



COHESIFY

The impact of EU Cohesion Policy
on European Identification

Cohesion policy implementation, performance and communication Thuringia case study

Stephan Heichel, Martin Gross and Marc Debus



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

Table of Contents

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 1. | Introduction | 1 |
| 2. | Context and background | 2 |
| 2.1 | EU attitudes and identity | 2 |
| 2.2 | Political context..... | 7 |
| 2.3 | Regional and local governance | 13 |
| 2.4 | Socio-economic context and history | 15 |
| 3. | Cohesion policy implementation and performance | 16 |
| 3.1 | EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework | 16 |
| 3.1.1 | Operational Programmes for Thuringia 2007-2013 | 18 |
| 3.1.2 | Operational Programmes for Thuringia 2014-2020 | 20 |
| 3.1.3 | Implementation framework and partnership structures | 22 |
| 3.2 | Assessment of Performance..... | 23 |
| 3.2.1 | Programme performance | 23 |
| 3.2.2 | Partnership..... | 34 |
| 3.3 | Assessment of added value | 35 |
| 4. | Cohesion policy communication..... | 36 |
| 4.1 | Approach to communication..... | 36 |
| 4.1.1 | 2007-13 period | 36 |
| 4.1.2 | 2014-2020 period..... | 37 |
| 4.2 | Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies | 42 |
| 4.2.1 | 2007-13 period | 42 |
| 4.2.2 | 2014-20 period | 45 |
| 4.3 | Good practice examples..... | 47 |
| 4.4 | Media framing of Cohesion policy..... | 47 |
| 4.5 | Implications for citizens CP perceptions and attitudes to the EU | 52 |
| 5. | Citizens views of Cohesion policy and the EU | 54 |
| 5.1 | Citizen survey results..... | 54 |
| 5.2 | Focus group results | 57 |

| | | |
|-----|--|----|
| 6. | Conclusions | 60 |
| 6.1 | Key findings | 60 |
| 6.2 | Scientific conclusions | 63 |
| 6.3 | Policy implications and recommendations | 65 |
| 7. | References | 66 |
| 8. | Annexes..... | 70 |
| | Annex 1: Online survey response rates | 70 |
| | Annex 2: List of interviewees | 71 |
| | Annex 3: Focus group characteristics | 71 |
| | Annex 4: Communication plan measures and indicators..... | 71 |
| | Annex 5 Online Survey Questionnaire | 74 |
| | Annex II: Interview Questionnaire | 80 |

1. Introduction

Objectives and rationale

This case study deals with Thuringia, a region which is located in the Centre East of Germany. We chose Thuringia as a case study for several reasons. First, Thuringia is one of the most prosperous regions in the eastern part of Germany in economic terms, but still did not reach the economic level of most of the West German regions. Secondly, Thuringia largely benefitted from European Union (EU) regional transfer money in the 1990s and early 2000s. It was an Objective 1/Convergence region, thus receiving much higher allocations than the wealthier regions in the Western part of Germany. For example, even though the gap to Baden-Wuerttemberg (the other German region investigated as case study) has decreased in the 2007-13 programming period, Thuringia still receives approx. 45 times more funds per capita than Baden-Wuerttemberg, and 4.5 times more than the national average. Fourthly, Thuringia lost approx. one quarter of its allocation in the current programming period and “phased-out” as convergence region. Fifthly, like people from other East German regions, Thuringians have been and remain EU sceptics despite the region’s status as a net benefiter of EU membership in financial terms. Until very recently, they overwhelmingly mistrusted the EU. Accordingly, people of the region tend to have rather negative or at best neutral images of the European Union, although they mostly agree with the ideas of an integrating Europe and the EU’s goals. However, they are largely critical or ambivalent with respect to how these goals are pursued. Similarly, only a little more of the region’s inhabitants see more advantages as compared to disadvantages of Germany’s and Thuringia’s EU membership. Finally, the emotional connectedness to the EU remains low as only minorities of Thuringians consider themselves Europeans first or European citizens – the latter until 2017 (Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017), 86.2 (2016), 84.3 (2015), 82.3 (2014; Thüringen Monitor 2014). Lastly, as opposed to other East German regions, Thuringia is not a border region and cannot apply for EU regional transfer money regarding interregional programmes.

Thuringia is a state (*Land*) in the Germany federal system, i.e., it has state character with typical features, like a parliament, a government headed by a prime minister, a multi-layered administrative system as well as a differentiated court system. Like all German states, it does also know a two-tiered system of democratic local government that enjoys constitutional protection. The state’s government (ministries) is the Management Authority for the ERDF and the ESF. As a result, although the German federal government performs a monitoring role to ensure that state implement EU policy, the state government of Thuringia enjoys vast discretion in policy implementation.

Hence, the selection criteria for the case study included Cohesion policy eligibility and financial intensity as well as recent dynamics in terms of the latter, particularities of Cohesion policy eligibility in an East German region, governance system and European identity. The case study results are derived from a mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative data. Empirical findings stem from desktop analyses of region’s implementation and communication of EU Cohesion Policy (CP), surveys among citizens and stakeholders asking for their views on CP, semi-structured interviews with members of Monitoring Committees (MC), focus groups with citizens, media analysis on CP, and socio-economic and political context analyses.

Methodology

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

A stakeholders’ online survey was carried out in the spring – summer of 2017. The survey was sent to 41 stakeholders, involved in ESI Funds 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. The response rate was 31.7 percent (or 10 respondents, out of which 3 incomplete and 7 complete responses) and the completion rate was 17.1 percent (or 7 complete responses), as shown in Table 32 **Error! Reference source not found.** in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Interviews were conducted with 7 stakeholders representing the Managing Authority, economic and social partners, civil society organisations, local governments and local authority associations, and implementing partners at regional level. Interviews were carried out between July and September. (see Annex Table 33 for more details).

In the focus groups being part of the case study of Thuringia, 6 participants (2 female and 4 male) took part in one focus group in the city of Eisenach. The group was larger, yet not completely homogenous per age cohort (27-57), but female participation was rated more important than closer age cohesion. The stronger male representation did not hinder the level of engagement by the female participants in the discussion. Most of participants were residents in Eisenach while two were residents of Erfurt, Thuringia's capital. All were German citizens.

All participants were recruited through snowball sampling using personal networks. A payment was not offered, but light refreshments and cakes were provided in a professional conference location in a local hotel (see Table 34 in **Error! Reference source not found.** for more details).

A citizen survey with a representative sample of Thuringia's inhabitants (n=500) was conducted in the spring of 2017 by a professional survey institute. Citizens were asked questions about their knowledge of Cohesion policy, their assessment of Cohesion policy's role in the region as a whole as well as in their place of residence, and if they have personally benefitted from a co-funded project. Besides, respondents were requested to express their opinion about German EU membership, i.e., whether they believe this is positive or negative. Finally, citizens were asked several question that had the goal to inquire into their identities. This means that questions intend to find out how closely people of Thuringia identify with Europe, the European Union in general and the idea of European integration. Within that scope, question also addressed aspects of national and regional identities of citizens and how the latter would contrast or correspond with identities beyond national borders.

Structure of the case study

The case study is structured as follows. The next section describes the socio-economic and political context of Thuringia, with a special focus on citizens' EU attitudes and identity, as well as regional parties' political orientations towards European integration and CP. In section three, we present the results on the implementation and performance of the Operational Programmes (OPs) for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in Thuringia for the programming periods 2007-13 and 2014-20. Section four deals with the communication aspects of CP in these two programming periods. How citizens evaluate the EU and CP is the focus of section five. The final section summarizes the key findings, draws scientific conclusions and elaborates on policy implications and recommendations.

2. Context and background

2.1 EU attitudes and identity

Systematic and rigorous inquiries into regional attitudes and identities in Germany – which would, for example, imply to (regularly) conduct and analyse representative surveys done at the states' level – lack a research tradition. This would especially hold true for comparative research, but the

assessment is also accurate for research that focuses on single regions, at least with respect to most German states (*Länder*). Thus, there is not really a state of the art that could be reported while this is even more so for research that would deal with regional attitudes and identities, and here especially in terms of observable differences, towards Europe and the European Union. The only major exception to this are analyses of differences between East and West Germans since unification in 1990.

In fact, it is only recently that systematic, comparative, cross-regional research focusing on regional populations' attitudes and values gained some momentum (see Bertelsmann-Stiftung 2017; Mannewitz 2015). Unfortunately, this research has not yet touched upon EU themes. However, for Thuringia, the data situation is considerably better than for most other German states. This is because Thuringia has established a survey instrument on a permanent bases, which annually inquires into beliefs, opinions and attitudes of the state's population about general and current political issues, often with an additional thematic focus. This is the *Thüringen Monitor*. It is financed by the state government (or more precisely the Thuringian State Chancellery, i.e., the office of the prime minister) while the surveys are conducted with subsequent analyses and presentation of results by a team in the Department of Sociology of Friedrich Schiller University Jena.¹ In that, the great advantage of this data collection is that underlying samples are truly representative for the entire regional population.

In the following, we present, first, selected results on EU related beliefs, attitudes and identities that are mostly taken from the 2014 version of *Thüringen Monitor* that focused on what people from Thuringia know about the EU, how they assess EU's role for Germany as such as well as for the region and if and to what extent they feel affiliated with the European Union. That issue of the annual serial is entitled *Der Thüringer als Europäer* [The Thuringian as a European] (Thüringen Monitor 2014).

As the data from the *Thüringen Monitor 2014* are the only available source so far that are, however, not updated annually for European Union related items except one (European identification), we, secondly, present some relevant results for residents of Thuringia from the German polling of the most recent annual Eurobarometer survey rounds. These are accompanied by results from the first year of the previous Cohesion policy funding period that is 2007.² For some highly relevant results of only recently included questions, data are presented for the year 2017 only.

In doing so, it has to be stressed that these are non-representative samples of region's inhabitants as representativeness of Eurobarometer data is only assured for the Germany as whole. Besides, sample sizes are generally too small for representativeness, but also for further, especially more sophisticated analyses. This would especially hold true for Thuringian respondents, which is why the actual number of state residents included in Eurobarometer will be clearly indicated in the following data presentations. However, in terms of (simple) descriptive presentation, the data would give some further hints with respect to – more recent – EU attitudes and values of inhabitants of the region. This would allow for reasonable, albeit also cautions and perhaps only preliminary conclusions.

As shown in Table 1, Thuringians were in 2014 rather undecided in terms of attributing advantages or disadvantages to the region's EU membership. While more people saw more disadvantages as compared to disadvantages, a clear plurality of people asked saw advantages and disadvantages equally distributed. This is resembled with respect to personal advantages or disadvantages, except

¹ Please consult http://www.soziologie.uni-jena.de/thueringen_monitor.html and <https://www.thueringen.de/th1/tsk/landesregierung/thueringenmonitor/> for more information.

² Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017) 86.2 (2016), 84.3 (2015), 82.3 (2014), 68.1 (2007). Data for 2007 are omitted in tables when respective question had not yet been included in survey.

that here there is an – albeit small – majority of persons expressing a neutral assessment (see Table 2).

Table 1: Advantages or disadvantages of Thuringia's EU membership, percentages

| N | More advantages | Advantages and disadvantage equalize | More disadvantages | Don't know/no answer |
|------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1005 | 26 | 43 | 15 | 16 |

Source: Thüringen Monitor 2014, Table A70.

Table 2: Personal advantages or disadvantages of EU membership, percentages

| N | More advantages | Advantages and disadvantage equalize | More disadvantages | Don't know/no answer |
|------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1005 | 24 | 53 | 12 | 11 |

Source: Thüringen Monitor 2014, Table A71.

While the assessment of pros and cons of regional and personal EU membership is mixed at best, yet 84 percent of respondents indicated that the EU means "peace" for Germany, 61 percent agreed that it means "economic prosperity", but for 78 percent it also meant "more bureaucracy" while 64 percent would even say that the EU means a "waste of money". 52 percent of Thuringians associated the EU with "more crime" for Germany (Thüringen Monitor 2014, Tables A72-A76).³

In contrast to this, it seems that region's inhabitants were more clearly in support of the general ideas behind the EU or European integration in general and that they overwhelmingly supported the larger goals involved. For 73 percent, the EU meant "solidarity between member states". 78 percent of Thuringians believed that a Germany leaving the EU would hurt the national economy while 68 percent thought that this negative consequence would also materialise for the regional economy. Nonetheless, only slightly more than 50 percent (53%) would have agreed that a German exit from the EU would mean "political isolation" while an astonishingly share of more than 40 percent did not see such a consequence. Considering this, it comes as a surprise that after all 50 percent of region's inhabitants thought that, generally speaking, things within the European Union develop in the right direction whereas only 31 would have denied this (Thüringen Monitor 2014, Tables A77-A90).

Finally, constantly collected representative survey data indicate a low emotional identification of Thuringians with Europe. From 2000 (question first asked) until 2016, less than 10 percent of region's inhabitants considered themselves as Europeans first, i.e. rather than German or Thuringian. This did only change very recently as in 2017, 12 percent said that their predominant self-assessment is "European" rather than a national or regional identity (Thüringen Monitor 2016, 2017).

When turning to Eurobarometer survey results, the empirical picture is clearly more EU sceptic, albeit it has to be stressed again that these survey data are non-representative as, among other weaknesses, the sample sizes are way too small of valid assessments. Hence, these results should rather be treated with extreme caution and conceived to be of illustrative, supportive character.

As the results indicate, until very recently, only small shares of respondents tended to trust the European Union while large and sometimes even vast majorities of people from Thuringia tended not to trust the EU (see Table 3). Corresponding to this, the shares of respondent with – at least – a "fairly" positive image of the EU have remained low in recent years. While the number of regional inhabitants with neutral image has obviously increased as this group now even forms the majority, the

³ For all results from the *Thüringen Monitor 2014* that are reported in the following, n=1005.

percentages of persons with a negative images were quite high and until recently much higher than the percentages of persons with positive images (see Table 4).

Table 3: Trust in the European Union of region's inhabitants, percentages

| Trust in European Union | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2007 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Tend to trust | 42.9 | 14.5 | 16.4 | 35.8 | 35.0 |
| Tend not to trust | 44.3 | 76.8 | 82.1 | 52.2 | 53.8 |
| Don't know | 12.9 | 8.7 | 1.5 | 11.9 | 11.3 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total N | 70 | 69 | 67 | 67 | 80 |

Source: Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017), 86.2 (2016), 84.3 (2015), 82.3 (2014), 68.1 (2007); question QA8a.

Table 4: Image of the European Union for region's inhabitants, percentages

| Image of the EU | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2007 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Very positive | 2.9 | 0.0 | 6.0 | 1.5 | 2.5 |
| Fairly positive | 20.0 | 7.2 | 13.4 | 22.4 | 32.5 |
| Neutral | 54.3 | 43.5 | 26.9 | 44.8 | 47.5 |
| Fairly negative | 17.1 | 30.4 | 34.3 | 17.9 | 15.0 |
| Very negative | 5.7 | 17.4 | 19.4 | 11.9 | 1.3 |
| Don't know | 0.0 | 1.4 | 0.0 | 1.5 | 1.3 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total N | 70 | 69 | 67 | 67 | 80 |

Source: Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017), 86.2 (2016), 84.3 (2015), 82.3 (2014), 68.1 (2007); question QA9.

On the other hand, in personal terms, people of Thuringia assign several positive meanings to the EU, especially peace, but even more so travelling and (the opportunity) to work abroad. Astonishingly, economic prosperity is hardly mentioned while this would clearly collide with the results from the 2014 *Thüringen Monitor*. Despite the obvious shortcoming of the data, a general impression is that Thuringians more often and personally associate negative meanings with the EU, like "more crime" or – as could be interpreted – an insufficient control of borders. In similar terms, people from the region tend to stress negatively perceived meanings like "waste of money" and "bureaucracy" in connection with the European Union (albeit with a partial decrease for 2017) (see Table 5).

Table 5: Meanings of European Union for region's inhabitants, absolute figures (mentions)

| What does the EU mean to you? | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Peace | 31 | 9 | 17 | 26 |
| Economic Prosperity | 7 | 3 | 4 | 9 |
| Democracy | 5 | 3 | 4 | 10 |
| Social protection | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Travel/Study/Work abroad | 34 | 17 | 28 | 25 |
| Cultural diversity | 8 | 12 | 7 | 20 |
| Stronger say in the world | 8 | 8 | 4 | 13 |
| Euro | 27 | 28 | 27 | 26 |
| Unemployment | 6 | 8 | 23 | 20 |
| Bureaucracy | 16 | 28 | 33 | 34 |
| Waste of money | 29 | 29 | 37 | 40 |
| Loss of cultural identity | 5 | 5 | 20 | 11 |
| More crime | 31 | 26 | 32 | 32 |
| Not enough frontier control | 32 | 20 | 36 | 30 |

| | | | | |
|------------|----|----|----|----|
| Other | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Don't know | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Total N | 70 | 69 | 67 | 67 |

Source: Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017), 86.2 (2016), 84.3 (2015), 0.3 (2014); question QA11.

In line with the previous results, there is also only a “mixed” assessment when it comes to deciding whether the selected terms would describe the EU rather well or rather badly. While for most positive attributes pluralities or even majorities of persons asked would assign a status of a fairly good description, it is remarkable that the percentages of fairly good descriptions in connection with positive attributes are low. In contrast, the percentages of fairly bad not to mention very bad rated descriptions of commonly positive attributes have been and remain rather high (see Table 6). This would largely correspond to the *Thüringen Monitor 2014* results.

Table 6: Terms, region's inhabitants see as appropriately describing the European Union in 2017, percentages

| How well do these terms describe the EU? | Modern | Democratic | Protective | Efficient | Remote | Forward-looking |
|--|--------|------------|------------|-----------|--------|-----------------|
| Very well | 14.3 | 11.4 | 8.6 | 2.9 | 22.9 | 14.3 |
| Fairly well | 47.1 | 57.1 | 62.9 | 42.9 | 31.4 | 47.1 |
| Fairly badly | 24.3 | 22.9 | 18.6 | 28.6 | 32.9 | 27.1 |
| Very badly | 2.9 | 5.7 | 4.3 | 15.7 | 7.1 | 7.1 |
| Don't know | 11.4 | 2.9 | 5.7 | 10.0 | 5.7 | 4.3 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total N | 70 | 70 | 70 | 70 | 70 | 70 |

Source: Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017); question QA12.

With respect to the “emotional dimension” of Europe and the European Union, Eurobarometer data clearly indicate a rather low level of attachment of people from Thuringia to the EU. Disregarding the data for 2007, until 2017 a majority of respondents felt not very attached to the Union while another about one fifths of persons asked even felt not at all attached to the EU (see Tables 7 and 8). Not in line, but also not really in contradiction to this – before 2017 – Thuringians at best felt to “some extent” as an EU citizen with large percentages of respondents that did not really or even not at all feel as a citizen of the EU. These latter segment even constituted majorities or pluralities (see Table 9).

Table 7: Attachment of region's inhabitants to the European Union, percentages

| How attached to you feel to the EU? | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2007 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Very attached | 1.4 | 4.3 | 1.5 | 0.0 | 6.3 |
| Fairly attached | 35.7 | 17.4 | 19.4 | 22.4 | 38.8 |
| Not very attached | 45.7 | 56.5 | 55.2 | 52.2 | 45.0 |
| Not at all attached | 15.7 | 18.8 | 23.9 | 22.4 | 8.8 |
| Don't know | 1.4 | 2.9 | 0.0 | 3.0 | 1.3 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total N | 70 | 69 | 67 | 67 | 80 |

Source: Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017), 86.2 (2016), 84.3 (2015), 82.3 (2014), 68.1 (2007); question QD1a.

Table 8: If region's inhabitants feel as a European Union citizen, percentages

| Do you feel to be an EU citizen? | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|

| | | | | |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Yes, definitely | 17.1 | 10.1 | 13.4 | 7.5 |
| Yes, to some extent | 52.9 | 37.7 | 29.9 | 44.8 |
| No, not really | 12.9 | 30.4 | 32.8 | 28.4 |
| No, definitely not | 17.1 | 18.8 | 22.4 | 19.4 |
| Don't know | 0.0 | 2.9 | 1.5 | 0.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total N | 70 | 69 | 67 | 67 |

Source: Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017), 86.2 (2016), 84.3 (2015), 82.3 (2014); question QD2.

Finally, it does not come as a real surprise that, especially in recent years, majorities of Thuringians see the future of the European Union as fairly pessimistic. However, as this assessment was clearly different in the year 2007 it seems reasonable arguing that it can to some extent be attributed to European Union's crises after 2007, i.e. the economic and fiscal crises that later turned into the crises of the EMU and the more recent at least EU related crisis developments in terms of asylum and migration, EU sceptic governments in ever more states and not least the *Brexit* (see Table 9).

Table 9: How region's inhabitants see the future of the European Union citizen, percentages

| How do you see the future of the EU? | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2007 |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Very optimistic | 2.9 | 1.4 | 9.0 | 0.0 | 5.0 |
| Fairly optimistic | 41.4 | 21.7 | 14.9 | 49.3 | 58.8 |
| Fairly pessimistic | 52.9 | 52.2 | 46.3 | 38.8 | 27.5 |
| Very pessimistic | 2.9 | 18.8 | 28.4 | 10.4 | 2.5 |
| Don't know | 0.0 | 5.8 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 6.3 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total N | 70 | 69 | 67 | 67 | 80 |

Source: Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017), 86.2 (2016), 84.3 (2015), 82.3 (2014), 68.1 (2007); question QD19.

Overall, although EU attitudes and identities of the Thuringian population are not clear-cut and results from the *Thüringen Monitor 2014* and most recent Eurobarometer data are for some issues different to reconcile (also considering that questions are not congruent) it seems fair arguing that the regional population (still) displays a rather high level of EU scepticism – even though this would not mean that majorities of region's population are opposing the EU in general or its goals and policies. This would especially hold true for comparisons with West German regions (states) although one could speculate that Thuringians are still more "EU friendly" than people of other regions in Germany's East. What is especially remarkable are pretty low levels of EU identification as the largest population segments indicate a low level of or even missing adherence to the Union. However, when taking a closer look, there are also first signs that this is about to change as previous younger age cohorts with considerably higher levels of EU identification mature (*Thüringen Monitor 2017*, Table A3).

2.2 Political context

The political context is not only shaped by the institutional structure of the state of Thuringia and of Germany, but also by the policy profile political parties adopt. Parties are the main linkage between the preferences and interests of the citizens with the institutions on the political system level, and therefore we analyse the issue area salencies and the policy positions of Baden-Württemberg state parties in more detail.

Methodology for estimating party positions

Party positions on policy issues, in general, as well as on European integration and EU Cohesion policy, in particular, are measured most of the time by either using expert surveys or content analyses of parties' election manifestos.⁴ Several expert surveys on party positions on the issue of European integration have been conducted in the last decades (Ray, 1999; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2012). Additionally, expert judgements on national parties' policy stances towards European integration are part of broader projects on assessing party positions on a variety of policy issues (Bakker et al., 2015; Benoit & Laver, 2006; Laver & Hunt, 1992). With the exception of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES, see Bakker et al., 2015), however, there is also on the national level a lack of data on party policy positions on EU Cohesion policy. This is, for instance, also the case for data sets on party positions based on the analysis of party documents. Both the Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR; see Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Merz et al., 2016) and the Euromanifesto Project (EMP; see Braun et al., 2015) manually code 'quasi-sentences' referring to European integration issues in parties' manifestos for national elections and European Parliament (EP) elections. EMP additionally provides data on Europarties' policy positions on European integration by analysing election manifestos of the transnational party federations of national parties in the EP (see, e.g. Klüver & Rodon, 2013; also see Gabel & Hix, 2002). Furthermore, EMP comprises data on national parties' and Europarties' stances towards EU Structural Funds: Coders have to decide if a 'quasi-sentence' belongs to the sub-category "Positive: Need to maintain or to extend EC/EU funds for structurally underdeveloped areas" or to the sub-category "Negative: Support for cutback or suspension of funds for structurally underdeveloped areas".

This variety of measurements on party orientations towards European integration led to a vibrant debate on the quality of the different measures (Marks *et al.*, 2007; Netjes & Binnema, 2007; Ray, 2007; Whitefield *et al.*, 2007). To put it in a nutshell, both expert surveys and manifesto data are valid measures of party positions on European integration (Marks *et al.*, 2007; Ray, 2007). Government parties in particular take a positive stance for a further deepening of European integration while opposition parties, radical left parties, and parties leaning towards a more nationalist and authoritarian state are more Eurosceptic (Hooghe *et al.*, 2004). Yet, researchers have to bear in mind that especially "[s]mall, extreme, parties appear more difficult to pin down than larger, centrist ones" (Marks *et al.*, 2007, p. 24). Experts sometimes do not have enough information on small and extreme parties and thus differ in their judgements. To sum up, expert surveys and manifesto data are two sources with valuable information on party positions towards European integration and CP. These sources, however, have one severe weakness: party positions on European integration and CP are *only* available for national parties or Europarties. If and how *sub-national* parties have different policy orientations on these two issues is a question that has not been addressed yet.

