

Institution: The University of Manchester
Unit of Assessment: 21 (Politics and International Studies)
Title of case study: Experiments to Stimulate Civic Behaviour
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>There is strong policy interest in more effective ways to increase citizen engagement, including time contributions and the donation of goods. Research undertaken at the University of Manchester (UoM) has stimulated debate around localism and the 'Big Society', directly influencing central and local government policy. Specifically, the research has shaped debates on the role of 'nudge' mechanisms in the generation of the 'civic goods' that underpin effective public service delivery, with impact demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, documenting and mobilising civic participation (volunteering and donations) through the use of innovative field experiments, including Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs). Secondly, demonstrating an influence on policymakers through clear illustrations of the rigorous and scalable methodologies that underpin the research.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The project: This case is based upon research conducted within the project 'Rediscovering the Civic and Achieving Better Outcomes in Public Policy' (2007-2010) delivered jointly with the University of Southampton. The project was co-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and the North West Improvement Network (NWIN). Key UoM politics staff include: Professor Peter John (2004-2011, now UCL), Liz Richardson (Senior Lecturer, 2006-) and Dr Sarah Cotterill (2008-, now Research Fellow in biostatistics at UoM). The themes and methodologies covered by this project have been continued within a further ESRC award of ~£500,000 for 'Citizen Contribution to Local Public Services: Field Experiments in Institutions Incorporating Social Information' (2013-2015), with Richardson as Co-I.</p> <p>The background: The research considers how positive civic behaviours leading to 'common goods' might be encouraged, focusing specifically on the different mechanisms of 'active citizenship' that might be employed by policymakers. Similar themes were broached by the previous Labour administration within the Empowerment White Paper 'Communities in Control: Real People Real Power' (2008), and they presage a growing interest by policymakers in softer 'nudge' mechanisms, rather than seeking to influence human behaviour through 'hard' interventions, such as legislation or regulation [D][E].</p> <p>The method: Recognising the reality of these difficult policy choices, the project used a variety of methods, including RCTs, in order to test different mechanisms, and measure their effectiveness in persuading citizens to change civic behaviours and attitudes. In total eight RCTs, two design experiments, and two separate analyses of secondary data were undertaken [E] (with examples in [A][B]). It was notable that whilst RCTs are considered by many policy communities to be the <i>sine qua non</i> of evaluation, they are under-utilised by political scientists based in the UK. Traditionally policymakers have struggled to find the appropriate mechanisms to achieve their policy goals, and it was thus significant that whilst the success of the methods employed rested upon their ability to be taken up and used independently by policymakers, the research also pointed to the need to seek policy outcomes in a local and decentralised manner [C][D].</p> <p>The findings: Shifts in behaviour varied both with reference to the specific method applied, and in terms of the subject matter. For instance: a reminder, accompanied by feedback, encouraged citizens to recycle their waste; the making public of contributions made some citizens more likely to pledge and donate to charity; providing information in the form of a booklet led to a greater willingness to donate organs; and publicising how many other citizens had signed a petition encouraged signing (when the figure was over one million). In line with these findings, it was considered whether it is more effective to nudge citizens towards a desirable outcome by using cues, feedback or social incentives, or even whether it is preferable to provide citizens with an opportunity to think and reflect upon key social problems before action is taken. In addition, survey data revealed that the main drivers for civic action are based on 'positive feelings' for the neighbourhood, rather than social norms or good citizenship <i>per se</i>. The key message emerging from this research is that governments and associated agencies must seek to customise the</p>

messages they convey to citizens in each case, so as to ensure they nudge them towards the desired outcome. The methods showcased provide the basis upon which this customisation can occur, with further refinement possible as the number of experimental interventions increases. The research continues to shape government policy approaches via ‘soft mechanisms’ through which desirable civic behaviours can be encouraged.

3. References to the research (all references available upon request - AUR)

The research has been published in leading journals, with earlier work feeding into a comprehensive monograph [E]. The end-of-grant report was graded ‘outstanding’ by the ESRC.

- [A] (2013) Cotterill, S., John, P. and Richardson, L. “The Impact of a Pledge Request and the Promise of Publicity: A Randomized Controlled Trial of Charitable Donations” *Social Science Quarterly* 94(1) 200-216 doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2012.00896.x
- [B] (2012) Richardson, L. and John, P. “Who Listens to the Grassroots? A Field Experiment on Informational Lobbying in the UK” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 14(4) 595-612 (REF 2014) doi:10.1111/j.1467-856X.2011.00481.x
- [C] (2012) Cotterill, S., Moseley, A. and Richardson, L. ‘Can Nudging Create the Big Society? Experiments in civic behaviour and implications for the voluntary and public sectors’, *Voluntary Sector Review* 3(2) 265-274 doi:10.1332/204080512X649405
- [D] (2011) John, P. with Richardson, L. ‘Nudging Citizens Towards Localism?’ (Brit. Academy London) (AUR)
- [E] (2011) John, P., Cotterill, S., Richardson, L., Moseley, A., Smith, G., Stoker, G. and Wales, C. *Nudge, Nudge, Think, Think: Experimenting with Ways to Change Civic Behaviour*, London: (Bloomsbury Academic: London) (REF 2014) (AUR)

