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SMART EUROPE Café Guidelines

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Introduction

This guideline has been created to explain how a SMART EUROPE Cafés is organised, its purpose, target audience and format.

This document also illustrates the role that the SMART EUROPE Cafés play in the project backbone and how the collected inputs are used in the project.

In the project structure, the SMART EUROPE Cafés are an activity of COMPONENT 2 “Communication and Dissemination”; however, they are also essential to involve the relevant local stakeholders in the first phase of the project and to collect their feedback in the following ones.

Therefore, although labelled as a communication activity, this is indeed a transversal and key one, important both to track the opinions of the regional stakeholders at the beginning of the process and, afterwards, to validate, through a possible second round of events, the proposals to be selected for the Action and Implementation Plan amongst the recommendations given by the peer reviewers.

These two steps will be implemented through small informal events. The World Café methodology (<http://www.theworldcafe.com/method.html>) has been identified as the best formula to stimulate the involvement and active participation of the stakeholders.

At the beginning of the project, all regions organised a SMART EUROPE Café to inform and engage their regional stakeholders on the project in an informal setting. In the final phase,

several conferences are organised at local level for the regional stakeholders, including an EU-wide final conference. Furthermore, all partners host a National Dissemination Workshop where they invite participants from other regions in their country.

The SMART EUROPE Cafés represent therefore a “starting point” in the project and are expected to define the most important issues agreed at regional level. The received inputs are then collected, formalised and used to prepare the Peer Reviews.

Each project partner is in charge of coordinating and monitoring the SMART EUROPE Cafés organisation in its area and of analysing the outputs.

An example of a SMART EUROPE Café reporting form, used to homogeneously report the outcomes is enclosed to this document, along with some suggestions on how to organise the format.

How to organise a successful SMART EUROPE Café

The SMART EUROPE Cafés were implemented according to the methodology of the World Café¹ with some improvements.

In a SMART EUROPE Café:

- A preliminary meeting among the organisers is necessary to agree on which topics are more in line with the focus chosen at regional level.
- Institutions and key stakeholders are selected and invited to participate (in SMART EUROPE, they are incubators, intermediaries, public administrators, services providers).
- A multidisciplinary and horizontal (private and public representatives are involved) approach is pursued.
- 3 simultaneous round tables are organised on the selected topics.
- 3 facilitators with 3 assistants are in charge of animating the discussion, ensuring that all topics are covered and that all the participants bring their contribution to the table;
- Everybody is free to intervene and to discuss its own experience; however, facilitators must help maintaining the focus on the selected topics;
- The discussion on a topic lasts around 30 minutes discussion; then people have to move to another table;

¹ <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>

- 15 minutes at the beginning are dedicated to “warm up”, by defining the starting point and the context;
- 15 minutes at the end are dedicated to share the main results of the discussion.

The SMART EUROPE Cafés format and methodology implemented

This section presents some insights on the methodology used in the SMART EUROPE Cafés and on how it has been fine-tuned for the project’s purposes.

The main objectives of the SMART EUROPE Café are:

- creating an active network to discuss essential issues;
- starting a creative process for sharing the knowledge achieved in previous projects and their outputs;
- developing ideas for the future based on collective know-how.

For instance, the SMART EUROPE Café might lead to the identification of tools to support companies growth (e.g. the financial instruments that can be used by young innovative companies or other actions aiming to enhance the knowledge and skills of innovative new businesses).

The findings of these events can be used to feed the discussions with the peer reviewers during their visits. A second round of SMART EUROPE Cafés (possible, but not mandatory) should help to validate some of the ideas and recommendations emerged from the peer review.

Equipment to set up a SMART EUROPE Café:

- 3 café tables (one for each selected topic) where you can write and draw on big sheets of white paper;
- enough pens in black or blue and one or two in a bright colour,
- post-its;
- chairs for around 6-7 people at each table;
- 3 flip-charts to summarise and present the results at the end of the SMART EUROPE Café.

Tips to facilitate the discussion in a SMART EUROPE Café:

- 3 rounds of discussion of 20-30 minutes each around the 3 main topics (1 for each table);
- make people circulate after max. 20-30 minutes;
- nominate one facilitator for each table; the facilitator remains at the table to give an overview on the discussion to the next group;
- The facilitator should help to connect issues, questions, suggestions and ideas;
- For the last round, give people the possibility to back to the first table if they have new inputs to propose, instead of going to a new table;
- At the end, the facilitator sums up the main issues emerged in the table.

Tips for selecting the participants:

- explain the target:
 - why are we doing these events
 - why have we chosen this group

- create a relaxed atmosphere (food and beverage, music, daylight, ...) encouraging the participation of everyone;
- explain the rules on questions at the beginning:
 - open questions
 - no more than 3 questions
 - questions should enable discoveries and must not rate
 - keep it smart and simple
 - attract attention, also by being provocative
- ask for inputs, require an active participation;
- link different points of view;

“To do list” for a facilitator

- remind the participants to write down immediately the important ideas, findings or connections;
- encourage the active participation of everyone;
- remain at the table and welcome the new participants;
- sum-up the results of the previous discussions when a new group arrives.

Café etiquette for participants:

- keep focused to the identified issues;
- add your own perspectives;
- listen to better understand;



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- connect ideas;
- play, draw and write to express concepts.