



TOPIC [INT-02-2014]

H2020-INT-INCO-2014

Deliverable N.: D5.1

Title: Dissemination Strategy

Funding scheme: Coordination and support action

Project Acronym: MERID

Project Coordinator: EMUNI

Grant Agreement n°: 645846

Author: S-COM

Dissemination level: PU (Public)

Official delivery date: M4

Project start: 1 January 2014

Project duration: 36 months

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1. Introduction

The Dissemination Strategy of MERID project represent the main reference for the communication and dissemination activities aimed at enhancing the visibility of the project, raising awareness of its stakeholders and engaging them in its activities. The main purpose of the Dissemination Strategy is to set the basis and tools to promote the work of MERID partners by ensuring both the internal communication - to guarantee the optimal outcomes of the project activities - and the foundations for an effective communication of innovations and benefits produced by MERID towards users and stakeholders external to the consortium as well as the broader society.

The Dissemination Strategy takes into account the variable geometry in the framework conditions between the European Union and the Middle East. Considering this variable geometry, the dissemination activities will be designed according to the existing framework conditions in each country.¹

The strategy also sets the framework for establishing links with the local communities in order to stimulate a wide participation. This will be achieved through an effective online engagement with PCs' civil society and through continuous, accurate and tight collaboration with all project's partners.

The basic approach is to:

- Determine **objectives, strategy** and **impact** to be pursued within the communication and dissemination activities;
- Determine the communication **channels** to be used;
- Determine the dissemination **tools** to be exploited;
- Identify the **target groups** to whom send the information on project activities and innovative results;
- Identify, through the **Quality Control Plan** prepared by the Project Coordinator, the procedures to be established within the framework of MERID project, to ensure that the outcomes of the project are high standards and meet its objectives.

¹ Since Iran and Iraq have at the moment no framework conditions for STI cooperation with the Union, dissemination activities will pay particular attention to these countries in order to contribute to the achievement of the project's expected impact.

Following this approach, the MERID Dissemination Strategy aims at:

- ❖ Formulate an action plan taking into account the virtual diffusion and dissemination materials;
- ❖ Build-up MERID network which builds on the basis of all key stakeholders of the regional areas concerned;
- ❖ Pursue fruitful interactions with other relevant projects and initiatives related to R&I cooperation between Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean area;
- ❖ Identify the best channels to vehiculate the project's innovative results to the target groups and the broader society;
- ❖ Evaluate the efficiency of the communication strategy by obtaining feedback information by MERID target groups and the follow-up of MERID uptake by end-users

2. Objectives, strategy and expected impact

2.1. Objectives

The communication activities will contribute to the realization of the following objectives:

- Increase the visibility and brand awareness of MERID project;
- Promote the aims of the project in Europe and the MEPCs;
- Disseminate information about the stakeholders involved in the European and Middle Eastern research community;
- Promote workshops, conferences, meetings and latest news on MERID priorities.

2.2. Strategy

The dissemination strategy will take into account the variable geometry in the framework conditions between the Union and the Middle East. Considering this variable geometry, the dissemination activities will be designed according to the existing framework condition in each country. Since Iran and Iraq have at the moment no framework conditions for STI cooperation with the Union, dissemination activities will pay particular attention to these countries in order to contribute to the achievement of the project's expected impact.

The strategy to achieve the above mentioned objectives and ensure the impact of the dissemination activities will be based on a set of actions:

- Establish a consistent and continuous dialogue with European and Middle Eastern researchers, stakeholders and policy-makers;
- Establish fruitful connections and interactions with other relevant projects, initiatives and networks at the regional level;
- Involve target groups through key events and within the reports and analytical papers;
- Provide and disseminate relevant documentation and information about the project through specific tools;
- Start networking activities through specific channels.

2.2.1. The strategy for interacting with social web communities

Several operational activities have been planned in order to encourage a broad participation of all key stakeholders (research community, policy-makers, innovation actors, private sector, etc.) in project activities and influence the project's agenda, contents and outputs.

A wide, serious and dynamic participation of the Middle Eastern and European research communities is needed to substantiate research and innovation proposals for research institutions, Euro-Mideast cooperation actors and policy-makers and have an impact on their agenda.

A huge number of thematic and regional web communities and blogs are occupying the internet across the world and discuss/deliver on ideas and proposals for innovative research and solutions. MERID, moving within existing web communities and previous similar experiences, will seek credibility and mutual trust in order to engage major research and innovation actors and stakeholders through social media channels, thus becoming a “follower” and “followed” member of the established web communities on the basis of robust content and values provided.

