



COHESIFY

The Impact of EU Cohesion Policy
on European Identification



The Impact of EU Cohesion Policy on European identity: Results from the COHESIFY citizen survey

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Summary

This paper investigates the impact of EU Cohesion Policy on citizens' identification with Europe. To do so, an original and representative survey was conducted in 17 regions across 12 EU member states, which vary considerably with regard to allocations from EU Cohesion Policy and attitudes to the EU. We estimate the impact of awareness about the EU Funds, perceived benefits and exposure to publicity on the likelihood that a respondent develops a European identity. We adopt a novel gradual approach to measuring EU identity by considering various stages in the shift from a sole identification with one's home country to a mixed national-European identity and then a sole identification with Europe. Multilevel models allow us to control for well-known individual drivers of identification with Europe, such as political interest, trust in EU institutions, or attachment to Europe, as well as regional/national factors, such as actual Cohesion Policy allocations as well as frequency, saliency and tone of national and regional media coverage of Cohesion Policy. We find that knowledge of Cohesion Policy matters for developing a European identity, and indeed awareness of the Cohesion Fund matters more than awareness of the European Regional Development Fund or the European Social Fund. Further, exposure to EU publicity of funded projects also increases the likelihood of developing a Europeanised identity. Wider theoretical and policy implications are discussed in the context of the debate on the post-2020 EU budget and Cohesion policy reform.

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1. Introduction

There is increasing recognition of the importance of a shared European identity for the development and sustainability of the European Union (EU) as a political regime (Kaina and Karolewski 2013; Bellucci *et al.* 2012). The impact of identity politics on the EU's political landscape is clear from the rise of populist and anti-EU political parties across Europe in the post crisis era and their successful exploitation of cultural and immigration fears in particular (Hutter *et al.* 2016). Among the most striking examples is the UK's referendum vote to leave the EU where concerns about the undermining of British identity by the EU and the degree of identification with Europe were strong determinants of how people voted (Hobolt 2016; Curtice 2017). Research shows that identification with Europe is a key driver of citizens' political support for the EU (Hooghe 2005; Klingeren *et al.* 2013; Serricchio *et al.* 2013) and EU policy responses to the crisis (Verhaegen 2017). The rise of European identity politics is not only a political game-changer. It has also challenged the assumptions of traditional European integration theories with their emphasis on the functional and economic determinants of integration, and led to new post-functional theories of integration with identity-based factors at their core (Hooghe and Marks 2005; Hutter *et al.* 2016; Risse and Borzel 2018).

If European identity has become a driver of European integration outcomes, a critical question is what accounts for European citizens' identification with the EU? This question has produced a vast and valuable body of work examining how and why citizens transfer their allegiance to the EU, emphasising a combination of top-down institutional factors and bottom-up individual-level characteristics of citizens (for reviews, see Favell *et al.* 2011; Sanders *et al.* 2012; Kaina and Karolewski 2013). While scholarship on collective identity in the EU has a long tradition, there remains a lack of robust knowledge about how specific EU policies impact on citizens' European identity especially at the subnational level. The existing literature has mainly focused on the role of economic and monetary union, or policies that facilitate mobility and transnational social interactions (e.g. the Single Market or Erasmus) but has paid limited attention to other EU policies.

In this article, we seek to add to the literature on the determinants of European identity by investigating the impact of EU Cohesion Policy. Cohesion Policy is ideally placed to bring the EU closer to citizens and contribute to European identity because it is the most explicit expression of EU solidarity through a redistributive programme of investment focused on the less developed countries and regions of the EU. Further, it has highly visible impacts on people's daily lives through infrastructure projects, support for businesses and training for people across the EU. Indeed, it is a funding requirement to publicise the funding, projects and achievements to stakeholders and the wider public to increase awareness about the opportunities and benefits. With its pioneering multilevel governance model and partnership principle, Cohesion Policy is also credited with encouraging the participation and empowerment of subnational governments and stakeholders in regional development policies and EU policy implementation more generally, as well as encouraging local and civic engagement at all levels.

Yet, there are unanswered questions about the extent of public awareness, knowledge and perceived benefits of Cohesion Policy, and whether this translates into identification with the EU across regions and localities. The limited available literature suggest that EU funding can have a direct or moderating effect on attitudes to the EU (Osterloh 2011; Chalmers and Dellmuth 2015) but no impact on European identity (Verhaegen *et al.* 2014). However, these studies focus on the impact of objective funding allocations and do not consider the role of subjective perceptions of Cohesion Policy owing to the lack of data. The present study addresses exactly this gap by including

additional factors relating to citizens' perception of Cohesion Policy drawing on an original survey dataset of 8,500 citizens in 17 EU regions.

The paper is organised as follows. The first section reviews the existing literature on EU identity and Cohesion Policy before setting out the theoretical expectations. The second section presents the data and methodology. The findings are then presented, highlighting sources of Cohesion Policy awareness as well as the impact of awareness and perceived benefits on European identity. Wider theoretical and policy implications are discussed in the conclusion.

2. Cohesion Policy and European Identity: Theory And Hypotheses

While scholarship on European identity has grown rapidly over recent decades, research on the role of EU Cohesion Policy in promoting European identity remains uncharted academic terrain. There are several quantitative studies assessing the impact of Cohesion Policy funding on citizens' support for the EU but very limited research on the impact on European identity. Nor are there any qualitative studies explicitly assessing the impact of Cohesion Policy on identity.

A qualitative study of European identity examined the everyday narratives of Europe used by families living in border areas through focus groups and examined the role of Cohesion Policy indirectly through the use of EU-funded project images (Armbruster et al. 2003; Meinhoff 2003). Photos of EU-funded cross-border infrastructure investments (e.g. buildings, roads, waste treatment plants with the EU plaque) were shown to the focus group participants as visual triggers to prompt discussion about the EU. The expectation was that the photos would prompt reactions and emotions about the role of Europe in their daily lives. However, European identity narratives were not triggered. Rather, the photos were unrecognized, ignored or interpreted as local issues. It is worth noting that fieldwork took place in 2000 before the accession of some of the (Eastern countries) covered in the research. It is therefore possible that European identities have changed in the interim period, not least because of major increases in investment to the Eastern side of the border and because of the need for a long-term perspective to measure collective identification processes. Further, some of the cases represented hard tests for collective identity formation (e.g. on the German-Polish border) because of historically high levels of territorial conflict and wide socio-economic disparities that militate against the development of a shared identity.

The quantitative literature on European identity has also not paid significant attention to Cohesion Policy. One exception is a study by Verhaegen et al. (2014) on the economic determinants of both European identity and political support for the EU, based on analysis of Eurobarometer survey data during 2011. Contrary to expectations, the study did not find a significant relationship between EU Structural Fund allocations (or net payments from the EU budget) at the country level and the strength of citizens' European identity, although other perceived economic benefits for the country and individuals did impact positively on European identification. As noted, the study did not estimate the impact of perceived benefits from EU Structural Funds among citizens because the Eurobarometer data used does not include such questions.

By contrast, there are several quantitative studies examining the impact of Cohesion Policy transfers on political support for the EU using Eurobarometer data on public opinion and financial allocations at regional level, albeit providing conflicting conclusions. Duch and Taylor (1997) found that Cohesion Policy funding did not generate support for European integration in the early 1980s. By contrast, studies of the impact of Structural Funds on public support for the EU in the late 90s, following a sizeable increase in the structural funds budget, have found a statistically significant and positive effect (Brinegar et al. 2004; Osterloh 2011). In addition, Osterloh (2011) found that citizens' awareness translated into higher public support for the EU particularly among direct beneficiaries of

EU funds. Publicity and information sources of awareness (such as TV, information signs) had a positive but smaller effect on EU support. A more recent analysis by Chalmers and Dellmuth (2015) using data on ERDF allocations for 2007-2010 found that the Cohesion Policy funding did not have a direct effect on public support for the EU, but rather a conditional effect mediated by the level of citizens' European identity and education.

