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# EU Cohesion Policy Can't Buy Me Love. Exploring the Regional Determinants of EU Identification

Marcin Dabrowski<sup>1</sup>, Dominic Stead\*<sup>1</sup>, and Bardia Mashhoodi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Delft University of Technology (TUDelft) – Netherlands

## Abstract

EU Cohesion Policy supports a variety of regional projects across Europe with the aim of improving the economic well-being of regions and reducing regional disparities. By investing in a range of projects across the European territory, EU Cohesion Policy is not only a direct and tangible expression of European solidarity, it also has direct impacts on the daily lives and environments of many citizens. However, awareness among citizens is often limited regarding the nature of these projects and the impacts for their region. Whether and how EU Cohesion Policy affects what people think about the EU is not well charted, particularly at the regional level where the policy has the most direct and palpable effects. Drawing on the research conducted as part of the Horizon 2020 COHESIFY project, this paper addresses some of these gaps in knowledge. The paper firstly investigates how the perceptions of the EU vary across different regional contexts of the 28 EU member states, both in terms of the public image of the EU and citizens' attachment to the EU. A regional typology of EU identification is constructed based on these two factors (public image and citizens' attachment) based on recent data from Eurobarometer surveys. The paper then presents an analysis of factors that help to explain some of the regional differences in public perceptions of the EU. The analysis considers a range of factors including variables related to socio-economic conditions (e.g. income levels, employment rates, demographic profile), territorial characteristics (e.g. highly urbanised or predominantly rural regions) and governance features (e.g. trust in government, quality of governance). The paper concludes that the amount of regional spending on Cohesion Policy is no guarantee of public support or approval for the EU project.

**Keywords:** EU Cohesion Policy, public perceptions, public image, citizens' attachment, regions

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\*Speaker