

E-CITIJENS

Civil Protection Emergency
DSS based on CITizen Journalism
to ENhance Safety
of Adriatic Basin



**LESSONS LEARNED
FROM A SUCCESSFUL
AWARENESS RAISING
CAMPAIGN ABOUT RISKS
IN THE ITALY-CROATIA
CROSS-BORDER
COOPERATION AREA**

#EDSS

AUMENTARE LA SICUREZZA ATTRAVERSO L'USO DI STRUMENTI BASATI SUI SOCIAL MEDIA

Deliverable «Publications e opuscoli», WP 2 Attività di Comunicazione.

Attività 2.2 Relazioni coi media, materiali di promozione stampati e pubblicazioni.

Partner incaricato del coordinamento del WP: Euroregione Adriatico Ionica (PP7).

Partner responsabile della pubblicazione: Euroregione Adriatico Ionica, Regione Molise (LP), Contea di Spalato e Dalmazia, Regione Veneto, Comune di Pescara, Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Rurale della Contea di Zara, Citta di Dubrovnik.

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Questa pubblicazione è stata prodotta nel mese di Giugno 2022.

Titolo del progetto: Civil Protection Emergency DSS based on CITizen Journalism to ENhance Safety of the Adriatic Basin

Acronimo: E-CITIJENS

Fonte di finanziamento: Programma di cooperazione transfrontaliera Interreg V-A Italia-Croazia 2014 - 2020

Call: Call 2017 Standard

Asse Prioritario: Sicurezza e resilienza

Obiettivo specifico: 2.2 Aumentare la sicurezza dell'area di Programma da calamità naturali ed antropiche

ID di progetto: 10187823

Durata: 01.01.2019 – 30.06.2022

Budget totale: 2.846.100,00 €

Fondo Europeo di Sviluppo Regionale (FESR): 2.419.185,00€

Partnenariato

Capofila: Regione Molise (IT)
Partner: P1 Contea di Spalato e Dalmazia (HR)
P2 Regione Veneto (IT)
P3 Università di Spalato (HR)
P4 EuRelations GEIE (IT)
P5 Università di Bologna (IT)
P6 Comune di Pescara (IT)
P7 Euroregione Adriatico Ionica (HR)
P8 Agenzia di Sviluppo Rurale della Contea di Zara (HR)
P10 Città di Dubrovnik (HR)

Project communication channels:

www.italy-croatia.eu/web/e-citijens

Facebook - Twitter - LinkedIn - YouTube

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Overall objective

The objective of the E-CITIJENS project is to increase the safety of the Croatian and Italian Adriatic basin from natural and man-made disasters by enhancing Civil Protection's capacity at reducing disaster risk through an innovative emergency management system capable of harnessing the potential of social media networks

Specific objectives:

- equip the Civil Protection with an advanced and efficient Emergency Decision Support System (EDSS), based on a semantically enriched web platform integrating institutional data sources, local sensors and real-time updates voluntarily provided by citizens via the social media (citizen journalism)
- raising citizens' awareness of their role of «active sensors», while stimulating them towards a responsible use of social media during emergencies
- harmonise the Civil Protection Regulatory System in Italy and Croatia by identifying similarities and differences, critical issues to be dealt with, and by developing common technology-based operational models

E-CITIJENS main activities:

- A scientific analysis of current risk scenarios, emergency management legislation and social media applications to model a «social media based» Civil Protection emergency management system in three target risk categories: *floods, forest fires, earthquakes*
- Developing, testing and releasing a «social media based» Emergency Decision Support System (EDSS) platform also through 6 pilot deployments, simulations and exercises, aimed at assessing available methodologies, monitoring systems and technical knowledge across the cooperation area
- A Citizenship Awareness Raising Campaign targeting 150.000 people through a sustained programme of events including 12 Info Days and 30 Work Cafes, and participation in several international conferences in order to reach out to the widest scientific and civil protection community

- Definition of an Emergency Services Regulatory Framework and final Adoption Plan by directly involving local/regional elected members and public officials as well as representatives of civil protection and other emergency structures in 6 capacity building workshops

Main project outputs:

- A «social media based» Emergency Decision Support System (EDSS) platform, a Civil Protection Emergency System Model and a Cross-border Functional Centre, representing operational instruments to ameliorate the efficiency of emergency management
- A Citizens Participatory Awareness Raising Framework and a Cross-border Emergency Services Regulatory Framework, representing permanent guidelines for future actions and measures

BACKGROUND

Enhancing safety and resilience to natural and man-made disasters through **innovative and participatory** solutions was the underlying priority of the E-CITIJENS project with a view to easing Civil Protection in managing risks in Italy and Croatia also by including real-time, place-based information voluntarily provided by citizens through their social media profiles.

To this end, during the course of the project, a Citizens Awareness Raising Campaign (CARC) was implemented by a group of partners led by the **Adriatic Ionian Euroregion**, partner in charge of communication, and composed of the **Split and Dalmatia County**, the **Veneto Region**, the **Pescara Municipality**, the **Agency for Rural Development of the Zadar County**, the **City of Dubrovnik** and the **Molise Region** (LP).

