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**PERCEIVE**

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

# What influences citizens' perception and identification with the EU?

## Insights from early results of PERCEIVE Project

### Introduction

The second deliverable of Working package 2 of the PERCEIVE Project was issued in December 2017, authored by **Vicente Royuela** and **Enrique López-Bazo**, researchers of the **University of Barcelona**. The work starts by proposing a list of simple but direct questions: Why individuals **identify** with **Europe**? In the absence of direct personal experiences with the EU and with people of other member states, **how can the identification with the European project be developed**? Are **EU policies** amplifying citizens' exposure to the idea of the EU? Are citizens aware of the aims and **perceive the benefits of the Cohesion Policy**?

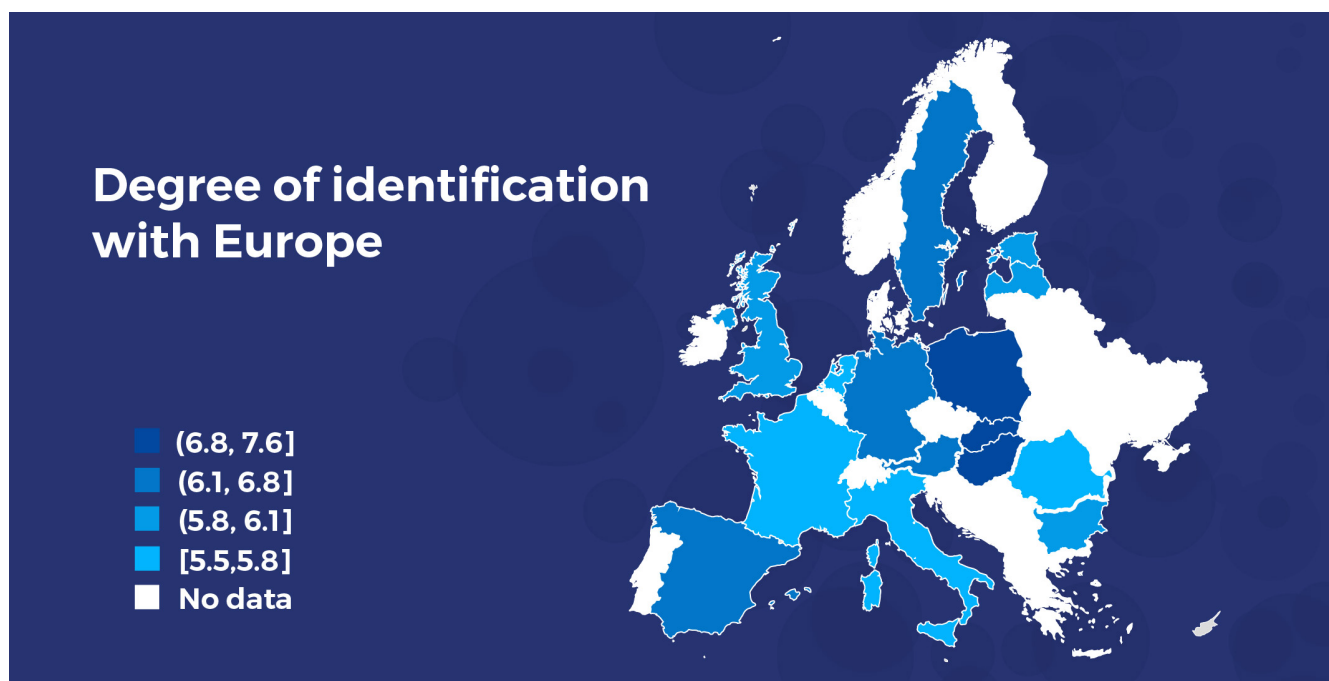
This report tries to shed some light to answer, at least partially, these questions by **assuming** in first place that for **most people** in Europe, their **experience with the EU** takes place in the **national political arena**. The Cohesion Policy is a clear example as it is one of the major EU policies, accounting for some 350 billion euros in the 2007-2013 programming period, which is managed **mostly locally**. As a consequence, the **citizens' perception** of European integration depends not only on **EU policies** but also on **how national, regional and local governments manage them**.

