



Cohesion policy implementation, performance and communication in Lombardy (IT)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Context and background	3
3.	Cohesion policy implementation and performance.....	4
	3.1. EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework	4
	3.1.1. Operational Programme for Lombardy 2007-2013	4
	3.1.2. Operational Programme for Lombardy 2014-2020	6
	3.1.3. Implementation framework and partnership structures	9
	3.2. Assessment of performance	11
	3.2.1. Programme performance	11
	3.2.2. Partnership.....	15
	3.3. Assessment of added value	16
4.	Cohesion policy communication	18
	4.1 Approach to communication.....	18
	4.2 Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies.....	27
	4.3 Good practice examples.....	29
	4.4 Media framing of Cohesion policy.....	33
	4.5 Implications for citizens CP perceptions and attitudes to the EU.....	35
5.	Citizen views of Cohesion policy and the EU.....	37
6.	Conclusions	41
	Annex	44
	References.....	46

1. Introduction

The goal of the present report is to discuss the implementation, performance and communication of Cohesion policy in the Lombardy region (IT). This paper presents both desk research on the official documents provided by the local authorities and original analyses carried out within the project.

The choice of Lombardy as a case study for the study of the relationship between Cohesion policy implementation and the EU identification is based on several reasons. First, Lombardy is the largest Italian region, with a population of 10 mln residents (about 17 per cent of the whole country). Second, its role in the national economy is particularly relevant, as it contributes for about 22 per cent to the national GDP. Third, even if Lombardy is one of the most advanced regions of Europe, very different territorial settings are present within its boundaries. While Milano is the largest urban agglomeration of Lombardy, several cities of smaller size are present, and mostly agricultural and rural areas characterize the more peripheral northern and southern parts of the region. This variety is mirrored by the different extent to which the population identifies with the EU. As it will be discussed in the next section, less urbanized areas are more sceptical towards the EU than the rest of the region.

The discussion is organized as follows. The next section provides some information on the context and background characterizing the regional context. It is followed by a section on the implementation and performance of Cohesion policy. The latter is studied by the means of a desk research on official documents, jointly with several other quantitative and qualitative analyses expressively undertaken in this project. These analyses include a media framing study, interviews with the policy makers (both face-to-face and through an on-line survey), surveys and focus groups with citizens. The collection of this new evidence on the perception of different stakeholders of Cohesion policy represents a fundamental element for the identification and interpretation of the mechanisms linking Cohesion policy implementation to the processes of EU identity building. A section is therefore devoted to the communication of Cohesion policy and to the implication that it has on citizens' attitudes towards the EU.

2. Context and background

Lombardy is the most populated Italian region, located in the northern part of the country on the border with Switzerland. Milano is the regional capital, and several other cities (Bergamo, Brescia, Mantova, Pavia, etc.) characterize the rest of the region. Per capita GDP is the second highest among Italian regions (35,700 euros in 2015), even if the distribution within Lombardy is not homogeneous. Per capita GDP in the province of Milano is about 1.7 times higher than in the rest of the region. This imbalance mirrors the imbalance in the territorial settings characterizing the region, from the metropolitan area of its capital city, to the smaller urban centres to the rural communities, mostly in the northern and southern parts of the region.

The political context is stable, since from April 1995 until today the same right coalition is heading the regional government, with the same president of the region (Roberto Formigoni) between 1995 and 2013. The two main parties of this coalition are Lega Nord and Forza Italia which received, in the last regional election in 2018, respectively the 29.64 and 14.32 per cent of votes.

In his study on Eurosceptic parties, Treib (2014)¹ classifies Lega Nord as a hard Eurosceptic party of the radical right. The high support to this party in Lombardy is characterized by two interesting features. First of all, the support to Lega Nord increased in the last years. At the 2014 EU Parliament elections, the share of votes to Lega Nord was equal, in Lombardy, to 14.62 per cent (against 6.16 per cent in the whole country), much less than the share in 2018. Second, the support to Lega Nord is highly differentiated across space: in the 2018 regional elections the provinces with the broadest support to this party were the Alpine areas of Sondrio (45.81 per cent) and Bergamo (36.69 per cent), while in Milano the share of votes was equal to 22.23 per cent. Compared with other parts of the country, the support to the Five Star Movement, classified by the abovementioned study by Treib (2014) as a soft, centrist Eurosceptic party is lower. At the regional 2018 elections its share of votes was equal to 17.36 per cent, slightly higher than the result at the 2014 EU Parliament elections (14.62 per cent) and not particularly differentiated across provinces (the highest share being in Mantova with 22.57 per cent and the lower in Sondrio with 12.62 per cent).

The strong, deeply rooted local identities of the communities in some areas of the region, in particular the less urbanized ones, represent a fertile soil for the Eurosceptic parties. Also due to this reason, Lombardy represents an extremely interesting case study for the analysis of citizens' perception of Cohesion policy.

3. Cohesion policy implementation and performance

3.1. EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework

3.1.1. Operational Programme for Lombardy 2007-2013

In the programming period 2007-2013, whole Lombardy was eligible for the Competitiveness and employment objective of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). ERDF expenditures covered the period from the first of January 2007 to the 31st of December 2015, for a total contribution of the EU equal to 210.887 million EUR (about 22.1 EUR per capita). Funds were allocated across the following five axes of interventions (Table 1):

- *innovation and knowledge economy* (about 50 per cent of total funding): this axis is focused on the enhancement of the so-called "Lombardy knowledge system". Actions are aimed at fostering the cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), research centres and "poles of excellence". The main goal is to create a network of existing centres rather than establishing new ones. At the same time, regional governance on these processes has to be strengthened, supporting private Research and Development (R&D) and ICT demand;
- *energy* (about 9 per cent of total funding): the scope of this axis of intervention is to reduce energy consumption and to increase energy production from renewable energy, so to reduce pollution and environmental externalities;
- *sustainable mobility* (about 26 per cent of total funding): this field of intervention is aimed at increase sustainable mobility, in the first place by a higher modal integration (road, rail, public transport) and by incentivising the use forms of transportation means with a low environmental impact (bikes, car sharing, etc.);

¹ Treib, O. (2014). The voter says no, but nobody listens: causes and consequences of the Eurosceptic vote in the 2014 European elections. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 21(10), 1541-1554.

- *protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage* (about 11 per cent of total funding): the goal of the actions on this axis is to foster tourism and to increase the attractiveness of some regional areas with a high potential (due to their natural and cultural heritage) but still underexploited by the tourism sector ;
- *technical assistance* (about 11 per cent of total funding): this field of expenditure is made available for the for administration, monitoring, evaluation and control of the actions undertaken.

In the programming period 2014-20, EU investments increased to 485.237 million EUR. The definition of the priority axes introduced three main differences. In the first place, even if the main goal of the program is still to strengthen R&D, innovation and the access to ICT, a specific axis is devote to the promotion of SME competitiveness. Second, the actions in the mobility field are included in the axis on the transition to a low-carbon economy, stressing the focus on energy savings and the application of new technologies. Finally, the axis on the protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage (receiving about 11.3 of resources in 2007-13, see Table 1) is replaced by two fields of interventions, namely sustainable urban development and tourism strategy for hinterland areas, whose funding is slightly above the 8 per cent of the total resources.

Table 1. Priority axes and allocations in 2007-2013 (ERDF)

Lombardy ROP 2007-2013		
Priority axes	EFRD allocation (%)	EFRD allocation (EUR)
Innovation and knowledge economy	49.4	104,198,930
Energy	9.4	19,820,233
Sustainable mobility	26.1	55,100,248
Protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage	11.3	23,784,280
Technical assistance	3.8	7,983,590
Total	100	210,887,281

Note: data reported in the table refers to the EU investments only. Adding the national public contribution leads to a total amount of investments equal to 532 million EUR.

As far as the European Social Fund (ESF) is concerned, in the programming period 2007-2013 Lombardy benefited of EU investments for an amount equal to 338.017 million EUR. the actions were organized along six main axes of intervention (Table 2):

- *workforce adaptability* (about 25 per cent of total funding): the major economic, technological and social changes characterizing modern societies require that both enterprises and the workforce are capable to adapt continuously. Actions in this field are therefore aimed at increasing the adaptability of the workforce through, for instance, lifelong learning programs and the support to networks able to relocate workers who lost their job;
- *occupation* (about 25 per cent of total funding): even if Lombardy was characterized (in 2006) by low levels of unemployment, some social groups (foreign population, women, low educated people) were encountering difficulties in entering the job market. This field of intervention is focused on these disadvantaged categories and it operates through, for instance, the institution of employment services.

- *social inclusion* (about 10 per cent of total funding): this axis is aimed at enhancing opportunities for the social integration and employment of people in situation of social marginalization. Those included into this axis are multidimensional measures. For example, they can take the form of actions aimed at the reduction of poverty under the form of micro-credit support, but they also comprehend the policies focused on the improvement of children's social care or the programs for reducing the number of badly-housed families with social and/or economic problems;
- *human capital* (about 32 per cent of total funding): the overall scope of this field of intervention is the improvement of the regional endowment of human capital. Actions aimed at reaching this goal have the specific targets to reduce the drop-out rate from training and education, to support workers in the search of their first and subsequent jobs, to improve the quality of technical and vocational education and training provided;
- *transnational and interregional relationships* (about 4 per cent of total funding): the goal of this actions included in this axis is to promote and realize transnational and interregional initiatives and networks in the social field, mainly focused on the exchange and comparison of good practices.
- *technical assistance* (about 4 per cent of total funding): this field of expenditure is made available for the for administration, monitoring, evaluation and control of the actions undertaken.

Table 2. Priority axes and allocations in 2007-2013 (ESF)

Lombardy ROP 2007-2013		
Priority axes	ESF allocation (%)	ESF allocation (EUR)
Workforce adaptability	25	84,504,403
Occupation	25	84,504,403
Social inclusion	10	33,801,761
Human capital	32	108,165,636
Transnational and interregional relationships	4	13,520,704
Technical assistance	4	13,520,704
Total	100	338,017,611

Note: data reported in the table refers to the EU investments only. Adding the national public contribution leads to a total amount of investments equal to 798 million EUR.

Also in the case of the ESF, in the programming period 2014-20 EU investments increased, to a total of 485.237 million EUR. The definition of the priority axes is quite consistent with the one adopted in 2007-13. The main difference is represented by the suppression of the axis devoted to transnational and interregional relationships, replaced by the building of institutional and administrative capacity.

3.1.2. Operational Programme for Lombardy 2014-2020

The programming period 2014-20 is characterized by an increase in the EU investments in Lombardy (Table 3). The EU contribution is equal to about 48.5 per capita EUR, more than twice the resources allocated in 2007-13. As pointed out in the interviews, Table 3 shows that the focus on

innovation is even stronger than in the previous period. More in details, the ROP is articulated in seven axes, expressed as goals to be achieved rather than fields of intervention:

- *to strengthen technological RD&I* (about 36 per cent of total funding): the targets of this axis are to increase business' innovative activities, to strengthen regional and national systems for innovation and to promote new markets for innovation;
- *to improve access to ICT* (about 2 per cent of total funding): the goal of actions in this field is to reduce the digital divide between geographical areas, extending the coverage of fast broad-band;
- *to promote SMEs competitiveness* (about 30 per cent of total funding): this axis is aimed, in the first place, at the support to start-up and at the consolidation of MSMEs, increasing the survival rate of new-born activities. Second, its target is to foster the international activities of the local productive environment, by promoting export and encouraging internal cooperation. The third objective is to modernize and diversify the productive structure of the regional economy, supporting the creation of networks of firms and the development of new products and services. Fourth, actions are aimed at stimulating the investments in the regional economy, also by the mean of an improvement in the access to credit, business funding and risk management;
- *to support the transition to a low-carbon economy* (about 20 per cent of total funding): the targets of the actions in this field are mainly two. First, to reduce the consumption of energy in the public buildings and spaces. Second, to develop sustainable transport;
- *sustainable urban development* (about 6 per cent of total funding): the goal of this field is to promote social inclusion, providing incentives to economic activities also serving a social purpose and reducing the number of families in poor housing conditions;
- *tourism strategy for hinterland areas* (about 2 per cent of total funding): actions in this axis concern the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, with the goal to promote tourism attractiveness also through the creation of innovative services;
- *technical assistance* (about 3 per cent of total funding): this field of expenditure is made available for the for administration, monitoring, evaluation and control of the actions undertaken.

