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**PERCEIVE**

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

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

### **PERCEIVE**

GA nr. 693529

#### **D 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'**

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## **1. Introduction**

This document is a comparative synthesis of the reports on regional case studies written by PERCEIVE's partners. Each report is based both on an original data collection and on the analysis of the focus group's section that addresses communication issues. Each partner collected national and/or regional communication plans, which were mostly used for the first chapter of this report: "Communication strategy at different levels and LMAs' organization."

Focus group were realized within Perceive's Work Package 1. Part of the data collected in the focus groups have been already analysed in tasks 1.1 and 1.2, and presented in deliverable 1.1. Another part of data collected in the focus groups regards communication issues. This data collection was the ground for the second chapter of this report: "Focus groups and in depth interviews." In particular, the partners of the PERCEIVE consortium realized the focus groups with practitioners of Cohesion Policy programmes between February and March 2017. Table 1 presents a description of the focus groups. Within the semi-structured questionnaire, a chapter was developed by UNIBO and WU to address communication issues: it is presented as appendix 1. The other parts of the focus group are analysed within Work Packages 1 and 4. The focus groups were moderated by members of the PERCEIVE partners' research units. The only exception being Italy's case-studies, where the moderator was a journalist with expertise in Cohesion Policy, under instruction and assistance of the researchers of the UNIBO team. The focus groups lasted between 3 and 5 hours. To allow for a deeper level of analysis and to collect feedback, a one-week follow-up phase was available to participants for providing an additional written contribution. In compliance with the Horizon2020 policy, the transcripts of each focus group, translated in English language, are stored in the PERCEIVE repository and available for open access.

**Table 1 - Summary information of the focus groups in the selected case-study regions**

<b>Partner</b>	<b>Case-study region</b>	<b>Date of the focus group</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Additional interviewees</b>
WU	Burgenland	-	-	12
UNIBO	Calabria	2017-02-16	8	2
UNIBO	Emilia-Romagna	2017-02-24	10	4
IAFE-NRI	Dolnośląskie	2017-03-21	8	
IAFE-NRI	Warmińsko-mazurskie	2017-03-10	7	
IEA	Sud Est	2017-02-21	13	2 <sup>1</sup>
UB	Extremadura	2017-03-28	18	
UGOT	Norra Mellansverige	2017-03-17	5	1
PBS	Essex	2017-02-13	8	3

<sup>1</sup> At the level of Sud Est region, 2 in-depth interviews were conducted on 5/5/2017 with: i) 4 SE RDA representatives involved in the coordination of operational programmes and communication activities (for collecting missing info for point 1.3 - Communication within SE RDA); and ii) the representatives of 3 beneficiaries of programmes managed by SE RDA (for collecting missing info for point 1.4 - Communication within beneficiaries projects).

## 2. Strategy and organization of communication

### 2.1 Key messages & objectives

The analysis of the reports brings to light a number of issues that illustrate how regions and nations outline the objectives of communication plans. A key issue is the level of articulation of objectives. Some regions put forward only general objectives whereas other regions report both strategic goals and more specific, operational, objectives. A second consideration concerns the homogeneity of strategic objectives. The analysed communication plans tend to converge in defining their general objectives. Finally, operational goals seem to carry out different, and complementary, functions in articulating and clarifying strategic aims.

In table 2, we report the articulation of objectives as reported in the communication plans analysed. In reading the table, a caveat is necessary. In some regions, the articulation of objectives emphasises the national/regional dimension whereas in other regions the objectives are presented along the strategic/operational dimension.

#### 2.1.1 Strategic objectives

As for the content of the strategic objectives, we report a number of themes that seem at the core of communication plans. More specifically, three are the recurring themes:

1. Awareness of programmes.
2. Awareness of the role of EU.
3. Transparency.

A first recurring theme is the visibility of the opportunity offered within the operational programmes (**Awareness of programmes**). The issue of visibility speaks to the need of enhancing the absorption rate of structural funds. By increasing visibility, regions aim at expanding audience, applicants and, hence, potential beneficiaries.

In a different but connected perspective, the issue of visibility recurs as a second theme. Namely, visibility is associated with the objective of eliciting the nexus between the funding opportunities provided within operational programmes and the economic and social development of regions. This theme often expands into a richer discourse when it refers to the role and identity of European Union (**Awareness of the role of EU**). In this respect, the issue of visibility pertains to the need of bringing to light the link between EU regional policies and the socio-economic convergence among European regions.

A remark, however, is necessary to capture the relationship between the first two strategic aims. As explained, the notion of increasing awareness speaks both to the need of increasing absorption rate and of legitimising the role of EU. The extent to which the notion of awareness nurtures the two aims is context-dependent.

For example, in the region of Essex, in UK, the discourse on the role of EU is crucial and our informants, in the focus group, explained that a delicate concern is the predation of the success of cohesion policies by politicians or administrators, and the shifting of the burden of unsuccessful stories to the EU bureaucracy. They reported that "This somewhat shows that even if the communication guidelines are followed - they will not necessarily be effective if there are opposing forces at play" and that "at macro level there's not [a] strategic story

being told about European policy". Given this picture, the communication plan of Essex explicitly lists among the strategic aims to "Raise awareness of the role of the European Union" and to "Publicise support received".

In Sweden, in the region of Norra Mellansverige, in the communication plan it is explicitly mentioned that the principle of "benefits" ought to guide the communication plan. The use of the principle of benefit implies that the communication strategy seeks to demonstrate clearly concrete examples of project results that exemplify success and could lead to increased awareness of EU investments in Sweden.

In Romania, the Sud Est region's communication plan puts among the key messages to be conveyed the idea that "Through the Structural and Cohesion Funds, Romania has the opportunity to develop and get modernized faster". In addition, in the national strategic goals it is explicit the aim to pursue a pedagogical approach to delineate the role of EU. In the programming period 2010-2013, the Romanian national communication plan included among its strategic goal the "constant and correct information of all target groups on: funding opportunities benefiting Romania through the Structural Instruments, the reasons why this process was initiated, objectives and benefits of its implementation".

On the other hand, in Austria, in Burgenland, the communication plan does not mention enhancing the image of the European Union among its objectives as its endorsement is deemed "dependent on political factors".

A third recurring theme is the issue of **transparency**. Communication plans ought to make clear the procedures for fund allocation. The notion of transparency has an oscillating meaning. It may refer to the need to remove inequalities in the access to funding or it may pertain to more technical aspects of the way in which data and information are conveyed. For example, in the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna, the issue of transparency is both articulated as a matter of equal opportunities and it is mentioned in connection to the technical issue of making available open data.

Of course, the themes may be associated in aims that are more general.

The general objective of the region of Dolnośląskie, for example, is to "Inform all of the regional stakeholders". In this case, the idea of 'including stakeholders' seems to speaking to both the aims of enlarging the audience of potential beneficiaries and to guarantee transparency.

### 2.1.2 Operational goals

Communication plans often report specific operational goals that illuminate the direction for attaining the general aims. Operational goals may bring to light specific organizational needs that are not explicit in the general aims.

In Poland, for example, both in the regions of Dolnośląskie and Warmińsko-mazurskie, the idea of partnership and cooperation is particularly important. In the two Polish regions, the communication plans point at "developing and maintaining the principles of partnership and cooperation, especially with social and economic partners and opinion leaders, for maximum use of the EU funds". This notion of cooperation refers to need of coordinating the efforts of the organizations involved in implementation of operation programmes. Such coordination and dialogue is required both within and between organizations. Another specific area often included among the operational goals is the organization and planning of the relationships with media (which is explicitly mentioned in the operational goals in the plans of Extremadura and Warmińsko-mazurskie).

Operational goals may intervene to clarify and articulate general aims.

For example, operational goals suggest mobilizing the information concerning the achievement of beneficiaries both to increase the *Awareness of programmes* and *Awareness of the role of EU*. To advance the *Awareness of the role of EU*, in Extremadura, in Spain, operational goals call for the "Record and evidence that the funds in the co-financed actions originate in the EU" and ask to "Disseminate the achievements and benefits derived from Cohesion Policy".

Operational goals may intervene to assign specific interpretations to the general aims as well. Specific interpretations assigned to general aims may lead to specific articulation of operational goals.

In the case of the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna, for example, the communication plan for the ERDF operational fund reports the strategic aim of "Guarantee transparency regarding funding possibility". Here, the notion of transparency has a connection with the discourse on equal opportunities, which is clearly stated in the operational goal to "Guarantee equal accessibility and information availability for all the potential beneficiaries". In the same region, the discourse on equal opportunity is clearly stated in the communication plan of ESF operation programmes in which the objective of Objective "Equal opportunities and multicultural approach" is reported.

This focus on equal opportunities recurs in the Swedish region of Norra Mellansverige as well, with the emphasis on the principle of 'norm-critical'. The principle calls for the inclusion of all potential target groups irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity, or religion and emphasizes the desirability of sustainable 'green' energy. On similar lines, in Romania, the communication plan of Sud Est region speaks about the need that "The structural instruments are accessible on a non-discriminatory basis and their management is transparent and well-controlled".

## 2.2 Style

In the analysis of communication plans, a number of considerations emerge concerning the style and the core messages conveyed in the plans. More specifically, in creating their plans, regions ground on partially different underlying discourses or highlight specific discursive issues. We focused on three issues:

1. Use of non-bureaucratic language.
2. Attitudes towards figures and numbers.
3. Inclusion of beneficiaries' stories.

A first issue deals with the need to adopt a **non-bureaucratic language**. Here the notion of transparency occurs in connection with the use of a language. More specifically, reports often stress the necessity to use straightforward language and to purge messages from bureaucratic jargon. This necessity impinges on two recurring discourses that surface in the communication with EU. First, simplification of language contributes to weaken the portrait of the European Commission as a lobby of bureaucrats who are detached from the real world. For example, in the communication of Burgenland in Austria, the 'simplifying idea' "materializes in a glossary demystifying the most essential terms of EU jargon while ESF and ERDF are illustrated separately for clarifying purposes". Second, the reduction of bureaucratic jargon is perceived as a mean to achieve the strategic goal of reaching wide awareness. Using unequivocal language aims at both



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democratising the access to operational programmes and reducing the recourse to intermediaries such as consultancy practices.

For example, in Poland, the research team suggests that "Hermetic language makes it harder to write an application on one's own, without the help of consulting company/business advisor". In Calabria, the officers of the LMA stigmatize the language used in the previous programming period as being "traditional" and aimed at meeting "bureaucratic needs". By highlighting the "lack of innovative tools for communication", officers in Calabria add another significant theme. In Romania, researchers report a shift from a bureaucratic and prolix language used in the communication in the programming period 2007-2013 towards the "simple, better targeted" language that characterizes the communication in the programming period 2014-2020.

Another issue that emerges in the commentaries of communication plans is the **attitude towards using numbers and figures**. The use of figures responds to two demands.

A first demand connects with, again, the reduction of the distance between the EU communication, which perceived as unattractive and detached, and the real needs of citizens. For example, in Burgenland, in Austria, making numbers more "visible, tangible and credible" helps to counter the EU jargon. Following this perspective, in Burgenland, the communication plan includes numbers, for example, in the definition of its objectives. The plan points at increasing both the visibility of, and knowledge on, operational programs put in place from 20% to 33% and 10% to 20% respectively.

A second demand refers to the need of citizens to exactly knowing how operational programmes affect their wellbeing. For example, the research team in Essex, in UK, reports that "Specific examples are very, very valuable" but that "it's got to be tangible". Again, the communication in UK focuses on "figures". The necessity of individual focus in the communication is connected with the fact that citizens "want to know how it's impacted on them". On the other hand, the research team working in the Romanian region of Sud Est points out possible drawbacks of working with numbers. Indeed, once interviewed in focus groups, a representative of the local LMA reports: "...I don't think that numbers are very easy to include in stories, because they pertain to the abstract side, to the very technical side". Concluding, the use of numbers and figures seems to facilitate a direct communication of tangible facts but, in the same time, it might render the conveyed message less empathetic.

A third issue concerns the **relationships with beneficiaries**. Beneficiaries are often considered a key lever for communicating operational programmes. The idea here is to show the benefits achieved by those that successfully applied for funding. Promoting beneficiaries' success is germane to attracting more applicants.

In Burgenland, the role of beneficiaries is well depicted by the policy of looking at beneficiaries as "ambassadors". In Sud Est region of Romania as well, the role of beneficiaries is mentioned as a key communication conveyor. Here, the communication plan clarifies that "Communication is bilateral, each beneficiary being both information provider and receiver". In Poland, report from the

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Dolnośląskie region suggests that in some cases the beneficiaries implement integrated campaigns combining several information and promotion activities. In the same vein, the region, in its storytelling, applauds the so called "pearl" that are unique projects that stand out from the rest due to the extraordinary involvement of the persons who applied for funds. However, as specified in the report for Burgenland, the relationship with beneficiaries is undertaken with a view to attract further beneficiaries rather than to promote the projects in the interest of beneficiaries. Of course, the benefit is reciprocal. Beneficiaries do benefit from participation in communication material published by LMAs. On the other hand, the beneficiaries' stories may support a panoply of communication devices. As reported by the research team in Burgenland, this repertoire of devices includes "yearly case study brochures depicting successful projects, a book called "7x7-Success stories Phasing Out" depicting projects throughout the period 2007-2013, or case study-folders on projects under a certain heading, such as those with a public stake, those catered to Research & Development or Art & Artificialities".

