

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna
Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

PERCEIVE project - Deliverable D3.1 "Annex2 - Calabria (IT)"

This is the submitted version (pre peer-review, preprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/605006> since: 2019-04-02

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.6092/unibo/amsacta/5620>

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Work Package 3 - The effectiveness of projects' communication strategies

CALABRIA

Report from focus group for assembling Deliverable 3.1

“Qualitative report on the impact and effectiveness of communication strategies from the semi structured interviews with cohesion policy practitioners (including third-party partners in the consortium), written by each partner”

Chapter I: Communication strategy at different levels and LMAs' organization

1. Main features of the regional (case studies) communication strategy (aims of the communication, priorities, key messages and targets)

Regione Calabria experienced a strong discontinuity from the previous 2007-2013 and the current 2014-2020 programming periods both in the implementation and in the communication of ERDF and ESF funds, which mostly depends on a political change in the regional council. In 2014 election, Mario Oliviero, that belongs to the centre-left Partito Democratico, became President of the Region, succeeding to two presidents belonging to a centre-right coalition.. Thus, the new political coalition modified the communication strategy of the region.

During the 2007-2013 period, the programs ERDF and ESF were managed together and communicated with synergies. Nonetheless, a communication strategy was developed for each plan. The two strategies are very similar in terms of structure, following is the structure:

1. References to applicable laws
 1. European Communication Plan
 2. EU laws
 3. Italian Laws
2. Contextual analysis
 1. Socio-economic analysis
 2. Main axes of intervention
 3. Information and Communication in Calabria
 4. 2000-2006 Communication Plan
3. Communication Plan
 1. Content
 2. General and specific objectives
 3. Addressees
 4. Communication strategy
 5. Implementation tools
 6. Strategic horizontal projects
 7. Communication partnerships
 8. Organization
 9. Evaluation
 10. Financial Plan.

Regarding the specific objectives, they are, both for ERDF and ESF:

1. Create awareness among all the potential beneficiaries of the aims and opportunities offered by the 2007-2013 programs. Create awareness regarding how to apply in order to ensure the greatest possible participation in terms of projects submitted.
2. Ensure transparency in the use of Structural Funds.
3. Attract citizens' interest toward the role of EU in development of regions, disadvantaged areas and disadvantaged social categories, and in the daily life of Calabria's citizens.
4. Create awareness regarding the method of development chosen by Calabria with the 2007-2013 ERDF & ESF regional operational programmes. Coordinate communications of different project and axes within one strategic framework.

A website for the programs was launched in april 2016, during the 2014-2020 programming period, despite being conceived in the previous one:

<http://calabriaeuropa.regione.calabria.it/website/>

Information the 2007-2013 period can be found on a different website:

<http://www.regione.calabria.it/archiviopor/>

The overall impression, regarding the communication plans, is that they were conceived of to meet administrative duties, with chapters that comply with specific bureaucratic needs, rather than as an actual operative plan. This impression was confirmed in the interviews in the focus group:

"...a communication plan was provided as it's a community obligation, we structured this community plan and the communication plan was approved always with the council's resolution, besides the communication plan provided for the organisation of an annual implementation plan. And the communication plan, despite the two operational programmes were separated, that is ERDF and ESF, with two distinct LMAs because they were mono-fund, the communication plan was a multi-programme, so multi-fund, because anyways it was a communication plan that was to be carried out jointly for the ERDF actions and the ESF actions. So every year an activity plan was written, whose aim was to give implementation to the communication plan. If I can give an evaluation [...] It was a pretty traditional plan, I'd say, it didn't have any innovative aspects, neither in the definition, initial organisation, nor in the organisation of the implementation plans, it was very much centred on what was supposed to be the institutional communication required by regulations. So certainly the information on the website, the publication of important documents relevant for the programme, however innovative tools weren't certainly envisaged neither in the communication plan nor did we envisage them in the implementation plans. So several publications were made, we had moments of debate in which it was advertised but nothing more.

2. How is communication organized and practically works within Calabria

The plans identify the responsibilities for communication in the *pro-tempore* executives of the following departments:

- *Dipartimento Programmazione Nazionale e Comunitaria* for ERDF
- *Dipartimento Lavoro, Politiche della Famiglia, Formazione Professionale, Cooperazione e Volontariato* for ESF

Then they explain how working groups were to be created for the communication. Details of the working groups can be found on the web;

<http://www.regione.calabria.it/archiviopor/comunicazione/2-non-categorizzato/1827-menucomunicazione>

Piano di comunicazione POR FESR 2007/2013



- » **Piano di comunicazione** POR Calabria FESR 2007/2013
- » **DGR 272 di approvazione** del Piano di Comunicazione POR FESR

Responsabile del Piano di Comunicazione: Dott. Tommaso Calabrò

Gruppo di Lavoro:

- Dott.ssa Rosa Conforti (responsabile)
- Arch. Giovina Del Vecchio
- Arch. Rosario Limarzi
- Arch. Gianfranco Marrazzo

Piano di comunicazione POR FSE 2007/2013

Piano di comunicazione POR FSE 2007/2013



- » **Piano di comunicazione** POR Calabria FSE 2007/2013
- » **DGR 273 di approvazione** del Piano di Comunicazione POR FSE



Responsabile del Piano di Comunicazione: Dott. Giovanni Pulvirenti

Moreover, with the resolution 571 (1/09/2009), the Regional Council defined the structure of the areas "Communication with Media" and "Integrated Communication, events and horizontal strategic projects" that, together with the institutions managing ERDF and ESF, are in charge of the development of the actual communication media:

- Development of the website CalabriaEuropa
- Realization of editorial and multimedia products
- Newsletter
- TV and radio broadcast
- Media relations
- Messages and strategies definitions
- Campaigns development

