

<b>Institution:</b> University of Strathclyde		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> C19 Politics and International Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Influencing Cohesion Policy and territorial cooperation in Europe, the UK and the Caribbean through comparative public policy analysis		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000 - 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
John Bachtler	Professor	01/10/1983 – present
Martin Ferry	Senior Research Fellow	01/04/2002 – present
Carlos Mendez	Principal Research Fellow	17/03/2003 – present
Irene McMaster	Research Fellow	25/01/1999 – present
Fiona Wishlade	Professor	28/11/1983 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 – December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Research by the European Policies Research Centre (EPRC) on EU Cohesion Policy has influenced policy decisions at international, national and sub-national scales. Research on the institutional dynamics of Cohesion Policy reform was used to facilitate intergovernmental dialogue among EU Member States and the formation of Germany's governmental negotiating position in EU policy and budgetary reforms in 2018-20. Studies of governance also informed decisions by the Scottish Government on its post-Brexit replacement of Cohesion Policy. Research on the perception of Cohesion Policy among EU citizens was used by the European Commission to justify a new policy priority and legislative changes. Comparative research on EU policy experience also provided the basis for a new cohesion policy by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Since 2000, the European Policies Research Centre (EPRC) has conducted comparative research on EU Cohesion Policy. Accounting for one-third of the EU budget, it is the most important EU policy for addressing regional and social inequality, with a policy framework developed at EU level and implemented by Member States through 535+ national and regional programmes. EPRC research by Bachtler, Ferry, Mendez, McMaster and Wishlade comprises four interrelated strands.</p>		
<b>Understanding the institutional and policy dynamics of EU policy formation on cohesion</b>		
<p>EPRC research on Cohesion Policy over the past two decades has analysed systematically how the design of the policy has evolved, assessing the relative importance of 'economic, social and territorial cohesion' in EU policymaking. A particular focus has been the impacts of reforms undertaken as part of the seven-yearly governmental negotiations of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) [R1, R3]. In each reform phase, Bachtler, Mendez and Wishlade have studied the process of formation of policy positions within the EU institutions and in individual Member States (including sub-national actors), the algorithms used for the budgetary 'negotiating boxes', the influence of interest groups and national/regional alliances, and the evolution of the negotiations. This has shed new light on the inter-institutional dynamics of the EU negotiations and the factors that explain the budgetary and legislative outcomes for Cohesion Policy.</p>		
<b>Comparative study and lesson-drawing on the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy</b>		
<p>Complementing the research on policy formation, EPRC's long-term research on Cohesion Policy [R1-R5] is distinguished by comparative analysis of policy implementation across all EU Member States. Studies have analysed in depth the operation of administrative processes in each EU country/region in areas such as strategy development, project selection, partnership, financial management, communication, monitoring and evaluation. The longitudinal analysis of these processes under successive implementation phases (1989–93, 1994–99, 2000–06, 2007–13, 2014–20) has created a unique knowledge base on how Cohesion Policy operates in practice in each Member State and how implementation processes have developed over time. Research by</p>		

Bachtler, Ferry and Mendez has produced new insights on: the factors influencing implementation in different institutional contexts and the effectiveness of EU conditionalities [R3, R4]; how quality of governance (administrative capacity) influences implementation performance [R4]; and how accountability requirements (financial control, audit) influence implementation [R5].

### **Assessing the governance of a post-Brexit regional policy and territorial cooperation**

A third strand of EPRC Cohesion Policy research over the period 2000-2020 has been concerned with inter-governmental relations. This has focused both on relations within countries, as well as across borders through European Territorial Cooperation, the policy framework through which the EU supports cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation between regions [R1-R3].

Over the period 2000-2020, Bachtler, Ferry, Mendez and McMaster have researched the multi-level governance of Cohesion Policy, investigating the powers and competences of national and subnational levels in the governance of European Structural and Investment Funds in the institutional contexts of 28 Member States. The research has contributed to improved understanding of the role of the European Commission, Member States and regions under federal, devolved, decentralised and unitary systems of government, identifying where in the cycle of policy design and implementation the different actors exert influence, and how this influence changes over time.

The transnational element of this research by McMaster and Bachtler has examined the institutional pre-conditions and governance models that facilitate territorial cooperation across borders between national and regional actors. It has also assessed the policy interventions to support cooperation, especially via EU cooperation programmes. The findings have revealed insights on the effectiveness of territorial cooperation (especially among regional authorities) and how collaboration in 'soft spaces' is used to achieve common goals, and both measurable results (new employment or investment) and less tangible outcomes (new socio-cultural relationships).

