



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

PERCEIVE

GA nr. 693529

D 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

1 [Table of contents](#)

Introduction.....	3
1. Methodological framework.....	4
2. Citizens' perceptions.....	7
2.1. Citizens' perceptions on most problematic issues in case-study regions.....	8
2.2. Citizens' perceptions on the effectiveness of public institutions in answering to the regional issues and solving these.....	13
3. Experts' perceptions.....	25
3.1. Experts' perceptions on most problematic issues in case-study regions	26
3.2. Experts' perceptions on effectiveness of Cohesion Policy in answering to the regional issues and solving these.....	36
4. Comparative analysis on citizens' and experts' perceptions.....	43
4.1. Comparative analysis on perceptions of regional problems.....	43
4.2. Comparative analysis on effectiveness of Cohesion Policy in answering to the regional issues and solving these	53
5. Concluding remarks and recommendations.....	57
References.....	61

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Introduction

This report is a comparative analysis of nine regional case-studies selected in our project, based on original data collected through the PERCEIVE field survey that was conducted during the summer of 2017 and on the reports on regional case studies written by Perceive's partners. Each report was based on the analysis of the focus group's section that addresses the assessment of Cohesion Policy.

The general objective of this report is to synthesize the citizens' and practitioners' views on EU Cohesion Policy and to compare them in order to understand if there are different perceptions of this policy and its implementation. For each region included in the study, the identification of the relevant regional needs are considered, followed by an assessment of the EU policy effectiveness in responding to the revealed issues. Both have been pursued at the level of citizens and of Cohesion Policy practitioners, and are followed by a comparative analysis that helps to understand whether the EU Cohesion Policy is perceived and understood by citizens in the same way as it has been conceived by practitioners.

The comparative analysis helped shed light on the convergence and divergence points between citizens and experts with regard to the public intervention needs through Cohesion Policy and in the evaluation of the effectiveness of these interventions, thus contributing to a better understanding of the general perception of the EU by the large public.

1. Methodological framework

For the purpose of this study, the methodological option is the mixed method design, firmly rooted in the evaluation literature. The advantage of mixed research methods is that they make it possible to combine the qualitative and quantitative data on the same research theme in the same study. The main asset of this methodological approach is that it allows to assess the overlapping but distinct facets of the phenomenon under study (Greene et al., 1989).

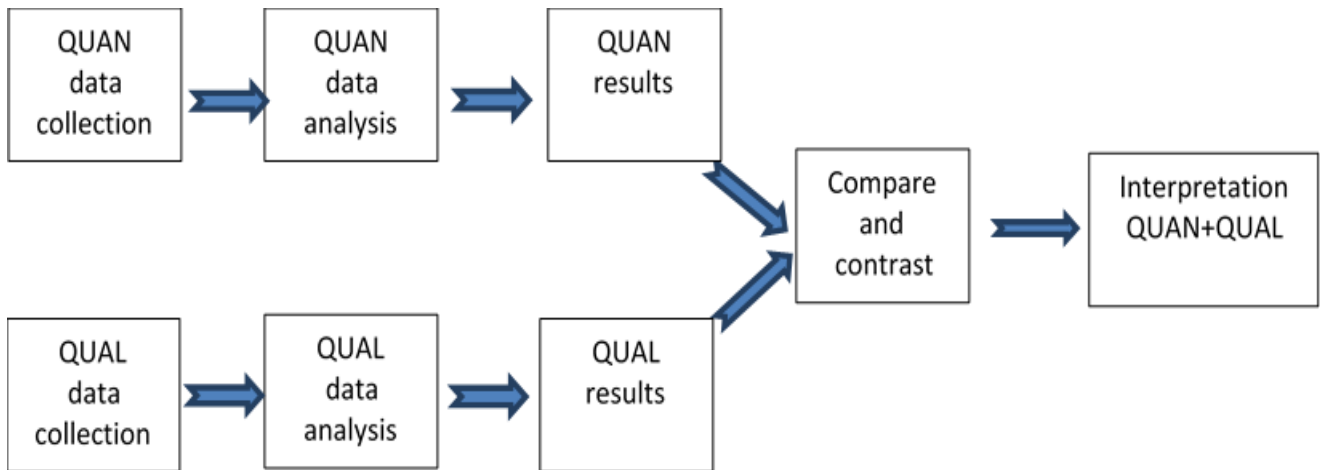
The most well-known and used approach to mixed methods is the *Triangulation Design* (Creswell, Plano Clark, et al., 2003). The purpose of this methodological approach is “to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic” (Morse, 1991, p.122) for a most adequate understanding of the research problem.

Triangulation Design presupposes the collection and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data during the same timeframe. These data are considered as having equal weight in their interpretation and combination. The researcher attempts to merge the two data sets, typically by bringing the separate results together in the interpretation or by transforming data to facilitate integrating the two data types during the analysis. According to this methodological approach, the two data sets are combined in the interpretation of results phase.

Out of the four variants of triangulation design, in our study our option was to use the convergence model that is most appropriate for the purpose of our study.

The convergence model (fig. 1.1) represents the most well-known model of mixed methods triangulation design. In this model, the quantitative and qualitative data on the same phenomenon are separately collected and analyzed. In the second phase of research, different results are converged (by comparing and contrasting the different findings) during the interpretation phase.

Figure 1.1. Triangulation design – convergence model



Source: Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007: 63-4


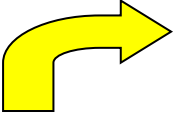
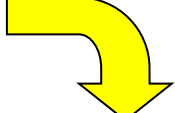
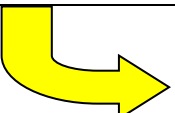
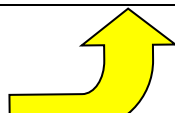
Researchers use this model when they want to compare results or to validate, confirm, or corroborate quantitative results with qualitative findings. The purpose of this model is to end up with valid and well-substantiated conclusions about a single phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The methodological scheme used in this study was the integration of the two data collection strategies (quantitative and qualitative data) referring to the regional issues and it is schematically described in figure 1.2 below. According to this scheme, the fundamental concept followed in the analysis is the *regional perceptions* of regional needs and effectiveness of corrective public interventions through the Cohesion Policy, both under quantitative aspect (at the level of citizens) and under qualitative aspect (at the level of practitioners).

The analytical approach have three steps: Analysis, Interpretation and Integration. The analysis is made separately for the two data sets. The interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data is done by contextualization¹ according to the three categories of regions defined according to Cohesion Policy Objectives: competitiveness, convergence, convergence phasing out regions.

¹ This gives a meaning of the obtained results with reference to the specific and particular context (Gelo et al, 2008, p. 277)

Figure 1.2. Methodological paradigm of the comparative analysis on regional perceptions

		Qualitative textual evidence		
Stages 	1	2	3	
	Analysis	Interpretation	Integration	
	Content analysis Association matrix Ranking	Analysis of story lines		
Regional perceptions		↑ contextualization ↓	Integrative analysis Compare Drawing conclusions	Perceptive similarities
	Descriptive analysis Ranking	Contingency analysis		
	Quantitative numeric evidence			

Source: based on Castro et al. (2010)

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data was made through their corroboration and comparison in order to identify the perceptive similarities between the two groups of investigated actors.

The quantitative data (referring to citizens' perception) and the qualitative data (referring to the practitioners' perception) were analyzed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 respectively. Chapter 4 was dedicated to data integration for comparing the results obtained from these analyses in order to identify the convergence and divergence elements between the perceptions of the two categories of regional actors on the regional problems that need corrective interventions through public policies, on one hand, and the effectiveness of EU interventions through the Cohesion Policy in solving these problems, on the other hand.

The comparative analysis was based on constructing tables of perceptive similarities between the two groups of regional actors. By this method the regional needs identified by the regional experts during the Focus groups were overlapped over the categories of pre-defined answers from the Survey (citizens' perception) in order to identify the perceptive similarities and divergences between the two groups of actors.

2. Citizens' perceptions

This chapter aims to highlight the perception of citizens from the PERCEIVE case studies regions on Cohesion Policy. Two aspects are taken into account:

- Citizens' perceptions on most problematic issues in case-study regions;
- Citizens' perceptions on the effectiveness of public institutions in answering to the regional issues and solving these regional needs.

In this chapter, we analyse the survey results² in selected PERCEIVE case study regions that was conducted in the summer of 2017. The respondents, from 18 years of age or older, were contacted randomly via telephone in the local language. To achieve a random sample, the 'next birthday method' was used. To aid in research of the PERCEIVE project's pre-selected case study regions, at least 500 randomly drawn respondents were taken from each of the selected regions to make a representative survey (Charron, Bauhr, 2017). The total sample in the case study regions was 4,863 respondents (table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Sample information

<i>Case Study Region</i>	Abbreviation	Respondents
Burgenland	AT11	517
Extremadura	ES43	541
Emilia-Romagna	ITH5	581
Calabria	ITF6	535
Dolnośląskie	PL51	579
Warmińsko-mazurskie	PL62	538
Sud Est	RO22	532
Norra Mellansverige	SE31	516
Essex	UKH3	524

Source: (Charron, Bauhr, 2017).

²Charron, N., M. Bauhr, 2017, PERCEIVE project Deliverable 1.2. "Dataset built from the survey at citizen level for the case-studies regions and report with preliminary qualitative results", Perception and Evaluation of Regional and Cohesion Policies by Europeans and Identification with the Values of Europe - PERCEIVE project, GA no. 693529, www.perceiveproject.eu.

In view of the aim pursued in this report, our analysis focused, in particular, on the Q4 questions: In the past 5 years or so, *which of the following do you think has been the biggest problem facing your region?* and Q5. *How effective do you think the following institutions will be at dealing with the biggest problem in your region?*

Our analysis takes into account the classification of the nine PERCEIVE case study regions according to Cohesion Policy objectives: Competitiveness regions; Competitiveness Phasing out regions and Convergence regions³. The analysis considers, on the one hand, the identification of common patterns with regard to citizens' perception of the regional most problematic issues and the effectiveness of public institutions (at EU, national, regional level) in solving these issues as well as on the inter-regional differences in relation to these aspects.

2.1 Citizens' perceptions on most problematic issues in case-study regions

We shall next focus on the citizens' perceptions of the biggest problems facing one's region, analysing the answers received at the level of the case study regions to the following question from the PERCEIVE field survey:

Q4. In the past 5 years or so, which of the following do you think has been the biggest problem facing your region? (randomized order)

- a. poor education*
- b. poor infrastructure & transportation*
- c. corruption and poor governance*
- d. unemployment*
- e. environmental concerns*
- f. poor wages/poverty*
- g. other (Charron, Bauhr, 2017).*

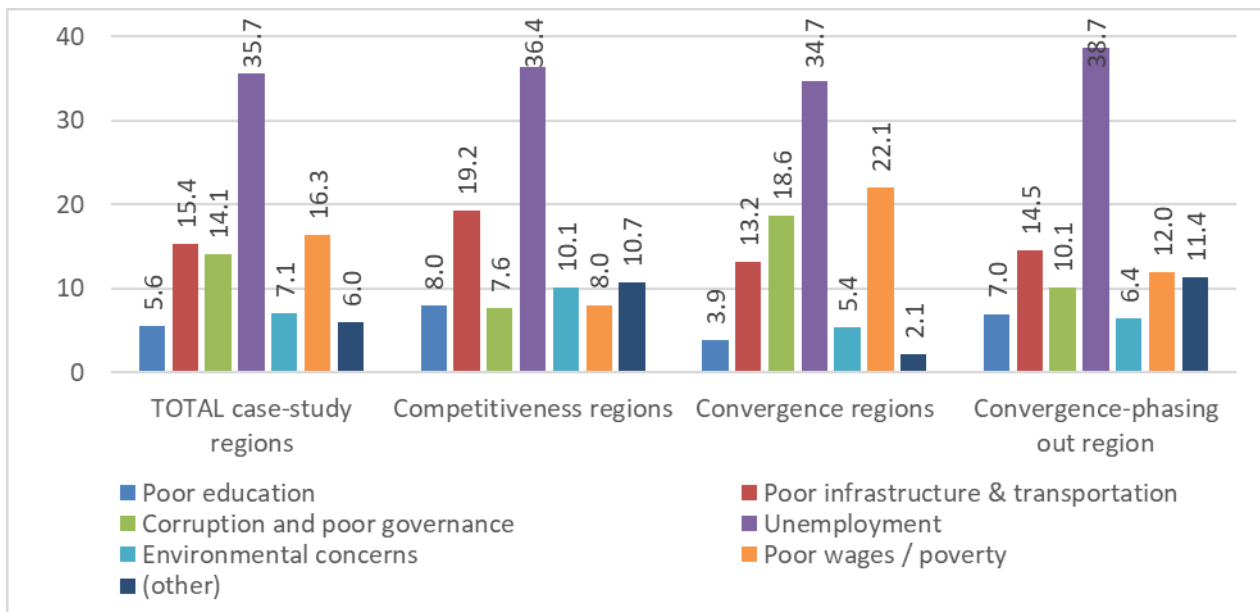
The analysis of citizens's perception of the most problematic issues in their region shows that, regardless of the region category, most respondents (slightly over 1/3) consider that *unemployment*

³Aiello V., C. Brasili, P. Calia, P. M. Reverberi, D1.1 "Report on regional case-studies", Perception and Evaluation of Regional and Cohesion Policies by Europeans and Identification with the Values of Europe - PERCEIVE project, GA nr. 693529, www.perceiveproject.eu.

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

is the most pressing problem. As regards the other regional problems that were the object of the question, the figure shows important differences between the perceptions of citizens from one category of region surveyed to another (fig. 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Most pressing issues by case study region category according to Cohesion Policy Objectives



Note: weighted averages, highest priority labelled in percent

Source: own calculations based on survey data

The figure shows that in the perception of citizens in **convergence regions** from PERCEIVE selected sample on the biggest problems of their region, there is a **higher level of concentration of answers on a few problems**. Like in the case of overall sample, the biggest regional problem is *unemployment* (34.7% of the respondents in convergence region chose this answer). In the case of this category of regions, one can notice a second group of problems perceived as pressing by the respondents. Thus, 22.1% of respondents declared that *poor wages / poverty* is the biggest problem for their region, 18.6% consider that *corruption and poor governance* is the main regional problem, while 13% answer that the most pressing regional problem is *poor infrastructure and transportation*. For the other problems listed in the field survey question, the shares of respondents from the convergence regions that consider that these problems are pressing are quite low (5% and under). Hence, in the perception of citizens from these regions, the *environmental problems* are not considered a priority, although these can lead to the increase of their life quality, and *poor education* is not perceived as

a regional problem, although this affects the insertion capacity on the labour market and conditions the access to higher wages (which citizens recognize as a regional problem).

At the level of Convergence regions, these data can lead us to the idea that public communication should target the increase of citizens' awareness of the connection between such aspects like: education – access to a job, salary level; environment quality – quality of life, so that citizens can understand these connections and through this, understand the sense of public interventions through the Cohesion Policy.

On the other hand, the public communication of Cohesion Policy could be targeted to revealing the efforts made by the EU in solving the problems considered as most pressing by citizens, so that their perception of the effectiveness of EU interventions would increase.

The figure shows that there is variation in citizens' perceptions of what the biggest problem in their region has been for the past five years across the five convergence regions (table 2.2).

The respondents in three out of the five studied convergence regions (Extremadura, Calabria and Warmińsko-Mazurskie) perceive that *unemployment* has been the most pressing issue (58.4, 58.7 and 37.0 per cent respectively). In the remaining two regions, the biggest problems are: *corruption* in Sud Est (39.5 per cent) and *poor wages and poverty* in Dolnośląskie region (26.1 %).