The measurement of sub-national party policy positions gained momentum in the last years. Scholars focused on sub-national parties' left-right orientation in a unidimensional policy space or on parties' orientations towards economic and societal policy issues in a two-dimensional setting (see, e.g., Bäck *et al.*, 2013; Benoit *et al.*, 2009; Debus & Gross, 2016; Stefuriuc, 2013). For example, adapting the MARPOR coding scheme to the regional level in Spain and Great Britain, the Regional Manifestos Project (RMP; see Alonso *et al.*, 2013, 2015) additionally allows scholars to empirically address research questions on how sub-national parties position themselves on territorial issues, among

⁴ Using mass public opinion surveys as a third method for determining the issue positions of political parties will not be discussed here.

others. There is, however, no data set based on regional election manifestos dealing with party positions on European integration and EU Cohesion policy. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, expert surveys on sub-national party policy positions do not exist. Jolly (2007), for instance, evaluates how parties on the regional level perceive the EU using CHES data on party positions on European integration issues, but his study is limited to *regionalist* parties—like the Scottish National Party (SNP)—that are covered in the CHES survey (which asks experts to position parties competing on the *national* level on several policy dimensions). All in all, there is still a lack of data for policy positions of national parties' regional branches on European integration and CP. This is surprising, given the empirical evidence that party branches' policy positions both differ from branches of the same party and from the national party's positions (Debus *et al.*, 2011; Müller, 2009, 2013, Stefuriuc, 2009a, 2009b).

For the cases with regions under study, and where parties draft regional election manifestos, we are able to estimate these *regional* policy positions more precisely than by just presenting party positions on the *national* level. We are using sub-national parties' election manifestos as a valid source for deriving sub-national party positions on European integration and EU regional policy (Marks *et al.*, 2007; Ray, 2007). We apply fully-computerised automated text analysis and here the 'Wordscores' method to derive sub-national party positions on European integration and European regional policy from election manifestos (for a detailed description see Bräuninger *et al.*, 2013; Laver *et al.*, 2003; Lowe, 2008). This leaves us with the degree of support of regional parties for European integration, in general, and EU Cohesion policy, in particular. The higher the scores a party receives on the respective dimensions, the more in favour the party is on European integration and CP

Methodology for estimating issue emphasis

Regarding national and sub-national parties' emphasis of European issues and EU Cohesion policy, we focus on the percentage of a party's manifesto devoted to these issues. Manifestos have been manually coded by, first, extracting every paragraph in which EU-related issues are mentioned, and, secondly, assigning these paragraphs to seven EU-related categories:

1. EU/Europe in general;
2. EU funding in general
3. European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF)
4. European Social Fund (ESF)
5. Cohesion Fund (CF)
6. Agricultural funds (combined category)⁵
7. Fisheries funds (combined category)⁶

The two combined categories comprise EU funds that are only partly part of CP. Yet, pre-tests on German and Dutch election manifestos showed, for instance, that national and sub-national parties do not distinguish in their election manifestos between CP funds and the Common Agricultural Policy

⁵ This category comprises the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF).

⁶ This category includes the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

(CAP). Furthermore, parties sometimes mention their intention to finance specific measures by using money of more than one EU fund. In order to not miss such valuable information, a broader category had to be included.

In the following section, we first present the percentage of a party's manifesto devoted to European issues and CP (*EUPER*), i.e. we compare the number of words related to EU-relevant paragraphs with the total number of words of the manifesto. Subsequently, we take a closer look at parties' emphasis of European issues by distinguishing between the percentage of words a party devotes to EU/Europe in general (*EUGEN*) and to EU and CP funding in particular (*SUMFUND*), i.e. we compare the word share of category 1 with the cumulated word share of categories 2-6. Note that we do *not* make any statements about whether or not a party speaks positively, negatively, or neutral about European issues—we answer the question *if* national and sub-national parties talk about European issues and if they do so, how much space they devote in their election manifestos to these issues. In other words, we are interested in answering the question "how salient is Europe for national and sub-national parties" (cf. Spoon, 2012)?

Results

Regional parties' positions on European integration and CP in Thuringia are almost identical to the ones in Baden-Wuerttemberg with one notable exception: The Left is far more pro-European than its counterpart in Baden-Wuerttemberg. This might be due to the fact that the Socialists in Thuringia adopted more moderate positions on European integration because they had good prospects to either be part of the regional government or to win the prime ministership (which they actually did in 2014 by forming a coalition with the Social Democrats and the Greens).

Table 10: Regional party positions on European integration and EU Cohesion policy in Thuringia

| Party | Election year | Policy positions | |
|--------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| | | (a) European integration | (b) Cohesion policy |
| CDU | 2009 | 6.73 | 5.69 |
| | 2014 | 6.73 | 5.92 |
| SPD | 2009 | 6.06 | 5.87 |
| | 2014 | 6.22 | 5.81 |
| FDP | 2009 | 5.52 | 4.24 |
| | 2014 | 6.18 | 4.62 |
| Greens | 2009 | 6.00 | 6.01 |
| | 2014 | 6.18 | 5.91 |
| PDS/The Left | 2009 | 4.00 | 4.96 |
| | 2014 | 4.18 | 4.99 |
| AfD | 2009 | — | — |
| | 2014 | 3.65 | 2.84 |
| FWG | 2009 | — | — |
| | 2014 | 4.44 | 4.04 |
| NPD | 2009 | — | — |
| | 2014 | 0.71 | 1.05 |

Note: Party policy positions are based on 'Wordscores' estimations of regional parties' election manifestos. Low scores indicate opposed positions towards European integration and EU Cohesion policy, respectively, while high scores indicate positions in favour of European integration and EU Cohesion policy.

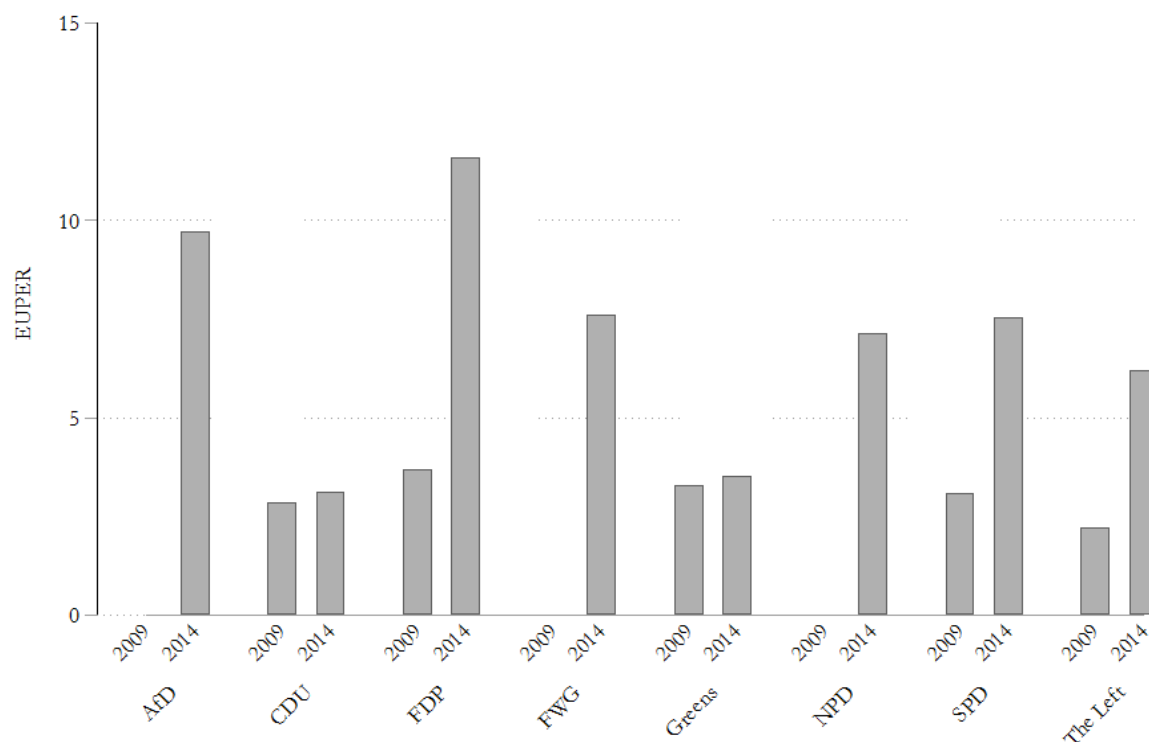


Figure 1: EUPER by parties by election year in Thuringia

Note: Bars show the percentage of the regional manifestos (grouped by party and election year) that focuses on European issues (EUPER). A blank space indicates that a party did not run for election in the respective year.

The data on percentages of the regional manifestos devoted to European issues by parties in Thuringia clearly shows that all parties running in 2009 and 2014 talked more about European issues in 2014 than in 2009 (see Figure 1). Yet, if this might be the case because Thuringia had to deal with reductions in EU funding in the programming period 2014-20, compared to the previous funding period, is questionable because even though parties in Thuringia focus on EU funding to a large degree (compared to parties in Baden-Wuerttemberg; see Figure 1), they mostly did so in their manifestos for the elections in 2009.

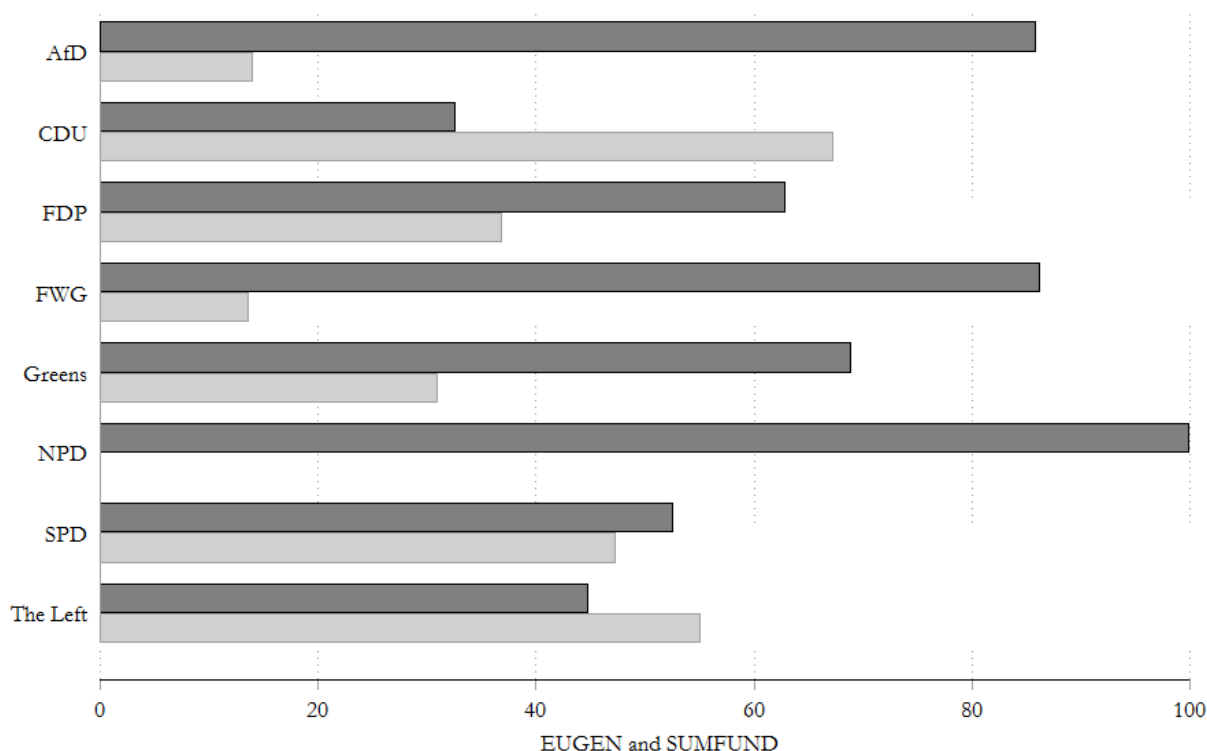


Figure 2: EUGEN and SUMFUND by parties in Thuringia

Note: Bars in dark grey show the average percentage of the regional manifestos (grouped by party) that focuses on Europe in general (EUGEN). Bars in light grey show the average sum of all categories related to EU funding (SUMFUND) in parties' regional manifestos.

2.3 Regional and local governance

Thuringia is one of 16 *Länder* (states) in Germany. In the German federal system, all *Länder* have the same competences and have state character. I.e., they all have the typical state features, like a (single chamber) legislature, a government headed by a prime minister, a multi-tiered bureaucracy and ordinary courts as well as courts for certain subjects (e.g. administration) only. Besides, the German system is one of "cooperative federalism". Furthermore, Germany resembles a "marble cake" type of federalism rather than a "layer cake" type. Hence, competence allocation between the states and the federal layer is not clear-cut with segmented or exclusive ("layered") spheres of responsibility, but competence spheres are mostly interwoven (Lehmbruch 2000; Sturm 2001).

Within that scope, a particular feature of German federalism with a long tradition is that legislation is overwhelmingly a federal task while administration of laws and rules (implementation respectively) overwhelmingly resides with the states (the Constitution assigns the local level within the realm of state competences). As a result, state action – policy making – is almost always a result of complex and intermingling processes in which federal and state actors (closely) interact (see Lehmbruch 2000; Leunig 2012).

Nonetheless, some general remarks on state responsibilities in terms of Cohesion policy are possible. As a *Land*, Thuringia has a range of responsibilities, although these are largely non-legislative with the important exceptions of school education, cultural affairs, police and criminal justice, state organization/administration and public employment as well as local government issues. Most important competences are economic development (including regional policy), health and social affairs (also labour market policy), rural affairs, housing, education (in general), environment,

advocacy and advice, infrastructure and traffic. As indicated, due to the particular characteristics of German federalism, states' competences can extend to almost all policy areas, albeit, as stressed, these competences are almost never exclusive (Hildebrandt & Wolf, 2016; Wehling 2004).

However, for some policy fields, the cooperation between states and the federal level is particularly pronounced and in that of special character. For example, economic development and improvement of living conditions as well as agriculture are constitutionally defined as a *Gemeinschaftsaufgabe* (shared responsibility) in Article 91a. For many other areas, states either use their own budgets or receive federal funding for tasks and goal achievement. The latter gained momentum in recent years. Currently, there is a federal reform dynamic towards increasing federal influence in state affairs, especially in terms of allowing direct linkages between the federal and the local levels, which is normally prohibited by the constitution (disregarding constitutionally defined exceptions). The basic intention behind this is enabling the federal government to finance policies, especially public service provision, at the local level. As a "new" *Land* with – typically – below average tax revenues and much smaller state budgets, Thuringia does much more depend on federal money than most Western *Länder*. This is important with respect to providing means for co-financing Cohesion policy projects.

Sub-regional government in Thuringia – on the first level – consist of one state-wide administrative unit (*zentrale Mittelbehörde*) that is the *Landesverwaltungsamt*. Beneath are 17 rural districts and 6 urban centres with district function (*Landkreise/kreisfreie Städte*). The latter have a dual character in all German states. On the one hand, they constitute the lowest level of the states' administrative system. On the other hand, *Kreise* form the upper level within the scope of democratically organized local self-government that enjoys constitutional protection (Article 29.1). *Kreise* have an elected legislative body as well as a publicly elected *Landrat* (district chief executive). The lower local authority level consist of municipalities while these are distinguished into "independent" municipalities, which means that the act "in own authority" and other municipalities. More than 600 other municipalities have formed municipality associations (*Verwaltungsgemeinschaften*) in order to fulfil their duties. A particularity in Thuringia are so-called fulfilling municipalities. Those are assigned with the task to fulfil local government functions for other municipalities.

Local authorities reflect geographical diversity within Thuringia and vary in size and population. The current structure was, first, the result of an overall reorganization process that followed the reestablishment of Thuringia as a German state in the process of German unification. Two major reform rounds of mergers and territorial incorporations followed in 1994 and 2004. The general intention was to establish larger and in that more capable territorial units. However, smaller municipalities were not always merged, but could also form municipality associations. Policy implementation and, hence, the provision of the majority of public services is allocated with the districts or the municipalities. Following the principle of self-government, local authorities operate independently of state government and are accountable to their electorates, also for policies.

In terms of relationships with the EU, all German *Länder* enjoy vast formal rights with respect to influence and information set up at the national level. These prerogatives are overwhelmingly anchored in the *Bundesrat* – the "quasi" second legislative chamber that is composed of state governments' members – and its competences in EU affairs. Hence, these rights are embedded in a complex constitutional (Article 23) and legislative structure that establishes a fine-graded system of federal government's obligations vi-a-vis states and states' legal options to receive information and to act, at least in theory (Borkenhagen 1998; Morawitz & Kaiser 1994; Sturm & Pehle 2001).

Despite these aspects, Thuringia supplements its formal rights with respect to the EU with informal channels of contact. However, the state's representation in Brussels is in terms of budget, staffing and range of activities one of the smallest among German states' *Landesvertretungen bei der*

Europäischen Union (currently 10 full-time employees). The state government's general intention is to use all available means to receive information about EU policies that target states' interest as early and as comprehensive as possible. Based on that, the government attempts to informally influence the EU policy processes according to its interests and, if possible, when proposals are still at an early stage. Overall, Thuringia enjoys considerable discretion in the implementation of (EU) policy (Große Hüttmann & Knodt 2003).

2.4 Socio-economic context and history

Thuringia is one of the five so-called *New Länder* in Germany. Following the partition of Germany that resulted from WWII, it, first, became part of the Soviet occupation zone and later, in 1949, of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). This was a state-socialist Soviet satellite state with no democratic government, a lacking rule of law and in which individual rights largely remained theoretical only (meaning that the latter were granted in the Constitution, without practical relevance). Following the Soviet centralization pattern, all *Länder* in the East German state were dissolved by the communist government and replaced with 15 larger districts (*Bezirke*) while Thuringia was split into (roughly) three such districts. Following regime transition in Central and Eastern Europe (that included the GDR) in 1990, Thuringia was re-established as a state-like territory in the final days of the GDR in order to enable its accession to the Federal Republic of Germany together with the other four Eastern *Länder* (plus the Eastern part of Berlin) by which German reunification was realised (see Wehling 2004 for the state's history).

As a result, Thuringia was and certainly still is in economic, environmental and social terms characterised by this state socialist "legacy", but at the same time by socio-economic developments that were largely unavoidable considering the "quick" unification with West Germany, not only politically, but perhaps even more so with respect to the economy. More explicitly, the former was a closed, backward, non-market economy with an outdated capital stock, often devastated environments due to overexploitation and for some regions incredible pollution loads, but, for example, also an extremely high female labour force participation (over 90 percent, one the highest ever recorded for industrialized states). Besides, the GDR had a relatively well-educated population, however, with a clear emphasis on technical skills development (Steiner 2004). The latter can mainly be described as an economic breakdown, a "deindustrialization" of entire regions, often involving plant closures within weeks (and resulting sudden unemployment of thousands of former employees), and a following out migration of especially younger and well educated persons to West Germany (that was, of course, also motivated by the much higher wages in the West). This was accompanied by a drop in women's fertility rate of about 50 percent (unprecedented in world history for peace times).

That this economic and social despair did not result in turmoil not to mention upheavals and widespread social misery could only be ascribed to massive transfers from Germany's Western part in all relevant spheres (economy, social area, and environment). However, the conditions not only indicated the enormous challenges that the region faced after 1990 from a national perspective. It also becomes obvious that EU's Cohesion policy had a large role to play in the following decades and years and it still has an important role for spurring regional development in all relevant fields.

Much has been achieved since then in basically every dimension that also cover Cohesion policy's fields. The overall socio-economic situation and the challenges in the current funding period (2014-2020) are quite different from those in the (distant) past and have already been quite different during the previous funding period (2007-2013) (see Bahadori *et al.* 2016).

Thuringia now clearly has economic strengths and the overall unemployment rate dropped to levels that are below those in some West German *Länder* (7.2 percent in 2016). In terms of GDP per capita, it has long surpassed the 75 percentage of EU average threshold having reached 92 percent of EU average in 2016. Even within Germany, it is now above 70 percent of national average. The economic growth rate in 2016 was 1.8 percent; it was 1.6 percent in 2017. The regional GDP in the same year was 61.906 billion EUR (*Thüringer Landesamt für Statistik 2017/2018; MMWWDG 2017*). Thuringia has four university cities as well as several more with universities of applied sciences and economically booming urban centres, like Jena, with a robust and diversified economy. The region is especially strong in automobile construction (including suppliers), machinery, electronics, optical products and food industry. It is dominated by SMEs that are, however, often clearly export oriented. Furthermore, important public research institutions (outside of universities) doing “cutting-edge” research and development are located in the region, such as the *Fraunhofer - Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik IOF* in Jena (Bahadori et al. 2016).

However, Thuringia does at the same still have enormous economic and social, but also environmental weaknesses (see Bahadori et al. 2016; *Thüringer Landesamt für Statistik 2017/2018*). In terms of the economy, there remain large intra-regional disparities with Thuringian’s North Eastern part still being a backward region. Consequently, there are huge intra-regional differences in unemployment levels. Despite impressive progress in recent years, the regional economy is still behind in crucial aspects, especially innovation (innovation capacity), value creation and related science-business cooperation, investments attraction and internationalisation (MMWWDG 2017). As all other Eastern *Länder*, Thuringia has only a far below average tax quota with respect to the most relevant taxes that are the corporate and personal income taxes, for which Thuringia only reaches slightly more than 50 percent of national average (ibid.)

Demographic change constitutes a particular challenge with a workforce that is in many branches overaged (Bahadori et al. 2016). Out of state migration of especially young and well educated persons is still a problem as not yet stopped, because employers in West German *Länder* can still offer higher wages and salaries not to mention career options. As a result, there is a growing shortage of qualified workforce in many sectors, especially in industry, but also craft. However, demographic change is a much greater and broader challenge. Younger people, but even more so younger people as “economic” individuals (consumers, tax payers and the like) are “simply missing” in many rural areas of Thuringian sub-regions, not only because of migration patterns, but also due to the drop in the fertility rate 25 years ago. For many of these rural areas, this poses the essential question if basic public and private services like public transportation, medical services, banking or grocery stores can be sustained in the future. Besides, to name just one environmental issue, connections to modern wastewater treatment plants are still not yet at levels, to meet the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive. Finally, infrastructural improvements are certainly still on the agenda. These conditions are the remaining challenges, but do also form new ones for Cohesion policy.

3. Cohesion policy implementation and performance

3.1 EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework

To implement the ERDF Operational Programme (OP), Thuringia was entitled to use 1.477.687. 909 EUR of financial resources of the EFRE funds during the period 2007 to 2013. The programme was valid in the area of Thuringia (NUTS 1). Being one of Germany’s five so-called New *Länder* explains this comparatively high amount, that is, when comparing to the national level).

The focus of the program was based on the following priority axes: Education, research and development, innovation, increased competitiveness of the economy, sustainable regional and urban development as well as protection and improvement of the environment. The programme was considered to support the targets of the EU summits of Gothenburg and Lisbon by strengthening the *Land's* competitiveness, attractiveness and overall stance.

The OP 2007-2013 points out the problems and challenges emerging in these areas and wanted to improve Thuringia's living conditions through the ERDF funding.

The title of the funding period 2014-2020's OP is "Investments in Growths and Employment." Between 2014 and 2020 Thuringia is entitled to spend 1.165.077.915 EUR of the ERDF. While this would still constitute a large amount, the considerable decrease as compared to the previous funding periods is due to Thuringia's status as a "phasing out"/transition region. National funds with at least the same sum complement the financial resources.

Key-sectors economic sectors of Thuringia are mechanical engineering, automotive industry (especially suppliers), electronics, optical products, food industry and processing trade (in general). **Thuringia's strengths** are its location in the centre of Germany and Europe with a – now – well development traffic infrastructure (motorways [*Autobahnen*], national highways, state streets, railway lines, including three major high-speed railway lines crossing the territory in all directions). That allows for "just in time" delivery in practically all corners of the state. Besides, the region has a well-educated population and workforce resulting from high quality schools and higher education institutions. Public R&D capacities (especially outside the higher education system) are comparatively large. In terms of employment, wages are still lower than in West German regions making the region attractive as a location for production, including as FDI. Employment relationships, including setting of wages are also still more flexible and adaptable to short-term challenges than in West German states (disregarding the disadvantages this entails, for example, due the weaker position of unions). Thuringia does also have vast natural areas characterised by a low-range mountainous landscape. It has a long tradition as an attractive vacation region, making tourism an important economic sector. Thuringia is also a region "abundant" in culture with many cultural monuments that have touristic potential. With respect to the environment, Thuringia's economy is relatively less carbon dioxide emission intensive. The regional economy performs also well with respect to energy productivity. Finally, the share of renewable energy, but even more so its potential are favourable.

Thuringia's weakness are the population development (demographic change), the overall structure of the economy that is dominated by S&M enterprises that lack R&D (R&D capacities), innovation (innovation capacity), business-research cooperation, especially in terms of established relationships and networks, a comparatively low level of internationalisation of the economy as well as several other aspects. One major negative result of this is a considerably lower productivity compared to national average as well as much lower level of value creation, which characterises the regional economy as such. This can, for example, be attributed to the fact that no larger German company with a R&D unit is located in the region. There are, besides, huge intraregional differences in key economic figures while unemployment levels remain way too high in many sub-regions. With respect to the environmental several problems have not been sufficiently solved. Many areas within that states are in dangers of being severely damaged by flooding, especially if the latter are about to occur more frequently as a result of climate change. Rates of connections to modern wastewater treatment are also still insufficient.

Thuringia's rural areas have several strengths like suitable location conditions for companies, good traffic infrastructure and touristic development potential (see above). **The weakness of rural areas** are below average income levels, below average numbers of workspaces, a lower quality of

workplaces in often micro enterprises and an in accelerated tempo ageing population (Thuringia having one of the highest population aging rate of all German *Länder* that will result in a massive population decrease until 2050). **Strengths of urban areas** are their basic function as working-and supply centres, the economic structure as well as the educational structure, a large service sector and good infrastructure. **Weaknesses of urban areas** are that several, especially smaller cities are former (East German) industrial regions with high unemployment and related social as well as urban development problems.

