



COHESIFY

The impact of EU Cohesion Policy
on European Identification

Stakeholders' perception of Cohesion Policy implementation and performance: dimensions, determinants and outcomes

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Abstract

The primary aim of this research paper is to offer a multidimensional assessment of the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy by its regional stakeholders. This is accomplished by fulfilling three specific objectives. Firstly, the paper identifies the main dimensions of differences in the stakeholders' opinions concerning the Cohesion Policy. In particular, it investigates the correlation between the stakeholders' opinions about the Cohesion Policy implementation and performance, operational programme management and application of the partnership principle. Secondly, it explores the reasons behind these opinions, notably the potential impact of the scale and structure of the allocation of the Cohesion Policy funds, the significance of the reported Cohesion Policy effects, the dynamics of economic growth and the degree of decentralisation of the Cohesion Policy implementation structures. Thirdly, based on the opinions expressed by the stakeholders, the study defines the conditions which are conducive to a positive impact of the Cohesion Policy on the resident's opinions about the European Union. The factors comprised by the analysis include those associated with the stakeholders' opinions about the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy and those based on the statistics capturing the nature of the Cohesion Policy intervention and its effects.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Cohesion Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy represent the two major Community's policies which, since the beginning of an integrated Europe, have absorbed over three fourths of the Community's budget. In financial terms, the two policies are currently nearly of equal weight. Nevertheless, and more importantly, the Cohesion Policy plays an incomparably greater role in building the European identity and the attachment of the EU citizens to the idea of European integration (Mendez and Bachtler, 2017, Capello, 2017). Its effects are visible everywhere across the EU, especially in the less-developed Member States where the Cohesion Policy finances infrastructure projects, offers supports to businesses and helps to establish culture centres and art facilities (Shore, 2013, Pellegrini et al. 2013), that is undertakings which benefit both the residents and manufacturers.

How the residents and stakeholders perceive the Cohesion Policy may depend on the way it is put to life, particularly on the role of the local authorities and participation of other actors in the process of its formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. As Begg (2010, p. 83) pointed out, the implementation of the Cohesion Policy helps strengthen the local governments in the Member States: *Cohesion Policy creates a dialectic between the EU and the subnational level, it legitimates the former and, in so doing, deepens EU engagement in the economic development process, while giving the latter a role distinctive from the central government.*

Less visible than the direct outcomes of the implemented projects, but no less important, are those effects of the Cohesion Policy which improve the standards of governance not only with regard to the implementation of Community policies alone but, more broadly, those relating to the operation of the whole public sphere (Bachtler et al. 2013). It is one of the major aspects of the so-called added value (Mairate, 2006; Bachtler et al., 2013A) which arises from adopting the operating principles of broadly understood administration and its decision-making procedures as well as attitudes of the public, and from eliminating such unfavourable phenomena as corruption, nepotism, financial and business crime.

The quality of governance - QoG (Rodríguez-Pose and Garcilazo, 2015, Dijkstra et al., 2012) is of paramount importance for the implementation of the Cohesion Policy in its general and territorial dimension, also because it does affect the actual outcomes of the Cohesion Policy. According to the authors of the quoted report, *finding the right mix of incentives and policies that improve QoG in lagging regions could make a substantial contribution to higher growth in those regions and thus to more convergence between EU regions* (p. 15). Although the new Member States have made a substantial step forward in that regard, the dynamic of the process was particularly robust before their EU accession, and has seriously decreased since 2004-2007 (GRINCOH, 2015). For this reason, the unfavourable processes observable in some Member States where the rule of law is constrained and overshadowed by politically motivated decisions, and where the level of corruption does not fall quickly, negatively affect not only the functioning of public administration but may also slow down the socio-economic processes in those countries and their regions.

One of the major components of the quality of governance, associated with one of the principles underpinning the Cohesion Policy, is the partnership of various entities in the programming and execution of projects funded from this policy (Dąbrowski et al., 2014). Significant actors in such partnerships include non-governmental organisations and associations which represent the wider



public and interest groups. The involvement of such social partners and their role in designing the projects and undertakings largely depends on the current state of development of the civic society (Potluka et al., 2017). The Steering Committees represent the crucial platform for exchanging opinions and active participation of social partners in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy.

Regardless of the model of implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy projects, the question whether the Cohesion Policy matches the needs of the local and regional communities may have a bearing on how the external intervention is evaluated (Capello and Perucca, 2017A, Dellmuth and Chalmers, 2018). In a situation of a severe mismatch, on the one hand counterproductive projects which will remain unused may be embarked upon (e.g. in hard infrastructure) and, on the other hand, their day-to-day maintenance may consume the funds earmarked for development-related goals (e.g. Faíña et al. 2013 for Andalusia).

Other aspects that might influence opinions about the Cohesion Policy and the European Union include those related to the proper use of the policy funds and those associated with burdensome bureaucracy and rigid procedures employed in the operational programmes implemented under the Cohesion Policy (Mendez and Bachtler, 2017, Capello and Perucca 2017B, McEvoy, 2016). These two factors can strongly influence both the opinions of the programme stakeholders and the region's residents due to their potential to attract media attention, which can sometimes result in unduly extensive coverage of the reported problems. The volume of the available funds may affect following the adopted programme procedures, which can lead to problems with the absorption of funds on the one hand, and on the other - to irregularities in their spending. These problems might be caused by excessive bureaucracy and strictness of procedures governing funds disbursement.

In this context, studies on the functioning of the Monitoring Committees and opinions of their members and other Cohesion Policy beneficiaries (including potential ones) on the programming, implementation and performance of Cohesion Policy programmes and projects carried out in selected countries and regions are becoming particularly relevant. Similarly, the opinions of the Member States' residents about the effects of the Cohesion Policy point to a substantial role of regional policy in the perception of the European Community in building European identity.¹

In light of the above-mentioned factors affecting the stakeholders' and residents' opinions about the Cohesion Policy, three objectives were selected for analysis on the basis of the accumulated research materials. Firstly, the study aims to identify **the main dimensions of differences in the opinions** of the stakeholders about the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy. Secondly, it focuses on **exploring the reasons behind those opinions**. Thirdly – and lastly - it identifies the conditions that - in the stakeholders' opinion – can help the residents to appreciate **the outcomes of the Cohesion Policy, which could encourage their positive opinions** about the European Community.

Under the first objective, we investigated the correlation between the stakeholders' opinions concerning e.g.: (1) Cohesion Policy implementation, (2) Cohesion Policy outcomes, (3) operational programme management, and (4) application of the partnership principle. Under the second objective, we explored the reasons that might have shaped the opinions about the aforementioned issues (or strands of issues if correlations between them were identified). In particular, we examined the potential impact of: (1) the scale and structure of the allocation of the Cohesion Policy funds, (2)

¹ In 2017 more than three in four EU citizens (78%), see a positive impact of EU regional investments in their city or region (up 3 percentage points (pp) from 2015). See Eurobarometer No. 452, 29.06.2017.



the scale of the reported Cohesion Policy effects, (3) the dynamic of economic development, which was also indirectly affected by the Cohesion Policy, and (4) the degree of decentralisation of the Cohesion Policy implementation. For the first three factors, summary indicators developed under Task 3.2., and, in the last case, the data from Task 3.1. were used, supplemented by case study reports. The last objective involved an evaluation – crucial for the overarching objective of the project – of the conditions in which the stakeholders are likely to subscribe to the opinion that the Cohesion Policy has been instrumental in improving the residents' opinions concerning the European Union. The analysed factors included those associated with the stakeholders' opinions about the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy, and those related to the characteristics of the Cohesion Policy intervention based on the available data.

The study presents the opinions of a broad spectrum of stakeholders (members of the Monitoring Committees, representatives of local and regional governments, business and community organisations) engaged in the implementation of Cohesion Policy programmes and projects in the EU regions selected for the research on the implementation and performance of this policy. The opinions were obtained both from the questionnaire survey addressed directly to the stakeholders (**Annex 1**) and from the case study reports on the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy based on in-depth interviews with representatives of the organisations in charge of Cohesion Policy programming, implementation and monitoring (**Annex 2**). The specific nature of the survey of the members of the Monitoring Committees and local government representatives engaged in the implementation of Cohesion Policy funded programmes should be noted. These are individuals with a profound knowledge of the programming, implementation and evaluation of Cohesion Policy projects, who in many cases are responsible for the effectiveness of their implementation and who are appraised on the basis of its final outcomes. Hence, their highly professional and detailed opinions may be considerably coloured by their subjective views. To verify such an effect, we compared the stakeholders' opinions concerning a) their role/or lack of direct involvement in the Cohesion Policy implementation, b) their position in the administrative structures of individual countries: whether at the local, regional or national levels.

The relationship between the questionnaire responses and the case study reports prepared on the basis of an analysis of contextual data, using the opinions expressed in the interviews with the stakeholders, should also be tackled. While in the former case we deal with direct communication, which is also easy to use for statistical analyses, the interview findings represent qualitative materials which have already been processed (through the selection of the obtained information and ascribing to it specific weights and meanings associated with its being embedded in specific regional contexts) for the purposes of case study reports.



2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY: SELECTION OF REGIONS, SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The survey was conducted in 2017 and comprised selected groups of Cohesion Policy stakeholders in 17 regions (and 12 countries) of the COHESIFY case studies and representatives of the central institutions of the European Union.

The regions/countries selected for the research can be classified using three meta-dimensions of differences regarding Cohesion Policy implementation and performance, defined through factor analysis (Smętkowski et al., 2017). On the basis of an arbitrarily adopted categorisation of these dimensions, 12 types of the surveyed territorial units can be distinguished (Table 1).

Table 1. Typology of the analysed surveyed regions/countries

TYPOLOGY OF ANALYSED REGIONS/COUNTRIES	"SCALE AND STRUCTURE OF ALLOCATION"			
	High		Low	
	"REPORTED ACHIEVEMENTS"		"REPORTED ACHIEVEMENTS"	
"GROWTH DYNAMICS"	High	Low	High	Low
High	Podkarpackie (PL) Pomorskie (PL)	Slovenia (SLO) (<i>Western</i>)*	North East England (UK) Southern and Eastern (IRL)	
Average	Cyprus (CY)	Romania (RO) (<i>Vest</i>)*	Thuringia (DE) Scotland (UK)	Baden-Württemberg (DE) Lombardy (IT)
Low	Andalusia (ES) Hungary (HU) (<i>West Pannonia</i>)*	Central Macedonia (GR)	Castile and León (ES)	Flevoland (NL) Limburg (NL)

*stakeholder survey was conducted at the country level (name of NUT2 regions in which citizen surveys have been done are provided in brackets)

Broadly speaking, the main dimension of the differences associated with the scale and structure of the allocation of the Cohesion Policy funds divides the analysed regions/countries into those in which the "Convergence" Objective was being pursued in the 2007-2013 perspective (including the "Phasing Out" category for Central Macedonia), and those categorised under the "Competitiveness and Employment" Objective. In the current financing perspective 2014-2020, the former have predominantly been placed in the category of "less developed regions" (except Andalusia, which was categorised as a "Transition" region), while the latter were classified as "more developed regions".

The second dimension of differences, related mainly to the dynamic of economic growth in the period 2008-2014, was only indirectly associated with the Cohesion Policy, especially as regards the absorption rate of its funds. In effect, this particular dimension shows, on the one hand, those regions/countries that best coped with the recession post 2008, that is mainly the Polish regions, Slovenia, the South-Eastern region in Ireland and the region of North East England, and those which



were most severely hit by the economic crisis, such as Hungary, as well as the Spanish, Greek and Dutch regions, on the other.

The final dimension of the differences demonstrates the scale of the reported achievements of the Cohesion Policy in relation to the regional potential in terms of the number of employees, number of SMEs and number of R&D personnel. The classification of the analysed countries/regions produced in the process is largely independent of the previous two. The extreme examples as regards a very high scale of the reported achievements included above all Hungary, whereas the relatively lowest scale of such effects in relation to the region's high potential was reported particularly frequently in Baden-Württemberg and Lombardy.

The typology developed in this way revealed the extreme cases in relation to the analysed dimensions of the regional differences in Cohesion Policy implementation and performance. The surveyed regions included both those in which the scale and results of the Cohesion Policy as well as the growth dynamic were very high in the period concerned (the two Polish regions), and those which were their opposites in these categories (the two Dutch regions). The remaining regions/countries showed considerably more differences as regards the aforementioned dimensions, and the sole field of typology that was not represented by any region was high growth dynamic, coupled with small allocation and minor reported achievements of the Cohesion Policy.

In all countries / regions listed in **Table 1**, quantitative and qualitative surveys of stakeholders were carried out in terms of their perception of implementation and effects of cohesion policy and the impact of cohesion policy on the perception of the European Union by the citizens. The number and types of stakeholders varied (see **Figure 1**), depending on the characteristics and the management structure of the Cohesion Policy and the region, but the respondent target groups in all cases included: 1) Monitoring Committee members, and 2) local government authorities. Other Cohesion Policy stakeholders who were not represented in the Monitoring Committee were also targeted in order to ensure a sufficient number of responses in each case study.

Each COHESIFY partner was responsible for sending out email invitations to potential respondents in their case study regions, monitoring the responses and making reminder emails or telephone calls.

In order to obtain the email addresses, all the partners contacted the Managing Authority to request or confirm the email addresses of the members of the Monitoring Committees as well as the main local authority beneficiaries of the Cohesion Policy. The contact emails to the local authorities were often found directly from their web pages. The strategy of contacting the local authorities depended on the local context. A total of 2191 individual email addresses were collected in the database and used for sending invitations to take part in an online survey.

The survey was available online from May until September 2017. Over this period, a total of 804 responses were obtained, of which 401 were complete. It meant that the response rate (for complete surveys) was 18.3%, and showed considerable differences between the regions. The lowest survey completion rates (under 10%) were recorded in the Dutch regions and Romania, and the highest (over 40%) – in Cyprus and Slovenia. The small sample size in some of the regions (with as few as less than 10 complete surveys in Thuringia and Flevoland) restricted the possibility to make comparisons between the regions for individual respondent groups.



Table 2. Response rate of the survey

REGION	CONTACTS	ALL RESPONSES		FULL RESPONSES (FR)		MONITORING COMMITTEE MEMBERS
	<i>count</i>	<i>count</i>	<i>[%]</i>	<i>count</i>	<i>[%]</i>	<i>[% of FR]</i>
Andalucia	104	50	48,1%	29	27,9%	89,7%
Baden-Württemberg	38	19	50,0%	10	26,3%	90,0%
Castile and León	77	38	49,4%	20	26,0%	100,0%
Central Macedonia	71	24	33,8%	14	19,7%	14,3%
Cyprus	51	48	94,1%	21	41,2%	38,1%
European Union	14	3	21,4%	1	7,1%	100,0%
Flevoland	81	17	21,0%	7	8,6%	71,4%
Hungary	204	65	31,9%	26	12,7%	100,0%
Limburg	238	60	25,2%	19	8,0%	52,6%
Lombardy	116	33	28,4%	16	13,8%	93,8%
North East England	58	28	48,3%	12	20,7%	58,3%
Podkarpackie	295	128	43,4%	68	23,1%	23,5%
Pomorskie	233	99	42,5%	53	22,7%	15,1%
Romania	207	30	14,5%	13	6,3%	84,6%
Scotland	152	32	21,1%	18	11,8%	22,2%
Slovenia	94	76	80,9%	47	50,0%	44,7%
S&E Region	117	43	36,8%	19	16,2%	42,1%
Thuringia	41	10	24,4%	7	17,1%	100,0%
Total	2191	803	36,6%	400	18,3%	51%

Source: authors' own elaboration

Representatives of the Monitoring Committees, that is institutions supervising the implementation of the EU operational programmes, made up 51% of the whole sample, although in many regions it was an overwhelming majority, reaching 100% respondents in Thuringia, Castile and León and Hungary. Most of the respondents were representatives of the local authorities, followed by regional authorities and central public administration bodies. Altogether, representatives of these three tiers of the administration accounted for about ¾ of the respondents, with the remaining ¼ being predominantly representatives of NGOs and, less so, of the enterprise sector.



Table 3. Structure of the sample – type of organisation

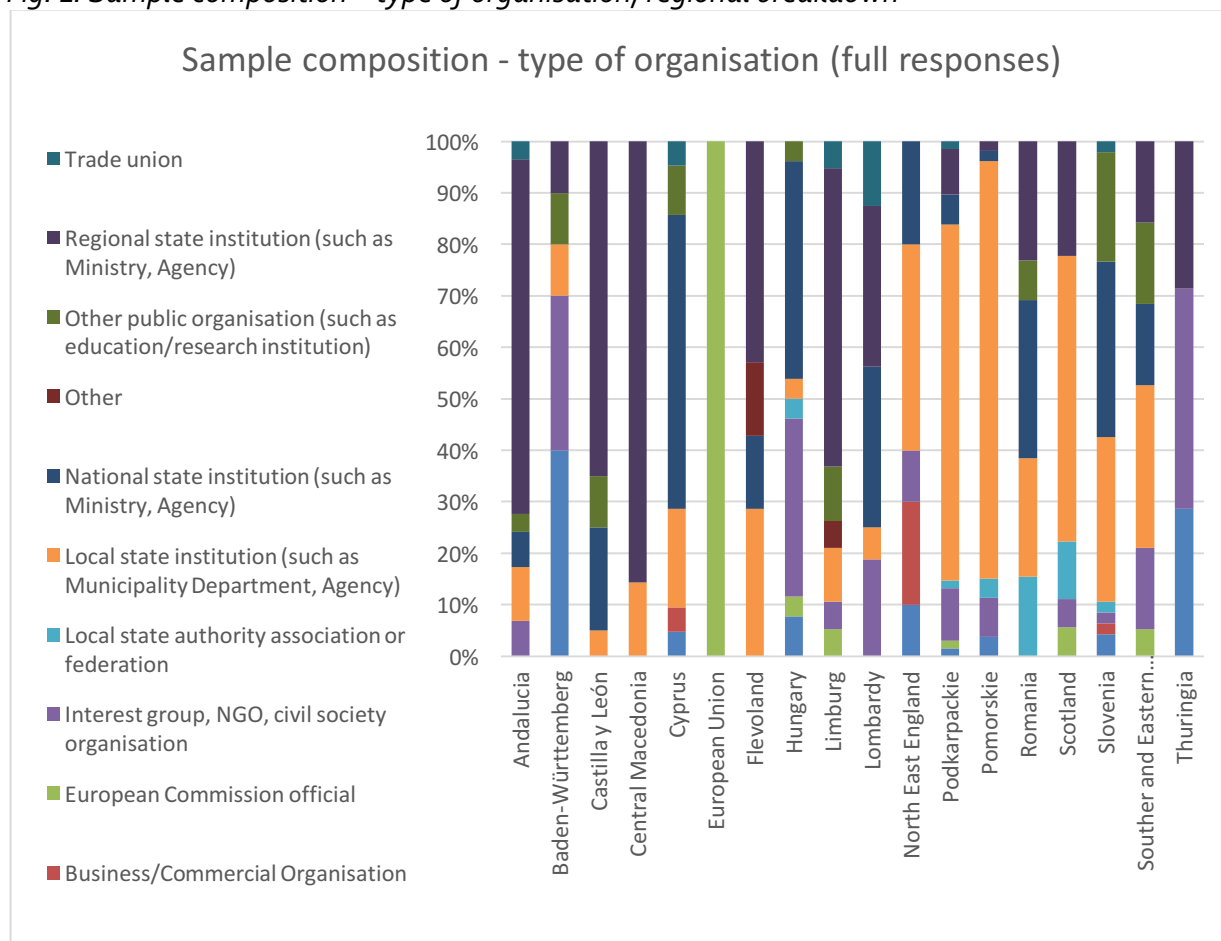
TYPE OF ORGANISATION	ALL RESPONSES	FULL RESPONSES
Business association or federation	33	15
Business/Commercial Organisation	5	4
European Commission official	9	6
Interest group, NGO, civil society organization	65	38
Local state authority association or federation	12	9
Local state institution (such as Municipality Department, Agency)	306	145
National state institution (such as Ministry, Agency)	132	65
Regional state institution (such as Ministry, Agency)	173	84
Trade union	16	7
Other public organisation (such as education/research institution)	45	23
Other	4	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>800</i>	<i>398</i>

Source: authors' own elaboration

The structure of the sample by type of organisation differs from region to region (**Fig. 1**). The local-tier administration prevails in the Polish and British regions, and the regional-tier one in the Spanish and Dutch regions. Cyprus and Hungary have a large share of central administration representatives, with a relatively considerable group representing NGOs in the German regions and also Hungary.



Fig. 1. Sample composition – type of organisation, regional breakdown



Source: authors' own elaboration



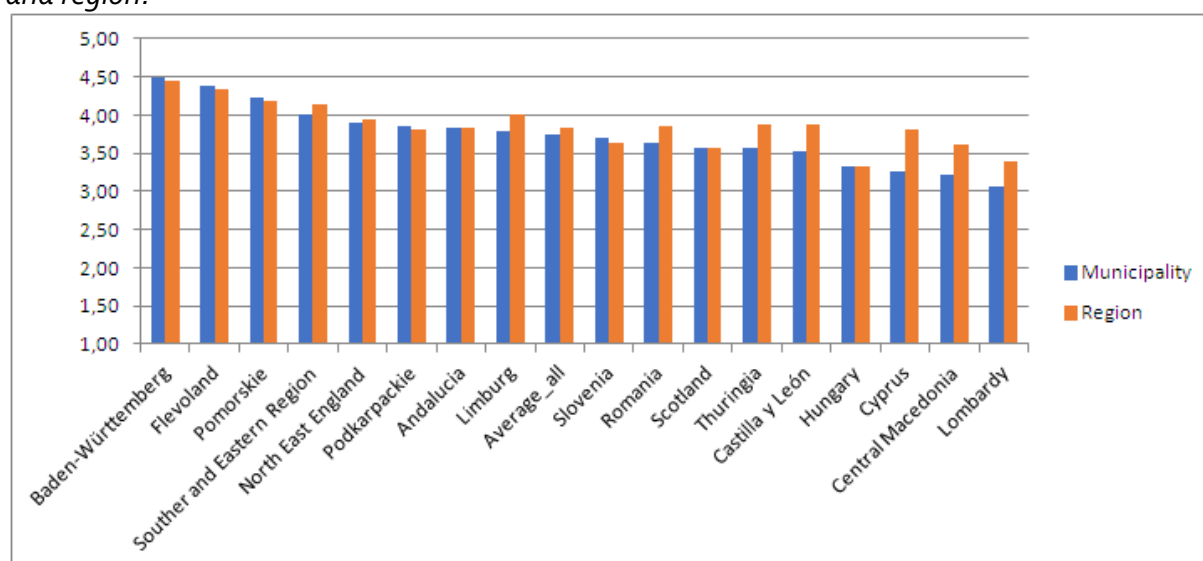
3. STAKEHOLDER SURVEY: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the stakeholder surveys concerning the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy were put together as a three-step process. The first was to compare and contrast the analysed regions in terms of the main issues addressed in the survey such as effectiveness of the Cohesion Policy implementation, major problems encountered in its implementation, evaluation of its effects, use of monitoring and evaluation results in policy formulation or application of the partnership principle. In the second step, opinions of various stakeholder groups on selected topics were compared. As the next step, factor analysis of the respondents' views was carried out in order to identify their main dimensions, particularly those which combined the specific issues addressed in the survey. Finally, the survey findings were juxtaposed with the contextual variables concerning Cohesion Policy implementation and performance (Gorzela et al., 2017, Smętkowski et al., 2017) in order to identify the predominant factors that may have shaped those opinions or to determine their impact on the Cohesion Policy implementation.

