

MyWeb2@Margrove Park



Report on First Phase Findings October 2007

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theDigitalCity
creativity, imagination and daring

Acknowledgements

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Centre for Social and Policy Research

The Centre for Social and Policy Research (CSPR) is based in the School of Social Sciences and Law at the University of Teesside. Directed by Professor Eileen Green, the centre carries out externally funded research, policy evaluation and consultancy. It has an established reputation for delivering external research projects in social exclusion, difference and diversity and also organises regional, national and international events and produces occasional papers. Key research areas include: leisure and culture; employment and labour markets; social aspects of ICTs; risk and safety; women's health; identity and difference.

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Institute of Digital Innovation

Steve Thompson is the University of Teesside's Community Media Coordinator and works with a range of community groups on social inclusion and digital media projects. These groups come collectively under the title of Tees Valley Community Media www.tvcm.co.uk. Some of these groups form the participants in the MyWeb2 project. s.d.thompson@tees.ac.uk.

Tees Valley Community Media

Community Media, led by Steve Thompson, gives individuals and community groups a "voice" they might not otherwise have had. Collectively the Tees Valley groups at www.tvcm.co.uk are known as Tees Valley Community Media (TVCM) Working through a range of funding regimes they are supported by open source software, applications developed at the University of Teesside and other free or inexpensive solutions. The University has shaped open source software to match the needs and demands of each community group and they in turn take ownership of their own content creation.

Social Inclusion Demonstrators (SID)

The Teesside SID project is a partnership between Tees Valley Community Media (University of Teesside) and Destinations, UK online centre in Saltburn. It is one of 20 Social Impact Demonstrators throughout England funded by the University for Industry (UFI). The SID projects were set up to explore the links between social and digital exclusion, and how ICT and the skills to use it can benefit individuals, families, communities and society itself. For more info <http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/9130>.

National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

NIACE exists to encourage more and different adults to engage in learning of all kinds. NIACE's functions include research, development and consultancy; advocacy to inform and influence public policy; information services and dissemination; campaigning for, and

celebrating the achievements of, adult learners. Established in 1921 NIACE is an independent non-governmental organisation, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Its corporate and individual members come from all sectors concerned with learning and include guidance services, trade unions and employers as well as colleges, universities and local authorities. The organisation currently employs 230 staff.

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1. Introduction

Based in the Institute of Digital Innovation and the Centre for Social Policy and Research and in collaboration with NIACE, this pilot project aimed to introduce older people (60+) to web 2.0 activities and undertake research on participant's experiences of and views about community and social media. The project combined qualitative research carried out by Carrie Singleton (CSPR) with action-based community media delivered by Steve Thompson (DC). The project builds on existing work carried out with Margrove Park residents centred on developing a community village website www.margrovepark.com and a media literacy project delivered in partnership with NIACE during Adult Learners Week 2007. In the MyWeb2 project participants have engaged with a web 2.0-based 'intranet' on the village website and set up a computer club in the Village Hall to enhance their media literacy skills. This report documents the early research findings from the project. A second report with further details will be available shortly at www.tvcm.co.uk/docs/myweb2.pdf. A week by week project blog is also available to read at <http://www.tvcm.co.uk/comblogs/index.php/myweb2proj>.

2. Background to MyWeb2

2.1 Project Aims

MyWeb2@MargrovePark is a pilot research and community media project involving residents over the age of sixty living in Margrove Park in Rural East Cleveland. Six dedicated sessions were delivered at the Village Hall together with additional support sessions and a focus group discussion with project participants in October 2007.

Community media aims:

- To run an informal club session from 4–8pm on a Thursday where participants can learn about web 2.0 applications via their village website. This included learning about:

- Basic IT
 - Email
 - Updating the Margrove Park website
 - Using the website to contact us and receive support
 - Images and scanning
- To explore the notion that media literacy can be enhanced through initiatives that promote a relaxed and informal learning environment which responds to community and individual need

Research aims:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot project in enhancing media and web 2.0 literacy for older people through:
 - Participant observation during computer club sessions
 - Interviewing participants about the project and their personal ICT use

2.2 Margrove Park

Margrove Park is a small village in Rural East Cleveland, North East of England, located in the Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council ward of Westworth. Demographics for the village as a unit are difficult to find since it is paired with the neighbouring village of Charltons in the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit Statistics database¹. Nevertheless, looking at the statistics for Margrove Park and Charltons together demonstrates that:

- There is a total population of 539 people
- Approximately 1/5 people are below the age of 16; 3/5 of working age; and 1/5 at retirement age and above
- The population is 100% White-British and White-other

¹ Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit statistics are compiled from a combination of Census 2001 and JSU population, crime, unemployment and educational data.

