



Cohesion policy implementation, performance and communication

FLEVOLAND PROVINCE THE NETHERLANDS

Ana Maria Fernandez Maldonado

Roberto Rocco

Marcin Dąbrowski

Marjolein Spaans

Wil Zonneveld



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1. Introduction

Objectives and rationale

The objective of this case study is to investigate EU Cohesion policy performance and communication and the impact on citizens' attitudes to the EU in Limburg, the Netherlands. The case study also contextualises comparative COHESIFY research findings and provides more in-depth insights into the performance and communication of Cohesion policy. The selection criteria for the Dutch case studies included Cohesion policy eligibility and financial intensity, programme types, governance system, European identity (also related to the specific geographical features and experience of cross-border cooperation), and Cohesion policy implementation setting and performance.

Funding and eligibility

Although there are several territorial cooperation programmes of which Flevoland is part beyond its Regional Operative Programme, OP West – called *Kansen voor West* (Chances for the West) – the emphasis in this research was put on the latter. Cross-border schemes have been explored more thoroughly in the case of Limburg Province, for which the territorial cooperation issue is more central.

Figure 1.1 The geographical area of OP West Netherlands and the participating provinces.



Source: G4P4

Funding and eligibility

Both Dutch case studies in COHESIFY, that of Limburg and of Flevoland, bring interesting and rare insights on Cohesion policy, its implementation and communication and the relation of those to EU identification, from the perspective of a country that is a net contributor to EU budget, is one of the most economically developed among the EU Member States and, hence, is not much exposed to the influence of Cohesion policy, which channels most of its funding towards the less developed territories of the EU. In other words, the Dutch cases shed light on the relationship nexus between EU identification and Cohesion policy in a context where the latter is not a major source of finance for public investment, as is the case in the Polish regions, for instance.

In 2015, according to Eurostat, the regional gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Flevoland corresponded to 99% of EU average (as compared to 164% in Noord-Holland, where Amsterdam is located, and 109% in Limburg). Flevoland was selected as one of the Dutch case studies because it is one of the less developed of the Dutch provinces and up to 2006 it has been classified in Cohesion policy under Objective 1, and thus has seen a substantial inflow of EU funds in the past. This inflow has been dramatically reduced after the Eastward enlargement of the EU Cohesion policy and also as a result of reorientation of funding within the Operational Programme West Netherlands (OP West) away from Flevoland towards the main urban areas in the Western Netherlands, located outside of that province. OP West, as part of which Flevoland has been receiving ERDF support in 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 support is a multi-regional programme comprising four provinces and only part of the funding unofficially earmarked for investment in Flevoland. Thus, in 2007-2013 period Flevoland's ERDF allocation was roughly 34 million euros (11% of OP West allocation) and in 2014-2020 it was only 15 million euros (8% of OP West allocation).

Governance

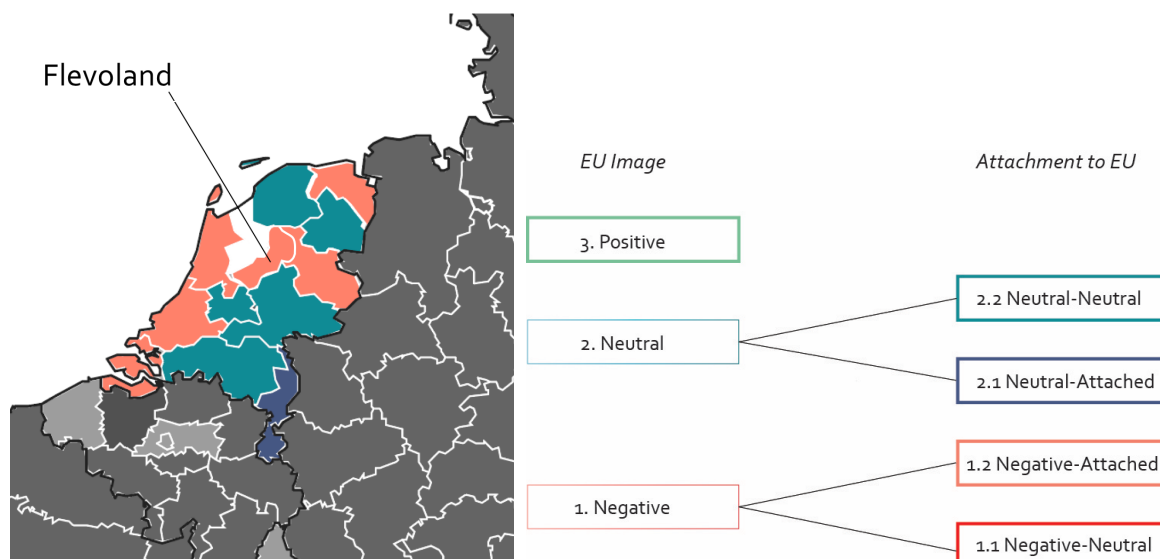
The Dutch cases also offer an example of regions operating in a unitary yet decentralised state, with the provinces having elected assemblies, appointing a provincial executive body. The provinces also have relatively broad competences, with responsibilities (albeit often shared with the central government and municipalities) for land use planning, transport, economy, agriculture, environmental protection, recreation, welfare and culture as well as financial oversight of the municipalities. Despite having important competences, the central government in the Netherlands remains a very strong actor and the provincial authorities compete and are often overshadowed by the biggest municipalities having their own agendas and greater political clout. Flevoland's governance context is also specific because the province is part of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, a grouping of municipalities and provinces around Amsterdam.

EU identification

The strategy for choosing Dutch case study regions was aiming at choosing highly contrasted cases. Unlike Limburg, an affluent region with a long history stretching to Middle Ages and rich experience in cross-border cooperation with the German and Belgian partners, Flevoland is not a border region and, interestingly, is a very 'new' province established on territories reclaimed from the sea in the course of the 20th century. It was assumed that this lack of deeply embedded historical regional identity, together with the legacy of EU-supported investment in the region, could matter for EU identification.

In the typology of EU identification elaborated as part of COHESIFY (Dąbrowski, Stead and Mashhoodi, 2017), based on Eurobarometer data, Flevoland was categorised as Negative-Attached. It is thus a region with a predominantly negative EU image, which makes it different from Flevoland (predominantly neutral EU image). On the affective dimension of EU identification, however, measured with the EU attachment variable, the majority of Flevoland's citizens declared attachment to the EU, as was the case in Limburg. The insights from the COHESIFY citizen survey paint a slightly different picture of EU and regional identification in Flevoland. In fact, roughly similar proportion of the Flevoland's inhabitants as in Limburg declared strong attachment to the region (41.4%) and also, similarly to Limburg, 38.6% declared being somewhat attached. Similarly to Limburg, 43.2% of the Flevoland's surveyed declared positive positions towards European integration and 43% agreed that EU membership was beneficial for the Netherlands. That said, the vast majority of Flevoland's, just like that of Limburgers, declared being attached (45.8%) or very attached (24%) to the EU, indicating that critical views of what the EU does do not preclude affection for the EU.

Figure 1.2 Typology on European identification in EU regions in the Netherlands



Source: Dąbrowski et al., 2017.

Implementation settings

The COHESIFY analysis of the regional relevance of EU policies, examining the objective vulnerability, receptivity and desirability of EU policies, from the point of view of the structural development situation, needs and challenges of regions, along with the analysis of relations between the features of territories, their receptiveness to EU policies and the perceptions of the EU and EU Cohesion policy, resulted in the development of territorial typologies, which also served the basis for the case study selection. Analysis of regional policy implementation settings classified Flevoland as a region with an opportunistic policy setting (i.e. where Cohesion policy intervention is not necessary but the resident population requests it) in a Eurosceptic context (i.e. the good quality of institutions is not matched with a widespread support to EU institutions) when it comes to EU support for tangible private assets, that is investment in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), innovation and tourism (Capello and Perucca, 2017). In that sense, Flevoland and Limburg are similar. Concerning EU investment intangible public assets, that is mainly in infrastructure (transport, healthcare, energy), Flevoland was classified as also having an opportunistic policy setting in a Eurosceptic context (appropriate policy setting in Limburg). Finally, concerning intangible public assets (investment in social inclusion policies, vocational training, supporting women on the labour market, etc.), like all Dutch provinces, Flevoland was deemed to have an opportunistic policy setting in a Eurosceptic context (Capello and Perucca, 2017). When it comes to Cohesion policy implementation and performance, the COHESIFY research by Smętkowski and colleagues (2018) concluded that Flevoland, like Limburg, came under the category of low growth dynamics region with a low scale of funding, and low reported achievements of EU-supported interventions.

Methodology

In addition to secondary and primary resources for the desk-based analysis, the case study is based on a rich set of original data collected through stakeholder survey, stakeholder interviews, focus groups and citizen survey, as detailed below.

Stakeholder survey

A stakeholders' online survey was carried out in the spring – summer of 2017. The survey was sent to 81 stakeholders, involved in ESI Funds during the 2007-13 and 2014-20 programming periods, including (1) Monitoring Committee members: stakeholders involved in the management and monitoring of operational Programmes, including Managing Authorities, implementing bodies, associations of local authorities or businesses, economic and social partners, education institutions,

civil society organisations and NGOs; (2) local state authorities: stakeholders involved in the delivery of EU projects as project promoters at the local level, (3) and other economic development stakeholders. The response rate was 21 percent (or 17 respondents, out of which 10 incomplete and 7 complete responses), as shown Annex 2.

Stakeholder interviews

Interviews invitation were sent to 25 stakeholders from Flevoland of related to its Regional Operational Programme (ROP); but few accepted the invitation, arguing that they did not know much about Flevoland, as the ROP includes all the West area of the Netherlands. Finally, interviews were conducted with 6 stakeholders representing the Managing Authority (including the Communication officer), provincial government, and local governments authorities. All of the interviews were carried out between June and October 2017 (see Annex 1 for more details).

Focus groups

In the case study of Flevoland, 14 participants (9 female and 5 male) took part in 3 focus groups in the cities of Lelystad, Almere and Delft. The groups included 4 or 5 participants. The first two groups had a stronger female representation (3 females, 2 males; and 4 females, 1 male; respectively). The third group had an even gender balance. Lelystad and Delft groups were homogenous per age cohort (56-68 and 20-25 respectively), while the Almere group had a wide range of ages (74-32). The level of engagement in the discussion of both male and female participants was balanced. All participants of the Lelystad and Almere groups were Flevoland residents and were Dutch citizens, five of them were of foreign origin. The participants of the Delft group were former Flevoland residents studying at Delft University of Technology.

The recruitment was done in different ways. The participants of Lelystad were recruited through snowball sampling using personal networks. The ones from the Almere group were recruited through the COHESIFY citizen survey, which asked a random sample of respondents' living in Flevoland to provide a contact telephone number if they were willing to participate in a focus group discussion on the topic of EU funding and attitudes to the EU. This method allowed the recruitment of 5 participants. The Delft group was recruited through posters hanged at the different faculties of the Delft University of Technology. As an incentive to participate in the focus groups, a payment of €50 in the form of a VVV coupon was made to each participant (see **Error! Reference source not found.** for more details).

Citizens survey

A citizen survey was conducted in Flevoland with similar questions asked as in all COHESIFY case studies. For Flevoland the sample size was 500 respondents.

Structure of the case study report

The case study is structured in seven sections. After this introduction, section 2 sets the context by reviewing the socio-economic and political context including public opinion on the EU, and territorial identity issues. Based on desk research, stakeholders' surveys and interviews, the following two sections analyse the implementation and performance of Cohesion policy; and the communication aspects in terms of the effectiveness of communication strategies and wider media framing of Cohesion policy, respectively. Public perceptions of Cohesion policy and the impact of Cohesion policy on identification with the EU are reviewed in section 5, drawing on stakeholders surveys and interviews, the citizen survey and focus group results. The conclusion summarises the key findings and includes a subsection on policy implications and recommendations.

2. Context and background

2.1 Introduction

Flevoland is one of the two Dutch case study regions of COHESIFY. The Dutch case is unusual among the COHESIFY study areas at least for three reasons. First, the country is a net contributor to EU budget and thus is not a major direct beneficiary of cohesion policy. Flevoland is exceptional in the Dutch context because, being the Netherlands' poorest province, until 2000-2006 period it was classified as Objective 1 region and thus has seen substantial inflow of Structural Funds in the past. This has changed since the enlargement of the EU and for 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 Flevoland is classified under the objectives Competitiveness and More Developed regions, respectively, which entailed a massive decrease in funding allocated and hence a decline of relevance of Cohesion Policy for the region.

Second, the Netherlands is also a case where territorial cooperation programmes, both cross-border and transnational ones, are particularly salient due to close linkages with the neighbouring states. This is particularly the case for Limburg Province, the second Dutch case study region, and less so for Flevoland which is cut off from the national borders. Third, the implementation of Cohesion Policy and in particular of ERDF regional programmes relies on a peculiar institutional set up. There are four Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) grouping several NUTS2 regions each. This entails a degree of complexity when it comes to disentangling the aspects of policy (funding streams, impacts, communication practices, etc.) for particular provinces comprised as part of the programme area, but also for understanding the underpinning governance dynamics. Throughout this report, therefore, references are made to the wider ROP, where data was not available for Flevoland only, but to the programme area as a whole.

Flevoland was established in 1986, when different polders resulting from reclaimed land from the Zuiderzee (an inland sea within the Netherlands) were merged into one province. This land reclamation spans from the 1930s to the 1960s and resulted in a large island in the newly created IJsselmeer (lake), connected to the mainland by bridges. This new Dutch province is divided in 6 municipalities which present different socio-economic profiles and face therefore different challenges.

Almere is the city at the southwest end of Flevoland, close to Amsterdam. It became a municipality in 1984, but has the largest population among the municipalities in Flevoland (196,290 citizens in 2017), with plans to expand to 350,000 inhabitants by 2030. Lelystad is the second city, located towards the middle-north of the island. It has 76,285 inhabitants (2017) and is home to the largest general aviation airport in the Netherlands. This airport is currently undergoing major expansion, with the construction of a passenger terminal and extension of the runway. Other municipalities are Dronten, Noordoostpolder, Urk and Zeewolde, which are communities whose economies revolve mainly around agriculture.

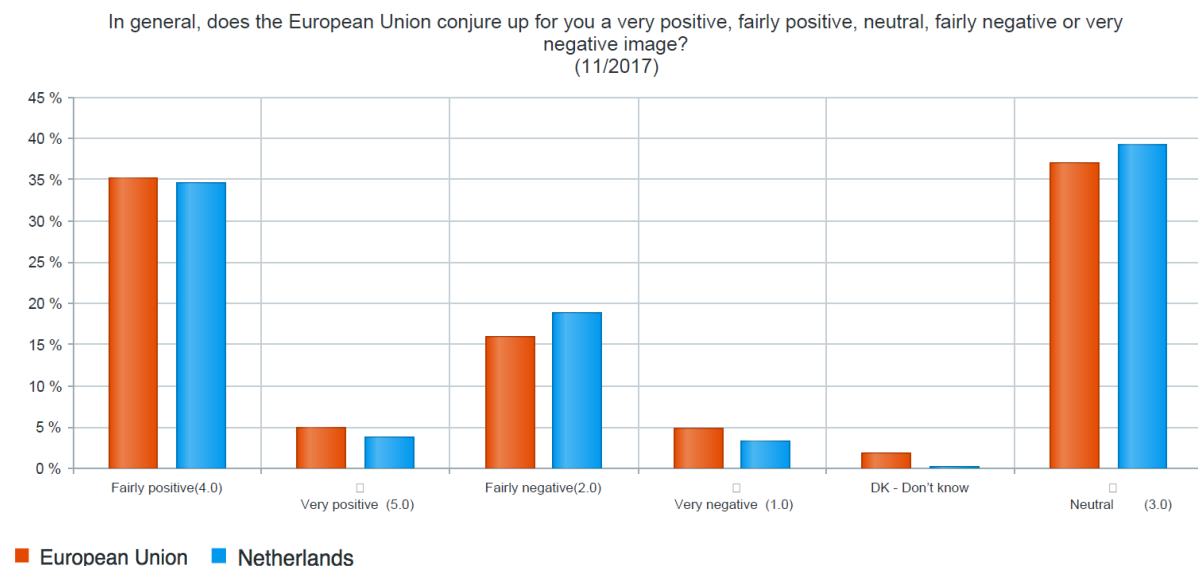
The average annual growth of the province has been much higher than the national and regional averages. While the Netherlands grew 2.6% in average in the period 1995-2005, the West of the country grew in average 2.9% and Flevoland grew 5% in average during the same period (G4P4, 2006). Despite high average growth, there is a variety of problems and challenges depending on the location of the municipality on the island. While Almere deals with the challenges of being a dormitory city for Amsterdam, Lelystad is a city with numerous touristic attractions, thanks to its waterfront, and home to an airport that is being expanded, with the expectation that it will take off some of the traffic from Schiphol Airport, located in the south of Amsterdam. Meanwhile the municipalities of Dronten, Noordoostpolder, Urk and Zeewolde deal with issues connected to innovation in agriculture.

2.2 EU attitudes and identity

Since the early 2000s, the profile of the Netherlands in the EU has changed: from a mainstream, no-nonsense partner to one with growing suspicion of the EU. Since the EU enlargement in 2004 the Netherlands has less of a say than some of the newest members, yet it is one of the largest per-capita contributors to the EU budget. A first sign of estrangement was the rejection in a 2005 referendum of the EU's proposed constitutional treaty. The perception that the Dutch were left paying the bill while other countries flouted the rules became fertile ground for Eurosceptic politicians. It boosted the anti-immigrant, anti-EU popularity of Geert Wilders and made the Dutch government increasingly critical of the European Commission and ever-closer EU cooperation. By 2013, Dutch national government was actively seeking a smaller, more effective Commission and finding support in Germany and other member states.

Gradually, public opposition to the EU hardened. The rejection of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine in a referendum in April 2016 underlined the image of the Netherlands as a country critical of the EU. Today, support for EU membership hovers at around 40% (Korteweg, 2017).

Figure 2.3. Image of citizens in the Netherlands (blue) on the EU compared to the EU average (red)



Source: Eurobarometer

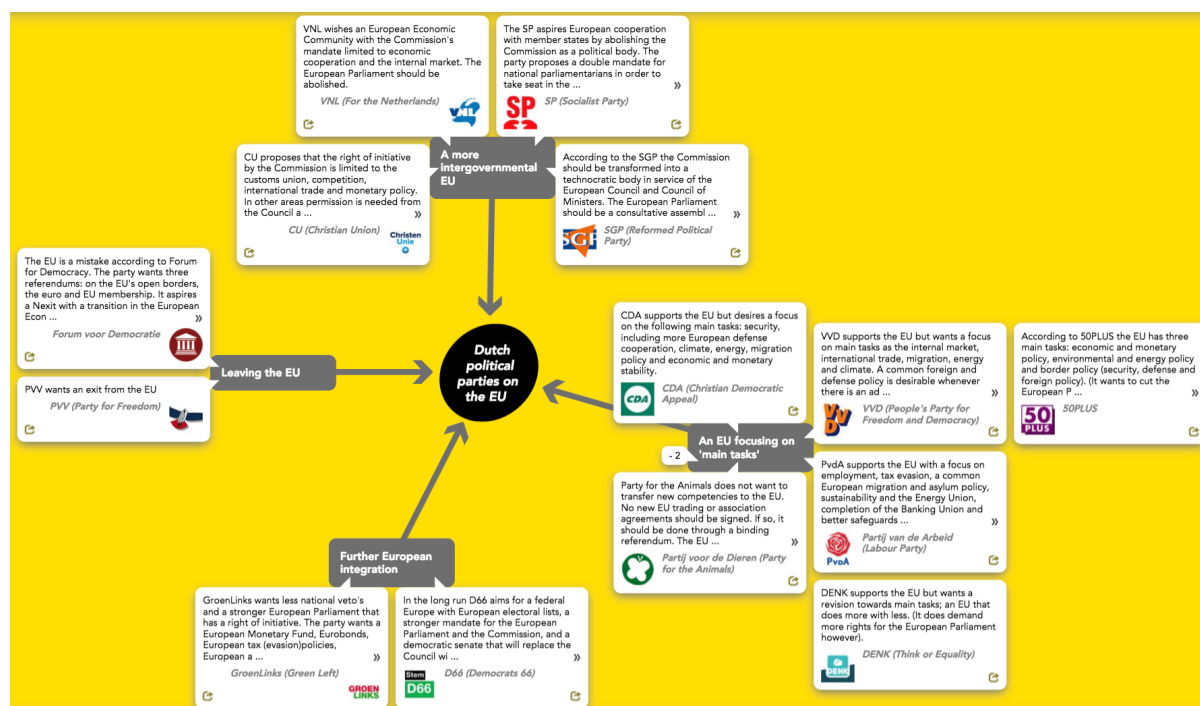
2.3 Political context

The results of the Dutch national elections on March 15 2017 were looked upon in the EU as a possible precursor of the upcoming elections in France and Germany later that year. Although the EU hardly played a role in the debates during the Dutch election campaign, much of the international debate focused on whether an 'anti-EU' government will be elected with at least two political parties that desire to leave the EU: PVV and *Forum voor Democratie*. The (extreme) right wing party of Geert Wilders, the Party for Freedom (PVV), calls for a 'Nexit' and is currently still leading in most polls. At the same time, this lead amounts to an average of 20% of the votes only, with many political parties refusing to form a coalition with the PVV. A new political party, Forum for Democracy (right wing, conservative), that favours more direct democracy desires to (ultimately) leave the EU, too. The Christian Union (socially conservative, economically left wing), the Reformed Political Party (theocratic, conservative right wing) and the Socialist Party aspire a more intergovernmental EU with the power of the European Commission being diminished. A new right wing party, called "For the

Netherlands”, wants to return to the European Economic Community. Mainstream political parties such as the Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid* - PvdA), Christian Democrats (CDA) and the centre right liberals (VVD) still support the EU but express that it should focus on certain so called ‘main tasks’. The Party for the Animals (ecological interest party) does not want to transfer new competences to the EU. The new political parties DENK (left wing immigrant party) and 50PLUS (an interests party for the elderly) are ambiguous about the EU but share the opinion of an EU of ‘main tasks’. Two parties are explicitly in favour of further European integration. The Dutch Green Left (*GroenLinks*) desires a stronger European Parliament. D66, a centrist liberal party, aspires in the long run a federal Europe (Luining, 2017).

