



Cohesion policy implementation, performance and communication

Central Macedonia case study

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1. Introduction

Objectives and rationale

The purpose of this case study is to investigate EU Cohesion policy performance and communication in the Greek region of Central Macedonia, as well as its impact on citizens' perceptions and attitudes to the EU.

The case study focuses on two regional Operational Programmes (OPs) that have been in place in both the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 funding periods. The 2007-2013 OP was a joint regional OP covering the regions of Western, Central and Eastern Macedonia, as well as Thrace. For the 2014-2020 period, each of the above regions had their own OP. This case study takes into account data from the 2007-2013 regional OP pertaining to the region of Central Macedonia, and data from the Central Macedonia OP for 2014-2020. It concerns itself with the various components of Cohesion policy in Greece, such as the political and socioeconomic context, the implementation and partnership structures, as well as the communication of Cohesion policy and its impact on the formation of European identity.

The selection criteria for the case study included Cohesion policy eligibility and financial intensity, programme type, governance system and European identity.

- **Funding and eligibility.** As part of the regional Macedonia-Thrace OP, Central Macedonia was one of the recipients of €3.264.500.000 worth of Cohesion funds, €2.675.000.000 of which originated from the ERDF. For the regions classified as being in a transitional state, Central Macedonia included, additional resources were allocated from the ESF totalling €796,924,000. According to the revised Central Macedonia OP, for the 2014-2020 period, the OP totals €947.105.949,00, €757.684.757,00 of which come from EU sources. Specifically, €606.701.245,00 are contributed over the course of the funding period from the ERDF, whereas €151.670.002,00 originates in the ESF.
- **Governance.** Central Macedonia has its own Management Authority (MA) for the 2014-2020 period. This forms part of the wider National Strategic Reference Framework mechanism ("Ethniko Stratigiko Plaisio Anaforas", colloquially known in Greece as "ESPA"). This mechanism comprised a variety of governmental agencies tasked with implementing Cohesion policy in the country, such as the National Coordination Authority tasked with providing information to the European Commission and coordinating the work of the various regional MAs, the Controlling and Accreditation Authorities, as well the various Intermediary Bodies (IBs).
- **EU attitudes and identity.** Central Macedonia is Greece's most economically vibrant region after the Attica Basin. The country's second largest city, Thessaloniki, is the regional capital. Its harbour is in turn an important transit hub, connecting the Balkans to the wider Mediterranean region. At the same time, Central Macedonia has been hit hard by the Greek fiscal crisis, an important factor in determining attitudes towards the EU and the idea of "Europe in general". Euroscepticism and disappointment with European institutions have produced regular outbursts of hostility to the idea of European unity. Central Macedonia forms an interesting part of the COHESIFY research design, primarily as a region of the EU state hit hardest by the 2008 economic meltdown.
- **Implementation settings.** COHESIFY analysis of the regional relevance of EU policies, examining the objective vulnerability, receptivity and desirability of EU policies, from the point of view of the structural development situation, needs and challenges of regions, along with the analysis of relations between the features of territories, their receptiveness to EU policies and the perceptions of the EU and EU Cohesion policy, resulted in the development

of territorial typologies, which also served the basis for the case study selection. Analysis of regional policy implementation settings classified most of Central Macedonia in an appropriate policy (i.e. match between real and perceived needs) and institutionally inefficient context (i.e. the inefficient quality of institutions is not matched with the appropriate policies implemented). This indicates that the policies are perceived by the citizens as appropriate which cannot nevertheless be supported by the regional and national institutional setting (Capello and Perucca 2017). The analysis of European identification in EU regions based on two dimensions – citizens' image of the EU and their attachment to the EU – using Eurobarometer data showed that a *negative-neutral* image prevails in Central Macedonia and the majority of citizens do not feel *attached* to the EU (Dąbrowski et al. 2017).

Methodology

In addition to secondary and primary resources for the desk-based analysis, the case study is based on the following original data:

Stakeholder survey

A stakeholders' online survey was carried out in the spring – summer of 2017. The survey was sent to 99 stakeholders, involved in Cohesion policy during the 2007-13 and 2014-20 programming periods, including (i) Monitoring Committee members: stakeholders involved in the management and monitoring of operational Programmes, including Managing Authorities, implementing bodies, associations of local authorities or businesses, economic and social partners, education institutions, civil society organisations and NGOs; (ii) local state authorities: stakeholders involved in the delivery of EU projects as project promoters at the local level, (iii) and other economic development stakeholders. Out of the 99 stakeholders that were contacted, 24 confirmed that they received the survey. From these 24 stakeholders, 14 returned to us a completed questionnaire which is translated into 58% response rate.

Stakeholder interviews

Interviews were conducted with 6 stakeholders representing various Managing Authority structures, such as representatives of Communication strategy and the National Coordination authority (see Annex I for more details). The interviews were conducted mostly by phone, as the research on Central Macedonia was carried out by the Cyprus University of Technology.

Focus groups

In the case study of Central Macedonia 8 participants (5 male and 3 female) took part in 3 focus groups in the city of Thessaloniki. The ages ranged from 25 to 62. All participants were Greek nationals and residents of the greater Thessaloniki area.

All participants were recruited through the COHESIFY citizen survey, which asked a random sample of respondents' living in Central Macedonia to provide a contact telephone number if they were willing to participate in a focus group discussion on the topic of EU funding, attitudes to the EU and European identity. (see 30 and 31 in Annex 1 for more details). The recruitment of focus groups contacts from social networks proved impossible, given the carrying out of the research by the Cyprus University of Technology. Low participation in the focus groups can be attributed to this lack of social contacts on behalf of the researcher, the absence of material incentives for participation, as well as the subject itself, given widespread Euroscepticism in Greece.

Citizen survey

A citizen survey was conducted via telephone using a dual sampling design to cover the entire target population while taking into account Central Macedonia's specific variation in landline and mobile

phone penetration. The sample was designed to be representative of all people aged 18 and over from the population and it was randomly selected, having identified a sufficient set of auxiliary variables for population weights (e.g. age, gender, or educational groups). The final sample was pre-stratified by posing screening questions and it consisted of 500 respondents. The data collection took place from 24.08.2017 until 07.09.2017 (See Borz et al. 2017).

Structure of the case study

The case study is structured as follows. The contextual scene is set in the next section by reviewing the socio-economic and political background including public opinion on the EU, territorial identity issues and political context. It then proceeds to the analysis of the implementation and performance of Cohesion policy, based on desk research, stakeholders' surveys and interviews. The analysis of the communication aspects follows in terms of the effectiveness of communication strategies and wider media framing of Cohesion policy, based on desk research, surveys, interviews and media framing analysis. Public perceptions of Cohesion policy and the impact of Cohesion policy on identification with the EU are reviewed in the final sections, drawing on policymaker surveys and interviews, the citizen survey and focus group results. The key findings are summarised in the conclusion including the policy implications and recommendations stemming from the case study.

2. Context and background

2.1 EU attitudes and identity

Anti-EU, and particularly anti-German sentiment has been on the rise in the Greece, owing to the EU's perceived leading role in implementing austerity and curbing the country's fiscal sovereignty in the context of the lingering Eurozone crisis (Michailidou 2017). According to the Autumn 2017 Standard Eurobarometer, Greeks have the most negative perception of the EU (4 out of 6)Greeks, placing them far above the EU average of 28%. Three quarters of Greeks perceive the EU as ineffective in tackling such pressing matters such as high unemployment. More than other EU citizens, Greeks believe in an overwhelming majority (79%) that their voice does not count in the EU, whereas 69% believe "things in the EU are heading in the wrong direction". Most Greek citizens (52%) do not feel like citizens of the European Union. Furthermore, most Greeks (74%) state that they do not trust the EU, although the percentage is significantly higher than those who mistrust national political parties (94%) and the Greek government (88%). Greeks are, in addition, the European citizens most pessimistic about the future of the Union. At the same time, high percentages of Greeks – more than average EU values – highly value perceived benefits of EU membership such as free movement (54%, EU average: 28.52%) and the common currency (42%, EU average:28.30%)

These and other findings point to a contradictory situation in Greece. On the one hand, increasing dissatisfaction with the EU is directly linked to the perception of the EU as an authoritarian financially-oriented institution imposing austerity on Greece. As such, Greeks tend to hold the Union responsible for major social problems such as high unemployment and the ensuing emigration of mostly young qualified professionals. However, as the same Eurobarometer results indicate, Greeks are not *per se* anti-European, as Euroscepticism based on the idea of national exclusiveness (such as in the United Kingdom) is weak. Greeks value the idea of a common European future and the associated perceived benefits. However, their criticism is directed at the way the European Union currently operates on the practical level.

2.2 Political context

The restructuring of the political landscape resulted in the weakening of the country's two dominant and decidedly pro-European political parties (Freire and Lisi 2015), with the once dominant social democratic PASOK becoming a second-tier party. However, rejection of EU policy should not be interpreted as rejection of the institutions of the European Union *per se*. The main political beneficiary of the decimation of mainstream parties has been the currently governing Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), which came to power in January 2015 combining a critique of austerity with (at times ambiguous) advocacy for remaining within the Eurozone and democratizing European institutions (Cf. Ovenden 2015). Its junior coalition partner, the right-wing "Independent Greeks", take a similar stance, combining verbal opposition to austerity with a pragmatic attitude towards the ongoing negotiations with the "institutions", as the Troika was renamed in early 2015.

SYRIZA remained in office after a second general election in September 2015, despite having failed on its promise to reverse austerity in light of the EU institutions' strident refusal to substantially ease the fiscal regime imposed on Greece. A tense standoff with the Troika and a national referendum preceded the election, during which 61% of Greeks rejected a new set of austerity measures. The emergence of parties combining strong criticism of European institutions with a simultaneous insistence on staying within the EU and the eurozone, appears to conform to the Eurobarometer findings, according to which most Greeks do not reject "Europe" and the EU outright, but rather its *current social and political articulation*., fearing at the same time any steps that might have an adverse effect on living standards, such as leaving the eurozone.

Besides the nominally pro-EU parties - SYRIZA, the conservative New Democracy, the national conservative "Independent Greeks", the liberal "Potami", and the social democratic PASOK – there are other parties with unambiguous Eurosceptic orientations. The most relevant ones are the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), which rejects the EU out of a Marxist critique capitalism - seeing the EU an imperialist expression monopoly capitalism - and the far-right "Golden Dawn" party, which rejects the EU on the basis of extreme nationalism and opposition to multiculturalism.

2.3 Socioeconomic context

The current socio-economic context of Cohesion policy in Greece is characterized by the ongoing economic crisis and the country's loss of fiscal sovereignty in the framework of the European Stabilizing Mechanism (ESM). Accordingly, the priorities of the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 funding periods present some differences, the latter being more geared towards substituting many social provisions effectively slashed by austerity measures.

Specifically, in 2013, unemployment was at 23%, whereas youth unemployment was the highest in the EU, exceeding 60%. This figure is remarkable given the emigration of many young professionals, mostly to countries of the European North like Germany and the United Kingdom. Participation in the labour force was around 52,7%. During the first trimester of 2013, merely 3.595.000 Greeks were in a state of employment from a total of 10.815.000 citizens (33% compared to 45% in the EU, 46% in the US). According to statistic data for 2011, the number of people in risk of poverty or social exclusion has risen from 3.007.000 (27,6% of the total population) in 2009 to 3.403.000 (31% of total population). The aforementioned data's impact on social cohesion cannot be understated, as the perpetual crisis of the Greek economy has a detrimental impact on the country's social fabric.