Table 2.2. The biggest problems in convergence case study regions

	Region					Total
	Extremadura	Calabria	Dolnośląskie	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Sud Est	
<i>Poor education</i>	3.1	3.9	4.0	3.2	5.1	3.9
<i>Poor infrastructure & transportation</i>	10.0	6.7	18.1	13.8	17.1	13.2
<i>Corruption and poor governance</i>	9.1	18.1	17.6	9.3	39.5	18.6
<i>Unemployment</i>	58.4	58.7	15.0	37.0	5.5	34.7
<i>Environmental concerns</i>	1.1	8.0	11.7	2.4	3.2	5.4
<i>Poor wages / poverty</i>	17.2	3.9	26.1	33.3	29.7	22.1
<i>(other)</i>	1.1	0.6	7.4	1.1	0.0	2.1
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: own calculations based on survey data (n=2725).

In particular, around one-third of participants from new member state regions (Sud Est, Dolnośląskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie) perceive that *poor wages and poverty* have been the most pressing issue.

At the level of ***convergence phasing out region*** from PERCEIVE sample, citizens' perception of the pressing regional problems has a *higher dispersion degree* than in the case of convergence regions. In the Burgenland region (the only region of the nine PERCEIVE case study regions from the category "convergence phasing out") we can notice the highest share of respondents who consider that *unemployment* is the biggest problem their region is facing compared to the other two categories of regions. As it was presented in figure 2.1 above, 38.7 percent from Burgenland respondents specified that unemployment is their region major problem, while for competitiveness regions this percentage is 36.4% and for convergence regions it is 34.7%. The other regional problems are perceived as pressing by less than 15% of respondents. Thus, between 10 and 15 percent of participants in that region, perceive the following as most problematic issues: *poor infrastructure* (14.5%), *poor wages and poverty* (12%) and *corruption and poor governance* (10.1%). The public concerns on *poor education* and *environment* are bigger in this region compared to the convergence regions (7% and 6.4% respectively), which reveals that the level of public awareness of these problems and their implications on regional development is still low. ***In our opinion, public communication efforts are needed to increase citizens' awareness of the links existing between education and environment quality on one hand, and regional development and life quality of the inhabitants of the region, on the other hand.***

In the case of ***competitiveness regions*** from PERCEIVE sample, next to *unemployment* that is considered the most pressing regional problem by 36.4% of respondents, the field survey highlighted that other 19.2% of respondents consider *poor infrastructure and transportation* as biggest issues facing their regions. For the other problems listed in the question Q4 of our project survey, there is a balanced dispersion of answers. Between 8 and 10 percent of respondents consider that the biggest regional problem is: *corruption and poor governance; poor education; poor wages/ poverty; environmental concerns* (fig. 2.1).

Taking into account these findings, we should consider that in order to improve the public perception of Cohesion Policy at the level of convergence regions, the communication efforts must be intensified in the direction of revealing the EU contribution to solving up the two big problems

considered as most pressing by the citizens in these regions: unemployment and poor infrastructure.

Among the three competitiveness regions included in the study, there is a relative variation with regard to the perception of the most pressing problems at the level of citizens. Thus, while in the regions from the European continent (Emilia-Romagna and Norra Mellansverige) the biggest problem perceived by citizens is unemployment (50.4% and 42.1 % respectively), for the British region the problem perceived as the biggest one is related to transport infrastructure (29.4%). Poor infrastructure and transport is also identified as the biggest regional problem by 21.1% of respondents from the region Norra Mellansverige (table 2.3).

Table 2.3. The biggest problems in competitiveness case study regions

	Region			
	Emilia-Romagna	Norra Mellansverige	Essex	Total
<i>Poor education</i>	5.0	9.1	10.1	8.0
<i>Poor infrastructure & transportation</i>	8.4	21.1	29.4	19.2
<i>Corruption and poor governance</i>	10.8	4.3	7.4	7.6
<i>Unemployment</i>	50.4	42.1	15.3	36.4
<i>Environmental concerns</i>	17.4	3.1	8.8	10.1
<i>Poor wages / poverty</i>	6.4	5.4	12.4	8.0
<i>(other)</i>	1.5	14.9	16.6	10.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	100.0

Source: own calculations based on survey data (n=1621).

The answers to this question by the respondents from Essex have a higher dispersion degree between the different alternatives: 15.3% consider that unemployment is the biggest regional problem, and 12.4% consider that the region is confronted with the problem poor wages/poverty. Essex is the region with the highest share of respondents who could not identify the biggest regional problem among the pre-defined answers, declaring "other" as answer variant. At the same time, in the region Norra Mellansverige, the participants in the survey chose in a significant percentage (14.9%) the answer "other" to define the main regional problem, which needs additional investigations to define these problems and address them through the Cohesion Policy and Programmes, in order to reach a higher adequacy of these to the regional needs (table 2.3).

Another aspect revealed by the field survey, which is relevant for the competitiveness and phasing out regions in particular, is the significant percentage of respondents who chose the variant "other". The fact that 10.7% of respondents from competitiveness regions and other 11.4% from phasing out regions considered that there is another problem more important for their region than the pre-defined ones and which are the object of EU interventions through the Cohesion Policy, needs a more detailed investigation with regard to the nature of these *other* regional problems. This investigation can lead to the ***identification of these (specific) regional problems that are not addressed by the regional policy, but which are considered relevant by more than one-tenth of citizens from these regions. The clear identification of these "other problems" and their targeting under the framework of the future programming horizon through the Cohesion Policy might lead to improving the citizens' perception on the EU.***

2.2. Citizens' perceptions on the effectiveness of public institutions in answering to the regional issues and solving these

The perceptions of government's effectiveness in solving the biggest problems facing one's region are analyzed below, on the basis of answers received during PERCEIVE field survey to question Q5, in order to identify to what extent citizens are confident in the capacity of institutions at different levels of territorial coverage (EU, national, regional/local) to get involved in the management and correction of problems their regions are facing.

Q5. How effective do you think the following institutions will be at dealing with the biggest problem in your region? (1. very effective, 2. somewhat effective, 3. not so effective)

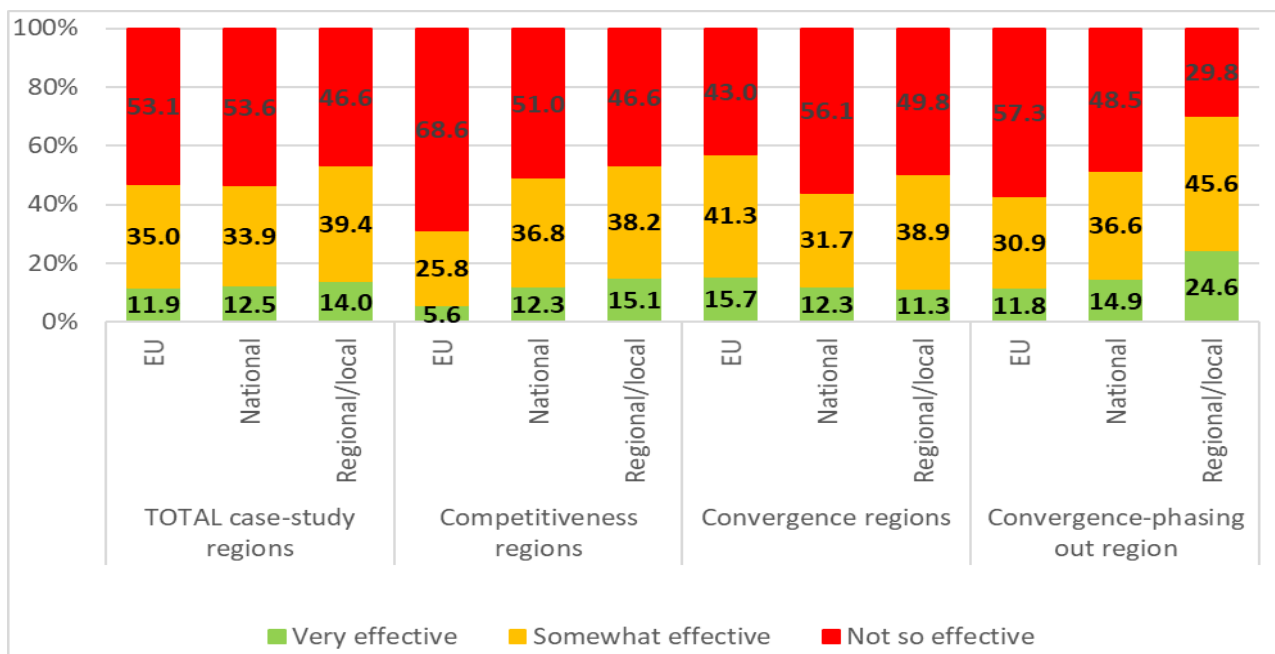
- a. The European Union*
- b. (COUNTRY's) national governing institutions*
- c. Your regional/local governing institutions (Charron, Bauhr, 2017).*

The answers to this question have the proxy function for the measurement of citizens' perception on the efficiency of policies and programmes designed and managed by these institutions (from different levels of territorial coverage) for addressing the problems of the analysed regions. It should be noticed that most respondents from the case study regions perceive that all the institutions, regardless of the territorial level, are "not so effective" in dealing with the biggest regional problems: 53.1% in the case of EU institutions, 53.6% in the case of national institutions and 46.6% in the case of local/regional institutions.

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

The analysis of the empirical data obtained from the PERCEIVE survey reveals that the interviewed citizens in the case study regions perceive the institutions at regional/local level as most efficient in solving up the regional problems, followed by the national institutions, while the European institutions rank only on the 3rd position according to the criterion of high confidence in their effectiveness for dealing with regional problems. Among the categories of regions classified according to Cohesion Policy objectives there are significant differences in citizens' perception of institutional efficiency (fig. 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Citizens' perception on the effectiveness of institutions in solving most problematic issues by regions' category according to Cohesion Policy objectives



Note: regions' category weighted averages reported.

Source: own calculations based on survey data

Thus, *at the level of convergence regions, the European institutions are perceived as having the capacity to be the most efficient in addressing regional problems.* This can be interpreted by *a higher confidence of citizens in the capacity of EU Cohesion Policy to solve the regional problems than in the efficiency of national and regional institutions and programmes to respond to these needs.* Half of the inhabitants of this group of regions considered that the regional/local institutions are "very effective" and "somewhat effective" in dealing with the biggest regional problems, the national institutional level being credited with the lowest confidence in this respect (fig. 2.2).

Among the convergence regions included in the survey, certain differences appear with regard to the perceptions of institutional effectiveness in dealing with the perceived biggest problem; yet it is

obvious that, except for the region Calabria, in all the other **convergence regions the EU institutions are credited with a confidence level of over 50%**. While the citizens from Extremadura have a higher confidence level in all institutions, regardless of the territorial coverage level, by contrast, the citizens from Calabria show a very high level of mistrust, irrespective of the institution involved in solving the regional problems (table 2.4).

Table 2.4. Perception that institutions are “*very and somewhat effective*” in solving the biggest problems in convergence case study regions

	Institutions		
	European Union	National governing institutions	Regional/local governing institutions
Extremadura	72.3	64.0	71.0
Calabria	22.1	17.0	21.9
Dolnośląskie	51.8	42.5	59.2
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	51.7	38.8	51.7
Sud Est	87.4	57.3	46.2
<i>Total convergence regions</i>	<i>57.0</i>	<i>43.9</i>	<i>50.2</i>

Source: own calculations based on survey data (n=2725).

The higher level of trust in EU institutions registered in Sud Est region (87.4%), where high level of corruption is perceived as biggest problem by 39.5% of the respondents, translate into high expectations of the European Union's ability to solve local problems.

At the level of **convergence phasing out region** from our study (Burgenland region from Austria) the respondents credit the **regional/local governing institutions with the highest capacities for addressing biggest regional problems**, and only 30% of respondents consider these institutions as being “not so effective” in solving regional problems. These are followed by the institutions at national level while the clear majority of participants (57.3%) perceived the EU institutions as having a low capacity for effective addressing their region’s problems (fig. 2.2).

When we analyse the perception on the effectiveness of institutions at the level of all the three case study regions from the category **competitiveness regions**, it can be noticed that generally, the citizens of these regions have **the lowest level of positive appreciation as regards the capacity of EU institutions to solve the stringent regional problems** (68.6% of respondents from these regions consider that the EU institutions are not so effective in solving regional biggest problems). In the case of these regions, the regional authorities enjoy the greatest trust from citizens as regards their

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

ability to efficiently intervene in regional important issues, followed by the national governing institutions (53.4 and respectively 49.0 percent of respondents considering these institutions as being very and somewhat effective in solving biggest regional problems) (fig. 2.2).

There are inter-regional variations in the group of the three regions from this group from our study, yet the **hierarchy of trust in institutions is the same**, regardless of the particular competitiveness region that is analysed. Like in the case of convergence regions, the citizens of the region from Italy (Emilia-Romagna) have a low trust level in all institutions, regardless their level of territorial coverage. Thus, less than 40% of respondents consider that the institutions and, implicitly the programmes managed by these, are able to solve effectively the regional problems that are considered important by citizens.

Table 2.5. Perception that institutions are “*very and somewhat effective*” in solving the biggest problems in competitiveness case study regions

	Institutions		
	European Union	National governing institutions	Regional/local governing institutions
Emilia-Romagna	29.4	30.5	36.1
Norra Mellansverige	37.8	63.2	68.2
Essex	27.3	55.7	57.8
<i>Total competitiveness regions</i>	31.4	49.0	53.4

Source: own calculations based on survey data (n=1621).

On the other hand, the highest trust in institutions, at all levels, is shown by the citizens of the Norra Mellansverige region. The percentage of respondents who trust the capacity of regional or national institutions to intervene effectively in solving their problems is around 60 – 70 percentage points in the case of the case study region from Sweden and 55 – 60 percentage points for the British region Essex (table 2.5).

The previously analysed data reveal that the citizens from the case study regions have different perceptions on the ability of European institutions to get effectively engaged in solving the regional issues considered relevant by respondents. A high level of trust in EU institutions (over 50 percent) is found in the regions from the EU new member states (from Poland and Romania) and also in the Spanish case study region, which are included in the category of convergence regions. In the competitiveness and convergence phasing out regions, there is a general lack of confidence in the effectiveness of EU institutions that could be put in relation with the fact that in these

regions more than 10% of citizens consider that their region's major problem is not listed in the Convergence Policy list of priorities that was used in the survey to define regional biggest problems.