4. Details of the impact

Pathways to impact: The impacts emanating from this research are grounded upon thoroughgoing engagements with policymakers, with specific areas of impact around the **mobilisation of civic participation** and positive action within society, and the development of a robust and demonstrable methodological grounding that has **influenced policymakers** in a range of settings. A number of targeted engagements, from public events to private meetings, have been undertaken with senior politicians and nominated policy leads in the civil service. This has served to stimulate and inform policy debate on the ‘Big Society’ and localism, providing the foundation for research impact. For example:

- **Ministerial (DCLG):** There has been ongoing engagement with Greg Clark MP (former Minister of State for Decentralisation) who wrote the foreword to publication [E] where he notes that: *“from the ‘nudge’ of giving cues and signals, introducing small incentives and harnessing the power of peer pressure, to the ‘think’ of providing people with information and asking them to reflect on the evidence before making choices. This book’s great strength is that it gives practical and tangible examples of the benefits and shortcomings of a variety of different approaches... Adapting to different ways of working will, I suspect, be a steep learning curve for many policy-makers. For the light that it sheds on the path ahead, this book is both timely and welcome.”* Clark has subsequently shared a platform with UoM researchers at a number of events, including the concluding ESRC project event where the final report was presented (23rd June 2010), involving 95 invited attendees – from DCLG, the Cabinet Office, civil society and voluntary organisations, local government and academia. Another occasion was the launch of publication [D] on 16th May 2012 [1].
- **Governmental (DCLG)** Subsequent to two meetings with the Deputy Director (Decentralisation and Neighbourhood Planning) in April 2011 and July 2012, the research has been utilised in the regular policy cycle of DCLG. As the Principal Social Researcher, (Decentralisation and Big Society Directorate) notes: *“The research, alongside the methods it champions are important for DCLG analysts and policy officials in that they point clearly to the kinds of simple messages and approaches that can be conveyed to citizens, through our policy, that will in turn ‘nudge’ individuals towards more civic contributions and further social action at the neighbourhood and local level. The methods and models that emerged from the research have been used in a number of ways within DCLG research and policy formation – they have informed the evidence base underpinning the implementation of our decentralisation and localism policies – including*

Impact case study (REF3b)

our work to encourage more communities to take up opportunities linked to... community rights and neighbourhood planning in their communities. The research has also informed discussions around the development of the neighbourhood community budget pilots... Taken as a whole, this research has been very valuable because it is both conceptually robust and innovative, yet distinctly pragmatic" [1].

- Additionally, the research has fed into **workshops, roundtables and advisory work**, including: involvement in a seminar run by the charity Involve (2009); three seminars at DCLG – ‘Value for Money, Localism and the New Policy Agenda’ (2010), ‘Neighbourhoods and Localism’ (2011), and ‘Decentralisation and Localism’ (2011); an expert contribution to the Commissioners seminar ‘The Role of Law and the Limits of Law’, as part of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Strategic Review (2011); and a Local Government Information Unit ‘Civil Society Innovation Network’ event (2012). It has made specific **contributions to policy**, including: within ‘A National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement’ (2008); and in the House of Lords ‘Science and Technology Select Committee Call for Evidence: Behaviour Change’ (2010). Finally **political parties** have demonstrated an interest; a meeting with the Chair of the Conservative Party Research Department took place in 2011.

It is notable that whilst the research was funded during the previous Labour administration, it was one of the key pieces of research presented to new ministers in the Coalition government within their introductory brief from civil servants. This encouraged policy dialogue across central government, and has strengthened the impacts of the engagements documented below.

Impact 1: Mobilising civic participation: Through the use of RCTs, increases in civic activity could be directly attributed to the research [E]. Specific examples of civic participation, included:

- Encouraging 1,000 Manchester households to make a charitable donation of 7,000 second hand books to children’s libraries in South Africa, through a Manchester-based pledging RCT with the charity Community H.E.A.R.T. Their director recognises that: *“such research is valuable in that it gives direction to activities and ensures valuable resources are not spent on activities that are not effective... The University of Manchester... took us through the whole process which has helped to inform us about our activities regarding the book campaign in particular but also other projects we are involved in” [2].*
- A door-to-door canvassing campaign (6,580 households), in conjunction with Trafford Council and the Greater Manchester recycling social enterprise EMERGE, resulting in extra funding for EMERGE, and the raising of household recycling rates in Old Trafford by 5% [3]. Similarly, feedback cards (9,082 households) in an Oldham RCT raised participation in a food waste recycling scheme by 6% [E].
- Triggering responses from local councillors (18% of 248) across eight local authorities to requests from community lobby groups around issues as diverse as asylum, access to services (including for those with learning difficulties), art programmes for ex-prisoners, and sexual violence.
- Informing public attitudes towards tolerance between social groups, via online deliberative RCTs that considered attitudes towards antisocial youth behaviours, and interracial relationships. Participants were selected via an Ipsos MORI on-line panel, and modest attitude changes were evident in the direction of increased toleration.