These insights are broadly consistent with the party manifesto analysis conducted as part of COHESIFY (Debus & Gross, 2017), according to which the Dutch party system is relatively strongly divided both on European integration and on Cohesion policy. The analysis of the manifestos across several electoral cycles (2006, 2010, 2014) showed that while the CDA, D66, *GroenLinks* and PvdA favour both the EU and its Cohesion policy, parties like CU, SGP, SP, PvdD and PVV remain opposed to the depending of European integration and also are against Cohesion policy (Debus & Gross, 2017, p. 40).

Figure 2.3. Dutch political parties on the EU



Source: <http://mattermap.nl/embed/2ti73/75>

Table 2.1 National party positions on European integration and EU Cohesion policy in the Netherlands

Party	Year (CHES data)	Policy positions	
		(a) European integration	(b) Cohesion policy
CDA	2006	5.33	4.80
	2010	5.29	5.25
	2014	5.55	6.00
PvdA	2006	5.58	5.20
	2010	5.29	5.13
	2014	5.46	5.40
VVD	2006	4.50	2.60
	2010	3.93	3.86
	2014	5.18	4.50
D66	2006	6.50	5.20
	2010	6.64	5.38
	2014	6.82	5.60
GL	2006	5.45	4.80
	2010	6.21	5.25
	2014	6.55	5.80
SP	2006	2.00	2.60
	2010	2.42	3.14
	2014	2.10	3.00
CU	2006	3.45	3.20
	2010	3.79	4.50
	2014	3.44	2.50
PVV	2006	1.55	1.60
	2010	1.36	2.00
	2014	1.09	1.20
SGP	2006	—	—
	2010	3.00	4.33
	2014	2.56	2.50
PvdD	2006	—	—
	2010	3.63	4.20
	2014	3.71	1.50
50PLUS	2006	—	—
	2010	—	—
	2014	4.80	3.50

Note: Party policy positions are based on a CHES seven-point scale, ranging from 'strongly opposed' (1) to 'strongly in favour' (7);

Source: Debus & Gross, 2017, p. 40

When it comes to party positions on the regional level, the COHESIFY party manifesto analysis for Flevoland indicated a similar pattern to the one observed at the national level (see table 2.2). These results have to be interpreted with some caution. It should be noted that little attention is dedicated to the European issues at the regional level (3.33 percent of the regional manifestos; this is slightly less than in Limburg manifestos where 3.7 per cent of space is dedicated to European issues). Moreover, the relatively new 50PLUS party, focusing on senior voters, had only very short manifestos for Flevoland, while the Eurosceptic PVV used a far more anti-European language on the provincial level than it does the national level, which drove the estimations 'out of scale' (Debus & Gross, 2017). At the same time, however, PVV did not even mention the EU in its Flevoland manifesto in 2011 (see Fig. 2.4). EU funds play a prominent role in the Flevoland manifestos of ONS FLEVOLAND, CDA and PvdA (see Fig. 2.5).

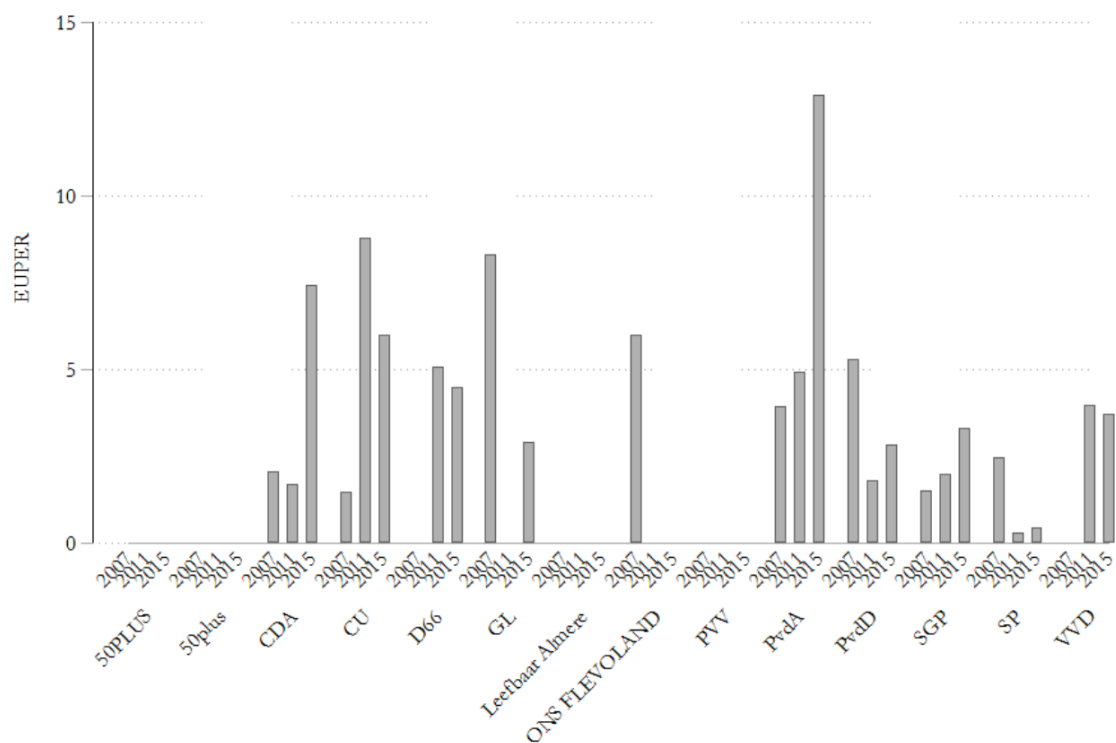
Table 2.2 Regional party positions on European integration and EU Cohesion policy in Flevoland

Party	Election year	Policy positions	
		(a) European integration	(b) Cohesion policy
CDA	2007	6.24	5.50
	2011	5.50	5.17
	2015	6.08	5.69
CU	2007	4.07	3.66
	2011	4.97	4.31
	2015	4.78	4.16
GL	2007	6.59	5.16
	2011	6.81	5.20
	2015	6.44	5.14
ONS Flevoland	2007	3.95	3.77
	2011	—	—
	2015	—	—
PvdD	2007	3.45	2.04
	2011	3.34	1.26
	2015	2.57	0.08
PvdA	2007	5.77	5.25
	2011	5.22	4.80
	2015	5.35	4.94
SGP	2007	3.23	3.38
	2011	3.35	3.47
	2015	3.87	3.64
SP	2007	3.23	3.38
	2011	4.31	3.82
	2015	4.37	3.88
D66	2007	—	—
	2011	5.66	4.68
	2015	6.67	5.32
Leefbaar Almere	2007	—	—
	2011	3.58	3.46
	2015	—	—
50PLUS	2007	—	—
	2011	-1.54	-1.08
	2015	4.92	4.42
PVV	2007	—	—
	2011	-1.20	0.25
	2015	0.95	1.34
VVD	2007	—	—
	2011	5.50	4.90
	2015	5.04	4.45

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

Source: Debus & Gross, 2017, p. 41

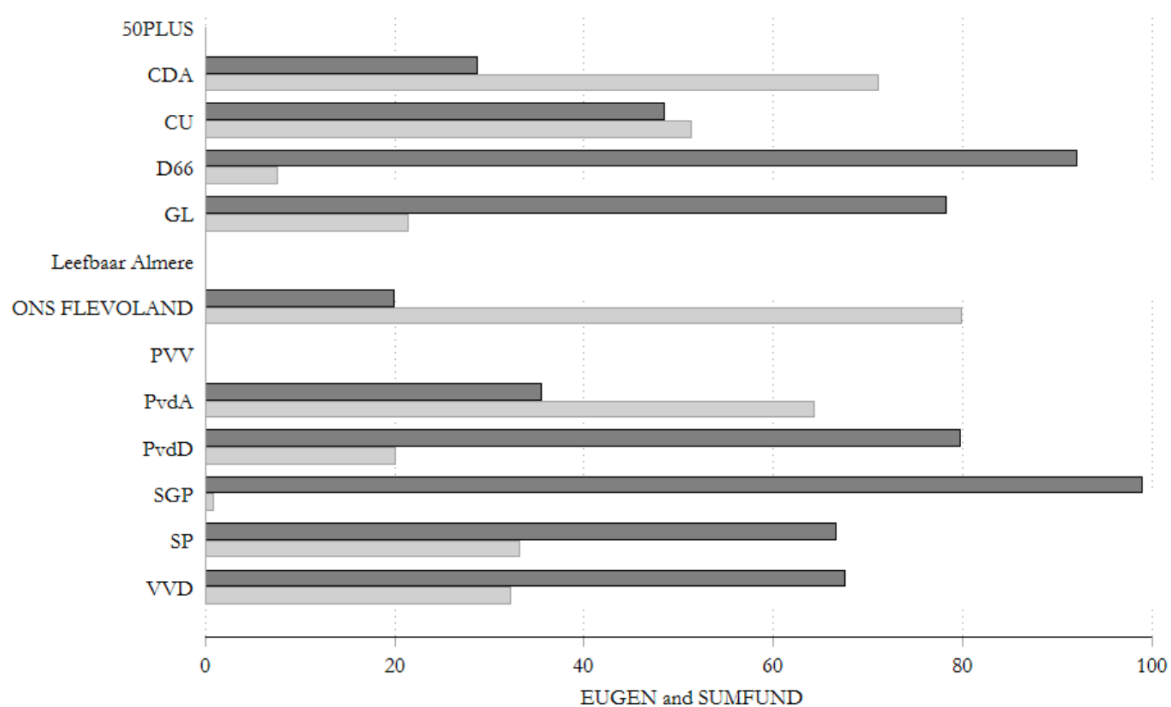
Fig. 2.4 Share of a party's Flevoland manifesto devoted to European issues and CP by election year



Note: Bars show the percentage of the regional manifestos (grouped by party and election year) that focuses on European issues (EUPER). A blank space indicates that a party's election manifesto could not be coded.

Source: Debus & Gross, 2017, p. 42

Fig. 2.5 Percentage of words that parties devote in Flevoland manifestos to EU/Europe and to EU and to Cohesion policy funding



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

Source: Debus & Gross, 2017, p. 42

2.4 Regional and local governance

Flevoland is the youngest one the twelve Dutch provinces and comprises only six municipalities. The Dutch institutional system consists of three formal government levels: the national level of government, provinces and municipalities. Additionally there is a functional tier (regional water authorities) and a myriad of formal and network-based collaborative arrangements. All three government tiers have deliberative assemblies, which are elected by direct universal suffrage. They have an autonomous power of regulation and administration of their own internal affairs as well as a taxing power. This system also includes numerous formal and informal network-based collaborative arrangements to jointly provide public services across administrative boundaries. The Dutch decentralised system still has a paradoxical nature, with several features revealing the strong presence of the central government at the local level, limiting the autonomy of the subnational government, in particular their competences and finances. However, the Dutch multi-level governance system draws its strength from the predominant political culture emphasising collaboration and consensus from well-developed vertical and horizontal linkages. This rich network represents an asset for the implementation of the subnational government reform and intricate policies cutting across levels of government, even if it requires efforts to align and co-ordinate the complex interactions (OECD, 2014).

3. Cohesion policy implementation and performance

3.1 EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework

Like elsewhere, there are several Cohesion Policy programmes operating in Flevoland (see Table 2.1). As mentioned above, none of the Dutch provinces, corresponding to NUTS2 level, has its own programme, as the option chosen for implementing ERDF is through multi-region programmes. The most important programme for Flevoland thus is the Operational Programme (OP) West, called Kansen voor West (Chances for the West), whose geographical area is indicated in Figure 2.1. The programme was initiated in the 2007-2013 period and continues as Kansen voor West II in 2014-2020 period. The programme(s) covers four NUTS2 regions: not only the Province of Flevoland (with its capital in the new town of Lelystad), but also those of Utrecht (with its capital in the eponymous city), North Holland (with Amsterdam at its heart) and South Holland (with bipolar core comprising Rotterdam and The Hague).¹

Table 2.1. Cohesion Policy programmes in Flevoland in 2014-2020 period

Programme	Focus
Kansen voor West II (OP West Netherlands)	ERDF for innovation of SMEs, low carbon economy and urban development (integration with ESF support)

¹ It is worth stressing another Dutch territorial peculiarity, that Flevoland is a relatively new entity (Province was established in 1986), located on land reclaimed from the IJsselmeer (lake) mainly in the 1950s and 1960s.

Interreg Europe EV Energy	EU collaboration on Electric Vehicles for City Energy
Interreg Europe Food chains 4 EU	EU collaboration on innovations in regional food chain
Interreg-programma Deutschland–Nederland	Cross-border cooperation between the Netherlands and Germany
Interreg North-West Europe	Strengthening innovation, sustainability and cohesion in North West Europe
Interreg North Sea Region	Stronger, more sustainable economies and societies in the North Sea region

The total available ERDF budget for OP West for the period 2007-2013 was 310.6 million euro (32.8 million for Flevoland, thus 11%). The ERDF allocation (40%) was complemented by the province and the state funding of 392.8 million euro and 66.88 million euro from private sources. The total budget was 770 million euro. OP West allocation, has been nearly double the size of those for other regional OPs for 2007-2013 period. This reflected the fact that this was the most populous region, however, in per capita terms the region received the smallest allocation among the four Dutch regional OPs (Applica et al. 2016). In the 2014-2020 period, the ERDF allocation was smaller, 189.84 million euro (39.6% of the total OP budget), while the share of the domestic contribution increased, adding up to a total programme budget of 479.47 million euro. Within that the ERDF allocation for Flevoland was 15.2 million euro, while 4,6 and 5,3 million euro were provided by the state and the Provincial government respectively (total budget for the Province in 2014-2020 is 25.1 million euro).

3.1.1 Operational Programme for Flevoland 2007-2013

In 2007-2013 OP West only 3 priorities were defined, as indicated in table 3.1. The first one, 'Knowledge Economy, Entrepreneurship and Innovation' corresponded to half of the allocation and focused on supporting knowledge infrastructure and flows in the growing clusters, on supporting innovation in SMEs, and on enterprise and innovation in small companies, and on supporting technological and environmental innovations to address the high pressure on the environment in the West Netherlands.

The second priority, 'Attractive Regions' focused on improving the attractiveness and economic vitality of the Randstad area through better quality of life and of rural landscape, with an emphasis on preserving environmental and landscape values and promotion of green areas and water in the vicinity of cities.

The third priority, 'The Urban Dimension', with 31% of the total ERDF allocation for the OP, reflected the importance of cities for the programme area, with the Randstad being the Netherlands' key and growing polycentric urban region. The objectives focused on, firstly, improving the living environment. This entailed efforts to boost linkages between the living and business areas in cities, on preventing social divisions and improving the overall living conditions through investment in greenery and socio-cultural facilities, etc. To reinforce this social aspect, provisions were made to use ERDF funding as part of this priority to support urban-focused social projects as part of OP ESF. Secondly, the priority focused on improvement of the business climate in cities (accessibility, regeneration, improvement of business services, etc.).

In sum, the emphasis in OP West 2007-2013 was very much on innovation, on the one hand, and on improvement of the attractiveness and environmental quality of the wider region and its cities for both its inhabitants and for businesses, echoing both the Lisbon Strategy (focus on knowledge economy) and the Gothenburg Agenda (pursuit of economic and social development with respect for the environment).

Table 3.1 Priority axes and allocations in OP West I 2007-2013

Priority axes	ERDF allocation (%)	ERDF allocation (EUR)	Public co-financing	Private co-financing	Total public and private co-financing	Total OP
1. Knowledge Economy, Entrepreneurship and Innovation	48	147,735,000	177,282,000	44,320,000	221,602,000	369,337,000
2. Attractive Regions	17	53,680,000	72,468,000	8,052,000	80,520,00	134,200,000
3. The Urban Dimension	31	96,761,000	130,628,000	14,514,000	145,142,000	241,903,000
4. Technical Assistance	4	12,424,000	12,424,000	0	12,424,000	24,848,000
Total	100.0	310,600,000	392,802,000	66,886,000	459,688,000	770,288,000

Source: Operational Programme West Netherlands 2007-2013

The OP is divided into 5 subparts, 1 for the region as a whole and 4 to be carried out by the specific cities on the basis of non-binding agreements between the stakeholders. This is made possible by the provisions in the General Regulations for sub-delegation using global subsidies. The 4 urban OP subparts correspond to 33% of total budget (98.398 million euro), however, in the remaining budget another 33% is 'indicatively labelled' for the G4 cities (OP West I 2007-2013, p. 46). Thus, about 55% of the total budget is expected to flow to the main cities on the basis of an informal agreement.

Agreements were also made for defining how much funding was allocated to each province. The Province of Flevoland was allocated roughly 11% of the total ERDF allocation for OP West, thus a small part only, which reflects the peripheral role of the Province in the wider Randstad region and lack of major cities, with only second-tier cities of Almere and Lelystad being located in the province. The Province broadly speaking followed the priorities for the whole OP, however, has put a stronger emphasis on Priority 3 ('The Urban Dimension') to provide a boost to its two urban centres, while putting less emphasis on the 'Attractive Regions' dimension (compensated by the use of provincial funding scheme for rural development).

Table 3.2 Flevoland's share of the budget in OP West I 2007-2013 (in euro)

ERDF	Central government	Province	Public co-financing	Private co-financing	Total
34,165,000	71,62,000	11,867,000	24,307,000	7,230,000	84,730,000

Source: *Kansen voor Flevoland 2007-2013, Utivoeringsdocument*

3.1.2 Operational Programme for Flevoland 2014-2020

The ERDF funds for the period 2014-2020 decreased significantly in OP West II in relation to the previous round of the programme, from 310 to only nearly 190 million, reflecting a diminishing important of Cohesion Policy for The Netherlands. Beyond this, the priorities also partly changed. In

2014-2020 OP West (see Table 3.3) the main priority remains investment in innovation (Priority 1), with even greater share dedicated to it than in the previous period (from 48% to 59%), however, the remaining priorities were redefined, with a shift away from a focus on regional spatial qualities and the urban dimension towards 'Low Carbon Economy' (Priority 2), 'Sustainable and Quality Employment and Labour Mobility' (Priority 3), as well as a more socially-oriented priority of 'Social Inclusion, Combating Poverty and Discrimination' (Priority 4). The lion share of funds were allocated to Priorities 1 and 2, with only a fraction of funding reserved for the social Priorities 3 and 4. Thus, while the programme claims to contribute to the Europe 2020's objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the emphasis is on the first two of these three.

Priority 2 'Low Carbon Economy' focuses on renewable energy generation and energy savings, which appears to reflect the realisation of the relative underdevelopment of the renewable energy production in the Netherlands, lagging far behind the 2020 targets agreed between the Dutch Government and the European Commission (14% of renewables, with only 4% being achieved in 2010).

Table 3.3 Priority axes and allocations in 2014-2020

Priority axes	ERDF allocation (%)	ERDF allocation (EUR)	Public co-financing	Private co-financing	Total public and private co-financing	Total OP
1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation	59	112,586,899	96,331,477	97,806,517	194,137,994	306,724,893
2. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors	19	36,450,635	27,338,476	27,338,476	54,676,952	91,127,587
3. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility	6	11,659,647	10,493,582	1,166,065	11,659,647	23,319,294
4. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	11	21,555,994	17,244,795	4,311,199	21,555,994	43,111,988
5. Technical assistance	4	7,593,882	7,593,882	0	7,593,882	15,187,764
Total	100	189,847,057	159,002,212	130,622,257	289,624,469	479,471,526

Source: OP West II 2014-2020

The 'Urban Dimension', while losing a priority status, remains strongly reflected in Priority 3 with a focus on employment in the big cities, and is also echoed in the promotion of Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) tool. In Priority 4, one finds the familiar emphasis on the importance of the business environment in cities, similar to OP West 2007-2013. What is new in 2014-2020 OP West is also the emphasis on the use of financial instruments (JESSICA) and promotion of Community Led Local Development (CLLD) as a tool to promote greater involvement of citizens in strategy-making in cities as part of Priority 4.

Concerning the place of Flevoland in the 2014-2020 OP West, like in the previous period, while the programme is multi-regional and has shared priorities and objectives, the Province has defined its own goals vis-a-vis the programme and what it wants to get from it. The share of allocation of the EU funds in the programme for Flevoland is smaller than in 2007-2013 (8%, from 11% before), which seems to indicate an even greater focus in the programme on the core city areas, which are not located in Flevoland (see Table 3.4). In its own specific implementation document for OP West 2014-2020, the Province explicitly chose to focus on only two priorities. The lion's share of its allocation – 13.1 million euro - is destined for Priority 1 (innovation); while circa 2.1 million euro being dedicated to Priority 2 'Low Carbon Economy' and within that on energy production only, considering that the

relatively new housing stock in the Province do not warrant a focus on energy savings as much as in other provinces with older housing stock. The more socially-oriented priorities 3 and 4 were not deemed important for the Province.