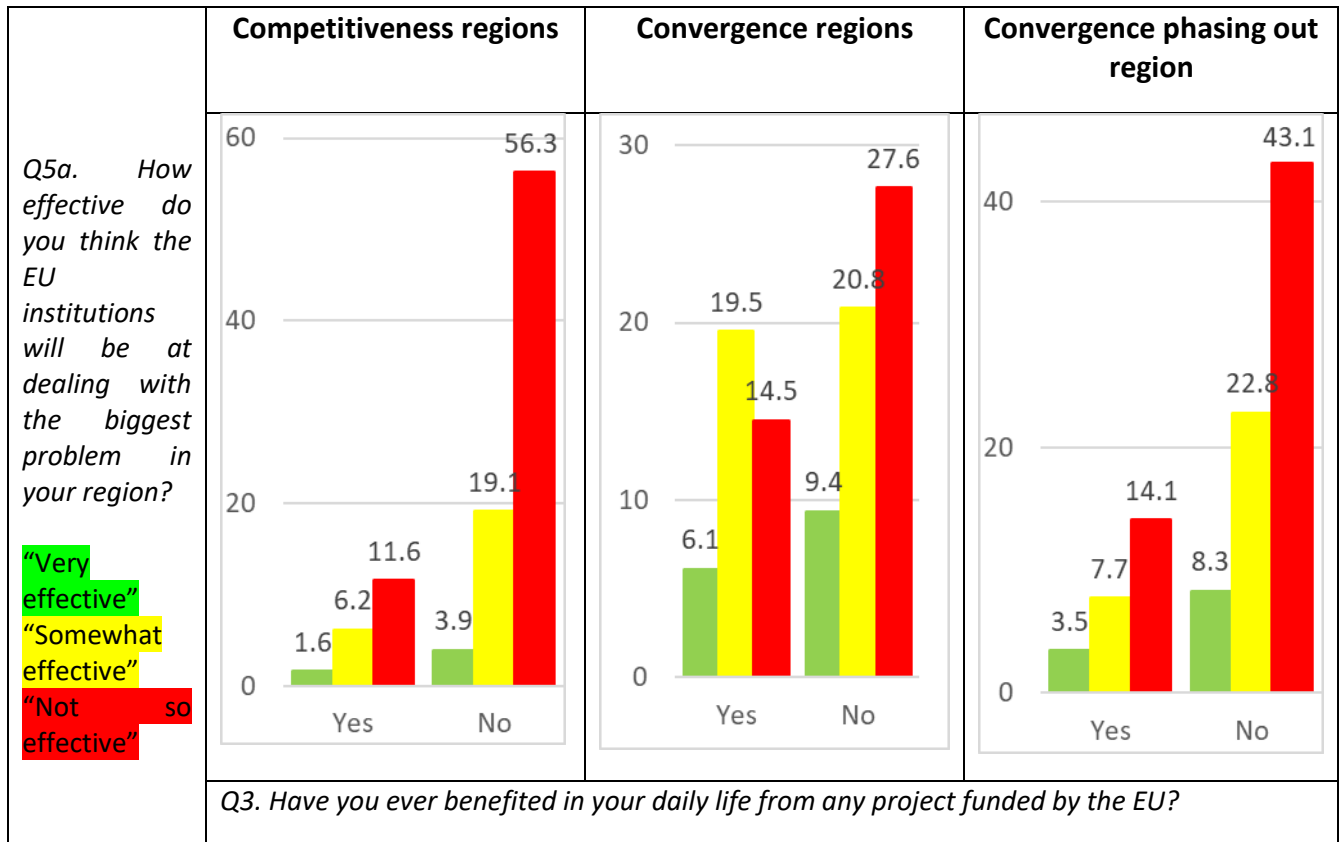
For a more detailed analysis of the respondents' perception at the level of case study regions on the effectiveness of European institutions to solve the regional problems, we consider it useful to present the results of a pair-wise correlation analysis based on the contingency method between two questions from PERCEIVE survey referring to:

- i) effectiveness of EU institutions (Q5a)
- ii) citizens' perception on the benefit they felt in their daily life as a result of projects funded by the EU (Q3).

In total ***convergence regions*** included in PERCEIVE sample, 40.1% of respondents **perceive that they have benefited from EU funded projects in their daily life**, being the biggest proportion compared to the other two categories of regions. Among these, the share of participants in the survey who consider that there is a low effectiveness of European institutions in solving the most pressing regional issues represents only one third (14.1%) (fig. 2.3). It is worth mentioning that among the beneficiaries of the European projects, the number of those who perceive the EU institutions interventions as "very effective" is twice lower than the number of those who consider that the EU institutions could have a "somewhat effective" contribution in solving regional problems. Hence, **even in the case of EU funding beneficiaries, the trust in the capacity of EU institutions to address regional problems is relatively limited.**

Half of the respondents who have not benefited from European projects have lack of confidence in the effectiveness of EU institutions to solve the biggest regional needs.

Figure 2.3. Correlation between the effectiveness of EU institutions and the perception of benefits from EU projects by region category according to Cohesion Policy Objectives (%)



Note: region category weighted averages reported.

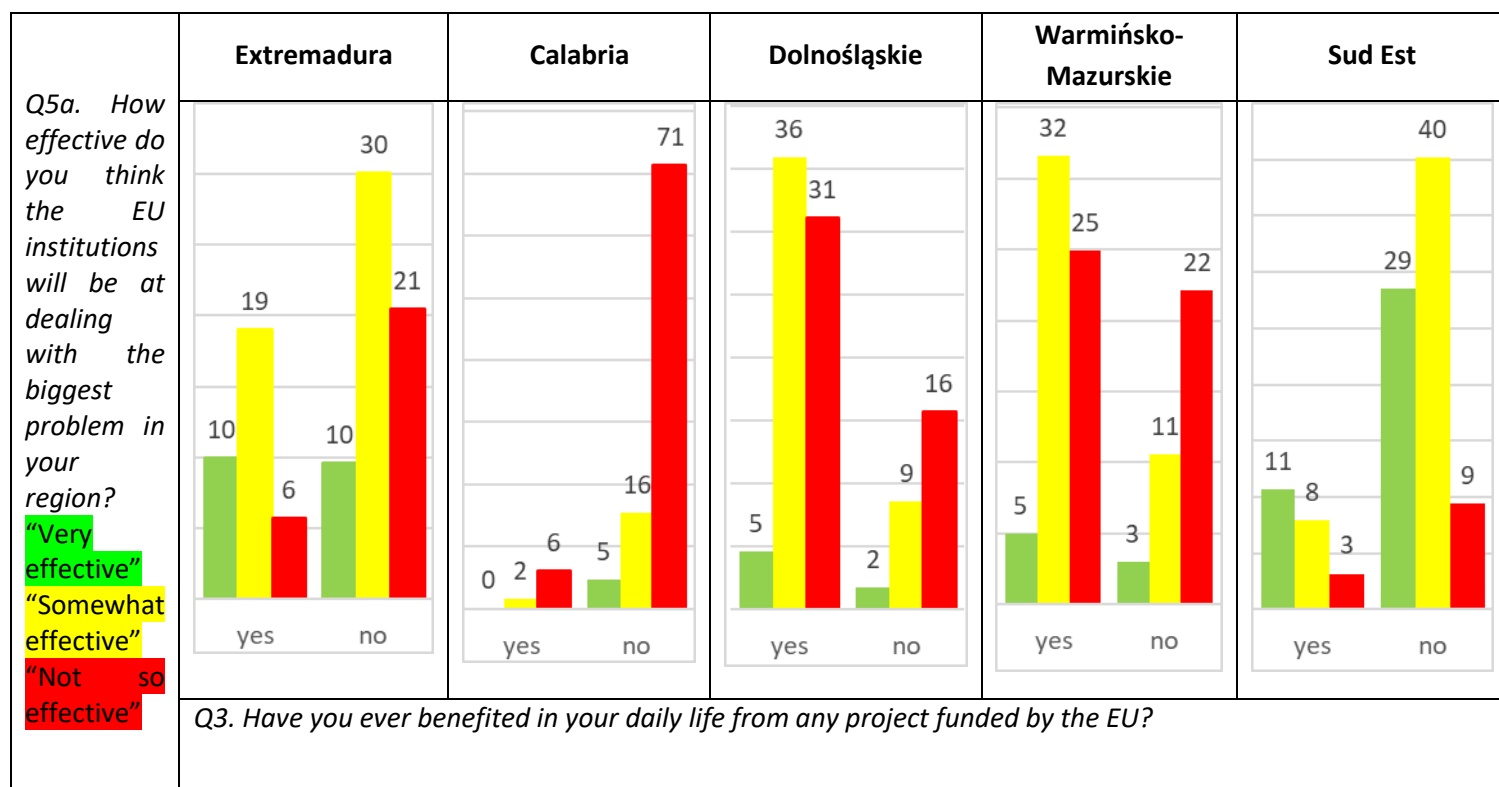
Source: own calculations based on survey data

Between the five convergence regions included in the survey, there are differentiations in the association between the effectiveness of EU institutions and the perception of benefits from EU projects. Thus, most respondents who declare that they have benefited from projects funded from EU funds are found in the two regions from Poland, where 62 percent of participants in Warmińsko-Mazurskie and other 72 percent from Dolnośląskie are aware of the benefits of EU funds spent in their regions (fig. 2.4). Most Polish respondents have moderate trust in the effectiveness of EU institutions, having in view the experiences with EU projects implementation in their regions.

In the regions Extremadura and Sud Est, the percentage of participants in the survey who perceive that they have generally benefited from EU projects in their daily life is less than half compared to the two regions from Poland previously mentioned before. Only 35% of the Spanish respondents and 22% of the Romanian respondents from the investigated regions are aware of the effects of European projects on their daily life. Half of the Romanian respondents from Sud Est region who have benefited from European projects consider that the EU institutions are “very effective” in solving the biggest regional problems (fig. 2.4).

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

Figure 2.4. Correlation between the effectiveness of EU institutions and the perception of benefits from EU projects in convergence case study regions (%)



Note: regions' weighted averages reported.

Source: own calculations based on survey data (n=2725).

By contrast, only 8% of the respondents from Calabria region declare that they have been beneficiaries of European projects, three quarters of these having a critical perception of the European institutions from the perspective of the effectiveness of their interventions.

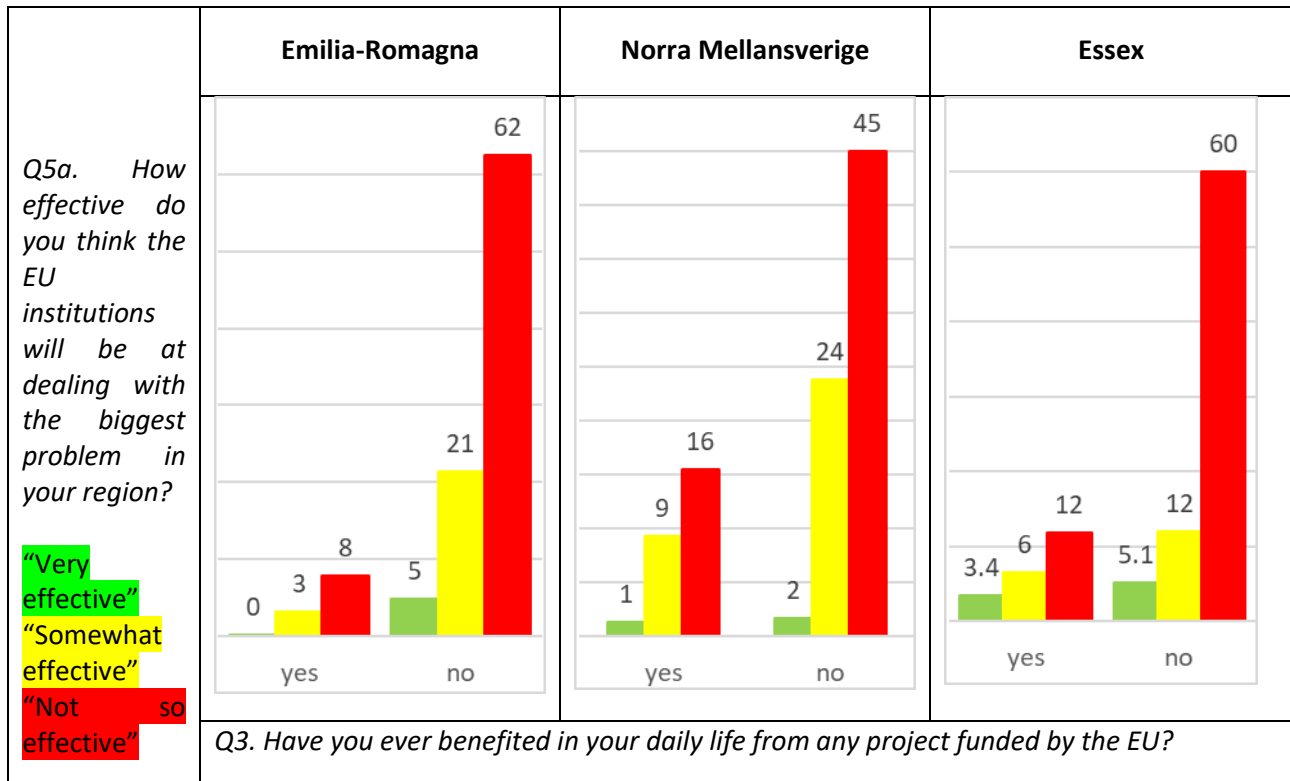
In total **competitiveness regions** included in the sample, only **19.4% of respondents perceive that they have benefited from EU funded projects in their daily life**. Among these, more than half (11.6%) consider that the EU institutions are not so effective in solving their region's biggest problems. Among the about 80% respondents who declare that they have not benefited from the implementation of any project funded with EU money, more than two-thirds have low confidence in the ability of EU institutions to address regional problems (fig. 2.3).

Between the regions classified in the category competitiveness regions, there are slight differences with regard to the association between the effectiveness of EU institutions and the perception of benefits from EU projects. Thus, while in the Italian region Emilia-Romagna, only 11.2% of respondents declare that they benefited in their life from EU projects, this share is more than double at the level of the other two convergence regions (26.2% in Norra Mellansverige and 21.6% for the

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

respondents from Essex). The Italian citizens' critical perception is also maintained with regard to the effectiveness of European institutions, as more than two-third of beneficiaries of EU funded projects declare that they consider the EU institutions as "not so effective" in the actions of regional problems attenuation (fig. 2.5).

Figure 2.5. Correlation between the effectiveness of EU institutions and the perception of benefits from EU projects in competitiveness case study regions (%)



Note: regions' weighted averages reported.

Source: own calculations based on survey data (n=1621).

In the regions Norra Mellansverige and Essex, the percentage of European funding beneficiaries who have a negative perception with regard to the effectiveness of European institutions is lower, yet it also exceeds 50%.

A quarter of respondents from the **convergence phasing regions** (fig. 2.3) declare that they were beneficiaries of European projects, yet more than half of these consider that the public interventions of the EU institutions in solving the most pressing regional issues are "not so effective".

We shall next analyse the perception of citizens from the case study regions on the effectiveness of European institutions in dealing with the biggest problem in their region in correlation with the problem that they have perceived as the most relevant. This analysis can create a picture of the European citizens' perception on the effectiveness of Cohesion Policy instruments, as the main

means of intervention of the Union at regional level meant to provide solutions for solving the stringent regional problems.

In the perception of citizens from the **competitiveness regions** covered by PERCEIVE case study, EU enjoys a rather modest confidence in the capacity of its institutions and implicitly of its programmes to solve the major regional problems. 68.6% of the respondents from these regions declared that EU is "not so effective" in dealing with the region's biggest problem. EU is invested with moderate confidence only as regards the effectiveness of its interventions in problems related to environmental protection and social protection of disadvantaged people (with low wages or poor), followed by unemployment (fig. 2.6).

