care what ordinary people think

(-1) Don't know (check box below the scale – this is exclusive, so either one option is picked in the scale or this box is ticked)

8. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with… Only one choice per row permitted. Checkbox below the table is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

	a. Very satisfied	b. Fairly satisfied	c. Neither/not	d. Fairly dissatisfied	e. Very dissatisfied
…the way **the British government** (in bold) is doing its job?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
…the way **your local council** (in bold) is doing its job?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (check box below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

9. Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted or can't you be too careful in dealing with people? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

d. You can't be too careful in dealing with people
e. Most people can be trusted
f. Don't know

10. There are different ways of trying to improve things in this country or help prevent things from going wrong. Have you ever done or have you considered doing any of the following? Only one choice per row permitted. Checkbox below the table is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

	a. Have done	b. Considered doing	c. Have not done or considered doing
Created or signed a petition in paper or online	☐	☐	☐
Taken part in a lawful public protest/march/demonstration	☐	☐	☐
Refused to buy a product for political/social reasons	☐	☐	☐
Bought a certain product for political/social reasons	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (check box below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

11. Have you ever contacted a public official or politician **using a mySociety website** (in bold) to express your opinion or ask for assistance … Only one choice per row permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked – check box below the table is exclusive

	a. Yes, more than once	b. Yes, once	c. No, but I have considered it	d. No, I have not done or considered it
… about an issue affecting your local community	☐	☐	☐	☐
… about other issues affecting the country as a whole	☐	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (check box below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

12. And more generally, outside of your use of any of the mySociety websites, have you ever contacted a public official or politician by email, by post or in person to express your opinion or ask for assistance … Only one choice per row permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked – check box below the table is exclusive

	a. Yes	b. No, but I have considered it	c. No, I have not done or considered it
… about an issue affecting your local community	☐	☐	☐
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(0/1) Don't know (check box below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

13. Excluding any of the times you have contacted public officials and politicians, have you ever used social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), blogs or the email to share your own comments or promote content produced by others … Only one choice per row permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked – checkbox below the table is exclusive

	a. Yes	b. No, but I have considered it	c. No, I have not done or considered it
… about an issue affecting your local community	☐	☐	☐
… about other issues affecting the country as a whole	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) Don't know (checkbox below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

14. We know that people don't always vote for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last European election in May? Only one choice permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

e. Yes
f. No
g. I wasn't eligible to vote
h. Don't know/Can't remember

15. In the last twelve months have you been involved with any **online** (in bold) political organisation or activist group other than mySociety (e.g. 38 Degrees, MoveOn.org, political group on Facebook)? Can you tell us how you participated? Please tick as many as apply.
Multiple choices permitted except for option G which is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked.
ONLY IF respondents tick option F, go to question 15.2 below**. If option F is NOT ticked, go to the next question (question 16).

    h. Browsed website or contacted group for information
    i. Registered/ Signed up as a member, supporter or friend
    j. Joined a discussion forum or chat room
    k. Attended 'real world' events, meet-ups or gatherings
    l. Helped promote the organisation on the internet (e.g. posted or forwarded a link, message or other material about the group)
    m. Other (e.g. donated money)
    n. None of the above (exclusive)

**QUESTION 15.2 (only if option F ticked in question 15)
You said you have been involved in online communities/groups in other ways than those listed in the previous question. Can you tell us how? [space for answers]

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16. In the last twelve months have you been involved with any **online** (in bold) community or group related to health, your hobbies, social or personal interests (e.g. a parenting site like Mumsnet.org, Cancerchat.org or an online craft/DIY/sporting group)? Can you tell us how you participated? Please tick as many as apply.
Multiple choices permitted except for option G which is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked.
ONLY IF respondents tick option F, go to question 16.2 below**. If option F is NOT ticked, go to the next question (question 17).

    a. Browsed website or contacted group for information
    b. Registered/ Signed up as a member, supporter or friend
    c. Joined a discussion forum or chat room
    d. Attended 'real world' events, meet-ups or gatherings
    e. Helped promote the organisation on the internet (e.g. posted or forwarded a link, message or other material about the group)
    f. Other (e.g. donated money)
    g. None of the above (Exclusive)

**QUESTION 16.2 (only if option F ticked in question 16)
You said you have been involved in online communities/groups in other ways than those listed in the previous question. Can you tell us how? [space for answers]

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17. The groups we just asked about in the last question operate almost entirely or fully on the internet. Beyond these online-based groups we are interested to know if you have been involved with any other more traditionally run types of community or political organisations over the past twelve months. For each of them, can you say how you participated? Please tick as many as apply.

	Looked for information online or in person	Joined or renewed membership, made a donation	Attended events or meetings	Done some voluntary work
Political party	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trade union	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local charities and community welfare organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐
NGOs and other environmental or humanitarian aid organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐
Religious groups or church organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recreational, social, sports and fitness clubs or societies	☐	☐	☐	☐
Health, weight management and disability support groups	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other community or civic groups	☐	☐	☐	☐

(0/1) None of the above (checkbox below the table – this is exclusive, so either options are picked in the table or this box is ticked)

18. How frequently do you discuss social and political issues **affecting your local community** (in bold) with family, friends or neighbours? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

g. Every day,
h. at least once a week,
i. at least once a month,
j. less than once a month,
k. never
l. Don't know

19. And more generally, how frequently do you discuss **about national/international politics and current affairs** (in bold) with family, friends or neighbours? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

g. Every day,
h. at least once a week,
i. at least once a month,
j. less than once a month,
k. never
l. Don't know

20. People learn what is going on in this country and the world from various sources (e.g. TV, radio, internet, newspapers, or magazines). How often, if at all, do you get information about news and current political affairs? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

g. Every day
h. Several times a week
i. Once or twice a week
j. Less often
k. Never
l. Don't know

21. And how closely did you follow the European election campaign? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

   a. Very closely
   b. fairly closely
   c. not very closely
   d. not closely at all
   e. don't know/can't remember

22. Here is a list of tasks that can be performed on the Internet. Some people have done these tasks, while others have not. Which, if any, of these have you done? Please tick as many as apply. Multiple choices permitted except for option H which is exclusive. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

   i. Written a blog post
   j. Purchased a product or service on a website
   k. Logged onto a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google+)
   l. Posted a comment on a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google+)
   m. Posted an audio, video, or image file to the internet
   n. Sent an attachment with an email
   o. Commented on an article or blog post
   p. None of the above (exclusive)

23. What is your marital status? One choice only permitted. Allow to continue to next screen even if NO box is ticked

   a. Married
   b. Living with a partner
   c. Separated (after being married)

d. Divorced
e. Widowed
f. Single (never married)
g. Don't want to answer

24. How many people are there in your household?

_ _ (2 digits box - allow number from 0 to 20)

(blank) Don't want to answer (checkbox below the digit box – this is exclusive, so either a number is typed in the box or this box is ticked)

25. How many of those are under 18?

_ _ (2 digits box - allow number from 0 to 20)

(blank) Don't want to answer (checkbox below the digit box – this is exclusive, so either a number is typed in the box or this box is ticked)

➢ **LAST SCREEN:**

"Thank you very much for completing this survey! Your answers are very valuable to our research. The research team will present the key findings from the study in a report for mySociety which we can make available to participants if you would like to receive a copy?" Please check the box if you would like to be contacted when the report is publicly available.

➢ **END OF SURVEY**