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**Table 2 - Goals of communication strategies in the programming period 2007-2013**

Region	National strategic goals	Regional strategic goals	Regional operational objectives
<b>Burgenland (Austria)</b>	-	1) Increasing both visibility of and knowledge of operational projects. 2) Maximizing transparency in the allocation of funds. 3) Increasing the visibility of EU-funded projects.	-
<b>Calabria (Italy)</b>	-	-	1) Create awareness among all the potential beneficiaries of the aims and opportunities offered by the programs. 2) Create awareness regarding how to apply in order to ensure the greatest possible participation in terms of projects submitted. 3) Ensure transparency in the use of Structural Funds. Attract citizens' interest toward the role of EU in development of Calabria region. 4) Create awareness regarding the method of development chosen by Calabria. 5) Coordinate communications of different projects.
<b>Emilia-Romagna (Italy)</b>	-	ERDF 1) Create awareness among citizens regarding the expected benefits of ROP programs and the role of EU in the development of the Region. 2) Guarantee transparency regarding funding possibility	1) Guarantee equal accessibility and information availability for all the potential beneficiaries. 2) Provide information to all beneficiaries. 3) Improve the level of awareness of citizens regarding the role of the EU regarding results and regional development
	-	ESF 1) Transparency, accessibility, impartiality in access to funding. 2) Identity and role of EU in regional policies 3) Objective "Knowledge" 4) Objective "Quality of labour" 5) Objective "Equal opportunities and multicultural approach"	
<b>Dolnośląskie (Poland)</b>	The strategic objective of the information and promotion activities is to support the achievement of the objectives set out in the National Cohesion	Inform all of the regional stakeholders. More specifically, this aim can be further articulated in other objectives: The main objective will be implemented through detailed aims: 1) Ensuring common access to information on the possibility of receiving grants from the Programme	1) Provide universal access to information. 2) Raise the knowledge of beneficiaries and the public about the effects of using the EU funds within the ROP. 3) Inform the society of Dolnośląskie region about the effects of ROP implementation and the impact of the programme on the development of

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	Strategy by encouraging potential beneficiaries to use the European Funds by providing them with the information they need to apply for EU funds, motivating them to carry out their projects properly and raising public awareness of progress in implementation of the National Cohesion Strategy and effects of the use of European Funds in Poland.	2) Raising beneficiaries' and public knowledge on the possibilities and effects of using ERDF in the ROP 3) Informing the Lower Silesian (Dolnośląskie) society on the effects of implementing ROP and its impact on the region's development.	the region. 4) Develop and maintain the principles of partnership and cooperation. 5) Supporting beneficiaries in the process of acquiring funds from ROP. 6) Creating an efficient communication system between the institutions involved in implementation of ROP. 7) Building trust with institutions implementing the ROP by providing them with professional staff and transparency. 8) Ensuring the transparency of procedures related to the disbursement of European funds.
<b>Warmińsko-mazurskie (Poland)</b>	The strategic objective of the information and promotion activities is to support the achievement of the objectives set out in the National Cohesion Strategy by encouraging potential beneficiaries to use the European Funds by providing them with the information they need to apply for EU funds, motivating them to carry out their projects properly and raising public awareness of progress in implementation of the National Cohesion Strategy and effects of the use of European Funds in Poland	1) Provide comprehensive, detailed and transparent information on the possibilities of using funds 2) Increase the knowledge and skills of beneficiaries in terms of making use of this support. More specifically, the main goals shall be implemented by means of the following intermediate objectives: 1) securing common access to information on the possibility of obtaining support within the frameworks of the programme; 2) promoting benefits offered by the European Union funds (good practices) and, as a consequence, the role of the European Union in supporting the development of the region.	1) Promotion of structural funds. 2) Activation of beneficiaries in order to increase the number of co-financed projects to increase absorption. 3) Development of the principle of partnership and cooperation. 4) Building confidence in institutions implementing European funds. 5) Caring for the professional capacity of people directly involved in the implementation of the regional programme; 6) Creating a base for effective cooperation, exchange of experience and dialogue between institutions involved in the implementation of the ROP WiM.
<b>Sud Est (Romania)</b>	1) Recognition of EU contribution to Romania's modernization. 2) Constant and correct information of all target groups.	1) Generating awareness of funding opportunities. 2) Informing the broad public on EU contribution to the balanced development of the regions from Romania, on the contribution to regional development policy implementation	-

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	3) Ensuring transparency.	inclusively.	
<b>Extremadura (Spain)</b>	-	1) Ensure the visibility of the EU and its Cohesion Policy (CP). 2) Optimize financial absorption and efficient use of funds. 3) Ensure transparent and effective management of programming. 4) Raise public awareness of the role played by the EU in the interests of economic, social and territorial cohesion.	1) Record and evidence that the funds in the co-financed actions originate in the EU. 2) Generate and disseminate the necessary information to ensure the best possible use of available funds. 3) Facilitate and strengthen the processes of information, concurrence, competition, participation, cooperation and partnership. 4) Disseminate the achievements and benefits derived from Cohesion Policy.
<b>Norra Mellansverige (Sweden)</b>	1) Support a more effective carrying out of the overall EU structural fund program. 2) Raising awareness of the benefits of EU funds prioritizing target groups.	-	-
<b>Essex (United Kingdom)</b>	1) Raise awareness of the role of the European Union. 2) Communicate the successes of the programme. 3) Promote funding opportunities. 4) Encourage networking and collaboration. 5) Publicise support received.	-	-

### 2.3 Structure, Actors involved & Responsibilities

In analysing how communication of ERDF and ESF programmes is structured at national, regional and beneficiary level for the regional case studies under analysis, we notice a variety of experiences. We highlight three general considerations:

1. Countries vary in terms of their degrees of freedom in organizing and implementing the communication plans.
2. Countries vary in terms of the articulation of organization lines of communication and command among different entities.
3. Regions vary in terms of articulation and enactment of information channels to capture media opinions.

As for the **degree of freedom** of regions, on the one hand, in Italy, regions are completely in charge of their communication plans, so that the experiences of Emilia-Romagna and Calabria result relatively different. On the other hand, in example, a National Communication Plan is carried out in Sweden, where the 8 NUTS2 regions do not have individual communications strategies. Following, we summarize the key considerations that emerge in the analysis of communication plans, table 3 reports and visualises findings.

In Austria a national communication plan was not put in place in the 2007-2013 programming period. Instead, regions were responsible for the elaboration of their communication plans. In Burgenland, which is the only convergence region, the Local Managing Authority (Regionalmanagement Burgenland, RMB) played a central role. General responsibilities included, on the one hand, RMB being directly responsible for the implementation of EU guidelines and directives, and being the main communicator of policy accomplishments to the general public as well as the main information provider to current and prospective beneficiaries. RMB's role in communicating policy accomplishments by the use of concrete projects seems particularly important given the small size of many beneficiary projects, which could not allow for a dedicated communication budget themselves. Beneficiaries are usually required to perform only mandatory communication activities.

In Italy, as anticipated, the regions have a certain degree of freedom in designing their communication strategies. The national level only provides guidelines, so that each region has to create one or more communication plans. In our sample, we report the experiences of Calabria and Emilia-Romagna. In Calabria, during the 2007-2013 period, two divisions were in charge for communication, with an in-house organ, Fincalabria, involved beginning from 2010. Fincalabria, which is completely owned by Regione Calabria, is a society that is involved in the support of SMEs and in the development the region's productive system. In particular, it is involved in fostering the creation and competitiveness of SMEs, and in supporting research and development of existing firms. A vast amount of communication was demanded to single beneficiaries in a fragmented way. As for Emilia-Romagna, the region developed a plan for ERDF and another one for ESF, with clear roles and actors involved. The structures in charge of managing and implementing the plans are coordinated by a single directorate, which fosters the production of synergies. ERDF's communication plan management is quite centralized, with an external communication agency in charge of operative activities. ESF's communication plan is

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implemented both centrally and by single beneficiaries. Indeed, the structure for ESF is more complex: the LMA realizes the higher level communication, then the beneficiaries, which are the accredited bodies that realize education courses for citizens - funded through ESF- are in charge of the "last mile". These accredited bodies are the ones that manage the relationship with the final actual and potential beneficiaries that are enrolled in the courses. The beneficiaries accredited bodies manage the direct communication both with potential beneficiaries (i.e. courses opportunities) and with actual beneficiaries (i.e. what is ESF, at the beginning of the classes). During 2007-13 programming period an attempt was performed, to have a coordinated communication for FSE: the beneficiaries had to use the central communication agency to perform all the communication activities. Yet, the process was too complex, so that now the LMA just provides beneficiary bodies with documents and suggestions.

Concerning our second observation, the **articulation of responsibilities**, in some countries the lines of communication and control are more articulated and unfold at different hierarchical and organizational levels. One of such countries is, for example, Poland. Here, the national level consists of the Minister of Regional Development and a Steering Group. A Communication strategy of European Funds is developed, together with a National Cohesion strategy visual identification. The LMA in Poland is located at the Board of the Voivodship this latter the NUTS2 geographical entity. Precisely, the Marshal Office of the Voivodship is the entity that is responsible for the activities. However, the implementation of communication plan may involve organizational articulations at four levels. At the first level is the LMA, the Marshal Office of the Voivodship. At the second level, are departments in charge, in general, of the regional development and a variety of intermediate bodies that function as cooperating institutions, such as, for example, the budgetary office of the Voivodship or, in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region, the Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management or the Agency for Regional Development. As for the articulation to the third and fourth level, in graph 1 we report the organization of Dolnośląskie region as an example.

As shown, the LMA that developed the Dolnośląskie communication strategy is located at the regional level in the Board of the Voivodship of Dolnośląskie region. At the second level is Department of the Regional Operational Programme of the Marshal's Office of the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship and the Intermediate Body. At the third level is Department of Implementation of the Regional Operational Program, this latter reporting to the Department of the Department of the Regional Operational Programme. Finally, at the fourth level, the Regional Operational Program Implementation Unit reports to the Department of Implementation of the Regional Operational Program. Beneficiaries generally performed mandatory communication activities.

As for Warmińsko-mazurskie, the articulation of responsibilities is reported in graph 2. The ROP Managing Authority represents the regional level. The role of the Coordinator of the Communication Plan was played by the Management Board of the Warmińsko-mazurskie region as the Local Managing Authority of the Regional Programme, which is a first level organizational articulation, and on its behalf the Department of Regional Program Management of the Marshal's Office of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region, this latter a second level entity. At this level, the

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Department of Regional Program Management interact with the Agency for Regional Development and with the Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, both intermediate bodies. A Promotion and Information Office constitutes a third level organizational unit depending on the Department of Regional Program Management. Beneficiaries generally performed mandatory communication activities.

In Spain, as well, the web of interacting organizational units is fairly articulated at the national and regional level (graph 3) and, in general, the organization seems to be less dependent on specific regional choices.

Indeed, in Spain, two of the three bodies responsible for the Communications Plan are located at National level: the General Sub-Directorate of EDFR management and the Managing Unit for ESF, General Directorate of Social Economy. The General Directorate of Regional Finance and European Funds, which belongs to the Counselling of Public Administration and Finance of the regional government (Junta de Extremadura), is the third body. These three bodies constitute the working group GERIP and the network GRECO-AGE, together with the responsible bodies of the rest of the Spanish regions. Beneficiaries are responsible for their respective communication obligations.

In other countries, the chain of communication and command is less articulated involving a national level providing guidelines within which regions produce their plans.

In Romania, Managing Authorities are located at national level, and have the responsibility to develop a Communication Plan for each Operational Programme. The regional development agencies from Romania act as Intermediate Bodies (IBs) for the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) and for the Sectoral Operational Programme Increasing of Economic Competitiveness (SOP IEC) in the period 2013-2015 (graph 4). The communication within beneficiaries' projects is largely directed by the compulsory procedures included in the Visual Identity Manuals.

In Sweden, in the Norra Mellansverige region, a national communication plan is devised by Tillväxtverket, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, and the 8 NUTS2 regions do not have a specific communication plan. Beneficiaries are involved in communication activities as addressee of institutional communication, and they can be an active part in asking for communication, by organizing specific meetings

In UK, in the Essex region, the Managing Authority (LMA) is the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that is responsible for the communication process. Each regional programme in the 2007-13 programming period was responsible for publicity and communications and each programme had its own strategy. Each one managed communication differently.

