Social software for social change

By Charles Leadbeater

A discussion paper for the Office of Third Sector, July 2007

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Contents

Acknowledgements

1. The social web's democratic potential

The next ten years could open up a huge opportunity to create a new generation of civic organisations and campaigns based on the way the "social web" – the tools, software and business models, including social networking, known as Web 2.0 – allows people to find new ways to organise themselves at scale. That could breathe new life into civic activism, third sector organisations and our flagging public domain. The tools associated with the "social web" do four main things which could together transform our capacity for civic activism.

First, they allow many more people to participate. Tools to create, publish and distribute content – video, pictures, music, text – through blogs and websites are within reach of the average computer user. More people than ever, in theory at least, can contribute to public debate and civic life. Second, the social web allows people with like interests to find one another and connect much more easily, through social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo, but also through search tools and systems for collaborative tagging of information and ideas. Third, under the right circumstances, people can collaborate and coordinate their activities at scale, without requiring much of the top down hierarchy of large organisations: they can raise petitions, organise fundraising and mobilise campaigns. As a result, fourth, large scale collaborations can create quite reliable, robust and complex products ranging from open source computer programmes such as Linux, massively multi player games such as World of Warcraft and compendiums of knowledge such as Wikipedia, the free online encyclopaedia. Similar collaborations could emerge in civic life: in the US Move.on.org, which has spawned sibling organisations around the world, is one example of what might be possible. The rubric of the social web is: contribute, connect, collaborate, create. Usually that is only possible with a fifth ingredient: a core. Most successful social web collaborations develop around a core that has been put in place by an organisation or a small band of pioneers who get a community going.

The emergence of the social web as a way for people to organise, campaign and debate comes at a critical time for the public domain in developed economies. Older forms of political engagement and campaigning are degenerating; new and energetic forms are emerging. The social web will only revive the public domain by unsettling it and many of its inhabitants. That is because the incumbent players of the public domain – political parties and traditional civic organisations – are themselves creatures of the industrial media era – broadcast, print, newspapers – which are being disrupted by the rise of Web 2.0.

Third sector organisations rely on information and media to inform and mobilise supporters and to make their case to the public. They are used to communicating by broadcasting, marketing messages to members, from one to many. Most are ill-equipped to take full advantage of the potential of a social web which relies on peer-to-peer communications and more lateral, dispersed forms of organisation. The kinds of organisations Web 2.0 is breeding – both commercial and social – tend to share some characteristics: they tend to be low cost and rely on high levels of user and community participation to self provide services. Many large third sector organisations are established charities with quite hierarchical forms of organisation.

People care about causes not the organisations that represent them. For the causes espoused by the third sector this might be a time of unprecedented opportunity, a flowering a social activism in many new forms. The social web will create more ways for people to engage with causes, possibly by-passing established voluntary sector organisations. Alongside Amnesty International, for example, a new range of human rights campaigns and organisations might emerge, such as Witness, which helps groups suffering human rights abuse to make and then distribute videos promoting their cause. There could be more time limited, global and collaborative campaigns that are beyond the reach of primarily national voluntary sector organisations, modelled on Make Poverty History. There could also be room for more specific and niche campaigns that might focus on a particular locality or issue, that are too specific for a large NGO to focus upon. In *The Long Tail* Chris Anderson argues there will be many more markets for products with a small but loyal following: millions of products will find micro markets with just a few consumers while only a few products will find mass markets with many millions of consumers. Something similar may happen to the third sector: a growing long tail of social causes. The emergence of these alternative forms of activism will be enlivening but unsettling for more established third sector organisations (just as it is for incumbents in other information and media intensive sectors such as magazines, television and newspapers). Third sector organisations are starting to adapt, for example, using the web to engage supporters in new ways and to raise funds. But they will find themselves collaborating and competing

with new forms of campaigns and social activism emerging out of the social web.

The policy challenge will be to encourage the existing population of third sector organisations to adapt to the social web but also to encourage the emergence of new entrants exploiting these new tools for social activism in new ways. The technology commentator Tim O'Reilly argues the social web depends on "architectures of participation" that make it easy for people to take part, contribute, collaborate and create together, for example through social networks. For social activism the key will be whether campaigning third sector organisations can create architectures of participation to make it easy for people to voice their views, link up with others and take action together. The potential is huge. A computer game with 1m players only needs 1 per cent of them to devote time as player-developers – creating content that is given back to the game – to have a developer workforce of 10,000. Apply the same logic to the voluntary sector, Amnesty International has 1.8m members. If Amnesty persuaded 1 per cent of its members – 18,000 people – to contribute three days' voluntary labour a year, that would be 54,000 days, or the equivalent of 240 extra full time staff. The social web now makes it easier for people to make these informal, voluntary contributions to campaigns where they work together. The question is what kinds of organisations will be ready to exploit this potential?

2. New media, new democracy?

Citizens seem increasingly uninterested by formal politics. Two centuries ago the disenfranchised majority clamoured to be given access to the political process. Now they are leaving in droves. In the 2001 and 2005 British General Elections four out of ten people chose not to vote, rising to six out of ten among 18–25 year olds. The 1997 election recorded the lowest post-war turnout. By 2007 membership of the main political parties was less than a quarter of its level in 1964 and members of political parties make up less than 2 per cent of the voting population. Less than 1 per cent of the electorate say they campaign for a political party. A more individualistic, consumerist culture has eroded the collective identities that mass political parties were based upon. Politics has become less ideological and more personality driven. The institutions of government seem more distant from and insensitive to the intimacy of people's lives and yet less able to protect people from impersonal global forces. People talk of their political representatives as invisible, distant, alien, partisan, arrogant, untrustworthy, irrelevant and disconnected.

A key feature of this public domain is the role played by television and mass media which have provided the information backbone to our public life: that is where issues are debated, politicians and others appeal for our attention and votes. These industrial era media, particularly newspapers and television, have high fixed costs – print plants and television studios – that create high barriers to entry and depend on reaching large mass markets to earn their keep. As a result industrial era media suffers from a number of significant drawbacks as a tool for democratic debate.