3.1. Comparative analysis across individual case studies

The first of the analysed topics was the assessment of the use of Cohesion Policy funds for the development of the municipality or region where the respondents lived. Generally speaking, the respondents viewed it positively, even though some distinct differences between the regions could be observed (**Fig. 2**). The Cohesion Policy funds were perceived as best used (with a prevalence of very positive opinions) both regionally and locally in Baden-Württemberg (DE), Flevoland (NL) and Pomorskie (PL). At the regional level, this group also includes the South-Eastern Region of Ireland (IE). On the other hand, poor opinions, especially with respect to the local level, were recorded in Hungary (HU), Cyprus (CY), Central Macedonia (GR) and Lombardy (IT). It should be noted that, in the latter three cases, most distinct differences could be observed in how the use of Cohesion Policy funds was assessed at the local and the regional levels. It means that, in the respondents' opinion, although these funds made a considerable difference at the regional level, the satisfaction of their use at the local level (in their municipality) were lower. The opinions expressed by the respondents were consistent between regional and local level only in the case of Hungary. Except those cases, some differences – albeit not as distinct – between the local and the regional levels could be found in Limburg (NL), Romania (RO), Thuringia (DE) and Castile and León (ES). In those countries where more than one region was surveyed, more often than not wide differences in assessing this phenomenon could be observed. However, it is difficult to pinpoint the reasons underlying such differences, which could arise from the dissimilar scales of Cohesion funds allocation on the one hand (e.g. Germany, Spain) and, on the other, could be associated with divergent views on the effectiveness of their utilisation (e.g. Netherlands, Poland).

Fig. 2. How well - in your opinion - have Cohesion Policy funds been used in your municipality and region?

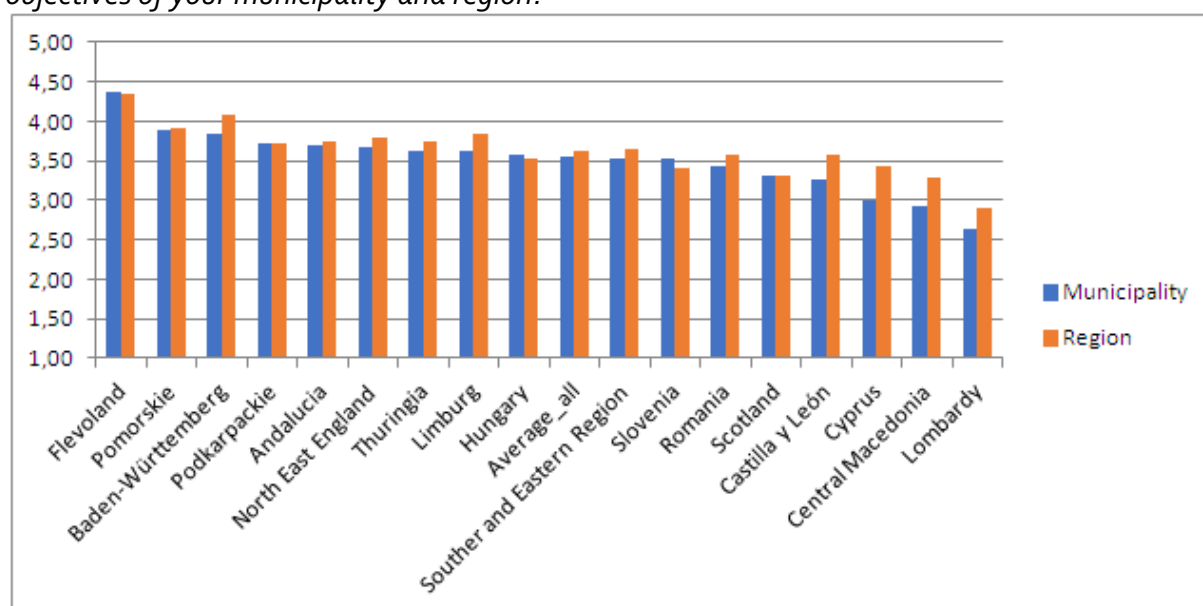


Source: authors' own elaboration; (5= Very well, 1= Very poorly)

More light on the underlying reasons of such disparities can be shed by the assessment of the impact of the Cohesion funds on the fulfilment of development objectives at the local or regional level (**Fig. 3**). Positive opinions could indirectly point to the relevance of the Cohesion Policy to the development needs of a given territorial system. While the distribution of the answers from the previous question largely remained the same, some significant differences could also be observed. Firstly, the overall assessment of the adequacy of Cohesion Policy to the development objectives was less positive than the assessed use of European funds. One significant exception to this pattern was Hungary, where the respondents viewed the relevance of the intervention to the development goals more favourably than their satisfaction with how the Cohesion Policy funds were used. The most distinctly negative answers to the first question were offered in the regions which assessed the utilisation the most positively, i.e. Baden-Württemberg and Lombardy, where the most negative opinions in that regard were expressed. In addition, a relatively high fall in the satisfaction level was recorded in the Southern and Eastern Region in Ireland and Podkarpackie in Poland.

The differences of opinion regarding the regional and local levels could still be observed, particularly in Cyprus, Central Macedonia and Lombardy. Within individual countries, wider differences than in the previous question were revealed in the Netherlands, with more positive opinions about the compliance of the Cohesion Policy with the development objectives being expressed in Flevoland rather than in Limburg.

Fig. 3. To what extent have the Cohesion Policy objectives reinforced the development objectives of your municipality and region?



Source: authors' own elaboration; (5 = Completely, 1 = Not at all)

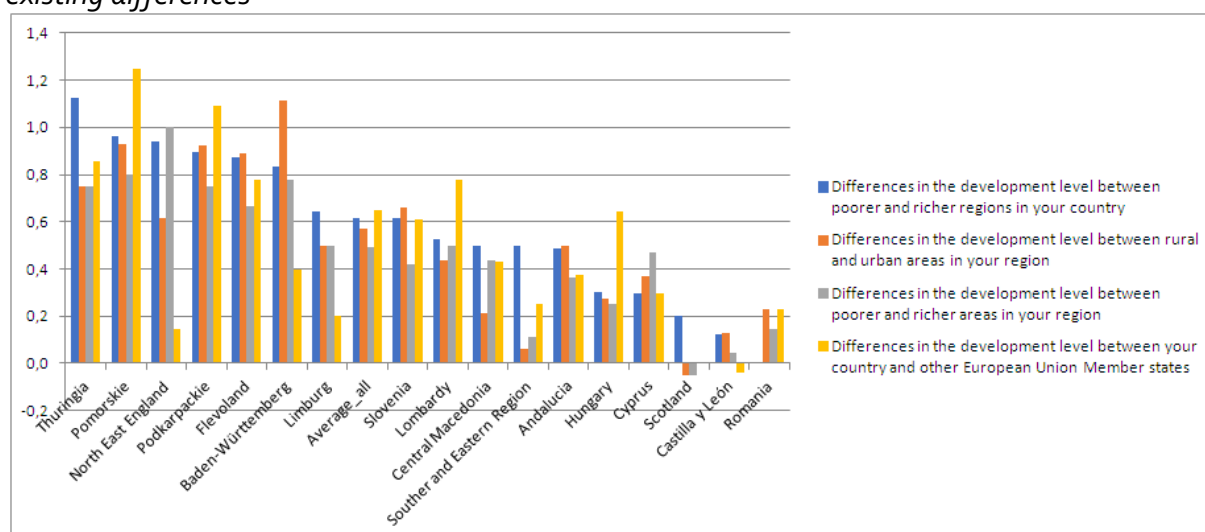
As regards the perceived impact of the Cohesion Policy on reducing the disparities between the richest and the poorest regions of the individual countries, the answers provided by the respondents were even more divergent (**Fig. 4**). While the opinions about the equalising effects of Cohesion Policy implementation were practically expressed in all the cases, only in the German, Polish and Dutch regions (in the latter case, with some differences being observed between the individual regions) such an effect did not give rise to any serious doubts. At the same time, in some of the remaining regions the number of the respondents who indicated the equalising aspect of this policy was slightly higher than that of those who believed that the implementation of the Cohesion Policy could further increase the regional disparities within the respective countries. This was particularly true for the national case studies, i.e. Romania, Hungary and Cyprus, but also the Spanish province of Castile and León and Scotland.

These opinions largely coincided with the view that the equalising nature of the Cohesion Policy also embraced lesser disparities between rural and urban areas, as well as income differences between the rich and the poor. Compared with the regional disparities, a more equalising character of the Cohesion Policy in the urban areas-rural areas dimension could be observed in the case of Baden-Württemberg (high indicator values) and Romania (low indicator values). On the other hand, the respondents in some other regions believed that the impact of the Cohesion Policy was weaker in that regard; this was particularly well visible in South-Eastern Ireland, Scotland, North East England, Thuringia and Central Macedonia. Rather interestingly, the opinions on the impact of the Cohesion Policy for equalising the level of affluence between the rich and the poor did not visibly differ from the opinions on reducing the disparities between urban and rural areas, except Baden-Württemberg (lower impact) and North East England (greater impact).

At the same time, and in line with the expectations, the distribution of the opinions concerning the impact of the Cohesion Policy on the process of convergence of a given member state and other EU countries was different compared to the earlier questions. The respondents in the Polish regions were most strongly convinced that the Cohesion Policy helped to close the gap in the development levels; among the new member states, this view was shared above all by the stakeholders from Hungary and Slovenia. However - and quite surprisingly given the rapid pace of economic growth

(but in the conditions of a wide development gap) - this opinion was not shared by many of the respondents in Romania. As regards Germany and the Netherlands, marked differences between the regions could be observed (the respondents in Thuringia and Flevoland much more frequently expressed such an opinion than the stakeholders in Baden-Württemberg and Limburg). On the other hand, such wide differences between the regions were not observed in Spain, although in Castile and León more respondents were convinced that the Cohesion Policy in effect propelled divergence processes. Likewise, in the British regions, the respondents as often pointed out that the Cohesion Policy could increase the disparities between their country and other EU member states. A similar situation could be found in Cyprus and also, although to a smaller degree, in Central Macedonia. At the same time, the respondents in Lombardy generally agreed that the Cohesion Policy helped to reduce such disparities.

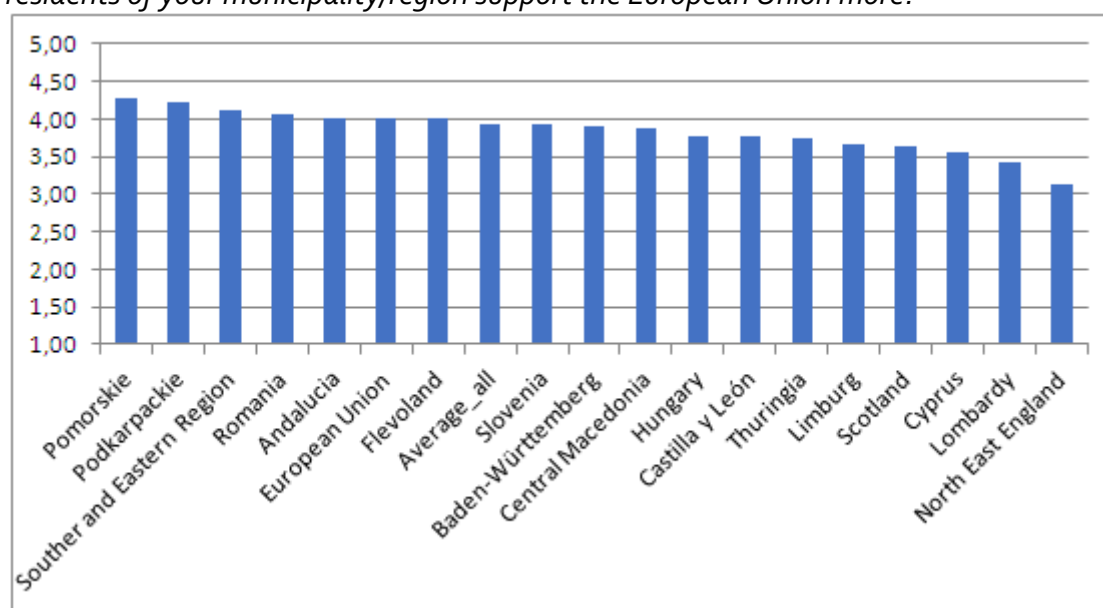
Fig. 4. To what extent have the Cohesion Policy funds helped to increase or decrease the existing differences



Source: authors' own elaboration; (where decrease = 2, and increase = -2)

In most of the regions, the respondents were of the opinion that the Cohesion Policy tended to produce favourable opinions about the EU among the residents and in effect led to a wider support for the Community (**Fig. 5**). The view that over the past 10 years the Cohesion Policy had fanned the support for the EU was predominantly shared by the respondents in Poland, Ireland, Romania, Andalusia in Spain and Flevoland in the Netherlands. At the other extreme there were the more sceptical respondents in North East England. In parallel, sceptical views about the increased support for the EU thanks to the Cohesion Policy were also expressed by the stakeholders from Scotland, Limburg, Lombardy and Cyprus.

Fig. 5. In your opinion, has the Cohesion Policy during the last 10 years or so helped to make residents of your municipality/region support the European Union more?



Source: authors' own elaboration; 5 - It has helped a lot; 4 -It has rather helped; 3 - It has had no impact; 2 - It has had a rather negative impact; 1- It has had a very negative impact.

Problems associated with the implementation process of the Cohesion Policy were reported in all the regions. Furthermore, in some regions (Central Macedonia, Slovenia, North East England and Cyprus), they were reported relatively more frequently than in the remaining ones. The most popular reason for complaints (accompanied by small differences between the regions in that regard) included excessive **bureaucracy (red tape)** (average 4.0), in many cases also associated with **problems in ensuring co-financing for the projects implemented from the Cohesion Policy funds** (3.9). The opinions ranged from extreme values in the region of North East England, where the majority of the respondents indicated serious problems in that regard (4.6-4.7), to the voivodship of Pomorskie, where some of the respondents did not observe such problems at all (3.3). Another frequently reported difficulty were **the audit and inspection requirements** concerning the implemented projects (average 3.85). This issue revealed significant differences across the regions. Those which attached a lot of significance to it included North East England and Scotland, but the problem was also relatively frequently reported in Castile and León, Baden-Württemberg, Flevoland and Southern-Eastern Ireland, and was relatively the least visible in Lombardy and Hungary, as well as Pomorskie.

Among the less frequently reported obstacles to the implementation of the Cohesion Policy, the relatively most popular was **lack of funds for the applicants' own contribution** (average 3.58), which, however, was always associated with difficulties in the access to loans and credits (average 3.28). This problem was mostly encountered by less affluent regions such as Central Macedonia, Podkarpackie, Thuringia and Slovenia, and was most rarely reported in the most affluent regions, i.e. the Dutch regions, Baden-Württemberg, South East England, but also Castile and León. Quite interestingly, difficulties in the access to credits and loans for own contribution to projects, in addition to Romania, Hungary and Central Macedonia, were also reported by the respondents in the highly developed Lombardy. At the same time, the respondents seldom mentioned the insufficient volume of Cohesion Policy funds (average 3.31). In addition, the distribution of the answers to the question did not reflect the differences in the scale of the allocation, which could mean that the question was difficult to interpret since the problem was most often reported in the regions of some

of the new member states, i.e. Slovenia, Poland, Cyprus and Central Macedonia (Greece). On the other hand, it was most rarely quoted in Scotland, Lombardy, Flevoland (the Netherlands) and also Hungary. Similarly, **problems with difficulties in the access to qualified staff** to work on EU-funded projects were reported much less frequently (average 3.24). This issue was most frequently brought up by the respondents in Central Macedonia, Hungary and Lombardy, and was practically unreported in Scotland, Baden-Württemberg and the Dutch regions. Likewise, the **unclear project evaluation criteria** were also reported relatively seldom (average 3.20), primarily by the respondents in England, the Greek region and the Podkarpacie region, and were not brought up at all in the Dutch and German regions and in Romania. Definitely, the least troublesome issue was **cooperation of the partners in the implementation of projects** (average 2.73), most often quoted by the respondents in Central Macedonia, and less so Cyprus and Slovenia, and practically unobserved by the stakeholders in Baden-Württemberg and Flevoland.

The overall view of how the Cohesion Policy operates in the surveyed regions was positive, as demonstrated by the results shown in **Table 5**. The respondents viewed most positively the changes in their environment which would not have been possible without EU funding, especially those in the Polish regions, Baden-Württemberg and North East England. At the other end of the axis was Lombardy, the sole region with no clear opinion being expressed about the positive effects of the Cohesion Policy in that regard.

The relevance of the disbursed funds was assessed as quite satisfactory – with the most positive opinions being expressed in Lombardy, and the most negative - in Central Macedonia and Cyprus. This opinion was accompanied by the belief that fraud, including corruption and nepotism, might occur during the implementation. With the relatively positive opinions overall, which meant that such situations were rare, there were negative exceptions: Cyprus, Central Macedonia, but above all – Hungary, with the most negative views expressed in that regard. The distribution of answers to this question indicated a division between the new members states (and Greece), where the opinions about this particular aspect were less positive, and Western European countries. The respondents expressed a similar opinion about the irregularities in the disbursement of funds caused by the lack of compliance with the EU law. In the latter aspect, however, the somewhat worse situation of the British regions could be observed, probably due to the more frequent occurrence and/or perception of the discrepancies between the national and EU law. The cost effectiveness of the administration involved in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy was assessed moderately well; likewise, there was no clear pattern in the spatial distribution of the answers; most negative answers in that regard came from the respondents in Scotland, Slovenia, Hungary and Flevoland (the Netherlands).

Table 4. How significant was the impact of the following problems and challenges during the implementation of Cohesion Policy projects?

	Andalusia	Baden-Württemberg	Castile and León	Central Macedonia	Cyprus	Flevoland	Hungary	Limburg	Lombardy	North East England	Podkarpackie	Pomorskie	Romania	Scotland	Slovenia	Southern and	Thuringia
Scarcity of cohesion policy funds	3.54	3.56	3.26	3.71	3.60	2.88	2.96	3.31	2.63	3.00	3.71	3.69	3.46	2.75	3.92	3.27	3.00
Problems with obtaining cohesion policy financing such as complicated rules for submitting applications	3.74	4.10	3.87	4.00	3.95	3.75	3.79	3.79	4.00	4.62	3.89	3.35	3.36	4.33	4.35	3.81	4.00
Excessive, cumbersome reporting	3.74	3.70	4.08	3.93	3.95	3.63	3.75	4.21	4.06	4.69	3.73	3.29	3.79	4.33	4.16	4.11	4.29
Unclear objectives for evaluating project results	3.28	2.70	3.32	3.71	3.29	2.88	3.11	2.82	3.31	3.50	3.53	3.04	2.93	3.50	3.53	3.06	2.86
Poor cooperation between project partners	2.77	1.67	2.67	4.07	3.17	2.13	2.96	2.59	3.00	2.38	2.93	2.90	2.71	2.82	3.17	2.15	2.33
Excessive audit and control requirements during or after the project completion	4.09	3.80	4.17	3.57	3.95	4.13	3.21	3.94	3.13	4.77	3.49	3.24	3.57	4.56	3.86	4.11	3.86
Lack of funds for own contribution (co-financing)	3.55	3.11	3.08	4.07	3.50	2.63	3.79	3.29	3.50	4.07	3.94	3.55	3.71	3.76	3.96	3.12	4.29
Difficult access to credit and/or loans for own contribution	3.46	2.17	2.62	4.07	3.50	2.80	3.88	2.18	4.13	3.50	3.33	2.91	3.93	2.64	3.64	3.14	3.83
Lack of capacity such as qualified staff	3.72	2.63	3.00	4.00	3.55	2.75	3.83	2.65	3.94	3.21	3.25	3.16	3.43	2.59	3.55	3.29	2.57

Source: authors' own elaboration; (5 = Very significant, 1 = Not at all)

Table 5. How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements

	Andalusia	Baden-Württemberg	Castile and León	Central Macedonia	Cyprus	Flevoland	Hungary	Limburg	Lombardy	North East England	Podkarpackie	Pomorskie	Romania	Scotland	Slovenia	Southern and Eastern Region	Thuringia
Cohesion policy funds finance those investment projects which your municipality/region needs the most	3.82	4.00	3.76	3.29	3.78	3.88	3.07	3.65	3.25	3.79	3.97	3.87	3.57	3.65	3.38	3.47	3.43
In your municipality/region cohesion policy funding goes to investment projects which are most valued by the local residents	3.22	3.78	3.17	3.00	3.64	3.25	3.04	2.79	2.81	3.29	3.69	3.71	3.38	3.19	3.23	2.94	2.71
There are many irregularities in spending cohesion policy funds due to non-compliance with eu rules	2.17	1.88	2.00	2.71	3.11	1.63	3.31	1.81	2.53	2.67	2.89	2.58	2.67	3.13	2.57	1.93	1.33
Fraud, such as corruption or nepotism, is common in spending cohesion policy funds	1.83	1.60	1.87	2.71	3.00	1.13	3.52	1.50	2.21	1.46	2.43	1.98	2.75	1.87	2.43	1.38	1.14
There have been many positive changes in your municipality/region thanks to cohesion policy funds, which would not have been achieved without the funds	4.09	4.33	3.72	4.00	3.91	4.00	3.72	3.55	3.07	4.14	4.26	4.44	4.00	3.88	3.88	3.79	3.71
The spending of cohesion policy funds is adequately controlled	3.72	3.56	3.80	2.07	2.48	3.75	2.90	4.00	4.07	3.92	3.81	3.72	4.00	3.88	3.57	3.94	3.57
The money from cohesion policy funds is in most cases wasted on the wrong projects	2.47	1.91	2.77	2.79	2.71	1.25	3.14	1.68	2.75	1.69	2.39	2.32	2.36	2.18	2.54	1.69	2.14
The administration of cohesion policy has been delivered in an efficient (cost effective) manner	3.53	3.22	3.60	3.50	3.48	2.75	2.60	3.05	3.27	2.92	3.68	3.62	3.62	2.44	2.58	3.41	3.33

Source: authors' own elaboration; (5= strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree)

Fig. 6. The partnership principle requires the participation of a wide range of partners throughout the different stages of programming and implementation through consultations, monitoring committee work and other mechanisms. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the operation of the partnership principle in practice?



