

FIXMYZURICH



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FixMyStreet goes Swiss

It's known for being one of the cleanest and most efficient cities on earth – but even Zürich suffers from potholes and graffiti.

Zürich's residents can now report infrastructure faults via their city council's own dedicated installation of the FixMyStreet platform: [*Züri wie neu*](#), which translates as 'Zürich: Good As New'.

For Zürich, it's a new online channel for its infrastructure reports. Meanwhile, for mySociety it's further proof that our platform can be adapted to any jurisdiction, language, and geography.

We spoke to GIS Project Managers Tobias Brunner and André Graf about the process of installation, and whether or not the launch has been a success.

- **More about FixMyStreet for Councils:**
www.mysociety.org/services/fixmystreet-for-councils

FixMyZurich

FIXMYSTREET GOES SWISS

How it all began

“The project came about as the result of a government competition,” explains Tobias. “Through the eZürich vision, they solicited ideas that would help the city use ICT (Information and Communications Technology).

“FixMyZürich, as the idea was initially presented, was one of the top three suggestions. It clearly matched the competition’s stated aims of increasing transparency and modernising communication channels. Plus there was a strong likelihood that it would also increase civic participation and improve the image of the council – wins all round.”

But Switzerland has a reputation throughout the world for being spotless and efficient – and could Zürich, which ranks second in the world for high standard of living, really have any problems to report?

There was definitely a fear that the service would barely be used. Only after launch would they see whether that fear was justified.

Why FixMyStreet?

Prior to this, Zürich didn't have an online channel for infrastructure fault reporting: citizens had to use phone, email, or even fax if they wanted to tell the council about a problem in their community. So it was high time for modernisation. eZürich's winning entry had mentioned the UK platform FixMyStreet, and so Zürich was well aware of mySociety's custom software.

They assessed other systems. But a number of factors led to the decision to go with FixMyStreet, rather than either buying a different option, or building a system themselves.

Firstly, says Tobias, "It's simple! And after the design revamp, it looks stunning." And then, "mySociety was able to adapt the software to our specific needs, which is very customer-friendly." And finally, "mySociety has a lot of experience in the field, which also persuaded senior council decision-makers."

Adapting to Zürich's needs

To complicate matters, each department had its own incident management system – and in fact they still do. In order to get the pilot scheme up and running, Züri wie neu has had to be a standalone system,

although eventually the dots will be connected and a unified system will be introduced.



Anyone familiar with the original version of FixMyStreet will immediately notice one big difference with Züri wie neu – the maps. They’re satellite, unlike the Ordnance Survey maps that our UK users know and love.

“People are used to Google Maps,” says Tobias. “We have nice orthophotos [aerial photographs that are geometrically corrected to show uniform distances]. This way, people can view more details, like trees or landmarks, and therefore will hopefully be able to better locate their problem”.

There are less obvious differences, too. For example, users of the original UK FixMyStreet are required to confirm their reports by clicking on an email link. In Zürich, not so. In fact, all reports are verified on the council side: “We didn’t want to let any reports slip by!” That’s admirable commitment.

Installation

With mySociety in one country, and our clients in another, there was always going to be a degree of collaboration from a distance. For mySociety, this isn't so unusual: many of us work from home habitually, and we have all the tools in place for co-coding, shared documentation, and instant communication.

All the same, there were several additional keys to making sure the process went smoothly:

“A lot of email contact and feedback. Feedback from mySociety was really swift – way faster than what we're used to from Swiss companies!”

And it was invaluable that there were two face to face meetings at crucial points in the development process. Here's how it went, according to Tobias:

“First, a lot of talk with council members and other responsible people. Then, even more talks!”

“After that, we provided firm requirements for mySociety to implement. There was a lot of testing throughout. And we provided detailed feedback to mySociety about each implementation sprint.”

The process was not entirely without challenges: for example, we needed to build the accompanying app from scratch, which of course added to development time. And Tobias reckons that another face to face meeting would have been useful, especially as regards the app.

Launch

Züri wie neu attracted a real blaze of publicity – clearly, this was an idea whose time had come in Switzerland.

“The media went crazy. Every newspaper in Zürich reported the story. Even European television picked it up. Even now, a month after the launch, the media is still covering us”.

Results

Of course, the outcomes are the important part. We saw at the beginning that Zürich’s main aim was to increase transparency and modernise communication channels. We are sure that all councils are also keen to cut costs and increase efficiency.

In the first month after launch, there were 600–900 reports. Zürich’s population is approximately 400,000: comparable to Reading in the UK, and somewhere between Leicester and Bristol. Zürich’s report rate is way in excess of what we see in any of those cities – but it’s early days for this project, and we expect the number of reports to settle down somewhat as the launch publicity subsides.

It’s interesting to hear that Tobias and André reckon the users of the website are ‘new customers’ – people who never would have been in touch before. You can argue whether that creates extra work, or increases efficiency as more faults are reported that would never previously have been fixed.

Meanwhile, feedback from Zürich residents has been overwhelmingly positive. Zürich council themselves are pleased: their next step is to look into adapting the FixMyStreet system so that it can be used by internal departments too, and, significantly, they are in discussion with other councils across Switzerland.

The final analysis

Would André and Tobias recommend FixMyStreet to other councils, including those abroad?

“mySociety were great. They were always very kind, and they brought a large amount of input from their previous experience. We’d definitely recommend them.

“Working in different countries turned out not to be a problem – so long as someone in your organisation speaks English. But I would definitely say that meetings are vital.

“As an extra plus point, you also gain knowledge about English culture – comic shops, real ale, all that sort of thing!”

We’re not going to guarantee a crash course in comics and beer, but we can promise a street fault reporting system that will suit your needs.

[Get in touch](#) to find out more.

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