## Results Highlights

Given the wide list of objectives of this deliverable, we summarise here some of the main conclusions that can be derived from the results. The theoretical approach of the report is grounded on the modern study of **European identity**, based on **social constructivism** and assuming that social processes are strongly grounded on the construction of ideas: the **legitimacy** of the **EU** is assumed to depend on the **existence** of a **European identity**. Both individual and collective definitions of a European identity imply an evaluative episode balancing the **costs and benefits** of being part of the EU project, what can call for an evaluation of EU policies, such as the Cohesion Policy.

Both mechanisms through which citizens develop a collective identification and determinants that promote or hinder the European identity matter (Bergbauer, 2018). Among mechanisms, the literature reports **information-based** and **experience-based** mechanisms. The former depends on the exposure to messages and awareness of citizens to EU issues. The latter is mostly associated with personal contacts with other Europeans, experience with the repercussions of EU integration, historical experiences within the collective memory of every context, what calls for a key role of how the Cohesion Policy is implemented locally.

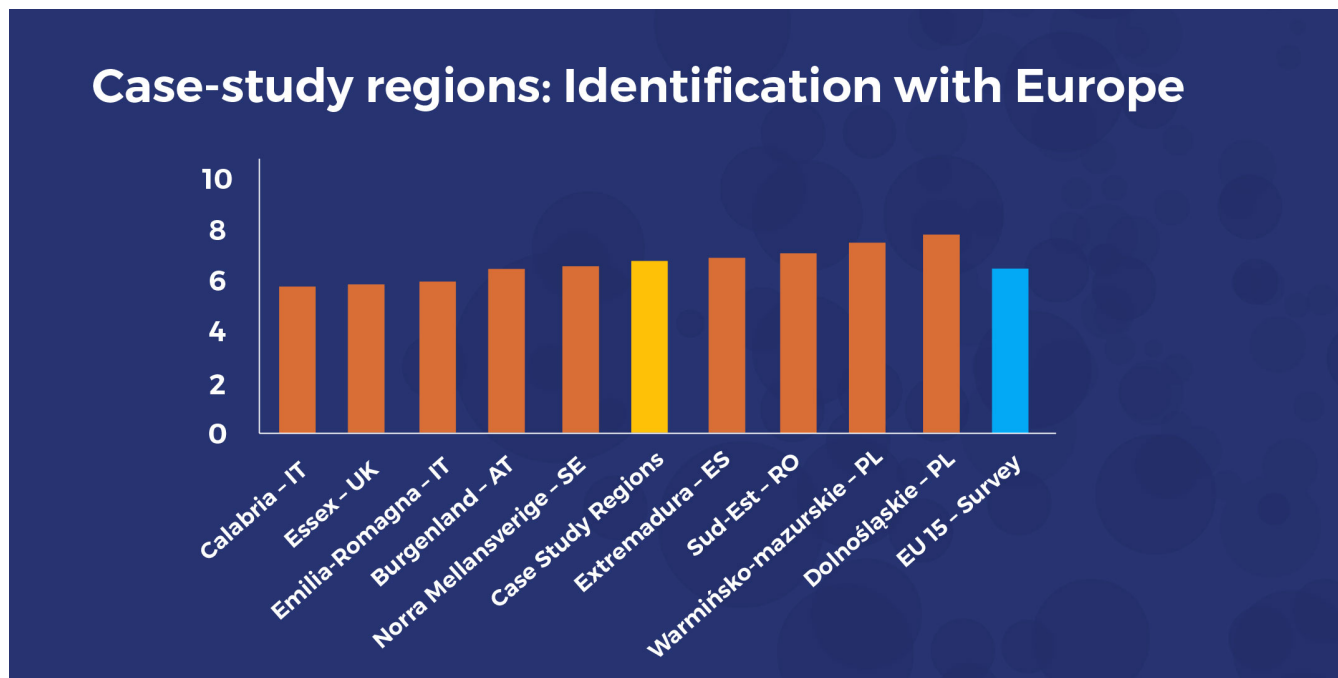
In fact, among the EU policies and institutions with a clear impact on the everyday life of citizens, the **Cohesion Policy** is a major example to analyse: it is designed to **solve specific regional needs**, represents about a third of the total EU budget, the request and management is developed mostly at the regional level, and over 80% of the budget of Cohesion Policy is allocated to less developed regions, implying a **redistribution effect over the EU**.



