

## **Major EU Research Project on Social Media and Emergency Management Led by Trinity**

*€3 million 'Project Slándáil' will develop a cost-effective and ethical social media information system to be used in emergency situations.*

**Dublin, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014** – Trinity College Dublin is leading a consortium of 10 partners to develop a cost-effective and ethical social media information system for use in a variety of emergency situations. The three-year project (Project Slándáil) will receive almost €3 million in funding and is sponsored by the European Union's Framework Programme 7 under its Security Research Programme.

Project Slándáil – Security System for language and image analysis – is a collaboration of emergency operatives, academics, ethics and security-oriented NGOs and four small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Italy, Ireland, Germany and the UK. Project Slándáil seeks to design and develop ethically well-grounded and intelligent information gathering and processing systems for providing information about public distress to emergency providers.

Warnings about major impending disasters (natural and man-made) and the subsequent efforts to recover from them involve the use of textual, visual and audio information. The Internet, embraced by the public on a global scale, enables rapid dissemination of all three information types via social media such as Twitter, TwitPic, Flickr, YouTube and Facebook. However, such speedy 'viral spread' also has its disadvantages.

Professor of Computer Science at Trinity and leader of the project, Khurshid Ahmad, said: "This project is well positioned because it includes front-line services from both jurisdictions in Ireland, as well as from Germany and Italy. New technology is to be developed addressing the needs and concerns of the general public as well as supporting the efforts of agencies that serve the public. The ethics of information gathering and dissemination is integral."

Vice-Provost, Chief Academic Officer and Deputy President, and Professor of Ecumenics at Trinity, Linda Hogan, who is a lead researcher in the project, added: "Major opportunities exist for the ethical collection and dissemination of the results of our analysis for substantially improving the security of citizens in a disaster zone."

The excellent work carried out by national disaster and emergency management experts and operatives relies on teams of human beings examining and synthesising information from vast numbers of documents on short time scales. Yet the sheer volume of information propagated via social media exceeds the limits of any possible unaided human professional monitoring. The challenge for Project Slándáil researchers then is to systematically capture what it contains to assist disaster management as efficiently as possible.

Professor Bryan Scotney, an image processing and security expert at the University of Ulster, and a Slándáil partner, said: “Processing such social media can transform the way that emergency situations are managed, enabling citizens in general to play a central role, and adding speed and agility to emergency response infrastructures.” Stillwater Communications, an Irish partner in Slandail, will be bringing their expertise in how disaster management agencies communicate with the public at large.

Project Slándáil’s partners include the Dublin-based Centre for Irish and European Security, Garda Síochána, Landeskommmando Leipzig, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, together with system houses dealing with social media and with emergency management. An Garda Síochána have announced that they are “proud to be associated with this Irish-led consortium. As a police service it is incumbent on us to make proactive use of new and emerging technologies including social media – whilst always conscious of our Data Protection Code of Practice. We are particularly pleased to be working in project SLANDAIL alongside several EU partners, and especially our colleagues in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. This project is another example of progress being made under the Cross Border Policing Strategy, and represents an important all-island aspect of emergency management. The user partners and technical experts will work with the university partners at Trinity, Leipzig, Ulster and Padova. Language processing systems developed at Leipzig and Trinity, and image processing systems developed at Ulster, will form the basis of a system that collects, analyses and manages disaster information. An Irish research consultancy, Pintail, will manage the project.

Carl Vogel, Professor in Computational Linguistics at Trinity, responsible for the multi-lingual aspects of the Project pointed out that Slándáil will deal with emergency messages in English, German and Italian. He said: “Given the free movement of peoples across the Union, it is important that communications about an evolving disaster are cognisant of EU multilinguality.”

**Ends**

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