

Citizens’ perception of Cohesion Policy: from theory to empirical evidence

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Citizens' perception of Cohesion Policy: from theory to empirical evidence

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ABSTRACT

Since the Brexit referendum and the widespread resurgence of nationalisms, the future of the European Union has become an urgent issue. The idea of this paper is that Cohesion Policy might contribute to the process of European identity-building, and the intensity of this contribution depends on how citizens perceive European Union interventions. This study provides original evidence on the impact of certain characteristics of local policy settings on the perception of Cohesion Policy. It finds that citizens' satisfaction depends on the fulfilment of their perceived needs. This holds independently of the capacity of European Union actions to fulfil the objective needs of the regions.

KEYWORDS

Cohesion Policy; citizens' perception; European regions

JEL E61, O10, R10

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the future of the European Union (EU) has become increasingly urgent in the policy debate since the British referendum on Brexit and the insurgence of nationalist parties in many EU countries (Mendez et al., 2017). The identification of citizens with communitarian values and strategies seems to be at its lowest levels ever (Kanthak & Spies, 2017). Therefore, a study of the processes of European identity-building becomes crucial in order to understand the determinants of the change in public opinion.

The literature on this topic has identified the actions undertaken by the EU among the main factors fostering citizens' identification with communitarian values. Through EU actions, such as, for instance, the introduction of a common currency, the EU has become part of the everyday lives of citizens. People perceive the EU as a tangible element of their lives and not just as a political and bureaucratic construct (Pegan, 2017) totally unconnected to their everyday experiences. The recognition of a positive effect of these actions on individuals' well-being is the element linking the implementation of EU policy to the creation of a common identity.

Accordingly, it is rather surprising that there is little evidence documenting the role of Cohesion Policy in the process of European identity-building, even if

this programme accounts for about one-third of the communitarian budget and is aimed at fostering balanced and integrated territorial development which should have a tangible impact on EU citizens' lives (Mendez & Bachtler, 2016). An exception in this regard is the recent study by Capello and Perucca (2018), which conceptually defines the local conditions of the policy implementation settings that are assumed to influence citizens' perceptions of Cohesion Policy.

A study of the relationship between Cohesion Policy and EU values shows that the linkage is not so straightforward; it requires a separation into intermediate, fundamental steps. In the first place, citizens must be aware of the existence of the actions undertaken by the EU in their region of residence. Once they are aware, satisfaction with these programmes is expected to increase the probability of their endorsing the EU's values. Both awareness and satisfaction with EU policy actions are assumed to depend closely, among other things, on the context conditions of the territorial settings where Cohesion Policy is undertaken. The presence of high-quality institutions, for example, does not necessarily lead to the same citizens' perceptions amid different degrees of Euroscepticism of the local authorities. This study draws on the variety of subjective and objective context conditions identified by the framework conceptualized by Capello and Perucca (2018) to argue that they are

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likely to impact on citizens' awareness and satisfaction with Cohesion Policy.

The goal of this paper is therefore to suggest a framework for the relationship among Cohesion Policy implementation, citizens' perceptions and the socio-political context conditions, and to measure such relationships. The findings have important implications for the future of Cohesion Policy.

The paper is structured as follows. A conceptual discussion about the relationship between Cohesion Policy implementation and citizens' perception is reported in the next section, where a set of research hypotheses is presented. The third section is devoted to the empirical testing of these *ex-ante* expectations and it describes the data and method used, followed by a discussion of the empirical results. Finally, the last section has conclusions and policy implications.

CITIZENS' PERCEPTION OF COHESION POLICY: CONTEXT CONDITIONS

Since the reform of EU regional policy in 1988, its focus has been on the implementation of actions able to generate real economic impacts, so as to promote regional competitiveness and economic development. At the same time, however, the main goal for regional policy has been to redistribute the benefits generated by economic integration. In the words of Jacques Delors:

all regions of the Community ought to be able to share progressively in these benefits. ... It is for this reason that the 'transparency' of the large market should be facilitated by supporting the efforts of regions with ill-adapted structures and those in the throes of painful restructuring. Community policies can be of assistance to these regions.
(Delors, 1987, p. 7)

Solidarity is a fundamental element for the sustainability of the EU project, because by having all citizens benefit from the existence of common markets and institutions, it broadens their support for and identification with the EU. Solidarity, however, cannot be achieved through pure transfers from the richest to lagging-behind regions; rather, EU regional policy should be more closely related to real economic circumstances' (p. 8). From this perspective, the integration of Structural Funds in an overall programme labelled 'Cohesion Policy' also underlines the redistributive aspects of EU regional policy. Clearly, the goals of Cohesion Policy cannot be restricted to an increase in solidarity, since EU regional policy programmes have different objectives (Faludi & Peyrony, 2011) and these objectives have evolved over time (Bachtler & Mendez, 2016; Manzella & Mendez, 2009). What we want to underline here, however, is the distinctive focus of Cohesion Policy on the necessities of regions, which are assumed to vary across different settings according to the level of development and other characteristics. In short, Cohesion Policy is expected to generate a harmonious socioeconomic development among regions by means of policies tailored

to their economic needs. On the basis of this reasoning, however, two distinct potential mechanisms driving citizens' awareness and satisfaction with Cohesion Policy may occur.

