

UACES Scholarship Report

Outline of PhD project

My PhD project investigates possible causality relations between the practice of EU Cohesion Policy and Euroscepticism by examining in particular selected EU countries and regions. In more detail, on grounds of specific selection criteria, the EU NUTS 2 level regions of West Wales and the Valleys (UK), Crete (Greece) and Upper Silesia (Poland) have been identified as suitable case studies (typical cases) to study the management and implementation principles and modalities of EU co-funded regional programmes and structural funds and the potential impact thereof on Eurosceptic trends. In particular, the project focuses on how EU Cohesion Policy has been designed, implemented and communicated by supranational, national and sub-national elites and how i) different policy strategies and organizational modalities and ii) identity at national and regional levels have impacted upon efficient implementation of the policy and ensuing Europhile or Eurosceptic trends.

Description of the fieldwork

During the six-month period funded by UACES/JMCT, I conducted four field trips as follows:

- Brussels, Belgium (March 7 - 11)
- Warsaw and Katowice, Poland (May 23 - June 1)
- Cardiff, UK (June 22 - 29)
- Athens and Crete, Greece (July 3 - August 4)

During these field trips, I have organized on-site meetings with key actors and stakeholders involved in the practice of EU Cohesion Policy and the administration of structural funds at different territorial levels. My fieldwork resulted in a total of 42 semi-structured and digitally recorded interviews with a pool of actors ranging from EC officials (DG REGIO and DG COMM) to national (EC Representation officers, civil servants at national Ministries and other centralized government structures, current or former politicians) and sub-national (Managing Authorities and representatives of local government and other decentralized government structures) actors. In addition, I have met with and interviewed consultants, academics, policy advisors and representatives of the NGO and business sectors, as relevant and available. It should be noted at this point, that I have organized a fifth and final field trip to Brussels in early-October 2017 to follow up some of the interviews and conduct some additional interviews with EC officials, MEP and CoR members/alternates. Finally, I have already conducted a number of skype interviews and have arranged some more in the near future with different actors identified during the field trips.

The UACES/JMCT scholarship was mainly used to cover travel and accommodation costs incurred during the four trips, as well as complement other financial resources to support incurrent subsistence costs.

Reflections on the outcome and follow up

My fieldwork experience has been highly positive and rewarding, as this scholarship enabled me to travel to three countries and meet/discuss with a number of elite actors, including civil servants, politicians and academics, who provided invaluable insight to my research project. I did not face any significant challenges as the flight itineraries as well as transportation from one city to another within the same country (e.g. Warsaw-Katowice and Athens-Crete) were very easy. Overall, having the chance to conduct fieldwork in my selected research area, namely European Union Studies and Public Policy has enabled me to better identify and analyse causal mechanisms and processes, increase the internal and external validity of my research findings and last but not least, provide a richer empirical account and a genuine contribution to the relevant literature. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to thank once again the UACES and the European Commission for their generous funding, which has been integral to the completion of my doctoral fieldwork.

The empirical research conducted during my fieldwork has contributed to a paper on Euroscepticism presented at the 8th Biennial HO PhD Symposium on Contemporary Greece and Cyprus, organized by the London School of Economics and Political Science on July 1st, and will inform another paper on the correlation between EU Cohesion Policy and Euroscepticism to be presented at the 2017 European Week of Regions and Cities' EU Cohesion Policy Master Class, scheduled to be held in Brussels in mid-October 2017.