



Cohesion policy and EU identity in Romania

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Introduction

This case study analyses the **impact of the Cohesion Policy on the formation of a European identity for Romanian citizens**. To do so, it first analyses the implementation and performance of the Cohesion Policy in the two programme periods since Romania's accession to the European Union: 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 (up to 2017) respectively. The section shows that Romania faces major structural problems in implementing structural funds and that these problems are caused by the low capacity of the state to manage European money. Furthermore, the section shows that there has been only a limited learning after 2014 from the previous programming period.

Linked to the above, the following section shows that Romanian citizens **assign blame for the poor management of structural funds to national and local actors rather than to EU level actors**. As a result, the majority of citizens are in favour of European integration and feel attached to the EU even if the Cohesion Policy has performed poorly in Romania. Furthermore, the **study finds that communication of the Cohesion Policy is uneven cross operational programmes**. In the majority of the programmes communication is perceived as a burden rather than an asset to be used and it is formally implemented. The Regional Operational Programme is an exception, with communication activities being used in order to improve both the knowledge about structural funds as well as general perceptions about the role of EU in Romania's development.

The study uses a **mixed-method design**, based on interviews, focus groups, surveys, secondary data analysis, documentary analysis, content analysis of political party manifestos and media framing analysis. It integrates individual, regional and national data to provide a complete picture of the impact and consequences for the EU identity of Cohesion Policy in Romania.

1. Context and Background

1.1 Socioeconomic context

Prior to the economic crisis Romania has been one of the fastest growing economies in the EU, with the GDP growth rate reaching 8.5 percent in 2008. GDP growth has resulted from a boom in consumption fuelled by a decrease in the cost of credit (similar to other economies in Central and Eastern Europe) but also from growing levels of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Romania's competitive complex manufacturing sectors. FDI has concentrated in the Western regions which has contributed growing socio-economic disparities between these regions and the rest of the country.

The economic expansion witnessed by Romania ahead of the crisis has been reflected in low levels of unemployment. However, in spite of the economic growth the country remained one of the poorest members of the EU with both relative and in-work poverty being the highest in the EU. The crisis has exacerbated these trends, with around 25 percent of the Romanian population being in relative poverty in 2014 18.9 percent being at risk of in work poverty in 2016 according to Eurostat data.

Besides, social problems, Romania's infrastructure development is slow, which impacts its competitiveness and contributes to its unequal regional development. Poor infrastructure has resulted in the creation of pockets of development around larger cities (Bucharest, Timisoara, Cluj) with the capital being the most attractive for investments.

In response to the economic crisis, the country has sought to streamline public sector expenditure while also accessing financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Union. Structural funds have been a key component in putting the economy back on track, especially after 2011, when absorption rates increased at a very fast rate.

Currently, the country is undergoing major reforms in its tax, labour market, and social security systems. In the aftermath of the crisis, the minimum wage has increased at a very fast rate, although labour costs remain competitive. At the same time, recent change in the tax system has shifted all employers' social security contributions in the responsibility of the employee.

1.2 Political context

All Romanian parties are in favour of both European integration and EU Cohesion policy. Party policy shifts in both policy areas are rather small over time (see Table 1). Yet, compared to Polish parties, parties in Romania devote much less space of their manifestos to European issues (see Figure 1).¹ Nevertheless, if they talk about European issues they frequently talk about EU funding (see Figure 2).

Table 1. National party positions on European integration and EU Cohesion policy in Romania

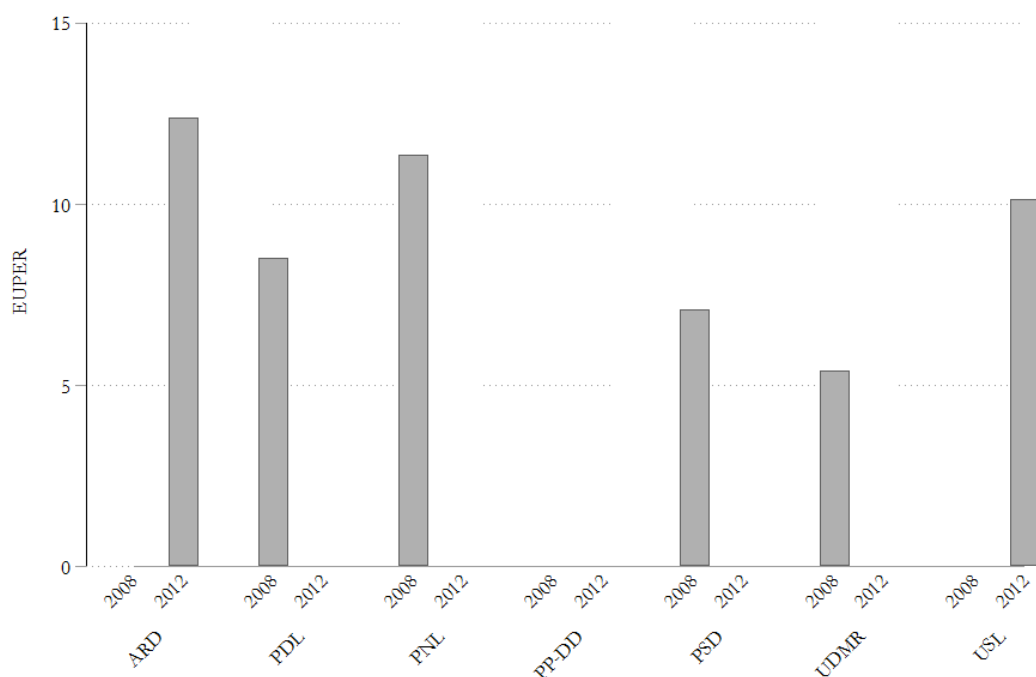
Party	European integration			Cohesion policy		
	2006	2010	2014	2006	2010	2014
PSD	6.20	6.14	5.82	5.89	6.21	6.71
PC	6.89	5.47	5.35	5.78	5.80	6.44
PRM	4.20	3.70	-	4.78	5.13	-
PDL	6.80	6.36	6.65	6.33	6.26	6.75
PNL	6.70	6.27	6.53	6.33	6.16	6.71
UDMR	6.60	6.45	6.29	6.44	6.42	6.50
FDGR	6.43	-	-	6.17	-	-
UNPR	-	-	5.59	-	-	6.50
PP-DD	-	-	4.53	-	-	5.92
PMP	-	-	6.50	-	-	6.60
PLR	-	-	6.29	-	-	6.69

Note: Party policy positions are based on a CHES seven-point scale, ranging from 'strongly opposed' (1) to 'strongly in favour' (7); see (Bakker et al., 2015).

On the other hand, as Figure 1 shows, the large parties, such as PSD dedicate very little space in their manifestos to European issues during elections and much less than parties in Western Europe (Debus and Gross 2017). Furthermore, as Figure 2 shows, new parties such as USL, talked more about EU funding in comparison with established parties. On the other hand, UDMR, which is a regional party has referred to European funds more often than most of the national parties (except for USR).

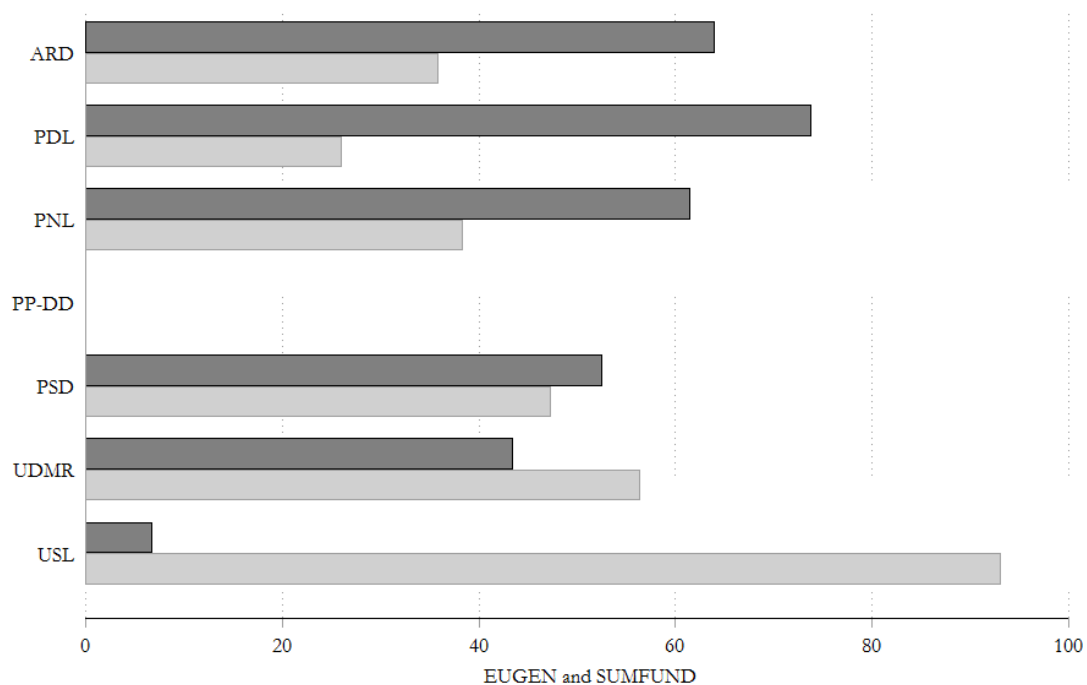
¹ PP-DD does not talk about European issues at all in 2012.

Figure 1. EUPER by parties by election year in Romania



Note: Bars show the percentage of the national 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.

Figure 2. EUGEN and SUMFUND by parties in Romania



Note: Bars in dark grey show the average percentage of the national 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' national manifestos.

1.3 European identity

Since accession, Romanians have consistently exhibited higher levels of trust in the EU in comparison to the EU average. For example, Eurobarometer data show that in 2017, 50 percent of the Romanians trusted the EU, compared to 41 percent of EU average.² **Romanians' attachment to the European Union and Europe remained stable across time:** both in 2007 and 2017, 39 percent of the Romanians responded that they feel fairly attached to the EU while 16 percent responded that they feel very attached to the EU.

At the same time, **the level of optimism about the future of the EU amongst Romanians remained fairly stable** since accession: whereas 57 percent were fairly optimistic about the future of the EU in 2007, 59 percent declared themselves fairly optimistic in 2017. Still, the share of those who declared themselves very optimistic about EU's future declined from 18 percent in 2007 to 7 percent in 2017.

However, support for European policies has somewhat declined amongst Romanians. For example, 72 per cent of the Romanians declared themselves in support of a European economic and monetary union with one single currency in 2007 compared to 58 percent in 2017. Furthermore, the number of Romanians **who oppose further enlargement of the EU has increased from 8 percent in 2007 to 27 percent in 2017.**

By comparison, **trust in regional and local public authorities has somewhat declined in Romania:** 55 percent of the respondents declared that they tend not to trust regional and local public institutions in 2008 compared to 59 percent in 2017. Trust in political parties has also declined with 84 percent of the Romanians declaring that they do not trust political parties in 2017 compared to 75 percent in 2008 (the EU averages for the same years were 75 and 77 percent respectively).

2. Cohesion policy implementation and performance

2.1 EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework: 2007-2013

The Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for Romania is the one of the implementation instruments included in the 2007-2013 National Development Plan', the document that set the developmental priorities for the eight Romanian regions. The general objective of the Plan was to reduce the economic and social disparities between Romania and the other European member states. Furthermore, the National Reference Framework for 2007 -2013 established the intervention priorities for European Structural Funds (ESFs) in Romania and linked the development goals set in the National Development Plan with the cohesion priorities set by the European Union. The framework also included an analysis of the developmental needs of Romanian regions, with a focus on the social and economic areas that should be prioritized by the interventions of the ROP as well as by other ESFs.³

The implementation responsibility for the ROP was assigned to the Ministry of Regional Development which is the Managing Authority (MA) of the programme. The MA relies a network of intermediary bodies, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), for implementing the ROP at the regional level. The RDAs ensure that the strategy developed by the MA is implemented and act as local representatives of the MA, being responsible with monitoring the implementation of the

² The Eurobarometer data can be accessed at: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/index>

³ The plan aims to identify the key development needs of Romania and establish a list of financing priorities. Thus its scope is to ensure that financing received from the European Union is synced with national investments.

projects, communicating with beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, evaluating financing applications and developing partnerships with local and regional actors. It is important to note that the RDAs are not public institutions but non-governmental institutions.

The ROP contained five priority axes (see Table 2 below), out of which the support to sustainable development of urban growth poles received the largest allocation (30%) followed by the improvement of regional and local transport infrastructure (20.3%) and improvement of social infrastructure and sustainable development and tourism (each with 14.9%). Financing was allocated to each region depending on its level of development (which was assessed in an ex-ante evaluation) and in sync with allocations that a particular region received from other operational programmes.

The first priority axis aimed to increase the quality of life in urban centres by creating jobs, restoring urban infrastructure, improving urban and social services as well as developing the infrastructure necessary for enhancing entrepreneurship. As one of the main problems of Romania was and still is the poor infrastructure, investments through the ROP aimed to improve transport systems and revitalise degraded areas, in a belief that such investments will improve the quality of life of inhabitants and increase the economic competitiveness of the targeted areas. The ROP aimed to finance the development of integrated urban development plans that ensured that investments in infrastructure had to be connected with social interventions. Thus, measures financed within the first priority axis, such as the restoration of historical buildings, the renovation of abandoned buildings, the rehabilitation of streets and public utilities had to be connected with interventions that fell under the third axis such as the restoration of social centres.

Other measures that targeted the social aspects of underdevelopment (axis 3) included: investments in hospitals and emergency services, investments in equipment in existing social centres, the development of multi-purpose social centres (centres that would provide help in different domains: financial, judicial, medical or training for integration in the labour market).