3.1.1 Operational Programmes for Thuringia 2007-2013

The desk research, which is based on the OP ERDF 2007-2013, reveals that from an overall perspective, the main priority of the Cohesion policy from 2007 until 2013 and 2014 until 2020 supported by ESIs is to increase the living standard and sustainability of a country's population and economy. Due to Thuringia's comparably weak initial structural, economic and environmental position as part of the former East Germany, the European Union has singled out this region amongst others to be in need of financial support. Consequently, the region's three major areas that are economy, the social field and the environment had to be advanced in order to become and remain prospectively competitive within a globalized world. To be more specific, this indicated the improvement with respect to the following target indicators:

1. More and advanced employment within all sectors of the economy
2. Reduction of the unemployment rate
3. Increasing the ecological sustainability of the economy
4. Adjustments and diminution of income differences
5. Enhancement of the attractiveness of the industrial location especially for young employees

The Thuringian Cohesion policy programme therefore has tried to raise not only the quality of the region as a place for business, but also the region's social attractiveness as well as – forward-looking – environmental sustainability. Hence, Thuringia aims at depicting an attractive living and working location, which is not only providing good living conditions for its inhabitants, but which is also internationally advanced and competitive.

Based on the identified indicators, Thuringia has been singled out receiving financial support by the European Cohesion funds within a set list of priorities. Those priorities then in turn have been analysed and compared with the German average in order to determine adequate funding levels. Principally, the need of financing the first priority namely "Education, Development and Innovation" has been classified for Thuringia as moderate to high in order to increase the willingness for investments into progressive and innovative start-ups. Besides, the enhancement of human capital has been one of the main foci for not only improving the educational dimension but also for providing effective counter-measurements against demographic change. Secondly, the further priority namely, "Enhancement of economic Competitiveness" has also been categorized as moderate to high priority, although some information concerning industrial real estate areas have been missing. Yet, to strengthen investments into companies and products is one of the main goals to be achieved by increasing not only the number of Thuringia's start-up enterprises, but also by advancing Thuringia's export quota. Furthermore, a local demand based expansion of industrial real estate sides respectively an upgrade of touristic and traffic infrastructure are essential for enhancing Thuringia's economic and international competitiveness. By depicting the only possible option for staying future-orientated in a globalized world, also sustainability and the efficient usage of resources have identified as eligible indicators. Hence, investments in renewable resources and alternative energies

have been likewise singled out to be supported financially. Last but not least, the third priority namely “Development and Expansion of sustainable Infrastructure” has been directed towards cities with more than 10.000 inhabitants by also matching it with the goals and priorities of the federal structural change programme “Stadtumbau Ost” [urban reconstruction East]. Consecutively, this priority includes issues like inner-city infrastructure and demographic change, which impact the progressive development of economic agglomerations. However, Thuringia’s need for financial support has been categorized as only moderate to low in this field. Yet, other integrated parameters like reactivation of fallow land as well as the effective utilization of former military bases are named as highly important and in need of financial support. Accessorily, also environmental indicators like water protection and levels of ecological damage to be tackled play an important role in this area of interest.

All in all, Thuringia has received money in all fields addressed during the previous funding period. Structural deficits have first of all been identified on a general level and have later been matched with the specific situation within Thuringia. Based on that, the following table provides an overview of priority axes and funds’ allocation between 2007 and 2013.

Priority axes and allocations in 2007-2013

Table 11: ERDF: Priority axes and allocations in 2007-13 according to OP

| <i>Thuringia ROP 2007-2013</i> | | |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Priority axes | ERFD allocation (%) | ERFD allocation (EUR) |
| 1. Education, Research and Development, Innovation | 31,06 | 459 000 000 |
| 2. Increased Competitiveness of the Economy | 37,8 | 558 450 000 |
| 3. Sustainable Regional and Urban Development | 14,6 | 216 000 000 |
| 4. Protection and Improvement of the Environment | 15,2 | 224 250 000 |
| 5. Technical Assistance | 1,35 | 19 987 909 |
| Total | 100 | 1 477 687 909 |

Interviewees basically emphasise in more detail the foci of the OPs for both periods. In that, they stress the importance of the objectives as formulated in the OPs that reflect their professional background. I.e., such emphasis is on securing and enhancing the qualification level of the workforce (especially to ensure sufficient qualification levels of the youth) as formulated by business umbrella organization representative or on further urban restructuring as stressed by representatives from cities who are in charge of city development (interviews TH-1, TH-3, TH-5, TH-6). Bureaucrats from the Land’s ministries (e.g. Economy, Science and Digital Society) refer to supporting business (or the economy as such) to increase employment, improving infrastructure and increasing the number of households/areas connected to advanced waste water treatment (interview TH-4).

For this funding period (2007-2013) the OPs of ERFD as well as ESF still had three main ‘classical’ pillars – economic development, infrastructure and wastewater. Later on, flood protection also enjoyed a high priority between 2007 and 2013 although it is still a relevant challenge in the current funding period (interviews TH-4, TH-6).

3.1.2 Operational Programmes for Thuringia 2014-2020

The desk research, which is based on the Thuringia ERDF OP 2014-2020, provided the general result that the main funding priorities and the implementation arrangements of the Cohesion policy programme for the period 2014-2020 vary only slightly compared to the goals from 2007-2013 while this would not apply to the specific allocation of fund to the respective goals. Nevertheless, a few deviations are observable.

First of all, the focus points are now more specifically set on "development" with all its multiple facets. Indeed, this indicates that the three pillars "smart development", "sustainable development" and "integrative development" build the main foundation for the 2014-2020 ERDF OP. Key targets at this point are enhancing innovation strategies, overall and expert education concerning future working opportunities, an improvement of the digital society, a general rise in economic competitiveness, facing the battle against climate change, the enhancement of renewable resources, increasing employment, improved qualifications (levels) as well as a continuing fight against poverty. As indicated above, albeit Thuringia's major Cohesion policy areas have only changed slightly, some significant improvements have been made in the meantime as compared situation that formed the basis of the 2007 to 2013 ERDF programme. Therefore, the following re-evaluation of the set indicators had to be undertaken.

Five core subjects of the Thuringian 2020 Cohesion policy strategy are still seen in moderate need for improvement as they are basically (already) comparable to the Germany standard in general. Those sub-fields include among other things the expansion of the digital agenda, renewable resources and the fight against poverty. Yet, some variations have to be highlighted within those five categories. Especially, the fields "qualification" and "poverty reduction" display a great discrepancy. Thus, the Thuringian level of qualification of skilled personal is above federal average and therefore only needs small to medium improvement whereas the long-term unemployment rate in certain rural districts is still comparably high and urgently longs for reduction. Furthermore, three further categories within Cohesion policy objectives are less exploitable in Thuringia if compared to the German average. Indeed, Thuringia is one of the pioneers in the fields of general and job specific education and employment with a small dropout rate and a high quota of gainful occupation. Again, the advanced Thuringian qualification level needs to be underlined. In contrast to that, however, Thuringia faces severe deficits with innovation capacity and founding of enterprises in the technological and research orientated industry. Indeed, Thuringia is rather characterised by small and half-inferior companies with little to no capacities for innovating and/or expansion. Hence, for establishing a future-orientated economy, Thuringia is in high need of European financial support targeting the areas of development, technology and innovation in order to not only be able to successfully compete within Germany, but also on an international, even global level. More specifically, funding priorities have to be set on the expansion of competence centres, especially those with European interest, an increase of the number of researchers within Thuringia and on the establishment/construction of new research facilities with focus points. Hence, clusters of regional conurbations which produce synergy effects by combining (applied) research, companies and academia have to be created. For achieving such an enhanced innovation capacity, obviously not only more research opportunities have to be created, but also more skilled workers need to be attracted. Hence, the local "production" of innovative researchers and employees who prospectively will be staying in Thuringia needs to be tackled. Therefore, the funding of universities and the expansion of the educational sector as such is also one key aspect which Cohesion policy is seen to prioritise.

In order to provide a quick overview of the previously addressed indicators, the following list comprehensively summarises the key points of the Thuringian ERDF programme for 2014-2020:

1. Consolidation of research, technological development and innovation

2. Enhancement of innovative capacities within the economy especially by supporting the already existing small and half-inferior businesses and expanding towards establishing larger companies
3. Strengthening of economic competitiveness also in areas like the agricultural sectors
4. Achieving a higher degree of internationalisation of the economy
5. Increase of (private) investments by companies
6. Attracting more qualified staff from outside, i.e., nationally and from the international level
7. Increase in the usage of investment and utilisation of renewable resources
8. Rise in the energy efficiency within communes and urban centres
9. Instauration of sub natural ecosystems with an emphasis on streaming water
10. Reactivation of areas for new settlements
11. Reinvigoration of Thuringia as an attractive economic and social region

Overall, the Cohesion policy strategy succeeds in most cases tackling the main key point for improving Thuringia economic, social and environmental state. Forward-looking speaking, the program aims at making more steps in the right direction up until 2020. The following table provides an overview:

Priority axes and allocations in 2014-20

Table 12: ERDF: Priority axes and allocations in 2014-20 (ERDF OP 2014-2020)

| <i>Thuringia ROP 2014-2020</i> | | | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Priority allocation | Source of financing | ERDF allocation (%) | ERDF allocation (EUR) |
| 1. Research and Innovation | ERDF | 28,58 | 333 000 000 |
| 2. SMEs competitiveness | ERDF | 24,29 | 283 000 000 |
| 3. Low-carbon economy | ERDF | 19,74 | 230 000 000 |
| 4. Climate change and risk prevention | ERDF | 12,04 | 140 300 000 |
| 5. Environment and resource efficiency / Social inclusion | ERDF | 13,06 | 152 200 000 |
| 6. Technical Assistance | ERDF | 2,28 | 26 577 915 |
| Total | ERDF | 100 | 1 165 077 915 |

Q2. In your opinion, what are the main socio-economic needs and problems that the programmes are trying to address over the last two programme periods (2007-13 and 2014-20)?

In response to Q2, interviewees referred for the current period to the changes in Cohesion policy objectives and priorities as implemented at the European level ('no more streets, no more wastewater [connecting]', interview TH-4) as crucial as these changes have to be implemented in the region. Accordingly, for the current period the major needs and problems to address have shifted to securing and increasing the qualified workforce (e.g., by attracting from outside), investments in R&D, regional innovation (strategies) and here especially an increasing support for SMEs (investments

support), internationalization and the general goal of increasing energy efficiency/decreasing CO₂-emissions; see especially statements by bureaucratic actors at the central *Land* level (i.e., from ministries, see interview TH-4, but also TH-1, TH-5, TH-6).

This has also be understood against the background of changed socio-economic challenges. Most importantly, albeit there are still huge intra-regional differences in Thuringia (as is also stressed by interviewees), unemployment is much less a problem in the *Land* than it used to be in the past. In that, what becomes now a much more urgent challenge to address is the much lower level of expenses for R&D in industry, which is a long-term problem of the economies of all former East German *Länder* as large not to mention international companies with their R&D units are almost completely absent here (entailing a much lower creating of added value, for example). Tackling this problem also requires increasing the internationalization of the economy (interview TH-4, also TH-5, TH-6). Nonetheless, tackling persisting problems such as long-term unemployment or youth leaving school without a certificate so that they practically unemployable remains an important challenge (interview TH-6).

For the previous funding period in which the OPs of EFRD as well as ESF still had three main 'classical' pillars – economic development, infrastructure and wastewater the change in Cohesion policy priorities required considerable adjustments and reallocations of financial means. Flood protection also enjoyed a higher priority between 2007 and 2013, at its end, although it remains be a highly relevant challenge in the current funding period (interviews TH-4, TH-6).

3.1.3 Implementation framework and partnership structures

Desk research, based on the Thuringia ERDF OP 2007-2013, ERDF 2014-2020 OP, ERDF 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation, ERDF 2014-2020, ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2014, ERDF 2014-2020 AIR 2016, shows that in Thuringia, the Management Authority for the ERDF and the ESF overseeing the OPs is the *Ministry for Economy, Science and Digital Society* (this name since 2014). Other relevant ministries involved are the *Ministry for Employment, Social Affairs, Health, Women and Families* and the *Ministry for Infrastructure and Agriculture* (these names since 2014). The body in charge of project implementation and administration (for payees) as well as regarding data collection is the *Thüringer Aufbaubank* [Thuringian Bank of Reconstruction]. Disregarding renamings, there were no changes for both funding periods. A further important implementation body (as an intermediate organisation) especially for ERDF programme implementation is the *Landesentwicklungsgesellschaft LEG* (State Development Agency). For ESF this is the *Gesellschaft für Arbeits-und Wirtschaftsförderung des Freistaats Thüringen (GFAW)* [Agency for Employment and Economic Development]. There are, besides, special State Agencies that perform specific tasks within programme implementation, like the *Thüringer Agentur Für Fachkräftegewinnung (ThAFF)* [Thuringian Agency Attracting Qualified Professionals] for ESF. In terms of overseeing programme implementation, there is, hence, an overall centralized approach as all responsible bodies are located at the state level.

The Monitoring Committee is the responsible organization in charge if ensuring the effectiveness and the quality of the implementation of the ROPs. It is composed of representatives from State Ministries, the Federal Government, Commission representatives, representatives of local government umbrella organisations, members of business associations (especially state umbrella organization that also have sub-regional or local branches in industry, trade and craft), representatives of academic and non-academic research institutions, unions, regional representatives of the Federal Employment Agency, other intermediate actors and NGOs (from various areas, like environment, welfare, education, women's affairs and agriculture).

To make the management and partnership structure more efficient some changes were made for the funding period 2014-2020. The central instrument for implementation and evaluation of the OP 2014-2020 is again the Monitoring Committee. A change was made to concentrate interest groups. However, its concrete design will be decided by Monitoring Committee. It is also planned to create

subsidiary bodies. One such subsidiary body is envisioned to pilot the evaluation process. Based on Monitoring Committee's membership lists alone, changes cannot yet be detected.

The guiding principle in terms of partnership structure is close cooperation and the involvement of wide variety of actor at all levels (local governments, municipalities' umbrella organisations, further economic and social partners as well as environmental and agriculture organisations) are involved.

For example, the OP for the period 2007-2013 was developed in the following manner: At a conference at March 2004, several representatives of the European Commission, as well as politicians and deputies from the German federal and regional government and experts for local and regional planning evaluated the situation so far by debating Thuringia's structural development between 2000 and 2006. Afterwards, the Thuringian Ministry for Economy, Technology and Work (this name until 2014) was assigned for the operational on-site programme execution by creating sub-divisional task forces. Additionally, the Ministry for Construction and Traffic (this name until 2014) was commissioned to guide the programme with the help of urban and ERDF funds experienced municipalities, which were considered to provide the most accurate local "know how". Indeed, the Thuringian cities Erfurt and Gera were able to provide valuable input based on their experiences and ideas for future projects.

In terms of partnership structure, most interviewees (disregarding their professional background) stressed the importance of the Monitoring Committee as the central platform for information, exchange and especially for consultation and involvement of partners in the preparation and implementation of the OPs. One actor from a business interest organization, however, rather downplayed the Committee's role by stressing that, if at all, it is only relevant before *subsidies* start (or are granted). Despite this positive general assessment of its role, some actors criticized that the Committee is hardly a forum for debate and discussion (e.g. in terms of the usefulness of certain project subsidies), but rather a platform of information overflow, especially in terms of facts and figures, see interview TH-6, also critical TH-1).

In general, interviewees emphasised the overall cooperative approach and the good working relationships of officials with economic, social and other partners (see interviews TH-4, TH-6)

3.2 Assessment of Performance

3.2.1 Programme performance

As indicated above, in order to implement the Cohesion policy programme for producing most effective outcomes, four key aspects have been singled out to be tackled in Thuringia for the period 2007-2013, namely:

1. Research, development and innovation
2. Investment quota and capital stock
3. Human capital
4. Infrastructure

Hence, Thuringia has been assigned about 2 billion euros from 2007 until 2015 as structural subsidies for achieving improvements with respect to those indicators (including co-financing). By being co-financed on a national level, those subsidies had an immense impact on the Thuringian GDP taking into account their considerable amount. The following table depicts the economic influence of those subsidies in Thuringia for the period 2007-14 (i.e., slightly extended beyond the previous funding period) as a share of the Thuringian GDP on a European, a national and a combined level:

Table 13: ERDF: Yearly impulses on the Thuringian economy between 2007 and 2015 with EU-share (GECSFRAE), the national co-financing program (GECSFRAD) and the overall amount (GECSFRAP) in percent of the Thuringian GDP

| Year | GECSFRAE | GECSFRAD | GECSFRAP |
|------|----------|----------|----------|
| 2007 | 0,10 | 0,03 | 0,13 |
| 2008 | 0,31 | 0,10 | 0,41 |
| 2009 | 0,35 | 0,12 | 0,47 |
| 2010 | 0,34 | 0,11 | 0,45 |
| 2011 | 0,40 | 0,13 | 0,53 |
| 2012 | 0,40 | 0,13 | 0,54 |
| 2013 | 0,37 | 0,12 | 0,50 |
| 2014 | 0,33 | 0,11 | 0,45 |
| 2015 | 0,29 | 0,10 | 0,39 |

Those numbers however do not completely represent the accumulated amount of structural funding on the Thuringian economy considering that interaction effects and spillovers are not taken into account. Therefore, in order to understand the collective scope of the structural funding of the Cohesion policy co-financed projects and its continuous impact on the Thuringian economy, the following table represents the actual and expected effects on the Thuringian GDP. From that perspective, Cohesion policy funding had an accumulated impulse of about 4 percent on the Thuringian GDP in 2015. This calculation also considers – based on a Keynesian economic assumption – that effective implemented structural funds will not only increase economic productivity in the short run, but even more important, it will provide improved conditions for a future-orientated economic development.

Table 14: EU structural funding: Accumulated impulse on Thuringian economy, EU share (GECSFRAE) and overall amount (GECSFRAP) 2000-2009 in percent of the GDP

| Year | GECSFRAE | GECSFRAP |
|------|----------|----------|
| 2007 | 0,096 | 0,131 |
| 2008 | 0,403 | 0,559 |
| 2009 | 0,756 | 1,027 |
| 2010 | 1,094 | 1,480 |
| 2011 | 1,491 | 2,014 |
| 2012 | 1,895 | 2,565 |
| 2013 | 2,267 | 3,026 |
| 2014 | 2,601 | 3,433 |
| 2015 | 2,895 | 3,748 |

Yet, this enhancement of the economy initiated an overall development for all of the previously listed indicators. Based on that, further macroeconomic outputs need to be taken into account for understanding the economic as well as social impact of the Cohesion policy funding on Thuringia.

Hence, between 2007 and 2014, altogether 9.808 projects have been realised with an overall financial capacity of 2.1 billion Euros. Those subsidies are composed of about 1.9 billion Euros from public funds, in which approximately 1.45 billion Euros are financial means from ERDF funds.

The area "Research, development and innovation" has been one of the less promoted sectors compared to other financially supported areas. Nevertheless, the main focus has been on enhancing the research infrastructure with respect to universities, universities of applied science and non-academic research institutions. For example, money has been provided for the *University of Jena Medical Centre* with a volume of 4.1 million Euros in 2014. However, more projects, especially in terms of creating a friendly social and economic environment for founding innovative start-ups and research centres needed to be initialised in order to turn Thuringia in a future-orientated competitive regional economy.

The development of the investment quota and capital stock, on the other hand, have evolved in a promising way. Indeed, the granted subsidies in 2014 initiated a so-called leverage effect of 3.3 indicating that with a grant of one Euro, the private investment rate of companies increased by 3.3 Euros. The overall effective leverage effect between 2007 and 2013 has been 4.0. This boosted investment capacity however did not entail for more jobs within 2014. Yet, this phenomenon is explained by the fact that former subsidies of the ERDF programme especially focused on the co-financed extension of workspace and the enhancement of the regional economic structure. Therefore, all positive employment developments had already occurred in previous years.

Regarding human capital, Thuringia has achieved significant achievements within the scope of the Lisbon target values. Indeed, targets for women's employment quota and the employment rate of the older population segment have not only been met, but have exceeded the expectations for 2014. More precisely, the employment rate in 2014 has been 75.5 percent with a women's employment rate of 72.9 percent. The employment rate for older people reached 65.4 percent (for comparison: in 2012, women's employment rate was 71.3 percent whereas for elderly it was 62.3 percent).

Last but not least, some advancement in term of sustainability can be reported for the period of funding between 2007 and 2013 (2014). Specifically, the continuous progress in the facilitation of renewable energy resources and alternative energy has been remarkable, although, the development has somehow slowed down in during the end. Furthermore, the significant evolution of water protection measures could be mentioned. Indeed, especially the extension and reconstruction of wastewater treatment plants has been a prominent issue during past years. Unfortunately, the positive trend for protection of the climate has come to a halt and even stagnated during the past years in particular when compared to the development in the 1990s.

In terms of more concrete target figures as indicators that the outputs and effective usage of the provided subsidies are achieved, considerable progress has been made, although some indicators are still in need of a further improvements. In order to check the financial, economic and social as well as environmental progress in detail, a yearly review of Thuringia's advance within each sector is provided. In the following, actual conditions with respect to these indications in 2010 will be juxtaposed with aspired goals for 2015 (ERDF Interim Report, 2010). Hence, with the help of output indicators for the main funding areas "Research and Development", "Investment capacity", "Environmental Sustainability" and "Human Capital", this comparison makes it possible gain a quick overview of the program's effectiveness considering intended improvements.

Table 15: Comparison of accomplishments and goals

| Targeted indicator | Accomplished in 2010 | Goal 2015 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Usable area for research infrastructure | 21.000 m ² | 15.000 m ² |

| | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| New training places | 3760 | 2300-2500 |
| Domiciled businesses | 41 | 80-90 |
| Expansion of important city areas | 133 hectare | 320 hectare |
| Future usage and resettlement of fallow land | 26.5% | 2.5%-3.0% |
| Population additionally connected to sewage disposal system | 30.000 | 18.500 |
| Population additional connected to modern wastewater treatment plans | 130.000 | 210.000 |
| People protected from floods | 4750 | 450.000 |

Sources: ERDF OP 2007-2013, ERDF 2007-2013 Interim report 2013. Note that the ERDF 2007-2013 Final Report has not yet been approved by the European Commission and is not yet available.

As the entries in the table demonstrate, the subsidies granted from 2007 until 2015 subsidies had already borne fruits within the funding period. Indeed, several established goals had already been reached by 2010. When looking at the research, development and education indicators, e.g. the advancement of usable area of research infrastructure has by far surpassed the aspired target in 2015. Moreover, also the number of newly installed training places had out-paced the initially intended target value. Yet, some indicators for the sector of investment and capital were in need of progress. Specifically, the domiciled businesses and the expansion of important urban areas for more capital acquisition in 2010 still lagged behind the target for 2015.

However, particularly the (environmental) sustainable indicators had developed very well already by 2010. The future usage and resettlement of fallow land as well as the added population to the sewage disposal system were already nearly twice as high in 2010 as compared to the desired value for 2015. This fact indeed depicts Thuringia's future orientation considering the prospective benefits of current executed sustainable investment.

At this point, the innovation and development sector in Thuringia also needed to be boosted in the same way, considering that new technology is a key factor for future competitiveness and economic "survival" in a globalised world. Yet, Thuringia lacks efficient investments in the technology sector for the expansion of e.g. innovative start-ups and development centres. On top of that, the presented indicators for human capital and the (social) well-being of Thuringia's population in 2010 did not reach the values aimed at for the year 2015.

On the contrary, the region's was were still in need of wastewater treatment plans and improved health care systems especially having in mind demographic change. Moreover, flood protection installations needed to speed-up at the end of funding period. This latter factor does not only influence the well-being of the population, but is also highly relevant for economic factors like investment capacities, company establishments and profitable output.

For a more detailed explanation of why implementation has worked in some areas within the period 2007 to 2013, but was not as efficient as intended in other areas, the following contemplation of yearly reports' abstracts will provide a quick overview of the annually achieved and missed targets (ERDF AIR 2007-2013). The following summaries all extracted from the corresponding AIR.

Starting in 2007, there were neither unexpected issues in terms of programme implementation nor such socioeconomic developments. By taking into account that the main funding guidelines were still in the course of elaboration, no changes within the ERDF programme were done. Ensuing, 2008 did not see severe problems, although, hardly surprising, the beginning of the financial crisis had an

impact on the Thuringian economy and the programme as such. Like in all other regions in Germany, the Thuringian economy faced a sharp decline especially in the last quarter of 2008 and struggles since then to steadily improve economic productivity.

Hence, the ERDF programme had to tackle subsequently arising (economic) challenges and was in need of revision. Therefore, the implementation of the conformity evaluation of the project needed more financial resources across all involved administrative units. On top of that, especially in the areas of education, research and innovation development, further severe challenges appeared.

To be more specific, Thuringia in this field faced a deviation of 47.5 million Euros as compared to initially scheduled public spending (105 million Euros). An important cause for this miscalculated proposition was amongst others that especially the university sector had to cope with several bureaucratic and administrative obstacles. Indeed, especially the approval of filed applications were – due to internal disagreements concerning the accurate separation of economic and non-economic actions – oftentimes withheld so that the entire university apparatuses were somehow paralysed. This in turn did not only mean bureaucratic struggles, but also a delay in the academic procedures.

Meanwhile, however, companies had increased their successful bid and the overall economic performance gained momentum. Additionally, considerable more request for the facilitation of research and economic development projects were been submitted which in turn did also boost companies' performance. A third sector is urban development whose financial progress, however, did not achieve the estimated value of 30 million Euros but stagnated at 17.3 million Euros. Hence, the urban development funding guideline had to be overhauled and relaunched. Finally, funding (spending) for environmental issues had not progressed as expected. Indeed, only 22.3 million Euros instead of envisioned 60 million euros were invested due to, for example, necessary adjustments of guidelines in the wastewater treatment sector.

