



MEME Micro-Interventions: A Methodological Guideline

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Introduction

This guideline has been developed within the Erasmus+ Project GREEN MEME EFFECT. It is directed at actors in the social space of young people and aims to empower them to apply micro-interventions in everyday situations.

This guideline is designed for you if you are:

- ▶ a teacher, trying to find an engaging way to teach green skills to your class;
- ▶ a parent, hoping to find a way to get your teens to behave more sustainable;
- ▶ a youth or social worker, wishing for an easy and fun way to inspire the young people in your care to be more environmentally-aware;
- ▶ a representative of a company, NGO or local/regional government, on the quest to find a new approach to transport your green messages and engage with the target group of young people:
- ▶ or even a young person yourself, determined to reduce the ecological footprint of your lifestyle and to spark green change in your peers.

About the project

The GREEN MEME EFFECT project acts in three phases:



Build GREEN knowledge, skills and competences

The first step is to equip actors in the physical and digital social space of youth with reliable and attractive materials to build green knowledge, skills and competences.



Implement MEME Micro-Interventions

The second step is the development of a unique, visually attractive and innovative collection of micro-intervention materials that capture the attention of young people and "greenspire" them to pursue and maintain a sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle.



Create opportunities for impact EFFECT

The final step is to promote the GREEN MEME methodology and materials by providing real engagement opportunities for young people in their physical and digital social space.

All project results and developed materials are available free of charge on the project website www.green-meme-effect.eu in six languages: English, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Swedish.



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Concept Definitions

This chapter briefly summarises the main concepts that are utilised in the GREEN MEME EFFECT methodology and provides links to further reading resources.

What are Micro-Interventions?

This technique is often used in therapeutical and health-related contexts, but can be applied to any situation. A micro-intervention is a brief statement towards a simple-to-implement action aiming at a positive effect in the target group. It can be the spark of motivation that sets change in motion or gives the strength to persevere. Examples of basic micro-interventions are “Don’t give up!” or “Please recycle”.

For an in-depth explanation on the concept of micro-interventions in a medical context, we recommend this resource by the National Library of Medicine (2020):

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7661243/>

What is a MEME?

MEMEs are images, videos or text elements of pop culture or of real people that transport a relatable element – often these MEME templates are coined with customised text to fit a specific situation even better. And due to their relatability, they are shared uncountable times. For perspective: the hashtag #meme is in first place among Gen Z on Instagram with 149.560.135 posts alone in 2022 (not counting many related meme hashtags).

Before the term meme has been known as an internet phenomenon, it was coined by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins to describe an element of culture, an idea, a behaviour that is passed from one individual to another by imitation or other communicative means. In essence, a meme is to culture what a gene is to biology – many memes together create the DNA of culture and, consequently, the attitudes and habits of people in a community.

To find out more about the origins and nature of Memes, we recommend this further reading resource by the New York Times (2022):

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/26/crosswords/what-is-a-meme.html>

Memes and Copyright

One more thing: Memes are considered parody and thus can be used freely without infringing copyrights. However, as we are not individual users, but an EU-funded project, our aim is to use meme formats consciously, respectfully and honourably. Read more about the exception of memes and GIFs from EU copyright laws here in this resource by the European Commission (2021), especially the paragraphs “How do the new copyright rules protect users and their freedom online?” and “Does the Copyright Directive prevent users from expressing themselves in the same way as now? Are memes and GIFs banned?”:

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_2821





Internet Meme Origins & Creator

A great way to find out about the origin and typical use of a particular MEME format is the website “KnowYourMeme” (<https://knowyourmeme.com/>).

To create your own meme or look at some examples and various templates, we recommend the website “IMGFLIP” (<https://imgflip.com/>). Anyone can use the online creator without creating an account and you can choose to keep your created memes private, by just downloading them without saving or publishing.

What are formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts?

A formal context is defined as a systemic, intentional learning setting, for example at school or university, where tests assess learning outcomes.

A non-formal context has still some degree of organisational framework and intent to learn, but it is outside of the formal context. The focus is set on a specific topic, skill, or competence, for example in a hobby class or club, sport or language course or participation in volunteer actions.

An informal context describes any kind of learning that happens unintentionally as part of daily life. There is no particular intent or purpose, it just happens naturally.

We recommend this further reading resource by the Council of Europe for more details about formal, non-formal and informal learning: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning>

What is the Socio-Spatial Paradigm?