Free speech is essential to any democracy. As political theorist Joshua Cohen points out, democracy is based on popular sovereignty that demands free and open discussion among citizens. Restricting speech creates inequalities between those whose speech is allowed and those whose speech is restricted. Those restrictions also impede the free flow of information not just reducing the range of views represented but also eroding the quality of democratic discussion and decision by providing it with less information to work with. Set against these yardsticks industrial era media has a number of shortcomings. It concentrates ownership and so can give undue weight to the views of a few proprietors. News editors can decide which views and voices are to be heard or when a story is important so an issue gets put on the national agenda or when on the contrary it drops off the agenda or never even makes it. Social capital theorist Robert Putnam blames the passive culture of

television in particular for much of the decline in social engagement and civic participation. Television turns citizens into an audience to be targeted with well-honed messages rather than people who can – and even have a responsibility to – engage in debate and efforts to change society. High fixed costs mean that industrial era media needs to reach large audiences with glossy political commercials that require large sums of money to produce. That in turn creates openings for corruption in party funding as parties turn to wealthy donors to fund their mass-market media strategies. That in turn creates a risk that policy will be tailored to the needs of rich donors. The number of people who can have a voice, raise an issue, join in a debate is restricted by the pages in a newspaper, limited airtime and scarce spectrum. Many people may be turning away from a realm of public debate that seems to offer them so few opportunities to voice their views and be heard.

Seen in this light the social web could be good for democracy – providing an alternative information back bone for the public domain – in three main respects:

1. Accountability. Those in power will face more scrutiny and will be more likely to be held to account in a world in which bloggers and citizen journalists armed with camera phones can record their every utterance. The powerful could be forced to be more transparent and so accountable. In the US an incident recorded with a camera phone – a security guard assaulting an Iranian born student – became a national issue. US bloggers have shown they can pursue and even reignite stories that the mainstream media have dropped, such as Trent Lott's racist remarks or John Kerry's remarks about military personnel serving in Iraq. Howard Dean's failed bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004 highlighted the possibilities for grassroots fundraising which organisations such as Moveon.org among others have continued to exploit as an alternative to reliance on large donations from the wealthy.

2. Debate. The social web will give more people a voice in debates, widening the range of issues debated and allowing better deliberation, more considered self governance and collective problem solving.

3. Campaigning. The social web should be good for campaigning by making it easier for people to come together to bring pressure to bear on those in power and to change public opinion by dramatically cutting the costs of mobilising people in campaigns.

When online social networking, campaigning citizen journalism, grassroots organisation and fundraising combine, they could change for the better the way democracy works, by encouraging more people to become participants in public debate and campaigns, shaping decisions about the future of their society. Indeed the social web seems ideally suited to encourage the kind of civic participation people are keen on. The ESRC's Citizen's Audit found that three-quarters of the public engaged in some form of civic political action in the course of a year, and a third engaged in more than five. The Audit found that people's political concerns were as intense as they ever were. Consumerist movements, such as support for Fair Trade products, have grown rapidly in the past two decades, as have campaigns that were often misleadingly referred to as single issue. Membership of Friends of the Earth rose from just over 1,000 in 1971 to more than 119,000 in 2002. Greenpeace went from 30,000 members in 1981 to 221,000 in 2002. Campaigns that have grown tend to have common characteristics, they: appeal to people's sense of identity as consumers as well as citizens; give them something concrete to do; provide them with a sense of belonging, by associating them with people of like values; and provide an alternative way to see how the world should be organised. Often these campaigns and movements have adopted innovative organisational forms: they tend to be more networked, decentralised and bottom up. Third sector organisations have been at the forefront of these campaigns for social change from Drop the Debt to gay rights.

As the formal political realm continues to empty of people, passion and ideas so social campaigning and civic activism have become much more attractive, especially for younger people. This is the setting in which the social web could reshape how civic activism affects our democracy.

This paper focuses on two potentially complementary ways in which the social web might re-energise the public domain: deliberation and mobilisation.

1. Deliberation

Many apostles of e-democracy imagine it will create a world modelled on the theories of German political philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who since the 1980s has argued that free undistorted communication could create the basis for a true democracy. In a "perfect speech situation", Habermas argued, there would be open, rational dialogue and debate. Anyone would be able to raise a topic for conversation, join in and

question the rules for conducting the conversation. Democracy would be a perpetual conversation, Habermas argued, which would encourage more thoughtful dialogue and debate.

Political theorists interested in the web's democratic potential have generally echoed Habermas's hopes. A study of the web in municipal politics in California suggested it would lead to "more thoughtful, civic minded and deliberative patterns of communication." Coleman and Gotze argued the web could "improve the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion." Witschge brings together the arguments of many proponents of deliberative democracy to suggest that online deliberation should provide "quality of participation, discursive equality and following from this diversity of viewpoints and arguments." In the UK context Geoff Mulgan, the Director of the Young Foundation, has argued for more innovation in hosting deliberative conversations "even though it remains unclear which forms work best in terms of delivering good decisions and making people feel engaged. There will also be competition between governments, parties, the media and NGOs as to who is best placed to hold such conversations." Stephen Coleman, Cisco Professor of e-Democracy at the Oxford Internet Institute argues that: "The challenge for contemporary democracy is not to create new technologies for delivering and new audiences for receiving online spin but to develop engaging ways for citizens to connect, interact and make a difference. I call this DIY politics."

Some experiments in e-democracy approximate to Habermas's vision. A study of Minnesota's well developed e-Democracy programme claimed it managed to "stimulate reflexivity, foster respectful listening and participant commitment to ongoing dialogue, achieve open and honest exchange, provide equal opportunity for all voices to be heard and maximise autonomy from state and corporate interests." Some of social web's best known products – Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia created in large part by volunteers, Linux, the open source software programme, and Slashdot, the geek discussion site which gets 3m visits a day – bear out these hopes. They depend on an ethic of responsible self-governance and open debate, in which decision making is transparent and open to account.

The challenge for the third sector will be to adapt these models of mass self governance and collaboration to engage more people in deliberative conversations on policy issues, not

just in response to government policy but independently. Take climate change as an example. The Stern review was commissioned by government: a work of experts, which claimed worldwide attention. But a wide range of other initiatives organised by citizen's groups, such as World Changing, the campaigning website and best selling book, have also had a big impact on public debate. A citizen's deliberation on climate change policy could be organised online by Greenpeace. One challenge for government is to recognise that it should not attempt to host all these conversations and turn them into consultations on policy. This government already consults so widely that many third sector organisations complain of a "consultation fatigue". Democracy will be strengthened only if there is more deliberation independent of government.