Table 3. Priority axes and allocations in 2014-2020 (ERDF)

<i>Lombardy ROP 2014-2020</i>		
Priority axes	EFRD allocation (%)	EFRD allocation (EUR)
Strengthen technological RD&I	36	174,677,500
Improve access to ICT, and the uptake and quality of local ICT	2	10,000,000
Promote SME competitiveness	30	147,322,500
Support the transition to a low-carbon economy	20	97,300,000
Sustainable urban development	6	30,000,000
Tourism strategy for hinterland areas	2	9,500,000
Technical support	3	16,437,258
Total	100	485,237,258

Note: data reported in the table refers to the EU investments only. Adding the national public contribution leads to a total amount of investments equal to 970 million EUR.

An increase of funds occurred also in the case of the ESF. In the programming period 2014-20, ERDF and ESF received the same amount of investments from the EU. Compared to the ERDF, however, the classification of the axes in the ESF is more similar to the one adopted in 2007-13. More in details (Table 4),

- *employment* (about 37 per cent of total funding): this field of intervention includes the ones on workforce adaptability and occupation defined in the previous programming period;
- *social inclusion* (about 24 per cent of total funding): the label of this axis of intervention does not change in the new programming period. Compared with the previous one, however, the share of funds allocated to this priority more than doubled;
- *education and training* (about 34 per cent of total funding): actions aimed at improving the quality and quantity of human capital in the region receive the same share of funds they were receiving in 2007-2013;
- *institutional and administrative capacity building* (about 2 per cent of total funding): actions included in this field are mainly intended to develop the conditions for a better performance of governments and public administrations. Some examples are represented by the increase in transparency and interoperability, in the access to government-held data, in the improvement of governmental services, in the improvement of the efficiency and the quality of the services provided by the legal systems;
- *technical assistance* (about 3 per cent of total funding): this field of expenditure is made available for the for administration, monitoring, evaluation and control of the actions undertaken.

Table 4. Priority axes and allocations in 2014-2020 (ESF)

Lombardy ROP 2014-2020		
Priority axes	ESF allocation (%)	ESF allocation (EUR)
Employment	37	179,000,000
Social inclusion	23	113,550,000
Education & training	34	166,250,000
Institutional/administrative capacity building	2	10,000,000
Technical assistance	3	16,437,258
Total	100	485,237,258

Note: data reported in the table refers to the EU investments only. Adding the national public contribution leads to a total amount of investments equal to 970 million EUR.

Together with the desk-based research whose findings were summarized before, the analysis made use of the results from original interviews with a sample of policy makers and stakeholders (respondents are listed in Table A2 in the Annex). These interviews pointed out two main findings.

First, many respondents recognize the peculiarity of the programming period 2007-13, being characterized by the effect of the crisis on the regional economy. The most intense effects in terms of job losses occurred, in Lombardy, after 2010. Due to this event, part of the funds was oriented towards the reinforcement and support of the regional system of social shock absorbers. This was

especially true for the ESF. This situation of emergency has been overcome in the programming period 2014-20.

Second, in the programming period 2014-20 the investments are much more oriented towards competitiveness and innovation. Also the environmental axis in the ERDF was included within the innovation sphere, as for instance in the promotion of electric mobility. A similar reasoning applies to the actions of the ESF. Among those aimed at promoting social inclusion, for instance, many are focused on social innovation.

3.1.3. Implementation framework and partnership structures

The implementation procedure for the programming period 2007-2013 is based on the general guidelines provided by the art. 37.1, letter g, Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006.

The actions funded by the ERDF are classified according to the following categories:

- *undertaken by the regional government*: they involve those interventions directly needed by the regional government, that will be responsible for the identification of the subjects (either public or private) which will carry on the realizations and implementations of the actions;
- *supervised by the regional government*: this category concerns those policies of interest for sub regional public institutions or other public bodies. In this case the regional government has to negotiate with the relevant authorities the selection and the strategic organization of the actions;
- *assigned through competitive tendering*: the funding for this kind of interventions, concerning either private or public or mixed institutions, is assigned by competitive tendering procedures. The applications are evaluated based on predefined criteria;
- *negotiated procedures*: this category refers to some strategic projects whose implementation is negotiated by all the stakeholders involved, both public and private.

Following the principle of the separation of the functions², in order to guarantee the correct execution of the Operative Programs and the proper functioning of the management and control, the regional government created three authorities, each of them responsible for a different aspect of funding implementation:

The *Management Authority* is responsible for the management and implementation of the program. The Management Authority of the ERDF is established at the Directorate General for University, Research and Open Innovation, while the Management Authority of the ESF is at the Directorate General for Education, Training and Employment.

The *Certification Authority* is responsible for the certification of expenses occurred in the implementation of Cohesion policy. It works in strict coordination with the Management Authority, whose role is to guarantee that the whole procedure, from the allocation of funds to the implementation of the project fulfilled the EU criteria. The Certification Authority is therefore the institution forwarding to the EU Commission the certified requests of payments. From the programming period 2007-13 on, a unique Certification Authority for both the ERDF and the ESF was established.

The *Audit Authority* is an organism completely independent from the previous two authorities. Its responsibility is to plan and supervise the audit and control of a sample of actions implemented by

² Art. 58, letter b, Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006.

the Operational Program. As for the Certification Authority, also the Audit Authority is in common for the ERDF and ESF.

While these three bodies are responsible of different aspects of the implementation of the Operational Program, the *Central Authority for Coordination and Programming* guarantees the complementarity of the actions undertaken in the framework of EU regional policy with the other programs aimed at promoting regional development.

In addition, the activity of the abovementioned three authorities is supported by other actors, namely the *Environmental Authority* (responsible for the monitoring of the environmental impact of the actions in all the phases of their implementation) and the *Authority for Gender Equality* (responsible for the fulfilment of the gender equality principle along the whole life of projects). Particularly relevant is the role of the *Monitoring Committee*, whose function is to monitor the implementation of actions and the achievements of their goals. Representatives of all the authorities listed above take part to the meetings of the Monitoring Committee, jointly with the representatives of the EU, of the national government and of all the relevant stakeholders, like labour unions, business associations, non-profit organizations, etc.

As long as the definition and identification of the actors involved in the implementation of EU regional policy, few differences characterize the programming period 2007-14 compared with the previous one. The first difference concerns the institution of a unique Monitoring Committee for both the ERDF and ESF. Moreover, a Committee for State Aid was established in 2015, with the responsibility to verify that all the actions undertaken are consistent with the EU norms on the topic. At the same time, the Control Room for Structural Funds 2014-20 is the new actor responsible for the coordination of all the development policies promoted by the region.

Another relevant aspect concerns the definition of the main priorities, goals and lines of intervention of the Operational Programs. For both the programming periods 2007-13 and 2014-20, this phase was supervised by the regional authorities and involved many stakeholders. About one year before the definition of the final version of the Operational Programs of both ERDF and ESF, the regional authorities promote public meetings in order to identify the most important needs in the different areas of intervention. In the programming period 2014-20, for instance, representatives of more than 200 stakeholders actively took part to these meetings, whose goal is not just to inform but, in particular, to collect ideas, advices and requests for the strategic lines of the future Operational Programmes.

Interviews to the regional administration officers confirmed what pointed out in the desk research, i.e. the structure and administrative organization of the authorities responsible for the definition and implementation of policy actions.

The interviews to the stakeholders pointed out the existence of different organizational models. The most common one is characterized by a hierarchical structure, where a regional unit coordinates the provincial ones and acts as unique representative in the relationships with the regional authorities.

As far as the main partnership structures and forums for discussing Cohesion policy, the interviews with the regional officers pointed out how, in the programming period 2007-13, every directorate within the Region had its own model of communication with the stakeholders. Since 2016 these relationships are instead regulated by a regional law. Moreover, apart from the official activities carried on before the beginning of each programming period, aimed at the defining the priorities, goals and lines of intervention of the Operational Programs, regional officers organize institutional tours across the different provinces to communicate the initiatives provided by the EU regional policy. This is also the occasion to collect the contacts of people potentially interested in this topic, in order to involve them in the future forums.

3.2. Assessment of performance

3.2.1. Programme performance

The assessment of the performance is constantly monitored over the programming period by annual implementation reports. These reports compare the intermediate achievements with the goals set by the Operational Programmes.

Considering the ERDF in the programming period 2007-13, Table 5 shows its main outcomes, classified according to the axes of intervention.

For each of the axes, several indicators of performance, with the corresponding targets, were identified *ex-ante*.

The results achieved in the first axis, *innovation and knowledge economy*, are extremely positive, since the goal of generating investments for 450 million EUR was largely overcome at the end of the programming period. A similar comment applies to the number of job places created in the research field and, to a lower extent, to the investments in ICT. Beneficiaries were mainly micro (15.2 per cent), small (37.2 per cent) and medium (30.9 per cent) enterprises. Universities and research centres received about the 10 per cent of the public investments, while the residual funding (6.7 per cent) involved large businesses. From the geographical point of view, the province of Milano benefited of the 48 per cent of the funds, much more than the second province in the ranking, Brescia, with the 15 per cent of investments.

Also in the case of the second axis, the *energy* field, the overall results are positive. The target was to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, mainly through the restoration of public buildings. The quantification of this target was based on conditions and scenarios that were not verified in practice and, therefore, the lower achievement (Table 5) was interpreted by the implementation reports as a substantial success. The distribution of the investments within the region is more balanced than in the previous case, and both Brescia (27 per cent) and Bergamo (22 per cent) attracted more investments than Milano (12 per cent).

The axis on *sustainable mobility* was characterized by several outcomes. The main one concerned the actions in the transport field aimed at providing better and sustainable transportation services to the regional population. Apart from this goal, however, actions of this kind were expected to create occupation in the phase of construction of the new transport infrastructure and to reduce pollutant emissions in the air. Policy results were lower than the target of the performance indicators³. Nevertheless, the outcomes of these actions is assumed to arise in the long-term, since it involves a change in the behaviour of citizens and in their cultural attitudes towards, for instance, new transportation modes. Also in this case, the geographical distribution of the funding is rather homogeneous, with the highest share of funds invested in Milano (22 per cent), followed by Cremona and Varese (20 and 18 per cent respectively).

The axis on the *protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage* was characterized by two goals. The first one concerned the activation of investments aimed at promoting cultural and natural capital. The second one was focused on the increase of tourism in the municipalities that received funding. As far as the former goal is concerned, the target was fully achieved in 2014.

³ The data reported here come from the Annual Implementation Report 2014.

Table 5. Program indicators 2007-2013 (ERDF)

Priority axes and performance indicators	Target	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<u>Innovation and knowledge economy</u>									
Total investments (Mil. EUR)	450	0	0	27.0	246.0	416.0	563.9	670.7	765.7
Investments in ICT (Mil. EUR)	120	-	-	-	-	-	101,2	103,4	129,4
Job places in the research field (n. of jobs)	30	0	0	0	0	23	23	84	119
<u>Energy</u>									
Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (CO ₂ equivalent)	54.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.1	26.7	35.8	38.1
<u>Sustainable mobility</u>									
Population involved in transport actions (n. of people)	500,000	-	-	-	-	-	0	53,707	261,569
Occupation in construction sites (n. of jobs)	183,000	-	-	-	-	-	15,000	22,204	45,839
Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (CO ₂ equivalent)	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3	3.3	5.8	13.7
<u>Protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage</u>									
Total investments (Mil. EUR)	110	0	0	68	68	115	128	118	130
Increase in tourism (%)	10.0	-	-	-	-	-	0.0	9.6	9.7
<u>Technical assistance</u>									
Creation of a unique Regional Informative System	RIS Availability (A)	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Speeding up of payment procedures (n. of days before the deadline)	45	-	-	-	574	47	13	13	15

Source: Lombardy Region Annual Implementation Reports.

Many actions dealt with the organization of the EXPO fair, hosted in Milano in 2015. Other relevant projects concerned the supply of a network of bike paths in the rural part of the region. Most of the funds (83.6 per cent) were allocated to public bodies (municipalities, provinces, etc.), followed by religious institutions (7.3 per cent). Not surprisingly, being responsible for the organization of the EXPO, the province of Milano received the largest share of funds (48 per cent), followed by Mantova (11 per cent) and Brescia (10 per cent).