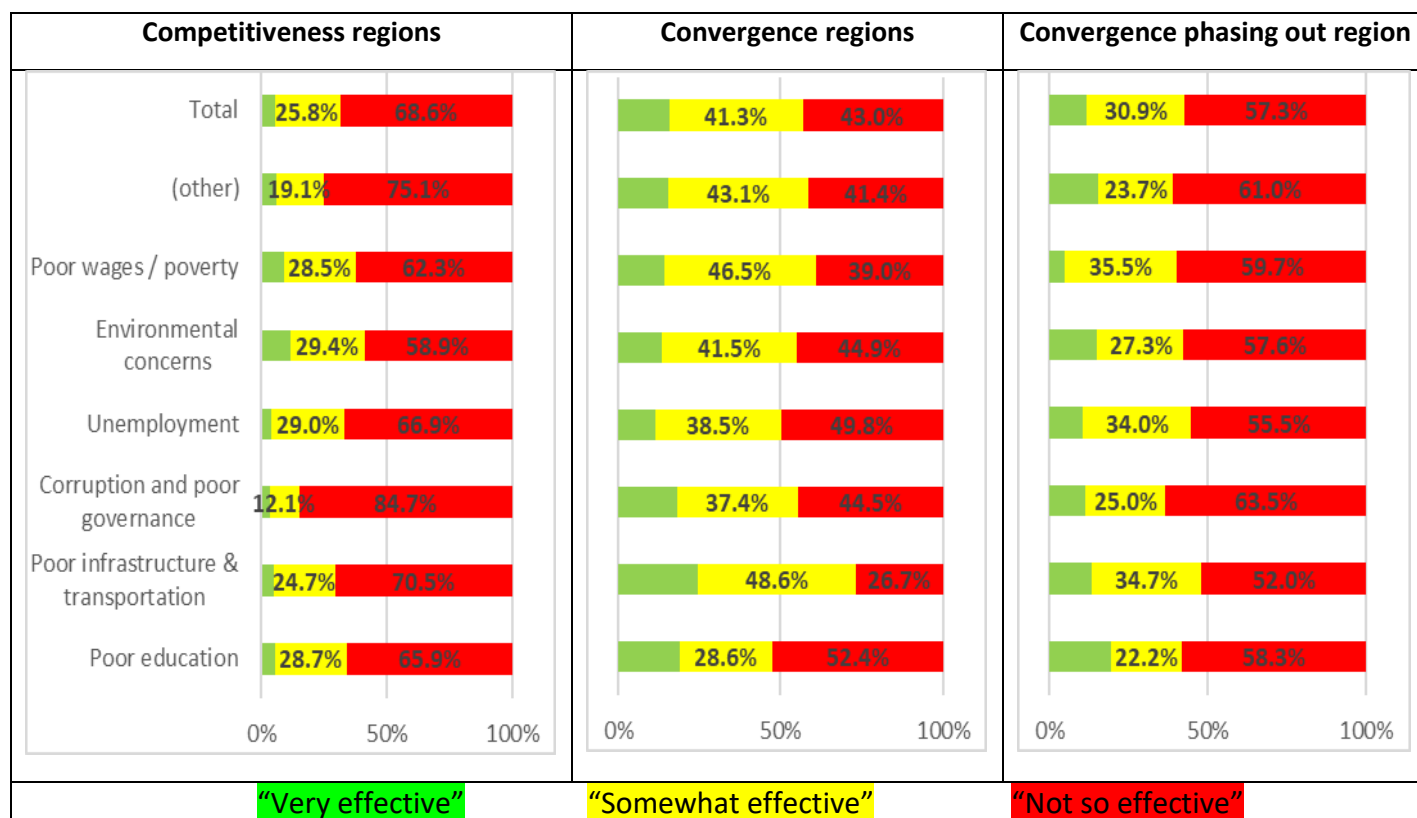
By contrast, the citizens from the **convergence regions** perceive to a greater extent the fact that EU has the ability to intervene for solving their regional problems; the percentage of those who declare that EU is "not so effective" in these actions is 43%, the remaining respondents considering that the European institutions are "very" or "somewhat effective" in this matter (fig. 2.6). The regional problems in which the citizens from the convergence regions consider that EU's interventions are mostly effective are related to poor infrastructure and transportation. Maybe this perception is generated by the awareness of the fact that the development of regional infrastructures needs major investments, difficult to be financially supported by own funds of less developed regions. Social exclusion is the second problem on which the citizens of these regions consider that the EU could be effective in their corrective interventions through programmes dedicated to combating poverty and stimulating wage growth.

The perception of citizens from the **convergence phasing out region** on the effectiveness of EU institutions in dealing with their region problem is, somehow, in between convergence and competitiveness citizens' point of view. The general percentage of those who consider that EU is "not so effective" is close to 60%, and the problem on which citizens think that EU can intervene more successfully is linked to regional infrastructure development (fig. 2.6).

Within each category of regions, divergences appear with regard to citizens' perception concerning the EU institutions effectiveness in solving regional problems. These are listed in the table below.

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

Figure 2.6. Citizens' perception of EU institutions' effectiveness in dealing with the biggest problem that they consider affecting their region



Note: regions' weighted averages reported.

Source: own calculations based on survey data.

According to these data, in the competitiveness regions it seems that there is a common and unanimously accepted perception of the fact that EU could deal with environmental concerns. Besides these issues, the citizens from Norra Mellansverige show somewhat greater confidence in the effectiveness of EU interventions for other two regional problematic issues as well: poor education and poor wages and poverty. The participants in the survey from Emilia-Romagna point to the fact that EU can have effective interventions in solving certain problems that have not been listed in the pre-defined answers. The same favourable answer to EU also appears in the perception of respondents from Extremadura and the two investigated regions from Poland. We consider that further investigations would be necessary to define the nature of these problems for the solving of which respondents think that the EU might assume a role.

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

Table 2.6. Citizens' perception of EU institutions' effectiveness in dealing with the biggest problem that they consider affecting their region

Categories of regions / region / effectiveness degree of EU in dealing with biggest problem			biggest regional problem							Total
			Poor education	Poor infrastructure & transportation	Corruption and poor governance	Unemployment	Environmental concerns	Poor wages/poverty	(other)	
competitiveness regions	Norra Mellansverige	Very effective	6.4%	<u>2.8%</u>	4.5%	<u>2.8%</u>	6.3%	3.6%	2.6%	3.3%
		Somewhat effective	40.4%	<u>29.4%</u>	13.6%	<u>35.9%</u>	50.0%	42.9%	33.8%	34.5%
		Not so effective	53.2%	<u>67.9%</u>	81.8%	<u>61.3%</u>	43.8%	53.6%	63.6%	62.2%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Essex	Very effective	7.5%	<u>7.1%</u>	5.1%	<u>11.3%</u>	17.4%	10.8%	4.6%	8.6%
		Somewhat effective	18.9%	<u>18.2%</u>	20.5%	<u>21.3%</u>	30.4%	24.6%	5.7%	18.7%
		Not so effective	73.6%	<u>74.7%</u>	74.4%	<u>67.5%</u>	52.2%	64.6%	89.7%	72.7%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Emilia-Romagna	Very effective		2.0%	1.6%	<u>3.1%</u>	<u>9.9%</u>	10.8%	44.4%	5.0%
		Somewhat effective	27.6%	34.7%	6.3%	<u>25.9%</u>	<u>25.7%</u>	24.3%	22.2%	24.4%
		Not so effective	72.4%	63.3%	92.1%	<u>71.0%</u>	<u>64.4%</u>	64.9%	33.3%	70.6%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
convergence-phasing out region	Burgenland	Very effective	19.4%	13.3%	11.5%	<u>10.5%</u>	15.2%	4.8%	15.3%	11.8%
		Somewhat effective	22.2%	34.7%	25.0%	<u>34.0%</u>	27.3%	35.5%	23.7%	30.9%
		Not so effective	58.3%	52.0%	63.5%	<u>55.5%</u>	57.6%	59.7%	61.0%	57.3%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
convergence regions	Extremadura	Very effective	29.4%	37.0%	12.2%	<u>19.0%</u>	16.7%	19.4%	16.7%	20.5%
		Somewhat effective	35.3%	44.4%	42.9%	<u>56.3%</u>	50.0%	47.3%	66.7%	51.8%
		Not so effective	35.3%	18.5%	44.9%	<u>24.7%</u>	33.3%	33.3%	16.7%	27.7%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Dolnośląskie	Very effective	13.0%	6.7%	2.9%	9.2%	7.4%	<u>2.6%</u>	16.3%	6.4%
		Somewhat effective	17.4%	64.8%	32.4%	40.2%	54.4%	<u>45.0%</u>	41.9%	45.4%
		Not so effective	69.6%	28.6%	64.7%	50.6%	38.2%	<u>52.3%</u>	41.9%	48.2%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Very effective	5.9%	18.9%	2.0%	<u>7.0%</u>	7.7%	<u>6.7%</u>	16.7%	8.2%
		Somewhat effective	35.3%	56.8%	28.0%	<u>42.7%</u>	38.5%	<u>44.1%</u>	50.0%	43.5%
		Not so effective	58.8%	24.3%	70.0%	<u>50.3%</u>	53.8%	<u>49.2%</u>	33.3%	48.3%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Sud Est	Very effective	37.0%	51.6%	<u>38.1%</u>	34.5%	52.9%	<u>33.5%</u>		39.3%
		Somewhat effective	37.0%	38.5%	<u>49.5%</u>	48.3%	41.2%	<u>54.4%</u>		48.1%
		Not so effective	25.9%	9.9%	<u>12.4%</u>	17.2%	5.9%	<u>12.0%</u>		12.6%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Calabria	Very effective	4.8%	2.8%	2.1%	<u>5.7%</u>	9.3%			4.9%
		Somewhat effective	19.0%	16.7%	18.6%	<u>16.6%</u>	20.9%	14.3%		17.2%
		Not so effective	76.2%	80.6%	79.4%	<u>77.7%</u>	69.8%	85.7%	100.0%	77.9%
		TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: regions' weighted averages reported; the underlined figures correspond to regional issues considered most important by most surveyed participants in each region

Source: own calculations based on survey data

For all the six regional problems from the pre-defined list of PERCEIVE questionnaire, the respondents from the region Sud Est have the greatest trust in the EU capacity to get engaged in solving these problems. Thus, 1/3 of those who mentioned poor wages and poverty as the biggest regional problem consider that the EU institutions are "very effective" and half of them think that the EU institutions are "somewhat effective" in dealing with these regional issues. More than half of those who mentioned the regional problems related to infrastructure and environment protection think that the EU can have a "very effective" intervention to solve these problems (table 2.6).

It is worth noting that regardless of the region, for the specific regional problem considered by most respondents to be the most important, the percentage of those who say that the EU would be "very effective" in solving it is rather low compared to the same perception expressed in relation to the other regional problems of less relevance.

From the analysis of these data, we can deduce that there is a higher trust in the European institutions and in their ability to intervene effectively in solving the regional problems among the respondents who have benefited from EU funded projects. In the light of this conclusion, in order to improve the public perception on the European institutions, a series of public communication actions would be necessary to better highlight the practical benefits of EU funding in the European citizens' daily life, transmitted in a language adapted to the target audience and through the most adequate communication channels for each region in part and for each category of audience.

At the same time, for the most developed regions in the EU (competitiveness regions), whose citizens perceive only to a low extent the fact that they are beneficiaries of EU projects and have a high level of trust in the effectiveness of EU institutions, innovative communication measures are needed to increase the awareness of the benefits brought to their daily life by the territorial cohesion of the entire EU space.

3. Experts' perceptions

This chapter aims to analyse the perception of Cohesion Policy practitioners at the level of PERCEIVE case study regions on two aspects:

- Ranking of main regional needs that were considered relevant at case study region level by practitioners during the implementation of last programming period;
- Adequacy level of regional Operational Programmes [Ops] (as main instrument of EU interventions at regional level) in addressing/responding to these problems.

Both elaborations are accompanied by the respective matrices depicting the importance assigned to the indicated problems, as well as Cohesion Policy adequacy in addressing these, in rank scores determined by numbers of Cohesion Policy practitioners agreeing on this ranking.

This analysis represents a comparative synthesis of the reports on regional case studies written by Perceive's partners. Each report is based on the analysis of the focus group's section 3 that addresses to Cohesion Policy assessment. The Focus group was realized within Perceive's Work Package 1 and part of the collected data have been already analysed and presented in Deliverable 1.1. and Deliverable 3.1. The partners of the PERCEIVE consortium realized the focus groups with practitioners of Cohesion Policy programmes between February and March 2017. Table 3.1 presents a description of the focus groups.

Table 3.1 - Summary information of the focus groups in the selected case study regions

Partner	Case-study region	Date of the focus group	Number of participants	Additional interviewees
WU	Burgenland	-	-	12
UNIBO	Calabria	2017-02-16	8	2
UNIBO	Emilia-Romagna	2017-02-24	10	1
IAFE-NRI	Dolnośląskie	2017-03-21	8	
IAFE-NRI	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	2017-03-09	7	
IEA	Sud Est	2017-02-21	13	
UB	Extremadura	2017-03-28	18	
UGOT	Norra Mellansverige	2017-03-17	5	1
PBS	Essex	2017-02-13	8	3

Source: Aiello V., C. Brasili, P. Calia, P. M. Reverberi, D1.1 "Report on regional case studies", Perception and Evaluation of Regional and Cohesion Policies by Europeans and Identification with the Values of Europe - PERCEIVE project, GA nr. 693529, www.perceiveproject.eu.

The focus groups lasted from 3 to 5 hours. To allow for a deeper level of analysis and to collect feedback, a one-week follow-up phase was available to participants for providing an additional written contribution. In compliance with the Horizon 2020 policy, the transcripts of each focus group, translated in English, are stored in the PERCEIVE repository and available for open access.

The analysis highlights the differences and the points in common in the perception of experts from the investigated regions by region category according to Cohesion Policy Objectives: competitiveness regions, convergence regions, convergence phasing out regions. This provides a better understanding of how Cohesion Policy practitioners from different categories of regions perceive the relation between the most pressing needs of their regions, on one hand, and the goals and the tools of the Operational Programme(s) (Ops), on the other hand.

3.1. Experts' perceptions on most problematic issues in case-study regions

The respondents under this category were generally asked to name the issues/problems/needs that their region had to face during the last programming period implementation and to hierarchize them.

In the perception of experts at the level of **convergence regions**, *unemployment* appears as a constant problem among the main issues that their regions are facing (table 3.2). This problem seems to be intensified by the economic crisis that overlapped the implementation period of the programming horizon 2007 –2013. However this problem has multiple facets and peculiarities from one region to another, depending on the regional socio-economic specificities.

For instance, Extremadura faces high levels of seasonality employment due to the strong role of agriculture in the economy. Besides, the average level of unemployment has been traditionally high, which sums to the fact that Extremadura is the Spanish region with the lowest per capita GDP levels. The Great Recession severely damaged economic growth and unemployment rates skyrocketed over 30%, being above 60% among young people.

In Calabria, in the period 2011 – 2012, in the aftermath of the economic crisis, the unemployment rate rose by 7 percentage points, from 12.7% to 19.4%. In 2013, at the end of the programming period, the percentage eventually rose up to 22.3%, more than twice the average European unemployment rate. Unemployment is mainly widespread among women and young people.

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

In the regions belonging to the former communist countries, the unemployment problem is closely linked to the restructuring of the economy (mainly in the case of obsolete industrial units from the socialist regime): "... we [Sud Est region] are an agricultural area, there were counties that used to have giant industries that closed down ...Buzău had small industry, and all the buildings and firms are still functional in the industrial area... Brăila had very large factories that were closed down, high unemployment rate compared to other counties" (Sud Est LMA representative).