Going beyond this literature, we develop hypotheses to examine the relationship between Cohesion Policy and European identity by drawing on the wider literature on the determinants of European identity.

Cognitive mobilisation

The existing literature highlights 'cognitive mobilisation' (Inglehart 1970) as an important mechanism impacting on European identity. This is understood as the ability of citizens to relate to EU as a political regime as a result of having the cognitive skills (such as education and political interest or engagement) for understanding information about European integration. Some studies find strong support for the impact of cognitive mobilization on European identity (Bellucci et al. 2012; Díez Medrano and Guittiérrez 2001 in Spanish context). Others have found that knowledge about the EU has a significant but limited effect on European identity when compared to other factors (Verhaegen and Hooghe 2015) or is not significant in the case of Central and Eastern European Member States (Schilde 2013). Instead of proposing any general impact of knowledge about the EU on identity, we are suggesting that awareness of specific funding programmes under Cohesion Policy, i.e. knowledge about how the EU provides structural support to regions and individuals, will contribute to EU identity. In that sense, we are proposing that what matters is not so much knowing what the EU is but rather what the EU does.

H1. AWARENESS. The higher the awareness of EU structural funds, the higher the probability of developing a strong EU identity.

Instrumental rationality

Another key factor driving European identity relates to material interests based on instrumental/functionalist calculations about the costs and benefits from European integration for a country and its citizens. This perspective echoes neofunctionalist theory (Haas 2004) expectations of economic cooperation and problem-solving by EU institutions leading to a transfer of loyalties to the EU. A number of studies have shown that the winners from European integration are more likely to identify positively with the EU than the losers (Laffan 2004; Fligstein 2009; Fligstein et al. 2012; Bellucci et al 2012). In addition, there is evidence that the perceived economic benefits are a more important determinant of European identity than the actual benefits to a country based on objective indicators (Verhaegen et al 2014). As noted, Verhaegen et al. (2014) did not find a significant relationship between EU Structural Fund allocations (or net payments from the EU budget) at the country level and the strength of citizens' European identity. However, they did not estimate the impact of perceived benefits from EU Structural Funds at the individual level because the Eurobarometer data used does not include such questions. We are suggesting that perceived benefits, both for the individual and for their region's development, contribute to EU identity.

H2. BENEFITS. The higher the perceived benefits from the EU funds, the stronger the EU identity.

An important qualification when it comes to instrumental rationality is of course that perceived benefits should in some way reflect real benefits. We can only measure perceptions at individual level, while real benefits remain constant within regions, so if we want to avoid falling into the trap of ecological fallacies we cannot specify a meaningful hypothesis about the direct impact of real benefits, i.e. funding allocations on European identity. In more substantive terms: real benefits need to be perceived by the individual in order to make an impact. What we are suggesting instead is an

interaction effect between perceived and real benefits, i.e. that perceptions should matter more where they are reflecting larger investments.

H3. PERCEIVED AND REAL BENEFITS. Perceived benefits of EU funding have a stronger impact on EU identity in regions with a high allocation of EU funding per capita

Psychological persuasion and symbolism

EU exposure and persuasion are top-down drivers of European identity and refer to the actions of EU institutions to promote identity-building policies and political symbols e.g. the European flag, the Euro bank note and Europe Day (Bruter 2003, 2005; Cram 2012; Cram and Patriokis 2014; Risse 2003; Laffan 2004). Various studies conclude that the EU has contributed to European identity through European symbols and the Euro (Bruter 2005; 2009; Risse 2003; 2014), media campaigns (Bruter 2005; Stoeckel 2011; Harrison and Bruter 2014) and elite discourses and narratives (Risse 2010). A methodologically sophisticated example is the Harrison and Bruter (2014) panel-study experiment. The study exposed participants across six European countries to EU symbols and news stories – which were either positive or negative depending on the group – through weekly newsletters over a two-year period to study short-term priming effects and so-called sleeper effects that accelerate over the longer-term on citizens' European identity. The study confirmed that news and symbols did impact on citizens' European identity and that this effect increased over time.

We are proposing both direct and indirect effects of EU communication on European identity. On the one hand, the EU advertises its funded projects, either directly on the ground through project publicity (plaques, banners and posters with the EU emblem and acknowledgment of EU co-funding), or via online and social media channels. On the other hand, respondents are exposed to different types of media and varying content in media coverage of EU politics in general and EU-funded projects in particular. We assume that media exposure, EU media coverage and EU communications can all contribute to the strengthening of European identity.

These considerations lead us to our final hypothesis

H4. COMMUNICATION. Effective advertising of projects funded under Cohesion Policy and exposure to European framing of media coverage of such projects strengthen European identity.

As a logical additional step, we also consider that communication relates strongly to cognitive mobilization and may reasonably be regarded as one of its key drivers. While we propose direct communication effects on European identity in H4, we also test afterwards for a more indirect path from communication to identity. We do this by estimating the impact of communication, media exposure and media coverage on awareness of EU Structural and Cohesion Funds.

3. Data and empirical strategy

In order to gain new insights into the impact of Cohesion Policy on citizens' perceptions of the policy and identification with the EU, we commissioned a telephone survey (carried out by GfK) of representative samples of adults in seventeen regions across twelve EU member states¹ (Borz, Brandenburg and Mendez 2018). Sample size per region was 500.² It is important to note that samples are representative for the regional populations, not for national populations. Apart from Cyprus, which constitutes a single NUTS2 region, we selected one or two regions per country, but since we were interested in controlling for regional variation in EU funding and absorption when estimating the impact of perceptions on identity, we opted for representative regional samples which do not sum up to representative national samples for any included country.

GfK adopted random digit dialling (RDD) to generate random phone numbers, for both a landline and mobile sample. Achieving a response rate of 11%, the data were then weighted by gender, age and education against existing NUTS2 regional population data. All subsequent analysis are based on weighted data from all regions.

This was a relatively short survey, consisting of forty questions, and interviews took no longer than fifteen minutes. We asked respondents about their awareness of Cohesion Policy funds as well as awareness of communication efforts to publicise these funds, their perceptions of benefits for their region and themselves, their attachment to the EU, as well as more general questions about ideology, party choice and a small range of socio-demographic questions. Throughout, we aimed to replicate questions that have been asked previously on these issues, either in Eurobarometer surveys, the European Election Study or the European Social Survey, to ensure comparability between our regional findings and previous surveys based on national samples (see the appendix for the full list and detailed description of all variables subsequently included in our analyses).

In terms of empirical strategy, in order to answer what drives individuals' identity across Europe we use a multilevel multinomial logistic model which can accommodate either nominal or ordinal dependent variables. Our assumption is for a gradual progression of identity, from country only, country and European, European and Country and European. We however also acknowledge that it is possible for citizens to shift from a country only identity to a European and country citizen identity. For this reason, a multilevel multinomial model is appropriate as it will calculate the odds of choosing a mixed or European identity in comparison to the country only identity which we consider the base category in our model. A multilevel model is also appropriate in this case because it allows us to control for actual Cohesion Policy allocations as well as frequency, saliency and tone of national and regional media coverage of Cohesion Policy among other regional-level variables.