Source: authors' own elaboration; (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree)

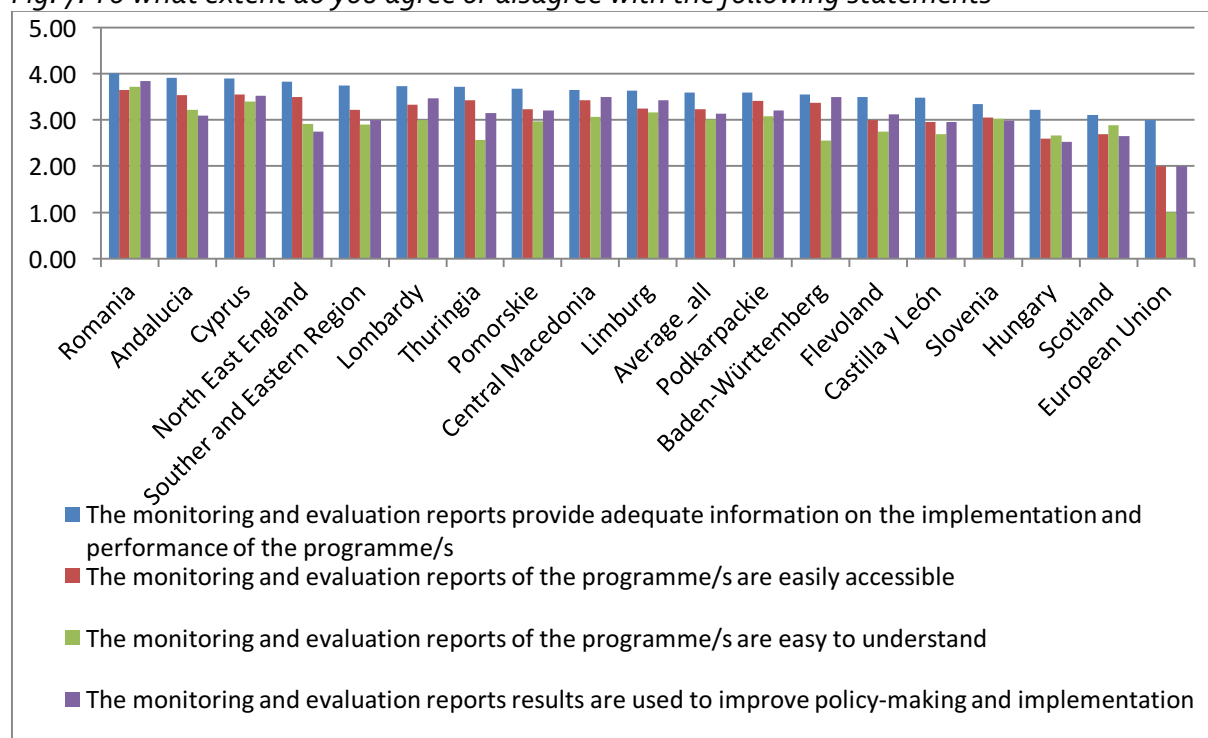
The open and fair operation of the partnership principle was rather positively viewed, with minor differences being observed between the regions participating in the survey (**Fig. 6**). Only three regions stand out from the majority of the group: Lombardy, Scotland and Hungary, which was the only region when the average assessment was negative. Except the United Kingdom, the results varied only slightly between the individual regions of a given country. This was particularly well visible in Spain and Poland, where the difference between the average values for the region was not higher than 0.1 on a 1 to 5 scale. The function of the partnership principle in developing a shared platform for reaching the goals of the programme was viewed rather positively, with the extent of the differences between the regions being even smaller than in the previous question. Both Scotland and Hungary lag behind, whereas the opinions about the functionality of the partnership principle in Lombardy were much more positive than was the case with the assessment of the openness and fairness in its implementation.

The respondents were also asked to assess to what extent the partners involved in programme implementation were interested solely in pursuing the interests, also financial, of their own organisation. The emerging picture is not unequivocal, with a higher degree of "egoism" being perceived in the Polish regions, Central Macedonia and Lombardy. Opposite views were predominantly expressed by the respondents in Andalusia, North East England, Flevoland and Baden-Württemberg.

Evaluation studies and monitoring represent significant components of public policies which allow for continuous learning and adaptation of the planned interventions. The views on the relevance of the information provided in the evaluation and monitoring reports concerning the Cohesion Policy were on the whole rather positive (**Fig. 7**). Quite interestingly, there were quite marked differences within the surveyed countries. The respondents in North East England rated this aspect at 3.83 (on a scale 1 to 5), compared to a mere 3.11 in Scotland. Quite wide internal differences were also observed in Spain, but not in Poland or Germany.

The key question about that issue concerned the extent to which the results of the evaluation and monitoring reports were used to improve the implementation quality of the EU programmes. The respondents' assessments were only mediocre, and this particular aspect was clearly positively viewed only in Romania. In some of the surveyed regions, negative opinions prevailed, especially in Hungary, Scotland and North East England. A similar spatial distribution of the answers could be observed in the opinions about the accessibility of the evaluation and monitoring reports. It can be expected, therefore, that there is a correlation between how the reports' accessibility is perceived and how they are evaluated in terms of the implementation process. The assessment of the reports' readability, i.e. their language, is rather average, although with some differences observable between the regions. The distinctly positive views were expressed in Romania and to a lesser extent in Cyprus. At the other extreme there were the German regions and Hungary. The low ranking of both German regions means that this particular aspect of evaluation and monitoring most strongly diverged from the other regions. It can be assumed, therefore, that there is a reason specific for Germany which makes these reports difficult to understand in terms of language, which, however, is not clearly visible in the assessment of their adequacy or accessibility.

Fig. 7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements



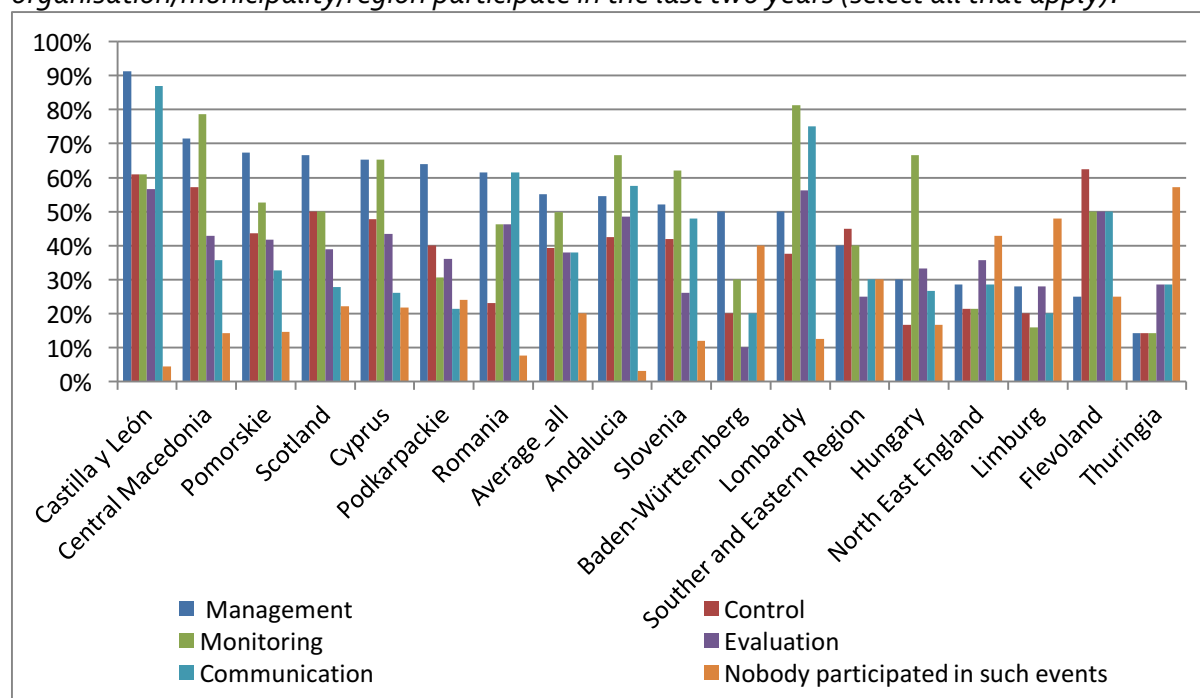
Source: authors' own elaboration; (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree)

The next question looked at the frequency of Cohesion Policy training programmes (**Fig. 8**). About 20% respondents on average declared that no one from their organisation had participated in such courses or workshops. The actual percentage values varied quite distinctly from region to region, ranging from below 10% in the case of Spanish regions and Romania, up to about 50% in the German regions, Limburg and NE England. More than ¼ of respondents from local state institutions declared that no one from their organisation has participated in Cohesion policy training and workshops. This value decreased on higher level of administration, to 12% at the regional level, and 8% for state institutions.

The training that the respondents referred to most frequently covered two aspects, management and monitoring, and definitely less so – such issues as control, evaluation and communication. Arguably, this is due to a more universal nature of the former two issues, while the latter three are basically addressed to individuals with a specialised background in a given area. The relative

popularity of the former two topics was visible in all the surveyed regions, although in some cases one topic came up much more frequently than the other (for example, monitoring in Lombardy and Hungary, management in Podkarpackie). The outlier values in Flevoland and Thuringia might probably be attributed to the small size of the respondent sample.

Fig. 8. In what Cohesion Policy workshop or training sessions did the representatives of your organisation/municipality/region participate in the last two years (select all that apply)?



Source: authors' own elaboration; (% of answers "Yes")

3.2. Comparison of different stakeholders perceptions

Owing to the limited size of the regional samples, it is difficult to compare the perspectives of the individual respondent groups in the regions because the significance test of the differences between two means did not reveal any statistically significant differences between the respondent groups in any of the regions (**Annex 3**). Therefore, the differences in the answers were analysed for the whole sample, divided into the aforementioned three territorial tiers of public administration, and into three additional dimensions: involvement in the operational programme implementation, membership of the Monitoring Committee and status of an EU funds beneficiary. Quite naturally, such a choice of the average values for selected questions regarded as crucial is strongly biased by the differences in the regional distribution of the answers provided by individual groups of actors.

On its basis, it can be concluded that the variable indicating individuals involved in operational programme management differentiated the answers to the least extent. On the other hand, being a member of the Monitoring Committee or a beneficiary status mattered in the evaluation of the use of the EU funds in the respondents' place of residence, of the impact of the Cohesion Policy on EU support and of the relevance of the EU investment projects to the local needs. In each of these dimensions, members of the Monitoring Committees proved slightly more sceptical than the remaining respondents, although significant regional differences between the samples should also be borne in mind in that respect. As regards these three questions, and in line with the expectations, a relatively greater optimism among the beneficiaries of the Cohesion Policy funds can be observed.

Table 6. Comparison of different stakeholders perceptions*

	Q1.1 CP USE IN YOUR MUNICIPALITY	Q4.1 CP HELPED TO SUPPORT EU	Q6.1 CP ADDRESS LOCAL INVESTMENT NEEDS	Q6.6 CP EFFICIENTLY ADMINISTERED	Q8.4 EVALUATION USED TO IMPROVE POLICIES
I work in the management of an operational programme or part of a programme (e.g. Managing Authority, Intermediate Body, Implementing Body)					
Yes	3,76	3,92	3,71	3,30	3,18
No	3,72	3,90	3,58	3,20	3,03
I am a partner represented in the Monitoring Committee of a programme					
Yes	3,70	3,89	3,59	3,25	3,14
No	3,79	3,96	3,75	3,29	3,13
I or my organisation is a beneficiary/recipient of the European Funds					
Yes	3,81	3,99	3,70	3,30	3,15
No	3,53	3,68	3,52	3,11	3,12
Tier of administration					
Local	3,97	4,09	3,86	3,39	3,18
Regional	3,71	3,85	3,58	3,28	3,07
National	3,64	3,83	3,66	3,17	3,30

Source: authors' own elaboration;

* Red colour indicates statistically significant average values (for binary variables only) , with the probability threshold of 0.05 .

The differences in the responses were also analysed for the whole sample, broken down into the three tiers of public administration discussed above, and in three other dimensions: involvement in the operational programme implementation, membership of the Monitoring Committee and status of an EU funds beneficiary. The average responses to five questions crucial for the identification of the dimensions in terms of the factor analysis provided below are presented in **Table 6**. For binary variables, the statistically significant average values are marked in red, with the probability threshold of 0.05 .

Interestingly, the variable representing individuals engaged in the operational programmes management is the one which the least differentiates the obtained responses. On the other hand, participation in the Monitoring Committee or the beneficiary status play a significant role for assessing the absorption of the Cohesion Policy funds in the respondents' place of residence; views on the impact of the Cohesion Policy on support for the EU and evaluation of the extent to which the EU investments match the local needs. What can be found surprising is that, in each of those dimensions, members of the Monitoring Committees were more sceptical than the remaining respondents. In respect of those three questions, relative optimism of the local administration representatives could be observed in comparison to the regional and national level officials, who share similar views about these phenomena.

3.3. Main dimensions of stakeholders opinions and its determinants

The results of the comparisons between the regions do not easily lend themselves to generalisation, which may point to a significant role of the regional contexts in the evaluation of the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy. An attempt at their classification has nevertheless been made and is presented below, showing the key dimensions visible in the opinions expressed by the respondents on various issues relating to the Cohesion Policy. To that end, a factor analysis was conducted, which demonstrated that four major dimensions of the differences in the opinions of the respondents in the surveyed regions can be identified (**Annex 4**).

The first dimension, which can be termed as **"satisfaction with the Cohesion Policy implementation"**, comprised a number of issues tackled in Questions 1, 2, 5 and 6. Firstly, according to the respondents, the **proper use of the Cohesion Policy funds as a rule strengthened the fulfilment of the developmental objectives of the surveyed territorial systems**, especially those at the regional level.² This coincided with the opinion that **there were no significant problems in the Cohesion Policy implementation**, that is, the evaluation criteria are clear, no problems occur in the cooperation between the project partners, access to loans/credits to secure the applicants' own contribution is good,³ and there is no shortage of qualified staff required to put the Cohesion Policy projects to life. Secondly, it was pointed out that **the proper implementation means disbursement of funds in compliance with the EU regulations, which helps to avoid financing unnecessary projects, reducing the scale of potential fraud, including corruption and nepotism**.

The second dimension that emerged from the analysis, which comprised the issues covered by Questions 6, 7 and 8, can be dubbed as **"efficient management of the Cohesion Policy"**. In that case, the opinion on the efficiency of the administration was accompanied, firstly, by the view that the application of the **partnership principle led to a shared understanding and involvement in the pursuit of the development policy objectives**.⁴ Secondly, good management concurred with the opinion about the **adequate monitoring and evaluation of the Cohesion Policy**, disseminating the results and using them to formulate and implement the Cohesion Policy.

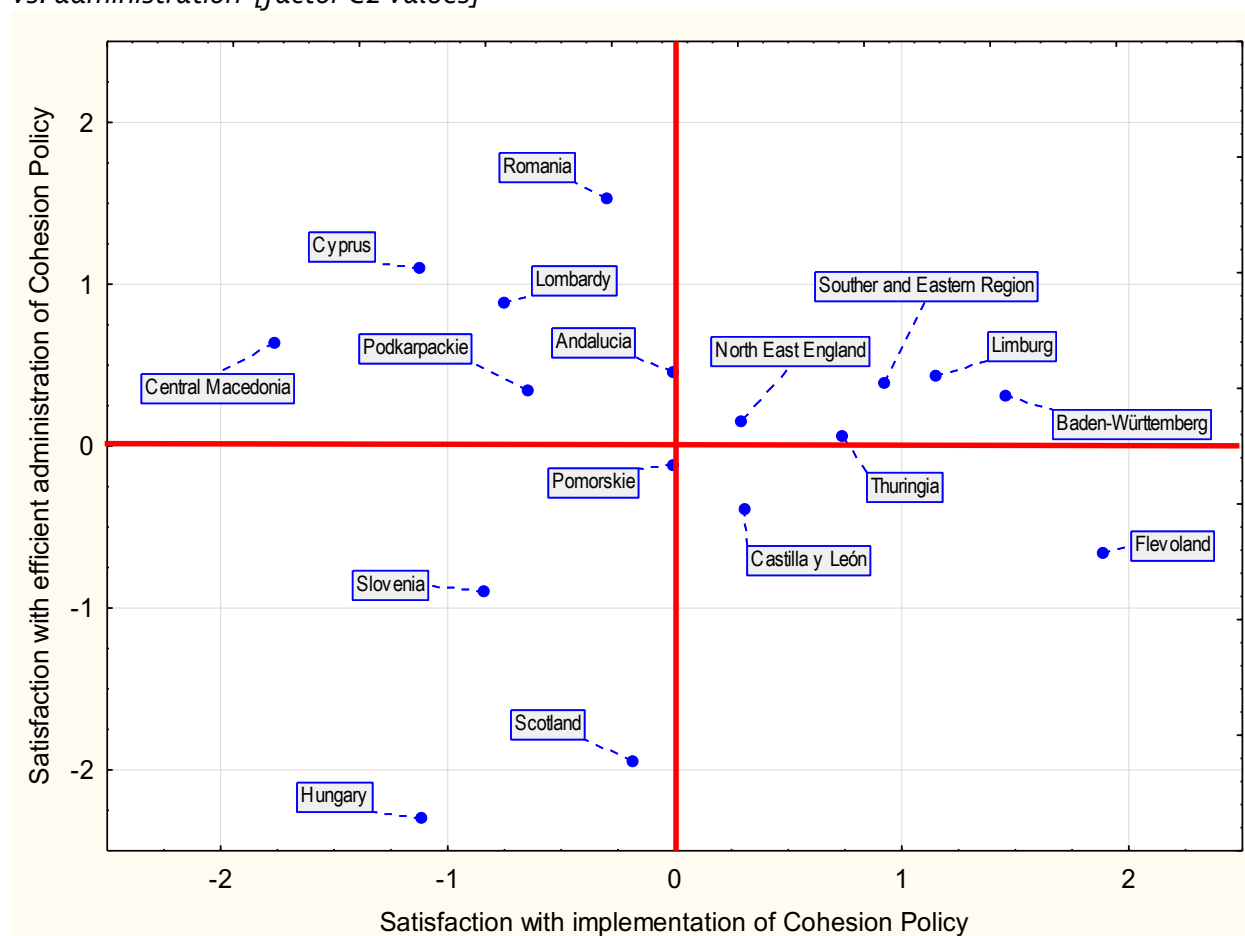
The question could be asked why these two dimensions were not closely correlated. A scatter analysis of the surveyed regions regarding these two dimensions (**Fig. 9**) suggests that this was an effect of the occurrence of dissimilar groups of regions. The first group included the regions where satisfaction with the proper Cohesion Policy implementation coincided with good management, a situation which was primarily observed in Baden-Württemberg, Limburg and Southern and Eastern Ireland. Satisfaction with the implementation, coupled however with more critical views concerning the management of programmes financed from the Cohesion Policy funds, was expressed by the respondents in Flevoland and Castile and León. On the other hand, satisfaction with the management but not with the programme implementation was characteristic primarily of Romania, Cyprus and Macedonia, while the countries which showed the least satisfaction with the two aforementioned aspects included Hungary, followed by Scotland and Slovenia.

² The correlation was also positive for the local level, but statistically insignificant due to the small size of the sample.

³ The correlation was the same for own contribution, but statistically insignificant due to the small size of the sample.

⁴ This particular dimension was also associated with the opinion about a fair encouragement of a wide spectrum of entities to participate in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy, but it was statistically insignificant due to the small size of the sample.

Fig. 9. Cohesion Policy stakeholders' perception dimensions: implementation [factor C1 values] vs. administration [factor C2 values]*



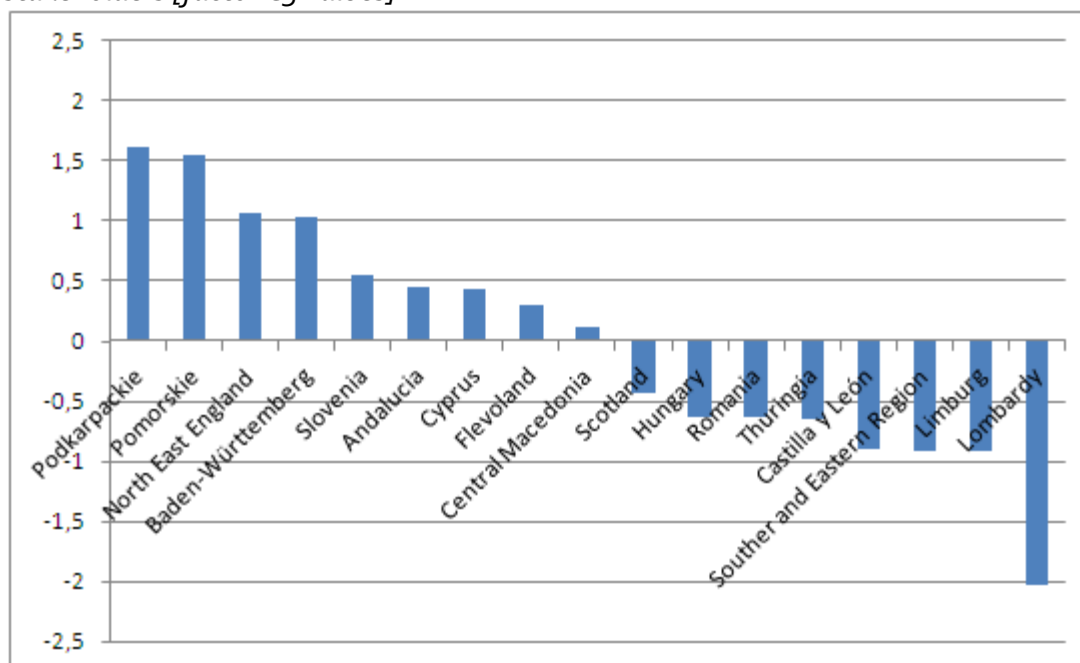
Source: authors' own elaboration

* see Annex 4

The third dimension, which combined some of the categories from Question 6 such as the relevance of the Cohesion Policy intervention to the needs of the residents of the surveyed regions with the opinion that the positive changes occurring in those territorial systems would not have been possible without the contribution of the European funds, could be termed as “**desirable effects**”. Lack of a strong correlation with the aforementioned two dimensions could indicate that **attaining a significant compliance with the EU regulations and efficient management might not encompass some aspects of those initiatives and activities which, in the respondents' opinion, could be more desirable from the residents' perspective and for the developmental needs of their territorial systems.**

The strongest opinions about the real impact of the Cohesion Policy on the region's development, which otherwise would not have occurred without the contribution of the Cohesion Policy funds, were expressed by the respondents in the two Polish regions, and were also distinctly visible in Baden-Württemberg and North East England. On the other hand, scepticism as to the usefulness of the implemented projects in terms of the local and regional needs was characteristic of Lombardy and, less so, of Limburg and Southern and Eastern Ireland (**Fig. 10**).