Table 3.2. Hierarchy of regional needs in the experts' perceptions from convergence case study regions

Hierarchy of regional needs	Convergence regions				
	Extremadura	Calabria	Dolnośląskie	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Sud Est
Primary order	- <i>great recession</i> - <i>unemployment</i> - social issues	- weak governance - <i>weak productive sector</i> - <i>unemployment</i>	- low quality of <i>infrastructure</i> , including tourism infrastructure - outflow of qualified workers – competition from neighboring countries - <i>low business innovativeness</i> - <i>unemployment</i> - pollution of the environment, especially air pollution	- low attractiveness for large <i>business</i> - weak transport and tourism <i>infrastructure</i>	- social infrastructure (healthcare, education) - technical and transport (road, urban, tourism, piscicultural) <i>infrastructure</i>
Secondary order	- accessibility - <i>education</i> - <i>R&D</i>	- social exclusion - <i>infrastructure</i> deficit	- <i>low living standards of population</i> - low mobility of <i>low qualified workers</i> - high intra-regional economic and social diversification	- low entrepreneurship of population - <i>weak social infrastructure</i> – not adjusted to the structures of regional society - the need of revitalization of urban areas	- business environment (capitalization, development) - <i>social problems</i> (poverty, roma people integration, <i>unemployment</i> , poor neighborhood)
Tertiary order	- <i>infrastructure</i> - <i>sectoral problems</i>			- insufficient environmental protection - <i>low innovativeness, including food processing sector</i>	- bureaucracy

Note: italic have been used to highlight the problems that occur regularly in several regions

Source: PERCEIVE Focus group and in-depth interviews

On the other hand, in the case study regions from the EU new member states, the problem of unemployment was (partly) solved by the external migration of (younger and better educated) native workforce that accessed the labour market from the Union's old member states. Referring to

this situation, one of the participants in the focus group from the region Sud Est shows the link existing between unemployment and external migration and makes judgements on the effectiveness of operational programmes to counterbalance the negative effects of this interconnection: *"Vis-a-vis labor migration, it is very difficult to...to, how should I say, counterbalance a national trend when the economic supply in the area is relatively low and limited, that is, if we think at macro level, besides the capital city and some other three – four towns, which attract labor force, other areas are losing labor force. So here Regio could do what it could do and we can prove it by figures, because if we consider the firms that were established and which either maintained their jobs or they created new jobs, we can say that it is too little; so when you have dozens of thousand people in a region who are unemployed, this is too little to solve the problem with 1000 or 2000 jobs that we created under the program Regio."* (Sud Est LMA representative).

The unemployment problem is linked to and generated by two other regional issues: *low level of qualification of the workforce and regional business structure and development.*

As regards the low level of regional labour force qualification, this is rather related to the **lack of adequacy of the qualifications required on the regional labour market to the skills of the regional available work force**. In this respect, one of the participants in the focus group from Dolnoslaskie region declares: *"I will add a word on what the employers talk about with us at the meetings. About a problem that they see and that certainly may arise in the near future, it is the lack of personnel, lack of a skilled employee in a given industry. So these are disadvantage that they mention. They say that they offer a job contract without a slightest problem, provide benefits, provide various kinds of additional things, which should be an incentive, but at the same time there is no employees. Or, if they are, these are employees who change jobs a lot, resign. So, this is a problem that the employer reports most often. Looking at the Mercedes factory, where Jawor signed a contract, there will big a considerable need for a lot of employees, who will have to join the workforce of the factory. So these are the types of problems, in which there might be a shortage of employees."* (Dolnośląskie focus group participant). The manager of the Educational Secretary from Extremadura asserted, in this respect, that most schools were obsolete and clearly insufficient. For the Calabria region, the conclusion from the PERCEIVE focus group analysis shows that a most recurring problem that deeply affected the efficiency and the effectiveness of the OPs was the lack of skills among citizens and public administration, which stemmed from the lack of both human capital and administrative capacity.

Regional business structure and development is claimed by Focus group participants as an important problem that requires OP interventions to improve the convergence level with the EU. For instance, Calabria's economy was and is still characterized by a low productivity level, mainly related to the presence of small and micro-sized enterprises, with a deficit of financial, managerial and organizational resources, active in traditional and mature sectors sensitive to the competition from emerging countries, scarcely innovative, with low propensity for inter-company cooperation, essentially local demand-oriented and with a low willingness to export. Extremadura and Sud Est representatives claim the lack of an entrepreneurial culture and dynamics as a factor hindering the economic potential of the region. For instance, a Sud Est representative declares during the Focus group that: *"the slow business dynamics, this is another issue ... Regio made what it could make, in relation to business centers or speaking about business support infrastructure, not much could be done in this region compared to the western regions of the country. But I want to tell that it's better not to do any projects than do projects that don't serve anybody, because we have such examples; in the poor regions they began, they launched out, they made business centers or industrial park where nobody is coming"* (Sud Est LMA representative). The representatives of Polish regions claim during the focus group the problem of low innovativeness of the business sector, which affects the region's economic performance.

In the majority of these regions, the low level of business development and attractiveness for investments is linked to the *poor infrastructure development*, mostly transport infrastructure. The low density of transport infrastructure and its poor quality is perceived as an important gap for accessibility in competitiveness regions from our sample, hindering the chances for attracting large business and restricting the mobility of goods and services. While in the case of regions from the EU old member states (Extremadura and Calabria), the infrastructure issue is considered of secondary order, in the other three regions belonging to NMS (Dolnośląskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Sud Est) the focus group participants perceive that the need for adequate and modern infrastructure development is a priority / first order need.

The regional economic problems and the dynamics of regional business sector are considered one of the main causes of *social problems* such as *poverty, social exclusion and deprivation* at the level of convergence regions. According to the Extremadura representatives, the economic crisis resulted in unemployment growth that generates social problems as poverty, risk of social exclusion and severe deprivation. In the analysis of Calabria region, it is recognized that the unemployment

problem affects not only the competitiveness of the economic system but also the region's social cohesion because one-third of households in Calabria were below the poverty threshold. Furthermore, in this region it seems that poverty and social exclusion are problems persisting in time, because the negative dynamics of the labour market could not be tackled by the educational, training and apprenticeship system, which is still very far from the objectives of Europe 2020.

By contrast, in the convergence regions belonging to the new member states, the perception of the social problems is of institutional nature, the respondents of focus groups from these regions considering that one of the important problems their regions are facing is the *poor development of social infrastructures*: in education, healthcare, culture, social integration. ("*Social infrastructure ...Because there was also huge demand here. I also mean the healthcare, social infrastructure*" [Focus group participant from Warmińsko-Mazurskie]; "*...social infrastructure, infrastructure of school type, social services, healthcare, transport infrastructure, urban infrastructure, including here: alleys, parks, avenues, public transport...*" [Sud Est representative]).

The experts' perceptions on regional most pressing needs in PERCEIVE case study **competitiveness regions** are synthesized in the next table (table 3.3), revealing higher heterogeneity between the analysed regions as compared to the category of convergence regions. However, *unemployment* is maintained as a constant regional problem, which grew as a consequence of the recent economic crisis and of the interconnection between the regional economic operators, as stated by one of the participants in the focus group from the region Emilia-Romagna: "*Certainly, unemployment, this is a region that used to be fully employed, so the issue of unemployment for this region is the first problem according to my opinion, to the point that this aspect is connected also to the second, in the sense that it's a region based on work, and on collaboration, it's a strongly cooperative region, so the fact that a model goes into crisis.... putting into difficulty also other enterprises ...*". In particular, it is perceived as a regional problem the high unemployment level among the young people: "*we, in Norra Mellansverige, have over 25% youth unemployment*" (Norra Mellansverige Focus group participant).

Unemployment is also perceived by Cohesion Policy practitioners as generating *social exclusion* by increasing marginalisation, especially for those who had more troubles in entering or staying into the job market (as in Emilia-Romagna region). Similarly, from the focus group in Norra Mellansverige region, it results that there are other *social issues* among the biggest problems facing the region, namely gender equality.

Table 3.3. Hierarchy of regional needs in the experts' perceptions from competitiveness case study regions

Hierarchy of regional needs	Competitiveness region		
	Emilia-Romagna	Norra Mellansverige	Essex
Primary order	- unemployment - innovation system - post-earthquake recovery	- economic growth (firm diversification) - unemployment - social inclusion - gender equality	- large contract size limiting bidder competition - auditing - small business exclusion
Secondary order	- youth unemployment	- media outreach /information to relevant groups	- low carbon economy - post programme evaluation - communication
Tertiary order	- social exclusion - regional disparities	-public awareness	- regional divisions and grievances, and urban/rural -“Parasitic” effect

Source: PERCEIVE Focus group and in-depth interviews

Among the regional problems perceived of first importance by the participants in the focus group from these regions, the following are mentioned: *fostering business oriented innovation* system (in Emilia-Romagna) and *economic growth* throughout firm diversification (in Norra Mellansverige), both being consistent with the regions' need for sustaining competitiveness.

“We had good allocation [2007-2013 programming period] in infrastructure, small business support, tourism, and other areas that were good for meeting growth goals of the region, but really, where we see that more is needed in the future is the energy sector.” (focus group participant from Norra Mellansverige)

As tertiary order problem the following was claimed in two out of the three case-study competitiveness regions: *regional disparities in accessing the OP opportunities*. Thus, the participants in the focus group from the region Emilia-Romagna emphasize the difficulty shown by poorer areas to seize the opportunities brought by the OPs. Thus it can be said that regional disparities were not identified as an objective per se, but they became an issue insofar as they meant an unbalanced distribution of the OPs' resources within the region's territories.

The related problem of regional divisions and *“grievances”* was raised, with *“the opinion in Greater Essex [being] it was a very Cambridge / Norwich orientated programme”*. This was somewhat related to the focus on the 'low carbon economy'. In other words, a few niche areas benefitted significantly more than the rest of the region. At the same time, a great part of the problems considered relevant by the participants in focus group in the region Essex are closely linked to the existence of regional mechanisms for allocating funds that are increasingly bureaucratic (auditing system), which

generate barriers to access to the cohesion funds for small business (large contract size), favouring the large companies and (urban) communities, with significant previous experience in implementing projects with EU money.

The Essex focus group participants also claim the post-programme evaluation problem. Among them there was a general consensus of the need for analysis of what worked, a post-programme evaluation, and for this to be timely. It was considered that the feedback and learning from any analysis would be too late to address the next round directly: *"You need to be evaluating it as it goes along to inform the next one, ...they're going to be relying on the evaluations of the 2007-2013 programme in the 2026 programme."*(Essex focus group participant).

A series of *problems* were also signalled out *in relation to the implementation and economic implications of programmes focusing on the low carbon economy priority*. There were issues with getting people to sign up to 'low carbon' projects and it was *"incredibly difficult to get the projects to come forward"*. There was still perhaps some misunderstanding around the low carbon aspect, with people automatically assuming it has to be solely about energy saving. However, *"once people got into the mindset it was quite a successful programme, the money was spent, but it wasn't something that in the East of England we particularly went willing for"* (Essex focus group).

From a business perspective, it was potentially seen as a *"diversion"* from what businesses *"do best"*. The concern was that this was particularly damaging for *"idea rich but absolutely time resource poor"* (small businesses from Essex). More widely, there was a concern of this distorting the economy and business decisions: *"giving them something to do which isn't absolutely what they need to do, you're diverting them from the most effective growth path"* (Essex focus group).

On the other hand, the participants in the focus group also signalled out the existence of certain particular problems, with local specificity, such as natural disasters. Thus, the experts from Emilia-Romagna region perceived the *post-earthquake recovery* as a first order regional need, after the double 6.0 magnitude earthquake that hit the region in May 2012, causing major damages over an area extending to 50.4% of its territory, 58.3% of the population and 60% of its value added⁴.

Issues, problems, and needs considered relevant by Cohesion Policy practitioners in Burgenland (the only **convergence phasing out region** from our sample) largely focus on the following key elements:

⁴Emilia-Romagna, 2012, *I danni del terremoto e le politiche messe in campo per affrontare l'emergenza e la ricostruzione*.

north-south disparities and issues of infrastructure, the risk of wage/social dumping, renewable energy, research, tourism, and education/qualification of workforce. In the Burgenland practitioners' perceptions, first order regional problems are: *infrastructure* feeding into the existing north-south disparities, *research* – either through university research and the making available of resources, or 'R&D' activities in companies. Second order problems that arise were largely focused on *education/qualification of workforce* and *tourism*. The regional needs classified as being of third order were mostly attached to the risk of *wage/social dumping* and to *renewable energy* (table 3.4).

Table 3.4. Hierarchy of regional needs into the experts' perceptions from convergence phasing out case study region

Hierarchy of regional needs/issues	Burgenland
Primary order	-north-south disparities: infrastructure -research (R&D)
Secondary order	-education/ qualification -tourism
Tertiary order	-wage/social dumping -renewable energy

Source: PERCEIVE Focus group and in-depth interviews

We briefly summarize below the main regional issues/problems relevant for Burgenland in the perception of Cohesion Policy practitioners from this area.

Burgenland is characterized by *intra-regional disparities in infrastructure development*, often referred to as 'North-South divide': while the north benefits from its geographic proximity to Vienna, Bratislava, and Budapest, the predominantly hilly south accounts for a rather underdeveloped region. One respondent states that the higher northern standard "*manifests in the purchasing power, the income and on the labour market*". *Transport infrastructure* was deemed particularly important with a view to its need for further development of the south part of the region. As such, a certain degree of accessibility is required for companies to settle in the south, "*and if there are no jobs, there is no possibility to live, and this includes venues where you could go or a cinema or minimal infrastructure at least, [otherwise] you cannot hold the people there*" (Respondent from Burgenland region). There are also signalled regional problems related to the development of *communication infrastructure* in the south of the region. This is perceived as "*failures in regional planning, where municipalities have deliberately allowed for this scattering to happen*".

Research has emerged from discussions with Burgenland experts as a problematic area for regional development both in terms of Higher education based and Research & Development in companies

(also innovation). In the respondents' perceptions, *"Burgenland is lagging behind other Austrian provinces"* from this point of view, both for higher education and companies. A critical point arises from the perspective of increasing research intensity in renewable energies and digitalisation where more capacity of innovation is needed in order to preserve the health of Burgenland's corporate landscape, with special reference to alternative forms for producing renewable energies and online trade.

Education, with focus on further *qualification for working staff*, is perceived as a regional need throughout Burgenland' experts. The main concern with this element of regional development regarded the sustainability of initiatives in the presence of decreasing EU funding levels due to the change of region's status from phasing out to competitiveness region: *"there will be difficulties once this transitional status is gone and [Burgenland becomes] Objective-2"* with specific reference to the education and training sector, in which companies *"depend on funding a lot, and sometimes solely"*. Also, education has been linked to the contingent issue of refugees in Burgenland: *"[They] are not the skilled workers of today or tomorrow, but of the day after tomorrow at the earliest"* and therefore the process of integration should start with German classes before any vocational training could make sense.

Tourism, as secondary order issue in the perception of Burgenland experts facing some problems related to heavy reliance on foreign workforce, quality of services and management of existing tourism infrastructures.

An often mentioned problem concerned *wage/social dumping* – the hiring of workforce from other member countries with lower wage-levels. This problem is perceived as highly differentiated and political in nature: *"one could say: 'well, these are jobs the Austrians do not want', but that is not true, and it is our duty to examine where the problem lies. It is true to some extent, that Hungarians do take away jobs, but not entirely. It is more broadly diversified"* (Burgenland respondent). There is also the perception that the entrepreneurs and public administrators acknowledge that the healthcare system and tourism sector would literally collapse in the absence of foreign workers, as Austrian substitutes would simply not be available.

Despite de fact that Burgenland was a pioneer in *wind energy* research and development, the respondents manifested a moderate concern about the *sustainability* of the good positioning of Burgenland in the renewable energy field in Austria and even internationally. This sustainability

issue arises with the increasing research intensity of the whole sector and of the photovoltaic segment in particular: “those [wind farms] are long-term projects ... and if it works out for ten years, it will work out for other ten years. And then I have to go and do something new, because the world keeps spinning. High-tech development is only assessable to a certain degree, no one knows what will be in ten years”.