As for our last notation, the **enactment and articulation of communication flow**, the Burgenland region is an interesting case (graph 5). Particular importance is given to funding agencies (Förderstellen), set to be involved to a larger extent and overtake a number of tasks, especially in the field of communication with beneficiaries (as to what regards compliance with publicity requirements). The communication strategy as such is meant to be adjusted according to opinion polls

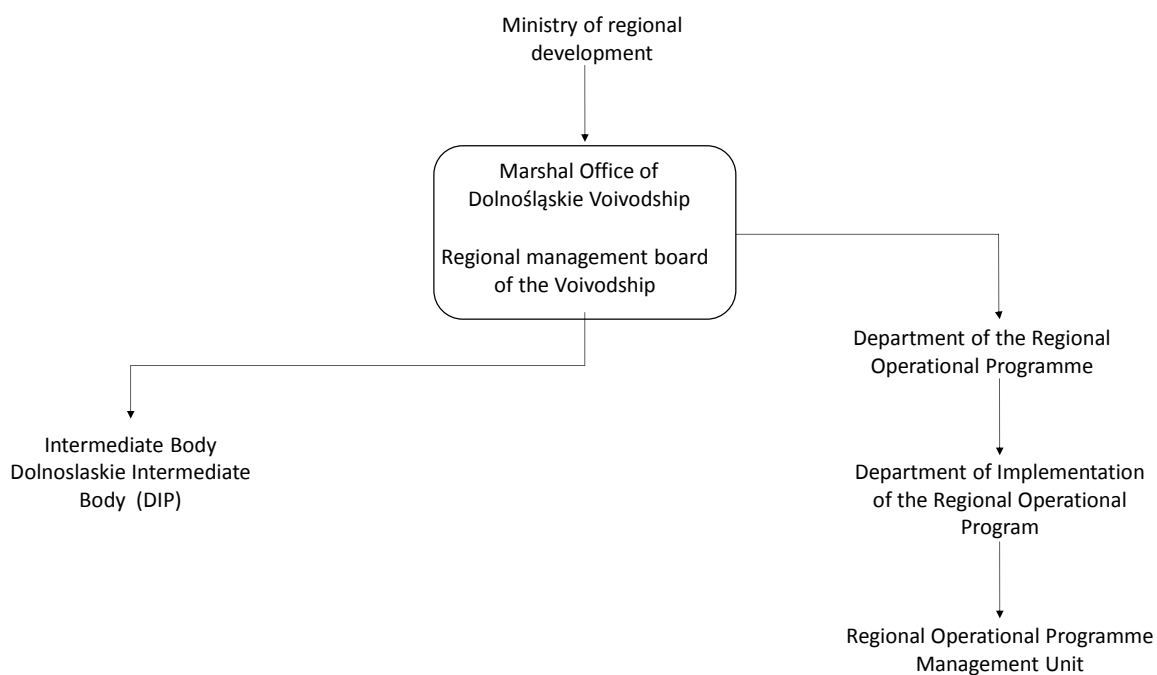


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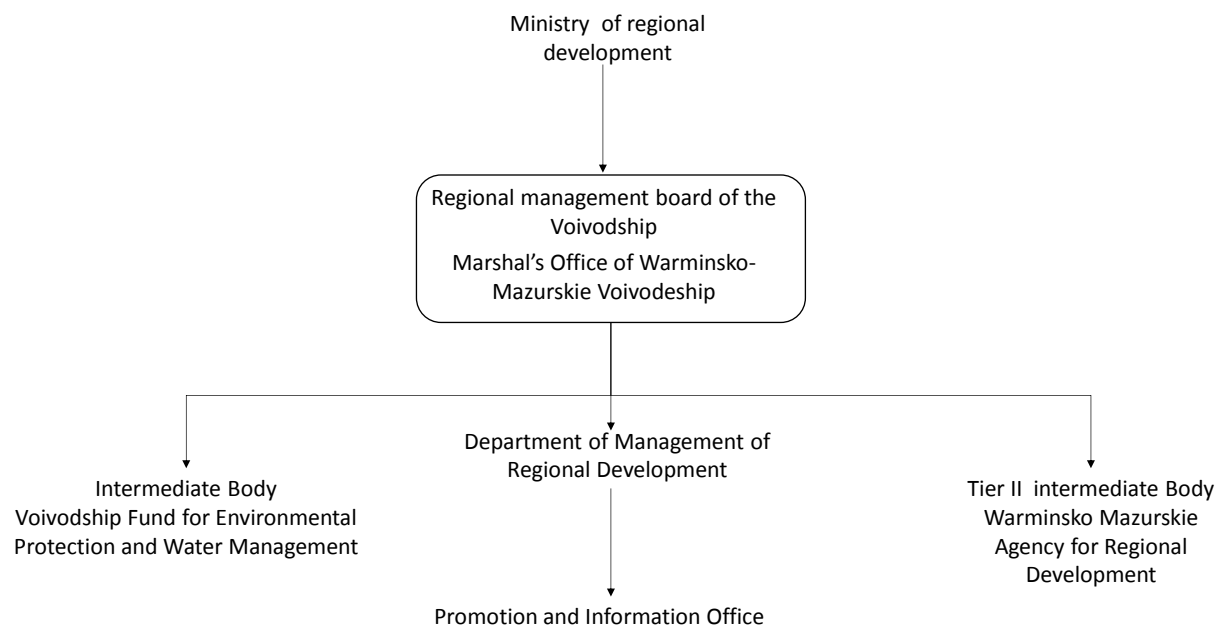
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and media resonance analyses revealing communication gaps, with communication measures specifically designed according to these and their impact monitored periodically.

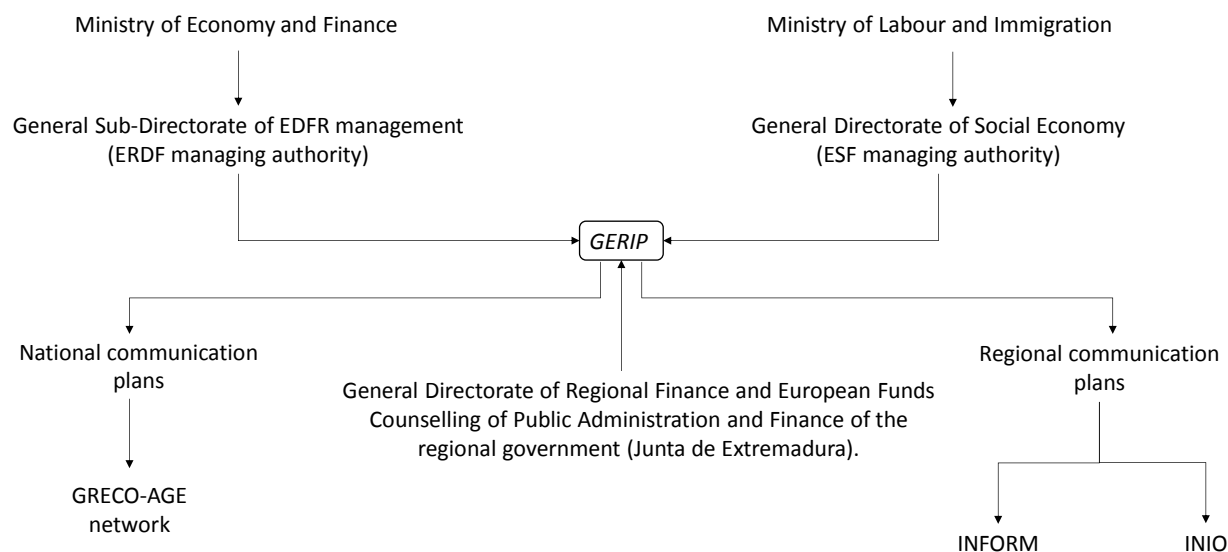
**Graph 1**  
**Articulation of responsibilities in Dolnośląskie**



**Graph 2**  
**Articulation of responsibilities in Warminsko-mazurskie**



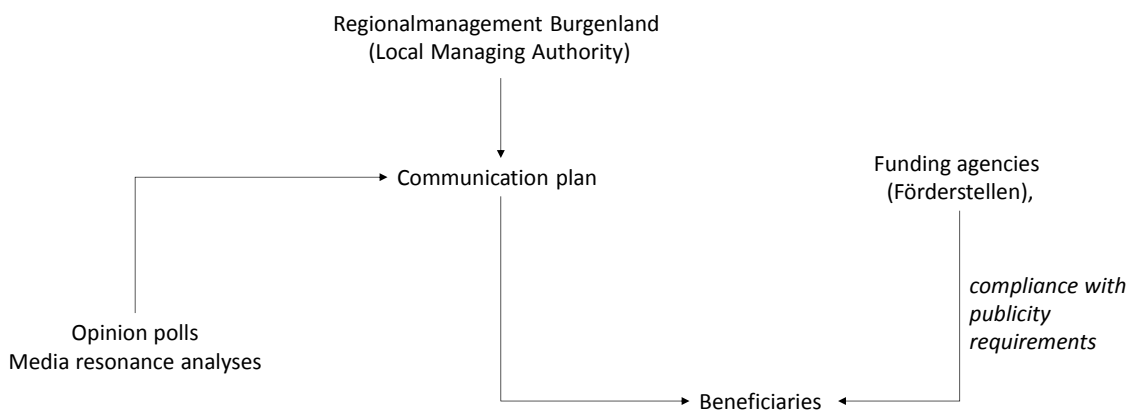
**Graph 3**  
**Articulation of responsibilities in Spain**



**Graph 4**  
**Articulation of responsibilities in Romania**



**Graph 5**  
**Articulation of responsibilities in Burgenland region**



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Table 3 - Communication roles at national, regional and beneficiary level

Region	National Level	Management Authority Level	Beneficiaries Level
<b>Burgenland (Austria)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A national communication strategy was not put in place for the period 2007-2013.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burgenland, as the only convergence region, complied with EU requirements in development of communication strategy.</li> <li>Regionalmanagement Burgenland (abbreviated to RMB in the following) is the LMA in Burgenland.</li> <li>Communication within RMB is organized through the Public Relations department, working closely with RMB's departments. Namely, the 'EU-Managing Authority' and the 'Monitoring and Evaluation' departments. The three departments cooperate with no hierarchical structure. Yet, in order to carry out PR cooperatively, Public Relations Department receives key figures and strategic targets from the other two departments</li> <li>Various social partners are involved in the communication process: non-governmental organizations, trade associations, Europe-information centres (e.g. EuropeDirect), representatives of the Commission and education institutions.</li> <li>The involvement of beneficiaries is presented in press conferences taking place at the beneficiaries' locations. The inclusion of regional politicians is expected to act as additional incentive for the media to attend press events. Co-operation is targeted towards regional media in order to create an extensive range of information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication with (prospective) beneficiaries takes place as follows: RMB as the local LMA is responsible for the initial contact with potential beneficiaries by means of acquainting them with the funding possibilities, responding to enquiries and getting them to the respective funding agency. A feedback-loop between beneficiaries and RMB is not provided.</li> <li>Communication work undertaken by beneficiaries are largely dependent on the project size: with the largest part of projects funded being of a rather small size, their sole disclosure very often lies in the mere compliance with publicity requirements. Larger-scale projects undertake their own communication activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Calabria (Italy)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Agenzia per la coesione Territoriale</i> was created with a decree on August 2013 to sustain and promote projects for regional development and cohesion according to effectiveness and efficiency criteria.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During 2007-2013 two divisions were in charge of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Dipartimento Programmazione Nazionale e Comunitaria</i> for ERDF</li> <li><i>Dipartimento Lavoro, Politiche della Famiglia, Formazione Professionale, Cooperazione e</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No specific rules for beneficiaries, except for mandatory communication requested by EU.</li> <li>Fragmented communication, demanded to single benefitting parties, not integrated, discontinuous, and not harmonised.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The role of the national level, before and after the creation of Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale was providing LMAs and beneficiaries with guidelines.</li> <li>No actual communication activities on funded projects were performed by the national level.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Volontariato</i> for ESF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actual communication activities were developed by the areas "Communication with Media" and "Integrated Communication, events and horizontal strategic projects"</li> </ul> <p>Then, starting from 2010, Fincalabra, the in house organ for project implementation, took on a role in communication as well, by planning and realizing communication activities mostly through television and radio.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ESF and ERDF had two specific communication plans.</li> </ul>	
<b>Emilia-Romagna (Italy)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>The role of the national level, before and after the creation of Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale was providing LMAs and beneficiaries with guidelines.</li> <li>No actual communication activities on funded projects were performed by the national level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two different divisions in charge for ERDF and ESF communication: each program has a single communication plan, which is managed independently. Nonetheless, integration is carried out when possible.</li> <li>Both the plans are very detailed in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>Role of internal communication, as a way to bolster external one.</li> <li>The role of the partnership with beneficiaries to enhance external communication.</li> <li>The role of external institution that play the role of communication partner.</li> <li>Communication of ERDF is centralized, whereas ESF relies on an external agency.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During 2007-2013, ESF communication department, within Emilia-Romagna, started a pilot project in order to coordinate the whole communication of ESF funded project. In particular, all the beneficiaries had to communicate through a communication agency provided by Regione Emilia Romagna Yet, coordination costs were higher than benefits, so now Regione Emilia Romagna provides partners with logos, tools and guidelines only.</li> </ul>
<b>Dolnośląskie (Poland)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Minister of Regional Development issued in 2016 guidelines for information and promotion to ensure uniformity in conducting information and promotion activities related to European funds. Communication Strategy of European Funds in Poland within the framework of the National Cohesion Strategy 2007-2013 was developed consequently (National Strategic Reference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The regional level is represented by the ROP Managing Authority that is the Board of the Voivodship of Dolnośląskie. This developed the Dolnośląskie communication strategy.</li> <li>Communication activity involves efficient communication between EU, the National level and the regional level, represented by Coordinating Authority for Regional Operational Programmes, Dolnośląskie Voivodship Board, and Dolnośląskie Intermediate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the beneficiaries' level the implementation of information activities was generally limited to the required information on plaques/badges and information stickers, prepared in line with the regional, national and EC guidelines in this area. There were also some projects that extended this minimum range of information and undertaken additional activities such as press-sponsored articles, radio broadcasts,</li> </ul>

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	<p>Framework).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Steering Group for Information and Promotion was established in order to ensure proper implementation of communication activities at the national level in accordance with the guidelines. The meetings of the Steering Group were attended by the representatives of the ROP Management Department at the LMA in accordance with the principles set out in the regulations of the Steering Group.</li> <li>The National Cohesion Strategy Visual Identification Book provides common visual identification</li> <li>The guidelines developed by the Minister laid down the basic principles for coordination and information and promotion activities, the way they were to be developed and the scope of the Communication Strategies for European Funds 2007-2013, Communication Plans and Annual Plans for Information and Promotion Activities. These also identified the main directions of the activities undertaken, as well as set out the rules for reporting and evaluating these activities. The documents are available online.</li> </ul>	<p>Body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within the ROP MA, the unit responsible for coordination and implementation of information and promotion activities was the Regional Operational Programme Management Unit in the Department of the Regional Operational Programme of the Marshal's Office of the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship. This unit cooperated with the Regional Operational Program Implementation Unit and the Dolnośląskie Intermediate Body in line with the competence range of these units.</li> <li>The Regional Policy Department in the Regional Development Department within the Marshal's Office was responsible for coordination of communication activities in the field of structural funds and the Cohesion Fund and the Rural Development Programme, Human Capital Operational Program and European Territorial Cooperation.</li> </ul>	<p>leaflets/brochures, events (conferences, meetings, "opening of investments", etc.), TV spots/websites or educational activities. The project with additional information and promotion activities were generally the large-scale projects.</p>
<b>Warmińsko-mazurskie (Poland)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2016, the Minister of Regional Development issued guidelines in the field of information and promotion to ensure uniformity in conducting information and promotion activities related to European funds. Communication Strategy of European Funds in Poland within the framework of the National Cohesion Strategy 2007-2013 was developed consequently (National Strategic Reference Framework).</li> <li>Moreover, a Steering Group for Information and Promotion was established in order to ensure proper implementation of communication activities at the national level in accordance with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The regional level is represented by the ROP Managing Authority that is the Board of the Voivodship of Warmińsko-Mazurskie.</li> <li>The Communication Plan was implemented by all institutions involved in the implementation of the Regional Operational Program Warmia and Mazury 2007-2013, based on the principles of partnership and cooperation. The role of the Coordinator of the Communication Plan was conducted by the warmińsko-mazurskie region as the Managing Authority of the Regional Programme, and on its behalf the Department of Regional Program Management of the Marshal's Office of the Warmińsko-mazurskie region, the Intermediate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All entities implementing the programme were obliged to use a coherent graphical system for European Funds in the 2007-2013 financial perspective, which was visually and structurally aligned so to build a recognizable and coherent architecture, ordering the content of the message. The rules for applying the visual system were set out in the National Identification of Visual Cohesion Policy Book.</li> <li>Moreover, they were provided with messages to adopt in communication actions in order to increase the number of potential beneficiaries and the chances of improving economic and social competitiveness of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region. The main</li> </ul>