In 2009, Thuringia experienced the aftermath of the financial crisis with a drop of 4.3 percent of its GDP. Yet, the sharp decline in the beginning of the year slowed down during the middle of the year which in the end explains the mentioned average value for that year. The ERDF programme tried tackling this issue by analysing the effectiveness of its priority axes. Yet, despite re-evaluation, no ideas for implementation changes or improvements came up. The strategy basically remained the same.

Meanwhile in 2010, Thuringia's economy recovered and the GDP grew by 3.7 percent. This improved economic situation, however, was taken as a justification for channelling even more funds' money in the economic sector for guaranteeing a steadily growing and stabilised GDP. As a result, programme parts like 'revitalisation of regions marked by environmental damage' were removed of the funding plan.

Like 2010, 2011 was also a prosperous year in economic terms. Indeed, GDP grew an estimated 3,4 percent and the unemployment rate dropped below the level prior to the financial crisis. Yet, another programme element was eliminated from the payment request of Thuringia which was the 'Hydraulic engineering program, waters first order' that mainly concerned enhancing flood protection. At this point, it became obvious that Thuringia' ERDF OP focused more on economic aspects leaving environmental issues behind. Nevertheless, an agreement was settled to re-include this program part in the future Cohesion subsidy payment if a re-evaluation would turn out positive.

In 2012, the programme's part on flood protection was indeed reinstalled in the ERDF OP and started again by using funds. Hence, the re-evaluation turned out positive and greater emphasis was placed again on environmental goals.

Finally, in 2013 and 2014, no implementation problems or abnormalities were present wherefore programme execution could be realised as scheduled. Yet, some minor adjustments had to be made

concerning the future implementation process with aspects like a change in expected time span of a project, the guideline for the guarantee of subsidies and the similar issues.

Overall, implementation structures proved to be effective in delivering single programmes and projects. What is also worth mentioning is that to improve service and authority information accessibility for businesses and citizens, the programme supported e-government applications. Especially on the local administrative level, information ought to be (increasingly) provided in electronic form. The goal was (is) to make administration more efficient, e.g. to save time for citizens and businesses. A new "Data Ware House" system enables systematic registration and management of related data.

ERDF OP, 2014-2020

(Sources: Thuringia ERDF 2014-2020 OP, ERDF 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation, ERDF 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation of financial instruments, ERDF 2014-2020 AIR 2016)

After having provided an overview of the output and results of the Cohesion policy in the funding period from 2007 until 2013 (2014), prospects for the current program from 2014 until 2020 will be presented. Basically, the current implementation strategy aims at continuously improving performance in terms of the previously mentioned indicators. In order to understand the project frame and goals until 2020, the following table will present an outlook for targeted points of action.

Table 16: Target values for ERDF OP 2014-2020

| Outcome indicator | Initial value | Initial year | Target value | Measuring unit |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ol 1: Third-party funds per researcher | 35,69 | 2011 | 37 | 1.000 Euros |
| Ol 2: Research and development expenditure proportionately to the GDP | 2,23 | 2011 | 3,22 | Percent |
| Ol 3: Number of company foundations within the research and technology sector per 10.00 gainful worker in Thuringia | 3,22 | 2011 | 3,22 | Percent |
| Ol 4: Export quota | 30,2 | 2012 | 37,5 | Percent |
| Ol 5: Pre-tax construction investment per gainful worker in Thuringia | 8.955 | 2011 | 14.000 | Euros |
| Ol 6: Guest accommodation in million | 9,7 million | 2012 | 11 million | Count |
| Ol 7: Guest accommodation from abroad in million | 593.000 | 2012 | 730.000 | Count |
| Ol 8: Energy-induced carbon dioxide emission | 16.801 *10 ³ | 2010 | 15.120 *10 ³ | Tons of carbon dioxide equivalent |
| Ol 9: Damage potential due to flooding | 3,5 billion | 2013 | Reduction of 380 million | Euros |
| Ol 10: Share of streaming water which reach the demands of quality of the WRRL considering hydromorphology | 20 | 2014 | 43 | Percent of the entirety of Thuringia |

| | | | | |
|---|-------------------|------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| OI 11: Preservation of meaningful living environments and species | Still in research | 2014 | Still in research | Standardized evaluation methods |
| OI 12: Living and economy quality (in % of the satisfaction with the living and economy quality in Thuringia) | Still in research | 2014 | Still in research | Qualitative value (Satisfaction) |
| OI 13: Total area of undeveloped fallow land in Thuringia | 6.800 | 2006 | Reduction of 170-200 hectare | Hectare |

Whether the output and results of the Cohesion policy funding are in line with the set targets and aspired policy objectives is not only a question concerning the effectiveness of the programme, but rather whether the programme in its core is constructive and meaningful. In order to therefore clearly identify the accumulated output and advancements it is distinguished between output indicators and result indicators. Output indicators on the one hand measure the directly produced results of the program's execution. At this point, actual numeric scales and indicators are necessary. In contrast to that, result indicators rather depict the overall change within the supported region as induced by the programme. By starting with the output indicators, five major priority axes were defined so that the effectiveness of the program can be assessed in quantified terms. Hence, there are five priority axes with various sub-indicators which have been previously addressed and that are the following:

1. Strengthening of research, technological development and innovation
2. Strengthening of economic and competitiveness of companies
3. Facilitation of reducing carbon dioxide emissions in all areas of the economy
4. Risk management and prevention, environmental protection and promotion of the usage of renewable resources
5. Sustainable city development

When evaluating all those set parameters, the ex-ante Report (ERDF OP 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation) came to the conclusion that all mentioned indicators are in general adequate and relevant for the effective implementation of the Cohesion policy programme in Thuringia. Yet, the report suggests to clarify in more detail the statistical and qualitative relationship between indicator x and degree of efficiency y so that the measurement unit and the device ("tool") scrutinised are unambiguously specified. Consequentially, the adapted output indicators are closer in line with the targeted policy goals wherefore the programme itself exhibits a high degree of effectiveness. Furthermore, the result indicators are subdivided and structured with the help of the previously mentioned priority axes in such a way as to enable them to directly assess the overall change within Thuringia induced by Cohesion policy's programme. The evaluated result conforms to the rating of the output indicators indicating that the applied measurements and proxies fit the cause sufficiently. Therefore, generally speaking, the programme obviously has targeted the Thuringian economic, environmental and social status quo significantly so that the Cohesion policy in the region may be called effective.

So far, both ERDF programme periods, meaning the subsidies from 2007-2013 and the package 2014-2020, have been rated as to the greatest possible extent fruitfully, although considerable improvements in different sectors like innovation and technology have to be achieved. Yet, it has to be taken into account that the programme for the current period is still running which in turn implies

that goals set will be accomplished within the default time span. In order to provide an overview of further aspired targets, the following table describes some milestones with the help of the priority axes mentioned above which are ideally met until 2020:

Table 17: Milestones, ERDF OP 2014-2020; OI = output indicator

| Indicator | Milestone 2018 | Implementing procedure | Target value |
|---|----------------|--|--------------|
| Priority axis 1: Strengthening of research, technological development and innovation | | | |
| Financially: Promotion of public spending in million euros | 109.9 | No information | 395 |
| OI: Areas of modernized and newly implemented research areas in m² | No information | Issued planning approval of 5 projects | 19.000 |
| OI: Number of supported joint research projects | 25 | No information | 70 |
| Priority axis 2: Strengthening of economic and competitiveness of companies | | | |
| Financially: Eligible promotion of complete edition in million euros | 126.56 | No information | 353.75 |
| OI: Number of companies that receive grants | 700 | No information | 1.600 |
| OI: Number of companies that on top receive loans | 85 | No information | 240 |
| Priority axis 3: Facilitation of reducing the carbon dioxide emission in all areas of the economy | | | |
| Financially: Eligible promotion of complete edition in million euros | 65.4 | No information | 308.75 |
| OI: Number of projects | 150 | No information | 300 |
| OI: Number of real estate with optimized energy efficiency and increased share of renewable resources | 10 | No information | 60 |
| OI: Number of communes with energy sanitised quarters | No information | Existence of 2 energetic city restoration concepts | 10 |

| | | | |
|---|----------------|---|---------|
| Priority axis 4: Risk management and prevention, environmental protection and promotion of the usage of renewable resources | | | |
| Financially: Eligible public spending in million euros | 41.11 | No information | 175.375 |
| OI: Number of projects concerning technical flood control | No information | Completion of the technical planning of 30 intended actions for technical flood control | 100 |
| Priority axis 5: Sustainable city development | | | |
| Financially: Eligible public spending in million euros | 51.35 | No information | 190.25 |
| OI: Area of enhanced regions in hectare | 37 | No information | 470 |

Hence, it becomes obvious, that none of the final target values will be met already in 2018. Some are very far from completion whereas others are already halfway. It will be necessary to evaluate the program's progress at the end of 2020 in order to check whether set goals were indeed reached and to what extent the ERDF programme will have effectively met its aspired milestones. 2020 will be the time to finally interpret the efficiency and precision of the ESI funds.

So far, only the ERDF AIR for 2016 is available yet. The following table will provide performance key indicators in order to demonstrate if meeting the targets is feasible from a current perspective.

Table 18: Key information on implementation, ERDF AIR 2016

| Number of Projects | Amount of Subsidies granted in million Euros | Percentage (%) of Total Amount for 2014-20 |
|---|--|--|
| Priority axis 1: Strengthening of research, technological development and innovation | | |
| 42 | 30.3 | 24.24 |
| Priority axis 2: Strengthening of economic and competitiveness of companies | | |
| 406 | 273.6 | 77.0 |
| Priority axis 3: Facilitation of reducing the carbon dioxide emission in all areas of the economy | | |
| 92 | 20.3 | 7.0 |
| Priority axis 4: Risk management and prevention, environmental protection and promotion of the usage of renewable resources | | |
| 62 | 17.8 | 9.8 |
| Priority axis 5: Sustainable city development | | |
| - | - | - |
| Priority axis 6: Technical assistance | | |

| | | |
|---|-------|------|
| 3 | 11.66 | 35.1 |
|---|-------|------|

For most priority axes, ERDF programme performance until the end of 2016 was assessed positively. Problems have not been identified. That projects for priority axis 5 have not yet started is justified with the underlying process. In the first two years, calls for submission of encompassing strategies by municipalities had been issued. As a result, 28 of the turned in strategies were approved. Based on that, municipalities that succeeded can now submit concrete project proposals. It is the goal of sustainable city development to strengthen selected locations as attractive economic and social spaces.

The high share of means already spent for priority axis 2 is justified with the fact that this axis is overwhelmingly implemented with the help of four financial instruments (two investment funds and two credit funds) while the necessary financial arrangements with a total volume of 203.75 million Euros were concluded in the funding period. Based on that, concrete preparatory work for distributing the funds could start. In total, financial support was granted to 452 S&M enterprises with the overarching goal to contribute to the four specific goals within priority axis 2 (see above).

From a current perspective, it cannot yet be assessed whether achieving all targets within the five priority axes is feasible or whether some target will be missed by 2020.

Referring to Q3 and Q4, interviewees stress that the central goals of the previous funding period were achieved, although the reallocation of funds especially for flood protection proved to be challenging as this had not been given priority at the beginning of the funding period. However, the general programme goals could always be achieved despite the need of changes in what programme elements to prioritise and related reallocations in programmes' budgets. In that, the main achievements are support for economic development, infrastructural investments and wastewater treatment in the previous funding period with additional investments in enhancing and constructing flood protection. For these, programme failures were not mentioned (see especially interview TH-4).

For the current funding period 2014-2020 interviewees consider it too early to come to firm conclusions with respect to achievements (e.g. interview TH-4, TH-6). However, achieving some of the programmes' goals will most likely turn out to be difficult, e.g. ensuring and especially expanding the basis of qualified workforce for the regional economy, that is also tried to achieve with a 're-migration' campaign, i.e., a campaign to convince former (highly skilled) Thuringians to return to their home state. So far, interviewees see campaign results rather sceptical. But this would refer to the work of the *Thüringer Agentur Für Fachkräftegewinnung (ThAFF)* that is entrusted with this and related tasks and which is co-financed by ESF in general (see interviews TH-1; TH-4).

When answering Q6, interviewees did not refer to particular problems that resulted or would result from implementation structures for delivering the programmes and projects. However, some interviewees criticized a tendency towards a disadvantageous centralisation of implementation structures in the previous period under the former government, but this critique remained vague (interview TH-1).

Overall, the general challenge to provide co-funding from own sources for projects (especially at the local/concrete project level) persisted, but this is not a new issue in the last two funding periods (e.g. interview TH-2). A further general problem that is, however, also not new is whether the funds are really used for projects that are indeed sustainable or if, for example, projects have to be cancelled once funding from ERDF or ESF ends. The latter is seen as a relevant problem (see interviews TH-2, TH-5, TH-6). An example would be a funding of restoration of public buildings at the local level, but where maintenance after the end of funding is not assured due to local budget constraints. In a similar vein, this applies to the creating of counselling services the social (inclusion) realm (ibid.).

Overall, interviewees' answers to Q7 did not allow for detailed clear-cut conclusions in terms of all four tasks 1) spending the funds 2) compliance 3) performance and 4) publicising achievements. However, there is an obvious tendency that compliance is by far the task that enjoys highest priority whereas publicising achievements is rather considered a task with lower if not the lowest priority among the four. This is because non-compliance with Cohesion policy's formal rules and regulations is considered particular dangerous as it might result in a repayment of funding received, i.e., a (tremendous) financial loss. On the other hand, publicising achievements of Cohesion policy is considered a difficult task against the background of a low interest of the general public in the EU, with little prospects to achieve much. Hence, greater efforts here would rather prove futile; see communication part below for details (see interviews TH-1, TH-4, TH-5, other priorities by TH-6).

Within that scope, all interviewees stressed the enormous formal demands that come along with implementing Cohesion policy in the region (whether in terms of receiving Cohesion subsidies as such or with respect to actual project level implementation). This would especially include the extremely detailed conditions to receive subsidies, the documentation requirements and the necessary work force (personnel) involved. These were commonly characterised as creating a sometime tremendous (additional) workload and in that also inefficiencies (albeit most actors also acknowledge that compliance and the bureaucratic requirements involved are somehow necessary due to the special constellation with a supranational organization providing financial support). What is crucial is that, despite the fact that reforms of Cohesion policy had this intention, most actors claimed that they cannot observe a decrease in formal (bureaucratic) requirement, but quite the opposite for the current period 2014-2020 (interviews TH-1, TH-2, TH-4, TH-5, TH-6).

More than 85 percent of stakeholders say that Cohesion policy funds have been used well or very well in Thuringia, but only about 57 percent say so for the usage on the municipality level. More than 85 percent also agree that Cohesion policy objectives reinforced the development objectives of Thuringia region as a whole whereas only slightly more than 71 percent would support this notion for the municipality (with another 14 percent saying that the funds did so in some way).

Cohesion policy funds helped to decrease differences in the development level between poorer and richer regions in Germany according to 14 percent of stakeholders whereas another 71 percent would support the statement that the funds did so 'somewhat'. Only 14 percent say that they had no impact here. In terms of the municipality, only slightly more than 57 percent say the funds have been helpful for the goal to decrease these differences while almost 43 percent find that fund had no impact to achieve that objective.

In terms of problems and challenges encountered during Cohesion policy implementation, stakeholders emphasize as 'significant' or 'very significant' excessive reporting requirements (more than 85 percent), lack of funds/co-financing (more than 85 percent), complicated rules (more than 71 percent), excessive audit and control during or after the project completion (more than 57 percent), and a difficult access to credit and/or loans for own contributions (more than 56 percent). Other problems are perceived as less or far less severe.

With respect to the correct prioritization of Cohesion policy fund in Thuringia as a whole or in the municipality, only about 57 agree with the statement that the money from the funds is used where needed the most. However, only 14 percent say that the funds have been used for the wrong projects (i.e., wasted). On the other hand, irregularities in spending of Cohesion policy funds due to non-compliance are hardly seen as problems. Besides, more than 86 percent 'agree' with the argument that here have been many positive changes in the municipality or in Thuringia as a result of Cohesion policy funding, which could not have been achieved without the funds. A further 57 percent of stakeholder respondents also agree that the funds have also been adequately controlled. However,

only about 43 percent of stakeholder would agree that usage of funds occurs in a cost-efficient manner.

A vast majority of stakeholders considers the monitoring reports informative and useful (more than 85 percent). However, a majority of stakeholders at the same time sees the latter as difficult to understand (more than 57 percent), albeit not difficult to access (about 71 percent). Besides, they are also used by a majority of stakeholders 'to improve policy-making and implementation' (more than 57 percent).

Finally, participation in Cohesion policy workshop or training sessions during the last two years was generally low. Only about 15 percent of stakeholders confirm participation for 'control' and 'monitoring' whereas at least about 29 percent participated in such workshops or training sessions dealing with 'evaluation' and 'communication'.

Note: Due to low number of participants in survey (n=7), tables and graphs are omitted.

3.2.2 Partnership

With regard to partnership, the desk research shows, on the basis of the Thuringia ERDF OP 2007-2013, ERDF Ex-ante Evaluation 2007-2013, ERDF 2007-2013 Interim report, ERDF 2014-2020 OP, ERDF OP 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation, its strengthening in two main aspects:

1. Improved electronic information access options for stakeholders, beneficiaries and civil society actors
2. Establishing cooperation platforms for closer cooperation between policy actors (i.e., on the local government level), economic actors, research institutes and universities at the sub-regional level

To improve service and authority information accessibility for businesses and citizens the ERDF programme supported e-government applications. Especially on the local administrative level information should be provided in electronic form. The goal is to make the administration more efficient and to save time for citizens and businesses (beneficiaries). For that purpose, a developed "Data Ware House" system enables systematic registration and management of data.

This e-government application is not only useful for businesses but also for the civil society to improve accessibility to information. Besides, a non-technical report about the environmental impacts of the OP ERDF was developed, which is accessible for interested citizens. Furthermore, the mentioned communication programs are also accessible for the civil society.

In the R&D area, corporate projects between businesses, research institutes and universities should enable technology and knowledge exchanges to develop new successful products and (production) processes. Sub-regions sharing crucial characteristics are encouraged to bring together economic, political and research institutions to form partnerships and improve the economic and social cohesion at the level the sub-region.

Referring to Q3 and Q9, interviewees have not highlighted partnership issues. As mentioned above, the general partnership approach is widely seen as open and also accountable to civil society. I.e., there is the principle to mobilize a wide range of stakeholders at different territorial levels (region, sub-regions, and municipalities). However, these seem to be issues that are not really of concern for most interviewees. This could be interpreted in a way that – on the one hand – there are no pressing problems here while – on the other hand – it is also a field where innovative approaches for even further gains in terms of implementing Cohesion policy or to get additional pay-offs are not really

pursued or the mentioned initiatives (see above) have not yet taken root (see again interviews TH-1, TH-4, TH-6).

In the stakeholder survey, the partnership principles are seen as complied with by the vast majority of stakeholders. At the same time, stakeholders vastly support that the participation of partners is important. More than 85 percent agree with the notion that partnership programmes operate in an inclusive, open and fair manner. Another 57 percent would also support that respective programmes and the 'living' of the partnership principle facilitate a shared understanding and shared commitments by partners to achieving the programme's objectives. That partners are only interested in promoting their own organisational and financial interests is only agreed with by a minority of stakeholders.

Note: Due to the low number of participants (n=7) tables are omitted.

3.3 Assessment of added value

The desk research, based on the Thuringia ERDF OP 2007-2013, ERDF Ex-ante Evaluation 2007-2013, ERDF Interim report, ERDF 2007-2013, ERDF 2014-2020 OP, ERDF 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation, ERDF 2014-2020 AIR 2016, demonstrates that added value is a broader concept than effectiveness that relates not only to impacts on developmental outcomes, but also to governance, learning and visibility effects as well as spill-overs into domestic systems and related innovation and efficiency improvements.

European Added value is understood as the spillover effects and externalities caused by EU financial interventions. Specifically, it addresses those effects, which are not quantifiable. It encompasses everything that would have not been harder to achieve without the European Union's assistance.

Financial added value is achieved when the funds complement existing efforts by the member states. The European structural funds are supposed to add to rather than replace such measures. In the financial structure plans laid out by Thuringia, ERDF funds are used complementary. The already existing structural funds by the state government will be kept at the previous levels. Therefore financial added value in the terms of the Lisbon agreement seems to be accomplished.

The Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies put a focus on environmental protection within a general sustainable development. Furthering these broader goals is creating European added value. Thuringia's current OP (2014-20) includes the goals of securing the natural environment as well as increasing efficient use of resources. The overall strategy and measures are constructed in a way that helps achieving these goals. Examples are the fields of creating or enhancing sustainable development and an environmentally friendly infrastructure.

Administrative added value is created through planning (long-term and financial), partnership and monitoring. Most important is the partnership aspect. It is created either horizontally – between the different levels of government – or vertically, when local government, interest groups and other stakeholders work together. Evaluating the added value is hard in the medium term. For the period 2007-2013, it can therefore not be assessed.

Finally, the 2007-2013 ERDF OP includes the goal of strengthening interregional cooperation in the area of research and development. The OP's authors and evaluators see huge potential for European added value through network effects of the exchange.

In the current period 2014-2020, the ERDF OP proposes bundling measures of flood mitigation, water structure and biodiversity. Such a holistic approach is conceived to activate synergies between the single measures and therefore should deliver additional value. City development is another area in which synergies are meant to be activated. The traditional, decentralised structure of Thuringia's

lower and middle order centres is crucial to the region's basic infrastructure. Population in these areas is shrinking, however. To counter this development, the state is funding several projects with the intention to increase the quality of life there. Measures for sustainable environment from the ERDF programme, for example CO₂ reduction and recultivation of land, complement these approaches. These overall effects are seen as an additional value created by programme's measures. Potential European added value is not debated in the relevant documents so far. It can, hence, be concluded that European added value seems to hold a rather low importance compared to the "actual" effects of the programmes. However, the issues of a European added values appears to have moved slightly more to the forefront with the OP 2014-2020.

When answering Q3, interviewees have not provided much here. A particular added value that solely comes with Cohesion policy as compared to domestic policies for regional development was not referred to. However, this should not obfuscate the general high relevance of Cohesion policy funds in Thuringia for achieving development goals or for addressing sudden and urgent problems that had not been foreseen, such as the need to increase investment in flood protection measures. The latter became especially in the previous funding period 2007-2013, but remains important also in the current period since 2014 (see, for example, interview TH-4). In that, Cohesion policy fund were available for addressing an urgent problem that became apparent with a locally devastating flood in 2013.

4. Cohesion policy communication

4.1 Approach to communication

The 2007-2013 ERDF-programme in Thuringia has four major objectives: (i) education, research and development, innovation; (ii) increase of the economic competitiveness; (iii) sustainable regional and urban development; and (iv) protection and improvement of the environment. ESF-funding is also used to achieve these goals. For 2007-13, ERDF-funding of 1.477.687.909 Euros is allocated to Thuringia and will be supplemented by additional 492.600.000 Euros. In 2014-20, ERDF-funding of 1.095.173.240 Euros is allocated, with a performance reserve of 69.904.675 Euros.

The following information for 2007-13 is based on the Communication Plan and the several paragraphs in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) from 2007-14. A final report on the Communication Plan is not been published yet. For 2014-20, the information is based on the Communication Strategy and the AIR 2016. Note that the Communication Plan 2007-13 has been developed for both ERDF- and ESF-funding. This Communication Plan has been approved by the European Commission on the 4th of April 2008. The 2014-20 Communication strategy, however, is solely developed for ERDF-funding.

Overall approach to communication

4.1.1 2007-13 period

As desk research reveals, two main goals are mentioned in the Communication Plan. First, EU citizens should be informed about the aims and objectives of OPs, about the EU Cohesion Policy, and the EU employment strategy for Thuringia. Additionally, this information should increase the transparency of the funding policy. Secondly, potential recipients should be addressed by specific measures and activities in order to better know the benefit of EU-funding. There are nine different target groups

specified in the Communication Plan: (i) citizens in Thuringia, i.e. the general public, (ii) potential recipients (e.g. private persons, companies, research institutes in a broad sense, municipalities, education institutions, (iii) recipients, (iv) political decision-makers, (v) local authorities, (vi) social partners, clubs, associations, chambers, (vii) persons entrusted with the implementation and management of vocational trainings and labour market policies, (viii) NGOs, and (ix) European information centre and regional office for Europe.

For some of the proposed measures and activities (see 4.5.1), the Communication Plan explicitly states the goals that should be achieved with these measures. For instance, information and advertising material should inform about EU structural funds in general and the strategy and the priorities of Thuringia in particular. Furthermore, best-practice examples and the results of project funding will be presented. Additionally, a series of events called "Europe for Thuringia" is particularly highlighted. It comprises target group-specific and subject-specific events, seminars, and workshops in order to raise citizens' level of awareness of EU Cohesion Policy. In particular, the magazine "Akteur" is seen as a valuable tool for regional and local media and companies to be better informed about EU Cohesion Policy (and is additionally a way to target the general public and to ensure the transparency of EU funding in Thuringia).

The Communication Plan explicitly mentions three elements that are seen as decisive for the success of the implementation of the Communication Plan. First, sound planning and coordination are very important. Secondly, specific topics related to EU Cohesion Policy have to be chosen to reach the media and citizens. Thirdly, information and communication has to be specific, i.e. a specific group, municipality or economic sector has to be targeted. Table 35 in the Annex gives an overview of all the proposed measures and activities, of output and result indicators, as well as of impact indicators.