Several products, that were realized, are described in the same web page:

Azioni e prodotti realizzati

Calabria Europa News	
Festa dell'Europa 2012 (Comunicazione Visiva)	
Festa dell'Europa 2012 (Evento)	
Pisl Tour	
Manuali della Progettazione Integrata	
Organizzazione dei Comitati di Sorveglianza	
Restyling del Portale Calabria Europa	
Evento "PISL - Apriamo i cantieri"	
Incontri PISL "Si Parte!"	
Evento "Verso Europa 2020"	
Seminari Tematici di Informazione e Comunicazione FESR	

Regarding the actual organization of communication, that can only be partially captured by the plans, the focus group provided useful insights. A group of communicators was hired for performing communication activities. Yet, we can start highlighting some barriers to a better communication:

My regret is that at heart we were dealing with a group of communicators who, beyond the specific professional level, more or less high and appreciable... [...] The point is that, for the various conceived and unimpeachable functions, no coordination work between them was ever created. Some worked in watertight compartments on certain things. No team building idea, absolutely fundamental to the communication activity, ever prevailed. That's a shame. I said that in no Calabrian business situation, even in public enterprise, could there be a combination of professional figures so varied and so, frankly, considerable in number. Because basically they were 7 or 8 in number. They were 5 journalists and 7 communicators, on the order of 12 professionals. In practice, it's the communications and external relations office at Buckingham Palace, as far as I know. Maybe not even Buckingham Palace has that. But this opportunity was unfortunately [missed].

Also in following 2014-2020 programming period, a group of communicators was hired. The group works under the direct control of the executive in charge for the communication of both ESF and ERDF, and is especially focused on on-line communication. This group is described as a major improvement in the communication, as it is able to develop communication actions almost completely within the Regione, thus providing a continuous support. Indeed, even if two groups were created in the 2007-2013 and in the 2014-2020 periods, only the latter is described as a major strength, whereas the previous one suffered by coordination problems, that we will describe in the following section.

We have 2 social media, 2 copy people, 2 journalists, a graphic designer, a video maker, then there's the assessment group, with the statisticians, with the assessment expert; then there's the structure that's more ... that belongs to FORMEZ, which is a technical secretariat, that deals with logistics for the events. This model allowed us to bring in-house, and to centralize, the decisions in such a way as to promote a communication that is univocal. So costs are lowered, because the services that are actually provided to the outside regard the production of means or the dissemination of the means, because we have brought everything in-house. So we do a job of detailed analysis of the documents [...] This is all an activity of synthesis, of making it more graphically pleasing, of doing the infographics, which are one of the produced instruments, which we use to convey on the social media. [We do] the press release, which announces that there is a call for bids in the pre-formation stage, that the call for bids has come out, that there are modifications, there are corrections. From the outset, the document is followed by communication, until its final results are provided [...] But there's a system that works, because there are skills that are put into play. The social media, the copy people, the video makers, the journalists, the statisticians. There are groups of people that work in a network and are linked. They allow communication to be done.

This group is now able to internally develop all the communication, except for some technical services:

We can articulate some products, like infographics, the press announcements there have been. The products are made by us. On the outside, we purchased services: the web page with the link for one month ...

In the previous programming period, starting from 2010, Fincalabra, the in house organ in charge for the implementation of policies, was involved in the communication as well:

at a certain point the programme was created: and now who's going to implement it? In part the department, in part Fincalabra, there was no vision at the source of the implementation aspect [...] Third element, in the pre-publication phase of the call for tenders, we posed the issue of communication to citizens, now this aspect is obvious, but in 2010 no one thought of a television campaign. We made television spots with the aim to spread the information to the largest audience possible, but not only. Also through the radio and using the web channels that today are taken for granted but back then absolutely weren't, just as it wasn't obvious to use a toll free number. And this was the theme of communication

Stakeholder were involved before the call for tender. On the contrary, citizens, more in general, were involved only in the 2014-2020 period.

There was the whole partnership that generally speaking composes the Surveillance Committee, so there was ANCI, UNCEM, Confindustria, Confcommercio, Confartigianato, CGIL, CISL, UIL, basically ... all of them.[...] Civil society ... a more widened partnership ... no, it was involved in the 14-20 phase.

3. How is communication organized and works within beneficiaries projects (if any info communication activity is carried out and information is available on this level)

There were no specific rules, except for the mandatory communication:

This means that the communication of the structural funds also in Calabria was a fragmented communication, entrusted to single benefitting parties, not integrated, discontinuous, not harmonised, the vision was not communicated, the construction of the programme, what the calls for tenders were, to what subjects they were addressed. So there wasn't even the targeting of the scopes of implementation and of the potential benefitting parties to whom it was referred. It was left to the single benefitting subject to implement communication. And it was also required, unlike the monitoring data that perhaps were even much more useful, in fact in the agreements that I always signed with the culture sector or productive activities, the obligations listed in the agreement also referred to communication. And this starting from formal obligations, in case of plates the logo had to be visible, of course the majority of the benefitting parties carried out this first part. A couple of public subjects pushed a bit beyond [...] it's clear that the level of communication was so strong to produce results in the national print, in the international one, in the network that had been created, the partnership even increased, because there had been a good communication. [...] Because we realised that there wasn't just one single communication distribution channel, all the communication patrimony coming from the benefitting parties was also that, like the assessment questionnaires left in the drawer, in the sense that not all of the festival communications were used to make a single container for tourists or citizens saying ...