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	<p>the guidelines. The meetings of the Steering Group were attended by the representatives of the ROP Management Department at the ROP MA in accordance with the principles set out in the regulations of the Steering Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Cohesion Strategy Visual Identification Book provides common visual identification.</li> <li>• The guidelines developed by the Minister laid down the basic principles for coordination and information and promotion activities, the way they were to be developed and the scope of the Communication Strategies for European Funds 2007-2013, Communication Plans and Annual Plans for Information and Promotion Activities. They also identified the main directions of the activities undertaken, as well as set out the rules for reporting and evaluating these activities. The documents are available online.</li> </ul>	<p>Body and the Secondary Intermediate Body.</p>	<p>message was: "Thanks to the European Funds funding available under the Regional Operational Program Warmia and Mazury for 2007-2013, Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship has a great chance to improve its economic and social competitiveness". Other messages, such as "European funds are also for you!", and "European funds are a means to raise the standard of living for all inhabitants of Warmia and Mazury" pointed at the widespread availability of aid from the EU and at the ability to fund a wide range of activities.</p>
<b>Sud Est (Romania)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2007 - 13 was the first multiannual programming framework after Romania's accession to the EU. Romania opted for a National Communication Strategy, unique for all the Structural Instruments. The Management Authorities are located at national level and have the responsibility of elaboration and management of Communication Plans for each Operational Programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The regional development agencies from Romania act as Intermediate Bodies (IBs) for the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) and for the Sectoral Operational Programme Increasing of Economic Competitiveness (SOP IEC) in the period 2013-2015. The national MA delegated some of their information and publicity responsibilities to regional IBs.</li> <li>• Sud Est Regional Development Agency (SE RDA), as an IB, performs communication, information and publicity activities in the Sud Est region for the operational programmes ROP and SOP IEC (after 2013).</li> <li>• The Communication Service of SE RDA has the role of information supplier, the main beneficiaries being the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the representatives of the projects Monitoring and Verification Service who are informed on the novelties /</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The communication within beneficiaries' projects is largely directed by the compulsory procedures included in the Visual Identity Manuals of the operational programmes by which the projects are funded. Communication varies according to the kind of beneficiary: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Public administration: the communication is formalized, being performed in accordance with the requirements of the communication procedures specific to programmes</li> <li>2. Private company: communication tend to go beyond mandatory procedures</li> <li>3. Private consultancy company: the consultancy companies play a key role in the projects implemented at regional level, from support to beneficiaries in writing project proposals to the management of their implementation, also including the project communication</li> </ol> </li> </ul>



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		<p>modifications that have appeared in the visual identity manual.</p> <p>2. Helpdesk officers (6 offices distributed throughout the region)</p> <p>3. Regional network of Regio communicators affiliated to SE RDA (composed of 100 persons, in general representatives of public institutions - with whom the RDA collaborates throughout the region) that facilitate the communication and information process by animating the territory of the region.</p>	activities
<b>Extremadura (Spain)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two of the three bodies responsible for the application of the communication plan are located at the national level:</li> <li>The ERDF managing authority, represented by the General Sub-Directorate of EDFR management, which belongs to the Ministry of Economy and Finance;</li> <li>The ESF managing authority, represented by the Managing Unit for ESF, General Directorate of Social Economy, which belongs to the Ministry of Labour and Immigration;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The third body responsible for the application of the communication plan is the regional intermediate body responsible for ERDF and ESF operational programs, represented by the General Directorate of Regional Finance and European Funds, which belongs to the Counselling of Public Administration and Finance of the regional government (Junta de Extremadura).</li> <li>The three bodies are part of a working group (GERIP), which include the responsible bodies of the rest of the Spanish regions.</li> <li>In addition, the managing authority establishes the GRECO-AGE network, a group composed by the managers responsible for communication issues within the Federal Spanish Administration. These networks are integrated within the European networks INFORM (that for ERDF) and INIO (that for ESF).</li> <li>The Communication Plan allocates funds within the Technical Assistance dimension of the Operational Programs of Extremadura</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beneficiaries are responsible for their respective communication obligations.</li> </ul>
<b>Norra Mellansverige (Sweden)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket), a government agency under the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, composes a national communication plan. Tillväxtverket is the main actor, along with Jordbruksverket (agriculture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Sweden, the 8 NUTS 2 regions (Övre Norrland, Mellersta Norrland, Norra Mellansverige, Östra Mellansverige, Stockholm, Skåne-Blekinge, Västsverige and Småland och Öarna) do not have individual communications strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beneficiaries have access to communication when they need it and are encouraged to reach out if they have any inquiries. They may book a meeting with the regional program groups, or communicate via mail. There are regularly scheduled small events for beneficiaries as well -</li> </ul>

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	<p>authorities), Svenska ESF-rådet (Swedish ESF council), and these help to organize the information about the various funds in Sweden (which are ESF, ERDF and the agriculture funds) to beneficiaries. A communication framework is draw up for each budget period, and is approved by an appointed oversight committee. Then each year, the main actors meet to draw up more specific annual events each year.</p>		<p>local 'information meets' as well as conferences for the main beneficiaries. These events are mainly planned by Tillväxtverket and carried out by them and/or the regional ESFs, although some larger ones are planned more centrally. Then there are websites, project bank, social media, regular newsletters and such to keep people informed.</p>
<b>Essex (United Kingdom)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Managing Authority (LMA) in UK is the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that is responsible for the communication process. Each regional programme in the 2007-13 programming period was responsible for publicity and communications and each programme had its own strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each programme handled communication roles and competencies differently: some recruited a team member who worked on communication activity full time and who would have had some experience of media handling and publicity. Most though (including the East of England) had a contract manager or appraiser take on the communications role as an extra part of their job. They are unlikely to have had any specialist knowledge. All of these programme representatives met together as a network to discuss communication work and to prepare joint activity such as the national brochures to publish.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In terms of communication within beneficiaries, the applications for ERDF have explain how the project will acknowledge the financial support received from ERDF. This acknowledgment is examined at the appraisal stage.</li> <li>It is part of DCLG compliance checks to make sure that projects are aware of their obligations. Projects have to demonstrate that they are acknowledging the ERDF support so we would look to see that the correct logos (including colour, size and position) are on the project website and all printed materials, and that artefacts such as ERDF plaque were displayed.</li> </ul>

## **2.4 Evolution through the programming periods**

In the focus groups the analysis focused on the communication of the 2007-2013 programming period. In some cases, however, it is worth to signal the changes occurred between the programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. We report three types of changes (Table 4):

1. General political and organizational discontinuities
2. Changes in the aims of communication
3. Changes in the tools

In this paragraph, we briefly summarize the key changes, region by region.

As for the general political and organizational discontinuities, we found changes in Burgenland, Calabria, Dolnośląskie, Essex and Warmińsko-mazurskie.

In Burgenland, a general discontinuity was highlighted with the national level becoming more important in the current programming period. In Calabria major changes occurred at the political level, in the programming period 2014-2020 the election of the President of the Region and of the new regional council led to a change in the political coalition ruling the region. Apparently, the new political coalition brought about a discontinuity in the attitude and in the approach toward the communication of regional policies. In Dolnośląskie and in Warmińsko-mazurskie, national communication is reduced due to budget constraints. Finally, in Essex, the political and organizational discontinuities were threefold. First, the ERDF Programme Delivery Team was centralized under the Department of Communities and local Government. Second, after the 2010 election, a freeze on marketing budget prevented from executing planned communication activities. Last but not least, the toxic debate on Brexit completely hijacked other debates regarding EU.

As for the change in the aims of communication, significant adjustments occurred in Calabria and Sud Est. Because of the before mentioned political discontinuity, in Calabria, the new executives in charge of the communication modified the aims of the communication. First, communication is now integrated, with a special emphasis on transparency. Second, a focus on the general objectives of Cohesion Policy replaces the emphasis on the orientation towards procedure, which characterised the previous programming period. In Sud Est, the general aim of the communication strategy has shifted from obtaining the highest possible absorption rate of Structural and Cohesion Funds to consolidating the notoriety, increasing knowledge of European funding objectives, and increasing the understanding of the funding mechanisms through structural instruments. Messages and keywords for communication were revised accordingly.

As for the evolution of communication tools, changes have been mentioned in Burgenland, Dolnośląskie, Norra Mellansverige and Warmińsko-mazurskie. In Burgenland, new social media are reported as being more widely used for communication activities. In Calabria, with the new administration, communication tools are more oriented toward social media and on-line communication. In Dolnośląskie, information points were developed starting in 2012 and social media communication is becoming more relevant. In Warmińsko-mazurskie, two evaluation studies had an impact both on the aims and on the tools (i.e. better

differentiation of messages for different target). In Norra Mellansverige, on-line communication was improved.

Two regions, Emilia-Romagna and Extremadura, describe continuity in communication policies from a political and managerial point of view. In Extremadura, the good practices developed in the 2007-2013 programming period were explicitly cited in the following plan.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn at the end of this section concerning the strategy and the organization of communication. The first point regards the aims of communication: the regions in our sample differ according to the explicit definition of more operational objectives alongside the general strategic ones. Three are recurring strategic objectives. First objective is the awareness of operational programmes. Many regions indicate this as the main communication goal. Second, objective is the awareness of the role of the EU. This emerges as a more delicate issue. Indeed, in some of the regions that we analysed, the idea of raising the awareness of the role of the EU is explicitly stated, whereas in other contexts, such as in Burgenland, there is no explicit statement regarding the importance of highlighting the role of the EU. In Burgenland, enhancing the image of the EU is, on the contrary, "dependent on political factors". The third recurring objective is "transparency", which is addressed both in connection with the goal of reaching the widest awareness of the program and for granting equality of opportunities to access to all the potential beneficiaries and stakeholders. The impression is that both the idea of transparency and of the importance of the funds are recurring discourses that may be interpreted and communicated by each local authority. As for the idea of the EU, this seems to be charged with values that may hamper or facilitate the communication of the programmes, depending on the local political and cultural context. In particular, in different regions, the recognition of the role of the EU can be emphasised or suppressed by political parties for political reasons, and this different posture impacts on the communication. Operational goals, finally, are a mean to translate general goals in simpler aims, easier to put into practice.

Another key area of analysis deals with communication style. The research emphasises the importance of communication style: a plea for the adoption of a non-bureaucratic language transpires in most of the accounts collected. The adoption of a more direct language is felt as a necessary step to reduce the perceived distance between the EU communication style and the actual issues faced by citizens. Interestingly, respondents often suggest that the usage of numbers and figures may contribute to lessen this perceived distance between citizen and institutions: their role is to clearly inform citizens about what is happening. Therefore, we suggest that a channel to improve transparency of communication resides in the accurate selection of a communication style. At the same time, beneficiaries are described as a core vehicle for communication for at least two reasons: first, they are the ones, whose story can be told in an attempt to humanize figures and shorten the distance between institutions and citizens by the means of storytelling. Second, especially for ESF program, beneficiaries organizing training courses funded by the EU, are often in charge of communicating with the citizens when these latter seat in the classroom as the final beneficiaries of funded education

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programmes. Therefore, beneficiaries that organized educational programmes are the face of the EU that is seen by citizens.

As for structure of responsibilities in communication programmes, the Regions in our sample offer a variety of different experiences.

On dimension of differentiation refers to the autonomy of regional responsibilities in respect to the national administrative level. On one hand, we have the Italian case, with regional programmes, and almost no national control both on the implementation and on the communication of programmes. On the other hand, we have the case of Sweden, where the eight NUTS 2 regions have no individual communication plan.

Another dimension of differentiation is observed in respect to the complexity of the web of responsibilities and the number of different actors involved in the process. We observed very simple structures, such as the Romanian one, with one national and one regional body, and very complex ones, such as the one observed in the Polish regions, where several institutions interact both at national and local level in developing communication programmes. Such dissimilarity makes a comparison troublesome. More importantly, it makes hard to understand where exactly the success (or failure) comes from.

As for the structure of communication web, an issue that emerges from this preliminary research is the need to further investigate the notion of 'regional learning', that is, the knowledge transfer among regions. Some research team reported little communication among regions. This issue is necessarily worth further investigation. What emerges from our analysis, however, is a clear policy recommendation: part of an evaluation to improve communication in the future could include comparing one's own region and CP communication with others. This does not seem to happen.