Since 2016, a particular focus has been on the UK context: how replacement policies for EU Cohesion Policy under the UK Government's 'levelling-up' agenda are affecting intergovernmental relations between the UK Government and Devolved Administrations; and post-Brexit models for UK authorities to continue participation in different forms of transnational collaboration.

### **Analysing the impact of EU Cohesion Policy on European identity**

Lastly, the most recent strand of Cohesion Policy research undertaken from 2016 onwards by Mendez and Bachtler, is innovative analysis of how the policy is perceived by EU citizens and whether EU policymaker claims of the policy being 'closer to the citizen' are valid. These research questions were addressed in an EPRC-led Horizon 2020 project (COHESIFY) that produced new empirical evidence on the impact of Cohesion Policy on citizen perceptions of the EU and European identity. An innovative mixed-methods design combined case studies with surveys of 8,500 citizens, framing and computational text analysis of media (6,700 articles, 115,000 posts/comments on Facebook/Twitter), and 47 focus groups with 240 citizens across 12 countries.

The results demonstrated that awareness of EU funding, together with communication about the benefits for citizens' daily lives and their region's development, contributed to citizen identification with the EU. The research also revealed that perceptions of Cohesion Policy are affected not only by scale of funding but also by its effectiveness and the quality of management. Finally, the research identified the effects of different methods (traditional vs social media) for communicating with citizens and the importance of locally differentiated communication methods and active use of digital media to generate awareness and appreciation of EU Cohesion Policy [R6].

### **3. References to the research** (Strathclyde-affiliated authors in **bold**)

**R1 J. Bachtler, C. Mendez** (2007) Who governs EU Cohesion policy? Deconstructing the reforms of the Structural Funds, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 45(3), 535–564  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2007.00724.x>

**R2 J. Bachtler, I. McMaster** (2008) EU Cohesion policy and the role of the regions: Investigating the influence of Structural Funds in the new Member States, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 26(2), 398–427 <https://doi.org/10.1068%2Fc0662>

- R3 J. Bachtler, C. Mendez, F. Wislade** (2013) *EU Cohesion policy and European integration: The dynamics of budget and regional policy change*, Ashgate, Aldershot (336 pages) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315580630> [REF2 in 2014]
- R4 J. Bachtler, C. Mendez, H. Oraže** (2013) From conditionality to Europeanization in Central and Eastern Europe: Administrative performance and capacity in Cohesion policy, *European Planning Studies*, 22(4), 735–757 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.772744> [REF2 in 2014]
- R5 C. Mendez, J. Bachtler** (2011) Administrative reform and unintended consequences: an assessment of the EU Cohesion policy ‘audit explosion’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 18 (5), 746–765. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2011.586802> [REF2 in 2014]
- R6 C. Mendez, F. Mendez, V. Triga, J. Miguel Carrascosa** (2020) EU Cohesion policy under the media spotlight: Exploring territorial and temporal patterns in news coverage and tone, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 58:4, 1034-1055 <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13016>

**Notes on the quality of research:** All articles are published in peer-reviewed journals and **R1** received the UACES Best Article Prize in 2007. This research has been supported with competitively awarded funding totalling GBP3,970,000, including: Bachtler (PI) Mendez (CI), Horizon 2020, Cohesion Policy and European Identification (COHESIFY), 01/02/2016–30/04/2018, GBP2,446,300; and Bachtler (PI), EIB University Research Scholarship, Administrative Capacity-Building and EU Cohesion Policy, 05/05/2014-04/05/2017, GBP226,327).

#### 4. Details of the impact

Strathclyde’s EU Cohesion Policy research by Bachtler, Ferry, Mendez, McMaster and Wislade has influenced policy developments in Europe, the UK and the Caribbean. Since 2014 it has:

- Influenced intergovernmental dialogue and national negotiating positions on Cohesion Policy;
- Informed decisions by the Scottish Government on replacements for Cohesion Policy;
- Influenced establishment of a new EU policy priority on ‘Europe closer to citizens’; and
- Enabled, beyond the EU, the development of a cohesion policy for the Caribbean Community.

##### 1. Influenced intergovernmental dialogue and national negotiating positions

ERPC research on policy formation in Cohesion Policy, especially its understanding of national government positions in EU negotiations on policy reform, has been used in two ways. First, it facilitated intergovernmental dialogue. Bachtler was an invited contributor (the only academic present) in closed meetings of government ministers and senior officials under the Bulgarian, Dutch, Finnish, Latvian, Polish and Slovak EU Council Presidencies over the past decade [S1].