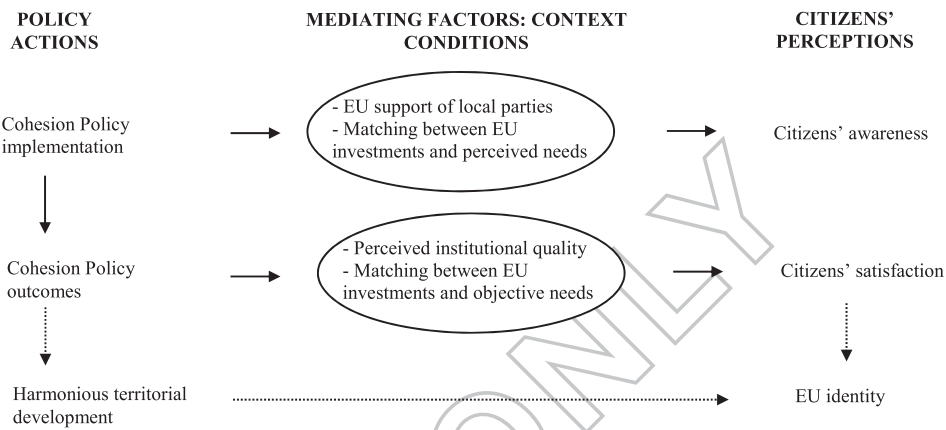
In the first case, if Cohesion Policy is focused on the *objective needs* of regions, this is assumed to improve social welfare and, as a consequence, to increase citizens' support for EU regional policy. In other words, the implementation of policies aimed at addressing the real needs of regions is expected to be positively perceived by the population.

In the second case, on the other hand, if Cohesion Policy operates on the citizens' *subjective needs*, this might make them more satisfied with these policy actions. Put differently, the implementation of policies aimed at addressing the perceived needs of citizens is expected to be positively perceived by the population.

Of course, these two mechanisms are not mutually exclusive: when the real and the perceived needs of regions coincide, the two views are consistent with each other. Mismatches may arise, however, and the understanding of how these elements are likely to influence citizens' perception of the EU regional policy is particularly important. The main question addressed by the present paper therefore concerns the relationship between citizens' perception of Cohesion Policy and its focus on the fulfilment of the objective and subjective needs of regions.

In order to shed a light on this issue, we developed a logical framework in which to determine the association between Cohesion Policy actions and citizens' perceptions (Figure 1). In the first place, the implementation of Cohesion Policy is associated with an awareness in the resident population of the existence of such a EU programme. The importance of the symbolic dimension pointed out in the literature for other types of EU policies is in line with this idea (Risse, 2004). For instance, most citizens became aware of European monetary policies, launched well before 2002, when the common currency was introduced, which made ordinary people aware of this EU policy. Second, once people are aware of a policy, they may be satisfied with the outcomes of the EU's actions. This appreciation can derive either from a direct payoff that the individuals receive from the implementation of the EU policy¹ or from the recognition that the latter has generated a positive effect on the national or local community of which they are part.² Finally, in the last phase, the impact of Cohesion Policy promotes a harmonious territorial development, redistributing the benefits of social and economic integration across regions. This balanced development is expected to increase general individual well-being and, when citizens are aware of the role played by the EU and satisfied by the achievements, to promote EU identity (Figure 1). The latter linkage is represented in Figure 1 by a dotted line, since it is not empirically tested in the present paper, whose focus is on the determinants of awareness of and satisfaction with Cohesion Policy.

Clearly, we do not expect awareness and satisfaction to be the only determinants of EU identity-building. However, they both represent, in our approach, important factors in increasing the likelihood that citizens identify



Q3 Figure 1. XXX

with the EU.³ Without awareness, in fact, citizens would not be able to evaluate correctly the outcome of Cohesion Policy on their welfare. Being dissatisfied with these outcomes, on the other hand, would make it more difficult to identify with the values on which Cohesion Policy is based. It therefore becomes of great importance – and this is the goal of the present study – to understand the process by which citizens' perceptions (namely awareness and satisfaction) of Cohesion Policy are generated.

How can the focus of Cohesion Policy on the objective and subjective needs of regions affect citizens' perceptions within the framework set out in Figure 1? Cohesion Policy operates on a variety of axes of intervention, from transport infrastructure to firms' support, from research and development (R&D) incentives to actions in the social sphere. In order to maximize the impact of Cohesion Policy investments, regions should allocate funds to those axes where actual and concrete needs arise by exploiting the potential for growth of every territory (Barca, McCann, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012). Therefore, whenever there is a match between the objective regional needs and Cohesion Policy investments, the latter are assumed to be more effective in fulfilling their purposes in terms of socioeconomic development (Fratesi & Perucca, 2018) as a consequence, citizens are expected to be more satisfied with EU regional policy compared with the situation in which actions are undertaken in policy fields not requiring any urgent intervention.

