



## Supporting local integration policies through scientific and ethical social media analytics

**A decision support tool for evidence-based and sustainable policies and measures**

**August 2013**

### Executive Summary

*Migration movements and the integration of immigrants in European societies are still key political issues across the European Union. In order to support local and pan-European policy makers and public administrations in their efforts to include and integrate immigrant citizens in a sustainable manner, the EU-funded ICT project UniteEurope develops a social media analytics tool that provides integration-relevant content from public social and online media in an ethical and scientifically-based way. The benefits of using social media and the new instrument of social media analyses for integration policies and measures are discussed and exemplarily described.*

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### The challenge: Integration and social inclusion of immigrants in urban areas

European cities – destination of migration movements for a long time – have the chance to benefit culturally, economically and socially from immigrants by creating inclusive and diverse communities. However, municipalities deal with several challenges such as social tensions, unemployment, etc. Therefore, governments at the local, national and European level have to strengthen their efforts to integrate and include immigrants in communities, labour markets, and neighbourhoods to exploit the manifold potential of diversity and to offer all residents the chance for prosperous lives.

One way to approach this overall goal of inclusive, diverse and flourishing communities is to integrate citizens' (migrant and native) opinions, sentiments and knowledge into the process of policy and decision making. Besides traditional instruments for opinion research (e.g. surveys, interviews etc.) and stakeholder involvement (such as consultation of NGOs or experts) which are important but both time- and cost-intensive, the growing amount of public data and citizens' participation in social media is increasingly considered as useful and valuable by governmental actors.

## New ways to consult citizens' opinions and sentiments

### Social media and governments

The United Nations E-Government Survey 2012 finds that governments are increasingly making use of social media not only as a means of communication and service provision in the context of open government but also as a *source of information* on citizens' opinions. The consultation of online users for input and feedback as well as the anticipation of upcoming trends and topics has been recognised as highly valuable for policy and decision making processes.

### Social media analytics

Software solutions that allow an automatic collection of content published by citizens in online and social media in the form of postings, comments, blogs etc. – so-called *social media analytics* tools – have been developed and offered for several years. However, these tools, which are primarily tailored for and used by private companies for commercial purposes such as social media marketing, branding and media monitoring, are not suitable for policy and decision making in governmental organisations.

### Benefits for governments and policy makers

The research undertaken by social scientists in the UniteEurope project shows that governmental actors are only interested in new social media analyses if they are offered a software tool that

- ◆ is easy-to-use
- ◆ saves time and costs (e.g. in comparison to traditional survey methods)
- ◆ offers new information that is not (easily) available otherwise
- ◆ provides good filtering and analysing options to avoid an overflow of (non-relevant) information

As the UN survey states, governments are currently looking at social media discussions in a non-automated, manual manner or by using commercial tools. This way of analysing trends and statements of public opinions gives policy makers and administrators a hint on random publicly expressed positions by individuals; however, to conduct a broad monitoring on the most important media sources including blogs and networks of migrant communities, stakeholders or other relevant groups great resources in terms of time and efforts are necessary.

To meet this growing demand among (local) governmental bodies dealing with migrant integration, a team of European IT experts, social scientists as well as city and NGO representatives has built a project consortium to develop an easy-to-use social media analytics tool that is scientifically-based and meets the highest ethical and qualitative standards and requirements.

## The UniteEurope project

### EU-funded research & development project

UniteEurope ([www.uniteeurope.org](http://www.uniteeurope.org)) is an international research and development project co-funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme in the field of Information & Communication Technology (ICT). It lasts from 2011 to 2014 and consists of universities, municipalities, NGOs and private companies from Austria, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands.

To address the challenge of local migrant integration in times of tight financial and personnel resources, UniteEurope aims at developing a software solution for supporting policy makers and public administrations in the realm of migrant integration. The UniteEurope tool will analyse and visualise *public content* from online and social media on the topic of integration and thereby support evidence-based decision making.

Social media analytics provides public administrations and governmental bodies with up-to-date information about citizens' pressing issues, their opinions and sentiments and the general trends in the online discourse on migrant integration.

*While UniteEurope is not decidedly an (e-)participatory tool, the project's target is to make integration policies and measures more sustainable by integrating the manifold voices of citizens as published in different social media sources.*