Second, it influenced the formation of national government negotiating positions on EU reforms of Cohesion Policy. A specific example is Bachtler’s influence in convincing the German government of the continued viability of Cohesion Policy. At the request of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs (BMWi) in 2016-17, he assessed the empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the policy and presented the results at two inter-ministerial meetings, chaired by the German Foreign Office (AA), and involving the Finance Ministry (BMF) and Chancellor’s Office (BKA). According to the BMWi, Bachtler’s contribution ‘*challenged the prevailing assumption by the BMF, AA and BKA that Cohesion Policy was outdated and ineffective. He provided credible evidence that the policy had a higher impact and European added value than had hitherto been understood by other ministries*’ [S2]. Further, he ‘*influenced the German national position on the future EU Cohesion Policy and delivered a major contribution to developing the Joint Statement by the Federal Government and the German Länder on EU Cohesion Policy beyond 2020 that was published on 20th June 2017. The German position included several important aspects with regard to the modernization of Cohesion policy that had previously been discussed with Professor Bachtler and which were taken up by the [European] Commission’s proposals in May 2018 for the future Cohesion Policy*’ [S2]. Bachtler’s role had a broader, indirect influence on other EU governments: ‘*The German position also influenced the approach of other ‘net payer’ countries (Austria, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden) towards the policy, dropping their arguments for the policy to be rationalised to focus only on poor EU countries*’ [S2]. Lastly, the BMWi acknowledged that Bachtler’s evidence ‘*allowed us to rebut arguments in the German Parliament from MPs critical of the effectiveness of EU Cohesion Policy and its importance in the EU budget*’ [S2].

## 2. Informed decisions by the Scottish Government on replacements for Cohesion Policy

EPRC research on the governance of Cohesion Policy has also been applied to post-Brexit debates in Scotland about replacement regional development and territorial cooperation policies.

Bachtler has advised the Scottish Government on Cohesion Policy and wider regional development for two decades. In 2016, he was appointed by the Scottish Government to be Co-Chair of its Steering Group on Post-Brexit regional development policy in Scotland [S3]. The Group's report [S4] formed the basis for the Scottish Government's negotiations with the UK Government, with the Scottish Government Minister for Trade, Investment & Innovation, acknowledging Bachtler as having influenced *'significantly the conceptual and institutional elements of the report with his in-depth research knowledge on regional development and regional policies across Europe, and the lessons for Scotland'* [S3].

McMaster has similarly advised the Scottish Government for 15 years on its territorial cooperation strategies with neighbouring countries in north-west Europe and the Euro-Arctic. This includes assessing the evidence base for the North Sea 2020 Strategy [S5a, b], and appointment to the Scottish Government Steering Group (2014-20) developing the Scottish Arctic Policy Framework [S6]. For Scottish Government, this contribution *'was particularly important given that it was new ground for us and our need to pursue an innovative approach'* [S6]. In 2016–19, McMaster advised Scottish Government on its post-Brexit policy on territorial cooperation. Her briefings were used *'to assess the 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes of territorial cooperation, the value of continued Scottish cooperation with neighbouring EU government authorities, and their policy justifications'*, ensuring that Scottish Government *'developed a viable and credible approach to make partner countries aware of our continued interest and offer re-assurance to stakeholders'* [S6].

## 3. Influenced establishment of a new EU policy priority on 'Europe closer to citizens'

Beyond the national level, EPRC research (COHESIFY) was used by the EU institutions to demonstrate how Cohesion Policy can address another pressing problem: the popular legitimacy of the EU. During the 2017–20 EU policy debate and reform of the MFF for 2021–27 and the associated legislative package for EU Cohesion Policy, Mendez and Bachtler exercised high-level influence on proposals put forward by the European Commission (EC) for negotiation with the Council of the EU and European Parliament in the field of communication and citizen engagement.

In the wake of the 2016 UK referendum result, and other European referenda and elections, the EU became concerned by rising Euroscepticism, its ability to engage with EU citizens, and its communication of EU policies. This applied particularly to Cohesion Policy, historically claimed by the EC to be *'closer to the citizen'* [S7a] and which the EC sought to make more citizen-focused. During the formative stages of its policy proposals, the EC invited Mendez to participate in an internal planning meeting of DG Regio administrative units, and to provide COHESIFY briefings to senior officials responsible for communication to inform the design of the legislative proposals [S4b]. Mendez and Bachtler were also asked to disseminate their research findings to EU Commissioners and Director-Generals to influence the final stages of political decision-making on the legislative package within the EU College of Commissioners [S7b]. According to the EC, Mendez and Bachtler *'provided timely evidence to support the need for a specific policy objective 'Europe closer to citizens' in the 2021-2027 legislative proposals'*. Further, their COHESIFY research *'provided the Commission with a solid evidence base to justify the introduction of new regulatory provision reinforcing the obligations on Member States to fulfil their communication tasks and engage with citizens (e.g. integration of communication chapters in partnership agreements and operational programmes, more systematic resort to social media, greater obligations with regard to the publicity of projects of strategic importance, or common branding for all Funds) as well as to elaborate more guidance on information and communication to support Member States, and to try and enhance together citizen engagement'* [S7c].