At the same time, however, considering subjective perceptions, we must acknowledge that individuals may have priorities different from the objective ones mentioned above (Capello, 2018a, 2018b). For instance, citizens in a certain region may perceive transport issues as extremely urgent even if they are objectively less necessary than actions in other policy fields. In an ideal scenario, perceived needs would be consistent with the objective needs of a region, but a mismatch may arise. We therefore assume in the first place that the consistency between perceived needs and Cohesion Policy spending plays a major role in promoting awareness: if actions are undertaken in their policy fields of interest, citizens will be more likely to be informed about the actions undertaken. The relationship between perceived needs and satisfaction is less clear. On the one hand, if perceived and objective needs are not

consistent with each other, investing in the former should lead to lower levels of satisfaction. Nevertheless, individuals could be more satisfied since funding is concentrated on their own preferred issues, even if this choice is suboptimal from the social point of view.⁴

Summing up, the matching between Cohesion Policy and the objective needs of regions is expected to have a positive influence on citizens' satisfaction with EU regional policy, while the matching between policy funding and the subjective needs of regions is assumed to have a positive impact the awareness of the population.

Apart from the allocation of funds across axes of expenditure, our contention is that the context conditions of the regional settings where Cohesion Policy is implemented are not at all neutral in this process. In particular, an element expected to mediate citizens' perception of Cohesion Policy is the receptivity of the local context, that is, the institutional setting in which policies are undertaken. In more detail, two characteristics of the institutional setting are expected to play a major role. The first is the EU support of local parties (Table 1). This characteristic is assumed to reinforce citizens' awareness of Cohesion Policy (Figure 1). Our hypothesis is that Eurosceptic local parties have a strong incentive to minimize the public recognition of EU actions in the promotion of regional development.

Table 1. Context conditions fostering awareness and satisfaction of Cohesion Policy: assumptions.

Context conditions	Awareness	Satisfaction
European Union support of local parties	+	n.s.
Perceived quality of local institutions	n.s.	+
Matching of European Union investments and perceived needs	+	n.s.
Matching of European Union investments and objective needs	n.s.	+

Note: n.s., Not significant.

Therefore, in regions where the local political institutions are in agreement with the EU ones, citizens are assumed to be more informed about Cohesion Policy.⁵ Satisfaction, instead, is not expected to be particularly influenced by Eurosceptic ideologies; rather, citizens' satisfaction is assumed to be fostered by a second characteristic of the institutional setting, *that is*, the perceived quality of local institutions. Since the quality of institutions is positively associated with the effectiveness of Cohesion Policy, as the literature reports (Crescenzi, Di Cataldo, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2016; Rodríguez-Pose & Garcilazo, 2015), our assumption is that citizens will *also* be more satisfied with the outcomes of EU actions. In terms of awareness, instead, there are no a priori reasons to think that the level of institutional quality could impact on individual perceptions.

From an empirical perspective, we investigate the relationship between citizens' perceptions, the matching between Cohesion Policy funds and objective/subjective needs, and the conditions of the institutional environment, once other relevant individual characteristics are taken into account. More formally, our empirical model takes the following form:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Cohesion Policy perception}_i \\ = f(\text{individual characteristics}_i, \text{matching between} \\ \text{Cohesion Policy funding and objective/subjective} \\ \text{needs}_i, \text{institutional setting}_i) \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

where the perception of Cohesion Policy (the dependent variable) can take three values. Individuals can be *not aware* of the policy; they can be *aware and dissatisfied*; or, in the last variant, *aware and satisfied*. These alternative perceptions are made dependent on a set of individual characteristics and on the context conditions defined above.

Among the other independent variables included in equation (1), an additional important aspect is the intensity of funding, since not all regions receive the same support from the EU. According to Haas (1958), the pervasive presence of the EU institutions in citizens' everyday lives makes people more inclined to identify themselves with the supranational institutions. Therefore, the perception of Cohesion Policy can be assumed to be positively correlated with the intensity of funding. In particular, awareness is very likely to be related to the amount of funds spent, independently of the allocation of the funds to alternative policy actions.

Moreover, the literature has already suggested that a major role in explaining citizens' perceptions of public policies and EU actions is performed by some individual characteristics, *such as* education (Şigalas, 2010; Van Oorschot, 2006), which are therefore included in equation (1). In addition, individual identification with the principles, goals and strategies of the EU influences the perception of citizens of the results achieved by Cohesion Policy (Fligstein, Polyakova, & Sandholtz, 2012; Mitchell, 2015; Risse, 2003; Schilde, 2014; Treib, 2014).

The next section provides more details about the data and methods used to estimate equation (1).

COHESION POLICY PERCEPTION AND CONTEXT CONDITIONS: AN EMPIRICAL MEASUREMENT

Estimation of equation (1) requires paying particular attention to the creation of variables capturing the context conditions mentioned above. This section presents such an endeavour; a concise description of the data and sources is reported in Table 2. In general, we considered Cohesion Policy funding in the programming period 2000–06. The choice of the funding period was based on the fact that analysis of the programming period 2007–13 is likely to be biased by the influence of the economic crisis on the allocation of Cohesion Policy funds. Many regions, in fact, revised their strategies of EU funds' allocation in response to the urgent needs (especially in the job market) generated by the crisis. This would pose an issue concerning the definition of the objective regional needs which are, in our approach, defined as structural and long-term necessities of the local policy settings.