The group developed a methodological framework for the campaign that is available at the project's website www.italy-croatia.eu/web/e-citijens.

OBJECTIVE

The Campaign's main **objective** was to stimulate a participatory process by activating a selected subgroups of population as "**active sensors**" of emergencies and improving their knowledge of risks (forest fires, floods and earthquakes) with a view to influencing their attitudes and behaviour, especially by paying attention to the responsible use of social media during emergencies.

The campaign was in fact designed to make citizens aware that the information they make available through social media posting can be integral part of civil protection risk prevention and monitoring operations and crisis management (**citizen journalism**).

TARGET GROUPS

The **target group** of the action included not only citizens (children, school-age youths, adults) but also a number of stakeholders, including civil protection volunteers and crisis management associations. Target groups were stimulated to understand the positive impact of cross-border cooperation between Italian and Croatian public authorities in charge of risk management in improving prevention, monitoring and management capacities.

By participating in the campaign, Croatian and Italian citizens got the opportunity to interact with emergency structures in their area and from partners' area, to better understand their work and how to responsibly cooperate with them when

posting information about emergencies on social media. The events were occasions to illustrate the project's objectives, activities and products as well as to involve stakeholders in the assessment of main products based on their opinions and previous experiences.

The participation of relevant stakeholders (firefighters, police, Red Cross, county office for civil protection, port authorities, etc.) was also crucial to the success of the campaign. Stakeholders were able to contribute with suggestions, comments, ideas that had direct impact of the project and the achievement of its deliverables, accompanying the various stages of development, assessment and adoption of a "social media based" Emergency Decision Support System (EDSS) and its Adoption Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CARC

The CARC begun to be implemented in 2020 and unfolded throughout project duration. The work group met periodically to plan and implement a number of local activities including:

- ◆ **12 Info Days** presenting the crucial role of civil protection and mainly focusing on raising awareness about risk communication via social media can play in improving the promptness and effectiveness of emergency operations;
- ◆ **30 Work Cafés** letting local emergency management structures (and supporting organisations) and local communities discuss and assess the EDSS;
- ◆ **6 Pilot deployments** through the participation of civil protection actors and the active involvement of citizens in testing the EDSS platform during simulated **simulations and field exercises**.

These activities provided a deep understanding of the role of emergency communication as applied to social media and, consequently, helped to enhance target groups' awareness about the difficulties that may emerge if emergency decision-making was based on untrustworthy information.

Target groups were targeted with a bulk of ad hoc **communication tools and materials** that were created to be easily accessible and available online (e.g. official webpage of the project, official social media profiles and partners' official communication channels). These included:

- ◆ more than **36** press releases
- ◆ web communication and constant content sharing on 4 social media Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube
- ◆ **5** newsletters
- ◆ project's promotional materials (brochure, poster, roll-up, folder, pens and other giveaways) produced in three languages (Italian, Croatian and English)
- ◆ **6** videos, cinemagraphs and infographics
- ◆ **6** thematic publications

Such tools and materials were developed with a view to stimulate the interest of target groups. Created with a coherent brand identity, in compliance with programme's requirements and visibility rules, they provide clear and relatable information about the issues of civil protection, civil protection cooperation across Italy and Croatia, innovative tools for emergency management across the borders and the centrality of citizens in the EDSS.

FOCUS

As the project image recalls, the CARC put a particular focus was put on emergency communication via the social media.

For almost 20 years now social media have been used in crisis management. The Haiti earthquake of 2010, the Ebola crisis of 2014, the UK floods of 2019, as well as the current Covid-19 crisis all provide examples of **risk communication happening through the social media.**

Social media are used by governments, emergency respondents and non-governmental organisations to disseminate early warnings, monitor situational awareness and in relief operations. Also, affected population increasingly use their social media profiles to communicate during emergencies.

With 3.2 billion people currently using social media and 91% accessing them via mobile devices, it is quite crucial to understand how to exploit the incredible potential of these technologies in an effective way to improve prevention, monitoring and management capacities. Many challenges in fact can be triggered by incorrectness, inaccuracy, insufficiency or obsolescence of information.

In order to solve this puzzle, the E-CITIJENS project created the first Emergency Decision Support System (EDSS) platform in the cross-border area capable to process data extracted from social media and thus support a more accurate, prompt and effective decision-making. The platform systematically searches such kind of data and analyses them against information collected through sensors and emergency institutions. For a greater accuracy and consistency, the platform relies on a taxonomy including mainly standard language but also local slangs and/or narrative used by young people like abbreviations or short versions of words. The final assessment of the reliability of social media-based information is however left to civil protection workers.

