COHESIFY
The impact of EU Cohesion Policy on European Identification

Southern and Eastern Region Ireland

Case study report

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Executive Summary

OBJECTIVE

This report is an analysis of the implementation and communication of the Regional Operational Programmes 2007-13 and 2014-20 in the Southern and Eastern Region of Ireland. It reports on the views of stakeholders and citizens based on data collected in-depth interviews with policy stakeholders, stakeholder survey, citizen survey, citizen focus groups and secondary sources. It includes an analysis of implications of Cohesion policy on European identity in the region.

CONTEXT

The Southern and Eastern region is the most populous and developed region of Ireland. It has benefitted from lower levels of funding intensity since 2000. In the 2007-13 period, the Southern and Easter (S&E) region was designated as a regional competitiveness and employment objective region and in 2014-20 it qualifies as a more developed region with GDP per capita above 90 per cent of the EU average. While the funding intensity between 2007-13 and 2014-20 has not changed, the ERDF funding allocation in 2014-20 (498 million EUR) is higher than in 2007-13 (367 million EUR). Due to its status as a more developed region in the EU, the priorities set in the Regional Operational Programmes 2007-13 and 2014-20 have been directed towards development goals set at the EU level. In both programme periods, an emphasis has been given to the development of the Southern and Easter region into a knowledge economy and society. Since 2007, the S&E ROPs supports developing information and communications technology, research, technological development and innovation, and entrepreneurship in Small and Medium Enterprises.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, policy stakeholders are satisfied with the implementation systems of the programme and its performance.
- There is less agreement among stakeholders how effective and important is the communication of the programme. Communication is the weaker point of the programme.
- Citizens views and a media framing analysis, suggest that, so far, Cohesion policy has not fostered European identity.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

- In the view of stakeholders, the implementation system of the programme is effective.
- Stakeholders agree that the priorities addressed in the programme are aligned with the socio-economic needs of the region and that the programme serves well the region.
- The needs of the region exceed the value of the programme. Two fifth of the surveyed stakeholders would like to see more Cohesion policy resources for the programme.
- Stakeholders think that the implementation of the programme involves disproportional reporting, audit and control requirements given the financial allocation for the programme. According to stakeholders, rules guiding the implementation of programmes should be differentiated based on programme's financial allocation.
- According to stakeholders, the Monitoring Committee overseeing the programme is open. Any issue can be addressed and there is a sense of freedom to speak up. Social partners and horizontal pillars representatives are critical participants in the Monitoring Committee meetings, since they are not involved in the implementation of any programme scheme. Yet, their active participation is constrained by time and the amount of material they need to read to be informed before the committee meetings take place.

COMMUNICTION OF THE PROGRAMME

- Between 2007-13 and 2014-20, the communication of the programme has improved. A network of national communication officers was created in 2016. Brexit has increased awareness on the importance of communication.

- The main communication tools used to promote the Regional Operational Programme by the Managing Authority are the programme websites and social media, press releases, regional and local newspapers, local radio stations, and plaques and billboards.
- There is no congruence between the most frequently used tools of communication to promote the programme and those that citizens mention to be the most frequent source of information.
- Social media are being increasingly used for the promotion of the programme. However, less than a third of surveyed citizens report to have heard of EU-funded project through social media.
- According to stakeholders, local and regional newspapers are the most effective tools in increasing citizens' awareness of EU Cohesion policy. This is supported by the media framing analysis, which found out that regional and local newspapers report on Cohesion policy more positively and emphasise more frequently the European dimension of Cohesion policy compared to national media. However, less than a third of citizens have become aware of EU-funded projects through local and regional newspaper. This shows the need for the Managing Authority to actively engage with the media.
- Under the 2007-13 and 2014-20 programme, the funding is concentrated to few investing priorities, where investments are, in the main, not physically tangible. According to the managing authority, this makes communication of the programme difficult.
- According to stakeholders, communication activities should be proportional to the funding intensity of the programme. Stakeholders believe that a centrally EU-regulated communication approach does not fit regional contexts and advise against increased communication regulations at the EU-level.
- Human resources and budget allocations suffice for the realization of activities mandated by the EU regulation, but are insufficient for further activities or for the tailoring of the programme to the national and regional context. Only one fourth of stakeholder survey respondents are satisfied with the resources committed to communication.
- While Managing Authorities are required to draw up communication strategies per programme, most the schemes in Ireland are delivered nationally. There is an argument for the Managing Authorities of ERDF Programmes in Ireland to develop a common communication strategy and share the cost of external evaluation, which has not been undertaken for the last two programming periods.
- Intermediary bodies implement the programme schemes and are responsible for the promotion of funding opportunities. The relatively small EU financial contribution to the schemes does not create an urgency among intermediary bodies to promote the European Union.
- There is overreliance on awareness from the period when Ireland was a Cohesion fund beneficiary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate communication into the early stage of the programming period and exercise communication throughout the programming period.
- Improve the communication strategy by differentiating audiences and adapting communication activities to them. Carry out an external evaluation of the Communication strategy.
- Professionalise and prioritise communication by dedicating adequate staff and budgetary resources for communication.
- Educate stakeholders on the importance of communication for multiplying the effect of communication.

Introduction

The Irish case study is the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) of the Southern and Eastern (S&E) region in the programming periods 2007-13 and 2014-20. The S&E ROP covers a geographical area, which expands across 21 counties gathered in 5 regions at the NUTS 3 level:

- Dublin: Dublin City, South Dublin, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdowne and Fingal;
- Mid-East: Kildare, Meath, Wicklow;
- Mid-West: Clare, Limerick City, Limerick County, North Tipperary;
- South-East: Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford City, Waterford County, Wexford;
- South-West: Cork City, Cork County, Kerry.

Objectives

The objective of this case study report is to present evidence collected through field work in the S&E region on the implementation and communication of Cohesion policy in the Southern and Eastern region. The field work contextualises cross-regional COHESIFY research findings reported in Capello and Perucca (2017), Dąbrowski et al. (2017) and Triga and Vadratsikas (2018):

- In their classification of regional policy implementation settings, Capello and Perucca (2017) classified the S&E region in an appropriate policy in an ideal context. This means that Cohesion policy is implemented in an environment, where there is a match between real and perceived needs with high quality of local institutions and high EU acceptance among the population.
- In their typology of regional EU identification, Dąbrowski et al. (2017) classified the regions of Ireland in the "neutral-neutral" type of attachment to the EU. In the "neutral-neutral" regional attachment to the EU, two fifths of Eurobarometer respondents declared being attached to the EU, 37 % declared to not be very attached, and 17 % not at all attached (Dąbrowski et al. 2017: 23).
- Triga and Vadratsikas (2018) found that the media in Ireland depict Cohesion policy positively by framing it from the perspective of the "quality of life" and "economic consequences".

Case study rationale

The S&E ROP is one of two ROPs implemented in Ireland and funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The other ROP is the Border, Midland & Western (BMW) Regional Operational Programme. Since the European Social Fund (ESF) is implemented at the national level, the case selection was restricted between the S&E and BMW ROPs.

The selection of the S&E ROP was based on a comparison of funding intensity[1], demographics and socio-economic context, financing priorities[2], and ERDF awareness[3] in the two regions between 2007-13 and 2014-20. This comparison showed very little differences except in the demographics.

[1] There are no major differences in financing priorities between regions and programming periods 2007-13 and 2014-20.

[2] For the period 2014-20, both S&E and BMW are classified as More Developed Regions (MDR) (GDP is above 90 % of the EU average), which means low level of funding intensity. For the S&E region there has not been a change of funding intensity between 2007-13 and 2014-20, while BMW received medium level funding intensity in 2007-13 (Phasing-in transitional region). Despite the funding intensity difference, the S&E region has always received more ERDF funding than BMW. Funding for the S&E region in 2014-20 is higher than in 2007-13, while the opposite is true for BMW region.

[3] The population in the S&E region has lower awareness of ERDF programmes than the BMW population.

Three quarters of the Irish population live in the S&E region, with more than two thirds of the population concentrated in cities. The S&E region is also the home to the majority of the Irish labour force and produced 80 per cent of the Irish GDP. Since one of the main objectives of COHESIFY is to research communication strategies, focusing on the ERDF ROP of the S&E permitted an examination of how these strategies affect the larger part of the Irish population.

Methods

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

Stahekolders' survey

A stakeholders' online survey was carried out in the summer of 2017. The survey was sent to 114 recipients from national ministries (departments), regional assemblies and the managing authorities, ROP monitoring committee members, local authorities - including local enterprise offices (LEOs) -, economic partners, social partners and third sector organisations (NGOs and civil society organisations).[4] The response rate was 31 % (or 36 respondents) and the completion rate was 17 % (or 19 respondents) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Stakeholders' survey

Southern and Eastern Region		
	Number	Rate
Recipients	114	
Respondents	36	36/114 = 0.31
Complete responses	19[5]	19/114 = 0.17
Incomplete responses	17	17/114= 0.15
Declined to participate	6	9/114 = 0.07

Stahekolders' interviews

Thirteen interviews were conducted with representative of the Member State (MS), Managing Authority (MA), intermediary bodies (IBs), Monitoring Committee (MC), local interests, economic partners and civil society. Most of the interviews were carried out between June and July 2017, while two interviews took place in October 2016 and January 2017. These interviews were carried out earlier as a means of introducing the COHESIFY project in the network. One interview was conducted over the phone on the request of the respondent. Another respondent preferred to answer the questions in writing.

Citiznes' survey

A survey to assess the awarness of citiznes was carried out in 2017. The sample for the Southern and Eastern region included 501 citizens' responses, where 42 % of the respondents were female.

Focus groups with citiznes

In the case study of Ireland, 17 participants (7 female and 10 male) took part in 4 focus groups. Each group included between 4-5 participants and took place in Dublin. All the groups were homogenous per age (18-36, 37-52, and 53 or older). In all but one case gender balance was achieved. Most of the participants live in the greater region of Dublin and two participants live outside the Dublin

[4] Initially, 120 recipients were selected. Ten survey were undelivered (5 recipients ceased to work for the organisation, 1 email was not in use, 4 emails were undelivered). Four recipients were added after the survey was launched. Sample size: 120 - 10+ 4= 114.

[5] One of the incomplete responses is more than 95 % complete and was added to the complete category.

counties. Except for one British participant who has lived in Dublin for over 20 years, all have Irish nationality and one has double Irish British nationality. Two participants were born in Northern Ireland and one emigrated to the UK and returned to Ireland after retirement.

Focus groups were advertised online (Twitter and Facebook), with ads posted on bulletin boards on the Campus of Trinity College Dublin, on location (St. Anne and Stephen's Green parks in Dublin and Dublin City University campus) and with snowball sampling. Ten participants were recruited with snowballing, 5 were recruited on location and 2 replied to campus ads.

The focus groups lasted between 0h55 to 1h45. The same person moderated all four focus groups. The focus groups were voice-recorded and transcribed. Participants were not paid, but light refreshments were provided.

Table 2: Focus groups

Southern and Eastern Region						
Group	**Location**	**Date**	**Number of participants**	**Number of female participants**	**Age range (year)**	**Age range (year)**
EI 1	Dublin	19/09/2017	4	2	1980	1992
EI 2	Dublin	21/09/2017	4	1	1984	1992
EI 3	Dublin	28/09/2017	4	2	1975	1980
EI 4	Dublin	13/10/2017	5	2	1948	1965

Structure of the case study

The following section presenst the background and context. This is followed by the analysis of the implementation of the programme, the communication of the programme, and the analysis of citiznes view. The final section summrises the findings and presents some recommendations.

Context and background

Socio-economic context

At the beginning of the 2007-13 programme period, the following socio-economic problems were identified in the Southern and Eastern region (S&E ROP 2007-13, p. 30):

- Environment: congestion and pollution from road traffic, reliance on fossil fuels, dependence on imported energy, poor protection of surface and ground waters;
- Infrastructure: Pressure from population growth on facilities (housing, schooling and local services);
- Lack of investment in R&D and innovation in the post-third level institutions and among indigenous Irish firms;
- Labour market: long-term and youth unemployment, and regional pockets of high unemployment both in urban and rural areas;
- Low and negative labour productivity in sectors other than the high-tech industry;
- Education: sub-regional disparities in third level education entry and attainment rates;
- Deprived urban areas: social inclusion.

An analysis for the 2014-20 identified similar socio-economic needs, but with a change in underlying issues (S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary, pp. 41-47):

- Environment: water and waste water facilities in major urban centres, renewable energy and energy efficiency;
- Transport and Infrastructure: bottlenecks within road system; sustainable urban mobility, broadband availability in rural areas;
- Investments in R&D and strengthening links between higher education institutions and industry;
- Levels of establishment of new SMEs including by women and young people;
- Labour market: appropriate skilled workforce for enterprises;
- Lack of funds to invest in major economic projects within key regional growth centres (gateways).

EU attitudes and identity

Eurobarometer surveys since 1973, show high levels of support for the EEC/EU in Ireland. The latest data from 2013 to 2015 show that the Irish feel more attached to their Irish nationality than EU citizenship or a European identity (Mendez and Bachtler,2017: 44). Irish citizens record on average higher exclusive attachments to their nationality (between 43 % and 63%) compared to the EU average (38 to 41 %). In addition to the country identity, there are distinctive regional identities throughout Ireland (Rees et al., 2004: 389). These correspond to local identities with counties and town-cities and are not regional identities (Inglis and Donnelly, 2011: 131-2). However, the country identity is above all other identities (see Table 20). COHESIFY findings show that a positive image of the EU prevails in all the regions in Ireland and that the majority of its citizens have neutral attachments to the EU (Dąbrowski et al. 2017). There is no difference in trust in the EU between S&E and BMW. In Ireland, 52 % of respondents tend to trust the EU, while 43-45 % tend not to trust it (Flash Eurobarometer 427, Public opinion in the EU Regions, 2015).

Political context

Ireland is a parliamentary democracy. Directly elected members (Teachta Dála or TDs) sit in the lower parliamentary house called Dáil Éireann. The executive consists of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and members of the cabinet. Political parties have a strong grip on the national level of government (Gallagher, 2011: 538). Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour have been the three most common parties in government since 1937.

Party manifestos

COHESIFY findings show that all Irish parties favour EU Cohesion policy (Debus and Gross 2017: 23-34). Support is stronger among Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Labour Party ("pro-European parties") compared to other more Eurosceptic parties (Sinn Fein, Anti-Austerity Alliance/People Before Profit). The Green Party lies in between these two positions. There is no evidence that pro-European parties emphasise European issues more than others in their party manifestos. Among European issues, Cohesion policy is not emphasised specifically by Irish parties, except for the Independent Alliance.

Regional governance in Ireland

Political parties have less control at the local level of government (Gallagher 2011). Members of the local communities elect councillors to represent the community in local authorities. There are 31 local authorities, which include county and city councils (Local Government Reform Act 2014). Local authorities provide a range of services in housing, waste management, water supply, roads, recreational areas, and environmental protection. Elected councillors are the policy making arm of the local authority. The executive function of local authorities is performed by a chief executive, (Collins and Quinlivan, 2010: 362–368). A referendum on the proposal to have directly elected mayors has been provisionally scheduled for October 2018. The regional level of government consists of three regional assemblies (the Southern Regional Assembly in Waterford, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly in Ballaghaderreen and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly in Dublin). Their geographical remit is the one of NUTS 2 regions in Ireland. Devising regional spatial and economic strategies is their present core function. The Assemblies are led by a director, while their membership consists of indirectly elected representatives from local authorities (Local Government Reform Act 2014). This level of government is by far the least politicised (compared with the National and Local levels). As one local councillor interviewed for their research commented (Interview D):

> *I would feel I have more say certainly on a more regional level [than national level]. I suppose, from a regional perspective, we tend to work as unit rather than as political parties and I think that is always beneficial and maybe a lot of that is because the public don't even know that we are involved.*

EU Cohesion policy framework

Ireland's regionalisation (i.e. the establishment and adaptation of territorial units and local authorities) advanced significantly in response to pragmatic adaption to EU policy (Rees et al, 2004: 383). Between 1989 and 1998 Ireland was classified as one NUTS2 region. EU regional development funding was implemented based on national rather than regional development priorities (National Development Plan – NDP). In 1994, Ireland set up 8 Regional Authorities to evaluate and implement Structural Funds at the level of NUTS3 regions. This represented a major shift towards concretizing the partnership principle envisaged in the 1988 Structural Funds Reforms and started an increasing involvement of local actors in national development plans (O'Donnell and Walsh, 1995; Adshead, 2014: 421). In 1999, after significant economic growth in the early 1990s, but unbalanced regional development, Ireland was divided into two regions with two regional assemblies (NUTS 2, Border, Midlands, and Western (BMW) and Southern and Eastern (S&E) regions).[6] This division allowed for more balanced regional development and the securing of optimal levels of funding from ESIF.[7]

[6] The East and South East of Ireland were prospering faster than other regions.

[7] A local government reform was implemented in 2014, which however, did not have any effect for the implementation of ERDF OPs.

Cohesion policy implementation and performance

EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework

The S&E region has benefitted from lower levels of funding intensity since 2000.[8] In the 2007-13 period, the S&E Region was designated as a regional competitiveness and employment objective region (formerly Objective 2), and in 2014-20 it qualifies as a more developed region with GDP per capita above 90 per cent of the EU average.

While the funding intensity between 2007-13 and 2014-20 has not changed, the funding allocation in 2014-20 is higher than in it was in 2007-13. As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, in 2014-20, the region is set to receive an additional 131 million euro of investments compared to 2007-13. Overall, 1.2 billion euro of Cohesion policy funding is available in Ireland for 2014-2020. This represents an increase of 8 per cent in real terms over the 2007-2013 period, at a time when the overall EU budget for Cohesion policy was reduced. The co-financing rate in 2007-13 was 40 per cent from the Irish exchequer and 60 per cent from the EU budget. In 2014-20, the S&E ROP is equally financed from the Irish exchequer and EU budget.

Due to its status as a more developed region in the EU, the priorities set in the ROPs 2007-13 and 2014-20 have been directed towards development goals set at the EU level, such as the Lisbon Agenda and the Europe 2020 Strategy. In both programme periods, an emphasis has been given to the development of the S&E Region into a knowledge economy and society. Since 2007, the S&E ROPs supports developing information and communications technology (ICT), research, technological development and innovation (RTDI), and entrepreneurship in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).[9]

National development plans in Ireland as well as the priorities of the S&E Region are well integrated with objectives at the EU level (Interview C). The view of the S&E ROP Managing Authority is that the EU objectives are priorities that the S&E Region would pursue even if these were not EU objectives. The alignment of priorities has eased the selection of investments and projects to include in the S&E ROP (Interview C):

> *"All of these things [EU priorities] are things that we in Ireland want to do as well. In a way, it has been relatively straightforward for us to be able to identify things that are in line with Structural Funds Regulations and that we want to do anyway in Ireland."*

While the Managing Authority perceives the priorities set at the EU level to be well aligned with regional needs (Interview C), the scope of regional needs surpasses the availability of ERDF financial resources (S&E ROP 2007-13, p. 53). As one respondent put it: "There is never a problem of absorption, there is never enough money" (Interview B).