Cohesion Policy perceptions were measured by using the results of a Flash Eurobarometer survey study conducted in 2010 (European Commission, 2011).⁶ The aim of this survey was to collect evidence on citizens' perceptions of EU regional policy by conducting more than 27,000 interviews across 27 member states. In the interview, respondents were asked to state (1) whether they were aware of the existence of EU programmes aimed at the financial support of regions and, in the affirmative case, (2) if, in their opinion, their city or region of residence had benefited from this support.⁷ From these questions, individuals were classified according to their perceptions of Cohesion Policy into three groups: those *not* aware of the existence of such a programme; those aware of its existence and dissatisfied with its outcomes; and *those* both aware of and satisfied with EU regional policy.

Individual characteristics of the respondents are made available by the same survey study. Individuals were asked to provide information about their age, gender, education, occupation and type of setting of residence (rural *versus* urban). Moreover, a question investigated the individuals' support for the redistributive principle on which Cohesion Policy is based.⁸ Therefore, a dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent appreciated the focus of EU regional policy on the poorest regions was added to the individual characteristics, under the assumption that support for the redistributive principle is positively associated with both awareness of and satisfaction with Cohesion Policy actions.

Measurement of the regional context conditions where Cohesion Policy is implemented is more complex. The Flash Eurobarometer survey provides information about the region of residence of the respondents, allowing for the association between individual and regional data.⁹ The context conditions defined in the previous section are empirically defined as follows.

The *objective regional needs* do not have a direct and simple measure. In the present study, they are measured

Table 2. List of variables for the empirical analysis.

Variable	Description	Source	
<i>Individual characteristics</i>			
445 Age	Age of the respondent	Flash Eurobarometer 298	500
Gender: Female	Dummy = 1 if the respondent is a woman	Flash Eurobarometer 298	
Graduated	Dummy = 1 if the respondent has graduated	Flash Eurobarometer 298	
Manager/professional	Dummy = 1 if the respondent is a manager/professional	Flash Eurobarometer 298	
Office worker	Dummy = 1 if the respondent is an office worker	Flash Eurobarometer 298	
450 Manual worker	Dummy = 1 if the respondent is a manual worker	Flash Eurobarometer 298	505
Student	Dummy = 1 if the respondent is a student	Flash Eurobarometer 298	
Setting of residence: rural area	Dummy = 1 if the respondent lives in a rural area	Flash Eurobarometer 298	
455 Support to Cohesion Policy principle	Dummy = 1 if the respondent supports the Cohesion Policy principle	Flash Eurobarometer 298	510
<i>Context conditions</i>			
460 Intensity of European Union support	Log of per capita Cohesion Policy funds allocated to each region in the programming period 2000–06	European Commission	515
European Union support of local parties	Share of voters for non-Eurosceptic parties at the 2009 European Union Parliament elections	European Election Database	
465 Perceived institutional quality	Index of perceived regional institutional quality	Charron, Lapuente, and Rothstein (2010)	520
Objective regional needs	Index of objective regional needs in different policy fields (economy, research and development (R&D), tourism, information and communication technology (ICT), transport, environment, health, social field)	Capello and Perucca (2017)	
470 Perceived regional needs	Index of perceived regional needs in different policy fields (economy, R&D, tourism, ICT, transport, environment, health, social field)	Capello and Perucca (2017)	525

475 by an index that signals, for each policy field, the discrepancy between the supply of and the demand for the relevant goods/services/resource, under the assumption that a need is represented by the imbalance between supply and demand rather than the absolute level of supply of resources (Capello & Perucca, 2018). Measurement is in most cases feasible as far as the supply side is concerned. For instance, considering the example of Cohesion Policy in the field of innovation, funds invested in R&D are usually tracked by official statistics. The demand side is less straightforward to measure. In a previous work (Capello & Perucca, 2018), the potential demand for a certain good/service/resource was estimated based on the presence of some characteristics of the local environment; for instance, the demand for R&D investments was associated with the productive specialization of the region, its propensity to innovate and the presence of urbanization economies facilitating knowledge spillovers. The difference between supply and potential demand, estimated by the presence of the above-mentioned regional characteristics, provides a measure of the area's objective needs. Similarly to the case of R&D, the objective needs of regions were measured for the following policy fields: economy, tourism, information and communication technology (ICT), transport, environment, health, and social.¹⁰

475 The match between the regional objective needs and the allocation of Cohesion Policy funds is measured by a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if at least one of the two most financed policy fields is characterized by an objective need, as defined above.¹¹ On the other hand, the dummy variable is equal to 0 if in none of the top two regional areas of intervention is the region characterized by an objective need.¹² Note that the allocation of Cohesion Policy funds is measured by the *ex-post* destination of funding, and not by the *ex-ante* allocation strategies discussed in the programme documents.¹³

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Perceived needs for policies in a certain area are captured, at the individual level, by the answers to a Eurobarometer survey question aimed at identifying the most important themes of EU policy intervention.¹⁴ Of the policy fields among which the respondents had to choose, those most preferred were fully consistent with those on which the objective needs were estimated. The match between perceived priorities by individuals and the allocation of Cohesion Policy funds was captured by a dummy variable equal to 1 if at least one of the policy fields identified as important by the respondent was also included among the two most financed areas. On the other hand, the dummy variable took a value of 0 if none of the areas defined as priority by the respondent

was included among the top two regional fields of intervention.