2. Mobilisation

Yet improved deliberation is only one way in which democracy might be improved by the social web. The reality is that online debate is often more raucous than face-to-face debates, in part because most of it happens anonymously. Online forums are often more like speakers' corner on steroids than a thoughtful seminar. They are good places for fierce argument and often for equally strong agreement among people of like mind. They are not so often places for shared, reflexive deliberation. However that does not exhaust its democratic potential.

The social web makes it easier for people to connect with other people of like mind to sign petitions, attend rallies, donate money. The main opportunity the social web presents is not to make it easier to debate issues but to mobilise people around a cause on which they have already made up their mind, that seals should not be killed, small arms banned, drugs legalised. It should lower the costs of campaigning and so open up the field to a host of new entrants.

As *Good Campaigning*, a report by the Young Foundation, puts it: "civil society campaigns play a vital and irreplaceable role in building the good society." Geoff Mulgan argues in *Good and Bad Power*: "The history of democracy … is bound up with the histories of social protest and moral persuasion in which social movements have claimed to better represent the interests and spirit of the people than their supposed representatives." Democratic advances have rarely come from reasoned deliberation alone. More often they have come through the mobilisation of many people in protest to force those in power to change tack, often involving a measure of conflict.

Social network campaigning should appeal to a younger generation who are the main participants in these sites and who feel most disconnected from mainstream politics. If social network style campaigning gives young people more of sense of connection with one another, more opportunities to take part in a way they want (not necessarily handing out leaflets or attending meetings) and faster feedback about the impact of their actions, then it could be particularly important for the future of democracy by re-engaging them.

Even when campaigns do not pay off they have wider social benefits. As Martin Vogel of BBC Action Network puts it, people engaged in campaigns: "start to make connections with other people in their community, when previously they didn't even know their neighbours. They work together and build the capabilities of their community to deal with issues. So even if they don't win the campaign at hand they're better able to respond the next time a challenge arises. In short people who take action end up feeling better about their lives and where they live." The more the social web allows people to join together in campaigns, ultra local as well as global, the more they should engage socially and with their communities.

The social web's potential as a platform for mobilisation, especially for those with little access to the mainstream media and its audiences, will pose a dilemma for government. This capacity for self organised campaigning might well play to populist issues. There is no guarantee that it will be used for campaigns in line with government policy. Indeed it is likely to be used to put pressure on government to change its policies. What should the government do – and refrain from doing – to promote the independent capacity of civic organisations to develop new tools for campaigning, when those tools will likely be used to make life more difficult for government?

Deliberation and mobilisation

These two ways to revitalise democracy – deliberation and mobilisation – are not incompatible. Campaigns can put an issue on the public agenda and so create an environment for a more considered policy debate. Deliberation – the Stern review on climate change – can create the evidence and intellectual consensus to mobilise further social change. The third sector and government should search for ways in which deliberation and mobilisation work together, for example,

learning from the success and limitations of the Make Poverty History campaign, in which mass mobilisation created the setting in which a G8 summit considered the future of Africa.

However nor are these two approaches necessarily complementary. Governments and large corporations are often keen on more deliberative and consultative approaches in an effort to win consensus for their policies, divert energy away from campaigns and make their strategies more legitimate by

working with third sector organisations. Many third sector organisations complain the government is already engulfing the sector with consultation exercises that sap resources and energy without securing any influence over policy.

One way of understanding how government and the civic sector might use the social web to promote more deliberative democracy and more social campaigning is set out in the accompanying grid.

	From Government	**In Between**	**From Civil Sector**
Deliberation	Government uses online tools and forums to engage citizens in policy development, increasingly to draw in younger people. E.g. the environmental contract wiki, online planning debates.	Government commissions the third sector to host conversations about shared policy issues, e.g. diabetes dialogue. Third sector persuades government to engage with a consultation/policy dialogue it has launched.	Third sector hosts conversations independently of government, e.g. US energy plan drawn up by participants in Daily Kos, open strategy tools for online multi stakeholder policy development.
Usage	Some already being used.	Limited usage.	Very limited.
Prognosis	More likely to come.	More likely but third sector concerns about cooption.	Complex undertaking but more experiments underway.
Campaigning	Government uses social networking as a direct channel of communication and mobilisation: e.g. neighbourhood watch, peer support for social care, health and education.	Government works with third sector to launch campaigns which change the context for policy deliberation: e.g. Make Poverty History, heart disease campaigns. Social networking allows mobilisation to happen more quickly and reach more people.	Civil society uses social networking and other online and mobile tools to create their own campaigns to change government policy and public opinion: e.g. fuel protests, Greenpeace Ocean Defenders.
Usage	Limited.	Limited.	Growing.
Prognosis	Limited because government will be too clumsy.	Huge potential following apparent success of MPH and Jamie's School Dinners.	Rapid growth ranging from controlled third sector campaigns to populist mass mobilisations.

Dealing with the downsides

As well as exploiting the social web's democratic potential third sector organisations could play a vital role in mitigating some of the possible downsides the social web might have for how we govern ourselves.

Cacophony

As US social theorist Theda Skocpol puts it, more voices do not automatically mean better democratic debate. Critics warn that the cacophony of media by the masses will disorganise, disaggregate and disable the public sphere of democratic debate rather than revitalising it. The clamour of voices needs to be brought together in some reasonably ordered and structured way. One critical role for the civic sector will be to act as independent, trusted guides and moderators to important online debates and so attract audiences to them.

Echo Chambers

Social networks and niche markets allow people to live in their own worlds, choosing to network and debate only with people who share their views. More people could live in an echo chamber: they hear from others a confirmation of what they already think. Instead of more challenge and debate there could be more feverish agreement and prejudice. Democratic debate thrives when people take independent positions on an issue but then argue it out. The social web might mean people with differing views might find themselves even further apart and less in contact. Social networking might be a recipe for growing conformity – group think – in the way people think, a license for populism and prejudice. One critical role for third sector organisations should be as hosts to provide spaces where different points of view can be aired.

Quality

As media markets fragment, in part due to the distractions of blogging, social networks and citizen journalism, the mainstream media may have to become more populist to retain the large audiences they need to fund their high cost business models. That may make it more difficult to fund good journalism and rigorous analysis. A critical role for the third sector will be to uphold standards of quality in public debate, to self regulate as public interest media producers. If more of the means of media production are going to pass into people's homes and workplaces then that will require a much broader culture of self regulation to uphold quality. Third sector organisations could play a vital role as quality leaders.