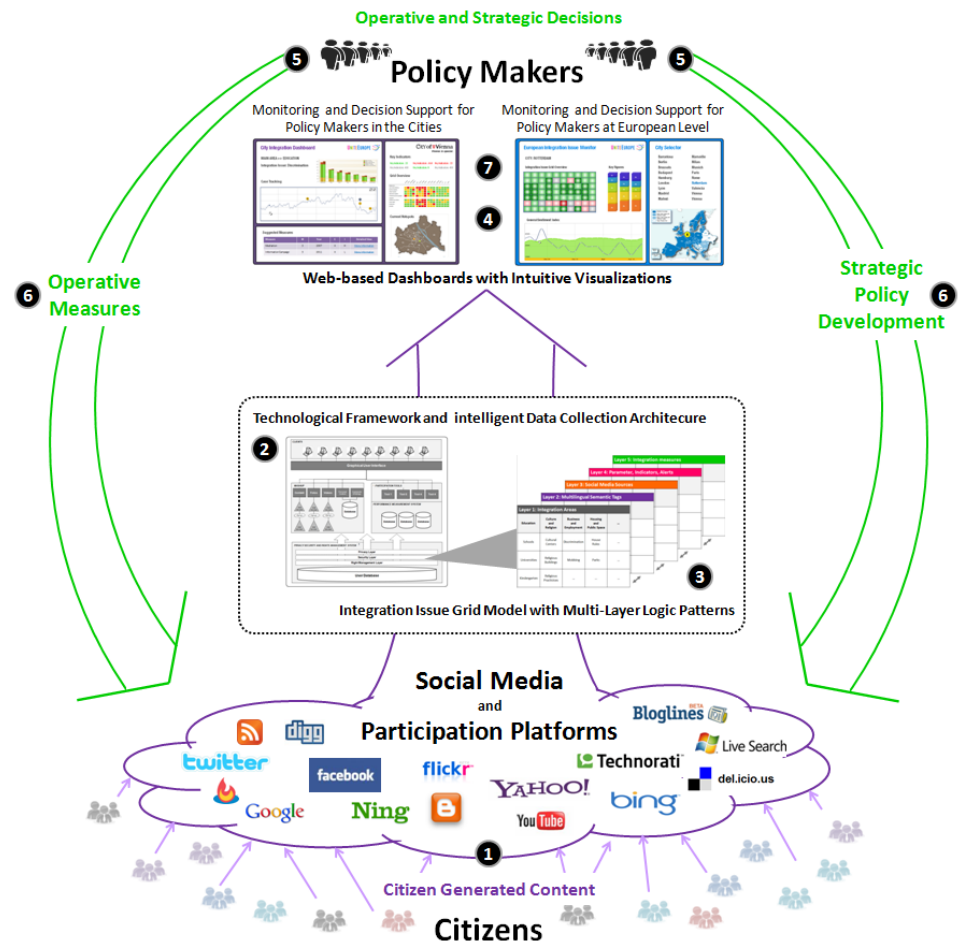
*[The] objective of the UniteEurope project and its SMA tool is to give public administrations and policy makers a new source of information from the grassroots level.*

*This approach allows the real-time, cost-efficient and broad analysis of people's opinions as stated in conversations and postings while at the same time safeguarding those online users' rights against privacy violations (Götsch/Grubmüller/Pejic 2013).*

## The concept of the UniteEurope tool

### Conceptual framework

The social media analytics tool developed in the UniteEurope project can be visualised as a cycle consisting of citizens' opinions and statements as published in social networks and online media sources, governmental decisions and activities, policy measures and campaigns.



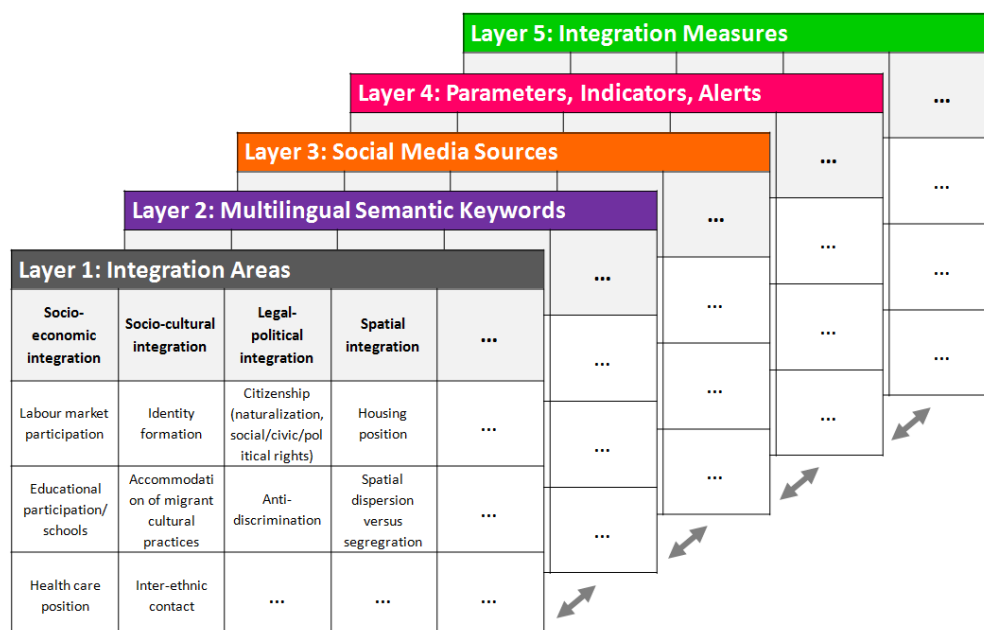
Policy cycle and conceptual framework

## How does it work?

### Layers of analysing system

- ◆ Out of selected global, national and local sources (from Twitter and Facebook to local blogs and discussion forums) integration-relevant content is gathered through a web crawler.
- ◆ Through an intelligent filtering and analysing system (the “grid model”) the content is categorised in a taxonomy of integration dimensions and areas (e.g. education, participation etc.) based on multi-lingual keywords lists.