This transpires as well in the stakeholders' survey, where a third respondents (7) believe the scarcity of Cohesion policy funding has a significant impact on the implementation of projects (Survey Question 5). This has been an important aspect for the selection of priorities in the programme periods 2007-13 and 2014-20, since the S&E region ceased to be a Cohesion fund beneficiary during the 2000-06 programme period and the level of funding subsequently dropped.

[8] During the period 2000-06 the SE Region was a "phasing-out" region from Objective 1 or Convergence (Cohesion Fund) region. This meant it was just slightly above the Cohesion Fund threshold of 75 % EU GDP average.

[9] A shift in priorities towards developing knowledge-based economy occurred already in the 2000-06 programme period (see Miller 2013, 13).

Thus, investment priorities have been confined to niche areas (S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary, p. 63-66; Interview C): "The needs of the regions are vast, so it's trying to identify out of all the needs, what are the needs that ERDF with a little bit of money can help do." This means that to maximize the added value of the S&E ROP, ERDF allocations are selected for investments, which are not addressed in government national plans. This is the main difference between the Structural Funds programmes starting in 2013 compared to previous periods. While National Development Plans[10] have been well connected to EU-Ireland Community Support Frameworks[11] in the past, the connection between these two has waned, as the latter became much smaller compared to the former (Interview C; Miller 2013, 10).

Operational Programme for Southern and Eastern Region 2007-2013

Table 3 provides an overview of priorities and ERDF allocations in the S&E ROP 2007-13. Priority 1 consisted of investments in RTDI and micro-enterprise entrepreneurship. It represented more than 65 per cent of the ROP budget and included most of the beneficiaries (calculations based on the list of beneficiaries). Projects were developed to enhance the link between the education/research and industry sectors in Ireland. For example, the S&E ROP co-financed investments in research infrastructure and equipment, and grants for the commercialisation of research ideas. Entrepreneurship in micro-enterprises was for example delivered through the co-financing of grants for starting and expanding business.

Priority 2 financed environment and accessibility projects, such as the National Broadband Scheme and energy saving investments (Implementation Plans 2014-20). The highest level of investment was directed to support energy efficiency and energy management in SMEs and public sector organisations. This was followed by investments in marine (wave and tidal) renewable energy and grants for the installation of new renewable energy plants in the private and public sector (e.g. the deployment of boilers fuelled by wood chips and wood pellets and applied in large buildings/small industrial sites).

Table 3: Priority axes and allocations in 2007-2013

Southern and Eastern Region ROP 2007-2013		
Priority allocation	EFRD allocation (%)	EFRD allocation (m EUR)
1. Innovation & the Knowledge Economy	65.4	240
2. Environment & Accessibility	17.7	65
3. Sustainable Urban Development	13.6	50
4. Technical Assistance	3.3	12
Total	100.0	367

Source: AIR 2014, p. 8

Priority 3 consisted of so-called "tangible" projects in sustainable urban development, whose results are easier to see for citizens compared to investments into businesses or research institutions. These projects represented less than 15 per cent of the 2007-13 S&E ROP. Overall, the purpose of

[10] These are development plans adopted by the Irish government.

[11] These are framework documents on Structural Funds agreed and adopted by the Member State and the European Commission on the same basis that individual OPs are adopted; known as the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) in 2007-13 and Partnership Agreement in 2014-20. The National Strategic Reference Framework for Ireland 2007-13 set out the following key priorities: 1) Promoting investment in human capital through up-skilling the workforce, increasing participation in the workforce, and activating groups outside the workforce; 2) Supporting innovation, knowledge and entrepreneurship in the regions; and 3) Strengthening the competitiveness, attractiveness and connectivity of the National Spatial Strategy, through improved access to quality infrastructure and promoting environmental and sustainable development.

these projects (under the ERDF Gateways Grant Scheme) was to develop urban locations into attractive living and working spaces (Dublin, Cork, Limerick/Shannon and Waterford). This included investments in cultural, community, and sports facilities as well as investments in public transport.

Operational Programme for Southern and Eastern Region 2014-2020

Table 4 provides an overview of priorities and ERDF allocations in 2014-20 and shows the consistency in pursing priorities determined already in 2007-13. In terms of projects, the following two changes can be observed (Interview C):

- An investment shift from buildings and physical capacity towards investments in human capital;
- An increasing attention to areas outside Dublin, where there are capacity constraints, which hinders the maximisation of regional potential.

Table 4: Priority axes and allocations in 2014-20

Southern and Eastern Region ROP 2014-2020		
Priority allocation	EFRD allocation (%)	EFRD allocation (m EUR)
1. Strengthening Research, Technology Development and Innovation	36.1	180
2. ICT Infrastructure	12.0	60
3. SME Competitiveness	13.9	69
4. Support the shift towards a low-carbon economy	26.7	133
5. Sustainable Integrated Urban Development	10.4	52
6. Technical Assistance	0.8	4
Total	100.0	498

Source: S&E OP ERDF 2014-20

Approximately half of the ROP budget was allocated for investments in RTDI and entrepreneurship (Priorities 1 and 3), which mirrors the levels of investment in 2007-13. Under Priority 1, the S&E ROP is currently financing four research centres in the S&E Region and ten spin-offs (S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary, p. 70). The investment in the research centres represents a clear example of the shift from financing R&D infrastructure to human capital. There is an ongoing commitment is to the commercialization of research ideas.

Under Priority 2, the S&E ROP is co-funding the Broadband National Plan (S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary, p. 81), which is a state-led investment for the extension of high-speed broadband into small rural settlements, which the market does not provide for. The investment in information and telecommunication technologies shows the shift from transport to communications infrastructure.

Under Priority 3, no major changes can be observed, and the S&E ROP continues to support entrepreneurship in the region through Local Enterprises Offices – a widely regarded successful model (Interviews B and D; S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary, p. 88). Due to the level of ERDF funding, support is provided for microenterprises, i.e. business with less than 10 employees. Support for microenterprises is delivered through grants, and no financial instruments are used. In addition, a series of initiative have been developed to promote entrepreneurial spirit, such as the Young Entrepreneurship Competition, which is an award for entrepreneurs below the age of 30.

Under Priority 4, projects are undertaken for the improvement of energy efficiency of social housing, private dwellings and public buildings (S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary, p. 95). The priority also includes a project for tackling poverty, where energy efficiency is delivered to low-income households.

Priority 5 on Sustainable Integrated Urban Development remains largely unchanged from the 2007-13 programme, in terms of type of projects and funding, while a larger number of counties will receive support (S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary, p. 103).

Alignment of socio-economic needs and ROP priorities

Most of the respondents that were interviewed agreed that the priorities of S&E ROPs match the socio-economic needs of the region (Interviews A, C, J and K). Where criticism of the selection of priorities is expressed, it is stated in disappointment that a larger number of regional needs cannot be co-financed due to limited ERDF funding. Some of the respondents' criticisms reflect the interests they represent (local communities, civil society and social partners) (Interviews E, F, H and K). For example, several respondents feel that the ROP continues to emphasise Dublin (Interview E and F), that more attention could be provided to the needs of those living in disadvantaged areas, (Interview H) and climate change (Interview K).

The managing authorities of Structural Funds in Ireland regularly commission citizens' surveys, where one of the questions is about the perceived needs in the region. These results show that the priorities set by the Managing Authority of S&E ROP are closely aligned with the perceived needs of the population living in the S&E Region. In the survey carried out in 2009, more than two-thirds of the respondents believed the targeted needs of the ROP are important investments for the region (Drury Research 2010).

Implementation framework and partnership structures

The most relevant changes to regional development in Ireland, and consequently in the S&E Region, have been implemented before the 2007-13 programing period. This notably involved the adoption of the National Development Plan 2000-2006, which included provisions envisaging balanced regional development.[12] In 1999, Ireland was divided into two NUTS 2 regions, which paved the way for pursuing development based on regional differentiation. This was in recognition of the fact that regional disparities were increasing within Ireland and that regionally-led single-fund programs were better suited to regional needs compared with central government-led multi-fund programs. Since 2000, regional assemblies have been designated as the managing authorities of ROPs.

While ERDF programs are delivered through two ROPs and managed by regional assemblies, projects are delivered through national programs (an exception is the urban development priority; Interview C). The implementation system is one of decentralised management, whereby the regional assemblies, as the managing authorities, delegate the implementing function to intermediary bodies. Intermediary bodies are located in main government departments, state agencies or local authorities, which deliver the project on the ground. However, as the managing authorities, regional assemblies are responsible for the overall monitoring, evaluation and financial management control. Since 2007, they also have an increasing role in tailoring schemes to reflect the needs of the regions (Interview C).[13]

Since the programme period 2007-13, regional assemblies have also started to tailor the actual delivery of projects in the region with the urban development priority. In practice, this means that schemes are devised by the regional assembly. Through ERDF advances for the ROP, the Southern Regional Assembly provides grants to local authorities, which in turn match it with their own resources (Interview C). There are no exchequer contributions involved. For the 2014-20 programme period, the regional assemblies remain committed to the reinforcement of these projects and have an interest in greater competences for tailoring projects regionally (Interview C).

For now, this approach has only been realised in the urban development priority. However, since 2015, regional assemblies have been granted competences to draw regional spatial and economic strategies (i.e. identifying needs specific to the region). This is now their core competence (Interview C). The first strategies are expected to be prepared by the end of 2018. For the post-2020 period, one can expect that these strategies will form the basis for identifying priorities for which Structural Funds are based on. This is an essential step for the future, which will allow a truly differentiated approach to regional development.

The acquisition of the functions described above has been the most important development in the regional focus on Structural fund implementation in Ireland since 2000. Given its past as a centralised state, these advancements are not negligible but remain modest compared to federally organised EU Member States (Miller 2013, 11-12, 13). Nevertheless, the strategic competences recently acquired by regional assemblies show a continued (albeit slow) commitment to regionalisation.

Management Structures

The management responsibilities for the S&E ROP are shared among the Managing Authority, Member State, and implementing bodies (mainly government departments) (Interview J).

[12] Prior to that, the government's development plans were based on national priorities.

[13] Besides the urban development projects, in the 2014-20 period, Enterprise Ireland, as an intermediary body, implements one of its schemes only in the S&E Region (i.e. commercialisation of research ideas) (Interview C).

Managing Authority

Since 2000, the managing authorities of ROPs have been regional assemblies. In the case of the Southern and Eastern ROP, this is the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA).[14] Since 2014, regional assemblies have two functions; firstly, to fulfil their role as the managing authorities of ERDF OPs (and regional contact points for European territorial cooperation programs). Secondly to prepare and subsequently adopt the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES).

To carry out these functions, the Southern Regional Assembly has an administration of 23 staff, whose responsibilities are divided between programme and regional planning. Among them, there are also several auditors, who assist the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC).

Regional assemblies in Ireland are not directly elected bodies. Political oversight of the administration is ensured through delegates from (the directly elected) county and city-county councils. A selected number of councillors will sit in the ROP Monitoring Committee and exercise an oversight function on the ROP.

Member State

The role of the Member State for the S&R ROP 2007-13 was taken by the Department of Finance. In 2014-20, this role is taken by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Department of Public Expenditures and Reform acts as the overall Member State Managing Authority for all ESFI programs and has primary responsibility for ROPs. This means that the Department is also responsible for the negotiations of the Partnership Agreement with the European Commission and the set-up of the Monitoring Committee for the Partnership Agreement (see p. 14). The Department is designated as the Certifying Authority and its internal and EU Audit Unit is the Audit Authority for the ROPs (Partnership Agreement 2014-20, p. 164; S&E ROP 2007-13, Citizens' summary, p. 151).

The division within the Department of Public Expenditures and Reform is divided into a Cohesion policy section and ERDF implementation section (Interview J). In the current period, two civil servants are dedicated to each task on a full-time basis. As the funding from Structural Funds decreases so does the administrative structure to implement them.

The Member State and the Managing Authority have a close working relationship, which is in the view of both agencies a successful one; based on mutual trust (Interviews B, C and J).

> "*When an issue arises on implementation, you know, we work with them [the Southern Regional Assembly/Managing Authority] to address that. So, for instance, with the designation, we didn't have the right system completed, so we [the Member State] with the Managing Authority and the Audit Authority, we worked with the Commission to come up with an ad interim measure, which was using the 2007-13 system until the new system is around. But that's how we work, we sit down together as a team and look at the issues."* (Interview J)

Intermediary Bodies

The management of ERDF programmes is decentralised, as the delivery of the programmes is delegated to intermediary bodies. The role of intermediate bodies is taken by government departments, state agencies, and local authorities. They deliver on the ground the schemes that are contained in the ROP (Interview C). The system is considered appropriate since it facilitates use of the best expertise in the country (Interviews A and C). The Managing Authority has formal contractual arrangements with each Intermediary Body and it holds bilateral discussions (Interview

[14] Before 2014, the Southern Regional Assembly was known as the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly.

C). Through its roles in reporting and financial management control, the Managing Authority makes sure that Intermediary Bodies fulfil their obligations in delivering the schemes (Interview C).

Table 5: Intermediary bodies S&E ROP

Southern and Eastern Region ROP	
2007-13	2014-20
Enterprise Ireland Enterprise Ireland CEB Co-ordination Unit.	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)
Department of Education and Skills	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCENR)
Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI)	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DECLG)
Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR)	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI)
Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and	Enterprise Ireland
Department of Transport	Higher Education Institutes
Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport	LEOs
Local Authorities	Local Authorities
Marine Institute	Marine Institute
Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly	Southern Regional Assembly
Iarnród Éireann	Science Foundation Ireland
	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEA)

Sources: S&E ROP 2007-13; S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary

Key Management Features

Interview respondents have identified the following key features of the management structure of the S&E ROP:

Integrated planning

Ireland has integrated its structural fund programming with its national planning (Interview C). This is viewed as a key for the successful implementation of ESFI funds in Ireland. The Managing Authority reports that this feature could potentially help younger Member States in their implementation (Interview B):

> *"You need to ensure that your national policies are providing full alignment with what you are trying to achieve in Structural Funds. What I mean by that, say you take the educational example, if we [in Ireland] hadn't built the foundation of the introduction of free secondary education in the 1960s, we would not be in the position to be the top league of tertiary level participation rates. The idea of full alignment between national priorities and European priorities is very important."*

Since 2007-13, national development plans and agreements on Structural Funds between Ireland and the European Commission (National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-13 and Partnership Agreement 2014-20) are less integrated due to decreasing amounts of Structural Funds (see p. 11). However, there has been more regional differentiation in the implementation of ERDF, while previously regional development was planned at the national level. Ireland is in this respect an example of how Member States need to continuously adapt their planning and implementation system, given changing levels of development and funding intensity. At the same time, Irish national and regional development priorities have always been closely aligned to priorities set at the EU level (Interview C).

Decentralised management

Decentralised management is also considered a feature of the ERDF implementation in Ireland (Interview C). First, it means that the Managing Authority is not the main grant-awarding body. In addition to the Managing Authority, Intermediary Bodies play a significant role in project selection and implementation. Second, it means that the schemes that are delivered through the S&E ROP are in effect national programmes that are divided into two parts by ROP (Interview C).

Relying on state agencies as Intermediary Bodies allowed Ireland to maximise the use of expertise (Interview A). This has been important given that Ireland has started to implement ERDF funds as a very centralised stated with few regional implementation capacities, compared to some other EU Member States. By relying on the decentralised management, Ireland overcame its shortcoming for the implementation of Structural Funds. Overall, decentralised management decreased the negative impact of weak regional structures, allowing Ireland to maximise performance while providing time for regionalisation. This is being achieved (albeit slowly) given the fact that since 2007, the S&E ROP Managing Authority has been able to increase its involvement in the tailoring of the ROP projects (Interview C; see p. 14).

Partnership Structures

The involvement of social partners in the ROP is guaranteed through three different regional and national monitoring and coordination committees (S&E ROP Monitoring Committee, National Coordination Committee of the Funds, and the National Monitoring Committee for Implementation; see Table 6). No major change can be observed between programme periods. In addition, the Managing Authority and Member State carried out public consultations before the adoption of the S&E ROP and the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-13 and Partnership Agreement 2014-20 (Interviews C and J).

Table 6: Partnership Structures

Southern and Eastern Region ROP		
ROP Monitoring Committee	National Coordination Committee of the Funds (NCCF)	National Monitoring Committee for Implementation
ERDF OP oversight	ESFI (and other EU funds) coordination	ESFI OPs oversight
Yearly meetings	Yearly meetings	Yearly meetings

Sources: National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-13, pp. 74-75; S&E ROP 2014-20, Citizens' summary, pp. 148-150; Partnership Agreement 2014-20, pp. 160-63; Interview J

Since the S&E ROP is, in the main, implemented through government departments as part of larger programs, the S&E ROP projects are scrutinised also through public consultation carried out by government departments. Thus, the structures in place for ESIF monitoring are an additional level to the scrutiny put in place by the intermediary bodies themselves (Interview J). Interview respondents from the Managing Authority, Member State and social partners report there is a strong tradition of social partnership in Ireland (Interviews C, J, E and H). Social partners are active in their participation (Interview J). The Member State has noted that in Ireland there is a limited number of groups to reach out to: "You do get the same people come to different meetings and committees" (Interview J).

This view is, however, not shared by a social partner representative, who on the whole feels more integrated into the S&E ROP than in the national oversight committee for ESFI funds (Interview H). Another social partner representative also says that by the time a public consultation takes place (in general and not only for ESIF programmes), it is unlikely for their organisation to exercise any

meaningful impact (Interview K). For this reason, they prefer to get involved in "participation" rather than "consultation" (Interview K):

> *"[At the consultation level] they [government departments] have already made up their minds before they come and talk to you. Participation is when they [government departments] haven't made up their mind and there is some chance that you get to actually exercise influence."*

S&E ROP Monitoring Committee

The ROP Monitoring Committee is the main partnership forum for overseeing the implementation and communication of the S&E ROP. It is chaired by the Managing Authority and meets on an annual basis. Its membership is presented in Table 7 and it includes representatives of all the four social partner pillars (community and voluntary pillar, environmental pillar, trade unions, employers and business). Over the different programme periods, the Monitoring Committee membership varied from approximately 35 to 60 members (Interview B). The Managing Authority works continuously to resolve any problems and if resolved this will usually not be brought up at the Monitoring Committee meeting (Interview B).