- There are low levels of unemployment (2.2%) when compared with the surrounding borough of Redcar and Cleveland (3.7%) and Tees Valley region (3.8%)
- 1/5 of the population are in receipt of Department of Work and Pensions Income Benefits
- There are lower crime rates than the national and regional rates (based on rate per 1000 of population)

Margrove Park village is a former mining community. The houses are arranged around and facing the village green (see cover photograph). Most of the housing stock is of a similar size with the exception of a larger property that used to be the foreman's house, located at the top of the hill. The history of the village is important to residents and this is reflected in the activities of the computer club.

2.3 MyWeb2 and the Computer Club

The project took place in Margrove Park Village Hall, which is WIFI enabled. Sessions were informal and tables were arranged in a rectangle facing one another to facilitate a club atmosphere. Laptops were placed on the tables and participants were encouraged to engage in a variety of activities which interested them. The project was led by Steve Thompson, the Community Media Coordinator at the University of Teesside with support and research carried out by Carrie Singleton. As a result of the project, the computer club is continuing to meet and hopes to encourage more members from the village and surrounding area.

3. Research Methods

The research adopted a qualitative approach to data collection to gain rich and in-depth data on participant's views about ICTs and web 2.0 applications and modes of enhancing media literacy for older people. The research involved participation observation on a weekly basis and an end of project focus group. Some parts of the sessions were

videoed with the consent of computer club members. The researcher was actively engaged in the sessions rather than observing from a distance. She provided support to the project coordinator and took part in some of the activities alongside participants. Research and project blogs were completed after each session and the focus group was recorded and transcribed.

4. Project Findings

4.1 Developing the project

The project began in July 2007 and the MyWeb2 domain was purchased to link with the name of the project, which in turn is closely related to YouTube and MySpace. Participants were encouraged to use the village website and Google Apps as a vehicle for expressing self and community identity and place with a view to using the space as a social networking arena. Partners included Destinations in Saltburn through the SID project and NIACE, who worked with Margrove Park residents during adult Learners Week 2007 and produced the report 'Adventures in Media Literacy' available at:

<http://www.tvcm.co.uk/docs/Adventures-in-Media-Lit2May07.pdf>.

The community media coordinator has used and promotes the use of free and open source applications wherever possible for reasons of scalability, sustainability and ease of use. Initially some work had been done with individuals using iGoogle which had been very successful. Although there are some Google detractors, the advantage of using Google relates to the organisation's technological 'muscle' and development power. The community websites used by the coordinator function via an open source content management system, and it was felt that the use of Google apps woven into this would be the most suitable tool. Since many of the potential MyWeb2 partner community groups already have domain names, it was possible to use Google apps to provide e-mail accounts with personalised addresses based on the communities in which the participants reside.

(See http://www.tvcm.co.uk/docs/Digital_Villages.pdf)

During the early stages of the project, Google apps in practice proved difficult to set up, and the community media coordinator spent many hours fine-tuning the applications. Google apps remains the product of choice for this project and the participants generally enjoyed using it, in particular finding new widgets to do things which interested them. However, across the course of the project some changes have been made to the interface, and even though this has resulted in improvements for the participating group, there are still ongoing issues which have confused participants and which require resolution.

Recruiting learners

The second step involved the recruitment of project participants via the currently operational SID project² (details of which are provided at the beginning of the report). The community media coordinator visited the village hall at Margrove Park to talk about the possibility of new workshops. Residents were keen to start, particularly when sessions for older people were mentioned, a description that they said applied to them. Following this meeting, the computer club sessions started in August 2007. The initial plan was to run for 6 weeks with a review at the end.