In a nutshell, the social space is defined as the social environment of a young person, in which they act and interact with others. In early definitions, there were zones defined that correspond with physical closeness to the person or they were described as interconnected islands. For example, the family would be the most inner zone/island, while school, the neighbourhood, hobby clubs or friend groups are other areas in which they experience contact with others. In current definitions, the social space of youth is defined by the interaction of a person with others in these various contexts and they can be formal, informal and non-formal.

The social space of youth has changed in the past years and is now as real in physical space at it is in digital space. Generation Z and younger do not remember a life without smartphone and internet, hence, using digital means of communication is as natural as putting on their clothes. They do not differentiate between their online and offline social environment and are highly influenced by their online peers and role models – no matter where they are in the physical world. Youth communication in the digital social space is highly characterised by visual elements – from photos, videos, emojis, stickers and GIFs to the popular format of MEMES.

For a more profound insight into the socio-spatial paradigm, we recommend this further reading resource by Spatscheck, Christian und Karin Wolf-Ostermann (2009):

<https://www.sozialraum.de/the-socio-spatial-paradigm-in-social-work.php>



The GREEN MEME Micro-Intervention Approach

A green and sustainable tomorrow begins with the people who shape their future by making the right choices every single day. To encourage and foster truly green lifestyles, green behaviours must become habits that get more and more internalised over time. It all begins with one spark that sets the change in motion – and ideally, spreads from one person to the next until it reaches all levels of society. This is what we want to achieve with the GREEN MEME EFFECT.

In essence, the GREEN MEME EFFECT project aims at empowering youth and relevant actors in their social space to become true agents of change for a more sustainable today and tomorrow. The methodology setup of the GREEN MEME EFFECT project is targeted at enabling behavioural changes in all levels of society by “greenfluencing” individual preferences, consumption habits and lifestyles.

Through this project, we want to engage youth of all social-economic backgrounds, genders and cultural identities. We plan to reach these hard-to-reach young people through informal stimuli in their social space - digitally and physically.

The verbal and visual micro-interventions should motivate them to get interested in green skills, try and adopt more sustainable behaviours and habits and, ultimately, participate in local/regional initiatives that support a sustainable future. Furthermore, the project provides low-threshold opportunities to get active through volunteering and implement green acts of solidarity (e.g. organised river/beach/forest clean-ups) that can be easily continued after its completion.

By empowering the young people to become true agents of change and by supplying them with a wide range of accessible, quick-to-use materials we enable them to feel included in their local community as active civic and social participants.

Why should I use MEME Micro-Interventions?

Basically, we want that the message we are trying to send sticks with our target group. There are many ways that lead to that goal, and the GREEN MEME EFFECT project chooses to walk the way of humour and visual storytelling. The briefer the better! A meme can transport a message in a pointed statement or hashtag, supported by a relatable image. If it sparks a smile or laughter, it may be shared to more people and with a bit of luck, the underlying message sticks with the people and inspires them to act accordingly and creates the spark of change we are trying to promote! Let’s look at an example:



This meme utilises a scene from “Spongebob Squarepants” in which the character has written a to-do list. To create the meme, the text is changed with whatever the meme creator wants to share.

To create a micro-intervention, it was replaced by the reminder to turn off the water while brushing your teeth.





How does it work?

The GREEN MEME EFFECT project provides a range of small resources that can be used as micro-interventions. We utilise Memes and humour to get the messages across to the young people (and anyone else who feels addressed).

If you are a key actor in the social space of youth, for example a teacher or a parent or someone fighting for a green cause with your NGO or company, you are free to use our resources. Or you can use them as inspiration and create your own using free online tools.

What resources does the GREEN MEME EFFECT project provide?

Within the project, we are developing a range of resources in the national languages of our partner countries: English, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Swedish.

Resource	Info	Availability
Green Meme Collection	A growing collection of green memes we created	Download PNGs or GIFs on our website
Sticker Sets (digital)	Digital stickers based on green memes and our project mascot. As the project proceeds, we are adding sets to the collection.	WhatsApp Sticker App On GIPHY On Tenor
Sticker Sets (physical)	These stickers are produced by the partnership and available as PDF download for further production.	Or print them using the PDF templates on our website . Ask one of the partner organisations if they have some to distribute!
Green Challenges Social Media Campaign	Weekly challenges posted on our social media channels	Facebook Instagram YouTube TikTok
Green Challenges Calendar	A one-page calendar (size A3) for digital and printed use to add one green habit each week. There is even an empty template you can fill with your own ideas!	View and download the filled calendar and empty template on our website
Green Meme Effect Stencils	Intended to be used for eco-friendly chalk art or for planting e.g. flowers or cress in meaningful patterns, or to put on T-shirts or bags with fabric paint.	Download PDF templates (size A4) on our website