As for the attitude of regions to confront with past results, all the regions, at different levels, displayed awareness of the outcome of the previous 2007-2013 programming period. Some of them decided to revise the communication process to improve its results. Some Regions had the chance to do so because of their independence in shaping managing and communication strategy. This is the case of Emilia-Romagna and Calabria. In particular, Calabria introduced innovations in communication style and in the tools used to convey communication. Some other, on the contrary, decided to stick to the directions of the EU, or simply adapted their communication to the changing cultural and technological context. In particular, a wider use of social media was pointed out as a main change in the current programming period. Finally, in several regions, evaluation of the communication activity was described as a very important activity for better communicating and the development of a common guideline for evaluation was described as an important target.

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**Table 4 - Communication's evolution from 2007-2013 to 2014-2020 programming periods**

Region	General discontinuities	Changes in aims of communication	Changes in tools
<b>Burgenland (Austria)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsibilities on a national level have considerably risen in the current 2014-2020 period, as the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (abbreviated to ÖROK) has overtaken all communication strategy tasks throughout Austria. Regarding the current period, too, Burgenland is taking on more communication tasks than required by national stipulations.</li> </ul>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The idea of using new- social media in order to reach the youngest strata of the local population starts to gain more generalized acceptance</li> </ul>
<b>Calabria (Italy)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political discontinuity with a new President of the Region and a new Regional Council (from centre-right wing to centre-left wing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From a communication oriented to compliance to the law, to a communication oriented toward results of Cohesion Policies</li> <li>More integrated communication, with transparent roles</li> <li>Orientation toward transparency (i.e. agenda of LMAs managers is published on-line)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internet based communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social media policy approved by the Regional Council</li> <li>Launch of a centralized website for call for tenders: here it is possible both to search for information and to submit projects. The aim is a greater transparency.</li> <li>Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Slideshare channels launched.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Emilia-Romagna (Italy)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total continuity both in terms of political direction and in terms of the people actually involved in the communication. The two divisions in charge of ESF and EERDF are now coordinated by the same assessor in order to bolster integration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funds are completely absorbed and some of the barriers that were an obstacle in the 2007-2013 programming period are now solved, as the emergency regarding the 2012 earthquake. Communication can thus target more differentiated aims, such as creating awareness among journalists.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual communication plans are now developed, together with the seven-year communication plan: the overall plan is perceived as too rigid to meet changing contextual issues.</li> <li>Less integration with beneficiaries. They receive guidelines, but do not have to rely on a specific communication agency.</li> </ul>
<b>Dolnośląskie (Poland)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the period 2007-13 the funding opportunities for specially organized fairs, information stands and direct meetings with beneficiaries were more significant than in the current programming period (2014-2020), and a permanent information desk on the functioning of the ROP was organized at the Regional Development Agency (RDA). Now, due to budget constraints, RDA cannot organize too broad a promotion. In 2007-13 a lot of information was organized by the Ministry of Regional Development</li> </ul>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information points were active in the years 2012-2015, during the greatest demand for information and advisory activity by potential beneficiaries. Evaluation of the communication strategy showed that nearly half of all beneficiaries of the program used the services offered by the information points.</li> <li>Social media, that turned out to be moderately useful to inform the general public in the period 2007-2013, will have a more important role</li> </ul>

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	(MRD). In the current financial perspective, the ministry's activities in this area have been significantly reduced.		in 2014-2020, when the group of people less using new media is being supplanted by people for whom it is a natural source of information.
<b>Warmińsko-mazurskie (Poland)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the period 2007-13 the funding opportunities for specially organized fairs, information stands and direct meetings with beneficiaries were more significant than in the current programming period (2014-2020), and a permanent information desk on the functioning of the ROP was organized at the Regional Development Agency (RDA). Due to budget constraints, RDA cannot organize too broad a promotion. In 2007-13 a lot of information was organized by the Ministry of Regional Development (MRD). In the current financial perspective, the ministry's activities in this area have been significantly reduced.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two evaluation studies were performed during 2007-2013 period to assess information and promotion activities of the programme, in order to improve these activities in the 2014-2020 period. One conclusion is that the public generally treats all EU funds as a single entity, not considering all the names of operational programmes and sources of funding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two evaluation studies were performed during 2007-2013 period to assess information and promotion activities. Some recommendations were developed for the following 2014-2020 period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Improve the differentiation of the message according to the groups of potential beneficiaries.</li> <li>o Increase the extension of promotional and informative activities via the Internet.</li> <li>o Increase the planning of activities aimed specifically at young people.</li> <li>o Key channels for communicating with the public are mass media.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Sud Est (Romania)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While for the period 2007-13, the aim of the national communication strategy was to obtain the highest possible absorption rate of Structural and Cohesion Funds (ACIS, 2007: 3), for the period 2014-2020 the focus has shifted on consolidating the notoriety and increasing knowledge of European funding objectives and increasing the understanding of the funding mechanisms through structural instruments (MEF - Communication strategy 2014-20: 13).</li> <li>The key messages of national communication strategies, have the following characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o period 2007 - 13: formulated into a generic, abstract language and an administrative style (based on administrative clichés);</li> <li>o period 2014 - 20: have higher adequacy and accuracy level.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While for the programming period 2007 -13, the Objectives of the Communication Plan for ROP focused on building ROP notoriety as a programme funding regional development, for the 2014-2020 programming period the focus has shifted on disseminating the information on funding rules and mechanism to potential beneficiaries.</li> <li>ROP key messages are significantly different in the two programming periods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o for 2007 - 13, the messages had a general content, not significantly different from other operational programmes, they were formulated in a formal, language, lacking concision (prolix).</li> <li>o In the programming period 2014 - 20, the key messages became short, simple, better targeted to different target audience categories and limited in number. The change in the form and content of key messages was due to the recommendations resulting</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	-

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		from the evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the communication campaign implemented in the previous programming period.	
<b>Extremadura (Spain)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The definition of good practices in communication was a goal of the communication strategy in Extremadura in the 2007-2013 period. These good practices, that are non-compulsory measures developed in the Spanish communication strategy, were adopted in the European communication scheme for the subsequent period.</li> <li>An important problem for LMA is that they program the whole period (communication included) before some key criteria are agreed at the European level, and consequently the program itself changes even when some actions have started.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In March 2017 the managing team was still closing the 2007-13 program and most of the actions for the 2014-20 program were not even started.</li> <li>As happened for the 2007-13 program, the general policy of the local managers in Extremadura was to tie to the European rules and not going beyond. Consequently, they accept that the responsible body of communication policy is the European Commission and consequently they strictly implement the policies and rules coming from superior bodies-</li> </ul>	-
<b>Norra Mellansverige (Sweden)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy perceived as largely successful, so there is no perceived need to implement major changes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While technically speaking the strategy of communicating Regional policy has been effective in drawing in target groups to successfully carry out project in an efficient way that lead to concrete growth results, this is not often conveyed to the general public, which is mostly not aware of the existence of Cohesion Funds. This contradiction is now apparent to LMA's personnel.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Tillväxtverket together with the EU Commission did an evaluation of the communication strategy for EU funds to see whether the applicants and beneficiaries of the Funds thought that information provided by the LMA was sufficient and clear regarding rules, demands and deadlines for financing. Nothing 'groundbreaking' was reformed, but the evaluation led to the addition a systematic follow-up survey for each beneficiary with several questions measuring the extent to which they thought information was clear enough about the Funds. This information will then be used throughout the 2014-2020 period and re-evaluated after 2020. Additionally, the evaluation showed a very low level of knowledge in Sweden about the Funds in general as well as people's lack of knowledge of the benefits of EU Funds. The messaging on the main websites and newsletters - as well as advertisements such as films about projects - are now more oriented toward educating about the benefits of EU Funds in one's area. The communication team also now uses</li> </ul>



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			measures such as website tracking of 'new users' to see how trends in interest vary over time.
<b>Essex (United Kingdom)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ERDF Programme Delivery team transferred from being under intermediary body EEDA to being managed under the Department of Communities and Local Government. Since July 2011, the Department for Communities and Local Government is the designated Managing Authority for all European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) structural fund programmes in England.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The toxic nature of the Brexit debate heavily affected the communication regarding the EU discourse in which it was not that the success stories were not communicated well, it was that they were not communicated at all. Brexit debate hijacked other debates regarding EU</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When the new government took office in 2010, there was a freeze on marketing budgets in DCLG and this curtailed most of the activity that had been planned, especially where there was a financial cost. Therefore, from that point on the main types of publicity were in-house such as ministerial visits to projects. Other activities such as events and printed materials effectively stopped.</li> </ul>

### 3. Focus Groups and Interviews

This chapter provides a comparative description of the results of local focus groups and interviews concerning the issue of communicating regional policy<sup>2</sup>. This analysis is aimed at better understanding the fundamental elements that determine the strategic communication of regional policy and the projects benefitting from funding.

The analysis starts with the very definition of successful communication as understood by policy practitioners and other stakeholders. Then, the perceived importance of and appreciation for guidance provided by the EU on communication matters is explored. A further central element analysed is the communication mix LMAs understand to be of importance in communicating effectively. Finally, by analysing the interviews, we elicit insights concerning storytelling strategies and practices that respondents suggest to be adequate for communicating policy to the public. These and additional findings are elaborated upon in a concluding remark.

#### 3.1 Success

Respondents under this category were generally asked to name constitutive elements of successful communication efforts and successful experiences. A definition of success was intentionally not provided by the facilitators, instead, respondents were invited to think of possible definitions for success in the context of communicating regional policy projects to the public, as well as to provide examples of successfully communicated projects. The interview design followed the rationale that different actors would express different understandings of what constitutes successful policy, depending for instance on their role in the policy system or the national culture.

Table 5 depicts a systematic and comparative reconstruction of the main findings for all nine case study regions. While the rows represent the different regions, the columns contain both elements of successful experiences (broken down into success understood as the fulfilling of planned communication activities or the achieving of economic goals, success as the achieving of high absorption rates and hence catered to beneficiaries, and success as awareness and appreciation for EU policies) as well as elements of barriers to communication.

The comparative analysis summarized in Table 5 highlights the emergence of three distinct conceptualisations associated with successfully communicating regional policy:

1. Achievement of economic policy goals.
2. Achievement of high absorption rates.
3. Impact on beliefs of citizens about the EU.

First, there is a rather common understanding (among respondents) of success as the realization of planned communication activities and achievement of economic policy goals in general. The underlying rationale for the latter is that the achievement

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<sup>2</sup> See section 2 of the questionnaire also connected to PERCEIVE's Deliverable 1.1.

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of economic goals implies effectiveness of communication. Considerations along these lines can be found in (almost) all of the respective regions. Extremadura for instance labelled a list of communication actions as Good Practices if they fulfilled certain criteria, including the conformance with the general purpose of the dissemination of funding or the fulfilment of certain technical aspects, such as the use of innovative resources or technologies.

The second understanding of successful communication of regional policy matters lies in the achievement of positive absorption rates and is hence catered to attracting prospective beneficiaries. If enough beneficiaries have been reached to absorb the majority of operational programme budgets, the possibility of funding must have been communicated adequately. Examples were mentioned in Emilia-Romagna and Norra Mellansverige - with the latter linking successful communication to all three observed dimensions.

The third perception of successful communication goes beyond both economic and governance boundaries and entails the impact on beliefs of citizens about the EU - a subtle and difficult to measure dimension that emerged in the conducted interviews. Still, this very dimension might be the most relevant regarding the research objectives of PERCEIVE, specifically linking the implementation of regional cohesion policy to the level of citizens' identification with the EU project as a whole, as well as capturing a general appreciation of the polity.

While 'success' as a category deals with the factors constituting prosperous communication to a large extent, it is also concerned with perceived barriers impeding the successful conveyance of messages. Most of the barriers to communication were linked to the "technical", "complex" - sometimes even deemed to be "hermetic" - EU language hampering communication and discouraging citizens to engage with the topic of Cohesion Policy. The use of acronyms and requiring of background knowledge further exacerbate the situation.

Other issues directly linked to the implementation of communication activities refer to limited budgets - as mentioned in the case studies of Burgenland, Sud Est and Norra Mellansverige, and projects not easily promotable by nature - as indicated in Emilia-Romagna and Sud Est. The latter refers to projects not related to 'easily distributable' issues such as hospitals, care homes or bridges and roadways, but projects whose immediate impact is not as visible, dealing for instance with technical assistance. Respondents in Emilia-Romagna for example were arguing that *"it's clear that the ERDF in this region carries out interventions on enterprises....so it's also a type of policy and a type of project not particularly visible to citizens immediately, I mean we're not in the southern regions where we build an airport, a bridge, a road, [a] big infrastructure that clearly has a more immediate return on citizens, right?"*

Other issue areas arise in the political environment of Local Managing Authorities, describable as 'political opportunism', in which politicians or others will frame funding activities to fit their purpose and increase their own status, expressed by respondents in Essex for instance by saying *"the message that actually came from the EU in the first place has been lost because somebody's grabbed it"* or *"the message is lost because if it's a good message it gets hijacked along the way"*.

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Respondents in Norra Mellansverige similarly mentioned economic actors ideologically opposed to EU funding who will actively not engage in the seeking of projects.

Communication barriers are attributed to the media (and the general public to some extent) too: case studies for Essex, Emilia-Romagna, Calabria and Sud Est refer to a lack of interest in positive results or the media disregarding EU references.

Extremadura respondents expressed a wish for better information systems tracking expenditure and a need for higher flexibility during the communication strategy period, as new technologies for instance might become available in later stages of the programme.

Finally, nation-specific and culturally embedded barriers come into play, exemplified by Sud Est and Norra Mellansverige: the Romanian case study for instance reports difficulties in the cultural mindset towards the State as a barrier with respondents stipulating that *"people do not sufficiently trust the implementation system, people think that this is not transparent enough, that it is wrong, not based on values but rather based on Balkanic principles, and it is very difficult to change this mentality..."*. The Swedish counterpart further elaborates on the already indicated issues of tight communication budgets: while an increase in the budget in hopes of raising public awareness via investing in advertising through the mass media could achieve higher awareness of CP among average citizens, such awareness could come at a price in the Swedish context. In the view of the communication strategists Swedish citizens would most likely perceive such spending on advertisement as 'wasteful', thus resulting in an overall negative effect on the image of the EU among Swedes.