Equality

The capacity to access and participate in the gilded world of collaborative creativity that Web 2.0 enables is unequally distributed. It requires time, computers and modems. Indeed social networking may simply entrench existing inequalities as people with computers and connections, time and money, make more connections with other people like them. Those already rich in knowledge, information and connections may just get richer and more influential as they network together. A critical role for the third sector should be to give voice to those who will still be without a voice, even in a world where the means of media production are highly distributed.

3. The social web in practice

How well placed is the third sector to take up the democratic and campaigning potential of the social web and address the problems it might cause?

Civic organisations are using the web in three different ways:

■   sustaining innovations in which the third sector uses the social web to do traditional tasks more effectively;
■   disruptive innovations which create new models for the third sector to organise itself;
■   hybrids, in which organisations create a mix of traditional and new ways of working.

These approaches may appeal to quite different forms of participation. One way to understand this is through a distinction made by Henry Jenkins, a media and communications specialist at MIT, between fans and hackers as participants. Fans participate in something created by an organisation or brand: fans of Star Wars, who have made hundreds of feature length homages to the science fiction epic participate in a fable created by Lucas Films; fans of Apple participate in the company's brand and products; fans of bands or football clubs. Fans generally want to participate as part of something that is already organised and may well be part of the mainstream. The sustaining innovations created by third sector organisations are encouraging more people to participate in causes and campaigns as fans providing their time, money and support to the organisation. A prime example is Oxfam's recent "I'm In" campaign, which encourages people to sign up to the campaign using a text message.

'Hackers', on the contrary, like more self governance, they want to participate in creating something that does not necessarily rely on a larger corporate organisation. Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, and Linux, the open source software, are examples of hacker style participation. Hacker projects are a mass form of do-it-yourself. The more disruptive, riskier innovations in civic activism are being created by hackers outside the mainstream of the third sector.

Between these poles – with fans at one end and hackers at the other – lie many different hybrid ways for people to engage and participate. Wikipedia and Linux, for example, are both hacker projects that have accumulated their own fan base.

Sustaining innovations

The campaigning tools available to the third sector have not changed that much since the 19th century: marches, petitions, street protests and publicity. The social web provides third sector organisations with a new way to organise these activities.

Thus we are likely to see more of:

■   Online petitions, such as Jamie Oliver's Feed Me Better. Sending an email at a click of a button is easier than posting a letter.
■   Recruiting, connecting and keeping in touch with members through social networks. Examples include Oxfam's "I'm In" campaign which recruited members through texting. The Genocide Intervention Network in the US grew through social networking on Facebook and MySpace. More campaigns will emerge from social networks.
■   Raising funds through targeting marketing and fundraising initiatives, using email lists.
■   Advocacy to mobilise support, for example by using the web to give voice to stories and accounts from people affected, such as the personal histories of people with paralysis on the Bridges2Hope site in the US or the way Global Voices has expanded the range of blogs from Africa that can be easily accessed.
■   Allowing smaller civic organisations to gain scale by coordinating their efforts, through shared sites and portals. Examples include the Shared Earth cooperation between hundreds of smaller environmental and wildlife NGOs in Washington State and the International Action Network for Small Arms that brings together a host of organisations campaigning against the small arms trade.

Many incumbent third sector organisations are quite sensibly using the web to allow them to do their existing jobs more effectively. However, incumbents are rarely good at exploiting the disruptive potential of new technologies. On the contrary that often comes from low cost, new entrants, that initially operate in the margins. That is why disruptive, hacker innovation will also be vital.

Disruptive innovations

In media, entertainment, software and information the social web has already shown its potential to create low cost ways

for many people to participate and collaborate in forming new organisations. The social web may well lower barriers to entry into campaigning and organisation. Established third sector organisations that have dominated a particular cause or issue may well face new challengers. Most people are interested in causes not the organisations that seek to represent them. It is common for organisations to see their own survival and health as a proxy for the cause or end they serve. But in future potential supporters may have more choice about which kinds of campaigns and organisations they want to get involved in.

Below we focus on examples of how that the social web could disrupt the third sector by creating new kinds of campaigns and organisations.

New quasi-political parties

The traditional distinction between political parties, with an overarching ideology, and single issue campaigns with a tight focus, may be breaking down as new catch-all movements, mainly organised online, reach out to encompass many issues. These new catch call online movements are not political parties but nor are they just single-issue campaigns.

A prime example is the Move.on network in the US, which was born when two internet entrepreneurs circulated a petition against Republican efforts to impeach President Clinton, calling on Congress to instead "move on" to address other issues facing the country. Within a week 100,000 people had signed the online petition. Co-founder Joan Blades said: "We thought it was going to be a flash campaign, that we would help everyone to connect with leadership in all the ways we could figure out and then get back to our regular lives. A half a million people ultimately signed and we somehow never got back."

Starting from that single issue MoveOn began to work with its supporters to campaign on a wider range of civic and progressive issues. Following the 9/11 attacks, a student, Eli Pariser, created a petition for a restrained, multilateral response which drew more than half a million signatures. Shortly afterwards Pariser joined forces with MoveOn.

As of early 2007 MoveOn had more than 3.3m members across the US, with more than 268,000 active volunteers, 700,000 individual donors and just 15 staff. The movement's civic action has blossomed far beyond being a single issue campaign to support an eclectic mix of issues from campaign finance reform

to environmental protection to social security. It helped to block efforts to remove federal funding from National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service.

MoveOn is not just a pressure group. For example, it organised the hosting of more than 30,000 evacuees after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. MoveOn has developed a well tried approach to sending mobilising emails linked to current events, mobilising people to donate money or take action. The funds have helped to buy advertisements in print and broadcast media that generated a wider audience and then a further wave of emails and social networking connections. MoveOn's political action committee, now directed by Pariser, pioneered the raising of small donations online in 2000. MoveOn raised $32m for progressive election candidates in 2004 and in the 2006 congressional elections MoveOn volunteers, working through a distributed phone bank system coordinated by email, made 7m phone calls, hosted 7,500 house parties and ran 6,000 events in target districts.

MoveOn is not a single issue campaign: its concerns range widely. Yet nor is it a political party, a pressure group nor a flash mob. It is a campaigning network that can swing from raising money for favoured candidates, to directly putting pressure on politicians, to taking direct action to supporting people in need. Move.on has spawned a similar effort in Australia, called Get.up, and more recently a global peace campaign Avaaz, which is based in the UK. As yet, however, Britain has no equivalent.