The Commission recommendations influenced legislative innovations, including the integration of communication plans in over 535 operational programmes across 27 Member States, strengthened social media outreach and greater conditionality on the publicity of major projects. Other Mendez/Bachtler recommendations taken up in soft law included elaboration of EU communication guidance, and the launch of a pilot call to increase citizen engagement [S8a].



The Mendez/Bachtler research influenced other EU institutions' policy positions. The European Parliament Regional Development Committee (REGI) commissioned follow-up research from Mendez/Bachtler to inform the REGI negotiating position on EU regulations to increase the online visibility and communication of Cohesion Policy [S8b, c]. The European Committee of the Regions also advocated that future EU regional strategies should take account of 'evidence from research carried out on the effectiveness of cohesion policy communication through EU-funded projects such as "Cohesify"', the Horizon 2020 project coordinated by Bachtler and Mendez [S8d].

#### 4. Enabled the development of a new cohesion policy for the Caribbean Community

Finally, the evidence base generated from EU research by Bachtler and Mendez [R1-R3] was used to design a Cohesion Policy in a different geographical context - the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which promotes economic integration among 15 Caribbean nations and dependencies. In 2016, the CARICOM Development Fund (CDF) approached Bachtler to develop proposals for a cohesion policy, consciously emulating the EU approach. Drawing on EU experience and lessons, Bachtler/Mendez submitted their policy proposals in 2017 [S9a]. After approval by the CDF and CARICOM Committee of Ambassadors, the policy proposals were subject to government and parliamentary consultations in 2018–19, approved by the CARICOM Council of Trade and Economic Development (COTED) in November 2019, and adopted by Heads of Government in January 2020 [S9b]. The CDF, which is piloting the policy's implementation, regard Bachtler as having 'significant influence on the design and implementation of new CARICOM Cohesion Policy. The Policy and Implementation Plan that he and his team drafted formed a substantial basis for the proposal of the CDF to the COTED and then, after Member State consultations, approved by the Heads of Government. As such, the research by Professor Bachtler has had a major impact on the Cohesion Policy of the CARICOM' [S10].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1** EU Council Presidency & Senior Official meeting programmes showing Bachtler involvement.
- S2** Factual statement from Head of Division for the Coordination of EU Cohesion Policy, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, German Federal Government, dated 4 March 2021.
- S3** Factual statement from Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance, Scottish Government, dated 8 March 2021.
- S4** Scottish Government (2020) [European Structural Funds: Proposed Scottish Replacement Funding Programme](#).
- S5 a.** CPMR North Sea Commission, [North Sea Region 2020, North Sea Commission Strategy](#) (p.5 & footnotes pp.4,8,9,13,14). **b.** McMaster (2016) [North Sea in Numbers: North Sea Region 2020](#), report for the North Sea Commission.
- S6** Factual statement from Lead for European Territorial Cooperation, Economic Development Directorate, Scottish Government, dated 22 March 2021.
- S7 a.** References to EU Cohesion Policy being 'closer to the citizen' by the European Commission, 1996-2016. **b.** Letters sent, at DG Regio request, to EC President Jean-Claude Juncker, and Commissioners Günther Oettinger (Budget and Human Resources), Marianne Thyssen (Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility), Carlos Moedas (Research, Science and Innovation), and Corinne Crețu (Regional Policy), all dated 21 April 2018. **c.** Factual statement from Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission, dated 2 March 2021.
- S8 a.** European Commission Inforegio website, '[Regional Development and Cohesion Policy beyond 2020: The New Framework at a glance](#)' **b.** Mendez et al. (2019) [Research for REGI Committee: The Visibility and Communication of Cohesion Policy in Online Media](#). **c.** European Parliament briefing (2019) [Better communication for cohesion policy](#), pp.8-9,10) **d.** [Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Better communication for cohesion policy](#), 8 October 2019.
- S9 a.** EPRC (2017) CARICOM – Proposal for a cohesion policy and implementation plan. Final report to the CARICOM Development Fund. **b.** A Cohesion Policy for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), 24 January 2020.
- S10** Factual statement from Chief Executive Officer, CARICOM Development Fund, dated 17 March 2021.