ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
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GREEN LIGHT FOR E-POLICY: HELPING POLITICIANS TO MAKE BETTER DECISIONS WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS

The European project is coordinated by the University of Bologna and will receive €2.6 million funding from the European Commission.

Increasingly, citizens seek to contribute to the creation of public policies using blogs and social networks (a process which is sometimes called "we-gov"). At the same time, policy makers are making complex decisions, which concern citizens, by evaluating a large number of variables and constraints - including environmental, economic and social impacts, and other factors which are affected by their choices. The ePOLICY project (Engineering the Policy Making Life Cycle) aims to create a decision support system for regional planning and its social, economic and environmental impact assessment. Launched on 1st October 2011, the project is coordinated by Professor Michela Milano of the Department of Electronics, Computer Sciences and Systems at the University of Bologna, Italy and involves nine partners from five European countries, who met recently in Bologna to officially launch the project.

With funding from the European Commission of €2.6 million and at a total cost of €3.2 million, ePOLICY will extensively use artificial intelligence techniques to engineer the policy-making life cycle: from game theory to opinion mining, and from agent-based simulation to visual analytics and decision support systems. This is an unprecedented multi-disciplinary effort to combine techniques that have previously been used in isolation. Thanks to the integration of the competencies of a consortium of information technology experts, social scientists, local authorities and SMEs, it will be possible to build a system that can be used by politicians and understood by citizens.

ePOLICY aims to integrate the regional planning process with strategic environmental assessment. Currently these two activities are kept separate, risking the discovery of real impacts once plans are implemented. This limits the potential benefits of the assessment and requires corrective measures to reduce the negative impacts of wrong decisions made during the construction of the plan. Embedding impact assessment into the decision-making procedure enables policy makers to evaluate different scenarios along with their potential impacts and produce better plans, by discarding a whole series of incompatible choices from the start.

In addition, the ePOLICY project will create a support system for decision-making in which regional "global" objectives, such as energy production from renewable sources or the reduction of polluting emissions will be integrated with "individual" objectives that aim to improve the quality of life and the environment that we live in. The individual vision will be created through "opinion mining", which involves "digging" among the opinions of people using social networks, blogs and forums on the specific political issue underlying the regional plan. This will ensure improved social participation and the definition of transparent politics which take into account their impact on society.

At the end of the project, politicians will have access to a user-friendly, integrated system able to create and evaluate highly optimised alternative plan scenarios from which they will be able to choose.

e-POLICY is not only about theory. The project intends to apply the project results to a practical case: the regional planning of the Emilia Romagna Region in Italy, one of the partners together with Aster, the Consortium that brings together the region, local research institutes and business associations.

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For further details please see our website at

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http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/index_en.htm