The ROP also focused on improving the competitiveness of Romanian regions by stimulating investments in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Specifically, the programme financed investments in industrial parks, business parks and logistic parks in order to attract investors. The programme also included a grant scheme for SMEs and start-ups as well as a consultancy scheme aimed at helping potential entrepreneurs to get the skills necessary for developing their business.

The other funding priority for the ROP was the development of tourism. The main domains of intervention within this priority axis included: the restoration and sustainable valorisation of cultural heritage and modernization of related infrastructure; developing or upgrading specific infrastructure for sustainable use of natural resources and to increase the quality of tourism services and promote tourism potential and creating the infrastructure for growing the attractiveness of Romania as a tourist destination.

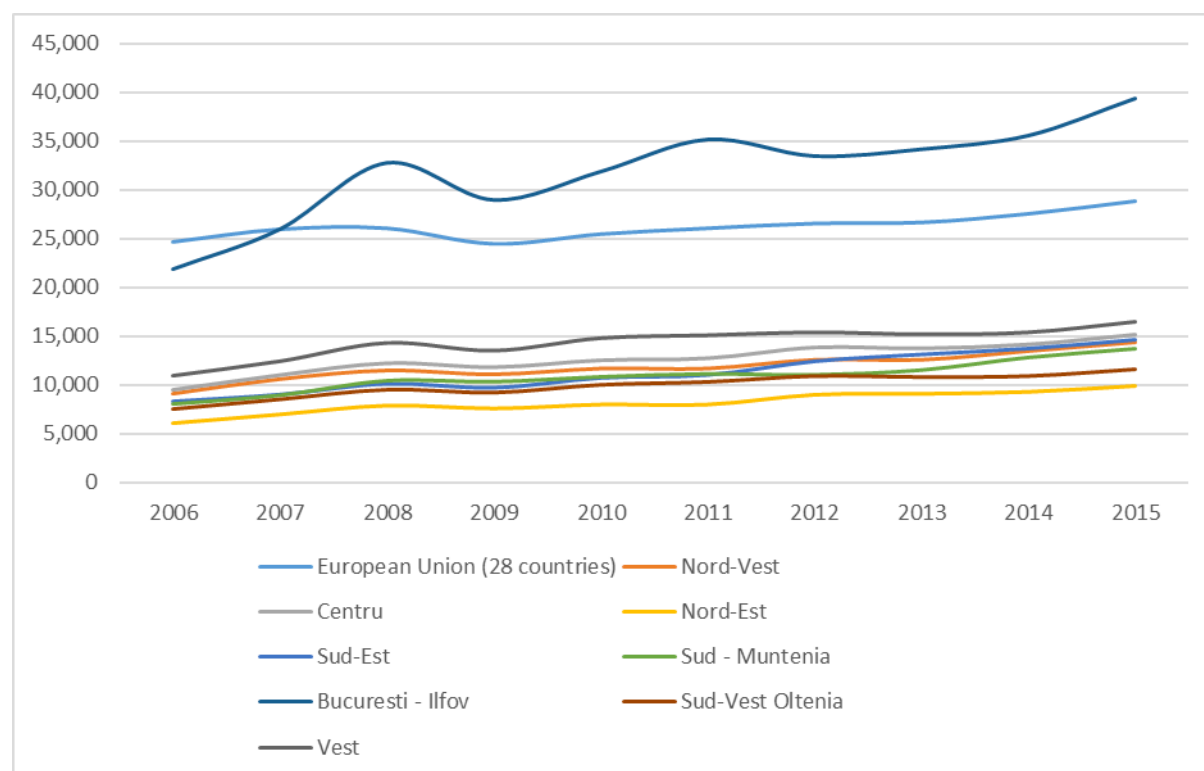
Table 2. Priority axes and allocations in 2007-2013

<i>Romania ROP 2007-2013</i>		
Priority axes	EFRD allocation (%)	EFRD allocation (mil EUR)
1. Support to sustainable development of urban growth poles	30	1117,8
2. Improvement of regional and local transport infrastructure	20,3	758,3
3. Improvement of social infrastructure	14,9	558,9
4. Strengthening the regional and local business environment	17	633,4

<i>Romania ROP 2007-2013</i>		
Priority axes	EFRD allocation (%)	EFRD allocation (mil EUR)
5. Sustainable development and promotion of tourism	14,9	558,9
6. Technical Assistance	2,6	98,6
Total	100	3726

Interviewees stress that the main socio-economic needs faced by Romania were the lack of infrastructure and the economic disparities existent between regions as well as between the country as a whole and other European countries. Overall Romania fared much worse in terms of development indicators even compared with neighbouring countries such as Hungary or Poland. The economic disparities are an acute problem as there is a large inequality between several urban centres (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca or Timisoara) that receive investments and have a much higher GDP per capita in comparison with other regions. For example, the GDP per capita in the Buharest-Ilfov region is at least twice as large as that of other Romanian regions (see Figure 2). By comparison, in the cities in the less developed regions such as the North-East region or the South-East Region, there is little investment, either domestic or foreign, which leads to high levels of poverty and unemployment. Unemployment levels are particularly high in the Eastern counties where industrial restructuring and plant closures during the past two decades have led to high levels of job destruction.

Figure 2. Regional GDP at Current Market Prices (PPS per inhabitant) in Romania.



According to interviewees, these problems are compounded by the lack of basic infrastructure such as roads. Romania has one of the poorest road infrastructure in the EU which limits severely the developmental potential of the regions. Plans to modernize road infrastructure have generally failed either because of lack of national and local financial resources, a disconnect between investment priorities in different counties, corruption as well as changes in central government which are linked with interruptions in ongoing projects. The latter presents a big issue for Romania as, according to one of the interviewees, regional developmental needs are not prioritized by central agencies which, due to a higher turnover compared with regional and local agencies, lack the know how about specific issues affecting cities and regions.

2.2 EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework: 2014-2020

The 2014-2020 ROP continues the development goals set in the previous programming period and was designed based on the *ex-ante* evaluation report for the 2007 -2013 ROP. The programme mission statement mentions that the development needs that identified for the previous programming period remain current and became even more urgent due to the impact of the economic crisis of 2008-2009. This had a negative impact on economic growth, business environment, social security and social assistance systems and the standard of living of a large portion of the population.

The mission statement identifies several priority development needs, some of which are similar with the previous period (the need to support SMEs as a mechanism to generate employment, the need of infrastructure in urban areas, the need to develop infrastructure for tourism, more investments in social infrastructure in order to promote social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and prevent high levels of unemployment and poverty⁴) and some which are new to the 2014 - 2020 programing period (the need to generate innovation in companies and cancel the disconnect between research and business, the need to address the unsustainable energy usage in private and public spaces, and the need to improve property registration in the Land Registry and unify the two existing systems of registration). These needs are planned to be addressed by the ROP which is organized in 11 priority axes (compared with 6 in the previous programming period) to be financed by the European Regional and Development (ERDF) which allocated 6.3 billion euro compared to 3.7 billion in the previous programming period.

Thus, in comparison with the 2007-2013 period, the ROP brings more axes for financing and has a total allocation of 8.25 billion euro which amounts to an increase of 70 percent. There are a range of new projects which can be financed through the ROP. The centres for technological transfer⁵ (financed through the first priority axis) aim to stimulate innovation and bring to markets state of the art research findings. This axis was developed in response to the ex-post analysis of the previous programing period which revealed that very few SMEs engage in technological uptake (around 3 percent in Romania) and that two thirds of SMEs disappear during the first

⁴ Unemployment and poverty became important policy themes especially in the aftermath of the economic crisis in Europe. They are an important aspect of the Country Specific Recommendations issued by the European Commission each year in the context of the European Semester.

⁵ These centres aim to facilitate the transfer of technology between research and development bodies (universities) and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). They develop partnerships with private and public partners, organize training sessions, participate and organize fairs and communicate about research.

year of existence. Furthermore, the ROP finances business incubators in order to help SMEs to develop.

Furthermore, a key difference between the two programming periods was the introduction of a correlated approach to developmental problems within and across regions, in a recognition that investments in infrastructure need to take into account both the local, regional as well and inter-regional needs. Thus, the 2014-2020 ROP finances the building of regional hospitals as well as the renovation of the emergency rooms for county hospitals. The programme also finances investments in road infrastructure which can ensure the connection with the European network of transport. Territorial Integrated Investments also seek to address the multifaceted developmental problems that Romanian regions face: they finance programs that address multiple priorities in a single area (for example programs that focus on SMEs, tourism and health infrastructure at the same time).

The new ROP gives more freedom to local disadvantaged communities to implement programmes that target their needs. Whereas in the previous period, programs were implemented by local authorities or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the new programme, local communities can implement projects of social inclusion financed by the ROP as well as through the Human Capital OP⁶.

As Table 3 shows, by far the largest priority axis in terms of financial allocation is the support for sustainable urban development which received 42.1 percent of total allocations.

Table 3. Priority axes and allocations in 2014-20

Priority allocation	ERDF allocation (%)	ERDF allocation (EUR)
1. Promoting technology transfer	2,6	165
2. Improving the competitiveness of SMEs	11,1	700
3. Supporting the transition to a low carbon economy	4,8	300
4. Support sustainable urban development	42,1	2654
5. Improving the urban environment and conservation, protection and sustainable use of cultural heritage	4,8	300
6. Improving road infrastructure of regional importance	14,3	900
7. The diversification of local economies through sustainable tourism development	1,5	95
8. Health and social infrastructure development	6,4	400
9. Supporting economic and social regeneration of deprived urban communities	1,4	90
10. Improving educational infrastructure	5,4	340

⁶ Local communities can organize themselves into Action Groups which include various local actors: local NGOs, private actors, local social assistance institutions, public institutions as well as school inspectorates.

Priority allocation	ERDF allocation (%)	ERDF allocation (EUR)
11. Geographical expansion of the system of cadastre and property registration in the Land Registry	4,0	250
12. Technical assistance	1,7	104
Total	100	6298

Reviewees report that the socio-economic needs for the 2014-2020 period remain largely similar with those which those which existed in the previous programming period. Romania remains a laggard in terms of infrastructure, which is the key area that should be tackled through ROP investments. Regional economic inequalities also remain high and growing with significant differences in unemployment and poverty levels between Eastern and Western regions. Furthermore, the urban – rural divide remains significant, with rural areas being more likely to be affected by high levels of poverty and unemployment. In the case of cities, there is a need to address the existence of disadvantaged communities through active measures that would promote inclusion in the labour market as opposed to passive measures which focus on income maintenance or investments in local infrastructure. Since 2014 the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived finances an OP in Romania which offers assistance to deprived persons. Investment in SMEs is also a priority for Romania. Romania still lags behind in the number of SMEs compared with other EU countries. This situation was worsened by the impact of the economic crisis which led to the destruction of many local SMEs because of an unstable economic and political environment as well as because of issues created by bureaucracy.

2.3 Implementation framework and partnership structures

For both the 2007 –2013 and 2014 – 2020 periods, the managing authority (MA) for the ROP was the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration. The programme is implemented in a decentralized manner, with 9 intermediary bodies (IBs): eight local development agencies (1 in each region) and the National Agency for Tourism. The IBs organize all the aspects related with implementation at the regional level (guidance for potential applicants, implement the communication plan, prepare the project guidelines, organise the evaluation of the projects, supervise projects, check for irregularities etc.) The Monitoring Committee is responsible with ensuring the effectiveness and the quality of the implementation of the ROP and comprises representatives from Ministries, IBs, NGOs as well as associations such as the Association of Romanian Cities. The composition of the Committee is: 1/3 members of the central administration, 1/3 members of the Regional Development Councils and 1/3 members of the civil society. The composition of the Monitoring Committee has not changed between the two programming periods. The Regional Development Councils are consultative institutions which analyse the investment priorities for each region.

Interviewees confirmed that, the monitoring committees are the key consultative bodies that supervise the implementation of the ROP in Romania. ROP national representatives reported that Monitoring Committees (MCs) are a useful tool to discuss issues related with the implementation of the programme and include the positions raised by local partners or by civil society. MCs are perceived as useful for a for communicating about the rules set for the programmes and for making sure that there is a proper understanding regarding the guidelines for accessing funds amongst

local and regional authorities. National representatives also reported that the MCs are used for receiving feedback from other members. Meetings are usually public and minutes of the meetings are published on the programme website.

On the other hand, local and civil society representatives report that MC meetings are of limited utility because they do not serve as fora for substantial feedback regarding the functioning of the programme but are just formal institutions. This is caused by several factors. First, local, regional and NGO representatives reported that their feedback during the MC meetings is not included in the project guides developed by the MA. Second, the agenda of the meetings is oftentimes not sent in advance or very little the before the meeting so there is little knowledge, especially amongst the representatives of the civil society, of the topics to be discussed. Third, some partners reported that they found out about meetings only after the meeting took place.

Therefore, there is little substantial consultation regarding the programmes in Romania. Civil society actors reported that they find little use of the MC meetings, except for the fact that they get to be informed about decisions already taken at the Ministry level. Furthermore, there seemed to be a similar perception amongst representatives of IBs who reported that there is little that they could do to set the agenda of MC meetings.

2.4 Assessment of performance

The evaluation of the 2007 – 2013 ROP reveals that *overall* the programme interventions had a net positive impact on the economy, by improving the availability and quality of services, increasing the number of jobs as well as increasing the number of users of particular services. These findings are the result of a *counterfactual* evaluation of selected interventions financed by the ROP, and represent the *average* impact of the programme and interventions undertaken under different domains of major intervention (DMIs).

Within the first priority axis, *support to sustainable development of urban growth poles*, there were 518 projects which received financing. Out of these, 355 projects focused on improving the urban infrastructure, 117 focused on improving the social infrastructure and delivering integrated services for disadvantaged groups while 22 projects focused on improving the business infrastructure. Thus, the majority of the interventions focused on restoring and modernizing streets and bridges, modernizing public transport systems as well as on modernizing urban public spaces. The projects were almost equally distributed amongst the regions. At the same time, some regions focused more on developing projects on social infrastructure such as the South-East region. Within the ROP, the first priority axis was seen as an axis that could provide support for the development of interventions prioritized by the other axes because of its focus on investments in basic infrastructure as a way of improving the competitiveness of Romanian cities.