Table 3.4 Flevoland's share of the budget in OP West II 2014-2020 (contributions in million euro)

ERDF	Central government	Province	Total
15.2	4.6	5.3	25.1

Source: Kansen voor Flevoland 2014-2020, Uitvoeringsdocument

The interviews shed more light on the differences between the two editions of the programme (2007-2013 and 2014-2020) and the rationale behind the priorities chosen. According to the Managing Director of the programme, while in the first round the emphasis was on research and development and infrastructure, the second round emphasises above all innovation (new products and services), with renewable energy coming in as the second focus area, and sustainability and work as the third one. This reinforced focus on innovation reflects, as he claimed, the fact that the knowledge economy remained a big challenge for the country. While the Randstad was in 18th place in terms of jobs in middle and high-tech industry (2005) among the top 5 regions in Europe, the performance of Flevoland is less impressive. While being within the national average, there is room for improvement in terms of job creation and patents submitted.²

The second priority in 2014-2020 period concerns renewable energy and sustainability, as part of efforts to nurture a low-carbon economy. The Netherlands performs badly in terms of the share of renewable energy (26th position among the EU28).³ Against this low national performance, Flevoland performs better because of the high amount of wind-energy infrastructures, but here again there is room for improvement. Another interviewee added more on the nature of the challenge with respect to the labour market, addressed in Priority 3. He highlighted the mismatch in the labour market concerning the lack of technically skilled labour force on one side and unemployment on the other.

An important difference between the two rounds of OP West, according to an interviewee, was that the period 2007-2013 put more emphasis on the municipal level, because the programme included funds for neighbourhood development. As Lelystad, Flevoland's capital, has a number of neighbourhoods lagging behind, the city has benefitted from OP West 2007-2013 using funding for public space improvement, civic neighbourhood meeting places and other projects as well as for projects connected to exploiting the tourism potential of the city's waterfront. In the second round of OP West there are indeed much less funding opportunities for Flevoland.

Another interviewee, however, outlined a broader view on the problems and issues faced by Flevoland with respect to EU funding: "for me, the most important thing is actually what we call here 'inclusive society' (...) that's what every citizen should belong to. So basically, preferably no poverty. You could also say jobs, jobs for those who can work (...) That's for me the inclusive society". Thus, social inclusion could also be seen an important issue for OP West, particularly in its second round.

² See Randstad Monitor 1995-2005, Randstad Holland international perspective, December 2006, TNO, Delft.

³ Eurostat. (2017). Share of renewables in energy consumption in the EU still on the rise to almost 17% in 2015. *Eurostat*.

The current programme addresses issues of competitiveness and business environment improvement, with an emphasis on smart city solutions, thus municipalities have used funds to promote incentives for innovative companies. One example of urban projects focusing on innovation cited by an interviewee, was the construction of a new rapid path for electric bikes between the local train station and the new Lelystad airport as an example of project connected to innovation and the smart city concept.

However, this shift in focus towards innovation and sustainability in the second programme, as stressed by one interviewee, entails opportunities mainly for businesses with a high level of innovation, which, as he argued, offered less chances for local authorities to take part in the programme. He notes, however, that a direct partner of the municipality of Lelystad (OMALA, a company in charge of airport redevelopment in Lelystad) is a beneficiary of the funds because of the sustainability aspects of the project. Similarly, another interviewee also stressed that the second programme focused more on competitiveness: "If you look from an economic point of view, that's basically we have to earn our money, so an innovative business is my priority two, because you can keep your competitive position up." This in turn means competitiveness at various scales: regional, national and at European level. The second programme is therefore coupled with a national innovation strategy: "How can you support businesses so that they continue to innovate, since we are not a region or a country with heavy industry (...) So Flevoland is not an industrial region at all [but] agriculture is a priority in this region and innovation on agricultural tools [is important], in the fields of agriculture and horticulture, especially innovation that takes place in greenhouses". The same interviewee highlighted the importance of the Technofonds initiative, which is an ERDF project in the OP West I programme that continues with support from OP West II: "which aims to support technical companies with grants, and occasionally also capital grants, so that companies can expand and provide employment in the region".

On a more critical note, another interviewee highlighted the fact that there are sometimes mismatches between programmes' priorities and needs, but stressed that currently this problem has been eliminated apart from the mismatch between the number of requests for funds on low-carbon energy sources and the funds available. The demand exceeding the amount of funding available also concerns financial Instruments: "for the revolving funds we see a lot of proposals, but not so much money [available]. That is one of the challenges."

3.1.3 Implementation framework and partnership structures

The approach to management of OP West is characterised by the central position of regional interests in the decision-making process. The key actors for OP West are the 4 main cities, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht – as well as the 4 provinces covered by the programme, namely Flevoland, Utrecht, North Holland and South Holland, representing 4 NUTS2 units. To reflect this peculiar setting 'G4P4' (4 cities, 4 provinces) was chosen as a subtitle for OP West in its both editions (see Figure 3.1). One can argue that this arrangement echoes the complexity of the Dutch subnational governance, characterised by constant flux, continuing search of the right regional governance formula, discussions on mergers of provinces and city-regions and cross-provincial coordination, and a complex institutional patchwork with no clear sub-national leadership role (Lambregts & Zonneveld, 2004; Salet, 2006; Hendricks, 2006; OECD, 2007, 2014).

Figure 3.1 OP West logotypes underlining the importance of the 4 key cities and 4 constituent provinces.



Sources: OP West I, OP West II

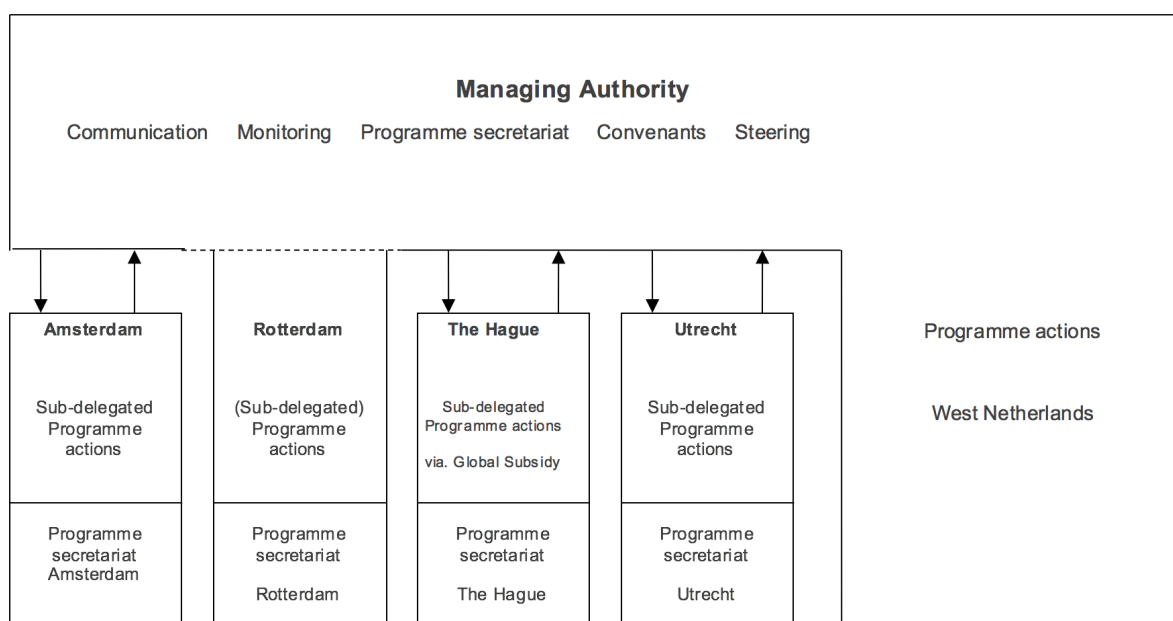
The Management Authority (MA) comprises the 4 cities and the 4 provinces, however it is based in the Rotterdam Municipal Government. It has judicial, financial and managerial responsibility for the OP West, for making payments to the cities for their respective parts of the OP and to the beneficiaries within that part of the region. The MA is supported by the programme secretariat (Programmabureau) under the auspices of the Province of Flevoland. The criterion underpinning the decision on the location of the programme secretariat was the choice of the public authority with the most experienced in EU Structural Funds, which was the Province of Flevoland, formally major beneficiary of Cohesion Policy (Objective 1 region until 2006).

As mentioned above, OP West is divided into a separate part for the West-Region as a whole and 4 individual sub-delegated programme parts for the G4 cities managed by the respective municipal governments, acting as 'Mediating Agencies' (Figure 3.2). The management of these various parts is not identical. At the same time, the constituent provinces of the West-Netherlands region have also defined their own interpretations and emphasis points with respect to OP West in order to direct the spending of their allocated part of the budget towards those. Flevoland did that in both programming periods in a special implementation document for each of the two editions of the programme, as was already outlined above.

The Monitoring Committee for OP West, the key partnership body in line with the EU requirements for the Structural Funds management, keeps track of the implementation of the OP and gives direction on strategic matters. It is chaired by Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, with the King Commissioner for the province Utrecht as a vice-chairman. It comprises representatives of the 4 provinces, 4 cities, of the remaining cities (the so called G27 cities plus the city of Almere in Flevoland), of the business community, of the social partners, of a knowledge institution, of the nature, environment and landscape organisations and of the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations. Representatives of DG Regio, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and of the MA play an advisory role. The Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations, together with the MA, are responsible for the secretariat of the Supervisory Committee. This set up, on the one hand, reflects the importance of the key municipal and provincial stakeholders in the programme area, but at the same time entails a degree of central government's supervision, with the chair roles reserved for representatives of the national executive.

In addition, the West Netherlands Steering Committee advises the MA in selecting projects to benefit from grants as part of OP West, using a pre-defined evaluation framework. Moreover, the Steering Committee's role is to stimulate a continuous inflow of funding applications from the four cities and 4 provinces through regular contacts. The Committee is chaired by a representative of the Province of North-Holland, swapping roles with the vice-chairperson from the Province of South-Holland halfway through the programming period, and comprises representatives of the 4 cities, 4 provinces, a single representative for the 27 smaller cities plus Almere and one for the Ministry of Economic Affairs, with a representative of the MA in advisory role, with support from the Programme Secretariat in Flevoland Province.

Figure 3.3 Management structure of OP West I 2007-2013



Source: OP West I 2007-2013

Moreover, for each of the urban subparts of the programme for the 4 cities, the Municipal Executive is designated as Programme Authority (PA), assisted by a steering committee of its own. While the exact composition of those committees varied, they also reflect the partnership principle, with a requirement for representation of the local authority, the Ministry of Interior, the economic and social partners.

This complex governance structure not only echoes the typical fragmentation and complexity of the Dutch territorial governance, but also is related with the geographic division of funding available for OP West in the so-called bulks. The rationale for setting these bulks, was to satisfy all the stakeholders' interests and ensure smooth cooperation during the implementation process. In this way, the parties know what they can expect from the OP in financial terms, and do not have to continuously discuss the allocation of resources during the review process. In addition, the bulks serve as means to protect the interests of rural areas and smaller municipalities where it may be more difficult to appraise projects and absorb funding. Therefore, the resources within the bulks are seen as 'own' means of the province or municipality in question. As a consequence, the influence of the steering Committee on the distribution of funding is perceived to be limited. Since funding is pre-distributed geographically, the need to critically consider each other's plans is low, which limits the content discussion in the Steering Committee.

The mid-term evaluation of 2007-2013 OP West (Berenschot, 2011) was generally positive about the decentralised implementation structure of the programme, however, raised doubts about the purposefulness of the delegation of Priority 1 (innovation) projects to cities, arguing that this contributes to unnecessary fragmentation. Instead, the evaluators argued for a regional-level management for innovation priority implementation, which would support cooperation of actors across the municipal boundaries and on a more regional scale. As the evaluation stressed, OP West I had a difficult start because of the differences in understanding of the division of roles between the programme partners. These tensions, however, were overcome gradually through informal contacts, which remained good.

For the second edition of OP West for 2014-2020, the management structure remained broadly similar, with a complex distribution of roles and responsibilities between the 4 cities and 4 provinces, in partnership with representatives of the smaller cities, the central government and economic and social partners. That said, greater emphasis was put on engagement of stakeholders in the discussion on the new priority axes, organised in thematic working groups on innovation, low carbon economy, and sustainable urban development, and on implementation structure. For each of these groups various relevant stakeholders were included, with a particular emphasis on the enterprises and knowledge institutions, that have played an important role in aligning the programme with the regional innovation strategy.

The implementation of the programme, as previously, entails 4 sub-delegated parts to be managed by the 4 key cities, this time as part of the new Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) instrument, which are drawn up by the Municipal Governments in collaboration with local partners. The ITIs correspond to city-specific 'visions' which were prepared in partnership with stakeholders (knowledge institutions, educational institutions, civil society organisations, companies, etc.) in several rounds of consultations.

The Monitoring Committee (MC) structure remained similar, however, a decision was made on an annually rotating presidency by the 4 cities and 4 provinces, thus putting a greater emphasis on a balanced and equal partnership in the management of the OP across the key stakeholders. Ministry of Economic Affairs is represented too, being in charge of ERDF in The Netherlands, and so is the Ministry of Interior, responsible for urban policy, which remains at the heart of OP West II, alongside a plethora of economic and social partners and civil society organisations representatives and, last but not least, a representative of the smaller cities. As previously, the MC members are expected to stimulate their own organisations and local stakeholders "contribute to a solid project pipeline, especially in the early stages" (OP West II, p. 76). The MA has also dedicated efforts to provide special training activities for the MC members to ensure that they have adequate knowledge to perform their functions.

While the MC has not changed much in 2014-2020 period, the project selection approach was substantially revised. Independent expert groups were established to perform a more objective evaluation of the projects, with its members appointed by the MC on the basis of a long list established with all potential stakeholders in the region (including universities, water authorities, economic and social partners, etc.). The overarching principle was to ensure neutrality in appraisal and a balanced composition of business sector and education/science/knowledge sector representatives, with no participation of representatives from umbrella, interest or lobby groups, or from any other party representing a wider interest. If a member of an expert group has a stake in the project bid in question, he or she is to be excluded from evaluation. This new setting was intended to ensure greater transparency and avoid a situation in which the potential beneficiaries of funding co-decided or advised on the project appraisal.

One of the interviewees, beyond outlining the governance structure described in the programme documents, has stressed the importance of the so-called support points, which are an important link between the companies and the MA, assisting them in acquiring funding, as well as the importance of the expert committee, to whom judgments about the project funding bids must be submitted for evaluation. What the interviewees also highlighted was the decentralised nature of the programme management, including a strong role of the partnership between the four provinces and the key cities and the delegation of the management of parts of the programme to the cities "which we consider an advantage. (...) In other words, you must leave the management to the region".

The Programme Director for OP West argued that the programme has a special governance scheme, in which there is just one programme officially, but "in the Dutch tradition (...) when you look to it

really closely, it is divided in 8 separate programmes [for each major city and each province involved], because every programme has their own money". This is based on an agreement among the authorities involved that is "not an agreement with Brussels, because Brussels say we have only OP WEST", but an agreement between the 4 provinces and the 4 main cities, which creates efficiency in delivering projects "because no-one wants to lose any euro to one of the other areas" and there are always a lot of proposals, "so it works quite well".

Another interviewee also praised this approach. According to him the OP "must be decentralised because the funds also come from this region, either from a municipality or from a province, sometimes some national money, which is then invested centrally. (...) [you have] one basket of resources. And then you have the [same situation] as in Flevoland in the 1990s with a multi-fund approach, which is also a good solution."

Another interviewee praised the structure of the programme, divided into 4 parts, in which everybody "owns" their projects and beneficiaries were close to the decision-makers: "If you had a national programme carried out from The Hague, you might be far more distant from your audience and your partners, I think [...]. This 'proximity' also has advantages when it comes to keeping the general public informed and aware of the programme."

The interviewees did, however, recognise the complexity of this decentralised management approach, by listing the 4 provincial partners and the four big cities that compose the consortium. He also highlights the different priorities among these partners, and mentions the imbalance between the big cities and the province of Flevoland, which is considered a "small partner" (the population of the province is roughly half that of the greater Amsterdam area). One interviewee, exemplified these differences by explaining the emphasis of the city of Amsterdam on the circular economy and on carbon emissions reduction, which is not shared by the Province of Flevoland which has already advanced well on the transition towards renewable energy, with a large amount of the energy produced in the province coming from wind mills.

Another governance issue pointed out by the OP Managing Director was that the MA of the OP WEST programme is based in the Municipal Government of Rotterdam, but only a few people involved in the programme are actually in Rotterdam. Most people involved work in the Province of Flevoland, because the programme secretariat is there. Thus, "[Rotterdam] has [...] a lot of people who are experienced and hence the city will be the managing authority for the programme [...] but then Flevoland will do most of the work".

Another interviewee pointed out that Flevoland used to have its own programme under Objective 1 in 2000-2006, with its own MA, but now needs to participate in the G4 / P4 scheme, where they are a "small partner" [and receive much less funding], but the advantage of Flevoland for that OP West is that "there is a lot of knowledge of people who have been involved in it [European funds] for years". Some interviewees have expressed disappointment with how the management of EU funds has changed over time in Flevoland from the Objective 1 era to present arrangement which not only restricted the opportunities for funding for the province not only through quantitative reduction of the allocation but also through concentration on the innovation theme, particularly in OP West II: "Because we were one region [until 2006], so you could have multiple funds, say the Agriculture Fund, Fisheries Fund, EFRO and ESF, you could have multiple goals, tackled in different ways [...] While now [...] it is all about innovation and we have ESF funds in the region, but the province does not work with them." Adding to this perception of Flevoland as being the loser in the distribution of funds in OP West, an interviewee noted that while the two bigger municipalities in Flevoland, Almere and Lelystad, effectively lobbied to stop a proposal to reroute one third of total funds to the 4 biggest municipalities in the Randstad, in 2014-2020 period funding that was supposed to go public space

improvement which could benefit those two cities ended up going to innovation instead, which limited the scope for acquiring funds by them.

For the Province it is also important that “all those people with knowledge” are kept in Flevoland, especially for the municipalities from the province: “If you move all the time to Rotterdam, people who live in the neighbourhood are not involved, so I think it's been very good for the program and for Flevoland too [that the programme secretariat is in Flevoland] because this creates short connections. We walk across the road and you can talk to someone.” However, as the same interviewee admitted, this proximity is less significant for the public, because what matters for the local citizens is that they “can see a sign which says European funding or there is an article in the newspaper about it.”

The daily cooperation between the MA in Rotterdam and the programme secretariat in Lelystad entails the OP Managing Director being on the payroll of Province Flevoland for 1 day a week, and being present in Lelystad for discussions, especially with the control-unit. In the programme secretariat in Lelystad, there are 13 people who control all the projects on a daily basis.

From the perspective of Flevoland, the specific management formula for the OP West, with sub-parts of the programme and informal division of funding was very successful and, as an interviewee stressed, the programme was quite widely known, especially since in Flevoland there are only 6 municipalities. “When you talk to people in Flevoland, they all know each other”, unlike in the other bigger provinces in OP West. Interestingly, in order to attract proposals there are separate calls for projects for Flevoland, but no general calls for the whole OP West. This is different for OP South as part of which there are calls for Limburg, Zeeland and Brabant provinces together. The projects from Flevoland thus do not compete with projects from other provinces, but with each other only.

The interviewees also reported a wider problem of bureaucratic burdens, which haunts Cohesion Policy implementation not only in the Netherlands. One that was mentioned in the interviews was, for instance, the tendering procedures: “The entire tender is checked from a to z, and they find you have done your job properly in 98% [of the document], but you have forgotten a very small piece, which does not matter for the whole process, and then they no, you haven't kept up with the prescriptions, we are going to cut 5%. And then you tell yourself, what's going on? people make mistakes everywhere and it can happen any time.... This is frustrating.” However, when asked if any of beneficiaries ever had to return unutilised funds to Brussels, one senior OP official answered categorically: “No never. Never. I work in structural funds and this was the third period, 2000-2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 and we did not get 1 euro back and we did not lose 1 euro [...] We finally get through difficulties like everyone, but we did not lose any money thus far. It should be a shame I think when we lose money, we don't have much, so we should be able to use it in a good way.”

In addition, interviewees raised the problem of general scarcity of domestic grants for public projects in The Netherlands, which is particularly felt in Flevoland, being a relatively poor province, particularly as compared to Limburg or Brabant which have substantial resources (“they swim in money”) thanks to profits from privatisation of provincial energy companies. Against this background, complaints were raised about the small allocation of ERDF funding to Flevoland, which makes competition for those funds fierce: “One out of three [proposals] gets the money, [and not in the first attempt. they often need to re-apply.]. We work with an expert committee and you have to have [at least] 70 points out of 100. (...) So, that is one of the challenges. (...) We bid for the revolving funds, we try to adapt to calls to blend more [with other funds]. Try to have some blending possibilities. So, we try to [...] to combine our JESSICA-funds for the cities. But for the grant schemes it is quite difficult.”

A challenge expected in the future relates to further reduction of funding available which may not be enough to make sensible programmes: “We don't really expect that there will be more ERDF funding

[for Flevoland]”. Those fears concern in particular the carbon emission reduction field: “Flevoland is quite good in making good project pipe-lines and to combine [integrate] programmes [...] Almost every project in low carbon is a public/private partnership and that is quite new in that area”. While there is a lot of demand for funding to support such innovative ‘combinations’ to promote renewable energy, it is not always interesting for the promoters of proposals to apply for European funds, because of the bureaucratic burden entailed.

