Cohesion Policies and the Creation of a European Identity: The Role of Territorial Identity*

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Abstract

Among the factors highlighted by the literature as crucial for the success of cohesion policies in generating satisfaction among citizens, and therefore in acting positively on the constitution of an European identity, this paper emphasizes a particular one, territorial identity. Elaborating on the definition of territorial identity as a local condition in which private interests coincide with public ones, the paper claims that territorial identity plays an important role in a European identity-building process. In fact, by increasing the probability that local public expenditures match private interests, territorial identity generates a favourable context where the critical factors that hamper the successful programming, design and implementation of cohesion policies can be overcome.

Keywords: EU identity; territorial identity; cohesion policy

Introduction

With the signature of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which laid the constitutional foundations for the European Union, the creation of a European identity became an issue to address, a goal to achieve, a system of values to identify, protect and build over time. Intensified over the last 15 years, the debate on a European identity, its definition, its building process and its co-existence with other identities, is still rich and open, and it stimulates more questions than answers (Bruter, 2005; Caporaso and Kim, 2009; Chacha, 2012; Risse, 2002, 2014; Treib, 2014).

Moreover, the recent resurgence of nationalism in various European countries (Brexit for example) generated by austerity measures imposed by the economic crisis, by large migratory phenomena, and by growing national feelings of insecurity due to terrorist attacks, makes the issue of how to maintain and strengthen European identity more crucial than ever before. Within the wide-ranging debate on the European identity, its building process calls for particular attention.

The process of European identity-building is seen as a circular process extending from the political élite leading the integration project down to a larger public that has to be convinced of the importance, advantages and positive feedback of the élite-driven project for citizens' lives. Once individuals perceive the strategic importance of the European integration project, they participate in building European identity through a bottom-up process of identification with the European Union's values. Particular attention is paid in the literature to the elements that influence this circular reasoning. In particular, a first

group of studies is mostly interested in how European values can be transmitted to a larger public, overcoming its well-known scepticism. Numerous indirect political messages, and symbols of these policies, like a European flag, a European day, a European anthem, a European currency, are studied in the literature as ways to reinforce not only popular perceptions of what the political community is, but also citizens' sense of belonging to a European community (Bruter, 2003; Laffan, 2004). Particular attention is also paid to the role performed by the media – from traditional newspaper articles to propaganda – that are expected to strongly influence citizens' belief systems in terms of ideology, prejudices and fundamental values (Bruter, 2003) (Figure 1, path a).

A second group of studies instead investigates the individual and social elements that condition the attitude of individuals towards the EU project (Van Oorschot, 2006). The degree of education of citizens, the presence of a strong feeling of belonging to a nation or region (nationalistic feelings), and the presence of a political ideology (euroscepticism) are all factors influencing the attitude of people towards EU values (Figlestein *et al.*, 2012; Mitchell, 2015; Risse, 2002; Schilde, 2014; Treib, 2014; Jensen & Richardson, 2003) (Figure 1, path b).

Among the different elements mentioned in the literature as supporting European identity-building, a new one has been recently suggested, namely cohesion policies; acting at the local level with a significant share of the EU budget, cohesion policies can be means whereby the EU becomes a reality in the everyday lives of citizens, reinforcing their sense of being part of a European community (Bachtler, 2016; Hooghe, 1996; Marks *et al.*, 1996; Richardson and Jensen, 2003; Revilla *et al.*, 2013). The role of EU cohesion policy in promoting European identity is mostly an uncharted academic terrain. However, a large research project (labeled COHESIFY) has been recently launched within the Horizon 2020 framework to remedy this shortcoming.

Among factors highlighted by the literature as crucial for the success of cohesion policies in generating satisfaction among citizens, and therefore in acting positively on the constitution of an European identity, this paper emphasizes one in particular, namely territorial identity. Defined as a local condition in which private interests coincide with public ones (section II), territorial identity plays an important role in a