Fig. 10. Relevance of the intervention to the regional needs and its desirability as viewed by the stakeholders [factor C₃ values]*

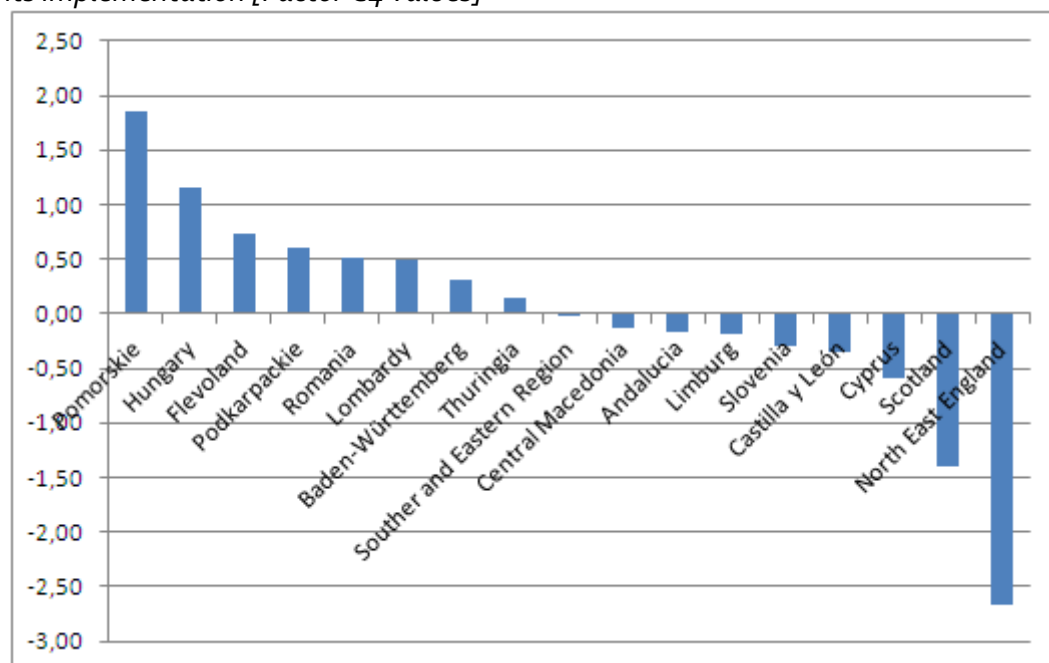


Source: authors' own elaboration

*see Annex 4

The final identified dimension was the positive opinion on the impact of the Cohesion Policy on greater support for the European Union among the residents, a conviction that also inspired opinions on the lack of implementation problems associated with bureaucracy and access to funds for own contribution, which in simplified terms could be summarised as "support for the EU". Hypothetically, this could mean that, in the stakeholders' opinion, the benefits offered by the Cohesion Policy justified the efforts to overcome the red tape and secure own contribution. This factor attained high values predominantly in the regions of some of the member states: Poland, Romania and Hungary, in addition to Flevoland and Lombardy. At the other extreme, there were the British regions and, to a lesser extent, Cyprus (**Fig. 11**).

Fig. 11. The impact of the Cohesion Policy on the perception of the European Union by the residents, with a concurrent opinion on the lack of serious bureaucratic or financial problems in its implementation [Factor C₄ values]*



Source: authors' own elaboration

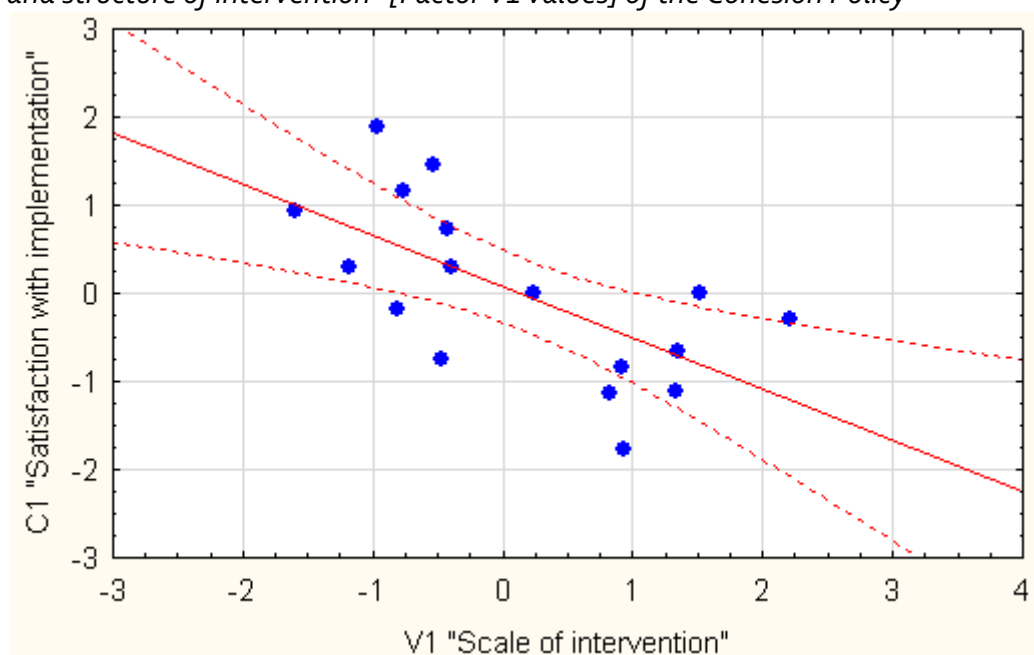
*see Annex 4

3.4. Stakeholders perception versus data on Cohesion Policy implementation and performance

The comparison of the major dimensions of the differences in the opinions expressed by the stakeholders with the data illustrating the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy (Gorzela et al., 2017, Smętkowski et al., 2017) leads to a number of conclusions which, at least partly, concur with the existing body of knowledge about the observable correlations between these opinions and the Cohesion Policy implementation.

The first notable observation was the negative correlation between satisfaction with the implementation of the Cohesion Policy and the scale of the intervention and its infrastructural orientation (**Fig. 12**). As regards the volume of the allocation of the Cohesion Policy funds, the respondents tended to complain of excessive reporting obligations and the need to conduct audits and evaluations, which in effect could lead to discrepancies between funds disbursement and the European Commission guidelines. On the other hand, according to the respondents the orientation of the Cohesion Policy on infrastructure results not only in difficulties with securing the applicants' own contribution (for bigger projects) and a shortage of qualified personnel, but also in poor cooperation between the project partners and more frequent financing of unneeded projects. However, the direct reflection of the scale of the intervention and its orientation on infrastructure in a more negative overall assessment of the use of the Cohesion Policy funds either locally or regionally is much weaker, and in effect statistically insignificant.

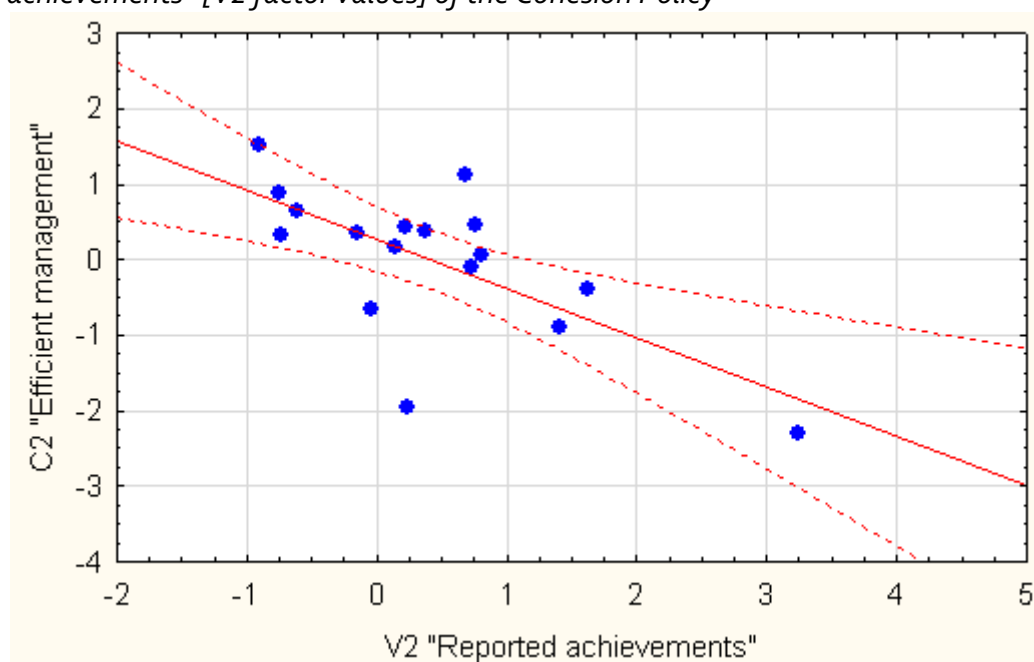
Fig. 12. Correlation between "Satisfaction with implementation" (Factor C1 values) and "Scale and structure of intervention" [Factor V1 values] of the Cohesion Policy



Source: authors' own elaboration

One much less obvious correlation is the negative relationship between the efficient management of Cohesion Policy programmes and the scale of achievements reported to the European Commission (**Fig. 13**). It means that, in those countries or regions where considerable achievements of the Cohesion Policy implementation have been reported, particularly with regard to the number of new jobs in relation to total employment, the following aspects are simultaneously assessed more poorly: a) the partnership principle facilitates a shared understanding and commitments to achieving programmes objectives b) the results of monitoring and evaluation reports are used to improve policy-making and implementation, and c) monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easily accessible. This correlation can be found in the rather isolated case of Hungary, where a very high level of the reported achievements stands in contradiction with the respondents' opinion on the quality of EU programmes management. On the other hand, the case which most strongly diminished the strength of this correlation is Scotland, where the reported achievements do not diverge from the average, with a very poor assessment of management efficiency. These findings could hypothetically demonstrate that the activities connected with reporting Cohesion Policy achievements (including the higher tiers of the administration) may be accompanied by doubts concerning their veracity. In effect, it can cripple the dissemination of such information at the regional level and limit its use in the designing of programmes implementing the Cohesion Policy.

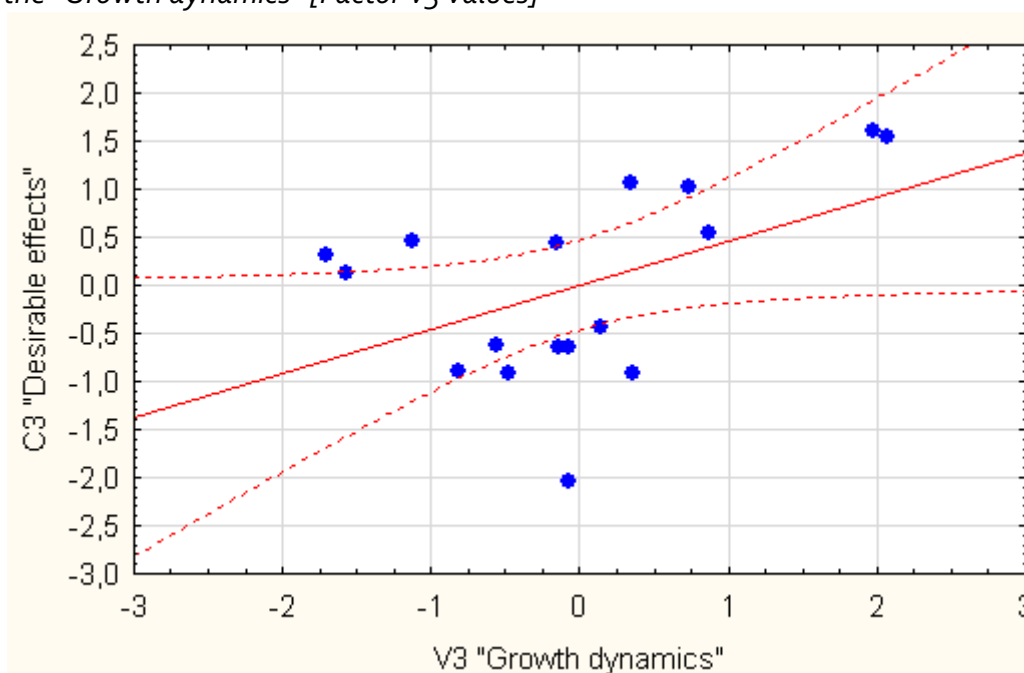
Fig. 13. Correlation between "Efficient management" [C1 factor values] and "Reported achievements" [V2 factor values] of the Cohesion Policy



Source: authors' own elaboration

At the same time, the dimension which most strongly reflected the desirable effects of the Cohesion Policy at the local/regional level was most closely correlated with the growth dynamics of the surveyed regions (**Fig. 14**). It should be pointed out, however, that the correlation in this case was weaker than in the previous two cases, and could be primarily attributed to the two Polish regions, which recorded a rapid rate of growth in the period following the crisis; this was accompanied by the respondents' opinion about significant achievements of the Cohesion Policy and conviction that many of those important projects would not have been completed if not for the Cohesion Policy funding. One region to considerably break away from this correlation was Lombardy, with a rather lukewarm assessment of the usefulness of the Cohesion Policy projects on the part of the stakeholders.

Fig. 14. Correlation between "Desirable effects" [Factor C₃ values] of the Cohesion Policy and the "Growth dynamics" [Factor V₃ values]

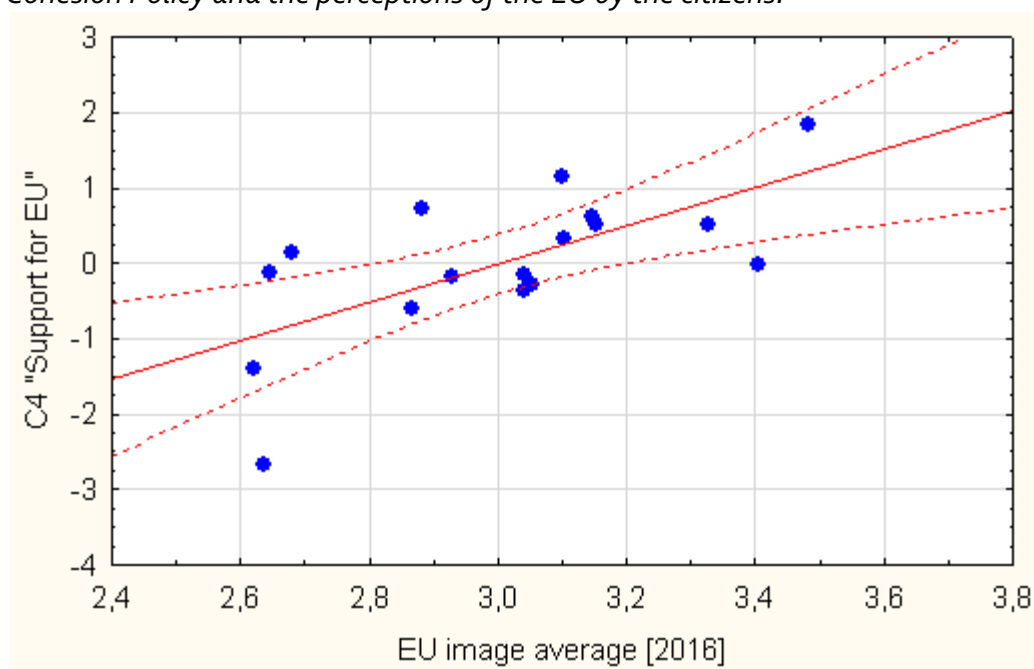


Source: authors' own elaboration

The final identified dimension of the differences between the regions, associated with the respondents' opinion about the impact of the Cohesion Policy on the positive perception of the European Union by the residents, and coupled with lack of criticism of excessive red tape and lack of problems in securing the applicant's own contribution, for simplicity's sake dubbed as "support for the EU", was reflected in the positive views concerning the European Union expressed by the residents of the surveyed regions⁵ (Fig. 15). This was most strongly visible in the region of Pomorskie, and the least so in the region of North East England, where the opinions about the lack of impact of the Cohesion Policy on the residents' support for the EU were particularly widespread. However, it should be pointed out that the observable correlation captured only the overall scale of support for the European Union expressed by the residents of the surveyed regions, determined by a number of factors, including those related to *longue durée* processes. However, no relationship was revealed between the stakeholders' interests concerning the impact of the Cohesion Policy on EU support and the changes in the perception of the Community by the residents in the period 2008-2016, as shown in the Eurobarometer data for that period. It should also be noted that no other issue addressed in the survey was statistically significantly correlated with the latter variable.

⁵ The Eurobarometer survey results from the latest available year (2015-2016) were used, i.e. Eurobarometer 85.2 May 2015; Eurobarometer 84.5 September-October 2015; Eurobarometer 86.6 November 2016 (see Smętkowski and Dąbrowski, 2018).

Fig. 15. Correlation between increased "support for the EU" (Factor C₄ values] thanks to the Cohesion Policy and the perceptions of the EU by the citizens.



Source: authors' own elaboration, based on Eurobarometer 85.2 May 2015; Eurobarometer 84.5 September-October 2015; Eurobarometer 86.6 November 2016

4. QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS OPINIONS

In addition to the desk research results, the qualitative research on the evaluation of the situation by the stakeholders was used to draw conclusions on the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy in the case studies reports. A detailed summary of their findings broken down by the following issues: (1) characteristic of the regional operational programmes, (2) relevance of the regional operational programmes to the regional needs, (3) managerial structures and partnerships, and (4) assessment of performance, is provided in **Annex 5**. This part of the study focuses on the following selected issues. Firstly, we explored the correlation between those aspects of Cohesion Policy implementation which, owing to their qualitative nature, were not used to analyse their impact on the stakeholders' opinions (the C1-C4 dimensions, discussed above), i.e. the degree of the decentralisation of the implementation system and the changes observable in that regard between the periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. Secondly, we assessed the consistency between the questionnaire responses and the opinions expressed in the interviews for such key issues as: (1) matching the Cohesion Policy to the regions' needs, (2) satisfaction with the Cohesion Policy implementation process at the regional level, (3) implementation of the partnership principle.

4.1. Managerial structure of Cohesion Policy vs. stakeholders opinions

The managerial structures – obviously following the suggestions and regulations of the European Commission – have been shaped by the national solutions of territorial governance, and there are no general similarities between analysed countries and regions (unless these regions are located in the same Member state, then their management structures are very similar, if not identical). This incomparability reduces the opportunities of transfer of experiences and good practices, as well as does not allow for drawing sound generalisations of the quality of particular solutions. However, some generalisation regarding the specific role of sub-national authorities in implementation of Cohesion Policy and its change over time could be used to analyse differences in stakeholders opinions regarding selected aspects of Cohesion Policy implementation and performance.

The comparison of the two programming periods that were studied (2007-2013 and 2014-2020) displays **both continuity and change**. In most countries the implementation structures adopted for these periods were the same, however in several countries there was no institutional continuity between the two programming periods (**Box 1**). In their cases the regional (sub-national) OPs have been cancelled and amalgamation of regional issues have been done up to the whole-national level which in reality meant centralisation.

These changes have increased the number of countries where the territorial challenges were met by National Operational programmes. To the three cases mentioned above also Cyprus, Romania and Slovenia should be added where in both programming periods the territorial issues were covered by whole-national operational programmes.

Box. 1. Examples of changes in implementation structures

- (1) Scotland: in 2007-2013 separate regional programmes were functioning in Highlands and Islands and in Lowlands and Uplands, and in 2014-2020 they were amalgamated into one programme for Scotland;
- (2) England: in 2007-2013 a separate regional programme was in operation for North East England, and in 2014-2020 it was incorporated into one programme for England;
- (3) Hungary: in 2007-2013 a separate programme was in operation in West Pannon, while in 2014-2020 it was incorporated into one whole-national territorial programme for all regions of Hungary that replaced former 7 ROPs for 2007-2013.

Source: authors' own elaboration

On the opposite side regarding centralisation are the Polish regions, where although no organisational change occurred, the twofold increase of the shares of the ROPs in the total spending of the Cohesion funds meant decentralisation of both programming and implementation of Cohesion policy. This was a result of an important organisational difference between the two programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 occurred: two-fund ROPs were allowed. This resulted in combining both ERDF and EFS into one ROP in Polish regions, Podkarpackie and Pomorskie, as well as in the ROP for England and Central Macedonia. However, in Italian (Lombardy) and Spanish regions (Andalucía and Castile and Leon) two separate one-fund ROPs were maintained (one financed from ERDF, and the second from EFS). In the higher developed countries (the Netherlands, England, Ireland) whose regions were assigned to the Competitiveness objective, in two periods only the ERDF financed the ROPs, and the ESF was absent in these programmes (it was involved in financing programmes on the national level). Also in other cases a discontinuity in the structures of the operational programmes can be noticed. In only few cases the same axes have been maintained in the two consecutive programming periods.

Based on Task 3.1 on data review and mapping of Cohesion Policy and Case Studies Reports the following generalisation regarding role of regional authorities in implementation of cohesion policy could be applied in order to assess its impact on stakeholders opinions (**Tab. 7**).