Tools and materials were enriched with the following elements:

Slogan Increasing safety in the Adriatic basin through social media-based tools

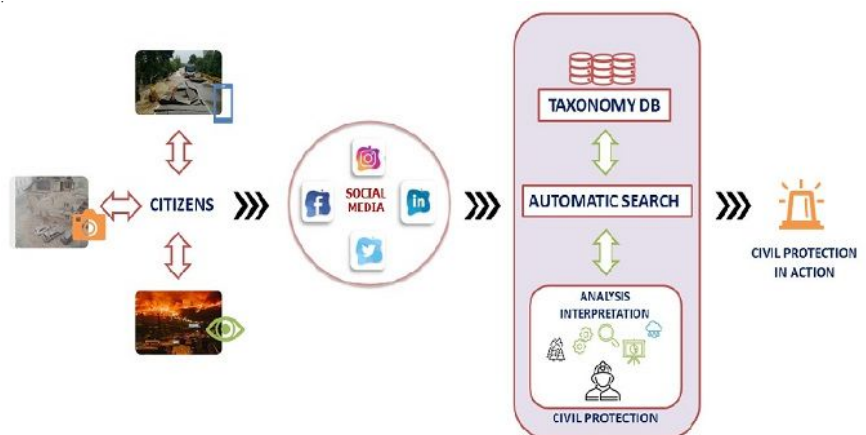
Hashtag #EDSS

Key message citizens can have role of «active sensors» of emergencies by properly using their social media during occurrences

Project image



Explaining diagram of the EDSS



LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CARC

The following section summarises key insights from partners implementing the campaign and defines lessons learned and relative recommendations. In order to collect lessons learned, all partners involved in the implementation of the CARC were asked by the WP coordinator to provide information about evidence of success, to gather participants' feedbacks and reflect upon possible transferability of the action.

Lessons learned refer to experiences that have occurred during implementation of a project and which have provided useful learning opportunities to be shared or re-used later or in other contexts.

Identifying them can help support local authorities in charge of emergency management and their civil protection and operational departments prioritizing good practices, pinpointing the activities and timeframes for the implementation of next actions. Under the framework of cross-border cooperation, lesson learned not only promote and foster the exchange of views and experiences, but add value to the joint efforts and can be good bases for capitalisation.

Overall, the action resulted successful and useful to collect positive feedback from participants. Most reactions highlighted the *willingness to broaden their knowledge* about how civil protection works, especially when it comes to school-age young people. Very frequently participants have asked to be informed about next events and activities and their feedbacks led us to the conclusion that citizens are *willing to engage personally and take action* especially when it comes to the concern about the responsible use of social media and the impact of fake news.

Lesson 1: Work Cafés and Info Days were a successful awareness raising methodology, although organising such events during the Covid-19 pandemic was quite challenging. By combining information to debating, this methodology allows the active involvement of participants, which in turn results in a participatory exchange of ideas and points of views that helps explore topics from different angles.

- ◆ **Recommendation 1:** In order add value to this success, it is important to continue raising awareness on the responsible and conscious use of social media during emergencies and to involve target groups more actively in co-designing and co-deciding civil protection actions related to the use of the EDSS to prevent, monitor and manage risks.

Lesson 2: Despite these merits of the EDSS, the platform has its own challenges especially when it comes to credibility, responsiveness and reliability of the information. The EDSS platform processes data and selects information by classifying social media posts according to scores assigned to key-words, an additional focus could be done on the minimization of unresponsive alerts.

- ◆ **Recommendation 2:** Considering that the system allows the user to read each of the posts that have contributed to the generation of the alert, it could be useful to add targeted controls by both the platform and the operators of certain types of posts.

Lesson 3: The CARC was based on an integrated approach aimed at facilitating the exchange of information between different actors in the civil protection system (firefighters, police, Red Cross, county office for civil protection, port authorities, etc.) and favoring interinstitutional cooperation. Different entities of the civil protection system were actively involved in work cafés, simulations and pilot deployment, and a great collaboration and cooperation was registered proving the common objective of achieving greater security and preparedness in the area. Moreover, civil protection experts and local administrators involved in the CARC expressed a deep appreciation of the EDSS and demanded access to the platform in order to improve their response capacities as soon as possible. A very positive synergy was also put in place with the education system, in some cases activating memoranda of understanding with a particular focus on the responsible and conscious use of social media by younger generations as possible and future «active sensors» of the EDSS.

- ◆ **Recommendation 3:** Extending the experience to other territories could benefit to the coordination and collaboration between Croatian and Italian civil protection, by permanently involving stakeholders in the optimization and territorial application of the EDSS. Moreover, the EDSS should be used as an interface between local/regional and national entities as to develop framework scenarios that can serve as a point of reference for national risk management as well. This could be achieved by means of:
 - Networking and exchange opportunities
 - Further dissemination activities
 - Simulations and experiencing the EDSS platform
 - Identification of new financial sources

- ◆ **Recommendation 3:** The EDSS was used mainly to create event scenarios, guaranteeing that Italian and Croatian civil protection operators that use it are able to monitor their areas and activate adequate resources in case of occurrences. A possible and desirable action towards more effective interventions in case of emergencies would be to activate EDSS related first response training courses involving both operators and citizens.
- ◆ **Recommendation 4:** It is recommended to systematize the involvement of schools can lead to a satisfying assessment of the platform and its applications as well as educational action that will lead to a concrete change of citizens' behaviour.



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