Regarding the third priority axis, *improvement of social infrastructure*, three DMIs, *modernization, development and equipment of infrastructure for health services, improvement of infrastructure in emergency care centres and improvement of infrastructure in social centres*, were evaluated using the counterfactual method. The evaluation generally shows that there were some positive outcomes of the interventions financed by the first two DMIs such as: the increase in the number of patients treated by hospitals which were modernized and an improvement in the quality of services offered to patients. However, the evaluation reveals that the interventions did not have any significant impact on access to healthcare for disadvantaged groups and that there were inequalities in the impact of the projects across regions (e.g. in Bucharest, South-East Region and the North-East Region the projects had no impact on the quality of care offered in hospitals which participated in projects financed through ROP). Furthermore, the evaluation reveals that the most successful projects were those which financed interventions in both infrastructure and equipment. Note that

the impact indicator used for evaluating the interventions are rather formal: the increase in the number of patients (which could be the result of other changes such as the closure of hospitals in some regions). Yet other indicators such as the mortality rate measured before and after the interventions show that the project had a *negative impact* (the mortality rate increased), which might be a statistical artefact and indicate some problems related to sampling and missing variable bias.

Regarding the effects of the interventions which targeted infrastructure in social centres, the evaluation report reveals that the effects of the interventions were also limited. The findings of the evaluation report are not reliable to the fact that the data used are not comparable and the number of interventions evaluated is small. The report reveals that the impact of financing on the number of user of social care centres is small to non-existent. Similarly, the impact of the intervention on the likelihood of the users to find a job is not reliable: although the report seems to suggest a positive correlation between financing and the ability of individuals to hold a long-term employment contract, it mentions that the 'size of the effect is small and should be tested on larger samples'.

The fourth priority axis, which covers projects that aim to strengthen the regional and local business environment, three DMIs were evaluated: *sustainable development of business support structures of regional and local importance*, *the rehabilitation of polluted and unused industrial sites and preparation for new activities*, and *support for the development of SMEs*. Out of the total of 99 projects financed within the sustainable development DMI, 41 projects were finished, with 22 business structures receiving help (5 more than in the impact indicator originally set in the project). Furthermore, by 2015, when the evaluation was carried out, the employment target was 68 percent fulfilled. The evaluation also shows that the intervention had positive externalities in terms of training and development for personnel working in SMEs, improvement in the quality of services delivered to companies, spill-overs in terms of innovation and good practices amongst SMEs at the regional and local level as well as the sustainability of financed projects after the end of the financing period.

Regarding the second DMI which focuses on *the rehabilitation of polluted and unused industrial sites*, at the end of 2014 there were a total of 7 projects which received financing, with none of the projects being finalized. The projects were located in two regions: West and Centre. There were several reasons outlined by the IBs for the failures of the financed interventions: the complexity of the projects and the lack of applicants, the fulfilment of formal targets without substantive impact on the local and regional economy (beneficiaries just built buildings without attracting investors as was mentioned in the financing contracts), problems raised by the property rights of the land included in the application for financing⁷ as well as the high costs associated with the interventions.

The interventions within the third DMI which aim to support the development of SMEs were reported to have a net positive impact both in terms of *job creation* as well as in terms of *job retention*. The evaluation reported that SMEs which received financing created, on average, an additional 3 jobs in comparison with SMEs which did not receive financing. Furthermore, four years after finishing the project, beneficiaries retained an average of 2.4 jobs which indicates that job retention is high amongst project beneficiaries. The qualitative analysis (interviews and case studies) also indicated that the interventions contributed to the increase of the entrepreneurial capacity of the beneficiaries by stimulating new approaches to business strategies, improvements in the delivery of products and a reorganization of the SME activities towards more sustainable approaches to business management. Still, these improvements have to be contextualized at the regional level. The regional competitiveness remained highly unequal with Bucharest scoring much higher in comparison with all other regions. Furthermore, within regions, inequalities in competitiveness levels remain high between urban centres and the rest of the region.

⁷ These refer to the cases in which public authorities could not expropriate land in order to use it for building the sites.

The fifth priority axis finances projects in the areas of sustainable development and promotion of tourism with interventions focused in the development and upgrading of cultural heritage and tourism infrastructure. Three were three DMIs evaluated within the scope of this priority axis: *the sustainable use of cultural heritage and creation / upgrading of related infrastructure*; the creation / development / upgrading of specific infrastructures for sustainable use of natural resources and for increasing the quality of tourism services; and *promoting the tourism potential and creating the necessary infrastructure in order to increase the attractiveness of Romania as a tourist destination*. The evaluation report of the first DMI revealed that at the end of 2014 there were 98 projects that received financing out of which 40 were finalized. The interventions had an overall positive impact on the sites: they contributed to the doubling of the number of visitors on the sites where projects were finished; they increased the interest of local authorities in developing programs related to tourism and created local networks for cultural tourism. In terms of the number of jobs created the impact is limited due to the nature of projects financed through this axis (restauration of monuments, churches, etc). Regarding the second DMI, the evaluation report shows that financing had positive effects on the number of rooms for accommodation while also increasing the number of clients for businesses. However, there was no impact on the average holiday duration nor on the profit rates of individual businesses.

Finally, through the third DMI 295 projects were finalized by 2015. A national campaign for creating a country brand was financed through this call. However, the evaluation shows that this measure had no impact on the number of tourists who visited Romania. On the other hand, the creation of National Information and Promotion Centers for Tourism also had a very small impact on tourism and the economy. Two case studies from different regions suggest that the measure contributed to a 10 percent increase in the number of people who visited the center in Cluj, while in the case of Tulcea the impact evaluation reports that there were 5 new jobs created at the center as a result of the investment.

There were a set of challenges which had an impact on the success of the interventions financed through the 2007-2013 ROP:

1. Rules regarding the public procurement procedures remain a major problem in Romania and contribute to numerous delays during the launch of call for projects, implementation as well as evaluation stages. Thus the administrative burden created by difficult public procurement procedures has been a key factor explaining delays in projects.
2. The calls for applications for financing were generally launched late and the process of applying for projects was extremely complex and unpredictable, with changes in rules being introduced after the call was open. At the same time the unpredictability of the rules which govern the projects extended after part of the money were already contracted: beneficiaries had to adjust to new rules introduced by the MA during the implementation phase of the project.
3. Some of the projects were too complex both logistically and in terms of the infrastructure available at the local or regional level which contributed to delays in implementation.
4. In some cases, the project targets were not clearly specified, thus enabling beneficiaries to fulfil formal targets with no real impact on the local or regional economy (as was the case of the DMI 4.2 - the rehabilitation of polluted and unused industrial sites)
5. The impact evaluations of the interventions carried through the ROP remain poor because statistically sound impact evaluation criteria were not incorporated in the initial evaluation plans. Rather, the evaluation plans set forward by the MA focused on descriptive indicators (e.g. number of people who use a service) and not on identifying *effects* of the programs. Thus, even if counterfactual methods were used in evaluating the impact of interventions

financed through several DMIs, these are of limited utility because the data gathered and the indicators used by the MA are of poor quality.

6. Although the ROP document requires that emphasis should be put on financing projects which are integrated across different DMIs, in reality projects were awarded without respecting this criterion. Thus, in some cases, investments had little impact and remained of limited utility for the community - for example investments in infrastructure for tourism in places with limited tourism potential or that are inaccessible by tourist. These types of investments were not correlated with local or regional development programs and proved to be difficult to sustain after the end of the project.
7. There remains a problem related to the sustainability of some of the implemented projects after the end of the financing period in light of the public sector cuts passed in Romania in response to the economic and financial crisis of 2008-2009. This aspect is particularly relevant for projects belonging to the third priority axis. Social centres were faced with changes in personnel numbers while NGOs faced financial issues as a result of the crisis. Thus an important aspect raised by these projects is the capacity of the beneficiaries (NGOs in this case) to successfully carry out a project.

Interviews revealed that there are several aspects which have led to problems for programmes. First, the MAs have a bureaucratic approach to programme guidelines which end up putting a large administrative burden on beneficiaries. In the case of SMEs for example, this places an extremely high burden in terms of reporting and fulfilling all the criteria and targets of the programs, and will ultimately deter them from applying for future calls. In comparison, applying for a loan in the case of an SME carries fewer burdens and allows businesses to dedicate time to development instead of filling paperwork.

Second, there is sometimes a disconnect between the priorities set by MAs and the priorities identified by the IBs such as the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). RDAs report that they have little influence over the management of the programmes.

Third, respondents report that public procurement procedures are major problem in the case of Romania. Public procurement rules are always changing or the rules for participating in projects are too strict relative to the scope of the contract.

Fourth, there are numerous blockages during the life of a project created by political changes in the MAs. Changes in the Ministries responsible with managing the ROP involve an overhaul of personnel responsible with project which creates project management problems. Interviewees also report a lack of transparency regarding the manner in which some projects are allocated. This is linked with the fact that corruption remains a major issue in Romania – although reported corruption levels in Cohesion funds are generally lower in comparison with state funds.

Fifth, interviewees revealed that there is a lack of administrative capacity that would ensure that the right projects get financing. In the 2007-2013 period, there was evidence of beneficiaries which gained financing from different RDAs with the same project. This indicates a lack of monitoring capacity of the MA as well a deficit of communication between RDAs and MA. Furthermore, the lack of the monitoring capacity is also revealed by the type of projects that are financed by the ROP. In some cases, it is evident that the MA places a great deal of importance in quantitative indicators without considering qualitative aspects of the project (is the infrastructure used by anyone? is investment in human resources desirable in the context of local and regional labour markets?).

Moreover, the decentralized manner in which the implementation of the ROP (as well as other OPs) is organized in Romania is generally perceived as a positive aspect. The MAs do not have the administrative capacity to manage all the project aspects and thus the majority of the

responsibilities are devolved to the Regional Development Agencies. The RDAs are essential in ensuring that the projects are implemented correctly and that the beneficiaries deliver on the targets set in the contracts.

Finally, in Romania the interviewees reported that the main priority for governments has been absorption – thus spending as much as possible of the available funds. Absorption has been the goal of all MAs especially after 2012 when the government shifted its policy and emphasized the need to use cohesion funds. Whereas up to 2012 MAs were barely launching the calls and were holding back on publishing the guides and having very high rejection rates for projects, after 2013, they realised that they have to increase the absorption rate and introduced absorption targets for each MA. This has led to investing in projects in terms of quantity and ignoring the quality of the proposed interventions.

In the case of the ROP publication of achievements has been an important part of the program as well. ROP has the most successful communication strategy amongst Romanian OPs and has been using information about its achievements in order to improve the quality of the applications.

2.5 Stakeholder survey

Survey respondents generally agree that Romanian regions have benefited from funds disbursed through the Cohesion policy. While 50 percent of the respondents agree that funds have been used well at the regional level, 43 percent agree that funds have been used in an acceptable manner at the municipality level (see Tables 4 below). However, when it comes to whether the local and regional objectives are in sync with those promoted by the Cohesion policy, most of the Romanian stakeholders' report that there is a degree of mismatch between these with 66.6 percent reporting that Cohesion policy objectives reinforced the development objectives of municipalities 'in some way' while 53.3 percent reported that regional objectives were reinforced 'in some way' by Cohesion funds (see Table 5 below).

Table 4. Use of funds at the municipality/regional level.

Q1. How well – in your opinion – have Cohesion policy funds been used in your municipality and region?	Very well	Well	Acceptable	Poorly
1. Your municipality	28.6%	21.4%	43%	7%
2. Your region	21.4%	50%	21.4%	7.2%

Table 5. Match between Cohesion policy objectives and local/ regional policies.

Q2. To what extent have the Cohesion policy objectives reinforced the development objectives of your municipality and region?	Completely	Largely	In some way	Not much	Not at all	Don't know
1. Your municipality	13.3%	13.3%	66.6%			6.6%
2. Your region	13.3%	26.6%	53.3%			6.6%

Table 6 reports the perceived developmental impact of the Cohesion policy in Romania. Generally, the majority of the respondents⁸ agree that the impact is positive both in terms of decreasing the cross-regional differences between the regions in the country, the differences between the poorer and richer areas as well as between urban and rural areas. However, a large share of the respondents (26.6 percent) reported that cohesion funds had no impact on reducing the developmental gap between Romania and other EU member states.

Table 6. Perceived developmental impact of Cohesion funds.

Q3. To what extent have Cohesion policy funds helped to increase or decrease	Decreased	Somewhat decreased	Had no impact	Somewhat increased	Increased	Don't know
1. Differences in the development level between poorer and richer regions in your country	6.6%	40%	33.3%		13.3%	6.6%
2. Differences in the development level between rural and urban areas in your region	6.6%	46.6%	20%		13.3%	13.3%
3. Differences in the development level between poorer and richer areas in your region		46.6%	20%	20%	6.6%	6.6%
4. Differences in the development level between your country and other European Union Member states	6.6%	30%	26.6%	13.3%	6.6%	13.3%

In terms of implementation problems, a large share of the respondents reported that excessive reporting is a major issue for the successful implementation of Cohesion policy in Romania (see Table 7 below). This finding reinforces the data gathered through desk research and interviews (see the sections above) and indicates that poor quality reporting is perceived to be a problem both by beneficiaries as well as by state functionaries responsible with the administration of funds. Furthermore, 42.9 percent of the Romanian respondents indicated that qualified staff is a significant problem for the administration of Cohesion funds in Romania. Data from the interviews indicate that this issue is important for both national and regional levels and is particularly important for the area of public acquisitions where there is a constant lack of qualified personnel, capable of implementing the complicated legislation existent in Romania. This happens even if Cohesion Funds have been used in the 2007-2014 period for training public sector staff in public acquisitions by both Regional Development Agencies and other beneficiaries such as NGOs. In fact, publicly available data shows that only in 2016, the Romanian Court of Accounts checked 2700 public entities out of 15.000 which used public procurement and found 23500 deviations or mistakes in contracts, with 93 percent of these being done in the implementation phase of the contract.