Dependent variable

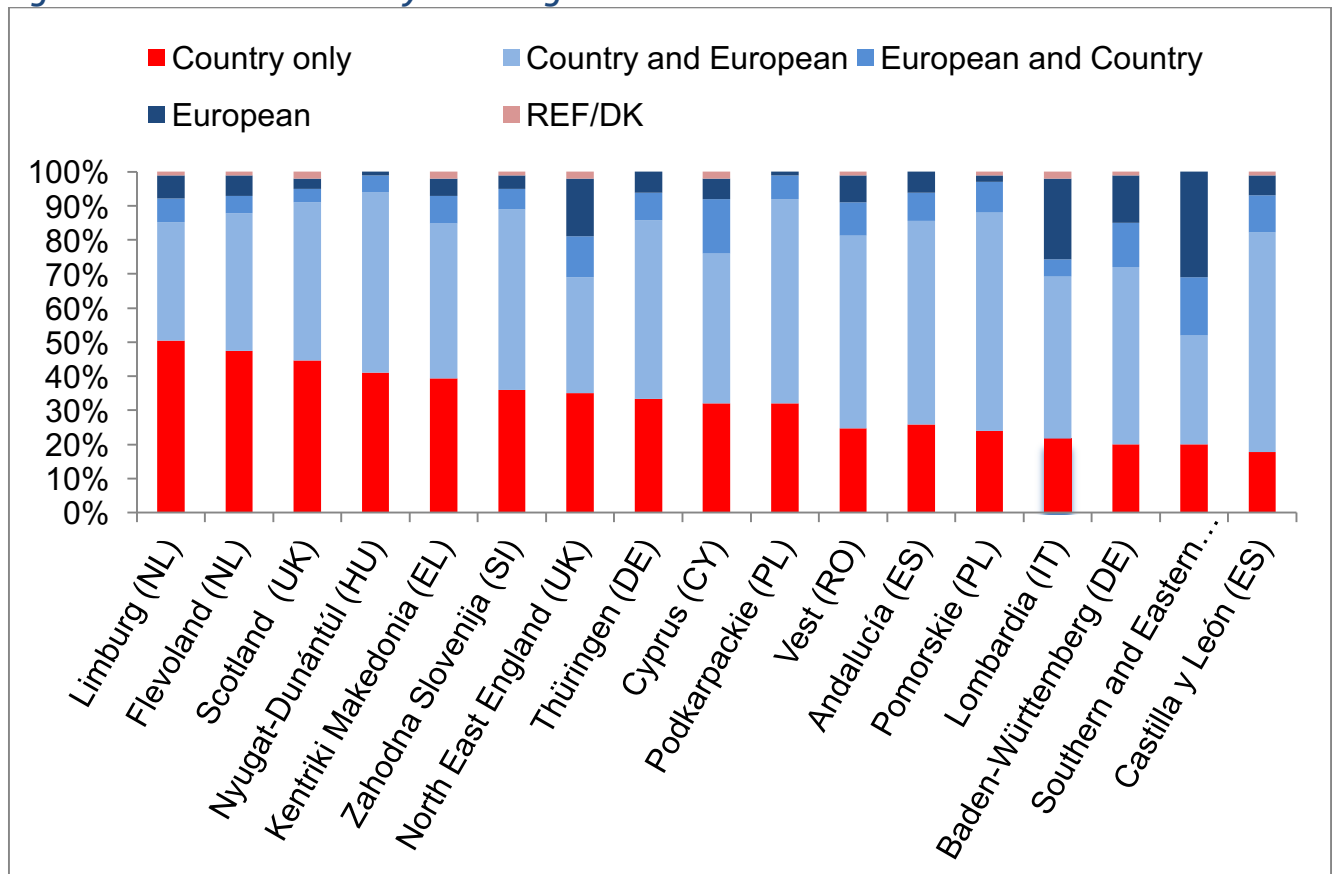
Our dependent variable is the level of European identity. We adopt a novel and gradual approach to the concept of identity to include various stages from a sole country identity to a sole European Identity. Our survey asks the following question: *Q13 [S] Please listen to the following options and*

¹ Cyprus, Kentriki-Makedonia (Greece) Cyprus, Baden-Württemberg, Thüringen (Germany), Nyugat-Dunántúl (Hungary), Southern and Eastern (Republic of Ireland), Lombardia (Italy), Podkarpackie, Pomorskie (Poland), Vest (Romania), Zahodna Slovenija (Slovenia), Castilla y León, Andalucía (Spain), Flevoland, Limburg (Netherlands), Scotland, North East England (United Kingdom)

² Exceptions are South-East Ireland with 501 and Limburg with 558 completed interviews, respectively.

pick one that describes best how you see yourself. Do you see yourself as: country, country and European, European and Country and European. Our data shows that across our regions a comfortable majority of citizens have some form of European identity (Figure X below). Almost half of our respondents (49 percent) think of themselves as having a mixed identity (citizens of their country and citizens of Europe), 9 percent also have a mixed identity which puts Europe before their country and 9 percent of respondents think of themselves as Europeans. Only 32 percent of respondents have a sole country identity, which suggests that after we exclude those who refused to answer (1%) and those who do not know (1%), a strong majority of Europeans (67%) have some form of European identity.

Figure 1: Predominant Identity across regions



This operationalization of European identity has often been employed by other scholars (Citrin and Sides 2004; Fligstein, 2009; Kuhn, 2012; Ceka and Sojka 2016). While previous studies have recoded this question into a dichotomous variable distinguishing between exclusive national identification ('nationality only') and those who reported some sort of European identification, we adopt a gradual approach, since we are assuming that the final three categories of the variable capture a graduate variation in intensity of European identity. Thus, we can capture not just what explains the core difference between purely national and some identification with Europe, but also what are the drivers of a deeper sense of belonging to Europe. Since our sample size is large enough for our models to cope with a four-category dependent variable, there is no good reason to artificially reduce variation by collapsing categories. But we did run robustness checks with a dichotomized dependent variable, which confirm the overall findings and are available upon request.

Independent variables

Our core independent variables of theoretical interest are Cohesion Policy awareness, perception of benefits, and exposure to communication and media consumption.

To measure awareness, we asked respondents a separate question [*Have you heard about the following funds? ... Yes; No; DK*] about each of the three funds associated with Cohesion Policy – the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

We are using two separate questions to measure perception of benefits from a personal as well as more general perspective, quite similar to the distinction between pocketbook and socio-tropic economic voting. The personal question reads: [*Have you benefited in your daily life from a project funded by any of these three funds? Yes; No, DK*] while the more general measure of perceived benefits is covered by this question: [*How do you think your region or city would have developed without EU funding? Much better; somewhat better; same; somewhat worse; a lot worse; DK*].

Finally, we included three types of communication variables:

- a battery of questions about media use, asking how many days a week a respondent uses national TV, national newspapers, regional or local newspapers, radio, social media or European media to inform themselves about current affairs.
- In order to capture not just which media a respondent is consuming but also variation in the content they are exposed to, we merged in data from a media study that was part of the same project. In particular, we added a regional-level variable which measures the percentage of stories about Cohesion Policy in national and regional newspapers that use a European frame rather than a national frame in their coverage (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018).
- We also asked about whether a respondent has noticed any public acknowledgement of EU funding in their region/town in the form of banners, placards etc., or whether they have ever visited EU websites.

Control variables

In order to estimate the effective impact of our independent variables of interest, we of course need to control for factors that have previously been shown to drive identity, European or otherwise. We use standard measures as previously employed in Eurobarometer studies, the European Social Survey and European Election Studies. Firstly, we control for cognitive mobilisation beyond awareness of Cohesion Policy – that includes measures of education, standard of living, interest in and knowledge about EU politics. Also, we consider that, in line with socialisation theories, European identity can be shaped by transnational interactions among citizens and university students (Mitchell 2014; Stoeckel 2016; Fligstein 2009; Kuhn 2012; Bellucci et al 2012). We measure this through two variables, first a question that asks whether a respondent has lived in another EU country for more than three months, and secondly through a variable we call “EU socialisation” – this is a scale that combines respondents answers to a battery of questions about whether during the last twelve months they have visited another EU country, read a book or watched a TV programme in a different language than their own, socialised with citizens from other EU countries, or ordered or purchased any goods or services online from another country.

We are also controlling for obvious strong drivers of European identity (actually factors that may be considered endogenous to European identity), like trusting the EU to work in one’s interest, attachment to Europe, expressing feelings of EU citizenship or considering Europeans to share a common heritage. Furthermore, we include attitudes towards immigration, general left-right ideology, working in the agricultural sector, and basic socio-demographics like age. We also control for a number of regional-level variables, including the quality of regional government, regional autonomy using the EQI and RAI self-rule indices respectively (European Commission 2017a;

Hooghe *et al.* 2016), past funding absorption performance (European Commission 2017b) and unemployment rates (Eurostat).

