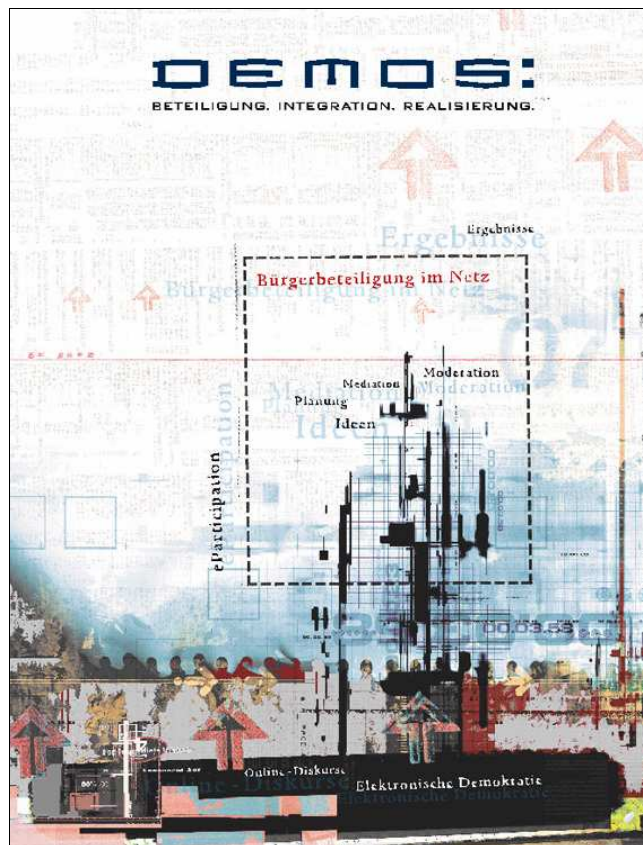


# DEMOS

DELPHI MEDIATION ONLINE SYSTEM

## - White Paper -



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## Preface

DEMOS (Delphi Mediation Online System) is a new online platform and specific method of supporting large scale citizen participation and result oriented public debates on the Internet – on a local, national or international level.

The distance between citizens and representatives is growing. Decisions are often not sufficiently communicated to the citizens and both, effectiveness and legitimacy of decisions could be increased by integrating experiences, expertise and opinions of the citizens more consequently into the political process.

Our vision is to make politics more democratic by motivating and enabling all citizens, whatever their interests, technical skills or income are, to take an active part in debate and decision making. To achieve this goal, DEMOS exploits the full potential of the Internet as a interactive mass communication medium.

DEMOS was developed within a RTD project under the 5<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme of the EU (IST) by a research consortium of eight organisations of different European countries., e.g. Fraunhofer Gesellschaft and the Cities of Hamburg and Bologna as pilot users.

After the project was completed in 2003 the initiator and lead partner TuTech Innovation GmbH decided to further develop the method and the technical system and to offer both to potential customers from the public and the private sector

This “white paper” has been written to provide interested parties with a quick overview about the DEMOS approach, the experiences and prospects.

## 1. Moderated Online Discourses

Online discourses can exploit the specific communicative potential of the Internet - interactivity, speed and scope – and allow interactive and asynchronous communication between large numbers of participants. The threshold to participate is quite low: The users can contribute anonymously and spontaneously, they can participate actively or as observers, either write contributions, take part in polls, ballots and surveys or communicate with other users on peer-to-peer basis. Furthermore, people can form coalitions by getting in touch with like-minded people effortlessly and discuss certain topics or subtopics of mutual interest. Online discourses are a promising approach for different target groups and frameworks. They can be set up for a broad public debate with a high number of yet unknown, anonymous people as well as for discussions with representatives, stakeholders or delegates. Compared to virtual working groups online discourses are not depending on known and already committed participants. Online discourses can cope with a higher level of fluctuation of participants and although come to concrete results.

Online discourses can also be regarded as an instrument for interactive public relation: as a means to attract and to involve new participants / target groups, to raise public attention and to increase the number of involved people in decision-making processes.