Concerning partnership, as explained by the interviewees, there are informal forums for discussion apart from two formal forums: the monitoring committee and the overseers from the G4P4 (the 4 provinces and de 4 municipalities). The overseers from G4P4 have regular meetings to assess how the programme is going and work alongside the monitoring committee.

While, as was highlighted in the ex-ante evaluation for 2014-2020 OP West II, involvement of stakeholders in preparation of the programme was extensive, however, the interviewees nuanced that assessment. According to one of them, “when the program 2014-2020 started, we had quite a lot of consultations, large consultations, in every region and with every area, one with the universities, one with Flevoland, and so on [...] The public was invited but did not really participate.” The main stakeholder organisations, like universities and companies are represented in the monitoring committee, but each with only one representative.

More critical points were raised vis-a-vis the MC, in particular concerning its structure and the role for OP West: “What is contradictory for me is the structure of the monitoring committee. I was a representative there and I found it [to have] more of a ceremonial role than a driving role. You actually expect a committee of supervision that really matters, [a committee that] pushes buttons if things are not going well”. The working of the MC was described as follows: “There were meetings twice a year and then you could hear about progress made, and where the bottlenecks were”. However, while the members of the Committee could hope that it would help solve problems, they found out that this body had indeed insufficient influence. This raised concerns about the ineffectiveness of the monitoring of the OP due to “insufficient insight” into the management practice. This lead to tensions when “the information you get from the managing authority is sometimes different from the information you get from the monitoring committee. Sometimes there are difference of interpretation in legislation and then you can get blocked in the accountability phase because of very small problems. We have sometimes been quite unhappy about being confronted at some point during checks [...] the management authority and the monitoring committee work completely independently from each other. They work on behalf of Brussels, but each looks at laws and regulations from their own different perspectives to the point where it becomes impossible”.

Moreover, Flevoland adopted a system of “support points which are gatherings of interested stakeholders in different locations to get information about bids and projects. One interviewee, pointed out that these “support points” were very active in Flevoland and stakeholders are used to this format”. For example, “it was very busy at the launching-meeting for the Flevoland-program and [...] a lot of appointments were made [so that the steering-point would] go to the 6 municipalities and they did a road-show there”. In addition, Flevoland Province, in the past, had arranged a round table for SMEs for all the G4P4 partners and SMEs could easily find each other and get information about the programme, a model which was replicated locally by the 6 municipalities of Flevoland.

3.2 Assessment of performance

3.2.1 Programme performance

For the 2007-2013 period, mid-term evaluation by Berenschot (2011) provides some quantitative and qualitative insights into the effectiveness of the regional OPs, including OP West. By October 2010, the achievements of OP West exceeded the expectations particularly concerning the support for R&D and SMEs, with five times more R&D projects supported than expected (121 target, 606 actually supported) and sixteen times more SMEs were supported than was initially anticipated (535 targeted, 8607 actually supported). The performance was, however, below target values for projects aimed at supporting tourism (86% of target achieved), landscape values and environmental quality (54%), or supporting participation and social activation (50%). Measuring performance in terms of jobs created, there are differences across the priorities, with Priority 1 exceeding its target by (188%), while Priority 2 and 3 lagging behind (64% and 73% accordingly). However, the evaluation did not expect problems with meeting the targets by the end of the programme period.

One of the consequences of the establishment of the 'bulks' is the limited consistency between projects for the region as a whole (Berenschot, 2011). While it was initially expected that the limited availability of resources and a strong thematic focus would limit the number of applications, the number of applications, particularly in Priority 1, has exceeded expectations. Therefore, selection of projects had to be more restrictive.

A further consequence of the fragmentation of the programme implementation structure was the difference in approaches to project appraisal. While for the four big cities the local steering groups ensure genuine discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of bids for funding submitted, the steering group dealing with applications for the regional sub-part of the programme hardly played its role of applications evaluation because it was based on an informal 'pact of non-aggression' between the parties involved to make sure that no project is blocked by conflicting views of the assessors, which undermined the very purpose of this body.

The evaluators praised the role of the support centres for each of the sub-parts of the programme, which helped the prospective beneficiaries to prepare eligible and stronger applications for funding (Berenschot, 2011).

A survey among beneficiaries and intermediaries of the programme probed their opinions on the extent to which objectives of the OP were being reached. Interviewees are generally positive about the projects supported by the OP. Both Priority 1 projects (Innovation, Knowledge Economy and Entrepreneurship) and Priority Projects in Priorities 2 and 3 (Urban Innovation Power and Urban Attractiveness) are generally seen as contributing to the economic structure and the economic climate in real terms in the west of the Netherlands. Nevertheless, there are respondents who find that infrastructural projects (including the modernisation of industrial sites) were in line with the program targets to a lesser degree, as these projects would also have been funded by ERDF with public money.

Several respondents have indicated that it is advisable to focus more on projects in priority 1 with regard to the objectives (and thus the assessment framework). More focus could lead to a greater added value of the ERDF investment as a whole. At present, some do not find the effectiveness to be optimal due to the lack of focus, and the program is still too much a 'project carousel', in which there is little cohesion between the different projects.

Beneficiaries familiar with these objectives tended to agree that they were being reached (72% of beneficiaries surveyed), however, the share of beneficiaries of OP West with positive view on the goal achievement was smaller than those of the North and South OPs. Strikingly, 23% of OP West beneficiaries surveyed had no opinion about this, which was much higher than in other regional programmes. The intermediary organisations such as the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNO), the Chamber of Commerce, Syntens and regional development companies were more critical about the overall level of goal achievement. There are clear differences between the 4 Dutch regional OPs:

in the West, these actors are least positive (35%) followed by South (41%), then East (50%), and finally North (66%). This relatively low opinion on the goal achievement for OP West, however, could be related to the fact that unlike in the OP North, for instance, those intermediary organisations were seldom also beneficiaries of the programme.

Despite the positive opinions on performance of OP West 2007-2013 of the stakeholders, as reported in the mid-term evaluation, the evaluators found limited consistency between the projects and with other subsidy programs. This limits the scope for generating synergies and hence improving the impacts. They also expressed doubts about the alignment between the objectives of the European Commission vis-a-vis ERDF and the objectives of the programme partners. Finally, lack of coherence was also highlighted across the different sub-parts of the OP West, leading to fragmentation of efforts. On the positive side, however, added value was created through good cooperation between the beneficiaries and the programme secretariat, both during the submission of the application and during the implementation of the projects.

Table 3.5 Reported achievements in period 2007-2013

	OP West	OP South	Netherlands	Unit
Jobs created	5360	4026	18518	jobs
Start-ups supported	2597	1884	6072	number
Area of business parks modernised	108	447	no data	ha
Cooperation projects enterprises-research institutions	79	141	519	projects
Direct investment aid projects to SME	10826	3519	no data	projects

Source: Smętkowski et al. (COHESIFY WP3 country factsheets)

The reported achievements of OP West 2007-2013 are presented in Table 1.6. The comparison between the two programmes OP West and OP Zuid should be done bearing in mind that the former covers a much wider population and used an allocation that was nearly twice as big. Thus, nearly a third of all jobs created thanks to ERDF support in the Netherlands and more than a third of start-ups supported were in the OP West area. Tables 3.6 and 3.7 below outline the committed funding for OP West as of end of 2014, indicating all funding available was committed to projects.

Table 3.6 Funds commitment as part of OP West 2007-2013, 31 December 2014 (in million euro).

OP West cumulative	(2) ERDF	(3) Public match funding	(4) Private match funding	(5) Total match funding (3+4)	Total OP (2+5)
Target	311	393	67	460	770
Committed	334	513	257	770	1105
Over-commitment	24	121	190	311	334
Commitment in %	1,08	1,31	3,84	1,68	1,43

Source: OP West 2007-2013 Annual Implementation Report 2014.

Table 3.7 Funds commitment for the priorities of OP West 2007-2013 as of 31 December 2014 (in million euro)

Priority 1 (knowledge economy, entrepreneurship and innovation)	(2) ERDF	(3) Public match funding	(4) Private match funding	(5) Total match funding (3+4)	Total OP (2+5)
Planned	148	177	44	222	369
Committed	163	288	161	449	612
Over-commitment	16	110	117	227	243
Committed in %	1,11	1,62	3,64	2,03	1,66
Priority 2 (attractive regions)	(2) ERDF	(3) Public match funding	(4) Private match funding	(5) Total match funding (3+4)	Total OP (2+5)
Planned	54	72	8	81	134
Committed	55	84	27	111	166
Over-commitment	1	11	19	31	31
Committed in %	1,02	1,15	3,41	1,38	1,23
Priority 3 (attractive cities)	(2) ERDF	(3) Public match funding	(4) Private match funding	(5) Total match funding (3+4)	Total OP (2+5)
Planned	97	131	15	145	242
Committed	104	130	68	198	302
Over-commitment	7	-1	54	53	60
Committed in %	1,07	0,99	4,7	1,36	1,25

Source: OP West 2007-2013 Annual Implementation Report 2014.

Hardly any data is available on performance of OP West 2007-2013 specifically in the province of Flevoland, beyond the amount of ERDF funding distributed. Table 3.8 below compares the funding actually distributed as part of the different sub-parts of the programme up to the end of 2014, indicating that 22.5 million euro was distributed in Flevoland, which corresponds to roughly 12% of the total amount distributed as part of OP West. According to interviewees, in Flevoland there were a number of larger projects on innovation in the previous period, which were quite successful. Flevoland was able to renew a number of R&D-facilities and R&D-infrastructure, "so they are up to date now", allowing the province to boost its research potential. One of the biggest projects is a smart field lab, for automated composites, for instance.

Table 3.8 ERDF funding distributed per priority and per sub-part of OP West I 2007-2013.

Funds distributed	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	TOTAL
Province Flevoland	12099759	882405	9525214	-	22507379
Province Noord-Holland	8391636	5395684	-	-	13787320
Province Utrecht	5659874	628564	1575091	-	7863529
Province Zuid-Holland	22636988	8579259	-	-	31216247
Amsterdam	14447083	1999387	25275352	-	39722435
Den Haag	8460783	1869431	11096837	-	19557620
Rotterdam	12373480	3168012	14012629	-	26386108

Utrecht	4492037	267343	9301947	-	13793984
West Regio	-	-	-	9012281	9012281
Total	88561640	22790086	63482896	9012281	183846903

Source: OP West I 2007-2013 Annual Implementation Report 2014

Unfortunately, there are no ex-post evaluations available for the regional OPs specifically, while the national-level ex-post evaluation provides only insights on the country as a whole (Applica et al. 2016). However, some further insight on the programme performance was provided by the reflection document issued in 2014 by the MA (Kansen voor West, 2014a). By the end of the programme, the investments were overall 40% more than planned in 2007: 328 million euro from ERDF (311 million planned), 505 million euro from domestic public funding (393 planned) and 428 million euro from private sources (67 million planned). On other indicators, OP West 2007-2013 also outperformed the expectations, in most fields, as indicated in table 1.10 below, with worse than expected performance only for the number of projects supporting tourism or recreation and for projects related to participation and social activation. Finally, about 65% of ERDF funding was spent on 'Lisbon Strategy objectives' (63% planned).

Table 3.9 Targets achieved for OP West I 2007-2013

Indicator	committed	target
Gross created jobs	11.386	6.880
Number of R&D projects	86	121
Number of collaborations	102	88
Number of SMEs supported	11.968	535
Number of start-up businesses supported	2.366	268
Private follow-on investments obtained (in millions of euros)	487	31
Number of tourist/recreational projects	23	35
Number of renovated/new urban amenities	65	40
Number of projects related to entrepreneurship, urban/district economy	58	35
Number of projects related to participation, quality of life or social activation	47	84

Source: Kansen voor West, 2014a

The Dutch Court of Auditors' report on the effectiveness of spending on particular projects was much more critical, however. It flagged up a further problem stemming from distributing funds on 'first come, first served' principle, rather than on the basis of rigorous comparison and evaluation of quality of applications, which limited the effectiveness of ERDF spending (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2014). Thus, lesser quality projects could benefit from funding only because they were submitted first, whereas potentially more impactful projects could miss out on ERDF funding opportunities only due to late submission of a funding bid. That said, OP West was the only of the four regional programmes for 2007-2013 for which the Court of Auditors remarked that the project applications were actually assessed in an insightful manner in terms of their ability to offer 'value for money' using qualitative and quantitative indicators. However, while on paper the projects delivered what was promised, the effectiveness of their impacts was not clear. In fact, the quality and outcomes of the supported projects that were implemented were not analysed further. Funding was granted regardless of good or bad performance on the intended target values.

Concerning the effectiveness of the management structure, the mid-term evaluation of OP West for 2007-2013 period underscored disagreements on the roles of the eight key partners in the programme in the early phase of implementation, which were later smoothed out through good informal cooperation.

Finally, it is worth stressing that the performance of OP West I seemed to broadly reflect that of other programmes in the Netherlands. The national-level ex-post evaluation, while not being specific about the implementation structures for regional programmes, made similar conclusions as those of other documents about OP West, stating that “the overall structure of planning and managing the Structural Funds was an example of well-performing multi-level governance” (Applica et al. 2016, p. 14). It stressed that there was a balance between a central-level coordination by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and a decentralised strategy and implementation for the OPs, with strong role of cities, which allowed for tailoring measures to local needs and ensuring coherence (on the latter point the national-level evaluation is more positive than those of OP West specifically). This evaluation also praised the transparency of project selection process and engagement of a wide range of stakeholders in drafting of calls, and deemed the monitoring system to be ‘clear and transparent’ (p.15). That said, the report also stressed excessive bureaucratic burden on beneficiaries, particularly with respect to audit and control rules.

At present, it is too early to report on the achievement of the second programme. The ex-ante evaluation of the OP West II for 2014-2020 (Technopolis Group, 2014) commended the programme for its realism and decision to use the relatively small allocation of ERDF for the region for a limited set of priorities. The programme was also positively assessed from the point of view of its focus on the key threats and weaknesses of the region and the strategic fit with the domestic regional policies and in particular the regional innovation strategy (RIS3) as well as the national policy supporting top industry sectors, nine of which are clustered in territory covered by OP West II.

However, it also pointed to a set of shortcomings, particularly concerning the coherence and complementarity between the priorities and objectives chosen. This can also entail a degree of ambiguity about which kind of projects can and cannot be supported (this is particularly the case for the objective related to improvement of investment capacity of SMEs). These shortcomings, combined with the multitude of stakeholders involved and the fact that the budget of the OP is rather limited, may undermine the impacts through fragmented use of resources. A further critique concerned the weak strategic coherence between the objectives in the plans for ITIs in the 4 core cities and the cross-cutting priorities and objectives, which again may limit the overall impacts of the programme.

There are no mid-term evaluation reports available yet for OP West II and the interviewees provided only scant evidence on performance. There were only 3 projects mentioned in the 2016 annual report. The interviewees stressed that in the previous period, however, a lot was done for the SMEs. This emphasis on SMEs was a characteristic of Flevoland, according to the Managing Director of OP West interviewed. There was also a technological innovation aid-team for small SME’s, which was very successful. Furthermore, was a grant aid-scheme for technological innovation in two small enterprises, for improvement on their environmental profile and innovation. The already mentioned project called Technofonds also received support in 2014-2020 programme. This scheme received EU-money from 2000 to 2016. About every 2 years, funds were increased, for the equity in small and medium enterprises. According to one interviewee, an example of on-going successful project is called PowerParking.⁴ The project allows cars parked for longer periods at the airport of Lelystad to transfer electricity for other uses, which the car’s owner can exchange for the parking fee. At the time of writing, there were further innovation-projects for small and medium enterprises, 4 out of which located in Flevoland.

It is important to note that Flevoland puts an emphasis on revolving assistance in 2014-2020 period, as an interviewee stressed: “in Flevoland, we start now again with a revolving fund, also for small and medium enterprises. We don’t have grant-schemes anymore. In our ERDF-program, we increased the amount of revolving money from 10% in the period 2007 to 2013 to above 50% in the period 2014

⁴ <https://www.flevoland.nl/actueel/flevoland-presenteert-powerparking>

to 2020. So, half of the money is given away in revolving way and only half of it [is given] as grant. Flevoland has a special revolving fund for small and medium enterprises to get them through the prove of concept-phase of new product”.

For one interviewee, the main problem is the mismatch between objectives, defined elsewhere, and local needs, and the decreasing amount of funds available. The decentralised governance arrangements help match funds with demand, which means that no money is “lost” (not used by beneficiaries), but the interviewee highlighted the great number of applications towards carbon emission reduction and the small size of funds as a source of problems. According to him, that mismatch created a problem for the sustainability of projects, which depend on several sources of funding and whose governance is complex. Because of the complexity of funding schemes, projects can be in trouble when one of the funding sources fails. He gives the example of a big project of Flevoland. “It is a geothermal project from Luttelgeest, it is one of the biggest, and they should have started 1.5 years ago, but they did not start until now because there are problems with finance”. He explains that “finally, 1 of the 3 or 4 [partners] won’t sign and then they have to find new ones”, spending quite a lot of time in process. According to him, there is a great number of projects in carbon reduction in the Netherlands at the moment, thus there is lots of competition for partners and funding. Hence, European funds are much sought after, but are extremely difficult to get.

Overall, the officials interviewed agree that Cohesion policy funds are generally well spent, and programme objectives are nominally achieved. No money is ever returned to Brussels, which seems to be a very important point for them. The only drawback highlighted is of a bureaucratic nature: “If you spend well in the programmes, there’s nothing going wrong, but there’s so much ridiculous regulation that you think of [...] there are all kinds of checking procurements and then [a project] is checked from A to Z, and the entire tender is also checked, to see whether you worked well. If you have complied for 98% and then you have forgotten a very small piece, which does not matter to the whole process, they will say no, you did not completely keep up with what is prescribed, we are going to cut 5% [of the funds] and then you think what is going on? Because everywhere people make mistakes of course, it happens all the time [...] This is frustrating”.

This was confirmed by another official, for whom the excess of rules might get in the way of project success. “Well [...] you want the money to be properly spent and there are a lot of rules to play. They [the rules] sometimes go too far, [and] I can hardly explain them to SMEs or to executives. Yes, you have to keep your hours, yes, it must be signed by a qualified person. Yes, but I am a director, can I sign for myself? No that is not allowed”. He points to similar issues as the previous official, saying that a lot of their work involves “explaining, explaining, explaining”. “We must bring this section to controllers, who are going to look at the administration of the project. [But then] an accountant will check the final report when the project is done, and people can be brought to court over mistakes, or someone will come from Brussels. If you have bad luck, people [auditors] will come five times”. He noted that although it was important to adhere to compliance rules, it was “a pity” compliance sometimes cost lots of energy and money.

For another interviewee, one of the problems lies with the auditing authority, which controls the MA. “The information you sometimes get from the management authority is different from that of the audit authority, sometimes there are differences in interpretation in legislation and then you can [have problems] in the accountability phase for very annoying problems” which affect the governance of project funding. He highlights the fact that although the audit authority is formally part of the management authority, they work separately and their views do not always coincide.

For one of the officials interviewed, “because Flevoland has a lot of experience from European funds”, local politicians and representatives have lobbied for the simplification of the rules in Brussels. He recognises, however, that Dutch authorities sometimes manage to make things even more complicated, with an even more complex management structure than the one suggested by Brussels, and highlights the many changes in governance the programme has suffered since its first round,

now with 8 sub-programmes and the management authority based within the municipal administration of Rotterdam. Earlier, in the first round of the programme, Flevoland had more control over its own programme and this particular official found the direct contact with Brussels easier. "I have learned a lot from it". For him, the Dutch ministries of finances or the economy, for instance, make things even more complicated than the EU: "do you know the saying [we want to be] more catholic than Pope?"

According to the OP West Managing Director, "the good answer" should be equal priority. But on a closer look, the order of priority follows the order of the question (First priority is spending, second is compliance, and so on). That interviewee also noted that in the Netherlands, there are often problems related to the sustainability of projects: "ERDF seems to be the most attractive for larger sustainable projects, because it is obviously quite difficult money [...] So you have a lot of projects now with 30 beneficiaries and 1 project and 5 years of implementation [...] but I think in the Netherlands in the political area the worst thing you can do is lose money by not spending it. We don't want [to give] 1 euro back to Europe". But he ponders that, in general, all the aspects are correctly implemented.

3.2.2 Partnership

On paper, it appears that OP West did promote engagement of various stakeholders in the debates, in the implementation process, through the sub-parts of the programme for the 4 main cities and for the region as a whole, and also in monitoring, mainly through the Monitoring Committee. While the Monitoring Committee for OP West 2007-2013 operated in accordance with its mandate and purpose, ensuring representation of actors from various sectors and operating at various levels (from local, to regional and national), the institution created only limited scope for meaningful engagement stakeholders. It was concerned with the 'big picture', while being 'distant' from the actual implementation issues (Berenschot, 2011). This was partly justified by the mandate of the Committee, supposed to mainly oversee the implementation, however, the evaluators stressed that the institution struggled to show its added value for two reasons. First, a low visibility of the programme as such and, second, a feeling among the stakeholders that it offered very limited scope to represent their views and interests, particularly those of the provinces having only one joint representative, which undermined the legitimacy of this body. The extent to which the partnership structures are actually accountable to civil society is rather limited, given that the Monitoring Committee had only a small number of representatives of non-state actors, met only twice a year and struggled from poor visibility.

The survey conducted among Flevoland stakeholders largely confirms these assertions, even though its results must be considered cautiously given the low response rate. Asked "how well - in your opinion - have Cohesion Policy funds been used in your municipality and region? most respondents said "very well" and "well". The stakeholder survey seems to confirm respondents were both well informed about the funds and satisfied with results. No respondents said they ignored the funds or their impacts on the region. While stakeholders seem aware of the decrease in funds, they do not see this as a major problem for the region. The responses also indicate that lack of cooperation between project partners did not have a significant impact on the programme.