Figure 1: The Circular Process of the European Identity-Building Process: Cohesion Policies and Their Enabling Factors.
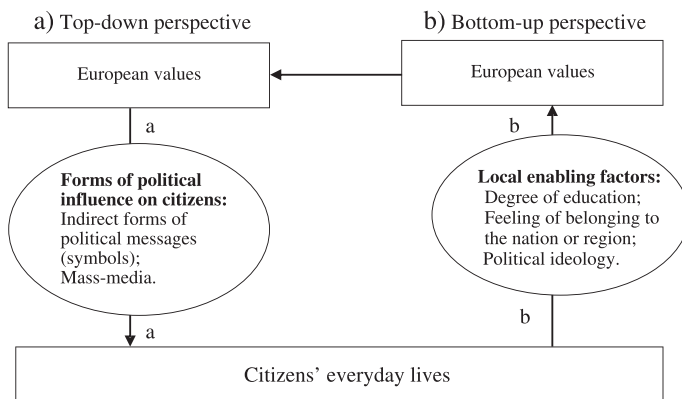
European identity-building process. By increasing the probability that local public expenditures match private interests, territorial identity generates a favourable context in which the factors that impede the successful programming, design and implementation of cohesion policies can be overcome (section III).

In line with the idea that 'individuals tend to identify with those units that provide them with more positive emotions' (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001 p. 757), the paper argues that the sense of belonging to a system and solidarity (defined as a single individual's spontaneous attitude reflecting a convergence of interests, feelings and ideas among local people) are the basic ingredients for the creation of a collective identity. Solidarity is guaranteed when individuals perceive a match between their private interests and the collective ones. When solidarity is present, a collective system works in a co-ordinated manner to solve problems; whatever action reinforces such a match – even if it comes from institutions distant from citizens like the European Union – is perceived as a positive phenomenon, accepted and pursued for the sake of private and public interests at the same time. Applying the 'proximal rule'– which suggests that individuals identify more with smaller groups than with bigger ones (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001) – the match between private and collective interests takes place more easily at local level, where socio-cultural and economic conditions cause feelings of similarity, and a sense of belonging to the local system, such as feelings of territorial identity.

To achieve its aim, the paper has to shed light on concepts that in the literature are still fuzzy, or do not have a unique definition. In particular, European identity is widely explored in the literature (see Bruter, 2003; Caporaso and Kim, 2009; Risse, 2002; Schilde, 2014), but with no single interpretation. In this case, the aim of the next section is to explain which definition is applied in the paper and why. Territorial identity is still a vague concept; despite some admirable attempts to provide a definition (Calafati, 2009; Camagni, 2007; Camagni, 2009), the concept still requires a sound interpretation. Based on scattered concepts existing in the literature, this paper proposes a new interpretation of territorial identity, which differs from the concept of regional identity already discussed in the literature (Chacha, 2012; Paasi, 2009). Strongly rooted in socio-cultural and political values, regional identity refers to attachments and feelings of belonging to a group fuelled by a wide range of manifestations and rituals. In this study, 'territorial identity' always refers to attachments and feelings of belonging to a group. However, the reasons for these feelings are rooted not only in common socio-cultural and political values, but rather in the economic advantages that a system of common competences and local relationships generates for people, inducing them to act spontaneously in favour of the local community (section II).

Once the definition of European and territorial identities has been provided, the paper moves to analysis of the role of cohesion policies in building a sense of belonging to European values. A certain number of factors are highlighted by the literature as hampering the ability of cohesion policies to act on citizens' satisfaction. The paper argues that the probability of overcoming the factors hampering the ability of cohesion policies to act on citizens' satisfaction increases in the presence of territorial identity (section III).

I. A Definition of European Identity

'European identity' is a fuzzy concept which cannot be taken for granted. A clear definition of what is meant by the expression in this study is therefore necessary. We can start

by claiming that European identity entails the concept of a collective identity which 'refers to the idea that a group of people accepts a fundamental similarity that causes them to feel solidarity among themselves, and to construct an 'other'. This sense of collective identity is socially constructed, it emerges as 'the intentional and unintentional consequences of social interactions' (Figlestein *et al.*, 2012, p. 108). Moreover, a collective identity is an 'imagined community', this being defined as a community which becomes real in people's lives when they increasingly share cultural values, a perceived common destiny, increased salience, and boundedness (Risse, 2002).

This first definition helps to specify European identity as a collective identity in which people accept that they have a fundamental similarity which causes them to feel reciprocal solidarity. However, this is not enough to understand what European identity actually is. The main element discriminating among different types of European identity is the similarity that makes people feel that they belong to the same community. Similarity may stem from history, ethnicity, civilization and heritage. In this case, Europe is perceived as a cultural entity, and the similarity based on the perception of having the same ethnicity, and sharing historical roots on which common civil rules and values have been built, generates a solidarity springing from a shared historical heritage (Bruter, 2003; Caporaso and Kim, 2009; Risse, 2002).