4.2 Project activities

Week 1

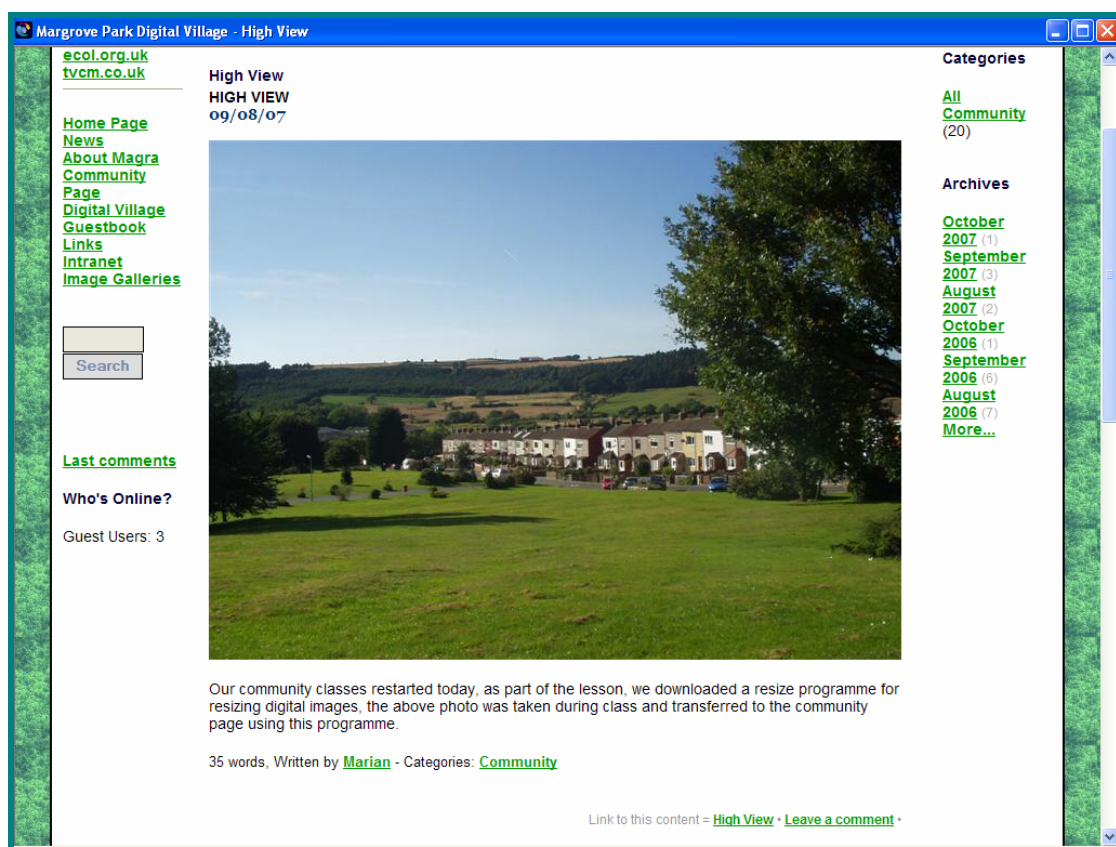
The first week drew in small but enthusiastic numbers. Participants learnt how to download and install free and open source software, including Picassa and spent time downloading and uploading village photographs. Another key aspect of this session was devoted to 'taking control' of the computer and other



² All participants of Myweb2 are counted as outputs for the SID project also.

devices. When participants were shown how to do things in a community environment, which they then repeated in the home, often the outcome was not the same. It would appear that in many cases, supposedly helpful software applications actually made life more difficult for the participant. The project team felt that participants would benefit from a fuller understanding of the architecture of their own machine and associated devices. For example, one participant was shown how to dispense with the software that came with her digital camera in order to use a more effective application for digital imagery.