**The territorial dimension** is an important mechanism to develop the identification with Europe. Together with the regional specificities, the **rural-urban divide** strongly influences the experience-based mechanism, and how the **Cohesion Policy is perceived**. We expect strong rural-urban differences, among others, in terms of the ethno-cultural identification of every territory, the party system, the economic position within Europe and within every country, and the degree of international integration.

The spatial analysis developed in the report shows **no clear geographical pattern** in the amount of **citizens' identification with the EU project**. If something, identification could be higher in the centre of Europe and in some Eastern Member States. In contrast, the degree of identification seems to be lower in some Western core countries of the EU. Meanwhile, the differences in the degree of identification with the EU project are observed between the two Mediterranean countries under analysis, namely Spain and Italy.

As a whole, the **degree of the citizens' identification with the EU project** in the **Case Study regions** is **not** significantly **different** to that in the entire **Survey** sample. The **highest** degree of identification is observed in the Eastern Case Study regions, **Dolnośląskie, Warmińsko-mazurskie, and Sud Est**, and in the Spanish region of **Extremadura**. In contrast, identification with the EU project seems to be rather **low** in the two **Italian regions** and in **Essex. Burgenland** and **Norra Mellansverige** occupy **intermediate** positions.

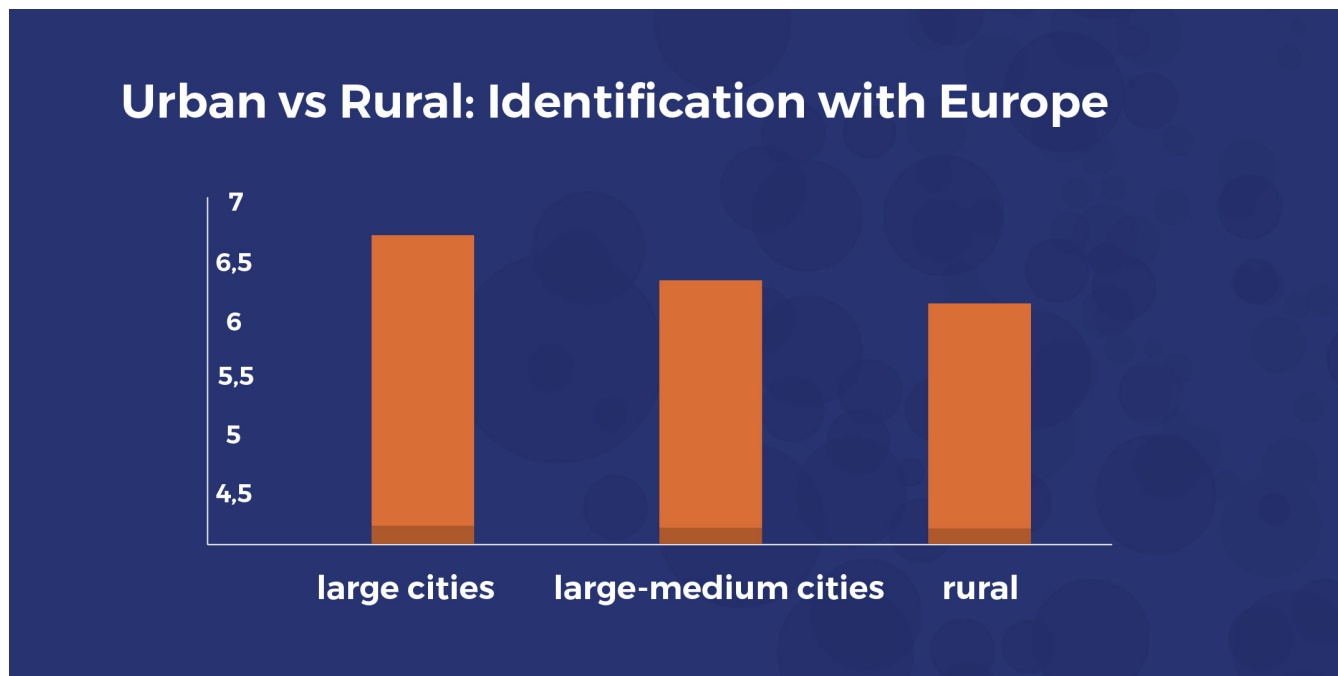