Mobile web campaigns

The wireless internet will soon encompass computers and mobile phones. This matters because mobile phones are diffusing around the world far more quickly than any previous technology, especially in the fast developing world of Asia but also amongst poorer and younger parts of the population of developed economies such as recent immigrants. As a tool for social inclusion the mobile phone is far more powerful than the computer. (Efforts to create the $100, largely self powered laptop may change this.)

In 1991 the ratio of mobile to mainline telephones in the world was 1:34 but by 1995 it was 1:8 and by 2003 mobile phone subscriptions had overtaken mainline subscriptions for the first time: 1,748m mobile lines in 2004, compared with 1,198m mainlines. The number of mobile phone lines per 100 inhabitants globally was 27.75 in 2004, compared with 19.04

for fixed lines. The potential for growth in mobile phone penetration remains huge, especially in the developing world. Penetration rates vary widely around the world from 89 per cent in Singapore to just 4 per cent in India, from 62 per cent in Chile to 0.7 per cent in Cuba, 88 per cent in Bahrain to 13 per cent in Syria. Although the mobile phone is barely established in some countries in Africa – penetration in Burundi is just 1 per cent – the potential is huge. In January 2004, 52m Africans had mobile phones while just 5.8m used email.

The more the social web embraces the mobile phone the bigger its impact on the developing world. The US is the centre for innovation in the PC internet and Web 2.0; but not in mobile phones. Europe and developing economies with high levels of mobile penetration, such as the Philippines, are proving to be some of the most innovative in developing mobile services. The average Filipino mobile phone user sends 2,000 text messages a year. The country's 30m mobile users send 200m messages a day. As of late 2004 only 27m US cell phone subscribers used text regularly.

The rapid spread of mobile communications around the world has created new political possibilities, what Manuel Castells calls "independent channels of autonomous communication person to person." SMS style messaging allows for a potent combination of high volumes of nevertheless highly personalised, peer to peer communication, through tightly knit social networks. This combination of tight social networks and rapid diffusion of messages has huge political potential. Studies of civic action have shown that people are more likely to get involved in political causes – for example the Freedom Rider civil rights activists of the 1960s in the US – if their friends do. A technology that can mobilise friendship networks for political ends thus is potentially very powerful.

One of the first examples of that potential came in the Philippines in January 2001 with People Power II, a popular movement of four days of protests in Manila involving thousands of mobile phone touting demonstrators. People Power II started on 16 January when a committee of senators refused by a single vote to move against the sitting President Estrada who was facing corruption charges. It ended four days later with his removal. Debate, rumour and gossip about Estrada's corruption had started to accumulate from 1998 in a series of online forums and chat rooms. By 2001 there were about 200 websites devoted to the subject and more than 100 email discussion groups. One, E-Lagda.com, collected a

petition with 91,000 signatures demanding Estrada's resignation. That online deliberation provided the backdrop for an extraordinary mobilisation in which thousands of people took to the streets. People Power II showed how mobile phones could be used to mobilise large numbers of people to undertake a specific action at a specific time and place. In four days Filipino mobile users sent an average of 115m messages a day, compared with the then average of 24.7m. At that stage only about 14 per cent of the population had mobile phones. The result of People Power II was that Gloria Arrayo, a Harvard trained economist, was sworn into office. Yet Arrayo was herself hounded from office in 2004 in part thanks to a 17 second long mobile phone ringtone which purported to be a recording of her trying to rig the forthcoming election. The ringtone was downloaded 1m times from the website of Txtpower.org, which has now become a political force in its own right in the Philippines.

Other examples of the power of "mobile politics" include the December 2002 elections in South Korea won by President Roh Moo-Hyun largely thanks to his online supporters' group Nosamo. On the day of the election Nosamo activists sent 800,000 emails to mobile phones urging people to vote. Nosamo continues to play a role in Korean politics not unlike Move.on: it has a structured way to make decisions and wide ranging policy debates. Mobile politics also had a decisive impact on the Spanish elections of March 2004 which came days after the Radical Islamist terrorist bombings of three suburban trains in Madrid, killing 192 people. Soon after the bombings on Thursday, 11 March the then governing party, The Partido Populaire, blamed ETA, the Basque terrorist group, an accusation widely reported without question by the mainstream media. On Friday, 12 March the government organised demonstrations of solidarity against the attacks. However by that stage allegations that the government was manipulating the bombings for its own electoral ends had already started to surface. On Saturday, 13 March criticisms of the government's handling of the crisis started to spread by word of mouth, without central organisation. A text message urging people to congregate outside the PP offices in Madrid for a silent protest began to circulate. That day text message traffic in Spain was 20 per cent up on an average Saturday; on the Sunday it was 40 per cent up. Protests spread from Madrid to Barcelona and eventually to every major Spanish city. On 14 March the PP lost the election.

Mobile campaigns – which grow out of flash mobbing – are starting to affect the US as well. For example, through the U2 Vertigo tour in 2005 Bono each night generated 10,000 mobile messages of support for One Campaign against poverty, asking all his audience to hold up their mobile phones in unison. In 2006 protests against proposed anti immigration legislation prompted a string of smaller, flash mob protests in other cities. As one report from Houston put it: "In a matter of minutes, literally, they can get a crowd to assemble some place within half an hour, of tens of thousands of people, simply by everybody text messaging five people." A newspaper reported from Las Vegas: "In Las Vegas, police and school officials said at least 3,000 students, drawn together by text messages and cell phone calls, left high schools, middle schools and community college after the morning bell."

Civic groups are also experimenting with campaigns organised through mobile networks. In 2005 Greenpeace in Buenos Aires recruited 4,500 "movil activistas" who were contacted by phone to lobby city politicians at critical moments of a debate about waste recycling strategy. In the UK the International Fund for Animal Welfare persuaded 50,000 people to join a text based petition against seal hunting. About 2 per cent of Oxfam members now get text alerts and many have been encouraged to sign up through the "I'm In" campaign.

Successful mobile campaigns seem to share several ingredients.

■ They mainly mobilise a core of existing social networks of friends or voluntary groups as the core.
■ Mobile is often best used in a moment of crisis when speed of response is vital, which is why they are so useful to complement traditional forms of street-based campaigning and protest.
■ These mobilisations work best with a clear call to action, for people to do something specific at a specific time and place.
■ Their success depends on the underlying political culture. For example in China the government has so far clamped down on protests orchestrated by mobile networks. In Japan, one of the most advanced mobile markets in the world, mobile phones play little or no role in politics. The technology alone does not determine what kind of impact it will have on politics.