A brief note about independence of our independent variables

Before getting into the full analysis to test our hypotheses from the previous section, we need to address possible queries about the independent nature of our main explanatory variables. Quite reasonably, commentators might question whether causality might not actually be reversed, namely with European identity driving awareness and perceptions, i.e. the more European you feel the more likely you are (or claim to be) aware of what the EU does and be satisfied that this has helped you or your region. And surely, all across European regions there will be prior levels of EU identity that have nothing to do with awareness of funding or perception of benefits. But if our independent variables were mere proxies for such prior identification, we should expect that variation in awareness levels and perception of benefits across European regions remain largely unrelated to actual funding allocations since funding is not concentrated in areas where prior levels of European identity peak. Of course, to use any aggregate-level evidence in order to say something about an individual-level relationship always carries with it the danger of ecological fallacies, but in this case, some simple correlations and figures that illustrate the relationship between funding allocations and awareness/benefits provide very neat illustrations of just how unlikely it is that prior identification is what drives our explanatory variables.

When comparing the proportions of each regional sample who are aware of either of the three funds we asked about with the actual allocation of structural funding to each region in the period 2007-13, we find substantive correlations, ranging from .57 (ESF) to .69 (Cohesion Fund). That means that the more money allocated to a region the higher the awareness in the population of these funding mechanisms. In Figure 1, we plot funding allocations (x-axis) against the per cent of the regional population that has heard of the Cohesion Fund (y-axis), which is the least well known fund and around which levels of awareness vary most across regions. Each dot represents one of the seventeen regions in our sample. We further divided those regions that received Cohesion Funds (blue dots) from those that did not (orange dots). Apart from the strong overall correlation, we do also find that coming from a region that did receive Cohesion Fund allocations makes respondents on average about three times as likely to have heard of it. The only non-receiving region with a considerable proportion aware of the Cohesion Fund is the Irish region (a major beneficiary in earlier decades) – 36% and thus more than in Cyprus which did receive allocations. Other than that, typically only a small minority of ten per cent or so has heard of it where no allocations have been received.

If prior identity were a core driver of awareness, how could it be that in countries that have traditionally high levels of EU-attachment and identity, like Germany, only a tiny minority of 10% or so has ever heard of the Cohesion Fund? The fact that there is such an aware minority in Germany, or the Netherlands, and also that there are large groups who remain unaware in regions that have received much Cohesion Fund transfers, does suggest that much individual-level variation is not explained by simple funding allocations. But the overall distributions across regions rule out prior European identification as the key driver of such individual-level variation.

4. Does EU Cohesion Policy impact on European identity?

AWARENESS (H1)

Our first hypothesis was that awareness of Cohesion Policy funds increases citizen's European identity. We find that H1 is supported by our multilevel analysis. The higher the level of awareness of EU funding, the stronger the European component of individual's identity. Distinguishing between Funds, awareness of the ERDF contributes to the development of a mixed identity: country and EU, while those who heard of the EU Cohesion Fund are more likely to develop a mixed identity: country and EU or, even more so, an identity which puts EU before their country. By contrast, awareness of the ESF is not a significant predictor of identity and does not contribute to the development of an EU identity.

Cohesion Fund awareness has the biggest impact on European identity. The stronger cognitive mobilisation effect of this fund is most likely due to the greater visibility of the Cohesion Fund than the ERDF/ESF given its focus on large-scale transport and environmental infrastructure projects often carrying large publicity banners and placards. Indeed, our analysis show that seeing EU project banners/placards has a stronger impact on awareness of the Cohesion Fund than on the other two funds.

BENEFITS (H2)

Turning to the instrumental rationality hypothesis, we argued that the higher the perceived benefits from the EU funds, the stronger the EU identity (H2). Our results differentiate between country, regional and individual benefits. In line with our argument, perceived regional benefits influence the development of a mixed country and EU identity. Those who believe that their region would have developed worse without EU funds tend to choose a mixed Country and EU or EU and country or even an EU identity over a sole country identity. The type of predominant identity changes when we move to the individual level benefits. Perceived individual benefits foster all mixed identities, and especially a sole identification with Europe. The more individuals think they benefitted in their daily life from the EU, the more attached to Europe they become.

Somewhat surprisingly, those who think that their country benefitted from the EU funds still have a predominant country identity. One explanation for this result might be that citizens want to take advantage of the benefits of membership but are not willing to change their identity and are not welcoming the development of the EU project. This is also in line with previous research which shows that individuals who think that their country benefitted from EU membership do not necessarily want further integration (Rose and Borz 2016). In other words, the country benefits may work as an instrumental rationality for endorsing membership but not for developing an EU identity.

Table 1: Explaining European identity (multinomial logit MLM, ordinal dep. variable, base category=country)

	Country & European		European & country		European	
Awareness						
heard of ERDF	1.309**	(0.111)	1.040	(0.125)	0.887	(0.113)
heard of Cohesion Fund	1.364***	(0.112)	1.428**	(0.167)	1.164	(0.155)
heard of ESF	0.930	(0.068)	0.833	(0.088)	0.965	(0.113)
Benefits						
country benefited from EU membership	0.746***	(0.027)	0.808***	(0.045)	0.902	(0.052)
region worse without EU funds	1.112**	(0.037)	1.097	(0.052)	1.029	(0.052)
region benefits more than the rest of country	1.015	(0.054)	1.022	(0.074)	1.037	(0.080)
benefitted in daily life from EU	1.360**	(0.134)	1.315*	(0.175)	1.450*	(0.217)
Communication						
publicity of funding via banners/placards	1.168*	(0.090)	0.897	(0.098)	0.799	(0.094)
EU media exposure	1.023	(0.020)	1.064*	(0.026)	1.158***	(0.028)
Cognitive mobilization						
education	1.212***	(0.031)	1.181***	(0.044)	1.153***	(0.047)
standard of living	1.056	(0.032)	0.993	(0.043)	1.025	(0.048)
interest in EU politics	1.111**	(0.040)	1.105	(0.058)	1.121*	(0.063)
knowledge about EU	1.224**	(0.091)	1.176	(0.122)	0.971	(0.109)
lived in another EU country	1.147	(0.099)	1.687***	(0.191)	2.309***	(0.278)
EU socialization	1.052***	(0.015)	1.066**	(0.022)	1.062**	(0.024)
trusts EU works in one's interest	1.092*	(0.047)	1.286***	(0.081)	1.157*	(0.077)
L-R ideology	0.961**	(0.013)	0.939**	(0.018)	0.901***	(0.019)
Attachment						
attachment to Europe	1.415***	(0.054)	1.500***	(0.088)	1.635***	(0.101)
attributes meaning to EU citizenship	1.927***	(0.113)	2.177***	(0.184)	2.136***	(0.195)
Europeans share common heritage	1.116***	(0.037)	1.049	(0.049)	1.100	(0.056)
Immigration						
immigration changed country (+)	1.062***	(0.015)	1.127***	(0.023)	1.125***	(0.025)
age	0.998	(0.002)	0.989***	(0.003)	0.998	(0.003)
agricultural sector	0.765	(0.111)	0.674	(0.159)	1.067	(0.254)
Regional level						
unemployment	0.946***	(0.008)	0.974*	(0.010)	1.060***	(0.014)
decentralization	1.008	(0.010)	1.053***	(0.014)	1.120***	(0.017)
EU funds absorption rate 2007-13	0.975***	(0.005)	0.944***	(0.007)	0.930***	(0.009)
allocalo713pc	1.001***	(0.000)	1.001***	(0.000)	1.002***	(0.000)
quality of government 2017	1.307*	(0.162)	2.990***	(0.515)	14.43***	(3.553)
Media EU valence (log)	1.045	(0.127)	2.318***	(0.387)	3.970***	(0.718)
Media EU civic (log)	1.313***	(0.067)	1.210**	(0.087)	0.748***	(0.057)
Allocation/cap X benefits in daily life	1.000*	0.000	1.000*	(0.000)	1.000	(0.000)
Allocation/cap X country benefited from membership	1.000*	0.000	1.000	(0.000)	1.000	(0.000)
Pseudo R-Square	17.2					
chiz	2979					
p	.000					