The country's GDP has cumulatively decreased by 25%. The primary sector contributed 3,7% of total net added value (EU 27 average: 1,7%), the secondary sector 16,4% (EU 27 average: 25,3%) and the tertiary sector 80% (EU 27 average: 73%). The Eurozone crisis has negatively affected all sectors, as

the secondary sector has collapsed due to lack of demand in key branches such as construction, whereas the structural deficiencies of the tertiary sectors were a major factor in the global economic crisis' devastating articulation in the Greek context.

In addition, the Troika consisting of the IMF, the EU and the ECB has imposed a structural adjustment programme aimed at servicing the debt incurred by the public sector in the years prior to the crisis. Doubt has been repeatedly cast on the effectiveness of this programme in relation to its stated purpose. For example, an IMF report from February 2017 has deemed Greece's debt at 180% of GDP as "unsustainable" and capable of perpetuating itself until at least 2060. The programme's social impacts can overwhelmingly be described as negative, as they have not succeeded in substantially decreasing unemployment or reducing social inequalities, let alone put in motion Greece's productive forces. The slashing of social provisions has hurt vulnerable groups such as the elderly the hardest. With the European institutions unwilling to proceed to any debt-relief measure, it is questionable if Cohesion policy - determined by the same institutions implementing austerity on the European level - can have any substantial impact other than ameliorating some of austerity's worst effects.

3. Cohesion policy implementation and performance

3.1 EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework

Operational Programmes for Central Macedonia 2007-2013

The region of Central Macedonia has in recent years undergone two programme periods as part of two different regional Operational Programmes. The 2007-2013 integrated Macedonia-Thrace OP. The total funding for the OP was €3.264.500.000, €2.675.000.000 came from the ERDF. For the regions in a transitional state (Central Macedonia, Western Macedonia), additional resources were allocated from the ESF totalling €796,924,000. The goal of the OP revolved around themes such as sustainable development, infrastructure project and the preservation of social cohesion, with priority variations between both programme periods. The general goal of the OP for this period consisted of a) strengthening the competitiveness of the productive system; b) utilizing the region's position in the South-eastern European rim; c) a balanced economic and social development within a sustainable framework. Specifically, for the subregion of Central Macedonia, the following general goals were adopted. These were a) strengthening the developmental role and prospect of Thessaloniki; b) the dynamic inclusion of the Central Macedonia region in wider region of South-eastern Europe; c) the strengthening competitiveness in Central Macedonia; d) securing inner cohesion; and e) environmental protection.

The following table provides information on the priority axes of the 2007-2013 programme period and the percentages contributed by Cohesion policy-related EU funds.

Table 1: Macedonia OP funding allocation per Priority Axis (2007-2013)

2007-2013	ERDF allocation (%)	ERDF allocation (€)
PA1: Infrastructure and Accessibility Services in Central Macedonia	83%	340.290.00
PA2: Infrastructure and Accessibility Services in Western Macedonia	79,5%	73.980.00
PA3: Infrastructure and Accessibility Services in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	81,32%	211.600.000
PA4: Digital Convergence and Entrepreneurship in Central Macedonia	84,26%	517.917.000
PA5: Digital Convergence and Entrepreneurship in Western Macedonia	77,32%	95.540.000
PA6: Digital Convergence and Entrepreneurship in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	68,67%	16.000.000
PA7: Sustainable Development and Quality of Life in Central Macedonia	82,95%	895.039.000

2007-2013	ERDF allocation (%)	ERDF allocation (€)
PA8: Sustainable Development and Quality of Life in Western Macedonia	81,46%	243.980.000
PA9: Sustainable Development and Quality of Life in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	79,56%	242.800.000
PA10: Technical Implementation Assistance for Western and Central Macedonia Regions	62,43%	28.254.000
PA11: Technical Implementation Assistance for Eastern Macedonia and Thrace Region	84,90%	9.600.000
TOTAL	81,94%	2.675.000.000

Operational Programmes for Central Macedonia 2014-2020

For the 2014-2020 period, the regions of Central Macedonia, Western Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia-Thrace were granted separate OPs. The Central Macedonia regional OP list a number of goals. These are a) the transition of the regional economy to a new and sustainable productive model with competitiveness, outward orientation, innovative entrepreneurship, and smart and friendly utilization of information and communication technologies; b) the protection and sustainable management of the natural and human environment, as well as natural resources to ensuring quality of life and resource efficiency; c) the completion of transport infrastructure and networks for the region's promotion to an internationally relevant transportation hub; utilizing the region's advantageous in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean; and d) supporting and promoting mobility and the upgrading the qualifications of human resources; dynamic tackling of unemployment and ensuring social cohesion.

Table 2: Central Macedonia OP, funding allocation per Priority Axis (2014-2020)

2014-2020	ESF allocation (€)	ERDF allocation (€)
PA1: Strengthening Research, Technological Development and Innovation	-	18.396.536,00
PA2: Improving the Accessibility, Use and Quality of Information and Communication	-	9.024.275,00
PA3: Improving Competitiveness of SMEs	-	83.306.389,00
PA4: Supporting Transition towards a Low-Carbon Emission Economy in all Fields	-	26.303.003,00
PA5: Promoting Adjustment to Climate Change, Risk Prevention and Management	-	59.151.204,00
PA6: Safeguarding and Protecting the Environment, Promoting Resource Efficiency	-	96.640.247,00
PA7: Promoting Sustainable Transport and Solving Transportation Problems	-	287.131.217,00
PA8: Promoting Long-term and Quality Employment, Promoting Workforce Mobility	9.794.540,00	-
PA9a: Promoting Social Inclusion, Fighting Poverty and Discrimination (ERDF)	-	24.451.683,00
P9b: Promoting Social Inclusion, Fighting Poverty and Discrimination (ESF)	119.033.980,00	-
PA10: Investing in Education, Qualification, and Professional Qualification for the Acquirement of Skills and Life-Long Learning	-	24.451.683,00
PA11: Promoting systems and administration and implementation procedures for the 2014-2020 C. Macedonia OP on behalf of the ERDF	-	11.791.054,00
PA12: Promoting systems and administration and implementation procedures for the 2014-2020 C. Macedonia OP on behalf of the ESF	2.415.534,00	-
TOTAL ERDF	640.647.291,00	
TOTAL ESF	131.244.054,00	
GENERAL TOTAL	771.891.345,00	
ADDITIONAL COHESION FUND ASSISTASNCE (EXCLUDING GREEK CONTRIBUTION)	186.884.512,00	

The priorities set for the two programme periods vary substantially. In 2007-2013, the Greek government was mainly concerned with the implementation of projects and actions from the previous period. According to some interviews, heavy emphasis was placed in increasing the competitiveness of the economy, by helping SMEs and investments in innovation.

Due to the specific manifestations of the Eurozone crisis in Greece (loss of fiscal sovereignty due to the debt crisis) the mission and character of Cohesion Policy OPs has changed dramatically. According to respondents, the current OPs are mainly geared towards dealing with the vast social

3.2 Assessment of performance

The performance of the regional OP for Central Macedonia for the 2007-2013 period uses a variety of indexes, such as the number of R&D jobs created, the reduction of CO₂ emissions, the number of kilometres of new roads, or the number of jobs created in the tourism sector. The following table provides some information on OP implementation progress based on the 2013 Annual Implementation Report.

Table 3: Central Macedonia OP, performance indicators (2007-2013)

Regional OP (Data for Central Macedonia)	Baseline	Status (2013)	Target
Number of works in Research and Development	40	157	170
Number of media-related projects	0	24	50
Number of works in the area "knowledge-based society"	0	45	190
Number of transport-related projects	72	18	20
Kilometres of new/repared roads	860,89	50,53	54
Additional population serviced by upgraded mass urban transit	0	0	250000
Additional population served by water-processing actions	64700	253000	100000
Reduction of CO ₂ emissions (Kt)	0	6,54	27,00
People who benefit from upgraded fire protection measures	1,876,588	0	1,876,588
Number of education-related projects	65	79	112
Number of public health-related projects	50	49	55

The main achievements listed by respondents overwhelmingly concern the period of 2007-2013. A gross increase of investments is directly attributed to the beneficial effects of the OPs. Most achievements listed by the respondents concern major infrastructure projects, such as airports, railways, road, and rail networks. To a minor degree, the strengthening of the social cohesion net is also regarded as an achievement of the OPs. According to some respondents, this is due to the focus of Cohesion policy on social projects, such as stores for welfare recipients. Bureaucracy was listed by respondents as a major obstacle for the failure of the programmes in fully achieving the goals. This bureaucracy was attributed by one interviewee to the complexities of the European framework and relevant rules and regulation, as well as the ensuing need of harmonization with the Greek context.

Another major problem was the lack of financing from the banking sector, with one respondent stating that ca. 50% of approved entrepreneurship actions were aborted due to lack of financing from a banking source. Given the fact the absorption rate for the 2007-2013 period was 100%, all respondents deem the performance of the implementation structures as satisfactory. Respondents

have admitted shortcomings related to the persistence of bureaucratic obstacles. However, constant improvement in this area is also mentioned. Considering, however, that most of the individuals willing to participate in the interviews are employed in services such as the National Coordination Authority or the MOU, there is an inherent bias in this question. Taking into account the limited fiscal sovereignty of Greece in the era of the memoranda, special efforts were made to achieve full compliance with EU rules and regulations. Spending the funds in order to achieve the highest possible absorption rate also figures as a main priority. No respondent has mentioned the publication of achievements as a major priority, whereas others have merely agreed with the sequence of the tasks as posed in the question.

The results of the Stakeholder Survey show that a stable majority of stakeholders takes a moderately positive stance around the question of adequate allocation of Cohesion policy funds. There is significant increase in positive responses when the question is posed in regard to Cohesion policy projects on the regional rather than on the municipal level. This can be explained by the greater visibility of regional projects, such as highways, airports, or other large-scale development. The less positive reception of Cohesion policy on the municipal level must be seen in the context of the inevitable entanglement of Cohesion policy with municipal party politics, something alluded to by participants of the focus groups.

Table 4: Stakeholder Survey Q1. How well – in your opinion – have Cohesion policy funds been used in your municipality and region?

	Very well	Well	Acceptable	Poorly	Very poorly	Don't know
Municipality	0%	35.71%	42.85%	7.14%	7.14%	7.14%
Region	7.14%	50.00%	35.71%	0%	7.14%	0%

This pattern is replicated when the question of the utility of Cohesion funds for the development of the region is posed. Again, slightly bigger percentages of respondents hold a more positive view regarding the use of funds on the regional level than on the municipal level. It is noteworthy, however, that absolute majorities of respondents on both levels do not seem to strongly believe that Cohesion policy has reinforced the development of objectives of Central Macedonia and the various municipalities within it

Table 5: Stakeholder Survey Q2. To what extent have the Cohesion policy objectives reinforced the development objectives of your municipality and region?

	Completely	Largely	In some way	Not much	Not at all	Don't know
Municipality	0%	14.28%	57.14%	21.42%	0%	7.14%
Region	7.14%	21.42%	64.28%	7.14%	0%	0%

Nevertheless, significant relative majorities of surveyed stakeholders believe that Cohesion funds have helped narrow gaps between richer and poorer regions of Greece, have helped narrow the urban-regional gap in the region, as well as differences between richer and poorer regions of Central Macedonia. The greatest achievement credited to Cohesion policy is, however, that of narrowing the developmental gap between Greece and other EU member states.

