

PANEL Title: Building the Future of Democratic Accountability Across Europe: Civic Engagement, Evaluation, and Open Administrative Data in At the School of OpenCohesion

Abstract: The COVID19 pandemic and the relative economic crisis has revolutionized the economic policy of the European Union. The Next Generation EU (NGEU) Program has been identified as a game changer for Europe. The future of the European Union is nowadays strictly connected to the success of NGEU. The 'EU value' is first and foremost under the severe scrutiny of the EU citizens, who will formulate a judgment based on tangible actions and impacts that they expect to observe. In this context, it is key that NGEU, as well as all public policies, is open to evidence-based citizens' scrutiny and ready to respond to it with policy improvements.

Up to now, the EU interventions through which citizens have observed EU action on the ground, in their living and workplaces were mainly the one funded within Cohesion Policy. Cohesion Policy and NGEU share many objectives and mechanisms, as well as their eventual manifestation into development projects across territories. During the recent decades, Cohesion Policy has stimulated different experiences of civic monitoring of its actions and impacts.

The panel focuses in particular on the experience of At the School of OpenCohesion (ASOC), a European-wide project that actively involve students in monitoring Cohesion policy in their neighborhood, city, or area. The purpose of the panel is to explore the role of civic monitoring in the EU policies, focusing in particular on the values of data and of the active role that citizens might take.

With the support of the teachers, ASOC provides high-school students with tools to analyze administrative data and collect relevant information in order to evaluate selected Cohesion Policy project. ASOC originated in Italy, as part of the OpenCoesione initiative, to facilitate the use of the administrative data on the projects financed by Cohesion Policy as published in the OpenCoesione web portal, that makes monitoring data available and understandable to anyone with an internet connection. Since the year 2019-2020 ASOC is now developed in the high-school of other European Member States.

The panel discusses civic engagement in evaluation and monitoring, by offering a view of evaluation evidences produced within ASOC across the EU.

Theme: 2, Adapting the toolbox: Methodological Challenges.

Keywords: Monitoring, Open Data, Open Government, Administrative data, Civic Engagement, Citizens, Schools, Democratic Accountability, Capacity Building

CONTRIBUTIONS

Chairs:

Simona De Luca, Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Cohesion Policy. Evaluation and Analysis Unit. OpenCoesione, Italy

Gianmarco Guazzo, Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Cohesion Policy. At the School of OpenCohesion, Italy

Bio:

Simona De Luca is an expert on open data and qualitative and quantitative analysis to evaluate public policy. For over 15 years she has been a member of the Evaluation Unit of the Italian Department for cohesion policy now at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, working on data collection and analysis for territorial development and well-being. She coordinates the open government initiative OpenCoesione, which provides open data and interactive visualisations on projects funded by cohesion policy in Italy.

Gianmarco Guazzo is a journalist and an expert in communication and data journalism. The fields of application of his activities range from digital storytelling to sustainability, Open Government and Open Data, social innovation. He is part of the #ASOC-At the School of OpenCohesion team, within which he holds the role of community manager for the international initiatives. He is the author of several economic and social research publications.

2) Luigi Reggi, Public policy analyst and Open Government expert

Bio: Luigi is a digital government policy analyst at the Italian Agency for Territorial Cohesion. He received a PhD in Public Administration and Policy from the State University of New York at Albany (USA) in 2020. His current interests include government transparency and accountability, open government data, governance networks, and information management.

Title: Creating Open Government Data ecosystems

Abstract: Open Government Data (OGD) ecosystems are composed of public, private and non-profit actors playing specific roles related to the availability and use of publicly accessible government information. The literature considers the presence of healthy ecosystems as crucial for effective use of OGD, with positive effects on democracy, policy effectiveness, and economic development. The contribution showed that governmental organizations as data providers and intermediaries play a crucial role in disseminating OGD and facilitating their use by local communities. Government organizations as policy makers were much less active. In addition, NGOs and the media were less disposed than government actors to serve as data intermediaries and less likely than local communities to engage in policy deliberation. These patterns suggest that the nature and level of engagement by various actors may be influenced by their interest in the specific purpose of the ecosystem. Finally, co-location is a powerful predictor of the creation of new connections among actors of all kinds, demonstrating that effective local data use can be enabled and encouraged by national data provision.