Significance codes: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

PERCEIVED VERSUS REAL BENEFITS (H3)

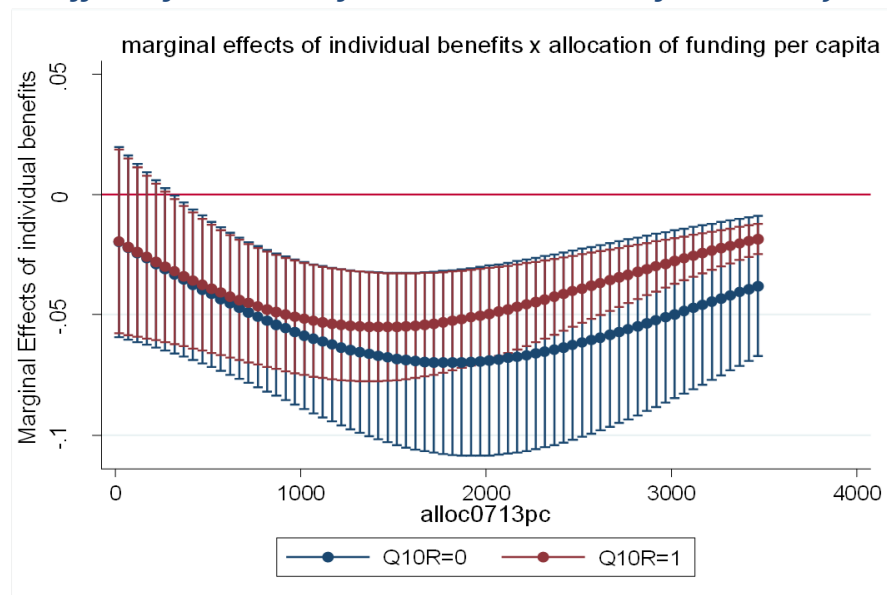
Of particular interest is the link between perceived and real individual benefits from integration as not all individuals may be aware of them, and how this is related to the development of a European

identity. The expectation was that *perceived benefits of EU funding are likely to have a stronger impact on EU identity in regions with a high allocation of EU funding per capita (H3).*

We test the interaction between allocations of EU funding per capita and perceived individual benefits from EU funding in our model (see table 1). In order to visualize the impact on identity, figure 4 below shows the marginal effects of perceived benefits on identity when taking into account the real benefits of individuals in their region. What the graph shows is that perceived benefits in daily life (red line) are conducive to a mixed and also European only identity, especially when the allocation of EU funding is over 1000 EUR/capita in the region of residence.

We show firstly that there is an association between real regional benefits and perceived individual benefits. Secondly, the amount of funding matters for individuals' perceptions and also for the development of their EU identity. Those who think EU had a positive effect in their daily life and live in a region where the allocation of EU funds is over 1000 EUR per capita are more likely to develop an EU identity than those who do not see any individual benefits from EU funds but still live in the same region.

Figure 4: Marginal Effects of Interaction of Perceived and Real benefits on identity development



COMMUNICATION (H4)

As expected, the way EU's contribution or activity is reported matters for people's identity development (H4). The use of EU funds has to be acknowledged at the regional level. EU publicity and information rules oblige projects to acknowledge EU co-funding including requirements for billboards and plaques (in large projects) and guidance on how to exhibit the EU emblem to publicise the EU contribution to regional development and increase citizens appreciation. Our survey results show that the communication EU projects via banners or placards contributes to the the development of a mixed identity country and EU identity.

Additionally, the more individuals are exposed to any sort of EU media, such as Euronews which cover extensively developments in EU politics and member states politics, the more they are likely to put EU first in terms of identity.

Finally, we also find that the more a respondent is exposed to European and civic framing of Cohesion Policy stories in their national and regional media, the more likely they are to develop a mixed national and European identity.

5. What explains Cohesion Policy awareness?

As mentioned in our theory section, while hypothesising separately direct effects of both awareness and communication on European identity, we are aware of the obvious inter-relationship between these two variables. Hence, while communication and media coverage emerge as significant factors in the preceding analysis, we may be under-estimating the true scale of the impact of communication since we are treating cognitive mobilisation (i.e. awareness of EU structural and cohesion funds) as an individual-level characteristic without considering the sources of such cognitive mobilisation. To this we turn now. We ran similar models to the ones presented in Table 1, only now we replaced our previous dependent variable on European identity with awareness of each of the three structural and cohesion funds. The model specifications change accordingly; the following are logistic MLM regressions; three separate regressions, presented in tables 2 a-c, with a dichotomous dependent variable, trying to explain whether or not a respondent is aware of the ERDF, Cohesion Fund or the ESF.

Explaining Cohesion Fund awareness

Controlling for a range of expected drivers of cognitive mobilisation (education, ideology, general political knowledge and interest), it emerges that one of the strongest predictors of CF awareness are indeed media exposure and communication of EU funding (see table 2). The awareness increases when the national media stories on Cohesion Policy emphasise issues such as common cultural heritage or civic belonging to the EU (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018). The same is valid when national media links elements of Cohesion Policy with the idea of the EU as a common project (Triga and Vadratsikas 2018).

While the model reported in Table2 just shows a general positive impact of media exposure on awareness, we also ran additional models (available from the authors on request) where we introduced each media outlet in the analysis separately; then we found that national newspapers and radio are the most effective and significant at raising awareness of the Cohesion Fund. European media and social media do not seem to play an important role in raising awareness in this case. The explanation for this result could be related to the type of projects funded by the CF and the way information is disseminated about them. It may also reflect the lack of interest by citizens in using social media to inform themselves or engage in discussion about Cohesion Fund projects.

The strongest driver of awareness (considerably stronger than media exposure, media coverage or any of the other drivers of cognitive mobilization) is direct EU communication of Cohesion Fund projects. It is the communication on the ground, billboards at construction sites etc. which generates awareness. Those who recall having seen such billboard or placards are more than twice as likely to have heard of the Cohesion Fund than those who do not.

Table 2: Explaining CF awareness (Dependent variable: heard of Cohesion Fund Q9_2)

	OR	SE
media exposure: TV, newspapers, social media, EU media	1.141***	(0.024)
publicity of funding via banners/placards	2.133***	(0.138)
visited EU official websites	1.003	(0.007)
Education	1.254***	(0.028)

standard of living	1.043	(0.028)
interest in EU politics	1.364***	(0.044)
knowledge about the EU	1.459***	(0.091)
lived in another EU c'try	0.949	(0.065)
EU socialization	1.040**	(0.013)
L-R ideology	0.975*	(0.011)
c'try changed positively because of immigration	1.016	(0.012)
Age	1.019***	(0.002)
agricultural sector	1.372*	(0.174)
Unemployment	0.978	(0.041)
decentralization	0.859**	(0.047)
EU funds absorption rate 2007-13	1.090**	(0.031)
Allocation of EU funds 07-13/pc	0.999	(0.001)
quality of government 2017	0.270*	(0.172)
National media: EU valence + (log)	0.351	(0.234)
National media: EU civic attitudes (log)	1.800*	(0.457)
N	7354	
McKelvey & Zavoina's R-Square	0.29	
chiz	751.873	
p	0.000	

Significance codes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

In stark contrast, and against our expectations we find that visiting EU official websites (of the European Commission or the European Parliament) does not increase citizens' awareness about the CF. This could either be related to the content of those websites or to the very low usage of those websites by the average European citizen.