Table 6: Stakeholder Survey Q3. To what extent have Cohesion policy funds helped to increase or decrease

	Decreased	Somewhat decreased	Had no impact	Somewhat increased	Increased	Don't know
Differences in the development level between poorer and richer regions in your country	7.14%	35.71%	28.57%	7.14%	7.14%	7.14%
Differences in the development level between rural and urban areas in your region	7.14%	21.42%	21.42%	21.42%	7.14%	21.42%
Differences in the development level between poorer and richer areas in your region	7.14%	42.85%	21.42%	14.28%	7.14%	7.14%
Differences in the development level between your country and other EU Member states	0.0%	50%	14.28%	9.5%	7.14%	21.42%

When it comes to problems faced by stakeholders in the implementation of Cohesion policy, problems involving financing and resources appear to trump procedural problems like an unclear objectives or poor cooperation between the partners. This is not surprising given the context of Greece's fiscal crisis. Another set of problems facing stakeholders appears to be related to the perceived bureaucracy accompanying Cohesion policy funds, such as cumbersome reporting and complicated rules when applying for funds.

Table 7: Stakeholder Survey Q5. How significant was the impact of the following problems and challenges during the implementation of Cohesion policy projects?

	Very significant	Significant	Average	Insignificant	Not at all	Don't know
Scarcity of Cohesion policy funds	21.42%	50%	14.28%	7.14%	7.14%	0%
Problems with obtaining Cohesion policy financing such as complicated rules for submitting applications	35.71%	28.57%	35.71%	0%	0%	0%
Excessive, cumbersome reporting	35.71%	21.42%	42.85%	0%	0%	0%
Unclear objectives for evaluating project results	7.14%	57.14%	35.71%	0%	0%	0%
Poor cooperation between project partners	21.42%	64.88%	14.28%	0%	0%	0%
Excessive audit and control during or after the project completion	14.28%	28.57%	57.14%	0%	0%	0%
Lack of funds for own contribution (co-financing)	35.71%	42.85%	14.28%	7.14%	0%	0%
Difficult access to credit and/or loans for own contribution	35.71%	42.85%	14.28%	7.14%	0%	0%
Lack of capacity such as qualified staff	35.71%	28.57%	35.71%	0%	0%	0%

When asked about various aspects of the implementation process, the general idea expressing itself in the stakeholder survey is contradictory. While on the one hand, there seems to be agreement that Cohesion policy projects have improved the lives of ordinary citizens, a strong majority of over 70% takes the view that the spending of Cohesion policy funds is not adequately controlled, half of those respondents "disagreeing" with the statement that it is, the other half "strongly disagreeing". Opinions are polarized on the question of fraud, corruption, and nepotism, with one fifth of respondents perceiving these problems as existent, more than a third expressing no opinion, and another third disagreeing with the statement that these phenomena are common in the spending of Cohesion policy funds. An almost identical polarization between agreement, disagreement and polarization is evident in the question of wasting money from Cohesion policy funds into the wrong projects. Around a third of respondents believe to some degree in the existence of irregularities in the spending funds, indicating non-compliance with EU rules. Half of respondents appear indifferent, while a significant minority disagrees with the statement. These findings seem to validate the

common perception of the positive impact of Cohesion policy, but of the negative consequences arising from the human factor in the implementation process. The variety of perceptions in an almost equal amount of responses may signal the existence of a bias by certain stakeholders, depending on their position within the implementation process.

Table 8: Stakeholder Survey Q6. How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Cohesion policy funds finance those investment projects which your municipality/region needs the most	7.14%	35.71%	35.71%	21.42%	0%	0%
In your municipality/region Cohesion policy funding goes to investment projects which are most valued by the local residents	14.28%	7.14%	50%	21.42%	7.14%	0%
There are many irregularities in spending Cohesion policy funds due to non-compliance with EU rules	14.28%	21.42%	21.42%	35.71%	7.14%	0%
Fraud , such as corruption or nepotism, is common in spending Cohesion policy funds	0%	21.42%	35.71%	35.71%	7.14%	0%
There have been many positive changes in your municipality/region thanks to Cohesion policy funds, which would not have been achieved without the funds	21.42%	57.14%	21.42%	0%	0%	0%
The spending of Cohesion policy funds is adequately controlled	21.42%	14.28%	14.28%	35.71%	35.71%	0%
The money from Cohesion policy funds is in most cases wasted on the wrong projects	0%	21.42%	42.85%	28.57%	7.14%	0%
The administration of Cohesion policy has been delivered in an efficient (cost-effective) manner	7.14%	50%	28.57%	14.28%	0%	0%

Asked about the impact and character of monitoring and evaluation reports, opinions about their availability, positive value, or their contribution in improving policy-making and implementation appear to be somewhat positive to neutral. A significant percentage of respondents, however, feel that the monitoring and evaluation reports are not easy to understand.

Table 9: Stakeholder Survey Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
The monitoring and evaluation reports provide adequate information on the implementation and performance of the programme/s	7.14%	57.14%	28.57%	7.14%	0%	0%
The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easily accessible	0%	57.14%	28.57%	14.28%	0%	0%
The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easy to understand	7.14%	28.57%	28.57%	35.71%	0%	0%
The monitoring and evaluation report results are used to improve policy-making and implementation	7.14%	42.85%	42.85%	7.14%	0%	0%

The following table is indicative of the priority attached by stakeholders to various aspects of Cohesion policy. Majorities of stakeholders have visited workshops or training sessions on questions of management, control, and monitoring. Less than half of respondents have visited a seminar or a workshop dealing with the aspect of evaluation. More strikingly, almost two thirds of respondents

have never attended a training session on communication, revealing that this aspects figures as a low priority in the consideration of stakeholders.

Table 10: Stakeholder Survey Q9. In what Cohesion policy workshop or training sessions did the representatives of your organisation/municipality/region participate in the last two years (select all that apply)?

	Management	Control	Monitoring	Evaluation	Communication	Nobody participated in such events
Yes	71.42%	57.14%	76.57%	42.85%	35.71%	14.28%
No	28.57%	42.85%	21.42%	57.14%	64.88%	85.71%

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES

The main partnership forum for the Central Macedonia OP is the Monitoring Committee. The MC is headed by the prefect of the region of Central Macedonia and is comprised by several officials at the national and local level, as well as representatives of civil society from trade unions, business associations and NGOs.

In addition, the strategic outlook for the Central Macedonia OP for the 2014-2020 period lists three networks of institutions. These are:

- Social and economic partners in Central Macedonia that participated in outlining the OP strategy. These included the municipalities, research facilities, universities, trade unions, business associations and other social and economic partners.
- Partners that took part in the deliberations for the biodiversity initiative Natura 2000. These were overwhelmingly environmental organizations and NGOs.
- A Network of Experts tasked with Smart Specialization in vocational training, comprised of technical schools, universities, and business associations.

In terms of the perception by interviewed stakeholders, not everyone was able to provide an answer to the question if the partnership structures and forums were open and accountable to society. Those who did have classified the accessibility of discussion forums such as the MC as satisfactory.

The public profile and visibility of the Structural Funds in Greece is deemed as extremely high by all interview partners. This is because the absence of fiscal sovereignty means that social projects are largely dependent on Cohesion policy funds and actions. In this exceptional socioeconomic constellation, Cohesion policy funds assume the function of a public budget.

One interview respondent mentioned Gallup research findings, according to which Cohesion policy actions have an 85% awareness rate in Greece. However, many interview respondents drew a sharp line of distinction between general knowledge about the positive impact of Cohesion fund on the one hand, and the level of information on the specific manner of fund allocation on the regional level. Respondents consider the former to be extremely high, whereas the latter is deemed circumstantial at best.

Some respondents able to adequately respond to the question lament the absence of sufficient acknowledgement of the contribution provided by EU funds for regional development by politicians. Others have noted that, whereas in the past politicians would avoid referring to the EU in order to gain credit for public works, the complete dependence of public spending policy in Greece on Cohesion policy renders this increasingly impossible. The latter group of respondents recognizes an acknowledgement of EU funding contribution to regional development.

All interview partners have referred to the “Europe in my region” set of events, which involved hundreds of events centred on raising awareness on the beneficial effects of EU Cohesion policy. Some respondents have noted the stronger emphasis in the 2014-2020 on digital forms of information concerning Cohesion policy (e.g. more websites related to specific aspects of this policy).

There is also a strong consensus that the communication strategy for the previous 2007-2013 programme period was a great success. More than one respondent has referred to a specific promotional spot on television involving a famous actor.

When asked in the survey about the various aspects of partnership structures, significant majorities said the way the partnership structure operates is characterized by inclusiveness, openness and fairness, while at the same time facilitating a shared understanding and shared commitment by partners to achieving the programme’s objectives. However, many (42.85%) of respondents conceded that partners involved are driven by the desire in promoting their own organisational and financial interests.

Table 11: Stakeholder survey Q7. The partnership principle requires the participation of a wide range of partners throughout the different stages of programming and implementation through consultations, monitoring committee work and other mechanisms. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the operation of the partnership principle in practice?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The way the programme partnership operates is inclusive, open and fair	0%	57.14%	35.71%	7.14%	0%	0%
The operation of the programme’s partnership principle facilitates a shared understanding and shared commitment by partners to achieving the programme’s objectives	14.28%	64.88%	21.42%	0%	0%	0%
Partners are only interested in promoting their own organisational and financial interests	0%	42.85%	50%	7.14%	0%	0%

4. Cohesion policy communication

4.1 Approach to communication

The section will examine the approach to communication strategy adopted by Greek stakeholders responsible for communicating the results and achievements of Cohesion policy in Greece, as well as highlighting the general role of the EU in regional development in Greece.

2007-2013 FUNDING PERIOD

The stated General Communication Objectives focus on highlighting the role of the EU and the EU Structural Funds to the public, and to ensure full transparency concerning access and allocation of funds. The Communication Plan’s (CP) listed Special Objectives were:

- Highlighting the efforts undertaken to elevate the region of Macedonia-Thrace to an energy and long-range transportation hub.

- Communicating actions aimed at strengthening the polycentric urban system of Macedonia-Thrace, as well as the emerging links between the various cities.
- Informing the Target Groups on the actions undertaken to upgrade the status of the Thessaloniki metropolitan area to that of a service and innovation hub.
- Highlighting the way in which the implementation of projects and actions in the framework of the OP contributes to the fulfilment of the OP's general goals.
- Highlighting the way in which results and benefits from the completion of OP projects and actions contribute to the fulfilment of the vision for spatial unity.

The CP defines a set of Communication and Publicity Measures (CPMs), which are divided into obligatory CPMs (inaugural event, yearly event, flying the EU flag on 9-16 May, publication of the beneficiaries' catalogue, the creation of an accessible and informative Website), as well basic indicative tools. Included in those are:

- Seminars and workshops
- Participation in exhibitions
- Direct information via email
- Info points
- Roadshows
- Training seminars
- Newsletter
- Working group meetings
- Various types of printed material
- Targeted approach groups
- Audio-visual media
- New media
- External advertising
- Surveys

Each of these measures is oriented to a specific target group and conforms to the CP's General and Special Objectives.

The OP's listed Target Groups for that period are:

- Potential Beneficiaries (national, regional, and local authorities; trade and professional associations; educational institutions)
- Beneficiaries,
- the General Public,
- Information Multipliers (NGOs, trade and professional associations, educational institutions),
- Media and Opinion Makers,
- and Vulnerable groups

The timetable for the Communication and Publicity Measures (CPMs) is described as the following:

- Phase A: (mid-2007 to mid-2009) – Dissemination and Communication of information on OP content to Target Groups
- Phase B: (2009-2014) – Public Engagement with Target Groups
- Phase C: (mid-2012 to mid-2016) – Dissemination of successful results

There is a wide range of indicators measuring the success or failure of CPMs. These are divided into a) impact indicators concerning the outreach of CPMs; b) result and implementation indicators measuring the practical implementation of specific measures.