To be conducted successfully, online discourses have to be based on methodologies that match the media. Individual contributions have to be aggregated and interrelated, the most promising aspects of the discussion have to be identified and fostered and different positions should be profiled. Moderators should also strive for convergence between contradicting viewpoints or at least figure out what are the truly disputed aspects where no compromise can be achieved. Depending on the objective, size and topic of the online discourse, results can vary from collection of different viewpoints to concrete agreements or action plans. In the following a generic methodology for online discourses will be introduced: the DEMOS approach which has been developed in the context of an EU-RTD-Project and applied successfully in the cities of Bologna (Italy) and Hamburg (Germany). Currently, several online discourses to be conducted according to the DEMOS approach are under preparation.

## 2. The DEMOS Approach

DEMOS stands for Delphi Mediation Online System and integrates three well-proven social research methods, namely the Survey technique, the Delphi approach and the Mediation method. Starting with the classic Survey technique, this method is designed for representative opinion polls and contributes to public opinion formation on a large-scale basis by including (virtually) the entire population. This technique allows to monitor the opinion shaping process and to come to collectively accepted decisions. While the level of interactivity of standardised surveys is rather limited, Delphi polls operate with a higher amount of interactive feedback and can especially be used to systematically exploit expert knowledge. The basic idea is to generate a consensus among a number of domain experts by aggregated feedback. Feedback is supplied by the 'Delphist' on a strictly anonymous and statistical basis to exclude direct personal influence among the participants. A Delphi process runs through two (or more) cycles of interview-feedback-interview. After each cycle the experts are asked to rethink their original answers in the light of the statistically aggregated 'group opinion' that has emerged in the previous cycle, until a satisfactory level of convergence or (statistical) consensus is reached.

Whereas both Survey and Delphi are quantitative methods, the Mediation technique is a qualitative method

used to reveal problems and resolve conflicts. The basic idea of Mediation is that consensus is not a statistical figure but a negotiated compromise. Mediation is a group process chaired by an impartial mediator, and often running through several cycles of open discussion.

The three methods will be applied and integrated in the 'DEMOS process' which is always concerned with one main topic to be commonly discussed on a limited timeline under the guidance of online moderators. To limit the debate to not more than one main topic is a conceptual decision derived from the general objective to support deliberative discourses and to discourage debates from losing any sense of direction. If needed, several processes can be

### The Delphi Method

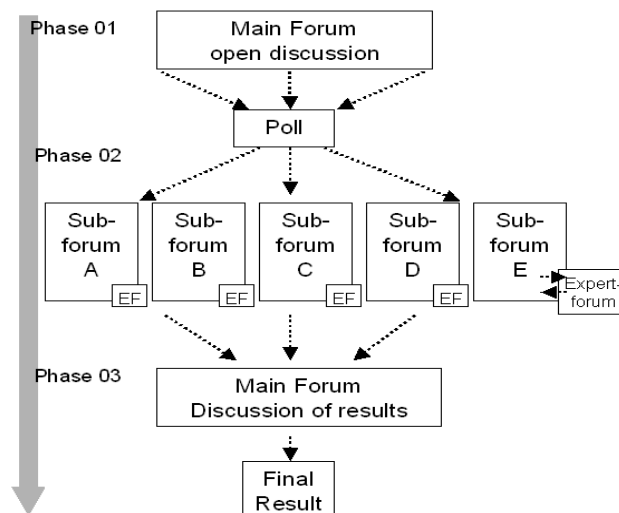
The Delphi method was developed at the beginning of the 1950's in the U.S.A. by the RAND Corporation and was originally used to predict future developments. Many different versions and definitions as well as numerous ways to apply the Delphi procedure have been developed. However, there is a general definition of the Delphi method proposed by Linstone and Turoff which may be accepted in accordance with many of those scientists making use of this technique: "Delphi may be characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem." The characteristics of the Delphi procedure in this conventional manner are:

- questioning of selected experts by the use of a standardized questionnaire,
- some degree of anonymity for the individual responses of the experts to avoid personal influences and control as well as group-dynamic effects,
- some kind of statistical feedback (like median and quartiles) being calculated from the individual responses in order to represent the contribution of the whole "group" of experts,
- repeated execution of the questioning to renew the judgement formation of each expert being impressed by the judgement of the (synthetic) "group" as a whole (usually 2-3 Delphi rounds), and
- termination of the questioning in case of a high convergence of the individual estimates (synthetic "group opinion").

conducted in parallel and each of them will split up into different subtopics during the course of the debate. To focus on just one main topic requires a careful selection of the topic to be discussed on the basis of general criteria. A potential theme should at least meet criteria like popularity, complexity, controversy and persistency.