Stakeholders surveyed agree, however, that the level of bureaucracy and "complication" of the programme has a negative impact on how funds are used [Q5], with most respondents saying that "excessive cumbersome reporting" had a very significant negative impact on the programme.

Moreover, most respondents agree with the assertion that "The way the programme partnership operates is inclusive, open and fair" and most of them also think that cohesion funds are adequately managed and there is low level of corruption. However, the responses are mixed when it comes to

agreeing with the statement that Cohesion policy funding is used for projects that are the most valued by the citizens.

3.3 Assessment of added value

The Berenschot evaluation (2011) of 2007-2013 programme stressed that the good working relations between the programme partners in the four cities and four provinces with research institutions and intermediaries resulted in establishment of strong links that had positive effects beyond the implementation of the programme and ERDF-supported projects. The first edition of the OP West triggered much higher than expected interest from SMEs, which resulted in private sector co-financing contribution beyond expectations, drawing a total investment of circa 1.1 billion euro (Kansen voor West, 2014a).

A further aspect of added value was the better-than-expected impact on SMEs. The mid-term evaluation stressed that the R&D projects supported led to eight times more private follow-up investment than what was expected (Berenschot, 2011).

Finally, OP West 2007-2013 added value through its capacity to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship through its 'open approach' to project appraisal, which was intended to prevent potentially good projects falling out of the competition due to formal reasons. Instead the support offices set up by the eight key partners in the programme played an important role in assisting the potential beneficiaries in meeting the eligibility criteria in an interactive process and stimulating new collaborations between them (Kansen voor West, 2014a).

4. Cohesion policy communication

4.1 Approach to communication

This section basically refers to the communication around the OP West programme, from which Flevoland is one of the eight partners (see section 1.1 for the geographical area and volume of funding of this programme).

There are no communication plans exclusive for the province of Flevoland. The communication priorities and activities related to Cohesion policy are decided at the level of the OP West, which prepares the plans for the different periods. The responsible body for communication is the Management Authority.

The Netherlands has a singular approach to Cohesion policy communication, following its administrative tradition of cooperation and coordination. Cooperation among the four operational ERDF programmes in the Netherlands - OP West, East, South and North - started already in the 2007-2013 period. Perceiving that they shared the same challenges, they considered more efficient and practical to work together. Their cooperation led to setting up the Europaomdehoek.nl (Europe at the corner) website, accessible to the general public, to showcase the ERDF projects, making Cohesion Policy and Europe closer and more concrete to the public.

More importantly, a joint communication strategy was established for the 2014-2020 period for the four ERDF programmes in close collaboration and consultation with other European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds, which is used to prepare the communication plan for the period, and the annual activity plans at OP level.

4.2 OP West Communication plan 2007-2013

The communication plan of OP West 2007-2013 explicitly mentions that communication is considered as an important policy instrument in the implementation of OP West. Communication is understood as all exchange of information between the Management Authority of OP West and the various target groups. This concerns both internal communication and external communication, for which all efforts have to be done to make the process run smoothly.

The role of communication in OP West is primarily to raise awareness about the opportunities offered by the programme to potential beneficiaries. Further, OP West communication contributes to the promotion of awareness of the EU's activities in the broader public and other target groups. Adequate communication activities act as lubricants and contributes indirectly to a better image of Europe and other co-financing parties.

OP West follows the European Commission's promotional and publicity rules laid down in EC Regulations No. 1080/2006, 1083/2006 and 1828/2006. The OP-West programme applies the ERDF communication requirements in its communication activities and means of communication, ensuring that grant recipients and project executives comply with the EU communication rules: making people know that the project is funded with a ERDF contribution; and focusing communication on the (local) society and the project participants. This is done using various means of communication, such as information and building boards, website, memorials, audiovisual / written information and publication material.

The formal communication structure of OP West consists of:

- External communication to the different audiences, which includes verbal, print and digital communication. This type of communication makes the most significant contribution to achieving the objectives of OP West;
- Internal communication within the organisation of the programme and its associated network of back-office organisations, which is mostly verbal, in consultation and meetings of the Monitoring Committee, Steering Groups, Management Authority, and eight Support Points (in the 4 large cities and 4 provinces). Minutes from these meetings are distributed to the relevant target groups. Some related activities are organised to promote the link between the various internal (communication) target groups and their networks.

The OP West 2007-2013 communication plan stated three strategic aspects:

- Dealing with complexity: OP West has a relatively large area with four provinces and the four largest cities in the Netherlands, whose great ambition is to belong to the top-5 regions of Europe, what asks for significant efforts in different areas;
- Collaboration: important because some provinces have experience with EFRO, others not. Joining efforts can provide added-value;
- Visibility: as the experience shows that giving examples of projects and good practices is a practical reference for potential beneficiaries.

As the communication at project level is considered of great importance, the MA has invested a lot of time in the project managers. Several times a year there have been information meetings to clarify matters such as project administration, law and regulation and communication. In addition, there were expert meetings for projects with similar subjects, such as energy-related projects and creative projects. Furthermore, the communication plan 2007-2013 had the following keywords:

- Collaboration: all activities are directed to bring parties together. Collaboration also offers internal benefits: learning why something went wrong provides insight and helps prevent obstacles in the future;
- Transparency: Many programmes include political and private parties, what can make processes very unclear. It is therefore of the utmost importance that all processes and decisions, including whether or not granting grants, should be as transparent as possible. In the interests of the support for, and the image of, the programme, no suspicions of "backroom politics" are possible;
- Visibility: to give a more concrete impact on the effects achieved through the programme, reports are regularly made on approved and on-going projects. Reports give a clear picture of how OP West - and explicitly the European contributions - are being made. Consistently making the results visible, also contributes to a better image of Europe;
- Good accessibility: open, accessible and flexible. Project applicants and internal partners are not customers, but should be treated as such. In order to succeed in making OP West it is important to think from outside to inside. This applies to (potential) project applicants as well as for the internal partners.

Table 4.1 Communication strategies and plans overview

Communication strategies/plans					
2007-2013			2014-2020 (at national level)		
Main objectives	Measures	Target groups	Main objectives	Measures	Target groups
Making the external target groups acquainted with the possibilities of the ERDF support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting visibility of OP West content - Clarifying the rules to apply for the grants 	Potential beneficiaries: firms regional and local authorities, housing corporations, training centers, etc.	Phase 1: To introduce the target groups with the new programs and methods	Not specified	Potential beneficiaries
Promotion of awareness of the EU's and ERDF activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting suitable projects and the use of programme subsidies - Publicizing the results of projects and programmes 	Citizens in West Netherlands, regional and national media, Europe	Phase 1: To get high quality projects	Not specified	Potential beneficiaries
			Phase 2: To show results and effects of European money	Not specified	Intermediaries, potential beneficiaries and public
			Phase 2: Promoting a more positive feeling and involvement with Europe on base of the good results.	Not specified	Intermediaries, potential beneficiaries and public
			Phase 2: Promoting the use of ERDF, ESF and other	Not specified	Intermediaries, potential beneficiaries and public

			European funds in the future.		
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Sources: G4P4, 2007; Kansen voor West, 2014b

Other significant measures of the 2007-2013 period were:

- Increasing knowledge about the specific possibilities in the programme among the different target groups, and especially potential grant applicants;
- Promoting a positive attitude of potential grant applicants towards their contribution to the achievement of the programme objectives;
- Strengthening the image of the EU;
- Increasing (public) knowledge about EU and ERDF activities.

Each year an Action plan communication, distinguishing external and internal communication, was prepared in order to implement the objectives of the overall Communication plan. At the end of each year the communication activities are evaluated and the lessons taken into the next Action plan. Since 2011, the emphasis has been on 'the general public'. The main message was: 'Look, this is happening with European money in your neighbourhood'. This means that projects play a central role, as reliable senders which deliver credible and personal messages to the specific target groups. These small target groups together form the 'big public'.

The Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs), posted on the website, summarise the main communication activities of the year, paying attention to the main communication measures and means. A midterm evaluation of the implementation of the 4 Dutch ERDF regions was undertaken during 2011 by Berenschot, an independent consultant, which included the evaluation of communication (see next section).

4.2.1 National OP communication strategy 2014-2020

In the following period, the OP West communication activities were based on the communication strategy of the four regional OPs (2014). In the period 2007-2013, the preparation of a communication plan for the whole period was mandatory, but it was proved to be impossible to formulate a communication plan for a period of seven years. The period is too long to be able to foresee unexpected events, which sometimes lead to a drastic change of course and a change of activities and resources; as it was during the 2008 financial crisis. In the period 2014-2020 it is mandatory to prepare communication strategy, defining the longer-term goals, how the different parties want to work together, and what the common 'tone of the music' will be. The annual communication plan of the fund or programme may describe the specific actions in the field of communication. Each year, these communication plans are adapted to the situation that is currently in place. This widely formulated communication strategy is an overarching of the communication year plans.

4.2.2 Indicators

Four output indicators were defined in the 2007-2013 communication plan for OP West, which mentioned that their results and impact would be stated in the annual reports. The Berenschot (2011) midterm evaluation of the four Dutch ERDF regions provided a longer list with output indicators and its results (see second table).

Table 4.2 Monitoring indicators in communication strategies and plans 2007-2013

Communication tools	Output indicators
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Website	number of hits (visitors)
Kick-off event	number of attendants versus number of invitations
Events	idem
Free publicity	number of announcements in the media

Source: G4P4, 2007

Table 4.3 Monitoring indicators in the mid-term evaluation of communication strategies for Dutch Ops 2007-2013

<i>Communication tools</i>	<i>Output indicators</i>	<i>OP West results</i>
Kick-off meetings	number of meetings	3
	number of visitors	485
Information events	number of events	16
	number of visitors	945
Events for a broad audience	number of events	41
	number of visitors	41.896
Website OP West 9-12-09 until 10-10-2010	number of visitors	45.571
Website Europa om de hoek 9-12-09 until 10-10-2010	number of visitors	8.265
Free publicity	number of press releases	16
	number of news items in media (incl. local media)	37
Brochures/leaflets	number of printed copies	5.000
Newsletter	number of issues	7
Annual implementation report	number of issues	3
	number of printed copies	200

Source: Berenschot, 2011

4.2.3 Budget

Only the 2007-2013 communication plan indicates the sum allocated for communication activities, according to the different communication means (see table 2.4).

Table 4.4 Allocation of funding for communication activities in OP West in 2007 and 2014-2020 periods

<i>Total allocation</i>	<i>OP West communication</i>	<i>Unit</i>
Allocation [2007-2013] Total	1,6 million	EUR
Communication staff	765.000	EUR
Website	40.000	EUR
Maintenance website	40.000	EUR
Representation, flags, videos, photos, day-trips, etc.	335.000	EUR
Brochure	12.500	EUR
Development of graphic identity	5.000	EUR
Application of graphic identity	62.500	EUR
Kick off event	50.000	EUR
Events	250.000	EUR
Communication control	40.000	EUR
Allocation [2014-2020]	Not available	EUR

Source: G4P4, 2007

4.2.4 Governance

In OP West communication, it is considered important to make as much use as possible of existing consultation structures and networks. This includes the communication of the Steering Committee and Monitoring Committee directors to their own networks and relationships, as well as the use of communication tools (such as newsletters and websites) of the parties involved in the opportunities for OP West. In particular, the members of the Steering Committee and the Monitoring Committee can act as ambassadors towards social organizations. But the policy at OP West is that most of the communication to the public is done through the projects and stresses the achievements projects themselves.

Since October 2007, the OP West Management Authority has a communication officer working full time, based in the municipality of Rotterdam (AIR 2007). During the same year a work group communication was established chaired by the Management Authority communication officer and with representatives of the partners, which gathers regularly to see the possibilities to bring Europe close to the broad public (AIR 2008). Berenschot (2011) mentions that the West region is the only region in which most of the communication tasks is carried out by the partners, which have a more direct contact with the beneficiaries and the public. Partners have their own staff working for communication goals, and almost every province has an own website with information about European subsidies.

There are also regular meetings of the Management Authority communication officer with representatives of the other Management Authorities and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and an annual INFORM meeting with communication officers from all Europe (AIR 2009). Consequently, there is a relatively high level of cooperation and coordination of OP West with (communication staff of) provinces and local authorities participating in OP West. This cooperation is also with intermediaries and relevant stakeholders. This was verified by the Berenschot evaluation, which mentioned the strong links between the relevant programme partners, knowledge institutions and intermediaries, which have a positive effect that goes beyond the performance of the OP. In Flevoland, the cooperation and coordination seems even stronger than in other provinces. This is related to their development path: Flevoland is a very young and relatively small province, with only six municipalities, what facilitates vertical and horizontal contacts among managers and all those involved in EU programmes. But despite several attempts, the Flevoland communication official did not accept our invitation to be interviewed as part of the COHESIFY case study research.

Table 4.5 Governance framework in communication

<i>OP West 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 (no change)</i>
<i>Communication networks</i>
Partners: provinces of North Holland, South Holland, Utrecht and Flevoland, linked with the Municipalities within each of the four provinces
Partners: Cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht
Intermediaries: Chamber of Commerce, development agencies, knowledge institutions, private sector
At higher level, other Management Authorities and the Ministry of Economic Affairs
<i>Bodies responsible for implementation of the measures</i>
Management Authority
Partners: provinces of North Holland, South Holland, Utrecht and Flevoland
Partners: Cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht

Sources: G4P4, 2007; Berenschot, 2011; Interviews with stakeholders

Even if intermediaries are not responsible for communication, they also carry out some related tasks, such as linking parties who can jointly submit a proposal (18%); write subsidy proposals for parties (71%); provide explanation of the criteria to be met (65%); and explain the possibility of the programme to potential applicants (65%) (Berenschot, 2011).

The interviewed stakeholders confirmed the starting point of the Dutch national communication strategy for Cohesion policy, to work together for common goals, remarking its singularity within Europe. For their common goals, ESF, ERDF, the fishery, agricultural and cross-border funds work together as many times and as much as they can. Interviewees also remarked their respect and space for different communication approaches, or other aspects in other funds. For their activities, their main policy is to involve projects, which are considered much more convincing for the general public. In such way, instead of 'EU propaganda', they can show that the EU money was well spent.

This approach has constituted a shift from the original EU recommended approach, which stated that every OP and every fund has to carry out the activities on their own. The Dutch government proposed to work together on communication for the country as a whole, for which they had a big discussion with the European Commission before this proposal was approved.

Most stakeholders interviewed mention a significant priority granted to the communication of Cohesion policy, especially at project level. At programme level, communication is all the time on the table of the monitoring committee. But in terms of staff time it does not represent such a priority because the policy is that the projects should tell the story, not the programme, as the former are more effective. It would not work otherwise in the Netherlands, they claim, because being a net contributor, people would think it is only pumping around the money. Other stakeholders are more critical about the priority given to communication, even by members of the Steering Committee, who would not contribute to communication of Cohesion policy in practice, but only on paper. However, all interviewees recognised that projects are the most important communicators.

The stakeholders survey has revealed that the most used communication tools to disseminate information about the use of Cohesion policy funds are the programme's websites, followed by workshops, seminars, brochures, leaflets and newsletter. Videos are also used frequently, as well as plaques and billboards with the EU flag. Local and regional newspapers are another fairly frequent tool for communication. Television, radio, national newspapers, press release and social media are used with less frequency. Finally, advertising campaigns on television and/or radio are almost never used.

4.3 Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies

The Berenschot (2011) evaluation of OP West distinguishes four target groups: the public, the intermediaries (such as the Chamber of Commerce, development agencies and subsidy advisors), the potential beneficiaries and the beneficiaries.

4.3.1 Methods used in the evaluation

For the task, the research approach and the research framework were first defined in consultation with the client. Then, all relevant quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The available documentation was inventoried and studied. A broad interview round, consulting about 50 people was undertaken. A survey was conducted for the four different target groups: the public, potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries and intermediary organizations. A media scan of the national and regional journals was conducted per OP. The collected material was analysed and tested it in group

discussions with the OPs communication professionals and with the managers of the OPs program offices.

4.3.2 Analysis of approach to communication taken

The Berenschot evaluation report considered the awareness of ERDF and the individual programmes as satisfactory. It was found that approximately half of the public and potential beneficiaries were familiar with the fact that the EU provides grants for projects in the field of innovation and attractive cities and regions. On the other hand, the ERDF programme is less known, even though more than 35% of the public and potential beneficiaries knows the ERDF fund. Beneficiaries and intermediaries are, evidently, familiar with ERDF, the OP of their region and its objectives.

4.3.3 Implementation experiences

The most significant implementation experience is a major annual public event that was established in 2010, initially with a stand at Utrecht Central Station with a joint photo exhibition of ESF and ERDF projects. A year later, the 'Europe around the corner *kijkdagen* (open information days) began as a national event, for the public to take a closer look at the projects. The open information days was positively mentioned by all interviewed stakeholders. The European Commission was particularly pleased with this form of cooperation and with the *kijkdagen* event. In base of its success, the first prize of the prestigious European Public Communication Award was awarded to the Dutch ERDF OPs in 2015. Later, it was decided to organise it at regional level in the four OPs.

4.3.4 Achievements and results

The findings regarding the use of the different communication tools OP West region showed that, compared to other regions, it organizes more start meetings, events and information meetings. This is due to the size and structure of the region, in which the four major cities and four provinces organize their own information days, events and meetings. This also explains why the number of visitors to the events is much higher than in the other regions.

The number of visitors to the OP West website is average. OP West produced a much higher number of brochures than other regions, but did not publish a newsletter at the time. For the second part of the programme, it was decided to prepare a summary of the annual report, supplemented by articles of "human interest" and attractive projects, to reach a broader public.

The number of press releases (16) was the lowest of the four regions. The report remarked that, in OP West, press releases were sent by the support points and the programme agencies, but these were not counted in the table. On the other hand, national and the regional newspapers spend little attention to ERDF. This attention is usually about ERDF in West, about ERDF in general, or on national themes.

Regarding the familiarity of the OP West communication means by potential beneficiaries, intermediaries and beneficiaries, the evaluation identified the website as the most well-known tool. Beneficiaries evaluated the information meeting very good (see Tables).

Table 4.6 Acquaintance with OP West communication tools, per target group

	Potential beneficiaries	Intermediaries	Beneficiaries

Brand image	100%	40%	74%
Website	50%	46%	75%
Articles in media	100%	43%	60%
Folders/brochure	50%	71%	54%
News brief	100%	86%	56%
Information meetings	0	50%	77%
Events	0	67%	67%
Mailing	0	100%	55%
Advertisements for the ERDF programme	50%	50%	0
Annual report	0	75%	67%
Contacts on symposia, fairs, etc.	0	71%	50%

Source: Berenschot, 2011

Table 4.7 Positive evaluation of OP West communication tools, among target group respondents that know the tools

	<i>Potential beneficiaries</i>	<i>Inter-mediaries</i>	<i>Beneficiaries</i>
Brand image	17%	59%	49%
Website	33%	77%	89%
Articles in media	33%	41%	20%
Folders/brochure	33%	41%	35%
News brief	50%	41%	14%
Information meetings	17%	47%	68%
Events	17%	18%	12%
Mailing	17%	24%	15%
Advertisements for the ERDF programme	33%	12%	1%
Annual report	17%	24%	4%
Contacts on symposia, fairs, etc.	33%	41%	14%

Source: Berenschot, 2011

4.3.5 Effectiveness in raising visibility and awareness about EU funding

An important objective in the communication plan is the awareness with the ERDF, the OP's and the role of the EU in both of them. Therefore, Berenschot (2001) investigated up to what extent different target groups (general public, potential beneficiaries and intermediaries) were familiar with European subsidies, ERDF and/or the OPs. However, in the West region there was no target value nor baseline measurements to compare the results. Therefore, it is difficult to state up to what extent the visibility and awareness of the policy and funds is attributable to the communication around ERDF.

In the West region the intermediaries, persons in companies and organisations that pay more attention to the grants, knew that EU funding was available for projects in the fields of innovation, knowledge economy and entrepreneurship, attractive regions and attractive cities. And two thirds of them could also name specific projects. The awareness among intermediaries in the West region was comparable to the other regions in the Netherlands.

Table 4.8 Familiarity of target groups with the provision of EU subsidies in the field of innovation, knowledge and entrepreneurship, attractive regions and attractive towns

	<i>General Public</i>	<i>Potential beneficiaries</i>	<i>Inter-mediaries</i>
I am not acquainted with it	54%	49%	0
I have heard about it, but I don't know about which programme or projects it is about	40%	47%	33%
I am acquainted with it and know the programme or projects that get subsidies	2%	5%	67%

Source: Berenschot, 2011

Naturally, ERDF is much better known among intermediaries and beneficiaries. Almost all intermediaries and beneficiaries in West know the ERDF and know what it is. In the West region, the familiarity among the intermediaries is higher than in the whole country. Nearly all intermediaries and beneficiaries who are acquainted with the ERDF, know that it is an EU subsidy programme.

Table 4.9 Familiarity with ERDF fund, per target group

	<i>General Public</i>	<i>Potential beneficiaries</i>	<i>Inter-mediaries</i>
I never heard about it	66%	67%	0
Sounds familiar but I don't know what it is	24%	23%	7%
I know what it is, but I have never used it	8%	9%	41%
I use it / I am related to it	2%	1%	52%

Source: Berenschot, 2011

Among the intermediaries, the share of familiarity with the operational programmes is much larger than in the other target groups; almost 80% of the OP is known to a greater or lesser extent. The intermediaries are also aware that these programs are linked to an EU subsidy programme.