Mobile social networks are opening up new avenues for autonomous social and political mobilisation independent of mainstream political parties and voluntary organisations. Mobile phones offer a potent mix of vast reach by personalised communications through linked social networks.

And increasingly mobiles are eyes and ears not just ways to distribute messages. The world's largest camera maker is Nokia. Phones will increasingly be used to report on events and share information. Castells et al argue that "the wide availability of individually controlled wireless communication effectively bypasses the mass-media system as a source of information and creates a new form of public space." As we will see in time mobile phones could provide important new social services especially in the developing world.

Collective problem solving

In late July of 2004 cinema goers across the US were treated to advertisements for Halo 2, a science fiction video game which involves a lot of shooting. In the closing few frames of the commercial the eagle eyed could spot the address of a website – www.ilovebees.com – flickering across the screen. Over the next few days thousands of Halo fans found the site, which seemed to belong to an amateur beekeeper called Margaret and had been mysteriously taken over. Her honey-based recipes had been replaced by a list of 210 global positioning system coordinates, each specifying a precise latitude and longitude. Below each set of coordinates was a time. The times were spaced out in four minute intervals over 12 hours. A message warned that "the system was in peril" and an ominous looking clock was counting down to a date which quick calculations showed was 24 August. At the bottom of Margaret's homepage was a single question – "what happened to this page?" – and a link to a blog written by Margaret's niece Dana, who exchanged about a hundred emails with visitors before herself disappearing without explanation.

That was it. No instructions and no rules: just a mystery to solve, a seemingly complex data set and an ominously ticking clock. Over the next four months 600,000 players – mainly college and high school students – set out to solve the mystery of what the coordinates meant. The players in *I Love Bees* did not simply gather, publish and share information. They sifted, sorted and analysed it, collectively, splitting into different teams to pursue different avenues. Eventually on the

basis of that analysis they managed to create a shared theory of what the coordinates meant and so as a result what they should do. (The coordinates were the location of a set of public pay phones. The game ended with thousands of players coordinating to complete tasks set by calls made to the pay phones.) To achieve all that the players created their own websites, communication systems and ways of making decisions. The experience of *I Love Bees* is that when the conditions are right large groups of people can collaborate, in ways that were previously very hard, to define, analyse and solve tricky problems. (Online massively multi player computer games, such as *World of Warcraft*, which has more players than the population of London, have similar features of collaborative problem solving.)

I Love Bees was designed by 42 Entertainment and grew out of the phenomenon of flash mobbing, where groups of people gather in a place, at a set time to undertake an apparently bizarre activity – like dancing in Liverpool St station – coordinated by messages on their mobile phones. In *I Love Bees* that simple idea took on a much more complex life. Over four weeks the game designers fed out clues to the players through hundreds of websites, blogs, thousands of emails and more than 40,000 live MP3 transmissions. The clues were distributed all over the web and all over the globe. That meant players anywhere could have a role. The game's players had to find a way to share evidence with the collective and then devise a way to analyse it together. In the first ten weeks of the game players divided into different groups and made more than 1m message board postings.

If games designers can get thousands of people around the world engaged in collaborating to solve a trivial puzzle then could the same techniques be involved to engage people in defeating bird flu, tackling global warming, keeping a community safe, providing support for disaster victims, borrowing and lending money, conducting political debates, making policy decisions, teaching and learning, designing and making physical products?

One challenge for the third sector will be to translate the power of *I Love Bees* into civic activism. An early sign of what might be possible are the policy discussion groups linked to the *Daily Kos*, a forum that grew out of Howard Dean's campaign, which has developed a sophisticated alternative energy plan for the US and new tools to bring together multiple stakeholders online and offline to shape a policy.

America Speaks, an online activist network, for example, organised a linked discussion between hundreds of displaced New Orleans residents in several US states to discuss plans for rebuilding the city.

Direct action

The social web is not just a tool for campaigning, to put pressure on politicians to change course. It can also mobilise resources directly to address issues. Move.on did not just push for the federal government to provide more help to people left homeless in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina; it helped to organise a people finder service and found temporary homes for 30,000 people. We are likely to see more examples of this kind of direct action: a form of pledge politics in which people either trade or donate resources to those in need.

The Fair Trade movement can trace some of its origins to barter arrangements between coffee growers and developed world buyers. The social web could multiply these kinds of trading and barter networks. One small example is the fledgling US non-profit Kiva.org, which links entrepreneurs in the developing world who need to borrow with personal lenders in the rich world. People can make small pledges – $20–$30 – with others to lend an entrepreneur $2,000 to refurbish a shop. A quite different example is Book Crossing, which aims to turn the whole world into a library by getting people to donate books sitting on their shelves. Book Crossing marks the book which is then left in a public place for anyone to pick up. It then keeps track of the book as it circles around. As of February 2007 it claimed to have 3.7m books in public circulation and 534,000 members, donating and sharing resources in new ways. Shared Strength is a US organisation that allows chefs to donate their time to help cook for the homeless.

The social web can also create resources which allow people to take action themselves. A small example is the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, which has created the first map of the city designed for people looking for soup kitchens and free food and to help providers coordinate their efforts better. New York has 1,200 soup kitchens serving about 1m people daily. In Chicago the Full Circle initiative – funded by the city council with federal support – allows community groups to adapt digital neighbourhood maps to include their own information such as the number of trees or restaurants serving salad or shops selling fresh fruit. Community groups have used this as a resource to mobilise campaigns to improve

the conditions of their neighbourhoods. In Holland the social networking consultancy Villa Kooptich has created an elder care social network in which people agree to look after one another's relatives: a network member in Rotterdam might look in on someone else's elderly parents, while their own parents in Eindhoven are visited by another network member. In the UK Bebo, the social networking site, has launched a Be Cause initiative to help local social networks to come together to campaign on local issues. The BBC's iCan initiative works in a similar way. My Society runs a Pledge Bank which orchestrates people to make pledges for example to clean up parks or donate time to local causes.