The interviewed social partner representatives are generally satisfied with the level of involvement in the S&E ROP (Interviews E, H and K), which is, in their opinion, higher compared to national programmes (Interviews H and K).[15] According to one of the respondents, the Managing Authority does a "very good job" in allowing questions and answers (Interview H):

> *"I think it is really good that the Monitoring Committee is there and everybody can ask questions, your questions are answered, it is not just an information sharing exercise, which I think is really good."* (Interview H)

After participating in the annual Monitoring Committee, the representatives of the social partners brief their respective organisation or pillar organisations members. The interest of other organisation pillars will vary, depending on their activity areas and whether these are addressed in the S&E ROP (Interviews E, H and K). One respondent noted that for the social partners to have an impact in the Monitoring Committee, the material of the meeting should be circulated more than one week in advance (Interview H). This would allow the social partner representative to consult other members of the pillar before the Monitoring Committee. Another respondent noted the large extent of the material that needs to be read before the Monitoring Committee meeting, which can be overwhelming considering the human resources capacity of the represented social partners organisations (Interview K). In the same vein, one of the respondents said it would be useful if the Managing Authority produced a concise bullet point document, where it summarised the main issues in addition to lengthy minutes (Interview K).

Social partners view their role in the Monitoring Committee differently depending on their areas of activity: pushing the social inclusion component (Interview H), making sure the S&E ROP does not have adverse effects on the environment (Interview K) and representing the interest of the pillar in a broader sense than the S&E ROP priorities (Interview E). The latter is a particularly important means of influence on the Southern Regional Assembly (i.e. the S&E ROP Managing Authority), given its new competence to adopt the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the S&E Region by the end of 2018.

Representatives of the local interest are satisfied in the way they are included in the S&E ROP (Interviews D and F). One respondent feels their involvement is high, especially compared to their

[15] When discussing the inclusion of social partners in policy-making, respondents noted that the government has made enormous progress in involving social partners into policy-making compared with the past (Interviews H and K).

inclusion in national policy-making (Interview D), another respondent feels they are equally well included in regional and national policy-making.

An interview respondent affiliated with an Intermediary Body, finds the Monitoring Committee to be a useful forum (Interview L):

> *"It [Monitoring Committee] seems to have the right people in the room and there are some lively debates going on, and you have the people from the European Commission present. You know, I also find it useful to learn about the other projects [...]."*

Table 7: Membership in Monitoring Committees

Southern and Eastern Region ROP	
2007-13	2014-20
Managing Authority	Managing Authority
Department of Finance	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Government Departments and Agencies involved in the implementation of the OP	Government Departments involved in the implementation of the OP (and/or their Agencies)
Special EU Programmes Body	Special EU Programmes Body
Regional Assembly	Regional and Local Implementing Bodies
Regional Authorities	
Each of the four Social Partners Pillars	Each of the four Social Partners Pillars
Appropriate statutory body(ies) to represent each of the horizontal interests (equal opportunities and sustainable development)	Appropriate body(ies) to represent each horizontal interest: social inclusion, gender equality, anti-discrimination and sustainable development
Representative of the County & City Managers Association	

Sources: S&E ROP 2007-13, p. 90; S&E ROP Citizens' summary 2014-20, p. 148

National Coordination Committee of the Funds (NCCF)

The National Coordination Committee of the Funds oversees the coordination of ESFI funds. The NCCF is a forum for discussing implementation, sharing ideas and opportunities for cooperation and spotting crossovers among ESIF (Interview J). For example, the idea to create an NCCF subcommittee on communication arose during the NCCF meeting in 2016 (Interviews B, G and J). The NCCF is chaired by the Member State. Its membership includes Managing Authorities, government departments and the Special EU Programmes Body (i.e. the body responsible for Interreg and Peace, see SEUPB 2017). Officials and staff from the Department of Taoiseach (i.e. Prime Minister) and Foreign Affairs Department are also invited to the NCCF (Interview J). The NCCF meets yearly before the National Monitoring Committee for Implementation. There is also a subgroup in the NCCF, where the managers of each of the ESFI funds meet. This group has been meeting more frequently while preparing for the new programme period (Interview J).

Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee

The oversight of the ESFI funds is carried out in the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee – a national monitoring committee for implementation. A similar committee was organised for the period 2007-13 and it was known as the National Strategic Reference Framework Monitoring Committee. Meetings are held yearly. All the Managing Authorities of the ESIF participate to make sure that everyone is involved in the monitoring of each other's programmes (Interview J).

The Member State has observed that the community taking part in these committees is small and that they all know each other (Interview J). While such familiarity might ease cooperation, it can have undesired effects as well. For example, a representative of one of the social partners' pillars has commented that during the Monitoring Committees of the S&E ROP there is a complacent atmosphere among the representatives of the government departments when discussing the S&E ROP projects (Interview K):

> *"A lot of the people on the [Monitoring] Committee are government agencies and one government agency won't criticise another government agency. [...] It is not gentlemanly to criticise a colleague."*

For this reason, it is even more critical for "independents", such as the representatives of social partners' pillars and horizontal interests, to be included in monitoring structures, as they are more likely to raise critical issues (Interview K). The attitude noticed by Respondent K is not corroborated in the stakeholders' survey, where an equal number of respondents (6) either agreed or disagreed with the statement that partners are only interested in promoting their own organisational and financial interests in the partnership structures.

Table 8: Membership in the National Coordination Committee of the Funds (NCCF)

Southern and Eastern Region ROP	
2007-13	2014-20
Department of Finance	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Department of Agriculture and Food	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Dep. of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Department of Education and Skills
Department of Community Rural Affairs	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
Department of Comm., Marine and Nat. R.	Department of Comm., Energy and Nat. R.
BMW Managing Authority	BMW Managing Authority
Southern and Eastern Regional Managing Authority	Southern and Eastern Regional Managing Authority
Special EU Programmes Body	Special EU Programmes Body
	Dep. of Environment, Community and Loc. Gov.

Source for 2007-13: National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-13, p. 75; Source for 2014-20: Partnership Agreement 2014-20, p. 162

Table 9: Membership in National Monitoring Arrangements for Implementation

Southern and Eastern Region ROP	
2007-13 Reference Framework Monitoring Committee	2014-20 Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee
Department of Finance	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
ESF Managing Authority	Department of Education and Skills
ERDF Managing Authorities	Border, Midland and Western Managing Authority Southern and Eastern Regional Managing Authority
Government Departments involved in the implementation of the OPs and Implementing Bodies	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
Special EU Programmes Body	Special EU Programmes Body
Regional Authorities	Dep. of Envi., Community and Local Government
Appropriate dep. to represent each of the horizontal interests	National representatives of the economic and social partners and the Irish Environmental Network
Social Partners Pillars	

Source for 2007-13: National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-13, p. 74
Source for 2014-20: Partnership Agreement 2014-20, p. 163

Assessment of performance

The performance of the S&E ROPs have been viewed positively in terms of the region's social and economic development (Miller 2013, 13). In terms of general implementation performance, Ireland had resolved the most pressing issues in its implementation system before the two programme periods studied in COHESIFY. As a Member State, which benefited from large allocations from the Cohesion fund, and as an older Member of the European Union, Ireland has a well-developed implementation system. There is limited differentiation in the ROP, despite the fact that a regional approach has been taken since the programme period 2000-2006.

Annex 1 summarises the achievements of the S&E ROP 2007-13 and shows that the targets have been largely met. The number of indicators where targets were not achieved is minor compared to the number of overachieved targets. The absorption rate for the S&E ROP 2007-13 was above the national average and is considered high (79 per cent compared to 71 per cent; COHESIFY/EUROREG 2017). The financial allocation data demonstrates that almost 97 per cent of the expenditure of the S&E ROP went to activities related to Lisbon objectives (828,219 million euro) (AIR 2014, p. 34). Despite the economic downturn in 2008, the mid-term evaluation of the S&E ROP 2007-13 confirmed that the ROPs priorities remained valid in the S&E Region and no major changes were proposed (AIR 2014, p. 52). Due to the crisis, Priority 1 (Innovation and the Knowledge Economy) was strengthened with a transfer of 38 million euro from other ROP's priorities (AIR 2014, p. 37).

Annex 2 summarises the progress in the implementation of the S&E ROP 2014-20 in 2015 (the latest available information on the Managing Authority's website as of October 2017). Most of the schemes are being implemented (AIR 2014-2015, Table 3.1). However, a delay is reported in the implementation of the Marine Programme and the National Broadband Plan. The National Broadband Plan is a large state-driven investment, where the S&E ROP brings added value to the project management and provides a monitoring service, rather than financial added value (Interview L). Given the scale of the investment and problems faced worldwide in the delivery of similar schemes, such delays are not exceptional for the Irish case (e.g. Marshallsea, 2017). However, the delivery of broadband is important for the success of business in the other ROP priority and the European 2020 strategy targets. Thus, it is not surprising that several Monitoring Committee members have expressed concerns about the delay in the roll out of high speed broadband at a regional level (Interviews E, F, H and K). The issue has attracted significant national media attention as well (e.g. Irish Times 2017).

Programme achievements

Interview respondents in the Managing Authority and Member State point to two main achievements (Interviews B, C, and J). First, the ROP 2007-13 has helped to address most of the infrastructure capacity issues in the region that could be addressed within the ERDF framework (Interview C). This was done by building on previous programme periods, which had already provided investments in the motorway network, public transport network, water supply and waste water infrastructure (Interview B).

Second, the infrastructure investments made in research and development in 2007-13 have allowed switching towards investments in the research itself in 2014-20 (Interview B and J). Overall, the investments through the Cohesion fund, ERDF and ESF in Ireland have targeted physical and human capital, which is what differentiates Ireland from most of the other cohesion countries (Interview B). The way investments were planned and targeted has for example helped to attain high participation rates in third level education (Interview B). Other achievements mentioned are a good absorption (Interview B), successful implementation through collaboration among stakeholders (Interviews B and J) and successful project delivery (Interview E).

Programme challenges

The goals of the S&E ROP 2007-13 have largely been achieved and the same can be said of the S&E ROP 2014-20, given its current stage. Respondents did not identify problems, which would have significantly affected the targets under S&E ROP 2014-20. One of the schemes under Priority 1 in the S&E ROP 2007-13 (Experimental Innovation Actions) was not implemented due to a lack of exchequer funding (AIR 2014, p. 58). However, the absorption rate shows this was remedied with other projects and results were delivered.

Three respondents pointed to the promotion of schemes and the availability of training for the widest audience possible as a shortcoming in the programme (Interviews A, D, and H). Their concerns are corroborated by the responses in the stakeholders' survey (see p. 26), where the number of respondents that *did not* participate in a training session is higher compared to those who have. Given the fact that the S&E ROP 2007-13 has, in the main, achieved its target (see Table 8), the levels of promotion and training seem to be sufficient to achieving the set priorities, as such, these issues are not serious problems. However, greater promotion and more training would, undoubtedly, increase the competitiveness and impact of projects.

Looking at the implementation of Structural Funds, in general, respondents from the Managing Authority and the Member State observed that the principle of proportionality is not satisfactorily observed in the implementation of programmes (Interviews C and J). This means that there is poor alignment between what is required under the Structural Funds regulations and the size of allocations (Interview C):

> *"I think the main frustration tends to be on the level of bureaucracy that attaches to this [ERDF]. Each programming period we talk about simplification and all of that. And in reality, it doesn't happen. It is a bit frustrating that the very elaborate apparatus that is required to deliver a 500 million euro program is the same as the apparatus to deliver a 5 billion euro program in a region in Poland. There is no proportionality. We have been saying this message for years now, but it has fallen on deaf ears."*

The consequence of this problem is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Managing Authority to get stakeholders on board the programme (Interview B):

> *"It is getting harder for us to get the cooperation of ministries and state agencies. Because if you think of it, they are not getting extra money. [...] You have to impose all these extra burdens without any extra benefits."*

A similar problem has been observed by a respondent from an Intermediary Body, who has contextualised it in this way (Interview I):

> *"It [ERDF] is extra work for my organisation, but we are happy to get money for the country. [...] We have a role in this in terms as an Intermediary Body and we didn't get any extra resources for it. We were kind of invited to be part of it. I had a lot of meetings. There is a new system e-Cohesion, and I have attended some meetings on that. So, you know, there is work. [...] My organisation doesn't get anything from it, but Ireland Inc. does. [...] I think it is more that we are doing our bit for the country."*

In the stakeholder survey, most of the respondents reported that the excessive audit and control during or after the project completion was a (very) significant challenge. On the other hand poor cooperation between project partners was reported to be the an insignificant challenge:

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

Stakeholder survey	Very significant and significant	Average	Insignificant and not at all	Don't know
Scarcity of Cohesion policy funds	7 (33 %)	5 (24 %)	3 (14 %)	6 (29 %)
Problems with obtaining Cohesion policy financing such as complicated rules for submitting applications	10 (48 %)	5 (24 %)	1 (4 %)	5 (24 %)
Excessive, cumbersome reporting	15 (72 %)	3 (14 %)	0 (0 %)	3 (14 %)
Unclear objectives for evaluating project results	5 (24 %)	9 (43 %)	4 (19 %)	3 (14 %)
Poor cooperation between project partners	2 (10 %)	3 (14 %)	8 (38 %)	8 (38 %)
Excessive audit and control during or after the project completion	14 (68 %)	3 (14 %)	1 (4 %)	3 (14 %)
Lack of funds for own contribution (co-financing)	7 (33 %)	6 (29 %)	4 (19 %)	4 (19 %)
Difficult access to credit and/or loans for own contribution	6 (29 %)	4 (19 %)	4 (19 %)	7 (33 %)
Lack of capacity such as qualified staff	8 (33 %)	6 (29 %)	6 (29 %)	4 (19 %)

Effectiveness of implementation structures

The implementation structures are effective (see p. 14). Rather than problems, the Member State and Managing Authority speak about issues that need to be addressed. One such issue was the establishment of a new e-cohesion system at the start of the S&E ROP 2014-20 (Interview J) (EP/DG IPOL 2016). In view of new regulatory requirements, the Member State could not adapt its e-cohesion system and had to design a new system. However, the Member State acknowledged that the new system was needed (Interview J). An additional issue arising from this was the need to communicate the new e-cohesion system to its users in a manner that would ease their worries that the new system would benefit their work.

Prioritisation of tasks

Interview respondents from the Managing Authority and the Member State agree that spending the funds, compliance, performance and publicising achievements are equally important (Interview B and J). In the view of the Managing Authority, the emphasis has gradually shifted from spending money in the earlier programme periods to the delivery of results (Interview B). In the programme period 2014-20, the Managing Authority is concentrated on milestones and targets given the money spent (Interview B). Moreover, the Managing Authority is also wary of different stages in the implementation of the S&E ROP (Interview B):

> *"As we come towards a critical period now, when the Financial Framework [the EU Multiannual Financial Framework] is going to be negotiated, we have to communicate what we are achieving from the investments being made through regional funds [ERDF]. So, the pendulum has moved much further to the right [towards publicising achievements]."*

The view of the Member State is that spending, compliance, performance and publicising achievements are given equal priority (Interview J):

> *"Anything that is required on the regulation is given priority, if that's required under the regulation."*

As the Managing Authority, the Member State also observes that prioritisation can vary based on the stage of the programme period. At the beginning, the emphasis is on "getting the system up and running", which is followed by "getting payment claims", and finally the communication of results (Interview J).

Respondents other than the ones from the Managing Authority and the Member State have observed that declaring expenditures (Interview I) and spending money (Interview H) are priorities. Others have noted that communication is not prioritised enough (Interview K) and that more consideration should be given on how to achieve social inclusion (Interview H).

Other findings from the stakeholder survey

The results of the stakeholder survey corroborate interview findings that stakeholders have an overall positive opinion on the implementation of the ROPs in the S&E Region:

- All the respondents believe that Cohesion Policy funds have been used in, at least, an acceptable manner in their municipality and region:

How well, in your opinion, have Cohesion policy funds been used in your municipality & region?

Stakeholder survey	Very well and well	Acceptable	Poorly and Very poorly	Don't know
Your municipality	6 (40 %)	6 (40 %)	0 (0 %)	3 (20 %)
Your region	7 (54 %)	4 (31 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (15 %)

- The majority of survey respondents believe that Cohesion Policy objectives have largely reinforced the development objectives of their municipality and region:

To what extent have the Cohesion policy objectives reinforced the development objectives of your region and municipality?

Stakeholder survey	Completely and Largely	In some way	Not much and Not at all	Don't know
Your municipality	11 (50 %)	7 (32 %)	1 (4 %)	3 (14 %)
Your region	13 (59 %)	7 (32 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (9 %)

- Most of the survey respondents believe that Cohesion policy funds somehow decreased the differences in the development level between the two regions in Ireland, between urban and rural areas in the S&E region and between poorer and richer areas in the S&E region. There is less agreement on the effect Cohesion policy funds have had on decreasing the development level between Ireland and the other countries of the EU:

To what extent have the Cohesion policy funds helped to increase or decrease differences between the regions in terms of development?

Stakeholder survey	Decreased & somewhat decreased	Had no impact	Somewhat increased and Increased	Don't know
Differences in the development level between poorer and richer regions in your country	12 (55 %)	2 (9 %)	4 (18 %)	4 (18 %)
Differences in the development level between rural and urban areas in your region	8 (36 %)	3 (14 %)	6 (27 %)	5 (23 %)
Differences in the development level between poorer and richer areas in your region	9 (41 %)	3 (14 %)	6 (27 %)	4 (18 %)
Differences in the development level between your country and other EU Member states	7 (32 %)	4 (18 %)	5 (23 %)	6 (27 %)

- Most of the respondents agree that Cohesion policy finances projects that their municipality/region needs the most. However, respondents are unsure whether these investments are at the same time the most valued by residents. Most of the respondents (strongly) disagree that there are many irregularities in spending Cohesion policy funds in the S&E Region due to non-compliance with EU rules and fraud, such as corruption or nepotism. This is further corroborated with respondents' (strong) agreement on the statement that spending of Cohesion policy funds is adequately controlled.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements …?

Stakeholder survey	Strongly agree or Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree and Disagree	Don't know
Cohesion policy funds finance those investment projects which your municipality/region needs the most	11 (52 %)	5 (24 %)	3 (14 %)	2 (10 %)
In your municipality/region Cohesion policy funding goes to investment projects which are most valued by local residents	2 (10 %)	12 (57 %)	3 (14 %)	4 (19 %)
There are many irregularities in spending Cohesion policy funds due to non-compliance with EU rules	0 (0 %)	4 (19 %)	11 (52 %)	6 (29 %)
Fraud, such as corruption or nepotism, is common in spending Cohesion policy funds	0 (0 %)	1 (5 %)	15 (71 %)	5 (24 %)
There have been many positive changes in your municipality/region thanks to Cohesion policy funds, which would not have been achieved without the funds	15 (71 %)	3 (14 %)	1 (5 %)	2 (10 %)
The spending of Cohesion policy funds is adequately controlled	13 (62 %)	3 (15 %)	1 (5 %)	4 (19 %)
The money from Cohesion policy funds is in most cases wasted on the wrong projects	1 (5 %)	5 (24 %)	14 (67 %)	5 (24 %)
The administration of Cohesion policy has been delivered in an efficient (cost effective) manner	10 (47 %)	2 (10 %)	5 (24 %)	4 (19 %)

- Most of the respondents (strongly) agree that monitoring and evaluation reports provide adequate information on the implementation and performance of the ROP and that these are easily accessible. Stakeholders also believe the reports are easy to understand and that they are used to improve policy-making an implementation:

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

Stakeholder survey	Strongly agree & Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree & Disagree	Don't know
The monitoring and evaluation reports provide adequate information on the implementation and	13 (65 %)	4 (20 %)	2 (10 %)	1 (5 %)

performance of the programme/s				
The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easily accessible	9 (45 %)	4 (20 %)	6 (30 %)	1 (5 %)
The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easy to understand	6 (30 %)	5 (25 %)	8 (40 %)	1 (5 %)
The monitoring and evaluation reports results are used to improve policy-making and implementation	7 (35 %)	5 (25 %)	5 (25 %)	3 (15 %)

- The majority of stakeholder survey respondents did not participate in any type of training:

In what Cohesion policy workshop or training sessions did the representatives of your organisation/municipality/region participate in the last two years?