Table 7. Problems of implementation of Cohesion policy in Romania.

Q5. How significant was the impact of the following problems and challenges during the implementation of Cohesion policy projects?	Very significant	Significant	Average	Insignificant	Not at all	Don't know
Scarcity of Cohesion policy funds	14.3	42%	14.3%	14.3%		7.1%
Problems with obtaining Cohesion policy financing such as complicated rules for submitting applications	14.3%	21.4%	50%	14.3%		

⁸ These numbers have to be interpreted with caution. Response rates to the Romanian survey have been very low with only 15 respondents filling in the full survey.

Excessive, cumbersome reporting	35.7%	21.4%	35.7%		7.1%	
Unclear objectives for evaluating project results	28.6%	7.1%	21.4%	35.7%	7.1%	
Poor cooperation between project partners		21.4%	28.6%	50%		
Excessive audit and control during or after the project completion	28.6%	21.4%	28.6%	21.4%		
Lack of funds for own contribution (co-financing)	28.6%	21.4%	42.9%	7.1%		
Difficult access to credit and/or loans for own contribution	28.6%	42.9%	21.4%	7.1%		
Lack of capacity such as qualified staff	14.3%	42.9%	21.4%	14.3%	7.1%	

Regarding corruption (see Table 8 below), most of the respondents (50 percent) indicated that Cohesion funds are not affected by corrupt practices. On average, reports regarding corruption levels in Romania show that corruption levels associated with Cohesion funds are lower than corruption associated with national funds. From the almost 4000 convictions for corruption which involve public funds done in Romania between 2010 and 2016, 11 percent involve the use of European funds. Out of those 62 percent (275) are convictions of people working in the private sector and 37 percent are convictions of people working in the public sector. Most of the public-sector convictions are of functionaries working at the local level in town halls. However, it is important to note that corruption related to public procurement procedures has been an important aspect for the disbursement of funds to Romania: in 2011, the Commission had to halt reimbursement claims for two OPs (ROP and Human Resources) because of problems raised by its audit mission while at the end of 2012 Romania was subject to the pre-suspension procedure due to similar concerns.

Table 8. Spending and irregularities in Cohesion funds in Romania.

Q6. How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Cohesion policy funds finance those investment projects which your municipality/region needs the most		57.1%	42.9%			
In your municipality/region Cohesion policy funding goes to investment projects which are most valued by the local residents		35.7%	57.1%			7.1%
There are many irregularities in spending Cohesion policy funds due to non-compliance with EU rules		21.4%	14.3%	50%		14.3%
Fraud, such as corruption or nepotism, is common in spending Cohesion policy funds	7.1%	14.3%	14.3%	50%		
There have been many positive changes in your municipality/region thanks to Cohesion policy funds, which would not have been achieved without the funds	21.4%	64.3%	7.1%	7.1%		
The spending of Cohesion policy funds is adequately controlled	21.4%	57.1%	21.4%			
The money from Cohesion policy funds is in most cases wasted on the wrong projects		7.1%	21.4%	71.4%		
The administration of Cohesion policy has been delivered in an efficient (cost-effective) manner	7.1%	50%	28.6%			7.1%

In this respect, it is worth noting that although the respondents generally report that monitoring and evaluation reports provide adequate information and serve to update public policies (see Table

9 below), Romania fared poorly in terms of the administration of Cohesion funds in the 2007 -2013 period. By 2012 Romania had one of the lowest rate of absorption of Cohesion funds in Europe and registered the highest level of financial corrections in Europe of around 20 percent of the total amount of funds absorbed by that time.

Table 9. Monitoring of Cohesion funds in Romania.

Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
The monitoring and evaluation reports provide adequate information on the implementation and performance of the programme/s	7.1%	78.6%	7.1%			
The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easily accessible		64.3%	35.7%			
The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easy to understand		71.4	28.6%			
The monitoring and evaluation report results are used to improve policy-making and implementation		78.5%	14.3%			7.1%

Finally, the Romanian respondents indicated that they have been involved various training programmes including management (61.5 percent of respondents), monitoring (46.2 of respondents), evaluation (46.2 percent of respondents) and communication (61.5 percent of respondents). The latter is particularly interesting since interview data suggest that communication of Cohesion policy occupies a secondary role in the case of Romania.

Table 10. Training provided for staff involved in the administration of Cohesion funds.

Q9. In what Cohesion policy workshop or training sessions did the representatives of your organisation/municipality/region participate in the last two years (select all that apply)?	Yes	No
1. Management	61.5%	38.5%
2. Control	23.1%	76.9%
3. Monitoring	46.2%	53.8%
4. Evaluation	46.2%	53.8%
5. Communication	61.5%	38.5%
6. Nobody participated in such events	7.7%	92.3%

2.6 Partnership

In the 2007 – 2013 period the ROP decided that funds will be distributed into different priority axes after a consultation with representatives of the eight regions of development in Romania. The consultation process for the ROP started in 2004, and continued until the final approval of the programme. Besides, representatives of the regions, at the national level various actors were involved in the public consultations: the Federation of Local Authorities in Romania, the Association of Romanian Municipalities, the Economic and Social Council, the Confederation of Democratic Trade Unions of Romania, the

Confederation of Employers in Services and Commerce, Pro-Democracy Association as well as other partners from the academic and NGO sector. Consultations were also carried out at the regional level with relevant social partners.

In the implementation phase, the central partnership institution is the Monitoring Committee which includes a variety of social partners including: NGOs, local authorities, national authorities, trade union and employers' representatives as well as representatives from the academia. The voting members of the Monitoring Committee are: one third Presidents of County Councils, one third representatives of relevant national institutions and one third representatives of social partners. In addition, the ROP used a network of *Regional Committees of Strategic Evaluation and Correlation* which include social partners from the regions and whose purpose is to ensure that projects which are implemented contribute to regional development goals and that there are synergies between projects implemented at the regional level.

Although formally these institutions sought to operationalise the partnership principle embedded in the EU regulations, oftentimes they failed to do so. Internal evaluations of the ROP showed that the implementation of partnerships had several problems including: lack of a coherent legal basis for implementing partnerships, the lack of administrative capacity of public institutions and in general fragmented communication between different actors.

Similarly, with the previous programming period, the 2014-2020 programme emphasizes the contribution of partnership to the success of the programme and followed a similar process of consultation with various stakeholders. The institutional structure for implementing the partnership principle is also similar. The ROP plan emphasizes its bottom up approach to identifying priorities for investment and therefore to tailoring financial allocations to each regions' specific needs. Compared to the previous period, the main innovation is that projects would receive additional points if they suggest the development of strategic partnerships at the local or regional level. Another innovation was the development of a code of practice for selecting relevant partners in order to ensure transparency of rules.

Interview respondents indicated that the partnership principle was formally implemented with social partners and local authorities having little power to influence key decisions in the programme. Specifically, social partners indicated that the meetings of the Monitoring Committees are sometimes not announced in time, scheduled in distant places (although all the members of the Committee can easily meet in large towns) or no agenda is sent in advance. At the same time, social partners feel that there is little room for them to influence decisions in the Monitoring Committees and that they are used by the managing authority to communicate already implemented decisions. As one of the interviewees explained:

"Let's say we prepared for these monitoring committees before 2007 and we even had some exchanges with colleagues from Poland from whom we've learned some things, about the monitoring committees. We learnt how to play within the committee, what attributions there are and so on. I thought that if you are part of a monitoring committee you have a stronger position and you can influence it, which turned out not to be the case."

"Certainly after we had a first Monitoring Committee in June, we were forgotten to be invited in October. They forgot to invite us and they did not give us any explanation. The Monitoring Committee should have been held last week, but it was cancelled once again. It happened last week and they sent us the implementation report for the last year to approve it online telling us that if we don't respond, it is a tacit approval. They didn't give us an explanation of why it was cancelled."

2.7. Assessment of added value

The ROP is one of the success stories both in terms of evaluation as well as implementation, even though, as argues above, several aspects regarding the implementation and evaluation of the programme were problematic. With these caveats, the ROP had an impact on:

1. The quality of life improved in the cities which were designated as urban growth poles. The interventions financed through the first DMI impacted not only the direct beneficiaries but had positive spill-overs through the communities where projects were implemented. This happened especially in the cities where projects emphasized the improvement in the delivery of social and urban services, the infrastructure for supporting SMEs as well the rehabilitation of urban infrastructure.
2. The programme has a long-term impact on unemployment and school enrolment by addressing one of the main problems in Romanian: urban infrastructure. The projects which focused on urban infrastructure improved access to urban labour markets to people living further from city centres. At the same time school enrolment increased in the cities which benefited from ROP interventions.
3. The evaluations of the ROP also indicate that cities where projects were implemented became more competitive and managed to attract more human capital as measured by the rate of migration.
4. ROP also led to a poly-centric approach to development (growth poles, urban development poles and urban centres) and contributed to the development of an urban network. Furthermore, the ROP was an important tool for implementing "bottom-up" integrated planning practices that enabled the activation of local actors and local investments around joint projects to revitalize the urban areas and enable sustainable economic development for cities.
5. Furthermore, the projects financed through the third DMI had a long-term impact on public safety. The implemented projects supported the development of an integrated approach and inter-regional cooperation in cases of major interventions.
6. The ROP also contributed to the establishment of links between public and private actors which had a positive impact on the sustainability of SMEs. ROP was key to financing SMEs during and after the economic crisis, when alternative financing mechanisms were not available.

3. Cohesion policy communication

3.1 Approach to communication

The communication strategy for cohesion policy in Romania is organized in a highly decentralized manner with the country having one national communication strategy that sets the general strategy for the programming period. The strategy is then broken down by each OP and even further by each region of development. Although this decentralization could in theory contribute to a better tailoring of the communication strategies to particular target groups and regional needs, in practice, it contributed to creating overlapping tasks and messages between various OPS. The communication strategies of the OPs follow similar templates and do not differ much in content and approach. This is especially visible when comparing the target indicators set for the evaluation of the individual communication strategies.

Although the 2007-2013 national communication strategy sets several very important objectives such as to communicate about the transparency in the allocation of structural funds and to provide complete and correct information about financing opportunities, these objectives were not clearly operationalized in the OP communication strategies. Rather, the general objectives remained in the background and the OP strategies focused on fulfilling formal communication criteria (see Table 11 below). On the other hand, it is important to note that in the majority of the communication strategies there is a disconnect between the set objectives, the indicators used for assessment and the messages learned after evaluation. In this sense, the indicators used for assessing the effectiveness of communication activities remained rather basic and did not reveal much about the actual impact of the measures which were undertaken. At the same time, with the exception of the ROP, which continuously evaluated its communication achievements through various methods, the other OPs have relied much less on evaluations.

Table 11. Communication indicators used in the 2007-2013 National Communication Plan

Type of Indicator	Indicator	Initial Value	Intermediary Value (2010)	Target Value (2015)
Output	Number of visitors on the www.fonduri-ue.ro	0	500.000	1.000.000
Output	Number of events organized	10	50	125
Output	Number of edited publications	2	30	100
Output	Number of interviews organised by MAs	0	150	300
Result	Number of questions asked in the Call Centre and at the local info centres	0	25.000	60.000
Result	Number of documents downloaded from the website	0	150.000	350.000
Result	Number of registered users for the newsletter	0	2.000	5.000
Result	Number of published interviews	0	100	250
Result	Number of full searches done in the internal common information system	0	8.000	15.000
Result	Decrease in the number of applications refused because of administrative reasons	40%	20%	10%
Impact	General level of knowledge about cohesion funds	5%	15%	25%

The lack of a sufficient number of evaluations of communication measures also impacted on the manner in which communication strategies were updated over the years, especially in the 2007-2013 period. The annual implementation reports for each OP suggest that there were little qualitative improvements in the communication practices used by the Romanian authorities, although they did fulfil all the official requirements set by the European Union. This was one of the

main explanations for the failure to influence public perceptions about structural funds allocation and their management in Romania. Thus, surveys carried out in 2013 and 2014 reveal that there were almost no changes in the negative perceptions that Romanian citizens have about structural funds.

The National Communication Strategy (NCS) sets the general guidelines for the respective communication strategies developed by each operational programme (OP). In the case of Romania, the NCS was developed based on a series of ex-ante quantitative (survey) and qualitative studies (focus groups), carried out by the Ministry of Public Finance in 2006, prior to the joining to the European Union (EU). The studies revealed several important aspects related to the general perception of Romanian citizens about EU structural funds. First, and not surprisingly given that the country was not yet a member of the EU, the average level of knowledge about structural funds was very low. Second, most citizens considered that the pre-accession funds such as SAPARD (Special accession programme for agriculture and rural development) and Phare (Programme of Community aid to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe) were not distributed transparently and that corruption, especially in the public administration, impedes a fair allocation of funds. Both the media and personal experiences contributed to these negative perceptions, with the Eurobarometer 66 revealing that in 2006 Romanian citizens placed more trust in the EU institutions for solving their problems rather than in national institutions. Third, information about structural funds was unevenly distributed: whereas non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public administration bodies were relatively well informed about the financing opportunities provided by the OPs, the private sector as well as the academia, knew very little about structural funds. In fact, potential beneficiaries did not make a difference between pre-accession and post accession funds and considered that EU money involved too much bureaucracy. Finally, the respondents indicated that the most common sources of information about EU funds were the internet, seminars and media.