One of the most impressive initiatives is the Kenyan M-PESA service which allows mobile phone users to use their mobile phones like a bank account and a debit card for micro payments. A person can credit their account on their phone with their air time providers. That credit can then be cashed out at a shop or transferred to another user. Only 10 per cent of Kenyans have bank accounts. The banking network is limited to urban areas and only 1.3 per cent of Kenyans have access to the Internet. Yet mobile phone coverage extends to 70 per cent of the country and air time can be bought from a wide range of shops. Tens of thousands of people are now using M-PESA to make micro payments. M-PESA was developed as a joint venture funded by the UK's Department for International Development and Vodafone's Kenyan affiliate Safaricom, with partners including Commercial Bank of Africa and Faulu, a micro finance specialist. In South Africa, for example, a third of people without a bank account own a mobile phone.

The potential to use mobile phones and peer to peer networks to enable poorer people in outlying areas to access micro finance, banking and other services – including education and health advice – is very large. Traditional and expensive infrastructures of banks, schools and hospitals may not reach these people for many years but mobile phones could provide a platform for providing them with alternative services.

All these are examples of how the social web can connect people directly to resources to achieve their ends rather than just relying on campaigns and campaigners to exert pressure on politicians and policy-makers. The social web can become a tool not just for campaigning but for direct action, support and even service provision.

Civic activism on the web

As the web itself becomes more important as a part of the public sphere, so actions confined to it will become more important too. Hacktivism is the combination of civil disobedience with the technologies and techniques of computer hackers. Hacktivists believe elites exert control over a society by repressing alternative narratives of resistance and protest, and that what is already true of television will soon become true of the Internet unless elites are challenged directly. One example of Hacktivism is the creation of open source software such as Six/Four and Privaterra to help human rights activists get around firewalls and blocks put in place by authoritarian regimes. Human rights software can allow people to publish material on sites outside their own country without being easily tracked by the authorities.

It may be there will also be a growth of civil disobedience online, for example through denial of service attacks on websites belonging to large organisations, virtual sit-ins, site parodies. Leading Hacktivists include Ricardo Dominques, author of the online manifesto *Digital Zapatismo* and Cult of the Dead Cow's *Hactivismo*. Most but by no means all Hacktivism accords with John Rawls' definition that it is conducted openly, non-violent, conscientiously undertaken and adheres to norms of accountability.

Sceptics doubt with good reason whether the social web will do much to reduce real world inequalities. About 25,000 people a day die from diseases caused by lack of clean water. Providing children with clean water and treatments for diarrhoea would be a revolutionary improvement in the living standards of the poorest. Being able to share MP3 files seems rather trivial in comparison. Improving women's access to education and health may well be the single most effective policy for more equitable development; not giving everyone a social networking profile.

Yet open models for sharing information, knowledge and ideas could help address these inequalities. As Yochai Benkler puts it in *The Wealth of Networks*:

"Information, knowledge and culture are core inputs into human welfare. Agricultural knowledge and biological innovation are central to food security. Medical innovation and access to its fruits are central to living a long and healthy life. Literacy and education are central to individual growth, to democratic self-governance, and to economic capabilities.

Economic growth itself is crucially dependent upon innovation and information. For all these reasons information policy has become a critical element of development policy and the question of how societies attain and distribute human welfare and well-being. Access to knowledge has become central to human development."

Not many people in the poorest countries in the developing world can afford to buy the Encyclopaedia Britannica. But anyone with a computer and a modem can get access to Wikipedia. Open source models of knowledge and information production – like Global Voices – might in themselves be important social and public goods.

Hybrids

The Make Poverty History campaign is the best known example of an attempt to marry sustaining and disruptive innovation in the use of the social web for campaigning ends.

Make Poverty History was backed by a coalition of organisations for a time limited campaign to change policies on debt, trade and aid for Africa. Make Poverty History utilised both old media – television and rock music – and the new media of the web. Mass mobilisation was choreographed to set the context for the policy deliberations at the G8 summit at Gleneagles in July 2006. That linkage provided the point of the mobilisation but also ultimately one of its limitations.

For a while Make Poverty History became ubiquitous. In the UK 4.5m white wristbands were sold: the symbol of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty. About 225,000 people attended the rally on 6 July in Edinburgh. One million people attended concerts for Live 8 and 30m watched on television. In the UK Make Poverty History reached media saturation point, with an awareness score of 87 per cent. Global Call to Action Against Poverty estimated 38m were involved in events in 75 countries.

New media was a more important part of Make Poverty History than previous comparable campaigns. Word spread in part through banner ads that people could put on their own websites. The ads allowed people to click through to the central resources at Make Poverty History. About 53,000 people joined the virtual G8Rally by creating their own avatar and placard and placing themselves in a virtual map of Edinburgh. Overall MPH reached more than 800,000 activists online and 500,000 signed up to an email list. A review by the NCVO and Hansard Society concluded that Make Poverty History was an outstanding example of how to "effectively devolve the distribution of campaign messages to a supporter base." The campaign's online effort worked because it treated people as potential participants and advocates, not just donors.

Yet there were also a number of limitations. The Gleneagles summit gave the campaign a focus but that also meant that after the summit most campaigners were demobilised. The campaign was not designed to leave behind a lasting internet infrastructure of the kind that has sustained Move.on in the US and Nosamo in South Korea. The organisations jointly running the campaign did not create local chapters and give them campaigning tools, like those used by Howard Dean's campaign, perhaps for fear of losing control. The terms of the coalition meant that all but 30,000 emails on the central mailing list had to be destroyed under data protection clauses. The opportunity to create a massive web linked constituency in support of global anti poverty movement was missed in part because the organisations that made up the campaign did not want to create a competitor to them.

4. Conclusions

The social web could help to revitalise the public democratic domain by:

■ giving more people more of voice, extending freedom of speech and allowing a wider range of issues to be raised for public debates.

■ creating forums in which people can come together to deliberate and debate public issues.

■ amplifying people's voices by making it easier to mobilise campaigns.

■ creating new ways for people to collaborate to address problems directly, not just through influencing government or international institutions.

This could particularly benefit those kept at the margins of formal political debate or who feel disconnected from it. The social web may be a way to draw young people into politics and campaigning, for example.

However, some important qualifications need to be borne in mind. Technology does not determine politics. Japanese consumers are technology rich and adept but the spread of the Internet and sophisticated mobile services seems to have had little or no impact on politics. Even where technology has changed politics – the mobile phone orchestrated public protests in the Philippines – that has not change society's power structure. The Philippines is still governed by a rich minority, albeit one that is now accountable to the population in a new way. More freedom of speech does not guarantee better democracy: it depends how it is organised. If people use this technology just to talk to people who already share their views in tight social networks and discussion groups, they will find themselves in ideological echo chambers: hearing their own prejudices confirmed back to them. This will tend to reinforce and entrench existing political divides rather than bridge them. On the other hand, more voices could mean more cacophony, rather than improved deliberation, if people just talk past one another.