As for **awareness** of the **Cohesion Policy**, the most salient feature is that there is **not** a common **spatial pattern** for the different types of interventions. In contrast, **awareness** of **EU funded projects** in the region or area of the respondent seems to follow a much **clearer pattern**. It is

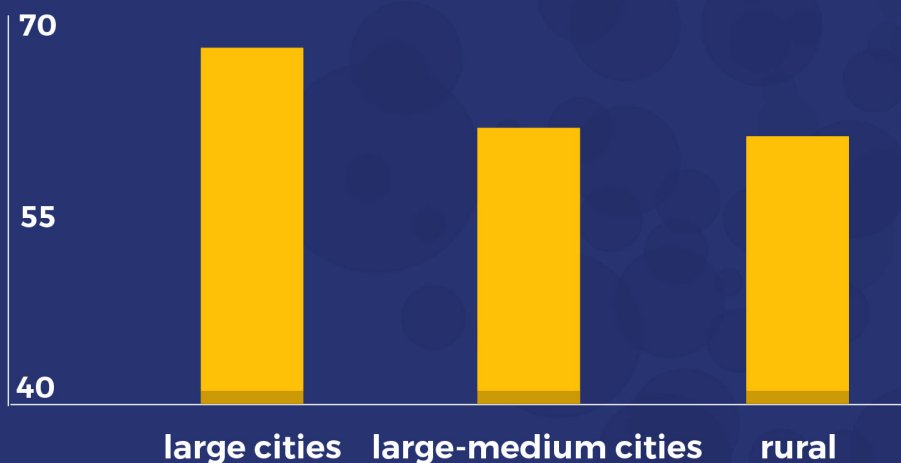
high in most of the Central and Eastern European and Mediterranean countries and relatively low in the core countries of Western Europe. This association is likely to be driven by **precise information on particular projects** carried out in the region of residence of the respondent. The average amount of awareness of the different policies in the Case Study regions is above the one in the whole Survey sample. As expected, **citizens in the Case Study Polish regions** are the ones **more aware of the EU policies** under analysis, whereas those **in Essex** are by far **the less aware**.

As for the evaluation of Cohesion Policy the evidence suggests that **the positive perception** of the **Regional Policy** is **higher** in the **Eastern** than in the **Western** part of the EU. By and large such divide corresponds to the group of Member States from the **enlargement** to the CEE and from that of the **founding members** of the EU. In all case-study regions the support to the Cohesion Policy is by far wider than the perceived benefits from the projects funded by the EU. Still, large differences among them have been identified.

The detailed analysis of the responses of individuals living areas of different size confirmed **the existence of a rural-urban divide** in the perception of the EU Regional Policy and the identification with the EU project. The rural-urban gap seems to be wider when responses from individuals in rural areas are compared with those living in large cities, as differences with respect to mid-size cities and rural areas are less pronounced.