The DEMOS process provides support for three phases of online discourses: broadening, deepening and consolidating. Ideally, this structured discussion process leads to consensus. In practice, participants may continue to disagree, but the reasons for the disagreement will have been made clear and comprehensible.

In the broadening phase the discussion is initiated and information about the topic under discussion and different viewpoints, interests, positions and ideas of the various stakeholders are gathered from as many sources as possible. The moderators are clustering and structuring the contributions and visualise relationships among them. The result of this phase is an outline and summary of the discussion thus far. The main task of the second phase is to address selected issues in more depth. Therefore, several thematic sub forums can be opened. The moderators help the participants breaking up into subgroups, conducting online surveys and collaborating on the formulation of joint position statements. The task of the third and final phase is to consolidate the results from the subgroups into a document summarising and visualising the main points of the discussion.



**Fig. 1: The DEMOS process**

## Phase 1:

### *Purpose:*

The purpose of the first phase is to initiate and facilitate the discussion, to generate different viewpoints and collect a widespread collection of opinions and statements and finally to identify the central and most important (sub)topics of the general subject matter. The phase concludes with a poll in order to prepare phase 2, splitting up the main forum into different thematic sub forums dedicated to the most central issues.

### *Moderators:*

The moderators have to analyse and cluster the free text contributions in order to find out the issues most participants seem to be interested in. Additionally, the moderators will have to summarise the discussion during the course of the first phase following a specific procedure. These summaries consist of content and progress related parts and highlight and profile emerging lines of conflict according to the Mediation method. The first phase finally results in a set of proposed sub topics that can be more intensively discussed in separate discussion forums in the next phase. Since this procedure is relying on interpretations of the individual postings as well as of the entire discussion, the result may not exactly meet the preferences of the participants. At this point the Survey method comes into play in order to evaluate whether or not the proposed sub forums meet the demands of the community and, if necessary, to generate ideas on how to revise the list of sub topics.

## Phase 2:

### *Purpose:*

In the second phase a limited number of sub forums will be offered on the basis of the poll results. This phase is meant to intensively discuss the chosen topics among smaller discussion groups and to work out ascertained and feasible solution strategies.

### *Moderators:*

In this phase specific aspects can intensively be discussed in smaller groups of interested participants while the main forum still catches those participants who want to discuss the topic on a more general level. Again the moderators will have to summarise the developing debate on a regular basis and, at the same

### **The Mediation Method**

The mediation method is one of the so-called Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) procedures which focus on 'informal participation' in the sense that they are not regulated by law. The mediator is responsible to balance occurring differences and the asymmetry of power. He/she also analyses the type of conflicts and considers how to achieve suitable solutions. In cooperation with the conflict parties he/she prepares suggestions on how to proceed. The Mediator also tries to clarify questions about the content and provides missing data, facts and expert opinions in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts. Mediation is a process rather than a technique. Hence, it requires that participants trust in the mediator as well as in mediation as a conflict resolution procedure. The following rules for mediators are important:

- Neutrality
- Without own interests or authority within decision-making process
- Balance of power
- Confidence and rule-keeping
- Organisation of proceeding in cooperation with conflict parties
- Clarification of content
- Collecting missing data, facts and expert opinion

time, try to tease out and manage emerging conflicts. This is where the Mediation method comes in as part of the moderator's task to clarify how and to what extent people are agreeing or disagreeing and at the same time to reduce the distance between diverging positions by deliberation. The results of the second phase should either be an agreement (consent) or a rational dissent. If required and appropriate, this opinion shaping process can be enriched and supplemented with expert knowledge by conducting Delphi surveys among a predefined set of domain experts. Delphi type studies can either be applied in the original fashion, e.g. to reduce the uncertainty with respect to future developments, or in order to evaluate certain positions of the community from an expert point of view. Since even experts are often not of the same opinion the Delphi method here provides the participants with a condensed picture of their degree of agreement regarding specific issues. Finally, the moderators will close this phase with a summary of what has been discussed so far, and will once again ask the participants for their approval (survey).