Some problematic issues in the implementation of EU regional policy arose in almost all the axes. In the field of innovation and knowledge economy, the economic crisis had a negative impact on the performance of firms, leading to several requests for the extension of the implementation deadlines. In the energy axis the main issue referred to difficulties in the accountability of the expenses, while in the field of sustainable mobility some delays in the identification of the actions to be undertaken led to a partial reallocation of resources towards the first axis, on innovation and knowledge economy. Finally, as far as the protection and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage is concerned, two main issues arose. The first one is of institutional kind, since the reorganization of the structure of Italian provinces and their competences generated delays in the implementation of the projects. Second, because the flood of the Po river in the Mantova province partially damaged the cycling paths built in that area.

As for the ERDF, also the Operational Programme of the ESF for the programming period 2007-13 defined a set of goals for each of the policy axes of intervention. For each of the axes reported in Table 2, the Operational Programme defined a set of goals, reported in Table 6. The achievements for every goal were therefore constantly monitored through several indicators of performance. Since the number of indicators is higher than those used for the assessment of the ERDF, a detailed description of is not reports here. In what follows, we discuss the main achievements (compared with the targets) in each axis of intervention, jointly with the problematic issues that characterized the programming period 2007-13.

Table 6. Priority axes and their goals in 2007-2013 (ESF)

Lombardy ROP 2007-2013	
Priority axes	Specific goals
Workforce adaptability	a. To develop systems of lifelong learning
	b. To promote innovation and productivity through better organizational structure
	c. To develop policies for the anticipation and management of change
Occupation	d. To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the job market
	e. To put in place active policies for elderly people, migrants and minorities
	f. To improve the access of women to the job market
Social inclusion	g. To promote integration in the job market, favouring the inclusion of disadvantage individuals
Human capital	h. To improve the integration of the education and training systems
	i. To improve the participation to training activities at all ages
	l. To create networks between Universities, research centres and
Transnational and interregional relationships	m. To promote the development of interregional initiatives, in particular for the exchange of good practices

The outcome of the actions undertaken in the field of *workforce adaptability* was satisfactory as far as the goal *a* and *c* (Table 6) are concerned. In fact, these initiatives involved a share of workers higher than what expected before their implementation. The same does not hold for the achievements in goal *b*, since fewer firms than previewed participated in projects aimed at improving their organizational structure.

The evaluation of actions in the *occupation* area is, in general, less positive. The number of individuals reintegrated in the job market was lower than the target (goal *f*). The result is particularly negative when considering the category of women between 55 and 64 years.

The achievements in the last three axes, *social inclusion*, *human capital* and *transnational and interregional cooperation*, are more satisfactory. Almost all the performance indicators used to assess the specific goals in these areas are higher than the targets.

The number of participants involved in the actions funded by the ESF in the programming period 2007-13 was equal to 381,434. Among these, about the 21 per cent was represented by unemployed individuals. The focus of these initiatives was mainly on people with low education (ISCED 1 and 2, 41 per cent of the participants) and disadvantaged individuals (migrants, disabled persons, 18 per cent of the participants).

The effects of the global economic crisis on the Lombardy economy represented a relevant issue in the implementation of these actions. It is important to point out that the targets on which the achievements of ESF initiatives have been assessed were set before the occurrence of the economic slowdown. As a consequence, as it will be discussed with more details in the next section, the program had to face a completely unexpected scenario, characterized by severe job losses from 2010 on.

Information on the achievements in the programming period 2014-20 is still limited. In the case of the ERDF, the Annual Implementation Report 2015 points out the following results:

- the activation of digital services aimed at simplifying the administrative procedures for the beneficiaries;
- the development of a new informatics system for the management of the Operational Programme;
- the introduction of training courses for the management of structural funds;
- the starting of the activity of the Committee for State Aid (see section 1.1).

The number of public calls for initiatives in the seven axes identified (Table 3) published in 2014 and 2015 covered a small portion of the budget.

As far as the ESF is concerned, the Annual Implementation Report 2016 shows a state of the art substantially comparable with the one of the ERDF. The first years of the programming period 2014-20 were devoted to the definition of areas of interventions and of the possible initiatives. Among the axes listed in Table 4, the one on *education and training* is at a more advanced stage compared with the others, since almost the 16 per cent of the resources have been already allocated to projects in this field.

Interviews to the stakeholders pointed out some interesting results. The last ones can be classified according to two main categories of respondents, regional administration officers and representatives of the beneficiaries of the funds.

The discussion of the programmes' achievements by the regional administrators is consistent with what discussed in the desk-based research. Their perception of the problems characterizing the implementation of Cohesion policy is more interesting. In particular, they all point out the issue of

excessive regulation and legal uncertainty. In particular, the overlapping of EU and national rules generate confusion and a heavy load of work for the local administrations. It is important to note that, in general, the opinion on the implementation structures discussed in section 1.1 is positive, the problem is represented by the complexity of EU and national regulations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the spending of EU funds and the fulfillment of EU rules are perceived as the main priorities by the regional authority, while less emphasis is put on the performance assessment and on the communication strategy.

Stakeholders' representatives gave a quite differentiated description of the achievements of the programmes, based on their area of expertise. In all cases, however, the overall evaluation was positive. The issues identified by this group of respondents mainly refer to the lack of flexibility of these instruments. In particular, they mention as problematic issues the delay of the calls for funding, the poor clarity of the rules for the submissions of proposals, the over regulated nature of these rules and the length of the process of allocation of funds to the beneficiaries. These difficulties were mirrored by the relationship between the regional institutions and the stakeholders' representatives during the programming period 2007-13. This phase was characterized, according to the respondents, by frictions between the two parts. In particular, according to their opinion, the activity of the Monitoring Committee was not enough focused on the discussion of potential changes in the regional strategy.

3.2.2. Partnership

The partnership between regional authorities and the civil society received a particular attention in the phase immediately before the starting of each programming period. The goal of these public *fora* was the shared definition of the main strategies and approaches to EU regional policy.

In the programming period 2014-20, the regional administration promoted a public consultation (carried on in September-October 2013) in order to identify the territorial needs and the priorities perceived by the resident population. Citizens were able to express their opinion by filling an on-line questionnaire, where the respondent had also the possibility to add any comment or advice addressed to the policy makers. The three main sections of the questionnaire were aimed at collecting information on *i)* the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, *ii)* their degree of knowledge of EU regional policy and *iii)* their priorities for the initiatives carried on in the programming period 2014-20.

The survey included 1,963 individuals. Most of the respondents (93 per cent) were aware of the existence of EU regional policy. Few of them (about 20 per cent), however, knew the Operational Programme undertaken in Lombardy between 2007 and 2013. Using these tools, the citizens interested in the topic have been able to communicate their priorities. The latter are the following ones:

- to promote innovation and the performance of SMEs;
- to increase the diffusion of broad band connections;
- to promote entrepreneurship and firms' networks;
- to promote renewable energy and sustainable mobility;
- to increase actions aimed at preventing the consequences of natural disaster;
- to promote recycling activities and environmental quality;
- to develop the cultural and natural capital of the region;

- to better integrate the transport network of the region;
- to support social services, especially in the provision of nursery schools;
- to improve the quality of tertiary education and its relationship with the job market.

Apart from this study, focused on the citizens, other partnerships were promoted in order to define future strategies and areas of interventions. In particular, in the third trimester of 2013, more than 6,000 firms were asked to express their opinion in a survey devoted to topics such as innovation, access to credit and occupation. In the same period, the regional administration organized an event with the aim of stimulating the debate on the future of Cohesion policy. The representatives of more than 200 organizations participated to this meeting, and 40 contributions were presented.

In June 2014 all the suggestions and proposals coming from different sources have been discussed within the regional administration, also organizing bilateral meetings with some of the stakeholders involved.

This process of confrontation with all the parties involved led to the definition of the ERDF and ESF for the programming period 2014-20.

The interviews to the regional administrators pointed out how, in the last years, the amount of information publicly available on the official website and social media accounts of the regional authorities largely increased. Therefore, citizens are easily able to get full information on Cohesion policy actions. The same finding arises from the interviews to the stakeholders' representatives. In both cases, however, respondents tend to report low levels of interest of citizens if they do not have a direct payoff from the policy.

Apart from the face-to-face interviews to the stakeholders, which had the goal to understand more in depth the perception of these actors, another instrument through which the empirical analysis was conducted involved a survey study. The perception of the operation of the partnership principle in practice is highly differentiated. Many partners are not able to evaluate this aspect; the others are almost equally divided between positive and negative comments on the inclusiveness and openness of such partnerships.

3.3. Assessment of added value

The added value of Cohesion policy implementation in Lombardy arose through different channels. The following comments refer to the programming period 2007-13, since for the current one it is still not possible to draw conclusions.

From the financial perspective, the added value was significantly high. As far as the ERDF investments in the *innovation and knowledge* axis are concerned, for instance, public funding had a leverage effect of about 2.5, meaning that every euro spent in EU regional policy funding activated 2.5 euros of private investments. Similar evidence, with a leverage effect equal to 2, concerned the axis on the *protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage*, where public funding promoted private investments in the tourism sector. The value added in the case of actions in the field of *sustainable mobility* is more difficult to be assessed, since it is only in the long period these initiatives are expected to produce an effect on the behavioral modes of the citizens.

Also in the case of the ESF, whose implementation phase was strongly affected by the impact of the economic crisis, the financial value added was relevant, even if difficult to quantify. The exceptional nature of the economic slowdown called for a redefinition of the allocation of funding across priorities. The funding of initiatives supporting unemployed persons and their inclusion in the job market helped the regional system to absorb the exogenous shock. Also, this situation of

emergency led to an administrative value added, since it helped in verifying the effectiveness of innovative policy tools first experimented in Lombardy and, in a second moment, adopted also by other Italian regions. An example in this sense is provided by the program *Dote lavoro*, which consisted in the provision of a portfolio of services (for instance courses) to disadvantaged individuals (for instance unemployed people), where the beneficiary had to choose the best suited for her until a predetermined budget is covered.

From the strategic perspective, the actions implemented between 2007 and 13 provided useful lessons for the following programming period. This led to the creation of two new organizations within the regional administration: the Control Room for Structural Funds 2014-20 and the Committee for State Aid.

Finally, the importance of partnerships and public *fora* in the definition of strategies and policy areas of intervention was recognized as crucial by the regional administration. For this reason, in the programming period 2014-20 even more attention was devoted to this topic and the same approach was applied also in the case of other regional development initiatives, as for the Smart Specialization Strategy of Lombardy.

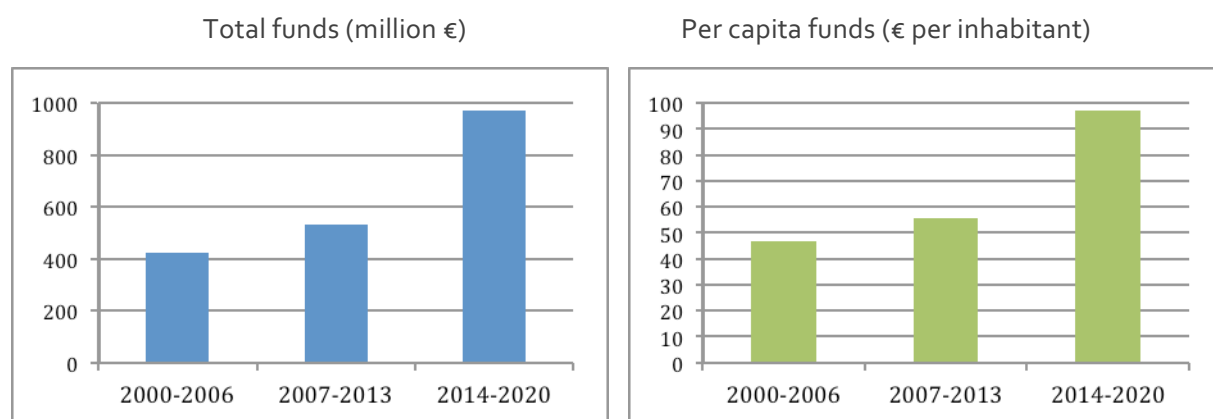
4. Cohesion policy communication

4.1 Approach to communication

Lombardy is one of the most populated and developed regions in Italy. From 2000 on, the region received financial support from the ERDF and ESF.

The allocation of ERDF funds to Lombardy increased in the last three programming periods, from 421 million euros in the period 2000-2006, to 543 million in 2007-2013 to 970.5 million in the last programming phase (Figure 1). Also in per capita terms, the funds available between 2014 and 2020 are more than twice the amount of resources of the first period analysed in Figure 1. It has to be considered, however, that in 2000-2006 only a small part of the regional territory was eligible for ERDF funding, 342 municipalities out of 1,527.