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**Table 5 – Evaluation of elements of successful communication efforts and barriers to communication**

<b>'Success' defined as... Region</b>	<b>Success as 'fulfilling planned communication activities / achieving economic goals'</b>	<b>Success as 'achieving high absorption rates'</b>	<b>Success as 'awareness and appreciation of EU policies'</b>	<b>Barriers to communication</b>
<b>Burgenland (Austria)</b>	1) Communication success is linked to achievement of economic objectives 2) Effectiveness and impact of communication success is quantifiable	-	1) Communication success, too, was understood as creating a sense of European identity	1) Political opportunism and background 2) Tight communication budget
<b>Calabria (Italy)</b>	1) Communication success is linked to communication results (as stipulated by law)	1) Communication success through providing clarity of what constitutes funding	1) Communicating a wider message of what constitutes Cohesion Policy	1) Emphasis on tasks rather than reaching results 2) Divided communication activities 3) Conflicting objectives / political opportunism 4) Complex messages 5) Technical difficulties in data handling 6) Lack of interest (in positive results)
<b>Emilia-Romagna (Italy)</b>	1) Communication success is measured by indicators and 'targets reached'	1) Communication success as communicating funding possibilities to (prospective) beneficiaries 2) Communication of the project value	-	1) Projects by nature not immediately visible 2) Technical complexities of conveying messages 3) Lack of interest (in positive results) by the media 4) Tight communication budget 5) Unforeseen events reshaping campaigns
<b>Dolnośląskie (Poland)</b>	1) Communication success is measured in evaluations of information and promotion activities	-	-	1) Complex EU language 2) Citizens not actively seeking information
<b>Warmińsko-mazurskie (Poland)</b>	-	-	1) Communication success is measured by awareness of and knowledge on EU funding and its impact at the citizen level	1) No information on the very concept of Cohesion Policy and its objectives as it is not thoroughly communicated at the EU level

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<b>Sud Est (Romania)</b>	1) Communication success lies in complying with norms, rules and milestones set out in communication strategy papers at various levels	-	-	1) Excessive formal requirements 2) Projects by nature not immediately visible / easily promotable 3) Lack of interest in positive results 4) Technical EU language 5) Citizen's (cultural) mindset towards the State 6) Prejudice stemming from prior negative experience with funding
<b>Extremadura (Spain)</b>	1) Communication success is linked to qualification for 'Good practices' 2) Conformance with the general purpose of dissemination of funding	-	1) An action is successful if awareness at the citizen level was created 2) An action is successful if the public is aware of co-funding	1) Technical difficulties in handling data 2) Limited flexibility in updating communication strategies
<b>Norra Mellansverige (Sweden)</b>	1) Communication success is linked to achievement of economic objectives	1) Communication success is measured by follow-up surveys with beneficiaries and authorities	1) Communication success is measured by awareness of EU funding both at the citizen level and coming from (prospective) beneficiaries	1) Political background 2) Tight communication budget (while a larger communication budget might lead to public backlash) 3) No clear metric for communication success
<b>Essex (United Kingdom)</b>	-	-	-	1) Opportunism / others taking credit 2) Unique EU language 3) Loss of contact with project beneficiaries 4) Role of EU is not evident 5) Media disregarding EU reference 6) No specific strategy targeting younger audiences using new media

### 3.2 Awareness and perception of EU guidelines

The second dimension inquired during the focus groups and interviews relates to the extent to which EU (DG) directives and guidelines induce a top-down effect on the daily practice of communicating regional policy. The objective behind this inquiry was to encourage respondents to think through the complexities of communication tasks implied by the multi-level nature of the policy system and its governance. Further aims were to capture their awareness of EU efforts to guide through communication tasks, and either an appreciation for centralized input and assistance provided or a certain reluctance and perceived imposition of input as deemed too much of a bureaucratic task.

All case studies mentioned awareness of EU guidelines and directives with the extent and perception of its relevance or role to the respective regional communication strategies however varying to a large extent. Table 6 below shows the comparative results for this dimension, consisting of three categories of perception, namely the notion of central directives as technical requirement, appreciated guidance or criticized input. The analysis of reports highlights that respondents perceive EU central guidelines and directives as:

1. Technical requirement.
2. Appreciated guidance.

In addition, respondents underscore a number of criticisms.

The perception of central directives as 'technical requirement' in this case is not understood as compliance with legal provisions, but rather as the perception of EU input merely as such. While many of the respondents in the respective regions depicted compliance with EU directives, descriptions might have been 'lost in translation' with case studies listing technical requirements rather than the perception of respondents thereof. While the case studies of Sud Est, Norra Mellansverige, Extremadura and the two Polish regions of Dolnośląskie and Warmińsko-mazurskie described a technical, almost pragmatic compliance with EU directives, Emilia-Romagna explicitly takes up the issue of focusing on the technical compliance with norms rather than the conveyance of messages, with an interviewee stating that *"Europe should focus better on the targets that it wants to achieve"* and having to write annual reports that comply with requirements but constitute the end of the chain: *"Well, we write it, two of them read it and it ends there"*.

Rather than seeing EU guidance as technical necessity, there were regions who highlighted appreciation of the input provided, as depicted by Sud Est, and the two Italian regions Emilia-Romagna and Calabria. Respondents in Emilia-Romagna were emphasizing that *"...the European regulation was the first to highlight the role of communication so much, to ask for communication plans, indicators, assessments, a whole series of activities that are important to be able to be effective in communication."* Similarly, interviewees in Sud Est expressed appreciation for the creation of a common network, stating that rules were *"...the same for all the European Union member states. We couldn't be making an exception..."* and describing

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them as "*first principle*" to follow. Calabria even went a step further with interviewees expressing the wish for more centralization at the EU level.

Despite regions appreciating EU efforts, further criticism was raised as to what regards various aspects, referring to the contrasting of centralized and bureaucratized EU input with the need for regional adaptation for instance, exemplified by a respondent in Burgenland saying that "*you have to align to people's needs...I mean, I cannot suggest almost the same thing for a region in Portugal and a region in Romania and expect them to go down equally well and this is a challenge.*" Similarly, Sud Est respondents stressed the importance of transforming EU guidelines from a technical into an accessible language. Regarding centralization, Dolnośląskie interviewees maintained the loss of discretionary freedom at the national and the regional level as consequence of observing EU rules while the case study of Emilia-Romagna mentions respondents at times incapable of seeing through opaque EU rule-setting processes. Extremadura respondents, finally, perceive communication as an obligation of the European Commission, while beneficiaries and local bodies should solely be responsible for implementing the communication policy at hand. In fact, they argue that "*communication is a theme that has been absolutely oversized*".

**Table 6 - Evaluation of awareness and perception of EU guidelines**

	Perception of central directives		
Region	Central directives as 'technical requirement'	Central directives as 'appreciated guidance'	Central directives criticized for...
<b>Burgenland (Austria)</b>	-	-	1) Rigidity of EU guidelines as opposed to flexibility and the tailoring to regional needs 2) EU guidance seemingly redundant as it derives from best practices at regional level 3) Too bureaucratized
<b>Calabria (Italy)</b>	-	1) EU directives are perceived as positive	1) Communication should be more uniform 2) EU support should be greater
<b>Emilia-Romagna (Italy)</b>	1) Technical compliance rather than conveyance of actual messages	1) EU regulation ensured the dealing with communication plans, indicators, and the like	1) Opaque EU rule-setting
<b>Dolnośląskie (Poland)</b>	1) Trickle-down effects from EU to national to regional level	-	1) Discretionary freedom at the national and regional level is limited, the latter to a larger extent



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<b>Warmińsko-mazurskie (Poland)</b>	1) Technical compliance with EU directives	-	-
<b>Sud Est (Romania)</b>	1) Compliance with communication guidelines is described as necessity	1) Guidance and creation of a common network is positively valued	1) Technical language has to be made accessible
<b>Extremadura (Spain)</b>	1) Compliance with EU directives	-	1) "Communication is a theme that has been absolutely oversized"
<b>Norra Mellansverige (Sweden)</b>	1) Compliance in which essential input is adopted	-	-
<b>Essex (United Kingdom)</b>	-	-	-

### 3.3 Communication mix

The third element of strategic communication explored in the focus groups concerned the so-called 'communication-mix'. That is, the mix of communication channels deployed (mainly by LMAs) to reach certain target audiences. This communication mix is expected to be of great importance to understand how policy messages (i.e., "the EU contributes to the development of regions") are conveyed in a way that eventually generates awareness and appreciation of the policy as well as identification with the EU.

In this regard, respondents were asked which audiences (i.e., potential beneficiaries, young people, etc.) they believed to be important to target by use of which communication channels. The rationale of this audience-channel association exercise is straightforward: a systematic and comparative assessment of the communication matrix-table representing individual regional case studies' responses can be effective in highlighting more or less expectable commonalities (i.e., most of the cases highlight the use of same channels to reach same audiences) as well as unexplored opportunities (i.e., a channel is used to reach a target in one case but not in others or cases). Table 7 summarizes the nine communication matrixes each research consortium partner has filled out for the respective case study regions.

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Table 7 - A synoptic view of communication matrixes

Target audience Channel	Beneficiaries (also potential)	Government agencies	Entrepreneurs , business groups, others	NGOs	General public	Youth	Universities, res. centers and prof. education	Journalists
Informative materials of various sorts (i.e. brochures, booklets, etc.)	EXT ESX DOL WM BUR	CAL	ESX WM ER CAL		EXT DOL WM ER CAL BUR	WM BUR	ER CAL	ER CAL
Info points	DOL WM BUR	CAL	WM ER CAL		WM DOL CAL	DOL WM ER CAL	ER	CAL
Information events, meetings, workshops and conferences	NM EXT ESX DOL WM BUR SE	NM ER CAL	NM ESX WM ER CAL SE	ESX	NM EXT DOL WM ER BUR SE	DOL WM ER CAL BUR	ER	NM ER CAL
Information campaigns	WM BUR SE	CAL	WM CAL		WM BUR CAL BUR SE	WM BUR	BUR	CAL
Local mass media (radio and tv)	EXT DOL WM SE		WM ER CAL SE		EXT DOL WM ER CAL SE	DOL WM ER	ER	ER
Billboards Road signs Plates	EXT WM SE	CAL	WM ER CAL		WM CAL	WM ER CAL	ER	ER CAL
Local press	DOL BUR		ER		DOL ER SE	DOL ER BUR		ER
Other publications	NM EXT	NM	NM		NM EXT			NM
Other traditional media	NM	NM	NM		NM			NM
The internet, websites, other 0.1 web channels	NM EXT ESX DOL WM	NM ER CAL	NM ESX WM ER CAL	ESX	NM EXT DOL WM CAL BUR	DOL WM ER CAL BUR SE	ER CAL	NM ER CAL
Newsletters	NM	NM ER CAL	NM ER CAL		NM CAL	CAL	ER	NM CAL
Social media	NM DOL WM	NM ER	NM WM ER SE		NM DOL WM	DOL WM ER BUR SE	ER	NM ER

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Legend (of table 7)

Case study NUTS2 region	Intensity of the association
BUR: Burgenland (AT) CAL: Calabria (IT) DOL: Dolnośląskie (PL) ER: Emilia-Romagna (IT) ESX: Essex (UK) EXT: Extremadura (SP) NM: Norra Mellansverige (SE) SE: Sud Est (RO) WM: Warmińsko-mazurskie (PL)	<b>Bold:</b> at least three respondents mentioned the association <i>Italic:</i> at least two respondents mentioned the association Normal: at least one respondent mentioned the association

A first overall look at the communication matrix above reveals the **wide scope of channels** used to reach the different target audiences. This means that communicating regional policy seems to engage local authorities in a rather **complex range of activities**. Therefore, a certain level of integration and **professional management** is to be expected as to what regards communication activities. This expectation has been confirmed in some of the cases. For example in the region Emilia-Romagna one of the respondents stated that: *"For the ERDF we placed insertions in all the local newspapers ... there was an evolution, first we used the print then we passed to the web for our communication campaigns, ... we used the web more and more, we've always done press releases, always organised at local level, we held press conferences, we organised many events, fairs ... So, I'd say that on communication there has always, I think, I mean, even if the ESF, I mean, was characterised as an integration of channels ... So the channels were integrated between traditional ones and ones that at the time were innovative and are now traditional. This was in order to achieve all the targets. Some were excluded from the internet, and some from paper. So the channels: traditional print, the web, something on the radio and television, as resources permitted, many direct meetings and direct services"*.

As for the audiences to be targeted by communication efforts, some general **commonalities** emerge from the comparative table. There is in fact a certain alignment among the different regional case studies about the primary importance of targeting **potential/current beneficiaries** with a specific focus on **entrepreneurs**, the **general public** and **youth**. The surfacing of these audiences as the most agreed-on targets (columns occupied by most of the case studies markers) somehow confirms standard expectations one could build by reading the EU guidelines on communicating regional policy.

As for the **channels** to be used to reach both beneficiaries and the general public there seems to be a prevalence of the **"live-event" channel**. This latter comprehends a variety of forms of events ranging from informative short events in schools and fairs for the general public, to workshops and meetings for practitioners and potential beneficiaries, as well as press conferences targeting media professionals and so forth. While being generally aligned on the general level, individual case studies varied significantly in terms of the importance assigned to different associations between specific forms and specific audiences. For example, in the case of **Emilia-Romagna** the idea of live events is primarily associate to the activity in schools: *"We have done campaigns in schools. If we look at the contacts we have, the effort we make is very costly"* and only secondarily to workshops and

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fairs which aim at current and potential beneficiaries to a larger extent: "We focus a great deal on small, medium-sized, and micro-enterprises, in terms of the Small Business Act and the type of funds. But large enterprises are also a part, through the trade associations and Confindustria".