Stakeholder survey Training	Yes	No
Management	8 (40 %)	12 (60 %)
Control	9 (45 %)	11 (55 %)
Monitoring	8 (40 %)	12 (60 %)
Evaluation	5 (25 %)	15 (75 %)
Communication	6 (30 %)	14 (70 %)
Nobody participated in such events	6 (30 %)	14 (70 %)

Partnership

Interview respondents from several organizations report that debate in the S&E ROP Monitoring Committee is open – any issue can be addressed and there is a sense of freedom to speak up (Interviews B, C, D, H, J and K). This is corroborated also in the stakeholders' survey. Most of the stakeholder survey respondents agree that the way the programme partnership operates is inclusive, open and fair; and that it facilitates a shared understanding and shared commitment by partners to achieving the programme's objectives. There is less agreement on the statement that partners are only interested in promoting their own organizational and financial interests.

Stakeholder survey	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree and disagree	Don't know
The way the programme partnership operates is inclusive, open and fair	16 (80 %)	1 (5 %)	2 (10 %)	1 (5 %)
The operation of the programme's partnership principle facilitates a shared understanding and shared commitments by partners to achieving the programme's objectives	17 (85 %)	2 (10 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (5 %)
Partners are only interested in promoting their own organisational and financial interests	6 (35 %)	5 (25 %)	6 (35 %)	3 (15 %)

Based on its membership, the ROP Monitoring Committee and the PAMC appear to be more open to civil society compared to the NCCF (see pp. 19). However, this might be due to the nature of the committees, the first two have a monitoring function, while the NCCF is a coordination committee. It also seems important that civil society is especially well-integrated in the ROP Monitoring Committee compared to the PAMC, as the ROP Monitoring Committee oversees the implementation of projects on the ground, i.e. the level closest to citizens.

None of the social partner representatives that sit in the S&E ROP Monitoring Committee 2014-20 attends the PAMC. One of the interview respondents is unsure how the Taoiseach's (Prime Minister) Department is involved in the monitoring of the Structural Funds implementation or who bears responsibility for the implementation of Structural Funds and the targets set under the Europe 2020 strategy (Interview H). Another social partner respondent is not aware of how social partners are represented on other Structural Funds Programmes (Interview K). It seems that by better connecting the representatives of the social partner pillars, the quality of oversight from civil society could be improved. This is important since it has been observed that the representative of the social partners and horizontal principles are the most active participants in the Monitoring Committee meetings in terms of oversight questions (Interviews H and K; see p. 20).

The impact of the openness of the social partnership structures depends also on the intrinsic interest of social partners and their human resources capacity to follow up on this interest. While there are lively discussions, according to the Member States, some individuals have more interest than others (Interview J). Since Structural Funds are not as "topical" as they were, interest has been waning (Interview J). On the other hand, some social partner representatives to the S&E Monitoring Committee have observed that the number of documents and limited time are constraints for their own personal involvement and the involvement of the partners they represent (Interviews K and H). The social partner representatives of the business community and local interest representatives did *not* express similar concerns (Interviews B, D, E and F). They are satisfied with their inclusion and the working of the S&E ROP Monitoring Committee (see also p. 18).

Assessment of added value

In Ireland, Cohesion policy has had an influence on the domestic political agenda and on governance structures (Miller 2013, 21). For example, the adoption of a regional focus to development has been credited as a pragmatic adaptation to Cohesion policy (Rees et al. 2004, p. 383). Development policy is said to have become more evidence-based and less politicised (Fitzpatrick et al. 2013, 70 in Miller 2013, 22). This view was also expressed in the interview with a local interest representative (Interview D):

> *"From a regional perspective, local councillors tend to work as a unit rather than as political parties and I think that is always beneficial and maybe a lot of that is because the public doesn't even know that we are involved. I think we are more mature [...] so we try and get the job done- what would benefit the greater area rather than to get a headline in the paper."*

In terms of cohesion added value, Cohesion policy has helped to bring attention to economic and social disparities within Ireland (Miller 2013, 22). An interview respondent has said the following (Interview E):

> *"Ten years ago, Dublin was nearly 3h driving from here, now it is 1h30. It is fantastic. So, it brings the two cities closer together. Unfortunately, the problem that we have, as I see it, it is still a motorway seen from Waterford to Dublin. It is not seen such as Dublin to Waterford."*

To what extent Cohesion policy funding has helped in closing development gaps within and between regions is difficult to assess. The stakeholders' survey confirms this (see graphs on p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). The role of the regional assemblies, as managing authorities of ERDF, has, however, demonstrated the capacity of regional governance actors (Interview E):

> *"I think you see projects being rolled out that are being equally rolled out in Cork, Kerry, Waterford, Tipperary at the same time. So, that gives you confidence and that shows that you [referring to the region] can do it. I think it is a good example."*

The Managing Authority has identified the following added values and for each there is at least one corroborating example in the stakeholders' interview or survey data:

1) *Financial added value* by reinforcing public investments in ICT and the knowledge economy, addressing environmental risks and strengthening the urban structuring of the region. Since 2013, the financial added value is affected by the low level of funding intensity (see p. 11). Due to low funding intensity, investment priorities have been confined to niche areas. This means that to maximize the added value of the S&E ROP, ERDF allocations are selected for investments on the basis that they are not already addressed in government national plans (Interview C):

> *"The needs of the regions are vast, so it's trying to identify out of all the needs, what are the needs that the ERDF, with a little bit of money, can help do."*

The financial added value is clear in the promotion of entrepreneurship in Ireland (Interview M):

> *"It [ERDF] basically co-finances our activity, which means that the Irish Exchequer receives about 50 % of what it has invested in. So, that's very useful yes. We [the Intermediary Body organisation] obviously see that a lot of benefits accrue from the association with the EU. And the financial side is only one aspect of that."*

2) *Implementation added value* through the integration of the partnership principle, appraisal, financial control, monitoring and evaluation of projects. The implementation and financial added value have been observed for the National Broadband Scheme (Interview L):

It is a large-scale project. And I think having that money is of huge value towards the project and I also think that the way it is structured in terms of the rules around what needs to be done to get that money is a good discipline for the process itself."

3) *Policy added value* with the introduction of innovative partnership arrangements in urban development projects and with the promotion of links between industry and research institutions. On this added value, two respondents have observed the difficulty in maintaining a link between industry and research institutions (Interviews H and I).

4) Visibility added value through information and publicity actions.
Interview respondents have also observed the learning added value in term of networking and dissemination of good practices (Interview M):

"*There is an opportunity to learn from other activities across the EU and therefore because we are connected, we do get opportunities to visit, to look at other programs, to disseminate and communicate and to transfer information."*

Cohesion policy communication

In 2007-13, communication activities were contained in one Communication Plan, while in 2014-20 a Communication Strategy was adopted. The Communication Plan 2007-13 set out the communication measures for all the ROPs in Ireland as well as the National Development Plan under the National Strategic Reference Framework. The main drafter was the Department of Finance, as the responsible body for developing the NSRF. For the programme period 2014-20, the Southern Regional Assembly (the Managing Authority of the S&E ROP) adopted its own Communication Strategy.

Approach to communication

Due to updated and new requirements set in the Structural Funds (SF) regulations, the Communications Strategy for 2014-20 is more comprehensive than the Communication Plan for 2007-13.[16] Tables in Annex 3 and Annex 4 summarise the communication objectives, measures, and targeted audiences for the programme periods 2007-13 and 2014-20 respectively. Measures for 2014-20 are more clearly defined than for 2007-13. The Communication Plan 2007-13 did not specify any activity, such as the use of social media or publication of press releases. Objectives for both programme periods are general and can be summarised as increasing public awareness and visibility of the regional OP and the contribution of ERDF in the region and Ireland.

Activities

The main communication tools used by the Managing Authority are regional and local newspapers, local radio stations, and social media (Interviews C and G). The respondents in the stakeholders' survey reported that the programme's website is the most frequently used communication tool. Social media and the programme websites are preferred modes of communication due to their low cost and accessibility to stakeholders (Interviews B, C, G and J).

Stakeholders survey: How regularly are the following communication tools used to disseminate information about the use of Cohesion policy funds?	Very often and often	Sometimes	Never or rarely
Programme website	16 (80 %)	4 (20 %)	0 (0 %)
Press releases	14 (70 %)	5 (25 %)	1 (5 %)
Plaques/billboard with EU flag	14 (70 %)	4 (20 %)	2 (10 %)
Brochures, leaflets, newsletters	12 (60 %)	6 (30 %)	2 (10 %)
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube)	11 (55 %)	4 (20 %)	5 (25%)
Workshops, seminars	10 (50 %)	8 (40 %)	2 (10 %)
Local and regional newspapers	7 (35 %)	10 (50 %)	3 (15 %)
Radio	4 (20 %)	7 (35 %)	9 (45 %)
National newspapers	2 (10 %)	9 (45 %)	9 (45 %)
Film clips/videos	2 (10 %)	10 (50 %)	8 (45 %)
Advertising campaigns on television and/or radio	2 (10 %)	2 (10 %)	16 (80 %)
Television	0 (0 %)	1 (5 %)	19 (95 %)

Southern Assembly Website

The website of the Southern Assembly (Managing Authority) is regularly updated and has been redesigned in 2017 (see http://www.southernassembly.ie/eu-programmes). The new website is user-friendly and has been praised by an interviewee: "The new website looks really good" (Interview H).

[16] Please note that the communications strategy for the programme period 2007-13 was labelled as a communication plan. Here, both documents are referred to as communications strategies.

Cohesion Policy Website

The single cohesion policy website required under Article 115 of Regulation 1303/2013 (and Annex XII, 2(1e)) is the responsibility of the Member States. The website for the 2014-20 period was put online in January 2017, or two years after the start of ROP 2014-20. Until then, the 2007-13 website was online, but not updated. This website includes information on all Structural Funds, and not just the ERDF and ESF (see http://eufunds.gov.ie/).

According to the Member State, the timing of the website is aligned with the rolling out of ERDF projects, which can be publicised once implementation starts (Interview J). As a reason for the delay in the delivery of the 2014-20 website, the Member State reported that the team that worked on the new website had to first complete the e-cohesion project (Interview J). The website could have been put online earlier, but at the expense of implementation, which is important for the content of information (Interview J):

> *"We started working on implementing and setting up the structures, including the IT system, and as part of that, the website came along. You know, it could have been done earlier, but we would not have been as far ahead on implementation. So, there would be a limit on what we would be putting up there [on the website]. And we did already have an existing website for the previous round."*

Traditional media

The Managing Authority has a list of national and local newspapers contacts. While it regularly prepares press releases, very few stories are picked up by the media (Interview B):

> *"Very, very little of that is taken up. You talk with people in the media, and they say, the amount of press releases they receive is just phenomenal. And you know it when you send it out. So, a lot of the times when I am writing press releases I am thinking this is content for the website. If we do get picked up, that is great. Maybe it might be some local county councillors in the photograph. From speaking to national journalists, they would tell you quite openly they are not interested. They come to you when there is a scandal or controversy."*

Except for two interviewees (Interviews F and I), the majority agrees the media does not show an interest in the S&E ROP (Interviews A, B, D, H, K and L). The difficulty in engaging traditional media is corroborated by the stakeholder survey, where 40 per cent of the respondents found that fostering good working relations with the media and press to reach the general public are neither effective nor ineffective:

Stakeholder survey: To what extent are the communication efforts effective in…	Very effective and effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Very ineffective and ineffective	Don't know
Fostering good working relations with the media and press to reach the general public	4 (20 %)	8 (40 %)	6 (30 %)	2 (10 %)

In the experience of interviewees, when stories are picked up by the media, they tend to be negative, since it is the negative stories that sell. However, this is not corroborated in the stakeholder survey, where most of the respondents neither agree or disagree that the media mainly reports negative stories about Cohesion policy. Moreover, the COHESIFY media framing analysis has shown that the newspapers articles report positively about Cohesion policy in Ireland (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018, p. 41).

Stakeholder survey	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree and disagree	Don't know
The media mainly report negative stories about EU Cohesion policy	4 (20 %)	10 (50 %)	6 (30 %)	0 (0 %)

One interviewee has observed that media coverage of EU issues has increased since Brexit (Interview J). As a counter-measure to low and negative media interest, the Managing Authority buys advertising space in newspapers. The Managing Authority acknowledges that buying advertising space is not an unbiased way of publicizing the ROP (Interview B).

Social media

The Managing Authority's Facebook and Twitter accounts were opened in September 2011 and June 2012 respectively (AIR 2010, p. 142). There is a lack of focus on Cohesion policy and on EU funded projects.

Storytelling

The Managing Authority also produces video clips that are posted on You Tube and present the story of an ERDF beneficiary. Five such video clips were produced in 2016. The number of views varies between 55 and 412 (as of March 2018). Stakeholder survey respondents reported diverse level of satisfaction in the use of personal stories in promoting the programme.

Stakeholder survey: How satisfied are you with…	Very satisfied and satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied and unsatisfied	Don't know
The use of human interest/personal stories	7 (35 %)	5 (25 %)	5 (25 %)	3 (15 %)

Events

The MA of the programme participates in the EU-wide campaign Europe in My Region. In 2016, it organised visits to co-funded projects in the Institutes of Technology across the region (Cork, Waterford, Tralee, Limerick, and Tallaght). The target audience were students. Five such visits were organised with 144 attendees. While the visits were publicised using social media, there was minimal interest from traditional media (AIR 2016, 45). The MA reported the timing of the campaign (May) coincided with the end of the school year, which did not facilitate a large number of participants. The Managing Authority also participates in the National Ploughing Championship, which is an agricultural show considered to be the biggest annual outdoor event in Ireland (Interviews B and C).

Target groups

The target groups are summarised in Annex 3 and Annex 4. In the Communication Plan 2007-13 and Communication Strategy 2014-20, the target groups are broadly described (for example local radio stations are mentioned, but no specific stations are listed) and there is little detail as to how a measure will reach the targeted audience. No distinction is made between targeting beneficiaries versus the public. The public is targeted in so far as it accesses media and social media or browses the websites of the Managing Authority, intermediate bodies, and beneficiaries. The majority of stakeholder survey respondents are neither satisfied or dissatisfied on how groups are targeted:

Stakeholder survey: How satisfied are you with…	Very satisfied and satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied and unsatisfied	Don't know
The targeting of different groups with different communication tools	3 (15 %)	12 (60 %)	1 (5 %)	4 (20 %)

Yet, almost half of the stakeholder survey respondents agree that the key programme communication messages are appropriate to reach target audiences:

Stakeholder survey	Strongly agree & agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree & disagree	Don't know
The key programme communication messages have adopted an appropriate form to reach their target audiences	8 (40 %)	8 (40 %)	3 (15 %)	1 (5 %)

There is some evidence of activities targeting the public in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIR). For example, the Regional Assembly/Managing Authority sponsors a competition for primary and post-primary students that focuses on topics important at the local and national level (AIR 2010, p. 104); the Managing Authority/Regional Assembly also sponsors the winner's trip to Brussels. The Regional Assembly/Managing Authority is also an adjudicator in the Waterford Community and Voluntary Awards (AIR 2014, p. 142). It is not clear how the competition and the award relate to the S&E ROP or Cohesion policy more generally. In other words, it is not clear whether these communication initiatives promote the Regional Assembly as a regional body or as the Managing Authority of the S&E ROP.

Other communication activities are more clearly linked to the SE ROP and can be grouped as those promoting the OP and the opportunities it offers, and those publicising the impact of the S&E ROP (AIR 2010, p. 95, pp. 103-105). To promote the S&E ROP, the Southern Regional Assembly organizes launch events, annual events on specific themes, workshops for the elected Members of the Regional Assembly providing an overview of the ROP and the role of the Southern Assembly as the Managing Authority, publication of material, such as a guide entitled "The EU at the Regional and Local Level in Ireland", organisation of conferences for potential beneficiaries, students, and foreign delegations. On a national level, the Managing Authority promotes the S&E ROP in the National Ploughing Championships, which is an agricultural show considered to be the biggest annual outdoor event in Ireland. On the EU level, the Managing Authority participates in the Brussels Open Days through the Irish Regions Office in Brussels. It is unclear to what extent these communication initiatives target the public. To publicise the S&E ROP the Southern Regional Assembly invites government ministers to speak at Southern Regional Assembly on the future of Cohesion policy and publishes annual reports highlighting achievements.

Changes to communication approach

When asked about changes to the approach in communication, interview respondents reflected upon different issues. In term of communication tools, a respondent from the Managing Authority observed that information technology (social media and the website) are being increasingly used in addition to the standard tools of communication, such as plaques and posters (Interview B). In terms of the delivery of communication, both the Managing Authority and the Member State emphasized that the newly formed communication officers' network at the national level had a positive impact (Interviews B and J; see p. 35).

The Managing Authority observed that the interest for communication of the Member State has increased compared to the previous period (Interview B). This increased interest is attributed to Brexit, which the Member State respondent characterised as a "big shock, unexpected shock for everybody" (Interviews G and J; quote is from Interview J). A respondent observed that while Ireland has been a net beneficiary for a long time, it is now a net contributor (Interview J):

> *"So, we need to think not only how we communicate the benefits, but what should we be paying for it or do these two things go together."*

Overall, it seems that the changes to the communication approach between the programme periods have been positive. This has been observed also by a respondent representing social partners (Interview H).

Indicators

Annex 5 provides an overview of the indicators for 2007-13 and 2014-20. The indicators that were developed for 2007-13 remain in place also in 2014-20. The output targets remain the same, except the target for the number of the website's visitors, which has been reduced based on the 2013 output indicator.

Budget resources

The budget of the Managing Authority for implementing the communication plan/strategy is 500,000 EUR per programme period.[17] This accounts for 0.1 per cent of the S&E ROP 2007-13 and 2014-20, which is below to the 0.3 per cent average of the OP budget during the 2007-13 funding period.[18] There has been no increase for the communication budget albeit the allocation for the programme has increased between 2007-13 and 2014-20.