## Urban vs. Rural: Individuals that think that EU membership is a good thing



After the spatial description of the measures of perception and identification, the report includes the results of a partial correlations analysis to assess variations by type of area, country, and region's exposure to the Cohesion Policy. The results reveal the importance of controlling for demographic characteristics, the **individuals' perception of their economic situation** and **that of the region** in which they live, their **political and social values**, and the **objective economic context of the region**. Otherwise, conclusions on the above-mentioned territorial dimension would be misleading. **Identification** with the EU project, **awareness** and **perception** of the Cohesion Policy are **higher** among individuals in countries that joined the EU in **the first and second waves of enlargements**, in comparison to those living in the founding Member States. Actually, this is particularly so for countries that joined the EU in the 1973-1995 period.

There is **not strong evidence supporting an urban-rural divide** in the identification with the EU project once the composition effect (individual characteristics) is taken into account. If something, there is a **marginal positive bias in large cities**. In fact, our results suggest that individuals in large cities tend to be **more aware** of the Cohesion Policy and the Structural Funds, while they are also **more supportive** of the Cohesion Policy. This calls for an important association between awareness and social civic values, and citizens' identification with Europe. As for the effect of the interventions of the Cohesion Policy, we found **no evidence of more identification with the EU project in the regions eligible as Less Developed**. However, the amount of **Structural Funds per capita expended in the region significantly increases the propensity of identification with the EU project**.

Overall, the evidence reported in Deliverable 2.2 leads us to conclude that the effect that the **EU policies** under analysis have on **identification and perception** can **well vary among individuals** in **rural** and **urban** areas, and even between those living in large and smaller size

cities. Therefore, the urban-rural divide would be more sophisticated than expected on a priori grounds.

## Some policy implications

Social processes are strongly grounded on the construction of ideas. **Nowadays the legitimacy of the EU is viewed to depend on the existence of a European identity.** Both individual and collective definitions of a European identity imply an evaluative episode balancing the costs and benefits of being part of the EU project, what can call for an evaluation of all policies run or mediated by the EU.

In this context, the Cohesion Policy is a major example to analyse. **The territorial dimension** (both across countries and regions, and the urban-rural divide) **influences the mechanism for identity formation**, what calls for explicitly spatial analyses of the formation of the European identity. A major driver of citizens' identification with Europe is not only if and how Cohesion Policy is applied, but also and more importantly **how citizens are aware of it and whether and how they experience the benefits and costs of being part of the EU project.** This is supportive on the **social constructivist** approach, stressing the need for a discourse to allow citizens to evaluate the EU project.

## Methodological Background

The work carried out for this deliverable considers **inputs from other deliverables of the PERCEIVE project**, such as the PERCEIVE survey developed in WP1, the datasets compiled in WP2. It also builds upon the **literature** review developed in Deliverable 5.1 (Barberio et al. 2017) and on results in WP4 on the urban-rural differentiation. The first aim of the report was to develop a **theoretical framework of analysis** in which we provided an **understanding of European identity** and the grounds of mechanisms and determinants driving citizens' identification with Europe. Next it focused on the **spatial dimension** of the phenomenon, by providing a descriptive analysis of EU citizens' perceptions. This analysis reviews differences across member states, north/south and east/west divides, and rural-urban differences. An additional objective was to distinguish the determinants of citizens' identification patterns in the EU, using multivariate techniques, with a specific attention to the **case-study regions**. Finally, it analysed **geographical disparities** in identification and perception of Cohesion Policy by means of multilevel regression models.

### Sources

Barberio, V., Mollona, E., Pareschi, L. (2017) "Short contribution (report) to be used in dissemination events about the empirical relevance of a social constructivist and discursive approach to EU identity emergence and integration", Deliverable 5.1 of the PERCEIVE project. Available at [http://www.perceiveproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Del-5.1-Barberio\\_Mollona\\_Pareschi.pdf](http://www.perceiveproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Del-5.1-Barberio_Mollona_Pareschi.pdf)

Bergbauer, S. (2018) Explaining European Identity Formation, Springer: Netherlands.