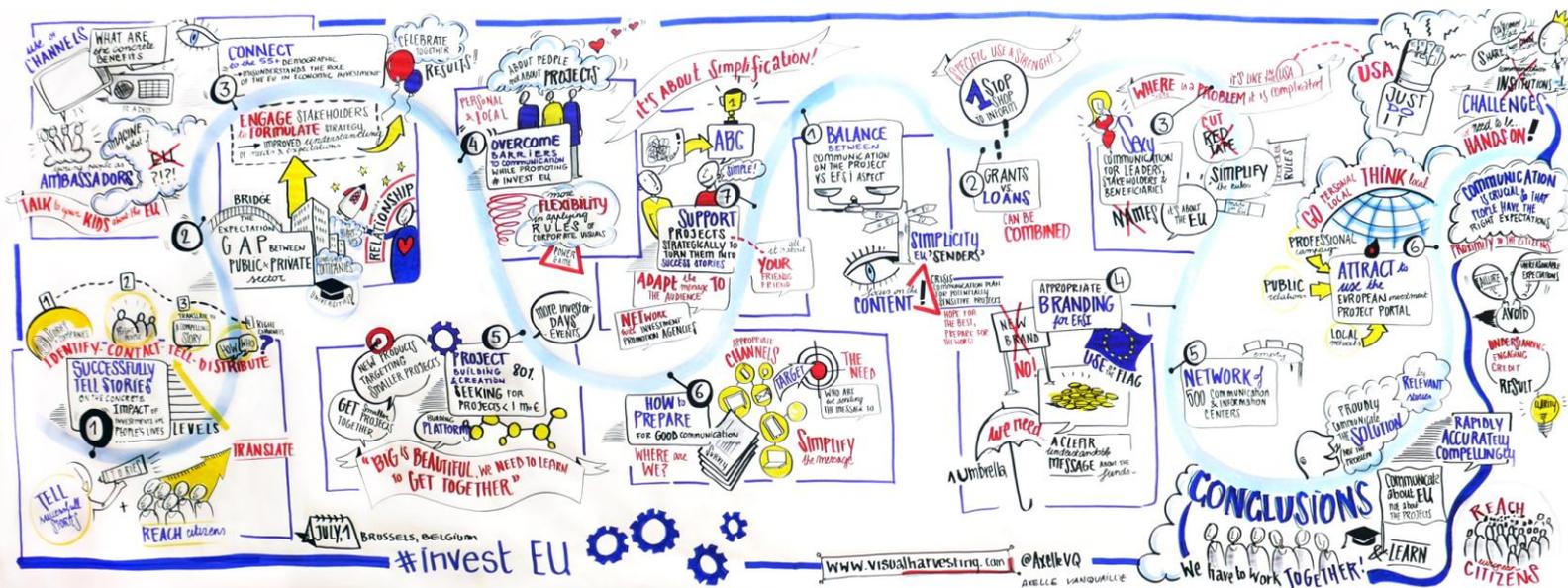




“Communicating investment at EU, national, regional and local level” high-level conference



Ideas Factory workshop harvesting report

Brussels July 1, 2016



The high-level conference ***"Communicating investment at EU, national, regional and local level"*** took place in Brussels on July 1st 2016. It was conceived as a one-day event for sharing communication best practises and discussing communication challenges related to investment in EU countries.

The event brought together communication *experts active in investment promotion and communication from across the EU, both from private and public sectors. Leaders of EU structural funds managing authorities were also present as well as representatives of the EU institutions and the European Investment Bank.*

Together they had the opportunity of brainstorming and raising awareness about communication activities related to EU funds and the Investment Plan for Europe.

Case studies were presented and a panel debate took place in the morning while in the afternoon participants were invited to think about communication challenges and identify topics to be discussed in small groups.

The following is a summary of those conversations.



"How do we successfully tell stories on the concrete impact of investments in people's life; reach citizens in a targeted way"

(conversation hosted by Mr Fabian Breuer – f.breuer@eib.org)



To tell successful stories and reach citizen as audience: identify right projects, professionally contact right beneficiaries, translate story with them and distribute jointly in targeted way

There's a need for examples and exchange of best practices on what happens on the ground to companies and relative impact numbers. Those numbers (outputs) should be translated into stories on impact for people. Get testimonials (real life/people) on the ground. Local audiences and media (local TV/radio) also need to be tackled. EU and national/local communicators have to cooperate. Use promoters/companies as 3rd party endorsement.

Everybody is overloaded and communication takes time. Contacts taken by EC/EIB could prove intimidating especially for small companies. It's crucial to find representatives of companies/investors who can and want to speak. Getting microeconomics impact numbers is also very important.