The main outcome of the first session is demonstrated below:

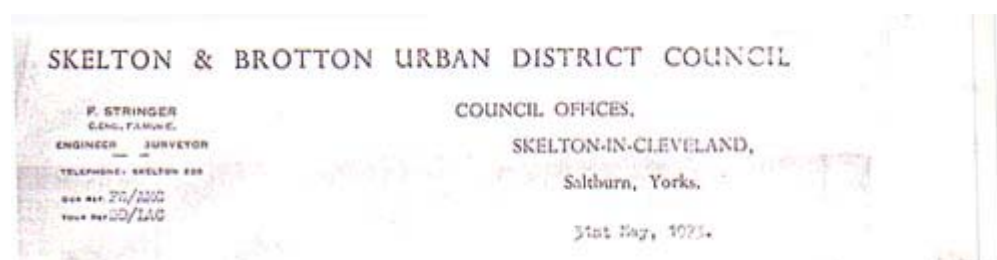


Week 2

In week 2, computer club members created a spreadsheet for the Village Hall finances; looked at YouTube videos; added a story to the website showing how all the houses narrowly escaped demolition (see below); shot video footage using a small hand held video camera that

gave people the idea of a Margrove Park "walkthrough" video; and created the first @margrovepark.com email. All of the tasks were recorded as a 'screencast' so that participants could refer back to the processes that they had learned.

DEMOLITION !
20/09/07



Messrs. Cochrane, Knott and Lewis,
Solicitors,
161/163, Albert Road,
Middlesbrough,
Teesside.
TS1 2PY.

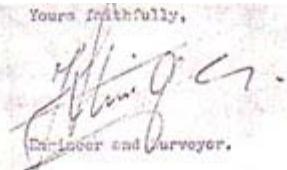
Dear Sirs,

44, Margrove Park, Boosbeck

In 1970 a progressive demolition programme was submitted to the Council by the Public Health Officer and this programme anticipated that all houses in Margrove Park should be cleared between 1980 and 1985. The Council adopted this suggested programme.

Since 1970 strong representation has been made to the Council by the owners of the majority of houses in Margrove Park, seeking an extension of the life expectation. They gave the Council assurance that by taking advantage of the Improvement Grant Scheme they would rehabilitate their properties to such a standard that demolition would not be required during the next 15 years or more. The Council have accepted this assurance and the response from owners has been very good to date.

You will gather from this that the Council cannot insist on improvements being carried out by any particular owner because, at the present time, they are relying on voluntary response and not carrying out a compulsory improvement scheme.

Yours faithfully,

Engineer and Surveyor.

170 words, Written by [Margaret](#) - Categories: [Magra](#)

Week 3

Week 3 saw the development of a poster advertising personalised Margrove Park email accounts:

Margrove Park Email Accounts

Would you like an email address that says who and where you are?

e.g john@margrovepark.com

If you don't already have an email account you can have one of these and we'll show you how to use it. If you already have an email account we can show you how to combine your email accounts.

If you would like an AT Margrove Park email address then simply contact... Marian on [REDACTED]