Table 10**: **Communication budget

Total allocation	**S&E Region**	**Unit**
Allocation [2007-2013]	500,000	EUR
Allocation [2014-2020]	500,000	EUR

According to the Member States, to decide the amount of funding for communication, the overall value of the ROP is considered and then appropriate funding is allocated (Interview J). Communication objectives ("what do you want to achieve versus how much money can you spend") are secondary in determining the budget (Interview B, 2017). According to the Member State, the level of the funding can be increased and decreased during the programme period (Interview J). It is not clear how this flexibility affects the strategic programming of communication. The view of the Managing Authority is that the amount at its disposal is small compared to other regions in Europe (Interview B):

> *"I am looking jealously and thinking: "We have 500,000 for the entire program." [...] It is very difficult to make a comparison because activities are so very different and so differently resourced.*

Staff resources

In the programme period 2014-20, one person in the Managing Authority works on communication activities and receives occasional administrative support from the other staff of the Southern Assembly (Interview B). This person is also the communication officer of the S&E ROP and attends the INFORM meetings and meeting in NCCF subcommittee on communication. Almost one third of stakeholder survey respondents is (very) unsatisfied with resource capacities dedicated to communication:

Stakeholder survey: How satisfied are you ...	(Very) Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	(Very) Unsatisfied	Don't know
The administrative capacity and resources dedicated to com. activities	5 (25 %)	7 (35 %)	6 (30 %)	2 (10 %)

[17] The budget for the Communication plan 2007-13 was in total 1.25 mil EUR (750,000 EUR from the Managing Authority of the BMW Regional OP and 500,000 from the Managing Authority of the SE Regional OP).
[18] Question 23, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/communication/qa_comm.pdf

Governance

The administrative structures for the delivery of the Communication Plan 2007-13 and Strategy 2014-20 differ per programme periods. This is because the Communication Plan 2007-13 covered all the ROPs in Ireland while Managing Authorities adopted individual strategies for their respective ROPs in 2014-20. Since there was only one Communication Plan in 2007-13, the Department of Finance (the Member State in 2007-13) was responsible to ensure a consistent approach across ROPs at the Member State level.[19] The Department of Finance no longer has a role in 2014-20 and the governance of the Communication Strategy 2014-20 is shared among the Managing Authority of the S&E ROP, the Member State represented by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries.

The Member State has appointed a communication officer for Cohesion policy funds. The communication officer sees their role in the following way (Interview G):

> *"Essentially, my role is to coordinate the Communication Officers that work with the Managing Authorities for each of the Operational Programmes under the European Structural and Investment Funds. This entails facilitating a communications committee where pertinent issues are discussed regarding the communication of the positive impacts of Cohesion Policy to the Irish public. Furthermore, I am responsible for the creation and maintenance of a national website that showcases the contribution that the ESIF makes to social and economic cohesion in Ireland."*

For the 2014-20 programme period, administrative agreements between the Managing Authority, Intermediate Bodies, and beneficiaries set out their respective responsibilities. As specified in the Structural Funds Regulations, the Managing Authority is responsible for the full implementation of the communications strategy and for ensuring compliance with the EU Information and Publicity Requirements (this is specifically written in the Communication Strategy 2014-20).

Intermediate Bodies

The role of Intermediate Bodies is to publicise funding opportunities provided by the ERDF to potential applicants, to participate with the S&E Managing Authority in project visits and study tours, to provide the Managing Authority with ROP level promotional material, and to display EU logos and plaques as required. Intermediate bodies have to make sure beneficiaries comply with publicity requirements set out in section 2.2 of Annex XII of Commission Regulation 1303/2013 and with Articles 4 and 5 of Commission Implementing Regulation 821/2014. Beneficiaries must inform the public of the funding they have received, for example by putting up a poster or a plaque when appropriate.

Intermediate bodies and beneficiaries report to the S&E ROP Monitoring Committee on planned and completed information actions relating to the operations they are responsible for. In the 2007-13 period the Monitoring Committee had to report to the Department of Finance, as the body responsible for the Communication Plan 2007-13. No such reporting is in place for 2014-20, since it is the Managing Authority and not the Member State that adopted the Communication Strategy 2014-20.

Communication network

[19] For 2007-13, the Ministry of Finance set up an Information Office, which provided advice and expertise on the implementation and delivery of the Communication Plan 2007-13.

The communication officers of the Managing Authority and the Member States participate in the INFORM network (see Article 117 (4) Regulation 1303/2013). Since 2016, Ireland has also a national network of communication officers. The idea to set up such a network arose in one of the meetings of the National Coordination Committee of the Funds when the e-cohesion project was discussed and where the national networks is *de facto* an NCCF subcommittee (Interview J). The membership includes the communications officers of all the Structural Funds (Interview J). Its purpose is to share ideas and identify opportunities to pool resources for more effective communication (Interview J). The subcommittee meets every four months, but there is an intention to increase the frequency of meetings to every 6-8 weeks (Interview J). The Managing Authority of the S&E ROP viewed the creation of this network favourably (Interviews B and C).

Table 11: Governance structures in communication

Governance framework in the Communication	
2007-2013	2014-2020
Communication networks	*Communication networks*
INFORM	INFORM
	National communication network of communication officers
Bodies responsible for implementation of the measures	*Bodies responsible for implementation of the measures*
Department of Finance (Member State)	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Member State)
Southern and Eastern Region Assembly (Managing Authority)	Southern Regional Assembly (Managing Authority)
Intermediate bodies	Intermediate bodies

Support to beneficiaries

Information and Publicity Guidelines for EU Structural Funds were published for each programming period to help stakeholders meet their obligations. These guidelines briefly summarise the responsibilities of the partners involved (Managing Authority, Intermediate Bodies, and beneficiaries) and specify the correct application of logos in terms of technical characteristics. These guidelines were distributed among the Managing Authority, Intermediate Bodies, beneficiaries and are available online (Managing Authority and Structural Funds websites).

The Managing Authority issues a Management Verification Checklist that includes a Publicity Checklist for intermediate bodies and beneficiaries. The Publicity Checklist specifies the requirements to display the EU flag, EU logo, billboards and plaques, and lists what kind of verifications will be carried out to check that beneficiaries meet their communication obligations. The Managing Authority publishes information on their website and organizes annual guidance seminars to acquaint intermediate bodies and beneficiaries with their information and publicity obligations and on the appropriate use of logos (Communications Strategy 2014-20, pp. 9-10).

Communication as a priority

Both the Member State and Managing Authority consider communication as one of the priorities in the implementation of the S&E ROP (Interviews B, C, G and M). The Member State said the following (Interview G):

> *"Ireland has always recognised the importance of communicating the positive impact of cohesion policy to its citizens. In light of Brexit, Ireland recognises that it is now even more important to effectively communicate the social and economic benefits of EU investment in Ireland."*

According to the Managing Authority, an increasing emphasis on communication in the S&E ROP has been witnessed across programme periods (Interview C). Through the narrative provided by one of the Member States' interviewees, it can be discerned that during the programming period, communication is given more attention once the roll out of projects begins (Interview J).

According to the same narrative, the promotion of achievements appears to be prioritized over the promotion of opportunities. This narrative is corroborated by the activities surrounding the set-up of the single online website. The website was put online in 2017 rather than at the beginning of the programme period. This reduced the opportunities to promote the projects, but had minimal or no negative effect on promoting achievements. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that several respondents believe there should be more promotion and training on the opportunities provided under the S&E OPs (Interviews A, D and F). The stakeholder survey corroborates the interview finding.

Aside from the Managing Authority and Member State, other respondents perceive communication to be done in an appropriate manner (Interviews H, I, L and M), as an area which is not prioritized (Interview I and K), as an area that should not be prioritized (Interview E; see quote on p. 42) or as an area that does not attract enough attention from stakeholders even when it is prioritized (Interviews A, K and L). Some respondents believe that communication is necessary not only to publicize the achievements but to create an understanding of the how the project implementation works (Interview L).

Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies

Monitoring

Intermediate bodies and beneficiaries report on their progress to the ROP Monitoring Committee (Communication Plan 2007-13, pp. 4-5). Intermediate Bodies must ensure that beneficiaries comply with publicity requirements. For the period 2007-13, the ROP Monitoring Committee was required to report to the National Strategic Reference Framework Monitoring Committee (Member State/Ireland level).

The Managing Authority of the S&E ROP controls the implementation of the communication requirements of intermediate bodies and beneficiaries based on a sample. This includes verification that the necessary plaques and billboards were erected, obtaining publicity material, viewing websites, and verifying that events took place (see Publicity Checklist in AIR 2009, p. 108).

The Managing Authority does not promote a "policing" type of monitoring since it would create an atmosphere of resentfulness and animosity, which would be counterproductive to communication (Interview B):

> *"Again, the attitude is one of helping to comply as opposed to trying to catch, because some of the things can be remediated retrospectively."*

Ensuring that the regulation requirements, such as the exhibition of logos, are observed has not proven problematic (Interview C). A cooperative approach to monitoring is, in the view of the Managing Authority, necessary for the Managing Authority's ability to carry out its tasks by not alienating its implementing partners (Interview B).

Evaluation

To evaluate the information and publicity measures, surveys on awareness among the public take place (Communication Plan 2007-13, p. 9; AIR 2010, p. 101; Interviews C and G). Ireland has been carrying out its own general EU awareness survey since 2001. In 2009, the first survey to evaluate structural funds awareness (including ERDF) was carried out (see

Table *15*). The survey facilitates the measurement of trends in awareness, which help the Managing Authority to design, implement and improve their communication strategy (Interviews B and G).

For 2014-20, the Managing Authority plans to carry out an on-line stakeholder survey seeking information on the effectiveness of publicity activities (Communications Strategy 2014-20, p. 12). Surveys are administered to participants at the S&E ROP launch event and each annual event (see Annex 2 of Communications Strategy 2014-20; Interview B).

The website is evaluated with Google Analytics. The use of social media is evaluated with the number of followers (in November 2016 the Southern Assembly Twitter page had 786 followers, in November 2017 it had 1,300), likes (in November 2016 288 liked the Southern Assembly Facebook page, in November 2017 312 likes), retweets, and comments. Media activities are monitored through media monitoring services (no further description is provided in the Communication Strategy 2014-20). Participants' feedback is asked following project visits.

The Managing Authority acknowledges that social media statistics and event evaluations do not reveal the impact of these tools (Interview B). When comparing different ROPs in the EU it is necessary to consider the communication budget and level of general EU awareness per Member State (Interview B).

Results of the Communication Strategy Evaluation

There has not been an external evaluation of the Communication Strategy due to few resources allocated for communication (Interview B and J).[20] The Managing Authority and Member State consider the citizens' survey an indirect way of evaluating the Communication Strategy, which can guide its design and implementation (Interviews B, G and J).

One of the interviewees from the Member State emphasised that while the Communication Strategy is not externally evaluated, it is discussed and must be approved by the Monitoring Committee, which provides scrutiny (Interview J). The respondents from the Managing Authority noted that the Monitoring Committee did provide some comments on the Communications Strategy 2014-20, as did the Member State and European Commission (Interview B). The involvement of the Member State was more in terms of queries, as there is a long-term established relationship, trust and knowledge of each other's expertise (Interview B). The European Commission's remarks were integrated in the Communication Strategy. The stakeholder survey revealed that most of the respondents are neither satisfied not unsatisfied with the support received from the European commission on communication:

Stakeholder survey: How satisfied are you …	Very satisfied and satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied and unsatisfied	Don't know
The support from the European Commission on communication	5 (25 %)	7 (35 %)	3 (15 %)	5 (25 %)

Another way to evaluate communication activities is through the communication officers' network (INFORM), where ideas are shared with other Member States (Interview J). The Member State concluded that if the Communication Strategy was going "drastically wrong, it would become clear very quickly" (Interview J). The interviewee of the Managing Authority emphasised that indicators for evaluating the communications measures are set on a rolling basis and that the European Commission has been satisfied with it (Interview B).

Effectiveness of communication measures

In the stakeholder survey, respondents evaluated positively the effectiveness of all communication measures for increasing citizen awareness of EU Cohesion policy:

Stakeholder survey: How effective do you think each of these communication measures are in increasing citizens' awareness of EU Cohesion policy?	(Very) effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	(Very) ineffective	Don't know	Not used in my region
Local and regional newspapers	16 (80 %)	2 (10 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (0 %)	1 (5 %)
National newspapers	14 (70 %)	3 (15 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (10 %)	1 (5 %)
Social media	14 (70 %)	3 (15 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)
Press releases	14 (70 %)	4 (20 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)
Brochures, leaflets, newsletters, other publications	14 (70 %)	1 (5 %)	3 (15 %)	1 (0 %)	1 (5 %)
Television	13 (65 %)	2 (10 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)	3 (15 %)
Radio	13 (65 %)	3 (15 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (5 %)	3 (15 %)
Video/film clips and presentations	13 (65 %)	4 (20 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)
Media/advertising campaigns on television or radio	13 (65 %)	5 (25 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)
Events	13 (65 %)	5 (25 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)
Programme website	12 (60 %)	5 (25 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)

[20] The Joint Evaluation Plan in 2015 does mention the Communication Strategy, but this one is not evaluated.

Plaques/billboard with EU flag	12 (60 %)	2 (10 %)	4 (29 %)	1 (5 %)	1 (5 %)

However, when asked about their satisfaction on the way Cohesion policy is communicated to citizens, almost half of all the stakeholder survey respondents reported to be neither satisfied nor unsatisfied. Stakeholders reported diverging levels of satisfaction on the branding and messages used to communicate Cohesion policy:

Stakeholder survey: How satisfied are you …	Very satisfied and satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied and unsatisfied	Don't know
The way Cohesion policy is communicated to citizens	4 (20 %)	10 (50 %)	5 (25 %)	1 (5 %)
The branding and messages used to communicate Cohesion policy	7 (35 %)	4 (20 %)	7 (35 %)	2 (10 %)

Most of the stakeholder survey respondents (strongly) agreed that Communication activities have led to an increased awareness among citizens of the contribution of Cohesion policy to regional and local development. Almost half of the respondents also (strongly) agreed with the statements that communication activities of Cohesion policy funds increase the sense of belonging of citizens to the European Union; and that communication activities of Cohesion policy funds contribute to increasing citizens' support for the European Union:

Stakeholder survey	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree and disagree
The communication activities have led to an increased awareness among citizens of the contribution of Cohesion policy to regional and local development	12 (60 %)	3 (15 %)	5 (25 %)
The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds increase the sense of belonging of citizens to the European Union	10 (50 %)	7 (35 %)	3 (15 %)
The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds contribute to increasing citizens' support for the European Union	9 (45 %)	6 (30 %)	5 (25 %)
Citizens mistrust Cohesion policy communication activities and messages or consider them to be propaganda	3 (15 %)	9 (45 %)	8 (49 %)

The Member State interviewee reported that the effectiveness is not easy to measure (Interview G). The effectiveness of communication activities depends on a series of factors, including the implementation system, level of funding and areas of funding. According to an interviewee from the Managing Authority, the effectiveness of communications measures varies by project. For example, under the Entrepreneurship Priority (Interview B):

> *"Micro-enterprises would have posters. The efficacy of that is questionable because if it is a private business, there might only be one or who people who may be seeing the poster. So, it is business dependent."*

The S&E OP funding is small and concentrated in a few areas (Interview C). Investments are, in the main, not physically tangible and therefore harder to communicate (Interview B):

> *"[Communication requirements in the regulations] can work fine, if you are, for instance, a museum or if you have a very large business that got very large funding and it is*

physically large enough and staffed enough that can allow public access on an agreed day."

The decentralised implementation of ERDF in Ireland means that the Managing Authority, for the most part, does not implement ERDF projects.[21] The actual implementation of ERDF schemes is in the hands of Intermediate Bodies (i.e. government agencies and departments). Since intermediary bodies "have a more visible role, are the owners of the scheme, are the implementers of the schemes, and are the founders of the scheme," they have opportunities to actively promote the S&E ROP than the Managing Authority (Interview B).

While there has been an increasing involvement of Intermediary Bodies (Interview B), a shift towards the understanding of communication as a collective effort of all stakeholder - as recently advocated by the European Parliament (Point 33, European Parliament, 2017) - has not been fully realised yet (Interview B):

> *"To get very busy and under-resourced people, to kind of have a sense "You also could be brand ambassadors" is very difficult."*

EU funding represents a small fraction of the total funding compared to the national effort. The proportion of EU funds does not create an urgency for publicising the EU contribution compared to the national allocation (Interview B, 2017):

> *"[…] we are dealing with government funds and agencies to whom this is a tiny fraction of their funding, they are not going to brand their website with the EU logo. It is different if this is a small business and it is their sole source of funding. […] If your department is providing 50,000,000 to a scheme, you are not going to talk all the time about the EU, you will talk about your department, that is your nature."*

In addition, in many instances, ERDF funding in Ireland feeds into national projects (Interview C, 2017):

> *"If you think about it, Enterprise Ireland is delivering a national scheme, it just happens it is broken into two regions and it just happens that some of the money blended in that is actually ERDF. It is a particular challenge we have in communicating."*

ERDF is, in this respect, a financial added value rather than a project added value, which the Irish government finances as a national priority. It seems that this hampers stakeholders' understanding of ERDF beyond a financial resource. For example, when asked about the added value of ERDF, an Intermediary Body respondent replied (Interview I):

> *"When we are funding it [project], we don't factor in ERDF whatsoever. […] Ireland will benefit by up to 50 % of the eligible expenditures [of the project]. Ireland will get 50 % of that money back from Europe. So, it is very positive for Ireland."*

Given the low funding intensity, the understanding of ERDF as a financial resource limits Intermediary Bodies' capability to promote the EU. Since EU and national priorities are so closely aligned, it seems that some stakeholders are not aware how European priorities feed into national ones and vice versa. Moreover, many Intermediary Bodies are not aware that they can be 'EU Ambassadors' for promoting the impact of ERDF for Ireland since their focus is on the primary mission of their organisation. Even staff at Science Foundation Ireland, where communication of science to society and public outreach are highly valued and institutionalised, do not internalise their potential as communicators of EU benefits (Interview I).[22]

[21] Sustainable Urban Development is the only exception.

[22] The knowledge at SFI in the dissemination of results and publicity has been acknowledged by the Managing Authority (Interview B) and mentioned by the Intermediary body itself.

To overcome some of these constraints, the Managing Authority invests its resource in developing strong relationships with intermediary bodies. Another way this problem is overcome is to reach out to beneficiaries (Interview C, 2017):

> *"One of the big challenges we face in communication is - because the amount of ERDF is very small compared to the national effort - trying to ensure that visibility is maintained. And the way we do that is to try to ensure that the beneficiaries, the actual recipients of the funding are made aware where the funding is coming from."*

In this respect, the Managing Authority in the S&E region in Ireland is aligned with the EP's idea to promote communication as a common effort of all stakeholders involved. However, it is wary of additional regulatory requirements, which do not consider the proportionality of funding, cultural differences within Europe and local circumstances (Interview C and Interview B, 2017). The Member States concurs with the Managing Authority on these views (Interview J).