Once stories/companies are identified speakers/testimonials should be asked to tell the story in a compelling way to better reach citizens.



**"The balance between the communication on the project vs the EFSI;
aspect problem cases: what is the plan for projects/crisis communication"**

(conversation hosted by Mr Jukka Ahonen - jukka.ahonen@nib.int)



The participants did not yet have much experience with EFSI, only some signed projects; in certain areas there is ample liquidity in the market and not necessarily great demand for good projects. Many financial institutions have limited disclosure possibilities due to bank secrecy, some other may have (some IFIs) an obligation to publish projects they finance but also in that case the media interest may be limited as regards financing aspects.

From a political point of view it is important to mention EFSI, it does matter that the beneficiaries know where the money comes from but it is a challenge to list all EU actors/instruments.

It is necessary to simplify different EU senders e.g. investEU. The challenge is that there are too many logos, acronyms and names which take more space than the story itself. The focus should be on content: the story rather than the institutional logos.

If awareness is raised for projects which fail, what would be the follow up in terms of communication? Have crisis communication plan for potentially sensitive projects.



"How to bridge the expectations gap between public and private sector"

(conversation hosted by Ms Natasa Pilides - npilides@investcyprus.org.cy)



"Engage stakeholders to formulate a strategy that leads to improved understanding of needs and expectations and then celebrate results together"

There appears to be a huge gap/disconnection between central government, regional government agencies and the public with regard to communication around investment policies; the private sector has the perception that government agencies are not competitive enough to understand the realities of the private sector. Communication about opportunities is not reaching the audience.

Europe has unique aspects such as richness of history and variety of cultures but lacks a harmonised common strategy. The following suggestions are proposed: use a marketing approach to explain what the various products should look like and above all their benefits. Involve universities, a strategy particularly advantageous for large companies, which can use universities as a testing ground for their projects. Organise stakeholder conferences (including the general public) to identify the needs of the various groups and find ways to meet those needs and create a communication plan based on the findings.



"Grants vs Loans – Why grants are considered more accessible than loans"

(conversation hosted by Ms Anja de Cunto - anja.decunto@eurocities.eu)



*"Both grants and financial instruments have their strengths
& can be combined"*

It seems that the reflex of managing authorities is to apply for grants before considering loans. The main point it is thus to clarify the distinction between grants and loans.

Applying for a grant can be an arduous and long process and are most suited for large projects (over 2.5 m) but in the end they are a gift. Loans on the other hand can be granted more spontaneously and should be considered for projects with immediate impact. Authorities that are too grant focused should also consider the cost of time lost when favoring grants over loans. A skilled advisor can recommend the right choice AND, more importantly also point out the option of combining the two.

This leads to another question: how to communicate and provide information about the plethora of options that exist. Stakeholders should be educated in simple language about the difference between grants and loans.

The dream would be to create a single site with all the pertinent information, a one stop shop for both products for entity (local authorities, NGOs, SMEs...)



"How do we connect specifically to 55+ demographic that thoroughly misunderstands the role of driving economic growth through investment?"

(conversation hosted by Mr Brett Kobie – www.fleishman-hillard.eu)



The current perceptions can be summarised in the following sentences: we don't benefit; the EU is spending our money in South Europe; Brussels decides everything; economic growth is very slow and EU is not helping...

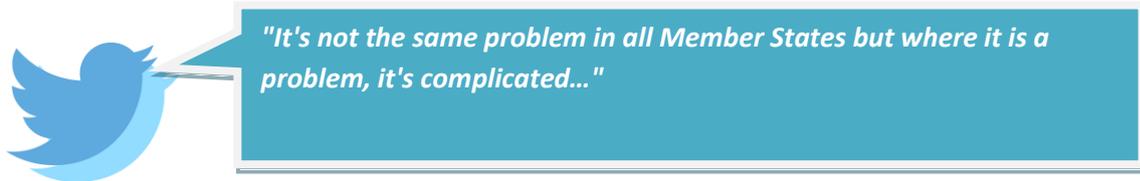
This narrative can trigger questions such as who do people believe? Is the reconstruction story still alive?

People need to see concrete benefits. Actions proposed are to use the young generation as ambassadors; the channels should be radio and television. The group also advised on the need to communicate the impact of not having the EU.



"How do we make EU funds communication "sexy" for our leaders, stakeholders and beneficiaries: stick, carrot or what?"

(conversation hosted by Mr Peter Fischer - peter.fischer@ec.europa.eu)



The amount of procedures is overwhelming and tiredness can manifest even before getting to the phase of communicating. It appears that leaders who are willing to communicate they are given up claiming "it is just too difficult".