In **Dolnośląskie**, one of the two Polish regions studied by PERCEIVE, the importance of live events has also been acknowledged and mainly associated with the idea of providing information, hence aiming at current and potential beneficiaries. One respondent there explained that: "In the Communication Plan, two types of activities have been envisaged under this policy: training and information meetings for potential beneficiaries. Both forms provide the possibility of two-way communication, the interaction of partners entering the exchange of information, which can influence the high efficiency of information flow".

In Romania, in the **Sud Est** region, the most efficient channels in order to communicate to public beneficiaries are considered the following: group meetings and information sessions, the latter being perceived as forms of network communication. There, information is of open type, debated, filtered by the present receivers, as one participant of the focus group noted: "... for the public beneficiaries there is one type of communication, which generally isn't this communication through mass media, as I rather prefer direct communication, ... we organize these actions, these information seminars..." (SE RDA representative).

In **Burgenland**, in Austria, all sort of live events and activities (including training) seem highly relevant, but particular emphasis has been put on an **associative mechanism called 'local action groups' or LAG** by a number of respondents. In the words of one such respondent: "There are currently fifty LAGs in Austria helping individual projects on certain issues and, in a next step, connecting them to network and profit from each other. The respondent further illustrated LAGs by using the example of winemaking, a prominent field in Burgenland: "...we have said 'Okay, we'll do wine ... that is a very important topic here. This is interesting to winegrowers, not the consumers, because they say 'Okay we have lots of operations, we have tourist accommodations, one of them only has a cellar, the other one offers tasting, another one has guided tours, so there are different kinds of winegrowers, we have connected them ... and now we have these maps and they are digitalised of course, and you can see 'Okay, where am I and where is the closest winemaker, where can I take a guided walk, how do I get there using transport, and so on'. So they see the benefit and the additional value generated, also regarding their marketing strategy, there is this connection we have made."

The second channel in terms of universality - i.e. number of targets aimed at - seems to be the 1.0 type of internet communication tools, namely the **website of the LMA** or the **website of the regional government**. The generalized importance of this channel is largely agreed on among the participants of focus groups and interviews in all case study regions. Also, it seems that techniques to manage communication through standard (static) websites are rather 'digested' in most of the case regions. In fact, many local managing authorities and local governments have set both indicators (i.e. visitors per page) and growth objectives (i.e. number of pages) for their official websites as part of their formal communication plans. In

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many cases web pages have been created specifically for the operational programs and funds (i.e. ESF and ERDF) and for local government and managing authorities. Finally, it is important to note that, given the small cost of building and maintenance, basic websites represents the main option for individual beneficiary projects to communicate with the public on their own.

A related form of internet 1.0 communication is the newsletter. Focus groups participants mentioned this tool a few times. For example in the case of Emilia-Romagna a respondent described a newsletter named Econer: *"We also used Econer a lot, which substantially is this house-organ of the Region and of Unioncamere, that will soon become an on-line newspaper, and that communicates with ten thousand subjects in Emilia-Romagna, more or less, and that therefore is a magazine in which the space devoted to structural funds was very very wide"*.

**Social media** is - of course - also found in implemented channels and especially used to reach out to young people or social groups more likely associated with digital literacy such as entrepreneurs. A respondent in **Dolnośląskie** pointed out that: *"Young people point to social media, press advertising, and outdoor advertising as the most effective way to communicate their cohesion policy ideas. It is clear that the communication regarding the individual activities of the programs should be planned with the attention of the group of potential beneficiaries. In the case of young people, the possibility of interacting with the message to this audience is determinant"*.

According to the results of the focus group held in the **Sud Est region**, special attention in communication activities is given to young people, for which, regardless of the organizational status of the interlocutor, social networks and social media platforms are considered the most appropriate means to communicate efficiently: *"For young people, Facebook in the first place"* (private actor - consultancy); *"It is difficult to tell which channels are interesting for young people... probably at this moment in the light of the new events I think that Facebook is the most relevant"* (NGOs representative); *"it very much depends on the target group that is addressed, if you have for instance programs for young people with start-ups, yes, you use Facebook"* (SE RDA representative).

In **Emilia-Romagna**, one respondent mentioned that: *"Twitter is used during the press conferences. Usually, we don't have anything to communicate on a daily basis. It's managed at the level of press office. It gave us satisfaction, but we could do more"*. The other Italian region **Calabria** offers a particularly interesting case in the compartment of social media. In this southern region with relative low levels of both economic development and institutional quality, respondents have mentioned the determination and the difficulties entailed into taking social media seriously as constitutive parts of official communication plans. For example, one respondent described the adversity of other institutional actors to the proposal of establishing social media channels as follows: *"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?'"*. After insistence of the proponents and rather successful past implementation, in the current period, the

region Calabria has hired personnel to specifically manage and increase the impact of communication through social media.

Even if their share is increasingly cannibalized by the new internet based media, **traditional local mass media** such as **regional press, TV and radio** seem to remain an absolutely important channel in order to inform and sensitize the general public. For example, in the Spanish region Extremadura, internet was the more often used channel, particularly with regard to beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. Nevertheless, one respondent stated that: *"Of course, **television is what arrives to more people**. And social networks, today, are very important. But you do not get all public with social networks"*. It is probably accurate to say that, while Internet based communication was generally more present in the discussion of the focus groups, traditional mass media still is the main channel through which people apprehend the existence of regional policy projects. In a way it could be said that its role in informing citizens tends to be taken for granted, but is absolutely not absent in the mind of practitioners.

In Burgenland, **press conferences** organized by the local government seem to cover an especially important role given the dominance of tabloid press on the territory and the often scarce attitude of such press outlets to cover topics such as the EU development policy under a positive angle. *"So if the Head of government (Regierungschef), the Governor of the Province holds a press conference, then usually all relevant media in Burgenland will cover this in an appropriate form. This is, especially with a view to the resources used, a highly efficient instrument. The other way around, again, the traditional daily newspapers, weekly newspapers are not suitable to convey basic information. So how many funding pools are there, how do you apply, who are the contact persons or institutions? You need someone, the other side, so information material, websites, e-mails and so on, what there is and I think, the whole thing will be effective"*.

**The traditional printed info-materials** (i.e. brochures, books and booklets, comics etc.) remain much in use according to the respondents of several case studies. However, they did not seem to overly excite any of those respondents. In the case of Burgenland, one of the respondents from the administrative side of the policy system mentioned that brochures generically promoting a region often tend to resemble each other and have only little impact on the citizens' mind.

As for **seldom targets** NGOs were only mentioned in Essex while universities and research centres only explicitly emerged as a potential target for communication activities in Burgenland, Emilia-Romagna and Calabria. Government agencies (i.e. internal communication) have only emerged in NM and ER, with journalists appearing only in NM and ER,

### 3.4 Storytelling

Storytelling was the last dimension used to characterize the strategic effort of communicating regional policy and projects. While the relevance of narrative know-how has increased steadily in EU guidelines over the last years, little is still known about the narratives used by practitioners in the policy system. The objective here was hence to reveal respondents' personal take on narrating the EU and EU policies as well as on certain specific storytelling elements such as the

use of numbers and data, or the 'human factor' building on emotions - both of which will be elaborated in more detail.

Almost all of the case studies mention the importance of storytelling as emerging from the interviews and focus groups, even though it was not a channel used for communication in one case (i.e. in Extremadura, although the respondents described storytelling as potentially powerful tool for communication). The analysis of the reports unveils a repertoire of storytelling devices reported in the Table 8 below:

1. Visual and material aspects.
2. Use of testimonies.
3. Stimulating deeper thinking.
4. Use of figures and data.
5. Conveying emotions.

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Table 8 - A synoptic view of storytelling devices

	Storytelling devices				
Region	Visual and material aspects	Using testimonies	Stimulating deeper thinking	Using figures and data	Conveying emotions
<b>Burgenland (Austria)</b>	1) Goes beyond the mere compliance with EU publicity requirements and materializes the EU - which otherwise makes for an abstract and distant entity	1) Giving the people a voice follows the democratic principle and sounds more empathic than political or administrative voices	1) Framing current measures in longer-term development plans 2) Holding out the prospect of removing acquired benefits brought upon by the EU 3) Anchoring examples and stories to the very local level and everyday life situations	-	1) Storytelling 'against the EU' elicits emotions rather than rational arguments 2) Blaming non-Europeans and non-Nationals of main socio-economic difficulties (i.e. unemployment)
<b>Calabria (Italy)</b>	-	-	1) It is not exclusively the mere existence of funds that has to be communicated	1) Figures and numbers ensure clear and effective communication	1) Figures and numbers are 'humanized' through narration
<b>Emilia-Romagna (Italy)</b>	-	1) Asking those who benefitted from the policy what the actual benefit has entailed for themselves 2) Collaborating with professional storytellers - i.e. movie directors - to interview citizens about their experiences	-	1) Using numbers in combination with direct experiences in order to give a bit of dimensionality to these latter 2) Helps to set criteria for selecting what cases should be communicated more in an impartial way	-
<b>Dolnośląskie (Poland)</b>	-	1) Projects are used that are unique in the sense of extraordinary involvement of beneficiaries, innovative measures, or the importance for the local community	-	-	1) Storytelling is focused on the 'human factor' as key element showing the impact of funding
<b>Warmińsko-mazurskie</b>	-	1) Storytelling caters to good practices and	1) Communication measures should change	-	1) Storytelling is focused on the 'human



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<b>(Poland)</b>		'good projects' that should be promoted first and foremost	the quality of life and even the behaviour of citizens		factor'
<b>Sud Est (Romania)</b>	1) It is easy to make a good story about projects visible and understandable to everyone - i.e. a road connecting an otherwise isolated location with the rest of the world	-	1) Linking investments to morally relevant examples -i.e. an operating room which has saved many lives	1) Rational vocabulary Used a lot although it is not as effective as opposed to emotional communication: a) abstract values b) create confusion c) difficult to remember	1) Emotions are seen as positive communicative devices (especially in stories for the youngest target groups)
<b>Extremadura (Spain)</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Norra Mellansverige (Sweden)</b>	1) Use of visuals information in the form of short video clips that show potential beneficiaries about success cases, usually told from an 'average person/small business' perspective.	1) Success stories showcasing the benefit of EU funding through the further connection with 'innovation' or 'gender equality'	-	-	-
<b>Essex (United Kingdom)</b>	-	-	1) Examples of stories on a local level will engage people to a larger extent	1) Tangible numbers of projects are used in cases of training opportunities or jobs created for instance	-

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The **visual and material aspects** of storytelling refer to the making visible of EU funding through concrete objects, such as, for instance, buildings funded by EU policy, EU plaques displayed upon them or the EU emblem used on websites informing about beneficiary projects. Visualization in this sense reflects the nature of funded projects too: certain projects, by nature, are more tangible than others and more easily graspable through storytelling. Both factors were mentioned by the case study reports of Burgenland and Sud Est: while respondents in Burgenland pointed out significant buildings renewed through EU funding almost speaking for themselves, respondents in Sud Est, too, emphasized that *"it is very simple to tell a story about a road that was made, which connected an isolated locality to the rest of the world"*.

The **use of testimonies** as storytelling tool was highlighted in almost all of the case study regions, with depictions thereof ranging from respondents in Burgenland emphasizing giving *"those convinced that they have benefitted from the European Union"* a voice to ensure a more natural flow of information, to respondents in Emilia-Romagna emphasizing *"[w]hat's the best way to recount an opportunity if not to ask those who had this experience what value it had?"*. Respondents in Norra Mellansverige described the stories told as showcasing the benefit of EU funding through the larger picture painted, emphasizing for instance innovation or gender equality. The case studies for both Polish regions were more concerned with which projects to choose, namely those that are seemingly unique - whether due to the extraordinary involvement of beneficiaries or the importance for the local community.

More than just using testimonies, storytelling in the case regions was often described as **stimulating deeper reflection at the citizen level**. Indications thereof were found in the case of Burgenland, Sud Est, Warminsko-Mazurski, Calabria and Essex. Burgenland's case study for instance pointed out the importance to frame projects as part of a longer-term development plan as well as holding out the prospect of removal of acquired benefits, as exemplified by the following quote: *"Your family has had to commute to Vienna ... for generations, where does the majority of your family work now? Do they still have to commute?"* Sud Est, too, induced deeper thinking, telling stories about *"an operation room that saved the lives of many"*. Interlocutors in Essex, for instance, expressed the following views of *"giving [them] examples of projects in their local area"* to engage citizens: *"I think people regularly say what's Europe done for me, but if you give them examples of projects in their local area then they suddenly become more engaged"* and *"when you actually see the impact the project's had on real people and real business, then you think ... that's what we want to achieve"*.

The **use of data** was mentioned as another storytelling tool and described by some as effective - if used properly - and ineffective by others. Sud Est for instance belonged to the latter: *"Numbers are negative valorized"* and too abstract and catered to the *"very technical side"* to be understood, they are creating confusion if they are not *"tackled in ... professional context and well explained"*, and difficult to remember. Both case studies of Italy however believe in the role of figures and data but mention the importance of finding the balance between the use of data and the depiction of stories - while data might be instrumental to transparency, the integration in stories creates a 'humanized' perspective *"to*

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*narrate what's behind those figures...an administration that works, an administration that is engaged..." (Calabria).*

This '**human factor**' emerged in storytelling techniques catered to **conveying emotions**, as mentioned in several case studies and summarized best by another quote from Calabria respondents: *"It's fundamental to narrate the final result, to have the true protagonists narrate it, .... because the whole chain and the whole process become more credible"*. Examples thereof were further found in both Polish case study regions and Sud Est.