Table 4.10 Familiarity with OP West operational programme, per target group

	<i>General Public</i>	<i>Potential beneficiaries</i>	<i>Inter-mediaries</i>
I never heard about it	84%	94%	22%
Sounds familiar but I don't know what it is	11%	1%	15%
I know what it is, but I have never used it	3%	5%	22%
I use it / I am related to it	2%	0	41%

Source: Berenschot, 2011

Six out of ten beneficiaries can recall the goals of the ERDF programme. The same proportion can be seen among the intermediaries. In the West region, intermediaries and beneficiaries know less about the objectives of the ERDF programmes than in the rest of the Netherlands.

Table 4.11 Beneficiaries and intermediaries that can identify the goals of the programme

	<i>West</i>	<i>Total</i>
Beneficiaries	61%	72%
Intermediaries	63%	71%

Source: Berenschot, 2011

This communication image that emerges from the evaluation, however, was somewhat nuanced by the stakeholder survey and interviewees in Flevoland. In the survey, communication of the programme was considered satisfactory by the respondents and considered communication easily accessible. However, when asked if "In your municipality/region Cohesion policy funding goes to investment projects which are most valued by the local residents", half of the respondents agreed and half neither agreed nor disagreed. This reflects, to some extent, the fact that policies and funds are not communicated well to broader civil society, and some of the policies financed by the funds seem far from the worries of common citizens.

In the eyes of the interviewees, first, the communication with partners is close, direct and effective. Partners and officials know each other and programs are well advertised and communicated among the network of actors involved in the OP. But concerning broader civil society, structural funds enjoy little attention. One official even used a Dutch expression that means "they don't care."⁵ Citizens and civic associations care about what they can see: "new amenities, business or roads, bike tracks (...) there are all kinds of realizations of projects that can be seen". he highlighted that information was always provided, "who funded the project? Yes, but who cares?" The message that comes across is on the investment itself and not about the scheme or policy behind it: "you have of course many initiatives to communicate via your website or newspaper articles, press releases, interviews, about your results. But it's about [the project], actually, not where those resources come from. [The acronym] ERDF doesn't say anything to anyone. [Also] Structural Funds [...] and Cohesion policy". It may thus be an "illusion" to expect citizens or organizations to follow the whole organisational line of a project: "Hey, here is tax money, this is going to the government, and there is a programme that comes from Brussels, so the money comes back to the government, the government shares it to the region and now we are going to spend it. Who wants to go know how this works? That's my personal opinion".

This is confirmed by another communications official, who highlighted the fact that the main communication efforts were focused on partners, and not on the general public. The general public is more focused on projects and they actually "don't care where the money comes from", although the source of funding is always visible on billboards and websites.

This has also to do with the amount of funds and their relative importance in relation to other funds available (national and province-level). "In perspective, they [Cohesion funds] are so small and they are so specific, they are not for the general public, so there is not a grocery around the corner who can ask for funds. It is the cities and the big organisations like your university the ones who ask for funds and the clusters of knowledge institutions and SMEs, for example. Thus, the general public has nothing to gain knowing about the Cohesion Funds. It's different in the southern and Eastern parts of

⁵ "Het zal hem een worst wezen" literally translates: "It will seem like a sausage to them".

Europe but not here. There is no infrastructural work, when you look around there is nothing to be seen. There is no bridge, there is no school, there is no square, there is nothing”.

The emphasis is, therefore, on accomplishments and on communication from beneficiaries to the public (rather than communication from the managing authority or the communications authority), because the public is more likely to believe in accounts coming directly from beneficiaries who can show how the money was well spent. This official adds “And we also found out how very important it is to let the project tell the story. If they do, as I said, they are believed and not us. We mainly take a step back and let them do the talking and what we do, what all our partners do and what I am doing when asked is to support the project, how to communicate.” However, one official highlighted that for the 2007-2013 programme, a book was produced with projects that would be implemented [in Flevoland] in the coming years, their possible connection with the European policies, whether they are eligible for the funds, etc.

A communications official interviewed claimed that members of the Steering Committee did little to communicate about Cohesion funds to the public, because there was little interest: “Maybe Europe is important but European money is not important [for Flevoland]. Cohesion funds are something very abstract”. This is confirmed by other officials, who say people are not interested in what happens in the “back office”.

Throughout the interviews, the general message was that cohesion funds are well communicated to stakeholders and partners, especially because of the decentralised nature of the programmes in the Netherlands, “we are very close to implementation”. But the programme is too technical and complicated to appeal to broader civic society, who focuses on the tangible results of the programme. Therefore, a communication strategy aiming at letting beneficiaries tell their stories of success is adopted.

4.3.6 Policy lessons and recommendations

Berenschot (2011) mentioned important improvement opportunities for communication of Cohesion policy in the Netherlands. On the one hand, it argued that, in a subsequent subsidy period, the EU should be able to clarify the scope for communication and, on the other hand, that the communication specialists can take more initiative to profit from the present freedom of writing the communication plans and their translation into resources and activities. In addition, the EU should make the regulation less restrictive and more inspiring to clarify the scope for communication in a subsequent subsidy period. This would lead to more creative strategies and approaches.

Furthermore, Berenschot supported the idea of communication specialists to address communication in a more generic way for the whole of the Netherlands and to be region-specific in the elaboration. This could be more efficient and effective.

Further, the quality and effectivity of the communication could be increased if an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) is made for the communication plan, which may be used as input for informed choices in the communication approach. Berenschot advised to do this for a subsequent period. The communication specialists indicated that making a SWOT analysis would be useful presently, to get a good input for the communication of the results of the programme during the current grant period.

Additionally, target group research would be useful in the continuation of the current and the next subsidy periods, to get input for an effective communication plan, considering resources and activities, and insight into ERDF and (comparable) arrangements. Although no target group research has been done, potential intermediaries were approached.

The quality of the core messages in all regions were considered sufficient and at the same time, for subsequent subsidy periods, each region could enrich the core message with ideas from other regions, to improve the who, where, why, when and how of the process. In spite of the fact that the effectiveness could not be measured, the core message could vary by target group in a subsequent period, but also in the continuation of the current subsidy period, to increase effectiveness.

The conclusions and recommendation for OP West region of the Berenschot (2011) evaluation about communication state:

- Information meetings are (very) well appreciated by the beneficiaries in particular. The target groups also indicate that this tool could also be used during the implementation of the programme. In view of the success, this is a good suggestion;
- The website – which has the largest communication range – is the best-known communication medium for intermediaries and beneficiaries, and it is often (very) well appreciated by them. West should use the website to target potential beneficiaries in a next subsidy period. Given the fact that the costs involved with the website are a relatively small part of the budget, this seems a sensible investment;
- The number of brochures produced in Wets was larger than in other regions, while the target groups that acknowledge the brochures is lower than the average in the Netherlands. The appreciation for the brochures is also lower than the average in the Netherlands. As an improvement proposal, the report recommends to use targeted information via mail or mail. A brochure may be available, but in order to make optimal use of it, qualitative improvement seems necessary;
- To promote the EU in the phase in which the projects (and thus the ERDF programme) are successful, the West region could use press releases more frequently (more specifically to the public). Rural media seems to be interested in projects located in the West region. The regional newspapers in West have less attention to ERDF-related topics. The newspapers in the province of Utrecht still report the most frequently about ERDF. Perhaps that best practices are available;
- The target groups find the means of communication where personal contact takes place, but their range is lower and the costs are higher. Where the results of the communication and / or the programme remain behind expectations, in a subsequent grant period the OP could make a decision to invest in personal communication, meeting the desire to make the information as concrete as possible.

To these recommendations, one should add the implications for communication for Cohesion policy that stem from the empirical data from Flevoland collected as part of COHESIFY research. In fact, the evidence from different sources of data - from focus groups, interviews to the citizen survey - suggests that there is very low awareness of Cohesion policy among the citizens, who may be positive about the EU but are generally unaware of whether and how EU supports the development of their city and region. The past and present OP West communication strategy relying on banners at the project sites and actions aiming at mobilising primarily the beneficiaries of the policy, can hardly reach the citizens. A rethinking of the communication policy for Cohesion policy in Flevoland and West Netherlands region (but also The Netherlands more generally) is needed, therefore, if the policy is to contribute to building EU identification.

4.3.7 Annual implementation reports

Each of the OP annual implementation reports was written according to a strict format that did not change during the period. Chapter 7 of each report, entitled 'Information and publicity', explain that its subsections describe the progress on: executed information and publicity measures; the communication plan; the communication activities; the networks; the necessary information for beneficiaries; and the publicity.

Despite that most of the sections mentioned section do not directly deal with the effectiveness of communication and generally have a descriptive nature, some AIRs mention the progress of the measures. For example, the successive AIRs explain that the different editions of the *kijkdagen* were visited by approximately the same number of visitors (12, 000/13,000/ 14,000) than the previous year, despite the increased number of projects presented (104/147/169). The innovative character of the projects may explain the low growth of visitors was explained. But the attention of the (digital) media was increased. In 2013 the number of visitors decreased to 10,000, because many projects were already ended (139 presented).

Another interesting evaluation mentioned in AIR (2012) is the results of the exit conversations, where project managers mentioned the pressures they encounter regarding too many rules and controls and procedures that take too long.

4.3.8 Communication strategy in 2014-2020

The lessons learned in the 2007-2013 period were incorporated in the national communication strategy 2014-2020, establishing three pillars: 1) we do together what we can do together, 2) we respect mutual differences, and 3) the message goes (almost) always through projects. An important starting point is that the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI) in the Netherlands are to work closely together to achieve synergy, also in the field of communication, confirming the existing situation, that grew in such way during the 2007-2013 period.

The European Commission sets out a number of explicit requirements for the communication, which have been addressed in the communication strategy, or further elaborated in a year / action plan by fund / programme / management authority. The annual action plan describes:

- How to communicate with the different audiences;
- The communication material for people with disabilities;
- How beneficiaries are supported in their communication activities;
- An indicative budget for implementation of the strategy;
- The required human resources for communication;
- Set up website and / or portal (provide relevant information for relevant audiences);
- How the public's visibility and awareness of the Structural Funds are shaped;
- A proposal for evaluation and feedback of the results and effects of the programme.

The objectives for communication vary over time. In the first half, the emphasis is on announcing new programs and recruiting new projects. In the second half, as the ceilings become visible, the focus of communication shifts towards announcing the programs and raising interest in potential project applicants, showing what the programmes have achieved and providing accountability. The purpose of the communication strategy is to establish the model for cooperation and to define the communication focus of the new programming period.

The document was prepared by the 4 ERDF regional programmes, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the ESF Agency, in close consultation with two ESI funds: the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The communication department of the European Commission Representation in The Hague was also closely involved.

The approach to implement this strategy uses the Factor C method, which assumes that 80 percent of policymakers' work consists of communication, receiving signals from the environment and translating them into policy and communication. The use of this method has contributed to a broad consensus for the strategy and the annual and action plans for the various funds.

In the interviews with stakeholders, it was widely recognised that the most effective EU information activities were the open days (*kijkdagen*) and the website Europe around the corner, which are closely connected to each other. Other very effective form of communication was going to the villages to talk with the public, trying to find potential beneficiaries. Another effective activity was an event which involved bringing the public in a boat to see the projects' results, as they did in Almere. They placed an advertisement in the local newspaper, and within a day hundreds of people registered. Hence the most effective tool was to offer residents something they can benefit from. Among the least effective communications tools, the communication officials mentioned the brochures, because they only reach a limited target group.

Table 4.12 Stakeholder satisfaction with communication

<i>Answers of stakeholders when they were asked about satisfaction with:</i>	
The way Cohesion policy is communicated to citizens	Slightly satisfied
The branding and messages used to communicate Cohesion policy	Slightly satisfied
The use of human interest/personal stories	Satisfied
The support from the European Commission on communication	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
The targeting of different groups with different communication tools	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
The administrative capacity and resources dedicated to communication activities	Unsatisfied

Source: Berenschot, 2011

Table 4.13 Stakeholder views on effectiveness of communication

<i>Answers of stakeholders when they were asked about effectiveness on:</i>	
Conveying the achievements of Cohesion policy programmes overall and the role of the EU	Slightly ineffective
Conveying the achievements of co-funded projects and the role of the EU	Neither effective nor ineffective
Using social media to promote the programme and projects (e.g. Twitter, Youtube, Facebook)	Ineffective
Fostering good working relations with the media and press to reach the general public	Neither effective nor ineffective

Source: Berenschot, 2011

4.4 Good practice examples

Table 2.14 below summarises several examples of good practice in communication of ERDF, as highlighted by the interviewees.

Table 4.14 Examples of good practices in communication

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Description</i>
Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the broad public	The open information days (<i>Europa kijkdagen</i>) is considered the most effective and significant among the different communication tools. In the open information days, projects from different sectors and regions present their results for the general public and interested groups. The first national day was organised in 2011 and attracted 12,000 visitors. Due to its success it was considered a good practice example that was introduced in other places of Europe (AIR 2011). In 2016, this event was organized in the European pavilion in Amsterdam, attracting many visitors (AIR 2016). The success of the <i>Europa kijkdagen</i> has promoted an innovation, to use the model within the events organised by third parties, with some level affinity for EU goals. In
Presence of innovative elements	
Synergies with other policies or intervention tools	

	such way, EU projects have been presented in the 'Week of Science' in the Netherlands or the 'Smart Regions' Conference in Brussels, as complement of the events organised for that purpose. In such way, synergy is achieved not only with partners and other EU funds, but also with external parties.
Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the broad public	A good practice in communication was established during the previous European programme (of the 2000-2006 period). The ERDF programme had a TV programme about EU funds in Flevoland for 30 minutes every week, broadcasted by the regional television. In the programme, projects were shown and SMEs visited schools, knowledge institutes and other target groups, which was considered the best way to reach the broad public. It was considered the most direct way to get to the broad public. However, in the next period, the ERDF money was greatly reduced, what had as consequence the end of the programme.
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives	

Source: own elaboration with data from stakeholders interviews

4.5 Media framing of Cohesion policy

Traditional media have little interest and attention to EU structural funds (AIR 2012). When stakeholders were asked how were 'Europe' and Cohesion policy viewed and reported by the media, the answers were mixed. Someone claimed that the topic is hardly covered by the press, and that both national and regional press are not at all mentioning Europe or Cohesion Funds. Stakeholder that all the projects that the cities have realized with ERDF money were accompanied by good articles in the local newspaper. But they also expressed that the press releases are mostly adapted and sometimes they do not mention the EU or ERDF as funders. This is also because European money is always accompanied by other funds, from the province, the country, or others. Stakeholders remark that the public is more interested in the results than in who funded the project.

Other stakeholders mentioned that the general tone of about the EU in the media is mostly negative, but that is more a kind of general reflex of the present political time among residents and voters. But this change when very concrete results are shown. Others mentioned that – since projects have the important task to publicise their progress – regional and local papers, media and even television do pay some attention to them. Regional media generally give a relatively positive attention to the projects; the projects that are being realised are really appreciated. But it is recognised that it was not the same in the past. The tone has improved slightly in the latest years.

Regarding the programme relations with the media, OP West officials claim that the programme itself has no media attention, unless something very specific is coming, like the *kijkdagen*, for which they send press releases. Links with the press at OP West level are more business-to-business, or face-to-face contacts, but without articles in press. The real contact with the media is at the level of the four provinces and four big cities, and mostly through their politicians. However, politicians mention the projects – as done by their province or city – but not all of them mention that they are also funded by the EU. Furthermore, under the policy to give the priority of communication to the projects, the Management Authority pushes project managers to launch press releases when projects are starting, or when they get a subsidy.

Stakeholders mention the website and open days as the two most important communication tools, and at project level, the mandatory information signs and press releases, as the most used ones. Social media, especially Twitter, is used by politicians, especially before a kick-off meeting or end of a project. But social media is not used at OP level. It is preferred not to promote OP West in social media, because it is not well seen, as it may appear as self-promotion. Thus, they leave it to the politicians and the project leaders.

Table 4.15 Perceptions of effectiveness of communication

Effectiveness of communication tools in increasing citizens' awareness of EU Cohesion policy, according to the stakeholders survey:

Television	Very effective
Radio	Effective
Local and regional newspapers	Effective/ Neither effective nor ineffective
National newspapers	Effective
Programme website	Effective
Video/film clips and presentations	Effective
Plaques/billboard with the EU flag	Effective
Social media	Very effective
Media/advertising campaigns on television or radio	Neither effective nor ineffective
Press releases	Neither effective nor ineffective
Brochures, leaflets, newsletters, other publications	Effective
Events	Effective

Source: Stakeholders survey in Flevoland

Table 4.16 Opinions of stakeholders on communication

Extent by which stakeholders agree or disagree with the following statements:

The communication activities have led to an increased awareness among citizens of the contribution of Cohesion policy to regional and local development	Agree
The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds increase the sense of belonging of citizens to the European Union	Agree
The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds contribute to increasing citizens' support for the European Union	Agree
Citizens mistrust Cohesion policy communication activities and messages or consider them to be propaganda	Agree / neither agree nor disagree

Source: Stakeholders survey in Flevoland

Media framing analysis⁶ reveals further insights on how EU Cohesion policy is communicated in the Netherlands (for more detail see Annex). Framing in relation to economic consequences of EU Cohesion policy dominates, corresponding to roughly 48% of the news items analysed. This indicates that Cohesion policy is primarily viewed through the prism of its contribution to the economic performance of the country. It is also striking that 19% of news items frame the policy in terms of innovation, which is the highest of all COHESIFY cases. This tendency seems to reflect the strong focus of all Dutch regional programmes on supporting innovation. However, framing in relation to quality of life was also salient with nearly 18% of news coverage employing it, which, by contrast is the lowest percentage among the countries studied in the project. Again, this seems to reflect the thematic emphasis on innovation in the Dutch operational programmes and hardly any attention paid to investment in projects to improve the quality of life, which is already among the highest in Europe.

A further interesting aspect is that most of Dutch news coverage related to Cohesion policy has a positive valence. In fact, this is the case for 70% of the news items, the highest proportion among the countries studied in the COHESIFY project. However, surprisingly perhaps, 10.7% of the news items studied used framing related to fund abuse, which would indicate a concern for the way in which funding is managed.

⁶ Media framing analysis was conducted by Vicky Triga and Konstantinos Vadratsikas, Cyprus University of Technology.

Finally, it is worth stressing that there are differences in the way that Cohesion policy is covered in regional and in national media. The framing on the national level is slightly less often positive (65.7%), but more 'Europeanised' that is framed in relation to the EU (27.3%). That said, national media more often employ frames related to funding abuse issues (twice as often as in the case of regional media) and to power (which is not used by regional media). On the regional level, framing relating Cohesion policy to quality of life, incompetence of authorities and to cohesion is more often used than in national media. Regional media are also more positive about Cohesion policy (76.8%), but, unsurprisingly perhaps, less often stress the European dimension (4.3%).

4.6 Implications for citizens' perceptions of Cohesion Policy and attitudes towards the EU

In terms of Cohesion policy, Flevoland is a special region in the Netherlands, because up to 2006 it was Objective 1 region, and as such it widely benefited from European funds in the past. It especially received a large flow of money until the 2000-2006 period, which ended on 3 June 2009. The end of that period was not so long ago, so most people still remember the EU support for Flevoland, which was accompanied by enough publicity. Although the younger generation is not so aware of such support as adults.

When the first period (2007-2013) of OP West began, it represented an enormous decline in EU funds for Flevoland, due to two reasons. First, there was much less money flows to the Netherlands as Flevoland was not any more objective one; and second, in the way that OP West was organised with eight partners, most of the Cohesion policy money went to the larger provinces and the big cities. Flevoland got a compensation from the other partners during the first OP West period, but they were not willing to do the same during the 2014-2020 period, so the funds for Flevoland have been minimal during this period. This means that the impact of the Cohesion policy funds has hugely decreased, and especially during the last period, as the funds cover mostly innovation and low-carbon goals, which do not have a direct impact in the broad public. This huge reduction in EU funding during the last period could possibly explain the difficulties that the research team encountered to carry out the stakeholders survey and stakeholders interviews, due to the low level of response and low acceptance to be interviewed, respectively.

In Flevoland, the predominant image of the EU can be considered as rather negative, according to the study on EU identification elaborated for Work Package 2 (Dąbrowski et al. 2017). The Flevoland region was classified as a region with a negative image but being well attached to the EU. When stakeholders were interviewed about this characterisation, most of them agreed that this was a good characterisation, expressing that citizens in the largest cities (Almere and Flevoland) appear less positive towards the EU. The same impression came from the focus groups meetings with Flevoland citizens.

The attachment of Flevoland residents to the EU is easily explained by the past flow of money to the region. On the other hand, the negative image of the EU can be explained by the large number of followers of the PVV (Party for the freedom), the anti-European party of Geert Wilders. In the city of Almere, this party won the majority of seats (eight) in the city council during the last elections. In the less populated municipalities of Flevoland, however, the image of the EU is much more positive because they have received significant funds, especially the agricultural funds.

When stakeholders were asked about ways of improving the communication of EU policy objectives and results to the public, they coincided that telling the story of the projects is the best strategy. Consequently, they try to find new ways to tell the story, trying to find something to make a connection with the public. They think that a modest and personal approach works best, especially when people are touched in their personal life.

Giving a concrete example of such idea, another stakeholder mentioned that people not only should go and watch the results, but also do something. You may show a device or equipment funded by the EU, explaining: this device can do this or that. People look at the device and say: “Well, nice, but it is better if you can go and show a project for a few hours in a boat, that is much nicer for citizens and residents”. For example, they had a very nice opening of a skating track, for which a few hundred people were present and afterwards they engaged in competitions, and skate games. In such a way, young people and the elderly could play on the new track and feel more connected to the EU.