4. Main features of the national communication strategy (please report the main points and issues in the communication strategy)

Agenzia per la coesione Territoriale was created with a decree on August 2013 to sustain and promote projects for regional development and cohesion according to effectiveness and efficiency criteria. The main strategic aim is to support Central and local managing authorities in implementing and monitoring investments, with a special emphasis on transparency.

A general Communication Plan, approved during 2008 within the program "Governance and technical Assistance", had the following objectives:

- Contribute to the success of the plan
- Ensure transparency for a greater participation from stakeholders and citizens
- Create awareness regarding the role of EU and the added value of CP for the innovative and sustainable development of the regions and the society
- Harmonize the communications efforts by creating an integrated logo to be used on communication supports

The image, together with guidelines on how to perform communication by beneficiaries, were created in 2012. Yet, in this period and even in the previous one, the role of the national level was providing LMAs and beneficiaries with guidelines, being a intermediate level

between EU and regions. No actual communication activities on funded projects were performed by the *Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale*.

More information concerning the activity of the *Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale* can be found at the following link:
http://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/it/pongat/Attuazione_del_programma/Comunicazione/

Chapter II: Focus groups and in depth interviews

1. The role of the communication: success and barriers to communication

1.1 successful experiences

The notion of Communication success lacks a clear definition. Communication, indeed, may refer to several aspects:

- Communication of the funding possibilities to potential beneficiaries
- Communication of the value of the projects
- Communication of the results to the citizenship
- Communication of the role of the European Union

Each of these communication dimensions entails specific aims and specific ways to analyze success which are almost not overlapping. On the contrary, one output of the focus groups is that the communication objectives may be at odds: local managing authorities have to communicate the funding possibilities, the results, the role of the EU, and they pinpoint a certain difficulty in pursuing all these aims at the same time. When asked about successful cases of communication, LMAs managers in Calabria tend to refer especially to the need to create awareness regarding programs and funding possibilities, as in the previous period (2007-2013), communication was lacking from this point of view:

So the need was to create awareness through communication in the benefitting parties and in the local bodies and in all the subjects involved, concerning what the programme is, what the calls for tenders are, the targeting of the subjects and then to accompany toward the final phase. Now, with the 14-20, this is the effort we're promoting.

In the previous period the emphasis was more on communicating results because of obligations imposed by the law.

Instead, beforehand it used to be left only to the projects that had been closed even by the cycle of controls, that had been completely certified, after which a bland communication was provided saying that the project had been carried out, or had not been carried out. While a public subject has the perception of the chain of Structural Funds within the programme because studying it, a private subject, a citizen, has no idea ..., it's difficult for me to think that in Reggio people known that 5 million Euros of the old programme contributed to open Reggio's Museum. This information is lacking in the citizens' perception. Perhaps it was communicated the moment it was carried out, but there was no communication of the programme, of how we arrived at that project and at the results.

Yet, there is a clear perception of a bigger objective:

So the point is to communicate a wider message, the CP has meaning because it's recalled by Treaties, and cohesion among regions, so the reduction of disparities is a foundation of Europe. I mean this is what you need to convey, you're in Calabria, it's very far, you're part of a political project,

first of all, that not only helps you have extra resources but also enables you to be part of a community, which has rules, moves along other profiles, has basic criteria. Even things we don't consider much, for example, environmental criteria, things like that. Perhaps you think they're the last obligations, instead they're important parts of the line of reasoning.

Indeed, in the current programming phase, communication is perceived more as a policy tool, that has to be used since the early phases of the programming:

Currently ..., we want to start from communication and make it become a policy, not a final tool. It's a policy that needs to go through all of the processes, otherwise it's useless, it's useless in recognising what the EU is, the Commission's role ..., I mean...

I don't know, perhaps today we're more capable, more sensitive, more careful, also on the basis of that experience. So now communication is a central element of the policy, not a final element. I mean, when we start studying a policy or a measure or a call for tenders we realise that the communicative moment takes place at the beginning, not at the end, because if you don't understand how to make this stuff comprehensible, participated, effectively connected to expectations and needs, it's as if you didn't even do it, it doesn't have appeal. Why are we able to achieve this participation in calls for tenders? I think it's because we place attention not on how we communicate, not on how often we're present on television, not on what logo we use, but because the communication process meant as transmission of information and collection and debate started before all this, not at the end, not at the end.

By communicating since the beginning of a project, it is possible to highlight the process, thus projecting an image of transparency:

I think that true innovation is to try and do procedural communication over the course of the work, to be able to give the idea that if you tell the story passage by passage, if you're always saying the truth, and you're not hiding any errors that might be there, then you have absolutely transparent communication. With the feedback data from the social networks, which today are the instruments we have at this time, the most important is certainly the portal, but Facebook, too, in my opinion, has had very positive feedback, but it requires constant work. She [indicating a colleague] answers messages within five minutes. Above all in the phase in which there are the most important and announced calls for bids, those on SMEs, we have had a large number of questions on the calls for bids. The idea that a citizen writes you on Facebook and the Region responds in five minutes, giving you a solution...

Another dimension of success entails education on what funds are and are not:

in the last 20 years the literature concerning finance that provides aids to the system of enterprises has created a class of professionals and a distorted perception of the potential benefitting parties, so community funds are funds for which I submit a request and get the money, so communication, a part of communication involves educating towards community policies.

Enterprises used to be much more dependent on assistance, they waited for a contribution before operating, or they operated only because there was a contribution.

1.2 Barriers to communications

Several possible barriers to a successful communication were pointed out. The two most important ones that were described, with an orientation to 2007-2013 programming period, are an excessive orientation toward the compliance to technical requirements, and a splitting up of communication activities between different organizations and divisions. Yet, money are not a problem:

it's not a matter of budget, the funds provide the resources ...