Considering the above, the NCS set three general objectives for communication policy: a) to ensure the recognition of EU financing in the modernization of Romania; b) to provide complete and correct information about structural funds; c) to ensure transparency in the allocation of the funds. The target groups for the communication activities were the general population, the potential beneficiaries of the structural funds, the institutions involved in the management and implementation of programmes, stakeholders who do not directly benefit from EU structural funds but who might be impacted by them (businesses, public sector authorities, NGOs etc.), and the media (written, radio and TV). The total budget allocated for the communication activities between 2007 and 2013 for all OPs in Romania was 172 million Euro with around 90% of the amount coming from EU money. Interestingly, although many of the respondents of the ex-ante analysis used in the NCS indicated that corruption was one of the most important issues of EU structural funds, the specific communication objectives set by the NCS did not target this issue as such but focused on more general themes such as increased visibility and information about structural funds. Thus, the issue of transparency set in the general communication objectives received less attention than originally requested by the NCS. The full list of communication activities planned for the 2007-2013 period is listed in Table 11, below.

Table 12. Communication activities listed in the NCS 2007-2013.

Activity	Description of Activity	Target groups
Develop the internet web-page www.fonduri-ue.ro	Should contain all public information provided by MAs and IB including description of funds, programming documents, EU and national legislation, annual reports, announcements about events, case studies and good practices, success stories, a list of projects which obtained financing, links to MAs, a logo and a manual of visual identity and a list of contacts.	All target groups
Create a central Call Centre	Operators who can answer general questions and redirect specific questions to MAs and IBs	Public and potential beneficiaries
Create a common internal info system	Develop a common database which will help internal communication and the creation of network for communication and implementation of the cohesion policy	Public sector employees
Develop a manual of visual identity	Ensure that the visual identity elements are used across OPs	All target groups
Develop Communication Networks	Organize regular meetings and seminars between the coordinators of communication activities across different OPs	Coordinators of communication activities
Create Info Points and Info Centres at the local level	These will provide information about projects and calls and will organize events. Each of them will have a direct phone and email address for communicating with the public.	Potential beneficiaries and local press
Media Campaigns	These will involve: spots, promotional movies, reports and interviews and TV programs as well as articles and spots in local and national newspapers.	Public and potential beneficiaries
Outdoor advertisements	Billboards	General public
Cooperation with mass-media	Journalists are information multipliers and should be constantly engaged through: training courses and thematic workshops, press releases and press conferences and dedicated sections in newspapers and magazines to Cohesion funds.	General Public
Promotional materials	Leaflets and materials with the imprinted visual identity, digital media.	General Public
Newsletter	The newsletter should contain up-to-date info about the implementation of the policy as well as decision of the Monitoring Committees and communication campaigns	Potential beneficiaries, Internal actors, Media.
Mass surveys	Implement surveys regarding the quality of information provided by MAs	All target groups
Events	Organize various public events and participate in fairs and that will allow communication with target groups.	General Public, Potential beneficiaries, Internal actors, Media.
Education and Training	Organize training on project management topics for personnel; organize training sessions with beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries; organize training and info sessions with media	Potential beneficiaries, Internal actors, Media.

As was the case in the previous programming period, for the 2014-2020 Romania opted for relying on a common communication strategy to be used across different OPs. The strategy starts by evaluating the progress achieved under the previous programming period and by identifying the communication priorities for the present period.

Looking at the National Info Centre, which was established in 2012, the strategy notes that due to its delayed implementation, it remained largely inefficient. A survey conducted in 2013 shows that 85 % of the respondents from the general public did not know that the Centre existed.

On the other hand, the strategy notes that the common webpage (www.fonduri-ue.ro) has been a real success and that it has easily outperformed the targets included in the previous strategy.

Furthermore, although the general public knows about the existence of Cohesion funds (8 % of the respondents answered that they know about the existence Cohesion funds in 2013 in comparison with 33 % in 2010), only 28 % of the respondents considered that they were well informed about European funds in Romania. However, in 2013, 61 % of the respondents considered that cohesion funds ultimately provide benefits only to a small group of people and not to the society as a whole. As a result, one of the communication objectives set in the NCS is to ensure that the general public is aware of the benefits brought by European funds across the entire Romanian society. The 2013 survey also reports that only few respondents reported that they trust the public institutions that manage European funds (19 % of the respondents). This led to the setting of a second communication objective which was to communicate transparently and coherently about the allocation of cohesion funds.

A third issue identified by the NCS is the low level of knowledge amongst citizens about the purposes of Cohesion funds. More respondents continued to report that Cohesion funds can finance projects in agriculture (85 % of respondents in 2013 in comparison with 57 % in 2010) or development of villages (from 48 % in 2010 to 74 % in 2013).

A key change revealed by surveys was that the preferred sources for obtaining information about structural funds changed between 2010 to 2013, with the internet overtaking TV as the most important source. This finding informed the third objective of the communication strategy which was to transfer the main communication efforts from TV to online media.

In terms of strategy, the document notes that in order to address the perceived lack of transparency issue, the communication efforts should focus on increasing the general level of knowledge and understanding of structural funds rather than on increasing their visibility. This implies several changes in the messages relayed to the target groups including:

- Communicating simple messages and emphasizing practical aspects
- Coordination between messages relayed by various OPs
- Coordination of spending across OPs
- Tailoring messages depending on the target groups

Furthermore, the strategy requires that for the first two years, communication activities to rely primarily on success stories from the previous period as well as on underlining the differences in terms of rules between the two periods. This is to be gradually shifted towards communicating about current affairs and, towards the end of the period, focusing again on success stories.

Besides the traditional communication tools (which are similar with the previous period), online communication is to be prioritized by keeping up-to-date information on the common website. Table 13 below lists the communication indicators used for the 2014-2020 period.

Table 13. Communication indicators used in the 2014-2020 National Communication Plan

Type of Indicator	Indicator	Initial Value (2013)	Intermediary Value (2023)
Result (specific to ROP)	General level of knowledge about ROP	46% (urban) 43 % (rural)	60%
Result	Solved inquiries by Info Centres	-	25.000
Result	Number of visits on www.fonduri-ue.ro	-	500.000
Result	Number of communication and information events for	-	1.200

Type of Indicator	Indicator	Initial Value (2013)	Intermediary Value (2023)
	ROP		
Result	Number of studies for understanding the general level of satisfaction amongst beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries	-	10
Result	Solved inquiries by the Help Desk	-	50.000

3.2 The Communication Strategy 2007-2013 for the ROP

The 2007 -2013 ROP communication plan begins with an *ex-ante* evaluation of knowledge about structural funds. The evaluation revealed that the most important sources of information used by citizens about the ROP were the local authorities, TV and written press, internet and the InfoEuropa centres. The study also showed that citizens have little knowledge about the responsibilities of the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (the managing authority for ROP) or the regional and local authorities which are involved in the management of ROP. The following information needs were identified as priorities in the ex-ante evaluation:

1. Citizens are not well informed about the rules regarding eligibility.
2. Citizens perceive that funds are not allocated in a transparent manner.
3. Citizens believe that around 30% of the funds are misused.

Thus, the communication plan for the ROP sets the following specific objectives:

1. To ensure the supply of correct information for all target groups concerning financing opportunities available through the ROP.
2. To promote the economic and social impact of the financial assistance and inform the general public on the added value of this EU assistance and its role in the regional development of Romania
3. To inform and increase knowledge about the horizontal themes: equality and sustainable development
4. To establish an efficient internal communication system
5. To ensure the transparency of the program and inform about its results

The main messages to be relayed were the following:

1. The EU and the Romanian Government support the development of regions in order to reduce unequal development. Through the ROP, all regions in Romania will have real opportunities to develop rapidly.

2. The ROP has a socio-economic component. This seems a bit obvious. Am I missing something?
3. The ROP is managed in an efficient and transparent manner.

The target groups for the communication activities of 2007 - 2013 ROP were: the potential beneficiaries (county councils, local city councils, local town and commune councils, NGOs, SMEs, higher education institutions, churches, provider of social services and associations of local development); the beneficiaries of ROP financing, the general public, the public employees, and mass media.

Besides the standard communication measures found in other OPs, the ROP planned to use a network of regional communicators in order to maximize the information efforts. The network was based on a project initiated by the European Commission before 2007 which aimed to inform Romanian citizens about the benefits of EU integration. The Regio network included: public institutions, NGOs, higher education institutions, professional associations and mass-media. The network used an online discussion forum established by the managing authority.

The total budget for the communication activities of the ROP for the 2007 -2013 period was 21.35 mil. euro.

3.3 The Communication Strategy 2014-2020 for the ROP

The 2014-2020 communication strategy of the ROP sets to build on the experience gathered in since 2007. The strategy begins by outlining some of the achievements of the program until 2014, including: a relatively high awareness about the programme amongst target groups, good functioning of the network of regional communicators, good usage statistics of the region website, the establishment of the Regio brand, successful media campaigns, and an increased role of IBs in communicating at the local level. On the other hand, the strategy also presents some of the weaknesses of the communication activities from the previous period. These were: the overlapping communication actions at national and regional levels, technical and complicated language used in communication, the lack of sync between communication activities and project deadlines due to public procurement issues, a generally poor relationship with the media, the lack of regular assessments of the impact of Regio communication activities at regional and local level, the reduced number of work visits of potential information multipliers where Regio projects are implemented and the low number of exchanges between Regio communicators' and communicators across the EU.

The following general objectives were put forward by the ROP communication strategy:

- To promote the contribution of the ROP to the regional development of Romania
- To ensure transparency and disseminate information about sources of financing in order to increase the absorption rate and make sure that information reaches all potential beneficiaries.

In addition, the following specific objectives were put forward:

- Raising the ROP's reputation amongst the general public as a program that finances regional development from 43% to 60% until the end of the funding program (2023);
- Informing all target audiences about project calls, project launches and implementation stage in order to increase absorption (publishing information on the website, sending e-mails, newsletters, etc.)
- Explaining the rules and the mechanism for granting funding and project implementation according to the specifics of each targeted target audience throughout the funding period and ensuring 100% of requests for information receive an answer;
- Informing the beneficiaries on manual of visual identity for ROP so that they comply with and apply the rules of information, publicity and visibility in the projects they carry out;
- Increase the reputation of MA and IBs as institutions involved in managing the REGIO from 45% and 38% respectively, by 7% for each by the end of the programming period (2023);

For each of the target groups, the strategy includes tailored messages that focus on communication the main contribution of the ROP to the development of Romania. for example, for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries the following messages were set to be used in communication:

- The EU helps you develop
- With a good and eligible project, you can receive funding
- The management of the European Structural and Investment Funds is carried out in partnership with the local and regional actors
- Your project contributes to European objectives

In comparison, for the media, the following messages were set to be used:

- The European Union invests in your region
- We focus on results
- The management of the European Structural and Investment Funds is carried out in partnership with the local and regional actors
- Money is used transparently

As mentioned in the NCS, the main communication instrument for the 2014-2020 period is the internet and the specific website which has to include up-to-date information about ongoing projects, call and rules for applying for financing. Besides, the plan includes the traditional means to spread information (newsletters, imprinted materials and media) as well as participation in events, caravans and exhibitions. Participation in 1200 events was planned by 2020. Besides, up to 5 media campaigns were planned to be implemented by 2020. In addition, the network of Regio communicators which reached 1000 members by 2015 was set to be revitalized although there are

no specific details in the strategy about how this will be done. Table 13 presents the result indicators put forward in the strategy.

Table 14. Result indicators for the communication activities of ROP.

Activity	2014		2019		2023	
	MA	IB	MA	IB	MA	IB
Events	0	0	30	400	134	1066
Number of visitors on website	0	0	750.000	500.000	1.500.000	1.000.000
Number of printed materials	0	0	12	40	36	80
Number of press releases	0	0	100	320	250	650
Number of media campaigns	0	0	2	16	4	32
Number of solved inquiries by Info Centres	0	0	7.000	8.000	15.000	20.000
Number of types of promotional materials	0	0	20	40	40	80
Number of impact evaluations	0	0	6	16	15	32

According to interviews, for the ROP effective communication was important ever since the start of the program. The main indicators used to assess how well the policy was communicated was a basic indicator of awareness. This was not very complicated and in some way, gives the MA an approximate assessment on how effective they were in communicating the program. In terms of priorities, for the 2007-2013 period the ROP had to create a market and a brand for itself. Since European funds are complicated to talk about and “sell” to the public, the ROP had to carve a market with public debate and discussion in order to reach the awareness target, which it did. In the 20014-2020 period, communication is undertaken on an incremental basis – learning from the evaluations which were carried out during 2007 -2013 and seeking to achieve an awareness amongst 60% of the population as to the existence of the ROP.

3.3 Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies

As mentioned above, during the 2007-2013 period, the ROP was the only Romanian OP that has systematically emphasized its communication policy, using diverse methods to evaluate its impact. These methods have included focus groups, case studies, network analysis, evaluation questionnaires for the media, surveys, as well as interviews with private beneficiaries, NGOs and direct beneficiaries.

The results of the communication activities are quantifiable both in terms of the visibility of the programme amongst the public and potential beneficiaries and in terms of the quality of the applications for financing - which was one of the key measures of success of the communication measures put forward. In terms of programme visibility, the evaluation of the communication measures reveal that:

1. Among the general public, the ROP has a high visibility with TV spots being specifically effective in using awareness about the programme. For example, in 2014, the general awareness amongst Romanian citizens about the ROP was 55 percent. Furthermore, the ROP is associated with the concept of ‘European funds’ and ‘modernization and development’ of Romania. More than half of the survey respondents indicate that the main

benefits of the ROP are: asphaltting roads, better water and sanitation networks, modernizing hospitals, rehabilitating schools and historic buildings, modernizing city and park centers, etc. The accuracy of the answers shows that the ROP was largely successful in communicating about its goals and achievements

2. Most respondents are interested in the criteria for funding applications (67 percent of respondents) as well as in the sources where such information can be found.
3. Survey respondents indicated that TV and Radio campaigns as well as online tools should be emphasized as opposed to flyers and magazines.
4. In terms of trust in the ROP, the results are mixed: 48 percent of the respondents indicate that they have a lot of trust in the programme whereas 43 percent indicate that they tend not to have a lot of trust in it.
5. TV campaigns have a high degree of visibility: the 2014 ROP campaign and its slogan 'From dawn until dusk we develop a country!' was heard by 84 percent of the respondents.
6. Public institutions are well informed about the ROP (90 percent of the respondents). For public institutions, the regional information offices and the RDAs are important points for obtaining information about the ROP. They also indicate that online means are the most effective tools for obtaining updates about the ROP.
7. Journalists who were part of the focus groups reported that they believe that accessing funds is a very difficult process in Romania that involves time and dealing with a complicated bureaucratic process. They also point out that the absorption rate in Romania is low. However, relative to other OPs, they indicated that the ROP is more effective.
8. The main weaknesses of the programme were: the technical and complicated language used in communication by the MA and RDAs, the poor relationship with the media and the lack of regular assessments of communication measures as well as the lack of use of social media.