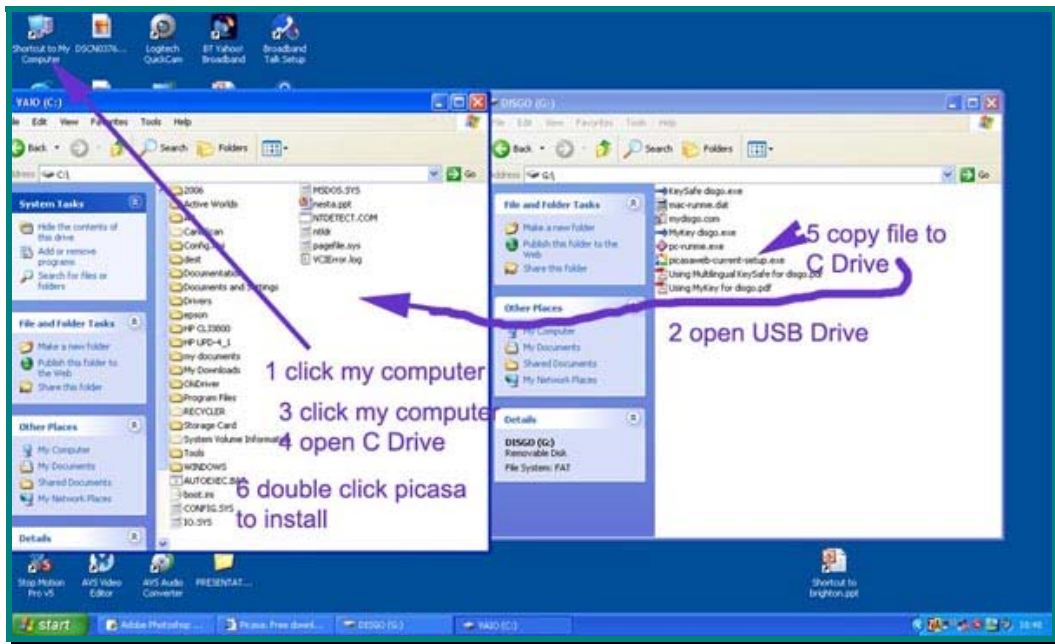


UK online centres

Other activities included: scanning into photoshop / picassa and image manipulation. The group also visited iTunes to find a Moody Blues song and made their first visit to Second Life.

Week 4

In week 4, participants looked at scanning again and the creation of a poster template for village notices. The group also looked at 'overtyping' onto forms using a programme called Form Pilot. Some members of the group asked for this software to be transferred to their USBs to enable them to utilise it at home. There was a recurring problem related to moving files around their PC's and USB's so participants addressed this in the session and were each given a screen grab of the process (see below).



Week 5

Week 5 included learning about Google Apps via the community Intranet and resolving the problem of ‘forgotten’ usernames and passwords for the intranet. In order to facilitate understanding of sharing documents the group collaborated on a limerick and spent time editing and re-editing it.

Week 6

The final session was centred upon sustainability of the computer club. Through links with the SID project, the group have access to Laptops stored in a secure cabinet at the Hall for use in future sessions with remote support through an application called Crossloop and occasional visits from the community media coordinator. The group also wrote a short piece on the workshops, added to the village websites and Second Life was revisited.

Additional visits

Following the final session the team have visited the computer club on several occasions. Below are clubs members at their laptops:



Additions to the village history pages continue through use of Google Apps and plans are in place to create an archive of images and scanned documents. Group members have also been approached for information on the village and its heritage in their visitor book. To date the website has had 1,970 visitors. There are also plans to extend the site to serve the community, for example, by adding job search, council information, NHS Direct and village shopping facilities. In a village that has no shops or post office the provision of services online could lead to the creation of a Digital Village with virtual post office, corner shop, job shop, and schoolhouse.

4.3 Initial research findings

Creating a club environment: an informal learning approach

A reflexive approach was adopted in the workshops. Sessions were informal, 'planned to be unplanned' and flexibly responsive to participant need. This had a number of benefits, including facilitating and maintaining a 'club' atmosphere, reducing potential anxieties related to ICT learning and creating opportunities in which the learners could guide the workshop and bring personal ICT-related concerns to the group for discussion. At the same time, challenges arose particularly related to tendencies for the group to go 'off topic'. Given

the potentially diverse range of queries raised by project participants it was necessary for the tutor to be flexible and to steer the group back to its original aims if needed. Additionally, it was important for that the tutor 'managed' group dynamics to prevent more knowledgeable learners or individuals with particular needs dominating the flow of activities. In this project, the tutor's expertise and experience of community media and group work was an invaluable asset.

Potential challenges for the development of new groups include:

- Possible exclusion of learners from club membership
- Applying similar teaching and learning techniques to larger group settings

Levels of participation

The project recruited low numbers of participants but those who did attend came regularly and are now enthusiastic to continue as members of the computer club. Participants were disappointed that the project did not attract wider membership but efforts are now being made to broaden participation through recruitment of residents from Margrove Park and neighbouring areas. Participants were mostly women and although some men did 'drop in' to the sessions, they did not stay for a long amount of time. Anecdotal evidence from the project participants suggests that the men were concerned about attending because of their lack of ICT skills and fears about being made to look 'foolish'.

