



## PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

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### ABSTRACT :

The worldwide response to the 2009 H1N1 pandemic was prepared in a strategic way, but the results were unsatisfactory. Many industrialized countries prepared response programs in anticipation of a pandemic similar to 1918 ‘Spanish influenza’ that killed 50 million people worldwide. However, as its decreased severity became evident, the scientific community was unable to influence decisions taken by administrators. Breaking news, preliminary but conflicting evidence, and scientific uncertainty were reported real-time on media and the Internet. As a result, confusion reigned and public mistrust in authorities increased. Social media spread rumors, contributing to a communication breakdown that resulted in low compliance of the population in implementing preparedness plans.

It is now clear that the top-down approach used by authorities to assure public compliance with the 2009 pandemic response plans was not effective. An alternative approach is needed in societies with real-time social media, 24/7 news coverage, and an educated public that questions authority. The European Union has undertaken to develop a new approach to manage pandemics through a 2014 to 2017 program, ‘‘Action plan in Science in Society in Epidemics and Total pandemics’’ (ASSET). At the core of this program is the concept of *participatory governance*, which engages all stakeholders in planning for and responding to emergencies. By allowing citizens to work with experts and authorities in a transparent fashion, trust is established and the ‘‘knowns’’ and ‘‘unknowns’’ are put into perspective, leading to a better informed public likely to implement emergency response plans.

In this paper we review the background and approach for the ASSET program, and discuss how participatory governance can benefit other forms of emergencies. We will also review how existing emergency management approaches might take better advantage of participatory governance, and how communities of practice and social media can be used to better engage the public in planning for and responding to emergencies.