In terms of good practices, the evaluations of the communication activities indicate the following practices: the development of webpages for RDAs and MA; the organization of public info sessions at the local level, the use of good practices examples in order to promote the ROP, the creation of a brand for the ROP and the use of working visits for journalists in places where projects are implemented.

The following recommendations were put forward for the 2014-2020 period: organizing conferences or communication events more often, a better use of online tools, more focus on content regarding the specific type of projects which can acquire funding from the ROP as well as better communication with mass-media through a simpler language.

Interviewees revealed that, Communication has been a priority for the ROP – as can be seen on the website the ROP has the most extensive analyses of communication measures undertaken in Romania. The general approach to communication was first to create a brand and, for the 20014-2020 period, to build upon the experience from the previous programming period.

Note that, for the ROP it is easier to communicate than for other OPs. ROP's project portfolio is wide (infrastructure, economy, development etc) which allows for communication activities to be very broad ranging and appealing to different audiences. Also, the programme has sufficient funds to invest in proper communication activities. The MA did not manage to spend all the money

allocated for communication in the 2007 –13 period. For the new programming period there is less money. However, this is a realistic amount for the objectives which are currently in place.

The most effective communication measure was an interactive movie called “Traveller in the Regio World” featuring a national celebrity actor and about 30 successful projects financed by Regio (<http://calatorprinlumearegio.inforegio.ro>). This received critical acclaim and even received a prize for it at a national competition. Facebook and Twitter are also used in communication, but these are mostly to keep people updated about activities of the MA. For 2014-2020 communication will also focus on providing help directly to beneficiaries – with the support of IBs which have to compile a list of concrete measures which can be undertaken by the MA.

3.4 Good practice examples

The following examples were listed as good practices in the final evaluation report of the communication activities undertaken by the ROP:

Case 1 – The 2014 Media Campaign “Traveller in the Regio World”

The campaign was organized in 2014 by the ROP in order to outline the contribution of the programme to the development of Romania. The campaign was based on a series of videos showing real examples of investments done by the ROP. In all the regions of Romania. Besides the spots aimed at capturing the diversity of investments which can be financed by the ROP. Furthermore, the campaign used an interactive movie in which users can interact with the main character who travels across different regions of Romania and discovers real stories about the impact of the ROP (<http://calatorprinlumearegio.inforegio.ro/>). The movie also shows “what if” stories - what would have happened if projects would not have received financing. The movie includes a total of 14 projects financed through 5 priority axes.

Table 15. Good practice criteria for assessing communication measures

Criteria	Description
Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the public in general.	Strong dissemination among general public, multiplier effect, including through media
Presence of innovative elements	Strong innovative elements that contribute to spreading knowledge about the impact of the ROP
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives.	Case studies show that the campaign has raised the knowledge about the ROP amongst the general population
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	All other EU funded programmes

Case 2 - The use of webpages of IBs and MA

The webpages used all the visual identity elements of the ROP and were updated with information for potential and current beneficiaries. For example, 92 percent of the public authorities (which can be potential beneficiaries of the ROP) declared that were satisfied with the information which they could find on the ROP website: www.inforegio.ro. Over-time, surveys revealed that the webpages

of the IBs and the webpage of the MA were the main sources for finding information about the ROP amongst the members of the target groups.

Table 16. Good practice criteria for assessing communication measures

Criteria	Description
Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the public in general.	Strong dissemination among general public, multiplier effect, including through media
Presence of innovative elements	Based on experience. Webpages have been continuously updated to include all the necessary information.
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives.	Surveys show that most of the respondents are satisfied with the information which can be found on the ROP webpage.
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	All other EU funded programmes

Case 3 Evaluations of the communication activities undertaken by the ROP

The ROP is the only Romanian OP which has systematically evaluated the impact of its communication activities and has sought to improve its practices based on results of evaluations. Thus, between 2010 and 2015, the ROP has carried out four nationally representative surveys, case studies, network analysis and focus groups in order to evaluate the impact of its communication activities on various focus groups. These evaluations have informed the NCS for the 2014-2020 period and also provided valuable information to other OPs.

Table 17. Good practice criteria for assessing communication measures

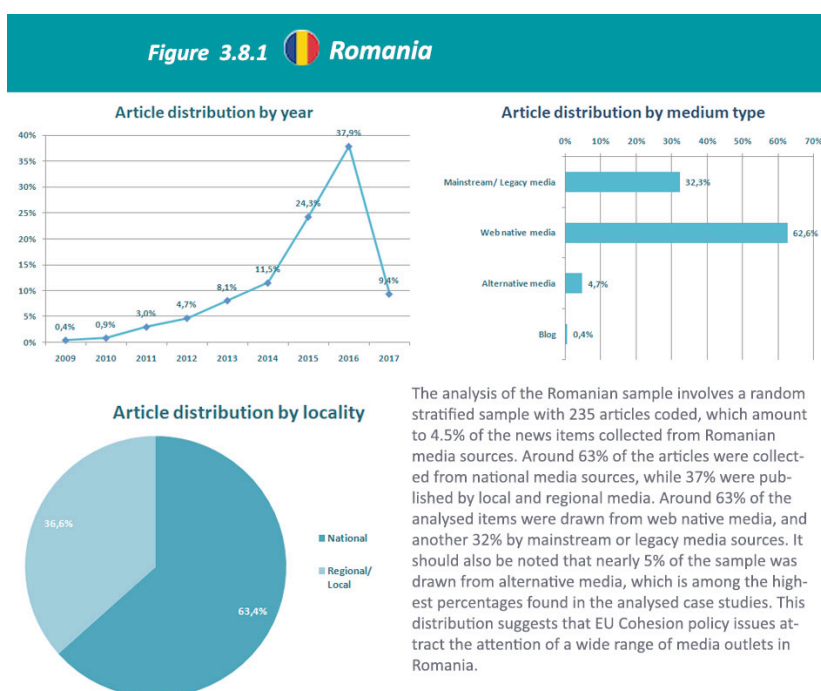
Criteria	Description
Presence of innovative elements	Based on experience. More recent evaluations moved towards counterfactual analysis.
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives.	The evaluations were key to establishing what worked and what did not work in terms of communication.
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	All other EU funded programmes

The interviews revealed that the most important step in the communication of the ROP was to establish a brand that would be recognised by everyone. The ROP communication officer reported that in the 2007-2013 period this was the most difficult task which was carried out successfully. In 2017, the main task of the communication department of the ROP was to build on the activity carried out in the previous period while focusing specifically on improving the knowledge about the ROP rather than on raising the awareness about the programme.

Connected to this, the visual identity of the ROP, was highlighted as one of the good practices which helped the programme to stand out in comparison with all other Romanian OPs.

3.4 Media framing of Cohesion Policy

As shown in Figure 3.8.1, Romanian media coverage of EU Cohesion policy issues is equally dominated by framing in terms of “Economic consequences” and “Quality of life” (31.1%) as was found in all of the case studies that were analysed. A significant finding in the Romanian case is that none of the analysed items were coded as containing “No frame”, suggesting that Romanian media tend to emphasize on specific interpretations when presenting the news. Additionally, the “Incompetence of local/ national authorities” frame was identified in 21.7% of the articles, suggesting that Romanian media tend to adopt a critical stance towards the government and Romanian public officials. As shown in Figure 3.8.3, this refers mostly to the “Mismanagement of funds” Subframe (4.1) with nearly 18%, which is the highest percentage found in all case studies. In a similar vein, a significant 8.9% of the articles were dominated by the “Fund abuse” frame, further indicating a critical stance of Romanian media outlets (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018).



Dominant Frame Frequencies (Romania)

(n= 235)

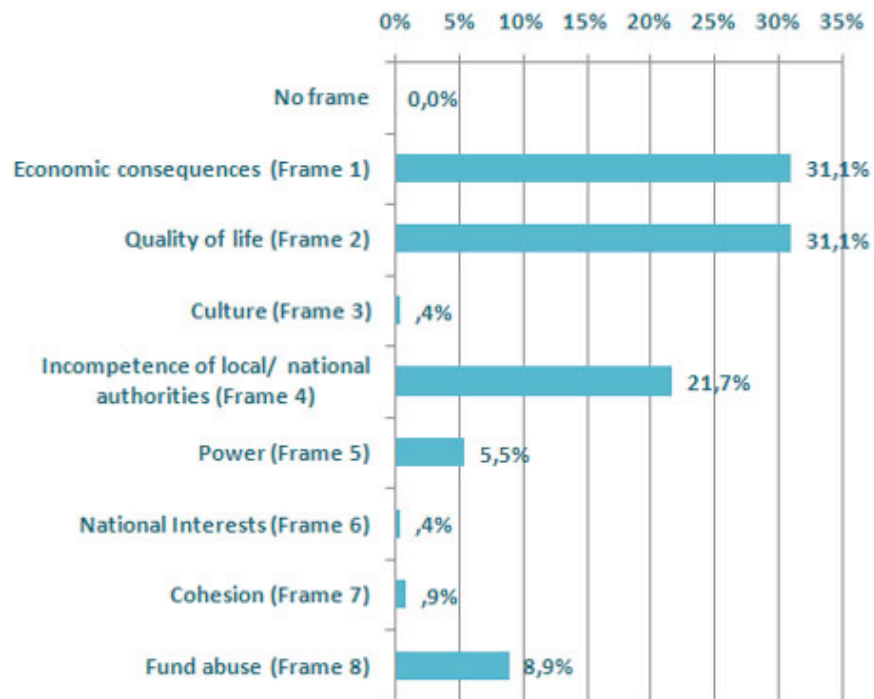


Figure 3.8.2
Dominant frame frequencies in Romanian media

Dominant Subframe Frequencies (Romania)

(n= 235)

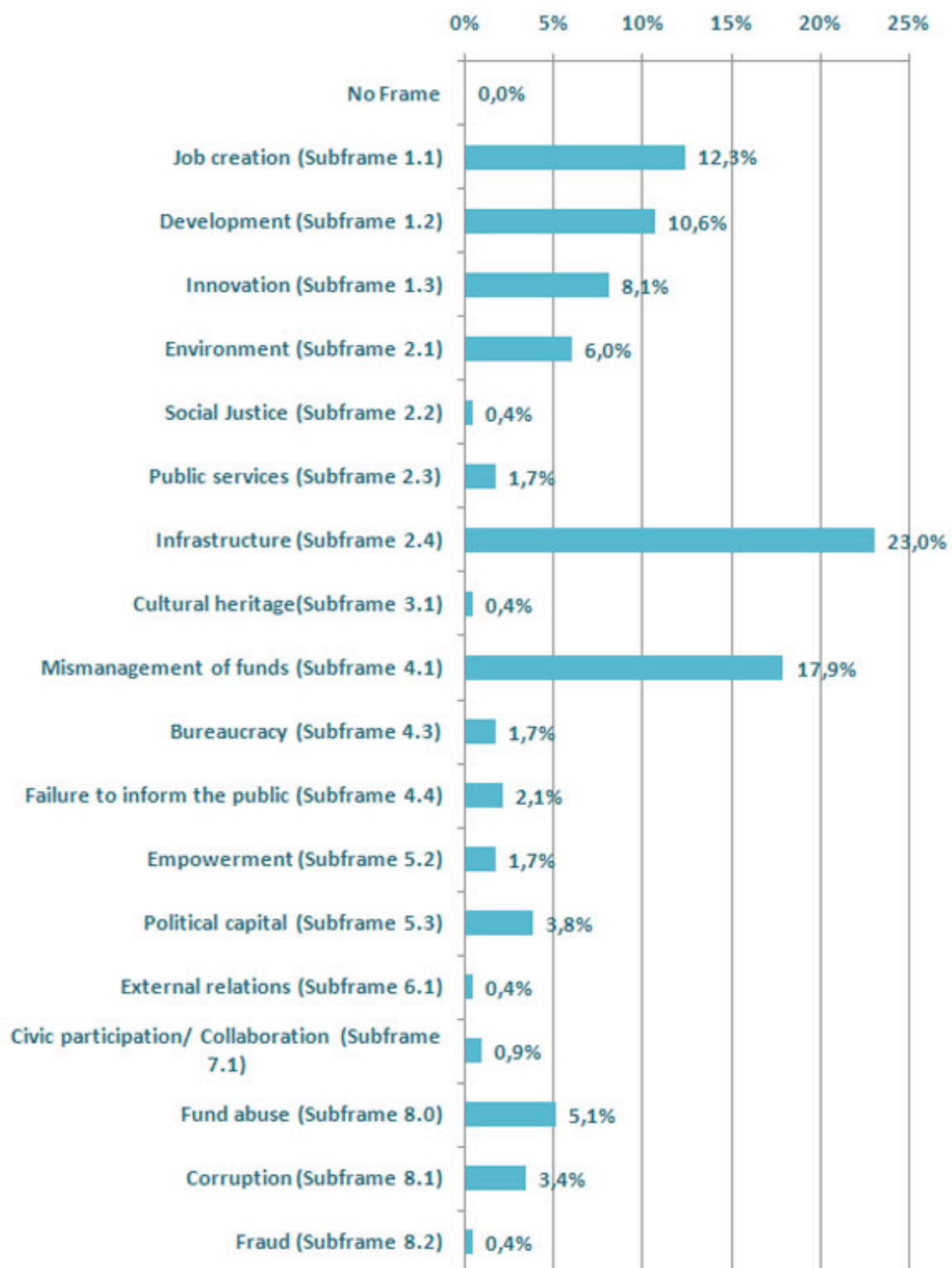


Figure 3.8.3
Dominant Subframe frequencies in Romanian media

The framing analysis of the Romanian sample reveals some significant differences between the framing attitudes of national and regional media as shown in Figure 3.8.5. National media tend to interpret EU Cohesion policy in terms of “economic consequences” (Frame 1), “Power” (Frame 5) and “Fund abuse” (Frame 8) more often than regional media. On the contrary, regional media frame Cohesion policy mainly on the basis of its effect on citizens’ quality of life (Frame 2).