Social identity in community-based learning

Project participants welcomed the need for a project which focused on older people. They discussed the importance of shared identity within the group and felt that this promoted cohesion and understanding. However, in spite of the advantages of a project tailored to the needs of these participants, it might be that this contributed to low levels of attendance by others because the club was viewed as exclusive and precluded more diverse membership.

Learning about community media and web 2.0

Although this was the first time that participants had encountered web 2.0, most had good working knowledge of Office, the internet and email. Only one participant had not used computers before and other group members were supportive of her learning needs. The difference in levels of knowledge and skills was not a major barrier to learning since participants worked at their own pace with support from the community media coordinator when needed. In spite of the paper-free environment that was encouraged, participants resisted this and brought notebooks to jot down reminders about how to use different applications.

The community media coordinator was enthused by the wide range of activities that they wanted to engage with and their eagerness for exploring unfamiliar web 2.0 applications. Although the research has not been able to ascertain how comprehensive an understanding of web 2.0 has been gained, it does show that participants have been moving towards greater self-directed learning and confidence to approach new and changing online environments. This also links with their increased ability to 'take control' of devices and software and not be deterred when processes do not go according to plan. This has perhaps in part been a result of the flexible and relaxed environment in which they have engaged with web 2.0 and community media.

Another important feature of this group is the development of ICT 'intermediaries' or mentors. Observation of group dynamics reveals that those participants with higher levels of ICT and media literacy have played a key role in supporting others with lower literacy levels. This has in turn contributed to the friendly environment in which the group has been learning. The research notes demonstrate that the first phase of each session was often devoted to 'trouble-shooting' ICT problems in the home through group discussion. Participants drew upon the knowledge of the community media coordinator and each other to resolve computer-related difficulties. In addition, one particular participant has been a pivotal community figure in relation to generating interest and maintaining the club's momentum.

Participant views on the project

Early analysis shows that participants both enjoyed the project and felt that their media literacy and confidence had increased. They were positive about the teaching and learning approaches adopted by the media coordinator. However, they felt that sessions lasting four hours were too long. (This is because they were originally meant to be drop-in sessions rather than dedicated learning time). The length of sessions has been changed to a more manageable two hours and the time altered to a morning because members were concerned about driving in the dark.

A key issue raised by the group was remembering what they had learnt. Some felt that this became more difficult with age and they valued the 'screencasts' as a memory aid. Although there were technical difficulties with the resulting videos, this would be a useful tool to roll out to other groups once the difficulties have been resolved. A significant advantage of the computer club was the opportunity that it afforded members to discuss issues from other ICT courses that they were attending. The flexibility of the sessions meant that participants could raise queries which had arisen from other courses and learn new approaches which were also compatible with the MyWeb2 project.

Collaborating on village and community heritage

Participants said that the main attraction of the sessions was the focus on village history and stories, reflecting the advantage of grounding ICT learning within people's existing interests. They are keen to contribute to the heritage section of the website and this is an important motivation for the continuation of the club. Participants enjoy researching village history, the creative side of uploading images and narratives and collaborating on ways of representing their village to the wider world. Heritage and community are also themes which, it is hoped, will encourage new community members to participate.

5. Forward Planning

Plans are in place to continue the work in Margrove Park and roll out the project to different communities.

Margrove Park Computer Club will be supported through:

- Remote support for and occasional visits to the computer club
- Assistance with funding applications. The group have recently submitted a funding bid for money to enhance the ICT infrastructure within the village Hall with a view to creating a Digital Village

Other projects similar to MyWeb2@MargrovePark are due to begin in the next few months. The projects will involve a blend of open source and web 2 to achieve what participants need and require. Participating communities will include:

- Brotton: www.brotton.org.uk
- North Skelton: www.northskelton.com
- Friends of Redcar Cemetery, Redcar: www.forcem.co.uk
- Hemlington Family History Club: www.hfhc.co.uk

Currently the friends of Redcar Cemetery are cataloguing graves on their website and using this space to narrate many fascinating stories of the people laid to rest there. Like other groups, they prepared to embrace the technology taking as much as they feel need to achieve their particular aims. Other forthcoming projects include partnerships between schools and libraries; the community and the BBC; and Tees Valley community media.