3) Natalija Šimunović, Head of Sector at the Croatian Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds

Bio: Natalija Šimunović is a civil servant since 2009, with previous work experience in the business and NGO sector. She works at the Croatian Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds on the implementation of the largest Cohesion Policy funded Operational Programme in the country. In 2019, her team within the Ministry started piloting the Italian ASOC project in Croatia.

Title: “At the School of OpenCohesion” in the Croatian Experience

Abstract: Starting from 2019-20, Croatia is participating to the European Union (EU) Pilot project “At the School of OpenCohesion (ASOC)”, originated in Italy as part of the OpenCoesione initiative. By following the ASOC spirit (“At the School of OpenCohesion (ASOC) is an innovative educational programme aimed at promoting and developing principles of active citizenship in Italian schools starting from Open Data on projects funded by European and Italian resources, by way of projects of civic monitoring and research of European and Italian public funding”, cfr. [ASOC website](#)), the Croatian Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds has involved students of schools from different part of the Country in the experimental initiative that lead them to build up civic engagement, analyzing and creating data in order to understand the impact of European Cohesion policies in their neighborhood, city, or area. This contribution will present the Croatian experience of “At the School of OpenCohesion (ASOC)”, highlighting criticisms and opportunities that have been faced in the early stage of the experience: particular importance will be given to the role played by the cooperation with different stakeholders and sectors involved. Lessons learned and plans for further upscale of the project will be also discussed in details.

4) Carlo Amati, Evaluation Officer, Evaluation and European Semester Unit, European Commission, DG Regional and Urban Policy

Bio: Carlo Amati deals mainly with thematic evaluations and support services. He has an extensive background in quantitative methods for analysis and statistical modelling. Before joining the Commission, he worked for the Italian government where he launched and managed the OpenCoesione initiative and other tools to exploit the potential of monitoring data. He holds a Master’s degree in Physics from the Sapienza University of Rome and a Master in Applied Econometrics.

Title: The ex post evaluation of cohesion policy

Abstract: In accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 on common provisions for the European structural and investment funds in the programming period 2014-2020, the Commission has started the ex post evaluation of the funds. The evaluation of the investments co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund examines the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments, their coherence with other policies, their relevance, and the EU added value, in line with the Better Regulation guidelines. The latest update of the guidelines in 2021 reinforced the transparency of the EU law-making process and the importance of stakeholder consultation. We will discuss how participatory approaches to evaluation can add to the available evidence and improve the evaluation process.

5) Mara Giua, Department of Economics - Roma Tre University

Bio: Mara Giua is Associate Professor at the Roma Tre University where she is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Manlio Rossi Doria Centre for Economic and Social Research. She is also Visting Fellow at the London School of Economics. Her research focuses on the economic disparities across regions, sectors and firms in Europe and on the economic analysis of the policies implemented to counteract these imbalances. She published a number of papers on the economic

impact of regional policy in the most disadvantaged areas of Europe, on the relations between the different European policies with a territorial dimension, on the role of the policies for the innovative and the most traditional sectors. Her principal articles appeared in Journal of International Economics, Regional Studies, Journal of Regional Science, Environment and Planning A, Journal of Common Market Studies.

Title: The role of Cohesion Policy evaluation for an evidence-based Next Generation EU

Abstract: The launch of the ‘Next Generation EU’ program (NGEU) has been accompanied by enthusiasm associated to the potential of such unprecedented amount of resources activated. Yet, the scientific debate on how to successfully use these resources to foster resilience and economic recovery is limited. NGEU and Cohesion Policy share similar objectives, governance and territories of action. Thus, the long and consolidated experience of Cohesion Policy can be leveraged as a laboratory for an evidence-based implementation of NGEU, providing guidance on what types of intervention should be funded, in which composition and for whom, and with which governance models. At the same time, NGEU should not miss the key advances gained within the Cohesion Policy experience in terms of data transparency and associated civic monitoring experiences.