Our results also show that EU funds absorption rates increases awareness of CF. Logically, citizens can only be aware of projects if they are delivered on the ground and are visible, but this also implies that effective management and delivery matters for increasing citizen awareness.

When in the same model from Table 2, allocation of EU funds per capita is replaced by the attribute of being eligible for the Cohesion Fund, we find an extremely strong link between beneficiaries and awareness. Individuals from CF eligible countries³ have heard much more about the CF than individuals from ineligible countries. The strength of the effect is also visible in Figure 5. Unsurprisingly, the level of awareness is three times higher in eligible than in ineligible countries.

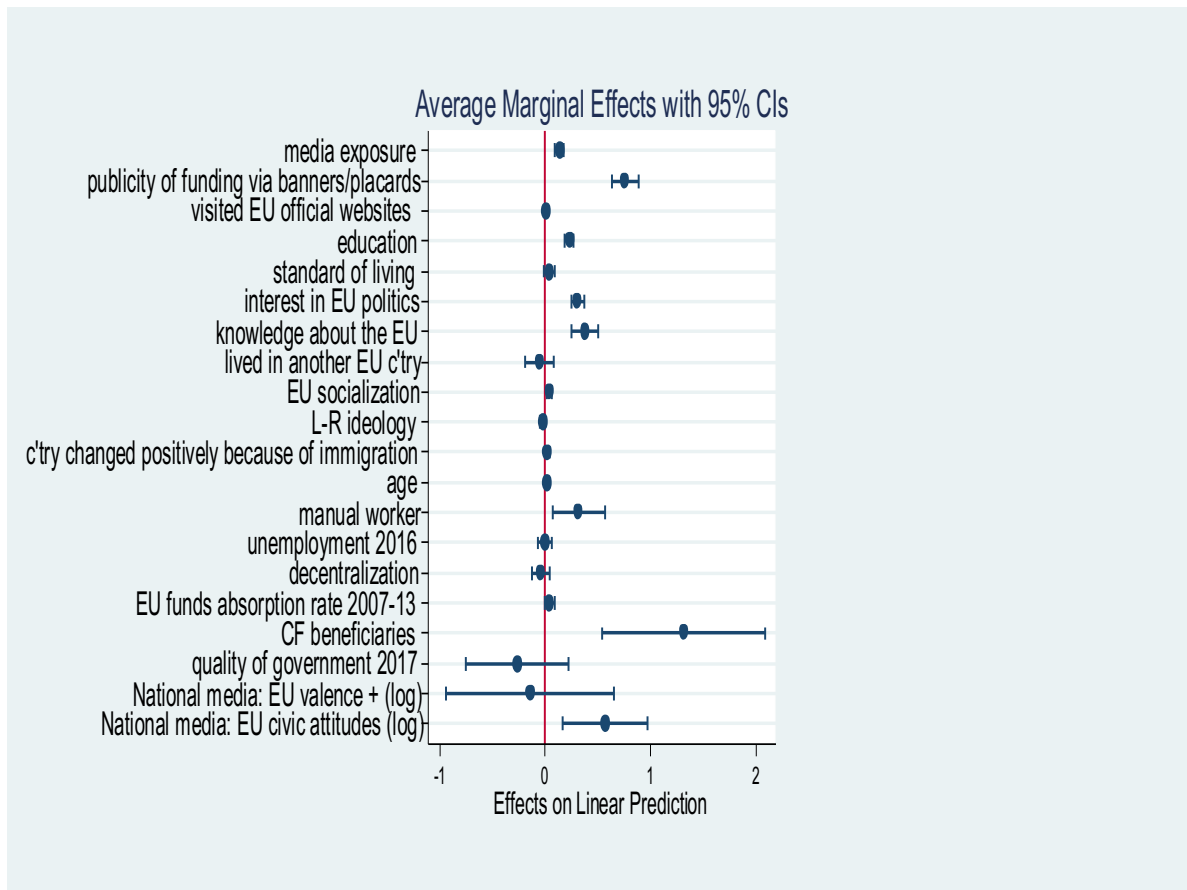
Figure 5 below shows the strength of influence derived from each determinant of CF awareness. Education, interest in politics and knowledge about the EU are the control variables already expected to be significant. The more educated and more interested in the EU politics or knowledgeable about the EU individuals are, the higher their level of awareness about CF becomes. However, even when controlling for these cognitive traits and significant regional characteristics, the mobilization through media and the publicity of projects via billboards matters significantly.

EU socialization is also important for raising awareness, however the effect is not very strong. This may be partly due to the fact that socialization activities included in our analysis (visited another

³ As of 2013, we consider as CF beneficiary countries: Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Spain, Slovenia.

European country, read a book, newspaper or magazine in a language other than your mother tongue, socialised with people from another EU country, watched TV programs in a language other than your mother tongue, Ordered or purchased a good or service online from another country within the EU) are not conducive to finding or being exposed to more information about the Cohesion Fund.

Figure 5: Explaining Cohesion Fund Awareness



Comparing Cohesion Fund awareness with ERDF and ESF awareness

In comparing Cohesion Fund awareness with ERDF and ESF awareness, the difference we observe is in the impact of publicity via billboards. This is by far the largest predictor of ERDF awareness (See table 3). Those who have heard about the ERDF fund are also the largest category in our sample to have noticed the public acknowledgement of EU funding via billboards (figure 6 below).

Again, while media exposure as such has a general positive effect, as can be seen from Table 3, there is variation across different media types. In additional analyses (available upon request from the authors), we re-ran the model but introducing types of media as separate variables. The findings are similar to what we found about the impact of media use on CF awareness: national newspapers

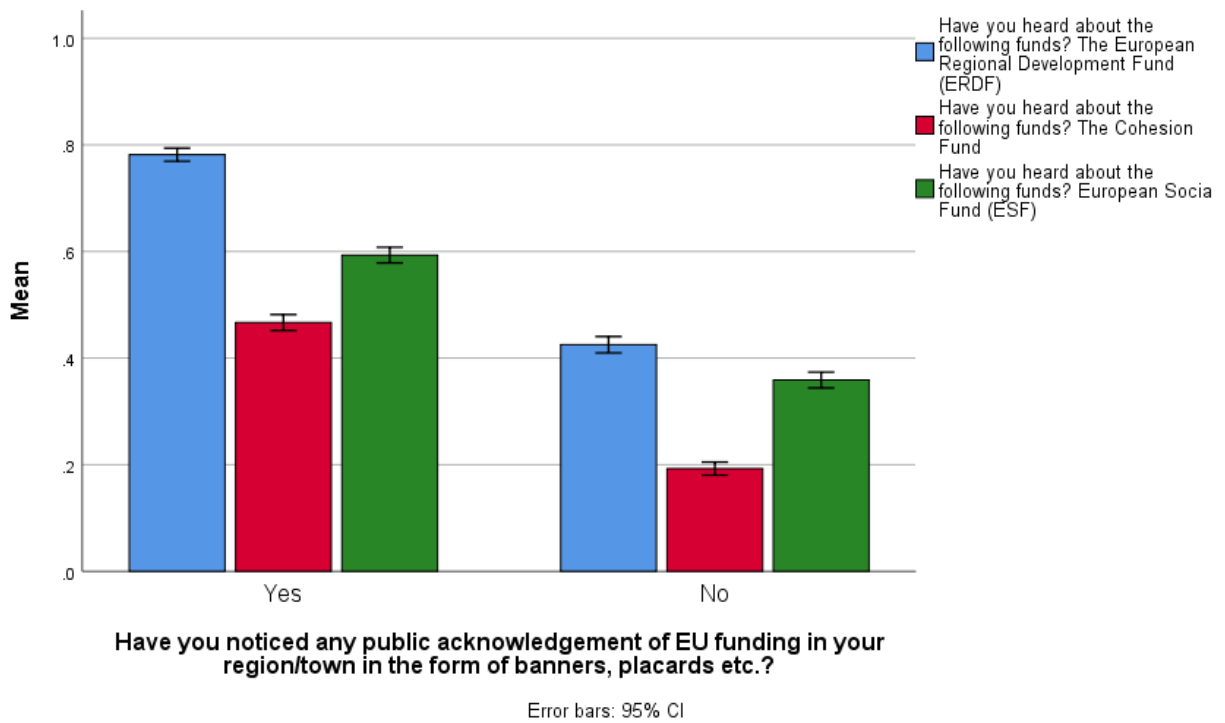
and radio matter the most at raising awareness about ERDF. The tone or the civic elements in the media content are not significant in the case of ERDF awareness. This could be because of the different nature of ERDF goals and projects relative to the CF and ESF as discussed further below.