The Impact Indicators listed in the CP and their set targets are:

- Number of guests per event.
- Ratio of event guests to participants
- Percentage coverage from TV and radio advertisement
- Number of press and media appearances; number of published press releases
- Number of visits to website; number of website users; number of registered members
- Number of distributed printed material

The Result and Implementation Indicators listed are:

- Creation and update of website
- Number of produced printed material
- Number of events
- Number of event participants
- Number of television and radio ads, as well as audiovisual marketing campaigns
- Number of material in the printed press (interviews, press releases, bulletins)
- Number of printed advertisements and marketing campaigns

The Budget for the implementation of the 2007-2013 CP was the following:

- Total: €22,400,000; EU contribution €19,040,000.

2014-2020 FUNDING PERIOD

Overall, the 2014-2020 CP follows similar guidelines as the one for the previous period. General Objectives listed were:

- Informing potential recipients regarding funding opportunities
- Publicizing the positive role and achievements of the Cohesion policy and the EU Structural Funds, as evidenced by the implementation of OPs for the 2014-2020 period

The Special Objectives were listed as the following:

- Utilizing results from the previous period
- Ensuring a unified communication identity
- Avoiding the use of additional logos to increase recognisability in the communication measures
- Using simple language
- Creating a functioning network of briefing and communication with recipients
- Creating a functioning network of information multipliers
- Highlighting the everyday benefits of OP actions to the wider public
- Increasing the use of “testimonials” as opposed to “prestige campaigns”; strategically using media to increase coverage; adding more emphasis to the use of internet and social media

The Target Groups listed were:

- Potential recipients
- Recipients (includes, among others, businesses, and educational institutions; actions funded by the European Social Fund have strong emphasis on vulnerable groups, such as the disabled, the unemployed, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, Roma; people living below the poverty line)
- The Wider Public
- Media and Opinion Leaders

The CP listed numerous measures for reaching out to these groups. The internet featured most prominently among them, but there is also a strong emphasis on networking, face-to-face support, as well as an extensive use of information multipliers among vulnerable groups. A series of targeted actions are focussed on media attention, including the creation of a journalists' network and the "qualification" of media workers as regards to OP measures and actions.

The timetable for the Communication and Publicity Measures (CPMs) was described as the following:

- Phase A: Dissemination and Communication of information on OP content to Target Groups.
- Phase B: Public Engagement with Target Groups.
- Phase C: Dissemination of successful results.

No precise timetable dividing the three phases is listed.

The concrete CPMs, as well as the indicators for the evaluation are identical to the ones for 2007-2013.

The Managing Authority is the same as the previous funding period.

The Budget for the implementation of the 2014-2020 CP stands as following:

- €2,947,764 (co-funded by ERDF)
- €603,884 (co-funded by ESF)

The overall communication approach is classified by the majority of interviewed stakeholders as satisfactory. Many interviewees have referred to various measures intended to inform the public about the potential and results of Cohesion policy.

Some respondents have noted a clear shift in the target groups. Whereas in the past the recipients of the communication strategy have mostly been public institutions and enterprises, the target audience of Cohesion policy communication strategy has been somewhat "popularized", i.e. communication measures are now directed to a larger degree towards the average citizen, something entailing the use of "simpler" language in the various promotional messages.

One respondent, however, complained about the "arrogance" of communication measures, in the sense that the specialized vocabulary associated with the OPs creates a certain gulf between institutions and the average citizen.

Interview participants also agree that the communication of Cohesion policy programmes and projects is not considered a key priority. This is due to the workload demanded by other priorities in the implementation of the OPs, such as compliance to the rules, funding absorption and performance, as well as the associated bureaucracy and the relative lack of resources and staff.

Questioned on the preferred means of communicating Cohesion policy, a clear preference for the website and press releases, and to a lesser degree television, radio and local and regional newspapers

became evident. Means used rarely by stakeholders were workshops and seminars, as well advertisement campaigns on television and the radio. Social media appears to be entering the repertoire of communication stakeholders in Greece, with responses on the usage thereof being almost split down the middle.

Table 1: Stakeholder survey Q10. How regularly are the following communication tools used to disseminate information about the use of Cohesion policy funds?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Television	0%	28.57%	35.71%	35.71%	0%
Radio	7.14%	21.42%	35.71%	28.57%	7.14%
Local and regional newspapers	0%	14.28%	35.71%	35.71%	14.28%
National newspapers	0%	14.28%	35.71%	42.85%	7.14%
Workshops, seminars	0%	35.71%	28.57%	28.57%	7.14%
Brochures, leaflets, newsletters	14.28%	0%	14.28%	42.85%	28.57%
Press releases	0%	14.28%	14.28%	28.57%	42.85%
Programme website	0%	7.14%	7.14%	28.57%	57.14%
Film clips/videos	7.14%	14.28%	21.42%	50%	7.14%
Plaques/billboard with EU flag	0%	0%	0%	28.57%	7.14%
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube)	14.28%	21.42%	42.85%	21.42%	0%
Advertising campaigns on television and/or radio	7.14%	35.71%	35.71%	14.28%	7.14%

4.2 Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies

The 2011 AIR lists very detailed information on the performance of the Greek Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund website (www.espa.gr), the website of the “Macedonia-Thrace” OP, as well as the newly-created associated website www.StartupGreece.gov.gr, which is focussed on the promotion of youth entrepreneurship. The information concerns the number of visits, unique visitors, pageviews, average number of pageviews, average amount of time spent on website, and percentage of new visitors, for the period between January and December 2011. However, given the fact that no target values are listed, it is not entirely clear if these results are deemed satisfactory or not. Additional measures included numerous events, exhibitions, as well as radio and television advertisements.

In the 2012 AIR there is a detailed description of information concerning the website www.anaptyxi.gov.gr, the website of the Ministry of Development and Competitiveness responsible for information concerning the implementation of projects of the National Strategic Reference Framework. The information concerns the number of visits, unique visitors, pageviews, average number of pageviews, average amount of time spent on website, and percentage of new visitors, for the period between June and December 2012. Similar data are listed for the www.espa.gr website for the period between January and December 2012. The number of visitors and absolute unique visitors to the site for the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 is also listed, as is the number of queries submitted to the Help Desk integrated in the website. The most frequent visits occurred during the year 2009. Other CPMs for this year included a photographic survey of completed works or works nearing completion.

The same analytical presentation of the www.espa.gr website performance is repeated in the 2013 AIR. Highlights include a marked increase (+51%) of registered users compared to the previous year.

This year also witnessed the first survey (November 2013) concerning the recognisability of OP actions, among a sample of 1000 person. According to findings, 78,5% had a basic knowledge of NSRF-related projects and actions. The main sources of information were listed as television (41,7%) and the internet (40,4%). Roughly half of the survey participants (50,8%) believed NSRF funds originate entirely from EU sources, 32,4% believed in a joint origin, whereas 15% of participants were completely unaware of the origin. There were no questions concerning the assessment of the role of Structural Funds or the EU in the citizens' daily life.

Another survey concerning NSRF recognisability in Central Macedonia was conducted in the summer of 2013. Recognisability amounted to 55%, with the lowest awareness registered among old people and the rural population. Much of survey participants judged NSRF actions as "important" or "very important" for their region and the country. Unemployment (72%) is listed as the most serious issue facing the region. Television (34%) and the internet (34%) are considered the most preferable means of information relating to projects and actions. Only 23% perceive an improvement in their living standards, whereas 51% perceive no marked improvement. Only 2% believe CPMs are qualitatively appropriate and quantitatively sufficient, whereas 69% and 74% of people surveyed believed that CPMs must be more lively and massive respectively.

Table 12: Stakeholder survey Q11. How satisfied are you with:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Don't know
The way Cohesion policy is communicated to citizens	0%	57.14%	21.42%	21.42%	0%	0%
The branding and messages used to communicate Cohesion policy	7.14%	42.85%	50%	0%	0%	0%
The use of human interest/personal stories	0%	35.71%	42.85%	21.42%	0%	0%
The support from the European Commission on communication	0%	28.57%	50%	14.28%	7.14%	0%
The targeting of different groups with different communication tools	0%	14.28%	53%	28.57%	0%	7.14%
The administrative capacity and resources dedicated to communication activities	0%	28.57%	57.14%	14.28%	0%	0%

Publicity and communication efforts were assessed by interviewed stakeholders as adequate. Television infomercials and spots on a national scale are considered the most effective publicity medium, followed by regional media and the internet. The importance on individuals acting as multipliers through the organization of information events was highlighted by one respondent.

Asked in the survey about their perception of communication efforts, responses by stakeholders were deemed positive about the way Cohesion policy is communicated to citizens (57%), the branding and messages of Cohesion policy in Greece (42,5%), whereas a fairly large number of respondents feels indifferent towards the use of human interest and/or personal stories (42.85%). Half of the stakeholders surveyed feel indifferent towards EU support of Cohesion policy communication efforts. An even greater number (57.14%) has no positive or negative feelings towards the volume of resources dedicated to communication activities. Only the targeting of different groups with different communication tools seems to arouse some dissatisfaction among surveyed stakeholders, with 28.57% of them appearing unsatisfied by this method. The mostly positive to neutral responses indicate an overall low level of engagement with communication as a key aspect of Cohesion policy in Greece.

Table 2: Stakeholder survey Q12. To what extent are the communication efforts effective in:

	Very effective	Effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Ineffective	Very ineffective	Don't know	Not used
Conveying the achievements of Cohesion Policy programmes overall and the role of the EU	0%	50%	42.85%	7.14%	0%	0%	0%
Conveying the achievements of co-funded projects and the role of the EU	0%	50%	42.85%	7.14%	0%	0%	0%
Using social media to promote the programme and projects (e.g. Twitter, Youtube, Facebook)	7.14%	21.42%	42.85%	21.42%	0%	7.14%	0%
Fostering good working relations with the media and press to reach the general public	7.14%	21.42%	35.71%	21.42%	0%	14.28%	0%

4.3 Good practice examples

No notable good practice examples relating to the communication strategy and its objectives are listed. However, the following can be categorized as good practice:

- Extremely detailed monitoring of website activity
- Extensive surveys conducted to assess and improve outreach of Communication and Publicity Measures
- Highlighted focus on vulnerable groups in 2014-2020 Communication Plan