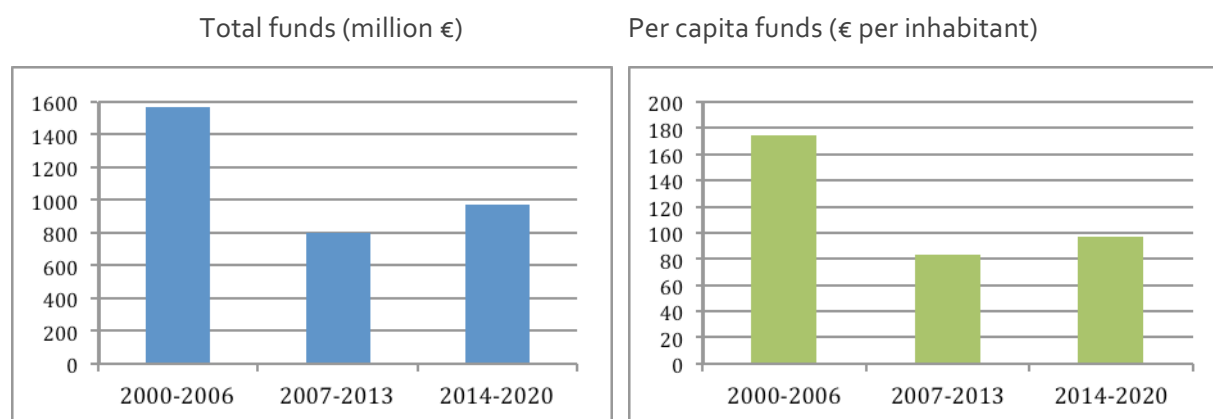
Figure 1. ERDF funding per programming period.



Source: Lombardy ERDF Operational Programs.

Figure 2 reports the amount of funds allocated by the ESF to Lombardy are showed, in both absolute and per capita terms.

Figure 2. ESF funding per programming period.



Source: Lombardy ESF Operational Programs.

The communication of Cohesion Policy is considered a relevant issue by the regional government. In each programming period the regional authorities elaborate a communication plan, jointly with an evaluation report on the communication activity of the previous period. These documents are available on the website of the Lombardy Region and they represent the main source of information for the present report.

In the period **2007-2013** the regional government developed a strategy for the communication of the **ERDF** policies. The overall goal is to promote the knowledge of EU policies in the Lombardy region, with particular reference to the role of the ERDF as the main tool for the development of the knowledge economy and sustainable development. The **main objectives** of the communication activities are the following ones:

- to make the general audience (citizens, firms, etc.) aware of the purpose and the contents of policies and strategies that the European Union will seek to achieve through the actions co-financed by the Structural Funds;
- to advertise the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds and how to access them, in order to achieve the greatest possible participation in terms of number of projects submitted;
- to ensure transparency in the use of public resources through a clear dissemination of information on the procedures and on the beneficiaries of the ERDF support;
- to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of communication activities through a constant and continuous process of monitoring and evaluation of the results obtained.

The strategy identifies the **recipients** of these communication measures, which can be grouped in the following categories:

- potential beneficiaries, i.e. those persons directly involved in the implementation of projects financed by the ERDF. Potential beneficiaries are public administrations (the Region, provinces, municipalities), public and private entities that can benefit from funding;
- beneficiaries, namely, all the parties actually selected for funding through the 2007-2013 ERDF. The beneficiaries include public and private entities, according to the different lines of intervention of the program.
- the general audience, which is represented by all the socioeconomic actors operating in Lombardy. This category can be subdivided into two main groups below.
 - The professional audience and the mass media, the information agencies, academic and research institutions, non-governmental organizations; consultancy firms, professional associations.
 - The general audience, which includes the whole socioeconomic environment of Lombardy. In particular, ad hoc communication operations will involve the Mountain Communities of Lombardy (in relation to the policies for marginal areas) and the high schools (with emphasis on the policies focused on research and innovation).

The realization of the Communication Plan is organized in **three phases**. In the first phase the Operational Programme activities are launched (2007-2008). The second phase corresponds to the intensification and full implementation of the policies (2009-2011). Finally, in the third phase an evaluation of the communication initiatives is carried out (2012-2013). The development of the communication plan can be represented according to the schedule reported in Table 7.

Table 7. ERDF 2007-2013 Communication plan: actions and initiatives.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Visual identity	X								
Advertising	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Promotional material	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Informative publications	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Media relations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Information events	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
OP launch	X								
Audio-visual productions	X		X		X		X		X
Website	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Help desk	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mail	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 7 reports a list of the communication **activities and initiatives**. All of them are aimed at reaching the general objectives discussed above. However, each of them operates through different tools and at different phases of the programming period.

The development of a visual identity concerns the creation of a special logo for the Operational Programme 2007-2013 ERDF Lombardy Region, so to make easy for the audience the identification of the messages on Cohesion Policy and to create continuity in the perception of the various communication products. Moreover, the flag of the European Union, together with the flag of the Lombardy Region, will be affixed on all advertising and information materials. The use of both graphic symbols ensures an immediate perception of the direct integration between Community policies and regional policies.

Concerning the advertising activities, a series of paid advertising initiatives are undertaken in order to broaden the communication also to the audience generally less likely to read newspapers and less interested to these kind of themes. Paid advertising will use mainly two different channels. The first one is represented by the press, and in particular local newspapers to ensure uniform distribution throughout the Lombardy region. The second channel involves radio and television. Again actions will involve, in the first place, local broadcasters. The results of advertising initiatives are subject to survey studies aimed at verifying their effectiveness.

Promotional material will be realized, in the form of gadgets distributed at conferences, seminars and exhibitions. The promotional material must report the program logo in order to enhance its perception and visibility.

Informative publications and documentation on the 2007-2013 Operational Programme will be made available at the Managing Authority headquarters and at the information points of the Lombardy Region.

The staff dedicated to the communication must be able to establish strong media relations. In particular, the media should be kept informed of the launch of the program, the opening of the procedures of submitting applications for assistance, the progress of the program and the gradual establishment of best practices. The media will be invited at all public events of the program.

To ensure better dissemination of basic information of the OP, and to illustrate the philosophy of Community Structural Funds Programming, informative events will be organized at both regional and local level, with particular emphasis on the areas of Lombardy not covered by the objective 2 funding in the programming period 2000-2006. With this purpose, every year in March a major event will be organized, aimed at encouraging the sharing of experiences at national, regional and local level and the transfer and dissemination of ideas.

The launch of the Operational Programme is coordinated with the one of the other programmes in which Lombardy is involved (ERDF, EAFRD, ESF, INTERREG Italy-Switzerland), in order to strengthen the perception of an organic and integrated strategy and to ensure the maximum impact and maximum visibility.

The production of audio-visual aids can increase the perception and the understanding of the content of the program. These materials will be distributed by the Managing Authority to the EU Informative agencies, the media, local authorities, stakeholders who so requests.

The website has proved to be the most important of the 2000-2006 programming communication channel. Due to the increase in the diffusion of broadband connections among the inhabitants of Lombardy, the intention of the Management Authority is to strengthen further, in the 2007-2013 programming, such instrument. The website will also include a discussion forum, moderated and managed directly by the staff of the Authority's Management, a service of FAQs to answer directly to frequently asked questions, and finally a mail box to send automatic responses to requests for further information.

A help desk will be created, organized through a dedicated email address can to provide in real-time a comprehensive information service. References to both these connections (website and help desk) will be advertised in multichannel mode.

The **strategic objectives** of the communication plan, as well as the operational objectives, will be subject to specific measurement campaigns, particularly focused on the awareness of the stakeholders about the objectives and results of European Union policies, as well as on the development of a perception positive towards European policies. The monitoring of the implementation of the Communication Plan will lead to the publication of periodic summary reports focused on the role played by information and advertising measures on the visibility of the Communitarian policies. Table 2 summarizes the operational goals of communication policies, the indicators to assess their impact and the expected impact, expressed by the difference between the initial and final (predicted) value of each indicator.

The correspondence between the operational goals reported in Table 8 and the actions and initiatives summarized in Table 7 is reported in the Annex (Table A1), providing more detailed information on the indicators aimed at measuring the impact of the communication programme.

Table 8. Operational goals, indicators and expected outcome of Communication policies (ERDF).

Code	Operational goals	Impact indicators	Empirical measurement	Initial value	Final value (predicted)
A	Ensure information on the program opportunities to potential beneficiaries	Increase in the awareness of the Structural Funds of potential beneficiaries	% of awareness about the opportunities of the Structural Funds	It must be estimated with an empirical study	50% of potential beneficiaries aware of Structural Funds
B	Information program on the measures financed by the Structural Funds	Enhancing knowledge of the opportunities of the Communitarian regional policies	% of knowledge on the measures financed by the Programme	It must be estimated with an empirical study	25% of awareness concerning assistance provided by the Structural Funds
C	Inform the media, the general audience about the role of the EU on regional development	Enhancing awareness of the general audience on the Operative Programme 2007-2013	% Of awareness on the Programming strategy 2007-2013	It must be estimated with an empirical study	40% of basic knowledge about the 2007-2013 Cohesion Policy
D	Increase the understanding of the role of the Structural Funds and the EU in the socioeconomic development of Lombardy	Increase in positive perception of the public towards the European Union	% of positive perception towards the European Union	It must be estimated with an empirical study	50% of positive perceptions towards the European Union

The **budget** for the communication activities amounts at 2.545 million euros in the whole programming period 2007-2013. The contribution of the European Union covers 0.890 million €, while the rest of the sum is funded by the Lombardy Region (0.300 million €) and the national government (1.355 million €). Approximately, 2/3 of the Communication Plan budget will be dedicated to the management of the structure specifically dedicated to the creation of products and measures, as well as monitoring and evaluation initiatives. Approximately 1/3 of the budget will be devoted to the reproduction of materials and to the implementation of the various initiatives.

The breakdown of the budget in the various communications and information measures will have approximately the following structure:

- 30% of the budget to the measures dedicated to the promotion of the program (radio advertising, television and other, various promotional materials);
- 60% of the budget to the measures devoted to information and communication (various publications and materials, annual events, and launch of the Operational Programme, audiovisual products, website, helpdesk, media relations);
- 10% of the budget to the measures dedicated to the support of the Communication Plan (monitoring and evaluation measures).

As far as the **ESF** is concerned, the communication strategy was assigned, through a public selection, to two private companies specialized in communication strategies. The general

objectives of the communication plan are similar to the ones discussed above in the case of the ERDF:

1. to raise the level of awareness of Lombard citizens about the benefits and expected results of the 2007-2013 OP, reinforcing the involvement of enterprises, institutions and citizens in the process of innovation and development of socioeconomic Lombardy system;
2. to guarantee the transparency, efficiency, simplification and fairness in the access to financing opportunities offered by the OP ESF in Lombardy, by providing tools and making information and knowledge easily accessible, clear and directed.

The **operational goals**, on the other hand, are mainly aimed at *i)* informing about the OP opportunities potential beneficiaries / recipients, *ii)* creating a system that ensures information and assistance to the actions financed by the Programme and *iii)* raising the awareness of the general audience to the role played by the European Union in promoting the implementation of actions focused on the enhancement of human capital and the on the labour market.

The **recipients** of the communication actions are the same ones summarized for the ERDF: potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries and general audience.

The communication **activities** of the ESF are carried out with the following tools:

- above the line: activities using the traditional media (press, radio, billboards, etc.), they are the tool for a widespread communication of the Lombardy Region, giving importance to the role played by the European Community;
- below the line: activities in synergy with traditional media aimed at informing the potential beneficiaries of the ESF actions about the funding opportunities.

The communication plan of the Lombardy region presents, in the programming period 2014-2020, some relevant differences compared with the previous period. The first one is that the communication plans of the **ERDF and ESF** are strongly integrated, focused on the same objectives, based on the same strategies and implemented with the same procedures. The management and implementation is still responsibility, as in the previous period, of the Management Authority of the Lombardy Region.

Moreover, compared with the programming period 2007-2013, the **principles** on which the communication strategy is based are different. These differences are summarized in Table 9.

The approach to the communication of the cohesion policy in the programming period 2014-2020 is based on some general principles. These principles are the foundation of any communication action undertaken from the Lombardy Region, also those concerning other regional or national policies. From 2014 on, in fact, all the institutional communication actions of the regional authorities must be based on the same approach. These general principles are the following ones:

- Lombardy must be perceived as a community / growth opportunities have to be presented pointing out the added value of cooperation between the European Union and the Region of Lombardy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the region and local communities. Objective: To strengthen the sense of belonging of citizens to the region and to the European Union;

Table 9. Differences in the approach to communication in the 2014-2020 plan compared with the 2007-2013 strategy.