Table 7. Main dimension of stakeholders opinions in different implementation context of Cohesion Policy [values of factor loadings]

Dimensions of stakeholders opinions* Implementation system**	'Satisfaction with implementation of Cohesion Policy'	'Efficient management of Cohesion Policy'	'Desirable effects of Cohesion Policy'	'Support for EU as result of Cohesion Policy'
Regionalised: (Germany, Italy, Netherlands)	0,9	-0,2	0,5	-0,3
Mixed: (Spain, Ireland, Poland)	0,1	-0,1	-0,4	-0,4
Centralised: (Cyprus, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Scotland, England)	-0,9	0,3	0,1	0,1

Source: authors' own elaboration

* see **Annex 4**

** based on M. Ferry et al. (2007) and COHESIFY Case Study Reports with regard to the classification of implementation systems

Based on the above table, it can be tentatively concluded (due to the small number of the analysed cases) that satisfaction with the Cohesion Policy outcomes depends to some extent on the adopted implementation model. The level of the stakeholders' satisfaction with the effects of the implementation of Cohesion Policy programmes is high in regionalised Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Thuringia) and the Netherlands (Limburg, Flevoland). It should be noted, however, that this group also includes Italy (Lombardy), where the level of satisfaction in that regard is low, as reflected very critical opinions about the degree to which the Cohesion Policy effects address the regional needs. On the other hand, in the countries with a centralised system of Cohesion Policy implementation, the satisfaction with the results is as a rule lower (this is relatively

the least applicable to Scotland and North-East England). The correlation between the level of centralisation and the level of satisfaction with the implementation of Cohesion Policy programmes independent of other factors such as dissimilar development levels in the individual countries or the impact of the 2008 financial crisis is demonstrated by the fact that the stakeholders' opinions on the remaining analyses aspects are not statistically dependent on the degree of centralisation. In particular, this can be said about the lack of distinct differences in the evaluation of the effective administration of operational programmes and of the impact of the Cohesion Policy on the perception of the EU by the citizens. As regards the degree of the intervention effects matching the regional needs, an interesting situation can be observed in the group of countries with a mixed implementation model, since it includes both the Polish regions, where the extent of the intervention's responding to the regional needs was assessed as very high, and the Spanish regions, where utterly opposite views were expressed on the subject. Similarly to the Spanish regions, the respondents in Hungary and Scotland had a very critical opinion about the effectiveness of Cohesion Policy administration. The above review of the changes made in the Cohesion Policy implementation indicates that in both these countries the degree of centralisation has considerably increased, a shift which the stakeholders viewed very critically in the context of the intervention matching the local needs.

4.2. Correspondence between surveys results and case study reports

Adequacy of the regional operational programmes

The operational programmes should be well tailored to respond to the needs and challenges facing the regions, and at the same time should follow the guidelines of the European Commission which shapes the frameworks of the Cohesion policy interventions. The respondents were asked to provide their opinions on the adequacy of the OPS for the regions which they represent.

Box. 2. Examples of adequacy of regional operational programmes

One may resume on the adequacy of the ROPs indirectly through the reconstructed links between national policies and the ROPs. For example the two Polish regions have not included in their programme decarbonisation of their economies (or attempts to lower the CO₂ emission) which has been a general and common goal in all other ROPs analysed. This may be the result of the negative attitude of Polish government to decarbonise the energy production in Poland, still heavily relying on coal (hard and brown) extraction and burning it in power stations. However, the very fact that "low carbon economy" was present as a goal in all analysed ROPs may also indicate the EU Commission's impact on preparation the national and regional programmes – not necessarily reflecting the actual needs of some regions.

By a similar token almost identical ROPs were formulated in the regions of Spain and the Netherlands. In Spain common structure of the ROPs was noticed in Andalucía and Castilla y León, and in the Netherlands the ROPs were very similar (more in content of the priority areas than in their names). The structures of financing reflected the specific features of these regions.

It appears that many stakeholders, instead of providing opinions on the relations of the OPs to the profiles of their regions rather reported on the contents of the programmes and indicated the changes which were introduced into the 2014-2020 programmes in comparison to the previous ones. In general, the structures of the OPs and ROPs were reflecting the greatest deficiencies of the countries and regions, and the biggest challenges facing them. Not in all regions this seems to be secured – for example this could be the case in Spain, where a national framework is designated for regions of different types and problems, and the specificity of the regions is reflected in different

shares of particular axes (priority areas), the same in all regions, have in the total budgets of OPs. Moreover, a persistence of the “regional problems” in many cases calls for a longer intervention in the same areas, and the only changes in the OPs are the result of new priorities suggested by the Commission. In the second perspective 2014-2020 usually less funds were directed towards infrastructure which responded to satisfying basic need in this sphere, especially in the new member states. Nevertheless, the critical opinions about the relation between the structures of the OPs and the characteristics and needs of the regions were very scarce. One example of such critical approach is seen in Scotland, where a shift to a Scottish-wide ROP in 2014-2020 period left many stakeholders with a notion of their region’s particular needs being omitted.

In general, one may notice that in the high developed countries the shift towards innovation and competitiveness has occurred in the second period 2014-2020 as compared to the previous one 2007-2013. In the countries of southern Europe – most hardly affected by the financial crisis, more attention was paid to alleviating its negative economic and especially social consequences. In the regions of central Europe less funds were directed to basic infrastructure and more – following the example of the most developed ones – to R&D and innovation.

Box. 3. Examples of relevance of Cohesion Policy funded projects to regional needs

On the basis of the opinions about the relevance of the Cohesion Policy-funded projects to the local/regional needs expressed in the questionnaire surveys, a qualitative assessment of the adequacy and shifts in the directions of allocation can be offered, especially in those countries where the relevance was exceptionally low, i.e. Hungary, Lombardy, Central Macedonia and Slovenia. In the case of Hungary, the years 2014-2020 saw a shift in the spending of funds from supporting the development of basic infrastructure to social-profile programmes comprising, in addition to employment, such issues as combating poverty, education and health care. In the case of Lombardy, the shift was from alleviating the consequences of the financial crisis in the period 2007-2013 to promoting innovation, also in its environmental and social aspects. In the case of Central Macedonia, between the years 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 the focus of the public changed from supporting economic development (enterprise, innovation) to promoting social infrastructure, a development which was relevant in the context of a social collapse caused by the slump in the Greek economy. On the other hand, in the case of Slovenia people-centred investments became more prominent, particularly as regards labour market adjustments, at the expense of hard infrastructure.

It should be pointed out that the empirical research was conducted at a singular moment, associated with the transition from the financing perspective 2007-2013 (for which the intervention effects were visible, especially due to the N+2 principle) to the new programming perspective 2014-2020, which as yet has not produced tangible effects. Therefore, based on the conclusions from the reports, it is difficult to firmly conclude whether the critical opinions about the relevance of the intervention to the actual needs could be attributed to the negative pool of experiences gained ex-post from the previous period or whether they were rather connected with the ex-ante changes proposed to be incorporated in the new operational programmes. In the former case, it could mean that the changes might be welcome by the stakeholders in the future, and in the latter – that it could be regarded as a strong warning, pointing to the need to carefully assess the implementation of the proposed arrangements.

Implementation problems

The problems associated with Cohesion Policy implementation were quite varied, and their diverse mixes could be observed in the individual countries/regions covered by the research. This is also corroborated by the survey findings, which revealed considerable differences of opinion (as measured by standard deviation) between individual regions, especially with respect to such issues as: non-compliance of EU spending with EU rules, level of fraud, inadequate control systems and

failures in the proper selection of projects. The qualitative research has shed some light on the major reasons underlying the problems encountered in the implementation of Cohesion Policy-funded programmes. The most often mentioned issues were the following:

- (1) the 2008 economic crisis, which seriously disrupted the implementation process under the previous programming perspective. In particular, it changed the socio-economic situation in the regions and caused new problems to appear, especially in the social sphere, which could not have been foreseen while programming the intervention. Furthermore, the financial crisis depleted the public resources, which led to problems with securing the sources for the co-financing of projects in some of the regions;
- (2) centralisation of management (in some countries), in some cases accompanied by allegations of the lack of a strategic vision of Cohesion Policy implementation and failing to produce the results which would be in line with the expectations (e.g. Hungary), or excessive dispersion of the funds on the one hand, and their unnecessary concentration in selected spheres on the other, which could weaken the positive impact of the intervention (e.g. Slovenia) ;
- (3) changing the rules and too rigid bureaucratic procedures (proportionality), which made the project implementation unduly difficult, especially where new regulations designed for the purposes of implementing large-scale investment projects were imposed for relatively small-scale projects.

It should be noted that, in light of the above research, the latter aspect relatively strongly coincided with the respondents' belief that the Cohesion Policy could have a bearing on the citizens' support for the European Union. Given the reported problems arising from difficulties with filling in applications for financing, the demanding and complicated reporting system and the likelihood of painstaking project implementation audits, especially with a small amount of EU co-financing, the respondents frequently expressed a view that these considerations could negatively affect the citizens' opinions about the European Union.

Partnerships

In all managerial structures - following EC guidance - close partnerships with several local and regional stakeholders, like local authorities and their associations, businesses and their associations, NGOs, citizens' organisations and representatives of regional/national state administrations, were established, and these partnerships have extended from preparation of the OPs, their implementation and evaluation. It cannot be assessed to what extent the declared partnerships were practically reflected in real influences of social partners on project formulation and implementation.

Box. 4. Examples of partnership principle

In some regions (like in Andalucía) thematic networks on national scales were created. In Poland the OPs are constantly discussed on assembly of marshals (officially called Union of the Provinces of the Republic of Poland). The Managing Committees usually have been indicated as the platforms of performing the partnership principle, also with partners not represented in the Committees but invited for specific meetings and discussions, according to the topics involved.

An interesting practice was introduced in West Netherlands, where the 4 main cities host the ROP's secretariats. Additionally, annually rotating presidency by the 4 cities and 4 provinces was introduced, thus putting a greater emphasis on a balanced and equal partnership in the management of the OP across the key stakeholders.

The reflection of the territorial structures in the managing organisation has also been applied in the OP for in North East England where a two-tier structure has been introduced.

The relatively least level of satisfaction with the partnership principle was declared in the questionnaire surveys in such countries as Hungary, Scotland, Lombardy and Slovenia. In the majority of cases, it was associated with the centralisation of Cohesion Policy implementation discussed earlier, which undermined the real competences of the regional and local actors in that regard. It means that, in the stakeholders' opinion, wider introduction and strengthening the partnership principle under the new programming perspective proved insufficient to offset the changes perceived as negative in the implementation system even if such changes were based on valid objective grounds. In the case of Scotland, centralisation was introduced following the negative experiences of the 2007-13 period, related to a number of audit and compliance issues. A similar situation could be observed in Slovenia, where, in the new programming period, and based on the negative experiences in the previous period, a single system of managing and monitoring was established, together with uniform guidelines for intermediate bodies and beneficiaries, which took into account the specific attributes of individual funds. The idea behind was that this would reduce the administrative burden for the beneficiaries.

5. SUMMARY

The results of the survey of 803 (including 400 full responses) regional and local development stakeholders (mostly individuals engaged in a passive or active way in the implementation of operational programmes financed from the Cohesion Policy funds) in 12 countries, with five countries being represented by two different regions, despite a small number of the analysed case studies in the sample (17) and various N values of the regional samples (ranging from 10/17 to 128), allow certain generalisations to be made concerning the relationship between the Cohesion Policy and its perception by the stakeholders. This was supplemented by the qualitative views of different groups of stakeholders (215 in-depth interviews) on Cohesion Policy implementation and performance presented in case study reports.

Dimensions of stakeholders opinions

In addition to showing the unique characteristics of the individual regions with respect to the selected issues, the survey also helped to identify the major factors shaping the stakeholders' opinions about the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy. These opinions may be divided into four quite independent dimensions, of which the first expressed the stakeholders' overall satisfaction with the Cohesion Policy implementation process, the second – satisfaction with the efficient management of Cohesion Policy-financed programmes, the third indicated the attainment of results which were desirable from the perspective of those regions and their residents. Finally, the view on how far the pursued policy helped to increase the support for the EU among the citizens could be treated as a separate dimension. The weak correlation between these dimensions indicated the existence of specific linkages of such factors in individual regions on the one hand, and on the other demonstrated the susceptibility of such opinions to the impact of various concomitant factors such as for example the scale of the allocation and its orientation.

Determinants of stakeholders opinions

Satisfaction with the implementation of the Cohesion Policy largely depended on the scale of the committed funds and their structural orientation, which to large extent reproduced the division into the "Convergence" regions and "Competitiveness and Employment" regions. Quite paradoxically, the stakeholders' satisfaction was considerably higher in the second group of regions, where the implementation process of the Cohesion Policy, due to a smaller allocation and smaller size of projects, not associated with the construction of large infrastructural facilities, was easier. On the other hand, in the first group the likelihood of problems associated with the proper disbursement of the awarded funds and selection of the best projects was higher. It should be borne in mind, however, that the correlation was not strong: some "Convergence" regions did not report any major problems with the implementation (e.g. Pomorskie), while some "Competitiveness and Employment" regions did encounter such problems (e.g. Lombardy).

On the other hand, the desirable effects of the Cohesion Policy were as a rule better assessed in regions where the economic and social development was relatively unobstructed. In this case, it is, quite naturally, difficult to clearly determine the direction of the observable correlation. It means that the situation when the properly delivered public intervention supported by the Cohesion Policy has strengthened socio-economic development processes is as likely as the situation when, due to an overall favourable business climate in the region, programmes financed from the Cohesion Policy funds are regarded as drivers of such processes. Just as in the previous cases, this correlation was weak; alongside the regions which best illustrated the correlation at hand (i.e. the Polish regions) there were also regions which did not follow the pattern at all (such as Lombardy).

The negative relationship between the efficient management of Cohesion Policy programmes and reporting the implementation proved to be the most surprising correlation. This could mean that, given the orientation on external reporting of the achievements of the delivered intervention, the

extent of centralisation and discretion of the decision-making processes was greater than the one in a situation of a more critical perception of the results of the implemented programmes. In the latter case, there was a greater chance of tapping the knowledge and expertise of various groups of regional and local development actors as part of a deeper partnership in order to attain the development objectives and improve the use of the results of monitoring and evaluation to design development policies. Overall, it could be concluded that the high-level of decentralisation strengthened a positive assessment of Cohesion Policy implementation by regional and local stakeholders.

Outcomes – citizens assessment of the European Union

Based on the answers provided by the respondents, it can be observed that the opinions on the Cohesion Policy promoting pro-European attitudes among citizens were associated with two issues. The first was the view about the lack of any serious bureaucratic and financial obstacles to the implementation of the Cohesion Policy, a stance that could also be reflected in a more positive perception of the European Union by the residents. In this case, communicating the process of Cohesion Policy implementation, including media coverage, could play a major role. Secondly, the opinion about a stronger impact of the Cohesion Policy was more frequently voiced in those regions where the overall support for the EU, expressed by its positive perception, was greater. However, no correlation was established between such a view and the real changes in the residents' perception of the EU as demonstrated in the Eurobarometer surveys for the years of the financing perspective 2007-2013 (Smętkowski and Dąbrowski, 2018). In other words, examples could be found both of regions where the opinion about the EU had deteriorated even though the stakeholders believed that the Cohesion Policy fostered pro-European attitudes, and of regions where the situation was opposite. This could result from the fact that the evolution of the opinions about the European Union depends on a number of factors, the Cohesion Policy being merely one of them.

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ANNEX 1. Survey question in parts focused on Cohesion Policy Implementation and Performance

INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESPONDENT

Please provide us with your country of residence:

1. Belgium
2. Germany
3. Greece
4. Hungary
5. Ireland
6. Italy
7. Netherlands
8. Poland
9. Romania
10. Slovenia
11. Spain
12. United Kingdom

Please select the type of organisation you are employed at:

Please choose only one of the following:

1. National state institution (such as Ministry, Agency)
2. Regional state institution (such as Ministry, Agency)
3. Local state institution (such as Municipality Department, Agency)
4. Other public organisation (such as education/research institution)
5. Trade union
6. Business association or federation.
7. Business/Commercial Organisation
8. Interest group, NGO, civil society organisation
9. Local state authority association or federation
10. European Commission official
11. Any other (please specify)

PLEASE TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH COHESION POLICY

I work in the management of an operational programme or part of a programme (e.g. Managing Authority, Intermediate Body, Implementing body) co-funded by the following Funds (select all that apply):

1. ERDF
2. ESF
3. Cohesion Fund

I or my organisation is a beneficiary/recipient of the following Funds (select all that apply):

1. ERDF
2. ESF
3. Cohesion Fund

I am a partner represented in the Monitoring Committee of a programme co-funded by the following Funds (select all that apply):

1. ERDF

2. ESF
3. Cohesion Fund

SURVEY QUESTIONS (only those that refer to implementation and performance)

EFFECTIVENESS

Q1. How well – in your opinion – have Cohesion policy funds been used in your municipality and region?

	Very well	Well	Acceptable	Poorly	Very poorly	Don't know
Q1.1. Your municipality						
Q2.1. Your region						

Q2. To what extent have the Cohesion policy objectives reinforced the development objectives of your municipality and region?

	Completely	Largely	In some way	Not much	Not at all	Don't know
Q2.1. Your municipality						
Q2.2. Your region						

Q3. To what extent have Cohesion policy funds helped to increase or decrease:

	Decreased	Somewhat decreased	Had no impact	Somewhat increased	Increased	Don't know
Q3.1. Differences in the development level between poorer and richer regions in your country						
Q3.2. Differences in the development level between rural and urban areas in your region						
Q3.3. Differences in the development level between poorer and richer areas in your region						
Q3.4. Differences in the development level between your country and other European Union Member states						

Q4. In your opinion, has Cohesion policy during the last 10 years or so helped to make residents of your municipality/region support the European Union more?

1. It has helped a lot
2. It has rather helped
3. It has had no impact
4. It has had a rather negative impact
5. It has had a very negative impact
6. Don't know

IMPLEMENTATION

Q5. How significant was the impact of the following problems and challenges during the implementation of Cohesion policy projects?

Please chose the appropriate response for each item:

	Very significant	Significant	Average	Insignificant	Not at all	Don't know
Q5.1.Scarcity of Cohesion policy funds						
Q5.2 Problems with obtaining Cohesion policy financing such as complicated rules for submitting applications						
Q5.3.Excessive, cumbersome reporting						
Q5.4.Unclear objectives for evaluating project results						
Q5.5.Poor cooperation between project partners						
Q5.6.Excessive audit and control during or after the project completion						
Q5.7.Lack of funds for own contribution (co-financing)						
Q5.8.Difficult access to credit and/or loans for own contribution						
Q5.9.Lack of capacity such as qualified staff						

Other – please specify including significance rating:

Please write your answer here:

Q6. How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements:

Please chose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Q6.1. Cohesion policy funds finance those investment projects which your municipality/region needs the most						
Q6.2. In your municipality/region Cohesion policy funding goes to investment projects which are most valued by the local residents						
Q6.3. There are many irregularities in spending Cohesion policy funds due to non-compliance with EU rules						
Q6.4. Fraud, such as corruption or nepotism, is common in spending Cohesion policy funds						
Q6.5. There have been many positive changes in your municipality/region thanks to Cohesion policy funds, which would not have been achieved without the funds						
Q6.6. The spending of Cohesion policy funds is adequately controlled						
Q6.7. The money from Cohesion policy funds is in most cases wasted on the wrong projects						
Q6.8. The administration of Cohesion policy has been delivered in an efficient (cost-effective) manner						

PARTNERSHIP

Q7. The partnership principle requires the participation of a wide range of partners throughout the different stages of programming and implementation through consultations, monitoring committee work and other mechanisms. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the operation of the partnership principle in practice?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Q7.1. The way the programme partnership operates is inclusive, open and fair						
Q7.2. The operation of the programme's partnership principle facilitates a shared understanding and shared commitment by partners to achieving the programme's objectives						
Q7.3. Partners are only interested in promoting their own organisational and financial interests						

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Q8.1 The monitoring and evaluation reports provide adequate information on the implementation and performance of the programme/s						
Q8.2 The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easily accessible						
Q8.3 The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easy to understand						
Q8.4 The monitoring and evaluation report results are used to improve policy-making and implementation						

TRAINING

Q9. In what Cohesion policy workshop or training sessions did the representatives of your organisation/municipality/region participate in the last two years (select all that apply)?

1. Q9.1. Management
2. Q9.2 Control
3. Q9.3 Monitoring
4. Q9.4 Evaluation
5. Q9.5 Communication
6. Q9.6. Nobody participated in such events

ANNEX 2. Interview questionnaire

Socio-economic challenges

1. What are the main socio-economic needs and problems that the programmes are trying to address over the last two programme periods (2007-13 and 2014-20)?

Achievements

2. What have been the main achievements of the programmes over the last two periods (2007-13 and 2014-20)?

3. What challenges and problems, if any, led to parts of the programmes failing to meet their goals?

Institutional framework and management

4. What are the key features of the management structure for the programme/s?

5. Where these implementation structures effective in delivering programmes/projects? What were the main challenges?

6. What is the relative priority placed on the tasks of 1) spending the funds 2) compliance 3) performance and 4) including publicising achievements? Why?

Partnership/public fora

7. What are the main partnership structures and forums for discussing Cohesion policy implementation and performance/achievements?

8. To what extent are these forums open and accountable to civil society?

Visibility and profile of Cohesion policy

9. How high is the public profile and visibility of the Structural Funds in your region and country?

10. Are citizens aware of the existence and achievements of Cohesion policy funds in terms of impacts on the development of their region?

11. Do politicians publicly acknowledge the contribution of EU funds to regional development?

12. Have there been efforts to increase the profile of Cohesion policy in your region/country, and if so, how has this been done?

Media coverage

13. How is 'Europe' and Cohesion policy viewed and reported by the media (e.g. journalist stories)? Is the tone negative or positive and why?

14. How do the programmes manage relations with the media? (e.g. press releases, specialised press officers, establishing strong relationships with the media so that the Structural Funds are understood in advance of press releases etc.) Could media relations be improved and if so how?

Approach to programme communication

15. How would you characterise the overall approach to communication in the programme in terms of the key priorities of the communication strategy, communication measures and target groups? Has the approach changed over time? Why?

16. Is the communication of Cohesion policy programmes and projects considered a key priority (e.g. in terms of resources, staff time, monitoring committee debates etc.)? if not, why?