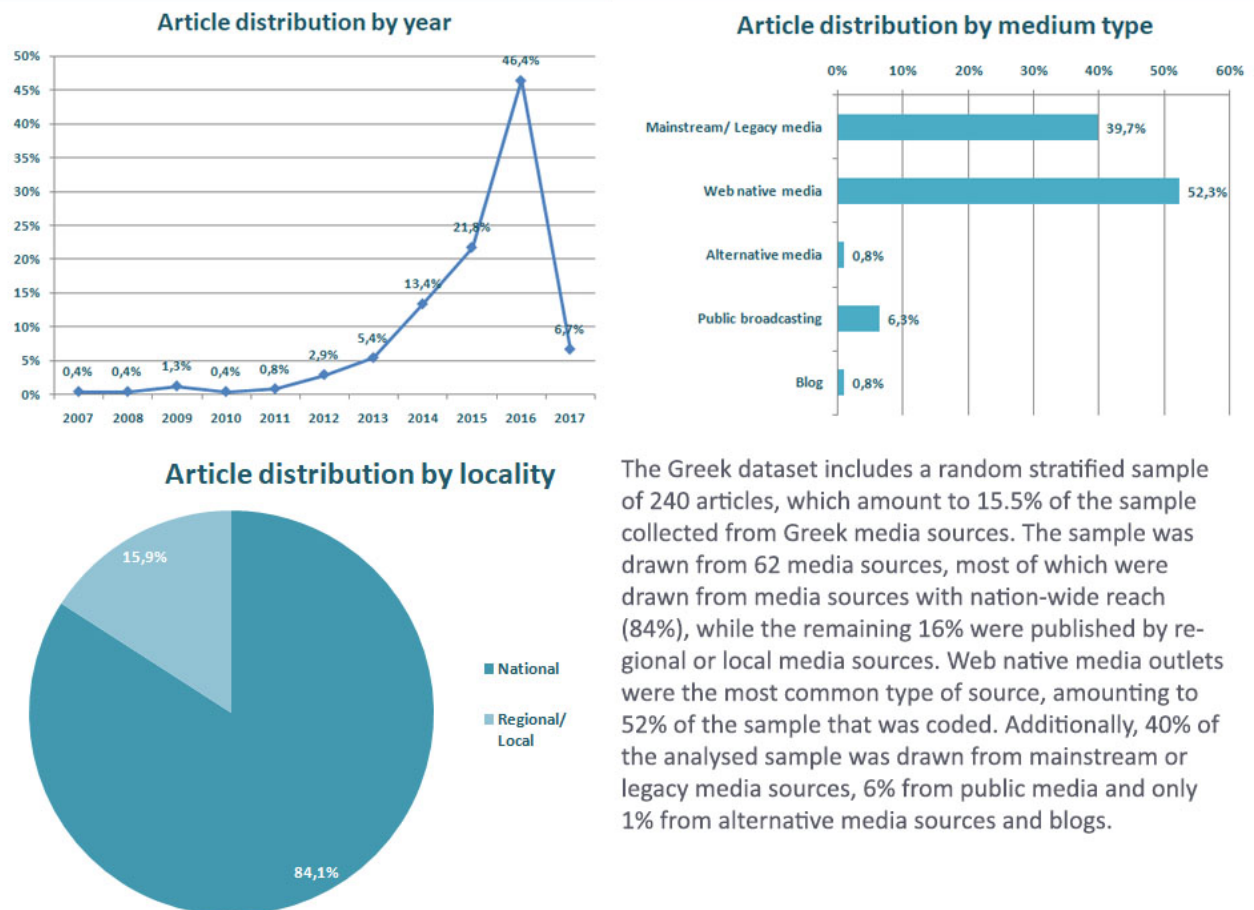
When asked during the interviews, good practice examples frequently mentioned stakeholders included the interactive website www.anaptyxi.gr, as well as a television spot during the 2007-2013 starring a famous Greek actor. Both examples were brought up as examples of a more popularized communication approach focused on the average citizen and his/her concerns.

4.4 Media framing of Cohesion policy

The framing analysis of the Greek sample according to Triga and Vadratsikas (2018) shows that an overwhelming majority (87.4%) of the articles applied some framing in their depictions of EU Cohesion policy. More specifically, Greek media outlets interpret EU Cohesion Policy mostly in economic terms as the “Economic consequences” general frame (Frame 1) is dominant in 42.3% of the sample. As shown in Figure 3.3.3, articles about EU Cohesion policy found in Greek media tend to emphasize the role of Cohesion policy in tackling the problem of unemployment, as the “Job creation” subframe (1.1) was the most dominant subframe in the Greek sample with 15.5%, followed by the “Development” subframe (1.2) with 11.7. This is not surprising, considering the bleak state of the Greek economy during the last years, which may have directed public discourses, and consequently shifted media focus, towards economic issues. Moreover, nearly a quarter of the sample (24.3%) is dominated by the “Quality of life” frame (Frame 2), which approaches EU cohesion

policy in terms to the positive consequences it brings to citizens' everyday lives, while the "Culture" frame (Frame 3) was identified as the dominant frame in 10% of the sample, which is the highest percentage found among the analysed case studies. Finally, the remaining five frames that were included in the Frame Matrix were also identified by the coders, but they emerged in lower percentages of the sample, as shown in Figure 3.3.2.

Figure 3.3.1  **Greece**



Dominant Frame Frequencies (Greece)

(n= 239)

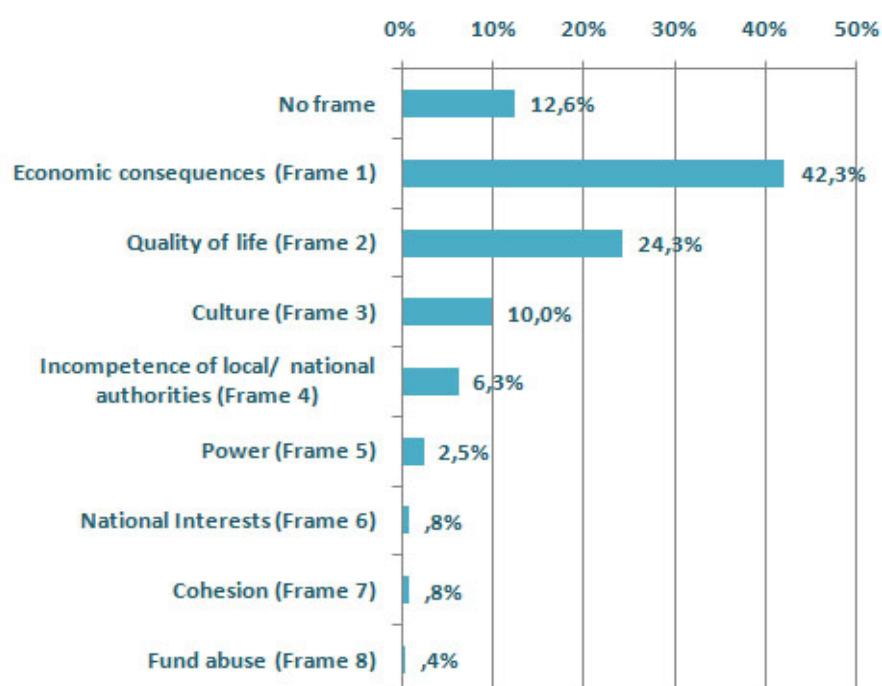


Figure 3.3.2
Dominant frame frequencies in Greek media

Dominant Subframe Frequencies (Greece)

(n= 239)

