

# 11 Innovation Camps

## Type of support / service available

Innovation Camps are essentially a tool to develop a culture of innovativeness at a local level. They seek to address societal and economic challenges facing local societies in a European context. They bring together a geographically and disciplinary diverse group of participants to work closely together during two to five days. Immersion in an entrepreneurial way of thinking and working processes aims to foster the discovery of opportunities and the development of ideas with real-world impact. This methodology has been refined through the ongoing organisation of such camps across Europe since 2010.

Sharing similar goals, the Smart Specialisation Platform (S3P) encourages and supports regions and cities willing to host Innovation Camps. The platform can provide methodological guidance and access to a pool of professional facilitators and support the preparation of a team of local facilitators for an autonomous use of the methodology.

## Relevance for regional authorities

The Innovation Camp methodology supports regions and cities in the identification of local societal challenges and the conception of innovative solutions for related issues. Multidisciplinary groups develop new ideas and perspectives on real-world challenges brought to the Innovation Camps by cities, regions, business organisations, universities and NGOs.

Innovation Camps are also a complementary tool for EDP (Entrepreneurial Discovery Process), a core methodology of the JRC Smart Specialisation process to stimulate inclusive and interactive bottom-up processes of collaboration between multiple and diverse stakeholders.



Gabrovo Innovation Camp (Bulgaria, 2016).

## Policy context

In the overall framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and particularly in the context of the Digital Single Market, Open Innovation is seen as a positive approach for innovation, helping to solve key European challenges by embracing change, and engaging all relevant stakeholders.

More positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and risk taking are needed to turn Europe into a more innovative, dynamic and competitive economy in a globalised world. Such a culture cannot be imposed but needs to be nurtured in society, as it exceeds the narrow domain of R&D and innovation policy. Policy makers have a clear responsibility to enable and favour innovation (e.g. rewarding it, supporting it, creating ecosystems to make it pervasive), but a culture of innovation is a societal feature under the collective responsibility of all driving societal stakeholders. A well-intended innovation culture can benefit society, so it is inclusive by nature. Methodologies like this are needed to guarantee that all relevant actors (including civil society) meet and cooperate to find solutions to common territorial development challenges.

## How to use

S3P encourages and supports regions and cities from all EU Member States willing to experiment with Innovation Camps. Expressions of interest can be made to the JRC via the S3P team<sup>1</sup>. Different stakeholders may have differing interests:

- Policy makers: to mobilise self-organising capacities of cities and regions to address local societal challenges
- Business/entrepreneurs: to match/join interests, capacities and forces locally to compete innovatively in a globalised market
- Academia: to identify locally-meaningful research and innovation capacities to be developed in the long run in cooperation with business and government, while working with and for the local society
- Civil society: to empower citizens to gain ownership and conceive innovative solutions to societal issues of their concern.

Any of these stakeholders could propose the real-world challenge to be addressed at an Innovation camp. Participants from diverse backgrounds, countries and ages work together at the Camps in largely self-organising groups. The lightly facilitated work process is designed to continuously frame and reframe the issues, problems, and assumptions relevant to a challenge. This leads to the creation of a range of new perspectives – new lenses through which the issues can be better understood – and entrepreneurial ways of dealing with them.

The prototyping period after the Camp is an integral part of the process. Follow-through takes place at diverse and relevant locations, with direct stakeholder engagement. Living labs and (urban) test-beds may be part of this co-creation process. This leads to more robust prototypes, to practical experiments, pilots and - with sufficient commitment - plans for fast-track realization.

The Innovation camp methodology is refined from camp to camp, and is adapted to best address the specific challenges of each event. A good example is the 2016 Gabrovo Innovation Camp<sup>2</sup>, in Bulgaria. There, the overall objective was to transform regional potential into innovation-led economic growth and societal wellbeing. It did this by addressing the theme of “Overcoming the Innovation Divide in Europe”, examining three core challenges and to identify possible solutions:

- Innovation Divide in Europe
- Smart Specialisation in Higher Education and Urban Development
- 21st Century Democracy.

Other regions can learn directly from the experience of the innovation camps by participating in them and/or studying the publicly available outcomes of the innovation camps.

## Impact

In the past, Innovation Camps have addressed issues such as low carbon urban planning, realizing regional test-beds and demonstrators, renewing citizen-government engagement, and enhancing the innovativeness

---

1. Available at: <https://rio.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/library/place-based-innovation-ecosystems-espoo-innovation-garden-and-aalto-university-finland>

2. <http://gabrovoinnovationcamp.eu/> This includes the basic methodology: [http://gabrovoinnovationcamp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Innovation-Camps-methodology-guide\\_Bratislava.pdf](http://gabrovoinnovationcamp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Innovation-Camps-methodology-guide_Bratislava.pdf)

and inclusiveness of society. Since 2016 the JRC has co-organised Innovation Camps in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions – namely in Amsterdam (NL), Bratislava (SK) and Gabrovo (BG) – or with regions in phase of implementing their RIS3 – namely in Lapland (FI) and Catalonia (ES). Particularly in the latter, it has been instrumental to cluster collaborations (Lapland) or to the aggregation of digital-social innovation spaces and organisations (living labs, fablabs, maker or co-working spaces, telecentres) to the Catalan innovation ecosystem. This engaged citizens as co-creators in the implementation of RIS3CAT. Going back to the Gabrovo example, it provided an innovative way to approach the largely unexplored and unrevealed potential of existing urban innovation opportunities in Severen tsentralen region of Bulgaria, coming from the bridging and the interaction of main local shareholders – local authorities, businesses and industries, academic structures (schools, Technical University, community centres), civil society, cultural operators, freelancers, etc. Within the Severen Tsentralen region, Gabrovo is a dynamic city and the co-organisation of the innovation camp was a strong catalyst for innovative ideas, and a possible boost for the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process. The Mayor of Gabrovo announced the intention to follow up the proposals and to finance what is possible. In particular, the “digital achievement” project, a mobile (truck based) unit bringing basic digital knowledge to elderly people in rural areas exhibited strong potential to be realised in practice.