

A technological path guides the blind

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Today, 29 September, a prototype of **SESAMONET**, an electronic path for the visually impaired, designed by the Joint Research Centre in Ispra and already in use, since 2007, along the lakeside in Laveno, has been presented in Varese. The first section of the path in Varese will go from the “Palazzo Estense”, the Town Hall, to Piazza Monte Grappa. **SESAMONET**, which stands for Secure and Safe Mobility Network, uses radio frequency identification (RFID) microchip technology, where the microchips are embedded in the ground, and react to a **walking stick used by the visually impaired**, into which a special recognition device has been inserted. The microchips send electrical signals that are collected by the stick and sent to the user’s mobile phone.

Thanks to a database entered into the mobile phone, the code sent by the radio signal is linked to a special phrase that informs the visually impaired person of obstacles or shops, or gives them simple information through a Bluetooth headset. “**The cost of a microchip**, or transponder, is €1.50 each,” explained Marco Sironi, the leader of the project at the **JRC in Ispra**, “This is negligible, and I hope it will positively influence the decision to embed transponders into the road surfaces in most of the town.” The low cost of the transponders is due to the fact that they are recycled. “They are small ceramic cylinder-shaped devices that are put into the stomachs of cattle to allow identifying them,” explains Sironi. “**However, when the animals are slaughtered**, the transponders are removed and thrown away. About 50 million transponders will be used in Europe next year, and their disposal is becoming a serious problem.

Thanks to this project, we have found a good way to recycle them. In contrast, the cost of the technology that has to be fitted into the walking sticks, and of the database that has to be downloaded onto the mobile phones is greater, at least for the moment.” “We already placed transponders in Via Orrigoni, during the last road surfacing,” added the Councillor in charge of Public Works, Gladiseo Zagatto, in reply to Sironi’s words. “**It give me great satisfaction to take part in this event**,” said Angela Mazzetti, the chairwoman of the Association for the Blind and Partially Sighted, in Varese, “because this path means, above all, more independence and safety for the visually impaired.” Ms. Mazzetti then wanted personally to try out the section of path, which she followed with satisfaction. “**I would like to thank the Town Council**, who have made all of this possible. Varese has always been sensitive to the problems of the blind and visually impaired, doing its utmost to remove architectural barriers.”

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