### **Phase 3:**

#### *Purpose:*

The third phase reintegrates the sub forums into the still existing main forum by transferring the summaries and related survey results. Here the participants have the opportunity to see the particular sub topic as part of the general subject matter and a 'big picture' will emerge. Participants have the last chance to comment on the main topic and the assembled results of the sub forums. The community will be asked to rate the sub topics in terms of importance for the main topic that the DEMOS process was intentionally set up for. The final result will be a condensed document depicting the results of a dynamic and deliberative discussion.

#### *Moderators:*

Phase 3 intends to open the single discussions again towards a wider perspective and the interrelations of the different aspects. The moderators have to keep track of the discussion and help the participants to finally scrutinise the results of the discussion. In cooperation with the users, the moderators will work out the final documentation of the discourse and its detailed results and upload it on the website.

### 3. The DEMOS Internet platform

DEMOS is a web-based discussion and publication platform. It helps to facilitate participation in public debates and gives moderators a huge variety of different tools to create successful dialogues. In addition, the DEMOS platform has strong auto-analysis functions which support reporting and embedding in decision-making processes.

#### **Clarity and user-friendliness for participants**

A fine discussion empowers users to participate by writing articles and comments on articles of others. DEMOS offers users different ways to access the debate. In contrast to classical Internet forums, it provides dynamic views instead of long lists of articles represented by threads where the user has to travel through the whole thread to find the most up to date article. With the DEMOS, users are encouraged to create their own „view“ (i.e. selection of articles by specific patterns) and their own access to the debate at the same time.

Another highlight is the differentiation between articles and comments. Participants are able to relate their articles to articles of other authors. By writing comments on existing articles it is possible to create one forum for all articles. The possibility to relate to other articles is realised in an user-friendly way by a special citation-tool.

#### **Active configuration of the discussion by moderation**

Typical architectures of Internet discussion forums have an ex-ante defined architecture and, therefore, remain static. As a result of this, the range to influence the discussion by moderation is very limited. Sometimes it is only possible to enforce the „netiquette“. This falls short of sophisticated moderation.

In decision-making processes usually distinct proposals find a majority of supporters. Moderation should be enabled to react just in time. A variety of tools to intervene in the discussion is needed. With DEMOS, special views can be created to introduce participants the up to date discussion results. An additional voting tool can select the most appreciated proposals. And there are many other possible ways to filter, to sort, and to display the articles. DEMOS also provides a built-in content-management-system to enable the moderation team to create additional content in an easy and user-friendly way.

#### 4. Experiences

**November 2001:** The Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg performed a public online debate concerning the topic "quality and evaluation of the lecture at the Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg". All students and teachers of the TU-Harburg were invited to discuss online for a period of six weeks. Although the trial was primarily intended to test the techniques and methods of the platform, 228 users registered and wrote nearly 1200 contributions. Therefore, the discussion developed to a much larger extent than the initiators had expected before. Furthermore, the platform and method were able to impressively demonstrate their suitability for goal-oriented large-scale online discourses.

**January / February 2002:** The City of Bologna initiated a public online discussion with regard to the topic "Traffic in Bologna". All members of the city network "Iberpole Civic Network" were invited to take part in this discourse that lasted for six weeks and was intended to work out suggestions on how to improve the traffic situation in Bologna. Actually, 362 registered users wrote 713 contributions and worked out several interesting and realistic ideas providing new perspectives to the local administration. Again, the system and methodology were able to prove clearly their attractiveness and ability to successfully perform a goal-oriented large-scale discourse.

**November 2002:** The City of Hamburg performed a public online discussion and competition of ideas concerning the topic "Metropolis Hamburg - Growing City". The citizens of Hamburg were invited to develop own ideas on how to improve the attractiveness and living conditions of the City of Hamburg. In the four weeks of discussion 540 registered users wrote nearly 4000 contributions forming 57 detailed concepts with regard to several important urban aspects. An expert jury rewarded 7 ideas and recommended them to the senate of Hamburg in order to translate them into action. Both, with respect to the integration into the policy process and with respect to the marketing activity, the DEMOS online discussion about the Leitbild Growing City is still at the forefront of e-democracy experiments in Europe. Following, the City of Hamburg recommended DEMOS and its suitability for e-participation for the German IT strategy "DeutschlandOnline".