Similarity may also represent the identification of citizens with a particular political structure such as the European Union and its institutions. In this case, similarity is based on similar political values and goals, and the identity built on it is much more circumscribed because it has a civic meaning in which Europe is represented by a political space. Also in this second case, the way in which people feel 'European' may assume completely different meanings in terms of the imagined political community to which they refer. If the European identity is interpreted through the translation of national values, it becomes enmeshed with different national identities leading to rather diverging national outcomes. The German political élite regarded European values as a means to overcome Germany's nationalist and military past; the French political élite constructed Europe as an externalization of distinct French values of republicanism; the British political élite constructed Europe in contrast to their understanding of the nation, particularly the English nation (Risse, 2002; Schilde, 2014).

The distinction between cultural and civic identity is important, but it is not the only one (Bruter, 2003; Caporaso and Kim, 2009). One can distinguish European identity on the basis of its intrinsic aspects. There is an identity based on self-rooted attachments and feelings of belonging to a group called 'subjective awareness'; and there is an identity based on how parts of the group fit together to solve problems and how interdependent these parts are, which is the behavioural and process-oriented part of identity called 'coherence' (Caporaso and Kim, 2009).

In what follows, it is this second aspect of a European identity that is borne in mind. Under the civic definition of a European identity – centred on the construction of European integration through shared political and social values – our concern is to identify how the presence of a territorial identity can help overcome limitations that cohesion policies may encounter in inducing diverse groups of people to work together to solve common problems and feel that they belong to the same community, sharing the same values, destiny and a forward-looking stance in which a territorial identity can play a role. This last notion also requires clear definition, which will be provided below (section II).

II. A Definition of Territorial Identity

If 'European identity' is a fuzzy concept, even more so is 'territorial identity'. It lacks a specific definition despite some interesting and enlightening attempts in the literature (Calafati, 2009; Camagni, 2007).

A starting point from which to analyze and produce a clear definition of territorial identity is the concept of collective identity. One can in fact claim that, as is the case of a European or a national identity, so a territorial identity emerges when 'a group of people accepts a fundamental similarity that causes them to feel solidarity among themselves', such as when feelings of similarity among people lead to solidarity (Figlestein *et al.*, 2012, p. 108). It is on the identification of similarity and solidarity that a definition of territorial identity can be appropriately based and distinguished from other types of collective identity (European, national, regional).

By elaborating on existing concepts, one can highlight different interpretations of the formation of similarity and solidarity in a local community on which the territorial identity-building process rests. A first 'model' of territorial identity-building can be termed a 'cognitive' model, since similarity refers to the existence of common competences and 'vocation' developed through a local productive specialization. Common competences express themselves in common working experiences, cultural practices and a cultural homogeneity in the local labour market, as largely analysed by the Italian tradition of local districts (Becattini, 1990). They generate shared ethical/cultural values able to reinforce people's feeling of belonging, and a sense of solidarity within the local community (Table 1).

A second 'model' of territorial identity-building can be defined as a 'cultural model'. This refers to a situation where similarity finds its roots in a cultural distinctiveness (Wolf, 1979). New shared cultural needs and values to pursue through innovative behavioural styles may easily be ways to construct a feeling of sameness and of belonging, structuring the inhabitants' actions around shared interests. Areas can generate a particular image of themselves thanks to shared values like those related to sustainable growth: around this image and consequent common behaviour like a zero kilometer consumption, the local community produces a sense of belonging and a feeling of attachment to common values among citizens that, when maintained over time, leads to the construction of solidarity, and therefore of territorial identity (Table 1).

A third 'model of territorial identity-building' comes about through the creation of relational capital. Constrained by common conditions of bounded rationality, individuals and firms control risks and uncertainty concerning outcomes of their actions through a complex set of co-operation networks with other actors. Because such relational capital results from a long-term investment in the establishment of potential and/or actual local relationships, it becomes the 'glue' of a territorial identity. In this case, feelings of belonging to a particular area arise from the evidence of fruitful 'collective learning processes' (Camagni, 1991) through which a specific common 'cognitive capability' is built. 'Socialized' management of information and problem solving – or, more precisely in the economic sphere, the ability to transform information and inventions into innovation and productivity increase through co-operative or market interaction – becomes a vital asset for individuals and firms belonging to the area. But especially, it becomes a sunk cost that prevents firms and individuals from re-locating activity outside the local area, and gives rise to a common feeling of 'territorial loyalty' (Calafati, 2009).