4.1.2 2014-2020 period

For the current period, three main objectives are identified: (i) information of potential recipients, recipients and WISO-partners (i.e. economic, social and environmental partners); (ii) information of the general public in Thuringia; and (iii) raising the awareness level of ERDF in Thuringia. Note that both the actual and the target value of citizens' awareness level of ERDF-funding will be specified in 2015 using the results of a survey. Five target groups are identified in the Communication Strategy: (i) general public in Thuringia; (ii) recipients, potential recipients (companies, private persons, municipalities, chambers, associations, public and private institutions); (iii) economic and social partners; (iv) political decision-makers; (v) persons and institutions dealing with the implementation of OP and the administration of ERDF funds.

It is explicitly stated that only a mix of media can achieve all these goals. This is one of the results of the evaluation of the previous Communication Plan. Referring to Flash Eurobarometer 384 (2013), it is mentioned that although the awareness level of EU regional policy is higher in East German states than in West German states, the nation-wide level is still lower than the EU-average. Consequently, additional measures to inform (potential) recipients about the benefits of EU-funding are required. The online presence is seen as the most important tool to communicate and to inform the general public.

Table 37 in the Annex lists result and output indicators as mentioned in the Communication Strategy. The planned methods used to evaluate these indicators are presented in 4.5.1/2. The following table provides a general overview on communication strategies for both periods (see also Table 35 in the Annex).

The AIR 2016 does not entail any information on the communication strategy in 2014-20

Table 19: Communication strategies funding periods 2007-13 and 2014-20

| Communication strategies/plans | | | | | |
|---|----------|--|--|----------|--|
| 2007-2013 | | | 2014-2020 | | |
| Main objectives | Measures | Target groups | Main objectives | Measures | Target groups |
| 1. Citizens should be informed about the aims and objectives of OPs, about the EU Cohesion Policy, and the EU employment strategy for Thuringia | (mix) | 1. Citizens in Thuringia, i.e. the general public | 1. Information of potential recipients and WISO-partners | (mix) | 1. General public in Thuringia |
| 2. Potential recipients should be addressed by specific measures and activities in order to better know the benefit of EU-funding | | 2. Potential recipients | 2. Information of the general public | | 2. Recipients, potential recipients |
| | | 3. Recipients | 3. Raising the awareness level of ERDF in Thuringia | | 3. Economic and social partners |
| | | 4. Political decision-makers | | | 4. Political decision-makers |
| | | 5. Local authorities | | | 5. Persons and institutions dealing with the implementation of OP and the administration of ERDF funds |
| | | 6. Social partners, clubs, associations, chambers | | | |
| | | 7. Persons entrusted with the implementation and management of vocational trainings and labour market policies | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| | | 8. NGOs | | | |
| | | 9. European information centre and regional office for Europe | | | |

Budget

The budget for 2007-2013 period's ERDF-information and publicity activities is ca. 2 million Euros and is co-financed with ca. 670.000 Euros from national public resources.⁷ The Communication strategy for 2014-20 has a budget of 1.165 Million Euros and is co-financed by public households and private funding. Financing of the measures and activities is provided by the technical aid of the OP and amounts to 3 Million Euros.

Table 20: Budget

| <i>Total allocation</i> | Country | Unit |
|-------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| 3 500 000 | 1 170 000 | EUR |
| 3 000 000 | 1 165 000 | EUR |

Governance

The implementation of the Communication strategy is supervised by the Management Authority ERDF together with internal and external partners. Competences and resources from the Thuringian Ministry of Economic Affairs (this name until 2014) should be used as well. Since the online presence is seen as the most valuable tool for communication about ERDF, a webmaster is hired for the planning and maintenance of the webpage.

Monitoring and evaluation is specified in the Communication Plan. AIRs are being presented to the Monitoring Committee every year. As required, information and publicity activities will be evaluated in AIR 2010 and in the final report of the OP. It is noteworthy that Thuringia intends to conduct a market survey in order to get information about the EU-funding knowledge of target groups. Additionally, it is intended to conduct a media resonance analysis that not only lists the number of media reports but also the focus of these reports.

Contact for information and publicity measures, coordination and implementation of Communication Plan are provided in the following table:

Table 21: Contact information

| Governance framework in the Communication | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 2007-2013 | 2014-2020 |
| <i>Communication networks</i> | <i>Communication networks</i> |

⁷ Note that the ERDF-budget for information and publicity measures is higher than the ESF-budget (ca. 1.5 Million Euros plus ca. 500.000 Euro from national public resources).

| Governance framework in the Communication | |
|--|--|
| 2007-2013 | 2014-2020 |
| <i>Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Technologie und Arbeit</i> (until 2014) Max-Reger-Straße 4-8 D-99096 Erfurt (Managing authority for OP) | <i>Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Technologie und Arbeit</i> (until 2014) / <i>Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Digitale Gesellschaft</i> (since 2014) Max-Reger-Straße 4-8 D-99096 Erfurt (Managing authority for OP) |
| <i>Bodies responsible for implementation of the measures</i> | <i>Bodies responsible for implementation of the measures</i> |
| Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Technologie und Arbeit Referat 35: Verwaltungsbehörde für die EU-Strukturfonds Frau Dr. Sabine Awe Max-Reger-Straße 4-8 D-99096 Erfurt Tel. +49 361 37 97350, Fax +49 361 37 978309 Mail: sabine.awe@tmwta.thueringen.de | <i>Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Technologie und Arbeit</i> (until 2014) / <i>Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Digitale Gesellschaft</i> (since 2014) Referat 35: Verwaltungsbehörde für die EU-Strukturfonds Max-Reger-Straße 4-8 D-99096 Erfurt Tel. +49 361 37 97330, Fax +49 361 37 978309 |

Interviewees have not particularly addressed key priorities of the communication strategy nor did they stress particular communication measures and target groups. What could, however, be reasonably concluded from interviews is that, first, communication relies on a broad spectrum of communication channels and tools. In that “regular” channels like brochure, leaflets, flyers (printed material) and signs/plates are important as are electronic channels (programme and beneficiaries’ websites, electronic newsletter and circulars distributed via email, now also social media, especially Facebook, but not yet twitter). Second, communication activities are certainly target group specific. For the latter, specific target groups, especially direct beneficiaries of Cohesion policy funds enjoy a higher priority (interviews TH-1, TH-3, TH-4, TH-5, TH-6). (Larger) changes in communication activities over time were not stressed with the possible exception that the employment of social media is, of course, a rather new phenomenon (ibid.).

Most stakeholders do not view communication of Cohesion policy programmes as key priority (interviews TH-1, TH-3, TH-4, TH-5, TH-6). Only one stakeholder considers this task as very important, but does not provide further explanations for his choice (interview TH-1). This would especially refer to personnel involved in communication, but also time spent for it or frequency of discussion of communication details. Here, resources devoted are clearly limited. The general view as expressed by most stakeholders, however, has to be differentiated for the different target groups. Communication to specific target groups, especially direct beneficiaries, was seen as relatively important, albeit as less important compared to the other three major tasks involved. Consequently, some efforts have to be invested here.

This is completely different with the goal to also reach the general public, to raise awareness in Thuringia for Cohesion policy's role. This was overwhelmingly considered a very difficult task, something that could hardly be achieved. The prevailing opinion is that "ordinary" citizens are not really interested in EU-matters in general not to mention specific aspects like Cohesion policy. Even with respect to the realisation of beneficial projects, "[citizens] do not care where the money comes from" (interview TH-4). This is also because Cohesion policy is too abstract, too cumbersome an issue to really enthuse people. As a result, communication activities within that scope that are required by EU regulations are at least in danger to become pure matters of duty especially because the communication obligations are viewed as already being quite extensive (interviews TH-1, TH-3, TH-4, TH-5, TH-6). Nonetheless, no actor interviewed would deny that communication remains an important task. The crucial question they posed, however, is if there are no other actors who are supposed to do that – e.g. politicians or EU actors (interview TH-4, see also interview TH-1).

In terms of 'traditional' media, stakeholders mostly use local or regional newspapers to disseminate information about Cohesion policy in Thuringia, however, mostly only 'sometimes' (about 86 percent) with about 14 percent using the channel 'often'. As expected, the situation is different with respect to national newspapers. Here, only about 14 percent employ this channel 'sometimes' with another 57 percent making use of this publication channel 'rarely' and the remaining percentage 'never'. On the other hand, TV and radio are hardly used (only 14 percent respectively 28 percent using it 'sometimes' with the rest employing these channels 'rarely' or 'never'). As could have also been expected, stakeholders' answers tend even more towards the 'never'-end of the answering spectrum when it comes to the use of specific advertisements or campaigns. The latter are overwhelmingly 'never' or 'rarely' employed (more than 86 percent disregarding precise channel).

With respect to the usage of new and especially social media, the empirical is more diverse as well as more nuanced. About 14 percent of stakeholders use these new media often and about 43 percent at least 'sometimes'. Still about 28 percent respectively 14 percent of stakeholder use new media 'hardly' or even 'never'. Overall, this clearly indicates a less frequent employment.

Regarding communication activities using 'own' publication forms and channels, i.e. those that are completely within stakeholders' authority, the stakeholders' answers, again, indicate a more nuanced, but also a more positive empirical picture. At the 'top', brochures, leaflets, and newsletters are employed by about 28 percent 'very often', by about 57 percent 'often' and by the remaining part (14 percent) of stakeholders at least 'sometimes'. In terms of press releases, stakeholders do also indicate using them overwhelmingly 'very often' or 'often' (43 percent respectively 14 percent) and a further 28 percent still 'sometimes'.

At a similar level, programmes' websites are very frequently used (28 percent 'often' and about 57 percent even 'very often'). Coming next, 43 percent of stakeholder use plaques/billboard with EU-flag placed on them 'very often' with about 14 percent 'often' and a further 28 percent still 'sometimes'. This is followed by workshops and seminars which are used 'often' (about 43 percent) or at least 'sometimes' (about 57 percent). Only videos or film clips are less often used with about 14 percent of stakeholders employing them 'often', 57 percent 'sometimes' and the rest 'rarely' or 'never'. Overall, the expresses a reliance on own publication channels when it comes to communicating Cohesion policy in Thuringia.

Note: Due to the low number of participants (n=7) tables are omitted.

4.2 Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies

4.2.1 2007-13 period

In the Communication Plan, it is mentioned that the experiences and the analysis of the evaluation of the Communication Plan 2000-06 for the ESF have shown that measures for recipients have been diverse and successful. This knowledge is also used in the 2007-13 funding period. Furthermore, one lesson from the previous programming period is that citizens of Thuringia have not been sufficiently aware of EU funding. The following measures to implement the communication strategy are explicitly highlighted:

- Preparation of publications as well as information and advertising material
- Usage of a logo for ERDF and ESF, respectively
- Setting up and maintaining an online presence (webpage)
- Starting kick-off events and information events
- Organising a series of events with the motto "Europe for Thuringia"
- Publishing a magazine of the Ministry of Economics, Technology and Labour for the implementation of EU structural funds
- Production of documentaries and CD-ROMs
- Publication of the list of recipients
- Public relations

In 2010, the Communication Plan has been evaluated. It seems to be an in-house evaluation because no external service provider is mentioned in the AIR 2010 and most of the time AIR 2010 just lists again the activities mentioned in previous AIRs. Table 36 in the Annex presents output indicators for 2007-10 (and from 2011 onwards). This is merely an update of the information in previous AIRs. The evaluation report is structured along the specific target groups outlined in the Communication Plan. We follow this structure and list the main points of the evaluation report in the following:

General public:

- The requirement for recipients to inform about the funding of their projects via billboards and explanation plaques is seen as a valuable tool to raise citizens' awareness level of EU structural funds

Multipliers (political decision-makers, social partners, clubs, associations, chambers, banks):

- Like the general public, multipliers are reached by the magazine and the newsletter
- Annual events are seen as a good place to share experiences, in particular if the annual events have a specific motto or call which boosts their acceptance

Potential recipients (e.g. companies, research institutions in a broad sense, municipalities)

- Some of the information is specifically presented to potential recipients by using flyers and posters
- Advertising campaign by "Thüringer Aufbaubank" is mentioned positively

European Information Centre

- Mentioned as a valuable partner for administrative authorities

The overall evaluation is that a change of or an adaption of the Communication Plan is not necessary. Regarding the budget for information and publicity activities, 463.500 Euros (ca. 23 per cent) of the allocated money has been spent until the end of 2010.

Annual implementation reports (AIR) mainly list examples of measures as well as information and public relation activities related to the OP. Yet, every AIR has a paragraph on a short evaluation of these activities. The information is reported separately for output and result indicators. The actual numbers of recipients, posters, participants at information events, etc. can be found in the respective AIRs. In the following, we focus on the analysis of effectiveness of measures and activities as mentioned in the AIRs. In the beginning, the evaluation is most of the time based on subjective judgements by AIR authors. Later on, AIRs provide data on the number of webpages with the highest number of downloads, etc. Every AIR highlights in a paragraph the main activities. Particularly this information is presented in the following. Additionally, AIRs in 2007, 2008, and 2009 have an Annex presenting some examples of posters, flyers, billboards and press releases. In how far these examples are seen as being "best-practice" cannot be conclusively assessed.

In 2007, the main activities focused on organising information events and the kick-off event, as well as on the provision of information on the webpage. The publication of the OP had a print run of 100. The webpage calculated 240.000 hits. 130 persons participated at the kick-off event, whereas 24 information events with ca. 1.000 participants have been organised. Last but not least, nine press releases have been published. The ERDF-logo has been used for a state-wide campaign "Thüringen-Invest" of the "Thüringer Aufbaubank".

The focus in 2008 has been on the organisation of the annual event (in connection with a so-called "information day"), on the organisation of various information events, and on consultations to specific funding areas. Furthermore, the online presence has been redesigned and three editions of the magazine "Akteure" have been published. The publication of the OP had a print run of 1.000. The webpage had 534 hits and 304 (information only available for December 2008, the month of the webpage launch). The annual event "Europe for Thuringia" had 100 participants, whereas ca. 2.500 participants attended 250 information events. 18 press releases have been published. The "Thüringer Aufbaubank" additionally published a brochure to inform about funding opportunities (3.000 exemplars). Several flyers have been distributed and 102 billboards have been installed within the state-wide campaign "Thüringen-Invest". AIR 2008 entails detailed information on information events which are not reported here.

In 2009, the realisation of the Communication Plan primarily focused on the implementation of a multimedia publicity campaign (ERDF and ESF). Furthermore, the organisation of the annual event in combination with the third call for transnational co-operations, the organisation of various information events, and the consultations to specific funding areas, the update of the online presence, and the publication of the magazine are specifically highlighted. Several flyers, posters and brochures have been distributed (some of them are newly created). As in the previous year, Thuringia also bought radio spots which highlighted the four main billboard themes in 2009: "innovation location Thuringia", "educational region Thuringia", "skilled workers in Thuringia", and "family region Thuringia". 2.000 exemplars of each billboard theme have been produced. Furthermore, parallel to the billboard and radio campaign, 54.000 postal cards with the logos of the billboards had been distributed in restaurants, bars, shops and other facilities in Erfurt, Jena, Weimar and Gera (the four largest cities in Thuringia). AIR 2009 does not present data on the number of visitors and hits on the webpage. 120 participants attended the annual event. More or less 1.900 participants attended 30 information events. 19 press releases have been published.

The main purpose of information and publicity activities in 2010 has been the organisation of the annual event, holding the event of the third call for transnational co-operation, the organisation of

several information events, and the new edition of the newsletter. The webpage has seen 430 hits per month.⁸ The paragraphs on the implementation of the Communication Plan are very short in AIR 2010 because most of the measures and activities are evaluated in the required section on the evaluation of information and publicity activities (see above).

In 2011, the main focus again has been on the organisation of the annual event, the fourth call of transnational co-operation, the organisation of several information events, the new edition of the newsletter, and – as a novelty – a location campaign. This location campaign was called “This is Thuringia” and one of the main objectives was to inform the general public about the business location Thuringia. This campaign explicitly highlighted that most of the location development is due to money allocated by European regional funds. The campaign was accompanied by 300 billboards across Thuringia, 33.400 postal cards in 180 outlets, radio spots, nationwide advertisements, and one cinema spot. An additional programme “Thüringen Dynamik” has been advertised by 62 radio spots on two radio stations where it has been explicitly mentioned that this programme is funded by the ERDF. Regarding output indicators, round about 7.700 hits on the webpage have been counted. 200 participants attended the annual event which is almost twice the number of participants in previous events. More than 4.100 participants attended 130 information events, and nine press releases have been published. Note, however, that the number of online subscribers to the newsletter decreased from 10.000 (in 2010) to 8.500. Yet, the number of printed version increases from 2.300 (in 2010) to 5.000/6.000. The newsletter has been published six times in 2011.

The AIR 2012 only highlights three main tasks the information and publicity activities focused on: (i) the annual event, (ii) information events, and (iii) the continuation of the location campaign. The main goal of the campaign still has been to inform the general public and relevant target groups about location factors in Thuringia. An image film for touristic marketing has been shot, explicitly mentioning all destinations that benefitted from EU-funding. This has been accompanied by a photo shooting. Feedback-questionnaires for participants of the annual event have been analysed with the result that the participants have been very satisfied with the event. The webpage had approximately 9.000 hits, and 130 participants attended the annual event. Ca. 1.900 participants attended 98 information events, and 9 press releases were published. Both the number of online subscribers (14.000) to the newsletter and the number of printed versions of the newsletter (6.000) increased. The newsletter has been published six times in 2012.

In 2013, the three main aspects of information and publicity activities focused on in 2012 were still important. Additionally, the preparation of the new funding period and the drafting of a new OP are highlighted. Due to positive feedback, the brochure “This is Thuringia – simply surprising” has been reprinted with more than 100 stories about Thuringia, mainly focusing on developments and achievements that are not well-known in other regions of Germany. Thus, this brochure is seen as a valuable tool to inform citizens and companies. This has been accompanied by an App, showing the brochure, an image film and a story booklet. Moreover, using ERDF-money several billboards have been installed at German airports showing several ERDF-funded projects in Thuringia. In the area of touristic marketing, a new magazine has been launched, combining information already mentioned in AIR 2012 and additionally providing this information and the magazine for iPads and Android-tablets. One of the main activities highlighted is a supra-regional campaign in summer 2013 to ease insecurities of tourists due to the flooding in East Germany in 2013. This resulted in a stabilized number of booking figures. Whereas the number of hits on the webpage only slightly increased (ca.

⁸ It is noteworthy that from 2010 on, the magazine “Akteure” is exclusively financed by ESF money.

10.000), the number of participants attending the annual event (554) and 554 information events (6.000) increased dramatically. Furthermore, the number of press released increased to 14. There have been no changes regarding the figures of the newsletter.

In 2014, the focus was already switching to the new OP ERDF 2014-20. The main innovation highlighted is the implementation of interactive maps and graphs on the webpage. Interviews with participants of the annual event – already devoted to the new programming period – were very satisfied with the event and evaluated the event with 1.5-2.0 on a 1-5 scale. Table 36 in the Annex provides an overview of output indicators from 2007 to 2014. It is not clear, however, in how far the figures for 2014 are based on measures dedicated to the 2014-20 funding period.

Communication strategy in 2014-20

The Communication strategy in 2014-20 lays out in greater detail the planned measures for and methods used in the evaluation than the previous Communication Plan. First, a survey among the general public, potential recipients, economic and social partners, and political decision-makers is going to be conducted in 2015 to assess the awareness level of ERDF-funding in Thuringia.⁹ This survey is going to be repeated in 2017, 2020 and 2023. Furthermore, knowledge tests may be used as well. Secondly, the publication of best-practice projects is seen as a valuable tool for communication ERDF-funding. All other measures are the same as in the previous funding period.

4.2.2 2014-20 period

While for the 2014-2020 period no evaluations are available yet, the AIR 2016 does provide some general information on the communication strategy's implementation progress in 2014 and 2015. Note that there is no AIR 2015 available.

In addition to several administrative steps of preparatory character (e.g. in terms of monitoring and regarding the set-up of evaluation of communication procedures), concrete communication activities began in 2014. In the first year of the funding period communication focused on information dissemination on the OP ERDF2014-2020 to the general public, but more so (potential) beneficiaries (e.g., priorities of the OP and options for receiving funding).

The ERDF starting event (*Auftaktveranstaltung*) took place on December, 8th 2014 in the *CongressCentre of Erfurter Messe* (Erfurt Fair) in which a Commission representative symbolically handed over the approval of the OP ERDF 2014-2020. Accompanying the event, a complete *Messewand* (long wall of stand-up displays) had been designed to present ERDF OP 2014-2020 information, especially focusing on the five priority axes. However, AIR 2016 does not provide further details on this information.

Besides, it is planned to design and produce an advertisement "gimmick" for the entire ERDF period 2014-2020 in form of a ball pendulum with five balls that would symbolically represent the five priority axes.

The ERDF annual event 2015 took place on October, 15th in Eisenach and was designated to "ERDF sustainable: Successes and Future". For that purpose, several communication tools had been prepared:

- 5 posters on the topic "Recultivation of Natural Ecosystems"

⁹ Results of the 2015 survey can be obtained from the ERDF Management Authority.

- 60 ERDF "seat cubes"
- 3 posters on the topic "Risk Prevention in Thuringia"
- 5 roll-ups with interactive maps on flood protection measures
- 3 drop-flags with ERDF Thuringia picture motives and the ERDF logo of the annual event

About 150 participants of the 2015 ERDF annual event were recorded. The event focused on priority axis 4 „Risk prevention and sustainable resources management“. In nearby Stedtfeld, a planned ERDF co-financed flood protection project was presented as a "demonstration object" of success.

ERDF Management Authority was also present at the "Europe Day" event in the Thuringian State Chancellery that took place on 24th June 2015. Here, visitors were informed "face to face" about ERDF in Thuringia and its priorities. For that purpose, ERDF OP was available in printed form (brochure) in two versions, a longer one and a shorter one while the latter would provide an overview on the most important aspects.

Finally, a new ERDF website was designed and launched, please consult www.efre-20.thueringen.de. Information provided on the website will be permanently updated. Besides, more information will be included on the website stepwise.

Referring to Q18, stakeholder have expressed that this has to be assessed differently for the different target groups. For specific target groups that are first and foremost direct beneficiaries of co-financed project (e.g. companies, higher education and research institutions, participants in education and vocational training measures or who receive career counselling co-funded by ESF) communication are mostly seen as effective, albeit interviewees would not assess certain communication tools or channels as clearly more successful compared to others (interviews TH-1, TH-4, TH-5, TH-6).

Naturally, websites or electronic newsletters and circulars are most important for business actors, but also persons who have recently finished school. Printed material (e.g. brochures with logo, but also organizations' journals), however, are also considered helpful. A little more scepticism and also ambivalence is expressed regarding (yearly) events. On the one hand, these are seen as extremely effective for reaching direct beneficiaries or other stakeholders (i.e., potential intermediates). On the other hand, similar events for other types of direct beneficiaries, like young persons in vocational training, are seen as hardly helpful for effective communication (interview TH-1).

In terms of reaching the general public, interviewees assess the different types of communication activities as equally less effective while this would especially refer to efforts to communicate Cohesion policy's role in Thuringia via generally media (like the regional or local press). In that regard there is also a general scepticism if the increasing use of social media channels for Cohesion policy communication would really result in considerable improvements, which might explain that they are not yet widely used. Most remarkably, perhaps, and in contrast to experiences in other German *Länder*, interviewees do not consider yearly events targeted at the general public, such as the "Europe Day" or "Europe Week" and *Europa vor Ort* ("Europe gets local"), as more effective to really raise the awareness of Cohesion policy. For the region, stakeholders express a similar view for such yearly events that either target specific groups, like beneficiaries, or the population. In the end, not many "ordinary" citizens show up there and they remain "closed circles" of people who already got the messages (interviews TH-1, TH-4, TH-5, TH-6, see above).

Stakeholders in Thuringia are only to 42 percent satisfied with Commission's support on communication while another 28 percent are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. More importantly, however, more than 85 percent of stakeholders asked are dissatisfied with the way Cohesion policy is communicated to citizens in general. The picture is a little different when looking at the data in

more detail. Here, stakeholders are dissatisfied with brandings and messages used as well as with the target groups approached to about 57 percent, but only to about 28 percent with respect to the employment of personal stories and to just 14 percent with respect to their own administrative capacities and resources dedicated for communication. However, stakeholders also often give mixed ratings (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) with respect to the detailed communication issues (for example, about 43 percent would rate their own administrative capacities and resources that way).

The situation is similar, albeit less severe in terms the communication's goal to convey the achievements of Cohesion policy programmes overall and also the role of the EU in general to the general public. This is seen by about 57 percent of stakeholders as ineffective while about 28 percent consider it effective and about 14 percent even very effective. However, or more positive assessment becomes visible for the question of how effective co-funded – i.e., concrete – projects are communicated in Thuringia. Here, about 57 percent consider the latter effective while about 43 percent ineffective. Most remarkably, this issue displays a clear polarized assessment by stakeholders.

The empirical picture is more nuanced in terms of how the employment of single communication instruments is assessed. On the one hand, there is at least a largely positive or neutral assessment regarding contacts with 'traditional' media in order to communicate Cohesion policy to the general public (about 28 percent agree with being effective while about 57 consider it neither effective nor ineffective with another about 28 percent saying that it is ineffective). On the other hand, there is a clear majority of stakeholders who consider using social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc.) ineffective, while only about 14 percent as effective (and another 14 percent as mixed in terms of effectiveness). Hence, there is an overall critical assessment with respect to the effectiveness of employing new communication channels and a 'mixed' to positive assessment of 'classical' media.

Overall, however, only a clear minority of stakeholders supports the notion that Cohesion policy communication activities influence citizens' support for the EU in general or Cohesion policy in particular positively.

Note: Tables and graphs are omitted due to low number of survey participants (n=7).