Programming period 2007-2013	Programming period 2014-2020
<p>"To communicate" the funds</p> <p>The experience of previous communication programs in the Lombardy Region shows that one of the challenges that still remain is to make the cohesion policy topic perceived as interesting to the general audience. The good practices at European level, in line with what was experienced with the Tour the "Lombardy towards EXPO" (see the last section of the present report), demonstrate the effectiveness of communication strategies not so much focused on the source of funding, but rather on the "what" and "why" of the interventions and the role of the Union.</p>	<p>Communicate to make people understand</p> <p>The strategy will ensure maximum visibility and understanding of the messages that the Administration wants to communicate, including through the identification and use of key words, in order to focus the attention of the recipients on the opportunities offered and on the expected results. The spread of social media requires the development of new forms of communication strategies.</p>
<p>Top-down approach of traditional media</p> <p>The period was marked by the end of a media system based on the transmission of information "from one to many" and on the dissemination of a message chosen by an editor, according to a precise editorial line. In this framework, the reader had almost no possibility to choose and modify the content.</p>	<p>Bottom-up approach and governance of social media</p> <p>The 2014-2020 strategy, strengthening the use of social media, will support a kind of communication that enables and encourages the active participation of users in the construction, renovation and / or evaluation of the content. The increased utilization of social media in the strategy calls for the adoption of a model of governance that takes into account the need to ensure a more intense, fast and consistent level of interaction and exchange between the administration and beneficiaries.</p>

- the regional OPs must be promoted in an integrated way, underlying the synergies between different programs like ERDF and ESF. Objective: to strengthen the integrated image of the regional funds, pointing out that different instruments are aimed at reaching the same goal;
- ensure visibility to the outcomes of Communitarian policies, underlying the benefits for citizens. Objective: to promote a proactive role of communication for the achievement, the dissemination and utilization of the results reached by the OP, in order to stimulate the territory "imitative" effects;
- strengthen the use of social networks, ensuring interaction with citizens through those tools and modes of communication they are using every day. Objective: To stimulate a proactive mode of communication between the administrators, the beneficiaries and the population;
- integrate the communication with the use of storytelling, spreading values, ideas or initiatives through the use of "personal". Objective: to capture the attention of the audience in order to establish an empathic contact with people;
- enhance communication as a knowledge management tool, overcoming the vision of communication as a unidirectional flow. Objective: to promote the logic of listening, engagement and collaborative network.

Based on these general principles, the communication plan of cohesion policy is aimed at reaching both general and specific objectives. The general objectives of the strategy are aimed at communicating the existence and value added of the Union's cohesion policy. A particular attention

goes to both the simplification and accessibility of information and to the engagement of regional citizens and partnership in sustainable and inclusive growth policies. The specific objectives are intended to motivate the recipients and to support potential beneficiaries in the preparation and management of the actions promoted by the ROP ERDF and ESF.

More in details, the **general objectives** (OG) are two:

OG1. To ensure maximum visibility and understanding of the role, the objectives of cohesion policies and the benefits of investments supported by the EU and by the Lombardy Region.

OG.2 To promote simplification, transparency and accessibility of information to increase interest, involvement and ability of all potential beneficiaries in the access to the opportunities, in the understanding of the rules for participation and management of Cohesion policies.

The communication plan defines four **specific objectives** (OS):

OS1. To provide clear, timely and consistent information on the objectives and outcomes related to the opportunities offered by the ROP ERDF and ESF.

OS2. To involve citizens, businesses, stakeholders as partners of the initiatives, promoting the wide dissemination and the creation of a brand for the immediate recognition of the opportunities offered by the ROP ERDF and ESF.

OS3. To ensure the access to information on funding opportunities to all the stakeholders involved.

OS4. To disseminate information to the public on operations supported, while ensuring transparency of administrative action and traceability in the use of the operational program resources.

As for the previous programming period, also between 2014-2020 the communication strategy will follow a progressive development, structured in three different **phases**: start, implementation, and closure. During the start phase, communication and information actions will focus on the presentation of the ROP objectives, giving emphasis to the opportunities for potential beneficiaries. At this stage the communication is aimed at increasing the level of awareness and trust of the public and economic actors on the role of the EU and of the cohesion policies. During the implementation of the program, the communication strategy will inform about the projects already funded, the first achievements reached and the future expected results. The closing phase will be devoted to the presentation of a set of case studies (i.e. successful projects and interventions) in order to consolidate a positive perception of the policies promoted by the Union and by the Lombardy Region.

The communication plan identifies the **recipients** of the communication strategy, which can be classified into four main groups:

- recipients: those who may benefit from the effects of the policy actions. Clear and accurate information on the interventions, which must be provided to this group of stakeholders, in order to increase their interest towards cohesion policies;
- beneficiaries: are the potential and actual actors involved in the implementation of the funded interventions. Communication must provide to these people the relevant information on the procedures and obligations in all phases of the project life cycle (from the submission of the application to the management of the balance, and subsequent documentation), through "step-by-step guide" on the procedures;
- European/general audience: they represent the actors not directly involved in the implementation of interventions. However, also this group of individuals benefits, as part of the community, of the investments promoted by the ERDF and ESF;

- information multipliers:

- target groups identified based on the topic covered (universities, research centres, associations of workers or companies);

- individual opinion leaders (bloggers, journalists, researchers and academics);

- mass media, on different media platforms. The choice of the medium is based on the specific objective of the implementation strategies in order to maximize the viral spread of the content;

- Antenna Europe Direct of the Lombardy Region, an agency of the regional administration that, through its head office in Milan and twelve disseminated information points throughout the territory of the region, as well as with its own website, provides citizens with the opportunity to obtain information on European policies.

As in the previous programming period, also between 2014 and 2020 the communication actions are subject to an **assessment** of their outcomes. In order to verify the effectiveness of the strategy, a set of indicators of achievement and realization has been identified. Result indicators express the expected changes in terms of awareness, knowledge, attitude, opinion, availability and accessibility of information in line with the general and specific objectives of the strategy. The output indicators concern the implementation advancement of policies and their communication. These indicators are reported in Table 10 and they are the same for ESF and ERDF.

Table 10. Performance indicators in the communication strategy 2014-20.

ERDF and ESF - Monitoring indicators in the Communication strategies/plans 2014-2020		
Goal	Indicator	Measurement
	Level of public knowledge and awareness on Cohesion policy. Level of trust and positive perception of the general audience towards the benefits from EU financial support.	Survey study: % of respondents who report to be informed about Cohesion policy. % of respondents who express a positive opinion on Cohesion policy actions.
	Level of availability of information for the general public and specific targets. Immediate/easy understanding of the information related to the opportunities offered. Availability of information about the achievements obtained through the OP.	Survey study: % of respondents who Are satisfied with the information tools available.
	Level of knowledge and awareness about the opportunities offered by the EU projects and about the benefits for the growth of the Lombard community.	Survey study: % of respondents who are aware of the opportunities offered by the ESF OP.
	Level of knowledge of the stakeholders about the EU policies and the programming processes, implementation and evaluation of the ESF OP.	Survey study: % of respondents who declared to be aware about the EU policies and the programming processes, implementation and evaluation of the ESF OP.
	Variety of tools for the support of the beneficiaries. Level of adequacy (diversification,	Survey study: % of respondents who were satisfied with the offer of tools

	quality and accessibility) of the instruments to support the fulfillment of beneficiaries.	supporting the beneficiaries
	Level of transparency of the information about the use of public resources.	Survey study: % of respondents who were satisfied with the level of transparency of the information about the use of public resources.

For the evaluation and monitoring several methods and tools of investigation are used. The main one, as showed in Table 10, is a survey study aimed at investigating the level of awareness and satisfaction of citizens with different aspects of Cohesion policy. At the same time, other tools will be used, from individual and group interviews, to focus groups. More precisely, it is responsibility of the Management authority to prepare methodological guidelines for the monitoring and assessment of the communication actions.

The **budget** allocated to the communication strategy over the period 2014-2020 amounts to 8 million €, equally shared between ERDF and ESF. Compared with the previous period, however, the communication plans of both ERDF and ESF do not provide any detail about the partitioning of the expenditures neither across time nor across different objectives.

The interviews with the stakeholders point out that the officers of the regional administration perceive the communication of Cohesion policy as a tool to reach the potential beneficiaries, with rules and obligations strictly regulated by the EU norms. In their perspective, the approach to communication did not change over time, apart from the use of new tools, represented for instance by internet and the social media. While the communication officer of the region did not accept to take part of the survey, it is interesting to note how the national officer responsible to the communication of Cohesion policy emphasizes the issue. In his opinion the effort to better communicate the actions undertaken in the framework of EU regional policy significantly increased in Italy in the last years. In particular, informative programs were launched in schools, trying to inform the younger generations about the possibilities provided by the EU.

The stakeholders' representatives are, in general, poorly informed about the communication strategy undertaken. As far as their own institutions are involved, communication is extremely focused on the possibilities of financing provided to the stakeholders.

The stakeholder survey, on the other hand, pointed out that the programme website is the most used communication tool used to disseminate information about the use of Cohesion policy funds. Also press release and the regional and national newspapers are among the most popular communication tools. The use of radio/TV, or also of social media is less frequent.

4.2 Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies

In the programming period 2007-13, the assessment of the communication strategies has been carried out jointly with the evaluation of the outcomes produced by the implementation of actions

supported by the ERDF and ESF. At the end of every year, the regional authorities prepared a detailed report on the results achieved by cohesion policy in Lombardy. A section of this report is devoted to the communication strategy.

This is the first time that the regional authorities decided to explicitly assess the outcomes of the communication strategies undertaken. In fact, in the case of the programming period 2000-2006 almost no information is available on the change in the awareness and perception of citizens about the Cohesion Policy themes.

The presentation of the outcomes of the communication strategy recalls the objectives and indicators showed in Table 8 and in Table A1. In other words, every year the report presents data on specific outcome indicators, from the number of contacts of the official website, to the number of participants to the official events, to the share of people aware of the existence of cohesion policies etc. Obviously, in order to collect these data different methods are required: from a simple counting of people or contacts to survey studies.

Table 11 presents the result of the impact indicators measured on the four operational goals of communication policies identified in Table 8.

Table 11. Assessment of the communication actions, ERDF 2007-2013.

Impact indicators	Baseline	Operational goal	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
% of awareness about the opportunities of the Structural Funds	18%	50% of potential beneficiaries aware of Structural Funds	0	0	0	0	75%	75%	85%	85%
% of knowledge on the measures financed by the Programme	16%	25% of awareness concerning assistance provided by the Structural Funds	0	0	0	0	0	0	78%	78%
% Of awareness on the Programming strategy 2007-2013	13%	40% of basic knowledge about the 2007-2013 Cohesion Policy	0	0	0	0	0	0	20%	20%
% of positive perception towards the European Union	13%	50% of positive perceptions towards the European Union	0	0	0	0	55%	55%	55%	55%

As discussed in the previous section, in the programming period 2007-2013 the communication of the ERDF and ESF are managed in different ways. The same holds for the assessment of their outcomes. As far as the ESF is concerned, the evaluation reported in the annual reports does not link the impact indicators with their measurement in the different phase of implementation. Rather, they provide some data about the access to the information services supplied within the communication plan: the call centre, the website, etc. More importantly, among the materials made available on the ESF, a final report for the year 2014 (the one providing, in the case of the ERDF the data shown in Table 11) is missing.

The design of the communication strategy for the programming period 2014-2020 took into account the points of weakness of the communication programme undertaken in the previous period. The most evident one, which emerged also from the previous analysis, is the lack of a coordination between the communication of the ERDF and ESF. In order to overcome this issue, the

new communication plan will involve all the policies managed at the regional level, whatever the source of funding (European, national or local).

The communication strategy was approved in 2015 by the Management Authority. Therefore, at present, no intermediate assessment of its outcomes is available.

The interviews to the stakeholders show that the evaluation of the regional communication strategy by the regional administration officers is quite differentiated. Those directly involved in communication actions have a positive perception, while the opposite holds for the others. Among the most interesting experiences, the project "Discovering the ROP Lombardy " was mentioned. More details about this project, involving students, are provided in section 1.6. It is interesting to note that also the national communication officer mentioned, as an example of successful communication practice, the project "At school of Opencoesione", another project aimed at informing students of all ages about Cohesion policy.