1.2.1 Orientation towards procedures and not results

there was an approach more linked to obligations than the process.

I was saying, in the first part of 07-13, communication was strongly institutional providing the minimum information possible, what strictly required by the Commission: benefitting parties, list of benefitting parties divided per province and the amounts ..., because that's what was asked. The awareness that communication is a tool for implementing policies has matured even at community level, it's no longer a tool simply to communicate that there are benefitting parties.

If you ask me what was the weakness, in my perception which is that of a manager of an activity financed with community resources, according to my opinion it was the orientation toward the task and not the result. I mean, we organised partnership tables, you had 10 days to answer, after 10 days we proceeded. So, for me the weakness ... the tool was there, its implementation was weak from this point of view.

It is apparent that by an orientation toward result a more effective communication is possible:

since I'm a manager of the sector in charge of ..., I have to make pressure on all because it's a community obligation and if I don't do certain things I have problems. While it's different, for example, if tomorrow the President of the Region sits down at the table and says: give me the 5 main data on transport. Because I start the debate ... saying that in the last 6 months..., right? When we get there ..., because the administration has to push and accompany policies, it's clear that this will drag everything else, when I'll be able to sit down at the partnership table telling them not only the level of expenditure but I'll be able to talk about the impact and results of the policies, at that point there will be a demand for these activities.

1.2.2. Fragmentation

Like we already pointed out in describing the role of the beneficiaries for communication, a perceived sense of fragmentation in the communication activities was described as a major barrier against efficiency and effectiveness:

each department launched separate calls and had even separate communications, in the sense that the departments managed the communication of the calls singularly, and this was an extremely big problem.

it becomes quite difficult to imagine that a company that produces various models of car might communicate each model with a completely different communication campaign, because this was what, unfortunately, was taking place.

A lack of centralized guidance was perceived by Fincalabra as well:

We acted [...] extemporarily, in total autonomy, on the basis of the project manager's sensitivity, feeling the need to use communication policy tools which were those of web marketing, or television channels, media etcetera... so it's not that there was a systematic use of communication tools.

This fragmentation has been used by politicians to capture the merits for the projects:

the mayor, right? That manages to achieve these funds, be they community funds, national funds, however capable of selling, so to say, his business and propose himself as the one who managed to obtain the resources. So for me it isn't a problem if you have problems in saying that they are community resources, actually the fact that you can obtain community resources and also spend them is a rewarding element for me. [...] But it's left to the single individual, I mean the press conference is of the single individual, showing the councillor cutting the ribbon with a press release, published in the newspapers. It's all over. We didn't say anything, what remains for the large public?

The European financing and the communication on Europe was used more by the political part, parcelled out to the councillorships, to basically have immediate return. [...] Immediate return – electoral and among the electorate.

1.2.3 Multiple and conflicting objectives:

Another problem was the one of multiple and conflicting objectives in the communication process. First of all, short term objectives, related to electoral reasons, are at odds with medium and long term objectives, related to communication of the value of EU:

At any rate, it's clear that communication has two speeds. Because it's hard for institutional communication to truly take place, and not only here: because it is often led astray into political communication, and this has different times from those of institutional and public service communication. Because consensus has to be built very quickly, while the processes of dissemination, of participation, of involving the citizen in shared administration [...] [are much longer]. If there's a possibility of renewing the administration in European terms, communication of the European tone, and of the European conception, must be provided. There, there was no relationship between European communication and being conceived in European terms. Only "Europe and financing" was communicated.

But political communication cannot be passed off as institutional communication. And there is the biggest mistake everyone has made, and that everyone continues to make.

I have always been quite clear in also recommending guidelines to act in such a way that the communication yields results [...] in the medium and long term, like spa waters. Unfortunately, this medium and long term, very clear from the academic standpoint, is quite difficult to translate into a situation managed by a public administration where, in any case, we're dealing with an establishment on a political level. [...] I would have preferred a more dynamic communication, with a broader scope, over one that went no further than to see how the press review was going. For the events, it went fairly well, but if one of the understandings was to launch European awareness on the territory and to act in a way that permeated the territory's social and economic fabric, I think this was the missed objective. Because along with that objective, the strategic communication plan implied another, extremely worthy objective, which was that of bringing to as many potential beneficiaries as possible, those who use structural funds, the news that there was the possibility of exploiting sources of financing. This objective, then, prevailed fundamentally over all the rest, and I am of the opinion that European financing distances the local territories from Europe.

The communication of the funding possibilities, in particular, may prevent from communicating the values attached to the policies:

Because if I'm with a woman only for her wealth, we cannot speak of love. I can't be clearer than that.

The communication process that had been initiated with that project, for the Calabria Region, could become an organizational communication project, in which communication became an organization project connected with administrative action. It became a participatory project that allowed us to bring the financing more in line with the concept of making "Europe in Calabria."

Instead, the opposite concept – making “Calabria in Europe” – prevailed. Unfortunately, we aren’t playing with equal weapons and, in fact, European Institutions today are probably suffering excessively from an identity crisis, because this identity wasn’t [communicated] the message that got across was the opposite: “let’s try to profit as much as possible from the European financing.” And this, then, is what came to pass.

Indeed, by communicating only the existence of funds, communication may be ineffective:

Well, I think that the substantial difference is between the communication approach of the old programme and that of the 14-20, at least as regards Regione Calabria, but more significantly also at European level, because at a certain point the European Commission realised that the data on communication didn’t have impact on the territory, on the large public, as to the acknowledgment of the institutional chain as well as the acknowledgment of the extraordinary opportunities offered by the funds.