Communication tools and activities

17. Which communication tools do you use most and least, and why?

18. What is your assessment of your publicity and communication efforts so far? Which information activities have been the most and least effective? Why?

19. To what extent is social media used to promote programme achievements and interactive engagement with stakeholders (e.g. through twitter, facebook etc.)?

20. Can you think of any communication good practices in your country/region? [probe for any aspect of communication such as the approach to branding/visual identity (EU Funds logo and messages); specific communication measures/activities (e.g. communication events, use of media/social media, websites, successful campaigns, etc.); support offered to beneficiaries to comply with communication requirements (e.g. online tools, meetings, helpdesks); and communication techniques (e.g. visuals, storytelling) at programme or project level]

21. Can you think of any ways of improving the communication of EU policy objectives and results to the public?

ANNEX 3. Three tiers of public administration – comparison of responses

	NO OF RESPONSES			Q1.1 CP USE IN YOUR MUNICIPALITY				Q4.1 CP HELPED TO SUPPORT EU				Q6.1 CP ADDRESS LOCAL INVESTMENT NEEDS				Q6.6 CP EFFICIENTLY ADMINISTERED				Q8.4 EVALUATION USED TO IMPROVE POLICIES			
	local	regional	national	mean_all	mean_loc	mean_reg	mean_nat	mean_all	mean_loc	mean_reg	mean_nat	mean_all	mean_loc	mean_reg	mean_nat	mean_all	mean_loc	mean_reg	mean_nat	mean_all	mean_loc	mean_reg	mean_nat
Andalucia	3	20	2	3,83	1,13	0,98	1,17	4,00	1,08	1,01	1,00	3,82	1,22	0,96	1,18	3,53	1,04	0,98	1,27	3,10	1,18	0,94	1,45
Baden-Württemberg	1	1	0	4,50	1,11	n/a	n/a	3,90	1,03	1,03	n/a	4,00	1,00	1,25	n/a	3,22	1,09	0,62	n/a	3,50	n/a	1,43	n/a
Castile and León	1	13	4	3,52	1,42	0,93	1,02	3,76	1,33	0,96	1,01	3,76	1,06	0,95	1,06	3,60	1,11	0,95	1,06	2,96	1,35	0,97	0,93
Central Macedonia	2	12	0	3,21	1,24	0,96	n/a	3,88	1,03	1,00	n/a	3,29	1,22	0,96	n/a	3,50	1,00	1,00	n/a	3,50	1,00	1,00	n/a
Cyprus	4	0	12	3,25	0,92	n/a	1,00	3,55	0,92	n/a	1,01	3,78	0,95	n/a	1,00	3,48	0,92	n/a	1,04	3,53	0,99	n/a	1,02
Flevoland	2	3	1	4,38	0,91	1,03	n/a	4,00	0,88	1,06	1,00	3,88	0,90	1,03	1,03	2,75	1,27	0,82	0,73	3,13	1,12	1,04	0,64
Hungary	2	0	11	3,32	1,35	n/a	1,03	3,77	1,19	n/a	0,97	3,07	1,47	n/a	1,03	2,60	1,54	n/a	1,12	2,53	1,58	n/a	1,01
Limburg	2	11	0	3,79	0,92	0,99	n/a	3,65	0,96	1,01	n/a	3,65	1,00	0,95	n/a	3,05	0,82	0,96	n/a	3,42	0,88	0,94	n/a
Lombardy	1	5	5	3,06	0,98	0,98	0,98	3,42	0,88	0,96	1,17	3,25	0,92	0,86	1,11	3,27	n/a	0,92	1,04	3,47	n/a	0,81	1,10
NE England	4	0	2	3,89	0,81	1,03	1,29	3,14	0,95	n/a	0,95	3,79	0,90	1,32	1,06	2,92	0,89	0,69	1,03	2,75	0,87	n/a	1,27
Podkarpackie	48	6	4	3,85	0,98	1,13	1,04	4,22	1,01	1,05	0,87	3,97	1,01	0,94	1,20	3,68	1,01	1,09	0,82	3,21	1,02	1,02	1,01
Pomorskie	45	1	1	4,23	1,01	0,95	1,18	4,28	0,98	1,17	1,05	3,87	0,99	1,03	1,16	3,62	0,99	1,11	1,11	3,20	0,99	0,94	0,94
Romania	5	3	4	3,64	1,10	1,03	0,89	4,07	1,07	1,05	0,93	3,57	0,93	1,05	1,05	3,62	0,92	1,04	1,11	3,85	0,95	1,04	0,98
Scotland	13	4	0	3,58	1,07	1,05	n/a	3,65	0,97	1,10	n/a	3,65	1,04	1,10	n/a	2,44	0,92	1,23	n/a	2,65	1,01	1,04	n/a
Slovenia	16	0	16	3,71	1,06	n/a	0,92	3,92	1,04	n/a	0,97	3,38	1,04	n/a	0,96	2,58	0,99	n/a	1,00	2,98	0,98	n/a	1,03
S&E Region	6	3	4	4,00	1,13	0,88	1,06	4,11	1,05	0,97	0,89	3,47	1,06	1,01	0,96	3,41	1,12	1,17	0,78	3,00	0,94	0,83	1,11
Thuringia	0	2	0	3,57	n/a	1,12	n/a	3,75	n/a	1,07	n/a	3,43	n/a	1,31	n/a	3,33	n/a	1,20	n/a	3,14	n/a	1,27	n/a
ALL*	155	84	66	3,73	1,07	1,00	1,05	3,83	1,02	1,03	0,99	3,62	1,04	1,05	1,07	3,21	1,04	0,98	1,01	3,17	1,06	1,02	1,04

Source: authors' own elaboration. Colour-coded values represent the variation between average response-value for a given question and a given tier, and mean value for the whole sample. Values over 1 indicate that respondents from a given sub-group [local: *mean_loc*, regional: *mean_reg*, national: *mean_nat*] were more positive in their perception of a given aspect of cohesion policy performance, than all respondents on average [*mean_all*]. Selection of variables were made according to results of the factor analysis (see **Annex 4**). [ALL] was calculated as an unweighted average of values for all case study regions included.

ANNEX 4. Factor analysis of responses for particular questions (Varimax rotation)

SURVEY QUESTIONS*	FACTOR 1 "SATISFACTION WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF COHESION POLICY"	FACTOR 2 "EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF COHESION POLICY"	FACTOR 3 "DESIRABLE EFFECTS OF COHESION POLICY"	FACTOR 4 "SUPPORT FOR EU AS RESULT OF COHESION POLICY"
q1.1	0.75	-0.06	0.46	0.13
q1.2	0.81	0.25	0.41	0.10
q2.1	0.64	-0.30	0.30	0.16
q2.2	0.74	-0.07	0.34	0.13
q3.1	-0.35	-0.03	-0.10	0.01
q3.2	-0.35	-0.11	-0.36	-0.25
q3.3	-0.18	-0.24	-0.21	0.07
q3.4	0.13	0.03	-0.04	-0.62
q4.1	0.10	0.02	0.36	0.72
q5.1	-0.26	0.33	0.65	0.22
q5.2	-0.09	-0.27	0.05	-0.81
q5.3	0.01	-0.05	-0.33	-0.86
q5.4	-0.73	-0.10	0.17	-0.44
q5.5	-0.89	0.05	0.00	0.06
q5.6	0.40	-0.14	0.15	-0.83
q5.7	-0.65	-0.01	-0.02	-0.30
q5.8	-0.73	0.21	-0.44	0.01
q5.9	-0.81	0.22	-0.23	0.12
q6.1	0.51	0.23	0.70	-0.09
q6.2	-0.01	0.12	0.88	0.16
q6.3	-0.79	-0.21	0.27	-0.07
q6.4	-0.84	-0.05	0.11	0.28
q6.5	0.10	0.00	0.83	0.04
q6.6	0.58	0.01	-0.16	-0.06
q6.7	-0.83	-0.08	-0.07	0.25
q6.8	-0.07	0.76	0.16	0.32
q7.1	0.68	0.54	0.28	0.09

q7.2	0.21	0.87	0.06	0.05
q7.3	-0.57	0.19	0.13	0.26
q8.1	0.03	0.91	-0.10	-0.07
q8.2	-0.03	0.93	0.11	-0.13
q8.3	-0.38	0.60	0.10	-0.01
q8.4	0.02	0.84	0.10	0.33
q9.1	-0.00	-0.12	-0.04	-0.08
q9.2	-0.01	-0.15	0.06	-0.01
q9.3	-0.15	-0.09	-0.16	-0.11
q9.4	0.02	0.03	-0.13	-0.10
q9.5	0.02	0.03	-0.13	-0.10
q9.6	0.18	0.22	0.14	0.13
Value	9.303	5.158	4.063	4.011
Share	0.238	0.132	0.104	0.103

Source: Authors' own elaboration

* see **Annex 1** for question formulation

ANNEX 5. Stakeholders' evaluation of the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy – insights from qualitative studies in Case Study regions

Adequacy of the regional operational programmes

The operational programmes should be well tailored to respond to the needs and challenges facing the regions, and at the same time should follow the guidelines of the European Commission which shapes the frameworks of the Cohesion policy interventions. The respondents were asked to provide their opinions on the adequacy of the OPS for the regions which they represent. The following table 2 summarised these opinions.

Tab. 1. Adequacy of the regional operational programmes

REGIONS/COUNTRIES	ADEQUACY OF THE 2007-2013 AND/OR 2014-2020 ROPS TO THE REGIONS' NEEDS	
Andalucía	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>The region's weaknesses include economic, environmental, social and institutional dimension.</p> <p>Funds were used for the labour and social integration of young people, both immigrant and homeless children.</p> <p>Innovation was also highlighted. An attempt was made to involve the regions in specific markets or niches, in international value chains.</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>The region's weaknesses include economic, environmental, social and institutional dimension.</p> <p>The crisis led to reorientation of priorities of the smart economic growth.</p> <p>The priority is employment and integration in the labour market, either by belonging to a segment of the population with a high rate of unemployment.</p> <p>Specific focus is put more on certain aspects: employment, inclusion and qualification.</p>
Baden-Württemberg	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>There is a consensus that ERDF funds were indeed used for the region's central needs: 1. Innovation, knowledge-based economy and clusters, 2. sustainable urban and municipal development and 3. resource protection and risk prevention.</p> <p>Innovation and R&D (specifically for S&M enterprises, put also for cooperations between public and private research institutions) was particularly stressed. Besides, the necessity of continuing support for mastering structural change in (former) urban problem areas was highlighted.</p> <p>In terms of ESF funding, major needs were seen in fighting unemployment, but (temporarily) also to contribute to</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>There is a broad consensus that the now clearer focus of the ERDF program on climate/energy transition and innovation – i.e., reflecting specialization and a "cutting edge" issue orientation – is a major achievement clearly reflecting region's need.</p> <p>The accomplishments of the <i>RegioWin</i> process in which ERDF funding is awarded in a competition between encompassing regional innovation concepts are highlighted, but also the creation and improvement of multiple research infrastructures platforms.</p> <p>In terms of the ESF program most important are located in funding for labour market policy by enabling to develop concepts and larger</p>

	cushioning negative impacts of the financial and economic crisis on the labour market. Accordingly, ESF funding is first and foremost used for developing and implementing innovative approaches to active the most difficult jobless population segments for labour market integration, e.g. individuals with multiple employment barriers. A special need be addressed by ESF was seen in achieving greater gender equality in academics.	approaches oriented towards activation of population segments that or not (yet) or hardly employable. While there is agreement that fund are spent in accordance with that need, the region could easily absorb 30 percent more funding for this task (i.e, a larger OP would be useful).
Castilla y Leon, 2007-2013	<p>Major issues and needs related to high cost permanent infrastructures have been solved and that their realisation would have been difficult to be viable without the contribution of the Cohesion Policy, as can be as transport infrastructures, buildings, scientific and technological buildings, innovation centres, etc.</p> <p>The creation of networks and the transfer of innovation to boost the competitiveness of companies and regional entities has been able to developed.</p> <p>The implementation of ESF has managed to foster communication, reintegration, employment and integration into the labour market.</p>	
Central Macedonia	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>Heavy emphasis was placed in increasing the competitiveness of the economy, by helping SMEs and investments in innovation.</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>Dealing with the vast social crisis facing the country. As such, OPs have a strong focus on social infrastructure to fill the void caused by the retreat of the state in the sectors.</p>
Cyprus 2007-2013, 2014-2020	<p>The answers were mostly vague and evasive. However, few needs were indicated: reducing unemployment and boosting the competitiveness of the Cypriot economy. Catching up with average European standards figured prominently between 2007 and 2013. In contrast, dealing with the economic effects the so-called "bail-in", or "haircut", imposed on bank deposits in March 2013, had on the Cypriot economy, determines the thrust of both OPs for the 2014-2020 period.</p>	
Flevoland, 2014-2020	<p>The current programme addresses issues of competitiveness and business environment improvement, with an emphasis on smart city solutions, so municipalities have used funds to promote incentives for innovative companies.</p> <p>However, as the OP entails opportunities mainly for businesses with a high level of innovation, which offered less chances for local authorities to take part in the programme.</p> <p>In an agricultural regions innovation takes place mostly in greenhouses.</p> <p>Also, there are sometimes mismatches between programmes priorities and needs.</p>	
Limburg 2007-2013 2014-2020	<p>In both periods innovation was a key motive. In the 1st programme period it was about the positioning of regions and promotion of innovation, where innovation was formulated in a broad sense. In the 2nd programme period innovation has been narrowed down and focused towards a sustainable society.</p> <p>Increase of employment and stimulation of the labour market have always been important. Innovation is also applied to these objectives by addressing cooperation between triple helix participants and consortia in an innovative way as well as stimulating innovative ways of thinking within educational institutions, companies, but also in government itself.</p>	

Lombardy	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>The focus was on overcoming the effects of the crisis on the regional economy like job losses which occurred 2010. Part of funds were oriented towards the reinforcement and support of the regional system of social shock absorbers. This was especially true for the ESF.</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>Investments are much more oriented towards competitiveness and innovation. Also the environmental axis in then ERDF was included within the innovation sphere, as for instance in the promotion of electric mobility. A similar reasoning applies to the actions of the ESF. Among those aimed at promoting social inclusion, for instance, many are focused on social innovation.</p>
North East England, 2014-2020	<p>The OP supports and enhances competitive advantage in industry areas of existing strength – advanced manufacturing, engineering, process industries – in an approach akin to smart specialisation. In this respect it demonstrates a continuation of the emphasis on industrial modernisation in NEE over the previous funding periods.</p> <p>There is a direct relation between the volume of funding and the specific needs and characteristics of particular areas enjoying the OP.</p> <p>The strategic approach is largely a product of changing national and EU-wide direction in the use of the ESI funds. It has become more focussed on concentrated spending in a smaller number of thematic fields such as SME competitiveness, aimed at driving regional growth through productivity increase.</p> <p>The use of ESF follows similar trends, but the current period has seen a greater focus on supporting youth employment and basic skills provision.</p>	
Podkarpackie	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>The OP addressed the major problems of the region: poor transport accessibility, coupled with very low development level of the peripheral, mostly agricultural, parts of the region (including the phenomenon of hidden rural unemployment); weak SME sector and poorly developed collaboration between academia and business; training profiles ill adapted to the market needs, leading to high unemployment, particularly in cities affected by industrial restructuring; environmental protection and energy infrastructure that required further extension and modernisation; underdeveloped local technical infrastructure (including social infrastructure) in need of upgrading, especially visible in rural areas.</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>In comparison to the previous period greater focus was put on innovations in the enterprise sector; improved access to the motorway and expressways, and improved intraregional connections; focus on equalising educational opportunities of children and youth; modernisation and adaptation of vocational education and training processes to the needs of the regional labour market; increased significance of environmental and energy-related issues, including improved energy efficiency and increased share of renewable energy sources in the energy balance; broader inclusion of social issues such as e.g.: social and vocational activation.</p>
Pomorskie	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>The OP addressed the major problems that the Pomorskie Voivodship faced: mediocre potential for investment, compounded by poor transport accessibility and a low level of public</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>In comparison to the previous period focus on the region's periphery was strengthened. Also, more stress was put on development of R&D and innovation of enterprises, launching an export</p>

	safety; wide spatial disparities in the potential for growth (e.g. unemployment), as a result of which various measures needed to be launched for metropolitan, rural and coastal areas and areas situated along the transport corridors; poor health condition of the region's residents, high air pollution and the condition of the energy infrastructure.	support system, improving cooperation between academia and business, increasing employment rate, enhancing quality of public space, improving transport and energy infrastructure, development of public transportation, revitalising of degraded urban systems, improving condition of the environment and an operational flood prevention system.
Highlands and Islands, Lowlands and Uplands 2007-2013	<p>ESIF programme strategies are considered by most interviewees to address the key challenges faced by the Scottish economy over last two programme periods.</p> <p>Some of the fundamental challenges identified at the end of the 1990s remain significant challenges today. These include underperformance in R&D efforts, labour market exclusion problem, or shortage of a vibrant and growing business base. The territorial challenges of the Highlands and Islands region remain related to the geographical remoteness from the mainland UK and Europe, peripherality and insularity, leading to challenges with transportation of goods, economies of scale and overall competitiveness of the regional economy.</p> <p>There are concerns from some stakeholders that these challenges are not sufficiently addressed in the new Scotland-wide programme for 2014-20.</p>	
Scotland 2014-2020	<p>ESIF programme strategies are considered by most interviewees to address the key challenges faced by the Scottish economy over last two programme periods. They are seen to have been purposefully aligned with the Scottish government's economic strategy, which is valued for its approach to supporting business competitiveness and inequality reduction and its emphasis on inclusive growth.</p> <p>At the same time, the new structure of funding delivery is seen, in particular by the H&I stakeholders, as being insufficiently responsive to the specific needs and challenges faced by different types of territories within Scotland. It is felt that the specific territorial challenges faced by the H&I region are not sufficiently addressed within the current OP.</p> <p>By contrast, some interviewees consider that the current programmes have seen an improvement in the rationale, intervention logic and effectiveness.</p>	
Southern and Eastern Region	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>Environment: congestion and pollution from road traffic, reliance on fossil fuels, dependence on imported energy, poor protection of surface and ground waters;</p> <p>Infrastructure: pressure from population growth on facilities (housing, schooling and local services);</p> <p>Lack of investment in R&D and innovation in the post-third level R&D sector and among indigenous Irish firm;</p> <p>Labour market: long-term and youth unemployment, and existence of several regional pocket of high unemployment both in urban and rural areas;</p> <p>Low and negative labour productivity in</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>Environment: water and waste water facilities in major urban centres, renewable energy and energy efficiency;</p> <p>Transport and Infrastructure: bottlenecks within road system; sustainable urban mobility, broadband availability in rural areas;</p> <p>Investments in R&D and strengthening links between higher education institutions and industry;</p> <p>Levels establishment of new SMEs including by women and young people;</p> <p>Labour market: appropriate skilled workforce for enterprises;</p> <p>Lack of funds to invest in major economic projects within key regional</p>

	<p>sectors other than the high-tech industry;</p> <p>Education: sub-regional disparities in third level education entry and attainment rates;</p> <p>Deprived urban areas: social inclusion.</p>	growth centres.
	<p>The priorities of the ROPs match the socio-economic needs of the region. However, a larger number of regional needs cannot be co-financed due to limited ERDF funding. The priorities of the ROP are closely aligned with the perceived needs of the population living in the region.</p>	
Romania	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>The main socio-economic needs were the lack of infrastructure and the economic disparities existent between the regions of development as well as between the country as a whole and other European countries. The economic disparities are an acute problem as there is a large inequality between several urban centres that concentrate investments and have a much higher GDP per capita in comparison with other regions. Phenomena like corruption and changes in central government linked with interruptions in undergoing projects. Regional developmental needs are not prioritized by central agencies</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>Similar problems. Additionally, in cities there is a need to address the existence of disadvantaged communities through active measures that would promote inclusion in the labour market as opposed to passive measures which focus on income maintenance or investments in local infrastructure. Moreover, investment in SMEs is also a priority due to the worsened situation by the impact of the economic crisis which led to the destruction of many local SMEs because of an unstable economic and political environment as well as because of issues created by bureaucracy.</p>
Slovenia	<p>2007-2013</p> <p>The OP mainly addressed the need of creating jobs with higher value added by facilitating investment in R&D and establishing linkages between science and economy. Lack of basic infrastructure, such as clean water supply and waste water management systems and municipal waste management were the main problems. Also there was a need for investments in human resources in terms of activation, addressing long-term unemployment, education and training. Regional dimension also played relatively important role in terms of a bottom-up approach.</p>	<p>2014-2020</p> <p>More attention was paid to investing into people (as opposed to investing in the physical infrastructure). This period coincided with the economic and financial crisis, resulting in challenges such as unemployment and social security costs. According to the needs, more support went to addressing activation, reduction of structural labour market gaps, activation of socially excluded, developing of social partners to be able to be actively engaged in the European semesters etc.</p>
Thuringia	<p>2007-2013, ROP</p> <p>For this ESI funding period the priorities of OPs of EFRD as well as ESF have been stressed as the major needs that are the three main 'classisical' pillar economic development (including employment and qualification),</p>	<p>2014—2020, ROP</p> <p>There is a general agreement that the shifts in Cohesion policy foci that are reflected in the ROPs are in accordance with the changed (changing) needs of the state, especially as a phase-out region. These needs are the changed</p>

	<p>infrastructure and improving wastewater treatment plant connections. Later on, flood protection also enjoyed a high priority between 2007 and 2013 that was addressed by re-allocation of fund during the funding period.</p>	<p>socio-economics challenges: Lower unemployment, increased lack of qualified workforce instead, more R&D investments, especially by S&M enterprises, achieving a higher level of internationalisation of the regional economy, embedded in the overarching priorities energy transition and decrease of CO₂-intensity.</p> <p>However, the declining option to use ERDF funding for improving the wastewater infrastructure is seen critical as there is still an enormous need for this.</p> <p>Further improvement of flood protection is also still seen as a high priority task, which is now also more difficult to adequately address due to shifts in Cohesion policy foci (especially for phase-out regions), i.e., less money could be spent for this.</p>
West Pannon, Hungary	<p>2007-2013, ROP</p> <p>Support the underdeveloped regions and to implement large infrastructure investments supporting both the growth of the country and regional convergence within the country. Increasing employment; education, anti-poverty and health investments were additional priorities.</p>	<p>2014—2020, National OP</p> <p>Less funds for basic infrastructure.</p> <p>Employment is still a key target, and anti-poverty goals have become central, previous pilot programs were extended. The goal of compensating social and educational disadvantages has also gained prominence. In the realm of health, prevention became central.</p>

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the COHESIFY Case study reports.