Monitoring Committee & Communication

The Monitoring Committee (MC) is the main forum for discussing the ROPs, including communication (Article 110(1c) and Regulation 1303/2013). Membership in the Monitoring Committee for the S&E ROP Operational Programme 2014-20 is presented in Table 4. Members of the Monitoring Committee are in an ideal position to act as 'EU Ambassadors' as they have an overview knowledge of ERDF. They do not necessarily possess specialist knowledge, as is the case for the Managing Authority and Member State, which means they are free from jargon when communicating ERDF. Nevertheless, respondents generally agree that there is little interest among Monitoring Committee Members for communication activities, if this interest is not a personal one (Interviews A, B, C, H and L). Since the role of the Managing Authority, Member State and Intermediary Bodies were presented above, I focus here on the results of the study on the communication attitudes of local councillors, social partners, and civil society.

Local councillors view communication activities favourably (Interviews B, D, and F). However, becoming knowledgeable about ERDF is not a priority (Interview A). They recognise that communication with citizens is difficult (Interview D):

> *"Most people want to see how it benefits them immediately and they don't always see the bigger picture and that's the difficulty while trying to engage with citizens and giving them the information they are not interested in is kind a futile."*

Part of the blame is assigned to the complexity of funding (Interview F):

> *"I am a very amateur person on this. I am sure some of my fellow members would agree with me. It is wonderful to see all this funding, but you have to be… your organisation has to be very professional to secure funding."*

Due to their grass-root connection with citizens, councillors are also aware of the effect communication has on citizens (Interview D):

> *"[…] let's say we do a road or something when we get EU funding and we tend to put up the big sign. This is what annoys people very much and they want it removed. And they think: "Why do we have to look at this sign there?"*

The views of civil society and social partner representatives are mixed. Some are sceptical about the effect of communication (Interview E):

> *"If you had a policy to make that more clear to them [the benefits of the S&E ROP], would they [citizens] be interested? I don't know. Would it be money well spent? So, do you spend money informing people about the benefits? Or, do you just go and do it and*

let people see the benefits. I think the latter for most people. […] To be honest, I am not sure that we need strong messaging. Maybe Brussels does, but from an Irish position, I am not sure."

Others see their role to be exclusive to their working domain: "[My role is] mostly ensuring what is being done doesn't actually have an adverse effect on the environment" (Interview K). Others are happy to engage with citizens and their counterparts to highlight the role of the EU (but not specifically the ERDF) (Interview H).

Learning

Three key lessons of 2007-13 are mentioned in the Communications Strategy 2014-20: there is an increasing use of social media to disseminate messages and communicate with target audiences, a decrease in the use of printed material, and an increase in the number of users seeking information on the website (Communications Strategy 2014-20, p. 11). An interview respondent in the Managing Authority believes that due to the decentralised implementation of ERDF, more time needs to be invested in developing strong relationships with intermediary bodies (Interview B).

Table 12: Progress of the monitoring indicators

Progress of the monitoring indicators of the Communication strategy/plan				
	20017-13		***2014-20***	
Output Indicator	***Target 2007-13***	***Implementation 2007-13***	***Target 2014-20***	***Implementation in 2016***
Number of people dealt with/accessing information (website and social media)	3,000 per month	100 %	1,500 per month	The AIR 2016 draws a comparison between the websites visits in 2015 and 2016. A downward trend is apparent but its significance cannot be established yet. In 2016, Facebook presence is reported as steady and Twitter activities have increased (followers, impressions, engagements and retweets).
Number of Annual Events	7	100 %	7	2 (the annual event in 2016 was organised under the campaign European in my region and consisted of 5 project visits)
Number of seminars/ presentations	96	95 (91 %)	105	The AIR 2014-2015 does not report the exact number. In 2016, 19 presentations were held.
Number of public launches/events/ Press releases/interviews of interventions	No target set	95	No target set	AIR 2014-2015, 2016 do not report the exact number, but provide a non-exhaustive list.

Source: AIR 2014, p. 144-45; AIR 2014-15, p. 15, AIR 2017, p. 44-54 and 151-153

Note: For the result indicator "Level of satisfaction with seminars and related documentation" no target has been set. In the annual implementation reports, the MA reports that seminars are appraised separately (usually with a survey after the event). The Annual Implementation Reports report of good feedback of events (with not actual quantitative target reported).

Table 13: Impact Indicators

Impact indicators	***Estimated 2007-2013****	***% implementation (2010)***	***Estimated 2014-2020*** **	***% implementation (2016) ** **
Level of awareness of the S&E ROP	Targets not set Dec. 2014 result: 12 %	Does not apply	13 %	An improvement of 1 %. To reach the final target the awareness should double.
Level of awareness of Structural Funds programmes	Targets not set Dec. 2014 result: 53 % prompted awareness and 16 % unprompted awareness	Does not apply	33 %	To reach the final target the awareness should double.
Level of awareness of ERDF	Targets not set Dec. 2014 result: 43 %	Does not apply	43 %	No change

Sources: * Based on AIR 2014, pp. 144-45, ** Based on Amárach 2016, pp. 22, 28-30

Good practice examples

When asked about good practices, interviewees agree that the use of storytelling about how individuals have benefited from projects is the best tool to publicize Cohesion policy achievements in Ireland (Interview A, B and C). Such stories deliver a concrete image in the minds of the targeted audience (the public) about the positive impacts of Cohesion policy. Storytelling is mainly delivered through video clips testimonials posted on the web, which is also a cost-effective measure (Interview B). Storytelling has also been mentioned in an open-ended question in the stakeholders' survey. One respondent wrote that there should be more frequent use of human-interest stories that show regional and European wide benefits.

For stakeholders, it is important to see the achievements and meet stakeholders (Interviews C and K). Respondents highlighted the importance of holding events to publicize results and onsite project visits (Interviews A and K). While these measures can only reach a limited audience (i.e. event and visit participants) compared to the video clips, they can have a multiplier effect if stakeholders take up the role of communicators.

An important aspect of the communication activities under S&E ROP is pooling resources with the BMW ROP and other Structural Funds programmes. This has been done for the website required under the Regulation 1303, where besides the ESF and ERDF, the EMFF, EAFRD and FEAD funds are publicised (http://eufunds.gov.ie/). An exhibition space has been shared at the National Ploughing Championships 2017 (Interview J). In the open-ended question of the stakeholders' survey, a respondent highlighted the importance of carrying out collective campaigns, at the programme or activity level, for improving cost-effectiveness and to extend the reach of the message.

According to interviewees (Interviews A, B, C and J) and a stakeholders' survey respondent that replied to an open-ended question, there needs to be a simplification of branding in terms of messages and logos. Priority should be given to the most recognizable logos based on national circumstances and the message should be about the European Union rather than the individual Structural Funds.

Table 14: Good practice criteria for assessing communication measures

Criteria	Description
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	Participation with other Structural Funds at the National Ploughing Championships
Presence of innovative elements	Storytelling of individual beneficiaries' experiences (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsV7qQW5CRpooZOFbgBSTrQ)

Media framing of Cohesion policy

A media framing analysis of national and local media in the COHESIFY case studies was carried out within the project (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018; see Annex 6). The analysis identified 8 overall frames and 33 subframes of media discourse on Cohesion policy: "economic consequences" (subframes: "job creation", "development", "innovation and financial burden"), "quality of life" (subframes: "environment", "social justice", "public service and infrastructure"), "culture" (subframes: "cultural heritage" and "cultural development"), "incompetence of local government" (subframes: "mismanagement of funds", "restored order", "bureaucracy", "failure to inform the public"), "power" (subframes: "political leverage", "empowerment", "political capital"), "national interest" (subframes: "external relations", "brain drain", "sovereignty"), "cohesion" (subframes: "civic participation", "social awareness", "solidarity") and "fund abuse" (subframes: "corruption" and "fraud") (see Triga and Vadratsikas 2018, pp. 11-16 for the definition of the frames).

The Irish case study included 81 news articles from 49 different media sources published in Ireland between 2007 and 2017. Most of these articles were published by national-wide outlets (60 %), while the rest (40 %) were articles with a local-wide reach. Overall, the Irish case did not deviate from the aggregate findings of all case studies (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018). This means that as in other case studies across the EU Member States, the Irish media frames Cohesion policy positively, where the two dominant frames are "economic consequences" and the "quality of life".

The analysis revealed that most of the articles published in Ireland included one of the eights frames on Cohesion policy (84 %) and that only 16 % of the articles in the sample were frame free. Most of the coded articles (43 %) qualified under the frame "quality of life", followed by the frame "economic consequences" (32 %). A minority of articles were coded under the frames "incompetence of local/national authorities" (2.5 %), "power" (2.5 %), "cohesion" (2.5 %) and "culture" (1.2 %). The frames "national interest" and "fund abuse" did not appear in the Irish corpus.

The "quality of life" frame points out the positive consequences of EU Cohesion policy in citizens' lives, by focusing on the implementation of a number of infrastructure projects, by supporting vulnerable groups through specific policies, and by supporting or suggesting a number of policies regarding the public services (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018, p. 41). In this frame, most of the articles (18.5 %) qualified under the subframe "infrastructure", which denotes a positive connotation with Cohesion policy as it describes the development of the necessary infrastructure and services for citizens (e.g. parks, squares, public transportation, pedestrian streets, and bicycle lanes) (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018, p. 13). In the "economic consequences" frame, most of the article qualified under the subframe "development", which denotes the positive consequences of Cohesion policy in revitalizing economic activity (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018, p. 12). The framing analysis showed some differences between national and regional media in Ireland, as national media tend to interpret EU Cohesion policy under the "economic consequences" frame, while regional media emphasize on the impact of Cohesion policy on citizens' "quality of life".

In addition to the analysis of media frames, Triga and Vadratsikas (2018) also analysed whether articles on Cohesion policy have the potential to promote European identity. While most of the frames depict Cohesion policy in positive terms, overall, they found little supportive evidence linking media frames of Cohesion policy to European identity. This is due to the fact that only 12 % of the articles across all cases approached Cohesion policy form a European perspective, while the majority (56 %) depicted Cohesion policy from a national perspective. This means that even though the media depicts Cohesion policy in positive terms, only a small minority of article convenes the positive message from a European perspective, thus, limiting the media's impact on European identity. Similar conclusions can be drawn for the Irish case. Albeit 75 % of the Irish articles were classified under a positive frame, only 11 % of the articles approached Cohesion policy from a

European perspective, 31 % from a national perspective and 58 % had neither a European nor national perspective. Moreover, among those articles that approached Cohesion policy from a European perspective, 87 % of them mentioned neither the "cultural" component of European identity (i.e. a narrative, which emphasis a common European cultural heritage or a common European culture) nor the "civic" component of European identity (i.e. a narrative, which emphasised the European Union as a common project and the common interests of the EU). The findings in Triga and Vadratsikas (2018) also suggest that regional media in Ireland promote the notion of a European common identity more often than national media. They also include more positive news on EU Cohesion policy, approach the news from a European perspective and depict the EU as a common European project more often than national media. In conclusion, it can be said that the media depiction of Cohesion policy does not depart from the situations seen in other Member States of the EU. So far, the media reporting of Cohesion policy in Ireland has had a limited impact on promoting European identity.

Implications for citizens CP perceptions and attitudes to the EU

European (Eurobarometer) and Irish public opinion survey data reveal a variable trend in Irish awareness and perception of EU funded programs and projects. The variability is, however, in-line with the trend seen elsewhere in the European Union.

Eurobarometer
Based on Eurobarometer data, Irish citizens boast above EU average awareness of ERDF. The average of the Eurobarometer data recorded in 2008, 2010, 2013 and 2015, shows that 62 % of citizens in Ireland are aware of the ERDF programme, while the European average is 44 % (see Mendez and Bachtler, 2016, p. 17). On the other hands, Irish citizens are less aware of EU-funded projects (33 %) than the European average (38 %) (based on the average of Eurobarometer data collected in 2010, 2013 and 2015; Mendez and Bachtler, 2016, p. 18). Despite below EU average awareness of local EU-funded projects, Irish citizens' perception of the impact of EU-funded projects is overwhelmingly positive (more than 90 % of respondents have a positive perception). In 2013, Eurobarometer recorded the highest proportion (96 %) of respondents with a positive perception of the impact of EU-funded projects of all time in Ireland. Ireland also boasts the highest awareness among citizens for any cross-border program in the EU, i.e. 63 % of Irish respondents have heard about Peace - the EU funded cross-border cooperation program between Ireland and the UK (Flash Eurobarometer 422, pg. 18). This is an important statistic considering ongoing Brexit negotiation's decisions on border relations between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and their impacts on the Northern Ireland peace process.

National survey
National statistics record lower awareness of EU funded programs among Irish citizens than Eurobarometer data. The general awareness of EU-funded programs is falling, while ERDF awareness is stagnant (

Table *15*).[23] Fewer people are knowledgeable about the purpose of ERDF, where the majority believes it is used for rural development. Fewer people are also interested in finding out more about EU funded programs. These results are in line with the decreasing levels of EU regional development funding in Ireland, since Ireland's ineligibility under the Cohesion Fund. On a positive side, more people believe EU funding will benefit their area/town or them individually (but not all the people of Ireland).[24]

National public opinion surveys reveal some differences among regions at the NUTS 2 and 3 level. In the S&E region, ERDF awareness amounts to 44 % and it is higher than in the BMW. Awareness of ERDF is the highest in the South West of Ireland (Kerry, Cork and Cork City). While it used to be the lowest in the region of Dublin (27 % in 2007, this includes Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown, Fingal, South Dublin and Dublin City), the 2016 survey shows awareness has now doubled (54 % in 2016) and it is above the national and regional level. All the other areas have, however, seen a percentage drop in ERDF awareness between 2009 and 2016. The Chief Executive of the Southern Regional Assembly, which is the Managing Authority of the S&E ERDF OP, interprets these statistics positively considering decreasing EU funding (Interview, 2 June 2017):

[23] Awareness of EU funded programmes fell from 52 % in 2007 to 40 % in 2016. Between 2009 and 2016, there has been no change in ERDF awareness. In 2010 and 2016, 43 % of all respondents are aware of the ERDF (54 % in 2004 and 49 % in 2002). Respondents are more aware of ERDF than ESF (39 % awareness in 2015, 27 % in 2009, 49 % in 2004 and 43 % in 2002); but not EAFRD (49 % awareness in 2016; 48 % in S&E).
[24] However, in the Eurobarometer only 28 % of respondents reported to have benefitted from an EU funded project in 2015, 34 % in 2013, 23 in 2010, and 89 % in 2008 (see Mendez and Bachtler, Cohesify RP 1, p. 19).

"[Awareness] is not a steep curve but it is going up. And while the knowledge of the general citizen on the details of the finer points, whether it is ERDF or ESF or CF, isn't well understood; the general idea is that this is European money being spent. "

Table 15: Citizens' awareness on European Funds in Ireland and S&E region (% of respondents) *

	2016		2009		2004		2002	
	Ireland	**S&E**	**Ireland**	**S&E**	**Ireland**	**S&E**	**Ireland**	**S&E**
Structural Funds	33	33	29	31	49	na	43	
ERDF	43	44	43	44	54	na	49	na
ESF	38	39	35	36	43	na	36	na
EAFRD	49	48	48	49	34	na	22	na
EMFF	37	37	42	na	22	na	16	na
Cohesion Fund	na	na	17	17	33	na	29	na

Source: Report on Public Attitudes and Awareness of Ireland's EU SF Programmes 2007-13 (Drury, 2010 and Amárach, 2016). Notes: *Question: 'Are you aware of any of the following European Funds?' (Responses: yes, no). Reported percentages are for 'yes'.

Cohesify citizen survey

The COHESIFY survey, which was administered in 2017 shows higher levels of Cohesion policy fund awareness than the survey commissioned by the managing authorities of Structural Funds programmes in Ireland (Table 16), but lower level of awareness than Eurobarometer.

Table 16: Citizens' awareness of Structural Funds in the S&E Region

	Have you heard about the following funds? 2017		
	ERDF	**Cohesion Fund**	**ESF**
Yes	55 %	36 %	51 %
No	45 %	64 %	49 %

N = 501, Source: COHESIFY Citizens Survey (2017), Question 9

Citizens views of Cohesion policy and the EU

This section present findings from the COHESIFY citizens survey and focus groups (for the method description see p. 6).

Awareness of "Cohesion policy"

Most participants in the focus groups in Ireland reported that they had heard about the term "Cohesion Policy", even if they were unsure as to what exactly the policy entailed. In two groups (EI 3 and EI 4) participants would talk about the Cohesion Fund as being synonymous with Cohesion policy without recognising the other Structural Funds, for example:

> *EI 4, Participant 1:* "Cohesion policy was to bring the poorest in the [European] Union up to the average level. There would be a certain amount of funding going from the richer [Member] states to help the poorest states to come up with the average level. We are now no longer qualifying to benefit from that. I think the term is used less in Ireland."

The goals of Cohesion policy were described in various ways, which delineated it as development policy. For example, one of the participants associated the purpose of Cohesion policy with the creation of jobs (EI 3, Participant 1), while another one described it as "new member states catching up with the old member states" (EI 2, Participant 1). Convergence was also mentioned in an intra-regional context:

> EI 4, Participant 2: "*I would tend to think Cohesion policy would be focused of what has been termed as backwards regions, so that's what makes me think about BMW region. Convergence in a sense that those areas have been brought up from a very low base and that has had a very positive impact.*"

Participants did not know how Cohesion policy funds are allocated. Some knew that funding depends on the average income, but only few knew it is the average income of regions rather than countries. There was no knowledge on how project qualify for Cohesion policy funding.

Awareness of Cohesion policy projects

In the COHESIFY citizens survey, a quarter of respondents (N=127) reported to have heard about EU funded projects that improve their region or city (a similar level of project awareness is reported in Eurobarometer, see above). The majority of respondents (N=374), did not know any project. Most of the respondents (N=331 compared to N=162) reported they did not benefited from projects in their daily life.

In the focus groups, participants were also asked to identify EU-funded projects and all of them had a sense that several roads in Ireland were built with the support of EU funds. Projects in the areas of education, culture and sustainable development were also mentioned. A list of all the mentioned projects is provided in Table 17. There was a sense surprise among participant in one of the groups (EI 1) to learn that Cohesion policy funds investments in rural areas as well as urban areas.

Table 17: Focus group participants' reference to projects' co-financed by EU funds

Roads: - Motorways - M50 - Roads - Port Tunnel in Dublin - Tunnel in Cork

Public transport:
- LUAS
- Dart

Culture:
- Heritage sites

Sustainable development:
- Energy saving projects

Education:
- Investments in universities

Rural development schemes in the West of Ireland

Sources of Cohesion policy awareness

According to the COHESIFY citizen survey, most of the respondents have become aware of EU-funded projects through billboards (Table 18). This is corroborated in the focus groups, where signs, such as flags and billboards were the most mentioned source of awareness.

Table 18: Where did you hear of EU-funded projects?

