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**Notes – key learning outcomes and comments about the MWG experience**

**1. Why is it important for us?**

Exchanges with people/practitioners/policy makers working on the implementation and monitoring of the strategies is for us very valuable. They help us to better understand: how the smart specialisation policy agenda unfolds in different territories and institutional settings; what are the main obstacles, challenges, etc.

Policy success (or failure) depends to a large extent on how the policy is translated and implemented in the territories. It depends on the existence (or lack of thereof) of favourable circumstances, leadership and committed partners, etc. Put it differently, making policy works very often remains *"a hands-on, messy and very much local affair "*.

From these meetings, we get important feed-back on methodological issues as well as on policy design and results.

**2. Key lessons and comments**

* **Different actors and different spatial scales.** The S3 policy framework includes **different levels of government. Every level has its own specific information requirements that** **serve specific purposes**. At the EU level the challenge is to identify common indicators and aggregate data ("common indicators are a powerful tool to communicate aggregate policy achievements across Member States"). At the national scale, the focus is often on benchmarking (see for example, the Italian experience: design of indicators for specialisation areas at national level). At the regional level, public administrations and stakeholders need: specific information on innovation priority areas (breakdown of data), funding allocation per priority area, feed-back on the policy instruments and process, information for refining/defining priority areas, etc.

This can lead to a **proliferation of indicators** **and data collection activities** etc. We **should avoid repeating past mistakes**. In many cases, a big effort was put in collecting data (of doubtful value), but nobody clearly knew what to do with them. Producing data does not mean that they will be useful. It is necessary to give a meaning at the measuring process. There are a few questions that we should have in mind when building our monitoring system: **are the data useful? Can I collect them in time? Do I have the necessary resources for collecting and analysing them?**

* **The logic of intervention.** The **importance of the logic of intervention is often underplayed**. Clear logic of intervention and objectives are two fundamental pre-requisites for an effective monitoring system. Bad indicators, which are not policy responsive, are often the result of a vague logic of intervention/theory of change. A good monitoring system stems from a clear logic of intervention.
* **Indicators.** **There is some confusion not only in the terminology, but also in what is an output indicator, a result indicators, etc.** We need to work more on the establishment of a common understanding on the different typologies of indicators. We need to better specify what we mean by output indicators, result indicators, etc. There are different interpretations out there.
* **Qualitative information. There is an increasing interest in collecting and using qualitative information** (which can also be useful to better define priority areas). Rising interest in going beyond indicators and data provided from the national statics office which are built for specific purposes (benchmarking, etc.) and are characterised by a greater level of aggregation. During the meeting **regions clearly manifested their needs for methodological support on how to collect and analyse this type of information** (challenges: "how do we gather information form non-beneficiaries?", "how do we collect information about non technological innovation?, etc.")**.**
* **Improvement as a result of measurement (monitoring).** This is the bottom line for judging whether monitoring systems really add value. Even if we have good data, valuable information, **there is no guarantee that data will actually be employed as a basis for strengthening decision making and management and eventually improving strategy performance** (lack of authority and interest to make changes, fear of "rocking the boat", etc.)

**3. Areas for improvement**

* **Partners' involvement and political support**. On this specific issue, in the code of conduct on partnership, there is a potential not fully exploited. There are provisions that can be used to foster stakeholders' participation: employing ESIFs technical assistance money to strengthen the institutional capacity of relevant partners (workshops, training sessions, networking activities; etc.). Managing Authorities should do more.
* **Coordination among the national-regional-local levels and empowerment of lower levels of government**. We heard many times during the meetings from regional and local representatives: "we are not in control". The EC should do more to empower regional and local governments in some MS, in light of the centrality of the place-based approach within the smart specialisation policy concept (recommendations for the future programming period).
* **Institutional capability** (building "**reflexive institutions**"). It is important to get external advice, but if we do not strengthen regional administrations' and agencies' capabilities (absorptive capacity) no much improvement can be expected.