



# PERCEIVE

Perception and Evaluation of  
Regional and Cohesion Policies  
by Europeans and Identification  
with the Values of Europe

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- PERCEIVE project is led by University of Bologna
- Call: H2020-REFLECTIVE-SOCIETY-2015
- Topic: REFLECTIVE-3-2015: European cohesion, regional and urban policies and the perceptions of Europe
- Grant Agreement number: 693529
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- Duration: 36 months starting from September 1 2016

# PERCEIVE: Perception and Evaluation of Regional and Cohesion Policies by Europeans and Identification with the Values of Europe

## Abstract

The PERCEIVE project aims at both mapping and explaining inter- and intra-regional variations in: the experiences and results of Cohesion Policy implementation; citizens' awareness and appreciation of EU efforts for delivering cohesion; and European identities and citizens' identification with the EU. In doing so, PERCEIVE will develop a comprehensive theory of "cohesion in diversity", and use this theory to create a better understanding of the channels through which European policies contribute to create both different local understandings of the EU and different levels of European identification across profoundly different European regions.

## Challenge

Regional policies were the second largest part of the EU budget in the period of 2007-2013 and they have maintain a large budget share in the new Multiannual Financial Framework as well (approx. €350 billion). The contribution of these policies towards European economic, social and territorial cohesion has been constantly monitored and critically analysed in recent years.

On the contrary, data are missing regarding the contribution of this policies to a positive identification with the European project or to the emergence of a valued, popular sense of European identity among the beneficiary population.

Europe's regions are very diverse in terms of institutional history, distinct cultural identities as well as administrative and governance functions. In some regions, indigenous peoples' issues and demands are affected and challenged by European policies. In the context of a perceived democratic deficit of the EU and bearing in mind the importance of local practices and mental representations in the construction of identities, it is highly important to analyse the triangular relationship between European regions, the European framework for the application of cohesion, regional and urban policies and the impact of European regional policies on a positive identification with the European construction.

## Aim

The tailor-made, multidisciplinary, geographically balanced and comparative research of PERCEIVE will aim at exploring the interplay between:

- European regions with highly different administrative roles, civil participation, history, culture, creativity and identity;
- The application of cohesion, regional and urban policies in the EU, including the subsidiarity

- aspects and decentralised decision-making and the aims of smart specialisation;
- The contribution of regional policies to a positive identification with the value-based European integration project by European societies.

In analysing the potential of EU cohesion, regional and urban policies for fostering a more positive identification with the European project, it is also crucial to incorporate the interplay with regional policy regulatory implementation experiences, both positive and negative. Based on a critical review of the existing conceptual and methodological background, the research will include a comparative analysis of case studies from Member States with different current and historical territorial administrative frameworks and regional identities, in order to identify the channels by which European regional policies impact the perception of Europe by its citizens. Moreover, the research will consider the impact and effectiveness of communication efforts related to EU-financed regional development projects.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Case Studies**

Nine regional case studies are selected to conduct focus-groups and in-depth interviews with local managing authorities and practitioners involved in the realization and communication of EU-funded projects. The number of case study regions per country is closely linked to the level of performance heterogeneity with which the regions contribute to the project objectives. Therefore, for two project partners' countries we selected two regions to better exploit their information power. This is the case of Italy, which displays very different development patterns among its regions that clearly follows a geographical North/South division and are able to influence the Cohesion Policy performance, and the case of Poland, where the Cohesion Policy performance is deeply influenced by a clear rural/urban division. In other project partners' countries, showing a lower degree of regional variation, we chose only one case study region. The countries and relative regions are:

Romania: Sud-Est Oltenia

Poland: Dolnoslaskie, Warminsko-Mazurskie

Italy: Calabria, Emilia-Romagna

United Kingdom: Essex

Spain: Extremadura

Austria: Burgenland

Sweden: Norra Mellansverige

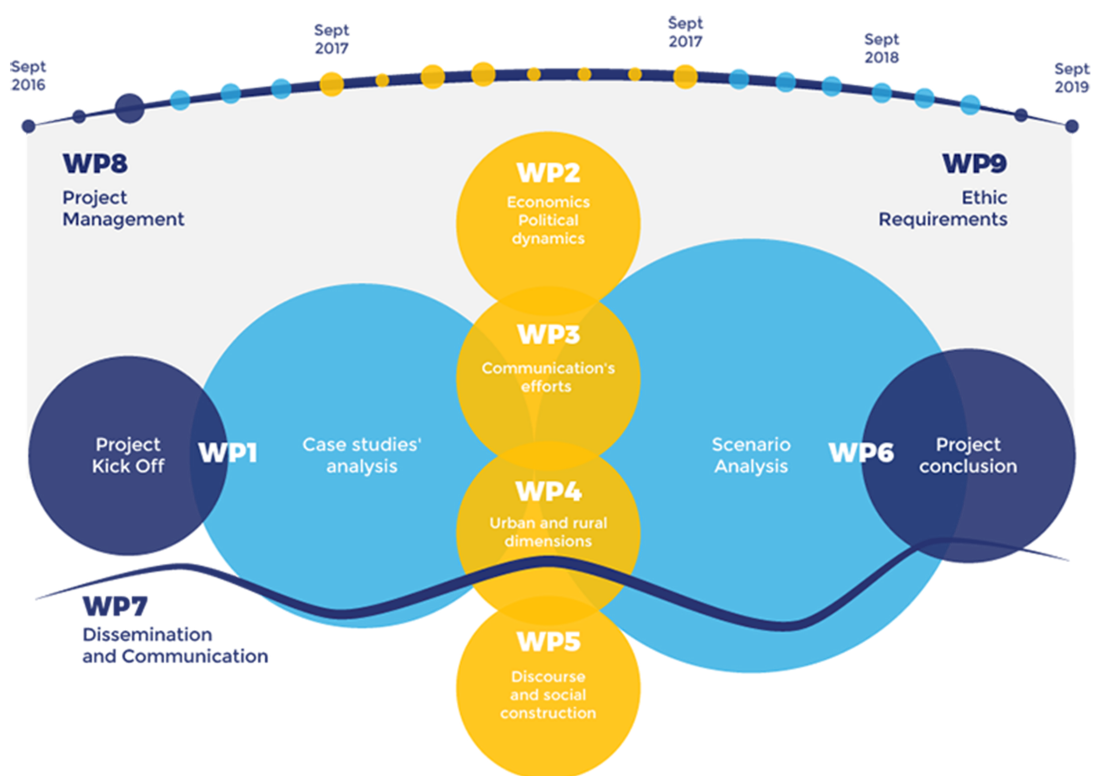
### **The Project Perceive**

PERCEIVE contrasts two different backgrounds: 1) a rational choice perspective stressing mainly the idea of institutions as "rules of the game" and the calculative rationality of actors as determinants of European identities and identification, and 2) a social constructivist perspective stressing mainly the idea that European identities and identification emerge from a process of "social learning" associated with different institutional discourses.

PERCEIVE relies on a multidisciplinary portfolio of competences bridging socio-political, regional-economic and public administrative backgrounds. It integrates the use of both qualitative and quantitative analytical methods such as surveys, focus groups, case studies and econometric modelling. In addition, it uses particularly innovative methods such as semi-automatic discourse analysis to elicit meaning structures in public discourse about the EU, its regional policy and being European.

Finally, PERCEIVE will produce a computer simulation environment and embed it into a virtual platform that cohesion policy stakeholders will be able to use and to produce what-if analysis and long-term scenario analysis of the effects of policies.

## Project Structure



### PERCEIVE project is composed by nine different work packages:

**WP1: Framework for comparative analysis: differences, implementation, perceptions and data gathering.** The objectives of this Work Package are to set the framework for the theoretical development for the next stages of the research activities and to grasp the complexity of the conceptual interactions between the main constructs of the PERCEIVE project. These are regional diversity, the framework of cohesion and its actual implementation experiences, the relationship between policy implementation and European identity emergence and citizens' identification with the value-based European integration project.

**WP2: Evaluation of EU citizens' perception of the EU project in relation to regional performance of the Cohesion Policy and institutional quality.** This work package provides the methodological framework and quantitative background to understand the relation

between the EU Cohesion Policy performance and citizens' perception of it and quantitative representation of the key concepts at the backbone of the project objectives and rationale. It will also map case studies selected at the regional level according to the class of identity value they belong to. The last objective is to use alternative quantitative methodologies, both parametric and non-parametric, to analyse the evolution of citizens' identification with the EU project in different territories.

**WP3: The effectiveness of projects' communication strategies.** The objectives of this work package are to map material and rhetorical strategies to build legitimacy characterize the communication efforts of a variety of EU financed projects. With a focus on symbolic aspects of communication, it will appreciate and measure how the content of media centrally generated and locally adapted. Finally it will assess both the impact and the effectiveness of communication efforts related to EU-financed regional development projects, in terms of variations in citizens' awareness and appreciation of the projects, followed by the reconstruction of an historical-dynamic dimension of communication efforts concerning EU financed projects.