Cohesify citizens survey	Yes	No
Billboard	66 (52 %)	61 (48 %)
National TV	64 (50 %)	63 (50 %)
National newspapers	60 (47 %)	67 (53 %)
Local or regional newspapers	51 (40 %)	76 (60 %)
National radio	47 (37 %)	79 (63 %)
Internet	46 (36 %)	81 (64 %)
Workplace	42 (33 %)	85 (67 %)
Personal experience or knowledge of projects	39 (31 %)	88 (69 %)
Local or regional TV	36 (28 %)	91 (72 %)
Social media	36 (28 %)	91 (72 %)
Local or regional radio	33 (26 %)	94 (74 %)

Cohesion policy impact

In the COHESIFY citizens survey, the majority of respondents (N=118 out of N=127) reported to have a (very) positive view on the impact of the funding of the European Union in their region or city. The majority of respondents (N=275 out of N=467) also believed that without EU funding their region or city would have developed somehow worse or a lot worse. Most of the respondents believed that the extent of the funding and its allocation for the right projects were important elements for the positive impact:

Table 19: Why do you think there was a positive impact?

Cohesify citizens survey	Yes	No	Don't know
Extensive funding	107 (91 %)	9 (8 %)	2 (2 %)
Allocation to the right projects	102 (86 %)	11 (9 %)	5 (4 %)
Good management	80 (68 %)	29 (25 %)	9 (8 %)
Executed on time	74 (63 %)	20 (25 %)	14 (12 %)
No corruption among government officials awarding tenders	39 (33 %)	57 (48 %)	22 (19 %)
No corruption among beneficiaries of EU funds	37 (31 %)	59 (50 %)	22 (19 %)
Other reasons	8 (26 %)	22 (71 %)	1 (3 %)

In the focus groups, participants thought that the impact of Cohesion policy projects was visible in transport infrastructure (road and trains), for example:

> Participants 2 (EI 2): "*Maybe I benefitted from it the most from being from Dublin. And we have so many stuff, like the Dart, the Luas, the M50. I am aware probably someone form Limerick, did they get the same impact? Probably it did. But I don't know."*

While infrastructure projects were the most recognisable and described in positive terms, they were also criticised. In one of the groups (EI 4), several participants agreed that some of the roads that were built went beyond the needs of Ireland, for example:

> EI4, Participant 4*: "I have noticed, especially around my own area by Dundalk, they got the motorways, but they got other access roads they build all around, they remind me of Cuban roads, they are not necessary."*

One of the participants explained the rent-seeking behaviour underpinning project decisions:

> EI4, Participant *1: "We got a lot of money and when people are getting money, maybe they don't always make the very best decision if they were paying 100 per cent."*

Focus group participants also mentioned that Cohesion policy has contributed to economic prosperity and an increased living standard. Participants acknowledged that EU-funding has helped to improve the living conditions in rural areas vis-à-vis urban ones. There was a widespread sense across all the focus groups that social and economic inequalities were rising in Ireland. However, the view was that these inequalities would have been greater without the support from EU-funds. In this sense, the focus groups narratives support citizens survey results. Structural funds were also associated with increased accountability in public spending.

The participants in the focus groups were able to identify a limited number of challenges to Cohesion policy. The lack of communication was discussed extensively in two groups (EI 1 and EI 2) among younger participants, for example:

> EI 1, Participant 3*: "So, I think, it is not overly well articulated just how significant the impact is, and I think that could be better publicised, cause at the moment it sort of popular to skew it negatively in terms of the EU and what it has done for us lately."*

Younger participants in two groups (EI 1 and EI 2) discussed as well problems with accountability, such as scapegoating the EU for failed policies and credit claiming, for example"

> EI 1, Participant 4*: "I think a lot of unpopular legislation is made by the EU. So, it kind of can be used a little bit as a scapegoat sometimes by national governments. So, then, when there is an opportunity to kind of, you know, kind a recognise more positive things, perhaps they just keep quieter voice."*

The mismanagement of projects and programs was on the other hand mentioned in the two groups, which consisted of older demographics (EI 3 and EI 4), for example:

> EI 3, Participant 2: "*I worked in a gallery once that had been co-funded by the EU and one of the things that they had really hard was great to get this beautiful new buildings, but actually maintaining it was very difficult, cause there was not funding there for that. I think we saw a lot of that around the country, you know, buildings were built, but actually to maintain then*

and even just to pay electricity, lightening and have staff, was a real problem, so, they were under-utilised then."

Excessive bureaucracy was discussed in three groups (EI 2, EI 3 and EI 4), but the remarks of participants were not directed to Cohesion policy but the European Union in general. In two focus groups (EI 3 and 4), participants acknowledged that while investment in public transport were made, their quality was not at the same level as public transport in West Europe (France and Germany).

European Identity

The Cohesify survey showed that most of the respondents in the Southern and Eastern region of Ireland feel greater attachment to their country, city and region than they do towards the EU and Europe (Table 20). Nevertheless, more than two thirds of the respondents reported a favourable position towards the EU (N=333, 67 %). Ten per cent of the respondents (N=48) reported to be opposed, while 24 % of respondents (N=118) reported a neutral position towards European integration.

Table 20: Attachment to places

Cohesify citizen survey, tell me how attached you feel to:	Very	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
Your country	343 (69 %)	81 (16 %)	48 (10 %)	28 (6 %)
Your city/town/village	294 (59 %)	100 (20 %)	63 (13 %)	41 (8 %)
Your region	277 (56 %)	108 (22 %)	76 (15 %)	37 (7 %)
European Union	191 (38 %)	192 (38 %)	66 (13 %)	51 (10 %)
Europe	188 (38 %)	201 (40 %)	73 (15 %)	38 (8 %)

According to the Irish participants in the focus groups, European identity consists of shared values, such as human and social rights and the welfare state. Being European means accepting other cultures and being in contact with people from other countries. EU membership rights and common policies, such as the euro and European citizenship also contribute to European identity echoing the civic dimension of European identity. For example:

> EI 1, Participant 3*: "The time I felt the most European, is when I was in Paris and I was able to get into the Louvre for free, because I was under 25 and an EU citizen."*

> EI 3, Participant 2: *"I suppose it [European identity] is that feeling of, I kind of go back to human rights, that you are in agreement with the others. You agree with what other members of the European Union are doing, saying, and striving towards. That makes me feel European, like I am part of the big picture that wants to create a better society for its members and more equal society."*

Other focus group participants supported the views that the EU is not equal to Europe. The latter was constructed in geographical terms and travelling outside European borders can make an individual feel more European due to contact with non-European cultures. Therefore, Europe shares a common culture. This notion coincides with a kind of "European nationalism" since it constructs European identity in terms of an "ingroup" in opposition to an "outgroup" along the lines of a national identity. However, the use of different languages and history limits the sense of Europeanness, so the old motto "unity within diversity" seems to be applicable for the majority of the Irish participants.

Participants agreed that Cohesion policy does not help to understand how the EU works and have mixed views whether it could play such a role in the future. One participant pointed out that it is rather a broader understanding on how the EU works that would help to understand Cohesion

policy. Another participant thinks that Cohesion policy projects can improve citizens' "appreciation of the EU", but not the understanding of it. If projects were more visible, then this could remove unfunded criticism on the efficiency of the EU. Participants agree that albeit the Irish know little about Cohesion policy, this has not hampered the development of a positive view on Europe. Over all, Cohesion policy and its respective funds were not seen as an effective mechanism for enhancing the notion of European identity. Participants felt that EU funded projects can generate support for the EU but that it is unlikely to translate into European identity.

Key findings and Conclusion

Stemming from years of experience in EU funding, the ERDF programme in the Southern and Eastern region of Ireland is well managed and implemented. There is broad agreement among stakeholders that the programme works well for the region. The positive impact is perceived by citizens as evidences by the COHESIFY survey results. The focus groups suggest that citizens are likely to recognize positive impact in economic development, investments in infrastructure, improved quality of life and the reduction of inequalities. While the EU has been a force for the decentralization of regional policy development, the newly introduced Regional Spatial Strategies will provide further impetus for a differentiation of the ERDF programmes in Ireland, and, thus, an increased accommodation of the specific socio-economic needs of the Southern and Eastern region.

One of the main concerns expressed by the Managing Authority, the Member State and some Intermediary Bodies is the bureaucratic load associated with the implementation of the ERDF programme in a low funding intensity region, such as the Southern and Eastern region. On the one hand, excessive bureaucracy can discourage the participation in the programme of those Intermediary Bodies for whom ERDF represents a small source of funding. On the other hand, the "due process" in the monitoring and control of funds that has been reinforced with Structural Funds is conducive to citizens' trust in government institutions. As evidenced in the COHESIFY survey, only one third of citizens attributed the positive impact of Cohesion policy to the absence of corruption. The positive impact of Cohesion policy on the governance of public funding was mentioned also in the focus groups. Any reduction of control and monitoring might affect the perception citiznes have on Cohesion policy. In this respect, it is important to mention that the programme does not register a high degree of irregularities and that most of the stakeholders were of the opinion that the programme is free of regularities. This is reflected also in the way the media reports of Cohesion policy, since the media framing analysis found that the frame "fund abuse" does not appear at all in the Irish media.

The good policy and citizens' positive perception of the implementation, however, does not translate into good communication and a positive perception of communication. While significant efforts go into communicating the programme, communication is understaffed and underfunded. As a result, it lacks the required professionalization for achieving effective results. Unlike in the case of the implementation of the programme, stakeholders have diverging opinions on how effective and important is the communication of the programme. Aside from billboards, the other most frequently used means of communication (programme website, social media and local media) do not appear as important in informing citizens about Cohesion policy. This transpires from the results of the COHESIFY citizens survey as well as focus groups. This finding indicates a need to rethink citizens as a targeted audience in the communication strategy and the measures through which they can be reached. One of the ways this can be done is to increase the effort in local media relations. Two main arguments support this recommendation. First, according to stakeholders, local media are one of the most effective tools for increasing citizens' awareness of Cohesion policy. Second, as evidenced in the media framing analysis, the local media in Ireland depict Cohesion policy from a positive perspective, approach the news from a European perspective and depict the EU as a common European project more often than national media. An increased effort to engage local media across the region is therefore warranted, even though, the managing authority and the member state have reported problems in the engagement and interest of traditional media.

The financial importance of Cohesion policy for the regional development of Ireland has significantly decreased since 2013. There is an understanding among some stakeholders that communication of the EU involvement has to be linked to its financial contribution. Only the material added value of the EU is, therefore, promoted. This limits the potential of Cohesion policy

to be an instrument fostering European identity, as it misses to communicate the solidary mechanisms underpinning the policy. An additional challenge faced in the communication of Cohesion policy in Ireland is the lack of consensus among stakeholders on the importance of communication. This might be due to the reliance on citizen "residual awareness", which stems from infrastructure project dating before 2013 and the Cohesion fund period. This is evident also in the expressed uncertainty by the managing authority and member state on how to communicate the benefit of Cohesion policy to citizens when most of the projects are not infrastructure related or physically tangible. Some ideas on how to improve the communication strategy might arise from an external evaluation, which the Irish authorities have not chosen to perform for the programming period 2007-13 and 2014-20.

On a more positive side, Ireland benefits from two significant advantages for the communication of the ERDF programme in the Southern and Eastern region. First, the communication officers are integrated in the implementation and policy work of the managing authority and the member state. This means that they are informed and involved already at an early stage of implementation. As a result, they have extensive knowledge of the programme, which can be utilised to communicate throughout the programme cycle when this communication is appropriately resourced. Second, the programme is successfully implemented, which in theory eases communication, as good communication does not come from bad implementation.

In summary, the main finding of the report are the following:

- Overall, policy stakeholders are satisfied with the implementation systems of the programme and its performance.
- There is less agreement among stakeholders how effective and important is the communication of the programme. Communication is the weaker point of the programme.
- Citizens views and a media framing analysis, suggest that, so far, Cohesion policy has not fostered European identity.

Based on these, the following recommendation can be made:

- Integrate communication into the early stage of the programming period and exercise communication throughout the programming period.
- Improve the communication strategy by differentiating audiences and adapting communication activities to them. Carry out an external evaluation of the Communication strategy.
- Professionalise and prioritise communication by dedicating adequate staff and budgetary resources for communication.
- Educate stakeholders on the importance of communication for multiplying the effect of communication.

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Annex 1: ***Achievements 2007-13***

Southern and Eastern Region ROP 2007-13			
Indicator	Achievement in 2013	Target	Unit of measurement
Research jobs created	820 (847)*	847	jobs
Number of direct investment aid projects to SME	7,488		projects
Number of start-ups supported	89		start-ups
Jobs created (gross, full-time equivalent)	3,449 (4,357)*		Jobs
Number of additional enterprises covered by broadband access	25,843 (25,482)*	23,125	enterprises
No. of training days provided to SME's	314*	249	training days
No. of recipients of training in micro-enterprises theme	186,976 (203,963)*	141,159	days training
No. of enterprises created in incubation centres	151 (138)*	156	persons
No. of energy schemes introduced	4	6	projects
No. of initiatives to enable broadband infrastructure and service provision	1	3	projects
No. of public transport projects supported	1		projects
Number of Monitoring Committee Meetings held	10 (11)*	7	meetings
Number of Evaluations & Studies conducted	3	5	studies
No. of Incubation Centres	12	16	start-ups

Source: Unless specified differently, the source of the data under "Indicator", "Achievement in 2013" and "Unit of measurement" is the S&E Region dataset prepared in COHESIFY WP2 by EUROREG, based on DG Regio available at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/ec/2007-2013/#1 (30. 10. 2017). Source for "Target" is AIR 2014.

Note: The star (*) indicates that the source of the data is the S&E AIR 2014.

Annex 2: Achievements 2014-20

Southern and Eastern Region ROP 2014-20			
Indicators	Target 2023	Achievement 2015**	Unit of measurement
No. of enterprises	713	570	enterprises
No. of licences from research	690	189	licences
No. of settlements with high-speed next-generation broadband	391	Implementation hasn't begun	settlements
No of jobs; in micro enterprises	186,852	169,866	jobs
Increase in the average thermal performance of housing units Kwh/BRm^2	185	94.82	housing units
Improvement in the social, economic and physical conditions in selected urban centres based on average GHDI score	5.1	5.0	GHDI score
Percentage of non-private car commuting levels in the designated urban centres	42.26	22.26	percentage
No. of new researchers in supported entities	689	174	persons
No. of awards under the Spokes Programme	25	10*	awards
No. of marine research MSc/PhD and Post-docs funded	21	Implementation hasn't begun	persons
No. of commercialisation fund awards	325	43	awards
No. of enterprises receiving support	143	109*	enterprises
No. of enterprises co-operating with research institutions	143	109*	enterprises
No. of enterprises receiving non-financial support	143	109*	enterprises
Additional households with broadband access of at least 30Mbs	164,244	Implementation hasn't begun	households
No. of enterprises receiving support under Priority 3a	51,736	14,195	enterprises
No. of enterprises receiving grants	1,804	844	enterprises
No. of enterprises receiving non-financial support	17,770	13,104	enterprises
No. of enterprises supported	2,398	561	enterprises
Productive investment; Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants in euro)	13,649,599	5,478,158	euro
Productive investment; Employment increase in supported enterprises (full-time equivalents)	5,760	1,700.5	jobs
No. of participants of enterprise training programs	105,552	24,756	persons
No. of households with improved energy consumption classification	19,497	10,870	households
GHG Reduction in Tonnes of CO_2 equivalent	8,945	13,052	tonnes
Population living in areas with integrated urban dev. strategies	1,571,356	Implementation hasn't begun	persons
No. of impl. integrated growth centre strategies	9	0	strategies
No. of impl. multimodal urban mobility projects	4	0	projects
No. of Monitoring Committee Meetings	10	2	meetings
No. of Evaluation Studies conducted	5	0	studies

Source: AIR 2014-15, Table 1; Notes: One star (*) indicates selected projects, which are not fully implemented yet. Two stars (**) indicate that the targets include the baseline level.

Annex 3: ***Communication measures, activities, target groups 2007-2013***

Communication plan		
2007-2013		
Main objectives	Measures	Target groups
Increase public awareness, transparency and visibility of the OP and EU Cohesion and Regional Policy at national, regional and operational level.	Flying the EU flag for one week starting 9 May in front of Managing Authority premises Informing the media Putting up plaques, billboards, and acknowledgment of funding sources Implementing agencies (e.g. Managing Authority) will use websites, launches, sectoral publications, business/community groups, advertisements, informal leaflets, and selected conferences and seminars. Host a high-profile event each year with a theme relevant to the achievement of regional policy objectives Publish an Annual Report that will set out the actions undertaken in the previous year Invite representatives of the EU Commission to attend major events, major conferences, launches, openings, announcements and may address senior Commission personnel to address meetings of the Regional Assembly Participating in local radio interviews Production of promotional material	Public, beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries Government departments, regional assemblies, local authorities, Intermediate bodies, Public bodies and agencies MEPs, TDs, Senators and Councillors International Groups (visiting groups, parliamentary delegations, other MS and Managing Authority) Social partners (trade unions, employer and business groups, farming organisation, community and voluntary sectors) Local, regional and national opinion formers and influencers including journals and the media, academics, researchers and educators

Source: Communication Plan 2007-13, pp. 3-8

Annex 4: ***Communication measures, activities, target groups 2014-2020***

Communication Strategy		
2014-2020		
Main objectives	Measures	Target groups
Informing on funding availability (including detail information on criteria, selection procedures, etc.)	1.1 Programme launch event	Potential beneficiaries, European, national, regional and local partners, public, private and voluntary sector organisations, national and local media, political representatives, wider public, internal Managing Authority staff
	1.2 Major annual information event	
	1.3 Website	
	1.4 Social media	
	1.5 Press releases/Media activities	European, national and local media
Highlight achievements of SE ROP 2007-13, communicating the benefits and impacts of the ROP programme, raising awareness and promote the SE ROP, its participants (including among new audiences)	2.1 Programme launch event	External, national, regional and local partners, public, private and voluntary sector organisations, national and local media, political representatives, wider public, internal Managing Authority
	2.2 Website	
	2.3 Social media	
	2.4 Publications (Electronic and hard copy)	
	2.5 List of Beneficiaries	
	2.6 Major annual information event	
	2.7 All forms of paid advertisement	
	2.8 Media activities	National, regional and local media
	2.9 Reports and Papers/Seminars/Presentations	MC Members, European Commission
	3.1 Project visits	Specifically, national and local media, project beneficiaries, and other partners
Ensuring effective communication	4.1 Staff Training of communication skills	Managing Authority and IB staff
	4.2 Internal Communications	Internal Managing Authority staff