Two interesting points emerged from single case studies, but did not to a full extent find their way into the Table depicted. The first point refers to **time-related communication aspects** of storytelling as described by both Polish regions Dolnośląskie and Warminso-Mazurskie. As regards the aspect of time, both case studies mention time-specific storytelling deviations: while the initial implementation is placing its key focus on the presentation of facts related to prospective funding possibilities and eligibility criteria, the following phases are accompanied with storytelling catered to new application dates or possible changes in funding criteria as well as absorption rates.

The second point refers to the difficult and even detrimental aspects of storytelling, further elaborated on by both Italian regions Emilia-Romagna and Calabria, by Burgenland and by Essex. The **difficulties of employing storytelling** are depicted by both Italian regions, albeit in somewhat different ways: Despite respondents in Emilia-Romagna painting storytelling as the most effective communication tool, the picture emerging is not as black and white: *"[S]ometimes the exemplary stories make people a bit upset. ... it has to be a good mix, both normal and exemplary stories"* and stories should be chosen *"that do not trigger the mechanism of competition, of discontent"*. While storytelling is appreciated, the difficulty of applying this tool seemingly lies in the right selection of which stories to tell in order to avoid excessive emphasis, or 'hidden commercials'. In addition, the effectiveness of storytelling may depend on the specific historical context in which it occurs. For example, one of the informants in Emilia-Romagna suggested that telling stories of successful entrepreneurship in the context of the economic crisis of 2008-2009 at times produced a sense of discomfort and frustration rather than enthusiasm and emulation. Interviewees in Calabria, too, mentioned the risk of overemphasizing results and the task of communicating the right messages within stories, namely *"the penalty aspect"* of misusing EU funding, or emphasizing *"resources for investment"* rather than *"spending"* or *"reaching the spending target"* - the latter of which might even be detrimental for the image of the EU.

The 'real damage done' however stems from **Eurosceptics undermining the image of the EU**, as indicated by respondents in Burgenland and reported in the Table: *"Sceptics, from my experience in my circle of acquaintances or other discussions come from other Politics. They end up with migration-related issues and integration issues really quickly... under the heading of 'justice, so the rich are growing richer, the large globalised companies will profit, and the man in the street gains nothing"*. Rather than grounding their use of narrative on facts and figures, Eurosceptics will link EU issues to emotional triggers, often blaming the EU in a populist

manner. The UK case study on Essex further maintains common stories told about Europe to be painted in a rather negative way, quoting, for instance, respondents saying "I can't do this anymore, I can't do that anymore, why aren't I allowed to do this". Issues as such are further aggravated by the absence of a strategic story told about European Policy at the macro level, as indicated by Essex too.

### 3.5 Conclusion

As for communicating regional policy, a sufficient level of responses were received as to what regards the second section of focus groups and individual interviews. In a few cases rich contents were retrieved and analysed concerning the four relevant elements in line with the PERCEIVE research design. These elements are: 1) success; 2) awareness and perception of guidelines; 3) communication mix; and 4) storytelling. Conclusions thereof are highlighted from the single cases. In addition a number of concluding remarks are made by considering critical perspectives and more optimistic ones as well as the perception of the link between awareness of policy and identification of citizens with the EU.

In the first section of chapter two, **successful communication** was described in different ways throughout the case studies: success was linked to the accomplishing of economic policy goals, the achievement of high absorption rates, and the impact made at the citizen level. Successful communication in its first definition was either described as prerequisite for the achievement of economic goals or the successful implementation of planned communication activities, and was mentioned by almost all respondents throughout the case studies. Its second definition was catered to beneficiaries as main target group and focused on the presentation of information and provision of guidance through funding formalities, best summarized by a quote from the case study region in Calabria, saying that the quest was to adequately set out "what the programme is" or "what the calls for tenders are" and then accompany beneficiaries toward the final steps. Its third definition emphasized the awareness and appreciation of EU policies created at the citizen level - as indicated by approximately half of the case study reports.

Successful communication efforts however were **impeded by barriers to communication**, connected to the very **technical and complex language** in EU documents along with limited communication budgets and the lagging interest of media or the general public in positive results of EU policies. An interesting observation arose as to what regards the **political environment** of EU policies in which other actors would claim attention for themselves, and the **cultural environment** hampering citizens' willingness to receive communication efforts as exemplified in further detail by the case studies of Sud Est and Norra Mellansverige.

The second section of this chapter was catered to **awareness and perception of EU guidelines**. While in all of the case study respondents maintained being aware of centralized EU input, its perception varied to a large degree. Whilst some case studies described the compliance with EU directives as a mere **technical requirement**, others were eager to emphasize their **appreciation thereof**. Centralized input for instance was described as ensuring that all Local Managing Authorities would engage in communication activities while guidance and networking possibilities provided were often pictured in a very favourable way. Still, input provided was criticized for certain aspects, ranging from the perceived rigidity

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and bureaucracy of EU guidelines and the limitation of national and regional freedom in performing communication activities. Other regions however expressed contrary concerns and wished for more centralized input and more uniform communication activities throughout the European Union, as instanced by Calabria respondents saying that *"there's no strong supply chain. We had no clear indications on the writing of the strategies ... Both with the network of communicators...and with the communication agency."* In fact, and in the past, *"the communication plans were copies of one another"* - expressing the need for clearer instructions and guidance from the EU level.

Section three of this chapter described the **communication mix**. Here, cumulative evidence emerged, across the nine case studies, on the rather professionalized fashion communication activities are carried out by LMAs, also in interaction with other actors (i.e. journalists and local media). In fact, almost all individual cases displayed that communicating regional policy entails the deployment of a rich set of actions using an articulated mix of channels and audiences. Essex has represented an extreme case in this compartment, with a slightly less articulated strategy, which makes sense when considered in light of the rather critical position of a number of respondents there.

The comparative reading of results highlighted a few points to be noticed. First, beneficiaries, both current and potential, are the main target audiences and 'face-to-face' or 'live' forms of communication seem to be the main way to communicate with them. While this particular attention to 'institutional' targets is not surprising, in a few instances respondents suggested that better web interfaces would help beneficiaries to find materials (i.e. documents and data) they need for their work.

The fourth section of this chapter was about **storytelling**. In this regard the most agreed-on way to narrate the accomplishments of regional policy entailed **the use of direct testimonies of beneficiaries** as vividly illustrated in the the case of Burgenland that addresses beneficiaries as 'ambassadors'.

While in most cases projects' publicity requirements (i.e. use of the EU emblem for instance) were seen as a mere matter of compliance, in some few instances (i.e. Burgenland and Norra Mellansverige) respondents further elaborated the idea of **visualizing the EU**. This seems to be an underestimated communication element - from both an EU study and a policy-recommendation angle. As for the possibility of further EU studies, future work could go in the direction of disentangling the function of **visual, material, and multimodal elements** as means of **materializing the EU**. The EU has often been referred to as an 'imagined community' - a collective where the large majority of members have no chance to directly interact and know each other - to emphasize its lack of concreteness. In terms of policy implications, it has been reported by several respondents that the use of visual symbols of the EU was hindered by complications and regulative rigidities - i.e. the use of an emblem with the wrong shade of blue for instance could lead to severe consequences for project beneficiaries.

Beyond the four analytical dimensions proposed above, some additional concluding points can be made by drawing on cumulative evidence from the case studies. In the

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reminder of this section three such points are reported: first, criticisms towards policy communication; second, positive takes on communication; and third, the gap perceived by practitioners between citizens' awareness and identification with the EU.

**As for criticism**, it has to be said that a **generally critical position towards communication** emerged during the focus group in **Extremadura**, including members of the managing body of the regional government. Despite their commitment for implementation, some of the participants perceived communication as obligation of the European Commission, while local bodies should be responsible for the mere implementation of communication policy only. In fact, some of them believed that *"communication is a theme that has been absolutely oversized"*.

Complaints about the **lack of flexibility** in implementing communicative actions emerged in several cases. In **Burgenland**, for example, representatives of the local administration lamented the bureaucracy of EU communication put in place and stressed the need for more adaptability of communication guidance in order to reach different population strata and meet different local needs (i.e. the same communication actions and measures cannot be used in different countries and regions without adaptation). In Extremadura too, respondents complained about the programming phase of communication actions, which does not allow for flexibility in adaptation.

Other crucial issues emerged as to what regards **'taking credit'**: respondents in **Essex** emphasized others putting themselves in the spotlight when promoting successful projects whilst unsuccessful projects were likely attributed to the EU. This comes in line with what **Burgenland** coins 'political opportunism' - especially prominent in richer Member States such as Austria, where the co-financed rates by the EU are rather low and mentions thereof tend to become seldom in times of Provincial elections and electoral campaigns. A related point regarding the political debate on EU policies is exemplified by interviewees in Essex stating that the *"toxic nature of the Brexit debate heavily affected the communication regarding the EU discourse in which it was not that the success stories were not communicated well, it was that they were not communicated at all"*.

Sud Est and Essex respondents further pointed out the difficulty of having to adapt the **technical and rather alienating EU language** while Warمیńsko-mazurskie pointed out confusion as to what regards individual Operational Programmes and the use of numerous acronyms further aggravating the complexity of EU wordings.

**More positive evaluations** emerged as well in the scope of the focus groups and individual interviews. A rather positive assessment as to what regards communication efforts - despite the critical points just mentioned - was given by practitioners in **Norra Mellansverige**, **Sud Est**, the two **Polish** and the two **Italian regions**. Dolnośląskie for instance maintained that communication activities were well planned, regional stakeholders were informed, and the communication budget envisioned was fully achieved. Emilia-Romagna, too, was eager to emphasize the general positive picture as plans were complied with and communication roles were adhered to - describing the overall communication as *"a machine that works perfectly, and that needs only minor improvements"*. Calabria depicted their

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communication efforts as having turned troubled past experiences into a better functioning communication strategy, stating that they *"for the first time ... this year, with this programme, activated a type of integrated and synergic communication"* involving all relevant stakeholders and having a group of *"social media managers, journalists, video makers"* to help enact their communication strategy.

Going a step further, **suggestions for continuing improvement** were raised by Dolnośląskie and Warmińsko-mazurskie, proposing to involve young people in the planning of communication strategies. By including those *"who know the habits of young people in the local environment"* (Dolnośląskie) by means of workshops, more effective communication measures could be created to cover the youngest communication target group.

Another suggestion could be for the European Commission to join in on regional campaigns, using *"its authority and global perspective"* (Warmińsko-mazurskie) to clearly emphasize the benefits of the EU.

**A final concluding point has been made about what could be described as 'last missing link'.** Overall, it seems, communication efforts undertaken are evident in all of the case study regions, with many reports however indicating that **awareness at the citizen level** and a **link to a sense of a European identity** are not as apparent as envisioned. **Norra Mellansverige** pinpoints the *"strikingly low awareness in Sweden of Regional policy among the mass public"* with even practitioners seemingly perplexed at the notion of a connection between Cohesion Policy and a sense of European identity among citizens. Their perceived task is not to help create a European identity - albeit its emergence would be a welcome result. This *"lost opportunity"*- as denoted by Norra Mellansverige - is picked up by **Essex** too, stating that many do not perceive the role of the EU in funding activities and suggesting this to be not a British phenomenon only.

Practitioners in **Emilia-Romagna** went even further and stated that *"the EU must be described not only as the payer, but as our community, that has a major role in fostering regional, economic and social development."* And despite this being an ambitious task, the only way to *"strengthen the sense of Europeanness"* is to *"communicate the role and importance of the EU"* - especially in regions such as Emilia-Romagna where both projects and communication thereof are particularly well managed.

In times of anti-European discourse and negative sentiment towards the EU seemingly on the rise, Burgenland emphasizes the importance of communicating in *"the 'post-truth-era'"* and *"reaching not only minds, but hearts of the European citizen"*. **Calabria** ends its case study on a particularly important note, highlighting the significance of communication and stating it to be *"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 ... Perhaps it's communication that can bring good administrators together with citizens who wish to grow, and this perhaps means building Europe."*



## 4. Appendix

### Appendix: Focus group template on Communication

#### **4. Section II. Communicating Cohesion Policy (40 mins)**

[This section aims at facilitating the transition of discussion to communication topics. The suggested protocol is as follows.]

**13. In your opinion, from the point of view of the Communication of Cohesion Policy, when is a project "successful"?**

Prompts:

- Can you provide an example of a successfully communicated project and an unsuccessfully communicated one?
- What specifically 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' mean under the point of view of communication?

[This section generally aims at assessing the level of awareness and the eventual implementation of communication plans that are provided by the central level of the RP system.]

**14. How much do you think EC guidelines and strategic plans, including those on budgeting, affect the actual practice of communicating Cohesion Policy intentions and accomplishments at different levels?**

**15. In your opinion, which channels, audiences/targets and messages are more important? Why?**

Prompts:

- Channels and, in particular, new media
- Specific tailored messages for: a) Low awareness countries; b) Low appreciation countries; c) Budget constraints countries; and d) Low absorption countries.
- Specific targeted audiences and recently added new targets: a) Local and regional media; b) Beneficiaries of EU funds; and c) Young people.
- Budget allocated to specific communication channels: where are Local Managing Authorities investing the most?
- Transparency and open data: do they have a legitimating effect? In which phases?
- How does communication work in your organization?
- Which communication channels are the most effective in urban and in rural areas?
- Do you think the communication of Cohesion Policy is affected by communication barriers related to perception, beliefs, prejudices or habits?

[In addition to the traditional communication dimensions explored above (i.e. channel, message and target), the EU guidelines for communication increasingly stress the key role of storytelling.

In this context, storytelling refers to the use of narrative and stories for conveying Regional Policy's aims and results. Eventually, this storytelling ability may contribute to build legitimacy so that audiences may ultimately identify with the EU and its actions.]

**16. What is your personal take on telling a good story about Cohesion Policy?**

**17. Do you think that "numbers" or the "human factor" have a more effective impact on people?**



## **5. Annexes :**

Annexes to this document are the regional case study reports.