Because several EU funds work together in the Netherlands, there are many projects to choose from: more than 2000 projects are shown in the *Europa om de hoek* website. Therefore, they try to present the EU funded projects in, for example, the day of the architecture, the day of the wind mills, the day of science, the day of innovation. Engaging with third parties in such events, they deliver something extra to the public, something they did not expect to get and that may be better appreciated.

5. Citizens views of Cohesion policy and the EU

5.1 Citizens survey results

The citizen survey conducted as part of COHESIFY in Flevoland adds more insight on the levels of awareness of EU funding and perceptions of its impacts among the citizens of that region and sheds more light on the citizens’ positions on the EU and their identification with the EU and other territorial levels.

Awareness of EU funding

One of the most striking findings from the citizen survey conducted in Flevoland was the very low awareness of Cohesion policy among the citizens, who may be positive about the EU but are generally unaware of whether and how EU supports the development of their city and region. Only 21.2% of Flevoland respondents have heard about projects supported by Cohesion policy in their region, and 77.6% have not (see table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Citizen survey: awareness of Cohesion policy

Have you heard about any such EU funded projects to improve your own region or city?

Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
21.2%	77.6%	0.0%	1.2%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

While probably reflecting the small size of allocation of EU funds for Flevoland, these figures are remarkable nonetheless. Only in Limburg, from among the COHESIFY case study regions there was a higher proportion of respondents who have not heard of EU-funded projects (81.7%), albeit similar level of lack of awareness of Cohesion policy was noted in the Irish case study. This result was in stark contrast to the levels of awareness noted in regions where the allocations of EU funding are greater, like in the Polish, Hungarian or Slovenian regions.

What was also striking, was that 69.4% survey respondents in Flevoland (see table 5.2) and 74.7% in Limburg had not noticed the billboards which typically are placed near the sites where Cohesion policy funds were invested to acknowledge the support of the EU. Again, this is in stark contrast to the other COHESIFY case study regions where EU funds allocations are bigger, like in Pomorskie in

Poland, for instance, where 91.6% of respondents did notice those banners. Despite this low level of awareness of EU-funded projects in Flevoland, 58.5% of respondents were positive about the impacts of EU funding in their region or city.

Table 5.2 Citizen survey: Visibility of public acknowledgement of EU funding

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

Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
29.4%	69.4%	0.0%	1.2%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

The survey also revealed the key sources of information on Cohesion policy and the projects it funds in Flevoland. In fact, by far the most important source of information on this are the local and regional newspapers, as pointed out by 67.9% of respondents (table 5.3). This seems to echo the results of the media framing analysis for the Netherlands, which showed that these are these media that also convey the most positive messages about Cohesion policy. Other important sources of knowledge on Cohesion policy for Flevoland are personal experiences and knowledge of the projects, the Internet and the billboards as well as national TV. Interestingly, social media are not a prominent source of such information for 64.2% of respondents.

Table 5.3 Citizen survey: Sources of knowledge about EU funded projects

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

Source	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
National newspapers	30.2%	68.9%	0.0%	.9%
Local or regional newspapers	67.9%	31.1%	0.0%	.9%
National TV	41.5%	57.5%	0.0%	.9%
Local or regional TV	33.0%	67.0%	0.0%	0.0%
National radio	21.7%	76.4%	0.0%	1.9%
Local or regional radio	19.8%	79.2%	0.0%	.9%
Internet	49.1%	50.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Social media	34.9%	64.2%	0.0%	.9%
Billboard	44.3%	54.7%	0.0%	.9%
Workplace	29.2%	69.8%	0.0%	.9%
Personal experience or knowledge of projects	50.9%	48.1%	0.0%	.9%
Other	12.3%	85.8%	.9%	.9%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

The survey also indicated some difference in the levels of awareness of the different funds used in Cohesion policy (see table 5.4). Thus, while the overall levels of awareness for each of them were generally low, ERDF proved to be the best known fund (28% of respondents), followed closely by ESF (26%), while Cohesion Fund remained the least known (10.2%).

Table 5.4 Citizen survey: Level of awareness of individual ESI funds

Have you heard about the following funds?

Fund	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
ERDF	28.0%	71.8%	0.0%	.2%
ESF	26.0%	73.6%	0.0%	.4%
Cohesion Fund	10.2%	89.8%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

Perceived impact of EU funding

Despite the low awareness of Cohesion policy, the majority of Flevoland citizens surveyed considered the impact of EU funding as positive (47.2%) or very positive (11.3%) for their region or city (table 5.5), numbers that are consistent with Limburg, but below the European average (22.5% of all EU citizens interviewed considered there was a very positive impact and 55.5% thought it was positive). At the same time, however, what emerged from the survey was that most respondents felt that the funds had not made a major difference in terms of how their region or city would develop (table 5.6). Thus, only 23.8% of respondents claimed that their region or city would develop somewhat (18%) or much worse (5.8%) without the inflow of EU funding. Thus, only a minority of responded saw added value of Cohesion policy for their region or city in terms of impact on development.

Table 5.5 Citizen survey: Perceived impact EU funding

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

Very positive	Positive	No impact	Negative	Very negative	Not applicable for my region or city	Refused	Don't know
11.3%	47.2%	19.8%	2.8%	0.0%	7.5%	0.0%	11.3%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

Table 5.6 Citizen survey: Added value of EU funding

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

Much better	Somewhat better	Same	Somewhat worse	A lot worse	Not applicable for my region or city	Refused	Don't know
5.6%	14.8%	32.4%	18.0%	5.8%	10.6%	0.0%	12.8%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

EU attitudes

Consistent with the idea that the Netherlands 'gives more than it gets' from the EU, only 13.0% of Flevoland citizens interviewed strongly agreed with the statement "My country has benefited from being a member of the European Union" and 40% agreed (table 5.7). Only Lombardy in Italy had lower scores (12.8% strongly agreed, and 40,4% agreed). 18.4% of Flevoland citizens interviewed disagreed with that proposition, which is the higher incidence of disagreement in all the regions

surveyed, higher even than the Dutch province of Limburg, and much higher than the European average (10.3%). That said, 40% agreed that EU membership brought benefits to the Netherlands, thus adding up to an overall 53% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement.

An interesting picture emerged from the survey question on positions on European integration. While in the EU identification typology, based on Eurobarometer data from 2015, Flevoland was classified as a region with predominantly negative EU image, the citizen survey showed that after all 43.2% of Flevoland residents surveyed were somewhat (15.2%), strongly (9.4%) or simply in favour (18.6%) of European integration (table 5.8). By contrast, 33.8% remained neutral about it and a minority of 21% decalred being opposed (6.8%), somewhat opposed (10.4%) or strongly opposed (3.8%).

Table 5.7 Citizen survey: Appreciation of EU membership

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My country has benefited from being a member of the European Union"?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Refused	Don't know
13.0%	40.0%	16.0%	18.4%	8.2%	.2%	4.2%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

Table 5.8 Citizen survey: Position on European integration

How would you describe your general position on European integration?

Strongly opposed	Opposed	Somewhat opposed	Neutral	Somewhat in favour	In favour	Strongly in favour	Refused	Don't know
3.8%	6.8%	10.4%	33.8%	15.2%	18.6%	9.4%	.2%	1.8%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

European identity and attachment

A high percentage of Flevoland citizens interviewed identified themselves as Dutch rather than European (47.0%), consistent with Limburg (50.7%), while 40.4% thought of themselves as equally Dutch and European (table 5.9). This is consistent with Limburg, whose citizens also thought of themselves primarily as Dutch (50.7%) or equally Dutch and European (34.9%). These are the highest rates of national identification, rather than European identification, across all the regions surveyed, much above the European average of 32.2%. Finally, when it comes to attachment to the different territorial levels, Flevoland appears also similar to Limburg with the country being the level to which the most respondents are very attached (55% in Flevoland and 61.6% in Limburg). Also 41.4% of Flevoland residents declared being attached to their city, town or village and 41.4% as well to their region.⁷ These scores are consistent with those from Limburg.

⁷ Defying our initial assumption on weaker regional identity in Flevoland because the province is a relatively new territory reclaimed from the sea in the 20th century.

Table 5.9 Citizen survey: Self-identification

Do you see yourself as...

Country only	Country and European	European and Country	European only	Refused	Don't know
47.0%	40.4%	5.4%	5.8%	.4%	1.0%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

Table 5.10 Citizen survey: Territorial attachment

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

	Very	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
Your city/town/village	41.4%	37.0%	14.6%	6.8%
Your region	41.4%	38.6%	14.0%	6.0%
Your country	55.0%	30.8%	9.2%	4.6%
European Union	18.2%	45.0%	18.8%	17.2%
Europe	24.0%	45.8%	17.2%	11.8%

Source: COHESIFY Citizen Survey

Interestingly, the majority of respondents in Flevoland declared being attached to the EU, which is consistent with the EU identification typology classification of the region (Negative-Attached). Thus, 18.2% respondents declared being very attached to the EU, 45% somewhat attached, and 18.8% a little attached, adding up to 82% of respondents having some feelings of attachment to the EU (similar to Limburg with 83.2%, where there was marginally more respondents strongly attached to the EU). Even more respondents felt attached to the more abstract 'Europe' with 24% declaring being very attached, 45.8% somewhat attached, and 17.2% a little attached (again, these scores are similar to Limburg, with marginally higher proportion of Limburgers having strong feelings of attachment to Europe). In sum, the majority of Flevoland residents tend to see benefits in EU membership for their country even if they tend to remain lukewarm about European integration, but still most of them feel attached the EU.

5.2 Focus groups results

To explore citizens perceptions of Cohesion policy and their attitudes to the EU, three focus groups were carried out with 14 participants (9 female and 5 male) in the cities of Lelystad, Almere and Delft. The groups included 4 or 5 participants. The first two groups had a stronger female representation (3 females, 2 males; and 4 females, 1 male; respectively). The third group had an even gender balance. Lelystad and Delft groups were homogenous per age cohort (56-68 and 20-25 respectively), while the Almere group had a wide range of ages (74-32). The level of engagement in the discussion of both male and female participants was balanced. All participants of the Lelystad and Almere groups were Flevoland residents and were Dutch citizens, five of them were of foreign origin. The participants of the Delft group were former Flevoland residents studying at Delft University of Technology.

Cohesion policy

The focus groups⁸ revealed a relatively low level of knowledge about Cohesion policy amongst Flevoland citizens, confirming the insights from the interviews and the citizen survey. This indicates that the effectiveness of the communication strategy used for Cohesion policy could be limited.

Thus, while most of the focus groups participants have heard about Cohesion policy before (which was not surprising given that it was mentioned in the materials used for recruiting them), very few of them understood the purpose of the policy, knew about the actual funding schemes involved or projects supported by them, or knew where the funding was coming from. Only three participants said they had never heard of the term, but only one of them had experience with the ESF. The ESF was known to two other participants and it was the only fund that was mentioned in the discussions. Only three of the fourteen participants did not name a project that they believed was funded by the EU.

Even though opinions about the policy were generally positive, if issues were raised, often they related to the way in which Cohesion policy was communicated, and in particular to the insufficient publicity of what was financed by EU funds and to the low visibility of the interventions (which in the Netherlands tends to focus on the less 'visible' innovation support projects).

Citizens from Flevoland associated EU funds mostly with projects in sustainable development and infrastructure development (see Table 5.11). A number of projects that were identified were implemented outside the region of Flevoland and the Netherlands. In some cases, participants were uncertain whether the project they had in mind had actually received funding from the EU.

Table 5.11. Participants' reference to projects' co-financed by EU funds

<p>Infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roads - Airport in Lelystad - Parking garage - Waste water infrastructure - Animal crossing (eco-duct) - Library and town hall <p>Sustainable development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solar panels - Wind energy - Insulation of homes - Removal of asbestos <p>Urban regeneration of Lelystad neighbourhoods</p> <p>Business support for Inditex/Zara distribution centre</p> <p>Projects in Croatia, Spain (airport in and roads), Poland (roads)</p> <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medical projects in Unilever - Unspecified project in Almere - Floriade

⁸ Additional analysis of the focus groups was carried out by Andreja Pegan, Trinity College Dublin, as part of the comparative analysis across all case studies.

The achievements of Cohesion policy were highlighted in two of the focus groups. In one group, positive attitudes on the impacts were expressed, but in very general terms. In the other focus group, participants discussed the positive outcome of urban regeneration projects and job creation with new businesses coming to the area. The only challenge of Cohesion policy that was discussed in all the three groups was communication. Participants agreed that there is not enough publicity on what is financed with EU money. In one of the focus groups, there was a discussion about the lack of highly visible infrastructure projects such as highways. The mismanagement of projects was mentioned in two focus groups by two participants. Other problems were discussed, such as excessive red tape and corruption in other EU countries. Below (table 5.12) we provide some extracts to highlight how participants expressed the problems associated most often with Cohesion policy for the region of Flevoland.

Table 5.12 Focus groups: key problems with Cohesion policy identified by the participants

Communication	NL 1, Participant 4: <i>"Some people get a benefit and they do not know whether it comes from the municipality, from the province or from Europe."</i>
Project mismanagement	NL 1, Participant 4: <i>"So much is being invested and this and that and that, and actually after a few months, you'll see almost nothing. For example, in my neighbourhood, they are going to do all the parks with new plants, and it does not matter if there is no maintenance or no water, those plants die and things like that, and then you think yes, it's just wasting money."</i>
Visibility of projects	NL 1, Participant 1: <i>"But such a road would still drive you over, but for example, if a sewer is being built somewhere you do not really notice anything about it."</i>

Source: own elaboration

European identity

Participants from Flevoland considered that a common European identity was rather difficult to achieve because of economic and cultural differences particularly between the North, South and East of Europe. At the same time, some participants believed that there are common cultural aspects deriving from religion shared by all Europeans. Such a representation of European identity is drawn from a rather primordial notion of identity formed mainly by the emergence of national identity. This was further followed up by the use of dualism between 'us' and 'others' by the participants. More specifically, they constructed the 'ingroup', namely the EU citizens, predominantly by referring to their difference to the 'outgroup', such as America, Asia and Australia rather than by emphasising the common elements that bring together the Europeans. By contrast, they represented the common elements that create a sense of unity among Europeans in more functional terms and a utility value, such as the freedom of movement, euro, trade and the absence of roaming charges.

European identity and Cohesion Policy

Participants perceived that EU-funded projects can have a positive influence on peoples' view on the EU. One of the participants remarked that projects should target segments of the population where support for the EU is low, although another participant disagreed with this view. It was also argued that the possibility of suspending EFSI funds for non-compliance with EU laws and guidelines was contrary to the idea of solidarity and creating a sense of European identity. Opposition to solidarity in terms of financial redistribution was also expressed. One of the participants argued that the more

funding the Netherlands is required to contribute to the EU budget for the development of poorer member states, the less European the Dutch will feel.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Key findings

Flevoland is specific among the COHESIFY case studies as this is a region that was a former substantial beneficiary of EU funds, benefiting from funding under Objective 1 until the end of 2000-2006 period, however, since then it has been losing most of its EU funding. Flevoland may be relatively wealthy as compared to EU average and is part of a state that is a net contributor to EU budget and for which EU Cohesion has arguably less relevance than for less developed countries, like the South or Eastern Member States. That said, in the Dutch context Flevoland remains a lagging region, and, importantly, it has been a loser when it comes to the share of the Cohesion policy 'pie': not only it lost its Objective 1 status, but also the share of its allocation as part of the multi-regional OP West has been declining between 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods, with the programme's objectives being to a large extent disconnected from Flevoland's investment needs.⁹ Despite that, the previous experience in (successfully) managing Cohesion policy funding before 2006 has been recognised and the Province plays a key role the management of OP West, using its knowledge in the programme secretariat that it hosts.

Furthermore, the case of Flevoland is inseparable from the wider area of West Netherlands because of the OP West structure, covering 4 NUTS 2 regions. Thus, the implementation of EU funds in Flevoland has to be understood against the background of the wider multi-region programme, in which Flevoland plays an important management role, but receives only a small share of funding, most of it being shared by the big cities of Rotterdam and The Hague (Province of South Holland), Amsterdam (Province of North Holland) and Utrecht (Province of Utrecht). OP West management is rather unusual as compared to usual practice across the EU territories. It is governed through a partnership of 4 main cities and 4 provinces within the programme area, each managing sub-parts of the OP. While largely informal and based on 'gentlemen's agreements' on division of the ERDF allocation to ensure a 'fair' distribution of EU funding, this G4P4 arrangement reflects the ever-shifting and fragmented Dutch governance patchwork, particularly in the West region or the Randstad.

OP West investment focused on 'Lisbon objectives' (innovation, competitiveness, etc.) and on supporting investment in the 4 main cities (which in turn reflects the Dutch interest in Cohesion policy as a tool for supporting urban development, see the Urban Agenda for the EU promoted by the Dutch EU presidency). The disbursement of funds as part of OP West has been efficient thanks to strong institutional capacity, good cooperation between the well-networked partners involved and assistance offered to beneficiaries through local support points. The projects supported are formally in line with objectives of the OP, however, as flagged up in the evaluations and partly in the interviews with stakeholder, the effectiveness of spending suffers from the territorial fragmentation of interventions, weak strategic coupling between them and little concern for the assessment of their actual effectiveness and value for money (even though OP West was the only programme where the qualitative and quantitative assessment criteria were applied to project appraisal, in practice the funds were distributed on a 'first come, first served' basis). Moreover, the typical Cohesion policy hurdle of bureaucratic burden also seemed to have affected OP West, with complex procedure for

⁹ This could help explain the relative lack of interest in Cohesion policy not only among the public, but also among the stakeholders in Flevoland, as reflected in the very low interest of stakeholders in taking part in COHESIFY research as interviewees or survey respondents.

acquiring and implementing grants being blamed by the interviewees for discouraging potential applicants.

On the communication front, three points stand out in the case of Flevoland. First, communication strategy is centralised and nation-wide, rather than specific to regional OPs. Second, communication effort on Cohesion policy focused on projects as vehicles for communication (emphasis on the actual result of the projects supported, able to touch the citizens in their daily lives, rather than on the policy behind it) and was based on the use of decentralised management structure to facilitate communication activities locally. Focus groups and citizen survey indicated, however, that most citizens of Flevoland are not aware of Cohesion policy and the investment it supports in the region. Third, two further factors complicate the communication task: the interviews and focus groups indicated a very low interest of the public in Cohesion policy and in the EU more generally, while the fragmentation of the 'pots' contributing to the OP West budget makes it harder to create a narrative on the programme as being a 'European' one.

6.2 Policy implications and recommendations

The recommendations for Flevoland are largely in line with those for Limburg, given the similarity of the approaches to implementation of Cohesion policy and communication on its impacts in both regions:

- If Cohesion policy spending in the Netherlands is to have a greater impact on EU identification, it should be, at least partly, refocused away from innovation support towards on issues that have a more tangible impact on citizens' lives and their living environment, such as the quality of the urban space, addressing socio-economic challenges in cities, or cross-border people-to-people cooperation. Designating part of the regional allocations for spending on local or regional priorities decided upon by the citizens themselves through participatory processes could be a way forward to achieve this, while mobilising and sensitising the citizens to Cohesion policy.
- Tailoring of the implementation of communication to regional media rather than national media to communicating Cohesion policy is recommended. What matters for the citizens is whether and how Cohesion policy touches upon their lives and what benefits it brings to them. In the case of Limburg, for instance, citizens tended to remark and value more the projects that supported cultural exchanges across the borders with the neighbouring countries, while ignoring the investment in infrastructure or innovation.
- Communication focuses on present and prospective beneficiaries of the funding, while neglecting communication to the wider public about the benefits that the investment brought to the community. While the emphasis in the Dutch Cohesion policy communication strategy placed on telling the stories behind the projects may be appropriate, it seems to hardly reach the citizens. Communication has to focus more on reaching out beyond the narrow circle of stakeholders of Cohesion policy to make the citizens aware of the policy and understand the opportunities and benefits that it brings or may bring to the region.
- Regional OPs in the Netherlands, like OP West, are multi-regional and hence cover territories which are not the nexus of regional identity (which typically is the province) and remain abstract in the eyes of the citizens. Such territorial arrangement makes it also much more difficult to communicate on what benefits Cohesion policy actually brought to a particular province. Thus, while recommending to break down the multi-regional OPs into programmes at NUTS 2 (thus provincial) level may be unrealistic, given that the allocation of EU funding for the Dutch regions is relatively small and the present system appears to be effective in absorbing the funding, communication of Cohesion policy would benefit from gathering and

making available (in an online database accessible to a wider public both literally and in terms of the language used) information on the funding invested in each of the provinces of OP West and communicating on the positive impacts of that investment in Flevoland (and, separately, other provinces covered by the OP) would make it much more tangible and visible to the citizens.