In the first 12 months, MERID project, in the framework of WP5, will pursue the following goals:

- Creation of MERID digital identity

- Mapping partner countries' target groups (research community, policy-makers, innovation actors, enterprise but also youth and broader society) that could have a stake in MERID activities and/or dissemination materials, while amplifying MERID identity in established web communities and thematic/regional blogs. Mapping will also address web initiatives such as existing scientific coffees in Mideast partner countries (with WP2)
- Establishment of a web-based information system through the creation of an adaptive, participatory-based web portal;
- Setting-up of social media channels and connecting them to established actors and networks of the web community in both Europe and the Mideast partner countries;
- Gradual participation in existing key social web communities, keeping low profile, gaining trust through proposing a strategic and visionary identity;
- Setting-up of a match-making platform offering the possibility of better organizing and targeting participants in the trainings and brokerage events, based on thematic/geographic areas or common interests, facilitating the identification of common needs and priorities.

2.3. Expected impact

MERID communication and dissemination strategy expects to reach the following impact:

- A significant number of actors coming from the different target groups (research community, academia, NGOs, policy-makers, innovation actors, private sector but also youth and broader society) are mobilized within MERID geographic area;
- The interaction and cooperation among Euro-Mideast stakeholders is enhanced and increased;
- The policy dialogue capacities on science, technology, research and innovation with public stakeholders and governmental organizations at both national and regional level is strengthened;
- The visibility and awareness of stakeholders on the project's aims is increased;
- MERID outcome documents reach the decision-making level.

Dissemination to other relevant networks and fora dealing with research cooperation in the region will also be ensured by strengthening relationship with existing initiative (MedSpring Agora, Inco-Net, and others). The consortium's balanced composition (governmental bodies, universities, and private associations) is well suited for ensuring an effective dissemination across the audiences identified.

3. Communication channels and tools

The dissemination tools and activities are the main instruments through which communication will be presented and promoted and will be the principal means to achieve the expected impact of the objectives provided for in this strategy.

3.1. Communication channels

The identified communication channels are:

a. The MERID website and its connectivity

The MERID website will be based on adaptive ICT technologies and participatory tools. The web portal will contribute to the project's objective of raising awareness among researchers and innovation actors on research opportunities within the H2020 framework. It will also be instrumental to raise awareness and understanding of researchers and innovation actors by including in its public repository the training material used in WP4 and by ensuring detailed dissemination of results of all project's events.

The website will contain, notably, the following sections:

- a.** A repository area with the project's documentation and material;
- b.** An internal co-working area for the project's partners (in coordination with WP1);
- c.** A match-making platform that offer the possibility of better organizing and targeting participants in the trainings and brokerage events foreseen in WP4;
- d.** An area for external communication with multimedia material on thematic/geographic topics of mutual interests for research and innovation actors.

The Project's Web portal will contribute to the project's objective of raising awareness among researchers and innovation actors on research opportunities within the H2020

framework and transferring best practices and experience from more advanced Middle East countries to newcomers in the H2020 arena (Iran and Iraq). The Web portal will be instrumental to raise awareness and understanding of researchers and innovation actors by including in its public repository the training material used in WP4 and by ensuring detailed dissemination of results of all project events and brokerage facilities to build international consortia.

Moreover, within the web portal the users will be offered the possibility of following online webinars, live streamings of brokerage events as well as participating through live twitting sessions.

The project's web portal will include a **match-making platform**. The platform offers the possibility of better organizing and targeting participants in the trainings and brokerage events foreseen in WP4. Through the platform, a pre-selection of participants based on thematic/geographic areas or common interests will contribute to make training and brokerage events more effective by facilitating the identification of common needs and priorities.

The first version of Website will be ready by M4 and the final version by M 10

b. The MERID AGORA and other social networks.

The Agora MERID is a virtual, internet-based forum, acting as a platform to stimulate the participation and discussion of the civil society and stakeholders on research and innovation. Social media channels and tools will be activated for creating the “virtual identity” of the project (Facebook pages, Twitter, Youtube Channel, Linkedin) and integrated with other mapped web communities. Social Media monitoring will also be activated to monitor social dialogue and will enable to evaluate how the project is perceived by users and followers. The contents defined on social networks will be discussed and further elaborated in coordination with WP2 (via face-to-face meetings) on the model of the digital Agenda of the EU.

Target groups: Project beneficiaries, Researchers, Policy Makers, Middle East

3.2. Communication tools

The identified communication tools are:

a. Project corporate identity

Definition of a project corporate identity (i.e., “branding”) is one of the principal tools to represent MERID project. Hence communication activities will make sure that the project improves the visibility and builds foundations for long-term Public Relations (PR) management. The corporate identity of MERID will show clearly the topics of the project and that this is founded by H2020 programme.

b. Promo video MERID

The most effective way to communicate to a large audience in an appealing manner is through videos. They are especially useful online, as videos are easily shared on social networks and partner’s websites, but are also effective at events, where they add an attention-drawing element to presentations.

