



THE FUPOL PROJECT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE POLICIES OF THE CITY OF SKOPJE IN THE AREA OF CYCLING

The City of Skopje in 2012 joined the project "Intelligent tools for creating policies" which is funded by the European Union within the FP7 Programme and aims to provide an entirely new approach to running the traditional policies. Through innovative method, using social networks and questionnaires, the FUPOL project contributes to improving the way in which politicians and administration communicate with citizens.

The result of the project is developing tools based on information technology, i.e. software that provides a new way of communication between politicians, citizens and the business sector. The software provides automatic collecting, analyzing and interpreting of the opinions expressed by citizens, and also allows simulation of the effects of the adoption of policies and laws and the possibilities to assist the authorities in the whole process of decision making.

With these tools, the residents of the City of Skopje can directly participate in the process of policy-making of the city, where through social networks they will be able to express their opinions on the proposed topics and projects. Additionally, users can comment on given topics on the official Facebook, Twitter and Blogspot profiles of Skopje, where all topics will be posted. All received comments, opinions and attitudes are systematized and processed with the special software and they are included in the process of policy-making of the City of Skopje.

THE BICYCLE AND THE CITY OF SKOPJE

The City of Skopje, as the capital city of the Republic of Macedonia, is the economic, political, tourist, cultural and industrial center. This results in high frequency of movement and a high concentration of people living and working in Skopje.

As a means of transport, used in Skopje by its residents and visitors are the private transport by individual motor vehicles and bicycles and public transport by bus. Over the past few years, the City of Skopje has made efforts to improve conditions for cycling as an alternative means of transportation, in order to reduce the number of

individual vehicles. To that end, a detailed record is necessary of all the problems and obstacles to the free use of bicycles in Skopje as a means of transport, as well as a review of the wishes, opinions and suggestions of the residents to promote the general improvement of cycling in Skopje.

To that end, one of the topics on which the City of Skopje decided to consult with citizens and to see their views, while fully using the tools arising from the FUPOL program, is cycling in Skopje. On 07.07.2014, the City of Skopje created the campaign "Using the bicycle as a recreational vehicle and a means of transport in Skopje", which is today by far the most popular and most talked about of all the campaigns created in Skopje within the FUPOL project.

On this subject, all interested parties left comments on a number of topics related to the cycling infrastructure in Skopje, such as:

- The condition of the bicycle lanes on boulevards and main streets under the competence of the City of Skopje;
- Whether they are satisfied with the current condition of the bicycle paths;
- Whether there were any obstacles on these paths, such as parked cars, poorly placed billboards and installations...;
- As well as to give their own ideas and suggestions on this topic.

In addition, citizens posted comments and opinions on the process of renting bikes in Skopje, which is organized by the City of Skopje (Public Enterprise "City Parking" - Skopje), whether it meets the expectations and deliver positive results, if there is a sufficient number of stations for renting bikes, where to open additional stations and the like.

This topic was presented by the City of Skopje to the public through the media, which resulted in a huge feedback and interest, with contributions of several national televisions, articles in three national newspapers and 11 online media.

As already mentioned, the topic "Using the bicycle as a recreational vehicle and a means of transport in Skopje" is the most widely discussed campaign created within the FUPOL project, which attracted huge attention by the citizens, resulting in a number of comments, criticisms and suggestions on this topic, submitted and collected on social networks. So far on this topic 404 comments submitted on the interactive map have been received, collected and systematized, 166 people had filled in questionnaires, while the social networks themselves collected more than 6,500 comments and posts on these topics. All these data and systematized comments were later carefully processed and divided by categories for which the application applies (the condition of bicycle paths, the rent-a-bike system; the need for new bike paths, obstacles on the bicycle paths, bicycle penalties, and biking abroad) and the location in question for which the comment or suggestion applies (if any).

Of all received data and knowledge of the tools of the FUPOL platform a special analysis was also created titled - Analysis of results of the FUPOL campaign on the topic "Using the bicycle as a recreational vehicle and a means of transport in Skopje", where all suggestions, comments and criticism of the residents of Skopje were presented and well elaborated on the given topic. This analysis was sent to the Mayor of the City of Skopje, to members of the Council of the City of Skopje working in committees related to infrastructure issues, to heads of the sectors in the city administration working on issues related to this kind of infrastructure, as well as to the members of the special body created by the Mayor of the City of Skopje to improve the cycling infrastructure in Skopje.

Based on this analysis, while fully using only data obtained through the tools of FUPOL, the City of Skopje in September 2014 adopted and promoted the "Action Plan of the City of Skopje for Bicycle Paths 2014-2017". This plan was developed by experts and is based on the demands of the citizens of the City of Skopje for improvement and promotion of cycling infrastructure, and it envisages the construction of new and reconstruction of existing bike paths in Skopje, the marking of lanes, removing all the obstacles that have existed (in the form of billboards, ads, electrical installations and poorly placed lighting columns), placement of metal poles of bicycle paths to prevent improper parking of motor vehicles, as well as the introduction of special traffic standards on sites that are so-called main bicycle highways.

The FUPOL project and the tools derived from this platform, in the case of the campaign on "Using the bicycle as a recreational vehicle and a means of transport in Skopje" showed and proved their full functionality and met all expectations and pre-set goals. This example of Skopje has achieved all the goals of the FUPOL project: enabled a fast and efficient system for the collection, processing and display of a range of data from social networks; made the work of the professional administration and decision-makers in local self-government far easier; provided an opportunity for citizens to directly participate in policy-making processes and directly engage in the process of policy-making; and significantly "reduced the gap" between citizens and decision-makers in local self-government.