**WP4: Spatial determinants of policy performance and synergies.** This work package has three objectives: identification of possible complementarities and synergies between EU Cohesion Policy, rural and urban policies supported by EU funds in order to improve the EU citizens' perceptions of European Policy performance; exploring the interplay between EU Urban Policy and the implementation of 'smart cities' and define an innovative index of city's 'smartness'; in-depth analysis of discrepancies between regional policies implemented in each case study area and the "real problems" perceived by regional actors/population to allow the better understanding of spatial discrepancies between the EU citizens' perceptions of European Policy performance.

**WP5: The multiplicity of shared meanings of EU and Cohesion Regional and Urban Policy at different discursive levels.** This work package has the following objectives: to advance an original conceptual account for the importance of social construction in understanding the impact that Cohesion Policy might have on EU identity; to empirically explore empirically and quantitatively the discourse about the EU, implementation of Cohesion Policy and European identity; to assess the diverse contribution of relevant actors "theorizing" the EU Cohesion Policy and identity at different levels; and to finally validate the proposed conceptual account through statistical data analysis.

**WP6: Virtual learning environment.** The general objective of this work package is to integrate contributions from previous WP and to generate a model to be processed through simulation in order to develop a scenario analysis.

**WP7: Dissemination and communication.** The objectives of this work package are to maximise comprehensibility of the project at different levels and to support general visibility of research activities. It will open specific communication channels towards research users within non-academic sector and reach out to civil society's theme enthusiast. Finally, it will share projects' communication impact with EU political and lobbying architecture.

**WP8: Project Management.** The overall objective of the management WP is the smooth

implementation of the project, and in particular: to coordinate and supervise activities to be carried out according to the work plan; to carry out the overall administrative and financial management of the project; to manage contracts with the European Commission (EC) and the Consortium Agreement (CA); to manage the knowledge generated by the project and the IPRs; to monitor quality and timing of project deliverables and to resolve conflicts; to establish effective internal and external communication procedures.

**WP9: Ethic Requirements.** The objective is to ensure compliance with the 'ethics requirements' set out in this work package.

## Expected impact

The research is expected to make major conceptual, methodological and analytical contribution towards a better understanding of the relationship between European regional policies, local and regional identities and the perception of the added value of the EU by its citizens. Each work package will produce idiosyncratic research results, that will tackle quality of government, absorption of EU funds, urban and rural specificities, communication strategies by LMAs, the social construction of the issue of European identity.

Moreover, the research activities will inform communication strategies at the EU, Member States and regional levels regarding the European regional policies and specific projects. They will provide insights on how to adapt these communication efforts to local and regional realities in order to maximise their impact. At the same time the research will consider how to increase the civic appreciation of these policies and how to improve regional policy relevance and efficiency.

## The Consortium

PERCEIVE's partners were selected in order to provide the necessary set of competences needed to tackle the challenge of analysing a very complex interplay of regional diversities, policies' performance and citizens' perception of the European Union.

- University of Bologna (Project Leader)
- University of Gothenburg
- Romanian Academy - Institute of Agricultural Economics
- Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics – National Research Institute
- University of Barcelona
- University of Portsmouth
- Vienna University of Economics and Business
- BAM! Strategie Culturali

An additional value to the project will be also brought by Local Managing Authorities, involved as third parties:

- Regione Emilia-Romagna, Italy

- Regione Calabria, Italy
- Regional Development Agency South West Oltenia, Romania
- Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain
- Department for Communities and Local Government (Cities and Local Growth Unit), United Kingdom
- Burgenland, Austria
- Dolnoslaskie, Poland
- Warminsko-Mazurskie, Poland

In order to strengthen the dissemination part of the project, to integrate policy partners early in the project, and to enable a permanent scientific supervision of the project and the coordinator's activities, will be aided by an external Advisory Board (AB). The role of the AB will be important in two ways: to provide independent external advice on scientific and policy issues relevant to PERCEIVE; to serve as the first point of contact in communicating and applying the results of the project. AB members are:

- Giuseppe Chiellino, Journalist at Il Sole 24 Ore
- Elisabetta Capannelli, World Bank, Romania and Hungary Country Manager
- Alessandro Criserà, Department Manager of the Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna Region
- Maria Paola Dosi, "Servizio Intese Istituzionali e Programmi Speciali d'Area – Direzione Programmi e Intese, Relazioni Europee e Cooperazione Internazionale of the Emilia-Romagna Region
- Mr. Andrzej Hałasiewicz, Vice Chairman of the Board, Foundation for the Development of Polish Agriculture
- Ms. Agnieszka Osuch, Expert of implementation and monitoring system of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in Poland
- Dr. Anatolio Alonso Pardo, Subdirector General de Gestión del FEDER
- Prof. Sandy Dall'Erba, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois

## **Contacts**

### **Website**

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