4.3 Good practice examples

Neither AIRs nor the several evaluation reports highlight good practice examples. Some examples of successful measures and activities are mentioned in 1.5.1. Thus, we just list them here again without any further explanation.

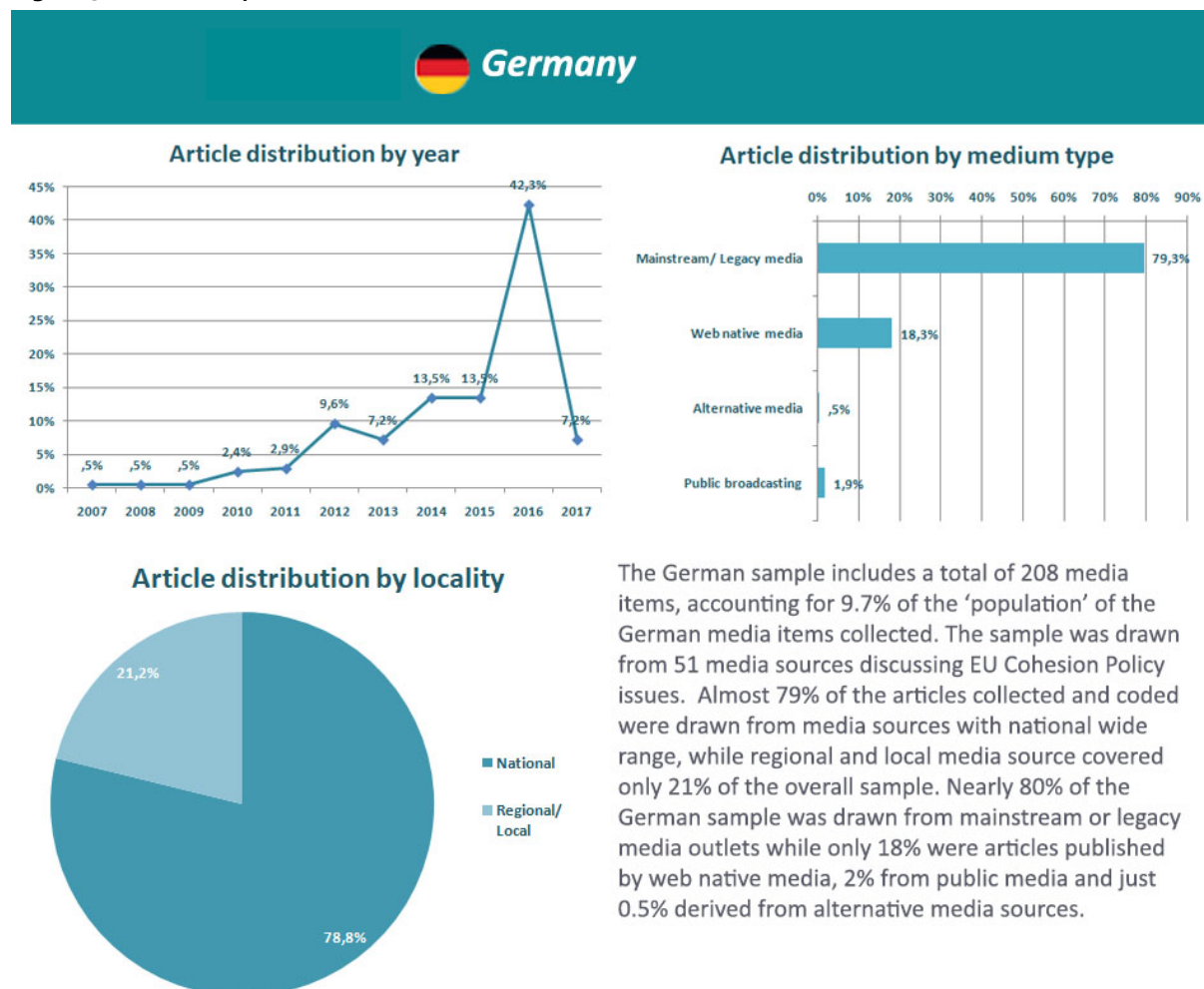
- Brochures
- Radio and cinema spots
- Regional and national advertisement campaigns (e.g. the location campaign "This is Thuringia")

Interviewees did not refer to specific communication measures as particular successful or good practice examples. However, one interviewee reported a recent innovative measure related to Cohesion policy that, if successful, could become such a good practice example. This is a smart-phone App that shows vacant positions for vocational training (i.e., for different professions such as in craft). If Cohesion policy funding would be involved for realising the project, this could easily be integrated in the App, for example by displaying the Thuringian ESF-programme logo (interview TH-5).

Stakeholders who participated in the survey did not provide further information here.

4.4 Media framing of Cohesion policy

Figure 3: Media analysis



In the framing analysis of the German sample coders all the eight frames consisting the Framing Matrix were identified. The analysis of the German media indicates that EU Cohesion policy is represented mostly in economic and Cohesion terms, as Frame 1 ("Economic consequences") and Frame 7 ("Cohesion") were identified as dominant frames in 30.3 percent and 20.2 percent of the articles respectively. In terms of the most commonly applied subframes, subframe 1.2 (17.3 percent) and subframe 7.0 (19.2 percent) were the most salient. It should be noted that the "Cohesion" frame has only been found to be that salient only in German media, indicating a trend of the German media to emphasize the importance of convergence among member states and to promote the process of European integration. Additionally, Frame 2 ("Quality of Life") with 12.5 percent and Frame 4 ("Incompetence of local authorities") with 11.5 percent were also prominent, while the coders did not identify any frames in 13.5 percent of the sample.

Figure 4: Dominant frame frequencies in German media

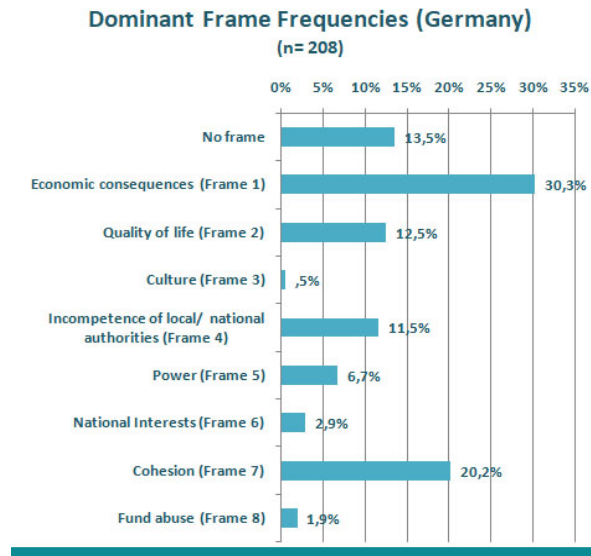
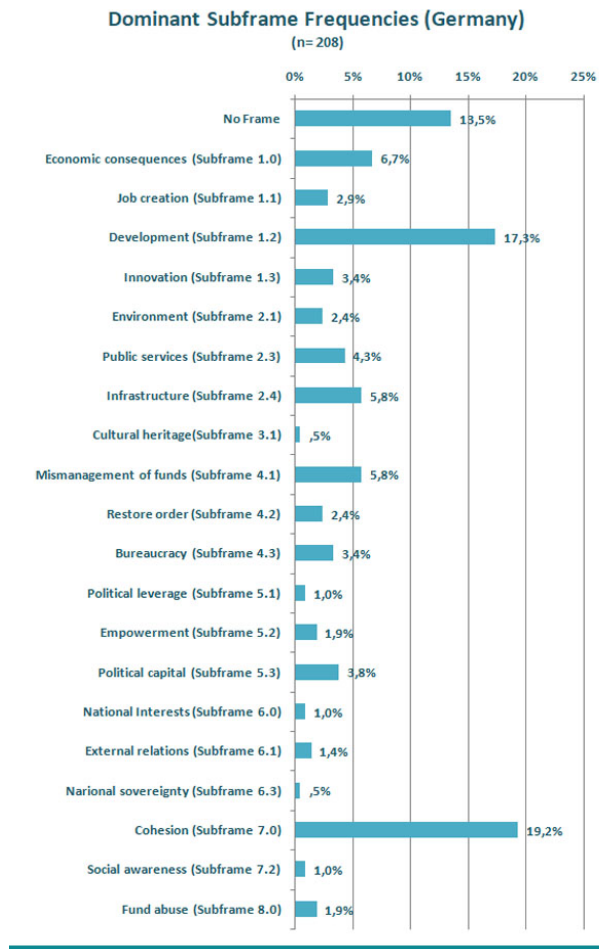


Figure 5: Dominant subframe frequencies in German media



The analysis of the German sample also revealed striking differences in framing between national and regional media, who seem to adopt totally opposite frames in their coverage of EU Cohesion policy. Regional media interpret Cohesion policy predominantly in terms of its implications on the economy as Frame 1 dominates more than 61 percent of the analysed news items, while one fourth of the sample employs the “Quality of life” Frame (Frame2). On the contrary, the emergence of frames in national media is more balanced, indicating that news presentation in national media approaches the news from several different perspectives.

Figure 6: Framing differences between national and regional/local media in Germany

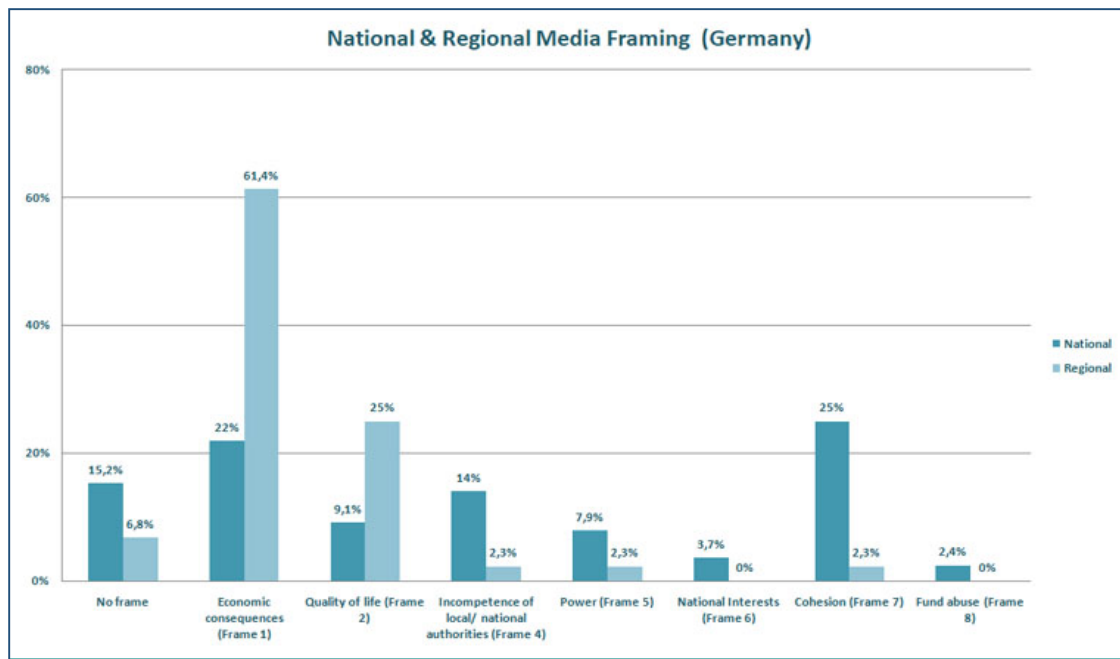


Figure 3.2.4  **Germany - Europeanization variables**

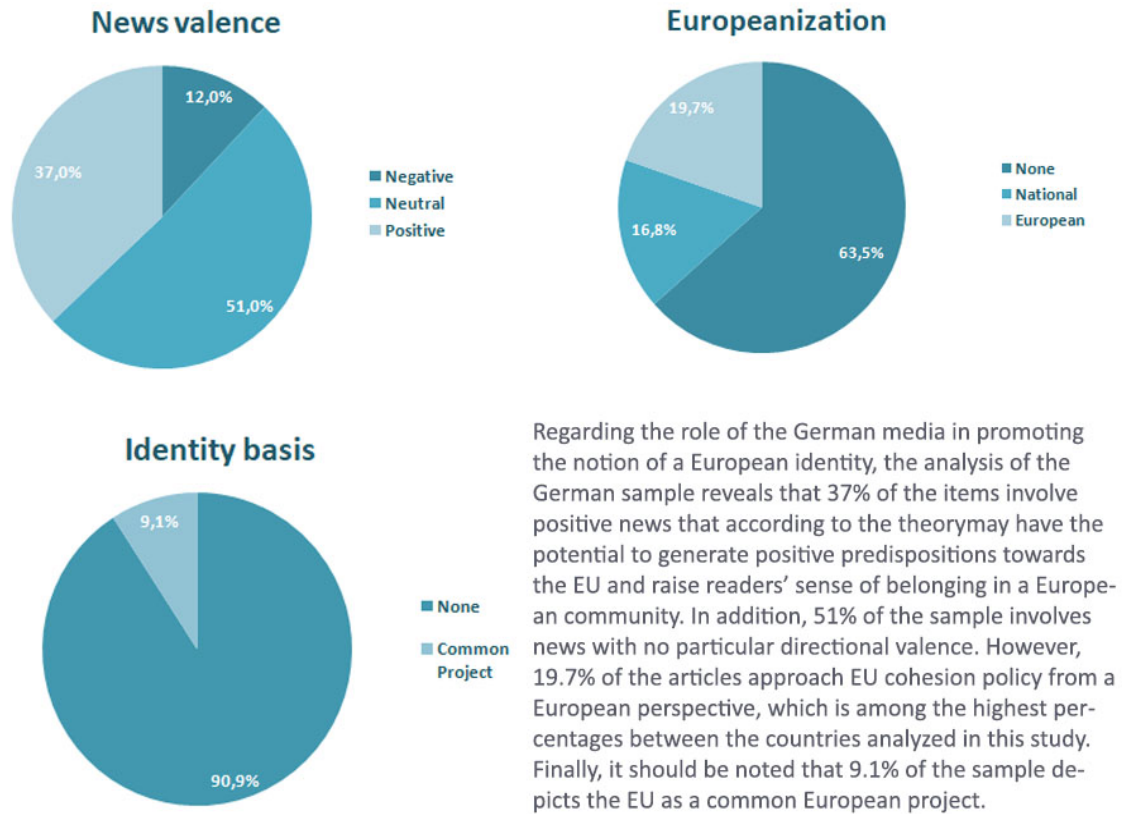


Figure 7: Europeanization variables

Some differences between national and regional media in Germany were also found in relation to the variables that affect the construction of European identity, as regional media tend to report positive news on EU Cohesion policy more often than national media. However, national media are more likely to approach the news from a European, rather than national perspective.

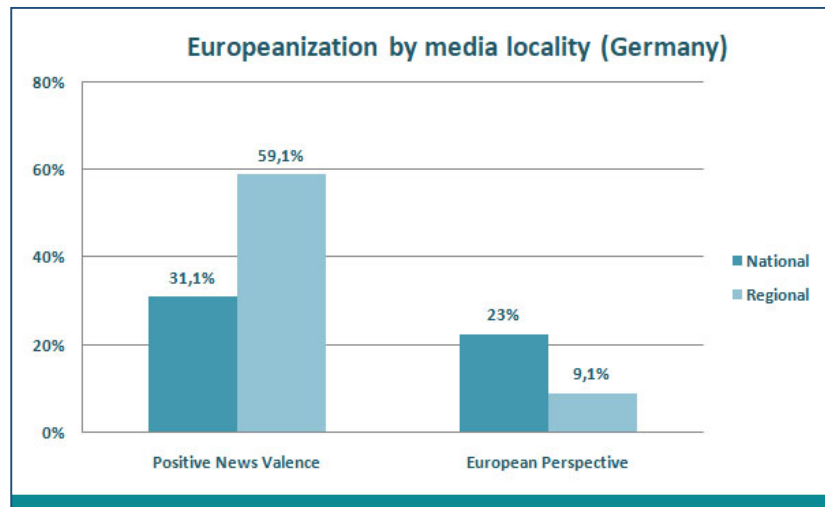


Figure 8: Europeanization differences between national and regional/local media in Germany

4.5 Implications for citizens CP perceptions and attitudes to the EU

It cannot be denied that communication of Cohesion policy is taken seriously by all actors at all levels involved in Thuringia. This also includes its evaluation. However, one could argue that for most actors it is mostly relevant that compliance with communication requirements is always ensured. There are hardly indications that specific efforts to pursue a more proactive approach to communication are systematically undertaken at a larger scale or with measures like pilot projects, although some actors involved in communication at the regional level assign it high priority (see section 4.2).¹⁰ For example, there is still a widespread reluctance to employ modern communication channels, like YouTube and other social media (except Facebook).

Furthermore, most other actors involved in communication share the belief that communication requirements are already enormous not to say excessive and that, hence, investing even more efforts in communication would be inappropriate. Nonetheless, the full spectrum of communication measures is exploited and constantly expanded. The increasing role of information dissemination online is fully acknowledged and taken into account. Programme websites, to name the most relevant example, have constantly been expanded, modernised with, for example, more visualising elements as well as (more) frequently updated. Overall, there is a clear process of professionalization of Cohesion policy communication. External evaluations do also indicate that communication complies with all criteria and even that it is effective and for some measures also innovative. Based on that alone, there are no severe inherent weaknesses in Cohesion policy communication that would prevent it from having desired impacts. Nonetheless, stakeholders express extremely different points of view which would hint toward severe obstacles that are hard to measure (see section 4.2.2.).

However, there are several relevant constraints as to the effectiveness of communication which naturally do also impact (at least potentially) citizens' Cohesion policy awareness as well as their European identities. First, citizens are overwhelmingly perceived to be predominantly interested in the results rather than funding sources of projects that start or have been successfully realised ("that things get done"). Beyond that, the prevailing opinion is that "ordinary" citizens are not really

¹⁰ The "This is Thuringia – simply surprising" campaign can hardly be considered an ERDF communication campaign, although ERDF funding does play a role in it as, for example, ERDF funded projects are presented. This is similar with general, nationwide billboard campaigns or the – innovative – cinema spot that advertised for Thuringia in general. It would also hold true for similar previous campaigns.

interested in EU-matters in general not to mention specific aspects like Cohesion policy. Consequently, most stakeholders prefer a clear distinction between communication to target groups (potential beneficiaries) and communication to the general public. As indicated, the latter is mostly assigned less importance. If communication to the general public is neglected because of that is difficult to assess. On the one hand, there are no clear and unambiguous indications that this would be the case. On the other hand, there are perhaps not enough indications that would suggest otherwise (see section 4.3.). Remarkably, there is at least an implicit conviction shared by several actors involved in communication activities that they are not the most appropriate group for this task.

Second, using the general media for Cohesion policy communication is a huge problem. In that, the most important transmission chain does certainly not function properly. However, there are obviously limitations regarding if and to what extent this could really be changed by actors in charge of Cohesion policy communication. Under conditions of constitutionally protection of freedom of the press, no one can be forced to print or broadcast EU Cohesion policy topics. Even if Cohesion policy reports appear in the media, journalist cannot directed what to write (e.g. to place EU funding of projects in headlines). Besides, Cohesion policy (even Cohesion policy that becomes very visible) in the region is only one of many issues for making news during the day. This is a decision up to journalists and editors. In the end, Cohesion policy communication actors can only assert a very limit influence if and when Cohesion policy will make it into the media.

Since for Germany, regional media are much more relevant for information about European themes in terms of their concrete consequence for the (presumably) regional economy or with respect to living conditions (in the particular region), it seems plausible that Thuringian residents who overwhelmingly consume local media should have a good chance to be informed about concrete impacts of Cohesion policy in their region and/or the city or village they live in. At the same time, there should be a greater likelihood that regional citizens consuming regional media have developed rational attitudes towards EU Cohesion policy in which concrete material benefits are crucial for their views on Europe, the European Union and also Cohesion policy. On the other hand, this would at the same time imply that regional inhabitants who receive their information mostly from local media are less likely to be informed about European themes and especially Cohesion policy from multiple perspectives that would also express more balanced views. As a result, they should be less inclined to develop a European identity or a feeling of closeness towards Europa that stems from an internalisation of general European values, like "Europe growing together" (cohesion) or solidarity between member states and other member states or "closer to us" than states outside of the EU.

In contrast, citizens of the region who solely or overwhelmingly consume national media (such as one of "big" national newspapers only) might have a lesser chance to get informed about Cohesion policy's role in Thuringian, their home region (sub-region) or the place they reside. As a result, they might not or hardly be informed about concrete co-financed projects and in that material benefits the EU provides. However, because of the frames that dominate national media reporting on Cohesion policy, citizens consuming national media might develop more nuanced views on the European Union and especially Cohesion policy. What follows from that is a greater predisposition for a European identity and a greater (emotional) attachment to Europe and the European Union that is derived from the perception of a "Common Europe", solidarity between member states justifying redistributive policies and an acceptance to help other member states and their citizens to progress. The fact that national media reports apply a Cohesion frame much more often than regional media would underline the plausibility of this expectation.

However, given Germany's role as a net contributor to the general EU budget – a frame that is at least likely to be present in respective media reports at the national level in terms of the subframe "Economic consequences – citizens consuming mostly national media might also have a greater

likelihood to assess Cohesion policy from a cost-benefit perspective. Hence, this could result in less positive and more critical views on advantages and disadvantage of Germany's EU-membership, but even more so with respect of Cohesion policy made a difference for Thuringia and/or their place of living.

Taking into account the overall importance of the "Economic consequences" frame that is also very relevant in national media (second in terms of percentage) one could reasonably expect that – when assessed from the perspective of the extent of media consumption – citizens in the region, but also citizens in Germany could be more inclined to develop attitudes towards Europe, the European Union and Cohesion policy that are more strongly impact by (subtle) calculations of pros and cons. Even though this could at the same time be counterbalances by the even more prominent "Cohesion" frame at the national level one could, hence, expect a tendency in which the factor "what does this cost us?" plays a crucial role for forming EU attitudes as well as in terms of developing European identities.

Finally, although German media do certainly not frame European themes as overwhelmingly negative nor from a predominantly national perspective, results of the media analysis would at the same time not really support a notion that media reports as such could be particularly supportive for increasing citizens European identities. This would even hold true when considering that the German percentage of frames that view Cohesion policy from a European perspective is among the highest found for all member states analysed. A share of less than 10 percent of articles that depicts Europe/Europeanisation as common project is not that impressive in the end.

5. Citizens views of Cohesion policy and the EU

5.1 Citizen survey results

Awareness of EU Funding

The Thuringia citizen survey shows an interesting general pattern in which there are discernible differences between the general and the concrete. On the hand, a large number of region's inhabitants – almost one half or even more than that – have heard of the ERDF as well as the ESF (see Tables 22–23). This almost completely corresponds to representative surveys data that were collected on behalf of the Thuringian ERDF Management Authority in 2015 (Spengler 2015). Here, 45 percent of respondents confirmed that they had heard of the ERDF (including 9 percent that had also heard of the Cohesion Fund). That more people have heard of the ESF might be because of its high relevance in a region with a state-socialist legacy that suffered from social upheavals during the two decades after regime change. In stark contrast, the share of citizens who have heard of the Cohesion Fund is much lower.

Table 22: Have you heard about the European Regional Development Fund?

| Answer | Percentage |
|--------------------|------------|
| Yes | 47,6% |
| No | 51,8% |
| Refused/don't know | 0,6% |

Source: N=500

Table 23: Have you heard about the European Social Fund?

| Answer | Percentage |
|--------------------|------------|
| Yes | 52,4% |
| No | 47,2% |
| Refused/don't know | 0,04% |

Source: N=500

Table 24: Have you heard about the Cohesion Fund?

| Answer | Percentage |
|--------------------|------------|
| Yes | 11,2% |
| No | 88,2% |
| Refused/don't know | 0,6% |

Source: N=500

On the other hand, a lower percentage – slightly more one third – of the citizens have also heard of concrete projects in their locality or in the region that were co-financed by the EU (see Table 25). However, this is somehow in contradiction to the noticeable larger number of persons asked – almost reaching one half – who confirmed that they have noticed any type of public acknowledgment of EU funding in their surroundings (see Table 26). The latter could perhaps be attributed to the high relevance of Cohesion policy fund in Thuringia, not only during the last two funding periods, but also before and especially for region's infrastructural renewal.

Table 25: Heard you heard about EU funded projects for own region or city?

| Answer | Percentage |
|------------|------------|
| Yes | 37,8% |
| No | 60,2% |
| Refused | 0,4% |
| don't know | 1,6% |

Source: N=500

Table 26: Have you noticed any public acknowledgement of EU funding in your region/town in the form of banners, placards etc.?

| Answer | Percentage |
|---------------------|------------|
| Yes | 44,8% |
| No | 54,8% |
| Refused/ don't know | 0,4% |

Source: N=500

Perceived Impact of EU Funding

This noticeable difference between the abstract and the concrete dimensions of Cohesion policy funding also becomes obvious when it comes to assessing the impacts of European funds in respondent's region or locality. Whereas a vast majority of persons asked would not only confirm that Germany as a whole has benefited from EU-membership, but also that EU-funding had a positive or even very positive impact in Thuringia and in their place of residency, a much lower share of survey participants that is below 20 percent would at the same time confirm such positive impacts of European funding for their own life (see Tables 27–29).