Concerning the characteristics of the institutional settings where Cohesion Policy is implemented, the *support of local parties for the EU values and strategies* is measured by the share of votes for non-Eurosceptic parties in the European Parliament elections held in 2009.¹⁵

On the other hand, the perceived *quality of local institutions* finds a good proxy in the overall index developed by Charron et al. (2010) on the perceived levels of corruption, rule of law, bureaucratic effectiveness, strength of democratic and electoral institutions in EU regions.

Another control variable is the intensity of EU support, which, keeping other things constant, could influence both the awareness and the satisfaction of citizens regarding Cohesion Policy, even if correlated with the general level of socioeconomic development of regions, since the poorest areas are the major beneficiaries of funding. The *intensity of EU support* was measured by per capita Cohesion Policy expenditure (in logarithms) in the programming period 2000–06.¹⁶ As stated above, we assumed that the intensity of EU support is positively related to citizens' awareness, while its effect on satisfaction is less predictable, depending more on the outcomes of Cohesion Policy than on the pure amount of funds invested.

As regards the methodological techniques used to estimate equation (1), the structure of the data set has to be taken in account. First, our dependent variable assumed three categorical, non-ordered outcomes, corresponding to the three categories of perception defined above. Therefore, a multinomial logit model was applied, with the *not aware* category taken as a reference. Second, apart from the controls summarized above, individuals in the sample were nested within both countries at a first level and regions at a second level. This hierarchical structure was taken into account by including a set of country dummies and, at the regional level, by clustering the error terms of the model for the respondent's region of residence, consistently with previous studies using similar data sets (Lenzi & Perucca, 2016).

THE ROLE OF CONTEXT CONDITIONS IN THE PERCEPTION OF COHESION POLICY

The results of the analysis of the determinants of EU citizens' perceptions of Cohesion Policy (equation 1) are reported in Table 3, which shows the estimates of three separate models, where the matches between Cohesion Policy investments and objective and perceived needs were introduced separately among the regressors in order to avoid multicollinearity issues.

The reference category of the dependent variable was the *not aware* condition. This means that, for each model reported in Table 3, the coefficients in the first column show the effect of a unit change in the predictor variable on the probability of being *aware and dissatisfied* rather than *not aware*. In the same way, the coefficients in the second column of each empirical model measure the effect

of a unit change in the predictor variable on the probability of being *aware and satisfied* rather than *not aware*.

Consider, for instance, the age of the respondent. A quadratic term was added to all model specifications in order to check for non-linear effects. Results in Table 3, model (a), show that the coefficients of age in the two categories of the dependent variable are very similar: both suggest an inverted 'U'-shaped relationship between an increase in age and non-awareness of the existence of Cohesion Policy. The size of the coefficients is not significantly different between the two categories, implying that age has an effect on awareness but not on the probability of being satisfied with Cohesion Policy.

The same does not apply, for instance, in the case of education. The coefficient associated with the dummy variable for graduated respondents is highly significant for the category of *aware and satisfied*, while it is not significant for those *aware and dissatisfied*. This implies that tertiary education increases the probability of being simultaneously aware of and satisfied with Cohesion Policy.

The coefficients associated with the other individual characteristics highlight the fact that, keeping other things constant, women are less likely to be informed about the existence of EU regional policy, while the opposite holds for those occupied as managers, professionals and office workers.

As expected, respondents supporting the Cohesion Policy redistributive principle tend to be more *aware and satisfied* than both *non aware* and, in particular, *aware and dissatisfied*. Residents in rural areas, on the other hand, are more likely than those living in more urbanized settings to be aware of and, at the same time, dissatisfied with Cohesion Policy. This result is consistent with the recent evidence on the Brexit referendum, where rural communities are characterized by higher support for leaving the EU (Harris & Charlton, 2016).

Apart from the effect of individual characteristics, Table 3 reports the association between the perception of Cohesion Policy and the characteristics of the local policy settings. The first comment concerns the intensity of EU funding. As expected, the coefficient is positive and highly significant. Interestingly, the size of the coefficient is not significantly different between the categories of respondents *aware and dissatisfied* and *aware and satisfied*, implying that the effect of funding operates only on the awareness of the population but not on the level of satisfaction. In other words, an increase in the amount of funds received by a region is likely to raise the awareness of the population, but not the appreciation of Cohesion Policy. More precisely, since the variable is log-transformed, a further growth of EU investments is expected to have a diminishing marginal return on awareness.

The pro-EU orientation of local parties has no significant effect, either on the level of awareness or on satisfaction. This finding contradicts our expectation about a positive relationship between EU support and awareness. A possible explanation concerns the fact that the presence of Eurosceptic parties also stimulates the debate on EU issues and policy.

Table 3. Cohesion Policy perceptions as a function of individual characteristics and context conditions.