## The UniteEurope grid model



The multi-layer grid model of UniteEurope

## Results and information

This allows policy makers to get an overview on the most discussed topics and issues or the connections between them (e.g. education and language, inter-cultural contact, political participation etc.). The user of the UniteEurope tool can for example search for all postings related to one specific issue or compare the discourse in different media (e.g. different local discussion forums, local and national media sources etc.).

## Tool modules, features and visualisations

The UniteEurope software offers several easy-to-use features and functionalities that provide valuable information related to local and European migrant integration. Some examples:



**Organisation monitoring:** Based on predefined keywords (e.g. name and acronym of organisation/company/department) this module monitors the online media presence for the adaptors of the solution.



**Campaign tracking:** This feature allows NGOs and governmental institutions to monitor the comments and feedback on their campaigns based on predefined phrases.



**Integration monitoring:** Being the core module of the UniteEurope solution, the Integration Monitoring functionality provides organisations with key information on specific integration dimensions and areas, trends in most discussed topics, relevant articles based on (pre-)selected local and global sources etc.



**Measures library:** The UniteEurope tool offers a pan-European integration measures and cases library to support policy makers and administrators with good practices and contact details from other cities and organisations.

Furthermore, the Unite Europe solution includes a main dashboard with aggregated key data and visualisations, a “Comparative Analytics” module for comparisons across cities and organisations, live monitoring, multi streams and other features.

## How UniteEurope can support integration policies

### Traditional vs. new opinion research

Social media analytics is an instrument that offers undistorted grass-roots information from online users which is otherwise (through traditional opinion research methods such as surveys or interviews) not (easily) available. Furthermore, the data gained through such tools is accessible in real-time and efficient in terms of costs and other resources.

### Feedback to campaigns and policies

Effects of policy campaigns or integration measures on public opinion as well as individuals' point of views as they are published in online media can be tracked through the different features of the UniteEurope tool. This allows organisations to identify satisfaction, resistance or need for discussion among citizens at a very early stage. Campaigns, policies and measures might then be adapted, modified or only communicated and explained more thoroughly by policy makers, press officers or media representatives.

### Bottom-up information

By including citizens' publicly expressed opinions and statements on integration issues and public policies into the process of agenda-setting, development and implementation of policies and measures, governmental activities can build on bottom-up, undistorted information. Thereby, UniteEurope contributes to the effectiveness and sustainability of governmental decisions and activities.

### Legal and ethical aspects

### Safeguarding measures

In order to safeguard citizens' privacy and to comply with data protection regulations the UniteEurope project consortium elaborated several "ethical safeguarding measures" of which the most important are:

- Anonymisation of authors' names and nicknames
- Extensive training of end user organisations and indication of the tool's valid usage in license agreement
- Qualitative, contextual information on displayed results (e.g. sources, numbers of Likes/followers etc.)

## Conclusion and recommendations

### Social and economic challenges

The socio-economic and cultural integration and inclusion of minorities, disadvantaged groups and migrants from foreign countries is still one of the main challenges for governments, societies and communities at the local, national and international level across Europe.

The current situation in European cities is characterised by increased movements of citizens as well as difficult economic circumstances and budget constraints for governmental bodies. Thus, new instruments to

**Intelligence of the crowds**

support integration policies with cost- and time-savings are necessary in order to safeguard inclusive and prosperous communities.

Using the “intelligence of the crowds” by analysing user-generated content from social media – anonymised and based on scientific methods – holds the potential to provide policy makers and public administrations with valuable information and indications on general trends – topics, issues, opinions and suggestions – in the public discourse on migrant integration.

The EU-funded FP7 project UniteEurope is currently developing such a software solution and aims at meeting the demands and needs of governmental and non-governmental organisations for grass-roots information. Offering a decision and support tool that emphasises the ethical, scientific and beneficial potential of social media and citizens’ opinions is the project’s contribution to sustainable integration policies.

**For further information**

about the UniteEurope project, its publications and the consortiums partners please consult our project website <http://www.uniteeurope.org>

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**References and further reading**

Our public reports can be downloaded on the project website:

<http://www.uniteeurope.org/deliverables>

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## The UniteEurope Advisory Board

UniteEurope is supported by the experience and expertise of public and non-profit organisations in our Advisory Board from several European countries.





# The Project consortium and its Advisory Board

## Project Consortium



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