Table 1: 'Models' of Territorial Identity-Building: Sources of Similarity and Solidarity

	Cognitive Model	Cultural Model	Relational Model
Definition of territorial identity	A system of productive competences generating socio-political values acting as mechanisms on which solidarity rests.	New behavioural needs, acting as mechanisms on which solidarity rests.	A system of local relationships acting as mechanisms on which solidarity rests.
Sources of similarity	Presence of a historical production competence.	Common culture.	Selected, long-term potential co-operation partners.
Sources of solidarity	Common working experience. Shared knowledge and reputation.	Trust and reciprocity.	High opportunity costs of a potential relocation. Co-operation surplus.
Outcome	Collective learning through internal mobility of the labour force.	Collective learning through cultural networks.	Collective learning through co-operation.
Local links	Place identity through specialization.	Place affection.	Place loyalty.

Feelings of sameness and similarity stemming from a common industrial vocation, a common vision, a common feeling of 'territorial loyalty' lead to the construction of a territorial identity formed by applying either a cognitive, a relational or a cultural 'model' to construct a sense of solidarity (Table 1). When similarities exist, in fact, they are potential sources of solidarity. Defined as a spontaneous attitude to protect a convergence of interests among local people, solidarity is what ensures that a collective attitude prevails over a private one, to maintain, reinforce and cumulate territorial identity over time, and build on it a true economic strategic vision of the economic competitiveness of the local area (Table 1).

While in studies of political science, social psychology and sociology, solidarity is socially constructed, being the result of social values and cultural elements that constitute the subjective awareness of being part of a specific community, in our approach solidarity is more the result of an 'individualistic mental mapping' whereby identities are free from traditional ties and collective visions, in line with the individualization thesis (Treib, 2014). Solidarity takes place when private interests coincide with collective ones, so that for each single citizen and/or firm, collective actions reinforce at the same time private as well as social interests. Under these conditions, a collective logic is fed by private interests, with the possibility of carrying on collective actions freed from opportunistic behaviours (Table 1); when this is the case, a local community works together in an harmonious way, in an orderly ensemble, to solve problems; separated individuals amalgamate, merge and form a single entity, a community destined to remain stable over time.

Similarities in local competences generate collective actions oriented to the reinforcement of local competitiveness (public goods provided by co-ordinated private decisions and public policies and incentives for the support of local productive specificities); all this is expected to generate positive externalities in the form of shared knowledge and specialized local employment and consequently collective learning processes through internal mobility of the labour force, as in the best tradition of theories on industrial districts (Becattini, 1989) and milieux innovateurs (Camagni, 1991). In a cultural approach, similarities stemming from innovative consumption needs are sources of forward-looking shared visions of the area, and consequent behaviour in which individuals reflect themselves, having their single interests protected. This behaviour gives rise to collective learning via cultural networks. When the relational approach is utilized in the interpretation of territorial identity, private advantages of remaining anchored to the local area thanks to the presence of relational capital assets coincide with the public interest of avoiding the impoverishment of the local area with the loss of historical actors and activities; collective learning takes place through forms of co-operation.

The merging of public interests with private ones gives rise to *territorial loyalty*: the protection of their private interests anchors individuals to the destiny of their area. They thus spontaneously feel that they share a vision and a future with their local community and public institutions. In economic terms, territorial loyalty becomes an important tool to protect local competitiveness by launching actions to protect local vocations (in a cognitive approach), enlarging and deepening (what is felt to be) virtuous behaviour (cultural approach) or anchoring historical actors in the territory, reinforcing collective learning processes (in a relational approach).

III. Cohesion Policies as a Form of Political Influence on Citizens: The Role of Territorial Identity

Conceptually speaking, the formation of an European identity is the result of two intertwined processes: a top-down process in which Europe, through the institutions of its Union, intervenes in citizens' everyday lives, influencing local values with its unified project, and a bottom-up one through which citizens take part in the creation of the Unified Europe design, transferring their values, and adjusting them to the unified project. As said, the top-down perspective has identified the tools with which the European Union can increase the awareness of citizens about its project through indirect forms of political influence, like symbols, mass media and their propaganda. The intensity of this latter process reflects the degree of education, the presence of a strong sense of having a national or regional identity (nationalistic feelings), and the presence of a political ideology – all of which influence the attitudes of people, and therefore their perception of EU values. The top-down and bottom-up processes are part of a single circular identity-building process which, through iterations, feedbacks and cumulative self-reinforcing elements, produces a European identity that can be shared by a multitude of European citizens, reinforced and established over time as a recognized system of common European values.