**February 2003:** The City of Bologna used the DEMOS platform for an exclusive expert discussion of the topic "Immigration and Integration in Bologna". In the 3 weeks of discussion internal and external experts invited and members of the local administration were exclusively allowed to write contributions actively. Although the extent of this discourse, 59 registered participants wrote 92 contributions, cannot be compared to previous DEMOS discussions it proved to be well suited for an intensive and exclusive exchange of experts as well.

**October / November 2005:** Familienfreundlicher Wohnort Hamburg – Online discussion concerned with family friendly living and housing in the city of Hamburg. The objectives of this public consultation were to collect citizen opinions about the current state of Hamburg's family friendliness and to develop concrete proposals on how to improve the housing situation for families with children. Furthermore, it was intended to involve all different stakeholders like

citizens, owner, planner, architects and politicians in a discussion about family and housing in the city of Hamburg in order to increase Hamburg's attractiveness. This DEMOS discussion took place from October 17th to November 12th -- an interdisciplinary working group with representatives of the municipalities (Bezirke), the city-state ministries and TuTech Innovation had already been set up in April 2005. For more information see [www.familienleben-hamburg.de/](http://www.familienleben-hamburg.de/)

**January 2006:** BioTalk. Online discussion about genetically modified food with pupils, teenagers and adolescents. This project was conducted in cooperation with Hamburg's Ministry of Education and the University of Hamburg and was partly funded by Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The project started in April 2005 and ended in March 2006. For more information see <http://www.biotalk.de/>

**Spring 2006:** Hamburg's Citizens Dialogue. The parliament of the city-state of Hamburg decided to use DEMOS to discuss the city's budget and financial policy with citizens. The first step was to inform the local public about the basic functionality of public budgeting and the specific conditions of Hamburg's financial situation. The objectives of this discourse were to involve the citizens in financial planning, to learn more about the citizens' priorities and to identify saving opportunities. The project started by the beginning of 2006; the active phase of the discourse ended by 12th May 2006. See <http://www.hamburg-haushalt.de/>

"In the course of the four week lasting discussion almost 3000 citizens registered, approx. 50.000 visitors have been counted. Also experts, politicians and VIPs have participated actively. The media coverage of the e-participation project was remarkable: Almost all regional news paper, radio & TV stations reported about the moderated online discourse. But also on a national level many news papers and magazines covered the event, among them the online edition of the internationally well known magazine "Der Spiegel" and the print edition of the weekly paper "Die Zeit"."

**May 2006:** Family Portal Munich. This online discussion forum concerned with the questions "what's good for children and families in Munich?" and "what need to be improved in Munich?". In a first phase (10-14.05.2006), citizens and stakeholders could allegorise their experiences within the family issue in Munich and give their advice on improvements. In a second phase (15-28.05.2006), the individual topics are discussed in special forums. At the end of the second phase all results will be summarised. In a third phase (29-31.05.2006) the results will be discussed and ideas will be evaluated (ranking). The final results incorporate in the revision of the children and family policy guideline for Munich in 2007. Up to now, 127 participants are registered in the forum. See <http://familie.portal.muenchen.de/>

## 5. Upcoming Projects

Beyond these projects, TuTech Innovation has started negotiations with different German states and municipalities about prospective DEMOS applications. Also, on an international level some projects are in the planning phase, like e.g. Utopic.nl.

Furthermore, TuTech's department Interactive Communication consults the UNO, Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL). CEPAL is currently managing the eLAC project which implements the Regional Action Plan for the information society for Latin America and the Caribbean (eLac 2007). In order to facilitate the implementation of eLac 2007, the project is planning to initiate a virtual dialogue to mobilise all relevant actors and sectors.

## 6. Testimonials

“I oversaw the whole testing of the first DEMOS prototype in Bologna. The chosen topic, so sensitive and up to date for our city, surely meant a real challenge to the spirit of analysis of the involved citizens. I noticed how the opinions of our “Iperboliani” were both fair and forerunners of new solutions for improving the traffic situation in Bologna.