The analysis of the perception of Cohesion Policy practitioners on the problems / public intervention needs that their regions had to face reveals the existence of a certain homogeneity of problems identified within the group of respondents belonging to one category or another category of regions, defined according to Cohesion Policy Objectives. Thus, in the case of convergence regions, the respondents considered that the biggest problems their regions are facing are related to the weak development of infrastructures, mainly of transport and social infrastructure, as well as poverty & social exclusion that are (mostly) linked to unemployment. Although the literature and empirical evidence reveal the existence of a significant correlation between the education level and the access to the labour market, the practitioners from the convergence regions revealed only to a lesser extent the problem of low educational and vocational training level of the population from their regions, as it results from the regional SWOT analysis from PERCEIVE Deliverable 1.1⁵. Having in view this empirical evidence, we believe that measures are needed for increasing the awareness of linkages between education – vocational training – employment and combating poverty at the level of practitioners from this category of regions.

The respondents from the competitiveness regions pointed out the problems generated by the change of the regional economies' structure and/or the fast economic growth that induced social exclusion for a part of the population facing problems in entering or staying into this new and flexible labour market. At the same time, these also showed that the implementation mechanisms of the operational programmes generated a series of difficulties in accessing EU funded programmes for small companies (Essex case) or for poorer regions from these regions (as pointed out by the respondents from Emilia-Romagna, Essex), widening the territorial disparities inside

⁵Aiello V., C. Brasili, P. Calia, P. M. Reverberi, D1.1 “Report on regional case-studies”, Perception and Evaluation of Regional and Cohesion Policies by Europeans and Identification with the Values of Europe - PERCEIVE project, GA nr. 693529, www.perceiveproject.eu.

these regions. The outcome from the study suggests that it is necessary to consider a more localized delivery approach in the construction and implementation of regional programmes, in order to address the issues associated with regional divide and the under-delivery of programmes in rural or poorer areas.

3.2. Experts' perceptions on effectiveness of Cohesion Policy in answering to the regional issues and solving these

This section represents an assessment of the policy adequacy in solving the revealed issues according to the perception of regional practitioners who participated to PERCEIVE focus groups. The evaluation scale with three steps was used to measure the adequacy degree previously mentioned, where:

0 - low adequacy

1 - partial adequacy

2 - high adequacy.

An evaluation adequacy matrix for each regional problem / issue was provided by each partner, being substantiated on focus group findings: Question 18 of the Focus Group protocol, section III. *What were the issues/problems/needs that your region had to face in the period 2007 – 2013 and in what order would you hierarchize them? In your opinion, did the 2007 – 2013 Operational Programme(s) respond to such issues?*

On the basis of these evaluations, average scores of the Operational Programmes adequacy were calculated for each level from the regional hierarchy of needs: primary, secondary and tertiary order, as they were classified in the previous sub-chapter.

$$AS_c = 1/n_c \sum_{i=1}^{n_c} a_{ci}, \text{ where:}$$

AS_c – average adequacy score for category c of regional problems

i - number of problems, $i=1, \dots, n$

c – category of regional problems, by the hierarchy of their importance

a_{ci} – adequacy score for problem i from category c , (where a_{ci} takes the values 0 - low adequacy, 1 - partial adequacy, 2 - high adequacy)

Tables 3.5-3.7 below summarize the results of this analysis. These show that there is a great variance between the categories of regions and between the regions from the same category with regard to the interviewed experts' perception of the adequacy of operational programmes for solving the regional problems considered relevant by Cohesion Policy practitioners.

In two of the five case study regions from the category **convergence regions (Extremadura and Sud Est)**, practitioners perceive that there is a **high adequacy level** of OPs to the biggest (primary order) regional problems (table 3.5). The participants from the region **Extremadura** positively appreciated **the flexibility of OP 2007-2013**, which made it possible to counteract the negative effects of the economic crisis, reported by them as one of the big problems faced by their region. At the level of this region, Cohesion Policy is perceived as having a significant contribution to **the alleviation of the unemployment rate explosion as a result of the economic crisis** by backing up local plans supporting employment in general and self-employment in particular, and by improving the education levels of the active population, both in formal education and in educational programs for the unemployed. In addition, the local manager from Extremadura stressed the fact that the European policies helped in *improving regional social policies by importing new knowledge*, and to modernize the system of child protection. In the region Sud Est, in the hierarchy of perceived problems, social infrastructure is of utmost importance, being appreciated as a vital need in the region. The 2007-2013 Operational Programmes responded to this need: *"...social infrastructure, infrastructure of school type, healthcare...received funding. This is the most important thing, that no useless projects were funded"*. (Sud Est LMA representative).

In the case of Cohesion Policy experts from the **Polish regions** included in the survey, there is a **moderate perception of the adequacy** level. In their opinion, the regional operational programmes were quite well-adjusted to the regional needs, which results from previously prepared strategies for the economic, social and environmental development of the region. However there were and still are barriers, which limit the opportunities to solve all the regional problems. In the opinion of the regional authorities from Warمیńsko-Mazurskie region, the centralized programming of Cohesion Policy at EU level may be a barrier to the effective use of the financial resources for further development. An excessive number of limits and boundary conditions significantly hinder the use of the support measures for the implementation of Regional Policy and of Cohesion Policy. **More**

flexibility is claimed by them for a good adjustment of regional Operational Programmes to the real needs of their regions.

Table 3.5. Operational Programme's adequacy in solving the main regional issues in solving the main regional issues in the perception of experts from the Convergence case study regions

Hierarchy of regional needs	Convergence regions				
	Extremadura	Calabria	Dolnośląskie	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Sud Est
Primary order	2.00	0.33	1.40	1.00	2.00
Secondary order	1.33	0.50	0.33	1.00	1.50
Tertiary order	1.50	-	-	1.00	1.00

Note: average score in the interval range 0-2, where 0 = low adequacy and 2 = high adequacy

Source: PERCEIVE Focus group and in-depth interviews

In the perception of practitioners from **Calabria region**, there is a **low adequacy level** between the biggest regional problems and the projects implemented through the regional operational programmes (table 3.5). This inadequacy is not linked to the lack of coherence between the needs and the objectives of the regional programmes, but it is rather related to the **management of OPs implementation process**. The Calabria representatives said that the administrative issues faced during the implementation phase affected the OPs' effectiveness in responding to the aforementioned issues due to: delays in Start-up phase and delays in implementation. These administrative barriers added to the economic crisis effects: diminution of the national co-funding and the difficulties of SMEs in accessing credit finance, which significantly reduced the chances of the programme to play an incisive role.

In the practitioners' perceptions from the three case study **competitiveness regions** on the adequacy of the Operational Programmes to the regional needs, two points of view can be noticed: that of the representatives from the continental regions (who speak about a significant adequacy level) and that of the practitioners from **Essex**, the latter being rather a **criticism concerning the matching between the real regional needs and the results generated by OP implementation** (table 3.6).

Table 3.6. Operational Programme's adequacy in solving the main regional issues in the perception of experts from Competitiveness case study regions

Hierarchy of regional needs	Competitiveness region		
	Emilia-Romagna	Norra Mellansverige	Essex
Primary order	2.00	1.25	0.33
Secondary order	1.00	0.00	1.33
Tertiary order	1.00	0.00	1.50

Note: average score in the interval range 0-2, where 0 = low adequacy and 2 = high adequacy

Source: PERCEIVE Focus group and in-depth interviews

The focus group participants from **Emilia-Romagna** region showed a general agreement on the **programmes' coherence and consistency with the local context**, with a positive appreciation of the **flexibility and adaptability of the priorities and actions of OPs** to the changing regional circumstances (2008 economic crisis and 2012 earthquakes). These two major shocks generated newly-emerged needs and issues as unemployment and earthquake disruptions.

As a reaction to increased unemployment during the crises, the recalibration of the ESF OPs priorities was agreed. Instead of increasing the region's human capital, the efforts went towards helping people who were left out of the job market, by means of an active labour market policy aimed at promoting workers' requalification. On the other side, ERDF OPs usage in sustaining the demand from the private sector was emphasized, while its role in accelerating longer-term supply-side processes by supporting a regional research and innovation system was strengthened.

As a reaction to the consequences of the 2012 earthquake that hit one of the region's most industrial and productive areas, both programmes (ERDF and ESF OPs) were amended with the aim to face the immediate consequences of disruption (relocation of businesses, schools opening, etc.) and prevent the economic system from losing competitiveness in the long run.

The focus group participants also showed general appreciation with regard to the **innovation-spurring interventions**: *"... through the investments of the ERDF the region nonetheless built the innovation system of Emilia-Romagna which is recognised as an important, effective, structured system that also gave continuity over time to investments, so it enabled the consolidation of a very well defined supply system, industrial research, involvement in universities."* (focus group participant from Emilia-Romagna region).

The OPs adequacy in fighting the **post-crisis social exclusion** (consisting of youth unemployment) can be rated as **partial**, like in the case of **regional imbalances**. For the second problem, the main

tool to ensure a proper distribution of resources was the OPs monitoring but this imbalance is still persistent.

In the case of **Norra Mellansverige** region, the participants in the focus group consider that for the first order problems their region is facing, OP had a **high adequacy level**: *"I would agree, if we look back, there is an effect of the funds on the goals of the region I think, but not in all cases of each of the goals. The programme helped also to increase diversity in the local labour market, which was also a goal – not just to strengthen existing employment areas, but to diversify them"* (Norra Mellansverige focus group participant).

In the case of **Essex**, it seems that there is a consensus in the focus group participants' perception with regard to the effectiveness of operational programs in counteracting regional problems. According to this perception, the Operational Programme 2007-2013 **did not necessarily respond to the regional issues**. This perception is linked to the fact that the problems that are considered important by practitioners (large contract size - from CP fund - limiting bidder competition, auditing of the projects, small business exclusion) are generated by the very mechanisms and practical OP implementation modality at the level of the region.

The overarching problem of the 2007-2013 programme in the Essex region appeared to be limitations to those able and willing to bid for the funding. These limitations took the form of a number of inter-related issues. Firstly, the large size of contracts and the high level of auditing created a situation where it was perceived that only larger organizations, and those with experience, were able to apply for the programme. Furthermore, by delivering operations at a wider regional level, regional divisions and a disparity between delivery within urban and rural areas were allowed to prosper. In summary, there was a concentration of output in the *"same old areas"*. Secondly, the focus on a 'low carbon economy' initially deterred many potential bidders. Thirdly, there was a perception that this type of funding was not suitable for small businesses to bid for, due to a number of issues including risk, match funding, bureaucracy, auditing, and developing case law.

As of the adequacy of regional Cohesion Policy to respond to the perceived regional issues, problems and needs in **Burgenland**, the overall picture emerging from interactions with regional experts is a positive one. Most respondents agreed that the action and policy of the EU have been **partially adequate on R&D and infrastructure** issues. To a lesser extent, *all other issues were also identified as somehow being addressed by the EU policy*. A more **critical judgment** about policy adequacy has seldom emerged (two respondents mentioned this aspect during the interviews) and only in relation

to **social dumping** and **education** problems. The last two problems belong to the group of secondary or tertiary order regional needs, in the practitioners' perception, which means that their poorer addressability through the Cohesion Policy is not perceived as a fact that creates great difficulties in regional development (table 3.7).

Table 3.7. Operational Programme's adequacy in solving the main regional issues in the perception of experts from the Convergence-phasing out case study region

Hierarchy of regional needs	Burgenland
Primary order	1.5
Secondary order	1.0
Tertiary order	0.5

Note: average score in the interval range 0-2, where 0 = low adequacy and 2 = high adequacy
 Source: PERCEIVE Focus group and in-depth interviews

Regarding the OP adequacy to the **Wage/social dumping** Burgenland problem, one respondent declared that the regional policy would, **hypothetically, be helpful** in this: *"If the ESF accounts not only for Burgenland labour, but for everyone, and everyone is equal, and workers from Slovakia or Hungary can be supported, then this is in the European Union's interest ..."*. So, in essence, **the call is for the European regional policy to be more internationally integrated and harmonized in its instruments and effects**. For **education and qualification problems**, practitioners' perception is that **some results have been achieved** through EU financing in education programmes. The part where lower adequacy is perceived is related to the fact that the programmes in education were addressed only to a lesser extent to the rural areas and to the more technically advanced regions.

For the first order problems (North-South divide in terms of infrastructure and research - R&D), mentioned by the practitioners from Burgenland, there is a strong agreement in the appreciation that the regional policy has been effective in addressing them to some extent, some of the interviewees considering that a high adequacy level was reached. As regards the infrastructure deficit in the southern part of the region, the respondents recognize that during the implementation of programme 2007-2013, the public administration tried to reduce the disparities between North and South by the partitioning of funds, whereby roughly 70% went to the South and 30% to the North. In respondents' perception, this leverage was apparently not enough, so it did not work. As regards the **research**, there is an agreement among the respondents concerning the **good accomplishments** of the EU policy as of creating the infrastructures (i.e. technology centres and technical/professional school). In this context, the respondents recognize the important

contribution of EU funding in creating functional links between universities – as technological centres and enterprises, mainly in connection with development of renewable energy. One of the respondents pointed out in this respect: *“all these people in the Universities of Applied Sciences have a job, and if we have companies, if we have jobs, then companies will move [close] to these technology centres because they need engineers from secondary technical schools and Universities of Applied Sciences and that is why funding these institutions is essential, also from a EU perspective”*.

As of **tourism**, there has been high agreement among respondents from Burgenland on the **high adequacy** of policy to address local issues. In fact, the general perception from the interviews is that tourism has received lots of funding and Burgenland has almost reached what it could reach. They think that through tourism specialization, Burgenland is securing the future to the region with a high specialization in quality of life, leisure, nature and everything connected with it.

4. Comparative analysis on citizens' and experts' perceptions

This chapter intends to compare the citizens' and practitioners' views on Cohesion Policy, by combining and integrating information from the field survey on citizens in the nine case study regions and from the qualitative study undertaken with the participation of Cohesion Policy practitioners in PERCEIVE Focus Groups. The comparative study analyzes the perception of two aspects by the two categories of regional actors: regional needs considered relevant, followed by an assessment of the EU policy' effectiveness in responding to the revealed issues.

4.1. Comparative analysis on perceptions of regional problems

The comparative analysis describes for each region category (competitiveness, convergence or phasing out) another perception model and perceptive differences/similarities useful for understanding the present and foreseen impact of Cohesion Policy.

In the category **competitiveness regions** there are significant similarities between the statistical profile of the perception of regional problems at the level of the citizens (obtained from the survey) and the profile of the perception of regional problems at the level of Cohesion Policy practitioners, obtained from the regional qualitative studies through the Focus group (table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Areas of perceptive similarity with regard to the biggest regional problems between citizens and practitioners from competitiveness regions

Biggest regional problems, according to survey	Regions		
	Emilia-Romagna	Norra Mellansverige	Essex
<i>Unemployment</i>	unemployment youth unemployment	Unemployment	(no match)
<i>Environmental concerns</i>	(no match)	(no match)	low carbon economy
<i>Poor wages/poverty</i>	social exclusion	social inclusion	(no match)

The perceptive similarities can be deciphered depending on the demo-social dimensions of the participants in the survey. Thus, the main problem, perceived as regional need, *unemployment*, appears particularly in the case of women. In total respondents from competitiveness regions,

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

40.2% of women perceived unemployment as a regional problem. At the same time, it is worth mentioning the relevant shares of women respondents from Emilia-Romagna and Norra Mellansverige, who specified unemployment as a major problem that their region had to face in the last years (55.78% and 46.77% respectively).

