



eEnviPer Profile #4

eEnviPer in the Region of Crete

The eEnviPer project is currently installing and testing a cloud-based e-government solution for the application, administration and consultation of environmental permits in five European municipalities and regions. This Profile explores the experience and lessons learned so far of one of eEnviPer's five pilot sites, the Greek region of Crete.

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Location

As the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean (and the largest island in Greece), Crete covers an area of 8,335 km². It is located 160 km south of mainland Greece, between the Aegean and the Libyan Seas. In addition to its coastline, which extends for over 1,000 km, Crete is characterized by the variety of its landscapes. One of the first European civilizations, the famous Minoan civilization, flourished in Crete from 3,000 BC to 1,400 BC. Nowadays, Crete has a prominent place in the Greek economy, thanks mainly to its tourism, agriculture and small- and medium-scale industry.

Crete is also an administrative entity within Greece. The region of Crete - one of Greece's 13 regions - has an elected government and consists of four regional units: Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion and Lasithi. Heraklion is the largest city and the capital of the region. The region is also divided into 24 municipalities. According to the new Greek legislation, the competent authority for this process is the Directorate for Environment and Spatial Planning of the Region of Crete.

More information on Crete can be found at www.crete.gov.gr.

Introducing eEnviPer in Crete

The implementation of eEnviPer in Crete aims at the substantial and multilevel improvement of environmental permitting processes, from carrying out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or of designating Standard Environmental Commitments (SEC), to the approval of environmental terms or commitments and their practical application. The Geographic Information Systems (GIS) applications integrated in eEnviPer provide important information for all stakeholders involved in the protection of the natural and anthropogenic environment. In addition, public consultation during environmental permitting for medium- and large-scale projects is greatly facilitated through the eEnviPer platform.

eEnviPer was introduced through a series of activities organised by the region of Crete, so that all potential stakeholders are informed about the system. In addition to the press releases and presentations made during various events, the region also printed



two eEnviPer brochures and a bookmark. Once the pilot testing phase was underway, two launch events took place, one in the city of Heraklion (20th June 2013) and one in the city of Chania (21st June 2013). Members of all stakeholder groups were invited, including the authorities involved in the environmental permitting processes, environmental scientists and consultants, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organisations and citizens. In addition to these events, environmental scientists and consultants are kept up-to-date in person by the staff of the Directorate for Environment and Spatial Planning, either through e-mails, phone calls or meetings. Some in-office meetings and demonstrations were also organized for internal users, i.e., the staff of the authorities involved.

Reactions

eEnviPer was welcomed by environmental scientists and consultants, as well as by investors and citizens actively interested in environmental policy and sustainable development. This positive reaction was no surprise, because environmental scientists and their clients, investors and entrepreneurs, have already made it clear that they find existing environmental permitting processes too bureaucratic and time-consuming. eEnviPer is therefore a tool that allows them to carry-out their work in an easier and more time-efficient manner. For their part, citizens are able to access EIAs more easily, and their participation in the consultation phase is greatly facilitated compared to the previous situation.

In the authorities involved in managing the environmental permitting processes, reactions to eEnviPer are split between those who advocate a rapid reorientation of public administration to the digital era, and those who prefer to keep working in the “traditional” manner they are used to, namely through transactions based on paper and communication through letters and phone calls. The latter group constitutes the biggest challenge to be addressed during the pilot testing phase: sceptics of an electronic public sector have to be persuaded that eEnviPer can improve their work, by helping them achieve better results in less time.

Nevertheless, the unfavourable economic circumstances prevailing in Greece since 2011 have created a rather difficult atmosphere: some stakeholders consider that

initiatives such as eEnviPer are inopportune and would be more useful or appropriate in a flourishing economy. The efforts to bridge this gap are being based on convincing reluctant stakeholders that the implementation of eEnviPer is an investment for the future, and a paradigm for higher quality and more cost-effective public administration.

Get involved

All stakeholders are invited to test the eEnviPer system on their use cases during the pilot phase, until March 2014. Participating in the pilot phase is crucial for the establishment and further use of the system.

Manuals to help users are available on the eEnviPer webpage. For additional assistance and questions, they can address the staff of the competent authority at any time. The Greek eEnviPer information base is constantly updated according to the ongoing changes in the environmental legislation, concerning the Standard Environmental Commitments.

The project will continue to monitor and measure the system's effectiveness and address any issues that might arise before the end of the pilot phase.

To visit the eEnviPer platform for Crete, please go to greece.eenviper.eu.