Thus, I assume that the development of reliable tools of e-democracy like DEMOS should be strongly fostered. Finally, I’m quite confident next trial of the DEMOS prototype in Bologna will be again so effective and widespread. Let me thank the DEMOS team and express my deep trust to anyone working for the good outcome of this project.”

Giovanni Salizzoni  
(Vice Mayor of Bologna)

“The experiment has demonstrated that DEMOS is able to bring together people with diverging interest, background and expectations in a fruitful debate. The project had a long lasting affect in raising the attention to the subject of the discussion – the quality of teaching. DEMOS generated some very interesting results which are of high value for our university. I wished that every lecture could be evaluated with the help of DEMOS.”

W. Bauhofer,  
(Vice President of the Technical University of Hamburg)

“It was impressing to see how the DEMOS team managed to involve so many young people into a political discussion. In the course of the online-dialogue the participants developed gorgeous and fascinating ideas, like e.g. to build swimming houses for our city with its numerous channels, rivers and water veins.”

Ole von Beust  
(First Major, City of Hamburg)

“We have intensively debated the results of the DEMOS discussion in the Senate's Commission for Urban Development, headed by Hamburg's First Major. I am pleased to announce that some of the ideas and proposals developed by Hamburg's citizens will be implemented soon, so that the benefit of the online-consultation for Hamburg is apparent.”

Detlef Gottschalck  
(State Secretary, Ministry of Finance, City of Hamburg)

## 7. Company Profile

TuTech Innovation GmbH (formerly TUHH Technologie GmbH) was formed in 1992 as the first private technology transfer company founded by a German university (Technical University of Hamburg). Together with its sister company Hamburg Innovation it serves all Hamburg's universities in technology transfer and industrial liaison matters. TuTech performs many tasks for the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg (FHH) as part of a knowledge economy development remit. This includes running the Patent Exploitation Agency for all Hamburg's universities and the Hamburg Start-Up Programme. TuTech Innovation is often called upon to present research project management and technology transfer best practice in Germany and in other parts of Europe including in the New Member States.

The department Interactive Communication (IK) is specialised in the conception and realisation of Internet based interactive applications and new media research focusing on electronic participation, online communities and e-learning. Acting in the field of e-government, e-administration and e-democracy for many years, TuTech/IK has gained considerable experience in establishing participative networks connecting major organisations and individual actors from science, politics, civil society and public administrations.

TuTech/IK provides advice and support on funding opportunities (EU and national programmes) with respect to e-government, e-democracy and e-participation.

### Staff:

Mr. Rolf Luehrs is heading the department Interactive Communication and works for seven years in the fields of social science, technology assessment and online research. He holds a diploma in sociology and was involved in many different national and European research and development projects. From 1999-2003, Mr. Luehrs was the scientific and technical manager of the European project DEMOS (Delphi Mediation Online System) which has been coordinated at the TuTech Innovation GmbH. Rolf Luehrs is author of numerous articles in scientific journals, books and conference proceedings and has excellent computer skills. Mr. Luehrs has gained high expertise in empirical research methods both, qualitative and quantitative and is specialised on theory of democracy and public participation. He speaks and writes English fluently and has a basic working knowledge of French.

Ms. Birgit Hohberg works at TuTech -- Interactive Communication since 2003. Ms. Hohberg holds a diploma in sociology. From 2000 -- 2004 she worked at the Technical University of Hamburg in the European R&D project DEMOS (Delphi Mediation Online System) which has been coordinated at the TuTech Innovation GmbH and the research project GOLEM (Group-oriented lectures with E-Learning and Multimedia) funded by the E-Learning-Consortium Hamburg (ELCH). Currently, she is joining the trans-national EU projects WATERFRONT, VISP (Vitalizing City Centres through Integrated Spatial Planning) and URBAL funded by the European regional Development Fund INTERREG III B. Birgit Hohberg is mainly specialised

on E-Democracy and increased citizen participation in planning and decision-making processes. She speaks and writes English fluently.

Mr. Harald Ratmann works at TuTech -- Interactive Communication since 2006. He holds a diploma in environmental sciences and has a strong focus on the topic citizen participation on the Internet. Before he came to TuTech he worked for the company geoGLIS specialised on Internet based geographical information systems and gained intensive experience regarding the fields of regional planning and geographical informatics.

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