	Model (a)		Model (b)		Model (c)		
	Aware and unsatisfied	Aware and satisfied	Aware and unsatisfied	Aware and satisfied	Aware and unsatisfied	Aware and satisfied	
665	<i>Individual characteristics</i>						720
	Age	0.041*** (0.012)	0.056*** (0.007)	0.041*** (0.012)	0.056*** (0.007)	0.041*** (0.012)	0.056*** (0.007)
	Age ²	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)
670	Gender: Female	-0.247*** (0.085)	-0.282*** (0.040)	-0.247*** (0.084)	-0.283*** (0.040)	-0.246*** (0.085)	-0.282*** (0.040)
	Graduated	0.091 (0.075)	0.460*** (0.040)	0.092 (0.075)	0.461*** (0.040)	0.091 (0.075)	0.460*** (0.040)
675	Manager/professional	0.224** (0.105)	0.430*** (0.062)	0.225** (0.105)	0.433*** (0.063)	0.225** (0.105)	0.432*** (0.062)
	Office worker	0.260*** (0.079)	0.235*** (0.047)	0.258*** (0.078)	0.233*** (0.047)	0.260*** (0.079)	0.236*** (0.047)
680	Manual worker	0.078 (0.147)	-0.111* (0.067)	0.077 (0.147)	-0.112* (0.067)	0.079 (0.147)	-0.112* (0.067)
	Student	0.162 (0.202)	0.333*** (0.120)	0.167 (0.202)	0.338*** (0.120)	0.164 (0.202)	0.331*** (0.120)
685	Support to Cohesion Policy principle	-0.578*** (0.109)	0.639*** (0.049)	-0.582*** (0.109)	0.631*** (0.049)	-0.580*** (0.109)	0.638*** (0.049)
	Residence: rural area	0.191*** (0.072)	-0.001 (0.051)	0.189*** (0.071)	-0.003 (0.051)	0.190*** (0.071)	-0.001 (0.051)
690	<i>Context conditions</i>						745
	Per capita funds (log)	0.738*** (0.214)	0.508*** (0.113)	0.777*** (0.228)	0.501*** (0.112)	0.757*** (0.215)	0.474*** (0.113)
	Pro-European Union (EU) orientation of local parties	-0.057 (0.063)	-0.037 (0.042)	-0.051 (0.062)	-0.033 (0.042)	-0.057 (0.061)	-0.042 (0.042)
695	Perceived institutional quality	-0.276* (0.141)	0.143* (0.080)	-0.243* (0.138)	0.167** (0.078)	-0.262* (0.139)	0.121 (0.081)
700	Matching EU investments and objective needs	0.186 (0.128)	0.048 (0.074)		0.363*** (0.099)		
	Matching EU investments and perceived needs			0.111 (0.148)		0.110 (0.122)	0.196*** (0.055)
705	Matching of EU investments, perceived and objective needs						
	Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
710	Constant	-4.102*** (0.380)	-3.601*** (0.259)	-4.193*** (0.388)	-3.933*** (0.260)	-4.090*** (0.380)	-3.595*** (0.257)
	Observations	21,697	21,697	21,697	21,697	21,697	21,697

Notes: Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses; *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
Reference categories: not aware (dependent variable), unemployed (occupation).

The perceived quality of institutions, on the other hand, has a significant effect on the perception of Cohesion Policy. Compared with the *not aware* category, an increase in

the quality of local institutions is likely to raise the probability of being *aware and satisfied* and, at the same time, to decrease the probability of being *aware and dissatisfied*.

Table 4. Marginal effects of the matching between investments, perceived and objective needs on the 'aware and satisfied' outcome.

	Marginal effect	Standard error	95% Confidence interval			
775	Matching European Union (EU) investments and objective needs (model (a) in Table 3)	0.001	0.013	-0.025	0.027	830
	Matching EU investments and perceived needs (model (b) in Table 3)	0.065***	0.018	0.030	0.100	
780	Matching of EU investments, perceived and objective needs (model (c) in Table 3)	0.031***	0.010	0.010	0.051	835

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

785 In other words, consistently with what was assumed above, institutional quality has a strong relationship with citizens' satisfaction with EU regional policy.

790 Model (a) in Table 3 introduces among the regressors the match between Cohesion Policy investments and the objective needs of regions. As reported in Table 3, this match has no effect on citizens' perceptions. Put differently, when a region allocates the EU funds to the most objectively needed actions, neither the level of awareness nor the level of satisfaction of the resident population is likely to increase.

795 The results are quite different if we consider the case of a match between the allocation of EU funds and the perceived needs of the population (model b). When such a situation occurs, the probability of citizens being *aware and satisfied* with Cohesion Policy increases, while the same does not hold for the category of *aware and dissatisfied*. In other words, if a region allocates the EU funds to policy fields that are perceived as needed by the citizens, the latter are more likely to be simultaneously informed about and satisfied with Cohesion Policy.

800 Taken together, the two former findings are partly in contrast with our *ex-ante* expectations. In the former case, we were expecting the match between objective needs and EU investments to be strongly related with citizens' satisfaction, since actions undertaken in the most needed fields of intervention are assumed to produce the most significant effects on social welfare. In the latter case, on the other hand, our conjecture was that the match between perceived needs and EU investments is likely to promote citizens' awareness, but not satisfaction.