The young and adult workforce, directly affected, evaluate this problem assigning it a significant importance. At the level of the competitiveness region category, in total age groups 18-29 years and 30-49 years, the shares are high, 39.68% and 40.21% respectively. The Emilia-Romagna region represents a particular case, because the weighted values of respondents from the age groups with the highest activity rate – 18-29 years and 30-49 years – who perceive unemployment as the main regional problem in the last years are very high, i.e. 38.67% and 58.71% respectively.

There is a partial overlapping of the perception generated by the two approaches, i.e. quantitative and qualitative, to the problem of *corruption & poor governance*. The weighted values resulting from the quantitative research indicate a problem: 7.6% of total participants in the survey from the competitiveness regions considered it a problem, mainly the inhabitants of the region Emilia-Romagna, 10.8%. A relevant share of respondents who marked this as the main regional problem in the last years was also found in the region Essex (7.4%), while in the region Norra Mellansverige, the weighted value is low (4.3%). On the other side, the qualitative study on the information collected through the Focus group from Cohesion Policy practitioners in the competitiveness regions, deepens this regional need. The regional experts particularly mentioned the consequences of a *poor governance* (table 4.2).

Table 4.2. *Corruption and poor governance* problem – area of partially corroborated perceptions

Survey categories	Regions		
	Emilia-Romagna	Norra Mellansverige	Essex
<i>Corruption and poor governance</i>	Regional disparities	Public awareness/information to relevant group Media outreach	Large contract size limiting bidder competition Auditing Small business exclusion Post programme evaluation Communication Regional divisions and grievances, and urban/rural Parasitic effect

It is interesting to analyze the set of problems that are not perceived similarly, by one of the two categories: citizens and practitioners. A discrepancy has been already noticed within the category *corruption & poor governance*, namely: practitioners slipping into the vast issue of consequences stemming from poor governance and mentioning them in detail (consequences, negative results of a poor governance in implementing EU programmes).

Overall, in the ***competitiveness regions***, the regional problems that are considered pressing problems by part of citizens, but which are not perceived so by practitioners, in the qualitative studies, are the following:

- *poor education* – 7.96% of the participants in the survey from the competitiveness regions think that poor education was a problem of their region in the last years. The profile of respondents who considered that *poor education* as the main regional problem is the following: women are much more sensitive to this vital need (mainly those from Essex and Norra Mellansverige), with an appropriate educational level elementary or high secondary (without graduating these courses) who belong to the age group 18-29 years (mainly from Essex and Norra Mellansverige).
- *poor infrastructure & transportation* – 19.2% of the participants in the survey from competitiveness regions think that the weak development of regional infrastructures is the big problem their region is facing, mainly in the perception of men (Essex), with an educational level corresponding to high (secondary) school graduates and aged 50-64 years (for all regions).

The differences of perception of the regional problems are so clear because, at practitioners' level, they represent outdated problems, their pragmatic interest shifting to other programmatic EU objectives. At the level of citizens instead, it is desired to completely solve the problems related to education and regional disparities in infrastructure development. At the level of citizens, there is a perception that these problems still persist in their regions and they want these problems to be addressed in the next programming period as well, until they are completely eradicated.

Consequently, a sustained effort for solving the real problems perceived by citizens is needed, as well as communication strategies specific to the large public groups.

At the level of ***convergence phasing out region*** another type of perception can be noticed, another way of assessing the regional needs, from the perspective of the two groups of investigated actors: citizens and practitioners.

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

The perception of regional problems overlaps, in the case of most needs identified at the level of large public and practitioners from the region Burgenland (table 4.3). The qualitative study, based on in-depth interviews with relevant regional Cohesion Policy experts, managed to provide a deeper insight into the sphere of problems:

- In the case of *poor education* problem, the qualitative analysis revealed the sub-problems, their depth, their current situation and the consequences stemming from these, the experts bringing to discussion the professional training, qualification of workforce issue.
- In the case of *poor infrastructure & transportation* problem, the discussions with the regional experts have detailed this issue, pointing to the spatial disparities existing at the region's level with regard to the development of regional infrastructures that have a negative impact on the general development of the region.
- Referring to the *environmental concerns* problem, the qualitative study highlighted a solution perceived by practitioners – *Renewable energy* – in which EU invests significant finance that the region can benefit from.
- In the case of *poor wages/poverty* problem, the qualitative analysis has deepened and completed the perception of citizens, detailing a particular aspect of this problem: *social dumping*.

Table 4.3. Areas of perceptive similarity with regard to the biggest regional problems between citizens and practitioners from convergence phasing out region

Biggest regional problem according to survey	Regional issues in experts' perceptions from Burgenland region
<i>Poor education</i>	Education/qualification
<i>Poor infrastructure & transportation</i>	North-South disparities infrastructure
<i>Corruption and poor governance</i>	(no match)
<i>Unemployment</i>	(no match)
<i>Environmental concerns</i>	Renewable energy
<i>Poor wages/poverty</i>	Wage/social dumping
<i>(other)</i>	Research Tourism

At the level of this region, there is a similarity of perceptions between citizens and practitioners, the majority of problems specified by the large public being detailed and completed by practitioners. This similarity of perceptions is of pragmatic type, at the level of practitioner group the

consequences and factors that can diminish or elude regional problems are specified and explained. This type of similarity in perceptions can explain how the European cohesion objectives can match the regional interests and expectations.

Yet two relevant discrepancies also emerge, in the perception of *unemployment* and *corruption and poor governance* problems. These problems are considered major problems by citizens in a proportion of 38.7% and 10.7% respectively. These two problems are not perceived by practitioners as relevant problems at regional level. The difference in perception indicates the relative cleavage / gap between Cohesion Policy programmatic objectives and the expectations of those to whom these objectives are addressed. The statistical profile of the participants in the survey from the region Burgenland who considered that *unemployment* is the biggest problem in the region is the following: women (44.2%); adults (42.9% are aged 50-64 years); with medium educational level (42.9% are high secondary school graduates). The perception of the problem *corruption and poor governance* as one of the relevant regional needs is mainly noticed in men, subjects aged from 50 to 65 years, who graduated from college, university or other third-level institution.

Consequently, for this type of regions, public consultation is required, in order to have a desired convergence between the political programmatic objectives and the communication strategies on the one hand, and the real citizens' needs on the other hand. At the same time, as regards communication, it is necessary to consider the formulation of messages focused on different groups, depending on predictive variables such as gender, age, education. The existence of a profile of citizens (age, gender, education, etc.) who considered that one particular problem was the biggest in their region makes it possible to formulate viable strategies for communicating with these citizens the results of Cohesion Policy targeting the respective problem. On the other hand, the statistical scientific analysis should influence the reformulation of Cohesion Policy objectives to respond to the regional problems.

The comparative analysis for the five ***convergence regions*** included in the PERCEIVE sample permitted the identification of main problems at the level of regional actors (citizens and practitioners), as well as intersecting the perceptions of regional needs. This analysis revealed the similarity of perceptions of the two groups of investigated actors only in the case of the problem *poor infrastructure & transportation* (table 4.4). Thus, in all the case study regions, this problem is perceived by citizens and it is deepened by practitioners, who draw the attention on aspects like

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

accessibility and development of different types of regional infrastructures (road, social, tourism, fisheries). Out of total survey respondents in the five convergence regions, 13.2% consider *infrastructure* as the main regional problem; this problem is signaled out in all regions. The subjects who perceived it as a regional need are mainly the following: young people (18- 29 years) at the level of the entire sample; mainly residents of the regions Calabria, Dolnośląskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Extremadura; persons with a high educational level – post-graduate degree (mainly in the regions Sud Est, Dolnośląskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Extremadura); no gender difference in this perception among the survey respondents.

Table 4.4. Areas of perceptive similarity with regard to the biggest regional problems between citizens and practitioners from convergence regions

Survey categories	Region				
	Extremadura	Calabria	Dolnośląskie	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Sud Est
<i>Poor education</i>	Education	(no match)	Low mobility of low qualified workers	(no match)	(no match)
<i>Poor infrastructure & transportation</i>	Infrastructures accessibility	Infrastructure deficit	Low quality of infrastructure including tourism infrastructure	Weak transport and tourism infrastructure Weak social infrastructure-not adjusted to the structures regional society	Technical and transport (road, urban, tourism, pisciculture) infrastructure Social infrastructure (healthcare, education)
<i>Corruption and poor governance</i>	(no match)	Weak governance	High intraregional economic and social diversification	The need of revitalization of urban areas	Bureaucracy
<i>Unemployment</i>	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment	(no match)	(no match)
<i>Environmental concerns</i>	(no match)	(no match)	Pollution of the environmental, especially air pollution	Insufficient environmental protection	(no match)
<i>Poor wages/poverty</i>	Social issues Sectorial problems	Social exclusion	Low living standards of population	(no match)	Social problems (poverty, rroma integration, unemployment, poor neighborhoods)

The most important problem identified by most citizens in the quantitative study is *unemployment* (34.7%), reaching very high values in the regions Extremadura and Calabria (58.4% and 58.7% respectively). In the regions Extremadura and Calabria, the profile of those who considered that unemployment is the most important problem is the following: women (in total respondents who

gave this answer in the region, 61.8% are women, while in total respondents from Calabria – 65.9%); with low educational level (80.2% of the respondents from Calabria and 62.4% in Extremadura). In general, the unemployment problem is signaled out mostly by elderly people (65 years and over) in Calabria, (who represent 67.7% of the region's citizens who declared that unemployment is the main regional problem) and by adult persons in Extremadura (65.7 % of respondents are aged 50 – 64 years).

The data show that there is a similarity of perceptions – identified in the quantitative study (at the level of citizens) and qualitative study (at the level of experts) – in the case of the two previously mentioned regions. This similarity in perceptions is not verified in the case of the region Warmińsko-Mazurskie, where the share of citizens who declare *unemployment* as the biggest regional problem is 37.0% and it is not completed by a similar perception of the regional importance of this problem at the level of practitioners. The categories of women citizens, of subjects aged 50 - 64 years and of those with low educational level are the most sensitive to the regional unemployment phenomenon.

The same type of partial similarity in perceptions is also met in the case of *poor wages/poverty* problem. At the level of the survey sample for all convergence regions, the share of respondents who signaled out this problem as relevant at regional level is quite significant, i.e. 22.1%. The inter-regional variations of this share identify significant perceptions of this regional need, ranging from maximum 33.3% (for the region Warmińsko-Mazurskie) to 17.9% (Extremadura), while in the perception of citizens from Calabria this problem appears important only for 3.9% of respondents. Although noticeable as a problem in citizens' perception, *poor wages / poverty* has no correspondence in the perception of regional experts who participated in the qualitative study from the region Warmińsko-Mazurskie. In general, at the level of this region, men, persons with low educational level and the adult work force were strongly aware of the problem *poor wages/poverty*.

Another important problem in the convergence regions, perceived as an acute problem at regional level by a significant share of citizens is *corruption and poor governance*: 18.6 % of citizens in the whole sample of convergence regions consider that this is the biggest problem their region has been facing in the last five years. Sud Est region stands out with an excessively high share, 39.5%, while the other regions oscillates around 9.1% (Extremadura) and 18.1% (Calabria).

Environmental concerns do not seem to be perceived as major regional problem by citizens from convergence regions, as only 5.4% of survey respondents consider that this is a critical problem. An exception is the Dolnośląskie region, where 11.7% of citizens perceive that this is the most important problem their region had to face in the last years. There is similarity between citizens and practitioners in the perception of this need at the level of the above-mentioned region, the latter providing additional clarifications on the nature of the respective problem.

The category Convergence regions, is, by its structure, one of the most complex category. The perceptions generated by citizens (during the survey) and practitioners (participants in in-depth interviews and / or focus group) are different in terms of statistical relevance and depth / amplitude, but it is clear that, in reality, a discrepancy exists between the needs perceived by citizens and the objectives, measures and concrete actions of Cohesion Policy.

From methodological perspective, the two types of perceptions – by citizens, as beneficiaries of European projects, on one hand, and by practitioners in the implementation of European programmes and projects, on the other hand – were corroborated (triangulated). Thus, a holistic, integrative picture was obtained on the perception of the big problems, constructed according to the categories of regional issues pre-defined in the PERCEIVE Survey.

A significant selectivity degree is noticed at the level of important regional problems, based on the perceptive similarities areas. For instance, for the ***competitiveness regions***, similar perceptions on the existence of three problems in the investigated regions were noticed: *unemployment*, *environmental concerns* and *poor wages/poverty* (table 4.5). These are the problems for which the qualitative study deepens, complements and supports the survey specific data.

In the case of problems for which the perceptions are partially corroborated between the two categories of actors, the practitioners recognize the existence of problem at regional level, yet they refer only to certain particular aspects of the problem. For instance, in the case of problem defined by the survey as *poor infrastructure & transportation*, practitioners refer only to the existence of certain regional problems related to poor infrastructure. The group of partially corroborated perceptions also includes the situations when, although the problem is present both in the practitioners' discourse and in citizens' perception, the former emphasizes only the consequences resulting from non-solving the problem. For instance, in the case of problem defined as *poor*

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

governance in the survey, the discourse of experts reveals the specific qualitative categories: *small business exclusion, regional divisions and grievances and urban/rural*.

Table 4.5. Perceptive similarities at regional level, according to the pre-established categories of needs (survey categories)

Survey categories	Competitiveness region			Convergence-phasing out region			Convergence region		
	Similar perception	Partial perception	Singular perception	Similar perception	Partial perception	Singular perception	Similar perception	Partial perception	Singular perception
<i>Poor education</i>			x	X				x	
<i>Poor infrastructure & transportation</i>			x	X			x		
<i>Corruption & poor governance</i>		X				x		x	
<i>Unemployment</i>	X					x		x	
<i>Environmental concerns</i>	X			X				x	
<i>Poor wages/poverty</i>	X			X				x	
<i>(other)</i>									

For the ***convergence phasing out region***, similar perceptions exist between citizens and experts for four out of the seven problems pre-defined in the survey: *poor education, poor infrastructure & transportation, environmental concerns and poor wages/poverty*.

In the case of ***convergence regions***, *poor infrastructure & transportation* is the only problem for which a high similarity exists between the citizens' and Cohesion Policy experts' perceptions at the level of the case study regions. For all the other problems from the pre-defined list of the survey, a partially corroborated perception was noticed between the two groups of investigated regional actors, practitioners placing these problems in a different order of regional priorities than citizens.

The perceptive similarity may also indicate the need to focus, in the first place, on solving those problems that exist in the perception of both citizens and practitioners.

In general, the categories of problems identified by the participants in the qualitative study are of contextual type and can be grouped into two big groups that target: regional resilience to particular situations and support to development processes by inhibiting the negative situations. The scheme of categories of regional problems resulting from the interaction with practitioners during the qualitative study is the following:

Competitiveness regions

- resilience: *post-earthquake recovery, economic crisis* (Emilia-Romagna);
- development / modernization: *innovation system* (Emilia-Romagna); *gender equality* (Norra Mellansverige).

Convergence phasing out region

- development / modernization: *R&D, tourism* (Burgenland).

Convergence regions

- resilience: *great recession* (Extremadura), *outflow of qualified workers – competition from neighboring countries* (Dolnośląskie);
- development / modernization: *R&D* (Extremadura); *business environment (capitalization, development)* (Sud Est); *low business innovativeness* (Dolnośląskie); *low attractiveness for large business, low entrepreneurship of population, low innovation* (Warmińsko-Mazurskie); *weak productive sector* (Calabria).