The general challenge for policy makers – and society at large – is how to use the potential of the social web to maximise its democratic dividend and minimise these downsides.

1. Keep it open

Given the enormous potential contribution the social web could make, regulators must keep open enough space for these new collaborative forms of activity to emerge. The future of public service media in this more participative age will thus be vital: the BBC, created as a broadcasting service, could become a platform for mass participation, the centrepiece of Britain's cultural and media commons. Ofcom, the media regulator, is exploring the possibility of a Public Service Publisher to fund public service media in new ways. We would need to consider policies that would encourage digital citizenship and literacy, ensuring people have access to and skills to take part in democratic life that will be played out, part of the time, online. However, the most basic policy is for media regulators to resist efforts by incumbents to control or privatise the social web in ways that would limits its social and democratic potential. The web must be kept open to all for its democratic potential to be realised.

2. A web savvy third sector

The third sector is often quite a capable but conservative user of digital tools. There are more support and advice organisations such as Advocacy Online and Projectivity to help organisations plan their online strategies. Action Aid has created a kind of MySpace for fundraisers to share ideas. (Unlimited is considering a similar initiative and the Office of the Third Sector is developing an online innovation exchange.) Friends of the Earth has a tool that makes it easy for someone to fill in a Freedom of Information request. Greenpeace's Ocean Defender campaign encourages people to sign up to a petition and to share their campaigning ideas. NGOs have used the technology to launch collaborative and time limited campaigns, for example against proposed changes to the Freedom of Information Act. In the Autumn of 2007 a group of organisations including Friends of the Earth, the Woodland Trust, the Ramblers Association and the Campaign for the National Trust launched an e-campaign in opposition to proposed changes to legislation governing planning applications. At about the same time Help the Aged launched its Change Lives Now campaign with the slogan: click to change aid policy, click to change lives.

Third sector organisations show a growing interest in using wikis, social networks, podcasts and online forums for debate. But thus far there has been less action. Overall the UK civic sector is lagging behind innovation in the US. As an NCVO report on the future of campaigning with participatory media put it: "Given the obvious fit between such technologies and the values and approaches of the VCS we may question why their uptake has not been wider."

One reason is that campaigning skills and funds are in short supply especially for smaller NGOs that make up the bulk of organisations in the voluntary sector. Some established organisations feel threatened by the disruptive force of the web, fearing they may lose control of their members and their brands. Many fear that involving members too much may overload them or open the organisation up to risks – of libel or loss of reputation. The UK does not have, as the US does, large numbers of venture philanthropists who have made their money from technology keen to promote social ventures using new technologies.

The most obvious steps the government could take to help the sector exploit the potential of the social web include:

■   Promote learning from innovations in the US and elsewhere, including a possible International Web2.0 for social change conference to raise the awareness of the British third sector.
■   Help to provide some shared resources and platforms that all third sector organisations could draw upon – a web campaigning platform and toolkit, for example. Encourage the social sector to learn from trends in the private sector to share resources.
■   Create an organisation comparable to NetSquared in the US, a collaborative community designed to foster innovation in technology empowered social change through blogging, case studies, meet ups, conferences and open source web tools.

The Charity Commission could look at whether its regulations would stand in the way of more fluid web based campaigns emerging and sustaining themselves. Social web campaigning may raise issues relating to the Charity Commission's guidance on political campaigning by charities: what falls inside and outside that definition.

3. Look for disruptive innovations that count

As yet there has been little or no disruptive innovation in campaigning from within the UK, apart from the use of mobile phone networks in the highly effective fuel tax protests of 2001 and the Countryside Alliance demonstrations. It is far from clear what role the government can and should play in fostering disruptive innovation. But government could encourage other funders – such as NESTA, the Young Foundation and the NCVO – to explore this potential. Disruptive innovations in this area

may make life for government more uncomfortable. It should resist the inclination to close them down.

The social web could spawn a new generation of social enterprises based on social networking and peer-to-peer exchange. A good example is the embryonic *School of Everything* incubated by the Young Foundation, which is creating a way for people with informal skills to offer training and teaching to those wishing to pick them up. At an international level DfID's joint venture with Vodafone to create M-PESA has created a new model for mobile phone based micro credit services.

4. Make it easier for campaigns to connect with Government

Government could provide information in a way that makes it easy for social campaigners to use, including, for example, public information that might be "mashed-up" with maps and other data. This might particularly apply at the local level, combined with the government's policy of double devolution to push more decision making to communities and neighbourhoods. This will increase the demand for locally relevant information as the basis for local campaigns and activism.

The government should explore more systematically how it could work with the third sector in joint-ventures which combine campaigning and policy deliberation. One example is the joint venture with Diabetes UK in a diabetes dialogue. Another example is how the lessons of Make Poverty History and Jamie's School Dinners could be applied to a campaign on child poverty. Government and the third sector need to find ways to collaborate on issues of shared importance that does not put at risk the third's sector's independence. One way forward will be the greater use of independent public deliberation to frame issues that then become the subject of joint campaigns so that both government and the third sector start from the same point rather than the campaign implementing government policy.

The government and the third sector need to become more adept at understanding how mobile technologies can be used to create personalised but mass campaigns, for instance over health, the environment and education. Evidence suggests that campaigns using mobile phones can mobilise large numbers of people so long as there is a clear call to action that comes from a friend.

5. Think global

Britain should promote global campaigns such as Make Poverty History using Web2.0 technologies. The stance the UK takes will have an impact on the possibilities of social action elsewhere in the world.

As Pippa Norris argues in the *Democratic Phoenix*, an account of the rise of social movements and single issue politics: "The many-to-many and one-to-many characteristics of the Internet multiply manifold the access points for publicity and information in the political system. The global dimension of the Web facilitates transnational movements transcending the boundaries of the nation state. The linkage capacity strengthens alliances and coalitions. Moreover…the values that pervade many transnational advocacy networks seem highly conducive to the irreverent, egalitarian and libertarian character of cyber-culture."

Britain's approach could include the promotion of Open Source software designed for use by human rights activists around the world and support for global knowledge banks, that might be a resource for social campaigners.

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