805 The same result is shown in Table 4, reporting the marginal effect of the different combinations of matching between investments, perceived and objective needs on the 'aware and satisfied' condition. Compared with the output reported in Table 3, the coefficients in Table 4 do not represent a relative probability of the occurrence of a certain outcome of the dependent variable over the reference one but, rather, the overall probability of the occurrence of a certain outcome (in this case, being aware and satisfied) of the dependent variable. The output in Table 4 shows that, as expected given the findings discussed above, when the EU investments match the objective needs of regions, the marginal effect is not statistically significant. On the other hand, when the EU regional funds are

840 allocated to the axes of expenditure perceived by the population as urgent, the probability of being aware and satisfied with Cohesion Policy is, on average and keeping constant the other characteristics, about 6.5% higher.

845 The policy implications of this evidence are significant. They suggest that the fulfilment of 'individual/private/subjective' needs is fundamental for the explanation of citizens' satisfaction. What is striking is that this is true independently of the capacity of EU actions to fulfil 'real/collective/objective' needs. The consequence of this finding is that, whenever a mismatch occurs between perceived and objective needs, risks of distortion in Cohesion Policy implementation may arise. When the subjective/private aim outweighs the objective/social one, the risk may be that of having Cohesion Policy actions influenced by lobbies, by poorly informed people, by ideological positions. By contrast, when the objective/social aim outweighs the perceived/private one, regional development may be fostered at the expense of citizens' satisfaction.

850 Nevertheless, this does not mean that such a mechanism cannot be avoided. In model (c) we tested the inclusion of the match among perceived needs, objective needs and EU investments. As shown in Table 3, when regions invest EU funds in policy fields that are, at the same time, characterized by an objective need and also perceived as important by the resident population, citizens are more likely to be *aware and satisfied* with Cohesion Policy. This effect, however, is on average lower than that shown in model (b), referring to the match between EU investments and perceived needs only. As shown in Table 4 the probability of being aware of and satisfied with Cohesion Policy is on average about 3.1% higher when EU investments match both perceived and objective needs.

875 CONCLUSIONS, POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

880 This paper has presented a first attempt to study the determinants of both awareness of and satisfaction with Cohesion Policy. It has tested the idea that the context conditions, and in particular the match between funds' allocation and regional objective/subjective needs, of policy implementation settings may foster the awareness of and satisfaction with Cohesion Policy.

Most of the findings are consistent with our expectations. ~~The political orientation and the perceived quality of institutions are important determinants of the perception of Cohesion Policy.~~

885 However, the most significant and most persistent result is the one concerning the match between the allocation of funds across alternative areas of intervention and the perceived and objective policy needs. The empirical analysis highlighted that the subjective dimension plays a decisive role in explaining the condition of being both
890 aware of and satisfied with Cohesion Policy. An allocation of funds fitting the objective needs of the region is not associated *per se* with a higher probability of being aware and satisfied. Only when the allocation of Cohesion Policy funds matches individuals' perceived needs does the impact
895 on the satisfaction with EU regional policy become positive and statistically significant.

This result has important policy implications. As discussed in the second section, the ultimate goal of Cohesion Policy is to drive a harmonious socioeconomic development among EU regions that, in turn, is likely to promote EU support. The achievement of an impact on individuals' welfare is expected to be maximized if the public investments are focused on the objective needs of regions. If
900 this is not the case, we have a suboptimal scenario in which second-best (if not worse) policies are implemented, leading to a regional convergence lower than what could have been achieved if the funds were spent on the objective needs of regions. The paradox resides in the fact that citizens might be, in this suboptimal case, even more satisfied
905 than in the optimal situation, if the policy action is focused on their perceived needs. The occurrence of such a mechanism is likely to weaken convergence across regions, but also, in the long term, it might reduce the support of the resident population for the EU. In the short term, in fact, individuals are more satisfied because their perceived needs are fulfilled by EU regional policy, as shown in
910 Table 3. In the long term, however, individuals' perceptions of Cohesion Policy *could* become negative, since the public intervention did not generate the expected benefits, with a consequent decrease in their support for the EU project.

While this paper has focused on the short-term effects on individuals' satisfaction with EU regional policy, future research should investigate the long-run relationship linking perceptions of policies to the identification of citizens with the EU's values, testing the hypotheses stated above,
925 *that is*, the existence of a direct association between satisfaction with EU policies and European identity. In other words, the linkage between satisfaction and identification shown in Figure 1 (but not empirically tested in the present paper) should be documented and fully understood.

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programme (Capello & Perucca, 2017). The present paper is a greatly revised version of that working paper.

