Out of the dark: cohesion policy to connect the EU and its citizens

EuroPCom
7 & 8/11/2019, Brussels

Luca Pareschi
luca.pareschi@unibo.it
PERCEIVE

Perception and Evaluation of Regional and Cohesion Policies by Europeans and Identification with the Values of Europe

This project has received funding from the European Union’s H2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 693529.
UNIBO
University of Bologna (Project Leader)

UGOT
University of Gothenburg

IEA
Romanian Academy – Institute of Agricultural Economics

IAFE – NRI
Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics – National Research

UB
University of Barcelona

PBS
University of Portsmouth

WU
Vienna University of Economics and Business

BAM!
BAM! Strategie Culturali
PERCEIVE project investigates, in different European regions, how much citizens feel European and to what extent this is related to the implementation of the European Cohesion Policy.

**09/2016**
Project Kick Off

**10/2017**
Online database of topics and sentiments

**04/2019**
Guidelines on Cohesion Policy Implementation

**09/2019**
Project Conclusion

**03/2017**
Focus Groups and Survey

**09/2018**
Report on New Media Role In EU Projects Communication

**06/2019**
Digital Simulation Interface

*Do you feel European?*

[Yes!][No][What?]
PERCEIVE

Case studies’ analysis (WP1)
- Assess variations in Cohesion policies’ implementation
- Framework for comparative analysis
- Data on citizen’s perceptions
- Data: focus groups and survey
  Practitioners’ Involvement in focus groups

Economic-political dynamics (WP2)
- Quality of Government
- Convergence

EU communication efforts (WP3)
- Effectiveness of Rhetoric
- Impact of communication investments

Urban and rural dimensions (WP4)
- Resilience of Urban Areas/smart cities
- Urban-rural contrasts

Discourse and social construction (WP5)
- Impact of topics in the media
- New media activism

Scenario Analysis (WP6)
- Integration simulation model and virtual environment
- Practitioners’ use and feedback
Some insights from our survey
Degree of identification with Europe
Percentage of individuals that heard about Cohesion Policy
Percentage of individuals that thinks they benefited in daily life from any project funded by the EU
Deliverable 7.6

Guidelines on Cohesion Policy Communication
The general context of communication

• **Overshadowing** of cohesion policy by other EU issues (migration, Brexit). Until the EU won’t provide a convincing and coherent answer to such issues, citizens would hardly be ready to focus on any other EU input. Here, the key implication is that the **EU has to strengthen its perception as a social actor in global scenarios**.

• Threat of the **political opportunism** – politicians taking credit for accomplishments realized with EU support and blaming the EU for local and societal problems. **Enforce even more the visualization of the EU presence in local contexts:**

  • **Avoid multiplication** of logos (i.e. of the individual funds or agencies).

  • Enact strict and rigorous monitoring and enforcing of the obligation to **clearly credit the use of EU funds**.
The objectives of communication

- Building awareness and appreciation: a “vaccine” against populism.

- **Clarify the mission** of local management authorities. We suggest that it would make sense for LMAs to have identity building as a task. Sense of belonging together should be stressed more at the local level.

- It is advisable the development of a more standardized system of measurement of investments and results. We found a high level of heterogeneity in the evaluation experiences.

- **Measure results**, not tasks accomplished (i.e. number of events, printed publications...)

The organization of Communication

• Improve the coordination between central and local units. OpenCoesione portal as a best practice for transparency, possibly integrated with data on companies involved in projects.

• More importance to global communication, less to the communication of each project to make visible the idea of Europe. European Commission should lead the role of communicating Europe with centrally developed actions.

• Inclusion of funds’ beneficiaries in communication: a mandatory chapter of their communication activities should be included in the application and evaluated during the selection process.

• Be inclusive of all stakeholders when building a call. Try to build bottom up the calls involving stakeholders in the preparation of the calls.
New communication channels 1/2

- LMAs seem to fear, or not fully understand, the potential of social media. Also, central control. New organizational roles and processes may be necessary: create profiles that have the authorization to speak on behalf of the organization with relative autonomy, and with up-to-date skills on social media communication.

- One-way communication need to work in parallel with the development of social networks in which LMAS’ officers, potential beneficiaries and different stakeholders are interconnected.

- Emergence of a “local dialogues” on social media (public servants interacting with citizens on Facebook homepages of LMAs). These local dialogues significantly associate with both citizens’ support for EU integration and perceived personal benefit from the policy projects. Major attention should be devoted to developing advanced and up-to-date communicative skills at the local implementation level.
New communication channels 2/2

• Create occasions for the news to cross the boundary between social and traditional media, when the news reports about what happens in the social media. (in example, we observed traffic peaks in Twitter talks on Cohesion Policy: 7th EU Cohesion Forum (@EU_REGIO being highly rewetted), shift at the head of the Committee of Regions (@EU_CoR being highly rewetted).

• Looking at social media as a thermometer of the public opinion, not just as an additional communication channel in the mix.

• LMAs need to invest to build know-how and skills for communicating with new media and to understand the logic of communication that inspires social networks.
Dealing with the memory decay effect

• To increase the resilience of communication, communication efforts need to be anchored into *established cultural accounts*. For example, communication of the values underpinning the EU project and the aims of Cohesion Policy could be communicated in secondary and high schools to create an appropriate cultural terrain.

• The increase in the **frequency of communication** is as important as the **magnitude of communication** investment since frequency slows down the decay of communicative attention.

• To be resilient, communication needs to be anchored on a sound analysis of **local discursive opportunity structures**.
More from PERCEIVE project?
Play with PERCEIVE Simulation Lab
To learn the impact of different factors on CP absorption and citizens’ awareness through an interactive computer interface

Read PERCEIVE Guidelines
To get key recommendations on CP communication and governance, directly from the project’s researchers team

bit.ly/perceive-simulation
bit.ly/perceive-guidelines
Thanks for listening

Out of the dark: cohesion policy to connect the EU and its citizens

EuroPCom - 7 & 8/11/2019, Brussels

Luca Pareschi
luca.pareschi@unibo.it