Among the stakeholders' representatives the assessment of the communication strategy tend to be neutral or positive.

As far as the survey involving the stakeholders is concerned, what emerges is that the point of weakness of the communication strategy is related to the lack of targeting of different groups with different communication tools.

4.3 Good practice examples

As examples of good practice we report here below some details of two projects undertaken in the programming period 2007-2013 under the ERDF.

Case study 1 - "Discovering the ROP Lombardy"	
Object	Contest "Discovering the ROP Lombardy "
Strategic objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To introduce young people to the issue of EU policies – To increase their awareness about the role of the institutions (European, national and regional) in the regional development through the Structural Funds – To spread the ICT utilization in the Lombard schools (from the 3rd edition of the contest the essays had to be video/multimedia content following some regional guidelines).
Typology of the action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – design of the contest – development of the tools and instruments – monitoring of the activities
Specific communication objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to increase their awareness of the role of institutions (European, national and regional) in the regional development through the Structural Funds – to stimulate the diffusion of information through multimedia and video content (from the 3rd edition)

Contents	<p>The competition, in its fourth edition (2011-2012-2013-2014), raffled prizes (study tours to visit the Community institutions in Brussels) for a group of students of the fourth/fifth year of secondary school. Participants were invited to submit a paper (which by the third edition could consist of a video or multimedia presentation) related to the theme "ROP ERDF 2007-2013 Lombardy".</p> <p>In order to support the students in the preparation of the essay, the Regional Administration has prepared guidance material about the ROP Lombardy, written in simple and clear language.</p> <p>The Management Authority has involved some beneficiaries (33) of interventions available for interviews and/or moments of discussion with student groups, in order to support them.</p>
Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Students IV/V year of a Lombard secondary institution – Professional Teachers of secondary schools in Lombardy
Instruments/ actions	<p>The promotion of the competition has been guaranteed with the transmission and dissemination of informative materials to all the schools potentially interested. It has been prepared on the portal of the ROP ERDF a page dedicated to the contest with a specific section "Read more", within which the materials and the supporting documents to students and teachers were presented.</p>
Administrations involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Management Authority ROP ERDF 2007-2014 – DG Education, Training and Employment /(Lombardy Region)
Outcomes	<p>The first three editions of the competition have involved increasingly schools in the Lombardy Region: from 9 schools and 234 students in the first edition, to 17 schools and 349 students in the second year, to 17 institutes and 383 students in the 3rd edition. The majority of the educational institutions involved is located in the provinces of Bergamo and Milan.</p>

Case study 2 - "Lombardy towards Expo: dynamic and sustainable, thanks to the ROP ERDF"	
Object	"Lombardy towards Expo: dynamic and sustainable, thanks to the ROP ERDF". Tour in the Lombardy provinces to present the ROP ERDF.
Strategic objectives	<p>The general objective is to present to the citizens the Cohesion Policy through concrete examples, in order to make them aware of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The purpose and the contents of policies and strategies that the European Union in collaboration with the Member States and regional governments aimed is developing; – The possibilities and opportunities offered by the ERDF, which allows beneficiaries to have access to funding for projects with a significant territorial impact in terms of economic competitiveness, technological, infrastructural, cultural and environmental development; – The active role of the Lombardy Region in the planning and in the activation of projects and best practices for the advancement of the regional economy; – The themes of Expo Milano 2015.
Typology of the action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strategy design and event planning – Creation of support materials – Monitoring of the activities, reporting photos/videos
Specific communication objectives	They correspond to the strategic objectives of the action
Contents	The tour, organized in 13 stages simultaneously with local events, festivals, fairs or exhibitions, was held from July to November 2014. It involved all the Lombard provinces preparing their participation to Expo Milano 2015. During this tour citizens were able to discover the research, development, technological innovation and energy projects, and all the other actions supported by the ROP Lombardy. The initiative was promoted by a special truck, equipped with an information desk, sofas and multimedia stations for the consultation of videos and an interactive game. The truck was easily recognizable internally and externally with the official symbols of the ROP ERDF and Lombardy Region.
Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Citizens of small urban centres, more distant from the institutional communication of the ROP ERDF and Expo – Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of the ROP ERDF 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 (companies, local authorities, etc.) – Mass media
Instruments/ actions	Each stage of the calendar was made in coordination with another local event, a Festival or fair. Contacts with the organizers of the various events were taken in advance, in order to ensure the maximum promotion and visibility to the tour. A press office has been activated, which allowed organizing press releases and conferences. Altogether, 40 articles in leading local and regional newspapers and web magazine were published. The coverage also included a series of interviews with major local TV stations. At each stop, the tour offered the opportunity to access different

	<p>types of information and entertainment, with the support of different materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – information and guidance: general information on the ROP ERDF and Structural Funds, on the projects implemented in Lombardy, on Expo Milano 2015 through the distribution of informational brochures and gadgets; – in-depth information: videos of the most important and significant projects implemented under the ROP ERDF in different provinces, accompanied by cards and study materials; – edutainment: interactive game on the touch screen to discover the ROP ERDF and Expo Milano 2015; – taste itinerary: brief moments of tasting and dining with drinks and food prepared by local producers; – rating: all the participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire to review their experience in the tour.
Administrations involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Management Authority ROP ERDF 2007-2014 – Directorate General for Production, Research and Innovation (Lombardy Region)
Outcomes	<p>In each stage, except the first two ones, the amount of people who entered in the truck space and participated in the activities is calculated. The same holds for the number of brochures and gadgets distributed, so for the portions of food served to the participants during the taste itinerary.</p> <p>Here are some data on the results achieved by the tour:</p> <p>Number of leaflets distributed: 76,000</p> <p>Number of gadgets distributed: 29,000</p> <p>Number of finger food portions served: 14,500</p> <p>Attendance detected on the truck: 57,277</p> <p>Number of press releases: 13</p> <p>Number of press conferences: 4</p> <p>Number of articles: 40</p> <p>Number of interviews: 5</p> <p>Number of journalists contacted: 120</p>

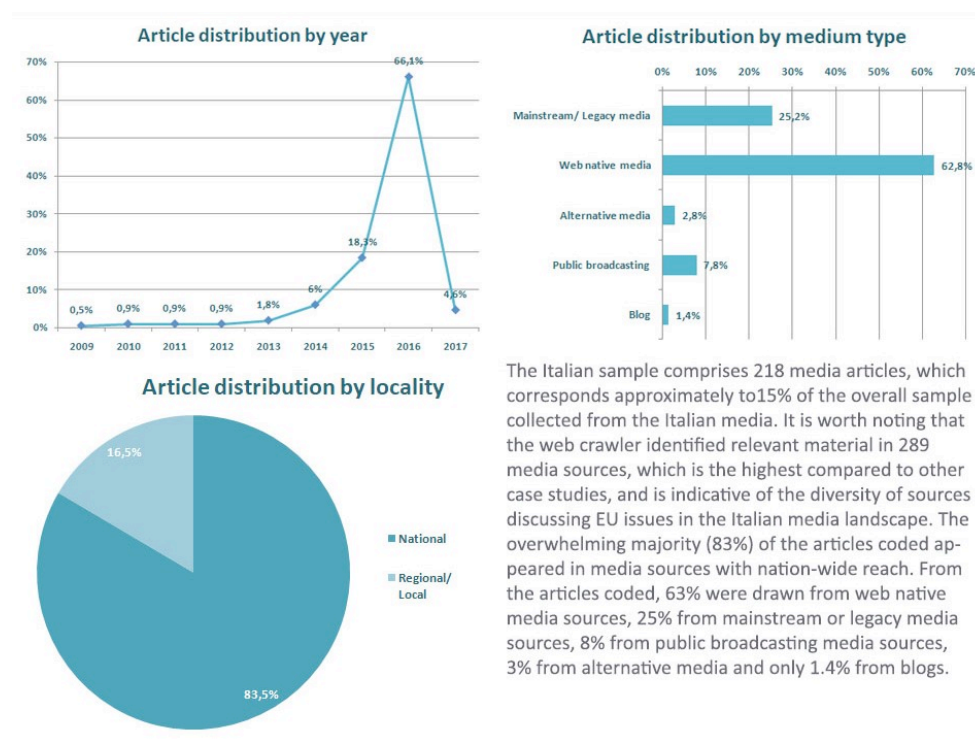
The interviews with the stakeholders pointed out that, despite of the effort of the public administrations in increasing the use of internet and the social media, the examples of good practices provided by the respondents are all about physical communication events.

Apart from the abovementioned project “Discovering the ROP Lombardy”, regional administrators referred to other two projects. One is the informative tour across the 11 provinces of the regions, in which the regional administrators met about 500/600 representatives of the stakeholders. They collected the email addresses in order to provide them in the future useful information about the actions undertaken by the region. The second project is the campaign on biodiversity, which involved also the school and had a broad echo also at the national level.

4.4 Media framing of Cohesion policy

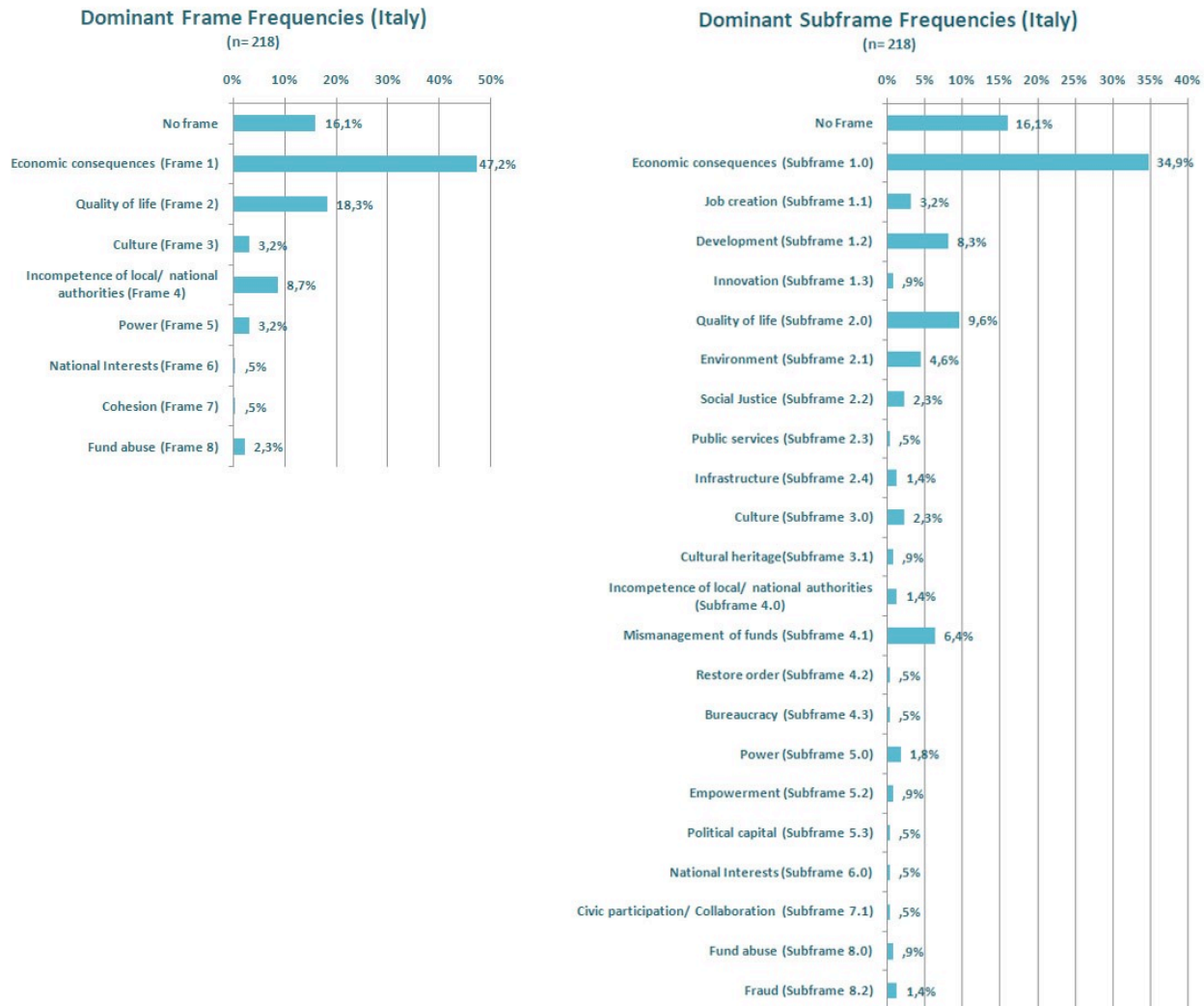
The framing analysis of the Italian sample covered the national and regional media in the period 2009-17. More details on this are provided in Figure 3. The framing analysis indicates that almost half of the analysed articles frame EU Cohesion Policy in economic terms, as the “Economic consequences” general frame appeared as dominant in 47.2% of the overall sample. This illustrates a strong tendency of the Italian media to interpret EU Cohesion policy in terms of economic gains and losses as only the British media exhibited a higher percentage in “Economic consequences” framing. Moreover, the second most dominant frame found in the Italian sample was the “Quality of life” frame with 18.3%, while 16.1% of the analysed articles contained no framing. Additionally, a significant 8.7% of the articles were dominated by the “Incompetence of local/ national authorities” frame, while the remaining frames were less salient as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 3. Framing analysis of the Italian Media.