This fragmentation prevents from performing a serious work on the language used, that must be simple enough to be understood:

Simplification of the language is our human duty, beyond our institutional duty, and our duty as administrators. Because the citizen... [...] The more we don’t simplify the language, the more the language of those who are administered becomes populist. Because no other words are left for them. That’s the point. If we don’t put ourselves in a condition that people understand, in a simple way, what we’re doing, we risk being unfairly assailed.

1.2.4 Complexity

Another problem entails complexity, defined both as complexity in managing the programmes, and in complexity in communicating the value for citizens:

I’d say that it started as a visionary programme [...] however, as all programmes it planned a process and development of this territory that then somehow clashed with the complexity of the implementation procedures, both internal complexities, maybe due to a better reorganisation which hopefully will give its results in the 14-20, and the complexities of the procedures experienced by an extremely frail system involving the benefitting parties

because the 2000-2006 ROP was composed of 4 funds, so it was terrible also from the coordination point of view.

If I intervene on water schemes, in the end how do I communicate this intervention? How do I communicate that there’s a specific project? Obviously I’ll do it once the problem has been solved, right? So it might be that it’s not only the intervention, that I shouldn’t reason on a single intervention but on a series of interventions. If, for example, you no longer have the closing of water at night because in Catanzaro at a certain point there’s no water at night, and so at home you have to have ... water tanks. At a certain point you say, listen, we’ve done this, this and that so today you ..., if there are no waste bins in the streets, that’s what you have to communicate, you have to communicate the result, that’s a point

1.2.5 Data and competences

Then there is the twofold problem of data and competences. First of all, Regione Calabria did not have a website for submitting and evaluating procedures:

No, we didn’t use to have a digital platform, obviously we managed the calls in paper.

This prevented from easily collecting and analyzing data on the tender. Data that were lacking anyway, preventing from having a clear analysis of the contextual situation.

What I think lacked was the analysis of the context, if not that of second level given only by the main informative sources and so by Istat, there were no qualitative data on the assessment or on the monitoring, perhaps quantitative,

I carried out for ten years projects approved [...] in quality of Province [...] we were required to provide the data [...] how many work units were involved? Definite or indefinite contracts? Let's say that these are cold data, of second level, that if I give them to you, I give them to you after 2/3 years, I also have difficulty in recovering them. In the meantime though assessment questionnaires were also requested so as benefitting parties. But all this, which is a patrimony of Regione Calabria, was never put in the system, in the sense that the Region doesn't have the figures, doesn't have the data, [...] they were data that could give you the measure, the photograph of that moment, of that subject, in that place, in that territory, and then systemised to become data from which to start for future programmes. All this lacked both in the general and in the specific aspects of the programme structure.

Then, one among the interviewee pointed out that within regional institutions, people in charge of communication sometimes lack a specific education of the issue

Because if you don't have a doctor, you can't open a hospital. We open hospitals without doctors, no? So you can't open communication structures if the persons that made them aren't placed inside them... Then, clearly, there was also this issue of these paths – pardon me – these night-school paths with thirty hours ... That is, replacing the path of persons that had devoted their lives to study paths, even when there was no appeal yet, right? But this... The hope, today, of being able to reconvert Europe is in crisis. The concept of Europe is in crisis.

Most of the communication plans of current institutions refer, as per the regulations, to law no. 150 of 2000. Then there's an article 5 of that law, which refers to an implementation decree, that was done by a Decree of the President of the Republic, but note that it's always missing [in regulatory references]. But why is that regulatory reference always missing?

1.2.6 Press coverage

Last but not least, a problem emerges with press coverage of funds. Press seems to be interested in scandals, only, and in the misuse of funds.

But the strongly negative datum that emerged is that, according to perception, funds were connected to corruption and not expenditure, and it's the only survey carried out in Italy at the moment, plus the data referring to Calabria are incredible percentages,

So according to my opinion the message that needs to be conveyed is this, because the perception concerning funds ... we talk a lot about European funds, but always in the terms ..., that European funds aren't spent, in negative terms, but not for the Commission's fault. I mean, what's the point here, the aspect that comes out here is that there are European funds allocated by an authoritative subject such as the Commission, because however it's Brussels, and that these funds arrive at local level and instead of being used well they're wasted.

2. Awareness and use of central directives

Central directives, related to communication and, in general, to the management of funds, are perceived to have a good impact:

That's different. How much do citizens perceive the EU's role in all this? That's where the difference stands. And not only as allocator of resources, because for me that's where the leap is, the European Funds ... are we capable of conveying a different message? It's not only the fact that you finance a programme, but that you introduce new rules, that you pay particular attention to the deadline, you pay particular attention to quality, you pay attention to the monitoring. I mean thanks to the community layout, the PA changes its way of working. I think this is what we should be able to communicate, not the fact that the Commission financed the theatre.

Actually, interviewees pointed out the need for a greater centralized effort in making communication uniform

With regard to the communication strategy, in the European Commission, at Agenzia per la Coesione territoriale (agency for territorial cohesion), which is headed by the Italian network of communicators, to which communication managers of every Region belong, there's no strong supply chain. We had no clear indications on the writing of the strategies. We actually tell each other this at all the meetings. Both with the network of communicators [...] and with the communication agency. Actually, in the past, the communication plans were copies of one another. There's no context analysis, they were children of all the distortions that had also engendered the programming. They went no further than to say: we'll use the channels, we'll do this or that number of events, at most the targets we want to reach.