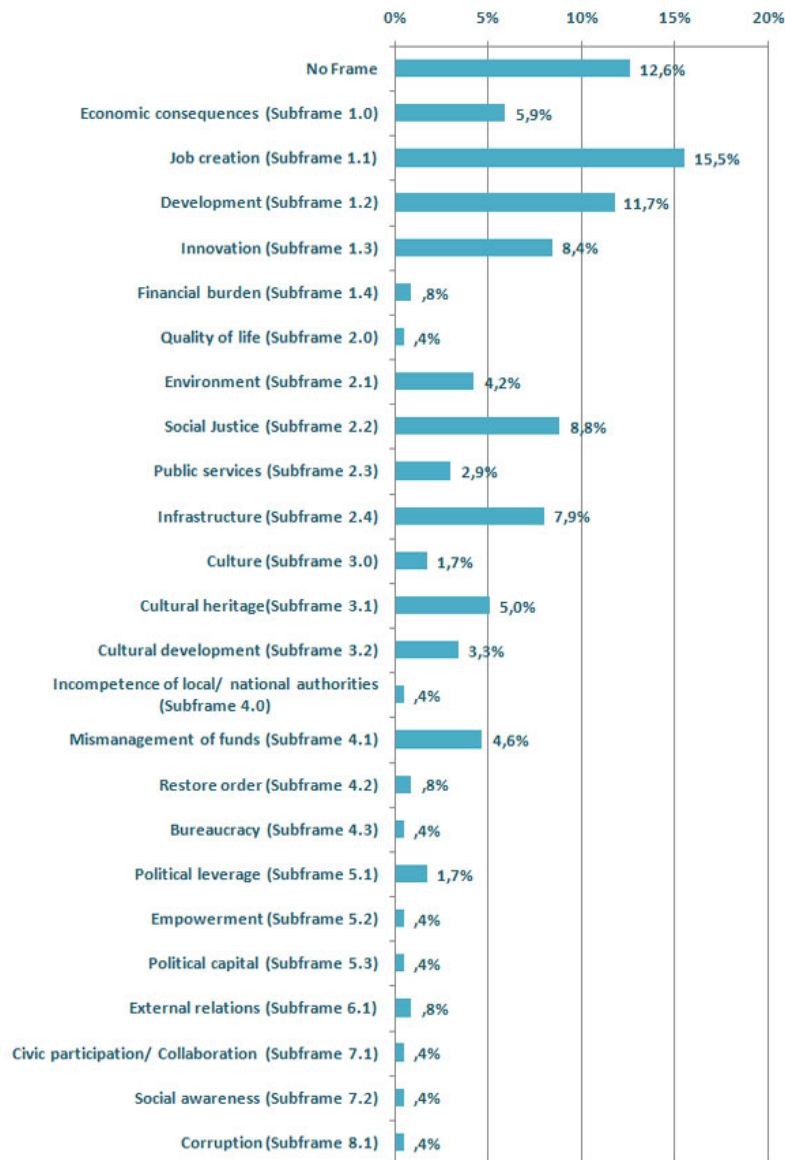


Figure 3.3.3
Dominant Subframe frequencies in Greek media

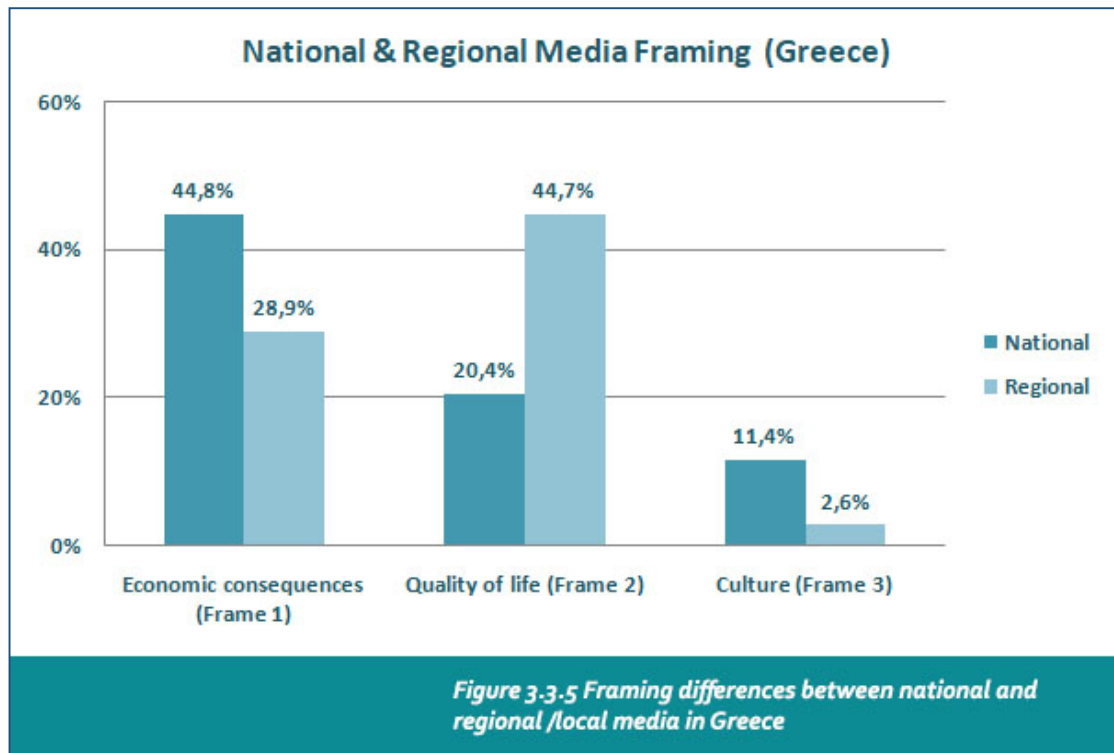
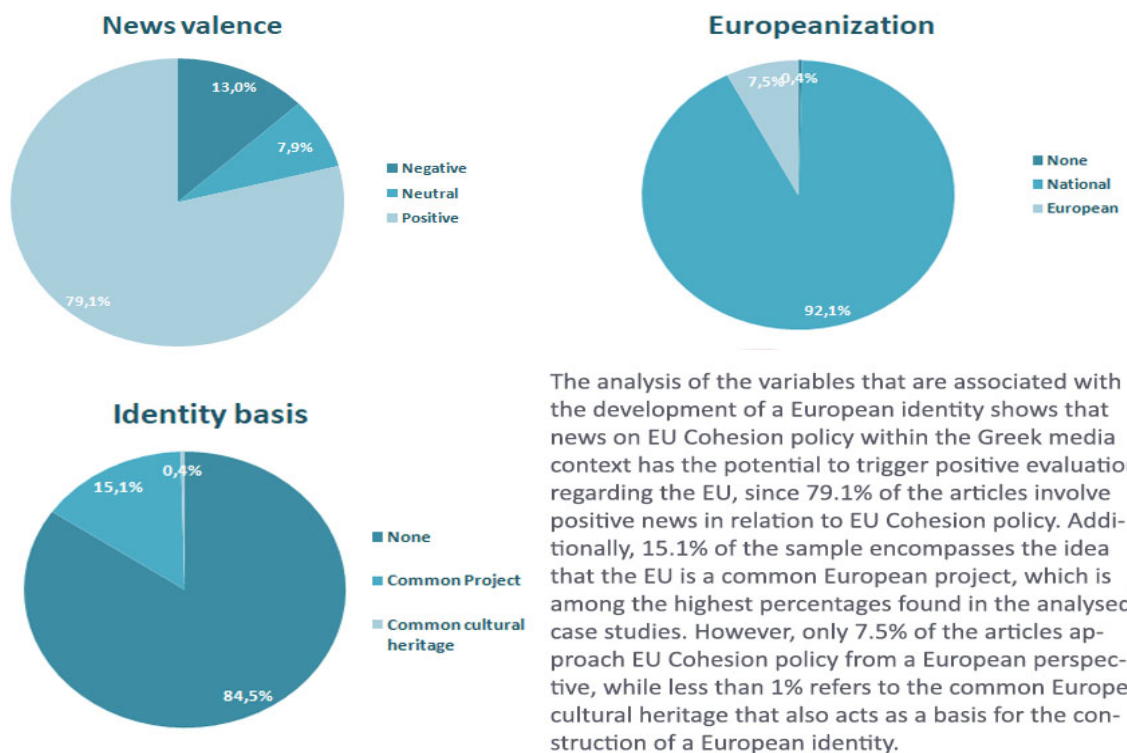


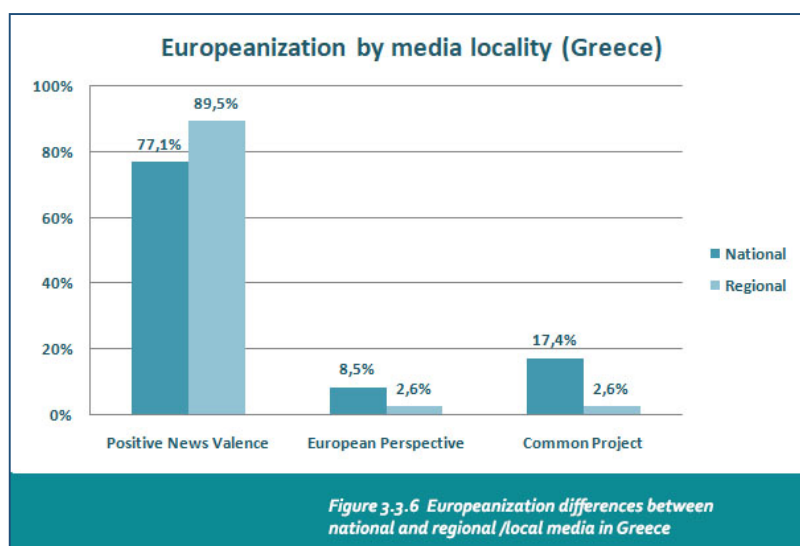
Figure 3.3.4  **Greece - Europeanization variables**



As shown in Figure 3.3.5 the analysis identified some differences in framing between national and regional media, as national media seem to interpret EU Cohesion policy predominantly in economic

terms, while regional media tend to emphasize on the implications of Cohesion policy on citizens namely in terms of quality of life. Moreover, the “Culture” frame appeared to be more salient in national media, while no other significant differences were found regarding the remaining frames.

Regarding the potential of Greek media to promote positive identification with the EU, the analysis shows that regional and local media tend to present positive news more often than national media. Nevertheless, national media seem to embrace the notion of a European community more than regional media, as they tend to present news from a European perspective and depict the EU as a common European project more often than regional media.



On a descriptive level, it is noted by most interviewed stakeholders that the media do not autonomously pay attention to the effects of Cohesion policy. An exception – as noted by one respondent – is the existence of three specialized broadcasts on public television dealing with general European issues, including Cohesion policy.

On a more political level, the findings here cannot be detached by the special condition of Greece in the era of austerity and the associated climate of Euroscepticism. Stakeholders are critical of what they perceive as an opportunistic and populist take on “Europe” as a concept by various media outlets, indirectly influencing the perception of Cohesion policy by the public. On the other hand, some stakeholders have voiced self-criticism, stating that Cohesion policy planners in Brussels must take account of the prevailing climate of discontent with European policies.

According to answers provided by interviewed stakeholders, the OPs manage their relations with the media primarily through specialized press officers assigned to the relevant ministries charged with the implementation of OPs. These provide the media with press releases and other informative material.

A certain improvement in the overall communication strategy could be observed in the fact that the focus has somewhat shifted from general television and radio advertisement to a more targeted approach involving events, as well as in the greater use of social media, something confirmed by Q12 of the Stakeholder Survey.

Once again conforming to the answers in the same question of the stakeholder survey, no definite answer on the question of which tools are used the most and least could be provided by interviewed stakeholders. However, it was noted that in various citizens surveys and focus group, the role of project signage has increased over the years. The events associated with the “Europe in my region” initiative was also credited with contributing to the raising of awareness. In general, measures with

greater public accessibility, such as events, were considered the most effective. Stakeholders further state in interviews that social media are not used extensively in promoting programme achievements. According to one interview, it is quite telling that of the 18 OPs currently implemented in Greece, only four use social media.

When questioned on the effectiveness of communication tools, the overwhelming majority of media used is judged positively by surveyed stakeholders, with television and the programme website being considered the most successful tools in conveying the messages of Cohesion policy in Greece. Only brochures and leaflets are judged to be ineffective by a significant percentage of respondents (28.57%).

Table 14: Stakeholder survey Q14. How effective do you think each of these communication measures are in increasing citizens' awareness of EU Cohesion Policy?

	Very	Effective	Neither	Ineffective	Very	Don't know	Not used in
Television	50%	42.85%	0%	7.14%	0%	0%	0%
Radio	14.28%	78.57%	0%	7.14%	0%	0%	0%
Local and regional	7.14%	50%	35.71%	7.14%	0%	0%	0%
National newspapers	0%	57.14%	28.57%	7.14%	0%	7.14%	0%
Programme website	50%	28.57%	21.42%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Video/film clips and	42.85%	35.71%	21.42%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Plaques/billboards with	21.42%	71.42%	7.14%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Social media (Facebook,	35.71%	50%	0%	0%	0%	14.28%	0%
Media/advertising	50%	42.85%	7.14%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Press releases	14.28%	71.42%	7.14%	7.14%	0%	0%	0%
Brochures, leaflets,	21.42%	50%	0%	28.57%	0%	0%	0%
Events	35.71%	42.85%	21.42%	0%	0%	0%	0%

4.5 Implications for citizens CP perceptions and attitudes to the EU

The overwhelming impression of the *interviewees* is that overall the public profile, visibility and awareness of the Structural Funds in Central Macedonia and Greece in general is satisfactory. This is because of the fact that there is general recognition of the added value of Cohesion policy programmes in Greece, both on the regional and on the national level. Cohesion policy has had a generally positive effect on the country, something recognized by both stakeholders and citizens. In addition, the effects of the economic crisis affecting Greece since the early 2010s have made the contribution of Cohesion policy even more salient, given the Greek state's curtailed fiscal sovereignty.

Despite these facts, many stakeholders feel that Cohesion policy and its achievements are not adequately communicated to the general public and not understood by the representatives of the media. Where support is recognised and noted, it does not necessarily translate into a positive perception of and support towards the policy and the European Union more generally.

In suggesting ways for **improving the communication of EU policy objectives and results**, the interviewees have covered the following aspects:

- Ensure a **coordinated approach to communication** across all levels: It appears important to ensure effective cooperation of delivery bodies (the MA, lead partners) and beneficiaries to support clarity and consistency of messaging across communication channels, maximise media coverage about the awarding of funding and overall strengthen partnership communications activity.
- **Apply a more strategic framework in identifying good practices**, as well as communicate and promote best practice examples. Best practices were mentioned by interviewees only circumstantially, indicating the lack of mechanisms of systematically promoting these to the wider public.
- Need to build and strengthen **cooperation with the media**, particularly through closer work with press officers and liaison with the local media as an efficient way of ensuring communication on EU funded projects. According to the interviews, media relations are mostly confined to press conference, as media representatives take little or no interest in Cohesion policy.
- In terms of actual **communication tools**, the main proposals by most interviewees for improving the communication of EU policy objectives and results focused on **continuing with the empirically successful medium of television as well as events such as “Europe in my region”**. Stakeholders interviewed take particular pride in the **programme website**, while also expressing positive attitudes on the emerging use of social media. The latter, however, is only in use by a minority of regional OPs in Greece.
- **Using simple and accessible language** – a language that people actually understand – and **delivering simple messages** is also seen as important. Surveyed stakeholders do not always believe that the language used is accessible to the wider public, both citizens and potential beneficiaries alike.
- **Involve high-profile figures to attend and speak at events**: Many stakeholders noted during the interviews that one of the most successful publicity campaigns involved a famous Greek actor during the 2007-2013 period.

Concerning the connection between the communication strategy employed by Cohesion policy in Greece on the one hand, and the impact on perceptions of the EU on the other, stakeholders surveyed were largely convinced that communication activities tend to strengthen the belonging to the EU, while largely not agreeing to the statement that citizens distrust Cohesion policy messages viewing them as propaganda. However, a fairly large percentage neither agrees nor disagrees with said statement, indicating a certain lack of interdependence between Cohesion policy and European identification.

Table 15: Stakeholder survey Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Source: N=18

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The communication activities have led to an increased awareness among citizens of the contribution of Cohesion policy to regional and local development	14.28%	50%	35.71%	0%	0%
The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds increase the sense of belonging of citizens to the European Union	21.42%	42.85%	28.57%	7.14%	0%
The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds contribute to increasing citizens' support for the European Union	14.28%	42.85%	28.57%	14.28%	0%
Citizens mistrust Cohesion policy communication activities and messages or consider them to be propaganda	7.14%	0%	42.85%	50%	0%

5. Citizens views of Cohesion policy and the EU

5.1 Survey results

The citizen survey provides more direct and representative insight into citizens' awareness and appreciation of Cohesion policy funding, as well as their attitudes to and identification with the EU.

