



FINAL CONFERENCE

Voices from the Regions: Rethinking the communication of Cohesion Policy

26 April 2018

European Committee of the Regions, VMA1
Van Maerlant 2 Street, Brussels

This is the final conference of the COHESIFY project (2016-2018) funded by the Horizon 2020 programme, which aimed to assess the impact of EU Cohesion Policy on citizens' perceptions of and identification with the EU. The conference will present the research findings covering three main themes: citizens' perceptions of the policy, how it is portrayed in media narratives, and what could be done to improve the communication of EU Cohesion Policy.

Hosted by



**European Committee
of the Regions**



The COHESIFY project (February 2016-April 2018) has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 693127

VOICES FROM THE REGIONS:

Rethinking the communication of Cohesion Policy

Event Agenda, Thursday, 26th April 2018

14.00

Welcome coffee

14.30

Welcome

Ian Barber - Director of Communication, *European Committee of the Regions*

Zoltán Krasznai - Policy Officer, *Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission*

14.40

Why is the communication of Cohesion Policy important?
The policy context for the COHESIFY project

Prof. John Bachtler - Director of the European Policies Research Centre,
University of Strathclyde

14.55

Session 1: What do citizens think about Cohesion Policy?

RESULTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS

Dr Andreja Pegan - *Trinity College Dublin*

RESULTS FROM THE CITIZENS' SURVEY

Dr Heinz Brandenburg - *University of Strathclyde*

PANEL REACTIONS

Lambert van Nistelrooij - Member of the European Parliament, *European People's Party, Regional Development Committee*

Agnès Monfret - Head of Communication Unit, *Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission*

DISCUSSION

15.35

Session 2: What are the media narratives ?

FRAMING OF COHESION POLICY IN THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Dr Vasiliki Triga - *Cyprus University of Technology*

PANEL REACTIONS

Dana Manescu - *Head of Social Media, Directorate General for Communication, European Commission*

Wolfgang Petzold - *Deputy Director for Communication, European Committee of the Regions*

DISCUSSION

16.20

Session 3: How to reconnect with citizens?

KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Dr Carlos Mendez - *European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde*

PANEL REACTIONS

Philippe Rousseau - *Communication Advisor, Agency for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Flanders, Belgium*

Aleksandra Kisielewska - *Counsellor, Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the European Union*

DISCUSSION

17.10

Conclusions

Dana Spinant - *Director, Budget, Communication and General Affairs, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission*

17.30

Networking reception

COHESIFY SUMMARY

Understanding the impact of Cohesion Policy on European Identity

A major EU-funded research project to understand whether and how EU Cohesion Policy influences the European identity of citizens across the EU (called COHESIFY) was launched on **3-4 March 2016**.

Led by **Professor John Bachtler** and **Dr Carlos Mendez** of the European Policies Research Centre (EPRC), and involving colleagues from EPRC and the wider School of Government & Public Policy at the University of Strathclyde, the **€2.4 million** study is funded by the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme of research excellence managed by the Research Executive Agency (REA).

The consortium comprises **8 universities** and **2 SMEs** from **10 EU Member States** with complementary disciplinary backgrounds and applied and creative expertise in communication, branding and citizen engagement: University of Strathclyde (EPRC, School of Government & Public Policy), Central European University, Cyprus University of Technology, Delft University of Technology, Polytechnic University of Milan, Trinity College Dublin, University of Mannheim, University of Warsaw, RegioPlus Consulting and Old-Continent. COHESIFY focuses on four inter-related issues:

- **How European identity and perceptions of the EU and Cohesion Policy vary at national, regional and local levels;**
- **The impact of Cohesion Policy on citizens' perceptions of the policy and identification with the EU;**
- **Whether and how Cohesion Policy communication strategies affect perception and identification; and**
- **What is needed to make Cohesion Policy more effective in terms of people's perceptions of the policy and the EU more generally.**

The study employs an innovative mixed-methods design including an original and representative survey of citizens in a sample of EU regions, quantitative and qualitative analysis of EU-wide data and of programme implementation and communication strategies in a sample of regions, framing and sentiment analysis of online and offline media and focus groups with citizens.

The structure of COHESIFY is designed around six work packages. Beyond project management (WP1), the research began with a contextual mapping of EU territorial challenges, attitudes and identities (WP2). The implementation and communication of EU Cohesion Policy were then examined in WP3 and WP4 respectively, feeding into the core questions on citizens' perceptions of Cohesion Policy and the impact on citizens' attitudes to the EU, drawing conclusions together along with recommendations for enhancing communication. The final work package (WP6) has been dedicated to the dissemination and communication of the research outputs.

Apart from advancing the scientific state-of-the-art on the relationship between Cohesion Policy, perceptions on the EU and European identity, COHESIFY has delivered **creative communication practice to disseminate its results through awareness-raising and outreach activities targeting policymakers, stakeholders and the public at large**. In addition, the project has produced a unique body of original, EU-wide comparative data that will be made available through open access arrangements to other researchers and policymakers for analysis and benchmarking. In the context of the current policy and budgetary debates about citizens' trust in the EU and the role of Cohesion Policy in influencing citizen identification with the EU, the emerging results of the project are challenging conventional understanding of how Cohesion Policy is perceived.

'The Voices from the Regions' is the first open event at which the results of the COHESIFY project are being made public. It will be followed by a series of specialist academic and policymaker seminars and conference contributions over the coming year.

More information on www.cohesify.eu