It's very hard because, since we have very few obligations of law and regulations, we need a very strong structure, as was created in the Region upon receiving the mandate and political orientation. The communication strategy and social media policy were approved by the council, with a decision. There were passages that, at the institutional level, recognized us as a subject that could implement the strategy. Since we are bound by expense reporting, as takes place for all the programme's budgeting, we naturally apply clear constraints. But what's missing, and we say it in Brussels and at all meetings, is this supply chain, this sharing of instruments. The latest proposal we made, at the national event in Salerno, was that of borrowing the assessment instrument. Agenzia per la Coesione, at a national level, does a survey, which is the one we talked about earlier in the focus group, in 2013. We talked about it with the professor at the last meeting: do that analysis, we accept it as good, going on the percentages. But if I measure the questionnaires done in Calabria, it's a trivial number. The regional analysis no longer makes any sense because you didn't do a sampling suited to that type of territory. 100 questionnaires [are not enough]. As the Region of Calabria, we proposed that Agenzia per la Coesione territoriale (agency for territorial cohesion) borrow a single model and then tell the Regions: "implement it, do the surveys on your own."

3. The communication mix: channels, targets, messages

3.1 The communication matrix

The communication plans are quite detailed, regarding channels to be used to communicate both ERDF and ESF. The following matrix is produced based on those documents.

- 3 means that a target is planned to be reached through a channel in a recurring combination

- 2 means that a target is planned to be reached through a channel in a likely combination
- 1 means that a target is planned to be reached through a channel in a might happen combination
- 0 means that a target is planned to be reached through a channel in a unlikely combination

Table 1 - Communication matrix: channels and targets (planned)

		Editorial publications	Website CalabriaEuropa	Newsletter	Communication Campaign	Events	Multimedia products	Television & Radio	Permanent Stand Spazio Europa	Plates	Gadgets
Potential & Actual beneficiaries	Youth	0	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1
	Enterprises	1	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1
	Universities & Research Centers	2	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	2	1
	Government agencies (national and local)	2	2	3	1	3	2	1	3	2	2
Journalists		1	3	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	1
Citizens		1	3	1	2	0	1	2	1	2	2

Yet, things did not go as planned. In example, the Website Calabria Europa was finally launched in 2016. It is a major improvement in the current programming period, but was not used at all in the previous one. As we pointed out, several barriers had an impact on the effectiveness of communication: the impression is that a general coordination was actually missing, so that the selection of targets and channels was left to Fincalabra and each beneficiary. We can have an hint on what they did based on the focus group.

The channels that we set up in these years [2010-2013] are more or less the ones that have been systemised: media, print, radio, television and web. We started to use the web, even toll-free numbers which could seem obvious. We had specially devoted toll-free numbers that had to satisfy the benefitting parties' requests.

It emerged that the most used tools were TV and web, and in fact in the 14-20 we continued to use these means which Fincalabra had used very well in promoting the calls for tenders to which [other interviewee] was referring before

The print had a major role, with a specific team devoted to creating contents for the print.

The channels were mainly the press, which was then done through the intermediation of hired professionals, and therefore a team [...] They acted each for their own specific area, enrolled through collaboration agreements. There was a function in the graphics area. There had to be an account function, a copy function; there was a complex structure. The Region had professional

figures in hand, that worked hard on the local territory to find themselves all together in a single agency. Use, then, was difficult because this team had on the one hand to attach itself to the Region's bureaucratic machine. On the other, [it had to attach itself] to this vision of institutional communication, which in the end often fell to aspects of extremely prevalent orientations, rather than to the technical aspect of implementing the best communication possibility. The press guaranteed an immediate return of image for each call for bids – a situation immediately effective for a political orientation. Then there was the creation of events, along with the surveillance committees, or with the yearly event, which to a certain degree sought to act upon young people, schools and the new possibility for spreading a European awareness, which was one of the missions of that communication plan. But it was done in an unsystematic way, immediately burning the small effects that this communication gathered on the immediate. At heart, this strategy served to provide those criteria of newsworthiness that could be picked up by the press. I don't know if I can define it as a missed opportunity, or a realized one. It's clear that from a standpoint of the administration, this may be a step forward.

The printed word and radio and television broadcasters. To be quite clear: there's also another need. We know that the information bodies are struggling to survive, because the advertising channels are gone and public funding has diminished considerably... [...] There were three communication campaigns. Advertising campaigns with 6 for 3... It was reported as a promotional and advertising campaign in the newspapers, but unfortunately it had no strategy, that was supposed to be there, as regards accompanying press campaigns with campaigns advertising and promoting certain interventions. Some interventions were supposed to serve to launch the idea, and others to launch the more in-depth examination, in order to provide the possibility of having a more in-depth examination. There was no planning of this kind, but a planning of the kind that said "let's try to allow all the press bodies we have on the local territory to survive." So this financing trap also fell on what was the communication organization.

Internet, substantially, did not have any role, whereas is very important in the current programming period.

[Today the most important channel is] the portal. We have impressive numbers. Unique accesses in fact, because if we go to page views, we have millions.[...] We have 230,000 unique accesses, but it's not an updated figure – it's from two weeks ago. 2,000,000 page views in six months.

It was a bit hard to impose a new use of Social media, that were not used at all in the previous programming period.

On the social instruments, which followed, we pay a discount. In the meantime, when we came here and said we wanted to do POR's social media channels, we had ... At first, they said no to everything [...] The first thing we were told was no, we can't do it. "But if we open the social media? Noooooo! Social media are fraught with danger. If we open the social media, and they make a negative comment?" So, we'll deal with the negative comment. There are social media policies for all this.

The importance of the web is apparent now, to the extent that a Social Media Policy was approved by the regional council in order to better exploit this channel.

3.2 Urban/rural divide

The difference between urban and rural areas is not an issue in Calabria. Indeed, it can be framed in the wider problem of a communication that is way too much dependent on the single beneficiary, regardless, the fact that he or she is in a urban or rural area. Yet there is a clear perception that policies funded by EU can have a great impact on internal areas.