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NOTES

1. This reflects the utilitarian mechanism through which EU integration leads to a process of *communitarian identity-building* (Haas, 1958), where the individual identifies in the EU only if s/he gains an advantage from the integration process. Evidence of this mechanism is provided by research on the impact of the Erasmus programme on EU *identity-building*: students enrolled in the project are more likely than the others to identify with EU values (Mitchell, 2015; Van Mol, 2011). 955

2. According to the various mechanisms of EU *identity-building*, the pervasive presence of EU institutions in citizens' everyday lives is assumed to make them more inclined to identify with the supranational institutions even if they have not gained any personal advantage from EU integration (Haas, 1958; Risse & Grabowsky, 2008). Empirical evidence for this mechanism is provided by several studies, *such as* that by Risse (2003), who found that the introduction of the euro made citizens feel somewhat more European than before, while Bruter (2003) claimed that exposure to symbols *such as* the EU flag has a significant effect on cultural identity. 960

3. This does not imply that being aware of and satisfied with Cohesion Policy is a necessary prerequisite for identification with EU values. A number of other reasons could explain EU identity. However, since *the interest of the present paper* concerns *the* study of the mechanisms through which Cohesion Policy is likely to influence EU identity, we assume that the perception of such policies is important, and that their appreciation by citizens reinforces their support for the EU, which is perceived as a useful institution and not just as an abstract political construct. 965

4. Again, this mechanism recalls the utilitarian approach defined by Risse and Grabowsky (2008) and Hall (1958). 970

5. We are aware that, with respect to the relationship between Eurosceptic positions in the local political arena and Cohesion Policy, a stream of literature has focused on the relationship between Euroscepticism and the allocation of funds. Kemmerling and Bodenstein (2006) claimed that EU funds tend to be more generously allocated to regions with Eurosceptic local governments. This result is contradicted by other studies adopting 975

- alternative statistical techniques (Bouvet & Dall'Erba, 2010; Dellmuth, 2011). Our contention is that, even if regions with high levels of Euroscepticism receive, *ceteris paribus*, more funding than the others (which is expected, in turn, to increase awareness), this effect is more than counterbalanced by the strong incentive of local governments to misrepresent the role of the EU in promoting regional development.
6. Flash Eurobarometer studies are ad hoc surveys conducted since 1989 on the request of any service of the European Commission.
7. More precisely, regarding the awareness of the existence of EU policy the question (Q1A) was 'Europe provides financial support in regions and cities. Have you heard about EU co-financed projects to improve the area you live in?' In the case of the level of satisfaction with Cohesion Policy, the question was: 'Taking into consideration all the projects you have heard about, would you say that this support had a positive or negative impact on the development in your city or region?'
8. The question (Q4) was: 'Most European regional funding is concentrated on the poorest regions in order to help them to catch up. In your opinion, is this rather a good or rather a bad thing?'
9. Individuals in the survey are classified according to their NUTS-2 region of residence, apart from some countries (Spain, Italy, Germany, the UK, Spain), for which the information is available at the NUTS-1 level. The empirical measurement of the context conditions is therefore consistent with these two classifications.
10. Following the same reasoning applied to R&D, for instance, the supply of ICT services is usually provided by official statistics, while the potential demand depends on a set of characteristics of the local environment such as presence of firms, human capital and agglomeration (Assimakopoulos, Tsouri, Mavridis, & Moore, 2016). In the tourism field, the supply of accommodation facilities can be matched with a potential demand depending on the density of cultural and natural amenities and the degree of urbanization (Massidda & Etzo, 2012). For full details about the identification of the objective needs across all the policy fields considered, see Capello and Perucca (2018).
11. We could not control for other policies undertaken through either regional or national programmes. From the statistical point of view, in order to capture the effect of different institutional settings and the existence of specific national programmes, we added a set of country dummies in the model specification. In any case, we assumed that the focus of any kind of policy (either regional, national or supranational) on policy fields with no objective needs is less efficient than the same action undertaken in an area where an objective necessity arises. Moreover, the question of the Flash Eurobarometer survey is very specific, making a clear reference to the actions undertaken by EU regional policy. Those respondents who answered that they were aware and had a definite perception of the impact of these interventions are assumed to isolate correctly the actions undertaken under the Cohesion Policy flag from all the others.
12. The choice of the three most financed policy fields is arbitrary and based on the fact that, on average, the first two most financed axes of expenditure cover about 32% of total funding. As a consequence, the actions undertaken in these fields are those more likely to be visible and perceived by the resident population. Nevertheless, findings are consistent with those reported in the present paper if we consider the first three or four most financed policy fields. The results are available from the authors upon request.
13. This is important because several studies have pointed out how the definition of the *ex-ante* objectives and strategies in the programme's documents are, in some cases, coherent with the actions undertaken (Nilsson et al., 2012).
14. The question was: 'EU regional policy can support many different sectors. I will read a list of areas to you. Please tell me for each of them, if you consider them among the more important or less important ones for your city or your region?' The sectors for which the respondent had to report his/her opinion were: transport facilities, energy networks, renewable, clean energy, research and innovation, broadband and internet access, environment, support for small businesses, employment training, education, health and social infrastructure, and tourism and culture.
15. The classification of parties between Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic was based on internet-based research and on the analysis by Treib (2014). Both soft and hard Eurosceptic movements were classified together as anti-EU. The source of the data was the European Election Database managed by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.
16. The Flash Eurobarometer survey study was conducted in 2010, while in the programming period 2000–06 regions were able to spend communitarian funds until 2008. Countries that did not receive any support in that period (Bulgaria and Romania, which entered the EU in 2007) are not included in the analysis.

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