Thus there's the need to cut the red tape in order to have time and energy for effective communication. As well as simplify fund communication rules: co-funded by the European Union is enough.



"Ways to overcome/extend barriers to communication while promoting #investEU (short attention span, necessity of paid promotion on social media, high level of criticism toward the EU in general"

(converation hosted by Ms Katarzyna Wolos - katarzyna.wolos@ec.europa.eu)



The impression is that beneficiaries are not very engaged; motivation fades as a consequence of having to stick to strict legal obligation (tick-boxing excersice). The feeling is that more flexibility in applying corporate visual rules would be welcomed.

Focus should be put on programmes and their contents and relations with potential testimonials should be cultivated. Motivation has to be built (what's in it for me?), make them feel proud about their projects so that they will want to communicate Europe and not feel obliged to "love the EU" in return of money.



"Appropriate branding for EFSI (also corporate designs)"

(conversation hosted by Ms Yvonne Schoenlein - yvonne.schoenlein@smul.sachsen.de)



#investEU we need comprehensive + clear messages, what is behind this funding. Source (EFSI) - EU flag + slogan (as an umbrella) = general branding and then sectors: SMEs, environmental projects, transport, broadband etc.

EFSI is about a whole concept; it is part of a larger product. On the other hand, ESIF is another fund thus differences should be made visible.

No specific branding, no logo is needed for EFSI. We need to send out a clear message to different audiences and present success stories. The only visual brand should be the EU flag accompanied by the names of different financial products and a clear/understandable message about the funds.



"Project bundling and project creation - 80% of local authorities projects seeking investment are less than 1M€ (source Covenant of Mayors Survey 2016)"

(conversation hosted by Ms Anja de Cunto - anja.decunto@eurocities.eu)



EIB efforts to promote bundling until now have not worked, especially in cross-national terms.

Banks usually work on one business model and want to replicate it which proves not possible in some cases. Either the projects get bigger or banks start focussing their interest in smaller projects. Some loan conditions on the market are better than EU conditions.

Small projects need to join forces in order to reach minimum investment size.

Stakeholders should engage at local level, reduction of red tape is also part of the solution.

Concrete actions could be organising more investors' days' type events; creation of new financial products targeting smaller projects; creation of bundling platforms. Use of EC Representations and EDIC's is also advised.



"What do we know about people's perception – how to prepare for good communication – information vs communication/change of perception"

(conversation hosted by Ms Ramunas Dilba - ramunas.dilba@finmin.lt)



There is a myth about EU funds, common perceptions are that they are complicated, too bureaucratic and people do not really understand the purpose of them. Start with a change in the vision: EU funds = loans.

Currently there are many information on the Investment Plan but not real communication i.e. interaction with people, engagement in discussions.

Companies need to understand better the goal of the project, be reassured that it's worthy. There's a clear need to simplify the communication (also on social media) and summarize the information. Surveys are needed to define the subject of the communication and who should be the target audience.



"How to attract investors and project promoters to use the European Investment Project Portal"

(conversation hosted by Mr Michael Feith - Michael.FEITH@ec.europa.eu)



"Underestimated role of surveys – understand where you are – more targeted communication and channels"

The Portal bridges investors and project promoters; it's user friendly, like a Facebook for projects. There are currently around 100 projects on the website since its launch on 1st June. Communications was done via VP letters to CEO of large companies, banks, insurance etc. and also with ads, prints and web.

Projects/success stories need to be highlighted not the website itself. Make it more human, closer to people.

Concrete actions suggested: articles in specific journals, high level events for investors. Personal contact with CEOs: they are a community, know each other so word of mouth could be used. Roadshows: series of meeting across different cities where top executives have the opportunity to talk with current or potential investors. They can range from 2 or 3 days in one country to marathon of 3 weeks trips to financial centres around the world.



"How can we support projects strategically to turn them into success stories"

(conversation hosted by Mr Diego Goenaga - diegoalberto.goenaga@gobex.es)



1) it's about simplification 2) adapt the message to the audience 3) it's all about your friend's friend 4) network with/or «Investment promotion agencies». Healthy competition

Opportunities and obstacles exist on regional vs national level. The EU role makes them more similar, gives common ground elevating regions to a more autonomous role and giving countries a common set of rules.

Key is going beyond EU for sources of investment; investors should be allowed to move to the regions or industries that need them most. More has to be done to generate success stories and make them viral so that investors and businessmen tell their partners, peers, etc...

We should find out if there is any potential in the cooperation with third countries chambers of commerce and or working with EU delegations and local agencies.