Another element that is worth pointing out, concerns the analysis at the subframe level, as nearly 35% of the sample is dominated by Subframe 1.0 (“Economic consequences”), which is by far the highest among the analysed case studies. This suggests that the Italian media tend to emphasize on the general impact of EU Cohesion policy on the economy, although without focusing on the particular policies affecting the state of the economy. No significant differences in framing between national and regional media in Italy were identified in the framing analysis.

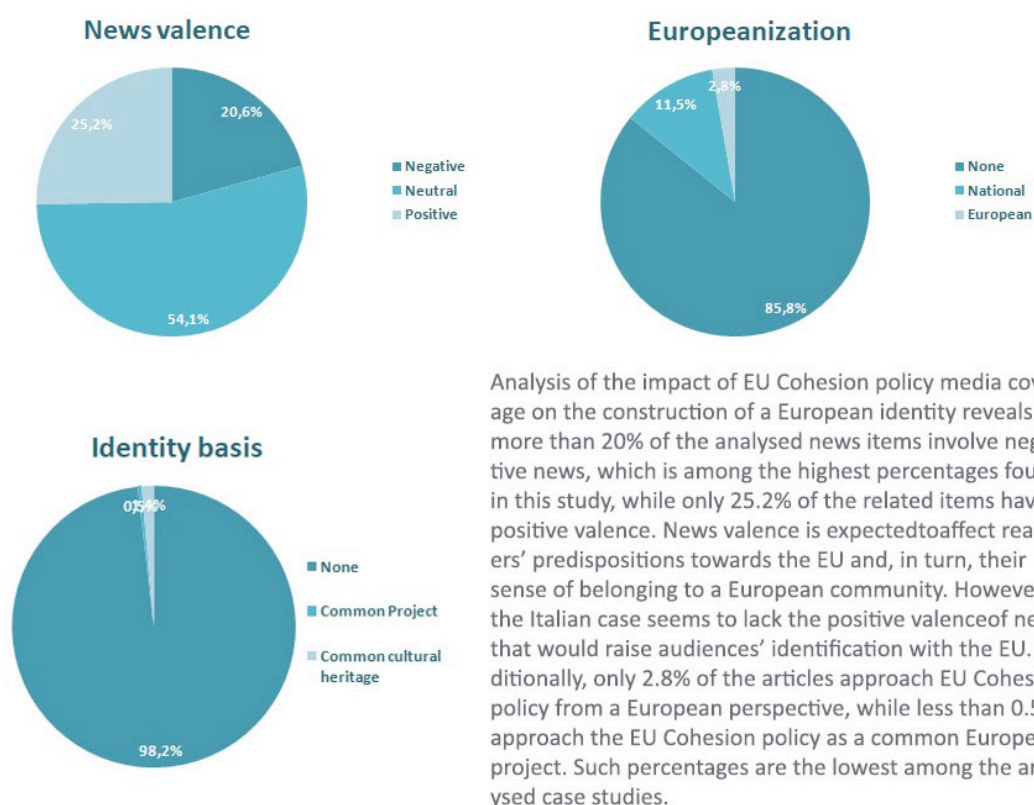
Figure 4. Dominant frame and subframe frequencies



Finally, in the Italian case there were no significant differences were found regarding the Europeanisation variables, with the exception of some difference in news valence, as shown in Figure 5 below.

In the interviews with the stakeholders, the general perception of the respondents is that the media tend to report mostly the unsuccessful stories of Cohesion policy. This is due, according to their opinion, to the fact that scandals and episodes of corruption or wasting of public money attract the attention of the audience much more than the best practices. Therefore, the tone is generally negative.

Figure 5. Europeanization variables.



The programmes manage relations with media mainly through press offices. Apart from this, the communication directly addressed to the general audience is usually posted on the official websites of the institutions and spread through mailing lists and the social media. As far as the latter are concerned, the main social media used is Twitter.

The results of the survey with the stakeholders demonstrated that, in general, they are convinced that the communication activities of Cohesion policy funds increase the sense of belonging of citizens to the European Union.

4.5 Implications for citizens CP perceptions and attitudes to the EU

The interviewed stakeholders pointed out several aspects in which, according to the opinion of the respondents, the communication of Cohesion policy could be improved:

- promote the idea that the access to Cohesion policy is a tangible chance, available to everybody and not just too few privileged people;
- increase the use, in the communication policy, of traditional tools. Websites and, in general, internet and the social media are still not accessible from the general audience;

- concerning the previous point, several respondents suggested that seminars and meetings with the local population are the most effective tools for the communication of Cohesion policy;
- politicians should put more emphasis on the Cohesion policy themes, underlying its positive effects on regional development.

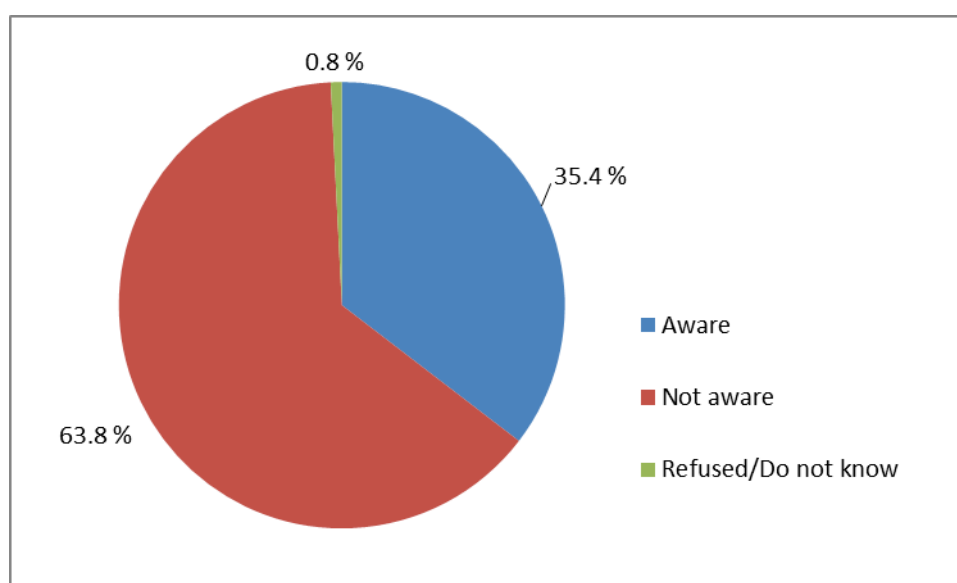
5. Citizen views of Cohesion policy and the EU

The first tool through which the citizens' perception of Cohesion policy and the EU has been investigated consists in a **survey study** involving a representative sample of the regional population.

The citizen survey provided some interesting evidence on the extent to which the resident population is aware and satisfied with Cohesion policy.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, only 35.4 per cent of the respondents were aware about the EU provision of funding for infrastructure, business development and training to regions and cities (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Share of respondents aware of EU regional policy.



This low proportion could be explained by the fact that Lombardy is not among the major beneficiaries of EU funding. This hypothesis finds some support when looking at the information sources where respondents got information on Cohesion policy. As reported in Table 12, the majority of interviewees became aware of EU funding through national mass-media, in particular newspapers (45.8 per cent) and TV (44.6 per cent).

The low coverage on the regional media mirrors the poor relevance of Cohesion policy as a “local” issue. Instead, since other Italian regions are massively funded by EU regional policy, this topic finds more attention at the national level. It is worth mentioning the extremely low share of respondents who became informed about the existence of Cohesion policy through the social media. Recalling what discussed in section 2, and in particular the effort that local policy makers are putting in the communication through innovative and digital media, it is clear that this aspect needs to be reinforced in the future.

The second section of the questionnaire was focused on the citizen satisfaction with Cohesion policy. A first question, posed to all the participants to the survey study, was about their assessment of the benefits that joining the EU brought to their country of residence. In Lombardy, only 12.8 per cent of respondents strongly agree that Italy benefited from being a member of the EU, the lowest proportion among all the regions included in the survey. The 45.6 per cent of interviewees, on the other hand, think that their country did not have any advantage (or even a negative effect) from EU membership.

Table 12. Where did you hear about EU funding to regions and cities?

Source	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
National newspapers	45.8	54.2	0.0
National TV	44.6	54.8	0.6
Internet	39.5	60.5	0.0
Personal experience or knowledge of projects	37.9	62.1	0.0
Workplace	27.1	72.9	0.0
Local or regional newspapers	24.9	75.1	0.0
Local or regional TV	24.3	75.1	0.6
National radio	19.8	79.7	0.6
Billboard	18.6	80.8	0.6
Social media	18.1	81.9	0.0
Local or regional radio	8.5	91	0.6
Other	6.2	93.8	0.0

The opinion about the impact of Cohesion policy on Lombardy is also relatively low when compared with other regions included in the survey study. The question was asked only to those respondents aware of the existence of EU regional policy. Only 6.2 per cent of these individuals think that the impact on their region of residence was very positive. Few interviewees consider this impact negative (2.2 per cent), but it is interesting to note that a quite high proportion of respondents claims that there was either no impact at all (11.3 per cent) or they are not able to assess such an effect (21.5 per cent).

The reasons explaining a null or negative impact of Cohesion policy on the region of residence are reported in Table 13. The most cited by the respondents is by far the bad management of the funds (83.3 per cent), followed by the allocation to the wrong projects (58.3 per cent) and by the corruptions among the beneficiaries of EU funds (54.2 per cent).

Table 14, on the other hand, shows the reasons explaining the positive impact of EU funding. The most mentioned reason is the extensive funding of Cohesion policy (81.3 per cent). The allocation to the right projects (62.6 per cent) and the good management (56.1 per cent) are both cited again among the most important contributors to the overall impact of EU regional policy, suggesting that satisfied and unsatisfied respondents have an opposite opinion of the same issues.

The perceptions on the implementation of Cohesion policy do not seem to be based on an aprioristic intolerance towards EU institutions and integration. In Lombardy, the majority of the respondents (68.2 per cent) are in favour of EU integration, while the 15.6 per cent is neutral and only the 14.8 per cent of the interviewees is against. The same applies if we consider the attachment of the respondents to places and institutions. The 86.2 per cent of respondents stated, in Lombardy to be somehow attached to the EU. This proportion is higher than the average of the other regions included in the survey study (84.9 per cent). It is worth noting that the opposite holds if, instead of the EU, we consider Europe, as a geographical and economic space rather than as a political and institutional body. In Lombardy, 85.4 per cent of the interviewees declared to be

attached to Europe, a proportion lower than the average of the other regions covered by the study (87.7 per cent).

Table 13. Why, in your opinion, the impact of EU funding was not positive?

Reason	Yes (%)	No (%)	Refused (%)	Don't know (%)
Not enough funding	29.2	62.5	0.0	8.3
Allocation to the wrong projects	58.3	33.3	0.0	8.3
Bad management	83.3	8.3	0.0	8.3
Not executed on time	41.7	50.0	0.0	8.3
Corruption among government officials awarding EU tenders	50.0	25.0	4.2	20.8
Corruptions among beneficiaries of EU funds	54.2	20.8	0.0	25.0
Other reasons	81.3	11.2	0.0	7.5

Table 14. Why, in your opinion, the impact of EU funding was positive?