Table 27: The impact of the funding of the European Union on region or city was ...

| Answer | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| (very) positive | 82,1% |
| No impact | 11,1% |
| (very) negative | 1,6% |
| Not applicable/refused/ don't know | 5,3% |

Source: N=500

Table 28: My country has benefited from being a member of the European Union

| Answer | Percentage |
|----------------------------|------------|
| (strongly) agree | 74,0% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 10,4% |
| (strongly) disagree | 14,4% |

Source: N=500

Table 29: Have you benefited in your daily life from a project funded by any of [the] three funds?

| Answer | Percentage |
|--------------------|------------|
| Yes | 17,8% |
| No | 78,4% |
| Refused/don't know | 3,8% |

Source: N=500

In terms of the issue if funding within the scope of Cohesion policy made a difference for Thuringia as a whole or the location they reside results a less clear-cut. At least about 40 percent of respondents believe that without EU-fund, Thuringia or their location would have fared worse. However, still a majority of survey participants tends to assess funding as either irrelevant or even harmful for regional or local development (see Table 30).

Table 30: How do you think your region or city would have developed without EU funding?

| Answer | Percentage |
|----------------------|------------|
| Much/somewhat better | 17,4% |
| Same | 31,4% |
| Somewhat/a lot worse | 38,2% |
| Not applicable | 5,2% |
| Refused/don't know | 7,8% |

Source: N=500

EU Attitudes, European Identity and Attachment

As the data of the COHESIFY presented in Table 31 reveals, an overwhelming share of citizens living in Thuringia feel very or somewhat attached to the city or village they live in, to their region and in particular to their country, that is, Germany. Only 38.4 percent say that they feel very attached to the European Union, while 38 percent say that they are somewhat attached to the EU. Almost 23 percent say that they have only little or no attachment to the EU. This patterns changes only slightly when the respondents were asked about their attachment to Europe in general. Still 17.4 percent say that they are not or only a little attached to Europe. This finding corresponds with the higher share of people with Eurosceptic attitudes in East Germany and the success of parties with less positive positions on further European integration like the socialist Left or the right-wing populist "Alternative for Germany". In addition, 33 percent of respondents in Thuringia identify themselves as Germans only, a significantly higher share comparing with the results for Baden-Württemberg (20 percent). However, am majority of respondents in Thuringia (52.4 percent) consider themselves as Germans and Europeans and 14 percent as Europeans. Thus, people in Thuringia are attached to Europe, but to a significantly lesser degree when comparing with Baden-Württemberg.

Table 31: Degree of attachment to city, region, country, European Union and Europe among citizens in Thuringia

| People may feel different degrees of attachment to places. Please tell me how attached you feel to: | City/village | Region | Country | European Union | Europe |
|---|--------------|--------|---------|----------------|--------|
| Very | 73,6 | 64,6 | 74,6 | 38,4 | 44 |
| Somewhat | 20,4 | 26 | 21,4 | 38 | 38,4 |
| A little | 5,8 | 6,4 | 2,4 | 12,6 | 11 |
| Not at all | 3,6 | 2,8 | 1,4 | 10,2 | 6,4 |
| Don't know | 0,4 | 0,2 | 0,2 | 0,8 | 0,2 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total N | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 |

Source: COHESIFY citizens' survey.

5.2 Focus group results

One focus group with 6 participants from Thuringia was conducted. Plans for a second focus group with 4 to 6 participants of the citizens' survey were abandoned after persons who had declared their willingness to participate in a focus had been contacted via phone. As it turned out, there were no females among them. Furthermore, scheduling a date proved extremely difficult due to persons' employment related time constraints or current personal circumstances (self-employment, external occupational assignments, parental leave). Three persons were unable to confirm one of three proposed dates in the foreseen period. Finally, persons were too homogeneous in terms of professional background with three men from the social/educational sector (including a clergyman).

Cohesion policy

Participants were not familiar with (the term) Cohesion policy except that some had looked it up online shortly before participation, which is disregarded here. They expressed no or only vague ideas as to what the term meant, but several had an intuitive understanding of what could be meant. However, almost all participants immediately linked this understanding to concrete contributions (or impacts) of structural policies and how they think about them rather than debating the more general concept of or idea behind "Cohesion (policy)". Remarkably, one participant spurred a debate later on

during discussion in which she clearly reflected core ideas of cohesion, like the alignment of living conditions and the role of solidarity in the EU. One view of Cohesion policy was largely positive:

Participant 2, DE(TH) 1: *"One hopes that [a co-financed project] has positive effects. When construction works are supported, what should be the downside of it?"*

The second view also stressed the positive role, but also referred to potential negative impacts and expressed a "trade off" understanding of Cohesion policy:

Participant 3, DE(TH) 1: *"In general – I think – [EU's project co-financing] surely has positive effects, though – let me put it this way – if someone grants money, this is always tied to a certain expectation, this means I will have to give something for it as well. And when I [the EU] say, I do finance a specific project in your region, and in return you keep out of certain other topics or you will not be funded or you abstain from doing certain things ..."*

An overarching issue that concerned all participants was that funding is always limited and that hence, selection of projects is of tremendous importance. This would also refer to Cohesion policy's role in entire Europe, i.e., where and for what purposes to spend Cohesion funds' money in member states. Here, participants were aware of pros and cons from a German – net contributors – perspective and debated this issue in a remarkably complexity-oriented and differentiating manner.

One participant was familiar with the ERDF, which was mentioned without a prompt together with a concrete co-financed project in Thuringia (railway line construction). ESF was not known. However, there were noticeable differences among participants' in terms of awareness of EU-funded projects in the region. Four other participants could remember projects in Eisenach or the surroundings, but rather vaguely. Another participant named a concrete project in another German state (*Land*) and one abroad in which he became personally involved because of his employment. That participant also recalled several EU-funded projects abroad that he had noticed during vacation, such as bicycle lane constructions along the Baltic Sea coastline in Poland. With that input, most other participants also contributed a similar "experience" from vacations in other member states. Overall, in DE (TH) 1 a range of (national) projects were mentioned in the fields of infrastructure, economic development (tourism), and (indirectly) education of Cohesion policy, but not really for social inclusion (Table 32).

Table 32: Participants' reference to projects' co-financed by EU funds

| |
|---|
| Infrastructure: |
| - Railway line construction in Thuringia |
| - Reconstruction of historical buildings in Eisenach |
| - Bicycle lane with (expensive) bridge across river Werra in Thuringia (extending to states of <i>Hesse</i> and <i>Lower Saxony</i>) |
| - Motorway in Thuringia |
| Economic development (including tourism) |
| - Business support of R&D (innovative technology development) |
| - UN cultural heritage preservation of <i>castle Wartburg</i> near Eisenach |
| - Arts (music) project in Eisenach |
| - Ski lift in north of Germany (state <i>Schleswig-Holstein</i>) |
| - Archaeological excavation in Thuringian town |
| Education |
| - Funding of an international youth camp (most likely ESF funded) |

No participant in DE(TH) 1 would deny that EU funding for regional development is in principle a good idea. As indicated, an EU added value was emphasised in the areas of infrastructure and economic development – even more so in other member states. Besides, some participants located – albeit theoretically only – the greatest positive impacts in cross-border economic development projects. The major types of (potential) problems related to Cohesion policy identified by participants were – very abstract – “trade offs” of co-financing, non-transparent project selection processes that could easily become prone to (negative) lobbying, and a “bandwagoning” effect in which entrepreneurs put their project ideas which they would realize anyway under Cohesion policy catchwords in order to receive funding. One main problem with communication related to weaknesses in the publicity of projects entailing a rather low level of people’s awareness, not least in Thuringia. However, this has also be attributed to people themselves who are hardly interested in EU’ role. Another was detected in the widespread scepticism towards and the commonly negative reputation of the EU not only in Thuringia, but in Germany as whole and particularly its Eastern part. This overshadows any positive impacts the EU have in the perceptions of large population segments:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Lobbying (negative) | Participant 2, DE(TH) 1: <i>“Well, I see this, when it is about the allocation of money, just the big point of lobbying ..., because this is spreading like a cancer through the entire political bodies, ... also through the EU, that means, that there are always people, who create junctures, to respectively bring in their interests [in], and surely as well to bring EU funds on their side.”</i> |
| “Bandwagoning” | Participant 4, DE(TH) 1: <i>“Well, my impression is, that many topics around the EU are “sexy” at the moment and that many attempt to assign projects to the [EU] topics; e.g., there is the topic of sustainability, network expansion, industry 4.0, all these are “hot” topics ..., and I have the suspicion ... that these ... that this project, which someone wants to do, is linked with [this topic] somehow, in order to receive the funding.”</i> |
| Communication | Participant 2, DE(TH)1: <i>“The problem is ... you hear the news, but you do not know exactly what happens in the region in detail and you don’t memorize that much ...; but nevertheless [EU co-financing of projects] should be communicated better for sure, I think.”</i> Participant 1, DE(TH)1: <i>“I believe, the EU doesn’t have a good reputation amongst the citizens in general because it is always reflected in the media; now it is about energy-efficient light bulbs, now it is about plastic bags, now it is about the size of cucumbers and about the angle of bananas and stories like that; it might be the case ... that many positive things are not known, not at all, how it works, what really comes in the EU; there is a ...[billboard] “has been ... [co-financed] by the EU”, but this is it and this is – I believe – ... that messages too little and therefore,– I think – a raising awareness campaign is important as well.</i> |

European identity

European identity was discussed from different points of view in which concrete material gains, culture and the idea of Europe as a strong force in world politics and economic globalization were emphasized. Participants believed that Europeans share a common history and culture, but with considerable national differences in terms of ways of thinking or mentalities, and traditions. Most participants of DE(TH) 1 also expressed the notion that the issue of a European identity largely remains abstract and too remote an issue during “normal life”, as long as one is within Europe only. However, it becomes more tangible if one is outside of Europe or returns from there, after vacation or as an expat; for example, if one arrives at a European airport and spots the “EU citizens” gate.

The single market, the freedom of movement as well as economic opportunities in general, consumer protection (policy) and the common currency were discussed in positive terms. Cross-border European projects especially in the field of infrastructure, but also social protection were mentioned as areas where “much more Europe” is needed. Apart from national cleavages including national “selfishness”, participants referred to economic inequalities and language barriers as central dividing element among Europeans. Rising nationalist tendencies were seen as a currently extremely dangerous dividing development with potentially devastating consequences.

European identity and Cohesion policy

In DE(TH) 1, one participant believed that EU funded projects can have a positive effect on European identity if they become very tangible (visible), but the majority expressed enormous scepticism as to whether EU funds can foster European identity. This extended to the role of EU’s fiscal or – more specifically – regional policy in general. Hence, participants largely doubted that simply “spending money” could be effective in that regard even if individuals would be better informed about this spending and its impacts. Besides positive impacts of cultural events such as *European Cultural Capitals*, participants emphasized instead the role of personal contacts across European borders, the opportunity of personal experiences in other member states as much more relevant for forming a European identity. As a result, financing exchange programs by the EU was viewed as crucial, especially since participants referred to the problem that not all young people (students) could afford going abroad as this largely depends on personal or family’s disposable income.

Participant 4, DE(TH) 1: *“And I also think that this personal exchange by means of these programs [like ERASMUS], so when I change my place of living and go somewhere else, contributes considerably more to how I perceive the EU and to what extent I support the EU than compared to the funding policy does.”*

6. Conclusions

6.1 Key findings

Cohesion policy undoubtedly had and has **major impacts in Thuringia**. In fact, regional policy is (still) impossible in Eastern Germany without ESIFs. The Funds made and still make very important contributions to managing socio-economic transition of a region that formerly belonged to the Eastern bloc. The overall financial volume of the ERDF programmes during the last funding periods was quite high if compared to the regional budgets and the annual GDP, albeit it has considerably decreased for the current funding period due to Thuringia’s status as a transition region.

These **positive impacts are not only observable within short time**, such as in terms of quantifiable contributions to regional growth of GDP/GDP per capita. The fund will also positively **impact regional development in the long run**. Financial means from the Funds **support the general development goals of the region** and are invested accordingly.

Consequently, it was generally confirmed by key stakeholders at all levels that Structural funds were and are clearly in line with the local and **regional development priorities**. More importantly, perhaps, there is an implicit notion that the changes in Cohesion policy's strategic orientation (as relevant for the current funding period) have indeed forced **Thuringia to tackle its most severe economic and social problems** with more ambition as well as more forcefully. Due to socio-economic changes, these are other problems now than they had been in the last 25 years. As a result, Funds are noted to provide a **tremendous added value**. However, there is also a perception that the shift away from infrastructure financing (especially wastewater treatment installations) might have come too early. In that, there are now slight mismatches between demands as perceived regionally and funding allocation. Thus, prioritising the use of funds in time of their decrease caused at least some unease.

ESIF delivery and performance did not really **encounter major problems** which could be attributed to regional factors, the design of programmes, implementation decisions or the general management approach. Usually, the most severe problems emerge from the need to change the OPs in order to react to unexpected macro-economic, structural development or project related obstacles of idiosyncratic character. In order not to lose funding or to react to sudden challenges of some magnitude (e.g. flooding), financial means had to be transferred from areas (priority axes) where not needed or where they had enjoyed a lower priority to those with an additional demand.

Problems of lesser magnitude are general obstacles to acquire co-financing (which is, however, not a problem that only came in the current or previous funding period). Besides, the sustainability of especially smaller infrastructure projects realised at the local level is sometimes questionable.

However, there were **other severe challenges**. The major reported policy implementation problems in the previous as well as the current period relate to **excessive audit and control**, as well as the complexity of EU rules and procedures regulating access to ESIF funding, along with excessive reporting requirements (such as statistical information on project beneficiaries to be submitted). These are seen as often undue and even as strangling. The legal obligations that come with the management of Cohesion policy programs are assessed in a way that they would (often) form a real obstacle to effective OP implementation, sometimes also for project realisation in the first place. Hence, the bureaucratic burdens are perceived as massive and time-consuming entailing ineffectiveness.

In terms of **citizens' awareness of Cohesion policy** in the region, there is an interesting empirical picture in which there are noticeable gaps between the general and the more concrete aspects of Cohesion policy. On the one hand, **a relatively large number of region's inhabitants** – around 50 percent – **have heard of the ESIFs** (except the Cohesion Fund). On the other hand, a lower percentage of citizens – around 40 percent – have also heard of concrete projects in their locality or in the region that had been co-financed by Structural Funds. Nonetheless, knowledge of 'Cohesion policy' or EU funded projects among the citizens of Thuringia appears to be way above the average awareness levels across the regions covered by this study.

Corresponding to this, a **vast majority of citizens surveyed agreed with a positive or even very positive impact of Cohesion policy funding** in the region and in their place of residency. However, citizens are rather undecided on the issue if Cohesion policy funding made a difference for Thuringia or the location they reside in – however with almost 50 percent of people who see either clear benefits or would argue that Cohesion policy did not make a difference. Somehow in contrast to that, citizens' understanding of the value of ESIF support for the local economies and communities is perceived by the key Programme stakeholders at all levels to be generally low.

There are **no indications** that the predominantly positive views of Thuringian citizens on EU membership advantages and the benefits of EU funding for their region do also translate into a sense of European **identity**. Region's citizens feel close to their region and especially their nation, but only

about one third of the population would also indicate a close attachment to Europe and less than one fifth to the EU. Nonetheless, an overall majority of region's residents indicates a multiple identity of being German *and* Europe that is greater than the share those identifying as German only. Thus, people in Thuringia are somewhat attached to Europe (but not necessarily to the EU), but to a significantly lower degree.

Communication activities at programme and project level are not insignificant in scope and clearly aim to raise the awareness and understanding of the role of the EU and the contribution Structural Funds make in Thuringia. There are at the same time considerable efforts observable to publicise the activities and achievements of the ESIF programmes in the region and even nationally. Within that scope, there largely is a continuity in the communication activities (as, for example, related to the single communication measures and tools) in 2014-20 as compared to 2007-2013. Naturally, the gaining of importance if new media and especially social media leaves its imprint on communication, albeit usage of these media channels remains limited so far. The general impression is that communication activities are constantly professionalised. However, a further general notion prevails that there is mostly a lower level of ambition in communication of Cohesion policy, although compliance with obligations is always assured. A proactive approach to communication becomes only visible in terms of certain activities, especially advertising campaigns for the region, but of which ERDF is only one part.

More importantly, perhaps, key stakeholders at all levels also express a widespread scepticism as to the usefulness, but more so the prospect for success of communication addressing the general public. Many actors share a belief that they are not the most appropriate group of actors for doing Cohesion policy communication, because the latter is conceived to rather belong to general EU PR and campaigning activity. Hence, there is at least an implicit conviction that "Europe is supposed to do that" in order to make it really or at least more effective.

As a result, the need for (further) efforts to ensure a more proactive approach to publicising and promoting the programmes in Thuringia to the general public is doubted which may limit the effectiveness of communication measures. But this would intermingle with general constraints on communication success and how these constraints are perceived by stakeholder involved in communication or the conclusions they draw based on their experience with these constraints. The very high share of stakeholders being unsatisfied with Cohesion policy communication would also support this notion. More precisely, these constraints mean:

- Interest of the media in Cohesion policy-related topics appears to be limited: the media is largely indifferent to 'Europe' and Cohesion policy, with stories being rarely picked up (even when media persons are explicitly approached with press releases, invitation to communication events or phone calls);
- Regional and local media tend to present positive Cohesion policy-related news far more often than national media, although the European perspective is more prominent in national media;
- Citizens and the media are interested predominantly in the results rather than funding sources of projects that start or have been successfully realised ("that things get done"): the media is largely indifferent to the source of support and, instead, interested in its effects (the outcomes and achievements of policy and human interest aspects, "what it brings for people"); mentioning the funding source is even often omitted when requested to be included by communication actors;
- There is a tendency to down-play European dimension and contribution in announcements and media stories: The EU dimension of support is often omitted or downplayed, while there

is a tendency to highlight the actions, achievements and impact of domestic actors (including local actors); although on average more articles frame Cohesion policy from a 'European' perspective emphasising the EU dimension, this can counter an otherwise prevailing economic emphasis on Cohesion policy reporting only nationally, but not for regional media;

- Communication activity is overall given a relatively low priority in the chain of implementation priorities at programme and project level, with main focus being on compliance above other considerations most importantly performance, but also publicising achievements (e.g. state-wide, but also nationwide campaigns using different media of which ERDF is part, but not the focus);
- There appears to be a weak approach to indicators to measure progress and effectiveness of communication activity, at project level (not necessarily at programme level); however, the usefulness of such an approach would most likely largely be questioned by vast majority of regional actors, i.e., there is an inherent danger that such an approach would be perceived as an increase of regulatory obstacles that come along with Cohesion policy implementation;
- The changes in Cohesion policy's strategic orientation clearly affects Thuringia, especially in the current funding period 2014-2020. There is now a focus on intangible investments (like R&D in S&M enterprises) or investments, hardly noticeable without further knowledge, such as research infrastructure. This will inevitably reduce visibility and presents a challenge in terms of ESIF communication, especially as this trend will most likely continue after 2020.

6.2 Scientific conclusions

Scientific conclusions can be drawn with respect to four major issues:

1. EU Cohesion policy and its effectiveness
2. Material incentives and citizens' attitudes towards the European Union or citizens' European identities
3. The nature of communication measures, their impacts and approaches of scientific inquiry of effectiveness
4. Systematic and continuous data collection in order to enable more rigorous and thorough analyses

First, EU Cohesion policy obviously is effective and can significantly contribute to regional socio-economic development also in terms of measurable output, such as GDP per capita. This would especially hold true for regions receiving large amounts of Cohesion policy money. However, such assessments are perhaps too general. Cohesion policy funding is often unevenly distributed in a region. With recent changes in Cohesion policy's strategic orientation, there is a clear tendency towards an acceleration of this process, as, for example, innovation clusters around research institutions can only be established where such research institutions already exist. Regions with a lower number of total population, like Thuringia, do only have some of such institutions that are mostly located in urban centres. There is, hence, the need to take a closer and differentiating look in terms of the effect Cohesion policy has.

For these reasons, research inquiring into the (measurable) impact of Cohesion policy should aim at disaggregation in terms of the level at which this is analysed. Hence, it would make sense focusing analyses on regions of a NUTS1 region (sub-regions of the entire region). Although there are

obviously data available problems involved, as for example, annual growth rates at a sub-national or even local level are hardly available not to mention measured on a regular basis, other relevant output targets could be analysed as dependent variables, like job creation, unemployment or investment activities. Given the uneven distribution of ESIF means, this would also allow for quasi-experimental research designs. Do sub-regions and municipalities that received funding perform better over time?

Besides, obviously, establishing a direct link between the size of material benefits the European Union provides in regions, cities and other municipalities and the extent to which residents of the latter develop a European Union identity (become a "European citizen") or how close they feel attached to Europe in general and the European Union in particular, proves difficult. Again, this would especially refer to research on an aggregate level, i.e., for the region as a whole. While it is clear and also been taken into account within this study that this would also depend on citizens' knowledge and awareness of these material benefits, other personal characteristics, like the level of education, are also highly relevant. However, several other predisposition and preoccupations of a person, e.g. prior knowledge of the EU, the level of European attachment already present, but also such factors like having personal contacts across European border are likely to be of high relevance. Hence, these should be taken into account as control factors. At the same time, looking more closely at interaction or conditioning effects might be a suitable research approach. For example, it seems likely that knowledge of EU's Cohesion policy entails a greater feeling of closeness to the European Union, but only for persons who already have been EU affine before (at least to a minimum extent).

In addition, this would again imply to conduct more experimental studies. When informing participants in such a setting about the role of Cohesion policy in their region or place of residence, it would be interesting to analyse if and to what extent this would make a difference for persons with varying degrees of prior knowledge of the EU, Cohesion policy or in terms of an existing presence of a European identity.

In terms of communication, it seems that there seems to be no "best approach", especially in terms of communication to the general public. However, this is also because the idea of a "best approach" is neither pursued by the European Commission, nor by relevant actors at the regional level (Management Authorities, other actors at programme and project level). Instead, there is a clear emphasis on a broad employment of communication tools and an "instrument mix". However, this would not allow to inquire into the impact of single or selected instruments, at least not in a systematic way. Their utility cannot be assessed separately.

However, it would, of course, be interesting to know more about the varying impact selected communication tools have. Again, this would strongly hint towards the usefulness of experimental research with respect to this issue. On the one hand, experimental research designs would enable testing for the influence of selected communication instruments only. On the other hand, experimental research designs would also allow for testing if variation in the design of single instruments could make a difference in terms of impact (e.g., very short, short and longer brochures, brochures with more graphs and text as compared to those with more pictures, including pictures in contexts of personal success stories). Last, but not least, experimental research designs could very well be applied in natural settings. If more and larger in size communication tools, such as billboards or plates, are visible on co-financed infrastructure, does this increase acceptance of the European Union or support of European integration in general? Does the increase the number and quality of media reports about Cohesion policy's role in the region or in communes that receive funding? Are such media reports – then – crucial transmission chains in that regard?

Finally, obviously, there is a lack of relevant regional survey data (*Länder* in Germany, NUTS 1 throughout Europe). This has to be tackled if one is really interested in regional populations' opinions

of the European Union, the perceptions of Cohesion policy or European identities and respective changes over time. So far, people are not regularly polled at the regional level in Germany in terms of these issues. Existing regular polling instruments touch upon European themes only remotely or not on an annual basis. This is unsatisfactorily. The European Union should think about its own role here. A possible remedy could be regional Eurobarometer surveys for member states from time to time.

Very last, in terms of a classical political science research topic, it is promising investigating positions of parties at the sub-national level and especially in terms of Cohesion policy. Closely related to this, there is a need for further research to what sub-national parties speak about Europe or the European Union and to what extent they emphasise European topics and with what frames they do that.

6.3 Policy implications and recommendations

- Give regional management authorities more discretion in terms of communication in general, e.g. by refraining from too detailed description (sizes of plates, where to place posters, number of produced and distributed items with ESIF logos etc.).
- Change the toolkit of current Cohesion policy's communication; use more detailed messages where appropriate (e.g. on EU plates), but also less detailed and simpler messages elsewhere (e.g. using picture in media, online and social media).
- Enable full-time communication personnel for social media channels communication by clarifying that this personnel can be financed from technical assistance funding.
- Put greater emphasis on "face to face" communication; encourage Management Authorities and all other persons involved in communication to seize opportunities whenever there is a chance to communicate Cohesion policy on-site within the scope of regular (annual) events in region, cities, local communes; shift focus more clearly on success stories here, i.e., where they can be given an eyeing and haptic "dimension"; similarly applies to on-site personal communication for all concrete projects (inauguration of new research infrastructure buildings, days of "open door", e.g. in modernised wastewater treatment plant, "Long Nights of Science" at research institutions that profited from ERDF funding).
- Establish guidelines that beneficiaries are to be more clearly involved in Cohesion policy communication for the purpose (do not let them remain passive only).
- Allow for more time flexibility in terms of "Europe Week"/"Europa Day" communication activities, give Management Authorities the option to move major Cohesion policy activities usually taking place at "Europe Week"/"Europa Day" at other days of the year whenever officials consider it appropriate in order to reach more citizens.
- Expand this sort of activity (i.e., comparable to "Europe Week"/"Europa Day" Cohesion policy communication measures): more than once a year, with major communication activities concentrated in changing location.
- Pursue a more active role in communication yourself, e.g. by embedding Cohesion policy communication in more general, professional EU PR and information campaigns that would also communicate the general advantages brought by the EU/EU-policies to citizens ("four freedoms", consumer protection etc.).
- Use mostly simple and core messages in such campaigns to be conveyed to citizens.

- Establish permanent representations in regional capitals assigned not only with Cohesion policy communication tasks (to be performed in close cooperation with Management Authorities), but also general PR work and information campaigning for the EU; be present with on-site for communication whenever possible even when event is not EU-related (including at smaller events); be regularly present with information points even in smaller cities in the same way.