Cohesion policies can be added to the possible tools that can play an important role in the previous logical scheme (Bachtler, 2016; Hooghe, 1996). Given their nature, cohesion policies can in fact be interpreted as an additional form of political influence on citizens (Figure 2, path a'). A number of characteristics make them a possible channel for transmitting European values, namely:

• their European nature. Being normative tools of the European institutions, they are a direct expression of the political ideas, projects and methods that are formulated in Brussels; therefore they represent a concrete sign of the civic European identity brought

Figure 2: The Circular Process of the European Identity-Building Process: Tools and Local Enabling Factors.
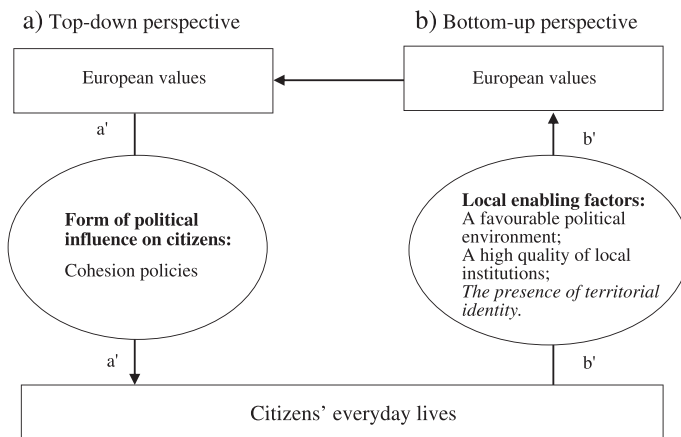
forward by the European political élite that affects citizens' everyday lives if spent in the appropriate way;

- their magnitude. Because cohesion policies represent a large share of the EU budget and cover many aspects (infrastructure, industries, culture, etc.), their effects on local development can be visible to citizens;
- their solidarity nature. The policy's solidarity rationale aims at fostering a common sense of community across Member States and regions by contributing to territorial development, to regional convergence and, therefore, to EU citizens' well-being (Ramajo *et al.*, 2008; Strumia, 2011)[1] ;
- their monetary nature. These policies do not impose rules and regulations, but provide investments in local societies; they therefore produce tangible outcomes for individuals (Marks, 1996);
- their local, place-based nature. Despite their European nature, cohesion policies are conceived to solve local needs, and are therefore able to act on and directly influence citizens' own interests. In fact, it is claimed that a European identity has little to do with information campaigns about the EU. Rather, the key for increased identification with Europe and the EU is increasing the reality of the community in the daily lives of citizens. Moreover, they should be tailored to local specificities, designed to meet citizens' specific needs, and therefore bring citizens closer to EU values and policies (Barca, 2009);
- the bottom-up nature of their design. The subsidiarity principle accompanying these policies makes it possible to satisfy the growing desire of people for a greater say in their government through higher levels and more effective forms of participation in decision-making (OECD, 1999) to overcome, when present, a growing feeling of insecurity among citizens concerning the ability of national governments to take care of them and correctly interpret their needs (Camagni, 2007; Camagni and Capello, 2015; Chacha, 2012). Through the subsidiarity principle that enables regions to influence their local and EU affairs, regions have become – and especially have the feeling that they are – more socially, economically and politically empowered.

For all these reasons, cohesion policies can logically be interpreted as an indirect form of political influence on citizens, like (or even more than) EU symbols and communications. Through cohesion policies, citizens register an increase in the quality of their everyday lives, and they are expected to have a more favourable attitude towards the European integration project, participating in building a European identity through a bottom-up process of identification with the European Union values (Figure 2, path b').