As it can be seen from this table many respondents, instead of providing opinions on the relations of the OPs to the profiles of their regions rather reported on the contents of the programmes and indicated the changes which were introduced into the 2014-2020 programmes in comparison to the previous ones. In general, the structures of the OPs and ROPs were reflecting the greatest deficiencies of the countries and regions, and the biggest challenges facing them. Not in all regions this seems to be secured – for example this could be the case in Spain, where a national framework is designated for regions of different types and problems, and the specificity of the regions is reflected in different shares of particular axes (priority areas), the same in all regions, have in the total budgets of OPs. Moreover, a persistence of the “regional problems” in many cases calls for a longer intervention in the same areas, and the only changes in the OPs are the result of new priorities suggested by the Commission. In the second perspective usually less funds were directed towards infrastructure which responded to satisfying basic need in this sphere, especially in the new member states. Nevertheless, the critical opinions about the relation between the structures of the OPs and the characteristics and needs of the regions were very scarce. One example of such critical approach is seen in Scotland, where a shift to a Scottish-wide ROP in 2014-2020 period left many stakeholders with a notion of their region's particular needs being omitted.

Managerial structures

The managerial structures vary among the countries and regions. It is difficult to summarise the existing systems of management. The reports have provided only fragmented evaluation of these systems. Below some specific, unique solutions are presented which may indicate innovative approaches to formulation, implementation, management and evaluation of the OPs.

In **Andalucía** and **Castilla y León** in the 2014-2020 period a wide participatory processes for the definition of the programmes was applied, and that made it possible to have the contributions from several public and private bodies (the exact compositions vary between these two regions): Provincial Councils, General Secretariats of the Government of Castilla y León, Regional Ministries,, Universities, schools, companies, business associations, NGOs, Territorial Delegations, Family Business Association, Regional ERD Fación of Municipalities and Provinces, Local Action Groups, Town Councils, associations of local authorities, Chambers of Commerce, Regional ERD Fación of Municipalities and Provinces, CONFERCO, CECAL, CSI-CSIF, UGT, Commissions Obreras, Economic and Social Council, professional associations. However, the reports do not indicate the ways and measures of coordination of these contributions, and their impact on the final shape of the ROP.

In **Baden-Wuerttemberg** the Management Authority for the ERDF is the *Ministry for Rural Areas and Consumer Protection*. Management Authority for the ESF is the *Ministry for Social Affairs and Integration*. For both, ERDF and ESF there are other Ministries involved, especially the *Ministry for Economy, Employment and Housing*. The common audit authority is the *Ministry for Finance, EU finance control, audit authority for structure unit*. Responsible department for EFRE and ESF payees (as an intermediate actor) is the *Landeskreditbank Baden-Württemberg – Förderbank (L-Bank)* [State Development Bank]. Key features of the management structures for the programmes are close inter-ministerial cooperation between all units involved. This refers to both, preparing and managing/implementing programmes. Within that scope, several coordination platforms operate.

The Monitoring Committees for ERDF and ESF are the responsible organizations in charge of ensuring the effectiveness and the quality of the implementation of the ROPs. They are composed of representatives from State Ministries, Federal Ministries, the *L-Bank*, representatives of local government umbrella organizations, members of employer and business associations (especially state level umbrella organization that also have sub-regional or local branches in industry, trade and craft), representatives of academic and non-academic research institutions, unions, regional representatives of the Federal Employment Agency, other intermediate actors and NGOs in selected areas (environment, women's affairs, welfare and integration).

Although the Monitoring Committee was commonly mentioned as the central discussion platform, it was stressed that the partnership principle is guiding for program management, implementation, but also preparation. At all stages, there is an inclusion of a wide variety of actors at different levels (region, sub-regions, municipalities) and in terms of functions. For ESF management, there is a particularity as it is largely managed at the sub-regional that is the district (*Landkreis*) level with so-called regional workshops ESF (*regionale Arbeitskreise ESF*). Those comprise all relevant labour market actors at the sub-regional level who jointly work and decide on what issues ESF funding in that particular sub-region should focus only (principle of decentralised management). For ERDF the decentralization principle was considerably strengthened in the period 2014-20 with the *RegioWin process*. This established the sub-region (that is, however, not identical with the official territorial unit *Landkreis*, but rather formed within *RegioWin* which was intended) with different types of actors at that level as (now) also central for ERDF program implementation.

In **Central Macedonia** the main forum where discussion of Cohesion policy for the region takes place is the Monitoring Committee. This institution is headed by the prefect of the region of Central Macedonia and members with voting rights represent public authorities, special services and ministerial staffs, local governments the Prefects Union of Greece and the Central Municipalities

Authority, economic and social partners as well as NGOs. Representatives of the Special Services of National Coordination Authority, the Fiscal Control Committee, the General Directorate of Public Investments, as well as EU Commission representatives, are represented in the MC without voting rights. There are also informal task-related meetings within the MCS, or annual meetings between different stakeholders focused on specific projects.

In **Cyprus** the Monitoring Committee was the sole public discussion forum mentioned by all interviewed stakeholders. Two committees were in operation: a) a Coordinating Committee comprised of the General Directors of ministries in charge of Cohesion policy funds; b) a Consulting Committee, comprised of business associations, trade unions, and other civil society actors, such as NGOs. However, civil actors often complain that they receive information late and have too little time to prepare, they also complain that the discussion in the MC is not deep or substantive. The main partnership institution for the OPs was the Monitoring Committee

Since **Flevoland** is a part of the West Netherlands region for which the OP West has been designed, this province does not have its own OP. The key actors for OP West are the 4 main cities, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht, and the provincial capital of Flevoland, Lelystad, seems to be of secondary importance (though the province of Flevoland is one of the 4 provinces for which the OP West is in operation). The OP secretariats are located in these 4 cities. This complex governance structure not only echoes the typical fragmentation and complexity of the Dutch territorial governance, but also is related with the geographic division of funding available for OP West in the so-called bulks. The rationale for setting these bulks, was to satisfy all the stakeholders' interests and ensure smooth cooperation during the implementation process. Some doubts were raised about the rationale of locating the management of activities under the "innovation" heading to cities, instead of the [provinces, but potential tensions were solved gradually through informal contacts, which remained good. In 2014-2020 the complexity of management structure increased through involving in partnership the representatives of the smaller cities, the central government and economic and social partners. Additionally, annually rotating presidency by the 4 cities and 4 provinces was introduced, thus putting a greater emphasis on a balanced and equal partnership in the management of the OP across the key stakeholders. Also the project selection approach was substantially revised. Independent expert groups were established to perform a more objective evaluation of the projects, with its members appointed by the MC on the basis of a long list established with all potential stakeholders in the region (including universities, water authorities, economic and social partners, etc. This new setting was intended to ensure greater transparency and avoid a situation in which the potential beneficiaries of funding co-decided or advised on the project appraisal.

In **Southern and Eastern region of Ireland** since 2000, the Managing Authority of ERDF OPs in Ireland have been regional assemblies. In the case of the Southern and Eastern ROP this is the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA).⁶ Since 2014, regional assemblies have two functions; one is to fulfil their role as the managing authorities of ERDF OPs (and regional contact points for European territorial cooperation programs). Two is the preparation and subsequent adoption of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). Regional assemblies in Ireland are not directly elected bodies. Political oversight on the administration is ensured through delegates from county and city councilors. A selected number of councilors will sit in the ROP Monitoring Committee and exercise an oversight function on the ROP. The management of ERDF programmes is decentralised as the delivery of the programmes is delegated to intermediary bodies. The role of intermediate bodies is taken by government departments, state agencies, and local authorities. A key feature of implementation of Cohesion policy in Ireland is the fact that Ireland has integrated its structural funds programming with its national planning. Also, decentralised management is considered as a

⁶ Before 2014, the Southern Regional Assembly was known as the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly before 2014.

feature of the ERDF implementation in Ireland. In general, the implementation structures were evaluated as effective.

In **Limburg, which participates in the** Operational Programme South Netherlands for which the province of Noord-Brabant is the management authority, the chair of the Monitoring Committee is located. As is the case of Flevoland, the managerial structure is multi-level and stems from the complex governance structure characterised by fragmentation and complexity of the Dutch territorial governance.

In **Lombardy** the regional government created three authorities, each of them responsible for a different aspect of funding implementation: The *Management Authority* responsible for the management and implementation of the program. The Management Authority of the ERDF is established at the Directorate General for University, Research and Open Innovation, while the Management Authority of the ESF is at the Directorate General for Education, Training and Employment; the *Certification Authority* responsible for the certification of expenses occurred in the implementation of Cohesion policy; the *Audit Authority* is an organism completely independent from the previous two authorities. Its responsibility is to plan and supervise the audit and control of a sample of actions implemented by the Operational Program. As for the Certification Authority, also the Audit Authority is in common for the ERDF and ESF. The *Central Authority for Coordination and Programming* guarantees the complementarity of the actions undertaken in the framework of EU regional policy with the other programs aimed at promoting regional development. The activities of the abovementioned three authorities are supported by other actors: *Environmental Authority* (responsible for the monitoring of the environmental impact of the actions in all the phases of their implementation) and the *Authority for Gender Equality* (responsible for the fulfilment of the gender equality principle along the whole life of projects). Particularly relevant is the role of the *Monitoring Committee* (since 2014 common for both ERDF and EFS finances programmes), whose function is to monitor the implementation of actions and the achievements of their goals. Representatives of the all the authorities listed above take part to the meetings of the Monitoring Committee, jointly with the representatives of the EU, of the national government and of all the relevant stakeholders, like labour unions, business associations, non-profit organizations, etc.

The management structure in **North East England** also reflects the organisation of the territorial governance in this country. The management structure is characterised by its two-tier structure. The MAs carry out the executive functions defined in the Common Provisions Regulation; this includes oversight of the England ESIF Communications Strategy for 2014-2020. The Growth Programme Board (GPB) ensures compliance with EU monitoring and evaluation requirements. The GPB also delivers non-regulatory strategic functions with support from the nine thematic National Sub-committees. Therefore the MA and its attendant national-level architecture has an oversight and executive approval function, adhering to the strategic aims set out in the national OP documents. Regional governance also performs a role in encouraging wider engagement and discussion about the ESI Funds in NEE. There are 12 local authorities in NEE. They make up two Combined Authorities; the North East Combined Authority (NECA), made up of seven local authorities, and the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), made up of five local authorities. The lead partner for NECA is South Tyneside council, which has a permanent presence on the NE LEP ESIF subcommittee. All five TVCA local authorities have a representative on the Tees Valley LEP ESIF committee. Each local authority in North East England supports LEP and MA efforts to promote accessibility to ESI Funds, engage local stakeholders and support project applications.

In **Podkarpackie** and **Pomorskie** similar management systems are in force. The management system both in 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 was similar in a way that it offered the same instruments and funds to regional institutions (and all institutions in general). However, the share of EU funds allocated to regional level have increased from 25% to 40% as a result of transfer of part of ESF funds focused on human capital development to Regional Operational Programmes. What is important, in the current financial perspective ROP is subordinated to the regional development

strategy which would not necessarily be the case in the previous programming period. The critical role in addressing partnership principle is played by the Monitoring Committee. This body consists of 40 to 60 (depending on the region) individuals representing regional and local, national authorities, partners from business, non-governmental sector, higher education and R&D sector, labour unions, etc. These three groups have voting rights – i.e. they can directly influence the decision of the Monitoring Committee. Additionally, the committee is supplemented by observers (with no voting rights). In general, the composition, operation and the role in the system played by the monitoring committee have not changed considerably between periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. Moreover, a number of member of the MC 2014-2020 have been involved in the previous MC. This is seen as a positive feature – mainly because this allows for accumulation and transfer of knowledge and good practices between programming periods. In addition, stakeholders can be, and indeed are, involved in the discussion on the state of the ROP carried on during sessions of the regional assembly (Voivodship sejmik).

In **Scotland** in 2007-13, programme management was largely centralised within the Managing Authority, although a number of strategic delivery mechanisms played a strong role. Further consolidation and centralisation of programme management was carried out in 2011 with abolition of the Intermediate Administrative Bodies (programme secretariats). A range of *Strategic Delivery Mechanisms* were developed to deliver elements of the 2007-13 Highlands and Islands and Lowlands and Uplands ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes. In 2007-13, there were two separate programme monitoring committees, one for each region: LUPS and H&I Programme Monitoring Committees. The monitoring committees were responsible for ensuring effective implementation of the ESIF in line with EU requirements. Their tasks include reviewing progress, especially the degree to which the quantified targets associated with each of the priorities have been achieved, approving selection criteria and approving annual and final reports on implementation.

In 2014-20, the Scottish Government continued to be Managing Authority for the ERDF and ESF programmes with responsibilities for overseeing governance, calling for and assessing applications for Strategic Interventions, ensuring monitoring, audit and regulatory activity complies with EC requirements, reporting on targets and for the overall performance of the ESF and ERDF programmes. However, the Structural Funds Division have brought the functions previously delegated to Intermediate Bodies in-house to ensure the expertise to manage the Funds is retained in the long term. Implementation of the ESIF programmes has been to some extent decentralised from the Managing Authority while at the same time increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small number of key partners (public bodies/government agencies/'Lead Partners') who are tasked with greater responsibility for leading on project delivery and verification. In addition, drawing on the negative experience in 2007-13 related to a number of audit and compliance issues in Scotland, the new delivery structure is hoped to help increase compliance with national rules and audit requirements, at the same time simplifying management and delivery as well as reducing administrative burden for beneficiaries. Since smaller organisations are seen less capable of coping with the audit and record-keeping burden required to draw down EU funds, up-scaling project delivery is seen important. Options to simplify and improve the ESIF management in Scotland, pursued by the Managing Authority, include the use of Lead Partners, increased use of procurement, increased use of simplified and unit costs, and improved IT systems. As noted in the ex-ante evaluation of the 2014-20 Scottish OPs, the pursued approach, seeking to minimise the risk to the MA and at the same time simplify the audit and compliance burden on delivery bodies, is expected to drive improved delivery

As **Romania** has one OP for its all regions, for both the 2007 –2013 and 2014 – 2020 periods, the managing authority (MA) for the ROP was the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration. The programme is implemented in a decentralized manner, with 9 intermediary bodies (IBs): eight local development agencies (1 in each region) and the National Agency for Tourism. The IBs organize all the aspects related with implementation at the regional level

(guidance for potential applicants, implement the communication plan, prepare the project guidelines, organise the evaluation of the projects, supervise projects, check for irregularities etc.) The Monitoring Committee is responsible with ensuring the effectiveness and the quality of the implementation of the ROP and comprises representatives from Ministries, IBs, NGOs as well as associations such as the Association of Romanian Cities. The composition of the Committee is: 1/3 members of the central administration, 1/3 members of the Regional Development Councils and 1/3 members of the civil society. The composition of the Monitoring Committee has not changed between the two programming periods. The Regional Development Councils are consultative institutions which analyse the investment priorities for each region.

In the programming period 2007-2013 **Slovenia** was a single convergence region NUTS-II. Managing authority responsible for efficient management of OPs was Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy. Certifying/paying authority confirming statements of expenditure was Ministry of finance. Audit authority was Budget supervision office, a body within the Ministry of finance. Intermediate bodies, implementing the tasks conferred by the managing authorities were several ministries. Next to these were other participants in planning and spending and beneficiaries. In the 2014-2020 programming period, Managing authority was Government office for Development and European Cohesion Policy. Based on the experience of the previous period, a single system of managing and monitoring was established, together with uniform guidelines for intermediate bodies and beneficiaries, taking into account specifics of individual funds. The idea behind was that this would reduce administrative burden by the beneficiaries. There was no change with certifying and audit authority. In line with the General Regulation, a Monitoring Committee was established for monitoring the OP (during the 2007-2013 period, each of the OPs had the control board where managing authority, intermediate bodies, economic and social partners, regional interests and civil society were represented). The monitoring committee consists of: representatives of ministries, offices and bureaus, economic and social partners, NGOs and equal opportunities, local communities, urban development and council of regions, and their associations.

In **West Pannon** in the period 2007-2013 one common Managing Authority within the National Development Agency oversaw all regional OPs. Partnership has been implemented firstly by the invitation of civil society representatives to become delegates in OP Monitoring Committees. For the 2014-2020 programming period the Territorial and Settlement Development OP has an Intermediate Body, which is the Hungarian State Treasury. The changes in the governance of territorial investments, namely the creation of one common Operational Programme for all regions, with pre-defined financial allocations to counties and county-rank cities created changes that have strengthened the centralization of the system and weakened the roles of local actors, while were accompanied by smaller and less apparent governance changes that on the other hand strengthened the role of local actors.

Centralization has been strengthened by abandoning the role of regional development agencies in Cohesion policy implementation. Both the Managing Authority of the Territorial and Settlement Development OP and the Intermediate Body are central government bodies. Regional development agencies lost their role as intermediate bodies in Cohesion policy implementation. West Pannon Regional Development Agency reinvented its own role in supporting regional development outside the official framework of Cohesion policy implementation, some other regional agencies were simply dissolved.

In **Thuringia**, the Management Authority for the ERDF and the ESF overseeing the OPs is the *Ministry for Economy, Science and Digital Society* (this name since 2014). Other ministries involved are the *Ministry for Employment, Social Affairs, Health, Women and Families* and the *Ministry for Infrastructure and Agriculture*. The body in charge of project implementation and administration (for payees) is the *Thüringer Aufbaubank* [Thuringian Bank of Reconstruction]. A further important implementation body (as an intermediate organization) especially for ERDF program

implementation is the *Landesentwicklungsgesellschaft LEG* (State Development Agency). For ESF this is the *Gesellschaft für Arbeits-und Wirtschaftsförderung des Freistaats Thüringen (GFAW)* [Agency for Employment and Economic Development]. There are, besides, special State Agencies that perform specific tasks within programme implementation, like the *Thüringer Agentur Für Fachkräftegewinnung (ThAFF)* [Thuringian Agency Attracting Qualified Professionals] for ESF. In terms of overseeing programme implementation, there is, hence, an overall centralized approach as all responsible bodies are located at the state level.

The Monitoring Committee is the responsible organization in charge of ensuring the effectiveness and the quality of the implementation of the ROPs. It is composed of representatives from Ministries, the federal government, representatives of local government umbrella organizations, members of business associations (especially state umbrella organization that also have sub-regional or local branches in industry, trade and craft), representatives of academic and non-academic research institutions, unions, regional representatives of the Federal Employment Agency, other intermediate actors and NGOs. Although the Monitoring Committee was commonly mentioned as the central discussion platform, in terms of partnership structure, there is an overall cooperative approach as a wide variety of economic and social partners is involved in programme preparation and development (consultation) as well as implementation.

* * *

As it can be seen from this overview, the managerial structures – obviously following the suggestions and regulations of the European Commission – have been shaped by the national solutions of territorial governance, and there are no general similarities between particular countries and regions (unless these regions are located in the same Member state, then their management structures are very similar, if not identical). This incomparability reduces the opportunities of transfer of experiences and good practices, as well as does not allow for drawing sound generalisations of the quality of particular solutions.

In all managerial structures close partnerships with several local and regional stakeholders, like local authorities and their associations, businesses and their associations, NGOs, citizens' organisations and representatives of regional/national state administrations, were established, and these partnerships have extended from preparation of the OPs, their implementation up to evaluation. In some regions (like in Andalucía) thematic networks on national scales were created. In Poland the OPs are constantly discussed on assembly of marshals (officially called Union of the Provinces of the Republic of Poland).

In most countries the organisational and managerial structures have been maintained over the two programming periods. However, in two countries (England and Hungary) the regional (sub-national) OPs have been cancelled and amalgamation of regional issues have been done up to the whole-national level which in reality meant centralisation. On the opposite side are the Polish regions, where although no organisational change occurred, the twofold increase of the shares of the ROPs in the total spending of the Cohesion funds meant decentralisation of both programming and implementation of Cohesion policy.

Assessment of performance

Problems and challenges

The reports indicate several problems and challenges that were encountered during implementation of the 2007–2013 OPs and preparations of the programmes for the next programming period. Below major points are summarised.

Tab. 2. Cohesion Policy performance - challenges and solutions

REGIONS	CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS AND REMEDIES
Andalucía 2007-2013	The economic crisis that has affected the country since 2007 and that has meant a budgetary contraction of the Public Administrations and a reduction of the activity of companies	Intermediate Organisation has taken various measures, such as a more continuous monitoring of operations, support in the Quality Management System certified in 2007 and, more specifically, the incorporation of the eligibility of private spending
	More time is currently spent on bureaucratic issues than on the development of project actions, the administrative complexity is a limitation	
Baden-Württemberg 2007-2013	<p>There was a general reluctance to admit general or severe problems with policy performance if these are problems within the realm of actors' competences. Instead, problems were mostly perceived as minor and no real obstacles for overall goal achievement (e.g. a single project does not perform as expected).</p> <p>A more serious problem, especially in ESF co-financed labour market policy project is the rather short duration of projects (maximum three years) and the annual budgeting of projects. This permanent threat of discontinuity is seen as an obstacle for effective work in the social sector.</p> <p>One management difficulty was a specifically set-up administrative system for implementation/compliance control of ERDF program (<i>Vollzugs- und Kontrollsystem VKS</i>). This proved to be extremely difficult to handle.</p> <p>The legal obligations that come with the general management of cohesion policy programs are seen as a very severe problem and (often) a real obstacle to effective ROP implementation and sometimes also project realisation. The bureaucratic burdens are perceived as massive and time-consuming. The entire approach – especially with respect to ensuring compliance and in terms of data collection and reporting requirements – is sometimes even described as strangling, undue and alien to the administrative (legal) tradition.</p>	<p>The ERDF program VKS was considerably changed for the current funding period (2014-2020). I.e., there is now a streamlined ("lean") system in place.</p> <p>For the perceived strangling bureaucratic obligations, there is an almost total consensus that this needs to be tackled at the EU level.</p>
Castilla y León 2007-2013	The budgetary restrictions that have been applied to all levels of public administrations during the economic crisis have had a major impact on the management of the Operational Programmes for the 2007-2013 period. The crisis has also had a negative impact on the activity of companies, so that their demand for investment support measures has also been influenced.	There have been changes and adjustments in the operational programmes, which have made it possible to achieve adequate levels of financial implementation in both ERDF and ESF.
Central Macedonia	Bureaucracy a major obstacle for full achievement of goals.	