It is obvious that the discrepancy between the perceptions by the two actors: citizens, on one hand, and practitioners, on the other hand, is caused by the dysfunctionalities in Cohesion Policy implementation in all categories of regions, especially in the convergence one. The actions and measures specific to this type of European policy should be better anchored in the regional specificity, taking into consideration the values and expectations of each region. The homogenization of problems is socially counterproductive.

The study on regional problems, as these are perceived by citizens, also opened a new perspective: there are sensitive, vulnerable groups, who perceive the problems differently, and have a different awareness level in relation to their programmatic solution. Depending on the characteristics of these groups, it is necessary to reshape the European discourse and communication channels, so that each category of citizens gets aware of what it is intended and in particular of what has been done so far through the economic-social cohesion programmes. Communication homogenization is, in its turn, counterproductive.

4.2. Comparative analysis on effectiveness of Cohesion Policy in answering to the regional issues and solving these

The comparative analysis of the citizens' and experts' perception of the ability of Cohesion Policy to respond to the regional needs was synthesized on the basis of results obtained from the quantitative survey (for the perception by the citizens) and from the qualitative survey with Cohesion Policy practitioners, both referring to the 9 case study regions that were selected. The comparative analysis has in view those regional problems for which perceptive similarities between citizens and experts have been identified, as they were presented in the previous sub-chapter.

In order to evaluate the citizens' perception, the answer to the question Q5a from the quantitative survey was considered: *How effective do you think the following institutions will be at dealing with the biggest problem in your region?* (the three pre-defined answers used in the survey were: *very effective, somewhat effective, not so effective*), with special reference to the EU, as a promoter of Cohesion Policy. In the decision to take into consideration this variable from the survey, it was considered that citizens' perception on the effectiveness of EU institutions is generally based on their previous (direct or indirect) experiences with the EU programmes and policies on which their point of view on EU effectiveness was based. For the experts' perception, we took into consideration the answers provided by the participants to the regional Focus groups on the adequacy of Operational Programmes in dealing with regional problems (three-step scale was used for the experts' answers: *high adequacy, partial adequacy, low adequacy*).

The pairs of answers, by citizens and regional experts, with regard to the effectiveness of EU and its Cohesion Policy in dealing with regional problems, are synthesized in the tables below, for each category of region.

As it results from the comparative analysis, it seems that at the level of the three **competitiveness regions** a perceptive similarity exists in relation to the investigated issue. For the problems identified by both categories of regional actors as important for their region, these agree on a mid-level assessment of the effectiveness of Community interventions. Thus, the experts consider that the Operational Programmes were only partially adequate for solving these problems, and the perception of a significant part of citizens is that EU can be only "somewhat effective" in dealing with them (table 4.6).

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

Table 4.6. Areas of perceptive similarities with regard to Cohesion Policy effectiveness between the citizens and experts from the competitiveness case study regions

Survey categories	Regions					
	Emilia-Romagna		Norra Mellansverige		Essex	
	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)
<i>Unemployment</i>	Very -3.1% Somewhat - 25.9%	Unemployment (high) Youth unemployment (partial)	Very -2.8% Somewhat - 35.9%	Unemployment (partial)	(no match)	
<i>Environmental concerns</i>	(no match)		(no match)		Very -17.4% Somewhat - 30.4%	Low carbon economy (partial)
<i>Poor wages/poverty</i>	Very -10.8% Somewhat - 24.3%	Social exclusion (partial)	Very -3.6% Somewhat - 42.9%	Social inclusion (partial)	(no match)	

In the case of Burgenland, in general, the citizens' and experts' perceptions converge on problems related to social issues: *poor education* and *poor wages/poverty*. For these two regional problems, the experts' perception, according to which OPs were only partially adequate, is convergent with the citizens' perception, about 60% of citizens considering that the European institutions are "not so effective" in getting engaged in their solving (table 4.7).

Significant perceptive similarity can be noticed for the *infrastructure-related* regional problems. Thus, the perception of experts is that the OPs are only partially adequate for solving these problems. On the other part, 52% of citizens have a high degree of mistrust in the EU's contribution to addressing this regional problem.

Table 4.7. Areas of perceptive similarities with regard to Cohesion Policy effectiveness between the citizens and experts from the phasing out case study region

Survey categories	Burgenland region	
	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)
<i>Poor education</i>	Very - 19.4% Somewhat -22.2%	Education/qualification (low)
<i>Poor infrastructure & transportation</i>	Very - 13.3% Somewhat - 34.7%	North-South disparities infrastructure (partial)
<i>Environmental concerns</i>	Very - 9.9% Somewhat - 25.7%	Renewable energy (partial)
<i>Poor wages/poverty</i>	Very - 10.8% Somewhat - 24.3%	Wage/social dumping (low)
<i>(other)</i>	Very - 11.8% Somewhat - 30.9%	Research (partial) Tourism (high)

D. 4.5: Report on the comparative analysis of experts' and citizens' perceptions and views

At the level of **convergence regions**, the existence of a wide perceptive diversity can be noticed with regard to the ability of EU and its Cohesion Policy to solve the regional problems (table 4.8).

Table 4.8. Areas of perceptive similarities with regard to Cohesion Policy effectiveness between the citizens and experts from the convergence case study regions

Survey categories	Region									
	Extremadura		Calabria		Dolnośląskie		Warmińsko-Mazurskie		Sud Est	
	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)	Citizens perception on EU effectiveness (%)	Experts perception on adequacy of CP (evaluation scale)
Poor education	Very - 29.4% Somewhat - 35.3%	Education (high)	(no match)		Very-13.0% Somewhat - 17.4%	Low mobility of low qualified workers (low)	(no match)		(no match)	
Poor infrastructure & transportation	Very -37.0% Somewhat - 44.4%	Infrastructure (partial) Accessibility (high)	Very-2.8% Somewhat - 19.7%	Infrastructure deficit (partial)	Very-6.7% Somewhat - 64.8%	Low quality of infrastructure including tourism infrastructure (partial)	Very-18.9% Somewhat - 56.8%	Weak transport and tourism infrastructure (high) Weak social infrastructure-not adjusted to the structures regional society (partial)	Very-51.6% Somewhat - 38.5%	Technical and transport (road, urban, tourism, piscicultural) infrastructure (high) Social infrastructure (healthcare, education) (high)
Corruption and poor governance	(no match)		Very-2.1% Somewhat - 18.6%	Weak governance (partial)	Very-2.9% Somewhat - 32.4%	High intraregional economic and social diversification (low)	Very-2.0% Somewhat - 28.0%	The need of revitalization of urban areas (partial)	Very-38.1% Somewhat - 49.5%	Bureaucracy (partial)
Unemployment	Very-19.0% Somewhat - 56.3%	Employment (high)	Very-5.7% Somewhat - 16.6%	Unemployment (low)	Very-9.2% Somewhat - 40.2%	Unemployment (high)	(no match)		(no match)	
Environmental concerns	(no match)		(no match)		Very-7.4% Somewhat - 54.4%	Pollution of the environmental, especially air pollution (partial)	Very-7.7% Somewhat - 38.5%	Insufficient environmental protection (low)	(no match)	
Poor wages/poverty	Very-19.4% Somewhat - 47.3%	Social issues (2) Sectorial problems (high)	Very-0.0% Somewhat - 14.3%	Social exclusion (low)	Very-2.6% Somewhat - 45.0%	Low living standards of population (partial)	(no match)		Very-33.5% Somewhat - 54.4%	Social problems (poverty, rroma integration, unemployment, poor neighborhoods) (partial)

In this group of regions there are both positive and negative perceptive similarities between citizens and practitioners. Thus, **a convergent negative perception** can be noticed between the two groups of investigated regional actors in the region **Calabria**; in this region, for the problems considered important at regional level by both categories of respondents, a low confidence level exists in the EU ability to deal with this problem, in both categories of respondents. The **Sud Est** region is at the other extreme, where most citizens and experts **agree** on the fact that EU, through

the **Cohesion Policy, can significantly contribute to reducing regional problems** related to infrastructure deficiency.

On the other hand, there are **perceptive divergences** between the two groups of regional actors in the case of the **region Extremadura**, where the group of interviewed experts declare that the OPs have a "high adequacy" to the regional problems. At the other extreme, citizens consider in a proportion of less than 30% that EU could be "very effective" in dealing with the majority of these issues.

In the two **regions from Poland**, the experts' and citizens' perceptions on the EU effectiveness seem to **converge towards a medium appreciation** on this issue (somewhat effective).

The perceptive discrepancies between Cohesion Policy practitioners and citizens – as direct beneficiaries of this policy, as regards the effectiveness of EU in dealing with regional issues can lead to targeting the regional policies (in the construction of which experts participate to a great extent) in directions that are not considered relevant by citizens. This can lead to a negative image of the EU. Better correlation of regional programmes with citizens' issues is needed.

This analysis clearly reveals the need to initiate better communication on the aims of the European policy and programmes and on their concrete outcomes, so that the perception of citizens can be improved.

5. Concluding remarks and recommendations

The comparative analysis of citizens' and Cohesion Policy experts' perceptions allows drawing some conclusions that represent starting points for improving the process of construction and implementation of Operational Programmes, as well as their communication mechanisms. The comparative study was based on the set of perceptions of the regional problems/needs, on the one part, and on Cohesion Policy impact assessment, on the other part. These perceptions were analysed both at the level of citizens, who are supposed to benefit from the European programmes and at the level of practitioners, who are involved in the design and implementation of these policies.

The *unemployment* concerns seem to *prevail in the perception of the main regional problems in both categories of respondents and for all the three categories of regions*. This topic tends to become dominant over the analysed time span (implementation of previous programming period of the EU) on the basis of the *effects of the 2008 economic crisis*, these effects being still felt in Europe today. At the same time, there is *a weak awareness of the existing links between education and professional training, on one hand, and the insertion capacity on the labour market and access to better remunerated jobs on the other hand*, mainly in the case of citizens and practitioners from the convergence regions. From the analysis of these data we can deduce that public communication should be targeted to increase awareness, both at the level of citizens and of experts in these regions, but not only, of the existing connection between such issues like: education – professional training – employment and poverty alleviation, so that all the regional actors can understand these connections and through this, understand the meaning of public interventions through the Cohesion Policy.

At the same time, the comparative study revealed the existence of certain *perceptive divergences between citizens and experts with regard to the hierarchy of regional needs*, other than unemployment. Thus, while experts consider the development of regional infrastructures as a first order need in most convergence regions, citizens consider this issue relevant only in a percentage of 7 – 18%. Similarly, at the level of competitiveness regions, poor infrastructure and transportation is the second regional problem considering the share of survey respondents who pointed out this

issue, yet practitioners report it as a regional problem only to a lesser extent or do not mention it at all. This divergence may lead to a negative perception of the effectiveness of public interventions through Operational Programmes at citizens' level, as it is the experts who generally participate in the design of the regional policy objectives. On the basis of these findings, *we consider that the public communication of Cohesion Policy can be targeted to highlighting the efforts made in solving the problems considered as mostly pressing by citizens, so that their perception of the effectiveness of public interventions should increase.*

At the same time, *citizens' consultation and greater involvement in the decision-making process regarding the EU intervention directions is necessary*, in order to reach the desired convergence between the programmatic objectives of Cohesion Policy and the citizens' real needs. With regard to communication, it is necessary to formulate messages focused on different groups, depending on predictive variables, such as gender, age and education. The profiling of each need/problem makes it possible to formulate viable communication strategies, as well as Cohesion Policy objectives to address them.

The fact that 10.7% of respondents from the competitiveness regions and other 11.4% from phasing out region considered that there is another problem more important for their region than the pre-defined problems that are the object of EU interventions through the Cohesion Policy, needs a thorough investigation with regard to the nature of these "other" regional problems. This investigation can lead to the identification of those (specific) regional problems that are not addressed by the regional policy, yet they are considered relevant by more than one-tenth of the citizens from these regions. *The clear identification of these "other problems" and their targeting in the near programming horizon through the Cohesion Policy could lead to the improvement of citizens' perception on the EU in these regions, where the lowest level of confidence in the ability of European institutions to effectively get involved in solving the regional problems is also noticed.*

A higher confidence level in the European institutions and in their ability to effectively intervene in solving the regional problems is manifested among the citizens who benefitted from EU-funded projects. In the light of this conclusion, in order to improve the public perception of the European institutions, a series of public communication actions would be necessary, to better highlight the practical benefits of EU funding in the daily life of European citizens, transmitted in a language adapted to the target audience and through the most adequate communication channels by each region and category of audience.

At the same time, for the most developed regions in the EU (competitiveness regions), whose citizens perceive only to a lesser extent the fact that they are beneficiaries of European projects and manifest a higher level of mistrust in the effectiveness of EU institutions, innovative communication measures are needed to increase citizens' awareness of the benefits brought about by the territorial cohesion of the entire EU space in their daily life.

From the analysis of Cohesion Policy practitioners' perception of Cohesion Policy effectiveness in addressing regional problems, we can draw a few recommendations for the exchange of experience between regions to help increase efficiency in implementing the Operational Programmes in the future.

Regional practices that can be used as models to follow

In the discussions with the practitioners from case study regions during the focus group, in many cases the idea emerged that the Operational Programmes are set for long periods of time, periods in which the circumstances in which the Operational Programmes are put into action may change substantially (emergence of economic crisis, of a severe natural disaster or technological changes, etc.), which leads to limiting the effects of these programmes from lack of adequacy between the programme actions and the new regional context. *What appears as a necessity is a greater flexibility of Operational Programmes during the implementation, so that the priorities and actions can be amended in order to tackle the newly-emerged needs and issues.*

In this regard, in the PERCEIVE case studies, a few regions were identified where the management authorities for the Operational Programmes succeeded in adjusting the measures and actions they managed for solving certain regional problems that were NOT initially foreseen, at the moment when the priorities of the Regional Operational Programme had been formulated, but which emerged during the implementation of the 7 years of the programming period. It is the case of the Emilia-Romagna region, whose example in amending the priorities and actions for both Operational Programmes (ESF and ERDF), to counteract the shocks generated by the economic crisis and earthquake at regional level, can be studied and used as example of good practice for Operational Programmes flexibilization in the future.

At the same time, the existence and persistence of certain discrepancies in the development of different areas within the same region were signalled out. The problem signalled out in this context is that *the most developed areas are also those most able to attract funds through the European*

programmes, to the detriment of less-developed areas. The introduction of certain mechanisms is needed to make Cohesion Policy create real cohesion and direct more funding to the less- developed areas, so speed up their development. During the focus groups it was shown that in certain regions a series of mechanisms were created and implemented meant to direct a more significant part of Operational Programmes funds to the less favoured areas of the region. It is the case of the region Emilia-Romagna where the regional management authorities tried to do this through a monitoring mechanism; this is also the case of Burgenland region, which applied a principle of regional distribution of funds by which 70% of funds for infrastructure were directed to the southern area that is less developed in this respect. We consider it opportune to investigate more thoroughly these models for directing the funds towards less developed areas within the same region and to multiply these examples of good practice among those responsible for implementing the Operational Programme because every region of Europe is confronted with the regional divide problem.

Practices that limit the access to EU funds

During the focus groups, a series of problems in Operational Programmes implementation were also signalled out, which generated negative consequences, limiting the access to European funding. One of these problems, signalled out by the experts from Essex, was the excessive *auditing of projects that generated a low interest from bidders (particularly among small businesses)*. This problem requires a more detailed investigation in order to establish an acceptable control level so as not to limit the access of potential beneficiaries to the European funds.

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