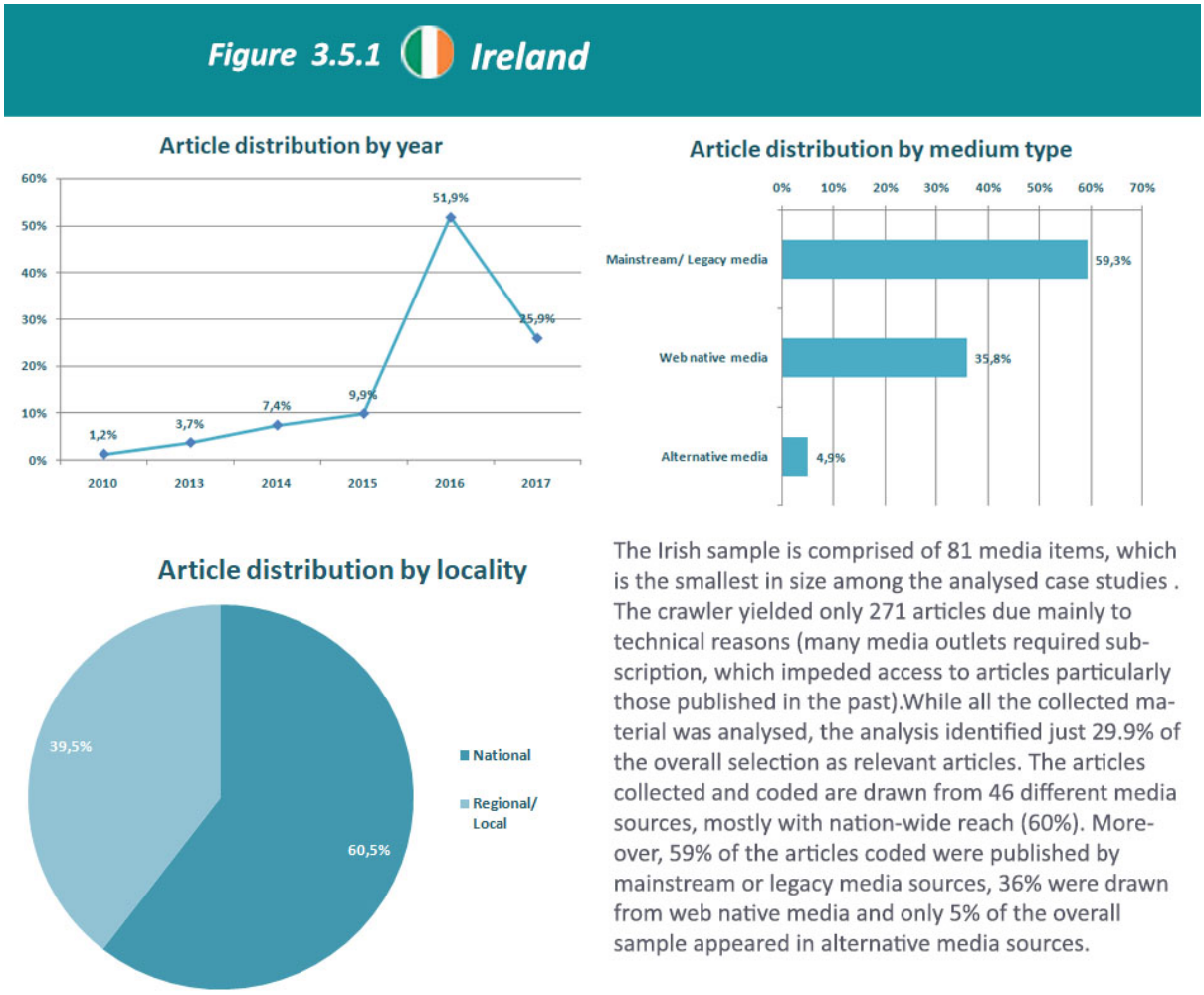
Source: Communications Strategy 2014-20, Annex 2

Annex 5: ***Monitoring communication indicators 2007-13 and 2014-20***

Measure/activity	Indicator	Target set for 2007-13			Target set for 2014-20		
		Baseline 2007	**Mid-term 2007**	**Final**	**Baseline 2014**	**Mid-term 2017**	**Final**
Website	Number of website visitors (Output)	3000 per month	3000 per month	3000 per month	1000 per month	1200 per month	1500 per month
Publicity events	No. of annual events (Output)	0	3	7	0	3	7
	No. of seminars/presentations (Output)	0	45	105	0	45	105
	No. of public launches/events/press releases/interviews of interventions by OP (Output indicator)	Targets have not been set			Targets have not been set		
	Level of satisfaction with seminars and related documentation (Monitoring indicator/result)	No targets set			No targets set		
Awareness	Level of overall public awareness of the EU SF Programmes (Impact indicator)	No targets set			53 % promoted, 16 % unprompted	55 % prompted, 18 % unprompted	60 % prompted, 20 % unprompted
	Level of awareness of the role of the S&E OP (Impact indicator)	No targets set			12 %	18 %	26 %
	Level of awareness of individual Funds (ERDF) (Impact indicator)	No targets set			43 %	45 %	50 %
Media	Local press coverage by OP/priority (Impact indicator)	No targets set			No targets set		

Source: Communication Plan 2007-13: Annex 2; Communications Strategy 2014-20: Annex

Annex 6: Framing Analysis of Irish Media (source: Triga and Vadratsikas 2018, p. 41)



In terms of the framing analysis, the Irish sample reveals that most of the coded articles frame EU Cohesion policy in terms of its implications on the "Quality of life" of the Irish citizens (43.2%). The "Quality of life" frame points out the positive consequences of EU Cohesion policy in citizens' lives, by focusing on the implementation of a number of infrastructure projects, by supporting vulnerable groups through specific policies, and by supporting or suggesting a number of policies regarding the public services. Therefore, the second most recurrent frame, which appeared in the coded articles, is the "economic consequences" frame which corresponds to the 32.1% of overall amount of articles. As revealed in the subframe analysis this refers mainly to the "development" (1.2) 12.3%, followed by "innovation" (1.3) 9.9%, "job creation" (1.1) 7.4%. It has also been found that 16% of the articles contained no framing, while the remaining five frames ("Culture", "Incompetence of local authorities", "Power", "National interests", "Cohesion" and "Fund abuse") appear as dominant in lower percentages of the sample (1.2%, 2.5%, 2.5%, 2.5% respectively).

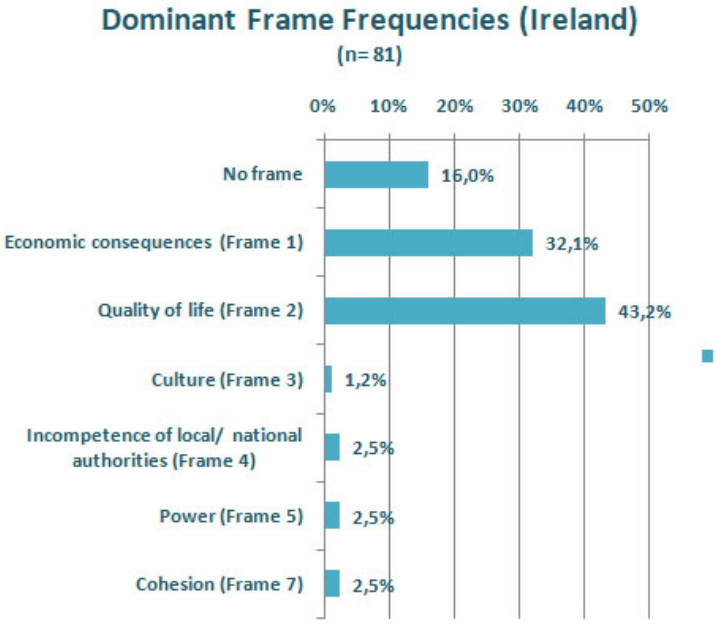


Figure 3.5.2
Dominant frame frequencies in Irish media

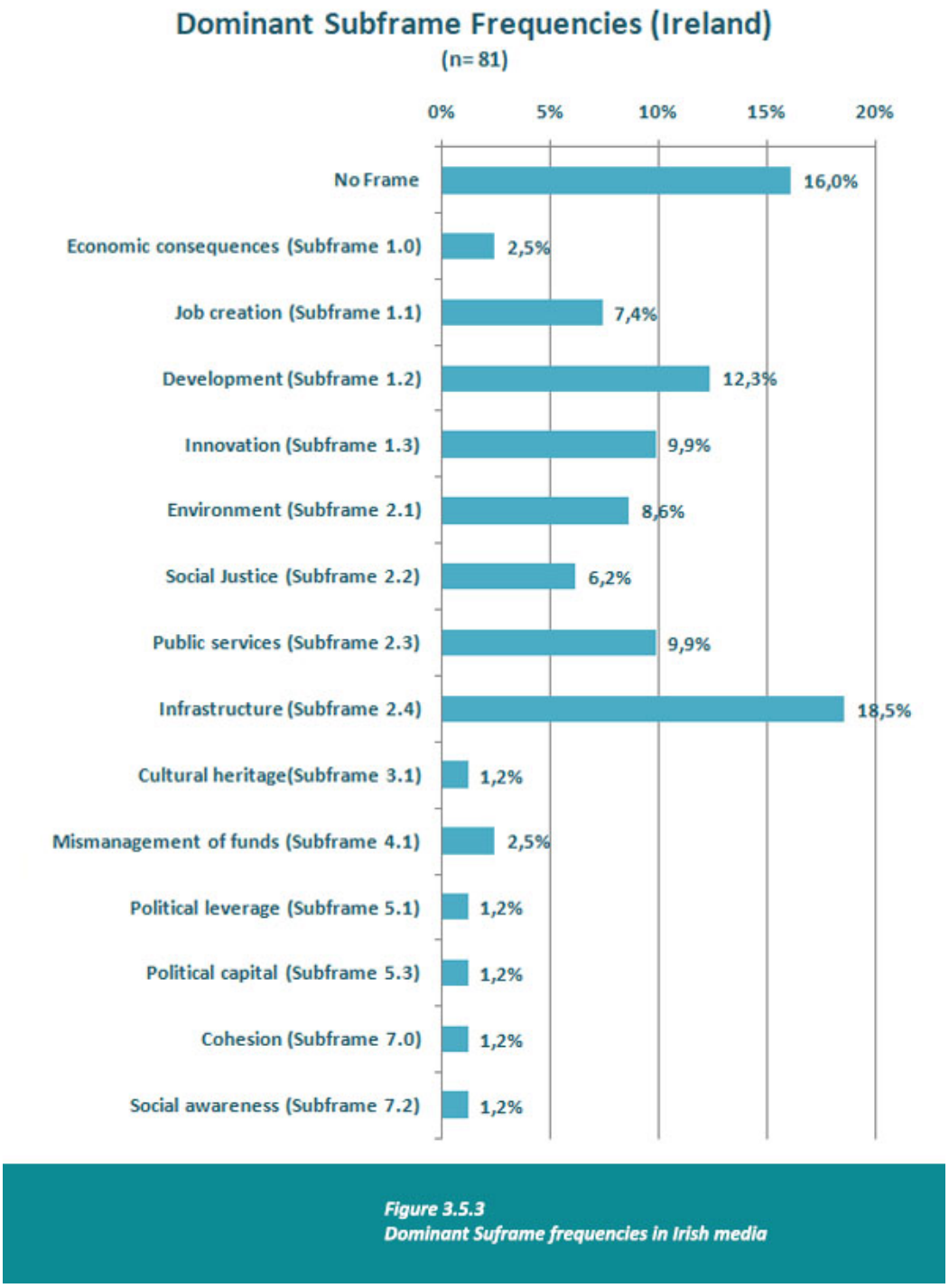


Figure 3.5.3
Dominant Suframe frequencies in Irish media

The framing analysis has shown some differences between national and regional media in Ireland, as national media tend to interpret EU Cohesion policy in economic terms (Frame 1), while regional media emphasize on the impact of Cohesion policy on citizens' "Quality of life" (Frame 2). No striking differences were found in the rest of the frames.

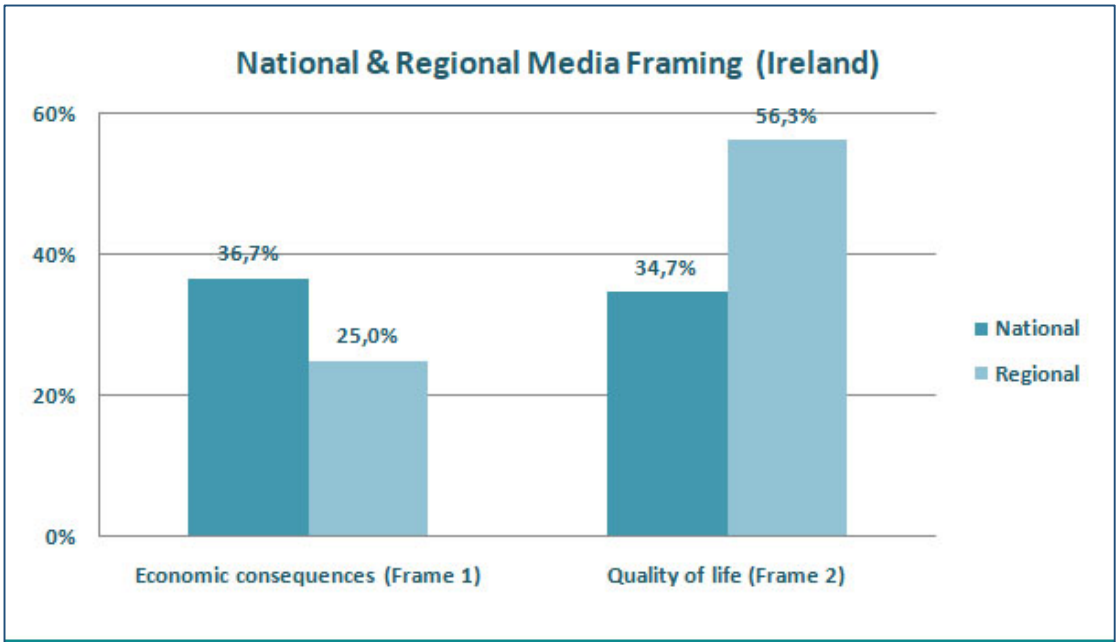
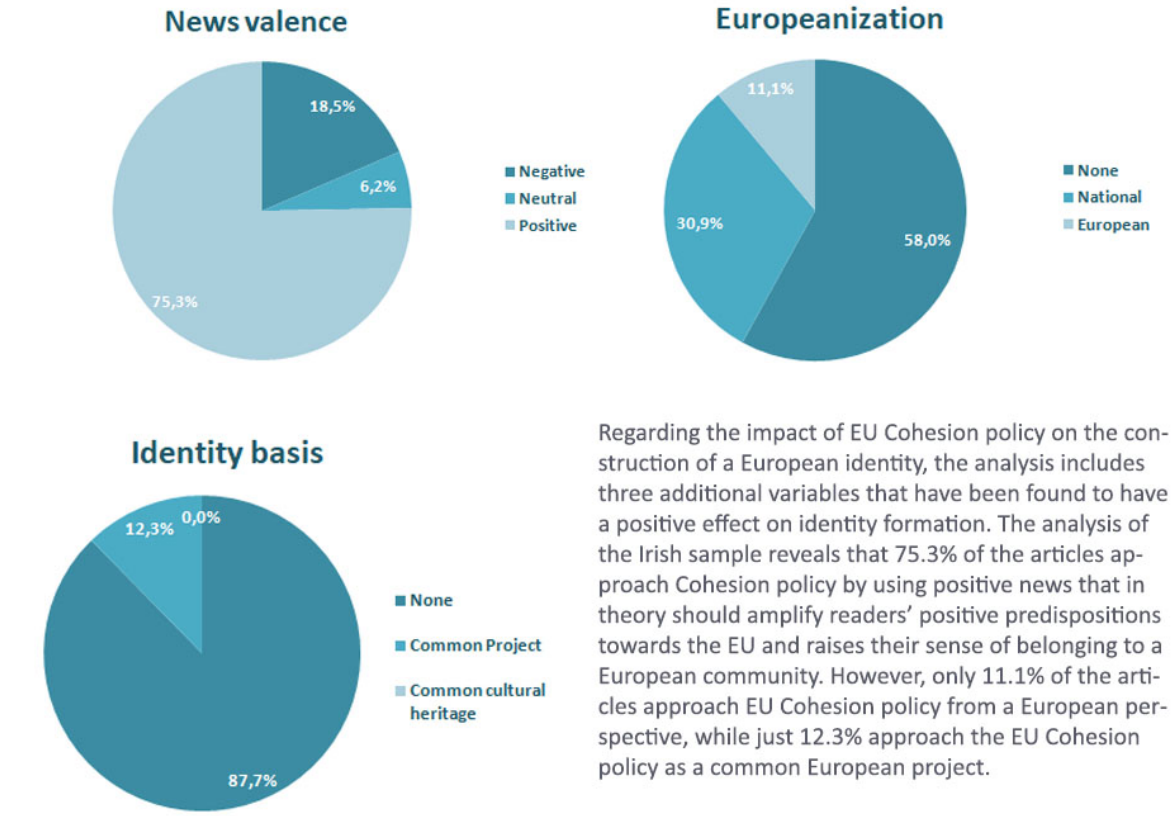


Figure 3.5.5 Framing differences between national and regional /local media in Ireland

Figure 3.5.4 Ireland - Europeanization variables



As far as the Europeanisation variables are concerned the analysis suggests that regional media in Ireland seem to promote the notion of a European common identity more often than national media. As shown in Figure 3.5.6, regional media include more positive news on EU Cohesion policy, approach the news from a European perspective, while they also depict the EU as a common European project more often than national media.

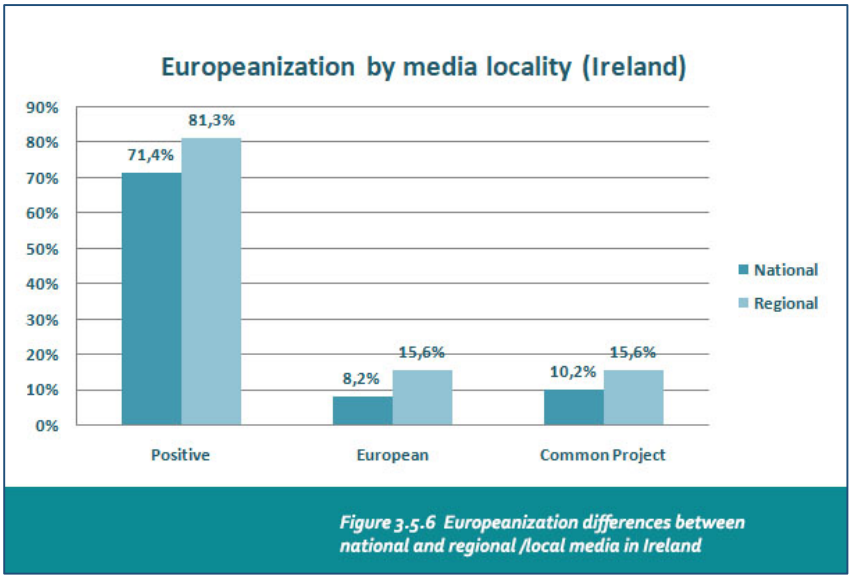


Figure 3.5.6 Europeanization differences between national and regional /local media in Ireland