	Limited financing from the banking sector, - ca. 50% of approved entrepreneurship actions were aborted due to lack of financing from a banking source.	
Cyprus	<p>Excessive role of bureaucracy resulting in obstructing the successful implementation of many Cohesion Policy projects and actions.</p> <p>Difficult harmonization of Cypriot procedures with standards set by the EU.</p> <p>Negative effects of the economic crisis, especially after the so-called "bail-in" of March 2013.</p> <p>Understaffing of relevant services dealing with the implementation of CP funding, e.g. the relevant Cohesion policy task forces assigned to various ministries and other state institutions.</p>	
Hungary	<p>2007-2013: results were disappointing compared to the high expectations due to fragmentation of funding. Expectations might have been unrealistic</p> <p>Too much on physical infrastructure investments, and the focus was more on concrete projects and often a strategic vision has been lacking.</p> <p>Often strategic priorities not reflected in the eventual political selection of projects.</p> <p>Social investments didn't contribute sufficiently to the compensation of disadvantage.</p> <p>Regional convergence has not been achieved in Hungary in 2007-2013.</p> <p>Environmental projects mostly achieved their goals.</p> <p>Corruption and nepotism endemic in the system.</p>	<p>More thematic concentration and an increasing in the size of single projects.</p> <p>Infrastructure investment will be important in 2014-2020 too.</p> <p>Compensation of educational disadvantage gained increased prominence after 2014.</p> <p>Incentives are not well-aligned in the implementation system to effectively prevent corruption and nepotism. Diffused responsibility. If there are any fines or penalties applied, eventually taxpayers pay the costs.</p>
Ireland 2007-2013	In general, the respondents have not identified problems which would have significantly affected the targets under S&E ROP	
	The implementation system does not observe the principle of proportionality. This means that there is poor alignment between what is requirements from the Structural Funds regulations and the size of allocations .	
Lombardy 2007-2013	The effects of the global economic crisis on the Lombardy economy represented a relevant issue in the implementation of actions financed by the EFS. As a consequence, the program had to face a completely unexpected scenario, characterized by severe job losses from 2010 on.	Part of the funds were oriented towards the reinforcement and support of the regional system of social shock absorbers. This was especially true for the ESF. This situation of emergency has been overcome in the programming period 2014-20.

North East England 2007-2013	<p>The changes in management and implementation structure between the previous (2007-13) and current periods have had a detrimental effect on the effectiveness of programme delivery. The management structures in 2007-13 were generally seen as robust and transparent, due in part to their physical situation in the North East region. The reduction in effectiveness is primarily due to the greater centralisation of decision-making powers in the current period, and the lack of economic resource available to support the Local Economic Partnership areas.</p> <p>The crisis had had a significant impact on implementation. It is of note that North East England along with the Yorkshire and Humber regions were the worst hit regions by the crisis in the UK with the highest rises in unemployment from 2008-2013 (UK Strategic Report, 2012). The impact of the crisis and associated austerity in the public sector combined with the increased compliance orientation of EU rules led to significant implementation challenges including.</p>	
Pomorskie 2007-2013	Because of the economic slowdown many firms had to curb down their investment plans and postpone or forgo more risky projects. Another problem was the shortage of capital available to businesses.	Returnable instruments applied on a larger scale than originally assumed
	Growing spatial polarisation of growth.	The programme did certainly alleviate it. It also offered opportunities for the less developed parts of the region to overcome their structural barriers.
	Differences in the absorption potential in successful in calls for proposals than those from less-developed areas. the Pomorskie Voivodship; more affluent local governments/entities were more	The arrangements allowed for the funds to be relatively evenly distributed in per capita terms at the county municipal levels; this made the Pomorskie Voivodship stand out from other regions.
	Scarce resources relating to personnel as well as organisational and financial aspects of some beneficiaries compared to the scale and level of difficulty of the tasks due to the simultaneous implementation of several, frequently large-scale, projects. Many training programmes offered to the beneficiaries were not able to improve this situation in any significant way, also because of an excessive workload and high turnover of the beneficiaries' staff. Also small and medium size enterprises had low level of knowledge on financial possibilities and also came across complicated grants clearance system.	

	<p>Instability and uncertainty of legal regulations and various guidelines and interpretations definitely made the implementation process much more demanding. Some regulations were published too late and were amended too often which led to acute problems.</p>	
	<p>Too stringent national regulations governing public-private partnerships, as a result of which they play a negligible role in the Programme implementation, being limited to the collaboration of enterprises with the science sector.</p>	
	<p>The ongoing centralisation, assuming many tasks and competences earlier resting with the local government by the state.</p>	
Romania 2007-2013	<p>The bureaucratic approach of the MAs end up in putting a large administrative burden on beneficiaries, like extremely high burden in terms of reporting and fulfilling all the criteria and targets of the programs.</p> <p>A disconnect between the priorities set by MAs and the priorities identified by the IBs such as the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs).</p> <p>Public procurement procedures rules are always changing or the rules for participating in projects are too strict relative to the scope of the contract.</p> <p>There are numerous blockages during the life of a project created by political changes in the MAs triggered by the changes in the Ministries.</p> <p>Lack of transparency regarding the manner in which some projects are allocated. This is linked with the fact that corruption remains a major issue.</p> <p>There is a lack of administrative capacity that would ensure that the right projects get financing. The were beneficiaries which gained financing from different RDAs with the same project.</p> <p>Lack of monitoring capacity of the AM as well a deficit of communication between RDAs and MA.</p>	
Scotland, 2007-2013	<p>In the Lowlands and Uplands, changes in the economic climate have meant that there has been a higher than expected level of interest in funding to help people progress into employment.</p>	<p>As a way of responding to this, in 2010, it was agreed to use the remaining <i>ESF</i> funds in the <i>LUP</i> Programme to kick-start a Scottish Strategy pursuing a strategic, continuum approach to workforce skills development. The remaining <i>ESF</i> funds were moved into a single new "<i>Strategic Skills Pipeline</i>".</p>

	<p>In the Highlands and Islands, significant problems in securing co-funding led to a reduction in project size and halt of some projects. Decreasing inflow of credit and concern over the length of the recession, as expressed in business and consumer confidence, as well as continued employment decline and contraction in demand were some of the major challenges affecting the region.</p>	<p>The Programme sought to respond through a <i>shift towards a more strategic approach to delivery</i> – a shift in priorities towards more strategic measures and adjustment in the scope and focus of the programme to better reflect emerging priorities at national and local levels. Amendments to the H&I ERDF Operational Programme were agreed in 2013. The programme transferred funds between priorities to reflect changed economic circumstances and allowing for a degree of private sector match funding, albeit of relatively modest scale. Allocation of funds recognised the local and community benefit that can be achieved through delivery of more targeted and strategic interventions supporting coordinated local development and providing catalytic investments rather than a number of individual projects. This was seen particularly effective in maintaining activity in these areas as the position surrounding public and third sector funding continued to prove challenging.</p>
Scotland, 2014-2020	<p>Diversion of resources led to delays in setting up the Management and Control System. The delayed launch of programmes are seen as potentially impacting negatively on absorption in the approved Strategic Interventions.</p>	<p>Corrective action included extension of the timescales, increases in levels of activity or amendments to projects as required to manage the situation.</p>
	<p>The ongoing <i>uncertainty</i> in the global financial picture has had local impacts, with recent shocks to the UK and Scottish steel sector and the closure of Scotland's largest power station, and Scotland's <i>public finances</i> are under significant <i>pressure</i>.</p>	
Slovenia 2007-2013	<p>Lack of a strategic approach and administrative capacity in terms of pre-existing strategies, priorities, analyses and evaluations.</p> <p>"Inflated planning" leading to spending all funds no matter on what.</p> <p>Absence of functional regions and strong role of central government on one hand and of local municipalities on the other, resulting in high dispersion and localization of investments with many inflated, suboptimal investments.</p> <p>Low sustainability of projects, including the high amortisation costs, indicating poor planning and optimism from the growth period. Though things improved, the before mentioned problems were</p>	

	still present during the programming stage of the 2014-2020 period.	
Slovenia 2014-2020	Continuation of the abovementioned problems and challenges	
Thuringia 2007-2013	<p>Particular or severe general problems that resulted or would result from implementation structures for delivering the programmes and projects or were encountered during implementation have not been emphasized.</p> <p>Overall, the general challenge to provide co-funding from own sources for projects (especially at the local/concrete project level) persisted, but this is not a new issue in the last funding periods.</p> <p>A further general problem that is, however, also not new is whether the funds are really used for projects that are indeed sustainable or if, for example, projects have to be canceled once funding from ERDF or ESF programs ends. This is seen as a relevant problem for concrete projects.</p> <p>For problems with bureaucratic obligations that come along with ESI program implementation, see Baden-Wuerttemberg.</p>	<p>Solutions to general problems were not mentioned.</p> <p>For a general solution to problems with bureaucratic obligations that come along with ESI program implementation, see Baden-Wuerttemberg.</p>

Source: authors' own elaboration based on the COHESIFY Case study reports.

As it can be seen from the above table, not all regions reported on problems and challenges, and in many cases these problems that occurred in 2007-2013 could not be remedied in the next programming period.

The issues most often mentioned – especially in the southern Member States - were the economic crisis and scarcity of funds combined with emergence of more acute economic and social problems; centralisation of management; changing rules and too rigid bureaucratic procedures. In case of Romania, the unstable political situation could have led to changes in the administrative staff implementing the OPs.

The principle of maximizing absorption has been regarded as a burden, impacting negatively on the rational use of the EU funds. Also, such orientation might have led to fragmentation of funding, which in turn could be remedied in the next programming period due to the acceptance of the two-fund programmes. Stability of organisational structures has been considered as a condition for successful implementation, especially in the regions and countries where significant changes have been introduced. Also, excessive centralisation has been a negative factor influencing the efficiency of project implementation.

Priorities

The reports provided answers to the question on relative priority placed on the tasks of 1) spending the funds 2) compliance 3) performance and 4) publicising achievements? These answers are summarised below.

In **Andalucía** compliance of the regulations and implementation of the OP was the most frequently indicated, followed by spending the funds and communication and dissemination tasks. However,

also another sequence was indicated: implementation of the programme, and compliance with the rules is inherent to this, continued spending and finally the communication.

In **Baden-Württemberg** interviews mostly placed “compliance” first, followed by performance while spending the funds was less frequently stressed (third priority). Publicising achievements was overwhelmingly placed on last position although some actors gave it a higher priority, e.g. equally with others in second or third.

In **Castilla y Leon** the interviewees considered the compliance of the regulations, the implementation of the OP, spending the funds and communication and dissemination tasks.

In **Cyprus** usually “compliance” and then “spending the funds” were indicated as main priorities, and “publishing achievements” has never been mentioned.

In **Flevoland** the order of priority follows the order of the question.

In **Greece** special efforts were made to achieve full compliance with EU rules and regulations. Spending the funds in order to achieve the highest possible absorption rate also figured as a main priority. Publication of achievements was not indicated as a major priority

In **Ireland** it was indicated that spending the funds, compliance, performance and publicising achievements were equally important. However, the emphasis has gradually changed from spending money in the first programming periods to the delivery of results.

In **Podkarpackie** and **Pomorskie** compliance with the regulations and guidelines was mentioned as first, then came efficient and effective use of the funds, the effects of the Programme and communicating the effects in the subsequent stages of the Programme.

In **Romania** the main priority has been absorption. In the case of the ROP publication of achievements has been an important part of the program as well.

In **Scotland** a strong focus has been put on and prioritisation of compliance, above other considerations such as performance or publicising achievements. Absorption/spending are closely related to compliance and are also high in the hierarchy of priorities. Performance and publicity are seen to be secondary considerations, although the relative priority placed on the different tasks largely varies depending on the programming stage.

In **Thuringia** clear-cut conclusions in terms of all four tasks are difficult to draw. However, there is an obvious tendency that compliance is by far the task that enjoys highest priority whereas publicising achievements is rather considered a task with lower if not the lowest priority among the four. Performance and spending the funds range in between without a clear order among them.

Compliance with regulations and streamlining of spending have appeared to be the most important priorities. It indicates a priority of formal structures over rationale of intervention. On the one hand this should be understood as a correct practice of following the regulations and procedures. However, on the other hand, a dangerous trade-off may appear, where a strive for correctness prevails over adaptation of an intervention to real-world challenges.

Added value

All reports have highlighted the importance of Cohesion policy in their regions, rather stressing the achievements of the programmes than the added value brought to the region/country by Cohesion policy programmes. In particular, in the regions and countries the following issues were mentioned.

In **Andalucía** it was estimated that the withdrawal of the European Funds in the region in this programming period would have resulted in a fall of 15.5% in the GDP and 16% in disposable

income, with the consequent positive impact in terms of reducing unemployment, although not quantified in a precise manner. Also, there is a leverage effect that leads to the multiplication by 1.4 for every euro from the community aid.

It was also indicated that actions relating to innovation and promotion of R+D and the knowledge society allowed for strengthening the capacity in research, technological development and innovation and promoted the entrepreneurial spirit and boost the creation and development of business projects, specifically (but not only) in research in the field of renewable energies such as solar or biomass. Integrated projects for urban and rural regeneration have been performed. Also, actions in the field of employment and social integration have had, if anything, much more relevance than in other previous stages of implementation of European aid. The application of the partnership principle is also a fundamental pillar on which the programming process is based, highlighting the participation of numerous organisations and the consensus reached between all of them at the time of carrying out the programming process for the actions to be undertaken in the 2007-2013 period, and intensively in the current 2014-2020. Finally, monitoring and evaluation methodologies are an improvement of the effectiveness of the implementation of the financial resources.

In **Baden-Württemberg** an added value of cohesion policy in the current funding process, was seen in the so-called *RegioWin* process within the ERDF program. The added value is particularly seen in the bundling of different actors (or types of actors) in the different sub-regions of Baden-Württemberg. The basic character of *RegionWin* that is competition between encompassing regional development concepts for receiving funding forced the relevant actors at the level of the sub-regions to think more clearly and more thoroughly about the strengths of their sub-regions and where and how to “strengthen the[se] strengths” and to find where fostering “intelligent specialization” would be appropriate, and to present a coherent plan how to achieve this with the help of ERDF funding.

This bundling of efforts at the level of the sub-regions would not have happened – or at least not in such a coherent and systematic manner – without Cohesion policy. It seems plausible that the cooperation infrastructure and platforms that have been established and institutionalized within *RegionWin* sub-regionally will persist and provide promising starting points for general economic development and/or concrete projects in the future – even without the “hard” incentive of EU funding.

In **Castilla y Leon** the same issues as in Andalucía were indicated.

In **Central Macedonia** A gross increase of investments is directly attributed to the beneficial effects of the OPs. Most achievements listed by the respondents concern major infrastructure projects, such as airports, railways, road and rail networks. To a minor degree, the strengthening of the social cohesion net is also regarded as an achievement of the OPs. According to some respondents, this is due to the focus of Cohesion policy on social projects, such as stores for welfare recipients.

In **Cyprus** infrastructure projects, such as the construction of new road links or the improvement of pre-existing port facilities were indicated as main achievement of the 2007-2013 programming period. Also among main achievements creation of jobs for youth and women were indicated. However, that around half of the interviewees could not provide an adequate (or any) answer to the question. Those who did were usually employed in related state institutions, such as the General Directorate or CP-oriented task forces among ministries. MC members, such as representatives of the trade unions or environmental organizations were less aware of any achievements, and even only the activities were labelled as cosmetic instruments in the fight against unemployment. The creation of more jobs in this case, according to his explanation, is neutralized by rising precarity, the liberalization of the labour market and a race to the bottom in the field of wages, rendering the creation of new workplaces because of OP resources meaningless.

In **Flevoland** not many issues were mentioned – only good cooperation between the beneficiaries and the programme secretariat, both during the submission of the application and during the implementation of the project, was considered as an added value of the Cohesion policy intervention.

In **Hungary** stakeholders were mostly dissatisfied with the practice of partnership. Several central administration interviewees suggested changes to policy design that would better involve partners and local actors into implementation of Cohesion policy programmes and projects.

In **Ireland** Cohesion policy has had an influence on the domestic political agenda and on governance structures. The adoption of a regional focus to development has been credited on the pragmatic adoption of Cohesion policy. Development policy is said to have become more evidence-based and less politicised. *Financial added value* was created by reinforcing public investments in ICT and the knowledge economy, addressing environmental risks and strengthening the urban structuring of the region, and is clear in the promotion of entrepreneurship. Moreover, the learning added value in term of networking, dissemination of good practices was indicated.

In **Limburg** the results of the OP - besides the quantitative achievement - also resulted in other dimensions of added value, such as the formulation of the South Netherlands Regional Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation, also called RIS3. This serves as a basis for OP Zuid 2014-2020 and MIT Zuid which is the Subsidy scheme to stimulate SME to innovate in top sectors in South Netherlands. The strategy is to commit to those top sectors in which a region performs well. This is also shown in new policy agendas towards 2020 such as Europe 2020, Top Sector Policy and Brainport 2020 and the three provinces relate with their policy choices to this strategy.

In **Lombardy** different channels of added value were mentioned. The investments in the *innovation and knowledge* axis the public funding had a leverage effect of about 2.5. A leverage effect equal to 2, concerned the axis on the *protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage*. In the case of the ESF the financial value added was relevant, even if difficult to quantify. An administrative value added occurred, since it helped in verifying the effectiveness of innovative policy tools first experimented in Lombardy and, in a second moment, adopted also by other Italian regions. Finally, the importance of partnerships and public *fora* in the definition of strategies and policy areas of intervention was recognized as crucial by the regional administration. For this reason, in the programming period 2014-20 even more attention was devoted to this topic and the same approach was applied also in the case of other regional development initiatives, as for the Smart Specialization Strategy of Lombardy.

In **North East England** the Cohesion policy has brought significant 'administrative' added value in terms of learning how to monitor and evaluate regional programmes. The financial dimension was seen through the availability of JEREMIE funding which has demonstrated significant developing access to finance and leverage. Also, a democratic added value has been a key feature of Structural Fund benefits in North East England across several programme periods. A wider range of partners were involved in management and project delivery over time. Further, the Structural Funds programmes 'became the main forum at which people came together to talk about regional development at a strategic level'.

In **Podkarpackie** several dimensions of added value of Cohesion policy were mentioned: financial, strategic, administrative as well as democratic indirect results of Cohesion Policy. Induced additional investment totalled to EUR 207 million. Complementarity of particular actions undertaken within the OP was stressed. In the administrative dimension the adaptability to external and internal dynamic changed was indicated. There is also some evidence that cohesion policy strengthened the role of consultations, partnerships, multilevel-governance in the region. The importance of monitoring and evaluating the effects of EU programs has undoubtedly increased.

In **Pomorskie** acceleration of growth by 0.8 percentage point (compared to the anticipated rate of growth with no EU assistance) in reducing the gap to the EU's average seems to be the greatest dimension of the added value of Cohesion policy intervention. Also, devising effective and efficient delivery mechanisms and testing the returnable assistance system in the form of capital injections has been indicated as one of the aspects of added value. Experiences gained during ROP PV 2007-2013 considerably helped to prepare another programme, ROP PV 2014-2020, make it more embedded in the region's development strategy and adopt unconventional regional smart specialisation policies, drawing both on the anticipated development directions of innovative economy and on the current and future innovative and economic potentials of the region.

In **Romania** several dimensions of added value were mentioned. The quality of life has improved in the cities designated as a growth poles, thanks to investments in infrastructure, social services and support to SMEs. Investing in urban infrastructure helped to address issues low school enrolment levels and high unemployment, due to improved access to dynamic labour markets. EU funds helped to raise attractiveness of cities, impacting the rate of migration. The poly-centric approach to distribution of funds encouraged the creation of an urban network, also the inter-regional cooperation was supported in order to strengthen the resilience of the territorial system. Finally, the ROP funds served as a stabilizing factor in the SMEs sector during the economic crisis.

In **Scotland** several dimensions of added value were mentioned, including strategic, administrative, democratic. as well as, marginally, financial, The delivery of Structural Funds in Scotland has had a significant impact on partnership working mechanisms historically. For instance, the Evaluation of ESIF contribution to Community Planning Partnerships, looking at how the CPPs have responded to their new role in delivering ESIF, has found that thanks to the Programmes, the CPPs have adopted a more strategic approach, developing local employment strategies, as a consequence of having responsibility for co-ordination of use of European funds, while delivery through CPPs has led to more effective use of European Structural Funds. A major achievement of the initiative of routing Structural Funds through CPPs has been the impact it has had on partnership working. Importantly, ESIF are viewed as a major driver behind the development of the concept of regional policy, in the sense of a strategic long-term policy addressing economic development challenges specific to particular areas. In addition, despite the relatively low share of EU funding in domestic expenditure, the finance provided to business through Co-Investment funding is reported to have created additional Gross Value added and employment than would otherwise have been the case.

In **Slovenia** the 2007-2013 programming period resulted in additional investment of a bit more than 1.3% of GDP which supported increased GDP in Slovenia in 2015 by around 2.5% above what it would have been in the absence of the policy. The EU funds constituted the main source of financing for business support in the country (specifically for the SMEs) thus helping to address the lag in terms of innovation, in particular the dynamics of employment in fast-growing companies and in the export share of knowledge-based services. These funds also funded some very important transport and environmental projects. In administrative terms, there were some changes in terms of awareness of administration burden, inefficiency etc. However, in some cases just mere investment of improvement of infrastructure were mentioned as main achievements. Some reports indicate critical assessment of the projects, naming them as "cosmetic" only, or indicating inadequacy of the structure of spending with the real needs of the regions.

In **Thuringia** stakeholders have not provided much in that regard. A particular added value that solely comes with cohesion policy as compared to domestic policies for regional development was not referred to. However, this should not obfuscate the general high relevance of cohesion policy funds in Thuringia for achieving development goals or for addressing sudden and urgent problems that had not been foreseen, such as the need to increase investment in flood protection measures.

The reported answers lead to a conclusion that the very term "added value" is not – generally – correctly understood. The respondents usually indicated direct achievements, rather than reflected

on the “extra” role of the EU intervention, neither in the sphere of organisation and management, nor in the material dimension. Counterfactual approaches to evaluation have presumably not been widely applied, and the EU support has been considered as “natural” and necessary, without an assessment what could have been achieved without it, basing on own resources, potentials and organisational skills and procedures. This suggests that more effort is needed to explain the special role of the Cohesion policy in local, regional and national development. It should be directed not only to the general public but also to those who are directly involved in Cohesion policy implementation.