- In the case of Flevoland, a recommendation from the research concerns also the need for greater emphasis of the 'European added value' of the OP West, on the fact that the programme is indeed a European initiative. At present, OP West is not always associated with the EU, being supported by a complex system of governance and financial contributions to it.
- While the citizens of Flevoland, like those of Limburg, may be aware that EU supports projects in their region, they hardly connect these to Cohesion policy, which is seen often unknown and/or misunderstood. In line with the overall messages of the COHESIFY project on communication of Cohesion policy, the EU funding should be 'humanised' through communication on the stories about people and places that benefited from Cohesion policy. In the Dutch cases, this is particularly important given the very low awareness of Cohesion policy. Local and regional media (press especially) would be the best outlet for those stories (given that these media are already telling a more positive story about Cohesion policy than the national ones and are the primary source of information on Cohesion policy for the citizens).
- Moreover, since the Cohesion policy acronyms (EFRO, ESF, OP Zuid, etc.) remain hardly telling for the wider public, it is recommended to consider using simple language and emphasising more generic and widely understood terms like 'EU funds' or 'European funds', even if this would probably require a change of communication and 'branding' approach to Cohesion policy.
- While COHESIFY research suggests that overall the traditional information billboards placed near the EU-supported investment, mentioning EU financial support, are effective in communicating what the EU does for the region (a source of information on Cohesion policy for nearly half of the respondents, according to the COHESIFY citizen survey), it is striking how little emphasis is put on social media in communicating Cohesion policy in the Netherlands. Not only social media become increasingly a prominent source of information and news for citizens, but also they could facilitate the said effort of 'humanising' the EU funds and telling the 'local' stories, with simple and visual material.
- Again, in line with the broader recommendations of COHESIFY on communication has to be on-going, continue after the projects end and be based on a strategic and place-tailored approach and ring-fenced communication budget both at OP level and in projects.

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AIRs OP Zuid Nederland for the years 2007-2015.

8. Annexes

Annex 1: List of interviewees

Stakeholder	Date of interview	Type of organisation	Role in organisation
1	28-06-2017	Province of Flevoland	Project manager
2	29-06-2017	Municipality of Noordoostpolder	Secretary General
3	17-07-2017	Management Authority OP West	Director
4	8-08-2017	Management Authority OP West	Communication officer
5	21-09-2017	Municipality of Lelystad	Manager European projects
6	16-10-2017	Municipality of Almere	Officer involved in the implementation of ERDF projects

Annex 2: Focus groups in Flevoland

In the case study of Flevoland, 14 participants (9 female and 5 male) took part in 3 focus groups. Each group included between 4-5 participants and took place in different locations: one in Lelystad, the capital city of Flevoland, one in Almere, the largest city, and one in a lecture room of Delft University of Technology. Two groups were homogenous per age and one had a varied age composition. One case had gender balance, the other two had more female than male participants.

Focus groups were advertised online (Twitter and Facebook), on location (Flevoland and Almere public libraries), with adds posted on bulletin boards on the campus of Delft University of Technology, phoning people from the citizens survey who mentioned they were willing to participate in a focus groups and with snowball sampling. Seven participants were recruited with snowballing, 5 were recruited through phone invitations and 2 replied to campus adds. It was not easy to recruit people, and we had to postpone an initial appointment to be able to get enough participants. For the young people session, we could only find two participants from Flevoland, but we invited two from the OP West region, with links to Flevoland. The sessions in Flevoland and Almere were rather enthusiastic and the participants mentioned they were happy with the discussions.

The focus groups lasted between 1h to 1h45. Two focus groups were organised in the evening (Lelystad and Almere) and one in the afternoon (TUDelft); with those in the evening lasting over one hour. The focus groups were moderated by two persons, the first one with both, and the other two individually. The focus groups were voice-recorded, transcribed by a company and translated by a student assistant. Participants received coffee, tea and biscuits, and a voucher for their participation.

The participants live in cities where the sessions were performed. All have Dutch citizenship but four female participants (Spain, Argentina, Morocco and Surinam) were born abroad but emigrated to the Netherlands long time ago. A male participant was also born abroad (XXX) and emigrated more recently.

Table 1: Focus groups

Group ID	Region	Location	Date of focus group	N of participants	N of female participants	Age range by year of birth
FL1	Flevoland	Lelystad	21-09-2017	5	3	1950-1962
FL2	Flevoland	Delft	28-09-2017	4	2	1993-1998
FL3	Flevoland	Almere	4-10-2017	5	4	1944-1986

Table 2: Participants

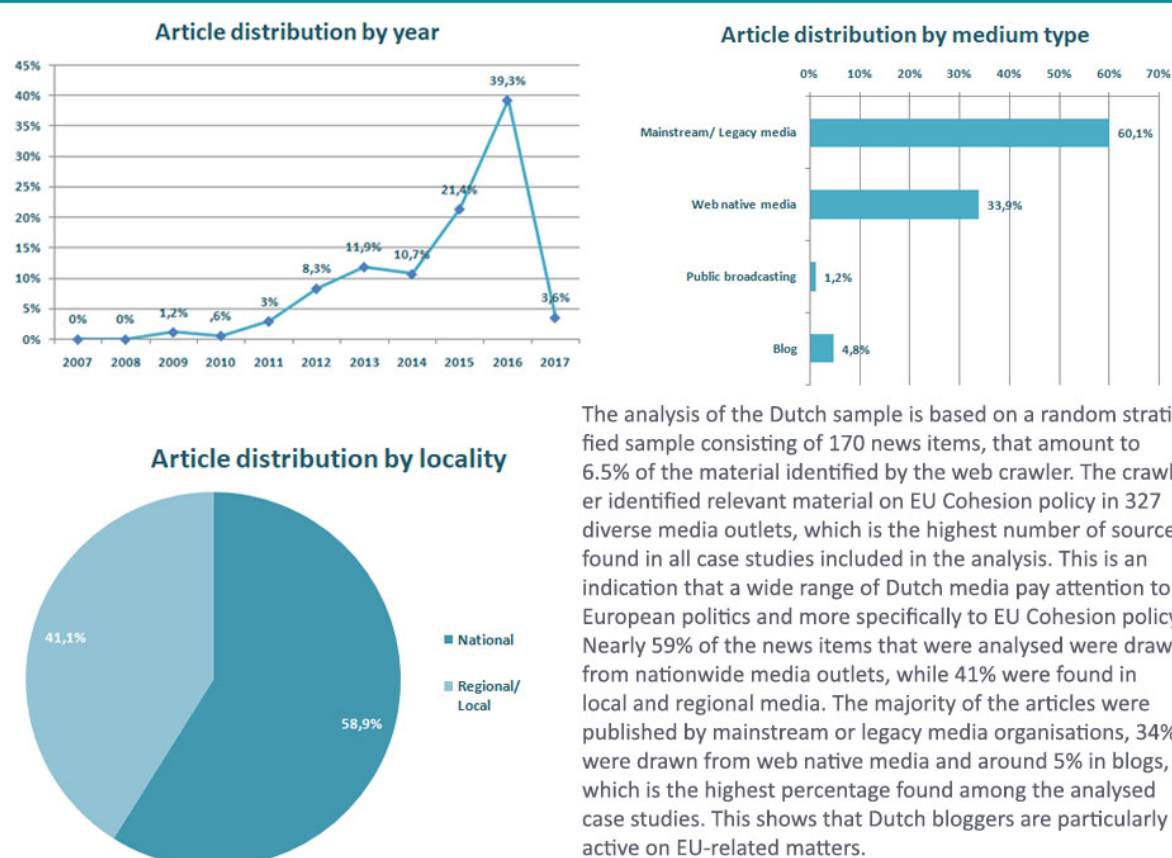
Group ID	Participant ID	Gender	Year of birth	How old were you when you stopped with fulltime education?	Level of education	Working situation
FL1	Participant 1	Male	1950	21 years	College, university or other degree	Retired
FL1	Participant 2	Female	1960	25 years	College, university or other degree	Employed/self-employed
FL1	Participant 3	Female	1955	18 years	Secondary education	Retired
FL1	Participant 4	Female	1959	34 years	College, university or other degree	Self-employed
FL1	Participant 5	Male	1962	31 years	College, university or other degree	Employed / self-employed
FL2	Participant 1	Male	1995	still in education	College, university or other degree	Studying
FL2	Participant 2	Male	1993	still in education	College, university or other degree	Studying
FL2	Participant 3	Female	1998	still in education	College, university or other degree	Studying
FL2	Participant 4	Female	1998	still in education	College, university or other degree	Studying
FL3	Participant 1	Male	1971	18 years	Secondary education	Employed / self-employed
FL3	Participant 2	Female	1986	18 years	Completed basic secondary education	Self-employed
FL3	Participant 3	Female	1965	16 years	Completed basic secondary education	unemployed
FL3	Participant 4	Female	1972	12 years	Primary education	unemployed
FL3	Participant 5	Female	1944	17 years	College, university or other degree	Retired

Annex 3: Stakeholders survey

Region	Contacts	All responses		Full responses (FR)		Monitoring Committee Members
	<i>count</i>	<i>count</i>	<i>[%]</i>	<i>count</i>	<i>[%]</i>	<i>[% of FR]</i>
Flevoland	81	17	21,0%	7	8,6%	71,4%
Total all regions	2191	803	36,6%	400	18,3%	51%

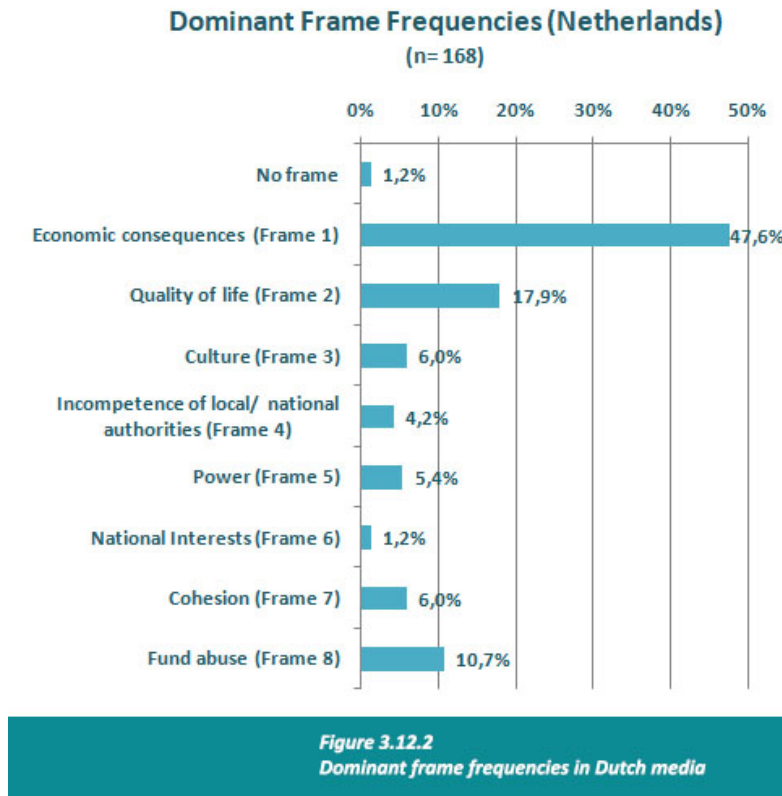
Annex 4: Framing Analysis of Dutch Media

Figure 3.12.1  **Netherlands**



Evidence from the framing analysis indicates that the Dutch media approach EU Cohesion policy predominately in terms of economic gains and losses as the “Economic consequences” Frame dominates nearly 48% of the analysed news items. This could be attributed to the high percentage of articles (19%) framing EU Cohesion policy in terms of the “Innovation” Subframe (1.3) as shown in Figure 3.12.3. Among the analysed case studies, the Dutch percentage of subframe 1.3 is the highest, suggesting that the Dutch media interpret EU Cohesion as a mean to modernize the economic production methods by financing innovative technologies and by promoting research and development policies. The second most salient frame identified in the Dutch sample was “Quality of life” with 17.9%, although it is one of the lowest found in the examine case studies. Additionally, the

Dutch media adopt the “Fund abuse” frame in 10.7% of the sample, indicating a concern regarding the management of EU Cohesion funding by national and local authorities. Finally, it should be noted that the Dutch media exhibit one of the highest percentages in employing the “Cohesion” frame, as well as the fact that they interpret EU Cohesion policy in terms of “Civic participation” (Subframe 7.1), more frequently than any other national media.



Dominant Subframe Frequencies (Netherlands)

(n= 168)

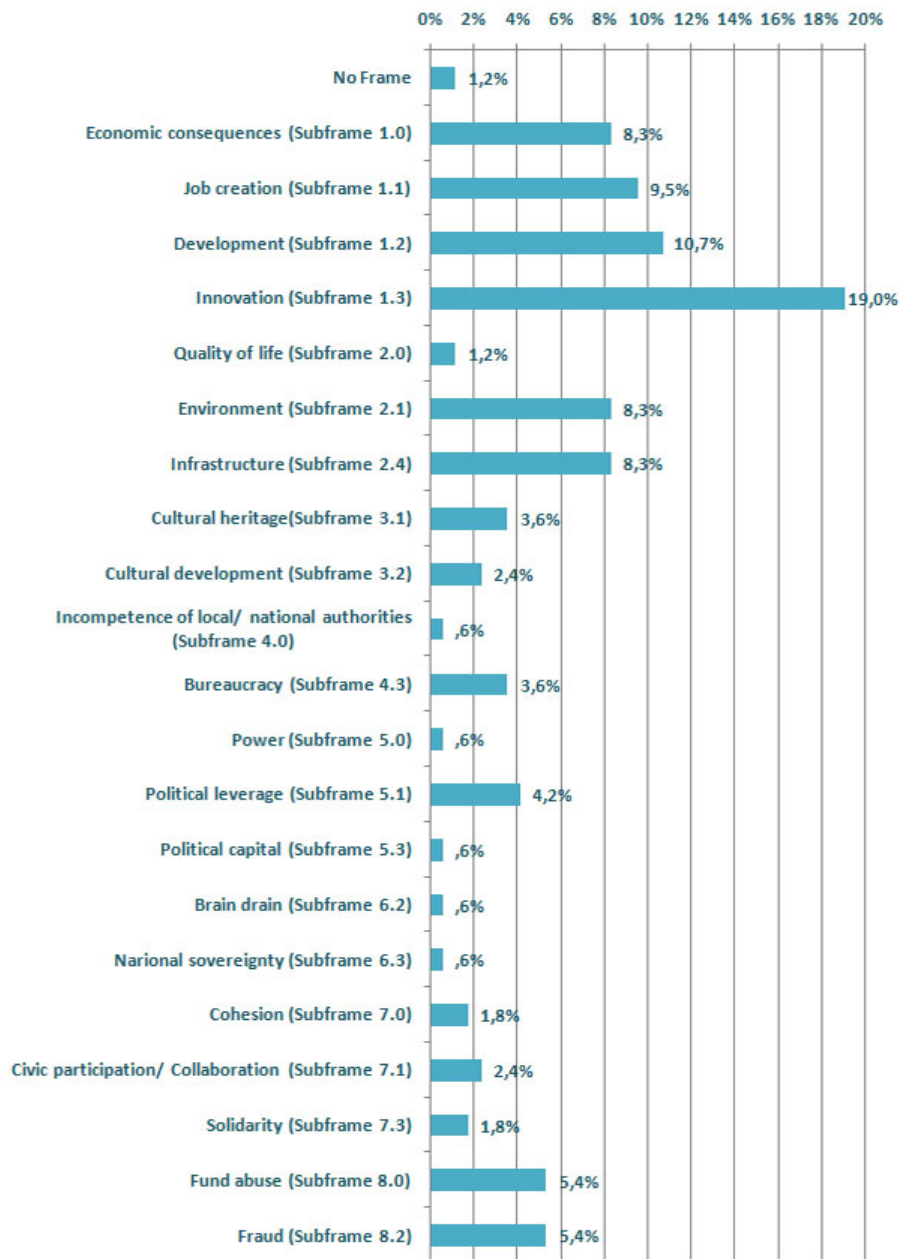


Figure 3.12.3
Dominant Suframe frequencies in Dutch media

As shown in Figure 3.11.5, the analysis of the Dutch media uncovered some significant differences between regional and national media regarding the frames employed. According to the empirical evidence, regional media tend to use Frame 2 ("Quality of life"), Frame 4 ("Incompetence of local/national authorities") and Frame 7 ("Cohesion") more often than national media. On the contrary, national media emphasize on "Fund abuse" (Frame 8) issues almost twice as often as regional media, while they also employ the "Power" Frame (5) that is inexistent in regional media coverage of EU Cohesion policy.

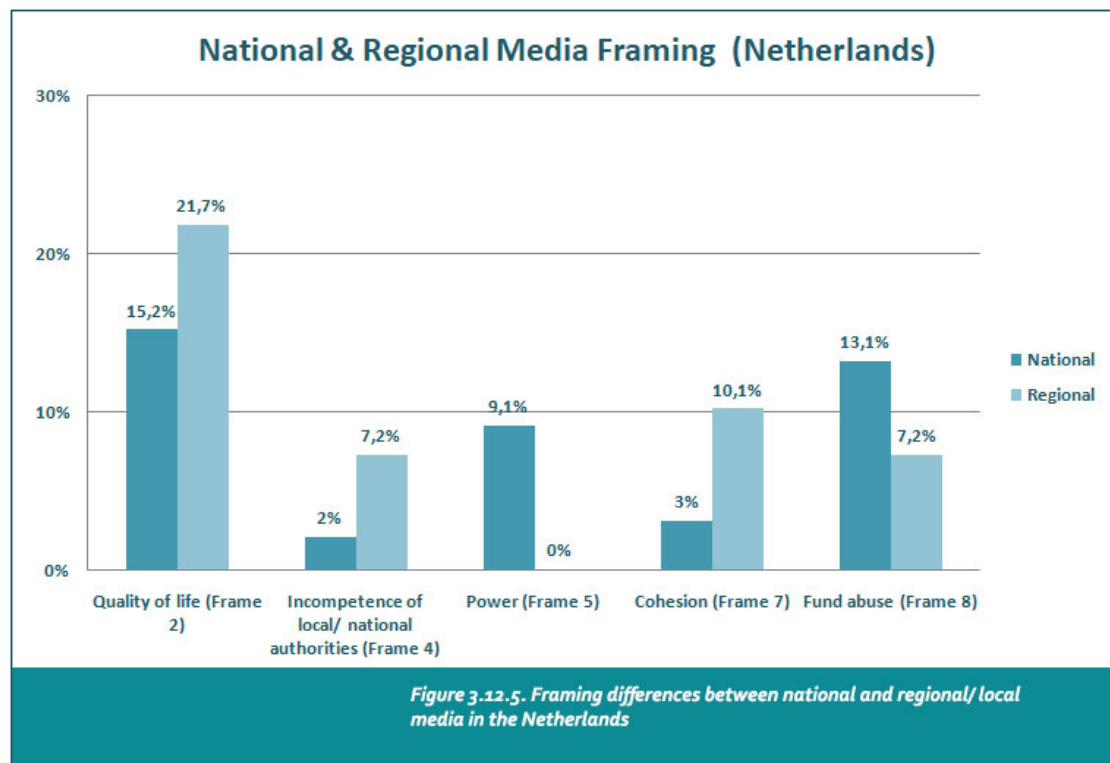
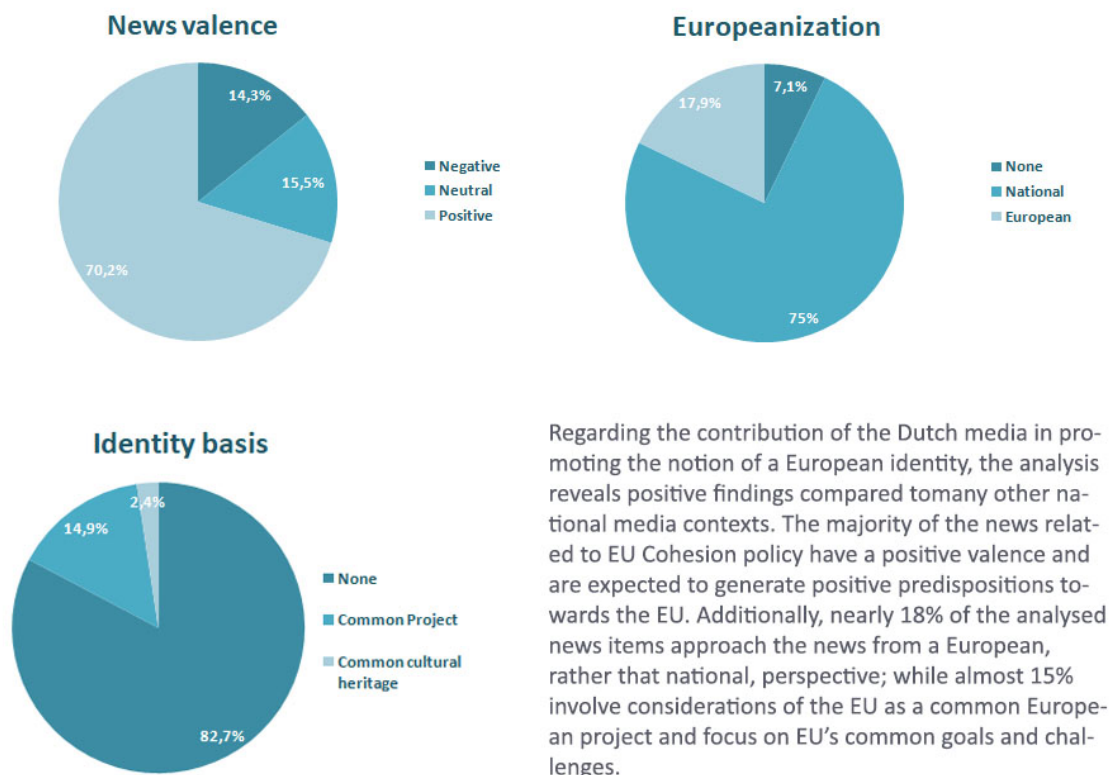


Figure 3.12.4  **Netherlands** - Europeanization variables



Several differences we identified in the analysis of the Europeanisation variables that are expected to affect European identity formation. As Figure 3.12.6 shows, regional media tend to present more positive and less negative news than national media, while national media perform better in the Europeanisation of the public discourse and in promoting the common European objectives, interests and cultural heritage.

