



Project IMS

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2012

The IMS project aims to develop and test the use of modern information technologies, such as an Intelligent Multimedia System (IMS) to support technical and public consultation in decision-making.

Typical target processes are environmental impact assessments, master city plans and other development plans, but the model also applies to elections, referenda and other public consultations.

IMS has been successfully implemented during a first pilot project (1995-1998), with the public consultation process of the Environmental Impact Study for the municipal solid waste incinerator S. João da Talha. This project was part of a doctoral thesis and became a protocol between the Ministry of Environment (DGA) and a University (FCT-UNL), with the support of CITIDEP.

The IMS system is a software prototype, developed at CITIDEP in the framework of a draft Research at MIT, and consists of an interactive interface, an expert system (motor inference), a multimedia database (texts, pictures, GIS maps, videos, etc.), and a knowledge-based model of "questions and answers".

IMS is a support system for technical and public consultations, promoting participative citizenship in decisions of a complex nature.

The first application of the system was with an Environmental Impact Study . The results of this pilot experiment proved the system's ability of "uncomplicating" technical information (without loss of accuracy) enabling any citizen, regardless of laymanship, to effectively participate in the public consultation process.

The second was applied to european parliament elections. The principal advantages of IMS in relation to other communication media are: - More appealing interfaces: the users have access to videos, texts, photos, etc., related to each theme. - Diversity of topics treated in depth: the information is catalogued and integrated into a knowledge base, making it possible to go beyond mere "sound bites" and rhetoric. - Freedom of the user in accessing and selecting information: he/she can obtain answers to any questions he wants, how and whenever he wants. - Specific questions allow for concise and complete answers.

In this third application of the IMS model, the researchers wish to test the following hypothesis: The capacity of the innovative and interactive media model to contribute significantly to fact-based opinion forming by lay citizens in matters that are both complex and of high relevance to civil society, while as a rule requiring higher levels of knowledge.

Info and published refs at: <http://www.citidep.pt/ims/eindex.html> & <http://www.labtec-cs.net/iscsp/ims/>