Resource	Info	Availability
GREEN MEME EFFECT Game	An educational, engaging game developed by the partnership.	Available for online play on our website . Additionally, all materials are available for download to produce it physically as well.
GREEN Info Cards, Videos, Blog Posts, engaging quizzes	<p>12 info cards featuring memes and pointed information about relevant green topics and what one can do about it.</p> <p>The info cards are also available as videos on the website and the project's social media channels.</p> <p>The info cards and videos link to blog posts with more in-depth information on the topics and engaging quizzes at the end.</p>	Blog , cards and videos the project website and the latter on all our social media channels.
Pedagogical Concept of Green Theme Days	The pedagogical concept includes the 16 Green Theme Day Ideas complete with learning outcomes and recommendations for successful implementation.	View and download the pedagogical concept on our website .
Green Theme Days Idea Set	The partnership has created a comprehensive Idea Set for 16 different Green Theme Days. They include to-do-lists, shopping/preparation lists, poster and invitation templates.	View the Green Theme Days Idea Set as a complete PDF or see the single blog posts about each Theme Day on our website .





How can I create my own Meme Micro-Interventions?

You should have an idea of which message you want to transport and then choose a suitable meme format. Make sure that you are using the format correctly by looking at a few existing memes that use the same template. A good start is to use either Google, GIPHY (<https://giphy.com/>) or TENOR (<https://tenor.com/>) and type one or two keywords that you want to express. If you already know the names of some memes, great! But no worries, if you don't. You can start by inserting an emotion you want to convey or any other keyword. Some meme formats or GIFs already work great if you just add a new tag line or hashtag, others require some more creativity.

There are many different and free meme software offers available. One we use and recommend is the website "IMGFLIP" (<https://imgflip.com/>), where you can choose from various templates and insert your own text. The resulting memes and GIFs can then be published on the page or downloaded in private mode.

Before you start, please consider that memes are usually created by individual users for the purpose of entertainment, so there are also some memes out there that use inappropriate language and are not safe for professional contexts. We recommend cautious use of external websites and if you are not 100% sure if a meme format is suitable for your purpose, check its origin, for example via the website KnowYourMeme (<https://knowyourmeme.com/>).

But most importantly, have fun creating your own Meme Micro-Interventions! Because only if you enjoy your memes, there is a chance that someone else will, too!

When and where do I use the Meme Micro-Interventions?

In short: anywhere and anytime you want. Here are some ideas:

- ▶ You can put a meme (printed or as sticker) on a light switch to remind someone to turn off the lights or above the sink to remind them to save water while brushing their teeth.
- ▶ Use digital memes and stickers in your virtual conversations, emails, newsletters, presentations, social media posts and more. It helps getting your point across and lightens the mood.
- ▶ You can print the green challenges calendar – either our pre-made one or the empty template in which you can put your own challenges and green habits! Hang it up as a poster in your office, classroom or somewhere at home, where you can see it every day.
- ▶ Use the stencils to transfer the motifs on textiles (T-shirts, bags), walls or floors that you own or use eco-friendly chalk that washes away with the next rain. You could even plant flowers or cress using these patterns – let your imagination be the limit, but please do not harm any property or objects that are not yours.
- ▶ Use the green info cards as information material to hand out to the young people you are working with. Read the blog posts together or discuss how to implement the proposed calls to actions. There are 12 topics available in all our languages! Use them printed or digitally or as videos if you want to sprinkle a bit of knowledge into the conversation.





- ▶ If you are a company, NGO or policy maker, consider using a meme in your social media channels to make yourself and your message more tangible for young people.
- ▶ Finally, if you feel savvy in using memes and meme lingo, try just using meme terms or statements similar to meme captions in daily life conversations with young people. Not too much, but sometimes this could be the catalyst to point out a problem in a humorous way that gets them to laugh and act at the same time.

What if the young people do not like my meme?

Realistically, this is a potential outcome. Using a meme is like telling a joke – there is no guarantee that everyone will like it. And as memes evolve over time, probably by the time adults find and use it, it may already be considered as “retro” by the young people. But do not despair – retro does not mean bad! There are memes that have existed for a decade and more, which are still popular.

When in doubt, you can ask the young people to recommend a meme format to you or let them show you their favourites. You can even let them do a meme or caption contest to engage them more!





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