Reason	Yes (%)	No (%)	Refused (%)	Don't know (%)
Extensive funding	81.3	11.2	0.0	7.5
Allocation to the right projects	62.6	22.4	0.0	15.0
Good management	56.1	29.9	0.0	14.0
Executed on time	44.9	30.8	0.0	24.3
No corruption among government officials awarding EU tenders	50.5	34.6	0.0	15.0
No corruptions among beneficiaries of EU funds	49.5	25.2	0.0	25.2
Other reasons	43.1	55.4	0.0	1.5

The second technique applied to the study of citizens' perception of Cohesion policy is represented by three **focus groups** involving 14 participants in total. These focus groups were conducted between September and October 2017. Two focus groups involved 5 people, while the last one had four participants.

Most of the participants were familiar with the term "Cohesion policy". Three participants said they had never heard of the term before, but they were familiar with individual Cohesion policy funds. All four ESIF funds were mentioned (ESF, ERDF, CF, EAFRD). One of the participants had heard about the ESF through a newspaper article, while another participant knew about the funds from work. Individual participants knew that Cohesion policy aims to reduce inequalities in the regions and Member States, and that a large proportion of the funds goes to the poorest regions and Member States. Some participants were surprised to learn that Cohesion policy is about regions rather than Member States and that funding is available for physical infrastructure and not just human resources development.

Given the general awareness of Cohesion policy among participants, it is not surprising that most of the participants - except four - were able to identify an EU-funded project. More projects were named in the two groups (IT 1 and IT 2) where awareness of Cohesion policy was higher. Projects were identified in various thematic objectives, such as business support, research, sustainable development and human resources development (Table 1).

Table 15. Participants' reference to projects' co-financed by EU funds.

<u>Transport</u> : Purchase of train coaches
<u>Research</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research projects carried out by universities in partnership with associations and other institutions - Research in agriculture
<u>Support for SMEs</u>
<u>Sustainable development</u> : Renewable energy/photovoltaic system
<u>Human resources development</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support of women participation in the labour market - courses on the basics of informatics for elderly people
<u>Culture</u> :
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eco museum - Palace of Venaria near Torino
<u>Other</u> : Projects in the field of healthcare

In the focus group discussions, there was relative equal attention paid to the achievements and challenges of Cohesion policy. In all three groups, a positive impact was acknowledged in relation to human resources development. Some participants considered that EU funding provided added value, since some projects would otherwise not be funded:

IT 1, Participant 3: "If I think about environmental sustainability, for instance, I am convinced that the funding activity of the EU is useful, because it stimulates further private investments in the field of renewable resources, generating collective benefits. Maybe this policy would have not been undertaken without the EU, so the existence of a supranational institution is positive."

Others were more critical about EU added value since they mentioned that some of the investments would have been realized without the EU contribution in any case, for example:

IT 2, Participant 1: "As far as Lombardy is concerned, they helped the process of development for sure. I would define it as a support to regional development, rather than an impact, because I think that most of these policies would have been undertaken in any case, with national or regional funds."

Apart from the perceived benefits, participants highlighted various implementation challenges, which differed across the three groups. The mismanagement of projects was mentioned in only one focus group. In two focus groups, participants discussed problems related to the accountability and communication by municipalities, which did not acknowledge the EU contribution to some activities. The lack of communication was the most discussed problem with four participants in two focus groups highlighting the lack of publicity surrounding EU-funded projects. Below we provide some extracts to highlight the way participants described the problems associated most often with Cohesion policy for Lombardy.

<u>Communication</u>	<i>IT 3, Participant 2: "Unfortunately, these achievements are not always advertised in a proper way. I live outside Milano, and my house is close to a river where they recently opened a boat service financed also with the EU funds. There is not even a small signal there, informing the visitors about how this infrastructure was financed and realized."</i>
<u>Project mismanagement</u>	<i>IT 2, Participant 2: "I think that the main issue relies in the phase of implementation. When the funds are over, for instance in the case of services provided to the population, also the policy stops to work."</i>
<u>Administrative capacity</u>	<i>IT 2, Participant 3: "If I think at my region of origin, which is Calabria in Southern Italy, I think that the resident population there did not have any impact at all from EU regional policy. This is mainly due to the scarce quality of institutions in implementing the policies."</i>

When discussing the notion of European identity, participants referred to two mechanism for strengthening the feeling of European identity. On the one hand, they argued for more political integration in terms of transferring more competences from the Member States to the EU institutions. This support for deeper European is in line with a 'supranational' vision of the EU as a polity. On the other hand, participants argued for more education about the EU and the corresponding need for the EU to exert more soft power by imposing specific educational projects on member states. In addition, a major criterion for creating a sense of unity was the necessity of Member States to be able to adopt a common position on critical EU issues. Foreign affairs were also mentioned as a policy area where Member States should act together. The ideas of a common army and fiscal union were also supported. One of the participants expressed the view that European identity is something that exists between older Member States of the EU, highlighting a membership 'cleavage' between new and old EU member states.

According to participants, more voice should be given to citizens but at the same time citizens should be more active and inform themselves on EU affairs. Personal contacts and the ability to communicate despite different native languages were also mentioned as a way to foster a feeling of closeness between EU citizens. Freedom of movement was considered an important unifying factor among Europeans.

Finally, participants mentioned that Europeans are united by history and values, such as the protection of the environment, universal healthcare, and Christian heritage. This view replicates again the notion of a civic European identity. Differences between the South and North of Europe were also pointed out, but were not considered to be obstacles as these may exist within a member state too as is the case in Italy.

Finally, participants believed that Cohesion policy is unlikely to create a sense of identity among Europeans, due to the low awareness of the policy. However, if the policy has positive outcomes, this can make citizens feel closer to the EU since Cohesion policy was perceived as a positive mechanism.

6. Conclusions

Lombardy is one of the most developed regions in Italy, producing about 21 per cent of national GDP. Therefore, it is not among the major beneficiaries of EU regional policy support. The allocation from the ERDF (485 million euros in the programming period 2014-20) were mainly focused on strengthening technological RD&I, promoting SME competitiveness and supporting the

transition to a low-carbon economy. The allocation from the ESF (485 million euros in the programming period 2014-20), on the other hand, concerned actions in the fields of education and training, employment and social inclusion.

From 2007 on, the allocation of funds was only partially consistent with what planned by regional authorities. The economic crisis, whose most intense effects in terms of job losses occurred, in Lombardy, after 2010, required a reorientation of financial resources from competitiveness issues towards the reinforcement and support of the regional system of social shock absorbers.

In general, the assessment of the actions funded by Cohesion policy is positive. For the programming period 2007-13 the outcomes were in line with the expectations, especially for the actions undertaken in the field of workforce adaptability, social inclusion, human capital and transnational and interregional cooperation. The evaluation of actions in the occupation area is, in general, less positive, since the number of individuals (and in particular women) reintegrated in the job market was lower than the target.

Regional officers and stakeholders recognize the positive effect of EU regional policy on regional development. Nevertheless, they identify as a relevant issue the administrative complexity and length of the whole procedure. On one hand, regional officers pointed out that the overlapping of EU and national rules generate confusion and a heavy load of work for the local administrations. On the other hand, this is mirrored in the opinion of the stakeholders' representatives, who complained for the delay of the calls for funding, the poor clarity of the rules for the submissions of proposals, the over regulated nature of these rules. An issue pointed out by both categories concerns the attitude of EU officers, particularly careful for the respect of the administrative requirements, and much less interested to the outcome of policy actions.

The communication of the actions undertaken by the regional authorities significantly changed in the last years. While in the programming period 2007-13 every directorate within the Region had its own model of communication with the stakeholders. Since 2016 these relationships are instead regulated by a regional law. Moreover, from the programming period 2014-20 the communication plans of the ERDF and ESF became strongly integrated, focused on the same objectives, based on the same strategies and implemented with the same procedures. Also the budget devoted to communication almost doubled in the current programming period.

The evaluation of the regional communication strategy by the regional administration officers is quite differentiated. Those directly involved in communication actions have a positive perception, while the opposite holds for the others. Among the stakeholders' representatives the assessment of the communication strategy tend to be neutral or positive. Nevertheless, they point out, as a point of weakness, the lack of targeting of different groups with different communication tools.

Another point of weakness, despite the effort of the public administrations in increasing the use of internet and the social media, is the limited effectiveness of these tools. The examples of good practices in communication provided by the regional officers are all about physical communication events. This issue is quite evident from the results of the citizen survey. Only 18.1 per cent of the respondents got informed on Cohesion policy through the social media. Even if in Italy the diffusion of social media is lower than the EU average this result is quite surprising, given that only other two regions included among the COHESIFY case studies performed worse.

The main source of information about Cohesion policy is still, in the case of Lombardy citizens, the national press and TV. This may convey some issues since, according to the perception of regional officers and stakeholders, Italian mass media tend to report mostly the unsuccessful stories of Cohesion policy. This is due, according to their opinion, to the fact that scandals and episodes of corruption or wasting of public money attract the attention of the audience much more than the best practices. The negative tone generally used by the media is confirmed by the framing Analysis

of the Italian Media provided by CUT, showing that more of the 20 per cent of the analysed news items has a negative valence.

This evidence could help explaining the relatively low level of satisfaction of Lombardy citizens with the impact of Cohesion policy on their region. It is worth noting that this dissatisfaction is apparently not due to an intolerance towards EU institutions and integration. In fact, the number of citizens in favour of EU integration is higher than the average level of the case studies analysed. This result is consistent with the evidence collected from the focus groups, where most of the respondents claimed to be in favour of the strengthening of EU integration in fields not covered by the current agreements, such as the fiscal norms and the military forces.

Summing up, the case study analysis suggested that the following policy actions are crucial in order to improve the citizen perception of Cohesion policy:

- Despite its simplification in the last programming period, the bureaucracy related to the different phases of EU projects is still too much complex, representing an obstacle for the efficient implementation of Cohesion policy. A revision of the administrative requirements, at both EU and national level, should be undertaken;
- At the same time, the attention of EU institutions for the fulfilment of the administrative requirements has to be accompanied by a more careful evaluation of the outcomes of policy actions. Even if in the last years this issue gained importance in the discussion of the future of Cohesion policy, the perception of local policy makers is still that the first task to be accomplished concerns the respect of bureaucratic procedures, rather than the supply of effective projects.
- The communication strategy adopted until now seems to be characterized by some points of weakness. In particular, as emerged from the interviews to the stakeholders, it should be more differentiated in order to reach the different categories of citizens and potential beneficiaries.
- The communication on the social media must be strengthened and improved, given the low visibility reached until now. It is worth mentioning that such a redefinition of the communication strategy does not necessarily involve an increase in the budget devoted to this field, since social media are substantially cheaper than other, more traditional, forms of advertisement. Rather, what is necessary is a strategic and qualitative change in the communication actions.

Annex

Table A1. Activities, operational goals and empirical measurement for the outcome of the communication programme (ERDF 2007-2013).

Activity	Operational goal	Outcome indicator	Unit of measure	Expected value in 2015
Advertising	C	Population aware of the OP	%	28%
	D	Population aware of the role of the European Union	%	30%
	B	Firms aware of the OP	%	28%
	D	Firms aware of the role of the European Union	%	30%
Promotional material	C and D	Per capita promotional material distributed	%	2%
Audio-visual products	All	Length (min.) of the audio-visual products realized	number	22
Media relations	All	Published articles	number	100
Information events	All	Participants to the events	number	1000
OP launch	All	Participants	number	100
European networks	All	Participants	number	4
Help desk	A	Satisfaction with the help desk	%	90%
Website	All	Web pages visited	number	10,000
		Contacts	number	60,000
		Mail received	number	40,000
		Downloads	number	15,000

Table A2. List of respondents to the interviews (sections B).

Interview	Date	Type of organisation	Role
1	9.06.17	Local state institution	Team Manager European Policy and Programmes
2	22.06.17	Local state institution	Director of the economic development, education and innovation Unit
3	05.07.17	Local state institution	Coordinator of the ERDF
4	14.07.17	Local state authority association or federation	Responsible for the Human capital and training Unit
5	18.07.17	Local state institution	Team Manager European Policy and Programmes
6	20.07.17	Local state authority association or federation	Member of the Monitoring committee between 2007-13
7	20.07.17	Local state authority association or federation	Responsible for the supervision of ERDF and ESF
8	21.07.17	Local state institution	Member of the Monitoring committee between 2007-13
9	2.08.17	National state institution	Team Manager European Policy and Programmes
10	06.09.17	Local state authority association or federation	Member of the Monitoring committee between 2000-06 and 2007-13
11	10.10.17	National state institution	Communication officer

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