However, it is logical to expect that cohesion policies impact on citizens' life satisfaction if they are spent in an efficient way. This is unfortunately not always the case. There exist factors that can create obstacles to how structural funds are spent, and therefore to how people perceive them. Certainly, individual characteristics (education, political ideology, etc.) can partially explain the degree of awareness and of satisfaction that people have concerning cohesion policies. However, the intensity of the relationship between citizens' perception and EU values also depends on the context conditions in which cohesion policies are developed, namely (Figure 1, 2, path b'):

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[1] For a survey on the issue, see Dall'Erba and Fang (2017); European Commission (2015); Gripaios *et al.* (2008).

- the capacity of local administrations to set *appropriate policy needs*. In this sense, cohesion policies call for the identification and implementation of a policy design requiring the identification of problems and policy goals (Hooghe, 1996; Marks *et al*., 1996; Bachtler, 2016);
- the capacity of local administrations to design and implement needs and to select projects avoiding *local lobbies*. The efficiency of local administrations in identifying local needs should also protect the area from a mis-allocation of public spending due to strong local lobbies and private interests (Barca, 2009);
- the *desirability of a certain policy for the local community* (Tosun, 2014). Perceived desirability in solving particular needs by citizens can explain much of their degree of satisfaction with respect to cohesion policies;
- the complex *multilevel governance* required by European policies. The participation of a range of different types of actors (public, private and societal) in policy-making and implementation through formal and informal tools required by European policies is a problem in most local contexts (European Parliament, 2014; Marks, 1996) because the sharing of power among several levels of authority requires close co-operation among public local institutions, private actors and the European supra-national institutions. Assessments of the effects of structural funds in the programming period 2007–13 have highlighted several limitations in implementing the multilevel governance, among them i) a lack of tradition and experience of decentralization and collaborative policy-making; ii) a lack of resources, mostly due to the complexity of cohesion policy rules; iii) the high administrative costs due to the large number of actors involved (European Parliament, 2014);
- the *quality of the institutional context*, which influences the design and implementation of efficient development strategies and makes development policies more viable (Crescenzi *et al*., 2016; Farole *et al*., 2011; Hooghe, 1996; Ketterer and Rodríguez-Pose, 2016; Rodríguez-Pose and Garcilazo, 2015);
- the *local political environment*. When not in favour of a European project, the local political environment may be inclined to support negative propaganda about the achievements of cohesion policies (Treib, 2014).

The thesis of this paper is that, in the presence of territorial identity, the critical factors limiting the efficiency of cohesion policies are more easily overcome. Generally speaking, in fact, by acting in areas where public (and social) interests easily merge with private ones, cohesion policies are not subject to conflicts between private and public normative goals. In a situation like this, the achievement of collective aims is in most cases the guarantee of individual satisfactions. It reinforces citizens' quality of life, and thereby their positive attitude towards EU values and the institutions or political élite that promote them.

Territorial identity intervenes in many critical factors, creating the context conditions for overcoming them more easily. Table 2 presents the domains of influence of cohesion policies on the critical factors that hamper the efficiency of cohesion policies in satisfying citizens, taking the different 'models' with which territorial identity is constructed into account.

In areas of high territorial identity, clear historical competences, shared strategic visions and strong relational capital are sources of similarities and solidarity generated by the coincidence of private interests with public ones. These conditions enable three

Table 2: Domains of Influence of Cohesion Policies on Critical Elements by 'Models' of Territorial Identity-building

Domains of influence on cohesion policies	Models of territorial identity-building		
	Cognitive Model	Cultural Model	Relational Model
Easier identification of local needs (overcoming lobbies)	Evident areas of 'smart specialization' thanks to clear historical competences.	Evident 'smart vision' thanks to clear innovative behaviours.	Evident 'smart co-operation' areas thanks to clear interest in maintaining local relationships.
Higher probability of investment in local needs (overcoming non-useful investments)	Easier co-operation between local private and public agents for the reinforcement of common goals. Easier selection of public-private projects thanks to common goals.	Easier co-operation between local private and public agents for the reinforcement of common innovative behaviours. Easier selection of public-private projects thanks to common goals.	Selected, long-term potential co-operation partners.
Easier multilevel governance	Concentration of resources on local needs. Local coalition in proposing projects on local needs to the European Union. Common political will of actors and institutions involved.	Concentration of resources on a local vision. Local coalition in proposing projects on a local vision to the European Union.	Tradition of co-operative private–public partnership.

kinds of critical factors to be more easily overcome: i) the identification of local needs, ii) the identification of a critical mass of local resources devoted to particular needs, iii) easier multilevel governance (Table 2).