The research thus impacted on specific community enterprises and public services. In particular, EMERGE and Community H.E.A.R.T. reaped benefits from ensuing take-up of their services and/or donations, and were further promoted in the marketing of research findings.

Impact 2: Influence on policymakers. The paperback of [E] sold out in four weeks and was re-printed, suggesting the work is reaching a wide audience. It is the 46th best-selling e-book (out of 5,000 in Bloomsbury’s catalogue); more remarkable when it is noted that the book is available free in HTML: *“The Bloomsbury Open edition of the book has had 9567 hits as of July 2013, which places it amongst the five most popular books of our Bloomsbury Open programme to date” [4].* Additionally, a precursor paper to [E], was picked up on (amongst other outlets) the influential blog of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), with

Chief Executive, Matthew Taylor referring to the article as a ‘brilliant paper’ [5]. The research also influenced the publication of ‘The Capital Ambition Guide to Behaviour Change’, which included input from 21 Greater London councils. [6].

Influence on policy-makers is also observed through on-the-record statements. Greg Clark made his first public speech on the ‘Big Society’ at the project conclusion event (23rd June, 2010). In the press release accompanying the speech, he states: *“This research confirms my fundamental belief that people are perfectly willing and able to take the lead in transforming their neighbourhoods; and the more they take pride in the places they live, the more they want to contribute. The old fashioned use of rules, instructions and directions often fails, whereas helping people to do the things they want to succeeds. I welcome the work by Manchester and Southampton Universities - it shows that citizens together can create the Big Society”* [7]. Moreover, in a subsequent letter to John and Richardson he adds: *“I was particularly struck by the important role that recognition and reward can play in encouraging people to take part in civic life and by how vital it is to feel part of a wider social movement... perhaps the most encouraging finding is the observation that in a decentralised setting you can stimulate innovation and get value for money from public services and programmes. However, rest assured I also recognise that this research does not invite government to rest on its laurels. I have taken away with me some clear views emerging from discussion at the event, in particular about what we should be doing differently here at the centre in order to generate the trust and support we need to deliver the Big Society... I look forward to a continuing dialogue with you all as we develop and realise our vision for the Big Society”* [8].

Finally, the Government’s ‘Behavioural Insights Team’ (BIT) – who have been engaging with Professor John in an advisory capacity – have expressed a continuing interest in further understanding the experimental methodologies at the heart of this research, noting that: *“randomised controlled trials of nudges to encourage the payment of court fines, and reduce tax avoidance... showed positive results, and offer insights which, if used more widely, could lead to significant amounts of money being recovered for the taxpayer.”* [9]. BIT cites pilot work undertaken with Manchester City Council (MCC), who confirm that: *“we have deployed the RCT method – again relying on the support of Liz and Professor Peter John – within our work with ‘Troubled Families’ in Wythenshawe and Gorton... part of a wider Government pilot, with the evidence that is being produced, on efficiencies and cost-benefit, assisting MCC in its discussions with partners around the pooling of public sector budgets. This is particularly important in... ensuring that the demand for services is reduced in line with the cuts. This long-term collaboration has led to two key outcomes for MCC. Firstly, it has informed decisions about flagship programmes such as Public Service Reform. Secondly, it has provided an evidence base for specific interventions that we have been considering such as Outreach”* [10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (all claims referenced in the text)

- [1] Testimonial from Researcher, Decentralisation and Big Society Dir., DCLG (23rd July 2013)
- [2] Testimonial from Director, Community H.E.A.R.T. (23rd August 2013)
- [3] (2009) ‘Rediscovering the Civic... Policy Briefings Number 1: Emerge Recycling’ (February)
- [4] Publication statistics from Senior Commissioning Editor, Bloomsbury (Email - 8th July 2013)
- [5] (2009) Matthew Taylor’s Blog ‘Nudge, nudge, think, think’ (8th May); (2010) Kevin Harris’ ‘Neighbourhoods Blog’ & ‘Big Lottery – ‘Pathways to Participation’ Blog (24th June)
- [6] (2010) The London Collaborative ‘The Capital Ambition Guide to Behaviour Change: Revised Edition’ (May) (p.32, *passim*)
- [7] (2010) DCLG Press Release ‘New research shows a nudge helps people develop the tools to build the Big Society’ (23rd June)
- [8] Letter to Peter John from Greg Clark MP (1st July 2010)
- [9] Testimonial from Deputy Director, Behavioural Insights Team, Cabinet Office (2nd September 2013); (2012) Cabinet Office-BIT ‘Applying Behavioural Insights to Reduce Fraud, Error and Debt’ (pp.15, 30-31) & ‘Haynes, L. *et al* ‘Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Public Policy with Randomised Controlled Trials’ (p.24)
- [10] Testimonial from Research Advisor, Manchester City Council (23rd September 2013)