PUBLIC VALUE AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL: UNPACKING COHESION POLICY

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Abstract

This paper explores the creation of public value at the European level on the example of Cohesion policy. It builds on data generated in 47 focus groups conducted in 16 regions across 12 Member States of the European Union. The choice of focus group data is motivated by an understanding that what is public value is determined by a collective, in the case of this paper groups of citizens that participated in the focus groups. Moreover, "value" suggests a certain subjectivity which considers citizens' perceptions. The paper offers insights into citizens understanding and the meanings that they associate to EU Cohesion policy. The main finding is that Cohesion policy is mainly associated with its economic utility to citizens, and much less with broader democratic values such as participation, stakeholder involvement and European solidarity. Given the upcoming negotiations on the EU budget, the point of reflections for practitioners is how can Cohesion policy be reformed to broaden citizens' understanding of how the European Union works.

Key words: Cohesion policy, public value, European Union, citizens