In the presence of territorial identity, local needs, local strategic visions, and local co-operation emerge as a collective good, and they are common goals to be pursued and reinforced. In a context like this, collective preferences and priorities are more easily identified and more widely shared; therefore, they are likely to be more effectively addressed by public policies. In such a condition, the probability that local lobbies can force cohesion policies in a wrong direction with respect to collective goals is limited, and strongly sanctioned by social behaviours.

The probability of free riding behaviour in public spending does not arise because it hardly reflects public or private interests. The mis-match between the needs perceived by citizens and the real needs of the area is also limited, since each individual matches his/her private interest with that of the local community. By the same token, private actors and institutions are more likely to be financially involved given their private advantage. Moreover, in contexts characterized by territorial identity, local private actors easily invest in fields that are of interest also for the local community. A critical mass of funds is easily dedicated to the reinforcement of historical competences ('cognitive model'), of common innovative behaviours to achieve a shared vision of the area's future ('cultural model'), of long-term co-operation between private and public agents ('relational model').

Multilevel governance is another domain in which territorial identity can help overcome some limitations. Prior experience in private-public partnership, existing in local contexts characterized by territorial identity, is certainly a condition that contributes to greater policy effectiveness in all aspects of programme implementation; to greater transparency in decision-making processes; as well as to a greater commitment and ownership of programme outcomes. The commonality of interests generates a strong local coalition in proposing projects on particular needs/visions to the European Union, as well as a common political will of actors and institutions involved, which can more easily achieve a consensus among multi-level actors.

Once established, the positive effects of territorial identity on cohesion policies generate positive feed-backs on territorial identity: by acting on the elements of similarity that characterize the territorial identity of each area, cohesion policies reinforce territorial identity by avoiding the destruction of natural and cultural environments, the loss of territorial specificities, the risk of knowledge 'de-cumulation' due to firms' outsourcing of production phases, and processes of economic decline and desertification of inner peripheries. All these trends, when not countered, can be detrimental to a territorial identity, which can be subject to decumulation like all kinds of territorial capital. Cohesion policies can instead guarantee a process of accumulation of identitarian capital, reinforcing people's attachment to the local area and territorial loyalty. When this is the case, citizens more easily assume a positive attitude towards the institution that protects their identity, and with it their private interests.

Conclusions

Cohesion policies can take part in the creation of a European community; they have in fact a European nature, but they act on local needs, help find solutions to local

problems, and overcome the growing feeling of insecurity among citizens concerning the ability of national governments to take care of them and correctly interpret their needs. Furthermore, they allow empowerment of local intermediate institutions, élites and citizens in a sound, economic and political sense. All these aspects can explain why cohesion policies may be interpreted as a way in which the European Union can become a reality in the everyday lives of citizens, reinforcing their feeling of being part of a European community.

However, for cohesion policies to act in such a way, they have to be effective. The main goal of the paper has been to demonstrate that the critical factors hampering the efficient programming, design and implementation of cohesion policies – from the identification of local needs, of a local collective vision on which to build a strategy, to all multilevel governance issues – are easier to overcome when territorial identity characterizes an area. Interpreted as local conditions in which solidarity among people stems from the merger between private and public interests, territorial identity is the behavioural and process-oriented part of a collective identity. Solidarity enables collective actions to be developed under the guarantee that private interests coincide with collective ones. This also means that a common vision on local needs and local strategies for the future of the area is shared by the local community, and easily identified when cohesion policies require the identification of productive and strategic vocations. But it also means that the probability of matching needs perceived by citizens with the area's real needs is higher, and the availability of private funds to finance a common goal is greater. Previous private-public partnership, which is frequent in these areas, is expected to be of great help in applying cohesion policies.

The impression is therefore that cohesion policies can act as an indirect form of political influence in the creation of a European identity, under the assumption that they are effective in their spending. However, territorial identity, defined as the social rules which guarantee that private economic behaviours of local agents coincide with public ones, largely affects the way in which cohesion policies may be perceived by citizens, an assertion conceptually presented here but which calls for empirical validation.[2] An interesting implication of this discussion is that the role of cohesion policies as a European identity-building vehicle cannot be reinforced through external interventions. It is instead the result of social rules rooted in the history of local areas that require time to be formed and to be adjusted.

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[2] This is the ongoing research goal of the author.

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