Table 3: Explaining ERDF awareness (Dependent variable: heard of ERDF Q9_1)

	OR	SE
media exposure: TV, newspapers, social media, EU media	1.130***	(0.024)
publicity of funding via banners/placards	2.981***	(0.187)
education	1.196***	(0.027)
standard of living	1.070**	(0.028)
interest in EU politics	1.312***	(0.041)
knowledge about EU	1.325***	(0.085)
lived in another EU country	0.979	(0.070)
EU socialization	1.052***	(0.014)
L-R ideology	0.984	(0.012)
country changed because of immigration	1.007	(0.012)
age	1.026***	(0.002)
agricultural sector	0.957	(0.127)
unemployment	0.935	(0.033)
Decentralization	0.931	(0.042)
EU funds absorption rate 2007-13	1.028	(0.024)
alloca713pc	0.999***	(0.000)
quality of government 2017	0.259*	(0.138)
EU valence log	0.292*	(0.161)
EU civic log	1.070	(0.224)
Pseudo R-Square	0.30	
chiz	893.024	
p	0.000	

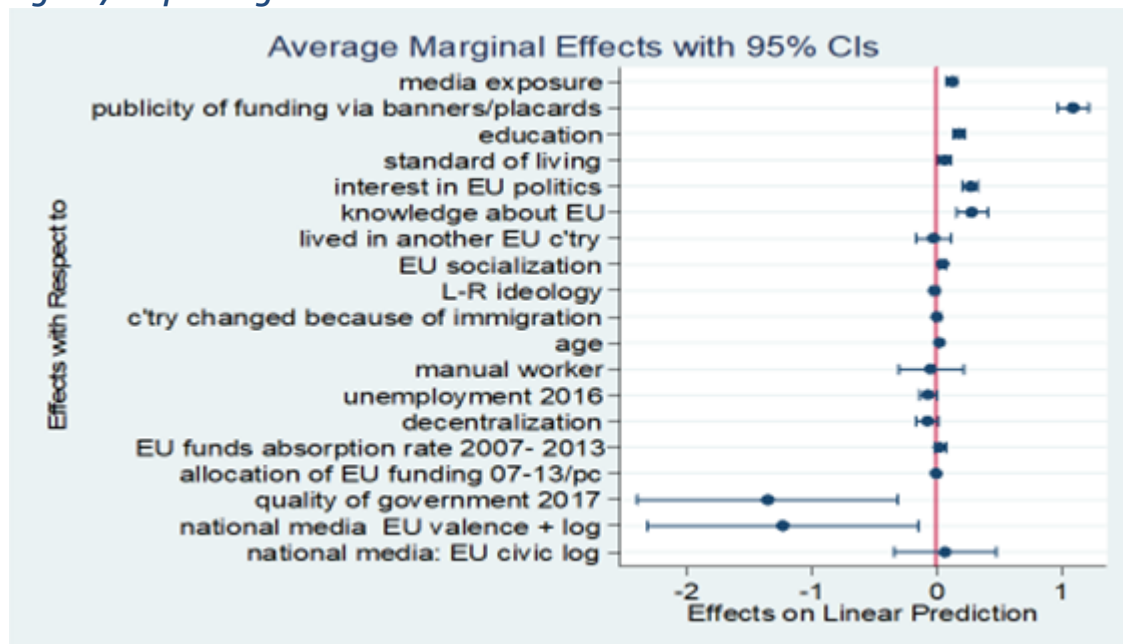
Significance codes: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Figure 6: Publicity via banners and awareness of funds



As in the case of Cohesion Fund, the awareness of ERDF is directly influenced by education, interest and knowledge of EU politics and also slightly by the level of EU socialization.

Figure 7: Explaining ERDF awareness



As far as ESF awareness is concerned, the picture is slightly different. Media exposure has a slightly stronger impact on awareness in the case of ESF. TV, radio, national, regional, local newspapers readership and also exposure to European media matter for raising ESF awareness. The media content has to emphasize civic attitudes towards Europe in connection to these projects in order to raise awareness. This may be related to fact that the ESF has a people-based focus aiming to reducing social inequalities between citizens across Europe and even facilitating mobility to work abroad. This closer relationship with people and a 'we feeling' may explain why the civic content of national media and the emphasis on Europe as a common project emerge as strong predictors of awareness for these funds, while less so in the case of the ERDF which has a strong economic development rationale and aims at reducing disparities across places rather than people.

Table 4: Explaining ESF awareness (Dependent variable: heard of ERDF Q9_3)

	OR	SE
media exposure: TV, newspapers, social media, EU media	1.180***	(0.022)
publicity of funding via banners/ visited official EU websites	1.917***	(0.107)
education	1.060**	(0.020)
standard of living	1.027	(0.023)
interest in EU politics	1.262***	(0.035)
knowledge about EU	1.041	(0.057)
lived in another EU c'try	1.073	(0.065)
EU socialization	1.014	(0.011)
L-R ideology	0.958***	(0.010)
c'try changed positively because of immigration	1.021*	(0.010)
age	1.005***	(0.002)
agricultural sector	0.942	(0.108)
Regional level		
unemployment	0.981	(0.015)
decentralization	0.984	(0.020)
EU funds absorption rate 2007-13	1.000	(0.011)
Allocation of EU funding 200-13/pc	1.000	(0.000)
quality of government 2017	0.948	(0.226)
EU valence log	1.001	(0.248)
EU civic log	1.405***	(0.133)
Pseudo R-Square	0.12	
chi2	547.401	
p	0.000	

Significance codes: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

6. Conclusion

This research paper investigated the impact of EU Cohesion Policy on citizens' identification with Europe at the regional level. To do so, an original and representative survey was commissioned of more than 8,500 citizens in 17 regions across 12 EU member states, which vary considerably in terms of Cohesion Policy allocations, attitudes to the EU, political-institutional conditions and economic development. Multilevel regression analysis was employed to estimate the impact of awareness of EU Structural and Cohesion Funds, perceived benefits for individuals and their region's development, and the communication of EU funding on the likelihood that a respondent develops a European identity. A novel gradual approach to measuring EU identity was adopted by considering various stages in the shift from a sole identification with one's home country to a mixed national and European identity, to sole identification with Europe.

Overall, the findings provide clear evidence of the positive impact of Cohesion Policy on European identity. Awareness of the ERDF and CF in particular, but not the ESF, make a real difference to citizens' identification with Europe. The perceived economic benefits of Cohesion Policy for individual's daily lives and for their region's development also contribute to European identity. Finally, we confirm the importance of communication efforts for European identity. Having seen EU banners and placards on EU projects increases citizens' identification with the EU. Additionally, the more individuals are exposed to EU media, such as Euronews which cover extensively developments in EU politics and member states politics, the more they are likely to put EU first in terms of their identity. We also find that the more a respondent is exposed to European and civic framing of Cohesion Policy news stories in their national and regional media, the more likely they are to develop a Europeanised identity.