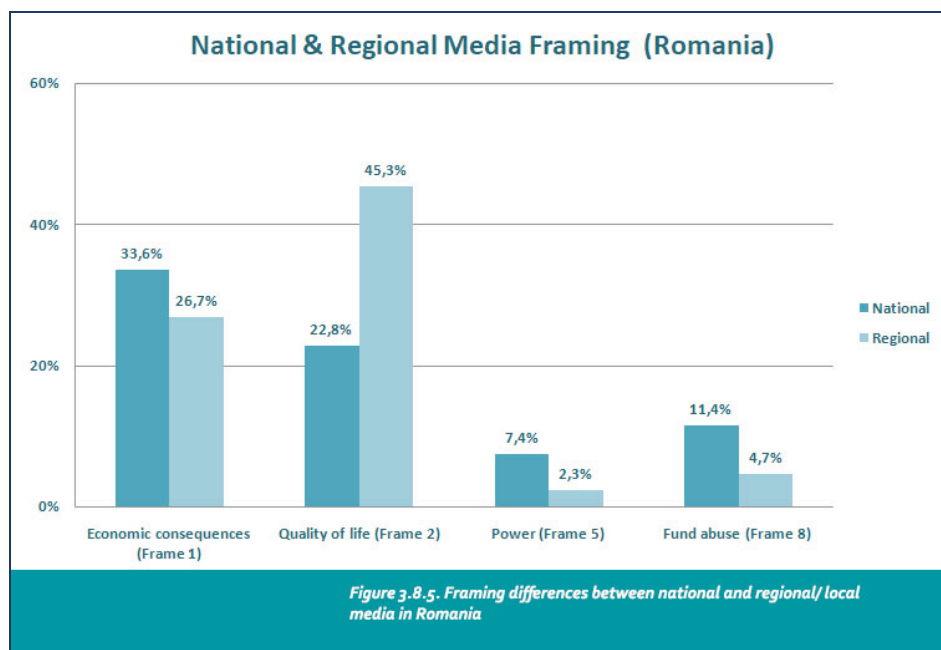
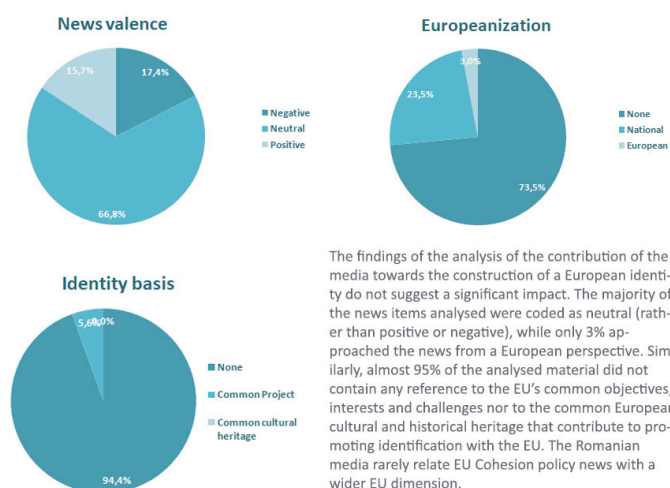


Figure 3.8.4 **Romania - Europeanization variables**



While several differences were found in the framing analysis between national and regional media, the analysis of the Europeanisation variables did not reveal any differences in coverage between the two categories of media.

The evidence from the interviews support the findings outlined in the above sections. Most of the interviewees, evidenced that both the newspapers and TV usually paint the Cohesion Policy in a negative manner. However, the blame is not attributed to the EU but rather to the local or national authorities which are incapable of using Cohesion funds to promote the development of the country. A recurrent big concern in the Romanian media is the incapacity of governments and public institutions to increase the absorption rate of EU funds, combined with the incapacity to monitor projects which have received financing. A second large concern is the corruption associated with public procurement contracts. On the other hand, the ROP representatives reported that, although not ideal, their relationship with the media is improving, especially because the program is the only one which has a structured approach to communication which puts emphasis on building credibility with journalists by providing access to information trainings and organizing annual meetings.

3.5. Implications for citizens CP perceptions and attitudes to the EU

In the case of Romania, the NCS was developed based on a series of ex-ante quantitative (survey) and qualitative studies (focus groups), carried out by the Ministry of Public Finance in 2006, prior to the joining to the European Union (EU). The studies reveal several important aspects related to the general perception of Romanian citizens about EU structural funds. First, and not surprisingly given that the country was not yet a member of the EU, the average level of knowledge about structural funds was very low. Second, most citizens considered that the pre accession funds such as SAPARD (Special accession programme for agriculture and rural development) and Phare (Programme of Community aid to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe) were not distributed in a transparent manner and that corruption especially in the public administration impedes a fair allocation of funds. Both media and personal experiences contributed to these negative perceptions, with the Eurobarometer 66 revealing that in 2006 Romanian citizens placed more trust in the EU institutions for solving their problems rather than in national institutions. Third, information about structural funds was unevenly distributed: whereas non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public administration bodies were relatively well informed about the financing opportunities provided by the OPs, the private sector as well as the academia, knew very little about structural funds. In fact, potential beneficiaries did not make a difference between pre-accession and post accession funds and considered that EU money involved too much bureaucracy. Finally, the respondents indicated that the most common sources of information about EU funds were the internet, seminars and media.

According to the latest survey data, Romanians have an ambivalent attitude towards the EU. On the one hand most Romanians (57 %) trust the EU and feel that their voice is heard in the EU (54%) (Mercury Research 2017). At the same time, the majority of Romanians (86%) have a positive or neutral attitude towards the EU. However, when it comes to the contribution that the EU had on their lives, only 21 % of the Romanians consider that the EU had a positive contribution to their lives, 13 % believe that they had something to lose because of the EU membership and 66 percent believe that EU membership did not have any impact on their lives (Mercury Research 2017). The same stands for the contribution that the EU funds had to the regional development of the country: only 30% of the respondents believe that cohesion funds had a positive contribution to regional development.

Table 16 describes the perceived impact of EU funding in the West Region of Romania – one of the most developed region in the country. In general, the data show that most of the citizens have a positive or very positive attitude towards the impact of EU funding at the regional or local level. Furthermore, a surprising finding in comparison with the national level surveys described in the previous sections, a majority of citizens report that they have heard about ERDF. However, most of

the respondents have not heard about the Cohesion fund (See Table 18) and almost half (48.2 %) have heard about the ESF. The data suggest that in order to make sense of the level of knowledge that EU citizens have about Cohesion funds, we should a) ask about specific funds as knowledge varies based on a range of variables (e.g. how much the region has accessed a particular fund, communication aspects etc.) b) should contextualize general knowledge questions because they hide the heterogeneity in the sources of knowledge about the EU.

Table 17. Opinions about the impact of European Union funding in West Romania

How positive or negative was the impact of the funding of the European Union on your region or city? (Western Romania, N = 281)							
Very positive	Positive	No impact	Negative	Very negative	Not applicable	Refused	Don't know
24	178	37	16	3	12	2	9
8.5%	63.3%	13.2%	5.7%	1.1%	4.3%	.7%	3.2%

Table 18. Knowledge about Cohesion Funds in West Romania

Have you heard about the following funds?				
Western Romania, N = 500	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	436	61	0	3
	87.2%	12.2%	0.0%	.6%
The Cohesion Fund	185	305	0	10
	37.0%	61.0%	0.0%	2.0%
European Social Fund (ESF)	241	247	0	12
	48.2%	49.4%	0.0%	2.4%

Furthermore, as Table 19 shows, most of the respondents believe that Cohesion funding had a positive impact on regional and local development: 29.8 % percent of them believe that their region or city would have been somewhat worse without EU funding and 21.2 % believe that their city or region would have been a lot worse.

Table 19. Perceived impact of Cohesion Funds in West Romania

How do you think your region or city would have developed without EU funding? (Western Romania, N = 500)							
Much better	Somewhat better	Same	Somewhat worse	A lot worse	Not applicable	Refused	Don't know
42	53	77	149	106	36	2	35
8.4%	10.6%	15.4%	29.8%	21.2%	7.2%	.4%	7.0%

4. Citizens views of Cohesion Policy and the EU

4.1 Citizens survey results

Tables 20 and 21 below show that the majority of the respondents have heard about EU funded projects (56.2 %) and that the sources of retrieving information about funds are varied. Indeed, as the data show, Romanian respondents use both traditional media (local newspapers, national and regional TV, regional radio) to stay informed as well as new media such as the internet. This is in line with the findings of the evaluations done for the ROP which suggest that social media and the internet have become a key source of information for citizens. As expected, national newspapers are not reported to contribute substantially to the knowledge about EU funded projects at the regional level, probably because they report less about local level projects.

Table 20. General knowledge about EU funded projects in West Romania

The European Union provides funding for infrastructure, business development and training to regions and cities. Have you heard about any such EU funded projects to improve your own region or city? (Western Romania, N = 281)			
Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
281	197	0	22
56.2%	39.4%	0.0%	4.4%

Table 21. Sources of knowledge about EU funded projects in West Romania

Where did you hear about it?				
Western Romania, N = 339	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
National newspapers	75	204	0	2
	26.7%	72.6%	0.0%	.7%
Local or regional newspapers	150	129	0	2
	53.4%	45.9%	0.0%	.7%
National TV	172	108	0	1
	61.2%	38.4%	0.0%	.4%
Local or regional TV	149	127	0	5
	53.0%	45.2%	0.0%	1.8%
National radio	103	175	0	3
	36.7%	62.3%	0.0%	1.1%
Local or regional radio	127	153	0	1
	45.2%	54.4%	0.0%	.4%
Internet	201	80	0	0

Where did you hear about it?				
Western Romania, N = 339	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
	71.5%	28.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Social media	152	125	0	4
	54.1%	44.5%	0.0%	1.4%
Billboard	142	136	0	3
	50.5%	48.4%	0.0%	1.1%
Workplace	87	192	1	1
	31.0%	68.3%	.4%	.4%
Personal experience or knowledge of projects	194	87	0	0
	69.0%	31.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	74	197	1	9
	26.3%	70.1%	.4%	3.2%

Tables 22 and 23 summarize the perceived impact of EU membership on the development of the Western region of Romania. The majority of respondents (86.2 %) either strongly agree or agree that the EU membership had a positive effect on the region. Furthermore, a majority of those who consider that EU membership had a negative impact on the region, consider that the negative impact was caused by a variety of reasons including misallocation of funds (73.2%), projects not executed in time (78.6%), bad management (89.3%), corruption among government officials awarding EU tenders (91.1 %) or corruption among beneficiaries of EU funds (76.6 %). Importantly, these data confirm the findings of the interviews which point to the fact **that national authorities are held responsible for failures in the implementation of EU projects**. Furthermore, **corruption is the perceived main cause of the negative impact of EU membership followed by bad management**.

Table 22. Perceived benefits of EU membership in West Romania

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My country has benefited from being a member of the European Union" (Western Romania, N = 500)						
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Refused	Don't know
97	316	52	17	9	4	5
19.4%	63.2%	10.4%	3.4%	1.8%	.8%	1.0%

Table 23. Reasons for a negative impact of EU membership in West Romania

Why do you think there was no positive impact?				
Western Romania, N = 56	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
Not enough funding	24	23	1	8

Why do you think there was no positive impact?				
Western Romania, N = 56	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
	42.9%	41.1%	1.8%	14.3%
Allocation to the wrong projects	41	8	2	5
	73.2%	14.3%	3.6%	8.9%
Bad management	50	2	1	3
	89.3%	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%
Not executed on time	44	8	0	4
	78.6%	14.3%	0.0%	7.1%
Corruption among government officials awarding EU tenders	51	2	0	3
	91.1%	3.6%	0.0%	5.4%
Corruption among beneficiaries of EU funds	43	8	0	5
	76.8%	14.3%	0.0%	8.9%
Other reasons	27	24	0	1
	51.9%	46.2%	0.0%	1.9%

On the other hand, perceived positive outcomes are associated with extensive funding (85.3%) and allocation to the right projects (88.1 %). A far smaller share of the respondents believe that corruption was not associated with positive outcomes for the region (41.6 %) (see Table 24). This suggests that **when EU membership was perceived to have a positive outcome for the region, this happened in spite of the fact that local or regional authorities were perceived to be corrupt.**

Table 24. Reasons for a positive impact of EU membership in West Romania

Why do you think there was a positive impact?				
Western Romania, N = 202	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
Extensive funding	349	40	1	19
	85.3%	9.8%	.2%	4.6%
Allocation to the right projects	178	15	1	8
	88.1%	7.4%	.5%	4.0%
Good management	130	51	2	19
	64.4%	25.2%	1.0%	9.4%
Executed on time	104	74	1	23
	51.5%	36.6%	.5%	11.4%

Why do you think there was a positive impact?				
Western Romania, N = 202	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
No corruption among government officials awarding tenders	68	84	1	49
	33.7%	41.6%	.5%	24.3%
No corruption among beneficiaries of EU funds	82	72	4	44
	40.6%	35.6%	2.0%	21.8%
Other reasons	93	94	1	2
	48.9%	49.5%	.5%	1.1%

In terms of perceived impact of EU projects, the majority of respondents (78.4 %) declared that they did not benefit in their daily lives from a project funded by the EU. This shows that although the Western part of Romania is one of the most developed regions in the country, as well as one of the most successful in terms of attracting EU funds, the perceived impact is still relatively low (see Table 25). At the same time, Table 25 suggests that the majority of respondents are in favour of EU integration (56.4%), showing that **their attachment to the EU is not primarily driven by the economic benefits which they experience in their daily lives.**

Table 25. Perceived individual benefits of EU projects in West Romania

Have you benefited in your daily life from a project funded by any of these three funds? (Western Romania, N = 500)			
Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
86	392	1	21
17.2%	78.4%	.2%	4.2%

Table 26. Attitudes towards EU integration in West Romania

How would you describe your general position on European integration? (Western Romania, N = 500)								
Strongly opposed	Opposed	Somewhat opposed	Neutral	Somewhat in favour	In favour	Strongly in favour	Refused	Don't know
9	22	18	124	31	204	78	2	12
1.8%	4.4%	3.6%	24.8%	6.2%	40.8%	15.6%	.4%	2.4%

In terms of identity, the majority of respondents feel that they are Romanians and Europeans (see Table 27). At the same time, in general people feel more attached to their city, region or country as opposed to the European Union or Europe. However, only very few respondents do not feel any attachment to the European Union or Europe in general. Interestingly, there are no large differences in attachment levels between the EU and Europe, suggesting that perceived

attachments are possibly a by-product of perceived ethnic resemblance rather than a consequence of economic or political variables (see also Table 25 above).