AWARENESS OF EU FUNDING

Awareness on the specific roles assigned to each EU fund tasked with the implementation of Cohesion policy can be classified as relatively high. The ERDF is the most known fund, followed by the ESF and the Cohesion Fund.

Table 16: Citizen survey: Level of awareness of individual ESI funds

Have you heard about the following funds?

Fund	Yes	No	Don't know
The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	61,2%	38,6%	0%
The Cohesion Fund	43,6%	56,2%	0%
The European Social Fund (ESF)	55,4%	44,4%	0%

An overwhelming majority of Greeks claim not to have benefited in their daily lives by any of these three funds. Even if this can be contributed to a lack of complete awareness of the existence of the three funds, the evidence testifies nevertheless to a widespread feeling of frustration with the implementation of EU Cohesion policy by local authorities.

Table 17: Citizen survey: Personal benefit

Have you personally benefited from these funds?

Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
13,2%	84,2%	0,0%	2,6%

Results on the awareness of specific EU-funded projects are split almost evenly, with those aware only slightly more than those survey respondents who have never heard of any EU-funded improvement measures in their community.

Table 18: Citizen survey: Awareness of specific EU-funded projects

Are you personally aware of any specific EU-funded project in your region?

Yes	No	Don't know
52,6%	47,2%	0,2%

When knowledge around the existence of EU-funded projects was existent, it came overwhelmingly from the internet, as well as from personal experience with EU funding. An interesting finding in the case of Greece is that a bigger percentage of respondents have traced their source of awareness to social media rather than television. This is remarkable given the still underdeveloped role of social media in Greek Cohesion policy communication strategy, and the heavy emphasis placed on the medium of television. A slight majority of respondent has also stated knowing about the funding of specific projects by the EU through billboards, indicating a good use of signage in Central Macedonia. Only around a quarter of survey participants have stated to derive knowledge of EU funding from printed media. Given the tendency of social media and the internet to be used by younger generations rather than older ones, a certain age gap in the general awareness on Cohesion policy can be presumed in the case of Central Macedonia.

Table 19: Citizen survey: Sources of knowledge about EU funded projects

Where did you hear about EU funding to regions and cities?

Source	Yes	No	Don't know
National newspapers	26,2%	73,8%	0,0%
Local or regional newspapers	27,0%	73,0%	0,0%
National TV	52,9%	46,4%	,4%
Local or regional TV	36,5%	63,1%	0,0%
National radio	28,1%	71,5%	,4%
Local or regional Radio	33,5%	66,5%	0,0%
Internet	76,4%	23,6%	0,0%
Social media	58,2%	41,8%	0,0%
Billboard	51,7%	47,5%	,8%
Workplace	35,0%	64,6%	,4%
Personal experience or knowledge of projects	66,2%	33,8%	0,0%
Other	11,0%	88,2%	,4%

Testifying to the positive role played by good signage, an overwhelming acknowledgement have stated to have noticed public acknowledgement of EU funding in the forms of banners, placards and other indicators, such as plaques, EU flags, etc.

Table 20: Citizen survey: Role of signage

Have you noticed any public acknowledgement of EU funding in your region/town in the form of banners, placards etc.?

Yes	No	Don't know
60,2%	38,4%	1,4%

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF EU FUNDING

According to the findings of the Citizen Survey, Greek citizens tend to have a favourable view on the impact of European Union funding in their region. Only an absolute minority of respondents have expressed negative feelings about the impact of EU funding on their region. Almost half of the respondents have a positive view. More than one fifth of respondents have claimed to not have experienced any impact resulting from EU funding.

Table 21: Citizen survey: Perceived impact EU funding

How positive or negative was the impact of the funding of the European Union on your region or city?

Very positive	Positive	No impact	Negative	Very negative	Not applicable for my region or city	Don't know
9,9%	46,0%	22,1%	8,4%	3,0%	4,9%	5,7%

When no positive impact from EU funding was perceived, respondents were overwhelmingly more likely to place the blame subjective factors, such as allocation to the wrong projects, bad management and untimely delivery, as well as corruption, rather than the scarcity of EU funds. This indicates that after more than three decades of EU membership, Greek citizens are well aware of the availability of EU funds earmarked for regional development and are more likely to place responsibility on the human factor for any occurring irregularities.

Table 22: Citizen survey: Reasons for lack of positive impact of EU funding

Why do you think there was no positive impact?

Reason	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
Not enough funding	38,6%	56,8%	0,0%	4,5%
Allocation to wrong projects	72,7%	22,7%	0,0%	4,5%
Bad management	93,2%	4,5%	0,0%	2,3%
Not executed on time	81,8%	13,6%	0,0%	4,5%
Corruption among government officials awarding EU tenders	79,5%	14,8%	0,0%	5,7%
Corruption among beneficiaries of EU funds	77,3%	15,9%	0,0%	6,8%
Other reasons	90,9%	9,1%	0,0%	0,0%

Conforming to this pattern are the responses to the question inquiring the reasons for positive impacts. The availability of extensive funding is cited as the main reason for the positive impact of EU funding on regional development, as well as the allocation to the right projects. Good management and delivery on time or the absence of corruption among officials and beneficiaries are less likely to be named as responsible for the successes of Cohesion policy in Greece. These results correlate with the findings of the Focus Groups, where the positive role of EU Cohesion policy was often contrasted with the negative experience of implementation on the national level.

Table 23: Citizen survey: Reasons for the positive impact of EU funding
Why do you think there was a positive impact?

Reason	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
Extensive funding	78,2%	15,6%	0,0%	6,1%
Allocation to the right projects	72,1%	22,4%	0,0%	5,4%
Good management	29,9%	61,9%	0,0%	8,2%
Executed on time	23,8%	69,4%	0,0%	6,8%
No corruption among government officials awarding EU	28,6%	48,3%	0,0%	23,1%
No corruption among beneficiaries of EU funds	32,7%	46,3%	0,0%	21,1%
Other reasons	87,0%	13,0%	0,0%	0,0%

Despite registering frustration with the benefiting from EU funding on an individual level, a clear majority of Greeks in Central Macedonia have stated that their region would have developed either “worse” or “somewhat worse”. This confirms the generally positive perception of EU funding, notwithstanding a level of critique directed at its implementation.

Table 24: Citizen survey: Added value of EU funding
How do you think your region or city would have developed without EU funding?

Much better	Somewhat better	Same	Somewhat worse	A lot worse	Not applicable for my region or city	Don't know
6,6%	12,6%	20,2%	26,8%	22,8%	3,4%	7,6%

EU ATTITUDES

Greek public opinion appears to be strongly polarized on the key question if EU membership has benefited Greece. Only less than a third seem to agree, whereas only 14% appear to strongly agree. A quarter of respondents neither agrees or disagrees, whereas almost a third either disagrees or strongly disagrees. This polarization appears to be the result of deep dissatisfaction within Greek society with the handling of the Greek debt crisis by the Troika consisting of the IMF, the ECB and the EU. A generally positive attitude towards EU Cohesion policy funding does not appear to determine an equally positive attitude towards the political project of the EU.

Table 25: Citizen survey: Appreciation of EU membership
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “My country has benefited from being a member of the European Union”?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Refused	Don't know
14,0%	31,6%	22,4%	17,6%	13,2%	0,0%	1,2%

A three-way polarization can also be observed on the question of European integration. Around a fifth of respondents take a Eurosceptic approach, either “opposed” or “strongly opposed” to European integration. A quarter takes an indifferent attitude, whereas a significant minority tends to be in favour. This last segment correlates with the findings of the Greek Focus Groups, in which participants criticized the perceived democratic deficit of EU institutions and advocated a deepening and parallel of the democratization process as a remedy to the Euroscepticism affecting Greek society.

Table 26: Citizen survey: Position on European integration

How would you describe your general position on European integration?

Strongly opposed	Opposed	Somewhat opposed	Neutral	Somewhat in favour	In favour	Strongly in favour	Refused	Don't know
11,8%	12,8%	6,0%	26,4%	13,0%	17,8%	9,8%	,2%	2,2%

EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND ATTACHMENT

A purely European approach to self-identification seems to find itself in a minority position in Greece. Almost half of Greeks view themselves as both European and Greek, whereas a significant minority of 39% defines itself as “only Greek”. There is no way to precisely indicate if this is the result of crisis-related Euroscepticism.

Table 27: Citizen survey: Self-identification

Do you see yourself as...

Only Greek	Greek and European	European	European	Refused	Don't know
39,0%	45,4%	8,4%	5,2%	,2%	1,8%

Only about a fourth of respondents feels “very” attached to the EU and the European Union respectively, which appear to be perceived as synonymous by most survey respondents. A more significant percentage (35.8% and 36.2%) feels “somewhat attached” to the EU and “Europe” respectively. There is no way of deciphering if this results from some ideological commitment and belief in the European project or if this results from objective factors, i.e. mobility within Europe as a result of studying abroad. A certain Eurosceptic segment of around 20 to 25% appears to be constant, claiming to be attached to the EU and “Europe” “a little” or “not at all”. Again, the answers to this question appear to confirm the wide cracks opened up within Greek society in respects to the European project, as a result of the ongoing Eurozone crisis.

Table 28: Citizen survey: Territorial attachment

People may feel different degrees of attachment to places. Please tell me how attached you feel to:

	Very	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
Your city/town/village	71,8%	15,4%	6,4%	6,4%
Central Macedonia	61,6%	23,4%	7,6%	7,0%
Greece	78,2%	14,0%	4,8%	2,6%
The European Union	20,8%	35,8%	18,2%	24,2%
Europe	22,4%	36,2%	19,6%	20,8%

5.2 Focus group results

In this section we provide a summary of the key findings of the focus groups conducted with citizens in Central Macedonia. The results are divided into three categories: a) Cohesion policy, b) European identity, and c) the relation between European identity and Cohesion policy.

COHESION POLICY

Participants had different views as to what Cohesion policy means. The predominant view was that Cohesion policy aims to reduce disparities between EU Member states (EL 1 and EL2). In addition, Cohesion policy was associated with common decision-making (EL1) and was understood to be synonymous with the Cohesion fund (EL2). These are two examples of Cohesion policy interpretations:

EL 1, Participant 2: *"I personally view this more as a policy of convergence among European states. Broadly speaking, there are vast differences between the European North and the European South. Cohesion policy focuses mostly on the question of infrastructure, the inter-European networks, the ability of people and commodities to circulate freely, to have some cohesion in the European market. This is something desirable."*

EL1, Participant 3: *"I for one believe that cohesion has to do with the idea of how "connected" the Europeans are to one another. How capable they are in reaching some decision jointly. That is, I believe it has more to do with this type of bonding, regardless in which field we are referring to. Whether this is the economy or something else."*

Participants spoke mainly about road infrastructure projects (Table 1). In both groups, the impact of EU-funded projects was assessed positively in terms of improving economic, social and infrastructure conditions. However, participants believed that Greece had not utilised the funding effectively and efficiently. Corruption and mismanagement were among the two most cited problems in the implementation of EU projects in Central Macedonia. Some participants expressed the view that the funds were not reaching those that need them most. It was common for the participants to refer to the economic crisis and increased social inequalities in Greece.