One short (< 5 min) Merid video aims at promoting on the one hand the launch of MERID project; on the other hand it aims at supporting and promoting the political role of the European Commission (DG research and innovation) in fostering international cooperation and especially political dialogue by means of scientific cooperation and the role of science as a diplomatic tool. The video will be featured within the project’s website and all relevant websites of the EU institutions and it will be publicly screened in all relevant European and regional events related to science, technology, research and innovation.

c. MERID brochure

Various events will be organised by the MERID project, and project partners will participate in several more. For those occasions, simple, vulgarised and appealing documentation is a key to ensure optimal communication and dissemination of the project outputs and outcomes. A MERID brochure will be produced to present the topic, objectives and activities of the project. This brochure will be printed in at least 3000 copies to be handed out at each event MERID partners participate in. It will also be distributed online under the form of clear and appealing info-graphics (as .jpg files), that can be much more easily spread through social networks and interested websites. The MERID brochure will be updated by M6, M18, M30

d. MERID public digital information

Developing public digital information and knowledge base focusing on research cooperation, and geographic/thematic aspects. The publication of digital information will have a clear editorial line and will be organized on a quarterly base: it will include opinions, best practices, analyses, contribution by partners. The quarterly publication

will provide the external visitor with a comprehensive vision regarding the focus of the project and its progress. The quarterly publication will represent the state-of-the-art with regards to the research cooperation in the Middle East.

Part 1: Short explanation of what the project is about/resume of the main results or conclusions achieved up to now; // Information about the last project activities/results/conclusions, and the activities/events coming soon; // Information about other events/information days/open calls for proposals of interest for the Middle East area; // Last novelties about the AGORA Merid

Part 2: Presentation of one MERID beneficiary: brief description of the organization, main highlights, expected contribution of this organization to the project, expected benefits of the project to this organization; // Presentation and interview to a high-level scientist from the same country than the before-mentioned MERID

Part 3: Invited key-note on some aspects of the project, following the DoW, to be published in months 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, 36

e. Cross-promotion of project

MERID will take advantage from the direct involvement of the partners in other international projects such as MEDSPRING, MIRA, EUJordanNet and BILATs etc. Similarly, synergies and coordination is foreseen with the R2I projects funded in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon in order to identify needs and better calibrate the training on innovation envisaged in WP4.

4. Target groups

All dissemination activities need to be precisely targeted and tailored to the group of stakeholders MERID intends to reach. The target groups are the beneficiaries of the principal communication objectives, and mainly consist of:

- MERID Consortium
- Individual researchers
- Research Institutions/associations/organisations (public and private)
- Research and Support Networks and Projects
- Policy makers

- Enterprises, NGOs, public administrations, private organizations, technological platforms, etc
- National and local authorities
- European Commission, Union for the Mediterranean, and other institutions
- Civil society
- Others

4.1. Role of MERID partners

The dissemination and exploitation of the project's results are concentrated in WP5 (dissemination and communication) but WP3 (support to policy dialogue) and WP4 (Training, capacity & awareness building for promoting cooperation in H2020) are also central in the process of dissemination.

MERID partners will be responsible of providing S-COM with complete information about all the activities they may organize under the umbrella of MERID, in order to be published in the website, update the calendar of next coming events and disseminate the results and conclusions.

They will also inform about any further activities that may have interest for the project or the project community.

Specifically, the MERID partners responsible of informing S-COM about the main activities, conclusions and results per Work Package are the following:

WP1 - Coordination and Management

(Task responsible: EMUNI)

WP2 - Mapping and stocktaking of Middle East Research and Innovation Landscape and Framework Conditions for EU Cooperation

(Task responsible: CNRS, CeRISS)

WP3- Support to Policy Dialogue: Towards establishing appropriate framework conditions and facilities for cooperation

(Task responsible: EMUNI, contributing partners: ESADE, MHESR)

WP4 - Training, capacity & awareness building for promoting cooperation in H2020

(Task responsible: CIHEAM, EFB)

WP5 - Communication and dissemination

(Task responsible: S-COM, IRAMOT)

5. Conclusions

A good internal communication of the MERID consortium will allow – following the strategy and communication tools and channels already described - an effective communication of the debates, results, conclusions and recommendations of the project towards users and stakeholders external to the consortium.

MERID will play a key role in this internal communication, since they will be responsible of providing S-COM with complete information about all the activities they may organize under the umbrella of MERID, in order to be published in the website, update the calendar of next coming events and disseminate the results and conclusions.

The success of the dissemination plan will be monitored closely throughout the project, online press and media coverage will be tracked. Appropriate web analytics software will be installed on the project website to enable closer inspection of web traffic, including investigating any observed changes in traffic surrounding key project events, as well as basic information about visitors and the use they make of the site.

Short informal interviews and/or questionnaires will be used at the face-to-face events to gauge participant reactions to the activities, as well as gather valuable feedback for planning future ones. The responsible partner for this concrete action will be S-COM and, in case S-COL has no budget to attend the event, a partner attending the event will be nominated to do this activity.

The results of this monitoring process will be reviewed at the regular consortium management meetings. Such discussions will provide an opportunity to identify particular gaps or overlaps in existing dissemination activities, and adjust the strategic direction accordingly during the project itself.