Table 27. Attachment to the EU and country West Romania

Please listen to the following options and pick one that describes best how you see yourself. Do you see yourself as (Western Romania, N = 500)					
Country only	Country and European	European	European	Refused	Don't know
124	283	49	38	1	5
24.8%	56.6%	9.8%	7.6%	.2%	1.0%

Table 28. Attachment to the EU, country, region or city West Romania

People may feel different degrees of attachment to places. Please tell me how attached you feel to:						
(Western Romania, N = 500)	Very	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Refused	Don't know
Your city/town/village	272	167	32	25	0	4
	54.4%	33.4%	6.4%	5.0%	0.0%	.8%
Your region	259	170	32	35	0	4
	51.8%	34.0%	6.4%	7.0%	0.0%	.8%
Your country	270	160	46	23	0	1
	54.0%	32.0%	9.2%	4.6%	0.0%	.2%
European Union	133	237	66	53	3	8
	26.6%	47.4%	13.2%	10.6%	.6%	1.6%
Europe	141	246	58	46	2	7
	28.2%	49.2%	11.6%	9.2%	.4%	1.4%

4.2 Focus group results

Two focus groups with 17 participants were conducted in the West region of Romania:

Table 29. Focus groups demographics in West Romania

FG	Location	Date	Number of participants	Number of female participants	Age range (min age)	Age range (max age)
RO 1	Timisoara	15/07/2017	8	4	21	79
RO 2	Timisoara	15/07/2017	9	4	21	77

In the two focus groups conducted in the West region in Romania, there was a stark contrast in participants' awareness of the term "Cohesion policy". In one of the groups (RO 1), all the participants had heard of the term "Cohesion policy", while in the other group (RO 2) none of the participants had ever heard of the term. Participants who knew the term, described Cohesion policy as the process of reducing disparities in the EU between regions and Member States (RO 1). In this group, there was also some knowledge of the ERDF and one of the participants mentioned the pre-accession assistance programme 'Phare'. In the group where no one had heard of Cohesion policy, one of the participants said Cohesion policy might be the same as EU funds, while another participant thought that Cohesion policy was probably about convergence in terms of "bring[ing] us to a similar level" (Participant 1, RO 2). Other participants associated Cohesion policy with the objective of "peace" (Participant 9, RO 2) and in achieving "understanding among the European people from different countries" (Participant 8, RO 2).

Despite differences on the awareness of Cohesion policy, most of the participants in both groups reported that they were aware of EU-funded projects particularly infrastructure projects (Table 1). When asked to name projects, a lively debate ensued among participants about the impact of projects. For example, in one of the groups there was a polarised discussion between two participants about the value of a waterbus project in Timisoara.

Participants' reference to projects' co-financed by EU funds

Infrastructure:

- The main road in Dumbravita
- Vaporetto project in Timisoara
- Water and waste water infrastructure (in Caras-Severin)
- Mine rehabilitation (Anina mine)
- Investments in the "Mariam" Medical Center in Pischia (near Giarmata) and the cancer clinic Oncogen
- Renovated train stations (in Valea Prahovei)

Culture and urban regeneration:

- Urban regeneration of Timisoara (historic city centre)
- Renovation of Mihai Eminescu Theater in Oravita

About a third of the participants identified a general positive impact of EU Cohesion policy. There was acknowledgment that with time the quality of projects has been improving and that EU-funded projects are less prone to mismanagement compared to nationally funded projects. However, most of the discussion focused on Cohesion policy challenges. In addition to project mismanagement, participants highlighted problems with the absorption of funds, accountability, administrative capacity, red tape, the lack of communication and fraud. In one of the groups (RO 1), participants discussed the low level of engagement by politicians as well as citizens in EU-funded projects. Some participants suggested that there should be more information on how to apply for funding and that such information should come for the EU, where there is less corruption than in Romania. For example:

RO 2, Participant 6: "The person responsible for the funds, those who work in that office, they charge 1,000 euros for helping you: 'I help you, you go further, 500 euros.' [...]"

RO 2, Participant 7: "Yeah, 'We get you 100,000 euros, but you give us 20,000 euros. Directly or indirectly.' These are not stories. These are realities."

By the end of the discussion and in addressing one of the moderator's questions, the participants concluded that corruption of national institutions discouraged people to apply for EU funds.

Below we provide some extracts to highlight the way participants described the problems associated most often with Cohesion policy for the West region of Romania.

Mismanagement	<i>Participant 7, RO2: "[Romania] managed to do many projects, but many have not been finalized. Either because they were delayed, either because all sorts of details were found with the ones supervising these in Bucharest."</i>
Accountability	<i>Participant 3, RO 2: "In general, they [politicians] associate these projects with themselves. They use all sorts of verbal tricks 'This is what has been done during my mandate.' And it's not less true, it's just that they don't mention the funds came from the EU."</i>
Citizens' disinterest	<i>Participant 1, RO1: "In my opinion, when I talk to my friends, they are very poorly informed. Not because they don't have access, but because they are not interested. If I take ten friends of mine, maybe two of them know what a European project is, what the EU is. If I ask them what the European Commission is, they don't know. They know we are in the EU, that we can travel abroad, and that's about it."</i>

The discussions on European identity in the two groups were similar. Participants described Europeans as united through common values and rights, such as equality, respect, human rights and access to healthcare. Furthermore, they discussed the role of Christian religion in uniting Europeans. Some participants believed that Christian religion still plays a role in uniting Europeans, while others thought it no longer connects Europeans. The common economic interests of the EU were mentioned, but not emphasised as a source of European identity.

The major identity reference for every Member States is its different national culture according to the participants. Therefore, national identities were represented as the crucial denominator for European citizens since it is what defines the differences among them. For this reason, national cultures need to be respected and citizens should be more educated regarding the existing differences between them. Similarly, participants also made reference to a divide between the West and East, where East Europeans are less respected and subject to negative stereotypes. According to participants, this problem needs to be solved to achieve a greater sense of European identity. To provide an example, one of the participants talked about the lower quality of products sold in Romania, indicating that they categorised themselves in the category of the 'inferior' group of nationalities in Europe. In discussions about the source of European identity, participants talked about the freedom of movement. However, this was not represented as an asset but rather as a need given that labour mobility occurs due to unequal economic conditions and wages across the

various countries of the EU. The immigration of Romanians to wealthier countries for job opportunities was considered to be a “crisis” from a Romanian perspective.

Participants thought that Cohesion policy can create a sense of European identity among Romanians if there is sufficient awareness. Through funding for economic development, Cohesion policy is improving the living conditions of Romanians, which leads to a sense of European identity:

RO 2, Participant 1: *“People go for opportunities. And they feel more connected to those offering opportunities.”*

5. Conclusion

5.1 Key findings and scientific conclusions

The case study has outlined the multiple facets of the cohesion policy in Romania, focusing primarily on the Regional Operational Programme and zooming in on the Western region of Romania. It has outlined the main features of the implementation and communication of cohesion in Romania using both a qualitative and quantitative approach. It analysed both what stakeholders think about the cohesion policy at the national and regional levels as well as what citizens’ attitudes towards the Cohesion Policy and EU in general are.

In terms of implementation of the Cohesion Policy, the report has shown that Romania **still lags behind in terms of managing to utilise available resources**. Absorption rates have been low in the previous programming period until almost the end of the programme and, due to political pressures in 2011–2013 have picked up. However, the fast pace of absorption of EU funds during the last two years of 2007–2013 period did not mean that EU money have been necessarily used in an efficient manner. Rather, as data from the interviews suggest, the rush towards accessing EU money has led to numerous mistakes in the management of EU funds, the financing of the same project multiple times as well as problems with monitoring and implementation, especially in cases that required commitment from regional authorities beyond the lifetime of the projects.

There is also **no leaning as to how to implement EU funds between the two programming periods**. Romania still lags behind in terms of accessing EU funds especially because numerous changes in the managing authorities which impacted the timing of launching the call for projects.

Furthermore, **public procurement and corruption remain the main issues associated with EU funds both in terms of citizens’ perceptions as well as in terms of how stakeholders perceive the EU funds in Romania**. Procurement rules remain one of the main issues in Romania and public authorities blame them for the delays associated with the EU funds. As outlined in the previous sections, the lack of knowledge about procurement rules, has led to paradoxical situations in which although Romania has a laggard in terms of absorption rates, it was the champion of penalties applied by the Commission due to mismanagement of EU funds. Although corruption in the management of EU funds is lower than the level of corruption associated with the management of national funds, both stakeholders and citizens perceive it to be one of the main reasons for the limited impact the EU funds have on the development of Romania.

Furthermore, the opportunity costs for applying for EU projects in Romania remains high due to an **overly bureaucratic approach adopted by national and regional institutions, changing rules**

during the lifetime of the projects and the unpredictability of generated by political changes in managing authorities. These are the main reasons why possible beneficiaries are sceptical of applying to EU funds.

In terms of communication, the general conclusion of the case study is that **communication activities are a secondary concern in Romania and are oftentimes perceived as an additional burden by both responsible public bodies as well as beneficiaries**. In the 2007 -2013 programming period communication has primarily focused on improving the knowledge about the funds but this activity has been delayed mainly because of delays in putting forward calls for projects.

At the same time **communication activities are highly unequal between the various operational programmes**. The Regional Operational Programme is the only one which currently has a systematic approach to communication. However, the evaluation of communication activities carried out by the ROP show that the impact of communication has been mixed – with the level of knowledge that Romanian citizens have about the EU projects being generally low. At the same time, evaluations show that knowledge about EU funds across the country has improved since 2007. By comparison, as the citizen survey shows, in the case of the Western Region of Romania, the level of knowledge about EU funds is relatively high, although the perceived impact of these funds on the daily lives of the citizens is perceived to be relatively low.

Furthermore, in terms of institutional structure, although the organisation of the Cohesion policy is highly decentralised in Romania, the managing authority preserves the decision making power in terms of programme goals and setting the calls for projects. Because of this, there are conflicts between RDAs and the MAs which are usually solved by adopting the position of the MA. Furthermore, social partners have indicated that **the monitoring committees are formal institutions** and that participation in these committees is oftentimes hampered by short deadlines and the lack of openness of public bodies towards inputs from the civil society.

5.2 Policy recommendations for communication

Overall approach

- Harmonise communication strategies across different operational programs
- Ensure that communication activities are used consistently across different regions and give more power to IBs to adjust the communication messages to their own regional needs
- Ease the administrative burden on beneficiaries by setting clear guidelines on communication in the beginning of the projects and ensuring that these do not change over time
- Target potential beneficiaries and communicate about the rules for applying for cohesion funds

Effectiveness and efficiency

- Improve the quality of the evaluations of communication activities and require all operational programs to undertake evaluations
- Set more ambitious and realistic target indicators

- Put more attention on result/impact targets
- Ensure that results of the evaluations are integrated in communication activities
- Simplify communication with beneficiaries by using online tools (email, social media etc.)
- Use impact evaluations instead of general surveys

Communication activities and tools

- Build on the existing good practices (e.g. innovative events, visual image)
- Improve communication with journalists by providing access to data on Cohesion Policy investments
- Make sure that conferences and info sessions clarify the objectives and rules of operational programs
- Improve communication on social media

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6. Annexes

6.1 Annex 1 – Interview List

Institution (place of work)	Position	Date	Form
Ministry of Development	Director	June 2017	In person
	Communication Officer	June 2017	In person
		June 2017	In person
Ministry of European Funds	Expert	June 2017	In person
	Programme Evaluation Expert	June 2017	In person
	Expert	July 2017	In person
Trade union	Representative of the Economic and social partners in the Monitoring Committee	June 2017	In person
Association of employers		June 2017	In person
		June 2017	In person
NGO Representative	Representative of the NGOs in the Monitoring Committee	June 2017	In person
NGO Representative		June 2017	In person
NGO Representative		June 2017	In person
NGO Representative		June 2017	In person
NGO Representative		June 2017	In person
Academia	Beneficiary	June 2017	In person
Private Sector	Expert Evaluator	June 2017	In person
Regional RDA	Director	June 2017	In person