Table 29: Participants' reference to projects co-financed by EU funds

Infrastructure
Roads (Thessaloniki-Chalkidiki, Chalkidon - Edessa)
Thessaloniki airport
Thessaloniki Metro
Nurseries
Biological processing plant
Environmental protection and resource efficiency
Energy efficiency projects in Central Macedonia and Crete
Employment
Projects aiming at enhancing work-life balance

Below we provide some more extracts to highlight the way participants described the problems associated most often with Cohesion policy for central Macedonia.

Mismanagement

EL 1, Participant 2: "I agree with what [Participant 3] and [Participant 1] said. In the sense that in Greece there are a lot of project carried out without the necessary preliminary studies. Often timetables are not respected and there is the example of the Thessaloniki Metro, where the project began without the full funding being secured in the first place. I don't think these things happen in other European countries."

Fraud

EL 2, Moderator: "Do you personally have experience with applying for EU funding?"

EL 2, Participant 1: "No. But friends and acquaintances of mine. Members of PASOK, they just took the money and hoarded it in the offices of their local branch."

EL 2, Moderator: "The funds?"

EL2, Participant 1: "Yes, they just grabbed everything for themselves."

Absorption

EL 2, Participant 2: "I personally don't know if this is part of our subject, but education funds, there is often a very small absorption percentage, five, seven percent. It is unacceptable. I read and hear things. There are schools with no desks or computers. For me this is unacceptable."

EUROPEAN IDENTITY

European identity was mainly discussed in cultural terms. According to participants, Europeans share some common values, such as the principles of parliamentary democracy and the respect of law. There was less agreement as to whether religion was a source of unity, due to debates on secularisation as well as a perceived increase of Islam among Europeans. Language was discussed as the most evident difference among Europeans. European identity was also represented through the use of the narrative of the "other". According to this representation, Europeans share a way of life which is contrasted against the American, Chinese and Russian way. This narrative emphasises not what unites Europeans as such but rather what differentiates them from 'others'. It was recognised that Greeks are not the typical Europeans because Greece is located in an area where "other" cultures (Ottoman and Balkan cultures) mix. Yet, some participants acknowledged that being European means living in a multicultural society, where national identity is not lost or undermined. Participants also felt that EU rights and policies, such as freedom of movement and the euro, contribute to binding Europeans together.

EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND COHESION POLICY

Participants had mixed views as to whether EU-funding contributes to building a common European identity. Most of them were sceptical about the idea. In EL 2, participants mentioned that the EU is seen as a source of money, which cannot "buy" identity. In EL 1, participants argued that social projects, such as subsidies for nurseries contributed more to building a European identity than other projects, highlighting the importance of a 'Social' Europe.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Key findings

Greece and its regions have a **long record of accomplishment** in implementing Cohesion policy Operational Programmes, meaning that authorities are relatively experienced. The **positive impact** of Cohesion policy programmes is widely recognized throughout the country and is considered a major factor in closing the developmental gap between Greece and the European core, ever since Greece joined the EU in 1981.

OPs implemented prior to the outbreak of the Greek debt crisis in the early 2010s have focussed largely on infrastructure projects, in line with the boom the Greek economy was experiencing from the 1990s onwards. The outbreak of the global financial crisis in Greece, however, has provided Cohesion policy stakeholders with a number of **challenges**. The outlook of the 2014-2020 OP for Central Macedonia, for instance, has a stronger social orientation, which can be attributed to the fact that Cohesion policy has become a central player in the provision of social services, given the bankruptcy of the Greek state and its curtailed fiscal sovereignty. Despite this, OPs such as the Central Macedonia OP presented in this case study, also place a heavy emphasis on more business-oriented aspects, such as renewable energy sources and information technology.

Not surprisingly under these circumstances, the **general awareness** of Cohesion policy in Greece remains high, something confirmed by the surveys and interviews conducted for the purposes of this study. However, a wide gap is evident between awareness and appreciation of Cohesion policy funds on the one hand, and a positive perception of the implementation and partnership structures involved. **Allocation to the wrong projects** and corruption were some of the main reasons mentioned by citizens to explain problems with the implementation of Cohesion policy. Their absence was conversely interpreted as a key to successful project implementation. As evidenced by the results of the focus groups, there is a widespread association of Cohesion policy with **corruption on the regional and municipal levels**, as well as a widely held suspicion that EU funding on those levels is intertwined party patronage networks, which form a salient feature of modern political life in Greece.

When it comes to **communication**, Greece can be described as a somewhat contradictory case. On the one hand, Greek stakeholders have accumulated experience with Cohesion policy and have tried and tested a number of communication tools over the years. Next to the widely acknowledged as successful medium of television, communication officers for the Greek OPs make extensive use of the internet and increasingly social media. Despite this, stakeholders in the implementation process **do not deem the communication of results to be a high priority**, as evidenced by the low number of participants in workshops and seminars that concern themselves with this aspect.

The results of citizen surveys and focus group suggest that awareness on Cohesion policy is **generally sufficient**. Nevertheless, awareness of Cohesion policy **does not necessarily translate** into a high level of awareness about the concrete mechanisms the funds are allocated, leading to a certain degree of mystification around Cohesion policy. Data from the stakeholder survey naming excessive auditing and cumbersome reporting, as well as a feeling that relevant documents are not easy to understand by the general public or potential beneficiaries, may be major causes behind the inability of Cohesion policy to transcend the mere stereotype of “EU money”.

There are **differentiations in the levels of awareness**, with younger ages exhibiting more knowledge on European affairs in general, with older generations lacking this knowledge. This date corresponds with the findings regarding **the ways in which information on Cohesion policy is communicated**. Accordingly, television and the internet, both media used by younger ages, are considered more effective communication tools than the printed press, which is usually read by older ages.

Furthermore, **views on European identity** can be described as only loosely related to the perception of Structural Funds in Central Macedonia and Greece in general. The media framing of Cohesion policy appears to confirm this trend, as Cohesion policy is almost always framed in **economic terms**. An identity dimension seems to be underdeveloped, with national media being more active in framing stories on Cohesion policy in European terms than local or regional media, where specific Cohesion policy projects on the microlevel are more likely to be highlighted.

Furthermore, the feeling of **“being European”** in Greece does articulate itself in competition to feelings of national belonging but is rather complementary to them. Greeks perceive Europe as synonymous with a highly developed, open and multicultural society, where particular national identities are not undermined. The euro and free movements are seen as key pillars of promoting a feeling of European inclusiveness, pointing to a largely economic perception of European integration. At the same time, Greeks are highly aware of their status as **not “ordinary” Europeans**, given the close interaction of Greek culture with other regional settings, such as the Balkans and the Middle East, often producing a certain dichotomy of “us” (Greeks) versus “them” (Europeans) in public, as well as informal discourses. When asked on how the EU can make its citizens feel more included, participants at focus groups have emphasized their preference for a more federalized structure in the EU, as well as a stronger focus on social investments rather than just profit-oriented infrastructure projects.

Some of the key findings regarding Cohesion policy communication in Central Macedonia are listed below.

- The approach to communication can be characterised as rich and multifaceted. A coherent Communication strategy with its own budget, indicators, and targets exists in Greece. Years of experience have provided Greek stakeholders with ideas on how to best pursue communication efforts. A variety of media is used in conveying Cohesion policy messages.
- However, stakeholders do not attach high importance to communication strategy, as the generally high awareness of Cohesion policy funds in Greece makes a stronger emphasis on communication appear superfluous.
- The media are aware of Cohesion policy, with regional and local media more likely to pursue stories on specific Cohesion policy projects than national media. At the same time, national media are more likely to frame Cohesion policy in European terms.
- There is no standardized and systematic cooperation between stakeholders and the media.
- Politicians used to take credit for the successes of Cohesion policy in the past, however, the outbreak of the Greek debt crisis and the ever-growing reliance of Greece on Cohesion policy funds seems to have increasingly rendered this impossible.
- The Cohesion funding measures for Central Macedonia for the 2007-2013 period had a strong focus on the advancement of the economy’s competitiveness and the promotion of the region as hub located between the Mediterranean and the Balkans, whereas the crisis has forced Cohesion policy to take a more socially-oriented posture in the 2014-2020 period, due to compensate for the Greek state’s weakness in the aftermath of the crisis.
- Citizens are primarily concerned with the results of Cohesion policy measures rather than their source. There is low awareness of the complexities of the EU laws and funding allocation.
- There is a diffuse criticism of the complexities of acquiring EU funding and the bureaucracy involved.

6.2 Policy implications and recommendations

In light of these and other evidence, the case study presents the following policy implications and recommendations, which might facilitate a better understanding of Cohesion policy in Greece:

- Invest more time and effort in communicating the complex mechanisms behind Cohesion policy funding allocation in a much more **simple and accessible language**, to overcome the feeling that EU funding opportunities involve too many technicalities and bureaucracy.
- Add a stronger emphasis to social aspects of Cohesion policy, such as the amelioration of the worst effects of the crisis in Greece, to promote a stronger feeling of **inclusiveness** for Greek citizens.
- Consider the widespread feeling of Euroscepticism in Greek society and take **integrate this awareness** in communication efforts.
- Add more mechanisms to **ensure transparency** in the allocation of Cohesion policy funds, to combat the image of Cohesion policy as a hub of corruption and party patronage. Actively involve citizens in processes of accountability.
- Give more prominence to **human resources** related to communication. Create more officer positions among various stakeholder institutions and beneficiaries.
- Ensure a **coordinated approach to communication** across all levels to ensure better and more cost-efficient ways in conveying Cohesion policy messages.
- Apply a more **strategic framework in identifying good practices**, as well as communicate and promote best practice examples.
- Expand the already extensive use of internet and **social media** in promoting the Cohesion policy message, without neglecting the importance of printed press media for people in older ages.
- Organize more events, such as the **“Europe in my region”** series of events, where the achievements of Cohesion policy are publicized to the wider public.
- Involve **human interest stories** from ordinary citizens as well as **well-known personalities** in promoting Cohesion policy messages.
- Attach greater importance to those aspects of Cohesion policy that have a **social, rather than profit-oriented** character.

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8. Annexes

Annex 1: Focus groups

Table 30: Focus groups

ID / file name	Region	Location	Date	Duration	N of participants	Female participants	Age range	Age range by year of birth
GR1	Central Macedonia	Thessaloniki	28.9.17	65 mins	3	1	25-61	1955-1982
GR2	Central Macedonia	Thessaloniki	28.9.17	61 mins	3	0	37-52	1965-1980
GR3	Central Macedonia	Thessaloniki	29.9.17	58 mins	2	2	39-54	1963-1978

Table 31: Focus groups participants

ID / file name	Age	Gender	Name	Recruitment method	Education level	employment status
GRCM1	62	Male	P1	survey	Post-secondary	retired
GRCM1	50	Female	P2	survey	Post-secondary	employed
GRCM1	25	Male	P3	survey	Tertiary education – advanced level	student
GRCM2	39	Male	P1	survey	Post-secondary	employed
GRCM2	52	Male	P2	survey	Upper secondary	employed
GRCM2	37	Male	P3	survey	Post-secondary	employed
GRCM3	54	Female	P1	survey	Post-secondary	employed
GRCM3	39	Female	P2	snowball	Secondary	employed

Annex 2: List of interviewees

Table 32: List of interviewees

Interview	Date	Type of organisation	Role
1	06.07	Intermediary/implementing partner	Special Strategy, Planning and Evaluation Authority, Officer
2	14.07	Managing Authority	National Coordination Authority, General director
3	17.07	Intermediary/implementing partner	Special Strategy, Planning and Evaluation Authority, General director
4	18.07	Intermediary/implementing partner	Management Organisation Unit, Senior officer
5	19.07	Managing Authority	Head of Information and Communication Department
6	21.07	Managing Authority	National Coordination Authority, General director