

Big Data: Public views on the use of private sector data for social research: The UBDC Response

The Urban Big Data Centre (UBDC) believe the public dialogue sessions were very successful in their aim. Through the participation of UBDC Director Prof. Piyushimita (Vonu) Thakuriah, Associate Director Prof. Nick Bailey, and the other Big Data Network 2 (BDN2) Data Centres, there was sufficient expertise and guided discussion around the use of private data from private sector organisations for research purposes, which included a variety of representatives from the general republic.

The findings report summarised the breadth of this discussion and identified key takeaways for the UBDC and other BDN2 Data Centres to reinforce and integrate into future communication and activities.

The main points for consideration to the UBDC are:

- 1. Reassurance from the report that concluded, once properly informed of the BDN2 Data Centres' funding and processes for accessing, managing and sharing private data for social research, it "demonstrated that there is wide public support for the use and re-use of private sector data for social research..." and that "the benefits of using private sector data outweigh the risks for this specific purpose" (pg. 35).**

The UBDC addresses the majority of these concerns in our existing communications and activities. For example, on our website we provide [background](#) on how we are publicly funded, [our aims](#) in addressing global city challenges, and information on how we [safeguard and control](#) private and sensitive data. When speaking with potential users and the general public at events, we communicate this same information. Likewise, we often promote specific examples of using urban data to improve cities through our social media channels (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook).

However, the UBDC could do more to communicate and raise awareness of the **potential benefits** of using data for social science research to the general public as our secondary audience, and do so through a diverse number of channels.

We will consider this as we develop our case studies to show benefit and positive impact on society, and as we continue to develop content for our [blog](#). Jargon-free blog articles on how private data is used for public benefit is a useful channel to communicate this information to



the general public, for example: [If you see something, say something: Big data and public reporting in the 21st Century City.](#)

2. Demonstration that the general public is “generally unaware of the concept of big data and what social research is” (pg. 31).

It was very clear from the report that the general public have a limited understanding of the basic ideas related to the work of the UBDC and other BDN2 Data Centres. Although our primary audiences are researchers and data owners (as identified in our Communications and Impact Plan), this conclusion is important for us to consider as we implement general awareness activities. For example, currently we recently produced two videos available on the [UBDC YouTube Channel](#), which are relevant for a general audience:

- [Data Experts at the City’s Service](#) focuses on the **potential benefits** of using big data for urban research.
- [Building a New Understanding of the City](#) focuses on the data collection process and **potential benefits** of such data from our integrated Multimedia City Data (iMCD) Project.

Additionally, we engage in various events, which promote the positive uses of data to the general public, including co-hosting the recurring [Open Knowledge Foundation](#) Open Data Meet-ups in Glasgow and participating in the Open Data Conference in Edinburgh (via a lightning talk and exhibition stand), hosted by The City of Edinburgh Council.

The UBDC will also work with the other BDN2 Data Centres to ensure consistent messaging around this topic tailored for the general public. For example, we recommend all BDN2 Data Centres develop and maintain the same FAQs tailored to a general audience on our websites and in a co-branded leaflet, and if resources and logistical support are available, produce a video (similar to the [ADRN video](#)), about how we all securely manage data and the potential benefits of using data for social research.

Overall, the UBDC will consider the report’s recommendations on how to improve engagement with the general public, by focusing as much as possible on the **potential benefits** of social research (or impact case studies – once available) and by doing so in plain, jargon-free language through a wide range of channels (events, website, blog articles, email newsletter, social media, and video content). We will put a concerted effort into reinforcing our existing communication and public engagement channels, as well as developing new activities to achieve these aims.