These findings contribute to the European identity literature by demonstrating, for the first time, how a crucial EU policy that accounts for a third of the EU's budget impacts positively on citizens' European identity. This contrasts with the findings of the only previous study to investigate this relationship, which concluded that EU Structural Fund allocations did not have a statistically significant effect on the strength of citizens' European identity (Verhaegen and Hooghe 2015). Importantly, that study was unable to incorporate other non-financial variables about Cohesion policy attitudes into the analysis due to a lack of data in the Eurobarometer survey used. In commissioning a new survey, we were able to provide a more comprehensive test to incorporate subjective mechanisms at the individual level. These subjective factors are recognised to be important drivers of identity but have yet to be investigated in relation to EU Cohesion Policy, namely: cognitive mobilisation (awareness of Cohesion funding), instrumental calculations (perceived benefits to individuals and regional development) and communication (exposure to EU-funded project publicity and the media). We found that real and perceived benefits both impact on identity individually and through an interaction effect. Citizens who say they have benefitted in their daily life from EU-funded projects are more likely to develop an EU identity than those who have not, but this is only the case in regions where the allocation of EU funds is over 1000 EUR per capita.

These findings have important policy implications in the context of the post-2020 EU budget and Cohesion policy negotiations currently underway and against a backdrop of rising populism and mistrust in parts of the EU. Most importantly, it demonstrates that if EU policymakers want to promote regional and local identification with the EU, Cohesion Policy is clearly an effective instrument. The second key finding is that communication is an effective tool for increasing citizens' identification with the EU. In particular, banners, billboards etc. at EU funded project sites are effective means to make citizens aware of EU investments, and actually have both direct and indirect effects on identity. By implication, efforts to improve the quality of publicity, symbols and messaging around EU funding, such as reducing the technical jargon in EU banners, plaques and posters and making them more visually appealing, could potentially improve public awareness and perceptions of the EU.

More generally, these findings substantiate the emphasis placed by the Council, Parliament, Commission and Committee of the Regions on communication and the need to raise the visibility of EU funding in order to connect with citizens. The fact that perceived benefits contributes to European identity implies that EU policymakers need to be mindful of the potentially damaging consequences of negative publicity for public opinion. For instance, the Commission's proposals for the 2021-2027 EU budget include conditionality provisions to make EU funding disbursements conditional on Member States compliance with the rule of law. The risk here is that Cohesion Policy could become politicised, leading to populist-driven resentment against the policy and the EU in countries where citizens perceive the EU to be punishing or treating them unfairly through Cohesion funding sanctions.

Finally, this study demonstrates the benefits of survey research for conducting impact evaluation of EU Cohesion Policy communication strategies. Unlike existing Flash Eurobarometer surveys of Cohesion Policy awareness (European Commission 2017c), this should involve the use of representative citizen surveys at the regional level (rather than national level) given the policy's subnational focus. Moreover, questions should not only ask about citizens' awareness and perceptions of Cohesion policy but also about their attitudes to the EU, such as identity or the 'positive image of the EU', not least because the latter is an official outcome target for Cohesion Policy at the Commission. This would allow causal relationships to be investigated between Cohesion policy attitudes and general EU attitudes. Similarly, experimental designs could be employed to investigate the impact of EU Cohesion Policy communication and to cross-validate our findings. Following Bruter and Harrison (2014), this could involve exposing groups of study participants to different Cohesion publicity messages and branding under treatment and control conditions. Both approaches allow cause-effect relationships to be studied more robustly than is currently done in existing EU and national evaluation studies on Cohesion Policy communication, and would lead to more reliable conclusions and policy recommendations about how to increase citizen appreciation of EU Cohesion Policy and the EU more generally.

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Appendix 1: Operationalisation

Variable name	Level of measurement	Question wording/measurement
European identity	Individual	"Please listen to the following options and pick one that describes best how you see yourself. Do you see yourself as ..." <i>Country only/Country and European/European and Country/European</i>
Heard of ERDF	Individual	"Have you heard about the following funds? The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) ..." <i>Yes/No</i>
Heard of CF	Individual	"Have you heard about the following funds? The Cohesion Fund ..." <i>Yes/No</i>
Heard of ESF	Individual	"Have you heard about the following funds? European Social Fund (ESF) ..." <i>Yes/No</i>
country benefited from EU membership	Individual	"To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My country has benefited from being a member of the European Union?"" <i>Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree</i>
region worse without EU funds	Individual	"How do you think your region or city would have developed without EU funding?" <i>Much better/Somewhat better/Same/Somewhat worse/A lot worse</i>
region benefits more than the rest of country	Individual	"Do you think your region benefits more, less or the same from EU funding than the rest of your country?" <i>More/Less/The same</i>
benefitted in daily life from EU	Individual	"Have you benefited in your daily life from a project funded by any of these three funds?" <i>Yes/No</i>
publicity of funding via banners/placards	Individual	"Have you noticed any public acknowledgement of EU funding in your region/town in the form of banners, placards etc.?" <i>Yes/No</i>
EU media exposure	Individual	"How many days a week do you use any of the following media to inform yourself about current political affairs? European media (Euronews etc.) ..." <i>0/1/2/3/4/5/6/7 days</i>
education	Individual	"What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed?" Recoded into dummy ... <i>degree/no degree</i>
standard of living	Individual	"Taking everything into account, what level is your family's standard of living?" <i>1=poor family/2/3/4/5/6/7=rich family</i>
interest in EU politics	Individual	"To what extent would you say you are interested in European politics ..." <i>Very/Somewhat/A little/Not at all</i>
knowledge about EU	Individual	Based on knowledge question: "Are Switzerland and Croatia members of the European Union?" <i>Yes, both countries are/Only Switzerland is a member/Only Croatia is a member/Neither is a member</i>

lived in another EU country	Individual	"Have you lived in another European country for 3 or more months?" <i>Yes/No</i>
EU socialization	Individual	Additive scale combining answers to following questions: "In the last twelve months, have you done any of the following things? Visited another European country; Read a book, newspaper or magazine in a language other than your mother tongue; Socialised with people from another EU country; Watched TV programs in a language other than your mother tongue; Ordered or purchased a good or service online from another country within the EU" ... <i>Yes/No</i>
trusts EU works in one's interest	Individual	"For each of the following institutions, please tell me how much you tend to trust it to work in your interest? European Union ..." <i>A lot/Somewhat/Very little/Not at all</i>
Political ideology	Individual	"In political matters people talk of the left and the right. What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means left and 10 means right"
attachment to Europe	Individual	"People may feel different degrees of attachment to places. Please tell me how attached you feel to: Europe..." <i>Very/Somewhat/Very little/Not at all</i>
attributes meaning to EU citizenship	Individual	"Does being a 'Citizen of the European Union' mean anything for you?" <i>Yes, it means a lot/Yes, it means something/No, it does not mean anything</i>
Europeans share common heritage	Individual	"To what extent do you agree with the following statement: 'Europeans share a common heritage that makes them closer to one another, more close than Asians to one another or South Americans to one another.'" <i>Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree</i>
immigration changed country (+)	Individual	"Using a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means 'makes it a worse place to live' and 10 means 'makes it a better place to live', how do you feel {#country1} has changed as a result of people from other countries coming to live here?"
age	Individual	"What year were you born?"
agricultural sector	Individual	"Are you or were you working in ... <i>Agriculture/State industry/Private industry/Public services/Private services/Other</i> "; recoded into dummy <i>Agriculture/Other</i>
unemployment	Regional	Unemployment rate, 2016 (<i>Source: Eurostat</i>)
Decentralization	Regional	Self-rule index (<i>Source: Hooghe et al. (2016)</i>)
EU funds absorption rate 2007-13	Regional	2007-2013 Funds Absorption Rate (<i>Source: European Commission (2017b)</i>)
alloc0713pc	Regional	2017-2013 EU Funds allocations per capita (<i>Source: European Commission (2017b)</i>)
quality of government 2017	Regional	European Quality of Government Index 2017 (<i>Source: European Commission (2017a)</i>)
Media EU valence (log)	Country	Per cent of news stories about EU Cohesion Policy with positive valence (see for coding)

		Triga and Vadratsikas 2018), logged.
Media EU civic (log)	Country	Per cent of news stories framing the EU as a common project (see for coding Triga and Vadratsikas 2018), logged.