Policies have been implemented for the internal areas as well as territorial policies with an integrated planning for local development that in the end have led to infrastructural interventions, on the entire regional territory, out of 398 municipalities, financed through the programme and this has probably created greater awareness. Let's consider a small town of 500 inhabitants in the mountains, the impact of that territory makes you understand that there's a higher body that isn't only the Region, there's also the European Commission, that invests in that territory, and maybe this has contributed to make the perception of the CP increase in terms of communication even in these areas. A survey commissioned by the Department for Territorial Cohesion highlighted that Calabria was among the southern regions and among the national ones that most informed on the CP and its effects on the territory. I also talked with who carried out this survey, and often the perception was driven by the work realised in small municipalities, so also in this case, in terms of communication, the infrastructure can become a means for communicating a more important message which is the one connected to the Commission's policy in its whole and cohesion.

I don't have an answer ready because it's a consideration that I've never made, this isn't an answer either. Let's say that in general there's a communication activity that we haven't centralised or obliged if not within the terms of community obligations, in the sense that you have to have the plate, carry out the right communication, put the logo on the leaflet, and so on. It's not centralised but left a bit to the sensitivity of the single individuals [...] But I can't give a specific answer on how it's been different, because we've never made this consideration.

3.3 Open data and transparency

The role of transparency is very important for Calabria, and several efforts have been put in place to ensure an actual and perceived transparency.

Communication for me doesn't mean only to communicate, in the end communication involves processes related to transparency, participation, social control. If communication follows these processes from the beginning, it is capable of showing you the administrative machine because this is a defect of the PA in Italy [...] the fact of communicating that Regione Calabria is made of men and women that are at work, that have a name and surname, that are easy to reach through a telephone number and e-mail, but that can also help

Calabria has a general problem of trust, that can be overcome through the means of communication

Something else we're working on is to narrate the process that's behind things. There's a general problem of trust, it's necessary to break [...] There's a problem here of perception that in the whole is negative, and this also affects what you do. You have this kind of perception because you come from this type of story, [...] you introduce an innovation and break through, but let's think of these platforms. The fact that in Calabria, it's not a novelty in the world that in 2014 you create a platform of calls for tenders online, it's not that it's something ..., but for a region like this it's important. It's important due to its efficiency, modalities, relationships, a whole series of things ..., it's clear that you bypass a series of interests. You very much depersonalise a process so [...] Now the criticism is: why does the region do a ...it's clear, it's automatic. It all goes in automatic and probably part of the criticisms will also be connected to ...to other views, I don't know how else to explain. So I think that also the communication process is important from this point of view. The pre-information of the calls for tenders, I mean the fact that calls for tenders at a certain point are put online and whoever can stand up, you don't go to any tables for discussion, whoever can stand up and talk about the calls for tenders and the calls are there a month before launching the competition, so to say, and being published, this increases the amount of benefitting parties, it gives the possibility also to those who are less structured to equip themselves, to prepare, I think widening the participation. This aspect is important for the administration's aims.

Transparency is so important that now the agenda of the main executives is published on the website

But I want to say, now we have to restart with the same strength, all that has been done in the Department has been communicated, the Department's agenda is on the website, if you want to know where I am tomorrow, if I have any institutional appointments, where I am all you have to do ... The two things can't be separated, also because communication helps implementation, it's a fundamental piece of the implementation process.

Transparency entails the use of a simpler language, as well:

There are a few things – even elementary ones. I've always said: why don't we do an abstract on the titling of documents, so the citizen can know? I've always said you have to speak of public administration [...] like you speak of making love. Now I don't think you make love with a woman, with a partner, saying "assume this position pursuant to measure 3.4 of the Kamasutra and so on... come on!"

4. Storytelling: communicate through numbers or data?

LMAs in charge of communication are aware of the role and importance of storytelling. Yet they point out firstly the importance of numbers and figures to ensure a clear and effective communication regarding results:

[figures] are important in particular for transparency, also all the monitoring data end up on the OpenCoesione portal, so there's a general view of the implementation of the programme. A debate has been lacking for years, a serious debate in the newspapers, with figures, within ... universities, on cohesion policies, nothing has been said for so long. When I think about it, I started working in 2003, 2004, and that's all you'd hear about ... vision policies, lines of reasoning... it has decreased over the years, so it's necessary to fuel it up again: fuel it with important basic figures, making assessments though ... [...] the decider has difficulty in making assessments and using them in policy choices, that have to fuel debates, discussions on these policies. So it's necessary to go back to talking a bit about Cohesion Policies, I think this is the point. In the whole, it's talked about little. Because it's not only what you narrate, it's also the debate that's created and settled.

Then storytelling is useful to humanize numbers and figures

Let's say that they're two different aspects but equally important. It's obvious that it's fundamental to give account to what the programme has realised in terms of figures, then...as to the human aspects

It's the storytelling phase, it's the need to make figures human ... to narrate what's behind those figures ... an administration that works, an administration that is engaged ...

Certainly the humanisation of the result amplifies the effectiveness of communication. [...] My experience not in general policies but very limited to aid policies is that when we gave aids for innovation services we provided figures, but we also carried out activities for making information widespread towards the benefitting parties

This is important because to rebuild a sense of trust on these tools doesn't just defend the tool, but brings the tool closer to who has ideas, projects ... but they often say ... I'll never make it, nobody considers me, if I don't know anybody I won't make it ... Instead if you start saying, the funds are for all, there's the platform, transparency...this is what you fuel and you favour participation. For this reason it's important to work on the details ... I mean..