7. References

Operational Programmes:

Thuringia ERDF OP 2007-2013

Thuringia ERDF OP 2014-2020

Annual Implementation Reports:

Thuringia ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2007

Thuringia ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2008

Thuringia ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2009

Thuringia ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2010

Thuringia ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2011

Thuringia ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2012

Thuringia ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2013

Thuringia ERDF 2007-2013 AIR 2014

Thuringia ERDF 2014-2020 AIR 2016

Evaluation Plans:

None

Strategy documents:

Thuringia ERDF and ESF Communication Plan 2007-2013

Thuringia ERDF Communication Plan 2014-2020

Evaluations:

Thuringia ERDF OP 2007-2013 Ex-ante Evaluation

Thuringia ERDF OP 2007-2013 Interim report

Thuringia ERDF 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation

Thuringia ERDF 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation of financial instruments

Academic literature:

- Alonso, Sofia/Braulio Gómez/Laura Cabeza. 2013. "Measuring Centre-Periphery Preferences: The Regional Manifestos Project." *Regional and Federal Studies* 23(2):198-211.
- Alonso, Sofia/Laura Cabeza/Braulio Gómez. 2015. "Parties' electoral strategies in a two-dimensional space: Evidence from Spain and Great Britain." *Party Politics* 21(6): 851-865.
- Bahadori, Barbara/Stefan Mitropoulos/Gertrud R. Traud. 2016. *Zahlen & Fakten: Das Bundesland Thüringen*. Helaba Volkswirtschaft/Research, Regionalfokus. Frankfurt a. M.: Helaba Landesbank Hessen-Thüringen.
- Bakker, Ryan/Catherine de Vries/Erica Edwards/Liesbeth Hooghe/Seth Jolly/Gary Marks/Joanathan Polk/Jan Rovny/Marco Steenbergen/Milada Anna Vachudova. 2015. "Measuring party positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill expert survey trend file, 1999-2010." *Party Politics* 21(1): 143-152.
- Bäck, Hanna/Marc Debus/Jochen Müller/Henry Bäck. 2013. „Regional Government Formation in Varying Multilevel Contexts: A Comparison of Eight European Countries." *Regional Studies* 47(3): 368-387.
- Benoit, Kenneth/Michael Laver. 2006. *Party Policy in Modern Democracies*. London: Routledge.
- Benoit, Kenneth/Thomas Bräuninger/Marc Debus. 2009. „Challenges für Estimating Policy Preferences: Announcing an Open Access Archive of Political Documents." *German Politics* 18(3): 441-454.
- Bertelsmann-Stiftung (Regina Arant/Georgi Dragolov/Klaus Boehnke). 2017. *Sozialer Zusammenhalt in Deutschland 2017*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann-Stiftung.
- Borkenhagen, Franz H. U., ed. 1998. *Europapolitik der deutschen Länder*. Opladen: Leske+Budrich.
- Braun, Daniela/Hermann Schmitt/Andreas M. Wüst/Sebastian Adrian Popa/ Slava Mikhaylov/Felix Dwinger. 2015. *Euromanifestos Project (EMP) 1979-2009*.
- Bräuninger, Thomas/Marc Debus/Jochen Müller. 2013. „Estimating Policy Positions of Political Actors Across Countries and Time." *MZES Arbeitspapiere – Working papers* 153. Mannheim: MZES.
- Bräuninger, Thomas/Marc Debus. 2012. *Parteienwettbewerb in den deutschen Bundesländern*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Budge, Ian/Hans-Dieter Klingemann/Andrea Volkens/Judith Bara/Eric Tanenbaum. 2001. *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments 1945-1998*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Debus, Marc/Martin Gross. 2016. „Coalition formation at the local level: institutional constraints, party policy conflict, and office-seeking political parties." *Party Politics* 22(6): 835-846.
- Debus, Marc/Jochen Müller/Peter Obert. 2011. „Europeanization and government formation in multi-level systems: Evidence from the Czech Republic." *European Union Politics* 12(3): 381-403.
- Gabel, Matthew/Simon Hix. 2002. "Defining the EU Political Space. An Empirical Study of the European Election Manifestos, 1979-1999." *Comparative Political Studies* 35(8): 934-964.

- Gross, Martin. 2014. "Koalitionsbildung in den deutschen Großstädten: Empirische Befunde aus Nordrhein-Westfalen." *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 24(1-2): 109-143.
- Gross, Martin. 2016. *Koalitionsbildungsprozesse auf kommunaler Ebene. Schwarz-Grün in deutschen Großstädten*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Große-Hüttmann, Martin/ Michèle Knodt. 2003. „Gelegentlich die Notbremse ziehen...“: Die deutschen Länder als politische Teilhaber und Ideengeber im europäischen Mehrebenensystem. *Austrian Journal of Political Science* 32(3): 285-302.
- Hildebrandt, Achim/Frieder Wolf, eds. 2016. *Die Politik der Bundesländer: Zwischen Föderalismusreform und Schuldenbremse*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Hjorth, Frederik/Robert Klemmensen/Sara Hobolt/Martin Ejnar Hansen/Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard. 2015. „Computers, coders, and voters: Comparing automated methods for estimating party positions.“ *Research&Politics* April&June.
- Hooghe, Liesbeth/Gary Marks/Carole J. Wilson. 2004. "Does left/right structure party positions on European integration?" in: Gary Marks, Marco R. Steenbergen (eds.). *European Integration and Political Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 120-140.
- Jolly, Seth Kincaid. 2007. "The European Fringe? Regionalist Party Support for European Integration." *European Union Politics* 8(1): 109-130.
- Klemmensen, Robert/ Sara Binzer Hobolt/Martin Ejnar Hansen. 2007. „Estimation policy positions using political texts: An evaluation of the Wordscores approach.“ *Electoral Studies* 26(4): 746-755.
- Klingemann, Hans-Dieter/Andrea Volkens/Judith Bara/Ian Budge/Michael D. McDonald. 2006. *Mapping Policy Preferences II: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments in Eastern Europe, European Union and OECD, 1990-2003*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klüver, Heike/Toni Rodon. 2013. „Explaining Policy Position Choice of Europarties: The Effect of Legislative Resources.“ *British Journal of Political Science* 43(4): 629-650.
- Laver, Michael/W. Ben Hunt. 1992. *Policy and Party Competition*. New York: Routledge.
- Laver, Michael/Kenneth Benoit/John Garry. 2003. "Extracting Policy Positions from Political Texts Using Words as Data." *American Political Science Review* 97(2): 311-331.
- Lehmbruch, Gerhard. 2000. *Parteienwettbewerb im Bundesstaat: Regelsysteme und Spannungslagen im politischen System der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Leunig, Sven. 2012. *Die Regierungssysteme der deutschen Länder*. Second Ed. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Lowe, Will. 2008. „Understanding Wordscores.“ *Political Analysis* 16(4): 356-371.
- Mannewitz, Tom. 2015. *Politische Kultur und demokratischer Verfassungsstaat. Ein subnationaler Vergleich zwei Jahrzehnte nach der deutschen Wiedervereinigung*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Marks, Gary/Liesbeth Hooghe/Marco R. Steenbergen/Ryan Bakker. 2007. "Crossvalidating data on party positioning on European integration." *Electoral Studies* 26(1): 23-38.
- Merz, Nicolas/Seven Regel/Jirka Lewandowski. 2016. "The Manifesto Corpus: A new resource for research on political parties and quantitative text analysis." *Research&Politics* 3(2).

- Morawitz, Rudolf/Wilhelm Kaiser. 1994. *Die Zusammenarbeit von Bund und Ländern bei Vorhaben der Europäischen Union*. Bonn: Europa Union Verlag.
- Müller, Jochen. 2009. "The Impact of the Socio-Economic Context on the Länder Parties' Policy Positions". *German Politics* 18(3): 365-384.
- Müller, Jochen. 2013. "On a short leash? Sub-National Party Positions between Regional Context and National Party Unity." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 23(2): 177-199.
- Netjes, Catherine E./Harmen A. Binnema. 2007. "The salience of the European integration issue: Three data sources compared." *Electoral Studies* 26(1):39-49.
- Ray, Leonard. 1999. "Measuring party orientation towards European integration: Results from an expert survey." *European Journal of Political Research* 36(2): 283-306.
- Ray, Leonard. 2007. "Validity of measured party positions on European integration: Assumptions, approaches, and a comparison of alternative measures." *Electoral Studies* 26(1): 11-22.
- Rohrschneider, Robert/Stephen Whitefield. 2012. *The Strain of Representation: How Parties Represent Diverse Voters in Western and Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spengler, Thomas. 2015. *Allgemeine Bekanntheit und Akzeptanz des Europäischen Fonds für regionale Entwicklung (EFRE) im Freistaat Thüringen: Eine Umfrage von TNS Infratest Politikforschung im Auftrag des Thüringer Ministeriums für Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Digitale Gesellschaft*. München: TNS Infratest.
- Stefuriuc, Irina. 2009a. "Governing Strategies in Multilevel Settings: Coordination, Innovation or Territorialization?" in: Wilfried Swenden/Bart Maddens (eds.). *Territorial Party Politics in Western Europe*. London: Palgrave, pp. 183-203.
- Stefuriuc, Irina. 2009b. "Government Formation in MultiLevel Settings: Spanish Regional Coalitions and the Quest for Vertical Congruence". *Party Politics* 15(1): 93-115.
- Stefuriuc, Irina. 2013. *Government Formation in Multi-Level Settings: Party Strategy and Institutional Constraints*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Steiner, André. 2004. *Von Plan zu Plan. Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR*. Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuchverlag.
- Sturm, Roland. 2001. *Föderalismus in Deutschland*. Berlin: Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit.
- Sturm, Roland/Heinrich Pehle. 2001. *Das neue deutsche Regierungssystem: Die Europäisierung von Institutionen, Entscheidungsprozessen und Politikfeldern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Wehling, Hans-Georg, ed.. 2004. *Die deutschen Länder: Geschichte, Politik, Wirtschaft*. Third Ed. Wiesbaden: VS.
- Whitefield, Stephen/Milada Anna Vachudova/Marco R. Steenbergen/Robert Rohrschneider/Gary Marks/Matthew P. Loveless/Liesbeth Hooge. 2007. "Do expert surveys produce consistent estimates of party stances on European integration? Comparing expert surveys in the difficult case of Central and Eastern Europe." *Electoral Studies* 26(1):50-61.

TMWWDG=Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Digitale Gesellschaft. 2017. *Viel erreicht. Viel zu tun. Halbzeitbilanz des TMWWDG in der Legislaturperiode 2014–2019*. Erfurt: TMWWDG.

Other:

European Commission, Brussels (2018): Eurobarometer 88.3 (2017). TNS opinion, Brussels [producer]. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6928 Data file Version 1.0.0, [doi:10.4232/1.13007](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13007)

European Commission, Brussels (2017): Eurobarometer 86.2 (2016). TNS opinion, Brussels [producer]. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6788 Data file Version 1.3.0, [doi:10.4232/1.12853](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12853)

European Commission, Brussels (2017): Eurobarometer 84.3 (2015). TNS opinion, Brussels [producer]. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6643 Data file Version 3.1.0, [doi:10.4232/1.12799](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12799)

European Commission, Brussels (2017): Eurobarometer 82.3 (2014). TNS opinion, Brussels [producer]. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5932 Data file Version 2.1.0, [doi:10.4232/1.12854](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12854)

European Commission (2012): Eurobarometer 68.1 (Sep-Nov 2007). TNS OPINION & SOCIAL, Brussels [Producer]. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA4565 Data file Version 4.0.1, [doi:10.4232/1.10988](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.10988)

Thüringen Monitor (Best, Heinrich/ Niehoff, Steffen/ Salheiser, Axel/ Salomo, Katja /Department of Sociology of Friedrich Schiller University Jena). 2014. *Die Thüringer als Europäer: Ergebnisse des THÜRINGEN-MONITORS 2014*. Jena: Department of Sociology of Friedrich Schiller University Jena. http://www.soziologie.uni-jena.de/thueringen_monitor.html.

Thüringen Monitor (Best, Heinrich/ Niehoff, Steffen/ Salheiser, Axel/ Vogel, Lars/Department of Sociology of Friedrich Schiller University Jena). 2016. *Gemischte Gefühle: Thüringen nach der „Flüchtlingskrise“*. Ergebnisse des THÜRINGEN-4MONITORS 2016. Jena: Department of Sociology of Friedrich Schiller University Jena. http://www.soziologie.uni-jena.de/thueringen_monitor.html.

Thüringen Monitor (Best, Heinrich/ Niehoff, Steffen/ Salheiser, Axel/ Vogel, Lars/Department of Sociology of Friedrich Schiller University Jena). 2017. *Thüringens ambivalente Mitte: Soziale Lagen und politische Einstellungen*. Ergebnisse des THÜRINGEN-MONITORS 2017. Jena: Department of Sociology of Friedrich Schiller University Jena. http://www.soziologie.uni-jena.de/thueringen_monitor.html.

Thüringer Landesamt für Statistik. 2017/2018. *Various Indicators*. <https://statistik.thueringen.de>.

8. Annexes

Annex 1: Online survey response rates

Table 31: Online survey response rates

| Contacts | Full responses | All responses | % of full responses | % of all responses |
|----------|----------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|----|---|----|------|------|
| 41 | 7 | 10 | 17,1 | 24,4 |
|----|---|----|------|------|

Annex 2: List of interviewees

Table 32: List of Interviewees

| Interview | Abbreviation | Date | Type of organisation | Role |
|-----------|--------------|-------|---|--|
| 1 | TH-1 | 19.07 | Business association | Local representation, manager |
| 2 | TH-2 | 24.07 | Local state institution | Economic development department, chair/manager |
| 3 | TH-3 | 07.08 | Interest group, NGO, civil society organisation | Regional representation, EU-affairs manager |
| 4 | TH-4 | 07.08 | Regional state institution, Managing Authority | Department of European Structural Funds & State aid, chair |
| 5 | TH-5 | 29.08 | Business association | Local representation, vice chair |
| 6 | TH-6 | 29.09 | Business association | Regional representation, manager |

Annex 1: Focus group characteristics

Table 33: Focus group characteristics

| FG | Location | Date | Number of participants | Number of female participants | Age range (min age) | Age range (max age) |
|----------|----------|------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| DE(TH) 1 | Eisenach | 06/01/2018 | 6 | 2 | 27 | 57 |

Annex 2: Communication plan measures and indicators

Table 35: Communication measures and indicators, 2007-13

| Measures | Output indicators | Result indicators | Impact indicators |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Publication of OP | No. of publications and print run | – | Raising the awareness level and visibility of ERDF and ESF in particular and EU Cohesion Policy in general in Thuringia Media resonance analysis should capture number and image of media reports in connection with ERDF and ESF |
| Online presence (webpage) | Hits p.a. | Satisfaction analysis of target groups and visitors | |
| Kick-off event | 1 event (no. of participants) | Feedback of participants | |
| Information events | No. of events and participants | Questionnaire for participants | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Series of events "Europe for Thuringia" | No. of events and participants | Questionnaire for participants | |
| Magazine | Periodicity and print run | Satisfaction analysis | |
| Public relations | No. of press releases and print run p.a. | No. of positive reports in connection with EU structural funds | |

Source: ERDF Communication Plan 2007-13.

Table 36: Evaluation of Communication Plan in 2010

| Measures | Output indicators | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Publication of OP | First print | | 100 | | | | | | |
| | First edition | | 1.000 | | | | | | |
| Online presence (webpage) | Hits p.a. | | 534 (only Dec. 2008) | | ca. 5.000 | ca. 7.700 | ca. 9.000 | ca. 10.000 | ca. 11.500 |
| Kick-off event | 1 event (no. of participants) | 130 | | | | | | | |
| Information events | No. of events | | 250 | 30 | 63 | 130 | 998 | 554 | 528 |
| | Participants | | ca. 2.500 | ca. 1.900 | ca. 2.200 | ca. 4.100 | ca. 1.900 | ca. 6.000 | ca. 7.750 |
| Annual event "Europe for Thuringia" | No. of events | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | Participants | | 100 | 120 | 120 | 200 | 130 | 550 | 330 |
| Magazine | Print run | | 5.000 | 5.000 | | | | | |
| | Periodicity | | 3 | 4 | | | | | |
| Newsletter | Online subscribers | | | | 10.000 | 8.500 | 14.000 | 14.000 | 14.000 |
| | Paper version | | | | 2.300 | 5.000 / 6.000 | 6.000 | 6.000 | 6.000 |
| | Periodicity | | | | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Public relations | No. of press releases | | 18 | 19 | 4 | 9 | 9 | 14 | 32 |

Source: ERDF AIR 2010 and AIR 2014

Table 37: Result and output indicators in Communication Strategy 2014-20

| Indicator | Unit used to measure | Target value (2023) |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| <i>Result</i> | | |
| Awareness level of ERDF in Thuringia | Percentage (base year: 2015) | – [survey will be conducted every three years) |
| <i>Output</i> | | |
| No. of Monitoring Committee meetings | Number | 20 |
| No. of events for exchange of information / subject-specific seminars / annual events | Number | 50 |
| No. of workshops for information and communication | Number | 7 |
| No. of communication projects | Number | 20 |
| No. of hits on webpage | Number | 11.000 |

Source: ERDF Communication Strategy 2014-20

Annex 5 Online Survey Questionnaire

EFFECTIVENESS

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 |
|----------------------|-----------|------|------------|--------|-------------|------------|
| 1. Your municipality | | | | | | |
| 2. Your region | | | | | | |

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 |
|----------------------|------------|---------|-------------|----------|------------|------------|
| 1. Your municipality | | | | | | |
| 2. Your region | | | | | | |

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 |
|---|-----------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1. Differences in the development level between poorer and richer regions in your country | | | | | | |
| 2. Differences in the development level between rural and urban areas in your region | | | | | | |
| 3. Differences in the development level between poorer and richer areas in your region | | | | | | |
| 4. Differences in the development level between your country and other European Union Member states | | | | | | |

Q4. In your opinion, has Cohesion policy during the last 10 years or so helped to make residents of your municipality/region support the European Union more?

1. It has helped a lot
2. It has rather helped
3. It has had no impact
4. It has had a rather negative impact
5. It has had a very negative impact
99. Don't know

IMPLEMENTATION

Q5. How significant was the impact of the following problems and challenges during the implementation of Cohesion policy projects?

Please chose the appropriate response for each item:

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

Other – please specify including significance rating:

Please write your answer here:

Q6. How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements:

Please chose the appropriate response for each item:

| | 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 | | | | | | |
| In your municipality/region Cohesion policy funding goes to investment projects which are most valued by the local residents | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| There are many irregularities in spending Cohesion policy funds due to non-compliance with EU rules | | | | | | |
| Fraud, such as corruption or nepotism, is common in spending Cohesion policy funds | | | | | | |
| There have been many positive changes in your municipality/region thanks to Cohesion policy funds, which would not have been achieved without the funds | | | | | | |
| The spending of Cohesion policy funds is adequately controlled | | | | | | |
| The money from Cohesion policy funds is in most cases wasted on the wrong projects | | | | | | |
| The administration of Cohesion policy has been delivered in an efficient (cost-effective) manner | | | | | | |

PARTNERSHIP

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 |
|--|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| 1. The way the programme partnership operates is inclusive, open and fair | | | | | | |
| 2. The operation of the programme's partnership principle facilitates a shared understanding and shared commitment by partners to achieving the programme's objectives | | | | | | |
| 3. Partners are only interested in promoting their own organisational and financial interests | | | | | | |

MONITORING & EVALUATION

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 | | | | | | |
| The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easily accessible | | | | | | |
| The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easy to understand | | | | | | |
| The monitoring and evaluation report results are used to improve policy-making and implementation | | | | | | |

TRAINING

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)?

1. Management
2. Control
3. Monitoring
4. Evaluation
5. Communication
6. Nobody participated in such events
7. Other

Other – please specify:

COMMUNICATION

- 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 | | | | | |
| Radio | | | | | |
| Local and regional newspapers | | | | | |
| National newspapers | | | | | |
| Workshops, seminars | | | | | |
| Brochures, leaflets, newsletters | | | | | |
| Press releases | | | | | |
| Programme website | | | | | |
| Film clips/videos | | | | | |
| Plaques/billboard with EU flag | | | | | |
| Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube) | | | | | |
| Advertising campaigns on television and/or radio | | | | | |
| We have not launched any action | | | | | |

○

Other communication tools – please specify including rating:

○

EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION

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 | | | | | | |
| The branding and messages used to communicate Cohesion policy | | | | | | |
| The use of human interest/personal stories | | | | | | |
| The support from the European Commission on communication | | | | | | |
| The targeting of different groups with different communication tools | | | | | | |
| The administrative capacity and resources dedicated to communication activities | | | | | | |

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 | | | | | | | |
| Conveying the achievements of co-funded projects and the role of the EU | | | | | | | |
| Using social media to promote the programme and projects (e.g. Twitter, Youtube, Facebook) | | | | | | | |
| Fostering good working relations with the media and press to reach the general public | | | | | | | |

Q12a. If you wish, you may supplement your reply with explanations, examples, facts and figures:

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Q13. 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 media mainly report negative stories about EU Cohesion Policy | | | | | | |
| During publicity events, politicians mainly highlight the local/regional dimensions of projects to claim credit for themselves, rather than the role and contribution of the European Union | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| The media do not highlight the European Union role and contribution in a sufficient way | | | | | | |
| The key programme communication messages have adopted an appropriate form to reach their target audiences | | | | | | |
| The communication messages have been consistent at country or regional levels | | | | | | |
| There is insufficient resources and priority dedicated to communication by programme stakeholders | | | | | | |

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION ON CITIZENS

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

| | Very effective | Effective | Neither effective nor ineffective | Ineffective | Very ineffective | Don't know | Not used in my region |
|--|----------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Television | | | | | | | |
| Radio | | | | | | | |
| Local and regional newspapers | | | | | | | |
| National newspapers | | | | | | | |
| Programme website | | | | | | | |
| Video/film clips and presentations | | | | | | | |
| Plaques/billboard with EU flag | | | | | | | |
| Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube) | | | | | | | |
| Media/advertising campaigns on television or radio | | | | | | | |
| Press releases | | | | | | | |
| Brochures, leaflets, newsletters, other publications | | | | | | | |
| Events | | | | | | | |

○

Other communication measures – please specify including rating:

○

Q14a. If you wish, you may supplement your reply with explanations, examples, facts and figures:

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements

| | 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 | | | | | |
| The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds increase the sense of belonging of citizens to the European Union | | | | | |
| The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds contribute to increasing citizens' support for the European Union | | | | | |
| Citizens mistrust Cohesion policy communication activities and messages or consider them to be propaganda | | | | | |

Q15a. If you wish, you may supplement your reply with explanations, examples, facts and figures:

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Q16. Do you have any concrete ideas for improving the communication of Cohesion policy achievements to citizens? Please specify and explain the reasons behind your suggestions.

Annex II: Interview Questionnaire

The interviews should relate to the following key themes and questions adapted to the specificity of the organisation interviewed. As noted, all monitoring committee members should have a general understanding of all the topics covered at the programme-level, given that these topics are addressed during monitoring committee meetings that they attend.

General question

Q1. Can you describe your role in this organisation? What is your role regarding Cohesion Policy?

Socio-economic challenges

Q2. In your opinion, what are the main socio-economic needs and problems that the programmes are trying to address over the last two programme periods (2007-13 and 2014-20)?

Achievements

Q3 What have been the main achievements of the programmes over the last two periods (2007-13 and 2014-20)?

Q4. What challenges and problems, if any, led to programmes or parts of programmes failing to meet their goals?

Institutional framework and management

Q5. What are the key features of the management structure for the programme/s?

Q6. Were these implementation structures effective in delivering programmes/projects? What were the main challenges?

Q7. What is the relative priority placed on the tasks of 1) spending the funds 2) compliance 3) performance and 4) publicising achievements? Why?

Partnership/public fora

Q8. What are the main partnership structures and forums for discussing Cohesion policy implementation and performance/achievements?

Q9. To what extent are these forums open and accountable to civil society?

Visibility and profile of Cohesion policy

Q10. How high is the public profile and visibility of the Structural Funds in your region and country?

Q11. Are citizens aware of the existence of Cohesion policy funds as well as the impacts on the development of their region?

Q12. Do politicians publicly acknowledge the contribution of EU funds to regional development?

Q13. Have there been efforts to increase the profile of Cohesion policy in your region/country, and if so, how has this been done?

Media coverage

Q14. How is 'Europe' and Cohesion policy viewed and reported by the media at national, regional and local level (e.g. journalist stories)? In your opinion, is the tone negative or positive and why?

Q15. How do the programmes manage relations with the media? (e.g. press releases, specialised press officers, establishing strong relationships with the media so that the Structural Funds are understood in advance of press releases etc.) Could media relations be improved and if so how?

Approach to programme communication

Q16. How would you characterise the overall approach to communication in the programme in terms of the key priorities of the communication strategy, communication measures and target groups? Has the approach changed over time? Why?

Q17. Is the communication of Cohesion policy programmes and projects considered a key priority (e.g. in terms of resources, staff time, monitoring committee debates etc.)? if not, why?

Communication tools and activities

Q18. Which communication tools do you use most and least, and why?

Q19. To what extent is social media used to promote programme achievements and interactive engagement with stakeholders (e.g. through twitter, facebook etc.)?

Q20. What is your assessment of your publicity and communication efforts so far? Which information activities have been the most and least effective? Why?

Q21. Can you think of any communication good practices in your country/region? *[probe for any aspect of communication such as the approach to branding/visual identity (EU Funds logo and messages); specific communication measures/activities (e.g. communication events, use of media/social media, websites, successful campaigns, etc.); support offered to beneficiaries to comply with communication requirements (e.g. online tools, meetings, helpdesks); and communication techniques (e.g. visuals, storytelling) at programme or project level]*

Q22. Can you think of any ways of improving the communication of EU policy objectives and results to the public?