It's fundamental to narrate the final result, to have the true protagonists narrate it, as they did in part with that experience of CalabriaInnova. That's why... the strategy is devoted to this narration because the whole chain and the whole process become more credible.

And yet, it is important to select what you narrate. Because overemphasizing results can be counterproductive:

My personal opinion was that, to the extent possible, of trying to tell stories. But under one condition, and that is that one have a story to tell. If not, it becomes pure invention. I'd dare to say the "public," but I'll say the citizen. Because if it's pure invention, the citizen – the aware citizen – realizes it.

More than on the different rhetorical strategies, it is important to focus on what to communicate. The existence of funds is important to communicate, but it must not be the final aim of communication.

While politicians earlier rode the concept of Europe to raise their standing, it appears clearer today that more support is won by doing exactly the opposite: burying the concept of Europe. This is why doing communication in a European setting today has become quite difficult, and it can't be done with the numbers any longer. This why it becomes important to tell stories. But the problem is where do we gather this story? The problem isn't only illustrating the best practice done with EU funds because[...] there must also be another communication that must be the same or the opposite: those who have abused and wasted it. Communicating the penalty aspect is also useful for communicating an orientation. It is necessary to communicate the European resources for investment in the local territory, not for spending. But this is true in all administrations, and not only for the Calabria Region [...] in offices, the term that recurs most is "spending." Reaching the spending target. And this has in fact created a communications short circuit, which has become absolutely deleterious for the construction of the European image, and for what was supposed to be the proper use of structural funds. The objective was no longer the intervention, but getting financing. And if there's a misunderstanding between the intervention and collecting the expenditure, the phenomenon of corruption increases on its own, because it is only natural for it to do so. And clearly, in the end, with this type of use of the European idea, it's the very idea of Europe that will vanish over time, and that's what's happening [...] Here, we have to be able to pick up and evoke the difference between development and progress [...] Because this is always the point. Even in the documentation of the communication of European financing, the prevailing word is "development" and not "progress." And therefore, development of an economic order is nowhere necessarily translated into the territory's social, economic, and civil progress.

Chapter III: Conclusions

The overall feeling regarding the communication of ESF and ERDF, during the focus group, was that Calabria came from an unsatisfactory experience, during the previous programming period. Thus several actions were put in place in the new programming period in order to ensure a better, more targeted and more effective communications. Clearly, the fact that a political change had occurred, at the level of the regional council and at the level of the president of the Region, may overemphasize the need of change. At the same time, several of the participant to the focus group were already involved in managing these funds and their communication in the previous period, so that we can imagine that their words are not misleading and that a need for change was apparent. Several effort were thus put in place to improve communication:

for the first time Regione Calabria, this year, with this programme, activated a type of integrated and synergic communication with the partnership. We called all the subjects involved, in the specific case category associations as they were the holders of interest of the benefitting parties' target in which we were interested, that is the SMEs, and we involved them in all the communication phases. From the choice of the claim, to the activation on their web channels of the information we sent them, a single communication, also at visual level, involvement in organising events. We carried all this out for the first time, and we really believe in all this and we're working [...] Communication can't be entrusted to a single subject, be it the benefitting party or the Region, each subject has to do what it's called to do taking the responsibility of the functions it's carrying out in that moment [...] we're trying to change this approach, because it's obvious that here in Calabria we have a type of print, it's useless to hide the issue because it's so evident, a print that prefers to give information on funds lost, or on the investigation carried out at the public prosecutor's office or some other investigation instead of giving voice for example to ... the extremely innovative project of Calabrialnnova that has helped lots of start ups.

I believe that the most innovative strength of the communication of the 14-20 is the work group model that has been structured. I mean, we have a group in which we have social media managers, journalists, video makers, we tried to create a structure that somehow would lead the implementation of the written strategy and help us translate the intended direction.

The new website CalabriaEuropa, that was launched in April 2016, had a great impact: in six months it had almost two million of page views, 230.922 unique visitors, 489.060 visitors. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Slideshare channels were created. Three big campaigns were performed, 19 events with 3.500 participants, 121 press releases and several dedicated events were performed, together with a questionnaire to grasp data. A clear new strategy in place. Moreover, data are collected in order to communicate with them and with powerful stories.

we also have a diachronic process of information on which I can't assure the faithfulness of the datum, in the sense that they aren't ISTAT data, they're things asked to the benefitting parties and collected. Then we also developed assessment models with specific indicators, also with a final summary datum, because on the aspect of cultural events even the Commission was very critical ... we were talking about the ERDF investment on cultural events, intangible activities ... actually we asked ourselves the following question: where does the money we use end up? Do we invest it or throw it away? [...] so hold on: the result, let's say the return, of the public investment in culture, after assessing direct effects, indirect effects and induced effects, adopting a quite well known methodology, is 1 to 4. So every public Euro invested in culture returns 4 times. But this datum of ours isn't far from the scientific studies [...] We verified it without a certified datum, let's say.

In this historical moment, the importance of communication is extremely high for the European project.

Communication is a wager, a hope, I don't know. That of the European Community is perhaps the only possibility for allowing Europe to go on surviving, because we have a communication to the contrary, which today is absolutely difficult to fight against. Because unfortunately, we have been unable to make the message believable. We have worked with many captivating languages, but I say that communication must be believable because it must be true. We have to say ... we don't have to find the way to say falsehoods, but to say the truth the right way, and that is by explaining a truth using techniques of good communication, rather than propagandizing a falsehood. Otherwise, the result you create from the administrative standpoint is that of creating more distance and more disappointment with regard to citizens and those who increasingly take you... More and more distrust accumulates [...] Perhaps it's communication that can bring good administrators together with citizens who wish to grow, and this perhaps means building Europe.